

Rovering in Bedford (2)

Relapse and Revival

The advent of the Group System was soon followed by the entry of four more Rover Crews (or Patrols) in 5th.Beds:(Bedford School), 11th.Beds (St.Paul's Church of England), 15th.Beds:(St.Mary's, Bedford) and 18th. Beds:(Bedford Modern School), although the former had only a brief existence. A new Training Syllabus was published by Imperial Headquarters outlining the objects of Rovering and the Badges which could be earned (to replace those which had been discontinued). The RAMBLER BADGE (Hike an aggregate of 100 miles (or go an aggregate of 400 miles by pedal cycle) outside towns, during week-end or holiday hikes; must keep a log of his journeys to be handed in on the completion of the total of 100 miles (or 400); this log should give dates, places and distances, and should preferably give information that would be of use to other hikers, such as places of interest to be visited, good camping places etc; Sketch maps and nature notes should be included) and the ROVER INSTRUCTOR BADGE (Granted to any Rover who had acted satisfactorily as an instructor to a Wolf Cub Pack or Scout Troop for a period of not less than 6 months) had been retained and the RSD BAR Scheme had replaced the First Class. (On passing certain tests the Rover was permitted to wear a narrow strip of red cloth across the end of his shoulder straps).

Also with the Group System came the Group Competition - which replaced the old Senior (or 'Roff') Challenge Flag, and a Group now had to enter two Sections. (Mostly it would be Troop and Pack but a Crew could now be entered). In the first such competition the Oneasterovers were first in the Rover section - not surprisingly - and the newly formed St.Mary's Crew - very surprisingly - were second. (In later years with the introduction of the Rover Totem competition, this and the Signalling Shield were included in the County Group Competition. so it was possible for a Group to enter three sections plus signalling).

Shortly after this, when Crews seemed to be settling down to the new pattern came the Industrial Crisis and for the next few years Rovering fluctuated with - and doubtless owing to - the industrial situation of the time.

The Crews which operated during this period were 1st.Beds:(Onester-overs), 5th.Beds:(Bedford School), 11th.Beds:(St.Paul's Church of England), 15th.Beds:(St.Mary's, Bedford), 18th.Beds:(Bedford Modern School), 27th.Beds (St.Peter's Own), 94th.Beds:(St.Paul's Wesleyan) and 101st.Beds:(Kempston, Church of England). But only the Onesters and St.Mary's came through the Industrial slump with continuous service, the latter barely surviving. All the others were forced to frequently suspend operations and some discontinued altogether. In the very early days of Rovering it was possible to be a "Lone" Rover and although in later days an 'enlightened' (?) Advisory Panel considered them an anomaly, there is little doubt that "Lone" Rovers served a very useful purpose during this troubled period to keep the spirit alive.

(For the record, at this time and since the commencement the Rover patrol system worked similarly to the Scout :- A Patrol of four to six Rover Scouts under a Rover Mate and Second Mate; if there were more than two patrols a Senior Mate could be appointed; the whole under the supervision of the Rover Scout Leader - who acted in an advisory capacity. Patrols were named after famous people such as Explorers, Missionaries, Soldiers etc.)

In the midst of this period - 1931 - came the first World Rover Moot at Kandersteg, Switzerland, and the Onsterovers provided Bedford's representation.

The industrial situation began to improve in 1934, and with it came a renewed interest in Rovering. Several Troops had started 'Senior' patrols, and these proved a challenge to Crews for, understandably, such patrols working well were hardly prepared to transfer to a Crew which was likely to disband at any time. Some Crews which managed to face up to this challenge eventually absorbed such patrols. (For Senior Scouts did not become an officially recognised section until several years later).

In 1934 the District Commissioner for East Beds: Mr. G. W. Gurney, presented a Totem Pole to be competed for annually by Rover Scouts of the County. The first competition took place at Westoning and was won by the 1st.Beds: (Onesters) who incidentally won the Group Flag that year.

These competitions were in two parts, one written in the form of a story - which the competing Crews had to enact at a week-end camp, the other consisting of a Special Activity Log kept by the Crews over a given period.

The competition for 1935 was rather unique for it co-incided with the second County Rover Moot - held at Manor Park, Westoning - during week-ending 6th - 7th. July. It was a grand, sunny week-end and on the Saturday afternoon whilst Rovers were arriving and pitching camp the County Wolf Skin (Cubs) and Signalling Shield competitions took place. Saturday evening was spent settling in camp, with Crews intermixing, getting to know each other, and generally discussing individual Crew problems.

Sunday morning was taken up with the Rover Competition, the story, enclosed in 'Sealed Orders' being :-

"You are a party of trappers, some hundred miles from civilisation. You are now ready to return home, but find that the Indian tribes are on the warpath. This will make your journey both difficult and hazardous, but by making use of a series of blockhouses which lie on your route, it should be possible to manage it. Each blockhouse is a days march from the next, but as they may be captured by war parties, your only hope of reaching civilisation is in making all haste and covering the ground rapidly. You therefore decide to travel light, and as you hope to sleep in the blockhouses, dispense with tents and sleeping gear; but take all other kit which you consider necessary on a journey of this sort. At each stage of the journey you will receive help and information to enable you to negotiate the next section. Remember that speed is essential, but that the ordinary precautions taken when travelling through enemy country should be observed continually".

The examining Commissioners represent blockhouses. Start off along the public footpath towards the camp fire site.

GOOD LUCK AND GOOD HUNTING.

There was also a set of General Knowledge questions and another on practical Nature Study.

The competition over, Crews returned to their own camps for dinner - after which they prepared for the final sessions and the Rovers' Own at 3.30 p.m. on the Manor Lawn.

The Totem was presented to the winners - 30th.Beds:(Dunstable) just before tea. The Bedford Crews, however, did not do too badly, finishing fifth (Onesters), sixth (15th.) and eighth (94th.)

After tea - also on the Manor Lawn, and provided by the County Commissioner - Mr. Howard Spensley - the Crews represented :-

1st.Beds:(Onesters),	15th.Beds:(St.Mary's, Bedford)
30th. " (Dunstable),	81st. " (8th.Luton),
89th. " (Bury Park, Luton),	93rd " (Christchurch, Luton)
94th " (St.Paul's Methodist, Bedford),	97th. " (St.Andrew's, Luton)

joined in open discussion on Rovering in general, and the outcome was a decision to hold another Moot later in the year.

For five years Rovering had been through a difficult time but now there seemed brighter hope for the future.