

Mobilising the Red Cross Journal: a charity's periodical in wartime

Article

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Mobilising the *Red Cross Journal*: A Charity's Periodical in Wartime

Abstract

The first issue of the *Red Cross Journal* was published in January 1914, only eight months before the outbreak of the First World War. This article explores the impact of the war on this publication, as the work of the charity it represented dramatically expanded over the course of the conflict. How did the *Journal* survive the war, at a time when the Red Cross was deeply involved in supporting soldiers? This article examines the genesis of this publication and its evolving role during the war. This periodical, we argue, not only helped raise awareness of the work carried out by the Red Cross, but it also served practical purposes in the areas of training and funding. This publication reveals an increasingly critical stance towards the British Empire's enemies in the war, as well as the need for the British Red Cross Society to foster a sense of unity amongst members posted around the world.

1. Relief Work in the First World War: A Brief Overview

The Centenary years have seen a growing interest in the role of philanthropic organisations during the First World War and its aftermath. A 2014 special issue of the *First World War Studies*, devoted to humanitarianism, highlights the “innovative humanitarian countermeasures” (Little 1) that emerged in response to the material and human destruction caused by the conflict. In his introduction to this special issue, Brendan Little underlines some of the challenges faced by relief organisations, including “fierce internal debates within their own organisations and bitter fights with rival relief agencies,” and sometimes also with state agencies (2). The present article makes a contribution to this emerging history of philanthropy in the First World War, while also furthering our understanding of the Home Front and of the agents involved in providing medical care during the conflict. It focuses on one such relief agency, the British Red Cross Society (hereafter BRCS), and its involvement in the Great War as narrated in a little-researched source: the organisation’s monthly newspaper, the *Red Cross Journal*. While some of the difficulties identified by Little, such as developing good working relationships with the War Office, had been addressed by the BRCS before 1914,

the question of collaboration with other relief agencies had to be tackled as soon as the war started.

The wartime work of the BRCS also raises questions pertaining to the struggle between maintaining a neutral approach to wartime relief, and relying on volunteers and funds from a country actively engaged in the war. How did the journal run by the national branch of a neutral organisation (the International Red Cross Committee) write about a war in which Great Britain was involved? This analysis of the *Journal* charts the development of a patriotic discourse as the war progressed while also examining how the BRCS presented itself to its individual members through the medium of the *Journal*. In his study of voluntary action in the First World War, Peter Grant stresses the collaboration between state and relief agencies, while Jessica Meyer's work on medical voluntarism underlines the "complex and contested relationship between the two" (108). If Meyer's analysis reinforces Grant's interpretation of the Great War as asserting "the state's domination of voluntary medical relief" (Meyer 108), she also stresses the tensions, past and contemporary to the outbreak of the Great War, between and military authorities and the British Red Cross Society. Moreover, disagreements within the BRCS itself, according to Meyer, were not uncommon (109). While these studies focus largely on the negotiation of relationships between governmental bodies such as the Army Medical Services, and voluntary organisations, the present article is concerned with the discourse on the war produced by one specific society, and with the way it envisioned and narrated its own role in the conflict. Where Meyer's study focuses more on male protagonists, this article charts the growing significance of female BRCS members. How, then, did the British Red Cross Society respond to the outbreak of the war? How did its work evolve throughout the conflict? This article explores the changes within the British Red Cross Society as it adapted to wartime conditions, and expanded the scope of its intervention.

The function of the *Red Cross Journal* as a medium and, we argue, a communication tool bridging geographical and experiential gaps arisen from the war, will also be considered. At a time when newspapers were changing rapidly, becoming lucrative commercial ventures under the influence of Lord Northcliffe (Williams 138), the *Red Cross Journal* fulfilled a different function from mainstream newspapers. While no archival records remain to help us ascertain the nature and size of its readership, most issues of the *Journal* have been kept between the Bodleian Library, the British Library and the British Red Cross Archives; the study of this periodical, and notably the editorial notes, gives some indication as to its success and its expanding target audience. While trench newspapers and aspects of wartime print culture such as censorship and propaganda are receiving increasing scholarly attention, the *Red Cross Journal* differs notably from such publications. The BRCS newspaper shares some similarities with trench publications insofar as it helped reinforce cohesion among members of a specific group (Fuller 13).

However, its durability, the conditions of its production, its target audience and the news it focussed on set the *Red Cross Journal* apart from both mainstream newspapers and trench publications. This article, based on a survey of the evolution of the key themes and sections featured in the 1914–1921 (and especially 1914–1918) issues of the *Red Cross Journal*, will therefore examine the singular position occupied by this publication, with special emphasis on the functions fulfilled by the *Journal* during the war, functions which justified, in the eyes of the Red Cross, continued investments of time and money at a time when most of the society's financial and human resources were required to provide relief.

2. The *Red Cross Journal* Goes to War

The first issue of the *Red Cross Journal* was published in January 1914, over forty years after the first foundations of this charity were laid. The British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War was created in 1870 to provide relief in the Franco-Prussian war; several other societies were set up later, such as St John's Ambulance Brigade in 1887. In 1898 the Central British Red Cross Committee was founded, in “an attempt by the War Office to ensure both closer co-operation with the Army Medical Service and to prevent any overlapping in duties” (Carrington 13). This effort at coordinating aid work was however not entirely successful, and his experience in the South African War prompted Sir John Furley, then Representative of the Red Cross Society in South Africa, to write on 29 October 1900:

We all know what a scramble there was for costly and unorganized assistance sent out under more or less authority, and how funds were collected, some for the purpose of aiding the hospitals; whilst others, with less defined limits, only increased the waste and confusion. [...] The position of the Central British Red Cross Committee should at once be made known throughout the Empire, and no societies or individuals should be allowed to aid the sick and wounded except through the one recognized channel. (qtd. in Best 96)

Furley's call for a single charity to coordinate the provision of relief was echoed in a Royal Commission report, in which the authors highlight that “there must have been some waste owing to the overlapping of the various charities and charitable gifts” and recommend that “[i]n future wars it would be advisable, if possible, that some provision should be made by which all charitable gifts should be received and dealt with by one organised body” (Report 16). This criticism was expressed at a time when Great Britain was experiencing what John Hutchinson describes as a growing “militarisation of charity” (179): increased attention was paid to efficiency and standardisation, be it in terms of procedures or of appearance. Relief societies thus gradually introduced uniforms that resembled those worn

by soldiers, for example. This evolution can be seen both as part of a wider change towards higher productivity in the economic and social spheres, but also as a response to the accusations of poor coordination previously levelled against relief societies.

In a further attempt to coordinate wartime relief work, the Central Red Cross Committee merged with several other societies to form the British Red Cross Society in 1905. Queen Alexandra was appointed its President and she subsequently called women to form local branches: “I therefore now appeal to all the women of the Empire to assist me in carrying out this great scheme, which is essentially a woman’s work, and which is the one and only way in which we can assist our brave and gallant Army and Navy to perform their arduous duties in time of war” (qtd. in Best 99). More specifically, the Queen asked the wife of the Lord Lieutenant in each county to set up county branches of the BRCS. The eighty-six local branches were meant to “become centres of Red Cross activity for their districts” (*Red Cross* website). Although the call came from the Queen, local branches were thus set up independently from each other; a central committee was however coordinating the work of the organisation as a whole, and leading relationships with other Red Cross societies. A means of keeping branches connected to the centre and with each other therefore had to be found.

The BRCS expanded through the formation of regional branches, and in 1908 it was granted a Royal Charter. By 1914, it had thus been in existence in its current form for almost a decade. Why, then, in an epoch during which the printed press was expanding rapidly, did the British Red Cross Society wait until 1914 to launch its own journal? The demand for a regular publication was present, as underlined in the first issue by the then Chairman of the Executive Committee of the British Red Cross Society E. A. Ridsdale: “The need of an Official Journal devoted to the work of the Society has long been felt, and it is a matter of congratulation that it has at last become possible to meet the wishes of our supporters in this respect” (*Red Cross Journal* 4; hereafter RCJ). Similar organisations, such as the St John’s Ambulance Association, had launched magazines decades before (St John’s *First Aid* was launched in 1894). According to Hutchinson the reason for this delay was the change in leadership that took place within the BRCS in 1912, when eminent surgeon Frederick Treves stepped down and politician E. A. Ridsdale became Chairman of the Executive Committee. Ridsdale had more time to devote to the Red Cross and managed to launch the Journal.

The early issues of the *Red Cross Journal* cost more than *The Times* or *First Aid*, however they numbered thirty pages on average, whereas *First Aid* only had around 18 pages. The *Red Cross Journal* described itself as an “illustrated magazine” and the frequency of photographs of prominent members, such as the Chairman of the Council Lord Rothschild, in the first few years of the journal’s existence testifies to the desire of making the leading members of the BRCS better

known. This emphasis on prominent individuals however gave way to a greater focus on Red Cross work during the war, as will be discussed later.

The support of the royal family is also confirmed in the first issue of the *Journal*, which contains a handwritten message by Queen Alexandra herself. This royal endorsement gave the *Red Cross Journal* additional prestige and respectability, even though the Queen was not a regular contributor. As noted by Ridsdale in this inaugural issue, news items are expected to be sent by Red Cross members themselves:

Members and well-wishers of our Society can materially help us [...] by supplying interesting local matter for appearance in our columns. As this step has been taken at the instance of numerous keen friends of the Society all over the country, I feel justified, now that we have been able to meet their wishes, in calling upon them to do all in their power to assist us in making this venture a great success. (1:1, 4)

Like *First Aid*, the *Red Cross Journal* encouraged readers to contribute, stating that “The Editor is desirous that contributors should, so far as possible, have full liberty with their subject to enable them to express their views” (1:1, 4). This participative approach was made possible in part because the *Journal* tapped into – and contributed to strengthening, as will be shown later – an existing network of people participating in a form of social capital that Peter Grant identifies as “bridging social capital,” i.e. “relations with more distant friends, colleagues and associates who share a common aim or principle” (173). In this context, the monthly publication is tangible evidence of the links binding Red Cross members together.

The first issues of the *Red Cross Journal*, in addition to official news, also contained a significant amount of local news. The latter was originally divided between London and the rest of England (news from other nations is not always featured) and it is diverse in nature, from fêtes to practice drills and fundraisers. A four-page article in June 1914 thus scrutinised a Red Cross practice mobilisation in Devon, while a successful bazaar in Stirling was discussed extensively in January 1914, perhaps in order to inspire other branches to hold similar fundraisers. The news featured depended on the contributions sent by local branches; and the editors did not seem to be struggling to find contents to include since from July 1914 onwards, the call for contributions mentions space constraints and states that “All reports should be as brief as possible” (1:7, n.p.). This pressure on space, already felt before the outbreak of the war, testifies to the success of the journal and the desire among members to contribute. No figures could be found regarding the number of readers and contributors unfortunately, but the fact that the *Journal* survived the war suggests that it was a viable enterprise, or at least that it was seen as an activity worth investing in.

Within months of its launch, the *Red Cross Journal* faced dramatic changes, as its parent charity went on to become “the single largest charity operating between 1914 and 1918” (Grant 132). The outbreak of the war in August 1914

did not lead to immediate changes in the *Journal*: the publication date being the 15th day of each month, the August issue recorded the outbreak of the war without much more detail. The main mention of the conflict is an acknowledgement of the “patriotic and public spirited action in placing the ground floor of Devonshire House and the Stables and Motor Garage at the disposal of the Society for the conduct of its war work” (256). The publication of a war supplement to the *Journal* was envisaged, suggesting that the editors did not expect the conflict to warrant coverage in the pages of the journal itself; the scale the war was going to reach was not yet fully appreciated.

War relief was the BRCS’s *raison d’être* and alongside the Order of St John of Jerusalem, it took on significant responsibilities during the conflict. When Red Cross members were so busy caring for wounded soldiers, why, and how, did they continue to publish a monthly journal? As underlined by Jane Potter (13), the publishing industry in the First World War faced greater pressure on contributors, but also material restrictions. The journal published by St Andrew’s Ambulance Association thus interrupted publication in September 1916, this decision being described as temporary for the duration of the war (3:9, 134). The *Red Cross Journal*, on the other hand, was published throughout the war but pressure on space increased as the war went on. From September 1914 onwards the editor requested that submissions be written “on one side of the paper only” (1:9, n.p.). The section on local news also became gradually shorter throughout 1915. At the same time, the number and size of pictures were reduced, and a stricter policy regarding the nature of the photos published was implemented. For example, it was decided that photographs of houses turned into hospitals and their staff, which bore a local interest only, would not be published; group photos were later also dismissed. In practical terms, paper shortages led the journal to shrink from around 30 pages in 1914, to 20–25 pages in 1915, and even further in January 1916 in order to “bring the *Red Cross* within the half-penny postage rate” (3:1, 3). The main cuts affected advertisements, bringing the total length down to around 12 pages, while the price was also reduced. The *Red Cross Journal*, like many other publications, thus faced practical challenges due to the war, and it had to adapt.

In addition to affecting the format of the journal, the war also impacted its contents. While no evidence that war supplements were published could be found, a section entitled “Red Cross War Notes” appeared in the *Journal* from September 1914 onwards, and contributions on war-related matters were explicitly invited: “The Editor will be glad to receive items of any kind likely to be of interest to readers of THE RED CROSS, especially those of recent date relating to work in connection with the War” (1:9, n.p.). Again, it is envisaged that individual members’ contributions will form the basis of the information contained in the newspaper; in fact the amount of official news issued by the central committee would also increase exponentially. By the early autumn of 1914, the war was a new development deemed worthy to be reported, but it had not become the focus

of the *Journal* yet; rather it was one item of news among others. The Red Cross was also exercising caution: the movements of Red Cross detachments abroad, which could reveal where the British Army's positions were located, were not to be disclosed but the editor reassured his readers, stating that:

[Readers] may, however, rest assured that, just as we are now placing on permanent record, month by month, Major Doughty Wylie's exhaustive and graphic record of the British Red Cross in the Balkan War, so in due time will every detail about our present great enterprise appear in these columns. (1:9, 293)

The scale and duration of the war were thus expected to be limited, and the presence of this topic in the pages of the Red Cross publication was anticipated to be limited; war news nevertheless soon became the focal point of the journal.

3. The *Journal*: A Communication and Fundraising Tool

While book publishers were concerned, at the start of the conflict, that book sales would plummet (Potter 12), their fears proved groundless. The war even highlighted the crucial importance magazines and newspapers especially had taken in informing – and influencing – European societies. In Gary Messinger's words, "one of the elements that made the war different was the spread of information through mass communication" (15): the *Red Cross Journal* participated in this phenomenon, although its engagement with propagandistic discourse is more nuanced than many mainstream periodicals (Messinger 22). The journal was in a situation somewhat akin to that of trench newspapers: the information it conveyed was communicated (and read) by protagonists directly involved in the conflict, and sometimes even posted near the battlefield. As we will show, news from Red Cross work on the Home Front abounded but stories from VADs posted on the Western and Mediterranean fronts gradually increased in number and frequency. Unlike trench newspapers, however, the journal's readership was very varied in terms of backgrounds, roles and war experiences; efforts at making the periodical relevant to all Red Cross supporters and members will also be discussed.

In terms of topics covered during the war, the economy, the increasing scarcity of foodstuffs and the difficulty to find domestic employees frequently featured in the pages of the *Red Cross Journal* during the first few years of the war especially. This suggests that many of the readers probably belonged to the middle and upper classes, amongst which Red Cross county leaders were initially recruited. The way in which food shortages are reported is telling of the increasing difficulties experienced on the Home Front; such reports are paradoxically used also as an opportunity to reassure readers. Indeed, the situation in enemy countries is also reviewed on occasion, the comparison suggesting that British people

are faring better than the Germans and Hungarians (2:5, 100; 2:11, 221). Such articles encourage readers to persevere in the knowledge that the enemy is also suffering, perhaps even more, and reinforce contemporary propaganda that tended to present the enemy as unable to win the war. Furthermore, articles about ladies' wartime fashion, food prices and the changing roles of women in wartime suggest that the target audience was essentially female. In line with mainstream women's magazines that reminded women of their patriotic duty of "thriftiness, industriousness and pluck" (Grundy Haigh 147), the *Journal* encouraged gendered patriotic attitudes. For example a November 1915 news item promoted a leaflet on "What not to buy" in wartime, published by the Women's War Economy League (2:11, 223), while another one advertised a shopping bag sold by the Patriotic Shoppers' League to raise funds for the BRCS, and encouraged readers to carry home their lighter purchases themselves (224). Such articles, similar to those found in mainstream women's periodicals, targeted civilians on the Home Front rather than Red Cross members overseas.

While topics of general interest to the Home Front continued to be published after 1915, the focus gradually shifted towards war news, and information relevant to Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) in particular. In April 1916 (3:4, 42) a new section entitled "V.A.D. Notes and News" was launched. Information in this section includes the number of detachments registered in any particular month, but also increasingly obituaries and a roll of honour. Changes in the content of the journal, and to some extent in its target audience, mirror changes in Red Cross operations and its relations with the state. As the need for relief continued and increased during the battles of 1916, VADs became essential to providing care for the sick and wounded. As their number grew, and more of them became posted at home and overseas, their presence in the pages of the *Journal* also increased. Alongside practical and official information, for example regarding discipline within the Detachments, comments and testimonies by VAD members also appeared. Their focus is sometimes serious, illustrating the dangers and hardships of working near the frontline, sometimes more superficial. A surprising number of comments, and complaints about the female VAD uniforms can be found. For example one woman VAD wrote in April 1917 that:

Surely there is no necessity for the enormous unwieldy brims of both winter and summer hats, or the out-of-the-way ugly shape of the latter also. [...] The gabardine hats for winter wear have deservedly met with nothing but praise; is it too much to hope that some day an equally satisfactory and comfortable summer headgear may be given to us? (4:4, 47)

As this quote reveals, although the uniform was widely accepted, concerns were expressed over the apparently unnecessarily unfashionable appearance of the hat, for example. The publication of this and other similar contributions by VAD members testifies to their growing importance in terms of Red Cross

work and also in terms of the journal's readership. The VAD News section grew so much that it was later divided into Men's and Women's VAD news, the latter often the most detailed. This evolution towards a greater presence of VADs is particularly worth noticing in comparison with the relative decrease in the number of portraits of prominent Red Cross members, which were a frequent feature in the *Journal* during the years 1914–1916; this change could be interpreted as greater recognition being given to members beyond prominent patrons. This shift is also telling of the growing importance of the figure of the female VAD within British society: alongside munitions workers for example, VAD members became one of Great Britain's "distinctive figures of mobilization" (Purseigle 262).

This increasing presence of VAD news in the journal is telling of a change in the role of the journal as a medium. While its primary function remained to convey information, the communication processes it reflected during the war shifted from top-down communication to a more democratic "horizontal" type of exchange between members. From its inception, the *Journal* provided information regarding practical matters. In pre-war issues, articles about medical science and First Aid Q&As can be found, as well as a section entitled "Red Cross Orders," launched in February 1914: "Through the medium of these 'Orders' Branches and Detachments will be notified of all changes affecting the Society's work prior to their embodiment in the Society's official forms. Branches and Detachments should therefore read the Orders month by month in connection with all Official Documents published by the Society" (1:2, 63). The information emanated from the central Executive Committee and was, through the medium of the journal, passed on to regional leaders. This article was followed by a list of recently amended paragraphs in Red Cross forms, which replaced previous versions. The *Journal* was thus initially used to spread information: it was the official medium through which county branch leaders especially could be informed and kept up to date. This was stressed again in the January 1917 issue: "the Official Letter sent by the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee to the Country Directors, [...] contains matter it is vitally important that every Commandant, at least, should be acquainted with" (4:1, 4). The wording in this later article makes it clear that regional leaders were expected to keep up to date with BRCS policies through the channel of the journal. The flow of information is from top to bottom, the journal acting as "a ready means of communication between the Society and its members" (2:8, 169). Throughout the war, information such as lists containing the Society's leaders' names and respective positions, as well as the addresses of the different wartime BRCS Departments, was also regularly published in order for readers to keep up with the evolving structure of the BRCS.

The informational content gradually expanded to include announcements relevant not only to county Commandants, but to all members. This is evidenced in two articles devoted to etiquette in VAD, one of which focuses on when and how to salute (2:9, 196). Changes brought to the uniform were also reported

(3:8, 99), and reminders regarding the role of VADs or the necessity to comply with fire regulations (3:9, 118) were issued, this content being relevant to an audience larger than county leaders. This expansion of the target audience is also clearly visible in the December 1917 issue, in which the Commandant-in-Chief of the Women's Voluntary Aid Detachments Katharine Furse resigned her position. While her official statement and a response by Arthur Stanley, Chairman of the Central Joint VAD Committee, both of which were previously published in *The Times*, were re-printed in the *Journal*, the latter also included a short letter from Katharine Furse to "all [her] V.A.D. friends" (4:12, 166). The journal was thus used to communicate a personal message of thanks to all VAD members, and not only their leaders.

The inclusion of Katharine Furse's message at a time when she no longer held an official position is indicative of the increasingly "horizontal" communication taking place through the *Journal*, and so are the many contributions from VAD members. Indeed, the war years saw a rise in the amount of content produced by members for other members and the journal gradually became a platform for contributors to share encouragement and practical tips, albeit in a space controlled by the BRCS. Examples of practical advice shared by members include a list of suggested menus for a Red Cross hospital put together by the East Lancashire Foodstuffs Advisory Board, for use by other Red Cross hospitals (4:4, 49). In June 1917 another reader shared a table to help count how many days a patient had been in hospital (81), while from June 1918 onwards a new section advertised used VAD uniforms needed or for sale (67). The war thus turned the *Red Cross Journal* into a means of communication not only from the central committee to county leaders, but between all members. This evolution, as will be discussed later, helped foster a sense of cohesion between members involved in increasingly diversified tasks.

Alongside a shift towards VAD news, increasing attention was also paid to a key aspect of the BRCS's war work: fundraising. The *Journal* regularly reported on fundraising activities organised by, or for the benefit of, the Society. In cities and in the countryside, the ladies who had responded to the Queen's appeal and set up county branches of the Society were often actively engaged in a number of philanthropic activities (Bush 30), and they could potentially tap into an existing network of patrons. During the war, fundraising activities however expanded to appeal to the British population as a whole. Regular updates on money raised through events such as "Our Day" collections, Christie's auction sales and one-off donations were published, showcasing the support the BRCS was enjoying among the British public, but also generous patrons abroad. In particular, the support of foreign Red Cross societies such as the American, Canadian and Australian organisations was acknowledged.

In addition to reporting on successful fundraising campaigns, the *Red Cross Journal* itself became a means to raise awareness and funds. This function became

increasingly visible throughout the war years, with the frequent publication of appeals for donations in the pages of the journal. For example in July 1915, the journal featured an appeal for the Motor Ambulance Fund, "the most urgent of all funds," accompanied by an image of a wounded soldier with a bandaged head and arm, still looking very manly and whole, and the words "Help Him" (2:7, n.p.). This evolution suggests that the periodical that had started as a means of communication between the central committee and local branches was increasingly aimed at an audience beyond active members and including patrons. Beyond the use of the journal as a medium to organise and publicise fundraising campaigns, the journal can be seen as a fundraising tool in itself. In 1915 the call to readers is gentle: the editor states in January that "we may express the hope that Red Cross members will make the *Red Cross* known to others. [...] The entire proceeds of the *Red Cross* go to the British Red Cross Society [...] every subscription to the *Red Cross* is a help to the Society" (2:1, 12). In 1916, this function of the journal is more clearly articulated: "Subscribers will be gratified to know that in taking in the *Red Cross* they are assisting to make a by no means insignificant contribution to the fund of the British Red Cross Society" (3:12, 154). In 1917 the call becomes more pressing: "may we urge each of our subscribers to do us two favours in 1917? One is to find a new subscriber. The other, to send us reports of their work [...] Everyone who subscribes to the *Red Cross* is fairly entitled to consider himself or herself a donor to the funds of the British Red Cross Society, as the profits earned by this journal are received, without deduction, by the Society" (4:1, 5). Readers are thus regularly asked to encourage others to take out a subscription in order to raise additional funds for the work of the BRCS. This stress put on the journal as a means to raise awareness and funds did not disappear with the end of the war, with another pressing appeal published in 1921 (8:1, 2). The repetition of such appeals suggests that readership was expanding and that the journal was regarded as a viable source of income for its parent society.

The inclusion of news from other national Red Cross societies, for example articles reporting the work of the Swedish (3:3, 32) or the Russian (3:3, 31) Red Cross societies, besides reveals a growing awareness of belonging to an international movement, and perhaps also an increasing collaboration between different societies. The *Journal* also included updates on the Eastern Front and even more, the Mediterranean area, giving it an increasingly global outlook, a far cry from the early 1914 focus on Great Britain. News from local county branches continued to be included, albeit in a very condensed format, annual reports being often printed in a smaller font than feature articles. Reprints of articles published in the *Nursing Times*, the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* also featured, showing a growing connectedness with other medical and nursing professional organisations.

4. Reflecting the Expanding Work of the Red Cross and Changing Views on War

The *Journal* was used as a communication and fundraising tool; it also gives an insight into how Red Cross members viewed the war and their organisation's involvement in it. Grant and Meyer underline the control exerted by state authorities over voluntary organisations, and the fact that the Great War saw relief organisations firmly side along their national governments. The *Red Cross Journal* is not a source that has been studied before in order to evaluate the evolution of patriotic discourse within the British Red Cross Society; it will now be analysed in this light.

The war is presented as a test for the BRCS to deliver relief on a large-scale, but also for the British population to live up to the challenge of providing adequate relief. The September 1914 *Journal* – the first one to address the war on a significant level – contains a reprint of a letter written by BRCS officials to *The Times* editor, in which they state that helping the wounded is a national duty: “Let it never be said that, in the pressure and confusion of these unhappy times, the wounded sailor or soldier went lacking or was, for the moment, forgotten. [...] The least we can do is to afford him such assistance in his distress as will make him feel that his nation is not ungrateful” (1:9, 292). Supporting the BRCS is presented as the way for the public to care for combatants and beyond, do their patriotic duty. This letter, published early in the war, inscribes the work of the BRCS within a specific national context. The frequent use of the possessive pronoun “our [soldiers]” reinforces this sense of belonging to a national community: the funds raised from among British donors are aimed to help British soldiers. Despite this surge of patriotism at the start of the war and in articles related to fundraising especially, the *Red Cross Journal* is largely void of patriotic declarations during the first years of the war. Newspapers such as *The Times* were openly demonising the enemy, for example reporting the destruction of the Reims cathedral in 1914 in those terms: “We ought to have foreseen this crowning atrocity, for Reims is hallowed ground to the modern Attila and to every Hun” (*Times* 21.09.1914, 9). The *Red Cross Journal* rarely criticised the enemy, probably due to the BRCS’s institutional affiliation to the neutral International Committee of the Red Cross. A note published in November 1914 explained this decision to refrain from reporting criticism against the German Red Cross: “We have not, so far, discussed in these columns the question of alleged abuses of the Red Cross by the Germans; neither is it our intention to do so now. But a time will come when all these matters will have to be gone into fully” (1:11, 367).

In the first year of the war, the concerns expressed in the *Journal* focussed on the treatment of sick and wounded soldiers. Even events that attracted widespread international condemnation, such as the burning of Reims cathedral and the execution of nurse Edith Cavell, were hardly mentioned, showing a reluctance to engage in the politics of war. For example, the article that announced the death of Cavell stresses the universal condemnation of this action, rather than

examining the possible implications for Red Cross personnel: “We share to the full the outraged feelings expressed in all countries of the world which still have any claim to be called civilized; and we sincerely trust the day will come when those responsible may themselves stand in sore need of the mercy they denied to our devoted countrywoman” (2:11, 226). The shared national origin of British Red Cross volunteers and nurse Edith Cavell is hinted at but not dwelt upon. Criticism against the enemy appeared mainly in reprints of articles published elsewhere; these are rather few but they nevertheless gave the *Journal* the opportunity to implicitly denounce the enemy. Thus, the October 1914 issue featured the testimony of a doctor whose house in Louvain, although it bore the Red Cross flag, was pillaged by German troops (1:10, 333), while the outrage caused by the German army apparently refusing to free British surgeons taken prisoners was reported through the eyes of the International Red Cross Committee rather than that of the BRCS (2:1, 4).

Contributors reacted most strongly to breaches directly affecting war relief; the use of a hospital ship for “ordinary war purposes” is thus described as “one of the greatest crimes committed by the Germans” (2:5, 124). The *Journal* seems especially concerned with “the far-reaching consequences of sowing confusion in connection with the succour of wounded men”: the main source of worries is thus not national matters, but issues specific to the missions of the BRCS. Likewise, a May 1916 piece on the treatment – or lack thereof – of ill Allied prisoners who were left to die of typhus in the Wittenberg camp, denounced the “cruelty” shown by the German doctor in charge, who failed to care for the diseased prisoners and therefore exposed healthy prisoners to the bacteria (3:5, 55). This article, like others on the use of poisonous gas for example, gives the *Journal* an opportunity to assert the moral superiority of British doctors and by extension, of the British people over the Germans: “Our chief objective in referring to the matter is to call attention to an act of cowardice which would be impossible in this country” (3:5, 55).

The year 1918 showed a significant departure from the *Journal*’s previously restrained discourse on the enemy’s practices but also on their moral values. Criticism increased and the *Journal* began to openly engage with common propaganda tropes, especially “the stereotype [...] of Teutonic brutality and ruthless inhumanity” (Taylor 179). This rhetoric is particularly visible in relation to the use of poisonous gas (5:3, 34) and it is in line with the International Committee of the Red Cross’ condemnation of chemical weapons. As the summer counter-offensive started, explicit condemnation of German actions can be found, for instance in an article entitled “Outrages and Attitude,” published in June 1918:

The cruel outrages perpetrated on the Red Cross by the Germans – the sinking of hospital ships, the deliberate bombing of hospitals, the atrocious treatment of prisoners, and the misuse of the emblem itself, provoke a righteous anger which is more

than justifiable. [...] The deliberate bombing of the great hospital at Etaples [sic] is the worst, but only one, of many similar atrocities. The destruction of human life which can never be made good and the grief and anxiety caused to the relatives of the 300 victims – indeed, to the relatives of all who were known to be working in Etaples [sic] – compel us to discuss what our attitude should be towards those whose treachery and brutality have brought disgrace on the Red Cross movement. [...] It is probable that even in bombing a great hospital they work on a plan which seems to their diseased ideas of right and wrong to be justifiable. (5:6, 65–66)

The accumulation of crimes is presented as having forced the *Journal* to stand up against the breaches of the Geneva conventions perpetrated by the Germans. The terms used (“cruel outrages,” “deliberate bombing,” “atrocious”) are consistent with contemporary propagandistic rhetoric and emphasise the savagery of the enemy, which stands in stark contrast with the “righteous anger” felt by Red Cross members. One side is associated with justice, the other with evil. The public condemnation the *Journal* finds itself “compelled” to issue does not appear to be motivated by attacks against British assets, but against the humanitarian principles it stands for. To the physical violence perpetrated are added degraded values (“treachery,” “brutality”) and a warped perception of right and wrong, which reinforce the idea that the enemy cannot be counted amongst the civilised nations of the world, a theme often found in propaganda. The impact of such practices and attitudes on the reputation of the Red Cross movement is presented as a significant source of concern. The use of the German Red Cross as “an engine of war, and part of the Army itself” is strongly criticised, suggesting that the BRCS did not see itself as serving its own national cause in the same way, but rather serving ethical principles transcending national boundaries.

The discrepancy observed between the work of the German Red Cross and the values of the international Red Cross movement prompted the *Journal* to wonder what the relationships with the German Red Cross would be once the war had come to an end:

The Red Cross emblem has been stained by the Germans, so that as a military signal on which soldiers can rely it has been made suspect as it never was before. [...] We may owe it to the interests of the Red Cross movement all over the world to show, by a period of abstention from co-operation with those who have done this injury, that their betrayal requires purging in the interests of the emblem which has been besmirched by their vileness. (5:6, 66)

Rather than the German army, it is the German Red Cross that is criticised, accused of failing to uphold humanitarian principles and by association staining the reputation of other societies. In contrast, the *Journal* portrays the BRCS as an organisation defending principles that are above national preoccupations. This focus on humanitarian concerns does not contradict Meyer’s and Grant’s analyses;

if in practice the BRCS (through the Joint War Committee) became increasingly controlled by military authorities, the study of the *Red Cross Journal* suggests that on an ideological level it cultivated the image of an independent organisation upholding humanitarian principles rather than patriotic ideas. A 1915 article made this hierarchy clear: "Many V.A.D. members have found themselves confronted, since the Government's call for assistance in military hospitals, with a question of divided allegiance. Their country asks for volunteers, but they are already pledged to their local Commandants. What is their duty? The answer is clear. They must fulfil their contracts to the Commandants" (2:7, 142). In the eyes of the BRCS, service to the Red Cross took precedence and BRCS members were expected to honour their commitment to the Red Cross. Nevertheless, this analysis has shown that as the war went on, the BRCS increasingly adopted a patriotic discourse that helped justify Britain's as well as its own continuing involvement in the conflict.

In addition to conveying the BRCS's changing views on the war, the *Red Cross Journal* also reflected the expanding work of the BRCS. At first, the disruption to the normal workings of the Red Cross showed through the inclusion of articles explaining the changed structure of the Society, with the names of individual members responsible for particular areas, such as auxiliary home hospitals, convalescent hospitals, hospital and ambulance ships (1:9, 295). In October 1914 two pages were devoted to clarifying the role of the BRCS in the war (326–327), in answer to the "disappointment" and even "complaints" (326) expressed by members regarding how they could contribute to the war effort. The Red Cross, through its journal, tried to maintain discipline and harmony amongst its keen volunteers, in order to prevent a repetition of the lack of coordination criticised in the South African War. In contrast, the efficiency of the organisation in the new war was highlighted, for example in a report by Sir Frederick Treves on the work of the Red Cross in northern France (2:1, 17). His reputation as previous Chairman of the Executive Committee and as an eminent surgeon, but also his experience in the Boer War, would have made his report a particularly notable contribution to the *Journal*. In this article he underlines the resources "disposed in the most perfect order" in the Boulogne store, itself described as "a model of efficiency." The organisation's adaptability was also celebrated, the July 1915 review of one year of war work (2:7, 148) telling of speedy changes, for instance from "insufficient and obsolete" transport methods at the start of the war to efficient motor ambulances.

If the care and treatment of the sick and wounded remained the focus of the BRCS, with many articles devoted to hospitals, convalescent homes, motor ambulances, hospital ships and trains, greater emphasis was gradually put on the society's new and diversified missions. In this respect the *Journal* was used to make these activities known and to call for help. Two of these new activities are the search for missing soldiers and the provision for prisoners of war. Responding to enquiries related to the wounded and the prisoners is described as "a definite

part of the Society's operations" (2:1, 2) as early as January 1915. An April 1915 article follows an imaginary woman searching for information about her missing husband and three sons (2:4, 82); this article thus highlights the usefulness of the Inquiry Department, but also the work of "pure mercy" carried out by the BRCS in giving relatives answers and sometimes enabling them to contact the soldiers. The fast-increasing volume of enquiries received was repeatedly emphasised, and regular updates on the number of queries received were also published; for example, readers were informed that 8,702 enquiries were received by the Missing and Wounded Department, and 11,838 reports collected by researchers in August 1916 (3:9, 124). In addition to quantitative surveys, letters from prisoners of war expressing their gratitude for the parcels sent through the BRCS were also published, showing the value of this activity (3:9, 132).

Another two new activities regularly discussed in the *Journal* are the setting up of the Star and Garter home from 1916 onwards, and the creation of a war library (first mentioned in July 1915 (144)). The BRCS collected books to send to patients in hospitals in the UK and abroad; between 1 May and 8 August 1916, 64,000 books were sent to UK hospitals and 118,000 abroad (3:9, 110). This led to frequent appeals for book donations; this scheme, like the Star and Garter, would continue beyond the end of the war, as did work among prisoners of war, for whom new difficulties arose after the Armistice. According to the *Journal* many prisoners were released or escaped without food or clothing, and were left to make their way home through Germany and France, making it urgent for the Red Cross to intervene (5:12, 144–145).

The difficulty of demobilisation, and the desire to see some of the Society's work continue was also expressed. The introduction of a scheme to use motor ambulances for the transport of civilians (6:8, 91) illustrates not only the material demobilisation, but the energies and goodwill that remained and which were channelled into other activities. The immediate aftermath of the war thus saw a further diversification in the missions of the Red Cross, this time to encompass support for civilians, for example in promoting Infant and Child welfare (6:4, 39). Trying to build on the momentum and reputation acquired during the war, the BRCS became involved in caring for civilians, this time under the supervision of the Ministry of Health (6:8, 91).

The diversification upon which the British Red Cross Society embarked during the First World War and the scale of its mobilisation in terms of resources and people thus show in the pages of the *Journal*. As a result of this increased membership and of diversification in terms of members' backgrounds but also of their war work, the *Journal* was used to foster a sense of cohesion within the Society. Articles recounting the history of the Red Cross movement, and of the BRCS especially, stress the common values and vision members were expected to share. A first overview of the history of the British Red Cross was published in early 1914, while another account published in 1917 suggests that the readership

had expanded between these two dates and the origins of those shared principles and concerns should be stressed again. In addition to historical overviews, more humorous contributions by women VAD also featured, including the story of a kitchen disaster just before an inspection in September 1917 (4:9, 119). Such light-hearted articles provided relief from otherwise serious war-related matters; they were also an opportunity for readers to share in the daily life of fellow BRCS members. In May 1917 a letter from a VAD member highlighted the importance of mutual encouragement, a motivational function that could be fulfilled through the medium of the *Journal*:

The Commandant-in-Chief sends us the following characteristic letter from a well-known V.A.D. in charge of a Red Cross Hostel in France, whose buoyant spirit and abounding courage will be helpful to those of lesser faith. Perhaps, in some dark moment of discouragement, its loyal and enthusiastic phrasing may be recalled to support a fellow V.A.D.'s halting steps over a thorny place. (4:5, 61)

The hope that this contribution would help lift the spirits of other members is explicitly stated, and the positive outlook on the sometimes difficult situations described in such articles is probably the reason why they were chosen for publication.

The *Red Cross Journal* was thus a medium for BRCS members to encourage one another and more generally, to foster a sense of community, regardless of the contributors' and readers' geographical posting and of the nature of their war work. The outbreak of the war saw a decrease in local news, the aim shifting to maintaining links between the Home Front and Red Cross units abroad (2:1, 12). The journal bridged the gap between BRCS members abroad and at home, as is made clear in a 1916 "Tour of Inspection in France" reported in the *Journal* (3:8, 99–100): "VAD members may like to hear what some of their friends are doing under the Joint Committee in France. [...] The work in the hospitals is, of course, the same as at home, and the glamour of being 'abroad' is quite counterbalanced by the fact that for six months at a time the members are out of reach of their relatives and friends" (100). The comparison between work in Great Britain and overseas, and the downplaying of any differences, serves to validate the work done on the Home Front but it also fosters a sense of common service, regardless of the place. The journal thus also functioned as a means to promote a sense of unity and of belonging amongst members engaged in a variety of tasks in different locations. This desire to foster cohesion within the BRCS was reinforced by the outbreak of the war; however it was also, we argue, an answer to the devolved structure of the BRCS. As county branches were set up independently from each other in response to Queen Alexandra's 1905 appeal, the *Journal* served as a means of keeping branches connected to the centre and with each other. Thus, if the *Red Cross Journal* gives an insight into the Society's perception of the war and of its

own role in the conflict, it also fulfilled a number of functions that went beyond its informational dimension.

Conclusion

The *Red Cross Journal* was launched in response to a need for a communication tool, initially for the central Executive Committee to disseminate information. However it took different functions in the course of the war, and its role and contents reflected changes within the work of the British Red Cross Society as it adapted to the wartime situation. The wide range of activities in which the BRCS was involved – from providing relief to wounded soldiers to finding missing servicemen and supplying food to prisoners of war – as well as the extent to which this charity mobilised its members and the general public are made clear in the pages of the *Journal*.

The *Journal* did not only report on the work carried out by the Red Cross, but it also served practical purposes in the areas of training, awareness-raising, social cohesion and fundraising. These multiple functions distinguish it from mainstream periodicals and partly account for its survival: the fact that it did not miss a single month during the war and carried on after peace suggests that it was perceived by both readers and headquarters as a useful enterprise. The *Journal*, like the British Red Cross Society as a whole, underwent significant changes throughout the conflict and its target audience expanded as shown in the type of contributions that started to be published (such as articles by and for VADs, notes of a practical nature and fundraising appeals).

This analysis of the *Red Cross Journal* has also shed light on the complex situation the BRCS found itself in as it sought to uphold neutral humanitarian principles but recruited members and donors largely amongst the British public. This article has shown that the loyalty expected from members, if it sometimes seems to supersede national allegiance, does not contradict patriotic sentiments but neither does it systematically adopt the propagandistic motifs seen in more broad-reaching publications. The *Journal* besides shows little engagement with the Order of St John of Jerusalem, with which the British Red Cross Society joined forces in October 1914 to form the Joint War Committee. The aim of this joint committee was to coordinate war relief and avoid a repetition of the South African chaos. St John's is however rarely mentioned in the *Journal*, suggesting that the British Red Cross kept a distinct identity although a large part of its work was conducted under the auspices of the Joint War Committee. Hutchinson goes as far as stating that the BRCS and St John's were “open rivals” (253) that were “forced into a partnership [...] for the duration of the war” (255). No open criticism of this partner organisation can be found in the *Journal*, however, although it is true that the two charities parted ways again at the end of the war. This separation,

which was complicated by the amount of funds raised together, shows that despite the similarity in their wartime work, and the British Red Cross Society starting to emulate St John's Ambulance Association in working among civilians in peacetime following the Great War, the sense of a distinctive identity amongst Red Cross members, which had been fuelled by wartime work and encouraged in the pages of the *Journal*, remained strong.

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