

Account of Purley on Thames

Scouts and Beavers

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Introduction

The Scout movement was founded by Robert Baden Powell after his experiences in the South African War when he had become a considerable hero.

The first troupe in Purley was founded in 1937. The following item contributed by one of its members Bill Fisher appeared in the Project Purley Newsletter of January 1989. An extended version was published in the Purley Scouts Annual report for 1989-90. The version below is a merger of the two.

BOY SCOUTS

The Purley Scouts were inaugurated in 1937. The Rector was the nominal Scoutmaster, but the person who really ran the troupe was Alec Fagg, a rover scout who lived in Hemdean Road, Caversham and became Executive Assistant Scoutmaster. He was 19 years of age.

I have a picture of myself in scout uniform taken in Glebe Road shortly after the troupe was formed. There were ten boys altogether which was a pretty good number from such a small village. We had enough for two patrols - Kingfisher and Peewit. Each consisted of a Patrol Leader who had two white stripes on his pocket, a Second - (and I was Second in the Kingfisher patrol) - and three scouts. I do not remember all the names but those I do recall are Ronald Rawlins (Patrol leader, Peewit), Jack Iles (I think patrol leader Kingfisher), Athur Sewell, Donald Carter, Tony Higgins, possibly Robert Iles, John Page (he died aged about 16 of heart trouble and had a Scout funeral), Ken Gibbons and myself.

Our meetings were held in the school on Thursdays. Our uniforms were supplied free. We had an interest in Woodcraft, played certain games in the school, one of which consisted of the patrols in opposition. The Patrol Leaders first would start from opposite sides of the room, hopping on one foot with arms folded and try to knock the opposing member over before he could reach the enemy's side of the room.

During our weekly Thursday evening meetings we learnt semaphore with flags donated by the church organist Mr Nelson Cooper who also kindly provided transport when necessary. The Morse code was learnt but not practised due to lack of facilities. The usual knots were practised, bowline, reef, sheepshank. We learnt the constitution of the Union Jack, rudimentary First Aid, and to be helpful and useful to elderly people.

There were only two times we went away camping to my knowledge. The first was a summer camp for a week in 1937 with the Burghfield Scouts at Bearwood Naval School. Burghfield had I believe five patrols. Their Scoutmaster was Mr Pugh, possessor of the Bushman's Thong, which I understood to be one of scouting's highest awards. In those days I confess to never having heard of the Silver Wolf

I regret I only recall the names of three of the Burghfield Scouts, Frank Dwyer, Terry Hutchins and Frank Beddoes, but I do know that their finances were far and away in a better state than ours. They had £90 in their funds, whilst we rarely made double figures.

Each patrol took turns at cooking for everyone during the week. Kingfisher was responsible for the Sunday repast, after our return from morning service at Bearwood Church. I recall we cooked the mind boggling culinary delight of Beef sausages and boiled potatoes. Our Patrol came in for a lot of stick for burning the sausages and serving partly cooked potatoes. Some parents, at least those who could afford it, sent tuck parcels. My parents did not fall into the latter category. However our patrol shared in an enormous box of Victoria plums sent by Ron Rawlins' parents and duly suffered for it afterwards.

A night patrol was organised each evening and Patrol formations infiltrated the surrounding woods to listen to the night life and endeavour to identify the natural sounds of the night We naturally congregated around an evening camp fire on another occasion, and enjoyed tales and community songs with visiting Rover Scouts, one of which I remember was "There's a hole in my bucket, dear Lisa" also the inevitable " Ten Green Bottles"

The District Commissioner paid us a visit during the week but alas I cannot remember his name. We slept in bell tents and there was a morning inspection for tidiness and cleanliness.

The following Easter we spent four days, Good Friday to Easter Monday, camping in Purley Park near the boathouse.

During the winter we occasionally cycled to the Arthur Hill swimming baths. We also held jumble sales to augment funds.

Shortly after that the war broke out and that was the end of any more camping. Alec Fagg was of course called up and I do not know if he survived the war, nor do I know who took over when he left, but the troupe was still running.

First Purley

The new 1st Purley Scout and Cub Group was formed in 1980. The Scout troupe met for the first time at the Memorial Hall on 24th November. They then met weekly at 7 pm on Mondays under leader Russell Wilkin of St Mary's Avenue.

Bibliography

PPN 12/80

576 - Purley Scouts Annual reportsSee

PPN 3/82 page 15

PPN 8/88

