

Ninth Morningside Edinburgh (George Watson's College) Scout Group Centenary Dinner, 6th September 2008

Perhaps the highlight of the Ninth Scout Group's centenary celebrations was the Centenary Dinner, held at Myreside Pavilion on the evening of 6th September 2008, and attended by 100 people (as it turned out).

The running order for the evening was as follows:

- Group photograph
- Grace
- Chairman's Remarks
- Toast to the Ninth
- Reply on behalf of the Ninth

Prior to the dinner, all present assembled on the grass outside the pavilion for a Group photograph. We then proceeded indoors to take our places for what turned out to be an excellent dinner, with good company and good food.

The toast to the 9th was proposed by Lord Smith of Finsbury, a former 9th Scout and Cabinet Minister. Professor Michael Steel replied on behalf of the Group. Both speeches were excellent, combining enjoyable reminiscence with deeply-felt gratitude for what the 9th has meant to so many in its 100 year history.

The enormous contributions made by the founder of the Group (and its leader for the first 50 years), Sandie Somerville, were duly acknowledged by both speakers and by the Chairman for the evening, GSL Richard Cavaye.

Centenary Group Photograph

This is available for purchase: please complete the form at the end of these notes if you wish a copy.

Grace

The grace was presented in verse by the George Watson's College Principal, Gareth Edwards:

Lord we gather for our dinner
Many a Scout and few – we hope – a sinner.
Morningside 9th one hundred years
Beavers and Cubs can give three cheers.
Campfires warm at Jophie's Neuk
Nineacres now at Devon Crook.

So give us friendship, sense of humour,
Banish malice, spiteful rumour.
While in Scout days' reminiscence,
Savouring drink and good food's essence.
May we show, both lad and lass,
from our hearts, Scouts' "caritas".

Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman for the evening, Group Scout Leader Richard Cavaye, spoke as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

When Sandie Somerville walked into the Headmaster's office in Archibald Place sometime in early 1908, to ask if he could follow the craze that was sweeping the nation and set up one of the new-fangled Scout Groups in the school, do you think he could possibly have imagined that 100 years on we

would be sitting here tonight celebrating a Centenary of uninterrupted Scouting at Watson's?

It truly is a magnificent achievement and I can tell you that we are one of only 40 Scout Groups in the entire world who were founded in 1907 or 1908 and are still in existence today.

However, we are not trying to suggest that the 9th is better than anyone else – we don't mean to imply that we might be the oldest in the world, in Scotland, or even in Edinburgh. This was also the view of Sandie Somerville himself when, later in 1908, a meeting of all the Scout Groups who had been formed in the Edinburgh area was held and this meeting led to the first Edinburgh Scout District which at the time was called the Midlothian Boy Scouts' Association. Up till then, Scout Groups had not been designated a number, and at the meeting many Scout Leaders present wanted to claim that their Group was the oldest and that they should be

called the 1st Lothian Scouts.

Sandie, who could clearly have laid claim to leading the oldest group, watched this debate take place and once it had subsided he quietly stood up and said: "We don't mind, we'll be the... Ninth!" And the Ninth we became, and have been ever since.

Out of the 40 Scout Groups still in existence from 1908, none other than ourselves bears the number 9, so tonight ladies and gentlemen, I can tell you that we are quite categorically "the oldest Ninth in the world!"

Toast to the Ninth

Lord Smith of Finsbury, aka Chris Smith, proposed the toast to the Ninth.

He began by saying that it was a remarkable celebration and that the history of the Ninth was, in itself, worthy of such an occasion. In fact, although the Scout Group has always been known as the Ninth it may even have been the one of the first since in the early days of 1907 and 1908 there were only meetings of small groups of boys.

On the last day of the Spring term in 1908 in the School in Archibald Place a meeting of prospective Scouts agreed to hold regular meetings the following Term.

Chris paid tribute to Sandie Somerville who was the first Scoutmaster and an inspirational figure in the Ninth until his death in the early 1960's. Having been seriously wounded in the First World War he devoted his life to Scouting and Youth work. He said "Sandie more than anyone else, set a long tradition of real commitment and dedication for Scout Leaders -many of them here tonight" He added "Sandie brought the best out of others without appearing to have had much to do with it."

He recalled a story when an American Senator had realised that he may have been well known and could demand attention, but the humblest of workers was every bit as important in society. Scouting, he felt, in its teaching and philosophy, reflected that we were all equally important.

He then recalled his own time in the Ninth. By the time he joined, the Summer Camps at Jophie's Neuk had been discontinued, and were now held in different parts of Scotland. He remembered Tobermory with its wonderful setting on the bay

and the twinkling light of the town on the other side. Loch Tummel – in his opinion the best of them all. The wonders of "plate golf" – tin plates being much more effective than frisbees!! The role that HP sauce critically played in making proper corned beef hash!!

Editing the *Ninth Magazine* was another highlight during his Scouting years. He remembered the Gestetner duplicating machine in John Kelly's bedroom with its stencils that would tear and ink that spilled. How modern technology has overtaken all that!

Another happy memory was the Jamborette in Denmark in 1966 when boys from six different countries camped together. The Scots, of course, all wore the kilt and had to learn Scottish Country Dancing. Chris said he played the piano to a limited extent at that time but was prevailed upon to learn a few tunes on the accordion. He mastered one – The Barren Rocks of Aden – and the Scouts danced everything to that one tune. It was the year that England's football team won the World Cup. When the Scots at the Jamborette heard the result the Scottish Flag was lowered to half-mast!!

Chris went on say what Scouting had given him – in fact all of us in the room – through the years: a love, and passion, for the outdoors. The camp fires; starlit nights; cold streams; mountain tops; glorious views; wet sleeping bags?; lumpy groundsheets?

He indicated there were comparisons with all that and his new job with Environmental Agency.

He went on to add that the gift of friendship and companionship was something that had lasted ever since. He stressed that he had learnt an understanding of how to work together, in groups, in teams, sharing common tasks, and all contributing what they could. This, he felt, was the best kind of education, of inspiration and of self-

Reply on behalf of the Ninth

Professor Michael Steel replied on behalf of the Ninth as follows:

Thanks to Chris for his reminiscences, a thoughtful and entertaining speech.

100 years is a remarkable achievement, an occasion for well-earned celebration and an incontestable excuse for nostalgia.

Many here, including myself, can remember clearly the 50th anniversary celebrations and we all still look just the same! On that occasion, we put on a “Gang Show” in the school hall. Sandie led the cast and audience in a con amore rendition of that great classic “There was a bloomin’ sparrow lived up a bloomin’ spout”. David Dunlop and Donald Easton performed the “Sheep’s heid” sketch as captured in the photograph on the display board by the front door. David was the English visitor enticed into a rural Scottish hostelry (prop. D Easton) and persuaded to try the local delicacy of sheep’s heid. He insists that it must be an “English” sheep’s heid, prompting the punch-line from Donald, which he calls through to the kitchen, and which I’m sure he still remembers. (Instant response from Donald) “Tak oot the brains!”. It just goes to show the jokes were old even then.

In fact my memories of the Ninth go back even earlier to the Spring of 1953 when I arrived at Watson’s fresh from East Africa and headed for the gym block on my first Friday evening. There seemed to be endless hordes of cubs pouring down the steps like the Punch cartoons of lemmings hurtling over cliffs. Inside about seventy Scouts were forming up in patrols for “flag”. I was welcomed by the leaders who included Sandie himself, Robin Ritchie and his brother Alistair and George Bauermeister. They were impressive in their obvious authority but approachable and kindly. I was amazed to find the boys addressed all of them by their first names – unheard of in my colonial experience, where it seemed anyone over 18 was addressed as “sir”.

development, that there could be.

He ended by saying that “All of this was what Scouting in the Ninth had given us all – Friends, Memories, Working together.”

He then proposed a toast to THE NINTH.

The Troop leader was Geoff Bulmer and among the other very senior scouts were Douglas Christie, “Twink” Wyllie and Victor Burton. My first PL was Alastair Marr. Again, I was astonished at how non-intimidating they all were, despite their exalted status. The ethos of care and support was very evident – throughout the school as well as in the 9th. It was very different from my schooldays in East Africa where many of the prefects were Afrikaaners whose exercise of authority tended to follow a rather different course. Like many thousands of boys, before and since, I very quickly found myself ‘at home’ in the Ninth.

The Group history reminds us that our origins, like those of the Scout movement itself, were military. Virtually all of the original leaders and PLs were drawn from the ranks of the School OTC – Sandie Somerville was a case in point – and within all too short a time the First World War was upon us. Many of these founders of the Ninth died in Flanders fields – Graham Burge was one of them. Sandie was severely wounded and, as Chris Smith noted, he bore the consequences for the next fifty years. Perhaps as a result of these terrible experiences, Scouting (and the Ninth) moved away from militarism. We never made a great issue of drill or warlike tactics while continuing to draw inspiration from the most positive aspects of the service ethos. The one aspect of our activities totally founded on military campaigns was Alan Flowers’ annual Cub summer camps, as anyone who participated will testify.

Of course, in years past, virtually all of our equipment was ex-army: the heavy canvas bell tents used at Jophie’s Neuk; the troop cooking pots, and primus stoves. Our personal equipment – hiking boots, sleeping bags and rucksacks – were mostly supplied by one of several army surplus stores dotted around Edinburgh. Even in the 1950’s at camp, many of the individual groundsheets were

First World War gas capes. My own very first sleeping bag was ex army, made of cotton and filled with Kapok. Its (presumably chemical) decontamination process before resale had reduced the filling to the consistency of pebbles and its thermal insulation value to that of tissue paper. The technique for getting a good night's sleep was to don every single item of clothing available and squeeze the sleeping bag over the whole Michelin-man ensemble like a sausage skin.

Long before quilted anoraks in waterproof but "breathable" fabrics came on the market, we hiked in shapeless garments of heavy cotton which could (allegedly) be rendered rainproof by soaking in a waxy liquid substance called "Nev". When wet, this gave off a distinctive aroma. Whether it repelled rain was debatable but it certainly repelled all animal life for several hundred yards downwind.

The Troop had a collection of large Primus stoves that fitted conveniently into McVittie's deep biscuit tins. Each stove had acquired, in the course of long and arduous military service, its own particular foibles. Some emitted a sideways tongue of flame to augment the standard circular pattern. Others would behave impeccably for several minutes then, without evident provocation, send an eruption of orange paraffin-smelling flame several feet into the air. Old hands learned to recognise the individual culprits and position themselves appropriately when operating them.

There was one memorable summer camp at Gullane when communication by morse code became all the rage. Several patrol tents, equipped with ancient (Royal Corps of Signals) wooden morse key buzz boxes, were linked by miles of frayed cable. Gradually we became proficient at sending and receiving vital messages. The learning process was helped by the fact that you could stick your head out of the tent and shout "was that dot-dot-dash-dot or dot-dash-dot-dot?" You can imagine the intensity with which the patrol would huddle round the box and tap out the query "W...H...A...T...I...S...F...O...R...S...U...P...P...E...R..." then the breathless wait for the reply "D...O...N...T...K...N...O...W", whose successful decipherment would be greeted with wild applause.

But Scouting has evolved and advances in equipment technology have contributed massively to the process. Canvas was replaced with

lightweight fabrics and wooden poles with aluminium or even carbon fibre. Wood and canvas canoes were replaced with fibreglass, ergonomic rucksacks replaced instruments of chafing torture. Stoves and lanterns powered by gas cylinders rendered paraffin obsolete and the youngest pleb was no longer required to sit below the Tilley lamp and pump every ten seconds to compensate for the slow pressure leak. We travel increasingly by mini-bus and rarely, if ever, by train. Mobile phones supplanted the buzz box and, I wonder, will gps replace the old map-reading skills? The opportunities for exploring the British countryside have expanded enormously and the Ninth has exploited them to the full.

Of course our explorations have not been confined to Scotland or even to Britain. The international dimension of Scouting, which has always been prominent, has become much easier to translate into reality. The Ninth, as ever, was quick to take advantage of greater mobility and for over 40 years has had a special link with the 4th Frederiksborg group from Denmark. It happens that this very day is the 40th wedding anniversary of Ian and Viebeke Turnbull who met at our first joint camp with the Danes in 1966. We toast their health and wish them many more happy years together.

At home and abroad, the spirit of adventure, inculcated by Scouting, remains and evolves with the times. But evolution must not be at the expense of our traditions. On this hundredth anniversary I am happy to report that the Ninth does not dismiss its past lightly. Almost fifty years ago, we launched the junior hike, for boys of twelve and thirteen who might find tent-based hiking rather arduous. We followed a route that linked several youth hostels. The event, in the Easter holidays, proved enormously popular and I recall being involved in drawing up the very first menu and provisions list. It was documented in a George Watson's College French exercise book. Some twenty-four years later, I rejoined the hike for a few days and was touched to discover the menu was still exactly the same and was solemnly followed from the same (now very dog-eared) exercise book!

These are just a few of my own memories and I thank you for indulging me as I recall them. Everyone here will have their own favourite memories and of course we shall exchange and re-live them well into the night. But I have been

reflecting on what it was (and is) about the Ninth that has contributed to its survival and the presence of so many here to-night – and the many more who are with us in spirit. I have come to the conclusion that the Ninth created a community where everyone was encouraged to discover their strengths – the strong man, the intellectual, the joker, the one with the bright ideas, the one who could remember and sing the camp fire song, the one who could rustle up a cup of tea and a bacon sandwich even in the rain. Everyone could contribute something to the happiness of the patrol and everyone found their niche. At the same time, it was acknowledged without censure that everyone had weaknesses – things at which they were mediocre or spectacularly bad. These were tolerated with good humour because as a team the strengths and weaknesses balanced out. Mutual dependence was a fact of life – rarely if ever articulated but recognised at a deep level.

One particular manifestation of this that only occurred to me when I was preparing these remarks, but which goes right back to our roots, is the fact that Sandie Somerville was blind (a result of his First World War wounds). This was hardly ever

commented upon because it never prevented him from being a great leader and inspiration to others. He did not have a white stick or a guide dog. He could find his way easily about his house and from there to the School. He could make out shapes and knew who was about by their voices so when you were in the room with him, his blindness was not an issue. He had a huge magnifying glass with which he could sometimes recognise a feature from a photograph or large print letters on a page but essentially, from his early twenties, he had little if any useful vision. He was an inveterate writer of notes and even used a typewriter but because he could not see what he was writing the former would be passed from hand to hand in a collective attempt at decipherment, while his typescript sometimes resembled Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky poem in its imaginative creation of new words. Sandie's attitude was "so what if I'm blind? Others can be my eyes and I will continue to do what I do best – no point in making a fuss about it".

So for 100 years the Ninth has helped boys to be boys and to become men. I am immensely grateful, as I am sure we all are, to have had the opportunity to be part of this continuing adventure.

Centenary Group Photograph

A mounted 10" x 8" copy of the Centenary Group Photograph is available for purchase.

If you wish a copy please complete and post the following form:

To: Steven Parry Donald Photography,
246 Dalry Road
Edinburgh EH11 2JG
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I wish to purchase a copy of the Ninth Morningside Edinburgh Scout Group centenary photograph taken at Myreside on the evening of 6th September 2008.

I enclose a cheque for £17.50 + £2.50 p&p = **£20.00**

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