



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides: World War II 75th Anniversary Edition

The War Funds Comfort Association

In September 1939, Britain and the allies were at war with Germany. Almost immediately, the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) set up the War Funds Comfort Association to help its staff and their families until peace returned.

Dubbed 'Warco' by staff, its mission was to provide financial support to the dependents of enlisted men as well as to households devastated by air raids at home. It also endeavored to provide knitted garments and cigarettes to staff in war service.

Lady Ashfield, wife of LPTB Chairman Lord Albert Stanley Ashfield, was appointed President of the London Transport War Comforts Fund Association (Warco). A management committee was also created led by Mr John Cliff who was Deputy Chairman of London Transport during the war.

Portrait of Lady Ashfield from staff magazine Pennyfare. December 1939. Archive ref num: LT000030/018



"This is Your Chance to Help Our Defenders"

LPTB staff magazine *Pennyfare* announcing the launch of Warco in 1939. Also sets out the aims of Warco.

Next—what *will* be done? The knitting battalion (we hope it will grow to a regiment!) are to go on making woollen comforts. But this job, important in itself, is only part of Warco's aims, which are chiefly to—

- Provide gifts and comforts to employees on war service;
- Relieve employees, or dependants who are injured, or whose property is damaged by enemy action;
- Relieve widows and dependants necessitous owing to the war;
- Contribute to education fees, provide medical and surgical aid.

Extract from staff magazine *Pennyfare* outlining the objectives of Warco. December 1939. Archive ref num: LT000030/018



PENNYFARE
LONDON TRANSPORT STAFF NEWS

PENNYFARE (War Series) is published on the 15th of each month. It is distributed free of charge to every member of London Transport's Staff, including those serving with H.M. Forces.

If you know of anyone who failed to receive his or her copy of this issue, please ask them to make application to the head of their department.

Contributions and all communications should be addressed, by the 20th of the preceding month, to the Editor at Shepherd's Bush Station (Central Line), W. 12.

No. 3 (WAR SERIES) DECEMBER 1939

This Month's Message
Conduct in War-Time

BY THE GENERAL MANAGER (OPERATION)

IN normal times the Board's staff have many opportunities for showing their readiness to adapt themselves to meet difficult situations. In war-time the number of such situations is bound to increase, and so there is the greater need for resourcefulness. Darkness upon the stations and the roads, reduced services and consequent irritation of passengers play their part in calling for a still greater display of even temper and courteous answer.

Those of us who make personal contact with our passengers will add much to the reputation of the Board, and incidentally to our own, by never losing our heads. A soft answer does not always turn away the wrath of an individual, but it goes a long way towards establishing the sympathy and goodwill of others.

If we keep abreast of the rising tide of opportunity, a permanent mark of good service will be recorded for London Transport.

R. Thomas.

This is Your Chance to Help Our Defenders

PENNYFARE commends to you and every other reader the aims of the London Transport War Comforts Fund Association. Warco, if *Pennyfare* may coin a title, is playing Father Christmas to those 7,500 or more colleagues who are away at this festive season, the fellows serving in H.M. Forces or in Civil Defence. That is not all. With the 1d. a week that you are asked to give, Warco is going to look after those 7,500 men, and still more as they join up, and where necessary their families as well, until peace returns. "Comforts" will be interpreted in a liberal sense. A task well begun is half done. To the pleasure of us all, Lady Ashfield has accepted the presidency, one more sign of interest in welfare work. Her ladyship's gracious lead is no formality. She writes to Mr. Cliff and the Committee, "God speed your splendid efforts on behalf of these noble men."

What has been done? It is decided to send a Christmas parcel to everybody on war service; there will be a pudding and a pair of socks, and to every comrade overseas 100 cigarettes as well. Women on the staff have knitted the socks: 1,500 women have volunteered to do knitting. They are all busy and include a growing number of wives and other relatives of the staff. The parcel scheme was made possible by these women sacrificing their leisure and by five staff associations presenting £1,225 of their money. If you read on, you will see this is £75 short of the sum wanted: the Committee banked on the goodwill of us all.

Next—what *will* be done? The knitting battalion (we hope it will grow to a regiment!) are to go on making woollen comforts. But this job, important in itself, is only part of Warco's aims, which are chiefly to—

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LADY ASHFIELD

What can you do? Pay just 1d. a week. A tiny sum, the cost of two cigarettes, but capable by multiplication of expanding to a fund of great power. The Christmas parcels alone are costing £1,300. Wool for knitted wear will cost hundreds more, while the generous aims outlined above would make big inroads into any fund. The committee, of which Mr. John Cliff is chairman, are sending you a printed letter: will you fill up the form at the end of it and authorize 1d. a week to be taken from your wage or salary and given to the fund. Already, of course, signatures are simply rolling in. Then more knitters are wanted. They will be welcomed at the Knitted Comforts Office, 55, Broadway, and there be given wool, patterns and needles.

For further information write to the secretary, Mr. W. H. Penson, Cranbourn Chambers, 20, Cranbourn St., W.C. 2; better still, to your Local Representative of the L.T. Benevolent Fund, who will tell you anything you want to know.

And now let each of us by personal effort make Warco a source of legitimate pride, one of the best achievements to which the entire staff has lent its hand—and its heart.

Front cover of staff magazine *Pennyfare*. December 1939. Archive ref num: LT000030/018

Staff enrolled into the scheme voluntarily. They were required to pay a subscription of 1d (pence) a week, which was automatically deducted from their wage or salary.

The fund was also supplemented by donations. These were made by LPTB Board members, staff sports and social clubs, individual trolleybus depots, external organisations, and retired staff.

The first donations the War Funds Comfort Association (Warco) received, printed in staff magazine *Pennyfare* in January 1940. LTPB Board members and the London Transport Benevolent Fund donated £1750 each, nearly £83,000 in today's money.

The War Comforts Fund

A Good Start

DONATIONS: FIRST LIST

	£	s.	d.
Lady Ashfield, President of the Association ..	10	0	0
Chairman, Members and Officers of the Board ..	98	18	6
London Passenger Transport Board ..	1,750	0	0
London Transport Benevolent Fund ..	1,750	0	0
Staff Welfare Fund ..	1,000	0	0
L.T. (Tramways) Social and Athletic Association ..	100	0	0
L.T. (ex M.E.T.) Athletic, Social and Benevolent Club ..	25	0	0
West Ham (L.P.T.B.) Social and Athletic Club ..	10	10	0
L.T. (Country Buses) Sports Association ..	50	0	0
Albert Stanley District Railway Men's Institute ..	50	0	0
Metropolitan Railway Athletic Association ..	25	0	0
L.T. (District Line) Athletic Association ..	25	0	0
London Transport (L.E.R.) Athletic Association ..	10	0	0
R.E.P.T.A. London Electric Railway Committee ..	5	0	0
C. and S.L. Club and Institute ..	10	10	0
L.T. (Central Buses) Sports Association ..	150	0	0
L.T. Administrative Staff Sports Association ..	25	0	0
London Transport Staff Association ..	10	10	0
Building Dept. (L.P.T.B.) Athletic and Social Club ..	25	0	0
Sundry donations ..	17	4	
	£5,131	5	10

*

Over £5,000 was collected in the first round of donations from various London Passenger Transport Board associations and employees. December 1939.

Archive ref num: LT000030/085

Funds raised were used to provide financial support to the families of men on war service and housing air raid victims, as well as to buy medical aid supplies, wool to make knitted garments for staff, and cigarettes to send to prisoners of war.

Monthly announcements were made in the staff magazine revealing how many employees had subscribed to the Warco scheme and which section had the most members of staff signed up.

By August 1940, the fund had 54,633 contributors out of an 86,500 strong work force, with the Country Buses & Coaches section having 95% of their staff registered.

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Warco is Two Points Up

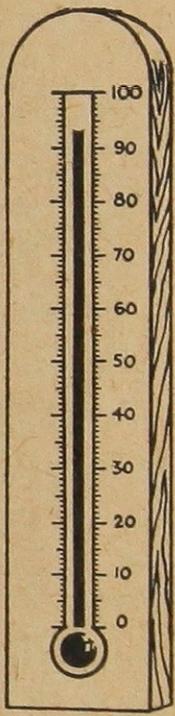
Subscribers are 1,382 more than a month ago and the average percentage of staff subscribers has risen from 67% to 69%.

4,429	Country Buses & Coaches	95%
14,273	Trams, Trolleybuses	74%
3,172	Clerical, Technical	69%
22,014	Central Buses	66%
10,745	Railways	60%
<hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/>	54,633	Average 69%

Steps have been taken, and are being continued, to help all cases of need, especially families of staff not qualified to receive the Board's allowance. More than 600 cases are being investigated, Warco and the Benevolent Fund have jointly made grants totalling £1,900.

Swear Club gives its Fines to Warco

Donations now amount to £6,522 13s. 7d. Those made lately were Welfare Dept. (Social Club) £10, Poplar Tram Depot socials £4, Girl Guides' Assn. £5, Merton Garage S. C. dance £2 4s. 11d., Plumstead Garage S. C. £2, Golders Green Depot staff 13s. 2d., Administrative Staff S. A. tennis drive 12s., Golders Green Swear Club 10s. 6d., Mrs. P. M. Hunt £2, Sundry £2 8s. 4d.



Donations were also up to over £6,500, with contributions coming from various depots, garages and associations, including the Girl Guides and the Golders Green Swear Club. August 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

November 1940 saw the cost of subscriptions increase from 1d to 6d for staff who could afford it. This incurred as Warco had to find thousands of pounds for the temporary relief of staff who lost their homes due to air raids and, in some cases, suffered bereavement.

“Knit for Warco”

Warco was renowned for its “army of war knitters” - volunteers recruited from staff and the wives and relatives of LTPB men in war service.

The Wool Knitters Roll of Warco was reportedly growing by 50 knitters each day, with more than 12,000 people contributing comfort items. LTPB employees knitted garments whenever and wherever they could.



Four women staff workers at LPTB's Effra Road Printing Works knit 'comforts' for servicemen during the Second World War. January 1940. Image courtesy of London Transport Museum 1998/23471



Photographs of the Warco knitters at various LPTB office and operational locations. February 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Where there's a "wool" there's a way!

Within its first year, 111,000 knitted comforts were sent to all enlisted men serving at home and overseas and within three years 183,239 woollen items had been sent to troops. This amounted to 23 tonnes of wool!

214,800 knitting needles had also been sent out to volunteers by October 1942.

Little Cry but Much Wool: Warco's Record

IN the first three years of its existence Warco has sent woollen wear to nearly all those of our colleagues (there were 18,610 up to Oct. 31 1942) who joined H.M. forces. By mid-November the woollen articles numbered 183,239. These used up the best part of 23 tons of wool. Reckon that it takes 4 oz. to make a pair of socks and you realise better the great scale of a knitting enterprise that consumes 824,320 oz.

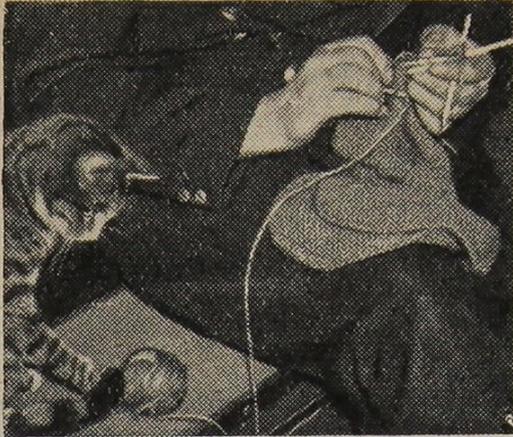
One necessary expense extra to that of wool has been needles: 214,800 of them. This quantity is a clue to the size of the army of war knitters for Warco. Through Miss Forty, Warco has been in touch with at least 10,000, yet these represent only a tithe of the spare-time army.

One in 70 of the recipients is prisoner of war. He receives a packet of 200 cigarettes 13 times a year. This Christmas he will receive an extra packet, 300. Also among the beneficiaries are women who in civil life are clerks and typists of London Transport: they receive a scarf, mittens and gloves.

So much for wool-gathering. It has been mated with eager industry and the result is a triumph; but money, the sixpences of the staff, was a pre-requisite, and all you subscribers will be pleased it was so well expended.

Article listing facts about the "army of war knitters for Warco". 1942. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

It wasn't just the women who made up the army of knitters. A "well known" male employee from the administrative staff signed up to knit during his time of recuperation in hospital, claiming it helped to aid his recovery.



Men, don't Knit your Brows—

Knit for Warco!

A well-known male member of the administrative staff of London Transport answers the question, What useful pastime can a man follow on a sick-bed if his hands are free?

TIME Should Never Hang Fire. I have had the misfortune to undergo an operation which necessitated my staying in hospital for four weeks. During the first week the passage of time was not noticed, because of the activities consequent upon the operation. After that the imprisonment would have been very irksome to a normally active man but for one thing—

When I could sit up my wife got in touch with Miss Forty, who sent some wool and knitting needles, and in three weeks I made four pairs of socks for Warco. When it was known there was a man knitting in the hospital, sisters and nurses came in from the other wards to inspect the finished work.

Matron was a Witness

Even the matron was interested. "Did you turn the heel?" she asked. "Certainly," I replied. "And the toe, did you graft it yourself?" was the next query. "Of course," was the answer. But I had to let her see me do the next heel and toe because (I fear) she did not believe me.

Knitting thus provided me with a pleasant task for a worthy cause, and very congenial company! I'm sure too it helped my recovery as it occupied my mind at a time when I might have been brooding over my misfortune at an operation.

So now, you men, take up knitting if you haven't anything better to do. Miss Forty will be pleased to supply you with the materials, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, if at any time you should be so unfortunate as to be laid up, you will be able to turn the otherwise idle hours to good effect, and provide some colleague on war service with comforts he needs. *C.J.H.*

Article describing male member of staff picking up knitting while recovering from an operation, and impressing the nursing staff and hospital matron with his sock-making skills. August 1941. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

How Warco helped those who lost everything

Warco and the Benevolent Fund in alliance came to the aid of staff and their families who suffered due to air raids, especially where death took the breadwinner, and gave money to get food, clothes, lodging and other immediate wants.



Image take from the staff magazine showing a busman's home devastated by an air raid. 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

By October 1940, £7,500 had been distributed from Warco and the Benevolent Fund.

Come November 1940 this had risen to £13,500 (£761,000 in today's money) being distributed from Warco alone. And by 22 January 1941, 4,145 grants

had been made to sufferers from damage to property or from personal injury by air raid.

"They had to sleep under a railway arch until they went to Warco"

Poignant descriptions of Warco not only providing financial support to victims, but also offering advice resulting in a "fresh start" for staff and their families.

Orphaned children of a Clapham Depot tram conductor who died in an air raid went to Warco for help.

A Croydon Garage bus conductor and his family escaped with their lives following an air attack. They received money and knitted comforts from Warco to help aid their recovery.

A Clapham Depot tram conductor, his wife and two children were killed. Two other of their children, a boy of 17 and a girl of 14, went to Warco to appeal for themselves and for two younger children evacuated into the country. These sad orphans will be the special care of Warco.

Congratulating themselves upon escaping alive, a Croydon Garage conductor, his wife and six children—all under 12 years old—lost everything else in the world. Warco gave money for beds and clothes for the older children: the Knitted Comforts office dressed the youngest of the family.

A labourer was killed on London Transport duty. His wife and youngster were left destitute. £20 from Warco helped with funeral expenses and something to live on for the time-being.

A Camberwell Depot tram driver and a Potters Bar Garage bus conductor lost everything: everything except their uniforms. Warco gave them a fresh start.

A bomb demolished the home of a fitter, his wife and three kiddies: they had to sleep under a railway arch until they went to Warco, which helped to start a new home.

A general hand at Holloway Garage lost his wife and four children after a bomb fell on their home.

Extracts from staff magazine listing cases where Warco was able to provide financial and morale support to staff who were air raid victims. 1940. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

The scheme was doing a phenomenal job and yet despite having given more than £40,000 (£2.2 million equivalent) in grants by February 1944, an article in the staff magazine made it clear that there was a regret at having to refuse aid to some because they did not subscribe.

Article describing how air raid victims received £40,000 in relief thanks to Warco. March 1944. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Warco Has Given £40,000 to Air Raid Sufferers

IN one month alone, 20 February to 22 March, London Transport War Comforts Fund—better known as Warco—made grants totalling £3,200 to subscribers or to subscribers' dependants because their possessions were damaged or lost in air raids. Some received grants for the third time.

The amount was larger than usual for a month: this was due to unusual conditions—the return of heavy raiding. But the service itself was not a bit unusual: Warco was formed to give help wherever it is wanted and to give it immediately—and this is service in which every one of us in London Transport can share.

Grants to date to air-raid sufferers alone are more than £40,000—and not a penny is repayable. Warco has only one regret—that it has to refuse aid to some sufferers. Because they are not subscribers. The weekly subscription is up to 6d. only. If you do not subscribe, why not contact your Local Committeeman—now?

Christmas pudding and a pair of socks...

In 1939, a Christmas pudding and a pair of knitted socks were sent to staff on war service both on the home front and in the armed forces. Every comrade serving overseas also received an extra one hundred cigarettes.

7,000 Christmas puddings were sent to enlisted troops along with 7,000 knitted comforts to London Transport's own Anti-Aircraft batteries and 1,240 men in other regiments. 1,024 knitted articles were also presented to the children of serving LPTB men.

This was made possible not only by the volunteers giving up their leisure time to knit as many socks as they could, but also to five LPTB staff sports and social clubs donating £1,225 of their money to the cause.

As the war ended, LPTB's Management Committee came to the decision to cease collecting subscriptions from July 1945. The fund's remaining balance

of £210,000 was used to support the families of staff killed in active service or during air raids.

The scheme had been an overwhelming success. As of July 1945, a total of £88,974 had been allocated to 14,000 cases relating to air raid damages and 2,600 claims made caused by some kind of distress.

In addition to this, the fund had spent £20,000 on 211,500 woollen comforts and £5,500 on cigarettes sent to staff held captive in prisoner of war camps.

Story compiled using information in records at the Transport for London Corporate Archives. The Corporate Archives seeks to preserve and make accessible records, not to interpret them. A wider range of material is available for physical consultation.

This story has been enhanced using some material from the London Transport Museum Collection. All enquiries regarding this material should be made directly to that institution.

Email: corporatearchives@tfl.gov.uk