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Social entrepreneurship and the social economy of Victorian and Edwardian Britain

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ABSTRACT

Taking Northeast England as our proving ground, we argue that social entrepreneurship played a highly productive role in deepening the social economy of Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Social enterprises flourished in the fields of community welfare, education, healthcare, recreation, and religion, enriching innumerable lives, and creating value at scale for both economy and society. Analysis of data relating to 3,919 Northeast social enterprises active between 1835 and 1914 reveals that social innovations spread rapidly from one locality to another in waves, as activists emulated developments elsewhere, within the region and beyond. We identify the factors that made this possible and reconceptualise social entrepreneurship as a collective endeavour led by social activists with support from the wider community and members of the business, professional, and ecclesiastical elites. In demonstrating how resources were once routinely mobilised by social enterprises, we provide a standard against which to evaluate social entrepreneurship in the present.

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Philanthropy; social economy; social enterprise; social entrepreneurship; social movement; Victorian and Edwardian Britain; voluntary sector

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship, generally understood to concern the deployment by entrepreneurs of market-based approaches in addressing social issues in challenging contexts (Kimmitt et al., 2022; Mair & Martí, 2006), is a topic of increasing practical and academic significance. Yet existing scholarship concentrates primarily on its contemporary manifestations, precluding deeper understanding of the historical foundations and long-run evolution of the phenomenon, the roots of which, we suggest, extend more deeply than commonly supposed (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018). Put simply, 'social entrepreneurship as practice predates academic interest' (Teasdale et al., 2023, p. 2155), the 'origin of non-state/non-private enterprising organisational forms' largely originating in the nineteenth century (Sepulveda, 2015, p. 846). A more contextualised appreciation of social entrepreneurship, capturing its development over the *longue durée* (Braudel, 1980), and in understudied settings (Doherty et al., 2014), might help in better understanding its motivations, strengths, and limitations by revealing what has changed and what has remained constant over time (Harvey et al., 2019a).

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Here, we respond to this challenge through an exploration of social entrepreneurship in Northeast England between 1835 and 1914. This period is generally considered to represent the golden age of voluntarism in the UK prior to the advent of the welfare state (Harris, 1992; Webster, 2023), when social entrepreneurs accomplished important work across a range of sectors in pursuit of social betterment (Owen, 1964; Prochaska, 1988). Our guiding research question is thus: how did social entrepreneurs succeed in mobilising the resources required to deliver social innovations at scale in Victorian and Edwardian Britain? In addressing this question, we explore what motivated social entrepreneurs, their collective behaviour, and how they organised and managed their social ventures. Northeast England, comprising County Durham and Northumberland, provides a fitting context in which to explore these issues. Here, during our period of study, as elsewhere in Britain, rapid urbanisation and population growth spawned new social problems, requiring innovative solutions on the part of social entrepreneurs. Our claim is not that the social economy of the Northeast was unique, but rather that what holds true for Northeast England likely holds true in general for Britain as a whole.

We show how across five domains – community, education, healthcare, recreation, and religion – social entrepreneurs organised, managed, and resourced the process of delivering social change at scale, significantly impacting the lives of most people across the region, often in multiple ways through multiple organisations. Underpinning our study is a specially created dataset containing details of the formation, survival/dissolution, location, activities, and histories of a large and representative sample of social enterprises active in Northeast England between 1835 and 1914 (Harvey & Maclean, 2023). Table 1 shows the distribution of new social venture formation by period and field for the organisations we have documented, confirming the strength of the voluntary impulse observed by others but never before enumerated (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018; Owen, 1964; Prochaska, 1988). Social entrepreneurship was so prevalent, we suggest, because of the ease of social venture creation, rising real incomes, a favourable moral and intellectual climate, and the evident need for voluntary action at a time when the state was reluctant to act. Our paper thus presents the ‘bigger picture’ of social entrepreneurship, informed by illustrative vignettes that shed light on the mechanisms and processes of resource mobilisation for social entrepreneurship (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023). In doing so, we shift the theoretical emphasis from individual social entrepreneurs to social entrepreneurship as a collective endeavour led by numerous socially responsible entrepreneurs and activists with broad support from other members of the economic and social elite (Diani, 2011). This, we argue, provides a more fitting representation of how major social innovations are accomplished and institutionally embedded, now and in the past.

Table 1. Social enterprises established in Northeast England, 1835–1914.

Period field	1835–1854	1855–1874	1875–1894	1895–1914	1835–1914
Community	62	79	95	60	296
Education	74	121	79	71	345
Healthcare	6	16	18	23	63
Recreation	120	285	617	422	1,444
Religion	213	445	366	198	1,222
Total	475	946	1,175	774	3,370

Note: The data relate to simple counts of identified and validated social enterprises established between 1835 and 1914 in various fields and sub-fields.

Source: Project dataset.

Our paper unfolds as follows. We first review the literature on social entrepreneurship through the lenses of hybridity and resource mobilisation, and then consider present understandings of social entrepreneurship during the golden age of voluntarism in Britain. We next outline our methodology, detailing our project in terms of the sources we draw on and methods we employ. We delineate our findings in four parts: scale, scope, and timing; organisation and resourcing; insights from five illustrative vignettes; and interpretation and conceptual model. Finally, we discuss our findings, highlight their implications for our understanding of the theory and practice of social entrepreneurship, and specify the limitations of our research before making suggestions for further research.

Social entrepreneurship and organisational hybridity

Scholars have identified a need for more a more comprehensive approach to social entrepreneurship, located within a 'matrix of institutions', resting in turn on constellations of belief systems (Gautier, 2019; Grimes et al., 2013, p. 460). These foundational belief systems, as Friedland and Alford (1991) show through their work on institutional logics, 'extend deeply into the core fabric of society' (Suddaby, 2016, p. 52). Likewise, it is widely recognised that social entrepreneurship research has suffered from lack of definitional clarity (Glasbeek et al., 2024). Insufficient attention has been paid, according to Battilana and Dorado (2010), to the hybridity of social enterprises in 'spanning the boundaries of the private, public and non-profit sectors' (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 418). The interrelatedness of social entrepreneurship to philanthropy is a case in point, the links between them often obscured in the literature (Hall, 2002; MacKenzie et al., 2019; Wong & McGovern, 2023). The origins of this hybridity stem in part from interactions with multiple institutions, which draw in turn on deep-seated, and at times contradictory, institutional logics relating to religion, communities, the state, and markets (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). This blurring of definitional boundaries means that alternative pathways to doing good, including voluntarism and philanthropy, can be overlooked.

More recently, 'forced marketisation' has driven non-profits to assume commercial strategies potentially at odds with their mission (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 422). Certainly, emphasising the primacy of market-based solutions to social problems contrasts with the motivations and logics of social entrepreneurs in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Socially innovative projects were then often led by people active in industrial life (Satalkina & Steiner, 2022), including entrepreneurs, working collaboratively to develop the social, not commercial, economy. In this regard, we are persuaded by Peredo and McLean (2006) observation that over-emphasising the market component of social entrepreneurship to the detriment of the social can detract from its essential mission to create social value (Hietschold et al., 2023).

We therefore take a broader, more expansive view of social enterprises as non-profit organisations addressing wicked social problems with funding from a variety of sources that seek to create social value. Hybrid organisational forms do not always fit neatly into preconceived categories (Gautier et al., 2023). A more expansive understanding of the term likewise acknowledges that social entrepreneurship is not new but represents, on the contrary, the blending of previous manifestations. In this, it bears the imprint of societal evolution over time (Kieser, 1989), being 'created, adopted, and diffused in the context of a particular period in history' (Phills et al., 2008, cited in Satalkina & Steiner, 2022, p. 568). It is specific contexts

that engender the opportunities taken up by social entrepreneurs (Austin et al., 2006). Exploring evolutions in social entrepreneurship and how these interweave with broader societal life, presents scope for new theory development (Doherty et al., 2014; Weick, 1989).

In this article, following Guclu et al. (2002), we define social entrepreneurship as the process through which social actors, individually or collectively, conceive and pursue opportunities to improve life in communities with which they identify. Social entrepreneurship may result in social innovation, defined as the generation and implementation new ideas, products and services that address social needs not yet met by the market or the public sector (Maclean et al., 2013). Accordingly, we define a social entrepreneur as a social actor who identifies and articulates a social problem or issue, conceives a ‘theory of change’, and mobilises the resources necessary to implement a viable solution to the problem identified. Conceiving a theory of change entails identifying the problem and how it has arisen, devising a proposed solution, specifying conditions for success, and formulating plans for resourcing, collaboration, evaluation, and programme management (Guclu et al., 2002; Price et al., 2023). Considered thus, social entrepreneurs emerge as purposeful agents propelling socio-economic change (Gautier, 2019), impelled by the belief that the proposed change is superior to the *status quo* (Austin et al., 2006). A social enterprise thus represents a formally constituted and legally sanctioned voluntary organisation whose objective is to deliver public benefit rather than private or sectional gain. In terms of mobilising resources, philanthropists are resource holders whose support social entrepreneurs might actively seek (Maclean et al., 2021). A particular feature of social entrepreneurship in Britain during the golden age of voluntarism is that both social entrepreneurs and philanthropists strongly identified with the regional economies and societies in which they were located (Grimes et al., 2013); their endeavours ‘embedded in concrete ongoing systems of social relations’ (Granovetter, 1985, p. 487).

Social entrepreneurs as resource mobilisers

Agents of change require an understanding of the ‘rules of the game’, as much as direct experience of the consequence of a problem, to operate successfully (Harvey et al., 2011). Northeast England is exemplary in this respect. Here, as elsewhere in Britain, the regional elite played numerous overlapping roles: as leaders within business and the professions, political stewards routinely taking up posts as Members of Parliament, Mayors, Aldermen, Counsellors, and representatives of the Crown, social trendsetters, religious and intellectual luminaries, philanthropists, and social entrepreneurs. The most highly networked played several roles simultaneously. Social entrepreneurship often resulted when several members of the elite, sometimes in concert with non-elites, together pursued a novel solution to a perceived social problem or deficiency for which they felt personally responsible (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). This communitarian aspect is fundamental; social entrepreneurs often being impelled to give back to the place in which they were born and raised (Casson & Casson, 2019; MacKenzie et al., 2019). In this way, social entrepreneurship is often geographically inscribed, benefiting from leadership heavily engaged in the local community (Jung et al., 2013; Kumar, 2021, 2022).

In departing from the longstanding conception of social entrepreneurs as inherently ‘heroic’ (Austin et al., 2006; Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023), we lay emphasis on the importance of collaboration in realising social goals. Social entrepreneurs, in whatever socioeconomic

context, are first and foremost resource mobilisers. Relational ties with relevant stakeholders are vital in securing the resources needed to realise social change, underlining the importance of community embeddedness (Dacin et al., 2011; Granovetter, 1985). Relationships with key regional stakeholders can be leveraged to raise financial resources and co-create solutions to pressing social issues (Kimmitt et al., 2022). This brings to the fore the collaborative propensities and convening power of social entrepreneurs in drawing on a range of partnerships, groups, and sources of funding (Lindsay, 2008). Social entrepreneurs are highly networked and serial in their approach. Elite cohesion engenders a sense of shared purpose and the capacity to mobilise in support of change. It is this coordinated, serial aspect of social entrepreneurship that leads to ‘geographic expansion through replication’ (Austin et al., 2006, p. 8). Social activism and social entrepreneurship can therefore stem not merely from individuals designated as ‘heroic’ but rather from any section of society, providing that a means of coordination exists to enable the diffusion and replication of organisational models.

Viewed in this light, social entrepreneurship cannot be studied in isolation, individual case by individual case. It is more appropriate to conceive the process as the spreading of new organisational types from one location to another, as in each location one or more social entrepreneurs founded local organisations by adopting or modifying organisational templates borrowed from other towns and cities (Maclean et al., 2024a; Yang et al., 2021), engendering new iterations. This focuses attention on the importance of social movements to social entrepreneurship, which is often overlooked or misrecognised in the literature, and its relevance to the institutionalisation of practices (Mutch, 2018, 2021). Social innovations in one place regularly spawn innovations elsewhere, diffusing through a dynamic process of imitation and isomorphism, movements expanding rhizomatically as new models of social enterprise become regarded as social norms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976).

Social entrepreneurship during the golden age of voluntarism

What is striking when investigating social entrepreneurship during the golden age of voluntarism is that many of its current concepts and practices have their origins in a distant past (Jung & Orr, 2021; Kieser, 1989), despite bearing different names and employing heterogeneous delivery models (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018). Examining the history of welfare activities sheds valuable light on the roots of social entrepreneurship long before the term was coined. Despite the ahistorical nature of much social entrepreneurship research (Doherty et al., 2014), entrepreneurs have a long history of providing social benefit for wider communities. Kieser (1989) writes that in medieval times, making a profit was regarded as sinful, the principal *raison d’être* of enterprise being to provide a social service. As Casson and Casson (2019, p. 473) observe, ‘Entrepreneurs, the evidence shows, engaged in philanthropy to a greater extent than other professions and exhibited distinctive patterns of giving’. MacDonald and Howorth (2018, pp. 8, 13) point to numerous instances from the 1660s onwards of entrepreneurial philanthropic approaches that might be designated as ‘quasi-social enterprises’ on the part of social reformers, who formed interrelated networks. These illustrations depict entrepreneurs as ‘embedded agents’ in their respective communities, manifesting a profound sense of place, their philanthropic activities anchored within regional social networks and structures (Grimes et al., 2013; Granovetter, 1985). This chimes with Massey’s (2005, p. 83) emphasis on the importance of place, conceived as ‘an active reconfiguration

and meeting-up through practices and relations of a multitude of trajectories.' Practices are the carriers of logics (Mutch, 2018), and many of the practices through which social reformers were interconnected rested on religious affiliation. In today's more secular society, social entrepreneurs are often relatively silent on religious beliefs, but in the period in question, religion afforded a sustained influence, conditioning organisational action.

Growing urbanisation and rapid industrialisation in Britain during the nineteenth century fuelled the accumulation of large entrepreneurial fortunes, most notably in the textile mills, coalfields, and heavy engineering works of industrial Britain (Shepherd & Toms, 2019). This exacerbated existing inequalities (Hobsbawm, 1964); however, it also provided, for some enlightened entrepreneurs, a stimulus to action (Bradley, 1987). Such action often accompanied other forms of welfare provision (Casson & Casson, 2019). At a time before the advent of the welfare state, enlightened entrepreneurs responded by assuming challenges disregarded by the establishment (Harris, 1992; Harvey et al., 2019a). The voluntary impulse appears to have percolated through the substrata of early modern England, funnelled 'via numerous guilds and parishes into hundreds of institutions such as almshouses, hospitals, and schools, as well as varied relief programs' (Ben-Amos, 2008, p. 379). This went hand-in-hand with regular fundraising campaigns targeting specific causes through what we call 'subscription philanthropy' (Gautier, 2019; Harvey et al., 2019b). Religion provided enduring motivation (Creed et al., 2014), exerting a powerful conditioning influence on social actors across centuries in a manner which is 'fundamental to the ways humans make sense of their world' (Mutch, 2018, p. 244). This suggests that our understanding of the pace of change in organisational life may be, to some extent, exaggerated, highlighting the importance of residual logics that dwell within practices (Braudel, 1980). Thus, many of the social innovations we assume to be inventions of the present (Hall, 2002) – such as the social rehabilitation of ex-prisoners by entrepreneurs – extend back to medieval times; entrepreneurs of this period likewise exploiting their social networks to amass, and redistribute, surplus wealth (Casson & Casson, 2019).

By 1900, however, the frontier of welfare provision had begun to shift (Finlayson, 1994). In community welfare, education and healthcare, the role of voluntary organisations had begun to recede, gradually replaced by local authorities and central government focal actors. Webster (2023) reports that between 1870 and 1900, voluntary hospitals were increasingly preoccupied with fundraising, such that by 1891 as much as 87% of their income derived from donations. Nevertheless, they were also increasingly obliged to make difficult decisions concerning whom to treat, distinguishing between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor'. Voluntary organisations had limited capacity to invest and struggled to meet the rising costs of running vital services like schools and hospitals, many having simply 'exhausted their credit' (Cruikshank, 1963, cited in Webster, 2023, p. 1109). This transition from voluntary to public provision occurred in tandem with the rise of the welfare state: not yet fully fledged, but which attained important milestones with the 1908 Old Age Pension Act and the 1911 National Insurance Act. Yet, many of the challenges of social welfare provision characteristic of our study period are not 'over', nor are they 'in the past', but resonate with analogous issues today. This applies in particular to the fundamental tension between the interests of taxpayers and those of beneficiaries, with disquieting echoes of the historical differentiation of recipients as being more, or less, 'deserving' (Webster, 2023); suggesting that the historical framing of an issue can affect its problematisation in the future (Wadhvani, 2018).

Research process

Our research falls within the ambit of historical organisation studies, defined as ‘organisational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods, and knowledge to promote historically informed theoretical narratives’ (Maclean et al., 2016, 609; Maclean et al., 2017). The use of historical methods in management research has gained momentum in recent years (Bruce, 2020; Decker et al., 2023), increasingly valued as a means of illuminating original case-based research to balance the ‘sweep of the historian’s vision’ (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023, p. 684) with the ‘close optic’ of context-rich analysis (Putnam, 2006, p. 626). In this we aspire to ‘dual integrity’, seeking to marry together organisation theory with historical analysis to foster a deeper understanding of the historical foundations of social entrepreneurship (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017).

The present study stems from a longstanding project on philanthropy, enterprise and society in Northeast England conducted by the authors since 2017. Previously, we highlighted how philanthropy and social entrepreneurship combined in creating and sustaining social ventures, but did not explore in detail temporal patterns with respect to scale, scope, and impact. In this later research, we undertook a more systematic search of available sources to identify and document social enterprises active in Northumberland and County Durham between 1835 and 1914. The period is marked at its beginning by the enactment of the New Poor Law of 1834 (Ritch, 2019) and at its end by the outbreak of World War I (Langley, 1999). The project dataset documents 3,919 social enterprises operational in the Northeast during the period. This contains coded data relating to field of operation, location, and years active, and unstructured textual data relating variously to people, activities, events, organisation, governance, and financial affairs (Harvey & Press, 1996). Data were gathered only for organisations complying with our working definition of a social enterprise as a non-governmental, non-profit venture with democratic governance procedures, accounts, and regular meetings of members. Thus, we eliminated informal organisations, temporary organisations, affiliates of national organisations lacking in autonomy, and groups or teams representing a parent organisation. In other words, only formally constituted voluntary organisations with a high degree of autonomy qualified for inclusion in the dataset.

Data gathering began with a small set of previously identified social enterprises whose histories we had already researched. We next identified candidates through historical trade directories, of which the online collection of the University of Leicester was invaluable.¹ Later, as our three-level social enterprise classification (field, sub-field, sub-sub-field) began to take shape, we consulted more specialist lists and websites such as those for churches,² brass bands,³ and football clubs.⁴ We then researched candidate social enterprises in two main ways. First, we consulted the websites of surviving organisations, local history societies, archives, and museums, especially the Co-Curate website hosted by Newcastle University.⁵ So, we searched the 73 million pages of the British Newspaper Archive (BNA), focusing on newspapers published in 19 towns and cities across the Northeast, the oldest dating back to 1711 and 1764, the *Newcastle Courant* and *Newcastle Chronicle* respectively.⁶ The BNA search engine is fast and efficient, though limited by the capacity of optical character recognition software to locate character strings in blurry texts, sometimes requiring lengthy manual searches. Notwithstanding, it proved possible to recover numerous texts relating to the activities, organisation, finances, and management of a high proportion of identified social enterprises. Indeed, by searching for short

character strings such as 'friendly society' and 'mechanics' institute' we were able to identify and document many more social enterprises.

Our typology of social enterprises was not imposed top down, but developed iteratively through the coding process, as we engaged in the process of identifying more and more social enterprises and the activities in which they were engaged, ultimately resulting in a fixed set of codes. At the top level, the 3,919 social enterprises identified are divided into five fields by primary purpose: community, education, healthcare, recreation, and religion. Hence, while churches may have engaged in educational activities through their Sunday Schools, recreational activities through their choirs and sports teams, healthcare through regular fundraising efforts, and community support through home visiting and financial support for families in need, their primary purpose was to engender faith in God and compliance to the practices and strictures of their religion. The five main fields divide into 30 sub-fields and 99 sub-sub fields. Under recreation, for example, sports clubs and associations divide into the 17 sub-sub-fields of angling, archery, athletics, bowling, cricket, cycling, football, gymnastics, hockey, hunting, motor cycling, rowing, rugby, sailing, shooting, swimming, and tennis. We do not claim to have identified and validated every social enterprise operating in the Northeast between 1835 and 1914 – cooperative ventures in retailing and housing provision are evident omissions – but we have certainly documented a large proportion of them. The resulting dataset enables us to explore the range and extent of social enterprise formation and activities over an extended historical period in a way that hitherto has not been possible.

Social entrepreneurship in Northeast England, 1835–1914

One of the most arresting features of the social economy of Victorian and Edwardian Britain is the diversity of social enterprises within it, embracing a multitude of organisations delineated by the principles of voluntary cooperation, participatory governance, putting people before profit, and reinvestment of surpluses for benefit of members and/or society-at-large (Harris, 1990; Prochaska, 1988). At one extreme are the charities through which the wealthy provided financial and material support selectively to the 'deserving poor' and at the other extreme the recreational clubs and societies satisfying the needs of what effectively were 'paying customers'. In between these extremes were a host of hybrid organisations through which better-off members of society, united in common cause, voluntarily subsidised the services enjoyed equally by less well-off members. Religious organisations are exemplary in this respect. Thus, conceptions of what constituted pro-social behaviour ranged widely from the spiritual, moral and political reformism of elite members or society to the mutual aid ethos of friendly societies, cooperatives, and working-class sports and social clubs.

In what follows, we provide an overview and interpretation of our top-level research findings. First, we trace the development of social enterprise formation and activities across fields and over time. Second, we show how social enterprises were founded, organised, and resourced, revealing commonalities and differences between fields. Third, we present five illustrative vignettes of locally prominent organisations in different parts of the region, one for each main field, to illustrate the interplay between wider social forces and localism in social entrepreneurship. Finally, we elucidate our thoughts on how our findings might best be understood with reference to a simple interpretive model.

Scale, scope, and timing

In Table 2, we present counts of social enterprises active in Northeast England from 1835 and 1914 by field, sub-field, and period of foundation. Social enterprises existed at the beginning of the period in all fields and most sub-fields. Unsurprisingly, churches, predominantly Anglican, comprised 74% of all social enterprises in 1834. Whether Anglican, non-conformist or Catholic, churches had long been at the heart of local communities in satisfying not only religious but also welfare, educational, and recreational needs (Jawad, 2012). Between 1835 and 1914, the number of churches in the Northeast quadrupled due to population growth and interfaith rivalry. Methodism in its various guises proved especially vigorous, as did

Table 2. Social enterprises active in Northeast England, 1835–1914.

Types of social enterprise	Existed 1834	Founded in period				Existed 1914
		1835–1854	1855–1874	1875–1894	1895–1914	
Almshouses & elderly care	13	6	3	2	9	31
Benevolent & mutual aid societies	11	40	23	5	7	79
Emergency services	5	2	4	7	1	18
Reform & public policy societies	3	6	33	31	9	78
Welfare organisations	1	8	16	50	34	105
<i>All community social enterprises</i>	33	62	79	95	60	311
Elementary schools	22	35	77	3	1	14
Further & higher education	4	4	4	0	3	14
Grammar & independent schools	12	2	0	14	4	21
Industrial schools	0	3	4	8	1	14
Learned & professional societies	4	2	2	2	0	10
Libraries & literary institutes	1	9	15	74	61	132
Mechanics' institutes	14	19	19	3	1	50
<i>All educational social enterprises</i>	57	74	121	79	71	264
Dispensaries & cottage hospitals	9	2	1	1	3	11
General & specialist hospitals	4	4	8	9	8	31
Nursing associations	0	0	1	6	6	13
Sanatoria & convalescent homes	1	0	3	2	4	9
Supporting organisations	0	0	3	0	2	5
<i>All healthcare social enterprises</i>	14	6	16	18	23	69
Agricultural & gardening societies	11	54	40	25	25	96
Leisure clubs & pursuits	0	1	15	52	28	87
Performing arts organisations	11	30	150	145	133	360
Sports clubs & associations	18	35	80	395	261	641
<i>All recreational social enterprises</i>	40	120	285	617	422	1,184
Anglican churches	218	62	97	95	51	518
Baptist churches	10	8	9	17	6	36
Congregational churches	9	6	12	6	2	34
Methodist churches	72	96	259	186	93	627
Other non-conformist churches	16	3	11	20	4	47
Presbyterian churches	50	14	20	13	4	79
Religious societies	17	10	9	7	13	41
Roman catholic churches	13	17	25	19	19	93
Synagogues	0	1	3	3	6	11
<i>All religious social enterprises</i>	405	213	445	366	198	1,486
Total number of social enterprises	549	475	946	1,175	774	3,315

Note: The data relate to simple counts of identified and validated social enterprises established between 1835 and 1914 in various fields and sub-fields, and the numbers for each type existing at the beginning and end of the study period.

Source: Project dataset.

The bold values are to emphasize the types of social enterprise and the relevant years. We are very happy with how the table looks.

Roman Catholicism after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. Local church communities of all denominations funded most capital spending and operating expenses, when the trend was to expand by building new churches and enlarging existing ones by adding new facilities, Sunday Schools, and Church Halls (Meacham, 2012). Churches also increased their popular appeal by expanding the scale and scope of their educational (e.g. Sunday Schools, bible study groups, temperance meetings, guest lecturers) and recreational activities (e.g. youth groups, sports teams, field days, social events, lantern shows, choirs, and musical concerts). In short, churches, driven by the evangelical quest for spiritual and moral improvement, were central to the social economy of Victorian and Edwardian Britain (Prochaska, 1988).

The period is frequently identified with endeavours to mitigate the effects of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and urban squalor (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018; Owen, 1964). Table 2 suggests a tenfold increase in community ventures between 1835 and 1914. Consistent with prior research (Owen, 1964, pp. 163–181), these fell into six main groups. The first consisted of organisations providing residential accommodation for vulnerable people, such as almshouses, orphanages, and homes for the blind, deaf, and disabled. A second group provided support to individuals and families with little income or savings. Indigent sick societies, for example, distributed small sums of money or tokens that could be exchanged locally for food, clothing or coal (Kidd, 1999). Other organisations like the Newcastle Aged Female Society provided longer term support in the form of small pensions. A third group comprised friendly societies like the Oddfellows and Foresters that provided death, sickness, and other benefits to members as a form of social insurance (Cordery, 1995). A fourth group provided relief from precarity and moral hazard in Christian refuges that offered food and shelter in exchange for work or small payments such as penitentiaries for prostitutes, labour homes for ‘friendless girls’, and seamen’s missions (Kidd, 1999). A fifth group sought reform through behavioural change and/or legislation. Anti-slavery and electoral reform are illustrative, but eclipsing all were numerous temperance societies that required new members to ‘sign the pledge’ to abstain from alcohol (Fahey, 2020). The final group consisted of local branches of national organisations that rose to prominence during the second half of the nineteenth century such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, St John Ambulance Association, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Children, the Charity Organisation Society, and the Girls Friendly Society (Owen, 1964, pp. 216–246).

Social entrepreneurship made similarly diverse contributions to the field of education. In terms of elementary schooling in reading, writing and arithmetic, the main contribution was made prior to the 1870 Education Act, which led by degrees to the introduction in 1891 of compulsory free schooling for children aged 5 to 10. Before then, the state limited its involvement in education to the provision of grants to build and maintain church schools (Lawson & Silver, 1973). Schools thus competed in a mixed economy consisting of for-profit private schools, grant-aided schools, and non-profit voluntary schools. The latter category was boosted in the first half of the period, as shown in Table 2, by the formation of so-called ‘ragged’ and other charitable schools and by the establishment of numerous colliery and factory schools – 24 and 88, respectively, between 1835 and 1874. Nearly all had become state schools by 1885, unlike the 16 industrial schools established for poor boys and girls to acquire practical skills in preparation for employment (Gear, 1999). In secondary education, the main contribution lay in the creation after 1875 of independent non-profit fee-paying

schools, including seven high schools for girls. In higher education, the period witnessed the growth of the University of Durham, founded in 1832, as a broadly based institution with campuses in Durham and Newcastle after merging with the Newcastle College of Medicine (founded 1834) in 1852, and the establishment of the Newcastle College of Physical Sciences in 1871. Each part of the university owed its existence to social entrepreneurs active within the ecclesiastical, professional, and business elites at the pinnacle of Northeast polity and society. Many were members of learned societies like the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, and supporters of diverse schemes for adult education, including the 182 Mechanics' Institutes, Church Institutes, Colliery Institutes, Literary Institutes, Libraries and Reading Rooms documented in our dataset.

In healthcare, as with education, social enterprise long predated state involvement in the field, which began with the construction of workhouse hospitals after 1834 (Ritch, 2019). Thereafter, private doctors catered for the everyday maladies of those with the means to pay, workhouse hospitals catered for the very poor, aged, and infirmed, and voluntary sector hospitals, dispensaries, district nursing societies, sanatoria and convalescent homes treated a broad cross section of society (Lane, 2001). General hospitals treating acute cases as inpatients were first opened in London in the 1720s and in provincial cities in the 1730s. Newcastle was the first mover in the Northeast in 1751 (Loudon, 1981). In the Victorian period, the regional network of hospitals was progressively expanded and deepened though building more general hospitals and specialist hospitals for children, maternity care, and specialisms such as dentistry and eye care. Dispensaries, outpatient centres where medicines were prescribed, and medical advice given free or for a small charge, were first opened in London in 1770 and spread quickly throughout England. The first in the Northeast opened in Newcastle in 1778, followed by Stockton and Darlington in 1790 and 1808 respectively (Loudon, 1981). District nursing, providing care for the sick at home, emerged from the tradition of home visiting within parishes following the employment of trained nurses by charities to complement the work of volunteers. What had already become a national movement was lent impetus in 1887 with the founding of Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses to set professional standards, issue qualifications, and promote best practice (Fox, 1994). Finally, social entrepreneurship played an important role in building and operating well designed sanatoria and convalescent homes to aid patient recovery from trauma and chronic diseases in attractive rural and seaside settings (Anders, 2021).

A significant and perhaps surprising finding reported in Table 2 is the sheer number of social enterprises active in the field of leisure and recreation, progressively deepening and enriching the social economy of the region. Agricultural and gardening societies disseminated knowledge and inculcated competition between members, attracting large crowds to regular agricultural and flower shows. As interest in gardening grew and horticultural societies multiplied, flower and produce shows became more numerous and elaborate, often featuring brass bands and athletic competitions (Elliott, 2001). These and many other types of public events, whether orchestrated by clubs, churches, trade unions, schools, or friendly societies, created a demand for the services of brass bands, choirs and orchestras, whose appearance boosted audience numbers. No fewer than 341 brass bands were active during the period, many over decades, compared for example to just nine operatic and 26 amateur dramatic societies. Brass bands, whether heading parades, performing at events, or in the bandstands of public parks, were ubiquitous (Herbert, 2000). More generally, it is evident that leisure and recreation activities for ordinary people really came to the fore in the second half of the period, propelled in two

main ways. First, through the creation of new leisure and sporting clubs. Under the guidance of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, founded in 1862, which promoted the model of a member-controlled club offering cheap beer, reading rooms, and a mix of traditional games like quoits, fives, dominoes, and the popular new game of billiards, workingmen's clubs took root across the region, beginning in Newcastle in 1863 (Metcalf, 2006). Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCAs), providing facilities for learning, entertainment, sports, and socialising, were founded contemporaneously to promote different values, specifically the lower-middle-class virtues of temperance, masculinity, and evangelical Christianity (Spurr, 2014). Alongside these developments, clubs for various sports, each favoured by distinct social groups, spread across the region in a series of waves, most notably angling, association football, athletics, bowling, cricket, cycling, hockey, rifle shooting, rugby football, swimming, and tennis. Issuance of rules and formation of leagues by national and regional authorities accelerated the process, encouraging mass participation and spectatorship, especially with respect to association football. Second, the rising importance of leisure and recreation within the social economy was boosted further as churches, adult educational institutes and assorted schools increased their appeal by expanding their leisure facilities, recreational programmes, and sponsorship of sports teams and performing arts groups, widening participation and the scale and scope of the social economy (Metcalf, 2006).

Organisation and resourcing

To this point, our findings suggests that social enterprises were more common and active within a wider range of fields and sub-fields than often supposed, and that many, especially churches, institutes, and leisure clubs, evolved to become hybrid organisations spanning boundaries within the social economy, strengthening their value propositions. Individual organisations were often relatively small and local, but their collective achievements within the fields of community, education, healthcare, recreation, and religion were considerable, improving the quality of life for large numbers of people, complementing the services provided by state and private-sector organisations. By 1914, for example, the various branches of the methodist church in Britain had a combined membership of more than 845,000, double the number of regular worshippers, and 1,686,000 Sunday School attendees.⁷ In Northeast England alone, a stronghold of methodism in its various guises, 627 church communities were linked not only by preaching circuits but also a dense network of affiliated clubs, societies and campaign groups. How, then, was this accomplished?

The answer, we propose, based on a wealth of organisational level data, lies in the combination of sound but simple organisational templates and effective strategies for revenue generation. From an organisational standpoint, the basic model adopted by most Victorian and Edwardian social enterprises was bequeathed from their eighteenth-century predecessors. All that was needed to start a new social venture was to convene a meeting of interested parties, invite potential members to make an initial cash subscription, and create basic governance and administrative procedures (Kidd, 1999). This involved appointing, usually by open vote, officers such as chairmen, secretaries, treasurers, committee members, presidents, and vice-presidents. Secretaries were charged with keeping minutes of meetings and copies of correspondence, and preparing reports for members and, when necessary, regulators. Treasurers kept account of transactions, maintained bank accounts, and presented financial

reports and accounting statements at annual general meetings. Chairmen convened and managed meetings, managed any senior paid employees, and took the lead in business negotiations and preparing recommendations for managing committees or boards. Presidents and vice-presidents typically performed less onerous symbolic duties. All roles were voluntary, unpaid, and subject to election by members/subscribers. This model, with relatively small variations in terminology and practice, served social enterprises small and large throughout the entire period.

The resourcing of social ventures varied far more than their governance, both with respect to capital expenditures and the generation of operating income. Large capital expenditures, such as those incurred when building a church, hospital, school, or university building, were covered through some combination of donations, fundraising, and long-term loans. Large donations of cash or land were regularly made by members of the philanthropic elite for the most prestigious projects, but the majority of funding in most cases took the form of subscription philanthropy (Gautier, 2019; Harvey et al., 2019b). This involved inviting potential donors, through direct appeal by committee members or newspaper advertisements, to subscribe cash to the cause, the precise amount being at the donor's discretion. Almost invariably, the amounts donated were graduated by social status, wealthier members of society giving substantially more than the middling and lower classes. Capital fundraising by other means typically was dwarfed by subscription philanthropy. Yet, the fundraising bazaars, sales of work, and concerts beloved by the Victorians, could on occasion make a decisive difference between the success or failure of a project (Prochaska, 1977). Inevitably, the gap between capital expended and income from philanthropy and fundraising had to be met by recourse to loans, which, for the projects of churches and other prestigious social enterprises, were not difficult to raise. Thenceforth, the elimination of debt became a top priority for encumbered ventures, motivating fundraising efforts and appeals for legacies and other donations.

Generating sufficient revenue to cover operating costs was the most basic challenge faced by most social enterprises of the period, and considerable differences existed between fields and sub-fields in the proportions of funds raised through earned income, philanthropic income, fundraising, and grants. Income earned through membership fees, gate money, and sales, together with fundraising, for example, predominated in the recreational field, in which income from philanthropic sources was limited. Conversely, in healthcare, the lion's share of income came from a variety of philanthropic sources, including regular subscriptions, legacies, and appeals, rather than patient charges (Kidd, 1999). Likewise, many community ventures, barring friendly societies, depended largely on philanthropic income and fundraising, but even here some income was generated through the sale of products, as in the case of workshops for the blind, deaf, and disabled, and services, as with laundries and repair shops or refuges for prostitutes and 'friendless girls.' In the case of churches, the greater part of operating income came from the collection box and regular fundraising events, including the charges levied for special concerts and lectures. Elementary and secondary schools earned income from student fees, such as the weekly pence paid by children at colliery schools, the remainder coming from philanthropic income, including the subsidies paid by employers to teachers at colliery and works schools. Income from grants was almost inconsequential for most social ventures, other than the occasional subventions from local authorities to grammar schools and government support for higher education provided towards the end of the period (Vernon, 2001).

Illustrative vignettes

Of all types of community oriented social ventures, friendly societies were pre-eminent with respect to mass participation and improving the lives of ordinary people, with at least 25% of working men in England aged 20 or above making contributions towards the end of the period (Kidd, 1999, p. 122). By pooling contributions and investing surpluses, societies could insure members and their families against sickness, death, and old age. In the Northeast, as elsewhere in Britain, the groundbreaking local societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were superseded after 1835 by locally managed lodges of national societies such as the Oddfellows, Foresters, and Rechabites. These, in turn, were challenged after 1860 by more centralised, professionally managed social enterprises offering a range of social welfare benefits to working people in return for small weekly payments. None grew more vigorously in the Northeast than the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund. Founded in 1862 following the Hartley Colliery disaster to provide financial support for 'the widows and orphans of those who may hereafter become the victims of fatal accidents', the new society quickly gained members (BNA, 1862). Within a decade, it had expanded its scope to provide accident and sickness cover, and could boast 34,000 members and 149 collieries making contributions equal to 20% of membership dues (BNA, 1872). Membership continued to rise, and benefits expanded to include medical care and pensions for the aged. By 1913, the society had 209,598 members, total income of £223,000, and reserves of £502,000 (BNA, 1913), a remarkable success story belying the myth of profligate mining communities (Benson, 1978).

In contrast to friendly societies, mechanics' institutes, which spread rapidly after the founding of the Glasgow Mechanics' Institute in 1823, have received a bad press from historians. They are generally perceived as lower-middle-class clubs rather than working-class adult education (Royle, 1971; Walker, 2013). Confirmation is found in the membership of the Darlington Mechanics' Institute, initially founded in 1825 and re-founded in 1840 (BNA, 1844). In 1876, the institute had 705 members, including 'ladies, 43; merchants and gentlemen, 78; tradesmen, 145; clerks, 169; mechanics, 121; youths under 21, 149' (BNA, 1876). However, while 'mechanics' formed a minority, the organising committee was in no doubt that the institute served a valuable purpose in 'the diffusion of sound, useful knowledge' to the benefit of 'mechanics and others', priding themselves in doing so for an 'annual subscription of only five shillings', which *inter alia* gave 'free use of a comfortable reading room – fire, candles, and all requisites provided' (BNA, 1844). In fact, the institute, like most others, proved a resilient, adaptable, and responsive organisation, attracting members by access to a large library, newspaper reading room, interesting and often illustrated lectures, regular soirées, and from the 1880s, scientific classes in inorganic chemistry, magnetism and electricity, and mathematics, preparing candidates for national examinations of the Society of Arts (BNA, 1890).

Adaptability in service provision and revenue generation was also crucial to the growth of social enterprises in healthcare, as illustrated by the Newcastle Infirmary. Founded in 1751, the greater part of income for long came from middle- and upper-class subscribers, who thereby earned the right to nominate patients for admission (Holden et al., 2009). Large capital expenditures likewise depended mainly on subscription philanthropy, as in 1906

when the hospital relocated to its present site, facilitated by gifts of £100,000 each from William Watson-Armstrong and John Hall. Thereafter known as the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI), the hospital gained a reputation for exceptional capabilities in treating difficult surgical cases and other chronic conditions. By the end of period, it had the capacity to treat 45,000 inpatients and 68,000 outpatients, costing in excess of £51,000 (BNA, 2016). However, this is not simply a tale of inexorable growth, success in treating patients masking a fundamental shift in hospital finances. Holden (2018, pp. 186–187) shows that subscriptions plummeted from 64% of total income in the 1830s to 20% in the 1890s. Over the same period, donations from worker collectives, legacies, and dedicated church collections rose sharply to 20%, 27%, and 7% of total income respectively, while income from investments increased slightly from 16% to 18% of the total. The ebbing role of philanthropy in voluntary hospital financing accelerated across Britain after World War I, limiting capital spending in the face of recurrent deficits, which by 1932 had led to long waiting lists and overcrowding at the RVI (Gorsky et al., 2002).

The RVI, like the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, was atypical given its size. Most social enterprises, like nearly all those within the recreational field, operated on a small scale. Yet they had a big impact collectively by virtue of sheer numbers. A good illustration is the Hebburn Colliery Band founded in 1874 with instruments 'costing upwards of £100', which, having recruited experienced players, within two weeks of formation 'perambulated the rows of the colliery... playing the couple of tunes they had so assiduously studied and mastered so well' (BNA, 1874). Over the coming decades, the band, consisting entirely of working miners led and trained by a professional bandmaster, went from strength to strength, generating income from performances at sporting and recreational events like agricultural and flower shows, and from bookings in local parks and concert venues, to cover the £100 or so required annually to fund costs (BNA., 1897). After winning upwards of 300 contests, the band attained its apogee in 1904 when it won the Thousand Guineas Trophy at the national championship held at Crystal Palace (BNA., 1904).

Unlike recreational ventures, social enterprises operating in the religious field were relatively complex and capital intensive. The advance of primitive Methodism in the coalfield village of Hetton-le-Hole in County Durham is typical. Here, primitive Methodism went hand-in-hand with the growth of the Hetton Colliery Company.⁸ A society was begun in 1823 and a chapel seating 300 opened in 1824 at a cost of £326. Vying for congregants with Wesleyan Methodists and Anglicans, evangelical fervour and the teaching of reading and writing to children and adults proved a winning combination. A new chapel and Sunday School, still known as 'the Big Chapel', with seating for 1,000 people, was conceived in 1856 and opened in 1858 at a cost of £1,600. This was a remarkable effort. Church members undertook the groundworks and the colliery company, headed by the famous mining engineer Nicholas Wood, provided building materials costing £550. An appeal for subscribers and fundraising events covered most of the remaining costs, limiting the required mortgage to £400 (BNA, 1857). The chapel, with various additions, including an infant school in 1872, and numerous clubs, societies, and representative teams, served as the hub for the social lives of generations of local families. It excelled in music; the high point being its annual Good Friday concert, when its choir and orchestra performed rousing music like Handel's *Messiah* to a packed audience (BNA, 1898).

Interpretation

Our findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurship was the motor force behind the transformation of the social economy of Northeast England between 1835 and 1914, notwithstanding the advances made by the state in social welfare, education, and healthcare. The argument that voluntarism was on the retreat as the state advanced, often equating voluntary action with ‘charity’ (e.g. Thane, 1996), is mistaken because of the failure to recognise the rapid growth of social enterprises in religion and recreation and its continuing vitality elsewhere. A more accurate depiction of the social economy, we hold, is of a dynamic cluster of interrelated fields driven by social entrepreneurs, people motivated and empowered to create value for their communities, as shown in Figure 1. The model clarifies that at the heart of each field was the liberal-evangelical belief system animating Victorian and Edwardian Britain, whose deep-seated moral and ethical values continue to permeate assorted domains, penetrating deeply into the social fabric of society, even if this is not immediately apprehensible (Harris, 1990; Lindsay, 2008). Churches, for example, first and foremost were about promulgating Christian beliefs and engendering faith, but in the names of ‘improvement’

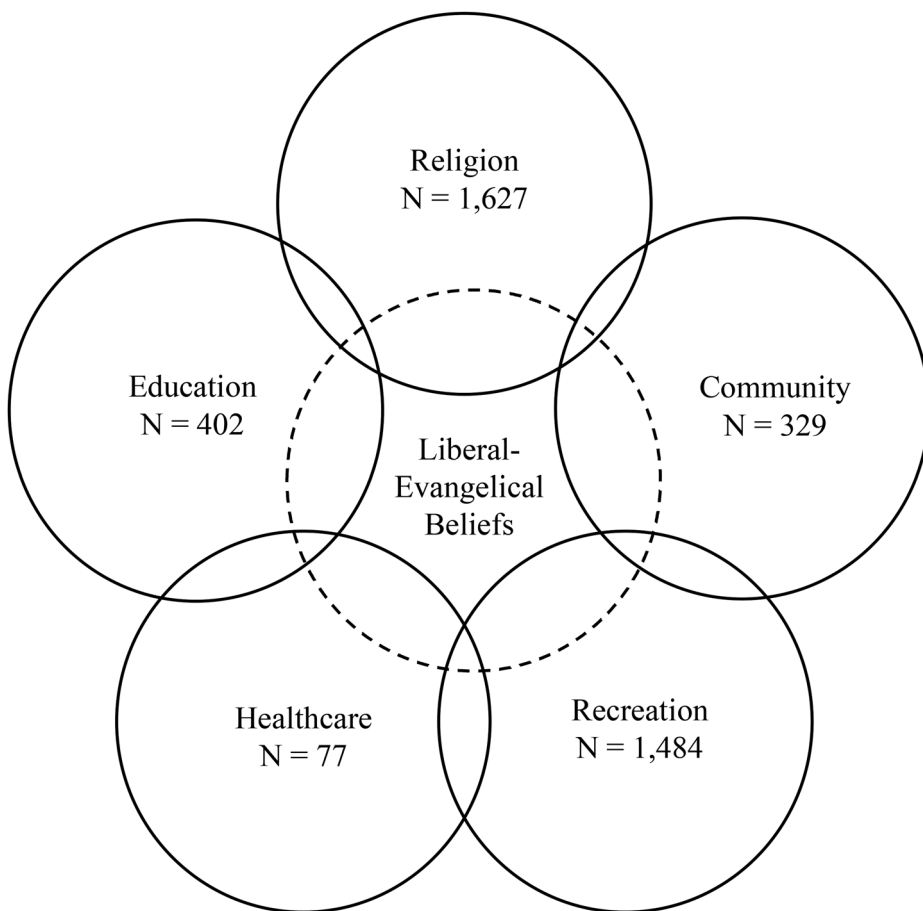


Figure 1. Social enterprises active in Northeast England, 1835–1914.

and 'opportunity' they contributed to all domains within the social economy, at once hubs for social welfare, places of learning, centres for recreation, and fundraisers for healthcare.

This interpretation is at odds with those of authors like Prochaska (1988) who equate voluntarism with philanthropy. Certainly, philanthropy was a vital source of funds in healthcare and variously in other fields, but this is not the whole story. Vision, strategy, leadership, organisation, and management are all important to success in social entrepreneurship. Moreover, earned and other sources of income were often more consequential than philanthropy within the funding mix. It is, we believe, important to understand the complexity of social entrepreneurship, and to recognise that macro-variables cannot easily be separated from micro-variables. The growing number of Northeastern social enterprises, for example, was partly the result of population growth and rising real incomes, as well as a vigorous response to identified needs by social entrepreneurs. During the nineteenth century, the region's population increased upwards of fivefold from 332,000 to 1.2 million (Harvey et al., 2019b), while gross domestic product per capita rose from £1,672 in 1830 to £3,911 in 1900 at constant prices, an average annual increase of 1.2%. Long-term interest rates, meanwhile, were steady and rarely exceeded 3.5% (Casson & Godley, 2010, p. 214). Each of these factors was conducive to the growth of social enterprises, most obviously the boom in recreational ventures and church building programmes after mid-century.

Discussion and conclusion

History affords us the opportunity to stand back to ascertain what has changed and what has remained constant over time. Uncovering the deep roots of social entrepreneurship enables us to see that many contemporary concepts have emerged from the distant past (Casson & Casson, 2019; MacDonald & Howorth, 2018). It allows us to discern that the relationship between social entrepreneurship, voluntarism, and philanthropy can assume many guises, manifesting in different organisational forms that may not fit easily within today's narrow definitional categories (Austin et al., 2006; Glasbeek et al., 2024). The prevalence of voluntarism in the period, of giving time and resources in exercising a duty of care for others, was a product of what Harris (1990) describes as a widespread belief in the importance of civil society and individual agency. Social entrepreneurship from this perspective was one manifestation of voluntarism, which Harris (1992, p. 116) believes underpinned the development of 'a vast, ramshackle mass of voluntary, self-governing, local, parochial and philanthropic provision', and on which we have sought to impose a degree of typological order and reveal the multiple logics of action at play in the growth of the social economy. In facilitating this growth, philanthropy, elite and non-elite, was an important source of resources, but it was not the ultimate driver of social change. Deep structural changes often take place at a slower pace and over a longer timeframe than commonly realised, illustrative of the 'slow-moving history' identified by Braudel (1980, p. 33). In combining research on multiple fields with illustrative vignettes (Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2023), we have shown how in Victorian and Edwardian Britain social entrepreneurs adapted and developed pre-existing methods of voluntary organisation and resourcing to realise their ambitions; exemplifying how social issues were identified, addressed, and resolved, yielding positive social outcomes. Social entrepreneurship was overwhelmingly a collective endeavour, building communities through diverse initiatives in social welfare, education, healthcare, recreation, and religion, thereby strengthening the fabric of society (Jung et al., 2013; Kumar, 2022).

Earlier, in stating the purpose of our research, we asked how social entrepreneurs in Victorian and Edwardian Britain succeeded in mobilising the resources required to deliver social innovations at scale. In answer, we identify three main factors at work. First, few impediments stood in the way of social entrepreneurship at a time when many felt impelled to act. Unlike today, social enterprises faced few barriers to growth (Davies et al., 2019). Given that the state was for long reluctant to become a serious player in the social economy, social entrepreneurs had free rein to implement solutions to perceived social problems. Individual motivations included the pursuit of status, legitimacy, and social capital, but these drivers were consistent with the prevailing moral and intellectual climate, which called capable actors to assume responsibility for the wellbeing of their communities (Kidd, 1999; Prochaska, 1988; Shaw, 2021). As Harris states (1990: 67), popular political philosophy in Britain, ‘saw “civil society” (business, work, culture, leisure, family life, religion) as the highest sphere of human existence and the arena in which men [sic] enjoyed some form of absolute rights. The “State”, by contrast, was an institution of secondary importance’.

The second factor is that social entrepreneurs quickly became aware through the media and personal networks of social innovations and organisational templates pioneered elsewhere. In consequence, social innovations spread from one place to another in waves, spurred on by competition between dominant elites in rival towns and cities (Garrard, 1995; Moore & Rodger, 2007). Diffusion patterns resembled social movements (De Bakker et al., 2013; Diani, 2011), profoundly localised, as idea and innovations spread rhizomatically from locality to locality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976), albeit unevenly, as in the case of voluntary hospital service provision (Gorsky et al., 1999). In many cases, the speed of adoption was remarkable, as with tennis and football clubs in the 1880s and 1890s following codification of rules of these games (Huggins, 2004). As innovations found favour, they became embedded in broad communitarian structures of social relations. Tracing their development helps in explaining how contemporary institutions came to exist, institutionalised, embedded to the point of being assumed (Granovetter, 1985; Sepulveda, 2015).

The third main factor is that social enterprises were enabled by access to multiple sources of finance. Philanthropic elites and private companies regularly provided cash, land and other resources to facilitate capital projects, as highlighted in our illustrative vignettes for Newcastle Infirmary and the Big Chapel at Hetton. However, in many other cases, it was subscription philanthropy that proved decisive to success in setting up and sustaining social enterprises. Social elites frequently topped donor lists, but typically these extended down the social scale to include numerous middle-class men and women and members of working-class collectives. Regular fundraising events for churches and other social enterprises, based on the principle of exchange rather than donation – notably bazaars, concerts, and special sermons – likewise were socially inclusive, attracting broad support within local communities (Prochaska, 1977). The same high levels of trust, commitment and support for social enterprises were also shown by lenders and the fee-paying members and clients of social enterprises. Lenders trusted that loans would be repaid, and those who in one way or another paid for services trusted that voluntary organisations were economical in their operations, delivering good value for money, hence worthy of support, as shown in our illustrative vignettes. In terms of resource mobilisation, far from being antiquated peculiarities, the social enterprises of Victorian and Edwardian Britain set high standards against which we might evaluate social entrepreneurship in the present.

Yet the achievements of social entrepreneurship in the period have hitherto largely gone unrecognised. In part, this is due to the fact that the language of social enterprise scholarship was not the language used by practitioners in the past when third sector organisations were referred to as societies, associations, and charities (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018; Sepulveda, 2015). However, it is also due in large part to biases within the relevant historical and social entrepreneurship literatures that compound misrecognition arising from the perceived foreignness of language and social realities of the past. In terms of historical bias, the gradual rise of a new institutional logic privileging public institutions over voluntary action by communities in healthcare, education, and social welfare (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Webster, 2023) has been interpreted as signalling the demise of voluntarism (Owen, 1964, pp. 500–572). According to this view, little more was achieved by Victorian and Edwardian social enterprises than to lay the foundations for the welfare state (Thane, 1996). Our research, in showing the continued vitality of social entrepreneurship in these fields and its stellar achievements in the fields of religion and recreation, provides a much-needed corrective to the thesis that state domination of the social economy was an inevitability.

In terms of bias within the social entrepreneurship literature, we refer to the tendency in recent times to overidentify social enterprises with market values and approaches (Kimmitt et al., 2022; Mair & Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012), further suffusing the neo-liberalist doctrine that currently holds Western societies in its grip (Harvey, 2007). As Sepulveda (2015, p. 849) argues, ‘social enterprise emerged within the US and European contexts as a result of a critical combination of existing organisational principles and novel institutional responses that materialised in light of the ideological hegemony that neo-liberalism achieved in the aftermath of the 1970s economic crisis and the end of the “golden age” of the welfare state.’

We support this argument. Much social entrepreneurship scholarship exudes a pro-market bias, implying that examples of social entrepreneurship cannot be perceived as such without exhibiting a strong market component (Dacin et al., 2011). This, we hold, is erroneous. A core insight emerging from our research is that having multiple sources of capital and revenue, from philanthropic to market, was a source of strength for Victorian and Edwardian social enterprises, enabling them to grow and multiply. Contemporary approaches to social entrepreneurship risk leaving us blind to the long-term evolution of the historically embedded practices from which it has emerged (Braudel, 1980). Better understanding of these practices might open possibilities for the future besides illuminating what worked so well in the past.

The first contribution we make in this article is to elucidate the interpenetration of social entrepreneurship, voluntarism, and philanthropy, highlighting in particular how resources were mobilised at scale to facilitate the growth of the social economy, a matter glossed over in extant literature. Existing scholarship tends to confuse social entrepreneurship with philanthropy, presenting the two as one and the same thing (Prochaska, 1988). In contrast, our research emphasises the primacy of social entrepreneurship in driving the social economy, casting philanthropy in a secondary role, as a valuable but by no means exclusive source of funds. These definitional demarcations are further complicated by the fact that social entrepreneurs and philanthropists were sometimes the same people, confounding the ascription of particular labels. However, what emerges strongly from our research is the importance of social activism, active engagement with the major issues and opportunities of the day, coupled with an entrepreneurial spirit, to the success of social ventures (MacDonald & Howorth, 2018). Nowhere is this more apparent than in sphere of religion where activist clerics like Charles Thorp (1783–1863), Archdeacon of Durham, were instrumental in the

formation of multiple social enterprises, including, in his case, a savings bank, a local elementary school, a pioneering environmental trust (Farne islands), a college (now university) in Sierra Leone, and the University of Durham (Harvey et al., 2018).

Our second contribution is to delineate for the first time the range and extent of social entrepreneurship in Victorian and Edwardian Britain for any region of Britain. The large number of social enterprises in each of the five fields included in our study confirm four of the five propositions said to be characteristic of social entrepreneurship put forward by Peredo and McLean (2006). All the social ventures included in our sample were emphatically social in orientation, motivated by social value creation, putting purpose before profit no matter how they raised capital or generated revenues. They displayed a marked capacity to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and envision improved social futures. In creating and distributing social value, they delivered social innovation, primarily through emulating other social enterprises within and outside the region, but also occasionally through conceiving and delivering new products and services, as was the case with the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, the first of our illustrative vignettes. It is harder to determine on the evidence available whether or not the social enterprises accepted 'an above-average degree of risk in creating and disseminating social value' (Peredo & McLean, 2006: 64), but the fact that most survived for many decades suggests that they were prudent in the management of the funds with which they were entrusted, running counter to this proposition. Finally, it is fair to conclude that the majority of the social enterprises we observed were indeed 'resourceful in being relatively undaunted by scarce assets in pursuing their social venture' (Peredo & McLean, 2006, p. 64), as the financial dexterity displayed by the Newcastle Infirmary, the third of our illustrative vignettes, amply confirms.

Similar patterns of social enterprise formation and operation doubtless can be found in other parts of Britain, albeit with local peculiarities and emphases, but this only adds to the generalisability and importance of our findings. The simple descriptive model presented in Figure 1, showing the interpenetration of individual yet overlapping domains, and placing liberal-evangelical beliefs at its motivational core, is valuable in underlining the coherence and interrelatedness of the social economy. Coherence stemmed from the informal, yet deeply ingrained know-how shared by social entrepreneurs about how best to establish, manage and govern a social enterprise, whatever its core social purpose. Interrelatedness meant that hard and fast field boundaries did not apply, meaning that social enterprises might compete across domains, as was common for churches embracing secular as well as religious missions, providing an animating ethos that seeped into other domains. Secular concerns may have assumed greater prominence over time, but what did not change was the imprint of religion on the behaviour of social actors. Mutch (2018, p. 246) expresses this aptly when he writes that the residue of religious faith, even in a secular society, engenders other manifestations of belief: 'Institutions... are put in motion and endure because of belief – belief that gives meaning to and is manifest in practices' (Mutch, 2018, p. 250).

Our third contribution is to highlight the importance of social mobilisation to social entrepreneurship, social mobilisation going hand-in-hand with resource mobilisation (De Bakker et al., 2013; Diani, 2011) within social movements accomplished by 'purposeful agents of change' who draw on networks and resources in varying roles, guises, and locations (Gautier, 2019, p. 99). The subscription lists routinely used in capital and revenue fundraising

campaigns were an 'integral part of the social structure and civic culture of the country' expressing and reinforcing 'the distribution of power and resources, class and patronage relationships, behavioural norms and community identity' (Harris, 1992, pp. 116–117). In many cases, across the spectrum, the lead in creating and running social enterprises was taken by local elites who occupied variously the command posts of society in business, media, churches, and the professions, using the pulpit and the press to mobilise public opinion and support for favoured causes. However, one of the limitations of much historical research is that accounts are biased because available sources tend to amplify 'the voices of the articulate elite whose documentation is so abundant' (Brown, 2003, p. 7), while silencing those of lower status majorities (Maclean et al., 2024b). An important part of our own contribution, therefore, is to draw attention to numerous instances of bottom-up social mobilisation. These are most conspicuous in the fields of religion and recreation. Large numbers of primitive Methodist churches, for example, were initiated, built, and maintained primarily through initiatives taken by working class people, albeit that, when possible, as in the case of our fifth vignette, the Big Chapel at Hetton, they solicited financial support from employers. In the field of recreation, from horticultural societies to working men's clubs to mass participation sports like football, bottom-up social mobilisation was the norm, even when, as often happened, local dignitaries became honorary presidents. By shining a light on the myriad social actors involved in our study, we emphasise the exercise of collaborative capabilities (Satalkina & Steiner, 2022), thereby providing a more appropriate representation of how major social change was propelled in the past, collectively rather than simply through elite driven legislation or philanthropic interventions.

Perhaps the most conspicuous limitation of our research is lack of precise estimates of the scale and scope of organisations in each sector of the social economy. To date we have gathered data on the numbers of social enterprises at work, but far more research is needed before we can speak confidently about the number of beneficiaries at the organisational and sectoral levels. Equally, future research may elucidate in more detail the multiple links which exist between highly networked members of the regional elite from a social network perspective. Given the importance of locality (Jung et al., 2013), there is considerable scope for research which examines the nature of social entrepreneurs as embedded agents in the localised social economy such as we depict here. There is already, for each of the five fields and several of the sub-fields we cover, extant literatures that in the main focus on developments in specific towns and cities (Moore & Rodger, 2007). The possibility already exists to pull these studies together and analyse the general and particular processes of social entrepreneurship at work within a field or sub-field. The foundation and fortunes of football clubs, their organisation into leagues, the establishment of laws governing matches and conduct, and the challenges posed by the advent of professionalism, are illustrative of a burgeoning yet still disjointed and undertheorised field of study (Kitching, 2015; Taylor, 2008). Further research might also consider the gender balance of social activists which, for reasons of space, we have not been able to explore in this paper. Additional attention is also merited by the many thousands of recipients who benefitted from the social interventions we document here, beneficiaries being accorded relatively little recognition in the literature (Harrow et al., 2021). Finally, we suggest that in-depth historical research that draws on archives, the methodology for which we illustrate in our study, holds considerable promise for the inquisitive researcher to follow.

Notes

1. See <https://leicester.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16445coll4>.
2. See <https://www.genuki.org.uk/>.
3. See <https://ibew.org.uk/>.
4. See <https://www.fchd.info/>.
5. See <https://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk/>.
6. See <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.
7. Membership and Sunday School attendee numbers computed from data tables of the British Religion in Numbers (BRIC) website. See <https://www.brin.ac.uk/>.
8. See https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/chapels/county-durham-2/h-j/hetton_le_hole_pm_chapel.

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