

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

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Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Gillian

Gender: F

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Old Peoples Welfare Organiser
Emergency Services
WRVS Association

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Interviewer's Notes:

Gillian Highley (GH) talks about her time as a WVS/WRVS volunteer from 1965 to the present day (2014) in Halifax, West Yorkshire. Her first role was delivering Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) and she then went on to start an afternoon and luncheon club in the town. GH ran the luncheon club for 33 years in a local Methodist church. From 1967 she became Old People's Welfare (OPW) Organiser for Halifax and was in charge of Trolley Shops and Dancing Clubs she also comments on the closure of the WRVS Centre in the 1990s. GH was also a member of the Emergency Services (ES) team and mentions some of the emergencies she attended, the training she received and how WRVS helped refugees. Comments on being a member of the WRVS Association, how the organisation has changed in the early 21st century and her most treasured memories of being a volunteer.

[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Gillian Highley on the 6th of August 2014 at her home in Halifax, West Yorkshire. Gill, Gillian would you just like to introduce yourself.

[GILLIAN HIGHLEY]: Yes as Jennifer's told you, I'm Gillian Highley. I've been a member of WRVS now for forty-nine years, I'm hoping to make it until fifty. I joined in 1965, really because we had a car and I had nothing... No, we didn't have a car, I made a mistake there, we didn't have a car, I had a driving licence and nothing to drive. So I thought if I joined Meals-on-Wheels I would be able to have driving to do at least once a week. So I went to WRVS office and did a test drive, in those days we had to do a test drive. It was still a remnant from the civil now then what did they call it? Mm, I think I just can't remember.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Its name Civil Defence, that's the word I'm after, I'm after Civil Defence when everybody who wanted to drive the WRVS vehicle had to do a, a slight test. I obviously passed because I was taken on for Meals-on-Wheels. At the time I was a teacher on a part-time basis teaching in the mornings and being free in the afternoons so I did the Meals-on-Wheels during the school holidays. It wasn't without some adventure sometimes I can remember in a Christmas holiday when somebody fell down with the container, which was a large Thermos flask of gravy, and all the people who were getting their dinners those days, that day had to have it without gravy, it was somewhere on the road in Halifax.

[JH]: And what's your earliest memory of WVS or WRVS?

[GH]: I think, it must be during the war when the WVS lady came round selling savings stamps, National Savings Stamps, and she came each week dressed in her green uniform wearing, what I know now as the original uniform with the original sort of pork pie hat.

[JH]: And what did you know about WRVS before you joined?

[GH]: I don't think I knew very much at all about it. I just knew that they did Meals-on-Wheels, which is what most people do. I perhaps knew a little bit about their work for the troops during the war and serving the teas and all the other things that they did. But for anybody who doesn't know all the things WRVS did or WVS did they really should read one of the books on the history of WVS and just see, you'd be amazed at what people did.

[JH]: And you mentioned that you became a volunteer because you wanted something to do, but were there any other reasons for joining WVS?

[GH]: No I don't think so I just wanted something to do. Mm, I obviously wanted voluntary work. I come from a family that's always done voluntary work and been in service like the fire service, the police force and nursing.

[JH]: And you started off with Meals-on-Wheels, how would you describe your role in Meals-on-Wheels?

[GH]: The first thing we had to do with the Meals-on-Wheels was we had to go to our local office, sign in, go across the road to the town hall and pick up the dinners. They were all in containers, and they were then put into a hot block. But, before we could get the dinners we had to go and set charcoal alight to warm the hot locks. And then all the dinners came in individual portions, round metal, aluminium, well aluminium containers with a lid, just the right number of dinners and just the right number of puddings. All the recipients were expected when we got there to have first of all their money ready, then they had to have a knife, a fork and a spoon, and a plate. And we served the dinner on to the plates, the, and served the pudding, and they were nearly always sitting at the table.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Ready to eat it. It really was an eye opener to me because I hadn't lived in Halifax all that long.

[00:05:03]

I came from an area where, I lived on a housing estate built just after the war and Halifax itself was an eye opener with its industrial parts, tiny little alleys, people lived in the most amazing houses. They didn't have back doors, they lived in what they call through by light houses, which have a front door and the back of the house goes into the hillside. And I was amazed at the poor conditions that some people lived in. I can remember one old man slept on a pile of rags in the corner. And another old man whose spoon was so old it only had half a bowl on it, it had worn away.

[JH]: Mm. And how did you feel about experiencing these conditions that people lived in?

[GH]: Well it was certainly an eye opener to me. I doubt if I thought much more about it than that. I had been at college in London, I had been to one or two of the East End tenements and done voluntary work there with a group called World University Service. I had then been absolutely appalled at the conditions that people lived in.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So perhaps Halifax wasn't such a shock.

[JH]: And what types of meals were you serving people?

[GH]: I suppose they were a meat and two veg and a pudding with custard. There must have been days when there was fish, but I don't really remember fish because I don't ever remember taking any parsley sauce.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: But perhaps in those days the fish was only given on a Friday. And gradually the dinners changed, they then got packed into tinfoil containers and there were those to do. And then of course, long after I had given up Meals-on-Wheels they got on to freeze dried.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes, mm.

[JH]: And what were the people receiving the meals like, apart from, sort of the one, the two old men you've already told me about?

[GH]: Generally really nice people, really, salt of the earth people most of them. It took me a while to get used to the people in Halifax and it took them a while to get used to me, because they saw me as somebody who spoke differently. I was a teacher at my Darby and Joan Club. I think they were in awe of me really mainly because I spoke so differently from them.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: They'd all been mill workers and factory workers but they really were the salt of the earth as I realised. Very outspoken, sometimes brusque, took a bit of getting used to. And the people we went to were rather like that, some of them were pleased to see you, some of them were standing on the doorstep looking for you, some of them wanted to give you presents or bars of chocolate or something like that, some of them said nothing.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Some people were poorly, some people were very well.

[JH]: And how would you describe the area that you were delivering meals in to, Halifax itself?

[GH]: Well, as I've said, Halifax was a hilly area. I came from a place where it was fairly flat in the Midlands. Mm, narrow streets, cobbled streets, back to back houses galore. Washing was strung up across the streets, we often had to, you often had to move a line of washing so that you could just creep underneath it. Difficult to drive sometimes because in bad weather it was, the, the hills were difficult to negotiate. Mostly we were delivering in the town areas, people in the outlying areas didn't get Meals-on-Wheels until much later when more people received them. But all this was organised by the Social Services.

[JH]: And where did you collect the meals from?

[GH]: We took, first of all we took our meals from the Town Hall, a place at the back of the Town Hall. Later on we collected them from a school, and I know that in latter years after I'd given it up the meals were cooked at old people's homes, they were cooked in various places.

[JH]: Yes. And who did you work with on the round, on the Meals-on-Wheels round?

[00:10:01]

[GH]: Oh I worked with anybody who needed a partner because I was just a spare time person, I didn't have a regular round. But I can think of one lady, that I've worked with in WRVS and she's still working with us, she was a real team because there was her and her husband and their daughter, and they did it once a week.

[JH]: And how did you feel about the Meals-on-Wheels service that you were providing at the time?

[GH]: Oh I think I thought it was very good and good value for money. I really couldn't tell you what it cost now.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: We had a few funny instances, I can think of one old lady. It was the norm that I if, if somebody wasn't in and you'd got a spare dinner, because not always, people couldn't, couldn't always let you know they, you left the dinner with the last person on the round so they had two dinners to eat. This one old lady, when we got there, she's sitting there and she said 'I can't eat my dinner I've lost my false teeth'. So we did a hunt for these false teeth and we didn't find them, but we did leave her with two dinners and make a, we said we would arrange for somebody to come and take her to the dentists. When the person went a few days later to take this old lady to the dentists she's sitting there with a set of shining false teeth. And she was obviously asked where she'd got them from, 'Nice to see you've found your false teeth', 'Oh no', she said, 'these aren't my false teeth, my home help had a spare pair, we've filed a bit off and they fit me a treat'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: [Laughing] That was really good, I've never forgotten.

[JH]: And then after you'd sort of been doing Meals-on-Wheels you started in Afternoon Clubs, and what was your role in the clubs?

[GH] Oh yes, well I started Afternoon Clubs almost as soon as I had started doing Meals-on-Wheels in the holidays, because, I saw a notice in the local paper that said they wanted a Treasurer at a, one of the local Afternoon Clubs and so I applied to go.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And I stayed there probably about eight or nine years. In that time my home circumstances changed a little bit because my husband took a, over, over the family business and I was required to work in it in the afternoon because it had a shop attached to a small plumbing business and so I wasn't any longer free in the afternoons to go and do the Darby and Joan Club work. So that's really how I came to start the Luncheon Club. But at the same time, shortly after I had taken on Meals-on-Wheels and the this treasurership I worked with a lovely old lady who was rather like Lady Reading, she always reminded me of Lady Reading, and she knew Lady Reading. She was one of the original WVS ladies.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Very gentle, and she taught me really everything I knew about working with people, 'Keep the people happy dear, keep the people happy', that was her mantra. And so I worked with her, she grew more frail and so I took her to more and more places and we went to some lovely afternoon teas and Christmas parties at the Darby and Joan Clubs in the days when if you weren't there before all the members came you could hardly make your way through the room there was so many members there. And we used to do various things together. She was very good at knowing the local council workpeople, the council employees and getting things done. And people used to meet us in the street and say, 'Oh Mrs', so and, 'Mrs Johnson, I'm having trouble with my rent', or something like that and she would say 'I know dear who you can talk to', and she would sort things out. So I learnt a lot from her.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And by the time I was ready to, I've got, I've lost my thread a little bit, by the time I was ready to start... No, I'll tell, I'll just do that a bit again. Mm, when my husband took the business I was required to work in our shop in the afternoons, mm, and so I needed something to do in the afternoons - in the mornings.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Because I was free in the mornings. So, with a friend, we looked round and we decided we would start this Luncheon Club. We both had an interest in cooking, we'd both done a City and Guilds at college and she had worked in catering during the holidays, she was also a teacher. So we started this Luncheon Club.

[00:15:00]

I'm just considering now how she had time to come and do it during the day, I don't really know. She must have retired and her children must have just been at school I think. And we started with twelve people with Mrs Johnson's help and with the help of the Director of Social Services, I suppose, at that time. It was just about, it was just about 1973 when we had changeover of the local government areas, and Halifax took in a lot of the outlying areas and we became Calderdale. So with their help and a small grant and the help of the local church, the local Methodist Church, we started with twelve people, and a nice team of volunteers, because we had four WRVS people and the local church where we were working made us a team of volunteers.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: They were really good to us. I mean half the credit for the success of the Luncheon Club goes to that local church as well and their volunteers, who all joined WRVS.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes, they all became members. And so we started with our twelve people, and we got the twelve people by walking up the street where the church was going, where the club was going to be and asking them if they'd like to come for their dinners, and they did. That was the first week. The second week we had twenty people, and by the third week we were up to forty and a waiting list, so it just snowballed by word of mouth. There was nothing like it really in the area.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Nothing at all to do. They were mostly local people, they could all walk to where we were mainly, and most of them lived in terraced houses, little back to backs, cottages, just the general sort of Halifax area, because we were in King Cross area which was a very tight community.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: It's all been pulled down now. But it, I learnt a lot about King Cross and the names of the streets and that, and where we delivered the dinners and from where these people lived.

[JH]: And how did your role change at the club over the thirty-three years that you were helping there?

[GH]: I don't know whether it did change really. I went in as the organiser, planning the menus. I suppose I took on more responsibility as my friend left. I learnt, I certainly learnt how to cook for large numbers from her.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: We still had the social side, not the social side to it really, the welfare side which I used to do.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: I used to go and see people if they had problems.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And if they were recommended to us I very often used to go and visit them. Looking back I wonder how I found the time to do it, but I did. Mm, if they didn't come, we always went to see why they weren't there. And that was virtually what I did all the years. In latter years we moved one of the Afternoon Clubs to join with the Luncheon Club and so it became an all-day club.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And somebody else did the afternoon part of it. I used to go to the shop in the mornings -, in the afternoons, and Dorothy continued it in the afternoons, and she still works with me. And now she does a lot more of the sort of welfare side of it than I do.

[JH]: And in the Afternoon Clubs what sort of activities were you able to do?

[GH]: Oh, that's something else, that was my job to find the speakers and what to do. Oh we had, in those days people were most generous with their time. They would rarely charge us to come and they just enjoyed coming. And so, the club that I was involved in was called Grove Court, and that was in a sheltered housing complex. So the first job we had to do was go and knock on all the doors and collect all the people from their homes and bring them down to the communal room. And then I would have arranged a speaker. We would sing our opening song, which escapes me.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: [Laughing] I haven't thought about it for so long. And then the speaker started. We had speakers about anything and everything. In those days there were very few slide shows.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I can't really remember having slides. I can remember people talked about their pets, their experiences. We had a lot of entertainment when people sang and played the piano and played a guitar or something like that. And then we had a cup of tea and then everybody went home. At least once a year we used to have an outing, we went to Southport or Scarborough.

[00:20:05]

Southport was good because it was a good distance to go and nice and flat when we got there. Blackpool was popular, St. Anne's.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Nearly always with a fish and chip tea at the end of it. And then, the club continued long after I'd left it. They're all finished now.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: There isn't, there's only one club left, which is no longer a WRVS club, they left us some years ago but it's really nice to see that the club that we started is really going well. Because the first club in Halifax started, well, oh, 1948, I have a list of the food that they bought for the very first meeting.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And at the Luncheon Club what sort of food were you serving?

[GH]: Oh, always meat and two veg. First of all soup, then meat and two veg. The most popular dish of all was meat and potato pie, always popular. It's very much a, a Halifax dish or a Yorkshire dish is meat and potato pie. Mm, always a cooked pudding of some description. It might have been a sponge pudding, it might have been a rice pudding, that was really the favourite. Ginger pudding was also very popular. We might have had Bakewell tart, it just depended, if I'd got a full staff we could have a better pudding.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Or a pudding that took more doing. People developed their own strengths. I mean one or two people joined us, learnt something about cooking and then went on to do a job in the catering industry. And we always had, we always finished with a cup of tea. So we always had soup and bread, a main course, a pudding and tea. Once a year we had an afternoon tea.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And we didn't have any outings from the Luncheon Club. Once it became a day club, an all-day club, the afternoon people used to go on outings.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm.

[JH]: And apart from going on outings and doing, having the speakers come in, did the Afternoon Club have any other activities that you got involved with?

[GH]: No, I don't think so because Dorothy did the Afternoon Club and they were very keen on having trips out. Mm, they had a lot of trips and always well organised. And, until fairly recently,

Dorothy was still do, organising trips with her husband for the present Luncheon Club. Mm, they would take a trip to the local theatre when the, The Round, The Round Table or The Rotary did a Senior Citizens Evening.

[JH]: And how would you describe the building that you held the Luncheon Club in?

[GH]: Oh well it was very good because it was a church.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Built in about 1860, 1850, and then it had been renovated and modernised. And upstairs now they've put a floor in, upstairs was the church part and downstairs was a large room, which we could accommodate ten tables quite easily. In the days when we had sixty people ten people sat on each table.

[JH]: And...

[GH]: No, no that's wrong, six people sat on ten tables.

[JH]: Mm. And then did you have any special events that you held at the Lunch Club before, you've mentioned afternoon teas?

[GH]: We did. Every year we had a service to celebrate our own birthday, which was, we started on March 21st, so every March the 21st we had a very special birthday. We always started with a service in the morning and coffee, and then we went on for lunch. We decorated the tables, right from the word go, with daffodils, that was a suggestion of one of the ladies from the church. She always made us a cake. And the daffodils were wrapped in tin foil so that everybody could take two or three daffodils home. And we nearly, well we always had what we called a special dinner. Sometimes that was chicken, sometimes that was salmon. A lot of the times it was salmon really because That was with the generation where we all considered salmon was a very special party dish.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And we always had trifle made by one of our, the church members. We used to call it 'King Cross Trifle' because it, sherry never even entered into it because it was a Methodist church.

[JH]: Yes.

[00:25:00]

[GH]: Mm, and I think that, that was what we had. And I mean we're still having special parties now for our birthday.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: We still tend to have salmon for our birthday and put daffodils on the table. I would like to say that after the, two years of grant money from the council for the Luncheon Club we became self-financing, we didn't need the money, and it became easier not to take the money because then we were entirely free to do what we wanted to do.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: When we took the grant we were constrained in some respects by what we could do with it.

[JH]: And how did you manage to self-fund the club?

[GH]: Well, we made the money for the Luncheon Club out of the lunches. And it wasn't because we charged a lot of money for them it was just because I could shop locally and the shopkeepers nearly always gave us ten per cent off or something like that. We had a very good butcher, who for thirty years, delivered the meat every Wednesday morning which was a great help because it meant you didn't have to go and get it. We had a greengrocer who delivered, we had a milkman who delivered. The last few years it was me fetching everything on my way. But it was very handy because I lived about a quarter of a mile from the church premises, it wouldn't have been so good if I'd had to make the journey much further. And the shops were between me and the church so it was very handy in that respect. I've forgotten what you asked me there now.

[JH]: Oh I was asking how you self-funded the...?

[GH]: Oh yes, we, yes, and the Afternoon Club self-funded itself. Later on when I started, I started a second Luncheon Club down in town at the, at a centre built specifically for elderly and disabled people and we had a grant there again, and then somehow, I don't know, the grant sort of disappeared. We had a grant and we bought a deep freeze with it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: With the first club we bought the cutlery I remember with the grant. Because all the rest of the things were provided, we didn't need saucepans or anything. And that applied also when we went down to Maurice Jagger Centre, which is very well known in Halifax.

[JH]: And then after, sort of while you were running the Luncheon Club and the Afternoon Clubs you also became Old People's Welfare Organiser.

[GH]: I was already Old People's Welfare Organiser right from about 1967 I should think.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I've got a letter somewhere, because in those days somebody wrote to you from London and, or perhaps, perhaps from Leeds, and congratulated you on being appointed. Mm.

[JH]: And how, how did you become Old People's Welfare Organiser?

[GH]: By being asked by, well recommended by Mrs Johnson who was already the Old People's Welfare Organiser and she'd got a little bit too elderly, she felt, to do it. And asked by the, our local Area Organiser.

[JH]: And why did you decide to take that role on?

[GH]: Well I just liked it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I just liked what I was doing. And it also was something that I could, at a pinch, manage, manage without having to be there personally. Although it, when many things closed, people couldn't go if I was free I went and finished it off. I think I've been able to say, I could honestly say that in Halifax WRVS never gave up anything, they always gave us up.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Premises closed, old people's homes closed so they didn't need us for trolley shops. Or, old people's homes saw how much people liked the trolley shop and we always gave the funds back to them but they thought that they could make the funds for themselves which didn't always work out that way. We gave all sorts of things back to the homes for trolley shops.

[JH]: And what did the role of Old People's Welfare Organiser involve?

[GH]: Supervising all the eighteen Darby and Joan clubs.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Keeping them staffed, although people staffed themselves, apart perhaps from club leaders which was difficult to find if they hadn't got anybody. Again, organising and staffing, making certain that the seven trolley shops worked satisfactorily.

[00:30:00]

And that was something, if people couldn't do the trolley shops then I used to try and go to those. The very last trolley shop I'd been doing it myself for about twelve months because I had retired by then and I just went to do it for twelve months when there was nobody else.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And the day the old people's home closed was trolley shop day, and I was a bit late going and they'd rung home to see if I was going because they'd got a gift for me.

[JH]: Oh.

[GH]: And when I got there I got a big bunch of flowers. But they'd wanted to make certain that I was going on that very last day. So that was really nice, that was a, a real thank you. Now I also organised a dancing club which we started in another, another church hall. Mm, I think that's it, have I got anything else on the list there?

[JH]: Mm...

[GH]: I did Emergency Services, but we're talking about old people's welfare.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Aren't we?

[JH]: That's right.

[GH]: And the Luncheon Clubs. Mm...

[JH]: I've got Afternoon Clubs...

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: Trolley shops, dancing club and Luncheon Clubs.

[GH]: Yes, no, those are the four aspects.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: And how would you describe the trolley shops that were going round the old people's homes?

[GH]: Oh, they differed a little bit, the basic thing as you might expect was they had a trolley to push.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Mm, some people took all the goods with them. Sometimes, and this was what we liked, the home could provide us with a room to keep the stuff in, but you had to stocktake pretty carefully. Mm, and then it was usually a couple of ladies went, they did the shopping for the homes, whatever they wanted they shopped for. Mm, two things stick in my mind, one home where the old folks loved ice cream, and that was always very popular. And another one where this old lady in quite a different area, where they liked the ice cream was a rural area, they were different sort of people in that home. This other home was more downtown and this old lady liked Whisky Mac, which I had never heard of, but apparently it's some sort of whisky, very dilute. And so in order to get the best terms from the warehouse, when we used to shop at a warehouse in town we bought about a dozen bottles of this Whisky Mac and the poor old soul passed away so we were left with all these bottles of Whisky Mac.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And, and tins of snuff, she liked Whisky Mac and snuff, which left us with a bit of a problem anyway. I don't know what we did with the snuff, but I remember we sold the Whisky Mac on.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Yes. Those are two things I remember. But our workers tried to cater for whatever the people wanted. If they asked us for something the ladies were very good and they would go and shop for it and bring it the following week.

[JH]: And were they a bit like the hospital trolley shops where any of the profit went in to...?

[GH]: We bought, whatever, we kept our books, that was something else I used to supervise very carefully was all the accounts for all the Darby and Joan Clubs, and in fact we once had a discrepancy and somebody said that they didn't know what was happening to their club funds, and Mrs Johnson sent me to this Darby and Joan Club, it was in the very early days, and she said 'You must say this my dear. You must stand up and you must read out this balance sheet and tell them that all the money

is spent on the club'. I think they thought that the money was going to WVS centrally and they wanted it to be on their club, which of course, it was.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Everybody was self-funding. Mm, but with the trolley shops we would ask what they would like us to buy, and we bought things from hairdryers, nest of tables, those are the two things that stick in my mind. I have got a long list of what one of the shops bought. Kettles when they started trying to get the people to be a bit more independent and they gave them little kitchens where they could make a cup of tea in these old folks' homes, anything that the home wanted.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Record players, entertainments, parties we paid for if they were having a party, that was quite a popular one.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, almost anything that they asked us for we would, we would buy if we'd got sufficient funds. And we did make quite a bit of money because we shopped at the wholesalers, then wholesalers disappeared and you had to shop at the supermarket. But everything we've done was always self-funding, nobody in WVS or WRVS expected to make any money or do anything, No, no, it was always self-funding.

[00:35:04]

In fact we, we used to joke, it cost us money to belong.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Nobody ever regretted it. You could have expenses if you were, if, if you wanted to do, but most people didn't bother.

[JH]: And what, you've already mentioned the Dancing Club, but what did that involve?

[GH]: Well that involved finding two people who knew old time dancing and could lead a dance club and getting some people to go to the Dancing Club. Setting up the bank account, organising the premises and hopefully finding a Treasurer amongst them who would be responsible for the books, if they didn't, I used to do it. I must say that that didn't last all that long, the person who led the Dancing Club had to have a leg amputated and his wife didn't really want to do it on her own.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: There is still a Dancing Club, which must be a legacy of WRVS going to this day, but nothing to do with WRVS. We sort of closed it, we couldn't find WRVS members to run it.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: But they have carried on.

[JH]: And were you responsible for organising anything else in the area?

[GH]: Not that I can think of connected with Old People's Welfare. Emergency Services, yes but not Old People's Welfare. Oh I know what we did, yes, amongst the clubs, every year we had a choir concert, a choir festival, because about five of the clubs ran their own choirs, and that was always very successful. And then we served an afternoon tea, we always held that down at the Salvation Army Headquarters. And the other thing we did, and I mean this had started, I started the choir festival, but long before then they had been doing a handicraft exhibition. And we once took The Victoria Hall in town and set up this handicraft exhibition, all in different sections, crochet, lace bobbing, knitting, painting, any sort of handicraft that you could be. And it was a very big affair. We issued very nicely lettered certificates and people must, I don't think they would pay, perhaps they bought a ticket because we must have had some, had some way of financing the hire of the hall, but it, a prize fund, the WRVS Handicraft Exhibition was well sought after really.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: We issued cups, we had a cup. In fact I've got a cup in the box there that's come from somewhere, I don't know what, that it, where it says, but it says WRVS on it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And we always used to get the Mayor or somebody to present certificates, so it was a really big affair was that.

[JH]: And that was all Darby and Joan ...

[GH]: Darby and Joan Clubs.

[JH]: Club members?

[GH]: Yes, and their Luncheon Club would be invited and the... Oh, there was another section which wasn't really to do with me called, where we worked in a centre for the disabled so they were invited to participate.

[JH]: And can you tell me what happened to your role as Old People's Welfare, Welfare Organiser over the years?

[GH]: Well everything in WRVS changed. Mm, it certainly today isn't the organisation that I joined. I have many years, many times been disappointed in the way WRVS has worked out. But I finally feel that they have, in modern terms, 'got their act together'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And is now going somewhere, concentrating on just the elderly. I have to say that a lot of the work we did, in Halifax particularly, was taken over by Age Concern who came to Halifax, had a very good organiser and we somehow seemed to get left behind. I'm hopeful that WRVS is going to go now from strength to strength.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, having been in the doldrums and had new ideas here, and then new ideas on the, at the new ideas. So I'm hopeful for it now. There are times when I felt like jacking it in, but I don't know,

it's been my life has WRVS. My husband and I never had any children so it just became my child in a way.

[00:40:03]

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Yeah. And something my husband always supported me, he must have eaten umpteen cold dinners and cold teas while I went, first of all to the Afternoon Clubs, to the parties, and then he, warmed up dinners, if there was anything left over from the Luncheon Club, I used to buy the, what was left over.

[JH]: Yeah.

[GH]: And serve it for his tea. So he has been a really great support to me.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And did you retire from the role of Old People's Welfare Organiser?

[GH]: No, it just sort of disappeared.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I didn't retire from anything. Mm, the down, the big downfall for WRVS in Halifax was when the office closed. First of all I think we lost Meals-on-Wheels, that really started the decline.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: We lost Meals-on-Wheels. And then the office closed, and then we just didn't seem to have anybody in charge of us quite honestly. I kept my little bit going, I'm just trying to think about Emergency Services. That continued after the office closed but when we were having training sessions nobody seems able to remember just how long the office has been closed, but I would think it's probably ten years now, oh probably longer than that because it, it was still open when I retired, and I have been retired twenty years, so probably twelve years, but nobody can actually put a date on it.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Now I've searched my records and can't find anything about it. Mm, but, not only did, just before the office closed WRVS had one of its famous reorganisations, and we were then administered by somebody from West Yorkshire who used to come from Rotherham probably once or twice a week.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And when you were working, when you had a centre where was it in Halifax?

[GH]: To begin with, when I first joined it was central Halifax, just across the road from the Town Hall, in part of a council building.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And we had the ground floor. And you walked in down this little corridor, and you could go to various departments belonging to the council, and we had a little window right at the end of the corridor. And people rapped on the window and we had a full time secretary, she opened it to see what they wanted. It was, it was really interesting, people used to come for all sorts of things because they remembered that WRVS could do miracles.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: You know, we had that sign, you see it lots of times that says something like 'Some things we can do at once, miracles take a little bit longer', I think that's right, and we had that on the wall. But people came for all sorts of things. One old man turned up one day with some balls of wool and said could somebody knit him some socks.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: My mother-in-law knitted his socks. One old man used to come regularly every week and bring us some dripping, because he was sure that we knew some poor people who would like some dripping to go with their bread. Just, everybody came.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: To the window, just came to the window. And if it was something that they needed to see the organiser about she had an inner sanctuary where she was there most days. But everybody, apart from the secretary, was a volunteer. And when I joined, I have to say that they were mostly middle, upper class ladies, doctors' wives.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And people like that. Mm, then gradually other people came. I mean I'm nobody really, I was not, I was working class in a way I just happened to train to be a teacher. But it generally changed and the best workers were the people who had worked in the mills and the offices themselves, you know we had some really good workers. The Clothing Department, I never was involved really in the clothing, occasionally I would collect clothing if there were, was clothing to be collected.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: But I never really was involved in that. But they were marvellous were the ladies who worked in the basement. Ah, but, talking about the basement, that came much later, I can't remember where the clothes were to begin with, in the first offices. And then, after, probably '73, probably about the early '80s WRVS had this policy that we would buy property, I don't know whether you've come across that before.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Yes and the organiser of the time, it was not me I always aspired to be the Local Organiser but I never could because I was always working and I couldn't have done it justice.

[00:45:09]

And by the time I'd retired and everything was done we no longer had a Local Organiser. But the organiser of the time was asked to look round and find some suitable premises where we could meet and run our services. And we moved then to a large terraced house just a little bit out of the town centre, it was never as convenient for people to come and see us, but we bought, WRVS

bought these properties, three storeys and a cellar, as so many houses in Halifax did, a real old Victorian house. And we had the basement set up as a clothing store. Mm, people who came to the clothing store we had a separate entrance, it must have been the servants' quarters when the house had servants, and they went in the back door, everybody else would come in the front door. We had the organiser and the secretary's office, we had a Meals-on-Wheels office and then upstairs we had a meeting room, we had a little kitchen and on the very top floor we had storage space, so it was very well run. And the organiser was responsible for everything. If there was a, when there was a burst it was her job to sort everything out and get us a new tank in the loft because the water ran all down the stairs. It was really nice and it was a really good social meeting place.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: For people. And we used to have one or two sort of parties there, well we had some really good parties in WRVS when we all took something.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And we all ate somebody else's things, really good it, the social life was very good.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And for, most people really probably came to the work when they were widowed, and in those days most of them were women.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Because I can't, I can't subscribe to this idea of dropping the 'W' because in, in my experience the men who have wanted to join us haven't minded at all, it's just been a joke. But the powers-that-be tell us we are now Voluntary, Royal Voluntary Service. I'm sorry about that because it was something that women could do on their own, and it was something that I could do without my husband.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: My husband jokes now, he says he's Mrs, he's Mr Gillian Highley, because I came, became so well known in the town for the work.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And the photographs, *The Courier*, the local newspaper supported us, we were nearly always in *The Courier*. So I became well known in the town, and, with not having any family, it helped me to have something to do and make a mark really. If I'd had any family it would never have happened, I would have just been at home looking after them.

[JH]: And how did you feel when they closed the centres?

[GH]: Oh very sad, yes, we all regretted it, very much.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, at that time the Luncheon Club was still going so we became, people who'd done Meals-on-Wheels sometimes joined us at the Luncheon Club. Very often people did Meals-on-Wheels, trolley shops and Luncheon Club, they just moved round. So then I suppose we became a bit of a hub at the Luncheon Club for it. I haven't really thought about it recently. There was a trolley shop still going, I think the trolley shop would still be going, just the one that I finished off in the end. Mm, after that I really haven't thought about it to remember, time dims the memory.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And you go on to other things. [Laughing] But, oh, I've had some really good times with WRVS. In the old days when it was run, have people told you about Hans House in London and places like that?

[JH]: No.

[GH]: You've not heard about Hans House.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Well then I shall tell you. Because WRV, well WVS had its headquarters on Park Lane in Halifax - in London.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Did you, you knew that did you?

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes. Well they also, I mean they were prestigious premises. They also owned a house, or I imagined they owned it, called Hans House, just at the back of Harrods.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: You just walked across the park to get there, and they ran training courses, they did a lot of training, I learnt a lot of things in WRVS. Mm, and they ran courses, and on one occasion, I don't think I went more than once, I went on a course there run specifically for people, Old People's Welfare Organisers, and we had talks, it was there for two days.

[00:50:12]

They paid our expenses and our accommodation and our food. It was not very palatial the accommodation, I remember the rooms upstairs were like one long dormitory and we had curtains between each bed so it was more like a boarding school really.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, we had a glass of sherry before dinner, but in order not to infringe some rules or something because they didn't have a licence we all bought a ticket and then they, and we exchanged the ticket for the sherry, that's something I remember. And we walked across to Hans House, to Hans, yes to Park Lane, Park Lane, because Hans House was in Hans Place.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, we walked across to Park Lane on the two mornings and we had lectures there. I also, they moved after that and they went to a place in Brixton, have you heard of that one?

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes, mm.

[JH]: I know Brixton.

[GH]: Yes. Probably about 1986, presumably some of the archives... One of the things in Hans, in Park Lane was a beautiful tapestry, I hope you've still got that somewhere in the archives. It was a marvellous tapestry, it hung on the wall and it had sections, I believe Lady Reading did it.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: It had sections of all the WRVS work, if you remind me I'll find you a picture of it.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Because it, I think I did make enquiries and I think somebody said you'd got it in the archives now. Unless it's gone down to Cardiff. I hope you've got it because it was a real, marvellous piece of work, and it really did tell you a lot about WRVS. After Brixton I don't know what happened to them, I don't know where they went after Brixton.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Oh, I know, they went to Berkshire, somewhere. Mm, somewhere in Oxfordshire.

[JH]: Mm. Milton Hill.

[GH]: Milton Hill, that's right. And then of course, they went to Cardiff. So I was lucky, I had one or two really nice experiences. I was lucky enough to be invited to tea, afternoon tea with The Queen Mother. That came to a rather sad end actually because twelve people from York, from Halifax and

Leeds and that were invited and they invited me to go about eleven o'clock, I remember it was one Wednesday morning, we were doing the Luncheon Club and she rang up, Mrs Helena Foster, you might have come across her name. You weren't, you didn't see anybody in Brighthouse did you?

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Well she was the organiser in Brighthouse, she was OBE. She rang me up, she was one of the upper class ladies and said would I like to go, you know, 'My dear, would you like to go for tea with The Queen Mother'? Well of course I would. But by the time I got home to tell my partner, my husband, she'd made a mistake and I was the thirteenth and only twelve people could go.

[JH]: Oh.

[GH]: So that got cancelled. Another nice thing I did was, apart from getting the MBE, I went to represent WRVS not so long ago with to meet Prince, well I didn't meet Prince Charles but The Queen.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: It was held at St. James's Palace. I'm sure Alice was there, yes, she, it isn't so long ago isn't this, it's probably...

[JH]: No. It's..

[GH]: Ten years ago I would think, even less. And we really, a lot of important people came and we were trying to generate funds for them, for WRVS.

[JH]: Yeah.

[GH]: Because I spoke to, I remember speaking to Nicholas somebody, he reads the news on television, not Nick Ross, the other Nicholas, Nicholas Owen.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I remember speaking to him and I made a little book about it, which I can show you. I made a tiny, tiny little book with quotes from what our Luncheon Club people said.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Because I thought it was small, it would go in my handbag, but I'll show it to you before you go.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Mm, what else did I do? I had a thing, I was invited to a garden party but unfortunately I was going to be on holiday so somebody else from Halifax took my place for that. So I've had some really good experiences. Oh, I was present at the fiftieth celebrations in Westminster Abbey.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: It would be fifty, in 1988, yes.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Fiftieth anniversary, in, in Westminster Abbey. Mm, fiftieth? I can't remember, oh fiftieth, that was when The Queen came to Milton Hill.

[[00:55:00]

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And I was invited to go there, some, several of us went there that was very nice, a very nice occasion. And then of course, I had the MBE which was lovely, a real honour, and I was very proud, and my husband was proud as well. And I have to say some of that medal belonged to him.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And a lot of it belonged to all the marvellous helpers that I've had over the years, and the ones I've still got. They're never down, these four particulars, there's about four of us left, we go every year now to The Cenotaph.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, there's only me can bend down now to put the wreath, to lay the wreath. Dorothy can still manage to walk, and the others just go to the service. We're getting old.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I was young when I joined you see. That was something else, I was only in my thirties when I joined.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: So it made a difference to the energy I had and what I could do. And a car, once we got a car.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Which wasn't long after I'd joined WRVS.

[JH]: And also during your time with WRVS you were involved with Emergency Services?

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: So how would you describe your role with, with them?

[GH]: Yes. I suppose Emer..., we had a good Emergency Services Organiser, and she used to organise exercises for us. Now in those days we had the cold war and we were doing One-in-Five.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And one of the things that WRVS did was we had, we used a Soyer boiler, have you ever heard of a Soyer boiler?

[JH]: Yes, we've got one in the archive.

[GH]: Oh good, good, we used to practice stoking this thing in the back yard at Prescott Street.

[Laughing] It became difficult to remember how to put it together.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: But we, we always kept it. I was really sorry to see that go from Prescott Street because I felt that epitomised WRVS. In fact I was sorry to see a lot of things go from WRVS and I rescued as much as I possibly dare. But I couldn't get the Soyer boiler I hadn't got anywhere to put it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, but that we practiced cooking on that. And then Emergency Services, when I first started we had what they called a 'bucket', have you, have you come across the emergency bucket?

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Well into this emergency bucket was, we put all sorts of things that we could use in an emergency, cloths and towels and in latter days a bottle of water. We always had a lipstick, a lipstick was always something that was on the list. I can probably find you a list, although I haven't seen it, it was recognised, a list was issued and these were what we put into our buckets. Mm, if you were tired you could turn your bucket upside down and sit on it, and if you needed a toilet when there very often weren't any you'd got a bucket handy, that was the joke about it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Bucket and chuck it. Mm, and, oh, that was our emergency bucket, full of these things. And we all took that if there was a call out. We were also told how to light a trench cooker, where you took the bricks and you made this trench cooker. I can remember doing that on two occasions, on one occasion we went up on the moors in somebody's back garden where they lived up on the moors

and we made this trench cooker and we cooked our sausages, which came out absolutely black, but just like children we all sat and ate them. [Laughing]

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And there were a good, there was a good turnout. Another occasion the then organiser did it in her garden, down on her driveway, and we built this trench cooker out of bricks. I'm sure you've seen photographs of them.

[JH]: Yes, oh yes.

[GH]: Yes. Mm, and we practiced there. We had one or two exercises where there was a mock emergency.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: One which we made up, people had to be evacuated from their homes because there was a big chemical spillage or something. And we set up the church as a rest centre, and we established a rest centre, and we had, we all had bits of paper saying what people were to say and do and everything. And we recorded, I still have the records for that and what we were asked to do. Somebody brought a, a canary, which we had to look after and somebody else brought a dog.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Another occasion we did an exercise with the police, well the police reserves the special constables. This was a Sunday morning we knew that these were coming up of course.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And we had to report to our office on the Sunday morning and we would get a message as to what was to happen.

[01:03:03]

Well this was to be, a plane had been seen over the moors, not far from where we live, about three miles up on the moors and people had been seen baling out.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So we had to go and see what had happened to them. So we set off, after much deliberation about whether we should go or not because the police wouldn't give us a proper map reference, a grid reference.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: And the organiser said we couldn't go without a grid reference so we were somewhat delayed. Anyway, we set off with all our equipment and everything and we established a, a sort of rest centre in the lounge of a pub up on the moors. And some of us joined the police and walked through the woods looking for people. Somebody else drove the van down to the other end, it was by a reservoir. We found one person, I think the others gave up and went home quite honestly. And it was quite interesting. I wouldn't say we acquitted ourselves terribly well, but in the light of the circumstances and things we had at, at our, mm, that were available for us to use then, our disposal, that's what I wanted to say, we did pretty well.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And we've all looked back on it, there's a report on it somewhere. Other people went to prop..., to real emergencies. I went to one true emergency, which was a fire. And, oh no I went to two actually, I went to a fire with my four most valuable helpers, they all turned out although it was going to be overnight. It didn't turn out to be overnight actually, they went home. I went home for a couple of hours and came back to prepare the breakfast and the place was closed. But this was a fire, and it was really a good test because we had people who had come without their medication, we had children, we had elderly people.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And they'd all had to be moved out at a, a minute's notice. We had a rest centre very near to where they lived. We had another instance which I didn't attend but my other two people did, and

they turned out at midnight to serve refreshments to the fire brigade at a local factory fire. And they had nothing at their disposal so they knocked on the door of the local Asda and the man opened up for them. In those days we sort of had arrangements with various supermarkets to let us in. Anyway he gave them tea and biscuits and they took them to the site and served them, which I thought was good because they'd all be seventy at that age.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: So it was very good of them to get out of bed. They were a husband and wife and a sister, and they were a good team you see. They, Ron was the driver and he was interested in our sort of work. Mm, and the only other thing I can think of doing was they ran a Calderdale Hike, which was a fifty mile hike round the boundaries, boundaries of Calderdale, this is a long time ago, probably back in '75 or something like that. And four hundred people were coming and they asked WRVS if we would cook the meals for them. So we cooked an evening meal, we cooked breakfast, we stayed all night, and served tea and whatever was required.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: With a team. Mm, and then we had various exercises, some which Janet Halsall [ph 01:03:33] mentioned to you organised. Some which the Area Organiser, somebody called Ray used to do it. I bet Christine Banbury [ph 01:03:42] knows all these names but I've forgotten them you see.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, and she would be involved, when we used to go to Wakefield, Christine Banbury [ph 01:03:49] was there.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, because she did an awful lot with Emergency Services. And then, I think really we're still supposed to have an emergency team.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: It isn't all that long, although I am not supposed to be the organiser of the emergency team any longer. Probably twelve months, eighteen months ago, yes, probably twelve, I got a call from somebody in WRVS asking me if I could possibly go and visit this elderly person who had been left without electricity. Fortunately it wasn't far from where I lived, but by the time I'd got myself organised, because it was night and I didn't know where this place was and my husband would come with me, they rang back to say a neighbour had dealt with it, so that was alright. So they, everything to do with WRVS lands on my doorstep still because I'm the one person in Halifax that people remember.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, the building society, no the bank, a bank account turned up with four hundred pounds in it, and eventually the, it landed on my doorstep.

[01:05:00]

And after a great deal of trouble the then organiser was still alive, and she is still alive, both our organisers are still alive actually, but she was able to sort sign the cheques and we, we shared, I shared out the money with everybody's approval I hope. Two hundred pounds to the archives.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: A hundred pounds to the one Darby and Joan Club that was still going in Halifax, and a hundred pounds to Yorkshire Pub, yes.

[JH]: [Coughs] And you sort of talked a little bit about how Emergency Services has changed over the years, but did the, were you trained for change at all?

[GH]: Oh yes, yes it did. I mean they used to run courses at... The Emergency Services in Yorkshire had a training centre at a place called Easingwold where they trained fire, police and everybody else.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And every so often WRVS could send people to be trained, I did go there on one occasion and you get talks from the police. And about that time they were, there were people flying in from somewhere, since there's been so many now I keep thinking, I remember collecting clothing and going to Leeds, that must have been the Ugandan Asians when they came.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: To this country, and we went to sort clothing. And then we had the Kosovan refugees, who came and they had, they came to Halifax and they had several homes here, disused or old people's homes that were now in mothballs.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And one of our roles there was to go and put all the beds together and put the bedding on them and that sort of thing. Mm, but it has changed from just volunteers training volunteers we had paid people whose job it was to train us.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And, of course, it's much more a different set up completely now. At one time we liaised with the local authority and we were on their emergency lists. I'm not sure whether we are still on their emergency lists or not because we haven't seen or heard anything about Emergency Services for a long time in Halifax. I think they put together five areas, Huddersfield, you might hear more from Huddersfield and Holmfirth.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm Wakefield, Leeds, Bradford and Calderdale, there were five areas that clubbed together, but they really didn't seem to appreciate our Emergency Services in Halifax.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: A lot it depends on the person who is organising it whether they appreciate you.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: We did do a couple of exercises with them, probably six or seven years ago now, at least that. So it has changed. I'm pleased to know that they're still working down in the South, particularly, they seem to be stronger in the South when I read what reports there are these days.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And of course, we're all getting a bit too old, nobody wants to turn out at night now. I don't mind if my husband will come with me but nobody else wants to, to do it. And I don't suppose he'd be too keen these days. [Laughing]

[JH]: No.

[GH]: But, I really have had a lot of really good experiences with WRVS, I really have.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And I shall always remember it with gratitude.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Although I have been disappointed in latter years.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: But, as I say, I'm coming round now, I do feel and hope that they have finally, as I've said earlier 'got their act together', yes. Mm.

[JH]: And you mentioned this part of your Emergency Services work, the Ugandan Asian and the Kosovan ref., refugees, how did you feel about helping them when they arrived here?

[GH]: Well, it wasn't face to face contact with the, mm, Ugandan Asians it was just going to Leeds to sort all this mountain of clothes. I can only think it was the Ugandan Asians.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, with the Kosovans, we were happy to go, WRVS did what the Social Services asked us to do. If anybody didn't want to go, they told me they didn't, but nobody ever told me they didn't want to go.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So we had a rota, we made up all the beds in the two homes. Because Halifax is a small community none of these places were very far away.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Mm, and I lived very centrally so it was always easy for me to go to places. Mm, and then we established a rota to go down and help with the preparation of the meals and the serving of the meals.

[01:10:00]

And then we used to go and take out some of these, I think it was the Kosovans, I've just forgotten, who were the last lot to arrive here since the Kosovan refugees, I think we've had another group. But we established quite nice relationships with them because we used to take them out, I can remember taking these three ladies to the park. To my horror they picked the fruit in the display garden.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: But I, I think they were just used to picking the fruit at home.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And for probably twelve months we kept in touch with these people. Mm, the child..., we, we went and I took books down and tried to help the girls to lead, to learn English.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: They went to school. I really don't know what's happened to them now, whether they're still established in Halifax. I did come across the oldest girl working in a hotel, but that's quite some time ago now so I really don't know what happened to them. Poor mother was very badly traumatised and father was, had been tortured. But we never really got to know their circumstances because it was confidential. But nobody minded doing it.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: WRVS, we did what people asked us to do, what we were asked to do. Which might have been knitting a pair of socks, giving out some old dripping or going to The Palace, mm, yes.

[JH]: And was there anything else you did with Emergency Services?

[GH]: Not that I can think of at the moment. Mm, there must have been other things. Mostly, I mean we served tea.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mostly that was our role, wherever we'd gone we served tea. But on a couple of these exercises we did, we did, well we were trained to do the reception. But the social, the local authority really wanted their paid employees to do that, and of course they were computer literate in the latter days so we were obsolete. But I mean when, when WRVS Emergency Services started during the war I'm sure when they had their rest centres for people who were bombed out, everybody's name who went in was written down and where they'd gone to. We used to have set books that were ruled out with columns at the top.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And somebody came to the office, you've probably got them in the archives, somebody came to the office, you have the date, what was reported to you, action taken, what you did about it, and you signed it off. And then you might have had another report at the other end. It worked very well.

A lot of the things that are statutory services today were started by WRVS. Look at the Meals-on-Wheels.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Mm, the clubs, Age Concern now is doing an awful lot of the work that we used to do with clubs. Certainly here, I don't know how it works in other places. I think where WRVS have got a hub going.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, Pickering, I think, still has like a day centre where they do all sorts of things. Oh, so, and we used to do SAM, that was our Spare a Mile service.

[JH]: Oh yes.

[GH]: That was the one that took the old lady to the dentists. Mm, I never really did that. Each little section had its own organiser who was responsible for running it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, did we do anything else? We once had Voluntary Daughters, they wanted to call it, it's very like the scheme now. They didn't call it Voluntary Daughters because when they put the initials down it said VD, and nobody liked it [laughing], you have another name for it now and I can't think what it is.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: But... [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: In our, in our day, forty years ago, that was what we called it, I can't think what they call it these days but I'll know it if you tell it to me. And that was the idea that if anybody came out of hospital we would go and spend a bit of time with them.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Some of the people, not Emergency Services, if there was an emergency when I wasn't about, or one of the organisers wasn't about, the secretary took it on and found volunteers to do it. And I had one or two reports. Somebody once went to look after some children because their mother was in, their mother wanted to go and visit the hospital, the father in hospital. Mm, that, that was actually with an ethnic group.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And up until about middle of the '70s they were very few of the ethnic minorities in Halifax. I mean there's quite a lot of them now, and, but they never seemed to have joined voluntary services with us.

[01:15:01]

[JH]: No.

[GH]: They would have been very welcome but they never have done. Mm, but she went there and she looked after these children. And I thought, to say that she was a very old, well a pretty elderly spinster lady she did remarkably well with these children. She was actually a dentist by profession, but she'd retired. Mm, somebody else went to do something, I'd have to get the reports out, I've kept them because I've thought they were interesting. And the very first report that I think was the very first Emergency Services report in Calderdale was written back in, probably 1966, something, long before we had Calderdale. And there were floods, you know, we've had a lot of floods recently, but there were floods down at Copley, and I distinctly remember a picture of the Director of Social Services, he was called, sitting in a rowing boat off the local park being rowed round to look at these floods. Mm, I don't know why I was telling you that but...

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Oh I know, this very first report, and WRVS, our then organiser, they had a meeting. There was a Social Services man, somebody from WRVS, somebody from the police I think, and they had a meeting and decided what plans they would draw up, it was long before this COBRA thing was even thought of. So WRVS have got a lot of things going that have now become statutory services. And it, it's a great credit really that they've become so. People forget to give us the credit for what we've done.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I don't know whether there's anything else that I've done. I've done all sorts of things really, anything and everything really.

[JH]: And then, but you've also been a member of the WRVS Association?

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: Why did you decide to join in 2000?

[GH]: I can't really say that I can take any credit for the formation of the WRVS Association, it was a lady who had worked in one of the afternoon clubs who decided that we should all stick together.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And she canvassed the people who were working in the Luncheon Club, they were about the only people, we just had the Luncheon Club at that time and one Afternoon Club going. And these people decided that they would like to form part of the WRVS Association. Doing things like that has never really been my scene, but I did go and I did enjoy it, and like all things I ended up organising it. And we used to meet once a month, this lady organised us a room in the Town Hall, we were all thought of in, by the local authority. Mm, we used to have our Annual General Meeting every year in the Town Hall in the Council Chamber in the days when WRVS had Annual General Meetings, attended by the Mayor and any dignities and medals were presented and things like that. Mm, I can find you some reports of those. And so they started to meet once a month down at the Town Hall for coffee and tea and biscuits and have a speaker. And gradually the numbers dropped off, people

died. The Town Hall provided the coffee, which became very expensive, and we decided that the people who were going were now doing the Luncheon Club down at Maurice Jagger once a month, and so we didn't really need to go to the WRVS Association.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So we moved down to Maurice Jagger, we were the same people doing the Luncheon Club so we still had the fun we used to have. And, mm eventually the Association closed. And we were sorry. I went to the last meeting that they had in Birmingham. Yes, it was sad really that it had gone. And I think a lot of the people, the old WRVS members who remember how it was, regret it that it had changed. But things have to change, times change. It's just nice that the archives are going.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: It really is nice. I mean it is my ambition, that's why I've never sent these, I keep thinking one day I'll pack them up and we'll drive down to Devizes and I'll make arrangements. If I'd had my wits about me I'd have packed them up and given them to you wouldn't I?

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: But no, I'm not ready to send them yet.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: I've sort of gone off them at the moment, I seem to be busy with other things.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So, but they will come to the archives eventually and then they, you'll be able to sort out what is interesting.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I've about seven scrapbooks there. One of the things that I used to organise was somebody at the Darby and Joan Clubs, or the Luncheon Club, in the days when *The Courier*, everybody sent a report to *The Courier* about what they did.

[01:20:07]

Somebody cut them out and pasted them all in books, so I've got several books there ranging from about, I think, I think the earliest one is something like 1949 with some old photographs in, going up to latterly, to the Luncheon Club really. Yes. To begin with we bought a scrap book, latterly they were sticking them on the back of old calendars and things like that. But they're a good record of, of what we did.

[JH]: And also in, so a lot has changed over the time you've been...

[GH]: Yes, it has.

[JH]: With WRVS? Mm, so how did you feel when the organisation became a charity rather than the Crown Service in 1992?

[GH]: Well I realised that over the years WRVS had had a very large grant from the government. That must have been how they could maintain the premises that they did in London, mm, and organise the things that they'd organised. And of course, money generally became tight. I can't remember the year in which it became a charity, do you know which year it became a charity?

[JH]: 1992.

[GH]: 1992. Mm. So I did realise, it did make life more difficult, although not so much for us because we, mm all our projects were self-funding. Whether that's why, why the office premises closed or not, I don't know. Perhaps there just wasn't sufficient money to, to run all these things. I don't know how they bought the premises in Prescott Street because it was really nothing to do with me then.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And I was just do, Old People's Welfare Organiser.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: But I mean, I think we went in the '80s there, and I would think we left, well we were still there by 1997. Mm, I don't think I minded very much about it becoming a charity. The accounts were more difficult, we had to toe the line much more with the accounts. But that wasn't really a problem because I'd always sent accounts, the local organi..., the Area Organiser always took the accounts.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes, yes. But it was good the way, this sort of waterfall system that it had, and I'm sure, has anybody told you about the system for calling out the Emergency Services?

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: The volunteers for the Emergency Services?

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Well it went with the bucket that we had. We had a, like what they called, a, I think they called it a 'waterfall system'.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: The organiser got the message and then they telephoned somebody, and if that person could go, they then telephoned the next person and if the next person wasn't in they telephoned the next person, so that it went round until we got sufficient people. You just telephoned through the list to find out who could come, and then we tried to make up a car load of people. I've just thought of an emergency we helped with.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: They had floods in Keighley a few years ago and some of our ladies went from here, just one, one went on the bus all on her own and the others went together. The brother and sister, [laughing]

no, the brother and wife, husband and wife and sister that I mentioned who were very good they went and I went on a couple of occasions to help, and we looked after the children on those occasions. We had a special mention in the paper, and a special thank you for it. But that was a more recent, and a real emergency, that was a countrywide emergency. I'm sure WRVS will have been busy, I hope, down in the South when they had the floods last year, were they?

[JH]: A bit, yes.

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: It depended, it...

[GH]: Yes. People don't remember, and I think it's become we always said that we lost Meals-on-Wheels because a member of the local council felt that we should be providing jobs for people to do delivering Meals-on-Wheels and the council could do that. But, in fairness, I have to say that we never delivered meals at the weekends, and it is better if people can have a dinner seven days a week.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And the council, when they have paid workers, are in the position to do that. But it's always been a sore point in Halifax.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And people still remember it and still mention it when we lost Meals-on-Wheels because that was the death knell for WRVS in Halifax.

[01:25:03]

[JH]: And can you tell me about how an increase in paid staff in the '90s affected vol., you, you as a volunteer?

[GH]: Well I don't know whether you'll want to put this in, but it affected us in Halifax in that our organiser came from Rotherham. She didn't seem to understand Halifax people, and if I'm absolutely honest there was a, I felt, always felt there was a bit of a personality clash between the two of us, so it probably isn't fair for me to say any more than that. I was disappointed when she closed down the office at the way things went into the skip. Mm, perhaps there was nothing else she could do about it, I don't know but, as I said earlier on, I got a few things out of the skip that I felt were very much Calderdale. Mm, one of them was a very large picture showing our offices, an aerial view, and I brought it home and I kept it for quite some time and then I offered it to another charity down in town and they were also on the photograph so hopefully that, that's still displayed somewhere. But now that was something we bought out of our slush fund, we always had a slush fund for some reason. If we had a, we might have had a raffle to raise money or we might have had a coffee morning in the office amongst the volunteers to raise money for things for our slush fund. We always used to have a, a Christmas dinner.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Oh, have we still got time?

[JH]: Oh yes.

[GH]: Have we run out of...?

[JH]: Oh yes, no, no, it's fine.

[GH]: No, well one of the really nice things we did was when The Queen Mother was ninety, in our local park, we have this very nice park with a Tudor building in it, and it's called Shibden Park. We organised a marquee, and it was a beautifully day and we planted a tree. I'm just going to tell you what sort a tree it was in a moment. I think it was a willow tree, unfortunately it didn't survive very long because it was a year when it was a drought.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: But we had a lovely day in this marquee. WRVS members could come and we had a lovely salmon salad, which we provided, and the Mayor came and the dignitaries from Leeds came, the

Area Organisers came, and it was really nice. I remember that with a great affection really because it was a nice day and we all thought, The Queen Mother was the patron at that time.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: So we, we planted that. When it was The Queen's Golden Jubilee we planted fifty red, fifty golden roses in the same park, but they're no longer there. I don't know what happened to those because that's not really so long ago is it? Perhaps it was for The Queen's fortieth, or perhaps it was the WRVS' fortieth.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I know when WRVS was forty we had a float with a local charity gala, and we made an enormous cake with a big 40 on the top of it and we walked behind it. The charity gala always walks from the town centre to another park, and we walked behind it. But that was when it was forty. One of our members, her husband had a sheet metal works and he provided us with one of these flatbed lorries that we could put this cake on. So over the years I've done all sorts.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And everything. Any more?

[JH]: Mm. In, and sort of, we have talked about the office closures and...

[GH]: Oh yes.

[JH]: Things like that already, but in sort of 1997 when we changed our focus to Emergency Services, hospitals...

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: And Old People's Welfare, how did you feel about that?

[GH]: Well I suppose I felt it was a, a pity that we weren't doing a lot of the other things that we did. But things move on, I mean the clothing was established by us, now, people get vouchers to go and buy their own clothes don't they?

[JH]: Mm, mm. Yes.

[GH]: Which must surely be better. Some people who came for the clothing were really grateful and some people took bags and bags of stuff and ordered a taxi to go home. I can remember going to the office one day and there was an old man standing outside dusting off one of these black Homburg hats that he'd just been given, and he was treating it with such respect, he was so pleased with it.

[01:30:00]

The, the clothing people could tell you stories of all sorts of things.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Yes they really could. But what, the question you asked me was?

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Oh...

[JH]: About the change.

[GH]: When it changed to hospitals, well hospitals didn't affect us.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Because we have never done anything in hospitals. When we got an organiser, we had a gentleman to organise Old People's Welfare, or perhaps it might have been even the Hospital Organiser, he had a really good idea which was never followed up but they do it now in the hospitals, he suggested that volunteers might like to go into the hospital and feed these elderly people their lunches. But it never sort of got off the ground.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: I don't know whether it got off the ground in WRVS anywhere else at all, but I mean it, that was another thing.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: That he'd thought of and then our having protective meal times.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And poor, folks are supposed to have their stuff left within reach and that aren't they?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: That was something the WRVS Emergency Services in, mm, Otley, where they were very strong in the hospital, they made one or two suggestions there and they got colour coded cutlery.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: For old people, which I believe they have colour coded things in present day hospitals.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: I won't say it's cutlery, but, because Otley had a very strong link with the local hospital, they were, they're not so far out of Halifax. But you hadn't been to North Yorkshire at all have you?

[JH]: Not yet, but we will do.

[GH]: And you think you'll be going?

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Oh good, oh well you might see the people there then, because a lot of those were younger than me so there'll be people there still I'm sure. Wetherby, Otley, mm, we used to meet them at, mm, meetings that we used to have at Birkenshaw. I know I said we went to Easingwold for training but once Easingwold changed the police closed, the police and the fire had their own services at a place called Birkenshaw.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Between here and Leeds. And we had one or two Emergency Services meetings there that our local, area Emergency Services people, pardon me, organised. It yes, I keep saying it I had some really good times and it has made my life, there's no doubt about it. It gave me a place in Halifax, because when I first came to Halifax I was Margaret Highley's sister-in-law, or Kenneth Highley's wife.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Nobody knew me as myself, but they do now. And I gained a lot of confidence, and, as I say, I learned a lot of things through the training. I enjoyed it, and I still don't want to put it down. I just, I'm just waiting for something else to come up.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: One of the reasons I hang on to this Luncheon Club, I mean some days it's a real effort to go when there's only and perhaps three others to cook and, it isn't the cooking, I can do the cooking, it's the serving and the washing up that is the problem. And it's the serving mainly, because we have a dishwasher and all that happens is that we just have to stay on until the dishwasher's finished. But getting the dinners served is difficult. I'm getting tired aren't I, I've lost my track, just a minute what was I saying?

[JH]: You were talking about the, holding on to the Luncheon Club and waiting for...

[GH]: Yes, so that we've got some premises to meet in.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: They're very good premises, part of me thinks it's time to tell them that Maurice Jagger to say, 'You'll take all the responsibility, you organise the cooking and just put us on a rota'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: They do it for Wednesdays and Thursdays, we do it on Fridays, they could do it every Friday. And perhaps we could, WRVS could make a rota with them.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: But part of me is reluctant to give up what WRVS has always done. But if not, if nothing happens soon I think that's what we shall have to do. But none of us want to do that, we all want it to be our thing really.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: WRVS or RVS now. And in fact our member who died about six or eight weeks ago, she had the collection for RVS, which was very nice. And she wasn't really a member, she'd never filled in the membership form she'd just sort of joined us. [Laughing] And because it became so difficult to become a member, with such a lot of checks and things, I had never really pushed it. I was always sorry I hadn't done in the latter years.

[JH]: And what about the changes in 2004, so the colour and the change, to just being called WRVS and...

[GH]: Oh to be called...

[JH]: The restructure?

[GH]: RVS you mean. No?

[JH]: In 2004 when we changed to orange and purple.

[GH]: Oh yes, oh I didn't like...

[JH]: How did you feel about that?

[GH]: That.

[01:35:00]

[JH]: No?

[GH]: I didn't like that, no question. I didn't like that, I didn't like the badge, I didn't like that at all.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And do you think it's better that we've gone back to the green and red? Do you prefer, mm...?

[GH]: Have we gone back really?

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Because it's a bit insipid is the green and red, when I tried to copy a badge off the Internet it was feeble, it came out grey, it wasn't good for when I wanted to make something. And I was asked to vote and I thought that the grey and green won the vote. Do you know any different?

[JH]: No, it's green, red, because the circles, the two areas are red and white aren't they?

[GH]: But this was to wear a sweatshirt.

[JH]: Ah, yes, it's that...

[GH]: The grey one.

[JH]: It's that, it's that grey/green...

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: Sort of colour.

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: Mm. I know which one you mean.

[GH]: No, no. Because, I suppose in your archives you've read about why we are green and red?

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: You know about it?

[JH]: Yes. We've got...

[GH]: Why, yes. Mm. And they were really good material and everything, the coats that they made.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: It used to be a joke at our house when I went out in my overcoat, 'If it rains and you get wet you'll never be able to stand up straight'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: Because it was such lovely material.

[JH]: So heavy.

[GH]: Yes. I regret not having kept any of that uniform.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Because we always used to buy our own uniforms, I think people still do, well I don't know, no I think now the trolley shops and that, the hospital shops, they need to get their things distributed to

them. But, no, and the only hospital volunteers I've spoken to in the last twelve months were very disappointed to have it grey and green.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Insipid. And we aren't insipid.

[JH]: And how did you feel about dropping the 'W' as well from WRVS, becoming The Royal Voluntary Service?

[GH]: I thought it was unnecessary. I've never met anybody who hasn't joined because it's a women's organisation. We had several men doing things and they were very good members and quite happy to belong to WRVS, quite happy. But, perhaps things change, so they tell me.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I'm, I would like to be convinced that we've got more younger men in to swell the numbers through changing the name, or that we've got more people. I mean it's still very difficult to remember to call it RVS, and until we get a badge people will never know. I haven't got any identification yet.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Should I have?

[JH]: Have you got a card, the ID card?

[GH]: No.

[JH]: No?

[GH]: Not with RVS on, no.

[JH]: Mm. I know it is filtered, and it...

[GH]: I'm sure I haven't, unless I've forgotten, I've got all the cards in the drawer.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: No I'm sure I haven't got anything with RVS on it, because I would have looked it out for that funeral. Because as the donations were coming to RVS there's going to be a problem with that, I, I think, but I'm waiting for it to crop up.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I don't, I won't put it on your machine.

[JH]: No. And what other changes have you experienced as a WRVS volunteer over the years?

[GH]: I've seen a change in the type of people who volunteer. As I've said, when I first started it was almost ladies of leisure, doctors' wives, people who didn't need to work, just the odd person. And then a lot of the workers who came to help us were really very, very good, and as I said they'd worked in the mills. When people were sixty, we got endless volunteers even before people retired, well I suppose they did retire at sixty, perhaps sixty-five, I don't know. They came to us, several of them were single women all with, all our volunteers if they've stayed six weeks they stayed forever, they really were those sort of people, they never let you down, they replaced themselves on the rota if they couldn't come, they were always so reliable were WRVS, that is one of the things. And, as Dorothy says, we're still caring, we're, we're the caring side of WRVS, we aren't into making the money.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Or keeping it running as such, we're the caring side, giving the service. I know now people have to have paid administrators and we have to have somebody at the top. It's always a bone of contention how much these people are paid, and I'm not sure how much WRVS, what would you call this man who's in charge now?

[JH]: Chief Executive.

[GH]: Chief Executive, I'm not sure what sort of salaries these, they're on or not.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Mm, but people do think they're on good salaries, I'm not so certain. But I realise, and I think most people do now that if we're to compete in this modern world we've got to have these people.

[01:40:05]

Age Concern have their Chief Executive, every organisation has its Chief Executive, and it's paid officials at the top. So WRVS or RVS has to be the same really to compete in this modern world. But I hope in thirty years' time you or somebody is still interviewing people who say what a good service it's, has, has been, and it's still is.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: I'm sure down South and in one or two other places it's a very good service. I'm not sure whether they don't, they still do something in Huddersfield, they do a Luncheon Club but they don't cook the meals, they bring the meals in and they just serve them.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And if ever my club closed I would see if I could go there because I do want to get my fifty years in, I know it's a funny number, it isn't fifty years, it's fifty-one if you want another bar on you. It was a funny, funny, did you realise that?

[JH]: No.

[GH]: You got a fifteen year medal, you got a twenty seven-year medal. You got, no you got a bar, which was a bar or a rose.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: It was a rosette. You got a thirty-nine year one, and you got a fifty-one. I don't know why they're such funny things unless they decided that we had to have fifteen years because people who were sixty during the war and seventy during the war were dying off and not being recognised. I really don't know, perhaps I'm wrong, I'm sure it was thirty-nine, I haven't got anything for thirty-nine. I got a badge that said 40 I think. But originally you got a little silver rose to sew on to your braid.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Which when we all wore it anybody like a, a Local Organiser was expected to wear a uniform really.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And then the, you got a braid to wear with the badges on. I know those things don't count as much these days but they counted a lot in those.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: People were really proud of their WRVS badge, and their old WVS badges. I'm proud to say my mother was in WVS. I have a member now whose mother was in WVS, she can remember going round with her mother doing things. There'll be one or two like that.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And they were a mother and daughter team who ran a trolley shop with the father for many years. But until 1973 I never came into contact with those people because before a reorganisation everything was just the County Borough of Halifax and then we became The Metropolitan District of Calderdale.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Which brought in several areas, the Sowerby Bridge area had always been very good with Meals-on-Wheels and everything like that, mm, and it just got absorbed into Calderdale. So I took on

extra responsibilities, there were several new trolley shops to organise, only one Darby and Joan Club. And we still call it Darby and Joan Club.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I can remember them getting, getting a write up in the local paper with my name in because I had suggested that we should change the name, and *The Courier*, the editor of the local newspaper didn't agree, he wrote something about 'What's wrong with being Darby and Joan'? [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: Oh, and of course, you'll know the story of why it was Darby and Joan, or why we think it was Darby and Joan.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: You've seen that photo, that painting I'm sure.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Anything more?

[JH]: And, so in your opinion what has been the most significant change that you've experienced?

[GH]: [Pause] The role of WRVS, what it used to do and what it does now.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I think that's the biggest change, and bringing in the paid executives, if that's the right word.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: They were, those are the main changes. On the ground it's still very much the same sort of people doing the same sort of work. But very much reduced work when you think of all the sections of work that we did.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: You'll know about those because you'll been keeping the archives. If I came to the archives I'd be reading and reading, I'd never, I'd never file anything away because I'd be reading it all.

[Phone rings]

[GH]: Oh dear.

[JH]: Do you want me to pause it for a minute?

[GH]: Mrs Johnson and myself about getting help with things.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And we could either go with them or direct them to the right department in the council.

[01:45:00]

Mostly it was housing, Mrs Johnson was very good at getting people into housing. We were talking about...

[JH]: We were talking about the most significant change.

[GH]: Yes.

[JH]: You were saying about bringing in the executives and..

[GH]: Yes, yes I think...

[JH]: People like that.

[GH]: And the work that they do.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: I wouldn't say it was as interesting now, not as varied. And in a way we aren't remembered like we used to be, people don't know who we are now. Even that instance when I said that two of my mem..., emergency team people knocked up the manager at Asda... Is it working?

[JH]: Yes, it is.

[GH]: Knocked up the manager at Asda and took these things to the fire brigade. Some weeks later I went along to the fire brigade headquarters to ask if I could organise a room and he said to me 'What is WRVS'? And I said 'Don't you know, we brought you tea and biscuits a few weeks ago', but they didn't know.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: It, tea and biscuits just came.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: So, oh, and one of the other things is in latter years we hadn't been able to organise ourselves if there was an emergency or something, we haven't been free to just pick up and go to things.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: Which could be a good thing or could be a bad thing. And that's reminded me of an exer..., another exercise we had, we used to work fairly closely with the, in the early days, with the Search and Rescue Team, the local Search and Rescue Team. Now they are much more streamlined, but that was another thing the Emergency Services did, they used to have a training weekend every year and we used to go on the Saturday night and cook their evening meal. We went on Sunday morning

at five o'clock to get their breakfast ready and then we cooked another meal for them on Sunday evening while they were, they were out practicing. And people, we were pleased to go.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: We loved going, you know, people were really keen. 'Oh I'll, I'll put so and so in this, mm, lasagne that I'm going to make'. But we always did meat and potato pie.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: And we always carved 'WRVS' in the pastry. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: Yes. Meat and potato pie was popular, and it's easy.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And I mean I'm still making meat and potato pie.

[JH]: Yeah.

[GH]: I wouldn't like to say. But by the time I'd finished the Luncheon, the Luncheon Club, we'd served eighty five thousand meals, and we'd peeled all the potatoes.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And cooked all the meat and everything. Yes. You don't need as many potatoes and as much custard as you think you do.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: For sixty people, well we weren't sixty, the numbers had dropped off.

[JH]: Yes.

[GH]: Yes, we weren't sixty. I don't know why, because there weren't so many elderly people to come for these things. Elderly people now, this is another big change, a sixty year old now is not a sixty year old as they were when I joined WRVS.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: No. They're out now, dancing and playing bowls and doing all these things whereas before people, or the ones I came into contact with were just glad to go and sit and be entertained. We're having a hundredth birthday party for one of our best and most loyal members.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And latterly, well help us to begin with and latterly a club member in November. I said to her last week 'You better keep going Dora', she said 'The way I feel I won't be here'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: 'Don't you pop off before' [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: 'Then'. She, she started, the first time I knew her, she started at about sixty-five, she might even have been seventy, helping at the Luncheon Clubs that we established in town. Well she's very outspoken and I have to say she's upset a great many people, but she is the salt of the earth when it comes down to it.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And now she just comes for a coffee with us and then she goes to another Luncheon Club which I don't mind, I'm pleased for her to go because she can go every Friday for her lunch there. She can't, you know, have it every three weeks with us, and it's not the same. So we'll be planning

this hundredth birthday and hoping that she keeps going long enough. But she's been a real stalwart member, she really has.

[JH]: And where would you say Royal Voluntary's place in society is today?

[GH]: [Pause] Well I think there's a place for us, even more so now with the ageing population. And, as I said right at the beginning, I feel that that's got, got to be our role now. I'm not certain that Emergency Services is appreciated because again Salvation Army get called in before WRVS.

[01:50:00]

Mm, Red Cross are very strong. Lot, people volunteer in their own communities now. But I do think there's something in this role for the elderly, I really do, keeping them in their own homes as long as they can, because I can see that's the way it's going.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what would you say is the future for the organisation?

[GH]: I hope there will be less changes. I hope that people will get to know us and respect us and love us, as they did in the old days. I'm sure there are still people somewhere who still appreciate us. But the people who knew WVS in its beginnings are all now dying off, and people are not, don't even know who WVS are.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: Or WRVS as my example of the fireman didn't know, which is sad, but, as I've said, that's the way it goes. It, I mean it was really the work that WVS did during the war I think, particularly serving the tea and that to the troops that made them remember. And the number of people who have remembered WVS from the, the wartime, it's lovely. I should have got my poem out to read to you.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[GH]: Can you turn off for a second while I look for it.

[JH]: Yes. Or you can look for it in a minute because I've just got..

[GH]: Oh, okay.

[JH]: I've only got ...

[GH]: Yes, alright. I'll look for it.

[JH]: Mm, so what would you say is your most treasured memory of being with WRVS?

[GH]: Well I suppose it would seem funny if I didn't say going to The Palace and representing WRVS at St. James's Palace, when we met all the important people to try and raise funds. And after that, the comradeship that we've had.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And I have enjoyed helping people, it's never been a chore to me. I'm thinking about one old lady, we had a call at WRVS one afternoon, a Friday, I know it was a Friday afternoon, I'd got a beautiful pink Grazia suit on because I must have been in town, and the police rang in and our secretary said to me can you go to this house. So I went to this house, I'd never been up this little back street before, and it was in a really poor part of town.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: This lady answered the door to me, she was dressed alright but the house was an absolute tip. The best thing that I always remember about her was she wore glasses and her glasses were always clean and shiny, Miss McCabe she was called. And I said the police had said, asked me to call and see if she was alright because she'd had a window broken. So she asked me in, there was no electric light.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: There was gas light. She slept on the settee, on a set of rags as it appeared to me, and she had umpteen cats, and these cats jumped all over me in my nice pink suit, it was on my shoulder, it was

everywhere these cats. And she said no there wasn't really anything we could do for her, she was alright, she was a very independent old lady.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: She must have been eighty plus at least. And shortly after that we had the years of the power cuts, and I can remember going before I went to work in the morning pushing a candle through her door. I don't know why, oh ah, because candles were in short supply when everybody had no electricity they'd bought up all the candles and I'd got some spare ones, so I can remember pushing these candles through her door before I went to work in the morning. Mm, the cats, I said to her 'Are you sure you want all these cats'? She said 'No', they were a nuisance. So in the end the RSPCA went and took several of them away.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And then she would have Meals-on-Wheels. And then, I used to visit her and she belonged to the Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church opened four sort of flatlets near to the church, and they gave her one of those. And so for years I visited her down there, eventually she became bedridden she just lived in bed.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: And I used to go and see her, I used to bring her sheets home and wash them for her. I ended up doing her finances, collecting her pension and paying her rent, and finally she was found collapsed when they went with some dinners, and they took her to hospital and they said she was suffering from hypothermia.

[01:55:01]

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: She just lived in a cold house, she'd always lived in a cold house all her life, it was not that I'm quite certain. And I went to see her in hospital, and instead of being a perky old lady sitting up in bed she was slumped in a chair and she didn't live long after that.

[JH]: No.

[GH]: But I had all, all her money accounted for and her nephew came from London to see me and we sat in this cafe down in town and I handed over all the money.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[GH]: Funnily enough, he came back to live in Halifax a few years ago and I came across him and his wife. So I remember so many things about so many people. I've met so many people.

[JH]: Mm.

[GH]: And as you go through life you meet people who touch your life, and I've certainly met a lot of those.

[JH]: And is there anything else you'd like to share about your time with WRVS?

[GH]: No, I don't think so. I think you better switch it off.

[JH]: Yes. Well thank you Gillian for talking to me today, and this will make a really interesting contribution to our Voices of Volunteering.

[GH]: Good, well I'm pleased then.

[End of Recording [01:56:19]]

