

## **2007-2008 – AN INTENSE BUT ENJOYABLE YEAR**

The year 2007-2008 was intense but very rewarding in terms of fellowship and giving assistance to many charitable organisations. Hopefully, an enjoyable period for the membership. Mind you, very little time for a President to relax and enjoy himself!

My most disconcerting moment came during the spring AGM, when moves for reform were discussed. Among these was the suggestion that our dress code should be relaxed during the months of July and August. A messy debate took place. I was known to be in favour, but unfortunately the Rotarian who had made the running on this was not present. A proposal to take a vote on the issue was adopted; a few people voted in favour but when the question of those against was put, a whole sheaf of hands went up. To my consternation the motion was overwhelmingly defeated, and I was left thinking “If I cannot get this minor matter through, what is going to happen to the bigger changes which some of us want to make?” (I have since become much more relaxed about our dress code remaining formal - removing the tie does not seem to go with the character of our Rotary!)

On the other hand I (and hopefully the Club) also had some very enjoyable moments. One of these was the long weekend in March 2008, when 36 of us stayed at the Holiday Home for Dexia Bank employees at Wielingen, on the Belgian Coast at De Panne – a modern high rise building in dunes behind the sandy beach. We had the whole Home to ourselves, including the wonderful swimming pool, games room, bar and above all the restaurant overlooking the sea and serving beautiful seafood. Excursions were organized to Ieper and Brugge. Fortunately our weekend visit took place before the Dexia Bank became a prominent victim of the international Credit Crunch – regretfully the Holiday was closed shortly after our visit and was sold off, no doubt with a view to conversion into luxury apartments.

Another memorable time of happiness came at the end of June 2008, when the aperitif of the Club Safari Supper was held at our house, marking the end of my Presidency. My happiness was not due to the fact that my travails as President were almost over; with the sun shining brilliantly across the Elham Valley, our back lawn was just the right place for a gathering of over sixty. All

were chatting happily and the choices for Paul Harris Fellowships, announced during the gathering - David Naumann with a Bar and John Hill as a Fellow – proved very popular.

## **Challenges and achievements**

### **Club venue**

For much of the Rotary year our venue changed from week to week – between the Kent County Cricket Ground ( and at different locations inside this), Canterbury Golf Club and the Abbots Barton Hotel. Behind the problem was the St Lawrence Ground Redevelopment Plan, to be activated halfway through the Rotary year. Our decision was to stay at the Cricket Ground except for three months during the Cricket season when we could meet at the Canterbury Golf Club. No sooner had the decision been taken than the Golf Club under new catering management rescinded its decision to take us. So we came to an understanding with the Cricket Club and shortly afterwards in the economic downturn the

Ground development plan had to be postponed, making it easier for us to stay there. All rather unsettling...

### **Establishment of Canterbury Sunrise Club**

For reasons connected with the relatively small size of Canterbury, our Club had not voted affirmatively on a District request to sponsor a new breakfast Club. However, District came back with certain assurances, and we agreed to sponsor such a Club. Our Representative, Immediate Past President Philip Abbot, provided great assistance along with others in getting the Club set up.

At times in the gestation period there were some surprises. On one of my breakfast visits I was astonished to find no fewer than six other members of our Club sitting there! One of our newest Members, the Headmaster of St Edmund's School, found breakfast meetings the answer to the difficulties he was experiencing in getting to our lunchtime meetings, and he was granted a transfer with full understanding of his position.

After Jaarle Tatt, son and grandson of Rotarians, agreed to lead the organization, it gathered momentum and quickly gained its own character,

based on the diverse occupations of its members . There is not only co-existence but active cooperation between our two Clubs; the Sunrise Club has gone from strength to strength in the last two years - and so have we!

### **Rotary Renewal Reflection Group**

I encouraged the formation of the above-mentioned group. (The title was unfortunate – nobody, sometimes not even myself, could remember what the three R's stood for!) The group held two meetings and then Council followed its report up through several meetings.

The Group saw the following needs: modernizing structures, with the RI model in mind; “digesting” the decision taken during the previous year that there should be supper instead of aperitif on the second Tuesday of the month; getting in new ideas for the Club, in particular with bearing on the high average age of the membership; possible impact on us of the Breakfast Club being formed.

Thanks to the efforts of Council Member Peter Hermitage a “Club Direction Report” was adopted by the Club. It was based on a diagram with the concept of “Rotary Service” in the centre, interacting with the five most important Club preoccupations. Emphasis was placed on ensuring cooperation with the other Canterbury Clubs and with all six in the Canterbury District. The need for special efforts to recruit new Rotarians in their fifties was spelled out. The importance of the newly formed Public Relations Committee was emphasized and it was resolved to have a website which would be fully operative in relation to running the Club. A three-year rolling programme was established and teamwork within the “Presidency Chain” was highlighted.

Whether or not the report and programme has had any influence on the development of the Club, we have certainly gained a new impetus, made our operation more efficient and attracted a good number of new Members since the programme was approved. We have however no grounds for complacency!

### **Some major events**

Art display: Over 20 Rotarians or Inner Wheel Members exhibited art or craft work in the Studio at the bottom of our garden. These works were much

admired by those present at the Presidency Garden Party and a substantial sum was raised for the District Governor's Charity Make-A-Wish.

Visit to St Quentin: Our Rotary visit to the St Quentin Club in early October was exquisitely timed for Rugby World Cup matches involving England on Saturday afternoon and France in the evening. Miraculously the two sides both won their matches. The champagne was flowing even more freely than on previous visits to St Quentin!

Victorian Music Hall at the Marlowe: The Lindley Players from Whitstable kindly put this on for us, and we had the use of the Marlowe for a relatively small fee. After giving a donation to the Lindley Players' theatre charity, we were able to present a cheque for £6,500 to the Save Canterbury Cathedral Appeal.

Prominent speakers: Jeremy Thompson, Chief Presenter of Sky News; Archbishop Rowan Williams; Sir Robert Worcester, Founder of Mori Polls and Chancellor of the University of Kent. Amongst many other good speakers, special mention should be made of Margaret Ovenden who stepped in at short notice to give a fascinating account of how she became a Cathedral Verger and what that work entails.

Two intercontinental visits by Members: I was very pleased that Second Vice-President Richard Kembell-Cook (as well as one of his sons) was able at his own cost to visit India with an RIBI mission targeting the end of polio-plus; also that PP Sidney Denham represented the Club on the visit to the Dodi Papase Hospital in Ghana, organized in connection with the Pentangular Five- Year Programme of assistance to the hospital.

Redwalls: I was keen to have a special Presidential Charity of the Year, which would not however exclude giving to other local bodies doing charitable work. Working with the Community Service Committee, we chose Redwalls, a new Care Home for young people with learning difficulties, to which we contributed almost £3,000 for furnishing and decorating two rooms. In a nice gesture our Rotoract (from Simon Langton Girls School) thereafter planted 400 daffodil bulbs in the garden of the Home.

**Postscript** I have already written too much and have not even mentioned District Conference at Eastbourne or the Pentangular Meeting at Utrecht – never mind, I have a 41 page Scrapbook of my Presidency, with handwritten entries, photos, press clippings, letters etc which anybody is welcome to consult about these two matters or any other burning issues of 2007 – 2008.