



PAX WOOD STORY

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by

Helen M. Grant

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Can be obtained from :—

Pax Wood, Rowhill, Wilmington, Dartford, Kent

FOREWORD

The first Pax Wood story was included in the brochure prepared in time for the official opening in April 1957. By the end of 1961 the original brochure had sold out and it was necessary to print a new one. The committee agreed that it was better to confine it to information concerning booking, and to ask Mrs. Grant to write the full story of Pax Wood as a separate publication, which she most kindly consented to do.

Kent Guides will always be grateful to Mrs. Grant for her dream of a Kent Guide House—to Mr. Leslie Wates for so generously making the dream practically and financially possible—to Mrs. Leslie Wates for her unflinching interest and support as President and to the whole family for their great generosity in securing Pax Wood to Guiding for a further sixty years, thereby making it possible for the committee to plan ahead and for Kent West to expand on the Woodlands camp sites.

The onerous task of making Pax Wood habitable, both inside and out, was undertaken by Mr. J. Y. Grant and his firm. It was a race with time to complete the work by the day of the opening and we are greatly indebted to Mr. Grant and his employees for all their willing and unremitting toil in those early days and for their continued interest and help.

When Mrs. Crosfield asked me if I would become chairman of a committee to investigate the possibility of a Kent Guide House, I had no idea what I was letting myself in for, but I shall always be grateful to her for giving me the opportunity of sharing in such a worth while enterprise. It has been a joy and a privilege to work with Mrs. Grant in making her dream come true and no chairman could be supported by a more cheerful, co-operative and united committee.

The County expressed everyone's appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Wates and Mr. Grant in presenting them with "thanks badges" at the opening ceremony in 1957 and we were all delighted when the Medal of Merit was awarded by Commonwealth Headquarters to Mrs. Grant and presented to her by Mrs. C. E. Notley, County Commissioner for Kent West in the Autumn of 1961.

I feel confident that all readers will enjoy this delightful and imaginative story and that many will catch the enchantment of Pax Wood and want to come and see it for themselves.

Summer 1962

Marjorie A. Campbell

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"Here you find something charming and delightful, in that having been a ruin, it has now been brought into a lovely—and shall we even call it an enchanted—little house for the use of the Brownies and Guides of Kent".

These were the words of the Chief Guide when she opened Pax Wood in April 1957, but the story of Pax Wood began as long ago as the early thirties.

My father was keenly interested in youth organisations and allowed Scouts and Guides to use the grounds of Rowhill Grange and the adjoining Woodlands for camping and hiking. The stables and coach house that had formed part of the Woodlands estate were used as a store for equipment; the buildings consisting of two stables with a hay loft reached by a rickety staircase, a small harness room with an open fire, the coach house and covered yard, a large lean-to greenhouse on the south side and various out buildings and sheds.

During the nineteen thirties the hay loft was converted into a studio where my mother could work undisturbed. It had a fireplace at one end, and the north windows and sky light made it very suitable for this purpose.

In 1937 I was working in a settlement in Millwall and, amongst other things, helped to run a Millwall Brownie Pack. This Pack had arranged to go to an open air school for their first pack holiday, which was a tremendous adventure. At that time there was a lot of real poverty in London's east end and for most of the Brownies this would be their first visit to the country. They had been saving and preparing for months, when on the eve of departure the blow fell! A telegram from the school reported infectious disease and the consequent cancellation of the holiday. The shattering news was telephoned to me at home by an almost tearful Brown

Owl. My mother was at that time District Commissioner for Swanley and immediately came to the rescue; could they not use the studio? It was dry and weather proof, water was laid on, they could cook on the little fire, surely it was worth trying!

Fortunately the local camp adviser lived near and came round at once to look at the studio and consider the wild scheme. She proclaimed the buildings as "totally unsuitable" but added: "You come and I will not inspect you"—How wise she was! The Brownies came, eighteen of them, and throughout that gloriously happy week of sunshine and laughter, they never discovered that it was not the place they had planned to go to! It was a wonderful holiday, the Brownies radiated happiness, they bustled about cleaning, sweeping, washing and cooking, interspersed with exciting games in the woods. They were so new to the country that their first lesson was to learn that nettles stung! Neither this discovery, nor the "bears" that they were convinced lived in the woods, damped their enthusiasm.

Such true happiness is surely indestructible and, equally surely, some of the fun and laughter stayed behind when the Brownies returned to their homes, bright eyed and pink checked.

The war brought an abrupt end to the activities at Woodlands, my mother stopped her painting and few people visited the studio. Gradually it fell into disrepair, ivy crept along the ground and up the walls, brambles and nettles flourished everywhere. A large bomb exploded where Jam Roll now stands making a crater big enough to hide a London bus, shattering all the glass and wrenching the doors off their hinges; it was remarkable that more serious damage was not done to the structure. This disaster seemed to complete the desolation of the old stables, they took on an unwanted, uncared for, look, especially in the winter when the wind blew the broken doors to and

fro creaking eerily on their rusty hinges and dried leaves swirled in drifts through doors and windows. In spite of all this, the place still held magic for children as the grandchildren discovered when they returned to Rowhill after the war; they made a wonderful playground out of the wilderness and spent many happy hours inventing exciting games round the old buildings; dens in the ivy, secret hide-outs in the rhododendrons, tasting the happiness left behind by the Millwall Brownies and the "enchantment" to which the Chief Guide referred years later.

By now the derelict collection of buildings had been written off as useless and no one gave them more than a passing thought until one day it transpired that there was a substantial outstanding war damage claim on them. My father was in a dilemma; the obvious thing was to pull the whole place down, yet what a waste! The walls were good, the roof repairable, there were drains—of a kind, water and electricity to hand. It could be put into condition as a shelter for the camp sites, or made into a house by adding considerably to the war damage claim and obtaining the Commission's sanction.

This problem arose in 1955, I was married and running a pack in Bromley but memories of the Millwall pack came vividly to mind and I saw a Brownie house—but why stop at Brownies? A Kent Guide house for anyone in the movement? Or perhaps some other youth organisation? There were lots of possibilities. After much discussion it was agreed that the County should be approached with the proposition of a Guide house, and correspondence was started between the County Camp Adviser, Miss P'Anson Jones and the County Commissioner, Mrs. Crosfield. Meetings and visits were arranged, plans and details were discussed and the general idea approved and accepted by the County Executive Committee, Mrs. Crosfield asked Miss Campbell to become chairman of a special committee to work out the details and Mrs.

McPherson, one time County treasurer, volunteered to act as treasurer. Miss Campbell called the first committee in May 1956; her whole hearted enthusiasm for the idea was a great encouragement and her experience and wisdom invaluable in the task of making the dream a reality.

It was generally agreed to call the house Pax Wood and to invite the Chief Guide to open it. The County Executive Committee decided that the furnishing and equipping should be the County's special effort for the centenary of the Founder's birth, and generously voted £100 to give Pax Wood a start.

Then began a year of feverish activity, the undergrowth had to be cleared and a garden laid, the structural work had to be carried out professionally, the internal cleaning and decorating and equipping had to be organised on a voluntary basis; and a list of needs and wants was sent out to Divisions, Districts, Companies and Packs in the County, to ensure that Pax Wood did not end up with twenty tables and no chairs or dozens of pudding basins but no spoons to stir with!

During all these exciting preparations, the splendid news came that Countess Gravina was giving Pax Wood her caravan as an annex. It duly arrived, towed all the way from Frittenden, and it turned out to be a "real" caravan, not the modern stream lined variety, in fact a perfect addition to Pax Wood. Sevenoaks Division volunteered to re-paint it and worked many hours to produce the gaily coloured "Jam Roll" we have today that is such a feature of Pax Wood. "Jam Roll" was the nick-name given to the Rolls Royce that was presented to the Founder at the coming of age Scout Jamboree in 1928. The Chief Guide welcomed the idea of naming the rooms at Pax Wood and chose the most appropriate nicknames given to the Founder as well as the names of their early homes.

The spring of 1957 was an exciting time for those of us on the spot, nearly every post brought a lovely surprise,

a parcel of gay kitchen utensils, or a beautifully worked cushion or rug, little egg cosies or mats, made by Brownies, and the promises of big things like beds and tables. Each gift had its special place and was recorded in the book of gifts, later a thank you certificate was sent to every giver.

By the opening day, April 26th 1957, the house was shining and gay needing only the Chief Guide's inspiration to bring it life.

The great day dawned cloudy and cold, but Guiders, Guides and Brownies arrived in their hundreds from all corners of Kent and crowded the camp sites where the Chief Guide was going to speak to them after the opening ceremony.

Inside Pax Wood were a few chosen Guides and Brownies from every Division, each had been allotted a task with instructions to remain motionless until the Chief Guide entered the room and her escort switched on the light, the signal to "wake up". As the Chief moved from room to room the house became alive and when every corner had been visited the Chief Guide came out into Paxtu and officially declared Pax Wood open—the full text of her speech is printed at the end of this story.

Since that memorable day, Pax Wood has seen the truth of the Chief Guide's words; many hundreds of Brownies, Guides, Guiders, Senior Branch and Trefoil Guild members come to stay every year and enjoy the beauty and freedom of the surroundings.

It is inevitable that the wear and tear of such a constant stream of visitors is extensive and makes the annual spring cleaning a major operation. Each Division represented on the committee, and the representatives of Kent East, undertake a room or some part of Pax Wood. A transformation scene takes place as Guiders, Trefoil Guild members and friends wield paint brushes, hammers and screwdrivers, needles and cotton, scrubbing brushes and mops and a quantity of soap and water and polish. Every

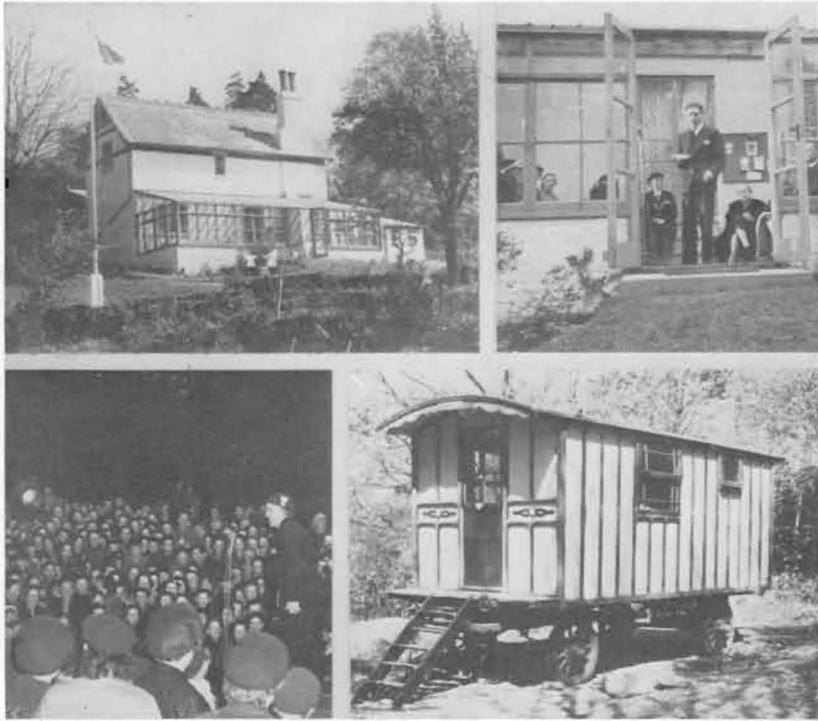
corner is gone into and Pax Wood emerges once again bright and clean ready to welcome another year of visitors.

This labour of love is sure proof of the value of Pax Wood to Kent Guiding and of the spirit of joy and service that radiate from it, which demonstrates the truth that "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal".

THE CHIEF GUIDE'S SPEECH

Mr. Wates, fellow Guides, and also may I say fellow Scouts and friends of Scouting and Guiding—I feel that this is indeed a very momentous and wonderful occasion. I have been very fortunate in the past in being able to visit camp sites, camp homes and buildings which have been made available for the use of Scouts and Guides in various parts of the world, but here to-day we have all been able to share in something which is quite unique. I would like first of all to say to Mr. Wates how very greatly I regret his father is not well enough to be with us to-day, though I am rejoiced to hear he will be coming home soon and will be able to come and see this lovely thing which has emerged from the plan in which he took so wonderful a part when the idea was mooted to him. I feel for the Guide Movement this place will be—shall we call it a power house, but not like a modern power house, a great modern building with chimneys, straight and square, walls with no beauty at all—here you find something far more romantic and charming and delightful in having been a ruin, it has now been brought into a lovely and charming and, shall we even call it, enchanting little house for the use of the Guides and Brownies of Kent, so we can never be grateful enough to Mr. Wates himself for having agreed to make the place available, by having helped so much in the construction of it. Also we should like to offer our thanks, I am sure, to all those—both great and small—people behind the scenes who have helped with the building, with the equipping, and for the delightful furnishings. Indeed here we will find in days to come Brownies and Guides, not only coming from Kent but perhaps from other places too, who will come here to rejoice in the surroundings, to benefit by their stay and will, in their turn, go away refreshed in mind, in body, and shall we also say in spirit, for continuing the game of scouting

and guiding, for continuing to carry out the ideals for which the movement stands. So may I in accepting the key from you, Mr. Wates, say to you and through you to your father how grateful I am sure we are at the present time in Kent and in the whole of England may feel in what he has done. Also may we hope that all who enter in these walls and those who share in the surroundings of these camping grounds, in the beauty and the peace and the quiet scenery will always think with gratitude of those who have made this place available during this unique and special centenary year, so to everyone who has had a share in making this possible I would like to offer our gratitude, and when I say our gratitude may I speak for the whole movement and also at this moment, as I am standing in Kent, on behalf of Kent, for Mrs. Crosfield, their Kent Guide leader at the present time who I know would like to associate herself with what I have said. I would like to say how grateful we all are and how much we would wish joy and success to all those who come to be within this delightful place in the days and the months and the years that lie ahead of us.



PAX WOOD ON OPENING DAY