

# A brief history of Wedmore Scout Group



## The early years

The first record of Scouting in Wedmore dates to October 1919, when the Reverend A Chisholm started a Scout Troop - just 12 years after the birth of Scouting

At the time of registration, it had eighteen Scouts under his leadership. This picture shows many of the original members of the Group.



The Troop was very active and held their first Summer Camp near Bridport in 1920, followed by Dawlish in 1921, and then Weymouth in 1923.

The 1924 Summer Camp was somewhere entirely different – France, with Scoutmaster Rev. Chisholm and Rover Scouts - A Collins, R Curtins and G Pavey Patrol Leaders - F A Curtin and H Redman - Patrol Seconds - J Hicke and E Norman, and Scouts - V Curtin, brothers C A and H D Burroughs, D Fear, A Merriman, J Morgan, L Redman, J Scammell and L E Walsh. No doubt, many of these were the original members of the Group.

The Troop left from Cheddar railway station and visited Salisbury, Southampton, Le Havre, Paris, Versailles, Honfleur, Vascouy, Deauville Trouville, Caen and Roueu, during their expedition.

In 1928 the Troop comprised fourteen Scouts, two Assistant Scoutmasters (ASM's), Mr H Brown and Mr George Pavey, and the Reverend Chisholm as Scout Master (SM).



Members of the Troop attended the County Jamboree in 1933, where this picture was taken. It is the first record of the old Troop Flag, which is still used when investing Scouts.

A new Troop Flag was obtained for general use in 2007 to preserve the old flag and mark the Centenary of Scouting.

In July of 1935, Mr Pavey stood down an ASM, and the following May, he was appointed as Rover Scout Leader. 1936 saw more changes to the Troop leaders, with the departure of Mr L J Redman in April and Mr F C Porter's appointment as an Assistant Scoutmaster. The Troop retained Mr C Curtis's services and the Reverend Chisholm as Group Scoutmaster (GSM).

Additionally, in 1936, a Wolf Cub Pack was opened by Colonel Cyril H Ommanney, who lived at the Manor House, with Mr Eric Banwell being one of the first Sixers in the Pack.

The vicar left the parish in 1937 and resigned his warrant. The new incumbent, the Reverend H C T Morgan, briefly took on the Group Scoutmaster's role in March before handing it over to Colonel Ommanney the following year.

1938 saw more new faces in the Troop, with two new warrants for Assistant Scoutmasters, Mr K G Bailey and Mr G E Curtins. There were further changes in February 1939, when Colonel Ommanney switched warrants from GSM to SM within the Group and the Reverend Morgan's return as Group Scoutmaster.



Gerald Deane, who now lives in Cheddar, joined the small but well-run scout troop, which met in the Sunday School Room, in 1936 at 10. He believes that Colonel Ommanney was a brilliant man, as he obtained the Manor Barn's use as a Scout Headquarters, which the scouts then got into ship-shape order.

He was a disciplinarian but greatly respected by all his scouts.

Amongst other things, the scouts made a hand pushcart, which they used to take their camping gear to Nyland, where they camped above Quarry Farm - only three miles to push it, but enjoyed as much, as of today's camps 100 miles away! They also did bridge building, using large long poles lashed together with square lashings in rope.

The Troop went to the Bath Jamboree at the start of the war, and Scouting remained very strong during the early war years. The first 'First Class Scouts' in Wedmore were Eric Banwell and Gerald Deane. However, the Group appears to have folded sometime late in the war years.

## The 1940's and '50's

The Group was reformed in August 1947 under the leadership of the vicar of Wedmore, the Reverend H C T Morgan, reprising the Group Scoutmaster's position.

Little is known about this post-war Group other than the information on the registration sheet with the Reverend Morgan as Group Scout Master, Mr D A Kennewell as Scoutmaster and twelve scouts. However, the Troop was to have a short life and had closed by 1958.

## The 1960's, '70's, and '80's

The Group restarted when a Cub Pack was formed in 1965 by Mrs Vera Banwell. Previously, the Group scarf was red, but this had to be changed to lemon as this colour was, by then, in use elsewhere.

Mrs Banwell started the Pack with a Queen's Guide, Gillian Brown, and was joined by Judith Hunter later, who became an Assistant Cub Scout Leader. Mrs Nicky Higgs, who lived in Mark, took out a warrant and regularly brought several boys from Mark to the Pack meetings in her car.

A second hand ex-World War II hut was purchased in October 1974 for £500 to use as a Group HQ. The Parish Council kindly granted permission to use land that it owned down Combe Lane to place it on. Work was still being undertaken on the hut as late as April 1980, when the flooring was in progress. The County Commissioner officially opened on 3 June 1983.

The Pack met in the village hall until moving to the new Scout hut; the Scouts had been meeting there for some time, though the headquarters, at that stage, had no running water or a toilet. The Pack had excellent assistance from Scouts in the Troop who were undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh Award, who came down and helped the Cub leaders run the Pack for three to six months.

The first Pack holiday was held at Woodspring Priory, at Sand Bay, by two Guiders Kathleen Mapstone and Kath Cottrell. Over the years, other camps took place at such places as Porlock Methodist Church, Great Wood campsite at Overstowey, and a County Cub Camp at B. P House.

Vera Banwell and Nicky Higgs retired from the Group in June 1983. It is unclear if the Pack closed temporarily at this time. However, later in 1983, the Pack had Roger Reynolds as Akela, Ann Robinson from Mark, as Bagheera, Kate (surname unknown) as Kaa, and Liz Johnson as Shere-Kahn.

A Scout Troop opened in 1970 under the leadership of a local teacher, Mr Godfrey Daine, with Mr Dennis Johnson as Assistant Leader. The Troop seems to have been quite lively, with Summer Camps held regularly between 1972 and 1981. This picture was taken in 1974 at their Summer Camp near

Rydal Water, in the Lake District

Dennis Johnson served as ASL until 1975 when Godfrey Daine stepped down; when he then took on the Scout Leader's role, remaining in post until 1982, when he eventually stood down due to a lack of adult helpers.

Again, it is unclear if the Troop closed temporarily at this time.





In 1983 Peter Westrik was recorded as the Scout Leader. He seems to have brought new life into the Group, as in 1985, he is the Group Scout Leader. By this time, there was a Beaver Colony under Susan Eadie's leadership, with help from Hilary Davies, while the Cub Scout Leader was Peter Nicholson from Brent Knoll, with Ann Robinson of Mark, as Assistant. There is no Scout Leader recorded, but three Assistant Scout Leaders were Jeremy Morse, John North and Danny Radcliffe, who left the Group sometime in 1986.

In February 1984, part of the roof blew off the hut. As a result, there were no meetings until 7 March 1984. Later that year, on the 15th and 16th September, a Dads & Lads Camp at Stogursey was attended by 14 pairs of dads & lads and five Leaders. In 1988, Group Scout Leader's role was vacant, as Peter Westrik had moved due to work commitments. It would appear that the Scout Troop closed when Peter Westrik left the Group.

Never-the-less, the Beavers remained active with Jean Windridge as Leader and Susan Eadie as Assistant. On 8 October 1988, 13 Beavers and three adults visited HMS Beaver. However, the Beaver Colony ceased to operate in July 1989.

The Cub Pack was being led by Mrs Sue Murray in 1988, with Robert Duckett's assistance. Little is known of the Pack during this period; however, it appears that the Cubs, which Robert Duckett was then running, ceased after part of the hut roof was again blown off early in 1990, leaving them without anywhere to meet.

By November 1990, there were no active Beaver, Cub or Scout sections, and only two serving officers from the Group's Executive left. These included the Secretary, Roger Ellis, who was instrumental in keeping the hut and group equipment together until he found new leaders to take the Group forward again.

## The current Group

The Group subsequently restarted in 1994 with a Beaver Colony, followed by a Cub Pack in 1995, then a Scout Troop in 1996. In 2000 the Beaver Colony closed due to a lack of leaders. Additionally, the Cub Pack closed temporarily in 2006 for the same reason; but both are now running again.

The hut, or 'Den' as it is known, has been gradually updated. The old felt roofing was replaced in two phases in 1998 and 2002. Additionally, in 1999 water and drainage were installed; and a new floor laid over the old one, with insulation between the two. The main hall, kitchen, toilets and lobby were insulated and fitted-out, during 2004; then, in 2013, central heating was installed. In 2014 insulated wall cladding replaced the original timber cladding, followed by a new insulated roof and the Bunk Room's fitting-out in 2016. Finally, in 2017, LED light fittings were installed throughout the building.



*Most of the information in this leaflet has been reproduced, with permission, from Duncan Biddulph's research for his thesis on the History of Scouting in the Mendip Area.*