

## **Early days in Colwyn District.**

### **Norman R.F. Tucker**

When in the spring of 1908 scouting was started in Colwyn Bay conditions were different from those of today. It is necessary to understand this to appreciate the tremendous impact the movement had on the orderly life of those days. Home life was accepted as the natural order of things; there were few attractions; there were few distractions. The roads, dusty in summer, were used by horse-drawn traffic; motor cars were few. Most houses were lit by gas; there were few telephones and no buses. No one had seen an aeroplane. Colwyn was a distant hamlet approached by a hedge-lined road which had not been widened since the days the turnpike road was constructed more than a century before. Bryn Euryn or Blackberry Mountain were ideal places for scouting.

Most boys who joined the first scout troop could (even if dimly) remember the relief of Mafeking in May 1899, and, in any case, Baden - Powell was the hero of practically every boy and girl in the land. When he started this movement there was a rush to join. Young people today may not understand quite what it was all about – it was enough for them that B - P. had started it.

It was the Secretary of the Colwyn Bay Y.M.C.A. – Mr. Samuel Johnston, who formed the troop using the ‘Y’ (then situated on Abergele Road over what is now Stead & Simpson’s shop). Mr. Johnston used to claim that the Colwyn Bay troop was the first to be started in North Wales, but so many troops came into being at this time – many of them claiming to be ‘the first’ – that it would be safer to state that it was one of the first. I do not know the date when it came into being but I do recollect that it was before the first number of “THE SCOUT” appeared, for I can remember buying this. (*April 18<sup>th</sup> 1908*) The cover was printed in two shades of blue which misled me into thinking that scout shirts were pale blue. Accordingly I dyed my cricket shirt this colour. My chum, more intelligent, guessed it should be khaki but he too, came to grief when his khaki turned out to have a distinct orange tint. Somewhat self-conscious of our gorgeous raiment we made our way to the “Y” to find one boy in red and black football shirt and another in a black and gold barred jersey. We all felt we had to wear something distinctive. Circumstances taught us to improvise; broom-handles for staves, school satchels for haversacks, syrup tins for billycans, and shoulder knots manufactured from the coloured braid teamsters used to decorate the manes or tails of their horses.

To the best of my recollections the hurriedly-formed ‘Headquarters’ in London could only supply patrol flags, whistles with white lanyards, and first and second class badges. These were all metal and were worn on the left sleeve – a hazard to be remembered when wrestling. A ‘patrol second’ was called a ‘corporal’ until the name was dropped as being too military.

The troop was called the “Colwyn Bay and Colwyn” – what is now Old Colwyn being the original Colwyn prior to Colwyn Bay being built and Colwyn, being anxious to preserve its identity. The first patrols were the owls, kangaroos, pewits, and wolves with the otters following soon after. My enrolment card dated May 1908 bears a facsimile of B.-P.’s handwriting and the words:-

“You are now a scout. I trust you – on your Honour – at all times to do your best to carry out your Duty and to do a good turn to somebody everyday.”

R.S.Baden-Powell. Lieutenant General.

**“The Welsh Coast Pioneer.”**

18<sup>th</sup> June 1908 contains the following paragraph:

“Boy Scouts:- The troop of Boy Scouts recently formed in Colwyn Bay in accordance with Lt.General Baden Powell’s scheme consists of five patrols, including one formed at Old Colwyn. The leaders of the five patrols are J.Hulme, R.T.Chaplin, C.Skelton, N.Tucker and F.T.Barker. Appointed corporals were E.Wild, J.Mills, A.Hulme D.Davies with W.Hibbins as aide-de-camp, and S.Johnston as Scoutmaster.”

25<sup>th</sup> June the Pioneer recorded:

“On Saturday four patrols of the Colwyn Bay and Colwyn troop (Y.M.C.A.) were engaged in “tracking” practice and some good work was done. The destination was Swch Farm. The lads not only showed keenness in Scouting, but thoroughly enjoyed the outing. On Tuesday two of the Patrol Leaders were told to act as “spies” their aim being to reach headquarters from outside a given radius without being caught by the scouts. Some 40 Scouts were spread all over the district each under instruction of its leader or corporal. The spies (C.Skelsey and F. Barker) were successful in their getting through, and are to be commended for their smartness.’

During August, B.-P. himself was a guest of the Hon. Lawrence and Mrs. Brodrick at Coed Coch. On the 1<sup>st</sup> October, by means of a relay, Scouts passed a message from Colwyn Bay Post Office (then in Penrhyn Road, to Llandudno Post Office. It took 44 minutes. The troop left Llandudno soon after five and travelled home via Llanrhos, Bodysgallen, Pydew and Bryn Euryn.

After such an encouraging start much might have been expected but by the next year the troop had dwindled. It must be remembered that Mr. Johnstone only undertook to act as Scoutmaster pro tem and he had to organise a building campaign to provide the Y.M.C.A. with a headquarters of its own.

Half a dozen enthusiasts decided to keep the troop alive and met in the rear of the premises of Mr. J. Wallis, Station Road. His eldest son, W. Wallis, was Patrol Leader of the Owls. I being the biggest boy, acted as unofficial leader. Our numbers grew and we arranged to join the Llandudno troop under Scoutmaster A.E. Cooper, until our own Movement could be reorganised. It was our practice to march to Llandudno, go scouting on the Great Orme or at West Shore (then a remote spot) and march home at night. In time this proved too severe a strain.

A. Mr. Richard Macklin came to Colwyn Bay and gathered a number of boys to form a troop though I do not think it was registered at first. I obtained an Assistant Scoutmaster’s warrant when I was sixteen (I suppose regulations were more flexible then) and in the Spring of 1910 a Colwyn Bay Local Association was formed.

The Chief Scout (who had been knighted by King Edward VII in October 1909) decided to visit North Wales in May 1910. He visited Hawarden and Denbigh. Sir Robert was the guest of Colonel Howard and Mrs. Howard at Wigfair, St. Asaph. It will be remembered that the late Colonel H.C.L. Howard (their son) became Commissioner for North Wales. The Chief also lunched with Colonel and Mrs. Ward at Segrwyd Hall.

A parade, which we attended, was held in the courtyard of Caernarvon Castle on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. I was in charge of the Colwyn Bay section and I recollect distinctly the Chief's keen but kindly eyes, his freckled face, and his row of miniature war medals – something I had not previously seen. I was so taken aback when actually spoken to by my 'hero' that I could only stammer "Yes Sir" when he addressed me.

F.T. Barker one of the original P.L.'s was by now practically grown up and he agreed to act as Colwyn Bay S.M. with myself as his assistant, we soon revived the troop. No Scoutmaster in those days showed his knees and we wore knee breeches. I had bought blue cavalry riding breeches which were so tight that I could not bend the knee.

According to the first Minutes Book of the Colwyn Bay Association, the preliminary meeting was held on the afternoon of 13 August 1910 at the home of Mr. Charles Reynolds, J.P. (Netherton, Walshaw Avenue) and by coincidence Mr. Charles Reynolds, the manager of the new Parr's Bank opened in Station Road (later the Westminster), undertook the work of Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. In addition to these two there were present – Col. David Gamble, Col. Cairns (The Croft) and Messrs. Barker, G. Hurd, Macklin and N. Tucker.

Mr. T.E. Purdy was elected chairman, a post he held for seventeen years. Col. Cairns was elected President, and the following Vice-Presidents: Messrs. Walter Whitehead, F.R.C.S. The Flagstaff: Frederick Smith, Queen's Lodge (later Lord Colwyn); Buckley, C. Reynolds (Netherton), Charlton Jones, J.M. Porter, J. Bernard Lucas, David Gamble, J.P. Heenan, Wellesley Humbley (Llanddulas), J.W. Raynes (Highlands) Joseph Smith (Parciau) and William Horton.

With this somewhat prosaic statement Scouting was officially established on approved lines in Colwyn Bay. From the names of the Vice-Presidents it will be seen that it had the backing of the most influential men in the town.

Incidentally the first meeting of the County Scout Council (the Denbigh Boy Scout Council it was then termed) was held at Denbigh Town Hall in September 1910, though it is obvious that some unofficial organisation in the county existed before this time. This had followed the visit of the Chief Scout the previous year. The Lord Lieutenant was President and the County Commissioner was Colonel (later Sir) Robert Watkin Williams –Wynn. Mr. G. Fitz-Hugh was District Commissioner (Wrexham), Lt. Col. T. Ward for Mid Denbigh and Col. S. Sandbach for West Denbighshire. The Colwyn Bay Scouts attended a Mid and West Denbighshire Camp at Coed Coch that August through the kindness of the Hon. And Lt. General Wynn, Mrs. Brodrick's first husband.

There were at the time 380 Scouts in the County. Colwyn Bay with 53 Scouts had the largest number of any town in the County: Llangollen came second with 44. Colwyn Bay received a setback in January 1911 when Mr. Barker resigned owing to his accepting an appointment in Shrewsbury, and I was appointed to act as S.M. pro tem.

That month, Mr. Eric G.S. Walker of Headquarters came to Colwyn Bay, met the local Scouts at the Council Chamber, and addressed a public meeting. Schoolmasters were invited. A lantern lecture was given at Rhiw Road on 21 January. Local Scouts were joined by troops from Conway and Abergele, whilst the 1<sup>st</sup> Llandudno sent their bugle band to head the parade through the town.

The President, Col. Cairns of The Croft, entertained 88 Scouts to tea at Cartmell's Hotel. I see that I had the task of proposing a vote of thanks, but I have no recollection of so doing.

During his address that evening Mr. Walker drew a parallel between this country and ancient Rome, and showed how that country had fallen owing to people becoming slack and watching others play games instead of playing them themselves.

A shop in Penrhyn Road was rented for Headquarters, a stipulation being that all boys using it should wear rubber-soled shoes. These were provided by the Local Association. The proprietor later returned the rent.

In 1911 Mr. James Ellis was appointed Scoutmaster in succession to Mr. Barker, and Mr. Tatton-Tatton became Scoutmaster of Dinglewood School troop. Scout Colours, worked by Mrs. Reynolds, wife of the Honorary Secretary, were presented to the 1<sup>st</sup> Colwyn Bay troop. This was the year of the coronation of King George V and local Scouts hauled a cartload of fuel to Bryn Euryn to help build the Coronation Bonfire. They also joined in the procession. Scouts attended the Investiture at Caernarvon Castle. In July six first Class badges, three Second Class, and a number of proficiency badges were presented. That summer the Scouts held a week's camp near Conway.

A Headquarters was obtained in a garage at the foot of Penrhyn Road (now the Market). At Easter 1912 a District Rally was held at Teyrdan, Llanellian. An inspection was carried out by Colonel R.W. Williams-Wynn, D.S.O. By October that year the President, Colonel Cairns, had to resign on account of ill-health. Scoutmaster Ellis also resigned. Unfortunately Col. Cairns, who had been a good friend to Scouting, died the following year. Sir Frederick Smith, Queen's Lodge (later Lord Colwyn), accepted the presidency, an office which Lord Colwyn held until his death.

Excellent work was done at this time by the Assistant Scoutmaster, W.H. Hibbins. 'Billy' Hibbins was one of the original Scouts and we had worked together from the start. My health now prevented my undertaking any work and he carried on the troop unaided.

A trek-cart was purchased in 1913, and was used to carry the kit to Swch farm, one and a half miles S.E. of Bryn-y Maen. It stood up well to the uphill work; so, presumably, did the Scouts who dragged it. Under the leadership of Mr. Hibbins eight Scouts attended the first big jamboree; the one at Perry Park, Birmingham.

A crisis arose in November, when the troop, now reduced to ten boys, disobeyed the Assistant Scoutmaster and some, contrary to Scout Rules, began to smoke cigarettes. A.S.M. Hibbins comment in the Minutes is worth quoting:-

'They do not seem to understand that "A Scout's honour is to be trusted" and unless boys will do things from a sense of honour the Scoutmaster has no hold whatever upon them, as there are no punishments, everything being left to the honour of the Scouts'.

As the A.S.M. had to leave the district the following month the Local Association resolved to disband the troop after the boys had received 'a little straight talk'. On that sad note Scouting ended for a while in Colwyn Bay, but the following year, an effort was made to revive it but this failed because of the difficulty of obtaining a Scoutmaster, and in August the First World War broke out. It was hoped that 'something might be done in view of the present crises.

Nothing seems to have resulted until May 1915 when Mr. J. Merddyn Rees asked permission to start a troop in Old Colwyn, which he did. By November Mrs. Butterworth was approved as 'Lady Scoutmaster' of the Colwyn Bay troop and worked most conscientiously for the remainder of the war.

August 6<sup>th</sup> 1915 was (to quote the PIONEER) 'a great day to Boy Scouts of West Denbighshire' as they were inspected by B.P. on Old Colwyn Golf Course before a crowd of several thousand persons. The local Scouts with other troops marched from Princes Drive and formed up outside the Club House where they loudly cheered the hero of Mafeking. Lady Baden Powell, the Lord Lieutenant (Col Cornwallis West) and Mrs. Cornwallis West, and the County Commissioner, Col. Sandbach, were present. The Lord Lieutenant for Caernarvonshire was also there. The boys were entertained to tea by Sir Frederick Smith.

The first Wolf Cub Pack was formed at Roofree School on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1916 under Miss K.M.B. Reece, as 'Cub mistress'.

After the war there followed a reaction and Scouting became dormant until in 1922 a determined effort was made to revive the movement. I found the Vicar, Rev. Ewis Pryce, contemplating starting a troop (1<sup>st</sup> Colwyn Bay) at St., Paul's and I offered to assist. It was registered 4<sup>th</sup> January 1923, but lapsed 16<sup>th</sup> January 1924. A troop was started at Rhos Methodist. They wore blue with orange scarves and were joined by a patrol from Colwyn Bay Eagles). From this nucleus the 2<sup>nd</sup> Colwyn Bay troop was formed, at first a 'controlled' troop under the St. John's Methodist Church, but later, under Mr. F.T. Downes, uncontrolled. Their emerald scarves and blue uniforms were then changed to khaki uniforms with light and dark blue scarves.

The Local Association was revived in October 1923, Mr. Charles Reynolds again acting as Treasurer, while I (amongst other officers) was Hon. Secretary. The County Commissioner was then a genial South African war veteran, Major A.E. Priddle, J.P. of Llanrwst, who gave me all possible encouragement and absolute freedom. I seem to have acted as Secretary, Scoutmaster, D.S.M. A.D.C. all at the same time.

The main thing was that Scouting got on its feet again and more orthodox methods were adopted. It was grand to experience the enthusiasm which followed this rebirth.

A minute of 16<sup>th</sup> October 1923 reads:-

'In order to revive the Local Association a committee meeting was called for 16<sup>th</sup> October. The Committee met in the Westminster Bank Ltd., at 7.30p.m. There were present Mr. T.E. Purdy, J.P. in the chair, and Mr. Charles Reynolds. Mr. N.R.F. Tucker was also present''.

About the best move made was to invite the Rev. A.J.C. Costain, headmaster of Rydal, to become a Vice-President, thereby paving the way for a highly successful County Commissioner. The next meeting was held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1924 and was presided over by Dr. Butterworth Wilks, accompanied by Mr. A.E. Sarson who became Chairman.

In the autumn of 1923 local troops paraded on the Promenade to welcome the Prince of Wales.

Rydal School's first scout troop started in 1925.

There is a record of the troops in 1927 which is worth recording as it shows how the movement had grown:

1<sup>st</sup> Colwyn Bay...3 Scouts – No S. M.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Colwyn Bay...24 Scouts – S.M. Mr F.T. Downes  
3<sup>rd</sup> Colwyn Bay...(Nantyglyn) – 10 Scouts – S.M. Mr. W.W. Ratcliffe.  
4<sup>th</sup> Colwyn Bay...(Secondary School) – 21 scouts – S.M. I. Cheer Roberts.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Old Colwyn... 6 Rovers: 36 Scouts – S.M. Mr. J.W. Mayer  
1st Llysfaen. ... 17 Scouts.- S.M. Mr. L.E. Hunn  
1<sup>st</sup> Rydal ... 31 Scouts. - S.M. Mr. J.L. Hawking  
3<sup>rd</sup> Rydal ... 31 Scouts. - S.M. Mr. L.W. Turner  
1<sup>st</sup> Rhos on Sea... 3 Rover Scouts  
1<sup>st</sup> Rhos on Sea and 3<sup>rd</sup> Colwyn Bay Cubs ... 22 Cubs

The total number of Scouts was 222.

In 1927 a Headquarters was obtained at the rear of Llewelyn Road. Mr. Roy Jones joined to assist with the Rovers. The highlight of 1927 was the visit of Lord Glanusk, the first Commissioner for Wales, whose caravans parked on the Cayley fields, were visited by hundreds of Scouts, Guides and Cubs. His genial personality fascinated everyone and a Rally was held on Rydal field in his honour. The Welsh Scout Council met in the Colwyn Bay Council Chamber on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

This was the year when the inter-patrol competition was started for the shield presented by Mr. John Gray of Tacoma, Queen's Drive.

The Chief Scout's visit to Bangor in 1928 was an attraction which drew many local Scouts to Penrhyn Park. This was the year which saw the First County Rally and the first County Scout Council since the war. There were now six King's Scouts in the district. Mr. R.H. Stone, a world war veteran arrived to take over the management of the newly-opened branch of Martin's Bank and he promptly undertook the job of Rover Leader with enthusiasm.

In 1928 Mr. Hawking (Rydal) was granted a presentation on leaving the district. From subscriptions, a flag was bought to be used in County Competitions and to be called the "Hawkins Flag" in recognition of his services.

The first District Church Parade was held at St. John's Church, a total of 180 Scouts attending.

The first County Rally was held on 20<sup>th</sup> October in Rydal field. Twelve troops were present. The County Commissioner, Captain (now Lt. Col) J.C. Wynne-Edwards of Plas Nantglyn, inspected the Scouts. He presented a gold-plated statuette for Scouts for the County Competition. It was named after him 'the Wynne Edwards' trophy. This was won by 3<sup>rd</sup> Rydal and handed to them by Hon. Kathleen Smith. It was reported that the Movement had increased from 214 all ranks in 1925 to 476 all ranks (17 troops) in 1927; a Scout County emblem was adopted.

The second County Rally was held in 1929 at Abergele; eight troops entered. Mr. F.T.Downes was appointed to lead the local contingent to the Arrowe Park Jamboree. The Rev. A.J. Costain was appointed County Commissioner. Lord Swansea succeeded Major Wm. Bailey, Lord Glanusk's brother, who had acted as temporary Commissioner for Wales, as Commissioner for Wales.

In 1930, Mr Alfred Lynn became District Commissioner, a post he filled for 18 years. About 100 scouts, under Mr. W.W. Ratcliffe, the District Scoutmaster, attended the Annual County Rally at Denbigh. The following year, the County Rally was held at Eirias Park Colwyn Bay, where nine scout troops and five cub packs competed. Lord Swansea was present, the first time for a Chief Commissioner for Wales to attend a Denbighshire Rally. The Turner Totem Pole, presented for the Cub competition, as a tribute to Mr.L.V.Turner, made its first appearance.

The fifth County Rally was held in 1932in Gwrych Castle grounds. The new Hon, County Secretary, Mr.W.E.Graty, had charge of the arrangements. That year Mr.L.Lines took over as Hon. Local Association Secretary in succession to Mr.R.A.Lloyd. Mr.G.B.Needham, County Treasurer, offered the Needham Flag for the best record of Scout work during the year. About this time the Taylor-Downes Swimming Flag was presented for the Swimming Competition by Mr. F.T. Downes, the former D.C. but I have no record of the actual date.

A novel experiment was tried in 1930 when the 'Border Scouts' was formed; an unofficial 'get together' of Scouters from Denbighshire and Caernarvonshire. It stimulated some lasting friendships. In 1932 the Camp Chief Mr. (Col.) J.S. Wilson visited the town as guest of the D.C. on the occasion of his opening the training camp at Rowen. The annual Rally of the County of Gwrych was attended by Lord Swansea.

A camp for 'poor boys' was held at Penrhyn Bay, an experiment which seemed highly successful. Dr. McKendrick, the Assistant County Commissioner for Cubs, reported visiting (as M.O.H.) about 60 scout camps and was impressed by the improved discipline.

Colwyn Bay received its Charter of Incorporation on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1934 and Scouts turned out in large numbers for the first 'Churching' of the Mayor.

Twelve year old Lionel Ryden, 1<sup>st</sup> Colwyn Bay (St. Paul's Group), saved a child from drowning, for which he later was awarded the Silver Cross. Two Rhos on Sea Scouts, E. Greenfield and W. Denton, (1<sup>st</sup> Rhos on Sea Scout Group) received the Gilt Crosses for saving a woman bather from the sea.

It was decided to start a Roll of Honour Book in which all such decorations were recorded.

Scouts hauled wood to the top of Bryn Euryn to mark the Silver Jubilee of the coronation bonfire beacon of King George V.

In the following year tribute was paid to a beloved King at his death. That year a Rally was held in the grounds of Glanydon Hall. At the close of 1936 Scouts attended in the rain to hear the Proclamation of King George VI read.

The following year several local Scouts and Scouters attended the International Jamboree in Holland. (6 Scouters and 13 Scouts).

Mr.C.D. Yonge succeeded Mr. Lynn a District Commissioner, a post he retained until his retirement from Rydal caused him to leave the district. For years Miss. A.K. Bird, who had run a pack at her Froebelian School, did good work, first as District Commissioner for Cubs, and then as Assistant County Commissioner for Cubs.

In 1938 war clouds were lowering. Some Scouts joined the Cadets. Many Scouters and senior boys left for the various services. An influx of Civil Servants gave a new aspect to Scouting. Fortunately a number of them were Scouters and they enthusiastically took over the vacancies in the local troops and Association, caused by the 'call up' of so many local Scouters and Scouts. Among these the most enthusiastic were Mr. Weir, who acted as D.C. and L.A. Secretary, Mr. Baker, and Mr. Stanley Hogg, who (fortunately) remained in the district after the war to give Colwyn Bay the benefit of his enthusiasm.

I must leave the task of continuing to some younger Scouter.

.....Norman R.F. Tucker