



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

SEMINAR ABSTRACT

20 May 2015

Gaynor Humphreys and Jenny Harrow

**Witness: Girls in Gower Street—commitment, confidence and carrying on
in London's 'LCSS' in the 1970s.**

1970 was the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the London Council of Social Service. Organisational antecedent of today's 'London Voluntary Service Council', the LCSS saw itself as "entering the 1970s, at a time of great social change, determined to maintain its traditions of service to London". The resulting resource implications were set out calmly with an underpinning of evident expectation: its plans were capable of materialising "if realistic support continues from local authorities, charitable trusts and voluntary subscriptions".

Yet the characteristics of organisational stability, appeals to historical successes and memories of an embattled London, as well as to the continuing use of London's "rich resources of voluntary service" were hardly the complete picture of the late 1960s and 1970s voluntary sector, nor of statutory-voluntary relations in the capital.

How then were the contested as well as consensual issues in this period interpreted then and now by LCSS's employees, especially the most junior administrative assistants? What were the effects and importance to them of the prominence of women's leadership, both in LCSS's separate 'departments', and especially from its General Secretary, Miss Kathleen Proud? What kinds of working conditions and motivations faced them in this necessarily rather 'grand' organisation but formally continuingly collaborative organisation? What experiences of the AAs (whose names never made it to the annual reports), if any, formed their understanding and valuing of the sector?

Gaynor Humphreys and Jenny Harrow were both LCSS admin assistants in this pivotal period, both having never left the sector, as trustees, volunteers, Gaynor in a series of prestigious CEO posts, nationally and internationally, and Jenny in 'pracademic' sector study, and a university chair. This seminar offers their recollection and reflection from their 'Girls in Gower Street' earlier lives.