Half a Century of Voluntary Service

A Commemorative History of Community Service Volunteers

Michael Walsh

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Foreword

By

The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP

Such is the impact of Community Service Volunteers on anyone who has had connection with them that I cannot remember when I first started as a Trustee, and after stepping down (after becoming a Minister) I cannot detach myself from feeling that somehow I am still there!

My own commitment to volunteering started way back when I was 16, visiting Mrs Plum who lived a couple of miles away from the boarding school which I was attending at the time. It was Mrs Plum who taught me so vividly that this was a two-way street. When I went to say my farewells as I moved back to my beloved Sheffield at the end of my course, it was Mrs Plum who said, “I really hope, David, that I have been of some use to you, and some help over these last two years!” I of course had gone to say exactly the same to her!

So CSV taught me that the development of self-worth and self-esteem by a young person was matched by the value gained from their giving of time and energy, by the recipient of a service, or a community that saw the gain around them.

Linked as I believe it is to the concept of active citizenship, to a sense of identity and belonging, it is crucial that we build on the experience of these years, we develop new ways of reaching and supporting young people and, as I hope, joining together organisations with similar objectives and the same commitment to caring and to service, so that we can create a bigger canvas than any single organisation can achieve alone.

It was, however, the testimony of young people themselves that made the most profound impact of any of my connections with Community Service Volunteers. Yes, we could oversee the general programme of work; yes, we could help in ensuring governments of whatever persuasion understood the importance of volunteering and of practical support to make it work. In the end, though, it was the young people speaking out about the change in their lives, the confidence they now felt, the ability to hold their own in conversation and to go for the job of their choice, that was so inspiring.

The original driving force of Alec Dickson, the energy and tenacity of its long-standing Executive Director Elisabeth Hoodless, and the handover of the baton to the experienced and modernising Lucy de Groot, link history with the present, and founding principles with the modern imperative which sees once again one in five of our young people under 25 without work or education.

Anniversaries come and go, but the lessons we learn are the bedrock on which we can continue building for the future. These words themselves say it all: the commitment and strength of community, the delivery of service, and the belief that volunteering has a special place in our civil society, as it draws not on the imperative of income, nor the unavoidable outcome of compulsion, but instead on the willingness to give.

That is why Community Service Volunteers have been able to give so much to so many, and why the value which has been added to our society must give us encouragement to build for the future.

House of Commons 22 March 2012
Preface

by

Lucy de Groot

Michael Walsh’s excellent review of CSV’s first 50 years allows us an opportunity to reflect on its pioneering approaches and how, through the decades, volunteering has become a central tenet of a civil and civilised society.

The notion that everyone has a right to contribute to society and volunteer was, and in some respects still is, quite radical. CSV believes that when we give we also receive and that this opportunity to be active members of society is fundamental to democracy.

Starting from that principle changes how we see people and how people see themselves. Those that have received can, and do, become those that give, and with that comes a sense of self-belief and belonging that is essential to be part of a good and inclusive society. It turns notions of dependency on their head through supporting people to become independent in their own right by the very act of volunteering.

We don’t see old people, young people, disabled people or those that are disadvantaged and vulnerable as problems but as the solution. They may be isolated and alone, excluded and marginalised, but we believe in their potential and help them find a better future. Change takes time, patience, investment and risk. We won’t always get it right but we won’t give up.

We bring people together to be involved in social action that changes themselves and those around them. This commitment to active citizenship is at the heart of the CSV ethos. When I ask people what it means for them to get involved I am told so many times, “It’s changed my life.” It remains core to CSV that “helping others is a right not a privilege.”

Our volunteers come from every walk of life and every community across the UK. What unites them is a profound belief that they have something to give to others and something to get back. The benefits are mutual. With over three million volunteers involved since 1962 we have an impressive track record and basis for the future.

Over the decades CSV has risen to new challenges, always looking to put practical and realistic approaches in place that address real issues. Innovation, professionalism and determination to help everyone contribute have been at the heart of our mission. At times, it has been a struggle to find the money to match our ambitions. In this age of austerity and very tough times we will have to think ever more radically and creatively about how we meet the challenges of the next 50 years.

We can do that by renewing our mission, building strong local and national relationships and sparking a new 21st century sense of giving relevant to people of all ages and backgrounds. We can provide people in need with another chance, a chance to change, to grow, to fulfil their potential and by doing so become valued members of a community that cares for each other and works together for the common good. Together we can build a stronger society for everyone.
Beginnings

In a letter of 23 January 1980 to Mike Geston in Northern Ireland about celebrating the “Coming of Age” of Community Service Volunteers, the organisation’s founder, Alec Dickson, wrote: “The only person who knows precisely to the very day when our first volunteer left for his project is my wife, and she states categorically that it was 23 April 1962 when we despatched one Nigel Potter from London to Glasgow, where he worked marvellously well in a boys’ Approved School ... throughout the summer”. The young Mr Potter was understandably nervous about his assignment. “It might as well have been the remotest part of Ghana”, Dickson reflected later, “so manifestly apprehensive was he of what an Approved School might prove to be” [p 116]. Dickson himself was almost as uneasy as he travelled with Potter to Euston station to put him the train to Glasgow, effectively to launch this new enterprise. “There is no organisation yet, Nigel”, Dickson told him. “You are CSV. It depends on you – and on us.”

Although always deeply concerned about the welfare of his volunteers, keeping in touch with them in frequent, long and (almost) always friendly and encouraging letters, everyone agreed, and that included even his business-like wife Mora, that Alec Dickson was a rather difficult character. “We know”, Mora said to Elisabeth Hoodless just after she had joined CSV, “that my husband is a great man. We just have to find ways of working round him”. And, in a contrary kind of way, it was Dickson’s challenging personality that brought Community Service Volunteers into existence.

Dickson had been a journalist, a soldier, an educationalist and – as and when required – a relief worker. For the details of his life, see the box below.

Box 1

Alec Dickson (Alexander Graeme Dickson) was born in Ruislip, Middlesex, on 23 May 1914 – the very same day as the pioneer development economist and environmentalist Barbara Ward, the future Lady Jackson of Lodsworth. Alec's father was a civil engineer, working on the construction of railways in South America, Asia and Africa. Consequently he was abroad a good deal, and Alec grew up very close to his mother. He went to Rugby school, which he did not much like, but despite that retained a surprising reverence for the British public school system. After Rugby he went to New College, Oxford, where he read modern history, graduating with a second in 1935. After a brief period as a private secretary to Alec Paterson, one of the prison commissioners in the Home Office with whom he visited Berlin, he embarked on a career in journalism, first on the Yorkshire Post and then on the Daily Telegraph. No doubt thanks to his reporting from Germany and then from Czechoslovakia, where, after the German invasion, he abandoned journalism for relief work, he was high on the Nazi hit-list should Hitler ever have successfully invaded Britain.

The war saw him commissioned in the Cameron Highlanders, though he was transferred to the King’s African Rifles and spent most of his time in East Africa. After the war he was posted to Berlin, to engage once again in relief work, but in 1948 he went to work in West Africa on educational and developmental projects. His most remarkable achievement was the establishment, with a colleague who had worked at the Outward Bound centre, of a training school at Man O’ War Bay in the Southern Cameroons – though it later moved to Nigeria when the two Cameroons, French and British, united to form one country. The undoubted success of the Man O’ War Bay experiment was a defining moment for Dickson. In their Life of Kurt Hahn, the founder of Gordonstoun school and co-founder of the Outward Bound Trust who was something of a hero to Dickson, Hermann RQ’hrs and Hilary Tunstall-Behrens wrote, “It is significant that Mr Dickson first saw a spirit of adventure among his students [at Man O’ War Bay] when they were undertaking constructive work with a purpose – that of helping a community” [p. 186]. It was this
insight he put into practice in the foundation both of VSO and CSV. As his wife wrote “He was convinced of the value of training in sudden confrontation with the unexpected, mentally as well as physically” [p55], a conviction that was put to the test when two of the students died climbing Mt Cameroon.

In 1951 he married Mora Robertson (1918-2001) who had come down to London to study at an art school and had taken lodging with Dickson’s mother in Wimbledon: it was Dickson’s mother who suggested that the two marry. Mora capitalised on their frequent journeyings to write travel books which she sometimes illustrated herself. She also composed a number of biographies and in A Chance to Serve compiled her husband’s memoirs from his speeches, notebooks and diaries. They had no children, but it was a happy marriage, and Mora became a very capable, and long-suffering, assistant in his many enterprises. They travelled widely as Dickson’s advice was sought on projects, especially youth projects, by many governments and organisations, both inside and outside the Commonwealth. He received recognition in the form of honorary doctorates from Leeds and Bristol, and, having been appointed MBE in 1945 for his work on British propaganda in East and North Africa, he was created a CBE in 1967: one may speculate that it was his impatience with civil service bureaucracy, with which, as the director of CSV he had often to deal, that stood in the way of a knighthood. When on one occasion the Home Office refused CSV further funding to support its work with boys from Approved Schools because of cutbacks – “We are no longer allowed to have breakfast on the train”, complained the official with whom he was dealing – he slapped 29 pence on to the desk in front of him saying it was payment for his coffee, and stormed out. “It is the gospel of St Stephen, the patron saint of Westminster and Whitehall: ‘I was a hungrier and ye offered me liaison facilities! I thirsted and ye gave me a co-ordinating committee’”, he once wrote in an article. It is perhaps worth noting that by the time Dickson had returned to his desk, the Home Office had found the required funding. The fault, perhaps, was not always on the side of the civil servants. He was not an easy man with whom to get along. “My determination not to have a row with him”, Elisabeth Hoodless, his successor as director of CSV, has remarked, “was even greater than his tendency to fall out with the people with whom he worked.”

In the early 1980s he was diagnosed with cancer of the prostate, and retired from full-time involvement with CSV. He died from cancer at his home in Chiswick on 23 September 1994.

When in the July of 1954 Dickson sailed back from Nigeria to Britain, he had no immediate prospect of work, and no particular skills which might commend him to an employer. He had independent means, however, and time on his hands. For a couple of years he headed a UNESCO mission to Iraq, which got nowhere. Then in October 1956 he was asked by the British Council of Churches to drive a mobile canteen to the Austrian border with Hungary. Its purpose was to assist those who were escaping across the frontier after the suppression of the Hungarian uprising against Communist rule. His service there lasted only two weeks, but during that short time he and Mora were deeply impressed by the dedication, and the creativity, of the international group of students who had turned up to help the refugees.

Late the following year he was invited by his brother Murray, at the time the Director of Education in Sarawak, to travel out to Borneo to report on programmes of community development in what was still a British colony. This experience, too, affected him deeply, and on his return he addressed a gathering of the British Association for the Advancement of Science about his trip. His theme was that money and skill, though necessary, were not enough for the proper evolution of what was then called the Third World. The problem was not development aid as such, he asserted, but the manner of its delivery.

He had already called together a small group to discuss what eventually came to be called Voluntary Service Overseas, and sketched out his ideas in an article written in January 1958 in which he proposed to offer “adventurous service” for a period of anything from four to 18
months to young men between the ages of 17 and 23. With the backing of Christian Aid 12 were chosen to leave in the September of that year for service in Sarawak, Nigeria and the Cameroons, all places known to Dickson, and where he had contacts. Two years later, in January 1960, VSO came officially in existence, sending from an office in the Royal Commonwealth Society 60 volunteers to 18 different countries.

While VSO was an almost instant success in the recipient countries, what it lacked back home was the formal backing of the British government. It was far otherwise in the United States. “The Americans have made a great national drama out of their Peace Corps,” mused the journalist Patrick O’Donovan in The Observer. “The British have mumbled theirs. They have buried it under a clumsy headstone called Voluntary Service Overseas. They have kept quiet about it. And yet it is the first of its sort and it justifies the sort of civilised pride that has taken the place of Imperial Pride.” The piece was not entirely accurate. In particular he attributed the founding of VSO to a bishop. Alec Dickson was very much a Christian, though of a distinctly non-denominational sort, a weekly “taster” of worship in whatever form took his fancy, but he was definitely no bishop.

O’Donovan was right, however, about the USA. Across the Atlantic VSO was much admired – and promptly emulated by President John F Kennedy when he created the Peace Corps. Shortly after Kennedy had established the Corps, he invited Dickson to travel to the United States to study it. Dickson was impressed. Unlike the hand-to-mouth early years of VSO the Peace Corps had in Washington a staff of 250 and, as he discovered rather to his distress, at least two territories, at the time still British colonies, Jamaica and North Borneo, were applying for Peace Corps members to work in these territories. He flew back to England more than ever determined to expand VSO. He arrived in London, however, only to find that the VSO committee had restructured itself, leaving him without a role. Administration had never been one of his strengths, and the management committee of VSO seems to have felt he was giving too much time to the volunteers themselves and not enough to running the organisation he had founded. In the circumstances he believed he had no alternative but to resign.

Even while the greater part of Dickson’s abundant energy was devoted to starting VSO, he was also sending young men to do voluntary work in Britain. He gave an account of what happened in the CSV Annual Report for 1979-1980. He wrote: “At a conference of Personnel Officers in Birmingham in the Winter of 1958 – when the original VSO volunteers had only just started their first assignments – Michelin’s representative rose to ask whether there were not comparable challenges in Britain that might be tackled by some of their apprentices. ‘Yes’ was the only possible answer that could be given off the cuff, if credibility and face were not to be lost. So, shortly afterwards, Henry Leigh left his workbench in Stoke-on-Trent to serve at the Turner Memorial Home of Rest in Liverpool – an experience he himself described in a moving report as ‘Adventure into service’.”

Dickson’s contact in Stoke-on-Trent was George Webb, the training officer at Michelin’s tyre factory. Together they thought up a scheme involving not just the one young man mentioned in the Annual Report but three more Michelin employees from the Stoke factory, placing them in situations far different from those to which they were accustomed. The period of the placement was to last a month. Henry Leigh went to work in what was an old men’s home on Merseyside, another went to Britain’s only leper colony, located in Essex, and the third was required to involve himself in social work in Notting Hill, then, unlike now, a very run-down part of London. The experiment was a great success, and Michelin’s George Webb became one of the members of the small committee which eventually brought Community Service Volunteers into existence. The other members were the Congregationalist minister Dr Hubert Thomas who was on the management committee of a big London hospital and chaired the CSV proceedings, Michael Dower of the Civic Trust, by far the youngest of the group who had made a name for himself engaging volunteers on what would now be called environmental projects, and, as well as the
Dicksons themselves, Tim Newell Price, then of the Student Christian Movement in Schools who was later to become a lecturer in a College of Education. “Without Mr Newell Price”, said Dickson when in June 1970 Newell Price decided to resign from the committee, “there would have been no CSV, since it was he who had called the initial meetings and given life to the scheme with help from the Christian Education Movement.” [Minutes June 1970] The name they chose was influenced by VSO – albeit negatively. “When it came to a name”, Mora Dickson later recalled, “VSO had suffered at conferences or public meetings from always appearing alphabetically at the end of indexes or lists. Though neither catchy nor inspiring, Community Service Volunteers (CSV) answered this need.

The original funding, a small amount of money, was contributed by a couple of trusts because they had confidence in Dickson personally: the Gulbenkian Trust undertook to provide £2000 a year for three years. The first office of the nascent organisation, as that of VSO had once been, was the Dicksons’ home, Acacia House in Mortlake, West London. CSV “started back in 1962 with a question,” he once explained in a lecture. “Voluntary Service Overseas – born off our kitchen table some three years earlier – had already demonstrated that young people from Britain had something of value to give to developing countries. Yet had we not got jungles and wildernesses at home which called out equally for our help?” This account, incidentally, though true, is misleading. The kitchen table was indeed the Dicksons’ desk, but it had been moved out of the kitchen to their bedroom and, as Elisabeth Hoodless was later to observe, it was this twin-bedded room rather than the kitchen which became the office.

But quite apart from the geography of the enterprise, there was another crucial difference between VSO and CSV. In the former there was a rigorous vetting and selection process, but this was not true of the latter. “To serve overseas, in other people’s countries, is a privilege – and so selection is inevitable. But to serve Britain, your own country, that is your right,” he often insisted, rather to the surprise of his audience who expected the last word in the sentence to be “duty” [p117]. As a later Annual Report, that for 1976-1977, was to put it, “One of CSV’s main aims is to establish that helping others is a right and not a privilege.”

But if it were a right, then there were implications: volunteering had to be open to everyone. One of the first decisions of the committee was that no one was to be turned away if they offered themselves for service, a principle which was soon put to the test when a blind girl applied to CSV. She had been so long on the receiving end of voluntary services, she said, that she now wanted to give something back. The existing voluntary organisations she had applied to join had all turned her down because of her disability. Alec Dickson accepted her. And, as the Annual Report for 1966-67 recorded, CSV had begun actively to seek volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds. The policy paid dividends. A trust made a large grant to CSV in 1968 for a four-year programme exploring the possibility of community service by the disadvantaged. In the Annual Report just quoted Dickson wrote, “Fifteen years ago, when CSV came into existence, volunteering suggested that society consisted of those who gave and those who received. Over a long period we have demonstrated that this division is not immutable: the handicapped can be helpers and the disadvantaged can become donors.” That everyone was welcome to join CSV was something of a mantra. It must have come as a surprise, then, to members of the committee when in April 1977, after a discussion about some especially tricky problems related to psychiatric patients, “Dr Dickson emphasised that CSV had never been committed to taking absolutely everybody”, as the minutes of the meeting reported.

But the emphasis at first was naturally on the able-bodied, school leavers, police cadets, industry apprentices, any young man or woman between the ages of 17 and 24. What it offered was full-time service ranging from a few months to a year. “The endeavour is concerned not just to place candidates in projects, but to explore new patterns of service, to expand the role of the volunteers in society, and to discover what contribution the young can make to the care of the
community,” explained CSV’s first published pamphlet. “The aim is involvement”, said Dickson, “the involvement of young people in voluntary service, in social work, in the care of others, to the benefit of Britain and the enrichment of their own lives”. As an 18-year-old volunteer remarked after working with immigrants in Manchester, “The one who has been helped most is me”.

Volunteers came from a variety of backgrounds, but a good many were police cadets – some forces eventually sent all their cadets – often sent to work in Borstals or prisons, and the experience clearly benefitted them as much as it did the inmates (for one early CSV experience, see Box 2). But just occasionally there was what might be called a conflict of interest. One cadet, put to work not in a prison but in a boys’ club in London, paid too close attention to the state of the boys’ motor scooters and reported to the local police station any infringements he noticed. He found himself in court giving evidence against one of the boys. Dickson was aghast, but the cadet was defended by his chief constable. On another occasion a cadet, acting as an escort to a Borstal boy, found himself arrested by mistake. The chief constable in this instance found the affair highly amusing, and told him it was valuable experience. “Now you know what it is like to be locked up”, he said, “I wish I could arrange that for every new constable joining my force.”

[Interview with EH] One volunteer, not a cadet, identified himself too closely with the culture of the inmates of a Borstal and his manager had to write to Dickson to express his alarm. Working in a prison environment certainly did not suit everyone. One had to be sent elsewhere after only two days: the claustrophobia reduced him “to near hysteria”.

Box 2

My name is Martin Stephen. I was a CSV for six months 1966-67, working as a child supervisor in Leeds and Oxford Remand Homes. I went on to become Headmaster of the Perse School, Cambridge, and High Master of both the Manchester Grammar School and of St Paul’s School, London. Alec changed my life. I think it was illegal to send a 17-year-old to work in one of the toughest young offenders’ institutions in the UK, but such minor things didn’t bother Alec. From having had twelve years in education without being given a single position of responsibility, I found myself in sole charge of 35 11-17 year-olds, locked in a room with them for an hour and a half of their evening recreation. It was the first time anyone in authority had trusted me, and I grew up very quickly. My memory of Alec is his fondness for meeting late at night in railway stations as he was en route to somewhere. His only practical advice was to buy a plastic PVC mac – Alec’s equivalent of the ubiquitous towel in A Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, and about as much use. I would have died for Alec. Actually I nearly did on three occasions when inmates tried to kill me, once with a garden fork, once with a carving knife and once with a car. Alec could be the most infuriating man I have ever met. But I’d give an awful lot to be able to pick up the phone and talk to him now.

It would be easy to get the impression, reading newsletters and Annual Reports, that these early placements were an unmitigated success. It was not always the case. Apart from the young man who waxed almost hysterical from claustrophobia, there were numerous occasions when people had to be removed from their posts. In a report written in 1975 for the Committee on Children in Care it was remarked that over the past year 44 placements had been made, though only 33 of them had “proved mutually beneficial” which clearly implied that 11 had not. But that was still a more than satisfactory proportion and, indeed, for the most part placements were successful.

One letter, from the head of a Scottish junior school with, he said, many maladjusted boys, read “In short, Mr Dickson, I couldn’t have done without David, but I’d be glad of a breather before I have him back”. The placements could be emotionally draining. One young man working in a Borstal found himself helping an 18-year-old inmate to write a letter to his girlfriend on the death of their baby. It was not simply a matter of sending volunteers to Borstals; even some of
the inmates were allowed to volunteer their services, and on one occasion Dickson clashed with the Home Office because he wanted to publish a photograph which showed a young offender helping disabled people at a holiday camp. (For another account of a less than successful placement, see Box 3.)

**Box 3**

I was a CSV September 1980. After stating that I didn’t have any particular religious preferences at my interview on the Pentonville Road, I was placed in a Salvation Army Community Home with Education for about twenty-five “Deprived and Delinquent Teenage Girls” on the Dewsbury/Batley borders. Whilst I met one of my lifelong friends there my experience was not a wholly positive one. The staff seemed to have a very Victorian view of child care which gave the girls little respect/rights or care. One of my lasting memories is of seeing a girl being hit on the head with a Salvation Army bonnet because she “touched the Sunday-best socks.” I remember feeling very low whilst there although ironically – being as I was in a Salvation Army project – I did enjoy my escape to the pub after work for a quick couple of martini and tonics. I also enjoyed meeting up with other CSVs to go bowling in Leeds. My misery was however compounded by the presence of the Yorkshire Ripper being around at that time and I decided I couldn’t stay any longer – my year posting became four months. I then arranged my own Volunteering at a LA Community Home with Education nearer to my family and this was a much more positive experience. What I learnt was about the danger of putting too much faith in religion which can be to the detriment of children’s needs and welfare. The experience no doubt influenced my choice of career as a Social Worker, for which I am grateful, making sure that no child in my knowledge would have a similar experience of being in care.

Caroline Smith (née Woodcock)

There was also one tragedy. Charles Woollett was sent to work as a volunteer in a Borstal. He was accompanying a party of the boys when one fell into a river. Woollett jumped in and saved him – but he himself lost his life. At a committee meeting in March 1964 much sympathy was expressed to the young man’s family, but it is clear that Dickson was very shaken by the event. The tone of the Minutes suggests that he might have been thinking of giving up. One committee member, however, urged him on. “This tragic event”, she said, “should not prevent the scheme taking similar risks in future”.

Not that there were that many risks. The volunteers were put to work with the mentally and physically handicapped, in youth clubs and on race relations. In the first 12 months or so, volunteers had been placed in Approved Schools and Borstals, in mental hospitals and in the rather more congenial Cheshire Homes. They had even worked for the French ministry of education, dealing with African immigrants, and, in what might have been the riskiest venture of all, a group had travelled to what is now the Republic of Macedonia but was then part of Yugoslavia, to help reconstruct Skopje after its devastating earthquake. The earthquake, which occurred in the early morning of 26 July 1963 and killed around a thousand of the city’s residents, had a major impact on the development of CSV. Despite the early success of the Michelin apprentices, it had been Dickson’s original intention to find his volunteers among young people just leaving school, or even finding work for them while still at school. And this remained a major part of the programme. However, when the Skopje earthquake happened the British government supplied a large number of shelters for those rendered homeless – but no one to help erect the shelters. Dickson approached a number of firms to send volunteers from among their workforce, and they agreed. The success of this initiative encouraged Dickson to extend the age-range of those he hoped to recruit.
Much of the information of what the volunteers were engaged in doing in these first years comes from letters which Alec Dickson exchanged with the volunteers themselves. He was punctilious in keeping copies, and in preserving the letters which they sent to him. So in a letter of 29 June 1963 he reported from one volunteer to another, “A volunteer of ours who is working in a children’s home in South-East London described being awakened in the night by the sound of footsteps on the fire escape and, on peering out of the window, saw a small feminine figure disappearing with two suitcases. He leapt out after the figure, to discover that it was not an inmate, but a member of staff fleeing the place!” Volunteers often took it upon themselves to comment on how well-run were the institutions in which they placed, and the comments were frequently unfavourable. It was regularly remarked that the staff were at odds with one another. But only rarely did the not altogether satisfactory context of their voluntary labour prevent them enjoying their work. Dickson wrote to the same young man with whom he was corresponding about the fugitive member of staff urging him to write to his school about his experiences, with the possibility that his account might be published in the school magazine. “I know you signed the Official Secrets Act”, Dickson advised him, “but I think this can be interpreted reasonably liberally.”

Dickson was eager that the young man should write – even, apparently, at some risk of prosecution under the Official Secrets Act – because it is clear that at the time CSV was having difficulty in recruiting new volunteers, not something, it should be said, that was obvious from the Annual Reports which tended to give the impression of steady progress. In a letter of October 1964 to the Gulbenkian Trust, thanking them for their support and seeking further funds, Dickson wrote that over 200 institutions had accepted volunteers. But the readiness of Chief Constables to send their cadets – 20 of them had done so, he reported in the same letter – was not matched by other employers. The committee in January 1964 expressed its concern at the decision taken by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to join the clearing house for university applications. It caused consternation because the majority of volunteers had been drawn from among those who in the past had been kept waiting by these two universities to learn whether or not they had a place. One partial solution, launched at the end of the decade, was the “catalyst” project where the idea that one full-time volunteer should involve local, part-time volunteers.

An article in Punch magazine for 19th February 1964 revealed that the writer had clearly never heard of the existence of CSV: “Alas, it’s less glamorous to teach Nigerians in Stoke Newington than in Ibadan, Indians in Southall than in Chittagong, but it’s probably more useful. As well as VSO we badly need a VSH – H for Home,” she wrote. Publicity was much needed, and Dickson had a good many ideas about how to arrange it. He had, indeed, both a flair for public relations and a vast network of friends and acquaintances. He set about making sure that the nation at large knew of the creation of CSV. Just over a year after the Punch article, on 3 March 1965, there was a debate in the House of Lords “To call attention to the importance of giving to the youth of the nation greater opportunities for becoming aware of their social responsibilities.” The motion was proposed by the well-known television and film scriptwriter Ted Willis, who spoke to a brief provided by Dickson. Lord Willis was backed by a number of peers, including the Bishop of Bristol, the ecumenically-minded Oliver Tomkins.

In such ways CSV began gradually to be better known, and highly complimentary pieces started to appear. There was an article in Woman’s Own and another appeared in Honey, the young women’s magazine – “For the teens and the twenties” ran the tagline – then at the height of its success. The Newsletter for February 1966 reported that even the Daily Mirror had carried a report headlined “Spend the Hols in a Mental Hospital”. Not that all such publicity was unadulterated good news. One volunteer was so upset by CSV’s association with the Daily Mirror that he resigned from the organisation – but nonetheless stayed working in the post CSV had found for him.
A less controversial way of ensuring CSV became better known was through the invitation to prominent individuals to address the annual assembly. At the Annual General Meeting in September 1968 the guest speaker was Cardinal John Carmel Heenan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster: they had hoped for George Brown, who had recently resigned as Foreign Secretary, but he said no. Heenan told his audience “People of your age have had less time to collect prejudices: you are therefore able to see things clearly … A great deal of energy is wasted in protests … Anarchists – and talkers – just don’t get things done” (a very typical Heenan comment). “The young people who form CSV are different: they act as servants, but never as slaves … Almost all good work is person-to-person.” The year after the Cardinal it was the turn of Trevor Huddleston, just returned to London (as Bishop of Stepney) after eight years in Tanzania as Bishop of the Masai. He was clearly not at all enamoured at the situation he found back in Britain. Although we have a welfare state, he told the CSV volunteers, we have a sick society. His address proved to be not quite as encouraging as the Cardinal’s.

As the organisation grew, Dickson felt the need for an assistant. Fifteen months into CSV’s existence such a post was advertised. There were several applicants: Miss Elisabeth Plummer, who had just completed a course at the London School of Economics as a medical social worker, applied belatedly. (For Elisabeth Hoodless, née Plummer, see Box 4) She was selected – rather against Dickson’s better judgement, she thought at the time: he would have preferred a man. She was engaged to be married (the committee congratulated her on her forthcoming wedding to Donald Hoodless at their meeting in July 1965), was not intending to stay more than a couple of years, and in any case the appointment was only for a probationary period of 12 months. With her arrival the modest office space was becoming cramped. After the kitchen of Acacia House in Mortlake, the nascent CSV had first taken offices in Toc H House. Toc H was – and is – the international movement founded after the First World War by Dickson’s first employer, Alec Paterson, together with the Reverend Philip (“Tubby”) Clayton who in 1923 had become vicar of All Hallows by the Tower. He was still the vicar of All Hallows, though just about to retire, when CSV moved into the top floor of the Toc H house at no 15 Trinity Square and it was there that the first AGM was held, on 14 September 1963. But the accommodation was limited to just one room, and with the expansion of CSV it was not only proving too small, it was also costing too much. After negotiations for bigger premises within the Toc H building proved abortive, talks were begun with Toynbee Hall, the residence and meeting-centre in located in London’s Whitechapel.

Box 4
Elisabeth Plummer’s first taste of volunteering was at the age of four, helping make tea for prisoners of war. That was in 1945, just as World War II was coming to an end. She lived first in Bournemouth and then in Bristol: the nursery to which she was sent was near Bristol Zoo. Her father was a member of the Independent Labour Party and originally a pacifist, but he joined the army out of hostility to Germany, and found himself teaching at Sandhurst. After the war Elisabeth’s father worked in advertising in Birmingham and later London and the family followed him – except Elisabeth, who had an aversion to Birmingham and remained in Bristol, living with the parents of a school friend. She became head girl at her secondary school in Bristol, Redland High, where she is now a governor. She had not expected to do well at her A-Levels and, in 1959, went off on a trip to Russia expecting to return to study nursing. Instead she found herself with a place King’s College, Durham University – which was located in Newcastle and was later to become the University of Newcastle – where she studied Sociology. While at Newcastle she was secretary of the Labour Club, as was Donald Hoodless after her: both church-goers, they married in 1965. Immediately following her degree she went for a few weeks to Israel to work on a kibbutz and teach Hebrew: she studied the language in the morning and taught it to recent immigrants in the afternoon. She followed her degree with the Applied Social Studies course at the London School of Economics with the intention of becoming a medical social worker. When planning her studies she
proposed incorporating some voluntary activity into her course. “Imagine my surprise when my tutor asked if I wished to qualify” she later reported. “Naturally,” I replied. “You are aware” she said, “we are endeavouring to establish social work as a profession, so no more of this volunteer involvement if you want a career in social work.” At the end of her studies she spotted an advertisement for the post of Assistant Director of CSV, a rather grand title for what was still a one-man-and-wife enterprise. Much to her surprise, and at the age of 22, she got the job, though before taking it up she went to Washington DC as Vice President of the United Nations Students Association, where she heard Martin Luther King deliver his “I have a dream” speech. Donald and Elisabeth were married in Shoreham where her parents and sister eventually settled, and have had two sons. Both Donald and Elisabeth have continued to be active in local politics, each serving as a councillor in the London Borough of Islington where they have lived all their married lives – Donald was for a time the Leader of the Council. Elisabeth has also served as a magistrate in the juvenile courts. CSV, from which she retired in February 2011, has been Elisabeth’s only career and her history can be read elsewhere in these pages, but she has not let her job dictate her private life. She spends much time with her grandchildren, sharing with them her interest in ballet which, along with the Girl Guides, was one of the great passions of her youth. She is also a keen gardener at their country cottage: she has a particular interest in orchids and is rather proud of her skill in fostering them.

The Hall, which was opened in 1884 as a memorial to the social reformer Arnold Toynbee – the uncle of the historian of the same name – had been established in the East End as a centre for education and practical help, help especially for those who lived nearby. It was from there that Charles Booth researched his Life and Labour of the People of London and half a century later William Beveridge worked at Toynbee Hall on what was to become the foundation document of the welfare state. By the early 1960s, however, the Hall had fallen into disrepair and its programme of outreach to London’s East Enders largely abandoned. It was rescued in 1964 by the appointment as its warden of the influential economist Walter Birmingham (1913-2004), who was shortly afterwards joined as a volunteer fund-raiser by John Profumo, the former Conservative politician and Secretary of State for War, who had resigned from the government over an affair with Christine Keeler: Keeler was also, it transpired, having a relationship with the Soviet naval attaché. Birmingham and Profumo needed to find money urgently, and one way to do so was to rent out, even if at a very modest charge, the decaying tenement block which lay on Gunthorpe Street behind Toynbee Hall itself. The block was uninhabited, awaiting redevelopment. CSV could expand at will into empty rooms, if need be, simply by knocking holes in walls to link them up. Negotiations over the lease were relatively easy: Birmingham was at the time a member of the CSV committee.

It was indeed part of Dickson’s genius that he could persuade prominent figures to serve on his committee. Cardinal Heenan clearly made an impression. A couple of years after his AGM address he was invited to join the newly-created council. He courteously declined, but many of the great and the good agreed to do so for a fairly undemanding three-year term – though their involvement frequently lasted much longer. Among the first members was Ernst Schumacher, the author of Small is Beautiful, another was the Labour politician Richard Crossman. Robert Birley had been headmaster at Charterhouse School and Eton College, but at the time of his appointment to the council he was Professor of Social Science at London’s City University. George Thomas, shortly to become Speaker of the House of Commons, was another recruit.

The Council was Dickson’s way of associating people whom he judged to have influence with the work of CSV. He was always ready to exploit his connections, no matter how unreliable. When on 3 May 1965 CSV’s new offices were opened at Gunthorpe Street it was the Minister of State for Education, Denis Howell, who cut the tape. He was an odd choice. Dickson had lobbied widely in Whitehall and with Tom (better known as Tam) Dalyell, then a relatively new Member of
Parliament, went to see Howell at the Department of Education and Science. “The interview was most unsatisfactory”, noted Dickson, and that at the Ministry of Health was little better: it had “little enthusiasm for involving young people”. The Home Office was more obliging. There was a pleasant interview for those who were responsible for Approved Schools, but they could not undertake to pay any pocket money to the volunteers CSV was ready to provide. After these rebuffs and a later one from the Home Office’s prison department when he wanted to find a placement for a Borstal boy, he made efforts to cultivate more politicians in the hope of exercising greater influence in the future: one of those he had his eye on was the young Shirley Williams, elected to Parliament only some six months earlier. It was a deliberate policy, endorsed by the committee: a group of MPs sympathetic to CSV was to be fostered.

Such support was much needed. As has been seen, relations with the various government departments were not always good. As Dickson was later to write in the Annual Report for 1976-1977, “Politically and financially we have to convince the Home Office’s Voluntary Services Unit that marriages (even of convenience) are seldom made happier when one spouse harps continuously on about who holds the purse strings, still less by pressurising the other to become more like him/herself – particularly when the latter manifests such a passionate preference for monitoring as contrasted with creativity.”

Dickson might have reflected that Whitehall Departments were spending taxpayers’ money for which they had to account. Moreover part of the problem was that there were other voluntary bodies at work in the same field which were usually competing for the same funds. This occasionally led to some ill-feeling. Dickson accused one such body, the International Voluntary Service, of distributing a “very offensive circular describing other voluntary service organisations in very unpleasant terms”, and when the Department of Education itself wanted to develop leisure services for children, although CSV, IVS and Task Force had been consulted, he was put out to learn it was the director of Task Force who had been most in touch with the Department. Then the government’s own Young Volunteer Force Foundation came into being in November 1965 with a budget of £100,000 for a three-year period. Tim Newell Price, the chairman of CSV, declared it was a “quite an independent additional and unnecessary organisation, brought into being in a manner which has frustrated and all but alienated the potential good will and has as its director someone who fulfils none of the conditions suggested”.

Nonetheless the committee agreed “to try and avoid confrontation” with it – not always an easy option for a volatile Alec Dickson. Indeed, he announced a year later that “It was his considered view that it would not be possible to cooperate” because the Young Volunteer Force was in direct competition with CSV, and did not seem to realise it. He was further upset when a Trust rejected CSV’s appeal for a grant, but gave one to the Volunteer Force. Dr D Hubert Thomas, who after having been chairman of the executive committee from the beginning became President in January 1967 (Dickson said a President was needed because people kept asking who the President was), was clearly alarmed at the director’s approach. When the Department of Education wrote to CSV about various issues, he undertook to discuss with Dickson the tone of his replies before they were despatched. “Opposition would soften quicker by CSV infiltration than by head-on attack”, said the Treasurer.

Despite worries about funding and uneasy relations with government departments, CSV continued to expand. Partly this was through the Director’s own reputation as a speaker. He was constantly in demand in schools and elsewhere. In 1969, for instance, he was invited to address the annual conference of the National Union of Students. “To be confronted with a psychedelic sea of potential Che Guevaras”, he reported back, “can be a daunting experience.” Such occasions were geared at the very least to arousing in the young members of the audience the thought of offering themselves to CSV as volunteers. In addition the organisation itself was featured in a number of television programmes, about which more later, and these brought a considerable increase in recruits.
Expansion came about not only through publicity, but also through the enterprise of the volunteers themselves. A conference was held at High Wycombe in the summer of 1964 which drew in many of those already involved in CSV. They were keen for expansion, Dickson reported to his committee, but only as far as the quality of the volunteers allowed. They were on the whole opposed to there being regional CSVs, but proposed instead that volunteers should work in the regions through already existing organisations. In the event a regional office of a sort was opened the following year when someone was sent to Birmingham to coordinate youth community services, on a salary of £500 paid by CSV. It was, the committee judged, an unsatisfactory arrangement. Her work was to be overseen by the Birmingham Youth Volunteers Trust despite no part of her costs being met by the Birmingham City Council, and CSV had, they considered, inadequate representation on the Trust.

Volunteering in the mid-1960s, then, was very much in vogue, stimulated by government interest in increasing the number of people who offered their services to the community. But government plans were not fully thought out, and it was in any case more concerned with part- or spare-time voluntary commitment. As a consequence of this influx almost every local authority was eager to have its own volunteer bureau, sometimes with the cooperation of CSV, sometimes not. CSV had therefore to some extent to revamp its strategy: “Once we thought only in terms of long-term volunteers serving full-time away from home: today no longer. For more and more enquiries reach us about how we undertake community service locally,” said the Annual Report in 1967. A handbook on community service, Count Us In, was produced as well as a pamphlet, Service in Your Neighbourhood. But the Birmingham model, with a member of the CSV staff running local volunteers at CSV’s expense, was not one which was ever again adopted. It was unacceptable, the committee decided, to be in a position where they were obliged to find the funds but unable to oversee the work.

CSV’s very first pamphlet asserted that “This endeavour is concerned not just to place candidates in projects, but to explore new patterns of service, to expand the role of volunteers in society, and to discover what contribution the young can make to the care of the community.” They were brave words, but not so easy to deliver. Funding was always an issue. It was true, as the Annual Report for 1966-67 pointed out, that trusts and foundations were primarily interest in funding new enterprises, but for every new undertaking there were long-term implications. A grant from the Nuffield Foundation to develop new projects and expand the range of volunteers presented the Treasurer with particular difficulties. It was all very well to receive a fairly considerable grant for three years, he pointed out, but what happened then? New responsibilities would accrue which would then have to be funded. As a consequence more staff would be needed and their pay would have to be found from somewhere. It was in any case already problematic enough to recruit staff. An assistant director (Miss Plummer, now Mrs Hoodless, was by this time the deputy director) was advertised for, and the post proved hard to fill at the salary which was being offered. It was eventually agreed that salaries would be placed on a recognised national scale.

It was soon after the post of assistant director was advertised that Alec Dickson, who had been awarded a CBE in 1967, the same year that Elisabeth Hoodless was given a Churchill Fellowship to study the role of young volunteers on the USA’s “War on Poverty” campaign, decided to withdraw from the day-to-day responsibility for CSV. In June 1970 he became the honorary director, and the post of executive director was given to Elisabeth Hoodless.

The 1970s saw CSV become increasingly involved in national issues. The higher profile was signalled by two reports appearing in 1968. As the foreword put it, Rootless in the City studied a project to help “clusters of adolescent girls and young women living poignantly miserable lives, without effective home, family or friends” (p 7). The project proved not to be a success. That was no fault of those engaged upon it: the failure was put down to the intractable nature of the problem with which they were dealing. Early on the project’s organising committee approached
CSV for the assistance of two volunteers in return (as was almost always the case) for their pocket money and travel expenses. They worked in a Day Centre for these young women from May 1965 to March 1968 at a cost to the project, meticulously recorded, of £886.

A report on the project was commissioned from the National Institute for Social Work Training, and was written by Noel Timms, Professor in the Department of Social Science Administration at the London School of Economics. What he had to say about the two CSV volunteers is worth quoting at length, because it substantiates in a more structured way what was regularly reported in a more anecdotal fashion:

Initially, it does not perhaps seem very plausible that young girls without training in social work could help those of similar age going through extremely exaggerated versions of the same kind of emotional problems as themselves. Altogether four community service volunteers were employed at the centre at different times, and on the whole they showed considerable resilience in the face of very great strain. They were able to survive the experience, usually with some benefit to themselves, because of a number of factors. Firstly, they had a selection interview from the psychiatric consultant. Secondly, they obviously gained a great deal from the support, encouragement, and explanations of the project worker. Thirdly, they were not inhibited from reacting spontaneously and, unlike the project worker who found herself in an ‘unorthodox’ setting, were not confronted with the problem of whether or not their role could be defined as professional.

The volunteers clearly survived the experience, but did they also significantly help the girls who came to the centre? The project worker and the consultant both viewed their activities in a very positive light. The worker considered that the very factor of their nearness in age to the girls sometimes meant that they certainly initially aroused the girls’ curiosity. This is no superficial achievement, since the main initial task in contacting the girls was simply often to evoke some kind of response. The psychiatric consultant judged that the very fact that the volunteers were untrained enabled them to enter into the lives of the girls, sharing their experiences in a way that most professional workers would find very difficult (p36).

One chapter of the report is devoted to case histories, and from these it is clear how significant the work of the volunteers could be, one of whom spent an entire night in Soho tracking down two of the girls in the project, both of them drug addicts, and eventually succeeding in getting them back to hospital.

It is also clear from other cases covered in the report how closely the volunteers related to some of the more troubled girls they were trying to help. As Timms remarks of the homeless girls in his concluding chapter that perhaps “they saw the presence in the centre of the volunteers as an indication that at least some people in the ordinary community were concerned about them.” In the committee minutes for December 1968 Rootless in the City was hailed as a landmark in the progress of the organisation “since it describes the developments in a service which has been geared from the outset to use two CSVs.” The remark in the Annual Report for 1974-1975 that “One of the most important contributions that volunteers can make is their unorthodoxy”, seems amply borne out by Noel Timms’s study.

The second report was more important, though strictly speaking in itself of less immediate relevance to CSV. In 1965 the government had set up a committee under (Baron) Frederic Seebohm to investigate the structure of the welfare services. In 1968 it produced a document of more than 700 paragraphs and over 200 recommendations. “What the Seebohm Committee want”, said Baroness Brooke in a House of Lords debate in January 1969, “is one family service geared to meeting as many as possible of the needs of the family. These needs may be different, but they all spring from one background—the background of that family and its home.” She went on, “A strong local team of social service workers with adequate resources in training,
buildings and finance is a requirement for the set-up of this new department, together with the friendliest co-operation and support of all the voluntary services already in the field who have done so much pioneer work in the past, and without whom a community service in its fullest sense could not exist.”

In all accounts of the Seebohm Report it is the amalgamation of social service departments under the local authority which is highlighted, yet from CSV’s perspective the importance lay in what the Baroness summarised in the phrases quoted above, “the support of the voluntary services.” “Whereas last year left us wondering if anyone else but CSV had actually read the Seebohm Report”, remarked the Annual Report for 1969-1970 somewhat tetchily, “we can now point to a significant number of Local Authorities mainly through their Children’s departments, who are requesting volunteers for exciting new services … .” (For the experience of a Director of Social Services employing CSVs, see Box 5.)

**Box 5**

I first met Elisabeth Hoodless in 1965 when she was the feisty young vice chairman (no chairs in those days) of the Children’s Department for which the new London Borough of Islington was now responsible – and which I had just joined as an equally young Senior Child Care Officer. The Seebohm Committee was then beginning its review of future arrangements for personal social services and after a spell as an inspector at the Home Office, I returned to Islington in 1972 as Director of the new social services department. Elisabeth was by then well established as CSV’s volunteer director at its HQ, also in Islington.

It was therefore little surprise that she soon came knocking on the door asking about collaboration. Our department prided itself on its commitment to pushing the boundaries of innovative social and community work, and it was immediately clear that the mission of her volunteering programme resonated very strongly with what we were trying to achieve.

Ours was a young, enthusiastic and radical work force – its passions sometimes a little excessive for some. This was a period of general industrial unrest and the three-day week. Many had been active in the university “evenements” of the late sixties, and their propensity for taking to the streets continued. Field and residential social worker alike grasped eagerly at the offer of unpaid volunteer labour to advance their local programmes in what had become the most decentralised department in the whole country. Strong trade unionists though they had mostly become, I was often wryly amused that they were so happy to see the work force diluted by colleagues with such inferior conditions of service.

By the mid-seventies CSVs were everywhere in the department – in field-work teams, in day and residential centres for the disabled and elsewhere. Their volunteer contracts completed, a number later returned to social work having gained professional qualifications. Progressively, we began to rise to greater challenges from CSV and to take volunteers with a wider range of backgrounds, in particular young people in the last months of their custodial sentences in young offenders institutions. Some of these gave us a few roller-coaster rides, but the experience of the journey (and the occasional loss of the petty cash) was well worth it for all concerned.

*John Rea Price (Director of Social Services, London Borough of Islington, 1972-1990)*

And it was not only Children’s services. On 20 April 1968 Enoch Powell delivered his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech to a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham: the influx into Britain of ethnic minorities had become a major political and social issue. CSV attempted to rise to the challenge, but it did not prove easy. In January 1970 the Community Relations Commission attached twelve volunteers to Community Relations Officers. They set up youth clubs, organised programmes of tutoring, launched playgroups. But after only nine months the experiment was
terminated. This initiative was, nonetheless, an example of what CSV had been striving to develop, closer links with the immigrant community. At a meeting in May 1965 Dickson said he had met Maurice Foley, shortly afterwards to become a minister in the Home Office with responsibility for immigration, and announced he was expecting a joint conference on the role of volunteers in promoting racial harmony. The committee “recommended that one of the leaders of the coloured community be invited to serve on the CSV committee”, and although this did not happen, a couple of meetings later members were addressed by the Rev. Clifford Hill on “opportunities for service by immigrant people”, as the Minutes put it. But outreach to ethnic communities proved difficult, despite the efforts of individual volunteers: by October 1967 there had been just one recruit, an Indian boy in Birmingham. It was a constant struggle. Ten years later CSV approached the Commission for Racial Equality with a request for a grant to help recruitment among ethnic minorities. The request was rejected – but only two years after it had been made. It was not as if CSV had failed to make an effort. The arrival of the Ugandan Asians – nearly 80,000 of them were driven out by the Uganda dictator Idi Amin – “somewhat surprised [the] government” commented the Annual Report for 1971-1972 rather smugly, as it noted that a hundred CSV volunteers were ready to greet the exiles at Heathrow, Stansted and Gatwick.

Regrettably associated in many people’s minds with the influx of immigrants from the developing world was the steep rise in unemployment. From the end of the Second World War until the 1970s Britain had enjoyed more or less full employment: the small number of those out of work could for the most part be accounted for by employees taking a break while looking for a new job. But in the 1970s there was an inexorable rise. On 20 January 1972 the Speaker was obliged to suspend the sitting of the House of Commons because of the riotous scenes which ensued when the Conservative government of Edward Heath announced that the number of unemployed had topped a million. “I am not alarmed but I am very worried,” said the Employment Secretary. A decade later, almost to the day (26 January 1982), the government of Margaret Thatcher acknowledged that the unemployment figure was over three million: only once in the previous 10 years had the numbers of unemployed dropped back, and then only marginally.

Unemployment on this scale added to the hostility faced by immigrants. CSV volunteers were involved in a survey to gauge the extent of racial prejudice. They made the rounds of landlords with flats or houses to let in Manchester: first a black volunteer would call, and would almost invariably be turned away. Then a white volunteer would turn up and would, equally inevitably, be offered the accommodation. This work was undertaken under the direction of Dipak Nandy, who was one of the founding members of the Runnymede Trust, established by him and others in 1968 to combat racialism.

### Moving

The stay at Gunthorpe Street, in the premises attached to Toynbee Hall, proved very congenial. The staff of CSV and that of the Hall shared a canteen and got along merrily. It was therefore a shock when CSV discovered it had to move. John Profumo, as has already been remarked, was acting in a voluntary capacity as a fund-raiser at Toynbee Hall, and had been quietly soliciting money for some kind of a memorial to the former Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee: Attlee had held, though only for a brief time (1909-1910), the post of secretary at the Hall. It was a somewhat odd suggestion for Profumo, once a Tory minister, to make, even odder because Attlee, who died aged 84 in 1967, had not found during his time there Toynbee Hall’s brand of socialism at all to his taste. Nevertheless by the spring of 1972 enough money had been gathered to redevelop the tenement block which was so successfully housing the London offices of CSV.
The news came as something of a bombshell. A heavily pregnant Elisabeth Hoodless tried to arrange a sit-in by staff and volunteers but found herself out-maneuvered by Profumo and had to go searching for a new property to serve as CSV’s headquarters. She at first set her sights high. Both the Royal Mint building and the old offices of New Scotland Yard were lying vacant but neither, she was told, could be spared by the government. CSV offered to act as caretaker for Centre Point, the then new but empty office block at the junction of Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street, but that suggestion too was turned down. There was a fruitless appeal to the Queen. Hoodless even considered hiring a train and stationing it on some unused railway line, but that rather too adventurous a vision proved impracticable, convenient though it might have been for touring the country. Then on 9 October, while Hoodless was still on maternity leave, a call came from the Greater London Council at County Hall: CSV could have an empty, and distinctly dilapidated, property at the bottom of Pentonville Road, handily situated near King’s Cross rail terminus and London underground stations: the offer was gratefully accepted. A team from Feltham Borstal cleared out tons of rubbish and on 11 November the staff moved in, as did builders, plumbers and rat-catchers.

Just five months later, on 28 March 1973, there was a formal opening of the new offices by Sir Keith Joseph, then the Secretary of State for Social Services. Quite apart from the chaos of ladders, paint, the sound of drills and no toilet facilities (the Welsh Tabernacle down the street kindly made their toilets available), the staff was still camping out at Pentonville Road during the three-day week which was introduced by the Heath government to cut down on fuel resources made scarce by a wave of strikes. So for much of the time there was no heating and no lighting in the building. They struggled on, and eventually conditions improved. The Committee minutes for October 1976 record that the GLC was proposing that CSV be granted a 20-year lease on the property and, in May 1980, the freehold was also offered for what at the time an independent valuer regarded as far too large a sum. After a further two years of negotiation a figure was finally agreed, a mortgage for £103,000 was arranged with the National Westminster Bank, and 237 Pentonville Road became CSV’s permanent home.

Not that London was the only office. There were groups of CSV staff in Oldham and Leeds. There was also an office in Edinburgh where a Scottish Advisory Committee had already been established. In Belfast the CSV team worked with the Community Relations Council to encourage volunteering in schools. There was evidence in the Annual Reports of the steady growth in volunteers. Counted in numbers of hours, the Report for 1969-1970 records 4342 months of voluntary service, which was a 12% growth on the previous year. The following report announced 5162 months, a 20% growth, and the year after that, 1972-1973, showed a further 20% growth, up to 8216 volunteer months. The year after, it should be recorded, the pace lessened, the number of volunteers months only slightly up as costs spiraled and budgets were being cut back in a harsher economic climate: a “year of consolidation”, said the Report euphemistically.

But as unemployment grew over this period the government was eager to encourage volunteering. Dickson’s original intention, that of recruiting young men and women as they left school, was being overshadowed by the numbers offering their services from among police cadets, from industry, from among university graduates – and from Approved Schools. The increase in numbers reflected a very active recruiting drive in schools spearheaded by Dickson himself. “One of our governors was in tears,” wrote the head of one school, while the headmaster of the Jesuit Stonyhurst College was so taken by Dickson’s address to the boys that he seriously considered opening an Approved School in the college grounds. Dickson’s efforts were very effectively backed up by the Advisory Service’s “school and community kits”, which guided potential volunteers into seeking out and running projects. CSV, which had a penchant for acronyms, called them SACKs: “Give your teacher the SACK” was the catch-phrase. There was a variant with an equally catchy title: SCIP, the Schools Community Involvement Project. The
project, set up in 1985 to work with older people, (Growing Old in Britain Today”, a substantial pack of material written for 14 to 16-year-olds was published by CSV in 1980 in conjunction with Age Concern) had encompassed some 80 schools in and around Newcastle-on-Tyne. It expanded into other areas – Bristol (which produced a newsletter, SCIP Ahead), Salford and Northern Ireland. A SCIP teaching pack on working with travellers was produced specifically for the province of Ulster.

This manner of involvement with schools had not originally been Dickson’s own idea. When he first encountered community service among boys the programme had already been introduced into Sevenoaks School and at Eton. In both instances, it was reported, the voluntary work done by pupils, far from interfering with their studies, had enhanced their academic performance. Dickson seized the opportunity which presented itself to employ a master from Sevenoaks to roll out a similar programme in other schools around the country. For a while this worked well, but it required the facilitator to do a great deal of travelling around Britain, and eventually he left to become a member of the schools’ inspectorate. The task he had undertaken was then brought in-house, and the Schools’ Advisory Service was born. It was supported, though not as a staff member, by the Eton College master who had been behind the community service there, Arthur Rowe (1935-2008) who, after a relatively brief time as a teacher at Eton, his old school, became a lecturer in social administration at Edinburgh University and a consultant to the Home Office on voluntary service. From there he was taken on as a full-time a civil servant. Though hardly a typical Tory he moved to Conservative Central Office and in 1983 became an independent-minded member of parliament. He always retained a strong interest in volunteering, especially in schools, and went on to found the Youth Parliament. For a long time he served as a trustee of CSV. The Advisory Service which he helped to inspire had a long history within the structures of CSV, and some notable successes, but it was always difficult to fund. Though community service in schools survives in some areas of country, it has been much more successful in the USA where it is mandatory in roughly half the States of the Union.

One technique, already mentioned, for finding volunteers worked especially well. A survey showed that most came to CSV after hearing about it at school or in their colleges, often after an inspiring speech by Dickson. A school or some other organisation would then express an interest in becoming involved in volunteering but didn’t have the know-how so a young full-time CSV was designated a “catalyst” for that particular neighbourhood, and charged first with finding projects then matching projects to the part-time volunteers. The catalyst campaign succeeded to such an extent that it was sometimes difficult to find enough projects for the volunteers to undertake. There was a conference on the theme of catalysts in February 1968, and in his talk Dickson listed those he called “allies” in finding likely projects: milkmen, postmen, policemen, newspaper boys – and undertakers, who might be expected to know, Dickson pointed out, the people who had been recently bereaved were therefore lonely. In 1970 CSV produced a report entitled “Half a million Pairs of Hands” in which was estimated the shortfall in staffing over a whole range of services under a series of general headings such as Health and Welfare, Education, Conservation, the Environment and Defence: the numbers could be made up, suggested the report, by the 500,000 volunteers of its title. The Council, while welcoming the report, suggested it might be advisable to leave out Defence, and put more stress on emerging needs.
The arrival of computers into the offices of CSV caused great excitement. The Annual Report for 1970-1971 recorded that Honeywell, then a major player in the main-frame computer market, had given a thousand hours of computer time. They had offered that amount of access as a prize in a competition to be awarded to whoever came up with the most imaginative use of Honeywell’s facilities. The team put its head together – and won the thousand hours. But this was a one-off. What CSV needed was its own computer system, or at least access to one – this was, of course, long before the days of desktop machines. They were talking to IBM, though in the end it was the British company ICL based in Putney, South London that made a firm proposal of £48,000 worth of computers for only £10,000, an offer which was gratefully accepted. That, however, was not until 1981. Meanwhile there was a computer section of three people working on data concerning numbers of volunteers and projects, the Annual Report proudly noted in 1974. The following year the results were announced: from 1 Oct 1974 to 31 March 1975 (6 months), there had been a total of 1,150 volunteers, of whom 591 were men and 559 women. They had served in 554 projects, amounting to 3,373 volunteer-months. In the course of the 6 months CSV had actually placed 864 volunteers (463 men, 401 women) in projects. There was the added detail that no less than 122 had ended before date originally planned, some of them to take up paid work in the project. Only 17 had left at request of those in charge of a project, a remarkable tribute to the success of the selection process, both of volunteers and of projects to support.

Though environmental projects were becoming increasingly important, in this time of high unemployment a good many volunteers, some 250, were working with the homeless. This put a strain on CSV’s already struggling finances. The Home Office made a grant for 1975-1976 of £96,000, but CSV was also reliant on income from the projects they supported: such projects were expected to contribute something to CSV’s costs in return for the assistance volunteers gave them. At the very least, volunteers needed pocket money, which CSV supplied. The sum had been set at £1 a week when CSV began work. By 1975 it was four times that amount, and was about to rise even higher. It was hard to make ends meet. From 1974 to 1975 there was a massive expansion in hospital placements, but that had to be halted the following year because of the economic situation, though there was a considerable rise in the number of children’s homes which received volunteers.

There was also, almost as a corollary, an increasing number of children from care homes who volunteered to work with CSV. Reflecting on this, Dickson wrote in the 1976-1977 Annual Report, “Fifteen years ago, when CSV came into existence, volunteering suggested that society consisted of those who gave and those who received. Over a long period we have demonstrated that this division is not immutable: the handicapped can be helpers and the disadvantaged can be become donors.”

The same Annual Report, in one of the occasional efforts to impose a structure upon CSV’s very varied activity, listed the organisation’s five programmes of work:

1. Full-time volunteering for young people for a period of four months to a year – in all, there were annually 2,000 volunteers in this category;
2. An advisory service for schools and colleges;
3. Disadvantaged volunteers, including boys in Borstals during the final year of their sentence, and children in care;
4. The Media programme, involving at the time Granada, Thames and Ulster Television;
5. Youth employment, putting into full-time work some 500 young people through the government’s job creation programme.

The list was not exhaustive. The same Report noted, for example, that CSVs were heavily involved in recycling schemes, one of them backed by Reports Action, a Granada television presentation.
CSV Media

The involvement with the media came about almost by accident. Elisabeth Hoodless had known Angus (“Gus”) Macdonald – now Baron Macdonald of Tradeston – when they were both members of the Young Socialists: the Glasgow-born Macdonald had been the leader of the Young Socialists in the Gorbals. He had left school at 14 to take up an apprenticeship as an engineer in the Glasgow shipyards (along with the future football manager Alex Ferguson and the comedian Billy Connolly). After a brief flirtation in London with the extreme left, he became a more mainline socialist and Michael Foot gave him a post on the socialist weekly Tribune, from which he graduated to The Scotsman and then the Sunday Times, where he worked as part of the “Insight” team. In 1967 his reputation as an investigative journalist got him a job with Granada Television, where he rapidly rose through the ranks, and where he conceived the idea of using television to recruit volunteers for projects in the midlands. Given his long-standing friendship with Elisabeth Hoodless he naturally turned to CSV for advice and support, and Reports Action was born with a number of relatively unknown presenters, many of them later to become familiar figures in the media. CSV volunteers manned the phones during and after the broadcasts as calls came in from people who had seen the programmes and wanted to offer their services. Reports Action began to broadcast nationally on 7 November 1976. Granada began the series by putting out a 15-minute programme, but later lengthened it to 26 minutes: by the end of 1975 it had produced over 3,000 volunteers. CSV prepared, coordinated and backed up the programme, which was presented by a then relatively unknown, but now Baroness, Joan Bakewell (a labour peer) and by Bob Greaves. There was an evaluation: the CSV team arranged for research to be done into the impact of the broadcasts by the Mass Communications Department at Leicester University.

This media initiative was an instant success. CSV studied a similar Dutch operation, and then in 1976 the IBA, at the time the regulatory body for television broadcasters other than the BBC, recommended the scheme to other UK regional companies. Thames, providing Help, and Ulster putting out a fifteen-minute slot entitled Respond, followed Granada’s lead, though not without the occasional contretemps with individual broadcasting companies. Joe Simpson, a CSV assistant director, was put in charge of the rapidly expanding media operation, and turned out to have a flair for the business: CSV Media was born. There was no difficulty in recruiting volunteers to answer the phones, but there were so many offers of voluntary work as a result of the appeals that CSV had problems in matching volunteers to projects. To take a couple of examples, a report to the committee in June 1977 recorded that a Thames TV “Help” programme brought 2,855 responses over eight programmes, and as a result that Thames was proposing a five-minute slot at midday every single day. At about the same time a further report was commissioned by the Samaritans on recruiting volunteers. It revealed that Granada TV’s Reports Action programme on Sunday 17 July 1977 had resulted in 5,305 viewers phoning in, with 1,100 new Samaritan volunteers after a four-minute broadcast. However, the broadcast also produced a higher proportion of unsuitable volunteers than other means of recruitment.

Meanwhile, in November 1975, Dickson reported to the committee on a visit he had paid to Capital Radio. His account was very positive. The programme manager, he said, was enthusiastic. He “indicated that he would like to strike a note of exuberance ... I gather that this is Capital Radio’s life-style, but”, he cautioned, “not every endeavour to help meet human needs and social problems constitutes an exuberant experience.” The manager was worried that, like the Blood Transfusion Service when it had a similar slot, CSV might get too many calls. Which indeed it sometimes did. When a programme offered packs to help people give up smoking a million listeners applied. The problem for CSV emerged when it came to postage: the bulky packs cost £1 each to put through the Royal Mail and CSV did not have a spare £1 million. The Department of Health and Social Security was approached for financial assistance. Giving money, said David
Ennals, the Secretary of State of the day, was outside the Department’s remit. It could, however, put the packs through its own mailing system at no cost to CSV, and this it did.

The Annual Report of 1979-1980 (which also recorded that Ralf Dahrendorf, the distinguished sociologist and philosopher, at the time Director of the London School of Economics, had said in an article in the Sunday Times that the continued existence of CSV was one of the things which gave him hope) noted that the 30 November Roadshow programme for BBC television had been staffed by CSV. On 25 July The Good Neighbour Show on Harlech television had been presented by the comedy actor Brian Rix and HRH Princess Anne. Other voluntary bodies wanted to know how to do it. A conference, “Voluntary Action Through Television”, was held at the Royal Festival Hall on the 26 and 27 of February 1976, which was attended by 183 representatives of voluntary and statutory social work agencies, together with 59 media representatives. Four years later, in April 1980, CSV ran a conference in Manchester for 105 voluntary organisations who wanted to learn how to make better use of local radio. By 1988 CSV Media programming had recruited over two million people to community action through 50+ radio and television stations. By 1996 CSV Media had clocked up 15,000 broadcast hours and was training many BBC personnel as well as preparing others for City and Guilds examinations.

By this time CSV was receiving substantial grants from the European Social Fund, and was reaching out beyond the UK. CSV staff visited projects in France, Spain, Italy and Holland and helped to establish one of first Europe-supported anti-racism projects. Volonteurope is an international organisation, founded in Holland, which was a network of volunteering bodies with 1,200 members. Its annual conference brought together volunteering bodies from all over Europe and, indeed, from the United States – it was run by CSV from its HQ in Pentonville Road. CSV Media itself was assisting more than 200 European radio stations. In the run up to St Valentine’s Day they organised the “Play Safe in Europe” campaign, promoting safer sex to young people in 24 countries. It was Europe’s largest ever social action media campaign.

But the scheme was proving too successful. The Minutes for May 1987 record that there were then 45 media projects nationwide, with 400 staff, 90 of whom were full-time, and 2,000+ volunteers. The Help-Line information desks were receiving 2 million calls year and a quarter of a million volunteers had been recruited for ten thousand organisations. But it was not just about volunteering. There were leaflets produced to back up the programmes, there was fund raising (Clyde Action in the west of Scotland raised £400,000 in December 1986 in the Cash for Kids appeal), there was community radio, and CSV Suffolk, which after it had only been going for little over a year, won a Sony radio award.

Alec Dickson, who tended to blow hot and cold, that year expressed his alarm that people were losing sight of the founding principle, volunteering, and wondered whether the media programme should be continued. A couple of years later, however, and, as he informed the committee just back from Lesotho (they thanked him for turning up despite his arduous travels), said he was delighted by the reports of CSV’s Media success, something he had never dreamt of when he founded the organisation.

But it was onerous. Preparing for the broadcasts, and dealing with the aftermath, came to occupy the energies of CSV staffers for at least half the week. So when the Trade Unions began to protest about the involvement of volunteers in staffing the telephones (apart from the first year, the telephones were borrowed for the occasion from various companies – in one case from the Tote) for these programmes, CSV was ready to withdraw. By this time, however, the idea had spread to local BBC radio stations. The emphasis, as Joe Simpson told the committee in January 1982, had switched from television, which was cash rich, to radio which was not. So there were funding problems for CSV and moreover, pointed out Simpson, the BBC charter precluded it from making payments to other agencies. The programmes that were broadcast over the radio were a good deal simpler and cheaper to make, and required much less input from CSV. They survived, as
If Alec Dickson had, if only briefly, once had his doubts, others on the committee were frequently seriously concerned about the finances of CSV Media. By the end of 1996 the programme had 100 staff in ten regions, running 46 projects. There had at one time even been a production company, “Helpful Productions”, though it ceased trading in 1994: its profits had been covenanted to CSV. In sum, there was a turnover £4 million, of which European Social Fund contribution was £1.2 million. London Media was responsible for 60 pages of CEEFAX with community news and volunteering opportunities. The benefits which accrued to the BBC from all these activities were calculated to be worth £1.2 million a year, yet the BBC’s investment was only £60,000 - plus premises and other gifts in kind. A potential lucrative sponsorship deal with MacDonald’s had fallen through the previous year. CSV Media was regularly exceeding its budget. In March 2000 it had overspent by some £200,000. In December 2004 it was reported that an expected surplus of £100,000 had become a deficit of £300,000. The following year there was a marginal improvement, but still a substantial deficit. Could it be justified? The committee accepted that it was central to CSV’s enterprise. As the minutes for 3 February 1999 record, the purpose of the programme was to promote action to build communities: “Social action broadcasting and training informs, educates and energises people”, and, it was noted, the principle focus was still volunteering, despite the doubts which Alec Dickson had once expressed.

### Wales

It is obvious from the above that CSV’s commitment to broadcasting was not simply London-based. Take Wales, for example. There was Marcher Action based in CSV’s local office in Wrexham, working in partnership with Wrexham’s local radio station, Marcher Sound. There was also Contact Wales which was principality-wide, providing back-up material for broadcasts of a community interest. Another office was set up in Bangor to work with BBC Radio Cymru, but it was also operating in partnership with Radio Gwent and was mainly funded by the Manpower Services Commission. Receiving money from a public body such as the MSC (and early in 2001 there was a grant to CSV Wales from the National Lottery) had of course to be accounted for. In 1985 there was a report to the government’s Welsh Office which supplied a helpful overview. “The CSV Wales office”, it recorded, “was set up in 1981 to enable CSV to provide services that were more sensitive to local need … CSV is the only voluntary organisation operating throughout the principality to place full-time volunteers away from home where they are needed locally … In Wales these volunteers are mainly young people in their early twenties many of whom were previously unemployed.” The head office, backed up by an advisory panel, was on the second floor of a building in St Mary Street, Cardiff and the organisation operated mainly in the Wales’ six southern counties.

### Scotland

Scotland was a somewhat bigger enterprise. As has been seen, the very first volunteer had been sent to an Approved school in Glasgow. This placement was a success, but as the minutes of the committee meeting in October 1967 record, “a disagreeable letter” had been received from
Home Office about a TV film involving another volunteer, again in an Approved School in Scotland, even though Scotland was, strictly speaking, outside Home Office’s jurisdiction. A grant was received to promote volunteering in Scotland, and very early on in the life of CSV an Advisory Committee was established in Edinburgh and later, in 1977, a separate policy group for Scotland, reporting to the CSV board. The organisation there had been blessed with a succession of highly competent development officers. A report was written in 1968 by the “Working Party on Service by Youth in Scotland”. The recruitment of police cadets, which had begun so well in England, was at first sluggish in Scotland, but Dickson seems to have been on particularly good personal terms with H.M’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary who was very supportive, and by 1974 it the programme for cadets was well under way. Scotland had such a very energetic development officer, but as a consequence there was a need for further staff, a publications officer and someone to work with the disadvantaged. Scotland had been ahead of the game, at least for a time. “The Scottish police cadets came before we ever got police cadets from anywhere in England”, Dickson wrote in a letter to the chairman of the Scottish committee in October 1979, “and the Scottish apprentices came before we ever got apprentices from anywhere in England … Then everything seemed to go wrong … The task of getting sixth-form leavers from Scottish schools to offer themselves as full-time CSVs on leaving school totally defeated me.”

As Dickson admitted in his letter, he was in a despondent mood. “The idea of service used to be looked upon as something which the privileged gave”, he went on. “Now, here in the South, it is something which Borstal lads engage in, if the Governors of their institutions have heard of the arrangement that CSV has with the Home Office; it is something to which you can be sentenced, as an alternative to imprisonment, by magistrates under the Compulsory Service Orders introduced a few years ago; it is something which you do in your last year at school if you are something of a dimwit and an early-leaver; or it is something you might experience, if you are jobless and there is one of CSV’s Springboard programmes nearby; or if you are a child-in-care.”

The situation was not at all as dire as he perceived it to be. A letter from Elisabeth Hoodless to the Secretary of the Scottish Education Department in October 1972 described the size of the operation only half a dozen years after its inception. There had been over 13 conferences held with Local Education Authorities, and over 100 schools were involved in the school and community programme. In addition there were more than 200 volunteers working in 82 projects. To provide backing for all this, she argued, there was need for an additional full-time officer working with the disadvantaged, a publications officer and a full-time secretary. CSV, she wrote, wanted in all a grant of £14,050.00 to pay salaries and support the various programmes.

Indeed, so big was the programme North of the Border that in March 1981 John Pulford, a management consultant with Arthur Andersen who had been recruited to act as chairman of the CSV board (in which capacity he served for three decades) reported at this first meeting that Scotland was in danger of UDI – a “unilateral declaration of independence”. Of course it did not happen. In Alec Dickson’s view the opposite was the case. In a meeting of the committee in September 1983 he objected that every major decision concerning Scotland was taken in the office of the Executive Director. Not that he was arguing in favour of devolution. On the contrary. His complaint was that his own suggestions were being ignored. But then, as he also complained in the letter which has just been quoted: “I am as useless on committees as I am unhappy on committees. It has always been like this … In committee I feel ill-at-ease, beleaguered almost, and I tend to become petulant at opposition or scepticism … This is not something peculiar to CSV in Scotland. I dread our own Committee meeting here and my loyal wife always awaits my return from these meetings with a combination of dread and sympathy for me.” He was writing, it should be said, to excuse himself from the invitation to attend a policy meeting in Scotland where the decisions, which he protested at being made without his knowledge, were being taken.
Ulster

It was very different in the Province of Ulster. Shortly after CSV had been established there a letter from a member of Volunteer Service Belfast which appeared in the Northern Irish journal for volunteering, trenchantly criticized its arrival on the grounds of cost, of duplication of effort, and its short-term goals. Though the Volunteer Service’s management committee distanced itself from the view of the correspondent (while defending the writer’s right to air his opinions), Dickson felt obliged to come to the support of the CSVs in Belfast, and wrote to the management committee’s chairman saying that, regrettably, the offending letter expressed a view which, it appeared, was widely shared. The chairman replied in February 1977 with a placatory letter: “I do not wish to engage in an unfruitful exchange on the subject; in trying to serve the many needs of this troubled Province, Voluntary Organisations have quite enough constructive work to occupy their time fully.”

It was a difficult situation in which to work, not least because, as the CSV organisers reported, the vast majority of those who offered their services as volunteers wanted to leave the Province to work elsewhere. Moreover the development officer believed that the London Headquarters was not eager to send volunteers to Belfast. The Corrymeela community, committed to reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and to peace making, had requested two volunteers, but had been kept waiting so long that they gave up and looked elsewhere. Despite these setbacks the Belfast staff did as best they could. The first report recorded that a night shelter had been set up in Londonderry “in a predominantly Protestant area” – though it was located near the Creggan, a specifically Catholic housing estate. And they had a boost from the government. Enterprise Ulster had received a great deal of money to support a job creation scheme through community service for young people in Northern Ireland. It had not been a success. Instead the Manpower Services Commission wanted CSV to set up in Ulster a scheme similar to that which was running so successfully in Sunderland: Springboard.

Springboard

Like so much else in CSV, Springboard and the learning and training work began by a chance encounter, on this occasion a meeting between Elisabeth Hoodless and the chief executive of the Sunderland council, then a metropolitan borough – it became a city only in 1992. Unemployment was rife in the North East of England and the recently established Manpower Services Commission was offering grants to those prepared to tackle it by providing training and other life-skills for those out of work. Sunderland was eager to take the money, but the chief executive, or Town Clerk in the rather archaic language of the day, was not clear how the Council would set about establishing schemes to help young people find work. CSV offered to take on the task. A married couple was recruited (the Commission refused to pay for a double bed, so CSV supplied one – they would recover the cost, Hoodless explained, by charging more for something else). The first pair did an excellent job, though the London office was never quite clear which of the two was in command. It was not a problem which lasted long. They moved on after a couple of years to be replaced by Bill Garland and his wife, Val. Garland made it perfectly clear at their interview that he was to be in charge. So successful were they that, in 1988, Bill Garland was appointed assistant director of CSV with responsibility for strategic planning, and in 2001 became CSV’s deputy director, in face of competition from over 40 other applicants.

The Sunderland scheme, which was soon widely copied around the country and named Springboard, received approval towards the end of 1975. The original proposal was for two CSV full-time staff (the married couple) and a grant of £5000.00 for materials. Each of the 250 unemployed young people was to receive £25.00 a week while in training.
It was a formula that worked. Before long as well as Sunderland there were Springboards in Bromley, Hackney, Islington, Kent, Lanark, Southwark, Thamesmead and elsewhere. Some struggled to survive, and that on Tyneside eventually collapsed. “Trying to help public servants had left CSV with unfunded loss of £5,000”, reported the Minutes of the Committee in December 1990, rather enigmatically. The committee had in 1988 already decided to set up each different enterprise as a separate company in order to guard against just such an occurrence, but they had not been quick enough in implementing their decision. Others were somewhat peripatetic. Springboard Islington, which was first established in Archway Central Methodist Church Hall in 1978, moved several times in the course of very few years. In Belfast the same structure was called Young Help, and had assisted equal numbers of Protestants and Roman Catholics but, the committee heard in 2001, the government was now investing in partisan agencies rather than in integrated ones, leading to demise of project after 25 years.

Sunderland Springboard was initially run jointly by CSV and Sunderland Social Services. Different places had different structures. That in Lanark, though it quickly received its funding, seemed to have had more than its fair share of problems with the local authority with whom it worked. Its statistics revealed that about the same number of its trainees, just over a third, found jobs as were forced to return to unemployment. Every Springboard found that some of those who came to it, after their period of training for work, returned instead to full-time education. In 1989 500 young people who had been excluded from school or were truanting had been educated at the various Springboards. In September 1980 Springboard Kent was in its third year. It had 160 full-time personnel working over the two boroughs of Medway and Gillingham, offering a wide variety of community-based placements. Three-quarters of those who came to it in that year, it reported, had difficulties with basic literacy and numeracy. Alec Dickson was not entirely happy with Springboard Kent. Two years after the initial report he questioned what he thought was an unduly high ratio of staff members to trainees: one to five, he noted. And, he added, why was it employing an American citizen?

There was a handbook produced for use across every Springboard. The Life Skills Training Manual was intended “for team leaders to be used in training life skills [and] was originally conceived for the Springboard Projects set up by Community Service Volunteers under the Community Service option of the Manpower Services Commission’s Youth Opportunities Scheme”, reported the Executive Director of CSV in June 1977. The January 1979 issue of the manual featured on the cover two rather unconvincing hairdressers tending the hair of an old lady who seemed mightily pleased by all the attention she was receiving.

All these undertakings were dependent one way or another on government funding, which could sometimes be desperately slow in arriving. Even money from the European Social Fund came via Whitehall, and that, too, was often delayed. Staff members wondered darkly whether the government had not put it into the bank to earn interest, rather than pass it on directly. A Minister, however, denied the allegation. Whitehall also refused the rather cheeky offer from CSV that they would send volunteers to help them deal more speedily with their finances. It may have been a joke, but the hold-ups were a serious problem. By the end of 1990 such delays were costing CSV something in the region of £15,000 a month. Over the years, training and skills work with both adults and young people developed across the Springboard brand, in Manchester, Newcastle, West Midlands, Ipswich, Wales and Bristol, for example.

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It was January 1963. I had just left a country grammar school where I had stayed on an extra term to take the Oxbridge entrance exams and thought I should do something worthy for a couple of months before going off to enjoy myself in Italy. I read in The Times that Dr Alec Dickson was starting CSV for those who wanted to volunteer in the UK. I was just 18 and totally wet behind the ears. There was no CSV office yet so I was invited to present myself at the Dicksons’ Georgian house in Mortlake for an interview. I was warmly greeted by Moira and then interviewed by Alec at the kitchen table. The only question I remember was “Young or old?” I took a deep breath and said “Young”. Somehow I knew much might hang on this reply: indeed my reply laid the base for my whole subsequent career. Dr Dickson disappeared to make a phone call but was soon back. “You’re to go to Balgay Approved School in Dundee. Be there in three days’ time.” So I was, met by the matron at the station whose first words were, “Your parents have rung to say your train ticket has been found.” I felt so ashamed of my carelessness just when I wanted to give the impression of being grown-up. How was I going to cope?

The school was in a severe Victorian building in a windy position high above the River Tay. I was given a huge set of keys: there were many doors to be locked and unlocked. It was clear from my introduction to the staff room that there were two warring groups and as I had no idea how to negotiate my way round such a situation this added to my discomfort. On my first morning I was asked to take sole charge of a class of girls only a little younger than myself. Dr Dickson had told me I would be a classroom assistant but that was never to be. The teacher had rung in saying she was snowed up and she continued to be snowed up until just before I left. It was one of the coldest winters on record and from my little bedroom I could see blocks of ice wedged against the long railway bridge that spanned the Tay.

Though I got on very well with the girls, they had a killer instinct for my weakness in maths. That first week the teachers’ maths answer book disappeared and I had to spend many an hour working out the answers. There was no curriculum. The school was only too happy for me to keep the girls occupied with whatever I chose. The girls treated me like an older sister and somehow this gave me just the necessary amount of authority and no more. Best for the girls and me were the times when I read them John Buchan’s Thirty Nine Steps with me skipping some of the descriptions and concentrating on the adventure.

Most of the girls came from poor homes in the old slums of Glasgow and Edinburgh. I don’t think they had to have a criminal record to end up in Balgay. Some had such broad accents that I couldn’t understand them and had no idea when they were swearing. “Didn’t you hear what she said?” remarked one of the staff to me, strongly disapproving of my lack of reaction to what one of my charges was saying in the lunch queue. I was glad not to have understood.

My first Saturday I was told to take a group of girls by double-decker bus to the city art gallery for a lecture. The girls were surprisingly cooperative. On the way back they rushed to the upper bus deck seemingly to enjoy the view across the frozen Tay. The next day I was called in to the head who explained what the girls had enjoyed was not the view but picking up fag ends on the top deck of the bus where smoking was allowed. As we had walked up the school drive behind my innocent back they had hidden the fag ends under the edging stones. Before they had a chance to retrieve them, the gardener, no doubt wise to this trick, had found them. Balgay was educating me again.

Alec Dickson had asked me to write and tell him how I was getting on. I hadn’t forgotten but I didn’t believe the great man really would be that interested in me. After a month I received a very stern letter ticking me off for not writing. I had a bit of a problem about what to tell him. He had been emphatic that under no circumstances was I to accept any payment. Getting paid had been no part of my plan either, but the Balgay School governors were insisting that I should receive some recompense for my wholly unexpected but significant classroom responsibilities for which they were extremely grateful. I think after much pressure I accepted £2.00 a week as “expenses” and probably never told Dr Dickson.
One Saturday the girls asked me if I would be going to a ball like Veronica. I was puzzled. There had been no mention of balls in Dr Dickson’s briefing. On further enquiry I learnt that 30 girls had watched, riveted, as my predecessor volunteer, Veronica Lyle (now Baroness Linklater), had swept down the Balgay Approved School grand staircase in a magnificent ball gown to a fairy coach that whisked her away to dance at the Duke of Atholl’s castle. I was a just disappointing English Cinderella whose fairy godmother didn’t even know she was needed north of the border.

I read history as planned at university but my choices after that were influenced by those two memorable months as a CSV volunteer. I embarked on a social work career, specialising in children and families, and in education and training. I worked in all kinds of settings over 40 years – local authority, hospital, the voluntary sector, for a government funded body responsible for child care training policy. I taught at four universities, and finally worked for the Home Office and what was then called the Department of Children, Schools and Families where I developed support for parents through the voluntary sector.

When I stopped full time work I was invited to be a trustee of a number of children and family charities. I reconnected with CSV as what was called a trustee, now renamed a member. Early in my time as a trustee I enjoyed visits to CSV projects from Bromley to Sunderland and seeing how the organisation had developed in the fifty years since I arrived on the banks of the River Tay as a totally naive 18 year old.

Clare Roskill

It was rather fitting, therefore, that, as the Annual Review for 1986-1987 recorded, CSV’s 40,000th volunteer was Scottish: 18-year-old Hazel Plant came down to London from Scotland on an Independent Living Scheme. By 12 September 2002 the Minutes record that CSV Scotland has fourteen main offices, a head office in Edinburgh, eighty staff and some 3,500 volunteers. For that number of volunteers the staffing level was remarkably low. A position paper – undated, but apparently from c. 1986 – argued that one volunteer director must place 85 “bodies” in one year (this was referred to as “the formula”). But to produce these 85 “bodies” there had to be recruited 141 new potential volunteers because nearly half of them would drop out before their interview, and another 14% would drop out after the interview but before placement. The paper laid out what had happened over the previous year in the different parts of the United Kingdom, figures which can, perhaps, be best expressed in a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Applicants</th>
<th>Placements</th>
<th>“Bodies”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>236</td>
<td>189</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
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<td>150</td>
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<td>84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
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<td>105</td>
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RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme)

As the Annual review for 1976/7 remarked, CSV was prepared to accept 15-year olds as volunteers, the youngest age group of any similar organisation. It had of course been Dickson’s vision to offer volunteering opportunities to young people, though as has been seen, the age profile gradually climbed higher. But it did not at first embrace that very large – and growing – cohort of people with time on their hands: those who had retired after a lifetime in work. There seems even to have been some resistance to doing so: the Annual Report for 1977-78 recorded that there had been a project to deploy retired volunteers in South Lakeland, but this initiative, though successful, was hived off to become independent under the name of Action in Retirement (AIR). However, as the Annual Review for 1986-1987 commented, to become a volunteer, “Age is certainly no bar, [as is] demonstrated by the launch of RSVP.”

About the same time as AIR was coming into being, the committee received from the volunteer coordinator in the Leeds office the suggestion that there be set up what was called a “retired people’s voluntary action group”. This proposal was greeted with enthusiasm, reported the Minutes for 6 April 1977. It was described in the Minutes as a “pioneering venture”. The over-50 age group was, as it were, an obvious “market” for CSV to move into: an increasing number of people were retiring early and were clearly candidates for volunteering. There was much discussion but in the end the impetus came through an accidental encounter. On a visit to Sion House Elisabeth Hoodless was hailed by Edith Kahn, someone whom she had first met on a visit to Israel, and who had afterwards been for 22 years headmistress of Fleet Primary School in Hampstead. Miss Kahn had retired from her post sometime before the chance meeting with Elisabeth, and had subsequently become immersed in preparations for celebrating the thousandth anniversary of Hampstead. Now she wondered what she should do with her time after the millennial celebrations were over. Elisabeth invited her to lunch and discussed the possibilities. As Edith knew a good many people in Hampstead who were, like herself, retired and in search of a role, this seemed as good a place as any to start the new programme. She was, moreover, a formidable fund-raiser, having had considerable experience in persuading money for her school out of the education authority and other bodies.

At about the same time that the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) was being launched CSV was visited by Frank Garson, the major shareholder in his family’s firm, the Lovable Bra Company. Its headquarters were located in Atlanta in the USA where it had been founded, but it had a branch in the UK and Garson, who had served in London during the Second World War, was something of an Anglophile. He was also interested in volunteering by older people. He had put money into five groups scattered around Britain, all operating under the aegis of another organisation, the Volunteer Centre UK, but this management structure had not proved successful. He now turned to CSV, which took the groups over, together with their funding. Elisabeth put in charge of the new branch of CSV the very efficient head of the Bristol office which had only recently (1981) been established.

RSVP, said an internal memo, “tries to fill the gap caused by the increasing number of redundancies and retirements.” There were listed three projects on offer to those who were recruited: to help out in schools, to serve as friends of Gingerbread – the organisation for lone parent families – and the Sesame project to help young people who wanted to start their own businesses. They were brave words, but getting RSVP running successfully proved to be a fairly slow process with much consultation with Age Concern. Money was also soon a problem. The funding from The Lovable Bra Company did not last – the firm was having problems, and was slimming down it operation in Britain – and although it was reported at the June 1985 Annual General Meeting that the Carnegie UK Trust had made a grant of £30,000 over two years to develop “retired senior volunteer practice”, growth was slow.
Efforts to win government support for this aspect of CSV's operation also proved difficult. A meeting was held with John (now Baron) Patten, the minister in the Home Office with responsibility for the Voluntary Service Unit (VSU), the government body directly involved in funding CSV as well as other similar organisations, “to discuss principles involved in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme”, as the September 1989 committee minutes put it. The minister came to visit the offices and as the December committee noted, the VSU grant was to increase by 2.5%. But this, it was remarked, in a time of inflation was the equivalent of a 6% cut, though possibility remained of a one-off grant for RSVP. They were living in hope: the original request for a grant from the VSU to support the new programme had been made well over a year before.

In December 1992 the committee was expressing regret at the slow rate of growth of RSVP. The Annual Reviews strove to put the figures in the best light. That for 1988-1989 reported that RSVP had recruited 600 volunteers with 22 coordinators; that of the following year (sponsored by Glaxo) said there were over a thousand volunteers. A year later a 30% rise was claimed compared favourably with a 23% rise in volunteering among teenagers (though it was noted the number of teenagers in the relevant cohort had been decreasing country-wide): there were now 1,206 “older volunteers” managed by two staff and 45 volunteer coordinators. By the 1995-1996 Review, however, RSVP had 4,063 volunteers, contributing 752,000 hours of voluntary work.

Apparently the numbers then went down for the committee minutes of June 1993 reported that the RSVP target had been 5,000 volunteers within five years, but now, five years on there were only 2,108. Eighteen months later the situation had improved and by December 1995 there were 3,500 RSVP volunteers sustained by only three paid staff. Six months after that there were 4,000 volunteers backed by a much more robust infrastructure of 17 regional coordinators and 150 volunteer organisers. Headquarters’ staff amounted to five-and-a-half people, with a budget of £375,000. The aim, the committee was told, was 10,000 volunteers by the year 2000. The committee suggested that there might be a mailing to those who subscribed to Saga, the magazine aimed at the elderly. In the event RSVP just managed to beat the deadline: the 10,000th recruit was in place before October 1999 and, moreover, RSVP had won an award.

The same minutes which recorded this success noted another of considerable significance: “The leadership of Lord Levy”, it reported, “has brought in significant new funding, excellent contacts in the design world, a splendid party at the Foreign Secretary’s residence and the opportunity to present CSV’s work at the embassy in Paris.” The Hackney-born and educated Michael Levy had been an accountant specialising in handling the financial affairs of musicians. This in turn led him to found a couple of recording companies which he eventually sold on. In the early 1990s he became a friend of Tony Blair, then Leader of the Opposition, and the two started to play tennis together at Levi’s Totteridge home. He was a major fundraiser for the Labour Party, and on Labour’s election victory in 1997 he went to the House of Lords as Baron Levy of Mill Hill. (He ceased his political money-raising on Blair’s retirement from office, and has since become an advocate of public funding for political parties.) He had a long history of fund-raising, but for Jewish charities in particular: his appointment as President of CSV, a position he still holds, was therefore for him something of a departure, in a sense extending his horizons.

He threw himself into his new role with enthusiasm, and his skills were much needed. CSV was going through one of its periodic financial crises. Money was running out, partly at least because a change of emphasis at the VSU in the Home Office, recently renamed the Active Community Unit. It now had a greatly expanded staff of 41, but was concentrating on tiny local organisations which, in the view of CSV’s committee members, were neither innovative nor best value. This change of strategy, however, was a matter of policy, and not easily to be changed. A 1996 report into the VSU’s activities by the National Audit Office [www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc9596/hc03/0315/0315.pdf] revealed that it has made grants of over £21 million in the financial
year preceding the Report. CSV was one of the major beneficiaries, though receiving the smallest amount of any of the “big five” (the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service received more than all the other recipients put together). The Report urged the VSU to look for “new and innovative” charities upon which to bestow the government’s largesse. As a consequence CSV was seriously short of funds. RSVP, it was reported in March 2000, had overspent its budget by £300,000.

There was better news by the end of the year. Denise Murphy, the new director of RSVP who had taken up her post the previous February, reported to the committee that the Scottish Parliament had voted £463,000 over three years to fund bases in Glasgow and Edinburgh. There were now, she added, 7,000 volunteers, organised by 450 volunteer coordinators and twenty-two paid staff: the oldest volunteer was aged 100, and participated in the “Teddies for Tragedy” initiative. RSVP seemed to be flourishing – but then came a major challenge, and from an unexpected quarter.

In a March 2001 speech to the Christian Socialist Movement’s conference on “Faith in Politics”, Lord Levy’s friend Prime Minister Tony Blair announced a new government initiative. Saying that his administration would work in harness with faith groups which ran community projects, he pledged £19 million to “The Experience Corps” which was to be set up for people over 50 who could use the skills they had learned through a lifetime in work in voluntary activity for the good of others. The Corps was to operate as an independent company – Baroness Sally Greengross of Age Concern was to be the chairwoman – with the brief of creating and filling new volunteering opportunities for the over-50s across the country. It was an extremely odd decision for the government to have made. It was establishing its own agency in a field that RSVP had very much made its own, and creating a new bureaucracy. It was all the odder because the Home Secretary at the time was David Blunkett, Member of Parliament for Sheffield Brightside, and a long-time supporter of CSV: he had served for a good many years on its committee. The proposal was widely seen as a political act rather than a serious venture into government-sponsored volunteering: three or four months earlier the Leader of the Opposition, William Hague, had said he wanted to “denationalise” compassion, and bring faith groups into the business of delivering some services which had hitherto been handled by the State. This appeared to be the Labour Party’s response: create a rival to RSVP.

It was not sensible, and it did not work. A quarter of a million volunteers from among the over-50s was the target set the Experience Corps by the government. It was meant to reach this level of recruitment by March 2004 but by that deadline it had only managed to attract 130,000, and just 75,000 of those had actually been placed in work as volunteers. The comparable figures for CSV as a whole, as recorded in the Annual Review for 2002/2003, were 128,868 volunteers, which was a 10% increase on the year before. The time they devoted to voluntary work had increased by an even larger amount, by 15% to 3,800,000 hours. Meanwhile, as the committee complained at the 2003 Annual General Meeting, the Experience Corps getting £7 million a year whereas RSVP with over 10,000 participants was getting only £30,000. Just two years later the Experience Corps was cut adrift from Whitehall, though it still survives providing “bespoke solutions to business focusing specifically on Organisational Development, Leadership and Diversity & Inclusion”, according to its website. It does so by calling on its database of a quarter of a million contacts among people over 50 years of age.

Perhaps as an incentive to the more elderly to offer their services to RSVP, the Annual Review just quoted also reported that “research by the University of Michigan reveals that senior volunteering reduces blood pressure, reduces cholesterol levels and prolongs life”. Whether or not it was indeed intended to encourage more retired people to volunteer, that is what happened. By the middle of 2005 RSVP had 10,340 volunteers, 2,000 of them recruited during Year of the Volunteer which had just past. There were 350 volunteer organisers, not enough, said the Review. Four thousand of these volunteers worked in schools, mainly primary schools, but many were also present in doctors’ surgeries, offering their assistance to those who needed it, including acting as drivers who offered a door-to-door service.
And then there were knitters. Indeed, there were 1,500 of them. The oldest recorded volunteer was 105, and she knitted jumpers for penguins. Knitting was therapeutic. It brought people together in “knitting circles” who might otherwise have lived rather isolated lives. The main beneficiaries of all this knitting were children up and down the country who were supplied with pullovers or, to a somewhat more complicated pattern, teddy bears. Supply of the latter, however, rather outstripped demand. A group of Post Office knitters therefore arranged for the teddies to be posted to needy children, particularly in Eastern Europe. Supplies of them were frequently carried in emergency vehicles, police cars, fire engines, ambulances, to be given to small children to take their minds of the traumatic events which they may have witnessed. Knitting circles were an obvious success. The downside, the committee was informed, was that every new recruit increased the programme’s deficit.

RSVP has, however, continued to grow. The Annual Review for 2009/2010 listed the figures on the inside front cover. Over that year, which marked the retirement of Elisabeth Hoodless and the appointment of Lucy de Groot as the new Chief Executive, CSV had in total 165,666 volunteers. Of those, 15,348 were in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme. RSVP was given a considerable fillip by being included by The Times newspaper as one of the charities chosen to benefit from that year’s Christmas appeal to its readers. In the end it received £100,000. The director of RSVP then invited groups from round the country to put in bids for the money but describing the local projects they would like to fund. By 2010/2011 the Annual Report shows 1,700 older people volunteering and 480 volunteer coordinators. This formula proved an enormous success, generating a great deal of interest, and is likely to be repeated when there is again money in the kitty.

Citizenship

The Annual Report for 1998-1999 was presented in the form of a tabloid newspaper and entitled Good News. The “good news” itself was hard to miss:

Victory! Cheers. Fanfares. It’s happened. We’ve done it. After a 32-year campaign, CSV emerges triumphant. In spring 1999, the government announced plans for all schools in England to teach citizenship as part of the national curriculum.

Early on in this history, Alec Dickson was quoted as saying “To serve overseas, in other people’s countries, is a privilege – and so selection is inevitable. But to serve Britain, your own country, that is your right." By volunteering, in other words, an individual was playing a necessary part in the life of the country. He or she was exercising citizenship. The need for education in citizenship was a constant preoccupation of the administration of CSV even if it only rarely came to public notice. As The Times reported on 16 September 1968, “Alec Dickson, CBE, the puckish, portly director of CSV, would like to see voluntary service on the school curriculum. ‘It’s too important for a voluntary extra’, he says.” He wanted to see voluntary service being given the same standing in the country as service in the armed forces had received (conscription had come to an end in 1960) and in 1969 he argued his case in an article entitled “Alternatives to Military Service” in Convergence, a magazine of the International Movement of Christian Students. (He appeared in the pages of the magazine in the unlikely company of the Welsh-born Roman Catholic pacifist Eileen Egan and Milovan Djilas, the Communist dissident who had once been the successor presumptive to Marshal Tito as President of Yugoslavia.)

As has been seen, from early on CSV had a department specialising in promoting volunteering in schools. As time went by greater emphasis was placed on the notion of volunteering as part of active citizenship, and this eventually became a separate section of the organisation. The Annual Review for 1996/1997 recorded the degree of effort which went into it. CSV’s Education for
Citizenship department was costing £669,000 a year. It had 15 staff, eight of them full-time. They managed 524 projects in 1,526 schools and in 189 colleges of Further or Higher Education and had produced no less than 22 publications. It continued to grow. In March 2002 the committee heard that CSV Education for Citizenship employed 16 people divided into four teams (higher education, schools, partnerships and services), and had a turnover of £755,000. Some 45,000 young people benefited from the service through peer support, mentoring, tutoring and capacity building.

This greater prominence of citizenship sprang from Encouraging Citizenship, published by the Stationery Office (HMSO) in 1990, the report of the commission on citizenship on which Elisabeth Hoodless served as vice-chairman. As the Annual Review of 1988-1989 put it, “The emergence of ‘Active Citizenship’ as a theme of Government policy threatened to limit volunteers to neighbourhood watching and governing schools. However, under the energetic patronage of the Speaker, Bernard Weatherill MP, we established the Commission on Citizenship, sponsored by Esso and Gulbenkian, which will report in January 1990 on the development and recognition of active citizenship.”

Mention of the Commission first occurs in the Committee minutes for 25 January 1989: it is to be a joint working party with the Prince’s Trust. It occupied a great deal of the Director’s time for some eighteen months. The Commission’s membership was drawn from a wide range of expertise, from the Trades Unions, Local Government, the Church, from the Education sector – and included a former CSV volunteer. The Report was, of course, of wider interest than simply to CSV, but from the very first recommendation it read like something which Alec Dickson himself might have written:

The Commission recommends that the study and experience of citizenship should be part of every young person’s education from the earliest years of schooling and continuing into post-school years … (pxviii)

And the fourteenth recommendation was in the same vein:

The Commission recommends:

(a) The provision of a comprehensive, nationwide network of information, publicly available, to direct volunteers to where their skills can best be used
(b) The involvement of public broadcasting in providing information about opportunities for volunteering and urges radio and television authorities to participate in this service
(c) That volunteers carrying out tasks for local and central Government should receive reasonable expenses
(d) The provision of structured state support for the training and management of volunteers who are involved with professionals in the delivery of social rights
(e) That managing volunteers should be part of the training of appropriate professionals, such as social workers or teachers.

It then went on to recommend that “for as long as an honours systems exists”, due weight should be given to volunteering on a par with service in diplomacy etc, and that there should be a “Volunteer Medal”. The Report concluded:

We offer two major observations. Firstly, that society is in general best organised through participation and mutual education, both in terms of efficiency and in terms of eventual outcome. The participation of citizens in their society is both a measure and a source of that society’s success: democracy and involvement are not, and should not be, reducible to the narrowly political, but concern the very “business of life”. Secondly, that citizenship is not only about formal rights, but about the everyday participation in our society; and not only about our own rights, but also about the rights of others. It is this conception of citizenship as both theory and practice that we wish to encourage. (p42)
There is an interesting insight into the way CSV viewed this “citizen’s service” contained in the Annual Review for 1988-1989: “The poll tax, or community charge, threatened to cut our volunteers’ £17 weekly pocket money by £2 or more. Happily our many supporters joined together to persuade the government that, along with monks and nuns, CSVs should be exempt - they make their contribution to the community directly, through service.” A CSV volunteer, in other words, commuted his or her tax obligation for a period of community action. Indeed they did much more than that. As Elisabeth Hoodless said in her retirement speech at a party held for her in the Speaker’s House within the Palace of Westminster, “The exclusion of the value of volunteers’ work in the Gross Domestic Product is long overdue for correction. It is independently valued at £7 billion.”

CSV had long tried to spur on the government. In 1979 a committee produced a report Youth and the Needs of the Nation advocating a nationwide Citizen Service, but its arguments made little or no impact on government. CSV then commissioned a cost-benefit analysis of just such a Service from a think tank, the Henley Centre, but Downing Street was unmoved. They then tried out three Citizen Service trial projects in Cardiff, Southwark and Sunderland. The Committee Minutes for October 2000 mentioned the project Education for Citizenship - experiential learning through service in the community. A training package had been produced. While it was much appreciated, it nevertheless failed to cover its costs.

It may have been that not everyone was singing quite the same tune. CSV was clear where it stood. Elisabeth Hoodless contributed an article to D-I-Y Britain, a pamphlet published by CSV in association with the Fabian Society in March 1997. In it she wrote: “Citizens’ Service has twin aims: involving all young people aged 18-25 in activities which develop them as citizens, and extending services to benefit the whole community. It should be a national programme, with government funding and dynamic leadership, delivered locally to ensure responsiveness to the community and participants” (p16). But there was a slightly different take on it in the first piece in the pamphlet. It was written by James McCormick, a Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Policy Research and, as his brief biography put it, “the moving force behind the recommendation of the Social Justice Commission (1994) that a national Citizens’ Service scheme should be established.” He seems to have been not quite so committed to the concept of education for citizenship which CSV had so vigorously embraced: “The case for Citizens’ Service should be made firstly on the grounds of personal development and enhancing life-skills … The answer is not more classes in civics or greater stress on Citizenship Studies in the National Curriculum. We should by now have learned one simple lesson: young people are more likely to learn new skills through activity” (pp5-6).

As has just been said, McCormick’s hesitations about citizenship as a classroom topic were not shared by CSV. In 2000 CSV’s Active Citizenship toolkit was launched at 10 Downing Street with Jack Straw, then the Home Secretary, and David Blunkett who was Secretary of State for Education. “I shall be telling President Bush that citizenship in the curriculum is the single most important achievement of Mr Blair’s administration”, said Robert Putnam, Malkin Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University and author of the seminal study Bowling Alone, who had been invited to deliver the 2001 Edith Kahn Memorial Lecture. Two years later the lecturer was David Blunkett himself, now Home Secretary. His theme was Civil Renewal: a new agenda, the text of which was published by The Home Office in conjunction with CSV. “Democracy”, he argued, “is not just an association of individuals determined to protect the private sphere, but a realm of active freedom in which citizens come together to shape the world around them. We contribute and we become entitled. This is a different view of freedom – one that generates civil virtues and duties. To be truly free, we have to take part. And to take part we have to be educated and inspired. That is why I introduced citizenship education into the school curriculum, so that young people would be equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for active citizenship.” (pp11-12)
“Personal volunteering builds up confidence and skills. It raises personal esteem and self-worth. It strengthens communities, and helps people learn and care about the wider society and democracy of which they are a part. And it represents, in as clear as possible a way, the value and importance of giving to others. (p27)

Reflecting on the work of the 5,000 volunteers at the 2004 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, Elisabeth Hoodless made a similar argument to that of David Blunkett: “The involvement of citizens in delivering public services, health care, education, child protection, crime prevention, and prisons is an important part of the participative democratic process ... Without citizen involvement we risk a dangerous division between those who exercise the state’s power and those who are on the receiving end.”

CSV continued to keep a watching brief on the progress of citizenship education in school and, from 2003, to provide teams of volunteers to assist teachers in its delivery. Overall, however, the implementation of citizenship education was patchy, reported Peter Hayes, Director of CSV Education for Citizenship, in a submission to the Department of Education and Skills in 2006. The Barclays New Futures award scheme for Citizenship (1995-2006) enabled CSV to gain regular access to more than 900 secondary schools. There is “some excellent and embedded practice at one extreme and some tentative steps to full provision at the other,” said Hayes. “Anecdotally we have observed some effective practice in faith – notably Roman Catholic – schools whose ethos frequently provides a foundation on which active citizenship can be built (eg, an expectation of helping and providing support to others in the public domain). We have been particularly impressed by the contribution of special schools to innovative practice in Citizenship and some of those we have worked with have given a lead to their mainstream partners.” Where it was not so effective, Hayes indicated, there was often a lack of teachers trained in the subject. On the plus side he noted enthusiasm for citizenship education among the teaching profession, and the “Active Citizenship Toolkit”, mentioned above, together with its associated training course for teachers and Local Education Authority advisers remained popular.

But as the Annual Report for 2004/2005 noted, there were no government targets for involving citizens in public service, and citizenship education as a significant part of the National Curriculum in the years following went into decline, and this continued, despite the Coalition Government’s promotion of “the Big Society”. The Big Society was defended in his 2010 Edith Kahn Lecture by Tom Loughton, the then Minister for Children and Families and, from 2001 to 2010, when he had to resign because of his new post in government, a CSV trustee. The government has also promoted and funded a new National Citizen Service to support its vision for the Big Society. The title would have warmed Alec Dickson’s heart, but the reality, an eight-week Summer programme for sixteen-year-olds, is alas far removed from what he, and CSV, have been campaigning for over the past half century. “Looking forward” said Hoodless in a speech at her retirement, “I certainly hope to see national youth service for 18-year-olds in my lifetime and curriculum-related service in our schools. It certainly works in the United States. It improves attendance and attainment, and reduces crime and teen pregnancies and it is supported by the biggest US teachers’ union. The UK is generally five years behind the US so it is high time we got started.”
The next half century

But it would be a mistake to end this brief history of CSV on too negative a note. Writing to Elisabeth Hoodless just after her retirement, and marking the organisation’s fiftieth anniversary, Tim Loughton MP wrote:

“CSV is one of the most effective, innovative and worthwhile charities I have had the privilege to be involved with. It has the ability to inspire, cajole and encourage volunteers to come forward to donate their time in the most appropriate and imaginative ways – none more so perhaps than the Volunteers in Child Protection scheme which has taken a very real and serious challenge affecting some of our most vulnerable children and brought the power of volunteering to help. It has provided a blueprint of effective volunteering even in sensitive areas like safeguarding which councils around the country are now adopting. Combined with the high profile success that is Make a Difference Day it is always a pleasure to be involved with CSV and I am sure it will continue over the next fifty years.”

Loughton’s note is a reminder that so disparate is the range of CSV’s activities – such as its contribution to safeguarding children which he mentions – that it has been impossible to cover them all in these pages. The Volunteers in Child Protection scheme deserves more than a simple mention. In February 2000 nine-year-old Victoria Climbie died in London from torture at the hands of her guardians; three years later was published a report detailing the failure of care by the authorities. Elisabeth Hoodless had heard of a scheme in California which recruited volunteers to work with families where children were believed to be at risk. Such an approach had never before been tried in Britain, and many doubted whether volunteers would be able to cope with the complex situations they would encounter in such families. Dame Elisabeth persuaded one of the Sainsbury family trusts to fund a pilot project and, led personally by her, it began in 2006 in the London borough of Bromley. The volunteers are carefully selected, trained and matched with families, and they collaborate closely with the social workers assigned to the families. It has been a remarkable success. This is not CSV’s own judgement, it is the view of an evaluation of the scheme carried out by a team from the Cambridge-based Anglia Ruskin University. They reported a remarkably high level of success, with many families being judged to be no longer at risk – or at such a high risk – after they had been helped by the volunteers. Parents expressed their gratitude, children’s behaviour markedly improved, and the scheme was judged excellent value for money, saving the local authorities, so the Anglia Ruskin team calculated, slightly more than twice the cost of buying into it. Central to this success, the team declared, was the highly competent management of the volunteers undertaken by CSV. In 2010 the Civil Society organisation declared the Volunteers in Child Protection programme the overall winner of its annual Charity Award.

Not all of its initiatives flourish. The present writer was involved in one project, funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, to foster volunteering in public libraries, which made only limited progress. But others, such as the learning and skills work through Springboard, and CSV Media, have had a much greater success, largely thanks to the entrepreneurial skills and dedication of those who took charge of them. One such initiative, also mentioned by Loughton, is MDD, or Make a Difference Day.

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary in John Major’s administration, claimed this as his brainchild, dating back to March 1994. Certainly a government grant of £382,000 was made to take the idea forward, under the auspices of a “Volunteering Unit” which was temporally established within the Home Office specifically for this purpose. CSV’s “Make a Difference Day” was launched on 12 October 1996 sponsored by Yellow Pages and supported by New Internationalist magazine, by the national lottery company Camelot, by the engineering firm GEC and by the Department of National Heritage. That November’s AGM heard that the message of Make a Difference Day had
reached half the population of the UK. There had been 430 separate projects, involving nine thousand volunteers, 3000 of them first-timers. Involvement of celebrities, including Virginia Bottomley, then Secretary of State for National Heritage, the actress Jenny Agutter and other similarly well-known individuals, led to wide media coverage. The overheads, it was reported, were also encouragingly low, at only about half of what had been expected.

The following year there were 10,000 people involved, two-thirds of the projects recruiting new volunteers and many of the projects reporting more volunteers than they had expected. This time a quarter of those recruited were first-time volunteers. In 1998 Chris Smith MP, who had succeeded Mrs (now Baroness) Bottomley as Secretary of State for Heritage in the Blair administration, launched Make a Difference Day at an event at Spitalfields City Farm. This time there were 819 projects, 350 more than CSV had hoped for.

Make a Difference Day was clearly a success. But it was also an expensive undertaking. When a new sponsor had to be found, the committee calculated the outgoings to be some £600,000 a year to cover the cost of advertising, organisation and so on. So when the NSPCC approached CSV to ask if it might use its copyrighted Logo, especially designed for the Day, the Trustees suggested CSV should charge somewhere between £100,000 and £150,000 for the privilege!

The Annual Review 2009/2010 revealed that by 2009 the number taking part had risen to over 67,000, with nearly 2,500 people heading-up projects in their own localities. But Make a Difference Day, of course, was only a small part of volunteering overseen or organised by CSV. As the same Annual Review recorded, over 20,000 had lent their time to environmental projects – including what was described in the Review as “a love hotel” for frogs. Well over 25,000 others had been reached through CSV Media, working in conjunction with 36 BBC local radio stations: they had helped 700,000 people to negotiate the digital “switch-over”. In GO London there were opportunities for people in the capital to do occasional volunteering on a Saturday or Sunday, cleaning gravestones, painting schools or generally improving public spaces. These events offered people the opportunity to make new acquaintances in a safe environment, said the blurb: and, it added, there have even been marriages.

Making friends, if not finding partners, has also been the attraction of Cathedral Camps. Originally this was not a CSV initiative. It had been the brain-child of Robert Aagaard, a distinguished antique dealer and furniture maker, who in 1980 had been asked by the Dean of Ripon Cathedral to organise the restoration of a house owned by the Cathedral. His son, meanwhile, was working on an “Acorn Camp” organised by the National Trust to encourage volunteering in conservation projects, and Aagaard visited him there. He was inspired to bring the two ideas together: summer camps for volunteers to work on the conservation, not of the environment, but of cathedrals and other notable church buildings in need of restoration.

Cathedral Camps became an organisation with a committee of trustees and funds to buy tools, provide transport and arrange appropriate, if usually pretty basic, accommodation. Under his chairmanship – he died in 2001 – some nine thousand students were recruited over the years to work in a number of different centres, in collaboration with the Churches Conservation Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme. (The Award requires those seeking the gold standard to work away from home, and Cathedral Camps became an “Approved Activity Provider”.)

Though the Trust survived the death of its founder the other trustees were aging and early on in the 21st century it seemed that it might disappear altogether. In 2009, however, the organisation of the camps was taken over by CSV after it had been approached by one of the Cathedral Camp trustees, and given a new lease of life. Its particular attraction for CSV was that it gave it a new strand, short-term volunteering. Young volunteers – they are aged from 16 to 25 – are recruited to work in smallish groups in a variety of cathedral or church locations around Britain. They each make a small payment towards living costs, but these are kept low: volunteers are advised to bring sleeping bags and mats to lie on, and accommodation is usually in the churches themselves,
or church or school halls. (The church of All Hallows by the Tower is a regular venue, providing, albeit accidentally, a link between Cathedral Camps and CSV’s early history.) The camps have leaders who have themselves been regular members of these camps. The work itself, however, is guided by experts, giving the volunteers the opportunity to learn about the buildings they are restoring, the techniques of conservation, and the surrounding area. Those taking part testify to the lasting friendships that are made, often with young people from abroad – a number of those who volunteer are from the European Union and, sometimes, even further afield. For CSV this is a relatively new enterprise, albeit one, unusually, which comes with its own history. Thirty years of Cathedral Camps was celebrated in 2011 at All Hallows by the Tower and a pamphlet reflects the experiences of each year. It seems destined to survive for a good many years to come.

Even in the present straitened times the organisation has continued innovate. The “Grand Mentoring” scheme, for example, was launched in June 2010 by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, at an event in the House of Lords. The initiative came from the Welfare Minister Lord David Freud (he reported that the idea came to him while in the bath) who had been particularly close to, and helped by, his Danish grandfather. This project, backed by Lord Freud’s family charity, matches out-of-work or otherwise needy 14 to 19 year olds with senior volunteer mentors (50+) who meet the young people on a regular basis, at least once a week, to help them find work, apprenticeships, further education – or just to befriend and them and lend a listening ear. The pilot scheme has been operating in three North London boroughs but the intention is, after its evaluation by Manchester Metropolitan University, to review how it can be mainstreamed to the whole country. What has become clear, however, is that there are more older people ready to volunteer as “Grand Mentors” than there are younger people at risk willing to be mentored!

The arrival of Lucy de Groot coincided with the government’s drastic cut-backs as part of its austerity programme. As she made way for Lucy, Elisabeth, described by The Guardian newspaper in May 2010 as “the mother of [David Cameron’s] ‘big society’” went on the offensive. “There are a lot of very worthwhile programmes – for example volunteers working in child protection as promoted by the minister for children – which are now under threat of closure”, she told the BBC’s Today programme. And to the governments’ claim it would be investing £470 million over the next four years in voluntary organisations she responded sharply that the cuts were taking place now. As the Annual Review for 2011/2012 reported, though half of CSV’s income came, one way or another, from central government, it had lost its Cabinet Office grant. It was not the only charity to do so, but it was disappearance of a funding stream which had supported the organisation for 40 years. And local authorities likewise were, perilous, less generous. CSV had to be restructured to meet the financial challenges, and new sources of funds had to be sought out.

Even if the organisation remains, as it always has been, seriously short of funds, the Cathedral Camps initiative and the Grand Mentoring project and especially the Volunteers in Child Protection scheme increasingly working with families with multiple problems illustrate that CSV, as it enters its sixtieth decade, remains endlessly inventive in finding new ways to propagate the attraction of volunteering.
Acknowledgements

This is by way of being a short commemorative history. By “commemorative history” I mean one over which those who have commissioned the booklet exercise a degree of control. While I of course hope to present a fair picture, such a history is intended, as well as recounting the facts, to celebrate the organisation on the occasion of some anniversary. I have written a few of them but hitherto they have all had Roman Catholic links whereas CSV clearly does not. A commemorative history of CSV, therefore, for which I was volunteered by a family friend who was at the time the Director of RSVP, lies somewhat outside my comfort zone. Consequently I am particularly grateful for the help I have received: from the friendly people at Pentonville Road who brought me the boxes of Alec Dickson’s papers (he kept absolutely everything) when I asked for them. And I should mention especially Kim Oliver, PA to Elisabeth Hoodless, and Dame Elisabeth Hoodless herself with whom I had many a conversation, both in her office before she retired and more recently in her flat in Islington.

As I have just indicated, my main sources have been Alex Dickson’s extensive, and sometimes totally illegible, papers held at Pentonville Road, the Minutes of CSV’s committees, its Annual Reviews and other reports on individual projects: I have tried to indicate the sources in the text. I have also used A Chance to Serve, a selection of pieces by Dickson edited by his wife Mora (London: Dennis Dobson, 1976) and Mora Dickson’s own account of their relationship in Portrait of a Partnership (Robertson Publications, Aberfeldy, Perthshire, 2004). Other publications quoted, or at least consulted, include the indispensable Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Noel Timms’s Rootless in the City (London: Bedford Square Press, 1968), Encouraging Citizenship: Report of the Commission on Citizenship (London: HMSO, 1990) and D-I-Y Britain, edited by Lindsay Mackie (London: The Fabian Society, 1997).
Lucy de Groot, Biography

Lucy de Groot, who took over as Chief Executive of CSV in February 2011, has had a wide-ranging career in the community, voluntary, local government and central government sectors. Her first volunteering experience was as a school girl visiting an elderly Polish lady and her budgerigar in a small rented flat in north Kensington. This was followed a few years later by spending eight months in India volunteering in an orphanage/school in north Bihar and then with the Methodist Mission Society in a rural hospital in west Bengal. Looking back, she realises that travelling to India independently aged 18 was quite a risk and a challenge.

After a degree from Oxford and a diploma in Social Administration at the LSE, Lucy’s first job was working for Holloway Tenant Cooperative as a housing management worker employed by the tenants in north Islington. This was when she first came across CSV. A number of community sector jobs in London and Manchester followed and after 10 years Lucy moved into local government in the early eighties working initially on economic development issues. This was a time of major economic recession and compulsory competitive tendering for council services.

After working for two London councils and the London-wide association of councils, Lucy moved to become Head of Policy and was subsequently recruited to be the Chief Executive of Bristol City Council. In 1996, she led Bristol through re-organisation to become a new unitary council with full education and social services responsibilities and strong partnerships with the private and community sectors.

In 2000 Lucy moved back to London and a job as Director of Public Services in the Treasury. One of the first outsiders to join direct as a senior civil servant in the Treasury, this was a time when a lot of policy was being developed with a strong Treasury input, on child poverty, regional development, learning and skills and the voluntary sector. Amongst her responsibilities was working on voluntary sector policies, then something of a blank space amongst Treasury officials. She was involved in a number of voluntary sector reviews, new voluntary sector programmes and in the setting up of what became the Office of the Third Sector, now the Office of Civil Society in the Cabinet Office. After a number of budgets, comprehensive spending reviews and innumerable public service agreements Lucy moved from the Treasury to run the Improvement and Development Agency for local government where she also developed strong links between elected councillors, councils and the voluntary sector.

Over the years Lucy has been an active trustee and non-executive and been involved with a range of charities and community organisations. Most recently she was a Trustee of Coram, the children’s charity for nine years, and she remains a Governor and Vice Chair of the Working Men’s College. Coming to CSV is, as she puts it:

“a little like coming full circle as I started by working life in north Islington in the community sector and I am now running a national charity based next to Kings Cross.

“Running a national charity like CSV in the current tough times has at least as many challenges as the other leadership jobs I have done. What links them all is my determination to see organisations make a positive difference for some of the most disadvantaged in our society. Professional skills combined with passion for our social action and volunteering mission are what I want us to have to make CSV sustainable and fit for the future.”