

HISTORY OF KELSALL AND DISTRICT GOOD COMPANIONS CLUB

(by Jean Fisher)

It is more than sixty years since the District Organiser for Cheshire WVRS founded what was then to be called the Darby and Joan club in Kelsall. There were no records kept for the first two years - record keeping started in 1959. Mrs Banwell had been the leader for those two years but due to her commitments as Area Organiser she found it too time consuming and even though she kept 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. Mary Diggle joined in 1984 as a WRVS volunteer, and then in 2002 Mrs Mary Diggle and Miss Audrey Parker took over from Mrs Hall as joint leaders. They worked together for many years until sadly Audrey was very ill and passed away in 2011. Mrs Ann Barnet stepped in to join Mary, who has received her 30 year medal as a member of the WVRS. They have always been supported by a thriving committee and band of helpers. The meetings were originally held in the old Church Hall until it was sold, moving to the Institute and finally to the Methodist Hall where they are held to this day. The fee for the early meetings was 1p and increased over the years to 4p, 5p and 15p as the cost of the venue, speakers and overheads increased. The cost at present is £14 for the year.

During the early years Wests Coaches used to pick up members around the village to attend meetings and also supplied transport for holidays and 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 meetings when they couldn't make it on their own.

The programmes over the years have been very varied with visits to garden centres, stately homes, pantomimes, demonstrations, and all manner of activities. The Club has always in the past been very active, putting on their own shows, crafts, jam-making, gardening, fashion and all manner of activities. Members special birthdays were always

celebrated with a tea party. These days speakers are costly, but we do have some great speakers on varied topics. One of the last meetings we did a Songs of Praise where we all chose a hymn and we have Ann as pianist so it was a lovely afternoon. We all enjoyed a good sing.

When Mrs Etile Hall took over in 1983 having previously run a thriving Brownie pack in the village her work was a great asset to the village as she put the same energy into the Darby & Joan Club. She started club holidays where members and friends journeyed by coach to various destinations. Lovely Weston Supermare, Skegness, Ayr, Cliftonville, Weymouth, Tenby, Great Yarmouth, Dunoon, Aberfeldy, and Newton Stewart among others. It gave members who weren't able to travel alone the opportunity to have an enjoyable holiday with pleasant company. In 1989 one of the members Mrs M Cooper was 90 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 celebrated her 90th birthday another one was organised for her with a "This is your Life". In 2000 the club were entertained to a Millennium concert and a special tea. In 2002 when Mary and Audrey took over the organisation of the club 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 Dilys Evans also celebrated her 100th birthday at Sable Cottage and Evelyn Temperton celebrated her 90th with a party provided by her daughters.

Over the years there were moves to change the name of the club from Darby and Joan but it was not until 1989 the decision was made to change the name to The Good Companions Club. The group then had a large membership but unfortunately things have changed we are now a smaller group.

Coming up to the present time I have now been a member for over 14 years since retiring from the Post Office after 50 years. It has been fascinating going through the minutes, newspaper cuttings and photographs collected over the years. I have made some souvenir books, chronicling the activities of the group into the correct years. I started with carrying on with a souvenir book when I joined and am at

present working on book 12. It is nice to look back on them, looking at the photos and cuttings and see how things are changing in the village. We have two dedicated leaders in Mary and Ann, who never fail to bring us such a varied and interesting programme. We usually manage a trip out to a garden centre - somewhere close. We used to have four coach trips out a year Audrey would take a trip out to find a suitable place for lunch at these venues. The last one was always an Autumn tints tour. Unfortunately, due to the cost of the coaches going up and our small group we can't afford to have trips any more. However the Norley Wednesday Club invited us to join their trips and there are usually about eight of us who go. They are really friendly and we help to fill their coaches.

We hold a carol service every year inviting outsiders to join us and the proceeds of the collection and raffle go to Tarporley Cottage Hospital. There is also the annual Christmas dinner. We have tried many venues but have settled with Mrs Harvey to come and cater for us her food is always top quality and enjoyed by all. We celebrated our 60th birthday in 2017 with a lunch at Rose Farm which was a lovely meal and enjoyed by us all.



Why don't you come and join us? We need some new members and we are very friendly. Our meetings start at 2.15pm once a fortnight at the Methodist Hall. Don't worry about being alone you will soon make new friends and transport can be arranged if you need it. We finish our meetings with tea and biscuits and raffle and a chat before we go home.

Jean Fisher
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