

## EPILOGUE

This account of Oxfam's history has been somewhat negligent in keeping the reader continuously informed of changes in the organisation's size and structure, and has failed to provide a round-up of contemporary vital statistics. The following information may help to fill the gaps.

**Oxfam's size:** With an income of £69 million in financial year 1990-91, Oxfam is Britain's largest overseas aid charity, and in recent years has consistently been in the top three of the income league of British charities. It has 12 local offices in the UK and Ireland; and 34 field offices in the developing world, 12 in Asia, 16 in Africa, 4 in Latin America, and 2 in the Middle East. Altogether, Oxfam employs about 1,700 people, and receives help from 30,000 volunteers, who run the 850 Oxfam Shops, belong to 'Oxfam Campaigning Network', and provide other valuable support.

**Oxfam's structure:** In keeping with the laws governing charitable activity in Britain, the ultimate policy-making body in Oxfam is the Council of up to 50 trustees, which meets three times a year. An Executive Committee of the Council meets 8 times a year to oversee the charity's management and expenditure between Council meetings. The Council delegates to other Committees the watchdog role over the Overseas Programme in different parts of the developing world and over the charity's Educational and Campaigning activity in Britain and Europe. Day-to-day decision-making is delegated to the Director and staff of Oxfam, but senior trustees and officers play a close consultative role.

Oxfam has been fortunate throughout its history in attracting to the membership of its trustee Committees the services of many distinguished scholars and veterans of public office in Britain and overseas. The following have served as Chairmen of Oxfam: 1942-47, Rev. T.R. Milford; 1947-60 Rev. Henry Moxley; 1960-65, Rev. T.R. Milford; 1965-71, Professor Charles Coulson; 1971-77, Michael Rowntree; 1977-82, Sir Geoffrey Wilson; 1983-89, Chris Barber; 1989- Mary Cherry.

**The distribution of Oxfam resources:** Since 1975, Oxfam has included the expenditure of resources on public education and informational work in the objects of its charity, as well as its grants to projects overseas. In 1990-1991, 79 per cent of income was spent on the overall programme; 13 per cent on fundraising costs; 4 per cent on administration; and 4 per cent on shop development and working capital. Oxfam aims to spend 80 per cent of its income on the programme, and usually manages to come very close to this target, occasionally exceeding it.

Of the £46 million spent overseas during 1990-1991, 18 per cent was spent on social organisation, 4 per cent on productive activities and income generation, 13 per cent on education, 9 per cent on agriculture, 11 per cent on health, and 45 per cent on emergency relief and rehabilitation. In recent years, the pattern of expenditure has been geared to spending more on advisory services to local groups and organisations so as to enhance their own capacity for project development and management, and less on large grants for material inputs. In 1990-1991, the total number of projects and organisations supported was 2,900. The highest proportion went to Africa, 61 per cent; Asia and the Middle East received 21 per cent; Latin America and the Caribbean, 16 per cent; the remaining 2 per cent went to projects of a general nature.

**Sources of income:** Donations to Oxfam from the public, in response to appeals and through the area network, bring in approximately one-third of income. Oxfam Shops raise a further third, including their sales of handicrafts. In recent years, official aid sources have been an important source of funds, through the co-funding schemes of Britain's ODA and the European Community. A ceiling of 10 per cent towards the regular overseas programme is imposed for governmental contributions so as to maintain Oxfam's independence, although additional funds are accepted in times of emergency. In 1990-91, these two sources provided £11 million; a further £3.4 million was received from other voluntary agencies.

**Oxfam Trading:** Oxfam's trading company celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1990. Since 1965-66, when Bridge was set up with the principle aim of promoting the interests of poor third world producers, Oxfam's experiment in 'alternative trading' has flourished. By 1985-86, Oxfam Trading's annual turnover had reached £2.5 million, and in 1989-90, sales of £8.5 million were achieved from Bridge products alone. Oxfam now purchases handicrafts for sale in its shops and through the Oxfam Trading Mail Order catalogue from over 295 groups in 43 countries; four overseas Bridge offices in India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Mexico provide producers with the services that enable them to improve their products, their manufacturing methods, their business and marketing skills.

**Oxfam international:** The cooling of relations between Oxfams in different parts of the world which took place in the 1970s when Oxfams in Canada and the US were asserting a separate identity from the parent body has given way in recent years to a global Oxfam warming. Each Oxfam defines its own programme and employs its own field staff; but in many countries there are close co-operative links between the staff of

the various Oxfams. New Oxfams have also come into being. Oxfam Hong Kong began life as a fund-raising support committee for Oxfam UK; in 1984-85, the group raised £2 million (in the wake of the Ethiopian famine), and on the strength of this success, became an independent entity in 1988. The latest member of the movement is Oxfam New Zealand, established in 1991.

Hong Kong is the first country to move through the spectrum of Oxfam recipient to Oxfam benefactor, reflecting its own development over 30 years. In India, a different impulse – that of decolonisation – is prompting discussions on whether the staff of the various Oxfams represented there should form their own ‘Oxfam’, raise their own funds, and gradually negotiate independence from the parent body. This is the first occasion on which the Oxfam policy of encouraging the growth of indigenous organisations and enabling them to build up capacity has led in this, quite logical, direction. A primarily recipient as opposed to donor Oxfam would be a new creation, and the practicalities have yet to be fully explored.

**Oxfam’s future:** At the end of 1991, Frank Judd – elevated to the House of Lords as Lord Judd of Portsea – left Oxfam, and David Bryer, previously Overseas Director, became the new Director. An extensive management review was in the final stages of completion, and the process of reshaping Oxfam’s internal structure continued into 1992.

Apart from the need to pre-empt the hardening of organisational arteries – to which Oxfam is nowadays more prone than when it was a much smaller and leaner outfit, along with other British charities Oxfam has also been confronted by the need to adjust to the recession of the early 1990s. The record-breaking income of 1990-91 was almost certainly the product of a series of calamities during that year, including the Kurdish refugee crisis following the Gulf War, continuing crises in Africa, and massive flooding in Bangladesh, to which the public responded with typical compassion and generosity. This helped to override the impact of the recession on charitable returns, particularly on the High Street, where the foreseeable prospects for regular fund-raising are not regarded as promising. Adjustments to Oxfam’s structure include a cutback in the number of Oxfam area offices in the UK, with greater emphasis on centralised fundraising. It is becoming ever harder to keep costs within 20 per cent of income.

The trends in Oxfam’s overseas programme, towards more investment in local organisational capacity, networking among project partners, particular attention to the problems of the especially marginalised (the landless, pastoralists, aboriginals (tribals), sufferers of poverty as a consequence of human rights violations, inhabitants of arid lands, and particularly the womenfolk in all these categories), are likely

to continue. Greater emphasis may be given in future to advocacy of 'alternative' policy approaches, both in developing countries as a part of programming, and among the international community as a component of campaigning.

However, predicting the future directions to be taken by such a volatile and energetic mass as Oxfam would be a fool's game and is not – fortunately – the task of the historian. Judged by the record of the past, Oxfam will remain up among the risk-takers and trend-setters in voluntary overseas aid, both in the donor countries of the UK and Europe, and in the recipient countries of the South. The first 50 years of Oxfam's life have witnessed a great humanitarian adventure, and the next chapter in the post-Cold War world will undoubtedly do the same.

## AN OXFAM CHRONOLOGY

- 1942** 29 May: national Famine Relief Committee formed to spread information about the plight of civilian populations in Europe.  
 January: 2,000 people a day dying of starvation in Athens/Piraeus.  
 20 July: Edith Pye, Secretary of NFRC, speaks at Oxford meeting.  
 5 October: meeting of concerned people at University Church. Oxford Committee for Famine Relief formed under chairmanship of the Rev T R Milford, including in its membership Professor Gilbert Murray OM.
- 1943** October: 'Greek Week' in Oxford raises £10,700 for the Greek Red Cross, including £2,300 from a temporary gift shop (now Dillons bookshop). Cecil Jackson-Cole, Honorary Secretary, becomes the driving force behind the Oxford Committee's activities.
- 1942–44** Committee members, with other famine relief committees, lobby unsuccessfully for lifting of Allied naval blockade to permit cargoes of 'controlled relief' – dried milk and vitamin supplements – into Greece and Belgium.
- 1945** November: the Oxford Committee pledges support to Victor Gollancz's appeal to 'Save Europe Now' by providing food parcels and clothing for the war-affected in Germany and elsewhere on the continent.
- 1946** January: European Relief Week in Oxford; £6,000 raised in two months.  
 11 November: first clothing collection depot opened.
- 1947** By the end of May, European Relief Appeal had raised £20,000 and 800 sacks of clothing had been collected. Aid sent to Quakers, Salvation Army, Save the Children, and other organisations working in Europe.  
 November: office acquired at 17 Broad Street, Oxford. Shop opened on ground floor during 1948. Full-time paid manager appointed in November 1949.
- 1948** Spring: first project grant made: £200 to the Friends' Service Council for the Domestic Training College for girls in Salonica, Greece.  
 September: due to determination of Cecil Jackson-Cole, Oxford Committee decides to continue in existence, although other war-time and post-war charitable committees had closed down.
- 1949** September: first grants for Palestinian refugees after creation of State of Israel in 1948.
- 1951** General Secretary appointed: Leslie Kirkley.  
 First grants made to Greek villages for water piping.  
 First grants to India: famine relief in Bihar.  
 Total aid 1950/51: £83,556 (money £16,711; clothing and supplies £66,845).
- 1953** August: earthquake in Ionian Islands; Kirkley visits and organises relief.  
 Grant to Korean war victims.  
 Gift shop income £10,000.  
 First roving fundraising organiser appointed: Frank Carter.

- 1954** First grants to Kenya for relief work during Mau Mau troubles.
- 1954–56** Grants to Korean orphanages and welfare programmes £60,000.  
Grants to Chinese refugees in Hong Kong.
- 1956** September: first grant for feeding in South Africa.  
October/November: Hungarian uprising. Kirkley visits border and refugee camps; £20,000 provided for feeding and medical supplies, plus 125 tons of clothing and bedding during following year.
- 1957** Grants Sub-committee set up.
- 1957–58** Grants made to 27 countries, including relief for refugees from the Algerian war.
- 1958** Grants Officer appointed.
- 1958–59** Income reaches half a million pounds – just over half in cash.
- 1959** First Schools Organiser appointed.  
First three Regional Organisers appointed, in preparation for the June launch of World Refugee Year. Kirkley is made Chairman of Publicity Committee. £755,900 raised for the appeal.
- 1960** Second gift shop opened, in Guildford.  
2 July: Freedom from Hunger Campaign launched in Rome by FAO.  
July: Oxfam Annual Conference on subject of freedom from hunger.  
Grants to 56 countries. Approximately 30 paid staff.
- 1961** Famine in Congo. £20,00 arrives in mail in one day in response to press pictures and appeal. By 21 January, £104,000 raised.  
First Field Director appointed. Jimmy Betts draws up and oversees new Oxfam programme of development projects in High Commission Territories in Southern Africa.
- 1962** Regional Organiser for Scotland appointed.
- 1963** Gift shops opened, Leeds and Cheltenham. Gift shop income £79,000.  
Northern Ireland Regional Organiser appointed. Now 200 staff, including 40 Regional Organisers supporting 250 Oxfam groups.  
Canadian committee set up in Toronto, precursor of Oxfam Canada.  
Disasters Emergency Committee set up for joint agency appeals.
- 1964** Oxfam Belgique founded.  
Second Field Director appointed: Bernard Llewellyn, in Hong Kong.  
Education Department in touch with 12,000 schools.  
Oxfam Activities set up to import and sell handicrafts and market Christmas cards.  
Oxfam and other overseas aid charities under scrutiny by the Charity Commissioners; questions raised about the charitable nature of development, as opposed to relief, projects.
- 1965** Third Field director appointed: Jim Howard in India.  
14 February: Oxfam decides to support family planning projects.  
March: Oxfam's trustees approve a new definition of charitable objects which resolves the earlier dispute with the Charity Commissioners.

- 1966** Famine in Bihar. Oxfam sends volunteers to help with feeding programme. Oxfam spends £345,500 on water supplies and child feeding in Bihar between December 1966 and November 1967. 100 Young Oxfam groups. Sponsored walks bring in £50,000.
- 1967–68** Income over £3 million.  
Now 7 Field Directors, supporting 638 projects in 89 countries.
- 1967–69** Nigerian civil war. Oxfam provides £500,000 to relief work on both sides, and fields a relief team in part of the Biafran territory recovered by the Federal forces.  
Over 200 volunteer-run temporary gift shops by 1970.
- 1969** First Field Director appointed in Latin America: Peter Oakley, in Brazil.  
‘Walk ‘69’: biggest ever Young Oxfam walk.
- 1971** March onwards. Bengal refugees fleeing from civil war in East Pakistan take refuge in India; eventually over nine million. Oxfam recruits 250 young doctors and medical students in India and runs programme for 500,000 people, at a cost of £120,000 a month.
- 1972** New state of Bangladesh created; Oxfam’s largest country programme to date initiated.
- 1973** Drought in Western India: Oxfam sets up network of feeding schemes. Famine in Ethiopia and in the Sahel.
- 1974** Oxfam opens waste recycling plant in Huddersfield.  
Leslie Kirkley retires. Brian Walker appointed Director.  
Oxfam’s Council of Management agrees up to 5 per cent of income should be spent on information and education at home.  
‘Oxfam: an interpretation’ statement redefines Oxfam’s philosophy as working in partnership with the poor for social justice.  
Public Affairs Unit set up to research relevant topics in depth.
- 1975** Trading Company turnover of £750,000.  
Funds first received from British Government’s Co-funding Scheme.
- 1975–76** Income tops £5 million. 600 shops raise more than £1 million.  
16 Field Directors, with nine assistants, support 800 projects.
- 1976** February. Guatemala Earthquake. Oxfam purchases over £1 million worth of corrugated iron sheeting for self-help rebuilding programme.
- 1978–79** 575 shops raise over £3 million.  
End 1970s: Oxfam establishes three specialist advisory units at headquarters (Emergencies, Health and Technical Units) with medical and technical staff, and registers of stand-by personnel (nurses, water engineers, etc.) ready to go overseas at short notice.
- 1979** Campaigns Department established. Area campaigners recruited in early 1980s.  
Boat people refugees: Oxfam helps with water and sanitation on the island of Pilau Bidong.  
Cambodia emergency. Oxfam and a consortium of voluntary agencies

- finance massive aid and establish joint agency team. 1979-1981 over £20 million of aid sent: food, fertiliser, equipment, and vehicles. Oxfam income doubles to £23.8 million, including £11.8 million for Cambodia. Blue Peter TV appeal for Cambodia helps to raise £10 million through Oxfam shops. 25 Field Offices working with 1,200 projects.
- 1982** Oxfam publishes 'Bitter Pills', an analysis of how medicines serve, and do not serve, the poor; one of a growing number of authoritative Oxfam books on key development topics.
- 1982-83** War in Lebanon. Oxfam assists with rebuilding programmes. Oxfam staff 480, including 66 in Field Offices.
- 1983-84** 33 per cent of Oxfam aid allocated to disasters: drought in north-east Brazil, war in Lebanon, drought and war in Horn of Africa. 'Weather Alert' campaign.
- 1983** October: Guy Stringer appointed Director.
- 1984-85** Famine in Ethiopia. Total income £51 million. 69 per cent of overseas aid on disasters. General income for development work also up, by 38 per cent. Launch of new 'Hungry for Change' supporter network. Nearly 300 new groups during following year.
- 1985** 11 March: joint agency lobby of Parliament on overseas aid. Over 1 million signatories call for more aid, especially to Africa. July: Guy Stringer retires, succeeded by Frank Judd.
- 1985-86** Oxfam supporting 2,400 projects in 77 countries. 726 staff; 41 overseas and 94 in education/information/campaigning.
- 1986** Gender and Development Unit (GADU) established to research and encourage women's development.
- 1987-88** Record income of £52.3 million including £4.8 million from the British government and nearly £3 million from the EC. Oxfam's Cambodia campaign raises awareness on lack of international economic assistance to Cambodia; most successful campaign to date. Oxfam participated in Comic Relief in February, which raised a total of £14 million. Oxfam shops total 830 including 13 second-hand furniture shops.
- 1989-90** Income £62 million. Over £12 million spend on emergencies; Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique and Angola. Staff 1153, including 128 overseas and 180 in Oxfam Trading.
- 1990** Charity Commission conducts inquiry into Oxfam's campaigning activity. Reports in 1991.
- 1991** Gulf war precipitates crisis for Kurdish refugees and others inside Iraq. 'Don't Forget Africa' campaign.
- 1992** David Bryer appointed Director.

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