

THE LIFE & TIMES OF

Olave Baden-Powell

LAST MESSAGE

Dear Guides, Scouts, Cubs and Brownies and all their leaders and friends.

I shall have left this world when you receive this message, which I leave to express my thanks for all the kindnesses and the affection shown to me, and to say how greatly I have rejoiced over the way in which you have all carried out your share in the work of the Movement that my beloved husband invented, for the advancement of boys and girls of all countries, years ago.

I have a firm belief in Almighty God and in the life in the world to come, when he and I will be reunited; and together we shall watch over you who have been enrolled as members of this world family, and go on caring for your progress and your well-being.

I trust that you will continue fully to use the system of work and play that our Movement provides, keeping up the fun and the friendships made at your meetings and in camps, abiding by the Promise and upholding the Laws that you undertook to live by when you joined up.

In that way you will not only advance yourself in body, mind and spirit, but you will affect those around you, in doing what is honourable and right and wise, and in giving out kindness of thought and action, thus striving against all ills and helping to make the world a happier and a better place in which to live.

I trust that you will be successful in all your tasks, and may God be with you all in the coming years.



Olave Baden-Powell

BIOGRAPHY

1889 February 22nd: birth of Olave St. Clair Soames at Stubbing Court, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, the third child and second daughter of Harold and Katharine Soames.

1901 Goes abroad for the first time to Mentone, France. Starts to play the violin. All formal education by governesses ceases.

1904 Confirmed by the Bishop of Crediton at St. Gregory's Church, Dawlish. Portrait by Nathaniel H. J. Baird in oil (Chesterfield Girl Guide Headquarters).

1907 As debutante 'comes out'. Writes to London hospital to enquire about training as nurse and is told to train locally.

1908 Father buys the family's first real home, Grey Rigg in Dorset. (Until this time Olave's father restlessly moves the family from one stately home to another – West House, Chesterfield 1890; Renishaw Hall, Scarborough, 1895; Bryerswood, Lake Windermere and 18 St. James's Place, London, 1897; Pixton Park, Somerset, 1898; Cranborne Manor, Salisbury, 1899; Purley Hall, Pangbourne, 1901; Luscombe Castle, Devon, 1904; Bradfield, Devon, 1905; Hardwick, Suffolk, 1907.) Works with Invalid Children's Aid Association at holiday convalescent home one day a week.

1912 January 3rd: sails from Southampton on the RMS *Arcadian* with father for holiday in Jamaica. Meets Robert Baden-Powell on board. October 30th: marries Robert Baden-Powell at St. Peter's Church, Parkstone. Portrait, a drawing by Leon Sprinck (Foxlease, Hampshire).

1913 Warranted as Scoutmaster of the Ewhurst Scout Troop.

‘Let us go forward with further zest and keenness to bring to the children all we have to give them in ideals and principles, and to do our best to make them the women the country needs.’

(In *The Guide*, December 1930)

Birth of son (Arthur Robert Peter).

1914 Writes first message in *Girl Guides' Gazette*. Offers her services to the GGA but is turned down as thought too young.

1915 Birth of daughter (Heather Grace). Goes to France and works in Army Recreation Huts, sponsored by the Mercers' Company and the Scout Association.

1916 March: appointed County Commissioner for Guides, Sussex. Tours Britain with B-P to support him in developing the Scout and Guide Movements. From this time onwards Olave travels extensively all over the

world for this purpose.

October: appointed Chief Commissioner.

'The Girl Guide Movement', a pamphlet by Olave, published.

1917 Birth of second daughter (Betty).

'Training Girls as Guides' by Olave published.

1918 Acclaimed Chief Guide at the County Commissioners' Conference, and presented with 'Silver Fish', the highest Guide award. (In fact the 'Silver' Fish was gold as a token of the Commissioners' esteem.) The B-Ps buy their first home, Pax Hill, Bentley, Hampshire. Olave is one of a number of eminent women chosen to go to France to investigate rumours of misconduct among the WAAC. Vice-President of the Camping Club of Great Britain and Ireland. Father dies.

1919 Sets up the Guide International and Imperial Councils from which emerges the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) in 1928. Sister Auriol dies, and Auriol's three children become members of the B-Ps' family at Pax Hill.

1920 Attends the first World Conference for Guides at Foxlease, Hampshire. Enrols Princess Mary, daughter of King George V, as a member of the Guide Movement, prior to Her Royal Highness becoming President of the Association.

1923 Makes her first radio broadcast while on tour in North America.

1924 Attends the first World Camp for Guides, Foxlease, Hampshire, the idea for which was Olave's.

1925 Presented with her own Guide Standard. Chief Guide's violin 'Diana' presented to GGA

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by Miss Sibyl Mounsey-Heysham the owner, which starts the Association's Musical Instruments Loan Scheme.

1930 Acclaimed World Chief Guide at the 6th World Conference, Foxlease.

1932 Appointed Dame Grand Cross of the British Empire (GBE) "for services to the GGA". Attends opening of the first Guide World Centre, 'Our Chalet' in Switzerland. Attends the Guides' 21st Birthday Service in St. Paul's Cathedral. Mother dies.

1933 With her husband is a passenger on the first of three Scout and Guide friendship cruises to visit members of the two Movements in other countries. The original idea was Olave's. Has audience with Pope Pius XI. Portrait, in oil by David Jagger, of Chief Guide in uniform, a gift from Guide Commissioner to B-P to celebrate the Guides' 21st Birthday in 1932 (Waddow, Lancashire).

1934 Goes on second friendship cruise. Presented with the 'Silver Wolf', the highest Scout award.

1935 'Travelogues' by Olave published.

1936 'Guide Link' by Olave published.

1937 Silver Wedding – Princess Mary attends dinner in honour of the B-Ps.

1938 Goes on third Scout and Guide friendship cruise. Makes first television broadcast from Alexandra Palace. With B-P leaves Britain to live in Kenya.

1939 Colony Commissioner for Kenya.

1940 Family reunion in Kenya.

1941 Death of B-P. Becomes President of the East Africa Women's League.

None of us are happy about present social conditions; there is much that is waiting for us to do in the future, much that will soon be in the hands of the children we are training.

Message Spoken by the Chief Guide

1942 Returns to Britain. Is granted a Grace and Favour apartment at Hampton Court. Gives former home, Pax Hill, to the GGA to be used as a Guide Homecraft Training Centre (eventually house is sold by GGA in 1953).

1944 Receives Guide Thinking Day messages flown by carrier pigeon from all over Great Britain to Guide Headquarters – this is the highlight of the fourth target month for the B-P Memorial Fund. Meeting with General Charles de Gaulle in the Council Chamber at Girl Guide Headquarters, London.

1944 Nearby flying bombs bring down her ceiling in Hampton Court. October: starts sending official messages to Guides in France and Switzerland.

1945 April: tours Europe to encourage the renaissance of Scouting and Guiding. Audience with Pope Pius XII.

1946 Meets Winston Churchill while on tour of North America and West Indies at Havana, Cuba. (Following year her nephew marries Winston Churchill's youngest daughter, Mary.)

1947 Opens Broneirion, the Welsh Training Centre. 'Opening Doorways' by Olave published.

1949 Revisits old home in Nyeri, Kenya.

Portrait, watercolour by Agnes Trinder, in Guide uniform (Commonwealth Headquarters).

1950 Receives the Freedom of Poole, Dorset.

1956 Portrait, in oil by Grace Wheatley, in World Chief Guide Uniform, commissioned for Centenary Year (Commonwealth Headquarters).

1957 During Centenary Year (100 years since the birth of B-P) attends two of the four Guide World Camps, in Switzerland and Great Britain, and receives 'birthday present' of £14,000 to rehouse the second Guide World Centre, 'Our Ark'. (Olave had sent out a letter to Patrol Leaders asking for help to raise the money in 1956.)

Opens 'Our Cabana' in Mexico, the third Guide World Centre.

1956 Lays the Foundation Stone of Baden-Powell House, the Scout International Hostel and Headquarters (which the Queen opens in 1961).

1961 Suffers small heart attack while on tour in Canada.

1962 Brother dies. Son dies.

1963 At the invitation of the National Trust, officially opens Brownsea Island, National Trust Property.

1930
1963

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'Our Ark' is renamed 'Olave House' in honour of the Chief Guide.

1966 Opens 'Sangam' in India, the fourth Guide World Centre. Becomes very distressed at the Scout Association's Advance Party Report which recommends that the ten Laws should be reduced to seven, and her relationship with the Scout Association is strained for several years.

1967 Unveils stone on Evening Hill, Poole, Dorset to commemorate the borough's close associations with the B-P family and Scouting and Guiding.

1968 Attends the launching ceremony in London of the 'new' Guide Programme with the 'new' Handbooks.

1969 On her 80th birthday reads the lesson at the Thinking Day Service in Westminster Abbey. Chalk drawing, not in uniform, by Julia Pannett (Commonwealth Headquarters).

1970 During Guide Diamond Jubilee Year travels extensively. Receives a diamond from South African Guides which is sold on behalf of the Association. Attends Jubilee celebrations in Britain, including Reception at Whitehall attended by the Queen and Princess Margaret, and the national Thanksgiving Service at Westminster Abbey.

July: discovered to be suffering from diabetes, and this marks the end of all foreign travel. By this time Olave has travelled 487,000 miles by (air not counting travel by sea, road and rail) to promote Scouting and Guiding world-wide.

1972 Harry Wheatcroft names a red tea rose 'Olave Baden-Powell'.

1973 Autobiography *Window On My Heart* published. Leaves

● I feel like the mother of a very large family of children and I care for you very much. ●

Hampton Court and moves into a nursing home near Guildford.

1974 Receives the Ceres Medal from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (part of the UN). Each year the FAO produce a coin with Ceres on one side and the head of a distinguished woman on the other.

1975 Visits Commonwealth Headquarters for the last time, and takes tea with the staff.

1976 Makes her last television recording (on the 'Jim'll Fix It' show) which is broadcast the following year.

1977 Takes tea with members of the World Committee at Olave House.

June 25th: dies, and ashes interred in her husband's grave in Nyeri, Kenya.

Sept 26th: Thanksgiving Service in Westminster Abbey. The World Chief Guide Memorial Fund and the United Kingdom Chief Guide Memorial Fund launched.

1979 First year that the Olave Baden-Powell Bursaries are awarded. (These are Bursaries which are allocated to Guides, Rangers or Young Leaders to help them develop a particular skill or

talent, or to discover more about a special interest, the money coming from the UK Chief Guide Memorial Fund.)

1981 February 12th: Joint memorial stone to Olave and Robert Baden-Powell dedicated in Westminster Abbey – the first joint memorial in the Abbey. Winners of the first Olave Award announced at the 24th World Conference in France. (Award instituted by WAGGGS to keep alive Olave's belief in the spirit of service and for any Pack, Company, or Unit which gives outstanding service in community with no thought of recognition, over a substantial period of time.)

1983 Ground-breaking ceremony in Hampstead, London to mark the beginning of phase I or the building of a big architectural complex to be called the 'Olave Baden-Powell Centre' in memory of the World Chief Guide. (Project is partly financed by money from the World Chief Guide Memorial Fund.)

Select Bibliography

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[as told to Mary Drewery] *Window On My Heart.* Baden-Powell (Olave). 1973. (Hodder & Stoughton)

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* suitable for younger readers.

1966
1977