

If Doc Pimm were alive today...

I expect you'd all like to hear how Guilford Crusaders started. In 1910 a young Guildford man called Pimm, "Doc" to his friends, was walking his dog on Pewley Down when he saw a group of boys playing football. He could see they really needed the gospel, and thought how good it would be to join their game, and then climb a tree with them and tell them the good news of Jesus Christ. Perhaps it might actually become a regular club.

However, he realised youth leadership training would be a pre-requisite, so filled with enthusiasm he joined a course at Guildford College the very next day, signing up not only for the "Youth Organiser" core module, but for training in activities like cycling, caving and sailing that he knew lost kids would relish.

One problem was that he soon found it was not acceptable to have a club only for boys, but he reasoned that if his club had an Gender Equality constitution from the start, it ought to gain the necessary accreditation for registration as an Approved Youth Activity.

The activities were also a problem, since although he was gaining the necessary training in them, as an inexperienced leader he would not be able to afford the insurance premiums, which had escalated because of recent notorious accidents involving trees, footballs and small children.

Still, he would be able to tell them the gospel, though in order to comply with European regulations, forbidding discrimination on religious grounds, he would also have to tell them the benefits of Islam and Javan Ancestor worship so that they could make informed comparisons between the various faiths. He might also have legal problems were he to insist that any co-leaders were Christians.

Despite all these obstacles, 4 years of hard work saw him as the proud possessor of a Certificate in Youth Leadership. Spurred on by this, he applied to the police for Sexual Offenders Screening, but even before the several months' delay for this had expired, he found that in any case he would not be allowed to run his club alone, in case the children should be alone at any time with a same-sex adult. Fortunately his brother "Guv" had already expressed an interest, and the wife of the local church organist could provide the necessary female leadership. She was old and used a stick to walk, but this at least provided the recognised staffing ratios for children's work, provided the class did not exceed 12 children.

Checking out the Health and Safety regulations he realised that the original tree-climbing idea would have to be shelved, unless the boys were provided with hard hats and rope harnesses, which seemed a bit contrived for an afternoon stroll on Pewley Down.

But despite that, after an advertising campaign in the Surrey Advertiser to ensure that equal opportunities were given to ethnic minorities to join, and a last-minute change of name from the planned "Crusaders" to protect Muslim sensitivities, he was at last ready to start. Taking his dog with him one Sunday afternoon, he ventured out on the downs.

But unfortunately he met no boys. Just a young, sad looking man in an army uniform. "I used to come and play up here with my mates," he said. "But when the war started we all joined the same Old Pals regiment, and all the others were killed at Ypres. I'm the only one left. I tell you, it makes you lose any belief you might have had in a loving God..."