A Dozen of ‘the best of women’ #Whoisshe?

Thursday 3 September, 2020

What do a pioneering architect, two environmentalists, two teachers, a farmer, a nurse, a social worker, a board trustee, a solicitor, a motivational leader and a doctor all have in common? They are all members of the first group of Soroptimists to be highlighted as part of the celebration of the centenary of the founding of Soroptimist International.

In September 2020 the **first pen portraits and photographs of 12 members are being featured on the Great Britain and Ireland Centenary website.** These **#Whoisshe? campaign** members, both past and present, from Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland have all been nominated by Soroptimist Clubs for their noteworthy contribution to society in the furtherance of the aims and objects of the organisation. In their personal, professional and public lives they have each in their own way sought to inspire action and transform the lives of women and girls – a reason for celebration indeed!

Twelve more will be showcased each month from now until October 2021, 100 years on from the chartering of the very first Soroptimist Club in Oakland, California. Read more about these remarkable women below.

Full biographies and photographs of all twelve members can be found on the Soroptimist Centenary Website here:

Brief biogs follow:

No longer with us are: Ann Lawthom MBE of SI Pontypridd, Sylvia Mear of SI Hertford and District, Mildred O’Brien of SI Dun Laoghaire, Elisabeth Scott FRIBA of SI Bournemouth, Ann Todd of SI Penrith and June Wilson of SI St Helens

Ann Lawthom MBE (1939-2015)
was headteacher of Rhondda Special School, where she brought education and happiness to her pupils and their families. Ann worked hard to integrate her pupils into the local community and raised money for equipment for the school to found an adventure playground, hydrotherapy pool and a sensory garden. In 1995 Ann spearheaded a major charity campaign and raised £57,000 to provide a brand new school hall. Ann joined Soroptimist International Rhondda Club in 1996, and was presented with Soroptimist International Woman of the Community Award on 22 March, 1996. She was awarded an MBE in 1997. Ann served as a Justice of the Peace locally.

Sylvia Mear (1922-2010) lived her entire life in Hertford and loved her community. Involved with setting up the Community Centre on Sele Farm estate, she championed the youth club and activities for the elderly. A volunteer for Age Concern for over 50 years, she served as County Chair and as a member of the UK committee. She launched the Visiting Scheme in Hertford which quickly went countywide. A trustee for Age Endeavour and Relief in Need in Hertford, Sylvia still found time to manage a local fashion store and be a school governor, all while caring for her family. In 2000, Sylvia received the East Hertfordshire Council’s community award and, in 2007, was named a Hero of Hertford in the town churches’ search for unsung heroes. Sylvia joined S I Hertford &District in May 1967 and served as secretary and regional representative for many years and as President three times. She represented London Chilterns Region on Programme Action, served as secretary for 6 years and was President 1984-1985. She was one of the most influential people in the founding of SI Thames Valley, enabling the club to join London Chilterns Region in 1990. Sylvia served on the Federation Executive and as representative for UNICEF for 4 years.

Mildred O’Brien was born in Newry, Co. Down and was a member of SI Dun Laoghaire in the Republic of Ireland from 1975 until the Club closed in 2001 when she joined Bray & District. Mildred was National President from 1981-1982. She was married to Conor O’Brien, and was the mother of two daughters. Mildred owned a Montessori School in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, where she taught for many years. In 1981 Regional President Northern Ireland, Miss Marie Brownlee (Bangor) and President of the Republic of Ireland, Mrs. Mildred O'Brien (Dun Laoghaire and District) launched the first joint venture: a Public Speaking Competition for Girls aged 15 to 18 years. In 2011, the 29th year of the competition, they were delighted to award the winner of the annual competition the Mildred O’Brien Perpetual Trophy. This was inaugural year of the trophy and Mildred presented the trophy. Mildred O’Brien had been a loyal and

Media:

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Leisure & Hobbies :: Lifestyle & Relationships :: Opinion Article :: Women & Beauty ::

Related Keywords:

Women :: Inspiring Women :: Empowering Women ::

Scan Me:

steadfast member for 38 years, in Dun Laoghaire and Bray. She was an outstanding National President from 1981-82, and her enduring legacy is the North/South Public Speaking Competition for Girls. Not only did this competition encourage confidence and communication skills in the participants, it was formed at the time of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, a time of great turmoil and division. This competition offered an opportunity to extend 'hands across the border', and for co-operation between North and South, bringing young women together in a safe environment and giving them opportunities to make friends and broaden their horizons. Mildred was a strong driving force behind the competition in the Republic of Ireland until her death in 2013, and all participants and winners since its inception, have benefitted hugely from taking part.

Elisabeth Scott 1898 –1972 was born in Bournemouth, when educating girls beyond the rudiments was still considered an unnecessary exercise. Home taught until 14, she persuaded her father to send her to Redmoor School in Canford Cliffs as a boarder where she passed her Higher Certificates and left with ambitions to train as an architect.

By 1917, The Architectural Association had begun to admit women to its courses and two years later Elisabeth was offered a place. Females were very much in the minority, but she succeeded, obtained her Diploma in 1924, then gained valuable work experience with several different architectural practices. In January 1928 Elisabeth was announced as the winner of a prestigious International Competition to design the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford -on- Avon. She was the first woman to succeed at this level and this was the first important public building in Britain to be designed by a female architect. On 23 April 1932, the theatre was officially opened by the then Prince of Wales, in the presence of a vast crowd. Elisabeth's career continued during the 1930s and several of her projects reflected her support for women's progress. These included the Fawcett Building at Newnham, Cambridge, to allow for an increasing number of female students, and the Marie Curie Hospital in Swiss Cottage which was to be run for and by women. The Second World War had an adverse impact on her work. She and her husband, George Richards, returned to Dorset where she remained for the rest of her life. At first she worked with other local architects, then for Bournemouth Borough Council. Here she designed the Pier Theatre, which was opened in 1960. Elisabeth had joined Soroptimist International of Bournemouth, giving advice on the conversion of a property which the Club had purchased for housing retired women. Here she had found a supportive group to counteract the effects of being a woman working in a man's world. Elisabeth continued working well into her late 60s. Her professionalism and example to other women moving into areas of work previously undertaken by men and her early fame made her a role model for all who followed.

Ann Todd (1920-2001) was a founder member of SI Penrith and District Club. She was nominated and elected Vice President at the first meeting and became Club President in 1963. Ann was born in West Cumberland and attended Newton Rigg Farm School near Penrith. After training she stayed on working in the poultry section, progressing to be manageress of the "Egg Laying Trials". She married a farmer and they ran the family business together. She attended the International Convention in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1964, the Toronto International Convention in 1967 and the International Convention in Rome in 1971. She was elected Northern Regional President that year and in that capacity she attended the Federation Conference in Edinburgh. The Regional Conference in her year of Presidency was a weekend residential programme at Shap Wells Hotel with the theme "The Countryside and its Future". This September would have marked her 100th birthday.

June Wilson LLB 1929-2015 was born in Liverpool but was later moved out of the city to escape the bombing. In 1947, she was articled to her father's firm of solicitors in St. Helens and despite working during the day, she achieved a first-class degree in Law from Liverpool University in 1952. Once admitted to the Roll of Solicitors in 1953, June joined her sister Barbara as a partner in a solicitors' practice previously established by her grandfather and father. At the time it was believed to be the only solely female practice in the country – a remarkable achievement at the time! June continued to practise following her marriage in 1955 and the birth of her sons, finally retiring in 1989. In 1955, June joined SI St. Helens with the category of Solicitor and her priorities became her family, her law career and her membership of the Club. She became Club President in 1962 and went on to hold the offices of Regional President, Great Britain and Ireland Federation Treasurer and in 1987, Treasurer for Soroptimist International. In recognition of these achievements, June was made an Honorary member of the South Lancashire Region. June demonstrated real concern for the well-being of her local community and gave her time tirelessly to Meals on Wheels in Ormskirk and represented SI St Helens on the inaugural committee which established Crossroads for Carers in St. Helens.

Still with us are: Bebe Ajodha of SI San Fernando, Lisette Genseberger of SI Cape Town, Trish Mellor of SI Cannock, Dr Audrey Morrison of SI Falkirk, Sue Perry of SI Bristol and Anitha Rajarajan of SI Madurai

Bebe Ajodha of SI San Fernando

has been a Soroptimist for over 13 years and served as President of SI San Fernando 2018 -2020. She successfully led the club to win SIGBI's Best Practice Award 2018 and First Place Advocacy. She is also a qualified Project Management Professional (PMP) and has conducted several trainings in Project Management to local clubs. As an Environmentalist and Educator, she received several prestigious awards working with students, communities, Ministers and Local and International organizations. In 1999, she won first place in the Young Leaders Award with Junior Secondary students in an environmental project, lobbying communities and politicians. In 1999, she was awarded the prestigious UNEP Global 500 Laureate Award on World Environment Day in Japan. In 2000, she was awarded a National Award the Hummingbird Silver for long and meritorious work in the sphere of environment. In her professional life, she taught at the Corinth Teachers College and devised and taught the Curriculum Elective in Environment. She is currently Vice-President of Naparima District Scout Council and is managing the construction of the Green building for Scouts' Headquarters. She is also a member of the Project Management Institute; Project Management Institute Southern Caribbean Chapter and National Science Teachers Association NSTA.

Lisette Genseberger of SI Cape Town
embodies the values and ethos of Soroptimism. Her membership has spanned over 35 years and two countries. Born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa she joined Soroptimist International in 1985, where her mother was still an active member. After moving to the Netherlands with her husband, she joined SI Club Zwolle from 1999 – 2004 and in doing so has developed a unique sense of what Soroptimism means to women across diverse continents and how unifying and powerful a movement it is. Lisette is a nurse by profession and has extensive experience in her field having worked in diverse environments throughout her career including a women's prison. Currently Lisette runs her own Chiropodist and Reflexologist Practice in Cape Town. Within South Africa as well as the Southern African region, Lisette has most definitely made her mark. She is a clear voice in our ever changing landscape and always meets challenges head on. Her passion, drive and commitment to Soroptimism is electrifying and always serves as a motivator for club members. She has shown an understanding of the challenges being faced by many Clubs and has always tried to be a part of the solution. She has been a sounding board and trusted source of advice for many. Over the years, Lisette has fulfilled many Executive level positions in her Club, Country and Continent. Most recently she has been an instrumental member of the Task Team which has been successful in the establishment of the SI African Federation (SIAF).

Trish Mellor of SI Cannock
is the lifeblood of the club, having undertaken a range of executive roles in the club including President and Vice President and also national and regional responsibilities. For many years she has been Programme Action Lead and Press Officer. Trish lives and breathes the principles of Soroptimism and many of the Club's programmes of work would not have been successful without her. She helps coordinate the Club's involvement in interviewing high school students supporting their personal development and giving them confidence as they go out into the world. She has been fundamental in SI Cannock's latest and award winning programme 'Your Body, Your Rules' and Ambassador Training Programme in High Schools to empower young people to understand and tackle the issue of sexting. Trish's networks and credibility enables the club to harness the support of key members in the community to help fund and drive these projects forward. Trish is the Club's go-to person with an idea; enthusiastic but also logical, looking at how it can be turned into actions practically and successfully. She is always honest about whether it is something that the club can take further, and if it is, she will be the first to promote it, bringing with her all her previous experience, contacts and a can-do attitude. Trish has been a Soroptimist for twenty-two years and has always taken an interest in its history and how the organisation is run. She has attended many regional, national and international conferences and is a well-known figure to many of her sister Soroptimists from around the world.

Dr Audrey Morrison of SI Falkirk is a mother, daughter, sister, wife, nurse, carer, colleague, friend, doctor, supporter, researcher and Soroptimist. She accredits working with so many inspirational people for her success in both her working and personal life. Audrey obtained a Masters degree, followed by a PhD. Since then, Audrey has worked as a research practitioner at the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre in Glasgow. Audrey helped set up a collaborative research group with the University of Glasgow which earned her honorary research fellow status. Audrey has recently become involved in a large international EU funded project, a Macmillan-funded creative arts project, and is about to explore individual perceptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff and patients within the cancer centre. In 2016-2017, Audrey won a prestigious Florence Nightingale Foundation Travel Scholarship in which she visited and observed world-renowned experts in New York, Toronto and Manchester. On 12 May, 2020 (International Nurses' Day), Audrey co- organised an event celebrating the bicentenary of Florence Nightingale's birth; designed to help staff rest, relax and find some reprieve from the challenges

and burden of work during the current COVID pandemic.

Sue Perry of SI Bristol joined in 1985 and has been, and still is, one of its most active members. She has twice been President of the local Club and of the South West and Channel Island Region. She served as a Councillor and as Co-opted Regional Officer and more recently shared the role of SW&CI President. Sue was a member of the FMB Membership Committee and a member of the FMB Extension Committee and was Chair of the SIGBI Manchester Conference Committee. Sue was elected to the Board of 63 Bayswater Road for two terms of three years, and as its Chair. During this time, Sue was particularly involved in Human Resources matters. Sue has consistently supported numerous local charity events to help the underprivileged, especially women and girls, throughout Bristol. She was instrumental in introducing SI Bristol to the valuable work done by Mary's Meals, which the Club has since supported. She enthusiastically supports SI Weston super Mare with their Skirting Science and Railing Against Abuse initiatives and SI Taunton with their Skirting Science project. Sue has supported Abbeyfield Society for over 40 years. She started as a volunteer with the Bristol Society in the 1970s became Treasurer of two houses and was then appointed its first paid Director of the Bristol Society. She is currently a volunteer Assessor for the Abbeyfield Quality Standard. Sue is active at All Saints Church, Clifton and an elected member of its Parochial Church Council. Sue was a Governor of Redland High School, Bristol for over 20 years and the Deputy Chair of Governors during the merger of Redland High School and Red Maids' School. She serves on the Old Girl's Guild Committee and supports activities to raise funds for the school. In addition, Sue has been a Trustee of Young Bristol, Off the Record and of Age UK Bristol.

Anitha Rajarajan of SI Madurai is a highly driven and passionate social worker with a self-effacing ability to conceptualise and create winning solutions. Her first rally with more than 5000 students in 2009 to say" No to plastics" resulted in a partial ban on single use plastic by the local government. In a local school and in an Institution, SI Madurai created two forests in their backyard using the Japanese Miyawaki method which enthused several educational institutions and the local government to work in tandem with SI Madurai in bettering the city's image. As President she started the Education Endowment Fund to financially support deserving girl students at the university level, also enabled a para-olympian to promote her tailoring unit that manufactured reusable sanitary napkins, and set up smart classrooms in two government schools benefitting more than 2,000 girls. At the request of the local government, she raised funds to combat Covid-19 by providing immunity boosting medicines to 1,500 families. In the last decade, SI Madurai has received four Best Practice Awards. Anitha has spearheaded many projects of the club, which always gained prominence in the print and electronic media. As a culmination of her achievements, and remarkable work she has been invited to be on the State Education Board, Government of Tamil Nadu, India. She has recently been elected Federation Assistant Programme Director – Planet.

Notes to Editors

For more information about Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland, or this Press Release, please contact Sally Higgins on 0161 480 7686, email sally@sigbi.org website www.sigbi.org/

1. Web addresses:

www.sigbi.org

www.soroptimistinternational.org

Soroptimist International is a leading global women's voluntary organisation. It has close to 80,000 members in more than 3,000 Clubs in over 100 countries around the world. The Federation of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has members in more than 270 clubs in 18 countries in the British Isles, Asia, the Caribbean and Malta.

Soroptimists **inspire action** and create opportunities to **transform** the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. Soroptimists are committed to a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential, **realise aspirations** and have an **equal voice**
in creating strong and **peaceful** communities worldwide.

1. Soroptimists focus on transforming the lives of women and girls, locally, nationally and globally, through **education, empowerment and enabling** initiatives by raising **Awareness, Advocacy and Action**. Soroptimists make a difference to the lives of more than half a million women and girls in the world every year.

1. Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland is an organisation in Special Consultative status

with the UN Economic and Social Council since July 2013, which is in addition to the General Consultative status held by the umbrella organisation Soroptimist International. Soroptimist International is a recognised Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) representing women from all over the world.

Company Contact:

Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI)

T. +44 (0)161 480 7686
E. lisa@sigbi.org
W. https://sigbi.org/

View Online

Additional Assets:

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.soroptimist.pressat.co.uk