

# **RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH: JAMES BARKER, AN ADELAIDE DOCK STRIKE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION OF REWRITING HISTORY**

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*A post-graduate thesis is expected to provide new insights, proving that previous conclusions on a topic were at best incomplete and preferably wrong. However, theology students have additional responsibilities to their fellow believers and to engage in Christian mission. This paper outlines the ethical considerations of rewriting a cherished Salvation Army historical myth which is often cited to inspire mission and reliance on the providence of God in service.*

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## **I. Introduction**

If you pick up almost any book on the subject of mission you will gain the impression that it is performed by ministers of religion or at the very least those engaged in full-time Christian service. The term can be expanded to include short-term overseas mission trips to foreign countries or forays into particular contexts. These are often presented as a kind of ‘taste-and-see’; participants can determine whether or not they are called to more intense mission, so they are generally seen as ‘pre-mission.’ With such an understanding of mission being the norm, I think I can be forgiven for initially viewing my postgraduate research as preparation for mission, rather than mission itself. Once I had completed a research masters – now upgraded to a doctorate – I would be qualified to teach at undergraduate level. I could then find a lecturing position and my real work would begin. I saw study and its accompanying responsibilities as the necessary requirements to reach my actual mission. However, I have come to realise that my research is part of the mission to which God has called me, rather than merely its preparation.

Before starting my thesis I completed a subject on research methods which covered ethics, most of which was irrelevant to my own work. I was not dealing with animals or chemicals and I was only interviewing humans from the distance of time. Flinders

University still required me to apply for ethics approval to gather oral history from great-grandchildren and I submit what is usually a nil report every year. I also considered the aspect of appropriate behaviour to fellow researchers and the responsibility of behaving in such a way that materials remained accessible to future researchers. What I did not consider was the implications of my research for mission. What follows is a description of a specific situation from Salvation Army history to explore the ethical issues involved in historical research and to illustrate how it impacts on the nature of mission itself; what it is, who is involved in it and the tensions it creates for researchers.

## **II. The Beginnings of the Salvation Army in South Australia**

The first meeting of the Salvation Army in Adelaide, South Australia, was held by immigrant soldiers (lay members) on 5 September 1880. Captains Adelaide and Thomas Sutherland arrived in February 1881 and were met by sixty-eight committed soldiers carrying a huge banner proclaiming them to be the Salvation Army. This was soon replaced by the official Army flag which had been presented to the Sutherlands by Catherine Booth. The Sutherlands also brought with them twelve uniforms and a determination to grow the Army in Adelaide.<sup>1</sup>

The Sutherlands were typical of officers sent from Britain to the Australasian colonies. They were young, enthusiastic and had already experienced opposition, often violent, in their home country. An already-commenced hall was soon opened. It was able to hold 1200 people, and was often filled to overflowing, with additional meetings being held concurrently outside.<sup>2</sup> Open-air meetings continued in Light Square, the Central and East End Markets and Whitmore Square where Sutherland enthusiastically preached ‘a real Hell and real Heaven and a real power to save from sin.’<sup>3</sup> Weekly Sunday meetings were held in Botanic Park.<sup>4</sup> Open-air were

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<sup>1</sup> *Victory*, 1897; Robert Sandall, *The History of the Salvation Army: vol 2 1878-1886* (New York: The Salvation Army, 1950), 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicle*, 30 July 1881.

<sup>3</sup> *War Cry* (London), 30 June 1881; *War Cry* (Adelaide), 6 April 1883.

<sup>4</sup> Tradition holds that there was an open-air in Botanic Park every week from 5 September 1880 until 1947. This is supported by reports in the Adelaide *War Cry* from the first edition of 6 April 1883 onwards.

supported by the band Thomas Sutherland founded to accompany the marchers.<sup>5</sup>

Captain Sutherland received requests to 'open fire' from Sydney, Melbourne and 'many of the surrounding townships.'<sup>6</sup> A second corps at Bowden was formed by November 1881. A new hall was commenced in the centre of a brickyard, with donated bricks and labour by the soldiers themselves.<sup>7</sup> Corps at Port Adelaide and Norwood were operating by April 1882, all under the officership of Sutherland, assisted by part time lay leaders.<sup>8</sup> He was also investigating starting corps in rural areas, particularly Moonta, and expanding into other colonies, sending copies of the *War Cry* to be sold as far away as Ballarat, seven hundred miles away in Victoria.<sup>9</sup>

As the Australasian corps grew in number and strength, it was necessary to appoint an overall commander to maintain unity. In August 1882 Majors James and Alice Barker were sent to Adelaide to form a territorial headquarters for Australasia. James Barker had been an Anglican compositor from the Midlands when he was attracted to a Salvation Army meeting at Bethnel Green by a man calling 'fire!'<sup>10</sup> He was mentored in the faith by Alice Sutton who was a supervisor in a boot factory.<sup>11</sup> Barker worked in the Salvation Army's Whitechapel printing works before becoming an officer at Manchester I Corps, then became Assistant Divisional Commander to Colonel Josiah Taylor.<sup>12</sup> He was married to Alice on 9 August 1882, the day before the couple sailed for Australia.<sup>13</sup> It took great sacrifice to leave Britain as Alice Barker's father was terminally ill and died the following week.<sup>14</sup>

We come now to the problem. Tradition states that the Barkers had intended to sail to Adelaide to establish the Australasian headquarters but a waterside dispute had prevented the ship, the

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<sup>5</sup> Percival Dale, *Salvation Chariot* (East Melbourne: The Salvation Army, 1952), 5.

<sup>6</sup> *War Cry* (London), 29 December 1881.

<sup>7</sup> *War Cry* (London), 22 December 1881; 2 February 1882.

<sup>8</sup> *War Cry* (London), 20 July 1882; *War Cry* (Adelaide), 28 September 1883; *War Cry* (Melbourne), 20 November 1897.

<sup>9</sup> *War Cry* (London), 30 November 1882; Percival Dale, *Salvation Cavalcade*, unpublished manuscript, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Minnie Carpenter, *Three Great Hearts* (London: The Salvation Army, 1921), 111-112.

<sup>11</sup> Carpenter, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Carpenter, 120, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Carpenter, 125.

<sup>14</sup> *All the World*, November 1889.

*Cotopaxi*, from landing in the colony and sent it on to Melbourne.<sup>15</sup> From this point the stories deviate. Some state that Melbourne newspapers had reported the Barkers' wedding and the diversion of the ship, so that when the couple arrived at the Williamstown docks on 21 September 1882 they were met by two immigrant Salvationists. There is some doubt as to the identity of the two men, but they are commonly identified as a young Cardiff Salvationist, William Whitchurch, and Isaac Unsworth, to whom we shall return later. Others paint the more colourful picture of the Barkers arriving alone, friendless and penniless on the dock, but managing to start the Salvation Army in Melbourne despite all opposition. Whether or not they were met, there was no reason to doubt this widely reported story.

Salvation Army historian R. G. Moyles has written of the joy of browsing and the thrill of discovering anecdotes and corroborative evidence.<sup>16</sup> Postgraduate students know this as creative procrastination (i.e. avoiding doing what you should be doing by doing something else that looks like work, but is really completely unnecessary). Australian history postgraduate students are also familiar with TROVE, the Australian National Library's on-line search engine, gateway to digitized newspapers and effective tool for creative procrastination. One day, while engaged in 'vital research,' I decided to search for the Melbourne reports of the diversion of the Barkers' ship. Failing on that score, I searched for details of the waterside dispute in Adelaide. However, there was no report of a dispute in the Adelaide newspapers and ships were arriving and leaving as scheduled.

Intrigued, I searched further, creative procrastination now having become a genuine mystery. Newspaper advertisements showed that the *Cotopaxi*'s normal route was via Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, not the other way around, as in the original story.<sup>17</sup> However the run on which the Barkers arrived was not advertised. More TROVE searches revealed that it was an additional sailing, designed to give experience to the ship's new captain. Although it carried passengers and cargo, the ship had never been intended to continue to Adelaide, and the *Cotopaxi* returned to London via Sydney, leaving the Barkers to find their own way to their

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<sup>15</sup> For example Dale, *Salvation Chariot*, 7; Barbara Bolton, *Booth's Drum: The Salvation Army in Australia 1880-1980* (Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), 17.

<sup>16</sup> R G Moyles, *Exploring Salvation Army History: Essays of Discovery* (Edmonton: AGM Publications, 2009), 81-88.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. *Queenslander*, 11 March 1882 and *Illustrated Sydney News*, 13 May 1882.

destination. In fact, the report of the voyage gives no indication of diversion from a planned route and boasts of how quickly and successfully the trip was made.<sup>18</sup> It seems unlikely that the Barkers were sold a ticket to a destination the ship would not reach, so they presumably intended to continue to Adelaide via one of the many regular costal connections between Melbourne and Adelaide. Later officers sometimes arrived the same way.

A further difficulty arises in that no reports of the Barkers' arrival appeared in the Victorian newspapers and it is hardly likely that London newspapers would have reported an obscure Salvation Army wedding, let alone reached Melbourne in time to inform the local population of the Barkers' intended arrival.<sup>19</sup> The two men who reportedly met the Barkers pose a separate problem. While some historians have identified them as immigrant soldiers of The Salvation Army, it is more reasonable to conclude that they were members of the YMCA who commonly met the ships when they docked. They would have recognized the Barkers as Salvation Army officers, as they were familiar with the uniform from their association with Captain Isaac Unsworth. The two men took the Barkers to the YMCA General Secretary, Mr W. G. Marsh, who arranged accommodation for them.<sup>20</sup> The warm welcome decided Barker to open fire in Melbourne, although he could still report in the *War Cry*, 'Newspapers against us, public against us, but God for us.'<sup>21</sup>

### **III. Isaac Unsworth's Role in Salvation Army Beginnings in Australia**

How Isaac Unsworth came to be in Melbourne forms an integral part of this story and is critical for our understanding of how it relates to mission. His early history in The Salvation Army is

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<sup>18</sup> *Argus*, 22 September 1882.

<sup>19</sup> The reporting in London and Victorian newspapers was suggested respectively by Carpenter, 127, and Dale, *Salvation Chariot*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *War Cry* (Melbourne), 25 December 1926. Sandall, 247; Carpenter, 128.

<sup>21</sup> *War Cry* (London), 30 November 1882. The Army tended to exaggerate difficulties – it made a better story. The image of Barker alone and friendless in Melbourne is a persistent one, suggested in 'History Making in Australia,' *All the World* (May 1897), 258, and repeated by writers such as John Cleary, *Boundless Salvation* (Salvation Army Southern Territory: Radiant Film & Television, 2008), and Derek Linsell, "Thank God for the Salvos": An Historical and Contemporary Assessment for the Public Acceptance of the Salvation Army in Australia,' Master of Arts Thesis, National Centre for Australian Studies, 1997, 4.

shrouded in controversy. 'Happy Isaac' was born on 23 December 1860 in Lancaster, Durham, and became, in his own words, a 'drunken sailor.' He was converted at Runcorn and became attached to the Consett corps. After becoming an officer in 1879, part of his initial service was in Bristol, where he assisted with the training of Frederick de Lautour Tucker.<sup>22</sup> Tucker subsequently pioneered Salvation Army work in India. When appointed to Salisbury, the home of the Fry family, he enthusiastically reported the benefits of music to his home corps. The Consett corps band was formed shortly afterwards and is recognized as the first brass band in the Salvation Army. Unsworth's next appointment, Hull corps, also started a brass band.<sup>23</sup> Unsworth was a musician in his own right and his melody *I Know Thou Art Mine* is still featured in band marches.<sup>24</sup> By the time Unsworth had made his way to Adelaide in 1882 he had been dismissed due to an unnamed difficulty.<sup>25</sup> His long-term friend Captain Sutherland reinstated him, placing Unsworth in charge of the Adelaide I corps.<sup>26</sup>

The general secretary of the YMCA, Mr Marsh, had heard Unsworth preach in Adelaide and invited him to Melbourne to speak at the tenth anniversary of the YMCA on 25 August 1882.<sup>27</sup> Marsh planned to raise £100 to employ him for a year to work with young men and outdoor missions. Of particular interest was the meeting of ships as they docked at the wharves. Whether or not Unsworth set up the mission is unclear, but it was operating soon afterwards. Unsworth returned to Salvation Army work in Adelaide, possibly anticipating the Barkers' arrival.<sup>28</sup> Unsworth remained in Australia

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<sup>22</sup> *War Cry* (Melbourne), 7 July 1923; St John Irvine, *God's Soldier: General William Booth* (London: William Heinemann, 1934), 542.

<sup>23</sup> Sandall, 114-115.

<sup>24</sup> *Salvationist*, 4 July 2009.

<sup>25</sup> *Argus*, 26 August 1882; letter from Percival Dale to Madge Unsworth 22 July 1947; letter from Percival Dale to Lt Colonel H Scotney 5 March 1956, held in Salvation Army Archives, Melbourne.

<sup>26</sup> *Observer*, 16 September 1882; letter from Percival Dale to Lt Colonel H Scotney 5 March 1956.

<sup>27</sup> *Argus*, 12 August 1882 and 26 August 1882.

<sup>28</sup> Dale, *Salvation Chariot*, 7. Note that there is no evidence to corroborate Robert Sandall's assertion that Unsworth had been sent to Melbourne by Booth to start the Salvation Army in Melbourne. As far as Booth was concerned, Unsworth had been removed from officership and would have approved no such appointment. Sandall, 10, 247; Letter from Percival Dale to Robert Sandall, 7 May 1947, held Salvation Army Archives, Melbourne. Barbara Bolton also places Unsworth in Melbourne at the time. Bolton, 17.

until early 1883, travelling with Sutherland to Sydney.<sup>29</sup> He was officially a soldier, but was referred to as Captain Unsworth by the local Salvationists and newspapers. Promising to return soon, he subsequently returned to Britain, to a warm welcome from one of his old corps in Hull, where reportedly thousands turned out to welcome him back and carried him through the streets on their shoulders.<sup>30</sup> He became an officer again in 1885, eventually reaching the rank of Commissioner, and many reports give this date as his first appointment as an officer, presumably to avoid acknowledging why he left the first time.

Unsworth's story indicates one issue in historical research; history is about people and people have relatives who may not wish to have their family secrets widely reported. Isaac Unsworth's daughter, Lieutenant-Colonel Madge Unsworth, was vehemently opposed to his early history appearing in Dale's book on the history of the Salvation Army in Australia. The omissions were to respect her wishes.<sup>31</sup>

#### **IV. Implications of this Discovery**

The method of the Barkers' arrival in Melbourne is not significant in historical terms. There has been little analysis of the role of serendipitous events or the use of personal connections in the establishment of the Salvation Army in new locations. Academic historians are unlikely to be concerned with the seemingly minor correction of the Barkers' ship being intended to arrive in Melbourne, rather than a dock strike preventing them landing in Adelaide.

However, as both a researcher and a person of faith who has been brought up in the Salvation Army, the discrepancy between received collective memory and primary documentation creates a personal dilemma that cannot be easily resolved. The story of the Barkers' unanticipated arrival in Melbourne is often cited to inspire mission and reliance on the providence of God. Salvation Army officers and soldiers are encouraged to see that even though unexpected events

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<sup>29</sup> *Observer*, 16 September 1882.

<sup>30</sup> *War Cry* (Adelaide), 20 April 1883.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Percival Dale to Madge Unsworth, 22 July 1947; letter from Percival Dale to Lt Colonel H Scotney, 5 March 1956; letter from Percival Dale to Robert Sandall, 7 May 1947. To avoid the difficulty Sandall gives the impression that Unsworth's service was unbroken. Sandall, 247. Note that Madge Unsworth has since been 'promoted to glory.'

might appear to thwart God's mission, God may have planned such setbacks to create new opportunities to spread the message of forgiveness. Like the Barkers, those who have entered God's service can trust God to achieve success out of apparent disaster. It is a very useful, loved story.

Should I simply ignore my discovery that there had been no unplanned arrival in Melbourne and therefore no need to place unexpected trust in God? Would this reduce the seemingly miraculous start of the Salvation Army in Melbourne to merely being opportunistic? Would this affect how Victorian Salvationists viewed the providence of God? After all, the findings were the result of procrastination, rather than serious research. They bear no real connection to my thesis, are based on circumstantial evidence and may even end up being cut from the final version. Is it better to leave the accepted version of the beginning of the Salvation Army in Melbourne as an inspirational story, even if a not totally accurate one? Who would know but me? As an academic researcher should my primary concern be the accurate reporting of history, rather than what effect such discoveries have on other people? Can I realistically separate my responsibilities as a researcher from my pastoral concern for fellow believers?

Obviously, I decided to release this corrected version of events. Apart from any other academic consideration, there is the practical problem that anyone with access to TROVE can do the same checking as I did. While the spiritual implications of the new account have no place in my thesis, as a Salvationist I hope that the real story will also inspire mission. I feel that it shows even more clearly the providence of God, in what could be regarded an act of prevenient grace, God paving the way for the Barkers' mission in Melbourne. Captain Unsworth felt prompted by God to a mission of meeting passengers arriving on ships. People of influence supported the Barkers and opened doors to allow thousands to be brought into the family of God. Would the Melbourne branch of the Salvation Army have started without this perfect storm of circumstances? Undoubtedly. Captain Sutherland in Adelaide had already been investigating the possibility of branching out into Victoria.<sup>32</sup> Barker may have arrived with a pre-existing plan to branch out into new Australasian locations. There had been reports of a group calling themselves 'The Salvation Army' in Melbourne, though by now they

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<sup>32</sup> *War Cry* (London), 29 December 1881; 30 November 1882; Dale, *Salvation Cavalcade*, 59.



had disappeared from records. There were probably scores of immigrant Salvationists in Melbourne that when found could be conscripted to the cause. However, it would not have happened as quickly or as successfully without God's providential care.

The tension between academic discipline and personal faith has also forced me to think more deeply about the significance of the event to my argument that the Salvation Army in South Australia developed differently to its sister colony. The unexpected welcome of the Barkers in Melbourne led to the Australasian headquarters being established in Victoria, rather than South Australia, and this had a considerable effect on the relationship between territorial and divisional leadership. Far from interfering with academic rigour, personal convictions have prompted new insights.

## **V. The Role of Ordinary People in Mission**

There are a number of other implications from this revised story, relating both to academic research and the training of those involved in Christian service. The first relates to what we use to inspire involvement in mission. I am something of a Titanic buff. I love the stories of courage and faith. I find it ironic that the words, 'Lady, God himself could not sink this ship' were said by a baggage handler to Sylvia Caldwell, a missionary's wife returning from Thailand. I find very moving the story of John Harper, a young Scottish minister who urged that the lifeboats be filled with the women, children and unsaved first. He refused to accept a place in a lifeboat because he knew he was going up, not down. Having initially survived the sinking, he witnessed to those in the water and urged them to be saved. His final convert reported that he continued this until he sank beneath the waves. So it is perhaps no surprise that I am not a fan of James Cameron's movie. I found it historically inaccurate and the main characters unbelievable. With so many good real stories why did Cameron feel the need to make one up? I suspect he didn't think them interesting enough and thought they lacked a certain punch.

There is the temptation to do the same thing with mission. We don't think that ordinary stories are sufficient, so we have to embellish them, give them that extra 'oomph.' The picture of the Barkers arriving alone and friendless on the docks of Williamstown but triumphing over all obstacles can make an inspiring story to those who are facing their own difficulties. However, an

overemphasis on the extraordinary can also be a deterrent to those who are less certain of their call to mission or their ability to carry it out. It gives the impression that mission is only performed by capable, talented, spiritually-blessed professionals, when the real story is that God uses ordinary, everyday people to do extraordinary things.

Those who are mentioned in this article were not particularly well-connected, educated, talented or even well-grounded in the faith. They were ordinary people – a boot factory supervisor, a compositor and a sailor. They included a man who made a serious enough mistake that he was dismissed from full-time Christian service. What made them extraordinary was their willingness to be used by God to grow the Church. The amended story should give encouragement to us that the Barkers were not exceptional human beings without whom Salvation Army work in Victoria would not have started and whose actions could not possibly be emulated by us mere mortals.

It is significant that Salvation Army work in South Australia was started by enthusiastic laypeople, not officers with a plan and a strategy. The Adelaide Corps was already well-established by the time officers arrived. The ‘professionals’ regulated work that was already occurring and provided direction. They didn’t do it all themselves, even when they arrived, but conscripted local talent to help them. They were prepared to take risks with people who might disappoint them, behave less than ideally, or even fail.

The world has changed. Officers now have to contend with ever-increasing rules, regulations, legal responsibilities and liabilities. However, even that cannot account for a decreasing involvement in mission by laypeople. I suspect that the Salvation Army has developed a culture that feels it has too much to lose to take risks, combined with a lack of expectation that anyone will be prepared to become involved in matters outside of filling a pew. In the nineteenth century, brand new converts were expected to play their part in the life of the corps; in today’s corps very little is expected from even seasoned members. I hope I am overstating the case. As an insider, I fear I am not.

## **VI. Research as Mission**

This paper is intended to raise questions about the nature of mission, rather than to answer them. The circumstances of James and Alice Barker’s arrival in Melbourne are a minor element in the

history of the Salvation Army. However, it demonstrates the tension between academic and religious expectations and raises questions of whether researchers should be mindful of how research in church history – or for that matter, research into any aspect of Christian thought and practice – might affect other people and therefore the importance of being cautious in how we present the correction of long-held beliefs.

The usual expectation of a post-graduate student is merely to produce a thesis which will pass. However, this assumes that apart from the obvious requirements to avoid plagiarism and to ensure the ethical treatment of test subjects, research is an activity that can be conducted in isolation. Nevertheless, the students themselves will often have additional concerns, and these will not be restricted to religious convictions. Given total objectivity in academic research is desirable but improbable it would be helpful to post-graduate students if this issue was raised in research methods subjects.

Far from happening away from the public eye, research is a profoundly social activity.<sup>33</sup> For Christians, how we behave while conducting research and completing post-doctoral work is important. Behaving appropriately is a reflection of a life lived in holiness and part of our Christian witness. It is an area where Christians should stand out as having a higher standard than those around them. Christian theology students have an additional responsibility to their fellow believers. We are required to consider the spiritual impact of our research upon the faith of others. This includes non-academic brethren who may have cherished convictions that underpin their understanding of Christian belief and mission. So how I relate the story of the Barkers is just as important as the story I tell. In this case I have been able to resolve the tension. There will be cases where this will be more difficult.

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<sup>33</sup> A premise that underpins the ethics section of Wayne C Booth, Gregory G Colomb & Joseph M Williams, *The Craft of Research* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 285-287.