



## Celebrating 90 years of voluntary and community action on Tyneside

A collection of memories from people who worked in our  
organisation from 1955 to the present

● One of the  
30 Tyneside  
occupation  
centres for  
the many  
unemployed  
in the region  
during the  
Thirties.

## Sharing a proud history of caring

# Our story: Memories from 1955 to 2019

Over the last few months, we have pulled countless fascinating stories from the archive to help tell our story. It's also interesting to add a personal perspective so we decided to talk to a number of people who worked for and with our organisation in the last fifty years. We asked them about their roles, the key challenges faced by the organisation and the communities we supported at the time, and how all of this influenced their later career. We were impressed with the detail and variety of stories we received from people who have gone on to make significant contributions to our sector both regionally and nationally. These memories not only offer an insight into what life was like for local organisations and communities but also share useful advice that still applies today.

## 1955 – 1980: The welfare state, then community work into 'The era of community development'

**Terence Finley** worked at our organisation (then called the Tyneside Council of Social Service or CSS) between 1975 and 1987 as Development Officer, Deputy Secretary and then General Secretary (Chief Executive). He then worked for the Baring Foundation and Millfield House Foundation. He shared memories of our former General Secretary John Long OBE.

**'John Long's achievements between 1954 and 1980 were considerable.** He not only raised the funds to keep the CSS going through the 50s and 60s, when many thought the voluntary sector might no longer be needed after the development of the Welfare State, but also brought the CSS into the era of community development by pioneering community work in Byker in the 70s. A longstanding Committee for work with older people was hived off as Age Concern and the work with organisations for the disabled became the Council for Disabled. John Long was crucial in the establishment of MEA House opened by the Queen in 1974.

Prior to this, leading voluntary organisations, like others, were housed in attics and basements around the city. In 1979, CVS celebrated its 50th year and John Long was awarded an OBE.'

The 1970s brought challenging economic times, youth unemployment and changing communities. **Kevin Curley CBE was Assistant Secretary between 1974 and 1979** and a Trustee from 1979 – 1980. He remembers the impact of these issues well.

**“ Around 1974 inflation reached 25% and staff salaries were revised twice a year. The sector and the people we serviced were hit hard by rising costs**

'Around 1974 inflation reached 25% and staff salaries were revised twice a year. The sector and the people we serviced were hit hard by rising costs. It's hard to imagine now the damage that 25% inflation did to communities. Youth employment was a major issue and the sector mobilised to use various job creation programmes. I worked with Jim Clavering the dedicated leader at Northumberland Association of Youth Clubs to set up the Tyne and Wear New Jobs Horizons Project. Byker and other neighbourhoods were being demolished and the sector and the City Council were trying to hold communities together with

When our organisation (then called the Tyneside Council of Social Service) first formed in 1929, we provided boats for unemployed men in Hebburn so they could fish. Hebburn was also the place where we helped to set up Britain's first community centre



community development projects. Newcastle CVS led a community development project in Byker. There was a big push by the sector to open neighbourhood advice centres, with a focus on welfare benefits take up.'

**Kevin also worked with partners from Child Poverty Action Group and Age Concern to set up North Tyneside CVS (now VODA) around 1977.**

Although Kevin Curley and John Long saw different values and purpose in the work of Newcastle CVS, Kevin recalls how much he learned from and was influenced by John.

'His meticulous attention to detail, his understanding of the need to build a strong trustee board and his commitment to achieving diverse and independent funding were approaches I took with me to Hull CVS in 1980 when I was appointed as their first CEO and which have influenced my whole career in the

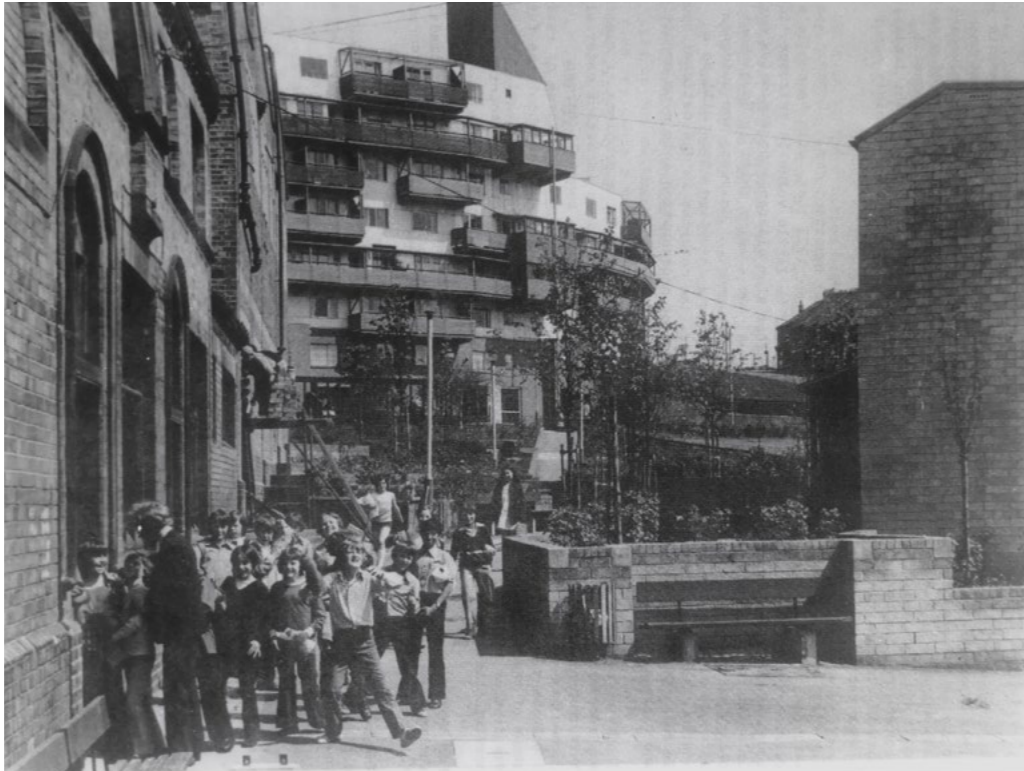
**“ What I took from my six years in Newcastle was understanding the impact of poverty and insecure employment on families and vulnerable individuals**

voluntary sector. Most importantly, what I took from my six years in Newcastle was understanding the impact of poverty and insecure employment on families and vulnerable individuals, and of the resilience of neighbourhoods and the people – often women – who took on leadership roles.'

Kevin Curley later went on to become the Chief Executive of NAVCA and is still involved with infrastructure organisations.

**Professor John Veit-Wilson dedicated 21 years as a Trustee of Newcastle CVS.** In the 1970s he was involved in the working groups for establishing the North Tyneside CVS and the Advice and Information Services. John contributed to many committees at Newcastle CVS. He was a founding member of the Child Poverty Action Group and was a member of the first national UK survey of poverty research team in 1964. He has published countless papers on issues around poverty. Today John is Emeritus Professor at the University of Newcastle School of Geography, Politics and Sociology. John's engagement with a significant number of local committees supporting different geographical areas and themes of work highlight the huge contribution

The Byker Wall, photo from 'Speaking for myself... A report on the Byker redevelopment made for Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service' April 1978



that Newcastle CVS made to social action over the years. John also encouraged the production of robust studies, which CVS continues to produce.

Our organisation has always supported other charities to develop and grow but up until the 1980s there was a large focus on providing direct services to people. Terence Finley described some of the key projects at this time.

'Between 1978 and 1980 there were part time social workers student training unit staff and a Volunteer Bureau Organiser. Funding

**66 Funding was provided for a pioneering integrated social and community work and advice project**

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Newbiggin Hall estate, a project to promote links in the health sector, a hospital based volunteer coordinator and a team of painters and decorators working in the homes of elderly people. I chaired a committee concerned with the settlement of Vietnamese refugees in Newcastle which culminated in a conference highlighting the lack of infrastructure for such work and led indirectly to the setting up of the North East Refugee Service.'

**'The CSS was well managed but changes were needed.** Kevin Curley, who was young and able, brought new life to the organisation and, not without some resistance, helped to move it in new directions.'

Terence went on to become a self-employed Adviser / Assessor for numerous charitable trusts.

'I am glad to have been able to play a part, for nearly 40 years, in the development of the third sector and its work on behalf of communities, groups and individuals in the region.'

## 1980s: 'A leading light in partnership working'

Unemployment continued to be a major issue throughout the 1980s and our organisation managed to survive several budget cuts. **Olivia Grant was a Trustee between 1979 and 1989 and shared her memories of these difficult times.**

'The period 1979-1989, was hard. I believe the crucial role that CVS played in supporting the wide range of member and partner organisations was fundamental to retaining and even growing skills in the sector, and offering support to a huge variety of groups serving the people in the area.

One of the key challenges I have seen has been the acceptance that what the CVS does and the help it gives is vital, yet, despite this undoubted support in principle, excruciating choices and cuts have been made over decades. That CVS has survived and remained so fundamental to the people of the area is a tribute to the work and leadership of the staff and the board, and their passion to provide high quality voluntary sector led services.'

Olivia Grant was Chair of Council and Pro-Chancellor at the

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University of Newcastle (2002-2011), Vice Chair of the Newcastle Building Society until April 2008 and became Chair of Your Homes Newcastle in 2014. Olivia was awarded an Honorary DCL in 2011 in recognition of her service to the University.

In the late 1980s, we see a shift to more partnership working and support for local charities.

**Shona Alexander was the Information Services Officer at between 1982 and 1994.** Shona described one of the biggest challenges as 'Keeping up with new initiatives in both local and central government. Newcastle

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was seen as a leading light in effective partnership working even back then! There was comparatively more funding around and Newcastle CVS helped local charities and voluntary groups to start using computers. I was personally involved in helping to set up new charities in the city, including Streetwise, Coping With Cancer and Dementia Care.'

'I went on to work in four different local authorities for 15 years but have now returned to the voluntary sector in Newcastle.'

Shona is now the Chief Executive at Citizens Advice Newcastle.

Jill Baker shares similar memories during her time as Self Help Group Development Officer from 1985 – 1987.

## “ The biggest challenge was carving a niche for ourselves with statutory partners

‘[The biggest challenge was] carving a niche for ourselves with statutory partners. It was my first ever ‘proper’ job and in a way it secured my place within the sector for the next 16 years, as well as meaning I had that experience and knowledge to draw upon. As my roles have also become more senior it helps me connect with people and ensure we remember the vital role the sector has in society’.

Jill Baker is now Director of Development at Lloyds Bank Foundation.

**Peter Deans was the Project Organiser from 1985 -1988 and Funding Advice Officer from 1988 -1990.**

## “ The most prominently discussed social issue at this time was the high unemployment rates

‘The most prominently discussed social issue at this time was the high unemployment rates and the impact of long term unemployment upon society. The projects I worked on were writing the first guide to grant making trusts for charities and the development work to set up the Community Foundation for Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. I also worked with hundreds of groups to help them apply for funding.’

Peter said that working for our organisation ‘gave me a great understanding of the variety of the sector, it’s characteristics in the north east, the social issues they worked on, its culture and the challenges they faced . This influenced all my later work in the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation, the distribution of National Lottery funds, the development of the social investment market and now as a third sector adviser and trustee.’

Today, Peter Deans is an independent consultant working with charities and social enterprises.

**Newcastle CVS (now Connected Voice) was instrumental in establishing the Community Foundation Tyne and Wear and Northumberland in 1988.** Peter



The Inner City Forum was an independent body set up in the seventies with the help of our organisation. It offered assistance with funding, development and training

Deans did the feasibility study and together with Carole Howells recognised that it was vital to get more money into the area and one way was to unlock private wealth. George Hepburn was the founding Director and Grigor McLelland was the Founding Chair with Carole as the Deputy Chair.

**Carole Howells MBE became the Director in 1986 and took our organisation through its next phase until 2009.** This period was characterised by responding

to social need, the major regeneration projects that took place in Newcastle and a close but independent relationship with the City Council to develop partnerships and improve and enhance funding for the local voluntary sector. Carole established Ellison Services (now called Charity Business Services) when she recognised the need for better financial management support for small local charities. Carole persuaded Directors of the Northern Rock Foundation to fund Newcastle CVS to provide advice to the sector. Our organisation was then able to assist with company registration as well as charity registration, which helped organisations to access funding more easily.

Carole was appointed as Chair of Involve North East in 2009. She died in 2015, leaving a lasting legacy through organising and influencing for a strong voluntary and community sector.

## “ A great example of Carole’s sense of clarity and purpose was her view of the role of Newcastle CVS as a membership organisation

**Mary Coyle MBE DL, former Chair of Newcastle CVS said** ‘a great example of Carole’s sense of clarity and purpose was her view of the role of Newcastle CVS as a membership organisation for local charities and community groups – acting as an incubator of projects until they could be handed over to an appropriate voluntary and community organisation.

Today, Mary Coyle is Chair of North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group

## “ I was very proud of the calibre of people we could attract at NCVS

‘I was a member trustee of NCVS for about 20 years from about 1988, during which time I held a number of offices, Chair, Vice Chair and Chair of Finance Committee. I was also a founding director of Ellison Services (now Charity Business Services).

Some of the initiatives that were developed during my tenure and which I was particularly interested and excited by were the Carers project, the Advocacy project and the Regeneration project.

I was very proud of the calibre of people we could attract at NCVS, many of whom went on to hold senior positions in Newcastle, the North East and indeed further afield. I learned a lot during my time as trustee of NCVS, about the sector and about myself. I pay tribute to NCVS for helping to develop my management and leadership skills.’

## 1990s – 2000s: 'A time of relative plenty public sector funding but also a time of limited technological capacity'

Neil Shashoua joined Newcastle CVS in 1989 as a Volunteer Coordinator when unemployment continued to be a major issue in communities.

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'At the time nearly one in five people of working age were out of work in Tyneside and 40% of unemployed men had been out of work for 12 months or more. I worked alongside Rosemary Allen and staff at Community Service Volunteers (now Volunteering Matters) to recruit, place and support unemployed people into voluntary work to give them work experience, maintain their skills and keep them motivated.'

'Newcastle CVS had already helped to set up and develop credit unions to prevent people borrowing from loan sharks and getting into debt, and the Inner City Forum which connected VCS organisations involved in regeneration. There was even a project around community health services operating in Blakelaw, run by future Chief Executive Sally Young.'

Neil left the organisation in 1993 before returning in 2014 as the Blue Stone Consortium Business Development Manager (another Newcastle CVS initiative).

'The most significant legacy of

being at Newcastle CVS has been that it gave me the means and the role to help make a small part of the world a little bit better for some people; and it connected me with others who wanted to do the same. I've not lost that sense of how bringing people together to improve something that's important to them results in positive change.'

Judith Temple began working in the front office in 1993 for three months on a temporary part-time basis. Three months turned into 26 years as Judith remains as Office Manager today.

'Over the years I've worked here there have been many projects and the work of Newcastle CVS has constantly changed. That is why it has always been interesting. In 1993 Newcastle CVS had a project that supported social workers in the voluntary sector. This was managed by Anne Hubbard who worked for Newcastle CVS for many years. There was also a team supporting local credit unions providing training and development and was led by Lynne Caffrey and Margaret Nolan. Pam Jobbins joined Newcastle CVS shortly after me and she developed the early advocacy work and advocacy forum. There were no advocacy workers at that time and Pam secured funding for an officer to develop advocacy in Newcastle.'

Ellison Services (Charity Business Services) was in its early days in 1993. Moira Mart and Ray Dixon had started working for Newcastle CVS in 1992. Moira administered the payroll bureau and it was all done on large sheets of paper and handwritten pay slips. Ray Dixon did book-keeping and accounts for charities. He was well liked by all of the customers and the success of the early days of Ellison Services

was due to his friendly manner and his willingness to always help someone even when he was very busy. When Ray died suddenly everyone was devastated and all of the customers sent tributes and a large number attended his funeral. The meeting room at Newcastle CVS is called after him as a reminder of the early days of Ellison Services and his contribution to making it a success. Moira is still working for Newcastle CVS and she has supported hundreds of voluntary organisations with their payroll and queries for 26 years.

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Over the years I've seen many changes but the dedication of staff and the type of people working for Newcastle CVS has never changed. Like me, staff who work for Newcastle CVS have

always enjoyed their time here and many still have links to the organisation. Staff comment on how the organisation supports and develops employees and that it is an enjoyable place to work.'

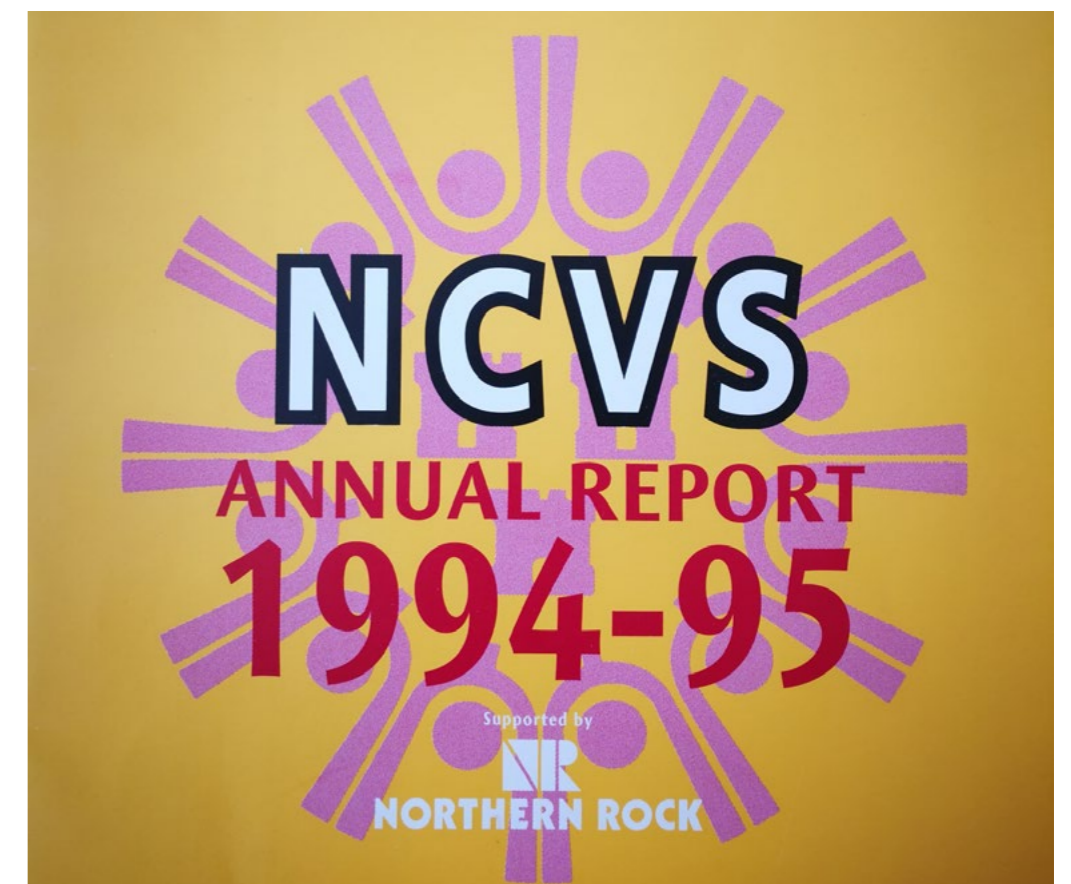
1993 saw the beginning of our advocacy work. Paul Marriott was the Advocacy Network Newcastle Development Worker from 1993 until 1998.

'The Advocacy Network was described at the time as a model piece of development work – and so it has turned out to be with the project still running today and attracting national recognition. The key challenges were short term funding, full cost recovery and engaging the voluntary sector in regeneration projects.'

'I now work in a hospice where volunteering and advocacy are important components and I often refer back to what I learned from CVS in that context.'

Today, Paul Marriott is Chief Executive at St. Cuthbert's Hospice.

It's interesting to look back at how our name and brand has changed over time. Many CVS's throughout the country used to share a similar logo. Today they are called Infrastructure Organisations and many have moved on from their 'CVS' name



The 1990s brought increased funding and new regeneration schemes. Rob Williamson was the Development Officer between 1998 and 2000.

## “ Newcastle was benefitting from several large-scale, area-based regeneration schemes

‘Newcastle was benefitting from several large-scale, area-based regeneration schemes. Community and voluntary sector engagement was high on the agenda and funding opportunities were more possible. Looking back, it was a time of relative plenty in terms of public sector funding but the complexity of the regeneration programmes in particular made them challenging for small, local groups. It was also a time of very limited technological capacity in the sector. I remember there was just one PC at CVS when I joined, which we had to book in time to use!’

Rob Williamson is now Chief Executive at Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

**Moira Gray became Information Officer in 1993.** ‘The Information Officer role was developing and changing rapidly as I began to work, mainly due to the rise of IT. In the years before 2000, we bought a lot of stand alone computers. IT took up a lot of my time (and those who worked with me).

It was a sharp learning curve for me initially but great fun and rewarding now to see that some of those initial “enquiries” are successful

organisations e.g. Stepney Bank Stables, Recyke y’ Bike, and Open Clasp Theatre to name a few.

‘Newcastle CVS was constantly up against a lack of money to do all it needed, but those days were wealthy compared to now.’

## The Age of Austerity and Innovation

From 2010 the Coalition Government initiated the policy of austerity, brought in the concept of Big Society and then introduced welfare reforms.

**Sally Young was appointed as Chief Executive in 2010** and she noted ‘This was a major shift, not just in funding, but also in how central, and indeed local government viewed the

## “ This was a major shift, not just in funding but also in how central, and indeed local government viewed the voluntary sector

voluntary sector. The impact of welfare reforms, particularly the introduction of Universal Credit, proved disastrous for many local residents and also had a major impact on how voluntary and community organisations worked. The loss of central and local government grant funding, regeneration money, and the shift to (mainly) large contracts proved disastrous for some local organisations. Newcastle CVS set up the Newcastle Voluntary Sector Consortium, which later became the Blue Stone Consortium.

Newcastle CVS lost an amount of project and policy work funding,

but we practised what we preached and looked at different income streams, reorganised, but kept to our values. We produced a number of studies and policy papers in order to give local people, groups and communities voices and hold decision-makers to account.

We expanded into Gateshead and our digital capacity meant we were able to offer more services to different areas. We engaged in partnerships with local, regional and national allies so our local groups, and thus communities and residents would benefit. We merged with HAREF and SkillsBridge to ensure those projects and services could still be offered. I continue to be amazed at the innovation and dedication that volunteers, trustees and staff display, often against the odds, so that people and communities are supported in the most difficult of situations.’

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## Looking back: what can we learn?

It is interesting to look back and see how the work of charities and community organisations in the North East has progressed but also where similar approaches can still apply today - the importance of good governance from a strong board of trustees, the need to have diverse funding and income streams, embracing partnership working and having the flexibility to adapt services

to respond the changing needs of local communities. These are particularly important as we are in a time of reduced funding and increased demand for our services.

It is interesting to note that back in the 1990s, charities were slow to make use of digital technologies. This trend has continued through to today with Lloyds Bank UK Digital Index reporting that 100,000 charities are lacking basic digital skills. Now a number of regional and national organisations have begun to put a focus on addressing this. It is likely we will see more focus on digital technologies and how to stay safe in an online world, and once again, we try to keep abreast of these initiatives and share knowledge and skills through our comprehensive training programme. .

One thing that hasn’t changed is that our organisation, and the communities and organisations we have supported over the last 90 years, are driven by motivated, hard-working and passionate people who want to make a difference.

Former employee Neil Shashoua summarises what this means to people:

**‘Many people, arguably most people in this country, get to have little real say with national and international government on issues that affect their lives; such as climate change, conflict, poverty and the economic system. But the voluntary and community sector (when at its best) aims to give everyone the opportunity of joining with others to determine to be active on how those issues impact on them as individuals, their families and their communities and neighbourhoods.’**

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share their memories of our organisation for our 90th anniversary celebrations.

Thank you also to the thousands of trustees, staff and volunteers who have been involved with us over the last 90 years; your commitment, work and energy have made us what we are today.

This document is available on our website at [www.connectedvoice.org.uk](http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk)

If you have a memory that you would like to be included, please email [connect@connectedvoice.org.uk](mailto:connect@connectedvoice.org.uk)

Photo: Teresa Merz, pictured left was one of the founding members of our organisation in 1929. You can read more about Teresa and our early history on our website. Photo courtesy of Simon Pringle.



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