

# leader

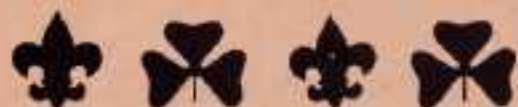


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with  
Mum  
and  
Dad*

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*Mum Dad  
Pax Hill 1929*

*Betty*



# Life with M

By JIM MACKIE

The railway station at Taunton in Somerset is really not very large, nor was it particularly crowded on the afternoon of June 13 when my wife and I stepped down from the train that had carried us there from London's Paddington Station; however, we were still concerned that we might not be able to recognize the lady we had come to see.

I was in Taunton to interview the Honourable Mrs. Betty Clay, youngest daughter of the Founder, Lord Baden-Powell, and Olave Lady B.-P. We had never met before and the arrangements for the interview had been made, on my behalf, by Jack Olden, Publicity Manager of The Scout Association. When I made the request, I had no idea that the Clays lived some 2½ hours by train, west of London, but Mr. and Mrs. Clay, recognizing that the trip to and from London, along with the interview, could not be done comfortably in one day, very kindly invited us to stay overnight.

We soon found that our worries regarding recognition were quite unnecessary. As a child, Betty Baden-Powell had been described as having "black hair, fair skin and resembling her mother, Lady B.-P., in both looks and temperament." This is still a very apt description and if sight were not sufficient, when she gave us a warm welcome and strong handshake, she proved most certainly that she was, indeed, her mother's daughter. Their voices are remarkably alike and this fact was confirmed on my return home when I compared the tape made with Mrs. Clay and another made four years earlier when I interviewed Lady B.-P. in her apartment of "Grace and Favour" at Hampton Court Palace.

Gervas and Betty Clay now live in a delightful 17th-century country home in rural Somerset. Located off the main road, the house is surrounded by a large and beautiful garden.

After dinner, we settled down in their comfortable living room, which contains many souvenirs and treasures, and looked through a number of the scrapbooks that Betty Clay has kept, on a yearly basis, since she was a very young girl. The books, wonderful memories of an exciting and worthwhile life, contain family photographs, postcards, many from her mother and father, souvenir menus and letters.

Later, we recorded the following interview and asked Mrs. Clay to tell us something of her life at home with her parents and, later, her 30-year stay in Africa where Mr. Clay was a member of the British Colonial Service in Northern Rhodesia.

**JFM:** Will you tell us something about your life at home with your Mother and Father?

**BC:** Well, I was very lucky because I had just about the happiest childhood that anybody could have. We had a very happy home in the country — Pax Hill, Hampshire — and I remember particularly the walks and rides with my parents. My father was very keen that we should have ponies to ride and, at a very early stage, he insisted that we look after them ourselves. This meant tending to the harness and grooming and caring for the horses. The cleaning out of

the stables was also a large part of our lives. And then, of course, he taught us to ride, on an enormous horse, about seventeen hands, that he had been given after the Boer War.

One thing I particularly remember about our rides was the sort of assignments he would give us. He would send us out in front and say, "Now, please tell me how many sheep there are between here and Isington Mill." We would then have to charge off on our ponies, count the sheep, rush back, salute and report, salute again and then whoever was correct received a prize for being a good reporter. Very much the type of thing he put into Scouting — observation, deduction and correct reporting.

**JFM:** Was he a strict father?

**BC:** Very, oh very, but not with the hand, with the eye. He had only to look at us and, my word, he put such an expression into his face, you didn't do that again in a hurry.

**JFM:** What are your first memories of Scouting and Guiding?

**BC:** Mainly the visitors to Pax Hill, I think. There was a constant stream of Scout and Guide visitors from all over the world. I remember the 1929 Arrowe Park



# Mum and Dad



Jamboree very well and the many people who attended from abroad and, after, came to stay at Pax Hill; so many in fact that my brother and sister (Peter and Heather) and I were strung out in tents on the lawn because there wasn't room for us in the house. I remember one man in particular because we all said he didn't wash while he was there. At the end of his stay, his towel was still folded exactly as I had put it in his room before his arrival.

Then I remember clearly the yearly party held by my parents for the entire staff of the Scout and Guide headquarters. They used to travel down the 30 miles in coaches and it was always a wonderful day in summer.

**JFM:** What was the first major Scouting or Guiding event that you took part in?

**BC:** I should think that the first time I was really, as it were, on parade, was about 1932 when my parents took us on a tour of Switzerland, Belgium and Holland and we had to be on our best behaviour and in our best uniforms.

**JFM:** As a child, were you impressed with the adoration that must have been coming through for your parents?

**BC:** No, I don't think so.

**JFM:** You don't remember that at all?

**BC:** No, I didn't even notice it. I mean, they were just Mum and Dad to me. The fact that they had to go about and do these Guide and Scout things, well that was just part of life.

**JFM:** Then you weren't aware that your father was the Founder of the two Movements?

**BC:** Not in the least, no, it didn't sort of impinge at all. In fact, in a way I think it is a good thing that a child takes his parents for granted but then, in a way, it is a sad thing. I realized it when I was grown up because I didn't, shall I describe it, sit at his feet enough, and it was only after I had left home, and had gone away from him and didn't have the opportunity anymore of learning from him and drinking in all his wisdom, that I realized just how wise and wonderful he was. But then it was too late really, and so, in a way, as a child I threw away many golden opportunities.

In fact, I can tell you about one tiny incident that has always stuck in my mind. He had just written a book and Mum gave it to me to read. I don't remember which book it was, but I suppose I found it too heavy, too difficult. I must have been about eleven and can remember saying to Mum, in some disappointment, "Why doesn't he write a storybook?" I didn't appreciate how immensely valuable his book was at the time because I was too young.

**JFM:** What's your most vivid memory of your Father?

**BC:** Oh, his sense of fun, I think. He was always full of fun, jokes and good humour. He enjoyed life enormously and always found a joke in it.

**JFM:** When did you begin to travel with your parents to world Scouting events?

**BC:** I should think that the 1929 Jamboree was the first, but Peter had attended Wembley in 1924; he also went to Jamborees in Hungary and Denmark.

**JFM:** Your first visit to Canada was in 1935?

**BC:** Yes, that was our first, really big, adventure. My sister and I had both trained as secretaries, so Heather went along as Dad's secretary and I did Mum's work. We took off on this world tour in 1934 and went to an Australian Jamboree via Ceylon, Malaya and what is now Indonesia. From Australia, we went to New Zealand and then it was across the Pacific to Canada where we spent about two months travelling from coast to coast.

**JFM:** How long were you actually away from home?

**BC:** Oh, it must have been six or seven months, and it was Scouting and Guiding all the way. They were, both of them, hard at it — speeches, meetings, rallies, dinners — the whole way.

**JFM:** And you and your sister worked all the way?

**BC:** We were very much the working girls, bashing away on our typewriters early in the morning to keep up with the mail. Both parents were meticulous at making plans beforehand and thanking people afterwards. They were so full of admiration and praise of the plans that people made for them and wanted to make sure people knew how much they appreciated their efforts.

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Garvas and Betty Clay, 1974

Betty Clay unveiling the Brownses Memorial

Lord and Lady B.P. at Pax Hill



## Life with Mum and Dad

(Continued from page 5)



**JFM:** Tell us something about your own family — that is, the Clay family; your early life in Rhodesia, your children and grandchildren.

**BC:** Well, I met Gervas Clay on board ship in 1936, when I was returning to England with my parents after an African tour. Of course, you see, all the best people meet their loved ones on a ship; my Father and Mother did and, like them, Gervas and I also share a birth date. Strangely enough, my brother Peter and his wife Carine also shared the same birth date.

Gervas was in the British Colonial Service and was coming home on a four-month leave, so I jolly well had to make up my mind in four months. We were married the day before he was due to return to Northern Rhodesia, where he was stationed and where we lived for the next thirty years.

**JFM:** What about your life in Rhodesia?

**BC:** Well, it was a wonderful life in those days. Gervas was District Commissioner of an area about the size of Wales or Switzerland and it was really like running a vast estate. He was, . . . well, the Africans used to say to us, "You are our father and mother," and that about sums it up. He was their advisor, counsellor, friend, postmaster, tax collector, veterinary surgeon, doctor and, well, everything. We had seventeen different homes during our stay and all through the war, in particular, our nearest white neighbours were 30 to 40 miles away. But, of course, we were there for the benefit of the Africans, so what need of white people?

Our four children, a girl and three boys, were all born out there and sometimes it was a bit hair-raising, from the health point of view. We were miles from the nearest doctor and did have a few bad moments but we were fortunate and got over them.

Naturally, all four children were involved in Scouting and Guiding and although, at the moment, none of them are active (they are all involved in growing families), they have served as leaders.

**JFM:** Mr. Clay has been involved in Scouting since his return to England.

**BC:** Yes, that's true; since he retired. He didn't get the opportunity as a boy or during his Colonial days but, since our return to England, he has served as county secretary and county commissioner — Somerset, and is, presently, chairman of the county Scout council.

**JFM:** And your present involvement?

**BC:** I am, presently, president of Southwest England Guides and chairman of various committees. I am

also involved in the youth committee of the county council.

**JFM:** Do you travel on behalf of Guiding?

**BC:** Yes, quite a bit. Simply because people got to know me when I was doing a bigger job than at present (until recently Mrs. Clay was Deputy Chief Commissioner (Guides) for England), and then they very often say, if Mother can't come, could I?

**JFM:** Which leads us naturally to Lady B.-P. How is she?

**BC:** She is reasonably well. She went to a nursing home last winter because Hampton Court was so bitterly cold and has now decided to stay on permanently and has given up her apartment of Grace and Favour. She is comfortable, well looked after and very peaceful. She feels rather tired, naturally; she has been wearing herself out for years.

**JFM:** Recently you led an African tour called "In the Footsteps of B.-P."

**BC:** Yes, the tour was suggested by the famous Thomas Cook's World Travel Service and planned by the Scout and Guide associations of South Africa. There were twenty-four of us — a real conglomeration of people, varying in age from late twenties to nearly seventy; a good mixture of men and women, almost all of them keen Scouters and Guiders or ex-leaders . . . people from all over Britain.

We took off from London in March, 1974, and spent 19 days travelling around South Africa. Everywhere we went, we were met and entertained by Scout and Guide people. We also had Bill Hillcourt with us who wrote the famous biography of my Father, *Two Lives of a Hero*. The tour was, in a way, based on that book. I felt it was important that the people should know what Dad had got from Africa, which later became part of Scouting.

We saw the positive contribution Scouting and Guiding is making towards keeping harmony in that troubled country, and we were all most impressed. Many in the party, whose prior impressions of South Africa were based on newspaper reports of apartheid were flabbergasted to see European, African and Indian Scouters and Guiders meeting, talking, eating and laughing together.

**JFM:** Had you visited Mafeking before?

**BC:** Oh yes, dozens of times. We had to go through it every time we went on leave and came back.

**JFM:** Is there anything left from the time of the siege?

**BC:** Oh, very much so! The siege, after all, made Mafeking famous, so lots of things were saved. Among other sites, we toured Cannon Kopje which was a major observation outpost, and the rock formations and little tunnels and wall are still there. When something falls down, it is repaired.

**JFM:** Was Mafeking the highlight of the tour?

**BC:** Well, you know, it seems to me the whole thing was a highlight, although every member of the tour seemed to remember a different highlight. Mafeking was exciting but our final stop was really the most thrilling and emotional. We went to Nyeri, Kenya, where my Father lived for the last two years of his life. We went to see his house, Paxtu, which still contains many of his original paintings and personal possessions and then to the little churchyard of St. Peter's where he is buried. African Scouts and Guiders joined us there for a charming ceremony. That was perhaps the most wonderful moment for everybody, because they really felt near him.

**JFM:** When did you last visit with your Father?

**BC:** We visited him three times, on leaves from Northern Rhodesia. It was wartime and we were really not allowed to be away from our post for any length of time, not too frequently. Then in November, 1940, when the news was so terribly bad for England, I got a message from Mum, asking if my cousin Christian, who was staying with us, could come to Nyeri and help her take care of Dad. She was still doing a lot of public work and sometimes had to go off for the day and wanted someone with him.

The only way to get there was overland, by road, so we got into our car and drove the 1200 miles. When we got there, he was very surprised to see us. When we walked in, he couldn't believe it, and it was a wonderful moment. He was still quite well and able to go walking in the garden and on the local golf course. He was also still painting and I remember one day he was doing a picture of an antelope and said, "Now, do you see, Bet? Now look when you are painting an animal's eye, it has a spot of light in it and you have to leave just a tiny bit of white when you paint the eye." And there he was, at 83 years, painting the animal's eye with an absolutely sure hand. He was still so interested in everything and, of course, still did his own Christmas cards. That was the last time I saw him. (During our visit we saw a number of B.-P.'s original paintings, including three that hung in our bedroom.)

**JFM:** Her Canadian friends would be interested in hearing about your sister Heather.

**BC:** Heather was always a great horsewoman so when her husband retired from the Royal Air Force, they bought a farm in Oxfordshire where they breed and train horses. They run the farm without help, so have a very busy life. They had two sons; the older one, Michael, was the only one of our children who inherited my Father's gift for drawing and he became an architect. Unfortunately, he was drowned in a tragic ferry sinking off the coast of Greece, which was a terrible blow for Heather and John. Their second son, Timothy, is married and now has a little daughter, so Heather, like me, is a grandmother.

**JFM:** Are you planning a trip to North America in the near future?

**BC:** We would very much like to visit Canada again but our eyes still look chiefly toward Africa because

two of our sons and their families are there. But we do send our very best wishes to all our friends involved in Scouting and Guiding in Canada.

When we finished taping the interview, I asked Gervas Clay what it was like to ask B.-P. for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Mr. Clay, I believe, exemplifies that breed of Englishman who devoted his life to the extension of the British Empire in strange, new worlds and, in the process, put up with many discomforts, problems and unique situations.

In answering my question, he reminded me that he really didn't have much time to worry about the prospects of facing the world-famous general and Founder of Scouting because he was due back in Africa in less than a month. He did, however, remember a request from his own father who asked him to see if his prospective father-in-law owned a pair of long pants, or if the dress for the wedding party would include shorts! And at that point, I remembered how strange B.-P. always looked to me in the few photographs that I had seen of him in a business or dress suit, accustomed as I was to seeing him in shorts.

Baden-Powell was 60 when his daughter Betty was born, but she never thought of him as being old. Mr. Clay told me of one of their few marital disagreements that centred around a statement he made, quite innocently, on "how old her Father was," and was told by his bride, in no uncertain terms, that he was not *old!* Actually, B.-P. was nearly 80 years of age at the time!

Very often, the children of the famous are forced to share their parents with the public, to the detriment of their own lives.

Although Lord and Lady B.-P. had dedicated their lives to Scouting and Guiding, they were determined that their children would have as normal a childhood as possible. Trips were planned while the young Baden-Powells were away at school and, during the holidays, the youngsters often shared in their parents' adventures.

Family events were very important and at such times other things took a back seat. It is to the credit of these remarkable people that, to their children, "they were just Mum and Dad."

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