

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Purley Scouts in the 1930s

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*Recalled by Bill Fisher in the 1980s*

The first Scouts in Purley were inaugurated in 1937. The nominal Scoutmaster was the Revd E E Scuse; but the Executive Assistant Scoutmaster was Alec Fagg, a Rover Scout who resided at Hemdean Rise, Caversham. He was 19 years old.

There were two patrols:- Kingfisher and Peewit. I was a second in Kingfisher patrol. I do not remember the names of all the scouts but those I do recall are: Ronald Rawlins, patrol leader Peewit; Jack Iles (I think he may be patrol leader Kingfisher); Bill Fisher; Donald Carter; Tony Higgins; not sure about Robert Iles but Jack Iles would confirm; John Page; Ken Gibbons. Our meetings were held in the school on Thursdays, our uniforms were supplied free.

We held Jumble Sales; occasionally cycled en masse to Arthur Hill Swimming Baths, we had an interest in woodcraft and played certain games in the school, one of which consisted of the patrols in opposition; the patrol leaders first would commence from opposite ends of the room hopping on one foot with arms folded and trying to knock the opposing member over before he could reach the enemy's side of the room.

We spent a week's summer camp together with Burghfield Scouts at Bearwood Naval School in 1937. 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 their finances were far and away on 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 Patrol was responsible for the Sunday repast after our return from the 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 didn't fall into that category. However our patrol shared an enormous box of Victoria plums sent by Ron Rawlins' parents and I 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 noises of the night. We naturally congregated around an evening camp fire on another occasion. I enjoyed tales and community songs with visiting rover scouts, one of which I remember was "There's a hole in my bucket dear Lisa, 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.

Purley Scouts second expedition was Easter 1938, spent camping in Purley Park near the boathouse.

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 useful and helpful to elderly people

Cubs and beavers were non existent in Purley before the Second World War.

Some scout details:

Ronald Rawlins - 7 Long Lane - killed in action

John Iles - 5 Glebe Road now the Bungalow Stores

Arthur Sewell - Purley Rise Stores - emigrated to Canada after war

Bill Fisher - 3 Glebe Road, later 144 Chapel Hill Tilehurst

Donald Carter - Ivy Cottage

Tony Higgins - Purley Park Lodge

John Page - 2 Jasmine Cottages - died of heart attack aged 16 given scout funeral

Kenneth Gibbons - 7 Glebe Road - moved to Devonshire.