

SLRN 2: Baden-Powell – Chief Scout of the World



The name Baden-Powell is known and respected throughout the world. He was a man who, in his 83 years, devoted himself to the service of his country and his fellow men in two separate and complete lives; one as a soldier fighting for his country, and the other as a worker for peace through the Scout Movement.

Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell was born at 6 Stanhope Street (now 11 Stanhope Terrace), Paddington, London on February 22, 1857. He was the sixth son and the eighth of ten children of the Reverend Baden-Powell, a Professor at Oxford University. The names Robert Stephenson were those of his Godfather, the son of railway pioneer George Stephenson.

When B-P was three years old, his father died, the family were not left well off. B-P was given his first lessons by his mother, then he went to Rose Hill School, Tunbridge Wells, where he gained a scholarship to Charterhouse School. Based in London when he first attended, it relocated to Godalming, Surrey, a factor which had great influence in his later life. He was always eager to learn new skills. He played the piano and fiddle. He acted - and acted the clown too at times. He practised bricklaying, and it was whilst a scholar at Charterhouse that he began to exploit his interest in the arts of Scouting and woodcraft.

In the woods around the school, B-P would stalk his masters as well as catch and cook rabbits, being careful not to let the tell-tale smoke give his position away. During the holidays, he and his brothers were always in search of adventure. One vacation was spent on a yachting expedition around the south coast of England. On another, they traced the Thames to its source by canoe. In all this, B-P was



learning skills, that were to prove so useful to him professionally. He was certainly not a 'swot' at school, as his end of term reports revealed. One records: 'Mathematics - has to all intents given up the study', and another: 'French - could do well but has become very lazy, often sleeps in school'. Nevertheless, he gained second place for cavalry in an open examination for the Army and was commissioned straight into the 13th Hussars, bypassing the officer training establishments, and subsequently became their Honorary Colonel for 30 years.

From the start, his Army career was outstanding. With the 13th Hussars he served in India, Afghanistan and South Africa and was mentioned in dispatches for his work in Zululand. Next came three years service in Malta as Assistant Military Secretary; then he went to Ashanti in Africa, to lead the campaign against Prempeh.

Success led to his being promoted at the age of 40 to command the 5th Dragoon Guards in 1897. They benefited from B-P's first training in Scouting, and he awarded soldiers reaching certain standards a badge based on the north point of the compass. Today's Scout Membership badge is very similar.

In 1899 came the successful defence of the town of Mafeking, from the Boers in South Africa. This was the most notable episode in his outstanding military career; he became a Major-General at the age of only 43. B-P became famous and the hero of every boy, although he always minimised both his own part and the value of his inspiring leadership. He learned how well young people responded to a challenge by using boys for responsible jobs during the 217 day siege. B-P's book, 'Aids to Scouting', was published during the siege and reached a far wider readership than the military one for which it was intended.

Following Mafeking, B-P was given the task of organising the South African Constabulary. On his return to England in 1903 as Inspector General of Cavalry, he found his book was being used by youth leaders and teachers all over the country. He spoke at meetings and rallies and was asked by Founder of the Boys Brigade, Sir William Smith, to work out a scheme to provide greater variety in the training of boys in good citizenship.



The Beginnings of the Movement



B-P set to work to rewrite his book for a younger readership and in 1907 he held an experimental camp on Brownsea Island, Poole, Dorset, to try out his ideas. He brought together 22 boys, some from public schools and some from working class homes, and put them into camp under his leadership. The whole world now knows the results of that camp.

'Scouting for Boys' was published in 1908 in six fortnightly parts at 4d a copy. Sales of the book were tremendous and boys formed

themselves into Scout Patrols to try out his ideas. What had been intended as a training aid for existing organisations became the handbook of a new and, ultimately, worldwide Movement. B-P's great understanding of boys obviously touched a fundamental chord in the youth both in this country and others too.

'Scouting for Boys' has since been translated into many different languages and dialects.

Without fuss, without ceremony and completely spontaneously, boys began to form Scout Troops all over the country. In September 1908, B-P set up an office to deal with enquiries pouring in about the Movement.



Scouting spread throughout the British Commonwealth and to other countries until it was established in practically all parts of the free world. Even in those countries where Scouting, as we know it, is not allowed to readily exist, admit they used its methods for their own youth training.

As Inspector-General of Cavalry, B-P considered he had reached the pinnacle of his career. The baton of Field Marshal was within his grasp. But he retired from the Army in 1910 at the age of 53, on the advice of His Majesty King Edward VII. The King suggested B-P would do more valuable service for his country within the Boy Scout Movement - now Scout Movement - than anyone could hope to do as a soldier!

All his enthusiasm and energy was now channelled on developing Scouting and its sister Movement, Guiding. He travelled to parts of the world, wherever he was most needed, in order to encourage their growth and provide the inspiration that he alone could give.



In 1912, he married Olave Soames who was his constant help and companion in all this work and by whom he had three children (Peter, Heather and Betty). Olave, Lady Baden-Powell, until she died in 1977, was known throughout the world as World Chief Guide.



Chief Scout of the World

The first international Scout Jamboree took place at Olympia, London in 1920. At its closing ceremony, B-P was unanimously acclaimed as Chief Scout of the World. Successive international gatherings, whether of Scouts or Rovers (subsequently Venture Scouts) or of Scouters, proved this was not an honorary title. He was truly regarded by all as their Chief. The shouts that heralded his arrival, and the silence that fell when he raised his hand, proved beyond any doubt he had captured the hearts and imaginations of his followers in whatever country they owed allegiance.

The Prince of Wales announced B-P had been created a Peer at the 3rd World Jamboree, held in Arrowe Park, Birkenhead, to celebrate the 21st Anniversary of the publication of 'Scouting for Boys'. He took the title of Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell - Gilwell Park being the International Training Centre for Scout Leaders.

Scouting apart, B-P excelled at fishing, and favoured polo and big game hunting. He was also a very good black & white and watercolour artist and took an interest in cinerphotography and sculpture. In 1907, he exhibited a bust of John Smith, the colonial pioneer, at the Royal Academy.

B-P wrote no less than 32 books, the earnings from which helped to pay for his Scouting travels. As with all his successors, he received no salary as Chief Scout. He received honorary degrees from Edinburgh, Toronto, Montreal, Oxford, Liverpool and Cambridge Universities. He also received Freedoms of the cities of London, Guildford, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Bangor, Cardiff, Hawick, Kingston-on-Thames, Poole, Blandford, Canterbury and Pontefract, as well as other cities around the world. In addition, 28 Foreign Orders and decorations and 19 Foreign Scout Awards were bestowed upon him. Every minute of B-P's life was 'sixty seconds worth of distance run'. Each new adventure was the subject for a book. Every happy incident or thought, every fine landscape might be the subject for a sketch.



In 1938, suffering ill-health, B-P returned to Africa, which had meant so much in his life, to live in semi-retirement in Nyeri, Kenya. Even here he found it difficult to curb his energies - he still produced many books and sketches.

On January 8, 1941, Baden-Powell died at the age of 83. He is buried in a simple grave at Nyeri within sight of Mount Kenya. On his headstone are the words, 'Robert Baden-Powell, Chief Scout of the World' mounted by the Boy Scout and Girl Guide Badges. His memory remains eternally in the hearts of millions of men and women, boys and girls. It is up to those who are, or have been, Scouts or Guides to see the two Movements he so firmly established continue for all time as living memorials to their Founder.



Baden-Powell's Last Message

Towards the end of his life, although still in comparatively good health, he prepared a farewell message to his Scouts, for publication after his death. It read:

"Dear Scouts

If you have ever seen the play 'Peter Pan' you will remember how the pirate chief was always making his dying speech because he was afraid that possible, when the time came for him to die, he might not have time to get it off his chest. It is much the same with me, and so, although I am not at this moment dying, I shall be doing so one of these days and I want to send you a parting word of goodbye.

Remember, it is the last time you will ever hear from me, so think it over. I have had a most happy life and I want each one of you to have a happy life too.

I believe that God put us in this jolly world to be happy and enjoy life. Happiness does not come from being rich, nor merely being successful in your career, nor by self-indulgence. One step towards happiness is to make yourself healthy and strong while you are a boy, so that you can be useful and- so you can enjoy life when you are a man.

Nature study will show you how full of beautiful and wonderful things God has made the world for you to enjoy. Be contented with what you have got and make the best of it. Look on the bright side of things instead of the gloomy one.

But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people. Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best. 'Be Prepared' in this way, to live happy and to die happy - stick to your Scout Promise always - even after you have ceased to be a boy - and God help you to do it.

Your friend,

Robert Baden-Powell"

