

HISTORY OF THE ROLL OF HONOUR

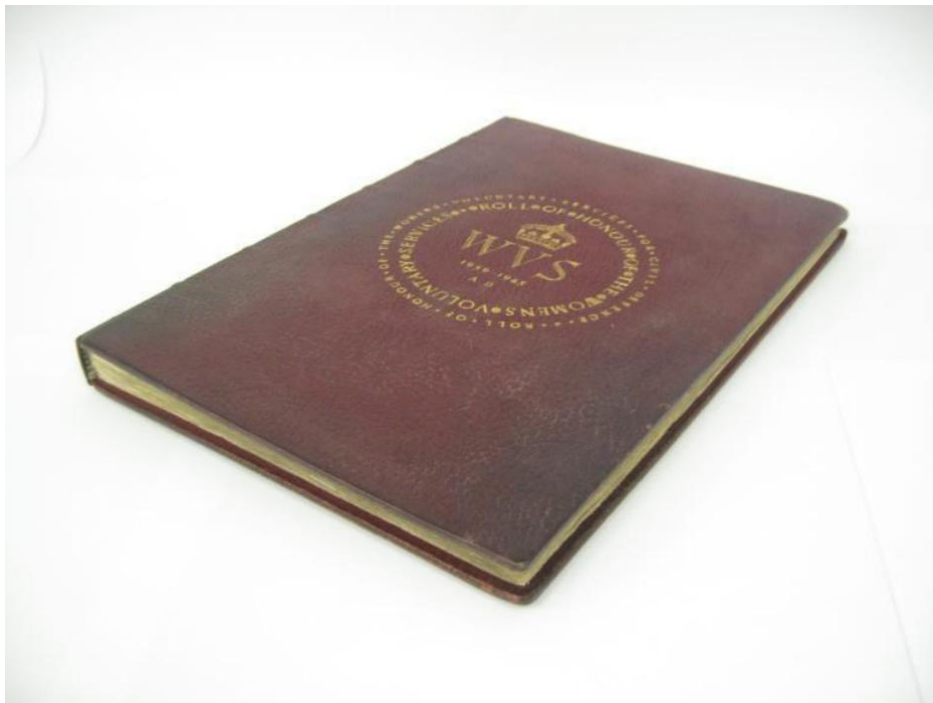
ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HERITAGE COLLECTION

Taken from 'History of The Roll of Honour', a document in the Heritage Collection

e: enquiries@royalvoluntary.service.org.uk
w: royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

Royal Voluntary Service is a registered charity 1015988 (England & Wales) SC038924 (Scotland)

In the years of war approximately 25,000 women were killed by enemy action in Britain. Two hundred and forty three of these belonged to W.V.S. When the fighting was over, Miss Claire Evans, Deputy Centre Organiser for Camberwell, undertook to inscribe their name on vellum as a lasting memorial. After five years work the task was finished. Mr Roger Powell, who is responsible for book-binding at the Royal College of Art, South Kensington, has now bound the book on red cape levant.



A copy of the Roll of Honour the original is kept at Westminster Abbey

Description of the Roll of Honour

The opening pages of the Roll of Honour show the pattern of W.V.S. and its relation to the Civil Defence Organisation. There is a Regional map surrounded by an illuminated border showing the Coats of Arms of the four Kingdoms, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, their emblems and some explanatory writing. The title page shows the Arms of the Cities in which the Regional Offices are situated. For London and Region 5 were the greatest number of casualties occurred, there is a section opened by a display of the Arms of the Cities of London and

Westminster and the Boroughs of Metropolitan London in gold and in colour. Scotland, Wales and Ireland have their own special pages. War Historians asked that the citations should be as correct and as full as possible and should state the exact occupation of each woman at the time of her death, the reason being that posterity would thus realise that the women of this age were prepared to risk their lives for little things in order to bring help and reassurance to other people, and thus the character of today could in a measure be judged.



Pages from the Roll of Honour

Materials used in making the Roll of Honour

The book is written on vellum, the pages measuring 18" x 11 ½". Before the war the skins were imported largely from Russia and the Baltic Countries, where large herds of cattle and their feeding together, made the skins much alike in substance. We used only British skins. There was, at the time, no shipping space available for importing skins, and these were chosen from skins obtained from all over the country by an old established firm of fellmongers. This leads to a quite beautiful variety of skins, both of weight and colour. The skins in the W.V.S. Roll of Honour vary considerably and have been graded in colour from nearly white skins to others that are pale yellow. They are placed hair side to hair side and smooth side to smooth side in pairs, all the way through the book.

When they are bound, as the material is too thick to be folded like paper, each pages is glued and sewn to a linen guard.

The gilding is of two kinds – burnished gold and flat gold.

Ink was sent from U.S.A., as the gift of a friend. It is an ink of very high quality, and if it could not have been obtained it would have been necessary to use the ancient Chinese stick inks which take so long to rub down.

The painting was done in water colour. Most of that used was pre-war, but a few colours came back onto the market just in time to be used.

The figure panels are charts to show some of the activities of the W.V.S. and to keep a record of the uniform worn by the members. Each one represents something seen or done by the designer, and has been chosen to show some aspect of war that might well be forgotten or never realised in the future. It may become of interest at some time beyond our knowledge that in any condition of distress and danger people saved their animals as a matter of course, and that weeping came with relief from strain rather than with a shock of disaster; and that batches of tiny children at railway stations rode contentedly on the luggage trolleys.

Private views

The Roll of Honour was shown twice in the autumn to the County and County Borough organisers at Ashridge.

6 December, 1950

The Chairman, accompanied by Miss Evans, took the Roll of Honour to Buckingham Palace where they were received by H.M. The Queen. Her Majesty was very interested in the Citations as well as in the fine workmanship.

The Roll of Honour was taken to Marlborough House so that Queen Mary might look at it at her leisure.

On subsequent occasions the Roll of Honour has been shown to a number of distinguished people. Their R.H. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Lord Clarendon, The Dean of Westminster, The Administrator of Westminster Cathedral, Dr. Arthur Bryant, Sir Sydney Cockerell, Sir Walter Lamb etc.

7 December, 1950

Preliminary Press Conference for editors of monthly magazines was held at W.V.S. Headquarters, to which all the News Editors were invited and which was attended by eight representatives of women's and technical magazines. Special arrangements were made for those who could not come to see it afterwards.

26 January, 1951

A preview of the Roll of Honour was held at W.V.S. Headquarters on this and several subsequent days. Many V.I.P's came to see it including Lords Ammon, Middleton, Porter and Badely, Mr. Bradley (Director of the Imperial War Museum), Mr. Williams (of The Times), Miss Quigley and Miss Mary Hill (of the B.B.C.).

8 February, 1951

Press Conference was held by the Chairmen. The News Editors of the London Dailies (morning and evening) and Sunday Papers – as well as some provincial papers – were invited to attend. In addition to these all news editors

of suitable weekly papers and several Free Lance Journalists were invited. Reuter sent a representative.

The Chairman spoke for ten minutes or more to a very full room. Everyone appeared to be extremely interested and asked innumerable questions.

The Roll of Honour was then shown by the Chairman assisted by Miss Evans and tremendous admiration was expressed. Towards the close of the Conference the Chairman and Miss Evans were both photographed with the Roll of Honour. Several fine photographs of the Roll of Honour subsequently appeared in the press, notably in The Times. The handout for the Press Conference was specially written for W.V.S. and contained the following:- "W.V.S. were called into being in 1938 as auxiliaries in the work of Civil Defence. With the progress of the war, their duties increased until they became the instrument for providing, in an organised form to all those engaged on war work in these Islands, the indispensable service which a household looks for from its womenfolk. They cooked, served, washed, house kept, cared for children, drove cars, alleviated distress, cheered the sick and old, cleaned, collected salvage, found shelter for the homeless and performed a myriad other tasks. And realising how much their services would lose in value unless brought to the place of need, the Nation's housewives came voluntarily into danger, nor – as this Roll of Honour shows – did they escape unscathed."

The names of those who died come from 34 counties ranging from Renfrew to Cornwall, and from Glamorgan to Norfolk. After the London area, Yorkshire and Devonshire stand highest in numbers. Ninety-six were killed between the outbreak of war and 1st June 1941. Eighty-three between that date and 10th June, 1944, and sixty-four between then and the end of hostilities. It will thus be seen that the names on this Roll of Honour reflect in miniature the total sacrifice made by British Civilians..... It was the function of W.V.S. to gather together the ordinary women of Britain in the service of the National cause, and they paid the toll required of all who stand forward. Here they are worthily Commemorated.

Specimen citations from Roll of Honour

Margaret Lorraine of New Seaham, C. Durham Landlady of the Colliery Inn Public House. She was killed by a direct hit by H.E., having seen her invalid husband and all the customers to safety.

Dorothy Cook. Mobile Canteen Driver of Bristol, Gloucestershire. While driving a Y.M.C.A. Canteen Van in the Bristol Docks area in the Blackout, the vehicle fell over the quayside into the water and Mrs. Cook, trapped in her van was drowned. She had been driving continuously for a week through the Blitz.

Margaret Jackson, Catherine Little, Ada Morris, Elizabeth Sherwood, Agnes Vernon, Jeanie Wright, of Bootle Lancashire. These six Rest Centre Workers were killed on duty at the St. Andrews Rest Centre when it received a direct hit.

Janet Wates of Leicester, Leicestershire. She had been over to Coventry with other Canteen workers helping after their first blitz. She returned home to sleep and was killed when her house was destroyed by an H.E.

Gertrude Chadwick of Skegness, Lincolnshire. She was at home making a cup of tea for her invalid husband, when the house received a direct hit. She was killed, but her husband was found under the debris, still in bed and uninjured.

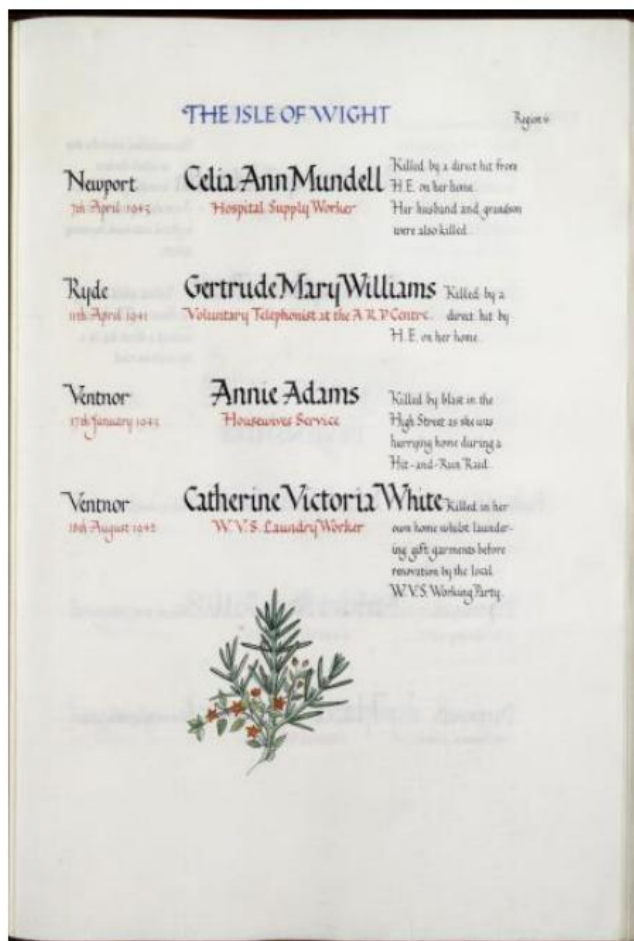
Winifred Alliker of Thurrock, Essex She remained sewing instead of taking shelter, as the work in hand was urgently needed in Hospital. Her whole family were killed at the same time.

Hannah Jane Miles of Battersea, London. She was killed in her own home while preparing breakfast for her family, by a direct hit from a V.1. (Flying Bomb).

Ada Jane Johnson of Camberwell, London. ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE 9 She died in hospital after being injured in the street, on her way home from work, in a Flying Bomb incident. She had only just recovered from injuries received from an earlier V.1. and had returned to work about a week.

Hon. June Mary Forbes-Samphill of Chelsea, London. Killed by a blast from H.E. in a doorway in Basil Street while waiting to go on duty.

Marjorie Brookman of Deptford, London. Central Hall Deptford received a direct hit while she was delivering wool to a knitting party. She was not killed outright, but with many others of the party was trapped by falling masonry. She tried to direct the rescuers, one of whom received the George Cross, but no one was rescued alive.



Pages from the Roll of Honour

Extracts from the WVS Roll of Honour

S.R. Round W.V.S. badge

"May you be able to understand to the full, all that you are, all that you have been, all the splendid strength that is yours. Use it for the good of your home, of your Community, and of the world."

Mr. Herbert Morrison, in the council chamber of the County Hall, Westminster on 7 December, 1944

"They have fought under the direct fire of the enemy, suffered and died under bombing attacks, and their steadfast fitness has not failed."

Her Majesty The Queen, 7 December, 1944

"When future generations look back on this most terrible war they recognise as one of its chief features, the degree to which women were actively engaged in it ... In this country, at any rate, the way could not have been won without their help."

Taken from a letter written in 1947 by the Dowager Marchioness of Reading, C.B.E., C. ST. J., D.LITT., Chairman of W.V.S.

"The Glory of Britain has not been won or held by leaders; it has been achieved and maintained by the mass of right minded and ordinary individuals who have acted up to their belief that the rights of others and fair play or all should come before their own wishes. This country believes in great intangible things; it holds its faith in that which is right, it admires that which is good, it loves that which is just."

Figure pages

I looked upon the wrong side of a piece of arras; it seemed to me a continued nonsense ... confusion itself had as much method. A company of thrums and threads, all of which signified nothing to my understanding. But then looking on the

reverse or right side thereof, all put together did spell excellent proportions, and figures of men and cities; so that indeed it was a history not wrote with a pen but wrought with a needle.

If men look upon our late times with the mere eye of reason, they will hardly find any sense therein, such their huddle and disorder. But the wrong side is objected to our eyes. Whilst the right side is presented to the High God of Heaven, who knoweth that an admirable order doth result out of this confusion, and what is presented to him at present, may hereafter be so showed to us to convince our judgements in the truth thereof.

Thomas Fuller 1608 – 1661.

7 February, 1951

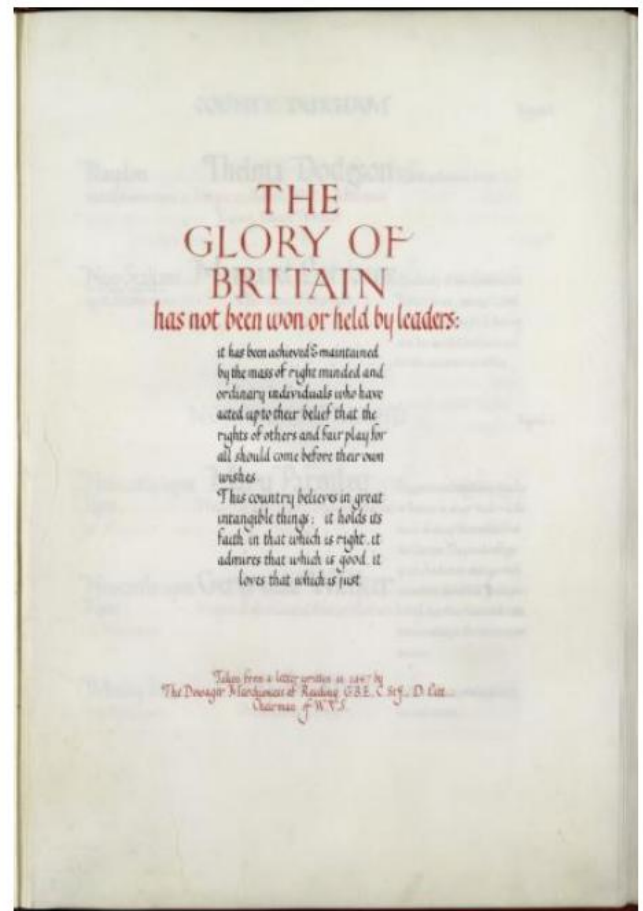
Miss Hill (of B.B.C.) came to Headquarters with a colleague and a recording van and made an excellent recording of Miss Evans showing the Roll of Honour. Part of the recording was used in Women's Hour on February 9th.

10 February, 1951

Miss Evans was televised most successfully at Alexandra Palace. The heat of the lights did the book a certain amount of temporary harm. Miss Evans however was able to rectify everything in the course of the weekend thanks greatly to the damp of the British Climate.

From the first Press Conference onwards and right through the Tour of the Roll of Honour, Miss Evans was inundated with correspondence. One letter which she received contains the following simple account of a very poignant "incident". Mrs. Sarah Moss, member of the W.V.S. Housewives Service of Stoke Newington... was killed by a Parachute Mine on the night of January 6th, 1941. Mrs Moss was sitting with a blind old lady and her deaf and dum daughter. This was her job in the Housewives Service, to go round to these people directly a Raid was impending. She never failed to do so and lost her life on duty. It was a shocking night – a blizzard blew up just after the incident occurred and snow was thick on the ground, making the rescue work even more difficult. The cold was intense. This was before

the issue of overcoats to the wardens and the men were perished. I lent an overcoat which was passed on by each man wearing it as he came off duty. My wife sent down a lot of potatoes to the Post. These were roasted and each man had one in each pocket so that he could warm his hands. Mrs. Moss's son, Harry, was a messenger at A.R.P. Headquarters, and he continued to work through the night, but, poor lad, he kept saying that he couldn't bear to think of his mother lying underneath the snow."



Pages from the Roll of Honour

Tour of the Roll of Honour

Region 12 February 21st – March 4th

Region 6 March 4th – March 18th

Region 9 March 18th – March 31st

Region 10 April 1st - April 7th

Region 2 April 7th – April 15th

Region 1 April 15th – April 25th

Region 3 April 10th – May 4th

Region 4 May 5th – May 12th

Region 7 May 12th – May 22nd

Wales May 23rd – May 30th

Scotland May 30th – June 14th

Region 10 June 15th – June 16th (returned)

Region 5 June 18th - June 23rd

Region 12

The Roll of Honour was shown in (amongst other places) Chichester, Canterbury and Rochester Cathedrals, Eastbourne and Lewes Town Halls. Altogether 1,500 people in the Region saw it, sometimes more than once. Amongst them were several relatives of deceased W.V.S., and the Dean of Rochester Cathedral, the Mayor and Mayoress of Guildford, the Lord Lieutenant of Sussex, etc. etc.,

Region 12 produced a special stand to show the Roll of Honour, which was used for the whole tour.

Region 6

A service was held on March 14th in the City Church of St. Martins and All Saints in Oxford, at which the congregation numbered upwards of 800 people. The Roll of Honour was also shown at the Civil defence Staff College at Sunningdale. A further service was held in the Minster Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Reading. The Roll of Honour was also shown at the Borough Museum of High Wycombe. 250 people saw it and many of them were particularly interested as they had seen Miss Evans televising.

Region 9

The Roll of Honour was shown to over 100 people in Coventry including the Mayor Elect and the Town Clerk. It was also shown in Hereford Cathedral (where the Dean took a service), Worcester Cathedral, and in the Birmingham Art Gallery where nearly 2,000 people saw it. At Lichfield it was shown in the Memorial Chapel of the Cathedral. Amongst those who saw it were: The Mayors and Mayoresses of Lichfield and Stafford, the Bishop of Stafford and Lady Harrowby. It was also shown at St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury and at the Leamington, Wolverhampton and Stoke-on-Trent Town Halls. All who saw it were indeed 'filled with wonder and amaze'. "There seemed to be an atmosphere of reverence in the way people looked upon every page". One woman said "It's beauty is a fitting tribute to the acts of self-sacrifice it commemorates", and another said "What a saga to hand to posterity."

Region 10

On April 2nd, a service was held in St. Anne's Church, Manchester, where the Roll of Honour was carried in Procession. Another service was held in Carlisle Cathedral. This was conducted by the Dean and various Civil Dignitaries were present. At Liverpool the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress performed an opening ceremony at which Representatives of various Local Organisations as well as several V.I.P.'s were present. "I felt it an honour to take the Roll of Honour to Merseyside and to show it to those members who themselves had known the Blitz so personally, and who had lost so many of their colleagues".

One woman was overcome with sorrow and pride when she read her sister's Citation. An Australian wrote in the visitors book; "A beautiful record of loving work."

The Roll of Honour was subsequently returned to Region 10 for 2 days (June 15th and 16th) when services were held in St. Georges Church, Barrow-in-Furness, where the Roll of Honour was carried in procession, and in Chester Cathedral, where it was dedicated by the Bishop, and where amongst others Dean Tubbs and Canon Hard were present.

Region 2

The Roll of Honour was shown in the County Hall, Beverley and the Hull Art Gallery, and at the Art Galleries of both York and Leeds. The Curator of the York Gallery suggested that a typescript copy of all the written material should be made, to be placed in the British Museum with the copies of all other great works.

Upwards of 800 were able to see the Roll of Honour.

Mrs. Somerville of the W.V.S. Regional Staff who was in charge of the Roll of Honour wrote in her report:- "Because of its great beauty it has brought joy and gratitude to those who have gazed upon it and also deep emotional feeling because of all that is recorded and portrayed within it . At present time when by necessity, so much importance is placed on unimportant things and when the art of living has become, for so many, the task of living, this has been a moving and unforgettable experience and I would like to thank those, who, by placing the Roll of Honour in my care made it possible for me to have this experience."

Region 1

A Special Service was held on April 16th in Durham Cathedral. The Roll of Honour was received by the Dean and a congregation of about 600 was present and included many prominent people. At the beginning and the end of this service Mrs. Houston, the County Borough Organiser from Newcastle carried the Roll of Honour in Procession followed by an escort of twelve W.V.S. This was done with great dignity and distinction and was in consequence, very impressive.

After the service the Roll of Honour remained in the Galilee Chapel for the rest of the week guarded by W.V.S. Members. A German woman said after seeing the Roll of Honour that it had helped her to understand civilian life in England during the War. The Roll of Honour was subsequently shown in the Public Library at Scarborough.

Region 3

The Roll of Honour was shown at Oakham and at Lincoln and subsequently in the Nottingham Library, where amongst many others who saw it were some students from the School of Art and some bookbinders (from various firms) who were particularly interested.

It was also shown to the members of the Conference of the North Midland Division of Soroptomotists of the Federation of Great Britain. One artist remained to see it three times and said afterwards that as an illuminator herself, she thought it was the finest modern work she had seen.

The Roll of Honour was shown in the Nottingham Guildhall to the Lord Mayor, the Sheriff and Town Clerk of Nottingham, to the High Sherriff of Nottinghamshire etc. "The exclamations at the beauty of design and craftsmanship" were unanimous. Many people came to see the Roll of Honour several times and one woman announced that she had already seen it eight times.

Region 4

The Roll of Honour was shown in the County Hall, Chelmsford. "A steady stream of people including many past and present members of the W.V.S. had a prefect view of it. We find it difficult to express in words our feelings for the exquisite work. Many people spoke of the great joy it brought them to see such perfection. We who were there all day felt that the true spirit of W.V.S. spread to all those who saw it, and it gave us fresh inspiration for the future."

The Roll of Honour was shown in the 15th Century Church of St. Edward King and Martyr and subsequently a Service was held in King's College, Cambridge. This was a service of Commemoration and Re-dedication and was conducted by the Dean

and attended by some 500 or 600 members from the Region. On May 11th a service was held in Norwich Cathedral at which the Bishop of Norwich gave a very inspiring address. The Master of Corpus Christi College (Sir Will Spens) wrote: "We went afterwards to look at the Roll of Honour..... This college is very rich in its illuminated manuscripts, and it seemed to me that the W.V.S. Roll stands comparison with the best of our mediaeval manuscripts."

A W.V.S. member who attended the service at Norwich Cathedral writes: "I do not know if it is because we who are born of East Anglian soil have our special joy in its particular beauties, or if the same characteristics strike the 'foreigner' who comes amongst us. However I think that on the particular late afternoon and early evening of which I am writing nearly all must have been struck by the quality of beauty given to our cathedral by the clearness of light and shadow – which shades I never seem to see in other parts of England, and which only East Anglia can offer.

And we came through the lanes and through the streets to a Service which had been inspired by our County Organiser, and as it unfolded itself in all its beauty and all its sadness, it must indeed have been a reward to her and to all those who helped her. We came to pay homage to those of our great Organisation who in the World War lost their lives in serving, and our first act after entering the cathedral was to look at that wonderful Book, the Roll of Honour, which is being shown to W.V.S. members in all the great churches of the land, and which belonged to Norfolk that day.

Every item of that Service of Evensong had been shown to perfection, and the sheer beauty of the music in such a wonderful setting made one feel the truth of the 1st verse of the first psalm which was rendered 'we were like unto them that dream'. And the second Psalm 'Except the Lord build the house, except the Lord Keep the City', could not have been more happy, because the W.V.S. house is built that way and its 'labour is not lost'.

To begin with it seemed that there was very little real colour, just a perfect blending of shades, but when a dignitary of the church moved from his place to take part of the service, the colour of his hood seemed to glow against the austere simplicity of the Altar with its white and silver and one huge vase of delicately coloured spring

flowers near the Bishop's Seat. Then when the Choir Boys in their cassocks rose to sing, one felt that perfect blending again and there was not a sound to be heard among the congregation during the rendering of the Anthem 'Souls of the Righteous in the hand of God'.

And once again when the stately figure of Bishop Herbert moved to the Pulpit there was that same hush, and every word of his clear and moving address was heard. He gave to us thought of Dedication and of Service to the Community and to the Home; he spoke of the glorious 29th Infantry Brigade, and the service given to those men by the Norfolk W.V.S. He also spoke of comradeship among W.V.S. members and the good which this friendliness has done and finally of the Roll of Honour with its 243 names inscribed by the hand of a member on thick sheets of vellum, and as he passed from the pulpit back to his seat he paused with head bowed before the Book with the open page showing the names of the 5 women from Gorleston and King's Lynn, who as W.V.S. members gave their lives in the service of their country.

After the blessing the Bishop and the Dean stood each side of the Altar with its pure tones of white and silver, and as the Choir and procession of Clergy retreated from us into the shadows of the great Cathedral, in the now evening light truly one felt the power of the St. Martin's Prayer 'When the shades lengthen and the evening comes', and that we may be granted 'safe lodging, a Holy rest and Peace at the last'."

Region 7

On May 15th, a short service took place in Bristol Cathedral and the Roll of Honour was subsequently shown in both Exeter Cathedral and in the Plymouth Art Gallery, where many distinguished visitors including the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress had an opportunity of seeing it.

Wales

On May 23rd, a choral service of Dedication and Remembrance took place in Llandaff Cathedral. The Cathedral was filled with W.V.S. and Representatives of the Red Cross and other organisations as well as Representatives of the Civic Life of Cardiff. "The lovely and historical Cathedral at Llandaff", so the report runs, "A gem

in a superb setting, surrounded by ancient buildings and trees of great age, still exhibits its own scars of war. The beautiful spire has been partly demolished and much of the Cathedral is still without a roof, but it stands bravely and in dignity, a fitting setting for a service of Dedication and Remembrance”.

On May 24th a short service was held at the Guildhall at Swansea. The Mayor unveiled the Roll of Honour and addressed those present (mostly associated with the Civic Life of the Town). Thereafter the Roll of Honour was on view all day. It was also on view at Newport, and at Radyr, near Cardiff.

On May 27th an impressive service was held at Heemon Chapel at Treoichy. “This event, earnest and fervent as are all Welsh religious services, was the highlight of the Rhonda for the day. In addition to a moving address by the Minister, a tribute to the work done by W.V.S. was paid by a local M.P. and a member of the local council”. On May 29th an inspiring service was held at the Wrexham Parish Church, beautiful in itself and on occasion exquisitely decorated with flowers by W.V.S. Between 500 and 600 people attended, and the proceedings were recorded by the B.B.C. A large portion of the Canon’s address was broadcast in the Welsh News that evening. About 200 saw the Roll of Honour in Wales.

Scotland

On June 1st, the Roll of Honour was shown to the Lady Provost of Edinburgh and others at Scottish Headquarters.

On June 4th it was shown in the Memorial Chapel of St. Cuthberts, Edinburgh. This made a very good setting and the Roll of Honour was greatly admired, one Comment being: “As perfect in its way as the Scottish Memorial at the Castle”.

Various artists were very interested and expressed great admiration of the decorative way in which the thistle had been used and painted.

The Roll of Honour was on view in the City Chambers in Glasgow for 3 days and was then shown, on June 12th and 13th, in the Sacristy of Paisley Abbey.

Region 5

From June 18th till June 23rd, the Roll of Honour was exhibited by kind permission of the Minister of Works in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey.

The Chapter House of Westminster Abbey was damaged by blast from a bomb which fell in Old Palace Yard on 26th September, 1940. The repairs were not completed until early June 1951 and it was reopened for the showing of the W.V.S. Roll of Honour.

Over 2,000 people, from 20 different countries, saw the Roll of Honour in the course of those few days.

Amongst the visitors were the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Morrison, Lady Reading the Chairman and the Dean of Queen's College, Cambridgeshire, who stated that in his opinion the Roll of Honour was the finest example of modern calligraphy he had ever seen. An Australian, on his first visit to England, said that was particularly struck by the trials and tribulations suffered by the British through the ages but he felt in spite of this, that everybody was working for peace and not taking war as inevitable.

Representatives from various Ministries, Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations came and, having seen the Roll of Honour, expressed great admiration.

Amongst other visitors were a party of French students with the Priest and a party of Scientists and their wives, from all over the world. They really came to see the Chapter House but stayed to see the Roll of Honour.

Organised parties came from various W.V.S. Centres. Throughout the Tour, the Roll of Honour was seen, studied and admired by thousands of past and present Members of W.V.S. and their friends and relatives.

Requiem Mass

Some of the Catholic W.V.S. thought that, before the Roll of Honour was placed in Westminster Abbey, a Requiem Mass should be said in Westminster Cathedral for the Catholic W.V.S. who had lost their lives in the war. The Roll of Honour was

taken and shown to Monsignor Collingwood, Administrator of Westminster Cathedral and he then and there offered to say the Mass himself.

A Press Notice was sent out - All W.V.S. Regions were informed, and various V.I.P's were invited.

The Mass was said at 12 noon on Friday, July 27th in the Holy Souls Chapel. The Roll of Honour lay on a draped lectern. The congregation was estimated at about 150 and consisted of Catholics and Non Catholics, W.V.S. and their friends, and some members of the public.

The Chairman attended and was impressed as were many Non Catholics, with the beauty of the music and the quiet serenity of the Ceremony. After the Mass, Miss Evans showed the Roll of Honour to all and sundry for upwards of an hour.

Roll of Honour

On December 8th, 1950, Lady Reading took the Roll of Honour to show the Dean of Westminster who immediately said that he thought it should be placed for safe-keeping in the Abbey. It was explained to the Dean that first the Roll of Honour must go on a tour of the Regions but on the conclusion of its tour W.V.S. would deposit the book in the Abbey. The Dean suggested that St. Nicholas's Chapel would be particularly good place in which to display the Roll of Honour and this was agreed. It was realised that in order to display the Book to its best advantage it would be necessary to have a casket or lectern specially designed and Mr. J. B. S. Comper, F.R.I.B.A., was asked to undertake the work.

W.V.S. members throughout the country contributed their money to pay for the casket which on completion stood 3'1" high and was 3'9" wide, 2'7" deep and was beautifully carved in English oak in a formal design with the words:-

"Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence"

And

"If we love one another, God Dwelleth in us".

The floor in which the Roll of Honour lies was lined with beautiful green Genoese velvet, so that with the dark red cover and the green velvet the W.V.S. colours are represented.

In order that as many people as possible would have access to the Roll of Honour a photographic replica in almost the same size was produced and bound in a cover by Mr. Roger Powell with the identical design of the Roll of Honour itself, tooled in gold. This was placed in a specially constructed drawer in the casket which is left unlocked so that it may be examined by any visitor.

On November 20th, 1951, the Roll of Honour was dedicated and placed in Westminster Abbey. The Service was attended by Her Majesty the Queen, relatives of the W.V.S. whose names are inscribed in the Roll of Honour and past and present members of W.V.S. from every part of the country. The Abbey was filled to its maximum capacity.

On arrival, the Queen was greeted by a Guard of Honour of London Centre Organisers.

During the course of the Service, the Roll of Honour was borne in procession to the steps of the High Alter by Miss C. G. M. Evans, accompanied by three other W.V.S. members who had served throughout the War – Mrs. Kelly of Bootle, Mrs. More of Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, and Miss Wolstenholme of Llandaff, Cardiff – who were chosen to represent England, Scotland and Wales, while Miss Evans represented London.

Lady Reading asked the Queen to unveil the Book which Her Majesty did with these words:-

“I unveil this Roll of Honour and request that it be kept within the precincts of this Collegiate Church of St. Peter in Westminster to remind generations to come of the devotion to duty displayed by all members of the Women’s Voluntary Service. And I bid you, Mr. Dean, to dedicate it on the High Altar to the Glory of God”.

After the dedication the Roll of Honour was taken by Lady Reading, accompanied by the Dean, to St. Nicholas's Chapel where it was placed in the carved oak casket, where it will remain on display for at least the next two years.

A copy of the Order of Service and of the description of the Service itself as published in the Bulletin is attached.

Part of the service was recorded and broadcast in "Women's Hour" by the B.B.C. that day and the broadcast was repeated in Radio Newsreel that evening. Once again, on the following Sunday, the Recorded broadcast was heard in the "Woman's Hour Digest" so that W.V.S. members everywhere had an opportunity of hearing it.

There were a number of representatives of the Press present in Westminster Abbey during the Service which was well reported in the daily papers on the following day.

The Roll of Honour is on view in St Nicholas's Chapel. Arrangements have been made for a small notice to be put up on the tomb behind it to draw the attention of visitors to the fact that the replica is in the drawer available for reference and that the Roll of Honour itself may be inspected on application to the Dean's Verger.

First published by Royal Voluntary Service 2017

This fact sheet is distributed under a CC Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) Creative Commons licence.

This work is copyright © Royal Voluntary Service.

Enquiries regarding use of the material contained in this fact sheet not covered by the Creative Commons licence, or the principals of fair dealing should be directed in the first instance to: heritage@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk