

The History of Scouting in Wales

Introduction

Wales is a small corner of the Scouting world. As we complete the centenary of the movement there are Scout Associations in 216 of the world's 222 recognised countries. Some of these are very small, numbering only a few hundred members – and the vast exception, of course, is China. Nevertheless there are more than 28 million Scouts world wide, of whom about 18 million are in the Asia/Pacific region, and over 600,000 in Africa. The United Kingdom has presently some 450,000 Scouts and Leaders, and Wales about 14,000. Scouting is comfortable with all the world's major religions – and most of its minor ones – and is practised in dozens of different languages. The first Scout Law, drawn up in 1908, made it clear that the movement was for all races and faiths, a principal to which it has remained true. *Sgowtiad Cymru* has a fully bilingual policy, and has had from the beginning, although it was 1932 before *Scouting for Boys* appeared in Welsh, and the number of troops making full use of the language is small.

There have been numerous landmarks along the way. Robert Baden Powell came to Swansea in the same year as the Brownsea Island camp, 1907, and there were Scouts in both Swansea and Carmarthen before the end of 1908. In fact Scouting took off like a rocket. By 1910 there were over 108,000 Scouts and Leaders in Great Britain. In 1911 the Boy Scouts (as they were then called) were given a royal charter, and in 1912 the then Prince of Wales became the Principality's first (and only) Chief Scout. At the same time Lord Glanusk became the first Chief Commissioner. In spite of having its own Chief Scout, Wales was fully administered by Imperial Headquarters in London, and Wolf Cubs and Rovers were introduced at the same time as in England. The same is true of the Girl Guides – but that is a separate story.

Wales sent a contingent to the first World Jamboree at Olympia in 1920, and has continued to do so at every Jamboree since. In 1925 the Welsh Scout Council was formed and an office was established in Llandrindod Wells. This did not mean that Scouting in Wales was devolved in the same way as in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but it did give Welsh Scouting a body capable of owning property, fund raising, and conducting such business as the translation of training material into Welsh. In short, it gave it an identity. The first *Jamboree Cymru* was held at Abergele in 1948, although there had been 'all Wales Camps' before that. The point about the Jamboree of course was that it was an international camp, whereas before that the only 'foreigners' had been the English and Scots. The next major 'shake up' had nothing particularly to do with Wales, but as a result of the Advance Party report in 1967 the big hats and the shorts which had been the trade marks of the movement since its inception, were consigned to history – a fact which (amazingly) still seems not to have impinged on the popular consciousness! More importantly, an awareness was growing that eleven year old boys are very different creatures from seventeen year olds. Senior Scouting (for the 15+ age group) had been introduced in 1949, and now the Advance Party brought an end to Rovering (which had never really recovered

from the second World War), replacing both with Venture Scouts whose ages were designed to run from 16 to 20.

In 1976 the ancient and thorny question of girls in scouting was approached afresh. Since the formation of the Girl Guides, the main role for women in Scouting had been as Leaders in the Cub section. Occasionally during both World Wars wives had taken over the responsibilities of absent husbands, but that was tolerated rather than encouraged by Headquarters. For girls under 18, there was no place. However, with the advance of co-educational secondary education that was seen as increasingly anachronistic, and nine years after it had been founded, the Venture Scout section was opened to girls. In spite of indignation at Guide Headquarter, it soon became apparent that there were 'girls girls' and 'boys girls', and the latter who joined the Venture Scouts were not mostly recruited from the Guides. All the training sections were opened to girls in 1991. Although the impact of this has been considerable (and would certainly have alarmed Baden Powell), the Scout Association, as it is now called, has not altered either its ethos or its training methods. The most noticeable consequence has been among the leaders, where, in addition to the 'Lady Cubmasters' of an earlier generation, and the occasional AVSL after 1976, women now feature prominently at all levels. The present Chief Commissioner and a number of Area Commissioners in Wales emphasise the point.

The Scout Movement continues to evolve, which is one reason why it is so necessary to maintain a sense of where we have come from. Its spiritual emphasis and socialising purpose have not changed, but the training programme, and the ways in which it is applied, have continually moved on. Scouts no longer signal with flags, or use the Morse code, and their websites are up there with the best. But a game of football is still a game of football, and the fascination of lighting open fires has not entirely succumbed to the delights of butane gas. In the 1980s the age range was extended by the creation of Beaver Scouts (an experiment pioneered in Canada, hence the name) for the 5 – 7 year olds, and just recently Venture Scouts have given way to Explorer Scouts, and the Scout Network has revived something of the best of the old Rover Crews. At the same time, Welsh Scouting, like the government of Wales, has become increasingly devolved. In 1992 the Council leased office premises in Llantwit Major, and miniature headquarters was established, and in 1996, having come to a financial understanding with Headquarters in London, Wales was able to keep its Field Commissioner Service, at a time when it was being discontinued in England. Since then the whole consultative and administrative structure of the movement in the United Kingdom has been overhauled, a process which it is unnecessary to relate here.

In 2000 the Welsh Scout Council published a brief outline history of its own functions and evolution, at which time it was observed that most of the history of Scouting in Wales consisted of anecdotes, of memories of outstanding leaders and of heroic efforts to rescue washed out camps. In other words, it was local history – sometimes very local – and it is upon that material that this present history is based. In 2000 we published in print, but this will appear on the WSC website. Not only is this a sign of changing times, it is also a deliberate attempt to make it interactive. Such material as has been assembled (and I am

immensely grateful to all contributors) is roughly divided by Area. In some cases complete pieces have been written in the Areas concerned, in others notes and other material has been provided, which I have used as I thought it fit. In no case should anything be regarded as 'finished' in the same sense as it would be between hard covers. Readers will send in corrections and improvements, and these will be incorporated as they are received – that is the great advantage of on-line publication. I am also well aware that many Areas, quite a few Districts and even some Groups, are proposing to write (or have already written) their own Centenary Histories. This is not intended to conflict with such efforts, but will rather supplement them, and add perhaps a wider dimension for such matters as jamborees and All-Wales events. It is, in a sense, a follow up to the 'Archives Project', which has been running for a number of years, and has been aimed at persuading our present leaders and administrators that today's working papers are to-morrow's archive, and should be properly preserved and stored.

A centenary is an excellent time to remind everyone that we have a heritage, which is our common possession. So even if you are not particularly interested yourself, please bear this in mind, and encourage those who are. I am well aware that exhibitions, displays and other junketings will be going on all over Wales this summer – and that they in turn will soon be history. However, I want this general history to provide a central thread. Please feel free to hang your own memories on it.

David Loades