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# *The Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and the separation women of Dublin in 1914*

By Paul Huddie

## **Introduction**

As the centenary of the First World War comes to an end and we enter the post-war and Irish Revolution commemoration and remembrance period, it remains appropriate to continue addressing topics from the wartime period. This will not only facilitate the analysis of subjects and areas that were not engaged with between 2014 and 2018, but also afford better understanding of the actions and events of the post-war year. One area that remains under-researched is that of the 'separation women' and their Separation Allowance on the home front. Although they numbered in their millions and were located throughout both Ireland and Britain, analysis of them, their lives and experiences and the organisations and people that helped them to survive the war, in the absence of their menfolk, remains remarkably scarce. Much work has been done to date on Irish women during the war generally, and not least of all by Fionnuala Walsh through her 2015 doctoral dissertation at TCD.<sup>1</sup> This is added to the work done by Eileen Reilly, Caitriona Clear and Peter Martin, but despite this collective work, the lives and experiences of those ordinary women and, again, those that assisted them, remains little known or understood.<sup>2</sup> This is no less true of Dublin. Thus, it is the purpose of this article to contribute to remedying this lack of historical engagement and general understanding.

This will be done by highlighting the effects which the initial mobilisation of British Armed Forces and the conduct of the war throughout the latter part of 1914 had upon the Dublin 'Division', or branch, of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA). This was a military charity that was established by Sligo-born Colonel Sir James Gildea in 1885 to provide philanthropic assistance to the wives, children and other dependents of serving British soldiers and sailors, in the absence of sufficient wages or state support. The article will focus on the problems that the mobilisation caused Dublin families and also analyse the actions taken by the Dublin SSFA committee to meet those new challenges, while also illustrating the regular (pre-war) and irregular (post-mobilisation) relief efforts of the charity. It is hoped that through this analysis of a particular Division of a particular District of a particular Branch of the SSFA – case study – that not only will a better understanding be formed of how Irish society mobilised in August 1914, and how it responded to the needs of military dependents during the earliest months of the war, but also of the broader SSFA's inner workings, the people who composed it and its response to the war as a whole.

This article's focus will rest solely upon the Dublin Division of the SSFA for three reasons. As is the case in Oonagh Walsh's study of Dublin philanthropy in the early twentieth century the geographical narrowness is 'determined partly by the available sources, which display a significant Dublin bias'.<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Belfast, comparative branch records in Ireland or Britain remain relatively illusive, being either lost, unknown or presently inaccessible. While Irish records do exist for Belfast, the year 1914 has not survived, while in Dublin the records for December 1914 to December 1918 are missing. What remain are the Dublin records from October 1905 to November 1914.<sup>4</sup> Dublin also had the largest concentration of Protestants outside of Belfast, which had a profound influence on the potential scale of charitable and philanthropic activity, and finally (again like Belfast) Dublin had the largest concentrations of army wives, children and dependents, and was an epicentre of recruitment both before and during the war.<sup>5</sup>

### **The organisation of the SSFA in 1914**

Before we begin it is necessary, due to the lack of historical research done on the SSFA to date, not only in Ireland but also in Britain, to provide some contextual information about the nature of its organisation in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (UK) on the outbreak of war.

Established in 1885 the charity was dedicated to the relief and support of servicemen's families and by 1914 it consisted of several thousand volunteers, primarily female, in a transnational network of local branches that annually dispensed tens of thousands of pounds in financial relief, as well as in kind, to tens of thousands of wives, children and related dependents of British and Irish servicemen living in the UK, India and other overseas stations. A detailed breakdown of the charity's organisation can be seen in Figs 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup> This aspect of the conflict was vital to the war effort. As the *Irish Times* suggested on 15 August 1914, by providing for the wives, children and other dependents who would be 'in sore distress' Irish people could be confident that the soldiers who had gone to abroad to defend 'Irish freedom and Irish homes' would fight harder and endure more.<sup>7</sup> It was also seen as necessary to induce 'respectable workers' to enlist, and it was the middle and upper-class women of society who were expected to support those charities and those sections of society.<sup>8</sup> As will be seen in this article that is exactly what they (or at least some of them) did.

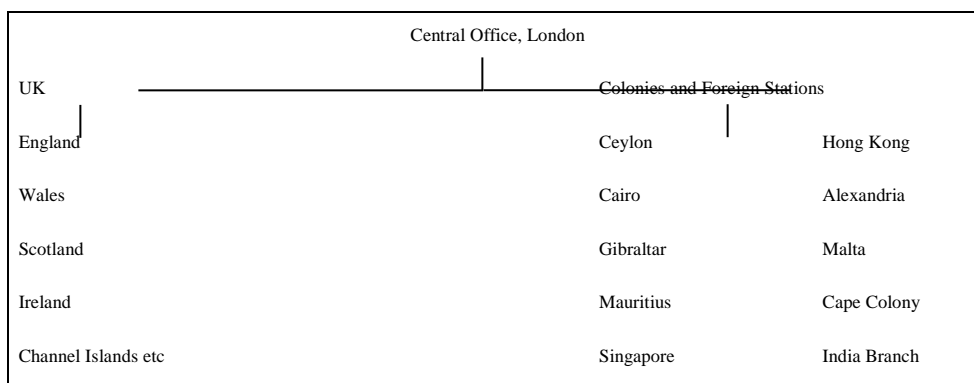


Fig. 1. SSFA organisation c1914.

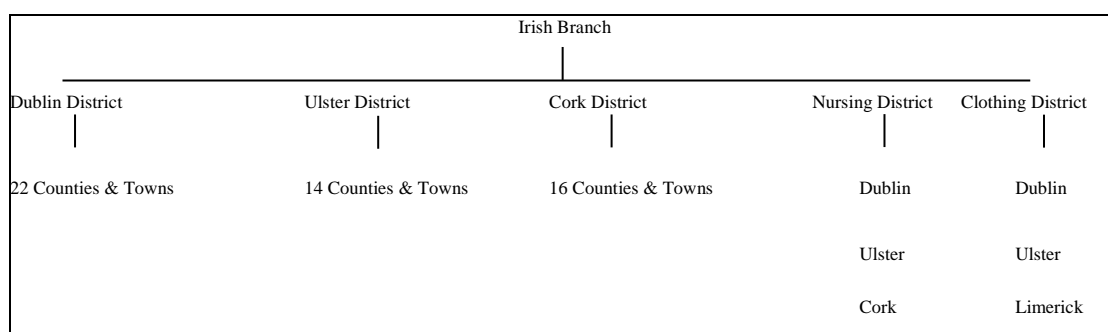


Fig. 2. SSFA Ireland organisation c1914.

The County Dublin Division through its committee, its local districts and their pay centres catered on an annual basis for the generally rudimentary needs of a very small proportion of the city's large military population.<sup>9</sup> This limitation can be explained by the work of Oonagh Walsh (and many others), who have illustrated the sheer scale of charitable and philanthropic options available in the early twentieth century – denominational and non-denominational.<sup>10</sup> Those that did seek assistance from the SSFA principally came from within the city boundaries, and especially the city centre, where there was always a high concentration of army dependents in the slums near the various barracks, especially the Royal Barracks.<sup>11</sup> To paraphrase Walsh, the city was effectively surrendered to the poor.<sup>12</sup> On the whole from October 1905 to July 1914 the Division took on only 1,084 new cases, a yearly average of 143. Those 'women' who most likely approached the Division directly through its office, firstly at Kilmainham Hospital and then at B House, Ship Street Barracks beside Dublin Castle, were visited and duly assessed by one of the volunteer 'ladies' who were assigned to their area.

Like most people who sought charitable assistance in the period the 'women' were 'the poor'. Most would have had little education or skills and would have supported their families through casual unskilled labour: needlework, charring and washing.<sup>13</sup> They were both Protestant and Catholic, although their denominational proportions can be debated, as little personal information survives beyond their surnames, street address and case numbers, and the charity was non-

denominational.<sup>14</sup> The SFFA ‘ladies’ were principally comfortable and educated Protestant middle-class women, who undertook charitable work for a variety of familial, social and religious reasons.<sup>15</sup> To these could always be added at least one land-owning peeress and more often one or two clergymen and military officers; again Protestant and primarily Anglican. This dynamic was replicated at all levels of the Irish and British organisation and all these features were common Irish and British charities more generally. The soldiers’ wives’ needs were met either through weekly grants for a specific period or through the payment of grocery bills, the supply of milk, medical treatment, travel to follow transferred husbands and in more melancholy instances children’s funeral costs. Interest-free loans were also regularly given and rent arrears were paid off. During the war, and until 1916 at least, the association also advanced or topped-up Separation Allowance and Allotment of Pay (a weekly statutory deduction from a married soldier’s pay for his wife and children) on behalf of the government, as the army pay offices and later the post offices could not cope. They also continued to give general relief.<sup>16</sup>

The County Dublin Division’s organisation was divided into city and county, with five pay districts in the former comprising twelve pay centres, nine paymasters and five clerks, and sixteen paymasters with no clerks or pay centres in the latter; a sixth city pay centre was added in October 1914. The city’s primary focus was most likely the wives, children and dependents or serving personnel, with the county’s being widows and orphans and, in some cases, aged veterans. A complete breakdown of the city’s pay districts and their paymasters can be seen in Fig. 3 and is illustrated in Ill. 1.<sup>17</sup> It was governed by a committee of twenty-one women and one man, which included four office-holders: the president, vice-president, honorary secretary and honorary treasurer. The latter was the man, Colonel McDonnell. While the full Committee tally was 20 (in 1912) the average attendance at the monthly meetings prior to the war rarely exceeded seven.<sup>18</sup>

The committee’s president was Lady Victoria Holmpatick, wife of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron, whose home was at Abbotstown House in Blanchardstown; today the site of the National Spots Campus.<sup>19</sup> All SSFA branches were presided over by a titled lady, while its committee membership were primarily women. Although the proportion was far greater in Ireland than in Britain. Alongside Lady Holmpatick served two other ladies, her daughter the Hon Sybil Hamilton and Hon Mrs Ernest Guinness. A dozen other untitled, middle-class ladies served as committee members, two of whom were wives of the only males committee members, Dr Daly and Colonel McDonnell.

Area	Location	Principal Paymaster
North West	Arbour Hill	Mrs Baines
North East	North East District	Mrs Teeling

City Centre	Thomas Street	Miss McDonnell
South West	Portobello Barracks (aka Wellington)	Mrs Denver
South East	Beggars Bush Barracks	Mrs Daly
(City Centre)	New District	Mrs Fitzgerald

Fig. 3. Districts of County Dublin Division in 1914.

### The outbreak of the war

By July 1914 the Division had a lack-lustre committee and perhaps a few hundred active cases, but within only a week of Britain declaring war it sprang to life – mobilised – and actively faced and responded to all the war’s challenges. On 13 August (the occasion of the last monthly meeting until January 1919) a ‘Special Meeting’ was held at 33 Molesworth Street and attended by twenty-two women. This new location was most likely chosen as the committee’s base because its main office (at Ship Street Barracks) was turned over solely to dealing with the influx of cases. The Molesworth Street building was home to two other charities: the Irish Bureau for Employment of Women and the Governess’ Association of Ireland, which made it an ideal venue and home for the rest of the war.<sup>20</sup>

At that meeting the first efforts were made to meet the already evident social crisis; in Pdraig Yeates’ words, 3,000 army reservists had already been ‘sucked out of the city’ in only a few days, along with entire regular regiments, and the effects were being felt.<sup>21</sup> To them were added (or soon would be added) all the new recruits, most of whom, as the *Irish Times* highlighted, left behind someone who depended upon them: a wife, a child, a mother or a sister, often in dire poverty. For example, the families of those men who came from Dublin’s notorious tenements more often lived on a diet of tea and bread.<sup>22</sup> In Belfast the problem was equally acute as men, regardless of religious or political affiliation, flooded into the recruitment offices: 16,500 by the end of 1914.<sup>23</sup>

At that inaugural war meeting several actions were taken. Firstly, a sub-committee was formed so that the Division could meet on a weekly and not monthly basis; this continued until January 1919. Although initially only comprising eleven members it quickly came to form the whole committee; no doubt because the workload and crisis continued to grow.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, new visitors were appointed. These were people (more often middle-class ladies) who administered the organisation’s assistance and relief through face-to-face house calls for assessment and validation of claims and the distribution of in-kind assistance and money or advice. The remit of the Divisions was also massively and permanently expanded beyond the city’s boundaries. Twenty-three additional ‘ladies kindly undertook to visit women’ in different areas, more often near to their own residents – all in the suburbs or countryside. Fourteen additional pre-war lady-visitors and two men (Dr Daly and Colonel McDonnell) who were already visiting the city districts (Fig. 4 and Ill. 2).<sup>25</sup> The

appointment of visitors to operate in all the areas outside of the city may have been for two reasons. The first was the mobilisation of the reservists, who may have been of a more middle-class composition or who may have retired or removed themselves to the suburbs and countryside. The second was the enlistment of upper lower-class or lower middle-class men who were not the Army's traditional recruits.

The most apparent and important way in which the war impacted upon the dependents of soldiers, sailors and even airmen, and as a result the SSFA, was through the number of cases that were taken on after the military mobilisation. By the time the first weekly meeting took place on 20 August 306 new cases – women seeking assistance – had been added to the Division's books (since 16 July) and between then and 12 November the average *weekly* intake was 741. This contrasts heavily with the average *annual* intake of only 148 between 1906 and 1913. A contrasting monthly return for 1906 and 1914 in Fig. 5 illustrates this increase even though 1906 was a year of high intake.<sup>26</sup> The increase was seen throughout the UK, and predominantly in the principal cities and towns. For example, by December Liverpool had 13,000 'active live cases', Manchester 16,000, while Glasgow reportedly had the highest at 25,000. In Ireland Belfast had 6,700 cases on its books by 8 October, while Dublin had perhaps over 8,000.<sup>27</sup>

Pre-War City Visitors		Wartime County Visitors	
Visitor	Area	Visitor	Area
Mrs Lynch, Mrs LePetou & Mrs O'Brien	'Anywhere in City'	Mrs Magee	Army Pay Depot
Mrs Batchelor	City	Miss Whitby	Blackrock
Mrs Ormsby & Messes Dodd	Donnybrook	Mrs Mathieu	Ballsbridge
Mrs Phillips	Dundrum	Mrs Watson	Boosterstown
Miss Foot	Grand Canal, Brunswick Street &	Miss Saunders	Ballybrack
Miss Barrington, Mrs Stokes,	North Side Quays etc	Hon Sybil Hamilton	Castleknock & Blanchardstown
Dr Daly, Mrs Daly and Miss Daly	Ringsend & Sandymount	Mrs Kennv	Cabinteelv
Mrs Richards	Stillorgan	Hon Mrs Barry	Chapelizod & Leixlip
		Mrs Phillips	Clonskeagh
		Mrs Connor & Mrs Jones	Clontarf
		Miss McDonnell	Coombe
		Mrs Kelly	Donnybrook
		Mrs Ide	Glasnevin & Santry
		Mrs Lawrence	Howth
		Mrs Edge	Mount Street District
		Hon Mrs Guinness	North Dublin
		Mrs Baines	North Circular Road & District
		Mrs Anderson	Royal Army Medical Corps
		Mrs Deane	Rathmines

		Mrs DeGax	Rathgar
		Miss Pettri	Terenure
		Mrs Waters	Fitzwilliam Street etc

Fig. 4. List of old and new visitors in August 1914.

1906			1914		
	<i>New cases</i>	<i>Max Case No.</i>		<i>New cases</i>	<i>Max Case No.</i>
January	85	212	January	4	1087
February	44	256	February	3	1090
March	16	272	March	2	1092
April	48	320	April	1	1093
May	?	?	May	6	1099
June	35	335	(No June after 1906)	-	-
July	39	374	July	7	1106
August	22	396	August	828	1934
September	41	437	September	2783	4717
October	19	456	October	2638	7335
November	27	483	November	401	7736
December	38	521	No December entry	-	-
Total	414	-	Total	6,650	-

Fig. 5. Comparative figures for new cases in County Dublin in 1906 and 1914.

## Wartime staffing and operations

Not only were new visitors taken on from within the Committee and their friends and families, but by October the scale of new cases requiring assessment had grown beyond what the existing visitors, Paymasters and even the structures of the Division itself could handle. Visitors' assessments had been undertaken as standard practice by the SSFA since its foundation, just like most other Irish and British philanthropic organisations, in order to verify the claims for assistance and judge the best form of relief. However, from August 1914 most of the assessment being undertaken (by the Association as a whole) was on behalf of the government, or more specifically the local army pay masters.<sup>28</sup> This was because with the granting of Separation Allowance and Allotment of Pay to all army wives and (not just the 1,200 that were on the Army's books in July 1914) the army simply could not process nor verify the claims of some 250,000 new wives and thousands more other dependents, plus children.<sup>29</sup> SSFA volunteered not only to assess the cases on the state's behalf but also administer SA payments where necessary (like it had during the Boer War) and as was more often the case, issue advances on SA and AP, while women waited on their army money drafts or post office orders books to be issued. This money (at least in theory) was to be paid back, but either way army pay masters were made aware of such payments and the sums were deducted from successive payments.<sup>30</sup>



Several actions were taken to improve the situation. Firstly, the committee brought in outside help from the Indignant Room Keepers (a homeless charity founded in 1790) and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. By the end of October all the paymasters were informed that the latter would visit any case necessary, but the power of registering those cases remained with the committee. None of the new visitors were to be issued with an SSFA application form, also known as a 'pink slip'.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, owing to the sheer numbers coming, on 1 October a circular – 'Instructions to Paymasters' – was issued to all the district paymasters revising and reorganising their duties, again to improve efficiency, but also to allow tasks and workloads to be better managed at pay centre-level. Not only did the circular empower paymasters to delegate certain tasks to their clerks it also allowed them to take on more volunteers and to open entirely new pay centres if necessary. It was also paymasters' duty to organise the visits and even undertake them in their district and if they were unable to conduct such duties they were empowered from 8 October to appoint someone in their stead.<sup>32</sup> The sheer number and concentration of cases in Dublin City and the need to do all of this is evident from the fact that pay centres could be established within walking distance of one another; one example was in the area north of Sackville Street: the Rotunda, St George's Parochial Hall and the Rutland Street schools. And as was previously mentioned an entire 'New District' was also established within weeks of mobilisation.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, and most importantly was the committee's decision during the meeting of 8 October that Colonel McDonnell, Dr Daly and Mrs Fitzgibbon were to establish a 'Branch Office' to assist the 'Central Office' at Ship Street, through the hiring of 'suitable rooms' for that purpose. This was because by that date 3,000 new cases had been taken on at a cost of £2,864.<sup>34</sup> The progress of the Sub-Committee was remarkably fast with the entire arrangements being completed by the time of the next Committee meeting on 15 October. At that meeting it was reported that Messrs Tedcastle and McCormick had agreed to give the Division a ground floor office at 16 D'Olier Street rent free for the new branch office, all the furniture had been obtained 'practically free' and the electricity was to be provided by a local company at cost price. No rates were to be paid on the premises either as it was to be occupied by a charity. In total the cost for acquiring and fitting out the new office for purpose was less than £30 and the branch was expected to be up and running. Even the provision that the new Sub-Committee would employ paid secretarial staff was an original wartime provision that only existed from 17 September.

At the meeting on that date it was resolved that a maximum of £5 would be provided on a weekly basis for the payment of a small staff of trained and full-time secretaries. This was in spite of such a move contravening the ethos of the charity, which was almost entirely voluntary.<sup>35</sup> So enormous and strenuous was the impact of mobilisation and recruitment in the first five months of

the war that possibly all SSFA divisions were forced to pay full-time staff; the Dublin Committee passed the resolution.<sup>36</sup> In fact, so essential was it deemed to be, and the threat of such paid people being rejected by the old guard hierarchy so real, that the Belfast Division threatened to resign en masse in December 1914 if the then President of the Ulster District, the Dowager Countess of Dufferin and Ava, did not agree to the endeavour.<sup>37</sup> Up to that point the only people employed by the association were the 'Alexandra Nurses' of the Nursing Branch and the auditors, which every division had, especially following the outbreak of the war. In Belfast too, new sub-structures were created, namely the East Belfast Sub-Division.<sup>38</sup>

### **Wartime protocols and directives**

To meet the situation head-on and to offer some assistance to as many of these cases as possible several new or revised protocols and directive also had to be instituted, especially in the first few weeks of the war. These were issued by the Dublin Committee to its Paymasters and to its visitors, as well as by the Central Office in London to the Dublin Division and the Association as a whole. Between August 1914 and June 1915, a total of ten 'WAR' circulars were issued by London; all to keep the charity up to date with the constantly changing government and army rules and regulations.

As was mentioned earlier the first Committee circular was issued on 1 October. Paymasters were also regularly updated throughout the war as to the rates of allowances they were permitted to give to each category of dependents, namely wife (with or without children), mother or sister, for example on 20 August and on 1 October 1914. While a liberalism of procedure did occur between August and November 1914 regarding who was to receive payments and how much, additional strictures were also applied on 5 November when it was resolved by the Committee that henceforth the 'decision of the Inspector on the spot [was to be] final'. Any appeal which was to be made would have to be made directly to the Committee. It was apparently deemed necessary to remove debate to ensure the prompt processing of cases.<sup>39</sup>

Such new protocols also involved the Division attempting to limit the number of claimants it supported through a strict (pre-war) vetting process: no woman was to receive any assistance unless she had previously registered at the Ship Street office by having submitted her 'pink slip' and been allocated a case number. This process underwent a steady development over the short period between 10 September and 22 October. On the former date it was declared by the Committee that any women receiving 'Government allowances' were to receive 'nothing from [the] association', however by the following week this harsh directive had softened slightly. Seven days later it revised this so that should a woman present herself at the Ship Street office having already received her 'Separation Allotment & Allowance' she was to receive one week's payment and to be told that 'she would

receive no more at present'.<sup>40</sup> The reason why a philanthropic organisation dedicated to the maintenance of servicemen's families and dependants while they served overseas would decide to turn away such people at the outbreak of a war was two-fold and stemmed from the association's founding charter. Its principal aim was to help anyone who approached them seeking assistance to obtain employment and after that or in lieu of that to make small grants on a 'purely temporary' basis. Under no circumstances did the association permit the Divisions to give 'anything in the nature of a pension or permanent allowance' to applicants. The grants which they could give could be issued at a daily rate, at 8s. for wives and 2s. for children.<sup>41</sup>

The war did change all that, but, through a mixture of its own traditions and rules (vestiges of the Victorian era) coupled with the regularly changing directives from Whitehall, adjustment took time and was not a smooth transition, nor was it without controversy.<sup>42</sup> On 22 October the Committee declared, following a directive from Head Office in London, that all 'separation women' were to be allowed 'receive additional allowances to make a total of 10s. per week'. This declaration came in response to a public outcry against the rates offered by the state but also by the perceived harsh treatment of the military women by the SSFA, based on the aforementioned reasons and the charity's fear of women receiving large sums of money from multiple sources. Additionally, all of this fed into the wider wartime debates around (female) citizenship, rights and state welfare.<sup>43</sup>

From 10 August 1914 the wives of soldiers who went on active service (whether married with or without the permission of a commanding officer: on the strength or off of it respectively) could receive a Separation Allowance from the state as well as an Allotment of Pay from their husbands. The latter was a compulsory minimum deduction of 3s. 6d. a week for any soldier drawing rations. At the outbreak of the war the rates of allowance stood at 7s. 7d. for a wife with an additional 1s. 2d. for every girl under sixteen and boy under fourteen. Thus, a soldier's wife with no children could receive a minimum of 11s. 1d. per week and one with two children 14s. 7d., but those rates had not changed since they were introduced during the Boer War. However, by the middle of the September, following demands in parliament, the government raised the rates of a wife to 17s. 6d. (including allotment) and from 12s. 6d. to 14s. 7d. for a wife with two children.<sup>44</sup> The deduction could be increased with the soldier's permission. When these payments and even the crucial registration of claims were delayed in the early months of the war (and even into 1916) the SSFA was required to advance army wives' money based upon government (and its own top-up) rates and using money granted by the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund.

All army wives received what was referred to as a 'postcard' upon which 'postmarks' were made to indicate whether she was in receipt of Separation Allowance and Allotment of Pay. If she was in receipt of both then there would be three such marks upon her card, if she was only in receipt

of Allotment of Pay then a 'little green slip' would be fastened to the corner of the paper.<sup>45</sup> According to the Dublin Division's records this was the official identification slip that a woman received when she was registered by an army pay master. Many people in Ireland and in Britain, principally the families of former unskilled labourers, found the state allowances to be far more income than they had ever had before, and this led to their standard of living increasing dramatically. Both Janet Dunwoody and Caitriona Clear have argued this point, with Clear stressing that the positive influence of Separation Allowance on the people of the Dublin; evident in the 13% drop in the number seeking Poor Law relief in Ireland between 1914 and 1918.<sup>46</sup> Yet this was not the case for everyone. Those families who had received higher incomes from the menfolk's civilian employment prior to enlistment saw their incomes and their standards of living fall, sometimes dramatically.

The voluntary nature of the organisation combined with the huge influx of cases after mobilisation and the first rush to the colours, and the influx of inexperienced volunteers (especially the pay centre clerks), ensured that inefficiency was another problem that also had to be addressed. Following a review at the end of August the Thomas Street District was deemed to have been very ill-managed; to the extent that £225 remained unaccounted for while the premises was described by Colonel McDonnell as 'not very convenient', while 'the help [was] insufficient'.<sup>47</sup> Two months later in a report to the Committee the Inspecting Paymaster, Dr Daly, who had been especially appointed in order to 'help in obtaining greater uniformity of payment' in all the Division's Pay District and Centres, highlighted a number of problems that were being faced by all Districts and Pay Centres.<sup>48</sup> According to him in November, and using the examples of the Pay Centres at Rutland Street schools, St George's Parochial Hall and the Rotunda, the first problem was that there was a tendency for certain individuals to do all the work. Whether this was by choice or because the others were not as skilled is unclear, but the message was that the workload had to be more evenly spread in order to ensure an efficient provision of services. The second was that some agents could also be 'a little harsh' on applicants, which was an interesting observation, given the rough manner in which the committee handled the 'separation women' until 22 October. He believed that ladies were 'better able to cope' with certain cases and thus ensured that the Districts didn't simply become 'mere cashiers'.<sup>49</sup> Such an observation suggests that a large number of men had come to be accepted as Pay Centre clerks by November, while previously the Division (like much of the Association as a whole, but especially in Ireland) was principally female. The third problem that he highlighted was that of poor assessment by visitors and clerks; something he feared would lead to bloated lists and women receiving too much money. Interestingly this ran somewhat counter to his previous observation, thus

it must be assumed that he sought a more balanced approach to the assessment and handling of potential cases and for the even distribution of work within the Division.

Cases did require scrutiny and vigilance, and while the cases of immoral, drunken and fraudulent women during the war were, as Catriona Pennell argues, blown out of proportion at the time, they did exist and were as evident in Dublin as elsewhere in the UK.<sup>50</sup> A very small number of fraudulent cases were highlighted in the minutes of the Dublin Division during 1914. In the case of Mrs Kelly (Case No. 6216) it was discovered that her husband earned 35s. per week, a considerable sum, and it was decided that the 15s. she had been granted was to be repaid by her to the Division otherwise her case was to be 'taken as fraud' and due action taken. That being said, the details of the case are not recorded, and her well-paid husband may not have given her a penny, thus she may well have been in great need of assistance.<sup>51</sup> While her case may not be cut-and-dry, it was for Mrs McLoughlin of 69 Mespil Road. According to the minutes and the printed reports therein she had been awarded a weekly allowance early on in the war, in August, as she claimed that her son and her only support had gone away with the army. Following a report that he was in fact working nearby on Baggot Street she was confronted about the matter which she refuted, claiming that he was with the army in Cork. When it was positively ascertained that the man was employed in the locality her case was given to the police and sent for trial. She was released on a bail of £10, further illustrating it would seem her financial security.<sup>52</sup>

While Kelly and McLoughlin are the only cases of fraud or potential fraud reported in the Division's minutes in 1914, other evidence does exist of other women's impropriety. By 22 October an issue had developed with the womenfolk of rejected recruits attempting to draw relief on the pretext that those men were still in training. As a result, it was proposed that a list be obtained of all permanently rejected men in Ireland in order to remedy the problem. However, such women were not to be damned for their impropriety but were once again to be directed to the Mansion House Fund (a wartime catchall charity) for assistance. The Division's response to that particular issue was to seek to obtain a list of all men who had been permanently discharged from the Forces, but also to petition the Records Office in Ireland for a list of sons who were in the Forces against which the names and numbers of future claims might be checked.<sup>53</sup> Whether or not this was provided is unclear. As well as that a very small number of cases can be found of women being barred from receiving any aid. Mrs Josephine Milne (2590) was noted as being 'Bad not to be helped', while others were simply 'written off' without any appended explanation, like Mrs Catherine Reilly (5444) and Mrs E. Redmond (5564) on 8 October.<sup>54</sup>

The perceived problem of women being unable to manage their SA – paid in single monthly instalments until 12 October 1914 – was raised as an issue by people in many parts of the UK in the

early weeks of the war, including the Dublin Division. In a two-page letter sent directly to the Central Office of the SSFA in London on 10 September, which was to be forwarded to the War Office, the Committee called for the cessation of monthly payments of SA and AP up to the sums of £2, because it was leading to 'reckless expenditure, extravagance and drunkenness'. This in turn was leading to 'want and shortage of food for children in the latter part of each month'. It called for such monies to be paid in weekly allotments through the post office in the same manner as the old age pension.<sup>55</sup> Although the Dublin Division believed that its letter had brought about great change, as their proposal was enacted by the government, it was most likely to have been just one of many divisions to have made the proposal in 1914.

With only two serious and detailed negative cases out of over 8,000 new ones in the latter part of 1914, the situation, whatever the press might have said and whatever it may have been elsewhere in Britain, was quite positive in Dublin, as it was in the rest of Ireland. Although the situation was somewhat different in 1915-18.<sup>56</sup> According to the Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the report compiled from the returns of the County Inspectors of the Royal Irish Constabulary in December 1914 no 'marked increase' was found to have 'recently taken place' regarding the 'drinking habits of the wives of soldiers'.<sup>57</sup> It was even suggested that '[a] certain number' of the complaints sent to the SSFA about drunken wives 'may arise out of personal squabbled and may frequently not be true'.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, with the massive and continued influx of new claims into the Dublin Division's books throughout the latter part of 1914 efforts were made to control costs.<sup>59</sup> The two distinct actions that were taken, beyond the curtailing of SA and AP recipients in the early months, were the limiting of the new Sub-Committee's spending power: rent and secretarial staff wages. Additionally, the Division Committee made a direct application to the Central Council at the end of October to have some of the funds of the Dublin Clothing Branch allocated to it for disposal. The decision to do this was most likely since with the outbreak of the war clothing operations were centralised at Queen Mary's Needlework Guild in London, thus the costs of the Clothing Branches may well have diminished while the Divisions were steadily increasing.<sup>60</sup> Such funding problems were seen in Belfast, Ulster and the Association more generally.

## **Conclusion**

Although massively under-researched the SSFA's contribution to the Dublin, Irish and British society, both during and after the war, was immense. Between August 1914 and August 1916, it distributed over £2,600,000 to 2,300,000 million wives, children and dependents, primarily in Ireland and Great Britain; plus, an immeasurable amount of in-kind assistance, comfort and advice.<sup>61</sup>

Between 1916 and 1918 most SSFA volunteers supported the activities of the government's short-lived national Statutory Committee and its successor Ministry of Pensions' Local War Pensions Committees. Then in 1919-21 the charity turned its attention towards the ex-serviceman and his family and dependents. What is most important to note about the 1914-16 activity is that while the SSFA expended £1,000,000 on about 1,000,000 persons over the twelve months of 1915; that same amount was spent on relatively the same number in 1914, but only over the five months from August to December. While this clearly shows the impact that the mobilisation had nationally (UK) analysis of the Dublin Division's records from 1905 to 1914 clearly shows that impact.

Along with the Royal Patriotic Fund it was to the SSFA, with its transnational network of local branches, committees, nurses, clothing depots, public subscriptions, homes for officers' wives and daughters and direct royal patronage, that the British government turned in 1914 to undertake the necessary vetting procedures relative to new welfare claimants, but also to issue advances on Separation Allowance and Allotment of Pay that had been or was to be granted.<sup>62</sup> This they did alongside Army Pay Department and Post Office. The sheer extent to which the County Dublin Division mobilised, reorganised, adapted and developed its structures and operations and personnel, in the first fourteen weeks of the war represents just one example of the large-scale 'self-mobilisation' of civil society in the Great War's principal belligerent states, which has been highlighted by John Horne and Catriona Pennell. Equally, the latter's argument that the events of the first six months of the war 'set the shape of much that was to follow' can be applied here.<sup>63</sup> Both the actions taken by military dependents in relation to seeking relief and by the Dublin SSFA committee to provide the same and ensure that that aid was promptly, efficiently and legitimately given on a regular basis and for as long as was required, form part of the broader mobilisation of Irish society in 1914.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>1</sup> See Fionnuala Walsh, 'The Impact of the First World War on Women in Ireland, 1914-1919' (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> Eileen Reilly, 'Women and voluntary war work' in Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (eds), *Ireland and the Great War: 'A war to unite us all'?* (Manchester, 2002), pp 49-72; Caitriona Clear, 'Fewer ladies, more women' in John Horne (ed.), *Our war: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin, 2008), pp 157-80; Peter Martin, 'Dulce et Decorum: Irish noble and the Great War, 1914-19' in *'A war to unite us all'?*, pp 28-48.
- <sup>3</sup> Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: philanthropy, politics and education in the early twentieth century* (Dublin, 2005), p. 4.
- <sup>4</sup> The principal manuscript source for this article are the surviving Minutes of the County Dublin Division of the SSFA, which cover the period of October 1905 to November 1914 only, and are held by the same charity (to called SSAFA) at its Dublin office on South Frederick Street. Hereafter called 'Dublin Minutes'.
- <sup>5</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 388.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association Annual Report, 1911* (London, 1912), pp 21, 46 and 66. Hereafter *Annual Report*.
- <sup>7</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 Aug. 1914.
- <sup>8</sup> Susan Pedersen, *Family, dependence, and the origins of the welfare state: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge, 1993), pp 107-8; *Irish Times*, 15 Aug. 1914.
- <sup>9</sup> To date only Oonagh Walsh has given any real attention to the SSFA in both Dublin and Ireland, and even then, the detail give to its wartime efforts was minimal (and did not utilise this article's sources), it is necessary to give a little insight into how the Association was organised in Dublin at that time.
- <sup>10</sup> Walsh, *Anglican women*, pp 213-19.
- <sup>11</sup> Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin sums, 1850-1925* (Dublin and Portland, OR, 1998), pp 32, 341.
- <sup>12</sup> Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin*, p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> Myna Trustram, *Women of the regiment: marriage and the Victorian army* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 106.
- <sup>14</sup> Trustaum cited in Paul Huddie, *The Crimean War and Irish society* (Liverpool, 2015), p. 121.
- <sup>15</sup> Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 2.
- <sup>16</sup> Walsh, *Anglican women*, p. 2; Dublin Minutes, 13 Aug. 1914. For more on the military connections of such ladies see Lady Holmpatrick's letters to her husband in France held by Fingal County Council Archives (HolmPatrick papers, Ms 11/12/13, FCCA/HEP/NA/11).
- <sup>17</sup> For more on the SSFA's activity in 1916-18, after the passing of the *Naval and Military War Pensions Act 1915*, see Susan Pedersen, 'Gender, welfare and citizenship in Britain during the Great War', *American Historical Review*, lcv, no. 4 (Oct. 1990), pp 983-1006.
- <sup>18</sup> Dublin Minutes, 20 May 1914.
- <sup>19</sup> *Annual Report, 1912*, p. 24; various dates Dublin Minutes.
- <sup>20</sup> For more on the history of the family and the estate see Brian Hughes, *A brief history of Abbotstown House c.1850-1950* (Dublin, 2014).
- <sup>21</sup> *Thom's Almanac, 1914*, p. 1639.
- <sup>22</sup> Padraig Yeates, 'Oh what a lovely war! Dublin and the First World War' in *History Ireland*, xix, issue 6 (Nov/Dec, 2011), p. 23.
- <sup>23</sup> For more on Dublin and Irish poverty and families relative to the war see Siobhán Pierce, 'For Her Sole and Separate Use', *History Ireland*, xiv, no. 5 (Sep./Oct., 2006), pp 44-9.
- <sup>24</sup> Eric Mercer, 'For King, Country and a Shilling a Day: Belfast Recruiting Patterns in the Great War' in *History Ireland*, xi, no. 4 (Winter, 2003), pp 29-33.
- <sup>25</sup> Dublin Minutes, 13 Aug. to 12 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>26</sup> Dublin Minutes, 13 Aug. 1914.
- <sup>27</sup> Figures compiled from minutes of monthly and later weekly meetings in 1906 and 1914 Dublin Minutes.
- <sup>28</sup> Report of special meeting held in the City Hall, Belfast 3rd December, 1914, (P.R.O.N.I. Dufferin papers, D1071/J/H/3/1); Stanley Ferguson to Lady Dufferin, 8 Oct. 1914, Dufferin papers, H/4/1.
- <sup>29</sup> *Regulations for the issue of Separation Allowance and Allotment of Pay during the present war* (London, 1915), p. 24; Pedersen, 'Great War', p. 992.
- <sup>30</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's army: the raising of the new armies 1914 1916* (2nd ed., Barnsley, 2007), p. 106.
- <sup>31</sup> *Regulations for the issue of Separation Allowance*, p. 25; Stanley Ferguson to Lady Dufferin, 8 Oct. 1914, Dufferin papers, H/4/1.
- <sup>32</sup> Dublin Minutes, 1, 29 Oct. 1914.



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- <sup>32</sup> Dublin Minutes, 1, 8 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>33</sup> Dublin Minutes, 22 Oct., 12 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>34</sup> Dublin Minutes, 1, 8 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>35</sup> Dublin Minutes, 15 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>36</sup> Dublin Minutes, 17 Sept. 1914.
- <sup>37</sup> Mr Wilson to Mrs Ewing, 12 Dec. 1914, Dufferin papers, H/4/1.
- <sup>38</sup> J. Blakinston Houston to Lady Dufferin, 9 Sept. 1914, Dufferin papers, H/4/1.
- <sup>39</sup> Dublin Minutes, 5 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>40</sup> Dublin Minutes, 17 Sept. 1914.
- <sup>41</sup> *Annual Report, 1914*, pp 1810-11.
- <sup>42</sup> For more on the unmarried mother controversy see *Annual Report, 1914*, p. 13; Mrs M'Calmont to Lady Dufferin, 28 Oct. (1914) in Dufferin papers H/4/1.
- <sup>43</sup> Dublin Minutes, 22 Oct. 1914; Pedersen, 'Great War', p. 993.
- <sup>44</sup> Simkins, *Kitchener's army*, p. 106.
- <sup>45</sup> Dublin Minutes, 1 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>46</sup> Janet Dunwoody, 'Child welfare' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Ireland and the First World War* (Westmeath, 1989), p. 70; Clear, 'Fewer ladies', p. 167.
- <sup>47</sup> Dublin Minutes, 2 Sept. 1914.
- <sup>48</sup> Dublin Minutes, 22 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>49</sup> Dublin Minutes, 12 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>50</sup> Catriona Pennell, *A kingdom united: popular responses to the outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), p. 82. See also Fionnuala Walsh's dissertation.
- <sup>51</sup> Dublin Minutes, 12 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>52</sup> Dublin Minutes, 5 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>53</sup> Dublin Minutes, 29 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>54</sup> Dublin Minutes, 8 Oct. 1914.
- <sup>55</sup> Dublin Minutes, 10 Sept. 1914.
- <sup>56</sup> For more on this see Fionnuala Walsh's dissertation.
- <sup>57</sup> Inspector-General of the RIC, Sir Neville Chamberlain to the Under-Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 17 Dec. 1914 (N.A.I., C.S.O.R.P., Ms 22394).
- <sup>58</sup> Goligher Report, p. 2.
- <sup>59</sup> Dublin Minutes, 1 Oct, 12, 15 Nov. 1914.
- <sup>60</sup> Dublin Minutes, 22 Oct. 1914; 'WAR No. 1, 2nd Impression' (c.1914), p. 15 (N.L.I., General Collection).
- <sup>61</sup> *Annual Report, 1918-19*, pp 14-15.
- <sup>62</sup> *Annual Report, 1912*, pp 115-19.
- <sup>63</sup> John Horne, 'Introduction: mobilisation for 'total war' 1914-18' in John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds) *Towards commemoration: Ireland in war and revolution, 1912-1923* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013), p. 5; Pennell, *A kingdom united*, p. 1.