



## *First President of the Girl Guides*

*Agnes*

Robert's sister Agnes was born in 1858. Like her mother, she was a woman of many interests and accomplishments. She would have been considered eccentric in Victorian times, and probably even today. She had some knowledge of 11 languages, astronomy and science. She was interested in natural history and had artistic and writing talents. She was interested in crafts from needlework to metalwork. Her outside activities included cycling, swimming and skating. She even went up in a hot air balloon! She played the organ, piano and violin, had excellent ability as a nurse, and was said to be a good cook and housekeeper. She kept birds, bees and butterflies in her home.

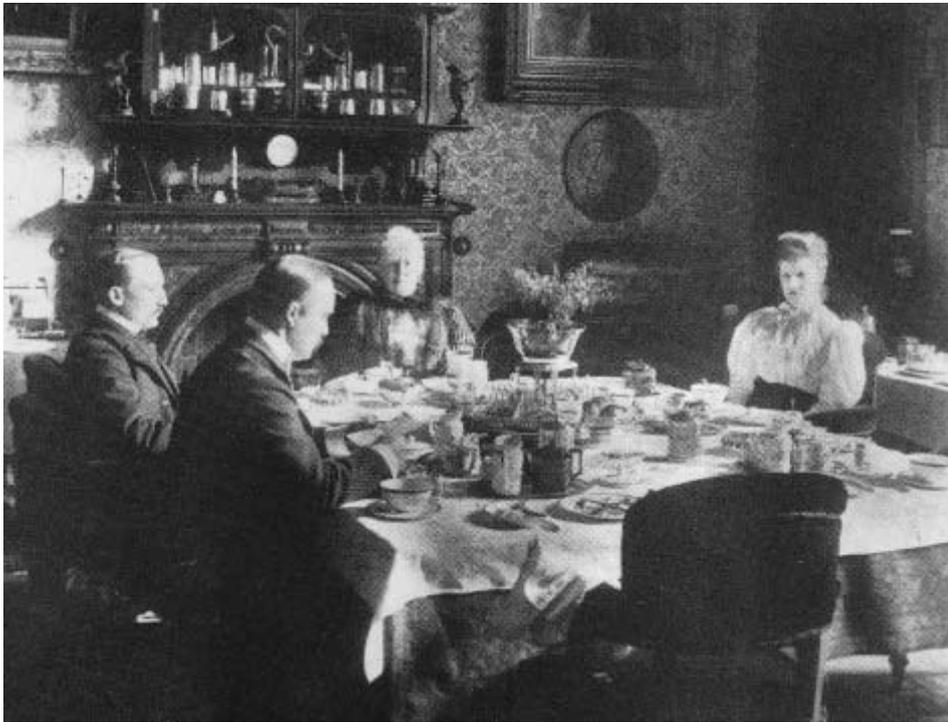


Being a woman of such wide interests, Agnes would almost certainly have been interested in her brother's Scouting activities. In 1908 she started a Boy Scout Troop "in hopes of finding a man to take it over." She felt strongly that girls should have the benefit of something similar, "a corps of girls trained to act in emergencies," and started a "Girls' Emergency Corps."

In 1909 when girls turned up at the Crystal Palace Rally clamouring to be allowed to join, there were already 6,000 of them registered with Boy Scout Headquarters, practising their own form of Scouting. Robert asked Agnes to help him organize the Girls.



In 1910 Agnes and some of her friends formed a committee to organize the Guides, with Agnes as President of the Girl Guides Association. B-P loaned money to rent office space in Scout Headquarters. Scouting for Boys was adapted for girls in a 475-page book called *How Girls Can Help to Build Up the Empire*, and published in 1912. In 1915 a charter was granted to the Girl Guides Association. Agnes was not apparently a very efficient organizer and for a time it looked as if the new organization would have to be taken over by the Boy Scouts. In 1917 she resigned as President in favour of Princess Mary, daughter of King George V, who was an active supporter of the Girl Guides. Agnes became Vice-President and continued in that position until her death in 1945. While Vice-President, she was always active, travelling in uniform, camping under canvas with the girls and writing articles, particularly for the *Girl Guides' Gazette*. She deserves credit for facing the prejudice of her time, against women in public life and against the very idea of an organization like Girl Guides.



Breakfast with her mother and brothers,  
George & Frank 1892

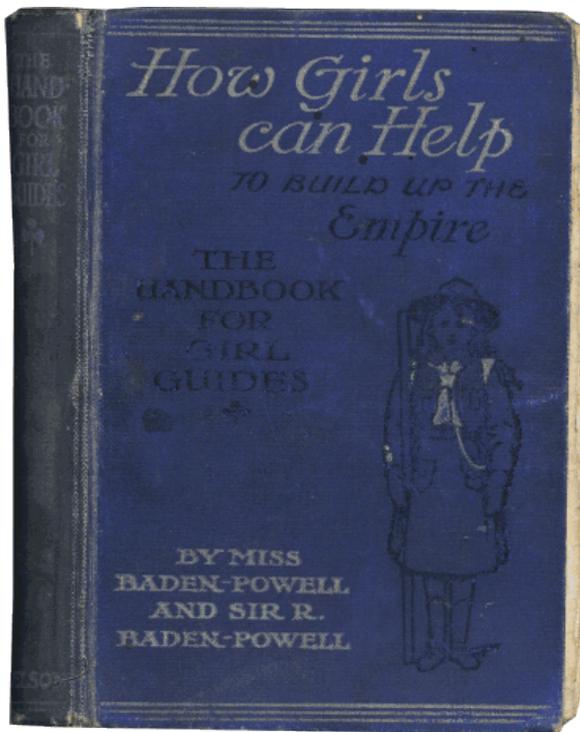
After the Crystal Palace, the girls met with Baden-Powell. What they wanted was to join the boys in Scouting. Baden-Powell listen to the girls, but was adamantly opposed to permitting them to join the Boy Scouts. Eventually he did, however, offer to assist them. He did not want them to use the Scout name. Rather a new term was chosen - the 'Baden-Powell Girl Guides'. There were some differences in ethos. Guides had patrols like Scouts, but the patrol names would be flowers or birds, not animals like wolves or other predators. Baden-Powell asked his sister Agnes to take on the task of organizing the Girls' Movement.

Agnes 1912, President of the Girl Guides Movement  
Sadly, Olave and Agnes were not on the best of terms for sisters-in-law.

"I am afraid there was never any love lost between us. She was a terrible snob and would have liked her brother to make a much better match" (*Window on my Heart*)

But, 'Azzie' as Agnes was called by her family, attended Olave at her wedding.





"How Girls can Help TO BUILD UP THE Empire"  
THE HANDBOOK FOR GIRL GUIDES  
BY MISS BADEN-POWELL AND SIR R. BADEN-POWELL  
Robert Baden-Powell, after finding that girls were also interested in Scouting, asked his sister Agnes to work up a Guides program for girls. She adapted his book *Scouting for Boys* into *The Handbook for Girl Guides*. The rest of the title *How Girls Can Help Build Up the Empire* reflected both Baden-Powell's original concept for Scouting and the need to overcome initial public resistance to a Scout-like program for girls. The book was published in 1912 and despite the title became the basis for Girl Guide and Girl Scout programs around the world.



The 'Rosebud' pin was designed by Agnes Baden-Powell

The Reverend B. Baden-Powell had ten children. Agnes and her younger brother Robert were two of them. Their father was a professor of Geometry at Oxford University. Their mother was a talented woman in her own right. She had both musical and artistic talents as well as being capable in math and science. Reverend Baden-Powell died when she was only 36 leaving her to raise the ten children by herself. When her brother approached her with the idea, she readily agreed to take on the Guides project. It is difficult to conceive of a more fortuitous choice. She was a gracious lady and helped to give an image to the new organization that overcome the fear of parents that 'Guides' would turn their girls into rough tomboys. Agnes Baden-Powell was an extremely well rounded person. She had pursued many of the activities more in tune with those expected of women at the time. She like her mother had pursued musical and artistic pursuits. She also was adept at handicrafts including activities as far a-field as metalwork and lace making. In addition she had a passionate interest in natural history. For the Guides she had insisted on an 'open air' movement.

Agnes is the oft-forgotten member of Guiding's early days, overshadowed by the vivacity of Olave.

BPs eldest sister, she was, like her high-achieving brothers, a woman of many talents. She was an expert apiarist, steel engraver, artist, musician, and craftswoman. In her younger days she was a skilled balloonist. With her brother Major BFS Baden Powell she made balloons, working the silk for the envelope. They made many flights together and share the excitement of ascents from the Crystal Palace. She joined her brother later in making aeroplanes. He was the President of the Royal Aeronautical Society for seven years, and Agnes was an honorary companion from 1938.

She had a great interest in natural history and had a variety of uncommon pets. A visit to her home, where she lived with her mother, meant dodging birds in the hall, butterflies in one room and bees in another. The bees in a glass hive found their way out to the park and back by a pipe laid through a hole in the wall.

She was a bicycle polo player, collected old lace, and retained her enthusiasm for swimming and dancing until after she was eighty years old.



Agnes became President of the Movement and not only wrote the handbook *How Girls can Build Up the Empire – the Handbook for Girl Guides* in 1912, but inspired and interested her friends in guiding through her own enthusiasm. She deserves a great deal of credit for having been willing to face the strong prejudice that existed against such a Movement at that time. Many were convinced that guiding would turn girls into tomboys and deprive them of maidenly modesty. However, Agnes was the perfect asset with her gentle influence, interest in all 'womanly' arts, love of flowers, birds, and insects.

#### Obituary

Miss Agnes Baden-Powell, the only sister of the Founder, Lord Baden-Powell, died on 2nd June, 1945, at the age of 86. She was the first National President of the British Girl Guides Association and, as she liked to call herself, "the grandmother of the Guides."

At the beginning of the Movement, when the girls wanted to follow their brothers, the Scouts, the Founder called upon his sister to help. Miss Baden-Powell started the first Committee in May 1910, and a year or two later she brought out the first handbook for Guides, *How Girls Can Help to Build the Empire*. And so the seed was sown!

Miss Baden-Powell loved to be asked to visit Guide companies, and, up to a few years ago, often used to stay with them in camp, where she slept under canvas. The photograph we publish shows Miss Baden-Powell on the occasion of a visit to Guides and Scouts at the Queen Mary Hospital, Carshalton, Surrey, England, in 1942.

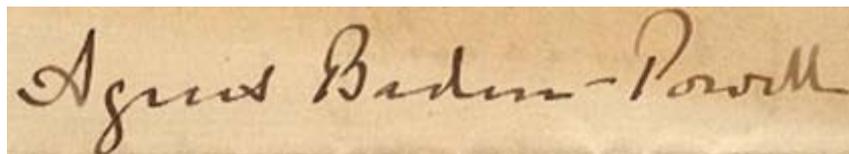
Her knowledge of gadgets was great; one, of particular interest to Sea Rangers, was a breeches-buoy life-saving apparatus in miniature which worked!

She was for some years President of the Westminster Division of the Red Cross, and worked for the League of Mercy and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. In the early days she was a very keen balloonist, an interest which she shared with her brother, Major Baden Baden-Powell.

Miss Baden-Powell was quite fearless. After a luncheon party given in her honour at the Forum Club, Grosvenor Gardens, London, when the flying bombs were at their worst and two had just fallen, she was offered a lift in a car, but she said firmly "No, thank you; I shall walk home" and she did!

Her activity and energy remained unimpaired until the last, and at parties given in honour of her birthdays as they came round she was always the brightest and the "youngest" there.

The World Bureau has received many messages of condolence from Guides and Girl

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script on aged, yellowish paper. The signature reads "Agnes Baden-Powell".