

The First 30-years - SI Worcester and Malvern

- Miss Barbara Cross, SI Birmingham “scouted” the locality of Worcester and Malvern in 1938 to assess if there was sufficient commitment amongst the local women to form a new Soroptimist Club in the area securing the assistance of the Mayoress of Worcester, Mrs W Moore-Ede.
- A preliminary meeting was arranged on the 1st April at the Star Hotel.
- Mrs Gertrude Mitchell was the ‘moving spirit’ behind the formation of the Club. Her unflinching enthusiasm inspired other local business and professional women including Miss H M Roden, a local Headmistress and Miss Edith Newth.
- Despite 1938 being a year of crisis, disaster, and uncertainty the local ladies ventured forth. Though several voices raised concerns about the wisdom of opening a new Club at this time, during a period of “relative calm” the Worcester and Malvern Club was ‘Chartered’ in October 1938. Miss Hilda Roden was duly elected to serve as Founder President just before the extension of hostilities in 1939.



The Guildhall Worcester

Miss Hilda Roden

- First Charter Dinner was held at **The Guildhall** in Worcester in 1939, when the guest speaker was Miss Addison Phillips (a member of Bristol Venture Club)

An Overview of the Club - 1938-1968

Club schedule

Through the uncertainties and anxieties of 1939, the new Club continued to meet – the arrangement at that time most suitable to most members was a luncheon meeting twice monthly (usually on a Wednesday) at the Cadena, Worcester (see photograph).

A variety of Speakers were invited along to these meetings, although some were entirely devoted to business. The occasional social meeting took place during the summer months at Malvern.



The Cadena Café Worcester

War Work – Members Working Together

- Committee meetings, held in the evenings were given generous hospitality by the Club's Honorary Treasurer Mrs E M Price.

The Annual General meeting of the Club continued to be held at the Alice Ottley School, courtesy of Miss Roden, for most of the war years.

- Mrs Price offered a large warm room at her house in St. John's for a knitting party each Monday evening. This gave members a chance to meet informally and was a welcome break from war work. It was also very productive: during one winter season the knitters produced 92 garments, including 62 pairs of socks. This same group continued knitting and in 1943 produced 75 garments for Indian prisoners of war.
- In late 1940 the Club started a "**Savings Group**" again run very efficiently by Mrs Price. They also put much effort into starting a Club Refugee Fund that enabled the education of an Austrian Jewish girl refugee at the Alice Ottley School.
- Members helped the City Youth Committee personally, by visiting and assisting at the new Gorse Hill Social Centre which they found most stimulating as well as taking an active role in voluntary work at the **Rainbow Hill Club*** for war workers in Worcester. This had a social centre and numerous facilities, including a canteen where Soroptimists took regular turns at making tea, cakes, and sandwiches. These were dispensed to girls from Scotland and Northern Ireland. Many of these ladies were working at the Royal Ordnance factories.

* The Warden of this Club, Miss Helen Mellor, was also a Soroptimist

Club Charities 1938 - 70

- From the very early days of the Club formation a “Charity Box” was passed around at every meeting. The members’ vision was for a Soroptimist House of some kind – possibly flats for single women with a room for Club meetings, or a home for the elderly.

Club support for numerous charities, local and national included, but was not limited to:

- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Funds for aid during periods of flood disasters
- Support for the Red Cross and other war charities
- Barnardo’s Homes
- The Federation’s Post War Relief Fund for the assistance of Soroptimists after the occupation of Europe
- Support for the building of a new theatre (The Swan) in Worcester
- Sponsorship of a blind boy to attend the Worcester Institute for the blind
- Sponsoring the costs incurred in the treatment of children abroad with leprosy
- Raising funds to support the formation of a local YWCA hostel
- Work with displaced persons, refugees often still trapped in camps abroad
 - British Empire Cancer Research campaign

“Sister Clubs” – now typically referred to as Friendship Links

During the war years the generosity of our sister Club, **Worcester Massachusetts**, was much appreciated. From 1940-41 large “food parcels” including such treasures as fruit for cake making, chocolate bars, tea, coffee, and tinned milk were received.

In 1944 a similar large parcel of goods was raffled in aid of the Red Cross ‘Penny a Week Club’, that provided parcels to send to prisoners of war. Most Club members paid in and secured a small parcel, typically a sachet of cocoa. Members would then be invited to bring along their prizes from the raffle and hold an impromptu party where games were played. Any spare cakes were auctioned for charity.

Greetings and presents were regularly exchanged –including illustrated calendars and English books amongst these items. One special parcel contained clothing sent from Massachusetts and this enabled Worcester and Malvern Club to donate them to aid the work of the Society of Friends in their relief work in enemy-occupied Europe.

In 1952 Worcester and Malvern formed a close association with another Club, **Zwolle in the Netherlands**. This was fostered by visits from a Past President of the Dutch Club, Miss J Van Lessen, to Worcester. Initially she stayed with Mrs Neal at Hallow Park, but later, on numerous occasions she stayed with Miss K C Harper and a close personal friendship developed, resulting in reciprocal visits to Miss Van Lessen's home at Kampen, near Zwolle.

SI Worcester and Malvern Club Presidents 1938 – 1968

Name of President	Year (s) of office
HM Roden	1938-39
JM Spencer	1940-41
EN Newth	1941-43 and 1958-59
MV Noake	1943-44 and 1965-66
B E Barrow	1944/45
J C Butler	1945/46
K E Strangeman	1946/47
Amy Perkins	1948/49
M E Denham	1949-50; 1960-61 and 1967-68
V Meadway Russell	1950/51
B L Lenton	1951/52
K C Harper	1952-53 and 1957-58
Marion Neal	1953/54
K M Marks	1954/55
M A Sherlock	1955/56
L Hibbard	1956/57
G R Phillips Broadhurst	1959/60
S A Peplow	1962/63

M M Bonney	1963/64
R I Warn	1964/65
R Wiltshire	1966/67
O Randle	1967/68

Worcester and Malvern “Regalia”

As early as 1940, the need for Club Insignia, especially a President’s badge, came under discussion. In 1945 work was at last put in hand and an impressive design by the Club’s artist member, Miss Myfanwy Campbell, was made to incorporate the Worcester City Arms and the county’s device that contained an heraldic representation of the Malvern Hills.



The President’s Badge of Office (on the left) first appeared at the Federation Conference in 1946 (and on the right) is the ‘Dress chain’ of the Club Badge

Club Members who served in the Midland Divisional Region* (MDU) - 1938 -1968

President

Miss EN Newth (1942)

Miss ME Denham (1954)

Miss Warn (1957; she later became a member of Worcester and Malvern Club)

*The MDU was the forerunner of the Midland Arden Region

Club Members who served as Midland Arden Region President

Pauline Colloby

Patricia Horriben

Club Members who served in the National Federation of Soroptimists of Great Britain and Ireland**

President

Miss ME Denham (1968-69)

** Miss Newth - in 1943 was honoured by the Federation for her service and dedication by Election to the Board of Governors

Club members who served in the Worcester Women's Group Action Council formerly known as the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (SCWO); Association of Standing Conference 1938 - 1968

President

Miss Edith Newth - she was the FIRST President of the SCWO in 1942-48 and was a staunch member of Worcester Women's Group Action Council

Miss R Warn – SCWO 1971