

75 YEARS OF SERVICE

a Brief look at the history of Stone & District Rotary Club

(Based on an article written by Rotarian Philip Leason on the occasion of the Clubs 70th Charter anniversary, updated to reflect developments in the next five years)

Rotary International started in 1905 in America but the idea soon spread to the U.K. and by the mid 1930's there were several Clubs around our local area. For example Stafford's first club was formed in 1924; Stoke-on-Trent's in 1927; and Newcastle under Lyme's in 1929. These clubs - together with several more - made up a Rotary "District" which was keen to form new clubs and thereby further the aims and objectives of the movement.

In 1938 it was decided to try and start a club in Stone. Representatives of many of the Rotary Clubs from throughout the Midlands attended an "interest" meeting held at the Crown Hotel in May 1938. The meeting concluded with a proposal from Mr Ernest Shufflebotham (the Manager of the District Bank) and seconded by Mr Thomas Bagley, the Chairman of Stone Urban District Council that a Rotary Club should be formed in Stone.

Mr Shufflebotham was elected the Interim President and he together with the prospective members nurtured the new Club during the early months of its formation. The Club received its Charter of Incorporation from Rotary International on 16th May, 1939 and a celebratory Dinner was held at the Crown Hotel on 5th July 1939 to mark its granting. Rotary in Stone was officially born.

During the early months of the club the threat of war in Europe was on the horizon. When war did indeed break out, despite a reduction in membership due to other commitments, the Club played an active role in the town's war efforts.

At its meeting on 21st August 1940 the members decided to launch a fund for the purchase of a Spitfire by the Town and the surrounding district. On 20th September 1940 a public meeting supported by both the Urban and Rural District Councils was held to establish an organisation to raise the necessary £5,000, which was the cost of production of a Spitfire fighter aircraft. The fund was started with a donation of 100 guineas from the Directors of John Joule and Sons.

The project really caught the enthusiasm of the town and many of the organisations and schools held events to raise funds for it. The target was achieved by the end of the summer of 1941. The plane was named "Star of Stone" but it sadly crashed in 1942 killing the young Norwegian pilot.

The "Star of Stone" was perhaps the first major fund raising project in which the Club has been involved over the years. For example in 1964, lead by President Geoff Leese, the Club purchased a mini-bus for the Physically Handicapped Club, and the following year the Club - under President Albert Holmes - jointly raised funds with the Inner Wheel Club to purchase a van for the Meals on Wheels Service. As is often the case, family and Rotary were working together: the President of the Inner Wheel club that year was Albert's wife Ev.

As well as raising funds for community projects the Club over the years has acquired an excellent name for the work that it undertakes in our Community. The Club did have strong connections with local schools and in the early years this work took the form of arranging career exhibitions and holding mock interviews. More recently it has involved young people taking part in "Youth Speaks" – a public speaking competition; Young Chef; Young Innovator, Young Enterprise – whereby a group of young people form a company and manufacture and sell products and the RYLA Camps – a week long activity to help develop leadership skills.

Over the years the Club organised an essay competition in memory of Tom Wilson, a former member and editor of the local newspaper. Today the Club organises awards to recognise the achievement of pupils at the Middle Schools in memory of former President Albert Holmes. Albert ensured that the Club was not only aware of the needs of the older population (hence the meals on wheels mini-van) but also the needs of the young.

The Club has always supported International exchanges - welcoming Michelle (Mickie) Siemplenski from Texas, USA for an academic year when she studied at Alleynes, and members are still in contact with her. Helen Frost, a student at St Dominics Priory School, spent a year in Mumbai, India on an exchange arranged by the Club. Club members have also supported Rotary Ambassadorial Scholars who study at Keele University

The Club has also regularly welcomed Group Study Exchange teams from all over the world - showing them our Town and some of the surroundings.

The Club (along with some of the other Service organisations in Stone) helped to re-launch Stone Festival some ten years ago and a group of members continue contribute their skill and time to the organisation of that event. Most of the Club turn out to help when Festival Week arrives.

Since 1997 the Club has collected for Children in Need, initially by dressing up as Highwaymen and, at the traffic lights on Christchurch Way, 'holding the passing motorists to ransom'. Now (in the interests of health & safety) Club members wear high visibility tabards and 'mug the motorist' in broad daylight. Over the years we have collected £43,465 for the charity, indeed in 2013 over £1,850 was collected in just a few hours. The Club's efforts have been recognised by the BBC - regularly appearing on the ticker tape at the foot of the screen during the Friday evening programme, and reflected in the loan of a Pudsey costume, which the Club takes around local schools.

The Club also collects for other national charities including selling poppies at the Stone Motorway Service Area for the Royal British Legion

During December the Club is regularly seen in Town with the Santa Sleigh, making children (and some adults!) very happy and collecting useful funds that can be distributed to local good causes. The Sleigh also visits the Motorway Service Area, to collect from the passing travellers.

In 2005, to celebrate 100 years of Rotary throughout the world, the Club's members bought for the Town (from their own funds, so no charitable funds were used for this project) a planter which is located in the Market Square. It is maintained by Oak Tree Farm (the local project to support adults with learning difficulties).

For many years the Club had its own "concert party" known as the "Rotones" which went round the many homes for the elderly around Stone providing entertainment for the residents. Rotarians also visited those residents in the former Tittensor Manor who did not have visitors or where their families lived outside the area and therefore did not visit regularly.

In 1977 the Club established a Rotaract Club in Stone. Rotaract clubs have similar aims as Rotary but are for young people from 18 to 30. The Club was extremely successful for a number of years and raised funds for projects both in Stone and Internationally before closing in the 1990s due to falling numbers.

Also in 1977 Rotary formed the Stone Probus Club that brings together retired business and professional people. This Club continues to thrive and celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 2007.

In addition to its work in Stone, Rotary has over the years supported numerous projects overseas.

They have provided water pumps for villages in India; provided equipment for a clinic in Kuala Lumpur; refurbished hand tools to be sent to developing countries; raised funds to help eradicate Polio throughout the world; supported camps where people can have eye operations, collected Bikes for Africa, and many more.

A few years ago the Club purchased two kilns in memory of one of our former members, David Thornton, to enable a community in South Africa to make pottery and sell it to support their local economy. The project was first identified by one-time Stone Town Councillor Sarah Williams, an honorary member of the Club and a Rotary Peace Scholar.

We are regularly supported in Rotary's Shelter Box appeals by other organisations in the town. These boxes are filled with a variety of items that are needed in the event of an emergency overseas. The boxes are stored at a central location and are one of the first forms of aid flown out to disaster areas throughout the world when the need arises.

The Club also regularly supports several local groups which, although small, help and support local people in need.

Of course all this work requires finance and over the years various fund raising activities have been tried ranging from Tea Dances, Cheese & Wine evenings; Race Nights; Barn Dances (in a real Barn!) through to more adventurous events such as a Ball in the food court at the Potteries Shopping Centre, an orchestral concert in the Victoria Hall Hanley and the Brass and Blues Concerts in the Park at Sandon Hall.

The Club was delighted to learn that their 75th anniversary is to be recognised by Stafford Borough Council with a special carpet bed floral display in the Town's Stonefield Park. It is due to be unveiled in late July.