
FEATURE ARTICLE

1st East Ilsley Scout Troop

The recent discovery of two photographs of East Ilsley Scout Troop, taken about 1911, prompted an investigation into the Troop.

As early as 1909, East Ilsley attracted the attention of would-be scouts. The *Newbury Weekly News* of September 16th 1909 carried the following paragraph.

SCOUTS IN TRAINING.- The Warden of Wantage Hall and the Registrar of University College Reading, brought about a score of boys from Reading to East Ilsley for three days, during August. Many of the boys were training as scouts, according to the methods recommended by General Baden Powell, and they found the Downs, and especially the parts around the Warren, very suitable for their purpose. Before they left the boys said that they had thoroughly enjoyed their outing. They found sleeping in a hay loft was by no means unpleasant, and they loved the freedom of the open Downs.



In February 1911 The *Newbury Weekly News* reported that a scout troop had been formed by the Minister of the Baptist Chapel, Rev E. Newell,

BOY SCOUTS. – The Boy Scout movement has reached Ilsley, so we are moving with the times in at least one thing. Pastor E. Newell, who started the movement, and is also Scout Master, at present has a total of 18 scouts under his command, divided into two patrols, named Cuckoo's and Wood-pigeons. Mr W. Horsman is assistant scout master, and treasurer. Last Wednesday evening a lantern entertainment was given in the Baptist Chapel, entitled "A trip to Switzerland". The collection was given to the scout's fund. Subscriptions have also been received from a number of residents. The Scouts will be affiliated to the Baden-Powell Scouts when they have received their full equipment.

This evidence is backed up by warrants in the Scout Archives in London. A warrant was issued to E. S. J. Newell of Beech Tree Farm, East Ilsley, near Newbury as Scout Master on 13th June 1911. This was followed by two warrants issued to W. T. Horsman and R. G. Wells of East Ilsley as Assistant Scout Masters on 13th September 1911.

It was assumed that the first photograph was taken at the time of the troop's formation, but the second had been attributed a date of 1920. It was obvious that the two pictures were almost contemporary with each other, depicting as they did many of the same people, though one appears to have been taken in the summer and the other late autumn or winter. From other Baptist Chapel documents it was learned that the Rev Newell moved away from East Ilsley in 1913. This narrowed down the possible dates.



It was also found that one of the scouts, Mervyn Sneller, joined the Army Ordnance Corps early in 1912. If he appeared in the pictures then they must have been taken in 1911. The second of the pictures shows several boys without uniforms, again indicating that this was early in the troop's existence. Another piece in the *Newbury Weekly News* in October 1911 mentions collections and fund raising in aid of providing winter clothing for the scouts. It also mentions Compton Scouts.

It is fairly evident that the person in the centre of each picture was Rev. Newell. The young man with the moustache was identified from other photos as Reginald Wells. Therefore the other older person in both photos is assumed to be Wilfred Horsman.

Another piece in the *Newbury Weekly News* in June 1911 identifies two more names

Dr E. R. Risien was called upon to dress a severe wound of the forehead of a man, on June 24th. Scouts Darling and Sneller (who are receiving first aid instruction from the doctor) controlled the bleeding by pressure whilst the necessary surgical instruments were being got ready to attend to the patient

A list of some 24 names of boys between the ages of 10 and 16 in 1911 was compiled, mainly extracted from the 1911 census, but as yet names cannot be attributed with certainty. The only names on the list known to have been members of the troop were the two mentioned in the above piece, Mervyn Sneller and Ernest Darling, and Reg Elliott, George Lailey, and Frank Woods.

It is not known if Ernest Darling is in either picture, but ten year old Reg. Elliott is 2nd left in the front row in picture one and 2nd right in the back row of picture two.

Mervyn Sneller joined the Army Ordnance Corps in 1912 and was stationed at Woolwich Barracks in London. After only a few months he is thought to have contracted meningitis and died on 13th August just before his sixteenth birthday. His funeral in East Ilsley was attended by a large number of mourners, including the scout troop, who followed the coffin into church carrying floral tributes. Mervyn's obituary states that he '*was one of the first and smartest members of the local troop of Boy Scouts. He took a lively interest in his duties and became a patrol leader*'. It has not proved possible to identify him in either of the photographs, suggesting that they may have been taken after he left the village early in 1912. A list of floral tributes appeared in the newspaper report of his funeral, which listed one from the scout troop, and one from 'Scout George Lailey'.

It is known that the Rev E. S. J. Newell left East Ilsley in 1913.

Early in 1913 Wilfred Horsman married and his parents emigrated to Canada. It is not known whether Wilfred and his new wife travelled with the rest of his family, but he certainly went out to Canada and was granted land there, as was his father, in Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan. He later returned to this country, and died here in 1958.

Reginald Wells married a local schoolteacher in 1911 and they had a son the following year. Reginald enlisted in 1914 and rose to the rank of sergeant. He was killed in action during the third battle of Gaza in 1917.

Frank Woods was known as a leading member of the scouts taking a prominent part in the band. He enlisted in 1915 and was killed in action in 1916. He may be the boy standing between Rev. Newell and Reginald Wells in the first picture and in the front row in the second, but this has not been verified.

George Lailey, who was known to be a member of the scout troop, enlisted in 1914, went to France in 1915, and was killed in action near Amiens on 30th March 1918, aged 22. He has yet to be identified in either photograph.

Two Warwick brothers have been tentatively identified. William John in both pictures, his younger brother, Albert George, in the second.

Jim Naylor is possibly in the first picture 3rd left, back row. He joined the army with his elder brother Harry in 1912. Jim survived but his brother was killed in action in 1914.

It appears that the Troop was short-lived, and, like a number of its members, did not survive the First World War.

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