



Summer Camp in Yorkshire

Cambridge Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 2014

2014 started off with a hive of activity: the dead of winter saw three tent-mending days when a dedicated group met to inspect and repair our orange vango sleeping tents after the battering they took in 2013 (when Venturer Camp and loans to NCS almost doubled their use). We replaced zips, patched canvasses, sewed in cunning new lugs, straightened pegs, counted poles and were rewarded with Helen's delicious cakes. Thanks to all who participated, and particularly to Chris and Helen for organising the days.

The Co-op 'enterprise' projects which Pioneers and Venturers had been working on over the autumn of 2013 came to fruition in the Spring (see individual group reports below for more detail). As a district we were honoured to have been chosen to pilot this venture, but found it perhaps more challenging than anticipated - the notion of enterprise without necessarily making money and as a time-limited activity was hard, and alighting on ideas which were youth-driven and achievable was also a challenge. Nevertheless it was an educational experience in the broadest of senses and we hope it has been useful to the Co-op too.

The other major challenge this year was the need to find a new home for our two shipping containers which house all our camping and other equipment. These have been living rent-free in a service yard of the Beehive Centre for many years since it was owned by the Co-op, but the current owners wanted to build on the yard and gave us a few months' notice to move. Many people contributed to the search for new premises, but it was Richard's perseverance which finally paid off and the containers are now comfortably installed in their new home in a farmyard in Impington.



Tent-mending

In parallel to this we ran our usual gamut of camps and trips: a small but harmonious group of families enjoyed the Easter sunshine at Lockerbrook, and Spring Camp at Wimpole was again blessed with fantastic weather. Elfin camp was very well attended by lots of keen Elfins, and the Pioneers fitted in trips to Cudham (February) and Darsham (October) as well as Pioneer Camp (June). Some of us joined others from the Eastern Region to provide children's workshops at Latitude Festival, and Summer Camp was in the park surrounding the beautiful ruined Jervaulx Abbey in Yorkshire, where the river provided hours of fun.



Summer Camp at Jervaulx Abbey, Yorkshire

We have seen some changes in the make-up of our groups this year: Platypus (formerly Peace) Pioneers had been struggling to spark interest in a community where none of the attendees lived, and finally merged with Penguins. We hope that some of the keen Chipmunk Elfin parents will be brave enough to set up a Pioneer Group in Histon in the future. On a more positive note, a fledgling Woodpigeon group has started up, populated partly by 'third-generation Woodies' - those whose parents had been members when young and whose grandparents are still involved today. The continued involvement of kinsfolk of all ages is one of the wonderful aspects of a well-established district, but long associations mean that more final goodbyes must also take place. Our New Year Walk 2015 was held in memory of Helen Pinder, Ian Willis, and Simon Sedgwick Jell, who all died during 2014, and of Hugh Pinder, who died tragically young ten years ago.

After three years as district coordinator, I am continually heartened by the devotion and cooperation of the different generations of people involved in Woodcraft, and how welcoming they also are to those new to the movement. The fact that many people who were members when they (or their children) were young now want their children (or grandchildren) to share the experience is a testament to the power of education through social change and the enduring effect it can have on the lives of those who actively engage with it.



New Year Walk in memory of Helen Pinder, Ian Willis, Simon Sedgwick Jell and Hugh Pinder.

Alice Reid

Cambridge Woodpigeons

It's déjà vu all over again

In 2014 I became aware that there were quite a few local parents who had been in Cambridge Woodcraft Folk as children and now had under 6s of their own. A chance meeting in a well-known Mill Road greengrocer's led to the hiring of the hall at St Philips Primary School for a one-off meeting on a Saturday morning in March. Over 30 people turned up, spanning three generations of Woodies, from new-borns to grandparents, with about equal numbers of adults and children. With parachute games, a break for refreshments and a chat, followed by a craft activity we hit on a programme that everyone could join in. It was quickly agreed that this should become a regular monthly Woodchips meeting.

The group is still growing and we have also welcomed Woodchips who are siblings of current Elfin and some new to Woodcraft Folk. Last year we visited Spring and Elfin Camps and are hoping to participate fully in District camps in 2015. We are busy making sure parents are signed up as members and are registering as an official group.



Re-visiting activities we did together 30 years ago is a bit like entering a time warp and the resemblance of some of the little ones to their parents is uncanny. It is lovely to see a new generation joining Woodcraft Folk and, as one of the parents said, 'I want my son to grow up knowing the Woodcraft Folk values, like we did.'

Hilary Sutton



Badger Elfins

The Badger Elfins have had another good year. The group currently has 16 members, with equal numbers of boys and girls, and an enthusiastic and supportive group of parents. We have also been ably assisted by a number of Venturers during the year and are grateful to Trish Rawson who came and led a couple of sessions for us in the summer.

As well as the usual Woodcraft games and outdoor activities, the Elfins did a number of other exciting activities: they held their own football World cup and learnt about Brazil as a country; created their own story boards for an episode of Sean the Sheep; and planned and performed a shadow play. At Christmas, as well as making decorations, they learnt through games how it might feel to be lonely or homeless at Christmas.

Elfin camp was very popular with the children and adults who attended, many of whom are planning to go again this summer.

We still don't have an overall leader, but are operating well on a co-operative basis, except that

we currently need someone to attend district meetings. After Easter, Liz Dignam will step down from her administrative role which will be taken on by Sarah Collins.

Liz Dignam

Acorn Elfins

Acorn Elfins are thriving on a happy mixture of foraging, cooking, eating, swimming, messing- about -in -boats- on- rivers, arting, crafting, acting, discussing, thinking, singing, bonfires, games and generally enjoying the company of others both on group nights... and especially at camps. We've celebrated Chinese lunar new year and LGBT diversity. We've filmed claymation and made comics. We've eaten blackberry bracts and wild sorrel as well as scrumped apples. We did yoga and made bivvies in the rain. We've had a lot of fun and tried new things; thanks family, friends and district for another great year!

Justine McLachlan



Group night with Acorn Elfins



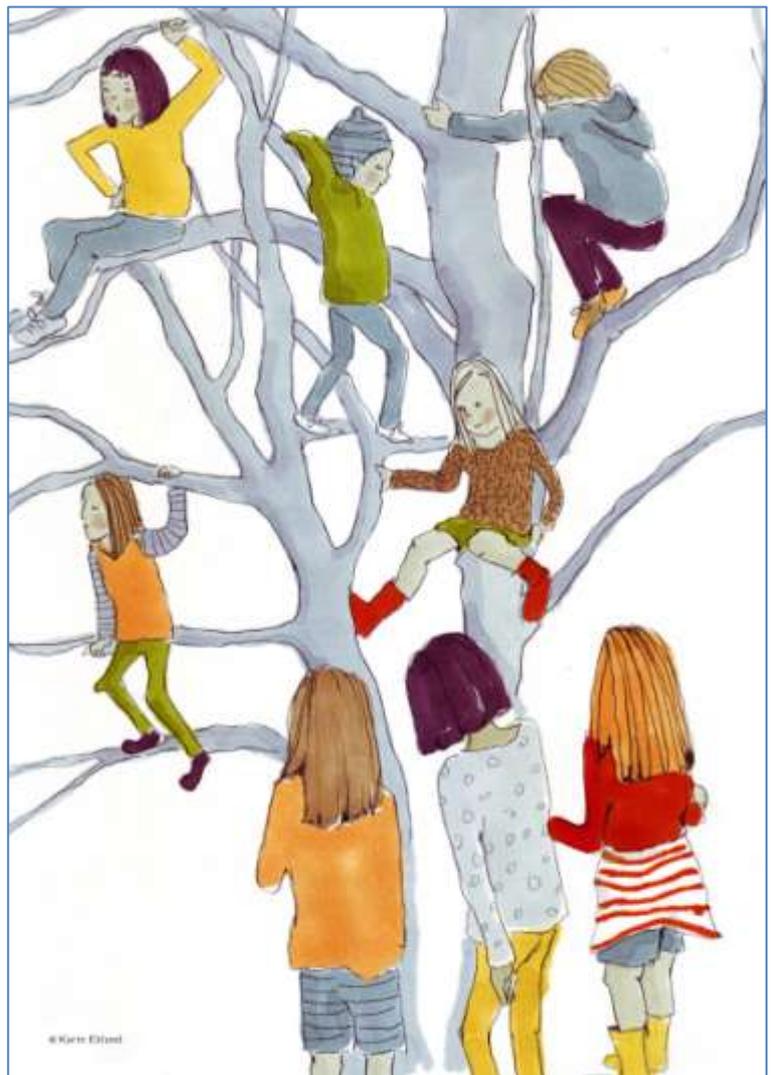
Summer Camp, after Elfin bedtime

Chipmunk Elfins

Again we can report that the Chips are happy. After sticking to our guns (thanks Nick) on the gender ratio for most of last year and a recruitment drive for boys, we now have 10 boys and 10 girls and are full. It is a very young group with six new girls having replaced six older ones this term. They brought with them a great group of parents who are already volunteering for sessions. We greatly miss our wonderful Nick Walters who handed the baton to Jenny Christal at Christmas. Huge thanks to Nick for his inspirational leadership over nearly five years and a very warm welcome to Jenny.



This year The Elfins made a mosaic Twin Pines logo to put outside the door to welcome people in and did a Flash Mob Pancakes session on the village green to the bemusement of passing Histonians. We visited the site of Rampton Castle with King Stephen (Tom's Dad) and learned its strange history. We had a French Impressionist painting party at the Brook, including French bread and cheese. We made dens in the WI woods and decorated amazing boomerangs. We had a bird session by a local RSPB ornithologist, spanned the world by making newspaper bags from Chinese newspapers and had another noisy 'Rec in the Dark' session. The Elfins had a debate on gender stereotyping in packaging and advertising of toys on which they had a great deal to say. Our international dinner party was a most civilised affair with relaxed chatting and handing round of food from different countries, from haggis to dhal. We went to Darsham again and a good number attended Elfin camp. We ran free activities for children at our stall at the Feast Market in July. Whatever we do, we plan carefully to ensure that cooperation and consensus are central to the way we play. We have applied for a grant from the Histon Feast fund to buy some more song books. As well as this supporting our now enthusiastic singing (thanks Huw), this keeps up our local profile as a youth group alternative outside Cambridge. Our trainee guitarist is aged seven!



Drawing, by Karin Eklund, an Acorn Elfin parent, inspired by Acorn Elfins at apple picking

Helen Wilkes and Jenny Christal

Penguin Pioneers: 2014 – 2015

The group is still small by the standards of 18 months ago, but numbers are increasing slowly, eleven now, and we hope this will continue.

The Coop Project took a lot of our time and energy but it was difficult to engage all the children in what were quite ambitious schemes. Perhaps - in the words of the joke stereotype – if we wanted to arrive at the endpoint we had decided on, we should have started from a different place! Nevertheless, it was great to see Pioneers fixing their dreamcatcher up in a tree, whilst others remodelled their mixture of second hand materials into a bug hotel. A learning process perhaps. Thanks go to the particular helpers who kept this going.

We joined the White Eagle and Platypus Pioneers on a weekend trip to Cudham during the Easter holiday – luckily blessed with good weather after a damp start – and had a fabulous walk in the woods of the Kentish Downs. Unfortunately, the ever popular Regional Pioneer Camp at Thorpe Woodlands later in the year was a much damper affair, especially on the last day, though the Pioneers said everyone had a great time and especially enjoyed the raft building and canoeing.

In the autumn of a year when we seemed to have been a well-travelled group, we spent a weekend at Darsham – and the good weather returned thankfully. A bracing walk to the beach at Dunwich included seeing England's oldest fig tree (or so the sign said), and far too short a time in the free museum which tells the story of the rise and fall of this once thriving port. Great Turner postcards, and eerie nineteenth century photos show the inevitable progress of cliff erosion which sent church and graveyard under the waves.

Amongst the many activities throughout the year we had another successful enamelling session making brooches and the like, using powder and a metal blank and heating them in a tiny kiln – very exciting and very hot - equipment courtesy of the Youth Store. We have also enjoyed baking, bushcraft, origami, cycling, making nature mobiles and science week. We had a bivvy in the Beechwoods, but never quite managed to fit geocaching into our programme. Maybe next term.

Once again, my thanks to everyone involved – adults and children – who always bring their enthusiasm and good humour to the group.

Chris Thompson



Serving up, summer camp



Waiting for food at summer camp



Picnic lunch at spring camp

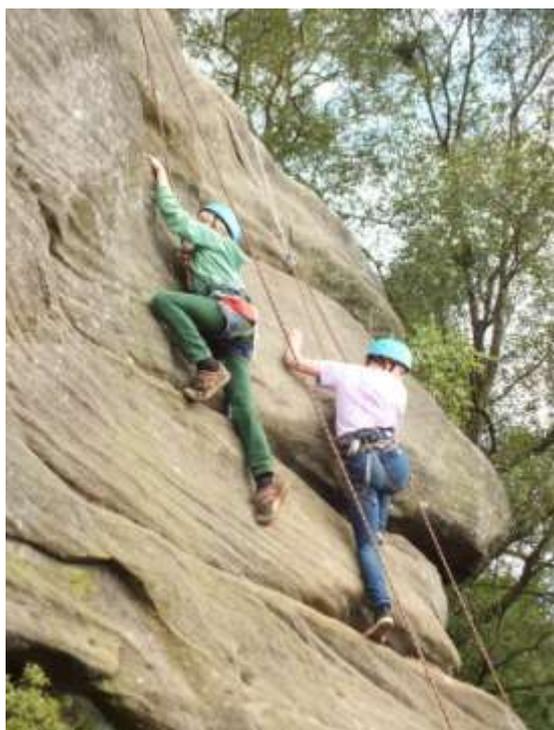
White Eagle Pioneers

The Co-op enterprise project which started last year wound up in the spring with another tea party at the residential care home whose garden we had planted with hundreds of bulbs, and the Pioneers learned some songs from the 1940s to sing for the residents. The wartime theme carried on for the rest of the Spring term through a visit from a local historian (Mike Levy), who told us about a Woodcraft connection with kindertransport, and a drama session which gave the Pioneers a vivid insight into the plight of refugees.

Our summer programme was packed with outdoor activities, including a visit to the new lambs at Wandlebury and a fiercely contested rounders tournament, although bad weather meant a last-minute change of plans on more than one occasion. A group night planned and organised entirely by the Pioneers themselves (they played basketball and other games, and made a collage) was very popular, so much so that it is now a regular fixture of the programme - the second occasion was an 'indoor camping' session including mini cooking on tea lights.

Several members of the group took part in the Spring camp at Wimpole, the Summer camp at Jervaulx Abbey in Yorkshire (where daily swims in the river and the climbing activities at Brimham Rocks were particularly popular), and the Regional Pioneer camp at Thorpe Woodlands. A small delegation went on a very harmonious residential trip to Darsham with the other Cambridge Pioneer groups at half-term in October, where we enjoyed cooking, many games of chess and pool, a walk to the seaside at Dunwich, and crabbing at Walberswick.

Patrick Campbell-Preston



Brimham Rocks: summer camp



Enjoying the river at Jervaulx: summer camp



Preparing the fire: spring camp

Venturers

Venturers has been larger than ever this year, briefly reaching 40 members! But not everyone turns up on any given night, and evenings have mostly been manageable. We have generally had enough adult help, though it would be nice to get more people involved in planning.

Activities this year have included self-defence and first aid; punting, printing, and poetry; tie-dyeing, whittling, and a debate about gender; and making everything from Tetra-Pak wallets and fire to a repeat of last year's three-course meal for parents. We were very glad of the Hall's dishwasher afterwards.

In March the Venturers merited a full-page spread in the Cambridge News for their Co-Op project, "Blitz the City with Loveliness". They printed poems and baked cakes, and gave them away along with a thousand flowers around the city. Daffodils and cheering thoughts were left on bikes, benches and windscreens and given out to passers-by. Judging by the number of smiles received in return, the city was cheered up very effectively! We even had a message from someone who was so pleased that she looked us up on the Internet and sent this message:

Dear Woodcraft Folk,

I just wanted to say how lovely it was to be given a daffodil from three of your lovely girls today in Cambridge by the All Saints Craft Market.

It really made me smile and also pleased my dad when I told him because he and my aunts were in the Woodcraft Folk in Enfield growing up. My aunt is now 70 & still meets friends from those days when she's over from Australia. They all remember those times as really special and it's obviously still a great group of people, as I found out today.

Finally, thanks to everyone who has helped with the group this year, with a special mention for our new full-time helper Racheal Pinner, who has moved to Cambridge from Brighton. Racheal grew up with Woodcraft, so she has experience of groups as a member and as a leader. Her energy and commitment are much appreciated.

With thanks to everyone who has helped with the group this year.

Peter Westlake



Venturers: Blitz the city with loveliness

Cambridge DFs

Local DF meetings have slowed this year as the most active older DFs went to university leaving behind a very small cohort. Plans are afoot to revitalise the new cohort of ex-Venturers. Watch this space! Luckily this has not stopped individual DFs from attending local camps and national events, helping at group nights, getting involved in national organisation, and doing other wild, whacky and woodcrafty things.



Thanks to photographers: Karin Eklund, Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge, Mark Irving, Sue Kington, Rosy Moore, Sean Munro, Alice Reid (and any others I might have forgotten).

Particular thanks to Karin Eklund for allowing us to reproduce her wonderful drawing of Elfin in trees.