

# Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

## Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

**Ref. No.:** HIGG

**Collection Title:** Voices of Volunteering

**Interviewee's Surname:** Highley

**Title:** Mrs

**Interviewee's Forenames:** Gillian

**Gender:** F

**Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:**

Volunteer 1965-Present (2014), Halifax, West Yorkshire  
Lunch Clubs  
Old Peoples Welfare Organiser  
Emergency Services  
WRVS Association

**Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To):** 06/06/2014 (Track 1)

**Location of Interview:** Interviewees Home, Halifax, West Yorkshire

**Location Interview Deposited:** Royal Voluntary Service Archive & Heritage Collection, Devizes, Wiltshire

**Name of Interviewer:** Jennifer Anne Hunt

**Type of Recorder:** H4n Zoom

**Total no. tracks:** 1

**Mono or Stereo:** Stereo

**Recording Format:** WAV 44.1/16

**Total Duration:** 01:56:13

**Additional Material:** Bibliography Form and Recording Agreement

**Copyright:** Royal Voluntary Service

**Clearance:** Yes

**Interviewer's Notes:**

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

and her most treasured memories of being a volunteer.

Time (HH:MM:SS)	Synopsis
[00:00:09]	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p><b>Gillian would you just introduce yourself for me please?</b>  GH mentions she has been a member of WRVS for 49 years, joined in 1965. Talks about not having a car but having a driving licence and wanting something to do. Joined MOW so she would have driving to do once a week. Comments on visiting the WRVS office for a driving test. GH did MOW during the summer holidays talks about a member falling over with the gravy container.</p> <p><b>What is your earliest memory of WVS/WRVS?</b>  GH mentions WVS selling National Saving Stamps during the Second World War.</p> <p><b>What did you know about WRVS before you joined?</b>  Only knew about MOW and work for troops during the war.</p> <p><b>Were there any other reasons for joining WVS?</b>  GH did not think so, just wanted voluntary work and came from a family that had always been in volunteering and service such as the police and fire service.</p>
[00:03:48]	<p><b>Meals-on-Wheels</b></p> <p><b>You started off with MOW, How would you describe your role?</b>  GH comments on collecting the meals from the Town Hall, hotlocks and how they were heated, putting dishes into aluminium containers, served the dinner on the plates. Talks about how MOW was an eye opener not having lived in Halifax for very long as people lived in through by light houses. GH talks about the conditions people lived in, one old man slept on a pile of rugs in the corner and another had a spoon where half the bowl had worn away.</p> <p><b>How did you feel about experiencing these conditions that people lived in?</b>  GH said it was certainly an eye opener, but did not think about it much when studying at London University she had done voluntary work in the East End.</p> <p><b>What types of meal were you serving?</b>  GH says they were a meat and two veg, does not really remember fish because there was no parsley sauce. Talks about the dinners being put into tinfoil containers and then frozen after she had given up MOW.</p> <p><b>What were the people receiving the meals like?</b></p>

[00:08:31]	<p>GH mentions they were ‘really nice salt of the earth people’, took a while to get used to each other. GH thought it was because she spoke differently the people she saw had all been mill workers, very outspoken and brusque.</p> <p><b>How would you describe the areas you were delivering meals in?</b>  GH talks about it being a hilly area, cobbled streets, back to back houses, washing strung up across the streets. Often had to move a line of washing to creep underneath it. GH mentions what it was like to drive around the area, in bad weather hills were difficult to negotiate. Mostly delivering in the town and all organised by social services.</p> <p><b>Where did you collect the meals from?</b>  Firstly meals were collected from the back of the town hall and in later years were collected from a school.</p> <p><b>Who did you work with on the MOW rounds?</b>  GH comments that she worked with anybody who needed a partner because she did not have a regular round.</p> <p><b>How did you feel about the MOW service you were providing?</b>  GH felt it was very good, good value for money. ‘Had a few funny instances’ mentions that when you had a spare dinner you left it with the last person on the round. Talks about one old lady who had lost her false teeth and her Home Help gave her a spare pair.</p>
[00:11:58]	<p><b>Afternoon Clubs</b></p> <p>GH talks about starting afternoon clubs as soon as MOW as she saw a notice in the local paper for a treasurer at a local club. Stayed there about 8 or 9 years and during that time her home circumstances changed because her husband took over the family business and GH was no longer free in the afternoons. Talks about working with an old lady who was very like Lady Reading, was one of the originally WVS ladies.</p>
[00:14:46]	<p><b>Luncheon Clubs</b></p> <p>When GH’s husband took over the family business she was no longer free in the afternoons but wanted something to do in the mornings so her and a friend started a luncheon club. Started with twelve people, set up around 1973 with the new council’s help and the local Methodist Church. GH comments on how they got people to come to the club. By the third week they had 40 people and a waiting list, tight community in the Kings Cross area.</p>

<p>[00:25:18]</p>	<p><b>How did your role change at the club over the 33years you were running it?</b>  GH didn't really think it change started by being the organiser and planning the menus. Though GH took on more responsibility when her friend left and learnt how to cook for large numbers. Talks about the welfare side of her work and checking on people who were new and regulars who did not turn up.</p> <p><b>What sort of activities did you used to do in the afternoon clubs?</b>  GH used to arrange speakers to talk about 'anything and everything'. Had an outing once a year at Southport, Scarborough, Blackpool and St Ann's. Always had a fish and chip supper at the end of it.</p> <p><b>What sort of food were you serving?</b>  GH comments on the food that they served for a three course meal. The most popular dish was always meat and potato pie.</p> <p><b>How would you describe the building which you held the luncheon club in?</b>  In a church built in 1850/1860 which had been renovated and modernised.</p> <p><b>Did you hold any special events at the lunch club?</b>  GH talks about celebrating the clubs birthday every year which included a church service. Always had salmon as at the time it was considered to be a party dish and a trifle which was called Kings Cross Trifle as it had no cherry in it because of being in the Methodist church.</p> <p>GH also mentions that they were granted funded by the council for the first two years but after that became self-financing as they did not need the money.</p> <p><b>How did you manage to self-fund the club?</b>  Made the money out of the lunches, which they did not charge much for but the shopkeepers always gave a discount. GH talks about starting a second lunch club at a centre for elderly and disabled people. Had a grant which they bought a deep freeze with but then the grant just seemed to disappear.</p>
<p>[00:27:40]</p>	<p><b>Old People's Welfare Organiser</b></p> <p><b>After running the luncheon and afternoon clubs you became OPW Organiser ...</b>  GH was OPW from about 1967 and has a letter from London congratulating her on being appointed.</p> <p><b>How did you become OPW Organiser?</b>  GH says she was recommended by Mrs Johnson the previous OPW Organiser and asked by the Area Organiser. Comments that she could manage it without actually</p>

<p>[00:35:21]</p>	<p>being there but helped where needed. GH mentions that in Halifax WRVS ‘never gave anything up, they always gave us up’.</p> <p><b>What did the role of OPW Organiser involve?</b></p> <p>GH talks about managing the Darby and Joan Clubs and trolley shops. Mentions the very last trolley shop in the area she ran on her own for 12 months, when the old people’s home closed they gave her a big bunch of flowers. GH also started a dancing club in a church hall.</p> <p><b>How would you describe the trolley shops which were going around the old people’s homes?</b></p> <p>GH talks about the trolley, where it was kept, stock taking, shopping for the homes, in one home all the residents loved ice cream and another where one old lady liked Whiskey Mac, to get the best terms at the warehouse where they bought it they would get about 12 bottles at a time but the lady passed away so they were left with the whiskey and tins of snuff.</p> <p><b>Where they like the trolley shops were you used the profits to buy things?</b></p> <p>GH talks about keeping the books and accounts, always kept the accounts for Darby and Joan clubs. Mentions a time when one person said they didn’t know what was happening with her accounts so Mrs Johnson told her to ‘stand up and read out this balance sheet and tell them that all the money was going to the club’. GH says that maybe they thought the funds were going to central WRVS and not locally. With the trolley shops they bought whatever the homes asked for including parties.</p> <p><b>You have already mentioned the dancing club but what did that involve?</b></p> <p>GH found people who new old time dancing and could run a club, setting up the bank account, finding the building and getting someone from the club to manage the accounts but if they did not GH did them. Comments that the club did not last very long as the man who led the dancing had to have his leg amputated.</p> <p><b>Where you responsible for organising anything else in the area?</b></p> <p>Mentions having a choir festival with the clubs each year as each club had its own choir. The other thing they did was a handicraft exhibition.</p> <p><b>Can you tell me what happened to your role as OPW Organiser?</b></p> <p>GH talks about how WRVS has changed ‘it certainly isn’t the organisation that I joined’. Comments on a lot of the work for older people in Halifax being taken over by age concern which had a very good organiser.</p>
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<p>[00:42:10]</p>	<p><b>Did you retire from the role as OPW Organiser?</b></p> <p>GH says no the role just seemed to disappear. Talks about losing MOW which started the decline of WRVS in Halifax though GH kept her work going after the office closed. Just before the office closed 'WRVS had one of its famous reorganisations' and they were administered by someone from Rotherham.</p> <p><b>When you had a centre where was it?</b></p> <p>The first centre was in central Halifax across the road from the town hall in part of a council building. Talks about people visiting 'people used to come for all sorts of things because they remembered that WRVS could do miracles'. One old man turned up with some balls of wool and asked if they could knit him some socks. Another came every week to bring them dripping because he was sure they would know people who needed it. GH says when she joined it was mostly upper middle class ladies who volunteered but this generally changed to mill workers and more working class people. The basement was used for the clothing store later on. Then in the late 1980s WRVS had a policy of buying property the organiser at the time was asked to find premises and they moved to a terrace house just outside the town centre, GH describes the house and how it was maintained.</p> <p><b>How did you feel when they closed the centres?</b></p> <p>GH was sad when they closed as the luncheon club was still going it became a bit of a Hub for volunteers. GH talks about Hans House at the back of Harrods where WRVS ran training courses. Mentions one session she went to and the accommodation one was more like a boarding school, walked to Park Lane for lectures. Then WRVS moved to Brixton and then to Oxfordshire and then Cardiff. Talks about being invited to go to tea with the Queen Mother but the organiser had made a mistake with the numbers so it was cancelled. GH went to St. James Palace and met the Queen when trying to generate funds for WRVS.</p>
<p>[00:56:09]</p>	<p><b>Emergency Services</b></p> <p><b>During that time you were involved with ES how would you describe your role with them?</b></p> <p>GH says they had a good ES organiser who arranged exercises for them, mentions One-in-Five, practicing stoking Soya Boilers. Comments on the emergency bucket, what equipment they kept in it including a lipstick. Mentions using trench cookers, mock emergencies, with WRVS and the police reserves. GH says she went to one emergency a fire and two volunteers went to a factory fire, had arrangements with various supermarkets. ES also helped at a Calderdale Hike overnight. Twelve months ago GH was asked to visit someone who did not have electricity but a neighbour dealt with it.</p>

[01:09:02]	<p><b>Did the way you trained change at all?</b> GH talks about training at Easingwold college, sorting clothing for refugees from Uganda and Kosovo. Mentions being on the local councils list for ES but have not being contacted for a long time.</p> <p><b>You mentioned as part of your ES work the Ugandan Asian and Kosovar refugees, how did you feel about helping them when they arrived here?</b> GH says it was not face to face contact with the Ugandan Asians it was just going to sort clothes in Leeds. They were happy to help the Kosovans, WRVS did what the social services wanted. GH talks about the relationships they formed with the refugees and keeping in touch with them, teaching them English.</p> <p><b>Was there anything else that you did with ES?</b> GH mentions mostly serving tea, on a couple of exercises they did the reception though really it was done by council employees in later years. Talks about the visitor books in the office. Mentions the Spare a mile service but GH was not really involved. Comments on the voluntary daughters scheme which was renamed and some of the people that were visited.</p>
[01:16:53]	<p><b>The WRVS Association</b></p> <p><b>Why did you join in 2000?</b> GH mentions that a lady canvassed the local volunteers to form part of the association, GH ended up organising it. Talks about the annual general meeting and the dignitaries who attended. Mentions how the association ended and how older members felt about changes.</p>
[01:20:48]          [01:25:10]    [01:29:11]	<p><b>Changes to WRVS</b></p> <p><b>How did you feel when the organisation became a charity rather than a crown service in 1992?</b> GH talks about the grant and how she thought it was used, made life more difficult but did not really affect them as all their projects were self-funding. Mentions the office closing in Prescott street, the accounts became more difficult.</p> <p><b>How did an increase in paid staff in the 1990s affect you as a volunteer?</b> GH talks about the organiser coming from Rotherham and not seeming to understand Halifax people. Mentions the disappointment of the office closing and things going into a skip. Comments on items which she rescued for the skip. GH also talks about celebrating the Queen Mother's Birthday, Queen's Golden Jubilee and 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.</p>



<p>[01:34:47]</p> <p>[01:43:50]</p>	<p><b>How did you feel about our change in focus in 1997?</b> GH says she felt it was a pity they were not doing what they had before but things had to change. Mentions the hospital organiser suggesting people feeding the elderly in hospital. Easingwold closed and they held meetings near Leeds. GH comments on holding on to the Lunch Club and the difficulties of it.</p> <p><b>What about the changes in 2004 ...</b> GH did not like the purple and orange. Talks about the changes in 2013, the quality of uniform in the past.</p> <p><b>What did you think about dropping the W?</b> GH thought it was unnecessary, talks about men joining before dropping the W and her opinions on changing the name.</p> <p><b>What other changes have you experienced as a WRVS volunteer over the years?</b> GH talks about changes in the sort of people who volunteer; class, age, staying power. Comments on people at the top of the organisation's salaries. Talks about the clasps/rosettes for years of service.</p> <p><b>In your opinion what has been the most significant change you have experienced?</b> GH comments on the role of WRVS and bringing in paid staff. Talks about the work of people at a grassroots level and not being remembered in the same way. Talks about not being able to organise themselves as much as they used to and a training weekend for the search and rescue team. GH discusses the differences between elderly people in the past and now.</p>
<p>[01:49:34]</p>	<p><b>Conclusions</b></p> <p><b>Where do you think RVS's place in society is today?</b> GH thinks there is certainly a place in society because of the aging population, did not think ES would be as important.</p> <p><b>What would you say is the future for RVS?</b> GH says she hopes there will be less changes and the organisation will become better known.</p> <p><b>What would you say is your most treasured memory of being with WRVS?</b> GH talks about going to St James Palace, the comradeship, enjoying helping people and visiting an elderly lady with a number of cats who was very independent but WRVS helped in different ways as she got older.</p>