

The Boy Scout Movement in Riverstone Part 1

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The Boy Scout movement was founded in Great Britain in 1908 by Lieutenant General Robert S.S. [later Lord] Baden-Powell who had written a book called “Scouting for Boys” (1908). Baden-Powell’s book described many games and contests that he used to train cavalry troops in scouting, this book became popular reading among boys of Great Britain. The symbols of the Boy Scouts include the handshake with the left hand, the Fleur-de-lis badge and their motto “Be Prepared”.

Since 1920 international scout meetings or “World Jamborees” have been held every four years. These are gatherings of thousands of scouts representing their countries and camping together in friendship. In 1916 Baden-Powell founded an organization for younger boys called the “Wolf Cubs” also known as Cub Scouts.

In 1921 the first Boy Scout movement in Riverstone was founded by the minister at St. Paul’s Church of England, the Reverend A.W. Setchell. The *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* provided information about the scout movement over the years. Many of these references are included below:-

Friday July 1, 1921: *A local Corps of the New South Wales Boy Scouts is in progress of formation. The objects of the movement are so laudable that it should receive support.* The only recorded scouts under Rev. Setchell are—Harry Vidler, B. Rosa, John McDonald, S. Allen, Allan Setchell [minister’s son], Fred Rumery, D. Kirwan, Eric Allen, Tom Wall, Keith McDonald.

Friday November 4, 1921: *The concert being organised by the Riverstone troop of Boy Scouts to be held in the Oddfellows Hall on Friday November 11th promises to be a big success. It will be unique in the fact that the whole of the performers will be scouts, the local troop have been fortunate in securing the assistance of such well known scouts as the choir boys of St. Andrew’s Cathedral and the St. Jude’s Randwick. The former are giving exhibitions of semaphore signaling and tent pitching plus 5 or 6 vocal items, the latter are giving exhibitions of Ju Jitsu wrestling, Morse signaling and are accompanied by scout Jock McDonald, a fine Scotch singer. The local lads will give a first aid demonstration, physical exercises and render an Indian sketch called “Pocahontas”; the proceeds are to be devoted to the equipment fund of Riverstone Troop.*

November 18, 1921: *A batch of about 20 young scouts, boys of between 12 and 15 years of age, arrived in Riverstone on Friday and gave a pleasant entertainment in the Oddfellows Hall that evening in aid of the movement in this district. An excellent program was put forward to a large audience and the financial result was very satisfactory. The scouts camped in Riverstone on the Friday night and the good ladies of the town gave them breakfast and dinner on the Saturday, and the party left by the afternoon train.*

Friday April 7, 1922: *The local Scoutmaster, Reverend A.W. Setchell has suggested to his troop that they should go into camp at his holiday site at Austinmer during Easter. About 20 of the local lads will be able to avail themselves of the invitation.*

Friday August 1923: *On Wednesday August 23rd the 1st Riverstone Boy Scouts tendered their Scoutmaster, Rev. A.W. Setchell and fellow scout Allan Setchell a farewell evening prior to their departure for Tasmania. During the evening the gifts, a handsome umbrella, suitable inscribed to Mr Setchell and a Gladstone bag to Master Setchell were presented. Both presents were fully appreciated by the recipients, who had received a good surprise. Mr Setchell in thanking the boys for their useful gifts, stated it was his sincere desire that a suitable and capable Scoutmaster would replace him, as he regarded the scout movement as essential in a boy's life as it made him look for the higher ideals in life, and it should be one that should receive the heartiest support of the public. Master Setchell also suitably responded.*

The scout musician then struck up "for they are jolly good fellows", in which the whole troop joined, all present did full justice to the refreshments provided, and later took part in various games until 10.45pm saw the termination of a most enjoyable evening. The troop are now eagerly awaiting the opportunity of a final outing with their Scoutmaster and fellow scout on Saturday next, they echo the sentiments of the whole district when they wish their Scoutmaster and family a most prosperous and enjoyable future.

With the departure from Riverstone of Rev. Setchell in 1923 there are no records that I can find to verify who carried on the scouts, if any, it appears that they did not continue much longer. There is no mention of scouts from 1923 until July 1929.

During 1929 the minister at St. Paul's church was Reverend W.J. Owens and it appears that he was responsible for the revival of the boy scouts when he came to Riverstone.

Extracts from the Windsor-Richmond Gazette of 1929 continue the story.

Friday July 12, 1929: *The 1st Riverstone Troop of Baden-Powell Scouts has been in progress for about three months under Scoutmaster W.J. Owens. The troop has a membership of 15.*

Friday November 15, 1929: *Movement well established... Successful Social...*

After a lapse of some years the Riverstone Boy Scouts was revived in April last, with the Rev. W.J. Owens as Scoutmaster. The churchwardens and committee of St. Paul's kindly granted the use of the Sunday School Hall for the use of the established troop, officially known as the First Riverstone Troop, doubtless with the opinion at headquarters that a "second" Riverstone Troop would be formed in due course. Work has been regularly carried on each Friday evening and on alternate Saturdays, and now the troop consists of seventeen who have passed the Tenderfoot's test. Of these, six have also passed for a Second-Class scout.

Organised in three patrols- the 'Doves' under Patrol-Leader T. Beazley, the 'Kangaroos' under Patrol-Leader A. Moore, and the 'Curlews' under Patrol-Leader K. Robshaw, with G. Andrews as Troop Leader, much good work has been done. A small detachment will go to Lake Illawarra to take part in the great corroboree for the New South Wales scouts starting on December 27, at which the Governor General and Chief Scout for the Commonwealth will be present, but the troop as a whole will go into camp for a week early in the New Year at Wentworth Falls.

The following are just a few examples from the Windsor and Richmond Gazette of the many activities performed by the Riverstone scouts at this time.

Friday September 19, 1930: *Splendid Progress: The Riverstone Boy Scouts held their second annual social in the Olympia Hall, Riverstone on Friday, August 29. Close on 300 of the townspeople, young and old met for the occasion.*

Four scouts under Troop-Leader Andrews had attended the great New Year's Corroboree at Lake Illawarra, and twelve scouts under Scoutmaster Owens, assisted by Acting Troopleader Moore, had gone into a troop camp for eight days in January at Wentworth Falls.

The thanks of all Riverstone scouts are most heartily given to their honorary examiners – Dr Rich for Ambulance, Horseman and Friend to Animals. Major F.W.D. McClean for Marksman. Mr. T.B. Davis for Pathfinder, and Sister Barnes for Missionary. The following have also given consent to serve: - Mr. W. Vaughan for Carpenter and Handyman. And Mr. O. Robbins for Athlete.

Friday May 6, 1932: *Hawkesbury District Association. On the 28th April a meeting was held at Windsor to form a Provisional Hawkesbury District Association, to embrace troops already existing in the Hawkesbury and to include such troops as may be formed in the future. Troops in existence are at Riverstone, Richmond, Wilberforce and Windsor. Commissioner Mc Allister, Commissioner for the Unattached area addressed the meeting. [The above scout troops were before under the Blue Mountains District]. Rev. Owens and Dr. Rich were elected as two of the Vice Presidents.*

Sunday April 13, 1933: *Scouts and Cubs under Scoutmaster Phillipson and Beasley attended the Anzac service at Riverstone. They added to the length of the procession, which halted at the monument and was drawn up in two ranks with the Scouts and Cubs on the right flank. I am not sure what transpired at this time, Rev. Owens was still at Riverstone until the end of 1934. There is no record of him handing over the Scouts to the two above.*

Friday December 7, 1934: *Ten Hawkesbury Boy Scouts are to attend the Centenary Jamboree, eight from Windsor, two from Riverstone. On Boxing Day 26 December, a party of ten Boy Scouts will proceed to Sydney to join one of the special trains which will convey the New South Wales contingent to the International Boy Scout Rally in Melbourne. Over 2,000 from New South Wales will be in Melbourne for the jamboree which will be attended by the Chief Scout, Lord Baden-Powell. Prior to their departure it is suggested that the Mayor should tender them a civic Farewell. During their absence from New South Wales the boys will be in a canvas city where all languages will be spoken, all creeds honored and neither color bars, nor international boundaries exist.*

During Rev. Owen's farewell report in the Riverstone Church of England October 1934 magazine he mentioned "the scouts and cubs who know I really love them when I growl at them.". During Rev. Owens stint as scoutmaster the scouts flourished and had a busy time and they were a very active group. Rev. Owens left the district at the end of 1934.

I cannot find any reports of scout involvement from 1934 until 1940. It also appears that the scouts in other nearby towns also dissolved around this time. Windsor and Ebenezer scouts reformed during early 1940, before Riverstone. Again the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* contained references to the scouts.

March 15, 1940: Under Scout News. *It is hoped to form a troop at Riverstone in near future. Mr. V. Rowland is the District Commissioner.*

July 12, 1940: *During the past week a 1st Riverstone Scout Troop and Cub Pack have been formed. The troop is under the leadership of Mr Jim Laughton once a scout in Riverstone and later an Assistant Scoutmaster at Windsor. Mr Roy Turnbull of Box Hill has taken the position of Assistant Scoutmaster. The Cub Pack is under Mrs M. Rowland. The lads are keen and enthusiastic and a good troop and pack are assured.*

Jim Laughton lived in Riverstone Road and had a run down poultry farm with some old chook sheds in poor state. While we were meeting there one of our regular jobs was to clean and repair each shed. We whitewashed four of these for our own use, one for each patrol, however after we got them repaired and whitewashed we suddenly left his premises. This was our first meeting place. It was during this time that I along with many other boys in Riverstone joined the scout movement.

One of the first things all scouts relished was to obtain the scout uniform. We had to go to the scout shop at Parramatta to get all the necessary gear. The hat when bought was not formed into the peak style required, to obtain this the hat crown had to be soaked for a considerable time to soften, then shaped and held in this position by four clothes pegs until the hat dried, it then retained this shape. Our scarf colour was Light Blue with a Grey border.

The scout uniform during my time as a scout comprised of khaki hat with leather band, khaki shirt, scarf with a woggle. Over the scarf we wore a white lanyard with a whistle attached. We wore navy blue shorts with a leather belt with the scout emblem buckle. On the belt we wore a small leather pouch, and, if lucky a sheath knife. We also wore long socks with green garter tabs showing on the outside, and black shoes. On the left shirt shoulder each scout wore the Shoulder Knot, six inches long. This was the colours of his patrol. I belonged to the 'Kangaroo Patrol'. This colour was red on the outside and grey inside. On the right sleeve, high up was the Group Name Badge. Proficiency Badges [of which there were many] were worn on your shirt sleeves.

January 1941: *Scouts worldwide mourn the loss of their Chief Scout Lord Baden-Powell. A memorial service will be held for World Chief Scout Lord Baden-Powell in the Windsor Park, Sunday January 1941 at 3.30 p.m. District Scouts and Cubs will be in attendance. (The Riverstone scouts attended.)*

When Scoutmaster Laughton decided to leave the scouts Mr Roy Turnbull took over as our Scoutmaster. The scouts then met for a while in an old slab shed on Mr Davis's property in Market Street [opposite to where the swimming pool is]. We also used the shed that used to be behind the Masonic building. Quite often we would ride our bikes out to Mr Turnbull's property at Box Hill. It was here that we would pass many of our proficiency badge tests.

After a big flood in the Hawkesbury River a letter appeared in the February 8, 1950 issue of the local gazette paper stating that the Boy Scout movement in the district would be beneficial in sending messages from one side of the river to the other during big floods when the river could not be crossed. The letter indicated that as the scouts were instructed in Semaphore [signals using two flags] and Morse Code they would be a big help, how about it boys. [This appeared to be a challenge.]

In response to this letter the Acting District Commissioner for scouts A. Morrison replied that all scouts under the Hawkesbury District [which Riverstone was a part of] would be used in any emergencies including floods. He indicated that scouts could send messages by day using flags, and

send Morse Code during the dark hours using a morse light. He states that senior scouts are well versed in these procedures.

We did not at the time have our own camping equipment. I can remember one trip going to the large Scouting area at Pennant Hills. Here, during Saturday night, some scouts from Parramatta let down our borrowed tents causing some merriment.

Another place visited was the Y.M.C.A. [Young Men's Christian Association] grounds on the Grose River. To get there we caught the steam train to Richmond and then walked out to the area which is about 5km.

During World War 2 scouts who had a push bike were used as what was called 'Runners'. We could be used for conveying messages from one place to another. We had to attend certain meetings to be told our duties.

We also collected aluminium (mainly old cooking utensils) and anything that was required for the war effort; for this we used our billycarts to go from house to house.

Windsor and Richmond Gazette of April 8, 1942: The scouts were up bright and early with their billycarts and a motor lorry at their disposal for the collection of rubber, and by the look of the collection they accumulated for the day they deserve a pat on the back for their marvellous effort.

One vivid trip I remember was when some of the scouts went into Sydney to view one of the four Japanese Midget Submarines that had enter Sydney Harbour and was depth charged and salvaged, it was later put on display at Circular Quay. Souvenirs off the sub were sold to the public. This occurred May 31, 1942.

During 1943 the Red Cross appreciated the assistance of the local scouts headed by their Scoutmaster Mr Roy Turnbull in gathering reeds from dams and Eastern Creek. These were dried and given to the Red Cross, who distributed them to military hospitals for our wounded soldiers. The reeds were used in teaching basket weaving as a means of helping them to rehabilitate.

Our scout group came to an end when Roy Turnbull decided to leave. As we did not have an Assistant Scoutmaster to take over, our troop folded and ceased to meet, this was about 1944-45.

I have always been a scout at heart and I decided to try and revive the scout movement in Riverstone. I started late in 1949. I had very good response from the boys and soon had enough, so I approached the R.S.L. to get permission to hold our meetings in their building which was at the time an old army hut. I was granted permission and we were away. We soon had enough boys to form into four patrols, namely Kangaroo, Wallaby, Dingo and Koala.

Like our last troop we did not have our own camping gear. I suppose money at this time was scarce. I mainly stayed with teaching the lads all about scouts and getting the boys to pass their different proficiency tests. We did go on a lot of short trips and attended the march on Anzac Days that usually started near the Presbyterian Church, went down the main street and ended at the Cenotaph.

The reports in the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* continued.

October 1, 1949. *Field Day for Boy Scouts. Scouts from Riverstone, Windsor, Richmond, Wilberforce and Vineyard troops descended upon Rifle Range Road at South Windsor which was the scene of great Scouting activity. Truck loads of Scouts and Cubs arrived for a real field day. Many scouts went through their Tenderfoot investiture ceremony and were presented with their Tenderfoot Badge and their Patrol Knots. There were varied activities during the day.*

October 7, 1949: *A meeting was held at Windsor to form a Hawkesbury District Association of the Boy Scouts Association to foster the Scout movement in the district. Prominent members of the association attended in force [too many to list here]. Mr W. Marchant the Area Commissioner for the Western Metropolitan area stated that our district had 170 scouts.*

November 1949: *The Phillip Festival. Inspection of Guard of Honor. His Excellency Lieut. General J. Northcott. Governor of N.S.W. refused to abandon his inspection of the Guard of Honor and in pouring rain, moved through the ranks of Boy Scouts and Wolf Cubs, who manfully stood to attention through the ceremony. Altogether 240 members of district Boy Scouts and Wolf Cubs were in attendance.*

December 7, 1949: *The local Scouts and Cubs attended the ceremony for the presentation and unveiling of the Honor Roll for the 1939 – 45 World War 2.*

After completing the necessary items I was granted my Scoutmaster certificate in 1951. Again with no Assistant Scoutmaster to carry on I reluctantly during 1951, due to unforeseen circumstances, had to bring to a close something I held dear. I did not look forward to what I had to do. This brought to an end another chapter in the Scouting movement in Riverstone.

At present I am compiling the complete history of the scout movement in Riverstone for the Riverstone Historical Society. I would appreciate any input to the scout movement however small, especially old photos. E.B. 02 9627 1846.