

WVS REPORT ON TEN YEARS WORK FOR THE NATION 1938-1948

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
HERITAGE COLLECTION

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Report of
Ten Years' Work
for the Nation
1938-1948

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WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY SERVICES
41 TOTHILL STREET, LONDON, S.W.1, ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION

W.V.S. came into existence in 1938, at the direct request of the Government of the day, and in order to provide a channel through which women could enrol and serve for A.R.P. Later, the terms of service of W.V.S. were enlarged to comprise the whole of Civil Defence, and the Minister of Home Security ruled that W.V.S. could properly undertake any work arising out of the war which might be asked of it by a Government Department.

From the start it was decided that W.V.S. should work on a Local Authority basis because it was recognised that the need for territorial coverage was one of the most important responsibilities which would confront the new service. A beginning was therefore made by the appointment of a representative in every Local Authority centre which led in time to the development of a working W.V.S. organisation within the centre; and in this way a nation-wide coverage of Great Britain was obtained instead of the springing up of sporadic groups wherever enthusiasm happened to be very strong.

W.V.S. came into being as an idea in 1938. It has grown into its great strength through the contribution of countless individuals, each interpreting general instructions in their own way, and its strength is literally in the faithfulness of its many members rather than in the genius of any few who may be in control. It is a disciplined and uniformed service, carrying its responsibilities to Local Authorities much in the same way as A.T.S. do to the Army, the only difference being that its members are voluntary and pay for their own uniform, etc. There have been no precedents for voluntary service of this type, working under the orders of Local Authorities and yet controlled by a National Headquarters, and the lack of these precedents enabled W.V.S. to undertake work as it was required, and to fulfil a function which although a very humble one, nevertheless, played a worthwhile part in the life of the nation during the war.

The work undertaken by W.V.S. during these ten years was done at the request of Government Departments or the Local Authority, and all its training was evolved in order to meet the needs which these calls were to make upon it.

From the very start, the concept was that women should be able to undertake the work in the time they could make or spare, rather than on a full-time basis. For this it was necessary to have a small nucleus of full-time workers and to evolve a method by which part-time workers could undertake the continuous and responsible job without fear of breakdown.

This was done by various different methods, such as two women enrolling as one, a deputy always available to the person in charge, an alternate for the particular job, etc. Recognising that mobile women must be called away to the forces or to industry, W.V.S. approached the housewives of the country and got from them a response which was unbelievable in its magnitude and tremendous in its contribution. The difficulty to be overcome was the innate modesty of each one of these housewives, but once convinced of their own personal capacity, responsibility was not only well taken but continuity of service and devotion to undertaking were shown, which were quite beyond all praise. Again and again women who had lost their homes reported to the Incident Inquiry Point because they had undertaken to do so and were not deflected from the duty they had undertaken by their own loss or their own hardship.

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In the years of war W.V.S. proved quite conclusively that it is possible for women to serve their community in an operational role and a disciplined way, integrating that service with statutory aid, provided that their effort is handled in an understanding way and their personal problems considered in relation to their national effort: it proved, too, that people will always work for a common cause if they understand how the small part they are playing contributes to the whole and how that whole advances the principles they hold.

Many lessons have been learnt by W.V.S., one of which is that personnel management and welfare for volunteers are just as necessary in an unpaid as in a paid service; second, that training must be practical and followed immediately by the task for which that training has been prepared, or enthusiasm is apt to flag and potential workers become disinterested, but though in all these ten years it has never offered its members any benefit but the privilege of serving, or held out any prize either of culture or education or personal advantage, it has never lacked for workers because the things it does are the ordinary things that ordinary women understand, and the people it serves are the ordinary people who are the strength of the Nation, and who are the members of W.V.S. itself.

In the long years many experiments have reached fruition, much has been done, and many people have found through W.V.S. an opportunity for service which has given them a deeper understanding of the life of the Nation and the problems which have to be faced by both Local Government and Central Authority. The Nation itself has become more conscious of such problems in these years, and it is the hope of all W.V.S. members that they may continue to have the opportunity of service and prove worthy of their great privilege.



Chairman,
Women's Voluntary Services.

LONDON, December, 1948.

MINISTRIES AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS
TO WHICH SERVICE WAS RENDERED
BY W.V.S. DURING THE WAR

Home Office	Ministry of Health
Scottish Home Department	Department of Health for Scotland
Admiralty	Ministry of Home Security
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries	India Office
Department of Agriculture for Scotland	Ministry of Information
Air Ministry	Ministry of Labour and National Service
Ministry of Aircraft Production	Ministry of Pensions
Assistance Board	Ministry of Supply
Colonial Office	Board of Trade
Dominions Office	Treasury
Board of Education	War Office
Scottish Education Department	Ministry of War Transport
Ministry of Food	Ministry of Works
Foreign Office	
Ministry of Fuel	

1938 — W.V.S. — 1948

In the early summer of 1938, as the European scene grew dark and sombre with the shadow of approaching tragedy, the Government of Great Britain, realising the necessity of mobilising the whole forces of the Nation to meet the growing menace of air attack, decided that a great effort must be made to awaken the women of Britain to the danger which threatened and to call upon them to come to the aid of their country in its grave need.

The Dowager Marchioness of Reading was therefore asked by the Home Secretary of the day to form, under the auspices of the Government, a nation-wide organisation which would assist Local Authorities everywhere with the work of recruiting and training women to serve with what were then known as the Air Raid Precautions Services.

The title of the new organisation was "Women's Voluntary Services for Air Raid Precautions" and it began with five members. Under the leadership of its Chairman, Lady Reading, it was from the first outstandingly successful in its appointed task and it soon became apparent that its capacity for National Service was too vast to be limited to the field of the recruitment of Air Raid Precautions alone. In January, 1939, therefore, in order to enable it to undertake Civil Defence and ancillary services, its title was changed to *Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence* and from that time onward, although Civil Defence remained its first responsibility, its field of activity was constantly widened and finally covered voluntary work of all kinds on behalf of twenty-four different Ministries and Government Departments.

ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANISATION

The administration and organisation of W.V.S. followed the same pattern as that of Civil Defence, Headquarters being in London, Scottish Headquarters in Edinburgh, and Northern Irish Headquarters in Belfast, and the country divided for Administrative purposes into the twelve Civil Defence Regions. Within each Region responsibility was centred in the areas of the Scheme Making Authorities, i.e., the Administrative Counties, County Boroughs, Metropolitan Boroughs, and in Scotland large Burghs. At the height of hostilities over 2,000 W.V.S. Centres were in operation in these areas.

Chief responsibility for the efficiency and direction of W.V.S. was vested, under the Home Secretary, in the Chairman, the Dowager Marchioness of Reading, who had the assistance of a Chairman for Scotland and a Chairman for Northern Ireland, a Vice-Chairman and a Deputy Chairman. The General Secretary and certain other staff officers were Civil Servants seconded to W.V.S. by the Government. Heads of Departments and Specialists undertook the organisation of the principal W.V.S. activities. The Chief Regional Administrator was responsible for the general administration of W.V.S. in all Regions; the Chief of the Metropolitan Department being charged with the special responsibilities appertaining to the London Region, in time of war. The Regional Administrator was the principal W.V.S. officer in each Region and had the assistance of a Regional Organiser and Regional Staff. Under the guidance of the Regional Office, County Organisers and County Borough Organisers were responsible, with the assistance of their respective staffs, for W.V.S. affairs in their own areas. Centre Organisers, assisted by the Centre Staff, were in charge in the non-county boroughs and the urban and rural districts, and for purposes of decentralisation, minor responsibility was further sub-divided between Divisional, Area, or District Organisers, Post and Group Organisers, etc., and Street Representatives in the towns, and Village Representatives in the villages.

By this means a chain of responsibility was set up which ensured that communication could be rapidly established between W.V.S. Headquarters and any W.V.S.

In Scotland the administrative machinery differs slightly and responsibility is centred in Scottish Headquarters, Districts, Counties and large Burghs. For Scotland, please read "large Burgh" wherever "County Borough" is mentioned in the text.

member in any part of the country and also that, in emergency, if cut off from higher authority, each unit of W.V.S. could operate on its own responsibility, under the guidance of its own leader. At every level W.V.S. representatives worked throughout the War in close co-operation with the appropriate Civil Defence officials, and much of the success attained by the Service can be attributed to the manner in which it developed in its members the powers of leadership and fitness for individual responsibility which are such a marked characteristic of the British people.

It should be noted that, although certain members were appointed to positions of special responsibility, there were no ranks in W.V.S. and all members, from the Chairman to the newest volunteer, worked on an equal footing and wore the same uniform, the only distinguishing mark being a small bar brooch worn by those holding special appointments.

Finance

The members of W.V.S. were, of course, unpaid and though not debarred from handling funds contributed to it for charitable or other purposes, the organisation held no funds of its own and was dependent on the Government or Local Authorities for the means of carrying on its work.

Office accommodation for its London and Regional Headquarters was provided by the Government, together with the necessary heat, light, telephones, furniture and paid clerical assistance; similar facilities were afforded by Local Authorities, in most cases, to W.V.S. in their own areas, the Government having informed Local Authorities in January, 1939, that expenditure so incurred would rank for inclusion in the grant made to them by the Exchequer for Air Raid Precaution purposes. Stationery used in W.V.S. offices was provided by H.M. Stationery Office and postage was Official Paid.

Membership

At the peak period of the war the membership of W.V.S. numbered over one million women who were drawn from all classes of the community and who worked together in perfect amity, united by their common desire to serve the country. In the beginning, this membership comprised women from the ages of 17 to 70, but in 1942, by the operation of the National Service Act, all younger members were transferred into the Services or industry, with the exception of those who were exempted from this ruling by the Ministry of Labour on the grounds that the work on which they were already engaged in W.V.S. was essential to the Nation. The extension of the application of the Act to the older age groups of women brought further complications for W.V.S. as still fewer women were then available for voluntary work, but in spite of every difficulty, the ever-increasing responsibilities of the service continued to be borne by the housewives and mothers who formed the great majority of its membership.

In addition to the sufficiently arduous task of caring for their homes and families in time of war these women contrived to give long hours of work to W.V.S. activities and it was due to their unremitting self-sacrifice and devotion to duty that W.V.S. was enabled to make so great a contribution to the National war effort.

Badge

A square white metal badge bearing the inscription in red, "W.V.S. for Air Raid Precautions" (later "W.V.S. for Civil Defence") and surmounted by the Royal Crown, was issued free to all members who had completed 60 hours' work on behalf of the organisation, and who had undertaken a very simple training course.

Uniform

The wearing of the grey-green and wine-red W.V.S. uniform, though optional, was regarded as a highly prized privilege and one which was accorded only to those undertaking certain responsibilities. The cost of the uniform was borne by the member herself.

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Post-War Developments of Administration and Organisation

Although W.V.S. had come into being solely to further the purposes of Civil Defence, later developments had made it impossible that it should cease to function when the need for Civil Defence itself had passed. In the course of the years it had put its hand to many tasks that could not be immediately laid down when the last "All Clear" had sounded, and though rockets and bombs no longer fell from the skies the havoc they had caused—both material and spiritual—remained; it was clear that W.V.S., to whom all classes of the community were accustomed to turn to as a friend in need, had still much useful work to do, and in September, 1945, it was announced by the Government that the Service was to continue during the transitional period following the end of the War, perhaps for two years, the words "Civil Defence" being dropped from its title.

In April, 1946, financial responsibility for W.V.S. premises, gas, electricity, water, telephones, paid clerical assistance, etc., was transferred from Local Authorities to the Central Government, the general administrative plan being otherwise maintained, subject to certain adjustments made in the interest of economy.

In April, 1947, in answer to a question in the House of Commons on the future of W.V.S., it was stated by the Home Secretary that "following on the end of the War, consideration must now be given to the question of how the Service can be fitted into the general pattern of Social Services rendered throughout the country by numerous voluntary bodies and how any financial assistance given by the Exchequer can best be used to promote those forms of voluntary work which are of special assistance to Government Departments and Local Authorities." A similar statement was made by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Meanwhile, it was proposed that the existing arrangements for meeting the approved administrative expenses of W.V.S. should be continued, and the statement concluded with the following words: "Whatever the future holds, the need will continue for voluntary helpers to supplement public services, both on occasions of emergency and at other times."

The threads of W.V.S. work had been woven into the National way of life and had thus become an integral part of the fabric.

Post-War Membership

For W.V.S. members, as for other people, the immediate post-war period had been one of high hopes succeeded by inevitable disappointment and frustration. At the coming of peace they had turned with relief and a sense of duty done towards their homes once more, happily planning renovations and refurbishing and a return to the normal family and social life so long disrupted; at this time there were naturally many resignations from active membership of W.V.S., but as month succeeded month and it became increasingly plain that there could be no return as yet to normality in a country so impoverished by its war effort, gradually many of those who had dropped out returned.

It was obvious that without the continued help of voluntary workers many vital and necessary tasks must be left undone and, led by the same spirit of service which had so long been their guide, the workers came once more to offer such help as they could give in tiding the country through the difficult years. Some there were, of course, who by reason of age, health, or family ties were not in a position to undertake further effort, but to compensate for their loss there were other new volunteers from the younger generation who now came forward to take their place in the ranks, and at the close of its first ten years of Service it was clear that the members of W.V.S. would respond, in peace, as in war, to the need of the nation.

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CO-OPERATION WITH CIVIL DEFENCE SERVICES

Work on behalf of Civil Defence was the chief responsibility of W.V.S. during the War years and as such took priority over all other commitments.

In addition to early recruitment of volunteers for the Air Raid Precautions Services and much important work in connection with the evacuation of children from the danger areas, many activities were carried on in direct support of the Civil Defence Services.

Training in Civil Defence Subjects

The organisation of lectures and courses for women in Civil Defence subjects such as First-Aid, Anti-Gas and Fire Fighting was one of the earliest responsibilities undertaken by W.V.S. Many thousands of these lectures were arranged prior to and after the outbreak of war, and in 1942, in order to relieve the strain on the Civil Defence Services occasioned by the necessity of releasing more and more men for the Forces, the *W.V.S. Basic Training Scheme* was introduced. Under this scheme every W.V.S. member was asked to take a short training course of five lectures in Civil Defence. It was realised that only a minimum of information could be imparted in so short a course, but busy women had little time for attending lectures, and it was hoped that by this means W.V.S. members would at least acquire sufficient knowledge to know what to do in emergency, and perhaps more important, what not to do and how best to assist their neighbours until skilled assistance became available. The lectures which were arranged in conjunction with the St. John Ambulance Brigade and the British Red Cross Society were purposely couched in simple terms which women who were long unaccustomed to absorbing learning could easily understand, but all members who could do so were urged to attend more advanced courses which were specially arranged for them. In addition to this, many W.V.S. members underwent special training and became qualified Civil Defence Instructors. In Scotland the Scottish Branch of the British Red Cross Society and the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association helped.

The Housewives' Section

The Housewives' Section was organised to assist the Wardens' Service and the public before, during, and after raids. Its members undertook to work in the neighbourhood of their homes by keeping records of the number of persons living in each house, of visitors arriving or temporary absences from home of members of families, of the position of shelters, ladders and stirrup pumps and of any similar information which might be of value in locating casualties or in lighting fires caused by incendiary bombs. They further undertook to provide, shelter for passers-by caught in the streets by air raids, hot drinks, blankets and hot-water bottles for the treatment of shock in casualties, and help for old people, invalids and mothers with young children or others in need of special care and assistance at such times. After raids, many of these women worked in teams, going from house to house, sweeping up glass and debris and helping householders to salvage goods.

Incident Inquiry Points

Incident Inquiry Points were a late development which arose primarily from the need which was proved for the Incident Officer to be relieved of the duty of dealing with inquiries on the spot. They were set up wherever required on request of the Civil

Defence Authorities and were usually located in the front room of the nearest house sufficiently undamaged to be used for the purpose.

These "I.I.P.'s," as they were colloquially known, worked in close co-operation with the Civil Defence Incident Officer in charge of the Incident and had two main purposes:—

- (1) to give authentic information to the public about casualties, the information being obtained from official records; and
- (2) to pass to the Incident Officer any information received from members of the public which might be of service to him in directing rescue operations.

They had, however, other functions, one of which, undertaken on the express desire of the Local Authority, was to take charge of jewellery, handbags and similar articles of value found by Wardens at the site of the Incident, each article being carefully listed and handed over to the Local Authority to await reclamation by owners or their relatives. Another such function was to care for cats, dogs and other domestic animals found wandering on the bombed site, while yet another was to compile lists for the authorities of householders wishing to have furniture removed from damaged houses and, in some cases, to issue certificates on behalf of the Local Authority to justify absence from work of persons affected by the incident.

Hot drinks, served from W.V.S. Mobile Canteens, were always on hand for all in need of such a restorative, and in general, these I.I.P.'s were a focal point for many works of necessity and mercy. They witnessed many poignant and dramatic scenes as good news was gladly given or bad news gently broken and bravely received, and by sympathetic and tactful handling of the anxious and often grief-stricken inquirers, W.V.S. was privileged to help to mitigate to some extent the distress and sorrow inevitably consequent upon these terrible incidents.

W.V.S. Aid Houses

W.V.S. Aid Houses were, when requested by the authorities, earmarked for the emergency reception and treatment of casualties, and staffed by W.V.S. under qualified supervision. There were a large number of such houses in the coastal towns.

Mobile Canteens

Mobile Canteens served hot drinks and sandwiches to bombed-out persons and Fire Service and Rescue Workers wherever a bomb had fallen and at all hours—night or day.

Static Canteens for Civil Defence Services

Static Canteens for Civil Defence Services were staffed in many areas, operating day and night shifts. 6,995 W.V.S. members at one time were working in Civil Defence Canteens.

Rest Centres and other Post-Raid Welfare

Staffing of Rest Centres was a task undertaken by W.V.S. in almost all parts of the country, and some 180,000 members of W.V.S. were available on call for Rest Centre work, although many of them had other non-emergency jobs which they carried on when the Rest Centres were not in use. In some cases (including the second and third-line Rest Centres in London) the Local Authorities handed over to W.V.S. the entire task of arranging and maintaining the Rest Centres and calling out the rotas of workers, as well as the care and feeding of the bombed people who came to them. In other areas W.V.S. provided all, or some of the staff, and worked under the direction of an official of the Local Authority.

The aim of the Government was to make each Rest Centre a self-contained unit ready to open with the minimum of delay after bombs had fallen. W.V.S. helped the Local Authorities in this by providing emergency stocks of clothing and often

augmenting the iron rations of food with gifts of food from overseas. Many of the Rest Centres were in damp and dreary halls, and W.V.S. did much to brighten them and to see that the bedding and clothing was kept clean and aired, and that the staff came regularly to practices. The task of caring for people shaken in mind and body called for the highest degree of understanding and patience and sympathy, and it was found that the best way to help people to recover from the effect of bombing was to get them back as soon as possible to their regular routine of eating cooked meals, going to work, and going to bed. It, therefore, became the basic principle in the care of the homeless that they should be rehoused or billeted with the minimum of delay. W.V.S. helped the Billeting Officers to make surveys and to place the bombed out people, and in some towns prepared and staffed Hostels or "Half-Way Houses" for homeless people who could not be billeted direct from the Rest Centres.

In some of the more vulnerable areas W.V.S. also co-operated with the Ministry of Health Regional Office in arranging Residential Schools in Rest Centres for training in Post-Raid Welfare.

Administrative Centres and Information Centres

Food, shelter and clothing were the first needs of the bombed out people, but next to them came the need for information and advice on all their questions of war damage, lost papers and possessions, etc. A system developed by which the officials of the various Government and Local Authority Departments concerned with the homeless were housed together in Administrative Centres, and at many of these centres W.V.S. received and registered the applicants and provided canteens. They also manned many Information Centres, often in conjunction with the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and provided specially trained staff to give information in the Rest Centres.

Queen's Messenger Convoys

Queen's Messenger Convoys, maintained by the Ministry of Food, were staffed by W.V.S. and brought food to thousands of persons in stricken areas where all normal cooking and feeding facilities were destroyed. 10,000 W.V.S. members were allocated to Emergency Feeding, including Queen's Messenger Convoys, fully trained and constantly ready for action in any area.

Clothing for Air Raid Distress

Stocks of gift clothing were issued by W.V.S. for emergency use in Rest Centres and further supplies of clothing distributed for the relief of Air Raid Distress from W.V.S. Clothing Depots. Fuller details of this important branch of W.V.S. work will be found in the later paragraphs on Clothing.

Emergency Cooking Stoves

As a precaution against the destruction of normal cooking facilities by bombing, W.V.S. members were instructed in the construction of emergency cooking stoves to be erected in gardens, waste grounds, etc. Many of these stoves were permanently maintained by W.V.S. members in their own gardens and others were quickly assembled in time of emergency from materials collected from bombed buildings. Three types of stoves were used, according to the amount of cooking required, the simplest one consisting of a brick chamber containing the fire with an iron plate on top, on which the cooking pots were placed, a rough chimney being constructed at one end.

Anti-Gas Measures

W.V.S. members in many areas took part in the work of assembling and distributing respirators to the public and in carrying out repairs under the direction of the Civil Defence Officers. Teams of W.V.S. members were trained in the work of gas

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cleansing and were in readiness to give their services at many gas cleansing stations had they been required. All members who underwent the W.V.S. Basic Training in Civil Defence were instructed in simple first aid for Gas casualties and in the operation of the Baby Protective Helmet, so that they could assist mothers with young children should need arise.

Regional Reinforcements for London

The first duty of W.V.S. was, of course, to the Local Authority and the people of the area in which they lived and worked, but it was, after all, to the service of the nation as a whole that they were dedicated. This was made strikingly evident at the time of the Flying Bomb attacks on London, when W.V.S. Headquarters issued an appeal to its members in the Regions to come to the aid of London W.V.S., who were working under conditions of almost intolerable strain due to the prolonged and incessant nature of the attacks and in urgent need of reinforcements to meet the constant demand on W.V.S. services. The response to the appeal was overwhelming and in a short time hundreds of volunteers from the Regions had come forward and were despatched to London in relays to work in Canteens, Clothing Depots, etc.

Bearing in mind the peculiarly terrifying effect of these Flying Bombs, it should be placed on record that though many of these volunteers had never been under fire before, and a few, indeed, came from areas where even the sound of a siren was unknown, they faced the ordeal bravely and, whatever their inward qualms may have been, carried out their duties cheerfully and capably.

Hostels for Bomb Repair Workers

In early May, 1944, W.V.S. were approached by the Ministry of Health for help with a proposed scheme for the reception of foreign refugees in this country. This scheme involved the staffing of 80 houses in Onslow Square, London, to deal with general welfare and an immense amount of preparatory work was also carried out by W.V.S., including the scrubbing of floors, cleaning of baths, making up between 4,000 and 5,000 beds, and washing thousands of plates, cups and saucers, etc.

When it was found that the arrival of the expected refugees was unlikely, it was decided to utilise this accommodation for the reception of the First Aid Repair workers being drafted into London in such large numbers to deal with the great damage done by Flying Bombs, and W.V.S. was again approached, this time to undertake the staffing of 11 huts built as dining halls. The work required the serving of meals (brought in containers by contractors), and the general cleaning and maintenance of the huts. As the first meals were served at 6.30 a.m. and the last at approximately 11.30 p.m., W.V.S. teams working in relays were constantly on duty, the Regional Reinforcements who volunteered for duty in London at the time being drawn upon for this purpose.

Civil Defence Comforts Fund

The work of the Civil Defence Services involved long hours of duty out of doors in all weathers, frequently in the cold wind and rain of winter nights when physical resistance was reduced to its lowest ebb by lack of sleep and the harrowing nature of the task of dealing with air raid incidents. The Civil Defence Comforts Fund was therefore launched for the provision of knitted comforts for Wardens, Rescue Workers, Firemen, War Reserve Police, etc. The administrative work of the Fund—which distributed comforts to the value of over £36,000—was carried out at W.V.S. Headquarters, and 280 W.V.S. Centres organised the knitting and distribution of the garments. The amount of time and personal effort devoted by W.V.S. members to this service to their fellow workers for Civil Defence can be estimated from the fact that over 200,000 lbs. of wool were knitted up into various comforts.

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Post-War Developments of Co-operation with Civil Defence Services

Since the close of the war many W.V.S. members have joined the Clubs and Associations formed in different parts of the country to keep alive the spirit of comradeship and co-operation among former Civil Defence workers and those interested in the technical aspect of the subject have attended any lectures on Civil Defence available in their areas.

In common with women the world over, W.V.S. members hope and pray that there may be peace in our time and for all time, but if it must be that Civil Defence should now become a permanent part of our National defence plan they will be found ready as good citizens to take up whatever part is allotted to them.

Civil Defence Welfare Fund

The need for knitted comforts for Civil Defence workers ceased with the end of the war and the dispersal of the Civil Defence Services, but in order that the balance of the Civil Defence Comforts Fund should be used for the benefit of those for whom it had been subscribed it was decided that the sum in hand should be distributed in the form of benevolent grants to former Civil Defence workers and their widows and orphans in special need. The Fund, under the name of the Civil Defence Welfare Fund, continued to be administered at W.V.S. Headquarters, and up to the end of 1948 has been the means of relieving hardship and distress in response to 3,000 applications for help in England and Wales.

DISTRIBUTION OF CLOTHING

W.V.S. during the War years acted as a distributing agent for the great quantities of clothing for the relief of war distress received from the American Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross and other organisations all over the world. It was, in addition, responsible for the care and distribution of stocks of clothing purchased by Local Authorities for evacuee children and also of clothing purchased by the Lord Mayor of London's Air Raid Distress Fund for the benefit of bombed out persons or those shipwrecked as a result of enemy action.

Approximately 11,000 W.V.S. members were continually engaged in the work of maintaining and distributing these stocks of clothing, and their task was further complicated, after the introduction of clothes rationing, by the handling of the great number of clothing coupons involved, as, though gift clothing was issued free, the recipients, by decision of the Board of Trade, had to surrender the necessary coupons for all new garments out of the emergency allocation made to them by the authorities.

W.V.S. clothing workers were noted for their sympathetic understanding of the needs of bombed and distressed people, and fully realised that by cheerfully taking trouble to find the right size in shirts for a man and the most becoming colour of dress for a woman they were doing much to maintain morale and help their "clients" back to normality.

Method of Allocating Supplies of Gift Clothing

Supplies of gift clothing from overseas were allocated to the Regions into which the country was divided for Civil Defence purposes, according to a mathematical calculation based on the population in each Region, including evacuees, refugees and bombed out persons, and also of its bomb damage and vulnerability.

Storage of Clothing

W.V.S. clothing was stored throughout the country in Regional, County and County Borough Stores, and in large numbers of smaller stores and dumps. These stores supplied the 2,000 issuing depots which were organised to distribute the clothing to the public. In addition to these depots the "National Store" was established in a strategic place in the Midlands, which is far from the coast and possesses good rail and road communications. This store held stocks of ready packed and listed clothing and was capable of despatching supplies immediately to any area subjected to concentrated attack and faced with heavy demands for clothing. The store was continually drawn upon during the time of the flying bomb attacks on London and South-East England. It still exists to deal with any emergency which may arise and it once more demonstrated its value at the time of the severe floods in the winter of 1947, when it was able to meet emergency demands.

Work Parties

W.V.S. all over the country formed Work Parties, at which thousands of yards of material received from Overseas were made up into clothing for the Clothing Depots. Wool in large quantities also gifted from Overseas was knitted up and, in addition, the Work Parties were constantly engaged in mending and altering second-hand garments.

Clothing of Bombed-out Persons

Many people whose houses had been destroyed by bombing were admitted to Rest Centres with little or no clothing except the night attire they were wearing at the time. To guard against this eventuality, emergency stocks of W.V.S. clothing were stored in the Rest Centres and issued as required. All persons who had lost clothing by bombing were further entitled to receive a share of gift clothing from W.V.S. Clothing

Depots on production of the necessary confirmatory documents. In one city alone (Exeter) 15,000 people were clothed in this way after a raid which destroyed the shopping centre.

Clothing of Evacuees

Clothing was issued to evacuees in need of it, both in the evacuation and reception areas. It is estimated that over one million evacuees were clothed in this way during the war years. Details are given of this work in the paragraphs on Evacuation.

Clothing of Shipwrecked Civilians

Many demands were made on W.V.S. in coastal areas for clothing for shipwrecked persons landed in small boats in remote areas or brought into the large ports by ships carrying survivors.

Clothing for Refugees

After the fall of France and the Low Countries, and again when refugees arrived from Singapore, W.V.S. supplied necessary clothing for those in need. Before the invasion of the Continent by the Allies, W.V.S. was responsible for the organisation of a clothing store in a camp in Sussex prepared for the reception of French people in case it became necessary to evacuate them from France.

Clothing of Evacuees from Gibraltar

Evacuees sent to this country from Gibraltar were given clothing by W.V.S. according to their needs.

Clothing for Malta

At the request of the Colonial Office more than 200,000 garments were despatched to Malta during the height of the submarine attacks on Malta convoys, the work being carried out under conditions of great secrecy in order to prevent leakage of information concerning the destination of the convoys.

Method of Record-Keeping Used in W.V.S. Clothing Stores

Though the nature of the work necessitated the keeping of careful records, the distribution of W.V.S. clothing was frequently carried out at high pressure and under emergency conditions; it was, therefore essential that methods of stock-keeping should ensure both speed and accuracy, and to meet this need a special system was devised, incorporating the use of an alphabetical code and a series of colour symbols for different categories of clothing.

Stock returns were made monthly from each Clothing Depot and each County, County Borough and Regional Store, and from these returns the Clothing Department at W.V.S. Headquarters compiled the National Stock Sheet, from which the clothing position in all parts of the country could be instantly ascertained.

Shoe and Clothing Exchanges for Children

As the war progressed and clothing became increasingly scarce, mothers found great difficulty in providing shoes and clothing for children, whose garments were continually outgrown and in need of replacement while still in good condition. To meet this difficulty, W.V.S. in 1942, with the agreement of the Board of Trade, organised Children's Shoe and Clothing Exchanges, to which mothers could bring their children's out-grown garments. These garments were examined by experienced W.V.S. clothing workers and awarded a certain number of 'points' for condition, quality, etc., and could then be exchanged for any other articles of equal points value brought in by other mothers.

Post-War Developments of Distribution of Clothing

During the war years W.V.S. was under the constant necessity of safeguarding certain of the stocks of clothing in its charge to ensure that whatever emergency might arise sufficient supplies would be available for the relief of those most urgently in need of help.

With the coming of peace, however, and the end of the constant danger of air attack it was enabled, with the consent of the donors of the clothing, to turn to the aid of many new classes who now had claims for special consideration.

Clothing for Civilian Repatriates from the East

Among the first to be helped with clothing at this time were the many civilian repatriates from the Far East, the clothing being packed by W.V.S. in this country and despatched to meet incoming ships from the Far East at Port Said, where a member of W.V.S. Headquarters' Clothing Department acted in an advisory capacity for the military authorities responsible for the issue of the clothing. Further supplies were available as required on the arrival of repatriates in this country, and repatriates of Dutch and other nationalities passing through on their way home were also helped in this way.

Clothing for Children from Europe

With the liberation of Europe, arrangements were made for the reception in this country under Government schemes of many parties of children from Holland and other liberated countries in urgent need of rehabilitation and recuperation. In addition to general work in connection with the welfare of the children, W.V.S. undertook the supply of much needed outfits of clothing.

Clothing for all Classes in need of Special Help

Arrangements were also made at this time for the issue of clothing by W.V.S. on the recommendation of the Assistance Board to widows with children, old age pensioners with children, unemployed applicants with children, etc., and through Public Assistance Committees, Hospitals, Education Authorities, Children's Homes, etc., to many men, women and children in special need of help in this way. Discharged Service men and women and Merchant Seaman and their dependants were issued with clothing on the recommendation of the Ministry of Pensions, British Legion, S.S.A.F.A., etc., and ex-members of the National Fire Service and families on the recommendation of the N.F.S. Benevolent Fund. Other recommendations for clothing accepted by W.V.S. were from Welfare Officers of Local Authorities, District Nurses, Almoners of Hospitals, Inspectors of the N.S.P.C.C., R.S.S.P.C.C., and other responsible officers.

The whole policy of W.V.S. clothing in the post-war years has been to give help while supplies of gift clothing were available wherever the need was greatest and in such a way as in case the general clothing position throughout the country.

Clothing for Evacuees from Palestine

Some of the women and children evacuated from Palestine early in 1947, arrived in Britain inadequately clothed for the prevailing climate and, at the request of the Colonial Office, were provided by W.V.S. with warm garments as required.

Clothing for Dependants of the Polish Resettlement Corps and European Volunteer Workers

The wives and families of members of the Polish Re-settlement Corps who began to arrive in this country from Italy in the autumn of 1947, were in many cases without sufficient clothing, and were supplied by W.V.S. with gift clothing to the value of

50 coupons for adults and 25 for children. W.V.S. stocks of men's clothing were insufficient and an arrangement was made for the gift clothing to be augmented from official stocks, which were distributed by W.V.S. on behalf of the War Office and the Assistance Board. Clothing, supplied mainly from official sources, has also been distributed in the holding hostels to European Volunteer Workers on behalf of the Ministry of Labour.

Clothing for Flood Victims

Many of the unfortunate victims of the disastrous floods of 1947 lost all clothing except what they were wearing at the time of their escape. W.V.S., by the aid of gift supplies specially sent from Canada, was able to do much towards relieving the consequent distress and inconvenience. Similar help was given to the victims of the floods in Scotland, in 1948.

Clothing Exchanges

The continued stringency of the clothing situation in the post-war years made Children's Shoe and Clothing Exchanges more than ever necessary, and W.V.S. was asked by the Board of Trade to increase the number of its exchanges and to improve the quantity and quality of clothing in the Exchanges to meet with the growing demand. A very successful post-war innovation was the conversion of Mobile Canteens into Travelling Exchanges, which visit the rural areas otherwise debarred from the benefits of this scheme.

Work Parties

The Work Parties which rendered such invaluable service to W.V.S. Clothing during the war have continued their activities where needed. Today such Work Parties are attached to most Children's Clothing Exchanges, to ensure that the most is made of every available garment.

EVACUATION AND THE CARE OF CHILDREN

The Munich Crisis in 1938 provided a warning of the demands that might be made if it became necessary to evacuate children from the danger areas, and much preparatory work was done by W.V.S. between then and the outbreak of war. In the Reception Areas the work consisted mainly of helping the Local Authorities to make billeting surveys and arrangements for the reception of the children. In London several thousands of volunteers for escort duty were interviewed and passed on to the L.C.C. Courses were arranged, with the help of industrial canteens, etc., for training in large-scale catering and cookery and, with the co-operation of the National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare, a short emergency training in child care was provided which when war broke out enabled W.V.S. to provide additional staff to go out with the many nurseries which were evacuated from London.

When the final order for evacuation came, 120,000 W.V.S. members took part in the work, mobilised through the excellent W.V.S. chain of communication by the simple expedient of the dispatch of twelve telegrams to the twelve W.V.S. Regional Administrators, and from that time onwards throughout the war years W.V.S. was continually engaged in a great variety of activities for evacuees.

Transit and Reception

In the first three days of September, 1939, about one and a quarter million people were evacuated, and at most stages of the journey W.V.S. help was provided. Canteens were improvised at stations, and at distributing points in towns and villages W.V.S. members met, fed and sorted the evacuees before taking them to their billets, and when later a scheme was introduced by which evacuees were taken to hostels and rest centres for a day or two to be rested, refreshed and in some cases cleaned, before being billeted, W.V.S. was in most areas responsible for this initial care.

The fly-bomb evacuation from London and the surrounding Counties meant very long train journeys for those who took part in it. In addition to providing escorts W.V.S. organised a canteen service on the trains. Each train which left London, up to the record number of 50 in one day, had on it its complement of churns, urns, etc., and four W.V.S. members to mix the babies' food and hand out the refreshments.

Transport

W.V.S. vehicles of many kinds were used in the transport of evacuees and luggage to receiving nurseries, to trains and to residential nurseries in reception areas. A vehicle of particular interest used for this purpose was known as the "Baby Bus." It was the gift of an American, sent through the American Red Cross, and was specially sprung to prevent "car sickness."

Escorts

W.V.S. members travelled thousands of miles in taking children by train to their destinations and were always in demand for escort duty of this kind.

Billeting

In some areas the authorities gave W.V.S. full powers as Billeting Officers and all over the country W.V.S. engaged in tasks connected with billeting and social welfare, work which called for a high degree of tact and sympathy with both evacuees and hosts.

Evacuees who had been badly placed were moved to other billets and community feeding centres, local centres, play centres, etc., were organised to lessen the strain on householders.

Communal Billets

It became evident at an early stage that some of the mothers would never settle down or be acceptable in another woman's house. Many who had been evacuated returned to their homes, but for those who remained and for those who were evacuated after each wave of bombing, various types of hostels and communal billets were opened by the Reception Authorities, with the help of W.V.S. and, with the appointment of a W.V.S. member to visit the billet regularly and exercise tactful supervision over cleanliness and the use of heat and light, etc., these arrangements were generally found satisfactory.

Social Centres

It was not in the national interest that women should be tempted to return to their homes in danger areas, and it was found that a higher percentage of the evacuated mothers stayed in the areas where a good social centre was organised. In most cases the Reception Authority provided a hall or room and W.V.S. collected a little equipment and started a club for the mothers, which they were encouraged to run as much as possible for themselves. In some there was a nursery which enabled the mothers to undertake part-time work, and facilities for washing and ironing, and even bathing, and in most there were communal feeding arrangements, which proved a great relief to the householder.

Communal Feeding

A communal feeding manual was prepared by W.V.S. Headquarters and issued to W.V.S. Centres before the war for the use of W.V.S. members who were good cooks but unused to large-scale feeding, and within the first week of evacuation communal feeding centres were being opened by W.V.S. in schools and halls under conditions which demanded the utmost ingenuity. Many of these centres developed into a part of the School Meals Service, while the communal feeding centres opened for mothers and children were in many places the forerunners of the British Restaurants.

Hostels for Children

It was found that certain types of children, particularly bed-wetters and those with behaviour difficulties, could not be billeted in private houses, and hostels were opened by Billeting Authorities with W.V.S. assistance in which W.V.S. members cleaned, cooked, deloused, washed, amused and helped quite inadequate staffs to battle with often unruly and unhappy children.

Help was also given in buffer or short-stay hostels, where children could be sent for short periods when necessary.

Sick Bays

Many W.V.S. members gave service in the Sick Bays which were set up for children suffering from minor ailments, skin diseases, etc., not requiring hospital treatment.

Evacuation of Unaccompanied Children under Five

Acting on behalf of the Ministry of Health, W.V.S. undertook the entire administration of a scheme for the evacuation of certain categories of unaccompanied children under five from the Metropolitan Area. This work comprised the handling of all arrangements from the time the applications for evacuation were received until the safe arrival of the children at their nurseries in the country, and it entailed the keeping of intricate and detailed records for each child.

A Metropolitan Evacuation Panel was set up by the Ministry of Health and met at W.V.S. Headquarters weekly, or more often when required, to examine applications

for the evacuation of children under five and to accept those suitable for nurseries in reception areas. The applications came through official recommending bodies, among which were included W.V.S. Centres. Approximately 89 per cent. of all under fives evacuated were sent from the London area, and by August, 1945, the Panel had dealt with applications for over 60,000 children. A large percentage of applications was for temporary evacuation during the illness or confinement of the mother, but 9,046 children were evacuated through the London Receiving Nurseries.

Nurseries

There were three W.V.S. Receiving Nurseries in London in which children under five were received for medical inspection, issue of clothing, etc., before being evacuated to the country, and through the generosity of the American Red Cross and the Surdna Foundation, which contributed the necessary funds, over 100 War Nurseries were established by W.V.S. as residential nurseries in reception areas and administered by the Waifs and Strays Society (now the Church of England Children's Society). After America entered the war in 1942, the Ministry of Health undertook full financial responsibility for these nurseries, the total number of which grew to 400.

W.V.S. also helped nurseries to find staff and undertook work in connection with non-residential war-time nurseries for the children of women in employment, and with toy-making schemes, etc.

Clothing for Evacuees

It was perhaps a misfortune that the first evacuation took place in such fine warm weather, since it meant that many of the children arrived in the Reception Areas with quite inadequate and unsuitable clothing, and great difficulty was found in getting the parents either to send clothing or money with which to purchase it.

A scheme, known as the London Clothing Scheme was, therefore, evolved by the Ministry of Health, the L.C.C. and W.V.S. under which the L.C.C. sent stocks of clothing to W.V.S. County Depots in the Reception Areas and these were augmented by garments made by W.V.S. from material provided by the Ministry of Health. In the case of a child requiring clothing, the teacher in the Reception Area notified the appropriate L.C.C. Care Committee Organiser, who investigated the case and asked parents who could do so to pay for the clothing. The W.V.S. County Depot was then notified of the garments needed and official stock issued where the parent could afford to pay and W.V.S. gift stock where payment was not obtainable.

This scheme was found satisfactory, and other evacuation authorities than L.C.C. either joined in it or, as in Scotland, evolved similar schemes of their own.

Under-Fives' Clothing Depot

A special clothing depot was run in London, in co-operation with the L.C.C., for the supply of clothing to unaccompanied children under five. A reserve stock was supplied to the Residential Nurseries from this depot.

The Special Scheme and the Evacuation of the Battle Training Areas

W.V.S. were ready and briefed to play their part in the "Special Scheme" for the very large-scale evacuation from the coastal areas which would have taken place if the threat of invasion had come sufficiently near to make it necessary. In addition to all the arrangements for helping with travelling and reception, key W.V.S. members were earmarked to stay behind to help to feed and look after the essential personnel.

Another evacuation task which fell to W.V.S. was helping in the evacuation of the whole population from certain areas which were cleared for battle training. Whole families, including the sick and the old, had to be transferred, together with their livestock, farming implements, etc., to other parts of the country. In most of these areas W.V.S. ran an information centre, as well as doing a great deal of visiting and transporting by car.

Post-War Developments of Evacuation and the Care of Children

The work of W.V.S. for evacuation was not to cease entirely with the mass return of the evacuees to their homes. There were some 10,000 children who, for various reasons, were unable to return and who must still be cared for in the reception areas, and apart from these cases, the resettling of the thousands of uprooted families presented many problems. Frequently parents and children had been so long separated that they had almost become strangers to one another and, all too often, the homes to which the evacuees returned had been made uncomfortable and unsuitable for family life by bomb damage. In all these difficulties W.V.S. help was freely given, whether it was practical help such as the provision of extra bedding or other small comforts from gift stocks that were needed, or a friendly word of advice and encouragement to a worried mother, struggling to reorientate the family to its changed conditions.

This first and most pressing duty fulfilled, W.V.S. turned with interest and hope to other tasks concerned with safeguarding the health and happiness of the nation's children. That they found many such tasks ready to their hand is apparent from the list which follows of work in these post-war years.

Co-operation with Children's Voluntary Organisations

A particularly satisfactory development of W.V.S. work for children has been its co-operation with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. In Scotland with the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The Society's Inspectors so often find that cruelty to children is engendered, not by real intention, but by ignorance and thoughtlessness, and that it is of the greatest value if they can ask a member of W.V.S. to call on parents to talk over their difficulties and suggest a solution. Such a visit brings with it no hint of "the Law," and usually calls forth a ready response with resultant great benefit to the children.

Other Societies to ask for and receive the co-operation of W.V.S. in various connections have been the Adoption Societies, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Church of England Children's Society, the Invalid Children's Aid Association and the Foundling Hospital.

Co-operation with Probation Officers

It is clear that if the children passing through the Juvenile Courts, often through the tragedy of a maladjusted home life, are to be rescued from their unfortunate circumstances and set once more on the path towards good citizenship there is much to be done by those who have their welfare at heart. It has been found that there is a wide field for W.V.S. activity in this work and the Service has been called in to help with both families and individual children in various parts of the country. By giving wise and timely advice and practical help in many difficulties, anxious or erring parents can be befriended and encouraged and precious young lives saved from progressive degeneration and degradation.

The Nutrition of Children

Realising the immense importance of building up a sound constitution in our children, in spite of prevailing food difficulties, W.V.S. has done everything possible to assist the Ministry of Food and local food offices with the distribution of *Welfare Foods* (Cod Liver Oil and Orange Juice), made available by the Government for all children under five. In order to encourage the uptake of these welfare foods, W.V.S. has made use of ingenious methods, such as taking a mobile canteen stocked with the foods to shopping centres and market places, and by keeping small stocks of welfare foods in the homes of W.V.S. members, where they can be easily collected by mothers in the neighbourhood. W.V.S. has been able to bring about a considerable improvement in the position in many districts.

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W.V.S. continue the distribution of stocks of Chocolate Powder, which was the balance of the milk and chocolate for which collections were made during the war by The Kinsmen Clubs of Canada. This most valuable food is distributed to children of school age and under, through hospitals, schools and institutions, and sometimes direct to the children themselves.

Escorts

The need for children's Escorts still continues and seems likely to do so indefinitely. W.V.S. is frequently asked for and provides these escorts to take children back from hospitals and clinics and on long journeys where no parent or other guardian is available.

Sitters-In and Daily Guardians

The difficulties of housewives and mothers in these post war years of queues and shortages and lack of help in the home are very great and for conscientious parents even the briefest of relaxations, such as an evening at the pictures together are almost out of the question because there is no one to mind the children. It was to meet a very real need, therefore, that W.V.S. in many areas began to organise Sitter schemes, either alone or in co-operation with other organizations such as the Girl Guides, with the object of providing rotas of reliable women or girls who would stay with children occasionally while parents went out on business or pleasure. Other branches of this activity of W.V.S. have been the finding of staff for creches and Daily Guardians on behalf of Local Authorities, and the opening of Children's Clubs where the children of working mothers can play until the mothers are ready to fetch them.

Mothercraft

In some areas Mothers' Clubs have been started with the object of fostering improved mothercraft by the exchange of ideas and discussion between mothers and a most interesting and valuable innovation has been the opening by W.V.S. of four Mothercraft Hostels for mothers who have nowhere to go when they leave hospital after the birth of the baby. These hostels are mainly intended for unmarried girls, although in special cases married women are admitted. The mothers stay in them with their babies for a minimum period of six weeks while they are taught mothercraft and their own health is cared for. It is always hoped that these mothers will wish to keep their babies, and though no pressure is brought to bear on them to influence their decision they are given full information on the various possibilities of obtaining employment and assistance which might help them to do so. On the other hand, should they decide on adoption, this is arranged through the Adoption Societies so that the welfare of the baby is fully safeguarded.

Diphtheria Immunization Campaign

The co-operation of W.V.S. was first sought by the Ministry of Health during the War in furthering the cause of Diphtheria Immunisation and much assistance given, particularly with clerical work and publicity, for which W.V.S. had special facilities in Children's Clothing Exchanges, W.V.S. Centres, Distributing Points for the Issue of Welfare Foods, etc. This assistance has continued in the post-war years and it is a source of much satisfaction to W.V.S. members to know that the work is productive of very satisfactory results. Help of a similar nature, but not to quite the same extent, has been carried out for the Department of Health in Scotland.

The Welfare of Children in Institutions—Godmother Schemes

Both from a long term National standpoint and as a personal matter affecting the immediate happiness of the children concerned it is probable that no activity of W.V.S. in the post-war period is likely to produce more fruitful results than the

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work undertaken wherever desired by Local Authorities on behalf of children living in Homes and Institutions or boarded out with Foster Parents.

Although so much has been done by way of the provision of Welfare Foods, milk, school meals, etc., to improve the physical health of the young generation, public opinion has been shocked and grieved by the result of recent investigations, such as that carried out by the Curtis Committee, which have clearly shown that all is not yet well in the lives of many children who, deprived of a normal home life, must be cared for by the State.

In spite of every effort on the part of the staff of many homes and institutions, there is grave evidence that the lack of personal interest and affection inherent in the circumstances must have a seriously adverse effect, not only on the happiness but on the development of the future character of these children; where a child has no toys or personal possessions of his own how shall he learn to respect the property of others or realise the duties and responsibilities of ownership; where he must be always "one of a crowd" how shall he feel that his own particular contribution to life is a matter of any importance at all?

It was to remedy this defect in the lives of many children that W.V.S., wherever the responsible authority has desired such help, has instituted the now well known Godmother Schemes. These schemes, which have been taken up with real enthusiasm, are designed to provide an unofficial Godmother for every child in the Institution or Home concerned, so that all may feel that there is someone who takes a personal interest in their welfare. The child is invited to tea at the home of the Godmother, taken for occasional little outings and treats, receives letters and small birthday and Christmas presents and is generally treated as any child whose parents in normal circumstances were abroad or otherwise unavailable might be treated by a real Godmother or Aunt. The Schemes are carefully administered to guard against favouritism, exploitation or other possible disadvantages and have had the happiest results; frequently children have been adopted by their Godmothers and in most cases the link established bids fair to hold throughout adolescence into the years beyond—perhaps for life.

Foster Parents

Certain cases which have come to light in the post-war period have made it plain that there is need for increased vigilance in the selection and supervision of foster parents with whom children may be boarded out by Local Authorities. W.V.S. members have rendered useful service by recommending persons known to them as suitable Foster Parents and, when asked to do so by the Local Authorities, by keeping in touch and checking up on the welfare of children already boarded out.

Road Safety

The terrible figures of death and injury to children in Road accidents are a matter of great concern to W.V.S., as to all thinking people, and every possible assistance is being given with the publicity campaign designed to bring about a reduction in these figures. In many areas W.V.S. is serving on the local Safety Committee.

Canada's Country Home

The health of Britain's children was maintained at a very high standard throughout the War, but inevitably there were some whose resistance to illness was lowered by war-time conditions and who consequently repeatedly return to hospital.

Through the generosity of the Queen's Canadian Fund a home (which is administered by a local Committee) has been established by W.V.S. on the coast of East Suffolk, with the aim of providing such children with good food, a normal open air life and close attention to their progress until such time as they are fit to return home.

The children, between the ages of three and eleven, are selected by the children's

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specialists of three London hospitals, and the greatest possible benefit to their health is obtained as a result of their stay in the home.

WORK FOR OLD PEOPLE

For those who are growing old and weary, the battle of life itself is apt to be sufficiently hard but when, in addition, it must be fought out in the strange and terrifying conditions of a country at total war, the struggle is bitter indeed. It was because they realised this very fully that W.V.S. members gave every care in their power to the welfare of old people during the War years and many of them made it a regular duty to look after those who were alone during an air attack, either taking them to shelter or staying with them in their own homes. In addition to this form of neighbourly aid, warm blankets and comforting hot water bottles were provided out of gift stores for many who were ailing or infirm, shopping was undertaken for those unable to do it for themselves and any who were confused or worried by the intricacies of pension books, form filling and rationing were assured of ready and kindly help and advice at the nearest W.V.S. Centre.

Assistance was frequently given in institutional homes for old people and in 1944, at the time of flying-bomb attacks on London and the Home Counties, W.V.S. was responsible for the initiation and administration of a scheme for the evacuation of special categories of old people from the danger area to hostels and homes in other parts of the country.

It was this scheme, which, though necessarily limited by the exigencies of the times, was the forerunner of that important W.V.S. activity of the post-war period, the running of W.V.S. Residential Clubs for Old People.

Post-War Developments of Work for Old People

Released by the end of the War from the constant over-riding importance of its Civil Defence duties W.V.S. gladly turned its attention to the means of increasing its work for the welfare of old people, a cause which it had much at heart.

Visiting Old People in Institutions, Hospitals, etc.

The main basis of all W.V.S. welfare work of this kind is the regular visiting of old people in Institutions, Alms Houses, Hospitals, etc., and also in their own homes. Many of these old folk have little or no other contact with the outside world beyond their gates and for them the visit of W.V.S. members bringing cheerful and friendly talk of the news of the day, has come to be an eagerly looked forward to event in their somewhat dreary lives.

All visiting is arranged in close co-operation with the National Assistance Board or responsible authority.

General Welfare

Linked with regular visiting is much work for the general welfare of Old People, such as shopping, mending, changing library books and collecting regular gifts of flowers and magazines for them, reading to the blind or ill and arranging occasional small entertainments such as simple concerts, summer outings, tea parties and garden parties in the homes and gardens of W.V.S. members. Sometimes, through the kindness and co-operation of managements of local cinemas a number of free seats are reserved for Old Age Pensioners.

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Help for Institution Staffs

The work done for old people in Institutions, etc., serves a dual purpose, for not only does it give pleasure to the old people themselves, but it frequently brings relief to short handed staffs. In some cases W.V.S. members, working in regular rotas, undertake any duties such as washing, feeding, which do not require the skilled help of a nurse.

Meals for Old People

It is an undoubted fact that many old people, ill or living alone, are not getting sufficient food, owing to their inability to cope with rationing, shopping, cooking, etc. To meet this need W.V.S. in many areas is operating or assisting with schemes whereby meals are delivered by canteens or sometimes by W.V.S. on foot, from British Restaurants to old people in their homes.

Darby and Joan Clubs

The lives of many old people who live alone are lonely and monotonous in the extreme, as except perhaps for an occasional word with a neighbour they have no opportunity for social life of any kind. With this in mind W.V.S. has been instrumental in opening many Darby and Joan Clubs where old people can meet in pleasant surroundings for a friendly chat and a cup of tea and perhaps a quiet game of cards or half an hour with the wireless. In some cases, too, a hot mid-day meal, cooked by W.V.S. members and served at a charge of 6d. or 8d. is available.

These clubs have proved extremely popular and W.V.S. has been well rewarded for its efforts by the sight of the obvious pleasure they give the old people.

Residential Clubs

The housing situation in these post-war years is one of great difficulty for all classes but it presses particularly hard on many old people who are living in uncomfortable conditions in the already overcrowded homes of their sons or daughters or struggling to pay rents they can ill afford for what is often inadequate and unsatisfactory accommodation. By the generosity of the Lord Mayor's National Air Raid Distress Fund and gifts of money from donors at home and overseas, W.V.S. has been able to make a considerable contribution towards the relief of this situation by opening Residential Clubs for Old People in many areas.

These Clubs, which are designed primarily, though not entirely, for the reception of old people from bombed areas, are capable of accommodating between 20-40 old people of both sexes. They have single and double rooms in which residents may use their own furniture if they wish and communal dining rooms and lounges. Full domestic help is given but often the old people help themselves with the lighter forms of housework. All the Clubs are in towns or villages and near shops and churches, so that residents are in easy reach of their friends, whom they can entertain as they wish, either in the communal rooms or in their own rooms.

It should be noted that these Clubs are in no sense regarded as charitable institutions. The old people pay a fixed charge which is within the means of pensioners or others with very limited incomes and are enabled to pass the evening of life's day in circumstances of comfort and dignity independent of the bounty of friend or relative or any outside agent.

WORK FOR THE FORCES

W.V.S. as a Civil Defence Organization was not originally concerned with work for the Forces but, after appointment as an Associate Member of the Council of Voluntary War Workers in December, 1940, it assumed many responsibilities in connection with welfare and other work for the Services.

Home

Canteens

The running of canteens was one of the first services for the Forces to be undertaken by W.V.S. In the early days of the war, and before the introduction of rationing and the control of commodities, these canteens were equipped and supplied locally but as the war progressed and restrictions were imposed, central buying was undertaken. Quotas of limited cotton, steel, chocolates, cigarettes, toilet goods, razor blades were made available to W.V.S. Headquarters, where they were allocated to hostels and canteens.

W.V.S. canteens were not only concerned with feeding men and women, but were the focal points for various and timely welfare services; thus, Newark W.V.S. provided a chiropody service, Malvern W.V.S. gave French lessons, while Whitchurch W.V.S. provided a free eyewash service for despatch riders.

Twenty-five *Station Canteens* supplied food and drink to travelling Servicemen and women at the principal railway stations. One of the earliest of the Station Canteens to be opened by W.V.S. was at York, where during a certain twenty-four hours in June, 1940, 16,000 items of food and drink were supplied to passing troops. Nine hundred and thirty *Static Canteens* were maintained on permanent sites as required by the Naval, Military and Air Force Authorities and one hundred and twenty *Mobile Canteens* carried refreshments and stocks of small comforts to isolated units cut off from normal shopping facilities.

Regional Trust Funds

Even when charging canteen prices profits are bound to be made, and the surplus trading profits accruing to W.V.S. Service Canteens were paid into Regional Trust Funds to be spent entirely on Service or ex-Service men and women. During the War grants were made to Command Welfare Officers and numerous A.A. and Searchlight huts were made more comfortable with curtains, cushions, and pictures, or gardening tools were bought, to brighten the grounds outside.

Hostels and Clubs

Hostels and Clubs where Servicemen and women might spend their time were operated or staffed by W.V.S. in many towns and were greatly appreciated by those who used them for their homelike atmosphere. It was the aim at all times of W.V.S. to provide escape from military and official methods, so that service personnel could enjoy complete relaxation on their brief periods of leave.

Library Service

Servicemen on isolated sites were in great need of some form of relaxation to relieve the monotony of their existence. W.V.S., by means of Mobile Libraries, which visited these sites at regular intervals brought many much appreciated books, periodicals, etc., which helped to pass the hours "off duty".

A further development of this service was the use of *Pilgrim Boxes* provided by the Pilgrim Trust in America, which sent a gift of money to W.V.S. for this purpose. Each box contained a selection of forty books which were carried to the sites by cars or mobile canteens and changed at regular intervals.

Camouflage Net Garnishing

W.V.S. began to garnish camouflage nets for the Army during the early part of the war, but in June, 1943, an official scheme was started whereby nets were garnished under contract for the Ministry of Supply. Between June, 1943, and September, 1944, a total of 129,558 nets were completed in 532 depots, while in the month of March, 1944, 350,000 woman hours were put into this work. The technique of breaking shadow, fading out edges and the correct way of turning corners had to be learnt, while as the campaigns moved from one part of the globe to another, so the proportion of colours was changed to suit the backgrounds of the places where the nets were to be used. Most of the workers were elderly W.V.S. members and even the most incapacitated could employ herself cutting scrim into six-foot lengths. W.V.S. also worked on models in Experimental Camouflage Depots.

Assembly Work

W.V.S. undertook various jobs for the Services, such as packing air crew survival packs, which contained first aid outfits, tabloid food and tablets for disinfecting water. The Admiralty asked W.V.S. to assemble the component parts of the sewing outfits known as "hussifs" issued to sailors, particularly those going to the Far East.

Jungle Jerseys

In December, 1944, the Ministry of Supply asked W.V.S. if they would undertake to put sleeve and shoulder patches on a large consignment of jerseys to be worn by the Troops in the Far East jungles. This additional strengthening had not been allowed for in the original specification and it was necessary to employ voluntary labour to complete the jerseys. 66,750 jerseys were despatched to W.V.S. work parties all over the British Isles for laborious and exacting alteration. W.V.S. had completed 32,270 jerseys when the Ministry found a firm able to take on the remainder.

Knitted Comforts

Throughout the War, W.V.S. parties were affiliated with all the Service Knitting Associations, and contracts were undertaken centrally. One of the largest of these was for 100,000 lbs. of khaki double knitting wool to be made into cap comforters. With the development of fighting in the Far East, W.V.S. knitters were faced with a demand for jungle-green socks made from wool specially treated for tropical wear, followed immediately by another demand for long-sleeved sweaters made of the thickest navy blue wool for the Royal Navy operating in the Northern Pacific.

Sock Mending

W.V.S. in many areas undertook the mending of socks, etc., for the Army and was issued with official stocks of wool for that purpose. In view of the fact that most W.V.S. members already had on hand the quantities of mending and darning required by their own families in war time, the additional burden of mending for the Army was no light one. Over 3,000,000 garments were mended annually for the Forces.

Sock Mending Classes were instituted in some cases, to teach the men how to mend their own socks when forced to rely on their own resources.

B.L.A. Compassionate Leave Camp

In March, 1945, W.V.S. were asked by the Welfare Officer at the B.L.A. Compassionate Leave Camp to follow up the domestic problems which had brought men back to this country. This usually entailed paying regular visits to bed-ridden parents, or helping a wife during her confinement by doing the shopping and in most cases the man was able to return to duty knowing that W.V.S. were keeping an eye on his family.

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Collection of Books

W.V.S. was, in most places, closely associated with the Ministry of Supply and Salvage Drives, organised by the Local Authorities. A feature of these drives was the preservation of any book likely to be read by a member of the Forces. Millions of books were saved and sent to the Services Central Book Depot in London, where they were added to the books sent in through the Post Office. W.V.S. members helped with the scrutiny of the books and W.V.S. work parties repaired them. In 1944, the Depot allocated 50,000 books for W.V.S. Service canteen and club libraries.

Book Buying

In 1944, W.V.S. Headquarters started buying, on behalf of N.A.A.F.I., light technical books for Clubs overseas and within the year 36,000 had been bought and despatched to B.A.O.R., M.E.F., S.E.A.C. and the Far East, W.V.S. Headquarters, acting for N.A.A.F.I., sent regular, weekly parcels of magazines, topical pamphlets and relevant White Papers to W.V.S. Administrators overseas for distribution.

Packing of Sunday Papers

A nation-wide effort was made in September, 1943, to collect Sunday papers to send to all the fighting fronts. The public were asked by the National Press to post their papers every Monday to the offices of the *Evening Standard*, in London.

For twenty-one months a basement was daily filled with W.V.S. members, many of them well over seventy years old, who undertook the work of sorting and refolding the papers for despatch.

Altogether thirteen and a half million papers were handled, weighing six hundred and twenty tons and filling 60,000 mailbags.

Hospitality

W.V.S. provided leave hostesses, particularly for Empire and Allied troops, and were attached to the Army Information Bureau in Trafalgar Square for London sight-seeing tours. When a New Zealand division was spending its leave in London, W.V.S. organised their dances and provided suitable partners; and throughout the country W.V.S. members held open house for Servicemen and women in their neighbourhood, so that for a few brief hours they might enjoy the comfort of home life. A particularly appreciated variety of this nation-wide hospitality was the provision of hot baths for girls and men serving on barrage balloon or anti-aircraft sites, where such facilities were unobtainable in any other way.

Collection of Vegetables for Mine-sweepers

One of the many discomforts endured by the men engaged on Mine Sweeping at sea was the inability to obtain fresh vegetables to relieve their diet, although granted a victualling allowance for the purpose. The vessels were rarely in port long enough or in suitable areas to obtain sufficient supplies in a time of general shortage, but W.V.S., by collecting vegetables from many sources and despatching them to the ports in readiness for the arrival of the mine-sweepers, was able to do much to meet this want.

Information Bureaux

W.V.S. ran, alone or with N.A.A.F.I., nearly one hundred Information Bureaux. Outstanding among these were the Allied Information Bureaux at Edinburgh, and at Bedford and those at the Channel ports and Southampton used by troops on leave from the Continent and the Far East. In Edinburgh and Glasgow, W.V.S. *Station Guides* used to take men across the city, find them lodgings or take them out shopping.

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Most of the questioners took it for granted that the Guides knew the time of the last 'bus and train to all points in Great Britain!

P.o.W. Reception Camp

When the first British and Allied prisoners of war began to return from Germany, W.V.S. members assisted with their reception at the air-fields where the men arrived and W.V.S. work parties went to all dispersal camps to sew on flashes and medal ribbons. In many camps, they provided extra furniture, books and pictures. As the camps turned from P.o.W. Reception Camps to camps for Selection and Training, W.V.S. were asked to remain as unofficial sempstresses.

A.T.S. Wedding Dresses

Realising that Service Brides without coupons were faced with little alternative to a khaki wedding, some W.V.S. offices made collections of wedding dresses and veils which could be borrowed by members of the W.R.N.S., A.T.S., and W.A.A.F. Many gifts of wedding dresses were received from Overseas by W.V.S.

Work for the Home Guard

Approximately 20,000 W.V.S. were enrolled as Home Guard Auxilliaries and continued their work with the Home Guard until the end of 1944, feeding men on the ranges and on exercises, manning telephones, supplying clerical assistance and drivers.

Work for the U.S. Forces in Great Britain

In August, 1940, W.V.S. were appointed official agents in Great Britain for the American Red Cross civilian relief programme and began to distribute the huge volume of gifts which were continuously sent throughout the War, and the arrival of the American Forces in Great Britain in 1942, gave W.V.S. an opportunity to repay in hospitality the generosity shown to this country by the United States.

In July, 1942, Lady Reading, the Chairman of W.V.S. wrote a letter to W.V.S. throughout the country asking them to open their homes to the Americans—a request which met with an immediate response—and during the succeeding months Information Bureaux and Hospitality Centres were set up in many districts. The Hospitality Scheme in one place, for instance, at one time handled between 300 and 400 invitations every Sunday, all of which were accepted.

As in the case of the British Forces, W.V.S., undertook mending for the Americans and small repairs to their uniforms, and W.V.S. canteens everywhere threw open their doors to them. W.V.S. members in many areas worked in American Red Cross Clubs and Aero Clubs, and as visitors, librarians and helpers of different kinds in American hospitals.

On Memorial Day, W.V.S. decorated the chapels and graves at the American cemeteries, on Mothers' Day they "loaned" mothers to many units, and at Christmas time W.V.S. organised children's parties to which Americans were invited or arranged to invite and escort the children to the parties given by the Americans themselves.

British Welcome Clubs

Although W.V.S. co-operated in the Ministry of Information scheme for Anglo-American Canteens, it was realised that, for many reasons, these canteens were not always an ideal medium for fostering friendships between British and Americans and that, if mutual misunderstanding due to differing national characteristics and temperament, were to be avoided, it was desirable that some means should be found of establishing happy social relations between the Americans and the British men and women both military and civilian, among whom they had to live.

After consultation with other interested organisations and societies an experiment was started in a small town, and the Americans invited to join a small club to which the local people would be subscribing members and the Americans the honorary members. The local people nominated a number of young girls of the neighbourhood as members and the Americans nominated an equal number of their own men, out of whom a Junior Entertainment Committee was formed to decide what should be the activities of the club. The idea proved very successful, but as W.V.S. holds no funds of any kind and it was obvious that if this idea were to be repeated elsewhere there would be some places which would need a small measure of financial assistance, W.V.S. approached the Ministry of Information and asked for their co-operation. The Ministry of Information officially adopted the scheme at the end of 1943, and until the time when the bulk of the American Forces left this country, W.V.S. started and operated over 200 British Welcome Clubs.

Overseas

The outstanding work done by W.V.S. for the Forces at home resulted in a suggestion from N.A.A.F.I. that W.V.S. members should go overseas under their auspices to undertake welfare work in N.A.A.F.I. Clubs and Leave Centres, and bring to them something of the atmosphere of the W.V.S. Clubs in Great Britain.

W.V.S. were also asked by the War Office to provide members to do similar work in Army Welfare Clubs in places where there were no N.A.A.F.I. Clubs at that time.

W.V.S. agreed to send as many suitable members as were required to take charge of welfare and entertainments, N.A.A.F.I. and the War Office being responsible for all travel arrangements and expenses.

The first draft left the United Kingdom (for Algiers) in February, 1944, and was succeeded by many others. As the Allies advanced in Italy W.V.S. members were to be found manning canteens close behind the forward fighting line, and at the conclusion of the Japanese War in August, 1945, W.V.S. were serving in S.E.A.C. (Burma and Malaya), Middle East (Palestine, Tripoli, Tobruk, Benghazi, Egypt, Cyprus), Central Mediterranean Forces (Italy, Austria, Greece), North-West Europe, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany.

The importance of the work of W.V.S. in bringing relief to the lot of men living in hard and abnormal conditions cannot be over estimated. The sight of a British woman, in such unfamiliar surroundings, the cheerful, friendly W.V.S. atmosphere and the breath of "home" she inevitably brought with her was as a refreshing draught to countless Servicemen in many a far foreign land.

Post-War Developments of Work for the Forces Home

With the end of the war and the great reduction in the numbers of the Home Forces, the need for W.V.S. Services Welfare work in this country was correspondingly reduced; the numbers of W.V.S. Canteens, for instance, fell from 1,050 in 1945 to 36 in 1947, and other activities, as they became redundant, were similarly curtailed or discontinued. It was realised, however, that the needs of the men and women still serving must not be neglected because actual hostilities were over, and W.V.S. continued to give willing help wherever it was required.

In view of the fact that young men are still being called up for service with the Colours, it is evident that this work, though reduced in scale, remains of great importance.

W.V.S. Help in N.A.A.F.I. Clubs

Large numbers of Servicemen and women use the 16 N.A.A.F.I. Clubs in Great Britain, and W.V.S. members are engaged in full-time duty in each club as Liaison Officers responsible for welfare and entertainment. Information Bureaux in the clubs are also staffed by W.V.S., a continuation of a much appreciated war-time service.

Sock Mending

In peace, as in war, soldiers, like other men, continue to make holes in their socks and W.V.S. continue, when requested, to mend them—a service extended also to R.A.F. stations as required.

Book Collecting and Repairing

When the war-time arrangements for the collection through local Post Offices of books for the Forces came to an end, W.V.S. Centres agreed to act as receiving depots for any books contributed by the public for men still serving. Any such books in need of repair are re-conditioned by W.V.S. work parties before dispatch to Units overseas.

Knitting for the Forces

After the closing down of the Army Comforts Depot, W.V.S. undertook the work of knitting up wool in hand.

"Adoption" of Overseas Clubs

N.A.A.F.I. Clubs and Unit Canteens overseas in which W.V.S. members are working have been "adopted" by W.V.S. Centres in this country, which collect newspapers, books and magazines on their behalf and generally take a friendly interest in them. The link between W.V.S. Services Welfare at home and overseas is one which is proving both useful and popular.

Profit from the clubs and canteens run by W.V.S. in Great Britain during the war has been used to provide many extra amenities for Army Welfare Clubs and Leave Centres, such as ice-cream soda fountains, garden furniture, etc.

Work for Commonwealth and Allied Troops

W.V.S. had always gladly given any help possible to men of the Commonwealth and Allied troops during the war, and willingly undertook, in 1945, the arrangement of tours and of hospitality for the Allied troops coming to London and living in tents in Hyde Park. Other assistance given was the provision of W.V.S. escorts for men on shopping or sight-seeing expeditions and arranging for lessons in languages, music, etc., on request. Similar facilities were given to Dominion and Colonial troops in co-operation with the Dominions Hospitality Committee and W.V.S. members regarded it as a privilege to be able to give this help.

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Victory Camp, 1946

The work of W.V.S. for Commonwealth and Allied troops was fittingly and very colourfully rounded off by the assistance given at the Victory Camp in Kensington Gardens for men taking part in the Victory March. W.V.S. was originally asked by the War Office to run an Information Bureau but, as so frequently happens in such cases, its work was eventually extended to cover a variety of services, from escorting theatre parties and shopping expeditions, to mending socks and washing cap-covers. These activities were carried on during the five weeks the men were in camp, and long before they were over W.V.S. was on the same happy and friendly terms with the soldiers of every country from Greece to Abyssinia as they are with our own men in khaki and blue.

Help for Wives and Families of the Forces

Believing that the welfare of his family is inseparably bound up with the welfare of the fighting man himself, W.V.S. has gladly responded to any request for assistance for Service wives and families, often in conjunction with S.S.A.A.F.A.

Escorts for Families of the British Army on the Rhine

A typical service rendered by W.V.S. at the request of the War Office was the provision of escorts for wives and families of soldiers of the B.A.O.R. travelling to Germany to join them. Many such wives had never travelled abroad before and the journey from Tilbury to Cuxhaven was apt to be a formidable experience, especially when the care of young children and the miseries of sea-sickness had both to be contended with, but by staffing nurseries and crèches and generally taking care of the welfare of both mothers and children W.V.S. was able to considerably relieve the strain of a rather trying journey and to ensure that the travellers arrived at their destination both well and happy.

Escorts for Children

W.V.S. escorts have been provided for parties of unaccompanied children travelling to join their parents for school holidays in Germany and the Middle East. This service has made possible many happy family reunions otherwise very difficult to arrange.

Help for Wives and Families of British Forces returning from India

The withdrawal of the Forces from India inevitably gave rise to many problems connected with the welfare of the wives and families returning with them, especially as many of the women had never been in this country before and knew little or nothing of the conditions of life in post-war Britain. At the request of the authorities W.V.S. escorts were therefore despatched to the ports of embarkation in India to travel home with the families and give them every possible help. To this end, nursery schools were organised on board ship to give the mothers some relief from the care of the children. Information Bureaux were set up, where W.V.S. were at hand to answer every question. Specimen ration books and clothing books were displayed and their mysteries explained, leaflets and information about Children's Clothing Exchanges and Welfare Foods were distributed and—perhaps the most valuable service of all—in the course of many informal and friendly conversations, unfounded doubts and fears were dispelled and reliable and helpful advice offered in case of need.

On arrival in this country the families were accommodated in camps where W.V.S. assistance was again available to smooth the path of the newcomers and to help them to be absorbed happily and with a minimum of difficulty into the normal life of the nation.

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W.V.S.

Help for the British Wives of American Forces

After the departure of the American Forces from this country many British-born girls who had married American soldiers undertook the great adventure of crossing the Atlantic to join their husbands.

These G.I. Brides, as they were called, travelled in large organised parties and were accommodated before embarking in specially arranged hostels. W.V.S. undertook many welfare duties prior to the departure of the ships, a gesture of good will, not only to their own departing countrywomen but to the American people with whom they were now so closely linked.

Overseas

The need for W.V.S. work for Services Welfare Overseas is still very great, and must continue to be so while Britain is compelled to maintain large forces abroad.

The age limit is as a general rule between 24 and 45, and recruits are carefully selected and trained for this most responsible work.

Welfare Work in N.A.A.F.I. Clubs

Men serving overseas, far from family and home must have reasonable facilities for relaxation and recreation if moral and physical welfare are to be safeguarded, and it is no less desirable that there should be some means of outlet for the inevitable human need for "someone to talk to" in moments of depression or homesickness. In connection with both these needs W.V.S. members are giving valuable services as Welfare Officers in the Clubs and Leave Centres operated by N.A.A.F.I. overseas; this work includes the supervision of games rooms, libraries and lounges, and the arrangement of tours, competitions, plays, gramophone recitals, etc., but perhaps its most valuable aspect is the provision of friendly feminine contact. A few minutes' conversation with a cheerful but sympathetic and understanding W.V.S. Welfare Worker can frequently help to roll away a gathering cloud of depression or throw a new and more favourable light on a worrying problem about friends or family at home.

Unit Canteens

A new development of W.V.S. work overseas is its extension to the canteens of individual Units. This branch of work is chiefly undertaken in Germany and is proving most successful.

Family Welfare Overseas

At the request of the War Office, W.V.S. members are undertaking welfare work for the British Service families in Trieste, and for Ghurka families in Malaya.

Say It With Flowers

A "Say it with Flowers" Scheme originated during the war to enable Servicemen overseas to order flowers through W.V.S. for delivery to friends at home is still in operation and continues to be very popular.

Areas of W.V.S. Services Overseas

In the spring of 1948, W.V.S. members were working in Germany, Austria, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Palestine, Trieste, Tripolitania, Malaya, Japan and Hong Kong.

Recruitment for W.V.S. (India)

Early in 1945, W.V.S. were asked by the War Office and India Office to recruit and send out volunteers for W.V.S. (India). Before the end of the year 150 volunteers had been selected, given a preliminary training, outfitted in uniform and sent off to do welfare work for the Services in India in transit camps and other isolated places where there were few British women.

At the request of the India Office, 20 of these volunteers stayed in India until March, 1948, to help the soldiers and their families during their last days in India.

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"HOME HELPS" SCHEMES

There have been few homes in Britain for many years in which all members of the family are not accustomed to give such help as they can with household chores. In the nature of things, however, this help is apt to be sporadic and uncertain and in the long run the burden of cooking, cleaning, washing and mending for the family falls on one pair of shoulders—those of the housewife herself. So long as she remains well and active things run smoothly, but if she should ever be temporarily incapacitated for any reason, such as illness, accident, or the birth of a new baby, conditions in the home rapidly tend to become chaotic and, all too often, the housewife is compelled to return to duty before she is fit to do so, possibly with lastingly serious consequences to her health.

It was with a view to providing help in any such cases of need that Local Authorities were granted powers under various Government orders to operate Home Help Schemes, but lack of personnel and the multiplicity of war responsibilities in most cases prevented any progress being made in the matter. In November, 1944, however, W.V.S., in co-operation with the Oxford City Council, undertook the formation of an experimental Home Help Service which, within a year, was to overcome all difficulties and become such an established success that it has been adopted as the model on which similar schemes throughout the country have been formed.

The basis of this scheme as envisaged by W.V.S. is the provision of a uniformed service of Home Help for all persons in need of help in order to keep the home running during an emergency; the Home Helps being employed and paid by the Local Authority and recovery of expenses met from (a) such sources as Maternity and Child Welfare Committees under powers conferred on them; and (b) payments by householders in a position to make them. A noteworthy factor in connection with the success of this scheme was that, by employing a characteristic and effective method of approach, W.V.S. found little difficulty in recruiting a sufficient number of suitable Helps. The women were shown that they were performing a useful public service and that as employees of the Local Authority they enjoyed a recognised and satisfactory status.

Post-War Developments of "Home Helps" Schemes

The story of the development of post-war W.V.S. assistance with Home Help Schemes is one of rapid and striking progress.

In June, 1946, the Ministry of Health in a circular to Local Authorities stressed the need for the extension of Home Health Services, and following on this recommendation W.V.S. was inundated with requests for information and advice. As a result, many schemes were set up throughout the country with W.V.S. co-operation, in some cases W.V.S. undertaking the whole work on behalf of the Local Authority. Although a similar circular was issued by the Department of Health for Scotland, the Scottish Local Authorities did not take it up to the same extent.

In November, 1947, a Home Helps Conference was held in London to which Medical Officers of all Welfare Authorities or their representatives were invited; following on this Conference, requests for W.V.S. assistance were greatly intensified and in the succeeding four months 49 additional schemes were set in motion.

By March, 1948, W.V.S. had been instrumental in initiating schemes in 123 towns and 16 counties, the latter involving operations of considerable magnitude in order to cover the large number of small towns, villages and rural areas to be catered for.

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Training for Home Help Organisers

As a necessary corollary to the running of Home Help Schemes the need has emerged for the provision of special training for Home Help Organisers, whether W.V.S. or persons employed by the Local Authority. Sponsored by the Ministry of Health, such Residential Training Schools have been and are being arranged, each course lasting for one week.

W.V.S. Home Help Advice and Assistance

W.V.S. has now acquired the most experienced pool of knowledge and technique in the country on all matters concerned with Home Help Schemes, and its help is placed at the disposal of Local Authorities by the supply of detailed advice and travelling specialists from W.V.S. Headquarters and by the provision of regional and local assistance of every kind. It is a source of very great satisfaction to the Service as a whole that it has been able in this way to contribute so much to the meeting of a very real national need in England and Wales.

SALVAGE

There was no activity of W.V.S. during the war years to which harder or more unremitting efforts were devoted than to the work, on behalf of the Ministry of Supply, of ensuring by every means in its power that no scrap of material was wasted which could possibly be salvaged and put to further use. The work was extremely arduous and often distasteful, but it was undoubtedly successful in saving many thousand tons of valuable material which would otherwise have been lost to the war effort.

During lull periods between air attacks when W.V.S. were not pre-occupied with Civil Defence duties, 42,658 members took part in salvage work of one kind and another, acting as Salvage Stewards on behalf of Local Authorities, taking part in publicity campaigns by distributing leaflets, canvassing householders, touring with loudspeakers, staffing salvage dumps, driving salvage lorries, organising house to house collections and sorting, packing and baling salvage of various kinds.

One of the most notable of W.V.S. salvage efforts was the organisation of the nation-wide collection of aluminium in June, 1940, when a special appeal was launched by the Ministry of Aircraft Production for aluminium pots, kettles, etc., to be turned into parts for the aeroplanes which were so desperately needed at that time; but apart from more spectacular undertakings of this kind, W.V.S. was continually engaged in steady, routine salvage work carried on under all conditions and in all weathers.

It should be noted that W.V.S. salvage work fulfilled a dual purpose, for not only was material saved for the war effort, but by the sale of the salvaged material, money was obtained which was put to many good uses.

As an instance of this, in one rural area where W.V.S. collected rags and bones for the Local Authority, it was announced that the community had benefited to the extent of a 2d. rate from this W.V.S. work, while in many other areas where W.V.S. was authorised to make special collections of salvage, substantial sums of money were obtained which, by permission of the authorities, were devoted to the provision of comforts for the troops, evacuees, etc.

The Cog Scheme

The Cog Scheme was introduced by W.V.S. in 1940, with the object of interesting children in salvage work. With the permission of the Board of Education, W.V.S. members toured the schools and gave talks on salvage. Volunteers were then enrolled to act as Junior Salvage Stewards, each volunteer being a "cog" in the salvage wheel, and after six weeks' work awarded a "Cog" badge. By the arrangement of exhibitions, collections, competitions of various kinds, the interest of the children was continually maintained, and in some schools it was found possible to augment this interest by linking salvage with the normal school subjects such as geography, mathematics, etc.

Post-War Development of W.V.S. Salvage Work

With the close of hostilities the necessity for W.V.S. salvage work became less urgent. Many items which had been needed for the war effort were not now required, and as more labour became available, normal methods of collection were resumed and less assistance was required by Local Authorities. At the request of the Board of Trade, however, W.V.S. continued to give help wherever desired, particularly with the drive to save waste paper; in some rural areas where collections of paper were otherwise difficult to arrange, this work was carried on by W.V.S. and house to house canvassing and similar publicity efforts were also undertaken, in order to impress on householders that paper, rags and bones were still needed for industry and would continue so for all time.

THE RE-HOMING GIFTS SCHEME

At the time of the Flying Bomb attack on London the Re-Homing Gift Scheme was instituted by W.V.S. in the urgent desire to do something to help the many householders who, having lost their homes with all their contents, were so bravely facing the prospect of beginning life all over again and once more trying to build up some semblance of a home.

The purpose of the scheme was to ask towns and counties in safe areas to adopt those in bombed areas and to send their gifts through W.V.S. of household furnishings, which in a time of such scarcity were almost unobtainable in the shops.

The appeal met with a most generous response, and by means of the gifts of furniture, hardware, crockery, etc., collected, W.V.S. was enabled to help 100,000 families in London and the bombed towns of the South Coast. 8,000 tons of goods in all being collected and distributed. The gratitude of those who had suffered the loss of treasured possessions, often laboriously acquired over a period of years, at this practical expression of sympathy from others more fortunate than themselves, was most touching and sincere and made a very lasting impression on the W.V.S. workers concerned in the scheme.

Post-War Developments of the Re-Homing Gifts Scheme

The Re-Homing Gift Scheme continued to operate throughout the immediate post-war period while bombed families were still settling into new homes and W.V.S. was indebted to generous donors overseas who now sent help. The Queen's Canadian Fund, W.V.S. in Bermuda and the Gold Coast Forestry Commission were among those who contributed furnishings, crockery, etc.

During 1946, the Swiss people sent 620 sets of new household furniture to the Ministry of Health, who handed them to W.V.S. for distribution. This furniture was allocated to the towns which suffered most by bombing, but in consultation with the Local Authorities and Regional Housing Officers of the Ministry of Health, it was decided not to restrict it only to those who had actually been bombed, and in this way, returned Service men setting up home for the first time were enabled to participate in the gifts. In Scotland, W.V.S. assisted the Department of Health in the same way.

In April, 1947, the whole of the Re-Homing Gift Scheme was reopened for the benefit of families affected by the disastrous floods of that year, and gifts of every kind, including not only pots, pans and cleaning materials as well as furniture, but also poultry and rabbits to replace livestock lost in the floods, were distributed.

Garden Scheme

As an outcome of the Re-Homing Gift Scheme, the W.V.S. Garden Scheme was instituted in April, 1946, to help owners of blitzed and prefabricated houses to begin making gardens around them.

Plants and seeds are collected from the country districts and distributed to householders faced with the difficult task of making a garden, often from the most discouraging and unpromising material of a "cleared site." The difference that such gardens can make to the aspect of the useful but somewhat depressing "pre-fab" must be seen to be realised and has a very marked effect, not only on the spirits of the householders but of the passers-by who see them also. This scheme has been very widely extended, and Her Majesty Queen Mary presented a challenge cup in 1947 for the best pre-fab garden created as the result of it.

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FOOD SERVICES

Recognising the importance of food in maintaining health, efficiency and morale, 50,695 W.V.S. members were continuously engaged in the task of assisting the various authorities concerned in feeding the people in the emergency conditions occasioned by war. In addition to the vast undertaking of maintaining and staffing canteens for Civil Defence and the Forces and the Queen's Messengers already mentioned, W.V.S. took part in many services developed to bring normal food to people living and working under abnormal conditions.

British Restaurants

8,807 W.V.S. members served in various capacities in British Restaurants operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Food and Local Authorities. In some cases W.V.S. undertook the entire management of the restaurant and in many other areas provided helpers of various kinds.

School Meals

1,886 W.V.S. members gave regular assistance with the work of cooking, transporting and serving hot mid-day meals for school children.

Feeding in Rural Areas

Farm workers and others in rural areas were greatly handicapped by being cut off by distance from the British Restaurants, canteens and other "off the ration" feeding facilities available to town-dwellers. To help to mitigate this difficulty 1,146 W.V.S. members were engaged in a FISH AND CHIP van service which delivered hot fish and chips in the villages, and in operating AGRICULTURAL PIE SCHEMES in 2,734 villages. These Pie Schemes, which were instituted by W.V.S. in 1941, under the auspices of the Ministry of Food, were a valuable and much appreciated service to agricultural workers. Under the direction of local Committees, arrangements were made for the baking, transport and sale of the pies, W.V.S. in many areas undertaking all necessary work, including the baking. Pies were delivered direct to the workers where required, thus providing them with a substantial and nourishing meal unobtainable by any other means. The average number of pies distributed weekly by W.V.S. in 1943 was 1,324,000.

Emergency Canteen Services

In addition to its more or less regular feeding services, W.V.S. was continually called upon for assistance in providing food and drink for men, women and children in all manner of emergencies. To refugees arriving from abroad, survivors of shipwrecks, train accidents and other disasters, men working at high pressure on secret and urgent jobs such as "Mulberry" at the docks, women working in the hop fields, children travelling alone, workmen drafted into London in thousands to repair bomb damage and to innumerable others in need, W.V.S. Canteens and W.V.S. members in their green uniform were a familiar and welcome sight.

Ration Books

When full scale ration books were first issued in 1941, W.V.S. were asked by the Ministry of Food to assist its 1,500 Food Executive Officers with their gigantic task of distributing ration books to everybody in the country within one week.

Whenever ration books were distributed, W.V.S. assisted the local Food Officers wherever help was needed—addressing books, marshalling queues, seeing that application forms were correctly filled in, and sometimes, in the early days, providing tea when there was a long wait.

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Post-War Food Services

In the continued difficulties of the food situation in the post-war period, W.V.S. assistance has been available wherever needed. With the improvement in the supply of paid labour, voluntary help in most cases is not now required in British Restaurants or with school meals and, happily, there are no longer any evacuees to be fed, but other W.V.S. services are still in demand.

RURAL PIE SCHEMES, for instance, continue to be a boon to agricultural workers and rural housewives, and have been extended over England and Wales, and W.V.S. assistance is increasingly given in connection with the **MEALS ON WHEELS** services for invalids and old people which are now operating in so many districts.

Food Leaders

The Food Leader Scheme originated during the war to provide a link between the Ministry of Food and the housewife, has been further developed and many W.V.S. Food Leaders give help by distributing M.O.F. leaflets, staffing Domestic Advice Centres and passing on to friends and neighbours and other housewives whom they meet in the queues the advice and information they receive in their monthly Food Leader's letter from the Ministry of Food.

Emergency Feeding

Even in time of peace emergencies arise and as an instance of this, during the floods of 1947, W.V.S. was called in to help with emergency feeding arrangements for the unfortunate people whose homes were submerged.

Canning

In the summer of 1947, realising the need to augment the national larder, W.V.S. trained a number of its members to help in the conservation of food by fruit canning, particularly in the urban areas.

Forty-two W.V.S. members have qualified as canning instructors; canning teams, and mobile canning units have been started all over the country. The first priority for canning is for local hospitals and institutions.

Ration Books

W.V.S. have continued to help with the distribution of ration books, and in some country districts undertake to collect the old books and distribute the new ones.

DISTRIBUTION OF GIFTS FROM OVERSEAS

W.V.S. throughout the war years was the tried and trusted medium through which gifts in money and kind from donors in every part of the world were used for the benefit of those who suffered most as a result of war conditions.

The most important undertaking of W.V.S. in this respect was its work as the official Distributing Agent of the American Red Cross for Civilian War Relief in Great Britain, but from all parts of the world a never ceasing flow of gifts in kind to the value of over £12,000,000 poured into the country, passing through the hands of W.V.S. to those for whom they were intended.

In order that full use might be made of these generous gifts, W.V.S. was granted a free Import Licence by the Board of Trade and other concessions arranged included free shipping, reduced railway charges and the waiving of Port Dues and Dock Charges wherever possible. Transport and storage charges were paid by H.M. Government.

Methods of Distribution

Supplies of gifts arriving at the ports were distributed to the Regions on instructions received from W.V.S. Headquarters, first, based on a mathematical calculation of vulnerability and war-time population—residents, evacuees, refugees and people who had been bombed-out from other regions. Later, when regular information was supplied to Headquarters by Regional Offices on the individual needs of each Region, this information was taken into account in allocating the gifts.

Within each Region distribution was based on local requirements reported by W.V.S. Centres to W.V.S. Regional Offices. In this way it was ensured that every Region, every County and every individual place had its fair share of all the gifts coming into the country.

Some of the Gifts Received

Clothing of all kinds for men, women and children, bedding (sheets, blankets, pillows, etc.), surgical dressings, sweets, soap, toys, paper towels, hot water bottles, babies' bottles, rubber teats, thread, thermos flasks, thermos urns, rubber soles and heels, handbags, paper cups, obstetrical units, mobile feeding units, shelter kits, rice, chocolate powder, dried milks, vehicles of every description.

Post-War Distribution of Gifts

The generous flow of gifts to this country did not cease with the end of the war, and many kind friends overseas continued to send shipments of various kinds to W.V.S. to help the people of Great Britain through the difficult period of reconstruction. Foremost among such gifts have been the regular supplies of clothing received from the Canadian Red Cross and the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, chocolate powder from the Kinsmen Clubs of Canada, and the quantities of goods, such as furniture, hardware, kitchen utensils, etc., sent from various sources for re-homing bombed families.

Personal Parcels Service

Responsibility for the distribution of bulk gifts of food is in the hands of the Local Authorities, and W.V.S. in many areas is assisting with the work; there are, however, many organisations and individuals overseas who wish to send parcels of foods to families and old people living alone who are in special need and W.V.S. has, therefore, originated the Personal Parcels Scheme. Under this scheme W.V.S. send to the donors lists of names of those to whom these parcels would be a particular boon, together with information about the most useful things to send, weights, packing, Custom regulations, etc. Nearly 200,000 names have been sent and parcels duly despatched to grateful recipients.

TRANSPORT

As the means whereby it was enabled to carry on its many and varied activities, transport formed a major part of the W.V.S. war organisation. In such an organisation, whose field of action necessitated not only the transport of personnel but the handling of commodities of every kind and in every quantity, the transport employed covered a range of vehicles of every size and type, from great mobile kitchens to handy little "porters' trolleys."

For most of these invaluable conveyances W.V.S. was indebted to generous donors in all parts of the world, but it must also be placed on record that from its earliest days great numbers of W.V.S. members placed their own cars at the disposal of the service and continued to do so throughout the war.

At one time there were approximately 14,000 of these owner-drivers and, including ambulance drivers, canteen and van drivers and personnel, over 35,000 W.V.S. members were engaged in transport duties.

Apart from private cars, over 1,000 vehicles were employed in W.V.S. service, most of them purchased in this country with money sent by donors in America and all parts of the British Empire, but a few of them sent direct from overseas.

Duties of W.V.S. Transport Drivers

Many of these duties were, of course, of a routine and somewhat monotonous kind, such as the regular delivery of supplies of all kinds (especially clothing, Klim (dried milk) and chocolate powder, used in enormous quantities in W.V.S. work), and the driving of canteens on scheduled daily and weekly rounds.

It was the essential nature of W.V.S. work, however, that it should be continually called upon to deal with emergencies, and no two emergencies were ever alike—with the exception of air raid incidents, which inevitably were of a certain tragic similarity.

Whatever the circumstances, these incidents brought in their train the same sad sequence of death, suffering, dirt, discomfort and sheer misery of every kind, and it was on these occasions that W.V.S. drivers carried out their most urgent tasks by bringing food, drink and clothing to those in need, by carrying homeless to Rest Centres, casualties to First Aid Posts, anxious relatives to hospitals and mortuaries, and by countless other errands of necessity.

Apart from these grave emergencies there were innumerable others of a lesser nature which were all in the day's work to W.V.S. drivers. There were Government officials to be driven on urgent journeys, bomb experts to take to secret investigations, maternity cases to hospitals, refugees to be met at the ports and evacuees at stations, and endless loads of beds, mattresses, pillows, blankets, babies' bottles, hospital supplies, tables, chairs, blood plasma, pathological specimens, food, drink, and all else besides to be transported here, there and everywhere.

There was no Government Department that did not at some time call upon W.V.S. transport for assistance, and it is true to say that W.V.S. drivers were always ready and willing to drive anything, anywhere and at any time and in any weather.

W.V.S. Work for the Volunteer Car Pool—"V.C.P."

In July, 1942, owing to restrictions in petrol and the consequent reduction in the number of private cars in use, the Ministry of Home Security instituted a national scheme for Volunteer Car Pools. Private owners who agreed to make their cars available in an emergency were invited to enrol and, if not already in receipt of supplementary petrol, were given a free certificate in place of a Road Fund Licence. A schedule was drawn up of day to day emergency work which Pool Cars might do and owners were offered a mileage rate not exceeding 6d. a mile for Pool work.

The scheme was the responsibility of the Regional Commissioners for Civil Defence, and at their request W.V.S. undertook various work in connection with the organisation, administration, record keeping, issue of petrol coupons and general running of the scheme, a vast and complicated task in view of the large number of cars involved and the multiplicity of purposes for which they were liable to be called upon at any hour, day or night. By the year 1944, 570 Volunteer Car Pools were in operation throughout the country, controlling 20,820 cars.

Post-War Developments of W.V.S. Transport

The end of the war and of Civil Defence duties considerably reduced the demand on W.V.S. transport, but in many cases the change involved was merely a switch over from one activity to another. There were now no Civil Defence Canteens on the road but, instead, there were Mobile Clothing Exchanges to be driven, and if Baby Buses for small evacuees were no longer required there were "Meals on Wheels" for invalids and old people to be delivered in ever increasing numbers. Clothing, too, though mercifully not now wanted for the relief of air raid distress, must still be transported for distribution to repatriates from Palestine, soldiers' families from India, the flood victims in 1947, and innumerable other people in need of help; and, if there were no isolated anti-aircraft units to be visited with Mobile Libraries, there were housing estates and villages to be toured with trailers carrying loads of welfare foods for children.

In peace as in war, therefore, W.V.S. transport continues to play an essential part in carrying on the work of the Service.

Hospital Car Service

The war-time Volunteer Car Pool ceased to function in 1945 but, in order to help both hospitals and patients, a Hospital Car Service was set up jointly in August, 1945, by the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the British Red Cross Society and W.V.S. for the purpose of providing conveyance between home and hospital for patients unable to use public transport. Cars are sent out by the H.C.S. at the request of Hospital Almoners all over the country to take patients to and from hospital for treatment, and in-patients for entry and discharge. The importance of this service in facilitating regular and often urgently needed treatment cannot be over-estimated. In Scotland this service is organised entirely by W.V.S.

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

The miscellaneous activities of W.V.S. during the war years were too numerous and varied to be tabulated individually. It is sufficient to say that W.V.S. members were accustomed to turn their hands to any form of work which could aid the war effort; no task was too humble, no project too great to be undertaken if it could further this aim. Below will be found listed a number of these miscellaneous activities, which are selected as indicative of the wide range and essentially practical character of W.V.S. war work.

Work for Evacuees from Gibraltar

When the fall of France necessitated the sudden alteration of the plan to evacuate the women and children of Gibraltar to Jamaica, it was decided that they should be brought instead to Britain, and W.V.S. help was sought by the Ministry of Health in making arrangements for their reception and after-care. In all, some 12,000 evacuees arrived, and the work done for them by W.V.S. included the preparatory scrubbing and cleaning of hostels, the provision of escorts and interpreters, help with feeding, clothing, care of linen and general welfare. A W.V.S. leader was allocated to practically every hostel during the difficult period when these bewildered and homesick visitors were slowly learning to adapt themselves to the ways of a strange and alien land and when, the night before they left the London area, a flying-bomb wrecked one of these hostels, W.V.S. helpers worked all night to clothe and equip the travellers for their journey.

National Savings

Work on behalf of the National Savings Movement was carried on by many thousands of W.V.S. members all over the country during the war years.

In many areas, permanent National Savings Selling Centres were staffed all the year round, wholly or partly by W.V.S. members, and many other members gave regular services as Street Savings Group Secretaries.

In addition to this regular work, W.V.S. assistance was always given in connection with the Special Savings Drives, such as "Warship Week," "Wings for Victory Week," "Salute the Soldier Week," etc., this assistance taking various forms such as clerical work, help with transport, publicity, staffing Selling Centres, etc.

Clerical Work

Local Authorities, hospitals, etc., were greatly handicapped during the war years by the shortage of clerical staffs, particularly for dealing with any heavy temporary influx of work.

To help in overcoming this difficulty many thousands of W.V.S. members gave their services as required for various forms of clerical work. Notable instances of this were the assistance given with the issue of Ration Books in many areas, the keeping of records for Blood Donor Schemes, the issue of special appeals for salvage, war savings, etc.

Rose Hip Collection

In view of the high food value of the syrup made from Rose Hips, W.V.S., originally at the request of the Ministry of Supply and subsequently of the Ministry of Health, regularly undertook the collection of Rose Hips in many areas during the appropriate season, in some areas being responsible for all the organisation of collections, packing and despatch of the Rose Hips to the factories. W.V.S. in Scotland undertook the collection of Rose Hips at the request of the Department of Health for Scotland.

Hospital Help

In order to help the hospitals, so badly handicapped by shortage of labour of all kinds, W.V.S. members in many hospitals throughout the country mended linen, acted as librarians, telephonists, clerical assistants, staffed canteens and undertook domestic and other duties of every kind.

Fruit Preserving

In the effort to conserve all available fruit, W.V.S. members in many districts, particularly in rural areas, worked in teams, during the appropriate seasons, bottling, preserving, making pickles and chutneys for children's and old people's homes, hospitals and institutions. Demonstrations were arranged and instructions and help given on request to any member of the public.

Household Jobbing

In view of the great shortage of labour for carrying out the various odd jobs which are continually necessary in a house, W.V.S. arranged classes for its members in simple repairs, such as replacing broken fuse wires, fixing new washers to water taps, mending broken furniture, china, etc. By this means they were enabled to undertake their own odd jobs and to help neighbours in difficulty without calling on already overburdened workmen.

Make-Do and Mend

Making-Do and Mending clothing, curtains, chair covers, etc., was at all times a major activity of W.V.S. both collectively and individually. Classes and demonstrations were continually held for members and the general public and W.V.S. work parties were regularly engaged in all towns and villages in altering and adapting garments, particularly for children's Clothing Exchanges.

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Miscellaneous Post-War Activities

In accordance with its policy of refusing no request for assistance which could possibly be accorded to, W.V.S., miscellaneous activities in the post-war years have covered a field ranging from the collection of jam jars to the teaching of English to Displaced Persons. Many of the war-time activities, such as MAKE DO AND MEND and NATIONAL SAVINGS, still continue with unabated vigour; the annual COLLECTION OF ROSE HIPS gives increasingly satisfactory results; CLERICAL HELP is still available where necessary and, as a new development in Fruit Preserving, CANNING of fruits and tomatoes, etc., has been undertaken by W.V.S. in certain areas. A notable instance of a war-time activity which has been greatly extended in its scope in peace-time is:—

Help for Hospitals

W.V.S. assistance is being given in hospitals in a wide and increasing variety of ways, and work is also being carried out at clinics. Duties now being undertaken by W.V.S. include acting as telephonists and receptionists; serving suppers and teas; feeding aged patients and babies; canning for hospitals; helping each ration period with ration books and catering forms; mending and sorting linen, and arranging linen for wards; sewing and knitting; hospital working parties; arranging flowers for wards daily or on visiting days; visiting lonely patients and writing letters for patients; shopping for patients and providing "trolley" or "tray" shops; entertaining patients, cinema shows and concerts, etc.; providing or assisting with hospital libraries and rebinding books; cooking and helping with domestic work during staff emergencies, etc., and providing canteens or buffets for waiting out-patients.

Work for Mental Hospitals

In January, 1948, the Board of Control asked W.V.S. to give certain types of assistance in certain mental hospitals; the Board felt that W.V.S. as well as certain other organisations, could make a real contribution towards providing companionship and providing activities which would assist in making patients feel that they were self-reliant members not only of the hospital community but also of a wider social community, thus helping to break down any feeling of isolation and "apartness" from the world beyond the hospital grounds.

It is seldom that W.V.S. have the opportunity to take part in actual "healing" and it is for this reason probably that this work is so popular, for all the work done in these hospitals by W.V.S. is actually part of the curative treatment and great pride is taken by the members concerned in the percentages of discharges as cured. The types of assistance given vary considerably—visiting lonely patients; acting as hostesses when relatives and friends come to visit; assisting with occupational therapy and teaching handicraft; arranging discussion groups, play-reading, painting classes, community singing, concerts, etc., library work; taking patients for walks to church; helping them with their own social clubs both in and outside the hospital; teaching folk and ballroom dancing, and games such as net-ball. This is all work for which W.V.S. is particularly fitted, for it needs in the workers just those qualities which have so helped W.V.S. work in the past.

Foreign Office Conferences

The Post War Era might well be described as the Age of Conferences judging from the number of such gatherings which have taken place. Among such Conferences held in London have been the United Nations Preparatory Commission, the Commonwealth Wool Conference, the United Nations Wheat Conference, the Preparatory Committee on Trade and Employment, all of which were of great importance to this country, and W.V.S., at the request of the Foreign Office, has given much assistance designed to secure the increased comfort and convenience of delegates and so help to secure success wherever possible.

Duties undertaken by W.V.S. have included the staffing of Information Desks, arrangement of hospitality, shopping expeditions and tours to places of interest, and other services much appreciated by our Overseas visitors.

Welfare of Dependants of the Polish Resettlement Corps

Our moral obligations to our Polish Allies have given rise to many problems never anticipated when first we went to war in 1939, and not least of these has been the absorption into our national life of many thousands of members of the Polish Resettlement Corps, together with their wives and dependants. That these people, who come of strong and virile stock have a valuable contribution to make to this country there can be no doubt and it is to the interest of us all that they should be given every help and encouragement to settle down in Britain happily and quickly. To this end W.V.S., at the request of the Government has undertaken much work connected with Polish Welfare, including the issue of clothing, the provision of quilts and blankets and other small comforts to brighten the somewhat dreary aspect of life in the Army Camps in which, for lack of other accommodation, the women and children were housed, the distribution of Welfare Foods for the children and of books, magazines and picture books, toys and games, the teaching of English and above all by inviting the Polish people into their own homes and showing them in every possible friendly and kindly way that they are welcome in our midst.

Welfare of European Volunteer Workers

Common humanity and our national interest alike demand that every assistance and encouragement should be given to the European Volunteer Workers now coming to this country in order that they may be easily assimilated into our national scheme of life.

At the request of the Government, W.V.S. first undertook welfare work of this nature on behalf of the girls from the Baltic who came here to work in hospitals and sanatoria, and, as other classes of workers have arrived, W.V.S. assistance has been extended to all of them in the Holding Hostels, etc., in which they are accommodated and later as they go out to work, and in the Dependants' Hostels where the women and children live until homes become available. Services rendered are similar to those accorded to the dependants of the Polish Resettlement Corps and are equally appreciated, and a special effort has been made to befriend and help the agricultural workers who are often living in very isolated hostels. At the request of the Ministry of Labour, W.V.S. has provided hundreds of escorts to take the newly arrived E.V.W's, all over the country, to the hostels and to their first employment.

Families Welfare—Prison Section

A woman does not cease to have family responsibilities because she has broken the law and must pay the penalty, and in all but the most hardened cases the inevitable mental distress occasioned by her committal to prison must be greatly intensified by the knowledge that those who are near and dear to her may be suffering as a result

of her folly. There are many efficient arrangements in being concerned with the long term welfare of prisoners and their families, but a brief space of time must necessarily elapse before these arrangements can be put in train, and, with a view to covering this interim period, W.V.S. were approached by H.M. Prison Commissioners in June, 1947, to know whether they would be prepared to organise a scheme to deal with the immediate domestic problems which arise within the first twenty-four hours after a woman is committed to prison.

This scheme is now in operation at H.M. Prison, Holloway, the largest women's prison in the country, and a W.V.S. member is on duty at the prison every evening, when all women admitted have an option of having a short informal talk with her in which they can tell her of their problems, and a very large number of women avail themselves of this opportunity.

Many women arrested in London have homes in the Provinces and the nearest W.V.S. Centre to the woman's home is then asked to give whatever emergency assistance is required.

The scheme, which was inaugurated as an experiment, has been found to have amply justified itself, and the implications of its success are now being considered by the Prison Commissioners.

Assistance to Probation Officers—Adult Cases

The assistance which is being given by W.V.S. to Probation Officers attached to the Children's Courts has already been mentioned, but it has been found that this assistance can equally be extended in cases in which Adults on Probation, and their families are concerned.

Such work of course must always be performed under the trained and expert supervision of the Probation Officers themselves, but with this skilled guidance there is much that can be done by practical and sympathetic women to help in the task of mending broken lives and rebuilding homes wrecked by misery and despair.

In general, the work done by W.V.S. in this connection falls into three categories:

(1) Providing material help of food, clothing and household essentials for those who are destitute or in dire need. (It should be realised that even in these days there are men and women who commit offences such as stealing or breaking and entering because they or their families are in actual want.)

(2) Giving moral support and friendship to those in trouble.

(3) Finding suitable Foster Homes for Children and, in special cases of need, providing temporary homes for children in the houses of W.V.S. members.

In whichever way such help is given, its efficacy depends upon the ability of the helper to secure the confidence and co-operation of the family concerned, and in this respect there is rarely any difficulty, for the friendly, "unofficial" W.V.S. manner of approach disarms fear and suspicion and paves the way for the work of hope and reconstruction that is to follow.

Housing

In an organization in such close touch with the public it was felt to be essential that W.V.S. should be in a position to give all possible help and information with housing problems. A W.V.S. A.B.C. of housing has therefore been published which acts as a reference guide on the subject and includes a summary of the Housing Act and a short list of housing literature. A W.V.S. Housing News is also issued periodically which gives current information, which may be of use to members in their work and W.V.S. Housing Schools are held centrally and locally so that the technical and social aspects of housing may be fully understood.

Many members of W.V.S. are also serving on the Housing Committees of Local Authorities.

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Rehabilitation

Modern science has devised many ways in which the tragic handicap of physical disablement can be overcome or mitigated to some extent by skilful treatment by occupational therapy, and W.V.S. has gladly given assistance to various authorities in the task of ensuring that those who wish to avail themselves of such treatment shall have the opportunity to do so. At the request of the War Office, W.V.S., in conjunction with the St. John Ambulance Brigade and the British Red Cross Society, undertook the work of visiting returned prisoners of war in their homes and reporting to the Civil Resettlement Units on their needs and wishes for training, a very large number of cases being visited.

Various other activities in connection with rehabilitation are now being carried on by W.V.S., such as the visiting of registered disabled persons in Salford (Lancashire) on behalf of the Disabled Persons' Employment Corporation, and supplying voluntary teachers of knitting and handicrafts to hospitals and other bodies concerned with occupational therapy.

Help for Alderney Repatriates

In October, 1945, the Home Office asked W.V.S. to assist with the return of Channel Islanders to Alderney. A team of W.V.S. members went over to Alderney with the first repatriates, and for the next two months assisted in a transit camp and communal centre, as well as with settling the families into their homes. W.V.S. were able to take with them a certain amount of supplies of clothing, food, bedding and equipment, which were of invaluable assistance during the first months when the Islanders were living under the most difficult conditions.

Help for Evacuees from Palestine

In February, 1947, at the request of the Colonial Office, W.V.S. undertook much work in connection with the evacuation from Palestine of British women and children. Many of these women had either been out of the country for many years or, having acquired British nationality by marriage, had never been here before and their ignorance of food and clothing rationing regulations, housing difficulties, etc., naturally made them look forward to their arrival in Britain with anxiety and trepidation.

To help in this situation W.V.S. escorts were despatched to Port Said to travel back with the women and children, not only to take care of their general welfare on the voyage, organise nurseries for the children and take charge of them when their mothers were ill, but to show them specimen ration books, clothing books, etc., and to give all possible advice and information which would familiarise the women with conditions in Britain.

Other groups of women arriving by train or aeroplane were met by W.V.S., helped to find accommodation and assisted in every possible way; in cases where mothers had to make long journeys with young children, W.V.S. escorts travelled with them to their destinations and, on arrival at their homes, local W.V.S. members called on them to offer help and advice about food rationing, clothing coupons, etc. W.V.S. assistance was thus given at every stage to enable the settling in process to be carried through expeditiously and with as little worry and distress as possible.

Flood Relief

In the great floods which have caused such devastation in different parts of the country in recent times W.V.S. assistance has been given in all the affected areas, and has included such practical measures as the running and staffing of Rest Centres, evacuation and billeting homeless flood victims and their rescuers, clothing, rehousing, home cleaning and help with assessment of damage.

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Disaster Relief

As in the case of floods, W.V.S. help has at all times been instantly available in such terrible events as railway accidents, pit disasters, etc., and arrangements have now been made in some parts of the country for W.V.S. to assist the Fire Brigade during and after big fires by feeding arrangements for the men and the help of and provision of clothing for the victims.

Fuel Economy

W.V.S. members throughout the country have helped the Fuel Economy Campaign by giving demonstrations of lagging and briquette making, by holding meetings to advise on the best use of appliances, and by sending speakers to meetings on Fuel Economy organised by the Regional Organisers of the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

National Savings

About 500 W.V.S. Centres have continued to work for National Savings, and W.V.S. Commando Teams have been formed to help with drives for more street and village groups. Savings Groups have been started in Darby and Joan Clubs, and in Camps and Hostels for European Workers. Joint Conferences between National Savings and W.V.S. Organisers have been held all over the country, so as to ensure the utmost goodwill and co-operation between National Savings voluntary workers and W.V.S. Centres.

Women's Home Industries

The exquisite quality of the handwork of British women enjoys a world-wide reputation and with a view to utilising this to the full in helping to solve our present economic difficulties a non profit-making Company, known as Women's Home Industries Ltd., was formed under the auspices of W.V.S. in 1947, for the purpose of selling such handwork for dollars in the United States and Canada.

The Company, the administrative work of which is carried on at W.V.S. Headquarters, has been extremely successful and large quantities of beautiful hand-knitted garments of all descriptions, children's frocks, beautiful quilting, needlepoint, etc., have been despatched overseas.

Her Majesty Queen Mary has graciously allowed the sale in America of six tapestry chair seats worked by herself and many precious dollars have thereby been earned for this country.

Welfare for Ground Nuts Scheme—Tanganyika

In December, 1947, the Chairman of the Overseas Food Corporation asked that W.V.S. should undertake and help with the Welfare Work necessary for the Ground Nuts Scheme in Tanganyika. After a preliminary tour it was agreed that W.V.S. could help and as an experimental measure five W.V.S. members, experienced in welfare work overseas, have been despatched to Kongwa and Dar-es-Salam. It is as yet too soon to know whether this experiment will lead to further development of such work, but its results are awaited with interest.

Royal Wedding Gifts

It is fitting that the list of W.V.S. activities in the post-war years should end with a reference to some of the pleasantest duties ever undertaken by the Service, namely those in connection with the Wedding Gifts of H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth. During the period when the gifts were on show in London, W.V.S. members carried out the work of dusting and cleaning the many beautiful articles on view, so that they should be kept in perfect condition, and other W.V.S. workers were engaged in packing parcels of the many Food Stuffs received as Gifts, which by the wish of Her Royal Highness were later despatched to people receiving supplementary pensions, widows with children and old age pensioners in the higher age groups, each parcel containing a personal message from the Princess herself.

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S**CONCLUSION**

W.V.S. has no monopoly of virtue in the matter of voluntary effort; the tradition of public service in this country is very strong and there is rarely a lack of workers for any worthy cause. It is, however, surely unique in its ability to carry on simultaneously and with unflinching success an apparently unlimited number and variety of activities and, above all, in the intensely devoted service which it seems to call forth from its members at any cost to their own personal comfort, convenience and even safety. If an explanation of this last quality is sought it may be that it is to be found in the curiously strong *esprit de corps* by which the whole vast organisation is bound together, an *esprit de corps* which, after all, must come naturally to women who so proudly wear the emblem of the Crown upon their badge as a sign that they serve King and Country.

December, 1948.

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