EVOC 150

EST. 1868

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS:

REFLECTIONS ON EVOC'S HISTORY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Our aim is for this collection to be appreciated by anyone who has ever been part of a community. The reflections have something for everyone and there are many parallels that can be drawn to contemporary issues, some explicit, others less so. You may choose to digest each piece in turn in the order they are compiled, sample them independently or use them as a springboard for your own research. We hope you find it thought-provoking.

Friday 30th March 2018 marked EVOC's 150th anniversary, a milestone celebrated with a reception at the Scottish Parliament. It also marked the start of a year-long programme of research, events and communications designed to discover and celebrate the work of the third sector in Edinburgh. This publication is just one accomplishment of the project, which has been made possible by the generous support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

EVOC was originally known as the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor and the essays reflect upon the work of the Association over the past 150 years, through its many name changes. Firstly, to the Edinburgh Charity Organisation Society (ECOS) in 1906, then to the Edinburgh Council of Social Service (ECSS) in 1919, and finally in 1992 to Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (EVOC) as we know it today. The essays cover issues ranging from education, to the provision of clothing and food, to housing for the homeless and the provision of community transport. The first chapter provides a narrative of Edinburgh at the time the organisation was founded. This is followed by a theoretical background to the voluntary versus the statutory sector, and the idea of Victorian philanthropy. The chapters thereafter are arranged in approximate chronological order.

This publication is designed to complement the timeline and more general introduction to EVOC's history produced at the start of our anniversary year, 'Celebrating 150 Years of Campaigning for Social Justice' available at **www.evoc150.org.uk**. It is not intended to be a rigorously academic tome written purely for an educational audience, although we hope it will become a valuable contribution and point of reference for disciplines relevant to EVOC's work.

Guide to abbreviations:	
EVOC	Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council
ECSS	Edinburgh Council of Social Service
ECOS	Edinburgh Charity Organisation Society

However you interpret the work that follows, I hope that you will allow yourself a moment to pause, reflect and question. To question what you have learned and what society more broadly has learnt, what has changed, and what still needs to be challenged in order for our lives and our city to thrive.

Lucy Ridley
Programme Manager - EVOC 150
February 2019

CHAPTER 01

Life in Nineteenth Century Edinburgh: A City of Two Tales

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Edinburgh had gained a reputation as the 'Athens of the North', thanks to figures such as David Hume, Adam Smith and Walter Scott who had produced work while living in Edinburgh that would transform philosophy, history, science and literature. Yet at the same time, it was also clear to those both living in and visiting the city that living conditions in many of its quarters were inadequate, especially in those where poorer and migrant families lived. When the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (as EVOC was then known) was founded in 1868, Dr. Alexander Wood, a well-known physician and one of the Association's founders, estimated in his *Report on the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Edinburgh* that 45,030 people were living in inadequate accommodation, one quarter of the City's population.[1] This number included not only the poor and destitute but the labouring classes too, with the majority of people sharing with six to fourteen other people in single room houses. Of the 458 houses he and his team visited when researching the report, only 97 had a water supply.[2] Dr. Wood also wrote that there were 1344 preventable deaths in the city each year due to inadequate living conditions.[3]

Old Town Edinburgh from the Calton Hill, 1870s, by George Washington Wilson. Gift of Mrs. Riddell in memory of Peter Fletcher Riddell 1985.

There were several contributing factors to the poor living conditions. One was the operation of the Scottish Poor Law, or lack thereof. Unlike in England, where a minimum standard of poor relief was written into law, in Scotland, voluntary relief was supposed to suffice. It was therefore down to individual parishes whether they wanted to collect money from their residents to be used in assisting the poor. In 1844, when a royal commission was set up to investigate the reform of the Poor Law, only 26.4% of parishes collected money from their residents.[4] Where this money was collected, it usually went to the ill and infirm and rarely to the able-bodied. Even when the Poor Law Act was reformed in 1845, creating a central Board of Supervision to allow the poor more clearly defined rights to relief, no provision at all was made for the able-bodied poor.[5]

Another key factor in Edinburgh's inadequate living conditions was the rapid population growth the city experienced in the early nineteenth century. This population boom was in large part due to an influx of rural and agricultural workers from Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. Edinburgh's population doubled from 68,000 in 1801 to 136,000 in 1831.[6] Coupled with this was the fact that the early nineteenth century also saw the completion of Edinburgh's New Town. Many families who had the means to move away from the Old Town and into the New did just that. When Irish and Scottish workers arrived with little money and an unstable income, they took up homes in the dilapidated areas of the Old Town that the departure of middle-class families had made vacant.[7] The 1831 Census shows the striking difference in the social class of residents in the New Town and Old Town by that point: 40% of residents in the New Town were described as belonging to the 'professional' or 'capitalist' classes, compared to only 5% in the Old Town.[8] Moreover, due to a severe financial crisis that hit the city in the mid-1820s, the building of new houses in the Old Town effectively came to a standstill. Both the lack of a sufficient volume of accommodation, and a lack of money to pay rent, meant that many families lived crowded together in the one building.

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As the years went by, the disparity between the classes and conditions of those living in the Old Town versus the New Town continued to be stark. Dr. Alexander Wood writes of Edinburgh in 1868 that:

There is no city in the empire where the inhabitants are more closely packed together in some districts, where there is a higher death-rate, more disease, more abject poverty, more vice and wretchedness, than are sheltered in the miserable dens of the Old Town, which are seldom visited by the well-to-do inhabitants of our palatial abodes.[9]

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In the 1840s, the link between poverty, overcrowding and disease had begun to be identified. Outbreaks of cholera struck Edinburgh in the 1830s, killing many hundreds at a time and making it vital that a way was found to stop the epidemics. Professor William Pulteney Alison, a prominent physician in Edinburgh, was one of the key figures in the debate, arguing for a direct correlation between the level of poverty in a city and the virulence of epidemic disease.[10] Despite Alison and others' efforts, little was done at this point to improve the sanitary conditions of the Old Town and those living there continued to suffer, with further cholera outbreaks hitting the city in 1848, 1854 and 1866.

On the 24th November 1861, a seven story house in the High Street in Edinburgh's Old Town suddenly collapsed in the middle of the night, burying nearly all of the inhabitants and killing 35 of them. The house was several centuries old, with decaying timbers, and was thought to house up to 100 people. The whole house gave way at once, leaving

only the gables still standing. The tragic occurrence was widely reported across the whole of the United Kingdom, with newspapers giving detailed and emotive accounts of the events that night. One, for example, reported the 'agony of a little boy' who had lost both his parents as well as the miracle of another child being found unharmed and alive amidst the rubble, next to the dead bodies of its parents.[11]

The fall of the house, the terrible loss of life that accompanied it, and the extensive media coverage it garnered meant that those in positions of power and influence in the city could no longer ignore the dismal conditions of those living in poverty.[12] As a result, the town council appointed Dr. Henry Littlejohn as the city's first Medical Officer of Health in 1862. One of Littlejohn's first acts as Medical Officer of Health was to publish his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the City of Edinburgh* in 1865 which aimed to 'to test for the first time by reference to the mortality, the sanitary conditions of the portions of the city inhabited by the richer and the poorer'.[13] For the purpose of his analysis, Littlejohn divided the city into 19 districts, and compared the living conditions in each, based on different factors.[14]

Indeed, Littlejohn's report took a remarkably wide-ranging approach to life in the city, exhausting all topics he could think of in relation to public health. As well as looking at the different causes of death in each district, such as diseases of the chest, diseases of the heart, diphtheria, measles, and dysentery, he also looked at other factors including the influence of trades and occupations upon health, the sale of diseased meats, the sanitary conditions of bakehouses, drainage and water supply, sewage and the burial of the dead. After outlining the city's failings under these various headings, Littlejohn also made recommendations on how to improve the situations, and thus the lives of the poor. His *Report* was thought to be so significant that for the 12 days following its publication, the *Evening Courant* and *Caledonian Mercury* newspapers published all 120 pages of the report in its entirety.

Following Littlejohn's report, an exceedingly harsh winter in 1866/67 exacerbated the difficult living conditions of the poor and thereby brought them more forcefully to the public's attention. Consequently, the Lord Provost decided to hold a meeting in April 1867 with many of Edinburgh's wealthy and elite, including doctors and ministers of all religions, to discuss what could be done to alleviate the conditions of the poor.

A newspaper report on the meeting the following day hails it as a landmark moment in the city's consideration of their poorer residents:

The public of Edinburgh seem at last to be awakened to a sense of the poverty and wretchedness that exist in her midst, and to the inadequacy of the numerous charitable institutions, as at present organised, effectively to meet the evil [...] at the meeting referred to, there were present representatives of all shades of religion and politics [...] the inquiry on which they (the Committee) are about to enter, cannot fail to be productive of good results.[15]

The eventual result of this meeting, and a subsequent one the following year, was the formation of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor in 1868 by Dr. Alexander Wood.

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4. Paul Laxton and Richard Rodger, *Insanitary City: Henry Littlejohn and the Condition of Edinburgh* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing Ltd, 2013), p.17.

5. Helen J. Macdonald 'Boarding-out and the Scottish Poor Law, 1845-1914' *The Scottish Historical Review* 65, no.2 (1996): 197-220, p.197.

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7. *Ibid.*

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9. Dr. Alexander Wood, *Report*, p.4.

10. William P. Alison, *Observations on the Management of the Poor in Scotland and its effect on the Health of the Great Towns*, 1840, p.66.

11. 'Fall of a House in Edinburgh Great Loss of Life' *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, Sat Nov 30 1861, Issue 823, p.3.

12. Dr. Alexander Wood, *Report*, p.x.

13. Dr. Henry Littlejohn, *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the City of Edinburgh* (Printed by Colston & Sons, 1865), p.5.

14. These districts were: Upper New Town, Lower New Town, West End, Upper Water of Leith, Lower Water of Leith, Broughton, Calton and Greenside, Abbeyhill, Canongate, Tron, St Giles, Grassmarket, Fountainbridge, George Square and Lauriston, Nicolson Street, Pleasance and St Leonards, Newington, Grange and Morningside.

15. *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, April 17 1867.

CHAPTER 02

Edinburgh Council of Social Service and the Statutory Sector During the Thatcher Premiership

The statutory and voluntary sectors have a convoluted relationship, which forms and reforms in accordance with respective economic and socio-political contexts, and particularly in accordance with the various historical manifestations of the Welfare state. As the purpose of a voluntary body is, typically, to promote the welfare (physical and mental well-being) of society, shifts in the nature of the Welfare state naturally impact its aims and scope of activity. Drawing primary material from EVOC's annual reports of the years 1979 to 1990, this essay discusses a) how EVOC's directorship (then still called ECSS) experienced its relationship – and of the wider voluntary sector – with the statutory sector during the Premiership of Margaret Thatcher and b) how it viewed the pertinent policies implemented in the area of state social expenditure. References to the turbulent socio-political and economic climate of the 1980s and a vehement attack on the changes in the welfare system appear predominantly in respective annual reports, with direct responses and references to pertinent governmental decisions and to what is now known as the document that paved the 'dismantling' of the Welfare state, the Fowler's Report.

Steps for the consolidation of the Welfare system were already taken in the early 20th century (for additional information about this period, see 'Edinburgh Council Of Social Service 1919-1926: A changing organisation in a changing world' in this publication). Yet, the period that marked a systematic approach in building a state that could provide comprehensive social support was the one of the immediate post-war era, with the economy and well-being of the citizens devastated by the war and the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Beveridge Report of 1942, published

in the midst of the Second War World, provided the foundations of the British Welfare state, advocating for social insurance from 'cradle to grave'. The state provided assistance that sustained a minimum standard of living for recipients, the idea being that individuals would not rely completely on the welfare state. As famously described in the report, '[i]n establishing a national minimum, it [the Welfare state] should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and family'.[1] The Beveridge Report and the consensus that followed it until before the Thatcher premiership was not, in any case, understood by ECSS as the ideal one for accommodating the various needs of the community but, nonetheless, was considered far more adequate than the one suggested by the Fowler's report; in the words of Duncan Forrester (then Chair of ECSS), '[w]e in the voluntary agencies should beware of participating in the dissolution of the Welfare state. It is very far from perfect, and needs reform and improvement, but it still provides by far the best context for the voluntary agencies to contribute'.[2]

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected to 'reduce public spending' and end the so-called 'dependency culture'.[3] The discourse promoted by the Thatcher government in the 1980s demonstrated similar ideological underpinnings to those of the New Poor Law, which suggested that the 'able-bodied' – people that were in a physical position that would allow them to find employment (or, better, perform labour), regardless of employment availability – should be induced to find employment and not be dependent on state provisions.[4] Accordingly, the manifesto of Thatcher's conservative government (1979) highlighted the need for encouraging individual initiative and self-reliance, commenting too, explicitly, on the importance of the third sector. Nevertheless, as thoroughly discussed in pertinent scholarship and throughout the annual reports of ECSS from 1979 to 1990, that was to be expected without adequate finance.[5] Commenting on this, ECSS' director, Matthews, in his 1979-1980 report, expresses ECSS' (and other organisations' opinion)

when stating that, '[t]he Government, in its manifesto, and in numerous ministerial statements, declared its commitment to the voluntary sector, but the commitment has yet to bear fruit when it comes to the actual delivery of services'.[6] As he moves on to explain (in the same and all subsequent reports until the end of the 1980s), ECSS in collaboration with other voluntary organisations advocated for the difficulties that many voluntary organisations were called to address as a result of 'massive rates of inflation, compounded by the near doubling of VAT and the decreasing value of covenanted income'.[7] Yet, difficulties faced by voluntary organisations were not merely a matter of resolving finances but indeed about the very role that voluntary organisations (and volunteers) were called to perform when statutory provisions were expected to be withdrawn. As put in the 'Director's Report' of the years 1982-1983, 'for many organisations especially those which are heavily funded by local or central government it is difficult to ignore the expectation that the voluntary sector should pick up those elements of service which the local authority now feels itself unable to handle. There is then a need to look again at the role of the volunteer in society. It has long been the view of this organisation, and indeed the philosophy which lies behind the work of the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange, that the role of a volunteer, and one which is immensely valuable, is to complement the role of paid staff and not to supplant that role'.[8]

The tone of urgency in the director's and respective chair's reports in addressing the changes unravelling in the Welfare state began increasing from 1984 onwards, amidst rampant poverty and following the announcements of the results of a government-commissioned report on the Welfare state.

> **Duncan Forrester wrote in the Chairman's Introduction, 1983-1984:**

[a]t a time when we face unpredictable and often inexplicable cuts in finance, and sometimes staff as well, the needs that we exist to meet have been increasing at a rate unprecedented in recent years. The sharp increase in poverty since 1979 has meant sub-standard living conditions for many families, often reminiscent of the dark years of the depression or even of the Victorian age, so much lauded by some of our politicians. These are dangerous times [...]. A body like the Edinburgh Council of Social Service cannot keep its head down and quietly get on with its own business. [9]

Indeed, from 1984 onwards, a reader of ECSS' annual reports would find apparent that a significant part of the reports were dedicated to castigating decisions taken during the premiership of Thatcher. As explained by ECSS' director himself, already in the 1980-1981 report, '[w]hile in no way wishing to suggest that charities should become surrogate party political bodies [...] Organisations have, many for the first time, been confronted with issues of poverty, health and education in a format which is political'.[10]

In the spirit of the aforementioned statements, ECCS' 1983-1984 annual report includes too the outraged commentary of Chair Duncan Forrester on the then new Welfare Review, known as Fowler's Review of Welfare. Forty years after the Beveridge Report, in April 1984, Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, announced the examination of the Welfare state in what he described as 'the most substantial examination

of the social security system since the Beveridge report 40 years ago'.[11]

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As the Chair put it commenting on the Fowler's review,

[i]n health and education the cuts in resources and the encouragement of the private sector suggest a basic lack of sympathy with the Beveridge-style welfare state. If one turns to theoreticians most admired by the present Government one discovers that they advocate the demolition of the welfare state and its replacements by a largely charitable and entirely haphazard system of meeting people's needs, reminiscent of Dicken's England.[12]

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In the review of the following years, the Chair further commented on Fowler's document stating that '[w]ith the publication of the Green Paper it is now clear that what is envisaged is the demolition of the Beveridge style welfare state and its replacement by a structure far less adequate and based on radically different principles'.[13]

The Chair moved on to explicitly comment on the changing responsibilities of the voluntary and statutory sectors in providing for the welfare of society. As he explained, '[t]here is a conviction that the role of the state in welfare should be significantly reduced *so as to promote 'responsibility' and 'self-reliance' instead of dependency on so-called 'nanny-state'*.[14] In light of this, the Green Paper proposed a significant transfer of responsibility for welfare provisions from the state to the individual. It is not a surprise then that within this context, 'most voluntary agencies

see such reduction in the role of the state as involving a massive increase in the tasks they would be required to undertake, probably without the necessary funding'.[15] Similarly, director Matthews commented that '[t]his year the voluntary sector has been affected for the first time in a significant way with grants being pegged irrespective of what happens to inflation. [...] What we have come to regard as the Welfare state, encompassing statutory and complementary voluntary services would seem to be at risk more now than at any time since the 1940s'.[16]

In this challenging context, the importance of continuing to form strong partnerships with statutory, voluntary, and informal bodies working for the advancement of the well-being of society was greatly highlighted. Throughout the years of Thatcher's premiership, the director (who was the same throughout, Edward Matthews) and respective chairs remained grateful for the support that they were receiving from local bodies and persistent about the importance of developing partnership with local authorities. It was only sporadically that references were made to financial cuts implemented by local authorities too. Illustratively, in the 1983-1984 annual report, director Matthews explains how '[w]hen local authorities are being penalised for providing services at a level which they believe to be appropriate for the needs of the community they seek to make whatever economies are possible, and the idea of cutting back on grant aid to voluntary organisations appear to some to be alluring'.[17] The 'Director's Report' of 1989-1990 is titled 'Left holding the bathwater' referring to the changes that the Health System was undergoing during the Thatcher premiership – '[m]any of the things which have been cherished are slipping through our fingers, perhaps more like the soap in the bath'.[18]

Concluding, concerns mostly highlighted in the reports were a) the expectation for the voluntary sector to undertake the responsibilities of the state without the appropriate increase in finance, b) the free labour involved in sustaining a voluntary organisation, and c) the complex and

conflictual relationship between local authorities and central government, and how it raised hindrances in forming partnerships between the voluntary and statutory sector which were necessary for the development of social provisions (see, for instance, the chapter in this volume entitled 'ECSS and the Victoria Hostel'). Making apparent ECSS' position in relation to the role of the statutory and voluntary sectors in promoting a society of welfare, Matthews, in the annual reports of the years 1987-1988 posits that, '[i]t is our belief that there should be a mixed economy of welfare which is built on the recognition of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each component, whether statutory or voluntary'.[19]

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CHAPTER 03

The Association's Provision of Clothing and Employment in the Late-Nineteenth Century. A Moral Crusade?

When the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor was established in 1868, the horrific squalor and deprivation suffered by large numbers of people in this wealthy city in the world's largest economy was a shameful truth. For modern liberal historians, this destitution is the result of rapid industrialisation and a state so fixated with classical liberalism that it would not intervene to redistribute wealth and provide basic welfare. However, to the eyes of the Victorians, another factor was in play that would mean even the most generous of approaches would have a limited, or even negative, effect. To them, much of the poverty they saw was not a policy failing on the part of politicians but a character failing on the part of the poor themselves. Despite their great efforts in alleviating some of the worst effects of poverty, this attitude to the poor is central to the philosophy of the Association in its early years. In no area is it more prevalent than its attitude to clothing the poor and providing temporary employment, where, although its actions were relatively progressive, its attitudes remained firmly paternalistic.

There is little doubt that the Association's actions in these areas and in others were both honest and genuinely helpful to those who accessed them. Active intervention in the lives of the City's poor was one factor that set the Association apart from organisations such as the London Charity Organisation Society (COS), established in 1869, which acted almost exclusively in the area of co-ordinating the relief that was available from other societies.[1]

However, this did not mean giving out financial or other help without conditions. The Association's philosophy revolved around helping people

to help themselves, giving them a better chance of being able to improve their lot.

The Association's provision of clothing encapsulates this approach: alleviating the acute symptoms of poverty such as lack of clothing, whilst aiming to provide a hand up, rather than hand-outs, as there were jobs to be done to prepare and distribute the clothes, and it was hoped those who received clothes would be able to take advantage of better job opportunities and education.

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An article in the Edinburgh Evening News from 1893 describes the peak of this aspect of the Association's activities, with the organisation providing clothing, assessing where it is needed and employing people in these operations. The first area of the Association's activities was devoted to men who were out of work:

[men out of work] are taken in and generally employed either in chopping wood, or patching up old garments if they are tailors, for which they receive a small remuneration.[2]

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The Association had begun providing employment for out of work men as early as 1869. It started to operate a firelighter factory on Leith Walk. The factory offered employment at wages below the going rate so as to provide relief but at a rate that would not discourage men from finding further employment.[3]

Flora Stevenson (1839-1905), who ran the Association's Sewing Room, © Edinburgh City Libraries, taken in 1903.

Another area of activity aimed at finding work for the unemployed was the Sewing Room. This had been set up in 1871 and was overseen by the social reformer and educationalist Flora Stevenson. It opened every winter until 1896 and, at first, made clothes for sale, covering its own costs, but from 1893[4] onwards also repaired clothes. The clothes being repaired were donations from the public, something the Association had been collecting and redistributing since its establishment. Once the clothes had been brought in they would be 'thoroughly fumigated before being given out to the women'. The women employed at the Sewing Room were paid in provisions vouchers, rather than cash.[5]

The third area of the Association's activities at this time was 'devoted to the providing of necessitous children with clothing'.[6] The issue of who to give the clothes to had been one of great concern (and one that will be addressed in greater detail below), but children had always been the primary recipients of this provision. Read 'The Association and Education in the Late-Nineteenth Century' in this publication for more information.

This combination of benevolence and self-help that was implemented in its early years shows the Association at its best and most effective, however its operation in these areas also shows a different side to the organisations, and one that was prominent across Victorian charities and society as a whole.

As with many aspects of society at the time, the Association was constrained by a philosophical straightjacket that has since been neatly summed up by the phrase 'Victorian morality'. It dictated that in most cases the condition of the poor was down to personal and character failings, and a large part of it could be alleviated if the poor themselves were made to change their lifestyles and adopt better morals.
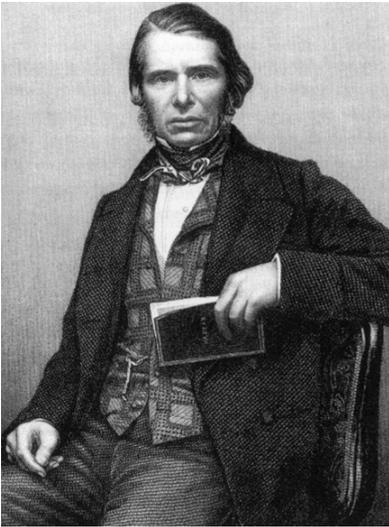
Sir Charles Trevelyan (1807-1886), seen as a founder of the modern civil service and a key figure in the London COS.

In 1870, Sir Charles Trevelyan neatly encapsulated this morality in a letter to *The Times* which was reprinted in *The Scotsman* upon his visit to Scotland, which included a meeting at the Association to discuss their work. Trevelyan was, by then, a retired leading civil servant and a major figure in the London COS, an organisation that, like the Association, aimed to co-ordinate charitable organisations to provide better relief to those deemed most needing of it. As previously mentioned, the COS stopped short of direct intervention, and in Trevelyan, a man whose deep prejudices and rigid application of his ideology are seen as a major factor in the Irish Famine, was led by someone far more extreme than any of the figures in Edinburgh. Nevertheless, the philosophy underpinning the two bore many similarities. He wrote that the 'vast majority' of pauperism was caused by 'idleness and vice' and the only way charities could help was to 'befriend, aid, and elevate, the suffering and struggling poor by sympathy, counsel, and material help; to discourage idleness, improvidence, and drunkenness' and 'in every way to foster a spirit of independence and self-support'.[7]

Victorian morality allowed some wiggle room for interpretation for the better off who wished to help the poor (though not for the poor themselves) and the Association took a more liberal approach than Trevelyan. However, on a base level it was still beholden to these standards. Annual reports continually adopt a tone of the poor being a 'problem', and ensuring the undeserving do not get assistance is as central to their written output as helping those who do.

For both organisations, mendicants, or beggars, were the lowest of the low, a semi-criminal class, thought to be beyond help and to be trusted under no circumstances. The annual report of 1869 dedicates its longest section to this class who are 'preying upon the charity of the public', and setting out how it ensures they do not receive any undeserved help.[8] After all, thanks to the Association, opportunities for self-improvement were now available to those who sought it through the firelighter factory, and its existence was used as further evidence that beggars were imposters.[9]

Even those who had been given work in the factory or the sewing room did not escape a harsh moral judgement. A newspaper report based on the Association's 1898 report describes them as 'very thriftless', as, clearly, when they were in employment they had made no 'attempt to save'.[10]

The workers in the sewing room, when not being judged themselves, worked to counter the suspicion of those who received the clothes, sewing markings into and stamping clothing which, along with deals with pawnbrokers, ensured the clothes were not pawned or sold. This was due the belief that the poor would use anything given to them to make money to spend on less wholesome pursuits.[11]

There is little question that the Association made great progress in its aim of improving the condition of the poor, providing relief and assistance that was not available before and better co-ordinating existing charities to improve the efficiency of relief within Edinburgh. We should always

be careful to judge events and organisations within the context of their own time, and in that context, they saw a problem and genuinely strived to eradicate it in a way that would be acceptable to those who provided funding for it.

It is clear that the abuse of charity was a concern to the middle classes who provided the money and people the organisation needed and therefore, in order to court their favour and donations, it made sense to impress upon them the steps they were taking to mitigate the potential for this abuse.

However, we should also not be too ready to see organisations such as the Association as mere followers of a moral code but also as part of the system that enforced it. At times the views they present, particularly of beggars and even those who sought their help, stray from suspicion based on evidence to demonisation, furthering negative views of them in society. All in all, it is clear that, in most cases the poor were seen as poor because of a combination of the habits they were born with and their own actions. Vices such as drunkenness are the cause not the result of poverty and they are viewed as thriftless with no attempt made to understand why they cannot save money. This acts as a philosophical barrier to the introduction of the more radical social reforms that would further help the poor in the next century.

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CHAPTER 04

The Association and Education in the Late-Nineteenth Century

In their early years, one of the main aims of the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor was to improve the provision of education and, in particular, the number of young people attending school. The Association prioritised education because they viewed it as the main avenue to social mobility, capable of allowing children to rise out of the destitution they had been born into. One of their most significant actions in improving the education of the poor in the city came in the form of their contributions to the bill of the Education (Scotland) Act 1872, as well as many other charitable actions they undertook for school children.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the landscape of education in Scotland looked rather different than it does today. Rather than a unified national system, there was instead a patchwork of different educational institutions. These included **parish schools**, which were run by local churches, **hospital schools**, which were residential schools within hospitals usually for children of once prosperous families who had fallen on hard times, **'private adventure' schools**, which were run by individuals as a commercial venture and charged accordingly, industrial day schools also known as **ragged schools**, charitable organisations founded to give education to the poor, and **burgh schools** run by the town councils.[1]

Although some of these schools could be attended for free, for most fees had to be paid, including for the parish schools which usually charged 3d for younger children and 4d for older children per week.[2] Moreover, attendance at school was not compulsory. The Association estimates that in many of the more deprived areas in Edinburgh 'one third of children of

proper age to go to school are growing up uneducated'.[3]

In lieu of any other legislation requiring attendance at school, the Association sought to compel children to attend school through the means of the Industrial Schools Act. Industrial Day Schools were first set up in Aberdeen in the 1840s for neglected, destitute children as well as for petty offenders. Alongside food and education, the industrial schools provided children with training in a trade and sought to instil in them a sense of moral values. They were funded entirely through voluntary donations. By the 1850s, cities and towns across Scotland, including Edinburgh, had adopted the Aberdeen model for the creation of industrial schools, or ragged schools, as they were also known.[4]

The fourteenth clause of the Industrial Schools Act, the one under which the Association attempted to force destitute parents to send their children to school, stated that if children were to be found out begging on the streets, to be homeless, to be without proper guardianship or to be in the company of reputed thieves, they could be brought before a magistrate who could order them to be sent to a certified Industrial School.

By 1870, the Association had investigated over 200 cases of truancy and identified several that they wished to bring to court, at their expense, in order to compel children to go to school. However, when they tried to do so, they discovered that while the Industrial Schools Act allowed them to bring neglected children before a magistrate, what it failed to do was to compel either the attendance of the children themselves at the hearing or of the witnesses whose testimony was required to prove the case. As such, the Industrial Schools Act became virtually useless as an instrument for compelling school attendance and the Association turned their attention to the Education Bill for Scotland which they knew was to be passed through Parliament in 1871.

The impetus for the Education Bill for Scotland came from the results of the Argyll Commission of 1867, a government-sponsored nationwide investigation into the state of education, which showed that, due to the rapid increase of population size in many parts of the country, the current system would soon be likely to collapse without the intervention of the state. The Association formed a special subcommittee to consider any action they should take with regards to the proposed Education Bill in order to make sure that the interests of children from poorer backgrounds were represented.

Although the Association was made up of people from a range of different political and religious backgrounds, members of the Association unanimously agreed that if the provisions of the Act 'are really ever to reach those who most require them, some means of compulsion [for children to attend school], direct or indirect, must be provided'[5] and set out to ensure that this was entered into the new legislation. In 1871, the Committee of the Association took this argument to the Lord Advocate, who received the suggestion well. As a direct result of their intervention, they write, a clause requiring the attendance of children from ages five to thirteen at school was 'inserted into the Education Bill for Scotland, submitted to Parliament last session, and which, it is presumed, will again form part of the Bill to be introduced next session'.[6] It seems unlikely that the Association were the only organisation to argue the case for the inclusion of such a clause, but certainly they view their intervention as key and happily celebrate their success in doing so.

As well as requiring children to attend school between the ages of five and thirteen, the Act significantly changed the landscape of education by taking the control for schooling out of the hands of the churches, charities and private investors and putting it under the control of locally governed School Boards. For the first time, educational policy and practice was standardised across the country, representing the beginning of the modern education system as we know it today. Parents who were found

guilty of failing to send their children to school could be fined a pound (the equivalent of approximately £60 today) or face 14 days in prison, a penalty that could be repeated every three months as required.[7]

With the passing of the Act in 1872, the need for the Association's work in enforcing school attendance lessened but this didn't mean that they no longer had any work to do in the education of the young. Firstly, although the 1872 Act made primary school education compulsory (for secondary school education this did not appear in law until 1918 and was not enacted until 1945), it didn't make it free. This was not to happen until 18 years later in 1890.[8] The Association was therefore still required to pay school fees for those whose parents could not afford it.

Perhaps even more importantly, no provision was made in legislation for providing food, clothing or supplies for children of destitute parents, even once schooling itself became free. Some measures to combat this were introduced in the Education Act of 1908 but it only allowed provisions for the ill and those in extreme poverty, and only if no voluntary organisation was able to provide relief. No sooner had they celebrated the success of their contributions towards the 1872 Act, than the Association realised that despite the legislation, in order for the children of the poor to be able to attend school, they would have to try to provide food and clothing for children whose parents were unable to do so. They undertook to provide at least one substantial meal a day for children while they were at school. Between 1872 and 1878, they estimate that they provided an impressive total of 149,530 meals for school children.[9] From 1878 onwards, the Edinburgh School Board took over this duty, with assistance from the Association, under the direction of Flora Stevenson.

Beyond food and clothing, for several years, from 1908 to 1913, the Association provided glasses for an average of 75 children a year who had been prescribed them by the School Board's Medical Officer but whose parents could not afford to buy them. During this time, they also made

Edinburgh School Board emblem by Magnus Hagdorn, used under CC BY.

arrangements for more than 100 children with disabilities, mental health problems and illnesses such as epilepsy to receive some form of education and to be able to live more comfortably rather than being sent to an institution.

The early achievements of the Association with regards to education were therefore not only its contribution to the passing of the clause in the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 that made education compulsory, but also their refusal to see the passing of the Act as resolving the problem of education among those from impoverished background. Recognising that 'mere teaching'[10] in itself was not enough to ensure access to education for children living in poverty, the Association continued to work hard to fill the gap in state provision and ensure that they were doing everything they could to provide children with the means to access education and, thereby, a brighter future.

TIMELINE

1867

Scottish Government sponsors the Argyll Commission – a nationwide investigation into the state of education. The results show that the current system is struggling to cope with the rapid population increase across the country.

1872

Education (Scotland) Act 1872 makes education compulsory for all between the ages of 5 and 13 and puts the control for schooling in the hands of locally controlled School Boards.

5 - 13yrs

1890

School fees are abolished in Scotland through the Education (Scotland) Act 1890.

1908

The 1908 Education Act introduces some measures to provide for feeding and clothing destitute children but only if a voluntary organisation is unable to do so.

1918

Education (Scotland) Act 1918 raises compulsory school age to 15 but due to the difficult conditions of the 1920s and 30s this was not enacted in practice until after the Second World War in 1945 when the age was further raised to 16. The 1945 Act also made secondary education free for everyone.

15yrs

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CHAPTER 05

Edinburgh Council of Social Service 1919-1926: A Changing Organisation in a Changing World

The period following the end of the First World War was one of rapid change and renewal throughout British society. The changing role of the state and the transformation of Britain's societal structures which began before the War had been accelerated by the conflict. These changes meant organisations such as the ECOS, as the organisation had been known since 1906,[1] either had to adapt to this new landscape or become an anachronistic obscurity. The regeneration of the organisation in this period was symbolised by the adoption of a new name, the ECSS, in 1919, but also encompassed the growth of more progressive values and a more progressive approach to their work. This essay will look at these changes within the context of the fluctuating economic conditions of the period between 1919 and the mid-1920s and how they shaped ECSS into a more progressive organisation at ease with its place in a new Britain.

As with most organisations in the country, ECOS' (as it then was) resources had been directed towards helping the War effort in any way it could. Whether that was overseeing the knitting of socks for soldiers or administering pensions and helping landladies who whose lodgers had all left for the frontlines. The War provided ECOS with an 'invaluable' insight into the potential of volunteering, the scale of which they described as 'remarkable' and hoped this experience would help them with the 'many social problems which are bound to arise once the War is finished'.[2] These lessons meant that far from resuming 'normal service' after the War, it was proclaimed that the society would 'start afresh…with new vigour'.[3]

The new name was far more than just a cosmetic change, and acted as a statement of how it differed from the old and was part of the new post-

war world. The name 'ECOS' had become problematic for the organisation for two main reasons. Firstly, it signalled its association with the wider Charity Organisation Society movement. This movement had been started in London in 1869 and was both limited in its scope and underpinned by a typically Victorian morality and approach to the poor (this is covered in more depth in 'The Association's Provision of Clothing and Employment in the Late Nineteenth Century. A Moral Crusade?' in this publication).

Secondly, the changing social and political landscape meant that, as Professor Sir Richard Lodge put it at ECSS' AGM of 1920, 'the word charity had unfortunately become unpopular in some quarters'. In particular, he cites the leadership of the emerging Labour Party and other similar bodies for whom it was too tied to the idea of patronage 'which it was important should not be associated with the work of the Society'.[4] In the nineteenth century, what would by this period be classified as 'patronage' was central to the organisation's outlook, with its largely middle class members imparting their wisdom and distributing funds at their discretion. By 1919, even being associated with patronage was seen as negative which is symbolic of both a hugely changed society and the need to adapt to it to remain relevant.

Beyond this, the annual report of 1920 stated that even the need for what was known as 'charity' had been much reduced 'in recent years'.[5] Some of this was due to short-term factors such as the full employment brought on by the War and the short lived post-War boom fuelled by the need to replace lost capital, other factors are more long term. These include 'the increase in state provision' as a result of the Liberal Party's reforms from 1906-1914, which included the introduction of National Insurance to assist the unemployed and state pensions, covering roles previously taken on by charities. Improving the Condition of the Poor also cites 'greater elaboration of social organisation', as Trade Unions and other societies took on a greater role of assisting workers in hardship; it also mentions 'the redistribution of wealth accompanying the war period' as another

long-term change affecting the need for charity.[6]

However equally evident as this change in emphasis and the need to change with the times, is the importance of staying true to their guiding principles as, they claim, 'the need for the exercise of the virtue of charity, the impulse to social service and its wise direction is greater than ever'.[7]

Rather than intervening directly in the lives of the city's poor through home visits and other measures, ECSS' primary objectives became about encouraging and facilitating co-operation between voluntary organisations and acting as a central body for the provision of information and co-ordination of voluntary work, with these aims accounting for six of the seven 'objects' set out in the front of their first report.[8] The seventh object states that they will 'promote methods of assistance which led to the preservation of independence' and 'are productive of social well-being'.[9] Overall ECSS now saw its role as co-ordinating voluntary organisations in the city whilst encouraging them to engage in activities that increased the general wellbeing of society, a more holistic and modern approach than its founding principles in 1868 of 'improving the condition of the poor'.

By 1921, this new approach was being thoroughly tested as ECSS was reporting that 'the number of families in distress through lack of means has greatly increased during the past year, owing to the large amount of unemployment in the city'.[10] ECSS concentrated its efforts on giving people a hand up in order to better help themselves and providing a 'central recognition of assistance' to ensure charities knew which individuals were receiving help from other organisations allowing more efficient use of resources.[11] In the face of these extreme circumstances, ECSS did administer some help itself, and reports giving advances for train tickets so the unemployed can take advantage of employment opportunities elsewhere, and continuing to provide clothing to allow people to take up employment and to keep warm in winter.[12]

UK Unemployment 1920s and 1930s
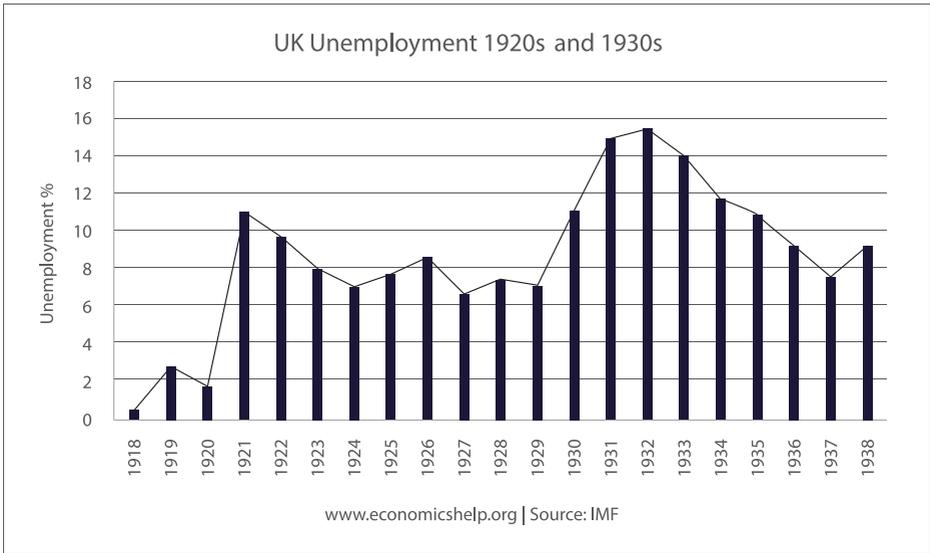
Unemployment increased sharply at the beginning of the 1920s across the UK and its effects in Edinburgh increased pressure on the ECSS.[13]

In addition to the focus of their efforts, the attitude towards those they assisted had undergone a major change. The people receiving assistance, once seen as partly at fault for their own predicament and morally failing, are now seen in a sympathetic light, victims of circumstances beyond their control. Whereas as late as 1915, ECOS was still putting the combatting of false claims of charity at the centre of its operations, assuring readers of its annual report of its 'central register of beggars… bogus collectors and imposters',[14] by the mid-1920s, ECSS was now much less suspicious of the poor and their motives. The annual report of 1926 stated that whilst 'it has been argued that those who apply for help from our council become dependent and rely on us whenever they are in a tight corner, I cannot say this has been our experience',[15] combatting prejudice with evidence based on their experiences.

There is evidence that this approach has led to the people seeing the organisation as more approachable with a 'surprising' amount of people just coming to the organisation not for material help but for 'advice and sympathy in their difficulties'. There are unfortunately no figures for the numbers seeking this kind of informal advice nor any measures of how it was appreciated beyond that it doesn't yield 'striking results'.[16]

As the period went on, ECSS became involved in more and more varied areas associated with 'social service' beyond the providing of relief and advice and in 1921 stated that they were 'ready to turn its energies into any direction which may be for the social good of the city'.[17]

This change in direction towards social services manifested itself in a number of ways. Some were interventions to correct systems that had previously been poorly operated and open to abuse such as ECSS' establishment of the Scottish Branch of the National Children's Adoption Association. This aimed to better oversee and regulate adoption to stop cases where children were adopted for the premium is provided with them by families who had little interest in bringing them up, and ensuring proper agreements are made and children are housed with good people.[18] This also shows a recognition of ECSS' reputation by national authorities as it was trusted to oversee this service for the whole of Scotland, not just Edinburgh.

Concerns about the types of activities being undertaken by the poor of the city, particularly that which centred around drinking, lead to the establishment of a recreation committee in 1919. It aimed to provide 'wholesome and inexpensive forms of recreation in the city'. Prominent amongst these were a series of dances which first took place in Waverley Market on eight Wednesday evenings in spring and summer 1920. The idea obviously proved very attractive to the public as the usual attendance was recorded as been between three and four thousand.[19]

Overall, this era was a crucial one for the organisation and one in which it changed itself to meet the demands and expectations of the new age. By 1919, helping the poor meant a different thing to what it did in 1868, and as ECSS, there was now an organisation that was fit to face this new world. Its focus on social rather than moral improvement marked a major philosophical shift away from patronage, and the emphasis on co-ordination brought to the fore in this era would become the basis of the organisation through to the present day.

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CHAPTER 06

'An Immeasurable Resource': Volunteering in Edinburgh

In its first year of operation, the Edinburgh Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor employed 1227 volunteers, called Visitors. Visitors acted as early charity case workers, visiting the homes of families who had applied for some form of relief from the Association, whether for money, food or clothing. They would then assess whether the family's claims were legitimate and decide on the type of help required. Many of these volunteers had little relevant experience and the Association tried their best to support them by holding meetings, giving them printed instructions, and assigning each group of 10 or 12 volunteers a more experienced volunteer to whom they could go for help.[1] As the years went by, the Association shifted its purpose, and changed its name, in response to the changing political landscape and the needs of the communities they served. Throughout, volunteering and the voluntary sector remained at the heart of their work. Over time, the emphasis shifted from working with voluntary Visitors to helping volunteers find placements in organisations across the city and influencing governmental policies and strategies on volunteering.

The first landmark shift in society that had a great impact on the voluntary sector, and the work of the Association to support it, was the outbreak of the First World War. Throughout the War's duration, huge numbers of people took on voluntary roles within their communities both through a desire to contribute and through sheer necessity. As the Association, by then known as the ECSS, recovered from the wartime years, the committee members recognised the immense potential and impact to be derived from the voluntary efforts which they had seen being expended during the war. This led them to set up the first volunteers' register

in 1920, where both those interested in volunteering their time and organisations looking for volunteers could register their interest and be matched to one another.

Over the decades, the momentum for volunteering continued to increase, both in terms of those looking to volunteer their time and organisations requiring the help of volunteers. As a result, ECSS decided to set up the first Volunteer Bureau in Ainslie House in 1970, run initially by one full-time worker who interviewed potential volunteers, asked them about their abilities and interests and placed them with the kind of work they seem best suited for. The Bureau also provided advice and information about voluntary work more generally. In their first full year of operation, they referred around 200 people to voluntary placements, a number which only increased in subsequent years.[2]

"

Keith Adams, the first employee of the Volunteer Bureau, highlights the range and variety of volunteers using the Bureau and the work that they undertake:

A group of volunteers visit the Young Offenders' Institution; one of the group is a young man who is blind. He is now hoping to work full time in a children's home before doing a social work course. The organiser of an old people's lunch club rings up to say how much she appreciates the help of a volunteer: their volunteer is recovering from mental illness. A disabled woman who is confined to her house is about to start operating an 'emergency service' telephone link up for the Bureau. Someone recently released from prison is giving his advice to a group that is planning a

volunteers' support scheme for ex-offenders. [...] And others such as secretaries, housewives, teachers, unemployed young men, retired businessmen, have all been giving their help usually for a few hours each week following a visit to the Volunteer Bureau.[3]

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The success of the Volunteer Bureau was such that a second location, known as the Volunteer Job Centre, opened in 1975 in Abbeyhill. The location of the premises was very carefully chosen on a busy shopping street so as to attract volunteers from a greater range of backgrounds. The layout and design of the Job Centre was also considered carefully, with an enticing window display to attract those in the local neighbourhood who might not otherwise consider volunteering. An independent evaluation by a sociologist after the first four months of the Volunteer Job Centre's operation revealed that it had succeeded in recruiting volunteers from a much wider cross section of society than the Volunteer Bureau had in its West End location.[4] In 1977, the Volunteer Bureau and Volunteer Job Centre merged in a new premises on Dalry Road and became the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange (EVE).

Photo of Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange, taken with permission from Volunteer Edinburgh website.[5]

Across all volunteers recruited, whether from the Volunteer Bureau or the Volunteer Job Centre, one notable trend is the age of the majority of volunteers. In 1973, Keith Adams notes that most people offering their help have been under the age of 30, with 52.3% of all volunteers falling into the 18-25 category and 24.9% in the 25-35 category. The volunteering of school pupils is also encouraged early with the establishment of the Edinburgh Young Volunteer's Group in 1965 who carry out tasks such as cleaning up beaches or decorating and gardening for elderly or disabled people.[6] School pupils were also encouraged to volunteer through the work of Community Service Volunteers who, from 1974 onwards, went into schools, including Craigroyston, Ainslie Park, Craigmount and Castlebrae, to encourage young people to volunteer in their local communities.

Age grouping of over 500 volunteers (excluding school pupils)
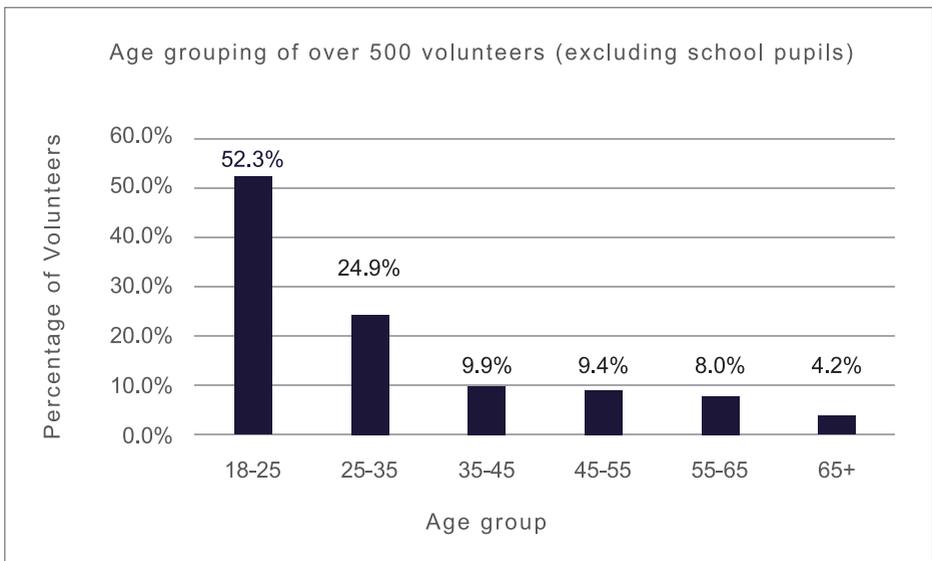
Replica of graph that appears in the 1973/4 Annual Report, illustrating the age grouping of volunteers visiting the Volunteer Bureau. [7]

The dominance of young people in undertaking volunteering continues

throughout the 1970s and 80s: in 1978, 75% of volunteers using the services of the Volunteer Exchange are 'young and mobile'.[8] Even in 1988/89, the biggest catchment group in terms of age range continues to be the 18-25 year olds, although by this point, EVE's employees foresee a time when this demographic will change, warning that 'in future, agencies may have to look for ways to attract older, retired people'.[9] Another notable trend is that of gender: not long after the opening of the Volunteer Job Centre, Keith Adams remarks that volunteers are more likely to be female and in 1978, the ratio of females to males using EVE's services is 2:1. In recent years, the gap between the number of males compared to number of females volunteering has started to close. In 2018, women were only slightly more likely to volunteer compared to their male counterparts.[10]

Another key change in the political landscape to impact volunteering occurred with the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979. Like ECSS' committee members in 1920, Thatcher too recognised the potential and impact of voluntary work and sought to harness this potential in an attempt to push back at the notion 'that the State can and should do everything'.[11] Unemployment was one of the pressing issues of the 1980s. One of the ways in which the government tried to combat it was by creating two new schemes encouraging unemployed people to volunteer, to enhance their skills and increase their chances of finding paid work. The programmes were called Opportunities for Volunteering and the Voluntary Projects Programme.[12] EVE declined all offers to be involved in the schemes, making their scepticism clear. They cited the short-term nature of the projects and the lack of provision for a proper organisational infrastructure and system of support for the volunteers as just some of the problems they saw.[13] Nevertheless, EVE saw ever increasing numbers of unemployed volunteers throughout the early 1980s as unemployed people sought to gain experience and make contacts that they hoped would lead to paid work. In 1980, unemployed people made up 38% of all volunteers placed, rising dramatically to 51% in 1981 and

further to 60% by 1983. The number of unemployed volunteers reaches its peak at 62% in 1986, falling to 54% in 1987 before rising again to 58% in 1988.

The increase in the number of unemployed people seeking voluntary opportunities was paralleled from 1980 onwards by an increase in volunteers with a background of mental health problems, who were referred to EVE by hospitals, doctors, psychiatrists, support workers or social workers in order to use volunteering as part of their rehabilitation. As a result of an increasing number of volunteers from such backgrounds, in 1984 EVE decided to establish a dedicated project on volunteers with additional needs, the first of its kind in a UK Volunteering Centre. As well as those with mental health problems, the project also sought to help potential volunteers who have physical or learning difficulties, addiction problems or ex-offenders' problems. 12% of all volunteers given placements in 1984 fell into one of these categories. This increased to 21% in 1986-86 and in 1987-88 to 27%, 60% of whom had recently experienced mental health problems. In 1988-89, the number of volunteers with additional needs reached 32% before increasing even further to 34% in 1989-90. As well as finding placements for these volunteers, the project also held training days on themes such as 'Volunteer Work as Therapy' and created a Forum where issues relevant to volunteers with additional needs could be discussed.[14] An early evaluation of the project published in May 1987, after the end of their first round of funding, proved to be highly popular and was requested from countries all over the world.[15]

The Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange continued to grow and flourish throughout the 1990s, to such an extent that by 1997, EVOC (as ECSS had become in 1992) started to consider making it an independently constituted body. In April 2000, the Edinburgh Volunteer Exchange launched as its own organisation. Now known as Volunteer Edinburgh, it continues to act as a vital hub for volunteering in the city, providing information and guidance to thousands of people each year who are

looking to volunteer their time as well as to hundreds of organisations looking to recruit volunteers.

Volunteer Edinburgh's current premises on 222 Leith Walk, taken with permission from Volunteer Edinburgh website.

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CHAPTER 07

ECSS and the Victoria Hostel for Women: A Commitment to Homelessness

From its very early stages in the mid-19th century, EVOC (as it is now known), in the words of Edward Matthews (director of ECSS between 1974 and 1994), 'has had a commitment to homeless people'.[1] Amidst the increasing socio-economic and political precarity of the 1970s and 1980s (the rise of unemployment, homelessness, demographics living under and near the poverty line, and the gradual dismantling of the Welfare State), EVOC foregrounded social issues surrounding the right to housing, supporting the work of many organisations involved in securing housing provisions for homeless people. Using information found in the annual reports of ECSS, this essay looks at the work that was done to support the improvement of the administration of, and living conditions in, the Victoria Hostel for Women at 3 Merchant Street – which preoccupied the organisation for 14 years – in ultimately attempting to relocate the provision for homeless women in a better suited and equipped building.

After the revelations of the appalling living conditions in, and poor administration and management of the Victoria Hostel (described by ECSS director, Matthews, as characterised 'by violence and most appalling squalor'), ECSS and the Edinburgh Council for Single Homeless (ECSH) joined forces with the statutory sector (local authorities of the Regional and District Council) to apply for the Urban Aid Grant from the central government to hire additional staff and cover running costs.[2] After being advised that the fund would be given only on the condition of replacing the existing management, ECSH and ECSS pressured the management and trustees of the Edinburgh Lodging House Association (an independent charity established in 1841 and the owning body of Victoria Hostel) to step down from their positions.[3] They were replaced

by eight new managers. On 1st February 1979, the Urban Aid fund was approved, enabling the appointment of additional staff (three co-wardens supported by ancillary staff and volunteers).[4] Further funds were given by the Regional Council's Social Work Department and the Edinburgh District Council's Housing Department, as well as individuals. These funds were used to physically improve the premise, including improvements in heating, cooking facilities, furniture, common areas, linen and towels, staff rooms, and so on.[5] In 1980, the Urban Aid fund was extended for an additional two years, after having met the commitment of securing 12.5% contribution of the overall budget submitted to the Urban Aid Grant (these contributions came from the District and Regional Council).[6]

By 1982, the Victoria Hostel was fully staffed (seven full-time staff and a part-time secretary) and offering emergency accommodation to 37 women. Nevertheless, in ECSS' annual report of that year, in a section dedicated to the hostel and written by ECSS director Matthews, concerns were expressed about an imminent closure of the hostel due to possibly failing to extend the Urban Aid Grant to its maximum period of seven years (until 1985).[7] This was the result of an increase in the number of staff required, which turned out to be mainly funded by the Regional Council's Social Work Committee, despite the initial agreement in applying for the Urban Aid Grant that required an equal sponsorship from the Regional and District Councils. Negotiations in sponsorship were made and the Urban Aid Grant was indeed offered to its maximum availability.

In the annual report the following year similar concerns were expressed, this time not due to shortcomings in securing the extension of the funding but due to the forthcoming end of the Urban Aid Grant: '[p]lanning [had] already begun to ensure that the core elements of the work carried on in the Victoria Hostel are retained and developed after the end of the Urban Aid Funding'.[8] By that time, the provisions offered by the Hostel were not limited to temporary, emergency accommodation but had expanded by 'providing assessment and support, through assistance with

welfare benefits, housing, medical and other problems, to the provision of long-term accommodation'.[9] As the scope of the organisation was that that required more than one agency to be responsible for it, part of the future planning was the building of partnerships with other voluntary and statutory bodies, which could undertake some of the provisions offered by the Victoria Hostel.[10] Similar to many other accommodation provisions, it was hard to maintain a clear cut division between offering premises and necessary social work for the social integration of homeless people.

The tone of the following annual report on the operations of the Victoria Hostel was even more urgent in assessing the future of the Hostel, with the review beginning by stating that '[t]he time is rapidly approaching when the Urban Aid funding of the Victoria Hostel will come to an end and the future is still far from certain'.[11] In planning for the longevity of the organisation after the end of the Urban Aid Grant, the management and staff of the Hostel applied for further financial support from the Regional and District Councils that would allow them, in partnership with the Edinburgh Lodging House Association, to move to a different, more suitable premise and develop the services that were identified as necessary, as listed in the report:

- A small hostel providing emergency accommodation for a period of eight to twelve weeks;
- A network of supported accommodation;
- A place where advice and information can be readily obtained.

The Regional and District Councils agreed to continue funding the operations of the Hostel, whose management and staff were in 1985 still in search for a new premise as the one at 3 Merchant Street was 'worn out', requiring a 'disproportionate amount of the budget' for its maintenance.[12] Indeed, the premise had been in use as a lodging house since 1861, or 1849 depending on the text, (and before that as a hotel) when it was first opened to provide accommodation for non-resident

domestic servants who were employed in the affluent part of the city, the New Town. Attempts for the improvement of the building resulted in 'somewhat anomalous position that dormitory provision was provided for the women in large ill-lit dormitories with the best natural light being found in the bathrooms and toilets at the front of the house'.[13]

Whilst a 'promising' replacement was soon found, its conversion to a lodging house was regarded as uneconomic.[14] By 1986, a new building was still to be found. Nevertheless, hopes were rekindled as the management of the Hostel (with the assistance of other voluntary bodies, including ECSS) began discussions with the Housing Corporation and Edinvar Housing Association for developing a premise that was owned by the Regional Council. With the prospect of these discussions being fruitful, the report on the operations of the Victoria Hostel for the years 1985-1986 closes on an optimistic tone: 'it is to be hoped that living conditions in the Victoria Hostel could thereby be markedly improved and the provision of emergency accommodation for homeless women in Edinburgh could, for the first time, be moved into the twentieth century'.[15] By 1987, plans for the development of a smaller and better equipped accommodation were reported to be at an 'advanced stage', having already secured the definite cooperation of the Edinvar Housing Association and still seeking the definitive financial support of the Housing Association and the Regional and District Councils.[16]

The following year found the Hostel at the same premises, with the physical deterioration of the building causing problems for the management. The windows urgently needed to be replaced, while a statutory notice 'was served' to the management, requiring the upgrade of the fire escape at a cost of approximately £12,000.[17] At first, the understanding was that the amount would have been subsidised by a repair grant provided by the District Council, only to find out later that grants for capital repairs were not available for hostel accommodations. Working against financial hindrances, the management and staff as

well as partnering bodies from voluntary and statutory organisations were still planning for the future of the Hostel, knowing that 'relief is in sight.'[18] At the time of writing of ECSS' 1987-1988 annual report, Lothian Council was preparing to sell an appropriate property to the Edinvar Housing Association, with planning permissions already obtained and the aspiration that the final 'future' of the organisation would be signed by the end of 1988, and that the premise on 3 Merchant Street would be vacant in approximately two years.[19] Indeed, by the Summer of 1991 the Victoria Hostel became vacant; as put in ECSS' 1989-1990 annual report 'enormously heartening to report that in the summer of 1991, nearby fourteen years after new management was installed, the dream or fantasy which had then of replacing it with decent accommodation and privacy will come to pass and the Victoria Hostel will close its doors'.[20]

This is in short the story of the involvement of ECSS with the Victoria Hostel for Women at 3 Merchant Street, which together with many other projects constituted ECSS' involvement in issues concerning housing, or the lack of it. As early as 1985, ECSS' Matthews wrote that '[i]t is not the time for inventing a new model lodging house scheme. In a human society, the days of the lodging house and the night shelter should be numbered'.[21] Yet, today, after almost thirty years, devastating homelessness is still a matter of societal concern, with a household becoming homeless in Scotland every 18 minutes.[22]

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CHAPTER 08

ECSS and Community Transport: A Venture into Mobility

'Community transport' (CT) is not a different term for 'public transport'. As the website of the UK Government explains, '[m]any areas have community transport services for people who have difficulty using public transport. These include door-to-door transport and trips to shopping centres'.[1] The UK Community Transport Association describes CT as a 'wide range of transport solutions usually developed to cover a specifically identified transport need, typically run by the voluntary sector for the local community on a not-for-profit basis'.[2] CT sets out to accommodate the transport needs of a 'wide range of groups where conventional transport fails to do so'.[3] This could be either due to the lack of impetus for economic profit for running conventional transport (both private or public transport) or potential users have needs that cannot be accommodated by conventional transport services. These needs vary: from ensuring accessibility to remote locations to assisting a choir to transfer its musical equipment. Importantly, such needs result from various physical disabilities, which are typically put at the centre of many CT organisations. This essay examines the CT services offered by EVOC (then still called ECSS), focusing on the services that were established to specifically attend to the needs of people with disabilities.

In the 1970s, mobility emerged as a factor pertinent to accessibility and community engagement, and whilst these questions were somewhat addressed by the statutory sector, their understanding of people with disabilities was merely confined to that of the patient and not of the socially active citizen, whose needs would not necessarily be limited to visitations to clinics and 'shopping centres'.[4] It was in 1970 when ECSS identified the need of community transport in Edinburgh, and in 1971

established Edinburgh Voluntary Transport (EVT), which attended to the needs of individuals and both voluntary and statutory bodies (in July 1986, EVT changed its name to Edinburgh Community Transport).

During the first years of EVT – specifically, between 1971 and 1973 – the majority of 'jobs' (as they were called by EVT staff) undertaken were for the transportation of furniture and other goods, with the ratio between them and so-called 'personnel jobs' being, for instance, between 1973 and 1974, 66% and 33%, respectively. EVT addressed this ratio by 1975, 'correcting' it to 40% and 60%, respectively, without reducing the jobs undertaken for the transportation of goods but by increasing the total output of jobs by 50%.[5] Transport services for people with disabilities, provided by two vehicles that were specifically designed for this purpose, were by then constituting 2/3 of the personnel jobs (with the remaining 1/3 provided by youth groups, community centres, and play schemes).[6] 1975's 'most exciting venture' was the establishment of a dial-a-ride service.[7] Essentially a taxi offering door-to-door transportation to people with disabilities. This service, the first of its kind in Scotland, was provided by a mini-van that could fit one wheelchair; as advertised in a flyer printed

Date unknown, taken from the EVOC archive.

by EVT sometime between 1979 and 1980, the service was for 'primarily those in wheelchairs, but also available to ambulant disabled people who cannot enter buses and conventional taxis. […] Fares are heavily subsidised to make the service affordable'.[8]

In addition to the taxi service that could accommodate only one person, another vehicle was designated for group trips, and could accommodate five

wheelchairs and 11 seated passengers, being the only one of its kind that was offered freely to the community. Revealing the scope of EVT's activity, the 1976-1977 annual report states that '[i]n the past year the ambulance has undertaken jobs such as regional occupational therapy runs from Bonnyrigg and Loanhead to Penicuik Y.W.C.A., trips to military tattoo, transport for a disabled folk group to and from rehearsals and concerts and a trip to North Wales with a group of thalidomide children'.[9] By 1977, it had become apparent that there was a ready demand for transportation services for people with disabilities, with pertinent services offered by EVT being 'tremendously popular'.[10]

During the years 1977-1978, EVT 'asked a great many questions of itself.'[11] Specifically, EVT '[felt] the need to reconcile the financial expediency with the needs of the community which [they] were serving' as they were concerned with the possibility of not providing exactly what the community needed, as well as examining the role of volunteers in supporting EVT's services, who, as explained in EVT's report, should not in any case undertake responsibilities that a paid staff member would.[12] In this context, EVT called a meeting for organisations that were using EVT services. During the meeting the users requested, as they had done numerous times before, an expansion of the transport provisions for people with disabilities, without, however, being able themselves to provide any recourses to assist towards this aim. By 1978, EVT was offering three different services: a furniture transportation service; a taxi service for disabled passengers; and a van, both for ambulant and disabled passengers.[13]

By 1979, still in search for further funding, EVT was operating four different vehicles: two mini-vans suited for carrying one wheelchair, part of the taxi service for people with disabilities, with, however, only one full-time driver; a 16 passenger minibus that could fit four passengers on wheelchairs and four ambulant passengers; and a furniture van.[14] Not being able to meet community demand, in 1982, the 'taxi' service

for people with disabilities became an independent organisation named Handicab Lothian LTD. EVT continued to provide similar services; as it was put in the 1982-1983 annual report, '[d]espite the growth of Handicabs and Edinburgh Cripple Aid in the field of Dial-A-Ride, EVT's service is still unable to meet the growing demand, and remains a much respected, innovative and invaluable part of the overall Dial-A-Ride provision in Lothian. Without EVT many people's only lifeline to the Community would be severed'.[15]

Like the overall direction of the organisation, whose position by the mid-1970s had shifted from direct action in the community to a mediatory body between statutory and voluntary agencies, providing consultancy and administrative support, EVT in the early 1980s began distributing knowledge pertinent to CT and lobbying for changes. As explained in the 1982-1983 annual report, 'EVT is used by a vast number of statutory and voluntary bodies as a storehouse of information and advice about all matters relating to transport'.[16] In the following years, EVT's information and consultancy provisions further expanded, with the report of the years 1983-1984 dedicating to knowledge and training services a more formalised section titled – Information/Community Development.[17] EVT had gradually evolved into a 'consultancy agency', providing information to various 'community groups on a wide range of transport related issues'.[18] By the same time, EVT had assumed an advocacy role too, working towards the development of partnerships between voluntary and statutory bodies in advancing transportation services for people with disabilities,

Lothian Community Transport Services office, date unknown. Taken from the EVOC archive.

as well as participating in campaigning for amendments to the Transport Bill (1985), specifically fighting for an amendment to the 'Buses' White Paper which had neglected to make references to the transportation needs of people with physical disabilities.[19]

By 1988, after 18 years of operation, EVT began systematically considering the possibility of becoming independent from ECSS, quickly identifying some apparent benefits, such as 'greater freedom' in determining its services.[20] Nevertheless, there were still concerns in ensuring that financial support was adequate before 'severing the unbiblical cord'.[21] The 1989-1990 annual report, titled 'GOODBYE ECT... HELLO LCTS LTD???', ardently informs – as the capitalised title already disclosed – that EVT would become independent under the name LCTS by 1 April 1991.[22] LCTS (Lothian Community Transport Services) continues its operation today providing: minibus hire to approximately 200 organisations, annually completing tens of thousands of passenger trips; training in, for example, taxi driving and passenger assistance; as well as consultancy to organisations offering transportation services.[23] This is a short story about EVT, which necessarily has many omissions but nonetheless makes visible a small part of a very crucial provision offered by the voluntary sector, which still remains widely unexamined.[24]

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