SALVAGE ON THE HOME FRONT

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE HERITAGE COLLECTION

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‘*Salvage means saving to use again; we are asked to save waste paper, rags, rope and string, household bones, rubber and all kinds of scrap metal.*’ [1]

During the Second World War, the demand for ordinary materials used in manufacturing profoundly increased. This requirement placed significant strain on the availability of materials that were essential to supporting the war effort. In response to this ever-increasing demand, the Ministry of Supply introduced the National Salvage Scheme in December 1939.[2]

For this scheme to work efficiently, the Women’s Voluntary Services launched a substantial campaign in February 1940 to assist the authorities in any way possible.[3] This involvement also had the added benefit that the salvaged materials could be sold for a small profit to help fund local projects.[4] Of all the wartime activities, salvage required a spectacular level of effort and commitment. With its huge membership, the WVS was perfectly positioned to devote considerable attention to salvage on the Home Front.

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[1] Royal Voluntary Service Archive and Heritage Collection, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/ SAL-41-002, Salvage 1940-1941, What a Cog Should Know, 1941.
[2] Peter Thorsheim, *Waste into Weapons: Recycling in Britain during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 44.
[3] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14 June 1940.
[4] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/A-48-004, Report of Ten Year's Work for the Nation 1938- 1948, p. 39.

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Kitchen waste for salvage as pig food 1939-1945.

RVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/SAL/PIG002. 1939-1945

As with all work that the WVS performed during the war, salvaging was rarely glamourous. Collection was often extremely laborious, but it was unquestionably successful in recovering thousands of tons of valuable materials that would prove vital for the production of items such as paper, explosives and tank armour.

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Likewise, non-ferrous metals such as aluminium could be used for aeroplane propellers and kitchen waste was boiled into pig swill to help replenish the stocks of animal feed.[5]

Over 42,000 members of the WVS engaged in a wide variety of salvaging activities that included the collection of:

- Waste-Paper and Cardboard
- Metals
- Bones
- Rags
- Rubber
- Kitchen Waste

The WVS also:

- Organised collections and established salvage depots
- Implemented The Cog Scheme
- Canvassed awareness by door to door visits
- Ran salvage drives.[6]

These examples were direct responses to an infrastructure that was placed under severe pressure. For instance, paper was mainly manufactured from wood pulp which was imported from Scandinavia.[7] Naturally, this became unavailable at the outbreak of war, so the UK had to start importing pulp from Canada.[8]

Whilst this may have created a short-term solution, transporting pulp from North America was not a sustainable option as merchant ships were already packed with

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[5] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help, 1941.
[6] RVS A&HC, WRVS/PUB/WVS004, Report on 25 Years Work, 1938-1963, p. 74.
[7] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-002, What a Cog Should Know, 1941
[8] Ibid.

food and other supplies. Without focusing on home-grown solutions to these issues, the manufacturing sector would have encountered an ever-increasing series of setbacks.

What became increasingly apparent during the course of the Second World War, was the division between publicity and collection. Both these aspects were explored by the WVS as they gradually shifted their attention towards collecting salvage not just as a means to an end but also as a method of creating awareness. This is highly significant because the WVS recognised that both features could be intertwined as opposed to treating them separately. The WVS achieved this by promoting a variety of different salvage schemes.

Creating a salvage-minded society

'Who better to organise the salvage drive than the WVS?'[9]

From the day that the Ministry of Supply implemented the National Salvage Scheme, it would be unwise to assume that the nation suddenly became willingly salvage-minded overnight. WVS was perfectly suited to create this positive attitude towards salvage, because it had a strong national presence and it maintained a close relationship with local authorities.[10] To achieve this level of national awareness, the WVS embarked on an extraordinary series of campaigns.

Initially, a series of house-to-house canvassing sessions were conducted. They consisted of a five minute talk and the distribution of salvage information such as bone leaflets. [11] To put the scale of this campaign into perspective, 1,167 members of the WVS delivered nearly half a million leaflets and personal talks to housewives across the nation, in only six months.[12]

Despite the initial progress, creating a salvage-minded society would remain a challenging task. It took a period of positive reinforcement until citizens completely acknowledged the importance of recycling. In order for this change of household

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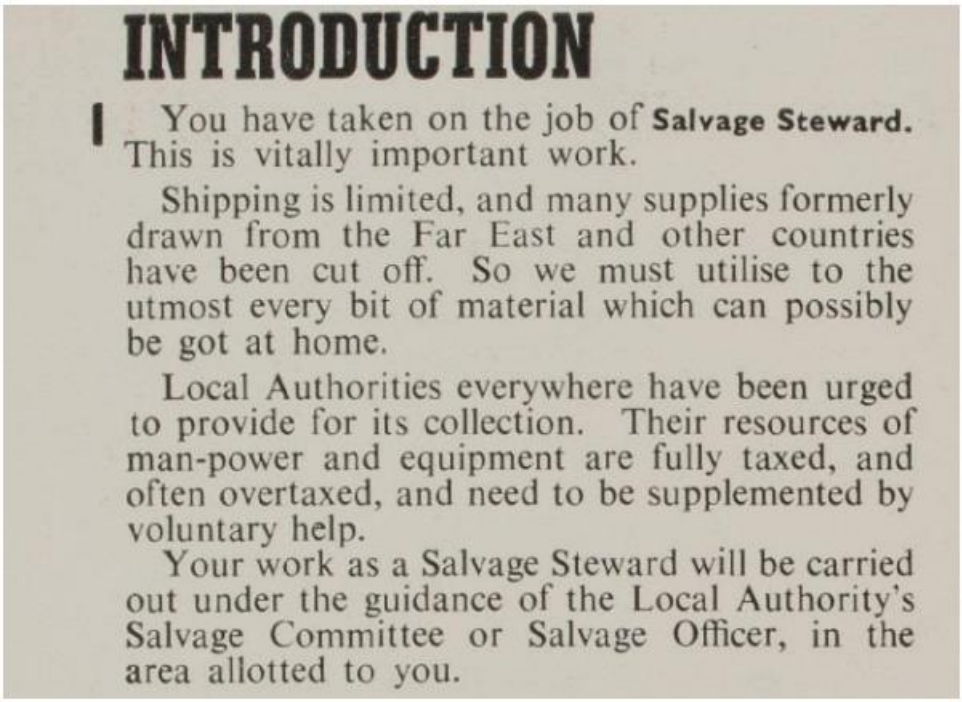
[9] Charles Graves, Women In Green: The story of the W.V.S. in wartime (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1948), p. 46.
[10] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14 June 1940.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

management to flourish, the Ministry of Supply established the Salvage Stewards Scheme.

Acting on behalf of the local authorities, Salvage Stewards continued to promote the significance of recycling on a community level. The Ministry of Supply originally intended that each street, or group of houses would have its very own Salvage Steward, but this proved difficult to achieve. [13] Despite this, thousands of WVS members signed up to become Salvage Stewards. After being introduced into the role, members received an informative leaflet known as the Salvage Steward's Guide.



INTRODUCTION

You have taken on the job of **Salvage Steward.** This is vitally important work.

Shipping is limited, and many supplies formerly drawn from the Far East and other countries have been cut off. So we must utilise to the utmost every bit of material which can possibly be got at home.

Local Authorities everywhere have been urged to provide for its collection. Their resources of man-power and equipment are fully taxed, and often overtaxed, and need to be supplemented by voluntary help.

Your work as a Salvage Steward will be carried out under the guidance of the Local Authority's Salvage Committee or Salvage Officer, in the area allotted to you.

Salvage Steward Guide 1941. © Royal Voluntary Service.

RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help

Salvage Stewards conducted four main duties that would be carried out under guidance of the Local Authority's Salvage Committee, or Salvage Officer.[14]

[13] Graves, *Women In Green,* p. 205.
[14] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help, 1941.

'By education of the householder and by personal example to increase the amount of salvage collected in your area.

To advise the householder from time to time on the different kinds of salvage required and how to sort it at the house.

To assist so far as necessary in providing local dumps or depots in your area, and thus make easier the work of collection.

To report to the Salvage Officer or the Local Authority and difficulties and any suggestions for the more efficient collection of salvage.' [15]

These guidelines placed the Salvage Steward at the centre of the community, and encouraged local members of society to follow their example. This was also an important exercise in morale, creating a sense of solidarity that helped ensure everybody was working towards a common interest.

One of the most important elements of the Salvage Steward Scheme was the relationship between publicity and collection. After the initial series of canvassing programmes, the WVS attempted to bridge this gap. This was achieved by using Salvage Stewards to help maintain a salvage-minded society, by promoting the collection of materials. Unlike local authorities, which treated these entities separately, the WVS realised that the distinction was not necessarily the most efficient method of continuing to encourage salvage. This was most likely due to the 'hands on' approach, because it was easier to ascertain how to create this attitude when working on the ground.

In contrast to this, many local authorities in rural districts considered that the collection of salvage would involve an expenditure which would be in excess of the profits of sale, which consequently resulted in them handing over collection services to the WVS. [16] By taking these collection services over, it illustrated that the WVS was arguably the most important component in creating a salvage-minded society on the Home Front.

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[15] Ibid.
[16] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14th June 1940.

What was salvaged and how was it used?

On the 26 March 1940, Harold Judd, an accountant that worked in the contracts department of the munitions industry during the First World War, became the National Controller of Salvage.[17] He released a document titled 'Salvage and Spring Cleaning'.[18] This was one of the first documents that we hold in our collection that provides a report on the first salvage campaigns of 1940.

More significantly however, is the 'Spring Cleaning' aspect of this document, because it highlighted six vital materials that were highly desirable; paper, bones, rags, metals, rubber and kitchen waste. These six materials formed the foundation for all salvage activities during the Second World War.

Paper is a fundamental material used in every aspect of society. Without it, wartime Britain would have struggled to maintain a resilient infrastructure. To counter this, clean, dry paper was salvaged as it could be re-pulped and used again and again.[19] Likewise, greasy paper could be used to light fires which gifted a sustainable source of tinder to the industrial sector.[20]

Due to its versatility, paper was inevitably utilised in the munitions industry. For example, paper was used to make cartridge wads, parts of mines, bombs and shells, targets for range practice and petrol containers.[21] Essentially, paper was used for anything that was required by the military.

Initially, paper salvage was limited to low-grade paper that had been collected from people's homes. As the war progressed however, the salvaged paper began to lose a significant amount of quality due to its continuous re-pulping. In reaction to this, the authorities acknowledged the fact that paper of a greater quality would need to be collected to ensure that stock levels did not become increasingly low. [22] This high-quality paper was to be found in libraries, offices and confidential records.

To access this paper, WVS members organised canvassing parties that encouraged offices to salvage their unwanted documents.[23] Due to the confidential nature of some of these documents, paper mills made special arrangements to repulp the material under the supervision of the owners.[24]

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[17] Thorsheim, *Waste into Weapons: Recycling in Britain during the Second World War*, p. 42.
[18] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-40, Salvage and Spring Cleaning by Harold Judd, 1940
[19] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-007, What a Cog Should Know, 1941.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Graves, Women In Green, p. 208.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

During the earliest paper salvage collections, books had always formed the majority of the material. The Ministry of Supply intended to build upon this foundation by liaising with the WVS to organise special book drives.[25] These were promoted nationally and often organised with the help of a WVS Salvage Steward.[26] The book drives became so successful that by October 1943, 56 million books were collected for salvage purposes. [27]

Despite these successes, there was a risk that the country was re-pulping a significant number of invaluable records. After recognising this issue, the authorities did eventually enforce a number of safeguards to help protect these irreplaceable documents. Members of the WVS however, had already realised that this would become an important issue, so they used their judgement to save many precious books and documents long before official precautions were established.[28] For example, the August edition of the 1942 WVS Bulletin, directed members to consult an expert such as a librarian, if they were unsure that the collected books were treasure or trash.[29]

The Bulletin summarised this outlook by stating;

'*Irreplaceable monuments of our civilisation should not wantonly be destroyed in order to make cartridge cases for its defence.*'[30]

It was this stance that allowed the WVS to help save so many significant literary treasures.

Another wartime material that became vitally important to the war effort was bones. Fortunately, they were readily available because they could be collected from the carcass of any dead animal. Likewise, they were in high demand because the extracted fats were used to make glycerine, an agent used in high explosives.[31] Alongside this, bones were also used to produce soap, candles, glue for camouflage paint and different variations of woodwork.[32] After being produced into these materials, their remains could be used for crop fertiliser and cattle feed.[33]

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/BUL/BUL-1942-08, WVS Bulletin No. 34, August 1942.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Adee Braun, Turning Bacon Into Bombs: The American Fat Salvage Committee, The Atlantic, April 18 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/04/reluctantly-turning-baconinto-bombs-during-world-war-ii/360298/ [accessed 10 April 2017].
[32] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help, 1941.
[33] Ibid.

This practice was also encouraged by the US Government, particularly after they created the American Fat Salvage Committee.[34] Due to their versatility in manufacturing, bones remained a highly desired material for the duration of Second World War. In terms of collection, members of the WVS specified that bones were best kept in a lidded tin with perforations, but a normal box would serve if otherwise.[35] This was requested because it allowed them to be kept fresh, ready for the fat extraction process.

Collection containers were the least of the WVS's concerns however, as bone drives resulted in a wide array of complications. For example, one WVS member recalls dragging an entire horse skeleton to her car after receiving this considerable donation at a local salvage drive.[36] Similarly, another member received the crumbling remains of fossils that had been donated by the local gardeners.[37] Nevertheless, the WVS continued to organise these bone drives as both a way of creating publicity and providing a collection service.

Another material that was extensively sought after was rags. No matter how worn, rags were exceptionally useful and could be reused for a wide variety of purposes:

- Stockings could be laundered to make fillers for shoddy (inferior quality yarn or fabric made from the shredded fibre of waste clippings) and consequently transformed into new material.
- Coloured rags (particularly red ones) were used for dyeing.
- Some were earmarked for machinery wipers in other wartime factories.
- Linen and calico were used to make Admiralty charts and paper.
- Stiff white shirts and collars were transformed into five pound notes.
- Knitted rags were highly coveted as they could be used to make uniforms, blankets, rugs and men's suits.
- Inferior quality cloths were set aside and used as mattress stuffing.
- Rags in severely poor condition were perfect for roofing felt. This was often found on the roofs of wartime army huts.[38]

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[34] Adee Braun, Turning Bacon Into Bombs: The American Fat Salvage Committee, The Atlantic, 18 April 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/04/reluctantly-turning-baconinto-bombs-during-world-war-ii/360298/ [accessed 10 April 2017].
[35] Ibid.
[36] Graves, *Women In Green*, p. 209
[37] Ibid.
[38] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-013, What Happens To Your Salvage, December 1941.

As there were so many different types of fabric, they were often sorted by women at the salvage factory. Hundreds of tons of salvage would arrive at the factories every week and huge warehouses would be piled high to the ceiling with mountains of cloth.[39]

Alternatively, members of the WVS also encouraged people to sell their cloths to the rag and bone man.[40] This was a viable option because it ensured that rags were still being delivered to the factories to be re-used. High-rise flats presented many collection issues, because people did not necessarily have room to leave their salvage outside.[41] In response to this, the WVS set up salvage shops that would allow people to offload their salvage at an appropriate time. Without these WVS access points, it would have been difficult for some to support the National Salvage Scheme because they did not all have access to collection sites.

Of all the materials salvaged during the Second World War, metal salvage was probably most associated with the production of military equipment. Iron, steel, copper, lead, pewter, brass, bronze and aluminium were used for tanks, guns, shells, ships and aeroplanes.[42]

Originally, Britain was receiving some of its scrap iron from America and tin from the Straits Settlements in South East Asia.[43] Due to the obvious difficulties faced by continuing to ship these metals to Britain, the munitions industry began to increasingly depend on the metal collected from salvage.

In the summer of 1940, the Ministry of Aircraft Production began to appeal for vast quantities of aluminium.[44] To assist this campaign, Lady Reading (WVS Founder and Chairman) launched the 'Pots to Planes' scheme.[45] This was essential for the production of aeroplane propellers and other aviation equipment required by the RAF. The public response to this call was overwhelming. In Hull for example, an impressive eleven tons of aluminium had been collected during August and were due to be shipped off to the factories that required them.[46] Similarly, the WVS Centre Organiser for Fakenham reported that;

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-007, What a Cog Should Know, 1941.
[43] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help, 1941.
[44] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/A-48-004, Report of Ten Year's Work for the Nation 1938- 1948, p. 39
[45] Ibid
[46] Patricia and Robert Malcolmson, *Women at the Ready: The Remarkable Story of the Women's Voluntary Services on the Home Front* (London: Little, Brown, 2013), p. 65

'*There has been a wonderful response to the aluminium appeal from the whole district. The villages have produced, I think, getting on for a ton, and there has been a good response in Fakenham, where an aluminium week was held*.'[47]

These examples demonstrate that the WVS's attempt to create a salvage minded society were beginning to come to fruition.

Whilst metal salvage was unequivocally important, the recycling of metallic materials (specifically iron) has remained a contentious topic. It has been argued that iron salvage was just an exercise in social solidarity in order to create morale. Furthermore, Gavin Stamp has identified that the cast-iron railings removed from parks and gardens proved to be useless for turning into guns and tanks,[48] and that aluminium saucepans collected by the WVS were never actually used to produce Spitfire propellers.[49] It subsequently appeared that all the excess metal had actually been dumped into the Thames Estuary.[50] The general consensus for this approach is that far too much iron was collected and it simply could not be processed.[51] Whether or not the authorities realised this would happen is another debate, but they certainly recognised that metal salvage was an excellent way of creating a sense of social solidarity. In terms of WVS involvement however, this issue does at least prove that they were successful in galvanising people to recycle their metallic possessions.

The final two materials that were salvaged were rubber and kitchen waste. Although it was difficult to acquire due to the loss of British Pacific territories such as Java, rubber was extremely valuable because it could be used to help manufacture new tyres for aeroplanes, army vehicles and wellington boots for evacuated children.[52] It was also used for protective equipment such as fire hoses.[53]

To achieve this, WVS members demonstrated admirable levels of commitment by fishing for old tyres in local ponds and streams.[54] These combined efforts culminated in the National Rubber Scrap Drive which produced over two hundred thousand tons of salvaged material.[55]

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[47] Patricia and Robert Malcolmson, Women at the Ready, p. 65.
[48] Gavin Stamp, 'Architecture: As part of a metal salvage drive for munitions in World War II, many of the UK's parks and squares lost their iron railings. With the National Gallery now victim to a constant stream of commercial events in its environs, isn't it time we got them back? ', Apollo, 2010.
[49] Stamp, Architecture, Apollo, 2010
[50] Ibid.
[51] So What Really Happened to Our Railings, London Park and Garden Trust, 23 May 2015, http://www.londongardenstrust.org/features/railings3.htm [accessed 11 April 2017].
[52] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-012, The Salvage Steward's Guide, How you can help, 1941
[53] Ibid.
[54] Graves, Women In Green, p. 209
[55] Graves, Women In Green, pp. 209-210.

Kitchen waste or food scraps were primarily used to maintain a constant supply of feed to national livestock. In order to accomplish this, kitchen waste was boiled and concentrated at special plants, thus resulting in what is commonly known as pig swill. Households had to ensure that nothing sharp like glass or tin was mixed into the food scraps, as it could be potentially harmful to the livestock.[56] Although kitchen waste was quite unpleasant for people to handle, particularly if had not been collected on time, it was undoubtedly beneficial to help maintain stocks of animal feed.

To help promote the significance of kitchen waste, the Ministry of Food released motivational salvage posters often accompanied with a poem.

'Because of the pail, the scraps were saved,

Because of the scraps, the pigs were saved,

Because of the pigs, the rations were saved,

Because of the rations, the ships were saved,

Because of the ships, the island was saved,

Because of the island, the Empire was saved,

And all because of the housewife's pail.'[57]

Cogs & collection

The WVS launched the Cog scheme at the end of 1940.[58] It encouraged children to become part of the National Salvage Campaign by aiding in any way possible. These children were known as Cogs, because they represented a small but important component in a national machine. In order for this scheme to be a success, the WVS developed two key objectives.

Primarily, the WVS recognised that Cogs could help and run collection services, as this was the area in which they were most needed.[59] A secondary objective of this campaign however, illustrates the WVS were using Cogs to help promote salvage in the home, with the intention of creating a family-based mentality towards the importance of recycling.

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[56] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-007, What a Cog Should Know, 1941.
[57] 7 Michael Levenston, The Pig Man and Pig Bins of WW2, City Farmer News, 2011, http://www.cityfarmer.info/2010/05/03/the-pig-man-and-pig-bins-of-ww2/ [accessed 11 April 2017]
[58] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/A-48-004, Report of Ten Year's Work for the Nation 1938- 1948, p. 39
[59] Ibid.

In order to inspire children to become Cogs, WVS members addressed the pupils in the schools of ten London metropolitan boroughs.[60]

'*Talks on salvage to the children of the L.C.C. Schools are being well received, and the idea of becoming a "Cog" and wearing the badge is very popular. WVS members in ten Boroughs have spoken at 112 schools and 18,291 children have been addressed.*' [61]

The local school in Shoreditch received a talk from the WVS in March 1941.[62] These talks proved to be highly successful, as salvage collections in every borough began to increase significantly.

After these early accomplishments, the WVS introduced rewards to continue to encourage children to help with the collections. For example, badges representing a cog-wheel was an excellent way of rewarding the most enthusiastic children. Over a three year period, 192,523 badges were issued to deserving members. [63] This was also a superb way of stimulating further interest in the scheme.

Bringing in salvage for COG Scheme in Thurston 1939-1945, © Ministry of Information Crown Copyright,

WRVSA&HC/WRVS/HQ/P/SAL/COG001, 1939-1945.

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[60] Graves, Women In Green, p. 204.
[61] RVS A&HC, 654- Region 5 (London) Quarterly Reports, January-March 1941, p.8
[62] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R12/1941-LON/SDH MB/MAR.
[63] Ibid.

In effect, Cogs became junior versions of their Salvage Steward counterparts. To recognise this, Cogs had to understand why they were helping with salvage collection. The WVS achieved this by handing out leaflets named; What A Cog Should Know. This pamphlet gave a brief description of each material that could be salvaged and what it would consequently be used for. Likewise, Cogs were also advised to help their mothers take the salvage out for collection or to help move it to the local dump or depot.

These sentiments were positively reinforced by what became known as the Cog's Song. This was written by two members of the WVS and sang by members of the Cog scheme to help motivate one another as they worked. Interestingly, this song is sung to the tune of There'll Always Be An England. The first verse is as follows.

'*There'll always be a dust-bin, to save for victory, so treat it right, and let it fight for home and liberty. We'll win this war together, as easy as can be. If dustbins means as much to you, as dustbins mean to me.*' [64]

Songs such as this had a huge impression on the young members. For example, in the July edition of the WVS Bulletin one child wrote, 'I am only a very small Cog in a very large wheel ploughing its way towards victory.'[65] This message was encouraged by members of the WVS because they recognised that the input of Cogs would make a considerable difference to national attitudes towards salvage.

Nevertheless, salvage conditions were not necessarily easy for members of the WVS or Cog scheme. Mrs Dorothy Rothschild, (WVS Centre Organiser for Aylesbury Rural District, Buckinghamshire) received a series of correspondence in March 1941 from Marsh Gibbon discussing how members of the Cog have become disheartened with the conditions. [66] The letter also suggests while that badges may help the situation, they are all suffering from a lack of work.[67] This situation highlights how important it was to achieve a salvage-minded society

Mrs Rothschild's collection of correspondence also provide an insight into the local price of salvage collection. Acting on behalf of the WVS, Aylesbury Scrap Merchant Mr Pearce was drafted in to help with collection because he owned a lorry. On August the 13 1940, Mr Pearce collected:

- Newspapers at 3 cwt. 24 lbs.
- Magazine at 1 cwt. 3 lbs.

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[64] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/SAL-41-008, The Cog's Song, 1941
[65] RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/BUL/BUL-1941-07, WVS Bulletin No.21, July 1941.
[66] RVS A&HC/WRVS/I/ROTD/3, Buckingham Salvage (W), March 1941.
[67] Ibid.

- Waste at 2 lbs.
- Cardboard at 1 cwt. 77 lbs.[68]

The approximate value of each material was £1. 7/-, [69] which at today's rates works out at as £138.11. Owing to the efforts of Mr Pearce and the WVS, the citizens of Aylesbury began to develop an interest into the importance of salvage.

As stated by the WVS's Salvage Memorandum in June 1940, 'no propaganda, however intensive, is of use if the authorities fail to make a proper collection.[70] Due to the scale of the National Salvage Campaign, the local authorities had originally agreed to fulfil its duty and collect the salvage from communities. Unfortunately however, this did not proceed as intended and placed significant strain on the services of the WVS.

Before the outbreak of war, urban areas had already been the recipient of efficient waste collection services. When the call for universal recycling began, it was relatively simple for the WVS to liaise with the local authorities and arrange special provisions for salvage collections. To maintain this efficiency, WVS members often accompanied the council dust-carts in their rounds to help collect the salvage.[71] Likewise, some local authorities provided the WVS with their own dustbin lorry so they could continue working.[72] It could be argued however, that these lorries were provided because some local authorities were already at their limit in terms of workforce and resource.

After collecting the salvage, it was taken to a depot where it was supervised by a Street Salvage Steward before being taken away for its intended purpose. In summary, the prewar waste structure that was already established in urban areas allowed the WVS to help convert this system into an effective salvage collection service. In contrast to this, the situation in rural districts was very different.

Unlike urban districts, rural areas did not have an established waste removal system that could be utilised for salvage collection. Additionally, many local authorities considered that the collection of salvage would cost substantially more than the profits gained at the point of sale.[73] This presented the WVS with a significant challenge, as it had to focus all of its attention to providing an efficient collection service. Remarkably, the WVS did eventually succeed in establishing a salvage network in rural districts. They achieved this by organising huge dumps of salvage that would allow the

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[68] RVS A&HC/WRVS/I/ROTD/3, Correspondence with Mr Pearce, September 1940.
[69] Ibid.
[70] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14 June 1940.
[71] Graves, Women In Green, p. 205
[72] Ibid.
[73] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14 June 1940.

local council to turn a profit upon collection.[74] This proved to be a viable solution, because council lorries were guaranteed to collect a full load.

To make this process even simpler, it was suggested that salvage from the village dump could be transported to a central dump via voluntary transport.[75] In order for this to be financially viable for members of the WVS, petrol tokens were provided by the local council. The WVS also prepared a series of depots and appointed an organiser to manage each one. In Hambledon, Surrey for example, the WVS organised 66 depots in February 1940 and distributed 210 sacks of salvage information leaflets.[76]

Despite all of these substantial efforts, there were still occasions when the local council would refuse to collect the salvage. In these circumstances, private firms would often step in and help the WVS remove the material. This was evident in Nottingham, where representatives of the Glue and Chemical Industry offered to help the WVS if there were any difficulties with local collection.[77]

By devoting such a considerable amount of time and effort to the difficulties faced in rural districts, the WVS did manage to establish many collection services in communities that were keen to become involved in the National Salvage Campaign. Ironically, the WVS achieved this level of awareness by essentially forcing the issue of collection, not the other way around.

Despite the achievements of the WVS, it is important to discuss the fact that National Salvage Campaign was not a universal success. The amount of salvage collected often fluctuated with seasonal changes. In the winter for example, people were far less likely to leave their paper supplies out for collection, as they needed these stocks for kindling. Whilst this was actually illegal, the warmth of one's home was naturally considered to be more important than salvage. Likewise, WVS members often found it challenging to maintain a frequent collection service. This was partly due to resources, but it was largely caused by the difficulties in attempting to change the attitudes of an entire nation in a very short space of time. Nevertheless, the commitment of the WVS eventually allowed the National Salvage Scheme to flourish, but it was not without many challenges.

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[74] Graves, Women In Green, pp. 206-207.
[75] RVS A&HC, 759, Salvage Reports, Salvage Memorandum, 14 June 1940.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Conclusion

The legacy that surrounds the salvage campaigns of the Second World War depends on the perception of how important the recycled materials were to the war effort. It could be argued that the salvage drives were nothing more than an act of solidarity, and the materials themselves were less significant than originally presumed. This may be the true in the case of iron, but overall the National Salvage Campaign demonstrated how society can work together to achieve something extraordinary.

From 'Pots to Planes' to Salvage Stewards and Cogs, the WVS proved that they could adapt perfectly to help promote the National Salvage Campaign. Each scheme demonstrated this flexibility in approach. However, it is important to recognise that none of the work that was accomplished would have been possible without the cooperation of the general public. Their response to the National Salvage Campaign was overwhelming. From the 3 September 1939 to V.E. day on 8 May 1945, a total of 4.2 million tons of waste paper was salvaged in Britain.[78] Due to the services provided by the WVS, roughly half of this total came from household collection. [79]

To accomplish this, there were no better orchestrators than the WVS. Without their guidance and determination, the National Salvage Campaign would have been unachievable. Each scheme was devised to help promote the importance of salvage and how it would provide a long-term benefit to the nation's industry. The WVS managed to blur the boundaries between publicity and collection, something which remains unique to their efforts. It is somewhat fitting that salvage can be used as a metaphor to represent the ethos of the entire organisation. Any job anytime; that was how the WVS operated. By focussing their efforts into every detail of society that needed assistance, they achieved their objectives. As with salvage, nothing would go to waste, and nobody would be overlooked.

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