

# 1<sup>st</sup> CONWAY TROOP Baden Powell SCOUTS

(Later known as 1<sup>st</sup> Conwy Scout Group)

Early in 1910 a group of boys in Conway read “Scouting for Boys” (probably a serial version published in fortnightly parts). Inspired by Baden Powell’s words they decided to form a scout patrol. They met in a field just outside the town in Cadnant Park (this is now a residential area). In bad weather they met in the cellar under St. John’s English Methodists Church, Rosehill Street, Conway.

The boy persuaded Mr. William Ralphs to assist them in ambulance and life saving practices. Mr. Ralphs in turn persuaded Mr. Waterhouse of Cadnant Park to become the first scoutmaster.

The family of one of the founder member boys, Robert (Bobby) Williams provided the fledgling troop with its first permanent home in 1911. The “round room” was originally built as Conway’s dog and cock pit and it has since been used as a picture gallery, Liberal Club, practice room for the town band, artist’s studio and finally a chapel of rest. As detached circular building, it stands behind Alfredo’s Restaurant in Lancaster Square. Bobby William’s daughter, Margaret Williams became famous in the area as author, historian and author and owner of the Smallest House in Great Britain on Conwy Quay.

The other founding members of the troop included Patrol Leader William H. Evans, his assistant, or Corporal as they were called in the early days of scouting, William D. Evans, Alan Jones, Glyn Jones, Llewelyn Jones and Frank Ralphs. This last named scout is significant.

In the first 60 years of scouting in Conway the names of two men were synonymous with the scout movement, Baden Powell and Frank Ralphs, and Frank Ralphs was Scouting in Conwy.

The troop was active very quickly and had its first camp in Hendre in August 1910 with a well photographed first official camp at Abergwyngregin in July 1911. By 1912 Arthur Ralphs was the bandmaster of the troop’s band of fifes, bugles and drums which not only led parades but participated in concerts.

Discipline was strong – the scout punishment for swearing was to have a mug of cold water poured down the offenders’ sleeve.

In 1914 the troop assisted the war effort by being orderlies and messengers for organisations such as the Red Cross and the Recruiting Office. They also assisted in looking after refugees and guarding bridges. Frank Ralphs and probably other troop members gained the Scout War Service badge for his services to the country.

Frank joined the army in 1916 and after serving overseas he was de-mobbed in October 1919. Upon his return to Conway he re-joined the troop and never left it.

Meanwhile the troop was thriving under Scout Master W.G.McMurry. He had taken over the troop in 1912 and a photograph of him at the 1912 camp at Deganwy reveals just how military the scouts and leaders appeared and acted in those early days. Mr. McMurry later became District Commissioner and remained in post until he was succeeded by Mr. Frank Ralphs in 1942. In 1915 Sir Robert Baden Powell visited the large Army Training Camp just outside Conwy on the Morfa. Whilst there the Conwy Scouts were inspected by the chief scout and photographs show some very proud scouts.

In November 1918 the 1st Conwy Wolf Cub Pack was formed and its founder Cubmaster was H.Russell Jones.

In 1920 Frank Ralphes attended the 1<sup>st</sup> World Jamboree in Olympia, London. He later attended jamborees at Arrowe Park, Birkenhead in 1929, Holland in 1937, France in 1948 and the 1<sup>st</sup> World Rover Moot in 1931 at Kandersteg, Switzerland.

Sometime between 1912 and 1921 the group moved its headquarters to a wooden hut at the top of Mount Pleasant under the shadow of the town walls. The group stayed there until the outbreak of World War II when the military requisitioned it. This building was demolished after the war and it is the only Conway Scout Headquarters for which there is no photograph in the group archives.

One of the group's activities was semaphore and between the wars they were the proud winners of the District Competition Shield on several occasions.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1935 the troop assisted in building and lighting a beacon on Conway Mountain to celebrate the Royal Silver Jubilee. Horses were used to carry the wood up the mountain and the beacon was lit by Major Douglas Porter. Earlier the same day a thanksgiving service had been held in the grounds of Conwy Castle and attended by the Cubs and Scouts.

Throughout the depressed years between the wars, the cubs and scouts of Conway were active in hiking, camping and all the traditional aspects of scouting. The group's archives are a little thin on these years but do contain photographs of camps and parades.

One of the boys in the 1930s was Trevor Jones who eventually became a Kings Scout. Trevor returned to the troop as Assistant Scoutmaster under Frank Ralphes from 1948 to 1951. Perhaps it is an indication of the groups industry in the 1930s that we are aware of their attendance at overseas jamborees and achieving high awards as a prestigious Kings Scout Award.

Whilst 1<sup>st</sup> Conwy has a continuous record from 1910 to date (2005) it should be recorded that two other scout groups rose and fell in Conway.

In the first five years of the 1930s there was a group (cubs and scouts) known as 1<sup>st</sup> Gyffin Scout Group. Gyffin is a small hamlet just outside the town walls on the road to Llanrwst. The first Scoutmaster was the Rev. W.R.Roberts so it is likely that this group was linked to St. Benedict's Church and based in the Gyffin Church Hall.

During World War II, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conway Scout Troop emerged at St. Michael's R.C. Church, which is within the town walls. Local knowledge indicates that this group was largely made up of evacuees from cities threatened by aerial bombing. The minutes of the District A.G.M. dated 5<sup>th</sup> March 1942 announced the formation of this group but this is the only reference and it is assumed that it closed down when the boys returned home when the war ended.

After the war 1<sup>st</sup> Conway had several bases including the Town Hall until it was destroyed by fire, then a room under the harbourmaster's office on Conway Quay, which is still there.

In 1966/67 after much hard work in raising funds, land on the edge of Morfa Bach Car Park was rented from Conway Town Council and a Scout Headquarters erected on the site. This building is still in use in 2005.

Frank Ralphes took a back seat in the running of the scout troop in the 1960s although he and his sister Violet (who had been Akela from 1943 to 1969) appear in uniform on the group photograph on the opening of the new headquarters on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1967.

In 1970 the group had its Diamond Jubilee and to make the occasion an inscribed bench was presented to the Borough of Conway. It was originally placed in the garden opposite Conway Castle but is now situated in Lancaster Square.

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1972 the town of “Conway” ceased to exist with that spelling and on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1972 reverted to the Welsh spelling “Conwy”.

From the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s the scout troop was much influenced by Philip Williams-Jones. His background was that of an officer in the Royal Marines as well as The Search and Rescue Dog Association. This meant that the boys had many challenging and exciting outdoor activities. The most unusual of these activities was for the boys to hide on the slopes of Tan y Fan or The Rhinogs near Harlech and wait to be found by very loud and large dogs, the dogs never failing to find them.

In 1980 Ray Castle took over the troop until 1987 when falling numbers in the troop coincided with the Cub Pack losing its leader so the troop was closed down and Ray became the Cub Scout Akela. Today the pack thrives which is an indication that Ray made the right decision.

There were two attempts to revive the scout troop in the 1990s but both failed.

On a happier note a Beaver Colony was started in 1988 and remains active under the guidance of Pam Newton and Mandy Williams with a controlled maximum membership of 18 boys. The colony feeds the Cub Pack, still lead by Ray Castle and assisted by Assistant Cub Scout Leaders Chris Williams and Susan Owen. The number in the cub pack varies between 24 and 30 boys who enjoy activities of canoeing, camping, hiking, rock climbing, skiing etc. Of particular value is the rough ground behind the hut where campfire cooking skills are developed before the Annual Camp at the Rowen Scout camp and Training Site, where it usually rains.

In 2005 we have come full circle as the cubs once again meet throughout the winter in St. John’s English Methodist Church where we started in 1910 and in the Scout-hut in summer. The Beaver Scouts are based at St. John’s Church all the year round.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Conwy Scout Group has recently joined with Deganwy, Llandudno Junction and Glanconwy and formed what is known as the Aberconwy Group. This means that when boys reach scout age they move on to the Aberconwy Scout Troop who meet in the Scout and Guide Headquarters in Glanconwy. This arrangement works well due to the large number of boys and the high standard of scouting in the troop.

Ray Castle, Archivist and Akela, 1<sup>st</sup> Conwy Scout Group.

Mr Ray Castle, the Archivist and Akela of the 1<sup>st</sup> Conwy Scout Group has been responsible for collating a great deal of historical material relating to the group's history and this is filed and documented in several ring binders and available for viewing by members of the movement. The following are four items from that collection.

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Scouts Hall  
Conway  
11<sup>th</sup> October 1920

Weekly Standing Orders for the Troop and Wolf Cub Pack are as follows.

- Monday. 7. to 8.45p.m. Parade for Wolf Cubs.
- Tuesday. 7. to 8.45p.m. General Instruction in badge work for Wolf Cubs.
- Tuesday. 8. to 9p.m. Patrol Night. Patrol Leader Seley in charge.
- Wednesday. 7. to 9p.m. Full uniform parade for scouts for inter-patrol competitions and night scouting
- Thursday. 8. to 9p.m. Band Practice
- Friday. 7.30. to 9p.m. General instruction night and examination in badge work
- Saturday. 2.30. Parade for scouts for outdoor scouting
- Saturday. 2.30. Parade for Wolf Cubs for Fire lighting, Tracking and Games
- Saturday evening. The room is open for scouts for recreation.

**Scouts Hall,  
Conway  
11<sup>th</sup> October, 1920**

TO THE CONWAY AND DISTRICT BOY SCOUTS ASSOCIATION.

Gentlemen,

I beg to present to you the following Annual Report in connection with the 1<sup>st</sup> Conway Troop B.P. Scouts and Wolf Cub Pack.

We have at present seventeen scouts on the roll, fourteen are 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Scouts, the other three have been in the Troop six weeks and have passed their Tenderfoot Tests. The latter are now training for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Test. Since the last monthly association meeting 44 Scouts have been examined for Proficiency Badges with the result that 42 have passed the tests, and I present Certificates for your approval. These Tests include the following, Ambulance, Missioner, Cyclist, Cook, Handyman, Interpreter, Clerk, Electrician, Naturalist, Entertainer, Musician and Engineer. In addition to working for these badges six Scouts have passed a number of Tests for the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Badge.

The early portion of the year was occupied by training the boys for an Entertainment which was proposed to be held in the Town Hall, Conway for the purpose of raising funds, but owing to the Conway Corporation leasing the Hall for the Cinema Shows we were unable to hold the Entertainment. However we did a good turn to the 1<sup>st</sup> Llandudno Junction Troop by giving the Entertainment at a small Hall in Llandudno Junction in the month of April last for their benefit.

From April onwards the time was occupied preparing for the County Rally which was held at the Castle on the 12 June last. We were only 4 points below the winners of the County Challenge Shield.

During the summer months we have done a great deal of camping at week-ends and these have been a great success. In addition to this, numerous journeys have been made by our scouts to Snowdon, these being made by both Cycling and on foot, a distance of over 60 miles.

We have assisted numerous visiting Troops who have come down to this district during the summer months camping.

During the past month and Inter-patrol Competition has been held. The test for this being Tenderfoot work, Attendance and Person Turn-out. This competition has proved a great success in promoting keenness and efficiency between the patrols.

Several woodwork articles (including models) have been made by our Scouts. These articles being one test for the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Badge. Some of the older members of the Troop have very successfully installed A Wireless Receiving Set in this Headquarters. This has encouraged the boys to take up "Hobbies" in their spare time.

For the past two years a Troop Magazine has been published each month and sold at 2d per copy. This paper contains Scouting articles and a monthly report of the Troop, Packs work.

Seven members of the Troop attended the International Jamboree held at Olympia last August.

The Wolf Cub Pack was formed in November 1918 and Assistant Scoutmaster Russell Jones was appointed Assistant Cubmaster. I was appointed Cubmaster in the month of February last. The Pack were successful in winning the prize for the best display of Physical Exercises held at the rally before mentioned. (The County Rally). The Wolf Cub Movement in this Town is a great success and we hope to train the cubs, so that they will in due time pass into the Scout Troop.

We regret to report the death of one of our old scouts, L/Cpl Alfred Jones, who has served in the Army for the past five years. A collection was made and a wreath was sent as a token of respect from members of the Troop.

The troop has to depend mainly upon outside subscriptions but we hope to raise a substantial sum in January next provided we can secure the Town Hall for the purpose of holding an Entertainment.

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1<sup>st</sup> Conway Scout Group  
Mayors Sunday Parade November 1920



# First Day Cover and Insert issued as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations 1970

The 1st Conway Troop was formed in 1910, and on 4th February, 1911, the Round Room was officially opened as Headquarters. Aber was the site of the first Troop Camp, followed by the second at Deganwy in 1912.

During the first World War the scouts helped their country. Sir Robert Baden Powell inspected the troop in 1915, and a Wolf Cub Pack was formed in 1917.

The Troop was represented at the first International Jamboree in 1920, at the 1921 Jamboree in Conway Castle, and Arrowe Park 1929, the 5th Jamboree in Holland 1937, the 6th Jamboree at Moisson, France. The Troop was also represented at the first World Rover Moot, Kandersteg, Switzerland. The Troop's Golden Jubilee was in 1960, and the Diamond Jubilee in 1970.

