



# FIRST CITY OF LONDON (LORD MAYOR'S OWN) SCOUT GROUP



## A Brief History

In 1908, following on the success of his experimental camp at Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Robert Baden-Powell wrote the fortnightly parts of "Scouting for Boys". Although it was written for the purpose of providing programme ideas for established youth organisations, it was not long before boys began forming themselves into Patrols and kitting themselves out with scarves, bush hats and staves. It was no different at All Hallows Church on Tower Hill where the choirboys with their copies of "Scouting for Boys" in hand approached their choirmaster, Arthur Poyser, with the request that they wanted to be Scouts. Thus it was that on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1908, the All Hallows Scouts became the 1<sup>st</sup> City of London – the first Troop of the world's first City. Since then the Group, as it was to become in due course, has had its ups and downs. Before the First World War, numbers reached 160, by 1929 when the Group was 21, the Troop numbered 32 and the Pack 24, plus a large team of Scouters. At the end of the Second World War, numbers were very low. The Group had lost its Headquarters at 22 Tower Hill to a flying bomb. Nevertheless, a small band of adults rejuvenated the Troop and ensured continuity, which has led to today's Group consisting of a Beaver Colony of 20, a Cub Pack of 30, a Scout Troop of 30, an Explorer Unit of 8 and a leadership team of almost 30.

Legend has it that 1<sup>st</sup> City was in fact the second Group to be set up in England. The original troop members wore two lanyards – one with a whistle and one with a knife. An example of the latter has recently come to light and has been donated to the Group.

The choirboys of All Hallows, in addition to being the Scout Troop, were also the Lord Mayor's Players and Singers (founded 1905). We have many examples of the plays and shows they put on. Arthur Poyser also wrote and published the first Scout Song Book (first published in 1912) – an example is in the Group Archive, and signed by Mr. Poyser. In addition, he wrote a Marching Song for the Group. In 1920, the Lord Mayor's Own Players supplied the musical programme (together with Dame Nellie Melba and Arthur Rubinstein) at the Albert Hall, with Arthur Poyser conducting. In fact the original "Boy Players" were founded in 1419 by Henry V, and they came to the City of London when Richard Whittington was Mayor. They were disbanded in 1609, and did the comeback of all comebacks in 1905. Given that apparently the vast majority of the Lord Mayor's Players and Singers were members of the choir and the Troop as well, we feel there is merit in claiming our birthday as three years earlier!

The early days of the Group are marked by firsts of many kinds. There was a Scottish Trek when an unfortunate Assistant Scoutmaster lost his return ticket. He stayed and went on to run one of Edinburgh's best troops. There was a summer trek to camp in France, which had more than a little to do with the start of French Scouting.

At the Privileges Committee of Aldermen on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1910 a letter from Mr. Arthur Poyser, Scoutmaster, 1<sup>st</sup> City of London Boy Scouts, asked permission to add the words "Lord Mayor's Own"

after the registered title of the Troop. It was resolved "that the Lord Mayor be informed that the Committee offer no objection thereto". Consequently, in 1911 at Mercers Hall, the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Crosby, granted his badge to the Group in perpetuity, together with the title "The Lord Mayor's Own". This was confirmed by a document bearing the Lord Mayor's signature and seal. Unfortunately this was a casualty of the blitz.

In 1912, the Group started a section for younger boys, who were called cadets. They met in the Guildhall and in due course became a Cub Pack when the Scout Association started its junior section in 1916. Meetings continued there until 1939.

Research has shown that the Troop Choir performed at Baden-Powell's wedding in 1913. Arthur Poyser was recommended by BP as the musical director for the Birmingham Rally in 1913. He was certainly the Director of Music at the 1<sup>st</sup> World Jamboree at Olympia in 1920. The Troop from 1<sup>st</sup> City was heavily involved in the event.

Immediately after the First World War, the rector, Rev. Tubby Clayton arranged for 1<sup>st</sup> City Scouts to escort war widows to visit their husband's graves on Armistice Day.

In the early 20's came visits to Latvia and the forging of a friendship link which lasted many years.

The vestry in All Hallows Church contains wood panelling on the walls. In one corner, the 1<sup>st</sup> City badge is prominent and beneath it are listed many of the original troop member's names – and when they passed away. In the crypt are the urns containing the ashes of several Troop members.

Between the wars there were a number of Groups in the City. The DC at the time was Father George Moore, curate at All Hallows where he was also GSM of 1<sup>st</sup> City. He had been Camp Chief alongside Baden-Powell at Gilwell in earlier years.

The investiture ceremony for Troop members usually took place in front of the altar at All Hallows (we have photos of this) and contained the following words;

*"Take this badge, which we entrust to your keeping as we welcome you into the First Troop of the First City in the World. The honour of the Troop is now in your hands – henceforth your enemies are our enemies, your battles are our battles and your friends are our friends. Remember the words you first heard as a Cub and don't let us down!"*

There was an article about the Group in The Scouter magazine in October 1937, which gives a tremendous insight to the Group at the time. The Group HQ had part of the Roman Wall at one end of the building – no doubt this came in useful as a goalmouth!

After the war, the Group was housed at 42 Trinity Square. The GSM was Arthur Spillard, who had been a Group youth member – glad to see the tradition will continue in 2009 with a new GSL who joined the Group as a Cub Scout and has been a member ever since. In the forties and fifties another leader was the radio actor Stephen Jack. The troop also included Michael and John Gibb who then became SM and ASM respectively.

By 1962 the City of London Boy Scouts Association consisted of:

1<sup>st</sup> (Lord Mayor's Own)

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Admiral Hinkley's Own Sea Scouts
- 3<sup>rd</sup> St Bartholomew's Hospital
- 5<sup>th</sup> Air Scout Troop
- 7<sup>th</sup> City of London School
- 8<sup>th</sup> Land Scout Group

The 1<sup>st</sup> had an HQ in Water Lane, the Sea Scouts had a Motor Torpedo Boat in St Katharine's Dock and the 3<sup>rd</sup> met in a basement at 37 Bartholomew Lane. Both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> had closed by spring 1963 due to lack of leaders.

In 1964 it was obvious that 1<sup>st</sup> City was in danger of closing due to a shortage of leaders. In consequence a merger with the 8<sup>th</sup> took place – they seemingly had leaders but no youth members. At this point the original green scarf worn by the LMO and the black and gold of the 8<sup>th</sup> became the red and white we have today, with the red on the right shoulder.

Around this time the hut in Water Lane was demolished, and a new meeting place was established at St. Peter Hill, off Upper Thames Street. Two years later, the Group moved to Talbot House in Trinity Square which became home for the next fourteen years, until it was redeveloped in 1982. The Group moved to the Bishopsgate Institute where it remained for 21 years. In 2002 we were relocated to the Sir John Cass Primary School near Aldgate.

With only three groups left in the City District, it was merged with Holborn in 1969 to become the City of London and Holborn District Scout Council which consisted of eight Groups. Again a falling population led to group closures and by 1984 the new district contained only 1<sup>st</sup> City, 8<sup>th</sup> Holborn and 17<sup>th</sup> Holborn (all still in existence today). In July of that year they were subsumed into Islington District. A further restructuring in 2004 led to the creation of the district of Camden, City and Islington (a welcome return for "City") – but through all of this 1<sup>st</sup> City of London (Lord Mayor's Own) has survived and is set for another 100 years.

The Group has held camps all over the UK, particularly those campsites within easier reach of London. International activity has been high as well with expeditions to Austria (twice), Romania (twice), Lithuania, Poland, France and Czech Republic. Group members have attended Jamborees in Malaysia, Thailand and the UK. (The Thailand one being particularly notable as we had twelve people from the Group selected as members of the County Unit, plus a Group Leader on International Service Team). One of our current ASL's has represented Scouting in North Africa, Korea and the Philippines.

#### Group Census Information

24 <sup>th</sup> May 1912	35 Cubs
1 <sup>st</sup> October 1919	80 Scouts, 20 Rovers and 4 leaders plus 35 cubs with 1 leader
30 <sup>th</sup> September 1924	25 Cubs and 1 Leader plus 57 Scouts, 3 Rovers and 3 Leaders
Oct 15 <sup>th</sup> 1925	32 Scouts and 2 Leaders

30 <sup>th</sup> September 1928	31 Scouts, 24 Cubs, 6 Scouters
29 <sup>th</sup> January 1959	5 Leaders, 8 senior Scouts, 15 Scouts, 24 Cubs
31 <sup>st</sup> January 2008	17 Beavers, 28 Cubs, 26 Scouts, 7 Explorers and 23 Leaders

We have copies of all annual census returns from 1967 and the other data above was supplied by HQ

#### Other Important Dates and Events

In 1989 the Group were invited to be the Guard of Honour at the Children's Royal Variety Performance in the presence of HRH Princess Margaret – the highlight for the members was meeting Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan (amongst others).

The Group was one of the first to admit female Assistant Scout Leaders (mid 1970's).

The Group admitted Girls into all sections from 1992 – we were the first Group in the District to take this step officially (another Group had invested girls into the troop a short time before us, but without full permission from the DC).

We have supported Venture Scouting since their inception in the mid 1960's with varying degrees of success.

We opened our own Explorer Unit in 2002 when new uniforms and programmes came in for the whole age range. The Scout section age limit was brought down to 14 from 15½, Explorers covering the 14-18 age range and then Network for the under 26's.

I am grateful to all of those who have contributed to this outline, and I apologise unreservedly for any omissions and errors. Feel free to contact me with any additional information or corrections in order that this document is as accurate as possible.

John S. Cronin

October 2008