

THE SOLDIERS' AND AIRMEN'S SCRIPTURE READĒ. ASSOCIATION

The Society would like to thank Mr JG Tucker of SASRA for his assistance with this article.

The Association first came about in the early nineteenth century and can trace its beginnings back to 1838 to Woolwich and the Royal Artillery, where a senior non-commissioned officer William Rudd a stout Christian was concerned for the spiritual well being of soldiers in detention. His concerns were heard by a group of army officers who formed The Soldiers' Friend Society. At that time evangelists were called Scripture Readers, because they literally read the Scriptures to men of the army, many of whom were unable to read effectively for themselves. The title Scripture Reader has remained to this day.

The task of the Scripture Reader has and is still today to communicate the Bible to serving service personnel. What has changed is that once men could not read, whereas today's service personnel generally do not read the Bible. When it could the Society would send into barracks specially selected and trained ex-soldiers of the Christian faith. They gained the friendship of the soldiers by providing the power of a living message and they sought to bring them into the faith of Jesus Christ.

In 1859 the then Chaplain General, the Rev G R Gleig, was instrumental in obtaining official recognition for the Society through the granting of its original Charter under the title The Army Scripture Readers and Soldiers' Friend Society. In 1937 official recognition was also granted by the Air Council and a Charter extended the work to the RAF. Authority to work among the Women's Services was granted in 1943 when the first Lady Scripture Readers were appointed. Since 1913 the Association has been privileged to have the reigning Monarch as its Patron.

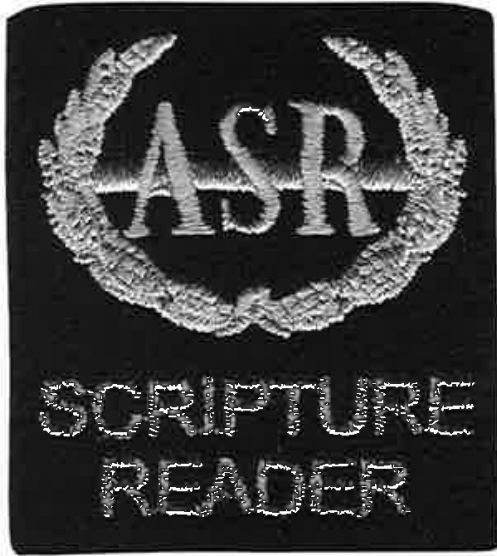
In 1887 the Soldiers' Christian Association (SCA) was founded to provide link-up and fellowship for Christians in the Army. It later became known as The Soldiers' and Airmen's Christian Association. In 1939 the amalgamation with the Scripture Readers took place and in 1950 the present title The Soldiers' and Airmen's Scripture Readers Association was adopted. The Association's ministry are able to authorise Scripture Readers to visit men and women in serving units with the blessing of the Commanding Officer and Chaplains. All Scripture Readers are ex-service personnel, many of these had become Christians whilst serving, so have a unique insight and first-hand knowledge of the environment in which they work and can relate to and understand those currently serving.

Each Scripture Reader has a Superintending Chaplain, appointed for administration purposes, who reports to the Association. The Association is directed by a Council, most of which are retired officers. Both the Chaplain General and the Chaplain in Chief RAF send personal representatives to Council meetings. The daily work is carried out by a full-time General Secretary and office staff.

Although civilians they are allowed to wear uniforms for ease of recognition, but they carry no rank. They work in barrack rooms, detention centres, hospitals and on the training field.

The cap badge has been in use since the First World War. Until then the Readers

worked in civilian clothes, but with deployment to the Western Front the powers that be deemed it wiser for them to wear uniforms, that policy has continued to the present day. The shoulder titles are only used on No 2 Dress (Army) and No 1 Dress (RAF). The slides with "Scripture Reader" are now obsolete, though some of the older Readers may still be using them. The cloth ASR badges were brought in to accommodate the widespread use of Combat 95, and, in the Army's case, to reduce confusion with the red tabs of General Officers.



The Scripture Readers anodised aluminium cap badge, gold coloured wreath with silver coloured letters and bar

Slip on shoulder title, bearing the title Army Scripture Reader. This came in three different colours. Black on khaki; RAF blue on dark navy blue; gold wreath, silver ASR and bar, black Scripture Reader lettering all on a khaki ground



The older version of the shoulder slide, now no longer worn. Two versions were worn, RAF blue on dark navy blue and blue on red

Scripture Readers shoulder titles, again two versions are worn one, blue lettering on a red ground and the other RAF blue on dark navy blue ground