

## Rovering in Bedford

The adoption of the Advance Party Report in the Autumn of 1967 marked the exit of Rover Scouts. Since the second world war the Rover Scout section of the Scout Movement had a very chequered career and never really settled down to any fixed pattern. Nevertheless by many 'old stag-ers' (and some not so old) the closure was received with much regret.

Therefore a brief history of the forty-nine years of Rovering in Bedford should be of some interest (It does seem unfortunate that it did not reach its Golden Jubilee). The Rover section of the Scout Movement started in 1918 but it was not until 1931 that the first World Rover Moot was held at Kandersteg, Switzerland. There had, however, been a COUNTY ROVER MOOT in Bedford in 1926, and it may be helpful for recording purposes to divide our history into approximately the same periods as the Moots. B\*P himself suggested the name 'Moot' for these gatherings, from the old English word meaning 'A gathering of young men for discussion concerning the affairs of the community'. The Rover motto was "Service" (which incidentally proved the strength - and weakness - of the section of the Scout Movement).

The story commences in 1918 (early details being related mostly by the late Horace ("Polly") Parrott of the Onesterovers - a great pioneer of Scouting in Bedford). The Scout Movement had started 'unofficially' in 1907 (officially in 1908) and in 1912 was granted its Royal Charter. When the first world-war came in 1914 there were many who believed that the Movement would collapse under the strain. Many Scoutmasters volunteered for Kitchener's Army and for other forms of service (and before the end of the war many of the elder Scouts had gone also) and it did seem that many Troops would perish (Indeed some did). But the Patrol System here began to prove its worth, with Patrol Leaders carrying on Troops with the Court-of-Honour as the directing body. Scouts undertook many jobs of war service, their finest work being in coastguard service. Some 30,000 Scouts passed through this service.



After the war - on demobilisation - several returned to civilian life with an increased desire to be of service to their fellow men, in the Movement which meant so much to them. But they were now over age. No doubt many would be able to help in the capacity of Scouters - but not all.

In his wisdom B.P. realised that not all young men were fitted to be Scouters - or Instructors - and decided that something must be done for this older age-group (just as it had been necessary for the under eleven age-group). So in 1918 Rover Scouts came into being and Bedford, of course, was among those first to adopt the new section. Emphasis was placed on Chivalry (using the legendary King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as example) - with the motto of "Service". A Rover could not be invested until he had attained the age of 18 but could be accepted into a Rover patrol as a 'Squire' at 17. Before investiture, however, the young man had to pass tests on the Scout Law, Signs and Salute, read "Scouting for Boys" and "Rovering to Success", have a knowledge of the workings of Local Government, and undergo his "VIGIL" (in which he would be accompanied by two Sponsors). In the early days the Ranks were the same as the Scouts but eventually the terms were changed :-

Rover Scout Crew became the equivalent of the Scout Troop					
Rover Patrol	"	"	"	"	Scout Patrol
Rover Mate	"	"	"	"	Patrol Leader
Second Mate	"	"	"	"	Second "
Senior Mate	"	"	"	"	Troop "
Rover Scout Leader	"	"	"	"	Scoutmaster

even so some Rover Patrols preferred the old 'titles' and often when attached to a Scout Troop, was run by an A.S.M (Rovers) just as in later years we had A.S.M.(Seniors) and S.M.(Seniors).

Also in the early days Rovers had a Badge scheme similar to that of the Scouts but, of course, the tests were more advanced and were divided approximately into two groups - Tenderfoot and First Class. (It will be appreciated that this was a period of trial and error and some of the



tests which could have been labelled 'Second Class' varied according to Crew or Patrol - some taking them before investiture, some after). There was also the KING'S ROVER SCOUT which was on the same lines as the King's Scout but the Rover not only had to pass the test himself but be able to instruct in the subjects. Most of the early Rover activities centred around Camping, Hiking, Pioneering and Service - which after all was B.P.'s intention - 'A Brotherhood of the Open Air'. Rovers really did take a pride in their activities and their 'appearance' as the following amusing anecdote shows :-

"Somewhere in the north of the county lies Hinwick, the home of (the late) Colonel R.R.B. Orlebar, himself a good Scout and a good friend to all Scouts. Somewhere near Hinwick lies Rushden (Northants) and for many years Patrols from Bedford attended the annual Church Parade at Rushden. This was always a well organised affair, and after Church every visitor was taken home to tea by a Rushden Scout, many friendships being made this way, particularly if the local Scout had a sister.

"Ted, Bill, two Cyrils and Alan decided that a week-end camp at Hinwick in conjunction with the parade at Rushden was an obvious arrangement, so one of the Hinwick meadows became their dormitory for the night.

"This was a very pleasant meadow containing a large pond, stagnant and overgrown with weeds, but still a pond, and there was a punt on it. Breakfast over, the camping quintet ventured a quick trip on the punt, it leaked a little but regular baling kept the water down, and everything in the garden seemed lovely. After a walk through the trees, dinner was prepared early so as to have plenty of time to get polished up for the Rushden Parade. Knees were scrubbed, shoes were shone, and each inspected the other (a good plan this), and there was still time for an idle hour before setting off.

"Alas! What changes may be wrought in an idle hour! Another trip on the punt was called for, and this was their undoing. Rovers from a riverside town like Bedford should have known better than to change places in



mid-ocean, particularly when dressed for a Church Parade, but the punt wobbled, took water, righted itself, did a side-step, then a lunge and just sank.

"The pond was stagnant and weed covered, but no more so than the Bedfordians - and aren't rushes squelchy, and isn't mud sticky, and don't bramble bushes scratch, and what a smell! The points at issue were (a) that the submerged punt had to be raised and (b) were five pairs of pyjamas plus five blankets proper dress for a Church Parade ?

"Emergencies need quick action and this one got it. While three entered the pond and rescued the submerged punt, two rigged up a clothes line cum laundry. Then two who were motor-cyclists, dressed in somewhat weird camp gear, hurried to Bedford to collect whatever dry Scout rig was available, while those at camp carried on with the laundry.

"Too late to reach Rushden for the beginning of the service, five spick and span Rovers joined the Parade as it left the Church, and were not only duly entertained to tea, but acclaimed by admiring sisters as the heroes they undoubtedly were."

At this time too Rovers could be registered independently from Scouts even though attached to the same unit. In Bedford a District Crew (87th.Beds:) was registered - under the charge of F. Stanley Smith - but the Onestrovers kept the same registration number as the Onesters Troop (although the Onestercubs had different). Each had its own "Master". With Rovers it was usually A.S.M.(Rovers) as mentioned previously. Actually Stan Smith's warrant was for "Scoutmaster".

Apart from the Onesters, however, there did not seem sufficient numbers to start up patrols in connection with other Troops. Some Scouts of Rover age did join the 1st.Beds: and the District Crew but by and large (as was found from time to time in later years) they were inclined to be 'parochial'. Round about this time new Rover patrols were formed by the 94th.Beds:(St.Paul's Wesleyan) and 101st.Beds:(Kempston C of E.).

One of the high-lights of this period was the COUNTY ROVER MOOT held during the week-end 4th - 5th December, 1926, at the new Local Association Headquarters in Howard Street. Rovers from all over Bedfordshire



ere in attendance, and these were billeted with Bedford Rovers and senior scouts. In return for the hospitality several Patrol Leaders and older Scouts were invited to the Camp Fire on the Saturday evening and the Rovers' Own on Sunday morning. This incidentally proved very good propaganda for the Rover section. At this Moot Horace ('Polly') Parrott of the Onesterovers was presented with a Warrant as District Rover Scout Leader.

Around this time Scouting in Bedford was expanding rapidly and several new Troops came into being. This, however, hindered rather than helped Rovering for 'Rover' age was 'A.S.M.' age and many young men took out Warrants. The Onesterovers were large enough to survive this onslaught on man-power - in fact they ran a "Service" Patrol of Rovers who held Warrants with other Troops. But the District Crew had now disappeared and some of the others temporarily disbanded. (Two or three Troops had intended to start Rovering and had in fact met as such but had to suspend activity). This was the first indication of weakness in the motto of "Service" although at that time it was considered good for - and part of - Rovering.

The year 1927 - 1928 saw the introduction of the Group System and all Troops, Crews and Wolf Cub Packs were re-registered and re-numbered in their respective SCOUT GROUPS. It also marked the end of the first decade of Rovering. By this time too the Rover First Class and 'King's Scout' had been discontinued.