



Workshop Report

Dependents on Welfare: Voluntary Action and Child Poverty in Britain, 1800 – 2000



University of Manchester, 3 May 2011

AUGUST 2011

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Britain, 1800 – 2000***

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PROGRAMME

10.30 – 11.00am	Registration
11.00 – 11.30am	Dr Kate Bradley (Kent) and Dr Mary Clare Martin (Greenwich): Themes and Controversies in the Historiography of Voluntary Action in Britain, 1800 -2000.
11.30 – 13.00pm	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Panel 1: The Responses of Charitable Organisations to Child Poverty.</i></p> <p>(1) Claudia Soares (Manchester): Institutional Homelessness: Charitable Initiatives of Domesticity in the Waifs and Strays Societies, 1881 – 1901.</p> <p>(2) Mark Crosher (Manchester): Poverty, Charity and Memory in Manchester and Salford: The Story of the Wood Street Mission, 1945 – 1990.</p> <p>(3) Gordon Marino (Manchester): Ellis and the Orphanage.</p>
13.00 – 14.00pm	Lunch
14.00 – 14.45pm	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Charitable Organisations: New Challenges Facing the Voluntary Sector.</i></p> <p>Presentations from Miss Jan O'Connor, Director of the Wood Street Mission; and Mr Tony Murray, Director of Cornerstone Day Centre. Wood Street Mission is a poverty-relief charity which maintains a clothing distribution service; and Cornerstone Day Centre is a drop-in centre, which provides food and advice over housing and benefits for people affected by homelessness.</p>
14.45 – 15.45pm	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Panel 2: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Voluntary Action and Child Welfare.</i></p> <p>(1) Tosh Warwick (Huddersfield): Industrialist Families, Charity and Child Welfare in Early Twentieth Century Middlesbrough.</p> <p>(2) Lyndy Pooley (Exeter): The Role of Psychology in Post-war Social Policy in Britain – Local Implementation in Exeter.</p>
15.45 – 16.15pm	Tea and Coffee
16.15 – 17.00pm	Roundtable

Event Summary

As part of a series of one-day workshops affiliated with the Voluntary Action History Society (VAHS), this event offered postgraduates the opportunity to disseminate their research in a friendly and informed environment on the subject of voluntary action and child poverty in Britain between 1800 and 2000. Papers were welcomed on any aspect of the relationship of voluntary action and child poverty, including: the operation of charitable organisations for children; philanthropists and social reformers associated with child poverty; and children's agency in charitable initiatives.

There were seven presentations, with five from postgraduates and two from voluntary sector practitioners. Postgraduate speakers were in different stages of their research, ranging from Masters to final year PhD students. These presentations covered a very diverse range of areas, including children's experiences in the Waifs and Strays Society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as the role of psychology in influencing local government social welfare policies after the Second World War.

We were also fortunate to persuade two voluntary sector practitioners to give presentations on existing and future challenges facing their charities, especially relevant given much recent debate on the impact of the coalition government's austerity measures. We strongly felt that involvement from current practitioners would further develop understanding of the voluntary sector amongst both academics and postgraduates. Presentations were given by two Directors of local poverty-relief charities based in Manchester, Miss Jan O'Connor of the Wood Street Mission and Mr Tony Murray of Cornerstone Day Centre.

Similar to previous workshops, the event was brought to a close by a roundtable discussion. The discussion enabled postgraduates to raise problems and issues they have encountered in their research with established academics in the field. Although we had planned a time-frame of 45 minutes for the roundtable, it lasted nearly an hour and half. This was later followed by much discussion in the pub!

The workshop was co-organised by Dr Niels Van Manen, who recently completed his PhD at the University of York (and Postan Fellow awarded by the Economic History Society) and Mark Crosher, a PhD candidate at the University of Manchester and member of the VAHS Postgraduate Committee.

Organiser's Evaluation

The workshop was quite well-attended with fifteen participants, including eight postgraduates and early career researchers, five academics and two voluntary sector practitioners. Although there were fewer postgraduate papers than at previous workshops (such as Public Health and Voluntary Action held at LSHTM in November 2010), this was offset by presentations from academics and voluntary sector practitioners. We found that the presentation by Dr Kate Bradley and Dr Mary Clare Martin on the historiography of voluntary action was an excellent way to begin the workshop. In particular, their presentation further informed postgraduates about the wider debates and controversies relevant to their research. We strongly recommend this approach for further workshops. Both organisers and academics feel that a presentation on historiography would help postgraduates, particularly at MA and first/second-year PhD level, think about the bigger picture of their research, and where they might contribute to the existing scholarship.

In contrast to previous VAHS postgraduate workshops, this event involved current voluntary sector practitioners. Their presentations were well received by academics and postgraduates, and we feel that their inclusion was very successful. We strongly encourage the participation of current practitioners as a means to promote further learning of the voluntary sector. Their experience and knowledge of the sector would greatly benefit discussions, especially as not all academics and postgraduates have worked in the field. Furthermore, their inclusion would support a vital process of getting people beyond academia interested in humanities research. Unfortunately, both practitioners were unable to attend the roundtable discussion at the end of the event due to time-constraints. For future events, we propose that a panel for practitioners would take place just before the roundtable.

The roundtable discussion predominantly centred on two areas: research concerns and advice on academic careers. Similar to previous workshops, the roundtable enabled postgraduates to talk about their research concerns within a friendly and informed environment. However, we also found that there was much discussion on how to pursue an academic career. Given that many postgraduates wish to remain in academia, there was enthusiasm to talk about topics, such as publishing and postdoctoral funding opportunities. A focused discussion on academic careers would be worth considering for further workshops.

The biggest problem we encountered in organising the workshop was attracting postgraduate speakers. Indeed, the approach of placing a call-for-papers on the IHR, SHS and EHS website was unsuccessful. Although time-consuming, we found that direct soliciting of speakers was the best approach. On reflection, there were a few reasons why we struggled to attract speakers. Firstly, the timing of the workshop, just after a Bank Holiday, was not ideal. Secondly, the boundary of the workshop, voluntary action and child poverty in Britain between 1800 and 2000, was quite narrow. Thirdly, two or three postgraduates were unable to attend due to either prior booking of research trips or pressures of completing their thesis. Despite our struggles to attract speakers, there was much interest in the event amongst academics. In addition to Dr Kate Bradley and Dr Mary Clare Martin, we very much benefited from the attendance of Dr John Welshman, Dr Pat Starkey and Dr Rebecca Gill. The one-to-one relationship of academics to postgraduate speakers proved to be mutually beneficial. While academics benefited from finding out about new postgraduate research, students benefited from the increased feedback and advice.

We would like to express our thanks the Economic History Society (EHS) for their generous financial support. We would also like to thank Dr Kate Bradley and Dr Mary Clare Martin for leading the roundtable discussion, as well as Dr Pat Starkey, Dr John Welshman and Dr Rebecca Gill for their participation. Lastly, we would like to say a big ‘thank-you’ to Miss Jan O’Connor from the Wood Street Mission and Mr Tony Murray from Cornerstones Day Centre for their excellent presentations.

Delegates

Organisers

Dr Niels Van Manen (University of Manchester)
Mark Crosher (University of Manchester)

Senior academics

Dr Kate Bradley – (University of Kent)
Dr Mary Clare Martin – (University of Greenwich)
Dr Rebecca Gill – (University of Huddersfield)
Dr Pat Starkey – (University of Liverpool)
Dr John Welshman – (University of Lancaster)

Postgraduate students

Eric Keys – (University of Kent)

Edward Poole – (University of Manchester)

Gordon Marino – (University of Manchester)

Lyndy Pooley – (University of Exeter)

Claudia Soares – (University of Manchester)

Tosh Warwick – (University of Huddersfield)

Charity Participants

Miss Jan O'Connor – (Director of Wood Street Mission)

Mr Tony Murray – (Director of Cornerstones Day Centre)