



Staplegrove Scout Group

I get the impression that the starting of a Scout Group in Staplegrove came with as much of a shock to the quiet village it was then, as it did in the other towns and villages the length of the land. Robert Baden Powell had returned from the siege of Mafeking as a national hero. During the siege he utilised the local lads to help with the errands that the army needed doing, and found them to be very useful. On his return to the UK he published a series of small books entitled 'Scouting for Boys', which so captured the imagination of the youngsters at the time that they flew off the shelves. Adults soon found themselves being asked to help provide leadership and support after the gangs of lads, which habitually form the world-over, created themselves into Scout Patrols, and then into Troops. Scouting was born!

That was then, and this is now, over 100 years later. Scouting is still alive and well, and offers all sorts of opportunities to the youngsters locally. The patrol tents are the same, the fires and sausages are the same, and the first night nerves are the same, but a lot has changed. I'd love to say that the Group has been shown to turn around the lives of 100s of youngsters, and that we can claim to have nurtured the first astronaut, a great composer, or a world-changing philanthropist, but we haven't as far as I am aware. Staplegrove is one of the Groups that forms the backbone of the Association; steady and unremarkable, and part of the community that is Staplegrove for 80 years now. This is how it happened.

The first recorded reference to Scouts in Staplegrove was an event on 9th October 1909, 2 years after Baden-Powell's experimental camp on Brownsea Island. Troops from Staplegrove, Wilton, Queens College and Pitminster were recorded as being present, but there seems to have been no formal Troop number, so they were probably operating as enthusiastic kids rather than as a led Scout Troop. The first 'real' troop was formed in 1932, as the 35th Taunton (Staplegrove), meeting in the stable block of what was then the Rectory, and has now been converted to Cloisters. The Rev J Storey was instrumental in forming the Group, along with other groups for members of the village, and donated the use of the stable as a meeting place. No doubt the by modern standards place was not ideal, but with all the straw, paraffin lights and nothing to sit on it was fantastic as a hidey-hole for the lads. One of the first members, even before the lower age limit, was Arthur Coles, who has gone on to do many things in Scouts and is now Vice-President of the Taunton Scout Association and the County as well. Arthur had to wait until he was 11 before he could start to wear the badges that he had earned, such as the Tenderfoot Award. The lads formed themselves into Patrols, as we still do, called the Lions, Eagles and Beavers. At this point the scarf was not the green and white that we have today (since 1945) but was either maroon, or royal blue

and gold (halved). Meetings were Wednesdays at 4:15, and Saturdays at 3:00, so it seems that time was not as much of an issue as it is today. The Rev. Storey seems to have been a bit of a breath of fresh air and a forceful character, and must have made an impression in the village as people travelled out from Taunton to listen to his sermons.

Leaders came and went over the years. Mr I F H Jones was responsible for the Rover Scouts (the section for lads older than Scouts) in 1933, and Mr Ivan Fitzroy Hippisley Jones is also referred to in 1933. He went on to become the County Commissioner for Scouting in Somerset, one of two that Staplegrove have donated, the other being the present incumbent Shaun Dale whom was a Scout Leader from April 1990 until 2006, in various roles.

After the Scout Troop left the Rectory stables they moved in 1935 to a piece of land at Westerkirk, thanks to Lt-Commander Campbell-Holmes, who allowed the Troop an area of land to build on and the use of his paddock, which is the area of ground that the Group occupy now. Not long after this the Troop was barred from attending church services by the Rev Storey, due to the wrong-doing of holding a fund-raising dance during lent, which many of the locals attended. The dance made £9, and I can only assume that the ban has been lifted in the subsequent years, as the Group attends services at intervals throughout the year. By now the scarf was royal blue and scarlet (halved).

December 1935 saw the first Wolf Cub pack being formed, under the guidance of Miss Alice Grace Evans, who was under-age at the time. By 1936 there were 17 Scouts on the official census and 5 Wolf Cubs, and the Rover Scout section was officially approved with 5 members. The Group also managed to secure planning consent for two wooden huts on Westerkirk Paddock, which were constructed by August of that year as we have a rates demand for that time; some things don't change! By June 1936 there was even electricity laid on (£11, 13s 8d), which must have been a great delight to those at the time but probably removed the element of being a den that had started back in 1932 in the stable.

Sadly the Wolf Pack lapsed by February 1939. It is obvious from the notes that things were taking a turn for the worse, as all the members of the Troop had volunteered to become ARP wardens, and some had been called-up for service. The Group minutes have a separate section on them for ARP activities. Also at about this time the huts were insured for the collection of waste paper for the war effort, and later for iron and other metals. In 1940 we got into trouble as a passenger on the bus reported that the white tents that we had up in the paddock were not camouflaged and were visible from the road, which would have been embarrassing for ARP wardens! As was common at the time, the war saw the end of many Groups nationwide as the leaders were called-up for active service; young Arthur Coles was not so young now, and went into the navy, but not before the Troop had been called-on to help try to tame some unruly evacuees from the east- who were staying at Westerkirk. Apparently their first view of a cow in the field behind the recreation ground reduced these ruffians to gibbering wrecks in the corner of the scout hut! The Group was disbanded in

1943, only to be resurrected in 1945 at the outbreak of peace when things began to return to normality.

Arthur Coles is noted as being the Scout leader of the reformed Troop in 1946, with Miss Elizabeth Evered as the Cub Mistress. This is the time that the green and white-edge scarf that we wear today first appeared. Mr Nicholls is recorded as being the Assistant leader to Arthur, who applied to the Somerset Youth Service for a loan to repair the huts in 1948, with the £13 of repairs done in 1949.

In 1951 Don Morton was the Assistant Scout Master, and in 1954 Robert Stephens was the Scout Master, followed by Raymond Wilmott. By 1955 there was a need for Cubs again, and a Pack was reformed experimentally by Mr Hartland and Mr Paynter. Some things don't change, and at the summer camp the winds blew the tents out so the summer camp at Carhapmton was abandoned; the scouts returned to find Rev. Storey preaching his last service as he was retiring at the age of 80; I wonder if he let them in. In October 1955 the Pack was reformed officially under Mr G W Duckhouse, and numbers certainly seem to have been exceptional with 38 on the books by December, but on the 19th December only 3 made it as the fog was too thick! 1956 saw Eric Russell as Assistant Scout Master, and in 1957 Donald Dutton was Assistant Cub Master.

In April 1957 the poor Cubs had to meet outside. This was because the new HQ building (not the ones there now) was in the process of being moved from Elm Barton to Westerkirk, the house now of Miss Williams who has sheltered the east-end cow ruffians. Lt Harry Sellers was Scout Master, Patrick Webb the Assistant, and Ronald Weaver the Cub Master, helped by Michael and Ian Paynter. 1958 saw the 25th anniversary reunion on 29th December; I wonder who was there? Mr G Wright was in the records in 1958, along with D Jefferies, Mr J H Parsons in 1960, Mr B W House in 1961, and Mr GSM Weaver as Group Scout Master in 1960.

1963 saw Miss Williams leave Westerkirk to return to Falmouth, and with that the land on which the hut now stands was formally gifted to the Group. There is a plaque to commemorate this on the wall of the hut to this day, and it is good to say that the donated land is still being used for the purpose for which the gift was intended almost 50 years later. Also this year Andrew Train attended the World Jamboree in Greece. This is not the only representative; in 1998/9 the Troop sent Andrew Read to Chile for the Jamboree as well. Mrs D M House was Cub Mistress, assisted by Miss Bridget Oxley and Miss D M Coles.

Remember Arthur Coles? He's still around in 1965, and he is awarded a Long Service decoration for his troubles and effort over the past years. By this time he is Chairman, so rising steadily through the ranks. 1966 sees reference to M J Trott as Assistant Cub Master / Mistress, and three temporary buildings on the land for the insurance inventory.

1967. The local jamboree – a large scale camping event with many activities –was a mud bath at Cheddar, which is reminiscent of the washed-out one at Dunster in 2000. Sadly, J Parsons (known to us as Kim) died suddenly in July, which seems to have some as quite a shock to the group and the local community, including the Post Office where he worked.

In 1969 travel must have been easier; the Cub Leader is Patricia Stapleton, who travels from Ilton to run the Pack, and is helped by Pauline Miller, Martyn Trott and William Rogers. Roy Griffiths is the Scout Leader, and Brian House the Venture Scout leader, heading the new section formed after the national 1967 review disbanded Rover Scouts and reformed the age ranges, uniforms, and all manner of things behind the scenes.

In 1971 there was a cataclysmic moment. I am not certain as to the reasons why, but Staplegrove Group merged with the Group from North Taunton (around St Andrews Church) and the local records fall silent. The interesting snippets of information, etc. are probably locked in the North group archives, but it's worth noting that so far there is no reference to the bonfire that the Group hold as the fund-raiser. The current Group Scout Leader, Chris Owen, can recall a bonfire in 1977 as a new Cub, so the first bonfire must have been in the 1971-1977 period.

By 1981 Staplegrove had split-off from North (Inventory; 3 wooden hits, worth nothing) because the Staplegrove arm had spent a lot of time earning money which North has spent on their hut! By this time the bonfire is referred to as a traditional event. Leaders were Steve Clift as Scout Leader, David Heitt as assistant along with Clare Morris. Maureen Ratcliffe was Akela (Cub Scout Leader) with Eglington and Loise Manning. The Group Leader was David Winter.

Arthur has been quietly continuing in the background. There are various awards that adult leaders are awarded by the Chief Scout for service rendered. In 1983 Arthur is the recipient of the Silver Acorn, the second-highest award for service after the Silver Wolf. The oak tree at Headquarters in Gilwell Park provides all the training insignia that the leaders wear, and the Silver Acorn is an evolution of that award from the same solid tree; well done to all who receive this award. On a lesser level, in 1983 the Group opens their new headquarters, on 23rd September. This is the wooden hut that is on site at present. There is concern by this point that the Troop in Staplegrove is non-existent, with only the Cubs present; will the opening of the new hut revitalise the Group? Sadly this was not the case, as in December 1986 the Troop was closed, leaving Louise Manning as Akela, Chris Owen as assistant with Sue Leighton, and a football team manager Colin Stone. On the committee Stuart Winter as resigned (when-ever he started), Chris Young is in the chair, along with Rob Cutler, John Brannon, Maurice Jordan, Pauline Stone, Martyn Hembrow, Alex Jackson, Sue Durban. In 1989 the Pack said goodbye to Chris Owen, who went off to become a farmer at Shepton Mallet, only to see the error of his ways and return a few years later. Phil Durban was there as Scout Leader in the Troop and also as District Scout Leader, with Judy Moring, Mark Williams, Sarah Derby, Peter and Chris.

1990 saw Shaun Dale appointed as the Assistant Scout Leader (Now County Commissioner), and M V Moring as Group Scout Leader in 1991, and the roof space in the loft was converted to useable storage which we have long-since outgrown and sprouted a garage to store the clutter in as well.

1992. Arthur Coles is still in Scouts. The youngster who was too young to join and had to wait until he was 11 before he could wear his badges gets a bar to the Silver Acorn previously awarded. I suppose he has had to wait longer to be able to wear this one, but it probably seemed longer when he was 10.

Martin Allen appeared on the scene in 1993, fresh from a group in Cornwall. I'm not sure it was related, but this year is noted as the year that Phil Durban steps down as Scout leader. It's known that there has been a bonfire each year since now, other than those that were curtailed by the foot and mouth epidemics in 2001 and 2007.

1995 saw Anne Hill as Cub Leader. At this time it was possible for girls to join Scouts and Cubs for the first time; there had been girls in Venture Scouts since 1967, and had been welcome as adult leaders since the outset in 1907. The criteria was that once the Group was open to girls there was no going back, and there had to be potential for the girls to move from up in the sections. The older boys were not keen on the idea, but the younger lads were more accepting, and as a result the Group was opened to provide Scouting to girls though all the age ranges that we had available. In 1996 we opened the hut to the local Guide Company; this led on to a series of activities with the Guides as their numbers gradually dwindled, culminating with the running of the two sections together on the same night in the same hut with the same programme, but still retaining their individual identities as much as possible. These instances are rare in the UK, and it is believed that Staplegrove Troop were one of less than 5 nationwide that ran on such a basis. The evenings ran well, but the camps were a nightmare, as the Guides needed to put in an application to camp with Scouts over a year before the event, apparently, and we were never that good at planning. 1996 also saw the starting of the newest section, the Beavers.

Spring 1997 saw the saggy-old ceiling in the hut removed, and the whole hut re-roofed as the result of a grant from the National Lottery. The hut instantly became warmer and lighter, but also noisier as the tiles proved to have been the only sound absorbing surface in the hall, so every little footstep now echoes around. On one memorable night a Scout leader who shall remain nameless started the process of creating the frames for Guy Fawkes with the kids, using hammer and nails. The din had to be witnessed to be believed, and the vow was taken 'Never Again!'. The roof was replaced with a lot of help from Bob Mellor as chairman, Rob Cox as treasurer, and Sue Derben as secretary. In the autumn of 1997 we levelled the site that the Group has at Huish Woods, near Thornfalcon on the Ilminster Road. The terraces there were limiting to the camping, so the decision was made to move the top tier to the bottom. That was done, memorably, during the funeral weekend for Princess Diana, and the grass has yet to take properly.

1999 was the year of the solar eclipse, and great plans were put in place all over the south-west to cope with the influx of tourists. We opted for a camp in Madron, Penzance, on the farm of the Patrol Leader that Shaun Dale had when he was a Scout down there. Off we went, and spent a sunny week other than the damp and dismal day of the eclipse itself. The cows went mad, running around the field as the light fell, and the glitter of flash-guns around the sea-front below us as Marazion was quite spectacular. At this time Shaun was Group Scout Leader, Danny Beattie as chairman, Phil Derben as vice-chair, Elaine Harwood as secretary. There were 26 Cubs on the census, the largest section, with 14 Scouts and a 'growing' number of Beavers. Unfortunately, in October 2000, the Beaver Colony was suspended due to lack of leaders as Sharon Parsons had left, and was later closed.

In September 2001 the Scouts camped at Perranporth, with an extractor fan in the kitchen that was unable to cope with a Scout fried breakfast, and there was no bonfire due to the foot and mouth crisis that was stalking the land. The Group was large enough and solvent enough not to suffer, but belts did have to be tightened as the loss of the income was noticeable. 2002 saw a Staplegrove Scout in the Royal Guard of Honour, as Her Majesty visited Taunton as part of her jubilee celebrations. Vivary Park was spruced-up and repaved just in time, and even the gardener collecting the horse-muck from the Police horses had a golden bucket. James Knight and Simon Lacey were Cub Leaders. Phil Derben was in the chair now, with Moira Read as secretary. Summer camp was at Grosmont, in south Wales, and one Scout, Andrew Read, attended the World Jamboree in Chile as part of the Somerset contingent.

2003 saw the Troop running joint meetings with the Guides. The Scouts and Guides remained as separate entities, but ran the same programme on the same night in the same venue, only occasionally breaking for their respective section requirements. Heather Brannon was the Guide leader at the time, and this was put in place to help after the Guides found themselves short on leaders. At the time the idea was to help the Guides survive for their anniversary, but as the lack of another Guide leader became apparent and the fact that the Scouts could accept Guides, the writing was on the wall, and the Guide Company finally closed by the summer of 2006. We had been on summer camps together in Penzance and Grosmont again, so I think that the Guides went out with a bit of a high.

In 2004 there was a general shake-up of the sections nationwide. Age ranges changed, and a new section, the Explorer Scouts, were formed for the first time. Venture Scouts closed a concept, with the upper section now being the Network Scouts, aged from 18 to 25. There was no specific Explorer section in Staplegrove, though the District did make use of the hut to run one of the local provisions for some months. Martin Allen was one of the first leaders in the District, and ran the Unit that used Staplegrove with Andrew Knight in 2006. Martin was also busy with the two Scout Troops, the Young Guns and the Monkeys Fists, as there were so many Scouts after the Guides had moved in as well, that there were too many for

the hall to be able to cope with, at 23. A good problem to have, certainly. The programme ran on two nights, Tuesday and Thursday, with the Scouts welcome to attend either and the camps open to all. Andrew Knight was also there as a Scout Leader in January 2007.

2007 was the centenary of Scouting, an event not to be missed. All around the world Scouts attended a sunrise ceremony, early in the morning, to celebrate and give thanks for that which we call Scouting. The Troop attended the ceremony at Monmouth Castle as part of the summer camp in Grosmont. Breakfast was early, porridge from a haybox, followed by a drive down twisty lanes in a minibus to get there. The Last Post was sounded from the top of the ramparts to show the last century passing, played by a Welsh Guardsman in full regalia, followed by reveille for the next century. Bacon baps followed, which was probably the most memorable bit for the kids.

At this point there were several leaders and helpers, committee members and willing supporters around the Group, almost too many to mention without it sounding a roll-call. Neil Palmer, Ruth Abolins, Phil Edwards, Andrew Knight, Charlie Evans, Andrew Read, Mark Foster, Vanessa Willis, Cheryl Hogg, Adrian Fuller, Gerry Fuller, Siobhan Linsey, Sarah Lott, and James Lott all came in and helped over the years. Some are still here, some have moved on. Perhaps the time for their detailed history will be in the next village history. What of Arthur Coles, I hear you ask? Well, by this time he has received his 60 year Service award, in 2008 when the Group was 75 years old. The lad who started pre-age in 1932 is still around in the Movement, as a District President. In his time he has been a leader, a district secretary and chairman, the Assistant County Commissioner (International) for Somerset, as the Somerset County Secretary, a County Vice President and President, and Taunton District Vice President as well. We said earlier that the Troop has not produced any notable eminents; perhaps that was wrong.

When the Scouts first started, one of the commentators at the time noted that it was 'legalised mischief'. Good. Kids will be kids, and will be thus the world over. Staplegrove is a small part of the local world, and I like to think that over the 80 years that the Group has been around we have helped nurture some people to have been a better-class of citizen than they would have been. We have survived a war, numerous bonfires, many changes of leaders and the efforts of literally hundreds of youngsters over the years. We're still here, and will continue to be for many years to come, with luck.