

# Prologue

*Lewes, June 1891*

The morning sun shone brilliantly over the nearby valleys as three blue-suited uniformed men and a woman were marched up the rugged cobblestones from the railway station towards the prison. Out of every door people came to watch, whilst excited children swaggered alongside with exaggerated steps. Some grim-faced adults, outrage and anger marring their faces, jeered and spat at the shackled, straight and stiff-backed little group with their military bearing who, strangely, appeared to be happy.

At the prison a crowd of well-wishers had gathered. The prisoners walked up the gravel path towards the big strong gates. Twice they turned and waved their caps to the crowd then fell on their knees and started to pray. Briefly, they raised their arms towards the sky, as warders looked on, before passing through a massive outer gate into a gloomy tunnel-like passage, with another inner gate at the end, then across a portion of the prison yard to the reception area. After the woman was separated, the men were unshackled, stripped naked, given a cold bath and had their hair closely cropped. In coarse jackets, trousers and pill box hats, freely stamped with broad arrows to denote crown property, they were taken to their cells. The next morning, lying on their wooden bunks, they heard the faint sound of singing and a band playing outside the prison walls. Each day of their 30-day sentence, they were to hear the same sound.

On release they were met by an enthusiastic flag-waving crowd singing songs. Later, they returned to Eastbourne railway station to a tumultuous reception from hundreds of men, women, children and brass bands. Why the welcome? Who were these soldiers and what was their crime? In the strictest sense of the word, they were not soldiers

but members of the Salvation Army – soldiers of Christ – who had been imprisoned for marching and playing music on a Sunday. As such, martyrdom and the baiting of Christians marching along a dusty road was the history and symbolism which gave them strength to continue. Blind to the insults, aware of the presence of each other, finding strength and comfort from their insignificant foursome against the mob. A few against the multitude. Soldiers preaching love not hate.

Today, the Army is respected world-wide and one of the biggest and most comprehensive welfare organisations in Britain. However, in the early days they were opposed by another little-known army: the Skeleton Army. This book is about the struggle between the two, of which those Salvationists, sent to Lewes prison, were a part. The places selected illustrate different aspects of the rioting which broke out during the Salvation Army's evangelical crusade in the late nineteenth century.

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