

## 54 SCOUTING IN ALRESFORD

*By*

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BE PREPARED is the motto of the Scout Movement, which celebrated its eightieth anniversary in 1987. The aims of the Movement, which are to encourage the mental, physical and spiritual development of young people, have played a remarkable part in the lives of thousands of young people worldwide throughout the past eight decades.

Scouting in Airesford started in Cheriton, a statement which for the uninitiated seems rather ambiguous, but the Airesford Scout District encompasses a large rural area.

It was on the 31st July 1908 that Robert Baden-Powell saw his dream of Scouting for Boys become reality with the camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour. Alresford District was not far behind, for in 1909 a Boy Scout Troop in Cheriton was registered with the Boy Scouts Association and on the 11th October 1911 the Alresford Local Association was formed.

Records for those early years are not very clear, but by 1925 there were Scouts in the town of Alresford meeting in the Girl Guide Headquarters, Rovers and Scouts in Cheriton, Wolf Cub Packs at Bramdean and Cheriton and a Cub Pack at Itchen Stoke. There were Scouts at Ropley and in October 1924 a Wolf Cub Pack was formed at Old Airesford with the Weir House given as the address of the Headquarters.

On the 19th June 1928 an Extraordinary Meeting of the Alresford Local Association Boy Scouts was held at Alresford Rectory with Dr. Hodgson in the chair; the Reverend A.J. Robertson was Honorary Secretary, a position he was to hold until his death in 1942. At this meeting new bye-laws from H.Q. were accepted, one of the rules being that all Scouts must pay for their shirts and shorts and for replacing them, and Cubs must pay for their jerseys. The subscription was one penny a week.

Throughout the years Scouts from the Alresford District were encouraged and supported financially to attend the Worldwide jamborees, a representative number representing the District. In 1929 fifteen members attended the great Jamboree held in Arrow Park, Birkenhead to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the Movement; supported by some 5,000 Scouts from 42 nations.

Scouting in 1928 was extremely active with 500 members and supporters attending a rally at Alresford Rectory, when they made a profit of £7.11.6d.

Canon Robertson, the author of *The History of Alresford*, published in 1937, in his excellent minutes presents a full Chronicle of Scouting over many years. In his days the Annual Meetings were held at 3.00 p.m. in the afternoon, presumably because the members were all local businessmen, clergy or gentry, or doctors.

But by 1934 the numbers for the annual census had fallen to 95 as against 162 in 1933 and this fall continued. In 1935 discussions were held to remedy this and one suggestion was that the boys should choose Scouters for themselves, but fortunately this was not acted upon.

On the outbreak of war Scouts assisted with collecting newspaper and many times making themselves useful to the A.R.P.

After the war there was much concern and rumours that Alresford Rectory, where the Scout Hut and Swimming Pool were located, was to be sold, and it was suggested the Scouts look round for alternative accommodation; and in 1951 plans were passed for a new Scout Hut. Cubs were going well under Mrs. Walter and Miss Young with Scoutmaster Harold Shaw back in harness. The Troop Headquarters moved

from the long-established home at Alresford Rectory to the Fulling Mill, but plans were later passed for the purchase of land in Bishop's Sutton Road, with the new Chapman Hut being opened on the 25th April 1953.

In 1950 the Rev. John Pearson registered a new Group, the 2nd Alresford (Handicapped) and the following year he was congratulated on his appointment as Assistant County Commissioner for Handicapped Scouts, but after fourteen successful years this unit closed down because of H.Q. policy. Thanks were extended to the Rev. Pearson and in 1970 he was presented with his Silver Acorn - a high scouting award.

And in 1966 there was an important development for the Alresford District when Brown Candover was transferred to the District from Basingstoke, being registered as the 11th Alresford under Group Scoutmaster Mileham.



A big and important change came into Scouting in 1967 With the Advance Party Report from H.Q. Arising from this the Alresford District Local Association changed to the Alresford District Scout Council. no more were there to be Boy Scouts and Wolf Cubs, but Scouts and Cub Scouts. The uniform was also modernised to the present one of mushroom trousers and green shirts and berets for Scouts, with leaders and Venture Scouts wearing mushroom shirts. The Cubs kept their green jumpers and distinctive caps.



World Scout Badge

Locally the Candover Group celebrated 21 years of Scouting in 1968 and it is hard to imagine a more successful 21 years. During this period 21 boys had progressed from Cubs to Venture Scouts, including ten King or Queen's Scouts - truly a splendid achievement.

By 1970 the District finally took possession of their Camp Site, this being one acre of land and one acre of woodland off Bramdean Common; at a peppercorn rental. This was achieved thanks to the kindness of Sir Derek Vestey and the great efforts of Dr. Skeggs.

And so in the year of 1971 the Alresford District celebrated 60 years of Scouting and this occasion was marked when the Chief Scout visited a camp at Old Alresford, for 1800 boys, during the summer months.

In the Alresford Group, by 1967, the Cubs were still meeting in the Chapman Hut but the Scouts had by now moved to the Senior Scouts Hut in Bridge Road. The next year the Cubs had also moved and steps were being taken to first rent and then sell off the Chapman Hut.

Land was purchased near the Senior Hut in Bridge Road and in 1970 plans were displayed for the new Scout Headquarters. Planning permission was gained the following year together with a grant offered from the County Council. To raise money fetes were held, newspaper was collected, Scouts and Guides worked hard, dances and discos were held and when the new Headquarters was finally erected, parents and leaders put in many hours of manual work in decorating and completing the new premises.



Scout Hut in Bridge Road

Another milestone for Alresford District was in 1980 when the Hampshire County Scout Council held their Annual General Meeting at Perin's School. The guest speaker was Lord Baden-Powell, grandson of the founder of the Scout Movement, making his first visit to the County of Hampshire in connection with Scouting. During the evening the County Commissioner Mr. John Derben presented the Silver Acorn to Alresford's Acting District Commissioner, Mr. Joseph C. Macinnes, known affectionately in the Scouting world as 'Mac'.

But what of Scouting in the Eighties. There are two Cub Packs, a Scout Troop and a Beaver Colony at Four Marks. The Beavers are the newest section of the Scout Movement for boys between the ages of 6 and 8 years and are now thriving all over the United Kingdom. Ropley has a Cub Pack, and Candover. Valley has a small Scout Troop and Cub Pack, Cheriton has Scouts and Cubs, and Alresford has a large Scout Troop and a full Cub Pack. A new Group was formed at Medstead last year with a Beaver Colony and a Cub Pack, together with hopes for a Scout Troop in the near future.

The District Venture Unit, the Red Roalfs Venture Scouts is going great guns - "Red Roalfs" is an anagram of Alresford and was chosen by the Ventures themselves as their title. They take part in many County activities and each year enter the National Scout Trek Cart Race which has been held in the New Forest, but more recently at Tweeseldown Race Course. The Red Roalfs have several times taken second place in the non-traditional section, and there is always a team with them from the 1st Alresford Scout Troop who have entered every year since the race first started. During this competition the teams wade through stream and bogs and cross very rough country, pulling their trek carts, but all emerge covered in mud and loving every minute of the race.

The Alresford Venture unit also entered the County Competition BLAZE, which took place in Paris; here they had to play a game of Monopoly on bicycles across the city, the Alresford team taking second place. There were two young ladies in this team, as Venture Scouts is the one section in the Movement which caters also for the feminine sex. The Ventures give service to the community in many ways; for instance, in 1987 they cleared out Swelling Hill Pond at Four Marks and also erected fencing for the Parish Council. They assist at the Alresford Show, indeed the Scout Movement in general is always well to the fore at this Show, with the Alresford Cubs selling the programmes and Scouts providing ring parties.

Two years ago a number of Ventures from the Red Roalfs took part in a Viking Venture, an exciting expedition, to Denmark. In this event thousands of Ventures from many counties crossed the North Sea to 'invade' Denmark dressed as Vikings.

District events taking part in the County still include the Candover cross-country run, Cub Cycle Rally, Cub Rally and Scout Pioneering Competition, a Football Rally in October together with events such as Mastermind, Olympics, Chess and Football.

The Venture Unit has produced eight Queen's Scouts in the last few years, and they received their certificates at a ceremony on board HMS Victory; later attending the Annual St. George's Day Parade at Windsor, most of them being fortunate enough to parade before Her Majesty the Queen. The District's own St. George's Day Parade and Service is held at a different church in the District each year. In 1988 it will be at Medstead, the home of the newest Group.

Scouts and Ventures also work for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award as well as their own Scout Awards. At Tichborne Down House Hospital the Scouts were able to give much valuable service. Whilst working for their Silver Awards they provided a weekly record request programme for the patients. The hospital is now closed down.

Scouts and Cubs can be seen around the town each year working for the annual Job Week, but four Alresford Scouts made their mark on the community in quite a different way. The Panther Patrol, assisting at Makins Court as part of their community service award helped to evacuate residents during a gas scare.

One day the smell of gas was so strong that the Gas Board, when alerted, said the place had to be evacuated within five minutes; so Colin Hayes, Stuart Harwin, Richard Mills and Damian Trasler each sprang promptly into action to the great benefit of the elderly residents therein.

Cubs also do good work for the community and over the years they and the Scouts have collected tons of litter from all the streets and recreation grounds of Alresford.

The District Camping Competition takes place each year when patrols from each Group compete for the Peto Cup (given to the District by District Commissioner Geoffrey Peto in 1924) the winning patrol then going on to the County Emlyn Camping Competition. In 1925 when the first Emlyn was held Alresford was one of the four Districts taking part, so in 1985, the Alresford Patrol entering the Emlyn was presented with special commemorative pennants to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the competition.

Camping is still one of the favourite aspects of Scouting and summer camps are held each year, with Cubs also participating in a weekend camp at the District Camp Site at Bramdean. A District Cub Camp is also held for those Packs not able to have their own camps.

The Alresford District always sends representatives to the World Scout Jamborees which is held at four-yearly intervals. The last, in Canada, was attended by three Scouts, two from Ropley, one from Alresford and a Venture Scout from Alresford. In December last year Gavin Griggs was one of the 600 strong United Kingdom contingent who attended the 16th World Scout Jamboree held in Australia.

Scouting has proved without doubt to be of great benefit to those who have had the privilege of participating in the activities provided within the Movement. Always there is a demand for more leaders, those men and women dedicated to bringing Scouting with its fun, commitment and fellowship, to more and more boys and, nowadays, young women.

In the Alresford District, Scouting has weathered eighty continuous years and now looks forward to the next decade with the Movement still going from strength to strength.

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