

# Charity Work at Schools in Lincoln: Past and Present

Written by

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From the Garton Archive: Item of Interest No 41

During the Second World War, Lincoln Christ's Hospital Girls' High School (LHS) engaged in charity work through a biennial 'Mission Sale'. The Christmas 1943 edition of the school magazine recorded that the proceeds of £60 for that year were divided among the '*Settlement*', the *Red Cross Prisoners of War Fund*, the *Merchant Navy Comforts Fund* (rum, presumably!), the *Russian Red Cross* and the *China Red Cross*.

Stalls at the Mission Sale were run by members of the Sixth Form and other pupils. The magazine reported that the School was generous in its response for an appeal for goods and especially with books, as a salvage drive was held at the same time. Competitions were organised by the Guides and Upper IVths, and great excitement was generated by the auctioning of two lemons! The sale concluded with a display by the dancing team, interspersed with singing by the choir.

Headmistress Miss Savill later reported that a sale had been held in July 1944 in the Greestone House garden in aid of the International Schools' Fund, sponsored by the *Council for Education in World Citizenship*, and financed entirely by school girls and boys to help re-equip the schools which needed to be built in the devastated areas of Europe. LHS had made a special effort during the year to increase its regular contributions to war and other charities, and a sum of almost £80 pounds had been raised at the sale for worthy causes such as children who were suffering under Nazi rule, and children in France in need of clothing. There was a dire need for clothing in certain parts of France, and two and a half years of clothing coupons were needed for a coat. Apparently the 'bran tub' was a particularly popular stall, and there was also an art exhibition in the main school building arranged by the legendary Miss Oyler and Miss Penny.

The School Diaries of the post-war period of austerity also recorded that, in 1946, 'charity boxes' produced a sum of almost twenty pounds for the '*Cot*', the *Mission to Lepers*, and *Aid to China*, and that in June 1947 a Mission Sale was once more held in the Greestone Garden, where a sum in excess of thirty pounds was raised.

In her address to the Upper School on Speech Day in 1948, Miss Cleeve drew attention to the remarkable work being done all over the world by former members of

the School population. Among those was the pioneering work of Giovanna Guzzeloni, in the 'devastated areas of Italy'. Giovanna had been to LHS in 1936 and left in 1938 to train as a teacher at Lincoln Diocesan Training College (now Bishop Grosseteste University). In 1941 she was appointed to the teaching staff at Monks Road School where, coincidentally, I was appointed twenty years later.

Miss Cleeve expressed the hope that Christmas gifts of clothes, toys and money would be sent for the nursery schools which Giovanna was establishing in those areas. The following photographs, taken from the Christmas 1948 edition of the LHS magazine, show the results of the work of the *Save the Children Fund* in Italy, and the transformation of the site of the Montenerdomo Nursery School to its completion in February 1948. Later in that magazine a free translation of an article by Giovanna which originally appeared in an Italian magazine is printed.

**“SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND” AT WORK  
IN ITALY.**



**THE SITE OF THE MONTENERDOMO NURSERY.**



THE NURSERY COMPLETED FEBRUARY, 1948.

The article described the Abruzzi region in the district of the Maiella, where many small villages seemed to spring from the native rock. Those villages had greatly suffered from the war, and had been reduced to pitiful conditions by enemy reprisals. Their ruins told the story of the tragedy of their destruction and revealed the misery and poverty of the inhabitants. The people had to eke out a living by cultivating the land which yielded little at the price of immense burden of labour by the men and women who worked in it. All the 'riches' which remained were a little wheat, maybe a sheep, a goat or even a cow. Nothing remained of the families' houses, stables or orchards. Conditions which were always poor had been made wretched by the war.

The victims of these appalling conditions were the little children who were placed in the charge of others not much older than themselves, or left without care or custody during the absence of their parents in the fields. The *Save the Children Fund* became aware of those conditions and sought to collaborate with a local charitable organisation. Giovanna was sent from England as its representative to help to create centres which would gather together the children of pre-school age, and not only provide them with meals but also give to each child the individual care and social education needed in those desperate circumstances.

The project began in November 1947 with the aid of the *American Friends Service Committee*. The arduous search began for suitable premises in which to establish the new centres, and some were eventually found which were easily adaptable as nurseries. Using whatever funds were available, suitable tables and chairs were ordered to provide the best possible surroundings for the children.

Teachers who were prepared to take up the challenge were recruited but the greatest difficulty was finding accommodation for them. In many cases the only solution was for them to live in small rooms in the nurseries. It was a life of great sacrifice. The following extract from the article conjures up a poignant image of the task facing those involved.

*The weather was very bad; we were still in the middle of winter and the centres lacked much that we considered necessary. The control of the nurseries was a great problem, yet in wind and rain, in sun and dust, our little American jeep, laden with provisions, small tables, chairs and mattresses, made its way heroically up the steep narrow roads among the ruins of the villages.*

The teachers looked upon their work as a mission, and were quite prepared to give up their time after school and at weekends to support the cause.

By April all the twenty-five nurseries were open and functioning. As the project developed, and the children began to acclimatise to their new lives, Giovanna compared its success to the ‘...miracle of the gardener who, having placed the seed in the earth, sees by a greater power than his own come forth a plant or a lovely flower.’

The article concludes by stating that the nurseries were only a beginning, but a real beginning. The humble, tiny seeds had germinated, but would they put forth leaves and flowers?

Curious to find out why such an exotic name as Giavann Guzzeloni should appear on the LHS admissions list I turned to the Internet with immediate dividends. It appears that Giovanna was the daughter of a Milanese aristocrat who had lived in England during the fascist regime, and had moved back to Rome after the war. It also seems that, even in her early career as a teacher, Giovanna was an active member of the National Union of Women Teachers whose archives contain letters and other documents pertaining to her interest in the state of Italy’s schools after the war. Correspondence between her and Muriel Pierotti of *The Woman Teacher* magazine in 1946 revealed that she became aware of the sheer terror that existed in the days of Fascism and was anxious to help in any way she could.

Two years later Giovanna wrote of the lack of facilities for nursery education in Italy from the effects of the war. The following is a quotation from a letter housed in the NUWT archives:

*We are fighting to improve the conditions of Nursery schools all over Italy... with what means of transport we could muster up we went round finding suitable rooms where this work could be carried out. Looking for a couple of rooms in a village that had suffered almost 99% destruction was like looking for a needle in a haystack... the rooms were found and by April we had set up 25 nurseries in places as far up in the mountains as 3000ft. Places that had barely schools and where help was very scanty. Our girls have been more than splendid, facing the hardships they have to face in those places which lacked almost every necessity of a civilised life. I cannot imagine any male teacher putting up with the conditions as they did....*

*As I had already mentioned in a previous letter to you, the position of women here, that is anywhere south of Rome, is rather terrible. The girls are still segregated and though the better educated girls lead an apparently free life there are a lot of restrictions everywhere to their behaviour... The position of women in the home is on about the same level. She is permitted to go out to work, be it in a profession as in the [word missing here], the field or to a factory, when she returns home she has to bear all the burden of the house without ever having the slightest help from the husband...*

The NUWT website also has evidence from correspondence that Giovanna, described as 'something of an enigma', left England late in 1947 to work in Southern Italy under the auspices of the Save the Children Fund, and in the LHS Spring 1951 magazine it was recorded that the School was glad to hear that she had been awarded the *International Order of Merit\** for outstanding work among children. Later that year it was reported that she and her husband were continuing their work with the Save the Children Fund, and were hoping to open a 'Baby Hut' in Ortona a Mare, Chieti, Italy.

As I read the tear-jerking accounts described above, my mind began to dwell on the images that are so readily available on our television screens and elsewhere from the current war-torn regions of the world. Direct comparisons are invidious, but the similarities are hard to deny. By coincidence I was drawn to an email from one of the teaching staff of LCHS, Jane Stannard, who circulated the following information to all the staff in the School in relation to the Children in Need campaign:

*Don't forget Friday is a non-school uniform day for Children in Need – bring £1 to wear your own choice of clothes. Consider being sponsored to wear your pyjamas or dress as a super hero.*

*There will be cake stalls – so we need cakes. If you would like to donate your creations, please bring them to R15 on Friday morning.*

*At lunchtime there will be a band playing in the Old Hall. Take your lunch and be entertained while you eat for a donation.*

*There will be various stalls selling unwanted toys and games on the cloister – donations can be brought to R15 too.*

*Lots of students have volunteered to do a sponsored silence – find out who they are and offer them a donation to keep quiet!*

*Look out for the Pudsey bear raffle – tickets will be on sale during tutor time, break and lunch.*

*Bring some spare change so you can join in the fun!*

The reference to 'small change' reminded me of Benedict Cumberbatch's humorous appeal at the end of his performance of Hamlet, which I saw in a relay from *The Barbican* at *The Venue* in Lincoln. He appealed for members of the audience to donate their 'loose change' to the appeal, and requested that it be 'neatly folded' and carefully placed in the slot provided!

I now hand over to Jane Stannard, who has kindly agreed to elaborate on the current appeal at LCHS.

*"Children in Need* has been a favourite charity with LCHS pupils for many years. Almost all are happy to pay £1 not to wear school uniform for a day and many bake cakes for cake stalls or take part in sponsored events to raise extra funds. This year in excess of £1400 has been raised. In 2011 BBC television cameras captured members of staff and pupils performing a tongue in cheek 'evolution of dance' routine which was broadcast (albeit briefly) to the nation as part of the evening's programming.

Reading about the Mission Sale of July 1944, I am struck by its similarity to the annual 'Christmas Fayre and Concert' held in the Old Hall during the last week of the Christmas term. Games and competitions, gift and craft stalls continue to be organised by pupils and Sixth Form students with the sole aim of raising as much as possible for charity. The Fayre concludes with a Christmas Concert in the Main Hall, organised by the Music department and featuring a variety of performances by pupils and staff.

The Christmas Fayre was initially set up by Mr Jason Stevens (Head of Citizenship) as a vehicle for GCSE Citizenship students to fulfil a practical component of their examination course. The School Council also came on board, and what has become a highlight of the fundraising calendar was born. The House system has replaced the School Council so this year the Heads of House have a pivotal role in organising activities, and funds will be divided between the four House charities as voted for by

pupils; currently Starlight, the Brain Tumour Trust, St Barnabus Hospice and Action for Children. Pupils will be allowed to wear a 'Christmas Jumper' for the day for a 50p donation to their house charity.

The aftermath of war, illness, and poverty sadly continue to be something the young people of LCHS strive to eradicate. With the world literally at their fingertips they do not have to travel quite as far as former members of the school population, such as Giovanna Guzzeloni, to understand the continuing need to share their good fortune. Her spirit lives on in pupils like Bailey Speed who completed a bicycle ride to the Humber Bridge and back, and Owen Jones who shaved his head, both to raise funds for teenage cancer charities, and many others who continue to 'do their bit'. These days, even the Headmaster gets involved in fundraising activities if it is for a good cause!"



Head Teacher Mr M Mckeown on the right and Mr J Gemmill on the left as you look at the photograph  
Both grew moustaches to raise money and the Mr Mckeown's is painted in the LCHS House colours

Photograph by Catherine Forbes

Reading Jane's contribution has made me even more aware of how world events are so accessible to children these days through television, the social media and other channels, and how the spirit of Giovanna and lives on in schools such as LCHS, and in the minds of their staffs and students.

A brief search on the Internet will reveal the extent of charity work in a range of educational institutions in the UK. At *EducationCity* in the West Midlands, for example, local charity work is carried out throughout the year, raising funds for a local, child-focused charity, and the GVI Project offers 150 different volunteer abroad projects in 25 countries all over the world, sending some 2,000 young volunteers every year to keep the projects sustainable, and to ensure that they have a positive impact on the local environment and its needs.

Giovanna was one of many excellent role-models who pioneered this work, and whose legacy deserves to be remembered, recorded and celebrated.



A general view of the Christmas Fayre 2015 in the Old hall at LCHS

Photograph by Catherine Forbes

**\*Note:** The Order of Merit is a dynastic order recognising distinguished service in the armed forces, science, art, literature, or for the promotion of culture. It was established in 1902 by King Edward VII.

### About the Authors

**Jane Stannard** came to LCHS as a student teacher in 2004 and, following a brief spell at a school in north-east Lincolnshire, returned to LCHS where she has been

ever since. She is a teacher of Religious Studies and General Studies, and Co-ordinator of House Charity Events.

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## **Sources**

LHS magazines from the 1930s and '40s

The Internet, including the National Union of Women Teachers' and Save the Children websites

[www.Giannathompson.weebly.com](http://www.Giannathompson.weebly.com)