

HISTORY OF KELSALL & DISTRICT GOOD COMPANIONS CLUB (by Jean Fisher)

It is fifty years since Mrs Banwell, the District organiser for Cheshire WVRS founded what was then to be called the Kelsall & District WVRS Darby and Joan club. It was the first to be opened in Cheshire and it was several more years before other clubs sprang up in the area. There were no records kept for the first two years, and record keeping started in 1959. Mrs Banwell had been the leader for those first two years but due to her commitments as Area Organiser, she found it too time consuming and even though she kept in close contact, she resigned and a new leader was elected. There have been several over the years: Mrs McLaren 1959; Mrs Hardy 1962; Mrs Inge Pilling 1976; Mrs Diane Cloke 1980; Mrs Etile Hall 1983 and presently Mrs Mary Diggle and Miss Audrey Parker as joint leaders. They have always been supported by a thriving committee and band of helpers. The meetings were originally held at the Church Hall until it was sold, moving to the Institute and finally to the Methodist Hall where they are held to this day. The fees for the early meetings were 1p and increased over the years to 4p, 5p and to 15p as the cost of the venue, speakers and overheads increased. The cost at present is £10 for the year which along with other fund-raising events usually covers the cost of the Christmas lunch.



Mary Diggle making a presentation to Jean Fisher to thank her for collating the Club history and scrapbooks

During the early years, West's Coaches used to pick up the members around the village to attend meetings and also supplied transport for the excursions. In 1983 the West brothers retired and for a time the group had the loan of a mini-bus driven by Joe Strong and Bram Craven. When this service ended a band of volunteers offered their services to bring members to the meetings when they couldn't make it on their own. These days, Pat Towey and Liz Wye carry out this service and for that we are very grateful.

The programmes over the years have been very varied with visits to garden centres, stately homes, theatre, pantomimes, demonstrations and other entertainment. The group has always been very active putting on their own shows, crafts, jam-making, gardening, fashion and all manner of other activities. Members' special birthdays were always celebrated with a tea-party.

Mrs Etile Hall took over in 1983, having previously run the thriving Brownie pack in the village. Her work was a great asset to the village and she put the same energy and drive into organising the Darby & Joan Club. She started the club holidays when members and friends journeyed by coach to various destinations. Lovely holidays were enjoyed and the group visited Ayr, Cliftonville, Weston Super Mare, Skegness, Weymouth, Tenby, Isle of Man, Isle of Wight, Great Yarmouth, Eastbourne, Dunoon, Aberfeldy and Newton Stewart. It gave members who weren't able to holiday alone an opportunity to have an enjoyable time with pleasant company.



Members enjoying a garden meeting at Becketts Croft in 2005

In September 1986, the village held a carnival to raise funds to build the new Community Centre and the procession was allowed to use the new by-pass prior to its being officially opened. There were 25 floats with the Darby & Joan club on a lorry all dressed up as gypsies. The entry came second in the competition for best float, being pipped at the post by the Mother and Toddler group with their teddy bear's picnic. On another occasion the group staged a mock wedding with Arthur Probyn as the vicar, Sam and Olive Reade as bride and groom, Bram Craven the best man and Betty Southern and Ella Pittam as bridesmaids. It was followed by a champagne toast, banquet and entertainment. It was a real fun meeting enjoyed by all.

Over the years there were moves to change the name of the club from Darby & Joan but the members kept voting against a change until 1989 when the decision was upheld. The name was changed more appropriately to the Good Companions.

In 1989 also, one of the members, Mrs M Cooper was celebrating her 90th birthday and the club organised a mediaeval banquet in honour of Lady Madge. This was such a success that a few years later in 1992, when Dilys Evans reached her 90th birthday another was organised for her together with a 'This is your life'.

In 2000, the club were entertained to a Millennium concert and given a special tea. In 2002 Mary Diggle and Audrey Parker took over the organisation of the club from Etile Hall. Etile was thanked for all her hard work over nearly 20 years and Nellie Dickinson, one of the founder members, made a presentation to her. During that year also, Dilys Evans celebrated her 100th birthday at Sable Cottage and Evelyn Temperton celebrated her 90th birthday with a party provided by her daughters.



Members enjoying a 50th anniversary lunch in May 2007

Coming up to the present day, I have only been a member for three years since retiring from the Post Office. It has been fascinating going through the minutes, newspaper cuttings and photographs collected over the years and I have made some souvenir books chronicling the activities of the group. We are fortunate to have two dedicated leaders who never fail to bring us such a varied and interesting programme. Mary opens her lovely garden to us every year, where we can wander around enjoying it, take afternoon tea and some form of entertainment. Each

year we have a local trip, this year to the Shire Horse centre at Cotebrook. We also have four trips a year for members and friends organised by Audrey who first of all seeks out the best venues for lunch. The final trip of the year is always for the autumn tints when the countryside is viewed in all its lovely colours and ending with a meal. At Christmas, Tarporley Round Table invites all pensioners to a free trip to Tesco for shopping where we are served tea and biscuits and sing carols to the accompaniment of Tarporley Prize Band.

We hold a carol service every year when we invite and welcome friends from Tarvin and Barrow. All the proceeds go to Tarporley Cottage Hospital. There is also the annual Christmas dinner, but having tried many venues, the favourite is having Mrs Harvey to cater for us, because her meals are always top quality. Our 50th anniversary is nearly upon us and we will be celebrating with a dinner in June prepared by Mrs Harvey.

Why don't you come and join our club. We meet every fortnight at the Methodist Hall at 2:15 pm. All will be made very welcome and don't worry about being alone, you will soon meet new friends as we finish our meetings with a raffle, tea and biscuits and a chat.

Jean Fisher