

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

Ref. No.: ASHK

Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Ashburner

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Kathleen

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer 1970-present (2015)

1970-present (2015) Leader of the Baxenden

WRVS Autumn Club

Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To): 31/03/2015 (Track 1)

Location of Interview: Interviewees home, Baxenden, Accrington, Lancashire.

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Name of Interviewer: Jennifer Anne Hunt

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Interviewer's Notes:

Kathleen Ashburner (KA) talks about being the Leader of the Baxenden WRVS Autumn club, a role she has performed since she joined WRVS in 1970 and one which she still does today. She discusses the outings she has arranged, the parties they have had and the characters she has come across whilst helping with the club. She also talks about her role within Emergency Services and the other members she has work with. She concludes by discussing what she feels is the future for the Royal Voluntary Service.

Time (HH:MM:SS)	Synopsis
00:00:11	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Would you please introduce yourself? KA introduces herself as the leader of the over 60's club in Baxenden, which she has been since 1970. They meet every Wednesday in the local Conservative Club. She mentions that when she originally took over there were over 40 members, talks about them filling the hall with any new members having to stand and wait to be seated, as everyone had their own place. She names those volunteers who helped her run the club.</p>
00:01:47	<p>Why did you join WRVS? KA outlines that Mrs Nora Davis was the leader of the club but as the demand increased for her services as a secretary in the junior school, she was looking for someone to take over the club and asked KA if she would take over. KA explains that she was not aware that the club was run by WRVS but that she had seen the old people coming out of the conservative club every Wednesday at 4pm. She mentions that as she liked running things and being on committees she took on the role. KA explains that having moved to the farm she was seen as an 'incomer' within Baxenden and that through working with the club she now knows everybody and had made some very good friends.</p>
00:03:42	<p>Which year did you join WRVS? 1970, with KA mentioning that she remembers it as the same year decimalisation was introduced, remembering that a lady came to the club to give a talk and to try and help the members understand the new system, which seemed absolutely impossible at the time. KA says she thinks she took over the running of the club in October 1970 as not long after joining she had to arrange the Christmas party. She talks about this party, describing what food was served and that there was a concert, with the local coach firm arranging to take the ladies home in the evening.</p>
00:06:36	<p>What did you know about WRVS before you joined? KA said she knew nothing, that she was busy on the committee for Haslington Grammar School, had three children to look after and just kept herself busy. So she did not know about the WRVS before joining, stating that she soon realised that a lot of people were also unaware of it.</p>
	<p>The Baxenden WRVS Autumn Club</p>

00:07:26	<p>Do you have any other memories of your first few weeks/months at the club?</p> <p>KA says the role initially involved getting to know the members and all their different characters. She describes the couple who decided to get married, and that the role allowed her to get to know how the over 60's thought, describing that she was only a young one, being 40 at the time she first got involved with the club.</p> <p>She explains that she had to arrange the programme of events, book entertainment, organised bingo and dominos. She talks about the Mayor giving the club a donation one year which was used to buy a lovely new set of dominos.</p> <p>She talks about the outings she had to arrange and that she found a lot of businesses, like the potteries, were happy to have them for tours. Such as the Hornsea pottery which was a favourite trip with everyone coming home with some pottery. She also describes the places the club has visited such as the Lake District, Grassington one summer for tea, and the Palace Theatre in Manchester. KA also talks about the time two members represented the club at an over 60's talent competition, held in Morecombe. One member played the organ with another, who was a baritone, accompanying him. They did not win but everyone had a great day out.</p>
00:11:41	<p>How many did you used to take on a trip?</p> <p>She explains that there would have been a full coach, and for the original trips out they had to take two coaches. The club originally started in a place called Baxenden Mission, but when the mission was sold to turn in to houses the Conservative Club invited the club there. KA also lists all of the amateur plays the club has been to see by the Oswaldtwistle, Townhall. She then lists the other businesses the club has visited, such as Warburton and Beechams. She explains that these trips are not undertaken anymore because there are not the facilities or funding to undertake them.</p>
00:13:20	<p>Were the trips originally funded by WRVS?</p> <p>KA says no, the club saved up, collecting every week for a trip, explaining that the Mayor has sometimes given a donation to the club which has been used to fund a coach for the trips, with the members just needing to pay for their tea. She describes that the tea the members enjoyed the most was at Bonds, in Elswick, near Blackpool. She also describes the tea they used to put on in the Women's Institute's wooden building, listing all the cakes that were laid out. She recalls that some of the women were noted for having one of each cake available.</p>
00:15:01	<p>How would you describe the building you are in?</p> <p>She describes that the building is not ideal for talking to the members in as they all have to sit around the room making it difficult to see everyone or be heard, with lots of comments being 'What did she say?' She explains that the building is divided into two, at the left is a big snooker room and at the right is the lounge, with it being improved a lot over the years, as one member does a lot of work to the building. KA says that if they ever do have any dinners or events at the hall they are held upstairs in the ballroom. She explains that the other difficulty are the four steps up to the front door which have eventually put a lot of members off as they are difficult to tackle.</p>
00:17:03	<p>How many members did you have when you first became a leader?</p>

00:19:14	<p>KA thinks there were about 45 because the club had been running for about 10 years by the time she joined. She said that there would have been enough members to fill a coach, which leads her on to describing the problems she had encountered with the coach trips, such as losing two members in Southport. She also describes the time they lost a lady in Bolton which resulted in having to go to the police station to report her missing. It then began to snow so they had to return home without her, only to find out that the lost members had travelled to her daughters in Manchester and so had got a lift home from her.</p> <p>How did you feel when you did have people go missing on a trip?</p> <p>KA said that she felt responsible and that she just had to think of the best way to find them. She says that it luckily did not happen often. She mentions that she found the best way was to arrange for the coach to drop the club members in the centre of town and also pick them up from there so they would know where to meet.</p>
00:20:11	<p>Did your role change over time?</p> <p>She says no, going on to talk about all of the support she has had from her family, with her son even helping to move plates from home to the club when events were taking place. She says that she has really enjoyed the experience, explaining that she often gets asked how she manages to think of something for the club to do every week. She says she deals with this problem by spending Tuesday evening working out a quiz mentioning that this task has become a lot easier with the invention of the computer.</p>
00:22:03	<p>You have mentioned some of the volunteers who have helped you, have there been any others who have helped over the years?</p> <p>KA mentions that at the beginning of the minute book there is a list of those who have helped with the club, such as Mrs Garlick who could help because the Newspaper shop she owned closed on a Wednesday. She mentions that Mrs Cowpe kept the books for the club and that Norma Jones at one time did the accounts. She said there was also a Miss Ingham, a Miss Green, and that everyone was so keen to begin with. Another was Mabel Morehouse and Mr Metcalfe, all of them being local people.</p> <p>She explains that they would come in, especially at the Christmas time, when more help was needed. KA also talks about the two men who would come in and play as accompaniment for the entertainers. She mentions that at some point the piano was taken out of the club and was replaced with a organ, which did not suit many of the singers, but they managed.</p> <p>She explains that the club used to give donations to various charities, such as the Hospice in Blackburn, which needed donations, or St Dunstan's, explaining that there was a lovely entertainer called Bill Griffiths who had been wounded during the Second World War, being blinded and losing both his hands. He worked for St Dunstan's and came and spoke about their work one year. This led to him coming every year after that to entertain the club with his wife, with a friend accompanying them. One of the members of the club also had an open house event to raise funds for the Hospital.</p>
00:27:19	<p>How did you raise funds for these different charities?</p> <p>For St Dunstan's it was a donation from the club funds, but for the others the club may hold a special raffle or a special tea party, or just use the club funds.</p>

00:28:53	<p>How did you get the club funds?</p> <p>KA outlines that initially members would pay very little every week, thrupence ha'penny in old money, with this slowly increasing to 5p and then to its current charge of £1. Before the £1 fee the club used to receive extra donations from their match box scheme. This was where everyone was given a match box, which they would fill with spare coppers, and every week they brought them in, counted up the change and gave each member a named thank you. This however stopped once the fees were increased to £1 a week, with the members feeling that they were paying enough. KA also explains that a raffle is held every week where everyone contributes something, so they all get a prize. At the beginning of the year they pay a £1 membership fee, with KA explaining that that is not a lot now that there are only eight members of the club. She explains that the funds are dwindling; with the organisers paying half of the Christmas meal last year with the members contributing the other half. She explains that she is not sure what will happen this year for Christmas and that she it is possible that may be closed, with the remaining money being spent on its members.</p>
00:31:36	<p>You mention there were quite a few characters; do you remember any of them?</p> <p>KA says that she remembers the little couple that got married, and that there were always problems with new people coming in and taking a regular members seat. She describes one member, Margaret, who insisted on making the tea every week, with any member who had a job to do being reluctant to give it to someone else. After Margaret there was Alice who, even after being registered partially blind, would not give up her role of pouring the tea. KA outlines that there are now only six members and that they do not want to help with the running of the club, coming instead to be looked after.</p>
00:35:35	<p>You also mentioned that you have tea parties as Easter?</p> <p>KA mentions that they are having one this week on Wednesday and that she had been busy boxing up the Easter eggs ready. She says that she has been buying supplies from the pound shops, like little bags to put Easter eggs and is planning on arranging an Easter egg hunt around the snooker tables. She mentions that she is not sure how the members will react but that they will have to get out of their chairs and walk round.</p> <p>She also talks about the birthday party the clubs holds every September. She says that the look for any excuse to have a party, such as any Royal family occasion. The club has celebrated the 50th Anniversary, the Golden Jubilee and the wedding, saying that they celebrated the wedding with members of a local residential home. For the occasion she arranged with her daughter, who owns a wedding shop, to have hats for everyone to wear. She mentions that the club has been invited by the home to visit them every Wednesday but the members of the club find the home too warm and say that the residents are too old and so do not want to sit with them.</p>
00:38:54	<p>Did you also celebrate WRVS anniversaries?</p> <p>KA says yes but that the members had to be told what they were celebrating as they did not know at first, but yes, any excuse for a party.</p>
00:39:08	<p>Did you celebrate with the rest of the WRVS?</p>

	<p>KA says no going on to describe what happened to the other services in the local area. She says that WRVS used to be in Accrington when she first joined and that they had a clothing section which was run by Miss Gregson. When she died the clothing petered out. The office was then closed because of changing over, so WRVS in Accrington has disappeared. There used to be quite a good emergency team led by Mrs Freeman; however members gradually dropped out until there was only a KA and another member call Irene. KA then explains that she was involved with the Emergency Services, a role which helped her learn more about other nationalities, with it being interesting.</p>
00:40:40	<p>Emergency services</p> <p>When did you join the emergency services team?</p> <p>KA explains that she became involved almost two years after joining WRVS, travelling to Blackburn to be trained such as how to keep records and lists of names. She says that these roles were slowly taken away from WRVS members and they were left to brew the tea.</p>
00:41:16	<p>Did you have practical training sessions?</p> <p>KA says that yes they did and she can remember attending a practice session at a school in Bacup. People were brought in to represent those who had been affected by an emergency and she had to give them soup and bread, which was when KA first tasted tomato and basil soup. KA says that these were very interesting things to take part in. She goes on to mention that she had read in Action magazine that it is felt that there is not the need any more for such a service, due to the supermarkets being able to meet the needs, but that she feels there is still a need for someone to brew tea and serve it.</p>
00:44:35	<p>You mentioned you were involved in clothing the Kosovan refugees when they came over?</p> <p>KA says yes and that her role was to help sort the clothing which had been donated as part of an appeal. She says that the Emergency Team from Preston organised it all. She talks about the Kosovan's being based in Calderstone's Hospital which was on the verge of closing down. She describes that the clothing came in, in droves with them being quite overwhelmed. There were some really nice items and their job was to sort the rubbish items. They never managed to get through all of the clothing and so it was transferred to another part of the building and turned into a dress shop, for the refugees to choose from.</p>
00:47:21	<p>Were there any big emergency's you were called out to?</p> <p>Not really no, with KA describing the type of emergency they would attend, such as a house fire where everyone from that area was evacuated to the sports centre. She says that as nobody had to stay in, they were giving food and then taken to B&B's, it was not a real emergency and that she was never really involved in one where she had to stay overnight.</p>
00:48:57	<p>Did you have any equipment that you kept at home?</p> <p>Yes a flask for hot water, which needs to be filled up before KA attends an emergency</p>

00:50:43	<p>along with her tabard and a pad and pen, which she has all ready in a bag.</p> <p>Were there other volunteers that you used to go on emergencies with? KA used to drive and pick Irene up and that at the beginning there was another lady and Mrs Freeman, but gradually it just became Irene and KA.</p>
00:51:31	<p>You haven't recently been called to any emergencies? KA says no, maybe there have not been any or maybe we have refused to go out to the longer distance ones. KA then goes on to describe a time when the male residents of Hilltop Hostel came to visit the club, which was arranged because the Matron there was also involved with the Autumn club. She explains that five of the gentlemen became members. She then mentions that they used to get a donation from the police every year but that then stopped. There was also a local council arrangement whereby each area of Accrington had its own council so the club received donations from them to pay for the Christmas party; however these individual councils have also now stopped. KA explains that the is, if you want to do something have to afford it yourself.</p>
00:56:08	<p>Are there any other services or work you have been involved with within WRVS? KA says no because she stipulated when she joined WRVS that she only wanted to do the Autumn club, deciding in time that she could also help with emergencies because the work was mainly in the evenings.</p>
00:57:04	<p>How did you feel when you were called out to an emergency? KA describes feeling interested, stating that she likes organising people, meeting different people and helping those in need.</p>
00:57:40	<p>Did you have much involvement with the wider WRVS? KA says no and they originally when WRVS was run from Preston there was involvement. There would be the occasional meeting in Blackburn with those higher up, but nothing much, with KA saying that she feels that things were changing during the time she joined and that it's been changing ever since. KA describes that all of the members have received their for 40 years service, with Nora Jones receiving her 50 years medal as she joined during the Second World War. She mentions that although they have been invited to go to the services in London they have not attended, with Nora only going because her son lives in London. KA then talks about not being sure where the charity will end up, noting that it says in Action magazine that it might have to merge with another charity. She then goes on to talk about Age Concern in Accrington who have made the Autumn club really cross because they have decided to put on a dance every Wednesday in the local town hall, the same time as the club meets. KA says fortunately, none of her members want to go, but she felt it was a bit mean. She says that she had a feeling that they were not really with us, trying to do the same things that the WRVS were trying to do. This leads KA to talk about the importance of being there to help take people home from hospital, talking about her experiences of helping Nora, who does not want to move in to a home but still requires a lot of help. She mentions that the hospital is not very co-operative, making the process of knowing when she is being discharged</p>

	<p>difficult.</p> <p>KA then remembers that she did occasionally help at the shop in Blackburn Hospital but that she was not very good at using the till. This was not continued when the Hospital was rebuilt with WH Smiths taking over instead. She explains that to begin with she went round with the trolley shop and that this was hard work as you were up and down in the lifts and round the wards, having to deal with the money quickly. She mentions that it was interesting but she said she would prefer to work in the shop.</p>
01:05:04	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>Is there anything that we haven't talked about today that you would like to mention?</p> <p>KA describes that when she first joined they used to collect old woollens, as they could re-cycle them. They called the man who took the wool to get money for it 'Mr Woollen's' and that the funds would then go to the Autumn club.</p> <p>She also mentions the very good concert party which was arranged by the Nurses from the Accrington Victoria Hospital, who called themselves 'the Victorians'.</p> <p>She also talks about the very good stewards who go in and put on the heating before the club starts, saying that she is even trusted with the keys to the building.</p> <p>As the local Doctor, Dr Sloane, had looked after many of the members of the club, he was invited upon his retirement to come to tea where he was presented with a picture of the road in Baxenden.</p> <p>KA then remembers that the committee has also entertained the club and that they practiced singing in her house before all dressing up and performing. She mentions that the song, tulips from Amsterdam, was particularly tricky to learn, taking a long time to get that right. KA talks about the club always celebrating Chinese New Year, with her using her Mother in Laws silk dressing gowns as Chinese costumes, helping the members making Chinese hats. She says that they have had some very happy afternoons and that they still do.</p>
01:10:20	<p>Overall, how had WRVS changed since you joined?</p> <p>KA says that there are too many big salaries, it has gotten too big at the top end. She outlines that what she does not like are the raffles tickets, finding it hard to sell these to just the five members who attend the club.</p>
01:12:30	<p>Where do you think Royal Voluntary Service's place in society is today?</p> <p>KA thinks more needs to be done to help those coming home from hospital, feeling that this is very important. She feels that the emergency services are now a lot smaller and the hospital shops have gone completely and that everything is running down. She notes that this is definitely the case with over 60's clubs.</p>
01:14:08	<p>What do you think is the future for the Royal Voluntary Service?</p> <p>KA feels that they need to find a very, very useful thing to do, possibly the hospital should be worked with. There are a lot of volunteers and they need managing and a centre to work from.</p>
01:15:22	<p>What has been your most memorable moment?</p>

	<p>KA says that nothing is extra memorable but that it is really nice when she is thanked. She always receives a present at Christmas to say thank you and that's what I appreciate. I've enjoyed everything that we do. KA has enjoyed making friends and bossing them about.</p>
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