

Scouting in Wales

Contrary to what is sometimes believed, Scouting was not imported from England. It arose spontaneously at exactly the same time and in response to the same stimulus – Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*. A newspaper report of April 1908 recorded the formation of a Peewit Patrol at Carmarthen Grammar School, and that must be one of the earliest examples of organised Scouting anywhere. There were full troops, not only in Carmarthen, but in Cardigan, Ystradgynlais, Cardiff and Connah's Quay before the end of 1908. Baden Powell had many friends and contacts in Wales, particularly active and retired army officers such as Major (later Colonel) Frank Morgan, and visited the principality at least four times between 1908 and 1910. In spite of its military origins and its strongly patriotic ethos, scout training was from the start entirely civilian. Camping and other outdoor activities such as tracking and cooking on wood fires; first aid, and building improbable structures out of wooden spars. Socialisation was always a primary objective, and there was much emphasis upon team games, and the transcending of social barriers such as class, wealth and religion. Part of the point of adopting a uniform was to remove the class distinctions which would then have been obvious from the ways in which the boys dressed. Race was not an issue in 1908, and scouting spread rapidly throughout what was then the British Empire. Nor, in spite of a strong religious emphasis, was scouting ever a specifically Christian organisation, and this was a factor in its rapid spread. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jews all became scouts in the early days, and have remained so.

The early adult leaders in Wales were mostly tradesmen, clergy and retired army officers, with a few other professional people, for the simple reason that these were the men with the leisure to attend such matters. Landowning families were also prominent from the start; the Baileys of Brecknock (Lord Glanusk), the Lawrences of Pontypool (Lord Trevithin), the Howards and the Drages in Flint and Denbigh, the Goughs of Ystradgynlais, the Vivians of Swansea, and many others. For this reason scouting was socially acceptable, and although this did not do much for its image among the radically inclined, it generated a lot of valuable support; not only in leadership and money, but also in facilities such as campsites. It was a great *coup* for Baden Powell when the Prince agreed to become the first (and only) Chief Scout for Wales. There were from the start girls among the would-be scouts, and women among the leaders. Baden Powell, whose views on sex were formed by many years of rigorous celibacy, was uneasy about this and encouraged his wife to form the Girl Guides into a separate organisation. He recognised, however that there was a need for female leadership with the younger boys, and when the Wolf Cubs were founded in 1916, the leadership was largely female from the beginning. When war broke out in 1914 many women also took over their husbands' roles, and that (although never officially sanctioned) was everywhere approved. Language seems not to have been an issue in Welsh Scouting until more recent times. Although *Scouting for Boys* did not appear in Welsh until 1932, and all the original training material was published in English, it is clear that the early troops simply used whichever language they were accustomed to for normal work, and although this may have created problems for individuals, no attempt was made to regulate the situation.

County Associations were set up in Wales from 1912 onward, as the growing numbers required a structure. Several of the first County Commissioners were Baden Powell's military friends, and it was normal for the Lord Lieutenant to become the County President; a development encouraged by the Prince's leadership. By 1914 there were about 150 troops scattered unevenly through Wales, and between 4000 and 5000 individual members. Lord Glanusk became the first Chief Commissioner, who was the executive head of Welsh Scouting. At the same time District Associations began to appear where the numbers warranted, particularly in large centres of population, such as Cardiff, Swansea, and Wrexham. By about 1920 every administrative county

had a Scout Association, although some had no more than two or three troops. By 1923 the census figure had reached nearly 8000, and the first All Wales Camp (they were not called Jamboree Cymru until 1948) was held at Llandrindod Wells in 1926. In 1925 a National Scout Council for Wales was established, not so much to 'run' scouting – that was the job of Imperial Headquarters and the Chief Commissioner – as to provide support, financial and otherwise. Specifically, it was an attempt to get more of the 'great and good' associated with the movement. In October 1926 a National Office was established in Brecon, and H.A. Gray became the first professional secretary. Leader Training began with a licensed course at Swansea in 1921, and by 1932 there were 432 groups and over 16,000 members in Wales.

Wales, however, unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland, did not have its own National Headquarters. The National Office was active through the 1930s, but did not survive the Second World War, and had been discontinued by 1948, when H.A. Gray retired. As early as 1930 Lord Swansea (the second Chief Commissioner) had felt it necessary to take up most of the Council's April newsletter defending the St George's day celebrations on the grounds that George was the patron saint of chivalry, and not just of England! It was hoped that a continent of (Welsh speaking) Rovers at the National Eisteddfod would help to dispel the illusion that scouting was an English import. After the second war, Scouting flourished exceedingly in Wales, the census peaking at 23,600 in 1984. Welsh Troops attended international Jamborees, and Jamboree Cymru steadily grew in size and complexity, but it is only quite recently that the issue of identity has again been addressed. Beginning in 1989 a determined effort was made to reach into the Welsh speaking community, where youth work was becoming increasingly dominated by the Urdd. A council committee was established for that purpose, and a number of training manuals were translated with the aid of grants from the Welsh Office. The impact on the ground was not great, but the image was significantly improved. In 1988 the National Office was re-established, at first on a part-time basis, and upgraded in 1992 when it moved into new accommodation in Llantwit Major. Since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, Welsh Scouting has become increasingly autonomous, and now manages most of its own finances. When UK Scouting discontinued the Field Commissioner network in 2000, Wales retained it, and now has its own professional staff.

Scouting has changed in many ways since 1945. The training sections have been modified no fewer than four times, and extended to include the 6-8 age group (Beaver Scouts). In 1974 girls were admitted to the Venture Scout section (15-18), and to all training sections in 1992, making Scouting a fully co-educational movement. New skills (such as computer operation) have been taken into the training programme as they developed. The emphasis is now more international and less patriotic than it was, and Wales has several bi-lateral projects in place, notably one with Hungary. However, the spiritual and social ethos remains unchanged. Forms of words in the Law and Promise have been updated, but the meaning remains the same. Scouts are active participants and leaders, socially and religiously aware, and citizens both of their own country and of the wider world. In many ways society at large is still catching up with where Robert Baden Powell had got to in 1908.