

Ann Sweeney MBE 1944-2019

What shaped Ann was an insatiable curiosity, a ferocious work ethic, an unnerving fairness gene, and a hatred of injustice. What underpinned it all was a simple love of people – her adored family, friends, and colleagues through to every workman to visit the house.

Ann was a renowned lecturer in history with a diverse range of subjects, from Mayan Astronomical Observation to Eminent Victorian Women via the Vikings. Wherever her curiosity took her, she found subjects to excite her and things she wanted to tell others. She lectured across the world in eminent universities, village halls and schools, and on several occasions gave inspirational presentations to Soroptimist clubs and regions, bringing together her academic studies.



She was probably most proud of her role as Chair of Hillcroft College, Surrey now part of Richmond Adult Community College, which provides a supportive environment for women who want a second chance in education. Established in 1920, the college was the first institution in the UK to offer female students a chance to bridge the gap between leaving school with no qualifications and going on to higher education, so they could boost their earning power and status. Ann was a respected lecturer for NADFAS, Chairman of the Pepys Club, and a member of the Court of the Worshipful Company of Fletchers Livery Company.

Ann was not an academic. She was not about facts; she was a communicator who delivered inspiration. She loved to be interrupted with questions and different views. If she left one person in the room inspired to open a book and follow their own thread, she was happy. The love she inspired in her audiences led directly to the MBE, canvassed by a committed group of her students.

A dedicated and committed Soroptimist for 34 years, Ann joined SI Woking & District in 1983 where she was a member for 24 years, serving as President on more than one occasion. Ann held a number of offices throughout her membership at club, region and national level, her passion being Programme Action. Ann served on the UK and Southern England Region Programme Action Committees, and was instrumental in raising the profile of both. In 2006 Ann transferred to SI Yeovil, Sherborne & Districts where she remained a member for 10 years, retiring in 2016 when her failing health prevented her from continuing.

Even as the awful Alzheimer's Disease bit into her memory and intellect, the core of the true Ann remained. She loved her Soroptimist and WI meetings and Kurling. She liked nothing better than to sit with friends, searching for good news stories in newspapers and magazines for her scrap book, or colouring her books with incredible attention to detail.

Her energy and enthusiasm and her love for, and interest in, people and life never waned. Her friendship and mentoring were held in the highest regard by her fellow Soroptimists, and she is remembered by many worldwide for the impact she had on their education and lives.