



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

**Voluntary
Action
History
Society**

**Report on a workshop for postgraduate
and early career researchers**

**Charity Begins at Home: Approaches to the History of
Domestic Space and Voluntary Action**

27 March 2010, University of Warwick



PROGRAMME

10 – 10.30am	Registration/ Welcome (<i>Wolfson Research Exchange, Library</i>)
Session One 10.30 – 11.30am	<p><i>Charity as the Home</i></p> <p>Laura Crombie (Glasgow): ‘The Ghent Hospital of Saint George: Donors, Sisters and Residents’</p> <p>Angela Nicholls (Warwick): ‘A Place of One’s Own?: Charitable Housing in Seventeenth-Century England’</p>
Session Two 11.30 – 12.30pm	Dr Alysa Levene (Oxford Brookes) and Dr Pat Starkey (Liverpool): ‘Writing and Researching on Charity and the Home’
12.30 – 1.15pm	Lunch
Session Three 1.15 – 2.15pm	<p><i>Charity Targeting the Home</i></p> <p>Oliver Betts (York): ‘Lady Bountiful and the Poor: Making Sense of Female Philanthropists and the Working-Class Home’</p> <p>Lynsey Cullen and George Campbell Gosling (Oxford Brookes): ‘Through the Almoner’s Eyes: Medical Charity, Social Enquiry and the Home, 1895 – 1948’</p>
Session Four 2.15 – 3.15pm	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Charity and the Home in Local Context</i></p> <p>Mark Crosher (Manchester), “‘From Evangelical Philanthropy to Secular Charity’: The Story of the Wood Street Mission, 1945 – 1965’</p> <p>Charlotte Mason (Warwick), ‘The Home and Acts of Mercy in the French Wars of Religion, c.1550 – 1600’</p>
3.15 – 3.45pm	Tea and coffee (<i>Modern Records Centre, behind Library</i>)
Session Five 3.45 – 4.00pm 4.00 – 5.00pm	<p>Notices of forthcoming events and relevant resources</p> <p>Roundtable discussion</p>
5.00pm >	Close, and for those wishing to join us, a drink and dinner at The Varsity

This one-day workshop offered postgraduates and early career researchers an opportunity to reflect on how historians might research and write effective histories of the relationship between charity and the home.

Papers addressed the relationship between voluntary action and domestic spaces including:

- **Charity *emanating from the home***, e.g., the home as a location for fundraising events, a place for giving or coordinating charity, collective action by families and neighbours
- **Charity *targeting the home***, e.g., social work, religious outreach, benevolent funds, or those ***rejected from the home***, e.g., unmarried mothers, foundlings
- **Charity *as the home***, e.g., almshouses, nursing homes, hospices, refuge and boarding

Papers presented in the first part of the workshop provided the basis for a roundtable discussion led by Dr Pat Starkey and Dr Alysa Levene in the second part of the day.

Participants' feedback

Participants commented positively on the speakers' contributions, noting that there was a 'good chronological mix' a 'good mix' and 'very interesting range' of papers, which the latter respondent recorded 'gave [her/him] lots of ideas'. There was universal praise for the quality of the discussion, and for the design of the day, which one person commented struck 'just the right balance between training and papers'. The briefest response noted simply that it had been a 'great day with interesting discussion'.

It is encouraging that one respondent particularly noted the 'nice relaxed and supportive climate for presenting', which suggests this workshop met the core aims of the series to offer a friendly environment for new researchers to explore issues in their work, and gain experience in disseminating their ideas to a wider audience.

Easily remediable suggestions related to the provision of tea and coffee on arrival, and the possibility of using a drop-box for question sheets, which this particular respondent felt were a 'nice idea'.

A potentially useful suggestion related to the possibility of getting first year PhDs to present a panel of 5-10 minute papers aimed at stimulating discussion on a core theme – an idea that future workshops might also consider extending to MAs.

Although feedback from academics was not anonymous in the same way, it is worth recording that both chairs afterwards wrote in support of what the event had achieved. Dr Alysa Levene felt the 'papers were all really interesting... and the round table brought up some good thoughts', while Dr Pat Starkey commended the 'quality of the papers and the enthusiasm of all participants. Again, she observed the 'supportive and friendly atmosphere... which must be so useful to people on the threshold of careers and needing to get experience', echoing the views of the anonymous new researcher recorded above.

DELEGATE LIST

Stephen Soanes (Lead Organiser: University of Warwick)

Liz Harvey (Co-Organiser: UCL)

Dr Pat Starkey (Academic Chair: University of Liverpool)

Dr Alys Levene (Academic Chair: Oxford Brookes University)

Oliver Betts (University of York)

Georgina Brewis (Institute for Volunteering Research)

Laura Crombie (University of Glasgow)

Mark Crosher (University of Manchester)

Lynsey Cullen (Oxford Brookes University)

George Campbell Gosling (Oxford Brookes University)

Julia Huntenberg (University of Warwick)

Prof. Hilary Marland (University of Warwick)

Angela Nicholls (University of Warwick)

Rebecca Preston (Royal Holloway University)

ORGANISER'S EVALUATION

Stephen Soanes

'Charity Begins at Home' was a smaller workshop than the first event at Oxford Brookes. This has advantages and disadvantages, which other organisers may want to consider. The numbers at the latter event arguably allowed participants to individually take a greater part in the discussion, and to ask questions. I think somewhere between 12 – 20 participants probably works best, providing a reasonable audience for speakers, whilst giving everyone ample opportunity to speak and raise their own issues and concerns. At the same time, however, it is probably equally important to ensure all those who might obtain benefit from attending such an event have an opportunity to do so. Obtaining the right balance will probably need some thought ahead of all future events.

One of the more challenging issues I found was how to identify suitable participants across other areas beyond my core areas of interest in the history of psychiatry/medicine. Future workshops might make use of pre-existing networks for dissemination (e.g., the Women's History Network). As general advice, I found the IHR's online 'Theses in Progress' pages especially helpful in identifying those outside my direct research area, who I then contacted directly, in addition to those who responded to the general call for papers. This was fairly time-consuming compared with the more passive approach of advertising and waiting for responses, but in this case arguably contributed to the success of the day. In feedback, participants seem to have particularly liked the thematic and chronological range of papers (see above), which suggests this mixed method of soliciting papers proved effective in practice.

Among minor innovations included a fifteen minutes devoted to advertising events and resources relevant to the topic under discussion. This potentially allowed those present to consider other avenues through which to disseminate their work, and maintain an active presence in the field, supporting our aim to facilitate networks of new research in different areas of the history of voluntary action. As evidence of these workshops' effectiveness in promoting interest in the history of voluntary action, one speaker has subsequently joined the VAHS New Researchers Sub-Committee, while another has put forward a proposal for a future workshop during 2010/11.

An archives display arranged in advance with the Modern Records Centre's archivists provided a nice focal point for tea and coffee, based on records I had identified via their online catalogue. Some of these related directly to the people and institutions discussed in new researchers' papers (e.g., Mary Stewart's work as almoner at the Royal Free Hospital). The feasibility of this is highly dependent on the venues chosen for individual workshops, but there may be secondary literature/leaflets/posters relevant to an area that could be made available at this time.

The roundtable followed the successful model of the Oxford Brookes and Birmingham events. On reflection, I would possibly recommend setting aside 5 minutes in future for everyone to write down questions, and place them in a drop box (or simply hand them to the chairs). This way all participants can ask questions relevant to the papers they have heard, and their developing thoughts during the day. There is no harm in also appealing for people to raise questions or issues ahead of the event, all of which can only help the chairs lead a discussion that is most relevant to attendees' interests.