

Field Lane



Annual General Meeting 2008

THE FIELD LANE FOUNDATION

1908 – 2008
A CELEBRATION



Happy anniversary! In 1908, Field Lane became one of the first charitable institutions to become a limited company

THE FIELD LANE INSTITUTION BEGAN its work among the poor and destitute in 1841. In 1908 it was one of the first charitable institutions to become a limited company. The year 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of its incorporation.

At the time, the decision to become incorporated was a bold and unusual step. A report referring to this time notes that: 'The past year has been a period of considerable anxiety as regards the finance of this Mission. The exceptional distress has caused a considerable increase in the applications for help.'

It is clear that the poor were having a very tough time. Field Lane's resources were being stretched to breaking point. Its response was pragmatic and enabled its work to be continued. ➤

In 1908...

The first Ideal Home Exhibition took place

Rex Harrison and Bette Davis were born

The British suffragettes began their campaign for female suffrage

'*The Wind in the Willows*' was published

Robert Baden-Powell began the Boy Scout movement

Mrs Beeton's cookbook was all the rage

The Field Lane Institution became a company limited by Guarantee

◀ The year of the incorporation came in a period known as the 'Belle Epoque', it was the era of H.G. Wells, P.G. Wodehouse and E.M. Forster, the age of Art Nouveau, music halls, gaiety and indulgence. Film was in its infancy, motor cars arrived, and conspicuous consumption was seen as a badge of honour.

For the well off, food was both elaborate and rich to the point of indigestibility. King Edward VII rarely sat down to a dinner consisting of less than twelve courses. The poor, on the other hand, kept going on what they could get.

Wealth and birth were the prime qualifications for commanding respect and obedience from others. For the poor, being without a job meant the very real possibility of destitution and the



workhouse. Those in employment, however demanding or poorly paid, were grateful for it.

Style and suffering

While many fashionable brand names including Jaeger, Burberry, Barbour and Aquascutum were as familiar to the comfortably off as they are today, the poor bought their clothing from ▶

WORKING WITH COUTTS

Field Lane began its work in 1841, running Ragged Schools. Field Lane's relationship with Coutts Bank goes back to 1843.

Charles Dickens, a customer of Coutts, was a friend of Angela Burdett-Coutts and knew of her active interest in the education of the poor.

At the time, Ragged Schools and the plight of the extreme poor was not attracting fashionable donors due to the desperate nature of the work.

Angela Burdett-Coutts was not influenced by popular opinion. Thanks to Dickens' 'sledge-hammer account', of conditions, she came to appreciate the struggles faced by those running Ragged Schools, who were teaching children so poor that many of them wore only torn sacking. She provided baths for the children and a larger school room.

She continued to support Ragged Schools all her life, and just as Field Lane diversified, so did she; working to provide refuges, libraries, classes for training and development and health education.

Thus began an association with Coutts which continues to this day.



◀ second-hand markets – though much clothing was likely to be fourth or fifth hand. Poor people’s clothes were worn until threadbare. It could be the reason why so little working class clothing has survived to be displayed in museums.

In London, in 1908, Field Lane reported that there were ‘400,000 families whose homes are circumscribed within a single room’. Such was the poverty of those quaintly referred to as ‘the submerged tenth’ that starvation was an ever-present fear, and those with dependants were particularly vulnerable.

Field Lane’s Ragged Schools, held on Sundays and Fridays, attracted ‘an average of 1000 scholars’. And there were male and female Refuges for those who might otherwise sleep outside. ➤

Field Lane: work in progress

In 1908, The ‘Field Lane Institution’ was at the heart of one of the poorest parts of London. During this year, Field Lane recorded over 100,000 attendances by men, women and children taking part in organised activities, availing themselves of facilities or joining in acts of worship organised by the charity.

The ages of attendees ranged from six weeks to over eighty, with Field Lane offering everything from crèche and nursery services to Bible classes, from adult Mission services to schooling, training and social activities.

Field Lane supplied fresh linen to women about to give birth so that their

babies were not born, quite literally, into rags. It taught young girls how to sew and how to prepare themselves for domestic service.

In 1908 the Institution supplied a Christmas dinner for the homeless and the poor, feeding upwards of twelve hundred people. The charity trained young boys in useful trades and sober habits. It looked after babies so that mothers, barely recovered from their confinement, could go back to work.

In the year in which it became a Company limited by Guarantee, it distributed 3,600 bundles of firewood and 64 tons of coal.



The people behind the statistics

Reports and notes from the time give poignant insights into the struggles people faced to survive.

'A widow applied to us to take care of her infant, nine weeks old...she had been left with four little ones.'

'RAS was admitted October 29th, 1897, for wandering and having no home. Was in the School seven years and learnt the baking trade well...'

'EB, who applied for admission, stated that she found great difficulty in obtaining work on account of her being middle-aged, young people only being in demand... after a time we found her a situation adapted to her age, where matured experience was of more value than girlish activity.'



'Mrs M. Aged sixty eight. A French polisher. Has to polish 144 of small frames for one shilling and ninepence. Knowing how impossible it was for her to exist on such a pittance, it was a privilege to assist her.'

'BB applied for shelter. She held a situation as a mother's help... there she was unfortunately taken ill and sent to lodgings. She spent all her savings... sold her clothes to pay for a little food...'

'Several nights had been spent in the open air... he applied timidly for shelter, and was taken in. From here he heard of a situation in a hotel in a seaside town. We applied for it on his behalf and he obtained it.'

'Mrs G. Aged eighty. Still goes daily to clean offices to help support herself and her daughter.'



◀ There was the 'Ragged Church Mission Service', which attracted 500-600, nearly all men. At the close of each meeting, the group, 'all one in utter destitution', were each given a meal of bread and cocoa. There was also temperance work 'amongst both adults and children.'

With over 5,000 attendances during the year, Field Lane's crèche was invaluable, taking care of children 'from six weeks to five years'. Each day, Field Lane ran a Mothers' meeting (attended by 350-500), with food supplied 'through the kindness of various great City firms'.

There was the Boys' Certified Industrial School: 130 boys were maintained, educated and trained 'so that they might be fit to hold their own in the battle of life.'

From the 1908 Annual Report:

RESULTS OF OPERATIONS

For the Year Ending March 31st, 1908

260	Persons to assist to employment
659	Men and women sheltered in Refuges
152	Boys maintained at Industrial Homes
5,439	Attendances at the Creche
20,533	Attendances at the Ragged Church
39,281	Attendances at the Adult Mission Services
58,331	Attendances at the Bible Ragged School and Classes
180	Children sent to Country Holiday Homes
10,453	Attendances at Band of Hope
7,204	Attendances at Gospel Temperance Meetings
7,886	Attendances at Youths' Institute
247	Temperance Pledges taken
15,446	Attendances at Mothers' Meeting
89	Bags of Linen lent from Maternity Society.
34,771	Distributions of Broken Food
15,153	Quartern Loaves of Bread distributed
4,172	Free Hot Dinners to Poor Children
3,625	Distributions of Firewood
886	Dinners on Christmas Day at the Institution
1,280	Christmas Parcels to Poor Families
64	Tons of Coals Given Away

“Suppose the Field Lane Institution did not carry on this work, other authorities might carry on some part of it... but what I want to put before you is this. Suppose public authorities undertake this work, do you think it would have the same tender hand, the same watchful and solicitous heart, the same spirit of Christ breathing through it all, when accomplished by public authorities as if undertaken by this voluntary effort? Surely not, and one of our joys is to know this – that here is a Christian enterprise that imbibes the spirit of its Lord and Master, and goes down to these poorer regions to take the bread that perishes, but with it also the bread of life and the spirit of love.”

The Reverend G. Downs Hooper

100 YEARS LATER...

TODAY, FIELD LANE IS A MODERN, optimistic organisation working with, and not simply on behalf of, those who receive its support.

Field Lane works with vulnerable families with young children to give them an independent future. It works with adults with learning disabilities, helping to create an environment in which many are able to discover their full potential. It cares for older people and for men and women with dementia, encouraging them to retain their capacity for enjoyment.

Field Lane challenges poverty of expectation, believing that everyone is entitled to lead an independent, dignified and fulfilling life.

Much has changed in the last one hundred years though throughout this time, Field Lane has continued to set standards to which many can only aspire.

For information about Field Lane's work to 2008, please refer to the Foundation's latest Annual Report, at: www.fieldlane.org.uk

The story continues.

www.fieldlane.org.uk



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Established 1841

Incorporated 1908

 **Field
Lane**

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Registered charity 207493

Registered Housing Association LH3047

A company limited by Guarantee 98226