

Across the road in the 'Lodge' lived Mrs Wakeman and her two sons Cyril and Dick who helped with repairs to the 'Hut'.

When the 1939/45 War came, we started collecting waste paper in the Trek Cart, which we were told had been given to the Troop to do the same job in 1914! Soon the sheds were full of paper and lots of junk no one else wanted. Unfortunately we were not so keen on bundling it up and it was a long time before action was taken to make us do the job. Some of us became ARP messengers and we helped with the washing up at the mobile canteen in Cassiobury Park.

The major event was Phasells Wood Camp. Located near 'Two Waters', Hemel Hempstead, it was a large wooded area with a field. A log cabin was the home and HQ of the resident Warden, known as 'Rainbow' Raynes? Later a bungalow was added as his home. We loved our weekends there. Pulling the Trek Cart with drag ropes – the kit piled high – was exciting although very tiring on the feet. Learning to put up tents, cooking (I do not know how Mum managed to give us any food as it was rationed) catching rabbits, night time camp fires, singing rousing songs – what an experience.

In 1943 or thereabouts, Dick Wakeman brought over his mother's lodger – Flight Lieutenant Cracknell in the regular RAF. He was some sort of manager for Ralph Reader running the 'Gang Shows'. We called him 'Flight'. He started helping and introduced us to 16mm films – silent, mostly short comedies – which were very popular. Later he helped us with our first, annual 'Gang Show'. Dick Wakeman built a small stage and Flight brought down two professional actors in the RAF, one of whom, Peter Dunlop, became a Costume Hirer after the War. They 'dressed' us in costume and taught us to move and speak out. Every year thereafter the show grew and parents became eager to attend.

In June 1944 we camped for the first time in Bucks. Before then it was only short camps. The roads nearby were full of troops waiting to move up to the ports for 'D' Day.

In 1945 we went to camp on the Isle of Wight at Quarr Abbey. On VE Day the ships in Portsmouth elevated their guns and thousands of shells and flares turned the night sky into daylight. Flight brought two RAF PT instructors from Germany to help so we played football a good deal of the time. Their names were Stan Mortenson and Billy Wrigglesworth, both of whom played for England.

In 1947 a Senior Scout Patrol 'Grenfell' (after the explorer) was formed and Joe Sebright, a former Commando, joined as assistant to Flight. I left the 2nd Oxhey Troop and joined the 11th Harrow Troop. I did not get on with Flight and was a difficult teenager! My brother Mick however, was chosen to play the lead in 'Boy Scout' by Ralph Reader, at the Royal Albert Hall and Roger Croft was the Patrol Leader. That was 1948 and the Comyns Cup was won by Mick's patrol also.

Scouting was the most important single event in our early life. We learnt to live together with boys of all creeds and classes and the outdoor activities kept us off the streets. The experience stood us in good stead when we all eventually had to go away on National Service.

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