

Rotary Club of York Centenary Club Meeting by Zoom – 5th February 2021



1921
2021

There were three stages to the formation of the Club:

The early days of the Rotary Club of York
A quick dip into the archives

Graham Wilford

First - following an approach to the Lord Mayor from Leeds Rotarians, the Lord Mayor invited a number of local professional and businessmen to a meeting to consider forming a

Rotary Club in York. That meeting was held at the Mansion House on 12th January 1921. 14 potentially interested members attended to hear Rotarians from Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle explain the purpose and ideals of Rotary. As a result, 12 of the 14 agreed to form an Interim Committee to establish a Rotary Club in York, with the Lord Mayor Alderman Edward Walker as the Interim President. That meeting at the Mansion House became the Preliminary Meeting of the Club.

The second stage, three weeks later, was the Inaugural Meeting held at the Station Hotel on 4th Feb 1921 - 100 years ago yesterday – at which a further 13 potential members were present, to meet the minimum requirement of 25 Members to form a new Club. With the appointment of the Lord Mayor as the President and other Officers and the completion of numerous formalities, the Rotary Club of York came into being as the 36th Club in the British Association of Rotary Clubs



Lastly the Club received its formal Certificate of Affiliation to the British Association of Rotary Clubs dated 7th May 1921 and notably became the 1000th Club in the International Association



Rotary International seems to have us down as founded on 1st Nov 1921, as shown on the 75th Anniversary Cert, hence I guess we're due a Centenary Certificate towards the end of the year

This all occurred only 2 years after the end of the Great War - the war to end all wars - at a time when the country and the City was in a very depressed state. To their credit, those involved – and they represented a wide range of business and professional activities - saw Rotary as a significant world movement to enhance business and social ideals, through local Clubs.

At the Inaugural Meeting it was agreed that future meetings would be held fortnightly, at the Station Hotel (now the Royal York), on Fridays at 1.00pm – at that time for a lunch of cold meats, vegetables, sweets and cheese at a cost of 3 shillings (coffee extra) – that's £7.50 in today's money.

Well, amazingly the Club's original decision to hold its meetings on Fridays has held good for the whole 100 years and the 1.00pm start hasn't varied by much, although the inconvenience of meeting during the working day has been hotly debated on numerous occasions. The fortnightly meetings only became weekly, 5 years later in 1926, even though the British Association of Rotary Clubs had decided in 1923 that all Clubs must meet weekly– early signs that York Rotarians weren't going to be pushed around. By that time the Club was up to 70 Members with 2000 Clubs worldwide in 35 countries.

The cost of lunches was always to be a contentious item – for instance in 1924 it was decided that the cost of the lunch should be brought back down to 3 shillings and that had to include the threepence bonus for the waiters! In 1948 the cost of lunch rose from 3/6 to 3/9, to 6/- by 1958 and 7/- a year or so later, and still only £1.65 by 1976 even though the latter was the subject of great debate in Council!

Whilst meetings of the Club started at the Station Hotel, 5 years later it moved to Terrys, then to the De Grey Rooms from 1927 to the mid-1960s, interrupted by a spell at Bettys in the 1940s and two years at the Windmill Hotel in Blossom St. The De Grey Rooms as a venue came to an end in 1966 when it suddenly closed down. Fortunately Kings Manor, just across the road, came to the rescue for a couple of years, before the Club returned to its roots at the Station Hotel. Obviously cheap University lunches at Kings Manor had gone down well, as the President's Ode on leaving was

*We don't want to leave you, but we know we've got to go,
For the Dons and students, both need you so,
We shall miss your low prices, and we'll pray with might and main,
That if BR goes bankrupt, we can come back again*

Many of us will remember the Station Hotel (Royal York) with a sort of affection – for their service in cleaning off the gravy they spilt on members' suits, for Lily the 80 year old waitress and after British Rail sold the Hotel, for every time the Hotel went bankrupt the standard of the food went up!

Two other characteristics which are now long gone but seem positively archaic:

Clubs were very territorial for their catchment areas for Members - in our case it was within a 10 mile radius around York – and it was only after great debate that in 1959, we ceded the area west of the Ouse to form a new Club – York Ainsty – hence their name!

Members had to fit into the strict classification of occupations - one member and an associate only, from any particular profession or business - which led to hotly debated discussions. For instance a 'Commission Agent' was deemed different to 'Bookmaker', so there could be a representative of each. In another case a new Accountant member could only be introduced, by the existing Accountant member transferring to a classification of Chapter Clerk! Some of our early members' classifications make interesting reading - tar distiller, hide and skin merchant, typewriter distribution, piano merchant, rope & twine maker and flour miller.

Details of the Club's activities for the first five years are sketchy, but very detailed thereafter. Fund raising initially was limited to passing the Benevolent Box around at Lunch meetings for contributions, with boys clubs and crippled children being the main areas for support.

Just as the Leeds Rotary Club sponsored us 100 years ago, during the Club's 100 years, we has helped pass the Rotary baton on, by sponsoring 4 new Rotary Clubs – Thirsk, Malton & Norton, Ainsty and Vikings.

As you can see, we've come a long way since 1921!