‘An Infinity of Personal Sacrifice’: The Scale and Nature of Charitable Work in Britain during the First World War

Peter Grant

‘Nobody has yet tried to count the full value of the immense outpouring of generosity, the multitude of sacrifices the War has called forth. Nobody is able to count it.’

W.E. Dowding

This article is a belated attempt to prove Dowding’s comment wrong. It seeks to measure the extent of the financial and human resources mobilised by non-uniformed voluntary action in support of Britain’s war effort. It also seeks to determine the effect this had upon existing charitable causes and to ascertain some basic facts about the class composition of charity activists. Though some details about First World War charities are quite widely known, knowledge tends to be anecdotal and unsystematic. There has been no attempt to calculate how extensive fundraising was, how many volunteers gave their time or from which strata of society they came. The usual suggestion is that the majority of charity workers were upper and middle-class women and that the overall impact of charity, in terms of building the social capital that helped win the war, was less significant than other activities such as uniformed volunteering or other women’s war work. Yet when the facts are examined this view is, at best, a partial and distorted one.

BACKGROUND

That there was a massive outpouring of charitable effort on the outbreak of war in 1914 is widely acknowledged. What is less clear is how this activity related to the prewar charitable context and to responses in the most recent conflicts in which Britain had been engaged, most notably the Crimean and South African wars.

Contrary to some assertions there was no ‘golden age’ of philanthropy in the last decade of the nineteenth century in the sense of a significant increase in charitable giving. Income of London charities in 1883–4 was £4.5 million and there were just over 1000 charitable institutions in the capital. In 1912 this total had reached about £8.5 million and by 1913 just under £9 million per annum, which meant that voluntary contributions grew approximately in line with national income. The Poor Law Commission had estimated that London charities accounted for 57 per cent of national resources and so national charitable income in 1913 was around £14 million a year of which 40 per cent was for charities connected with the propagation of Christianity (especially overseas missions). So, excluding religion, total charitable income in 1913 was about £8 million, worth around £628m today.

The charitable response to previous wars, especially in relation to providing ‘troop comforts’, had been patchy and uncoordinated. Despite the pioneering efforts of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole charitable support during the Crimean campaign was, like much of the military planning, ‘temporary, ill-planned and largely unsuccessful’. The Boer War experience was certainly an improvement but still left much to be desired. The officer in charge of troop comforts, Sir Wodehouse Richardson, was against the whole idea of parcels being sent out for individual soldiers by their families. This was because they often contained ‘inappropriate items’ such as bottles of brandy or beer, inflammable wax matches or even a decomposing pig’s head and, Richardson concluded, there was undue profiteering by some of the commercial organisations involved. His conclusions were unequivocal in that the sending and receiving of comforts should be a privilege and not a right. Richardson’s views were partially supported by the Red Cross in their report on the war. They were concerned with the lack of co-ordination and stated that ‘in connection with the formation of these several funds and of private committees throughout the country, there was much danger of overlapping and of undesirable competition’.

3. The figures exclude ‘self-help’ or mutual charities such as friendly societies. Source Howe’s Classified Directory of Metropolitan Charities (various years).
5. See John Sweetman, ‘“Ad Hoc” Support Services during the Crimean War’, Military Affairs 52: 3 (July 1988), 135–40.
7. Ibid, 126.
Though similar problems of supply and co-ordination surfaced quickly in 1914 by the end of the war better planning and organisation through such innovations as the office of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations (DGVO), had overcome many of them. The war also proved to be the greatest flourishing of sustained charitable fund-raising in British history.

**Numbers of Charities and How Much They Raised**

It is somewhat difficult to agree on a definition of a wartime charity and the legislators who framed the 1916 War Charities Act were faced with exactly the same problem. The only accurate statistics are the published figures of the Charity Commission recording those officially registered following the passing of the Act. Even after the war ended new ‘war charities’ were being created (for example to build war memorials or support disabled servicemen) so the date used also affects the figures. There were some organisations who, whilst clearly connected with the war, were deemed not to be ‘war charities’, and others who operated only before 1916 or who were simply too fleeting or unofficial to show up in statistics. Thus the number of organisations in the War Charities register must be considered a minimum number. If we take 1920 as a suitable, though somewhat arbitrary, cut-off date, the total number of war charities was 17,899. This is a huge number, especially when compared with the number of charities operating before the war: 36,865 in 1913—an increase of nearly 50 per cent. A further point of interest is that some areas had significantly more charities than others. Croydon in southeast England and Blackburn in the northwest for example had very similar working populations (74,460 and 79,609 respectively), yet the former had 38 registered organisations, the latter 148.

If the number of organisations operating is difficult to calculate accurately the amounts they raised are even more problematic as no official figures were ever compiled. However there are sufficient indicators available to take an informed view. Firstly there are the figures given by contemporary commentators. The first national estimate would seem to have been calculated by the journalist and social commentator W.E. Dowding. Dowding’s calculations came from detailed research of what organisations had raised and were publicised by the Liberal politician and head of the British War Propaganda Bureau, Charles Masterman, in July 1915. Referring to Dowding’s calculation, Masterman said that in the opening ten months of the war

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9. For example the Ruhleben Prisoners Release Committee did not need to register as it was a campaigning rather than a fund-raising body. A rough and ready calculation of the number of charities that were newly created compared to ones that already existed and turned their activities to war-related work is provided in T.N. Kelynack, Pro Patria: A guide to public and personal service in war time (London: John Bale, 1916), probably the most comprehensive contemporary reference work on wartime charities. Kelynack includes 132 organisations in his survey of which 40 (30 per cent) were pre-existing. If this was an accurate reflection then there would have been just over 23,000 war-related charities.


12. Dowding was the former editor of the Free Trader, had published two books on tariff reform in 1913 and also published articles on other aspects of the war such as the effect of the Registration Act on women.
some £25 million, in money or in kind, had been donated. Masterman reported that Dowding's meticulous calculations had even taken into account 'such items as 15,000 fresh eggs, presented every day to the hospitals [and] 47,000 razors collected by the master cutlers of Sheffield for the use of soldiers at the front'. By November 1915 Dowding concluded that 'in money and in kind the United Kingdom has given nearly thirty millions'. This amount included between six and seven million for Belgian relief funds, five-and-a-half million for the National Relief Fund (NRF) and five million for troop comforts.

A similar figure to Dowding's (minus the items 'in kind') was given in a parliamentary debate on 8 December 1915 by the Labour MP Will Anderson. He raised the issue of government control over war-time charities and asked whether some form of registration would be introduced (which it was, some seven months later). He quoted a figure of some £20 million that had been collected by that date for these causes. His source would appear to have been a statement at a police court prosecution in the last week of November where the sum was given as an 'official' estimate of the money collected for war charities since the commencement of the war. Around the same date another semi-official, Home Office, estimate was that £27 million had been raised and, in February 1916, the Daily Chronicle reported that 'it is estimated in the past 18 months £29,000,000 have been subscribed by the British people to benevolent objects at home and abroad connected with the war'.

If one accepts the veracity of these figures for the moment the next question is, if £20–27 million had been raised by the end of November 1915 how much had been raised by the end of the war? Perhaps due to the fact that references to amounts raised rather dry up after 1915 it has been argued by some that 'donor fatigue' set in or, at best, that the sums raised by charities remained steady throughout the war, meaning that when inflation is taken into account they fell in real terms. One of these is Trevor Wilson who has stated that:

As the war went on, these forms of gift in cash and kind diminished, and increasingly the state was looked to as the proper supporter of the war’s victims. This was evidence of the scale of the problem but also the way in which the conflict was diminishing the incomes of the charitably inclined.

14. Ibid.
17. Truth LXXVII:2032 (1 December 1915), 873.
18. Quoted in a report by Metropolitan Police Detective Inspector Curry, 18 November 1915, MEPO 2/1675, National Archives, Kew [cited hereafter as TNA]. It is unclear whether this is the police source used by Anderson and Truth. Their source might also have been a statement by Travers Humphreys QC in the case of Herbert Cole and the Patriots League which took place in Portsmouth that week. Another estimate was one of 'over £30 million' raised by early summer 1916, quoted by E.C. Price in the Charity Organisation Review (August 1916), 47. It is possible, though perhaps unlikely, that the source of all of these estimates was Dowding’s calculation.
By the charitably inclined Wilson was speaking of the upper and middle classes, especially those on fixed incomes, whose spending power most certainly did decrease as war-time inflation hit them hard.21 My own researches have not found evidence to back up the assertion that charitable donations declined, in either gross or real terms. Certainly the state took over in many areas, such as dependents allowances and pensions, but charity moved from these into new activities. As the war continued a number of high-impact new funds, such as those devoted to disabled ex-servicemen, helped compensate for any losses and, as Britain mobilised its citizen army, those left behind rallied in its support. There was another compensatory reason why charitable income did not decline, and Wilson himself suggests it earlier in the same book. When he quotes Masterman he goes on to point out that donations came from all classes and sections of society. In Birmingham alone (for example) 20,000 wage- earners contributed regularly; in Northumberland and Durham trade unionists voted a weekly levy on wages for the trade unionists of Belgium; and on the Clyde and in Glasgow (one of the most generous areas for charitable donations as will be shown) 'nothing was more remarkable than the "regularity and the amounts paid by the workers themselves towards one or other of these national purposes"'.22 Masterman noted that 'all these huge funds have been collected at a time when the City and high finance have been badly hit, and many of the wealthiest contributors to normal charities are unable to provide a penny'.23 There was however another group whose income had not been reduced. Large numbers of the working classes saw a real increase in their incomes.24 It would seem possible therefore that as middle-class incomes were squeezed and they gave proportionally less to charity that this loss was more than compensated for by a corresponding rise in working-class giving.

If it be thought that these comparatively better-off workers would not be likely to give to charity this is refuted both by evidence from modern research and the prewar period which shows that the poor are proportionately more generous than the rich in their support for charitable causes. One study, in 2000, found that those with incomes under £10,000 per annum gave over four per cent of their income to charity whereas those earning over £25,000 only gave two per cent.25 Though there is no equivalent, systematic statistical evidence stretching back to the period of the First World War there is plenty of circumstantial evidence and research that backs up this trend going back well into the nineteenth century. 'Poor-to-poor' (or, at least, working-class to working-class) charity was recognised as being highly significant by many social

21. Inflation during the war years was 12.5 per cent in 1915; 18.1 per cent in 1916; 25.2 per cent in 1917, and 22 per cent in 1918. Source http://www.safalra.com/other/cumulative-historical-uk-inflation/ (accessed on 16 June 2008).
22. Wilson, Myriad Faces of War, 159.
commentators. In *The Condition of the Working Class* Friedrich Engels, no lover of bourgeois philanthropy, noted that 'although the workers cannot really afford to give to charity on the same scale as the middle class, they are nevertheless more charitable in every way'.26 One small-scale research study in 1907 conducted by the Head of Cambridge House, a charitable settlement in Camberwell, discerned many examples of both spontaneous charity, more selfless but with an understanding that donor and recipient roles could easily become reversed, and 'organised' giving, carrying with it overtones of 'social improvement'. The study concluded that 'there reveals itself an unostentatious, wholly unselfish charity of the poor amongst themselves, which is startling in its extent. The poor breathe an atmosphere of charity'.27

More recently Frank Prochaska has also noted the significance of working-class charity when he suggested that:

The availability of records of wealthy, middle-class institutions has distorted our understanding of charitable experience ... [whereas] the contribution of the working classes is likely to be underplayed, for so much of it was informal and unrecorded, unostentatious and uncelebrated ... But the relative dearth of evidence for organized working-class benevolence should not lead us to underestimate its extent.

Prochaska points out that, not surprisingly, 'the respectable working class, often identified with church and chapel, was particularly noticeable in its charitable activity', and that this motivation was not solely altruistic but, as with middle and upper-class philanthropy, carried implications of self-interest. This was especially the case 'when they cooperated with their wealthier neighbours, as in hospital provision, education, or foreign missions'.28 This 'dual motivation' has been commented on in charitable activity up to the present day. It is therefore not implausible to suggest that increased giving by working people helped off set any decline in middle-class donations and that this was prompted by the nature of the war. In other words working-class donors were more likely to contribute additional support for Britain's armed forces when those fighting were drawn from the ranks of their own friends, relatives, workmates and church or chapel congregations.

What evidence is there of at least a 'steady state' of donation? One straightforward statistic is the date of formation of charities registered under the Act. Clearly this does not cover any that had ceased operation or did not register and it takes no account of the scale of the organisation, however it gives some sort of guide. Taking one example, of the registered charities in Blackburn 15 per cent were formed in 1914; 7 per cent in 1915; 10 per cent in 1916; 29 per cent in 1917 and a sizable 39 per cent in 1918. Not conclusive, but certainly not an indicator of declining interest.

Other possible sources are the sums raised by street collections in London later in the war and the year after victory. These show a rise that more than compensated for inflation:

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Collections</th>
<th>Amount Raised (£)</th>
<th>Adjusted for Inflation (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916–17</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>268,736</td>
<td>286,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>391,864</td>
<td>340,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>416,640</td>
<td>341,749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If this is thought to be evidence with an urban bias then Walter Armstrong’s research on rural Kentish charities is relevant. He found that ‘these charitable efforts do not appear to have flagged as the war continued’.30 An even more reliable indicator that donor fatigue may not have been especially significant is seen when the income of the largest of all wartime fund raising efforts, *The Times* Fund, is examined. The full income figures show a year on year increase, and are as follows:

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yearly Total (£)</th>
<th>Yearly Total Adjusted for Inflation (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 1914 to October 1915</td>
<td>1,655,807</td>
<td>1,655,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1915 to October 1916</td>
<td>2,652,300</td>
<td>2,244,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1916 to October 1917</td>
<td>2,944,107</td>
<td>2,058,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1917 to October 1918</td>
<td>4,203,299</td>
<td>2,555,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1918 to October 1919</td>
<td>4,666,426</td>
<td>2,676,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Raised</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,121,939</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. HO 45/11217, TNA. Tony Allen says that £25 million was raised through this means during the war: *Charity Flags and Flag Days 1914–1918* (York: Holgate Publications, 1999), 2.
32. Taking 1915 values as the basis for further years.
The remarkable thing about these figures is that, adjusted for inflation, the income remained so constant throughout the war and that giving did not even decline with the Armistice.

Assuming this 'steady state' theory, which I do not believe can be hugely wrong, then the total value of funds raised for war-time charities based on Dowding's and other contemporary estimates was not less than £75 million (approximately £3.5 billion today based on mid-war, 1916, values).

Perhaps a more accurate method of calculating a national figure is to use those reasonably reliable local statistics that do exist. Though many local histories of the Great War were produced, only a handful of them attempted a comprehensive listing of amounts raised. Eight of those that did are given below together with a calculation of amounts raised per head of population.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Amount Raised (£)</th>
<th>Population (1911)</th>
<th>Amount Raised per head (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>190,061(^{33})</td>
<td>288,458</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>586,026(^{34})</td>
<td>357,144</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartlepool</td>
<td>93,969</td>
<td>63,923</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>227,222</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>230,454</td>
<td>117,088</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todmorden</td>
<td>38,377</td>
<td>25,404</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crieff (Scotland)</td>
<td>17,735</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>3,500,000(^{35})</td>
<td>784,000</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bradford is a major wool manufacturing city in Yorkshire; Hartlepool is an iron and shipbuilding town on the northeast coast; Leicester is a light manufacturing town in the Midlands; Preston is an industrial town in the northwest; Todmorden is a small wool manufacturing and market town on the Yorkshire/Lancashire border in northern England; and Crieff is a holiday centre on southern edge of the Scottish Highlands.

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33. In 21 months, total estimated up to £470,627.
34. Excludes income from flag days.
35. Estimated as follows: figures given in the Glasgow Herald are that the city had raised £4,000,000 by the end of the war. However this included their estimate of the monetary value of 'clothing, food, and comforts despatched to the troops' which was £240,275 after two years (nine per cent). They also included some, though relatively few, funds raised across the whole of Scotland (notably for Belgian refugees). I have reduced the overall figure by £500,000 (12.5 per cent) to compensate: 'War Philanthropy: Glasgow Raises £4,000,000', Glasgow Herald, (26 December 1919). 3. The article concludes that they considered the overall amount to be an under-estimate and the figure to the end of 1915 certainly excluded church and regimental funds and 'in kind' contributions. The former could be quite considerable as, in some areas (for example, Todmorden and Blackburn) they accounted for between 20 and 40 per cent of the charities in the area.
How reliable are these figures as being typical of the entire country? The first point is the consistency of the per-head totals with the exception the two Scottish examples. Crieff is perhaps not surprising in that smaller communities might well have raised more per head than larger ones. But how can one explain the apparent anomaly of Glasgow? This is, perhaps, the most significant of all the statistics as it was the only place, as far as I have been able to ascertain, that officially collected comprehensive data on wartime charitable giving. These were accurately audited at least until the end of 1915 and later presented to a government committee and in a detailed newspaper report at the end of the war. In April 1915 Thomas Dunlop, the Lord Provost, gave a summary of Glasgow’s work to date:

The generosity of Glasgow in connection with the War, as shown by the contributions to the various official funds, is represented by a cumulo sum of over £652,000, or nearly 13s per head of the population of the city. This does not take into account numerous private efforts of individuals, self-constituted committees, and churches who are working independently in various directions.

Glaswegians’ generosity could be partly explained by the fact that they contributed relatively little to national, London-based, UK appeals, such as the NRF, where opposition to its policies led to a Glasgow-based version being started. It may also have reflected the city’s historical generosity; Glasgow was, for example, the first city in the UK to utilise flag days and Dowding also indicated that Glasgow newspaper funds were especially effective. However the likeliest explanation is surely that given to account for the ‘steady state’ of fundraising during the War; that giving from working-class Glaswegian donors rose with their incomes. Coupled with the city being more systematic at recording donations from working-class sources and organisations this suggests that the Glasgow figure may well be the most accurate of the eight.

The towns in Table 3 are reasonably different (in size and geography) and cannot be considered over-prosperous or impoverished. They cover both highly urbanised and rural areas where ‘networks of giving’ may have differed significantly. The sums raised also do not contain any donations made directly to national causes such as The Times appeal, and so must be something of an underestimate. If the median figure

36. W.E. Dowding discussed the issue in an unpublished article draft concluding that the closer personal relationships existing in rural areas might be more effective: “Town or Country: Which is the more generous?”, Women’s Work Collection, BO2 49/4, Imperial War Museum, London [cited hereafter as IWM].
37. ‘War Philanthropy’, Glasgow Herald, and John S. Samuel, European War: Statement of the funds raised in Glasgow for war relief purposes from August 1914 to December 1915 prepared for the Lord Provost (Glasgow: City Chambers, 1916).
38. If this figure was ‘multiplied up’ over the full period of the war, it would indicate a Glasgow per-head figure of £4.80.
per head (£2.32) were multiplied up over the entire country this would give a total of £107 million, significantly above the initial estimate of £75 million. If the overall average (£2.90) is used which, given the greater precision of the Glasgow figure, is not unreasonable it would yield a national figure of £133 million. If indeed the Glasgow figure is the most accurate and was repeated nationwide the total would be £205 million. More research and more examples are needed to confirm the validity of these findings, but they may be more accurate than those of Dowding and his contemporaries.

To these cash figures we should add the value of goods donated or produced for troop comforts and hospitals and contributions made directly from officers for the comforts of their men. Especially in the early years of the war—prior to the establishment of the DGVO—it was extremely common for officers to use their own money to buy gifts for their men.41 Such gifts were not only welcomed but also helped in the officer/man bond with soldiers having ‘affection for officers who took pains to attend to the needs of individual men’.42 What figure can we put on these ‘in kind’ gifts? Here we have the estimate of Frederick D’Aeth (of the Liverpool Council on Voluntary Aid) that the figure was equivalent to £5 million in the first year of the war and the Glasgow figure of £240,000 after two years. Again, from my studies of a range of organisations, I would not consider these to be an over-estimate. If so this would add a further £20 to £30 million to the total figures.43

Overall then the total fund raising effort for the war was, in my view, certainly not less than £100 million, was more likely to have reached £125 to £150 million and may well have been greater than that. This meant that every man who served in the forces during the war had an average of around £20 to £40 contributed to his support, worth about £1,000 to £2,000 today. In 1916 the total value of all charity investments was £34 million and annual charitable income was just £14 million.44 Therefore war

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41. Gary Sheffield, Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-man relations, morale and discipline in the British Army in the era of the First World War (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 82.
42. Ibid., 83.
43. The ‘Glasgow calculation’ is: £240,000 x 24 (months) x 52 (months, the duration of war) ÷ 784,000 (population of Glasgow) x 46,000,000 (total population of GB) = £30,510,204. Though it is beyond the scope of this study these figures also omit the huge fund raising efforts of the rest of the Empire for its own forces or domestic relief. For example:
   - ‘In India itself an Imperial Indian Relief Fund was started, quite independently of any fund here, for the relief of distress caused in India; and an Indian Ladies’ Loyal League collected subscriptions throughout the country. By the beginning of March [1915] the War relief funds in India had reached one million sterling.
   - In Britain the Indian Soldiers’ Fund had raised £140,000 by the same date.
   - The Canadian Patriotic Fund had passed £600,000, also by the same date; W.E. Dowding, ‘The Romance of Voluntary Effort: Part 7—East and West’, TP’s Journal 3: 38 (3 July 1915), 314.
causes more than doubled prewar charitable income. With regard to fund raising for domestic purposes the increase is even more dramatic, as 40 per cent of prewar charity income went to overseas missionary activity. At the ‘median’ modern value of the wartime pound (£46 in 1916) £100 million would be the equivalent of four-and-a-half billion today, or rather more than £1 billion a year. To put this figure in some context it is roughly equivalent to the total sum raised for ‘good causes’ by the present-day UK National Lottery.

**Effects on Existing Charities**

Was all or some of the income of war charities simply displaced from existing causes? There is evidence of a wartime effect on some charitable giving in the early war years. Between 1913 and 1916 both the number of endowed charities registered and the value of new endowments went down. However the figures from the Charity Commission for the entire war period demonstrate that there was certainly no clear wartime effect though incomes were affected by inflation. Endowed charity income rose from £934,533 in 1913 to £1,264,360 by 1918, an increase of 35 per cent.45 Figures for London charities for the war period are also available from two different sources and these specifically exclude both war-related charities and those whose work shifted to war-time causes. They also cover collecting charities as well as endowments; those whose income might be expected to be most affected. The number of charities surveyed in *Howe's Directory* went down from 897 in 1912–13 to 885 in 1917–18 (a decline of just 1.3 per cent) but two of the years (1913–14 and 1917–18) show slight rises in numbers and the prewar trend had already been downwards (from 933 in 1910–11 or a four per cent drop by 1912–13). The income of these charities actually shows an increase in income of over £1 million a year during the period, from £8.1 million in 1912–13 to £9.1 million in 1917–18.46 Statistics from the *Annual Charities Register and Digest* are very similar but include figures for direct charitable contributions and also point to immediate postwar trends, rising from £8.3 million in 1913 to £9.9 million by 1918 and £13.6 million in 1920. These statistics include investment income as well as donations and do not take into account inflation, but they do demonstrate that charitable income remained at worst steady in gross terms during the war. Dowding was certainly clear at the time that the massive contributions to war causes had been achieved ‘without any diminution ... in support of the permanent charities’.47

What we can reasonably conclude is that the dramatic increase in charitable effort and giving to war-related causes certainly had no catastrophic effect on existing charities. Indeed the significant postwar increase in charitable income suggests tentatively that the stimulus to charitable activity during the war may have continued into peacetime at least while higher wages and full employment continued. Overall, if you looked at the figures for the income of existing charities without knowing their

45. Charity Commissioners for England and Wales Annual Reports passim.
46. Howe's Classified Directory to the Metropolitan Charities, 39th to 44th editions (London: 1914 to 1919).
historical setting, it would be difficult to realise that such a cataclysmic event as the First World War had even taken place.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED?**

The above evidence suggests that the value of wartime charitable activity was greater than has previously been realised. One might also ask just how many people were involved in this effort. Though not having a direct monetary value it was again highly significant. This is an even more elusive question as it requires a definition of what constituted a contribution and therefore what to count. To take just a few examples: in the first year of the war more than 20,000 new workers entered the field of personal case work for the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Family Association; by May 1915 over 60,000 volunteers were assisting the British Red Cross and in Birmingham ‘in the distribution of relief over 2,000 persons are working voluntarily; 3,000 assisted in the street collection, and 3,500 took part in the house-to-house collection’.48

Typical of such schemes was the Croydon War Supplies Clearing House. Formed in October 1914 the CWSCH’s main function was ‘to obtain detailed information respecting all appeals made by recognised organizations providing comforts for the men of the allied fighting forces’.49 It opened its first depot at 110 George Street in the centre of the town on 2 November, appointing Mrs Iredell as Lady Superintendent. Its first collections were for the benefit of Belgian refugees but it rapidly expanded to 14 depots supplying all local hospitals with comforts, hospital requisites, games, books and so on. Much of the fetching and carrying was done by the Boy Scouts and the executive of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway agreed to transport goods in bulk for free. In December 1914 they held a ‘shopping week’ for Red Cross comforts which sent £350 of goods to France and this was followed by a Christmas Pudding appeal. In March 1915 there was a condensed milk appeal, supported by the major local employer Nestlé, which collected 63,451 tins valued at £925. The committee felt confident enough in its financial base to take out a bank overdraft which was repaid by holding whist drives and a golf tournament. In July 1915 Union Jack Flag Day raised £330 and the CWSCH funded and ran its own cinema at the Addington Park War Hospital. In December 1915 a massive sale of donated items was held at the Town Hall. Opened by Queen Alexandra the sale ran for seven days from 11am to 11pm raising the impressive sum of £8,746, equivalent today to nearly £500,000. ‘Hut Week’, held in September 1916, realised a further £6,458 which supplied several ‘Croydonian’ huts and even a ‘Croydonian Travelling Cinema’ in France and was followed up by a YMCA appeal for books. Croydon’s citizens were clearly avid readers as this produced 55,000 volumes and ‘besides surprising ourselves with this result, we heard the YMCA

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49. *Croydon War Supplies Clearing House: Summary Report 1914–19*, (probably written by Mr H. Terrell Peard the Chairman and Joint Secretary), Croydon Local Studies Library.
were obliged to take further premises to accommodate them.50 In 1918 there were only two special efforts, a matinee at the Hippodrome in conjunction with the West Croydon Cadet School (£309) and a Flag Day in aid of St Dunstan’s (a war charity for the blind) which produced a war record for such events of £1,274.

CWSCH finally ceased its activities on 17 April 1919. The balance sheet showed that they had despatched 436,993 parcels to the Front or to hospitals, and 176,823 through the DGVO scheme. Larger items ranged from a motor car and driver for the Red Cross (sent out in December 1914) to a harmonium for the YMCA for religious services in camp. The total sum collected amounted to £20,683 (close to £1 million today) and the final balance of just over £317 was used to endow a bed in Croydon General Hospital’s children’s ward to be named after the Fund and with preference to be given to children of ex-servicemen. Several hundred volunteers regularly assisted the Clearing House but Croydon was a relatively prosperous area and, of those who spent their entire time on war charity work, many were members of the ‘leisured’ middle and upper classes. Others could only spare an hour or two a week. It was, overall, an heroic effort and just one of 38 war-related charities in the same town.

It was not just adults who contributed their time. Virtually every schoolchild was involved in at least one of the national campaigns, whether it was collecting eggs for the wounded or horse chestnuts for explosives and seven million children contributed to the Jack Cornwell VC Memorial Fund to commemorate the boy hero of the Battle of Jutland. In East Anglia the headmistress of St Matthew’s District School, Ipswich, reported that ‘the girls really put their backs into the war effort’. On 4 August 1915 a branch of the ‘League of Young Patriots’ (or ‘Princess Mary’s League’) was started and by 9 October three-quarters of the girls had joined. They began by knitting socks for Belgian refugees, but by 1916 even the youngest children were contributing directly to war production. On 2 July (the day after the start of the Battle of the Somme) the Young Patriots despatched 42 rifle covers and 42 sandbags they had made. The log book also records that on 2 May 1917 ‘this afternoon the First Class Girls [aged 7 and 8 years] spent the whole time in making sandbags’, a task in which the boys of the school also joined. By 5 December 1917 the school could boast that ‘today we have sent off the last consignment of Sandbags and Grenade bags, making a complete total of 931 sandbags and 2,209 grenade bags’.51 Participation in these activities was no doubt stimulated by the many visits made by servicemen to the schools they had attended. All the log books speak of frequent talks by soldiers either home on leave or invalided out. Many returned to thank the children for their assistance in the supply of comforts for the troops and sometimes they expressed their appreciation in more direct ways, such as at Tattingstone National School, Suffolk, where a soldier and former pupil visiting in December 1916 left enough money at the village shop for every child to have a farthing’s worth of sweets. In Kent some children were even luckier when ‘no

50. Ibid.
51. Extracts from the Log Books of East Anglian Schools, compiled by Mrs S.M. Hardy, MISC 68, item 1056, IWM.
doubt against all the rules, children living near Broomfield [an airfield near Maidstone] enjoyed occasional flights in exchange for cigarettes and home-made cakes'.

If we try to confine the question of participants to those who regularly and consistently gave a significant amount of their time to charitable work and exclude children, there is again some indirect evidence of numbers. Inevitably the fact that, by definition, these people had to have time to give meant that certain sectors of the population were over-represented: women more than men; older people more than younger; the better-off rather than the working class, though this trend is perhaps not as clear-cut as previously thought. Local histories once more provide some help as they sometimes list the numbers of those engaged in wartime charitable work. In Stamford, Lincolnshire, 176 women were awarded the Voluntary War Workers badge issued by the office of the DGVO for regular helpers. In Stamford in 1911 there were 3590 women aged between 15 and 70, so this represents five per cent of the female population and is probably an underestimate as it only includes those whose work was eligible and who bothered to apply for the badge. In Bradford the number engaged in regular war charity work was put at 2000 men and 5000 women from an adult population (excluding those in the services) of about 100,000 giving estimates of four per cent of men and ten per cent of women. This represents a huge increase on the prewar numbers involved in charitable work. In 1911, for example, the number of volunteers for the entire Guild of Help network, the largest social welfare organisation at the time, was 8000 and they were considered to be 'uniquely successful in enrolling citizens for charitable work'. These locally extrapolated figures might indicate that something like 400,000 men and 1.2 million women were regularly engaged in working for wartime charities. They can be partially substantiated by reference to the total number of people (mainly women) who applied for and received the DGVO badge. In his final report, Sir Edward Ward gave the total number of badge holders as 400,000. To qualify for the badge a volunteer had to work regularly for a period of at least three months for one of the charities registered with the DGVO. These numbered 2983 or approximately one-sixth of the total number of wartime charities. If the badge holders also represented one-sixth of all regular charity workers then this would give an overall total of 2.4 million. Either way the number of people volunteering regularly to help wartime charities ran to at least one and probably nearer to two million—a figure that would compare favourably with the 2.6 million men who volunteered for the armed forces. It is also highly significant in relation to the numbers of women who were employed in other activities during the war. There were 57,000 in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps; 90,000 in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, and 260,000 in the Women's Land Army. There were also 950,000 'munitionettes', still fewer than the likely numbers who were regularly working for charities.

52. Armstrong, 'Kentish Rural Society during the First World War', 122.
53. W.F. Markwick, Stamford and the Great War (Stamford: Dolby Brothers, 1919), 23.
**Gender and Class Analysis of Office Holders of Wartime Charities**

Was charity work as class-based an activity as is usually suggested? Croydon's War Supplies Clearing House certainly had a preponderance of middle-class volunteers but how typical was it? Examining contemporary local histories is bound to give a partial result as they tend to concentrate on the dignitaries who fronted the major charities rather than on those who worked for them or who ran smaller organisations. Instead the detailed records from the original central register of charities were analysed. Evidence from two contrasting areas revealed a more complex picture.

In Croydon the Mayor, Howard Houlder, chaired six of the 38 registered charities while his wife, Mary, chaired two more. The town clerk, John Newnham, the Borough Treasurer, William Gunner, and the Borough Accountant, James McCall, served on a total of 12 committees. Overall the impression is very much of a top down process: a small number of larger charities run by experienced, middle and upper-middle class office holders. The picture in Blackburn was entirely different. In the industrial North smaller charities based on workplace or church/chapel were more characteristic. Of the 148 charities 41 per cent were workplace based and 39 per cent based on a church or chapel. The figures in Croydon were only five per cent in each category. This resulted in a remarkable geographical concentration of charity workers. For example at 93 Queen's Road lived William Jones, Secretary of the Audley Range Congregational Church Charity. The Treasurer, William Oldham, lived at number 147 and another Committee member, Jones's brother Frank, lived at number 127. Between them, at number 107, was the Chairman of the Blackburn Parkside Manufacturing Co Soldiers Comforts Fund, George Burke, whilst a few doors down at number 31 resided William Howorth, committee member of the Chapel Street School Soldiers and Sailors Comfort Fund. At number 20 was Ellen Carr, chair of Daisyfield Co-Operative Society Women's Guild Soldiers and Sailors Comfort Fund; at 149 William Harrop, chairman of the Furthergate Congregational Church and School Soldiers and Sailors Comfort Fund; at 63 Joseph Broughton, Secretary of Oxford Street Primitive Methodist Church Charity and, at 105, its Chairman Nathaniel Brown; at 111 Joseph Smyth, Chairman of St Jude's Blackburn Soldiers Comforts Fund; at 89 Charles Gregson, committee member of St Matthew's Blackburn Soldiers Comforts Fund and at 103 its Treasurer, John Swarbrick. No fewer than 12 charity officers in a quarter-mile long street. In the two streets parallel to Queen's Road, Pringle Street and Audley Range, lived another 19 charity officials, an astonishing concentration of charity organisers and a pattern very much indicative of a bottom-up approach.

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55. Registers of Individual Charities, held at the National Archives, Kew, CHAR 4/1 TO 4/21.
But is this impressionistic evidence borne out by more systematic interrogation of the registers? The following analysis is based on a relatively small sample and further research, especially taking in major conurbations, agricultural districts and Scotland in particular, is required to confirm these preliminary findings. In addition to the two areas already selected, suburban South London and the cotton towns of Lancashire and the West Riding, registered charities in Coventry in the Midlands were also examined.\textsuperscript{56}

The study looked both at registered charities and those exempted under the 1916 War Charities Act. Exempted charities were generally smaller organisations that restricted their appeals to, for example, a work place, a single church or street or were raised in response to a specific event. However each registration district interpreted the Act in a different way with regard to exemption. Some areas tended to err on the side of registration and so here registered charities outnumbered exempted bodies. For example in the London County Council jurisdiction church-based funds that made any appeal outside divine service were deemed to be making a ‘public appeal’ and had to register, whereas in Todmorden they did not. In Todmorden there were many more exempted charities than registered ones, many of which would have been registered a few miles away in Blackburn. Over the whole of England and Wales 64 per cent of wartime charities were registered, with 36 per cent receiving exemption; in Todmorden the figures were more than reversed: 28 per cent registered to 72 per cent exempted. For registered charities the occupation of the chairman and two further committee members (and often those of the secretary and treasurer as well) are recorded. The occupation of those persons applying for exemption is sometimes recorded but rarely what position in the organisation they held. I have attempted to discover the occupation of remaining office holders through a search of the 1901 Census. This is clearly an imprecise exercise, especially as only some could be traced in this way. Those women listed as ‘married women’ or ‘spinster’ have been classified, where possible, by their husband’s or father’s occupation. The social class classification adopted is based on that of T.H.C. Stevenson, the medical statistician in the General Register Office. His 1913 classification mixed occupational and industrial groups and, though individual occupations were later reallocated to different classes, the overall shape of the model changed very little during the next 60 years. The classes are now usually described as follows:

56. In Todmorden social class statistics were unavailable (the town not being differentiated in the 1911 Census), so those in Blackburn were utilised for both towns.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This classification was found useful as it avoids artificially separating skilled manual workers employed in the textile industry (a very large category in Blackburn and Todmorden) from other categories of skilled manual workers such as those employed in engineering, cycle and aero works in Coventry. More recently devised systems were rejected as being both over-complex for a non-scientific study such as this and too difficult to relate to contemporary statistics and views on class.

In terms of the gender of charity officials the proportion of women was over 30 per cent in Blackburn, Todmorden and North Kent, 26 per cent in Croydon, but only one per cent in Coventry. This might be explained by the nature of the social structure of the town and its industries resulting in the fact that women made up only 26 per cent of the workforce compared to 35 per cent in Croydon (the largest number being domestic servants) and 45 per cent in Blackburn (the majority being weavers). In the case of those women holding named office (chair, secretary or treasurer) it is only possible to consider the registered organisations, as it was not a requirement to indicate these against exempted bodies (though it was sometimes done, the numbers are too small to consider). This indicates that, in comparison to their overall numbers as office holders, women were underrepresented in the most ‘prestigious’ office of chair (19 per cent in Croydon, 11 per cent in Blackburn, none in Coventry). Chairman was certainly the rule and this is no surprise. It is also not surprising that women were underrepresented as treasurers, a role often filled by a book-keeper, accountant or bank manager. The highest representation of women was amongst secretaries (39 per cent in Croydon, 32 per cent in Blackburn and six per cent even in Coventry) which would lend support to the contention that men were more likely to act as the figurehead of charities but that women often did the majority of the day-to-day work.

57. So although women probably accounted for two-thirds of charity workers they comprised less than a third of office holders.
58. 1911 census figures.
The main analysis conducted looked at the social class of office holders based on the considerations, selections and assumptions set out above.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class of Charity Office Holders (%)</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III (N)</th>
<th>III (M)</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croydon (n = 135)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kent (n = 33)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry (n = 63)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn (n = 528)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todmorden (n = 79)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results can then be compared with the occupational make-up of each area. The figures in the next table are taken from the 1911 Census. This analysis has to be treated with some caution as I have allocated the occupational classifications from the census to the class categories. In the census tables it is impossible to separate semi-skilled textile workers from more skilled professions and 'overlookers' (foremen). Somewhat arbitrarily I have placed all the textile workers in Class IV and therefore the Class III (M) figure for Blackburn is certainly an under-representation and here the Class III (M) and IV figures might better be looked at as a combined total rather than being distinct. In some categories a split has had to be made between those in authority (and hence a 'higher' class category) and others. This has been done with local and national government workers (split 1:4 between classes I and III (N)) and those in the armed forces (split 1:19 between classes I and III (M) which is approximately the proportion of officers to other ranks). As there are clear occupational differences between men and women separate figures are provided for each sex as well as one for the combined totals in each area:
To compare the class of office holders to the class make-up of the district the results from Table 5 were matched against the combined figures from Table 6 to produce the following results that indicate whether each class group was under or over-represented on the charity committees in the area. Positive figures (+) show an over-representation by that ratio, negative figures (-) an under-representation, an exact correlation is indicated thus (=).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Class based on Occupational Categories*</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III (N)</th>
<th>III (M)</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Croydon – Males</strong> (n = 48,746)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Croydon – Females</strong> (n = 25,714)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Croydon – Combined</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coventry – Males</strong> (n = 37,364)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coventry – Females</strong> (n = 13,435)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coventry – Combined</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blackburn – Males</strong> (n = 44,110)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blackburn – Females</strong> (n = 35,499)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blackburn – Combined</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For comparison the national division by class in 1911 was Class I: 7 per cent; Class II: 7 per cent; Class III (N): 11 per cent; Class III (M): 31 per cent; Class IV: 34 per cent; Class V: 10 per cent. Source: Robert Price and George Sayers Bain, ‘The Labour Force’, in A.H. Halsey (ed.), *British Social Trends since 1900* (Basingstoke/London: Macmillan, 2nd edn, 1988), Table 4.1(a), 163, and A.H. Halsey, *Change in British Society: From 1900 to the present day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pb edn, 1978), 35. Self-employed manual workers have been placed with the skilled III (M) group. Arthur Marwick gives a figure of 80 per cent working class and between 10 and 18 per cent middle class: *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Boston: Little Brown, 1965), 23.
These figures indicate that in every area Class Group I was, not surprisingly, significantly over-represented (charities today would show the same tendency), but that this was less marked in Coventry and within the exempted charities in Todmorden. The over-representation of Class Group II was broadly similar with the exception of Coventry where this may have evened up the relatively smaller proportion of Class I representatives on committees. Skilled non-manual workers were the group whose proportion on committees most closely matched that in the general population. Manual workers of all kinds were underrepresented but this under-representation was significantly more marked in Croydon than in the more industrialised towns.

This analysis may be further explored and clarified by looking at the overall class composition of charity committees. How many were entirely composed of upper and middle-class members; how many of only working-class members and how many of members of both or all groups? These are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III (N)</th>
<th>III (M)</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
<td>+2.4</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>+5.0</td>
<td>+4.2</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn (registered)</td>
<td>+19.0</td>
<td>+2.9</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>+1.4</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With III (M) and IV merged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todmorden (exempted)</td>
<td>+6.0</td>
<td>+2.0</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With III (M) and IV merged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These figures reinforce the findings from the analysis of individual class above. In the suburban south east 60 per cent or more of the charities operated without any committee representation from the working classes whereas only 12–13 per cent did so in the Midlands and North. Equally, virtually no charities in the south were entirely run by working-class members (the single exception was, unsurprisingly, the Croydon branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers). In Coventry and Blackburn the figures demonstrate the greatest social mix on committees with over 50 per cent having members of both upper/middle and working classes. In the exempted Todmorden charities more than three-quarters of organisations operated with no input from upper or middle class representatives. What these tables demonstrate is that there are clearly significant differences in the make up of charity committees in Southern, suburban locations from those in the industrial Midlands, Lancashire and West Yorkshire. This can perhaps be partially explained by the class structure of the areas in question and also by the differing views on class in these communities. Despite these factors it is clear that working-class people were far more likely to be involved in the organisation and running of wartime charities in the Midlands and the cotton towns than in the suburban South. There is little difference in the social class of officials in the registered and exempted charities in the South, whereas there are some between the registered charities in Blackburn and the exempted ones in Todmorden.

60. In Blackburn this was often the local non-conformist minister.
More research needs to be carried out to confirm these findings and other areas need to be analysed but the above results may help to give further credibility to the argument that the working classes, especially in the industrial North of England, contributed a greater degree of support to wartime charities than previously thought. Again contrary to some previous comments this charitable activity strengthened as the war went on, when the majority of these smaller and exempted charities were formed.

Overall the discussion in this article tends to indicate that the extent and financial impact of charity in the First World War was greater than has previously been suggested. Charitable giving in the UK increased massively without having any serious impact on existing causes. It was far more significant and better organised than in any previous war and, just as Britain's Army in 1914-18 reflected the national social class proportions, so too did the charitable support for it. Very large numbers were engaged in voluntary charitable work with, for example, more women involved than worked in the munitions industry. In some areas, especially again the industrial towns of the North, working-class people ran many of these organisations directly, often with no input from their social 'superiors'. Working-class support for charity both in financial and human terms was therefore far greater than has previously been admitted. Overall the scale and extent of voluntary charitable activity in the First World War provided vital support for the war effort and contributed greatly to the 'social capital' required to win it.