

Remembrance Day 2015 Gilwell Park

2015 marks 100 years since the death of Captain Anthony Slingsby a little known but hugely influential pre-war Scouter. Alongside many other leaders and former Scouts Slingsby joined up at outbreak of the First World War. Prior to this his life had been devoted to Scouting. He had started his own Troop in Skipton, known as the Bulldogs named after Slingsby's devoted canine pal. His style of leadership, was to trust his troop and empower them to make their own decisions, even down to troop discipline. Slingsby described

"In our troop there is a definite understanding that no Scouts is allowed to let off the mill dam behind the club room. A boy once did this, with the result that part of Skipton was flooded. I always leave these little matters to the Court of Honour, and so went away for the weekend! The Court of Honour came to the following decisions 1) the boy had broken the Scout Law, 2. He had shown some ingenuity in knowing how to let off the dam. 3) As a punishment they turned him into the mill dam instead of turning him out of the Troop.

This unorthodox approach to leadership inspired the loyalty of his Troop and whilst his Scouting career took him away from Skipton he maintained contact with his Scouts and when he joined up 37 of his former Scouts followed him into the 6th Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

Slingsby's Scouting influence spread far beyond Skipton, in Slingsby's obituary his great friend Roland Philipps described his impact on Scouting:

"Anthony Slingsby has passed bravely on his journey. Never has news stirred me with such a pang of sympathy for so large a number of people. I thought of his boys in Skipton, that wonderful bursting forth of Scoutishness that happened beside his Yorkshire home several years ago. I thought of the northern counties, where he had wandered and organised and been loved almost since Scouting was started and where he constantly visited Scoutmasters and their troops, creating new ones, whilst he helped and inspired the old. I thought too of East and North East London and of all that he had done for my own boy's there. I thought of what he meant to the whole of the London District, of his six months' work as London Organising Secretary, of his unforgettable organisation and

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inspiration at the London Scoutmasters' Training Camp, of the way in which he always turned up anywhere and everywhere and was always loved and always made at home. Finally I thought of us all – the whole Scout brotherhood for never will we have a brother Scout who has striven more earnestly for the things that we all are striving for, or who has attained more fully to those things which are the goal of us all."

After joining up Slingsby maintained contact with HQ and in June 1915 a letter he wrote appeared in the Headquarters Gazette. He described life on the Western Front

"I was in Sunday's big battle. I cannot write of it as it was too terrible, but somehow we found the strength to do our work and mend wires under heavy fire. Once I was knocked out, but by a miracle only winded. I am very glad and thankful to be here and doing our share.

Thanks for the mouth organs. They are now owned by Silver Wolf "Toc-H" Walker and King's Scout Jimmy Chandler. They are lovely but the tunes are not. We have some Germans opposite our trench who come from London and speak excellent English. So we played them "Has anyone seen a German Band?". At least we did but it draws fire so I shall forbid it."

A month later Slingsby was killed. A note to the HQG entitled "How Captain Anthony Slingsby Died" describes what happened

"He was working at one end of the trench. At the other end was a wounded Tommy who could not be moved until night. Anthony went to cheer him, and tried to move him a little for comfort. He forgot that in that particularly part the parapet of the trench was gone and when he raised the man he was easily spotted by a sniper as the German Trench was only a few yards away."

Slingsby's death was a great blow to the movement. Baden-Powell wrote an acknowledgement of his contribution to Scouting.

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“By the death in action of Anthony Slingsby the movement loses one of its keenest and most high-minded workers. His whole-hearted enthusiasm for the higher aims of the cause was seconded by a gift of humour which enabled him to put his views in a most attractive and human way to others, and he thus gained for us many adherents and sympathisers”.

100 years later, even if the methods have changed, it is still possible to recognise the efforts that Slingsby and those like him were undertaking to encourage Scouting to develop and flourish. They too wanted young people to be Better Prepared.

Please join us in two minutes silence.