

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Summary Sheet

Title

Page

Ref. No.: JONM

Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Jones

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Maureen

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer (1968-2013)

1968-1972 – Meals-on-Wheels, Halstead Essex

1972-1980 – Meals-on-Wheels, Books-on-Wheels, One-in-Five, Emergency Services, Hounslow Essex

1980-1984 – Guernsey Meals-on-Wheels, Guernsey Bailiwick Organiser

1982-1992 – Information Desks for Wimbledon

1984 – Children's Department, London Headquarters

1984-1988 – County Organiser for Meals-on-Wheels, Essex

1988 – Meals-on-Wheels, Monmouth, Monmouthshire

1989 – Head Office Cardiff

1990-1995 – Trustee

1997-2013 – Meals-on-Wheels, Limington, Hampshire

Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To): 08/05/2014 (Track 1)

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Interviewer's Notes:

Maureen Jones (MJ) talks about her time as a WRVS volunteer after she returned from Solonge in 1968, starting with Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) and Books-on-Wheels (BOW). Then MJ comments on being a District Organiser and how she moved up the ranks of the organisation, eventually as high as Vice-Chairman of Wales and a Trustee. MJ also gives her opinions on the Royal Voluntary Service in its current form and her memories of working on the Information Desks at Wimbledon in the 1980s and 1990s.

[JENNIFER HUNT] This is Jennifer Hunt interviewing Maureen Jones, on the 8th of May 2014 at her home in Milford on Sea, Lymington. Mm, Maureen, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

[MAUREEN JONES] Mm, I'm sorry, you've caught me there.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] Do you want me, I'm sorry.

[JH]: It's okay. Tell me a little bit about who you are, your personal sort of life then.

[MJ]: Oh right, okay. Mm, well I'm married with two children and four grandchildren. Mm, I started married life out in Ceylon and then we came home in '65 and we lived in Halstead, Essex. Mm, and there I got in, first got involved with the WRVS.

[JH]: And why did you decide to join WRVS in 1968?

[MJ]: Because I saw an advertisement in the local paper and I thought 'I'd like to do that'. The two children were at school and I still had to collect them from school and take them to school and it was something to do in the week. Mm, and I enjoyed meeting with the older people.

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

[MJ]: Very little. During the war they came round and gave us stirrup pumps to put out incendiary bombs and sort of they collected pots and pans for the, to make aeroplanes. And that's all I really knew about them.

[JH]: And, would you be able to describe your sort of earliest memory of delivering Meals-on-Wheels with WRVS?

[MJ]: We went out always in twos and we, we collected the meals from a school. They were put into aluminium hot locks which were warmed by charcoal, and we did a round of about fifteen. And the conditions we went into were quite hard for, for the clients. Mm, but it was still very interesting. In those days I used to take my daughter out with me, who was four, and they absolutely loved seeing her, seeing the children.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: I think it gave them a sort of pick up for the day.

[JH]: And how many meals were you delivering a week?

[MJ]: I think there we were delivering about fifteen, I think there were about three, three rounds in Halstead itself and the outlying countryside.

[JH]: And who, did you work with other volunteers?

[MJ]: Yes. We, in those days we had to go in with a partner because we never knew quite what the conditions were, and some of the men were a bit naughty with us, you know, [laughing] so that's why we went in, in pairs.

[JH]: How were they, how were they naughty?

[MJ]: [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: Well, you know, they, they, they didn't actually try and pinch your bottom or anything like that [laughing] which we just, we just felt... I, that was the order that and, and you followed orders in, in those days. [Laughing]

[JH]: Mm. And can you, you've already mentioned, sort of, a little bit about the people you delivered to, but can you describe some of the, your clients, or the people who received the Meals-on-Wheels?

[MJ]: They were very, they were very poor people. Mm, I said to, there was one in particular it, my children were at home and I had to take them with me, and I said to my partner 'Look, don't come with me today' 'I'll, I'll take the children', because my son was a bit older than Kate. And we went into this man and he's lying back in his chair and he had a grey parrot beside him, and the the parrot was saying 'hello, hello'. [Laughing]

[00:05:05]

And I realised the man was dead in his chair. So I said 'Come on, I don't think he wants his meal today'. But there were no phones to ring and nobody had a phone around, and so we left him there quite comfortable until I got back to the office.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: But, [laughing] that, that was one introduction I had. But later on there were worse conditions, when I was at Harlow and even last year I think we met our worst case of somebody living in Lymington in appalling conditions.

[JH]: And what were the, how would you describe the meals that you were serving?

[MJ]: The meals either came from the schools or they came from different firms who, who would make them up. Mm, they were good, it was a, quite a lot, you know, it was better than these frozen meals. Mm, they were delivered in aluminium round tins, a, a pudding, oh well a, a main course and a pudding. And [laughing] there was one, one individual we, oh, in Harlow we used to take round gravy and custard in Thermos flasks to pour over the meal, and there was one man living in a flat in such terrible conditions, he had a dog which he never exercised so you can see what I'm getting at.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: It was filthy. And so we always used to take the tops off the custard and the gravy so we, we had, had a, we smelt those instead. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: It was, it was bad, it was bad.

[JH]: And then in 1972 you moved over to, that was when you moved over to Harlow?

[MJ]: Yes, I moved because Peter was with BP then and he was in London so I moved over, I, I, I tried to join in Epping and they said 'Oh yes, you can come and lay tables'. Well I didn't really want to lay tables I did enough of that at home, I wanted to get out to Meals-on-Wheels. So I was at a, a show in Harlow, you know, a country, country show and they were there and that's where I joined them.

[JH]: And was Meals-on-Wheels in Harlow any different from Halstead?

[MJ]: Yes, it was a much bigger set up. Harlow was really still a very new town sort of cement blocks sort of flats and had really no feeling of community because they were all ex-Londoners, more or less. And it, it was a difficult town in those days. Mm, and there we had about twenty to twenty-five on a round, mm, and, but we only did it twice a week, the council did it on the other, on the, the other days. Mm, and eventually we couldn't get members, people to join because the council paid their drivers and helpers and well obviously a lot of them didn't want to, you know, they wanted the money. But it, it was the same with hot, hot locks we called them with charcoal to keep them warm. And then we had to wash up the dishes, which wasn't funny after they had been sort, sort of put in a bag and, and, or got cold, mm, it was quite a job, so, it was a long job, but I enjoyed it.

[00:10:04]

[JH]: And then how did you become a Meals-on-Wheels Organiser?

[MJ]: [Laughing] Because there was nobody else.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] And I think I was fairly young, [coughing] and they said 'Right', you know, 'will you take it on?' Yes, that's how I became a Meals-on-Wheels Organiser.

[JH]: And how would you describe your role as an Organiser?

[MJ]: Well I was much younger than all the other people and I was a bit frightened of them. And they soon let you know if anything went wrong on the round, if it was, you know, I hadn't ordered enough meals. Mm, but they were very kind and they used to, I think the meal cost one, one and six, which was a sort of, you know, in, in old money and they just sort of gave you the money and you had to collect it all in and then bank it. Mm, yes, it was quite a sort of, a, a job to do.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Quite a responsibility. But I, I, I enjoyed that. Mm, and you used to go and see the customers to see what they really liked, not that they had any choice in the meal.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: But in those days it was much more individual, we knew, we knew their birthdays and we always took them a birthday present or something like that. And at Christmas we used to take a bottle of sherry round and give them a little drop of sherry for, for Christmas, you know, in a, in a, in a, they produced a sherry glass and that was it. But it, it was nice, it was good.

[JH]: It was more of a social aspect to it?

[MJ]: Yes, yes. Yes.

[JH]: And do you have any memorable moments as a Meals-on-Wheels Organiser?

[MJ]: Well there was one place that, out in the country a little bit out from Harlow, where there was a woman who was overrun by mice and I had to get members who didn't mind mice, because they

were running everywhere. Mm, in, in Guernsey, if I can go on a bit ahead of time there was a woman who was, used to, she, it was really a hovel she lived in and she used to sit over her fire, if we were very lucky it would, her fire would smoke and the smell of the room was taken up by smoke, that was really our lucky day. Mm, and, oh, Mrs 'B' was, she, she was rather like a witch really [laughing] sitting over her fire, and her face was filthy, her hands were filthy. And when she died they found she had a thousand pounds in old black and white five pound notes under her bed. She also had a revolver and she also had twenty rounds of ammunition for the revolver, so I'm glad we didn't fall out with her. We didn't know where the revolver, it might have been during the occupation that she had the revolver. But yes that was one of our people. [Laughing]

[JH]: And so going back to sort of the 1970s you, how did Books-on-Wheels get started in Harlow?

[MJ]: Mm, they were, they just had one round of Books-on-Wheels, and when we decided that really and truthfully we were very, struggling very bad for volunteers we, I, I suggested to the organiser if we could expand the Books-on-Wheels. So we transferred all the members who wanted to to do Books-on-Wheels, which was very popular because you didn't have to be there at, at a certain time, because in Meals-on-Wheels they expect you sort of at ten to twelve and if you're later than that they grumble.

[00:15:20]

But you could stop and talk to the, to the people for a little bit longer because you hadn't got that hot meal to deliver. I didn't know anything about, in those days, Mills and Boon, I'd never heard of them, and they all seemed to want that. And I said 'Well what do, what is this', and they said 'Oh, they're love stories'. [Laughing]

[JH]: And how were you involved in Books-on-Wheels?

[MJ]: Well it was through, we went to the library and they used to, we, as, as I say, we went round the people who were going to receive them to know what they were really interested in, in love stories, in mm, detectives and biographies and then we told the library and they would put those books out for us. And we used to, we, I got baskets I think, from Tesco's, they let me have some baskets, and we used to take them in, in, in supermarket baskets to, to the people, and then collect

the ones that they had read. I think we got, we got paid by, it, for, for mileage, from the Library Service.

[JH]: And what was a, you just talked a little bit about what your Books-on-Wheels round, but what was sort of a typical round, Books-on-Wheels round like?

[MJ]: I think that was much smaller because of the weight of the books.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Mm, I should think we only had about sort of ten to deliver, ten, or eight or ten people. So, you know, we, it's a big town, Harlow, lots of flats. So it was, obviously we had to cut down the recipients and, and, mm and sort of use more of our members to do this round, all the rounds. It was about every fortnight.

[JH]: Mm. And did you also work with a partner with Books-on-Wheels?

[MJ]: No, not so much, but we still did because we had our, they, they were our, they became our friends, the partners. And it, it was just nice to work with somebody and have a laugh and a chat, it was more social to go with someone who were used to it, you know.

[JH]: Mm. And you also became involved with Emergency Services?

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: How did you become involved with that?

[MJ]: Well they always spoke that Emergency Services was the jewel in the crown of WRVS. Mm, it was very exciting, we became involved with it when we did the One-in-Three, or Three-in-One talks, which every member had to have to, if they joined the WRVS, and this was about how to prepare for a nuclear attack. And from there you went on to Emergency Services, which really began in the War. Mm, and we were trained to work to the same system throughout the country, so wherever you were you knew what the plan was and, and how to fall in with a team. It, it really was very interesting and very exciting.

[00:20:00]

Mm, we used to be sort of on call often if they're expecting anything if, at any time day or night. Yes, I, I think I lost my way here.

[JH]: It's okay. Mm, we were talking, so you were talking about you had to have the Three-in-One talk.

[MJ]: Three-in-One, yes. Three, mm, that was how to prepare for nuclear, which it was a threat. And, oh, you, you had to put up your, put white sheets up at the windows at, to prevent, prevent this awful flash that would come and to prepare somewhere safe like under the stairs, to have water and tinned food and candles. Mm, I really, I really don't think it would have worked at all looking back on it.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: But it, it sort of, it, it helped us to, too against this worry of nuclear. I can remember saying to a friend when we were having this talk 'Well I'm going to fill my, my cupboard full of gin, I think that's the best thing'. [Laughing]

[JH]: Probably was. [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] But yes, I think it was propoganda more than anything else.

[JH]: And did you give any of these talks yourself?

[MJ]: Yes, yes.

[JH]: And what sort of, who were you giving these talks to?

[MJ]: To, to new members.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: Yes. Mm, I, I, they weren't, they weren't cheerful talks and I think it alarmed some, some members quite a lot, or new members. But I think being sort of typically British we just sort of, you know, went through it.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what sort of advice were you giving them in this talk?

[MJ]: Well to have water. I think we were going to take the dog in under the stairs as well. I, I don't really know how we were all going to live like that. Mm, it, the, the, you know, it, they were sort of one hour talks sort of for three weeks sort of, you know, one, one each week. Mm, but, as I say, I don't think it would have helped us at all. Especially when I went on to learn about, more about nuclear war you realised it wouldn't help you.

[JH]: And you also attended some emergencies as well as part of Emergency Services?

[MJ]: Yes. They, they was exciting fires and we used to turn out at night, and when the supermarkets came in we had arrangements with the supermarkets, and before that with the local baker or the local dairy that we could, mm could give them a call at night and get milk. And we always emergency packs in, in our offices to take out like tea and biscuits and so on. Because we were really, in those days the Fire Service didn't do anything for their crews, it was, if it was a large fire the WRVS was called to give tea and, and biscuits. Or even make, if it was a big fire, sandwiches, for the firemen. But above all they needed liquid because of wearing breathing apparatus and things like that.

[00:25:06]

Mm, it really, it was, I think everybody enjoyed Emergency Services because it's so unusual.

[JH]: Mm. And it's doing something a bit different as well.

[MJ]: Yes, yes. Yes.

[JH]: And you also were called out to the evacuation of Ugandan Asian refugees at Stansted Airport.

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

[MJ]: That came because of General Amin expelling all the, all the Asian community. And [clears throat] it, we were called out to Stansted, and for a long time we really didn't do very much except sort clothes, mm, which came in from the public. There were so many clothes, we didn't know what to do with. But they all had to be sorted because some of them were not fit to give to anybody, and some were absolutely, really super clothes. And these were all sorted into men, women, children's and babies. And we had one, one school sent us in with the children's clothes, in the coat pockets were, was a toy in every one, which was lovely. And then we got one lot in which there were glass in the pockets. And, and you can see, there was this feeling 'We can't take all these Asians'.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: Mm, in fact I was lucky because at Epping where I lived, and asked to work for them and I was told to lay, I could lay tables the Organiser there wouldn't even allow her members to go to Stansted, none of them went.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Mm, but I was at Harlow and that's how we prepared for them. We, we got a call in then and I was lucky enough to be on that, that night's shift. And it was just a complete and utter muddle. The press, I've never, I've never seen anything like the behaviour of the press crowding these Asians out and wanting reports of what happened to them and trying to get through the windows to them and to us. And we really [clears throat] it, it was, it was a bad day that day, but we got ourselves sorted out and it went like clockwork after, after that. They came in by plane and it was decided [clears throat] that we, one of us would meet the plane and watch the people coming down the steps. And most of them were okay, you know, they could look after themselves. And then you'd find a woman with just her belongings wrapped up in a sheet with about three children. And I was, I, it was my job to do this to, to look out for them and then we would escort them right through Customs and through registration and then they were given refreshments and then they'd come upstairs to us at Stansted Airport, and receive clothing. And the children used to be so excited to be wearing wool, trying on wool sweaters and this, that and the other.

[00:30:01]

And they asked us at the end 'Have you hand shoes'? And we didn't know what they were talking about, it was gloves. I, I just, the, I have great admiration for those people because no, not one of them lost their tempers or became impatient, they took, they, they were, they were very brave, they really were. I know they were exhausted, but I think some of us would have lost our cool. Mm, they were, they were great.

[JH]: And after Stansted did you have any other involvement with the Ugandan Asians while they were here?

[MJ]: No, not, not really. Mm, [clears throat] I did meet some afterwards, and I was up in London and I met one who, I was in my green uniform and he came over and he said 'Oh you're the ladies, the lady in green', and I said 'Yes'. And 'Did you come from, in from Stansted'? And he said 'Yes', and he said 'you were marvellous to us', which was lovely, very nice. That was some years later.

[JH]: And also you did a nuclear bunker exercise in 1976, do you remember much about that?

[MJ]: Yes, that was at Colchester. Usually Colchester organised it themselves but I got friendly with somebody at Colchester, because I was then in, still in Harlow, and she said 'Oh you can, you can come along'. So two of us went along and we were there thirty-six hours in the bunker. You lost all sense of time because you were cooking meals, there were the people coming in, you know, The Royal Observer Corps took their meals at any time, and all these sort of 'high ups' in the Armed Services and Water and all, all the things, local things like sanitary and they all came in to see how things were going. So we were, we were in the kitchen all the time and they had bunks for us to sleep in, not that you really slept. But at the end of it we were invited up to the actual operations room and watched the operation, which, which was really rather like I don't know if you've seen any wartime, mm, Air Force operations as, you know, they have, they move things and on a, on a huge big board. And there you saw that Birmingham just disappeared, it was very, very realistic. And it was extraordinary to come out on the Sunday sort of in the afternoon and, and see bright sunshine, and you think 'Golly that was nuclear,' that really was, you know.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And you can realise how people become, ah, sort of so involved, it's almost true. That's all I can say really.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: It, it was quite, quite a sort of step to take and that's when you realise these talks were not going to help you.

[JH]: And during that time you also became District Organiser for Epping Forest?

[00:35:00]

[MJ]: It, this was when the District Organisers were, what, introduced with, with the new districts, when they were completely or.., reorganised local government. And so they, they appointed District Organisers. And sort of the local offices I, I had about five local offices and I also overlooked Harlow because they had no Organiser. Again that was a bit frightening because I seemed to be much younger and there was great opposition to having some, the local organisers didn't like the district coming in. But it was alright, you just had to work carefully with them.

[JH]: And what was your role as a District Organiser?

[MJ]: It was really to go round the districts and see if they needed help, sort of with organisation, and to take interested, interest in the Lunch Clubs, and in the Darby and Joan's and, mm also Emergency Services, which again was very important. Mm, also to bring in frozen meals, nobody had heard of frozen meals.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And where places, the schools were beginning to say 'We can't do this' and so it was a start of a kitchen, a special kitchen set up for frozen meals, and that's what we did in Waltham Abbey. It was a good time sort of, it was beginning to modernise a little bit, the service.

[JH]: And do you have, what, was that different from being sort of a Meals-on-Wheels Organiser and...?

[MJ]: Quite different. They, I used to visit a very large home for, well it was sort of asylums where WRVS went in and sort of did a Darby and Joan Club. Mm, and through sort of my job was to meet other voluntary organisations as well, and through The Ladies' Circle I got them a whole percussion sort of instruments which they sort of, they were very good in, in the end, sort of doing this and they, they loved it. And they, they used to do dancing, and there was this dance called 'The Paul Jones', where you go round in a circle and the music stops and you have to play, you have to dance with the person who, who you stop opposite. And I stopped opposite a lady and she said 'I share a flat', and I said 'Oh really, do you? That's good'. And she said 'Yes, I share it with Vera Lynn and The Queen'. 'Ah, right, "really?" she said 'Yes, and if you really want to know, Vera Lynn's much nicer than The Queen'. [Laughing] And then we, they ran clubs for people with, adults with Down's Syndrome. And there there was the most cheerful group I've ever been to see, because they were all almost little children.

[00:40:01]

Mm, and they didn't look old because they had no worries. But WRVS were very good with them. Mm, I think they, the members really loved their work with these people.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: It was, it was good. It was a good time.

[JH]: And do you have any other memorable moments as your time as a District Organiser?

[MJ]: Well we had our troubles but you usually, you always had, we had the County above us who could help you if, if you were, you know, in difficulties. We had, I was doing Emergency Services talk and one woman hadn't appeared and it turned out that the family hadn't seen her. They last, last saw her just before she went off to the WRVS and she never turned up to our meeting and, very sadly, she had been murdered in the forest. And I had the press on me, but, mm, I was well supported by my Local Organiser and the County Organisation, and, and you felt you, you were on safe grounds, you know, I was warned, we were all warned never to speak to the press without

permission. But they would ring you time and time again. I had *The Telegraph* on to me and, and all, and how they got my number I have no idea, but that was something else to, you know, to look after. And, of course, the members were terribly upset.

[JH]: And then you became involved with Guernsey WRVS?

[MJ]: Yes, we moved from Guernsey, mm,, to Guernsey from, from Epping and I was there about seven years. We did Meals-on-Wheels, I again, went on Meals-on-Wheels. And we used to start at about ten o'clock, which was quite amazing to me. But you used to stop for a cup of tea, tea or coffee, at some shop while doing your Meals-on-Wheels round. And it all had to be finished before twelve o'clock because the members went home to feed their husbands, because it was such a small island that any, all the husbands, I discovered, came home for lunch. But that again was, that was where the old woman with the revolver was.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] And, mm...

[MJ]: We did Emergency Services there.

[JH]: Yes, as well, and you were called out in 1980?

[MJ]: Mm, well we, we used to have, each year the Territorials of the SAS used to come in and do a parachute jump into the sea. And the, the some, there was some of the public who used to collect them out of the sea and bring them to, to a small ferry that we were on for them to get out of the water and change, and we were told on no account were we to turn round while they were changing. We were giving them hot tea and rum and the Organiser was allowed to look at them but we had to have our backs turned to them.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] But they were a lovely set of chaps, mm, that was very unusual.

[00:45:00]

Then we, we had quite a few fires in Guernsey, mostly at night, sort of supermarkets and things like that. I came Organiser in '81, mm, that was difficult, I was English and they were Guernsey. And it was quite a difficult, mm, you had to bend over backwards really. But they were very good, they were supportive of me, after a long, you know, their Organiser had been an organiser for a very, very long time so it was a difficult time, time to, to be taking over from her. Mm, but we didn't do, we, we did Darby and Joan Clubs and Emergency Services. We went to the airport, mists came in and they couldn't get out for two days so we opened our lunch, well we had a house which was for lunch and we opened it completely up. We had blankets always ready for an emergency. And we took about twenty people, passengers who had been, they had no money, they'd spent all their money, and we took them in there for a night, gave them supper and gave them breakfast and then luckily the fog, fog cleared. But they, they were, they were very appreciative.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Mm, and a lot of us also took them, other, other families into our homes for the night because they'd evacuated, you know, they, they, they'd finished with their hotels and there was nowhere for them to go. Mm, that was interesting. And we used to help helicopter, we helped helicopter crews who'd got terribly wet and, and we, we, we had clothing for them put in, in our stores, in, in, in the clothing stores in Guernsey. And also if there were people with, when their yachts seemed to sink we helped them as well. It was a different kind of, mm, different kind of work really.

[JH]: Yes. And how was your role as a County Organiser different from being a District Organiser?

[MJ]: I, I wasn't a County Organiser, they called that a Bailiwick, it was the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Mm, it was much, much smaller role, and yet it was, you had to be very tactful to these people, and they, they were very nice, the Guernsey people, but some of them still had the feeling that the British had let them down during the War, had not helped them. But we couldn't.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: There was no way you could help the, the small islands, we couldn't have fought, for, for them or anything like that.

[JH]: And how were you involved with Easingwold College?

[MJ]: I was sent there for a middle management course. There was another person, another WRVS person and a member from, from England there. Mm, it was all men, the fire, police and people from local services and we stayed about three nights there.

[00:50:02]

We, we found it very intensive. The police and the fire moaned and groaned that they were there, mm, and they, they couldn't understand why we had volunteered to go. Well we hadn't really, we, we were, we were sent. Mm, we had to work quite hard at night, we had a lot of homework to do at night. But the police and the firemen used to sort of go out to the pub and say 'Oh, forget that'. Mm, there I took a sort of, I, I didn't enjoy that course at all. Mm, it, it wasn't a pleasant experience.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: It, it really wasn't.

[JH]: And so then, after living in Guernsey, you moved?

[MJ]: Back.

[JH]: Back over to England.

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: To London. And you were in the Children's Department.

[MJ]: Yes, I was. And I didn't do any work at all because I don't think... I think the well there wasn't anything for me to do. I put in orders sort of orders for children's holidays, they, they used to ask for extra things for, you know, giving the children's holidays but I found that atmosphere not good. Mm,

I, I can remember somebody coming in and giving the office cakes and she turned to me and she said 'When you've been two years here you'll be able to have some birthday cake', and I thought 'Oh great'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] 'I think it's time I moved out of here'.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] As I said it, it wasn't really, that wasn't for me.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: Going up to London. I saw, I saw the, the head office in, in a different way really.

[JH]: Yes.

[MJ]: [Laughing]

[JH]: And where was head office at the time?

[MJ]: Oh, it was in Park Lane.

[JH]: Yes.

[MJ]: It was an old building sort of fairly near to The Hilton. And I think they had it for a 'peppercorn rent'. It used to be an old, a hospital for, in the Great War for, for soldiers. I, I don't know how Lady Reading got, got hold of it, but my goodness you, you knew your place and you had to step aside when anyone came down the stairs. Oh it was very rank orientated there.

[JH]: And was the Chairman there as well at the head office?

[MJ]: The Chairman was there as well, yes.

[JH]: And who was that at that time?

[MJ]: Mm, Lady, no Dame, mm, I can't think of her name. Sheffield, mm, Shenfield. Barbara Shenfield.

[JH]: Oh Barbara?

[MJ]: Yes, Barbara Shenfield. Yes.

[JH]: And did you meet her while you were at headquarters?

[MJ]: Yes I did. I met her in Guernsey, she came to Guernsey for two days and I met her there.

[JH]: And what was she like as a, a person?

[MJ]: She was quite different from the previous Chairman, mm, who, who had time for every member. But Dame Barbara was an economist really and she hadn't got the same way with members as, as, mm, Dame... There was also Frances Clode, mm, she hadn't got the same way with members, yes.

[JH]: And then, so then you went to Essex Meals-on-Wheels, instead of...?

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: Children's Services?

[00:55:00]

[MJ]: Yes, I went back to Meals-on-Wheels in Essex for the County, mm, which I enjoyed very much indeed. It was a, it's a large county and I was very pleased to be back there. Mm, it was a good time, I went all over the, the county, so, you know, look at, looking at the Meals-on-Wheels.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And we also had 'The Butter Mountain' - have you heard of 'The European Butter Mountain'?

[JH]: A little bit. Would you like to tell me a bit more about 'The Butter Mountain'?

[MJ]: Mm, they, they had all this butter in, in storage and we were suddenly told that they'd got to get rid of all this butter. I mean, you know, over Europe and, all over the place. And we were told it was to go to the pensioners and the clubs and the, the Lunch Clubs and everywhere. It all, all of the clubs, not just WRVS but everywhere that we could think of, Red Cross Clubs, everywhere. And we were told there were five tons of it to collect from a, a store. And we didn't even know what five tons looked like. Mm, and so we had all the various Districts coming up to collect this butter, and it all had to be accounted for. I think I got it wrong by two pounds at the very end and we couldn't account for two pounds of butter, and you'd think it was The Crown Jewels, because I got a rocket for [laughing] losing two pounds of butter, [laughing] But I had even people ringing up from abroad to say they wanted their butter, they were on holiday in Spain or somewhere and they wanted their butter, or else they were up in Northumberland with aunt so and so and they wanted their butter. And I said 'I'm sorry we can't, [laughing] we've got to deliver it now'.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And I think we made about ten deliveries, you know, yes county wide, all over the counties with this butter. It, it was quite a, a problem really, a lot of extra work. But I think that WRVS did quite well out of that. Mm, yes I think, I think they did.

[JH]: And by, sort of that time in the '80s, had Meals-on-Wheels changed quite significantly from 1968?

[MJ]: Yes, I think they were coming again from the schools but then insulated containers were being used and it was beginning to, we were still cooking some meals for ourselves, but it hadn't really changed that much, there was still that personal contact with the people, the sherry going out at Christmas and, and perhaps some garden flowers going in to an old person. But you could see that something had to, to change in the Service. It was still running almost sort of, not wartime but things were becoming difficult to get volunteers, people to take responsibility.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: That's what we were beginning to find. People hadn't got their time and just weren't interested in taking up any responsibility, and it was, it was a responsibility if you were going to do the job well.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And then, in 1988, you moved to Monmouth in...

[01:00:04]

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: Wales.

[MJ]: Back I went to Meals-on-Wheels in Monmouth. That was a lovely job because we, it's so beautiful in Monmouth and we travelled sort of, sort of not just in Monmouth but all outlying parts of the country, country there. And that, that was really good, I loved that.

[JH]: And were you doing more or fewer deliveries out over there?

[MJ]: I think we were doing about the same, same, but they, they were lovely the Welsh people.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And there was an old man he, he had been a miner and his room was full of cups for pigeons, winning pigeons, he had the most terrible lung dis..., disease, but he always had a bar of chocolate for us. He was, he, he was a sweet old chap.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And I said to him, 'Do you know', there was a speaker called Thomas in the Parliament, and I said 'Are you a relation of him?' 'No', he said 'yes, I come from the same village'. But he was, he was an exceptional old chap.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Lovely.

[JH]: And by this time, sort of by the late '80s, did, were the people who received Meals-on-Wheels changing?

[MJ]: Yes, they were. I mean that's the first time I've seen people on a mobile phone, they were, they were becoming, you know, just beginning.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: And you thought 'Oh, things are changing'. But they still liked their Meals-on-Wheels. I think it's because we had time to give and time to have a laugh with them and, and so on. But they, they hadn't changed to the sort of, I'd call it these frozen foods, you know, these, they were still the, being delivered in these aluminium containers and you'd dish them out on their, their plates. Mm, it, it still had that great contact with the elderly.

[JH]: And then you're, you became Vice-Chairman of Wales, in 1990?

[MJ]: That's right. I worked at Cardiff previously in the head office at Car..., at Cardiff. I was in charge of prisons and magistrates' courts, events and personnel. And then I became Vice-Chairman of Wales, there were two Vice-Chairmans, and, and the Chairman herself. And this was very interesting work, it was completely different to what I'd done. Mm, I visited Cardiff Prison and Usk Prison and Swansea Prison and the magistrates' courts where they gave out coffee to the people who were waiting around. Mm, I enjoyed doing the events. We had the very big Welsh Show, up in the middle of Wales, and personnel.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And being in Monmouth I moved around quite a bit in, in Wales, especially going up to North Wales, which I loved.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And I did training as well. Being Vice-Chairman, really it was a title I think it was these other things that I did, meet, I met an awful lot of Welsh people, and they, they were lovely.

[01:05:00]

Mm, I think the name of Jones helped.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] So although I spoke with an English accent. But it was good, mm, I met many, many people.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: I once did a, we, we had a, at, at one of the supermarkets we were trying to start a new shop at Abergavenny, a WRVS shop, and we wanted staff to, mm staff it. And we did a run on the supermarket as people came out, and we were eyeing up the sixty year olds, fifty to sixty year olds. And there was an old lady watching me and she, she, I didn't really have eye contact with her because I knew she was in her eighties or somewhere abouts, but she couldn't stop staring at me. And at last she came up to me at this supermarket and she said 'I'd like to know if your teeth are real, or are they false?', and I just burst out laughing. And she said, I said 'they're real'. 'Oh', she said 'are they, really'? And then walked off. And I was beginning to say, think when she came up to me that she was going to volunteer and I wasn't going, I didn't know what to say to her because I didn't really want, we weren't looking for eighty year olds.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: We were... [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: And then when the shop opened the Chairman, Elizabeth Toulson, came down and they went and had lunch with her and I said 'I'll stay and look after the shop'. Well I'm dyslexic with numbers

and we had flowers and a man came in and they, they sort of told me how to use the till and the man came in and he bought some flowers, and they were £3.50 but it came up on the till three £3,500 [laughing] for the flowers. [Laughing] I laughed but he, he, he didn't think it very funny at all, no. So that was my, my experience of being in the hospital, hospital shop, I wasn't a success. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] And did you do any other sort of activities with volunteers as Chairman?

[MJ]: Yes, I was all over the place really.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Mm, I did, we, we did emergency work. I actually, we had a day out with the emergency people. I'd never worked a, do you know what a Soyer boiler is? Yes?

[JH]: Yes. We've got two in the archive.

[MJ]: You haven't have you?

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Well this is the first time I met those and, and we actually cooked with those. I was also a sort of trouble shooter when things got a bit strained up in the, in the North. But it, it was very interesting, again it was such a variety of work. The Royal Show we, we looked after the lost children's tent.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And it was an enor..., it wasn't a tent, it was a marquee and we had a lot of people, we had one team of pure Welsh speakers, they weren't WRVS, and because a lot of the children could not speak English, mm, which I found quite amazing really, but they'd come down from the farms.

[JH]: Yes.

[MJ]: And so the, the, this team was, was very necessary to have for, for the children. Mm, and we had information desks there to, you know, guide people around the show.

[01:10:05]

Mm, that was a great occasion every year.

[JH]: Mm. And so when you resigned you became involved with Meals-on-Wheels in Lymington?

[MJ]: Yes.

[JH]: And how was, how, what did that involve being?

[MJ]: That was just going back to grass roots. I wasn't an organiser, I just did the Meals-on-Wheels. Again I really loved Meals-on-Wheels.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: I, I enjoyed meeting the people, we were a very happy team, we still meet up sort of every two months. Mm, you'd think that things had moved on but, as I, I said in the beginning, we came across a woman who was living in complete and utter squalor and there was nothing we could do, we reported it to the Social Services and as her daughter was supposed to be looking after her there was little they could do. But I can honestly tell you it was the most awful place we, we'd ever been in.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: And you really can't sort of believe in this day and age...

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: That people could live in this sort of condition.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And so not really being able to help, was that very different from earlier in sort of '70s and '80s?

[MJ]: Yes, I always felt we could, could help a bit. And when I, in Harlow I was saying about the old man who, who had the dogs, and there was a, a colonel's wife who used to deliver meals for us, and she came in and she said 'Why are you sitting on your bottom Maureen when you know this man is living in this squalor'? And I said 'Well it's been reported to Social Services, and we can't do much more than that'.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And she said 'Well I am going to see about him', and she did, and she got that man moved within a fortnight. And within another fortnight he was dead. So, you know, you, you cannot just remove people from their own home really without their, at least they're protected now.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: Rather than the Social Services stepping in in the old days, quite quickly.

[JH]: And you also became involved with Books-on-Wheels again?

[MJ]: I was back at Books-on-Wheels, which was quite a small, it, it wasn't a big round at all, but it was, it was nice to do it. As I say, you had time to talk to people, to actually sit down and talk to people. And I think they quite enjoyed that, I did.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And so through, so sort of between 1997 and sort of now when you've been doing Books-on-Wheels and Meals-on-Wheels and things like that, was, was that very different from when you'd done it before?

[MJ]: Not really, not really. Mm, the camaraderie was the same, the laughter was the same and the sympathy's was the same. Mm, you, you met sadness and you met sort of, oh, just the same really, very lonely people, some quite cheerful, but all very interesting.

[JH]: Mm. And what has happened to sort of Meals-on-Wheels and Books-on-Wheels in this area now?

[MJ]: Well, we were told that we were going to be made redundant by the County Council, and that was it.

[01:15:08]

We read in the paper, the local paper, that Lymington had been awarded some award for meals, for their work with WRVS. And we were never told by WRVS, somebody went and collected our award, we still don't know what it was. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: We were never told by WRVS.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And that left us with a very, really sour taste.

[JH]: Yes.

[MJ]: It was not a way to say 'thank you' to us.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: Not that we expected but, but, it, it actually made the members, well, very, very angry that this had happened. Some, somebody, somebody has got our award somewhere.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: This is what I feel the communication isn't good.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: But that, that was the end of our careers really. Mm, but I have so many happy remembers, you know, memories and, and laughter with friends all over the place.

[JH]: And have you taken on any other roles with WRVS?

[MJ]: No, because there is no WRVS here, we were told we could go up to Andover.

[JH]: That's quite far.

[MJ]: And then I've got a letter in my files to know if we'd like to go and work in West Sussex.

[Laughing] Because West, West Sussex they went on strike when they were told they were, were going to be made redundant they weren't quiet members like us they went on strike and more or less left the Service. And we were asked if we knew anyone who could come and help, and could we come and help ourselves? Well you can imagine the com..., [laughing] we didn't answer actually.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] It was so extraordinary to be asked that, I mean fancy going from here to West Sussex.

[JH]: It's quite far. [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing]

[JH]: And have there been any other changes that have affected you as a volunteer?

[MJ]: No, I, I've had a, a wonderful life with WRVS. I know things have to change. I'd love to have got, just gone on just a little bit more but I realise that I am now eighty-two and, and shouldn't have been doing Meals-on-Wheels at all. I wouldn't have been allowed to in the, in the old days but there aren't the volunteers. And I, I still enjoyed my going out and meeting, meeting everybody. And that won't change.

[JH]: No. And would you like to continue with Royal Voluntary...

[MJ]: I can't.

[JH]: Service?

[MJ]: I can't. I'm not going to drive up to Andover.

[JH]: No. [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] Mm it, it's just not on.

[JH]: No. And where would you say that Royal Voluntary Service, as it is now, place in society is today?

[MJ]: I, I don't know Jennifer, I really don't know because [sighs] we were always told our communication was very bad, that was always so. Who knew about what WRVS in those days stood for? And, but we used to see ourselves when there's a big, anything happened on television you would always see WRVS in their orange mm, tabards.

[01:20:00]

Now you, you don't, you don't even hear anything about them. I think that's worrying, I don't know if Emergency Services are even working, are working now. We don't seem to have that communication through the magazine or whatever it's called that, that doesn't seem to tell us anything. Mm, I have rung the Service on occasions and never got anywhere with them, with them, you know.

[JH]: Mm.

[[MJ]: 'Oh yes we will, will ring you up'. And my fellow members feel, feel the same that they seem to have lost communication with the grass roots. I think having the Local Offices, the Districts Offices we, we worked more as a team and more as a family.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: And I don't, I don't know how it works now. But that is change, and that is the future and it's for them to get it right. Occasionally I read that they've done a survey on something in the papers.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: But I, I really don't know what they're about. Mm, I see them in Bournemouth Hospital when I go, go there as a patient, and they're pretty angry about the changes.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: I never let, I just say 'I was a member', and they said 'Oh what yes', but it's quite interesting to know their, their comeback. I never let on anything.

[JH]: No.

[MJ]: But I think they're feeling neglected, that, that's...

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: The word. The grass roots, I have no idea what happens up above. And, as I say, I'm now too old to do it, do anything about it, it's not my business, keep your fingers out.

[JH]: And so, finally, to sort of conclude, what would you say was your most sort of treasured memory, or most memorable moment of being involved with WRVS?

[MJ]: Well that's a big, I've had so many happy memories with them. Mm, I, I have had so many happy memories with them. I enjoyed doing Wimbledon, the information desks.

[JH]: Mm, mm.

[MJ]: Mm, I think it's the whole thing of camaraderie, of being part of a family. Mm, I think the Service we had at Westminster Abbey for Thanksgiving when we were Fifty years old was a lovely time. We met lots of people you knew. Mm, we were proud, we were proud of ourselves, yes.

[JH]: And you mentioned the information desks at...

[MJ]: Wimbledon.

[JH]: Wimbledon, which we haven't quite covered, but what, what were you doing on those information desks?

[MJ]: Well first of all you go to learn, there were five information desks around Wimbledon and we worked with a partner. There were twelve of us each week there, for the fortnight. And we answered any question at all. They even came and asked where was the nearest launderette, when would it stop raining? Mm, men in beautiful suits would say, 'Could you tell me', they weren't taking the Mickey out of us, but 'could you tell me when, when you think it's going to stop raining'? It was extraordinary the questions that were asked.

[01:25:00]

We were asked to sew on buttons for men's trousers. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: We were asked to look after children, they were lost. Mm, it was so varied. We worked fairly closely with St. John Ambulance. And we had to go up once to a coach of children who had come down from the Midlands, it was very hot and these schools used to bring the, the children down, I don't think the children knew anything about tennis but the teacher got a free ticket in to Wimbledon and said to the children 'Oh meet us under the clock at sort of five o'clock and we'll go back by coach'. And this teacher had said to the children 'I'm going now to get the tickets, you stay here', and by about twelve o'clock they hadn't seen her and they discovered that she had come down on the wrong day and scapered.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] And, and left the children, in the bus.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: So we had to take up water for the children and send them back on their way, because they'd been sitting in the bus all the time. And that, and there were very, it, odd things you had to deal with. There was another case of a child having appendicitis and the St. John Ambulance wanted to know where the teacher was and I had to go and find out where the teacher was sitting, which actually they knew exactly where she was sitting, Wimbledon authorities, and she wasn't there so I went and sat in her seat until she came back to sit in her seat. And I said 'You're wanted by St. John Ambulance', and she, she said 'What for', and I told her this child had been sent to hospital for appendicitis and she said 'well that's nothing to do with me until five o'clock'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] I said 'Oh yes it is, you come with me'. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] But things went, it was amazing really.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Mm, all the questions we were asked. And there was a great lot of learning to do. And then after five years I was asked to take over, so we had teams of members from all over the country. And they, you see every member had to go with an experienced member to, to learn and it took you about two years to actually learn, because you were only there a week to, to know the, exactly where everything was. Mm, it was a very interesting job to do. We had a, a lady from Scotland who was so delighted to be there and she didn't quite fit in. And I said, well the Chairman, the Mary Corsar was then Chairman for Scotland, and I'd chosen the Scottish members to have lunch with her. And this member told Mary Corsar a story all about what she, this, this member had done, and it was so astonishing [laughing] that I think Mary Corsar sort of nearly started laughing and so did I.

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: [Laughing] And, and it was, the whole thing was, we didn't see her again actually.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: [Laughing] We didn't have her again. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing]

[MJ]: But, yes, they were, they were good days. You went, we, we actually wore, one year we wore a mileometer on it and we did, we walked about six to seven miles my, myself, myself, when I, couldn't, visiting the, the desks and taking special visitors to, to places they wanted to get to or something like that.

[01:30:19]

It's just we were walking round, you know, a lot of the time, but you could, the teams had, they could go on to Centre Court, we had two tickets for the teams to, to share. Each information box had, had a ticket either for the first the Number One Court, or Number, Centre Court, which they could share. And so, you know, in their off times, they had two hours on and two hours off. And it was good, Yes.

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

[MJ]: No, just a lovely, happy, it was a family time.

[JH]: Mm.

[MJ]: Almost. It was a completely different life to what you did at home. And you met so many interesting people, lovely people. And that's how I met you, your boss lady. [Laughing]

[JH]: [Laughing] Alice.

[MJ]: Alice. Yes, yes. So yes.

[JH]: And you've kept in touch with Alice?

[MJ]: I've kept in touch with Alice. And I've got some things to give you for Alice's archive.

[JH]: Excellent. Well thank you very much Maureen, that's been, it's been really interesting to talk to you, and it's a really good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.

[MJ]: Thank you Jennifer, thank you.

[End of track 001:32:02]