

# The History of the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts at Brownhill

## Setting up the Scout troop

Following the formation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Catford Guide Company for girls at Brownhill in late 1925, interest was aroused in the possibility of forming a Scout Troop for boys. Mr, H G Reed was approached as a Christian man who had all the necessary attributes to run a successful Scout Troop with the right Christian emphasis.

A certain amount of persuasion was necessary, then all the paperwork had to be completed and the officers had to be trained. This was not a speedy process and it was not until 24<sup>th</sup> May 1930 that the 20<sup>th</sup> Lewisham South Scout Group was officially formed. The deacons gave their formal approval to a sponsorship agreement and Mr. Reed was appointed as the first Group Scoutmaster.

## Past Scout and Cub Leaders

It has not proved possible to locate records of all those who served as Assistant Leaders up to the outbreak of war in September 1939, although the 'Old Man' which was Harold Reed's affectionate nickname, kept the lads up to scratch with effective and caring leadership. Frank Howkins was equally effective as Cub master from the inception of the Group. Many of the early 'Scouters' became active leaders in both the Scout movement and the church fellowship. Joe Latham and George Brown are just two examples among many.

Frank Howkins, the Cub master had, as his assistant, Mary Turland who, in spite of her young age, was a keen pupil and shared his concern for the younger boys. So much so that he was able to retire in February 1943 and let Mary take over the leadership role. This was a position she held until she had to retire herself at the end of March 1982 although she continued helping out for several years until ill health finally meant she had to stop working with the Cub Scouts (as they were now called).

Mary was initially assisted by Peter Young until 1961 and then by a succession of others.

What happened in the early part of the war is not known, many youngsters were evacuated away from London and rather than joining Scouts or Guides were encouraged from the age of 14 to join one of the cadet forces for basic military training.

However, records show that by February 1943 G.A. (George) Colley had been appointed Group Scoutmaster and he continued in that position until retirement in December 1951. George Colley was a man of great courage, energy and considerable ability - making light of the fact that he had an artificial leg (prosthetics were not anywhere near advanced as they are today and it was something of a physical handicap). The amputation had been necessary as the result of war wound in the 1914-18 conflict and he never complained about any difficulties in commuting by train from Hither Green Station to town each day, to work in County Hall in a responsible administrative position.

As well as his scouting responsibilities George was actively involved in the life of the church at Brownhill. His sudden death in hospital after a minor operation at the beginning of July 1964 was a great shock to everyone.

Following his retirement Joe Latham was appointed Group Scout Leader (same job, different label) in January 1952, a position which he held with great distinction until his retirement from that office at the end of March 1966.

Joe was appointed District Commissioner in 1957 during which time he was awarded the coveted 'Silver Acorn' - one of the top scouting awards.

When Joe retired from active scouting in 1966 his successor was Jack Jeffcut who had been Scout Leader since 1964, a wise choice. He proved to be a very capable leader and remained as Group Scout Leader until 1981.

Derek Shelbrooke, Alan Latham and Mr. Day all had responsibility in the Scout Section for a few years, then in 1974 Steve Buckland, after sharing the leadership role, became the Scout Leader and served until 1979, with Dave Taylor as his very able assistant, when he felt it was time for him to retire from the position.

Keith Wilkinson was appointed as an Assistant Scout Leader in partnership with Dave Taylor in 1980 and this lasted until 1982. Keith was then appointed Scout Leader and shortly after he was acting as Group Scout Leader.

In October 1982 Ian Stedman was appointed Group Scout Leader having had previous experience of youth work. Under his leadership the troop grew in numbers and was very active in the outdoor pursuits particularly camping and hill walking.

The Venture Scouts were formed on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1983, for both boys and girls between the ages of 15½ and 20 with Keith and Suzy Wilkinson appointed as leaders - Keith found it necessary to resign towards the end of 1984 but Suzy remained as leader for a further short period until the appointment of Ian Stedman as Venture Scout Leader in addition to being Group Scout Leader. However, shortly after, John Roberts, the Group Treasurer, took out a warrant as Venture Scout Leader and handed over his financial responsibilities to Ann Newbold.

When Mary Evans (nee Turland) retired as Cub Scout Leader in 1982, there was a special retirement presentation in recognition of her lifetime of service in the Scout movement. Sheila Stedman, who had been Mary's principal assistant for some time was then appointed as the new Cub Scout Leader (Akela) and served in that capacity with Mark Stedman as assistant and Mary as helper. They were joined in 1985 by Beryl Roberts as Assistant Cub Leader. Sheila battled for a long period with a diseased foot which eventually affected her lower leg also and led to an amputation. On discharge she managed very well with a modern artificial leg and her walking hardly indicated that she suffered any incapacity. Sheila found it necessary to resign in 1989.

A Beaver Colony was formed on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1985 with Irene Ebdon as Leader and Marian Goswell her Assistant. Irene remains a very able leader to this day but has had various assistants including Iris Foster, Margaret Wood and Rita Howe; the latter is still serving.

When Ian Stedman left in 1989 John Roberts took over the role of Group Scout Leader. Mark Stedman moved into the Scout Section as Leader and Beryl Roberts became Cub Scout Leader.

Following a Family Camp, two parents took out warrants as Assistant Cub Leaders, Lynn White and Ann Barnes-Warden. After a couple of years they both moved away. Lynn to Essex and Ann to Epsom. Ann did carry on for a while until ill health prevented her from making the long journey. Very sadly she died shortly after.

Beryl was joined shortly after by Clare Hann an exVenture Scout. Through pressure of work and ill health Mark resigned after a couple of years and John held the reins until Jeremy Redwood who had recently left the army with a lot of experience of teaching outdoor pursuits to young soldiers, joined to run the Scout Section but never took out a warrant.

After 5 years as Group Scout Leader John Roberts wanted to return to hands on scouting and reverted to his previous position with the Venture Scouts. Jeremy became Group Manager (same as Group Scout Leader but without the uniform). Unfortunately, after a short period he had to move with his family to Cornwall.

John acted as GSL supposedly as a temporary measure, but these things have a habit of continuing. In the meantime, through a lack of members, the Venture Scout Unit faded away but with a lack of leadership in the Scout Section John had to run the troop, again for a short period but it was difficult to find someone to take over the leadership. Colin Jacobs, an ex Venture Scout, returned as Assistant Scout Leader but, after a couple of years, pressure of work forced him to resign. John then had the help of a scout parent for just over a year then, as he left, so Colin Jacobs returned and began to take a more active leadership role. He was then joined by Barry Goswell another ex Venture Scout. John Roberts was then able to partially withdraw from the Scout Section and take up his old position of Group Scout Leader. Once again work pressure forced Colin to resign, but fortunately, following a Family Camp, Phil Williams joined the Scouts as Assistant Scout Leader. Shortly after Phil and Clare (Assistant Cub Leader) were married, Phil and Clare moved away about a year later and had to leave the Group. Phil was replaced by Barry Goswell's partner Penny Hann (Clare's sister).

Before Phil and Clare moved away, Jo Ann Fish-Halvorsen joined the Group as Assistant Cub Scout Leader.

A mention must be made of the Group Executive, group of non-warranted persons who act as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the group with parent representatives. This Group should meet as a separate team from the leaders but over recent years it has been found beneficial to combine the two meetings. One person who has been connected with the Group is Peter Ebden who, for several years was Group Chairman then stepped down and generally helped out and a few years ago took on the role of Quartermaster. Peter's self-appointed title is General Dogsboddy, if you want something done, ask Peter.

Currently the Executive is headed by Mark Jeffrey as Chairman who gives a strong positive lead with Geoff Gummer as Treasurer keeping the group on the financial straight and narrow.

Beryl still leads the Cub Section and is ably supported by Jo Ann Fish-Halvorsen, Beryl and Jo Ann have been running the cubs since then, teaching and nurturing the boys until they are ready to move up to scouts. Jo had her first baby (Jasmine) at the end of 2005 and after a short break returned to the Pack.

Over the years, members of the Troop have achieved the coveted and hard won Chief Scout award and, when moving into the Venture Scouts, have achieved the Queen's Scout award, which approximates to the Duke of Edinburgh Gold award.

At the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Group in 1990 there was a re-union and celebration weekend with the Sunday service being led by the Rev. Graham Thomson a former 20<sup>th</sup> Scout and during the service a new Union flag was presented in memory of Joe Latham. Former members of the Group traveled for the weekend, one even flying in from Jersey. A special badge was designed by Roy Goswell to celebrate the 60 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> and after approval by Scout Headquarters was produced to be worn on the point of the group scarf.

At the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary another special weekend and service was arranged with Alan Latham leading the morning service, The group badge was slightly modified at this time to incorporate the colours of the group scarf.

When girls were allowed into scouting several years ago, the group overwhelmingly decided to stay single sex. However, with falling rolls (a national trend) the subject was discussed at great length by the leaders and executive and the decision was made to admit girls. To date, no girls have applied to join the Scout Troop. However, very quickly girls joined and were invested into the Beaver Section and these early members have moved into Cubs and will soon be going up to the Scout Section.

Barry and Penny now have joint responsibility for the Scouts and while numbers are relatively small (some would say manageable) there is now an active and imaginative programme in place.

The group has a proud record of 76 years of scouting, being a positive influence on the lives of many young men and women. We trust and pray that this will continue.