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Introduction

An American with a reputation as ‘the world’s record money collector’ arrived for a ‘tussle with London’ at the beginning of 1912. Charles Sumner Ward’s goal was to raise £100,000 in just twelve days for the city’s new YMCA building. Despite some concerns over the supposedly ‘namby-pamby’ YMCA, the British media was suitably impressed with Sumner Ward’s ambition. Newspapers praised his ‘novel outlook on the business side of philanthropy’, and lauded his intention to clinically target the city’s wealthy businessmen during his ‘whirlwind’ funding drive.¹ Breathless press reports continued during the twelve-day effort, and several specially constructed, electrically lit clock dials arranged around central London were updated hourly with the latest cash totals, creating a fervent atmosphere. Although when time ran out the fund remained short of its target by about a third, the campaign could hardly be deemed a failure: £66,000 in just shy of a fortnight was a splendid haul.²

But while journalists had been right to point out the novelty of Sumner Ward’s ‘short period’ fundraising in a British context,³ London in 1912 was hardly bereft of homegrown fundraising innovation. If the press liked the cut of Sumner Ward’s jib, it was in part because Britons had long been conditioned to expect constant reinvention when it came to charity fundraising. And if novelty was one vital element of fundraising success, business-like efficiency and transparency were also much valued. Sumner Ward appeared to embody these qualities but he was far from alone. This book argues that from at least 1870 charity overseers across Britain had not merely been good at winnowing donations from businessmen and others, they had acted as astute and innovative businessmen in doing so. Whether harnessing emergent technologies, securing mass publicity, creating distinctive brands or ‘scaling up’ enterprises, the people we term the ‘charity entrepreneurs’ of late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain were at least the equal of any contemporary American philanthropic expert.

They had to be. During the Victorian era, the British charity scene altered dramatically. The tangle of endowments, trusts and parish-based ‘ladies bountiful’ that characterized the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not disappear but they were joined by a recognizably modern charity market, in which increasingly professional ‘collecting’ or ‘voluntary’ charities, which derived their income from subscriptions and donations (rather than the proceeds of large endowments), predominated. This is not to imply that no such charities had existed before. But by 1870, we suggest, a critical mass had been reached, in part because parallel social and technological developments facilitated their foundation, growth and endurance. These more permanent organizations were joined by an increasing preponderance of one-off funds for causes at home and abroad, generally fatal catastrophes of one sort or another, which themselves adopted new technologies in their pursuit of donations.

The resulting intense competition for donors among these funds and organizations, we contend, drove many of them to greater heights of innovation in their fundraising practices. It created, in effect if not in intent, a charitable fundraising ‘market’. This charity market was characterized by competition for consumers (i.e. donors) among charity entrepreneurs. It involved conscious adoption by them of surprisingly up-to-date marketing techniques and strategies to ‘sell’ and distinguish their particular brands of compassion from those of rivals with similar relief remits. It arose organically, as each new enterprise was set up by motivated individuals to tackle a perceived evil of modern industrial society, from child poverty to unemployment, and intemperance to immorality. It was in many ways a classically ‘free’ market, unfettered by state intervention, although an invisible hand of self-regulation imperfectly contained the inevitable frauds and misconducts that even compassionate markets were wont to generate.

This market produced a charitable income whose scale was impressive, even if it must also remain impressionistic. As numerous historians of British philanthropy have noted, putting an accurate total on the amount of money raised for all charitable purposes in the nineteenth century is fraught with difficulties. There were several contemporary attempts, both provincial and metropolitan, to gauge levels of philanthropic income, but the first historian to tackle the issue seriously on a broader scale, David Owen in the 1960s, declared it ‘out of the question’ to reach a satisfying quantitative measurement.⁴ In a review of philanthropic scholarship Brian Harrison was initially critical of Owen’s failure to exploit the readily available balance sheets, annual reports and other documentation that he believed made such a measurement possible.

Revising this piece later on, Harrison backtracked and seemed to agree that no meaningful overall figure could be derived.⁵

Meanwhile, the prolific historian of philanthropy Frank Prochaska also tended to agree that no complete measurement was possible. He cited a purely indicative amount of £6 to £7 million per year being donated to some 1,000 charities in London alone, something derived from contemporary estimates.⁶ We have our own signal figures: by 1899, William Booth's 'In Darkest England' campaign, launched in 1890, had raised almost £300,000 for food and lodging costs alone⁷; by the 1920s, multiple Mansion House Funds since the late 1860s made in excess of £12 million for various domestic and overseas disasters⁸; and one of several newspaper funds operated during the Boer War reaped well over 4 million shillings, even as other larger and more 'official' funds also sprang up.⁹ Given the range and volume of funds and collecting organizations, arriving at an integrated figure may be impossible but such sample numbers, coupled with the expanding number of charitable organizations and funds, certainly suggest that the 'cake' of charitable donations was getting bigger rather than merely being cut into ever-narrower slivers.

For donors of all classes, opportunities to monetize their compassionate responses to poverty, need and disaster mushroomed in the later nineteenth century. One need only peruse the correspondence files of high-profile philanthropists to see this in action. By the 1890s, William Rathbone, Liberal MP first in Liverpool and later Wales, fielded constant requests for donations, mainly to educational and religious causes. While he told many canvassers that he limited his giving to places to which he was closely connected, he violated his own rule frequently, sending money to fundraisers from Manchester and London and simply asking them not to put his full name on their published subscription lists.¹⁰ He evidently found it hard to resist a deserving cause. For another Liberal MP R. B. Martin, the demand that he give to all the charities of his town (Tewkesbury) whether he approved of them or not was 'most objectionable'; the gifts in many cases 'are merely bribes in the name of charity – [b]ut how is it to be avoided!' ¹¹ If Rathbone found that there were more good causes he wished to support than he was able to, Martin saw charity gifts as a cynical ploy to buy votes but gave nevertheless.

The same was true of less exalted charitable contributors. Across Britain, as more and more voluntary charities were founded, the public were increasingly assailed with chances to hand over cash. While the 'charity bazaar' had long been a staple form of middle-class entertainment-cum-fundraiser, it was one that required a conscious decision to attend, and from which the working classes

remained more or less excluded for much of the nineteenth century.¹² As we will show, although the bazaar remained important, the definition of a charity donor expanded far beyond its typical, bourgeois participant. Street fundraising, workplace fundraising and mass media fundraising meant that people from all walks of life, and at all stages of life, were increasingly likely to encounter charitable appeals of one sort or another. As mass culture emerged, the charity donor market acquired a new social depth.

The increasing social depth of donors goes to the heart of our key argument about the development of charitable fundraising in this period. There has been much written about the two transformations in the charity world from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries: as Martin Gorsky noted, first trusts and endowments ceded ground to voluntary, collecting charities, and later, the state gradually encroached into what had been purely philanthropic welfare provision.¹³ While a tendency to explain the latter change as the inevitable onward march of the welfare state is now tempered by more nuanced accounts of an enduring, if undulating, ‘mixed economy’ of welfare,¹⁴ the earlier transformation has had less attention, and fundraising’s role in both has been underplayed. Gorsky explains the rise of voluntary charities in Bristol as a consequence of discredited management in charitable trusts and the ‘dual role of voluntary associations for the middle class, expressing the desire to exercise authority over the poor and at the same time representing a middle-class identity divided by religious and political allegiance’.¹⁵ There is undoubted truth to this. We argue, however, that the central significance of fundraising in itself has been overlooked. The collecting and giving of money fulfilled the needs of people as economic actors just as much as its expenditure served their religious or political identities: charitable giving was a form of compassionate consumption in the midst of sharp rises in other forms of consumption. Moreover, individuals could engage in philanthropic activism and advance a critique of capitalism in ways that united seemingly disparate religious, social and economic backgrounds.¹⁶ That goes some way towards explaining why mass fundraising arose and endured even as state involvement in welfare exploded.

An historical turn to material culture also presents some important and relevant avenues. Charitable fundraising could entail the consumption of goods in commercial contexts but this was frequently reframed by consumers’ desire to express their compassion *while* consuming. This emphasis on goods in a world increasingly dominated by the display and consumption of new products marked, if not an entirely new departure, at least a clear acceleration of material social dynamics in charitable giving.¹⁷ Much of the concern for the history of consumer

goods has focused on commodities and their impact on society. The eighteenth-century boom in world-traded goods may have enabled a new consciousness of distant sufferings as Thomas Haskell argued in his landmark article on the origins of humanitarian sensibility,¹⁸ but the late nineteenth century witnessed a wider range of goods and much broader set of representations throughout the strata of society.¹⁹ Consuming goods, Haskell argued, enabled action and the possibility of comprehending the fate of distant societies. Buying in a good cause, through fairer trading practices or purchasing alternatives to blood-tainted products, was to subscribe to the aims of the cause. Late-nineteenth-century religious and charitable organizations such as the Salvation Army or, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Boy Scout movement²⁰ entailed paramilitary uniforms and other material emblems of membership. But they were not alone in selling the means of identifying oneself as part of a broader group united around moral values. Smaller charities raised revenue and their profile through the publication and sale of subscription lists, objects and printed material; support for good causes could begin and end with ephemeral purchases and the innocent pleasure of consuming compassion.²¹ As Aileen Fyfe pointed out in her study of religious tract publishing, commercial and philanthropic activities could closely overlap.²² This book takes these selling practices and charities' interest in entrepreneurial innovation as the starting point of our analysis.

Most cities and towns had their turn-of-the-century philanthropic innovators, and a few, notably London, have had their historians.²³ While charity *was* sometimes truly 'local' in that it was confined to a few city streets, both in terms of donors and recipients, it was also a national and an international process. As such, this study adopts a broad archival search, not restricted by region.²⁴ The book draws on the appeal literature, publications and the ephemera of fundraising but, also, the accounts and auditing of monies raised. To an extent, histories of charities inevitably privilege the organizations that had the long-term stability to retain archives. Digitized newspapers and the extraordinarily rich holdings of the Charity Organisation Society (COS), founded in 1869, have extended the remit of this study. Newspapers carried the advertisements and subscription lists of numerous short-lived funds and organizations. The late-Victorian expansion of the press and print culture, including images and photographic representations, benefited charitable enterprises but also relied on charities to express new areas of concern and new objects of pity and compassion.²⁵ The COS's meticulous files on (mostly but not exclusively) London missions and charities may have proved to be of little use in their original purpose – preventing philanthropic duplication and frauds – but they are a goldmine of appeal literature from

charitable organizations of varying size and longevity which otherwise left no archival footprint.

This extensive archival search provided a diverse documentary base that has shaped the thematic flow of our six chapters. Chapter 1 examines voluntary charities' appropriation of features more readily associated with commercial enterprise at the end of the nineteenth century: advertising, marketing and public relations. In the context of a charitable marketplace, this form of entrepreneurship facilitated charities' capture of new donor markets and enabled them to find the funds to tackle myriad social problems. Chapter 2 extends anthropological conceptions of the 'gift' relationship in charitable life to show the extent to which tangible exchange became a vital part of fundraising from the mid-Victorian period. Innovations including 'purchase-triggered donations', the creation of charity calendars and an 'experience economy' represented a further engagement by charity entrepreneurs with emerging forms of consumer capitalism. The processes by which charitable organizations created a brand that was unique is scrutinized in Chapter 3: how did names, symbols and slogans communicate their values to donors? And, once created, how did charities not only deploy their brands in a competitive context to raise funds, but protect their brand identities from infringement by competitors?

The last third of the nineteenth century marks the point at which significant outside observers recognized the emergence of this new charity market and sought to protect donors from its potential pitfalls. This was not, contrary to some assumptions, the work of the state-backed Charity Commission, which had finally been put on a permanent footing in 1860 after decades of work compiling a 'Domesday book' of ancient charitable trusts. Chapter 4 argues that in the absence of a state-backed regulatory system, charities sought to exercise a form of self-regulation by adopting from the business world the emerging mechanics of auditing and accountability as signifiers of legitimacy and as a basis for denouncing those competitors who did not conform to them. We consider the evolving role of elite fundraisers in raising money for international and national causes in Chapter 5 by considering a case study of fundraising for international causes, the Stafford House Committee. Aristocratic fundraising might be viewed as the last gasp of an older patrician form of philanthropy but, we argue, it also engaged in fundraising practices more readily associated with highly professionalized fundraising, albeit one not without controversy. As the chapter demonstrates, old and new forms of fundraising could coexist. Finally, Chapter 6 argues that the organizational growth models followed by many of the most famous charities and appeals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries were heavily influenced by and influential upon contemporaneously emerging business replication strategies. In particular, it shows how, throughout our period, the Lord Mayor of London's 'Mansion House' appeals, via a pioneering form of 'franchising', allowed millions of ordinary donors up and down the country to buy into British philanthropic responses to disasters, both at home and abroad.

Over the period 1870–1912, between the rise of the British Red Cross movement and the sinking of the Titanic, Victorian and Edwardian charities experienced vast expansion and consolidation but they also faced tremendous challenges. Ideas of society, democracy and the state changed around them but also, we argue, through them. The vitality of multiple charitable organizations was to some a worrying indication of the scale of unanswered needs; to others, a demonstration that a modern capitalist society would thrive on its Christian heritage of compassion and charity.²⁶ These debates remain pressing and attitudes to charities often define clearly the polarities of political debate in Britain today.²⁷ To 'follow the money' and understand late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century British fundraising in its myriad facets, this book argues, is not only to acquire crucial insights into the wider society in which that activity took place, but also to expose some significant shared roots of a diverse twenty-first-century charity market, or 'third sector', whose history has been patchily addressed to date. We argue that many of the practices described as cutting edge in the management of charities today had their first serious iteration and sophisticated application in the period spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In taking a long view, we might better understand the challenges facing the 'third sector' today.