

GEOFF GOODBAN - YEAR 2013-2014

I came to Rotary somewhat late in life, and while still running four businesses and belonging to another eighteen fund-raising clubs. However, I at once felt at home in Rotary and was pleased and honoured to be invited to become President after only five years in the Club. However, I had help in my job: the Council and the committees provided an excellent back-up, working with great flexibility whenever needed. We managed to produce a good number of innovatory projects. We also found time to educate ourselves in various ways and to enjoy some very pleasurable experiences.

Great flexibility

Flexibility was called for in connection with the Mini Group Study Exchange, which comprises two young people from the countries of each of the five Pentangular partner clubs. The event is held in each of the countries in turn over six days at the beginning of September - just when a new Club President is beginning to find his feet. It was our turn to host. All went well, except that the Dutch Club made a mix-up and sent its two girl representatives at the end of the week instead of at the beginning. Bed and breakfast type accommodation was provided by Rotarian Alan Holmes, and an impromptu programme was arranged for them. All was well that ended well - except that they missed out on the important element of being together with contemporaries from four other countries for a week! However.... there was a bonus. I have a collection of Classic cars, and one of my grandchildren, Amber, who was the same age as the Netherlands girls, enjoyed travelling in Classic cars. This gave the girls a good chance to mix with an English girl and also ride in Rolls, Bentleys and Jaguar. I think my grand-daughter enjoyed their visit as much as they did.

Another example of rapid reaction was our collection to help the people of the Philippines hit by the typhoon and the beginning of the tsunami. We quickly gave £2,400 to Shelterbox for disaster relief. We followed this up with a street collection in Canterbury together with the Forest of Blean and Sunrise Clubs. This realised a further £2,340, and the total for Shelterbox became £4740.

Innovatory projects

Around this time the value of music for bringing comfort and some coherence to the mentally ill was beginning to be recognised. In regard to the Mustard Seed Choir for patients with mental illness, we donated the sum necessary to pay for a pianist for six months. Thanks to a gifted and devoted leader, the Choir has gone from strength to strength. In a different context, we made a donation to Canterbury Age UK to support singing sessions for clients with dementia.

We struck out also in the sporting field, making a grant to sponsor tennis coaching and tournament costs for an exceptionally talented tennis player 12 years old, and another to sponsor goalkeeping equipment for a needy 20 year old student hockey player with great potential.

Among many good projects on the international front, those concerning South Sudan, a new African country torn by sectarian strife, gathered momentum with the help of a Rotarian , Margaret Griffin, who has firsthand knowledge of the area and a willingness to follow up projects on the spot. One four-year programme in Juba encourages girls to stay on in secondary school and hopefully go to university. Moreover, the Club was successful in applying for a joint Pentangular project concerning the Juba Diocesan Secondary School, and a two year General Bursary scheme will start in 2017.

A new feature presented by the Vocational Service Committee was a "Young photographer" competition, organised jointly with the Sunrise and the Forest of Blean Clubs. 130 photographs were submitted by 62 entrants from 11 schools. Prizes were awarded at school assemblies, and all photographs submitted were put on show at the Robertson Centre, London Road. 70 members of the public visited the exhibition.

In addition, an innovation competition was organised for secondary schools within the county. Kent Innovation Centre backed the project and provided judges who discussed with the 13 participants the possible exploitation of their ideas.

Club life

Beside many interesting local trips, the Vocational Service Committee produced diverse outings for our edification:

- an inspection of the old colliery railway station at Shepherdswell and ride through the countryside;
- a historic visit to one of the two bell foundries left in the UK, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry;
- a rehearsal of a concert by the English Chamber Orchestra at the Cadogan Hall, London, followed by the concert itself;
- a day on an engineless Thames barge;
- a bird-watching walk round Oare Marshes;
- as well as planning a visit to Down House, home of Charles Darwin; a trip to a Brett plant at Chatham making the tunnel sections for Crossrail ; and a trip to the new Thames Gateway port and the Crossness Steam Pumping Station at Erith.

A Fawlty Towers Dining Experience at the Abode made us laugh, while we held a more solemn Guest Night in April to commemorate the centenary of the Great War. Verse readings and acting skills were involved, and Sheila Boyd-Howell gave a thoughtful talk about the effect of the war on women.

Add to all this two Club visits to my home, attendance at regular District meetings and Pentangular events, and I conclude that it was a very busy but enjoyable year for our Rotary.