



Club of Swindon

District Conference Bulletin March 2018

BOURNEMOUTH was the venue for the annual District 1100 Conference - as you can see, the weather wasn't brilliant.....



...but the company was great, and by and large, the programme of events was interesting and stimulating.

Friday afternoon:

The session started with a presentation from the representative of the RI president, and what a presentation. As we might have expected Julia Phelps is incredibly enthusiastic about Rotary and as the weekend went by, turned out to be a very sociable person as well. Her message in a nutshell was "embrace change, stand up and take part"

Sadly few of us from Swindon arrived in time to hear former club member, Tim Mason talking on the "Let's Hear Project" but by all accounts he characteristically put the case for all that Rotary can and does do in promoting hearing technologies, and auditing venues all over the district to check the quality of hearing loops and other devices.

Quentin Letts, the parliamentary sketch writer was as entertaining and opinionated as ever - amusing some but annoying others and promoting his latest book "Patronising Bastards" (enough said!). But at least his salvos were aimed at all sides of the political spectrum.

Friday evening:

Cote Restaurant in the centre of town was our club venue for the evening meal and a very convivial event it proved to be - good food and wine and excellent company!



Needless to say, late night drinks for some continued back at the hotel.



Saturday morning came and by 9.30 most of us found ourselves in the conference hall taking our seats for the morning session, though it has to be admitted that many of the ladies took off to explore the possibilities of shopping in Bournemouth,

and they seemed have enjoyed themselves considerably.

Here we see President Ian, with immediate past president and incoming president keenly awaiting the start of proceedings...



...but of course one of the club had to be different, and stood apart from us all.....



Peter Hayman carried out his role as Sergeant at Arms in characteristic style: well done Peter!

DG Alan Hudson 'kicked off' the session in his inimitable down-to-earth style - what a great DG he has been this year - friendly and approachable and clearly dedicated to Rotary and seemingly well aware of all that the clubs are doing across the District.

Toilet twinning was the subject of the first presentation and at least one club member now has his loo at home twinned with a third world convenience somewhere in

Nepal! (Could be an interesting subject for a club meeting?)

Kris Saunders Stowe gave a humbling talk on "Wheely Good Fitness". He works as an instructor to those who, like him, live with a disability...but when he started talking he made us wonder which of us was disabled - nothing seems to stop him!



Pat Dazely, talking on the work of "Inner Wheel" came next and was unfazed by the breakdown of the mic system and managed to tell us of the various projects undertaken by these busy ladies (even if we had to take a coffee break in mid-stream!).

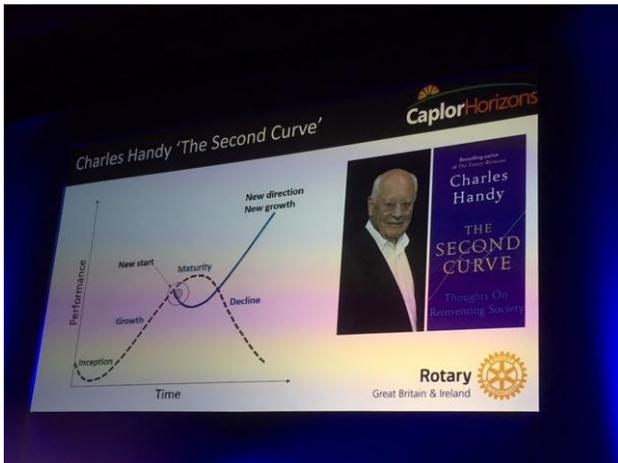
Setting up schools and working with children and young people in Cambodia is the work of the Ponheary Ly Foundation and proved a very moving talk indeed as the population there struggles to come to terms with the aftermath of the Killing Fields. Heather Gorringer and Bobby Morris gave a talk that made us so aware how lucky we are in the UK to have the educational facilities we so often take for granted.

Adrian Brewer, promoting "Roll out the Barrel" was the next speaker (many will recall his visit to our own club a few months ago) and his talk was as entertaining and informative as ever as he explained how the acquisition of a simple roller barrel changes lives in developing countries.

Meningitis Now was the topic of the next speaker, Steve Dayman, who gave an

update on a presentation given to Conference in Warwick some years ago: the loss of his son 36 years ago spurred him into working to do all that he could to support research into this devastating illness. It was both moving and humbling.

And finally in the morning Professor Sharon Turnbull gave a very business-like talk on "Dealing with Change" that set us up for an afternoon of interactive discussion on the future of our clubs.



It has to be said that attendance in the afternoon session dwindled; (were the beach/ shops more attractive, I wonder, or was it the Boat Race?) but very useful points arose out of the final discussions.

Whatever happens, change in any organisation is inevitable but it is very clear that within our own club there is plenty of life yet as the evening was to prove.

Saturday evening saw the gala dinner and we donned our bling and finery and what a sight we all made!

We were all grateful to President Ian and Anita who hospitably served us all with pre-dinner drinks and nibbles and gave us all the opportunity to talk over the events of the day and catch up on what we all thought of the conference so far. I ought to add the thanks of all of us to Peter and Denise for opening up their suite to cater for the 27 from the club who managed to cram in there!



I leave it to your imagination as to why the ladies seemed far more voluble and lively, while the men seemed to be distinctly sober!.....



The meal itself was a splendid occasion and greatly enjoyed by everyone - the catering team are to be congratulated on serving an excellent meal that was both hot and tasty as well as served promptly. Some of us with hearing difficulties had problems with the booming microphone (but if that was our only complaint it says much about the excellence of the evening!)



President Ian and Anita enjoying the evening dinner

As ever, after-dinner drinks carried on at the hotel but with clocks moving forward that night no one was really too late to bed.



Sadly travel arrangements for some, and a Sunday morning lie-in meant that attendance at the morning session was much reduced, but three excellent presentations took place.

Sunday morning

Ian Williams gave a very moving talk on Modern Day Slavery in India where some 65,000 women and children work as 'bonded labourers' and are forced into heavy manual work. The charity works in various communities across the state of Tamil Nadu, to rehabilitate and support these tragic cases.

The Butterfly Gardens on the outskirts of Cheltenham were the subject of the second presentation. Here a quarter of an acre plot of wasteland has been developed into a four acre landscaped garden that is worked by more than 100 autistic as well as other disabled students, and the project now embraces art, music woodwork and catering (as well as very obviously gardening!)

The final talk came from Milaney Varaljay-Boyce who works as a fundraiser with "Winston's Wish" a charity that supports bereaved children and young people. As she pointed out, one hundred children lose a parent every single day of the year in the UK and many of them do not receive any form of specialist help in coming to terms with their loss. The aim of the charity is to ensure that grief does not destroy a child's future. Again, a very moving presentation.

All in all then, an extremely good conference during which we learned a lot, friendships were deepened and fellowship abounded. It was a great opportunity to catch up with other rotarians across the District some of whom we only ever see at this annual event.

Sixteen club members from Swindon were in attendance and, together with partners, our numbers rose to 27 so it was an excellent turnout that nearly put us in the frame for the award of having the largest club attendance there. However, that is worked out on a percentage basis so we lost out to Wootton Bassett & District who managed an astonishing 50% turnout. It would be good to see a few more club members from Swindon at next year's conference. We all had a great time, so think about it!

A word of thanks to the Conference Committee that did such a good job and to our own Chris Firth who chivvied and sorted us out in Swindon!