

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE

1ST BEDFORDSHIRE (THE ONESTERS)

SCOUT GROUP.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Bedfordshire (The Onesters) Scout Group.

## A Brief History.

The "Onesters" as they are affectionately known, were first registered at Imperial Headquarters, in London on 12th January 1909, as the 1<sup>st</sup> Bedfordshire Troop of Boy Scouts and given the registration number 4952.

Records show that the troop was meeting at least nine months prior to this, as a note opposite the name W. BERAH in the Troop register of names as at the date of registration, states "first enrolled" 10/4/08.

The origin of "Onesters" is not certain, but it is obvious the cardinal ONE identifies with ordinal FIRST; the first Troop in Bedfordshire to be registered.

The Group (or Troop) scarf was originally Scout Green, but was changed to Maroon with a Gold border to mark the Groups 50th Anniversary in 1959. Khaki woollen jerseys and black serge shorts were worn by both boys and leaders alike, but the jerseys were eventually replaced by khaki drill shirts, and in turn those made way for the present green shirts and mushroom dongs when uniform was standardised nationally in 1967.

Down the years, past members have moved on and spread to all parts of the country and to Australia and New Zealand, that we know of, and taken up all sorts of positions not the least of which was Alderman A. H. NICHOLLS M.C. a one time mayor of Bedford and in more recent years George Walker head of the Blent Walker Group.

Patrol names in those far off days and which appear in that early register are many, but it is not known just how large the Troop was; there were Curlew, Peewit, Cuckoo, Eagle, Owl, Stag, Woodpigeon, Otter and Parrott patrols all before the end of 1909.

The Troop's first Scoutmaster was a Mr. E. W. (Jimmy) EBBOT, at that time an employee of the Bedfordshire Times newspaper, which more than likely accounts for the fact that in those early days, the Troop held its meetings in a room at that establishment in Mill Street.

Several other meeting places were used, among them the loft above the garage (probably once stables) at the rear of the Lion Hotel in the High Street; St Mary's Church Hall in Cauldwell St, before finally settling in their own Headquarters (an ex Bedford School O.T.C. building)

which was transferred to their present Cardington Road site in 1933/34. Initially it was rather primitive with no proper sanitation, no heating and lit only by kerosene lamps.

Many leaders and Commissioners have emigrated from The Onesters and very many young and even older men have quite unashamedly stated that their time of Scouting in The Onesters have been some of the happier times of their lives.

Things have changed somewhat over the years, as a programme for the summer camp (then called an outing) of 1909 shows; i.e. bed 8 o'clock each night; but wait for it, rise 5 o'clock - surely that can't be in the morning, can it? I can't imagine any leader insisting on that now.

The Troop played its part during the two world wars and no fewer than 75 names appear in the 1917 Roll of Honour booklet as serving King and Country; two of whom <sup>at</sup> that time had been called to 'higher service' and of course as with other Groups up and down the Country, very many of The Onesters past and present members, served their Country in one or other of H. M. Forces in the various theatres of the 1939/45 war.

Some as young men before call up age helping to evacuate school children from London to Bedford and then "firewatching" in as many as three different places on different nights of the week.

As was mentioned earlier, things have changed, for in 1914 an old (ex) Scouts Comradeship, was formed in order to keep together as far as was possible, those ex members who for one reason or another had left the movement.

Initially 14 old Scouts registered and by August 1st 1914, 20 had been elected and since the Armistice was signed in 1918, 11 more members were elected. At the time of publication of the report of March 31st 1919, the membership of the comradeship stood at 27.

During its history, the Group has supported all six sections - albeit, Venture Scouts for only a short time; a Scout Troop formed at the outset, a Cub Pack, first registered in January 1921 and both still active, a Rover Crew which first appeared on Headquarters records in 1928 but was probably functioning some time before then, since local knowledge suggests the 'ONESTEROVER' CREW was probably at its peak in about 1925-28

The Rover crew disbanded in 1967 as a result of the Chief Scout's Advance Party Report, which declared that Rover Crews should become Service Crews and that the maximum age of members should be 21 years. A Senior Scout Patrol was formed in 1943, but lapsed and was reformed again in 1949 and shortly after its reforming the Senior Scout Troop was running with two Patrols.

Eventually however, due to two factors, dwindling numbers and finally the recommendation in The Chief Scout's Advance Party Report that Senior Scout Troops become Venture Scout Units, catering for a different age range, the section closed - sounds rather like the Beeching report with British Railways.

A Venture Unit was started in 1971, but its members, upon the wishes and wisdom of the District Commissioner and the A.D.C. Venture Scouts, were absorbed into the District Unit and were subsequently lost, upon its failure to survive.

More recently a Beaver Colony was formed, the inaugural meeting being held on 27th June 1985.

The Group now has running, the three basic sections, Beaver Scouts,

## Cub Scouts and Scouts.

all sections at sometime or another have had their ups and downs but in their peak, were second to none and always acquitted themselves well in competitions, often being referred to as the "Famous Onestars", one such remark being made by John Sweet in "Scouting" when inviting the Troop to try out one of his new mad-cap games and then report back.

The Group has had representatives at many national and international gatherings such as Jamborees and Rover Meets.

ie - Olympia 1920; Arrowe Park, Birkenhead 1929; Kandesteg 1931, Vaglergang, Holland 1937, Moisson, France 1947, Niagara-on-lake, Canada 1955, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire 1957 and Haliburton, Canada 1979, and then for a period of service at Camp Kern in California and an emergency trip as a replacement for an American leader at the Canadian Jamboree in 1983.

There have been 42 Kings Scouts, 22 Queens Scouts, and 8 chief Scouts Awards and 13 leaders at least, have gained Wood Badges as a result of undertaking the required leader Training.