



Salvation Army International Heritage Centre

Darkest England Gazette Research Guide

Maternity and child care



THE NURSERY AT GROVE HOUSE, CLAPTON, LONDON, N.E.

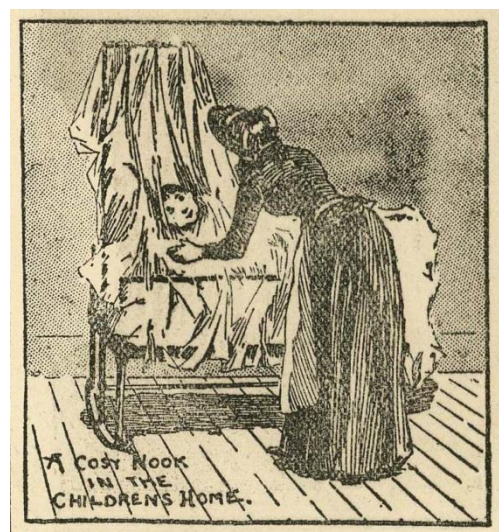
Children were a priority in The Salvation Army's Social Work. The organisation perceived that poverty and social injustice had a significant impact on children, who were powerless to resist or change their circumstances. Children in poverty suffered hunger, cold, ill health, and accidents, and child mortality was high in deprived areas in the 1890s. The Salvation Army stepped in to offer food and care for children to alleviate some of this suffering. It also recognised that relieving families of some of the burden of child care freed time and money that the family could use to gain more security. Child care was a particularly significant aspect of the 'Rescue Work', which included maternity care and support for unmarried mothers, and the 'Slum Work'.

Maternity and infant care

Part of what was known as The Salvation Army's 'Rescue Work' involved support for unmarried mothers. These women, who could be ostracised by their employers and communities, were received into so-called 'Rescue Homes' where they were offered support through their pregnancy and the delivery of their child. Very often, The Salvation Army undertook part of the care for the baby to enable the mother to find work to support herself and her child.

Because this work was sometimes considered controversial, it was felt to be especially important to defend it against accusations of institutional neglect or misconduct. This is illustrated by 'The Case of Phoebe Atkins', the lead article in **issue 16**. The case concerned a baby born in a Rescue Home. The mother had subsequently found work, left the home, and placed her child in the care of an independent nurse. While in the nurse's care, the child died of malnutrition. The Salvation Army was anxious to prove that it had done everything it could to support the mother and child, but could take no responsibility for what had happened to the baby in the nurse's care. It emphasised that it was impossible for such a tragedy to have occurred within one of its own institutions, because 'a properly-qualified medical man gives most careful oversight to the Babies' Home, sees all the babies frequently, and is always sent for in any case of illness'. To find out more about Mothers' and Babies' Homes, see our [research blog](#) on [Spring Grove House](#), a 'home for mothers and infants' in Leeds.

Nurseries or 'Babies' Homes' could be incorporated within Rescue Homes, but The Salvation Army also ran independent day nurseries and crèches as well as Children's Homes for children who had no parents or guardians to look after them. Examples of different Babies' and Children's Homes appear in articles from London ('Our Babies' Home', **issue 16**), Toronto ('Canadian Babies', **issue 48**), and San Francisco ('The Children's Home San Francisco', **issue 24**).



The article 'Bristol Creche' in **issue 38** provides a good example of how The Salvation Army supported women in poverty in combining work and parenthood. It advocated good, regulated, and accountable childcare, because:

A competent authority has recently asserted that one great cause of the high death-rate amongst infants is the lack of attention they receive, consequent on being left to the tender mercies of careless nurses, or 'minders,' whilst the parents are at work.



While cases like that of Phoebe Atkins's child served to prove this point, the article made very clear that the placing of children with such 'minders' was not the result of careless parenting, but rather of a lack of options for mothers who were unable to leave their child in safer care while they were at work. Therefore, to 'the widow who strives to earn a decent living as a charwoman, but who cannot afford a nursemaid, a well-conducted creche [sic] is an unmixed blessing'. For the price of threepence a day, the Bristol crèche looked after and fed children from 8am, also providing clothing for the children at low prices where necessary. The article stated that, for this price, the crèche was able to finance itself, and it was extremely popular with working parents.

Child care and the Slum Work

The Salvation Army established itself in urban slum neighbourhoods early in its history with the 'Cellar, Gutter and Garret Brigade' whose efforts became known as the 'Slum Work' within the Darkest England Scheme. Officers engaged in this work offered material as well spiritual support for the residents of these deprived areas who lived in acute poverty and were frequently subject to precarious employment as well as accommodation. The impact of these conditions, especially on children, are described in articles such as 'The Sorrows of One-Roomed London' in **issue 34** and 'The Children of the Slums' in **issue 39**.

One prominent social concern in the late nineteenth century were the evident effects of the damp, unhygienic, and overcrowded conditions in slum housing on the health and wellbeing of residents, and particularly children. Many contemporary charitable schemes worked to organise day trips for children from urban slum areas to give them the benefit of a cleaner and healthier environment as well as the enjoyment of a holiday. One sea-side outing to South Shields arranged by The Salvation Army for children living in poverty in Newcastle is the subject of an account entitled 'Great Slum Children's Treat' in **issue 5**.

A very popular feature of The Salvation Army Slum Work were the so-called 'Farthing Breakfasts' held in several deprived urban areas, but especially in London. For the price of a farthing (a quarter of a penny) children could begin their day with a filling breakfast, which they could eat in a communal space or take home to share with other family members. Regular articles on the great demand for these breakfasts encouraged donations to the dedicated 'Children's Breakfast Fund', and the articles were accompanied by a table acknowledging donations already received. These articles were lavishly illustrated with appealing pictures of hungry or contented children, probably to encourage further donations. In **issue 32**, for instance, 'An Expectant Trio' of small, hungry siblings are portrayed awaiting a breakfast.



Accessing the *Darkest England Gazette*:

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