



South Lancashire Leader

Women inspiring action
transforming lives



SOUTH LANCASHIRE CONFERENCE 2026: A weekend of inspiration, action and sisterhood

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SI Swallows celebrate their 1st Birthday!

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SI St Helens unveil new memorial celebrating the work of women through war.

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SI Widnes reaches the 5k Pink Tuk Tuk goal!

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PRESIDENT SUE'S WELCOME



Regional President: Sue Underwood
Club: SI Manchester

It's been quite a quarter! What's it like second time around? Now halfway through my year, we've had our challenges, but I must admit that I'm loving it!

Fun, Food & Friendship abound! I arrived home from a cruise the day before SI Manchester's 100th Charter Dinner and had to take SIGBI President Gillie's place and reply to the toast to Soroptimist International. I enjoyed SI Southport's Change of Insignia and celebrated with SI Swallows on the first anniversary of their Charter signing as well as at The Lewy Body Ball, their partner event.

Then there was our South Lancashire Region Conference! What a wonderful day! My heartfelt thanks to my Conference Committee for all the work put in to delivering such a successful event.

I thoroughly enjoyed it, starting with the Friendship Supper, even if the "Soroptimist Anthem 'Dessert' Island Discs" left some of you cursing me for the 'ear worms'! The Speakers were inspiring, thought provoking and certainly helping us with the "Why? When? Where? can Soroptimists be of service?" question. Of course, the yellow jacket came out, it's been to as many Soroptimist Conferences as I have!

We're waiting for your feedback, but the 'exit poll' was positive!

Former Soroptimist International President Ann Garvie sent this message: I write to congratulate you and your team, and please convey my congratulations to the Team, your Region Conference was stimulating and informative. Thank you for inviting me, the day was most enjoyable with extremely pleasant Soroptimists.

Thanks too to Nicola for her amazing report, I cannot attempt to put it better myself!

Now for a summer of Soroptimism!

Sue

EDITOR'S COMMENTS



Editor: Nicola Parkinson
Club: SI St. Helens

The year has begun with more excitement than I expected, both personally and within our Soroptimist community. Taking on my new roles as President of SI St Helens, Communications Officer for South Lancashire and continuing as Editor of The Leader has been a real privilege. Alongside my day job, my work as a Trustee with PSS Liverpool, Enterprise Adviser across Wigan and Greater Manchester and CIPD Mentor, life is full, but I wouldn't have it any other way. And I even managed to enjoy the added bonus of a Wigan Warriors Challenge Cup win at Wembley last week in the glorious sunshine!

A highlight of the year so far was my first official engagement as President at the centenary of the St Helens cenotaph. Laying a wreath on behalf of our club was deeply meaningful, especially as we witnessed the unveiling of a new memorial honouring the women of St Helens, revealed with the help of Past President Linda.

The Regional Conference was fantastic and gave a real sense of purpose and positivity, leaving me inspired for the work ahead. I've also loved getting out across the Region. Swallows' first birthday was full of the friendship and fun that make our clubs special. Widnes' speaker meeting had that same warm energy, and speaking with Alice Edgerton at the Mothers' Union in Haydock gave us a great chance to share who we are, and dispel the myth that we're "like the Masons." We're anything but: open, outward-looking and focused on real action for women and girls.

I must convey my sincere apologies for the absence of SI Bootle and District's articles in the last edition, an editing error meant the page was deleted before circulation. I've included your pieces in this edition which can be found on page 6. Apologies once again.

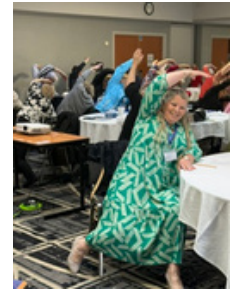
As always, putting together this edition of The Leader has reminded me just how much incredible work is happening across South Lancashire.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I've enjoyed creating it.

Nicola

Southlancashireleader@outlook.com



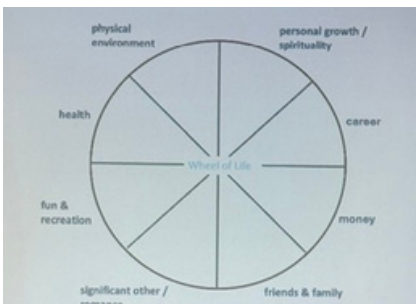


Regional Conference 2026



SHE LEADS - THE NEED

- Uganda currently ranks 79th out of 148 countries on its Global Equality score*
- In rural communities, deep-rooted cultural practices give men absolute control over finances and household decisions
- Women are left trapped in cycles of poor health, limited education, and economic dependence.....
- ...and stripped of the right to refuse unwanted sex or demand protection.



South Lancashire Conference 2026: A weekend of inspiration, action and sisterhood



The South Lancashire Region Conference on Saturday 16th May was one of those weekends that left everyone smiling, thinking and feeling more connected than ever. Seventy-eight Soroptimists came together, with forty-four of us already in high spirits from the Friday night Friendship Supper. Hosted by Regional President Sue Underwood, the evening was full of singing, a lively music quiz, plenty of laughter and, of course, that classic Soroptimist trio of Fun, Friendship and Food. Former Soroptimist International President Ann Garvie joined us too, and her call to action to keep pushing for gender equality set a powerful tone for the whole weekend.



Saturday morning opened with a gripping and emotional talk from **Barbara Jermiah and Kay Linnell**, two Soroptimist sisters who have spent years supporting victims of the **Horizon Post Office scandal**. They spoke with such honesty and passion about the devastating human impact, the families torn apart, the reputations destroyed, and the staggering depth of the cover-up, including the £26 million-plus cost to taxpayers. Their commitment to justice was inspiring, and many of us were left wondering what other systemic failures might still be hidden. It was a sobering but empowering reminder of why advocacy matters.



We then shifted to a global perspective with a presentation on **Act4Africa**, showcasing their **'She Leads'** project and the incredible work being done in Uganda. It was uplifting to see how even modest financial support can create long-lasting, transformative change for women and communities. It really brought home how far compassion and targeted action can go.

After that came a burst of energy led by **Jaz in the form of chair Pilates**. We didn't leave our chairs, but we certainly felt it working. It was a brilliant way to wake up our bodies and reset our minds before moving into the afternoon. Past Regional President Sandy Taylor then offered a warm and heartfelt vote of thanks, tying the morning together beautifully.



The afternoon began with **Dr Charlotte Badescu from the Diane Oxberry Trust**, who shared her lived experience of ovarian cancer. She spoke openly about symptoms, early detection and the importance of listening to our bodies. What made her talk even more powerful was the way she balanced everything—her work as a GP, her role as a Trustee, and being a mum to her son Gabriel, who she was also tending to while speaking to a room full of Soroptimists. Her honesty, strength and warmth made her message resonate deeply.

We then welcomed **Arvid from Inspired Lives**, an executive coach who introduced us to the Wheel of Life. His session encouraged us to pause and reflect on the different areas of our lives where we feel fulfilled, where we might want to grow and what balance really looks like. It was thoughtful, grounding and gave many of us something meaningful to take away.



The final session of the day was led by **Alison McMath**, who shared her inspiring story of changing her career at fifty and the incredible work she now does supporting women who have undergone mastectomies (**MastectoME Beauty Project**). Her courage, reinvention and compassion shone through every part of her story, reminding us that it's never too late to reshape your path or use your experiences to lift others. A warm vote of thanks for the afternoon was then given by Sue Gledhill, rounding off the day with genuine appreciation.

Before we closed, Val Moss, North West England Regional President, issued a call to **conference for next year**, which will take place at **Brockholes Nature Reserve on 15th May 2027** a date many of us have already marked in our diaries. There was also a well-deserved thank you to Sue Underwood and the conference committee for their hard work in bringing the event together, and to the hotel staff for looking after us so well throughout.



By the end of it all, the conference felt like a celebration of everything Soroptimists stand for. We'd laughed together, learned together, reflected together and been moved together. We'd heard stories of injustice, resilience, global impact, personal transformation and women supporting women at every stage of life. It was a weekend filled with energy, connection and purpose, one that reminded us exactly why this organisation matters and why our work continues to be so important. We all left feeling inspired, united and ready to carry that spirit forward into everything we do next.

SI STOCKPORT



Retiring President Sue presenting President Kate Clarkson with the Presidents chain.

SI ST HELENS



Outgoing President Linda presenting President Nicola Parkinson with the chain of office.

SI CROSBY



Out going President Pat with New President Vesna Levi with the chain of office.

SI LIVERPOOL



President Pat with Regional President Sue Underwood.

New Leadership, Same Mission: Welcome Incoming Presidents

SI SOUTHPORT



Welcome new President, Carol Hill. Carol received the President's chain from Immediate Past President Lisette Muddiman

SI WIDNES



Welcome returning President, Denise Parker and new President Elect Sheelagh Dayus.

SI MANCHESTER



Welcome new President, Sophie Gascoigne with Immediate Past President Fiona.

**LEND
WITH
CARE**

TOGETHER WE HAVE ...

Provided 153 loans

Lent £4,487

Helped 739 entrepreneurs

Helped 2,046 family members

Created 182 Jobs

Helped 2,967 people



IMPACT

Thanks to the following for providing their information

- Crosby
- Leigh
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- South Lancashire Region
- Stockport
- St Helens
- Widnes

SIGBI NEWS

30 - 31 OCTOBER



29-31 OCTOBER 2026
CARDIFF
SIGBI CONFERENCE



You must log into the Hub for member discounts.

You can log on and then click here ...



Conference Registration | Cardiff 2026 Conference

Cardiff 2026 Conference : Conference Registration opens 8 May 2026. The prices are available now.

Cardiff 2026 Conference

NEW MEMBER TOOLKIT AVAILABLE ON THE HUB

SIGBI has launched a brand-new Member Toolkit designed to support clubs in attracting and welcoming new members. This comprehensive resource hub brings together a wide range of ready-to-use materials to help you promote your club with confidence and ease.

On the Hub, you'll find a wealth of resources including social media graphics, briefings, pre-written social media posts, new member articles, and much more. Everything is prepared for you – simply download, personalise if you wish, and share.

This toolkit is an excellent way to raise your club's profile, strengthen your outreach, and showcase the impact of Soroptimist work across our communities.

[Click here to access the Hub and explore the toolkit.](#)



NEW MEMBER RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT



BENEVOLENT FUND

Contact in confidence...

THE BENEVOLENT FUND IS YOURS!

DO YOU KNOW ANYONE IN YOUR CLUB WHO MAY BENEFIT FROM OUR SMALL FUND?

ARE YOU IN NEED?

- **Dorcas Akeju OBE** (Benevolent Fund Trustee): dorcasakeju@aol.com or call **07952058641**
- **Ann Dawson** (Chair): dawsonann3@gmail.com
- **Myra Penn** (Secretary): myra.penn@yahoo.co.uk
- **Venessa Billing** (Treasurer): billing2109@gmail.com



SI BOOTLE & DISTRICT

SWACA SUPPORT CONTINUES

We continue to support SWACA. Donations of Christmas chocolates were made for the children along with Chocolates for the staff who continue with the tremendous work they carry out. Club members and staff. Fifty bags of chocolates, Christmas puddings, together with new items of bedding for the refuge were presented. Because of the nature of their work, front line workers never appear in photographs.

Supporting Regional clubs with their collections, along with other items 1 kilo of blister packs have been donated for recycling. At the Regional Meeting in December a table sale of jewellery was held for the clubs Charitable Aims. We would like to thank the many members who gave us their support on the day. Raising £196 for charity. A lot of interest was shown on the day of the unique story of the gems on sale.

A TALE OF A JEWELLERY SELLER

Those who attended the December Regional Meeting may remember the jewellery displayed near the entrance, some of you browsed, bought pieces, or even won them in the raffle. Many items were crafted with genuine gemstones set in sterling silver, gold, or gold-plated silver. You might find it interesting (and satisfying) to know how this collection came to be.

I come from Sri Lanka, once known as Ratnadeepa, the "Isle of Gems" a name given by ancient travellers. I also spent five years working as a doctor in Ratnapura, the "City of Gems." One famous local tale tells of a poor betel grower who struck his foot on a stone in his field, only to discover a massive sapphire that made him a millionaire overnight. His gem business, Ratnaloka ("Light of Gems"), still thrives today.

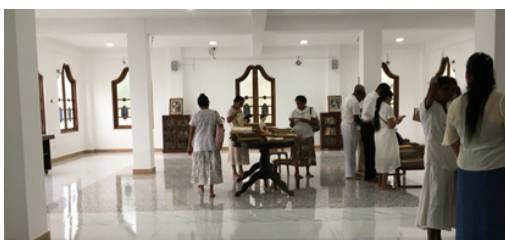
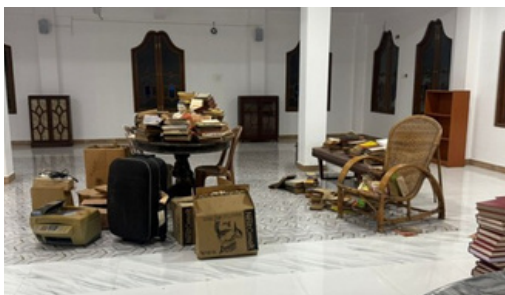
Although I'm not a gemmologist, I've gained a good understanding of gemstones. Sri Lanka produces some of the world's finest sapphires, but my collection comes from across the globe: rubies from Africa, Burma, Thailand and Madagascar; emeralds from Colombia and Siberia; peridot from Russia and China; opals from Ethiopia and Australia; tanzanite from Tanzania; sapphires from Sri Lanka, Burma, India and Madagascar; and diamonds from many regions. There are also citrines, amethysts, moonstones, pearls, abalone and more.

I buy most of the jewellery online or by phone from two companies whose reasonable prices and ethical values drew me in. They purchase rough stones directly from mines and run workshops in India, providing employment in developing communities. One company has built a clinic and school in Zambia; the other donates a meal to a child in need for every purchase, over five million meals so far, now including children in the UK.

So, ladies, it truly is charity from charity. Every penny of profit from my sales goes to our club's causes, including support for victims of domestic or sexual violence and FGM. By buying these pieces, far more affordable than anything on the high street—you're helping change lives in more ways than one.

LIBRARY OF HOPE

My father had a rich library of books in English & Sinhalese mainly, a few in Sanskrit & Pali a large number of newspapers (my father was the editor of some) as early as 1939. I funded a library at our village temple in Sri Lanka & donated all the books & book cupboards, book racks etc. When I visited Sri Lanka a very quick ceremony & opening was done even before the books were catalogued & arranged.



REMEMBERING A DEAR FRIEND

Dr Hemamala Jasenthuliyana, a childhood friend of Sriya and the person who introduced her to Soroptimism, later became a dedicated member of SI Enfield and went on to serve as a Past President of the club. For those who knew her, she passed away peacefully at Murrayfield Care Home in Edmonton on 21 January 2026.



SI MANCHESTER



CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

What a wonderful evening at our Centenary Charter Dinner! The wonderful atmosphere and the warmth and friendship throughout the room was down to all our wonderful Club members, Soroptimists from clubs throughout the South Lancashire Region, friends & family.

The room looked stunning with the beautiful flowers, the display from the archives was fascinating and both our guest speaker Helen Pankhurst and His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Diane Hawkins, spent some time looking at it. Then there was the cake, but sadly the Prosecco didn't materialise. (Your donated refunds added over £500 to our Centenary Charities Fund)

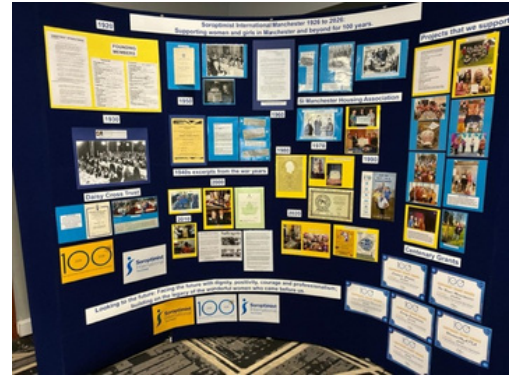
Millie Huang, who played the harp so beautifully during the reception, is a student at the Junior RNCM, and astonishingly is only 14! She was delightful and I was able to introduce her, and her mother, to the Lord Lieutenant and Helen Pankhurst as everyone else entered the dining room.

We were lucky to have His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Diane Hawkins with us to respond to the toast to the City and Ports of Manchester as her work on His Majesty's behalf introduces her to so many groups across Greater Manchester and she was able to add to the story about how much women contribute to the successful city and surrounding areas.

The idea of an interview really came from Helen herself as she had not wanted to give a dry speech, so I was armed with some questions in case I needed them. I started by asking Helen how it had been growing up with the name Pankhurst. She explained that she was born and grew up in Ethiopia as her grandmother Sylvia had travelled and settled there whilst an activist against Mussolini taking over Ethiopia. So the name was also very auspicious there but for different reasons. Coming back to school in the UK later she then realised how differently it was recognised for her suffragette great grandmother and great aunts and said it was no coincidence that the women in the family had kept the Pankhurst name. I was then able to ask her a bit more about growing up in Ethiopia and how the two cultures had contributed to her work life. She had undertaken a PhD examining the rural Ethiopian women's life and this with her economics background helped her as she worked for several NGOs or agencies before becoming a senior Advisor for CARE International.

We then talked about how she had been an advisor for the film Suffragette. This followed on from having been one of the suffragettes, with her daughter, in the London Olympics opening ceremony in 2012. She was also an advocate for the film "Emmeline: the Making of a Militant" and at the showing in Manchester in 2018 ended up in a twitter conversation with the mayor of Manchester Andy Burnham. In that she challenged him to look, over a similar time frame to that of the suffragettes obtaining votes for women, at how lives and work for women in Greater Manchester could be improved. This led to her convening GM4Women2028, at which our club has also had representation with many organisations and educational institutions to look at and measure several different aspects of life for women to achieve gender equality. They have learnt that overall, some metrics don't change much but that within it there are clearly more disadvantaged groups but that bringing together the network to look at this may itself be generating change.

Helen is also Convenor for centenary Action which aims to ensure we have a parliament that truly represents gender equality and that it is important that we talk to young people today to help them understand the importance of equality in creating a harmonious society. It was wonderful to have her with us for the evening and to hear her thoughts and enthusiasm as an activist continuing the work of the Pankhurst name.



SI MANCHESTER

WALKING SUFFRAGETTES

Our guests enjoyed (despite the cold weather!) a guided walking tour on 'Suffragettes, Significant Women and Manchester'.

We heard about the Pankhurst family, Lydia Becker, Annie Kenney and many more heroines of the female suffrage movement in Manchester who are commemorated in this stroll around interiors, buildings and landmarks where women fought for representation. There are stories of reasoned argument, attacks on paintings, arrests and the raising of the Votes for Women banner on 13 October 1905.

We also learnt about some exceptional and eccentric women that have featured prominently in the Manchester story from Ann Lee 'the bride of Christ', through Ann Bland, Elizabeth Raffald, Mary Fildes, Elizabeth Gaskell, Shena Simon.

We warmed and enjoyed a traditionally British lunch, fish & chips in the main, in Mr Thomas's Chop House which was established in 1867.

On Sunday morning Katarina enjoyed visiting Susan at the Pankhurst Centre and made a very striking Suffragette!

We met at The Lowry on Salford Quays for coffee on Sunday morning. We toured the Lowry Gallery including 'immersing ourselves in the sights and sounds of LS Lowry's iconic painting, Going to the Match' Lunch at KargoMkt followed, dodging the rain.



AFTERNOON TEA WITH THE LORD MAYOR



As part of our Centenary Celebrations members of S I Manchester were invited to afternoon tea with the Lord Mayor of Manchester Cllr Carmine Grimshaw. As the town hall is still undergoing refurbishment the civic and ceremonial team had relocated to the central library which was the venue for this very special afternoon. President Sophie and guests were warmly welcomed by the Lord Mayor, and we were introduced to the Lord Mayor's consort Cllr June Hitchen.

Both the Lord Mayor and Consort were interested to know the history of our club and the many projects we support especially during our centenary year. We found some common interests in that they also support a girls football team and the Consort had secured donations of Revlon beauty products for Contact and had visited the hostel.

When the doors of the banqueting room were opened we all gave a gasp as the table was beautifully decorated and laden with delicious looking food. We were not disappointed. After much chatter and partaking of the delicious sandwiches, pastries and cakes the Lord Mayor asked each of us to give brief details of our own Soroptimist journey and the reasons why we became Soroptimists.

The Lord Mayor then moved to the head of the table and thanked us for our support for women and girls in Manchester and beyond. President Sophie responded with our thanks for a truly enjoyable and memorable occasion in this our Centenary Year which was the perfect way to conclude a lovely afternoon.

I think Susan Hollick summed up what we all thought as we left; we were proud of one another and proud to be a Soroptimist.