



The Great War AND THE ROYAL OVER-SEAS LEAGUE

ROSL, then known as the Over-Seas Club, was approaching its fourth anniversary when the First World War was declared. This tumultuous event was also instrumental in shaping the development and ethos of Evelyn Wrench's fledgling organisation. The advent of war reinforced his belief of the need for solidarity between the peoples of the British Empire, which found expression through the Over-Seas war funds. As the war continued and the lists of casualties lengthened, Wrench did all he could to ensure that the Over-Seas Club responded to the plight of the soldiers, sailors and airmen on the front lines.



Early in 1915
OVER-SEAS AIRCRAFT FUND
Members were encouraged to raise money to purchase aeroplanes for the Royal Flying Corps, which would then be named after their district.

14 September 1914
THE OVER-SEAS TOBACCO AND COMFORTS FUND
The first of many bursaries established in response to the 'urgent needs of the troops in the coming winter'. The scheme was a huge success. In his memoir *Struggle*, Wrench recalls the 'dirty bank notes, parcels of silver coins, postal orders and money orders from every country' that 'came in a steady flow through my office. Subscribers sent in jewellery and trinkets to be sold. A farmer in Rhodesia put up an ox for auction and sent us the proceeds'.

28 JUNE 1914
Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, assassinated in Sarajevo



1914

28 JULY 1914
Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia; Russia mobilises

25 APRIL 1915
Australian, British and New Zealand troops arrive in Gallipoli

19 JANUARY 1915
First German zeppelin attack on Britain



May 1915
Evelyn Wrench and Lady Des Voeux (later his wife), visited the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough to view the first aeroplane donated by the Over-Seas Club. After the naming ceremony, Lady Des Voeux was taken for a flight in the newly christened 'Overseas No 1', becoming one of the first women in England to fly in a military aircraft.

July 1915
Four more planes presented to the Royal Flying Corps, and named by Queen Alexandra, who became an active patron of the fund.



Empire Day 1916
CHILDREN'S PENNIES SCHEME
2,848,806 children give pennies to the comfort for troops appeal.

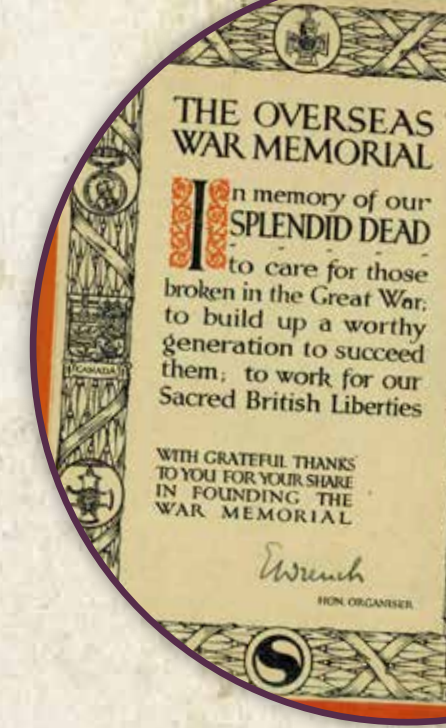


March 1917
Wrench commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps, reaching the rank of major during his service.



March 1916
OVER-SEAS AIRCRAFT FUND
54 planes with names such as Montreal, Yangtze Valley, Jamaica, British Guiana and Pretoria had been put into action.

31 March 1918
Over-Seas Club and Patriotic League of Britons Overseas amalgamate to form the Over-Seas League



1918

25 FEBRUARY 1918
Rationing begins in London

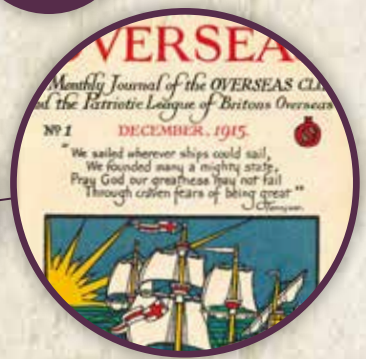
8 AUGUST 1918
Allied hundred day offensive begins

26 SEPTEMBER 1918
British enter Damascus

1 August 1918
Overseas dedicated to the 4th anniversary of the war. Includes articles by AA Milne on 'Blighty' and a poem by Rudyard Kipling called 'Song of the English'

9 NOVEMBER 1918
Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates

January 1916
OVER-SEAS WAR MEMORIAL FUND LAUNCHED



December 1915
LAUNCH OF OVERSEAS JOURNAL
Becoming the main form of communication with 'friends overseas', promoting the fund-raising efforts of both the Over-Seas Club and its sister organisation, the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, the journal also helped to consolidate international ties by acknowledging the vital contributions and sacrifices made by the soldiers of the British Empire.



8 JANUARY 1916
Allies complete evacuation of Gallipoli

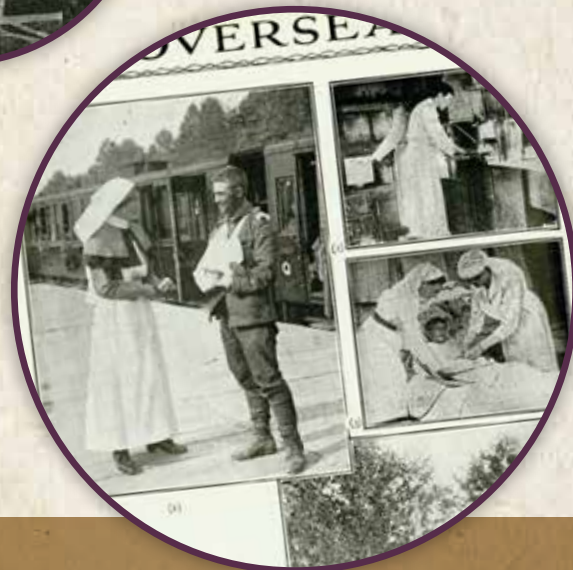
April 1915
SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' FUND & BELGIAN SOLDIERS' FUND
Raising funds to provide essentials for troops and prisoners of war, as well as to satisfy individual requests, ranging from socks and shaving kits to footballs and gramophones. The Over-Seas Club received many grateful letters from the recipients which were regularly published in the monthly editions of *Overseas*.

27 JANUARY 1916
Conscription introduced in Britain; Military Services Act



Empire Day 1915
CHILDREN'S PENNIES SCHEME
The Over-Seas Club presented a certificate to all school children in Britain, asking them to bring in a penny to help buy comforts for troops. The appeal was met with an enthusiastic response. According to the Daily Mail (21 May 1915), the club received 'Over two thousand letters and telegrams' in a day and a total of £10,000 (£719,000 in pennies was raised).

Early in 1915
RUTLAND HOSPITAL OPERATIONAL
Not yet home to ROSL, Rutland House played its part in the War effort. Arlington Street was turned into an officers' hospital '...the function rooms became wards, walls were hung with glazed linen and the floor lined with linoleum...Lady Rutland's bedroom became an operating theatre...'



1 AUGUST 1914
Germany declares war on Russia

3 AUGUST 1914
Germany declares war on France

4 AUGUST 1914
Germany invades Belgium. Britain declares war on Germany. The United States declares neutrality.



Late in 1914
OVER-SEAS RED CROSS FUND ESTABLISHED

23 AUGUST 1914
The Battle of Mons; the first major action of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF)

11 NOVEMBER 1918
Armistice Day

27 NOVEMBER 1918
Germans evacuate from Belgium

1 DECEMBER 1918
Allied troops enter Germany



Legacy

By the end of the war, the newly amalgamated Over-Seas Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, now known as the Over-Seas League, had raised over £1,000,000 (almost £50,000,000 today) for comforts for troops including:

- £368,203 for the Over-Seas Tobacco Fund – of which £57,604 was raised from the children's pennies scheme
- £278,630 for the Over-Seas Aircraft Flotilla which funded 172 aeroplanes and seaplanes
- £123,292 for the Over-Seas Red Cross Fund
- £20,070 for the Over-Seas League War Memorial Fund

In 1921, the Over-Seas League used the proceeds from the Over-Seas War Memorial Fund, inaugurated in 1916, to purchase Vernon House. The building was 'dedicated to the memory of the men of the Old Country and from Overseas who made the great sacrifice', serving as a permanent War Memorial.