Not very long after Queen Victoria came to the throne, a boy called William Booth took a job as a pawnbroker's apprentice in the city of Nottingham.

A pawnbroker is a shop keeper who takes a valuable object like a watch or a piece of furniture from someone who needs cash and lends them money while the pawnbroker keeps the object. Later the person can buy their object back for a little more than the pawnbroker lent them. In Victorian times it was usually very poor people who needed the services of a pawnbroker.

It wasn't long before young William Booth began to realise just what miserable lives many of these poor people led.

Often men were so depressed by their circumstances that they began pawning household objects so that they could buy alcohol to make themselves forget the hopelessness of their lives.

William was a religious boy who went to church regularly. He loved going to open-air meetings to listen to the great preachers and, when he was seventeen, he decided that he would become a preacher.

But then, William became dissatisfied with his own church. He thought that his fellow Christians were too self-satisfied, too concerned with saving their own souls and not interested in saving the souls of others less fortunate than themselves.

He believed that they didn't do enough to help the desperately poor people that he saw around him every day.

By now William Booth felt that he had something really important that he had to do. He left to live in London and joined up with other Christians who went about the city preaching.

Then he was asked to tour the whole country preaching his sermons.

As the years went by, William Booth gathered around him a group of helpers and set up several soup kitchens. These were places where the poorest people could get a free meal.

A magazine was published to spread his ideas.

William married a lady called Catherine and together they determined to help the poor, the destitute and the hungry.

In the East End of London people got used to seeing William's new missionaries on street corners. They wore red and black uniforms and played cheerful hymns on their brass instruments.
Because William spoke so often about salvation – being saved – and because his followers were known as soldiers fighting against wickedness, they became known as the Salvation Army.

William Booth became the Salvation Army's first general and Catherine was known as the 'Mother of The Salvation Army'. William's helpers became colonels and majors, just like the ranks of real armies. But, this army was different to all other armies. Its members were there to fight poverty and nobody would suffer from its attacks.

William preached to the poor and Catherine spoke to the wealthy asking for their help to care for the poor. Thousands of people helped William. Rich men gave him money to help in his work of caring for the poor. Branches of the Army were set up all over Britain.

Not everyone was pleased to see the Salvation Army grow. Some people were shocked by the brass bands and the merry hymns which were so different to what many Victorians were used to.

Some said that feeding the poor was wrong as it discouraged them from looking after themselves and anyway, it was just a way of bribing them to attend church.

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One hundred years after William Booth began his army, the Salvation Army helps homeless people and provides meals for rough sleepers. It helps the elderly and those in trouble through family breakdown, unemployment, poverty and drug and alcohol misuse.

A rough sleeper is a person who, for whatever reason, has no home and sleeps in a tent or a makeshift shelter out in the open.