



THE HISTORY OF THE WVS & WRVS ASSOCIATION

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HERITAGE COLLECTION

Introduction

The sudden death of WVS/WRVS Founder Chairman, Lady Reading, in May 1971, caused a period of unrest where it became more and more clear that whilst maintaining the traditions of the past, there would have to be many changes in the organisation and administration of WRVS, some of which older members might perhaps regret or not understand. It was hoped that in these trying times a solution could be found which would unite both retired and semi-retired members who had given loyal service to WVS/WRVS over the years with those who were still working actively. So in March 1973 Joan Bertram, Bobby Tywhitt, Doreen Harris and Joan Haines met and as a team created a solution to the problem... the WVS/WRVS Association.



Original badge of the WVS/WRVS Association

This Association would be a Nationwide Scheme which would have a central office in WRVS Headquarters in London. After 26 years the office moved to Bootham Road, York on 1 October 1999 before finally settling in rented offices in Priory Street Centre, 15 Priory Street, York in July 2006 where it would stay until its closure on 26 July 2013.

The Association would encourage the formation of local groups of members who would meet together through reunions and events. 'not only to remember the past, but to keep in touch with old friends and with those who were carrying on the ideals

of our Founder against the background of an ever-changing society with varying needs'.¹

In 1995 the 'WVS/WRVS Association' became known as the 'WRVS Association', a legal part of the WRVS, with the added commitment to maintain contact with and give all possible help to members as they inevitably grew older.

General meetings

First general meeting

On 9 January 1974 the first general meeting of the Association was held with Dame Francis Clode (Chairman of WRVS) chairing the meeting. Miss Kathleen Halpin CBE, formerly chief Regional Administrator of WRVS, was elected as the founding Chairman of the Association, a position she would hold until the tenth annual meeting when a constitution was adopted decreeing that a chairman should not hold office for more than three consecutive years. Mrs Harris was elected as Honorary Secretary and Miss Hamilton as Honorary Treasurer.

The Committee consisted of:

- Mrs J. Haines BEM
- Miss J E Tate MBE
- Mrs Houghton OBE
- Mrs J Sich

After becoming the President of the Association Baroness Pike agreed that the WRVS could co-operate with the Association to assist with its work. The matter was discussed at a meeting of the WRVS Consultative Council in November 1981 where

¹ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/GOV/4 'The story of the WVS/WRVS Association', p.1.

WRVS Area Organisers were asked to 'do what they could to support the Association locally'.²

Annual General Meetings and reunions

The first Annual General Meeting of the Association was held on 4 July 1974 at Hans Place, London of which 100 members attended and had the chance to meet the new president of the Association, Baroness Pike.³ Between 1974-1982 the AGM's were held in London, until it was decided that from 1983 only every third AGM and reunion would be held in London with the rest being held in different locations around the Country such as York, Bristol, Bath and Durham to name a few.



Members attending the AGM in York, 1990

Membership

The Association was for Retired/semi-retired WVS/WRVS members who had to have served five or more years with WRVS. Initially, active members of the WRVS were not discouraged from joining the Association, as they 'helped to form a bridge between the old and new regime' but as the membership grew it was no longer

² WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/GOV/4 'The story of the WVS/WRVS Association Part 1', p.1.

³ Information gathered from WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/GOV/4 'The story of the WVS/WRVS Association Part 1', p.1.

necessary to recruit current members as it was hoped that all retiring members would be informed about the Association. ⁴

Therefore, with the implementation of the Association's Constitution in 1982 'new members holding headquarters appointments were not eligible for membership although those with less responsibility, e.g. holding a local appointment, could if they wished join.'⁵

At its first General Meeting on 9 January 1974 the Association's membership stood at 158, but by the time of the First Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 4 July 1974 membership had increased to 400 with 43 life members. By 1978 the Association reached 1,000 members with Mrs Jennings being the 1,000 member to be enrolled. The Association reached 4,000 members in June 1987.

Subscriptions

The WVS/WRVS Association has to charge for its membership as it received limited support from the WRVS through the payment of the rent, electricity and telephone bills of the Association's office. At the first annual meeting it was decided that the subscription for membership would be £1 annually, of which 50p contributed to the WRVS Magazine, with life membership being £10.

⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-23

⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/GOV/4 'WVS/WRVS Association constitution', 1982.



Meeting of members of the Warwickshire Branch 22 May 1990

Once the WRVS Magazine was discontinued in December 1974 the Association began to produce its own newsletter which had to be self-funded. It was the cost of producing and distributing this publication, along with the increase in postage and general costs that took a considerable amount of the membership fees and led the Association to continue to increase membership costs.

Firstly, in March 1986 annual subscriptions increased to £1.50 and then on 1 July 1989 life membership increased to £15. From 1 October 1992 it was decided that annual subscriptions would be increased to £4 and life subscription to £20 for new members. Finally, on 1 April 1998 annual subscriptions were increased to £5 in conjunction with the discontinuation of life membership which would now not be available to new members.

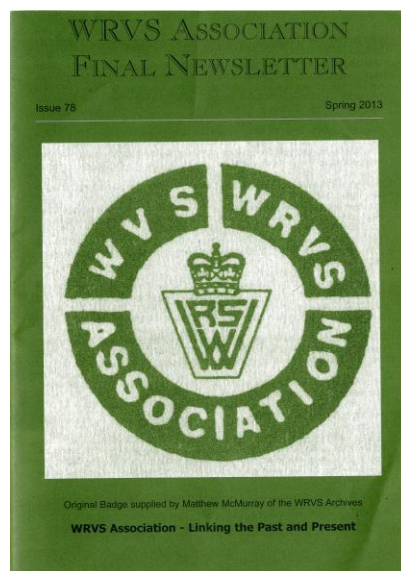
Association Newsletter/WRVS Association News

The discontinuation of the WRVS Magazine in December 1974 and members feeling there was a shortage of news about the Association led the Association to create an independent newsletter.

This was initially called 'The WVS/WRVS Association Newsletter' which was changed to 'Association News' in 1984. This was initially meant to be three news sheets annually but eventually became two newsletters annually, one in May with

accompanying information about the upcoming AGM and one in November with the minutes of the AGM.

These newsletters would be compiled by the Association's Editor with stuffing parties being arranged where members would organise the newsletters for posting. The first newsletter was published in January 1975 across 78 issues in total, the last being spring 2013.



Front cover of the final newsletter, Spring 2013.

The Newsletter contained a variety of information from reminiscences of member's time with WVS/WRVS and their work on various services, random recollections on their childhood and experiences of the Second World War and reports from Association Representatives. It also gave updates on the current work of the WRVS as well as numerous anecdotes and jokes to amuse its readers.

WRVS Association constitution & rules and guidelines

During the first formative years of the Association it had been agreed that the time was not right for a formal constitution as it may restrict progress. However, at the 7th Annual General Meeting the Chairman Kathleen Halpin proposed that members 'ought, during the coming year, to give consideration as to whether they wanted to

develop a more rigid constitution than the present one, which was really nothing more than guide lines for administration'⁶

After much thought and deliberation a Constitution was agreed and adopted at the AGM on 2 June 1982. This constitution allowed the Association to continue to follow the principles it had held from the beginning but allowed for clarification of procedures. For example, the eligibility for member was outlined as:

"The Association is primarily intended for WVS/WRVS Members who have served for a minimum period of five years and are no longer active in the Service. Also eligible are members who have relinquished a post of responsibility and others who may wish to continue working in a less demanding capacity".⁷

During 1994 it was outlined that the WRVS Association could no longer come under the WRVS Charity number and that it could not remain a charity due to the exclusive nature of its membership which did not promote sufficient public benefit for the Association to be regarded as charitable in law. It was agreed that the Association should come within the main WRVS structure by becoming a club which resulted in the Association implemented 'Rules of the Association (The Club)' ensuring that the association could be regarded as charitable.

Finally, at the AGM meeting in September 2008 the Association unanimously adopted a new constitution which replaced the original 'very open, and quite vague' constitution with a truly legal document.⁸

An addendum was made to this constitution after the Bassetlaw Branch of the Association reviewed and offered suggestions for alterations, finding that it lacked contents regarding local branches, with these changes being approved at the AGM on 2 October 2010. These changes stated that a branch should hold an Annual General Meeting each year to elect the officers of the branch for the preceding year and approve the social programme. They should give copies of the minutes and financial statements to the Divisional Representatives or York Office and that where

⁶ WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-23

⁷ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/GOV/4 'WVS/WRVS Association Constitution', 1982.

⁸ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-70

possible be run by an executive committee and should consist of a chairman, secretary and treasurer.

Organisation of WRVS Association

The President

The Chairman of WRVS was the Association's President and together with the Chairman of the Association they appointed the Association's Treasurer and Secretary.

The Chairman

The Chairman of the Association was elected each year at the AGM and under the rules of the Association's Constitution should not hold office for more than three consecutive years.

The Committee

The Committee consisted of:

- the Association Chairman
- the Treasurer
- the Secretary
- representatives of each WRVS Division
- no more than two representatives of Association members.

The Committee could from time to time appoint people to be the Vice Presidents of the Association. The Association members who served on the Committee were elected annually by members of the Association at the Annual General Meeting and would serve for three years.

The Committee's first meeting was held on 26 February 1974 with the last occurring on 6 October 2012.

Area Representatives

The Association had Area Representatives in Scotland, Wales and all regions/areas. An Area Representative had to be a member of the Association and was appointed by the WRVS Area Organiser concerned in consultation with the Chairman of the Association.

Their role was to keep in touch with WRVS Area Organisers so that they kept up to date with current WRVS activities and could also relay information about any Association reunions being organised.

Area Representatives also organised reunions and social events, which were invaluable, especially to those members who could not travel to London or further afield for annual meetings and reunions. They could obtain a £5 float from the Honorary Treasurer to assist with postal and small expenditure such as stationery and could claim 35p per person for members to attend a local reunion.

Divisional Representatives

The appointment of an Association Divisional Representative was made after consultation between the Chairman of the Association and the appropriate WRVS Divisional Director. The Association Divisional Representative was an ex-officio member of the committee and served indefinitely, receiving full voting powers.

Their duties included:

- Ensuring that they obtain, annually, a simple statement of account from each County/Branch/Group.
- Organising reunions and other social events in their Division, arranging an annual gathering of members. If this could not be easily achieved the county representative should (in consultation with her Divisional Representative) consider the planning of an occasional meeting within her County. Such meetings can take place in Members houses, WRVS offices, by kind permission of WRVS Organiser concerned or, if necessary in hired halls.

- Visiting local groups and speaking briefly about the work of the Association at meetings.

County Representatives

County Representatives were appointed by the Divisional Representative (previously Area Representatives) in consultation with the WRVS Association Chairman. They were to keep in touch with their Vice Chairman Committee so that they were kept up to date with current WRVS work and to inform them of any Association activities. It was hoped that the outcome of involving County Representatives would be an 'increase in membership, a new interest in the Association and the part it can play in relation to the Service as a whole.'⁹

Branches

Each branch of the Association had to support itself financially, with initial meetings tending to be arranged in member's homes or in a WRVS office until the group could raise enough funds to support the arrangement of events and potentially the hiring of a hall. The money was raised by various methods such as: bring and buy sales, raffles or charging members a small fee for the provision of tea and biscuits at meetings. Each branch would have its own organiser who would arrange the meetings.

Each branch did something different and would organise a variety of events to entertain members. Many held regular meetings where guest speakers would be invited to talk or bingo was played and quizzes enjoyed. Trips out were also arranged such as trips to the museum or a day's shopping. Where possible, a Christmas meal was enjoyed. Appendix 2 includes some lovely extracts of what branches got up to at their regular meetings.

⁹ WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-17



York Association members enjoy a visit to a farm



York Association members boarding a barge on Kennet and Avon Canal, July 1990

Scottish section of the Association

As membership rapidly increased in Scotland, consideration was given to the formation of independent Group of Scottish members. It was agreed via a letter sent by Mrs Crabbie, 23 April 1979 that the Scottish section would not be a separate organisation and would follow the national constitution but have its own Chairman and committee.

The first meeting of the Scottish section of the Association was held 12 July 1979, with Veronica Crabbie (past Chairman of WRVS Scotland) as its first Chairman. Copies of the Association Newsletter would be sent to the Scottish section for

distribution along with their own publication. They enrolled their own members and sent 25p per member each year as a fee towards postage of the newsletter etc. to the National Headquarters. The Scottish section of the Association decided to close at the same time as the Association.

Closure of the Association

The WRVS funding of the Association was to cease after 2011, and although the Association felt it could potentially last up to two years without this support, it was decided to hold a secret ballot at the AGM to decide the Association's fate.

There were declining membership numbers due to the death of members and the resignation of others for various reasons such as ill health and going in to care, with very few new members joining.

The decision was therefore, made to close the Association, with the emphasis being that all existing clubs could continue their meetings independently if they wished with the Divisional Representatives told to make it clear that things can go on locally as before.

The last AGM and Reunion was on 6 October 2012 in York with a final reunion event held at Birmingham Botanical Gardens on 12 June 2013, this being the 40th year of the Association and the 75th year of the WRVS.

84 members attended this last event and the Association officially closed on 26 July 2013 with membership of 1592.

The closure of the Association is nicely summed up by the Editor of 'Association News' Paulene Lambert:

*'More of the reports indicated that numbers had dropped, recruitment was almost impossible and members were unable or not inclined to meet up for whatever reason. As a monitor, this gives us an indication of the state of the Association and where it is headed. A sad time, but I personally believe that it has had its day and that it is time to draw a line under a piece of history that, thanks to Matthew McMurray and the WRVS Archives, will be able to remain a fond memory for many.'*¹⁰

Bibliography

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¹⁰ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-75

Appendix 1: Timeline of events

Date	Event
March 1973	Initial meeting of the Association held at Hans Place, where WVS/WRVS association was created.
9 January 1974	First General Meeting held, annual membership agreed as £1, with life membership being £10. Membership Stood at 158.
26 February 1974	The first Committee meeting was held.
4 July 1974	First AGM meeting held at Hans Place, London, with 100 out of the 400 current members attending.
January 1975	First issue of Association Newsletter published.
16 May 1975	A grant of 25p per head might be made from the funds for members functions held at regional or county level.
1978	Association had 1,000 members.
12 July 1979	The first meeting of the Scottish section of the Association was held with veronica Crabbie elected as its first chairman.
2 June 1982	The Association's first constitution was agreed upon and approved at the AGM.
13 October 1982	Working Party held at Headquarters which discussed the implementation of

	County Representatives to 'help to recruit new members and form a unit within the county' with the assistance of Area Representatives. Led to the draft of "Notes for Guidance of County Representatives."
June 1983	Constitution was adopted at the tenth AGM of the Association.
1984	Association newsletter becomes known as 'Association News'.
1985	Association Committee unanimously agreed that a separate float of £20 be allocated to Area Representatives to be used specifically for extension work in starting new Groups.
1986	6,000 vests had been knitted by Association members for the Save the Children appeal with the work only taking 3-4 months to complete.
March 1986	Annual subscriptions increased to £1.50.
10 June 1987	Association had 4,000 members.
1 July 1989	Life membership was increased to £15.
1 October 1992	Annual subscriptions would be increased to £4 and life subscriptions to £20.

1995	WVS/WRVS Association became known as the WRVS Association, and became a legal part of the WRVS.
1 April 1998	Annual subscription increased to £5 and life membership for new members was discontinued.
1 October 1999	Association office moved from WRVS Head Office, 151 Clapham Road, London to 82 Bootham, York. Had seven staff manning the office Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 10am-3pm.
2000	<p>The Divisional Representative may make a claim for 50p per head once a year only, for members attending a Divisional or County Reunion, to help defray the cost involved in hiring a hall.</p> <p>In order to assist in the development of County/District Groups, the Divisional Representative could apply to the Hon. Treasurer at Headquarters for an Extension Grant of £30 to be used at her discretion.</p>
2006	Association office moved from 82 Bootham, York to The Priory Street Centre, Priory Street, York.
September 2008	New WRVS Association constitution was approved.

2 October 2010	Changes to the Association constitution requested by Bassetlaw Branch were approved at the AGM and included as an Addendum.
6 October 2012	The last committee meeting, AGM and Reunion were held in York.
12 June 2013	Final event, a celebration lunch at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.
26 July 2013	Closure of the Association, membership stood at 1,592.

Appendix 2: Extracts from WRVS Association newsletters

Tales of one member's travels to the 40th anniversary service 25 April 1978.¹¹

"I was taken out to lunch by an old friend and as we were leaving the hotel dining room we noticed three middle-aged gentlemen sitting at a table by the door, obviously celebrating a birthday. As we passed their table one of them commented "Ah, a little WVS lady". I flashed my teeth in a winsome smile of acknowledgement and the eldest of the three enquired "is it not your Anniversary ma'am?" I replied that this was so, whereupon he raised his glass and said "Congratulations, and well done!" and to my astonishment he and his friends rose and applauded as we left the room. I think I will never make a better exit!

"Later the same evening while waiting for a taxi at the station in Birmingham, a similar incident occurred. The taxi-driver leapt out of his cab and held the door open for me, an almost unknown courtesy these days, and asked "Meals on Wheels me darlin?" in a rich brummie accent "No" I replied, "I'm not 'ON' until tomorrow morning" He talked continuously on the drive home about his army service, and asked if I had gone down to the East Coast Floods. I said 'Yes and he remarked that his aunt who lived there 'remembers you lot'. When I offered him his fare he said "Oh no, me darlin' - I'm not taking nuthin' from you today - it's your Anniversary, and I've not forgotten how good you girls were to us in Cyprus - let me make your day a happy one - God bless you". He shook me firmly by the hand and drove away very quickly, leaving me standing in the rain and snivelling rather idiotically."

Scottish section: November 1983

Mrs Macdonald went on to say, "It is interesting to see how various groups entertain themselves; the erudite in the capital, Edinburgh, forming a bridge club and a cosmopolitan group in Aberdeen, the oil city, who have found speakers on a wide variety of subjects - from lace-making to living in a desert, but most groups meet just for a coffee and a chat. Some members from Dumbarton really got lost on a mystery

¹¹ WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-09

coach tour and eventually had to fall back on their old map reading training to get them home".¹²

Dyfed, W. Mid. & S. Glam. Gwent. Report: Autumn 1995

Mrs Travis calls Gwent members "girls", in her report. (They will be pleased. We could all do with that! Ed.). "The girls" have enjoyed their monthly meetings; a planning meeting in January, with subs collected, a knitting design demonstration in February, a quiz in March, lunch in April, 20 free tickets from the Mayor to the historic Muster in May, a train trip on the Brecon Steam train in June and a coffee morning in July, (with a break for rest in August Ed!). In September they visited the Working Horse Centre, heard a talk on Lifeboats in October and in November or December they plan a Christmas lunch. A busy lot, these "girls".¹³

Lancashire Report: Autumn 2012

'Crosby in Merseyside has a busy programme this year starting with a talk from Kevin Harvey, a local actor, this was very enjoyable. In April we had a quiz afternoon, the quizzes were set by Linda McEvoy and stretched our brains somewhat. Our trip to the new Museum was cancelled as it clashed with the Queens visit to the museum as part of her Jubilee visit to Liverpool. The highlight of the year so far was our Jubilee garden party - in the rain. How 40 of us fitted into Linda's house was a puzzle but it was a great success with a lot of red, white and blue outfits and a display of 50s memorabilia. Later this year we have a garden centre trip for coffee and shopping, a 'balloon' debate, and Christmas lunch at a local pub - always a convivial event.'¹⁴

Great Yarmouth Branch Report: Autumn 2012

'Our last luncheon of 2011, and also our Christmas Luncheon were held at The Star Hotel, Gt. Yarmouth on 16 November 2011. We held the event early to ensure all our members and friends would be able to join us, knowing that many belong to

¹² WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-19

¹³ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-43

¹⁴ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-77

other clubs, and therefore have many Christmas functions to enjoy. We had 54 friends and members attend. This was our first meeting at the hotel. The food was most enjoyable. The raffle followed, as usual. Have you ever heard 54 ladies chatting all at once? A truly wonderful sound.¹⁵

¹⁵ WRVSA&HC/WRVSA/HQ/PUB/ANEWS/ANEWS-77



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