

# He may be 90, but 'Mr B' is still prepared to do his duty

Gordon Biden tells Barbara Eeles how joining the cubs at the age of eight was the beginning of a lifelong commitment to scouting ...

**G**ordon Biden joined the cubs the day after his eighth birthday. His grandmother gave him a pound to buy his uniform and he went home the proud owner of a green jumper, navy blue shorts, cub cap, knee-high stockings ... and a penny change.

That was 82 years ago and Gordon, who is now 90, is still a scout. His amazing record has seen him take on countless different roles to support the work of the organisation he loves.

He is now a county vice-president in Suffolk, as well as maintaining strong links with a group he ran in Surrey.

And far from resting on his laurels, he is currently masterminding the building of a new scout hut for the Suffolk group where, until recently, he was leader.

"Scouting has been my life," says Gordon, or Mr B as he is more often known.

"Throughout my career, the children have always called me that ... although now it's often men with beards and grey hair who say 'hello Mr B'."

Gordon's scouting story began at the 1st Surbiton Wolf Cub pack on August 1, 1937. He remembers getting 10 proficiency badges, and becoming a senior sixer.

But then a serious injury while playing football landed him in hospital and it was six months

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**Gordon Biden**  
Vice-president  
Suffolk Scouts

before he fully recovered. "I had to learn to walk again," he says.

After that, he joined the Leander (Kingston-Upon-Thames) Sea Scouts – the troop of which his father was a founder member in 1907. He still treasures the silk Leander scarf his dad passed on to him.

It was there that he met Eric Ebbage, a role model whose influence stays with him to this day. "Our scout master was a very sincere person who taught us how to behave in life," he says.

"The reason for scouting is to make young people fit to be adults, learn to do things for themselves and become good citizens.

"It's a way of life. We were taught to do a good turn every day – I've tried hard to do that.

During the war, the scouts helped after school by acting as collectors for the national paper salvage scheme.

In 1946, Gordon was made a King's Scout. "I went to London to be presented with the certificate,



Gordon Biden with some of his scout uniform scarves collected over 82 years.

Pictures: Mark Westley

signed by George VI," he says.

"It also meant I was invited to watch the victory parade after we won the war against Germany.

"I had a place at the base of the Victoria Memorial and witnessed the whole parade, and the King coming back to Buckingham Palace. I shall never forget it."

Through his life, he has earned numerous awards, including the Silver Wolf for "most exceptional" service, and the Chief Scout's Award for 70 years.

Scouting has been important to other family members, too. Younger brother Neville is also a lifelong member.

Gordon's second wife, Rene, who died in 2012, also gave more than 70 years service to the scout movement and, like him, received a Silver Wolf.

The couple met in Surrey. Later, in Suffolk, she acted as appointments secretary for the Bury area.

A great-grandfather, Gordon has three children, Gillian, Angela and Andrew, who also became a scout.

"Scouting was very different when I joined," said Gordon. "The Sea Scouts did ordinary activities like camping, cooking, first aid and hiking, but also swimming, boating, rowing, sailing and canoeing.

"We took part in regattas on the Thames. We used to row down the

river with no life jackets. That would definitely not happen now.

"We also used paraffin and petrol to light fires. These days, we have to be much more safety conscious.

"There were no girls in the Scouts when I joined. Now, I think about 30 per cent are girls.

"An awful lot of children have a lot of fun doing their modern-day scouting. It makes them better people, they still learn so much and get more confidence."

Gordon left school at 14 and went to work in a factory making parts for ships. He studied electrical and mechanical engineering at night school.

In 1947, he began national service in the Royal Navy, then worked for a firm that made fireplaces before joining his family's building company.

He spent several years as a rover scout, before becoming a leader in Surrey and, eventually, leading his old sea scouts group.

In the 1980s, he bought a farm in Suffolk and, in a complete career change, became a pig farmer. He and daughter Gillian went to college to learn farm management.

News that he had moved counties spread through the scout network. He was soon asked to be assistant district commissioner for the Suffolk Scout Fellowships – now

known as Scout Active Support.

The movement encourages people, usually former scouts, to support groups in their local areas.

"When I started, there was only one fellowship group, in Ipswich. My challenge was to form them in every district in Suffolk," he said.

Gordon's 21 years in the job resulted in fellowships all over the county, including Sudbury, and a total of 500 members. He also ran the Suffolk Show Scout Unit for 15 years.

In 2007, he was asked to return to group scouting as help was needed with the troop in Great Barton. After helping out for a few years, he was made leader.

The group thrived and now has more than 100 members. He recently stepped down as leader to concentrate on driving forward plans for an extended scout hut.

Gordon, who is married to his third wife, Christine, also keeps in touch with Surrey scouting colleagues through the Leander Fellowship, attending meetings once a month.

He holds three vice-presidencies: Suffolk County, Great Barton group, and Royal Kingston. Is he proud of his scouting achievements? "I like to think people are proud of me," he says. "I do it because I think it's right."



Gordon with his Chief Scout's Award for 70 years' service.