

## Grayshott Band of Mercy

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Grayshott Band of Mercy The National Origins of the 'Bands of Mercy'

The origins of the Band of Mercy organisation can be traced back to the beginnings of the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (R.S.P.C.A.) which was originally formed in England as the S.P.C.A. in 1824, the Royal Warrant being granted by Queen Victoria in 1840. The establishment of the S.P.C.A. arose from an 1822 Act of Parliament to introduce controls for the prevention cruelty to farm animals, it was the first animal charity to be formed in the world.

Led by Catherine Smithies, a small group of activists made up of S.P.C.A. members established the Bands of Mercy as a wing of the S.P.C.A in 1824. The intention was for it to be a children's club, modelled on the Temperance Society's Band of Hope, the latter being an organisation to promote a "children against drink" campaign. The idea behind the Band of Mercy was to encourage children to love animals.

However, as the years rolled by, the cause was taken up by more adults and with an increased enthusiasm than originally intended. The organisation became more generally known for engaging in direct action against hunters by sabotaging the hunters rifles. At some stage, possibly during the First World War, the enthusiasm of the Band of Mercy organisation fell away and then, as such, appears to have become almost non-existent.

In 1963, a journalist from Devon named John Prestige, decided to revive the idea of organised direct action against hunts and revived the name Band of Mercy. This latter organisation should not be confused with its origins of Victorian times, however. Its policies were far removed from the intentions and activities of the original and its actions became increasingly more extreme. It became known as the Animal Liberation Front from the mid 1970's. The Grayshott Band of Mercy

The Grayshott Band of Mercy was formed in 1897. The aim of the Band was "for the regular and systematic study of animals and to do the best to protect them, erring on the side of mercy". It was contended by those that ran the Band *"that interests in the life history of the animals around us is best preventive of cruelty, because interest breeds intimacy, intimacy, respect, if not love, and we cannot maltreat those we love"*.

The Parish Magazine of March 1898 contained a report, presented by the organisation's Secretary Miss Moir, on the first year's activities of the Grayshott Band of Mercy. At this time, a total of 135 children and adult members had been enrolled. Nine meetings had been held in the year with an average attendance of eighty-seven. Lectures had been given by various residents of the village on a variety of topics including bees, spiders, birds' nests, and hedgehogs & moles. The June meeting of 1897 was held at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Hook at *Beefolds* in Churt, where the juvenile members were entertained to tea and then given a lecture on goats, Mr Hook being the keeper of a large herd of goats in his grounds.

The first annual show had taken place in July 1897, when an exhibition of pets was held in the grounds of Mr. Jackson of The Grange, with many exhibits *"gaily dressed with flowers and ribbons"*. Exhibitors were required to belong to the Society for at least three months prior to the exhibition and prizes were to be awarded on the understanding that the tending and whole care of the animal had been the work of the exhibitor. Classes of exhibit included 'Horses and Donkeys', 'Dogs', 'Cats', 'Goats', 'Rabbits', 'Poultry', 'Birds' and 'miscellaneous pets'. There were a large number of exhibits of animals and sixteen prizes were awarded by the judge, C.F.Hulford of Haslemere. The principle followed in

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judging the exhibits was that *"breeding and pedigree go for nothing but well groomed, well kept and generally happy and prosperous animal for everything"*.

The May 1898 Parish Magazine records a meeting held at the school in April when Miss J.F.Gruner gave a talk on "The Coverings of Animals". The talk covered the whole animal kingdom from the *"amoeba right up to man himself"* and was accompanied, with the aid of Mr. Ward, the school Headmaster, by a Lantern-Slide show.

In July 1898, another show, which was thereafter to become an annual event, was organised by Miss Moir, judged by Mr. Hulford, again taking place in the grounds of Mr. Jackson's home. This show was reported in both the local press and in the Pall Mall Gazette. There were many exhibits, everything from horses to a salamander. The prize for the miscellaneous class went to a Daisy Eames for her jackdaw and rook.

An extract from the Pall Mall Gazette describes the scene as follows. *"The show was held at half-past five o'clock. At a quarter to five, Betty and Jenny, led by two members of the family, who also carried baskets of flowers with the decorations, started off along the road. The walk, which owing to their being led on chains, was rendered interesting by the fact that all along the road were other dogs on chains also going to the show. And not only dogs. Ponies and donkeys, and even goats were also being led along, while cats and rabbits and poultry were being trundled along in wheelbarrows.*

*The scene of the show was a charming spot--all heather and pines. The cats and dogs were chained to little fir trees either side of a long path, and the ponies and donkeys looking very pretty with their flower decorations, stood in groups under the large trees. Excitement rose to a climax when the band arrived, and, planting itself in the midst of the dogs, began to play festive tune".*

Monthly meetings continued to be held. In May 1899, the lecture to the children was given by George Bernard Shaw. In June 1899, the annual show was attended by the Grayshott Brass Band, its first public performance.

By March 1900, it was reported that adult membership had increased and the total membership now stood at 200, the annual membership fee costing four pence per annum against an overall annual cost of the Society of £6. In July 1901, Mr. Bryan Hook, the judge, commented that *"the horses were more numerous and in better condition and a better class than ever before, in spite of their hard work on our Surrey hills"*. It was around this time that it was suggested that future shows should include a class for Cows and a Flower Show. It was also suggested that, in view of the number of empty perambulators in a corner of the ground, *that they could in future be arranged in a row with their occupants inside and be judged, providing that Mr. Hook or some other brave person, was willing to act as judge and risk offending all the mothers in Hindhead and Grayshott bar one!* By August 1901, membership of the Grayshott Band of Mercy had increased to 274.

In July 1902, the First Grayshott Flower Show was held in the Village Hall, on the same day as the Band of Mercy Show of Animals, which, by kind permission of Mrs. Plimpton-Smith, was held on land adjoining that of the Village Hall. The Show of Animals was much smaller than in previous years due, it was thought, to the earlier start time, which meant that many horses were still working in the fields. On this occasion, the Haslemere Band was in attendance.

By the summer of 1903, it was decided that the Grayshott Band of Mercy, which up to this time had been run by the founder of the Society, Miss Moir, was of a size that required a more formal organisation as one of the recognised institutions of the village. A Committee was formed to organise and run the Show in future years, with Miss Moir remaining as Secretary and Miss Weston appointed as President. Additional changes were that prizes would in future be monetary, previously they had generally been the gift of a book, and that the judging at the Show should be conducted by an Inspector of the S.P.C.A. from London. The Accounts of 1903 showed total income to be £10. 4s. 4d, compared with an expenditure of £5.0s.2d.

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In 1904, the Animal Show moved to the grounds of the Whitaker's home at *Grayshott Hall* and was held in conjunction with the Village Sports competitions. The report of the Show reveals there were eighty-six entries in total, including 26 horses, 4 donkeys, 20 dogs, 13 cats and various other categories. The great feature of the show was the procession in which nearly all the competitors took part, the children leading or carrying their pets in their arms and the horses bringing up the rear. Of the horses exhibited, four belonged to gentlemen, two were cart horses and the rest were either driven in tradesmen carts or were let out for hire.

In 1907, the Band was reorganised to become The Grayshott & Hindhead Band of Mercy. By this time there were ninety-three junior members, organised into squads of eight, each with a captain and an adult warden. In 1908, there was a large turnout of spectators and the annual show was the largest to date, with the added attractions of riding, jumping and driving competitions. Another feature of the show was the Maypole Dancing performed by children of Grayshott and Hindhead, *"the girls wearing bonnets with green and white dresses, and with the Maypole decorated with Hindhead heather"*. The band in attendance was the 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

1909 and the show was larger still with the addition of Athletic Sports, including running and cycle races and a Tug of War competition, and a performance by Morris Dancers. The 1910 show was of a similar size and ended with dancing from 7pm until 9pm. The show of 1911 was the fifteenth to be held and took place in the field behind St. Luke's Church. This year it was reduced in size with driving and riding competitions being excluded and horse and turnout entries being limited to Hindhead and Grayshott owners only. The reduction in size was mainly due to similar events having taken place in the village in June to celebrate the Coronation of King George V. However, there was the added attraction of competitions between Patrols of Scouts from Camelsdale, Thursley, and Headley & Bordon. Music was provided on this occasion by the scouts Bugle Band and an "organ Gramophone" which played from 3.00pm until 7.30pm.

In 1912, the annual show was back to its full size, with increased numbers of exhibitors and the procession of members being led by 120 Boy Scouts from the district and Girl Guides from Lingham School. The band of 2nd Border Regiment was in attendance. The Statement of Account for the event shows receipts of £18 from gate money, equating to some 700 spectators, total expenditure amounted to £46, including £13 in prize money and awards and a fee of £11.10s for the band.

It is known that periodic Lectures and the Annual Show were held in each of 1914 and 1915, but thereafter we have no knowledge of any further activities. In June 1920, a Committee Meeting was held at Undershaw at which *"it was decided not to revive the Bands of Mercy, whose operations were suspended when the war interrupted them"*, the decision being partly attributable to the fact that the Scouts and Guides covered, to a great extent, the same ground. The cash in hand was divided equally between the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides and the S.P.C.A. and so the Grayshott & Hindhead Band of Mercy came to a close.

*Brian Tapp, Grayshott Village Archive, March 2009*

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