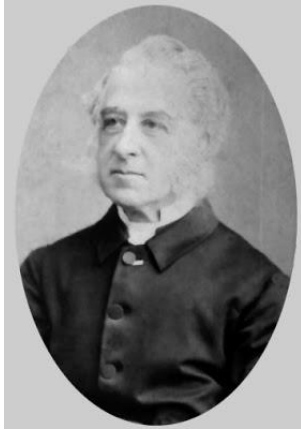


What the Rev. Cruse really thought about

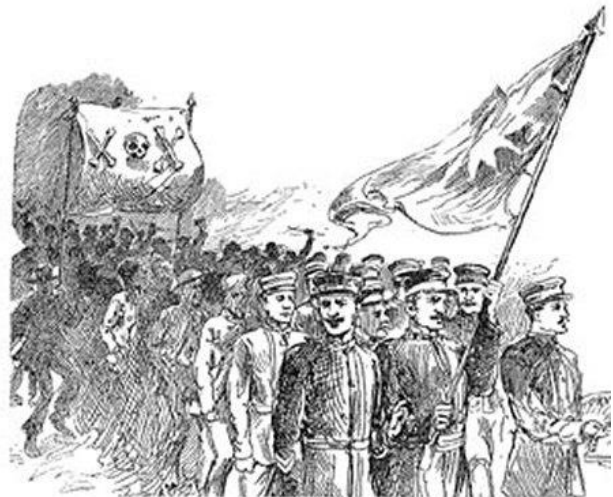
The Salvation Army

When Ann Feloy wrote Worthing's Community Play, 'The Just Cause,' she focused it around the notorious ant-Salvation Army riots that gripped the town in 1884. The play was staged at Christ Church in June 2014 with the central character being the Rev. Francis Cruse, vicar of Christ Church in 1884. A lot was known about Cruse through his homilies in the Christ Church Parish Magazine. We learned that he was a keen supporter of the temperance cause and a committed advocate of the work of Christians in other lands. He was not in good health and often took himself away to recuperate in North Wales.



However, the parish magazines for 1884 were missing, so Ann could not know for sure what Cruse actually thought about the Salvation Army nor what view he took towards their opponents, the self-styled, 'Skeleton Army.' But now we do know because the volume of the parish magazines for that year has been discovered at Christ Church and they reveal that the views of the real Cruse were remarkably close to the views he was portrayed as having in the community play.

In the play Cruse is seen as being sympathetic to the Salvation Army but distressed, if not dismayed at their methods, especially their noisy evangelism. In the parish magazine for 1884, Cruse wonders whether their "aggressive actions" could be justified and fears that they could not. He goes on to assert that he would not dispute their sincerity, nor



“the excellence of their motives,” but he laments their inability to show due reverence and to respect the holiness of the Sabbath day.

He wrote: “But the first thought that strikes the mind in connection with the ‘Salvation Army’ is the painful absence of holy reverence which so prominently marks their proceedings. It would hardly be too strong to say that some of their public utterances are little short of blasphemy. We have in our remembrance at this moment such



utterances which we would not dare commit to paper.” Cruse is probably referring to the graphic language that Ada Smith, Captain of the Salvation Army in Worthing, used to motivate her ‘troops.’ She talked of “firing Holy Ghost ammunition into the souls of the sinners,” and “marching into the vilest spots” in the town to assail them with “Calvary death and judgement.” Previously, the Salvation Army had promised to ‘attack Worthing,’ and

later – after the riots – Ada Smith had remarked, “If the Devil does not attack us, we must attack him.”

This language suited neither the temperament nor the theology of the genteel and learned Cruse. However, the behaviour of the Salvationists opponents, the Skeleton Army, shocked him even more. The Salvation Army may have turned Worthing’s peaceful Sundays into a loud and uproarious day of music and proselytising, but that was nothing compared to the profanity of their opponents –

“...the very title ‘Skeleton Army,’ suggesting so terribly the opposite of ‘Salvation,’ or, Eternal Death as opposed to Eternal Life, is in itself so shocking that it can only emanate from one secret and ultimate source. And if it be irreverent with a right intention to thrust holy things on public notice, how much more irreverent must it be, with a wrong intention, to parody those holy things themselves, and deliberately and designedly to turn them into burlesque and ridicule.”

By “secret and ultimate source,” Cruse meant the Devil. The ‘Skeletons’ put they own words to religious songs and hymns and those words were frequently threatening and abusive. This sensitive and caring man clergyman was deeply troubled by these disturbances but felt unable to side with the Salvation Army all the time it behaved in a manner that to him appeared unseemly and disrespectful to other Christians.

Chris Hare