

Heritage Thoughts for the Month (March 2019)

Two important historic events took place during March. The first was unique and due to certain restrictions was by invitation only. It concerned the unveiling of a commemorative plaque to mark the first boy in Hertfordshire to make The Scout Promise. Readers of my book of Scouting History, *Milestones of 105 Years of Hertfordshire Scouting* will see that on 1 March 1908, a boy in Watford **Alan J. Emery** was the first of a small group to make The Oath or Scout Promise as we know it today, at his home at 128 Estcourt Road, Watford. In researching my book, I was drawn to the fact that sometime in the future there might be an opportunity to mark this (and other events) in more detail. About five years ago I started gathering the facts and information about this event, the life and family of Alan, and his contribution throughout his life to enhance and progress Scouting in Watford and Hertfordshire.

Having taken all this time and between many other similar projects, I engaged the help of two trusted members onto my organising Team. **Roger Sands** from Watford and **Liz Jack** from Harpenden. They were assisted by **Janet Sands** and **Peter Hadwin**. Their objectives were to complete further, more detailed, research both locally and more widely - to pull together any loose ends of Alan's life, and contact his descendants. We met on a regular basis over the next 12 months to formalise our plans with a date of 1 March 2019 in mind.

As the house was rented in 1908 and remains so today, it was necessary to obtain permission from the Landlords, the Managing Agents, Local Councillors and the Watford Museum for planning permission to erect a Blue Plaque and a number of other relevant matters. They were all very co-operative. To cut a long story fairly short, thanks to the influence and enthusiasm of my well-chosen assistants there were no hiccups. We arranged for a local hotel, The Holiday Inn in Clarendon Road, to assist with hospitality, a buffet lunch, displays and speeches following the unveiling of the plaque. Probably the most dialogue amongst the organising Team came in the final selection of guests. Although Alan had died in 1972, as a former long serving District Commissioner of South West Herts District he was very well remembered in Watford Scouting. We were limited to 60 in the hotel conference room and clearly the family descendants had preference, followed by ever helpful dignitaries from Watford Council and so on. We could have easily accommodated nearer 100 but it was just not possible. This is one reason why the event could not have prior advertising.

As the date approached and the jigsaw of arrangements took shape, invitations were sent out in January. As these were for an important County Event, they were addressed from the County Commissioner **Liz Walker** who at all times gave her enthusiastic support. The County Executive recognised the importance of this event by my History & Heritage Team and gave approval for the budget at their meeting in 2018. This included the production of explanatory brochures for attenders, an A5 front cover, more appropriate documents for the family and other necessary research. Four Cub Scouts from Alan's original [The First South West Herts

(Countess of Clarendon's Own) Scout Group], were given time off school to facilitate the unveiling and attend lunch with their parents. At various times speeches were given by **myself** and **Cllr Rabi Martins** (Chairman of Watford Borough Council), **Liz Walker** (Scout County Commissioner) and **Peter Taylor** (Mayor of Watford). An adjacent exhibition about the life of **Alan Emery** and his family was appreciated. Our main contact with the family was **Patrick**, he is **Alan's** grandson who helped enormously by providing information and artefacts for the exhibition which were later donated to the County Scout Museum.

Following lunch many attendees expressed their appreciation of the event, its celebration of a unique and early milestone in Hertfordshire's Scout history and the way it had been tabled. The organising committee also wrote to the Hotel Management and others expressing their thanks.

The next most notable event in March was the first public gathering of the Units who had been selected to attend the next World Scout Jamboree in North America, later in 2019. This was held in camp in glorious sunshine at Phasels Wood Activity Centre over the weekend of 23/24 March 2019. (The five Units had met individually during the past two years). The County Heritage Team were invited to provide a display of selected previous Jamborees. (The artefact lists of attendees and other information on every previous World Jamboree are kept at the County Archive Facility). I chose items from five previous Jamborees. The First (Olympia 1920), the last (Japan 2015), (UK Sutton Coldfield 1957), (Holland, 1937), and Moisson, (France 1947).

*On a historic note, Hertfordshire Scouts have attended every World Jamboree. The smallest ever attended was in the Philippines in 1959 where only one person from Hertfordshire attended. He was **Ken Foxcroft** from Elstree District. This, the Tenth WSJ was led by **Laurence Stringer OBE, JP, TD., (d.2008)** a man of boundless energy and commitment. A former Soldier of the Durham Light Infantry in whose service he was wounded in WWII. He was, I remember, formidable HQ Commissioner for Senior Scouts who led a number of UK contingents to WSJs. The total UK Contingent in 1959 was 94 plus 18 Leaders and HQ staff. This UK Jamboree contingent did however have a successful Reunion. **Roger Norman** (of the Captain Oates Rover Crew and Co-ordinator of the Fairmead Active Support Unit) traced 25 of the Contingent members and a reunion was held, exactly 50 years to the day after the start of the Jamboree. However, **Ken Foxcroft** was unable to attend as he had moved to Canada. The largest WSJ ever attended was in the UK in 1929, when the Hertfordshire Contingent was over 200.*

I attended both days of the event at Phasels Wood. The Hertfordshire Contingent were in camp over the weekend and I believe this was their first combined camp. The event was co-ordinated by leaders of the Hertfordshire Jamboree Units. A large marquee and smaller canopies were provided to accommodate the Units, their presentations, visitors and displays. The Heritage Team display attracted interest especially on the Sunday by parents who asked me many questions about previous Jamborees. The interest by parents was significant as for

many youngsters this was to be their first time abroad without them. There are 5 Units attending with the addition of those attending as part of the **IST, CST & CMT**. The Units are **Unit 14** (Antares), **Unit 15** (Psychedelic Squirrels), **Unit 16** (Wapiti), **Unit 17** (Busby Bears), **Unit 51** (Swans and Stags). This Contingent is arguably the largest total number from Hertfordshire of any of the previous WSJs. However, when extracting those from Girlguiding UK and from outside the County of Hertfordshire, the number is reduced to around 180. This means the WSJ to Birkenhead in 1929 still holds the record number of actual Hertfordshire Scouts attending a WSJ.

STOP PRESS

I am very sorry to inform you all that a direct descendant of the founder of Scouting in Hertfordshire, died on 24 March. **Commander Peter J Everett, OBE, RN (retd)** has died aged 92. At my invitation, he visited Hertfordshire a number of times in recent years. In particular to attend an exhibition I held in 2012 to mark the death of his Grandfather, **Sir Percy Everett 1870 -1952**. I have written to his family to inform them that I will be attending his funeral on Tuesday 9 April. The announcement was made in *The Daily Telegraph* on 30 March 2019.

When I was invited to become the Archivist of Scouting History for Hertfordshire in 2003, by the then CC, **Roger Sands**; I consulted with an old Scouting friend, **Terry Price**, the GSL of the First Wormley Scout Group (d. 2012). He gave me some advice which has been proved sound all these years later. He suggested that if I wanted to learn about people, I should read the individual obituary announcements published in *The Daily Telegraph* every day. As my parents had taken this newspaper for many years, I had naturally continued reading it after they had passed on. Taking Terry's advice, my eyes were opened to a new and exceptional resource of the individual history of people from all walks of life. This suited my new role admirably. These announcements sometimes detailed a Scouting involvement, and not always from Hertfordshire! This is how I spotted the obit of **Commander Peter Everett**.

Another old friend **Anthony Churchill** has also died recently on 9th January aged 83. He was not directly connected with Scouting but his famous ancestor **Sir Winston Churchill** was. **Anthony** lived on the Isle of Wight and I met him there on several occasions, and once in June 2015 at Blenheim Palace Oxfordshire, for the launch of the new £5 note, which carries the image of Sir Winston. I was invited there as the Historian of Hertfordshire Scouts by the Bank of England. I took with me a member of my Heritage Team, **Colin Walker** and his wife **Fran**. **Anthony** wrote a book *Winston's Island*. It was the story of how **Sir Winston Churchill** met his future wife **Clementine** on the Island and the locations they visited while courting. **Anthony Churchill** was primarily a Yachtsman, entrepreneur and a stalwart of **Ted Heath's Morning Cloud Crew** in the 1980s. I have of course written to his widow, Linda.

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