



The History of the Gilwell Scarf and Wood Beads

The Wood Badge

In itself the badge is valueless; two pieces of wood hung on the ends of a bootlace; but, treasured by the aged, coveted by the young and worn with just pride by those of middle years!

Each piece of the Wood Badge insignia, the Beads, Bootlace, Scarf and Woggle, has its own story.



The Beads

In 1887, B-P was posted to Cape Town, and seconded as Aide-Camp to his Uncle, General H. A. Smythe General Officer commanding South Africa.

Shortly after his arrival at the Cape, trouble broke out with the Zulu warriors, led by their chief Dinizulu.

On state occasions, Dinizulu wore a necklace some 10 to 12 feet in length consisting of over a thousand beads, ranging in size from tiny emblems to others four inches in length. It was considered sacred by the warriors and there was a belief that if it was ever captured all resistance by the natives would cease. The necklace was kept in a cave, high on the mountain and guarded night and day.

B-P heard of this, and hoped that he would capture Dinizulu and acquire the necklace. It did come to pass, and his wish was fulfilled and B-P took the necklace home to England where it was kept with his other military souvenirs. It was over 30 years before he made further use of it!



The Leather Lace

The next stage of our story goes to Mafeking where, in the book “The Wolf That Never Sleeps” B-P relates the incident where, after many months of siege, one day he was feeling very despondent when an old native Zulu ‘boy’ of high caste gave him a leather thong. This thong, as was the custom, had been placed round the old man’s neck at birth to ward off evil spirits and so bring the wearer good luck. The story further relates that Mafeking was relieved soon after – and the leather thong joined the souvenirs.

In 1919 the first Scouters’ training course was held at Gilwell, at the completion of which B-P wondered what to give the Scouters to signify passing the course. He went home and while rummaging through his bags came across Dinizulu’s necklace.

A few days later he invited all those who had attended the course to come to dinner at the Scout Restaurant in Buckingham Palace Road. He presented each of the members with two beads from the necklace, and instructed each to go out, buy a bootlace, tie a bead at the end of each end and hang it round his neck. (B-P’s writings quite clearly indicate that his original intention was to wear the thong and beads around the hat, but he changed his mind and decided it was to be worn around the neck.) **Thus the Wood Badge came into being.**

Some hundreds of the beads of reasonable size were used for presentation to those who completed the early Wood Badge courses. However, it became evident by 1920 that the supply of original beads wouldn’t last, so replica beads were manufactured at Gilwell and have been ever since.

In the early days, and in theory today, Leader Trainers, who wear four beads on their necklace, were presented with one original bead but now this only happens if a former Leader Trainer returns his beads to Gilwell. An Assistant Leader Trainer wears three beads on his necklace.

The Camp Chief of Gilwell Park (England) wears a necklace of six original beads which B-P first presented to Sir Percy Everett as a tribute for his help in launching Scouting and help at the first Scout Camp at Brownsea Island in 1907.

Sir Percy presented the necklace to John Thurman and suggested that it be worn as the badge of office of Camp Chief, Gilwell Park. It is a matter of history that the first time it was worn by John Thurman was when he visited Pennant Hills Training Camp, New South Wales, in 1949.

When Wood Badge training was instituted for Cub Masters in 1921, the Wood Badge as such was not used. Instead, the Cub Leader was presented with a Wolf’s Fang on a leather thong. It was a pretty revolting looking affair and went out of practice in 1924.

From 1923 to 1925 a small coloured bead was worn above the knot on the bootlace. These beads, yellow, green and red, indicated for which section of the Movement the Wood Badge was awarded, i.e. Cub, Scout or Rover.



The Scarf



The scarf is officially coloured dove grey (the colour of humility) on the outside and it is a warm red on the inside to signify the warmth of feeling. On the Peak of the Gilwell Scarf is a small piece of Maclaren tartan to remind us of the fine gesture by Mr de Bois Maclaren in providing the original Gilwell Park.

The material is a registered cloth, which means it cannot be used for any other purpose, nor may it be modified or additions made to it.

When do I wear the scarf?

- * At District Training Meetings (DTM), your training functions, Gilwell Reunion.
- * ***Never when with or representing your own group or youth members.***



The Woggle

In 1920 or 1921 the scarf, which had always been tied with a knot, was held together with a scarf slide. So far as is known the name 'woggle' was invented by Gidney, the first Camp Chief of Gilwell.

In the early days of Scouter Training, fire lighting by friction was very much a novelty and for years was demonstrated on Wood Badge courses. A main piece of equipment was a length of leather thong and it was always found that a driving belt from a treadle Singer sewing machine supplied the best required object.

B-P suggested to the Gilwell Staff that they experiment and produce a special scarf slide to go with the Gilwell Scarf and Wood Badge. So, using one of the fire lighting thongs, W (Bill) Shankley, who was serving at Gilwell at the time (and later was group leader of 8th Hobart, Tasmania, for many years) produced a two-strand Turk's Head slide which was adopted as the official 'woggle'.

In 1943, the camp chief was anxious that there should be some badge to denote completion of various parts of the Wood Badge training. It seemed logical to present some part of the Wood Badge insignia on completion of the Preliminary Course (now replaced by basic level training). So in 1943, the Gilwell woggle was awarded. The scarf and beads are still presented on completion of the Wood Badge.



1st Gilwell Park Troop

All Leaders throughout the world who receive their Wood Badge become members of the 1st Gilwell Park Troop. Gilwell Park is on the outskirts of London and until the 1960's was the 'Laboratory of Scouting'. Purchased by W de Bois Maclaren in 1919, Gilwell Park was given to The Scout Association as a boy camping and leader training centre. All Wood Badge Leaders are eligible to wear the Wood Badge emblems which are only awarded to those Leaders who have undertaken this training recognised by the World Scout Bureau.

When Sir Robert Baden Powell became Lord Baden Powell most people thought he would adopt the title 'Lord Baden Powell of Mafeking' based on his army experience, but he chose to be Lord Baden Powell of Gilwell.

Gilwell training is more than the 'what' and 'how' of Scouting and includes the underlying spirit – the essential goal of Scouting including the spirit of happiness, tolerance and good fellowship, of thoughtfulness, preparedness and unselfishness. The task of Gilwell Training is to maintain this spirit. All members of the Gilwell troop are charged with that responsibility. Members of the Troop are in all countries of the Scouting World.

Did you know?

- At the end of the first Gilwell training course B-P wanted to give the Leaders a souvenir and gave each of them one of the beads from Dinizulu's necklace. The supply of original beads has long since gone, but in the replicas you can see the notch which represents the hole left when the pelt decayed away.
- At least one of the original beads is in each Scouting country.
- The National Commissioner for Adult Training and Development wears one of these as part of the four beaded Wood Badge.
- Training Team Members wear additional beads – three for Assistant Leader Trainers and four for Leader Trainers.

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