

HOW CAMPHOUSE SPENNYMOOR WAS BUILT

Campsite

The need for a permanent campsite had been voiced as early as 1934. The County Training Camps were held each year at different sites, around the County, but it was felt that it would be better to have a fixed site somewhere centrally situated for ease of travelling from all points. At that time Durham North & Durham South were all one County

When WW2 started, this project was put on one side until 1952 when it was taken up again. Once again various suggestions were made but ideas failed to produce a satisfactory campsite

However in 1954 the issue was given a great boost by the gift of £500 donated by the Bishop of Jarrow this was earmarked for a permanent campsite. Then in 1955 a further grant of £50 from the King George V Jubilee Fund making the basic fund £550

In 1954 & 1956 Training Camps were held at Whitworth Park Spennymoor. The site belonged to Mrs Shafto of Whitworth Hall
By this time everyone's thoughts began to turn to Whitworth as the answer to the permanent campsite problem. Mary Pattie County Camp Adviser and Dorothy Watson the County Commissioner made contact with Mrs Shafto too discuss whether this would be a possibility. Mrs Shafto met this suggestion with enthusiasm.

Camphouse

By now it was not a question of a permanent campsite but also of a building to be used as a Brownie Pack Holiday House, for trainings and a place to store the County Camp equipment. But one snag emerged the site was to be used for opencast coal almost immediately, so neither camping or building could be entered into until this was finished, and the park returned to its normal condition.

Opencast work took place from 1959-1961 - during this time planning for Camphouse went ahead – plans were drawn up, costings made, and tenders asked for. Mrs Shafto was keen for the County to still camp in the grounds so made another site available. The co-operation of Mrs.Shafto in all this is obvious, to have the opencast workings on her beautiful estate must have been heart breaking but also to throw the rest open to the Durham Girl Guides Association showed an amazing support that was truly generous. The Shaftos are one of the oldest families in County Durham and the well know song; “Bobby Shafto's gone to sea”

is of special significance. The eldest son of each generation is always called Robert, and Mrs Shafto's grandson not only opened the House when it was finally completed (as a young boy) but has since proved helpful and co-operative in all things connected with both site and building.

The original estimate for the building was £11,000 but this figure soon grew to £18,000, but as any application grant required at least 25% from the applying body and the fund only stood at £550 it was necessary to have a County effort to raise a substantial sum to meet this requirement.

The whole County responded – every Division, District and unit got behind the appeal and between them raised over £3000 which was nearly 25% required. In March 1962 application was made to the Dept of Education & Science for a grant of 50% of the total cost. By this time the total cost was estimated to be £20,000 which covered the preparation of the site, making the road, installing the septic tank, filling in the ravine and the building itself

When the vision of a building had first become more than a pipe-dream back in 1958 it was thought that the house would be finished by 1962 and so the Chief Guide had been asked to open it. However building still had not been started but it was decided to still have the Chief Guide come anyway – so a large stone was carved with a Trefoil on the top and the words “This stone commemorates the visit of Olave Baden-Powell GBE on the 6th June 1962”. The Chief Guide unveiled it as hundreds of Guides and Brownies sat on the slope above where the house was to stand, and sang to their Chief

Work began on building camphouse in March 1964 and a 28 yr lease was obtained from Mrs Shafto and by early in 1965 Camphouse was completed and opened by young Bobby Shafto, who cut the ribbon across the double doors with a silver penknife. The stone that had been unveiled by the Chief Guide had been incorporated into the inside wall of the entrance hall. There were one hundred and twenty visitors inside that day and praise and delight was expressed by all.

The building itself was purpose built and has more than proved its worth to the thousands of members who have used it to great purpose since.