

Books on Wheels



Books on Wheels services bring books to people unable to visit libraries. Readers choose from a range of books brought to them by volunteers. Volunteers would also have time to chat and some also provided practical help such as posting letters and changing lightbulbs.

WVS first provided library services to the armed forces during the Second World War. The WVS had a travelling library for the forces in September 1940 at RAF Balloon Barrage HQ. In 1942 "During one period of six months Edinburgh WVS sent out 16,000 books on loan" to members of the armed forces.¹

The phrase, Books on Wheels, was first used in December 1960 when a service was started by Plymouth WVS when the City Council, purchased them a van.² It was called Books on Wheels in order to identify the service as being run by the WVS and also to avoid confusion with the mobile libraries which were run by the council.³ From 1968 more and more schemes were being introduced and it was officially launched across the country in 1974.⁴

WRVS's 'Books on Wheels' Film was produced to help volunteers start new schemes and by 1976 there were 200 schemes which grew to 2,000 by 1981. Social Services, Home Helps and Meals on Wheels deliverers would recommend people for the scheme.

WVS/WRVS advertised for volunteers encouraging husband and wife teams, mothers with school children and in 1980s secondary school pupils. Volunteers usually used their own cars to deliver books, occasionally WRVS vans were available. Books were delivered to people who were housebound, disabled, young mothers and childminders. WRVS did not just provide books; cassettes and jigsaws were also delivered.⁵

Today Royal Voluntary Service runs Books on Wheels services taking Books, DVDs, CDs and Audio Tapes to older people in Great Britain.

¹ Norman Watson, *WRVS in Scotland Seventy Years of Service*, Black and White Publishing Ltd, 2008

² WRVS/HQ/NR/R7/CB-1960/PLM/Dec

³ RVS A&HC, 718, *A Story of Books on Wheels*, n.d.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ RVS A&HC, 811/4, *Books on Wheels*, *Books on Wheels [Film] 1971*, *Notes on Books on Wheels 1976*, *WRVS Books on Wheels 1981*, *General Information leaflet for WRVS Members and Helpers: Books on Wheels 1983 and 1985*.