

Scouting in Ruishton (1920 – 2000)

The earliest record of scouting in Ruishton dates from 19 December 1920, when Miss M.E. Whish reported the closing of the 28th Taunton (Ruishton & Henlade) troop because she was leaving the area. In 1921 the vicar of Ruishton, Reverend H.S. Pugh, was involved in an attempt to restart the troop with the School Attendance Officer, Mr Alfred Trimby, as the Scout Master. The new troop became known as 29th Taunton (Ruishton), but it folded the following year.

The next attempt to form a local Scout troop was in 1929. District minutes record a letter received from Mr E.J. ("Peter") Clarke of Woodlands, Ruishton, on 10 July 1929, requesting permission to form a new troop. Permission was granted, subject to Mr Clarke being able to locate a headquarters and an experienced Assistant Scout Master. The new troop was registered as 28th Taunton (Ruishton & Henlade) and the old school was hired for meetings at a charge of 1 shilling per week.

In 1932, Rover Scouts John Barrington and William Bryant drew up plans to erect a Canadian-style log cabin to provide the troop with its own headquarters. The site was donated by Peter Clarke's mother and the foundation "stone" was laid on 1 April 1933. The construction itself took several years, with a lot of help from other Rover Scouts in Taunton District. The spruce logs were carted from Staple Fitzpaine to Ruishton, where they were stripped and the half-joints were cut, before being placed on concrete pillars. Each layer of logs was laid on a bed of oakum and 12-15 inch steel spikes were driven into ½ inch holes drilled every 6 feet along the structure. The stone for the fireplace and chimney was brought by trek cart from a derelict building behind Ruishton church.

The log hut was completed by July 1935. The costs incurred are documented in the Group accouts:

<i>roof & floor timber</i>	<i>£15 6s 9d</i>
<i>chippings, sand & cement</i>	<i>£9 10s 0d</i>
<i>frames etc</i>	<i>£7 18s 6d</i>
<i>hauling logs</i>	<i>£5 10s 0d</i>

Meanwhile, at the County Jamboree at Taunton, in 1933, the troop carried off the County Flag and won the Thomas Trophy for the third year in succession as the troop with the highest percentage of First Class Scouts in Somerset.

During the Second World War, various people took over the leadership of the local Scouts for short periods, but it became increasingly difficult to keep the troop going and it eventually folded in April 1945. It was reformed briefly between July 1946 and December 1947, but this was followed by a long period without any Scouting activity in the Ruishton area.

Use of the Scout Hut was offered to any troop of Scouts raised in Ruishton, but in May 1949, Brigadier C. Paul Clarke (brother of Peter Clarke), wrote: *"I wonder very much if it is worthwhile insuring it at all as it has become very dilapidated recently. I would be willing to defray the cost of repair to it if it were going to be used. But when not in use the local youths seem to take delight in throwing bricks through the windows and so on."*

Shortly afterwards, the Huish School Senior Scout troop began to use the hut as its headquarters. A new roof was constructed, fresh horsehair was stuffed into the cracks, some large box-seats were

installed, and the electricity supply was connected from the overhead power lines in Ruishton Lane. The Huish School troop, whose neckerchiefs were black with a red border, continued to use the hut until the early 1960's, when the building of the new Huish School meant that they no longer needed to meet at Ruishton.

By 1967, the East Taunton Scout Group had acquired the use of the Ruishton Scout Hut. Their Scouts started meeting there in January 1967, but found it so cold that they soon moved to a more comfortable and convenient meeting place in Taunton. However, their Senior Scouts - the equivalent of today's Venture Scouts - continued to use the hut for some time.

Throughout this period, any Ruishton or Creech St. Michael boys who wished to become Cubs or Scouts had to travel to West Hatch, West Monkton or to East or Central Taunton. In 1970, a new Cub pack was formed as part of Central Taunton Scout Group and began meeting at Creech St. Michael primary school. By 1972, the number of boys had grown to allow the creation of a "Ruishton Patrol", which met at the Ruishton Scout Hut but continued to wear the red neckerchief of Central Taunton.

In 1980, a meeting was held at the W.I. Hall in Creech St. Michael for interested parents to consider the formation of a new Group, independent of Central Taunton, as it was felt that *"the boys and parents would identify more closely with a village Pack and Troop"*. Following this meeting, the 1st Henlade Scout Group was formed, officially starting on 1 April 1980 and continuing through to the present day.

The 1st Henlade Group wears the black neckerchief with red border, as previously worn by the Huish School troop, thus preserving an interesting link with the Ruishton Scout Hut. In 1985, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Scout Hut, the Group was given permission to wear a circular badge, sewn on the back of the neckerchief, depicting the hut and its distinctive fireplace (see diagram). The design for this badge came from the original plans drawn up by John Barrington and William Bryant in 1932.

The year 2000 will see 1st Henlade Scout Group celebrating its 20th anniversary in a healthy position. It currently has over 70 members, comprising a Beaver colony for boys aged 6-8 years, a Cub pack for boys aged 8-10 years, and a Scout troop for older boys up to 15 years. The Beavers meet in Creech St. Michael, as do the Cubs during the colder months, while the Scouts continue to use the Ruishton Scout Hut as their headquarters. The Cubs also enjoy meeting at the Scout Hut when the weather is warmer.

The Group is fortunate to have its own minibus for taking the boys on outdoor activities and to have its own site at the nearby Huish Woods Scout Camp Site. 1st Henlade Scouts have an excellent tradition for taking part in typical Scouting activities such as pioneering, hiking, back-packing and camping. Two patrols competed at the 1998 County Jamboree, for example, and both were awarded First Class pennants.

These Scouting activities are largely funded by monthly subscriptions, but additional fund-raising activities are held throughout the year to pay for the upkeep of equipment and the maintenance of the minibus and Scout Hut. In 1996, for example, the Scout Hut roof was completely re-felted using materials kindly donated by two local building firms; and in 1998, the Group was awarded a grant of just under £5000 from the National Lottery Charities Board for the purchase of new tents, folding tables and benches, rucksacks, cooking stoves and compasses.

As part of the world-wide Scout Movement, the Group's aim is "*to promote the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potential, as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities*". This is achieved "*by providing an enjoyable and attractive scheme of progressive training, based on the Scout Promise and Law, and guided by adult leadership*".

The Group depends entirely on the support of adult volunteers to help run the weekly meetings of the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts, and to organise the various fund-raising activities. It is always pleased to hear from anybody who is able and willing to offer their services, whether as uniformed leaders and assistants, or as skills instructors, regular helpers or members of the Group's executive committee. Anybody interested in becoming involved in any capacity, however small, is encouraged to contact an existing member of 1st Henlade Scout Group. A warm and friendly welcome is guaranteed.

This article was written by Ron Streeter.

Acknowledgement: Much of this article is based on extracts from an earlier history of "Scouting at Ruishton", compiled by John Branchflower (1st Henlade Scout Leader, 1984-89) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Ruishton Scout Hut in 1985.