

# DON WOODHOUSE...

## **A Tribute to Donald Woodhouse OBE from the family**

"My father Donald, who many knew as Captain Don, gave me the plans for his funeral some years ago. He stated that above all it should be joyful. Donald had a positive attitude to life, he brought joy to those he met, and he rejoiced in the Christian faith which was the foundation of his life.

Donald died full of years but those years almost ended not long after they began. He was born in the small family home in Huddersfield, a twin and the youngest of six children. He weighed 3lbs 5oz at birth and was a sickly child contracting diphtheria and scarlet fever from which he nearly died. But he overcame these early health problems to lead the most remarkable life.

My father's home and childhood in Yorkshire were happy and by his late teenage years he felt that God was calling him to full-time service. He was also sure this service would be as part of the laity whose ministry he has done so much to foster over the years.

Donald began his working life aged 15 in a factory and later a shoe shop. In the Second World War, unfit for military service, he was drafted to work in industry and served in the Home Guard. He valued those years doing very ordinary jobs because they taught him how to get along with people. He loved people and had a great interest in them, and with his outgoing personality and sense of humour, he had a gift for befriending folk of all ages and from all walks of life. Many have spoken of him as an exceptional and special man, whose like we will never see again.

During the War Donald studied to be a Church of England Reader and in 1944 was licensed as Reader in Charge of a small rural parish in Yorkshire. So began a ministry that was

to last almost seven decades and encompass an incredibly wide range of work.

Shortly after the War my father trained as a Church Army evangelist and was commissioned in 1948. His early ministry with the Society ranged from youth work in London's East End, teaching at the training college and working as a chaplain with the army in Germany. The Church Army recognised that Donald had a talent for organisation, and for thirty years he was based at its headquarters in a series of senior administrative posts. These included organising the Society's centenary celebrations in 1982, and the following year he was awarded an OBE in the Queen's birthday honours.

It was during my father's spell at the Church Army training college that he met and married my mother Norma, and they enjoyed a loving marriage lasting almost sixty years. When my sister Mary and I were growing up Dad worked long hours and travelled extensively at home and abroad. But he always made time for us, to play, take us to places of entertainment and help and encourage us in all we did. We count ourselves blessed to have had such a father.

Donald's ministry has touched so many people in this and other countries too. But perhaps his greatest passion was for children and young people. He was always young at heart. He was a Scout from the age of 12 and was active in the movement wherever he lived and worked. For more than a quarter of a century until his death he was the County Scout Chaplain and for many years he directed the Church Army's Scouting and youth work. Since his official retirement in 1985, as Lay Minister at St Lawrence, he was always busy with our ministry to children and the uniformed organisations. He had a special gift for bringing the gospel to youngsters with enthusiasm, imagination and humour.

Donald also had a great gift for words, both written and spoken. He always found the right words for every occasion

and was much in demand for speaking engagements. His sermons overflowed with God's love, never failing to encourage others to develop and share their faith. Over the years my father wrote countless articles and, when with Church Army, a couple of books. More recently in the last dozen years he has produced, with the help of people at St Lawrence, small books of short stories and anecdotes, some amusing and some more serious, but all demonstrating his wisdom and wit. He was the author of thirteen of these books and was planning another.

My father was indefatigable. Last November at the local War Memorial he gave the address on Remembrance Sunday. This was well received, not just for what he said but for the fact that he spoke without notes. Two weeks before he died he conducted the funeral of an old friend. A week before he died he was planning the next all age Eucharist and children's holiday club.

Donald accomplished much in his life and knew and met all sorts of distinguished people. But he was essentially a prayerful, humble man who just felt grateful that he was counted worthy to stand in the presence of God and serve Him. My father is now home with the Lord he loved and served faithfully all his life. He will remain evermore in the hearts of all those who knew him."

## **Ian Woodhouse**

### **A Tribute to Capt. Don Woodhouse OBE – from the Church Army.**

"It is a privilege and honour for me, as the leader of Church Army, to be able to bring the sympathy and the prayers of the whole Church Army family to Norma, Ian and Mary and to all Don's family and friends. The whole Church Army family grieves Don's passing. He has been such an important part of our movement for such a long time, Church Army ran through Don's blood.

I remember meeting Don the night I was commissioned as Chief Executive of Church Army in 2006. He came up to me and promised he would pray for me every day. It meant so much to me then and it still does. In fact he said you know you are getting old when the chief is young enough to be your grandson.

He and I regularly exchanged letters, he always wrote to encourage me. I loved getting letters from him, even if I had to hold them at arm's length to read his long hand!! I always knew I could rely on Don's support because he worked closely with the chief, he knew the particular pressure people face in my role, and he was always sure to show me his support.

I loved hearing from Don, and I loved seeing Don. He came to Church Army conferences, meetings and gatherings regularly, I saw him at a big service in St Paul's Cathedral just a few months ago. Don always sent me a copy of his little books when he published them. Like many of Don's friends, these little books always brought a smile and a chuckle.

Captain Don had been in Birmingham making Spitfires during the Second World War and he attended a mission church where he met a Church Army Sister, who told him she had a word with God and God said Don should be in Church Army. The Sister's prophetic word was right, and sure enough Don joined Church Army on his birthday in 1946, and after his training he was commissioned as a Church Army Evangelist in 1948, and he clocked up an amazing 64 years as a Commissioned Church Army Officer. 64 years of public ministry. 64 years of serving God, 64 years of giving himself to others, 64 years of promoting Church Army tirelessly. 64 years of public service. What an amazing record of service, from an amazing man.

Of course Don was also a lifelong Scout, and his service to the Scouting movement is even longer than his commitment

to Church Army. The esteem Don is held in both Church Army and Scouts could be seen by both organisations in everything he did or said. I remember Don being thrilled when I told him I had been invited to be the preacher at the National Scouting service at Windsor Castle on one occasion.

Don's ministry in Church Army was wide and varied. From working in youth centres in London, to providing welfare support to soldiers in Germany, he was involved in training Church Army Evangelists, and worked in parishes. Norma was the principal's secretary and Sister Advice and Dennis tells me everyone pulled Don's leg when he sneaked up to her office to chat to her!!

Alongside that Don worked at head office in a variety of roles. He worked in the Parochial department, he was secretary to the youth and social centres department, he was a Headquarters Commissioner for Church Army Scouts, he worked in our Fundraising Department, and he finished his active Church Army ministry rising to the office of Assistant Chief Secretary in charge of Communications. As part of that role he led the organising committee for the Church Army centenary celebrations in 1982. This was a huge undertaking.

Don technically retired from active ministry in 1985. When I say technically, I mean we all know Don never retired at all. He was preaching, evangelising, serving others, working with his beloved scouts, right up to the end. Don was continually scoring goals in extra time. He was living proof that age was just a number; Don was one of the youngest people I have ever had the privilege to know.

Don Woodhouse quite simply is a legend. He was a giant in the Church Army world, he will leave a massive space, and we will miss him immensely. His enthusiasm, his energy, his compassion, his gentle spirit, his wisdom, his humour, his positive attitude, his deep faith. Don was such a blessing and inspiration to us all.

Don was an amazing man and he touched all he met. There are many people who have come to faith through Don, many people inspired by Don, and many people who ended up in Church Army because of Don. One of them, Roger Murphy, wrote to me to say how he had enquired about joining Church Army but Roger was about to go on holiday and Don ran to the post box to ensure Roger had the application form before he went on holiday. Roger is now a Church Army Evangelist. Don continually went the extra mile to help others.

I remember asking Don to share his story at the 125th anniversary of Church Army back in 2007. His passion, energy and life deeply touched us all. The Bishop of London said – we've met the spirit of Wilson Carlile here tonight, and super abundantly we've met it in Don

All of us in Church Army look up to Don Woodhouse, he shows us what it means to live a life of faith, a life of compassion, a life of serving others, a life of an evangelist. Don had a life well lived. As my friend Ken Clarke says... Don was still worrying the devil in his old age

Don's legacy will live on, it will live in the lives of all those he blessed, encouraged and inspired. Today the whole Church Army family salutes the memory of the great Donald Woodhouse. And we send our love and prayers to Norma, Mary and Ian, and all who grieve his passing – may God bless and sustain you in your loss and grief.

Today Don is on the other side, beyond the other shore, and in the company of the Jesus he gave his life to proclaim. Captain Donald Woodhouse, may you rest in peace and rise in glory."

**Mark Russell – CEO Church Army**

**A Tribute to Captain Don Woodhouse OBE – from the Scout County of Greater London Middlesex West**

“It won’t surprise you to know that Don brought to his rich and varied Scouting involvement the same qualities that he contributed to all his other areas of life – commitment, dedication, and quiet determination, as well as good humour, and a good sense of humour. The contribution that he made to Scouting over many decades cannot be measured. Indeed, nobody knows how many young people were influenced for good by Don through his work with a huge number of Scout Groups.

His Scouting life started in his home town of Huddersfield, where he joined his local Group as a Scout in April 1933 at the age of 12. He would probably have joined sooner if he could, but at that time the 11th Huddersfield Scout Group did not have a Cub Scout Pack. So Don put that right by helping to set one up and within a few days of his 18th birthday he was presented with his first warrant as an Assistant Cub Scout Master. That was the first of many appointments in Scouting and, wherever he went, and whatever other jobs he had, he always found time to be involved in Scouting.

The Scout Association’s records and many Scouters’ memories provide a good picture of the different roles that he held. During the war years he was in Birmingham, making Spitfires during the day and working with the Home Guard at night. That would probably have been enough for most people, but Don also found time to maintain his involvement in Scouting by working with the 18th Birmingham Scout Group, keeping an eye on the Cubs and Scouts.

When he moved to London after the war, he helped at the 3rd Shoreditch Scout Group but then his career took an international turn, and we find him in January 1954 becoming Cub Scout Master and helping with the Scouts at the 1st Hamburg (British Army of the Rhine) Scout Group, which was part of British Scouts Western Europe.

His roles within the Church Army enabled him to strengthen connections between the Church Army and the Scouts. In 1955 he was appointed to a Scout Headquarters role as Commissioner for Relationships and subsequently his remit was broadened to cover Community Development. He held this role for the next twenty years. During this time he worked in Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Holland and was a representative on the European "Duty to God" Conference from 1964 and became its Secretary in 1970. Wherever Scouting and religion interfaced, Don seems to have played a part.

He made an enormous contribution to supporting Scout Groups in Anglican churches, especially in parishes where a Church Army Officer was attached, combining his Church Army role with his personal commitment to Scouting. He also maintained hands-on responsibility with a local Group, running the Cub Scout Pack at the 10th Southall Scout Group which met at the Salvation Army Citadel, so clearly he didn't confine his activities to the Anglican domain!

In 1975 he became Chairman of Southall Scout District, exchanging his headquarters' role for a District one. But he never let a job title constrain his activities and I have been told how he happily got involved with any activity in any section wherever he felt he could play a useful part.

He was the ideal person to play a major part in a working party held in the early 1980's at Baden-Powell House in London to discuss how the Church Army could best be involved in Scouting. A new Scout training programme was about to be launched and religious award schemes the Scouts had operated, such as "The Chosen Way" and the Roman Catholic "Chi-Rho", were being discontinued. Don was convinced that the Church Army had a vital part to play in Scouting and, because of his involvement in both organisations, he was well-placed to bring this about.

The result was the creation of the Anglican Fellowship in Scouting and Guiding. Needless to say, Don was a founder member. The Fellowship produces a newsletter as well as factsheets and resources for Scout and Guide groups. It won't surprise you to know that Don wrote many of these.

When most people get to their mid-60's they start thinking about slowing down, retiring or having a quieter life; not so Don. When he was nearly 66 he did step down from being District Chairman – but immediately became County Chaplain for Greater London Middlesex West and the County Advisor for Religious Development. More recently this role became County Advisor for Faiths and Beliefs. Don continued his very active involvement in these roles until his death.

As many of you will know, the Scout Association has its own system of awards and recognition of service and achievement. During his 74 years and one month of service to Scouting, Don's commitment to working with young people has been rewarded by a Medal of Merit in 1962, a Silver Acorn in 1971, a Bar to the Silver Acorn in 1994 and the Association's highest award for good service, the Silver Wolf, in 2002. This is Scouting's equivalent of a CBE or possibly a knighthood, which is awarded for service of the most exceptional nature.

There is no doubt that Don's service was truly exceptional and hundreds, probably thousands, of Scouts across the world will bear witness to that. He touched so many young lives, sowed seeds of faith, and embodied the values of Scouts everywhere: honour, trust, loyalty, doing one's best and having self-respect and respect for others.

His Scouting record was exemplary and it demonstrates his commitment to Scouting, to young people, and to God. But Don the Scout was much more than a list of appointments and awards. Everyone here will have their own memories of

Don, and I would like to share with you some of mine and some of Scouting friends to whom I have spoken recently.

Most of us remember very rarely the first occasion we ever meet a particular individual. Perhaps the first encounter with your life partner, or with someone who becomes very influential in your life might stick in your memory. I can very clearly remember the first time I met Captain Don. He was leading a Cub Scout Christmas service in Harrow in the mid 1980's. I was then running the 16th Harrow Cub Scout Pack and, at the end of a wonderful service, he came up to talk to me. I think he had spotted that one of the badges on my uniform was the black and silver Church Army badge. This was a hangover from a previous Scout Group in Wandsworth where I had been Assistant Scout Leader in the 1970's. I had tried to remove the badge as the 16th Harrow did not have Church Army connections, but it left a black mark on my shirt, so I had sewn it back on. Don did not seem to mind that I knew little about the Church Army, or about the Wandsworth Group's affiliation with the Church Army. If he did mind, he certainly did not let on, and it did spur me on to buy a new shirt.

I have not worn my Scout uniform for quite a while because it's not what District Chairmen wear. However, I felt it was right to wear it today to honour Captain Don, a man who would put on his uniform on every possible occasion, even if it was hidden under his cassock, because he was proud to be a member of the Scout Movement. It did not matter that his uniform was not the latest style (Don still favoured the mushroom shirt and trousers) but he was happy for all the world to know that he was a Scout. Very appropriately his uniform had its last outing at the 4th Eastcote's Christmas party on 19 January.

Noticing little details about people and being interested in them was one of Don's special qualities and, once you had met him, you remembered him. This was brought home to

me very strongly when he and I were at the Scout Jamboree in Chelmsford in 2007. I spent time walking around the site with him and I was overwhelmed by the number of people he knew and who knew him. He not only recalled people's names but also where they were involved in Scouting and details about other people in their Group. He could recall the latest news about the Group's activities and was always genuinely interested in what they were doing.

Don told us on the coach on the way to Chelmsford that he had been at the 1957 Jamboree at Sutton Coldfield. Not only had he been there, but he was on the service team, involved in security and had also been part of the colour party. It was typical of his modesty that it took some questioning on our part to find all this out. Humble by nature, Don was never one to brag about his exploits.

Chad Lake shared with me some of his memories of Don attending a County Expedition to Kandersteg. Don visited all our Troops and Units, some 600 people, on an almost daily basis, talking and telling stories as only he could, and recounting anecdotes that touched a chord with the young people, even though the age difference was well over half a century. Chad says that for a long time afterwards people kept mentioning Don's visits and saying that it made them think differently about themselves and others. One of Don's many gifts was being able to reach out and change thinking in a simple and direct way. And, while on the trip to Switzerland, Don managed to squeeze in visits to numerous friends he had in the country, always making the most of every opportunity to maintain his friendships.

His fresh and creative approach was apparent in the Parade Services that he prepared here at St Lawrence's. He pressed Harry Potter and other unlikely characters into service to present ideas and concepts that the young people could relate to and identify with, making God seem accessible to them. During the interregnum here a few years ago, when I

was churchwarden, I remember Don handing me a sheaf of papers, which were the services he had written for the next four or five Parade services. Always making the best use of his time, he had prepared them between conducting funeral services at Breakspear Crematorium, writing them out in his inimitable, just-about-legible loopy scrawl. There were very few alterations, as fully-formed ideas just seemed to flow out of him. Poems, additional verses for hymns, songs, rhymes and stories just poured out. How did he do it? With God's help, I am sure he would say.

And, with God's help, Don just seemed to go on and on. He did not seem to slow down, or give up, or forget. Rationally, we all knew he must die one day, but miraculously he continued year after year. He conducted many funerals, turning them from sad occasions into ones of thanksgiving and happy memories with his well chosen words and complete confidence in life after death. Don carried out the funerals for many Scouts and John Brooke, who last year sadly "went home" as we say in Scouting, used to remind Don regularly, "You're doing my funeral so you can't go before me."

And so our thanksgiving service was one of thanksgiving for everything Don brought to Scouting, for the positive impact he had on thousands of young lives, and for the special moments we all hold of him.

Words by Robert Louis Stevenson describe Don's success to a T.

He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much, who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children, who has filled his niche and accomplished his task, who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauties, nor failed to express it; who has always

looked for the best in others and given the best he had; whose life is an inspiration, whose memory a benediction.

Don truly was "a man of the people" as well as being "a man of God". He inspired, he encouraged, he congratulated, he never judged nor mocked, he respected others and other religions. He was a wonderful man and his memory will live on in everyone who had the good fortune to meet him.

**Andrew Bedford, County Vice-President**

Don's funeral service was held at St Lawrence's Church, Bridle Road, Pinner on Monday 18th February 2013.

Don wrote the introduction to this Book of Remembrance.