

SI Midland Chase Programme Action Newsletter Winter 2021/22



In 1924 three years after the first Soroptimist club was formed in America, the Greater London Club was formed in Great Britain.

During 2021, Midland Chase members have done an amazing amount of work to celebrate our Centenary – enjoy reading all about our activities!



SI Cannock member Lynne Tuckley produced a wonderful cross stitch to commemorate the centenary, celebrating our five federations



WhoIsShe?



When Soroptimist International reaches a milestone in its history as now, the Celebration of 100 Years of Service, it is fitting that we should look back and pay tribute to those pioneers who established Soroptimist International on firm foundations and kept the flag flying through difficult times. During 2021, over 100 women were showcased on the Centenary Website, in our #whoisshe campaign.

A number of our Midland Chase members were included in this select gathering!

Centenary drama

At the Regional Conference in 2021, we were treated to a drama presentation on the history of how Soroptimist International came into being and the awesome and inspirational women who took the first steps in founding our organisation?

Written by Sue Challoner of SI Runcorn, Frodsham & District and presented by Dishy Attwood our narrator and our Soroptimist thespians, the play was a delight.



Thank you especially to some of our newest members who played their parts well. The visual interpretations brought a different dimension. Many things have changed (hats and gloves) but their spirit lives on in their legacies which continue to inspire us today.

Soroptimist International Celebrations

Report by Edna Schafer-Hughes who attended the online celebrations

These took place over two days with 3 hours of listening and 1 hour in the breakout rooms on both days. This was a mixture of celebration and information from around the federations.

100 Soroptimists from all over the world wished members Happy Birthday or gave a brief message and it was wonderful to see Debbie Hardman-Wilson's, (SI Stafford) message as part of that. It was really wonderful to see members from all over the world and to greet and be greeted in all languages.

Each of us attending will, I am sure, have found the projects from around the federations inspirational e.g. the "Pink Rooms" project in Italy where safe rooms have been set up by Soroptimists in police stations for women who have suffered Domestic Violence. Different things and/or projects will obviously have resonated with each of us.

I felt it was great to be reminded of the various Quadrennial Projects which have taken place and see the results of the work and fundraising in which we have all taken part over the years.

All five UN Officers spoke as well as Past President Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, former President of the UN General Assembly, on the fact that to date no country has achieved gender equality and only 55% of women participate in the labour market.

We felt that there was a real connection with sisters across the world and agreed that overall the event was brilliant and we would certainly join a global event again, encouraging other members to do so if that opportunity arose.

Saving Trees – the first action taken by Sorooptimists in 1921

100 years later 'Planting Trees for a Brilliant Future' #PlantTrees



What better way to celebrate the first centenary of Sorooptimists, to raise the profile of our Organisation and to help the environment #PlantTrees.

Sorooptimists have always been dedicated to addressing the issues related to the environment. The first-ever Sorooptimist project was to 'Save the Redwoods', which was launched by the first Sorooptimist club formed in 1921 in Alameda County.

All clubs worldwide were encouraged to plant trees and Midland Chase clubs certainly rose to the challenge.

All of our clubs have taken up this project and have planted trees both locally and internationally.

SI Bilston

When it was decided that all Sorooptimist Clubs should plant trees for the Centenary year our President Elect Cherril came up with a fund raising scheme as lockdown had prevented us all from holding normal fund raising events. Cherril gave us a virtual £5 note and asked us to 'grow it'. Members found innovative ways to grow their money and a substantial amount was raised.

In the meantime, after consultation with the City Council, we were in discussion with a local secondary school in Bilston, Moseley Park Academy, whom we had learned were developing an allotment area with fruit, vegetables, a poly tunnel and walkways. The scheme is being undertaken by students who have a great interest in practical subjects.

After discussion with the school we established that a Signature Tree was required as a centre piece for the allotment around which paving and benches could be established to form a sitting out area. Cherril researched a number suitable trees from which the students chose a Himalayan Birch, *Betula utilis jacquemontii*. In addition to the signature tree a member suggested that we could raise more funds if members who wished purchased a tree in memory of a loved one. Thirteen members took up the challenge enabling us to purchase thirteen fruit trees, eight of which, apple and pear, have been planted at Moseley Park. The last five will be planted at a site in Bilston in the Spring 2022.

We invited the local Member of Parliament, Pat McFadden to unveil the Signature tree in the presence of a local Councillor Olivia Birch, school staff, pupils and Bilston Sorooptimists. Our trees now feature on the Queen's Green Canopy.



SI Burton on Trent & District



SI Burton upon Trent and District have planted trees at Rosliston Forestry Centre - red cedar, common pear and silver fir. We were replacing trees that had died on their tree trail which is used to educate schools and members of the public about trees. There will be a plaque saying who planted the trees, the partnership, and why. We also replaced tree guards.

We have also got a further tree planting event planned in February at Rosliston and will be helping to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and will be handling disease free elm trees.

In addition, two members have paid for trees to be planted by the National Trust to mark their 80th Birthdays and SI's 100 years.

SI Stafford

SI Stafford marked the 100 years of Soroptimism planting one hundred trees and recording information about all our members.

The photograph below shows SI Stafford club members with John Potter of the Stafford Riverway Link, representatives from the 1st and 5th Berkswich Girls Guides groups, Jeremy Lefroy former MP for Stafford, Gillian Pardesi Stafford County Councillor, and our joint Presidents Gill and Maudie.

The Riverway Link is reconstructing the waterway from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal at Baswich with the River Sow. This would enable boats to access Stafford Town centre. We really appreciated the work of our member Margaret Pritchard who did all the 'spade' work in finding this wonderful site and organising the planting.



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SI Cannock & District

Each SI club was tasked with planting 100 trees throughout the centenary year remembering how the first club was set up in 1921 to save the Giant Redwood trees. Living close to Cannock Chase, SI Cannock thought this would be a simple task, that was not the case! A 'Tree Team' was set up consisting of three members plus President Jackie to investigate how we could identify places where we could plant trees and things began to happen!

The new designer Village in Cannock said that they would plant 20 Oak saplings on our behalf & that we could erect a plaque by them commemorating our centenary. After reading about our project in the local press, people began contacting the club offering trees and saplings for us to find homes for, which we duly did! With the help of the local council we planted trees in many local woodland areas around Brereton, Heath Hayes, Norton Canes and Hednesford. We also planted a magnolia tree at a local Nursing home.

Finally, as usual we have had wonderful support from our members! They and their families have been planting trees in their gardens. One member's sons have planted trees at their homes in France and Spain!

We are delighted to say that to date our tree tally is now 121! This is down mostly to the hard work of the Tree Team of whom we are very proud!

Pictures show President Jackie, Trish Mellor, PA Chair and our tree team June Bould, Lynne Tuckley & Adrienne Hewitt in various locations.



c75,000 trees
planted by SIGBI
so far



SI Lichfield & District

During 2020-21 our target was to plant 100 trees to celebrate the SIGBI Centenary and we've exceeded that, happily. The trees have been planted in a range of settings via a number of mini projects which form our Planting Trees for a Brilliant Future project 2020-21.

It's fair to say that we didn't have any difficulty whatsoever in getting hold of trees, but what was much more difficult was finding places to plant them ironically. As a Club we decided to partner with Lichfield & Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust (L&HCRT) as we knew that they have ongoing tree planting activities along all the areas of the canal that they are restoring.

Originally we aimed to plant our first trees with L&HCRT in November 2020 but were unable to do so as land which they were expecting to have had transferred to them from the local county council had not materialised. As a result, six members took on the job of sapling-sitting, which entailed getting hold of 10-15 of the saplings (provided under the Woodland Trust's community scheme), finding a suitable spot in their gardens and keeping them watered and looked after for, as it turned out, for the next 12 months!



Chris tamping down



Karen enjoying the soil

Separately, we have also planted 22 Hawthorn trees - an extremely environmentally valuable tree – and a centenary mini orchard on land owned by a member at Tamhorn. This contains over 20 different fruit trees including green and red eating apples, cherries, plums, cooking apples, pears and of course damsons! We aim to be able to produce our very own Club damson gin in four or five years' time all being well. Another member has also planted trees in Portugal on our behalf!

Back in June 2021, we held our planet environmental conference which was attended by Ian Retson of the Woodland Trust. The main point that Ian made at the conference was that it's very important to use native trees and trees which are grown in the United Kingdom to avoid importing any diseases or problems as a result. So we've been very careful to tick both of those boxes with all the work we've been doing over the last 12 months, to get to our 100 trees target.

We've really enjoyed this project, and although it took longer than we would like in some ways, we genuinely believe that we've made a big difference to our local area and our own well-being.





SI Sutton Coldfield

New Hall Primary School

The Club is in partnership with New Hall Primary and the Lottery. Members are planting a tree in September to mark the centenary of SI in the school outdoor learning area. Discussions have been ongoing for over a year but owing to lockdown and visitor restrictions, dates have slipped.

Small Fruit-farm in Naic, Manila

To mark both SI's Centenary and SI Sutton Coldfield's 75 years since their Charter, a donation of £1,200 (including Gift Aid) was made to Purple Community Fund to fully fund the development of a small fruit-farm in Naic, near Manila. 75 fruit trees will be planted shortly:

- 20 cacao
- 20 satsuma
- 10 pomelo
- 15 jackfruit and
- 10 mango

A ceremony is being arranged by Marcel, Jane Walker's Deputy in Manila, to enable local Soroptimists from SI Makati, SI Malabon together with the District Director to represent the Club and SI. Filming of the planting ceremony and plaque is planned to enable us to share with our members. Photos of the planting and farm will be available shortly.

The farm will create a livelihood project for the families enabling them to provide for their own families with the possibility of generating an income from selling the fruit produce to others.



SI Tamworth

SI Tamworth have planted 10 beech, 10 hornbeam, 10 hawthorns, 5 hazel and one mature cherry tree in the grounds of Sir Robert Peel Hospital.

Photo below shows members of SI Tamworth with the cherry tree – should look lovely when it flowers.



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SI Wolverhampton

In support of the SIGBI project 'Planting Trees for a Brilliant Future' that recognises 100 years of Sorpotimism, SI Wolverhampton have worked with local community organisations and have donated 20 fruit trees of various types as well as providing pots and compost where needed. The organisations that have received trees are Gatis Community Space, Compton Care, Albrighton Moat Project, The Big Venture Garden and Bantock Park.



SI The Wrekin

Our first decision in relation to where we should plant trees was where and how. We decided to go for Tree Planting both at home and abroad:

- The first is in Nepal where our donation of £80 to the Eden Reforestation Project, Ecologi, has meant the planting of 565 trees. Ecologi aim to protect and restore forests.
- Our next focus is at home and we are currently working again with Ecologi and the Future Forest Company in Scotland with each tree costing £20. Barren land will be reforested. We have paid for 4 trees to be planted.
- Finally, we are contributing to a very local project to develop a Community Orchard with the Friends of Holmer Lake in Telford, Shropshire where we have donated £300 for 10 trees. It is hoped to extend the orchard with more fruit trees, such as plum, gage, pear, etc. This will be available for the local community to enjoy, especially school visits to see where fruit comes from, before being wrapped in cling film! It is planned to have a noticeboard in the area describing the trees and acknowledging donors of any grants towards their purchase. This is local; the donors are publicly acknowledged; the trees will be tended by a dedicated volunteer group - with this project led by our very knowledgeable Environment Officer; and they will provide a local amenity. This work is ongoing in terms of planting as we are waiting for the right time and weather conditions and availability of volunteers.



Other projects to celebrate the centenary

In addition to the planting of trees, a number of clubs have worked on special projects to celebrate the Centenary – and had a lot of fun as well as helped others.

SI Bilston

Centenary drama

Having seen our Region's presentation of the excellent play devised by Sue Challoner, SI Runcorn, celebrating our 100 years of Soroptimism, our past Region Presidents Pat and Cherril decided that Bilston members should be encouraged to 'perform' the play at our November Dinner meeting.

Needless to say, as we are not thespians, several rehearsals were required under Pat's dramatic guidance to whip us into shape. It was great fun!
Costumes acquired, lines and movement much practised we were ready to go with Pat & Cherril as narrators and Sue our projectionist in place.

Thank you Sue (Challoner) for a great experience.



SI Cannock & District

One Hundred Acts of Kindness

In October 2020, SI Cannock's then President Trish Smith and President Elect Jackie Prince set the club a challenge for the centenary year. It was to perform one hundred Acts of Kindness.

These could be individual acts or those carried out by the club. It was a lot to ask but they were confident that it could be achieved; in fact the challenge would be in getting the members to report the acts. This proved to be the case! So used to helping others, many of the ladies just thought that what they do is nothing special, not appreciating the effect these acts have on others.

One of our members volunteered to collate the Acts and when she said that we had reached one hundred acts we were delighted, particularly as the target was reached just in time for us to announce it at our Soroptimist Centenary Celebration!

It has been a privilege to hear of some of the lovely things that SI Cannock members have done for others, here are just a few of those acts of kindness

- I've been at the hospital and then at the home of a lady whose husband has been told there's nothing that can be done for him. So we waited for him to arrive home and spend his last few days with his wife - so sad.
- I have been making blankets and bears for Bliss, (premature babies in intensive care).
- Helped a young lad on a local campsite who needed help regarding food. I rang Adam at the local foodbank & got it sorted. I'm so pleased that I approached him and he was willing to accept help.
- I have made 74 dementia forget me notes for Dementia Activity week.





SI Cannock & District

One Hundred Acts of Kindness

Two of our members found different ways to celebrate the wonderful acts that have been performed.

One produced a wonderful word art picture that contains all of the acts performed in the numbers 100, here's what it looks like.



The other produced a video that she posted on our You Tube site, you can watch it here [Cannock and District Soroptimists 100 Acts of Kindness - YouTube](#) and see many more examples of the Acts performed.

So those were our Centenary Projects! None of them were easy but they have been so rewarding and lots of fun! We really think that our club has benefitted from taking part in them and we know that many people have benefitted from all we have done! Here's to the next 100 years!!

SI Bilston

Bilston Elves help Santa

It was a cold and starry night but one cannot hold back the enthusiastic Elves (aka Bilston Soroptimists) who, at the invitation of Bilston Rotary Club, were thrilled to be able to accompany Father Christmas to see the switching on of the Christmas lights in Bilston and promote our Centenary. So many people were there to share the special occasion and indeed some children were very keen to have their photographs taken with our Elves. The guests on the rostrum for the actual ceremony included Ben Whittaker, the Olympian boxing silver medallist, the Mayor of Wolverhampton and Mr Pat McFadden, the local MP. Needless to say, the Bilston Elves had a lovely time.



SI Cannock & District

Sorooptimist Centenary Celebration

SI Cannock wanted to celebrate the one hundred years since Sorooptimist International was formed in a way that we could share with our family and friends.

So, in true Hollywood tradition, we decided to put on a show! The show was designed to look back at the news, fashion and music decade by decade from the 1920s to the 2020s. This involved lots of work researching world events, making costumes and finding songs that as well as belonging to a specific decade, in some way focussed on women's status at that time.

It also involved lots of fun as many of our lovely ladies volunteered to model the costumes! Other members were busy making the costumes, selling tickets for the show and carrying out all of the other admin tasks, it truly was a club project!

The day of the show dawned! After the final dress rehearsal everyone was excited but nervous, so many had stepped out of their comfort zone! The evening was wonderful! One of those nights that will be talked about for years to come! The audience reminisced about the news, sang along to the songs and loved seeing the models in their fabulous costumes. "It's taken me right back" was the response from our friends and families as they enjoyed their fish and chip supper during the interval!



The finale was obviously the 2020s and when all of the models and helpers came on the stage in PPE to Captain Tom singing 'You'll never walk alone' there wasn't a dry eye in the house!

The other wonderful consequence of the night was the fact that we raised almost £1,000 for charity! Over £600 from ticket sales that was divided between Pathway and Staffordshire Women's Aid and more than £200 on the raffle held on the night that went to the SIGBI Emergency fund.



SI Lichfield & District

We set ourselves the target of **100** for a number of projects – in many cases, we exceeded this target!

SI Lichfield & District

100 Homes for Nature

The RSPB is a great source of ideas and help if you'd like to make your outdoor space more wildlife-friendly.

Here are just a few things Club members have done in their gardens or local open spaces during the Centenary year. We easily got to more than a hundred "homes for wildlife"...from washing up bowl ponds to hibernaculums made from piles of stones, there's something to suit any sized space - and it all helps!



SI Lichfield & District

100 Bulbs

In addition to tree planting, we also decided to plant 100 bulbs.

One of our members didn't just plant 100 bulbs but 100 of three different varieties of flowers! 100 aconites, 100 wood anemones and over 100 snowdrop bulbs were planted in March 2021 in the little wood at the top of her drive. We are waiting for them to appear in the spring.



SI Lichfield & District

100lb weight loss!

One of the ideas for the centenary was 'Lose from Lockdown', the idea being for members to join together as a club to lose 100 pounds in weight.

This was prompted by lockdown having become an excuse to have a biscuit or a piece of cake with the morning coffee, or an opportunity to try out perhaps not such healthy meals, sometimes snacking through boredom and not enough exercise to burn off the extra calories.

12 members took part in this and lost an amazing 126 pounds!



SI Lichfield & District

100 Days for Girls kits – feminine hygiene kits

Our aim was to make and send 100 Days for Girls kits - washable feminine hygiene kits to enable girls to continue their education without missing days each month when they have their period.

As we know, education can empower girls for life and the effect is long-lasting. Children – especially girls – born to educated mothers are more likely to attend school themselves, resulting in opportunities that extend across generations, for years to come. The life of each kit with proper care is c3 years. This translates to 180 days of education, health, safety and dignity for each girl who receives one of these kits over 3 years.

We handed 100 kits to Judy from the Baraka charity which works with girls in Zambia – will enable the girls to have c18,000 additional days in school. The packs will be handed to girls at the safe house in Maamba – the girls there are all vulnerable to pressure from families to stay at home and raise children but they all want to continue their education.



Girls in the safe house in Maamba, Zambia, receiving their packs

SI Lichfield & District

100 jumpers

Some of our members are keen knitters and we set ourselves the target of sending 100 children's jumpers to the charities we support in Africa – Baraka in Zambia and the Kori project in Sierra Leone.

We beat our target and sent 100 jumpers to Zambia and 10 jumpers to Sierra Leone plus a further 27 school jumpers for children at the schools supported by the Baraka charity.

Many of our jumpers used follow the pattern for 'fish and chip jumpers' – so called because they are sent to countries where babies are often sent home wrapped in newspaper. The jumpers are knitted in bright colours to make them as attractive as possible.



SI Lichfield & District

100 dresses



Girls in Kampala wearing the dresses we sent



We have been making dresses for some time and sending them through personal contacts to girls in Africa to empower them with confidence & enable them to have dignity.

In 2021, we sent 114 dresses to Uganda with Kids Club Kampala, a charity which works to support vulnerable kids in Uganda by providing for both their Immediate needs and strengthening their futures through education, feeding, protecting and skilling. Their vision is to see children's lives transformed, communities empowered and poverty reduced throughout Kampala's slums.

We sent a further 90 dresses to the Kori Project in Sierra Leone bringing the total number of dresses we have sent to 992.

Centenary target well and truly exceeded!

SI Lichfield & District

100 items for pamper bags

As many clubs, we decided to put together and gift "pamper bags" for women using the services of our local refuges and modern slavery support providers in Lichfield and Staffordshire/The Black Country more widely. We set out to collect 100 items but exceeded this and collected more than 600 items in total.

Club members donated goods and money to enable us to make up pretty, seasonal gifts, all carrying a message from us to show that the recipients are "not alone," and that women they don't even know are holding them in their thoughts – always – and not just at Christmas time.



Katie Newell of BCWA with Pauline & Angela

The gifts were very well received. Katie Newell (pictured right with Pauline and Angela – Kerry's behind the lens) of Black Country Women's Aid commented: "Thank you so much ladies! It was a pleasure to meet you all & your gifts were so lovely. I can confirm most are on their way to the ladies in Modern Day Slavery support who will be overwhelmed with the contents of the bags."

SI Bilston

Christmas Tree Festival

St Leonard's Church in conjunction with Bilston Lions invited organisations to participate in the Christmas Tree Festival which we have done in previous years prior to Lockdown. This year we chose as our theme Orange the World and 100 Years of Soroptimism. Plans were made, hangings designed and created and the tree was dressed in time for the Festival. It looked lovely and promote Christmas Tree Festival.



SI Stafford

Centenary archive

As well as tree planting, our other commemoration was the brain child of Katie Taylor, our past President who suggested we make an archive of current members. Katie drew up questions to structure the archive and organised us into pairs. Every member was interviewed by one person and in turn interviewed someone else about their life. The activity helped us to get to know each other better. And for our newer members it provided an active introduction to the club. We chose either to meet in person or talk over the phone. Each interview was written up and the compendium will make an important contribution to the record of our club's history. For future generations it may give insights into what life was like during the pandemic for ordinary women.



Some of SI Stafford members. Always up for a challenge!