

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Transcript

Title Page

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Interviewee's Surname: Miller

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Margaret

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1939-Present (2015) Glasgow

War Work 1939-1945

Post-war Work (Meals-on-Wheels and Hospital
Escort Service)

Lightburn Harmony Stroke Club 1973-2015

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Interviewer's Notes:

Margaret Miller (MM) talks about her time as a WVS/WRVS/ Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) volunteer from 1939-2015 in Glasgow. MM was first involved during the war with collecting items and distributing them to people who had been bombed out during the Second World War (the War). She was also involved with visiting soldiers in hospital and talking to them or bringing them gifts. After the War MM was involved in Meals-on-Wheels (MOW) and the Hospital Escort Service. In 1973 she was asked to set-up and run a stroke club called the Lightburn Harmony Stroke Club. MM talks about

the club and the different members she has had over the years and fundraising for the club. She also comments on her Long Service medal and 2 BEMs, attending the 50th WRVS anniversary, a Garden Party at Holyrood in 2014 and her views on how RVS has change over the years.

[JENNIFER HUNT]: This is Jennifer Hunt with Margaret Miller on the 2nd June 2015 at her home in Glasgow. Mrs Miller would you just like to introduce yourself?

[MARGARET MILLER]: As you have said my name is Margaret Miller, I've been a volunteer for a long time and have thoroughly enjoyed all my work volunteering for the W..., not 'W', it's RVS now, is that right?

[JH]: Yes.

[MM]: I went in when it was The Royal Voluntary Service, I joined in 1939. It then became after a number of years The Royal Voluntary, Women's Royal Voluntary Service when the Queen Mother became the Patron, and I've been a member ever since.

[JH]: And why did you join WVS in 1939?

[MM]: Well, I had just come home from holiday and I was cutting through into Shettleston, there was one of those big barrage balloons hanging, supposed to be to try to stop the enemy planes, I said tell us 'What's that?' 'Well', she said 'that's to keep them from attacking us', so I said 'Well we better maybe do something about it then', and I decided to join the WRVS.

[JH]: And where did you volunteer? Where did you volunteer?

[MM]: Here in Shettleston, in Springboig actually. It was, the group was started up in the school premises and we worked from there. We had a store to try and help anyone who was bombed and had no clothes or anything, so we had to build up normal things that you'd be using every day so that we could help out, fortunately they were never required. [Laughing] I don't know where they went but they weren't required for this district.

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

[MM]: Very little. I had heard it spoken about but no details of what it meant, but I was quite willing to help if people were bombed out or anything, and I was fortunate in my friends, they all tried to help me.

[JH]: And what is your earliest memory of being a member of WVS?

[MM]: Pardon?

[JH]: What is your earliest memory of being a member?

[MM]: I spoke to a lady who had been a neighbour for a number of years but I didn't really know her very well, and in conversation I told her the we'd started the group and we were collecting any kitchen things, towels, towels, bedding or anything like that, and she came with a half set of china that she'd bought just the week before and she says 'You can have that', I thought it was wonderful.

[JH]: As well as collecting items for people who'd been bombed out, was there anything else you did with WVS during the war?

[00:05:00]

[MM]: Well, as the war progress, progressed we were having wounded soldiers brought to a small hospital just up the road and it was in our patch to see for visiting and we needed to visit them once a week, people whose families were too far away to visit them, we visited them. And the shopkeepers were very helpful to us.

[JH]: Why were the shopkeepers helpful?

[MM]: Well, I think you're too young to know what it was like but you had no cream biscuits, no chocolate biscuits, nothing like that, that was a treat special and was really kept by the shopkeepers for their special customers. And I was very fortunate in being included with, for them and I used to be able to take something up most weeks to give them just as a little special that we couldn't get.

[JH]: Was there anything else you did for WVS in the hospitals?

[MM]: Pardon.

[JH]: Was there anything else you did for WVS in the hospitals?

[MM]: No, I don't think so, it was mostly just talking to soldiers, speaking to the staff and knowing which ones were being operated on and what they needed, and we tried to provide it as far as possible.

[JH]: Did the soldiers come from different areas of...?

[MM]: Yes. And then you couldn't get travelling so much then, their families couldn't get travelling, they couldn't afford it anyhow because they didn't have the special permits.

[JH]: Did you wear a uniform for WVS?

[MM]: Yes.

[JH]: What, do you remember what the uniform was like?

[MM]: I wore a dress, a greatcoat, a hat, and that was all wasn't it?

[JEAN – MM'S DAUGHTER]: Yes. But going back to the war you can tell her about the orange and the stirrup pump.

[MM]: I had to attend the fire brigade offices to be trained to use a stirrup pump, which was, must be a party of two, and one was in control of the water and one was in control of trying to put out small fires until the fire brigade could arrive themselves, so I had to be trained in that. I wasn't very exact where I put the water.

[JH]: Do you have any other memories of volunteering during the war?

[MM]: Pardon?

[JH]: Do you have any other memories of volunteering during the war?

[MM]: Well, a lady once phoned and said 'Have you got your Easter eggs in'?

[J]: That wasn't the war, it was during the war she wants to know Mum. The orange?

[00:10:00]

[MM]: Well I went to a vegetable shop in Shettleston Road, and he, I was teasing him a bit and saying 'Well could you not give us something that was different, how would you feel if you were wounded and there was nothing special for you'. And he gave me two large Jaffa oranges, so I took them up. The sister said 'On that's marvellous, I have a patient just coming out of chloroform and that'll be the first thing he'll taste', you see she took the orange and he thought it was marvellous, wonderful.

[JH]: Mm. And when the war came to an end did you stay a member of WVS?

[MM]: I'm still a member of, of it.

[JH]: Mm, mm. And what did, what did you do with WVS after the war?

[MM]: Well I started the first Stroke Club in Scotland and it's been running now for forty odd years.

[J]: 1973.

[MM]: But it's way back in membership because they don't want one day a week now, they want provision to allow them to be taken to a club or something, the stroke person, and the other house partners will be free to go out to work, they don't want one day a week they want three days a week if possible.

[JH]: When it started was it just one day a week?

[MM]: Yes.

[J]: Still is.

[MM]: As a matter of fact there's some pictures of it there.

[JH]: On the...?

[MM]: On the settee, but you have, but you don't have that now.

[JH]: The ones in the envelope?

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: In an envelope, I've put them out this morning. Actually we lost all our paperwork in a fire.

[J]: That's an Easter bonnet parade that they had.

[JH]: Is that the sort of activities you have in the club as the Easter bonnet competition?

[MM]: We did that yes, to begin with.

[JH]: And did you have any, do you run any other activities in the club?

[MM]: Pardon?

[JH]: Do you have any, did you run any other activities?

[J]: What is a normal day in the club?

[MM]: Well, they come in for twelve o'clock and they had soup and something to make a light lunch for them. Then they talked among themselves for a wee while. And we've got all their news and things like that. I made a big mistake because I didn't allow Bingo. And Professor Isaacs used to bring doctors from all over the world to see the Stroke Club and see the reaction to the men who'd had the stroke. And that was about all. I eventually played the violin and another one who played the piano and they always had a singsong before they went home.

[J]: But you always made the club a family club?

[MM]: Yes. It was more like a family club than a stroke club really.

[JH]: Mm.

[MM]: And they talked to one another so you were discussing what had happened the week before. And maybe somebody's family, in their family they'd had another addition or something like that.

[00:15:12]

[J]: Christmas shopping?

[JH]: Mm.

[MM]: [Coughing] I, excuse me, one of the stores in Glasgow used to open at night and let us have the run of the store for shopping for a couple of hours wasn't it?

[J]: Mm, mm.

[MM]: And we went there, and we had one man who had never spoken a word from he'd had his stroke and he was afraid to go in the lift so I said 'Well, I'll stay with you and the others can go up, we'll meet at a certain place to go home'. So he wanted a purse for his wife and we started at 'A' and went right through the alphabet and couldn't find his wife's name so we'd to start again. But halfway the girl serving us had said 'Would you like me to put your wife's initial on the purse'? [Laughing] And he said 'Yes'. So it was a pet name, I don't remember what it was but if it... No I don't remember what the pet name was but anyhow he got it on the purse and was quite thrilled. The following year I said to members 'Do you want to go Christmas shopping?' 'Yes'. 'Do you want to go Christmas shopping?' 'I don't want to go', so 'Right, you don't want to go, you stay at home'. So the following week we were into the club and he came in with a face like thunder. I said to him, I said 'What's with you this morning?' And his friend said 'He was all dressed ready to go Christmas shopping and you didnae come for him'. [Laughing] He meant to say 'I want to go' but he didn't so it cost me a taxi to take him Christmas shopping, [Laughing] shopping. But he never said another word in the club or at home.

[J]: No. The man who fell?

[MM]: His wife went out working in the forenoons to try and help things and he was left sitting in the house and she left their lunch ready on the cooker just for the gas to be lit when she come back home. So he was sitting she says, 'Go with Mrs Miller', she said to him 'get up and do something'. So he got up and lit the gas, forgot he'd put his stick down and he fell, so he was lying on the floor weeping, 'What would she say to me if she saw me lying on here no trying to do anything'. So he crawled from the kitchenette in to the kitchen where there was a settee and pulled himself up by the weight of the settee, and when his wife come home their lunch was ready and he was smiling, and he thought that was why he was a member of our club. The purpose really was to give them back their confidence.

[JH]: Was that why you set, set the club up?

[J]: Is that why you set the club up?

[MM]: No, it was Professor Isaacs who was at that time in Lightburn Hospital and he sent out requests to all the churches in the district to see if we would do something for the stroke people and have a club for them. And he, we went and nobody would help. I was going on holiday and said 'Well, I'm sorry', he wanted it started right away, 'I'm going on holiday, I don't know anything about strokes but I would have tried to help you of I could'. 'How long are you going on holiday for? We'll run it for a fortnight till you come back'. So that was how I came to run the Stroke Club.

[00:20:50]

[JH]: Did, you...? Sorry.

[MM]: Go ahead.

[JH]: Did you have other volunteers who helped you with the club?

[MM]: Yes, I had friends who were the tea makers and friends who were, one lady said 'I'll be your treasurer', another one said 'I'll be your secretary', but they wouldn't take the responsibility of running the club. And it was really just the family club for several years wasn't it?

[J]: It still is.

[MM]: Ah, but we haven't the members now.

[J]: You also did volunteering in the hospital.

[MM]: We did Meals-on-Wheels was another thing that we did.

[JH]: Where did you deliver the meals?

[MM]: In the outlying districts of Baillieston and right in to here.

[JH]: And what were they, a typical Meals-on-Wheels round like?

[MM]: Really quite good. You know, when you've nothing coming in and their meals are delivered to you cooked ready for just keeping hot and eating it they were really, I considered they were very good.

[JH]: What sort of food did you deliver to people?

[MM]: It's a long time ago. [Laughing] They usually had soup, a main course and a sweet, usually a three course meal. And they had their plates and things all laid out when you went in and you had to serve it to them. Mostly, a few could serve it for themselves but not many.

[JH]: Who did you deliver the meals to?

[MM]: When?

[J]: Who?

[JH]: Who?

[J]: People that Social Work had recommended to The WRVS.

[MM]: That's right. And we had to go to a hospital and pick it up in containers and serve it out, bring the containers back to the place we got it from. We had them all to wash before we could go home ourselves.

[JH]: Did you have a hot lock to keep the meals warm?

[MM]: No, but we had... Not as modern as that, we'd to find out ways of keeping them hot. They had to go in ordinary vans to be delivered. And most of the people were very grateful to get them. Because before that we had come through the rationing period and that made it very difficult for some people.

[00:25:00]

[JH]: Do you remember how long you delivered meals for?

[MM]: No.

[JH]: Were you...?

[MM]: I was asked to go into the hospital.

[J]: A good number of years she delivered meals for.

[MM]: Was it?

[J]: Five or six years at least.

[MM]: Not as long as that I don't think.

[J]: Then you were asked to do escort duty.

[MM]: In the hospital. And one of the times I was just leaving the hospital and the patient wouldn't go unless there was another female person going with her in the ambulance. So I turned to get my handbag out of the cupboard otherwise I'd have been stranded with no money or anything. When we got to the place where this person was been to the hospital I said to the driver 'Now will you let me off near the station so that I can get a train back to Glasgow'? 'We're no going back to Glasgow', so there's no transport laid on and I was late. [Laughing]

[JH]: Do you have any other memories of the Escort Service and the hospital?

[MM]: The one I'll never forget was a lady coming in and I was taking her to the ward. Her daughter was in to have an abortion and she knew nothing about it until that day, and the girl was already in the hospital and I was so sorry for her mother. But I had to leave her at the ward but she was in a dreadful state.

[J]: Then you started the Harmony Club?

[MM]: Well, that was Doctor, Professor Isaacs was asked us to do that and I told...

[J]: Toys are another story. The Easter eggs are another story.

[MM]; They're horrible. I told you the story about the Easter eggs.

[J]: No, you haven't told her.

[MM]: Haven't? I told you the lady phoned up and said 'Have you got your Easter eggs'? I said 'You might have asked me before today, I bought them this morning'. She said 'Could you use some more'? And I said 'Och I can always use plenty'. So I got all the ones that she didn't need and I tried to deliver them to people who wouldn't get any. And I went to one lady, fairly well off, she was comfortable. When I gave it to her she burst out in tears she says 'Nobody ever bought me an Easter egg', I said 'Well, I didn't bring it to make you cry'. So she wasn't able, she was in bed and couldn't straighten her spine herself, she'd got one of those beds that you can touch a button and it moves different ways. But that was, I thought so many people got so much and there was an awful lot of people that got nothing, I tried to pick out the ones that might not have got anything.

[00:30:01]

[J]: The toys and the sweeties?

[MM]: Jean was in a warehouse one night and the manager of the warehouse came to her and said 'Why are you buying all this stuff, are you interested in buying some other stuff that's in the warehouse'? She said 'No I'm not, but my mother might be'. He said 'Well tell her to come on Thursday night and speak to me'. So I went and he'd put his things in one of those big trolleys that they use in warehouses was conveying their goods and I'm saying to myself 'Well, I can't pay this out of my ordinary account I've not as much money as pay this I don't know what's to happen'. So when the trolley was absolutely full he took me to the pay out place, I said, he's adding it all through and all through and I said 'My bank account's not going to make, meet this cheque'. 'It's yours,' I never paid a ha'penny, and that was practically the whole of the sale of work for Christmas. We used to have a sale of work once a year. And the neighbours got to know, Jean worked on all the lightly broken stuff that came in and learnt how to sew them and how to do a whole lot of other things and the goods were perfect by the time I was selling them again. So that was what helped the Harmony Club and also what gave us some money to work on. But he wouldn't take a ha'penny for them. He was closing down the department and that was why he gave me all the things. I think that was about all was it not?

[J]: No, the neighbours.

[MM]: The neighbours got to know that I'd got the toys for Christmas, and they come in and bought so many for their children for Christmas so I had to keep a book and they come in every week and paid so much up till they had the goods paid for and they came and collected them for the children's Christmas, it made such a difference to them.

[J]: The lady who wasn't going on holiday.

[MM]: Well, she come up the road. I was working in the garden and this lady came up carrying her messages across the road and she says 'Are you that woman that does all the charity work'? I says 'Well, I don't know if that's exactly what you mean but I run the Stroke Club'. 'Oh, that's it aye, that's it. I work in Belvidere and I know all about you'. I says 'Oh well, I hope it's good'. 'I'm on holiday, I'm

no going on holiday though I'm going to just stay at home and I'll no be away so there's something for your club', and she handed me money. I don't know her, I don't know her name, I asked her her name and she wouldn't give it to me. But where but in the East End of Glasgow would that happen? Is that my story?

[00:35:08]

[JH]: What did you do with the money that you raised for the club?

[MM]: I used it for the club members, I took them out in the summertime for a summer outing and I took them out at Christmas for their Christmas dinner and they never had to pay for anything. And I had my own system for years and years, the same people auditing the books.

[J]: Your café? The man, you were going for your Christmas dinner in a hotel.

[MM]: Now what happened there?

[J]: Well you were going for your Christmas dinner in a hotel and he didn't think, he wanted to go to a café.

[MM]: [Laughing] I said to him, he kept, he wouldn't come out of his wheelchair and he wouldn't mix with the members. And I usually gave them maybe about a month to settle in but he just stayed in his chair and I said 'Dear, we're going out for our Christmas dinner, would you like to come?' 'Oh, I don't know. We could go to a café'. I says 'No, I wouldn't go to a café'. 'If you go with me you'll go where you'll be treated properly as you were before you took your stroke, you're still the same person, you've nothing to hide'. 'Oh, I don't know'. I said 'I'll go and get some others then and I'll come back and see what you've got to say'. So I went back I says 'Have you made up your mind?' 'Aye, if you'll gan with me hame I'll go nowhere'. [Laughing] And that was him into the club. They had to get their confidence back before they could enjoy it properly.

[JH]: Have you had a lot of members over the years in the, joining the club?

[MM]: Have I made what?

[J]: Have you had a lot of members during the years?

[MM]: Oh yes. I was in Lightburn myself last year.

[J]: Two years ago.

[MM]: And they, the staff at Lightburn told me they were still getting people come who'd had a stroke and been in the Stroke Club and what good it had done to them.

[J]: You only really - excuse me - lost members when they died. Once they were in the Stroke Club they were in for life.

[JH]: Mm.

[MM]: Well they were regarded as forgotten people - the stroke people - when I started the Harmony Club. And I was very, very fortunate because I had friends who came to help with the teas and other things. And I had one with a violin, I had another one that played the piano, I think I've told you that.

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: With the... And as they got their confidence they got the benefits of the Stroke Club.

[JH]: Have you had a Long Service Medal for your work with WRVS?

[MM]: Oh yes. You've got your Long Service too.

[J]: I've got mine too. Mum has every bar that it's possible to have. She's got her Sixty Years, I've got it there.

[00:40:03]

[MM]: And I got, I also got the BEM.

[J]: And bar.

[MM]: Well it came later.

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: You see it, there was, we don't know because we don't know anything... I don't know anything about it - the bar to the second BEM. Seemingly there are very few people have been awarded that, and I think that's why I got such a fuss in London.

[JH]: Were you surprised to get a second?

[MM]: I was, I had never given it a thought.

[J]: She was surprised to get the first one.

[MM]: [Laughing] It was you that got the surprise, I got a shock.

[J]: No I had phone calls from, you can cut this out yourself.

[JH]: Mm.

[J]: I'd had phone calls from the WRVS saying that they wanted to put Mum's name in 1987, I think it was, forward for the British Empire Medal, would I write a résumé of her life? Now there was only Mum and I in the house and I was at school every day so any time I could write was in my bed at night, which I did to be shouted at every night as mother came up to bed 'Get that light out, stop reading, it's time you were asleep'. What she didn't know was I was sitting writing her life story. And they wanted a life story, they wanted it from the beginning right up. I thought 'How am I ever going to get this typed'? I haven't a clue. And I was receiving phone calls, which were rather awkward sometimes to take because we'd to say it was wrong numbers and things. And I was told the only person that I could say, who I could tell that she was being put forward for this award was the minister. So I said to the minister one Sunday morning 'I need to speak to you'. So I had to go down to the vestry hour on the Thursday night to speak to him and I told him. And I read, I let him read what I had written. I says 'Now on Saturday the Guild's going away for the day, I'll need to spend the

day with two fingers at the typewriter trying to type this out'. And it was the Reverend Tuton [ph 00:42:50] and he said 'No you won't, I'll take it now, I'll have it typed out and I'll send to Newton Terrace', where it had to go. And so he did that.

And something I never did, I never took the mail upstairs, and in those days you were usually up first. But anyway I was downstairs and I found this letter on Her Majesty's business and I took it up to Mum in the bedroom and she opened it and her first reaction was 'Oh, I've opened somebody else's mail'. But after a wee while she became used to it, she'd got The British Empire Medal. That was the first one.

[JH]: Mm.

[J]: And then last year you were at Holyrood, you can tell her about that - the archers.

[MM]: Yes, them. Jean went to ask the police if we were properly parked because she left the car. And in conversation they, the policewoman found out my age so she said 'Oh, I've never met anyone of that age'. And Jean says 'Well, if she's sitting down in the car you can go down and speak to her'. Well my method is whenever I see a policeman or anybody else like that 'It wasnae me', before they get speaking. And they, when she came down I saw all the silver and her card I thought 'I better not speak'. And they, she was thrilled and she said 'You'll just sit where you are and I'll get you a signal and then you'll come over and you'll have all the field to yourself without having any fuss'. So she did that. And just as we were through one of the archers spoke to, you spoke to him.

[00:45:21]

[J]: I spoke to him.

[MM]: And it said on the invitation there would be part of the grounds laid off for wheelchairs so that they could have a good view of The Queen. He said, I didn't know anything about it. So they talked, but he said 'Well, come and find out', and she and he talked until we got up, further up, and when he found about the BEM and the bar he went to his boss to tell him. And his boss came to ask questions, then his boss went to his boss and he came to ask questions. And it finished up that the Queen's Equerry came to me and said 'How do you feel about being the first person to greet The Queen when she arrives?' 'Oh', I says 'I would be honoured'. He says 'Oh no, she's interested in the

work that you have done because she's interested in stroke people and she'd be very happy to meet you'. 'Well', I says 'I'd be honoured to meet her', and I was the first person to be presented to The Queen when she came out at the garden party. And it was the hottest day that they'd ever had in Edinburgh for such a gathering. And everybody was being sheltered and I was being put under the shade of the trees and I was almost shivering. [Laughing] But I was kept there until it was time and she'd, they said that she'd moved, things had been changed you've to go so and so, and so and so she says it was World War III if I asked them to move they said 'No, you'll just go over, if you just say "excuse me" and it'll be alright'. And the people just moved away and let us through onto the grounds that The Queen was coming onto anyway. It was a beautiful afternoon, it was a wonderful finish to the day.

[Interruption – bell rings]

[J]: Excuse me.

[JH]: It's okay. Is there anything else you remember about that day and meeting The Queen?

[MM]: Well it was wonderful and she spoke very nicely. And we came away and Prince Philip he was in the runway next, the next runway to The Queen. And went over to stand at the edge and Prince Philip crossed straight across from his runway to where I was and he said 'That's the best chair in the place today', I said 'It certainly is'. He said 'Are they good pushers'? I said 'Oh, they're very good'. So it was a very good day altogether.

[JH]: Did you meet Lady Reading at all? Lady Reading?

[MM]: Pardon?

[JH]: Did you meet Lady Reading?

[MM]: No, I never did. I thought there was a letter from her in, no I put the box back upstairs, there's not. I did get a letter of congratulations from her, I don't know whether it was for the BEM or not. I was invited to the Fiftieth Anniversary of The WRVS in Westminster and The Queen Mother visited it.

[00:50:06]

[JH]: And...

[MM]: She had become the Patron.

[JH]: And that was the Golden Anniversary wasn't it though? Fiftieth, Golden Jubilee? Did you do anything in Glasgow to celebrate...

[MM]: No.

[JH]: The Fiftieth?

[J]: All celebrations were down in London.

[JH]: Mm.

[J]: You didn't tell her about the, the car, the WRVS car.

[MM]: Perhaps that wouldn't go in her book.

[J]: She can delete it.

[JH]: Yes, I can remove anything that...

[J]: If you don't like it. That's true, it's all the truth so.

[JH]: Yes.

[MM]: I, oh the draughts things there at the door. The WRVS told me I was on my own, that I wouldn't get any money from The WRVS to run the club. I says 'Well, I've got to have money to run it so I've got to have something'. So I ran a sale of work once a year and we made different things, and Fred come in and he had a friend who was employed in a factory on ladies wear and we used to get some things from him and some things from other people to sell at the sale of work once a year. So

we didn't have a car at that time and I went into the office and I said 'Could I have the use of a car one morning, there's a factory further out the road and if I can be there on a certain morning I'll get the cuttings from all the bras to make different things for the club'. So 'Wait a minute', someone come in who was in a higher position than I was, she said 'I'll take the car for so and so'. The girl in the office says 'Well, I'm sorry you can't get it'. 'Why can I not get it'? She says 'Mrs Miller's got it, she's away to Lovable Bras [Laughing] to collect what stuff as she can get'. The lace from the front of the bras was picked off and was made into jabots for a local choir that we were running that was not connected with the WRVS. But the girl made jabots for the front of everybody's blouse, and everybody got a jabot. So the other thing was if you had a draught you put a draught excluder at the foot of your door, and that was where I was saying to Jean I thought there was one there.

[J]: It is there, I've showed her it.

[MM]: We packed it with the packing from the bras and guaranteed it was all new material so we sold them at a pound. And a friend, a friend come in one night and he looked in he says 'I never knew you had a carpet on this floor, I've no seen it for years'. [Laughing] That was how we had to get our money.

[JH]: Did you do any other fundraising for the club or WRVS?

[00:55:03]

[J]: Did you do any other fundraising while you were at the...? When they got the minibus, the minibus remember you were at the receiving of it? Glasgow City Council, or Glasgow Corporation as it was then the WRVS presented a minibus.

[MM]: Yes, but I didn't get the full use of it.

[J]: No, no.

[MM]: It was for everybody, you know, for WRVS.

[J]: She made, you made Dougals? Dougals, by the hundred.

[MM]: No I was going to lift them hankies.

[J]: No it's alright, it's just there, she can see it. A hanky box.

[JH]: Oh right, yes.

[MM]: And do you know the furniture that you can buy? It's usually about that isn't it?

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: The material. And if you cut it out a certain way, you had a head and a tail. So Jean cut them all out and we pulled them on to the boxes and that was a head and a tail. And I made their eyes, and you sewed them all up.

[J]: Ah, ha. Hundreds of them.

[MM]: And we sold them at a pound.

[J]: They were a pound each.

[MM]: And that was how we got money to run the Stroke Club. Because the stroke people didn't have the money themselves, they weren't able to go out.

[J]: When you started what did the WRVS give you?

[MM]: Tin mugs.

[J]: And?

[MM]: A kettle.

[J]: A kettle.

[MM]: And then Miss Johnson, who was in charge here, said 'Oh no you're on your own, you don't get any money to run the club'. [Laughing] But everybody in those days was exceptionally kind. And I remember going to somebody, Templeton's Building, and I always took a letter with me and he looked at it and he said 'Oh, my granny was in there, I'll keep my pack, my samples for you if you come back so and so and so and so I'll give you my samples. Have you been to this man downstairs'? I said 'No'. 'Well', he said 'go to him'. And I went down and he had had a...

[J]: Returned order?

[MM]: Ah, ha. And it was all those jackets. There was...

[J]: Waxed.

[MM]: They cost about sixty or seventy pounds.

[J]: In those days.

[MM]: And he gave me the whole lot. And I sold them at thirty pounds, that was it wasn't it?

[J]: No twenty pounds.

[MM]: No thirty I think it was Jean.

[J]: Was it thirty pounds? Sorry. Can I say she'll be right, not me.

[MM]: And the door was going all the time 'Have you got one of those jackets size so and so'? But the names went around and I think we sold them all.'

[J]: Yes you did.

[MM]: That was how we got our running costs. And then we were very lucky because while Professor Isaacs was in Lightburn we got our premises free, we didn't have to pay rent until two or three years.

[JH]: So it's only recently that you've had to start paying rent?

[J]: On no.

[JH]: Or is it...?

[J]: Well the club started in 1973.

[JH]: Mm.

[MM]: It's your turn.

[JH]: Do you think that WRVS had changed over the years?

[01:00:02]

[MM]: Very much so.

[JH]: And how do, how has it changed for you?

[MM]: Well, in my opinion, there's not the closeness among all the clubs. You go in, and for example there was a group from the WRVS up in the prison but they were not allowed to use any profits in the prison, they're not allowed to put that money back in there And I got chairs one of the times.

[J]: Mm, mm.

[MM]: They were lovely chairs. But they couldn't go through us from the prison, so something to do with the law I don't know. But we had meetings every month of the WRVS and you knew what each group were doing, and if you could help them they could maybe help somebody else. I don't think that happens now. I've had people come to find out how to run a stroke club but whether the rules have changed altogether I don't know. A man came to one of the officials and said 'But how could I run a stroke club if I don't have so and so and so and so'? He says 'That's Mrs Miller over there, go and ask her for she just runs it her own way'. But we had no official, well, we had officials because...

[J]: You'd Mrs Bomphray. You'd Miss Johnstone.

[MM]: Ah, ha. And they came to Troon once when we went to Troon for an outing. 'Mrs Miller do you know your members are drinking alcohol'? And the problems I had, so I went away to get them, keep them out, and it was cans, obviously cans of lager or something that they had bought and they were drinking it, so they got out for that. And there was another one, another lad I saw his picture there this morning.

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: He was late and I says 'And where have you been'? He says 'Mrs Miller I was here during the war, that was the church there, I just went over to see the church'. So I had to apologise to him. The trouble was you couldn't let them go too far away from the crowd in case they forgot where they were or something, you'd to keep them close together. And we've had some very good times.

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: With them.

[J]: They have. And it's amazing what has happened.

[MM]: Well another shop we were in and they said 'Were you not interested in something else'? And you said 'No, but my mother might be', and I had to go in and see the manager and in those days they didn't take, return broken goods to the makers, they must have got a contract of some kind that they got an allowance so those were the things that Jean learned to - what do you call it? Solder and things like that.

[01:05:34]

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: Maybe a wire broken in them and people brought them back so they took them back and they gave them to Jean. Because they come for the, the maker wouldn't take them back, it was too much bother.

[J]: Don't give away all the trade secrets that we got up to Mum.

[JH]: No.

[MM]: But it's strange just the other week there somebody was speaking to me about the sales we used to have.

[J]: Ah, ha. They don't have them now.

[MM]: Which they didn't want me to have but what could you do, you had to get money?

[JH]: Mm. Do you fund the club in different ways now?

[MM]: Yes, because they have more opportunities now of perhaps going out and learning to knit again at some of the clubs that you hadn't, that hadn't been there before and they get their food. I was very fortunate because I got my food in the hospital. But, as I say, ours was more a family concern. And then I was accused, not of flirting but of course, it was John Pepper. John came in one morning, he was down and I said to him 'What's the matter with you this morning John, that's an awful face to come out with?' 'My wife's just been confirmed with dementia'. And I said 'Oh, she's just having a bad morning John you're needing a cuddle', and I've got my arms round him. Someone was passing the word 'Do you know this is no a carousal, the men that come into our club'? But it was family, everybody round about him then was concerned about his wife.

[J]: Yes. Is that the kind of things you want?

[JH]: Yes, yes.

[J]: Right, that's fine.

[JH]: And is there anything that we haven't mentioned that you'd like to talk about?

[MM]: I don't think because I run away with when I start a story off.

[JH]: And what has been the most significant change to WRVS since you joined?

[MM]: Well, we have lost an awful lot of members in Scotland through not having a meeting place. We used to meet once a month wasn't it?

[J]: Charing Cross.

[MM]: And they had their own offices and gradually all those offices have disappeared. They're too far apart now. You would go to a meeting, and as I told you about the prison.

[JH]: Yes.

[MM]: 'Oh Mrs Miller's needing chairs'. Well, I got chairs from the prison, the money from a prison, now you don't know what's happening. I mean maybe I strayed outside the rules occasionally but it was never for any reason except the good of the club.

[01:10:11]

[JH]: And what did you think when we changed name to Royal Voluntary Service?

[MM]: I don't think it's made much difference. Of course, I'm not in the office now except for the Stroke Club, but I'm not mixing so much now to know all that's going on. There comes a time when you've got to say 'Enough's enough'.

[JH]: And where do think Royal Voluntary Service belongs in society today?

[MM]: I really don't know. I came through the Second World War in this district of Glasgow, which is considered one of the poorer districts, and I got more kindness shown to me and the club than I could have got anywhere.

[JH]: And what do you think is the future for Royal Voluntary Service?

[MM]: I wouldn't like to offer an opinion on that. I don't think it will ever be the same as the family service it was when I joined it, it was more a family, mm, what would you call it? You know you said to your cousin and you said to your cousin and that was how you got publicity, and they all sort of joined together. I don't think I ever got a refusal.

[J]: No, I don't think you did.

[MM]: Did I tell you about the man who asked me how much money I wanted?

[J]: No.

[JH]: No.

[MM]: I was told to go to this man's, and my idea was to get samples and things that I could sell on at the sale of work and that would be bringing in the money to our club. And he said 'How much is it you really want?' I says 'I, I don't want money'. He said 'You're the first woman I've ever spoken to that's said they didn't want money'. I says 'No', and I told him about the sales of work. So it was two brothers that were running the business, one was on the financial side, one was on the floor, the production. And he says 'You go to that address there', it was only up the street a wee bit, so I went to him. 'And you don't want any money?' I says 'No, not really', I said 'I'd prefer if you would give me some stuff I could sell myself'. 'Well come back such and such a time'. Went back, 'Come back next year and we'll keep them for you'. 'Oh right'. Went back the next year and there was what? Socks, aprons, pyjamas, tabards.

[J]: Tabards.

[MM]: Tabards. All kept for me. And he would see me coming in, he would say 'It's no that time of year already is it?' I'd say 'Yes'. But that was the reception I got from the producers. I don't think I could do it now, and I don't think I would get it now. But they certainly supported me a lot. One lady said to me 'You wrote a letter acknowledging coconuts', coconut stuff. I said 'Yes, I did'. 'Well, why did you write to me?' I said 'Well, I always write to acknowledge anything that I get'. 'But I've sent you stuff for years and you've never acknowledged it', and the man that was getting the stuff thought it was for his club and it was for mine. [Laughing] So he lost it from then on.

[01:16:24]

[JH]: And finally what has been your most memorable moment of being a volunteer for WRVS?

[MM]: I think it would be the greetings from The Queen at the last garden party. I don't think there was anything more personal than that.

[J]: And you also thought it was very memorable London the other, a month ago.

[MM]: Oh that? I forget. I got into the taxi when it came here and it went up on to the main road and I saw him touch a button and there was a thing came up in the front of the car. And he touched another button and the two would went down I thought 'There's something funny going on here. Got into the airport, there was not a thing that could stop us and right up and there was four men and one woman wasn't it?

[J]: Yes.

[MM]: Waiting to receive me at Glasgow Airport. And the girl came forward with a bunch of flowers.

[J]: Mm, mm. From, from the Airport.

[MM]: I thanked her but I said 'I don't know the hotel I'm going to, I might not be able to keep them'. 'Oh, we'll keep them till you come back tomorrow night', they kept them. And from there I went, every queue that I came to was told to move. And I, I don't know what they said but they had papers in their hand and they said that was alright then right through. I never had anything like it in my life. And they took me to the hugs, is that the name of it?

[J]: Oh well now you're... You were taken into a...

[MM]: At Glasgow Airport.

[J]: At British Airways lounge and you were taken up to the snug.

[MM]: Snug, that was it. And Jean had brought me a croissant, and I thought 'I'll never eat that', it was the size of the plate that it was on. And you know how sometimes it gets a wee bit tough if you get to the inside, it was beautiful to eat, every bit of it for my breakfast. [Laughing] Oh, it was, and it was the same when we got to London.

[J]: Ah, ha.

[MM]: And a nurse got laid on for the whole time.

[J]: But coming back up, where were you taken?

[01:20:05]

[MM]: Oh I can't...

[J]: The Concorde.

[MM]: And I had steak and champagne, I'll never forget that either. But I think it's gone a wee bit away from the type of club I had, it was more a family meeting.

[JH]: Mm.

[MM]: Because everybody 'Oh, so and so and they've had a baby', and somebody else they've had a baby and somebody else their son's married and it was all family news that they were getting. I remember the man with the orange lemonade. One of the local firms gave me some drinks for the Christmas and there was an orange drink in it. Well there's never any question asked about religion or anything else, but if he got, and this is a bottle and it was coloured orange, he just waited till I was out of sight and he changed it to the one that was green or something else, he wouldn't take a bottle coloured orange. But those were just personal things that happened in the club.

[JH]: Well thank you for talking to me today Mrs Miller and this will make a really good contribution to our Voices of Volunteering Project.

[End of Interview – 01:22:28]

