

How Did We Get Here?

VICTORIAN GIRL GUIDING TURNS 100 IN 2011!



Throughout our lives, the Girl Guides Association of Victoria has been there for girls, young and not-so-young women to join and enjoy a program of informal learning, opportunities, fun, personal development and friendship. So just how did Guiding arrive in Victoria?

Following the Brownsea Island Camp and after the release of the magazine *Scouting for Boys*, many groups of girls as well as boys read and tried out Baden-Powell's (B-P) ideas and formed themselves into Patrols.

Although there were no jet planes, emails or mobile phones in 1908, news of Scouting soon reached Australia, along with the magazine, resulting in several boys banding together to form a Scout Patrol, then seeking an adult to act as their Scout Master. Not to be left out, groups of Victorian girls formed their own Patrols too and like several girl groups in the

UK and other countries, wrote to B-P begging to be allowed to join and register themselves as Girl Scouts. However adamant he was that it was a boy's only organisation, such was their determination that they went ahead and registered themselves anyway, by filling out the application form, using only their initials and not their full names. It is not known how many Patrols of girls were in existence in Victoria prior to the Crystal Palace Rally in September 1909 but it is noted in the book *Those Boy Scouts*¹ that at a meeting of Scout Masters in 1909, they were told "any Scout Master assisting or aiding in the formation of Girl Scouts should be asked to resign from his troop"!

B-P underestimated the determination of the girls and they continued to enjoy these activities until that very courageous group, led by their Patrol Leader Marguerite de Beaumont, gate crashed the first Boy Scout rally, announcing they were the 'Girl Scouts'. He was then 'forced' to look at formalising an organisation specifically for girls run by his sister Agnes and so began Girl Guides.



At 17 years of age, Winifred Gipps from South Yarra led a group calling themselves 'Florence Nightingale Girl Aids' who met at the statue of Queen Victoria in the Domain or at St Chad's Church (now St Martin's Theatre). It is reported they had a bugler and a drummer. Winifred wrote to Agnes Baden-Powell applying for registration but was told she was too young to be recognised but that as she had the backing of a Committee, Agnes sent her information and they continued to correspond. Finally in 1912, when she turned 21 years of age, Winifred Gibbs was issued with her warrant as Captain of 1st Melbourne Baden-Powell Girl Guides.

In Hawthorn, Miss Louie Kerr who had previously helped her fiancé with his troop of Boy Scouts, wrote to Miss Baden-Powell and was given permission to become a Captain (Leader) of Baden-Powell Girl Guides. She was also sent instructions and the Law along with her warm wishes for success as a Girl Guide Leader.

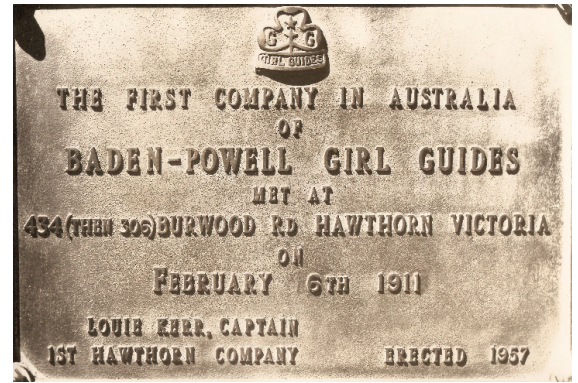
A notice appeared in the *Hawthorn and Camberwell Citizen* inviting those who wished to become Girl Guides to meet at 306² Burwood Road Hawthorn on 6 February, 1911. Reassurances about conduct were added. A large umbrella, striped red and white, swung out from the upper storey of this building, high above the street. This splash of colour was a treasured landmark and one of the last old business signs to survive in the area.

Mr and Mrs Aylen and their daughter Rosa, aged 13, hosted the evening at their home behind the shop where 10 girls came to meet Miss Louie Kerr and they decided, on 6 February 1911 to form 1st Hawthorn Baden-Powell Girl Guides. It appears that it was the first Company in Australia to have been registered with the full official title chosen when the Association was founded in May 1910 and by which it was incorporated in 1915, to protect the title and register the badges.





In 1957 (the centenary of the birth of Baden-Powell), a plaque commemorating the first Guide meeting of the 1st Hawthorn Company was unveiled on the building by Lady Baden-Powell. Also present were six of the original members, some of whom were at the time Trefoil Guild members. Since then, the building has been sold and demolished and the plaque is now held at The Joyce Price Centre for Girl Guides Victoria.



1st Hawthorn numbers soon increased to 15. The Mayor and Councillors of Hawthorn sponsored the Guides and they were permitted to meet in the sports pavilion. Scoutmasters instructed the girls in star-gazing and allied camping activities.

The girls had to make or collect everything they needed for their uniform, which was a navy blue dress with a Khaki 'sailor' collar and mushroom-type straw hat. A Staff was the final part of the uniform and required a special skill to be able to use it.

The Guides learnt needlework, cooking, ambulance work, nursing, physical culture as well as camping, outdoor skills such as drill, hiking, semaphore, Morse and star-gazing.

The company met regularly and frequently went camping. They camped at a variety of places and one of the Guides noted that they went to Dromana for a week, travelling down Port Phillip Bay by paddle steamer. Members of Hawthorn and Melbourne Guide Companies, along with Girl Guides possibly from Fitzroy and Richmond, helped to form the Guard of Honour for Sir Robert Baden-Powell at Eastern Hill Fire Station in 1912 during Girl Guide day.



After B-P's visit, Guiding's profile was lifted by frequent complimentary articles in the newspapers, along with photographs of their activities.

In 1912 Agnes Baden-Powell's book *How Girls Can Help to Build an Empire* was published. This was the first Girl Guide handbook ever written. War was declared on 4 August 1914 and lasted until 11 November 1918 and during this time, 1st Hawthorn Guides made themselves white uniforms and became a Red Cross Corps, attached to the central depot at Government House, until they gradually dispersed and Miss Kerr married and moved away from the area. Of their time in 1st Hawthorn, Rosa Aylen wrote "we were a very professional company but a very happy one. Captain Kerr was a wonderful person; very kind and tolerant. I believe the members of her company have carried throughout their lives the high standard of morals she taught us".

After the end of World War 1, Guiders and Guides returned home from England or came here for the first time and in doing so, brought with them a fresh lot of ideas and enthusiasm. So once more, the girls took hold of their own destiny and new Guide Companies popped up all over the state of Victoria.



¹ *Those Boy Scouts* by A.R.Milne & C.B.Heward

² Burwood Road was renumbered some years later and 306 became 434 Burwood Road