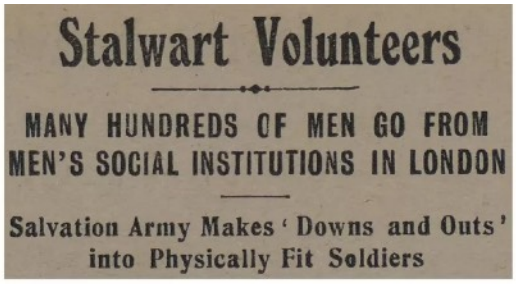
CHARITIES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

As the First World War began in the early days of August 1914, a stream of wealthy and well-connected people visited Whitehall and volunteered to put their substantial resources at the disposal of the War Office. Nearly 18,000 charities were established during the four years of the war. The most popular causes were "comforts" - including clothing, books and food - for British and Empire troops, medical services, support for disabled servicemen, organisations for relieving distress at home, post-war remembrance and celebration, aid for refugees and countries overseas, and assistance to prisoners of war.

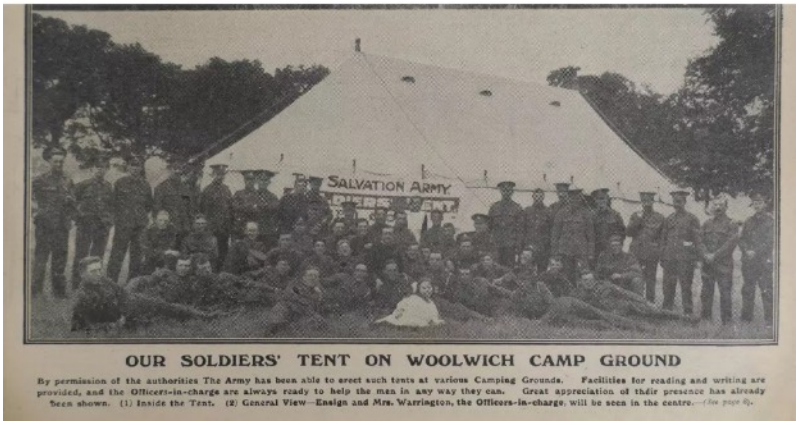
'A New Kind of Help': The Salvation Army and comforts in the First World War.



Stalwart Volunteers

MANY HUNDREDS OF MEN GO FROM MEN'S SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN LONDON

Salvation Army Makes 'Downs and Outs' into Physically Fit Soldiers



OUR SOLDIERS' TENT ON WOOLWICH CAMP GROUND

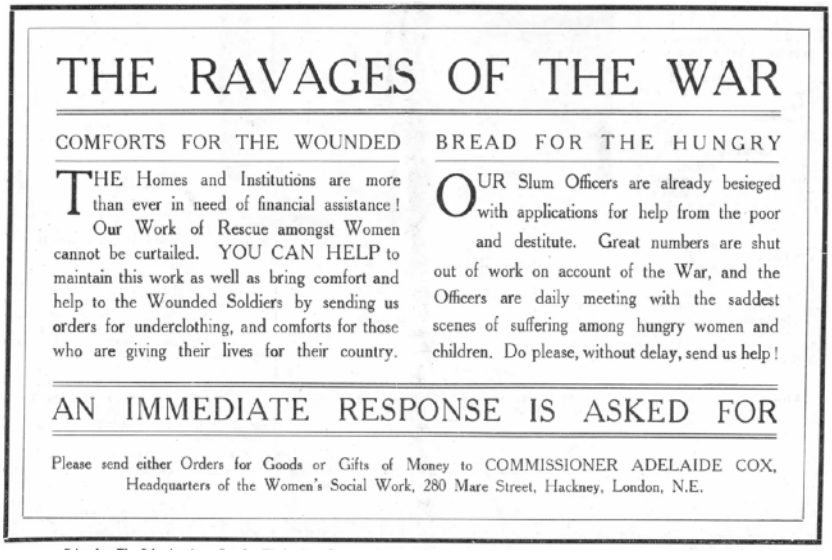
By permission of the authorities The Army has been able to erect such tents at various Camping Grounds. Facilities for reading and writing are provided, and the Officers-in-charge are always ready to help the men in any way they can. Great appreciation of their presence has already been shown. (1) Inside the Tent. (2) General View—Ensign and Mrs. Warrington, the Officers-in-charge, will be seen in the centre. (See page 6).

By the outbreak of the First World War, The Salvation Army in the UK was well-established in a range of fields of charitable work. Up to this time its welfare work had largely been shaped by the needs of the urban poor, resulting in the provision of labour exchanges, night shelters, hostels, food depots and maternity services, as well as industrial homes and elevators which both provided housing and work to the unemployed. However, virtually overnight, the war changed the landscape of British society and with it the needs that charities like The Salvation Army existed to meet. Many of The Salvation Army's hostels and elevators for men emptied as residents enlisted or were called up to fight, but this created new spheres of work as The Salvation Army stepped in to provide support services among the troops.

Meanwhile the need for women's and children's welfare services remained high as it took time for financial support from the government to reach the families of enlisted soldiers. Female unemployment also rose sharply in the early months of the war as industries which had previously employed women closed or were scaled back. One industry from which many women lost jobs was textile and garment manufacturing. The war closed off export markets on which this industry relied. Perhaps surprisingly, The Salvation Army had a small stake the textile industry at the time through its women's industrial homes. In most of these industrial homes, female residents undertook needlework, producing sewn garments and embroidery.

In an effort to reach a wider audience, the same appeal from Commissioner Cox also appeared in The War Cry, but the editor of The War Cry introduced another perspective on the matter:

"The Women's Homes are begging for orders to keep their work rooms busy. Voluntary labour is all very necessary no doubt, but to give an order for the needlework needed, whether for the soldiers, the wounded, or to meet one's ordinary needs is better still."



THE RAVAGES OF THE WAR

COMFORTS FOR THE WOUNDED

THE Homes and Institutions are more than ever in need of financial assistance! Our Work of Rescue amongst Women cannot be curtailed. YOU CAN HELP to maintain this work as well as bring comfort and help to the Wounded Soldiers by sending us orders for underclothing, and comforts for those who are giving their lives for their country.

BREAD FOR THE HUNGRY

OUR Slum Officers are already besieged with applications for help from the poor and destitute. Great numbers are shut out of work on account of the War, and the Officers are daily meeting with the saddest scenes of suffering among hungry women and children. Do please, without delay, send us help!

AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE IS ASKED FOR

Please send either Orders for Goods or Gifts of Money to COMMISSIONER ADELAIDE COX, Headquarters of the Women's Social Work, 280 Mare Street, Hackney, London, N.E.

Donations to war and other charities rose between 1914 and 1918, and continued to do so into the 1920s. From the start, as

reservists were called up, the loss of the main wage-earner created severe hardship for many families. At first, the war exacerbated unemployment, because the markets for some goods collapsed. The government quickly realised men would not volunteer to fight if they did not believe that their homes and families would be looked after.

A WELCOME LINK WITH HOME—SALVATION ARMY OFFICER AMONG BRITISH TROOPS IN PARIS

(1) Adjutant Lucy Lee Visiting Wounded Soldiers in the Hotel Majestic Hospital, Champs Elysees. (2) The Adjutant Distributing Clothing and Chocolate to Men from the Trenches

Our Officers regularly visit six Military Hospitals in Paris, as well as others at Boulogne and Rouen, and Soldiers' Rests have been established under their charge at Boulogne, Havre, and Abbeville. The Army has also a Motor Ambulance Unit at the front.—(See page 2)

By early 1915, The Salvation Army had also been entrusted as one of the charities responsible for distributing the clothing gathered under the Queen's schemes to British troops. In January, The War Cry announced the receipt of a quantity of clothing from Queen Mary's Needlework Guild comprising '60 shirts, 200 pairs of socks, and 200 pairs of mittens'. This meant that Mrs Commissioner Catherine Higgins, the head of the Home League, was able 'to send six sacks of warm garments to France that week instead of the customary three'.

Even without the generosity of the Queen's Needlework Guild, the Home League was already producing hundreds of garments each week. In November 1914, when The Salvation Army's first unit of motor ambulances was dedicated for service at the front, it had departed London 'laden' with '162 shirts, 320 pairs socks, as well as helmets, night shirts, gloves, cuffs, mittens, body belts, mufflers, sleeping socks, and various other garments.' Adjutant Lucy Lee and Ensign May Whittaker, who were among The Salvation Army officers working behind the front lines in France, both testified to the enormous gratitude of those who received the comforts.

A National Relief Fund was set up with Edward, Prince of Wales, as treasurer, to help the families of serving men and those suffering from "industrial distress". In a message in national newspapers, he said: "At such a moment we all stand by one another, and it is to the heart of the British people that I confidently make this earnest appeal." Within a week, donations to the fund had reached £1m.

Belgian refugees were the focus of early voluntary action. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, led by Millicent Fawcett, provided 150 interpreters to meet them. In the first 10 months of the war, 265,000 Belgian refugees arrived, and the government looked to volunteers to offer all the necessary services.

The War Refugees Committee coordinated the relief efforts - not always effectively. Donations of money and goods poured in, as did thousands of offers of accommodation. The committee established a network of local charities, growing to 2,000 at its peak, almost all of which were staffed and run by volunteers.

Belgian refugees were also the subject of the first fundraising flag day in Glasgow on 3 October 1914. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* said it was a great success, raising £5,874 6s 10d: "Of this amount, £169 10s was in gold and £2,724 in silver. Boxes of chocolates sold in the streets brought in £54 and over £10 was received from the sale of grapes. A number of Belgian refugees took part in the collection, including a child of three years, who comes from the Louvain district."

Belgian Soldiers Fund.

One of the first funds during the First World War was the Belgian Soldiers Fund. It funded sterilisers to purify the water for the Belgian Army in the field. There was a lot of water available in Belgium but hardly any of it was fit to drink. Thanks to the fund, 300 or 400 portable sterilisers were sent to the country.

The 'Times' Fund

The Times Fund was a fundraising campaign that supported the Red Cross. The Times newspaper donated significant advertising space to the Society almost daily for over four years, free of charge. No such funds had ever been raised in the UK and no newspaper had ever performed a service of such magnitude to a similar cause. All funds went towards services to support sick and wounded soldiers both at home and abroad.

Red Cross shops

On 22 May 1916 a gift house (possibly 48 Pall Mall) was opened, and a steady stream of gifts were donated and purchased. The Queen presented her own war savings certificate which raised 50 guineas. Items were also sold on behalf of the French Red Cross.
In June 1916, it was reported that a gift house had been opened at 48 Pall Mall which had already raised £2,000 through the sale of gifts. During the war a bazaar was also held in Shepherd's Market, London which raised £50,000 for the Red Cross. In February 1918, the Kensington gift house opened at 92 Kensington High Street. The premises were lent to the Red Cross free of charge. The profits were shared between the Red Cross' Kensington division and Kensington war hospital supply depot. The shop was reported to be flourishing in January 1919. Even after the armistice had been declared there was still a large demand for victory souvenirs and gifts from the Red Cross shop at 39 Old Bond Street.

'Our Day'

Our Day was a Red Cross fundraising event organised for the first time in 1915, which then took place annually throughout the war. The origin of the collection was considered to be 'Queen Alexandra's Day', when people showed support for the Queen by buying flowers. During 'Our Day', street collectors sold flags, which were ordered and supplied centrally. Flags for motor vehicles were also available. Small flags were sold for a penny and silk ones were sold for sixpence. Gifts for 'Our Day' were also received from overseas.

Many local schemes were also devised, including a mock auction for two pigs, concerts, magic lantern lectures and market stalls. "Perhaps the most novel was a marrow-seed competition… there were 1,580 entries raising £35 17s 11d (over £1,700 today). Contestants had to guess the number of seeds in a vegetable marrow". Find out more about this unique fundraising event.

In addition, there were a number of sellers who represented other areas of the Empire. Canadian women in London sold tinted maple leaves. Australian sellers sold special Australian flags and leather kangaroos. Women from New Zealand sold kiwi badges.

Newspapers ran appeals for everything from sports equipment to tinned food and hard cash. The aims of the *Daily Express*'s Cheery Fund were "to oblige everybody at the front who asks for things, and cheer up those who do not want anything". Men on active service received an extraordinary range of gifts from the fund, including footballs and cricket equipment, gramophones and records, books, banjos, violins and games.

Tobacco and cigarettes were among the most popular causes: one of the largest charities, the Smokes for Wounded Soldiers And Sailors Society – known popularly as the SSS – distributed more than a billion cigarettes to wounded men bought with funds raised through events such as **"Fag Day".**

The British royal family transformed its image through its wartime charity work, developing a more personal relationship with the British public and distancing itself from its European relations - Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was Queen Victoria's grandson. Royal visitors boosted the morale of charity workers and encouraged public donations by meeting troops and volunteers, making personal appeals and lending their names as patrons. Crucially, royal visits featured in cinema newsreels - the new form of mass entertainment - and in the newspapers, which were read by almost all of the adult population.
However, it was not all plain sailing, as the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild demonstrated. Many women in the textile and clothing industry had lost their jobs as export markets closed, and the guild posed a direct threat to their job prospects.

The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, which included leading figures from the labour movement, opposed it. Representatives of working women were called to the palace and the Queen's Work for Women Fund was created.

Contracts to supply clothing and other items for the Army Supply Department were issued and the Queen placed a personal order for 75,000 woollen body belts as part of her Christmas gift to the troops. For most of the population, fundraising became part of daily life. Local newspapers carried details of money and goods collected through dances, fetes and sales of produce and work. In the streets, posters advertised wartime charities, and women sold lapel-pin flags from trays. Picture postcards were sold to raise funds.

Lady Hanbury Williams and Mrs Schlater selling flags for Soldiers Day, 1917

Children played a significant role in the war effort. Their activities were built into the school week, and they were encouraged to donate their breakfasts to "Egg Day", on which eggs were collected for wounded soldiers. Even small children were often used in fundraising, dressed as soldiers and nurses. Jennie Jackson, aged seven at the start of the war, was one of the best-known: wearing a replica uniform, she toured pubs, clubs and factories, and raised a total of £4,000. Help for marginal groups came from people such as Dr Alfred Salter, a Quaker, pacifist and GP in Bermondsey, south London. He bought Fairby Grange in Hartley, Kent, as a free convalescent home for the people of Bermondsey. Soon he also admitted conscientious objectors, whose health had been broken by their prison experiences, and, after the war, Austrian refugees.

Concern about animals in war work prompted the formation or expansion of several welfare organisations. The Blue Cross Fund aimed to be the equivalent of the Red Cross for animals and became known especially for its work with horses. The War Office initially rejected its services as unnecessary, but the fund soon established horse hospitals and provided treatments, equipment, vets and ambulances in battlefield areas. Public donations to its war activities soared, but the fund found it more difficult to raise money for its other work.

As so many new and disparate organisations were established, with so few rules to regulate them, concern grew about the management of funds. Many organisations, including the National Relief Fund, were slow to distribute money and marshal their volunteers. Some disillusioned regular contributors withdrew their support. A few charities were exposed as fraudulent and many more were poorly managed and had high running costs. Flag days were a particular problem and were totally unregulated until 1915, when local authorities were given the powers to license them. Donated items were of variable quality and the distribution was chaotic; in the same year, the government appointed Sir Edward Ward, a retired soldier, to the post of Director General of Voluntary Organisations. Ward had no connection with the Charity Commission and no role in policing charities - his job was to deal with the distribution of donations to military hospitals and comforts to troops. Ward issued leaflets giving instructions for making items, set up systems for matching supply with demand and organised transport.

This coordinated approach was a great success, and the scheme supplied more than 322 million items to troops during its existence. But the press, the Charity Organisation Society and leading UK charities continued to campaign for compulsory licensing for war relief charities. This, they believed, would prevent corruption and fraud, and increase public confidence. A parliamentary War Charities Committee investigated and agreed that legislation was needed.

The Lord Mayor's City of London Fund.

Connected to the 'Our Day' scheme was the remarkable fundraising effort by the Lord Mayor's City of London Fund. The appeal was a success as practically every trade in the country had an association and about 70 were asked to collect money within their trades. The result was a cheque presented to the Red Cross for £750,000 (around £32 million in today's money) – the largest cheque ever to be presented to the British Red Cross at the time. A total of £811,075 8s 6d was added to the 'Our Day' fund in 1918 as a result of the Lord Mayor's appeal.

The British Farmers' Red Cross Fund .

The British Farmers Red Cross Fund mainly raised money through agricultural sales. Around 1,600 were organised during the war. The proceeds were earmarked for particular schemes, such as providing motor ambulances, cars and lorries to the various battle-fronts.
More than 150 ambulances were provided in this way. Hospitals, known as British Farmers Hospitals, were supported by Church collections. An annual church collection was made by churches of all denominations for the benefit of the Red Cross. The collection was (for the most part) held on the special day of national prayer and thanksgiving which was generally the first Sunday in the New Year.

Christie's sale.

Jewels and valuable items given to the Red Cross were sold at sales organised by Christie's. Seven sales took place, which included 59 days of actual selling. Items included silver, porcelain, embroidery, jewellery and works by artists such as G F Watts and Max Beerbohm.

The Red Cross pearl necklace.

During the Christie's auctions, the Red Cross decided to appeal to the public for pearls. They would be used to make a necklace which would be sold by a lottery, and the proceeds would go to the sick and wounded. However, the number of pearls donated was so great that it became a question of making multiple pearl necklaces. The Committee decided to hold an exhibition of pearls in the Grafton Galleries from 22 June – 1 July 1918.

Over 16,000 people attended this exhibition and as a result nearly 300 additional pearls were received. A sum of £1,207 3s 2d was added to the fund. In total 3,597 pearls were given to the appeal. Many of the pearls were of historical value and had been given by prominent English families. Others came from all parts of the community, including single pearls in memory of those who had fallen in the war.

Unfortunately the idea of a lottery for the pearls was rejected. Lotteries held in public places, or to which the general public were invited, were illegal and a Bill to allow the pearl lottery was rejected by the House of Commons by four votes. However, Christie's kindly offered to sell the necklaces by auction. After three days' viewing time, the auction was held on 19 December 1918. Forty-one pearl necklaces were sold at the auction, raising £84,383 19s 9d in total.

Meat and allied trades Red Cross appeal.

Contributions of livestock, meat and other lots were given up to auctions as gifts from stock breeders and those of the meat trade. So generous was the response, that within two months, £140,000 was raised. The most successful method was the auction sale of livestock and meat which took place at Reading in April 1916, raising £7,258.

Auction sale of wine and spirits.

It was decided that gifts of wine and spirits should be sold at auction on behalf of the Joint War Committee. The owners of the Wool Exchange offered their premises for five days for the sale, which began on 17 June 1918. A gift of note was wine from the cellar of King George V. As well as the monetary value of the wine, the gift added to the public interest in the auction. The total amount received was £54,347 2s 7d.

Red Cross Gold and Silver Fund.

Started by Miss Elizabeth Asquith in April 1918, the purpose of the fund was to collect and sell gold and silver to raise money for the Red Cross. In connection with the King and Queen's silver wedding anniversary it was suggested that the public should express their loyalty to the Royal family by contributing to the fund. Articles that were broken or useless were melted down. Among the many items given was a silver tankard inlaid with gold, from His Majesty the King, which sold for £1,000. A teapot and stand were given by Her Majesty the Queen. The

fund's activities were cut short by the armistice, but it raised £53,196 10s 5d. The following funds are examples of money that was collected for a specific cause.

Dennis-Bayley Fund.

The Dennis-Bayley Fund gathered money from coal miners and colliery owners, as well as other industrial sources, to supply ambulances and boats for the transport of the wounded at home and abroad. The fund contributed £491,283 19s 8d to the Joint War Committee.

Central Prisoners of War Fund.

When the central powers refused to allow food to be sent to prisoners of war by the government, the Red Cross stepped in. Packages containing food and conveniences were sent fortnightly to those in prison abroad. Donations from the public for these parcels reached £674,908 19s 1d. In total, £5,145,458 16s 9d was spent.

Fresh Air Fund.

The Fresh Aid Fund was perhaps the only charity from which no money was deducted for salaries or management expenses. All costs were covered by the promoters of the fund. Money collected went towards providing days out for 3,476,633 children and a fortnight by the sea for 31,496 sick children based in the country. This was a long-standing fund, which existed for 24 years before the outbreak of the First World War.

The War Charities Act 1916.
During the summer of 1916, unscrupulous tricksters forced the government to introduce the War Charities Act, which was to provide for the registration of charities connected with the war. It was now an offense to, ***"Make any appeal to the public for donations or subscriptions in money or in any kind to any war charity…or to attempt to raise money for any such charity by promotion, any bazaar, sale, entertainment or exhibition, or by any similar means, unless the charity is registered under the act…Any person guilty of an offense against this act shall be liable on summery conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds, or imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding three months."*** The sale of fund-raising postcards seems to have come within the confines of the act.

The War Charities Act 1916 made registration for public appeals compulsory and gave local authorities the power to decide which organisations would be registered or exempt. This local emphasis meant that there were wide variations in the way the act was applied, especially in relation to defining a war charity, and to what constituted a public appeal.
The Charity Commission was heavily criticised throughout the war, although even its sternest critics conceded that it had nothing like the resources required to do its job. The 1916 legislation was an eloquent expression of its failure. In a debate in 1917, MPs complained that the commission had not yet acted on legislation passed during the first year of the war and had done nothing about the large number of charities sitting on funds that might be distributed to wartime causes. Joseph King, Liberal MP for North Somerset, described the commission as "defunct". Conscription of the male population was introduced in the same year as the act.

The consequent massive increase in the numbers of men going to fight forced the government to take a more direct part in some activities previously left to volunteers and enthusiasts.

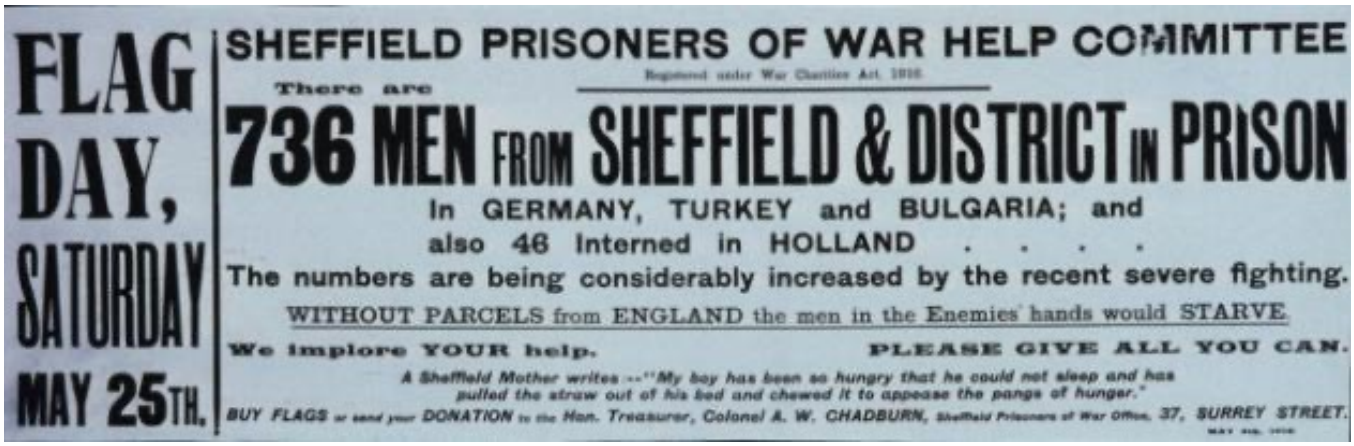
Almeric Paget's masseuses, for example, were effective, but now the government needed hundreds more for military hospitals in the UK and abroad. The professional body, the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses, held an emergency meeting. The government thereafter took a more active role in the corps, which it expanded by hiring male masseuses trained by St Dunstan's, the charity for soldiers blinded on war service.

Wounded Soldiers Selling Penny-flags

It was not only women who collected funds for the flag-day movement. This photographic postcard depicts convalescent soldiers with trays of penny flags, collecting tins and postcards. Four of them are wearing an official flag seller's lapel badge. The man in the wicker bath-chair has tucked a crutch in beside him. Their hospital and the cause they were collecting for is unknown. There are no details on the back of the card, although it was quite likely they

were collecting funds for the hospital or convalescent home in which they were in.

Flag Day Poster

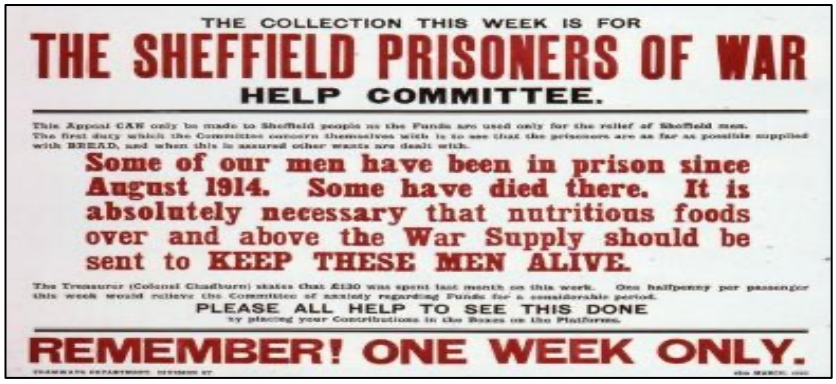


Escaped German Prisoner of War

In 1917, a pinflag almost led to the unmasking of an escaped German PoW. When Oberleutnant Heinz Justus absconded from a prison camp, he decided to go to London where he visited a theatre, took in the sights and enjoyed himself for a while. He later recalled something which happened one morning shortly after leaving his hotel. There "was a Red Cross day on or something, and I was stopped by a kind elderly lady, who insisted on selling me a little Union Jack, which she tried to pin on to my mackintosh", he said.

She tried several times, but the pin would not go through. "The trouble was she always stubbed against the iron cross I was wearing on my tunic."He thought of saying to her that the Union Jack did not go to well with the iron cross but thought better of it and took the flag from her, and "fastened it myself just above my decoration,"

In March 1916, this poster appeared for one week on public transport vehicles in Sheffield. Collecting boxes were placed on the platform of buses and it was hoped that passengers would give generously to the Prisoner of War Help Committee Fund.



Two-and-a-half million men volunteered to fight, 700,000 of whom lost their lives in the cataclysm.

There emerged another aspect of volunteering during these war years that is less well-known. The war saw a massive increase in volunteering at home, predominantly to support the men at the front but also in aid of numerous other causes, such as aid for refugees. The few publications that

have examined the subject have portrayed these efforts as amateurish and ineffectual.

The surge in philanthropy did in fact raise the equivalent of billions of pounds in today's terms, gave a significant boost to the war effort, and had an important effect on the relationship between voluntary organisations and the state.

It was a truly national endeavour. A wide range of people and areas contributed to the concerted voluntary effort; from the residents of radical Glasgow and the cotton towns of East Lancashire to the middle classes of suburban Croydon, and theatrical stars and impresarios of London. Research indicates that something approaching 400,000 men and 1.2 million women were regularly engaged in working for wartime charities and in total there were around 2 million people, including children, regularly volunteering for philanthropic causes.

First, the war provided new impetus to voluntarism based on the principle of mutual aid. It is notable that a very large number of Britain's approximately 20,000 war charities were run by ordinary working-class people for the benefit of local troops or local causes.
Second, the war contributed towards an increased level of professionalism of the charity sector. Many fund-raising techniques used today were pioneered or expanded during this period.
Thirdly, there was a greater movement towards democratisation in the voluntary sector, as well as moves into new areas and greater use of business principles.
Finally, charitable activities truly gave to the overall war effort and helped Britain win the war. Voluntary action contributed significantly to morale at home and abroad. Germany, militaristic and controlling, never established the same reservoir of social capital to draw upon.

Voluntary action in Britain during the war acted as an integrating mechanism between social classes. It helped initiate changes in the relationship between 'top-down' philanthropy and 'bottom-up' mutual aid. This trend continued post-war.

In every sense the First World War was a 'people's war' and, however small their individual contribution, those working for charities had done their bit.

Norman Bambridge
Basildon Borough Heritage Society
February 2025.