

Petersham & Ham Sea Scout Group

**Parents' Get Together 2003
Celebrating Our 95th Birthday**



**G T Biddulph
Scout Leader
1909 - 1921**

This is a potted history of P&H for our Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and their Families.

Early Days

This Scout Group, now known as the Petersham and Ham Sea Scout Group, was born on 6th December 1908 as the “Petersham Troop of Baden-Powell Scouts”. Baden-Powell, building on his experience in the Boer war and the Balkans, and also using the earlier experience of the church-based Boy’s Brigade, held his first Scout camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour in August 1907. His book “Scouting for Boys” was published in January 1908 and was an instant success. Scout Troops were formed in many parts of the country.

Without a formal organisation to record their existence it is difficult to be sure which Group was the earliest. Several still-existing Scout Troops were founded earlier than P&H, but suffered some sort of interruption in their existence (wars, lack of Leaders or premises, ...) and were later re-founded. Some earlier Groups depended on the enthusiasm of just a very few people, and disappeared as these enthusiasts got older, moved away or were short of time.

For what it is worth P&H claims to be the oldest Scout Group in the world with a continuous existence.

The original Founders were a group of local schoolboys led by Will Jewitt. (Will persuaded his father Mr. A.T. Jewitt to become the first Scout Leader in January 1908.) The Petersham Troop was lucky in attracting strong local support from all parts of Petersham society. The early leadership proved stable and the original leaders published a short history of the Troop in 1923. Photographs of four of these Leaders are on the next page. Thanks to their book we know a lot about these first fifteen years and can follow how this Group acted as an inspiration for the development of the Scout Movement in and around Richmond.

The subsequent Leaders did not leave such a detailed record of events, or if they did they these records were lost in the fires which, as we will see later, feature in our later history. Around the late 1970s and early 1980s Mrs I. Kimbell gathered as much information as possible from older peoples memories, but of course much information had died with others by then. For the period since about 1980 more detailed history is available from the memories of people still around.

In the early days Petersham was a larger village than Ham and people felt quite separate, hence the “Petersham Troop”. In 1921 a recruitment campaign was run in Ham and resulted in many Ham boys joining, with a subsequent name change to “Petersham and Ham”. The current “Ham Scout Group” (of land Scouts) was not founded until 1946.

The rest of this history is divided into two sections dealing with a) the development of the P&H Scout huts and field and b) the development of the Organisation, Leadership and Activities.

P&H Scout huts

Initially the Scouts met in the original Petersham Russell School in Richmond Park opposite the Dysart Public House. Mr. Jewitt the headteacher was the Founder Scout Leader. Later in 1909 Mr. Biddulph, the owner of Douglas House, took an interest in the new Troop, became



Alfred T. Jewitt Founder Scout Leader 1909



G.T. Biddulph Scout Leader 1909 - 21



Walter C. Joel A.S.L March 1909 Scout Leader 1921



C. Miller Scout Leader October 1922

its President and donated the “Iron Room”, an indoor shooting range near All Saints’ Church, as a headquarters building for the Troop. This shooting range had become redundant on the opening of the Shooting Club in Ham. Later in the same year Mr. Biddulph also became Scout Leader on the emigration of Mr. Jewitt and his family to Canada.

At that time Douglas House Meadow (the “Scout Field”) was part of the grounds of Douglas House and also owned by Mr Biddulph. He had built a wooden Pavilion with verandah in the meadow in 1914, and the following year moved the Iron Room from Sudbrook Lane to the meadow and donated both this and the Pavilion to the Scout Group. He also rented Douglas House Meadow to them for a peppercorn rent. Mr. Biddulph retired from being Scout Leader in 1921 due to ill health. He died in 1929, and Douglas House was bought by Col. A. C. Bromhead

Mr. Bromhead also took an interest in P&H and became its President in succession to Mr. Biddulph. P&H continued to rent the Scout Field. Additional smaller wooden huts were soon added to the site to act as Rover Scout headquarters, stores, etc. P&H became officially Sea Scouts in the early 1930s (probably in 1931) and the Iron Room was then used for storing boat equipment.

In 1940 Mr. Biddulph’s original wooden Pavilion was destroyed by an incendiary bomb with the loss of much equipment and historical records.

Mr. Bromhead died in 1963. His family donated Douglas House Meadow to the Scout Group in August 1964 before Douglas House itself was sold for the German School. How fortunate this Group is!

After World War II, society changed in such a fashion that vandalism became a real problem at the headquarters. At that time the headquarters consisted of several separate wooden huts, together with the Iron Room, see the 1945 photo on the next page. Large sections of the wooden huts were burnt to the ground in May 1947, again in 1957 and again on 22nd December 1973 (the maindeck) and 28th December 1974. The Iron Room and its boats were also burnt on 6th October 1970.

In May 1971 the old Iron Room was replaced by a new prefabricated concrete building, the “Boat Deck”, which still stands, although the original corrugated asbestos roof has had to be completely replaced with a metal roof due to damage by repeated break-ins.

These repeated struggles to replace huts and equipment put a tremendous strain on both the Leaders and the supporting Group Executive committee, some of whom were in poor health. Support faltered but, inspired by Mr. Roger Jones (the Assistant County Commissioner for Water Activities, part of the upper echelons of the Scout Association), fresh members were found for the committee under Mr. Arthur Carter (chairman) and also fresh Leaders.

The burning of the wooden maindeck in December 1973 was a real problem. Cub and Scout meetings had to take place elsewhere (including Ham Scout Headquarters, Petersham Village Hall and 1st Mortlake Sea Scout Headquarters (by minibus) and in the Boatdeck.). However the Group Executive committee and our honorary architect Mr. J.Kimbell succeeded in building the present maindeck which was opened for use in 18th June 1977 and has lasted since. It was deliberately built of concrete with few windows, to defeat fires and burglary.