

# Refugee relief during the First World War: Belgian refugees in Birmingham (1914-1919)



## Description

- ▶ The First World War as a watershed in the redefinition of humanitarianism and consequently social work
- ▶ Discourse changed from 'charity' to 'human rights'
  - Decisive turning point for the initial outlines of the current (inter)national policies regarding refugees and human rights;
  - The war as a catalyst for the transition of charity towards a more professional and institutionalized social work.
- ▶ Case: the transnational refugee problem (Belgium - Birmingham)
  - 1.5 million Belgians fled the country, 250.000 to England;
  - More than 4.000 Belgians stayed in Birmingham;
  - University of Birmingham: first university in the UK to give official diplomas to social studies students (1908).

This study starts from a *social work perspective* :

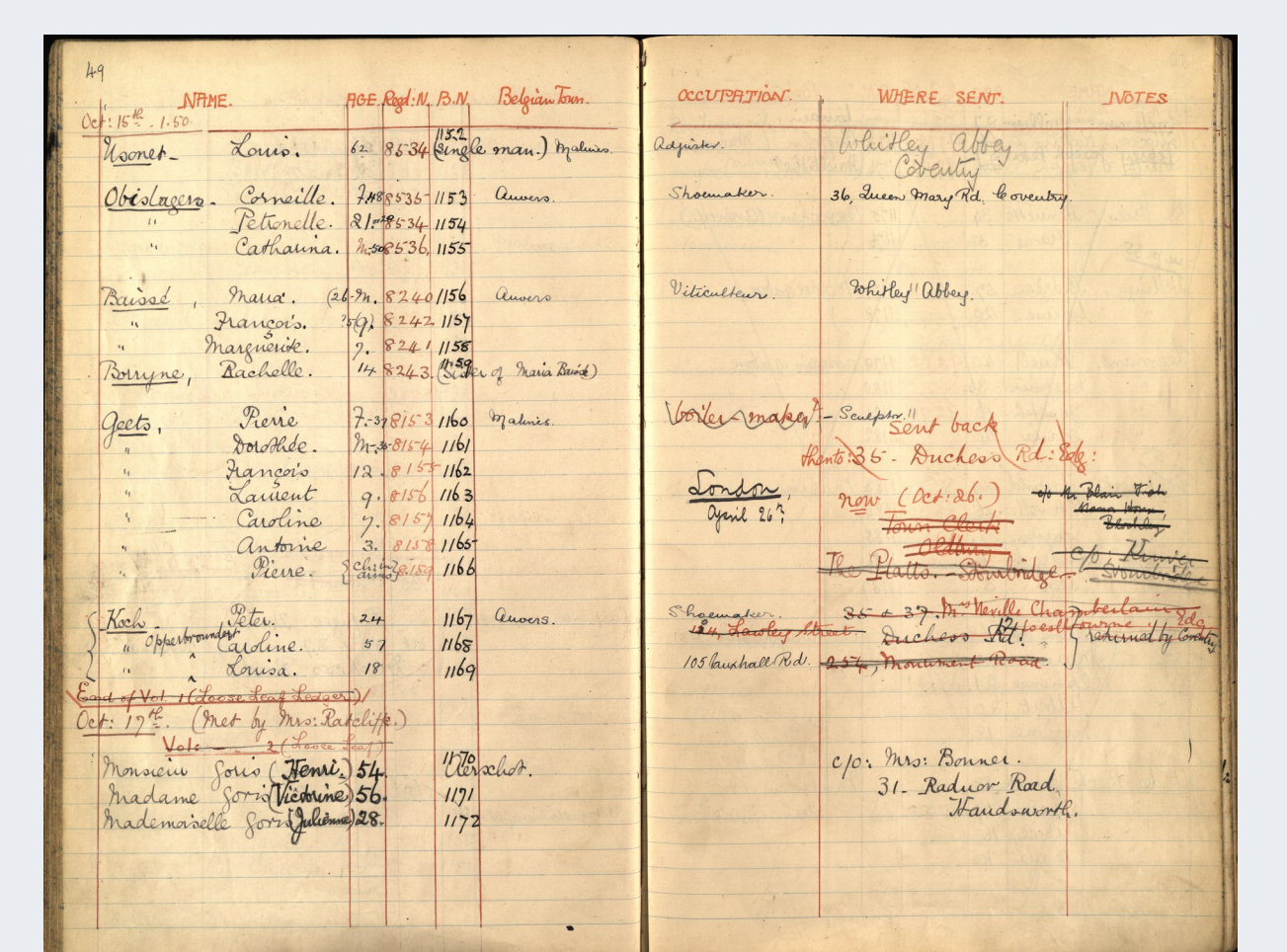
**Aim:** to investigate whether and how the Belgian exile during the First World War challenged and influenced social work and underlying networks, and what the possible post-war effects were on the further development of social work.



## Research questions

This will be concretized in the following research questions and corresponding studies:

- Study 1** In what contexts the refugee relief was imbedded in and how did both interact? What did the relief work encompass and how was it organised? Which networks of institutions, organisations, charities,... and actors can be identified?
- Study 2** What role did the networks and actors play in refugee relief and how are they interrelated? How did actors influence and experience the relief work? How and to what extent the networks and actors can be linked to social work?
- Study 3** How did the Belgian refugees themselves experience their exile, refugee relief in particular? How and to what extent refugees participated in refugee relief, and what was their possible influence on it?
- Study 4** How and to what extent did the refugee relief have an impact on the further development of social work, both locally and (inter)nationally? What long-term and medium range effects did the First World War have as a factor of continuity and discontinuity on the development of social work?



## Methodology

Throughout the aforementioned studies, mixed methods will be applied in order to answer the research questions:

Literature study

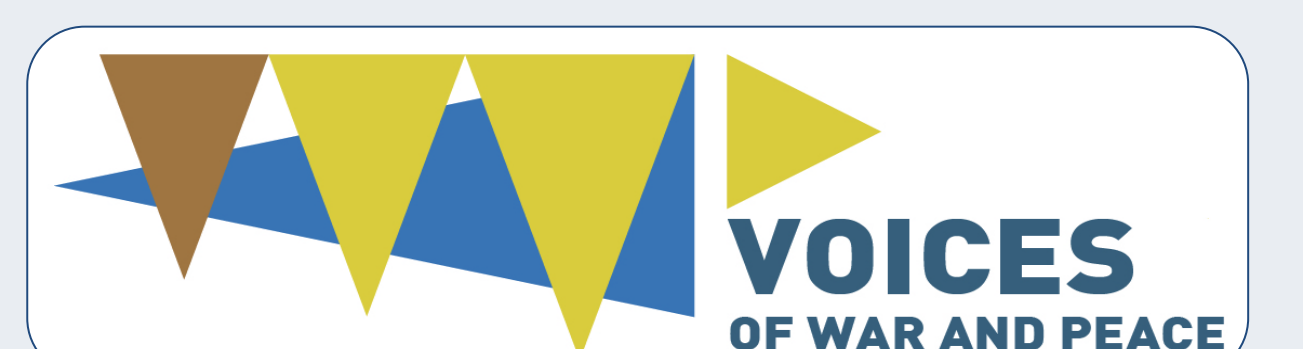
Qualitative Content Analysis

Genealogical approach

Archival research

Social Network Analysis

Biographical approach



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