

TRANSITION AND THE TROUBLES – THE POST-WAR DECADES 1946 - 2015

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF HELPING CHILDREN

A journey of generosity and giving through the generations



The post war decades have seen the debate on family and welfare take many turns. In the 1940's the Welfare State came into being based largely on the Beveridge report. Poverty was not eradicated but disappeared from political view for most of the 1950's., and when it was 'rediscovered' in the 1960's 'child poverty' became an important issue. The 1960's and 1970's transformed society. Attitudes changed to sex outside marriage, the position of women, marriage and the role of the state to provide for all.

The late 1970's saw the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher aim to reduce public spending and the priority of fighting poverty was downgraded in the 1980's, whilst later the New Labour government pursued policies to help eradicate poverty, with some limited success. Since then coalition and Conservative governments, particularly the latter have moved to radically reduce public spending and curtail welfare benefits. In Ireland declining church influence, materialism and destabilisation of Northern Ireland by 'The Troubles' impacted families. Whilst in the South, European Union investment, the 'Celtic Tiger' economy followed by radical austerity have influenced social care. The North, cushioned from austerity for some years, is now subject to welfare applied to all UK regions.

Adjustment and Adaption

The Society in the post war decades has faced a period of radical change and necessary adaption. With the advent of the Welfare State the Society entered a period of adjustment where the state's role impinged on the Society's work. Annual Reports from 1945 onwards make reference to help by the state but this "universal impersonal help of the government leaves many needs unmet" (1948) according to one commentator. Reference is continually made to the "need for the church's help". The state's reach in terms of the National Assistance Board and Ministry of Education in Northern Ireland was lamented and criticised due to its restriction of the grant making policies of the Society. The Society in a new era of overarching state was feeling a curb of its powers and probably subconsciously attempting to redefine its role.

The reports continually assert its relevance in the midst of burgeoning state provision which though welcome, was viewed as impersonal and able to satisfy only basic tangible needs and unable to meet those that were intangible. The role of the Society and its neatness of fit within the framework of welfare provision has been debated in the decades since 1945. In 1987 one commentator suggested that "far from withering away, the need for the Society is growing". Perhaps reflecting the impact of diminished public spending, the comment may have equal relevance in the current climate where the retreat from welfare appears underway.

"We help the fatherless and motherless. This is our purpose, this is what we must live for"

The range of families helped by the Society has changed over the years and now encompasses separated, divorced, bereaved, disabled, single mothers, those in long term hospital care and those in prison. The type of background varies but the nature of the help is the same, and another theme prevalent in the Annual Reports after 1945 is still relevant today. The meaning of the grant is greater than the monetary value, for it is its emotional and spiritual import, showing that Christians care about the recipient, that resonates down through the years.

Numbers Helped & Finances 1955 – 2015 (Selected Years)

Year	Children On Roll	Children Elected	Subscriptions	Grants
			£	£
1955	1306	213	12,430	30,622
1965	1374	183	17,751	35,135
1975	1491	177	39,444	72,960
1985	1050	98	129,218	208,924
1995	983	131	202,515	333,239
2005	766	93	296,657	435,055
2014	728	93	335,607	578,050

Notes

1. Numbers on the roll are the numbers being assisted at 31 December each year.
2. 'Elected' means the number who applied and were selected for help each year.
3. Subscriptions are supplemented by investment and other income.

Case Studies

Case studies from 1946 to 2015 cover a wide variety of family backgrounds. Jackie's situation changed in 1950 when her husband, who had a good job became addicted to drink and left the family. A 12 year old and a 2 year old were left without support. The family were aided by the Society. Jennifer's situation deteriorated when her husband died in 1952 and she became hospitalised when the stress and strain became intolerable. Four children were supported by the Society. In Margaret's case her husband deserted her in 1961 leaving her with 5 children all of whom were supported by the Society. In 1980 the Society helped a family of four children where the father was in prison. In 1994 Roberta's husband died suddenly leaving her with 10 and 8 year old children. The Society supported the family. In 1997 John became disabled and had two children aged 14 and 10 to support. Again the Society was able to make a difference to this family. In 2009 a father was left to care for two children when his wife died, and, with one of the children seriously ill the Society helped to support the family through a difficult and traumatic time.

This random sample of applications illustrates the range of needs and the invariable response by the Society. It is impossible however to do justice to the vast catalogue of suffering and the Society's role in helping alleviate it. It is nevertheless a reminder of the diversity and complexity of need faced by the Society on a daily basis.

KEY TIME LINE 1946 – 2015

YEAR	EVENT
1948	National Health Service established in the UK
1949	Republic of Ireland comes into being
1969	"The Troubles" start in Northern Ireland
1995-2007	'Celtic Tiger' economy in Republic of Ireland
1998	Belfast Agreement



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