

- SISEE President's Message 2
- Eastbourne Soroptimists Celebrate International Women's Day 2026 3
- Orange Coffee Morning for Bromley 4
- Easter Gifts for the Women's Refuge - SI Folkestone 4
- SI Medway and Maidstone becomes CIO in March 2026 5
- East Grinstead members assist with mock employment interviews 6
- East Grinstead Club learn more about Ashdown Forest 6
- President Roxanne attends Medway and Maidstone AGM Dinner 7
- Tunbridge Wells members making items for Comfort Cases 8
- Medway and Maidstone does too... 8
- Obituary: June Bridgeman CB 26th June 1932 - 19th April 2026 SI Tunbridge Wells 9
- Foreshore litter pick on River Medway - SI Medway and Maidstone 10
- 80th celebrations in 2026 - SI Tunbridge Wells and SI Medway and Maidstone 11
- On the HUB.... 12/13
- Why not enter our Ruby Anniversary themed Quiz? 13

Editor: Sherry Eskander

Deadline for May articles is Friday 23rd May, email Sherry at soroptimistnewsletter@gmail.com

SISEE President's Message

Hello and welcome to our regional newsletter. I hope that the longer days and lighter evenings are bringing a renewed sense of energy and positivity to you all. As clubs begin planning for the year ahead,

I have had the pleasure of joining two of our clubs for their AGMs, both of which were enjoyable and uplifting in different ways. At SI Medway and Maidstone, the meeting was lively and purposeful, with a strong reaffirmation of the club's key focus areas. It was encouraging to hear thoughtful updates regarding absent members and the continued efforts being made to maintain meaningful contact. One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of a 25-year long service award, a truly special moment recognising dedication and commitment. As always, the hospitality was warm and generous.

At SI Sevenoaks, I was delighted to learn more about the history of their venue, particularly that it was commissioned by a former Soroptimist. What a powerful and lasting legacy. The evening also included an engaging talk that shared valuable insight into the work of the local police force and the realities of the challenges they face daily. It was also a joy to celebrate so many member birthdays, contributing to a genuinely celebratory atmosphere throughout the evening. Thank you to both clubs for such welcoming and pleasant visits.

I am also pleased to share an update on our regional project supporting Comfort Cases UK. It is wonderful to see teams across the region beginning to take action. Members have started working on cotton drawstring bags for toiletries, and we have already seen our very first "Barry the Sloth," created using a pattern kindly provided by designer Amanda Berry. I had the pleasure of seeing him in person, and I must say, he was so comforting to the touch that I would have happily taken him home with me. In addition, I would like to recognise the excellent initiative taken by one of our members, who has researched and identified an accessible crochet pattern to ensure that as many members as possible can participate. This spirit of inclusion, creativity, and collaboration truly reflects the heart of what we do.

Thank you all for your continued commitment and contribution. I look forward to seeing how both your individual club plans and our regional project continue to develop in the months ahead.

In friendship, Roxanne.



Eastbourne Soroptimists Celebrate International Women's Day 2026



Like most clubs Eastbourne celebrates International Women's Day (IWD). This year was a new first!

Having joined in with Cllr Teri Sayers-Cooper and other Eastbourne women's groups for the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women activities in November last year, Teri and the groups wanted to continue collaboration. IWD was the obvious choice, so, a day event was held at The Gather (a community space) in Eastbourne's Beacon Shopping Centre.

Activities included a Living Library of local inspirational women including (amongst others) a Holocaust survivor and Honorary Free-woman of Eastbourne; an outreach trainer for Care for the Carers; a local artist founder of an organisation which provides emotional support, peer networks, and confidence-building for survivors of domestic abuse; someone from the Sanctuary Café, which exists to welcome people seeking refuge - offering a safe space for community, connection and counsel.

Other activities throughout the day included:

- A collaborative Give to Gain photography project, with a photographer on site capturing images of participants in a gesture of giving, alongside a community photo collage
- Screenings of Being a Woman, created by Creative Force to celebrate International Women's Day
- Distribution of handcrafted crocheted flowers in the IWD colours of

purple, white and green

- A Tree of Inspiration inviting visitors to share quotes or name women who inspire them (a club member made decorative labels for this)
- Signposting to local organisations supporting women's health, wellbeing and safety
- An interactive installation gathering views on what women would like to see happening in Eastbourne for themselves, their families and their communities



- White Ribbon pledges inviting men to commit to helping keep women safe and challenge inappropriate behaviour
- Craft activities including decorating wooden coasters and making bead friendship bracelets



It was an enjoyable, but thought provoking day, and, at one time there were 7 club members sharing in the day together. I am sure there will be another one next year.

*Joyce Boorman
SI Eastbourne & District*

Orange Coffee Morning for Bromley

On Orange day the 25th March, Bromley Soroptimists were invited to the weekly coffee morning at Orpington Methodist Church.

As well as good company and delicious cakes, we were able to publicise our Fresh Thoughts booklet. *We are now making the booklet available in as many places and to as many people as possible.

The business and post cards have a QR code so it is very easy for everyone to access the booklet.

Eileen Lee—SI Bromley



Easter Gifts for the Women's Refuge



SI Folkestone was once again pleased to be able to provide gifts for the women and children at the Folkestone Women's Refuge. The Easter eggs and chocolates were well received as always.

The club also has plans to purchase a small bookcase and provide books for the children in the Refuge in the near future to help with their literacy and to encourage their enjoyment of reading.

Yvonne Freeman -SI Folkestone

SI Medway and Maidstone becomes CIO in March 2026

Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists are very proud to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). We were registered with the Charity Commission on 24 March 2026 during our 80th anniversary year.



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

A CIO is a 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation'. This legal structure is designed specifically for non-profit organisations in the UK. Introduced by the Charities Act 2011, a CIO combines the benefits of having a separate legal identity, like a company, with the simplicity of a traditional unincorporated charity.

The Soroptimist organisation is about 'Women at their best, working to help other women be their best.' Our club was founded in 1946.

Over the years the club has raised hundreds of pounds to give to charities that work with women and girls, both locally and internationally. The members of the club have given thousands of hours of voluntary service to help improve the lives of disadvantaged women.

Our work focusses on women and girls:

- Supporting the women's refuge and working with specialist charities, for women who have experienced violence and domestic abuse, providing a home where they can live in safety, empowering them to live safer, healthier futures.
- Helping fundraise for a local nature-based charity that works with children and their wider family to overcome issues and difficulties
- We work with local schools, including helping young people learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Raising awareness of health issues that affect women and girls e.g cervical cancer

The work on this was started by Liz Duckworth after attending SIGBI Edinburgh conference. Just prior to her passing in February 2025, Liz asked Carol Infanti and Daisy O'Hagan to take it forward. They have worked diligently over the past year liaising with Giselle Davies (SIGBI) on behalf of the club to make it all a reality. Well done.....

East Grinstead members assist with mock employment interviews

On Friday 20 March Sue Edgar and Gill Beeney were part of a team of professionals (or ex- professionals!) who spent a very enjoyable day interviewing students at Sackville School as part of their work experience programme.

Students had been given a selection of job scenarios from which they chose one and then submitted a CV and letter of application. They then had a job 'interview' for 15 minutes followed by a brief written report and verbal feedback.

Both Sue and Gill were impressed with many of the students' applications and interviews and also enjoyed meeting others who gave some extremely amusing responses, including one student who, having not completed an application letter, discussed the position he wanted in the future - a beach lifeguard. There was, however, a slight problem in that he wasn't a very good swimmer! Nevertheless, it enabled a good conversation about the skills you might require for certain positions!



Gill Beeney SI East Grinstead

East Grinstead Club learn more about Ashdown Forest

On Wednesday 1 April we were very pleased to welcome Richard Pike who spoke to us about Nutley Windmill which stands in a beautiful setting overlooking Ashdown Forest, just 'down the road' from East Grinstead.

Richard, who is a trustee of the windmill, first became interested at the age of six! Nutley Mill is the last Open Trestle Post Mill in Sussex and one of only 5 left in the country, a design dating back to the 12th century. It was restored to full working order in the 1970s and is run by a group of 6 volunteers. It has received a Heritage Year Award as well as appearing in the film Chocky's Children and on a postage stamp in 2017. Many windmill aficionados say this is one of their favourite windmills. Interesting pictures of renovations over the years, resulting from deterioration and severe weather such as the Great Storm of 1987, were shown to the audience.



East Grinstead is fortunate in being so close to the Ashdown Forest and we have benefited from some very interesting and informative talks over the years; ecological, historical and fictional (it being the well-known 'residence' of Winnie the Pooh, currently celebrating his 100th birthday!). As a 'thank you' to Richard and to help ensure that the windmill continues to flourish, we gave a donation to Uckfield Preservation Society who are responsible for its maintenance.

Rosemary Stone/Gill Beeney SI East Grinstead

President Roxanne attends Medway and Maidstone AGM Dinner

Medway and Maidstone members were pleased to welcome President Roxanne to our AGM Dinner held at Oliver's Restaurant in Rochester on 9 April.

The AGM was hosted by Janet Hughes (Governance lead) prior to the dinner and all business matters dealt with efficiently. It was an opportunity to reflect on the past year and all that had been achieved through the efforts of members.

Roxanne as our speaker spoke about the work we hope to do as a Region on the Rail Safety project with Adam Downing from South Eastern Rail. In addition to working with Sarah Jacoby (CEO) from Comfort Cases UK to help by sewing bags for toiletries and knitting 'Barry the Sloth' cuddly toys to go in rucksacks provided to each child going into care. Medway and Maidstone members will be taking part in both projects.

Roxanne also presented Carol McKeough with her 25 year long service certificate. Carol is our club Safeguarding lead and has played an active role previously at Region as the Safeguarding Officer and on the SIGBI Safeguarding Network reviewing policies. Carol supports Amnesty International and also hosts an annual Summer BBQ and



President Roxanne presenting Carol with her certificate

Christmas Soup Kitchen in her home as fundraisers.

Another long-term member, Nellie Adjaye gave a short talk about her life coming to the UK from Ghana and becoming a doctor specializing in Paediatrics. Nellie will be moving to live in North London but has agreed to become an Associate member, so thankfully not a loss to Soroptimism.

Jane Barnes – SI Medway and Maidstone

Tunbridge Wells members making items for Comfort Cases

At the March 2026 SISEE Region meeting there was an excellent presentation from Sarah Jacoby, CEO of Comfort Cases, a charity which provides filled backpacks/holdalls for children in and young people in care, to provide them with essentials as they go into care initially or subsequently move between foster homes. The Comfort Cases, intended as a better alternative to bin bags, and would be the children's own to keep, and can be used by them to move their possessions when changing foster homes or moving to other accommodation.

At the meeting Sarah invited Soroptimists to make and donate drawstring bags, lined with waterproof fabric, to hold toiletries, to be added to the Comfort Cases. The bags were to be made up in different fabric designs to suit both boys and girls, and also younger and older children. For those bags for older girls, fabric 'Period SOS' pouches, where girls could keep spare sanitary pads or tampons, were also requested.

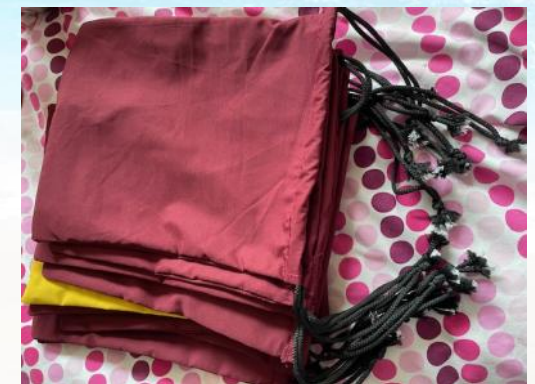


A group of club members – initially five, later joined by others - from SI Tunbridge Wells set to with a will and embarked on producing the toiletry bags and period pouches. The intention is to produce as many bags as possible by the time of the June club .

Louise Taylor SI Tunbridge Wells

Medway and Maidstone does too...

Here is first 'Barry the Sloth knitted by Jane Barnes using Amanda Berry pattern. Maya Bangar has also been busy sewing 11 comfy bags to date.



Obituary: June Bridgeman CB 26th June 1932 - 19th April 2026

June Bridgeman CB was a distinguished public servant, community leader, and tireless advocate for women's equality, safety, and education, whose life was marked by both national achievement and deep local commitment.

June began her long association with the Tunbridge Wells Soroptimists in 1966 while working at the Prices and Incomes Board. Her career in public service went on to include senior Whitehall appointments, notably within the Cabinet Office Think Tank and as Transport Director for London. In recognition of her national and international contributions to road and vehicle safety, she was appointed Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB).

Her dedication to equality was evident in her role as Deputy Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission, where she built strong relationships with women's organisations across the UK and beyond. In 1995, she represented the Fawcett Society at both the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York and the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. She later served as one of three Commissioners on the three-year BSE Public Inquiry.

In 2001, June received a Women of Achievement Award from the European Union of Women, recognising her outstanding contribution to pan-European understanding and progress.

Before her marriage to Michael Bridgeman and the arrival of their five children, June also served as a Territorial Army Signals Officer, driving heavy lorries and developing expert rifle-shooting skills. Her commitment to public and community life extended into the Church, where as a Bishops' Selector for the Advisory Council on the Church's Ministry, she was involved in selecting the first women to train as deacons.

A passionate advocate for girls' education, June served as a Council member of the Girls' Public Day School Trust, a governor at several schools, and was made an honorary Fellow of Queen Mary Westfield College.

Within Tunbridge Wells, June's impact was profound. As President of the Soroptimist Club (1996–97) and long-serving Programme Action Officer, she applied her public policy expertise to advance the work of Soroptimist International. Through the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society and Town Forum, she championed women's perspectives, notably leading a pioneering Southeast Region Rail Project that examined personal safety in rail travel through women's experiences, resulting in national improvements.

Her evidence-based approach informed influential reports on public safety and community wellbeing, addressing issues such as car park and taxi safety, spiked drinks, facilities for teenagers, recycling provision, public lavatory design, and litter reduction. She was also a founder member of the Kent Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence.

June's lifelong passion for local history led her to help found the Edenbridge Historical Society, the Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery, and the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, fostering historical, environmental, and educational engagement, particularly among local schoolchildren.

In 2021, June was one of one hundred women who were recognised as part of the #WhoIsShe celebration of the first centenary of Soroptimist International as having 'made a noteworthy contribution to society in the furtherance of the aims and objects of the organisation'.

In recognition of her exceptional service, June was awarded



the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Civic Medallion in 2022. The award acknowledged her outstanding contribution to community life and her ability to bring people together across backgrounds and interests to improve the town she loved.

Those who knew June remember her as astute, driven, and deeply thoughtful. She had a remarkable ability to anticipate emerging issues, ask probing questions, and inspire others to act. A gifted speaker and natural connector, she combined intellectual rigour with warmth and a strong sense of civic duty.

June Bridgeman's life exemplified the belief that individuals can make a lasting difference through service, insight, and determination. She leaves a legacy of progress, community spirit, and opportunity for others, truly embodying the sentiment that "women hold up half the sky."

Caroline Auckland SI Tunbridge Wells

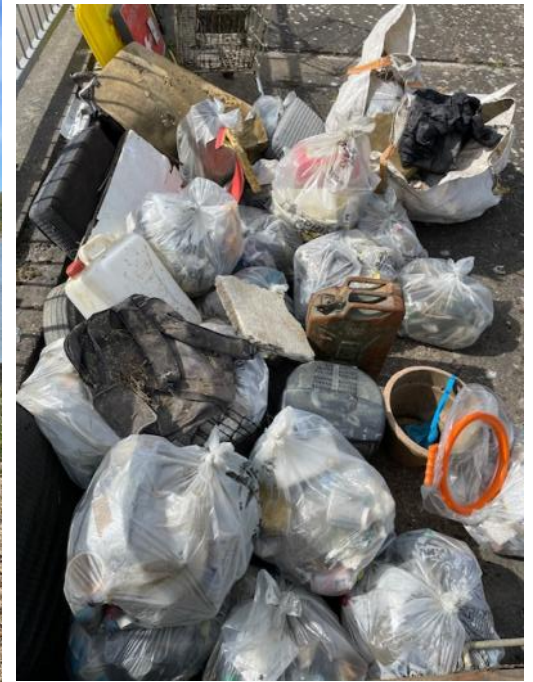
Foreshore litter pick on River Medway

On Saturday 25 April two Medway and Maidstone Soroptimists joined in the Foreshore litter pick organised by Friends of Rochester Churchfields Esplanade.

Sixteen volunteers spent two hours equipped with our litter pickers and plastic sacks collecting the rubbish we came across. We filled 24 sacks with usual discarded items such as drink cans, beer bottles, plastics, sweet wrappers and crisp bags. In addition we found mattresses, shopping trolleys, tyre, TV, traffic cones, large water carriers and a number of shoes

It was pleasing to see the River Medway foreshore looking a lot cleaner and safer for the wildlife after all our efforts. A good morning's work and making a difference.

Jane Barnes SI Medway & Maidstone



80th celebrations in 2026



Invitation
Soroptimist Tunbridge Wells are
celebrating 80 years of service in 2026



Sunday 5th July 2026



Let's Celebrate! Soroptimist Tunbridge Wells & District are excited to invite you to celebrate with us at this special event to celebrate the chartering of our Club. Your presence would mean the world to us as we mark this important milestone.

The Spa Hotel, Mount Ephraim, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 8XJ

Arrival and welcome drink from 12.15pm Lunch will be served at 1pm

Menu Choices

Starters - choice of 2

Salmon roulade, pickled cucumber, stout bread

£50 per person

Vine tomato and basil tart, bocconcini, olive crumb (Vegan Feta option available)

Main - choice of 3

Herb crusted hake, mussel charred corn chowder

Chicken breast, thyme potato pavé, charred leek, green beans

Butternut squash wellington, fondant potato, green beans, celeriac velouté (VE)

Dessert

Celebration cake served with tea and coffee

Please RSVP with menu choices for all guests to Louise Taylor at itsrosehill@gmail.com by 10th June 2026

Payment is by Bank transfer Club Account A/C no. 00386467, Sort Code 30-98-77

Account Name : **Soroptimist International T/Wells**

Please state your surname name & 80 as a reference



**Soroptimist
International**
Medway & Maidstone
80 years of service



***Soroptimist International Medway & Maidstone
would like to invite you to join us in celebrating our
80th anniversary on Saturday 6th June
at the Tudor Park Marriott Hotel, Maidstone, Kent***

Timetable

2.30 – 2.45pm Arrival and welcome drink

3pm Welcome address followed by Afternoon Tea

4.30pm Toasts. Prosecco is served

Cutting the cake

The Molly Oldham Award

Raffle

5.30 closing remarks

The Mayors of Medway and Maidstone will be joining us, plus local MPs and some members from our International Friendship Link clubs.

Afternoon Tea Menu

Savour a delightful selection of sweet and savoury treats accompanied by your favourite blend of tea in the opulent surroundings of Tudor Park Marriott Hotel

A selection of wholemeal and white finger sandwiches and savoury bites

Homemade fruit and plain scones with clotted cream and jam

A selection of homemade dainty cakes and sweet treats

Tea and coffee

£30per person

Guests are welcome to stay, chat and enjoy the gardens after the event.

A pay bar will be available

RSVP to Daisy O'Hagan at daisy.ohagan@gmail.com by **Monday 18 May 2026**

Payment is by bank transfer. The Club's account details are:

Sort code: 30-18-06 Account number: 00002827

Account name: SI Medway and Maidstone.

Please state your name as reference.

On the Hub...



MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2026



CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECTS EVERYONE, BUT NOT EQUALLY.

Women and girls are often among the most impacted, while also being powerful drivers of change.



World Environment Day: Women Leading Green Futures



WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY TOOLKIT



ARE YOU COMING TO CARDIFF?

We are looking for volunteers who are willing to help out as Conference Stewards at the SIGBI Conference in October '26.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEER STEWARDS



CARDIFF CONFERENCE 2026

Interested?
Email joanne@sigbi.org



What sort of woman is a Soroptimist?

STANDING UP For Women and Girls

New membership leaflets available to buy

Women's Safety Group - 12 Month Social Media Plan



May	June	July	August	September	October
Theme: Enough 	Theme: Unhealthy Relationships 	Theme: Anti-Stalking 	Theme: Safe Spaces 	Theme: Harassment 	Theme: Don't Be That Guy 
November	December	January	February	March	April
Theme: White Ribbon 	Theme: StreetSafe 	Theme: Ask for Angela 	Theme: Hollie Guard 	Theme: Just Be Lads 	Theme: Safe Places 

PROGRAMME WEBINAR FROM IDEA TO IMPACT: CREATING, DELIVERING AND REPORTING SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

WEDNESDAY 20 MAY 2026
19.00-21.00 BST

WHY NOT ENTER OUR RUBY ANNIVERSARY THEMED QUIZ?

and give yourself the chance to win a Zaytoun Gift Box worth £50.00.

There are 40 questions, all answers beginning with the letters A,B,C or D.

Closing date: Friday, 1st May.

Please contact: katie@abcdbethlehem.org for your quiz sheet. Our thanks go to Zaytoun for their authentically sourced Palestinian produce. www.zaytoun.uk

By Alison Driscoll, SI Bromley

