

MIDLAND ARDEN REGION

IN THE BEGINNING

Midland Arden Region was formed in 1975 when the Midland Divisional Union was split into two new Regions, the other one being Midland Chase.

The first Regional President was Margaret Kennedy of SI North Birmingham, who was proud to be the first MAR President to wear the newly created Presidential Chain.

The old Midland Divisional Union Chain was broken up with selected parts going to both new Regions. The jewel encrusted emblem which hung from the Chain came to Midland Arden.

The bond between the two new Regions was kept strong in many ways, but in particular by holding a bi-annual lunch hosted alternately by the two Regions.

ROLLCALL OF REGIONAL PRESIDENTS

1975-76	Miss Margaret Kennedy	North Birmingham
1976-77	Miss Daphne Hingley	Stourbridge
1977-78	Mrs. Joyce Waggett	Central Birmingham
1978-79	Mrs. Audrey Young	Coleshill
1979-80	Mrs. Dora Greenway	Kenilworth & District
1980-81	Miss Mary Ingliss	Bromsgrove & Redditch
1981-82	Mrs. Hilda Cash	West Birmingham
1982-83	Mrs. Joan Brewin	North Birmingham
1983-84	Miss Irene Darlaston	Nuneaton
1984-85	Miss Doreen Bastable	Solihull & District
1985-86	Mrs. Betty Nicholas	Coleshill
1986-87	Mrs. Yvonne Rich	Kenilworth & District

1987-88	Mrs. Helen Creery	Rugby
1988-89	Mrs. Joy Pinder	Central Birmingham
1989-90	Mrs. June James	Leamington & Warwick
1990-91	Miss Margaret Toole	Bromsgrove & Redditch
1991-92	Mrs. Mary McCurry	West Birmingham
1992-93	Miss Pat Kirby	Central Birmingham
1993-94	Mrs. Eileen Castle	Coventry
1994-95	Miss Jane Powell	Kenilworth & District
1995-96	Mrs. Pauline Colloby	Worcester & Malvern
1996-97	Mrs. Anne Hill	Central Birmingham
1997-98	Mrs. Patricia Dent	Leamington & Warwick
1998-99	Mrs. Nancy Doyle	Bromsgrove & Redditch
1999-2000	Mrs. Val Clarke	Stourbridge
2000-01	Miss Jean Lockley	West Birmingham
2001-02	Mrs. Mary Lloyd	Rugby
2002-03	Mrs. Georgie Larsen-Archer	Kenilworth
2003-04	Miss Jane Davies	West Birmingham
2004-05	Mrs. Carol Strongman	Kidderminster
2005-06	Mrs. Pauline Holdsworth	Rugby
2006-07	Mrs. Pat Horriben	Worcester & Malvern
2007-08	Mrs. June Muir	Stourbridge
2008-09*	Miss Isobel Smith	Central Birmingham
2010-11*	Mrs. Gail Teague	Bromsgrove & Redditch
2011-12	Mrs. Ruth Longville	Stourbridge
2012-13	Mrs. Margaret Phillips	Rugby
2013-14	Miss Ann Keepax	Solihull & District

2014-15	Mrs. Jill Yarwood	Stratford-upon-Avon
2015-16*	Ms. Su Roxburgh	Stourbridge
2017-18*	Mrs. Jan Bowden	Rugby
2018-19	Mrs. Jan Hemlin	Solihull & District
2019-20	Mrs. Rose Hutchinson	Stratford-upon-Avon
2020-21	Mrs. Elaine Clarke	Kenilworth & District

* 18 months as Regional President

1982 CONFERENCE AT THE NATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTRE

Thelma de Leeuw attended as Federation President and Irene Darlaston from Nuneaton Club was Chair of the Conference. Pat Kirby helped with this event. It was held at the Hilton Hotel.

1993 FEDERATION CONFERENCE IN HONG KONG

Midland Arden Region was well represented on the Conference Committee
Irene Darlaston (SI Nuneaton) was Federation President (1992-1993)

Aileen Rotherham –Chair - Central Birmingham

Audrey Bond – Treasurer – Central Birmingham

Mary McCurry – Chief Steward – West Birmingham

Jean Lockley – Deputy Chief Steward

Joan Francis – Central Birmingham

A press cutting from the Birmingham Post reads as follows:

‘In Search of Wider Horizons’

The 59th Soroptimist Federation Conference was held in Hong Kong with 11 members of Soroptimist International of Central Birmingham and two members of West Birmingham clubs.

The event was the first held outside Great Britain and Ireland for 20 years. The theme of wider horizons attracted members from all over the world.

The Federation President Miss Irene Darlaston welcomed David Ford, acting governor of Hong Kong who opened the conference.

Among the issues addressed by international speakers was the plight of refugees, child prostitution and slavery. On the social side there was a fashion show with entertainment provided by the Royal Hong Kong Silver and Pipe Band.

The ladies now look forward to renewing their friendship when they meet at the 1994 conference which will take place In Birmingham.

1994 SIGBI CONFERENCE IN BIRMINGHAM

On the conference committee were Mary McCurry (West Birmingham), Pat Kirby (Central Birmingham) Helen Creery (Rugby) an Yvonne Rich (Kenilworth)

Mary McCurry was Transport Steward. She said we used West Midlands Transport, who were extremely helpful. Jean Lockley from Kenilworth Club was one of Mary's Stewards with responsibility for getting delegates out of their hotels along the Hagley Road and onto the buses to get them to the ICC. Those who know or remember the amount of traffic along the Hagley Road on a Friday morning between 8 and 9am will understand why it would have been quicker for most delegates to have walked!

President Dorothy Llewellyn (now Jamieson) held an opening event a Lichfield Cathedral on the Thursday evening. You can imagine what the traffic was like, getting everyone out to Lichfield in the rush hour. Mary was mortified to be told that one of the buses had become partially stuck under a low bridge on approaching Lichfield. They should have used the A5 and approached via the Walsall Road, but obviously the driver (or escort) had not picked this up. All was well in the end though, and they were very efficient for the remainder of the weekend.

Anne Hill was a 'goffer' at this Conference. Joy Pinder's school Star Bank were the flag bearers at the opening ceremony. Joy was worried because the children were so small carrying these large flags, but all went well.

Below are some reminiscences of the Presidents' Year in Office

1991/1992 PRESIDENT MARY McCURRY – WEST BIRMINGHAM

H.E.E.D (Help East European Doctors) project was started by S.I West Birmingham Club, and supported by several Midland Arden Clubs, following a visit from a member of the newly formed SI St Petersburg, who informed the meeting that abortion was the main form of birth control in Russia.

Between 1992 and 1997, twenty-five doctors from several Eastern European countries underwent training in gynaecology and birth control at Birmingham Women's Hospital.

The first doctor who attended was instrumental in setting up the first Soroptimist International Club in Bratislava.

The Region hosted a very enjoyable joint lunch with Midland Chase Region at Chateau Impney.

A sponsored Cycle Ride took place in the Rugby area, organised by Winifred Hancox of SI Coventry, which raised the amazing amount of £1,300 for Sight Savers.

We were pleased to receive an acknowledgement from the newly appointed, (and first female) Speaker of the House of Commons, Baroness Betty

Boothroyd, in response to her receiving a message of congratulations from the Region.

Yvonne Rich (Membership) and I attended the last meeting, marking the sad closure of SI Hereford & District. I was fortunate to attend the subsequent opening of the new Club a few years later.

During my year as President of Midland Arden Region, I was honoured to meet and work with the remarkable Officers and Members of the various Clubs on a business and social basis and am proud to maintain contact with many of those with whom I worked, and who taught me so much about Soroptimist International.

1996-97 PRESIDENT ANNE HILL – CENTRAL BIRMINGHAM

I organised a Human Rights Day lunch at a hotel in Leamington Spa with Lynn Dunning as speaker. She was inspirational then as Federation Adviser for Human Rights and the Status of Women and went on to become Federation President and then International President.

We also had a Regional Day Conference followed by the Change of Insignia and Dinner.

The speakers were:- (followed by the programme areas covered at the time).

The Director of Groundwork Coventry who spoke about the regeneration of industrial and under used land. (Environment)

Stroke Association, Director of Community Services (Health)

Elizabeth Hughes, Federation Liaison for SIAM, The International Quadrennial Project. (Health, Human Rights and Status of Women, Education, Economic and Social Development, International Goodwill & Understanding).

Hilary Page incoming International President talked on UNICEF, (Hilary was the SI Representative on UNICEF) (Human Rights and Status of Women, Education, Health, Economic and Social Development, International Goodwill & Understanding).

The raffle money raised went to the Stroke Association.

Following the Conference, we held the Change of Insignia and a Dinner. I believe that it was the first time we had asked outgoing and incoming Presidents to write a few words on what they had achieved, or hoped to achieve. Valerie Evans was a very able and amusing compere.

The Presidents Evening out was a tour of Packwood House Gardens with the Head Gardner followed by supper at Baddesley Clinton. (Packwood House did not have a cafe in those days!)

During my year there was a Programme Action Committee Study Day held at the Beeches Management Centre, Bournville, Birmingham. I can still remember the speaker talking about domestic violence.

Valerie Evans CBE and member of Central Birmingham was the SI Representative on the Women's National Commission and was elected Co. Chair of the WNC.

On 3 October 1996, some members of the Region joined others in the Federation to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Soroptimist International with a tour of the Houses of Parliament and lunch at the House of Lords. The guest speaker was Kate Adie who considered SI to be a real powerhouse, a force to be reckoned with.

On 4 October, as a member of Central Birmingham, I went to the National Motorcycle Museum at Meriden for the Women of the Year Lunch where Central Birmingham had arranged a publicity stand. With over 600 ladies attending we thought we could promote our organisation. The speaker at the lunch was Kate Adie once again. We did not attend the lunch, but remained at the stand. There was interest shown.

In my day fundraising was left to clubs. However, Region used to have a raffle on Human Rights Day with the proceeds going to the International President's Human Rights Day appeal.

1999-2000 PRESIDENT VAL CLARKE – STOURBRIDGE (NOW STRATFORD)

My Regional theme was “Always look on the bright side of change” (music playing “Always look on the bright side of life”)...to highlight changes and the new Millennium.

The Regional members embraced a change of format to Regional meetings with the introduction of a timed business agenda (thanks to Jean Lockley with a nudging bell!), a high-profile speaker and a full lunch. My first Regional meeting in December was held in a hotel in Coventry with Col. Mark Cook of Hope and Homes for Children as our speaker followed by a delicious lunch for a full house of 120 members. There was a wonderful injection of Soroptimist enthusiasm which continued for the whole year and beyond.

A night to remember was the formal club Change of Insignia dinner, with all Regional clubs represented, held in the Guildhall in Worcester, a superb building stepped in history from 1729. Hilary Page, Federation President, and other Federation officers also attended.

Many happy memories of fun, friendship and focus for me, leading an excellent collection of regional clubs all of which I tried to visit in my year.

2002-03 PRESIDENT GEORGIE LARSEN-ARCHER – KENILWORTH

In my year I introduced the Regional Public Speaking Competition for school students aged 11-18 years. This event has grown and continued successfully to this day. In 2003 I became Federation Friendship Link Co-ordinator – a position I held for 6 years.

2003-04 PRESIDENT JANE DAVIES – WEST BIRMINGHAM

‘Growing Together in Awareness’

The year started at the Change of Insignia at conference in Belfast. A special memory is walking from the Waterfront Hall to the Market Hall for dinner.

As it was the start of a new 4-year cycle for Programme Action that was the focus for the year, our first meeting had the SIGBI Programme Officer as our speaker to update and guide us. We celebrated International Women's Day at Moreton Morrell; an impressive new venue for us.

All was planned for the Regional Change of Insignia to be held at the National Motorcycle Museum, and then it burnt down a couple of weeks before the big day! All was well in the end though, as we managed to hold it at the Manor Hotel Meriden.

The year ended at the conference in Bournemouth, where the chain was passed to Carol Strongman.

2008-09 PRESIDENT ISOBEL SMITH - CENTRAL BIRMINGHAM

My year started very exotically in Barbados which was the location for our SIGBI Conference that year and ended at our Conference in Cardiff the following year. The time in between was spent on the difference we could make to the lives of women and girls.

My first speaker was Lisa Potts Webb who was awarded the George Medal in 1997 after protecting children at the nursery in Blakenhall she then worked at from a machete wielding attacker.

She was awarded the medal by the Queen and went on to set up her own charity, Believe to Achieve, which works with schools in the Wolverhampton area. She was an example of how to move from a traumatic devastating event to be a force for good in other people's lives.

Quite quickly after that we became involved in the cross-party consultation 'Call to End Violence against Women and Girls', https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97905/vawg-paper.pdf. We completed the consultation questions by running a study day focused on the 6 areas of violence, Elder Abuse, Domestic Violence, Trafficking, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriages and Modern-Day Slavery.

Post the study day, workshops were held one Saturday every month for us to come together to research and advocate for change.

We are still working to achieve the objectives of this consultation.

2013-14 PRESIDENT ANN KEEPAX – SOLIHULL AND DISTRICT CLUB

The theme for my year was Deeds not Words (the Suffragette motto) as I believe that is exactly what we are all about. I reintroduced the five-minute presentations from the clubs in our Region on their Programme Action work.

During 2013/14 a huge volume of work was undertaken by clubs/regions to provide data for the Prison Reform Trust. Pat Martin – Regional Programme Action Officer at the time for Midland Arden Region – organised an excellent workshop to look at the issues and possible solutions to reducing the number of women who are sentenced to prison. All the information that clubs/regions collated was sent to UKPAC who forwarded to the Prison Reform Trust in 2014. This brought about changes in the law.

I joined members of Bromsgrove and Redditch in celebrating their Charter evening at Bromsgrove School. The evening raised money for the Breast Cancer Unit in Worcestershire. Steven Thrush – Breast Cancer Specialist and main driver of this campaign – was an excellent speaker.

On Remembrance Sunday I joined my fellow Regional Presidents from Midland Chase and Midland East, together with members from clubs around the regions. Ann Garvie – President of Soroptimist International and Margaret Oldroyd – Federation President of SIGBI also attended. This was a rare moment to have both our Presidents together and share in the ceremony of laying wreaths at our plot at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Our March Regional meeting featured the BIG Project – Birthing in the Gambia. Sharon Maxted and Rose Hutcheson – our Regional Ambassadors - lead the session. Although this project was slow to get started, Midland Arden Region contributed greatly thanks to the inspiring messages from Sharon and Rose.

One fundraising idea adopted by all clubs in Midland Arden Region was to fill Smarties tubes with 20p pieces.

March 15th was the Regional Public Speaking Competition. A wonderful event. For the first time in its history, the competition was held in the Solihull Civic Suite.

May 10th was the Regional Change of Insignia at St Johns Hotel, Solihull. This was the last time the event was a black-tie dinner. In subsequent years, the event has been either a luncheon or an afternoon tea.

At our July Regional Meeting, Ann Hodgson – Organisational and Development Federation Director – talked about the proposed Associate Membership. This was subsequently adopted and is proving a great alternative means for women to join our organisation.

At our September Regional meeting we heard from Ann Barton and Andrea Kingston (members of SI Kenilworth) about their trip to New York in March to attend the CSW meetings at the UN. We also looked at the future of our Region – how can we make Regional meetings better with more attendees. A questionnaire was circulated to all clubs where various suggestions were made. The following were adopted, namely reducing Regional Meetings to three per year, and using three permanent venues in the Region.

On Sunday September 28th, 2014 members from Soroptimist clubs in the three Midland Regions, along with friendship link club members, family, and friends, gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum to celebrate the planting of a tree to mark the 80th Anniversary of the founding of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland. Members were joined by Federation President Margaret Oldroyd, and her husband Robert, along with International President Ann Garvie. After the marking of the spot where the tree will be planted and unveiling of the plaque, the Peace Pledge was read by myself and Edna Schafer Hughes - Regional President of Midland Chase. Members then made their way to one of the woods in the Arboretum to plant some bulbs. A large party from

Liverpool had organised a coach to join in the fun, as well as members from Cardiff and Manchester to name but a few. It was certainly a day to enjoy friendship and to mark the International Day of Peace.

My last official engagement was on Sunday October 26th, 2014 when I joined Birmingham Central Club to celebrate their 86th year of being chartered. Guests also included the Lord and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham, and International President Ann Garvie. It was a real celebration of the City of Birmingham and the activities of Birmingham Central Club.

2015-16 PRESIDENT SU ROXBURGH – STOURBRIDGE & DISTRICT

There was a standing ovation at the Regional meeting (I am not aware that many of these have happened) for Jayne Senior, the Youth Worker and whistleblower who gave a talk about the child sexual abuse cases in Rotherham.

We hired The Electric Cinema in Birmingham to watch the film 'Warriors' about the Masai Mari tribes in Africa who had decided to end FGM when their young men travelled to Lords to play cricket. We filled the cinema. This was in conjunction with Cricket without Boundaries.

FEDERATION PRESIDENTS FROM MIDLAND ARDEN REGION

1938-39 Hilda Gibbs OBE from Central Birmingham
1966-67 Miss Margaret Murray from Central Birmingham
1992-1993 Irene Darlaston from Nuneaton (which closed that year).

In 1993 Irene Darlaston (Regional President 1983-84 from Nuneaton Club) was Federation President. The Conference was in Hong Kong in the August, but the AGM and Change of Insignia was held at the Hilton Hotel at the NEC in the Autumn. Jean Lockley from West Birmingham Club was on the Conference Committee.

Margaret Murray – Central Birmingham

Marjorie Morris – Central Birmingham

2019 – 2020* Isobel Smith – Solihull and District

* 2020 was the year of Corona Virus (COVID 19.) A Global Pandemic with a global loss of life of over two million people. Clubs, Regions and Federation were unable to meet and carry out Programme work for several months.

REGIONAL PROJECTS

THE INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN'S AWARD

2016

Hannah Simnett (nee Borg- she has married since the award) Founder of Cherished (www.Cherisheduk.org) nominated by Solihull and District Club.

“Cherished is a non-profit organisation providing attachment focused support for girls in Primary and Secondary schools across Birmingham. Their ground-breaking self-esteem workshops and mentoring schemes are committed to nurturing, empowering, and developing the true potential of young girls”.

2017

Catherine Rowe – nominated by Kenilworth & District Club.

Catherine was a Girl Guider and although only 29, was also a trainer for Rainbow, Brownie and Girl Guiders. Catherine was passionate about the importance for girls to have the opportunity, through Girl Guides, to make the transition from child to young adult in a safe environment. With a place to express themselves without fear of ridicule, bullying and embarrassment and reduce the effects of societal pressure. A concept clearly aligned with our core values as Soroptimists.

In the face of stiff competition, she had won a place to be part of the Guiding Overseas Linked with Development (GOLD) project, specifically in Oman. During her time in Oman, Catherine was part of a team delivering a scheme aimed at preparing the women and girls there for leadership. Helping them tackle some of the uniquely tough challenges of living in an Arab country and becoming the epicentre for proactive change for women. Catherine was so effective she was asked to go back and help with future GOLD projects.

Catherine was very modest about her achievements, and she did not let her dyslexia hinder her goals and aspirations to improve the lives of girls and young women. To our Club, if Catherine represented the future for women then there was a lot to be inspired about.

2019

Jane Clarke MBE - nominated by Stourbridge and District club.

Jane impressed the judges with her lifelong service, not only to our CHADD refuge in Dudley, but with her family's dedication to their own Kerala Partnership charity. Jane also runs a charity outlet in Halesowen's Cornbow Centre supporting The Hope Centre and the local homeless. We are delighted to say that Jane has fulfilled her promise to join Stourbridge Club.

REGIONAL PROGRAMME ACTION AWARDS

The Regional Programme Action Award was introduced in 2018 to be held on the alternate years to the Inspirational Women's Award.

The first award was under the categories of environmental sustainability, water and sanitation or food security. Clubs had to have submitted a Programme Focus Report form onto the federation database within the previous year. During the Change of Insignia afternoon tea, six clubs that were eligible gave a five-minute presentation on their project using any media they liked. Those attending the tea (including Soroptimisters) were able to vote for their favourite but not for their own club.

The winner was SI Kidderminster who gave a song and dance performance around their project recycling fabric and knitting garments for the Hoima Hospital in Uganda.

The 2020 award reflects the fact that we have aligned our work with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The categories are based around preventing violence against women in the UN Goals 5 and 16. The rules are the same as before.

Although the Change of Insignia has been cancelled due to Coronavirus it is hoped it can be held later in the year.

REGIONAL TRIPS

PARIS 9TH-12TH MAY 2013

A Johnsons' coach full of Midland Arden Region Soroptimists together with some partners left Henley-in -Arden for Paris early on the morning of Thursday May 9th, 2013. We had a fab female ex-Army driver who safely threw the coach around like you would a mini...very impressive. We had champagne and smoked salmon in the channel tunnel and a canapé and wine reception waiting for us at our hotel. A superb beginning for 44 rather weary travellers.

The main purpose of the trip was to visit the UN building in Paris for a pre-arranged tour, lunch and talk by our Soroptimist UN representative in Paris. However, 24 hours before leaving, I had a message to say that the UN building was in "lockdown" as there had been an incident and visitors would not be allowed in. After a minor panic, stoicism won the day and we all left for Paris with a very hurried plan B and a determination to have fun regardless. We managed to have a tour of Paris by day and a quite different one of Paris by night. Our visit included seeing the Champs-Elysees, The Arc de Triumph, the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame, Montmartre and the left bank, the Sacre-Coeur Basilica, and a Seine cruise around the Ile de la Cite and Ile St Louis plus good food and wine. Absolutely wonderful Paris... We also had an extra visit to the Palace at Fontainebleau...a perfect alternative to the cancelled UN visit.

It is worth mentioning that we enjoyed a celebration dinner at a restaurant called Chez Françoise in the Air France building often frequented by French politicians. Needless to say, we did not see any politicians, or rather we did not recognise any, but we enjoyed good food and wine before leaving Paris in the morning of Sunday 12th May. We stopped for lunch at Arras, a special historic town, en route to the tunnel. The trip was certainly a jolly time of fun and friendship for Regional members and definitely one for the Soroptimist memory bank.

Val Clarke

GENEVA SWITZERLAND 29TH APRIL – 3RD MAY 2019

Our visit to Geneva was a real highlight of my year as Regional President. A group consisting of 30 Midland Arden Region members, 6 Soroptimists and 20 Scottish Soroptimists, enjoyed a 5-day city break which included a guided tour of the Palais de Nations. We also had the opportunity to meet one of the Soroptimist UN representatives, who provided a highly informative talk about their work and what we need to do to maintain our ECOSOC status.

In addition to sightseeing using local free transport and boat trips on the lake; members of the two Geneva clubs very kindly organised a guided walking tour of the old town. This was followed by a traditional Swiss evening at the Edelweiss Hotel where our party enjoyed lots of fun and friendship.

Jan Hemlin

With each successive Regional President has come an interesting and stimulating programme for Clubs across the Region to come together to further our SI vision and mission as well as grow in friendship and support. As International days became known it was agreed to align three Regional Council meetings to the International days of: Human Rights, Women's Day, and Peace.

The annual Programme has often been enhanced by both regular and occasional events. For many years there was a Regional Change of Insignia dinner, or lunch, to celebrate the work of outgoing and incoming Club Presidents. This has now evolved into a Celebration dinner, or lunch, to recognise the achievements and goals of Clubs. Also there have been visits arranged such as to Paris, the UN in Geneva.