

This is a letter sent by Edwin Lucas to Angus Mitchell prior to the 31st Midlothian (Juniper Green) Scout Group's Diamond Jubilee celebration. It recalls the early years of the troop, from its formation in 1924 through to 1939.

24th October 1984

Dear Angus,

When I received, your letter about the 31st's Diamond Jubilee, I phoned you with my thanks and to say that I would contribute towards your effort to compile a history of the Group. On referring again to your letter I was surprised to see that it was so long ago (8th May) and I send my apologies for taking so long to do anything about it. The fact is that I am getting old and forgetful of recent events, though my memories of what happened 60 years ago are clear enough.

I joined the Troop on the first evening on which it was formed. I had seen a notice in the window of Linton's sweetshop and, while I was reading it, I was joined by Tom More whom I persuaded to come along with me. There were very few, if any, others from the village at that meeting, certainly none of the immediate contemporaries of myself and Tom, but there were several from further afield, among whom I remember the Williamson brothers, John and Humphrey, and Tom Dykes from Colinton. The meeting was in St Margaret's Church Hall and we were duly enrolled by Willie Stevens, the village policeman's son, resplendent in ASM's uniform. It was on his initiative and enthusiasm that the Troop was formed and it was he who conducted all our meetings. Later, I learned that the Scoutmaster was Mr Ramsay, the Session Clerk of St Margaret's, but he took no part in the conduct of our affairs, and may well have been persuaded to lend his name to the new venture in order to balance Willie's extreme youth. In any event, he soon found himself fully employed in the affairs of the church, for the minister, the Rev Mr Short, died and the filling of such a vacancy in those days required somewhat more work from the Session and its Clerk than it does now.

It was very unusual for young teenagers like us Scouts be interested in the filling of a church vacancy, but when our enthusiastic ASM informed us one evening that one of the applicants was a young assistant at St Giles celebrated for his activities in youth work, who, if successful, might well be persuaded to become our Scoutmaster with dramatic effects on our numbers and prospects, we pricked up our ears. We hardly constituted what would now be called a 'pressure group' but I have no doubt that our parents and their friends got the message. Be that as it may, our best hopes were realised, the Rev Wm B C Buchanan came to St Margaret's, Juniper Green, and, as soon as he had settled in, became our Scoutmaster. Under his leadership our number grew rapidly and we were soon a flourishing troop of four patrols, able to do all the exciting Scouting things – camping, trekking, tests, badges, etc and raise funds for these activities by concerts, sales, fetes, etc.

Our first uniform was a Navy blue shirt and a pale blue neckerchief and, of course, the Scout hat. WBCB immediately changed the colour of the shirt to khaki and, some time later, the necker to khaki with a black border. Willie Stevens departed when he gave up his job as a bank clerk and began his studies for the Ministry. For a time after that we had Bob Bogie a very keen and able Scouter as our ASM, but he soon left to form his own Troop in the city. When the Cub Pack was formed, I am not at all sure, but it was within this period. The first Cubmasters were Hilda Clark and Sybil Ritchie, and we Scouts were always greatly impressed by the efficiency and discipline of the Pack.

John Arthur Muirhead (Jam as he was affectionately known to us all) who was later to become our first Group Scoutmaster and its guiding personality, was introduced to us by WBCB as an instructor in the arts of self-defence, boxing and jiu-jitsu.

Our first camp was at the Bole o' Bere, a farm on the Lang Whang about three miles beyond Balerno Station. The actual site was at the foot of Dalmahoy Hill on its South side. It was only a week-end, affair and few attended - it may, indeed, have been only for the Court of Honour - photograph of some of those there enclosed - dates probably 1926 in June. We had other week-end camps in the grounds of Cockburn House which lay a few miles above Balerno towards Bavelaw. I remember only one full week's camp and that was at Stoneypath a hill farm on the South side of the Pentlands about 2 miles above West Linton up the Lynne Water. That was in Bob Bogie's time and I enclose photographs of him and some of the others who were there. The troop had a week long camp each year, but I was unable to be at any of the others as their times co-incided with my school's OTC camp which, as the big drummer in the pipe band, I was obliged to attend. The climax of WBCB's reign, if that is the right word, came in 1930 when he took the Troop on a visit to Germany for two weeks. Again I was not able to go because of dates. I had to start my first job in the Civil Service just two weeks prior to the date of departure.

That summer also saw two other events of significant importance: Mr Buchanan accepted a call from a church in Kilmarnock and left the village; and a group of twelve or so of the older Scouts who were eighteen years of age or nearly so left to form a Rover Crew with JAM as their Leader. There was no ASM and all who had been Patrol Leaders and seconds were among those who joined the Rovers. I was Troop Leader at the time and, when meetings resumed in the autumn, I assumed the duties of an ASM and kept the remnant of the Troop together and functioning. Difficulties were put in the way of the Troop's continuing use of the church hall and, for a time, we met in a room of the old snuff mill which lay on the Water of Leith between Kinleith Bridge and the railway bridge a hundred yards more downstream. The Rovers made their Den in a rented single roomed cottage at the top of Belmont Avenue (now Juniper Avenue) between the Smiddy and the Kinleith Arms.

Under JAM's leadership we began looking and planning for a place of our own to make into a Headquarters. Meantime, we started raising funds in the time-honoured way by concerts, sales and so on. To older heads the prospect would, no doubt, have seemed rather forlorn, but in a few years, a local builder gave up business and his yard, including sizable storage and office premises, came on the market. The price was £350 which we were able to raise on overdraft secured by Mr Bruce of Torduff, Lanark Road, a member of the family that once owned Kinleith Mill and who was then, I think, the

Managing Director of the Company then controlling it. The money in our hands was used in converting the property to our requirements. Tom Montgomery was the Clerk of Works and the considerable work entailed was soon completed.

With our own premises, it was less difficult to raise funds both to pay our way and repay our indebtedness. Shortly after the commissioning of the new HQ, the Troop was fortunate in acquiring an energetic SM in the person of Raymond Johnston and, before long, recruiting improved and numbers built up satisfactorily. He departed from the district in 1938 or thereabouts and I resumed my carrying on act for a short time. On the outbreak of war in 1939 Alec Scott became SM and I departed from the scene.

I see that I have left out Bob Fordyce and that is really unforgivable. He may have gone on the Germany trip in 1930 in order to help WBCB and, if so, that was probably his introduction to Scouting. He had a fine singing voice and was an indispensable member of the Rover concert party, and Jenny Bruce, his fiancée and later his wife, was similarly essential.

Bob took over the leadership of the Rover Crew not long after its formation and JAM then became group Scoutmaster. Both of them and also Jack Bruen gave me considerable help with my annual camps in the early 30's. I enclose two photographs taken at these camps. One must have been taken by JAM as his dog is in it, and the other was probably taken by Bob. Sorry about the missing names - these could perhaps be supplied by John Noble if he is available. There is one missing name in the photograph of the concert party that I feel rather bad about. I should, certainly remember it but it has disappeared completely. You will see it marked on the back - he and his younger brother were both, I think, at your Jubilee gathering and the latter was then still staying in the village. Help!

Well, I've gone on much longer than I originally intended, but, once started, I continued to cover the whole period during which the original gang held together. By the mid and late 30's they were marrying and moving away. I'm looking forward to seeing a goodly representation of them on the 7th!

Edwin Lucas