

My Life as a Magistrate

20th June 2006 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

If you have never met or appeared before one, what do you imagine when you hear the word Magistrate? Someone stern and forbidding? Somebody who will 'throw the book at you?' At our last meeting those impressions were modified somewhat. Hazel Nicholson, who had previously given us an entertaining talk about Red Funnel, now told us of her experiences as a Magistrate. Their history goes back 800 years, when Henry III appointed men as Justices, but women were not admitted until 1920. They are all unpaid volunteers whose everyday 'Bosses' are obliged to allow them to serve. Hazel told us about the training, and the oaths of allegiance they swear, to the Queen for example. She said that they were friendly people - with each other - and that there was a strong impression of wanting to be fair. She talked about cases in general, and how sentences were decided. These were usually fines based on the seriousness of the offence, and what you can afford. Prison was a last resort! Comforting to know, but I think I will try to behave myself and avoid a confrontation!