

## A Life of Service: A Tribute to Dr Fredrick Dawson

by Paul Young, a former scout



One of Hadstock's most distinguished late residents, Frederick Lawrence McCallum (Jock) Dawson was an explorer, veterinary scientist, scout leader, and altruist. He was born near Glasgow in 1918 and died in Cambridge in 1989. He was educated at Mill Hill School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he read zoology. It was during his undergraduate years that Jock made the first of his zoological expeditions, in this case to Iceland, where he travelled on horseback, although the adventure was cut short by the onset of war. An article describing the events leading up to the expedition and its discoveries appeared in *The Geographical Journal*, the first of his many published scientific reports.

During the war, Jock was sent to Edinburgh to qualify as a vet, having been declared unfit for active service. Later postgraduate studies resulted in the award of the PhD.

The main part of Jock's career was spent with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, where he held the position of Assistant Veterinary Investigation Officer (Sterility Advisory Officer), although his ability and scientific contributions suggest that he deserved to have risen higher, especially in view of the reputation he gained as one of the world's leading authorities on infertility in cattle. In connection with this, he was a frequent contributor at international conferences and his scientific papers and articles contributed greatly to an understanding of the subject.

None of the above meant very much to an eleven-year-old boy. As far as I was concerned, 'Skipper', as he liked to be called by the boys in his charge, was a marvellous scout leader. He was far too modest to give any hint of his status, but what he did give unstintingly was his time and effort in

developing in his charges a sense of the importance of service to the community, good citizenship, and reliability - qualities which he possessed in abundance. He encouraged boys from all walks of life to join the scouts - years before 'widening access' became the mantra of the politically correct. In fact, our troop included several boys from the nearby children's home and others from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We flourished and found new confidence in the range of skills he taught, especially horsemanship - our troop was the only mounted one in the country - orienteering, survival, animal care, concern for the environment, and, most importantly, absolute honesty and integrity in our everyday dealings. Many of us became successful in our work or careers. Most became good citizens and parents. All of us benefitted from the role model he became.



For Skipper Dawson, happiness was not dependent in the slightest upon material possessions or status. He much preferred the bale of hay in the barn to the couch in the sitting room, or the campfire of the jamboree to the central heating of the home. For him satisfaction was a scouting expedition accomplished well, a camp efficiently run or boys mastering new skills. His acts of kindness and generosity both within and outside the movement were innumerable and earned him the lifelong gratitude of the beneficiaries. For their services to scouting, he and his wife Lettice, who ran the Hadstock cubs, were awarded the Silver Wolf, and after retiring Jock was appointed Assistant District Commissioner (Venture Scouts for Cambridgeshire). Public distinction, however, meant little to this man of humility and modesty. His achievement was of much greater significance than honours or acclaim: he made a profound and lasting impression on all who were fortunate enough to know him.