

The Beginning of The Salvation Army

The Life of William Booth

William Booth was born in modest circumstances in Sneinton, Nottingham on 10 April 1829, one of five children born to Samuel and Mary Booth.

His first job was in a pawnbroker's shop. This stirred his social conscience as through it he became aware of the plight of the poor. He also started attending Broad Street Wesley Chapel, where he came to faith at the age of 15.

In 1849 William moved to London to find work, briefly returning to pawnbroking but also joining a chapel in Clapham. Through this church he was introduced to his future wife, Catherine Mumford. After William had become an evangelist in the Methodist New Connexion, they married on 16 July 1855, forming a formidable and complementary lifelong partnership.

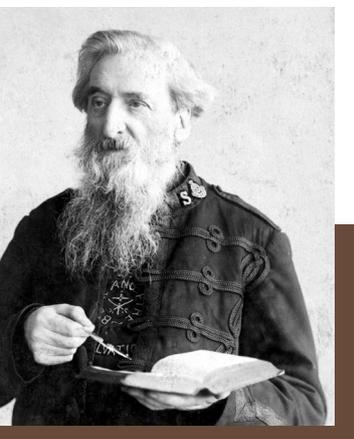
Following a brief honeymoon, William was appointed to circuits in Halifax and Gateshead. But, finding this structure restrictive and feeling himself called to itinerant evangelism, he resigned in 1861.

Four years later William and Catherine moved to London. It was here that William commenced his first open-air evangelistic campaign in Whitechapel, preaching in a tent. This ministry led to the creation of The Christian Mission, with Booth as its leader.

In 1878 The Christian Mission was renamed The Salvation Army. 'General Booth', as he was now known, summed up the purpose of this body in the following way: 'We are a salvation people - this is our speciality - getting saved and keeping saved, and then getting somebody else saved.' But there was to be frequent opposition to the Army's methods and principles in its early years.

After suffering from cancer, Catherine was 'promoted to Glory' on 4 October 1890, leaving a significant void in William's life. In the same month Booth published his major social manifesto, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. He explored various far-reaching ideas, such as providing hostels and employment centres and helping young men learn agricultural trades before emigrating.

Thereafter Booth turned back to preaching and evangelism, with day-to-day administration of the Army passing to his eldest son, Bramwell. The years that followed were difficult ones for William. He had to deal with three of his children leaving The Salvation Army and one dying in a train crash.



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In August 1904 William Booth, always eager to make use of new technology, commenced his first motor tour, travelling from Land's End to Aberdeen. Six more motor tours followed. Then in the spring of 1905, en route to Australia and New Zealand, General William Booth visited the Holy Land, where he visited many sites of biblical significance.

On his return he was honoured by being given the Freedom of the cities of London and Nottingham. Amongst many other honours, Booth was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from Oxford University.

Though his eyesight started failing at this stage in his life, it didn't prevent him from conducting campaigns, with his last trip abroad being to Norway in 1912. On Tuesday 20 August 1912, 'the old warrior finally laid down his sword'. His legacy was a Salvation Army that numbered 15,875 officers and cadets, operating in 58 lands.

Text provided by the International Heritage Centre

Discussion Questions

Why do you think William Booth wanted to help the poor?

In your own words why was The Christian Mission renamed The Salvation Army?

Why do you think The Salvation Army grew in numbers so rapidly?

If William Booth was alive today what questions would you like to ask him?