A Cause for our Times

Oxfam
the first 50 years

Maggie Black

Oxfam
and
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We are grateful to the British Red Cross Museum and Archives for supplying the photographs 4 and 5 of relief work in Greece in 1942, and to the International Committee of the Red Cross for permission to use them in this book.
Exactly 21 years ago, I joined the staff of Oxfam. Although I stayed only for four years, those years shaped my world view more than any other passage in my adult life.

Oxfam has its quota of self-critics at any given moment, chastising its shape, its size, its pretensions, and its failure to deliver on a dizzying number of agendas, including that of transforming the world. But there is no doubt in my mind that it has transformed the lives of thousands of people, and brought a speck of gold – hope, opportunity, material help, a new self-confidence – into millions of others. No-one will ever convince me that this organisation is anything less than extraordinary, possessing a concentration of calibre, energy, and dedication which would be the envy of any organisation in the world.

Having confessed to an outrageous degree of bias, how can my account of Oxfam's history claim to be independent? First, it is independent in the sense that it does not assume that Oxfam is all-important in its own story. The centre of gravity of this book is not Oxfam and its many works, but ideas in the wider society of which it is a reflection and, at its most inspirational, a goad. Second, it is able to be independent because there is no need for an essay in self-congratulation; Oxfam at 50 has a sufficient record of achievement not to waste resources on a 'vanity book'. Third, Oxfam’s penchant for self-criticism means that most Oxfamers – including my own ex-Oxfamer self – would be antagonised by an account which belonged to the genre of artificially untroubled self-advertisement.

If this book can justifiably claim to be independent, it should also admit to being idiosyncratic. There is almost no subject in the international pantheon of causes that Oxfam can bear to leave alone, nor a geographical corner of the Third World that it abjures. To try to write, authoritatively, on such a plethora of subjects and vicinities from a historical perspective, and to do so in such a constricted space, leads inevitably to arbitrary decisions about what to cover and what to leave
out. The requirements of narrative and chronology as well as personal predisposition have also narrowed my choices, which are not the choices another author would have made.

There are those who will search in vain for their pet project or their personal heroes; who will look for a dissertation on certain areas of Oxfam concern – AIDS, disabilities, urban health, paravets, Gujarati dairy co-operatives, cholera control in Bangladesh, Bolivian tin-miners, disaster housing, genetic seed-banks, Turkana fishermen, the travails of fundraisers, the modern role of the charitable trustee – and who will be disappointed. Many people and organisations have played a vital part in the Oxfam story whose praises remain unsung, a feature of this account I readily acknowledge and regret.

So many people have contributed in their different ways to the perspectives which find expression in these pages that it is impossible to apportion credit or blame. They include many at Oxfam in whose company I first discovered the Pandora's Box of 'World Development' back in the early 1970s; those at the New Internationalist, where I served as an editor in 1976-77; and also many staff members of UNICEF, both in East Africa and in New York, where I worked from 1977-1987. Most of all, they include innumerable people in what is called 'the field', people in villages, in health centres, in slum settlements, in refugee camps, in hot and dusty offices, who said something or did something which told me as much about this inexact science of 'development' as all the experts' treatises combined.

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Finally, there are two people who have made a unique contribution. One is Elizabeth Stamp, whose encyclopaedic knowledge of Oxfam's world has been laid generously at my disposal and without whose guidance and research I would have been frequently at a loss. The other is Ann Cullen, whose patience and editorial support have never flagged.

Maggie Black
Oxford, June 1992
On a war-time evening in October 1942, a small group of people met in the Old Library of the Church of St. Mary-the-Virgin in Oxford. Their concern was the misery and starvation pervading Europe as an outcome of the war.

One of them was an Anglican cleric. One, a retired Indian Colonial Service officer. Another, a Jewish refugee from Germany. The most prestigious was a Greek scholar and a leading figure of his time in the field of international social endeavour. All were people whose outlook had been strongly influenced by the ideals of international understanding to which the carnage of the first World War had given birth. The 'internationalist' ideology to which they all subscribed had launched the League of Nations and, in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, a ferment of movements and societies dedicated to brotherhood and peace.

When Hitler's armies tramped through Europe, such ideas were overwhelmed by a new dark age of hatreds and antagonisms, national suspicions and distrust. Britain was far from immune from this contagion. In the sudden reversal of public mood, doctrines recently seen as brave and visionary - Gandhi's espousal of non-violent protest, for example - were discredited. Pacifism, until 1939 a highly respectable creed, became tainted with overtones of cowardice and treachery; its followers deserted in droves. The call to arms against the Nazis became compelling. To resist the forces of spiritual and political darkness, a chilling doctrine was proclaimed: 'total war'. But for those committed to the ideal of international fellowship, this policy ran against deepest conviction.

The group of Oxford citizens who met at the University Church on that October evening were not only concerned about the hunger and suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians by Hitler's armies of occupation. Along with a network of other like-minded groups throughout the country, they stood for a principle not yet enshrined in international law, a principle then too frail to stand the shock of
international conflagration: humanitarian neutrality. This principle states that the needs of innocent men, women, and children involuntarily caught up in war transcend the political divide. The group in Oxford felt anguished about the impact of ‘total war’ on helpless civilians. They were, at least in thought, part of an incipient protest movement about the ruthless conduct of the war, not only by Germany but by Britain.

The elements of the debate that evening were recorded in a school exercise book. The tone was tentative and exploratory, the outcome inconclusive. But before the participants bade each other good-night and set off into the black-out, they made a decision: to call themselves the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.

From this hesitant beginning grew in time an organisation which, as Oxfam, has changed the face of British charitable activity. Not only in its genesis, but in its adoption of the multiplying causes of distress among peoples in other lands, Oxfam’s mission has reflected major evolutions of 20th century thinking. This is true not only of its work among victims of war and other disasters, but among victims of poverty in what the post-colonial world came to call the developing countries.

A voluntary aid organisation such as Oxfam is, ultimately, of historical interest as a barometer of the way people in Britain and elsewhere have viewed other societies over time, especially the fortunes of their least privileged members. The story of Oxfam is primarily the story of what happened to the doctrine of ‘internationalism’ over the course of half a century. That, anyway, is the starting point for this particular historical voyage of enquiry.

On 20 August 1940 at the height of the Battle of Britain, Winston Churchill made one of his great war-time speeches in the House of Commons. His salute to British airmen went ringing down the years: ‘Never in the history of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.’

The tribute was contained in a speech of much broader purpose addressed to a beleaguered people. Churchill told the chamber that this was a new kind of war, not like the war of 1914-1918. This was a conflict not only of men versus guns, but ‘of strategy, of organisation, of technical apparatus, of science, mathematics and morale’. This was total war, in which everyone – not just those who fought, but entire populations – were involved. He stiffened his audience for the single-mindedness which must characterise the conduct of the war, not only for the defence of one island realm, but for the counter-attack which Britain must mount, alone, to rid Europe of Nazi aggression.

‘It is our intention’, Churchill stated, ‘to maintain and enforce a strict
blockade not only of Germany, but of Italy, France and all other countries that have fallen into the German power.' He made it clear that the blockade extended to all relief, including food, for the people of friendly countries now overrun. To let food through must nourish the Nazis and prolong the agony of the conquered. 'There have been many proposals, founded on the highest motives, that food should be allowed to pass the blockade for the relief of these populations. I regret that we must refuse these requests.'

He went further. It was the responsibility of the Nazis to feed the peoples they had conquered. If they did not, and famine prevailed, this would encourage the hungry to bring forward the day when their yoke would finally be broken. 'We will organise food immediately an area is liberated. We will build up reserves of food all over the world so that these will always be held up before the eyes of the people of Europe – I say it deliberately – the German and Austrian peoples, the certainty that the shattering of the Nazi power will bring to them all immediate food, freedom and peace.'

In the debate that followed, many speakers rose to applaud Churchill's call for unconditional commitment. With the battle for the skies still far from won and the threat of German invasion still imminent, this was not a time for equivocation. Churchill refused point-blank to provide any statement of his eventual peace aims, which was a way of saying that he refused any dialogue with those who still had a toe in the anti-war lobby. Only one voice, that of Dick Stokes, the Member for Ipswich, expressed a reservation about the impact of total blockade. 'Surely you can hold out some hope to our own friends in Europe who, according to the Ministry of Economic Warfare, will suffer the most appalling privation of famine and plague during this coming winter?'

No, the Prime Minister could not.

Encirclement and siege, with their corollary, the gradual starvation of a blockaded people, are weapons of war as old as warfare itself. The policy of Britain in the second World War, as laid down by Churchill in this speech and re-confirmed on many later occasions, was to use these ancient weapons to the limit of their applicability. Not only were all goods traded with the enemy declared contraband; so were all goods destined for the relief of friendly countries now under occupation by the enemy.

In August 1940 these countries included Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and France. Germany had announced that it would introduce a unified economic system in Europe, and was clearly
going to draw upon the resources of all the countries in its power to fuel its war machine. Industrial workers, labour of all kinds, would produce on behalf of the Third Reich. To cut off German supply lines therefore entailed cutting off all supply lines, even where allies in the fight against Hitler, including civilians – women, children, the sick and elderly, the bombed, interned, and refugees – might suffer cruelly as a result.

As modern weaponry had pushed out the frontiers of warfare until its theatre became all-embracing, it had become much harder to wage war in a way that distinguished between combatants and civilians, enemies and subjugated peoples. Parleying relief across enemy lines to distribute among civilians under neutral supervision was first undertaken during the first World War, but the procedure was not yet coded or articulated in any internationally binding legal instrument.

In the 1920s and 1930s the International Committee of the Red Cross managed to achieve ratification of improvements in the Geneva Conventions dealing with the wounded in battle and treatment for prisoners-of-war. But similar proposals put forward to limit the bombing of civilians and protect people in countries under occupation proved stillborn. When war began in 1939 there were, therefore, agreed international rules for sending food parcels to prisoners-of-war; but none for the delivery of food and medical relief to suffering civilians, even where they might be living in the same country, even community, as combatant internees.

The Hague Conventions of 1907 maintained that it was the responsibility of the occupying power to feed those people under its authority, or to allow them to feed themselves from their own resources. It was this which provided Britain with legal respectability for the total ban on relief for those now subject to Nazi rule. In other contexts the Hague Conventions were not conspicuously honoured: Article 25, for example, prohibited the attack or bombardment of undefended towns and villages. The Conventions also stated: ‘The Laws of War do not concede to belligerents unlimited power with reference to the choice of means of injuring the enemy.’ Britain never trusted Nazi Germany to honour any such ‘Laws of War’. The arguments in favour of a watertight blockade included the accusation that the Nazis would certainly pillage anything allowed through. On the one hand, the British insisted that the Germans were most unlikely to act in the interests of their conquered peoples; on the other, they asserted that Germany alone must come to their relief. Public debate of any such inconsistency was, however, for the future.

In the first World War a different precedent had been set. In the autumn of 1914, the people of Belgium had faced starvation as a result of the British blockade of North Sea ports. While the US was still a neutral
party, a private philanthropic body, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, was set up in London at the initiative of an American magnate, Herbert Hoover. Hoover, whose exploits as Europe’s unofficial ‘Food Czar’ eventually led him up the ladder of US power and into the White House, managed to obtain agreement from the warring parties to take food through the blockade, and distribute it to civilian committees under the supervision of American and other neutral nationals. Drawing on Belgian government deposits abroad, as well as British, French and US loans and private contributions, the relief operation dispensed supplies worth $1 billion in Belgium and German-occupied northern France during the war and immediately afterwards.

In May 1940, with the US similarly neutral, ex-President Hoover put together a similar proposal for relief of civilians in Belgium. His Commission for Polish Relief had already delivered supplies through the blockade in 1939 with British consent. But by May 1940, with Churchill in power, the atmosphere had altered. In early August, Hoover laid a fuller proposal before the warring powers for relief to Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. The Germans did not rebuff his initiative but were reluctant to concede its necessity. The British dismissed it out of hand. It can not have helped his case that Herbert Hoover, whatever his humanitarian credentials, was an isolationist and President Roosevelt’s most bitter political foe.

Hoover’s proposals were uppermost in Churchill’s mind when he issued a blanket refusal to all such requests. At a time when the German armies had rolled all before them, when ‘Battle of Britain Day’ – 15 September – was still three weeks away, and every last fibre of effort was needed to harden British resolve to fight on, let alone to believe in victory, total war was an understandable policy. Its implications, however, were extremely harsh, if not immediately, then for the future. For the moment no-one could tell how fully the Germans would shoulder the obligation to act as quartermaster to their subject peoples. In the autumn of 1940, there was some food scarcity everywhere on the continent, and there was hunger in southern France, Norway, and Poland. But there was no evidence of disaster. Not yet.

Deep civilian distress would only come with the changing tide of war – the change envisaged by Churchill in his address to the House of Commons in late August 1940, which the hardening of the blockade was itself designed to hasten.

In September 1941, the International Red Cross delegate in Athens cabled an SOS to headquarters in Geneva. ‘Food situation in Greece extremely grave. Mortality increased sixfold in the last two months. Catastrophe
inevitable unless outside help arrives quickly.' The cable proved prophetic.

After a heroic campaign against Italian forces during the winter of 1940-41, the exhausted Greeks – assisted by British troops – had been unable to withstand the German invasion of the spring. On 27 April 1941, the Greek government capitulated and went into exile. The Germans initially offered friendship to their latest subject people. When it was repudiated, retaliation was severe.

The Germans needed provisions for the campaign in North Africa, so they requisitioned all Greek public and private stocks of food, clothing, and medical supplies. The 1941 harvest, planted in the midst of war, had been meagre; but the Bulgarian occupation in the north and the Germans' disruption of the transport system cut off all access from Athens and the south to whatever wheat there was. Greece, mountainous and stony, was a poor food producer at the best of times, importing 60 per cent of food requirements in a normal year. During the Italian campaign, British naval convoys brought in supplies. With defeat came something quite different: British naval enforcement of the blockade against all such shipments. Within weeks, food became desperately scarce.

In July, the Greek Ambassador to (neutral) Turkey began to try and organise cargoes from Istanbul. Through the mediation of the Turkish Red Crescent, the Turks agreed to the use of a ship and to the purchase of food, but insisted on permission from the adversaries. Since Turkey was within the blockade area, Britain had no technical objection to food purchases there or their shipment through the Dardanelles. Italian and German agreement was also needed: their planes controlled the air. After lengthy diplomatic negotiations in Ankara, the parties agreed that both shipment and distribution should be put in the hands of the International Red Cross.

The Turkish ship S.S. Kurtulus – painted brilliant white with a huge Red Crescent on each of her sides – was finally loaded and left for Athens in late October.

The Kurtulus was greeted by haggard crowds. The Master reported: 'Barefooted children almost stormed the vessel crying pitifully for food.' Marcel Junod, a senior Swiss Red Cross delegate, arrived from Istanbul. He found a city full of refugees and desolation. 'In the streets were walking spectres. Here and there old men, and sometimes young ones, sat on the pavement. Their lips were moving as if in prayer but no sound came. They stretched out their hands for alms and let them fall back weakly. Pedestrians passed backwards and forwards before them without paying the least attention. Each one was asking himself when his own turn would come.'
The Kurtulus made five voyages between Istanbul and Piraeus before January 1942, each cargo bringing enough to give half a pound of food to around 12,000 people for ten days. Junod and his staff set up kitchens which ladled out hundreds of thousands of bowls of soup, feeding stations for 100,000 children over seven, and 130 nursery centres; but only in Athens, and without firm guarantee of more supplies. By the end of the year, nearly 8,000 metric tons had been sent from Turkey. Many of the supplies were paid for by the Greek War Relief Association of America, a voluntary body which was extremely active throughout the next two years.

In January 1942 came disaster: the Kurtulus struck a rock and was wrecked in the Sea of Marmara. A few provisions arrived from Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, but very, very few. Pressure built up in Britain for something to be done and on 27 January, the Minister of Economic Warfare announced that a cargo of British wheat stored in Egypt would be sent. It took until late March for the ship to arrive. Meanwhile two other Swedish ships carrying flour were mobbed by small boats when they arrived in Piraeus. One was bombed by Italian planes and lost at sea after discharging its cargo. During March and April, Athens continued to be the scene of terrible suffering.

At the height of the famine, the death toll from starvation and exposure in Athens and Piraeus alone reached over 1,600 a day; towards the end of January 1942, it was reported to exceed 2,000. The authorities issued ration cards to the Greek population. They were useless: there was no food to be distributed. More than half the townspeople were trying to survive on 250 calories a day, one-tenth of a normal diet. Whatever food there was vanished onto the black market, flourishing to the benefit of members of the German occupying forces and their collaborators. Inflation was astronomic and the currency lost all value. Only those with gold sovereigns could buy provisions. Thousands of children in Athens were described as ‘living skeletons’ and infant mortality rose to over 50 per cent. Every morning found more dead bodies in the street, left there anonymously by families frantic to retain their ration cards. In other parts of the country the situation was as desperate. ‘Send bread or coffins’ was the message received in Athens from the half-starved population of one Aegean island. In the Peloponnese and some of the islands, neither wheat nor flour had been seen for months.

Not until 16 April 1942, after pressure from the International Red Cross, Sweden, Canada, and finally the US, did the British government accept that to allow in a few shipfuls was not enough. In Parliament, Dingle Foot announced on behalf of the Minister of Economic Warfare that Britain had agreed to let regular relief for Greece go through the
blockade. Monthly cargoes of 15,000 tons of Canadian wheat were to be loaded in Swedish ships, carried under the Red Cross flag, and distributed under the supervision of a joint Swiss and Swedish Red Cross Commission. Some dried milk for children as well as dried vegetables and vitamins were to be included. The quantity of basic food amounted only to a quarter of estimated need, but it was still significant.

The system of regular shipments took some months to establish. In July 1942, news came from a Swiss Red Cross delegate that the first cargo in the Aegean had arrived in the island of Chios. With starving children scouring the streets and thousands of famished islanders fleeing in small boats to Asia Minor, food had arrived just in time. By August, eight Swedish ships were in commission for Greece and by October, the relief programme was relatively well organised.

Around 200,000 Greek people died of starvation during the terrible winter of 1941-42, proportionately far more than in any recent Ethiopian famine. 'Catastrophe inevitable' had proved correct. And catastrophe continued on a less drastic scale until liberation in late 1944 and beyond. Starvation, exposure and disease took up to 500,000 Greek lives between 1941 and 1944 out of a population of seven million. Without the relief operation, at least a quarter – maybe more – of the population would have perished.

The severity of the famine in Greece was exceptional. Elsewhere the blockade held firm. From France, Norway, Poland, Belgium came further reports of serious food shortage. To pleas on behalf of people other than the Greeks, the British government remained unmoved.

When news about the starvation in Greece began to filter through to London in the autumn of 1941, prominent individuals had begun quietly to use their influence on behalf of the Greeks. Among these were Lord Robert Cecil (Viscount Chelwood), and Professor Gilbert Murray, leading figures in the League of Nations Union, a citizen support group for international peace and understanding.

Chelwood and Murray believed that the Germans were using starvation as a deliberate instrument of war, and that this required the British government to reconsider the morality of their position on relief. On 6 November, they set up a small committee to consider what should be done for the people of friendly countries, and began to press for a meeting with Hugh Dalton, the Minister of Economic Warfare. Dalton was implacably committed to the policy of total blockade. Early in January, Chelwood finally managed to see Dingle Foot, Dalton's Parliamentary Secretary. His attitude was not encouraging.

It was in January 1942 that the Kurtulus foundered and the famine in
Athens reached its height. There were reports in the British press from correspondents based in Turkey, and pacifists began raising their voices about Greek starvation. The Peace Pledge Union had already set up a ‘Food Relief Campaign’ with the author, Vera Brittain, as Chairman. Local committees began to petition their MPs. But, as Vera Brittain lamented, a campaign by pacifists could easily be dismissed as the work of ‘fanatics, soft-heads, and sentimental idealists’.

On 27 January, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, a churchman known for his outspoken defence of humanity, spoke in the House of Lords in support of an appeal for Greek relief. This appeal was successful: on the same day, Dalton made the announcement about the cargo of British wheat from Egypt. Vera Brittain then suggested to Bishop Bell that he establish a weightier group of churchmen, academics, and public figures than the pacifists could muster, to lead protest against British policy on relief and the blockade.

On 29 May 1942, the creation of a national Famine Relief Committee was publicly announced. The active spirit behind what was to become a nation-wide campaign was the redoubtable Edith Pye, a Quaker then in her late sixties. Pye had devoted a long professional life ‘to the margins of chaos’, to refugees and the war-torn in countries all over the world, through the relief services of the Society of Friends. As honorary secretary of the Famine Relief Committee, she was its chief strategist and organiser. Like Vera Brittain, Edith Pye devoted herself to dispelling British indifference towards hungry women and children in occupied countries.

Apart from its Chairman, Bishop Bell, the Committee boasted three Bishops and a number of other leading clerics. Members included Gilbert Murray, the Master of Balliol, the Master of Selwyn, Julian Huxley, Douglas Woodruff, editor of the Catholic journal The Tablet, and other figures whose titles and honorifics placed them squarely in establishment circles. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Moderator of the Free Church Council, and the Chief Rabbi, all lent public support.

The Famine Relief Committee’s aims were very carefully phrased. ‘Objects: To obtain authentic information as to food conditions in German-controlled or invaded countries; to promote schemes for the sending of food, vitamins and medical aid into such countries, wherever control is possible, in co-operation with existing organisations.’ The Committee also opened a Famine Relief Fund, to pay for such relief ‘as soon as permission is obtained to use it’. In 1942, there was no way to spend such money because that, too, would breach the blockade.

Throughout the summer of 1942, Edith Pye began to develop a network of support committees all over Britain. She organised speakers
for meetings, and attended many in person. On 20 July she travelled to Oxford for a gathering at the Friends’ Meeting House, prompting a handful of citizens led by the Rev. T.R. Milford, Vicar of the University Church, to become actively concerned. The same pattern was repeated in towns throughout the country.

Information about the condition of people in occupied Europe was difficult to come by. What little there was came from refugees or those who managed to get reports through to friends and relatives. Occasional short despatches from newspaper correspondents based in Ankara, Cairo, Geneva, Stockholm and other neutral capitals were printed, notably in *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, both of which tended to be strongly sympathetic towards relief. Other reports were circulated by governments-in-exile or Red Cross representatives in London. But full statistics, which could only have been collected and provided by the German-controlled authorities, were unobtainable.

The lack of information and the question marks which hovered over the accuracy of many reports – particularly if circulated by anyone with well-known pacifist leanings – dogged the efforts of the Famine Relief Committee and the food campaign groups throughout the next 18 months. The lack of pictures and graphic accounts and the shortage of evidence made it very easy for the government to advance the virtues of the blockade while omitting to dwell on its negative aspects. For these reasons Edith Pye did her best to cull from all sources information of unimpeachable veracity and circulate it as dispassionately as possible.

Political overtones were unavoidable. To suggest, however circumspectly, that Britain’s war policy was causing starvation among women and children in friendly countries was, at best, unpatriotic; their sufferings were essentially Nazi-induced. The question remained whether Nazi responsibility exonerated Britain’s refusal to allow any help to be sent. Gilbert Murray believed passionately that it did not, and he also believed that assistance to the enemy was unproven: ‘Does all this famine and misery injure the Germans? On the contrary, it helps them,’ he wrote. His case: decent rations were given to industrial workers, therefore the able-bodied co-operated with their conqueror; the rest – children, the sick, the elderly and infirm – were expendable.

The problem faced by those who took such a line was that all positions which were equivocal about total war, even on moral grounds, were out of tune with the times. George Bell, who vigorously protested against both the blockade and mass civilian bombing, was expected to become Archbishop of Canterbury until he publicly opposed the evil of all-out war. Sentiments about our membership of ‘one humanity’, the idea of a new world order based on common understanding between peoples, had become unpopular to a degree unthinkable a few years
earlier. Their advocates, so recently in the philosophical mainstream, now needed courage to stand up for their principles against the blacker side of the bulldog spirit Churchill had so successfully conjured among his compatriots.

Although there was no hard data on hunger from Europe, the level of official rations was known. This in itself provided some benchmark of shortage, even though entitlement – as in Greece – did not necessarily mean that the rations were available. The content of rations and the calorific needs of children and mothers were a constant focus of enquiry.

According to the Ministry of Economic Warfare, in spring 1942, rations were lowest in Norway, Belgium, Poland, and Greece. In Poland, the food allowance was not much higher than in Greece: per week, 39 ounces of bread, one-and-a-half ounces of meat and one ounce of fat; and rations were not evenly distributed, with native Germans receiving more than Poles, and Jews receiving almost nothing. But Poland could not be supplied by neutral shipping from the sea. Belgium and Norway could.

Belgium was the most likely next candidate for special status. Like Greece, Belgium never fed itself in normal times, depending on imports for up to 70 per cent of food supplies. Since Herbert Hoover’s first proposal in May 1940, efforts had been made to open up the blockade for Belgium, as had been done in the first World War. Hoover never stopped trying: a third proposal was turned down in January 1941. Thereafter, the Belgian government in London put forward its own proposal for ‘controlled relief’.

Professor Emile Cammaerts, a Belgian intellectual living in London, campaigned persistently on behalf of his compatriots. He described the situation, in The Tablet on 1 August 1942. ‘Only bread and sugar can be purchased regularly at the fixed price. Potatoes have been unobtainable after the exhaustion of last year’s crop in April. The black market only supplies the wealthy, about five per cent of the population, and this last resource is waning fast. The vast majority are reduced to a diet providing 900 calories.’

The situation of children was poor. ‘The mortality among children under six has trebled in the large hospitals. There is a fall of 80 per cent in the growth rate of the young. Attendance at school has considerably decreased. ... In hospitals and sanitaria, the number of cases of tuberculosis has trebled. ... The only efficient remedy is a healthy diet and doctors stand helpless, since they cannot obtain the means of curing their patients.’

By July 1942, the Famine Relief Committee, with eminent nutritional
and medical advice, had developed a scheme for 'controlled food relief' for children, mothers, and the sick in Belgium and Greece. In the case of Greece, the scheme was intended to supplement the existing imports; no relaxation of the blockade for large-scale food imports into any other country was proposed. Bishop Bell went to see Lord Selborne, now Minister of Economic Warfare, and Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary. He was told that no further exceptions to the blockade were likely to be admitted. Undaunted, the Committee set out its proposal in a pamphlet called 'Hunger in Europe' in October 1942. Every care was taken not to criticise government policy. Indeed, the Committee applauded the existing relaxation in the blockade, and argued that this experience could be built upon for a modest, medicinal, injection of dried milk and vitamins which could have no impact on the German war effort.

An amount of 2,000 tons a month for a daily nutritional 'tonic' for six million recipients in Greece and Belgium would be sent from the US, paid for by the countries concerned, and shipped in neutral vessels. Distribution would be supervised by International Red Cross personnel, and if any diversion occurred, the pipeline could be instantly closed. All the British needed to give was navicerts – permission to pass the blockade.

The Famine Relief Committee believed that existing evidence showed that the practical obstacles of controlling relief could be overcome. Not only was there the Red Cross operation in Greece, but the American Friends' Service Committee were still running a relief programme in southern France. From neither was there evidence that feeding schemes were disrupted by the Germans, or were made the pretext for a reduction in rations. The Committee also believed the moral case for trying to help was unanswerable. On 15 October 1942, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, addressed the Upper House of the Convocation: 'It is intolerable that Christian people should be forced to acquiesce in the slow starvation of their fellows, and particularly of children and nursing or expectant mothers. ... Neither can we justify, from a purely humanitarian point of view, the mental and physical mutilation of a whole generation of European peoples. True peace will be harder to win if this is allowed, and many Christians will feel impelled to do their utmost to prevent it.'

In November 1942, under pressure from Britain, the American Friends’ Service Committee feeding scheme for 100,000 seriously malnourished children in southern France found its sources of supply closed off. Its Director, Howard Kershner, visited London to protest. He argued for controlled relief in terms diametrically opposed to those employed by Churchill against it in August 1940. A starving people did not rise against their oppressor; on the contrary, their predicament
reinforced their powerlessness. He put it strongly: 'The proud boast of the Nazis that they are a superior race is coming true. Those that have enough to eat are indeed superior to the tuberculosis-ridden, undersized, misshapen bodies of the starving inhabitants of the occupied countries.'

Kershner undertook public meetings and newspaper interviews to boost the cause of food relief. He also did the rounds of government offices and representatives of the occupied countries. The latter were all in favour; but the former, however sympathetic some might privately feel, were obdurate. Kershner was disappointed: 'I won all the arguments but I certainly lost the decision.' He went on to Washington in February 1943 to campaign from there alongside Hoover and others, believing that US pressure on Britain was the only way to obtain a change. In time the 'Kershner Plan' for limited relief became well-known in the US, and his appeal to American citizens began to bear fruit.

Meanwhile, Edith Pye was succeeding in building up a network of support in Britain. By October 1942, there were over 100 groups on the list of correspondents for her newsletter. The Derby Food Relief Committee had held a Greek Relief Week, with special church services, entertainments, and a flag-day, and raised £5,000 against the day when a way could be found to send the money on. Gradually, public opinion was beginning to stir.

On 5 October 1942, a support group for the Famine Relief Committee was formed in Oxford. At the invitation of the Rev. T.R. Milford, those who had expressed concern about starvation in Europe at Edith Pye's visit on 20 July met in the Old Library of St. Mary-the-Virgin, and constituted themselves the 'Oxford Committee for Famine Relief'.

Gilbert Murray, who lived just outside Oxford and had been Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford until his retirement in 1936, was one of their number. Murray's links with the Greek Royal Family in London, as well as his membership of Bishop Bell's Committee, meant that he was particularly well-informed. Another present was a colleague of his in the Oxford branch of the League of Nations Union, Nowell Smith. The Friends were also represented; Dr. Henry Gillett, a well-known Oxford figure, was a strong supporter. Other founder members whose relationship lasted over many years were Dr. Leo Liepmann, a refugee from Nazi Germany, and Sir Alan Pim, ex-Indian Civil Service, who became Honorary Treasurer.

Murray described the food situation in occupied countries, and explained to the group how difficult it was to advocate relief without invalidating the policy of blockade. The fourth minute of the meeting,
entered in a school notebook, reads: ‘Several speakers urged caution in planning effort lest controversy be aroused.’ Whatever light years of purpose and organisational effort separate this nucleus of well-meaning citizens from the charity which much later emerged, engagement with political controversy is stamped in Oxfam’s genes.

Milford’s meeting in the Old Library of his church, mindful of the black-out and other exigencies of war-time Britain, did discuss what they could do immediately to relieve the suffering of those infinitely worse off in Europe. They talked of raising money to spend on supplies for famine victims. But at this point the Famine Relief Committee in London had not been able to come up with any way of spending donations on food relief. It had not been able to obtain permission to transfer funds outside the sterling area, to contribute to operations being run by the Swedish, Swiss, and International Red Cross. Pressing for a government change of heart on the hermetic seal of the blockade, an exclusively political activity, was still the only avenue for effort.

During the next few months the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief did some modest lobbying. A letter to the press was organised, signed by heads of various colleges and distinguished academics. So were two meetings: in late November the Greek Ambassador’s son addressed an Oxford audience about the famine, and in early February 1943, Emile Cammaerts spoke at a public meeting held at New College presided over by the Bishop of Oxford. A shopkeeper in Queen Street made available some space in his window for a display of photos from Greece. A pamphlet put out by Edith Pye was sent to all Oxford churches with a request that they commend controlled food relief as a subject for prayer. Milford wrote to the Minister of Economic Warfare, and received the standard negative reply.

In spring 1943, when the Committee was running out of steam, a letter was received from Dr. Cawadias, President of the Greek Red Cross ‘in Foreign Countries’, based in London. It was now possible for people in Britain to support the International Red Cross relief operation via this route. Edith Pye encouraged Cawadias to make his own connections with local Committees; it was her policy from the outset that Committees should act independently rather than be co-ordinated under a central umbrella.

Oxford, with its intellectual connections both to Greece and to liberal dissent, was a natural target for Dr. Cawadias’ appeal. His request that the Oxford Committee raise funds for famine relief in Greece had the effect of galvanising the Committee. Or rather, it galvanised one very special member: Cecil Jackson-Cole.

This eccentric philanthropist had decided to take up the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief as the forum in which he would find expression
for his particular sense of mission. If he had not done so, the Committee
would probably have sunk without a trace, if not in 1943 or 1944, then
certainly after the immediate postwar period. Jackson-Cole originally
heard of its formation from Quaker contacts in London, and offered his
services as its Honorary Secretary in December 1942. He brought to it a
businessman's zeal to succeed and a Christian humanitarian's zeal to do
good. A political pressure campaign adorned with the signatures of
prominent liberals was not enough for him. People in Europe were
praying for food and he wanted to help put food in front of them.

Jackson-Cole had been born in the East End of London at the turn of
the century, and he certainly knew what hardship felt like. At 13, he left
school, and at 19 he bought his father out of his flat-letting and
furnishing business. He was a hard worker and consummate trader, and
drove himself forward relentlessly - so relentlessly that in his thirties his
health collapsed. He spent most of the next two years in bed, a time of
inactivity which caused him to think deeply of God's purpose in his life,
and how his ability to make money could be harnessed to help the
helpless. He sought a new combination of business and charitable
principle, something akin to Quaker good works. He was himself not a
Friend, although he was powerfully influenced by the Quaker spirit.

It was purely fortuitous that Jackson-Cole surfaced from his illness
living on Boar's Hill, opposite the gates of Gilbert Murray's large house,
and that it was the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief which supplied
his need for a vehicle in which to put his ideas to the test. On Jackson-
Cole's initiative the Committee was registered as a charity in March 1943
under the War Charities Act and began to appeal for funds. This
cantankerous yet self-effacing figure in a crumpled suit did not always
elicit more than pained forbearance from some of the more conventional
types on the Oxford Committee. He also expected those he employed in
his business to go house-to-house canvassing for the Committee at his
whim. But no-one could be other than impressed by his results, both
commercial and charitable.

In the first place, financial support for a Greek Famine Relief Appeal
was sought from members of the University. Over the summer months,
this appeal raised more than £3,000, which was promptly despatched to
the Greek Red Cross in London.

Jackson-Cole now proposed to extend the Appeal to the city. Milford
gave him the go-ahead. Following the pattern of other recent successful
war-time charity drives, Jackson-Cole opted for a special week of
fundraising in Oxford to take place during mid-October. He was an
excellent organiser, and recruited the necessary dignitaries for
ceremonies and endorsements, and an army of volunteers to run events,
address envelopes, and hold collections. The Mayor, the Sheriff, the Vice-
Chancellor, the Editor of the *Oxford Mail*, local churches and educational associations, Lady Beveridge, Frank Pakenham, the Warden of All Souls, leading department stores, Quintin Hogg MP, the Presidents of the District Trades Council and the Chamber of Trade, lent their names, their energies, or both. It was a remarkable achievement for a cause not widely known and a committee almost no-one had previously heard of.

A gift shop on the most conspicuous corner of the city's shopping area managed to raise £3,000 in 11 days. The opening event of the week saw the Mayor officiating and Gilbert Murray introducing the Greek Ambassador. There were lunch-time concerts, a variety show in the Town Hall, an evening of Greek folksongs and dance performed by children in national costume, talks on Greek history and lantern-slide shows, and a celebration in St. Mary-the-Virgin by the Archbishop of Thyateria of the Holy Liturgy according to the Greek Orthodox rite. Even Vera Brittain came down to Oxford, to speak out for controlled relief in tones which Milford found a little too contentious.

Above all, there were repeated appeals for churches, groups and individuals to donate. Every few days, Jackson-Cole advertised a list of donors in the Oxford press: even those who had contributed two shillings were fastidiously enumerated. When all the donations were counted, £12,700 had been raised. Dr. Cawadias came down from London for a ceremony at which Gilbert Murray presented the cheque. Jackson-Cole was delighted with the results, crediting Oxford's 'altruistic spirit'. The effect on him was profound; he had sought and found his own path of missionary endeavour.

He had done something else. He had begun to put the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief on the philanthropic map.

Throughout 1943, as the tide of war turned and the German armies were pushed increasingly onto the defensive, conditions in occupied Europe deteriorated.

Although the death rate in Greece had dropped, it still hovered at horrendous levels. In the first two weeks of October, there were 500 hunger deaths in Athens. The weakening effect of persistent under-nutrition allowed epidemics of malaria, typhus and diphtheria to play havoc. Relief stations were reasonably organised over most of the country; but the Swedish ships brought in just over a quarter of what was needed and very few protective foods for children. As Dr. Cawadias pointed out: 'Babies cannot live on wheat alone.' Most of the newborn perished. Thousands of other small children, whose parents were in detention or dead, appeared at the soup kitchens on their own, homeless and uncared for.
From other parts of Europe, the picture was almost equally grim. Serbia reported 400,000 orphans and there were 20,000 cases of typhus in Sarajevo. In France, the basic ration was down to 884 calories, with extra distribution bringing it to 1,100. In Belgium, the Germans continued to feed workers adequately, but women and children had to survive on 900 calories, one-third of pre-war consumption. Emile Cammaerts continued to write and campaign: 'People used their savings in the first two years, but by 1943 they had nothing left and the years of privation are telling.' One-third of children under 18 were tubercular; in some cities, 80 per cent had rickets from vitamin D deficiency.

By mid-1943, Edith Pye could report that the groundswell of support for 'controlled relief' was growing. Famine Relief Committees had been set up in 109 localities, many chaired by the Mayor, the Bishop, or some other local figure. Most were in the north, and pacifists and Friends played leading roles. Another 78 organisations had lent Bishop Bell's Committee their public support, among them the British Red Cross and the British Council of Churches.

Press coverage had been generous; 20 petitions had been delivered to MPs. The Committee now had a Council of Supporters, a Medical Committee and a Political Committee. The Archbishop of Canterbury had addressed a special meeting in the House of Commons, as had M. Hubert Pierlot, Prime Minister of Belgium. There had been two Parliamentary debates, with MPs thoroughly briefed by the Food Campaign and the Famine Relief Committee. But still the government refused to budge.

The Committee did not change its proposal: it still sought monthly cargoes of 2,000 tons of dried milk and vitamins for Greece and Belgium only. The case in international law was based on the two countries' normal reliance on imports. Vera Brittain put it best: 'We all know that the Nazis have plundered the occupied countries but even they cannot remove food which never went there. There appears to be no dictum of international law which requires an occupying power to make good the shortages resulting from a blockade imposed by its enemy.' The case for relief had on its side the continued lack of any evidence of German diversion of food relief in Greece. Dingle Foot admitted this while insisting that the operation still helped the Germans and could not be emulated elsewhere.

Harold Nicholson MP, speaking in an adjournment debate called on 27 October 1943 by Stokes, the tenacious Member for Ipswich, echoed the views of many when he described the government's counter arguments to relief proposals as utterly insubstantial. He had found himself deeply embarrassed when, in Stockholm, he tried to articulate the British government's opposition to a plan to send Belgium a modest
amount of food and medicine in sealed trains from Lisbon. 'I racked my brains to think of the arguments Ministers have in the past given me, hoping I would find in them some armour-piercing javelins which would confound my Swedish critics. I searched, and what did I find in the palm of my hand? Not a javelin, not even a pointed dart, but just a handful of dust. I had not come to Sweden to throw dust in the face of the Swedish Red Cross.'

With a growing body of public and parliamentary opinion moving its way, the Famine Relief Committee held a delegate conference on 3 January 1944 at Caxton Hall in London. Over 120 delegates came from support groups all over the British Isles. Famine Relief Committees in 82 towns and districts were represented. Among the delegates were a number of Bishops and leading churchmen, as well as Mayors, Councillors, and local notables. The representative of Leeds FRC was a certain H. Leslie Kirkley.

While they listened to speakers from the stricken countries - Cawadias, Cammaerts, and a representative of the Free French - a deputation went simultaneously to see Lord Selbourne, Minister of Economic Warfare. The Bishop of Wakefield led the deputation, which included representatives of many of the strongest local Famine Relief Committees: Birmingham, Derby, Manchester and Salford, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Swansea, Peterborough, and Coventry, as well as Professor James Young, Vice-Chairman of the FRC Medical Committee, Hugh Lyon, Headmaster of Rugby School, the Master of Selwyn from Cambridge, and Dr. Henry Gillett from Oxford.

The deputation came back to the conference to report on the outcome of their meeting. Keen frustration was felt at having yet again to listen to the Minister’s familiar recitation of what had become a tired, tattered, and defensive stance. His manner indicated that even he did not agree with it. Martin Parr, Chairman of the conference, closed the proceedings on as upbeat a note as he could manage: the discovery that the Minister of Economic Warfare had no secret weapon up his sleeve to counter their case. ‘If there had been some secret weapon he would have let it off on this occasion. He has not got one, and I am more convinced than I was yesterday that our right policy is to go on hammering away until the British public can convince sufficient Members of Parliament that something has got to be done.’

An announcement came some days later that the amount of food for Greece was to be significantly increased. On the basis of a gift of 20,000 tons of wheat from the Argentine, food deliveries gradually rose to 32,000 tons per month. When Antony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, went to Athens after the liberation in October and saw the situation for himself, supplies were finally increased to 60,000 tons a month.
For Belgium, nothing. The only concession was Vitamin D, a shortage of which was afflicting Belgian children with rickets. Vitamin D was removed from the contraband list in spring 1944, and the South African Red Cross began to send in supplies. Cases of advanced tuberculosis had reached 109,500; but for TB, the antidote was a good diet, and no food went in.

On 16 February 1944 good news came from across the Atlantic. The US Senate approved a resolution of its Foreign Relations Sub-Committee calling for the US, British, Swedish and Swiss governments to formulate a relief scheme for Belgium, Norway, Poland, Netherlands, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. This, surely, must embarrass Whitehall. All statements in the House of Commons had referred to the blockade policy as that of both the British and US governments; this common front – in which the British bulldog had always barked the louder – was beginning to split. US support for controlled relief was now used with good effect in Famine Relief Committees' local campaigns.

Edith Pye's next newsletter repeated the need to keep up the pressure on local MPs. She was a clever lobby strategist, advising Committees first to gain evidence of widespread local support before petitioning Westminster. A series of deputations and Parliamentary questions would, she believed, prove more effective than one co-ordinated onslaught.

On 17 January 1944, Henry Gillett and Leo Liepmann, back from the Famine Relief Conference in Caxton Hall, described the day's disappointing results to their colleagues on the Oxford Committee. In an effort to put pressure on the Member for Oxford City, Milford had already paid a visit to an unresponsive Quintin Hogg. Hogg stuck to the line: 'the government has secret information about how this would help the Germans', which by this stage had little credibility. It was agreed that a petition should be got up: this might be somewhat more persuasive than Milford's call to conscience.

Jackson-Cole opened the bid for signatures in the correspondence columns of the Oxford Times. 'Oxford people have already subscribed generously for Greece,' he wrote. 'In the case of Belgium it is not money which is needed. Belgium wants to be given the right to buy their own supplies from their own money and transport them in their own ship from the USA for their starving children. The US is openly in favour, but our own government is not.' He asked those in favour to send a postcard to the Committee to that effect. By June, Jackson-Cole had collected over 7,000 signatures. Even Quintin Hogg was impressed.

On 7 July 1944 a deputation from Oxford went up to London to visit Dingle Foot at the Ministry of Economic Warfare. Hogg introduced the
members, while careful to disassociate himself from their cause. Milford was present, together with the Chairman of the Oxford Trades Council, the President of the Oxford Rotarians, and two members of the University. Familiar arguments were produced – the thin end of the wedge argument, the argument that any relief helped the German war effort; but Foot did admit ‘the intolerable dilemma of total war’. The Committee was not best pleased with this response, but was at a loss about what to do next.

Events overtook the Oxford Committee and others. As summer gave way to autumn, the issue of breaching the blockade to send in relief became out-dated. In September 1944, Paris was liberated. Greece and Belgium were close to freedom. Although the worst fears of famine on the continent turned out not to be realised, the dimensions of relief needs in the formerly occupied countries were enormous. Churchill had promised that the Allies – now called the ‘United Nations’ – would organise food for civilians the minute an area was liberated. The instrument for so doing, and for trying to put ruined economies and infrastructures back on their feet, had been launched in November 1943. This was the first experiment in post-war co-operation between the nations: UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Voluntary organisations – Friends’ Relief Service, the Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, and many others – were to play an important part in the post-war relief operations alongside UNRRA and under its umbrella. There were now, therefore, a variety of channels through which aid could be given to help relieve what was to be two more years of bitter hardship throughout continental Europe. But to ship in and distribute food was a task of such monumental size that it was left to governments and UNRRA. In the new circumstances the Famine Relief Committee in Brook Street, London, gradually wound itself down and handed its assets over to the Friends’ Relief Service: the cause that had brought it into being had thankfully disappeared.

Many of the support committees out in the provinces swiftly followed suit. Others, such as those in Manchester and Salford, Huddersfield and quite a few others, felt that the misery now exposed in Europe demanded their efforts as never before. In February 1945, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief closed down its Greek Relief Fund, with the proceeds standing at £13,517 14s 10d. At the same time, it decided by resolution to enlarge the objects of charity ‘to the relief of suffering in consequence of the war’. A new phase was about to begin.

Over a period of nearly two years, and with the active support of senior churchmen and eminent individuals in all walks of public life, the
Famine Relief Committees' campaign to breach the blockade for humanitarian relief was a failure. Whatever they may have achieved in support of the Red Cross operation in Greece, not one navicert for one meagre cargo of milk and nutritional supplements was ever granted for Belgium or elsewhere. It is very doubtful that the British government's dogged refusal to allow aid through did anything to shorten the war. The iron-clad nature of the blockade was entrenched as an article of war-policy faith, and no quarter – except for Greece – was to be given. Many who officially defended it, especially towards the end when Germany was collapsing and conditions across the continent were rapidly deteriorating, found it upsetting to have to do so.

Vera Brittain drew comfort from the ashes of defeat. She wrote in late 1944 that, for all its disappointments and the lives lost that might have been saved, the campaign had been worth it. At a time of despair for those entering their fourth, fifth, even sixth, winter of occupation, the campaign offered moral encouragement and a sense of solidarity: 'The concern of a few bore witness to the oneness of humanity.'

The war-time famine relief campaign, quickly forgotten in the turmoil of the post-war scene, left one other important legacy: Oxfam.
The war and its aftermath: 1942-1959

WINNING THE PEACE:
THE MORAL AFTERMATH OF WAR

Few bonfires were lit in Britain on 8 May 1946, the first anniversary of VE (Victory in Europe) Day. A year after the end of the war, the mood was far from festive. Two months later, bread rationing was introduced. Even at the hardest time of the war when bread was rationed everywhere else in Europe, it was Britain's boast that this step had never been necessary. A storm of protest arose from shortage-weary housewives. But however unwelcome, the 'bread unit' was to be a part of their lives for the next two years.

Far from ushering in an era of 'food, freedom and peace', the end of the war had brought prolonged hardship and, across Europe, continuing upheaval. In Britain, 'austerity' was to become the watchword of the next few years. But Britain's austerity was well-heeled compared to others.

In the countries UNRRA (the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was supplying - Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia - food had only reached 60 per cent of pre-war levels by mid-1946. The long disruption of farming, trading, and factory life had reduced the supply of basic necessities - coal, cloth, thread, leather, wool, paper, wood, fruit, vegetables, cows, chickens, pots, pans - to the point of universal scarcity.

Everywhere, fuel was desperately short during those bleak post-war winters. The bitterness of the continental climate exacerbated hardship in Central Europe. Lack of warm clothes and bedding, shoes disintegrating from years of wear, made the cold and wet yet harder to bear, specially for those living in bombed and burned-out dwellings. Holland endured a 'famine winter' in 1944-45, and there was much sympathy in Britain. The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief was one of many groups to run clothing appeals in spring 1945, moved by the condition of the Dutch people at liberation.

But nowhere was need more severe than in Germany. Attitudes towards this need were perceived by some as a test of the civilisation the war had been fought to retain. A world informed by crude, nationalist antagonism could not be a safe world. It could only be a world in which
the moral cause – the only possible justification for such a war – had been betrayed, a war whose battles were won but whose peace was lost. The need now was to build bridges with hearts and minds in a Europe grateful to be free, but liberated at terrible cost to its physical, economic, and spiritual fabric.

Germany was now divided into four parts, administered separately by the British, French, Russians, and Americans. The Allies had determined on Germany’s unconditional surrender, with all its implications of annihilating destruction and humiliation. They had brought Germany and the German people to their knees, and as victors they were now obliged to shoulder the responsibilities of occupation in a blasted land. Among these was the responsibility to feed, clothe, and care for civilians; a principle they had insisted upon when Germany was itself an occupying power.

But there were serious problems in contending with the extraordinary destruction and chaos wrought by war until the bitter end. Bombing had created widespread homelessness. Over 12 million people displaced during the war needed repatriation. The re-drawing of boundaries in the East led to a spate of expulsions in the second half of 1945, bringing an influx of millions of refugees westwards.

Meanwhile, major German wheat-growing lands had been ceded to Poland, and industrial plant in Germany itself was being deliberately wrecked and jobs closed down as a part of ‘denazification’. It was impossible for the area administered by the British, the country’s urban and industrial heartland, to feed itself. On top of this, there was a serious shortage of food grains worldwide and the US was reluctant to export its surplus.

By the time bread rationing was introduced in Britain – so that cargoes of wheat on the high seas could be diverted to Germany – the government had decided it had no option but to import some food into the part of Germany for which it was responsible. At the end of June 1946, people in Hamburg were losing weight at an average of one kilo a week. The Economist wrote: ‘The threat of starvation in the Ruhr – of real starvation with men, women and children dying of hunger in their thousands – has been hanging over the world for so long that many people have ceased to take it seriously.’ This journal and others had been sounding the alarm for months.

UNRRA’s Food Committee had laid down that the minimum for a healthy diet was 2,650 calories a day. In March 1946, rations in the British Zone had been reduced from 1,500 calories a day to 1,014. For many townspeople, even this minimum was not available. The idea that most could somehow make up their food needs adequately from the black market or elsewhere did not hold up to inspection. The amount they
were getting, as *The Economist* and others pointed out, was the amount provided in Belsen up to a few weeks before the final collapse.

The comparison was not casually made. In Britain at this time, the ration was 2,800 calories – nearly 95 per cent of pre-war food consumption levels – and the British were better fed than other Europeans. But there was an ugly mood in the country. People were not only disgruntled by shortage, queuing, and the endless constraining regulations, but still influenced by the hatred whipped up against the foe by war-time propaganda. The revelations of concentration camp atrocities and the Nuremberg trials only hardened anti-German feeling.

Xenophobia was fanned by the popular press which demanded a rise in rations on the grounds of the nutritional damage being done to British health. People tired of plain fare and limited menus willingly believed this. As a result there was great resistance by Attlee’s government to any action which could remotely be seen as removing a morsel of food off a British plate and putting it into a German mouth. Sir Stafford Cripps, austerity’s father figure, talked of there being no question of ‘depriving John to help Hans or Gretel’. Many felt that indefinite helpings of humble pie were the only way to quench the German instinct for aggression.

On 3 March 1946, a few days before German rations in the British Zone were reduced to a third of British rations, George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, gave a well-publicised sermon with a text from Romans: ‘If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink ... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.’

Another voice, the most resonant in this cause, was that of Victor Gollancz, the left-wing publisher and forceful polemicist: ‘The plain fact is that ... we are starving the German people. And we are starving them, not deliberately in the sense that we definitely want them to die, but wilfully in the sense that we prefer their death to our own inconvenience.’

For the next two and a half years, many of those who throughout the war held fast to their faith in ‘one humanity’ gave their energies to the relief of suffering in Europe, irrespective of nationality. Their keynote was reconciliation, not vengeance. Among them were many of the same people who had opposed the iron-clad blockade against relief from 1942 until the liberation. One of the active local groups was the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.

Victor Gollancz’ campaign to ‘Save Europe Now’ began in September 1945. In a letter published in the *Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle*, and the *Daily Herald*, jointly signed by Bishop Bell, Gilbert Murray,
Bertrand Russell and others, he described the appalling misery in Berlin and wrote: 'It is not in accordance with the traditions of this country to allow children – even the children of ex-enemies – to starve.' Gollancz, who was Jewish and had spoken out during the war against the concentration camps and Nazi terrors, could hardly be accused of softness towards the Germans. He appealed to people to send him a postcard if they agreed to forego some of their own ration entitlement so that 'men, women and children of whatever nationality may be saved from intolerable suffering'.

He received over 75,000 postcards. Here was Gollancz' ammunition: he could show the government that there was strong popular disfavour with an attitude of vindictiveness towards the vanquished. In early November, a 'Save Europe Now' delegation laid a series of proposals before the Minister of Food. They suggested that people in Britain be allowed to make voluntary contributions to help the needy in Germany through a national scheme for giving up ration points, and that the ban on sending food parcels to Germany be lifted. The Minister, Sir Ben Smith, was anti-German and unenthusiastic, but agreed to have his department examine these ideas.

Before Gollancz had received any reply, he was horrified by an announcement that British rations would be increased at Christmas. Immediately, he rushed out a booklet – 'Is It Nothing to You?' showing photos of starving German children – and planned a mass meeting in the Albert Hall. By the time it took place, Smith had turned down all proposals except one: the Ministry agreed to sell – not donate – £100,000 worth of food to British relief agencies acting under the umbrella of the Council of British Relief Societies Abroad (COBSRA).

On 26 November 1945, the Albert Hall was packed to overflowing. The Archbishop of York took the chair, and among the speakers were MPs Dick Stokes, Michael Foot, Bob Boothby, and Sir Arthur Salter, as well as Victor Gollancz himself. Gollancz set about the government's position with his verbal truncheon, attacking Smith's refusal to let anyone voluntarily give up anything for relief purposes. 'This is intolerable. We are free citizens of a free country and ... how we balance our obligation to ourselves against our obligation to our neighbours is a matter for our own conscience.'

The demand to be allowed to give relief for Europe, especially for Germany, had become a moral crusade.

That same day, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief met and discussed the issues to be brought before the Albert Hall rally. They were in no doubt where they stood on 'Save Europe Now': in favour.
In September, they had passed a resolution supporting voluntary food relief. They wanted people to be able to surrender food points from their ration books at Food Offices, on the understanding that the government would send equivalent supplies to help those ‘most in need’ on the continent. They were willing to run depots in Oxford either for food point surrender, or – if this was refused – for food collection. They had sent their resolution to Gollancz’ London headquarters, and circulated it locally.

Now they were told that all such proposals had been turned down. Meanwhile children in Germany were starving. ‘Save Europe Now’ was about to launch a £100,000 fund to buy the food offered by the Ministry for relief distribution via COBSRA, whose members included the Red Cross, Save the Children, the Friends’ Relief Service, the Salvation Army, and Catholic and Jewish relief organisations.

The Committee wanted to run an appeal in Oxford, but were not sure of its advisability. So before going ahead they decided to seek the advice of Sir Arthur Salter, MP for Oxford University. Salter, who had been prominent in international relief after the first World War and spent the second negotiating supplies in Washington, was knowledgeable about food stocks and shipping. He had spoken out strongly in the House of Commons, claiming that if millions froze and starved in Europe during the winter it could not be excused by overall shortages either of food or transport worldwide.

Salter outlined his understanding of the position to key members of the Oxford Committee on 2 December. His immediate concern was to have military reserves of food released, and to mobilise imports from the US, and he was calling for a White Paper on European requirements. He advised the Committee in favour of supporting the COBSRA relief agencies; their work in Europe could, he said, in no way let the authorities off the hook from the main responsibility of providing rations. In view of sensitivities, he felt that there was no particular need to emphasise Germany.

After this reassurance, the Committee went ahead forcefully. The appeal was to be mounted for ‘Europe’; funds would be spent on food distributed by the Friends’ Relief Service ‘wherever needs are greatest’. Milford wrote to the Oxford Times on 21 December: ‘Many people this Christmas will be troubled in conscience by the knowledge that winter in Europe means cold, hunger, misery and death.’ He explained that the voluntary surrender of food points had been refused by the government, and that Sir Arthur Salter and others were still urging ‘large-scale action’. Meanwhile: The Friends are working in the liberated countries; need is however very acute in certain parts of the defeated countries also. ... Eventually, it is hoped, supplies will be directed where need is
greatest, without distinction of nationality. Personally, I am convinced this is the right principle, but those who wish may earmark their gifts “for liberated Europe only”.

Milford was a gentle, almost a saintly, figure. It was his voice that thus established on behalf of the Oxford Committee the principle of impartiality governing its aid; that relief should be given purely on the basis of need, without reference to nationality or religion. This principle governed the work of the Friends, and was also to be adopted by the new international humanitarian organisations set up within the United Nations family.

Sir Arthur Salter led a panel of MPs at a meeting held on 23 January 1946 in the Oxford Town Hall to launch ‘European Relief Week’. The Mayor spoke eloquently: ‘It may have been a necessity of war to bomb villages, bridges and factories, but peace entails responsibility and gives us the opportunity to relieve suffering wherever the need is greatest.’ The Rev. Henry Moxley, Congregationalist Minister in Summertown, was in charge of the appeal. Volunteers sent out an appeal letter signed by civic and university luminaries. The Oxford newspapers gave excellent support. Over the next weeks, as more and grimmer information about hunger in Europe appeared in the national press, the appeal gained momentum.

In February, the Ministry of Food finally admitted to a serious world shortage of wheat. The tone of government statements was, however: ‘We in Britain are comparatively lucky, so don’t complain’, rather than: ‘We in Britain may have to do more for others in need.’ Not all reactions in Oxford were positive towards the Committee’s appeal. A Hag Day was turned down by the Oxford City Council when four councillors refused to sanction a collection whose proceeds might feed the ex-enemy.

There was great ignorance about what serious food scarcity meant, both in its effect on an individual person and among a population at large. As Victor Gollancz complained, many people refused to believe in a problem of hunger unless those on the scene found streets full of wraith-like people collapsing and dying at their feet. Fifty years later, his words would still be valid.

Within two months the Oxford Committee raised £6,000. They channelled their support to the Friends’ Relief Service (FRS), the special war-time relief organisation set up by the British Quakers. FRS, as part of COBSRA, was also appealing for funds to buy food from the government. Its teams were based in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, and Poland. Altogether, ‘Save Europe Now’ raised £56,083; with the appeals by COBSRA members, the target of £100,000 was easily surpassed.

This was only a first stage of the campaign for European relief, a campaign which was to continue until Marshall Aid was introduced in
1948. By July 1946, several of the measures urged by crusaders in Westminster and Whitehall had been put into effect in the face of deepening disaster. But rations in the British Zone of Germany were still at starvation level: 1,014 calories amounted to two slices of bread a day spread thinly with margarine, a spoonful of porridge, and two potatoes – except that the potatoes were often unavailable.

The ban on sending food parcels abroad was still in force. But the installation of a new Minister of Food, John Strachey, gave Gollancz cause for optimism. In meetings at the Ministry, a parcels scheme was painstakingly worked out. Committees around the country were geared up to accept parcels and run depots. But the imposition of bread rationing cut the ground away. In so grave a national crisis, said the Minister, no food could be allowed to leave the country.

The battle for a better peace was far from won.

During the next few months, public pressure was kept up. Famine Relief Committees wrote to the press and to their MPs. But it took a six-week visit to the British Zone by Victor Gollancz, and a barrage of letters to The Times and other newspapers describing the realities of food supplies and German misery, to break down Attlee’s resistance.

Gollancz set off on his mission on 2 October 1946. Eighteen months after the end of the war, he found cities still in total ruin, families living in crowded cellars and squalid boltholes. In Hamburg, 100,000 people were suffering from ‘hunger oedema’. A bunker without light or air was used as a school for 800 children, many of whom had skin sores and protruding ribs beneath their shirts. They came to school without breakfast, and at 2.30pm were given their meal: half a litre of ‘biscuit’ soup with no bread. TB cases had multiplied by five, perhaps ten, times in Germany since 1939. Gollancz saw the effect on morale when the Salvation Army handed out a few sweets and goodies. How could the ban on parcels be justified? Gollancz railed in copious detail and forthright prose in every newspaper that would print him. Photos appeared of his bulky figure, heftily coated, in ruined buildings surrounded by skimpy children pathetically shod and clad.

Gollancz and the Minister fought out the issue in the correspondence columns of the News Chronicle. The newspaper’s mountainous postbag was two to one in Gollancz’ favour. On 25 November, the government gave in. Replying to MPs’ questions in the House of Commons, John Strachey announced that food parcels could now be sent. No-one should send more than one parcel a month; contents should be limited to 7lb, with no more than 2lb of any commodity, and only rationed foods and soap could be included. Although food parcels alone could only touch
the misery, this was an important moral victory, and it symbolised a spirit of goodwill.

The immediate problem was how to ship the thousands of parcels that poured into 'Save Europe Now' and depots set up around the country. The parcel post to Germany did not open for another six weeks, so 'Save Europe Now' had temporarily to take on this function, using private carriers. Over the next two months, in spite of snow, floods, and all the administrative difficulties at both ends, over 100,000 parcels of food were successfully delivered to Germany. For three weeks, the Air Ministry provided 1,000 lb of freight, free, every day. Those parcels not addressed to any specific individual were given to the churches for distribution to the neediest.

Famine and European Relief Committees up and down the country played an important part. In Oxford, premises above a toyshop were lent, volunteers were organised, and children from local schools spent their Saturday mornings wrapping up parcels of tinned soup, coffee and sugar. All packages were sent to a named German family, marked with the name of the sender. A well-known local figure, the Stationmaster, F.C.Price, sent a parcel to an opposite number in Berlin, railway inspector Albert Wurl-Rothweil. He received a touching letter of thanks: 'You would have been overjoyed if you had seen the shining eyes of my wife and children. At last we lived like human beings again, and hunger and worry vanished for a time from our faces. Dear Mr. Price, it tasted so good to us. We had not eaten such good things for so long.'

Food relief answered only one element of need. The winter of 1946-47 was one of the harshest on record, in Britain as well as in Europe. In February, icefields were reported off the Norfolk coast and on the continent railways were inoperable and vehicles froze in their tracks.

Fuel was still in short supply. So was clothing. On 6 January 1947, the Manchester Guardian reported: 'Hamburg has two needs of desperate urgency; hope, and immediate physical help in shoes and clothing. A ragged people may be able to endure hardship if they have hope. Hamburg today is cold, in rags, and hopeless.'

Since the end of the war, the Friends' Relief Service had been appealing for 'warm clothing, menswear, underclothing, overcoats, shoes and boots, napkins, and blankets in clean, mended condition'.

On 11 November 1946, the Mayor and the Sheriff of Oxford, Lord Lindsay the Master of Balliol, and two Reverends, Milford and Moxley, stood outside a modest shop premises owned by the Oxford and District Co-operative Society. A presentation was made of its key to the Mayor, who then declared open the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief's first
clothes collection depot. The European Relief Fund had raised £15,000 and the response to their clothing appeals was generous; they needed a proper address for receiving goods. In their borrowed premises, they set up a tiny office and took on a paid part-time organiser, Robert Castle. He organised publicity, while rota of helpers sorted, mended, and packaged clothes and shoes to send to the Friends in London.

By this time, the FRS clothing operation was well-established: on 11 January, their special newsletter, Clothing News, recorded that the 10,000th bale of garments was on its way to Europe. The provision of these clothes met real survival needs in a way difficult to picture today, when images of mass deprivation are almost always associated with people in tropical climates.

In Dortmund, 160 of the 1,737 children enrolled in a feeding scheme could not attend because they had no shoes. In Normandy, German prisoners of war were clearing mines off beaches in mid-winter, clad in rags. Thousands of children took daily turns to go to school, sharing one set of clothes and shoes with brothers or sisters. People went to work in unheated offices, shops, and factories through the blizzard, wearing threadbare summer garments. Mothers of newly-born infants sought despairingly for layettes and napkins. A Times leader observed at the height of the cold: 'It is better to hunger than freeze.'

By May 1947, the European Relief Appeal in Oxford had raised £20,000, and £8,000 worth – 800 sacks – of clothing had been forwarded to the FRS depot in London. The Friends expressed appreciation for 'a most remarkable success that far outshines the efforts of any other city in the country'. By this time, FRS had sent to Germany over 1,100 tons of food, clothing, and medical and other supplies since mid-1945.

The situation had still failed to improve significantly. On 10 May 1947, the Manchester Guardian reported a hunger strike by 150,000 people in Hamburg. In the Ruhr, food administration had collapsed and things were even worse. In the town of Wuppertal, the week's ration came to 627 calories a day. People were so busy scouring the countryside for food that offices and factories were empty. The lesson was clear: the Germans could not rebuild their economy if they did not have enough to eat. The crisis of austerity and hardship in Britain and Europe endlessly continued.

In November 1947, the Oxford Committee took up more permanent abode in a shop at 17 Broad Street, leased for £325 a year from the City Council. This original Oxfam Giftshop is still at 17 Broad Street today. Initially it was primarily a clothing receiving point and an office, although some gifts were accepted and sold. A part-time worker, Frank Buckingham, was recruited to help, and Committee members organised rota of volunteers. Through the intervention of Michael Rowntree,
Manager of the *Oxford Mail* and later a key Oxfam trustee, free transport for the clothing to London was provided by a weekly Rowntree's van. In the year up to February 1948, the Committee brought in clothing worth £25,000; funds raised for two years came to £26,000.

In the winter of 1947-48, the third winter after the war, misery again pervaded Europe. In tones weary with repetition, the *Manchester Guardian* repeated the stories of calories promised and not available in the British Zone of Germany: ‘Almost opposite the British Military Government headquarters in Dusseldorf the walls of the building are inscribed with the words: “Bizonesia Verhungert” (Bizonesia is starving). These writings are three weeks old but nobody has troubled to rub them out. In the Ruhr, the next food crisis is always just around the corner.’ Michael Foot wrote in the *Daily Herald* of Germany’s cry of hunger, and of ‘millions of people facing the imminent collapse of the whole fabric of society’.

Why was the agony so prolonged? One reason was the premature demise of UNRRA early in 1947. The joint effort of United Nations governments to expedite post-war relief and rehabilitation was an early casualty of the frost entering East-West relations. It was also symptomatic of US failure to grasp the depth of need and desolation on a continent in ruins. In spite of bitter protests from Norway and elsewhere, in the autumn of 1946 at the UNRRA Council meeting in Geneva, the US representative declared that ‘the gravy-train has gone round for the last time’. Desperate for a major US loan, the British government followed the US lead, and the UNRRA Council voted its programme of aid out of existence.

Until the Marshall Plan began to fuel a proper economic recovery, voluntary organisations, many working in close liaison with UNRRA, shouldered more responsibility for relief than had earlier been envisaged. Their work required, and won, support from fundraisers from all over the world on a continuing basis. ‘Save Europe Now’ carried on until 1948, as did the FRS teams, until such time as European recovery was assured. Not until the end of 1948, when governments' own welfare and social services had been rebuilt to the point where they could cope, was misery reduced to pockets.

In a valedictory on ‘Save Europe Now’, Peggy Duff, its chief organiser, recognised the modest scale of the effort in proportion to need, but recorded the following: ‘The value of these gifts and of this work has been tremendous because they have been to Europe a token in tangible form of the sympathy and human understanding which exists in Great Britain for suffering wherever it may be.’

A letter received by the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief from a refugee schoolmaster in the North Frisian Islands off the German coast
illustrates the point: 'When I returned with my daily load of dry heather everyone was up. That is rare, because for weeks now an icy east wind has been sweeping across the island and we stay in bed as long as possible, wearing the few clothes we possess or covering ourselves with them to keep ourselves warm. The rooms are never really warm, as only coal would be of use against this icy blast and that we have not got. Cabbage soup doesn't warm one's inside much either and few have enough winter clothing.

'I enter. The room looks quite different, all are up, all are talking at the same time, happy faces, bright eyes, children laugh and stare. I am just going to ask what has happened when my eyes fall on the table. Am I seeing aright? Things are lying there, lovely warm things, suits, clothes, underclothing, shoes. A little girl can't stop admiring the brightly coloured pullover which her mother has put on her. A white-bearded man over there has tears in his eyes as, with trembling hand, he strokes a woollen waistcoat.

'You unknown friends in England, you have brought warmth to our hearts. May the fire you have lit grow till it burns up everything that divides us.'

1948 marked the watershed in post-war relief. As Marshall Aid took effect and life in Europe began to hum again, organisations active in post-war relief began to close down their programmes or adjust to better times.

The FRS wound up its operations, passing on a much reduced programme to the Friends' Service Council, the Quakers' permanent body for overseas relief. Many of the Famine Relief Committees felt that, like the emergency, their life had come to its logical conclusion. But not the Oxford Committee; nor a few others.

The driving force behind the continued existence of the Oxford Committee was Cecil Jackson-Cole. Milford had by now left Oxford, handing over his chairmanship to Henry Moxley. Jackson-Cole took a simple view of the Committee's mission. Despite the improvements in European conditions, there was throughout the world great suffering and need, and as long as this was so – and surely it would indefinitely be so – 'the work' must go on. An efficient if modest vehicle had been developed. It should grow. There were no heights of charitable enterprise, in his view, to which it could not climb.

Jackson-Cole was not entirely sure, and with justification, that other members of the Committee would see things in the same light. To some, his aspirations for this citizens' group and its clothing appeals must have seemed grandiose indeed. When the Committee met in September
1948 to discuss whether to close down, Jackson-Cole had laid the groundwork for a decision in favour of widening the scope of its activities. Letters strongly endorsing this choice had been received from two founder members who attended rarely, but whose moral backing was tremendously esteemed: Professor Gilbert Murray and Dr. Henry Gillett. Their voices and that of Leo Liepmann swayed the Committee in favour of going on, for which in the end the decision was unanimous.

Jackson-Cole had also developed plans for putting the Committee’s management onto a more regular basis. He was prepared to lend an ‘Interim Administrator’ from his own business company, an estate agency called Andrews and Partners. In the past few years, Jackson-Cole had considerably advanced his mission to couple entrepreneurship with Christian service. Andrews and Partners, established in London in 1946, was a business with an ulterior purpose: the development of charities. Jackson-Cole did not intend to do this primarily by ploughing company profits into good works: his enterprises rarely had many profits since these were all ploughed back into their development. He wanted to attract a team of committed Christians who would use their skills to make Andrews flourish, and would also spend some of both the company’s and their own time on charitable activity. He appointed as its General Manager Raymond Andrews, a Methodist and a businessman to whom Jackson-Cole’s ideas had strong appeal. The guinea-pig organisation that Andrews and his team would set about building up was the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.

At this time, the idea of charitable organisations employing professional or business people was strange. Charity was still almost exclusively an affair of the churches, of vocational activity; or an affair of the shires, with admirable and titled patrons leading drives and collecting subscriptions. Jackson-Cole’s idea that charities should follow the path of business practice was extremely radical, even subversive; charities were by definition run by amateurs so as to keep costs to a minimum. And the notion that they should plough back part of their receipts into growth, as did commercial concerns, was almost indecent; like gambling with the Sunday collection. When Robert Castle had been appointed to run the clothing drives, the Committee had agreed to pay him a part-time salary, and Jackson-Cole made up the rest. But by 1948, he felt the Committee needed someone more experienced to build it into a larger, more permanent body. So he borrowed from Andrews and Partners one of his best managers, Leslie Swain. The Committee paid Swain a modest income, and Andrews topped it up. Jackson-Cole wanted to establish with the Committee the principle that a permanent organisation, even a small charity, needed qualified and remunerated direction.
Swain was a success. He had drive, flair, and efficiency. He was also able to cope with Jackson-Cole's idiosyncrasies and restless ambitions for his Oxford cause. The appointment lasted into the 1950s, but in 1951 Swain began to redevote his energies to his business career. At that time, Jackson-Cole set up a branch of Andrews and Partners in Oxford so that Swain could remain closely involved with the Committee's affairs.

One of Leslie Swain's earliest proposals to the Committee was to do up the premises at 17 Broad Street and make the Gift Shop into a going concern. Although charities often used temporary shop premises during fundraising campaigns, the use of a permanent site to sell donated items of value was a novelty.

In November 1949, a full-time manager - Joe Mitty - was appointed. Mitty had faith in the maxim that people would happily give away something they no longer needed if it could be turned into help for someone in distress. He loved a deal for items great and small in value or in size, and had a knack for mining a speck of gold out of the most unpromising contents of somebody's attic. In his hands the shop at 17 Broad Street became a thriving concern, turning over anything from candlesticks to fur coats, false teeth to feather boas. Gift Shop appeals broadened and Gift Shop income rapidly grew. Within a short time, income doubled to £3,000 a year, and climbed to over £10,000 by 1953.

Meanwhile the Committee had begun to develop a new source of income for clothes, cash, and gifts: advertisements.

Curious as it nowadays seems, at that time the sustained marketing of a charitable organisation by placing advertisements in newspapers and journals was uncharted water. Ads for worthy causes could be seen in local newspapers, but they were of the demure, 'here we are' variety.

Jackson-Cole, a self-made man, had a natural enthusiasm for advertising, and regarded as axiomatic in the growth of any enterprise that certain financial risks would have to be taken. But for charities, risk was a most uneasy, even unrespectable, partner. Charities were still clad in their Victorian uniform of gentility, probity, and earnest good works. Although Oxfam's patrons were known rather for their commitment to ideals of international peace and understanding than for their social connections, when it came to the day-to-day running of affairs, they adhered to the conventions of the time. These included utmost financial caution.

Jackson-Cole's most important contribution to Oxfam, and to the charitable movement in Britain generally, was to discard this conceptual straitjacket. In doing so, he trod on toes, and ruffled feathers, but his vision and persistence, backed by his reliance on his own company to
provide risk capital, eventually changed the face of charitable activity in the UK. It may also inadvertently have sowed the seeds of ambivalence towards Oxfam, an anti-establishment upstart brat among the dignified ranks of the ineffably correct – charities such as Dr. Barnardo’s, the Red Cross, and Save the Children – an ambivalence which continued down the years.

In January 1946, with the misery on the continent daily in the press and the European Relief Appeal at full spate, Jackson-Cole purchased in *The Times* the maximum amount of space permitted under newsprint rationing for an Oxford Committee advertisement. If the charity’s own funds had been involved, the Committee would certainly have prevented this venture, but they had little choice in the matter. Headed ‘European Relief’, the ad sought funds to purchase food offered to COBSRA by the government. At its foot was the legend: ‘Space presented by Andrews and Partners’. It cost £55; it raised £1,200. After this result, the Committee found it hard to maintain that national advertising was an inappropriate use of charitable money.

The Committee then agreed that part of the proceeds could be ploughed back into further advertising. Robert Castle wrote the copy, and Fougasse, a famous *Punch* cartoonist, donated a drawing of a scarecrow for clothing appeals. Raymond Andrews ran the campaign on behalf of Jackson-Cole, trying Christian and special interest journals, taking the risk on Andrews’ account for experiments in unproven outlets. Newsprint was still rationed, and there were long waits for space. *The Times* and the Sunday qualities were the most fruitful. The *Manchester Guardian* was also used on a monthly basis. The Manchester and Salford Famine Relief Committee regularly contributed £5 to the cost of the space and, in return, their own address was included.

The advertisement – a squarish upright across two columns – was standard. Alongside the scarecrow motif, the caption read ‘No clothes are too old’. Codes were used as part of the appeal address to identify the source of response: ‘Manrelief’ for the *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Telrelief’ for the *Daily Telegraph*. ‘Oxfam’, originally contracted from the Committee’s full name for telegraphic purposes, was a useful shortform for cramped advertising spaces. A registry was kept of all contributors. Thank-you letters went out under a well-known signature, for many years that of Dame Sybil Thorndike; responses from the religious press were acknowledged by a Reverend.

In 1949, a new partnership began which dramatically affected the evolution of the Committee’s advertising and the role it played in Oxfam’s future fundraising success. Like so many of Jackson-Cole’s ‘finds’, Harold Sumption came into contact with him through the Society of Friends. During the war, Sumption nearly lost his life to TB. His case
was so bad that, as a last hope, he was sent in 1947 with charitable help to a Swiss sanatorium. Many of his fellow patients were concentration camp victims and churchmen persecuted under Hitler. This exposure to his own near death and that of a very special group of others had a profound effect upon him.

In 1949 when he returned to England still in a frail condition, Sumption wanted to resume his career in advertising. A correspondence in the Quaker journal The Friend led to contact with Jackson-Cole, who employed him for a few hours a day writing advertising copy. When he was sufficiently recovered to join an agency, Sumption took the Oxford Committee advertising with him, remaining its manager for the next 20 years. He became fascinated by the application of marketing and advertising to the whole charitable field, and over his career has influenced its development profoundly.

Sumption soon proved his effectiveness by turning £5,000 worth of advertising space into £25,000 for one of Jackson-Cole’s pet causes. This gave him confidence that advertising was a sure path to a charity’s growth and to gaining public visibility. Sumption went for a dramatic expression of human need, making the message sing. Out with the scarecrow, in with a photo of a child in distress, in with the punchy message, away with long sentences in small print. The theme was still the detritus of war and emergency: refugees, the sick, the destitute. The appeal was for clothing, or for a specific sum of money – ‘Send 10s. to help one stricken family’ – to cover the costs of transport.

It was newspaper advertising, using increasingly striking images as the 1950s progressed, which did most to familiarise the British public with the name of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief. Between 1950 and 1961, Oxfam had five appeals on BBC radio’s ‘The Week’s Good Cause’. The increase in response, from under £10,000 to Gilbert Murray’s appeal in 1950, to £105,000 to Richard Dimbleby’s in 1961, was not a matter left to chance or divine intervention. The key to success was an increasingly intense promotional effort for each appeal, with ads placed around the broadcast to encourage people to listen and respond. The increase in national recognition the appeals gained for Oxfam’s name were closely associated with this achievement: another Jackson-Cole inspiration.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, disasters overtook one another in different parts of the world and the map of overseas relief began to fill in.

The Oxford Committee’s first grant to a specific project overseas went, appropriately, to Greece. In spring 1948, £200 was given to the Friends’ Service Council for the Domestic Training College for Girls in
Salonica. This was a pioneering educational venture for young Greek women, set up in 1945 by Sydney and Joice Loch, a Quaker couple deeply committed to Greece and involved in war-time and post-war relief.

Support to the school paved the way for help to other projects connected to the Lochs and to Salónica. Piping was given so that the mountain springs which constituted the water supply for many Northern Greek communities could be trapped and brought to a standpipe in the village. Greece thus became the first country in which there was a group of defined projects with which the Committee had a direct relationship. Other special grants were also made to orphanages and individuals running schemes in Europe known personally to Committee members such as Leo Liepmann; but most help went in bulk form – mostly clothing – to the FSC or other welfare organisations for use at their discretion, primarily among refugees and displaced people in Europe.

In early 1949, the Oxford Committee broadened the stated objects of its work to: ‘The relief of suffering arising as a result of wars or of other causes in any part of the world’. This was designed to cover both geographical expansion beyond Europe, and the relief of distress caused by emergencies other than war. The situation then commanding the attention of organised compassion was the human fall-out from the creation of Israel in May 1948: war and a mass exodus of Palestinian refugees. ‘Arab Relief’ was made the subject of advertising appeals; but met with much less success than those highlighting need among displaced people in Germany and Austria.

The winding down of the post-war programmes run by the Friends, as well as expanded income, encouraged the Oxford Committee to broaden its links with societies, groups, institutions, missions – organisations of any kind which ran operations on the ground to help those in distress. The framework of Oxfam’s work overseas has, throughout its history, been defined by this continuing quest. There was never any idea of a special ‘Oxfam’ recipient pre-selected by age, faith, or sex; nor of employing its own workers at the front-line to fulfill among such recipients an ‘Oxfam’ mission. It was from the beginning a ‘donor’ body. Its ideology held that the giver of money, goods or of time, fulfilled a mission as spiritually significant as that of the relief worker. The quest was always for sound and reliable practitioners to use money and relief goods on the donors’ behalf, to provide the essential link between the funds Oxfam could raise and the suffering it wanted to alleviate.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the range of possibilities was not overwhelming. Relief work and the relief worker belonged to a
relatively new sub-branch of social welfare, inspired by compassion for unfortunates beset by some cataclysmic crisis outside their control, whose needs were not met by existing public or private social services. As an activity of the fledgling international civil service, relief management was still in its infancy. Most relief work was carried out by missionaries and representatives of proselytising faiths, when a crisis beset their flock or the human family around their physical and institutional presence.

Thus the Oxford Committee looked for partners among the array of religious societies at work in all corners of the world; age-related welfare groups such as the Save the Children Fund and YM- and YWCAs; in emergencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and whatever else it might happen upon in the way of local initiatives overseas. It excluded no partner on the grounds of faith, nor sought any special pre-qualification. The main inhibition to developing the network was the need for Committee members – or staff – to travel to distant overseas destinations. In the meantime, some members visited Europe; and each different disaster situation – Palestine, Korea, India – produced a new crop of partnerships as the Committee sought the best route for response.

In 1951, when the combined value of clothing, gifts, and donations had reached around £80,000 annually, the Oxford Famine Relief Committee was ready to open a new chapter. A General Secretary was appointed. Jackson-Cole undertook the most careful search, and made his best-ever ‘find’. He picked the man who would stay in the Committee’s driving seat for 24 years and turn it into Oxfam: Howard Leslie Kirkley.

Leslie Kirkley was born in Manchester in 1911. His father, a schoolteacher, encouraged his interest in social and political affairs. As a young man he was much moved by the damaging poverty of the Depression; and he was also inspired by the idealism then widely current which, until the rise of Nazi aggression, envisaged a new world order built on justice and peace. Kirkley became close to the Society of Friends, and more importantly, active in that part of the peace movement which held that all war was evil and armed violence morally unacceptable. He joined the Peace Pledge Union, and helped pack Manchester’s Free Trade Hall for speakers such as Bertrand Russell.

In 1936, Kirkley qualified as an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. By this time he was employed by Manchester Corporation. As war loomed and Hitler’s aggression appeared unstoppable, many pacifists dropped their opposition to all war. Not Kirkley. In 1939, at the age of 28, he registered as a conscientious objector. At the tribunal, he chose not to become a member of the Society of Friends to claim
exemption from military service on religious grounds, but based his case purely on his convictions as a pacifist. He won the exemption, at a price: he was fired by the Manchester Corporation.

During the war years, Kirkley moved to Leeds and remained active in the pacifist network. He helped found and run the Leeds Famine Relief Committee, and as its Honorary Secretary, attended the national Famine Relief Conference in Caxton Hall in January 1944. The Committees in the North of England worked closely together, and were particularly active in trying to protest against the impact of the blockade on civilians under German occupation. After the war, the Leeds Committee – like the Oxford Committee – took up the cause of European Relief, raising funds and collecting parcels of food for ‘Save Europe Now’. It was during the course of joint meetings and delegations that Kirkley first had contact with Jackson-Cole.

In 1950, the Leeds Committee for European Relief decided to follow the example of other similar committees around the country and close down. Jackson-Cole invited Kirkley to come and be interviewed by the honorary officers of the Oxford Committee, then looking for a Secretary to back up Swain and ultimately replace him. Kirkley was appointed, and took up his new job early in 1951. For the next several years Swain formally remained Administrator, later becoming an influential trustee; but day-to-day responsibility passed to Kirkley.

Leslie Kirkley was a man cut in solid cloth, not a person who visibly trailed his charisma. He was not by any means a simple man. But his manner was simple and direct, he had great charm of the quiet kind, and a persuasive tenaciousness which worked its leaven slowly but effectively. His Lancashire doggedness was belied by an outwardly easygoing style, which might frustrate but rarely angered. He inspired respect, and great affection, among people from many different cultures and walks of life. He gave his friendship freely, usually with a twinkle in his eye, although he remained an essentially private man.

Kirkley was not an intellectual, but neither was he anybody’s fool. He had a canny instinct for people, admired those with strong ideas forcefully expressed, and never felt threatened or overshadowed by them. He liked to stay in the background, quietly steering and encouraging those more inclined to take the limelight. He brought the ideal combination of personal qualities to a task at Oxfam into which – and in which – he grew as if it was a tailored garment.

Like Jackson-Cole, Kirkley had a deep-rooted sense of service and a long-term commitment to a vision of a better world. It was not an apocalyptic vision. There was no imminent dawning of a great tomorrow. Building this world would require as many tortoises as hares. When he joined Joe Mitty and the volunteers in the premises at 17 Broad
Street, life went on as normal. He got to know the Committee, visited refugee camps and orphanages in Europe, consolidated links with like-minded organisations, cultivated useful public figures, and in his spare time he wrote out appeal receipts with other volunteers.

From this very early period of Kirkley's involvement, two milestones stand out. One was the first effort to respond to a natural disaster in what would later be known as a 'developing country': famine in Bihar, India. This took place in 1951, and confronted Kirkley with the difficulty of finding the right partner to whom to entrust funds donated for relief in a place thousands of miles away. Eventually, mission routes were found; much of the £3,500 raised over the course of 1951 went to a Famine Relief Committee run by the wife of the Bishop of Bhagalpur. The appeal was a landmark, for it gained the Oxford Committee its first, approving, mention in the House of Commons.

The second milestone had, once more, to do with Greece. In August 1953, a devastating earthquake struck the Ionian Islands. The Rev. Henry Moxley happened to be in Greece at the time, checking up on village water projects helped by a national 'Help for Greece' committee, on which he was the Oxford Committee's representative. Moxley cabled Kirkley after the earthquake struck. He flew out and attached himself to a Greek Red Cross team on one of the worst-hit islands. He took a money order in his pocket, and used the funds to purchase supplies — utensils, bedding — on the spot.

This was the start of Oxfam's direct involvement in disaster relief. It was also the start of something that became Kirkley's hallmark: his own immediate arrival at the scene of catastrophe. In Hungary, Algeria, Morocco, and the Congo, his presence among the first emissaries of aid would help to put Oxfam definitively on the map.
On the night of 23 October 1956, students in Budapest staged a demonstration. They demanded a change of regime, liberalisation, and the departure of Soviet troops from Hungarian soil. In the early hours, police and troops opened fire. Thus began the Hungarian uprising, a patriotic insurrection which engulfed the country and horrified the Western world.

In the confusion of the days that followed it seemed for a time that the revolution would succeed. With Hungarian troops fighting alongside them, the reformists won control. Political concessions came thick and fast and Moscow promised military withdrawal. But on 4 November, while Budapest was celebrating, the Red Army struck back. Tanks rolled down the streets reducing to rubble any building where there was resistance. Citizens smeared the streets with soap to slow them down, tore up cobblestones for barricades, and cut out the Communist emblem from the centre of their flags.

Their bravery was futile. While UN and Western attention was caught up with the simultaneous Suez crisis, tens of thousands of Hungarians were killed. By 12 November the uprising had been crushed, blamed on ‘Fascists and counter-revolutionaries’. A shocked world looked on as a stream of refugees, many wounded, some frost-bitten, began to pour across the Austrian border. They carried suitcases, balanced bundles on their bicycles, pushed farm-wagons and baby-carriages. They hurried their children through the cold and snow, hiding by night, risking the bullets of the secret police.

By 23 November, 48,000 people had crossed the Austrian frontier; on one day, the exodus reached 8,537. By the end of the year, 171,000 refugees had taken flight. Many who witnessed this thin stream of humanity plodding its way to freedom, faces bleak with cold and desperation, found its image indelibly imprinted in their minds. The sight encapsulated the agony of the refugee: sudden forced departure, arrival at a strange destination, and the loss, of nearly everything – personal identity included – in between.
Among those witnesses were members of the world’s press and an armada of sympathisers, people with or without organisational affiliation from all over Western Europe. Leslie Kirkley of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief was one of their number. He reached the border on the bitterly cold night of 26 November, helping a Friends’ Service Council team deliver supplies to temporary shelters. Voluntary agencies ran mobile canteens at border towns, ferried people across canals by boat, took exhausted women and children to sleep overnight in monasteries, schools and churches. Many arrived hungry and wretched with only the clothes they stood up in, feet blistered and poking through their shoes.

The Oxford Committee had been providing help to refugees in Austria through the Friends’ Service Council for many years. Early in the crisis, a lorry was loaded with five tons of warm clothes and sent off post-haste to Vienna. Other consignments by train soon followed, as did Leslie Kirkley. At Oxford’s request, he had cut short a visit to the Far East to fly back to Europe, and as he listened to the stories of the newly arrived, he was sobered to discover that their foot-slogging journey had taken the same four days it had taken him to come from Hong Kong.

The Hungarian uprising and the mass exodus it prompted made a profound impression on the world. There had been the expulsions and, later, the flight, of Germans from Eastern into Western zones of Germany; but their migration was perceived as an intrinsically German problem, a wash from the human ebb and flow set in motion by the Third Reich and still eddying about the continent. What happened in Hungary was a symptom of the new threat to freedom posed by the Cold War. The revolt had happened suddenly, with terrifying and unexpected consequences.

The care of the uprooted was traditionally regarded as a charge upon the authorities of the country where they sought refuge. But in the case of Hungary, the usual view was thrust aside. The problem of the refugees could not just be left to Austria simply because it happened to be next door. The armies of occupation had only withdrawn in 1955, and Austria’s national government was neither administratively nor economically in a position to cope with such an influx.

Austria declared her borders open, offering sanctuary to all those who wanted it. Almost in the same breath, she appealed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – then Dr. Auguste Lindt of Switzerland – to open up every possible channel for international assistance. With co-operation from the battalions of the Red Cross and help from voluntary organisations great and small, the UNHCR proceeded to co-ordinate a relief and resettlement programme for the thousands of men, women, and children who had abandoned their fate to Western hospitality.
UNHCR launched an appeal to the member nations of the UN Refugee Fund (UNREF). The response was immediate and generous. The League of Red Cross Societies recruited 650 volunteers from member societies to run reception centres. Non-governmental appeals were launched all over Europe – the Lord Mayor of London’s Appeal for Hungarian Refugees raised several million pounds – to support the voluntary organisations providing hot meals, clothes, health care, and comforts. The Oxford Committee opened a Hungarian Relief account to receive special donations, and clothing poured into their depots.

Contemplating the machinery of the Red Cross with partners and resources all over the world, and the seasoned know-how of social workers from long established church and voluntary networks, the one-man band of Kirkley might well have felt daunted. He trod warily, looking for nooks and crannies into which he could insert modest but useful amounts of on-the-spot assistance. He was beginning to develop a style of response to mass human crisis. He searched for unforeseen or unforeseeable shortages, sometimes petty but often critical: shelter materials, blankets, utensils, fuel, babyfood, water equipment.

Kirkley stayed in Vienna for most of a week. He tried, unsuccessfully, to get into Hungary itself to see how those left behind were faring. He used £2,750 to plug some immediate relief gaps, and made contact with those organisations – the YMCA, the Friends, Save the Children, and Austrian and Hungarian agencies – who would continue to be in action over the coming months. Inevitably, there would be special casualties: the sick and elderly, young and orphaned. Teenagers were singled out as a particular focus for the Oxford Committee’s ongoing concern.

The camps in Austria were only the first stage of the refugees’ journey. Every new arrival was screened with a view to onward passage to a new country of residence. Strict conventions governing refugee status were waived. Several countries offered immediate homes for large numbers of refugees, so strong was the flow of public sympathy. In November, an airlift brought 7,500 Hungarians to Britain. By the end of January 1957 over 100,000 had departed, nearly half for countries in Europe, the rest for North America and Australia. Among them were many problem cases, handicapped and elderly, on whose behalf a special appeal was made by Oscar Helmer, Austrian Minister of the Interior: ‘Asylum,’ he said, ‘is an affair of the heart.’

This operation of unprecedented size and effectiveness to handle a sudden mass migration and resettlement cost $14 million, to which the Austrian government and the voluntary agencies contributed around $10 million. In comparison to the whole, the £20,000 for feeding and medical supplies and the 125 tons of clothes, bedding, and shoes sent from Oxford appears insignificant. But voluntary effort depends on
carers who are not diverted by the size of the whole problem, and are content to do something for a few of its myriad human parts.

Of those who fled from Soviet bullets and shells on the streets of Hungary, only some 19,000 remained in Austrian camps by early 1958. The Western world and its charitable fellowship had made a supreme effort to pick up the human pieces of Hungary's blow for freedom. But while for the broken heroes of Budapest, asylum might well be 'an affair of the heart', the fate of thousands of other refugees inspired no such feeling.

Among the 42,000 European exiles still languishing in Austrian camps 11 years after the end of the war were many refugees of Hungarian nationality who had repeatedly sought, and been refused, a home and prospects elsewhere. This process mortified their self-esteem: they were being constantly put in a human auction where they failed to find bidders. At the time of the uprising, they watched their compatriots set off with their new passports for their new lives, and understandably they felt great bitterness. Some even slipped across the frontier to re-arrive and enjoy the special privileges, the waiving of strict immigration tests, that would enable them finally to leave camp life behind.

The gross unfairness in the world's behaviour did not go unnoticed. Hungary dramatised anew the heartbreaking plight of refugees everywhere and raised their status as a preoccupation of international concern. It showed that, in a volatile world, the refugee problem required a special commitment from the forces of the new internationalism. And it led, in time, to a special crusade on their behalf.

The story of each refugee is an individual story. It is a story of fear, in which flight and exile, material loss, the abandonment of home, kin, country, personal status, job and profession, even of birthright and identity, seems preferable to the fate involved in staying put.

During the war, around 30 million people in Europe were uprooted by one cause or another from the land where they belonged. The task of wholesale repatriation was given to UNRRA, but it was a difficult task to complete. At the end of 1945, 750,000 displaced people who refused to go home were still living in camps in Austria, Germany and Italy. Most came from countries absorbed into the Soviet bloc; many had ethnic or other associations which led them to fear persecution if they returned. New waves of refugees soon joined them. All these people, rich and poor, young and old, skilled and illiterate, wanted a new start in life. Many set their sights on emigration to North America.

When the United Nations General Assembly discussed what to do about these refugees early in 1946, the debate was long and heated. The
idea that, under certain circumstances, the citizen of a country might claim as a right protection against being made to belong to it was a relatively novel concept, and by no means universally agreed. Finally, against opposition from the Eastern European countries, the principle of no forcible repatriation – first upheld by Fridtjof Nansen, Refugee Commissioner for the League of Nations after the first World War – was accepted. This advance for human rights gained ground when a UN Convention set out as the criterion for refugee status ‘a well-founded fear of persecution’ in the home country. It was many years, however, before the 1951 Convention was fully recognised in international law.

In the meantime, the UN set up an International Refugee Organisation (IRO) with a set life-span of five years to deal with the remaining refugees, the lingering human scar of war. The IRO managed to find new homes, mostly in North America, for over one million. But there were still 130,000 ‘hard core’ refugees lingering in German and Austrian camps when the IRO’s mandate expired in 1951. Its successor, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was brought into being with the greatest international reluctance for a period of three years to make these hard-core cases disappear.

No-one wanted the remaining refugees. They had a tubercular patch on the lung, or their eyesight was poor; they were too old to earn, or learn a new language; there were whispers about communist leanings and more sinister disabilities. Likewise, no-one wanted to help pay for their upkeep, or invest in their retraining or rehousing. Their right not to go home was respected, but not their right to leave the decrepit limbo of the camps, to live in a way that showed respect for them as human beings. The US refused to make any contribution to the UNHCR’s $3 million appeal, their UN delegate, Eleanor Roosevelt, declaring that the ‘refugee problem is over’. Somehow, without funds and with no place for them to go, the UN High Commissioner, Dr. G.J. van Heuven Goedhart of the Netherlands, was expected to sort out 130,000 reject people’s future existence within three years.

Since governments were so unhelpful, Goedhart turned to the voluntary sector. If countries of asylum would not accept the refugees, they might be integrated into the communities where they were already living. In August 1952, the Ford Foundation came up with a grant of $2.9 million, to be administered by UNHCR and utilised in programmes run by voluntary agencies. These included the YMCA, the World Council of Churches, and the international Lutheran, Friends, Jewish, and Catholic networks. Many of the projects were for youth centres and vocational training: the problem of delinquency, the camps as breeding grounds for youthful anger and political extremism, were common worries of the time.
Other prospects improved when Sweden, in 1952, showed a willingness to provide 'asylum from the heart': places specifically for active TB cases. Since a shadow on the lung disqualified entrants from the US, there were tragic stories of suicide and break-up within refugee 'families because one member had TB. Often it was the squalor and overcrowding in the camp itself which spread the infection, especially to children whose parents had then to choose between abandoning a sick child or refusing a long-awaited exit visa.

For the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, the plight of the residual camp residents in Germany and Austria was a natural focus of concern. During the late 1940s and the 1950s, the notion of overseas charity was virtually synonymous with relief for destitute refugees. The official attitude of neglect, even discrimination, towards those debilitated in body or in mind – marginals among the already marginal – reinforced the compassionate feelings of the charitable donor.

Leslie Kirkley and Leslie Swain travelled often to Germany and Austria to visit projects and make contact with partner organisations during the 1950s, as did Dr. Leo Liepmann and other members of the Committee who had a special interest in Europe. As the Committee's cash income increased, more grants were made to rehousing schemes, handicraft workshops, scholarship and vacation funds, on top of the usual consignments of clothing, shoes, and bedding for camp inmates.

Most refugee camps were miserable places. They had their own special smell: old cooking, sour sweatiness, and cheap tobacco. It was redolent of the demoralisation suffered by people whose rotting surroundings reflected the world's valuation of them as human beings; who were bitter and quarrelsome in quarters too communal for the preservation of personal dignity; whose sorrows had pushed their wills and minds into a place from which it was hard to recover them. Many struggled to maintain the precious atmosphere of family life. 'Oh yes, we have a lovely home,' explained a child to a visitor, 'it's just that we have no house to put it in.'

In the wake of the Hungarian crisis, Kirkley was put in touch through the UNA with a Dutch social worker, Frankie Hamilton, working with refugees in the market town of Enns in Upper Austria. Camp 106 had been set up in a cavalry barracks from imperial times; the building was dark, humid and depressing. Enns camp was a headache to all voluntary organisations trying to resolve refugee predicaments. The authorities had made it a dumping ground for problem cases from other camps, and its 400 inmates included a high proportion of prostitutes, alcoholics, and social misfits. There were Poles, Yugoslavians, Hungarians, Russians, and Rumanians, of all ages and social status, some very old, some with criminal records. The task of rehabilitation seemed truly daunting.
When almost every organisation had given up, the Netherlands Federation for Aid to Refugees sent Frankie Hamilton, courageous, competent, and warm-hearted, to Enns. She set out single-mindedly to close Enns down. While she sought permanent solutions for the residents – immigration, integration into local communities – she organised temporary help for the sick, elderly, and those with special problems. Her work – building small apartment houses for problem families, running handicrafts classes, finding hospital places and funds for TB treatment, helping unmarried mothers find jobs, scraping small pensions together from obscure sources – was wholeheartedly supported by several voluntary agencies; for the latter part of her time in Enns, Oxfam met her salary and costs.

In November 1958, the last of the hard-core cases left Enns; as a camp, the building was closed. But not before it had been totally rehabilitated, and some refugee as well as Austrian families given apartments. Frankie Hamilton had achieved a goal no-one had thought possible. Kirkley was so impressed that, when she went off to Greece and settled among the northern villages, the Committee paid for her to promote the kind of health and water supply schemes they had long supported there. She also set up a number of social schemes for women and their families. Frankie Hamilton was one of those very special people whose humanitarian work in various parts of the world was infinitely worth backing.

When Leslie Kirkley hastened back from Hong Kong to Hungary in November 1956, he had been on his first ever visit to the Far East. His itinerary was long: Pakistan, India, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Korea. Most of the projects he visited were also for the human casualties scattered far and wide by regional conflict and its accompanying upheavals.

By the mid 1950s, a large share of the Committee’s relief assistance was going to Korea, where the after-effects of war required painful years of recovery. Hostilities had broken out in June 1950 with the North Koreans’ offensive across the 38th Parallel. The war was protracted, sweeping up and down the peninsula as first General MacArthur’s troops counter-attacked from the south, and then the Chinese army counter-attacked from the north. Not until mid-1951 did the war become relatively static and the vast movements of population cease; the war itself did not formally end until political settlement divided Korea in July 1953.

The damage inflicted by the war on the civilian population was tremendous. The total death toll was estimated at around three and a
half million. Nine million people in the South lost their homes or possessions. The economy was completely disrupted, plunging living standards below subsistence level and consigning war widows and their families to destitution. Until peace negotiations bore fruit, all relief work was carried out by the unified military command, and voluntary agencies were effectively banned. With no FSC or Save the Children teams on the ground, the Oxford Committee had no channel for clothes or other relief goods. By November 1951, the only supplies they had managed to send were reels of cotton thread, despatched to an orphanage in South Korea via the small packets service of the GPO, 'the parcels service being suspended'.

During 1952, the Committee became so bothered by the blockade against voluntary agency relief to Korea they considered protesting to The Times. The long stalemate which no-one could agree to end deepened the tragedy in Korea, exacerbating food shortages and inflation, and delaying prospects of economic repair. Finally it was decided that UNKRA, the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency, set up in preparation for the peace, should start its operations early in 1953 even without a cease-fire. This opened the way for the Friends to send a team to Kunsan, under UNKRA's umbrella. Save the Children also managed to gain permission for a relief team to establish itself further south, at Pusan.

A major concern of all the agencies was the condition of the children. The estimated number of those orphaned or made fatherless was 100,000. The first representatives from the Friends to go to Korea late in 1952 were told by the military authorities that 30,000 orphans were being cared for in 300 orphanages set up since the war. Some were run by missions, some even by groups of soldiers who had taken compassion on the hungry mites surviving on leftovers on the outskirts of their camps. Some of these places were terrible, barely providing a roof and some food. Most of their charges were dull and apathetic, showing every sign of neglect and expressing 'neither joy, interest, nor fear'.

Outside the orphanages were at least as many waifs and strays. Quite small children could be seen walking the streets, sleeping rough in a sheltered corner, begging for food. Some were not orphans but had become separated from their parents and had no way of finding their way home or discovering where their parents had gone. Many fetched up in a wretchedly malnourished condition in hospital wards. Older children were better able to look after themselves, forming gangs and living wild by thieving. Bringing such children into care, rehabilitating them, giving them some skills and education, was a major preoccupation, as was the rebuilding of health care facilities.
Between 1954 and 1956, more financial grants from Oxfam went to Korean orphanages and welfare schemes than to any other part of the world.

Clothing was also sent. That refugees and indigent war victims were in need of clothing was an article of faith with the Oxford Committee; in fact, most British cast-offs – particularly women’s, which were much more commonly given than men’s – were not the kind of garments that Koreans would wear. One enterprising missionary set up war-widows with sewing machines to adapt the less suitable items, using part of the clothing as currency to pay them in. If the contents of some bales fetched up in the market, sensible helpers looked the other way. Needs were so great among the poor that if unusable relief goods could bolster a petty trader’s livelihood, so much the better for his or her family.

By October 1956, the Oxford Committee had spent £60,000 on projects in Korea, and the need to check up on this expenditure was the primary justification for Kirkley’s Far Eastern tour. What touched him most was, however, not the Koreans’ plight but that of the refugees in Hong Kong.

In the years following the Communist takeover on the Chinese mainland, over a million people fled to Hong Kong. With an existing population of two million crammed into the usable 62 square miles of Hong Kong’s territory, this was already the most crowded space on earth. Half the refugees had no resources and nowhere to go. They set up flimsy packing-case and tin-sheet shacks, a piece of rag serving for a front door, on any piece of ground they could find. They spilled over pavements, stairways, and rooftops; they erected plank and basketwork dwellings on steep hillsides and ravines.

Accommodation was not counted in ‘rooms’ or ‘huts’, but in ‘bedspace’, an area three or four planks wide within which every possession had to be stored, every activity carried out. When rehousing was provided in special new apartment blocks, a family of five refugees moved into comparative luxury: one room, twelve feet by ten. Smaller families had to share.

A number of church-related organisations ran welfare programmes for children, the elderly, and other specially needy categories of refugees. One of these was a mission with the unlikely name of the West China Evangelistic Band, whose leading light, Mrs. Gladys Donnithorne, was the wife of an Archdeacon. Mrs. Donnithorne did not exactly run a project; whatever she did was the project. A ministering angel by method and instinct, she unearthed pockets of misery on rooftops and in alleyways of the kind the authorities were loath to admit existed. She was prepared to go anywhere, however distressing, moving around
among the most pitiful ‘bedspace’ cases to bring a little extra in food or cash, to pass around warm garments or blankets, to arrange for an invalid to be taken to hospital. Her activity was not particularly orderly or planned; but its sincerity could not be doubted nor that it brought solace into some poverty-stricken lives.

Mrs. Donnithorne’s work became a special concern of the Oxford Committee. If she wanted to buy some sewing machines to help some girls use their bedspace as a trouser-making venture; if she wanted to set up an old people’s home; if she wanted to find a dwelling place for a family flooded out by Hong Kong’s notorious downpours, she would write to Leslie Kirkley, and the Committee could be counted upon to help. Her personality and the quintessentially charitable nature of her work were in themselves sufficient guarantee; as yet questions about the method and conduct of programmes were exclusively confined to financial queries. Occasionally a formal statement of accounts was sought; but Oxford’s requests for information were more typically for the little human stories of suffering relieved and tears replaced with joy that could be put in an advertisement or otherwise used for fundraising.

One of Oxfam’s handful of staff members took a very particular, almost proprietary, interest in Mrs. Donnithorne’s work among the Hong Kong refugees. This somewhat eccentric individual was Frank Carter, appointed in 1953 as Oxfam’s first organiser of local appeals. Carter was an evangelical Anglican lay preacher, an Old Testament figure with a flowing patriarchal beard. He ran clothing and gift drives in towns and cities all over the country, recruiting local dignitaries, churches, and voluntary groups according to Jackson-Cole’s ‘Appeals Week’ formula. He was also a determined publicist.

Frank Carter took on the plight of the Hong Kong refugees as his personal crusade. He studied Hong Kong until he knew it like the back of his hand, although he did not go there until 1961. His descriptions in local newspapers sounded as if they came from the very pavements of the colony, elbow to elbow with the tin-shack dwellers. More than once he hit the correspondence columns of the Daily Telegraph, and managed almost a regular ‘Hong Kong Notes’ in the religious press, often raising hundred of pounds at a time for Mrs. Donnithorne’s good works.

Carter conducted a personal correspondence with Mrs. Donnithorne, asking by name after her many families’ tribulations and sending her blankets knitted by his pet supporters. Carter was a law unto himself. Over the years he raised amounts running into four figures for her projects independently of the Oxford Committee. By 1960, nearly £20,000 had been provided to Mrs. Donnithorne altogether. When she came home on leave, Frank Carter managed to collect an audience of 450 in Westminster Central Hall to hear her; Sir Alexander Grantham, ex-
Governor of Hong Kong and an Oxfam trustee, introduced Mrs. Donnithorne. She spoke movingly of the 'grannies', women of over 80 living on pieces of rain-soaked matting, now moved to her old people's home in Kowloon. She epitomised the simplicity of the Oxfam ethos of those days.

The Oxford Committee also channelled funds through more conventional channels than the West China Evangelistic Band, notably the much more organised and professional programme run by the Lutheran World Service under the well-known figure of Pastor Ludwig Stumpf. Clothing distribution, vocational training for teenagers, roof-top schools, medical care, flood relief, and community services for the inhabitants of the new refugee apartment blocks, were among the activities of this and similar Christian bodies. By 1960, the Oxfam cash and clothing total to Hong Kong had reached nearly £125,000. Pastor Stumpf deeply impressed Leslie Kirkley, and his programme continued to receive Oxfam aid for many years.

Until 1957, the colonial government regarded the refugee influx as a matter solely concerning the British and Chinese. But as numbers mounted beyond one million, the scale of need grew well beyond the authorities' capacity. In the wake of the Hungarian uprising and the international response it elicited, the Governor, then Sir Alexander Grantham, sought United Nations assistance both for relief and for possible resettlement of refugees elsewhere. UNHCR was glad to have the Hong Kong refugee problem internationally recognised and brought within its remit; but, as always, it was short of money. As in so many parts of the world, private philanthropy did what it could while the machinery of international assistance slowly took on a definitive shape.

There was one part of the world where the needs of a large refugee population were accepted as an international responsibility from its inception: the Middle East. After the war which followed the creation in May 1948 of the new state of Israel, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was set up to care for the 982,000 Palestinians who lost their homes and livelihoods. This most intransigent of refugee situations, whose victims were scattered between UNRWA camps in Jordan, Gaza, and Lebanon, was perceived in Britain as a running sore. During the 1950s, it was the most well-known of refugee predicaments outside the European camps.

UNRWA was persistently underfunded. UN member states might recognise their responsibility for problems caused by the creation of Israel; but were parsimonious in helping pay for repairs to the many lives it shattered. UNRWA provided rudimentary services: a ration of 1,500
calories; basic medical care; shelter, first in the form of tents and later more solid huts; and schooling for refugee children. But the Palestinians rejected anything which carried even a whiff of permanency concerning a future outside their homeland. The UNRWA mandate was limited; even the ‘works’ of its title – supposed to provide refugee employment on resettlement schemes – never came into existence. In spite of the large numbers it cared for, UNRWA existed from hand to mouth and some of its programmes depended heavily on philanthropic support.

Outside Europe, UNRWA refugee camps were the largest recipient of clothing from the Oxford Committee. UNRWA – like UNKRA – met the costs of freight; this contribution to the costs of exporting cast-off British clothing to distant locations made it a just practicable form of relief. Reports from the Middle East were reassuring. In late 1956, a vivid account of a clothing hand-out arrived from the Lutheran World Service, whose Committee in Jerusalem had been invited by UNRWA to give out winter clothes to 6,500 needy families.

‘When we started, the central hall and four surrounding rooms were stacked to the ceiling with bales, bags, and boxes of shoes. UNRWA provided the families’ ration numbers, and their members’ ages and sexes. All day long for five weeks we could hear a voice calling out: ‘Man, 50 (or 40); woman, 45; boy, 15; girl, 12’, and so on. The women took down suitable warm garments for each member of the family, and placed them in the centre of a coat. When neckties, blouses, socks, underwear, had been added to the bundle, it was tied securely. We were not prodigal at any time. But the mass of bales which had appalled us at the start now appalled us by the speed with which it seemed to melt, with thousands yet to care for and winter coming fast.

‘The UNRWA team were efficient and courteous. At all times a member of our Committee was present so that the refugees would understand that the clothing was an expression of the loving concern of Christian people in the West.’

Grants were also made to health projects among the Palestinian refugees, especially in Jordan, mainly through the usual network of Christian organisations. Not entirely, however. One early recipient was Musa Alami, a charismatic Palestinian who set up a home and vocational training school for 160 orphaned refugee boys in the Jordan Valley under the aegis of an organisation he called the Arab Development Society, essentially consisting of himself.

Ignoring the advice of experts, Musa Alami drilled for water in a stony wasteland near Jericho, and went on to ‘make the desert bloom’ with grains, fruit, and vegetables. He then established an imported herd of Friesian dairy cattle in the wonders-of-the-world tradition beloved of Middle Eastern potentates. This farm was supposed to cover the costs of
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the boys' training, and Oxfam supporters were invited to 'buy a cow' – £250 including passage from Holland – to graze in his miraculous pastures.

Musa Alami was a brilliant fundraiser, and by the late 1950s had become a recipient of Ford Foundation money on a scale which made grants from Oxfam look like pocket money. Oxfam continued to support his home for boys, however, only finally concluding in 1971 that the four-star standard of accommodation – for boys and cattle – and other showpiece characteristics of Musa Alami's farm disqualified his Arab Development Society from receiving further aid. He represented a type of heroic charitable entrepreneur that Oxfam often fell for. He was a dedicated visionary, but his schemes were touched by a grandiosity which unfitted them for the environment they were supposed to serve. Donors from the foundation and government world might not object to elaborate buildings and agricultural high tech, but charity ultimately did.

News of Musa Alami's water drilling success spread to Zerqa, a small town in a stony desert 20 miles north of Amman. This was a home of last resort to a refugee community, and to the chunky and determined figure of a retired headmistress turned relief worker: Miss Winifred Coate. Since 1948, the elderly Miss Coate had set up a small sewing factory, given loans to tinsmiths and carpenters, and done what she could in a most unpromising setting. Throughout the 1950s, Oxfam was a regular supporter of her centre for 'Refugee Industries'.

Pondering the ruined medieval castles just across the ridge, Miss Coate deduced that the courts and garrisons they had once contained must have had access to water. All the experts assured her that the land around Zerqa was totally dry. In the early 1960s, one of her Palestinian workers said he had a knack as a water diviner. When they went out into the desert, his stick moved. Miss Coate thereupon bought 500 acres of stony waste. She was regarded as crazy. All her attempts to gain the necessary £5,000 to sink a well and install a pump were greeted with derision. Except by Oxfam. At 400ft, water was struck, and the source turned out to be abundant.

Miss Coate was a shrewd businesswoman. Her deep regret was not to have bought a much larger chunk of the landscape, whose value swiftly multiplied by 40 times. She set up irrigation works, and carved up the land into five-acre smallholder plots. With water, two crops a year were possible, as well as citrus trees and vegetables. By the end of 1964, the first nine farmers had received title deeds: Miss Coate believed strongly in incentive and self-sufficiency. This was the first land to pass into peasant ownership in Jordan for as long as anyone could remember. The settlers were soon renowned for the biggest cauliflowers in the vicinity of Amman, and became a flourishing community.
The civil war in Algeria produced yet another 1950s refugee emergency. Fighting broke out in 1954, and by 1956 had engulfed the country, driving refugees across the borders into Tunisia and Morocco.

International action was severely hampered by the insistence of the French government that the refugees were technically French citizens and therefore not entitled to international protection. Alternative mechanisms for relief assistance were few. Until 1958, there were no properly established Red Crescent Societies in Tunisia or Morocco. The Tunisian government appealed to the UNHCR for help, but significant assistance had to wait until the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for full-scale action in November 1958. The war, and the outflow of refugees, continued until 1962.

When the Oxford Committee first became exercised on the Algerians' behalf, there was virtually no private philanthropic channel for assistance to the Algerian refugees except the embryonic Red Crescents. Late in 1957, a Commander Fox-Pitt of the Anti-Slavery Society visited Oujda, a Northern Moroccan border district. He described conditions as the worst he had ever seen: 'The ration is calculated at 300 to 400 calories. Starvation has already begun.' Oxfam gave Fox-Pitt some drugs, and money to help 500 families buy sugar and olive oil. They then began to send out relief goods via Red Cross channels.

By March 1958, the Committee had already despatched 37 tons of clothing and footwear, thousands of blankets, and two tons of milk powder - by now a standard relief item. Leslie Kirkley decided to visit Tunisia to see what could be done for the 70,000 refugees crowded in makeshift border camps, and for 60,000 more inside Morocco, half of whom were children. He was horrified to discover the appalling conditions they endured. 'Some had not had proper food for days and the children showed every sign of prolonged malnutrition - babies with big stomachs, large eyes and unhealthy skins, ragged and inadequate clothing, shivering in the cold wind. The mother of one family of ten had died from eating a poisonous root.'

Throughout 1958, while a full-scale relief operation was yet to be mounted, the Algerian refugees suffered quite agonising hunger. Food distribution was sporadic and inadequate. Many were reduced to eating grass and prickly pear. Each eye-witness report was a terrible repetition of the last. 'I have never seen hunger as I saw it in those refugees,' reported an Oxfam correspondent. 'Not only were they thin, but their nervous, drawn, cadaverous faces had pits where their cheeks should have been. They looked like victims from some fearful concentration camp.'

Oxfam was still one of only a tiny handful of voluntary agencies trying to do something. One modest venture was organised by Sheila Bagnall, a London schoolteacher who spent her holiday in Morocco
1 Edith Pye, a veteran of Quaker relief work, prompted the formation of a Famine Relief Committee in Oxford in 1942.

2 The Committee's most distinguished member, Professor Gilbert Murray OM, with Lady Mary Murray, at their Boar's Hill home.

3 The minutes of the first meeting of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief were recorded in a school exercise book.
4 Famine in Greece, 1941-44: 500,000 Greeks lost their lives in the war years. International Red Cross soup kitchen for children in Athens.

5 Queue for relief provisions in the Greek island of Chios, June 1942. The islanders telegraphed Athens: 'Send bread or coffins'.

6 Left to right, Leslie Swain (Administrator), Cecil Jackson-Cole (Hon. Sec.), and Robert Castle (Organiser): Oxfam's 'three musketeers' of 1948.
The severe post-war distress in continental Europe touched many hearts in Britain, in spite of shortages at home.

As Lord Halifax says:

"No cause can appeal more strongly to our sympathy and to our conscience than the cause of trying to bring relief to the stricken countries of Europe."

I wish all success to your Committee in their work.

OXFORD RELIEF is entrusted to Friends Relief Service whose voluntary workers act with economy, care and a personal touch, regardless of frontiers, race, politics, class or creed. Many countries have benefited and now the peoples of Austria, Poland and the British Zone of Germany are getting most attention, but France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, etc., are not neglected.

Gifts as below will be welcome (if no local body is collecting for Europe):—

MONEY FOR FOOD, MEDICAL SUPPLIES, BLANKETS, ETC., for children, the aged, and special cases. (This does not reduce our rations.) Please make cheques payable to "European Relief," cross and post to Barclays Old Bank, High Street, Oxford, Sir Alan Pink will acknowledge.

CLOTHING, FOOTWEAR, UNIFORMS, TOWELS, BEDDING, BLACKOUTS, MENDING MATERIALS, Etc. (including clean, mendable articles for repair, by Displaced Persons sadly needing work) to "Oxford," c/o Messrs. Taphouse's, 3, Magdalen St., Oxford. Lady Franks will acknowledge (if address supplied).

BOOKS & PERIODICALS (any language: for Reading Rooms) to "OXFORD," c/o C.O.B.S.R.A., 75, Victoria St., London, S.W.I.

OXFORD FOR FAMINE RELIEF COMMITTEE (Reg'd War Charities Act, 1940) FOR THE FRIENDLESS

N.B.—We cannot accept food or coupons nor send parcels to individuals.

Helping to win the peace: the Oxford Committee advertised in the national, religious, and local press, keeping a careful tally on financial results. From Robert Castle's scrapbook.
10 Rowntrees vans detoured to Broad Street weekly to collect sacks of donated clothing and deliver them free to London.

11 and 12 In 1949, the premises at 17 Broad Street became a Giftshop selling anything from candlesticks to fur coats, false teeth to feather boas.

14 Clothing drives and fund-raising appeals in towns all over Britain were the fundraising style for the late 1950s. Organiser Gordon MacMillan right.
15 Winifred Coate (centre), a retired headmistress from Jerusalem, became a legend by striking water with money from Oxfam in the 'waterless' east Jordan desert (1962).

16 Oxfam's oldest ever supporter: Mrs. Roe, 110, of Lowestoft, gives a donation to Organiser Frank Carter.

17 The Pimlico warehouse: clothing donated to Oxfam was stored and baled here for despatch abroad.
Camps like Enns in Austria remained home for many years to 'hard core' war-time refugees. World Refugee Year 1959 tried to close the camps for good.

Clothing distributions gave each family member one good garment: Algerian refugees, 1958.
Refugee living, Hong Kong style, in the 1950s: a family of seven manages to eat a meal in one ‘bedspace’.

Bernard Llewellyn, Oxfam’s first Overseas Aid Officer, and later its Field Director in the Far East, visits a hospital in Hong Kong.
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setting up a milk distribution scheme for 1,200 children. 'When all is ready, we call 'Ajee, ajee' ('come, come'), and in less than 20 minutes 600 pints of milk have disappeared into tins, bottles, cupped hands and down throats, and supper time is over.' Sheila Bagnall was to be another forceful figure in the network of people involved in many pioneering projects, later working at Swaneng School in Botswana, and becoming an Oxfam trustee.

Victims of the Algerian Civil War, at first in the refugee camps, inside the country once peace was declared, continued to receive Oxfam help throughout the 1960s.

As the relief emphasis moved ever further afield throughout the 1950s, it became obvious that the future of any serious overseas aid programme did not lie in clothing. Many voluntary agencies already felt that garments had had their day: they cost a lot to ship and, unless people were desperate, climate, culture and pride inhibited their usefulness. In 1956 the Friends' Relief Council – to whose Bourne Street depot in Pimlico most of the 'men's heavy', 'women's light', and other categories collected by the Oxford Committee had long been consigned – announced its intention of closing down its clothing operation.

This precipitated some soul-searching in Oxford, particularly as the volume of clothing coming in was rising: in 1954-55, 472 tons, in 1955-56, 546 tons. Clothing appeals were deeply entrenched in the Oxford Committee's modus operandi, even its identity; the idea of dropping them overnight was impracticable. So Oxfam decided to take over the FSC depot and continue the operation themselves. But Kirkley used the opportunity to give the clothing issue a thorough airing. He did not want to see the growing list of grant-aided projects foreshortened because a high proportion of cash income had to be spent on shipping to destinations such as India cast-off clothing which no Indian woman would want to wear.

Over the clothing issue, Kirkley was at odds with Cecil Jackson-Cole, still the hyperactive 'Hon. Sec.'. Jackson-Cole was a great enthusiast for clothing, partly because he genuinely wanted to wrap up every refugee in a woollie. But also because clothing was a card he could play to fulfill his expansionist ambitions for Oxfam. All clothing donated was valued, and this value was expressed in the accounts by a money equivalent. In this way, the Oxford Committee's overhead expenses appeared very low: under 10 per cent. This was useful at a time when all charities were supposed to run if not on air, at least on a shoe-string. But it was also a liability because aid in the form of grants instead of clothing – as grants grew in proportion – looked extravagant.
After Frank Carter’s appointment in 1953, Jackson-Cole wanted to take on more people like him and expand Oxfam’s local branch network. Clothing drives were still the key local activity. Jackson-Cole convinced himself that spending money – employing people – to bring in clothing would also help boost appeals for cash. It would also, incidentally, be represented by money in the balance sheet and thus contribute to the charity’s overall growth. Although he was a great schemer, Jackson-Cole’s motives were of the best. He simply wanted Oxfam to become well-known and thereby widely supported. A network of local organisers would provide a set of building blocks for a financially solid future. These considerations, in his mind, overruled Kirkley’s desire to reduce the role of clothing in Oxfam’s overseas allocations.

Jackson-Cole’s instinct about Oxfam’s growth and visibility was correct. But he was constantly thwarted by the much more cautious Committee. With something close to sleight of hand, Jackson-Cole found a way around his colleagues’ objections. He had set up a philanthropic organisation called Voluntary and Christian Service in 1953, and he began to use it to run local clothing appeals on Oxfam’s behalf. This created considerable friction. Not only was Kirkley trying to diminish clothing’s predominance in the aid programme; he also disliked the fact that helpers were operating in the Committee’s name without Oxfam having any control over their actions. It was, however, unthinkable to tell them to stop. Suggesting this course to Jackson-Cole was almost as difficult; hints were invariably ignored.

In 1958, the status of the Oxford Committee was changed, a move which Kirkley justified to Jackson-Cole by saying that it would make Oxfam ‘more settled’ – a prospect which did not appeal to Jackson-Cole at all. But the Committee had outgrown the temporary character implied by its original registration as a ‘War Charity’. It was now registered as a non-profit-making company, a step which indicated its permanent nature and its seriousness of intent. This, it was hoped, would encourage trusts, industry, and wealthy patrons to give long-term support. It would also, incidentally, make it more difficult for Jackson-Cole to apply his mastery of the art of bending ‘his’ organisation to his will.

From this point on, the ‘Hon. Sec.’ became a less potent figure. Jackson-Cole resigned his formal position in 1966, but stayed in close touch as the ‘Hon. Sec. Emeritus’ for many years. Whatever the extraordinary quirks of his personality, for the first 12 years of its life, Oxfam owed more to Jackson-Cole than to any other individual.

The legal and administrative consolidation of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief was an important landmark. Physically the Committee had become more dispersed, occupying several office locations in central Oxford as well as the premises above the Gift Shop at 17 Broad Street.
Income expanded steadily: in the financial year 1958-59, the total topped £500,000, of which just over half was cash, the rest representing the value of clothing. Cash donations were raised mainly through advertising and postal appeals to previous donors. The BBC radio appeal for 1958, by Lord Birkett, yielded nearly £49,000. The Gift Shop raised over £19,000, and the embryonic Christmas Card operation, £1,400.

In 1959, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief was on the threshold of a new chapter. The impetus, fittingly, was to be the refugees who had filled the 1950s with their plight.

Although refugee situations piled up throughout the 1950s, each tended to occupy a short span of public attention before fading from view until some new calamity pushed the ‘forgotten people’ back into the news. The intractability of many refugee situations made it difficult to inspire more than sporadic sympathy with their cause.

Hungary changed that. The mass exodus of push-cart people through the snow made a deep impression on public opinion all over the world. Hungary also proved that, with concerted international effort, an exodus of people could be gathered up and redispersed humanely and efficiently. It showed that a refugee problem could be solved.

Early in 1958, a young Conservative politician and journalist, Timothy Raison, came up with an idea: a World Refugee Year, a concerted 12-month push, to do something definitive for the world’s uprooted. He was influenced by ‘that strange desolation of spirit’ he witnessed on a visit to Jordanian refugee camps in 1956; he was also one of the armada of sympathisers who went to the Austrian-Hungarian border. Raison enlisted three colleagues: MP Christopher Chataway, journalists Trevor Philpott of Picture Post and Colin Jones of The Economist. Philpott had covered both the Hungarian uprising and the Korean War; Chataway had visited the crowded pavements of Hong Kong.

Raison was the editor of Crossbow, a new Conservative Party quarterly journal. The issue of April 1958 carried their joint article: ‘Wanted: A World Refugee Year’. The proposal might well have sunk without a ripple let alone a splash. But partly because it was solidly conceived and articulated, and partly because it echoed a mood of the moment, it not only floated but set sail.

Crossbow alone could never have made it happen. But there was an instant response from those organisations in Britain concerned with refugees, in particular from David Ennals, General Secretary of the UNA in London, and Janet Lacey of the British Council of Churches’ refugee assistance arm, Inter-Church Aid. A key supporter, who helped to promote the idea to David Ormsby Gore, Minister of State at the Foreign
Office, was Sir Arthur Rucker; Rucker had been head of UNKRA in Korea, was the Chairman of Trustees of UNA's Refugee Fund, and an Oxfam trustee. The representative of the UNHCR in London, Nicholas Wyroubof, also took up the idea of the Year, promoting it to Auguste Lindt, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva, and to the British press.

Mainly because of its performance in the wake of the Hungarian uprising, the UNHCR had been given an extension of its mandate, and a wider range of geographical responsibilities, by the 1957 UN General Assembly. The plan submitted in 1954, to close the European camps by the end of 1958, was nearing completion; unfortunately, the camps were not nearing closure, although donors were becoming more generous and over three years 50,000 refugees had been resettled. The need for yet another 'last push' on behalf of the increasingly abject camp population was a potent argument for the Year, and received support from all active UN sympathisers. The support of UNA was particularly important.

The Year's proponents moved swiftly. David Ennals at UNA arranged for an all-party group of MPs to sign a letter to *The Times*. In Geneva, Dame May Curwen, British Delegate to the UN Refugee Fund, raised the idea internationally. At the United Nations in New York, it was promoted by a British Delegate, Pat Hornsby Smith MP. In the autumn, she submitted a Resolution to the General Assembly, explaining: 'The basic objective of the scheme is to devote a year of intensified effort to focus public opinion, and to enlist support, both from governments and equally from peoples and charitable organisations of all kinds, to solve the problems of refugees wherever they may be throughout the world, into whatever formal category they may fall.

'If it is successful, it may help greatly, coming at this particular moment, in resolving once and for all one or two of the more manageable refugee problems with which the High Commissioner and his staff have been wrestling in recent years.' The resolution was passed overwhelmingly, by 59 votes to nine. It called upon member states to set up national organisations to pursue the objectives of the Year; the Year itself was to begin in June 1959.

The focus was placed on four specific situations. First, and most prominent in every mind, were the 162,000 European refugees mostly living in Austria and Germany but also in France, Italy, Turkey and Greece, of whom 32,000 were still lingering in camps. Then came the 915,000 Palestinians whom UNRWA resources could barely sustain, and the 750,000 Chinese refugees spilling over pavements and gutters in Hong Kong. Also singled out was a group of between 8,000 and 10,000 European Russians stranded for decades in China, now persecuted by the Communist government and unable to leave.
Of these predicaments, the key issue with which the Year became identified was the drive to 'close the camps'. Countries must be persuaded to relax immigration controls so that difficult cases could be admitted and families, long separated because of illness or handicap, reunited. The Year also aimed to raise funds; to provide the means for programmes of long-term rehabilitation and training run by voluntary agencies.

The first National Committees to be established worldwide were those in Britain, France and the US. The World Refugee Year United Kingdom Committee was a prestigious and highly effective body. Its patron was Her Majesty the Queen, and its three Vice-Patrons were the Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, and the leaders of the two opposition political parties, Hugh Gaitskell and Jo Grimond. The Chairman was Baroness Elliot of Harwood; Christopher Chataway and Dame May Curwen were Vice-Chairmen; and the Chairman of the Executive Committee was Sir Arthur Rucker. A number of other well-known figures were included in its various committees, including Janet Lacey, David Ennals, and others from the voluntary agency world.

The Chairman of its Public Relations and Publicity Committee was H. Leslie Kirkley, Secretary of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief. This was the first time that Kirkley, representing Oxfam, held an official position in which he rubbed shoulders with people at the heart of public and international life. Kirkley saw World Refugee Year as a launch-pad for Oxfam, a chance to elevate it from what was still essentially a provincial niche onto a much broader national stage. Equally, he saw the Oxford Committee as a major fundraiser and consciousness-raiser for refugees, both to the public and as partner with like-minded organisations. The results of the Year were to exceed his and others' wildest expectations.

During 1958, the Oxford Committee had been growing in size and confidence. In the run-up to World Refugee Year, a number of new staff members were recruited.

The most significant was Bernard Llewellyn, who was to play an important role in shaping the embryonic overseas aid programme. Llewellyn was an economist who had two areas of special expertise. He was the first person to join the staff with experience in running relief programmes overseas, most recently with Save the Children in Korea; and he was an accomplished journalistic writer with three books on Asia to his credit. He was also a thinker, not always a comfortable one to have around. Brought up a Methodist, he had become a conviction pacifist in the pre-war period. During the war he had served with the Friends'
Ambulance Unit in South West China, driving the length of the Burma Road. Two later recruits to Oxfam's aid programme, Ken Bennett and Michael Harris, served a similar apprenticeship.

Llewellyn's job title, 'Grants and Information Officer', reflected the fact that Oxfam had not yet completed its metamorphosis from the very simple and straightforward role of overseas conduit for compassion. The Committee was essentially an almoner, selecting charitable good works on behalf of donors at home, and communicating back the 'good news' about what their gifts had done. Llewellyn was expected to write advertising copy and Information Bulletins, drawing on correspondence from the recipients of grants. Searching questions about the way a programme was being run and its relevance to the overall picture of need were not yet part of the organisational vocabulary. Llewellyn, with his overseas experience and his reflective instincts, was to make them so.

Another important appointment was that of Financial Officer, Gordon Rudlin, an accountant, recruited via the Society of Friends network in 1959. And the Committee also began to build up the network of staff for local appeals Jackson-Cole had envisaged, taking on Gordon MacMillan in 1959, followed shortly afterwards by Geoffrey Petts and Peter Briggs.

These local organisers worked round the clock out of their own front rooms, driving up and down the country creating support groups and masterminding local drives. Their World Refugee Year committees, drawing on Mayoral parlours, church and voluntary groups, were an important ingredient of the Year's success in Britain. These incipient Oxfam groups were uncharacteristic of traditional blue-chip charitable committees. They were mainly ordinary folk, often professional and working people. The unwanted refugee - stateless, penniless and alone, pining away in a camp or on a pavement - was a potent symbol of wasted humanity and proved an inspiration for a new kind of workaday compassion.

World Refugee Year in Britain was launched on 1 June 1959 by the Lord Mayor of London at a ceremony at Mansion House. The Prime Minister spoke, as did the other heads of political parties; ambassadors, churchmen, and leading industrialists were present. An appeal film was made for use in cinemas by the Duke of Edinburgh, and Lord Montgomery and Lady Churchill both made radio appeals during the next six months. The degree to which the Year caught on, creating a bandwagon onto which jumped the press, public figures, civic institutions, schools, and every kind of society and organisation, was exceptional. The government gave £200,000 to the UK Committee, and Britain - like other countries - announced a special scheme to relax immigration regulations so that homes could be given to some hundreds of the TB-affected and handicapped.
Oxfam's strategy of mobilising local groups, of making the Year penetrate into homes and communities through events of every kind - coffee mornings, concerts, Youth Club drives, flag days, school competitions - paid off handsomely. Cash income for the six months to the end of February 1960 was more than double that of the same six months in the previous financial year: close to £300,000. This allowed a considerable expansion in Oxfam's grants for aid to refugees, particularly in the Middle East.

Energy was also devoted to events which conferred national visibility on Oxfam. A Gift Fair in London's West End, laid on by Joe Mitty and Leslie Durham of the Broad Street Gift Shop and opened by Anna Neagle, raised £1,500 in a week. A frugal Lenten lunch – bread and cheese for one guinea – was served to 60 peers, MPs, bishops, sports and theatre celebrities at the Westbury Hotel and lavishly covered by press and TV. Flora Robson and Christopher Chataway welcomed the guests, and Chataway launched a 'hunger lunch' movement. 'If everyone in Britain went without one meal, the money saved would raise £2 million.'

The fundraising success of World Refugee Year in Britain outstripped all expectations. After six months, the initial £2 million target was raised to £4 million, which in turn was rapidly overtaken. Of the 15 refugee-oriented charities most prominently associated with the Year, Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service (soon to become Christian Aid) raised the most: £1,253,500; the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief came next with £755,900, gaining Oxfam recognition as a charity of national status. In no other country – 39 altogether set up National Committees – did World Refugee Year capture so much attention. The total raised in the UK was over £9 million.

Worldwide, the Year yielded $74.7 million, of which $23.2 million came from governments and $51.5 million from the fundraising efforts of National Committees. Contributions in 1960 and 1961 brought the grand total to $91 million. The voluntary agencies who produced two-thirds of this result had their own international co-ordinating committee (ICWRY) in Geneva, set up in March 1959 under the sponsorship of the Standing Committee of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees. At the two conferences held in January 1960 and January 1961 for the 80-odd members of the ICWRY, Kirkley was on the UK delegation and chaired one of the three Working Parties. He made many contacts in the international community which were to serve Oxfam well in coming years.

The dream of the Year – to close the remaining European camps – was not fulfilled. But it came measurably nearer. Of the hard-core cases, only 7,000 remained. And when the goal was finally achieved in the early 1960s, it was largely because of the Year's impetus. Many of the
Europeans in China were rescued; a large-scale scheme for vocational training among the Palestinian refugees was launched; extra assistance went to the Hong Kong refugees, and to the Algerian victims of civil war, a group not originally targeted. During World Refugee Year, many countries which had previously been reluctant to do so ratified the 1951 UN Convention on refugee status.

Most important of all, the continuing predicament of the refugee, the stories of lives locked up and forgotten in the rotting huts, tented camps, and pavement shanties, emerged definitively onto the international humanitarian agenda. In the subsequent decades, they have never left it.