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Celebrating the centenary of the Rotary Club of Chichester

Changing Times

 Pat Saunders, volunteer
 The Novium Museum, Chichester

The Rotary Club in Chichester celebrated its centenary at the beginning of 2020. The very first meeting was held on December 2, 1919, at the Dolphin & Anchor Hotel, where a group of Chichester businessmen met with Mr Graves of Brighton, a representative of the British Association of Rotary Clubs, and Mr Reeves of Portsmouth, where a new group had recently been formed.

A week later, on December 9, another meeting was held. At this time it was decided that a Rotary Club in Chichester should be formally established, and 31 members agreed to join. The club officially received its charter on May 1, 1920, having been sponsored by the Portsmouth club. Dr Arthur Bostock, senior surgeon at the Royal West Sussex Hospital, Chichester, and King Edward VII Sanatorium, Midhurst, was elected as the first president of the Chichester club.

Originally, each trade or profession had just one representative and they were always required to attend meetings. In the early days, membership to any Rotary club was open only to male participants, one of a number of strict rules the club originally observed, which has subsequently been slowly relaxed.

One of the first projects the club

was involved with, in 1920, was raising funds for Chichester's War Memorial, originally located in Eastgate Square until it was relocated to Litten Gardens in the 1930s. In November 2019, a statue of Maurice Patten, a soldier who died in the First World War, sculpted by local artist Vincent Gray, was unveiled near the War Memorial with the support of the Rotary club.

From early on, the Rotary club was involved in giving assistance to local charities, supporting local people who were affected by the consequences of the First World War. One project was the establishment of the Boys Club in Little London, offering opportunities for education and outdoor pursuits, which began its work in 1922.

During the Second World War, the club's attention moved to assisting the war effort through matters such as air raid precautions, defence and assisting with finding suitable accommodation for refugees and evacuees.

For over 70 years, the Rotary club has sourced Chichester's Christmas 'Tree of Goodwill', an iconic part of the city's celebrations and a focal point for fundraising for the charity account. Initially, the tree was positioned on the Cathedral Green but in more recent years it was transferred to the Cross.

Since 1985, Rotary's global key humanitarian priority has been to rid the world of Polio. Chichester is one such Rotary club to join the fight, raising many thousands of pounds for the cause over recent years. In 2016, the club raised awareness by inviting local



schoolchildren to plan crocus bulbs in the Rotary Sensory Garden in Prior Park. Unfortunately, many of the bulbs proved popular with the squirrels.

In addition, the club supports the Youth Speaks competition. Team members can practise public speaking skills in addition to debating and taking questions from skilled speakers.

The Rotary Youth Exchange offers opportunities for developing confidence and language skills through experience of other cultures.

Unveiling LCpl Maurice Patten's statue in Litten Gardens on Remembrance Sunday in November 2019

Picture: Chichester Rotary Club

There is a leadership development programme, the Rotary Youth Leadership award, as well as an annual technology tournament to encourage young scientists and engineers. Hopefully it fosters a better life generally for future generations.

Sadly, with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March, the Rotary club's centenary celebrations were put on hold. If you are interested in joining Rotary, please email chichesterrotaryclub@gmail.com.



The war memorial in its original location in Eastgate Square, around 1934



Chichester Rotary Club's Christmas tree in December 2016