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One remarkable legacy

FUNDRAISING DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Refusing to ignore people in crisis

Fundraising during the First World War

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Background

Following the outbreak of the First World War on 4 August 1914, the British Red Cross formed the Joint War Committee with the Order of St John. They worked together and pooled their fundraising activities and resources. Fundraising was vital to allow the committee to carry out its work, which included supplying services and machinery in Britain and in the conflict areas abroad.

Donations

Fundraising was of vital importance throughout the war. Money and gifts-in-kind received through a variety of funds, collections and donations went towards services for soldiers both at home and abroad. By the end of the war, £21,885,035 had been raised and £20,058,355 spent on hospitals, medicine, clothing, grants and care for the sick and wounded.

War Charities Act, 1916

The War Charities Act of 1916 prohibited the raising of money for war charities unless the charity had been registered. Once the Joint War Committee had registered it then had to approve, in writing, all fundraising activities undertaken on behalf of the Red Cross and Order of St John. Permission was granted only to enterprises where all the proceeds would go to the Red Cross.

Many people thought the War Charities Act impeded Red Cross fundraising activities. However, many informal collections had raised funds for several different charities under the symbol of the Red Cross. This meant that donors could not be sure that their money would go towards Red Cross activities. The War Charities Act remedied this.

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

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support sick and wounded soldiers both at home and abroad.

The amounts of funds raised by the Times Fund during the First World War:

Year	Amount
1915	£3,005,492
1916	£2,502,425
1917	£3,000,967
1918	£2,495,691
1919	£5,117,364
Final total	£16,510,023 6s 5d

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.

Collections

Many people collected funds for the Red Cross. The Cinematograph Trade Ambulance Fund and the Butt-Rumford Fund, organised by Dame Clara Butt, arranged concerts in London and across the country. One of these took place at the Royal Albert Hall in 1915.

The following events and activities raised money for general purposes.

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“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”.

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.

Total amounts raised on the four Red Cross ‘Our Days’ during the First World War:

Year	Overseas	Home	Total
1915	£590,266 6s 5d	£446,523 6s 3½d	£1,036,789 12s 8½d
1916	£832,313 11s 2d	£377,723 10s 2d	£1,210,037 1s 4d
1917	£1,868,534 7s 4d	£709,354 5s 10d	£2,577,888 13s 2d
1918	£2,127,791 7s 4d	£1,670,123 12s 8d	£3,797,915 0s 0d
Total	£5,418,905 12s 3d	£3,203,724 14s 11½d	£8,622,630 7s 2½d

Street collections

In 1914, the Central Office started the collecting box scheme. The scheme was placed under the management of Miss Ilbert O.B.E, the collecting box secretary at the Head Office. Upon her appointment the scheme was handed over formally to the Red Cross. The society re-organised the collecting box scheme and it was decided that the responsibility would be held by the local branches. Vying with each other to get better results, 80% of the funds collected went to Head Office and 20% went to the local branches. The branches withdrew collecting boxes from 31 January, 1919 after the armistice.

The Lord Mayor’s City of London Fund

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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 this fund in Belgium, France and Serbia. The fund received a total of £1,024,808 19s 2d.

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.

The approximate amounts collected through church collections during the First World War:

Year	Amount
1915	£85,000
1916	£68,000
1917	£45,000
1918	£84,000
Total	£283,000

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.

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Money raised by Red Cross auctions at Christie's during the First World War:

Year	Amount
1915	£37,383 7s 9d
1916	£63,944 2s 7d
1917	£71,692 5s 11d
1918	£149,616 10s 5d
Total	£322,636 6s 8d

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.

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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.

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Sources

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Cover photo

Selling flags for Alexandra Day at Netley Red Cross Hospital, Ref: IN0786. © British Red Cross.