51st Renfrewshire (2nd Renfrew) Scout Group

Baxter House

Baxter House was a Church of Scotland care home and this is the story of Trinity Scouts' involvement there over many years.

BAXTER HOUSE

Baxter House was located just off Great Western Road in Glasgow. It started out as an ornate single residence built for an oil magnate in the early 1900s before other adjoining properties were added as the area became less rural. In 1946 the entire row was purchased by The Church of Scotland for conversion into a care home. It eventually opened in 1949 as the first Eventide care home in Scotland.

INVOLVEMENT

In the early to mid 1960's the Rovers, together with the Parish Church Ranger Guides, visited elderly folk in Renfrew at Christmas to hand out bags of food and gifts. The Parish Church minister at the time was the Rev Peter Houston and, while attending a joint Rover/Ranger meeting, he mentioned that he had heard that the staff at Baxter House would be working on Christmas Day and would not be able to spend time with their families. He suggested that the Crews could help out by doing some of their duties thus allowing them some time off. This was agreed and it was decided that the cover would be arranged over three shifts as follows:

1. 8.00 to 12.30
2. 11.30 to 4.00
3. 3.30 to 8.00

Each shift would have both Rovers and Rangers.

THE FIRST DAY

The following is an account of the first ever shift, with grateful thanks to Jim Hair:

"On the crisp dark Christmas morning the 1st shift met at the Den and travelled in two cars to the home at Great Western Road. The first car could not find the way to the front of the home and, after a couple of times going up and down Great Western Road, spotted the Rovers and Rangers from the other car and so were able to go as one group to the door of Baxter House where they were met by the home's Superintendent and his wife.

Once inside we were split into two details, one for kitchen duties and the other for cleaning and serving. In the kitchen the home's cook was finishing the breakfast preparation and was serving the breakfasts for the residents onto plates. She said that the first duty she wanted done was the taking out of the waste from the kitchen to be emptied into the large waste bins in the lane at the rear of the home. She also required that the dirty cooking pots etc be cleaned. The Rovers and Rangers were supplied with large aprons to wear, and the sinks filled with hot water and soap.

The breakfasts were taken to the dining room by the second group whilst the kitchen squad got into the clearing of the waste and washing the pots. Before these tasks were completed, dirty dishes from the dining room were arriving back and it was indicated that these had to be washed, dried and put away. Cook then started to get the Christmas meal prepared with more dirty pots and cooking utensils to be washed.

At about 10.00 a break was called with both squads coming together for tea and rolls and bacon or sausage not used at breakfast. The waste from the breakfasts had to be emptied and then taken out. A continuous stream of dishes and crockery had to be washed dried and put away. The other detail were cleaning the dining room and preparing the tables for the Christmas dinner. At about 11.45 the next shift arrived and we gave over our chores to them. As the shift left, they were thanked by the Superintendent and his wife.

That night the first two shifts met in the den to discuss the day and the final shift arrived with cakes and biscuits given to them as thanks from the home. It was generally agreed that it had been an enjoyable day and the consensus was that, if asked, they would do it again."

SUBSEQUENT YEARS

They did indeed do it again. In fact, the involvement would last for around 30 years, although the original Rovers/ Rangers arrangement evolved into Scouts and Ventures. Boxing Day was added and the shift pattern eventually became 3 on both Christmas Day and Boxing Day as follows:

4. 8.00 to 12.00
5. 10.00 to 2.00
6. 12.00 to 4.00

From bitter experience the early shift did all the hard graft with the later shift involving some glad-handing and an early finish!

In addition to the Christmas cover, in the late 60's / early 70's a rota was put together to help out on Sundays. Fred Wilson recalls his first visit with Derek Cowie involving:

- Paton's bus to Govan Cross
- Underground train to Hillhead
- A long walk (for his wee legs) along Great Western Road
- Then the reverse to get back home. That was dedication for you!

Over the years the tasks evolved and included the following:

- Washing copious amounts of dishes
- Peeling spuds
- Using the toaster (which didn't toast!)
- Working in the laundry
- Interacting with the residents
- Serving Christmas dinner and even playing Santa!
- Eating Christmas dinner then getting another one at home – not entirely sure how this helped the Baxter House staff!

Speaking of helping the staff, the following photos sum up the heavy workload and the close relationship we had with the staff!

APOCRYPHAL (OR MAYBE NOT) STORIES

As with all Trinity activities, humour was never far from the surface. Stories tend to grow arms and legs over the years but why let the truth get in the way of a good story? The following anecdotes may or may not be true:

- While on the first shift, one Rover came running in, white as a sheet, from emptying the waste in the bins in the lane in the dark, claiming that a rat as big as a cat had jumped out of the bin as he lifted the lid.
- One of the Rangers had to wash her hair as someone had poured porridge over her.
- We enjoyed a love/hate relationship with the dishwasher. On one occasion we might have blown it up and on another it gave out an electric shock. Not sure which came first!
- One (hopefully Venture!) Scout was given a couple of large whiskies as thanks for playing Santa.

THE END

By the mid-1990s bureaucracy had well and truly kicked in, including Health & Safety and Food Hygiene legislation. This meant that our involvement was restricted to interacting with the residents, including chatting and singing. The contributions had diminished significantly from the original aims and, therefore, it was decided to call it a day. Baxter House itself carried on until, amid funding concerns for Church of Scotland care homes, it closed in 2007. The site has now reverted to housing having been converted into apparently "stunning" modern apartments.

Ewen McLeod
Former Baxter House attendee
Cub, Scout, Venture Scout and Venture Scout Leader