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Retail and Community: English Experiences and International Encounters in the Long 20th Century

George Campbell Gosling, Alix R. Green and Grace Millar

Introduction

'A good position is one of the great secrets of success in business', declared Gordon Selfridge at the 1922 grand opening of a new shop on Regent Street, less than a mile away from his famous department store in London's fashionable West End. This was the new flagship store of the charity St Dunstan's, which had been providing rehabilitation and retraining for blind veterans since the early days of the First World War. The mats, baskets, wooden trays and other craft items made by St Dunstaners were sold from this prime location until the 1960s, and of it, said Selfridge, 'no organisation in the country is more deserving'.[1]

At the turn of the 20th century, many charities ran workshops training the disabled or the poor in handicrafts and helped sell the items made.[2] St Dunstan's was notable for two reasons. First, it was a remarkably successful high-end example of this model, combining modern retailing with elite philanthropy. Their business-like approach embraced contemporary styles for store design, lighting and window displays while emphasizing the quality of products for sale. Aristocratic and even royal endorsements reinforced the clear message presented in shop windows and mail order catalogues alike that being a customer was a way of living up to the community's responsibility to aid 'victory over blindness'.[3] St Dunstan's usually avoided saying explicitly that buying from them was an act of charity. Yet that would have been clear to passers-by reading:

> All the goods in this window have been made by Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen blinded in the Great War: they are strong, well finished and good value: the proof by sales that their work is appreciated is a great encouragement to them
> BUY SOMETHING TO-DAY
> ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.[4]

The second reason St Dunstan's is a notable example is that it not only trained its charitable recipients but often set them up as small shopkeepers. Whenever possible St Dunstaners were expected to open their own shops, using their new artisan skills to serve local communities around the country, while the charity found ways 'to sell those goods which cannot be disposed of locally'.[5] By 1951, the After Care Department was paying regular visits to 140 shopkeepers. Many had branched out beyond selling their own craft goods, with picture framers selling art supplies and others trading as confectioners, newsagents and tobacconists. Only rarely were these stores owned by the charity, yet photographs show it was common for a sign over the door to announce that the shopkeeper had been 'trained by St Dunstan's'.[6] The reputation of the charity was thus traded on and customers made aware of the social purpose of lending their support, not to a fundraising effort but to a commercial venture in which the St Dunstaner was working to make a profit just like any other shopkeeper.

Across much of the early and mid-20th century there were a significant number of blind shopkeepers all around the country being supported by the charity. At a time when the presence of broken and brutalized men was widely seen as posing a moral threat to the community, there was a further dimension to supporting blind veterans to set themselves up in business. Where disabled and unemployed veterans might constitute a radical political force in other countries, St Dunstan's was part of a wider effort that sought to re-establish them as 'breadwinning fathers and husbands'.[7] Yet in the case of the shopkeepers, cultural reassurance went beyond breadwinner domesticity, with the St Dunstaner as head of both a household and a small business. The new identity and social position offered was not that of the respectable worker, aligning instead with an old idea of England as being traditionally a 'nation of shopkeepers'.[8] The long-serving chairman of St Dunstan's, Ian Fraser, himself blinded at the Somme, hoped the St Dunstaner opening his own shop would have 'the added advantage of stimulating local interest in his welfare'.[9] Setting up shop in a community was assumed to be one and the same as establishing oneself as a member of that community.

Such close and complex interrelationships between retail and community more widely are at the heart of the following chapters, which present some of the latest research on the histories of retailing over 150 years, from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries. The focus here tends to be on small-scale,

urban retailing. It was in urban settings that we find the key developments in the emergence of modern retail, while in small-scale retailing we find the clearest evidence that the dramatic changes of the 20th century were only part of the story. Meanwhile, the chapters' specific case studies are drawn from across England, rather than the Four Nations. This allows for a complex and diverse picture to be presented without any implication that the distinctiveness of Irish, Scottish or Welsh retail was a mere variation of a shared retailing culture.

Each of the following chapters speaks to one or more of our three overarching themes. The first of these is how social contexts and networks have influenced and in turn been influenced by retailing. Trading initiatives as social projects to aid the disabled or the poor place this front and centre, but they can also be seen in retailers' practices of employment, payment and credit, and their relationships with the local communities within which they operate. As a multidisciplinary collection, the chapters here engage with a variety of ways in which community has been understood. This includes the investigations of sociologists and others into networks of kinship and explorations of who has historically belonged or been excluded. We also contribute to debates rooted in human geography and community studies on what has been lost as the social consequences of economic change – and importantly what was *not* lost.

The second theme brings together the emergent scholarship on the history of charity retail with new thinking in more established areas of retail history. The St Dunstan's case shows a different kind of *charity shop* to that which is familiar today, neither selling second-hand goods nor trading as a form of fundraising, and offers a glimpse into a longer and more varied history of charity retail than is often imagined. The prominence of charity retail in this collection, with case studies including but also going far beyond the late-Victorian bazaar and the postwar charity shop, is a conscious effort to redress an imbalance. Bringing histories of charity retail into conversation with those of co-operative and commercial retailers' social aims and interconnections invites a rethinking of familiar narratives of ever-increasing depersonalization and instrumentalization in modern retail.

Third, our analytical frame embraces both the local and the global. Some chapters emphasize the importance of local communities, bringing politics, class, race and gender to the forefront. Specific case studies are drawn from London and Leamington Spa, the Black Country, Manchester and the North East of England, and are all located within a broader frame. This framing recognizes the ways in which local stories play out against much wider backdrops. Britain's place in the world and how this was understood at home were central to the local-to-local cultural transmission evident in exotically themed markets or in the neo-imperial project to export the Oxford charity shop tradition to a former colony. St Dunstaners lived this

complexity, establishing themselves as shopkeepers in local communities, supported by a national charity working with imperial veterans in the aftermath of two world wars. These chapters demonstrate the potency of retail to explore historical connections between the local and the global.

While the chapters in this collection share these core concerns, they approach them in a variety of ways. As a multidisciplinary collection, the contributors employ different methods, draw upon different types of sources and use different scholarly languages to make sense of the multifaceted historic relationship between retail and community.[10] In some cases, this means making explicit the sociological or ethnographic nature of the research presented, or its relevance to the heritage industry or archival contexts within which the research was conducted. In others, it is implicit in the routine use by historians of theories developed in other disciplines, reflecting the fact that, as Ludmilla Jordanova has convincingly argued, 'history is profoundly interdisciplinary'. 'Thematic overlap, shared concepts and broad approaches' are at the heart of a deep-rooted 'kinship' between history and the social sciences, which might be expected given the 'absence of watertight categories, and the subject matter, approaches, concepts and themes shared between the many fields that concern themselves with human existence, individual and collective'.[11] We do not take interdisciplinarity to mean the subsumption of history; if anything, the interdisciplinary enterprise relies on a keen sense of *disciplinarity*: what is distinctive about a field's approaches and methods. This might be the historian's preoccupation with disrupting or complicating too-neat structures of time or her attentiveness to archival sources in the contexts of their production and retention, resisting conceptualizations of the archive as a site of data extraction and of the archivist as gatekeeper.[12] Record creation, organization and retention require our critical attention – not just the content we can glean from their present-day presentation. This applies across retail settings to the records produced by charities and voluntary organizations, co-operative societies and commercial retailers large and small, and is a task immeasurably enriched though engagement with archivists.

This collection takes a porous understanding of historical practice as both necessary and generative for the study of retail and community. Beyond informing individual chapters, the involvement of scholars from a range of disciplines, working in a variety of academic and other research environments, has been integral to the dialogic development of the book and its treatment of its overarching themes. The remainder of this chapter serves to locate the following chapters within the scholarship on each of these three themes: the community and social dimensions of modern retailing, the place of charity retail within this, and the significance of wider global contexts in influencing the development of retailer–community relationships.

Community in retail history

This collection contributes to a strand of scholarship that complicates the dominant narrative of a transition from traditional to modern retail by challenging the assumption that the social dimensions of retailing were left behind in the process. In presenting case studies of continuity and adaptation, rather than decline, we break from views of modernity that draw binary distinctions between traditional lives, deeply embedded within a series of social relationships and rooted in a specific place, and unrooted modern lives. As far as there was any clear transition from the traditional to the modern, it was more than a matter of shedding social entanglements and did not always render encounters between increasingly atomized individuals ever more transactional. The history of modern retail – as of modernity itself – is not one in which *community* is simply something lost. A fuller understanding requires us to ask questions about the changing nature of belonging and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.[13] In order to understand how the social dimensions of retail played out over the long 20th century, we must first trace the changes seen in the world of retail during this time.

The emergence of modern retail has traditionally been seen as beginning in the late 19th century. Although historians have been keen to highlight earlier innovations, the notion remains influential that there was a change across Western Europe and North America around this time when, as Selfridge put it, 'a few shop-keepers became inoculated with the spirit of enterprise' and 'grew beyond the little shop'.[14] He saw 'the modern spirit of organization' represented by the new department store, both through the scale of its operation and its impact in the locality: 'It is intimately associated with every family in the community in supplying them with the necessities of life, and thus by force of circumstances enters into the daily life of the city in which it is.'[15] Historians have tended to agree that department stores had a significant impact in a number of respects. For retail historians, they relocated consumption to city centres and were instrumental in the establishment of new practices for displaying, advertising and pricing the goods on sale, alongside rationalization and a 'managerial revolution'.[16] Meanwhile, cultural histories of *the* department store have explored the extent to which it was architecturally and symbolically something new and exciting, promising democratized luxury and the opportunity to browse as a form of leisure activity.[17]

Writing in the 1950s, James B. Jefferys identified the emergence of the department store alongside two other defining trends over the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One was the growth of the co-operative movement, strongest in its industrial heartlands in the North West and East Midlands.[18] Local societies typically established themselves by selling groceries and provisions, always adhering to the model set out in 1844 by the Rochdale

Pioneers which saw surplus profits returned to members in the form of a dividend.[19] The other trend was the rise of multiple store retailers (or chains), whereby expansion was made profitable through economies of scale, standardization and prioritizing low prices over luxury. By 1914, both the newsagent WH Smith & Son and the Singer Sewing Machine Company had over 1,000 sales outlets, with the likes of Lipton Ltd, the Home and Colonial Tea Company and the Boots Pure Drug Company not far behind.[20]

It was only over the middle of the 20th century, however, that these and other new forms of retail became the norm. Mass retailing and mass consumption developed less rapidly over this period than it did in the United States, though the transformation was still dramatic.[21] As John Benson noted, by the 1980s 'British shoppers [had] transferred the bulk of their custom from small, local retailers … to larger, more centralised, and more impersonal outlets'.[22] At the forefront of retailers adopting the practice of selling pre-packaged branded goods at a fixed price were the new self-service supermarkets.[23] Increasingly the customer's guarantee of quality came from the standardized product and the way it was mass advertised, rather than through negotiation and relationship with a specialist retailer. What might be celebrated as greater freedom for the consumer could also be regretted as a loss, though felt differently according to class. This might be a loss of the economic advantages of credit and bargaining for working-class consumers, and equally a loss of the subservience displayed to middle-class customers.[24]

If the mid-20th century saw the relationship between buyer and seller depersonalized and disentangled from local relationships, then the past half-century has seen it commonly relocated from localities altogether. By the 1990s, out-of-town British versions of the North American shopping mall were being developed.[25] Retailing moved further away from traditional urban sites when it then migrated online more dramatically in the United Kingdom than elsewhere in Europe. This was evident long before the COVID-19 lockdowns, with one in five Britons having bought food online by 2012, and 15 per cent of all retail sales taking place online by 2014.[26] These changes combined have prompted an existential crisis for the high street and bricks-and-mortar retailing more generally.[27]

The core narrative of these changes is one in which retailing has been standardized, depersonalized and essentially uprooted from the communities within which it operates. Where historians have explored the limits and counternarratives to this, they have tended to do so with a focus on credit.[28] For Margot Finn, 'Victorian and Edwardian tradesmen remained hostages to traditions of consumer activity rooted in credit, character and connection', which worked against the emergence of economic relationships entirely defined by the cash nexus.[29] Sean O'Connell has seen some continuity despite the further developments of the 20th century, as 'agents from within working-class communities made many business decisions on behalf of mail

order catalogue companies or the large-scale moneylenders'.[30] Meanwhile, in his study of working-class credit in Tyneside, Avram Taylor looked to 'the interpenetration of instrumental and affectual spheres of action' to explain the apparent contradiction that small shopkeepers 'were part of the communities that they exploited'.[31] The chapters in this collection consider credit as one of a variety of ways to explore the place of retailers within those communities.

This is clearest when looking at small-scale retailing, which has, despite the modernizations and consumer revolutions of the 20th century, remained an important part of the retail landscape. Michael Winstanley acknowledged this for the early part of the century, noting that the great many independent traders and small shopkeepers who survived tended to be skilled specialists rather than the general stores more easily displaced by the supermarket.[32] Moreover, and significantly for our purposes, he found they often 'value[d] social and psychological rewards which find no place in the balance sheet or the economic textbooks', placing independence and respectability ahead of a simple calculation of profits made.[33] The tendency to overlook small-scale retailing continued into the 21st century, as John Benson and Laura Ugolini noted: 'The hawker and peddler, the Saturday-night market, the corner shop and even the specialist grocer, clothes shop and off-license can all too easily be relegated to a sepia-tinted, Christmas-card version of the world we have lost.'[34]

These traders have undoubtedly had to operate alongside increasingly large-scale, automated and depersonalized alternatives, but small-scale retailing – often with a local and personal character – has never stopped being an important part of *modern retail*. Indeed, in 2018, those with fewer than five employees accounted for three-quarters of VAT (Value Added Tax) or PAYE (Pay As You Earn) based enterprises in the UK retail sector.[35] Despite the challenges and disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, discussed in Chapter 14, small traders are still an important part of contemporary retailing. We therefore cannot understand retail, historically or today, if we overlook small-scale and local retailers.[36] And it is the tailor in Leamington Spa, the fundraising bazaar in Darlington, the womenswear shop in the Black Country, the charity shop in Manchester, the fish and chip shop in County Durham and the British Asian corner shops up and down the country which occupy much of this book.

'Successful small shopkeeping' in the early 20th century, as Christopher Hosgood put it, 'demanded an investment by the proprietor in the social life of the community'.[37] In Chapter 7, Nadia Awal and Jenny Gilbert document this in the cases of two small female-owned clothing retailers trading throughout the 20th century. As brought to the surface in a new heritage project at the Black Country Living Museum, the buying and selling of women's clothing was and continued to be social, tactile and embedded

in community networks, deeply rooted in place and regional identity. Meanwhile, it is local contexts and cultures that Ian Mitchell tells us, in Chapter 4, explain not only the business success or otherwise of individual co-operative societies, but also the choices made in balancing paying out the members' dividend and funding a range of educational, social, cultural and political projects. In doing so he adds to our understanding of both co-operative retailing and the political movement.[38]

Credit was often central to a small shopkeeper's standing in their community. In Chapter 3, Nick Gray sheds new light on its social dynamics at the turn of the 20th century, focusing on a Leamington Spa tailor shop as a case study. He shows how important male, middle-class social relationships were to credit, and credit to the business, with customer loyalty more significant than social status for understanding business practices. In working-class communities, shopkeepers have been described as 'bankers of the poor', with a moral obligation to support regular customers through times of hardship.[39] Mitchell tells us in Chapter 4 that similar practices were to be found in local co-op stores, despite their supposed insistence on cash payments. Meanwhile, in Chapter 12, the authors find this to be true on the other side of the world in 1950s New Zealand and at the other end of what might be called *the short 20th century* during the 1980s Miners' Strike. Prolonged industrial action in each case led to credit and other forms of economic and material support being provided not only by small shopkeepers and co-ops, but even supermarkets, presenting a challenge to typical narratives of the impact of supermarkets on the relationship between retailers and the communities within which they operate. Rather than it being customers who maintained older modes of shopping and forms of social relationships, the authors find times of widespread hardship revealing that retailers continued to be rooted in community networks of solidarity.

Large-scale retailers' histories of community relationships also include the co-operative John Lewis Partnership. As Alix R. Green discusses in Chapter 10, John Lewis found the racial politics of Commonwealth immigration complicating its principles of 'colour-blind' recruitment. Through relationships with their staff and local communities, large-scale retailers found they were not so insulated from the political environments they operated in. Meanwhile, geographers have identified cases where consumers have come to treat out-of-town shopping centres as in some senses a 'new town centre', suggesting a greater degree of continuity in the relationship between retail and community spaces – even if relocated – than critics envisaged.[40] Optimistic impressions of this kind run counter to Robert Owen's initial scepticism about the precursors of the Rochdale movement two centuries ago, paraphrased as the view 'that a community might set up a shop, but a shop could never set up a community'.[41] In contributing to this literature, the chapters presented here suggest that the ways retailers

engaged with their social contexts was far from unaltered by the changes of the modern era, but neither were they entirely swept away.

Charity retail

This collection addresses the very limited inclusion of charity retail in retail history scholarship. This is especially striking given the attention from scholars across a wide range of disciplines prompted by the growth in the number of charity shops in the final decades of the 20th century. These were retail outlets run usually as one of a number of shops trading to raise funds for the same charity, typically staffed at least in part by volunteers and primarily selling donated second-hand goods. At the time of writing, there are over 10,000 such shops in the United Kingdom.[42]

Charity shops are not an exclusively British phenomenon, although the latest available figures do show the United Kingdom to have more per head than any other country in the world, at 15.22 charity shops per 100,000 population in 2023.[43] This is significantly more than the equivalent figures for North American charity-run *thrift stores*, which (even grouped together with other kinds of resale retailers) would be roughly half the UK rate in the United States and only a quarter in Canada.[44] The only other countries to come close are New Zealand (12.56) and Australia (9.60), where they tend to be called *opportunity shops* or *op shops* for short, and the Republic of Ireland (10.42).[45] The most common charity-run stores across the rest of Europe are the *world shops* (previously *third world shops*) selling foodstuffs and craft items produced ethically in the Global South. Germany leads the way with 900 of Europe's 2,500 world shops today, though compared to population this is only around one per 100,000 people.[46]

Most of the United Kingdom's charity shops are in England, along with the vast majority of the population. However, pre-COVID-19 figures showed that, of the constituent Four Nations, England in fact had the lowest number of charity shops per head (at 16.61 per 100,000), behind Wales (17.86) and Northern Ireland (17.83) and noticeably lower than Scotland (18.48).[47] An independent Scotland would therefore have the highest number of charity shops per head in the world. This stands in stark contrast to only 68 South African charity shops listed by Charity SA (1.13 per 100,000).[48] In Chapter 9, Jessica Field looks to the 1970s as a time when there were efforts to export the British model of the charity shop to the former colony. The difficulties these efforts ran into offer some insight into the geographical boundaries of this retailing phenomenon.

It is this distinctly, though not uniquely, British form of charity retail that first came under serious investigation from a range of disciplinary perspectives in the 1990s, led initially by retail and marketing researchers. The reasons for growth were identified as both the increased popularity of

supporting charities as customers and donors, and the willingness of charities to embrace the fundraising opportunities presented by turbulence across the retail sector, including vacated premises.[49] In 1992 researchers found that 41 per cent of charity shops were run by medical or disability charities, 18 per cent by international development organizations and 14 per cent by children's charities.[50] Detailed surveys profiled the charity shopper, finding that more than half the population had bought from a charity shop, and investigated how distinctions of class, education, gender and generation played out in patterns of and motivations for charity shopping, donating and volunteering.[51] Contemporary charity shop retailing and consumption was mapped out.

Sociologists and geographers were among those who brought a heightened focus on the charity shop as a site of alternative modes of consumption, with the commodification of donated and sold items complicating the supposedly linear process of production and consumption. This means that 'goods are not only potentially resaleable but are open to re-enchantment; they have consumption histories and geographies just as much as production histories and geographies'.[52] The motivations for consumers to engage in this process can range from affordable provisioning to using obscure purchases for positioning themselves within subcultures or as a political choice to engage in 'alternative economies' as a way of 'fighting against the capitalist system'.[53]

By the turn of the 21st century, the distinctiveness of this model of retailing, and the tax advantages it brings, were widely seen as being undermined by the increasing professionalization of the charity shop.[54] Suzanne Horne mapped this onto a continuum, whereby the development of a charity retailing operation entailed moving from a 'social service orientation' to a 'commercial service orientation', resulting in 'a retail sector which at one end of the scale shows unrivalled retail professionalism and at the other a safety net for the socially excluded in society'.[55] The social and community functions that a charity shop might leave behind in its *professionalization* were listed by Elizabeth Parsons as including 'providing a contact point between the parent charity and the general public, providing clothes and household goods cheaply for customers, providing useful employment, support and training for a range of volunteers, and recycling unwanted household items'.[56] Researchers emphasized the complexity of these developments.[57] Richard Goodall noted that 'professionalisation and commercialisation' were accompanied by 'alternatives and counterposed resistances'.[58] Equally, Parsons' typology of charity shops revealed that the most profitable were not always the most professionalized, with community-rooted local hospice shops a clear counter-example.[59]

This debate took place during a temporary decline in the number of charity shops, which was widely mistaken for the onset of a period of retraction after decades of growth. As growth returned, there was a let up

in the pressure to address the 'unusual cocktail of values' informing the retail practices of what had become 'a hybrid sector'.[60] Triona Fitton's ethnographic participant observation research set out to observe *in situ* the ongoing and unresolved heterogeneity of everyday practices in charity shops, moving the discussion on from 'top-down processes' to 'how these are played out by actors within the physical space of the charity shop itself'.[61] She found professionalization's bureaucracy, rationality and impersonality countered by price negotiations, the continued importance of unpaid staff's informal obligations, and connections with the public and private sectors.[62] It is the last of these which is the focus of her contribution here (Chapter 13), historicizing this changing aspect of charity shop retailing practices not only in relation to developments in the sector but also the wider political and economic context of the period following the global financial crash of 2008. In doing so, she documents the sometimes-perverse implications recent practices have had on the *gift relationship* in the charity shop, establishing a 'subversive moral economy' that reveals the complexities of interactions between social and economic goals in charity retailing.

More widely, this collection locates the charity shop of recent decades within a longer and more varied history of charities engaging in retail. In the 1970s, Frank Prochaska identified bazaars as a notable aspect of middle-class women's involvement in 19th-century public life, as seen in the fact they were sometimes referred to as 'ladies' sales'. He traced the growth of the charity bazaar, in parallel with the commercial bazaar, between the 1810s and the 1840s. Estimating there were still annually over 1,000 bazaars across the country at the end of the century, he projected tens of thousands raised over the century as a whole by bazaars ranging from the grandest which might be patronized by the Duke of Wellington or Queen Victoria to small rural sales, of which little trace has been left behind.[63] The Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar of 1845, which Prochaska thought 'probably the most profitable and long-lived fancy fair of the century', was said by Peter Gurney to have 'collapsed consumption and politics together and perfectly captured, both materially and symbolically, the ultimate ambition of the League: to turn the whole world into a giant bazaar'.[64] By the end of the 19th century, organizers had moved beyond exploiting the 'captive bazaar audience' for fundraising purposes to work with commercial partners on developing the charitable commodity on offer, which was one of many ways the likes of Dr Barnardo and the Salvation Army have been seen as leading the way in the emerging 'charity market'.[65] In these changes the elements of spectacle and entertainment increasingly took on international and 'exotic' themes, as explored by Massimiliano Papini in Chapter 2, focusing on the Mikado Festival in the North East of England in the 1880s.

The contemporary scholarship on charity shops occasionally briefly acknowledges bazaars as part of a longer history of fundraising retail,

including the earliest incarnations of Salvation Army thrift stores.[66] A more comprehensive account of Salvationist retailing is offered here across two chapters. The idea of retailing that not only adheres to the values and principles of the Salvationist movement, but also raises funds that can be reinvested into growing that movement, is discussed in Chapter 5 by Marjorie Gehrhardt. She traces the impact of the 1890 'Darkest England' social scheme on the various retailing operations run by the Salvation Army's Trade Department, which developed beyond fundraising initiatives to become a vehicle for the Army's core social mission. The fact that some of its schemes were highly profitable exposed it to fierce criticism, to which the response was partly an argument that consumption of the goods for sale was the material embodiment of belonging to the Salvationist community. This rationale could apply beyond the central Trade Headquarters, to the early thrift stores attached to local social centres and the retail activities run from the women's rescue homes. In Chapter 6, Ruth Macdonald explains that it was keeping these trading operations separate that allowed them to remain so firmly embedded in the social mission to *rescue* women from lives of poverty and immorality, restoring them to *respectability*. Beyond the moral environment of the homes as sites for needlework, the production and sale of the items they made were opportunities for the women to build connections and strengthen their membership of the Salvationist community, reinforcing their newfound respectability. As with the St Dunstaners running shops, economic considerations were not unimportant, yet they were firmly enmeshed with the social and moral dimensions of buying and selling that meant charity retailing was never simply transactional.

It is within this diverse history of charity retailing that we ought to see the development of the modern British charity shop, charted by George Campbell Gosling in Chapter 8. Whereas developments since the 1990s have been well documented, significant contributions on the preceding decades have been notably rare and tend to focus on the retailing operations of the international development charity Oxfam. 'Business acumen and concern for social change became tangibly entwined' when the charity's flagship store opened on Broad Street in Oxford in 1947, Jessica Field has argued, constituting 'consumption and giving as mutually reinforcing ethics' and 'charity shopping as a key form of popular philanthropic action'.[67] Between its shops and its trading company, established in the mid-1960s, Tehila Sasson has gone as far as to suggest that 'Oxfam changed consumerism into an ethical act, a choice that went beyond what one *wants* to what one *ought* to purchase'.[68] Yet the same connection between items for sale and the social projects from which they originate, fusing charity and consumption, might be seen in the 'one good turn deserves another' sales pitch of disability charities like St Dunstan's or the retailing linked to the Salvation Army's rescue work and other job creation schemes discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

When our focus shifts from consumption to retailing, Gosling suggests, we find postwar charity shops rooted in the associational culture of local communities, largely independent of the fundraising or fair trade aims of the parent charity.

All of which suggests the need to locate Oxfam and the contemporary charity shop in the context of a wider history of charity retail, something to which numerous chapters in this collection contribute. It is equally enlightening to bring the history of charity retail into conversation with the histories of commercial and co-operative retailing, as this collection does. Offering historical perspective sheds new light on more recent concerns in relation to charity retail: assessments of the relative merits and dangers of replacing charity shop volunteers with paid staff, reducing the predominance of second-hand goods in the merchandising mix, and implementing more business-like and commercially oriented retail practices. Doing so reveals that these all echo the tensions, discussed earlier, which characterized the (supposedly linear) transition from *traditional* to *modern* retailing.

From the local to the global

The chapters in this collection respond to the call of Benson and Ugolini that historians 'should look to the broader economic, political and social environment within which retailers (and potential retailers), customers (and potential customers) found themselves'.[69] Those environments, and the factors that shaped them, did not stop at the water's edge. For this reason, the following chapters consider the international and global dimensions of modern retail's social embeddedness alongside the local, the regional and the national. They are therefore in step with a broader disciplinary shift that recognizes the extent of transnational connections; no longer treating national borders as stable, inevitable markers of historical analysis nor of human organization or identity.[70] Efforts by British historians in the 1990s 'to recast the nation as an imperialized space … materialize[d] the traffic of colonial goods, ideas and people across metropolitan borders and indeed [threw] into question the very Victorian distinctions between Home and Away that defined the imaged geography of empire'.[71] Gregory A. Barton's favoured response was a 'British World model' focused on the 'elite transformations, trading patterns, and cultural exchange that gave rise to a single global culture'.[72] Although critiqued for its lack of engagement with the diversities and power dynamics of imperial history, this scholarly project has shed new light on the histories of global Britishness and Britain's place in the world through its networks across the globe.[73] This adds to the longer-running explorations of imperialism as a cultural phenomenon, focusing instead on the impact of the world, including the British Empire, on Britain itself.[74] In keeping with this diversity of scholarly approaches, various chapters in

this collection adopt different ways of exploring the movement of people, practices and products in, to and from modern English retailing.

Within retail histories at the local level, we can see wider global entanglements playing out through the impact of migration. It was not uncommon historically for migrants to secure an income from itinerant trading as hawkers or pedlars. As Benson and Ugolini have noted, 'the economic disadvantages and cultural discrimination faced by many working-class and minority families encouraged them to enter trades like hawking and peddling and small shopkeeping, which demanded only a small initial investment and provided the opportunity to turn their working-class/minority identity to economic advantage'.[75]

Mui and Mui drew a distinction between 18th-century hawkers and pedlars in the North of England, whose trading they saw as complementing the range of goods on sale in local shops, and those in the South who were widely perceived to be in more direct competition with local shopkeepers.[76] It was those southern concerns that prompted reforms in 1832, whereby acquiring a licence required character references to prove local connections and social standing. Among those who suffered were the Scottish and Irish itinerant sellers identified by Alison Toplis as filling a gap in the rural retailing of non-elite women's clothing in early 19th-century Herefordshire and Worcestershire.[77] The same can be assumed of the Jewish traders commonly associated with the itinerant selling of second-hand clothes by this time.[78]

Historians and migration scholars, as Léa Leboissetier has noted, have viewed the more recent history of itinerant trading differently. Historians have typically written it off as a form of retail that fell into decline over the 19th and 20th centuries and was not a significant part of *modern retailing*, while migration scholars have recognized its continuing significance for those seeking to make a living in a new place.[79] Despite this, the opportunity dramatically declined over the postwar period as traditional door-to-door sellers lost out to the new mail order catalogues, whose part-time agents were more often women drawn from the local community than offering an entry point into it.[80] At the same time, other forms of employment were becoming easier to find. For the first generation of postwar Commonwealth immigrants, as Kennetta Hammond Perry has noted, manual work was both easy to find and assumed by employers and the state to be suitable for Black workers.[81] By contrast, the widespread manufacturing redundancies in the 1970s prompted growing numbers of Sikhs and other Punjabi migrants to pool family savings and purchase a shop.[82] These patterns and the wider relationship between retail and migration over the 20th century remain ripe for further study.

One area of immigrant retailing which is better addressed in the scholarship (more often by migration studies scholars than historians) is that in relation

to food. 'Historically', as Marta Rabikowska and Kathy Burrell have noted, 'food has always been central in maintaining ethnic identity away from the original homeland, and an important means of asserting a presence on the new landscape through market stalls, shops and restaurants'.[83] As Anne Kerschen observed:

> [I]t is not only hunger which impels the migrant. Perceived economic opportunity either in the exporting or importing of 'exotic' foodstuffs or in the transportation of culinary cultures has been a determining factor in the migrant's rationalisation of destination. The burgeoning of ethnic food purveyors and restaurants bearing witness to this phenomenon of voluntary migration. Within the British context it has to be recognised that, allied to the beacon of upward economic mobility has been the legacy of imperialism which set in place the chain migration of immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, countries which today provide the bulk of Britain's Indian restaurant owners and workers. It is a chain forged out of a British colonialism which employed Indian lascars, mainly from east Bengal, to work on the ships that carried the spices, fruits and tea – that most English of drinks – from lands far away to the heart of the Empire.[84]

The association between food selling and Italian immigrants in London had grown from the ice cream street vendor to the many restaurants serving Italian and other cuisines by 1928, when the first Indian grocery shop was opened to serve the growing number of Indian students, businessmen and officials in the city.[85] Nearly a century later, Rabikowska and Burrell have noted that 'the need for Polish food has dominated business activities among and aimed at the new immigrants' of the early 21st century.[86] In the decades in between, historian Panikos Panayi has traced a shift from the era of 'the foreign restaurant', when relatively small numbers of migrants opened shops and restaurants, to a 'culinary revolution' in the postwar period.[87] This included the proliferation of Indian and Chinese restaurants which provided an opportunity for (often exploitative) employment through family and networks of newcomers.[88]

The relationship between migration and retail work in the postcolonial period is the specific focus of two chapters in this collection. Alix R. Green, in Chapter 10, uses the John Lewis archive to explore racialized definitions of inclusion in different communities within and beyond the retailer's co-operative partnership. She explores moments of tension in the 1950s and 1960s when the exclusion of Black Commonwealth migrants from employment were discussed internally, revealing tensions between a rhetoric of equality and the power given to imagined customers and their imagined views. In Chapter 11, Harshad Keval turns his attention to both the lived

realities and deeply embedded narratives of the postcolonial 'encounter at the counter' in the British Asian corner shop over the last half century. Together, these chapters shed new light on how the racial politics of Commonwealth immigration in the postwar period was inscribed onto the world of retail, ranging from the large multiple trader to the independent small shopkeeper.

Movement in the other direction is explored in Chapter 9, where Jessica Field considers efforts in the 1970s to export the British model of the charity shop to South Africa. The relationship she details is a paternalistic and a racialized one, reflecting the entwined histories of charity retailing and global humanitarianism. She also demonstrates the conflict between the imagined community that charities believed they were helping, and the much more complicated relationships that existed within. If Field finds the limits of a *British world of retail*, in Chapter 12, Millar and her co-authors identify similar retailing practices employed during times of prolonged industrial disputes in both 1950s New Zealand and the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Independent traders, co-ops, department stores and even supermarkets all contributed to networks of solidarity and support. Even if the methods for doing so might vary with changing business practices, their role within the community was similar in the industrial North of England and the farthest reaches of the Commonwealth. Both chapters, in different ways, contextualize and complicate narratives of British exceptionalism in modern retailing.

Two chapters, including the next, consider the transcultural significance of selling global products. In Chapter 2, Massimiliano Papini presents the 1887 case study of a charity bazaar in the North East of England, where the local steel industry's connections with Japan had little impact on the middle-class organizers' construction of an idealized imagining of pre-modern Japan. Papini's transcultural framing acknowledges the importance of imperialism alongside other discourses. For Gosling, in Chapter 8, it is the end of empire and the rethinking of British global responsibility that provides the context for international development charities' forays into alternative trading in the 1960s and 1970s. In both cases, the impact of international dimensions is limited, though from different directions. At the bazaar, the Japanese-themed fantasy to the setting and the goods for sale had a tenuous relationship to Japan itself and the money raised went to a local religious charity. For Oxfam, Christian Aid and others, the objective was to find new markets for craft items and later foodstuffs produced in the countries where they operated: the aim was global and charitable. These efforts, however, struggled to find a place within a domestic charity retail sector that was already well established as being geared towards local second-hand selling. The postwar charity shop was not a space where the local and the global found an easy accommodation.

Conclusion

Two decades ago, Benson and Ugolini made a strong case for 'a more nuanced approach to retail "patterns and processes", with a greater awareness of local circumstances, of small as well as large enterprises, and of the "traditional" alongside the supposedly "modern"'.[89] The chapters brought together in this collection do so in a variety of ways, drawing upon a range of disciplinary methods to engage with our three overarching themes of the social and community dimensions of retailing, the place of charity alongside commercial and co-operative retailing, and the significance of wider international connections and global contexts. They each explore different histories of retailers with significant community connections, though not only the local community within which they were geographically located. From the local to the global, social contexts and community networks have shaped and been shaped by retail operations, even as the development of the modern consumer society was thought to be leaving them behind.

The following chapters show, in different ways, that change in 20th-century retailing was about much more than ever-larger chains competing for their share of a globalized market. The changes in retail practice and technology were real and they transformed consumer culture.[90] They were, however, not the full story. By exploring retail and community, we hope to draw attention to socially contextualized experiences of buying and selling that defy easy attribution of scale. By looking beyond shopping malls and multinational chains, we find the spaces of personal interaction where global stories played out at street level.

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Notes

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3 St Dunstan's, *Annual Report*, 1923, 13. For a wider discussion of the role of philanthropy in this field, see D. Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–939* (University of California Press, 2001).

4 Blind Veterans UK archive, image _2GA8233, view of shop window with handicrafts displayed (c.1920s).

5 *St Dunstan's Review*, 19, February 1918, 12.

6 See St Dunstan's, *Annual Report*, 1923, 6.

7 M. Roper, *Afterlives of War: A Descendants' History* (Manchester University Press, 2023), 203.

8 While the origins of the phrase are disputed, it was held up as a historical reputation to be celebrated by Margaret Thatcher, 'Remarks after speaking to National Chamber

of Commerce', 17/02/1975, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102496 (accessed 07/07/2023).

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[10] B. Vienni-Baptista, I. Fletcher and C. Lyall (eds), *Foundations of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research: A Reader* (Bristol University Press, 2023), 30.

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