

Guiding in Cheshire

When Baden- Powell began Scouts he little realised that girls would want to join in and that he would launch their own movement. The county of Cheshire at this time covered the areas from Derbyshire to the Wirral (the ‘teapot’ county!) This short history only mentions units or places which involve our current county. Until the 1970’s all major events in Cheshire normally took place in Chester, often on the Roodee or at the Cathedral. For those of you who would like a fuller account of the history of guiding in Cheshire try to find a copy of The Trefoil and The Wheatsheaf, compiled by Marjory Corlett.

The beginnings to 1913

Among the first pioneers in the North West was a Miss Mary Royden. The earliest records show there were troops in Macclesfield with Captain G H Owen and in Alderley Edge with Miss Tipping and Miss Whyman. A Miss G Blundstone wrote ‘I joined the Alderley Edge Guide Company in 1909. We were then called The Baden-Powell Girl Guides. We were a large company of about 150 strong with one Captain and Lieutenant. The Patrol Leaders were like the present Guiders, their Seconds were known as Corporals and wore three stripes on their arms. We all wore khaki hats’



1st Alderley Edge Guides 1910 -1911. Third oldest company in the world



1st Alderley Edge Guides 1911

In Dec 1913 Miss Agnes Baden-Powell (B.P’s sister) ‘reviewed’ the Alderley Edge Company. The local Advertiser described it as ‘an epoch-making event which took place in the Wesleyan School... the company is the most efficient in the county’.

Companies in Cheshire were increasing in numbers and in June 1914 Miss Royden was asked to ‘undertake the Commissionership’ - it was pointed out that she already did the work ‘without the honour and rank’. Our first County Commissioner was appointed.

These were soon followed by companies in Stockport, Knutsford and Crewe. In 1913 three hundred Guides from Stockport met in the Town Hall to be inspected by Miss Royden. In 1919 Headquarters showed 42 companies registered – not a true record as many ran ‘unregistered’

War Service

1914 saw the start of the first World War and our Guides responded to the request 'for every girl to serve her country'.

1st Bollington Guides took over a house and ran it as a convalescent home. They looked after the internal and domestic arrangements while a trained nurse took responsibility of the cases.

Handforth Guides, who were members of the V.A.D., were equipping a hospital as well undergoing message work, duty at the Red Cross Headquarters and tending fires to heat water. Alderley Edge Guides were doing needlework to raise money and the laundry work for the war Hospital run by the V.A.D. They prepared all the vegetables at the hospital, collected newspapers, made 700 garments for soldiers, delivered 5000 letters and circulars as well as rolling 3020 bandages!

The Girl Guide Market Garden was another branch of war work undertaken by them as Miss Whyman was associated with The Women's Land Service Corps. In 1918 the girls went to camp to become flax pullers as flax was needed for making aeroplane wings. A film was made by the Gaumont Film Company of this company's National Service.

Cheshire Girl Guides Company Rules were drawn up and these had a remarkable similarity to the later 'Policy, Organisation and Rules' issued by Headquarters. Has Cheshire always been in the forefront of developments? It would appear so.



Alderley Edge Guides c1916



In 1918 a County Secretary was appointed and the beginnings of a county organisation appeared, the numbers of Guides in the County reached 1492 and Rosebuds (now Brownies) numbered 311.

The next year saw the first Cheshire Girl Guides Officers' Conference being held. The first county rally took place in 1920 when it poured with rain. Special trains were run for this event and Miss Ida Mayne described how the Crewe Guiders got onto their train in Chester Station, pulled down the blinds and took off their uniforms to wring the water out of them!

The first Lone Company came into being, formed by Mrs Moore (nee Miss Tipping) who had moved to Wales. Two thousand new members joined the county in 1921 and Gold Cords were awarded to two members of Alderley Edge. Margaret Barclay from the 1st Mobberley Company came second in a competition for writing a copy of the Guide Laws to hang in Chester Cathedral.

The County Badge, the sheaf of wheat, and the Motto "I Serve", were chosen and suitable badges made.

There are records showing that Knutsford Guides presented "The Amber Gate" (scenes from Alice in Wonderland) as well as holding Brownie Revels as did the division of East Cheshire in 1923. This was the year that the first issue of "County News", then a quarterly publication, was produced.

Cheshire was represented at The World Camp in 1924 and the group included a Guide, Doris Barret, from Knutsford. Canadian Guides had home hospitality in Cheshire following this camp so starting a tradition of international exchanges which continue to this day.

A county group camp was held at Doddington Park near Nantwich in 1924 which lasted for two weeks which 'did away with many small indoor camps'. Nothing is new!



The first County Standard was embroidered in and dedicated in 1925 at a County Rally when The Chief Guide, Olave Baden-Powell was present. Miss Margaret Barclay was the bearer of the standard on entering the cathedral. In the same year a Lifesaving Certificate was presented to Joyce Ackerley, then seven, of Sandbach and Holmes Chapel District for rescuing a three and a half year old from drowning.

Mrs Broughton from Addlington was appointed as the first Assistant County Commissioner in 1926. The 1st Cheshire Post Guides held their first rally – in Holmes Chapel with all members in 'bath chairs'. (Post members lived at home and Extension Guides were in hospitals.) At the end of the year there were 9500 members in Cheshire and North Division had to be split into two – North and Stockport.

In 1927 Waddow Hall was opened as the Guide Training Centre of the North. Cheshire raised enough money to furnish two rooms (Cheshire Bedroom and Garden Room) as well as buy a Grand Piano for the drawing room. Dorothy Simpson, a member of 3rd Knutsford Rangers was chosen as one of the first Rangers to go to Waddow.

The Old Cheshire Guiders' Club first met in November 1927 with two meetings being held each year, one in Cheshire and one in London. By this time the membership numbers had topped 10,000 in the county.

A training weekend for Brownie Guiders was held in Macclesfield, to which the Great Grey Owl came together with the Head of Brownies from the U.S.A. and an Eagle Owl from New South Wales. The titles showed different forms of Brownie Trainers, for example, Eagle Owls were diplomed trainers.

Miss Royden received a letter from another County – 'There is more going on and more irons in the fire in Cheshire than in any other county I ever heard of'.

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1929-1949 - Jamboree Hospital

The Jamboree to mark the coming of age of the Scouts was held in 1929 at Arrowe Park in Birkenhead. Our county was asked to provide the Hospital. This consisted of 8 large marquees, four were wards, each with 16 beds. One was the operating theatre and dispensary, one a dental clinic and Out patients department. The final two were the office and store tent. Six bell tents were used for isolation cases. The Cunard Steam Ship Company loaned the bed linen.

The Guides were responsible for equipping all these, all the staffing and catering for a three week period. Over 110 Guiders were involved. 21 patients were treated from 33 countries, 52 were transferred to other hospitals. 2319 visits were made to out patients – 20 operations took place, 8 cases of infectious diseases were recorded and there were no deaths!

A cot in Chester Infirmary was adopted by the Guides of Cheshire in 1930. This was supported by the collection of silver paper and this service only ended with the introduction of the National Health Scheme in 1948.

The coming of age celebrations for the Guide movement in 1932 were marred by the economic crisis so celebrations took place in Divisions. A company in Crewe put a seat at a local bus stop and another had a Manchester Company visit them for a day. The East of the County collected and repaired clothes before sending them to holiday clubs, books and magazines were collected for hospitals and lightships. Guides at High Legh raised £20 at a dance and sent this to the Manchester Chronicle Cinderella Fund. One hundred silver birch and mountain ash trees were planted on the Tarvin by pass.

In 1932 Miss Royden had to retire as CC through ill health but by now the county had grown to 17,000 members. Soon after in '34 Cheshire Life published an article about the growth of Guiding. 181 camps were held that year with 438 girls enjoying a taste of living outdoors. Miss Barlow was appointed County Commissioner but poor health made it necessary for her to retire in 1938

The outstanding event of 1936 was the Northern Area Blind Post Ranger Camp which took place at Somerford Park near Congleton. There were 60 blind campers helped by thirty sighted Guiders.

1938 -1939

Mrs Harley, one of the Assistant County Commissioners took on the role as CC in 1938. In the same year it was seen as necessary to appoint a publicity representative 'to present the correct image of Guiding to the public'.

The government appreciated the value of the contribution of Guiding to the war effort and said it hoped trained leaders would remain running units as we made definite contributions to National Service. Waddow Hall became a children' hospital and members collected toys and books while older ones knitted bed socks and bed jackets to send them.

War work took many forms including cleaning a house for evacuees, the reception and entertainment of many hundreds of children, acting as messengers, filling straw palliases, arranging a canteen, knitting, darning, collecting salvage, making and serving teas at weekends, running allotments, hop picking, potato picking and providing meals with the WVS.

Cheshires contribution to Girl Guide Gift week in 1940 was the fourth highest in the country with £1088 being raised to help provide two air ambulances, and a motor life boat. The lifeboat was named Guide of Dunkirk and was ready in time to take part in the evacuation of Dunkirk. The idea was to raise £20,000 – the final total was £48,000! £10.000 went to provide quiet rooms for army camps and £10.000 for twenty ambulances for the navy.

Ranger numbers grew rapidly during the war in part due to the Home Emergency Service Training which was given. The correspondence course for Guiders usually had about six takers a years but in 1942 rose to 94 Guiders! This was one way to gain a guiding qualification.

In 1944 an American Thunderbolt plane crashed and the pilot and plane were buried in marshy ground. 4th Nantwich Brownies decided to look after the grave for the mother of the dead airman who lived in America. In 1956 the Brownies who had renewed flowers monthly on the grave of the American pilot had a reunion – attended by the mother of the officer.

1947 saw the Silver Cross for Gallantry awarded to a Patrol Leader in Crewe, Margaret Glover, who sustained some burns while rescuing her four year old brother from burning.

In 1948, after the war, all Guiders in the County were sent a questionnaire asking for their thought on whether or not the County should be divided. Almost unanimously the vote was to remain as one County.

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Mrs Constance Bickmore became our next CC in 1949.

<p>Joan Unna (DC), Lady BP, Mrs Bickmore, Matron and Mrs H Philip at Chelford Epileptic Colony.</p>	<p>The Chief Guide - Olave Baden-Powell is welcomed with a Grand Howl.</p>

The World Conference was held in Oxford the next year and Scrolls of Friendship were messages of welcome to delegates attending this conference. Two scrolls travelled through Cheshire, one left Bebbington and at Shotwich (en route to Eire) was joined by a scroll starting from Wales for Switzerland. These then travelled through Cheshire and went to Congleton, Macclesfield, Alderley Edge and Wilmslow before going on to Stockport and across to Derbyshire. Another scroll destined for Guatemala arrived at Dunham Massey and travelled by boat and barge to Staffordforshire via the canals from Middlewich to Audlem.

Sea Rangers were well established by now and SRS Seafarer was the first Crew to receive Admiralty Recognition.

In 1951 Cadets became 'the fourth branch of Rangers' according to County minutes. The others being Land, Air and Sea Rangers. One Ranger, Elizabeth Rose of Sutton was awarded the Fortitude Badge. She had only one arm and was later mentioned when 15 years old as taking part in ringing a memorial peal for King George which lasted almost three hours.

Amongst the celebrations for Coronation year in 1953 was a camp for two hundred Patrol Leaders was held at Crewe Hall Farm.

A new County Standard was made to replace the original standard which had worn out.

To commemorate Baden Powell's centenary in 1957, lights were placed in every members' window. In 1958 Crewe was the venue when Cheshire hosted the countries Extension Guiders Training Day and later in the same year a Headquarters member of staff met Guiders from all over Cheshire to explain the new Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

Cheshire Guides appeared on television for the first time during the camp held to celebrate the 1960 Golden Jubilee.

Mrs Bickmore reached the end of her term of office and handed over to Mrs Monica Robinson.

By 1967 the numbers in Cheshire had risen to over 18,000 and the number of Divisions had increased to twenty. Increased numbers meant increased administration and two Assistant County Commissioners had been appointed. A Commissioners Training Scheme was devised in the county which helped to make life run more smoothly.

We also had a new uniform introduced this year while new handbooks were distributed in 1968. This was the year that a survey was carried out in all guide companies in Cheshire as it had been tradition until then for all Guides to wear a blue tie. Companies now decided to choose their own colours.

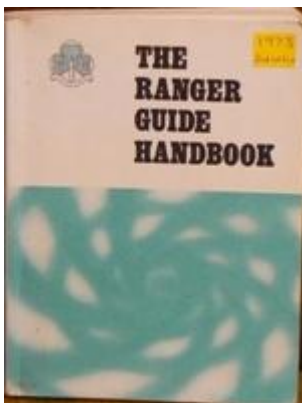
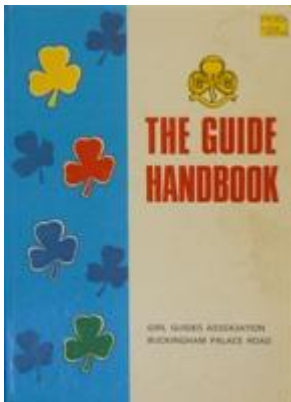
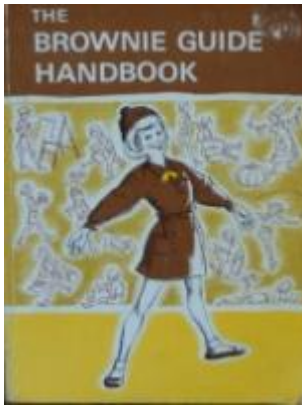
New handbooks launched in 1968

This was because all sections had a 'new look' programme. We did away with Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class and All Round Cords. More choice came into the programme.

By now Cheshire Guiding had grown to almost 22,000 members. After many discussions it was felt that the time was right for the county to divide into three which is the next stage in our history.



Mrs Constance Bickmore



1970 was Diamond Jubilee Year and The Chief Commissioner for England, Miss Beryl Cozens-Hardy, was our guest speaker at the Annual Meeting in Winsford.

When she announced the names of the Designate County Commissioners for the three new areas – Mrs Reid to lead Wirral County, Mrs Sandra Jones from Eccleston for Cheshire Forest

and Mrs Nancy Walthew to care for Cheshire Border, a buzz of surprise and delight was heard as some much younger people than usual were appointed!

In May we had not one but three County Camps, one for each of the new areas and all were honoured by a visit from the President, The Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon. Royden Park was used for the area to become Wirral County, Chelmondeley was home to the six divisions which were to become Cheshire Forest with Eileen Reeves in charge and Pat Moseley ran the camp for 450 girls for the new Border County. A Guider's Camp was also held at Eaton Hall. June saw a Thanksgiving Service held in Chester Cathedral – £350 had been raised to recast a 'Guide Bell', the service was followed by a march past where the salute was taken by the The Lord Lieutenant, Viscount Leverhulme.

	
<p>Cheshire Forest Commissioner, Mrs Sandra Jones with HRH the Princess Margaret, President of GGA at the Chelmondeley Camp.</p>	<p>Princess Margaret watching Maori dancing with Mrs Sandra Jones, Mrs Eileen Reeves, Mrs Eileen Dixon, County President- Mrs Monica Robinson.</p>
	
<p>Princess Margaret looking at Shelagh Pennell's string horse on theSwitzerlandsub-camp. This was the South East (Sandbach, Alsager) and South Division (Crewe and Nantwich) camp.</p>	<p>Switzerland Sub camp staff and Division Commissioners. Mrs Margey Densem (QM), Mrs Barratt (SE Commissioner)Miss Joyce Bradshaw (Jeb) , Mrs Sandra (Crewe) Jones (Commissioner), Miss Annlyn Colclough, Miss Chris Revett (Commandant).</p>

The County Ranger Camp took place at Thornton Hough, the home of the Leverhulmes. Eileen Scott ran this successful International Camp where Lady Baden-Powell, the World Chief Guide and her daughter Mrs Clay were special guests. All of us attending were lucky enough to meet her and experience her renown two handed handshakes.

Our final event as the County of Cheshire was the Chester Conference when the Chief Commissioner of the Commonwealth, Mrs Ann Parker-Bowles joined us. What a year we had in Cheshire for visitors!

The County also joined in National events of celebration. 95 members were selected to represent us at the Westminster Abbey Service in May. The weekend also included a tour of the West End, visits to The Tower, Houses of Parliament, the theatre to see 'Charlie Girl', the Changing of The

Guard and Hampton Court Palace. As well there were representatives at the Catholic service in Westminster Cathedral and at the Jewish Guide Service.

Argosy was a Young Adults Gathering, held over ten days when 50 UK and 50 Overseas Delegates stayed in Birmingham to learn new skills and more of each other's countries and cultures. Princess Anne visited their event.

Several young members took part in The Diamond Jubilee Spectacle at The Empire Pool, Wembley in September and this was followed by a Joint Act of Worship on Sept 6th.

Later that month Wilmslow Rangers won the Berwyn Trophy.

October 1970 saw the final edition of Cheshire Girl Guides County News.

January 1st 1971 dawned, the birthday of the Cheshire Triplets, as we were to be called for a short while.

Cheshire Border was composed from the old East Division where Eileen Smart had been Commissioner for Macclesfield, Bollington and Congleton; from North Division covering Romily, Hyde, Marple, Disley, Bredbury and Woodley areas; North-east Division which included Alderley Edge, Handforth and Wilmslow as well as Stockport North and South.

Cheshire Forest included Chester Division, Mid Division – Knutsford, Middlewich, Northwich and Winsford; NorthWest Division – Frodsham and Runcorn; South West with Malpas and Tarporley. Also included were South Division which covered Crewe and Nantwich and South East Division with Alsager, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel.