

Part 2: POST-WAR PROGRESS

Once the war was over in November 1918 great strides were made and important events took place. These events too, got considerable publicity for it was decided to invite to all meetings reporters from the Leicester mercury, Leicester Daily Post and Leicester Mail. The proprietor of the Mercury and Post was a member, and soon the editor of the Mail was invited too.

The local newspapers carried long reports, often a column in length, of all meetings, but this lasted a few years only. The inclusion in these reports of some domestic decisions made at meetings caused embarrassment and it was decided that meetings should in future be generally private. A Club member was deputed to send short accounts to the newspapers, but this presented difficulties and was soon discontinued. Since that time, press coverage has been invited only on very special occasions.

It was at a meeting of the Club on 16th June 1919 that the Mayor made the first announcement that Leicester had been granted the charter of a City. The general public heard a little later. The New York Rotary Club presented the American flag to the Club in 1919. It was handed over by the President of BARC at a dinner held in the Assembly Rooms, Hotel Street, and later J. Harrison visited the United States and presented to the New York Club some etchings of old Leicester and personally expressed Leicester's gratitude for the flag. The following year the wives of Leicester Rotarians presented a Union Jack to the Club, to be displayed alongside the Stars and Stripes.

At the 1919 annual meeting it was decided to change the Rotary year to run from 1st January instead of 1st July and the officers were therefore re-elected for a further six months. Another decision was to dispense with the saying of grace at meals. Could the reason have been, perhaps, the difficulty of finding someone to say grace? Speaker-finder Bedingfield complained bitterly of the reluctance of members to give a talk at weekly meetings! A few years later it was suggested at a Council meeting that new members be on probation only, until they had addressed the Club, but the idea was not accepted. There were occasions, though, when time was allowed for certain Rotarians to sing to their fellows. This was very popular, for there were some good voices in the Club. There were also some less acceptable ones, as was to be apparent when a whole meeting was set aside for community singing. But singing continued from time to time, particularly at Christmas, until the "fifties".

The first Constitution of the Club laid down that if any member missed four consecutive meetings without adequate reason he could be removed from membership. This was done frequently, but newcomers were elected fast and membership soon reached 100 for the first time in 1922. One of the objects of Rotary incorporated in Leicester's own first Constitution included the words ". . .to co-operate with others in civic . . . development". That object was very much in the minds of Leicester Rotarians just after the war, and during the next few years was applied in full. In 1919 a Public Service Committee was formed and one of its recommendations approved by the Club, was that encouragement and support be given to non-party candidates in local elections.

Later came a proposal that 28 sub-committees – no less – be formed. Each would consist of three Rotarians and they were to hold a watching brief over the various branches of public service embraced by the Town Council committees – Watch, Finance, Markets, Sewerage, Asylums, Transport etc. This was turned down by the Club on the grounds that it might be considered an interference in the work of the Town Council! Instead, the Club approved the setting up of eight committees, each comprising 12 members, and these were: Education, Charities, Public Morals and Recreation, Housing and Health, Factory Welfare and Industry, and Young People.

Rotary generally did not have standardised committees at this time and it was Leicester's Public Service Committee which was the forerunner of the Community Service Committee, so much a part of Rotary today. Out of the work of these 8 Leicester committees came a number of good suggestions, many of which were ultimately acted upon. Among them were the desirability of Leicester having an Information Bureau, that school playgrounds should be open for children during holidays, the provision of a theatre for Amateurs and the development of evening study circles (adult education). But the Licensed Houses of Liquor Control Committee chairman reported at the end of the first year that he was unable to give a detailed account of their deliberations as they were still collecting information.

The Education committee reported progress on the "University" Scheme", an idea for a University College for Leicester and ultimately, it was hoped, for a full University. The project had been brought before the Club by Dr. Astley V. Clarke and it met with instant and enthusiastic support once differences with Nottingham had been ironed out – they wanted Leicester to join in promoting an East Midlands University based in Nottingham. Leicester University College opened in 1921.

Rotarians were keen to provide entrance gates to mark their involvement, but there were persuaded that there were other, more urgent needs. In the end they became responsible for panelling and a dais for College Hall. Robert Hyde, President at the time, was appointed a life governor. The first Principal, Dr. R.F. Rattray, and the first Secretary, W.G. Gibbs, were Leicester Rotarians. Gibbs gave up the editorship of the Leicester Daily Post to take the job.

This link between the Club and the College, and later the University, was to be perpetuated. Dr. F.L. Attenborough, Dr. Rattray's successor as University College Principal, and University Vice-Chancellors Sir Charles Wilson, Sir Fraser Noble and Maurice Shock all joined the Club soon after appointment. The Club also provided two Pro-Chancellors, Charles Keene and John Frears, and several members of the Court or the Council – or both: Charles Keene, Mac Goldsmith, Archie Carmichael, Ben Gimson, Charles Frears and Peter Kendall. Keene, as one of the founders, Goldsmith, a great benefactor, and John Frears were awarded honorary Doctorates of Laws by the University. John Frears' name was given to a Hall of residence and the generosity and talents of his brother Charles, are evident in a number of places, particularly the Beaumont Hall botanical gardens. When the medical facility was established, the second Dean was a Rotarian, Robert Kilpatrick.

The Rotary Badge was not standardised until 1920. Clubs had hitherto designed their own and BARC did not move in the matter – and then only slowly – until urged to do so in a letter in the publication "Rotary Wheel" from a Leicester member three years earlier. Leicester's bronze lapel badge, bearing name and classification, was designed by a new member, Frank Gayton in 1917 and was destined to continue unchanged. Fellowship, an important factor in Rotary, was as strong in the early "twenties" as Service. There was even an Outings Committee which organised motor-car trips for Rotarians and their wives to various parts of Leicestershire, to Buxton or the Derbyshire Dales, and occasionally a picnic with another Club. When the 1921 International Conference was held in Edinburgh 38 people attended from Leicester, They took with them 350 woollen scarves provided by Charles Stibbe, each marked "a warm and woolly welcome from Leicester – the City that clothes the world from head to foot". They were presented to 350 ladies from overseas.

In February 1921 meetings were transferred from the Grand Hotel to the Bell Hotel, Humberstone Gate (since demolished to provide for part of the Haymarket Centre). Within weeks the price of lunches was increased to three shillings (15p). But there were constant complaints about the food, of which it is recorded the Club was "not proud" and in December of the same

year a move was made to Winn's Oriental Café in the Market Place (nearly opposite Pearce's and since demolished). The owner, J.S. Winn, was a member of the Club. Membership at the time was 134 and it was decided to appoint a paid Secretary. An accountant and former rugby international, P.W. Lawrie, joined the Club and occupied the post at a salary of £52 per annum. But not for long, for within the year it was decided to share secretarial services with Church House at 5 St Martin's at £100 yearly and Percy Lawrie's position became an honorary one again.

Canon W. Thompson Elliott, Rural Dean and Vicar of St. Peter's was instrumental in arranging this. He became President of the Club in 1922 and two years later President of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland (RIBI) which was the new title for BARAC operative in 1922 following Ireland becoming a Republic in 1920. Canon Elliott moved to Liverpool as Sub-Dean of the cathedral a few weeks before taking office, but it was his Rotary work in Leicester which brought him the honour. Roger Levy's book "Rotary International in Great Britain & Ireland" says this of him: "He was a man of great business acumen and of wide culture, a brilliant and witty speaker and preacher, a considerable sportsman and a man regarded with the deepest affection by many".

District recognition also came Leicester's way. In 1923 W.K. Bedingfield became the first Chairman (later termed Governor) of District 7 (later 107), as well as being Secretary and Treasurer. Henry Hyde followed him as Chairman in 1926. The Secretaryship was held between 1923 and 1933 continuously by Leicester men Walter Bedingfield; Karl Russell and David Bentley. Bentley gave up on taking the Chairmanship, which he occupied from 1933 to 1935. When Districts within the British Isles were introduced in 1918 Leicester was in District 2 (Midlands: Birmingham, Derby, Leicester & Nottingham). In 1921 Leicester became part of District 3 (Eastern Counties: Leicester, Northants, Lincoln, Norfolk, Suffolk, Rutland and Cambridgeshire). Two years later Leicester belonged to District 7 (East Midlands) and in 1956 this was renumbered 107. In 1972 the District was split into 107 and 122 and Leicester remained in 107 (now re-numbered 1070).

Mention should be made of the Club's involvement at this time in the Big Brother Movement. Fatherless boys, principally those who lost their fathers in the war, were allocated to individual Rotarians who were "to give counsel such as the father would have given, win the boy's confidence, encourage him, perhaps find him a job, and keep in touch". This continued for several years with some excellent results. This kindled ideas of doing more for the young and the Club was instrumental in establishing the

Young Peoples' Organisation, which brought together a number of concerns working for youth and encouraged a more concerted community effort. The good work done by the Club in many spheres and its excellent fellowship increased the interest in extension. Leicester formed Clubs as widely placed as Northampton, Norwich, Lincoln, Ipswich and Cambridge, with near-neighbours Loughborough (1924), Hinckley (1926) and Melton Mowbray (1928) to follow. Club visiting was not confined to individual members; frequently two Clubs combined for a meeting, and on one occasion the London club came in force to join Leicester at lunch and make a guided tour of the city afterwards. One of the most important events of Canon Thompson Elliott's presidency of RIBI in 1924-25 was the drawing up of a new Constitution. The changes subsequently agreed at Conference were decided at a meeting he called in London of members of the Brighton & Hove, Leicester, London, and Portsmouth & Southsea Clubs. A.A. Ironside and Dr. W. Henry represented Leicester.