

| Project: Scouting through the Decades: A Century of Adventure Respondent: Alison Thomson Year of Birth: 1951 Age: 74 Connection to the project: Husband was a Scout leader in the 1970s & was involved with the group through him. Date of Interview: 10 April 2025 Interviewer: Caroline Richardson Recording Agreement: yes Information & Consent: yes Photographic Images: no Length of Interview: 1.01.18 Location of Interview: Davidson's Mains Scout Hall Recording Equipment: Zoom H4n (internal mics) | |  |
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| Summary Time (from: mins/secs) | Time Coded Summary/ Transcript | Transcribed Extract (from- to: mins/secs) |
| 0.00 – 0.36 | After welcoming the Respondent, the Interviewer asked about where and when she was born, then invited her to share how she was involved with the 30th Craigmmond Scout Group. | |
| | “My husband was this Scout leader in the 1970s, maybe even 1969, and we used to have the boys around to the house a lot, and I used to go to camp with him.” | 0.36 – 0.54 |
| 0.54 – 1.29 | The Respondent goes on to explain that there were around sixty in the Troop at that time, and in those days the older boys would go out on night hikes or take part in Patrol Leader meetings. | |
| | <p>“I remember them coming back one time on a night hike, and we lived in a flat, and they piled into the living room and slept because it was too late to go home, and all you saw in the morning were boots going up each set of steps [laughs]</p> <p>Interviewer: So, does that happen quite a lot then? Did your house just get taken over by teenage boys?</p> <p>Respondent: Yes, definitely. I think it was particularly the group that there was then - there was a really strong bond between the group that was there and Scouters and things. My father had been involved in Scouting in Johnson, so it was just part and parcel of my life.”</p> | 1.29 – 2.19 |
| 2.20 – 4.33 | <p>The Interviewer asked whether the new Scout Hall was already in place at that time - she confirmed that it was, although she could not recall exactly when it had been built.</p> <p>The conversation then turned to her involvement with the group, and she explained that she was often asked to help out at various events and camps. Through these experiences, she got to know the Scouts well and described them as a “lovely boys.”</p> <p>She also recalled an occasion when the Scouts returned from a night hike and ended up camping out in her living room. Afterwards, she and her husband couldn't find their cat, who had gone into hiding to escape the sudden invasion of teenage boys.</p> | |

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| | <p>She was then asked about her husband’s involvement with the 30th Craigalmond Scout Troop, and she explained that he had first been a Cub, then a Scout, before later becoming a leader.</p> <p>The Interviewer noted that, according to previous interviews, her husband, Ken, had played a significant role in the development of the Troop and encouraged former Scouts to return as leaders. She was then asked whether he had been very passionate about Scouting.</p> | |
| | <p>“Yes, I would say so. but he was a kind of, I’d say, a non-threatening type of person, so people took to him, and he worked hard. He did...he had lots of amazing activities.</p> <p>Bobby Brown, who was a Scouter - I can't remember, but I think he was probably in the District as well - wrote an article for <i>Scouting</i> and Ken adopted a lot of his ideas, and I think it was the variety of activities that attracted them and kept them because they were always doing something. I mean, I would say maybe two if not three weekends a month - they were out doing lots of activities.</p> <p>As I say, when he started off, he had a Troop, and then I think it was maybe in the teens—in the teens, the numbers, and by the time he left, it was about 60, and that's when they decided to split the troop because it was a bit congested out there.”</p> | 4.34 – 5.48 |
| 5.48 – 6.11 | <p>They talk briefly about how busy the new hall would be with so many Scouts at that time, and the Respondent recalls a story about why the lockers, which used to be in the hall, may have been removed.</p> | |
| | <p>“One of the funniest things was they were playing football one night, and Ken caught his foot on the lockers and damaged a toenail, and he was absolutely incapacitated. The next morning, he decided he had to go to the doctor to get something done about this, and I was watching him, and he went up to the bus stop and nothing in sight, not a bus, no, not a person. All of a sudden, this dog appeared and stamped on his toe, so I think after that, I can't remember whether they actually took out the lockers.”</p> | 6.12 – 6.47 |
| 6.48 – 9.38 | <p>The Interviewer went on to ask whether her husband’s love of Scouting might have been inspired by the leaders he had during his time as a Cub and Scout with the 30th. She explained that Ronnie McPherson had been the Scout Leader at the time, with his wife serving as the Cub Leader, and that Ken had a very good relationship with him.</p> <p>When asked about the kinds of activities her husband enjoyed, she said that he loved the outdoor focus of Scouting. Since there were fewer restrictions in those days, activities took place most weekends. She felt that for many boys, the camaraderie within the Troop and the opportunity to get outside and be active were what made Scouting so appealing.</p> <p>She added that in later years, Ken became involved in training leaders in how to deliver outdoor activities. The Interviewer then asked what she could recall about the camps that took place during those years, to which she remembered attending camps at Hunam in the Borders and Loch Venacher. She went on to tell a story that took place at one of these camps.</p> | |
| | <p>“Ken got wind of the fact that some boys, some of the older boys, had bought drink on site and so they decided to have a look through the tents, you know but could not find anything, could not find anything.</p> | 9.35 – 10.17 |

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| | <p>And they came out and there was a spade lying and somebody - you know how you take the take the turfs off if you're doing certain things – and there's this pile of turf and somebody lifted the spade, put it through the turfs and this sprinkling of alcohol came out [laughs]"</p> | |
| 10.17 – 10.22 | The conversation then moves on to camp cooking. | |
| | <p>"The one thing that Ken was very keen on, as far as camping was concerned, was that it had to be patrol camping, patrol cooking - sorry because he felt that they weren't getting the full experience if they didn't have to do that.</p> <p>And one of the things ...can't remember whether it happened every night...was that the Scouters took it in turns to go around the different groups.</p> <p>And I remember when we were down at Hunam - I was going to patrols and obviously must have been very nervous because the food was always dire [laughs] everybody else got good food.</p> <p>But one of the ones I remember was it was the time of Smash, and I went to see how they were getting on because I had never been called for my tea.</p> <p>I went to find this soup, because what they've done was they'd boiled the water and added the Smash, and of course they'd boiled far too much water, and it ended up as liquid, then what they've done is they'd boiled it hard, and it ended up this crust."</p> | 10.22 – 11.45 |
| 11.45 – 12.28 | The Respondent went on to explain that at camps the patrols were often in competition and activities such as cooking would gain them points so the boys would try their best to win. She was then asked if she could recall any other camp activities | |
| | <p>"When we were at Loch Venacher you certainly canoed, because we weren't quite beside the loch, but we were up there, and we would go for a day hike or things like that.</p> <p>The other thing I remember about that camp in particular was that everybody, not everybody – experienced people got a camp name May not have heard it because it might have been in the other ones when they got together, but I remember one of the highlights of the camp was Scouters getting round together at the end and trying to work out camp names, you know, like Eagle or you know and so on."</p> | 12.28 – 13.20 |
| 13.20 – 18.43 | <p>She went on to talk a little more about this, mentioning some of the nicknames given to the Scouters and noting that receiving one was considered a badge of honour.</p> <p>The conversation then turned to cooking, and she was asked whether the Scouts had any say in what food was prepared at camp, though she couldn't quite remember.</p> <p>They also discussed the number of leaders who volunteered at camp, which she estimated to be around six, with Scout camps typically taking place once a year, at different locations, and lasted about a week.</p> <p>She was then asked about the Scouts' behaviour during these camps, to which she said the Scouters took on a paternal role, but overall, because of the patrol competition at camps, the boys were usually behaved, and although there were a few "rogues" among them, she could not recall any major incidents where Scouts were sent home.</p> <p>The Interviewer then asked about travel to camps, to which she said that they would usually use a lorry, although she travelled by car.</p> | |

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| | <p>They then return to talk about cooking, to which she explains that they cooked over the fire and managing this would be part of the patrol competition.</p> <p>The conversation moved to whether any Scouts got homesick.</p> | |
| | <p>“They were kept very busy, and, in those days, they didn't have mobile phones, and they were often in the back of beyond. So, you know, there wasn't even a call box nearby.”</p> | 18.40 – 18.52 |
| 18.53 – 20.04 | <p>The conversation continues a little more about camps, then moves on to talk about the types of activities introduced into the group at this time and how they managed it.</p> | |
| | <p>“I feel that nowadays there's not the camaraderie or the opportunities for leaders to mix that there was in those days.</p> <p>And I think <i>The Scouting</i> came out once a month, and Bobby had great ideas, and there were quite innovative parents, where it was almost pre-empting that, you know, this technological era. You know, there was a parent who worked at Heriot-Watt University, and it was before the beginning of computer stuff, and it was something to do with that. So, you know, Ken just used what he had around, but there was a lot of people, you know, that he knew, and he was also a teacher, so he was creative that way.”</p> | 19.54 – 20.52 |
| 20.52 – 21.37 | <p>The Interviewer asked if there was much community input in terms of people coming in to run sessions or teach skills, to which she said there were enough skills in the group, as it was a diverse group of leaders in terms of skills. She was asked how easy it was to recruit leaders in those days.</p> | |
| | <p>“Two things. In those days, you also had Rovers, and I think the strength of the group was that, apart from when they went away to university, you know, people... boys wanted to stay within the group.”</p> | 21.26 – 21.44 |
| 21.44 – 22.59 | <p>She mentioned two leaders who had come from outside the 30th but noted that the majority were from within the Group. The discussion then turned to former Scouts who had returned to become leaders in the Troop.</p> <p>The Interviewer remarked that many of the previous leaders interviewed had described Ken as a nurturing mentor, to which she agreed, adding that the Group was particularly close-knit at that time.</p> | |
| | <p>“I don't think anybody felt they had to bond – I think they wanted to bond. They just enjoyed each other's company, and I mean, if you'd been with the group that were there, you would understand totally why, because they were just...they just gelled.”</p> | 22.59 – 23.20 |
| 23.20 – 25.06 | <p>The conversation then turned to how the leaders from that period continued to stay in touch over the years.</p> <p>The Respondent reflected on the importance of leadership, noting how much time Ken had for the current Group Scout Leader, Dylan.</p> <p>She remarked that although Ken's relationship with his own GSL had not always been straightforward, he nevertheless admired him, and he supported many of the group's activities.</p> <p>The Interviewer then observed that her husband's commitment to the Group must have taken up a great deal of his time and asked how this had affected their family life.</p> | |

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| | <p>“I was used to it - my father was out at Scouts all the time so it didn't bother me, and where it was appropriate - then you know, I got involved, and I did Guiding at that time.”</p> | 25.06 – 25.22 |
| 25.23 – 27.41 | <p>The conversation then moved on to her husband’s Scouting career. She explained that after leaving the 30th as a Scout Leader, he moved to Liberton, where he became the District Commissioner, a position he held for several years. He later served as Area Commissioner for Edinburgh and subsequently took on the role of Chair of the Scottish Board. In addition, he was a member of the Board in London, where he chaired the Finance Committee for the entire Scout Association.</p> <p>The Interviewer then asked whether there were particular areas of Scouting that he felt especially passionate about or sought to change. She replied that his greatest passion was for outdoor activities and for developing these within the organisation.</p> <p>They went on to discuss some of the activities that took place in the hall when he was a Scout Leader, noting that the game <i>British Bulldogs</i> was a particular favourite. She then spoke about the kinds of activities that the young people remembered most fondly.</p> | |
| | <p>“It’s the extreme things, you know, like the night hikes and, you know, being taken out and left somewhere. Those are the things that young people remember, and there were never because you were in danger, I suppose you were in danger with British bulldogs, but you know it's calculated. You know, I think nowadays people are so risk-averse - that's one of the reasons why young people have such difficult mental health, because it's always ‘Oh you can’t’ You know, whereas they don't learn their own boundaries.”</p> | 27.41 – 28.21 |
| 28.21 – 29.45 | <p>The conversation then turned to whether she believed that the skills learned through Scouting helped young people become productive members of society as they grew up. She replied that she did, noting the number of U.S. Presidents and British Prime Ministers who had been involved in the movement.</p> | |
| | <p>“It gave a lot of the leadership skills at an early age, and you know, I think it was one of the things that was good about when the boys were older, because you had 15, 16, 17-year-olds looking after the younger ones and that really, you know, that really did bring on their leadership skills.”</p> | 29.45 -29.11 |
| 29.28 – 35.22 | <p>The Respondent was then asked for her thoughts on modern Scouting. She explained that she didn’t feel she knew enough about it to comment in detail but said she had sympathy for today’s leaders due to the increase in risk assessments and paperwork. She felt that many activities which once took place might no longer be possible because of health and safety restrictions.</p> <p>The Interviewer then asked whether she thought parents viewed Scouting as a positive experience for their children or simply as a way to get them out of the house. She replied, “Both!” She went on to explain that in those days, there were few alternatives for young people, and for many, it was a valuable opportunity to experience the outdoors. Some discussion followed about how the Scouts joined the Troop—some progressing from the Cub pack, while others joined directly as Scouts.</p> | |

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| | <p>She was then asked how well the Scout Troop managed when it was divided into two nights, but she was unable to answer, as Ken had left by that time. She recalled, however, that Jim Campbell was the leader on one night and Peter Harnden on the other, noting that the two men had quite different leadership styles.</p> <p>The conversation then moved on to community activities. They discussed the popular Jumble Sales that served as fundraisers at the time and briefly mentioned <i>Bob-a-Job Week</i>, though she was unsure how it had been organised. She was also asked whether the local community had been supportive of their activities.</p> | |
| | <p>"I think it was everywhere, you know, that was part of life at that time, because you know, as I said I lived on the other side of the country and Scouts did Bob-a-Job and everything like that. It was just an accepted part of things."</p> | 35.22 – 35.40 |
| 35.40 – 36.38 | <p>The discussion moves on to talk about the 30th interacting with other Scout groups.</p> | |
| | <p>"I know there were rivalries [laughs] I'm sure the 23rd – I'm not sure how well they got on, but I don't know -I can't think of any others but there could have been. I don't know."</p> | 36.20 -36.41 |
| 36.42 – 39.16 | <p>The conversation continued, and she was asked whether most of the Scout Troop members came from Davidson's Mains, to which she replied that they did.</p> <p>The Respondent was then asked if she remembered anything about Gala Day or the Remembrance Parades, but she said she couldn't recall much about them.</p> <p>The Interviewer went on to ask about her memories of Troop members receiving the Chief Scout Award - she said she did remember some members achieving the award and noted that it had been considered a significant accomplishment.</p> <p>She was then asked how the Group supported its young people in working towards it.</p> | |
| | <p>"I think achievement was very much part of the philosophy of the group, and so boys were motivated to work towards getting as many badges and so the leaders just facilitated that."</p> | 38.58 -39.19 |
| 39.20 – 41. | <p>She was asked whether she thought the Scouts had a say in the badges they worked towards. She wasn't entirely sure but believed that was probably the case. She reiterated that the Scouts were a very motivated group at that time, and that Patrol Leaders' Councils were in place so the boys could express their views, which were then passed on to the leaders.</p> <p>Returning to the topic of how camps were planned and organised, the respondent explained that Ken would travel around the country looking for good camping sites and would arrange all the activities. She laughed as she added that, quite often, this was done instead of the two of them going on holiday.</p> | |
| | <p>"It would be on a landowner's land – I mean they weren't proper campsites as such. The one at Hunam, it was somebody who had a large house and she allowed people to use this area. It had an old church, it was lovely, and we would go along on a Sunday to the church and to the service. So, Loch Venacher, that was a kind of area –</p> | 41.15 – 42.04 |

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| | I think he got it off a list – it was in the middle of nowhere. So, it all varied but they always went Scouting for campsites.” | |
| 42.04 – 42.53 | The Interviewer asked if they were keen campers out with Scouts, to which she laughed and said they weren’t – it was only something they would do with the group, mostly because they didn’t have much time. The conversation then turns to how she and Ken took a group of young people to Sri Lanka to undertake a UNICEF project in 1985. She was asked to talk more about this. | |
| | “The Area decided they wanted to do an overseas project, and we had been to Sri Lanka in 1979, and in those days, people didn’t travel. So, they approached Ken and then they asked me if I would go as joint leader, and we took a group of 33 people out there. It was a young people-led group – they did all the decision making, organised their fundraising, everything like that, and when we went out, we worked with the Scout Association of Sri Lanka and UNICEF, and we put in wells and latrines and did a health project.” | 42.53 – 43.43 |
| 43.43 – 44.25 | The Respondent explains that this took place in 1985, and the following year, Sri Lankan Scouts visited Scotland, staying at Bonally. She recalled that there was much group fundraising for the trip, including the establishment of the Scout Post. | |
| | “I remember being here, I think it was 1984 – Christmas 1984, I think, and we had chairs all around the place of different areas of Edinburgh, and they started Scout Post.” | 44.25 – 44.49 |
| 44.50 – 47.34 | The conversation then turns to Scout Post, where the interviewer asks what she remembers about it. She explains that Scout Post had already been running in other parts of the country, and the Group decided to replicate the idea as a fundraising initiative. She recalls that, in the first year, the collection and sorting of the mail took place either in the Davidson’s Mains Scout Hall or on Valleyfield Street— though she isn’t entirely sure which. She remembers that around ten thousand cards were handled that first year, with the young people largely organising it themselves, so it wasn’t always particularly well structured. She also recalls helping with deliveries, noting that she and Ken covered about two hundred miles in their car during that period. The scheme, she believes, ran for about two years before it grew too large for the Group to manage, at which point it was taken over by the Area. The conversation then returns to the fundraising efforts for the Sri Lanka trip. | |
| | “If you ask Ken and myself, what was the best thing you have ever done, it would be that because we took 33 people out for a month in quite trying circumstances and we never had a cross word.” | 47.34 – 47.49 |
| 47.49 – 1.00.58 | The conversation continued about the International Project, and she was asked what had motivated them to take part. She explained that the initiative had come from the Area, which had wanted to be involved in such work. They had liaised with the Sri Lankan Scout Association, and she recalled that three or four groups had travelled there at different times – one from Jersey, one from the south of England, though she couldn’t remember where the others had come from. She explained that the groups stayed in various parts of the southwest of Sri Lanka, noting that at the time the country was a war zone. Her | |

group had been the second to go out, and UNICEF had identified both the area where they stayed and the projects they would support. They camped in a village called *Walakada* [?], setting up on the playing field of the local school, and their main task initially was to conduct local health surveys.

She shared a memorable story about how some of the local children were initially frightened of her because she had freckles. In their community, pale spots on darker skin could be seen as a sign of illness, but the children soon became comfortable around her. She remembered the local people as extremely kind, often sharing food despite having very little themselves. One amusing memory was how fascinated the villagers were by the Scouts' daily routines — many travelled miles just to watch them brush their teeth.

In terms of the project work, she explained that the local community always had input into the volunteer projects. The villagers would dig wells and latrines, while the Scouts were responsible for the brickwork and concrete. It was agreed that whatever was built should be simple to maintain after the volunteers left.

She also recalled how they bought paddy rice, which she would spend up to an hour each day cleaning to make it suitable for eating. On one occasion, she was away in Colombo for a day, and when she returned, there was a terrible smell — the rice had been cooking, but the Scouts hadn't cleaned it. Fortunately, the local women stepped in to help them.

When asked about communication between the Scouts and the Sri Lankans, she explained that English was widely spoken. Some locals who owned televisions had watched *Take the High Road* and thought one of the team members, Ken, had appeared in the show because of his accent.

She noted that ten years later, Scout Leader Jim Campbell returned to the village and was warmly welcomed by the local community.

When asked how the Scouts were selected for the trip, she explained that several training weekends were held, including practical sessions such as bricklaying, where leaders could assess who would work well in the team. Volunteers could be up to 25 years old, though she wasn't sure if any had come from the 30th Craighalmond Group, apart from another leader, Jim Campbell.

The Scouts had many opportunities to experience local culture and interact with the villagers, including evenings of entertainment and shared activities. However, one memorable mistake was bringing haggis as a gift — something that turned out to be inappropriate for cultural and religious reasons.

She mentioned that a 40-year reunion of the group was being planned for September, and that those who attended had a very positive experience, growing as people as a result.

She also mentioned that about seven Sri Lankan Scouts had made a reciprocal visit the following year.

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| 1.00.58 – 1.01.02 | The Respondent was then informed that this was the end of the interview and thanked for her time and for sharing her memories with the project. | |
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