

Written by Godfrey Hugh William BRAMHALL

## **George H BRAMHALL 1866-1947 and his wife Eliza A WASHBURN 1866-1928**

My paternal grandfather, the eldest child of John Henry BRAMHALL and his wife Ellen MARSDEN, born at 40, Fawcett Street, North Sheffield in 1866.

At that time John Henry was a saw-maker but by 1879 he had moved to Hull and had become an 'insurance manager.' The family later moved to Stoke-on-Trent where John Henry continued his insurance work but also kept a toy shop.

George Henry's obituary states that brought up in 'the established church' but his youngest daughter Ellen felt sure that they were all Methodists. However, her claim that, as a boy, her father 'used to sing in the church choir' suggests Anglicanism rather than Methodism.

I know nothing concerning my grandfather's early life or education but everything I have discovered about him indicates that he had considerable ability with figures and considerable skill in music both as an instrumentalist and as a composer. There can be no doubt that he had inherited these gifts from his father who, as we have seen, abandoned the steel trade for an occupation requiring some facility with figures and had learnt the by no means easy technique of transferring musical ideas to paper. I would like to now how and where he had acquired this knowledge.

Late in life he composed much choral music for Salvation Army choirs (nine items being published) in addition to training and conducting an Army choir in Stoke-on-Trent. Although his compositions cannot be described as great music they are, nevertheless, competently done and well suited for their evangelical purpose.

But although father and son shared mathematical and musical interests they did not see eye-to-eye on religious matters. George Henry's teenage involvement with the Salvation Army met with parental displeasure. In the end his declared intention of 'enlisting full-time' so enraged his father that George was obliged to leave home. In fairness it must be recorded that years later they were reconciled and John Henry himself joined the ranks as a humble 'Private'.

George Henry found employment in Wolverhampton and it was from there he was sent to the Officers' Training Centre at Clapton, East London, in 1887.

At that time aspiring officers seldom received more than four months training before starting their evangelical work in a hostile world. In the light of what I had learnt about the mobility of officers, especially at the beginning of their careers, I was surprised to find no mention of any early appointments until the Gazette section of the

War Cry' recorded the following on September 28th 1889 – at the very least eighteen months after the completion of his training:

*Lieutenant Bramhall of the Training Garrison Headquarters to be Scribe with the title of Captain.*

Two inferences can be drawn from this: first, that after completing his meagre preparation he had been retained on the staff of the Training Garrison and second, that his undoubted facility with figures and accountancy had already been spotted.

Family tradition and my grandparents' obituaries agreed that they had both spent eventful years in three Scandinavian countries but precise details were scanty and sometimes contradictory. Fortunately research in the Army's archives in London, Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen has produced a wealth of material, which has enabled me to reconstruct their careers in more detail than I had ever thought possible.

At this point it seems necessary, for the better understanding of my grandparents story, to say something of the origins of the Salvation Army both here and in Finland.

It is a matter of history that the evangelical innovations of the Methodist preacher, William Booth, sprang from the total failure of both established and non-conformist churches to make contact with the vast numbers of folk who had, for various reasons, rejected any kind of organized religion. Booth's references to 'darkest England' encapsulates his conviction that Britain was a missionary area just as much as 'darkest Africa'.

But William Booth was not alone in realising the need for an unconventional approach to the problems of poverty, deprivation and amorality.

In Finland a similar, free-church, evangelical movement had sprung to life - the initiative having been taken by a group of very privileged and wealthy people led by Constantin Boije, Hedwig von Haartman, Louise af Forselles and Countess Karin Ouchtomsky.

Boije came from a very influential family. While studying at the Military Academy in St. Petersburg he experienced a religious conversion, which caused him to abandon his studies and resign his commission.

By virtue of his aristocratic birth he had, since 1883, been a member of the hereditary upper house of the Finnish parliament and had successfully introduced a bill legalising meetings held by religious bodies other than the State Church.

During visits to Sweden and Switzerland Boije and his friends become familiar with the work of the Salvation Army and realized that, by comparison, their own efforts were woefully inadequate.

They asked William Booth to absorb their organization into the Salvation Army and by April 1889 three of them – Boije, Haartman, and Forselles had come to London to be instructed in the Army's evangelical techniques. Haartman and Forselles

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went to the women's Training Centre at Norwood (at that time under the direction of William Booths' daughter Lucy) while Constantin Boije went to Clapton.

It seems certain that grandfather's Scandinavian travels must have been the direct result of Boije's stay at Clapton. Knowing that he would soon be returning to Finland Boije was, no doubt, on the lookout for the assistance of somebody who might combine several gifts with would be useful in evangelical work.

Grandfather must have filled the bill very adequately. The records of his transfer to Finland come from four, slightly conflicting sources:

- *November 8th 1889 is considered the birthday of the Salvation Army in Finland. On that day three officers who had returned from England, together with an Englishman, conducted the first meetings on Finnish soil.*  
Elin Olsoni - a Finnish officer
- *When work had been in progress for about a week a necessary and welcome reinforcement arrived from England in the person of Captain Bramhall who skilfully played several instruments. He was to be responsible for book-keeping at Headquarters as well as helping with other work...*  
Extract from one of a series of articles in the Finnish 'War Cry' 1939
- *Captain (later Lt. Colonel) George Bramhall arrived from England soon after the opening to help the little group of officers with music and book-keeping.*  
History of the Salvation Army" Vol. 4 page 48 by Archibald Wiggins.
- *Captain George Bramhall arrived on the scene two weeks after the inaugural meetings.*  
Jaakko Hinkka of Finnish archives

By a majority of three to one we must, therefore, accept that George Henry arrived after the 'first shots had been fired' but this does not shake my conviction that grandfather's 'posting' had been arranged before Boije left London.

The notion that an appeal for help could have been made and that, in response to it, grandfather could have travelled to Finland all in the space of two weeks does not seem feasible. If Grandfather was not present at the inaugural meetings on November 8th then the 'reinforcement' was, surely, already on the way.

Constantin Boije's daughter Helmy recalled

*Naturally he (George Henry) had to learn the language (Swedish) first. We children became good friends with Captain Bramhall at once. When we discovered that he reminded us of our uncle Adolf we started to call him 'Little Ado' and he always remained our favourite.*

*Since he had to learn Swedish and father was anxious that we should learn English 'Little Ado' used to place a large number of objects on the dining-room table, place*

*himself solemnly at the head of the table with us children around him and the lesson would begin. 'Little Ado' picked up an ink-stand - we repeated*

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*the word after him and then said it in Swedish for him. That's how our language classes went on. Sometimes we had to learn an English chorus and when the lesson was over we had a 'hallehujah' march around the table. 'Little Ado' went first with his cornet and we followed after in our little bonnets and waving our red, Army handkerchiefs while we all sang at the tops of our voices.*

Finnish 'War Cry' of July 28th 1939

This delightful account of a parlour pastime combining the elements of 'Kim's Game' with 'look and say' reading techniques must surely conceal the strenuous but more private efforts which Grandfather must have been making to learn Swedish - the official language of Finland.

But if his tuition had been confined to childish, though helpful, games he could never have acquired the vocabulary required in double-entry bookkeeping (a procedure not confined to the manipulation of figures) let alone the idiomatic skill to deal with such abstractions as 'sin', 'repentance' and 'salvation'.

In the matter of learning a foreign language there is nothing so stimulating as being 'thrown in at the deep end' but I am tempted to think that grandfather's first lessons in Swedish were not those so amusingly described by Helmy Boije.

If I am right in thinking that grandfather's appointment to Finland had been requested and approved during Constantin Boije's stay London it is distinctly possible that the Swedish lessons started there and then.

By March 1890 another three 'overseas' officers had arrived in Helsinki, Eleanor Kelly and Eliza Ann Washburn both from England and Erik Leidzen from Sweden. The two women had been working in Sweden since 1886 and would, therefore have already possessed a good command the language.

Within two years grandfather had married Eliza Washburn and Erik Leidzen had married Eleanor Kelly. All four remained firm friends for the rest of their lives. When Erik Leidzen died very suddenly, and at a relatively early age, my grandparents cared for his three children Karen, Erik junior and Maggie.

### **Eliza Ann Washburn**

She was the sixth child of Joseph Washburn and his wife Ann Keeling and was born in 1866 at Trowse Lane, Wednesbury, Staffordshire. Joseph was a general labourer from Wilmcote in Warwickshire. The Keelings were all potters from Longton.

Although Elise's home was in Wednesbury she joined the Salvation Army in 1884 from Northwich in Cheshire which prompts the question 'What was she doing there?'

After the customary brief period of training she served at Northwich, Walton-on-the-Naze and North Walsham as Lieutenant to Captain

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Eleanor Kelly who had joined the Army in 1883 from Watford.

In August 1886 these two young women were sent to Sweden. The Stockholm archives record that in the following two years they served in Linköping, Kristianstad, Koping, Karlstad and Sala.

By August 1888 they had parted company and Eliza, single handed, had started the Army's work in Karlshamn before moving on to Norrköping. This breathless itinerary fills me with admiration for the stamina and zeal demonstrated by these young women.

By February 1890 Eliza had joined forces with Eleanor Kelly once again. In a letter to 'The War Cry' Miss Kelly reported that Eliza was with her at Kristinehamn and 'was resting' there, which presumably meant that she was enjoying a brief holiday or a period of recuperation.

In that same month they were both sent to Helsinki where, as we have noted, they both met their future husbands. However, for the sake of objectivity, it must be recorded that the official reason for their journey across the Baltic Sea was to assist Hedwig von Haartman who had just been put in charge of the Army's work and had been taken ill.

But their stay in Finland was brief and by August 1890 Eliza had resumed her 'whistle-stop tour' of Sweden with appointments at Nybro (March 1891), Vimmerby (July 1891), Nas (December 1891) and Kristinehamn (a return visit).

During this period Eliza, together with some of her colleagues, fell foul of the civil authorities in the district of Kalmar in south-west Sweden and spent some time in prison for conducting meetings contrary to local bye-laws.

The Swedish archives say that in those early, intolerant years about a third of the officers suffered imprisonment, the most frequent offence being that of holding meetings after eight o'clock in the evening!

According to family tradition grandmother spent the time making match-boxes. Official sources record that she and her friends emerged from their brief ordeal 'hale and hearty and in hallelujah mood!'

### **Opposition to the Army in Finland**

Anyone who reads the story of the Army's early days will know that their work met with verbal and often physical opposition. In Scandinavia it was no different but whereas in many countries the trouble often started with the 'mindless aggro' of hooligans in Finland opposition appears to have been fomented by the establishment. As early as December 1889 no less a person than Bishop G.

Johansson had produced, with precipitate haste, a book of one hundred and sixty-two pages attacking the Salvation Army. He asserted that-  
*Once having established itself in Finland the Salvation Army would try to push into Russia and would assuredly cause misunderstanding... and disturb the religious harmony between those two countries.*

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He went on to demand that the Finnish authorities should act and the journal of the Finnish Free Churches, 'Evangelick-Kristendom' quickly echoed his sentiments. It seems that the Bishop had some temporary success for when the Army leaders applied for legal recognition as a non-conformist organisation they were refused, thus putting their activities outside the law.

With a century of hindsight it mildly amusing think that such sinister motives should have been attributed to the Army's missionary work but perhaps the privileged and aristocratic backgrounds of the founder-officers led the Bishop to suspect that evangelism was being used as a cover for political activity.

It also seems possible that, as the spokesman of the established church, Bishop Johansson was still resentful of Constantin Boije's parliamentary success in winning a degree of toleration for the non-conformists and viewed Boije's still more radical activities with a jaundiced eye!

George Henry Bramhall's Itinerary

Although grandfather's work in Finland must be seen against this back-ground of opposition he did not, as far as I know, suffer any great personal hardship, as did many Finnish officers.

This is a summary of the record of his movements as supplied by the Helsinki archives:

- November 1889 George arrived in Helsingfors (Helsinki)
- March 1890 George travelled to Porvo (Borga) with Hedwig von Haartman to initiate the work there.
- March 1890 Arrival of Eleanor Kelly, Eliza Washburn and Erik Leidzen from Sweden.
- March 1890 The Helsinki Archives report the welcome given to the above and mentions that Kelly and Washburn played and sang at this welcome-meeting.
- June 1890 A band of seven players was formed of which George and Erik were members.
- Nov and Dec 1890 George was in charge of the Helsinki mission.
- Christmas 1890 George visited Pori.
- February 1891 George transferred to Sweden.

On arrival in Sweden grandfather was employed at the Swedish Headquarters in Stockholm before embarking on a long period of purely evangelical work, which must have proved the most exacting and strenuous he had encountered so far.

- February 1891 At Stockholm H.Q.
- December 1891 At Anal
- August 1892 At Skara. Here he and Eliza Washburn were married. Ceremony recorded by British Consul in Gothenburg.

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- December 1892 At Smedje-backen
- May 1893 At Falun. Daughter Eva born here May 2nd 1893
- January 1894 At Sodertalje
- August 1894 Hudiksvall
- Daughter Katherine born at Falun November 15th 1894
- January 1895 Vasteras
- July 1895 Oskarshamn. My father, William born here May 12th 1896.
- July 1896 Luleo.
- May 1897 Sodertalje. Daughter Ellen born here September 23rd 1897.

Letters written by grandfather and preserved in Stockholm show that from 1897 until the family went back to Denmark in April 1899 he was working, once again at the Headquarters in Stockholm.

My Aunt Ellen told me that her parent's marriage did not take place without a certain amount of difficulty.

It was, and still is, the custom in the Salvation Army for officers to apply to their superiors for permission to marry, since they are all initially regarded as being 'married' to the 'war against the devil and his works.'

George's application was, at first, refused on account of Eliza's indifferent health.

With a touch theatrical bravado George declared that 'if he couldn't marry Eliza within the Army, then would marry her outside it!' The Army relented but only after a year had passed in which Eliza received a special course of treatment suggested by a kindly Swedish doctor who, out of admiration for the Army's work, refused all payment.

In the light of the official record of Eliza's movements between her return from Finland in the summer of 1890 and her marriage in 1892 it is difficult to see how any protracted medical treatment could have been fitted in. Nevertheless, the wedding did take place and the punishing schedule continued.

'My mother' said Ellen, 'always had to fight against a weak body but she had a wonderfully strong spirit.'

But nine changes of home and four children in five years must have taxed Eliza's admirably 'strong spirit' to the very limit. The fact that both Eva and Katherine were born in Falun leads me to suspect that perhaps Eliza was forced to 'stay put' for a short time while George continued his work alone.

For some reason which neither my father nor his younger sister could explain the births of the four children were not registered with any of the British consuls in Sweden. It was not until 1942 that George Henry was persuaded that this omission was going to cause difficulties.

He did his best to rectify this irregularity by making a statutory declaration before a solicitor so that each of his children should have an acceptable document concerned their birth and parentage.

The Copenhagen records show that *Ensign and Mrs. George Henry Bramhall*

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*were transferred to Denmark from Sweden on April 18th 1899.*

Of grandfather's seven years in Denmark the first five were spent working the Finance Department in Copenhagen. For the last two years he was the Divisional Officer for the district of Funen.

This second appointment, together with the Swedish itinerary, provides a sharp reminder that, whatever their specialist interests may have been, all officers were expected to take their full share in the fundamental task of evangelism

Clearly the family enjoyed a more settled existence in Denmark with only one intermediate move in seven years before they returned to England. My father and his sister differed as to the date of their return home.

A search in the London records failed to produce this important date but, ironically, a letter to Copenhagen produced this quite specific reply:-

*Your grandfather left Denmark for England in July 1906, taking up an appointment as Divisional Secretary in Cambridge on July 26th 1906.*

While their parents were establishing some sort of a home for them at Milton Road, Cambridge, the four children went to stay with their grandparents in Stoke-on-Trent.

Both my father and his sister insisted that this was a very difficult time for all concerned as none of the children could speak a word of English. This seems like an exaggeration for it is difficult to believe that English parents would not have spoken their mother tongue in the home, whatever the linguistic necessities of their evangelical work, and especially as they knew they would all return to England.

Nevertheless it is certain that they had all acquired some command of Swedish or Danish, which was never totally forgotten. One of my early memories is of the aunts singing Scandinavian carols at family parties and, judging by the reactions, sometimes being extremely rude to one another in a foreign tongue!

In view of George Henry's musical ability it is not surprising to learn that he was active in musical activities in all three Scandinavian countries. Wherever he went he seems to have organised and played in instrumental ensembles and found time to give his four children a modest musical education.



My father was a very good trombonist and his three sisters could all read vocal music and play the guitar competently.

I recall that Aunt Eva was much amused to find how the wheel of musical fashion had turned full circle and that, in her retirement, she had to re-string her neglected guitar and teach the eager youngsters of the Romford Salvation Army Youth Club how to strum the simple tonic, dominant and sub-dominant harmonies that were 'de rigour' - in the fifties and sixties.

George Henry did not stay long in Cambridge By 1908 it was clear that he had been allowed to follow his bent in accountancy matters and was employed at the Army's London headquarters. Consequently the family moved to 23, Hatherley Road, Walthamstow in order to be within commuting distance of

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Victoria Street.

By 1917 grandfather had risen to the rank of Major and had been appointed an Auditor, a responsible role in the course of which he travelled all over the world.

It was not possible for Eliza Ann to accompany him and she was forced to lead a somewhat lonely life in the various London homes she occupied with her daughters Eva, Katherine and Ellen until her death at Leytonstone in 1928.

George Henry retired in 1932 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and spent the rest of his days at 60, Parkside Avenue, Romford. He died in 1947.

### **George and Eliza's children**

- Eva became a Salvation Army Officer and spent most of her life on the staff of the Salvation Army Assurance Company. She died at Romford in 1969.
- Katherine was an invalid all her life and was, sadly, never able to earn her own living. She died at Romford in 1965.
- My father, William, married Henrietta Day Pigott in 1917. He ended a successful business career as managing director of the Margros Company of Woking, a firm which manufactured artists' materials. He was also a founder-member of the Educational Exhibitors Association. He died in Exeter in 1981.
- Ellen married Alex Deans, son of Colonel Deans of the Salvation Army. Alex died in 1961. Ellen now lives with her daughter's family in Felixstow.

Grandfather's homes after his return from Denmark

- 1906-1908 Milton House, Milton Road, Cambridge.
- 1908-1911 23, Hatherley Road, Walthamstow.
- 1911-1922 45, Howard Road, Walthamstow.
- 1922-1925 15, Belgrave Road, Leyton.
- 1925-1929 63, Poppleton Road, Leytonstone.
- 1929-1947 60, Parkside Avenue, Romford.

*Sources*

*Parish Registers of Longton, Wednesbury, Staffs.*

*Census Returns for Sheffield, Hull and Wednesbury - 1871 and 1881 Consular Marriage Records.*

*Salvation Army archives, London, Helsinki, Stockholm and Copenhagen.*

*The British 'War Cry'*

*The Finnish 'War Cry'*