

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL
of
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON AND DISTRICT

A Brief History of the Club

1958 – 1973

The Stratford-upon-Avon and District Soroptimist Club was formed in 1958 with fifteen Founder Members, as a daughter of North Birmingham Club. The first President was Councillor Mrs L Woodman.

The Charter was presented by the Federation President, Miss Petrina MacDonald, at the first Annual Dinner, which was held on 3rd June 1959 at the Welcombe Hotel. The chain of office was kindly donated by the late Mrs N Neale, and the jewel designed by Mrs Phyllis Davey, a member of our Club.

Inspired by the National Federation; the Club embarked on a busy period in 1959, helping to clear the Refugee Camps still existing in Europe. Money was raised by various means, including a successful 'Christmas Fayre' when the sum of £250 was reached – no mean achievement for the youngest and smallest member of the Midland Divisional Union at that time.

Together with other clubs in the Midland Divisional Union, the Club sponsored the education and training of a blind girl from Iran.

In the following years charities benefited from many successful fundraising efforts, including Wine and Cheese evenings at the Town Hall, at Charlecote Manor and Coughton Court. There were evening concerts on several occasions, afternoon tea parties including a most popular dress show, and other entertainments and parties.

'Enterprise Neptune' was the project during the years 1966-67, the proceeds from this amounting to £350. (Project Neptune, also known as Enterprise Neptune, is a long-term National Trust project to acquire or put under covenant a substantial part of the English, Welsh, and Northern Irish coastlines)

During the 1971 Federation Jubilee Year, the Soroptimist Appeal benefited from a successful Art Exhibition featuring the work of the Club's artist member, Mrs Phyllis Devey, and her pupils. This was staged in the Stratford Methodist Hall and culminated in a delightful garden party at Hall's Croft, which was attended by the President of the Midland Divisional Union, and many members of Midland Clubs.

The Club has been privileged in having many guest speakers of national repute, both at Annual Dinners and at Club meetings:

These have included Mr J C (John Courtenay) Trewin the Theatre Critic; Lord Fiske, Chairman of the Decimalization Board; Jaquetta Hawkes, renowned

anthropologist and archaeologist; Captain D S Tibbits, now Deputy Master of Trinity House; Dr Gareth Lloyd Evans, Drama Critic; the late Mrs Denne Gilkes, the operatic and folk singer, and well-known teacher of voice production; Mr W G Stone, former Director of Education for Brighton and Principal of the Central School of Speech and Drama; the late Mr C Chenevix-Trench, County Education Officer; Mrs Inka O'Hanrahan, well-known American anthropologist and physiologist; Mrs Gordon Spencer, Assistant Director of the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, Mrs Margaret Castell of Detroit Comprehensive Girls' Schools; the late Sir Geoffrey Cretney; Mrs Wendy Cooper, 'Journalist of the Year'; Dr Cannon-Brookes of Birmingham Art Gallery; Dr Levi-Fox, Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Miss J Dickenson, Soroptimist Housing Consultant.

Over the years, Club members have visited many places of historical interest including Coughton Court, Charlecote Manor, Harvington Hall and Alscot Park. The Folk Museum at Bromsgrove, the Birmingham City Art Gallery, Shire Hall, the Lord Leycester Hospital, the Doll Museum at Warwick, and Police Head Quarters at Leek Wootton were also included in the Club's itinerary.

The Club has taken a special interest in Elizabeth House – a youth club for underprivileged children – situated and run jointly by the Save the Children Fund and Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland. One of our Founder Members and a former President, the late Mrs V G Morgan, was deeply interested in Save the Children Fund and, in her memory, the Club presented Elizabeth House with a much-needed tea urn for their new canteen, and a silver cup, known as the 'Morgan Cup'. This is presented annually for outstanding achievement to any group or individual fulfilling the necessary requirements.

A silver cup was also presented to Stratford Broad Street Junior School, in memory of Mrs Morgan, who had been Deputy Head at this school.

Members have a continuing interest in the Marie Curie Memorial foundation, to which an annual contribution is made. The Club through its members, is involved with several local organisations, including Age Concern, United Nations, Citizens' Advice Bureau, and Welfare projects for the elderly and the disabled. A small fund exists for a possible future housing project.

The Club has a Friendship Link with Hilversum Club in Holland. Several of our members have visited Hilversum and return visits have been paid to Stratford by our Dutch friends.

Soroptimist International of Stratford-upon-Avon and District is on the Standing Conference of Women's Organizations.