

President Alison's message

Inside Out and Outside In



MY THANKS to everyone who attended the June 22 regional meeting (see report on page 07). Feedback has been very positive but I thought you might like to read what our keynote speaker Dr Roli Degazon-Johnson had to say in response to my formal thank you: "I am happy to know that all went as you would have wanted. I found the Soroptimists an interesting and very receptive group of women with a vast array of experiences and proposals, which were good to hear.

So I learnt as much as I shared and thank you for the invitation to lunch during which more thought-provoking conversation took place."

The re-gift shop (items donated for others to purchase) raised £150 for the Benevolent Fund and offered those not able to attend a chance to contribute. Only a couple of items were not sold on this particular occasion, so this was an excellent recycling opportunity too.

I am sure you will agree that the venue for the meeting pulled out all the stops, so hopefully we have secured a home for at least the next meeting and I would like to give a vote of appreciation to Susie Forbes and Barbara Fisher for their sterling efforts on our behalf.

The next day I was in Lewes going through the arrangements for the additional Murder Mystery (MM) lunch to be held next month, and then on to East Grinstead for President Alison's garden party – a fabulous afternoon in the sunshine! (See page 06.) All in all a very busy weekend.

With the proceeds of a second MM and the recent "Art at the Seaside" hosted by SI Eastbourne's President Lotte, we are fast approaching the £4K mark for the regional project.

I mentioned at Region that I have now applied to the Rosemary Nutt educational trust for matched funding but the call on their resources affected by the current situation in Gaza means realistically that we may be looking at a maximum of £1,000. A final decision will be made in July so I will report next month.

Ratification of Roxanne St Clair as our Vice-President and a nomination for next year to be brought to the AGM, implies that as far as the presidency is concerned we have a good succession plan but two major roles, Secretary and Treasurer, will become vacant in September. Please do discuss this in your clubs and see if any member might volunteer.

My husband and I are now off to Kos and I'm really looking forward to a fortnight relaxing by the beach. I hope you too are able to enjoy some kind of a break in the sunshine.

YOURS IN FRIENDSHIP, ALISON DRISCOLL

What's in this month's newsletter?



Whitstable club raise funds for MAP, page 02.



Croydon club supports local foodank, 03.



Sevenoaks' gardeners at work, page 04.



Fashion fundraiser for hygiene banks, page 05.



Two summer garden parties, page 06.



Clubs participate in Orange Cafe Day, 08.

Come Dine for Palestine



WHITSTABLE MEMBERS WERE inspired by President Alison's ABCD appeal and, as well as a club donation to Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), one club member invited members, family and friends to 'Come Dine for Palestine' and make another donation to the charity.



They ate Middle Eastern food including the Holy Land cake and raised £667. This money will help MAP support the women and children who are so badly affected by the war and the resulting shortage of food, water and medical supplies.

JANE WEBB, SI WHITSTABLE



An invitation to the Mayor's Civic Service



ON SUNDAY, JUNE 23, the newly elected Sevenoaks Town Mayor, Councillor Libby Ancrum, invited SI Sevenoaks' President Pauline Payne to her Civic Service. It was rather special as it was the 50th one for Sevenoaks!

A very nice service was held at St Luke's Church in Sevenoaks attended by representatives of many local organisations, including Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees and Riding for the Disabled, which are Cllr Libby Ancrum's chosen charities for the year. A reception with tea and cakes followed the service.

Pictured outside the church are SI Sevenoaks member Cllr Dr Marilyn Canet, SI Sevenoaks PAO Sandie Higgs (representing President Pauline who was unable to attend), the new Sevenoaks Town Mayor Cllr Libby Ancrum and SI Sevenoaks member Linda Larter who is the Sevenoaks Town Clerk.

SANDIE HIGGS, PAO, SI SEVENOAKS

Building relationships with students at the University of Kent

SI CANTERBURY IS having a very successful year with developing and sustaining social relationships between our club and women students from the University of Kent.

The main link for us has been through the active students' Women's Network with a membership that changes each year and that is keen to include us in their events during the 2024/5 academic year.



Last November a small group of women from this Network participated in our annual Silent March through the streets of Canterbury. In Spring this year, our club was invited to the on-campus 'Breaking the Silence Against Sexual Abuse' march.

Club members who attended this welcoming and warm event were surprised at the number of young male students marching with us and we found further informal alliances between our club and student support staff.

The Women's Network then invited our club to contribute to their Women's History Month. One club member, Sue Causton, pictured above, organised and facilitated a workshop for women students on "Knowing Myself". Also, our now Club President, Keji Moses, gave a talk to students and staff in the Department of Politics. These very well attended events were an opportunity for speakers to introduce our club and wider Soroptimist values.

The Women's Network has now invited us to attend their forthcoming day event in support of the Women of Palestine. This invitation has sparked much discussion within our club over if and how we might be able to participate.

So, what has been gained from these new relationships between our club and student members of our city community? Besides promoting the name and identity of Soroptimist International to new generations of women, we have learned a lot about the aspirations, challenges and present life experiences of young women students.

They have recently presented us with new and difficult questions about the blurry lines between humanitarian and political viewpoints.

MARY ADAMS, PROGRAMME ACTION LEAD, SI CANTERBURY

Dates of the 2024 Saturday Region Meetings

September 14 (AGM note change of date)
to be held at the Holiday Inn, Rochester
Maidstone Road, Rochester ME5 9SF

December 07 via ZOOM (to be confirmed)

Proposed dates for 2025 Region Meetings

March 15; June 21; September 20

Keji begins her journey



Official photo of Cllr Keji Moses, Sheriff of Canterbury, with the Lord Mayor of Canterbury, Cllr Jean Butcher.

KEJI, OUR PRESIDENT in Canterbury, is committed to giving a voice to the voiceless and a hand up wherever she can. Her warm smile, open arms and all-round enthusiasm impresses everyone she meets on her journey as Sheriff of Canterbury. Our club is extremely proud of her.

These following words are from Pip Hazleton, Labour and Co-operative Party, Cabinet Member for Housing, Westgate Ward Councillor, and Armed Forces Champion:

“We know that all organisations thrive when they are inclusive and include a wide range of diverse experience and talents. Keji to become our next Sheriff, our council will be the richer. I am not simply talking about her being a woman of colour in our overwhelmingly white council chamber. Although that will demonstrate to our ethnic minority communities that they are important and valued too. She is a Trustee of EMIC – the local organisation Ethnic Minorities in Canterbury.

“No, the specific quality that I have found in Keji, is one rarely found in Councillors – that of listening more and speaking less! Whether, in small group discussions or the wider forum of full council, Keji will NOT be the first on her feet, WON’T be the one to grandstand and, thank goodness, DOESN’T feel the need to jump up to repeat the same thing that has just been said by someone else!

“Her silence on these occasions can easily lead her to being overlooked, but it also means that when she does contribute, you can be absolutely sure that she has listened carefully, acknowledged all the points that have been made and only then will she offer her own considered opinion. I’m pretty sure that is one of her strengths too when she sits as a magistrate.

“It will also be an excellent quality in the role of Sheriff, where her genuine interest in the experiences of others will shine through. The residents and representatives of local organisations that she will meet as Sheriff, will, I know, feel valued, recognised and validated as a result of her visits. Their stories will be heard with interest and respect and her encouragement for the work they do will leave their mark long afterwards.”

CAROL REED, SI CANTERBURY

Croydon club members to support local foodbank



WHEN SI CROYDON presidents, Roxanne St Clair and Heather Bailey, shared their vision for their joint presidency they highlighted a desire to support a local food bank.

The club was already aware of one run by the town’s former Mayor, Councillor Humayun Kabir, so they reached out to investigate how club members could offer support.

On Father’s Day, Sunday June 16, Roxanne and Pat Dale volunteered their time and got to see how the food bank worked. Users of the facility were given fresh fruit and vegetables, juice, packaged and tinned staples, plus a choice of meat pastries and some frozen vegetarian rice dishes.

Some of the products are donated by the Felix Project, however, Councillor Kabir and his team also have to source additional donations in addition to purchasing a selection of other essential items out of their own funds.

Croydon club members have been invited to bring non-perishable items to each club meeting. It is then hoped that one or two members can deliver said donations at the end of each month.

ROXANNE ST CLAIR, PRESIDENT, SI CROYDON



From left: Mrs Rahena Kabir, Councillor Humayun Kabir, a Volunteer, Roxanne, Pat and a Volunteer

Closing Date

for the next edition of SEE News
Thursday, July 25, 2024

2024 Closing Dates are:

August 25; September 24;
October 25; November 24; December 27.

Email your text and photographs to Patricia at
pat.painting@btinternet.com 020 8668 2681

The Sevenoaks' gardeners at work



Some of the gardening team working at The Vine. From left are Anne Bond, Mary Hogarth our leader, Vicky Tibbits, Shirley Brigham and Sandie Higgs

SI SEVENOAKS HAVE been working hard since March on three special garden areas in Sevenoaks.

At The Vine we tend a gorgeous raised sensory garden and a herb garden which we established a few years ago, and at Sevenoaks Station we maintain a colourful bed in the station forecourt (see Kelly Bennett and Sandie Higgs in the cover photo). Whenever possible we take the opportunity to display our 'Soroptimists at Work' sign.

The gardening team have had to dodge showers to keep on top of the tasks but have enjoyed the work and results, plus the kind comments from passers-by!

On Friday, June 28, judging will be held for the Sevenoaks in Bloom competition; in previous years a gold medal has been awarded to The Vine, and we are hoping for a good result this year too.

We will report back on the results of the competition a little later in the year.

SANDIE HIGGS, PAO, SI SEVENOAKS

Bromley's annual walk to raise funds for Handicap International



THE ANNUAL WALK to raise funds for Handicap International was led by Leslay Darvill. Sadly the weather was not kind to them.

The group met at Blackheath Station and walked up over the heath, into Greenwich Park, and down to the river by the Maritime Museum, where they took a well-earned rest to dry out, and have a much needed warming drink.

The small but enthusiastic group raised £220 for Handicap International.

CHRISTINE THOMAS, SI BROMLEY

What About Women?



OVER 100 PEOPLE (women and men) attended an event organised by the Tunbridge Wells Soroptimists to hear this question being put to the candidates standing for the Tunbridge Wells constituency at the forthcoming General Election.

Five of the six would-be MPs (the Liberal Democrat hopeful declined to attend) took part and the audience was able to hear how they believed policies of their respective parties would progress the cause of women's rights and equality and what difference they would make to women's everyday lives.

Candidates were posed five pre-prepared questions on a range of issues: equal pay and flexible working, empowerment and safety in education, cost and accessibility of childcare, fair treatment by the Criminal Justice System, and equal representation in public life.

After addressing all of these, the participants answered questions from the floor which covered topics such as the relative morality of tax cuts versus welfare spending, legislation governing asylum seekers, and the changes to the abortion laws recently discussed in parliament.

The candidates thanked Tunbridge Wells Club for giving them the opportunity to address voters directly, and the audience expressed their appreciation to the Club and to the candidates by giving them a loud round of applause.

JILL RUDDOCK, SI TUNBRIDGE WELLS



Tunbridge Wells members, Kathleen Lynch-Howard, Jill Ruddock, Caroline Auckland and Lorna Blackmore



Fashion Fundraiser for Hygiene Banks



DURING MAY, MEDWAY and Maidstone Soroptimists hosted by a Charity Fashion Show run by Travelling Trends. More than 50 Soroptimists, friends and family came along to support the event which was in aid of the Maidstone and Medway Hygiene Banks.

Two of the five models strutting their stuff along the catwalk were members Stella Barnes and Wanda Wright, who had been 'real life' models previously. They brought the clothing to life, and it certainly added a fun element to the evening.

All the clothes that are modelled, plus lots of other items in assorted sizes, are available to try on and buy on the evening.

When the Fashion Show finishes there is an hour for some retail therapy and the opportunity to pick up some real bargains.

Travelling Trends Fundraising Fashion Shows have been in operation for more than 25 years and we have used their services several times over the years. Normally they have a vast

clothing collection available from manufacturers for the most popular high street stores, individual boutiques, and designers. The clothing and accessories are all at excellent discounted prices and everything is under £30.

Unfortunately, in the current financial climate, it has proved a challenge for Travelling Trends to source sufficient stock to sustain the business and it will cease at the end of the year. However, there were plenty of clothes to choose from on the evening and many 'happy' customers left with their purchases.

With the ticket sales, raffle and % commission from the sales we raised £410 which will be shared between our two local Hygiene Banks in Maidstone and Medway.

Our thanks go to Angela Howe who organised the evening and our two models, Stella and Wanda...well done.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE

Tunbridge Wells members invited to LSBU Workshop in Dublin

SI TUNBRIDGE WELLS were honoured to be invited to take part in the LSBU (London South Bank University) Arts and Humanities Research Council Network Women's Grassroots Activism Workshop in Dublin at the end of April. Thanks to Prof Caitriona Beaumont FRHistS and Dr Anne Logan, (University of Kent) for the opportunity.

Caroline Auckland and Angela McPherson represented Tunbridge Wells and presented on the work our club has undertaken in the area of #VAWG (Violence against women and girls) and the continuing advocacy of improving the situation around this issue. We also considered the importance of archives in revealing the continual narrative around visibility and traceability.

The workshop was held in the National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks, Dublin. A fitting place to showcase our beautiful club presidential chain of office designed by enamellist Ernestine Mills, also a Soroptimist, who supported women's suffrage through art and action (heritage, humanists.uk)

Angela McPherson gave a presentation on our 'Holy Porridge' project, a banner designed by the women of HMP Bronzefield for this year's International Women's Day, and sewn by members of Tunbridge Wells club.

An amazing two days of historical and current collective activism involving academics and members of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), SIGBI Republic of Ireland, SIGBI Northern Ireland, and the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA).

CAROLINE AUCKLAND, SOCIAL MEDIA OFFICER, SI TUNBRIDGE WELLS



From left: Angela McPherson, SITWD, Aisling Nolan President Soroptimist SIGBI Republic of Ireland, Eadaoin Lawlor IP President Soroptimist SIGBI Republic of Ireland, and Caroline Auckland SITWD

Garden Party raises £266 for Itarsi Railway Street Children



Valerie Randall Webb



Sue Hunt with Carol McKeough



Pat Varty and Janet Hughes



Stella Barnes and Jill Squires

AS WE WOKE up on the morning of the longest day of the year, it was to bright sunshine and ideal weather for Sue Hunt's Garden Party.

Sue is an enthusiastic supporter of the Itarsi Project and has been holding fundraising garden parties at her home for more than 20 years. Soroptimists and friends are invited to contribute a savoury, and/or dessert dish.

Along with enjoying the food and drink sat outside, there was chatting with old and new friends. In particular, we welcomed Valerie Randall Webb, a former member of Maidstone club for over 40 years. Valerie had left Kent and only returned to live here last year. She was keen to come to the Garden Party and support the event as when she was a Soroptimist she had visited the Itarsi project. She was able to share her experiences of the work Itarsi were doing to support the Railway Street Children.

We also met with two potential new members and friends of Sue's who had been invited. Hopefully, they will decide to join us in the future or come along to a meeting to find out more.

Members' donations and proceeds from the Raffle organised by Janet Hughes meant £266 was raised for Itarsi.

A big thank you to Sue Hunt and her husband Chris for the warm welcome and for opening their home and garden for us all to enjoy.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE



East Grinstead Club hosts its annual Garden Party



SUNDAY, JUNE 23 DAWNED bright, sunny and warm, ideal conditions for East Grinstead Club's annual Garden Party.

This lunchtime event was supported by 46 members and guests, including visitors from Croydon and Bromley Clubs, who gathered in President Alison's beautiful garden to enjoy a delicious cold buffet.

East Grinstead members had prepared a wonderful spread of cold meats, quiches, a wide variety of salads and a range of mouth-watering desserts.

Guests had the opportunity to participate in challenges – golf, seek the egg and bacon, and find the number of animals in the garden – as well as purchasing handmade craft items, pre-loved clothing and books.

There was also a raffle with some very attractive prizes. All proceeds from the afternoon will be donated to President Alison's chosen charities.

Unlike last year when the heavens opened towards the end of the event, this year's Garden Party was blessed with glorious weather throughout.

A lovely occasion of fun, food and fellowship.

ROSEMARY STONE, SI EAST GRINSTEAD





SISEE June Regional Meeting at Holiday Inn, Rochester

OUR JUNE REGIONAL meeting was attended by 38 members at a new venue, the Holiday Inn at Rochester. The day had been planned by Regional President Alison and promised to be a full and interactive time.

Guest Speaker

Our first speaker was Dr Roli Degazon-Johnson, seen in the top left photo with Croydon members Roxanne St Clair and Pat Dale. Roli spoke on Female Genital Mutilation and the culture of secrecy and silence that exists and asked, "How can we save them?":

- Identify perpetrators.
- Ensure you speak out about FGM.
- Learn as much as you can to stop it – useful videos on YouTube.
- You can protect any child or young woman who may be vulnerable, and it is going on in the UK.

Vice President Roxanne St Clair thanked Roli for her thought-provoking presentation.

Visit from SIGBI Board Member

There is a commitment from the SIGBI for Board members to visit each Region on a rota basis. We were pleased to welcome Christine Corless as the Finance Director who took us through the SIGBI Strategic Plan 2021–2025. As SIGBI looks forward, 2025 onwards with the modernisation proposals, a George Bernard Shaw quote is relevant: "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

Membership

Membership is key and they are looking at trends and forecasts with declining numbers on recruitment and retention across the Federation, which has 5100 members with 1000 being overseas. However, Christine noted our Region was bucking the trend as our numbers were up by 5% and the Whitstable club had also been chartered.

Long Service Presentation

Christine presented Julia Search from SI Medway and Maidstone with her 25-year long service badge (bottom centre photo).

Something Different!

We were then treated to something different with Alan Bennett's Talking Heads' monologue 'Soldiering On' performed by Dot Pullan (top centre photo).

Club Presentations

After an enjoyable lunch, we heard from four clubs, Folkestone, Lewes, Medway and Maidstone, and Whitstable, with short presentations highlighting Good News Stories on their club activities.

Feedback

Feedback on the day from SI Canterbury: "Fabulous regional meeting, great to hear from other clubs and their projects. Good venue too and very thoughtful catering at the Holiday Inn."

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE

Members of SI Sevenoaks celebrated Orange the World on June 25 at Coblands Garden Centre



Members of SI Bromley celebrated Orange the World in the Beckenham Methodist Church Cafe



STOP PRESS Byron Primary School

SI Medway and Maidstone's partner, Byron Primary School, has recently gone through the re-accreditation process as a UNICEF Rights Respecting School and achieved Silver Award. A full report will appear in the July issue of SEE News.

JANE BARNES, SI MEDWAY AND MAIDSTONE

Whitstable & District's first AGM



OUR FIRST AGM was an occasion for congratulations all round! So far we have achieved:

- 17 members, all of whom are active in some way to support the club and our programme action.
- Three well established and long running projects including daily supermarket collections, and 40 Plastic Free Business Champions.
- Five charity car parks raising £1125 for the school and our charities.
- Monthly nights out.
- One Reflections Day.
- Lots of beach cleans, outings, local links and friendship.

Mags Harrison, (seen above fourth from left) with other club members, becomes our first Immediate Past President with our appreciation for her leadership since Whitstable & District was chartered in 2023 .

The Club's Planning team will share the leadership role for the coming year and Caroline Gipson becomes our Vice President.

JANE WEBB, SI WHITSTABLE

Josephine Butler an influential woman

No, I hadn't heard of her either, but in 1869 she campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CD Acts) first introduced in 1864.

The CD Acts gave UK police the power to forcibly inspect the genitals of women they suspected to be prostitutes for signs of venereal disease. This was an attempt to prevent infections among soldiers and sailors. Reformers objected to these measures since they did nothing to limit infected men's sexual activity.

A National Association for the repeal of CD Acts was formed in 1869, followed soon afterwards by a separate Ladies' National Association (LNA) with Josephine Butler at the helm.

Apart from attempts to repeal the CD Acts, a campaign to raise the age of consent from 12 to 14 was denied by MPs, which meant that men could legally have sex with young girls, which today we would class as rape. In 1875 the age of consent was raised to 13!

This horrifying but fascinating story has been documented by Susanna Rustin in her book "Sexed: A History of British Feminism" published by Polity Press on June 28, 2024.

An excellent article was published in *The Guardian*, on June 27, 2024. (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk>)

PATRICIA PAINTING, EDITOR