

## The Scout Troop in Ainsworth

From a talk by Gwen White (nee Arrowsmith) in July 2014

Scouting was in Ainsworth before the war – we know there was a 14<sup>th</sup> Radcliffe group in 1935. It was based in the old band room on Bradley Fold Road and a number of its members were lads who were residents at Bankfield Children's home. We have little information about this early troop except that it was only a Scout section. (If you have any information please let the history society know). This troop appears to have disbanded at some point early in the Second World War.

Rev Ken Bullock, when he originally came to Ainsworth in 1963, planned to open a Church Lad's Brigade, as he had been very much involved with that organisation in his previous parishes. As there were no Lad's Brigades in the area, he switched his idea to opening a scout group. Guiding was already set up with a company and a brownie pack, but there was nothing similar for the boys.

He made his request during his first sermon and Gwen and her cousin, Valarie Powell, decided to put themselves forward. Rev Bullock wanted to open a Wolf Cub Pack and Boy Scout Troop. Because Gwen was only 19, she was too young to become Akela (you had to be 21 to hold that position), so the District Commissioner, Sydney Ormerod, asked Hilda Oates to organise the group for the first two years. The Scout Leader was Alan Bamber, who had been an assistant at St. Thomas and had recently moved onto Edgeworth Avenue. Rev Bullock went to see him and the leadership was sorted.

The group opened on a Friday night in September 1963, when 29 lads aged between 7 and 10 turned up to join the pack and 50 year later there has never been less than 25 cubs on the books. The scout troop was also full to capacity and have 28 youngsters in the section today

Rev Bullock had decided that the neckerchiefs should be scarlet edged with old gold, to represent the blood of Christ and the gold of the cross in church. Church parade was to be held on the second Sunday of each month and new flags were ordered and dedicated. However, he took a foot off the cub flag so that the smaller boys could carry it! Flags dedicated since that first one have all been left at the standard height.

The group's first scout camp took place in Easter 1964, at Giant's Seat Camp site. They borrowed equipment and Gwen found herself cooking for all the group – in the snow. It was here that she met Bill (she remarks that the thing she noticed was his legs as he came over the top of the hill). A couple of years later, Gwen and Valarie, with Anne Jones who worked at Bankfield, decided to be more adventurous and went to Waddecar Scout Camp, near Longridge Preston, for a pack holiday – going Monday and returning Friday. She remembers getting lost, carrying Bill R on her back and visiting the pig farm (then having pork sausages for lunch!) and having to have prunes on the menu!

Over the next 2 or 3 years there were Gang shows, district camps and Gwen courting at the camp site as Bill was Assistant Camp warden. Then in April 1967, she and Bill got married, with the lads forming a Guard of Honour.



Geoff Hampson was one of their first Queen's Scout, with many more over the following years. There were lots of events, competitions (especially the swimming where the Group won most trophies) and father and son camps and representatives from the troop at the World Jamborees. In 1976 girls were invited to become Venture Scouts and it is hoped that there will soon be a female Queen's Scout in the troop.

Camps have changed over the years – tents now have built in ground sheets - staying in centrally heated accommodation, indoor flush plumbing and camps overseas.

In 1982 Beaver Colonies, for lads aged 6 – 8 years, were introduced and a colony was started by Valarie – the first in the district and the GM County, although they were only officially accepted to have the title Beaver Scouts in 1986.

Over 1000 young men have come through the cub section since it started and a number of them attended the Jubilee Ball in 2013, reminiscing about their time in the group.

*If you have any memories or information that you wish to share, the History Society would love to hear from you*