

# Mrs. Booth's Most Unusual Enquiry Bureau

By SHEILLA JONES and JIM BURNS

**Mrs. Booth's Enquiry Bureau was a most unusual detective agency, born out of the desperate search for girls seduced or forced into prostitution in London slums, and grew to become arguably the largest detective agency in Victorian London.**

The Salvation Army's attempt to address the number of girls "lost through the portals of the abominable trade of prostitution"<sup>1</sup> began with the establishment of the Army's first Rescue Home for fallen women, opened on 22nd May 1884 at 212 Hanbury Street, Whitechapel.<sup>2</sup> As 24-year-old Florence Booth, daughter-in-law of Salvation Army founder William Booth and wife of Bramwell Booth, took over management of the Women's Social Work department, the Home moved to larger quarters at 48 Navarino Road, Dalston in 1885.<sup>3</sup>

The Rescue Homes that opened over the next few years provided women seeking to escape prostitution with free food, lodgings and training. But for General William Booth, that was not enough. Rural poverty had enticed many country girls to board a train to London to find work as domestics, a more appealing future than "pulling turnips in cold wind-swept fields or digging potatoes from the sodden land for a few coppers a day".<sup>4</sup>

Notes Richard Williams, author of *Missing: The inside story of the Salvation Army's Missing Persons Department* (1976):

These innocents abroad, simple and untutored in sophisticated city ways, were easily recognized by experienced women vultures who haunted the stations. Railway stations were not the only hunting grounds used by pimps and procurers. In parks and open spaces and wherever people gathered, the hawks would watch for unsuspecting pigeons who could by skillful enticements be induced to consent to their own abduction, little realising the horrors of the fate awaiting them.<sup>5</sup>

As the number of anxious parents seeking help from Salvationists to find their daughters grew, the General sought the aid of all Salvationists in setting up an enquiry service. In a July 11, 1885 address in *The War Cry* (the Army's weekly newspaper), written in English, French, German, Swedish, Italian and Spanish, Booth proposed a central office whereby:

1. Any forsaken, helpless, friendless girl can come for counsel and assistance at any hour;
2. Any white slaves can run from their prison houses and can be assisted;
3. Foreign girls unable to speak English can come for advice and assistance;
4. Girls can write when detained in houses against their will;
5. Girls who have not entirely made up their minds to abandon the life can be talked to and prayed with;
6. Parents who have lost a girl can apply for information.<sup>6</sup>

This was the recipe for the new Enquiry Department, a pilot scheme for tracing missing people. It was generally known as "Mrs. Booth's Enquiry Department".

- 1 Williams, Richard, 1976, *Missing: The inside story of the Salvation Army's Missing Persons Department*. Salvation Army, London, p 4. Abridged version of original 1969 Hodder and Stoughton edition.
- 2 Salvation Army UK Territorial Departments: Women's Social Services in Great Britain and Ireland, Salvation Army International Heritage Centre Archive (SA Archives), archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/329e3512-5c70-3249-9fab-eddb56bbb519.
- 3 Salvation Army homes for women: Hanbury Street and Navarino Road Refuges, SA Archives, archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/1ee8c147-f8d0-38ef-ad32-d3c5486b8af5.
- 4 Williams, *op. cit.*, p 38.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p 39.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p 40.



**MISSING!**

Mrs. Bramwell Booth  
259 Mare Street  
Hackney  
London, N.E.

MRS. BRAMWELL BOOTH is willing, by means of the Enquiry and Help Department, to assist in finding missing friends, lost daughters, and prodigal sons, both in this and other countries; and especially invites parents, relatives, and friends, who are interested in any woman or girl who is known, or feared, to be in moral danger, to communicate to her all particulars.

All letters, whether from friends, or from SUCH WOMEN OR GIRLS THEMSELVES, will be regarded as strictly confidential.

Give full names, dates, and address of all concerned, and whenever possible, send a photograph of the subject of enquiry.

Letters may be written in any language and should be addressed, Enquiry, 259, Mare Street, Hackney, London, N.E.



The *Missing!* column became a regular feature in weekly editions of *The War Cry* around the world beginning in 1885, asking for assistance in locating missing family and friends. This work grew to become the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service, which continues today in more than 100 countries.

Florence Soper Booth married into the Salvation Army Booth family in 1882 and, at age 22, was promptly assigned to develop and manage the Women's Social Work branch of the Army. That included the creation of the Enquiry Bureau in 1885, which became a professional detective agency in 1888.

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Within a year, enquiry offices had opened in New York, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney, taking advantage of the broad reach of the Army around the world.<sup>7</sup> The first advertisement for a missing person appeared on 10th October in *The War Cry*, the UK Salvation Army's weekly publication. Thereafter, a "Missing!" column ran regularly in the Army's editions of *The War Cry* around the world.

As the Women's Social Work activities expanded, the headquarters moved in 1887 into the former Salvation Army Training Home at 259 Mare Street, Hackney. This spacious building housed nine offices and a substantial reception room for all the branches of the women's work.<sup>8</sup> Two rooms were set aside for the Bureau, one for interviewing people seeking the Bureau's help and a second for records and documents and attending to the correspondence from all parts of the world seeking help finding missing relatives.<sup>9</sup>

But General Booth was not done yet. He felt that it was not sufficient that girls be rescued and taken into a Home,

but that "an equally important part of the work was that men who tempted the girls should be brought to justice."<sup>10</sup> To that end, Chief of Staff Bramwell Booth (Florence's husband and the Army's second-in-command) had his eye on a professional detective, Salvationist Clifford Harland, whom the Army had engaged to investigate a serious case implicating a Member of Parliament.<sup>11</sup> The case was discreetly concluded, and Harland installed as the head of

7 Williams, *op. cit.*, p 42.

8 Central Office, *The Deliverer*, Salvation Army, London, 1st January 1890, p 83.

9 Cox, Major Adelaide, Help and Enquiry Department, *The Deliverer*, Salvation Army, London, 1st January 1890, p 87.

10 Parker, Percy L., 1897, A Salvation Detective Agency, *The Young Man: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, London, Vol. 11, p 16.

11 Clifford Harland, *The Deliverer*, Salvation Army, London, September 1893, p 38.

the Enquiry Department on 1st June 1888 at the rank of Lieutenant.<sup>12</sup>

With the hiring of Harland, the Bureau moved beyond a missing persons bureau to a full-fledged, professional detective agency. Thus, a typical advertisement in *The War Cry* would read:

This Department will SEARCH in any part of the world for missing or runaway relatives or friends; will seek to BRING TO JUSTICE men who have ruined or wronged girls or women; will ENQUIRE into the respectability of people, houses or situations, and generally advise and help, as far as possible, those in difficulty.

Beyond the above it is prepared to undertake detective cases and investigations of certain descriptions for those in a position to pay, at moderate rates.<sup>13</sup>

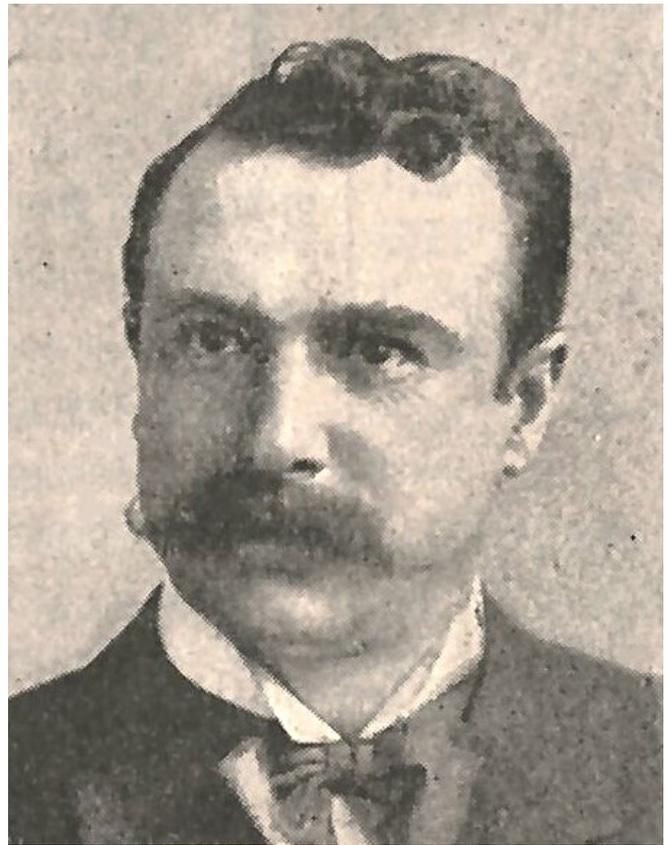
By 1893, the Bureau had four full-time “hallelujah detectives”. Harland, now promoted to the rank of Adjutant, described them as “one man and three of the best women detectives possible — all Salvationists.”<sup>14</sup> Harland himself was taking on cases of significant public interest, including “a *cause célèbre*, in which a baronet was the defendant; the Y.W.C.A. scandal involving the character of an aristocratic lady, which is likely to come before the Queen’s Bench”, as well as solving the Forest Hill Mystery Case<sup>15</sup> after Scotland Yard had given up on it.<sup>16</sup>

The Bureau had the extensive resources of the Salvation Army to draw on. In 1890:

The Army had ten thousand full-time officers throughout the world and many more thousands of other Salvationists. Any of these could be called upon to act as enquiry agents to search for the lost, sometimes in the most remote areas... [and] used the English *War Cry*, with its 300,000 circulation in Great Britain, as a medium for advertising for the lost; its twenty-three other editions published in various parts of the world were also used.<sup>17</sup>

“Since the commencement in 1888,” said Harland in an interview in 1893, “we have dealt with no fewer than 8,177 cases, and 2,289 have proved satisfactory.” When asked how that compared to Scotland Yard’s rate of solving cases, he replied, “Very favorably. The official returns of Scotland Yard show an average of one in ten, whereas we discover one in three-and-a-half or four.”<sup>18</sup>

By 1897, the Enquiry Bureau was considered the largest detective agency in London. The volume of work necessitated dividing the Bureau into two wings – the Lost and Missing Friends Section and the Affiliation Section. The “Salvation Army Detective Agency” activities were described in an 1897 edition of the London magazine *The Young Man*:



*Staff-Captain Clifford Harland, a professional detective, took over the SA Enquiry Bureau from 1888 to 1897, working out of 259 Mare Street, Hackney.*

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Mr. Harland has something like two thousand search cases a year to look after, and from two hundred to three hundred affiliation cases... Five out of six people who seek help in finding their relatives are quite unable to pay anything, and but for the Army, would never set inquiries on foot; but the average cost of an inquiry case is only four shillings.<sup>19</sup>

12 Clifford Harland’s promotion record was kindly provided by Chloe Wilson, Archivist, Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, pers.com., 27th February 2018.

13 Enquiry Bureau advertisement, *The War Cry*, UK, 7th October 1893, as referenced by Ray Wiggins, *My Ancestors were in the Salvation Army*, Society of Genealogists, London, 1999, p 34.

14 Helpers of Men, *The Deliverer*, Salvation Army, London, August 1893, p 28.

15 The “Forest Hill Mystery Case” refers to the mysterious disappearance of a Miss Eason from Forest Hill some time prior to April 1889, with a criminal conspiracy suspected. The Forest Hill Mystery, *South Wales Daily News*, 22nd April 1889.

16 Clifford Harland, 1893, *op. cit.*, p 38.

17 Williams, 1976, *op. cit.*, p 44.

18 Clifford Harland quoted in Helpers of Men, *The Deliverer*, Salvation Army, London, August 1893, p 29.

19 Parker, 1897, *op. cit.*, p 16.



*The Salvation Army's Women's Social Work department moved into the spacious quarters at 259 Mare Street, Hackney, in 1887, moving to purpose-built headquarters constructed at 280 Mare Street in 1910.*

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The Affiliations Section of the Bureau handled “investigations of certain descriptions”, which broadly encompassed “affiliation and seductions”, “disputes between masters and servants”, “wills, legacies and property matters” and “wife desertions”.<sup>20</sup> This branch of the detective agency seemed, however, to be disrupted when Clifford Harland, then a Staff-Captain, died suddenly on 28th June 1897.

The name of the Bureau changed around 1900 to the International Investigation Department, where the cases under investigation appeared to be all focused on missing persons.<sup>21</sup> The Army later changed the department’s name to the Family Tracing Service, which remains active today.

### **Our Murdered Sisters: The Salvation Army and the Ripper**

The Army’s Enquiry Bureau was certainly well-positioned to assist in the investigation of the Whitechapel murders. However, no documentation has appeared to date that would suggest the Bureau was directly involved. The Rescue workers, on the other hand, were familiar with many of the women in the Spitalfields and Whitechapel slums, particularly the prostitutes and homeless women

they sought to help. In early 1889, the Army returned to Whitechapel, opening a women’s shelter at 194-196 Hanbury Street known as Hope Town,<sup>22</sup> with William Ward as superintendent.<sup>23</sup>

The close relationship between SA workers and the women of the district was highlighted in a short article by an Army officer, identified only as “R”, published in *The Deliverer* of 15th August 1889. It was titled “Our Murdered Sisters”.<sup>24</sup>

Our claim to be regarded as real sisters of the poor women of the street was blessedly illustrated in connection with the last Whitechapel murder. Our Shelter captain’s wife went to try and identify the poor victim, and when she was seen approaching the mortuary, was saluted by the whole crowd of poor creatures standing around the doors with, “Here comes our captain, let her go in!”<sup>25</sup>

The “last Whitechapel murder” is most likely that of Alice McKenzie, who had been murdered a month earlier in Castle Alley on 17th July 1889, with injuries similar to those inflicted by the Ripper. As McKenzie’s identity was not immediately known, it is conceivable that it was Matron Ward from the Hanbury Street shelter who made the short walk to the Whitechapel Mortuary on Old Montague Street, where the woman’s body had been taken.<sup>26</sup>

The inquest into McKenzie’s murder concluded on 14th August 1889 with a verdict of “Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown”.<sup>27</sup> Given that the article by “R” was dated the next day, it is possible she knew of the verdict, and that the police and pathologists were in disagreement over whether McKenzie was a Ripper victim.<sup>28</sup> She lamented that some “poor defiled form lying

20 Weale, Sally, Looking for Someone?, *The Guardian*, January 27, 2007, [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/jan/27/familyandrelationships.family](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/jan/27/familyandrelationships.family).

21 Haggard, Henry Rider, 1910, *Regeneration*, Longmans Green and Co., pp 63-64.

22 Berk, Louis and Rachel Kolsky, 2017, *Secret Whitechapel*, Amberley Publishing Ltd.

23 *Kelly's Post Office London Directory* lists “Salvation Army Women’s Shelter (Wm. Ward Supt.) 192 Hanbury Street”.

24 “R”, Our Murdered Sisters, *The Deliverer*, 15th August 1889, p 19.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Old Montague Street, [wiki.casebook.org/old\\_montague\\_street.html](http://wiki.casebook.org/old_montague_street.html).

27 Inquest: Alice McKenzie, [www.casebook.org/official\\_documents/inquests/inquest\\_mackenzie.html](http://www.casebook.org/official_documents/inquests/inquest_mackenzie.html).

28 Evans, Stewart P. and Donald Rumbelow, 2006, *Jack the Ripper: Scotland Yard Investigates*, Sutton Publishing, pp 208-209; Trevor Marriott, 2005, *Jack the Ripper: The 21st Century Investigation*, John Blake, pp 182-183.

in some out of the way court or alley”, “a poor creature is found sweltering in her blood just where the assassin has left her brutally murdered” prompted a great furor, but then was quickly forgotten. “Oh, must each poor victim die before anybody will care about them?”<sup>29</sup>

The Hanbury shelter was directly linked to “Jack the Ripper” later that year by General Booth. In December 1889, Booth answered a summons to appear at the Worship Street Police Court, to face a charge by police that the Hanbury women’s shelter should have been registered under the Common Lodging-house Act. The Army’s defence was that “the premises had been opened as a charity at the time of the ‘Jack the Ripper’ scare,”<sup>30</sup> and did not fall under the Act.

The matron, Mrs. Ward, also testified that “many a woman had ‘thanked Jack the Ripper’ as the cause of such a nice shelter being opened, and she wished to give instances, but was told that it was unnecessary.”<sup>31</sup> The magistrate sided with the SA and dismissed the summons.

29 Our Murdered Sisters, *op. cit.* p 19.

30 *The Standard*, Saturday, 7th December 1889. The non-paywall text is available on Richard Jones’ blog [www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com/generalnews/salvation-army-summons](http://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com/generalnews/salvation-army-summons).

31 *Ibid.*



Canadian authors SHEILLA JONES, MSc and JIM BURNS, PhD are developing a murder mystery series based on a fictional female detective working out of the 1888 London Enquiry Bureau, and welcome additional material linking the Salvation Army and the Ripper ([www.sheillajones.com/contact](http://www.sheillajones.com/contact)). The authors thank Cloë Wilson (SA International Heritage Centre, London, UK), Tyler Boeneke (SA Archives and Research Center, Alexandria, Virginia, USA), and Colonel John Carew, ret., (SA Archives of Canada and Bermuda, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada) for their kind helpfulness in our researches.

## 23 New Road

Now leading to flats, in 1865 this doorway on a handsome Georgian house led people to the first indoor meeting of what was to become East London Christian Mission founded by William Booth. Renamed the Salvation Army in 1878, by the time Booth died in 1912, his Army operated throughout the world.

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