**A History of Soroptimist International of Stourbridge & District**

The Stourbridge club began its life in 1947 at that point in time Stourbridge was a town, with its own council; council house and mayor (rather than now as a part of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council). Records show that when the club opened subscriptions were one guinea.

One of its early members was a Miss Dancer (who was the club secretary), who was from the family of a local large store, who was also the Mayor’s secretary. Apparently, she was very strict and kept everyone in line. In those days, members wore hats and gloves to meetings. Also, in those early days of the 40’s and 50’s much of the work was done for refugees and displaced people in Europe. Dr. Rita Wilson who was president in 1957-58 felt that whilst Stourbridge was a good club in raising money for good causes the club did not excel as “strivers”.

Another early rule within Soroptimists was that only one category was allowed per club so if the club had one teacher of French then it could not take on another teacher of French.

In its early years, the club would invite local dignitaries to be honorary members, so back in the late 60’s Floss Guest who was Mayoress of the Borough was invited to join as an honorary member for her year as mayoress and then became a full member the year afterwards. Floss recalled that most of the clubs’ members were businesspeople.

During the 60’s a Miss Tissington, left the club her house to convert into two flats. These flats were sold and another flat bought which was let out for a few years and then sold and a sum of £18,000 went to the Compton Hall Hospice, Wolverhampton which was the nearest hospice at the time.

One of the first Friendship Link clubs was Vevey in Switzerland and though out the years many exchange visits have occurred including one for the club’s 65th anniversary. The club now has other friendship links with Lyon; Shepparton; Wrekin and Bootle.

In the 70’s the club membership dwindled considerably, and they were informed by the Divisional Union (not Regions back then) that they either had to find new members or close. Fortunately, a few members worked very hard, and built the membership up for them to become a thriving club.

By now the club consisted of many professionals in education, health, and public service. Also, during this period, The Federation decided that the Midland Division Union with 36 clubs should be split into two and become Regions, known as Chase and Arden. Stourbridge club gained a reputation as holding one of the best annual dinners which always took place at the Pedmore House Hotel.

The early 90’s once again saw the club dwindle in numbers at the beginning of 1992 had only 9 members, strictly speaking the club should have closed, it’s bank balance was down to just under £10. Those members voted to try and turn the club around and moved from meeting in the library to meeting twice a month (one dinner and one business) in The Talbot Hotel. This change did turn the club around and it went from strength to strength.

In 1998, SI Dudley closed its doors and several Dudley members transferred to the Stourbridge club. A similar influx of occurred in 2012 when SI Birmingham West closed its doors with 4 of their members transferring to Stourbridge.

At the end of the 90’s Lorna Bedford introduced Literary Dinners to the club, and these were extremely successful, and they have continued almost every year until the pandemic put a stop to any type of event other than virtual ones.

Other memorable Programme Action items were Data Link during June Muir’s year. This project was to supply the local area with Data Link Bottles. The club distributed 42,000 bottles (the bottles contained information about the persons medication to be used in an emergency) over a two-year period and was taken up as a project by many clubs in the region. Another memorable project was ‘Dudley Top Church’ when at one time the club had three members on the management committee and this project won one of the Programme Action awards at Conference.

In the year 2005-6, ten past presidents took on the President’s role sharing out the month’s tasks, this came about after the person who was to be president, was at the last minute unable to fulfil the role. A similar thing happened in the clubs 65th year when five members took on the Presidents role.

Many Stourbridge club Presidents have gone on to become Regional Presidents, the first one of the new Midland Arden Region being Peggy Scott. Others to be regional Presidents were Daphne Hingley; Val Clarke; June Muir; Su Roxburgh and currently the regions President Elect is Anne Rogers.

Finally, the club has had a really successful year with programme action covering Toilet Twinning and enabled the town of Stourbridge to become a Toilet Twinned Town (TTT); gave funds for 8 laptops and a laptop for renovation to a local school; gave out 100 friendship bags to local refuge and other charities and planted over 100 trees to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Soroptimist International.