



# Institute for Philanthropy

## UK Philanthropy's Greatest Achievements

A research-based assessment of philanthropic success

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report, based on original research, draws attention to a wide range of significant successes achieved by philanthropic acts. It was commissioned by the Institute to inspire further acts of generosity, by demonstrating that personal wealth can be effectively used to promote the public benefit.
- Philanthropic achievements do not occur in a vacuum, they are often the result of co-operation with talented individuals, public bodies and private companies. Whilst the generosity of individual donors is a necessary, rather than sufficient, factor, the philanthropic contribution is often over-looked and is therefore celebrated in this report.
- Philanthropists are able to use their personal wealth to be innovative, act quickly and take risks. These characteristics differentiate philanthropic spending from government funding and are the key to philanthropic success.
- The greatest achievements were nominated by experts working in research and academic institutions, charitable foundations and other philanthropic-support organisations.
- The three major achievements of historic philanthropy are:

- 1 Provision of social services before the creation of the Welfare State
- 2 Campaigning which led to the abolition of the slave trade
- 3 Provision of education and leisure opportunities for all

- The three major achievements of modern philanthropy are:

- 1 Famine relief and long-term aid to developing countries
- 2 Health research and pioneering health services
- 3 Campaigning which led to major social change

- Many other significant achievements of UK philanthropy are highlighted and discussed below. Further details and background information on some of the nominations are provided in boxed text.
- This report does not claim to contain a comprehensive list of every noteworthy achievement but rather it seeks to begin a debate about what philanthropy has achieved so far and what can be achieved in future.

### INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the Institute's ongoing efforts to help create a culture of giving in the UK.

We can be justly proud of our status as a nation of givers, with most people making voluntary donations most of the time<sup>1</sup>. However, our giving has not kept pace with increases in national and personal wealth in recent decades, resulting in significant scope for the level of private giving to be increased.

The starting premise of this report is that a raised awareness of the significant achievements funded, in part or whole, by philanthropic efforts will inspire an increase in support for those individuals and organisations that are working to tackle some of society's most challenging problems.

It is, of course, important to acknowledge from the outset that social problems are not solved solely by money. In reality, most meaningful achievements require a combination of individual excellence, structural support and financial assistance from a variety of sources. This paper does not claim that philanthropists can claim sole credit for the achievements listed, but it does argue that without the contribution of philanthropic gifts, they are unlikely to have occurred.

### THE SECRET OF PHILANTHROPIC SUCCESS

Philanthropists use their private wealth to affect the public good. They do not need to persuade voters or shareholders of the merits of their schemes and can therefore deploy their money in ways that differ from

<sup>1</sup> According to C. Pharoah et al (2006) Charity Trends. Charities Aid Foundation & CaritasData, (p.156), 57.2% of the adult population gave to charity every month in 2004/05 and the average amount given was £14.17 per month.

both public and private sector spending: they can be more innovative, act faster and take greater risks.

#### *Innovation*

Philanthropists have a strong track record in being innovative, identifying new needs and proposing new solutions to old problems. For example, the hospice movement applied new thinking to help people die with dignity and 'green issues' were first brought to public attention by environmental campaign groups.

#### *Speed*

Unencumbered by the need to pass legislation or argue for pots of public spending, philanthropists can react more flexibly and quickly to meet new, urgent needs. For example, voluntary organisations were the first to provide services for people with HIV and AIDS.

#### *Risk-taking*

Freed from the need to be accountable to the electorate or to pacify the media, philanthropists can take greater risks and pursue the causes and concerns that motivate them, which may include providing support for asylum seekers, visitors for prisoners or services for other marginalised and unpopular groups.

These distinguishing features of philanthropy are evident in the achievements described in this paper.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Given the nature of the problem that this report seeks to address – that people are generally unaware of the successful outcomes of UK philanthropy – this research is based on the opinions of the small, though rapidly increasing, body of 'philanthropic experts' living and working in the UK.

In addition to the experts known to the Institute, three other organisations involved in UK philanthropy (the Association of Charitable Foundations, the Community Foundation Network and the Beacon Fellowship charitable trust) kindly agreed to invite their contacts to participate in the project. With the help of these three partners, we were able to reach around 1,000 experts.

Invitations were issued, by letter or email, inviting these experts to submit nominations of up to three 'greatest achievements' for UK philanthropy pre-1900 and up to a further three nominations for philanthropy post-1900. Well over a hundred nominations were received and analysed to identify recurring themes.

## **HISTORIC AND MODERN PHILANTHROPY**

The 'historic' and 'modern' categories used in this research were designed to counter the tendency to admire the philanthropy of the Victorians above the

modern day and ensure we identified sufficient contemporary achievements. In previous ages, when the state's role was largely confined to defending borders and waging war and the public purse provided negligible welfare, the voluntary efforts of individuals in tackling social problems inevitably appear more significant. It is important to recall that, whilst charities are sometimes collectively described as the 'third sector', they were in fact the first to provide basic services to those unable to pay for them, such as education, health and housing.

Modern philanthropy in the UK is rarely treated with the respect and appreciation shown to such acts in earlier times. This is partly due to the prevailing cynicism of our times, manifested in a suspicion that self-interest is the primary motivation behind philanthropic acts. It is also partly due to a lack of understanding of the role available for philanthropy in a welfare state society. A survey conducted in 1948 found that the vast majority of the population felt philanthropy had been made superfluous by the creation of the welfare state<sup>2</sup>. Yet, as our findings show, there remain innumerable ways for private philanthropy to complement and co-operate with tax-funded provision.

We also hope that the historic/modern categories will stimulate further debate about the changing role and importance of philanthropic effort.

## **FINDINGS**

The greatest achievements of historic (pre-1900) UK philanthropy are:

- 1 Provision of social services before the creation of the Welfare State**
- 2 Campaigning which led to the abolition of the slave trade**
- 3 Provision of education and leisure opportunities for all**

The largest area of pre-1900 philanthropic achievement identified by our experts is the provision of a wide range of social services, paid for and provided by philanthropists, long before the state took responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. In addition to the well known tradition of the rich giving alms or poor relief to the needy, multiple nominations were made for philanthropists' efforts in providing housing for the poor, almshouses for the old, care for orphaned and abandoned children, basic educational institutions as well as health care and hospital fees for those unable to afford to consult private medical practitioners. The

<sup>2</sup> The survey is cited in Jeremy Kendall and Martin Knapp (1996) *The Voluntary Sector in the UK*, p55

philanthropic roots of a range of public services were also highlighted, including the ambulance service, probation service, social workers, universities and care for those injured fighting for their country.

**The probation service** has its roots in the common law practice of releasing offenders on condition that they kept the peace and would come for judgement if called. During the late nineteenth century, voluntary societies, led by the Church of England Temperance Society, appointed missionaries to the London Police Courts. Their initial function, to reclaim drunkards, was later extended to other offenders who were released into the care of missionaries on the condition that they accepted their guidance. This philanthropically-organised system continued until 1907 when supervision was given a statutory basis, allowing courts to appoint and employ probation officers.

*Information provided by Clare Cox from the charity Crime Concern*

Whilst these are now viewed as essential government-funded responsibilities, and increasingly as public-private partnerships, they were all originally funded and provided by private individuals. The direction of travel does not always flow from philanthropy to the public sector as occasionally provision is taken over by the private sector. For example, mass access to clean water supplies was originally organised through the funding of public water fountains by town guilds and rich merchants and is now a commercialised business.

The final type of philanthropic effort identified in this area is the research effort, first funded and undertaken by the Rowntree family philanthropists, which captured and analysed the extent of poverty in the UK. This evidence helped to create the firm foundations on which the British welfare state was eventually built.

In 1899 Joseph Rowntree and his son, Seebohm, studied the extent and causes of poverty in the York slums. The work of these early social researchers, funded by philanthropy, demonstrated the extent of poverty in Britain, helped to undermine the myth that the poor were entirely responsible for their own situation and contributed to the reform of the Poor Laws and the introduction of state support for the poor. The **Rowntree research** helped to create an evidence base for those who argued the necessity of tax-funded, state-organised welfare and is said to have directly influenced the Beveridge Report which set out the blue-print for Britain's Welfare State. The three Rowntree funds (Joseph Rowntree Foundation,

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust) have continued to support research as a means to bring about social justice.

*For further information please see [www.jrf.org.uk/centenary/poverty.html](http://www.jrf.org.uk/centenary/poverty.html)*

The single most frequently named historic achievement was the philanthropic effort of those involved in financing and running the campaign to end the slave trade. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in 1787 by Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson, and the contribution of William Wilberforce is most widely remembered. But many thousands of individual philanthropic men and women joined the campaign, ran local groups, raised funds, distributed pamphlets and worked collectively for decades to secure the successful passage of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act and the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.

The third most popular type of historic philanthropic achievement is the widespread provision of education and leisure opportunities. Apprenticeships are identified as a charitable objective in the oldest known records of British philanthropy. A range of schools were founded to cater for the needs of poor children who had to work for most of the week, including Ragged schools, Charity schools and Sunday schools. The ongoing needs of the working adult population to learn and gain new skills has been consistently funded by voluntary contributions. One of the best known philanthropic efforts of this type is the mass provision of public libraries funded by Andrew Carnegie. The turn-of-the-century founding of the Carnegie UK Trust led to hundreds of libraries being built across the country, with an open access policy that brought educational opportunities and a love of literature to ordinary people.

The Carnegie UK Trust was established in 1913, six years before the death of the Scots-born industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. One of Carnegie's lifelong interests was the establishment of **free public libraries** to make available to everyone a means of self-education. There were only a few public libraries in the world when, in 1881, Carnegie began to promote his idea. His global foundations collectively spent over \$56 million to build 2,509 libraries throughout the English-speaking world, including hundreds across the UK.

*For more information, please see [www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/html](http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/html)*

Finally, in this category of achievements, are the philanthropic efforts that ensured the existence of sporting facilities, public parks and open access to the countryside and significant buildings.

This latter is epitomised by the work of the National Trust, founded in 1895 by renowned Victorian philanthropists including Octavia Hill, who was also named by our experts for her work in social housing and is therefore a key figure in two of the three greatest historic achievements.

Octavia Hill (1838-1912) was a remarkable Victorian woman, involved with a variety of philanthropic achievements that continue to enhance the quality of life in the UK today. Multiple nominations were received for two of her projects: the provision of **quality homes for the poor and the preservation of open spaces for all**. Hill's pioneering work in improving housing standards with the aim of making, in her words, "*lives noble, homes happy, and family life good*" is described as laying the foundations of the modern profession of housing management. Her belief in the value of fresh air and the joy of plants and flowers lay behind her success in creating a number of London's public parks and her co-founding of the National Trust in 1895. The Trust now cares for over a quarter of a million hectares of countryside, 700 miles of coastline and hundreds of significant buildings. Its work depends on the gifts of the rich who donate property and land and on the smaller donations of over 3 million members whose subscriptions support the Trust's ongoing work.

For further information, please see [www.octaviahillsbirthplacehouse.org.uk](http://www.octaviahillsbirthplacehouse.org.uk) and [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

The greatest achievements of modern (post-1900) philanthropy are:

- 1 Famine relief and long-term aid to developing countries**
- 2 Health research and pioneering health services**
- 3 Campaigning which led to major social change**

Despite our prediction that historic philanthropic successes would dominate nominations, the achievement most frequently cited overall was the philanthropic response to famine and poverty in developing countries. A fifth of nominations came in this category, with the three most frequent mentions being the establishment of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (now known as Oxfam), the response to the 1984 news coverage of the Ethiopian famine which led to Live Aid and, indirectly to Comic Relief, Live 8 and Make Poverty History and the Jubilee Debt campaign which resulted in billions of pounds of unpayable debt being cancelled.

Oxfam began life as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, which first met in 1942 with the aim of getting essential supplies to people affected by blockades during the Second World War and raising funds for war refugees. After 1945 the committee recognised the need to continue efforts to relieve world-wide suffering and Oxfam (as it has been known since 1965) went on to play a major role in **disaster relief and tackling the root causes of poverty**. In October 1984, TV footage of famine in Ethiopia (especially the BBC news report by Michael Buerk) prompted unprecedented public generosity. Initiatives like Band Aid and Comic Relief followed, raising funds for Oxfam's work, as well as for other international aid organizations. Oxfam was a key partner in the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign and continues to mobilize hundreds of thousands of volunteers, campaigners and donors.

For more information please see [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

Many experts noted that the achievement in this area is two-fold – the meeting of immediate, desperate need abroad and the rejuvenation of generosity in the UK, evidenced by the widespread participation in national fundraising efforts such as Comic Relief and Children in Need. Further nominations in this field include philanthropic funding of long-term development projects, including Fair Trade, microfinance and healthcare infrastructure.

The second theme that emerged in the nominations for modern philanthropic achievements is health research and pioneering health services. The three most cited nominations in this area are the establishment of hospices to provide dignified and pain-controlled environments for the dying, the philanthropic response to the AIDS epidemic which provided preventative education and support for sufferers before the state grasped the scale of the problem and the enormous scientific enterprise that resulted in the mapping of the human genome in which the Wellcome Trust was a major partner.

The Wellcome Trust, which currently has assets of over £11 billion, was established in 1936 as a result of legacy left by Sir Henry Wellcome to fund research to improve human and animal health. A number of Wellcome Trust projects received nominations, including the development of antimalarial drugs and the establishment of the UK Biobank. But Wellcome's contribution to the international **Human Genome Project** received most nominations. Funding from the Trust not only paid for the sequencing of one-third of the human genome but also ensured that this information, on what is described as the 'recipe book'

of life, was kept in the public domain. The Wellcome-funded UK work was led by Sir John Sulston who argued strongly that sequence data should be released freely and as rapidly as possible, enabling researchers all over the world to access this information free of charge. This tremendous boost for global biomedical research is therefore a direct result of a philanthropic act made seven decades ago.

For more information please see [www.wellcome.ac.uk](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk)

Clearly all these achievements involve co-operation between talented individuals, publicly-funded services (not least the training of scientists and health professionals) and the generosity of individual philanthropists; yet this third part of the equation is often overlooked and is therefore celebrated in this paper.

The third main area of achievement continues the tradition of the slavery abolitionists in using campaigning as a technique to bring about significant social change. Nominations for successful philanthropically-funded campaigns cover an enormous area of social terrain including the right for women to vote, the banning of handguns after the Dunblane massacre and the ban on the production and use of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. An inter-related set of campaigns resulting in equalities legislation received multiple nominations, including the repeal of Section 28, equalisation of the age of consent and the Civil Partnership Act.

The campaigning charity, Stonewall, receives no public funding and is entirely reliant on donations and sponsorship. Founded in 1989, it successfully co-ordinated a campaign to repeal Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which was designed to prevent the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. A recent achievement resulted in **The Civil Partnerships Bill**, enacted in December 2005, giving lesbian and gay couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in matters such as pensions, inheritance and recognition as next-of-kin. By September 2006 over 15,000 couples had registered their civil partnerships. One of our experts described this campaign as *"a major milestone in equality that was delivered by philanthropy as result of an intelligent, focussed and ambitious campaign"*.

For more information please see [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

Campaigns can also tackle more intractable problems by successfully highlighting as-yet unresolved issues and building a consensus that action must be taken. For example successful campaigns have raised awareness of homelessness, the plight of prisoners of conscience and the ongoing reality of domestic poverty in our rich country.

In addition to the three main areas of achievement discussed above, numerous nominations singled out modern philanthropic efforts to promote education, the arts and the environment.

Given the dominance of government funding for school-age students, philanthropists tend to focus on higher education, especially the endowment of significant new centres and facilities at many UK universities. The Judge Management school and the Gates scholarship programme, both at Cambridge University, were singled out for being, respectively, one of the most generous gifts as a proportion of the donor's wealth and one of the largest charitable acts in the UK. The contribution of the late Michael Young to the founding of the Open University and the Sutton Trust's efforts to provide educational opportunities for less privileged children, notably to access university, were also recognised by our experts.

As with education, the efforts of individual philanthropists to promote the arts received several nominations. In particular, the funding of temporary and permanent exhibitions, capital building projects at national art galleries, museums and music venues and the widening of access to the arts, especially for young people and the disadvantaged.

Many environmental campaigns and projects owe their success to funding from private individuals, though not just from the wealthy. As one of our experts noted, some of the greatest philanthropic achievements are the result of collective acts by many small donors, as evidenced by the successful campaigns run by membership organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

Three specific examples of successful environmental activities cited by our experts are the saving of the Rwandan mountain gorilla, the successful campaign against mining of Congolese coltan for use in mobile phones and efforts to preserve fragile ecosystems in Latin America.

## CONCLUSIONS

This report is a celebration of the achievements of philanthropy in the UK. It contains ample evidence that the decisions of individual women and men, rich and not-so rich, to give away some of their money can, and has, changed the world for the better.

It is undoubtedly true that philanthropy alone cannot claim credit for the entirety of every achievement described above, but it is equally true that the role played by philanthropic funding is frequently overlooked. Money is an essential ingredient in creating social change and bringing about social justice, yet those who willingly provide the funds are often at best ignored

and at worst vilified. This report seeks to challenge the dominant cynicism and suspicion held by many people regarding the motives of philanthropists.

The achievements contained in this report stand as a proud corrective to the pessimistic view that philanthropy does not change anything. They point to an historic and ongoing role that British philanthropy has played, domestically and internationally, in creatively investing private capital and mobilising citizens to solve social problems. This report is evidence that a combination of money and passionately held beliefs can create enough momentum to change the world.

## END NOTES

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR PHILANTHROPY

The Institute was founded in 2000 and exists to increase effective philanthropy in the UK and internationally. In the first phase of its development, the Institute for Philanthropy was focused exclusively on the UK. More recently, it has broadened its mandate to work internationally. The Institute for Philanthropy is governed by a Board whose members are leaders in the fields of law, finance and academia. It is led by Dr. Salvatore LaSpada, the Chief Executive.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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