



## *The World Chief Guide*

*Olave Baden-Powell*

*Biography*

**Olave St Clair Baden Powell**, Baroness Baden-Powell, GBE was born Olave St Clair Soames on February 22, 1889 at Chesterfield, England, the younger daughter of brewery heir Harold Soames (himself descended from a landed gentry family paternally and maternally from a self-made man, Joseph Gilstrap Gelthorpe, who had been Mayor of Newark in Nottinghamshire. She died on 19 June 1977 as Olave, Lady Baden-Powell, or The Dowager Lady Baden-Powell, having outlived her husband, the founder of Scouting, by 35+ years.

Her father - brewery owner and artist Harold Soames - continually moved house as he travelled. He, her mother Katharine (nee Hill), and a number of governesses educated Olave at home. She became keen on outdoor sports including tennis, swimming, football, skating and canoeing, and also played the violin.

In January 1912, Olave met Boer War hero and founder of the Scouts and Girl Guides Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Baden-Powell on an ocean liner (Arcadia) on the way to New York to start one of his Scouting World Tours. She was 23, he 55, and they shared the same birthday. They became engaged in September of the same year, causing a media sensation. To avoid press intrusion, they married in secret on October 30, 1912.

The Baden-Powells had three children - one son and two daughters (who took the courtesy titles of Honourable in 1929; the son later succeeding his father in 1941):

Peter, later 2nd Baron Baden-Powell (1913-1962) and  
Hon. Heather Baden-Powell (1915-1986), and  
Hon. Betty Baden-Powell (1917-2004) who married 1936 Gervase Charles Robert Clay (b. 1912, and had issue 3 sons and 1 daughter  
During World War I Olave left her children to help the war effort in France.

Olave became a County Commissioner in the Girl Guides in 1916, became English Chief Guide in 1918 and was elected World Chief Guide in 1930. The same year she was awarded the British honour of Grand Dame of the British Empire King George V. In 1932 she was awarded the Dame Grand Cross of The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (GBE) by Queen Elizabeth II. As well making a major contribution to the development of the Guide / Girl Scout movements, she visited 111 countries during her life visiting Jamborees and national Guide and Scout associations.

In October 1939 Olave moved to Kenya with her husband, where he died in January 1941. In 1942 she braved U-boat attacks to return to a 'grace and favour' apartment in Hampton Court Palace (in which she lived from 1943 to 1976), since her own home Pax Hill had been taken over by the Canadian military. Through World War II she toured the United Kingdom. Fortunately she was on a visit when a V2 missile damaged her apartment in 1944. As soon as she could after D-Day, she went to France, toured throughout Europe as the war ended to help revive Guiding and Scouting.

Having suffered a heart attack in 1961, she was finally banned from travelling at the age of 80 in 1970 when she was diagnosed with diabetes.

Olave died on June 19, 1977 at Birtley House, Bramley, England. Her ashes were taken to Kenya to be placed next to her husband's. The Olave Centre for guides was built in north London in her memory.

Scouts and Guides mark February 22nd as B-P Day or Thinking Day, the joint birthdays of Robert and Olave Baden-Powell, to remember and celebrate the work of the Chief Scout and Chief Guide of the World.

She was survived by her two daughters, her son having predeceased her.