



Heritage

BULLETIN Volume 1

A treasury of dreams and memories

It is rumoured that our founder Lady Reading dreamt up the idea for the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) whilst travelling across Europe on the Orient Express in 1938.

She had the vision to realise that ordinary British Women could play a vital part in protection and care of our nation, if the war that threatened ever came.

In the years that followed, Lady Reading's WVS took on a life of its own, expanding far beyond the limited role that the Home Secretary who paid for its formation had envisaged, and into every part of British life. Since that time and for over 70 years the WVS, and WRVS after it, has been pioneering charitable care in local communities, realising the dreams of its founder.

To ensure that these dreams and memories of our strong tradition of volunteering, begun during such a turbulent time, were not forgotten, Lady Reading set up what is now the WRVS Archive & Heritage Collection in 1958. After five years of hard work by a devoted band of volunteers and staff and



Our founder Lady Reading at her desk in 1943.

following our successful appeal for funds last year, we now have a new home and a new beginning for the collection. It now falls to me, as the fourth WRVS Archivist, with the help of you and many others to both protect and champion the enormous legacy of these million plus women and men and to make sure that we tell and bring to life their stories for future generations.

Matthew McMurray – WRVS Archivist





Three of the 'women in green'. This is the earliest colour photograph from our collection taken sometime in the late 1940's.

Saving the Women in Green

A grant from the *Aurelius Trust* is helping to save our historic uniform collection for the future

The Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence (WVS) became a properly uniformed organisation in October 1939, primarily as a quick and easy means of identification for members in emergency situations after the outbreak of war in September. Unlike the armed forces, WRVS members had to buy their own uniform - the most expensive of which cost £9 4s 7d, the equivalent of two weeks wages for an average worker! As with all clothing the WVS/WRVS uniform evolved over time and the Archive & Heritage Collection now holds over 300 different items of uniform from the past 70 years, from hats, coats and dresses to armbands, ties and overalls.

Packing and storing all of these unique items of uniform is a big and expensive task. However, thanks to a recent grant of £3,000 from the Aurelius Trust we have begun a programme of preserving this part of volunteer history for years to come.

Guardians of our Heritage

In 2005 a group of interested staff and volunteers set up the WRVS Heritage Advisory Council to help us care for and develop our archive. The group donate their time, effort, expertise and ideas to ensure that the collection is brought to life for WRVS volunteers now, the older people we help and the wider public. Current members include a WRVS trustee, a former WRVS Vice-Chairman and the Chairman of the WRVS Association (for former WVS/WRVS members) as well as one of our local service managers. The group's most significant achievement so far has been winning a £40,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which paved the way for our current cataloguing project.



A £5,000 gift from Mrs Lindy Wood in her Will helps secure our history

Lindy Wood at the cenotaph 2007.

We were all saddened in August last year to hear of the death of Mrs Lindy Wood, after a long battle with cancer. A long serving volunteer and well known character in WRVS, Lindy started volunteering for WRVS in 1970 helping once a month to deliver Meals on Wheels. She however found her niche in Emergency Services – a branch of WRVS that helps local authorities, police, fire and ambulance services in times of disaster. For most of her 39 years service she was on call 24 hours a day 365 days a year and remained in post ready to do her duty until the very end, only retiring in July last year.

Lindy was a strong supporter of the WRVS Archive & Heritage Collection and last year entrusted us with her own small collection of papers and photographs relating to her WRVS work. WRVS have always been grateful for any donations however small or large. This generous legacy will be spent on preserving the collection so that the dedication and duty of the millions of inspiring volunteers can be shared with future generations.

Did you know?

We welcome and collect almost anything to do with WVS/WRVS, but there are some bizarre things in the collection which do give us some storage challenges. Perhaps one of the oddest items we have is this 32 year old cake icing (pictured above) from our 40th Anniversary in 1978.



What's in a name or a colour?

This newsletter is named after the first regular WVS publication 'The WVS Bulletin' issued monthly from 1939-1970. The keen eyed of you may also have spotted that we have used a special shade of green in our bulletin. This green is as close a match as we could get to the original 1940 uniform colour and is our own tribute to the 'women in green'.



Marguerite Braithwaite with the silver cigarette case from Bushey.

A Volunteer's perspective

I started working on the archives in September 2008 when the Archive volunteer project was set up in Devizes. We were faced with hundreds of large boxes of papers received from closed offices, from all over the country, which had lain virtually untouched since they had found their way to the archive in the 1990's. It took us a whole year to sort the boxes and briefly list their contents, but at least now we know what is in them all!

It was so very interesting to see the variety of work that had been carried out by so many volunteers over the last seventy years, and from time to time I came across a report or photo of an event in which colleagues or I had been involved. One box from HQ contained a silver cigarette box presented to Bushey Centre in Hertfordshire by an army unit to which we had been sending paperback books and magazines. The centre organiser at the time was a smoker – but weren't we all?

When Bushey Premises in Ivy House closed we wondered what to do with it – and I took it up to Park Lane (London HQ) for safekeeping! It was good to see it again.

Things are now moving to a more detailed stage, and I am glad to know that records such as these that have involved so many people are being preserved. They are in fact an important part of our history.

Contact us

If you want to know more about the WRVS Archive & Heritage Collection you can visit our web pages:

wrvs.org.uk/archiveandheritagecollection

If you have a story to tell or material which you would like to donate to the collection please contact Matthew McMurray the archivist

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Unfortunately because we need to concentrate all of our efforts on cataloguing our collection we are unable to offer a general enquiry service at this time, but it will re-open in the future.

WRVS positive about age
practical about life

