

Chapter 12. SPHERE OF CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE

Although because of its selective membership, the Rotary Club of Leicester is a comparatively small society, its influence in the city and county life is disproportionately great. Honours come to its members on a fairly regular basis, such as in March 1999 when Brian Smith and John Aldridge, a former president of the Club, were appointed for life as Deputy Lieutenants of Leicestershire. Gerry Aspell, at 84 the second longest-serving member of the Leicester Club, was Vice-Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, Honorary Colonel of the Royal Anglian Regiment and of the Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Army Cadets. The late Michael Cufflin was appointed Lord Mayor of Leicester in 1985 and also awarded the Order of the British Empire. Many other members have been similarly awarded by the State and by Rotary, through Paul Harris Fellowship to the highest award Rotary International can make, the "Service Before Self" Award, made to Frank Norburn for his work in Eastern bloc countries.

Members come and go, move to other parts of the country, retire from the Club or pass on. Of the many of the latter, it is appropriate to mention Brian Thompson, President 1977/8, who compiled the bulk of this history, from the Club's 1916 founding 1980. Brian, secretary, director and chairman respectively of the Leicester Mercury, and the last member of the family Hewitt which owned the newspaper, died in November 1997.

While the plethora of minutes of past meetings gather dust, and the Monthly Diary, in colour since July 1998 and renamed Bulletin under the editorship of Geoffrey Bromely, continues to present 'all the latest', the work of the officials of many committees strides on. One of the 'unsung hero' jobs worth recording here is that of the Speaker Finder, whose task of seeking out about 45 speakers on different and interesting topics each year must be regarded as considerable. The particular occupation of the Speaker Finder often helps, when in 1994/5 then President the late David Smith was able to call his year of office, the 'Year of the Establishment' as among Speaker Finder Graham Moore's success were representatives of the Law Society, the House of Commons Clerk's Department, Eton College and a former High Sheriff of Leicestershire. On the other hand, the interests between the speaker and the person chosen to thank the speaker after the talk, did not always coincide, as illustrated when bachelor the Very Rev. Derek Hole, Provost of Leicester, complimented as Mrs. Summerfield for talk on the Marriage Guidance Council.

So the Club still thrives healthily. The average age of members some four years ago was just under 60 and since then, many younger members have

been recruited, although there is no upper age limit to membership. The nature of membership has, however, as mentioned before changed. As Colonel Gerry Aspell says: There is a changing nature of Rotary, and a changing face of business. The old industries of Leicester, once family owned, have now been taken over and sons no longer follow fathers as of right. Charities appear every week when once it used to be a major one every year. On the other hand I've enjoyed some amusing moments, like coming out of Mothercare with a Pregnant Mothers' Appeal gift and running into a couple of Rotarians offering knowing winks!"

Final words must come from the Club's longest serving member, 85-year-old Rev. Arthur H Kirkby, a former District Governor and 52 years in the Leicester Rotary: I forecast a healthy future for Rotary in Leicester," he says. "The character of a man is the first consideration. Having found him we can find a classification. Jokes are made about sub-divisions of sub-divisions, but when we come across a man of quality this is perfectly justifiable way of finding him a place. "Service Before Self" is our motto and we must maintain that high standard, not forgetting that work itself is services as well as spare -time activity." When Mr. Kirkby joined Rotary he was soon fascinated by the fact that he, a mere parson, was rubbing shoulders with the great and the good, all men on the same level. His feelings then are the same as his feelings now. "Rotary fosters warm cherished friendships." What other needs are there to enjoy such lives of service for this Millennium.

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