

Voices of Volunteering: 75 Years of Citizenship and Service

Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

Ref. No.: HOWM

Collection Title: Voices of Volunteering

Interviewee's Surname: Howard-Jones

Title: Mrs

Interviewee's Forenames: Mary

Gender: F

Volunteer/Employee Roles and Dates:

Volunteer (1953-Present)

1953-1963 Ambulance Driver and Radioactive
Trainee Department, Rhyl, Denbighshire, Wales

1963-2014 Old Peoples Welfare, Wales

1989 Joint District Organiser, Cynon Valley,
Glamorganshire

1989/1990 County Old Peoples Welfare
Organiser, Mid Glamorgan

1990s/2000s Old Peoples Welfare, visiting war
widows, Darby and Joan clubs, Volunteer Partner

Date(s) of recording, Tracks (From-To): 23/06/2014 (Track 1)

Location of Interview: Royal Voluntary Service Headquarters Cardiff Gate Room 5

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

Total Duration: 01:16:54

Additional Material: Biography Form, two photographs, Recording Agreement

Copyright: Royal Voluntary Service

Clearance: Yes

Interviewer's Notes:

Mary Howard-Jones (MHJ) talks about her time as a WVS/WRVS/Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) between 1953 and 2014. She mentions her time as an ambulance driver for civil defence in the 1950s and 60s and the disbandment of Civil Defence. Also talks about being a village rep in Haverfordwest and being responsible for the Butter Mountain. Comments on moving to Mid Glamorgan and getting involved with Old People's Welfare (OPW) after joining Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), helping in magistrate's courts,

hospital tea bars and visiting residential homes. Also talks about how her role in the county developed including becoming joint district organiser, Emergency Services (ES), training at Easingwold college, becoming a senior trainer, call outs to emergencies. Discusses her time as OPW organiser in Mid Glamorgan and how her role in OPW changed over time. Also discusses Darby & Joan Clubs, being on Coal House at War, giving talks to Welsh Assembly Members, MPs, Business men, launch of the WRVS computer and laying a reef at the cenotaph in London. Discusses being a volunteer partner and what the role involves including legacies. Mentions work with war widows and how WRVS stopped running the service and visiting other people as part of WRVS.

Time (HH:MM:SS)	Synopsis
[00:00:10]	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Mary Please can you introduce yourself MHJ says she has been through many changes in WRVS and was 20 when she joined Civil Defence Ambulance Service.</p> <p>Before you joined what did you know about the organisation? MHJ talks about her mother helping with evacuees transport, billeting and checking them for cleanliness. After the war her mother worked in the WVS Prestatyn office.</p> <p>What made you join in 1953? Mentions working as a telegraphist at the GP Surgery, going home and her mother telling her about WVS looking for people to be ambulance drivers.</p> <p>What are your earliest memories of being an ambulance driver? Comments on the training and driving the green goddess ambulances, using Geiger counters and helping with the field radio. Talks about Wales becoming a non-nuclear area and training involving one-in-five talks.</p>
[00:04:48]	<p>Radioactive Trainee Department/Ambulance Driver</p> <p>Who did you work with as an ambulance driver? MHJ explains how she mostly worked with men and seemed to be the only female driver around.</p> <p>How did your role as a driver and with the radioactive team change over time? Mentions she was never called out, but was interesting to be double declutching and explains what it involved.</p> <p>How would you describe the Ambulance? 'Very heavy', MHJ talks about carrying radioactive material in double sealed metal and couldn't park near any cars.</p> <p>Do you have any other stories or memories of your time as an ambulance driver? MHJ comments on attending a royal event and the dark blue civil defence uniform she had to wear which was recalled in c1963.</p>

	<p>Did you have any other experiences with WVS in Rhyl or Prestatyn? MHJ mentions she dealt more with civil defence at that time.</p>
[00:08:05]	<p>Work for WRVS in Haverfordwest/Cefn Pennar/Glamorgan</p> <p>You also mentioned on your form that you were involved with WVS in Haverfordwest and Pembrokeshire? MHJ talks about being a village rep and delivering butter and cheese around the village.</p> <p>Were you involved with the 25th Anniversary? MHJ says that she thinks she went to a service but doesn't really remember it.</p> <p>Did you receive your 15 year service medal in that time? MHJ says that she didn't, when she moved near to Aberdare she was told she couldn't claim the civil defence part but had her membership backdated later on.</p> <p>Did you have any experiences with Lady Reading? MHJ explains she didn't as Lady Reading was in London and she was 'floating' around Wales.</p> <p>After she died in 1971 did you notice a change to the organisation? MHJ didn't think so but then didn't have as many links until moving to Mid Glamorgan.</p> <p>In 1966 we got 'Royal' in the tile, can you tell me about that MHJ says she remembers it because it was the year her second daughter was born in 66. In that year she was doing a bit of everything in Pembrokeshire and Mid Glamorgan.</p> <p>And what were you involved in at the time with WRVS, was it Old People's Welfare? MHJ thinks it was then it became OPW which has changed right the way through to volunteer partner.</p> <p>What is your earliest memory of volunteering in Mid Glamorgan? MHJ mentions they had all her details but there was a gap but couldn't be doing nothing so for a short time joined CAB. Then WRVS got in touch from the office in Ponty Pridd. Then started looking after residential clubs, magistrate's courts, visiting residential homes teaching exercises.</p> <p>Where was the magistrate's court? Aberdare, MHJ mentions going to a home for people with dementia in Aberdare with her daughter and the interactions with the residents. Also talks about helping occasionally at a tea bar in mid Glamorgan and taking her son with her.</p> <p>In the tea bars and cafes, what sort of people were you serving? MHJ talks about serving her 'own burglar', she knew who he was and asked him how he was and he said 'I've been rumbled'. Talks about some of the people she served in the hospital and a time when a young man asked how much she got paid.</p> <p>You've mentioned the Butter Mountain as well, how was that distributed? Usually the area office had it and MHJ would collect it. Talks about how people were</p>

	<p>wary of coming forward because it felt like charity. MHJ talks about delivering it from outside the church in the village and spreading the message by word of mouth.</p> <p>Do you have any other memories or stories about your time in mid Glamorgan in 1980s?</p> <p>MHJ mentions standing in at meetings for the area manager and meeting more people</p>
[00:19:32]	<p>Joint District Organiser Cynon Valley, Glamorgan (1989)</p> <p>How did you get that role?</p> <p>MHJ explains it was difficult for the woman who was the district organiser. The Area manager asked her to help. MHJ mentions she was given a pocket alarm as she was visiting families who would be using WRVS holiday accommodation. Tells a story about visiting a man with just his trousers on.</p> <p>Did you have any other roles as Joint District Organiser?</p> <p>Attending council meetings, used to meeting people, being able to chat to anyone.</p>
[00:22:18]	<p>Emergency Services</p> <p>How did you start volunteering with ES?</p> <p>Asked if she would like to do it and go on a course at Easingwold, MHJ talks about being watched all the time on the course and having to always wear uniform. Says the college was very interesting, shown air raid shelters.</p> <p>What were your roles and responsibilities with ES?</p> <p>MHJ was training other people and explains you had to take exams but was slowed down for family reasons before becoming a senior instructor.</p> <p>Did you attend any exercises?</p> <p>MHJ talks about helping the manager setup exercises and giving people certain roles to play during the exercise.</p> <p>Where did the exercises take place?</p> <p>Usually in leisure centres, MHJ comments on the relationship WRVS had with big supermarkets before they were 24 hours. Talks about a battery operation near Mythir Tydfil and managing it all from home.</p> <p>What emergencies did you attend?</p> <p>Talks about flooding in Aberfan in 1990s and ringing her team up, going off to deal with it. There was a wedding at the same time and couldn't open the bar, ran the rest centre for two weeks, one lady was interviewed by the Television crew and MJH mentions she was interviewed as well.</p> <p>Have you attended any other emergencies?</p> <p>MHJ comments on a fire at Hoovers, working four hour shifts and clearing up at 2 in the morning. The fireman helping her dropped 500 polystyrene mugs down the stairs. Mentions being on standby but not always being called out and you always had a bag of things ready.</p>

	<p>What was in the bag? Personal items which people used and a grab bag which had milk, cheese and butter.</p> <p>How did you feel when you were on an emergency? 'Getting on with the job, you didn't panic'. Also talks about learning new things such as what half and half meant with curry.</p> <p>Do you have any other stories or memories of your time with ES? MHJ says she has 'loved every minute' of being a WRVS member and doing a bit of everything. Talks about meeting different people and being in the same boat as them.</p>
[00:32:28]	<p>Old People's Welfare</p> <p>How did you become the OPW organiser 1989/1990? MHJ says the lady before her died suddenly and she was asked by the area manager to take over. Also talks about questions she asked people joining the WRVS including if they drove and why this went from being the first to the third or fourth question she asked. Talks about which clubs she managed and how they are getting smaller.</p> <p>Can you tell me about the projects or services you ran for older people in Mid Glamorgan? Mainly afternoon clubs, used to have more than one club every day. MHJ comments that she couldn't visit all the clubs every week but as long as it was every six weeks. Mentions clubs are self-funding.</p> <p>You mentioned the clubs have got smaller has the way they have been run changed as well? MHJ says she thinks so and most of them like playing bingo. Talks about the benefits of having speakers visit the clubs.</p> <p>Have you taken your clubs on any trips? MHJ doesn't personally but club leaders do</p> <p>You were also involved with residential homes? MHJ says she was but not now, as she is so involved with clubs, often stood in if someone couldn't turn up.</p> <p>How would you describe what a day club or a Darby and Joan was? MHJ says it was a place for them to meet so they were having an afternoon of friendship. Mentions that that has changed a lot as they don't get many men in the club. Talks about how more older women today are looking after grandchildren and most drive now but the clubs are still important.</p> <p>Why did you want to be involved with the clubs? MHJ says she has been lucky and had some many different roles and like being busy.</p> <p>MHJ mentions she didn't get involved with the clubs before becoming an organiser. Though did sing in a choir at a Darby and Joan Club in Rutherland in 1940s.</p>

	<p>Are Darby and Joan Clubs usually held in community centres? MHJ says yes though some have to hire a room. They have to be self-funding but as they get smaller it is becoming more difficult. Very good at fundraising but MHJ can see them dying out.</p>
[00:40:46]	<p>Computer/Talks/Wreath Laying/Coal House at War</p> <p>MHJ mentions being asked to represent WVS in Coal House at War in 2008.</p> <p>How did you feel about being involved with coal house at war? 'That was fantastic'. MHJ talks about having to be Mrs and found the first very difficult and having to inspect the accommodation for evacuees.</p> <p>Did you wear uniform? MHJ mentions that she was loaned uniform from the archive but that the coat was three sizes too small. Tells a story about driving home in the coat, also about having an emergency exercise and asked for another WVS/WRVS person.</p> <p>As well as Coal House at War you have also done talks for MPs and Welsh AMs? MHJ talks about David (McCullough CEO) and businessmen hearing the talks and talking about the night at the Hoover factory and spending the night with the firemen. Also stood in for the chairman at the House of Commons in the Attlee Room.</p> <p>What sorts of things did you used to tell people about? MHJ would say what jobs WRVS did and having identities as uniform was used less and less. Talks about meeting the now Secretary of state for Wales (David Jones).</p>
[00:48:21]	<p>You were also there when the WRVS computer was launched; can you tell me about that? MHJ with the chairman, involved in just chatting generally with chairman and local AM.</p> <p>You also said you had laid a reef at the cenotaph ... MHJ mentions standing as the guard at the cenotaph and it was very selective at that time, WRVS went on last and came off last as well. Talks about it raining and when the bishop said let us pray you could flick the water off your hat.</p> <p>Talks about Wimbledon information desks and her son being asked to go, he was the first male to go and after that many more men started going. MHJ talks about her son being able to help out somebody Russian. Mentions what people would ask and the Royal Welsh Show, people always ask where the nearest toilet is.</p> <p>At the Royal Welsh Show did you ever get any unusual questions? MHJ says no but it was interesting, doesn't know how people used to miss the signs for the toilets.</p> <p>And you would also provide tea and refreshments? MHJ mentions they just had a rest room and a crèche and that's when emergency services would come in useful.</p>
[00:52:45]	<p>Volunteer Partner</p>

	<p>How would you describe your role as a Volunteer Partner? MHJ introduces herself as a Volunteer partner when talking to people, doesn't know people as well in big clubs but is a mixed role.</p> <p>You're also involved with Paul Tasmin and Legacies? MHJ says that even if people are just buying raffle tickets they are still supporting. Mentions a legacy meeting in Newport. MHJ talks about how she has noticed men come to the meeting on their own and the women bring someone with them.</p> <p>MHJ talks about her work with war widows for eight years who she would visit every six months. Visited individually, talks about upsetting a War Widow by asking for cold milk in coffee. Mentions it had to stop, WRVS were running it on behalf of Social Services and then rules were changed so that you had to be trained to visit. MHJ felt the decision was very short sighted but she 'loved it'.</p> <p>MHJ talks about how she feels through WRVS she has 'been there'. Says that people always say she is still young. Feels that she can relate to people through her own experiences including a lady with cancer.</p> <p>Have there been any other services you have been involved with that WRVS have stopped doing? Mentions it was more the pension people and not many people are going to do that job.</p> <p>[01:00:34] In 2004 we had the change in the colours and the name to just WRVS, what was your experience of that? MHJ says you have to move with the changes but was delighted because she didn't like bottle green.</p> <p>Talks about the current change and people don't really know what we do now. MHJ says we need better advertising but it all costs money. Thinks we need to be in a popular magazine. MHJ comments that they claimed two new members in Newport.</p> <p>Do you have much contact with your local hub in Cardiff? MHJ says she is and always in touch with area and locality managers. Also says we need to be in schools. Comments that we have younger people, not all inactive and sitting at home.</p> <p>Has having the new hubs affected your role at all? MHJ says she has been lucky with being in contact with people but now WRVS has to be carefully it doesn't lose itself.</p>
[01:07:23]	<p>The organisation today/conclusions</p> <p>Where would you say RVS's place in society is today? MHJ comments on still are thought of as in hospitals but that RVS is losing role in hospitals. Mentions now there is no uniform, people don't know, have to show who we are but not allowed to put up signs. Again talks about having to advertise ourselves.</p>

	<p>What do you think is the future for RVS? MHJ says without good advertising there won't be anything, need a younger group coming in. talks about her last uniform costing £115.</p> <p>Talks about going to Armed Forces day and going into Tesco in her uniform and herd someone say whose the lady in green and another person replied she's with WRVS.</p> <p>Do you have any other stories or events that have happened to you as a volunteer that you would like to share? MHJ mentions the Hoover fire again, comments that its friendship and loves people , meeting people who you haven't seen for years.</p> <p>You also celebrated 60 years of being a volunteer with WRVS ... MHJ mentions having clasps and being a diamond champion, discusses being nominated for the award. Also talks about the event that took place when she received her award.</p> <p>Do you have a favourite or memorable moment of being with WVS/WRVS? Mentions that everything is good, but doesn't want a butter mountain again.</p>
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