Teaching the History of Charity and Philanthropy through Objects

A DIY Approach

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ABSTRACT: This article considers the material culture of charity and philanthropy, arguing that objects and artifacts related to charitable causes and campaigns are important sources for research and teaching. Recent scholarship explores the challenges faced in preserving and enabling access to records of charitable organizations but rarely examines material objects in this context. Yet charity objects can be engaging, stimulating, and insightful when used with both public audiences and students. This article offers an outline of object-based learning (OBL) in higher education. It then explores how teaching the history of charity and philanthropy through objects requires pedagogical innovations beyond the museum-based approaches which tend to dominate much OBL practice and suggests more portable, accessible, and affordable solutions. The paper ends by examining the pedagogical benefits of teaching the history of charity and philanthropy through material culture.

KEY WORDS: material culture, charity, philanthropy, objects, teaching

The Archives and Records of Charity, Humanitarianism, and Philanthropy

In a 1992 report summarizing the first seven years of Band Aid's work, Irish pop musician-turned-philanthropist Bob Geldof explicitly referenced the materiality of the "Do They Know It's Christmas" charity single when he asked donors, "Will you ever forget the gift of a small plastic record in the cold dark Christmas of '84?"[1] This original seven-inch record encased in its Peter Blake-designed sleeve is now a collector's item, widely available on online auction sites—I have one myself. In the forty years since the charity single's release, much scholarship across many disciplines has discussed the song's lyrics, its place in British popular culture, the role

1 Band Aid, *With Love from Band Aid: Report of Seven Years Work* (London: Band Aid Trust, 1992), 3; see Norbert Götz, Georgina Brewis, and Steffen Werther, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World: The Moral Economy of Famine Relief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 278–83 for a discussion.

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp. 16–36 (May 2024). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576. © 2024 by The Regents of the University of California and the National Council on Public History. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2024.46.2.16.

"Do They Know It's Christmas" seven-inch charity single, 1984. (Photo by author)

of celebrities and the media in humanitarian fundraising, as well as the operations of the Band Aid Trust, which was set up to administer the millions it raised for famine relief in Ethiopia.[2] However, the material culture of the Band Aid phenomenon is one aspect that remains underexplored. This was true of much historical scholarship on charity, humanitarianism, and philanthropy until relatively recently, even though many objects relating to philanthropic causes and campaigns, such as collecting boxes, pin badges, lapel buttons, and charity-branded household items, have become highly collectible items. I've experienced first-hand what appears to be a particularly brisk market on eBay for vintage charity collecting boxes, often losing out to higher bidders.

2 See for example Lucy Robinson, "Putting the Charity Back into Charity Singles: Charity Singles in Britain 1984–1995," *Contemporary British History* 26, no. 3 (2012): 405–25; Susanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: Hurst, 2013); Cheryl Lousley, "'With Love From Band Aid': Sentimental Exchange, Affective Economies and Popular Globalism," *Emotion, Space and Society* 10 (2014): 7–17; Andrew Jones, "Band Aid Revisited: Humanitarianism, Consumption and Philanthropy in the 1980s," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 189–209; Götz, Brewis, and Werther, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*.

This paper begins by exploring some of the challenges of research into the material culture of charity and philanthropy and the significance of recent activism to promote the better preservation and use of voluntary organizations' archives and records before turning to the focus of this paper: how these historical objects can be inspiring and engaging to use in the higher education classroom. Drawing on a case study of my own "DIY" approach to curating a teaching collection, the article argues that engaging with objects can center the role of ordinary people in the history of voluntary action in twentieth-century Britain, particularly the millions of women, young people, and children who volunteered and raised money for causes they believed in, joined campaigns and protests, or became members of voluntary associations. Teaching charity history through objects requires pedagogical innovations that go beyond the museum-based approaches, which tend to dominate much object-based learning practice in higher education. A portable, affordable, curated teaching collection opens charity history to a wider range of educators and can be adapted for use in public engagement or informal educational settings. The paper ends with a discussion of the pedagogical benefits of teaching the history of charity and philanthropy through objects, including the value of creating sensory links to the past and the importance of improving memory retention as a key outcome for students.

In recent years there has been a new focus on the source base used to write histories of charity and philanthropy, with a growing scholarship exploring the challenges faced in preserving and enabling access to records of charitable and humanitarian organizations or specific causes and campaigns.[3] The place of material objects and artifacts in such collections is rarely, if ever, discussed in this literature. Globally, the archives and records of voluntary organizations remain vulnerable and at risk, although there are a number of welcome initiatives seeking to raise awareness of this vulnerability in order to help mitigate these risks through practical advice and by promoting better partnerships between archivists, researchers, and owners of records.[4] Although larger, better-funded charitable and

3 Elizabeth Dawson et al., "Issues and Challenges for Records Management in the Charity and Voluntary Sector," *Records Management Journal* 14, no. 3 (2004): 111–15; Matthew McMurray, *Charity Archives in the 21st Century* (Cardiff: Royal Voluntary Service, 2014); Georgina Brewis, "Using Archives and Objects in Voluntary Action Research," in *Researching Voluntary Action: Innovations and Challenges,* ed. Jon Dean and Eddy Hogg (Bristol: Policy Press, 2022); Melanie Oppenheimer, "The Historian Activist and the Gift to the Nation Project: Preserving the Records of the Australian Red Cross," *Archives and Manuscripts* 48, no. 2 (2020): 171–85; Bertrand Taithe, Mickaël le Paih, and Fabrice Weissman, "Historicising Humanitarian Action: Synchronicity in Historical Research and Archiving Humanitarian Missions," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2022): 49–56.

4 Produced in eight languages by the International Council on Archives, *The Records of NGOs, Memory to be Shared: A Practical Guide in 60 Questions* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 2004). In the UK the British Academy funded "Archiving the Mixed Economy of Welfare" project, see Charity and Voluntary Sector Archives, https://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/. The National Archive's Charity Archives Development Plan was published in 2022 (https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/advice-and-guidance/running-your-organisation/charity-archives-development-plan). Important doctoral research is underway via an AHRC-funded

humanitarian organizations are likely to have invested more heavily "in the preservation of their own pasts" and thus receive greater attention from academic researchers, it is not always the case that even the highest-income charities today consider their own histories to be of value or worthy of investing resources in archives and records management.[5] Scholars have pointed to the role of researchers and activists in making important "archival interventions" to preserve particular collections—such as Melanie Oppenheimer's work securing a permanent home for the archives of the Australian Red Cross—or a need for owners of records and researchers to "co-curate" collections where these are not available for research.[6] In many cases, the records of an organization are held privately, and researchers will need to negotiate access individually, which can raise barriers to critical analysis. The creation of new archive collections, such as the "Philanthropy Archive" at the University of Kent (2019) and the "Humanitarian Archive" at the University of Manchester (2022), are also forms of academic archival intervention.[7] There is evidence too of greater ethical reflection about the representation of individuals whose stories may appear in charity archives.[8] This paper seeks to add to this literature by drawing attention to the material culture of charity as equally worthy of preservation and use in research and teaching alongside the paper-based, audiovisual, and digital records of voluntary organizations.

In line with a wider material turn across disciplines, there is now a growing interest in researching the history and contemporary practice of charity and philanthropy through the lens of objects, as the articles in this special issue attest.[9] Indeed, in recognition that knowledge of the past has often been "constrained by reliance on written materials alone," Laurel Thatcher Ulrich et al. suggest that "just about any tangible thing can be pressed into service as primary historical evidence."[10] The *Journal of The History of Childhood and Youth*, started in 2008, includes an "object lesson" in every issue to "exemplify how paying attention to things can shed light on the experience of a child or youth," with several of these

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Collaborative Doctorial Award, "Charity and Voluntary Sector Archives at Risk: Conceptualising and Contextualising a Neglected Archives Sector."

5 Eleanor Davey and Kim Scriven, "Humanitarian Aid in the Archives: Introduction," *Disasters* 39, no. 2 (2015): 113–28.

6 Oppenheimer, "Historian Activist"; Dydia DeLyser, "Towards a Participatory Historical Geography: Archival Interventions, Volunteer Service, and Public Outreach in Research on Early Women Pilots," *Journal of Historical Geography* 46 (2014): 93–98; Georgina Brewis et al., "Co-curation: Archival interventions and Voluntary Sector Records," *Area* 55, no. 3 (September 2021).

7 See "The Humanitarian Archive," John Rylands Research Institute and Library, https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/special-collections/subject-areas/humanitarian-archive/; "UK Philanthropy Archive," University of Kent Special Collections and Archives, https://www.kent.ac.uk/library-it/special-collections/uk-philanthropy-archive.

8 Laura Crawford, "Emancipatory Archival Methods: Exploring the Historical Geographies of Disability," *Area* (2022).

9 Brewis, "Using Archives and Objects"; Tammy Proctor, "(Uni)Forming Youth: Girl Guides and Boy Scouts in Britain, 1908–39," *History Workshop Journal* 45 (Spring 1998): 103–34.

10 Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ivan Gaskell, Sara J. Schechner and Sarah Anne Carter, *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2–3.

linked to youth movements or children's charities.[11] Historical studies often draw on insights from anthropology and archaeology to interrogate the multiple meanings of seemingly mundane objects, such as paper poppies sold for the Royal British Legion, items of the Girl Guide uniform, or goods purchased at charity bazaars.[12] There has been further academic focus in sociology, geography, and nonprofit studies on the symbolism of philanthropic objects such as awareness-raising ribbons.[13] In his book on the symbolic power of charity, Jon Dean calls attention to a range of charity objects, such as the £1 cotton tote bags bearing the slogan "I shop at Cancer Research UK. I save lives" that are sold in Cancer Research UK's charity shops. These products echo, whether deliberately or not, the 1980s branding of the merchandise sold by the Band Aid Trust to raise money for famine relief, such as the Live Aid commemorative publication, which proclaimed, "This book saves lives."[14] Indeed the production of objects by charitable associations to raise funds or promote their campaigns has a very long history, with transatlantic abolitionists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century particularly innovative in this area.[15] The Victoria and Albert Museum, for example, describes Josiah Wedgwood's anti-slavery medallions as the "forerunner of the protest badge."[16] New research has called attention to how the Salvation Army "pioneered a new kind of purchase-triggered charitable donation and an expanded, distinctly new, material culture of philanthropy" through the production and sale of an extensive range of products in the late-nineteenth century.[17]

A challenge for historians is that, in many cases, such objects and ephemera have not been well preserved in charity archive collections—indeed, the material culture of charity and philanthropy can often fall in between what archives hold and what museums collect. Annette Sheil notes that "very little material culture" had survived from the Australian charity bazaars she studied because "a bazaar is ephemeral by nature."[18] Charities with limited professional knowledge of archiving and curating, working with tight budgets, have understandably prioritized key records

11 Martha Saxton, "Introduction," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 1–3.

12 Emily Bartlett, "Reassembling Disabled Identities: Employment, Ex-servicemen and the Poppy Factory," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 210–36; Proctor, "(Uni)Forming Youth," 103–34; Annette Shiell, *Fundraising, Flirtation and Fancywork: Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth Century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

13 Sarah Moore, *Ribbon Culture: Charity, Compassion and Public Awareness* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

14 *Live Aid: The Greatest Show on Earth* (London: Band Aid Trust, 1985).

15 J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787–1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Bronwen Everill, *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Capitalism in the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

16 "The Wedgwood Anti-slavery Medallion," Victoria and Albert Museum, https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-wedgwood-anti-slavery-medallion.

17 Sarah Roddy, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism in Britain, 1870–1912* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 41.

18 Shiell, *Fundraising,* 11.

(often paper-based), with objects and ephemera often seen as marginal to institutional histories and their retention compounded by the challenges and costs associated with conservation and storage. For collections still retained in-house by a charity, ephemera may not have survived, and objects might be the first to go when an archive service needs to downsize premises or reduce the use of offsite paid-for storage. The extent to which physical objects have been taken by local record offices, university special collections, or other archive repositories to which charities might have donated or deposited their archives varies hugely, in part according to *when* and *where* such collections might have been deposited. Any increasing interest among archivists in collecting material culture must be balanced by restrictions on strongroom space.

Some collections, for example, the Woodcraft Folk archive at University College London (UCL)—originally deposited at Cardiff University in 1978 as part of the "Youth Movement Archive"—contains a wide range of material culture including toys, badges, banners, and clothing.[19] On the other hand, although the papers of the National Union of Students of England and Wales, founded in 1922, were transferred to the Modern Records Centre (MRC) at the University of Warwick in batches from the 1980s to 2000s, the MRC was unable in 2023 to take many items from the extensive object-based ephemera the organization has collected. Larger items, such as furniture or paintings, are understandably less likely to be preserved than smaller objects such as badges or albums. Even where objects are accepted, such unusual items may be lower priority for cataloging, so researchers may struggle to identify that a particular archive even contains material culture. For example, the Church Missionary Society archive at the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham contains eight boxes of games and toys produced for child supporters of the mission, but the section remained uncataloged for many years.

Objects relating to the history of charity and philanthropy are also to be found in museum collections across the world, although specialist museums or exhibitions that focus exclusively on charity or philanthropy are very rare. There are, of course, many museums devoted to individual voluntary organizations or causes—two examples in London include the Foundling Museum, which tells the story of the "UK's first children's charity," the Foundling Hospital started in 1739, and the Museum of the Order of St John in London, which explores the evolution of a "charity that dates back almost a thousand years."[20] Museum collections with a focus on the history of childhood, education, medicine, housing, disability, or other social welfare issues will often contain objects linked to particular charities and causes, but they are rarely curated or cataloged under headings of "charity" or

19 Annebella Pollen, "Who Are All These Folk Dressed in Green?," in *A People's History of the Woodcraft Folk,* ed. Phineas Harper (London: Woodcraft Folk, 2014), 40–49.

20 See museum websites "History," Foundling Museum, https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-story/history/; "History of the Order," Museum of the Order of St John, https://museumstjohn.org.uk/our-story/history-of-the-order/.

"philanthropy," making them difficult to identify. There is no museum of charity or philanthropy in the UK. The Philanthropy Initiative at the National Museum of American History in Washington DC is an innovative and important example. It has been identifying and collecting material culture relating to the history of charity in the US and showcasing these objects through the exhibition *Giving in America* since 2016.[21] The Chinese Charity Museum in Nantong City, China, also set up in 2016, has been described as "probably the only national-level museum in the world to feature a permanent collection of exhibits focused solely on the history and practice of philanthropy."[22]

Inspiring Objects

For historians, objects and artifacts relating to a particular cause, campaign, or charity can "serve as both sources of inspiration and provide key evidence for research."[23] Such objects may be encountered in an archive setting, but they are also likely to be spotted in a museum, be something encountered in everyday life, or be tracked down and purchased from auction sites. In my own research, for example, I have purchased objects and items I had seen referred to in print sources—including a forget-me-not blue pin produced for older people attending clubs and activities run by the National Old People's Welfare Committee (now Age UK) in the 1940s and 1950s and a badge and enrollment card from the BBC's Radio Circle, an interwar club for middle-class radio-listening children that raised funds and promoted "beneficent deeds" for "children less fortunately situated than the members themselves."[24] A focus on the material culture of charity and on objects we buy, sell, or give away through charity shops, those well-known features of every British high street, has enabled me to reach a public audience for charity history.[25] In the UK, at least, it seems people are interested in the history of charity objects, and this can help spread the message of the significance, and vulnerability, of voluntary organizations' archives and records. Moreover, following in the footsteps of the BBC's "History of the World in 100 objects," a trend has developed for organizations to tell their history through lists of objects.[26] While I have deployed

21 "About," National Museum of American History Philanthropy Initiative, https://americanhistory.si.edu/philanthropy/about.

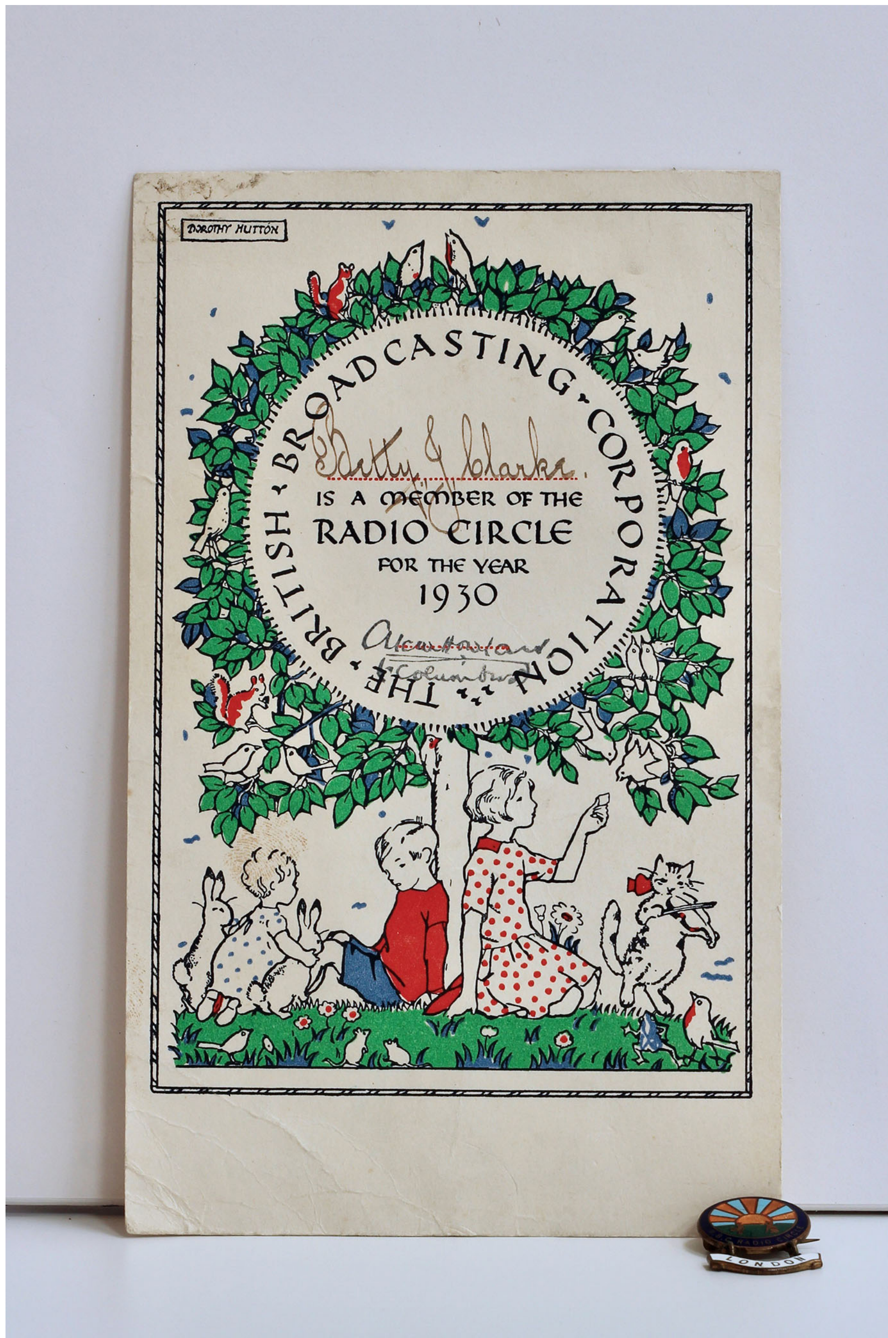
22 Elaine Jeffreys, "Curating Philanthropy and Socialist Governance: The Chinese Charity Museum," *Museums & Social Issues* 13, no. 2 (2018): 78–93, quotation 78.

23 Brewis, "Using Archives and Objects," 77.

24 Georgina Brewis et al., *Transformational Moments in Social Welfare: What Role for Voluntary Action?* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2021); Memo from BBC Director of Education, January 7, 1926, "Children's Hour," BBC Written Archives, R 11/58.

25 This research was featured on "What We Cherish and What We Give Away," Free Thinking, BBC Radio 3, November 10, 2020.

26 See for example, *Fifty: The University of Stirling in 50 Objects* (Stirling: University of Stirling, 2017); *Pennies of the People: A History of Aberystwyth University in 150 Objects* (Aberystwyth: University of Aberystwyth, 2022).



BBC Radio circle membership certificate, 1930, and pin badge from the late 1920s. (Photo by author)

objects in public history settings, the focus of this paper is how such objects can be used for research-based teaching with students in higher education. The article now offers an overview of object-based learning (OBL) in higher education more

broadly, before exploring how teaching the history of charity and philanthropy through objects requires pedagogical innovations beyond the museum-based approaches, which tend to dominate much of OBL practice.

Object-Based Learning in Higher Education

The twenty-first century has seen a resurgence of interest in higher education teaching through objects—now often described as "object-based learning" or simply OBL. In the nineteenth century, collecting and handling objects was the mainstay of many academic disciplines, with students studying art, sculpture, historical artifacts, and natural history specimens from specialist teaching collections compiled by academics that, in many cases, evolved into permanent university museum collections.[27] The twentieth century witnessed a decline in such pedagogies and prompted what has been described as a "crisis" for many university museums around the world, which saw the dispersal of collections or the merger and closure of premises, as museums failed to persuade their host universities of their value.[28] There has, however, been new recognition of the pedagogical benefits of students engaging with objects.[29] In higher education today, object-based learning is an active, experiential, and student-centered approach to learning, which contributes to improving the student experience.[30] Object-based learning involves the close observation, touching, handling, and often drawing or photographing of objects and artifacts that have either been selected by teaching staff or chosen by students from a collection. As such, it is a multisensory experience, and it is the tactile, sensory nature of object-based learning that scholars, including Helen Chatterjee, consider to be so important in understanding its pedagogical value.[31] There is an extensive scholarship on the relationship between "objects and meaning making" in educational theory, with objects valued for sparking imagination, eliciting a sense of identity, and triggering "memories, ideas and emotions in ways that other information-bearing materials do not."[32]

27 Thomas Kador et al., "Object-Based Learning and Research-Based Education: Case Studies from the UCL Curricula," in *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Perspectives from UCL*, ed. Jason Davies and Norbert Pachler (London: University College of London Press; 2018); Helen J. Chatterjee, "Object-Based Learning in Higher Education: The Pedagogical Power of Museums," *University Museums and Collections Journal* 3 (2008): 179–81.

28 Zenobia Kozak, "The Role of University Museums and Heritage in the 21st Century," *The Museum Review* 1, no. 1 (2016); Zenobia R. Kozak, "The Role of University Museums and Heritage in the 21st Century—The Museum Review," WordPress (blog), 2016, https://themuseumreviewjournal.wordpress.com/2016/12/12/vol1no1kozak/; Laurel Bradley, "Curricular Connections: The College/University Art Museum as Site for Teaching and Learning," College Art Association *Reviews* (2009).

29 David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984); Scott G. Paris, ed., *Perspectives on Object Centred Learning in Museums* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002); Helen Chatterjee and Leonie Hannan, eds., *Engaging the Senses: Object-Based Learning in Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

30 Helen Chatterjee, Leonie Hannan, and Linda Thomson, "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning and Multisensory Engagement," in Chatterjee and Hannan, *Engaging the Senses*, 1–18.

31 Chatterjee, Hannan and Thomson, "An Introduction to Object-Based Learning," 4.

32 Ibid.

Research has found that students across a range of disciplines consider object-based learning an effective method of learning that enhances the acquisition of knowledge and understanding.[33] Other studies have explored the links between object-based learning and the well-being of both students and staff who take part in it, including the "joy" and "happiness" experienced by university staff when teaching through object handling.[34] However, object-based learning may also generate nostalgic, emotional responses in ways that textual-based primary or secondary sources generally do not. On a more practical level, OBL is useful as a way to inspire discussion, promote engagement, and sustain group work in the higher-education classroom.

Object-based learning can be delivered in various ways, but a museum-based approach dominates in higher education practice in the US and UK.[35] In this model, students will be taken on one-off class trips to museums where they might handle selected items in small groups, or they may have a whole module of weekly taught sessions using objects in campus-based museums. The museum focus arose, in part, because of the important role played by university museums and their curators in promoting the renaissance of learning through objects from the 2000s onwards as they sought new futures for vulnerable collections. In the US, the Mellon Foundation's "College and University Art Museum Program" was a fifteen-year initiative aimed at strengthening the educational role of museums by supporting university museums and academic departments to collaborate more fruitfully.[36] A "curricular use of collections" has now become a standard approach for many university museums in engaging both students and academics and is valued because it can promote "cross-cultural, international, and interdisciplinary perspectives."[37] Leading promoters of object-based learning as a pedagogy in higher education in the UK include Helen Chatterjee and colleagues at UCL, which has three museums open to the public and in 2019/2020 opened its innovative "Object Based Learning Laboratory," a central space for teaching with various UCL collections including archives and rare books.[38]

33 Arabella Sharp et al., "The Value of Object-based Learning Within and Between Higher Education Disciplines," in Chatterjee and Hannan, *Engaging the Senses*, 97–116.

34 Cecilia Rodéhn, "The Happy Teacher: A Critical Examination of the Joys of Object-based Learning and Teaching in Higher Education," in *Object-Based Learning and Well-Being: Exploring Material Connections*, ed. Thomas Kador and Helen Chatterjee (London: Routledge, 2022), 140–56.

35 Joe Cain, "Practical Concerns when Implementing Object-Based Teaching in Higher Education," *University Museums and Collections Journal* 3 (2010): 197–202; Kador et al., "Object-based Learning and Research-Based Education"; Charlotte Clements and Georgina Brewis, "Good Practice Case Study: Diversifying the Curriculum and Engaging Students through Archives and Object Handling," in *The Inclusivity Gap*, ed. Karisa Krćmar (eBook, Inspired By Learning, 2019), 405–14.

36 Kylie E. Quave and Nicolette B. Meister, "Assessing the Impact of Curricular Collections Use at a Liberal Arts College," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32, no. 1 (2017): 2–19.

37 Quave and Meister, "Assessing the Impact," 2–3.

38 A different module I led was one of two courses chosen to pilot the OBL Lab in the academic year 2019/20.

However, there remain many practical barriers to teaching with objects, which means undergraduates rarely get the opportunity to engage with artifacts. These include access or transportation to collections (particularly for universities and colleges without campus museums), the large size of many undergraduate classes, the availability and resourcing of staff to lead sessions (often requiring curatorial or archival staff as well as tutors), and the lack of suitable spaces to use objects in many higher education settings.[39] Such obstacles can seriously reduce the "joy" in working with objects expressed by teaching staff that Rodéhn identified.[40] Since university collections, in my experience, rarely contain the types of objects and artifacts necessary for teaching the history of charity or philanthropy, a pedagogical development is needed that moves away from these museum-based approaches toward the more DIY approach of a "curated teaching collection," outlined in the next section.

A Curated Teaching Collection for Charity History

In 2016 I compiled a "curated teaching collection," made up of everyday items from the twentieth-century history of charity and youth in Britain, for use in higher education teaching. The collection was intended explicitly for two undergraduate modules at UCL, namely "Voluntary Organisations, NGOs and the British Public, 1914–1985" (for second- and third-year history students) and "Youth and Youth Movements in the Modern World" (for third-year education students). The objects have subsequently been used in a range of other modules and outreach activities, and, indeed, my teaching with objects has since widened to include extensive use of UCL museum and archival collections.[41] The curated teaching collection was initially purchased using around £250 taken from a £1,414 UCL Liberating the Curriculum Grant titled "Diversifying the curriculum: A staff-student partnership to select archival material and objects for use in teaching and learning across two faculties." The collection was purchased via online marketplaces but has since been supplemented by donations from a range of my professional contacts across the UK charity archives sector, including duplicate archival material or family-owned objects. The collection comprises a range of mostly small objects representing the material culture of charity, voluntary organizations, and youth movements in twentieth-century Britain. Although not all familiar or in common use today, many of the objects are of a more everyday nature than many of the museum objects

39 Cain, "Practical Concerns"; Charlotte Behr and S. Nevin, "The Roehampton Campus Project: Using Campus Collections and Memories of the University as a Learning and Teaching Resource for Humanities Students," *Arts and Humanities in Education* 18, no. 4 (October 2019): 395–415; Sara Marcketti and Jennifer Gordon, "'I Should Probably Know More': Reasons for and Roadblocks to the Use of Historic University Collections in Teaching," *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 17, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

40 Rodéhn, "The Happy Teacher," 148.

41 See Georgina Brewis and Kathryn Hannan, "The Worlds of UCL: Teaching, Learning and Institutional Histories," *London Review of Education* 21, no. 1 (2023).

typically thought of as teaching tools. In developing the collection, I conducted a series of focus groups to explore what students made of each object, and these findings shaped the development of the "Voluntary Organisations, NGOs and the British Public, 1914–1985" module.[42] Students reflected on how these items might have been originally used, or have been intended to be used, as well as on their future as prospective teaching tools. The research found, for example, that handling, touching, and comparing charity objects from different periods in the same session could prompt discussions about changing trends in charity fundraising over time.

We cannot write the history of modern Britain without considering the vital role of voluntary organizations in social and political life. Across the fields of social welfare, health, education and youth work, social policy, leisure, the arts and culture, international development, and humanitarian aid, nongovernmental organizations have made and continue to make significant contributions. The module "Voluntary Organisations, NGOs and the British Public, 1914–1985" aims to introduce students to the latest research and exciting debates in what is a vibrant and burgeoning field of history, with historians calling for the study of voluntary action to be taken more seriously by those studying British politics and growing interest in the topic from allied disciplines such as historical geography and sociology.[43] The module explores change across the twentieth century, from challenges to Victorian and Edwardian models of philanthropy during and after the First World War to the age of the big international NGO in the 1980s. By starting with the objects and ephemera that charitable causes and campaigns generated in the twentieth century—including badges, clothing, certificates, toys and games, household goods, collecting boxes, charity records, and so on—we put voluntary organizations and the volunteers, campaigners, and fundraisers these bodies involve at the center of students' understanding of the history of modern Britain. We examine the experiences and motivations of school children, students, and other members of the public who collected money, volunteered their time, signed petitions, and joined marches for a huge range of causes and campaigns in the twentieth century, examining the class-based and gendered nature of this participation.[44] The course also explores how the public's understanding of voluntary action has been

42 These are discussed in Clements and Brewis, "Good Practice Case Study."

43 Matthew Hilton et al., *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sarah Mills, "'An Instruction in Good Citizenship': Scouting and the Historical Geographies of Citizenship Education," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38, no. 1 (2013): 120–34.

44 Anna Bocking-Welch, "Youth against Hunger: Service, Activism and the Mobilisation of Young Humanitarians in 1960s Britain," *European Review of History* 23 no. 1/2 (2016): 154–70; Anna Bocking-Welch, *British Civic Society at the End of Empire: Decolonisation, Globalisation and International Responsibility* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880–1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

mediated by the media over time, notably by the BBC.[45] In so doing, it aims to also promote an enhanced understanding of the UK voluntary sector today.

This focus on the importance of voluntary action for ordinary people across the twentieth century—particularly women, children, and young people—has shaped the nature of the collection. Items include a range of uniforms, badges, and flags from several youth movements including the Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Woodcraft Folk, and the Boys' Brigade; a selection of paper First World War fundraising flags; a 1963 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) "Youth against the bomb" badge; a Women's Voluntary Service pin; a set of 1960s Youth Against Hunger postage stamps; a Youth Hostel Association postcard; five bright yellow Civil Defence Welfare Corps armbands from the 1950s; badges and medals spanning a century of the NSPCC's "Children's League of Pity" and its later incarnations; a tea cup and saucer in the (suffragist) green, white, and red colors of the National Association of Townswoman's Guilds; a carved wooden tea tray made by blind ex-servicemen supported by the charity St Dunstan's after the First World War; a 1920s badge and membership card for the BBC's Radio Circle for children;

Dr. Barnardo's paper-mâché charity collecting box, 1930s. (Photo by author)

45 Eve Colpus, "The Week's Good Cause: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-war BBC," *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 3 (September 2011): 305–29; Suzanne Franks, "'Please Send Us Your Money': The BBC's Evolving Relationship With Charitable Causes, Fundraising and Humanitarian Appeals," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 38, no. 4 (2018): 863–79.

Cup and saucer in the colors of the National Association of Townswoman's Guilds. (Photo by author)

a paper-mâché collecting box in the shape of a Dr. Barnardo's "cottage home"; a set of four framed and unframed certificates awarded to members of one family across the period 1922–59 by organizations including the British Red Cross and the Mothers' Union; and of course my seven-inch "Do They Know It's Christmas?" charity single.

Overall, there are now over fifty individual objects in the collection, which were stored in archive boxes in my university office until 2023 when they were put on display in a glass cabinet in UCL's Object Based Learning Lab to be more easily accessible for teaching. The initial idea, however, was that it would be a portable collection that could be carried to any classroom on campus—although, in practice, carrying several boxes containing all this material can be a challenge. The collection is continuously growing as I spot new items to buy online or in charity shops (now mostly using my own money) or receive donations from someone who has heard of my interest. Some of the objects are familiar and instantly recognizable to students—the iconic CND badge, for example—others less so, such as the BBC

Armbands produced for Civil Defence Corps Welfare volunteers, 1952. (Photo by author)

Radio Circle badge or the Civil Defence Welfare Corps armbands. The collection was inevitably shaped by what objects were available to buy on eBay, with youth movements or war charities seemingly well represented by online traders. To accompany the collection, I put together a full written inventory, listing all items with a short paragraph of text about the object, its provenance and the charitable organization or cause to which it was linked, and a reading list.

In the "Voluntary Organisations, NGOs and the British Public, 1914–1985" module, objects from the collection are used in the classroom with students every session over the ten-week course. In the first seminar, all the objects are laid out and students are asked to choose an object or two to closely examine, at first, without any background information. Searching online is forbidden, but students can discuss in groups and share theories about each object. Following

well-established object-based learning practice, this lack of context or easy answers forces students to look very closely at each object, and often they can find information about the date it was made, what cause or campaign it might be linked with, and who might have owned or used it in the past, through observation and discussion. This first class not only introduces students to the objects themselves but, through them, to the course themes and to key debates. As this is a curated teaching collection, students are free to hold and examine each object and even to try on items such as hats or the armbands, which would be unlikely in many museum settings.

Every object in the collection is linked to course content—and for the subsequent nine weeks of teaching an "object of the week" becomes a way into each topic, offering a unique perspective that focuses student attention on the individuals who engaged with the organizations discussed. For example, we start with a Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) pin badge to open a seminar on mainstream women's voluntary organizations and citizenship—asking students to consider: what did the badge symbolize for the (mostly) housewives who earned the right to wear it in the 1940s and 1950s? What skills, experiences, training, and authority might the WVS uniform have conveyed to others at the time? The Radio Circle badge and certificate allow insight into the BBC's long and intimate connection with mediating charitable giving in Britain, and the Freedom from Hunger postage stamps begins a session on popular humanitarianism and international development in the era of the Cold War and decolonization. The module ends with a class exploring humanitarianism in the 1980s through the lens of Band Aid—playing the "Do They Know It's Christmas?" charity single, as well as a number of other records that were produced across North America and Europe to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia, as a way into discussion of changing fundraising practices, the role of celebrities, and the concept of "expressive humanitarianism."[46] The emphasis on approaching the history of charity through material culture is further developed by other seminar activities; students, for example, have undertaken activities such as creating a "pop-up" display about a particular youth movement (as the collection is particularly strong in that area), consolidated their learning about protest movements by designing and making their own badge to take home, and explored historical traces of philanthropy and social welfare in the built environment through walking seminars of the local area.

To give a more detailed example, there are two sets of objects that directly link to a class on voluntary action and the First World War: a set of four small paper flags that were sold on the streets to raise money for a range of causes in aid of the war effort and a wooden tea tray made by blinded soldiers retrained after the war by St Dunstan's, a charity set up in 1915 to train ex-servicemen, now known as Blind Veterans UK. The seminar explores how the British public responded to wartime charitable appeals, considers problems of fraud and the growing demand for

46 Götz, Brewis, and Werther, *Humanitarianism in the Modern World*.

Selection of paper fundraising flags from the First World War. (Photo by author)

charity regulation that was eventually met through the War Charities Act of 1916, and examines provisions made by both government and philanthropy to deal with war disabilities. The session examines the thesis that the First World War was a crucial stage in the development of the British "voluntary sector" that reshaped the relationship between voluntary and state effort.[47] To prepare for the class, students have to read a chapter by Peter Grant, and they also look at two written primary sources—a *Daily Mail* article about flag sellers and a set of fundraising appeals that appeared in newspapers and magazines during the war.[48] These objects, read in relation to the primary and secondary sources, prompt questions and discussion—by touching and handling the item, students come to realize that the flags are basically the equivalent of a sticker or pin they might receive for giving money to a street collector today. Looking at these fragile paper items that are over one hundred years old, students have regularly asked me how and why I was able to buy these cheaply on eBay—prompting a realization that millions of such flags were produced for sale and a new understanding of the enormous scale of wartime fundraising. At the time of writing, there are dozens

47 Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

48 Peter Grant, "Voluntarism and the Impact of the First World War," in *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society*, ed. Matthew Hilton and James McKay (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2011).

of such flags available to buy online, none costing more than ten pounds. Similarly, by handling rather than just reading about the tea tray, students are impressed by the craftsmanship and durability of the tray and have a new appreciation of the skills that the blind veterans acquired through training. Purchasing such a tray in the 1920s and 1930s was a way to acquire useful household items for a keen price while supporting a worthy cause. Students, moreover, question why disabled veterans had to be supported by charity after the war and discuss what this says about the challenges of reconstruction and the inadequacies of state aid. The seminar led to spin-off discussions about buying charity-branded goods today—would such items last over a century? Who makes such products and are they paid a fair wage? Why do we still have so many charities in twenty-first-century Britain?

Embedding Objects into Assessment

A key aspect of integrating objects successfully into teaching and ensuring that they do not remain just add-ons is to ensure that object-based learning is fully embedded into the whole module, including assessment. In the "Voluntary Organisations, NGOs and the British Public, 1914–1985" course students are asked to write an "object report." Each student selects one object (or a set of linked objects) from the curated teaching collection and produces a three thousand-word illustrated report offering a detailed description and analysis of the object with an assessment of its place in the history of voluntary action in modern Britain. Students need to connect the object to the voluntary organization, cause, or campaign with which it is linked and to explain its significance to the topic under study by researching its origins, use, ownership, and iconography. They are asked to situate the object in the history and historiography of voluntary action in modern Britain and to draw out the key themes, debates, and arguments in the history of charity and related areas. The assessment is intended to enhance students' skills of observation, research, and analysis and to promote engagement and student choice by offering a range of directions in which to take each project. Each object allows multiple interpretations. Take the paper-mâché Dr. Barnardo's house, for example. A student could choose to focus on the object primarily as a fundraising tool, or examine it for evidence of the long history of children's charitable activities, or focus on the work of Dr. Barnardo's as a charity providing residential care for children, including exploring the darker topics of child emigration, exploitation, and abuse.[49] Embedding assessments, such as object reports, is standard practice in object-based learning and is by no means unique to this module, but it does present a type of assessment that few history students who take the course have encountered before. The module was evaluated by collecting anonymous feedback (with a request that such reflections might be used in reporting on the module and in making

49 Susan Ash, *Funding Philanthropy: Dr Barnardo's Metaphors, Narratives and Spectacles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

improvements). This theme came out strongly from responses, with students noting, “It gave us a chance to do an assignment outside the usual history criteria” and that it “facilitated one of the most engaging essays I’m yet to write (the object report).”

Some Reflections on Teaching with Objects

Teaching the twentieth-century history of charity and voluntary action through objects has proved enjoyable and stimulating for me as a higher education teacher and seems to have been highly engaging for students. It is important to note that the curated teaching collection shaped the module content and design—by approaching charity history through everyday objects owned, used, collected, and worn by ordinary people in the past, we can better understand the significance of membership, volunteering, fundraising, and participation in charitable activities to the British public in the twentieth century. While necessarily only a partial evidence base, the module has routinely secured positive reviews from students who emphasize their enjoyment of learning through objects, the chance to explore a topic in depth that is only tangentially touched on in British history survey courses, and the opportunity for independent research offered through the object report. Holding, touching, and even wearing physical artifacts provides a very tangible link to the past that has encouraged students to think about those who might have used or worn these objects but whose experiences might not have been captured or survived in written form. As an early write-up of the project reported, “objects allow a direct, tangible and multisensory link to the past and allow students to feel that they are encountering an ‘authentic’ piece of the past, even when they understand that this authenticity is mediated.”[50] As a sensory experience, students felt that the classes handling objects and artifacts were more *memorable* than other seminars, which generally focused on discussing written texts—in years to come, they told me, they felt they would remember the course and better understand the contemporary role of the voluntary sector because of the object-based learning approach. Studies on the pedagogical benefits of object-based learning have likewise identified greater memory retention as a key outcome for students, alongside a deepened knowledge and understanding of key concepts and theories.[51] In particular, I have found using objects to teach charity history to be a helpful way to engage students unfamiliar with British history, particularly international students, because it enables them to fully contribute to discussion from the outset, thus breaking down barriers between students.

Creating my own object-based learning collection was a practical solution arising from the lack of suitable objects in existing collections to which I had access, and it aimed to overcome some of the well-known barriers to object-based

50 Clements and Brewis, “Good Practice Case Study,” 412.

51 Sharp et al., “The Value of Object-based Learning,” 97–116, quotation 113.

learning. Relatively cheap to acquire, a curated teaching collection is available to academics at universities and colleges without museum collections. A basic collection could be put together by spending perhaps £100 on eBay or looking in charity shops and asking for donations—many people have old items of Scout or Guide uniforms or a charity single, for example. Such a collection is portable and accessible, providing an opportunity for students to engage with material culture that is woven into curriculum design. Each object can be specifically sourced to complement the module's topics and can be matched to suggested academic reading. Students can interact with the objects regularly throughout the module and can make appointments to use objects for their own research. There is flexibility to change topics as new objects are acquired or as new research emerges on a subject, and it encourages what is called "contemporary collecting" of new (often free or very cheap) items to complement the existing collection. For example, I've added items such as the "I've had my jab" vaccination stickers and badges produced as part of the UK rollout of the COVID vaccine in 2021 and 2022, which involved the mass mobilization of volunteers.

Because the collection was created explicitly for use in teaching rather than acquired or inherited as a collection, each object can be touched and handled, and most of this learning can take place in classrooms. There is a very real chance that some objects can become damaged, dirtied, or lost through repeat handling and the constant unpacking and transportation required—though students are of course asked to take care with each item. Sadly, some of the First World War paper flags are no longer in the condition they were when I bought them, and at least one item of a youth movement uniform has been lost. For me, this is a small price to pay and should not preclude the objects in the teaching collection being handled. This is a possibly controversial approach to object-based learning, and it is certainly different from that of many museums where a concern to preserve the object is paramount. Students are not allowed to touch or handle many museum collections—even under controlled conditions such as in UCL's Object Based Learning Lab. In part, my approach can be justified because many of the objects used are everyday and familiar, often mass-produced, and easily replaced. Indeed, the everyday nature of the objects selected is also useful in making charity history accessible and points to its wider use in public history. My teaching is closely linked to my own "archival activism" in directing a long-running interdisciplinary project that seeks to promote the preservation and use of voluntary organizations' archives and records.[52] Promoting the teaching of charity history at the higher education level is an important aspect of this wider work, and since creating the collection, I've sought to disseminate my teaching approach to a wide interdisciplinary audience through conference talks, practical workshops, and both blogs and academic

52 Funded by the British Academy since 2014, see Charity and Voluntary Sector Archives, https://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/.

publications.[53] Through such activities, and in this article, I seek to raise awareness of the specific risks faced by voluntary sector archives and the varied research and teaching uses that exist for charity-produced artifacts, documents, and audio-visual sources.

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53 For some examples see Clements and Brewis, "Good Practice Case Study"; See also Georgina Brewis and Charlotte Clements, "Teaching History with Objects," Social History Society Exchange, December 19, 2018, https://socialhistory.org.uk/shs_exchange/teaching-history-with-objects/.