

John E. Hill President 1992 –1993

A former Prime Minister said “a week is a long time in politics”, but a year seems to be a very short time in Rotary. No sooner have you got used to being addressed as “Mr President” and not looking behind to see who they are talking to, than you are taking off the ceremonial collar and handing it to your successor. That’s how it felt to me; to the members, it may have felt a lifetime.

We were able to give donations to a number of local and international bodies, a number of whom are still “on the books” and receiving support. I particularly remember opening the Rotary Room at the Umbrella Centre – the Press photo shows me wielding a pair of scissors and for some inexplicable reason, on my knees. I am pleased to say that we are still supporting the Centre in 2010.



During the year I welcomed our first Russian Rotarian, an achievement slightly marred by hearing subsequently that he was serving a prison sentence for confusing his and his bank’s finances.

The Christmas Dinner was held at the University with a view of the floodlit Cathedral framed in the window behind the top table. On the top table for the first time was the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey and his wife Eileen. What supporters they have been over the years and how lucky we are to have them. Now, no Christmas Dinner seems complete without them. Also on that occasion I was able to make Jack Parkin an Honorary Member at the age of 90. He subsequently celebrated his 100th birthday as a Rotarian.

Over the year we had two controversial ballots: one to decide to have two courses only for lunch and to cut the meeting to an hour and a quarter, which was passed, and the other to vote on whether to allow ladies to join Rotary, which wasn't. I remarked that we could look at this latter decision again, but not for a year or two! The price of meals at the time was £6.50!

Another feature of the time - we used to get letters (no emails in those days!) telling us that a particular club would be drinking our health at their next meeting and asking us to do the same. This seems to have died out now. Rather a pity.

Pentangular was held at Utrecht in my year and since we all expect the Dutch to speak English, I thought it would be more polite if I could learn a little Flemish for my Presidential speech which I did, with a little help from a Dutch friend. It went down well and Dutch Rotarians still remind me of it even if at the time one of their members said I spoke the language like their dear Crown Prince – he was German!

My final thoughts as I looked through my records, was how many friends are sadly no longer with us, but it was nice to think of the good times I had shared with them.

John Hill
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