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EDITOR

Sherry Eskander

Deadline for articles for June Newsletter is Monday 23 June

President Sue's Message

It is Never Too Late or Too Early

May has been another busy month for all Clubs as they prepared events to commemorate VE Day on May 8th.

Some Clubs celebrated a little earlier such as Soroptimist International East Grinstead who decorated their May Fair Gazebo with Red, White and Blue along with the Blue and Yellow Soroptimist colours and also some 'Orange' was evident too. This Club took advantage of showcasing the Regions breadth of Programme Action displaying the regional banner that was first seen at the Conference in Edinburgh. It is a real talking point!

I then delivered the banner to Wendy of Sevenoaks for them to use at a town event in the High Street and feedback was very positive. It is now ready to be passed on should you have forthcoming events that could showcase our work. Please get in touch with Sevenoaks or drop me a mail if you would like to have the banner delivered. (P.S. a thanks from me for Wendy for a delicious cream tea at the garden centre where we met!)



*Since our last newsletter your Club Secretary should have circulated more information regarding **Refuge in Literacy UK**. I have more information from Anne Stairmand, regarding Pathway Project who are a domestic and sexual abuse service based in Lichfield & Tamworth, Staffordshire. They offer a range of support services and run two refuges. They held an initial launch meeting at Lichfield refuge on Friday 16th May 2025. They have also developed a robust project plan that I can share with those Clubs who are interested in finding out more on how this offering can and is being introduced. Their CEO will also discuss and inform the National Women's Aid team of this project and suggest that they meet with Anne with a view to a National Launch after the Pilot is completed.*

More from the President



I would also like to remind you that our Regional Meeting is coming up on Saturday 21st June. An agenda has been circulated to all members via Club Secretaries and I hope to see many of you there. There will be a Programme Action Workshop in the afternoon.

It is also a time for many Clubs to be holding Garden Parties and all fingers will be crossed that rain will not be mentioned in the weather forecast! I also hope to see many of you at our Regional Charity Lunch on Sunday 20th July 2025. More details and the invitation you can find on P.13 in this newsletter.

President Sue

ORANGE IS NOT JUST A COLOUR
It's the colour of #OrangeTheWorld's Unite Campaign

Orange Cafe events in our Region continue to raise our profile and they give us an opportunity to open up a conversation about what we do. I hope to drop into a few over the coming months!

SI Sevenoaks held another very successful Orange the World event at the Cornflower Café in the Coblands Garden Centre near Riverhead. 16 members, past members and friends met at the café to enjoy coffee, tea and some delicious cake. We were able to talk to other café users and hand out leaflets. We also welcomed Maxine Quinton, who works for Sevenoaks District Council on health and safety matters in the area. She provided us with items to hand out to protect people from having their drinks spiked. This has been a very interesting topic for us with input from the last Region meeting and at our last Orange the World event. We are happy to report that one of our guests, Eleanor, is going to join us - so a really worthwhile event! by Sandie Higgs



SI Sevenoaks busy at work

Swap for Spring

SI Sevenoaks held a Swap for Spring event at Sandie's - well, a posh bring and buy really - and we held a tombola and also served a light lunch to our guests. 37 lovely people attended, including past members, some from a distance, members from our nearby clubs at Bromley and Tunbridge Wells and friends and neighbours from the Sevenoaks area. We were lucky to receive some beautiful dresses, tops and jackets, and are very grateful to members and friends who so kindly donated these. We welcomed Irene and gorgeous Rhubarb, her puppy in training for Guide Dogs and as it was a sunny day we were able to sit in the garden. Our most senior guest was delightful May, 98, who was very pleased with the new handbag she bought! We have been able to invite others to view the clothes subsequently, and to date the amount raised is £644.00 for President Margaret's chosen charity, Guide Dogs for the Blind. By Sandie Higgs & Kathy Jordan



SI SEE Region Poster doing the Rounds!

80th Anniversary of VE Day

SI Sevenoaks were invited by Sevenoaks Town Council to join other groups in the town to help celebrate the 80th Anniversary of VE Day on 8th May. Here we are on a beautiful sunny evening welcoming the Mayor of Sevenoaks, Cllr Libby Ancrum, to look at our poster and have a celebratory chocolate!



Pictured are members Sandie Higgs and Vicky Tibbits and Cllr Libby Ancrum. We were able to speak to lots of people including possible new members and one young lady has already been to a club meeting.

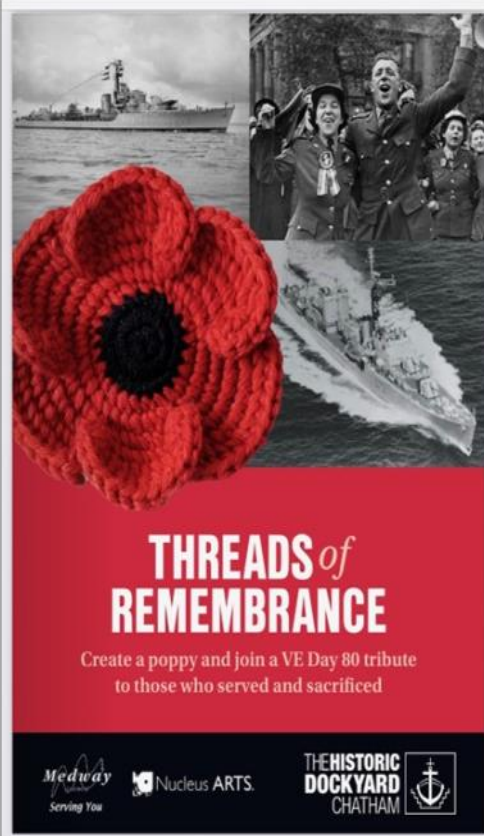
It was a very successful event with band, singers and beacon lighting at the end. It is great to be part of a lively community.

Regional President Sue Edgar drove over to Sevenoaks to meet with member Wendy Metcalf to hand over the Region Poster for use on the SI Sevenoaks 80th Anniversary of VE Day stand.

Our second picture shows the poster on display with Wendy Metcalf and Vicky Tibbits. It was great to have the poster on our display and we send big thanks to President Sue for getting it to us! We promise to return it shortly! By Sandie Higgs



Soroptimist Knitters make 136 Poppies for Threads of Remembrance



To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, a striking installation of 11,000 handcrafted poppies are needed.

Jane and Stella Barnes (Medway and Maidstone) have been busy knitting 136 poppies in memory of their grandfather (b. 1889) who was based at Chatham Dockyard in WW2.

Threads of Remembrance will be displayed at the National Destroyer Memorial at The Historic Dockyard Chatham to honour those who served and sacrificed during the War.

It will be unveiled in September and will remain on view until Armistice Day. The tribute will honour the 11,000 men who lost their lives aboard the 142 Royal Navy destroyers sunk during the Second World War.



Francis William Kennard (1889 – 1963)



IMPORTANT DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Book your place now by
contacting

Susie Forbes at

susieforbessorops@gmail.com

**Fundraising Regional Lunch**
Sunday 20 July 2025
£38.50
12.30 for 1.00pm
Carvery and Dessert

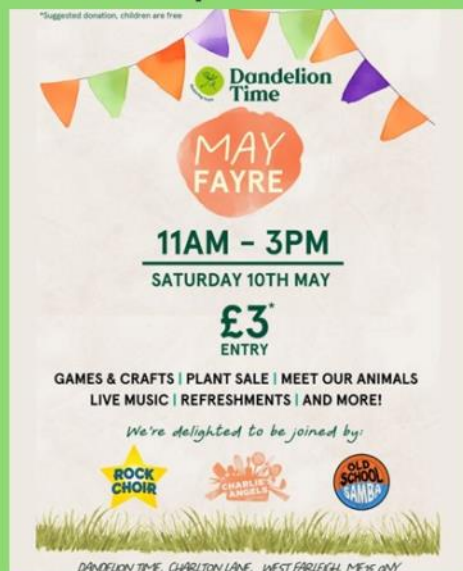
**THE LONDON BEACH HOTEL**
SPA & COUNTRY CLUB

All proceeds to following Cancer charities

**Breast Cancer Kent**

**The ROYAL
MARSDEN
Cancer Charity**

Soroptimists Volunteer at Dandelion Time May Fayre



Stella and Sharon



Savouries and cakes on sales table



Sharon, Jane, Stella and Janet

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists were asked to volunteer again this year at the Dandelion Time May Fayre on 10 May. Our task was to set up and man the refreshment stall from 10 am – 4pm. Seven members plus a Soroptimister volunteered and we had two shifts covering morning and afternoon. Some members who were unable to volunteer had made cakes for the stall.

We were fortunate as the weather was ideal attracting more than 800 people to the Fayre on the hot sunny day. It meant our stall selling homemade savouries, cakes and hot and cold drinks was extremely busy throughout the day.

Dandelion Time is a nature-based charity that gives early support to children who've suffered from traumatic experiences such as domestic abuse and neglect. They help them overcome their emotional and behavioural issues to build self-esteem and confidence, and cope better at home, at school and in life.

They believe that every child has the opportunity to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment to feel loved and to be free of fear. They put the child at the centre of every decision that is made. Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists are proud to support Dandelion Time in this way. By Jane Barnes.

New President for SI Eastbourne & District

SI Eastbourne and District welcomed new President Julie Healey-Hill at our recent AGM.

Julie follows on from Past President Lotte Peasgood who served for two successful years and hosted many lovely social events, oversaw our 70th Anniversary celebrations last year and raised funds for our local women's Refuge.

New President Julie will be raising funds for the **Alzheimers Society** and will be supported by President-Elect Barbara Lunt. Lotte, Julie and Barbara are seen in the photo at our AGM. By Lynne Chiswick





Soroptimists on Memory Walk around St Mary's Island

Seven members of SI Medway and Maidstone led by Jenny Jones enjoyed a Memory Walk around St Mary's Island, Chatham this month.

The Memory Awareness Week 2025 (19 – 25 May) theme is Boost Your Brain. This theme emphasizes the importance of keeping mentally, physically, and socially active to benefit brain health. The theme also highlights the role of supportive communities in the lives of those affected by dementia.

Everyone enjoyed the company and what was an interesting and informative morning walk with Jenny giving a lot of information about the history of the local area, that for some was new to them. A big thank you to Jenny.

SUPPORTING EASTBOURNE DEMENTIA ACTION ALLIANCE

SI Eastbourne & District have continued to support an important local charity, the Eastbourne Dementia Action Alliance (EDAA) and recently club members took part during the Arlington Bluebell Walk charity month.

This is an annual event in early spring on a local farm, Bates Green Farm, when the white wood anemones and bluebells are flowering. Local charities are selected and participate by welcoming visitors and offering them refreshments and support and also raising much needed funds for their own charity. To date well over a million pounds has been raised for local charities.

Eastbourne Club members supported EDAA's day at the Bluebell Walk and helped with a range of activities including working in the kitchen, cafe and on the gate taking entrance fees.

We have also recently helped at an EDAA tombola in a local ASDA. By Lynne Chiswick



Whitstable and District AGM

Whitstable and District club doesn't have a president and club leadership comes from the Planning Team, who work together to give direction and focus, taking it in turns to chair meetings. Our second AGM was chaired by Judith who began by welcoming a new member, Jane Terry, to our club. Jane is our 23rd member. She volunteers for the local Clothing Bank and we are looking forward to hearing more about their work soon.

Highlights for 2024/25 from the officers' reports included:

- * Almost £7000 raised for local and international charities. The balance will be distributed at the June club meeting.
- * Programme Action projects address the



majority of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

- * Nearly every member takes part in one or more PA projects.
- * Welcoming five new members, including one who returned to Soroptimism after several years absence.
- * Developing supportive friendships, especially from our monthly meals out, sharing common health and caring experiences.
- * Another dance to celebrate International Women's Day. It was a fun and inclusive night out, welcoming nearly 100 local people.
- * Winning the Grace Onions award for our Plastic Free Whitstable project and being shortlisted by SIGBI.

- * Introducing our mentor/buddies plans, which are known as our link members and will offer friendship, support and information to new members.

Members confirmed that these leadership arrangements will continue for 2025-26. The club calendar dates were also confirmed, trialling quarterly business meetings. To keep club meetings topical, inclusive and responsive, their content will be planned every quarter.

To round off the AGM, our founder member Jane Webb was presented with a certificate from SIGBI President Ruth Healey marking 25 years of Soroptimist service. Well done Jane! By Mags Harrison

Carmelita in Durban



Soroptimist Internati... 19h ·

SI Durban Friendship Links
SI Durban club members had the privilege of meeting Carmelita from SI Bromley, UK, and the Mottershaws from Jersey, Channel Islands, for fruitful in-person catch up. The discussions were heartfelt and expansive on creative project ideas. We are so grateful to have these engagements with our fellow friendship links that always bring so much value to our club



East Grinstead at the Town's May Fair

On Monday 5 May East Grinstead Club set up a stall at the town's May Fair. Gill Beeney and Helen Pond ran the stall throughout the day, joined by other Club members from time to time.

The stall displayed information about Soroptimist International and examples of East Grinstead's work and activities. Helen had made a range of craft items as well as bags of her 'famous' fudge. Sales of these items raised over £70.00 for Club charities. A number of people expressed an interest in the Club and it is to be hoped that some potential new members have been contacted. By Rosemary Stone



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International
Great Britain & Ireland

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SIGBI.ORG



Happy Easter to Crawley Open House

This Easter East Grinstead Club were kindly offered 20 Easter eggs by the local Food Bank. These eggs, part of a generous donation from Lingfield Preparatory School, were surplus to the Food Bank's needs. Since the Club has an ongoing relationship with Crawley Open House, a year-round high support hostel for those experiencing homelessness and hardship, we

were delighted to accept the eggs on their behalf. One of our members delivered the eggs and Open House were delighted to receive them, adding unexpected extra enjoyment to their clients' Easter-time.

By Rosemary Stone





MIGHTY OAKS FROM little acorns grow

.... but it takes a very long time! At their May speaker meeting, East Grinstead Club were delighted to welcome Gilly Halcrow who entertained us with a very interesting, illustrated talk on the work of The Woodland Trust.

Gilly began by telling us that it took 600 oak trees to build Henry VIII's Flagship, the Mary Rose. Since it takes between 30 and 50 years for an oak to reach maturity and around 40 years to



produce its first acorn, this one project alone would have caused immeasurable damage to the environment. Henry may well have been surprised that we are concerning ourselves with this some 480 years later!

Wars and natural disasters, such as the Great Storm of 1987, have all taken their toll on our woodlands. The Great Storm resulted in the loss of 15 million trees. The town of Sevenoaks lost six of its seven famous trees, those six now happily replaced. In the last 45 years, 43 million trees have been planted.

Gilly based her talk around the aims of the Woodland Trust which are to provide healthy habitats for people and wildlife by creating, protecting and restoring. Some beautiful pictures of trees, wild flowers and birds, including some of the Ashdown Forest where Gilly lives, were displaying on the screen. As well as being an accomplished speaker, Gilly is a talented artist and has produced many beautiful nature-themed greetings cards from which she raises large sums in aid of the Ashdown Forest.

The oldest tree in the UK is the Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, Scotland which is at least 2,000 to 3,000, possibly even 5,000 years old. It's incredible to think that the trees East Grinstead Club has planted in memory of former members may still be enjoyed thousands of years from now!

By Rosemary Stone

'We want a world where woods and trees thrive for people and nature.

We can't achieve our vision without you.'

Woodland Trust

The perfect day for SI Croydon & SI Bromley

Saturday 17th May was the perfect day for SI Croydon & SI Bromley to host their Inter-Club Lunch at the Shirley Park Golf Club.

A Landmark Case

You may have watched the ITV miniseries, *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*, and recall Mr Sam Stein KC, the Barrister representing the Sub Post Masters whose lives were drastically impacted by the shortcomings of the Horizon system. Sam is the son of SI Croydon's late member, Gillian Matthews, and agreed to deliver a key note talk in memory of his mother.



Synopsis:

Mr Bates v The Post Office: A Landmark Case

The case of Mr Bates v The Post Office brought to light one of the most significant miscarriages of justice in British legal history. Between 2000 and 2014, hundreds of Sub Post Masters were wrongly accused of theft, fraud, or false accounting due to errors in the Horizon IT system, developed by Fujitsu and used by the Post Office. Despite repeated concerns raised by Sub Post Masters, the Post Office insisted the system was reliable and pursued legal action against individuals, resulting in criminal convictions, financial ruin, and immense personal suffering.

Alan Bates, a former Sub Post Master, led the legal battle to expose the truth. In 2019, the High Court found that Horizon was indeed flawed and that the Post Office had shown institutional obstinacy in refusing to acknowledge the system's faults. This ruling paved the way for subsequent appeals and the quashing of dozens of wrongful convictions.

Despite the judgment, the Horizon system remains in operation, and many victims are still awaiting full compensation. The case has since prompted widespread calls for reform and accountability within public institutions.

The talk highlighted the struggles, misinformation and legacy of rolling out an accounting system that was not fit for purpose. Guests heard that neither the Post Office or the developers were prepared to take the blame for the inadequacies in the system, pointing the finger at each other instead. Furthermore, compensation payments are still outstanding, hence, the ripple effect of wrongful accusations against the Sub Post Masters continues to today.

Although a landmark case that proved that the Horizon system was not fit for purpose it has not led to the system being decommissioned. In fact, the system is still in use around the country.

SI Croydon were delighted to have two additional participants in the case attend the lunch. Both Soroptimists, and instrumental in putting the case together, Kay Linnell and Barbara Jeremiah. It was a pleasant meeting of three individuals who continue to fight for justice on behalf of those who possibly have nowhere else to turn.

Thank you to Heather and the team for coordinating such an enjoyable event and, everyone who joined us and made the day very special. By Roxanne St Clair



Let us continue what we started

Railways stations surveys

Back in March 1995 I was attacked on a train. June Bridgeman (Tunbridge Wells) persuaded me to bring about something positive from the experience.

SI Bromley club had done safety surveys of local stations, but the project soon went regional and then national. Several reports were the result over the following years as we tackled different aspects of safety on the railways and worked with the rail industry inputting to what became the Safer Stations Scheme and building in new safety features to the Networker trains that emerged. These reports can be found on the hub in the resources and materials area, railway and drill down <https://thehub.sigbi.org/filerepository?parent=675af5cf2f6c8c0008f0c105>.

Changes were also made to the British Transport Police's policy of following up with victims, they no longer send a lone male officer late on the night of the attack!!! I am also pleased to say that the Criminal Injuries Board now also recognize more appropriately how significantly such an experience can impact on someone's life, at the time compensation was less than a broken toe! The photo was taken in 1997 when NatWest recognised the work with the Chief Executive's Award for that year. Life has moved on although even now I have to manage certain triggers carefully and it does affect what I feel confident in doing sometimes.



SIGBI has recently requested clubs to complete surveys of their local stations to check up on certain safety aspects after 30 years. SI Bromley did 9 in the first fortnight and have another 13 to go! There have been some interesting findings, especially around safe access to the platforms, particularly if you are unable to use the steps up and over the tracks, magnified in the dark of course. Perhaps the most disturbing finding so far has been that although large, usually wall-mounted, white Help Points are in place (which should automatically connect to the 24 hour cover at the rail company) a number of the stations in the first batch sported proper yellow signs on them with clear black lettering 'OUT OF ACTION in an emergency ring 999.' !!! One is unfortunate if you are in need, but both sides of the track at several stations on the same line??? Unforgiveable.



I encourage you to complete surveys of stations near you there clearly remains work to be done! The deadline for them to be returned is the end of June..... It only takes a few minutes each time and I am assured that areas identified as being in need of attention will be fed back to the relevant companies to be addressed.

By Mary Dalman