

HIDDEN HISTORIES OF A MILLION WARTIME WOMEN KICKSTARTER UPDATES

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
HERITAGE COLLECTION

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COLLECTION

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INTRODUCING JACOB



I admit, I am very content to spend my time in a dark room trawling through old documents. This is a fascinating project that I am delighted to part of.

I'm Jacob and I am very excited to begin digitising 'The Hidden Histories of a Million Wartime Women.'

What does digitisation mean to me?

It is the beauty of transforming hidden histories into digital copies which allow us to access a wealth of fascinating stories.

Outside the archive, I am a keen cat lover, and you may find me playing a game of chess with my partner; but I have yet to beat her! I am also an eager sportsman and have enjoyed playing squash for most of my life, and I also attempting to master the violin. Much to the joy of my housemates!

I'm a recent history graduate, (very appropriate for this job) and spent many sleepless nights burning the midnight oil in the library. Fortunately, I just about managed to get everything in on time!

Thankfully, those days are behind me and I have this morning completed a 10 month work plan to make sure this project is delivered on time and am about to delve into creating the first Pdf documents to go online. Quite a lot to take in on my first day.

We are still well on track to deliver the first diary entries to our supporters who signed up for that reward, who should receive them in the first few weeks of November if everything goes to plan.

You'll be hearing from me about progress at the end of each week and, if you follow us, on Twitter and Facebook every day.

Best wishes

Jacob Bullus
Archives Assistant

MY FIRST WEEK DIGITISING, ‘THE HIDDEN HISTORIES OF A MILLION WARTIME WOMEN.’

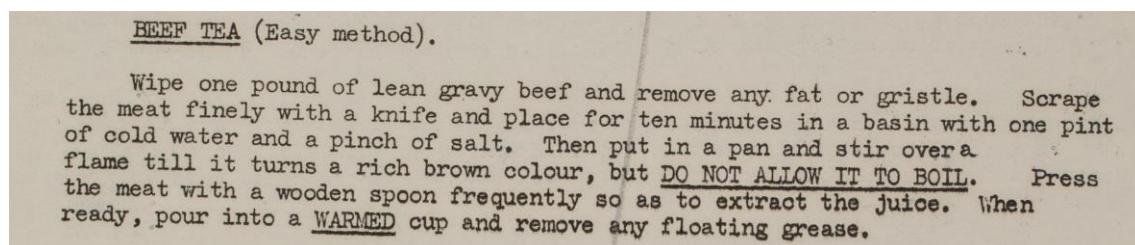
Phew, what a busy week! I have been working closely with Matthew to ensure that I understand the precise measures that must be taken to make sure that this project is ready on time.

I am happy to confirm that after a hectic week learning all the different aspects of digitisation, I am fully up to speed and feel confident about the direction of this project. I am equally acquainted with the archive's kettle!

The majority of this week has been spent digitising the narrative reports that will be ready for our supporters who signed up for this reward. These reports are on

target for the first few weeks of November and I have enjoyed converting them into PDF's to go online.

In the midst of all this excitement, I have discovered some of the wonders of the archive. Only this morning, I was digitising some reports from Cardiff and found a recipe for Beef Tea! I think I shall stick to my trusted Earl Grey!



It has been a wonderful week and I am looking forward to keeping you updated about the progress of the project. Make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter if possible.

Have a lovely weekend and you will hear from me next week.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archives Assistant

MAKING GOOD PROGRESS

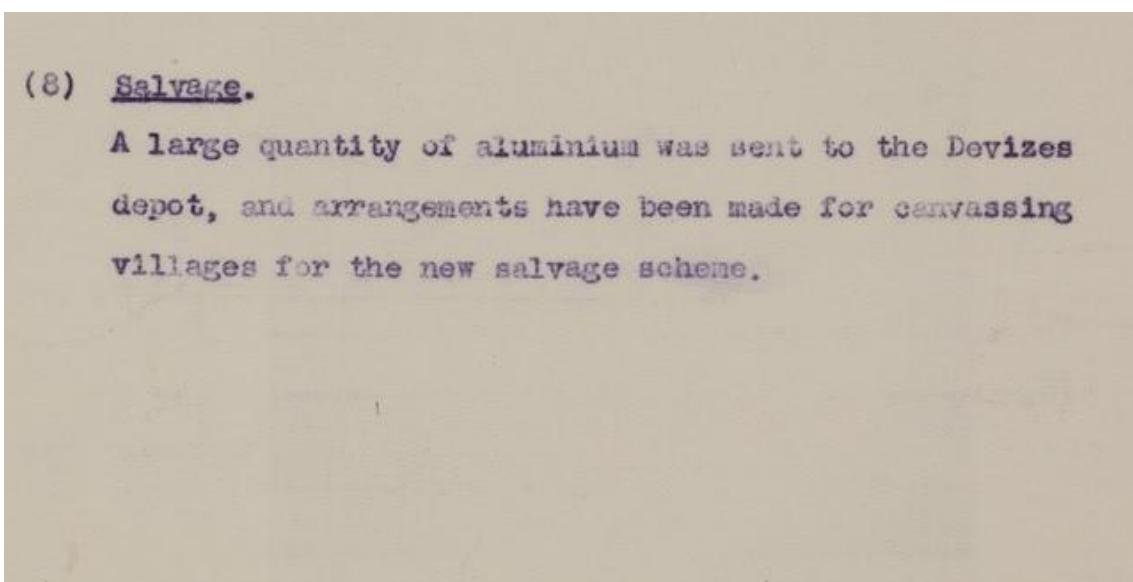
This week has flown by! It felt like only yesterday when I began my first day. You will be happy to hear that I have spent the majority of this week digitising the narrative reports ready for the backers that signed up to receive them in November. I am pleased to say that we are still on target to release them on time.

This week I have been solely focused on taking photographs and attempting to average over 360 per day. Which is no mean feat I may add!

Fortunately, I am now fully confident using the digitisation software and I am progressing as expected, much to Matthew's delight!

I have found some rather interesting things this week (it really is surprising what you can uncover on the back of a narrative report). After hours of black ink, North Wales provided me with the joy of bright purple. It was a surprising yet welcome change and certainly brightened up the digitisation room!

As most of you may know, our wonderful archive is located in Devizes, Wiltshire. I found a local report which presented Devizes as a Second World War aluminium depot. I was certainly not expecting that!



I am really enjoying working on this project and I would like to express my thanks for your continued interest. If possible, make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter for daily snippets.

As always, have a lovely weekend.

Best wishes,

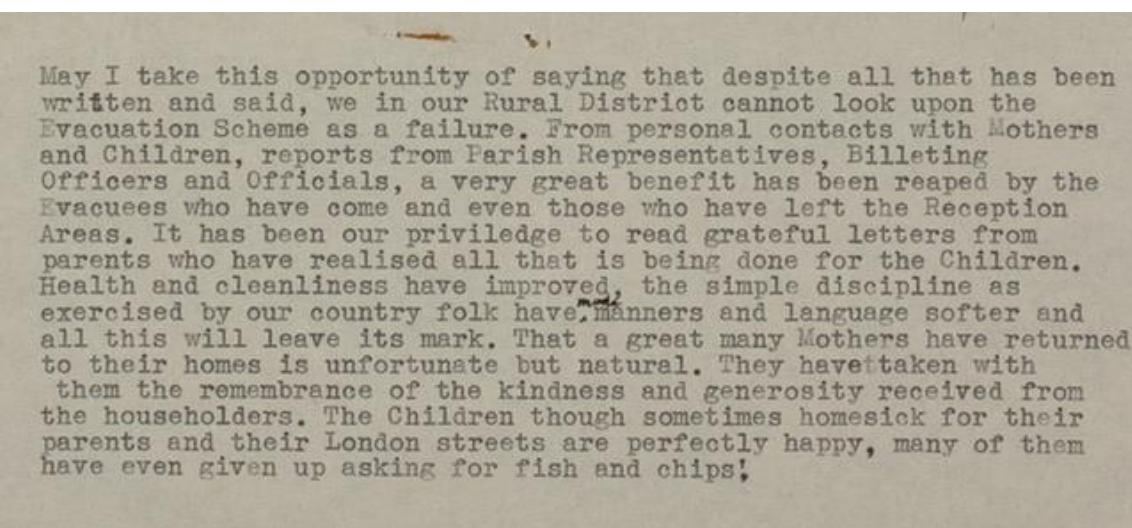
Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN HISTORIES

Thank you for helping bring a million untold stories into the light.

To celebrate that, I have found a report from East Sussex that gives us a wonderful insight into the Evacuation Scheme.

The war may have been a difficult period, but among those hardships there are always stories of joy. After finding this unmarked note, I quickly decided that it was far too fascinating not to be shared with you.



I found it very interesting that the local community had really engaged with the Evacuation Scheme, despite the challenges that would have been faced. It is particularly poignant to appreciate the letters from London thanking the local community and the WVS for their work. I am not too sure however, that the WVS were highly impressed with the evacuee's constant desire for fish and chips!

I also enjoyed the distinction between the country folk and the evacuees. I am sure that the locals were rather startled when some of the evacuees may have been uncertain of why milk came from the farm cows, and not a bottle on the doorstep!

This brilliant note summarises why these stories are so important. Not only do they add to the history of the twentieth century, they provide us with interest and joy.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter for daily snippets.

Have a lovely weekend and a happy Halloween.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

NOVEMBER TARGET REACHED!

We have just finished sending out the 1938/1939 reports to all those that qualified for that reward.

To do this we have digitised 2,478 pages, checked, watermarked and converted those into 662 pdf documents, all in 8 weeks. It has been an arduous few weeks, but we are all looking forward to beginning 1940. We hope that you are as pleased as we are!

This project is all about uncovering the hidden histories of our selfless volunteers and to celebrate this I am delighted to share another wonderful story from the Women in Green.

Please indulge your love of history and read this fascinating insight from the Isle of Wight in 1939.

Hot drinks and light refreshments are being served at all Control Centres during air-raid warnings. Emergency supplies have been issued for use during such warnings to Wardens' posts, First Aid parties etc. The W.V.S.S. in certain areas~~in~~ have been asked to provide hot drinks during the night to the troops guarding the beaches, pending other arrangements being made. Additional Canteens are being organised wherever the need arises. In Ryde where there are now many French sailors, free refreshments were provided for them on the night of their arrival when they were without English money. W.V.S. members arranged and paid for this and have since helped in similar ways and have done much to assist foreign sailors who are sometimes stranded owing to their inability to speak or even understand English.

As I work my way through the volumes of Narrative Reports, there is always something to surprise me. This report was no exception, as it perfectly demonstrates the breadth of work that the WVS coordinated.

Imagine those late moonlit evenings as the fog swirls with the flow of the sea. In the distance, you can see the gradual approach of a ship as it breaks the water and enters into full view. You may be concerned with the unnerving prospect that this may not be a friendly encounter. As the ship docks and the mechanical clang of the metal meets the harbour, a French sailor pops his head out from the bridge. To your surprise, many French sailors start pouring out of the boat overwhelmed by their safe arrival. If you think that was a surprise for you, imagine their astonishment when they are greeted by the WVS with lots of hot cups of tea in the middle of the night!

Reports like this one are the perfect opportunity to reflect upon the multitude of brilliant tasks performed by the WVS. Thank you for helping bring the story of the mysterious island women (at least in the sailors eyes anyway) with cups of tea to life.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [@RVSArchives](#) for daily snippets.

Have a lovely weekend.

Best wishes,

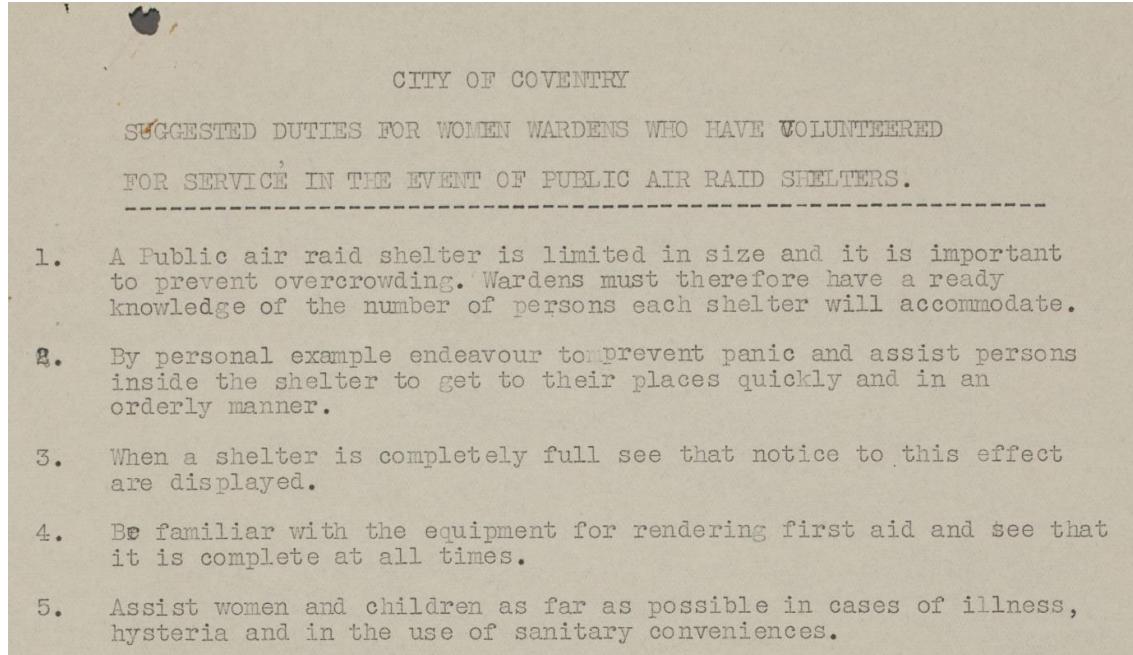
Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

TIPS FROM THE WVS IN COVENTRY

After sending out the Narrative Reports for 1938-39 last week, I am thrilled to have started digitising 1940.

As the years progress, the sheer volume of reports dramatically increase. Matthew likes to remind me of this every so often!

To capture the 'Hidden Histories of a Million Wartime Women', I have found an excellent report from Coventry that gives the brave women of the WVS a few tips in the occurrence of an air raid. As we know, the WVS were a highly instrumental component of the ARP and I thought this report provided an interesting insight into their combined histories.



After reading this, the famous wartime adage, 'Keep Calm and Carry On' came to mind. Although that famous wartime saying has been heavily commercialised in recent years, it is certainly pertinent here.

As with so many endeavours undertaken by the WVS, the courageous Women in Green helped so many citizens to the air raid shelter despite working in dangerous conditions.

One particular example of this is a lady named Grace Rattenbury, who received the George Medal for bravery.

'In September 1940 when a dockland fire threatened to cut off part of the London docks from the mainland, there was only a single span bridge left by which to evacuate the women and children remaining there. The road was extremely dangerous, for in addition to the vast fire, there were bomb craters and unexploded bombs everywhere. But in spite of this Grace drove a WVS van in a shuttle service between the docks and the rest centre until all had been evacuated. Not only did she ferry the families of fleeing people to safety, but also firemen who had been injured in fighting the flames. The van, on her return, was full of steel helmets, blood-soaked bandages, a fireman's axe, and other marks of a very heavy night's work.'

I think you will agree that Grace Rattenbury was certainly deserving of her medal after that eventful night!

Both examples illustrate the importance of bringing these hidden histories to life, so thank you for your continued support.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Have a lovely weekend.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

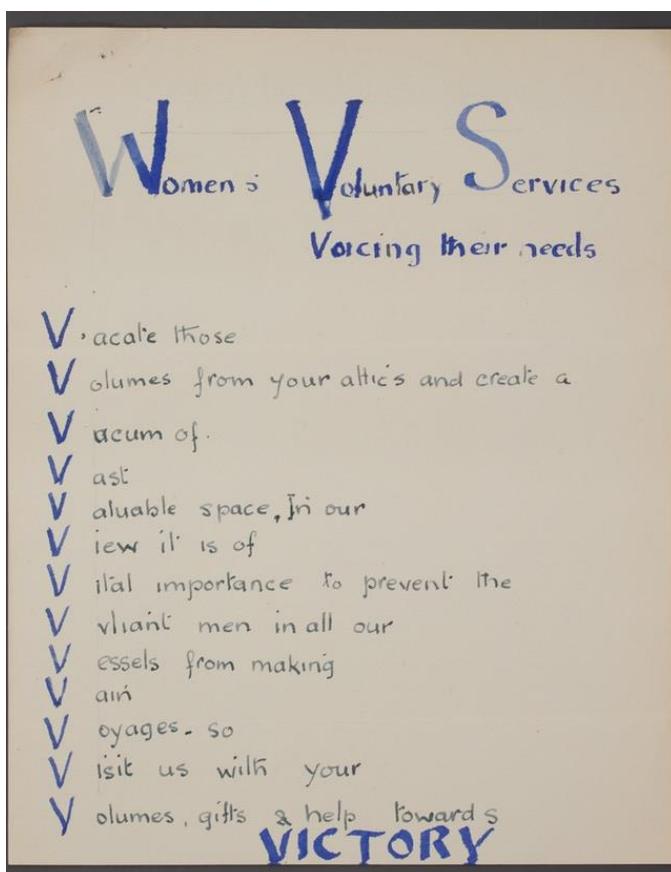
Archive Assistant

VOICING THEIR NEEDS IN SURREY

The process of digitising these fascinating Narrative Reports is a time-consuming one indeed. Attempting to average over 360 photographs a day is no mean feat, especially when I am surrounded by interesting documents that are ever so tempting to pore over for the rest of the day. Occasionally, I devote a little time to fully appreciate the history of these beautiful reports.

The vast majority of my work is dedicated to the digitisation of the Narrative Reports. Every so often however, I come across something slightly different. Dorking in Surrey has provided us with this wonderful poster and I thought as it is something slightly different to the usual extracts, it would be marvellous to share it with you.

Please take your time to enjoy this wartime poster and admire the condition of the document considering that it is from 1940. I am quite sure that some of the pages in my diary are not up to this standard!



This poster is a metaphor for all the hard work behind the scenes on the home front. It shows that all the little things could be added up to help contribute to the war effort. Once again, the Women in Green were at the forefront of this. I also suspect that Churchill's famous victory sign may have had a slight influence on this poster!

Thank you for appreciating the 'Hidden Histories of a Million Wartime Women.' Maybe take a moment of reflection next time you are tidying out all those old volumes from your attic!

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter for daily snippets.

Have a lovely weekend.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

HOW DO YOU RUN YOUR KITCHEN?

The WVS are renowned for helping out in just about any way possible. From salvaging aluminium to assisting blood transfusion services, the Women in Green were on hand to help your every need. This stoic attitude never abandoned the brave volunteers and it is a delight to continue uncovering their hidden stories.

This week, I have managed to find something quite remarkable. Yep, you have guessed it, a competition to find Britain's best housewives! This six point document focuses on finding the very best kitchens in the country. I hope mine meets the criteria!

I actually discovered this in the Plymouth Reports, but I am sure that their kitchens were up to an impeccable standard!

Here are six helpful tips from 1940 that helped people enter for Britain's best housewife. Please take the time to read this wonderful document and look out for any rules that may have some relevance today!

HOW DO YOU RUN YOUR KITCHEN?

Here are some simple rules to guide you in the competition to find Britain's best housewives.

You can enter yourself or you may be recommended by friends who will themselves receive a special award if they are lucky enough to spot a winner.

Cut out these rules and pin them up as a guide when you write your letter.

1. Write a short letter of not more than 500 words describing the way you run your household: how many in family, children and adults; whether you have evacuees, or others billeted with you. Say what you do in your spare time - if you have any.
2. Write out menus for a full week's meals, including any special wartime dishes you may have invented yourself, with instructions for making.
3. If you have to supply meals to be taken away, give menus for sandwiches, etc.
4. Mention whether you have free or cheap milk for your children.
5. Give your methods of using up scraps, left-overs, etc.
6. Say how you manage to get your shopping done, how you fit it in with your other household duties, and whether you have to buy all your vegetables, etc., or have a garden or allotment to provide you; and whether you are able to keep hens, rabbits, etc.

Hopefully, you picked up some handy wartime tips. I particularly liked number 5, as I am sure that the applicants dreamt up a multitude of peculiar concoctions! You may remember the Beef Tea recipe I displayed to you a few weeks ago...

As always, the Narrative Reports never fail to serve us something interesting. I am certain that that the special wartime dishes would have been equally interesting to taste.

I apologise that I didn't post a blog last week, but I was away on leave (in Plymouth funny enough). I hope that you enjoy reading this week's blog to make up for it.

Thank you for supporting the campaign to bring their stories into the light once again.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

POETIC BENEVOLENCE FROM THE ISLE OF WIGHT

In the last few weeks, I have managed to find some quite unique things to share with you. When I have such a wealth of fascinating material in front of me, it is sometimes difficult to select a particular snippet to post (mostly because I want to post all of it).

This week, we return to the Isle of Wight as I have stumbled upon a poem hidden away at the bottom of December's Narrative Report.

The Centre Organiser Mrs Needham, insisted upon writing a poem at the end of each year. I like to think that it was to brighten up the day of the officials at HQ when they received the reports. It is also a wonderful metaphor for the importance of the WVS and their good-natured attitude.

The poem certainly brightened my afternoon, so I hope it has the same effect on you!

W.V.S.

The W.V.S. are a cheerful crowd,
They cooperate with all;
Do not interfere or squabble,
Are at everyone's beck and call.
Nothing is too small a trouble,
Rest assured - they'll do their best.
The W.V.S. are out to help you,
Phone or call - they'll do the rest.

The poem is also intended to reflect the kindness of the entire WVS. An organisation that consisted of over one million women that helped fight a war in their own backyards.

Mrs Needham's words ring true. A lovely example of poetic benevolence. I would also like to update you all on how the project is coming along. As we approach the Christmas period, we are still right on schedule to hit our target for March. So far we have digitised thousands of Narrative Reports but we still have much more to go!

Thank you for helping bring these Hidden Histories back into the light once again.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Best wishes,

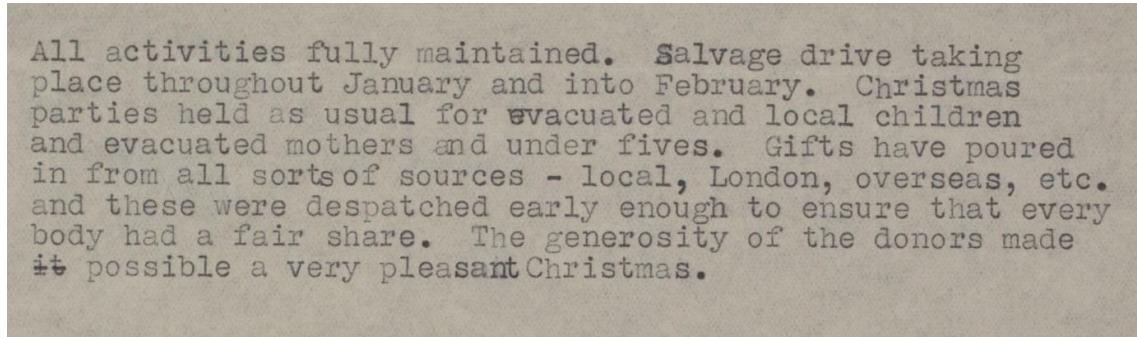
Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM WOKING

As the festivities loom ever closer, everyone here at the archive is looking forward to the Christmas break. This will be my last update before Christmas and as a festive treat I have managed to find a touching report from Woking in Surrey.

I would like to use this report to help express my sincere gratitude for the overwhelming support for this project. You have made it possible for us to reveal some of the most important documents in British History.

I actually stumbled across this diary whilst looking for something else. A rare case of serendipity!



All activities fully maintained. Salvage drive taking place throughout January and into February. Christmas parties held as usual for evacuated and local children and evacuated mothers and under fives. Gifts have poured in from all sorts of sources - local, London, overseas, etc. and these were despatched early enough to ensure that every body had a fair share. The generosity of the donors made it possible a very pleasant Christmas.

I am sure the evacuees in Woking fully appreciated their gifts. They were probably quite surprised to receive such a wealth of gifts from a range of sources! I am positive that the WVS members enjoyed distributing the presents to ensure that everyone received a gift.

'The generosity of the donors made possible a very pleasant Christmas.'

That line could not be more fitting today. Just like the evacuees in 1940, all of us here at the archive will enjoy Christmas that little bit more thanks to your kindness.

Have a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

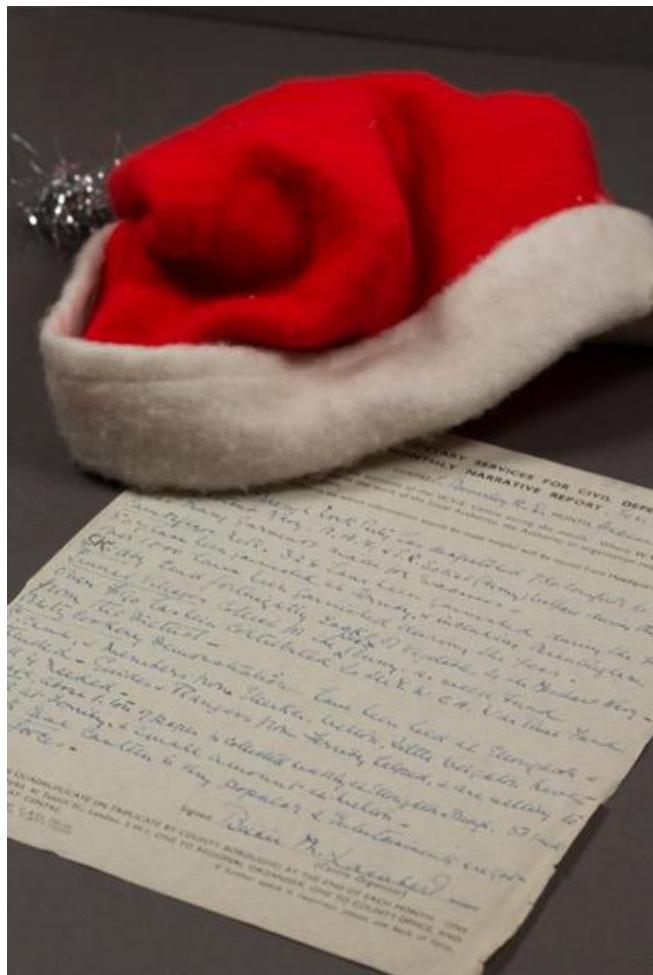
Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

CHRISTMAS 2016 UPDATE

It is almost Christmas and I and my colleagues here are off on our holidays, saying goodbye to a very successful year.



I don't know if I am getting older and lazier, but this wonderful project you have all helped us achieve is already paying dividends. This morning I didn't have to get out of my chair, walk to the store room, find the right box, and leaf through hundreds of sheets of paper to look at a Narrative Report from the North East of England (Region 1) in 1940. I simply went to the right folder on our computer server here and there it was! After ten years of working as the archivist for this great charity it was a miracle! However all this extra lethargy and Christmas food I fear may do nothing for my waist line!

The point I am trying to make is that Jacob has been doing a great job and we are right on track with our digitisation of those hundreds of thousands of Narrative Reports which UNESCO has seen fit to call one of the most important documents in British History.

So far we have photographed 18,932 pages, with just under another 10,000 to go to meet our expected target of 28,000 by July 2017 when they will all go online for everyone.

But before you get too excited and think, surely we will be finished in 3 months time, remember that capturing these pages is just the first step, we still have to convert them all into pdf documents, add them to our catalogue and upload them all to the internet. So far we've only created 662 of the 2,427 pdf's we need, so there is a long way to go.

Anyway, I hope that you all have a very happy festive season and we will continue our updates in the New Year.

Very best wishes

Matthew McMurray

Royal Voluntary Service Archivist.

THE SALVAGE STEWARD'S GUIDE

Writing a monthly Narrative Report is not quite as easy as it may seem. They are carefully crafted by the Centre Organiser who uses ten pieces of criteria as a guide. As extensive as the WVS intended them to be, occasionally they may have been rather reluctant to fill the entire page in!

One highly important activity undertaken by the WVS was salvage. Salvage involved the retrieval of metal, plastics, rubber and other vital materials that could be used for the war effort. Almost anything could be salvaged and almost certainly was!

To demonstrate the scale of the salvage scheme, I have found a wonderful guide from Birmingham that should prepare one to become a Salvage Steward. I hope you enjoy reading this fascinating document, it really exemplifies the all-encompassing nature of this important wartime activity.

Notes for the Guidance of Salvage Stewards in Charge of Street Salvage Depots

1 You have taken on the job of SALVAGE STEWARD and will be doing vitally important work. Shipping is limited and supplies formerly drawn from the Far East and other countries have been cut off. We must, therefore, utilise to the utmost every bit of material which can possibly be found at home. Local Authorities have been urged by the Ministry of Supply to intensify their collections of salvage materials, but unfortunately in the case of the Birmingham Salvage Department the release of many men to H.M. Forces and the serious shortage of transport has resulted in the available man power and equipment becoming insufficient to deal with the additional work. It is therefore necessary to secure voluntary help, and your services as a Salvage Steward will play an important part in the national war effort.

2 YOUR DUTIES GENERALLY WILL BE:—

(a) To provide or find accommodation for the salvage receptacles supplied by the Salvage Department, and to invite all householders living near your salvage depot to bring their materials to it for bulk collection.

(b) To advise householders on the different kinds of salvage required, and how to prepare it at the house before bringing it to your salvage depot.

(c) To increase the amount of salvage collected from your area by education of householders and by your personal example.

(d) To ask all householders to reduce their ordinary house refuse to the absolute minimum by keeping out of the dustbin all garden refuse (this can be used on the compost heap), sifting all cinders and using them as fuel, and burning on the kitchen fire all material not required as salvage. Only fine ashes should remain to go into the household dustbin, and even these can be used on garden paths in suburban houses.

I love how the scheme could be applied to almost anything that could be salvaged. For example, bones were of vital importance for war purposes. They were used to acquire grease for making nitro-glycerine for explosives, soap and candles. Bones were even used to produce camouflage paint!

The usage of metal skyrocketed as the war progressed and the salvage scheme corresponded accordingly. Metals provided the factories with raw material to produce munitions. This example will give you an idea of how much scrap iron and steel could be used by the munitions factories.

One ton will provide the steel for 100 Bren guns; five tons will provide it for 250 A.A. shells; twenty-five tons for a cruiser tank, and one hundred tons for a 15 inch naval gun!

It is quite unlikely that one of us has ten tons of aluminium bottle caps lying around that could be used for shell casings. If you do however, I am not sure the local milkman would collect them as they did during the war!

Next time you throw away a paper clip or a dirty polishing rag, think of the brave Women in Green salvaging every available item to aid the war effort.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Happy New Year to you all.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

DRIVING IN THE CITY OF DREAMING SPIRES

Oxford. A name so synonymous with learning, its illustrious reputation is legendary across the world. As glamorous as this may be, Oxford still needed people on the ground to help aid the war effort.

This of course brings our attention to the WVS. Alongside its academic qualities, Oxford has become increasingly well-known for its high population of cyclists. During the Second World War however, the WVS were on hand to help provide transport to all those that were in need of it. By providing this transportation service, the WVS were also fulfilling one part of their centre's criteria.

To demonstrate this, I have found a wonderful extract that illustrates how transport aided the welfare of the local community.

TRANSPORT. Cars and drivers have been particularly busy this month. We provided two drivers for the Ministry of Works and Buildings at Reading for two day tours of Buckinghamshire looking at country houses. All last week we met a man at Oxford station and took him out to Dry Sandford where he was blacking out a school for the Berkshire Public Assistance Committee. There is no bus service to Dry Sandford which is 6 miles out of Oxford. Our drivers have also taken him back to his train at night. We have also collected clothes, toys, sewing machines, etc, every day and have taken evacuees to hospitals.

.....

When I finished reading this extract, I found myself wanting to know a little more about the man at the railway station. I can only assume that he is the official blackout officer for the Berkshire Public Assistance Committee!

The WVS provided a service that ensured local communities would not become isolated, even during the harsh realities of war. I just hope that wartime fuel prices weren't on a par with todays!

Another superb example of how diverse the WVS became. Any job, anytime.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Have a lovely weekend.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

THE REALITIES OF WARFARE

As selfless as the abundant number of acts performed by the WVS were, they were unfortunately, a direct consequence of war. A war so vast, so profound, it shook the foundations of the world to its very core.

Despite the trials and tribulations of the Second World War, the unshakable WVS continued providing a greatly needed service on the home front. I have been working on this project since October, and one of the things that I have come to deeply admire about the WVS, is their perseverance.

The ability to help turn such a horrific period of time into a million stories of benign virtue. That to me, will be the lasting memory of this wonderful project.

Over the course of the war, both sides extensively used incendiary bombs to cause massive devastation to the target. That brings our attention to the report that I have found for you this week. It is a report on why incendiary bombs are used and how to deal with the threat of a 'dud', if one is succumbed to a raid.

These notices would have been massively educational at the time of print, so please indulge your love of history and enjoy reading this report.

You will hear more in the lecture on High Explosive of its effects and what protection can be afforded against it. You will also be told of the types of bomb which are likely to be used, and with regard to this, we must remember the new type of high Explosive bomb, which appears to be a "dud", but which may explode some hours, or even days, after it has been dropped. Any member of the A.R.P. Services or of the general public finding an unexploded bomb should report it AT ONCE to the police, either directly or through A.R.P. control, and the area concerned should be treated as a danger centre, and the inhabitants either told to take shelter or evacuated, according to the position.

INCENDIARY BOMBS.

The reason why Incendiary Bombs are used, is to cause numerous large or small fires over a wide area. These bombs are usually of the kilo type, weighing 2½ lbs., but a considerably heavier type may be used on special objectives. So far the method has been to use the lighter incendiary bombs, as one plane could carry between 1,000 and 2,000 of these. It is for this reason that the Fire Brigade have been reinforced, and the Auxiliary Fire Service formed, but in the initial stages, much can be done by the householders themselves to prevent such fires from spreading, and so becoming major outbreaks.

This report brings the harsher realities of the Second World War to the fore.

Despite this, the WVS were readily available to help assist the emergency services in the event of an incendiary raid. They would help evacuate the streets safely to ensure everybody was free of the danger zone. I mustn't forget the warm cups of tea that were provided to the Fire Brigade!

This report doesn't represent all the different groups that were also there during the raids. What it does do however, is demonstrate that the WVS were prepared to face the hardships of bombing on the home front to help ensure that everybody else would sleep that bit easier.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ARCHIVE ASSISTANT



In order to achieve our goal of 28 000 pages, a series of different tasks must be completed, so you and everybody else can freely enjoy reading these wonderful wartime diaries.

To accomplish this, we need to work through various different stages to have the diaries ready and waiting for you to pore over! So for this week, I thought I might share a few insights into my role as an Archive Assistant. (Hopefully you won't find this too boring)!

Naturally, the majority of my time is filled by taking photographs of the Narrative Reports. The reports need to be photographed individually and edited accordingly. When I arrive in the morning, my first job is to turn on the camera and studio lights so I can begin digitising. I usually leave the box I am working on in the storeroom for safekeeping. This keeps Matthew and Jennifer happy archivists!

Fortunately for me, the reports has been packaged in the correct order so I am able to digitise them without any worries of misplaced documents or random anomalies. Once however, I did find a 1945 document in a centre from 1940. It was quickly moved to its correct position!

In terms of digitising the diaries, we use Adobe Lightroom so I can take each photograph through the computer and compile a series of photographs for each specific centre. The trick is to ensure that the document is perfectly aligned in the template as it makes the editing process so much easier. Aligning the document perfectly is also much harder than it sounds!

Upon opening the pack of reports, I am never quite sure how many are going to be in each centre. Normally, I find there tends to be around 10-12 documents. Saying this however, some centres do throw up the occasional surprise. One of the centres from Herefordshire contained 112 reports. That's more than some counties! I can certainly say that this centre took a whole morning of editing.

After photographing and editing the reports, they are exported from Lightroom into our digital Archive where I subsequently watermark and PDF the reports ready for reading. This is where you come in at the end and enjoy them all!

I hope you enjoyed learning about the digitisation process. I can assure you, it is quite easy to become quickly engrossed in a report and forget about the time! Nevertheless, the project is right on schedule and I am enjoying the challenge.

I would just like to add, if there are any areas of the Narrative Report collection that interest you, please leave a comment on this blog, and I would be happy to write about your chosen subject in the future.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and @RVSArchives for daily snippets.

Best wishes,

WORK OF POETIC IMPORTANCE

Thank you for all your feedback last week, it was really wonderful to hear that you are enjoying the updates. In terms of focusing on individual areas of interest, I will aim to write something fitting over the coming weeks.

This week however, I will attempt to encapsulate the various different tasks performed by the WVS with a delightful little poem from Hertfordshire. It is always a pleasure to come across a report that has a touch of poetic mastery. Mrs Needham from the Isle of Wight would certainly agree!

This project is all about showcasing the hard work performed by ordinary women during a period of great adversity. The Narrative Reports represent a history that is so vast and profound, it can be difficult to quantify so much information.

That is why I thought this poem would be perfect to help remind ourselves why we all became involved with this project in the first place. The rewards were pretty appealing too!

Anyway, I found this poem just before lunchtime and as I looked over the other reports from this centre, I realised that they all contained poems too! I decided to ponder them over lunch and chose this one, as I thought it would summarise the sentiments of a million women perfectly.

These last three months in Braughing Rural
WV Works have been singular & plural.

Round Buntingford the chestnut trees
Grow to great heights with giant ease.

This year instead of conker fights
(a game in which each boy delights)

The horsechestnuts glossy and brown
Were sent in sacks by train to town.

Believe me these were no mean freight
Four tons of them six hundred weight!

Now they are stomach powder and
Glucose D throughout the land.

Buntingford children also daily
Picked all the rose hips growing gaily
From the autumn hedgerows bare.

Two hundred weight of these were packed
With W.V.S. care and tact
And sent to Allenb'rys at Ware
For babies syrup to prepare.

The centre organiser Mrs Gatty, is actually referring to Welfare Foods in her poem. This was a scheme set up by the WVS to help provide citizens with essential vitamins during rationing. The reference to the picking of rose hips, demonstrates the need for Vitamin C in the national diet.

Unfortunately for all the young boys at school, conkers would not be as prevalent in the playground at lunchtime. The WVS had seized the opportunity to make good use of the chestnuts by turning them into stomach powder. I think some may have preferred the game to the powder!

Whilst rose hips and chestnuts contributed to the national diet, the WVS also ensured that orange juice and cod liver oil were widely distributed. Vitamin C galore!

Thank you for your support once again, we really appreciate your feedback.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

KNITTED INTO THE FABRIC OF SOCIETY

A few weeks ago, I asked you to comment on any particular areas of the Narrative Reports that caught your interest. Thank you to those that replied, it must have rather difficult to narrow it down to just a few areas!

After reading through your comments, I decided that this week's update would focus upon the significance of knitting. Not to be underestimated, knitting was an integral component of wartime activity, and one which features on almost every Narrative Report that has been digitised so far.

Understandably, some centres have retained more reports than others. Occasionally however, a centre with almost 100 hundred reports crops up! Fortunately for me, these are quite rare, as it can take over an hour to fully digitise such a centre. That brings us to the centre in which I have found this week's report; Gainsborough.

After trawling through Gainsborough's diaries, I found an account concerning the progress of the local knitting guild. These were set up by the WVS to help produce appropriate garments for domestic and foreign purposes. This individual report, illustrates how the guild was operated by different parties in order to organise everything efficiently. You will be surprised by how many garments the WVS could knit!

KNITTING GUILDS. This month the W.V.S. Knitting Guilds have become registered with the R.A.F. Comforts Committee, Berkeley Square, London and with The Lincoln County Welfare Committee Comforts Fund, Old Barracks, Lincoln, the Registration number for the former being "418W" and for the latter "Lincoln W/39". Wool has been ordered by Mrs Ridley, delivered and duly served by the Secretary to the various Guild Leaders for distribution. Garments when completed will be weighed and checked by Mrs Rose and the Guilds Secretary before being dispatched by Mrs Rose to the Depots. Guild Leaders have been asked to keep a list of comforts knitted by each member so that in time badges may be obtained for the industrious knitters. It is suggested that one large parcel be dispatched instead of a number of smaller ones with the list enclosed inside the parcel. Satisfactory arrangements seem to have been arrived at between the Guilds Secretary and the Comforts Committees so that all work should run smoothly between the two parties.
(Report by Miss R.M.Palmer, Knitting Guilds Secretary)

As you can see, the report demonstrates how the WVS have become affiliated with the R.A.F. Comforts Committee. Generally speaking, a significant number of garments were knitted for the forces and members were entitled to a WVS badge after a certain period of work.

In fact, the WVS were so well organised on the knitting front, by 1941 they had a work party attached to almost every British Embassy. The scale of the work achieved by the WVS never ceases to amaze me!

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, the WVS began to devote some of their proficient needlework to those in the east. One month, a WVS centre managed to knit just over 2000 pairs of Russian Gloves. That works out at 64 gloves a day!

To encourage a good day of knitting, centre organiser's awarded prizes to those who knitted the most gloves. For example, Mrs Pearson of the No. 1 WVS Afternoon Guild won Mrs Ridley's prize for knitting the highest number of gloves in that group with 25 pairs. Unfortunately, it doesn't tell us what the prize was. I do hope it wasn't another ball of wool!

As with all wartime activities, the ordinary things in life became of vital importance. Knitting; a pre-war hobby that became a national industry to help those fighting the cold on the front line.

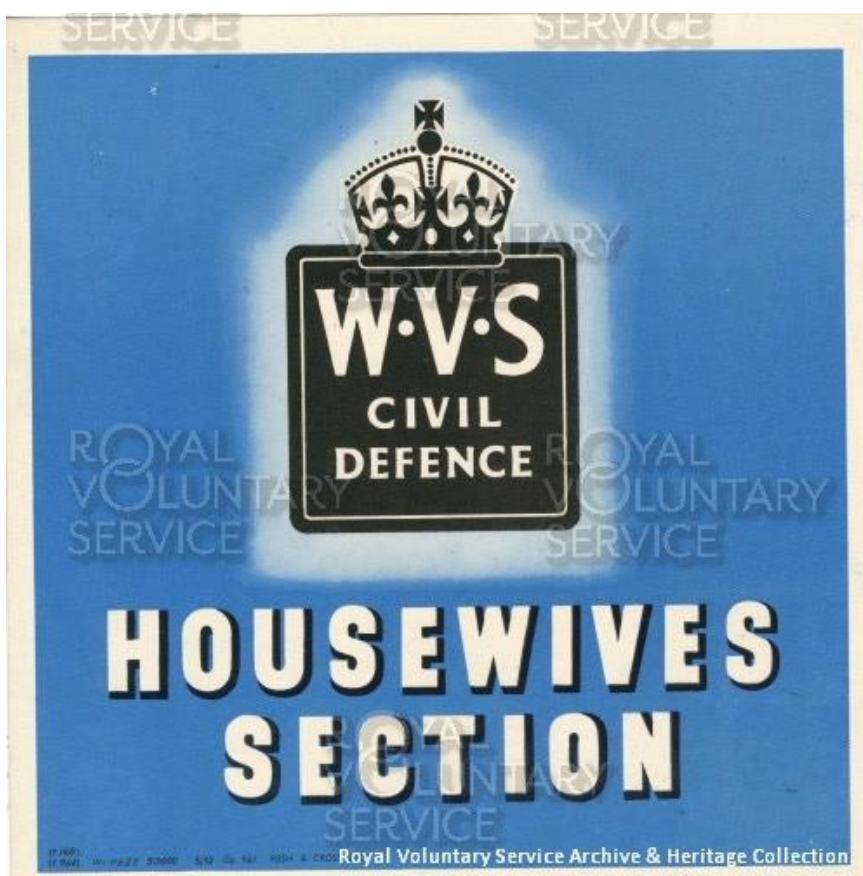
If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

HOUSEWIVES' IN BRITAIN'S GEORGIAN CITY



Narrative Reports were usually written by the Centre Organiser or their Secretary. It must have been quite difficult to document every aspect of the month's events in such a concise manner. Then again, some Centre Organisers tended to go the other way and write entire essays!

Either way, it would have been challenging to include all the tiny details of the centre's activity. That brings us to a poem written by an anonymous author outlining the different roles of the WVS Housewives' Service. I haven't come across anything else that provides such a succinct but accurate summary.

Our setting for this scene, is the beautiful city of Bath in Somerset. Globally renowned for its Roman bathhouses and Georgian architecture, Bath boasts an impressive collection of Narrative Reports. It also had an extensive network of WVS Housewives' Services.

The Housewives' Service was unofficially set up in 1938 by the then Centre Organiser of the WVS Centre for Ilford. The Centre Organiser realised that little provision was made for the ordinary housewife, who had too many duties to fulfil to be able to promise her time to other voluntary causes. If partially trained, this would allow the housewives to assist the ARP and help promote morale in the event of an air raid.

This early idea formed the basis of the Housewives' Service which was officially titled in December 1938 by the WVS Centre for Barnes. From these ideas, the framework began to filter into the national system.

I think this may be the appropriate point for you to discover the history for yourself. Please read and enjoy.

W.V.S.

Housewives' Service.

The Organiser

Yours the credit, high indeed,
Showing us the City's need.
So I write for all to read,
"Thank you for a splendid lead".



The Group Leader

Visiting till Leaders found,
Planning lectures, running round.
Seven league bootees, I'll be bound,
Should be yours to cover ground.

The Sector Leader

You're the one that holds the strings,
Smoothing out the knots and things,
Criticizing without stings,
Grumbles that a helper brings.

The Street Leader

As the "Mother" of the Street,
Every Housewife you must meet,
Gain her help and save your feet,
Talk to her, but be discreet.

The Housewife

You're the one that needs the grit.
Jars, tins, salvage - every bit.
Finished? Not a bit of it!
Shop, cook, wash, housework, sew, knit....

The Salvage Stewards

Bones and paper, rubber, tin,
Are the things to help us win,
See they're safely in the bin.
Do your duty, get them in.

All of these roles were the components that formed an extensive national structure where each title was replicated in every WVS centre in the country. Almost as impressive as the Housewife's work ethic!

Some examples of the work that was performed by the Housewives' Service included; assisting warden with house to house census, helping with emergency cooking schemes and acquiring knowledge of anti-gas precautions, the list was endless.

The response was overwhelming. The WVS Housewives' Service had allowed women that had never before joined any time of organisation found in this service an outlet for all their experience. As one report eloquently put it, 'here was an opportunity to pool individual talents for the good of all – a Service to which any woman could belong, no matter how difficult her home ties.'

Thank you for helping us bring these 'Hidden Histories' back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

AN INSPIRING VISIONARY

A single monthly Narrative Report represents more than just the specific information for a WVS centre. It is part of a story. A story so vast, it would take me another twenty years to fully digitise every diary that has ever been written. Fortunately for me, we are only digitising the first few years of reports!

Behind each story, there is a writer. A visionary, an intellect, the list goes on and on.

Behind each Narrative Report however, there is Lady Reading, the founder of the WVS and true visionary of the twentieth century. It is quite remarkable that she managed to set up such a huge organisation in such little time. At the outbreak of war, the WVS had only existed for little over a year!

Lady Reading's vision is upheld with the preservation of these reports. All the different tasks that were carried out by the WVS are a reflection of her ideas. To promote her ideas, Lady Reading travelled around the country to WVS centres and gave lectures on the importance of volunteering and service.

That brings us on to a report from the Isle of Wight which discusses the impact of Lady Reading's visit. A truly great orator, Lady Reading's speeches had a profound effect on all who listened to them. Maybe this snippet will do the same!

Lady Reading's Visit. In spite of all the above activities the high spot of the month was Lady Reading's visit. Lady Reading was certainly the Fairy Godmother, and turned the Cinderella of the Services into a Princess for three glorious days. During her stay in the Island she visited Newport,

Ryde, East and West Cowes, Sandown, Shanklin, and Ventnor, seeing many of the local activities. Civic receptions were held for her in Newport, the County Hall, Ryde, West Cowes and Ventnor. A visit was also paid to Brigade Headquarters. The Chief Event of her visit was an All Island Meeting held at the Medina Cinema, Newport. Almost a thousand members of the W.V.S. and County Headquarter Guests were present. (A copy of the programme is attached). The speech given by Lady Reading has inspired us all, and as a result not only has each Centre shown increased activity, but those who were "agin" the W.V.S. are now with us. Many offers of help have been received from unexpected quarters. There was a most happy atmosphere throughout the whole of the three days which seemed to be enjoyed by everybody, even the Organisers who, fortunately had no anxious moments. Cinderella has now gone back to her chores, but the memory of the visit of the Fairy Godmother will long remain an inspiration.

I wanted to share this with you so you would gain an insight into how highly regarded Lady Reading was by her WVS contemporaries. As Mrs Needham stated, 'Lady Reading was certainly the Fairy Godmother.'

Her visit also showed that people who were less willing to volunteer at that particular time, were suddenly inspired by speech. A wave of her wand indeed!

These types of visits were conducted relentlessly as she attempted to recruit more and more volunteers into the WVS. The rest as we know, is history.

Lady Reading continued with this undimmed spirit until 1971 when she sadly passed away. I think that her legacy lives on in these monthly diaries. Here are some touching words from the Home Secretary that recognise Lady Reading's kindness, perseverance and stoicism.

'I know that every member of the WRVS will have felt the death of Lady Reading as a personal loss. The service she created expressed her own genius for friendship and help to her fellow members of the community: and, through you, countless people have been helped by the service during the 33 years it has been in existence-and for the whole of which she has been your Chairman.'

Her personal style of leadership exemplified this approach and enabled her to keep a large organisation of volunteers at peak efficiency without giving those who worked in it or were served by it the feeling that they were being organised. The emphasis was always on personal service to the community, in meeting the needs both of war and of peace.

I am sad to be the last of a long series of Home Secretaries who have known Lady Reading's unique blend of charm and determination. I am sure that in spite of your great loss you will carry on your work as Lady Reading would have wished.' [\(WRVS Magazine, Issue No. 377, June 1971\)](#)

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob

WARSHIP WEEK

During the course of the Second World War, national saving campaigns became regular schemes to help raise money for the war effort. These campaigns raised significant amounts of money and helped facilitate a national drive towards victory.

For such an important task, you couldn't possible imagine that the WVS were absent. At the forefront once again, the WVS helped spearhead these national campaigns to greater heights. They even had their own section in the Narrative Reports!

This brings us onto one of the more prominent national saving campaigns; Warship Week. Naturally, this campaign served to raise financial support for the Royal Navy's fleet.

The campaign was structured in various different ways, as British cities were asked to save enough money for the adoption of battleships and aircraft carriers. Rural Britain differed in this respect, as they would focus on cruisers and destroyers. With the help of the WVS, the response was overwhelming

I have found a tiny snippet from Huddersfield that demonstrates the role of the WVS during Warship Week.

WARSHIP WEEK. The grand total raised by W.V.S. Housewives Service Street Savings Groups was over £20,000, which reflects the greatest credit on the many devoted workers. In addition, they handed over £342-9-0 as a free gift.

I originally wanted to share with you a piece of correspondence that illustrated the impact of Warship Week on the seaside town of Southend-on-Sea, but due

to copyright and fair dealings, I am unable to post it on the blog. Happily, I am allowed to quote some of the material in writing.

The letter in question is a reply from the Mayor of Southend-on-Sea thanking Mrs Leyland (County Borough Organiser) for The WVS's assistance during Warship Week. Here are two extracts from the letter to pore over.

'I have read with very great interest your letter to Major Kinghan setting out the story of the Street Group Movement in Southend, and the invaluable help that the WVS have rendered in connection with it.' (Letter, Warship Week, from Mayor's Parlour Southend-on-Sea, to WVS County Borough Organiser).

Personally, I found this particularly interesting because it demonstrated that Warship Week had helped facilitate other campaigns of equal value. The flexibility and opportunism of the WVS is never to be underestimated!

'After all, with the National Savings contributions, this town has found nearly a million pounds for the Government during the last seven or eight months, and the WVS has taken a very active and noble part in bringing about this achievement.' (Letter, Warship Week, from Mayor's Parlour Southend-on-Sea, to WVS County Borough Organiser).

To put that amazing donation in perspective, Southend was just one of thousands that raised vast amounts of money for the war effort. It seemed that the good people of Southend wore trousers with boundless pocket space!

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

NOT A SINGLE COMPLAINT

The Second World War dominated every level of society. This total domination of British society placed enormous strain on the country's ability to cope with the pressures of war.

One of the more overlooked factors during this difficult period, is the importance of clothing. Of course, the population of Britain didn't suddenly lose all of their clothes overnight. Nevertheless, clothing those in need became an integral part of the services offered by the WVS.

This was a direct response to those who had suffered during an air raid and needed provisions for survival. Those living in urban parts of the country were more susceptible to bombing campaigns due to their location.

The Narrative Reports reflect these moments and it is quite clear that rural WVS centres aided the nearest city in their time of need. I admire this chain of support networks, so I thought I would share a clothing report from Paignton in Devon. I just hope they remembered warm hats and gloves!

Allow me to paint the scene before you read this report. Exeter has suffered an air raid and the good people of Paignton have organised a collection of garments for those in need of them. Please read the diary to gain an insight into the hard work performed by the Women in Green.

2. <u>Clothing</u>	
Number of cases helped	69
Details of cases ✓	
S.& S.Families	6
C.9's	34
Awaiting C.9	8
A.B.	8
Bombed	13 - total 69.
No. of Garments given out	269
No. of Boots & Shoes	52
" " Repaired	59
No. of coupons sent up-	341 Special A.B. Coupons
" Ordinary Coupons	358 Total 699

As you can see, they even managed to repair 59 existing items of clothing! Impressive as that is, it is important to remember that they were multiple centres in the surrounding area that assisted in circumstances such as this. In these scenarios, it becomes easier to appreciate the scale of the work undertaken by the WVS.

In the aftermath of this event, the WVS Centre Organiser for Paignton, Mrs Spanton, wrote these touching words.

I went personally to Exeter on Saturday and Sunday (being two days the Paignton Depot. is closed for Clothing). We obtained very useful experience. Things to remember to get in readiness and things to avoid, should Paignton have the same sad experience. Exeter people were most brave, and I never heard a complaint. The Clothing both Lord Mayor's and American was plentiful. If only our American Friends could have been the Distributors personally of their own gifts, they would indeed have felt adequately rewarded for all their love, self-denial and labour by the spontaneous expressions of gratitude from the poor 'bombed-out People.'

Mrs Spanton's report illustrates that they were always people on hand to help. More poignantly perhaps, is that despite the hardships of a bombing campaign, the citizens of Exeter did not complain once.

Thank you for helping bring these 'Hidden Histories' back into the light.

You can find out more about clothing and WVS on our school resources site here; [Voices of Volunteering](#).

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

DUTIES OF EVERY KIND

The stories that have been digitised over the last few months give us a unique insight into the work of WVS including Hospitals. In some cases they included extra reports for example this list of supplies made for Hospitals in Somerset.

15 Shirts. (free material)
20 Pairs of pyjamas.
10 Operation gowns.
30 Many tailed bandages.
20 T bandages.
20 Small pillow cases.
10 White pillow cases.
30 Operation towels.
10 Slings.
10 Bedpan covers.
30 Treasure bags.
40 Surgeons masks.
10 Pairs operation stockings.
40 Pairs bedsocks.

295

260 Surgical dressings (free gauze)

The WVS Health and Hospitals Department was established in 1938 to assist local authorities with welfare work. Its work in hospitals began by focusing on services that would assist with the war effort and staff shortages or which would expand services they already provided outside of hospitals; for example making hospital supplies, recruiting auxiliary nurses and feeding injured servicemen. Although a number of other organisations, including St. John's Ambulance, already volunteered in hospitals there was still plenty WVS could do or provide volunteers for in conjunction with those other voluntary groups.

At this time WVS's main role was to recruit women for ARP and help with preparations for the government evacuation if and when war broke out; in its early days in many cases it acted as a recruitment agency although the organisation was starting to develop services of its own including Hospital

Supply Depots. Investigations were made in to the need for volunteers to make supplies such as dressings, swabs, bandages etc. by the WVS and League of Remembrance. Before the war broke out there wasn't really a great need however from September 1939 as hospital staff were called up or went off to war the need for volunteers increased. This meant more work for WVS but it was willingly taken on.

80,000 women were trained by the British Red Cross Society and the Joint Emergency War Council to make hospital supplies. A lot of these women had originally been recruited for the evacuation scheme but for most the main duty became hospital supplies as the numbers of expected evacuees in reception areas dropped for example in early 1939 Cornwall were expecting 20,000 but by August, just before the first evacuation, the numbers had dropped to 5,000.

Once trained there were a number of activities for WVS volunteers to get involved with including: The reception of materials from manufacturers through Central Hospital Supply Service (CHSS) HQ; Issue of materials to depots and the reception and collection of reports from depots. There many others too many for this short blog for the full list see our [Health and Hospitals Factsheet](#). The stories which Jacob has been digitising over the last few months give us an insight into some of the interesting entreaties from Matrons to the Hospital Supply Depots for instance a Matron in Lincolnshire made this request:

The Matron has also supplied 50 yards of material, which has been cut out and made into surgical coats, many tail, breast and T. Bandages and swabs for the above hospital. Having supplied a sufficient quantity for the above hospital, we have been asked to make a further supply for the town Nursing Association which we have decided to do. When required each one of these women has offered to give four time to this very excellent work.

The fading of the ink just shows you the importance of this project to preserve this information while we can.

Throughout World War II WVS continued to provide volunteers to help in the supply depots of hospitals in Britain. They also expanded their vast repertoire of services for hospitals which included food including distributing food (of course), giving vegetables to HM Forces in hospitals and running canteens for hospital trains, and domestic work one 80 year old volunteer in Hampshire would wait on doctors in the common room from midnight to 3am. Over the years Hospital Services would become one of WVS/WRVS and Royal Voluntary Services most recognisable roles.

You can read more about this in [Report of Ten Years Work \(1938-1948\)](#) here as well as following us on Twitter and Facebook for daily snippets from our million war time women.

Happy reading and best wishes,

Jennifer Hunt
Royal Voluntary Service Deputy Archivist

SERVING HOT MEALS IN CANTERBURY

Of the many public schemes that existed during the Second World War, the importance of British Restaurants should not be overlooked. These feeding centres were set up in 1940 to help people that had been bombed out of their homes or run out of rationing coupons. A true example of societal cohesion that provided nourishment to those in need of aid.

In fact, by 1943, 2160 British Restaurants served 600,000 incredibly cheap meals every day. At the time the meals worked out at 9 pence each, which in today's terms works out at just under £1. To achieve this astronomical number, help had to be drafted in. Who else to turn to, other than the Women in Green...

Interestingly, Winston Churchill personally chose the name 'British Restaurants' in 1942, as they were originally called 'Community Feeding Centres' in 1939. I

can only assume that this decision was made in an attempt to add a patriotic stance to the scheme.

The report focuses on the running of the British Restaurant scheme, but also discusses how Mrs. Moore, (WVS member and Girl Guide Commissioner), served hot dinners to local demolition men. Please read this fascinating source to gain an insight into the Hidden Histories of a Million Wartime Women.

5. Feeding.

On the morning of June 1st the British Restaurant was serving hot meals by 7 a.m. By June 1st it had served 8,000 main meals, apart from teas, lunches, etc. (3,332 in number)

The Technical Institute served hot dinners cooked in Field Cookers to the demolition men working in that part of the city who only had 30 minutes for lunch. It was organised by Mrs. Moore, W.V.S. member and Guide Commissioner, with her Guides. (The County Borough Organiser is Vice-President of the Guides).

From 90 to 140 dinners were served each day. The dinners ceased on June 27th and teas and sandwiches have been served since then.

✓ The Field Cookers supplied all the boiling water for the Region Mobile Canteens. There were six cookers always in use with boiling water.

At 7 p.m. on June 2nd the Divisional Food Officer requested that eight Emergency Feeding Centres might be manned by six W.V.S. helpers in each and be prepared to operate at dawn. The second raid occurred that night and all Centres were staffed at dawn on the 3rd June.

Due to the level of staffing needed to run these restaurants, members of the WVS prepared and served meals to those that requested them. After digitising the WVS centre for Canterbury, I decided that this Narrative Report describing the feeding situation would be make for an interesting read. Fortunately for the diners, the British Restaurants didn't serve anything to bizarre!

Everybody was served equally and no-one could receive a meal with more than one serving of meat, game, poultry, fish, eggs or cheese. In contrast to the British Restaurant, conventional private businesses were not subject to rationing.

As we can see from the Narrative Report, the British Restaurant in Canterbury was extraordinarily popular. 8,000 main meals served in 13 days is impressive

indeed! It is even more remarkable when you consider that the Technical Institute served 90 to 140 meals each day, despite the fact they were using Field Cookers to heat everything up.

The Second World War allowed one scheme to flow into another. There was always something to be done, and fortunately, there were always people on hand to help. This theme still exists today, as the British Restaurants gave way to the Derby & Joan clubs in 1946. By 1949, this was transformed into the Luncheon Club scheme which is better known today as Lunch Clubs. Amazingly, this is still run by the Royal Voluntary Service today.

Thank you for helping bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

ALL ARE WELCOME

By now, I really shouldn't be surprised by what I discover within the pages of these monthly diaries. Nevertheless, the Narrative Reports have never failed to treat me and now I am going to treat you to another fascinating insight into volunteering on the home front.

We set our scene in the most affected area of all, London. Despite London's size, it has significantly less records than other regions in the country. Of the few centres that do exist however, each has provided me with more than enough digitising!

Upon opening the sub-file for the WVS centre in Camberwell, I realised that the Narrative Reports had been split into two sections. Firstly, there were the usual monthly diaries and then a separate section documenting WVS work at the Camberwell Reception Centre.

These Reception Centres were set up to provide necessary aid to refugees that were arriving in London. Refugees received clothes that had been collected or made by the WVS and were offered nourishment from a canteen. This aid proved vital for so many that passed through the doors into the helping hands of the WVS.

I have found a report that perfectly describes a typical day working at the Reception Centre. Enjoy!

On 15th March, 268 men, women and children of seven nationalities arrived at the Camberwell Reception Centre. W.V.S. had been told beforehand that they might be arriving, and the Clothing Depot staff was standing by. However, when they arrived on Sunday morning, it was found that no one was in immediate need of clothes, so nobody was called on. When W.V.S. arrived on Monday morning, ready to distribute clothes, it was found that many interviews and many official parades were taking place. We were asked to postpone the clothing distribution till the following day.

We were, however, asked by the Superintendent to run a canteen, starting the next day. This was arranged forthwith and provided daily until the last man went on Friday, the 26th. It was open from 10 - 11 am, 3 - 4 pm, and 7 - 8 pm. We were fortunate in being able to send many fluent French speakers from among our members and one who spoke five languages. It was found to be necessary to have four helpers in the mornings and evenings and six in the afternoons.

Reports like this illustrate that not only did the WVS do just about everything, they also targeted areas that were calling for certain services. During this period of time, London would have been crying out for centres that provided aid to refugees and of course the WVS responded admirably. According to one WVS member, 'this has been a very worthwhile job as some of the men had arrived in a starving condition.'

People that visited this centre were also kindly offered a list of supplies for future purposes. Some of the items on the list are a sign of the times indeed! I thought it would make for a rather interesting read.

Cigarettes
Cigarette papers
Matches
Petrol for Lighters
Flints & Wicks for Lighters

Dictionaries
Lesson Courses
Note books & Pencils

Shoe Polish(brown & black)
Shoe Brushes
Cold Cream
Shaving Soap
Tooth Paste
Ping-pong Balls
Tennis Balls
Needles, cottons, buttons, etc.

As useful as some of the items are, I am not quite sure cigarettes would be at the top of the list in 2017!

As a final thought, I would like to leave you with part a letter written by E.J.B. King (County Hall Representative) to Miss K.M Halpin O.B.E (Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence) regarding the work of the Camberwell Receiving Centre. 'I cannot speak too highly of the work of Mrs. Crombie and her colleagues, and I should like to take this opportunity to say I much I appreciate it.

Yours sincerely, E.J.B King.'

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

MENDING THE SOLES OF SOCIETY

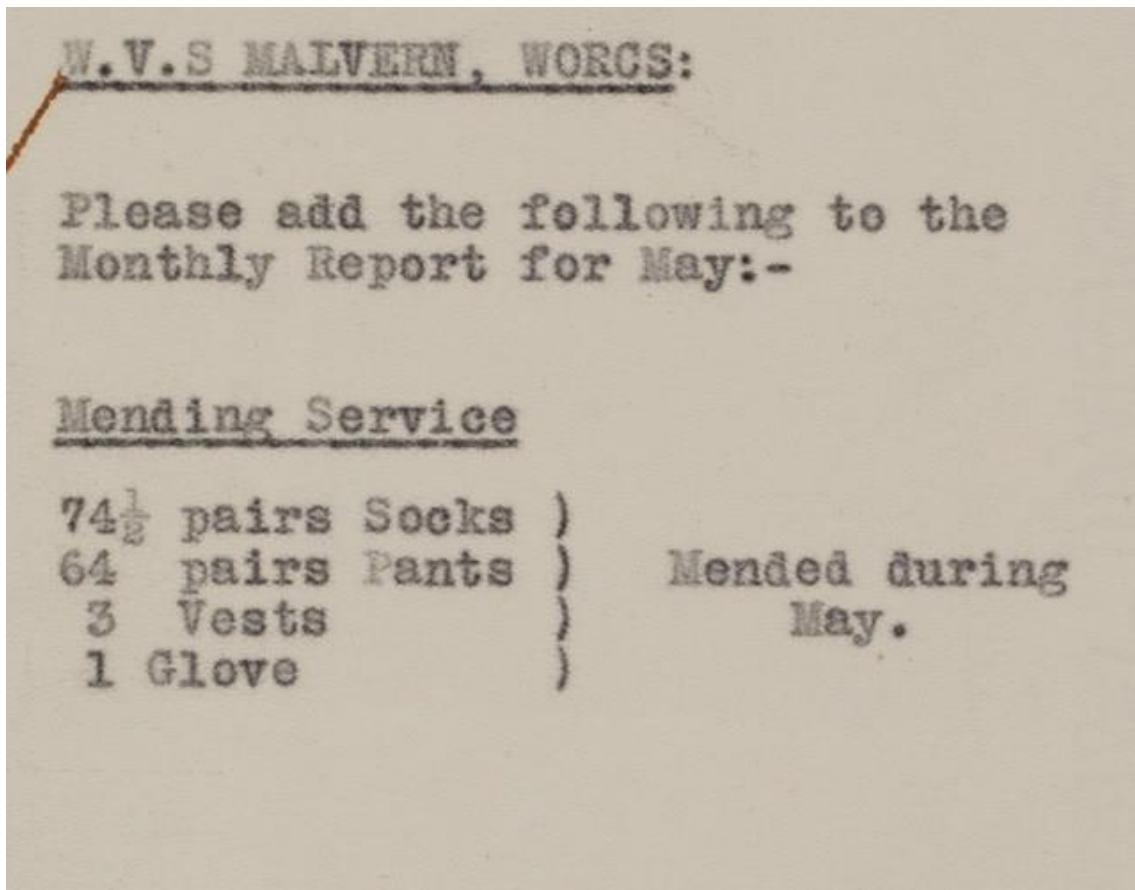
When reflecting upon history, it can often become easy to focus on the grand achievements of civilisation and overlook the smaller but no less important stories that have helped shape our world; in this respect, the WVS falls into the latter focus. We are fortunate enough to reveal these stories through a series of monthly diaries. Using these diaries, we can illustrate that the WVS's legacy of its contribution to the Second World War is profound indeed.

As with any organisation, its legacy is often defined by its past. Although WVS still exists today in the form of Royal Voluntary Service, I like to think that those brave women working on the homefront will be remembered for undertaking any task that needed doing, regardless of scale or difficulty.

This brings us to a tiny but nonetheless interesting snippet on the WVS Mending Service from Malvern in Worcestershire. The Centre Organiser must have forgotten to add the statistics to the original Narrative Report, because it was sent to headquarters as an afterthought. I am sure the staff at headquarters were happy to add it to the original!

The WVS Mending Service was responsible for fixing clothes that would eventually be distributed to those in need of them. Recipients included; evacuees, the homeless and soldiers. However, mended clothes were generally offered to anyone that required them.

Please read this document to gain an insight into the WVS Mending Service during the Second World War.



Although tiny, I found this document extremely fascinating because it embodies everything that the WVS represented. Work such as the Mending Service was rarely glamourous, but existed because it was fundamentally essential to the war effort. Also, mending 74 ½ pairs of socks in one month is highly impressive work!

WVS Mending Services sprouted up all over the country during the war, largely due to the fact that clothing needed to be fixed and re-used. Likewise, the Mending Services provided women with an outlet to develop or gain new skills whilst contributing a wholly worthwhile effort to those in need of it.

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

GAS MASK FITTINGS

Unfortunately, the Second World War brought many unforeseen dangers to those on the Home Front. The threat of gas was a constant worry for all, as it could have potentially lethal consequences. As a result, people in Britain were issued with gas masks and regular drills became routine.

After digitising three years of Narrative Reports, a certain pattern has started to appear. Diaries that document the activities of a large urban area are more likely to discuss how the WVS responded to the threat of gas. This is largely due to the increased risk involved for those living in metropolitan areas.

There was no doubt that each side possessed the ability to drop poisonous gases on each other. To ensure that people were kept safe in the event of a gas strike, the WVS organised gas mask fitting sessions and established repair depots. As previously mentioned, these sessions were more common in urban parts of the country, but lectures were also provided to help people understand what to do in the event of a strike.

ANTI-GAS LECTURES A course of 5 lectures was arranged for W.V.S. members; these were well attended, the average attendance being 45; several members volunteered to take the Oral examination, and all gained high marks, 43 being the lowest out of a possible 50.

As you can see from this document, members of the WVS passed their examinations with flying colours!

After organising a series of sessions for gas mask fittings, everything was recorded on that month's Narrative Report. As usual, I stumbled across this report when looking for something else, but I thought it would make for an interesting read for this week's blog.

<u>Gas masks Fitting and Repair Depot</u>		REGISTER
1.	No. of school children fitted at H.Q.	80
2.	Baby helmets issued	250
"	" returned	364
3.	Small child's respirators issued	363
"	" returned	136
4.	Facepieces changed beyond local repair	160
	Containers	47
	Bands	22
	Valves	29
	Contex	28
	New Cartons issued free	190
	Respirators	57
5.	No. of respirators washed, disinfected, examined etc. from children, deceased persons, salvaged etc.	1,190
6.	Civilian Duty Respirators disinfected etc...	30
"	" " reharnessed	3
	Haversacks washed repaired	30

To organise these types of sessions, the WVS set up the Housewives Anti-Gas Treatment. They were specifically trained to deal with the threat of gas and had to undertake a series of assessments to prove their competency. Likewise, the WVS often cooperated with members of the ARP, who delivered lectures on the importance of repairing and cleaning both service and civilian duty respirators.

Unfortunately, gas masks were often lost due to severe bombing campaigns. In spite of this, the WVS were on hand to help distribute new gas masks to those that needed them. One month in Bath for example, 1147 people had to be given a new mask.

The threat of gas was a huge concern for those on the Home Front. Although Britain never actually received a gas strike, the admirable work of the WVS and the ARP would have ensured that people were better prepared if such a scenario were to have happened.

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If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICES

The Second World War encouraged many volunteer organisations in Britain to collaborate with one another to help benefit the whole of society. For instance, the WVS and the British Red Cross often worked together as they could use each other's strengths for national gain. For example, the Red Cross was on the Advisory Council to help recruit women for the war effort, which would be of great benefit to the WVS. These partnerships were typical of wartime society, as they often generated new schemes and ideas.

The Blood Transfusion Service that began in 1941 is a wonderful example of this type of collaboration, as the WVS collaborated with the health authorities to assist local donations. For example, this scheme was particularly popular in West Sussex. Our collection of Narrative Reports demonstrate that there were two to three blood donation sessions every month.

Alongside promoting this scheme, the WVS helped register people for donations. They were also on hand to distribute tea and biscuits to people that had just donated. As far as I can tell from the reports, everything seemed to run smoothly!

Here is an example of a Blood Transfusion Report from Worthing & District. It discusses the two 'bleeding' sessions from that month. I hope you enjoy reading this insight into another example of the WVS's commitment to wartime society.

W. Sussex Emergency Blood Transfusion Service
Worthing & District
Report for July.

There have been two bleedings this month -
The first on the 7th when 12 donors were used from
Chichester and Worthing.

The second on July 21st when 12 Worthing donors
were used.

14 Bottles of blood were used and 9 donors
were called for.

It has been arranged that in future Southlands Hospital
shall draw their donors from Lancing and Shoreham as there
are a great many "O" donors in those districts; this will
avoid waste of petrol.

To help replenish future blood stocks at Southlands hospital, the WVS
recognised that people with 'O' blood did not necessarily need to be transported
into the area. To achieve this, members of the WVS promoted the importance of
blood transfusions in Lancing and Shoreham. Likewise, the saving of petrol was
an excellent exercise in wartime austerity!

After the war was over, Blood Transfusion Services were not necessarily such a
central issue. However, during the mid-1950s the Ministry of Health again
sought the aid of the WVS to help increase the number of blood donors.

Collaborations such as this proved how important they were to wartime society.
It was only through the effort of all, that schemes such as the Blood Transfusion
Service could be conceived.

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

HOSTELS FOR THE HOMELESS

Of all their wartime responsibilities, providing the homeless with a place to stay was always a high priority. Due to the air raids, people were often forced out of their homes onto the streets. Who was there to help them? The Women in Green of course.

In response to the bombing campaigns, the WVS set up a series of hostels across the country to help accommodate those in need of shelter. These hostels tended to be located in metropolitan areas, as they were more likely to experience an air raid.

Each hostel was usually staffed by members of the WVS. Whilst making sure that the safety of the homeless citizens was paramount, each member of staff was charged with equipping the hostel to ensure it was suitable to live in. Some hostels were so well equipped, that people didn't always want to leave them when alternative accommodation had been found for them.

To illustrate this, I have found a report from York that perfectly describes the hostel situation at the time. On that note, I hope you enjoy reading this interesting piece of history.

Hostels.

The Department is entire charge of the staffing and equipping of 11 Hostels for the Homeless. These hostels are only in use after a raid on York. Each Hostel is staffed by an organiser and two Deputies and a Band of helpers. Their duty is to keep the Hostels in order so that they can be used at any time at a few hours notice. One of these Hostels can be used by Evacuees who arrive in York too late to make arrangements for accommodation and they are allowed to stay in the Hostel for a limited time whilst they find accommodation.

Of all 11 hostels in York, one was used for evacuees. This was also the only hostel that benefitted from the luxury of a resident caretaker. With the care of the WVS, I suspect that the evacuees did not want to leave either!

The excellent hostel work that was performed all over the county, is best summarised by a quote from our [Ten Year Report](#). It illustrates how important it

was to empathise with people that had just been forced out of their homes and were left with almost nothing.

"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." ([RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/PUB/PUB/A-48-004, Report of Ten Year's Work for the Nation 1938-1948, p. 14](#)).

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

INCIDENT IN THE SKY

The WVS were accustomed to dealing with the threat of air strikes, as they became more frequent as the war progressed. However, they rarely had to deal with the event of an aircraft collision. Unfortunately, on one sleepy night in Goole (Yorkshire), two planes crashed into each other and caused a serious incident for the local community.

The Goole Centre Organiser Mrs Martin, wrote a detailed chronological account of these events. After reading through her thoughts I was struck by the speed and commitment that was demonstrated by the entire town. Likewise, her account is also a great example of how people come together in times of crisis.

At 12.20 a.m. on the above date, two planes collided, parts crashing at several points in the town and causing serious fires.

Centre Organiser contacted Control at once but had difficulty in collecting volunteers owing to absence of alarm and those living in unaffected areas not aware of incident.

Several streets had to be evacuated owing to a suspected unexploded bomb; the nearest Rest Centre being in this area, another had to be opened. By the time people had arrived there were plenty of volunteers to assist.

After recognising that certain areas of the town needed evacuating, the WVS were opened another Rest Centre to help locals avoid the threat of an unexploded bomb. This is a further account of what happened after the impact at 12.20am.

Gas pressure was low, so hot water was provided from the W.V.S. Cooking Cmtnre. W.V.S. provided hot drinks at the incidents and at 4 a.m. provided drinks for 100 Home Guard who had been on duty.

The Housewives assisted Wardens with the evacuation.

Delay was caused in getting out one Food Van owing to the Fire Guard at the next premises not having the key and duplicate keys were at houses which were evacuated, also emergency supplies of tea, milk etc. were not obtainable from the Local Authority.

Once the WVS had established the Rest Centre, they were able to provide comfort to those that had to be evacuated. Thanks to the WVS Cooking Centre, people were also offered hot drinks at the crash sites. However, Mrs Martin did note that emergency supplies were unavailable from the Local Authority. This could be due to the fact that they were not present at the time of the incident. Fortunately, there was enough to warm up the local Home Guard!

These and other matters were brought up by the Centre Organiser at an Emergency Committee meeting next morning and itwas dcided that some emergency supplies should be hept at the W.V.S. Cooking Centre and the British Restaurant should be made available to W.V.S. to obtain extra containers etc.

This final part of Mrs Martin's account illustrates that the WVS responded to this by taking extra measures in case of a future emergency. By spreading out their

resources across the town, it would be very unlikely that these much-needed supplies would be unavailable again.

Unfortunately, there were three fatal casualties that night in Goole. Despite this sad occurrence, the other seven casualties only suffered minor injuries when they were evacuated from areas already on fire. Thanks to the quick response from the local community, each person made a full recovery. Above all else, that is testament to the importance of not just the WVS, but to everybody that was fighting the fires in their own homes.

Thank you for helping bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

KITCHEN WASTE EXHIBITION

A few months ago, I wrote about the salvage work that was conducted by the WVS. For this week's blog, I have decided to take another look at salvage, but with particular focus on kitchen waste.

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.

In order to continue salvaging as much kitchen waste as possible, local WVS centres organised Kitchen Waste Exhibitions. These exhibitions intended to create further interest in the importance of salvage, and encourage the local community to put their waste food in allocated bins. The WVS were always on hand to help collect these smelly deposits!

That brings our attention to the Kitchen Waste Exhibition in Thurrock (Essex). Members of the WVS in Thurrock organised this exhibition to help increase their monthly quota of collected kitchen waste. Amazingly, their target was a whopping 64 tons!

Hopefully you enjoy reading a brief snippet into this local campaign that helped boost their levels of salvaged kitchen waste.

Map showing countries from which animal feeding stuffs, such as for feeding pigs, are normally obtained, namely:-

Canada	Argentine
United States	Russia
Holland	Norway
Poland	India
Egypt	Australia
Brazil.	

The present shortage of shipping, the fact that all available ships are required for transporting men, munitions and food for direct human consumption, and the fact that the enemy are endeavouring to blockade our shores, make it essential that this Country should rely on their own resources and their own homes for every scrap of salvagable material, including waste food for feeding pigs and producing bacon and pork for human consumption.

Before the outbreak of the war, Britain was heavily reliant on material imports to help sustain the manufacturing sector. As you can see from the report, British pigs relied on a wide variety of international feed!

Due to the wartime climate, the only viable solution was use to home-grown resources to help replenish the stocks of animal feed. The people of Thurrock responded admirably to these exhibitions, as they managed to improve their quantity of salvaged kitchen waste month by month.

Despite this, they did have to be reminded of the purposes of salvage occasionally!

It should be emphasised that the object of the exhibition is to increase the amount of food placed in waste food bins, not to encourage the wasting of food, nor to obtain a market for waste food, as the demand already far exceeds the supply.

This topic is one that has fascinated me since I have become involved with this project. To stimulate that interest, I have also been working on writing a Fact Sheet for the Royal Voluntary Service Website that discusses the importance of Salvage on the Home Front. As I have just finished writing it, I will leave a link to it so those of you that are interested can find out more about all things [salvage](#).

This has been completed alongside the main project, so don't worry I am still going full steam ahead with the digitisation of the Narrative Reports!

Thank you for helping bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

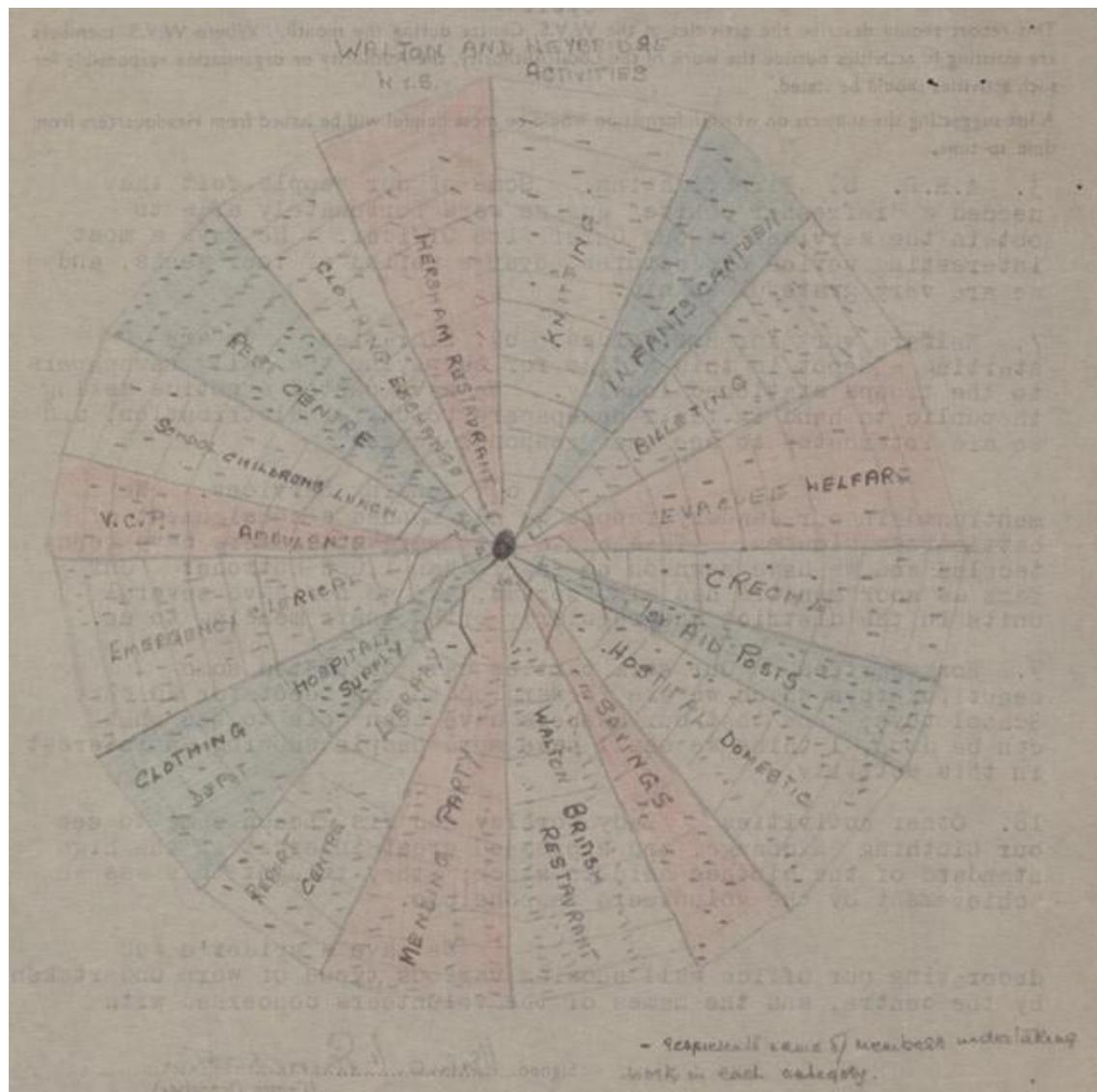
THE SCALE OF WVS INVOLVEMENT

Over the past eight months or so, I have attempted to demonstrate how a million women volunteered in a wide variety of different wartime activities. As hard as I have tried to portray this diverse work, I am yet to truly scratch the surface!

However, help is on hand. After working my way through a collection of Narrative Reports from Walton and Weybridge in Surrey, the Centre Organiser had very kindly drawn a spider diagram illustrating all the activities that were

undertaken in that area. It was almost as if she knew that in the future I would want to show it to you!

This drawing summarises the wonderful work of the WVS better than I ever could! I hope you enjoy examining this insight into another example of these Hidden Histories.



This drawing did not end up on a Narrative Report by mere chance. Lady Worsley the Regional Administrator for Region 12 (which subsequently became Region 5 - Kent, Surrey East & West Sussex), visited Walton to view their local Clothing Exchange. Whilst admiring the high standard of clothes held in stock, she noticed a spider's web decorating the office wall that showed various types of work undertaken by the centre. Each activity was also listed with the name of a volunteer that was responsible for that section.

Lady Worsley expressed such interest in this diagram that she asked the Centre Organiser Mrs Pennefather to reproduce the drawing on a Narrative Report, so that everybody at headquarters could appreciate the work that was being performed. This was also a great way to quickly demonstrate the scale of the work that existed in a local area. Remember, the members working at headquarters were receiving hundreds of Narrative Reports each month so it wasn't always easy to decipher what was going on.

Thanks to a gentle nudge from Lady Worsley, and the drawing skills of Mrs Pennefather we can certainly establish what the WVS in Walton were up to in the midst of the Second World War.

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

READING RESPONDS ACCORDINGLY

A few weeks ago, I used an example of the incident in Goole to demonstrate how the community came together in the face of great adversity. To further demonstrate how important this aspect of wartime society was, I have discovered another report that highlights how the town of Reading coped in similar circumstances. This is the story of how the WVS dealt with these significant challenges.

Feb 10th.

" 4.34 p.m. W.V.S. Office was partially wrecked. No casualties to W.V.S. Staff. Immediate attention was given to casualties and frightened people from outside were brought to, or congregated in the Market Passage Shelter under the office.

" 4.55 p.m. The box bicycle was extricated from the debris in Corn Exchange, the urn filled and tea dispensed to these people before the 'All Clear' was sounded.

On February the 10th Reading was bombed extensively, thus causing considerable damage to areas of the town. These are the earliest memories of the WVS Centre Organiser immediately after the raid. Quite aptly I think, the WVS not only helped treat those with injuries, but also brought them a warm cup of tea to calm their emotions.

" 5.30 p.m. Instructions were given by Emergency Food Officer for Mobile and Trailer Canteens together with the 3 Ford Food Vans to report for duty.

" 5.45 p.m. Mobile Station Canteen took up position in Market Square and almost immediately after the Trailer Canteen was brought to the other site in Minster Street. Both were ready for service with the A.R.P. and Rescue Squads immediately.

After these initial responses, the WVS tried to ensure that everybody involved in the incident was sufficiently nourished. The members that took up position in the Market Square Canteen just 56 minutes after the incident worked all through the night to help those that were in need. Once again, the speed and efficiency of the WVS never fails to impress.

" 6.0 p.m. Ford Food Vans reported, one taking up position on far side of Market Square, the others reporting at Oxford Hall and bringing supplies for Canteens throughout the night. A Berks County W.V.S. Canteen worked at the far side of the Town Hall throughout the night until daybreak. The box bicycle canteen was mobile all night also.

Feb 11th.

" 10.30 p.m. The Ford Vans proceeded to their garages for cleaning etc. and proceeded on their normal duties according to ordinary routine. These were relieved in the afternoon by the Berks County Tea Van which remained until 6 p.m.

As you can see, the WVS were able to establish more than one canteen immediately after the incident. In fact, their efforts were so unrelenting the Mobile Station Canteen continued working until Wednesday 17th and the Trailer

until Sat 20th. The box bicycle canteen was the last part of this inspired effort to stop on Sat 27th, 17 days after the bombing. Throughout this time, there were a lot of WVS members that working behind the scenes to help ensure that the canteens had a stream of readily available food. It is estimated that these members made around 5,000 sandwiches over 17 days at Oxford Hall British Restaurant. I can only hope that they didn't run out of butter!

Despite the relentless efforts of everybody involved there were a number of fatalities at this incident. Owing to the release of these stories for the first time, we are able to bring these memories out of the darkness and give them the light that they respectfully deserve. Reading Mayor, W.McIlroy summarises the thoughts of all in this letter of gratitude to the WVS Centre Organiser, Mrs Deans.

The Reading Civil Defence Services have received the congratulations of the Regional Commissioner and one of the Regional Officers told me yesterday that the good work of Reading Services was a matter of comment in London. The W.V.S. held an equal place with the other Services and so whatever honours and distinction we have gained are shared by you and those under your command. In conveying this honourable mention to you I ask you to accept also the grateful thanks of the borough.

We deplore the sad loss of some of your number but we are full of gratitude that you yourself and your office staff escaped even though you were in the midst of the disaster.

Sincerely yours,

Thank you for helping bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

LET'S HAVE A CUP OF TEA

Of all the themes that flow through the many activities performed by the WVS, there is one that stands out above all else. This theme is not just an integral part of the WVS, but it has become entrenched in the national psyche of Britain. Well, what could I be talking about? A good old cup of tea of course! (The title may have given this away)...

After looking at so many different aspects of the WVS, I wanted to find something that linked them all together. In each Narrative Report, there are regular descriptions of scenarios that involve members of the WVS making teas to help fit any occasion. As demonstrated by the incident reports in Goole and Reading, the WVS were on hand to not only treat the injured, but soothe the emotions of the frightened by offering them a warm cup of tea.

Fortunately, Mrs King the Centre Organiser for Rochester in Kent shares my enthusiasm. She actually loved tea so much, she wrote a poem about it and sent it to headquarters in London. After reading through her poem, I think it is safe to say that the members of the WVS in Rochester were not die-hard coffee addicts!

I hope you enjoy reading through these memories.

"TEA".

At two o'clock we mount the stairs
And quickly take our place,
We throw the rivets in the tins
At a truly rapid pace.

The tins fill up without a pause
Till shortly after three,
Then someone murmurs longingly,
"Oh, for a cup of tea" !

We talk of scandal and of war,
And of the B.B.C.,
But then our conversation flags -
"Where is that cup of tea" ?

We do our best to brighten up,
We're there to win the war,
But throats are dry and tongues hang out
When the clock is striking four.

We do not hope for a reward,
We do not ask a fee,
"Just help to keep us up to form
And send a cup of tea".

One plea we make O Messrs. Shorts,
We do not ask for more,
To help us send the bombers up,
"Let's have our tea at four".

This poem illustrates why tea has become such a national emblem. It became more than a drink for people living throughout the difficulties of the early 1940s.

Tea represented solidarity and a sense of normality for those that were working on the home front. I can imagine that Mrs King and the rest of her colleagues had a wonderful time taking a pause from the world over a warm brew.

During a crisis, it would have been very reassuring indeed to encounter a group of women dressed in green with a cup of tea at the ready.

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.

If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus

Archive Assistant

RETURNING FROM AFRICA

As we are in the middle of an uncharacteristic heatwave, I thought I would try to cool the sunshine by writing about a report from the middle of winter 1942. I do hope you don't think I want the sunshine to go away!

Deep into the heart of North Somerset lies the town of Clevedon. Soldiers returning from military campaigns in North Africa, were often billeted in places like this. As we are quickly approaching the project launch day, I am sure you can guess which smartly dressed women were there to help take care of the soldiers. (If you need a hint, they often wore green...)

Of course, these soldiers were blissfully unaware that the WVS had organised their Christmases upon their behalf. Clevedon Centre Organiser Mrs Day summarised how these events unfolded on the Christmas of 1942.

Early in December some of the men back from North Africa were billeted in Clevedon. We wanted to give them as nice a Christmas as possible so we collected enough money to give each man 10 cigarettes and a bar of chocolate on Christmas night and the Y.M. allowed us to serve all refreshments free of charge. To our great disappointment and also I think to theirs, they were ordered off 3 days before Christmas. However, we gave them their little party on December 21st and they were all so nice, but so sad at having to go off to a fresh place just before Christmas. The money over was left with the Leader of the Y.M. and he and the Army Welfare Officer drove out to all the isolated groups on gun sites & searchlights etc. - in the neighbourhood and to the Red Cross Hospital - and gave cigarettes and chocolate. I don't think anyone was forgotten.

In stark contrast to 2017, chocolate and cigarettes were the order of the day. What is most striking compared to today's society, is that money was willingly collected to give each soldier ten cigarettes. I suspect that the public would respond slightly differently today!

Nevertheless, this example summarises why the WVS are considered so fundamental to the war effort on the home front. One day, you are told that a small group of anonymous men are coming to stay in your home town for Christmas. Before they arrive, you do all in your power to raise a significant amount of money to buy two luxury items for a group of complete strangers. Before the Second World War, society had never been so united. Without the WVS pulling on the strings, those soldiers would not have experienced such a welcoming Christmas.

In the light of all this sunshine, next time you go to eat a chocolate bar and half of it has melted all over your hands, think of those soldiers returning from the front line to a sea of friendly faces holding chocolate and cigarettes.

Thank you for helping us bring these Hidden Histories back into the light.
If possible, please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Best wishes,

Jacob Bullus
Archive Assistant

MY FINAL BLOG

Nine months ago, I started working on the digitisation of these wonderful Narrative Reports and here we are at the end of that journey. How it has gone so quickly I will never know.

As of 10am on Tuesday, all the Narrative Reports from 1938-1942 will go online and will be available for all to enjoy. (Don't worry, we will send a link to the reports on the day so you haven't got to trawl through the internet trying to find them).

These past nine months have been thoroughly enjoyable for me and I have loved interacting with everyone that has supported this project. Quite literally, we couldn't have done it without you!

You will all be used to me sharing a snippet of an interesting story that I have discovered in these reports. So as a final treat, I thought I would show you a complete Narrative Report that beautifully describes the selfless work of the WVS. Adequately named, An Appreciation, it pulls together everything I have been writing about for the past nine months.

AN APPRECIATION.

The "WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY SERVICE" is now famed throughout the land
As a most efficient body, always keen to lend a hand.
So if you find it difficult to clear up any mess
Just make an application to the "W.V.S.".

They run a "HOUSEWIVES SECTION", which will always render aid
To stricken fellow-beings after any "Nazi" raid;
Giving refuge to the homeless and, in countless other ways,
Spread the "Milk of human kindness" one remembers all one's days.

"REST CENTRES" for the "BOMBED-OUT" needed organising skill,
A problem tackled bravely with astonishing goodwill.
Food, clothing, blankets, bedding are ready, if required,
By homeless, worn-out comrades, who may be sick and tired.

They manage "CLOTHING DEPOTS", filled with garments, boots and shoes,
Where people, having "PERMITS", may go inside and choose!
All things are given freely, to those who've suffered loss -
Our thanks are due for much to "THE AMERICAN RED CROSS".

Then "SALVAGE" is another of their many acts of grace -
A very strenuous business, carting things from place to place!
Our FORCES much appreciate, books gathered from this source,
Which brings in other articles of usefulness, of course.

"QUEENS MESSENGERS" - those mobile vans - run by this gallant band
In raids, all stand-by, ready, to meet the least demand
For food and drink, by workers, the police and "N.F.S",
So busy, when the time comes, in clearing up the mess!

They staff the "BRITISH RESTAURANTS", feed thousands every day,
Where one procures a hearty meal for very modest pay.
These useful "Cafeteria" have proved themselves a boon
These days of rush and bustle - one can feed, and leave, quite soon!

In "FRUIT PRESERVING CENTRES" these willing workers toil -
Bottling, canning, simmering, bringing juices to the boil.
Despite the heated atmosphere they have been known to sing
A pretty little ditty - "O WASP, where is thy Sting"?

The "VOLUNTARY CAR POOL" is very much in use -
But watchful care is taken in preventing its abuse.
Many Government Officials, whose business calls for speed,
Have reason to approve this really, very pressing need.

There is a "CENTRAL OFFICE" where these duties filter through,
Which give the "ORGANISER" quite a lot of work to do:
Statistics, Letters, Filing, and callers to be seen.
(With stacks of forms and papers to be filled in, in between)!

This Wonderful, Valiant, Sisterhood, so splendid and serene,
Are known throughout the Country as "THE WOMEN WEARING GREEN".
They save the Nation Millions; their one aim is to see
An end to all hostilities, THE WORLD - at PEACE - set FREE!

Unfortunately I do not know the author of this brilliant poem, but it originated from Axbridge in Somerset. It perfectly summarises all the activities that the WVS had been working so tirelessly on throughout the Second World War.

I would just like to thank everybody that has supported this project. All of us here at the archive are ever so grateful for your generosity. This really is the first

time that these irreplaceable documents of our civilisation have been fully exposed to the world. That would not have been possible without your unwavering interest in these histories that are no longer hidden away. Also, thank you for putting up with my blog on a Friday afternoon, it has been really rewarding for me to share all these memories with you.

The real heroes of course, are the Women in Green. Without their unrelenting efforts to just about every job in the country, the nation would have been a little bit less bright.

Matthew will be providing you with a final update on Wednesday to let you all know what we are planning to do with this blog in the future.

Please make sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter if possible.

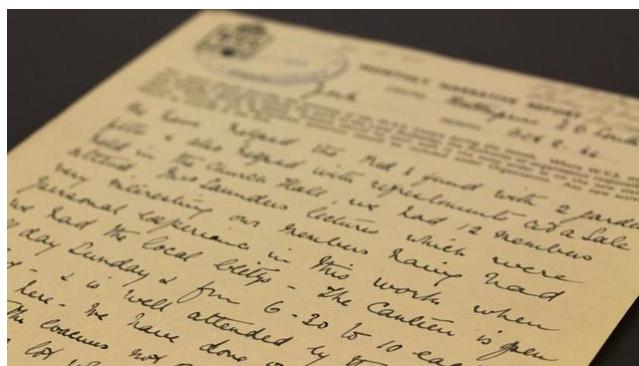
Have a wonderful weekend.

Best wishes,

Jacob
Archive Assistant

BREAKING NEWS – THE DIARIES ARE NOW ONLINE!

The day is finally here, launch day and now you can access those interesting and hidden stories which you, our Kickstarter supporters, generously funded the digitisation of in May 2016.



As you know Jacob has been working hard over the past nine months to capture the stories of members of WVS who volunteered on the Home Front and now 1938-1942 is available for all to see.

You can read digital copies of the reports which make up the vast diary of over a million women through our [online catalogue](#) searching your local area or county. If you need any assistance please contact our [enquiry service](#). Please note that we are expecting a lot of people to be exploring this fascinating archive so at times the catalogue may be slow but do please be patient and keep investigating I am sure you'll be surprised by what you find.

Today we are holding a launch event at the Conrad London St James which was our former Headquarters in Tothill Street between 1938 and 1966 where Lady Reading with four other women, in a tiny room which they barely fitted in, formed the Women's Voluntary Service's for ARP. We will be posting an update tomorrow to tell you all about the celebrations but in the meantime you can follow us [@RVSarchives](#) and Royal Voluntary Service on Twitter to get the latest information.

Happy searching and thank you for all your support

Jennifer
Royal Voluntary Service Deputy Archivist

FINAL KICKSTARTER UPDATE



The past year seems to have flown by, especially for me, but here we are at the end of what has been a fantastic project.

This is our 54th and final Kickstarter update, but we still have a few surprises in store.

Yesterday we placed 31,500 pages of our UNESCO UK Memory of the World inscribed Narrative Reports online from 1938-1942, three and a half thousand more pages than we had promised.

I hope you all agree that the wait has been worthwhile and that this fantastic new resource about the role of women during the Second World War will make a big difference to our understanding of that period in our nation's history.

At our launch event Yesterday in London at our original Headquarters (where all these reports were received, read and then stored for so many years) we were able to share some with those that attending, including some of our wonderful backers.

Our campaign was so successful that while we have exhausted all of the money raised directly through Kickstarter on completing the project, the publicity brought us in donations outside Kickstarter and we are therefore going to be

able to keep Jacob on and carry on digitising (much to either Jacob's joy or perhaps horror!). We hope to reach the end of the war in 1945 by April next year before we completely exhaust our funds.

If you want to follow along with our progress, Jacob will be contributing to our Heritage Bulletin Blog on the Royal Voluntary Service website once a month and continuing to post on Twitter. Many of you are signed up to receive our e-mail reminder about the blog, but you can at find it here www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/hbblog if not.

From the bottom of my heart thankyou again for all your support and enjoy finding out more about the million women of the WVS.

Goodbye and very best wishes

Matthew McMurray, Royal Voluntary Service Archivist