

Dave L.Gardner

Memories of 1st Thurstaston

In many ways you are born into Scouting and in my case I followed in the footsteps of my father, who had been in Scouting and held the appointments of District Secretary for Fairfield and later District Secretary for West Wirral.

I joined 1st Thurstaston as a “Wolf Cub” who in 1958 met at the Methodist Church Hall, Mill Hill Road, Irby, on a Friday between 1830 and 2000.

I was invested into the “red six” by the Akela (Cub Master), Bill Horn, a fatherly man who seemed at the time to be quite an old man. Bill was assisted by Tony Martin (son of Vic Martin) and Peter Morton.

As I got older I gained my First and Second Stars and some badges – House Orderly, Cyclist and Collector. Gaining 3 badges meant that you were awarded the Leaping Wolf badge, which was a prestigious badge that you could still wear in the Scouts. In 1960 I became “sixer” of the Brown Six (2 yellow bands on the arm).

1st Thurstaston Cubs never entered competitions and so never won anything. However, in 1960 Bill Horn decided to enter a team for the Margaret Blackburn Sixers Get Together competition, to be held at the 1st West Kirby headquarters. This was something new for us, and we ventured with Bill on a Crossville bus from Irby to West Kirby.

I remember Bill promising us on the bus, that if we won, he would give us a Fish and Chip Night. Well, we won (see photograph) and good to his word we got our “chippy” night at his home in Woodlands Road.



In 1961 I moved up to the Scouts, who also met in the Methodist Church Hall on a Friday, but from 1930 to 2100, moving into the main hall after the cubs finished at 2000. The Scoutmaster was Frank Holland and the Assistant Scoutmasters were Colin Ratcliffe and later Arthur Mews. I was invested into the Peewit patrol, and my patrol leader was David Franklin.



Scouts were great with the added advantage of adventure, challenge and new friends.

Summer camps were the highlight of the year, and we camped at Anglesey, Market Drayton, Northumberland (near Hadrian's Wall), Llandrillo and Penmachno. Transport in those days was very different to today. Kit was piled into the back of a furniture wagon (or later a Redifusion Wagon) and the boys and leaders piled on top. Can you imagine the Health and Safety assessment today!!



I progressed through the Scouts and became a Patrol Leader of the newly formed Raven patrol. Although badges “were not the thing”, I enjoyed every moment of it.

In the early 1960’s the group acquired the land behind Irby Village Hall on a lease and in 1964 the present headquarters was delivered in sections and erected on an already constructed concrete base, by leaders, parents, friends and us scouts. Every weekend we were up at the headquarter, putting up timber framing, fixing plywood linings, glazing, painting, digging out for the water main and laying out the approach road.



By late September 1964, although not totally finished (no ceiling), it was ready for the official opening by Mr A.J.Kentish-Barnes, President of West Wirral Scout Association. At the opening ceremony, I had the privilege of making the presentation to Mr Pollard, who had provided the scouts with camp transport over many years.

With a new headquarters, fund raising became an important part of the group and the annual Bob-a-Job week was supplemented by Jumble Sales, Christmas and Summer Fairs etc.

By 1965, my time in the scouts was at an end and I moved to the Senior Scout section. Initially Frank Holland and Arthur Mews set up the unit, but this was followed shortly afterwards by Peter Morton as the newly appointed leader.

To become a Senior Scout you had to have the First Class badge or undertake an “Initiative Test”

None of us new Senior Scouts had a First Class badge so we had to do the Initiative Test, which included an 8 mile hike and a compulsory log. We revelled in the challenge, although on the hike the leaders reckoned we got lost and the Flintshire Police were looking for us around the Treuddyn area. We showed up – eventually passing our test and became invested as Senior Scouts

**What a team we were: John Corlett (PL), Dale Caddick (APL), Geoff Smith, Robert Petrei, Andy Meadows, Steve Leidecker, Stephen McDonald and I.
I was appointed the treasurer.
A bit like Explorer Scouts today, we were encouraged to do our own thing.**

We walked the Conway Valley, travelling from Irby to Conway by bus and then hiking to Snowdon via Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig and Pen-y-Pass. Arriving at the foot of Snowdon we were guided to the summit, using the Crib Goch route by Paul Leidecker and another Rover Scout.

Another adventure was a week with the 42 Command Royal Marines at Bickleigh, just outside Plymouth. Pete Morton drove us there – 19 hours in an old ambulance ! For the week we were treated just like marines, fully kitted out, we undertook activities such as shooting, night hiking on Dartmoor, canoeing, aerial assault course and taking soundings while on a trawler around Plymouth Ho. - what more could a 16 year old want !



When we returned, we even set about demolishing the old brick air raid shelter behind the scout headquarters.

I gained the First Class badge, which was quite a challenge. It required a 15 mile hike over 2 days and the compulsory log. The route was set by the District Commissioner, Mr R.O.Freeman and I still remember the objectives that my hiking companion, Gary Setford and I had to fulfil, which included following the course of the River Tern. As I travel on the A41 through Shropshire, past Tern Hill, RAF Base, the memories come back !

The First Class Hike Route:

Start at Market Drayton and follow the brook that rises in the Dingle and flows to Stoke upon Tern. Visit Colhurst Manor and report on it, then follow the River Tern back to little Drayton. Report on current depth and river crossings. Is the airfield used ?

Dear David

It has been a pleasure to read your log. I see how much trouble you have taken to make a full record.

Your maps are perhaps a little less than perfect, but we cannot all be cartographers. I had no difficulty finding my way along with you.

Your log is acceptable for 1st Class.

Yours: R.O.Freeman. 19.9.65

The other daunting memory in achieving the First Class badge was that I had to swim 50 yards. At the time I couldn't swim, but this made me learn – another achievement.

By this time I was starting to gain some proficiency badges and even had thoughts that one day I might gain the Queen Scout badge.



Peter Morton put me forward as a prospective candidate to represent West Wirral at the forthcoming 12th World Jamboree to be held at Idaho, USA.

Much to my surprise, I was selected, which meant I seriously had to gain the Queen Scout badge before the Jamboree.

Badges followed: Fireman's, Ambulance, Despatch Rider, Meteorologist, and Venturer badge. I gained the Bushman's Thong (several strips of leather that were knotted and tied to make a "thong" that went around the shoulder). Part of the fun in making this was that the instructions were useless !

The Venturer Badge included backwoods cooking, adventurous outside exercises and a 20 mile hike, over 2 days. The hike was undertaken near Penmachno with my hiking companion Dale Caddick:

The Venturer Award Hike Route:

Start at Dolwyddelan Castle, hike to Gafell Wen, Blaenau Festiniog, Gwydr Forrest and back to the Penmachno camp site.

Dear David

Although you were unable to follow the prescribed route exactly, you were wise to apply the 11th Scout Law and I approve. The ridge from Gafell Wen is not a good one in thick mist..

You have done well to keep to high land as much as you did and I am sure that you will have increased your confidence in map reading and compass work. My regret is that you were deprived of the quite outstanding views from the ridge.

Well done ! Accepted for Venturer Badge.

Yours sincerely: R.O.Freeman. 3.9.66

By June 1967, prior to the Jamboree I was awarded the Queen Scout badge and later in the year I was presented with the certificate by the Chief Scout at a special ceremony in Glasgow. In the December, I was invited with other Queen Scouts to a dinner at Peckforton Castle (then empty) and afterwards a night's stop over in the castle – spooky stuff !

1967 was an amazing time for Scouting. The Advanced Party Report was issued and Scouting was totally modernised. Awards were changed, uniforms updated – no longer did scouts wear shorts. Senior Scouts became Venture Scouts and the Rover Scout section disappeared.

As a representative of the World Jamboree, I was one of the first in the country and certainly the first in West Wirral to have the new uniform. I was regularly required to go round scout groups and district events to show off the new uniform.

As a Jamboree Contingent member, I proudly participated in the colour party marching through Chester City in my new uniform on the way to the cathedral.

The Jamboree was fantastic and I made many new friends from around the world. Badge collecting was almost compulsory, and I still today have these memories from the Jamboree.



People in 1967 were only just starting to fly to the USA and certainly didn't go to places like Idaho or San Francisco, where we had home hospitality after the event.

To this day I am still in touch with the family that I stayed with in San Francisco and on a return visit in 2001, I met up with the "boys" from the family, now all over 60

Returning from the Jamboree I visited groups showing them a cine film and slide show I had made of the Jamboree and of course showing them my new uniform.

There followed a time when I was a Cub Instructor and in 1968 I became an Assistant Scout Leader, putting something back into the group from which I had benefited so much.

This was a great time for 1st Thurstaston with the Scouts winning the Tom Temple Cooking Competition, Cheshire Hike, having a visit from the Chief Scout at Arrowe Park, a second Scout Troop being formed (Colin Ratcliffe as Scout Leader) and of course the erection of the second scout hut.



In 1969 we won the Presidents Prize for the first time.

For many years thereafter I continued to go with the scouts on the annual summer camp as a helper – what memories !!