

### Early days how I remember it

In 1944 I wanted to join the Sea Scouts they had just taken delivery of a training ship in Sutton park. I was ten and a half the weather was beautiful being mid August, and Sutton Park did not seem to far away on my bike. Mum and Dad knew where the Sea Scouts met in Chuckery Senior Boys School on Saturday Morning .I duly turned up and was told in no uncertain way that I was too young. “come back next Easter”. I did.

Meetings had now been moved to Thursdays. My best friend Reg Plumber who lived just across the road and a second friend, John Tame planed to

join the first Thursday after the Easter Holidays. Reg and I arrived at Chuckery, but John went to the wrong place and joined the Sea Cadets who also met on a Thursday, above “Dunn’s Hat Shop” on the Bridge, where Barclays Bank Stands at the moment, John being wooden, said there was no mistake, he had always intended to join the cadets and refused to budge.

April 1945 I re-attended the meeting at Chuckery Senior Boys School in Tong Street and Chuckery Road I was equipped with a swimming certificate from school for a half a struggling mile a small tin containing a few first aid plasters and a pair of tweezers and a sheath knife strapped to my belt. Well, I stood with a friend, Reg Plummer who lived immediately opposite to me in Barns Lane Rushall we were the same age. We stood there for months, joining in where we could, but being cheerfully ignored. Eventually someone asked our names and designated a Deck to each of us Reg stood in “D” Deck Port watch under the tuition of Roger Stebbins and I stood in “C” deck Starboard watch under the careful eye of Peter Hall, there was in the early days a great deal of un-written rules surrounding the Guardship you could only attend if you had had certain qualifications, and by the time I had qualified the boats were off the pool and it was painting time, where everyone was welcome. The sand paper was damp and worn out, the paint was pure white lead and as thick as putty. There were only two boats one sixteen footer estuary working boat called Rover, where the present boats draw their design from and a 10 foot dinghy called Pegasus so now you know.



Roll on Easter 1946 I was a fully committed member, a knot in the bottom of my blue scarf said so. I put on my brand new freshly “blancoed” hat and peddled to the Guardship at Powell’s Pool Sutton Coldfield

We wore Blue hats through the winter. and white hats through the summer. There was very little traffic on the roads, petrol rationing and all that austerity stuff that lasted until 1953.

The competition to attend the Guardship was fierce Starboard one week, Port the next.

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You must remember that rationing was still in place and was to remain until 1953, so to cater for the week end you were obliged to self provide. A packet of sandwiches, to tide you over the initial set up, or until bed time. An egg, for your breakfast or cereals. Also a tin of Irish stew for lunch, bread butter jam cake tea for the afternoon snack. There were certain groceries that could be bought from Boldmere Potatoes Bread Milk Margarine "if you were in favour" This supplemented the food we brought and everyone seemed to have access to other tins and soups to make it enough. Camp fee Two bob, for gas and other bits.

It was much the same at the cabin,,, I suppose it was the same crowd same logic same intake. Just a lot more peddling. That Red Hill is a killer, but the ride down to Oaken Gates past Granville colliery was worth the push and the walk.

### **Programme for a weekend Afloat**

It was always the target to have the boat work finished by Easter to have the Easter Camp afloat. Some times of course it would not have happened without the intervention of a couple of fellows from my firm to put the last coat of paint in place. It's surprising what 40 man/hours can achieve.

Starting on a Saturday Lunch time. Open up and divide the crew into two watches. Appoint a rota of look-outs to man the bridge for other members showing up. Collect the boats from the Golf Course Trot. Rig the booms to either side of the Guardship and Bail out the boats Scrub the bird droppings and rig them for rowing..



Mean while two members were dispatched to Boldmere for the provisions and watch ever they could scrounge. If gas was needed then a Scouter had to attend to provide transport.

By four o'clock Eight bells, tea was made sandwiches devoured and pulling races or rescue exercises were organized for the rest of daylight.

Saturday evening was taken up with Bosun's Mate activities; Knots, bends, hitches, splices, whippings. Patch a canvas tear. Make a rope fender, perhaps if the weather permitted, a Wide Game through the park There was no "tele" Sutton Coldfield had not started to transmit.

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Sunday

Clear the bunks have breakfast flag up and a prayer and then sailing Rig and unrig the boats a timed exercise special attention given to the correctness of Halyards. The boats were rigged Balanced lug sail, that means there was a small section of main sail in front of the mast.

The prime mover in all this seamanship was a fellow who had seven or eight years experience before the mast in a Swedish ship plying from Europe to Australia. His name Joe Haliwell.

What he didn't know about ships and ropes wasn't worth knowing. There seemed to be a great number of Scouters about but I suppose it was having the new Guardship there being rationing lack of petrol. It was somewhere to go and enjoy an activity at little cost. Their names "Onion" Kenyon; Ginger Beebee, Clifford Millard "Bottle" to his friends, he played the Gene in the film Wizard, Skipper Joe Haliwell that I have already mentioned, he always played the villain in the films produced by Sarg. Jos Carver. Occasionally Cal Day but he was senior Scouts really Gogga Turner Patrol or rather Deck Leaders Yank Law, Mac Macmanus Peter Hall Stebbo Stebbins Chilly Roper Peter Haliwell, who later went into bomb disposal and earned the George Cross Not bad eh!

On a Sunday afternoon we acted as rescue for Sutton Sailing Club for we were all founder members

There were no engines on the pool so we were under oars. No spinning props to consider.

### **The regular Troop meetings**

We met on Saturday mornings. Sometimes at Sarg's garage which was paneled and painted to represent a ship's cabin, we called it "Killock" I have always judged it to be part of a film set. Sometimes at the Chuckery Senior Boys School in Tong Street, as numbers grew the meetings were always at Chuckery.

At the beginning of each meeting the flag halyard needed to be tossed over a roof truss stay bar, this needed a great deal of skill, next the equipment box, fetched from the corridor. There was available some gym equipment a box medicine ball, wall bars mats, this allowed steam to be used up, call to decks and a roll call, instruction on scouting topic, camp, first aid, pack a ruck sack. Mapping. The next period was "deck cag" were the deck leader demonstrated what had just been instructed. A game followed. More instruction on the Seaman's badge, boat maintenance, first aid mapping and grid references, contour lines. Back to the Decks for relays. The meetings were closed by the collection of subs" A shilling a week" or, 24 "Turks Heads" tied with leather thongs. Sarg had undertaken a contract with Gilwell to provide them. The final count and issue of the beads won that evening, issue and presentation of awards and badges, notices for camps and other events and finalized by a collect the Lord's Prayer and the grace. Flag down and dismiss not so very different to now.

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At Killock in the drawers in the office are tobacco tins containing relay cards covering several Scouty topics, Tenderfoot test "Scout Badge now" semaphore; 32 points of the compass; convention signs; boat parts; international code flags with single flag hoists; knots and bends, and a few more, it was all part of the award system to win the Garter. This is another topic I must explain. It was a major part of the success of the Group that we knew our subject Sea Scouting.

Subs were collected, a shilling with the reply "Aye Aye Sir one shilling" or if you had missed a week two shillings or you might not be sure how your subs account stood, in which case "Aye Aye Sir How much do I owe?" Prayers and flag down, two hours, and then if it was a Saturday meeting off to the Guardship

The initial badge was the "Tenderfoot" which consisted of :-

- Knowledge of the Movement
- Ten Scout Laws
- Promise
- Understand the Union Flag and dates
- Six basic knots
- Three whippings
- Kim's game (24 items on a tray)
- Compass points, sixteen of them



The test was always conducted at Sarg's House in Gorway Road

To arrive there in some sort of sartorial order I traveled by bus and walked along Upper Bridge Street, Ablewell Street, Spring hill, Jesson Road, Belvidere Road, Highgate Road, and left into Gorway Road. There stood a huge house on the corner and Sarg's house was next, and just as imposing..

I stood back on the other side of the road and gazed at the size of the house No 40 WOW; I was transfixed where I stood and quivered. Eventually I crossed and rang the bell, wrong one, I had rung the bell for his mother's ground floor flat, but Sarg came to the rescue. I was supposed to have gone round the rear of the house and ascended the open air stairs, no one had mentioned this. He dug a stiff finger into my ribs and remarked that if I had rung the bell when I first arrived I would not have been late.

Sarg always conducted the initial Tenderfoot Badge himself.

He then sold to you your uniform 2 Hats one blue and one white, which needed to be "Blancoed" 1 jersey, scarf, woggle, and tally band for your hats.

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The next test to attend the Guardship was swimming 50 yards in shorts shirt and socks, I only just made it, I don't think I had swum that far before and certainly not in clothing  
Painting the boats, to be ready for the water was the next chore on the agenda. We had three ROVER a 16' foot working boat that the present boats are based upon PEGASUS and 10' foot dinghy used as a tender

A boat I never saw on the water stood in the Boat Yrd. Now I judge this boat to have been "Hope" although I had heard her called SPERSUM. She was a ply construction with a fore deck and Heavy crosstrees up the mast plus a Hard Chine. Her reputation that was she was very critical to sail, over canvassed and very tippy.

The paint was white lead for the outside and gray for the inside and Black enamel for the thwarts and gunwales.

The paint was so dense that it made yours wrists ache.

The final problem was the Guardship, she was very new and the demand exceeded the number of beds on board, so we took it in alternate Watches to camp on the ship. This lead to another disappointment for Reg had joined Port Watch and I was in Starboard, we overcame this by Day Boarding and therefore we could attend every weekend.

The rule seemed to be that you could earn Proficiency Badges once you had attained the Second class badge and sewn a white stripe around the neckerchief, which completed your uniform, for this the tests were;

A short hike using maps and compass

A few more knots and splices

32 points of the compass

Simple first aid

Blocks and Tackles

Throw a life line

Semaphore or other signaling discipline

Pack a rucksack

Pitch a tent

Light a fire and cook a simple meal

The aim was to complete these and gain Boating badges.

Oarsman; coxswain; Helmsman; power coxswain; race helmsman; finalizing with the master mariner, a super round large badge with a compass rose as the motive.

There was one more addition to your uniform, when you became a Deck Leader and held a First Class badge you could have a tally band for your hat with the Scout Emblem between the words Sea & Scout. Now you were complete.

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First Class Badge

Re-do the second class tests, to a higher standard,  
Semaphore or other signaling  
The St John's First Aid Badge  
Estimate weights and measures  
A two day hike in exposed territory  
I think there were a couple more items but I cannot remember.

The meetings on a Thursday night became difficult, the Council gave everyone else priority over the Sea Scouts, The challenge became find the meeting. We met at just about every school in Walsall, The training and badge work was progressing because of the Guardship and the Cabin, also at a push we could meet in the new boatshed at Gorway Road but it was very tight and there was no heating.

### The Joint

At the rear of 24 Birmingham Street, Jos & Nancy's place, there was his garage. It was at one time when his father lived there, a stable for the horse and a place to keep the trap and carriage. In the loft of this brick building was storage for hay and feed and a small annex where I suppose they stored the tack. We cleared the place out an installed a few bus seats, I don't know who provided them for we appeared to have ready access to bus seats , we had already bolted three or four in the Hearse, it was just ask and there they were.

We had to be mildly careful the way we horsed around for the building was of half brick construction and you could feel the place move a little if the activities got too boisterous , not that was very much room. It was very convenient to gather there after college and then a short walk to the Wheat Sheaf, halcyon days..

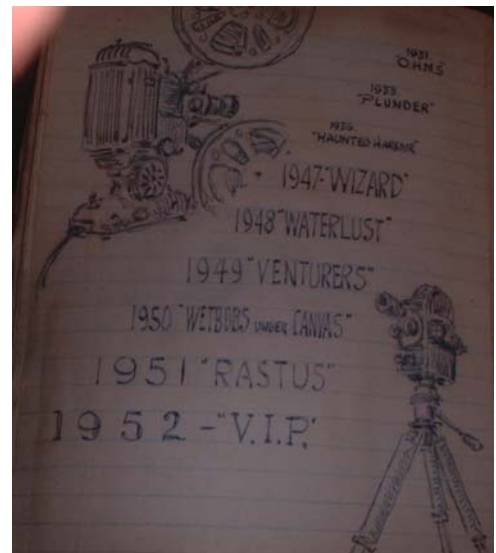
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Subject: 3rd Walsall Sea Scouts Steve Atkin (Attic) 63 - 69  
Date: 08 March 2009 20:05

Hi GRiFF

Thanks for your reply

Sorry to hear about the Parkinson's...I hope your work with the history of the 3rd Walsall SS is helping

For my own part I am doing a little research into slides, photos and film (16mm & Cine Super or Standard 8) on my early years when I was in Walsall so that they can be captured to DVD for later inclusion in presentations



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I joined the troop in about 1963, on an introduction by my (then) future brother-in-law Roy Shelley..of Mikey Taylor, Dave May era.

The first camp I went to that year in September was to the weekend Midland Meet at Packington Park outside Birmingham. We camped in the old brown patrol tents, attending the chapel on Sunday morning after breakfast

At that time the troop met at Chuckery Junior School on Thursday nights

Over the next few years as a junior through the weeks and months I went to Troop nights...went over the Barge... and up to the Wrekin for the cabin  
On an annual basis there would be events such as down at the Arboretum with festival displays using the breeches boy tripods, rockets and ropes, and also the St Georges day parades

Then there would be the summer camps to Bala. It is these and the filming by people such as Jos, Murray Mackie, May brothers, Carpenters that I was particularly interested in

I understand that you do have some footage of Sarg's 16mm films (which I did help setup for him on occasions). Is there any chance that these could be put onto the 3rd Walsall SS web site along with pictures?

Steve

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Yes I have all the old films here at Green Lane plus the "Filmosound " projector The large screen is at Killock; there is more room there. I have taped in VHS format Films; LATE; Building the Boat Shed at Gorway; The Morna Cruise; Wizzard; Waterlust; V.I.P.; Venturers ; Jubilee J.I.M.;

There a few more to convert, Pewitts; Rastus; Haunted Harbour;

I shall need some help to convert these. Also there are three films on 9.5 stock

Dated 1927 1928 1929 These films are shot in North Wales but the characters are unknown except Sarg on the Norfolk Broads. The interesting item is in two of the films the people are wearing scout uniform and the last one we are in Sea Scout uniform.

### BUILD A NEW CABIN

Just at this time The Cabin on the Wrekin was burned down by youths from Wellington. This story strays into the realms of the last of the Summer Wine

I wrote to Lord Barnard at Barnard Castle Durham and requested that in view of the long standing association the Third had enjoyed with his staff at Uppington could we rebuild the cabin and continue to train the boys and girls in our group. The answer was a firm "yes" but it must look like the old one



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There was monies enough to buy a prepared kit of substantial softwood all in cut lengths to the design by Tony Harrington. The frames were nailed together on the Half Deck. It was fortunate that just at this time an Old Boy's Dinner was planed so we assembled the cabin in short form on the Main Deck in the hope that everyone would donate. Some did.



When we took the fames and logs to the site at Little Hill Mr. Eade, the Estates Manager, was curious about where we obtained the logs. We bought them as part of the kit. I explained that the



logs were tongue and grooved together and out -side the scope of his mill, however when we rebuild the Bunk House we would need some logs and I would ask him to quote. I did write and ask , he had in the mean time been in touch with Barnard and the logs were free again just the same routine as the first time similar to 1920, except we had to collect them from the Mill in Uppington, not tong and grooved this time. On the Half deck at Killock there were five or six single span roof trusses. Harrington and Penall spent weeks of Tuesday mornings taking them apart, to fabricate the basic frames the new bunk

house. The rest of the timber was supplied by my firm. The four light window came with the initial kit.