

History of the Club

The Chain of Office, worn by our president, is heavy for two reasons.

It bears the burden of responsibility undertaken each year and also bears the history of the Bulawayo Rotary Club. The first name on the chain of office is that of Major Robert Boomerang Gordon, first President of the club which held its first meeting at the Selborne Hotel July 17th 1931.

The club was chartered on January 27th 1932, which was a great day as the President of Rotary International, Sydney Pascall, presented the charter to Major Gordon. He formally declared the club elected to membership in Rotary International. All 20 founding members were present. The RI President also planted a tree of fellowship in the garden of the Bulawayo Technical College.

There were 6 committees with an average of 5 Rotarians serving on each. Weekly lunches cost 2s 6pence.

The first Community Service project was a Christmas Dinner given to men employed on relief work at the time of the world depression. There were 250 acceptances and the Drill Hall was used for the occasion. Two barrels of beer were supplied along with tobacco and cigarettes. About 90 pounds was raised by the Rotarians to meet all the costs.

Further first projects included the planting of Ornamental trees In various parts of the city, seeing that tree's were planted down Essexvale road and helping to raise funds for the improving of roads in the Matopos. Major Duly, chairman of this committee helped with inception of Coronation Cottages and Queen Mary Old Age homes.

The International Committee invited people of different nationalities visiting Bulawayo to enjoy and visit the Bulawayo Rotary Club.

Even at that early stage this committee was communicating with the Rotary Clubs of Cairo and Sofia and some clubs in America. At one luncheon in October 1933, this enterprising committee invited a speaker as stated in the minutes "instead of the usual luncheon address we had an exceptionally interesting demonstration of the long distance telephone!" Several members spoke to Rotarians in Pretoria. It was also the occasion of the opening of the first telephone circuit between South Africa and then Rhodesia.

The African Welfare Committee was always hard at work. They were virtual watchdogs for any improvements that could be made to the lot of the African people either by the Municipality or the Government.

The Social Welfare Committee was involved with purely social and welfare service; for example ferrying convalescent patients from the hospital for motor drives. They also began a "Young Men's Club" and after that the Boys Club in which a building was raised in 1937 for 7 pounds after much fundraising and opened by the Mayor.

The boys' work committee changed their name to the Youth Service Committee because their work included all youth irrespective of race, sex or religion.

A bequest of 50,000 pounds was left to the Bulawayo Rotary Club by Sir James Macdonald on the proviso that the Club was to use the money for a Young people's Club or Barnardo home. Hence the formation of the MacDonald's club especially for the young people of Bulawayo.

Carols by Candlelight was first introduced to Bulawayo in 1953 and has been run by the Bulawayo Rotary Club ever since !

Rotarian John Barham virtually got a project off the ground single handily by erecting a children's playground called Rotary Park in Barham Green in 1961 costing 1700 pounds.

A small rock of granite from the Matopos was sent in the 50's to Rotary International to be part of the Rotary walkway - 'International walk' that was paved with stones at HQ-having something of every Rotary Club in the world at that time!

The golden Jubilee of Rotary was celebrated on the 23rd February 1955 in the form of a banquet at the McMurray Hall. The Jubilee fund of the club collected 700 pounds, disbursed equally amongst St Joseph's Home for Boys, the Barham Green Community for a swimming Pool and the African Children's orphanage. Sir Henry Low gave a broadcast speech on the history of the Rotary movement to mark the occasion.

When the membership of our Club exceeded 100 members in the sixties it was decided to form a second Bulawayo Club, known as Bulawayo South receiving its charter in 1967.

Both Clubs in 1968 combined together to raise money to build the aviary in Century Park housing exotic birds to mark Bulawayo's 75th Birthday.

The Rotary Club of Bulawayo also sponsored the Rotary Club of Ndola and the Rotary Club of Lusaka. Both charters were presented by Sir Henry Low who at that time was second vice President of RI.

In 2001, Maureen Bond was installed as the first Woman President of this prestigious Club. "It is with this historical approach that I feel is very necessary

for us in Bulawayo Rotary Club today to know the background of our humble beginnings and why we are still here today after 70 years.

Our Club has meant a great deal to the City and its community, which we continue to serve in the Rotary spirit.

I was hoping for an administration that was starting in a change in our country, alas we have to soldier on in even more difficult times ahead and not get despondent.

I love these words from a Speech by the (US) President (Bill) Clinton after more carnage in another American school. 'There is nothing so wrong in America that cannot be rectified by what is so right in America'

I like to believe that there is nothing so bad in this country that cannot be rectified by so much that is good in Zimbabwe especially in Rotary and other organizations."

Maureen Bond, President - Bulawayo Rotary Club

Also see our history of early clubs of Africa at **www.rotaryafrica.org**