



*The World Chief Guide*

*Olave Baden-Powell*

*Briefly*

## Childhood

Olave St.Clair Soames, Born 22nd February 1889, Stubbing Court near Chesterfield. A sister to Auriol and Arthur, parents Katharine and Harold Soames.

Olave and Auriol looked after the chickens for their mother, making a small business for themselves. They also had the responsibility of helping their father care for his garden, and knowing what all the plants were called and used for.

She was educated by her governesses and never went to school. Olave loved her animals and spent many hours playing with them. One of her favourite hobbies was horse riding, she also enjoyed her music and played the violin.

There was also tennis and squash to help while away the hours.

## Teenager

Olave enjoyed canoeing and rowing on the river, she even won a prize.

Just before her 14th birthday she attended her sisters coming out dance. This was to be the start of her first romance, with a friend her brother Arthur brought home from Eton college. This meeting also presented Olave with her first kiss. The romance lasted eight months.

Music was a big part of Olave's teenage years, keeping up her studies on the violin her father had given her. It was a copy of a Stradivarius, which she called 'Diana'. The violin was later donated to the Girl Guide Association and was loaned to promising young violinists.

Olave didn't learn to swim until she was 15 and then she had a lovely neck to knees bathing suit. Swimming became one of her favourite sports along with boating, skating, tennis croquet, football, squash and hockey.

## Love

On January 3rd 1912, Olave and her father set out on a voyage aboard the "Arcadian", this cruise was only made possible by the cancellation made by two other passengers. Olave thought that the cruise would not be interesting until a couple of days later she met up with Lieutenant General Sir Robert Baden-Powell.

Olave was quite surprised to find that Lord Baden-Powell recognised her from two years earlier, when he had seen her walking her dog in London. This wasn't the only coincidence - it turned out that they both celebrated their birthdays on February 22nd.

There was a 32 year difference in their ages, but this meant nothing to them as they were deeply in love. It was to take a long time for the couple to get married. Lord Baden-Powell was on his way to tour the World starting in New York.

The many months apart were filled with letters, with each letter signed with a small picture of a robin with different facial expressions.

The time came when Lord Baden-Powell was to arrive back in London. Olave was excited about seeing him again, she was most disappointed when he went straight to see his mother and then took his nephew on a promised fishing trip. Seeing how distraught his daughter was her father sent a letter to Lord Baden-Powell. When he received the letter he dropped everything and rushed to her.

After talking things over with her father, permission was given for them to be married.

## Marriage & Family

After the announcement of their engagement, the couple were hounded by the media for photos. The publicity was so great that the couple decided to marry quietly on Wednesday October 30th 1912. Due to many people being disappointed about missing the wedding a reception was held in December 1912.

A special gift arrived on the occasion of their first wedding anniversary; a son, Peter. Two more children were born with Heather arriving in June 1915, and Betty in April 1917.

In 1919 Olave's sister Auriol died. Olave took over the entire care of her sister's children, as their father was travelling overseas as part of his work.

## **Girl Guides**

In September of 1914 Olave offered her services to Agnes Baden-Powell. She was turned down, and believed it was due to her age. Even though she was disappointed she continued to help her husband by typing up his correspondence. Then one day in Guide Headquarters, she asked about Guiding in Sussex. She was put in touch with two other ladies in that area and without a warrant and a small knowledge of Guiding, she set about starting Guiding committees all over the district.

In March 1916 she received her warrant as County Commissioner. There were plenty of girls interested in Guiding but as is today there was a shortage of leaders. During this time she also published a booklet called "The Girl Guide Movement" with information about the organisation and the duties of Commissioners.

Early in 1918 she was appointed Chief Guide. In 1920 the Royal Family sent for Olave to enrol H.R.H. Princess Mary, before she became Guide President.

In 1930 Olave was appointed World Chief Guide.

Olave was presented with the Silver Wolf award by the Scout Association for her work in caring for their beloved Founder and Chief. She was also awarded the Grand Cross of the British Empire by the King in 1932.

## **Home**

One of the favourite times for Olave was around Christmas time. At this time, she along with her husband would walk through the village dropping parcels off on various doorsteps.

In 1937 their first grand child Robert was born. Their other grandchildren include, Michael, Michael, Nigel, Gillian, Crispin, Wendy, Timothy and Robin.

January 1941 saw the passing of her beloved husband, while spending their Winter in Africa.

## **Carrying on the work**

On arriving back in London, Lady B-P found that with World War II in full swing, and the home they had once known had been taken over for the housing of Canadian Soldiers. She was given an apartment at Hampton Court. Even with the smaller apartment and rationing, Lady B-P still hosted Scouts and Guides for afternoon teas.

She kept herself busy by touring the country talking with Scouts and Guides. It was the wish of her husband to keep on building Guiding around the world. So from 1942 until until her death she travelled the world 5 times on 653 flights. On one of her visits to Australia, Lady B-P was given a large ice-cream to represent the pennies that Guides and Brownies from Australia had donated as a way of saying thank you for her visit. This money went to providing books to South America and doors to any Headquarters that she had opened.

As she grew older and found travel more difficult she would entertain overseas guests in her own home.