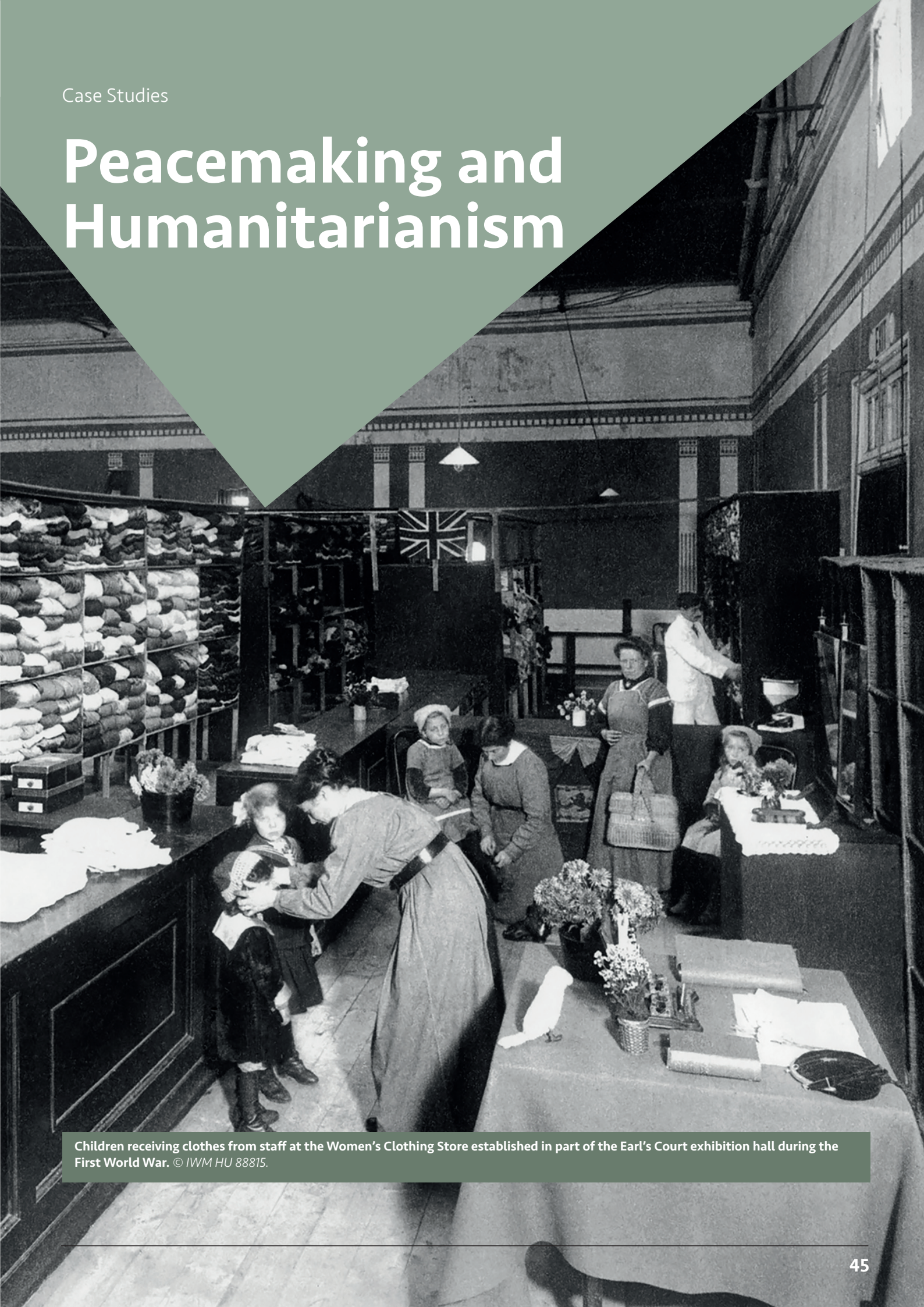


# Peacemaking and Humanitarianism



Children receiving clothes from staff at the Women's Clothing Store established in part of the Earl's Court exhibition hall during the First World War. © IWM HU 88815.



'Learning from the Past' community event, Romania, March 2020.

## GLOBAL LINK (Lancaster)

'Documenting Dissent', <http://www.documentingdissent.org.uk>

'Learning from the Past', <http://learningfromthepast.net>

Global Link was first funded in 2013 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to work with historians, schools and community groups to research and document the history of religious and political dissent in Lancaster, particularly in relation to Lancaster Castle. As a global education centre, they link these distant struggles for social justice and human rights with more recent activism, or with issues that resonate around the world today. The stories the volunteers discovered were posted on the 'Documenting Dissent' website.

Following the success of this project, Global Link received further funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund that allowed them to run a series of further community heritage projects,

researching and documenting more 'hidden histories' of dissent and activism in the North West and adding these stories to the Documenting Dissent platform. Many of these projects looked at heritage related to the First World War, including: stories of North West conscientious objectors; the work of women and girls on the home front and in efforts for peace during the War; and the mapping of movements for peace, internationalism and education for world citizenship during the interwar years.

In 2018, Global Link received Erasmus+ funding to run a European peace heritage project called 'Learning from the Past', that documented histories of peace and internationalism across the continent in the years following the First World War, and reflecting on that learning for us, as Europeans, today.

David Savill interviewed Alison Lloyd Williams, the project coordinator:



Youth dance group performs a dance inspired by one of the 'Learning from the Past' heritage stories, Romania, March 2020.

**David** - Could you please outline your project 'Documenting Dissent'?

**Alison** - We got Heritage Lottery funding in 2013 for our first 'Documenting Dissent' community heritage project that explored histories of dissent and activism in and around Lancaster. The starting point was Lancaster Castle, which was the assize court for Lancashire, as well as a prison and a site of execution. That project did not initially have a First World War focus – we were looking at all kinds of dissent and activism from Quakers to Chartists to LGBT activists – but we also began to explore stories of conscientious objectors from Lancaster, and that initiated an exploration of the First World War. Through the project, we developed a website where we uploaded the stories our volunteers had found and documented, and we developed a methodology of community-heritage work with local volunteers who were keen to keep going.

We then undertook a series of several small HLF-funded projects that added to the 'Documenting Dissent' online platform, looking at lesser-known aspects of the First World War and its legacy. These included a project researching stories of conscientious objectors from Lancashire, and another exploring the role of local women in peace activism during the war. We then ran a project called 'World War One: Sowing the Seeds of Global Citizenship', as we were interested to learn what these peace activists we'd researched were doing after the war. In addition, as a global learning provider, we were keen to find out more about the growth of peace education in the years following the First World War, or what we might today call global citizenship education. We wanted to do some

research on this topic, because we were aware it wasn't very widely known.

'Sowing the Seeds of Global Citizenship' mapped activity in the years following the war that showed how people engaged in peace activism, building international connections, reaching out across cultures and countries, because, we sensed, the war altered people's perspective on the world and their connection with it. Many people travelled because of that war in a way that they never had before, and encountered different people and places. Another context was the increase in the franchise after the war, which meant that many more people felt invested in decision-making, including foreign policy. Related to this was the birth of the Workers' Education Association, and the adult learning movement. In this project, we created an interactive map with pop-up examples of peace and global citizenship activity happening in the North West during the 1920s and 1930s. The map also started to look at how some of the work going on in our region connected with the rest of the country and other parts of the world. The research led us to begin broadening our study more and more beyond our own locality.

We then did a follow-up project called 'World War One: Growing the Seeds of Global Citizenship' which was specifically for young people. We worked with a group of Girl Guides and students from a local school, to use their own archives to look at what schools and the Scouting and Guiding movements were doing during the interwar years to promote peace and internationalism.

'Growing the Seeds' sat beside and co-funded our European Erasmus+ 'Learning from the Past' project, which built on the success of 'Sowing the Seeds'. 'Learning from the Past' came about because, having undertaken this mapping project, we wanted to know what was happening in other parts of Europe after the First World War. We were aware that life in Britain would have been very different in the 1920s and 1930s, than life in, for example, Germany, Hungary, or Italy. 'Learning from the Past' extended the work of 'Sowing the Seeds' by creating a European map that charted histories of peace and internationalism across the continent in the interwar period. In 'Learning from the Past', we built a second stage into the community-engagement work that went beyond just creating the map and documenting those stories, by running creative workshops with young people, where we shared the map and used it as a stimulus for discussion and arts work about the relevance of this heritage for us today. As a development education centre, we were really interested to explore the importance of this heritage for us in terms of global learning. What can we learn from these stories? How can they act as a starting point for thinking about issues of peace, human rights and social justice and exploring possible actions for change?

**David** - What were the key themes? And how were they agreed by the different participants?

**Alison** - We had a training week at the very beginning of the 'Learning from the Past' project, where all the partners came over to Lancaster. We started off with a range of activities that explored what we mean by 'peace' and 'internationalism'. For some of our partners from Eastern Europe, the term internationalism carries a very different meaning because it's associated with State socialism. It didn't suggest for them, as it might do for us, things like a global outlook and building positive international connections. We had quite a lot of discussions about how to 'translate' some of these concepts. The partners included a mix of different types of organisation. The Italian partner was from an archive of 20th century history with a focus on the history of fascism. They are experienced historians but had never worked with community groups. The other organisations were mainly youth ones, so used to running participatory activity exploring, in some cases, global learning themes, but they had never turned that lens on heritage. Between us we had a lot of different expertise and were very creative. We also involved a consultant historian from Lancaster University, Corinna Peniston-Bird, who we've worked with regularly on our heritage projects. It became apparent that for many of our European partners, where the history of this period in their country included living under extremist governments, the stories they researched would be different from the ones we had explored in 'Sowing the Seeds'; it could be about speaking out against fascism or hiding a Jewish family in a place where that is dangerous. We took a very flexible approach to the themes under exploration during the project, and realised it was about standing up for issues of social justice.

**David** - How did you find the partners? Were they already working with Global Link in different ways - or?

**Alison** - Some were partners we'd worked with before and others were referred to us through organisations we know. It was fascinating to work with the Romanian partner, for example, as the organisation is based in the Hungarian-speaking part of Romania in Transylvania. Questions about internationalism, peace and identity are really fascinating in a place that, at different points during the 20th century, has been part of both Hungary and Romania. The partners and their volunteers identify as Hungarian and speak Hungarian, while living in present-day Romania, and many of their stories touched on these themes.

I was very conscious of the fact that the 1920s in Britain was so different from the 1920s in Eastern Europe. Across Europe, borders were being redrawn, people were displaced, and there was a rise in political extremism. Fascism had some impact in Britain, of course, but it didn't take over our political systems. I think it was important to acknowledge how differently people experienced this period in other parts of Europe. Our 'Sowing the Seeds' map identified this vast network of League of Nations Union activity in Britain, ranging from tea parties to marches and demonstrations. That just wouldn't have been able to take place in so many of the countries we worked with on this project. And I think it was important to juxtapose those experiences, because by only looking at Britain, that doesn't tell the whole story... yet, at the same time, so many of those activities happening here in the North West did intersect with what was happening with other European countries. It's interesting to see the context in which those connections were happening.

We were conscious that the interwar years are generally seen, particularly in this country, through the lens of the rise of extremism in Europe; the failure of the League of Nations; and the move towards another war. We tend to see the interwar years as the move from the First World War to the Second World War - that's the dominant narrative. But what that misses is the vast effort that ordinary people were making to not reach the point of another war; to challenge the rise of extremism; to build connections across nations. I think by pinpointing specific individual stories from across the continent, our project has provided a counter-narrative to that dominant view. There were movements across the whole of Europe, organisations being founded, that still exist today with growing numbers of members who were committed to a peaceful world and to international cooperation. We felt it was important for people to know about these stories, because I don't think we know enough about it today.

**David** - Could you perhaps begin by saying a little bit about what is Aftermath and how you see that?

**Alison** - We were always keen to look at the First World War through a different lens; exploring the lesser-known stories and the people who were trying to resist war. That's why we did projects on conscientious objectors and women in peace activism, for example. I think we were also conscious of issues of legacy that, today, when we commemorate the First World War, it tends to still be about remembering soldiers in the trenches, and their sacrifice and the huge loss of life, but this



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can be somewhat one-dimensional. What's interesting, of course, when you look at the history of that period, is that the British Legion was very active in promoting peace in the years following the First World War. Many of those soldiers who had experienced that conflict became ardent proponents of peace. The League of Nations Union was very active in army barracks, doing talks and giving out literature. The British Legion awarded medals to schools for doing activities that promoted peace. There were also, I think, attempts by veteran organisations to reach out to soldiers from other countries and build international organisations. When we held our very first meeting during 'Learning from the Past', we asked people to bring an object connected to the First World War and to talk about it. One of the British partners took a red poppy and was talking about how we commemorate the end of the First World War in Britain. What's really striking is how it is not commemorated to anywhere near the same extent in most of our European partner countries. I think the European partners found it fascinating how much we go on about the First World War in this country, because they don't in most of those places. And I think it's interesting for British people to think about that. And at least to question, what are we doing through this sort of commemoration? What are we wanting to commemorate? And why is that important? What can we learn from that experience, then? And what are the other voices we might want to bring to that conversation? I think there's been more work recently to talk about the international dimension of that conflict, for example - to acknowledge the many colonial soldiers, the forced labour and the other fronts involved in that conflict, not just in Western Europe. There is more going on around that now in this country than there used to be. But I think we've still got some way to go.



'What is Peace?' Photographic piece by project volunteer, Sofia Westholt, inspired by 'Learning by the Past' heritage stories.

**David** - I wondered what the impact has been on you.

**Alison** - I knew nothing about heritage really before I started doing this work at Global Link, though I've always been interested in history in an informal way. I came to these projects from a global learning perspective and a background in running participatory work with communities. I've always been interested in how people can use creative work to express their voice, to speak to power, to explore social change. I think I've become an evangelist for community-heritage projects, the more I've done them, and I find archival research fascinating. I think I have seen more and more the potential for this work as a stimulus for exploring contemporary social issues. I think it's too easy for people to think it's dusty, old or boring, and I really don't believe that's the case. I think more and more we're seeing how inspiring those stories can be.