

Miss Eleanor Addison Phillips, MA (1874-1952)

Source: *Clifton High School 1877 - 1952*, reprinted with the kind permission of Clifton High School

Miss Eleanor Addison Phillips was the founder of the Bristol Venture Club and its first President (1920-1921). Eighteen professional and business women were invited to tea in Royal Hotel, Bristol by the Rotary Club of Bristol (10th May 1920) where it was suggested that a club for women be formed. By a unanimous vote, Miss Phillips was asked to be President. Under her leadership the Club did numerous service activities – some so important they were eventually taken over by local Social Services and the National Health Service.

In 1928, the six Venture Clubs formed the Association of Venture Clubs and Miss Phillips was its first President. When the Venture Clubs and Soroptimist Clubs became aware of each other, Miss Phillips was one who believed in uniting rather than working in competition and was instrumental in their amalgamation (1930) and, as Vice President of the National Union of Soroptimists (1930-32), she was a key member of the Board.



In June 1933, at the National Union Conference of the Soroptimist in Bristol and on her retirement, Miss Phillips was appointed an Honorary Member of all Soroptimist Clubs “*in recognition of her outstanding services*”. She is the only Soroptimist to have received such an honour. A month later, SI Bristol gave Miss Phillips a pendant bearing the initials ‘V’ and ‘S’, and jewels spelling out the name ‘Soroptimist’ by the first letter of the following jewels: sapphire, opal, ruby, onyx, pearl, tourmaline, iolites, moonstone, iolites, sapphire and topaz. She gave the pendant back to the Bristol Club, who gave it to SIGBI; it is now worn by the Immediate Past President of SIGBI.

Despite her somewhat severe *persona* in official photographs, Miss Phillips was a fun-loving lady. She attended Maida Vale High School, passing Junior and Senior Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board Exams with distinction. She went to St Mary’s College, Paddington and after securing honours in Higher Local Groups and taking the Teacher’s Diploma she became a lecturer on History and Methods of Education and was soon Head of the Training Department. She then read history at St Hugh’s College, Oxford and became Headmistress at Clifton High School in 1908. Miss Phillips was hard-working, cheerful and hopeful. She had a deep understanding of human nature and her outlook was strongly rational. The right word for the right occasion, always kind and apt, she was generous in appreciation, as well as understanding and tolerant of other people’s infirmities. She is remembered with affection and admiration.

During 1929-1931, Miss Phillips was President of the Head Mistresses’ Association – a fitting climax to a life devoted to education. Clearly she was a special person with many talents and the epitome of a fine Soroptimist.

SI Bristol is the oldest club within the Soroptimist movement, although from 1920 to 1930 it was called a Venture Club.