

# Mobilizing charity: non-uniformed voluntary action during the First World War

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This study proposes that the voluntary sector in the UK underwent major managerial and state-directional change during the period of the Great War, as a concerted response to but also enabling it to make important contributions to the war effort. It provides an important challenge to that scholarship which presents charity and voluntary activity in this period as marking a downturn from the high point of late-Victorian philanthropy, as representing far less serious activities than those undertaken by munitions workers, and VADs; with charitably-minded civilians' efforts alienating rather than encouraging to men at the front. The study seeks to demonstrate that such a depiction is incorrect; suggesting that the degree of negativity that surrounds much previous work on voluntary action in this period is reaching a myth-like status.

The study draws on previously unused primary sources in publicly available archives; notably regarding the developing role of the UK's Director General of Voluntary Organizations (DGVO) from 1916, and regulatory legislation of the period; and on the activities of specified local charities, in particular areas, notably Croydon and Blackburn. It utilises a crossdisciplinary approach drawing on philanthropic, social, military and political history as well as the history of management. The career of the DGVO, Sir Edward Ward, is examined in detail and analysed from the perspectives of both contemporary and current management practice.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries did not represent the zenith of charitable activity, this came during the war itself. Charitable donations rose to an all-time peak and the scope and nature of charitable work shifted decisively. Far more working class activists, especially women became involved, though there were significant differences between the suburban south and industrial north of England and Scotland. Far from there being an unbridgeable gap in understanding or empathy between soldiers and civilians the links were strong and charitable contributions were enormously important in maintaining troop morale. This bond significantly contributed to the development and maintenance of social capital in Britain, which, in turn, strongly supported the war effort.

Issues of developing social capital within voluntary organisations, and a review of the nature of the deference exchanges occurring within charitable activity at this time follow. Finally, the extent to which responsiveness to wartime needs was able to trigger managerial change, if not a managerial revolution among active voluntary organisations is considered. A series of appendices illustrate key aspects of charities' development and direction during this period.

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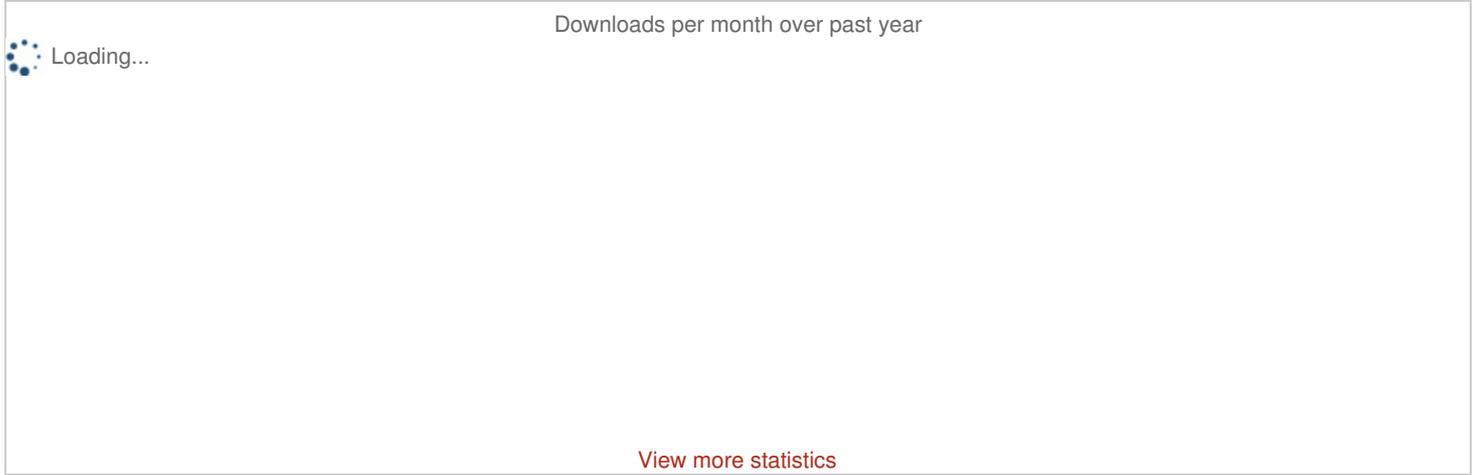


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Many First World War charities undertook the same or similar roles in the Second World War, while many individuals – a few decades older, the second time around – provided support or leadership to the same voluntary organizations in both wars. An excellent example of how Canadians' First World War volunteering experience shaped their handling of the Second World War is the Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF). The CPF, Canada's leading war charity of the First World War, was noticeably absent from the Second World War. Their efforts to do so eventually branched into non-traditional roles (such as the First World War Farmerettes who helped harvest crops, or the Second World War entry of women into the military), but they started from a firmly traditional place.