

NEWSLETTER No.16

When the Association was formed in 1973 the main object was to provide a means by which retired members of both WVS and WRVS who wanted to remain "friends" of the Service could meet others who had worked with them throughout the years and through the dissemination of news and information be kept aware of what the WRVS of the day was doing. To achieve this we admitted members who were still serving if they felt it a useful method of keeping in touch and in this way a bridge was made between the older members, particularly of the WVS vintage and others, many of whom were still working.

The last nine years have been an exciting time in the history of our Service and I am more than grateful to have been the Association's Chairman during this particular decade of our history. Three succeeding national Chairmen have found that the aims and structure of the Service as laid down by our Founder, Lady Reading, have stood the test of time. The last 45 years have seen considerable development of the Social Services of this country, demanding constant changes in our priorities, but more dramatic still have been the recent changes in our society as a whole which have given rise to much variation in the needs of the people we serve and differing demands have required changes in attitudes, more tolerance and understanding together with a new form of self dedication.

If our Association is to be more than an opportunity to get together and talk about our past achievements and way of doing things, we too, must move with the times, using vision and imagination to see how best we can support the Service to which we are still proud to belong.

Last year I said we would be giving a great deal of consideration to a formal Constitution for the Association and after several drafts, the Committee have now agreed on a Constitution, a copy of which is attached to the Agenda for the Annual General Meeting on June 2nd. The Constitution will not become operative until it has been confirmed at the AGM in June and will not affect present membership. The Association has now within its ranks many ex-County, some ex-Area Organisers and other retired members able to build up strong local units and there is no fear of us becoming "an old people's club", but it is generally agreed that in future active members should not feel the need to join in order to maintain contact with retired members, as this can be done by Association members being invited to open meetings held at local or county level, and Organisers at all levels being invited to attend Association meetings and being given an opportunity of speaking about the current activities of WRVS. In this way the Association, while remaining an independent body, can be regarded as an integral part of the Service and an ongoing section to which active members can look forward to joining as they reach the time when they feel they should be giving up some of their responsibilities.

If you can make your own Group a welcoming and caring unit we shall all go on together from strength to strength.

K. M. HALPIN, Chairman

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE

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RETURN OF THE ICE AGE - OR WAS IT THE FLOOD? WRVS WERE THERE

No member of the Association will be surprised to know that during the last winter, whenever one read in the Press, heard on the radio or saw on television, accounts of motorists and others stranded or trapped by blizzards, fog, floods or other natural disasters, WRVS, as usual, were there! Perhaps, because the public have come to expect this of the Service, rarely is any mention made of the part played by our members, so we thought it would be of interest to extract from a Headquarters Report, some of the incidents in which WRVS members were involved.

Snow/Blizzard Conditions

The earliest reports were for the 13th/14th December when many Rest Centres were set up for a large number of stranded people, coach passengers and motorists in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Herts, Norfolk, Yorkshire and Bedfordshire; in Suffolk - bus loads of school children, stranded after attending a carol concert and 25 airmen were cared for. The sites of the Rest Centres were even more varied - an Old People's Day Centre, WRVS Day Club, Police Station, Magistrates' Courts, Church Halls and a closed ward in a Hospital.

Numbers of both helpers and helped also varied greatly in the two December days and then later when WRVS were manning switchboards in the Emergency Control Room in County Hall, Devon, as well as using the WRVS network to help the elderly, mothers with young babies and others at risk through electricity failures and other hazards; and in Scotland, Humberside, Lincolnshire and Shropshire serving soup, tea and sandwiches for motorists trapped in freezing fog and snow. At Caister in Lincolnshire where a coach was stranded, hot drinks, blankets and breakfast were provided by WRVS members who had been called out by a member - in contrast to most of the others who had been alerted by the Police or Social Services

As would be expected most of these services were needed during the hours of darkness, as exemplified by teams of eight in Berkshire who served refreshments to approximately 300 persons stranded on snow-blocked roads from 1800 to 1030 hours the following day, and in another area coach passengers dug out of snowdrifts were given tea, breakfast and blankets between the hours of 0050 and 1200.

Flooding

Reports came from Strathclyde and Dunfermline in Scotland, Liverpool, Isle of Wight and Avon, where again Rest Centres were opened for people evacuated from flooded homes as well as refreshments provided for firemen, police and other emergency services.

Devastation on the Somerset and Avon Coast: Margaret Soloman, Avon County Food Organiser, reported that "on the night of Sunday, 13th December, 1981, disaster struck the whole coastline of Somerset and Avon, leaving a trail of destruction and misery, the worst in living memory. High tides backed by gale force winds smashed through the sea defences sending walls

of water inland. As soon as the news was broadcast on the TV and Radio the WRVS Emergency Teams were alerted and awaited their call out. When this came a team went to the worst areas and the sights they saw and tales heard were unbelievable. The village of Uphill, near Weston-super-Mare, was struck first by a huge tidal wave which swept through two-thirds of the village, 5 to 6 feet deep. Anyone living in a bungalow had to be hastily rescued by boat and house owners had to cling to stairs. One lady was terrified by the arrival of a cow which crashed through her lounge window together with a torrent of sea and sewer water; another lady struggled to rescue her husband's artificial leg as it swirled past her. Another elderly lady saw a box with her life savings float away; when recovered by workmen it was found to contain thousands of pounds.

WRVS teams provided a continuous supply of tea, soup, etc., and over the next fourteen days 2,000 hot meals were served from the Meals on Wheels kitchens. Two Rest Centres were set up and refreshments provided for Council workers, R.A.F. personnel, police and volunteers. A clothing store was opened and received gifts of blankets and really good quality clothes.

The great British spirit of survival showed everywhere despite terrible weather conditions. When darkness fell the battered houses were lit with candles and people shared any small comforts they had. As soon as electricity was restored, several houses lit up Christmas trees in their front windows to cheer up the bleak scene".

#### Other Emergencies

It is also of interest to record that, in addition to the difficulties caused by bad weather being experienced by members carrying out their routine day-to-day work, especially delivering meals and making visits to those at risk, WRVS members were involved in other emergency work, including the following:

In Bristol a team of seven members ran a mobile canteen, feeding police, firemen and rescue workers when three houses were demolished and forty others damaged by a gas explosion. A few days later seventeen members were involved in a similar accident in another part of the City.

St. John's Ambulance called WRVS out in West Devon when "a chaotic road accident" involving a petrol tanker, a coach of elderly people, a farm tractor, a motor cyclist and A.T.C. cadets resulted in two deaths and 40 casualties. WRVS provided emergency clothing, tea and sandwiches for 100 members of St. John's Ambulance Brigade, the Fire Service, Police and the victims.

In West Derbyshire the Police requested the help of WRVS to provide sandwiches, soup, tea, etc., for about 500 volunteers who were searching for a missing boy in Tideswell.

After a very bad train crash in Buckinghamshire, British Rail asked WRVS for refreshments for the rescue workers and passengers temporarily housed at a Golf Club.

Finally, "WRVS were there" during the tragic disaster that hit the headlines of national and international Press when the SS Union Star and the Penlee lifeboat were wrecked. From 0030 to 0530 hours teams were supplying tea, coffee and food to 150 workers as well as producing dry clothing for the Lizard lifeboat crew.

## REPORTS FROM AREAS

LONDON has recently been divided into Areas and is now, therefore, organised in the same pattern as the rest of England and Wales. The new grouping of London Boroughs has been based on the Emergency Services divisions of which there are five, but for the time being there is a sixth WRVS Area around the City of London. All the Areas will be invited to appoint Association Representatives who will sit on the National Committee. It is likely, however, that they will combine for their annual reunions.

NORTH WEST DIVISION, Area 1 - Cumbria & Lancashire. The new Area Representative, Mrs. Anne Spibey, has been busy making initial plans; she has contacted as many people as possible and looks forward to further development.

NORTH WEST DIVISION, Area 4 - Cheshire & Merseyside. Mrs. Mary Preston, the Area Representative, reports that membership of the Association is steadily increasing and has, to date, reached 53. There will be a special welcome to Mrs. Jane Rawlinson, who, although considerably disabled since a serious accident, hopes to be able to attend their meetings.

The Annual Reunion is to be held on 22nd April at the Floral Hall Restaurant, Southport. The previous one was in Chester and it is hoped that varying the venue will enable more to attend.

NORTH EAST DIVISION, Area 1 - Northumbria. Mrs. C.V. Smurthwaite, the recently appointed Area Representative, in reporting that the Association in Northumbria is "off the ground", states that their efforts, which have been concentrated in establishing Local Representatives in all areas in Northumbria, have met with success.

The first Area meeting was held on March 17th in the WRVS Area Office, Newcastle-on-Tyne. As it is such an extensive area, they have plans to keep in close touch with each other with a Northumbria Newsletter and to have reunions at least once a year.

MIDLANDS DIVISION, Area 1 - West Midlands. The Warwickshire group held two meetings in 1981, "get-togethers" for a bar lunch which were very popular. The second was in December for a pre-Christmas gathering and luckily just missed the first heavy snow. Dame Frances Clode's presence on both occasions was much appreciated. In December, Mrs. Olive Wright, an old friend of so many Warwickshire members and now the Association's Area Representative, and Mrs. Rose, the new County Organiser, were made most welcome.

MIDLANDS DIVISION, Area 2 - East Midlands Counties. There was splendid support at the first meeting held in this Area, called together by the newly-appointed Area Representative, Mrs. Alys Tyler. A Reunion for the whole Area is planned for June 16th.

MIDLANDS DIVISION, Area 3 - West Midlands Metropolitan County. Mrs. Elizabeth Kenrick, who writes that she is still having to hobble about slowly after her second accident last year, states that the activities in this Area were upset by the awful weather of this winter. However, they managed to hold a coffee morning in early March and plan to organise a lunch towards the end of May to make up for their "missed" Christmas gathering. A party of 22 members enjoyed a visit to the School of Music opera.

HOME COUNTIES/ANGLIA DIVISION, Area 1 - Home Counties. From the Narrative Report of St. Albans, we read of a "delightful Garden Party held last summer" in the garden of the Hertfordshire County representative, Mrs. E. Sewell.

SOUTH EAST DIVISION, Area 1 - South East. Miss Joanna Barnard, the Area Representative, sends the following report from Surrey: "With a membership of 112, two flourishing County Groups have been formed. In January, Woking held its first big reunion since its inaugural meeting in September followed by a coffee morning in February. Waverley had a buffet lunch in January and has several future events planned, including a County meeting".

There is also to be an Association lunch at the Eastbourne WRVS Office on 24th April but news of this will have to wait until the next Newsletter as well as a report on the Chairman's visit to Tunbridge Wells to which the Association has been lucky enough to be invited.

SOUTH WEST DIVISION, Area 1 - South East.

Wiltshire: The Narrative Report from West Wiltshire District reports on a "get together" and lunch held in Steeple Ashton when, as it is so usual, members were delighted to meet and chat to friends they had not seen for sometime.

WALES. Here again the weather prevented the holding of a number of planned activities, especially in South & Mid Glamorgan; nevertheless, members continue to meet for coffee once a month and managed to have their Christmas lunch.

Members in Dyfed, too, still find popular their lunches held every second month and their special Christmas lunch was well attended. Mrs. Mowat, the Association Representative for Wales, also reports that Wrexham Maelor Group had an enjoyable meeting on 26th March 1982 arranged by Mrs. Greenway and her band at Cefn Mawr. They had a most interesting talk by the Rev. Mrs. Crewse, who, before her marriage had been a Salvation Army Officer, and she gave hitherto unrealised insight into their training and work. Wrexham Maelor meet regularly and Rhyl occasionally. A member of the Rhyl group celebrated her 90th birthday in hospital, surrounded with flowers and was radiant despite having broken both legs.

SCOTLAND. Extract from Scottish Information Sheet, January 1982:

"A Reunion of Scottish Headquarters and Lothian Region was held at Scottish Headquarters on 10th December from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Nearly forty members attended; coffee and biscuits were served as they arrived and the noise of conversation rose steadily. At 11 o'clock Mrs. Crabbie, Chairman of the Association in Scotland, introduced Mrs. Corsar, Chairman Scotland and President of the Scottish Section of the Association, who gave a most inspiring talk.

Mrs. Kinnaird and Mrs. Scott, Organisers for Lothian Region and Edinburgh District respectively, gave accounts of current work.

A lively discussion followed and could have gone on for more than one meeting in the year and it was obvious that there were lots of ideas to be followed up. As it was clear that a more informal meeting before long would be popular, this was arranged."

"THERE'S ALWAYS TOMORROW" - by Anna Neagle.

Mrs. Doreen Harris has drawn our attention to the following extract from Anna Neagle's autobiography:

"Early in the run of "Glorious Days" a compliment was paid me which came as a great surprise - and honour; I was invited to become a member of the Executive Committee of the King George VI Memorial Foundation. The only other woman was Stella, Marchioness of Reading, known to all as the Founder of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.

It had been decided that the monies donated by the British people should be used to benefit the elderly and the youth of the country. Lady Reading with her expert knowledge was invited to be Chairman of the Sub-Committee dealing specifically with the elderly. Her suggestions for the best use to which the monies could be put and seeing the various projects carried through were masterly.

The Committee consisted of a number of eminent men in many fields, but in my opinion none spoke or expressed his views with greater clarity than Lady Reading.

Meetings of the Committee were held over a period of seven years. Toward the end when the funds had been distributed, the Chairman invited Lady Reading to report on her particular activities. She made a complete survey, prefaced with 'my colleagues at (say) Glasgow have now completed equipping the Hostel', or, 'I am assured by colleagues at (say) Wolverhampton that the decorations will be completed in time for the Old People's Club, etc., etc., and the special ramp for wheelchairs has been delivered'.

When she sat down there was a general murmur of agreement and approval, a question or two after which the Chairman turned to her, saying: 'Is there anything else you would like to add, Lady Reading?'

'Yes', she replied disarmingly, 'I rather expected to take back to my colleagues, who have worked so hard, a vote of thanks from the Committee'.

A rare person indeed, with her administration ability, understanding and charm. How glad I am to have known her."

We invited Mrs. Beryl Maxwell, who is in charge of both Premises Ltd. and the Residential Club Department at Headquarters, to let us have a note on the King George VI Foundation Clubs today. She has sent us the following:

Four Clubs were set up with money provided exclusively from the King George VI Foundation. These were in Bootle, Stoke-on-Trent, Port Talbot and Dundee and they are all, some 26 years afterwards, still running and very active. They are at present all in their original buildings, though over the years repairs have been needed and some of the buildings have been extended out of all recognition to cope with the greater volume of activity. Each is still run by a local committee and the WRVS is responsible for the administration and the organisation of the Clubs.

Apart from these four Clubs which were initially financed completely from the King George VI Foundation, a number of other Clubs were started at the same time with a contribution from the Foundation and the rest of the money contributed by the WRVS Trust. These are run on the lines of all other WRVS All-Day or Afternoon and Evening Clubs for the Elderly and most still flourish.

The activities have not really changed over the years because the elderly seem to like their leisure pursuits to be traditional ones, but the Management Committees and the WRVS who organise the Clubs are always trying to be innovators and new ideas, where acceptable, are tried.

The King George VI Foundation Clubs are ones of which we can be very proud. They take their place alongside the 1,738 Clubs (Afternoon, Evening and All-Day) which WRVS runs. Afternoon and Evening Clubs are usually purely for leisure activities; All-Day Clubs provide a lunch in addition.

#### OBITUARIES

We are sorry to learn since the publication of our last Newsletter of the deaths of the following members:

Mrs. D.K.S. Bowring - Avon  
Mrs. M.L. Groves - East Sussex  
Mrs. S. Green - Worcestershire  
Miss W.N. Kennett - Essex  
Mrs. L.M. Marfleet - Derby  
Mrs. V. Neale - Solihull  
Mrs. E.M. Palmer - Gloucestershire  
Miss H.B. Prior - Nottinghamshire  
Mrs. M.G. Rickards - Avon  
Mrs. J. Ropson - Merseyside  
Mrs. K.W. Wood - Norfolk

#### NEW YEAR HONOURS - 1982

Congratulations are extended to the following:

MBE: Mrs. Mary Theodora Cooke, County Organiser, East Sussex.  
Mrs. Mary Elizabeth McMaster, Services Welfare Organiser,  
Princess Marina College, Arborfield, Reading.  
Mrs. Lily Ziegler, Metropolitan District Organiser, Wakefield.

BEM: Mrs. Winifred Beasley, Emergency Services Officer, Altrincham.  
Mrs. Marjorie Buckley, District Hospital Organiser, Chichester.  
Mrs. Marion Joan Eccleston, WRVS Meals on Wheels Organiser, Devon  
Mrs. Dulcie Mary Heald, Local Organiser, Barry, Wales  
Mrs. Elsie May McCambridge, Emergency Services Organiser, Cumbria.

#### For Services to the Community

MBE: Mrs. Charlotte Proctor Anderson, Grantown-on-Spey.  
Mrs. Gladys Lillian Mallinson, Huddersfield.  
Mrs. Grace Wilkes, West Midlands.

BEM: Mrs. Mary Berry, Great Harwood, Lancashire  
Mrs. Marjorie Lathe, Wolverhampton

WVS/WRVS ASSOCIATION

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President

MRS. BARBARA SHENFIELD

Chairman

Miss Kathleen Halpin, CBE

Hon. Secretary

Mrs. Isola Wren

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Miss Freda Cooper

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Mrs. Doris Moss, OBE

Members of Committee 1981-1982

Miss Enid Cubitt, MBE

Miss Jose Duke, MBE

Mrs. Dilys Gloin

Mrs. Doreen Harris, OBE

Mrs. Doris Moss, OBE

Mrs. Mary Wilkinson

Area Representatives - ex officio members:

LONDON

- Mrs. J. Sanderson

NORTH WEST DIVISION - Area 1.

- Mrs. A. Spibey

Area 4.

- Mrs. M. Preston

NORTH EAST DIVISION - Area 1.

- Mrs. C.V. Smurthwaite, MBE

Area 3.

- Mrs. D. Stokes, MBE

MIDLANDS DIVISION - Area 1.

- Mrs. O. Wright, MBE

Area 2.

- Mrs. A. Tyler

Area 3.

- Mrs. H.M. Cooper, MBE

- Mrs. E. Kenrick

HOME/COUNTIES ANGLIA DIVISION

Area 3.

- Mrs. Piers Currie

SOUTH EAST DIVISION - Area 1.

- Miss J. Barnard, OBE

SOUTH WEST DIVISION - Area 1.

- Mrs. K. Barker, BEM

Area 2.

- Mrs. M.E. Coyle

WALES

- Mrs. K. Mowat, MBE.

SCOTLAND

- Mrs. V. Crabbie, CBE

For addresses of Area Representatives see NEWSLETTER No.15, November 1981.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND REUNION

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH HALL, BROMPTON ROAD, LONDON, SW7

Wednesday, 2nd June, 1982

Invitation with full details enclosed