

Chapter 6: TWO GOLDEN JUBILEES

It was the Golden Jubilee of the Rotary movement in 1955, and it was decided to mark the occasion by sponsoring a special public appeal for funds for furnishing new premises for the St. John Ambulance Brigade, an organisation which did excellent work and in which the President, H.N. Bream, was particularly active. A sum of £2,000 was raised. Ladies' Evening that year was appropriately outstanding. The ballroom walls were adorned with sketches of Ladies of Fashion over 50 years, the MC used a 1905 motor horn to call the assembly to order and Eric Pochin devised and Robert Martin compered a masque embracing some of the great events of the half-century, which was performed by the Leicester Drama Society. A surprise item was a calypso, hilariously performed by "six personal friends" of the President, in fact six Rotarians, extrovert and talented but too shy to allow their names to be recorded in the detailed Press report of the evening.

The efforts of the brothers Martin (father and uncle of Robert) and the Club in providing and supporting the amateur theatre in the city played a significant part in the eventual establishment of the Leicester Drama Society. And ever since that day both Society and Club have owed much to each other. No fewer than nine Rotarians have been President of the Society, Percy Groves, Herbert Russell, William Bastard, Eric Pochin, Roy Pochin, Frank Gayton, Alan Gayton, Geoffrey Hilton and Ivan Tarratt. Another, Geoffrey Burton, has been chairman of Leicester Theatre Trust, on which a number of other Rotarians have served.

It is interesting to note the competition in the fifties for the office of President. When Bert Bream's name came before the Club for Vice-President (the automatic step to Presidency) in 1953 it was stated that his was the "only withdrawn nomination". In fact, five names had been put forward originally, and before the election came along four had withdrawn.

The £2,000 raised for St. John Ambulance in 1955 was an impressive figure for those days. It was repeated four years later when the Club organised a May fair in aid of the Old Peoples' Welfare Association. A van and some linen, at a total cost of £750 was handed over immediately; the remainder was held and dispensed as required. Two Rotarians joined the Committee of the Association. The welfare of old people was very much in the minds of everyone. Each year Rotarians, using their own cars, took elderly folk on an afternoon's outing in the summer, to Wickstead Park, Overstone or Charnwood Forest, where tea was provided. This eventually came to an end when the increasing facilities available to old people reduced the demand.

At the same time it could be said that in several cases the age of the Rotarian driver exceeded that of his passengers!

But in 1960 came a more permanent and constructive contribution to the welfare of old persons with the establishment of the Dorothy Russell Work Centre for the Elderly – then in South Albion Street but later moved to Chancery Street – chiefly the work of a Past-President, C.T. Barton, ably assisted by Harold Freer. The concept, which came from a Rotary idea used by the Bedford Club, was that industry supply work of a reasonably simple nature for old people to do – labelling, packing, sorting etc. A modest charge was made and a small payment given to the workers who were also provided with lunch. It gave a great number of elderly folk an opportunity for an easy occupation, a little pocket money and some companionship. An impression by Kenneth Nutt on the theme of “Tired hands, Working Hands, Satisfied Hands”, appropriate to the Work Centre, won the Club first prize of 500 dollars offered by Rotary International in 1961-62 for pictures illustrating community service. The money was given to the Centre.

Mrs Dorothy Russell, after whom the Centre was named, was Lord Mayor and a former employee of Clem Barton. A management committee was set up with the Lord Mayor as President. The Rotary Club supplied the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary and five other committee members. The rest of the committee came from Leicestershire Social Services Department (2), Age Concern (2), Leicester and County Chamber of Commerce, Leicester Trades Council, Leicester Inner Wheel and the WRVS. The early years were not easy, and made less so by Barton’s sudden death in 1963. H.N. Bream took over the chairmanship and he guided its growing fortunes for 13 years. Before he handed over the reins the South Albion Street premises became the subject of a development order, and a move had to be made to Chancery Street. J.E. Savage succeeded him in the chair.

Leicester formed a Club at Lutterworth in 1953 and the Blaby, Oadby and Wigston club in 1962. In each case territory was ceded, as it had been on frequent occasions for the formation clubs with other parentage. Oadby split into three some years later, Oadby remaining officially Leicester’s offspring and itself becoming the sponsor of Wigston. Lutterworth became responsible for Blaby.

In 1962 and again in 1964, Leicester Rotarians became Lord Mayor, Harold Heald and A.H. Kimberlin. Throughout Leicester’s history, it has been a “family” club. Fathers and sons have constantly served together; brothers too. At one time there were three brothers, James, Fred and Archie Carmichael, whose combined membership exceeded 150 years! Four

generations of one family was first achieved with Christopher Hilton joining in 1969. It was in 1964-65 that son first succeeded father as President, R.M. Evans following forty years after W.A. Evans. This was repeated the following year, with F.I. Tarratt, whose father, George Tarratt happened to have followed W.A. Evans in 1925. Other father and son Presidencies have been David Bentley (1936-37) and Roland Bentley (1969-70), Harold Nutt (1951-52) and Horace Nutt (1971-72) and Frank Gayton (1947-48) and Alan Gayton (1975-76). Harold Nutt was the only father to live to see his son in the chair, although at that time the father was no longer a Leicester member. George Tarratt died little more than a year before son Ivan guided the club through its Golden Jubilee in 1966. He was the last surviving found members with 48 years' membership.

To mark the Golden Jubilees a sum of £1,200 was raised from members for a specially-equipped mini-bus for the conveyance of partially handicapped old people. It was presented to the City Welfare Committee, with an understanding that it be made available for Rotary and other organisations responsible for moving old people. The President of RIBI was among the distinguished guests at the Jubilee dinner. Among the District Offices was C.S. Owst, District Secretary, a member of the Club who had been District Governor in 1958-59 while belonging to Skegness. Although there was no founder member present, H.H. Gimson, who joined only some weeks after formation in 1916 and was now an honorary members, completed a half-century of membership later in the year.

He was to be followed by a succession of 50 year members, for whom a special badge was designed in 1969 and has been worn on all Rotary occasions since then by the small but distinguished band of qualifiers. They have been (with dates of their jubilee in brackets):

H.H. Gimson (1966)
A.B. Pick (1969)
L.O. Smith (1969)
F.T. Carmichael (1969)
S.H. Russell (1971)
C.R. Frears (1972)
H.W. Tharp (1973)
A.D. Carmichael (1974)
H.F. Smith (1978)

A comprehensive list of re-classifications came into being in 1957. It provided no problems, but removed an amusing ambiguity in the case of the 1966-67 President, G.P. Kendall, of the umbrella company bearing the

family name. No longer was his classification to be the paradoxical one of “Dry goods – Umbrella Manufacturing” but instead “Umbrella and Rainware Distributing”.