

A trip around HOPEHILL

A conducted tour round the grounds and buildings to help new friends to know where we are coming from!

A TRIP AROUND HOPEHILL

I have just driven off the A227 and in through the gates of HOPEHILL, the camping & training ground and District Headquarters of the Gravesham Scouts. Come with me for a walk around the site and I will introduce you to some of its history.

I don't know about you but I managed to park my car near to the finger post that tells me that to get to Hopehill I should go back out of the front gate and keep walking for 24,900 miles. I suppose that is a polite way of asking me to use the tradesman's entrance at the back (if there was one).

It's the building that catches the eye but I would rather take you round the twenty acres of grounds first; even though the warden would prefer that you went inside first and got your boots muddy afterwards.

Beside the drive there is a sundial. It's quite ancient, bearing the date 1725 so it is older than Hopehill. The plaque tells us that the sundial commemorates the work of Redvers Walker and Joe Dust and it was put in place in 1964. These two gentlemen are also remembered for setting up the Dust-Walker Fund which has helped to send Scouts from this area to World Jamborees every four years up to the current one in Chile.

There are three benches outside the building and the Dust name appears on two of them. Joe Dust joined the Executive Committee in 1925, became Chairman in 1942 and held that post until 1964, which is when the sundial was erected. Clara and Helen were his sisters.

The third bench is in memory of Bert Sandall. He was Group Scout Master of the 21st Gravesend (St. Faiths), which became Christ Church Scout Group and, more recently, Windmill Hill Scout Group. He died when he slipped between the platform and a train at Gravesend Station. At the time his wife was expecting their daughter. Mrs Sandall took over as the first lady GSM in this district and went on to teach good scouting to many, including Syd. Pryke who went on to wind my spring up more than once.

The next sundial, made from local flint, was put here by "Boss" Tutton as a thank you to all those who helped to make Hopehill what it was. Now this is really interesting because "Scoutmaster" Tutton started the first Gravesend Scout Troop in 1908 and he had a letter from the Chief dated May 1908 confirming his appointment as Commanding Officer. It must have been 1918 that Mr Tutton picked up the title "Boss" because this was when Gravesend became a Scout District and Mr. Tutton became D.C.

Boss went to Singapore in 1924 but picked up where he left off on his return in 1926. He resigned and moved from Gravesend in 1939, which was before Hopehill was acquired so what were the circumstances that led to the sundial? Well the truth was that he did not personally actually put it in place himself. He sent the top and the service team of the day, namely Derek Parsons and Doug. Rew-Smith made the pillar and mounted it. Well that is the explanation according to John Thompson, famous Rover Scout and GSM of 6th Milton. There was a collection at the time of "Boss" Tutton's funeral that provided funds for the signs at entrance to Hopehill and for the District public address system.

In researching this last bit of information I discovered that ten new troops were formed in North West Kent during 1910 and they included one at Holy Trinity, a church that burned down just before I came to Gravesend, Third Gravesend and 1st Northfleet, both of which are still going strong. Another troop was 1st Perry Street, now 4th Gravesend but this one cannot claim an uninterrupted existence.

Moving on round the out buildings the hut now used by the Service Team (known by their labours, an apt motto) was once the camp shop and in those days this was a service that was managed and manned for the most part by members of the B-P Guild of old Scouts.

Just beyond the Green Store, given to us by Beck & Politzer, are three fairly new trees. The first, an acia, was bought and planted by Jackie Kemp and now after three years it is starting to take off. The other two trees are part of Tom Young's progressive planting programme. We have in the past planted quite a few trees in memory of people but sometimes the tree does not last as long as our memories. Two such trees, one to Bert Pickering and another to his "side kick" Bert Cross, are examples of this so now we try to find other ways to remember our heroes. Bert Pick. just happened to be the DC at the time when Gravesend & District Scouts acquired Hopehill. It was thanks to a legacy of the late Walter Mathews and the generosity of Mr A. E. Barnes (Rainbow Stores) that Hopehill was obtained but someone had to say thank you and Bert Pick. was that someone.

Now we have reached the chapel gates. The last chapel gates were wrecked in the 1987 gales so they had to be replaced but instead of having new gates we had the "Skipper Bennett Gates" restored and reinstated here in a new gateway. These were the original front gates to Hopehill, built by a local man and erected in 1961 to commemorate the jubilee of "Skipper", honorary camp warden for many long years.

The gates had been taken down when the posts rotted and anyway the opening was simply not big enough for the current traffic. The storm was just the impetus needed to get the gates repaired and back into service as a reminder of all skippers' time and energy spent at Hopehill. The cost of the restoration was met from a collection made for Stan Day.

Now Stan was ADC Cubs for as long as I remember and he was forced to retire when the "65 rule" came in with the advance party report. He was well past 65 at the time. Scouting played a large part in his life, when "Scouting for Boys" was still hot off the presses he was out there persuading someone to start a troop in Northfleet. He told us the story of 999, the ninth day of the ninth month in the year 1909, when the formation of the Girl Guides was announced. Stan was there, and at the first Jamboree even though he had to walk all the way from Northfleet. Stan married his Girl Guide sweetheart and they both lived happily ever after.

Added to the gates is a memorial to Ken Jarvis, DC until his 65th birthday and he died not long after.

Inside the chapel gate you will see a number of plaques of remembrance that are being added to all too frequently. They are all for revered leaders from groups in the Gravesham area.

Inside the chapel is a bench dedicated to Bert Cross 1907 to 1985. Bert was county secretary for the "BP Guild of old Scouts".

This did have other names from time to time but Bert was constant. He was also Bert Pickering's right hand man. Bert Cross deserved to be remembered, not because he was a memorable sort of a bloke but he was everybody's "first lieutenant" and in the front row of every support team whatever the event.

The next bench was donated by the residents of the Cheshire Home at Maidstone to mark the many Hopehill Handicapped Rallies that their members had enjoyed. Here is another bench, in memory of a gracious lady, C Olive Brand 3rd June 1968. This lady was Jack Beslee's wife's aunt, there is another seat elsewhere bearing the name William J. Brand 1968. Mr Brand gave both seats but did not think it necessary to die before we sat on his bench.

Then there is a plaque to Mary Grace Appleby, wife of DC Howard Appleby. Howard is still active in the district.

Cyril Brown, last heard of living in New Zealand, constructed the altar and cross.

Moving round the activity field we come next to the climbing wall & abseiling tower dedicated to Martin Wright, leader of the Kipling Venture Scout Unit. You will see from the dates on the plaque that this was a young life and climbing had been a big part of it, so it seemed very fitting that when this facility was built it should use money from the Martin Wright fund and be dedicated to his memory.

There was a move at one time to name different areas of the site after people but it appears the only one we got was "Bennett Way", the tree lined avenue that separates the east & west camping fields. Half way along this path is Skipper Bennett's Oak Tree (there is no notice but you'll know it when you reach it) so you can tell that this chap was held in high esteem by the Scouts of the day and long may his tree continue to grow.

I recall that we were to have a "Jack Beslee Copse" but it never happened. It should, and perhaps one day it will, because Jack with his service team did so much for Scouting and Hopehill in particular.

So we have reached the end of Bennett Way. "Skipper" was the warden of this site for a good long time, he was connected with the Grammar School Troop (the 23rd Gravesend) and he probably had a hand in planting many trees on this field. But not this one right at the end. This one is for "Mina" Hobbs ADC (Beavers) who died in 1996. It was planted by Denis & Terry Hobs and another of Mina's relatives provided the tree. It's a Dutch Elm, treated to be resistant to the disease that did for most of the elm trees in the country some time ago, making it significant as a specimen and a poignant reminder of Mina's ancestry. We hope that this tree will grow into a splendid example as was Mina herself.

I am now walking back towards the toilet block. Now I don't know how many people would be flattered to have a toilet block named after them but we call this one the "Madeline Allen Amenity Block". It was Madeline Allen's will that left a significant amount of money to Gravesend Scouts to remember the happy times her husband spent camping whilst a Scout in Gravesend. So that is how we have the Clifford Allen Centre which is where I go to next, passing on the way seven silver birch trees given by the Longfield & Hartley Scouts because of "Sticky" Wickham their leader.

The Clifford Allen Centre has two wings, the Barnes Wing and the Lions Wing. This perpetuates the names of the two accommodation buildings that preceded this one. Mr Barnes has already been mentioned; he was the proprietor of the Rainbow Stores, which later became Bennett & Brown. It was he who put up the money for the first Barnes Hut. This was not the only furniture shop to support scouting in its earlier days, Baldwins of Perry Street and Pounces were both in the forefront. The Lions Wing takes its name from the Lions Hut, which was built, for us by the Lions Club. The Rotary Club contribution to early Hopehill is now the service team workshop but the first warden accommodation built by the three wheelers club sadly had to go to make way for the current complex.

The Clifford Allen Centre has two foundation stones. One is its own and is self explanatory; the other was taken from the Barnes Hut and marks the official opening of the site in 1950 by Brigadier W.E. Clark. CGM. DSO. DL. CC. Except that he didn't! Mr Clark went down with flu or something so Richard Scully did the honours in his absence. John Hill is convinced that he camped at Hopehill in 1949 but the records clearly show (and I have seen the receipt for £22 and sixteen shillings dated 1st March 1950) that the land was not purchased until 1950 although the incumbent of "Ivy House" from whom the land was obtained, did let Scouts camp whilst it was still his.

In the entrance lobby there are a few interesting items. There is a painting of how the site once looked to campers and it comes "with gratitude to JB", that has got to be Jack Beslee. It is dated 1965, which is when Jack was playing a prominent role at Hopehill along with Derek Parsons and Doug Rew-Smith. They took on the physical part of running Hopehill from Skipper Bennett, as Skip got older.

Here is a cartoon drawing with tents and characters, given by a contributor to Scouting Magazine "the last laugh". He had occasion to visit the site and was significantly impressed to the extent that he came back to leave this memento of his visit. Next is a reproduction of the Pathfinder by Ernest S Carlos. It depicts the quintessential Scout, albeit in an old style uniform, being guided by the one who guides us all. This picture did at one time hang in the entrance to the 6th Gravesend (Milton) Scout Group Headquarters, now demolished. It was put there, and later here, by Norman Hibben who found that the sentiment described by this picture had been good for him, not only in his Scouting but also throughout his life and he hopes it will continue to be an inspiration to others. Norman was "Director of Hopehill" from 1980 to 1989, ten years that included the erection of this building and although this was by no means his only accomplishment in Scouting, for us it will be his most notable.

The horn, hanging with the picture of B-P (the piper of Pax) was made and presented to Hopehill by Skipper Knapman, Warden of Gordon Park, the Matabeleland Scout Camp Site, in the Matopos Hills, Southern Rhodesia, in 1959. It is the horn from a Kudu, a type of antelope, and was brought to England by Norman & Jean Hibben when they returned from that country. The picture of B-P blowing a Kudu horn at Gilwell in 1922 is from the Life Story of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, by E. K. Wade, entitled "The Piper of Pax".

The blue flag, inscribed Cycle Hike Trophy, was competed for annually when cycling was the only alternative to walking for most Scouts and their leaders. I'm too young to remember (A'hem) but I heard it said that frequently, perhaps always, the cycle hike ended at the Priory at Aylesford where the Monks provided Sunday afternoon tea.

Over the door is a traditional picture of the founder and below it a gallery of chief scouts to the present day.

There is a display of jamboree badges that was brought back from Korea in 1991 by one of our members that was there. It is a "thank you" to all those in Gravesham District who made it possible for that scout to attend. Next to it is a similar token from the two boys that went to Chile in 1999.

A visitor from that country left the badges from Tasmania for us.

Now we see the banner from Brazil. In 1995 the Brazilian Contingent on their way to the Jamboree in Holland stopped here for a few days to take in the local high life and to visit London. They left this token to mark those days in "the best Scout Hut in the world". Their words not mine.

In the next frame is a certificate and medal for bravery. It is a gallantry award presented to a member of the 6th Gravesend but that was in the days when the 6th was St. Johns who are now the 29th. The fact is that this Scout received the award for gallantry because he rescued a lady from drowning on April 3rd 1929 and that's a bit of history worth remembering.

If you go into the main hall you will find the American Quilt hanging. It was given by 191 troop when they stayed at Hopehill in August 1999. Each of the Scouts produced his handprint with the badge of his favourite scout activity and has all been appliquéd together by a leader. It is hoped that this liaison will flourish and that Scouts from Gravesend will make a return visit.

In the outer lobby there is a case containing badges from visiting groups and in the wardens bungalow there are more Hopehill treasures awaiting a permanent museum.

Some items outside get moved from time-to-time so you may need to seek them out. Benches get moved to the chapel sometimes and the three picnic tables might be anywhere. The big picnic table is Richard Wenban's, it is difficult to read the plate but Richard was a Cub Scout Leader with the "Holy Family" (which became the 33rd Gravesend) and a youth worker.

Visitors Books and Photo albums are kept in the office but other Hopehill souvenirs can be found in the warden's quarters along with those of past Scouts who left their individual treasures to us for safe keeping.

Just to wet your appetite there is a picture of the Barnes Hut 1951 – 1986, a postcard from a jamboree and a couple of video tapes of events at Hopehill. However, I can see another story coming on "Hopehill & other Treasures" but for now the walk-about is finished and I hope you now know a bit more about parts of Hopehill and some of the people that have had a hand in making it.

Since writing the first edition of this booklet another five acres have been added to Hopehill along with hundreds of trees. All right, they are not all trees yet but give them time.

HOPEHILL TREASURES

All right, I give in. I'll just use these empty pages to tell you about some of the treasures tucked away at Hopehill waiting for the day when they can be displayed for all to see.

Up in the district office there is a picture that Ted Barlow produced which shows all the donors of trees to hopehill at the time of a special appeal for trees. Whilst on the subject of pictures I'll bring your attention to the one in the warden's bungalow depicting a patrol of Scouts rescuing a damsel from a crashed horse & cart. G. Hillyard Swinstead was the painter in 1916 and it was hung in the royal academy in 1919. Our copy is a print but non-the-less dedicated to Lieutenant General Sir Robert Baden-Powell KCB. KCVO. Chief Scout

In 1994 a Sikh youth camp was held at Hopehill and we have one of the booklets produced by the young people.

We have a selection of Colin Hibben's memorabilia. Colin was a Scout at the 1947 Jamboree in France.

A pennant from the 30th Kent Rover Moot 1958.

An interesting picture of a Scout with 76 Clipper Crescent on the back so we should ask Tom Young for more information about this.

A wine glass that belonged to "Bert" Kemp dated 1982 and engraved to mark the 75th anniversary of Lewisham South District Scouts.

A woodbadge course photograph dated May 1952, Hopehill.

A plaque from a national Jamboree at Valley Forge 1964.

Someone at some time gave us a little shield from Chalfont Heights Camp Site.

We have a candle from the Jan van Hoofgroup in the Netherlands. Everyone in the group had one of these night-lights in a little wooden stand to remind them of their guiding light. This was an extra one given to the site and the duty warden got one as well and that was Bill Smith. One day I'll give you the hand painted windmill scene, which was my gift from the group in 1990.

Also from a Dutch group is this display of badges with a scarf and photograph from the Scoutinggroep Jan van Riebeek of Amsterdam. The covering letter is dated July 1980 and it says that although it is almost a year since their camp at Hopehill the badges they intended to send after the camp had been mislaid but now they had been found along with the original covering letter.

A "thank you" certificate from the Culverstone & Vigo Scout Group.

A postcard showing what the Barnes Hut looked like up to 1986.

Videos transcribed from 8mm film of events at Hopehill in the 1950's to '60s.

A blanket badge from Feltham Scout Week 1980.

An autograph album from one of the early Handicapped Rallies. Every visitor and helper seemed to get his or her name in that book and elsewhere we have another similar tome from another year but with photo's as well.

Pennants from the Gravesham District Scout Camp 1985, various "JP Trophies", Beaver Bonanzas, Greater London South East Venture Scouts Event 1987.
Blanket Badges for the Bexleyheath Sixers camp 1980, & 1979.

A copy of the souvenir programme to mark the opening of Hopehill.

A sheath knife that belonged to Gordon Carter when he was in the pewit patrol, 1st Bearpark Troop, Durham. 1949

At least one Family Camp pennant and one from the Twegen Venture Unit.

The Scout badges of Albert Cross with a little write up of who he was. 1907-1985.

In another cupboard are the newspaper cuttings of when the Chief Guide came to Hopehill. Also with this are all the original letters to and from Lady B-P arranging the event.

We have a wide range of books on all sorts of subjects like Trees, Wild life, Hydroponics, Mushrooms, the law regarding footpaths, After the hurricane etc. Pity no one has time to read them!

An American flag, brought over by the visiting American Scouts that was flown over the White House before being given to us.

I am aware that things do not stay exactly the same for long and it is hard to keep up. Since writing this the Women's Institute millennium oak has been planted and Hermoine's tree has appeared to mark a boundary between sites on the east camping field. In a few weeks, no doubt, someone will be looking at the Millennium Cairn, wondering what it is all about and why it is not featured in this booklet but that will be for someone else to tell.

Stan Kemp.