



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

AUTUMN PROGRAMME, 2010

All seminars are held at 5.30pm on Mondays in the Low Countries Room

27 September, 2010

Clare Mulley

Eglantyne Jebb, 1876-1928: unlikely children's champion?

25 October, 2010

Eve Colpus, University of Oxford

The 'geography of the matter': space and the language of location in interwar British female philanthropy

22 November, 2010

Dr John Lee, University of Bristol

Following "The Absent-minded Beggar": a case-history of a fund-raising campaign of the South African War

6 December, 2010

Dr Caitriona Beaumont, London South Bank University

The Myth of the 1950s Housewife: Voluntary women's organisations and the challenge to idealised domesticity in post war Britain

PODCASTS

Since September 2009, our monthly seminars have also been freely available to listen to on the IHR website at www.history.ac.uk

For more details see www.vahs.org.uk

If you are interested in giving a paper as part of this series, please contact the seminar convenor, George Campbell Gosling, at gccgosling@brookes.ac.uk



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

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SEMINAR ABSTRACT

27th September, 2010

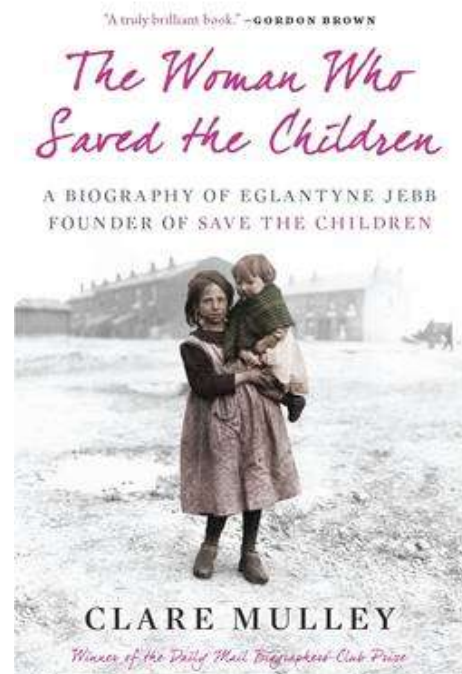
Clare Mulley

Eglantyne Jebb, 1876-1928: unlikely children's champion?

'To succeed in life, you must give life' Eglantyne Jebb once wrote. But she herself did not give life in the traditional way expected of a well-to-do Edwardian lady – by marrying and having a brood of children. In fact Jebb confessed she was not fond of children, once calling them 'the little wretches', and looking back she claimed that 'the dreadful idea of closer acquaintance never entered my mind'.

Instead Jebb chose to 'give life' from a strategic distance by setting up the *Save the Children Fund* at the end of the First World War. She went on to write the pioneering statement of children's human rights that has since evolved into the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most universally accepted human rights instrument in history.

In this seminar Clare Mulley, the author of a new and award-winning biography of Eglantyne Jebb, looks at the life, work and motivations of her subject, one of the great pioneers of children's rights and welfare, whose fabulous name has all but been forgotten today.



For more information visit

www.claremulley.com



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

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SEMINAR ABSTRACT

25th October, 2010

Eve Colpus, University of Oxford

*The geography of the matter: transnationalism and
interwar British women's philanthropy*

This paper explores the transnational dimensions of British women's philanthropy between the First and Second World Wars. Its starting point is an article in The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) 1934 almanac which discussed women's social action. According to the article, 'The geography of the matter', was to be found in the 'little homely ways' in which women performed good works. Because historians have tended to equate women's philanthropy with parish- and domestic-based methods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there has been an understandable tendency to assume that where it was still operating in the twentieth century it remained bounded in its scale of operation. However, far from promoting a delimited scale of operation, the YWCA's commentary was part of a broad worldview which cultivated transnational methods and thinking. This paper will argue that in the interwar years discourses of domesticity and religion continued to undergird women's philanthropy but they were recast in order to position it as transnational – both in terms of its crossing of national boundaries and its engagement in processes of cultural exchange.

The paper examines these questions through focusing on four celebrated contemporary British-born philanthropists: Evangeline Booth, Lettice Fisher, Emily Kinnaird and Muriel Paget. These women were active in different philanthropic milieux, representing between them devout Christian social work, liberal educated reform and cosmopolitan humanitarianism. Through analysing these women's letters, public addresses and media publicity, as well as literature of the charitable organisations with which they were connected, the paper seeks to explain how and why interwar female philanthropists negotiated the boundaries between older discourses of women's public activity and newer gendered ideas about personal service, voluntary expertise and religious universalism. Critical to all these debates, I will argue, was the idea that female philanthropists were part of a global community of reformist interwar social activists working towards redefined goals of social improvement. This involved them in both an intellectual and a practical process. In the interwar years established codes of British women's philanthropic effort were drawn onto a geographically and philosophically enlarged canvas, developing creative and expansive socially-reformist visions.



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Institute of Historical Research

SEMINAR ABSTRACT

22nd November, 2010

John Lee, University of Bristol

Following "The Absent-minded Beggar":
a case-history of a fund-raising campaign
of the South African War

POEM FUND NOW £50,000

GREAT CHRISTMAS GIFT TO THE NATION'S
HEROES

ABSENT-MINDED BEGGAR RELIEF CORPS

AN APPEAL TO THE GENEROUS

"The Absent-minded Beggar" has passed the first great milestone on the road which is paved with good deeds.

Thanks to Mr. Kipling's heart-stirring poem, thanks to Sir Arthur Sullivan's charming musical setting, and thanks to Mr. R. Caton Woodville's fine illustration, the receipts from the three totalled on Saturday just over £50,000.

The history of the world can produce no parallel to the extraordinary record of this poem.

Daily Mail, Monday, December 25, 1899

Kipling's poem was written at the very beginning of the South African war to raise money for the families of soldiers. It was an immediate and lasting success, and is usually credited with raising between £250,000 and £300,000 (perhaps around £14 to £17 million in today's money). If true, that makes it - if not unique in the history of the world -- then perhaps the most practically effective poem in English, and one of the largest such fundraising campaigns of the Nineteenth Century.

The poem and its associated campaign, masterminded, to begin with, by the *Daily Mail*, seems to have succeeded so well because they were able to create something like a cultural perfect storm. The poem became a recital 'boom' in the music halls; set to music by Sullivan, it became a singing 'rage'; Woodville's illustration became one of the most famous images of the war. This, though, was only the start: there were performances in the Albert Hall and national brass band competitions, and 'Absent-minded beggar' branded cigarettes, tea, and chocolate. Every soldier who embarked for South Africa was offered a free meal from the 'Absent-minded beggar fund' café. An 'Absent-minded beggar' ambulance service was founded.

Yet little beyond brief anecdotal accounts are known at present about the details of this campaign. This paper aims to establish the general outline of that campaign, drawing mainly on newspaper and periodical accounts. It aims to recover the detail of: the campaign's duration; the amount raised; the rate at which money was gathered; the social class of the donors; the varying coverage over time given to the campaign in a selection of newspapers; the various means and events employed to raise money; the social class of those involved in organizing those means and events; the means of the disbursements of the fund; and to whom grants were made.

The paper will confine itself mainly to evidential detail, in part owing to the fact that my academic background is a literary. I am keen to present a paper on this campaign to the more specialized and methodologically sophisticated audience that VAHS represents, believing that the feedback from such an audience will be of particular value.



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

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SEMINAR ABSTRACT

6th December, 2010

Caitriona Beaumont, London South Bank University

The Myth of the 1950s Housewife: Voluntary Women's Organisations and the Challenge to Idealised Domesticity in Post-War Britain

The changing role of women in post war British society has been well-documented by historians, for example Jane Lewis (1992), Sue Bruley (1999) and Martin Pugh (2000). These studies examine in detail the ways in which many women's lives were transformed following the Second World War by expanding educational opportunities, greater access to health care, reliable birth control, improved living standards and paid employment.

Yet in spite of such changes in women's lives and their experiences, the enduring image of the 1950s housewife, both in the popular imagination and orthodox historiographies is that of the 'perfect' wife devoted exclusively to her home and family having acquiesced to the prevailing ideology of domesticity.

This paper will suggest that the 'real' 1950s housewife was instead a complex construction of wife, mother, employee, consumer, active citizen and campaigner for women's rights. These multiple identities of the housewife are best represented by the hundreds of thousands of women who joined popular voluntary women's organisations such as the Mothers' Union, the Townswomen's Guilds and the Women's Institutes during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Through an exploration of the aims and activities of these conventional women's organisations it becomes clear that during the post war years significant numbers of so-called 'typical housewives' were actively engaged in local and national campaigns to enhance the lives of women and to ensure that women, as equal citizens, had access to the rights and privileges of democratic citizenship in post war British society.