SCOUTING AND ST JOHN AMBULANCE AUSTRALIA

Baden-Powell’s advocacy for first aid and life-saving – a perspective in the Centenary Year of Scouting.

John Pearn

A paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the St John Ambulance Australia Historical Society, held at the Priory Meeting, Adelaide, June 2008.

Major General John Pearn AM RFD
MD PhD DSc (Hon)
President, St John Ambulance Australia (Qld)
c/- History and Heritage
Department of Paediatrics & Child Health
Royal Children’s Hospital
Brisbane Qld 4029
ABSTRACT

In 1908, Lieutenant General Robert Baden-Powell published *Scouting for Boys* and established the Boy Scouts, which within a decade had grown to be the largest youth organisation in the world. So it remains today. *Scouting for Boys* contained 28 “Camp Fire Yarns”, of which three were incorporated in the chapter entitled “Saving Life; Or, How to Deal with Accidents”. Thirty years previously, Surgeon Major Peter Shepherd (1841-1878) and Colonel Francis Duncan (1836-1888) had introduced the first civilian First Aid training for adults, conducted in segregated classes held at the Presbyterian Church Hall near the Woolwich Arsenal in London. Baden-Powell adopted these concepts and promoted both the chivalric heritage (inherent in the Order of St John) and its pragmatic teaching of the drills and skills of First Aid, incorporating these themes into the broader curriculum of Scouting. He promoted the teaching of First Aid as part of his broader ethos that one could be an optimal citizen, albeit as a child or youth, if one could “Be Prepared” both by prior training and knowledge; and by the maintenance of personal fitness, to help others. Shepherd and Duncan’s pioneering St John advocacy was to bring the hitherto exclusively-military drills and skills of First Aid to the civilian adult population. Baden-Powell further extended what had been a novel, if not radical concept, to include boys and male youths. This pioneering advocacy was one specific example of his broader promotion of training in rescue, resuscitation and pre-hospital care that would enable youths to “Be Prepared” to deal with emergencies encountered in the pre-hospital scene. Many of the First Aid techniques which Baden-Powell proposed have changed; and many accident risks, such as runaway horses in the streets of towns and bites by rabid dogs, commonplace in his day, have disappeared. Nevertheless, his general principles of training for safety and rescue, accident site control, the seeking of counselling for depressed or suicidal victims and the hands-on skills to treat common injuries remain true today. This paper is a perspective audit of an important milestone on the road to widespread community training of essential life-saving and resuscitation skills.
The year 2008 is the Australian Year of the Scout\(^1\). It is also the world centenary of the publication of one of the most popular and perhaps most influential books\(^2\) published in English, Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys*\(^3\). It is the centenary also of Lieutenant-General (later, Lord) Baden-Powell’s first uniformed Scout Camp, held at Carr Edge, near the village of Fourstones, four kilometres south of Hadrian’s Wall, in Northumberland\(^4\).

Exactly thirty-three years before, in 1878, two British military officers, Surgeon-Major Peter Shepherd (1841-1878) and Colonel Francis Duncan (1936-1888) had established the concepts of First Aid\(^5\), as we know the drills and skills of pre-hospital care of the sick and injured, today.

In 1877, Surgeon-Major Peter Shepherd had written a comprehensive series of lecture notes entitled “Aids for Cases of Injuries and Sudden Illness”, for his radical proposal to teach the skills of military stretcher bearers to adult civilian members of the general public. In 1875, the Order of St John had established its own wheeled transfer litter, called the “St John Ambulance”. It was a short step, in 1877, to the establishment of a volunteer St John Ambulance Association; and a further giant step to the teaching of First Aid to the civilian public. In a rented hall, the Presbyterian Church Sunday School Hall, at Woolwich, south of the Thames in London, Surgeon-Major Shepherd and a Dr Coleman conducted the first First Aid class\(^5\). Shepherd was killed on active service later that year, massacred along with almost 2,000 of his colleagues at the Battle of Isandhlwana, in the Anglo-Zulu War.

After his premature and tragic death, Shepherd’s lecture notes were codified and published as *First Aid to the Injured* over Shepherd’s name, by Dr (later Sir and Lieutenant-General) James Cantlie\(^6\). By December 1878 St John First Aid Classes were being taught to tens of thousands of members of the general public, both in the United Kingdom\(^7\) and in the colonies. Enthusiasm for St John First Aid Classes was boundless and members of the general public were taught in St John Classes in Malta (1882), Cannes, Melbourne (1883), Bermuda, the Bahamas, Bombay, Gibraltar, Hong Kong (1884), New Zealand (1885), Singapore, South Africa (Kimberley in 1885) and in Borneo (1887).
"B.P." conducted an experimental camp on Brownsea Island, off Poole, in 1907. The enterprise was a great success and in January 1908 he started publishing, in fortnightly serial form, the first parts of *Scouting for Boys*. Later that year he conducted the first uniformed Scout Camp at Carr Edge near Hadrian’s Wall in Northumberland. At that time he was based in North East England in the context of his appointment as Commandant of the newly-formed Northumbria Division of the Territorial Army.

By the time of Baden-Powell’s invention of the Boy Scouts Movement in 1908, hundreds of thousands of civilians had completed a 16-hour examined and certified course in St John Ambulance First Aid.

Lieutenant-General Baden-Powell was influenced by both the pragmatic teaching of first aid and by the codes of chivalry that had been adopted by the secular Order of St John, established by Queen Victoria in 1888. Its governance was invested in *The Grand Priory in the British Realm of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem*. From that date, dedication to the alleviation of pain and suffering, as a volunteer skill in the Good Samaritan ethic, became the chief terms of reference of the Order.

In *Scouting for Boys* (1908), Baden-Powell wrote specifically of the work of St John Ambulance and included first aid and its concepts of rescue in the curriculum of outdoor training and adventure which he devised for Scouts. Specifically, he promoted the altruistic proactive treatment of the sick and injured as part of the Scouting regimen.

**SCOUTING AND OTHER BODIES.**

Prior to 1908, Baden-Powell had seen the virtues of training, discipline and collegiate pride which were espoused by many other youth organisations. Prior to his establishment of the Boy Scouts, as the national and Empire hero of Mafeking (1900), he had been actively associated, either as a role model, a counsellor or as Patron, with many youth organisations. These included The Boys’ Brigade, the Junior YMCA, the Church Lads’ Brigade, the American Temperance Cold Water Army, the Baden-Powell League of Health and Manliness, the Baden-Powell Brigade, the Baden-Powell Boys of Greenock
and the Baden-Powell Anti-Cigarette League. A number of these youth groups were Church based. One example was the Baden-Powell Brigade which was a branch of the Sunday School Union of the Primitive Methodists. Other bodies with which he was closely linked and whose work he promoted included the Royal Humane Society and the Boys’ Life Brigade.

Baden-Powell took fragments and ideas from many of these bodies to formulate the miscellany of doctrines which was to form the text of *Scouting for Boys*.

*Scouting for Boys*, described as an “apparent rag-bag of unrelated topics, was in reality a cunning blend of entertainment, moral exhortation, practical advice and escapism”.

The St John chivalry themes and the advocacy for the boys to learn rescue and first aid techniques were contained in three of his 28 Camp Fire Yarns which comprised the first bound edition of *Scouting for Boys*, published on 1 May, 1908.

He recommended several “Books to Read” which encompassed the themes of rescue, life saving and first aid. These eclectic references again came from a miscellany of sources:


*Swimming*, by Professor Holbein.

*Aids to the Injured or Sick*, by H.W. Gell.

[Booklets] on *Sanitation*, and *Hygiene*, by the National Health Society.

**FIRST AID.**

Baden-Powell’s all-encompassing ethos in *Scouting for Boys* was the absolute necessity of prior-training; and the maintenance of personal fitness in order to “Be Prepared” to help others. Baden-Powel had first used the motto, “Be Prepared”, for the South African Constabulary which he had formed in 1901. Later, he adopted it also as the motto for the Boy Scouts in
1908. He noted in *Scouting for Boys* that the motto "Be Prepared", also stood for:

> B.P., my initials, which means that a Scout must always Be Prepared at any moment to do his duty, and to face danger in order to help his fellow-men.\(^{15}\)

This remains today also the ethos of all first aid training. As the national Honorary Medical Adviser of the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia, in the 1989 Foreword to *Preventive First Aid*, I had written:

> First aid is a skill required by all. It is one which knows no rank or status, no limitation by age, and no special constraints of time or place. The most important person in the world if acutely injured is the person standing beside the victim. Every parent, every family member, every workmate, every employer, every citizen – all will at some time be called upon either to restart a stopped heart, or to prevent loss of sight from eye injury, or to prevent a fitting person from choking.\(^{16}\)

Later, when I was national Director of Training for St John Ambulance Australia, I had written in the Foreword to the 1989 edition of *Australian First Aid*:

> First aid remains one of the most important of all life’s skills. The simple yet essential skills to preserve life in an emergency, to protect a casualty and to hasten the healing of wounds, are skills which no parent, partner, motorist or workmate can do
without. Acute illness and sudden injury have no respect for age or status, or place or time. It is one of the imperatives on modern living to ‘do the right thing’ by those around us. First aid training is one vehicle by which these important skills can be achieved”.

In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell condensed his Camp Fire Yarn No. 23 (“Be Prepared for Accidents”) 18, Camp Fire Yarn No. 24 (“Accidents and how to deal with them”) and Camp Fire Yarn No. 25 (“Helping Others”) into a single chapter – Chapter VIII which he entitled “Saving Life, or How to Deal with Accidents”.

In his Camp Fire Yarn No. 23, “Be Prepared for Accidents”, he recounted some stories about chivalrous deeds performed by the Knights of St John, and other recent English accounts of heroism by young people. One of these concerned a courageous attempt at a cliff rescue:

*Three boys were climbing up some cliffs from the seashore, when one fell to the bottom and was very badly hurt.... The third one, Albert Abraham, climbed down to assist the boy who had fallen and he found him lying head downwards between two rocks, with his scalp nearly torn off and his leg broken. Abraham dragged him up out of the reach of the tide, for where he had fallen he was in danger of being drowned and then replaced his scalp and bound it on, and also set his leg as well he could, and bound it up in splints, having learned the ‘First Aid’ duties of the St John’s Ambulance Society. He then climbed*
up the cliff and gathered some ferns and made a bed for the 
injured boy. He stayed with him all that day and when night 
came ... even then when a great seal climbed on the rocks close 
to him and appeared to be rather aggressive, he drove it off 
with stones... 18.

Baden-Powell followed this account with details of a practical training 
game called 'Flinging Squaler':

_This was a piece of weighted stick attached to a life saving line._

_A crossbar with a simulated head, "life-size, representing the 
head and arms of a drowning man, is planted in the ground 20 
yards away. Each competitor throws in turn from a ...line drawn on the ground – whoever throws the furtherest wins, provided the line falls on some part of the dummy, so that it could be caught by the drowning man_18.

Camp Fire Yarn No. 24 told stories of heroism of young people 
rescuing victims of drowning, from fire, from bolting horses and from bites by 
rabid dogs. Practical exercises which were set were the practice of crowd 
control, knowing the positions of "fireplugs and hydrants, police points, fire 
alarms, fire stations, ambulances, hospitals etc., and how to prevent a man 
shooting another with a pistol".

In Camp Fire Yarn No. 25, he summaried detailed instructions on first 
aid skills. These included the Schafer method of artificial respiration; lifts, 
carries and dragging techniques to rescue victims in fires; the treatment of 
burns, the splinting of broken limbs, and the treatment of a range of
conditions from snakebite, through grit in the eye to the management of threatened and attempted suicide victims.

Baden-Powell emphasised the importance of realism in first aid training:

*In practising First Aid, it is a great thing to bespatter the patient with blood to accustom the rescuer to the sight of it, otherwise it will often unnerv[e] it in a real accident. Sheep’s blood can be got from the butcher’s shop.*

Emphasis was also given on practical simulations of burning buildings and the drills of shutting windows and doors, checking for people in need of rescue and survival techniques used to minimise inhalational smoke and gas injury.

Many of the First Aid techniques taught by St John Ambulance and which “B.P.” promoted in *Scouting for Boys* have subsequently been discounted. For example, his 1908 recommendation for the treatment of convulsions or an epileptic seizure was:

*Fits – it is no good to do anything to him but to put a bit of wood or cork between his jaws, so that he does not bite his tongue.*

For the treatment of snakebite, the 1908 recommendation was:

*The great thing is to stop the poison rushing up the veins to the body. To do this bind a cord or handkerchief immediately around the limb above the place where the patient has been bitten... then try to suck the poison out of the wound, and if*
possible cut the wound still more, to make it bleed, and run the poison out... the patient should also be given stimulants, such as coffee or spirits, to a very big extent and not allowed to become drowsy, but should be walked around and pricked and smacked in order to keep his senses alive – practise this process in make-believe.

This latter technique persisted in much First Aid teaching until the experimental work of Dr Struan Sutherland proved its ineffectiveness in 1979; and the first demonstration, in humans, by the author, of the effectiveness of Sutherland’s compressive-bandage and splinting technique.

In other areas, “B.P.’s” proposed First Aid management was wise, undoubtedly culled in derivative fashion from the teachings of the St John Ambulance Association and from other sources. As a cavalry officer, it is known that Baden-Powell was called upon to administer first aid in the field on a number of occasions. A specific example of this, in which he referred to himself as the “doctor”, is recounted in one of the biographies, The Piper of Pax, written by E.K. Wade in 1924. Wade described the aftermath of a skirmish in Zululand, when Baden-Powell (as ADC to his uncle, General Smyth) together with Major McKean (of the Inniskilling Dragoons) completed building Fort McKean, near the township of Etshowe in Zululand. A Zulu girl had been shot and abandoned by her people. Wade recounts how:

The doctor having been left behind at the Garrison at Fort McKean, it fell to Baden-Powell to act as doctor to the sick and wounded with his column, and for such a task he had prepared
himself some years earlier by studying 'First Aid'. Among his patients were two traders, whose wounds had been shockingly neglected, also a white woman, who was suffering from dysentery and fever and several wounded neighbours, all of whom were recovering under the 'doctor's' treatment, although one of them had been wounded in the stomach. [another] Zulu girl had been shot through the abdomen. McKean and B.P. made a fire for her and gave her a restorative. The 'doctor' bandaged her up and got a sack and blanket for her.... In spite of being wrapped in the officers' waterproof cloaks, the girl died.\(^{21}\)

Although much of the First Aid teaching espoused by Baden-Powell has changed, in the "full circle of life", some of the original techniques which he proposed and were subsequently changed, only to revert (in the twenty-first century) back to what was proposed in that era of the first decade of the twentieth century. For the treatment of burns, for example:

**Burns...** Instead of flour or oil to stop the pain of a burn, put a piece of paper firmly over the wound, and the patient will be relieved in a few seconds.

In the case of depressed individuals in whom the First Aider knows that suicide is a significant risk, after speaking with the patient:

Then, if possible, try to get a Salvation Army Officer to see him; he will probably set him right and in this way you may be able to save lives.
This totally naïve and facile exhortation was well meant; and was advocated in an era before specialist counselling or an understanding of the potential risk of suicide which involve all depressed patients, was appreciated.

"BE PREPARED".

In Camp Fire Yarn No. 2, written in one of the early pamphlets published prior to their codification as the bound folio of Scouting for Boys, on 1 May, 1908 "B.P." had written about "Saving Life". He wrote:

Many .... will at one time or another get the chance of it [saving life] if you are prepared to seize the opportunity. That is, you must Be Prepared for it; and you should know what to do the moment an accident occurs – and do it then and there... you must actively practise how to open a manhole and let air into a gassy sewer, how to lift and carry an insensible person, how to collar, save and revive apparently drowned people and so on... when you have learnt all these things you will have confidence and when everybody is in a state of fluster, not knowing what to do, you will quietly step in and do the right thing.22

The novel spectacle of boys undertaking simulated training for such things as accident site control, crowd control and competitive First Aid games-drills, inevitably subjected then to ridicule:

Like members of early Christian sects, the first Boy Scouts were subject to frequent ridicule... the ridicule seemed a small price to pay for this organised example from repressive school-
masters, moralising parsons and coddling parents... there was
no radio then, no cinema and too few playing fields and most
schools were tyrannical places – Scouting seemed heaven-sent
to boys and to those who cared for them ... 23.

A hundred years later, uniformed and disciplined training of the youth
of both sexes also does not find favour with all. Nevertheless, Baden-Powell's
foresight and advocacy that boys, as well as adults, should learn First Aid
drills was pioneering in its concept and salutary in its motives. Although
many of the techniques of First Aid have changed, the principles of Baden-
Powell's teaching remain as true and as appropriate today as they did a
century ago. "B.P.'s" advocacy of the desiderata of First Aid and rescue
training was not primarily for self-interest. It was to enable children and
youths, just like adults, to "Be Prepared" to help others who suffered the
injuries of daily civilian life; and those who were victims of life-threatening
emergencies. St John ethos had similarly stressed the Good Samaritan ethic.

One of Baden-Powell's legacies, highlighted in this Centenary audit of his
work, was to promote and extend the altruistic and humanitarian work of the
Order of St John, and to offer it to the young. St John later adopted this
concept also with its uniformed St John cadets, lowering the bar progressively
in the later decades of the twentieth century to include safety training and
basic first aid skills for primary school children. Baden-Powell would have
approved.
References

1. NOTE. The Australian Government declared the year 2008 to be The Year of the Scout, celebrating the Centenary of Scouting in Australia. Many formal celebrations were held to celebrate this event, including the issue on 19 February 2008 of a series of postage stamps to commemorate the centenary; and the issue by the Royal Australian Mint of a dodecahedral 50-cent piece and a limited edition (5000) of sterling silver five-dollar coins. In 2008, there were currently 60,000 Scouts, boys and girls and youths of both sexes, in Australia.


10. NOTE: Major General Baden-Powell was a Vice-President of the Boys’ Brigade five years before he wrote Scouting for Boys (1908). See his autobiographical note in Lessons from the Varsity of Life. (London, 1933: 268).


20. NOTE: Baden-Powell’s sources of first aid doctrine remain unreferenced. Undoubtedly he had had experience with the First Aid drills of military stretcher-bearers. In one of his biographies, *The Piper of Pax*, the author, E.K. Wade, recounted (pp.66,67) how Baden-Powell had administered First Aid to a wounded Zulu girl near Fort McKean, Zululand on 11 July 1888. Baden-Powell knew of Dr H.W. Gell’s *Aids to the Injured or Sick*, and recommended it as a text for Scouts in Chaper VIII of *Scouting for Boys*.


The Author

Major General John Pearn is the Vice-President of Scouts Australia (Queensland) and has been a Councillor of Scouts Australia (Queensland) since 1992. He was an active Scout and in 1955 was awarded the Scout Cord. He has served as a National Councillor of the Scout Association of Australia since 1997.

As a paediatrician also, General Pearn was appointed (1995) as Adviser to the Chief Commissioner of the Scout’s Child Protection Code of Conduct. He served also as an Adviser on the 18th Australian Jamboree (in First Aid provision and pre-hospital care) (1996-1998), and has been the author and editorial consultant for several books published by Scouts Australia. These have included Youth Suicide Prevention – Parents Guide, published in 1997. He wrote A Parents Guide on Adolescent Health for Scouts Australia, a text published in 1999. He has also been an author of a number of articles on the history of Scouting.

Major General Pearn has served in senior positions in St John Ambulance Australia for more than four decades. After various Divisional and Corps appointments, he was promoted to District Surgeon for Queensland (1983-1988) and since 1984 has served as a Councillor for the St John Council for Queensland. He served as the national Director of Training for St John Ambulance Australia for 10 years (1990-1999), and during this period edited the Australian best-seller, Australian First Aid, with over 2 million copies sold during this period. He has been an author and editorial consultant for a number of other St John publications including Occupational First Aid, Staying Alive, Survival – Remote Area First Aid, The Science of First Aid, Emergency First Aid – a Quick Guide, First Aid for Children Fast, and The Carer’s Handbook. In 1997 he was appointed as the Chairperson of the foundation Ethics Committee of St John Ambulance Australia and since 1996 has served on its Medical Standards Committee.