

Some of the history of Mothers' Union at St Mary Collegiate, Warwick

My reference points for these details come from the archive at the County Records Office, Warwick, but we do know from earlier research, that the branch was started in the 1920's. The period that I've been able to investigate now covers 1938 – 1969.

From the Minute Book of the PCC of St Mary's Church we learn that, at the AGM in February 1939, the Mothers' Union branch income and expenses were £24/12/6, which included banner alterations costing £6/2/6.

The PCC also recorded that the year 1946-47 was "An important year with a service of Re-affirmation and Re-dedication at Westminster Abbey, and further that a Young Mothers' group under Mrs Battersby and Mrs Farmer had made a good start, with 12 new members enrolled". Receipts and expenses of £39/5/1 were recorded, which included a regular sum to the Girls Shelter in Leamington Spa.

The Mothers' Union Minute Book covering committee meetings between 1938 – 1969 tells us that in January 1938 Mrs Russell presided with 7 committee members. Mrs H C Sleath was elected Secretary, and we learn that she served in various posts from 1938 – 1950, when she retired. Mrs Knight was Treasurer, and Mrs Turrell and Mrs Kings were elected as workers. These two, and others who joined them later, were responsible for keeping in personal touch with members in their immediate locality, informing them of meetings and events, collecting their tribute (the forerunner to subscriptions) and other donations, and generally building good relationship with members. In that year, a Rummage sale was held to raise funds for banner alterations and pole, and a Household Stall at Wroxall Revels was held, attended by 16 members.

Mrs Kings was also appointed Missionary Secretary, and in succeeding years regular donations were made to the MU Overseas Fund. In 1939 the branch supported a Missionary Sale held at St Paul's. A regular donation also began to Church schools in dire need, and to the Diocesan Moral Welfare fund. In October 111 members were recorded; this dropped slightly to 106 members in 1940.

The branch appears to have followed the tradition of many by electing the incumbent's wife as Leader. In March 1946, leader Mrs Mariane Littler instigated a Book of Remembrance for those lost in wartime, which was inscribed by the art mistress at Kings High School. Central President Mrs Fisher attended an event in Jephson Gardens, for which tickets were issued. Canon Littler died late in 1947 and was remembered respectfully in January 1948, the Christmas party being postponed to a spring event.

In 1948 the Enrolling Member was Mrs Elliott, and a Bring & Buy sale raised over £7, enabling £10 to be sent to Mrs Greenwell, Diocesan Secretary, for the Coventry Restoration Fund. A letter of thanks was received from Mrs Howard (wife of Provost Howard).

During these post-war years there were new members added regularly. Events included the annual Christmas party each January, jumble sales, and a summer outing by local coach. Members toured the Houses of Parliament with our MP Mr Eden (!!) in 1949, and in 1950 visited London and Windsor on the day of the King's birthday. In 1952 Mrs Battersby, of the afore-mentioned Young Wives group, was in the Chair, and in 1953 Sister Fenton became the Enrolling member. In 1969 a Young Wives group was formed, led by Mrs Williams, Mrs MacDowall Morgan became Chairperson, and the MU Annual Conference was held at Central Hall, Coventry in October.

The trail of information ran out at this point, and we know that the branch no longer existed in 1979 when Gill James moved to Warwick. Although it is sad that we've been unable to talk with anyone directly involved with Mothers' Union here, we can praise and bless God that, through the prayers and efforts of many dear ladies whose names are recorded and many who are not, his work across Warwick and further afield was faithfully carried out, especially in the darkest of times for our country.

Val Brant 19/7/2023