

Roman Catholic Girl Guiding in Sussex, 1912-1919: Origins, Ideology, Practice

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Abstract

This article has significance for the history of youth movements, and for religious and feminist history. It shows how the Roman Catholic Church adopted the Baden-Powell Girl Guide movement, at first almost by default, but then as a means of outreach to attract young women into the church. In the English context this demonstrates how a minority religious organisation could be incorporated into the Scout movement yet retain a distinctive identity. Roman Catholicism fostered the development of another form of internationalism, enabling English Catholic Guides to meet and share in religious rituals with their 'sisters' in France and elsewhere. Iconic female figures, notably St Joan of Arc, and adventurous female missionaries were promoted as role-models, thus calling into question the view that the primary ideal of Guiding was domesticated femininity.

Key words: Girl Guides, Roman Catholic, feminism, Sussex

DESPITE ITS status as an international movement, and the phenomenal numbers it attracted in its early years, the Girl Guides have received comparatively little attention from historians, despite their recent centenary.¹ Roman Catholic Girl Guides have been not only neglected, but invisible.² Yet the Catholic Guides provide a particularly useful vantage point from which to view the relationship between a youth movement linked to a minority religious denomination with international links, and the parent body. Moreover, the integration of English, Scottish and Welsh Roman Catholic Girl Guides within the national movement, unlike in Ireland, Belgium or France, where Protestant and Catholic Scouts and Guides formed separate organisations, has important implications for understanding English Catholic identity.³

This article will argue that Roman Catholic Girl Guide companies enabled girls to practise their religion freely, separately from Protestants, initially under the umbrella of an all-female Catholic women's organisation, the Catholic Women's League (CWL). Nevertheless, they were not confined within a Catholic ghetto,⁴ or 'fortress church',⁵ but had a place within an international, inter-denominational, youth movement. I will also interrogate the characterisation of Guiding as primarily intended to produce good wives and mothers.⁶ Guiding developed a subculture of both older and younger women which had an impact on their local communities as well as on society as a whole. It might include young women of all social classes, some already engaged in paid

work, others at school. Activities included training in a range of skills, from domestic to survival, including sports and games, which often gave Guides a public profile, and might prepare them for employment. As such, Guiding made an important contribution to the discourse and practice of 'active female citizenship' in the inter-war years, even before full female suffrage in 1928.⁷

The focus on Sussex makes it possible to map Guide activities in greater detail than in a broader study. The period 1912 to 1929 spans the period between the founding of the first Roman Catholic Girl Guide company in 1912, the retirement of some of its first initiators in 1924, and the transfer of control from the CWL to the Catholic Scout and Guide Advisory Council in 1929. The county of Sussex was important for Guiding in general and Roman Catholic Girl Guides in particular, being the first to be organised into districts and divisions, like the Scouts, under the direction of Olave Baden-Powell.⁸ A number of high-profile Catholic Guiders also stimulated the development of the fledgling Catholic Women's League Girl Guides (CWLGG). The county of Sussex, which includes coastal and inland rural areas, as well as small and large towns, provides a much-needed counterbalance to existing studies of adolescent leisure. Many of these have focused on the industrial North, especially Manchester, and London, the authors claiming that working-class girls preferred the dance-hall and cinema to youth organisations.⁹

Most data has been taken from published sources, such as the *Catholic Women's League Magazine*, the *Girl Guide Gazette*, founded in 1914, and *The Guide*, which was targeted at Guides rather than Guiders from 1919. The reports of local company news in these volumes purported to be written by the Guides themselves, though they had to be approved by the Captain.¹⁰ Local Sussex companies produced their own newsletters and ephemera, some printed. Guide memoirs, notably May Hollist's manuscript scrapbook, provide invaluable information about reporting in the local press, as well as photographs and recording of events. Prescriptive literature includes Flora Lucy Freeman's published advice book for Catholic Guides, but also pamphlets of the speeches of key clergy and lay people, which provide insights into approved behaviour.

Origins

The founding of the Girl Guide movement is usually dated from 1909, when groups of girls turned up at Crystal Palace demanding to be inspected like the Scouts. Baden-Powell quickly founded a separate organisation under his sister Agnes, who published the first handbook in 1912.¹¹ Roman Catholic Guide companies were in existence from 1912 at least.¹² About 1919 the Girl Guides Association invited the CWL to form a kindred society to be attached to the main movement, following the previous affiliation of the YWCA, Girls' Friendly Society and others.¹³ The Standing Committee was formed in 1920, chaired by Lady Margaret Macrae, and approval was given by prominent ecclesiastics, including Cardinal Bourne, the Archbishop of Westminster, and the

Pope.¹⁴ The hope was expressed that Catholic Guides belonging to other companies would join up with their co-religionists, and that existing Catholic companies would re-register with the CWL.¹⁵ By 1919, 19 companies had registered. CWL companies had their own standard and could sew a CWL name-tape onto their uniform.¹⁶

While Catholics were far more numerous in northern cities such as Liverpool, parts of Sussex, such as Arundel, the Midhurst district and Brighton had a long history of Catholicism,¹⁷ and new types of Catholic organisation for women were quickly adopted there. The Catholic League for Women's Suffrage, founded in 1911, had three provincial branches outside London in 1913, two in Sussex and one in Liverpool.¹⁸ A branch of the CWL, founded in 1906, which promoted a range of initiatives for women, was launched in Brighton in December 1908.¹⁹ Catholicism in Sussex benefited from gentry patronage, the Duke of Norfolk being 'a sort of lay head of the English Catholic community'.²⁰

In October 1917, Olave Baden-Powell estimated there were 83 Guide companies in Sussex, almost double the 46 in existence the previous year.²¹ In 1918 the number of companies (117) was the fifth highest in the country, after London, south-east Lancashire, Norfolk and the West Riding of Yorkshire.²² Sussex also claimed they were the first county to have their own magazine, started in January 1917.²³ CWL Sussex companies comprised a high proportion of those formed nationally. The first recorded Sussex Catholic company, the 1st St Leonards, was formed in 1912, and registered in 1913.²⁴ By 1919 there were eight Catholic Guide companies in Sussex, and one Brownie Pack. The large numbers of residential, usually fee-paying schools and institutions in Sussex would seem to have boosted the numbers considerably,²⁵ including those of Catholics.²⁶ Two Sussex CWL companies were attached to residential institutions, the Convent of Mercy (Midhurst) and the orphanage at Nazareth House, Bexhill, both of which were for poor children.²⁷ Of the eight companies affiliated to the CWL in May 1920, four were from Sussex, the others being from Portsmouth (two companies), one from Preston and one at St Philip's Settlement, Mile End, London.²⁸ By 1924 there were 71 Guide companies and Brownie Packs registered, eight from Sussex.²⁹

While Roman Catholic Guides formed only a tiny proportion of the total number of Sussex Guides, (nine companies out of 175 in 1919³⁰), some leaders (including converts) had a high profile within the CWL, and the Guide movement as a whole. Flora Lucy Freeman (circa 1869-1960), a former Anglo-Catholic, and author of widely circulated advice books for organisers of working-girls' clubs, had created an inter-denominational infrastructure to support working-girls' clubs, the Brighton Girls' Club Union, by 1906. By 1916, she had been converted to Catholicism.³¹ In March that year she founded the 11th Brighton, in 1917 the 6th Hove, and in May 1919 the 23rd Brighton.³² In 1921 she published the first handbook for Catholic Guides.³³

May Hollist (d. 1947), from an Anglican family, lived in Lodsworth house, Lodsworth, with her father Colonel Hollist (1838-1924) until his death in 1924. She was not only the Secretary for CWL Guides nationally from 1920, and by 1923 Area Director,³⁴ but also played an active role in village life, her imminent departure from Lodsworth due to her father's death in 1924 being deplored by the local vicar.³⁵ From 1919 she was Captain both of the CWL 2nd Midhurst (Convent of Mercy) and of the first Lodsworth (non-Catholic) Village Company, and from 1920 was Captain and Brown Owl of the 1st Lodsworth Brownies.³⁶ She also organized camps, both non-denominational and for the CWL, in England and abroad. She was Commandant of the first CWL camp in La Capelle, near Boulogne in 1923, and by 1929 was leading a camp in Malta.³⁷ The 1st Arundel, 'Lady Rachel's Own' (founded in 1919) was named after the daughter of the Catholic Duke of Norfolk, Lady Rachel Fitzalan-Howard, who was a Divisional Commissioner by 1928 and County President by 1948.³⁸ Her mother the Duchess (d.1946), was the Hon. Secretary of the CWL in 1920 and on the Guide Council from 1916.³⁹ As County President, she presided over a number of important county Guide events reported in the local press.⁴⁰

The CWL provided opportunities for women to hold positions of authority, each branch having a Chair, Hon. Secretary, and Treasurer.⁴¹ While the regulations of CWL Guides stated that Guiders in companies attached to churches should be approved by the clergy,⁴² local records show that clergy could play a facilitating rather than merely a controlling role, providing resources, support and expertise. In 1929 the CWL Standing Committee was dissolved as a new Catholic Scout and Guide Advisory Council had come into being two years previously and it was felt the work would prosper best under them. Miss Hollist was the Treasurer of the new Council, and Miss Warrender, chair of the CWL and former District Commissioner for Rye and Peaseborough, was Vice-Chair of the new body. By then there were 5,000 Catholic Guides nationally.⁴³

Ideology

Roman Catholics, both clergy and lay women, incorporated Baden-Powell's ideology of citizenship and service, self-sufficiency and the value of outdoor activities⁴⁴ into a framework which emphasised the distinctiveness of Roman Catholic religious identity and the potential of Guides to attract new or lapsed members into the church. The movement thus developed particular aspects of female spirituality. Catholic Guides had as their patron saints the Virgin Mary and St Joan of Arc who was canonised in 1920.⁴⁵ By 1925 they had adopted as their own 'Our Lady, Guide of the Way' from a Byzantine picture of 450AD later found in a church in Messina.⁴⁶ The rhetoric about Catholic Guides reflects both assertive and defensive positions regarding religious worship and gender roles. There was a huge fear of the corrupting influence of allowing Catholic Guides to worship with non-Catholics, and also that Guiding would make girls unwomanly. The counter-arguments were that Catholics needed to move with the times, or lose out, and that the

discipline and practical training would be of positive benefit to the task of evangelisation, as well as to future mothers and colonisers.

At the opening rally in 1920 Monsignor Jackman, private secretary to Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, argued that ‘Catholic girls are today the hope of the world. From having been a refining influence they can be more a directing influence’.⁴⁷ His argument was for the importance of seizing opportunities which Catholics had missed in the past, to their detriment, as in the organisation of schools. The woman question was the most important of the day. Catholics might not have liked women in uniform in public places, but they were there to stay. Interestingly he did not so much recommend Girl Guides as a means of inculcating piety and goodness, which he argued could be done by the home and confraternities, or sodalities, but for their ‘efficiency, organisation, practical sewing’, as regards domestic responsibilities. His response to the criticism that ‘it makes them tomboys’ was to argue that ‘a tomboy is a good girl rather than a flapper’.⁴⁸ As Proctor noted, the notion of Guiding as an antidote to flapperdom had become ‘a common accolade’ by the end of World War One, and was not specific to Catholics.⁴⁹

Similar themes were developed by the Hon. Mrs Walter Roch at the same rally. Significantly, the religious justification was only listed third. The first was to give women an outlet, as ‘working girls and women had suffered from dullness in the past’. The second was to promote efficiency and training of character: ‘Each little unit was made to realise by co-operation and comradeship that she had her duties and responsibilities to others as well as herself’. The third was religious: Catholic Guide corps were often the means for attracting girls back to the church.⁵⁰

Flora Lucy Freeman’s handbook (1921), targeted at the Guides themselves, was structured to show how each section of the Guide Law should be interpreted. She urged girls to remember they were Catholic Guides at all times, to stand up for their faith, even if it involved persecution, and to resist the temptation to attend non-Catholic services and prayers, even when told this was a kind of ‘united Guide service’.⁵¹ Patrol leaders should look after their patrols. All should remember ‘A Guide is a Friend to all and a sister to all other Guides, no matter to what social class the other belongs’; ‘I hope no Guide would look down on any of her sisters because they happen to be in service’.⁵² Neatness and tidiness were important: ‘A girl never looks better than in uniform... but an untidy Guide is a pitiable object’.⁵³ She also urged Catholic Guides to pray for the conversion of England, and presented the Irish as exemplars for ‘holding fast to the old faith’.⁵⁴

Local clergy might reinforce such messages. In July 1921 Monsignor Ottley, to whom one of Freeman’s books was dedicated, gave a talk to the 6th Hove emphasising the following. Uniform was a better dress than the usual fashion. They should not attend non-Catholic services. He then referred to ‘the knot he could tie that could not be undone’, a reference to current Catholic opposition to the Divorce Bill, and an example of how the Guide movement could be used to

promote Catholic policies.⁵⁵

In later editions of his address, Jackman further developed the theme of the need for women to be equipped with the practical skills required for a frontier life. In the Catholic context, which still valued celibacy in comparison with marriage and motherhood, the image of the nun and missionary had particular power. 'We know of brave women missionaries in the wilds of Australasia struggling with elemental Nature, crossing torrents on a single plank bridge, scaling rocky precipices to visit the lonely sick. There is one nun at least in South Africa an expert in shoeing the convent oxen'.⁵⁶

Catholic women developed these themes. An article in *The Catholic Woman's Outlook* of 1925 justified Catholic Guides as crucial in the transition to adulthood. On the one hand, 'sodalities provide no outlet for the high spirits and energies of the livelier girls'. Nor did they include in their aims practical efficiency and physical fitness.⁵⁷ Moreover, in practice, there was no conflict of interest; 'we often find our best patrol leaders are among the Children of Mary'. Since Guiding covered the age-range between secondary school and starting work, the Guide network could provide practical assistance in helping Guides entering employment, especially those who had come to a new place, to find 'sister-guides'. Arranging church parades and corporate communions was an important way of helping them to maintain contact with their faith.⁵⁸ By 1930, Mrs Walter Roch was highlighting the religious rationale even more strongly, emphasising that the first part of the Guide promise was 'I promise to love my God'. Since many Catholics had only had a nominal religious upbringing, at home or at school, the Guide movement could provide the place for the real development of a girl's faith.⁵⁹

Practice

A reviewer of *On the Right Trail* commented that Freeman 'admirably links up the Guide spirit and the Catholic spirit',⁶⁰ and arguably the ability to do this contributed to the appeal of Catholic Guides. Whereas Catholic literature emphasised the importance of preserving a separate identity, the Girl Guide magazines tend to gloss over such differences. The first reference found in the *Girl Guides' Gazette* to Roman Catholic Guides, was to the church parade on October 13th, of the 1st and 2nd Bournemouth companies. This observed that, 'During the service the Roman Catholic members of the Troop guarded the Colours in the porch', without openly stating that they were not allowed to join the service.⁶¹ Olave Baden-Powell's list of Brighton companies in 1916, including Congregationalists, Presbyterians, two YWCA companies, and one Girls' Friendly Society, shows how Roman Catholics comprised one denomination amongst many.⁶² *On the Right Trail* was sympathetically reviewed in the *Girl Guide Gazette* of January 1922 as of interest to all Guides.⁶³ This section will show how Catholic Guides were integrated within the main organisation, yet maintained a separate religious identity, due in large part to the involvement of priests and Catholic

laywomen. Pomfret, Warren and Collins have claimed that sporting and leisure facilities for girls were much less exciting than those available for boys in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁴ Catholic Guiding, like the main movement, provided opportunities for a range of leisure activities, including sports and the development of physical and survival skills. It encompassed war work, badges, entertainments, physical activities, rallies and camping.

Catholics were involved in the war effort, like many other Guides.⁶⁵ From November 1914 the 1st St Leonards were thanked for making socks, helmets, stocking-legs, ration-bags, cuffs and scarves for the soldiers.⁶⁶ In July 1915, the 1st St Leonards had been 'helping daily for some months at the VAD hospital and at Hastings House Temporary Hospital for the Wounded, running errands and assisting the nurses'.⁶⁷ Leisure activities were a problem for soldiers in the Brighton area, and on February 9th and 11th, 1918, the 11th Brighton 'gave performances of 'Beauty and the Beast', and a varied entertainment in aid of a new soldiers' club just started in Brighton. 'The dresses were extremely pretty and the girls were complimented on their clear enunciation'.⁶⁸

While the last statement emphasised the femininity of the performers, examination of the badges gained indicates the complexity of making judgments about gender bias. Guiding involved a series of 'targets': first attaining 'tenderfoot' status, then second class, then first class. There was a wide range of proficiency badges which had to be worked for. While some were for domestic skills, there were many others which encouraged adventure and self-sufficiency, such as rifle, war service, surveying, pioneering, geology and Special Service Corps.⁶⁹ The most popular badges nationally in 1916 were 'laundress', (8102 awarded), 'child nurse' (7,056), 'ambulance' (5,772), 'knitter' (5,076), then 'thrift'(4,812).⁷⁰

Records of the badges attained in Sussex CWL companies show the co-existence of domestic and more active skills. In January 1917 the newly-formed 11th Brighton reported: 'Seventeen Guides have passed their second class test. Mabel Ray has gained the St John's Ambulance Certificate for First Aid, and Alice Simmonds won Second Prize for the 40 yards' race in the Elementary schools' Athletic competitions'.⁷¹ The latter statement indicates that at least some of the members were not from privileged backgrounds. In 1918, the 11th Brighton recorded that '11 Guides have passed their test for fire brigade work and 12 for laundry'.⁷² In October 1921, badges were awarded to members of the 23rd Brighton; five domestic service, one cyclist, one needlewoman.⁷³ In June 1923, '15 of the 2nd Midhurst have lately passed their ambulance test, and several hope shortly to get their first class badges'.⁷⁴

While in 1918, the Guides were addressed (on cheerfulness) by Lady Day, the 'mother' of the company, and President of the Brighton CWL branch, the procedures of inspection, enrolment and badge-giving were in principle the same for Catholic and non-Catholic Guides, who shared the same Divisional and District Commissioners. Thus, in May 12th 1920, 'Mrs Jennings, the

(Divisional) Commissioner for Brighton paid a visit to the 23rd Brighton company and enrolled 4 girls. She presented Service Stars to some Patrol Leaders and Second Class Badges to the girls'. Clergy might also have a role: on this occasion, Rev Fr Newton, from St John the Baptist, Bristol Road, (this company's local church) was present.⁷⁵ Clergy were recorded as awarding badges, as in the case of Monsignor Ottley, who in 1921 also gave a piece of church land for cultivation to the 6th Hove.⁷⁶

Catholic Guides participated in competitions and rallies with other Guide companies, the *CWL Magazine* noting the winning of prizes at such events. The 23rd Brighton, 35 in number by 1924, was particularly successful: 'The Guides had had three inspections, and won the East Brighton District Shield, gaining 93 marks out of a possible 100'.⁷⁷ They also won a tent in a District tent-making competition in 1922.⁷⁸ The 2nd Midhurst were another very successful company, winning the fourth highest number of badges (40) nationally in 1924 (of CWL Guides) as well as numerous prizes, in local inter-denominational competitions, from handicrafts, to fire-lighting to signalling.⁷⁹

Events and competitions were also held with non-Guides. In 1924, Guide Nellie Trill (of 6th Hove) won the beginners' race in the Hove and District swimming competitions.⁸⁰ In December 1924 there was an exhibition at Brighton Town Hall of Hobbies and Handicrafts for Guides and other organisations affiliated to the Juvenile Welfare Committee. On this occasion, Nellie Trill won the first prize for 'Millinery'. 'Their Royal Highnesses opened the exhibitions...there were over 1000 Guides present, all the 6th Hove being there except for two who were unable to get away from business'.⁸¹ Again, this indicates how some Guides had paid jobs.

Whereas the *CWL Magazine* presented Guide news for the benefit of an all-age all-Catholic female audience, many accounts from the local press represent Guide activities as central to their local communities. In December 1921, a sale was held at the New Inn Assembly Hall, Midhurst, by the Midhurst District Association (including Catholics and non-Catholics) at which all the Christmas presents had been made by the Guides. It was attended by the Duchess of Norfolk and Lady Rachel Fitzalan-Howard, who was dressed as a Girl Guide.⁸² A similar event was held in November 1924. Whereas the proceeds of such Guide events went to company funds, or occasionally other charities, the proceeds of CWL Guide events frequently funded local churches.⁸³ In 1923, the 1st St Leonards reported a plan for a grand 'Soirée bizarre' (the suggestion of the priest), to reduce the debt on the Concordia Hall.⁸⁴

Rallies, which involved the assembling of large numbers of Guides for inspection, at local, county or national level, played an important part in bringing Guide companies together. The military language used to describe these is noteworthy, as is the criticism of feminine attire, jewellery and expensive clothes. Thus, at a rally of about 130 Guides (seven companies and one Lone Patrol) held on Saturday afternoon in 1919 at the Cowdray ruins in Midhurst, where the Boy Scouts had

lapsed, the reporter noted how the Guides afforded an ample demonstration of their 'keenness, virility and efficiency'. 'The marching was excellent, and the onlookers were evidently impressed by the neat and well turned out appearance of the girls, and the evidence they gave of discipline and efficiency'... in the competitions the 2nd Midhurst (Miss Hollist's Catholic Company) 'gave evidence of their dexterity at knot-tying, which is not popularly supposed to be a feminine accomplishment'. There was a firelighting display, and then sports, such as an obstacle race. 'Miss Godman expressed...her delight at finding no jewellery worn'.⁸⁵

A much larger rally was reported on June 30th 1920, a 'Brilliant Carnival of Youth-Hove August 1920' at Sussex County Cricket ground, presided over by the Duchess of Norfolk, with over 1000 Guides. 'It was an inspiring sight ... all those girls and young women in spirited marching order, eyes right when they came to the royal standard, the officers raising their hands in such excellent style to the salute'. Again, the issue of dress was raised: 'the uniforms generally looked neat and serviceable rather than costly'. Recruits were from all classes of society ... 'quite poor people were there'.⁸⁶

Catholic Guides formed Guards of Honour to accompany well-known people at gatherings with non-Catholics, such as escorting the princesses to the handicrafts exhibition in 1924, or in Catholic contexts. Thus, when Cardinal Bourne came to chair Father Bede Jarrett's lecture at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, in 1923, all the parish organisations were represented and Scouts and Guides formed a Guard of Honour. This event was reported in the *Brighton Herald*, and *Sussex Daily News*.⁸⁷ Catholic Guides might also perform special roles within their own religious communities. Thus, the 23rd Brighton formed a choir at Midnight Mass in their church, St John's Kemp Town, in 1921.⁸⁸ However, as Catholics were not allowed to participate in the church services of other denominations, they would have been absent from some of the major events of the Guiding year. Annual church parades were held in the Brighton District attracting large numbers: in October 9th, 1921, at All Saints, Hove, over 700 Guides attended.⁸⁹ On October 1923, the annual Church Parade was attended by Miss Godman, County Commissioner, and her two daughters, an estimated 2,000 were present. Indeed, it was reported that often new recruits were gained after such events.⁹⁰ Instead Catholic rallies were staged. The first at the London Scottish Drill Hall in November 1920, was attended by Lady Helen Whitaker, Guide in charge of kindred societies.⁹¹ On the afternoon of May 25th 1924, a church parade in Westminster Cathedral, attended by the 23rd Brighton (amongst others),⁹² took place at the same time as an inter-denominational service at Wembley. Cardinal Bourne asked for strength for Guides in Protestant countries to resist the temptation to attend non-Catholic services and prayers.⁹³ Services were also arranged at local level which reflected Scout and Guide themes, and could include entertainment. Thus, in 1923, the 2nd Midhurst had a Church Parade on the eve of St George's Day, the day when Scouts renewed their Promise. Father William spoke of the advantages of Catholic camps for Guides, and after Mass the hymn to St George was sung. In the afternoon, the Company 'had a delightful picnic tea in the beautiful garden of their

Commissioner'.⁹⁴

Camping, the apogee of the Guide year,⁹⁵ provided holidays for some young people who might not normally have had them.⁹⁶ These could include short breaks, even one-day trips. Many 'camps' involved sleeping in barns rather than tents. The *Girl Guide Gazette* of 1918 stated that the 11th Brighton had their first experience of camping, sleeping in a large barn at the foot of Wolstonebury Beacon, Hurst. The report focused on the improvement in cooking skills, and acquisition of the knowledge of wildlife.⁹⁷ While Catholics might camp with non-Catholics (and indeed May Hollist hosted such camps in the grounds of Lodsworth House),⁹⁸ CWL camps provided greater opportunities for communal religious activity, as well as outreach. Thus, in 1924, the 23rd Brighton Guides camped at Amberley and 'thoroughly enjoyed it'. They 'gave a concert to the villagers and gave over £2 to Father Ellis who allowed us to use the schoolrooms etc. There were several river trips and parties and one young girl was baptised a Roman Catholic before we left'.⁹⁹ Twelve of the 1st St Leonards troop and their captain and two helpers camped in Winchelsea and heard Mass in Rye on the Feast of the Assumption. They also had an excellent report from the camp inspector.¹⁰⁰ It was reported that during the first camp in France in 1923, 'Monsieur le Cure' kept the church open in the evenings 'so we could go there to say our night prayers'. When attending Mass they were slightly startled by the notice that 'les jeunes filles anglaises' would sing Benediction, and they were also told to say the rosary in English.¹⁰¹ Such foreign holidays reversed the Guides' usual experience of being a minority religious group in England, and enabled them to experience their membership of an international religious community. Camps also provided opportunities to develop awareness of their Catholic heritage within England. In 1927, when about half the Guides camping at Lodsworth were Catholics, special arrangements were made to take them to Midhurst by taxi for Sunday Mass. One day they were taken to Chichester to the tombs of the Norfolks, 'buried there when the Cathedral was still Catholic'.¹⁰²

Conclusion

By 1920, Catholic Girl Guides were embraced by leading clergy and laywomen as a safe means for preparing girls for the new world of emancipated women which followed the granting of limited female suffrage in 1918 and the turmoil of World War I. The 'dangerous' period between childhood and adolescence could be filled by participation in a system of military-style discipline and training in leadership. Girls were expected to be smart and neat but avoid jewellery or expensive clothes. Almost uniquely for a Catholic female youth organisation the uniforms emphasised citizenship and facilitated the diminution of differences between rich and poor. From feeling obliged in 1920 to protest that tomboys were preferable to flappers, by 1924 Monsignor Jackman praised the practical skills which the movement fostered as a positive and necessary adjunct to overseas and domestic missionary endeavour. The promotion of Guiding within Roman Catholicism was indubitably

viewed as a means to attract young people into the church. It also provided opportunities for Catholic worship outside formal church services, at Guide meetings, or at camp. The development of ‘secular’ activities such as rallies and competitions, from the early 1900s, made it easier for Catholic Guides to join in with non-Catholics. Such rallies and entertainments occupied an important place in town and village life, facilitated in Sussex by the prominent public profile of female Catholic Guiders. Nevertheless, it was not an unequivocal success story. Although numbers of companies doubled between 1923-4, by 1924, the 4th CWLGG Annual Report pointed out how Guiders often had to struggle with very small numbers, and the difficulty of providing activities for a very wide age range.¹⁰³ By 1929, a number of companies had folded because of lack of Guiders.¹⁰⁴ Of all the Catholic companies listed in Sussex, none were in existence after 1955, and most were disbanded earlier.¹⁰⁵ This calls in question whether the establishment of a mixed-sex leadership, in the form of the Catholic Scout and Guide Council (in 1929), was the best way to promote the interests of a female-initiated organisation.

Acknowledgements

In the preparation of this article, I am much indebted to Pat Lambie, Girl Guide archivist for East Sussex, Margaret Courtney, at Girl Guide UK archives (hereafter GGUKA), and Hazel State, archivist at the Diocesan Archives of Arundel and Brighton (hereafter, DAB).

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the conference ‘Christian Youth Movements’, YMCA/University of Birmingham, February 2006, at the Annual Conference of the Social History Society, Reading, March/April 2006, and the ‘Religion and Play’ conference, organised by the Centre for the Study of Play and Recreation, University of Greenwich, March 2011. I am indebted to the organisers and participants for their comments, and particularly to Professor Clyde Binfield and Dr Allen Warren.

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- 45 *CWL Magazine*, June 1920, No.104, pp.1-2.
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