Celebrating 100 years of the Salvation Army in Smallthorne

1923 - 2023

By Paul Dale

INTRODUCTION:

The Salvation Army was first founded in 1865 by William Booth and was originally called 'The Christian Mission'. In 1878, the name was changed to 'The Salvation Army' and the Christian organisation spread throughout the country and overseas too. In the late 1800's, The Salvation Army came to Stoke-on-Trent and opened citadels in the major towns.

In 1923, two young Salvation Army officers were sent to Smallthorne to commence the work in setting up a Salvation Army Corps in the village. This is where our story begins…….

THE EARLY YEARS

Work commenced in Smallthorne on Saturday, 22nd September 1923. The opening entry in the Corps History Book reads.....

> *'On this night (Saturday), the motor battery under the command of Captain E Williams and Lieutenant J Nellist was driven into Smallthorne for the first open-air. This was held at the top of Dean's Row (opposite the Post Office) and conducted by the two officers and their concertinas. Quite a large crowd gathered and caught up the chorus with delight.*
>
> *Previous to this open-air, we went all over Smallthorne announcing the week end open-airs and meetings.*
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> *The Captain was driving and Lieutenant stood on the back of the van ringing a bell and making announcements. The crowd which was attracted became so great that the police came and demanded if we had permission to stand as we were stopping the traffic. Assuring him that we would soon be off he went on his way.'*

(photo shows an example of a similar vehicle as used in Smallthorne)

In his memoirs, Joseph Nellist wrote: Eventually we got the van, a model T Ford, painted red and lettered in gold 'GET RIGHT WITH GOD' and also the SA crest on it. We got lodgings with an old lady at 77 High Lane. It was nearer to Smallthorne. We had lived in Burslem where we paid 25 shillings board per week and my salary was 21 shillings. I remembered headquarters allowed us 5 shillings each to help in lieu of quarters so that is how we managed to pay our board.

You can just imagine the noise and excitement of the people as they pushed their way to see what was going on. The following evening (Sunday), the first indoor meeting took place in the boys' classroom of Smallthorne School. The room was crowded and five young people were saved and took their stand in Monday night's open-air. All throughout the first week, the officers carried out door-to-door visitation and on the following Sunday (30th September), 30 people knelt at the mercy seat in the night meeting. Another week of visitation followed and soon everyone had heard of the Salvation Army's opening in Smallthorne. (photo shows early converts at Smallthorne Primary School 1924)

The next meeting took place in the presence of the Division Commander Brigadier Mullins. In the packed room, 40 more people were saved. The meetings then had to be transferred to the larger "playhall" which held 350 people. Even this became filled to capacity at the following meeting and again many souls were saved.
(photo shows first group of junior converts 1924)

This work continued for some time and the officers carried on visiting and nurturing the new converts. They were only able to have one meeting each Sunday, so they organised more open-airs and 'cottage' meetings.

One Saturday evening, some of the converts stood with the officers outside the Post Office conducting an open-air service, and a young man named Jack Smith approached the ring. He was under the influence of alcohol but he wanted to get saved. He told Lieutenant Nellist he would come back when he was sober, but the Lieutenant warned him that anything might happen before morning. Jack Smith then said: "All right! I'll make a job of it!", and he knelt down there and then and was soundly converted.
The officer wrote 'Jack not only proved a real trophy of grace, but a real Blood and Fire soldier'.
(In his memoirs, Joseph Nellist wrote: I had witnessed some wonderful conversions, perhaps I can mention one by the name Jack Smith. He was a real drunkard and a great trouble to the police. We were having one of our Saturday night open air meetings by the Post Office with about 70 comrades when someone said we are in for trouble, look who is coming along the street. I left the meeting to ward off Jack, but he had not come for trouble, he had come to seek God. He knelt in the ring and was very wonderfully converted. He became a great help. He not only came himself but was the means of others coming. He became an Insurance agent for the Army and also served 12 years as Corps Sergeant Major.)

May, 1924 saw Captain Williams farewelling to Scotland and Lieutenant Nellist was promoted to Captain. For a few months he received help from a Captain Haith who was sent from Spalding.

The officers found some land to build on in Camp Road and it was bought by Headquarters. Captain Haith farewelled to Nantwich and again Captain Nellist was left alone. Construction work began on the hall in November (1924) and was completed in March (1925). It was opened on 21st March 1924 by Mr Robert Heath Esq, of Tittensor supported by Brigadier Kington and staff. The ceremony took place at 3.00 pm followed by a tea in the Primitive One hundred and fifty people sat down for tea and Hanley band provided music. Fenton band came the day after and two brothers, one sister and a brother-in-law of Jack Smith (now Sergeant Major) were converted in the meeting. About £45.00 was raised that weekend.

(Photo shows new hall in Camp Road. Photo courtesy of Bert Bentley)

In his memoirs, Joseph Nellist wrote:
I was able to get a Hall built and it was opened by Sir Robert Heath the owner of the Iron Works there. He gave a good donation and said he would have the road mended for us which he did. Some of the converts worked for him and he was very impressed. I could write much about this Corps it was a wonderful experience. I was 21 years of age, a Captain, getting a Hall built and with a congregation of 200 any night of the week.

On 7th May 1925, Captain Nellist ‘farewelled’ to get married. His final entry in the Corps History Book reads:

> *'I thank God that He has given me the privilege to see this Corps grow right from the first until now. And I look back and think of the difficulties and hardships we have had to face in the early days of this Corps and now I look around and have to say that it has been worthwhile. Hallelujah! I trust that my successors will be blest in the days which are ahead even more than we have during past days. May God give them wisdom, power and blessing is the prayer of my heart.'*
>
> Joseph Nellist
> Captain

In his memoirs, Joseph Nellist wrote: Now I got permission to be married. This took place in Great Horton, Bradford. Jack Smith came to the wedding!

As Captain Nellist farewelled, Captain Coulter and Lieutenant Back were sent to take charge of the Corps. The first Young People's Anniversary was held on Saturday 20th June 1925. The hall was packed and a total of £43.00 was raised (Receipt books and 1d blocks from 'Trade' were used).

25th August 1925 saw the first Salvation Army wedding in Smallthorne. It was conducted by the Divisional Commander Brigadier Kington and took place in the Salem Chapel.

Armistice Sunday (15.11.25) was conducted by the commanding officers and featured a march through the village by the Band, Songster Brigade, Sunbeams, Singing Company and supported by the Girl Guides, Boys Brigade and ex-servicemen. A wreath was placed at the cemetery gates by the officer and a service took place inside.

The inauguration of the Sunbeam Brigade by Adjutant Lister (the Divisional Young People's Secretary) in March 1926 was a touching ceremony and resulted in many people seeking God. The officer stated:-

"May this only be the beginning of similar sections in this Corps"

(photo shows the Sunbeams)

20th June 1926, saw the first women officers at the Corps Ensign M Greenwood and Lieutenant E Watson who reported in the history book:-

“On arriving, we found a great crowd who gave us a good welcome, even if rowdy and unconventional"

The two officers found themselves surrounded by great poverty and hardships in Smallthorne. The village was in the thick of a coal-mining dispute (or 'lock-out'. They thought that they had to do something to help so they immediately went to see the Councillor and got relief tickets (at half a crown and a shilling each) from the Mayor's Distress Fund. These continued for six weeks. The Corps Sergeant Major, who knew the village people well, helped the officers to distribute the tickets.

Corps Officers' Greenwood and Watson called the Census Board locals to a meeting concerning the 'distress' situation and laid plans for fund-raising. These plans were brought before the soldiers and comrades of the Corps and all promised to help. Money was raised by the Band playing in different areas, door-to- door collecting, donations and special meetings. A total of £44.00 was raised to help the village people, but the Divisional Commander received complaints from other officers because the Band had played on other peoples' districts.

Some 4,002 free teas were given to school children which continued until the distress fund was exhausted. Through the hard work of the soldiers and friends of the Corps, a good relationship was set up between the community and the Salvation Army.

A very important date in the history of the Corps was 19th August 1926, when William Dean became the first soldier to leave for the International Training College (or 'Garrison' as it was called then).

The promotion to glory of Candidate Nellie Nixon, who it was felt ought to have gone into training, made a profound impression on the district. She was a Company Guard and Songster Sergeant and was loved by everyone. Nearly 200 people walked in the funeral procession. (20th August 1926), and 300 people attended the memorial service.

Captain Joseph Nellist (Hednesford) came back to Smallthorne to conduct the third Corps Anniversary on 25th September (1926) a celebration tea took place on the Saturday evening.

In October 1926, the Divisional Proficiency Shield was presented to the Young People's Corps at Burslem Town Hall by the Lady Mayoress. It was a memorable evening and the shield was a just reward for the hard work of the officers and YP Workers.

Each meeting saw people seeking God and soldiers renewing their commitment to God. The Corps continued to grow not only in number, but spiritually too.

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS (Extracts from the Corps History Book)

1920's:

20th. December, 1925: Drunks raid.....22 seekers.

4th.August, 1926: Young People's outing to Trentham Gardens. The tea was provided by the caterers on the spot but was not satisfactory. I would suggest that if you go to Trentham Gardens again another year you take your own eatables!

2nd.October, 1926: We had a 'Drunkards Campaign', holding a late open-air. No one captured.

19th January, 1927: Annual Y.P. New Year and Social. A really happy time. 188 children besides the Y.P. Workers. Oh for a Y.P. hall! Talk about no room. Packed to suffocation.

15th.April, 1927: The Sunbeams collected 440 eggs for Haywood Hospital today from door to door.

4th.November, 1927: The great Salvation Siege. Open-airs held every night in the week as well as indoor meetings. Leaflets were distributed door to door explaining the 'Army's' beliefs and

invitations were given out. The corps united with Burslem corps to hold an open-air with the British Commissioner. Everyone then went for an open-air in Hanley, where 20 souls knelt in the ring. During the two-week siege, 25 adults and 50 children knelt at the mercy seat.

1930's:

24th January, 1933: A soup kitchen was opened at the hall owing to poverty and need. It took place every Tuesday and Thursday and the provisions were sold out every time.

13th June, 1934: Procession of witness. This took place at Hanley...Smallthorne represented 'Conversion- before and after'. Mr.Burnham of Cornhill loaned us his lorry free, also Mr.Brereton of Market Street loaned his horse and cart.

November 1934: The Officers' Quarters rent was altered. The Officers now live in the front rooms only.

9th August, 1935: Y.P. Outing to Overton Hills. The weather was lovely. Everyone enjoyed the change. WARNING: In the event of a repetition of this outing, make sure you get to the proper Overton. There are two, one in Wales and one in Cheshire (the proper one). Owing to a misunderstanding, the buses took us to the wrong one and we had a long journey to get to the proper place.

12th.May, 1937: Coronation Day Effort. Songster Leader Lucas undertook to organise the day, which was a good success. Four ticket holders responsible for 25 tickets each collected the weekly pennies for the Shilling Club banquet, and passed the cash to Treasurer Horne. 100 people were catered for. The ticket entitled the holder to the banquet, two musical programmes and a coronation souvenir.

1940's:

31st.August, 1940: Y.P. Outing to Trentham Gardens. Two buses, one with juniors, one with adults, left Smallthorne at 1pm. We packed a parcel of food and sweets for everyone who went. The catering department at Trentham Gardens provided the tea or rather, they provided the milk and hot water, we provided the actual tea!).

26th.August, 1940: Moved to new Quarters at 118 Leek Road, from 40 Lord Street. A great change after being confined to two rooms.

6th.November, 1941: Commencement of 'Beat the blackout' campaign. Held cottage meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

27th.November, 1945: The first of a series of Joy Hours for children, conducted by DYPS. Major Taylor. Nearly 600 children gathered.

5th January, 1946: Welcome home celebrations for brother Platt and brother Lucas who have been de-mobbed from the forces. 30 comrades sat down to tea. A social was held at night.
8th.August, 1946: The Electric Light was installed in the hall. It has made a great improvement.

1950's:
14th.November, 1950: A Feed and a Film. A feed (cup of cocoa, peas, cake or pie) and a film (Bryan Lucas used miniature home cinematograph) was held in the hall for children. 90 came and paid 6d. each.

20th & 21st January, 1951: New Singing Company commissioned with Leader Sam Lucas and Assistant Leader Dorothy Jones. 7 of the new members were away with flu.

9th.October, 1954: During the open air meeting in Robert Heath Street, so many people left their houses to join the ring that the whole street was blocked. 120 people went back to the indoor meeting where eight knelt at the mercy seat.

1960's:
4th July, 1960: The Home League went on a mystery trip with PMT. Sister Mrs.Whalley took names and money.

4th.November, 1962: A special meeting was held in the afternoon in which the newly-renovated hall was dedicated, the mercy seat was dedicated in memory of YPSM.Joe Horne's wife, two tables, a bible and songster books were given in memory of songster Mrs.James. After the meeting tea was served to all who attended.

27th.September, 1965: Centenary of the Salvation Army. A special programme was given by Hanley Band and Smallthorne Songsters in Leigh Memorial Chapel, Milton.

6th.May, 1967: Building Fund launched.

1970's:

22nd January, 1972: Opening of new hall. Commissioner Albert Mingay (B.C.) opened and dedicated the hall in the presence of the Lord Major.

7th November, 1972: CSM. & Mrs. Ken Boffey travelled to London to sing at the personal request of the General.

10th.February 1973: Commissioning of Y.P. Band (Leader S.Aucock) by Brigadier Hayman.

July, 1975: New Quarters purchased...29, Livingstone Street.

11th.October, 1977: Funeral of Mrs.Martha Wickstead who had been a great help to the corps.

11th.December, 1977: Visit of the British Commissioner & Mrs.G.Dalziel, who enrolled two senior soldiers in the salvation meeting (Paul Critchley and Paul Dale).

17th. & 18th.November, 1979: Presentation of new band instruments by Colonel Snape.

1980's:
7th.November, 1981; Centenary of the 'Army's' work in the 'Potteries'.

18th.May, 1983: Smallthorne Songsters joined with other churches for the B.B.C. Songs of Praise at St. Joseph's R.C. Church, Burslem. Six of our bandsmen accompanied the songs.

8th.June, 1986: Our Songsters joined with songsters from Leek and Kidsgrove to perform at the National Garden Festival (Etruria).

13th.November, 1987: The start of SABAC. (Salvation Army Boys' Adventure Corps).An encouraging start under the leadership of Ian Mountford and Tracey Dale.

5th.July, 1989: At last, the long awaited move into the new Quarters took place. The address is 139, Southborough Crescent, Bradeley.

1990's:
19th.December, 1992: Our band and songsters (with help from our friends at Hanley) presented a carol concert at the Civic Centre, Alsager, to raise money for the Hope House Children's Hospice.

16th/17th October, 1993: 70th.Corps Anniversary. A musical programme and celebration tea took place on the Saturday. The guests for the weekend were Major Margaret Slater (Former Corps Officer 1971-1973) and 91 year old Brigadier Joseph Nellist R. (The first Officer at Smallthorne 1923-1925).

2000's:
January, 2007: After the announcement that Hanley Citadel building was declared unsafe, the Hanley Corps (that had been in operation since the late 1800's) joined with Smallthorne Corps to create the Stoke-on-Trent Corps (using the hall in Camp Road, Smallthorne). Alterations had to be made to the current hall and New Ford Primary School kindly allowed the meetings to be held in the school every Sunday.

The Stoke-on-Trent Corps, that has such a welcoming family of members, has continued to serve God and the community week by week. When the Covid pandemic hit, hundreds of meals were prepared and delivered to the community with donations and helpers also assisting from local supermarkets.

Christmas food and toy parcels are delivered every year to local families.

A Food Hub has operated on a weekly basis to help needy families.
The support to the community has continued from when the Salvation Army first arrived to the present day.

May God continue to bless us all in the coming years….

OFFICERS POSTED TO SMALLTHORNE

(Including dates of command.)

Lt.Joseph Nellist 22/9/23 - 5/25
Capt.E.Williams 22/9/23 - 6/24
Capt.Haith 5/24 - 11/24.
Capt.J.Coulter 15/5/25 - 20/5/26
Lt.A.Back 15/5/25 - 20/5/26
Ensign M.Greenwood 20/5/26 - 5/27
Lt.E.Watson 20/5/26- ?
Lt.Harvey ? →5/27
Capt.Robert Johnson 19/5/27 - 6/5/28
Lt.Alldous 19/5/27 - 6/5/28
Capt.Atkinson 11/6/28 - 8/29
Lt.Burley 11/6/28 - 8/29
Ensign Holmes 29/8/29 -10/5/30
Capt.Griffiths 29/8/29 - 10/5/30
Capt.Grace Jackson 16/5/30 - 17/7/30
Lt.Emily Franklin 16/5/30 -18/1/31
Capt.Doris Allemand 28/8/30 - 24/12/30
Capt.& Mrs.Wyles 14/5/31 - 11/31
Adjutant Devitt 11/31 - 5/32

Capt.Mortimore 11/31 - 5/32
Capt.& Mrs.Lillicrap 5/32 - 18/5/33
Major M.Williamson 18/5/33 - 5/34
Lt.Foster 18/5/33 - 5/34
Capt.Yates 10/5/34 - 16/5/35
Lt.Mason 10/5/34 - 29/7/34
Capt.Doris Wompra 19/8/34 - 11/34
Capt.& Mrs.T.Young 5/34 - 10/8/35
Capt.Arthur Gand 10/8/35 - 14/5/36
Capt.Emma Bailey 21/5/36 - 28/10/36
Capt.Winifred Smith 12/36 - 29/5/37
Major Gertrude Courts 3/6/37 - 4/4/38
Lt.Anne Hackett 3/6/37 ?
Lt.Ludow ? →12/37
Lt.Beales 12/37 - 29/5/38
Capt.M.Patterson 2/6/38 - 11/12/38
Lt.Laker 2/6/38 - 11/12/38
Major A.Oyen 16/12/38 →?
Capt.Parton 16/12/38 - ?
Capt.Lodge 7/12/39 - 1/40
Lt.B.Thornett 3/2/40 - 3/40
Capt.& Mrs.Greeves 6/3/40 - 17/11/40
Lt.Tucker 30/11/40 - 42
Capt.Procter 4/6/42 - 3/43
Envoy Evans 4/6/42 - 3/43
Capt.Langham 3/6/43 → ?
Capt.Bridgwater 12/10/44 - 30/8/45
Cadet Walton 12/10/44 - ?
Lt.Brenda Eldridge 18/10/45 - 20/1/46
Capt.Gough 21/2/46 →?
Capt.Griffiths 23/5/46 → ?
Lt.Radford 23/5/46 - 19/10/46
Capt.Margery Malone 15/5/47 - 9/5/48
Lt.Shuter 4/12/47- 9/5/48
Capt.B.Hoskins 16/5/48 - 15/5/49
Lt.E.Walton 16/5/48 - 1/49
Capt.B.Ferguson 5/49 - 5/50
Lt.O'Shea 18/8/49 - 5/50
Lt.& Mrs.Turrell 18/5/50 - 22/5/52
Lt.Stanley Richardson 15/6/52 - 10/4/53
Lt.William Lee 15/6/52 - 10/4/53
Lt.E.Thompson 5/53 - 20/5/54
Capt.Dorothy Mills 20/5/54 - 11/11/54
Lt.& Mrs.Don Mason 22/12/54 - 7/4/56

Capt.Park 17/5/56 - 5/57
Envoy Sturdy 17/5/56 - 5/57
Lt.Edwards 24/5/57 - 11/5/58
Lt.Niel 24/5/57 - 11/5/58
Capt.& Mrs.Bromley 15/5/58 - 19/5/59
Capt.Ellis 5/59 - 5/60
Lt.Most 5/59 - 5/60
Capt.Barker 19/5/60 - 21/5/61
Envoy Kern 19/5/60 - 21/5/61
Capt.M.Campbell 21/5/61 - 17/5/62
Envoy Holland 21/5/61 - 17/5/62
Capt.& Mrs.G.Bakker 17/5/62 - 5/63
Capt.M.J.Pond 23/5/63 - 5/64
Cadet E.Green 23/5/63 - 5/64
Lt.Ann Potter 5/64 1 day only.
Lt.J.Lindsay Anderson 5/65 - 5/66
Capt.Middlehurst 5/66 - 11/66
Capt.Johnston 5/66 - 11/66
Capt.Sheila Parmenter 11/66 - 5/68
Capt.& Mrs.R.Hope 5/68 - 4/69
A/Capt.& Mrs.Heritage 27/4/69 - 5/70
Cadet Sgt.& Mrs.D.Littlehales 28/5/70 - 9/70
Capt.Margaret Slater 16/5/71 - 29/11/73
A/Capt.V.Vardon 29/11/73 - 7/75
Lts David & DaphneWeston 10/7/75 - 29/5/77
Lts. David & Miriam Jones 2/6/77 - 28/5/78
Lt.Sheila Stewart 4/6/78 - 9/1/79
Cadet Margaret Baldry 4/6/78 - 11/9/78
A/Capt.& Mrs. Geoffrey Day 3/6/79 - 25/5/80
Cadet Sgts.& Martin & Marjorie Owen 1/6/80 - 3/8/80
Capt.Joan Cutland 11/1/81 - 29/5/83
Capt.Roslyn Cook 5/6/83 - 25/5/86
Cadet Paul Hardy 1/6/86 - 5/10/86
Capts Stephen & Hilary Naylor 28/5/87 - 27/5/90
Lts Mark & Linda Billard 31/5/90 - 07/96
Lt Jo Blowers 07/96 -
Majors Colin & Valerie Harrod Jan 2000 - July 2005
Envoys David & Maureen McEvoy
MERGING OF HANLEY & SMALLTHORNE CORPS TO CREATE STOKE-ON-TRENT CORPS
Capts Alan & Carole Donaldson Jan 2007 - July 2007
Majors David & Julie Luddit 2007-2011
Lts Richard and Kathryn Reynolds 2012 - 2017
Major V.Cummings 07/2017 -present

CADETS WHO HAVE GONE INTO THE TRAINING COLLEGE FROM SMALLTHORNE TO BECOME SALVATION ARMY OFFICERS

William Dean 19/08/1926
Amy Barnish 18/08/1927
Evelyn Slade 21/07/1930
E.Glaze 21/07/1930
R. Turner 18/8/1932
Ian Mountford 06/09/1993
Tracey Mountford 06/09/1993
Fred Eardley 1995
Elaine Eardley 1995

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