



# A History of the Citizens' Advice Bureau



**1939**



**2009**

**Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau**  
Ash Hill Road, Surrey.

# Index

## Part 1: Citizens' Advice Bureau - the early years

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<u>3</u>
<b>Beginnings</b>	<u>3</u>
<b>World War II</b>	<u>4</u>
<b>Post War</b>	<u>6</u>
<b>The Welfare State</b>	<u>6</u>
<b>Moving Forward</b>	<u>8</u>
<b>The 1960s onwards</b>	<u>9</u>

## Part 2: Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau

<b>The Beginning</b>	<u>10</u>
<b>Under Threat</b>	<u>11</u>
<b>Portacabins</b>	<u>11</u>
<b>Move to the Ash Centre</b>	<u>12</u>
<b>Volunteers</b>	<u>12</u>
<b>Board of Trustees</b>	<u>13</u>
<b>Adapting to today's needs</b>	<u>13</u>

## Introduction

Anybody who visits the offices of Ash Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) today (2009) will find a friendly welcome from highly trained and helpful staff. The modern and well equipped offices are situated at the rear of the Ash Centre, near the shopping parade and at the hub of the village of Ash. The Citizens Advice Bureau is at the rear of the building and the Centre has parking and easy access for disabled people.

Ash CAB is just one part of one of the UK's largest voluntary organisations. All local bureaux are separate registered charities who are members of Citizens Advice, the national charity which sets standards for good quality advice and equal opportunities. It supports bureaux with an information system, training and other services.

Nationally, the Citizens Advice Bureau has a workforce of over 26,000 people, providing free, independent and impartial information and advice about 5.5 million new problems a year. Most of the workforce are volunteers.

It has not always been this way.

## Beginnings

The earliest ideas for a national network of Advice Bureaux emerged during the 1930s when the Government of the time believed there could be a need for a nationally led but locally run information service to support new welfare services that were being planned. However, the event which kick started plans and drove them to become a reality was the outbreak of World War II. The Munich crisis in 1938 and the first evacuations of children from key cities such as London gave a glimpse of the social problems that could arise if war should break out. From 1938 it was clear that if war came, civilians would need urgent advice to guide them through the turmoil that may ensue.

The National Council for Social Services put forward plans to establish a national network of local Centres which would provide free and unbiased information and advice. Local centres were to be linked with a central advisory network to ensure that reliable information could be available to all who needed it. Initially the NCSS funded the service but in 1940 the Ministry of Health provided a Grant of £6,549. The organisation was named the "Citizens' Advice Bureau" and their owl logo was to become a familiar sight throughout the country.



Citizens' Advice Notes, researched by a team of lawyers, were stencilled and distributed by NCSS. These were updated monthly and provided an overview of social legislation.

## World War 2

On Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August 1939, the BBC announced:

***“The National Council for Social Services has drawn up plans to set up what they call a ‘Citizens’ Advice Bureau’ in London and other large cities and towns if war does break out. The bureaux will act as clearing houses for family and personal problems that arise from war conditions. They will give advice on what to do if your home is damaged during an air raid or how to get in touch with your children if they are evacuated”.***

When war was declared on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, the Citizens' Advice Bureau was ready to press ahead with the establishment of bureaux in places not already covered by the scheme. It was usually a local resident who became prime mover in bringing the service to their area. In many areas, organisations experienced in social care services used their knowledge and skills to set up bureaux. Where no such organisations existed, a variety of organisations such as Toc H, Rotary Clubs or groups of professional men took on the task.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, all men in Britain aged between 18 and 40, who were not in reserved occupations, became legally liable for call-up under the new National Service (Armed Forces) Act. The age limit was raised to 51 at the end of 1941, when single women between 20 and 30 also were required to do some kind of war service. Within three days of 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, 827,000 schoolchildren and 524,000 mothers with children under 5 were evacuated from vulnerable areas of the country.



The life of an entire nation was turned upside down. There were over 60 million civilian changes of address between 1939 and 1945. Within the first two months, 200 Citizens' Advice Bureaux had been set up, mostly in Town Halls, libraries, churches and private houses. In some places, vans or even horse boxes were converted to provide a mobile service.

Mobile services took information and advice to the heart of communities in bomb damaged areas. Many people's question, when their home had just been bombed, was simply "What do we do now?"

A bureau in Toynbee Hall, East London, recorded that a client had said: *"We were bombed out the night before last and the pawn tickets went. Now the pawnbroker says he can't give us our stuff back without them. He's got our blankets and our best clothes".* The bureau also recorded complaints about rats coming from sewers hit by bombs.



WW2 Identity Cards

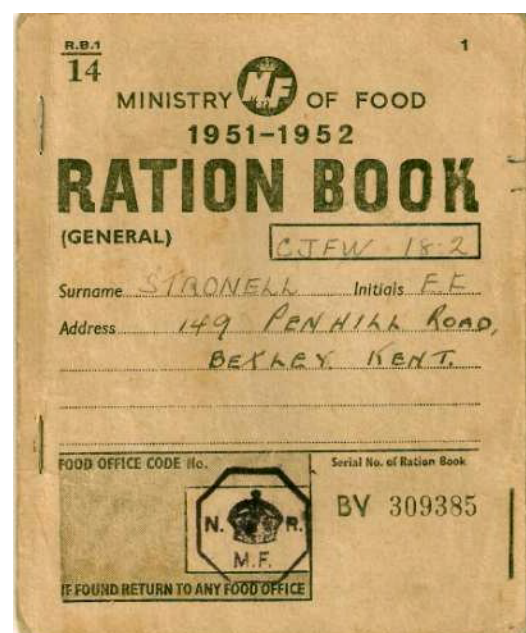
As well as providing information to the community, much as the Social Policy arm of the modern CAB does today, Bureaux were also able to feed back to the Government the problems and issues that were of most concern to people. Numerous families were broken apart. Communications became a major issue.

Food and commodities were in short supply, rationed or completely unobtainable. It was the role of the Citizens' Advice Bureau to find out what could or should be done and pass the information to those who needed it.

CAB advisers dealt with evacuation and homelessness issues. They helped trace missing relatives and prisoners of war. This was a major and time consuming issue in many cases. They advised what to do about rationing and lost ration books. They even advised on how to eke out limited resources.

Poverty and debt soon became key issues, not least because incomes reduced due to call-ups for military and war service. So reliable was the CAB's information that Citizens' Advice Notes were used by people in Central and Local Government and Reference Libraries.

By 1942 there were over 1,000 bureaux across the UK staffed entirely by volunteers.



WW2 Ration book

## Post War



At the first national conference of Citizens' Advice Bureaux in 1945, it was agreed that although the war was over, there would still be a need for the CAB.

The immediate post war years brought their own problems as servicemen returned home and families adjusted to peacetime. Food rationing continued until July 1954. Housing was a major issue for very many

people. Numerous homes had been lost. Many private houses and flats had been requisitioned by the Government during the war to house homeless families, so there was an extensive building, derequisitioning and resettlement period. No new homes had been built in wartime and materials and labour shortages had made normal repairs impossible. Therefore housing issues became very prominent for many people.

Through all this, people continued to turn to the CAB for advice. However, funding from the Ministry of Health was halved in the early 1940s and then discontinued. This was a major blow for the CAB. In order for a bureau to survive, funding had to be sought from other sources such as the Nuffield Foundation, Carnegie Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. However, by 1953 the number of bureaux had halved. Government funding did not start again until 1960.



Bureau Early Post war years

## The Welfare State

By the time Britain entered the second World War, pressures had been mounting for social reform. The surprising reality was that rationing for everybody had actually raised the food consumption of the poorest groups. During the war, free school meals had been introduced for children from poorer families and there was free cod liver oil and orange juice for the under twos, and extra milk and eggs for expectant mothers. All of this resulted in a fall in the infant mortality rate and a sharp drop in cases of TB. The sacrifices made by so many during the war created a feeling in the country that never again should British people be called upon to fight for an unequal or unfair society.

The war provided a catalyst for social reconstruction and the Beveridge Report in November 1942 was seen by many as a blueprint for the eradication of Want and security “from the cradle to the grave”.

The Beveridge Report heralded the advent of the modern Welfare State, when existing welfare measures were overhauled and new ideas were crystallised. The Beveridge proposals rationalised previously fragmented relief systems including the Poor Law, Unemployment Insurance, Pensions Insurance and National Health Insurance and created a single system of national insurance intended to cover all classes of family need with a supporting national health service, secondary education and good standard of living for all.

Legislation introduced a five pronged attack on the “5 giants” of want, disease, squalor, ignorance, and idleness through a universal welfare state which would provide a comprehensive health service, expanded social housing, free secondary education, and full employment, as well as benefits for the poor and family allowances.

In the first year of the Welfare State, the total number of enquiries dealt with by the CAB rose to over 1.5 million. Independence of the CAB was a key advantage to people using the service because they could discuss matters in confidence and receive unbiased advice. For example, a disabled person could register their disability with the Ministry of Labour in order to gain access to disability training schemes and enhance employment opportunities through the disability employment quota scheme. However, the down side of this was that registration may actually disadvantage a disabled person by permanently reducing the types of opportunities available. The CAB could help to examine the issues.

A harassed mother, perhaps living in a slum and at breaking point, might desperately have asked the CAB how to get some of her children taken into care to ease the burden. An adviser may have seen, during discussion, the various causes for the crisis (housing, poverty and/or health issues) and identify ways the mother could be supported via the new regulations to keep her family together.

New regulations were complicated and confusing. CAB advisers were called upon to understand and advise upon complex issues. It was not just an understanding of the new legislation itself that was required. Advisers needed to be able to understand how one service dovetailed with another and the long term consequences of a chosen route.

It was a tall order and in 1946 training for CAB leaders was introduced and a nationally co-ordinated training programme for new advisers was agreed.

Today, all advisers go through an extensive initial training course before beginning to work with clients. This is followed by ongoing training to keep them abreast of current Legislation and systems. The original Citizens Advice Notes that formed the core of CAB knowledge were soon replaced by loose leaf duplicated notes that were updated every month. The advent of the technological age meant that all this knowledge could be stored on computer. However, even today shelves remain stacked with additional books and files containing information on a huge range of issues.

## **Moving forward**

In a country recovering from the ravages of war, the British government did not have the money to pay sufficient flat rate benefits to keep people from poverty, so means tested National Assistance played a bigger role than Beveridge had planned. Family Allowances were also never implemented in the generous way Beveridge had proposed.

However, as Britain grew wealthier, soon everyone could afford a basic basket of goods (using Seebohm Rowntree's ability to afford a "shopping basket" of standard food, housing and clothing as a method of defining "poverty"). According to Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics, *"By 1950 poverty, as defined by a basket of basic goods, had virtually disappeared. Employment - the lack of which had led to a rise in poverty in the 1930s - had returned and the welfare state was having a major impact,"*

It would be easy to think that the need for a Citizens' Advice Service might diminish in such a climate but financing the Welfare State became a key political issue. There were ever increasing costs for the NHS due to advances in medical technology, increased life expectancy and increased demand. Insurance benefits were not paid at a high enough level to prevent many pensioners living in poverty, and by the 1970s unemployment had become a major problem which was to endure well into the 1990s. Social problems continued.

Through all this the CAB was there to advise but just as important were their first hand knowledge of the problems people faced and their ability to feed back information to influence future social policy making. As Margaret Brasnett said in her "Story of the Citizens' Advice Bureau", *"Scores of bureaux all over the country tell headquarters where they find that the new shoe pinches or the old one is losing its good fit".*

## The 1960s onwards

**1960** Government funding for the national body was restored.

**1960s** A quarter of all enquiries were related to housing. Number of bureaux had fallen from 1,074 to 416



A bureau in the 1960s

**1963** Government asked bureaux to play a major part in a new programme of consumer education and advice.

**1965** Total number of enquiries nationally reached 1.25 million.

**1970s** Consumer protection became a key issue.

**1972** The Citizens Advice service became independent. Previously, the national organisation was part of the National Council of Social Services and most bureaux were run by the local Council for Voluntary Service.

**1970s** Major housing reforms. Increase in people seeking housing advice.

**1980s** Two recessions increased poverty. Debt became a major issue.

**1990s** Major reforms to benefits system brought influx of enquiries.

**1999** [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk) was launched

**2000s** Housing, benefits, employment and debt continued to be key issues.

**1979** The CAB was brought to Ash.

## Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau

*Much of the information in this section has been extracted from "Ash Citizens Advice Bureau - the first 20 years", a history of the bureau compiled in 1999 by Robert Lawrie, who has been a volunteer with the bureau since 1989.*

### The beginning

At a public meeting sponsored by Ash Parish Council in January 1979, it was agreed that Ash should have its own Citizen's Advice Bureau, conditional upon Guildford Borough Council meeting the costs for its launch. A committee was formed to set up the Bureau. They included Guildford Borough Councillor, Rosemary Hall, Mrs Jean Curwell, Mr Tom Lloyd, Mr Ron Ludgate, Mrs Marie Seakin and Mrs Audrey Williams.

The project had been discussed for five years but lack of accommodation had previously thwarted the plan. In 1979, accommodation became available next to the Victoria Hall due to the Parish Council's move from there to larger premises at the Ash Social Centre. Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau was opened on 13th July 1979 by Cranley Onslow, MP for Woking. He remarked: *"Ash's new Citizens' Advice Bureau is a mine of information which will be of tremendous benefit to the fast growing community"*. At the opening ceremony was Mrs Rosemary Hall, described as the prime mover in fighting for and establishing Ash Citizens' Advice Bureau and who has continued to support the bureau to this day as a member of the Trustee Board.



Victoria Hall, Ash



*Photograph courtesy of the Aldershot News*

### Official Opening of Ash CAB 1979

In the picture are:

Cranley Onslow, MP. (left)

Organiser, Avis Ritter holding OPEN card

Ron Burgess, Mayor of Guildford

Joan Golding, Ash Vale Councillor

Tom Tumber, Chief Executive of GBC

Councillors and members of the original

Ash CAB steering group.

Then, as now, the aims of the Citizens' Advice Bureau were: *"To ensure that individuals do not suffer through ignorance of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available or through an inability to express their needs effectively. To exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally. The service is confidential, free, impartial and independent"*. Initially, the bureau opened five days a week between 10.00.a.m. and 12.30.p.m.

The Aldershot News reported that during the first three weeks, the bureau dealt with over 50 enquiries. At the first Annual General Meeting in 1980, when the bureau had been running for ten months, it was reported that 420 enquiries had been dealt with. Housing was the principle concern, followed by family and personal problems and social security. Over the years, the number of enquiries rose year on year as the bureau became known and trusted by local people. By the AGM in 1981, enquiries had doubled and five years later had reached 1,724. By 1988 the figure had grown to 3,000.

### **Under threat**

In the summer of 1986, Elizabeth Filkin, Director the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (NACAB) visited Ash CAB and held discussions with Guildford Borough Council. The outcome was that unless Ash CAB could find more space, NACAB would withdraw Ash CAB's membership.

### **Portacabins**

The threat of closure continued through 1987, during which emergency meetings were held and much discussion took place about what to do. It was not until September 1987 that Guildford Borough Council's Housing and Health Committee offered a lifeline. Ash Parish Council gave permission for a portable building to be erected on Parish Council land adjacent to the Social Centre. Guildford Borough Council promised £45,000 in the 1988/9 budget to provide accommodation for Ash CAB. Therefore the crisis was abated.



*Photograph courtesy of the Aldershot News*

#### **Tuesday 9th August 1988**

The first of two portacabins was delivered to Ash Parish Council Car Park next to Ash Social Centre. These were to be Ash CAB's home for the next few years.

Once the portcabins were in place the building needed furnishings.

Guildford Borough Council had provided the finance for the building but Ash CAB had to find the funds for the rest. They were extremely fortunate that a local removal firm, WIDS carried out the removal of existing furniture and equipment from Victoria Hall Annexe to the new premises free of charge. Vale Furnishers supplied carpets and Marks and Spencer supplied curtains and gift vouchers. The new building was opened on Saturday 29th October 1988 by Cranley Onslow, MP.

The new accommodation provided much needed additional space for the bureau and the luxury of 3 interview rooms, a general office, a manager's office, small kitchen and toilet facilities. The building and one of the interview rooms was wheelchair accessible.

### **Move to the Ash Centre**

The portacabins were to remain Ash CAB's home for almost 12 years but in 1999, the decision was taken to re-house both the CAB and Ash Parish Council in purpose built premises. In order to prepare the site it was necessary to demolish the Parish Social Centre, which had been home to the Parish Council since their move from the Victoria Hall. The two CAB portacabins had to be moved a few yards to make room for a third portacabin which was to provide temporary accommodation to the Parish Council during building works. These manoeuvres took place on 20th September 1999, one of the wettest days of the year.

In April 2000, when the new Ash Centre was built, Ash CAB moved to their new and current home at the rear of the building. Moving day was 1st April 2000 and as Vicky Payne, Ash CAB's current manager says, it was "*an auspicious start!*". She relates that the portacabins had "*provided cosy accommodation, but moving into purpose built offices was fantastic*". The building was supposed to be facing a different way but because of a tree preservation order, the building had to be turned round. This meant that Ash CAB's offices got the best view, overlooking the recreation ground and caught the morning sunshine.

Citizens' Advice Bureau staff were able to have some input into the design. They also chose their own carpets, which were bought from bureau funds. Furniture was moved from the portacabins and additional furniture was supplied by Guildford Borough Council from their surplus/redundant stocks of desks and tables.

### **Volunteers**

In the early days following the opening of Ash CAB in 1979, there were five volunteers who had previously worked at other advice centres. They were led by Centre Organiser, Mrs Avis Rutter.

As years went by, experienced advisers left and new advisers were trained. The number of volunteers gradually increased over the years. The original team was led by a single paid manager whilst the 2009 team is led by a paid Manager and two Deputies (all part time) with additional expertise of a paid money and debt adviser. It is clear, however, that the service depends more now than it ever did on the input of volunteers. In the 2008/9 annual report it says that Ash CAB has 37 volunteers, 60% of whom are advisers, 14% are administration and IT support staff and 26% are Trustees. Using a formula created by the Institute for Volunteering Research, if volunteers (who account for over 90% of the staff at Ash CAB) were paid, it is estimated that they would cost the bureau approximately £137,000 p.a.

### **Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees is collectively responsible for the governance of the bureau and for its effective management. The Trustees agree the broad direction the bureau should take by consulting with the bureau manager and within the community. They ensure realistic financial controls and are responsible for the financial stability of the bureau. In the case of Ash CAB, the main funding source continues to be grants from Guildford Borough Council although other additional sources of funding are sought and fundraising activities are instigated at various times. The current Board of Trustees is fortunate to benefit from the experience and continuity of support from a member from Ash CAB's earliest years, Jack Mayhew, but it also has a wide diversity of other people, all bringing their own expertise and experience to the Board.

### **Adapting to today's needs**

Ash CAB serves the Wards of Ash Vale, Ash South and Tongham, Ash Wharf and Normandy although being on the border with Hampshire means there is inevitably an overlap sometimes. Throughout its 30 years, Ash CAB has moved with the times and adapted to the needs of the community which it serves. The modern offices are now equipped with computers and a full range of equipment.

From time to time, outreach services have been offered to meet the needs of people less able to travel to the bureau from outlying areas. In 1979 the bureau opened to the public for 12 and a half hours a week. In 2009 that has risen to 26 hours plus an additional 3 hours for telephone enquiries only. There is also a web site and the facility to obtain advice by email.

In 2009, debt, benefits, and employment are the most frequent enquiry areas with debt in the lead. Ash CAB has responded to this need by employing a paid money adviser. The demand for advice from Ash CAB has never been greater.