

Rovering in Bedford(3)

Peak Period

1935 marked the Silver Jubilee of King George V and in Bedfordshire it also marked a great revival in the Rover Scout section of the Movement. Bedford District commenced the year with three fairly strong Crews and finished it with three very strong ones. Some of this no doubt was due to co-operation between the Crews in the Silver Jubilee celebrations in which they were asked to assist, the greatest occasion probably being the lighting of the beacons on Milton Hill and Waterworks Hill on Jubilee Day.

The Rover Competition and Moot at Westoning have already been mentioned but the biggest local event was undoubtedly the County Rover Moot at Cardington, in September and this deserves special mention:-
(Introduction by Sir Charles Bowring - District Commissioner for Mid-Beds)

"During the year there has been a satisfactory increase in Rover Activities of all sorts. Rovers supplied a duty picket at Whipsnade Zoo on Sundays during the summer, Crews taking turn to do duty. Considerable interest in local history and archeology has also been shown by some of the South-Beds: Crews. In the county there has been an encouraging increase in Rover membership, and in Mid-Beds: District, although the Census numbers of Scouts and Cubs are down, that of Rovers is up. (And this does not include the active Rovers who are Warrant Holders, nor the 'Squires' awaiting Investiture).

"Activities in the Mid-Beds: Crews have perhaps not extended so far as those of South-Beds: but nevertheless there has been considerably more co-operation between the three local Crews, notably on the Silver Jubilee Celebration - when beacons were lighted on Milton Hill and Waterworks Hill. All three Crews entered the competition for the County Rover Totem Pole and although, competitively, not so successful as last year, when the 1st.Beds:(Onesters) won the trophy, it provided a much greater opportunity for getting to know the other Rovers of the County, particularly so during the Rover Moot held at the close of the competition.

"As a result of discussion, and suggestions from Mid-Beds: it was decided that a week-end Moot be organised later in the year. Agreement that the event take place at the week-ending 21st - 22nd. September led

to the organisation of this County Rover Moot in the Bedford District."

G.C.B.

Thus the third County Rover Moot was held at the Royal Airship Works, Cardington (Though at one time during the previous day it looked as if it would literally be a washout). The venue was the 78th. Beds: (Cardington) Troop Headquarters and the adjoining field. It was a great success in spite of the weather, which could hardly have been worse.

After a week of unsettled weather, Friday night being particularly wet, the prospects on Saturday did not look very bright. The morning had been wet but rain had ceased by afternoon - though it was still very cloudy, damp and rather hot. This, however, did not deter the Rovers and the afternoon saw the arrival of several Crews. No organised activity - apart from a "Welcoming" Session - had been arranged and the afternoon and early evening were allowed for pitching camp and generally settling in. There was also opportunity for expeditions to the nearby villages of Cardington, Shortstown, Cotton End and Harrowden - or even in to Bedford.

Camp Fire was held in the evening, at which the County Commissioner - Mr. Howard Spensley was present. The weather appeared to have cleared up but rain started again in the late evening and distant thunder could be heard. About mid-night a terrific thunderstorm broke over the camp and some of the tents were flooded out. Several Crews evacuated to the Headquarters building. On Sunday morning most if not all of the Rovers were up early and seemed to be in one mind about what to have for breakfast - mushrooms. These grew in plenty in the field around the hangars and any early passer-by would have been excused in wondering what was going on, for the place was alive with youths in various stages of attire - some still in pyjamas. The weather seemed to have cleared after the night's storm. Breakfast was prepared and eaten in the Headquarters - now strewn with drying blankets, pyjamas, parts of uniform etc; There was more rain in the morning.

The first of the organised activities was a conducted visit to the Meteorological Station, Imperial War Museum, over one of the hangars and up the Mooring Mast, which was most interesting and enlightening.

On return to camp, as rain persisted, much time was spent inside tents or in the Headquarters building and amidst fraternising between Crews and individuals several new (?) unofficial activities came to light. Any-one who had looked upon 'Tag-card' collecting as something associated only with Wolf Cubs would have been surprised and disillusioned by the number on 'exhibition' - and they were being used as suggestions or guides to possible special activities (or projects as they would be called in the present day). The current series were "Aircraft", "Animals of the Countryside", Film Stars (several series), "Kings and Queens of England", "The Reign of King George V" "Wild Flowers" (several series). (Most of these were in fact used in some way or other in later times, chiefly as illustrations. CIGARETTES CARDS ceased to be issued shortly after outbreak of war in 1939 and gradually disappeared from circulation - never to be renewed - and as is often the case, with their rarity came increased interest and they became 'show pieces'. The Aircraft sets became specially interesting and useful in the war days when the nation was warned to 'know your enemy'. After the war several Tea Companies issued similar cards. Of the subjects mentioned the one of 'Film Stars' developed in the Forces with 'pin ups' - mostly female and after the war with the advent of television T.V. stars were included. The project has spread in several directions, not all, unfortunately, for the good. Very few of the stars appearing in those days are still doing so.) Several Crews had collected and pressed Tree Leaves or Wild Flowers; one Crew had collected specimens of Rock and Stones, another pieces of Pottery - which they said were probably of no use or value whatsoever, but came within the province of their special Crew activity, 'Archeology'. So the 'unofficial' activity, thanks to the weather, proved very useful indeed.

In the afternoon the weather cleared up and an outdoor session on Practical Pioneering was held and a trestle-bridge was erected. At first there were no volunteers to test it, then two at once - the Senior Mate of Onesters and his counterpart from the 15th - and they started from opposite ends. The rest stood back to see what would happen when they met in the middle. The bridge swayed well - but when they did meet they passed each other - a feat considered impossible. After that there were plenty of volunteers, and the bridge stood up to it, so all were well satisfied.

Most of the sessions, however, were held indoors. These were on Rovering Activities and led by 'Tiny' Chamberlain, a speaker from Imperial Headquarters. Two very interesting ones were "Hiking with a Purpose" and "Hotel and Inn Signs". A Rovers' Own took place, and the Moot closed at 4.30 p.m. It was unanimously agreed that the Moot had been a great success and all looked forward to the next.

Actually it proved a much bigger inspiration than was realised at the time, and opened up several fields for 'Special Activity' and in the next four years some fine studies on Archeology, Botany, Constructional Engineering, Local History and Topography, Mycology (Mushrooms and Toadstools etc.), Ornithology (Birds), Practical Pioneering, Town Planning, and Zoology were done by Rovers. Membership also increased and although the Census figures did not show a great increase it was only because Rovers were taking out warrants as Scouters and were shown as such.

Rover Crews in attendance at the Cardington Moot were :-

Mid-Beds (Bedford and District Association)

1st.Beds:(Onesters)
15th " (St.Mary's, Bedford)
94th " (St.Paul's Methodist)

South Beds: (Dunstable Association)

30th.Beds:(Dunstable)
84th " (Houghton Regis)

South Beds: (Leighton Association)

25th.Beds:(1st. Leighton Buzzard)

South Beds: (Luton Association)

3rd.Beds.(First Luton)
93rd " (Christchurch) 5th.Luton.
91st " (7th.Luton)
81st " (8th.Luton)
97th " (St.Andrew's) 9th.Luton.
89th " (Bury Park) 10th "
112th " (High Town Methodist)

There were also several Scouters from the 78th.Beds:(Cardington) Group - and one or two representatives from neighbouring counties. Fifty nine Rovers were present on the Saturday and seventy three on the Sunday.

In 1935 the Second World Rover Moot took place at Ingaro, Sweden, and the District was again represented by three of the Onesters - J.Aynesley, E. J. Lowe and L. G. A. Hennan.

Unfortunately the next County Rover Meet (at Kimpton) was really washed out. Some Rovers did attend but had to spend most of the time inside tents. It was more of an endurance test than a Rover Meet.

By 1937 the Fifteenth had outgrown their Rover Den and moved out to Shortstown where, after a while they split off one patrol as a nucleus for a Crew in '78th'. This too began to grow and again the den at Shortstown was not big enough to house the two Crews so, when invited by 7th.Beds(Kempston) the Fifteenth moved over to Chantry - and by the end of 1938 there was a 7th. Beds. Crew. In the meantime the Onesters and the '94th' had been consolidating their own 'new houses' - and the latter had started a Sea Scout section. Also north of the river the 18th.Beds (Bedford Modern School) had formed a strong Crew. In the Rover Competition of 1939, at Yarrow Field, Milton Ernest, Bedford had no fewer than six Crews represented.

Competitionwise, however, a large crew could be a liability, for numbers per team were sometimes limited and on two occasions the '15th' were divided into 'A' and 'B' teams and the average taken. But on the whole in pre-war competitions Mid-Beds. did very well :-

1934 at Westoning	1st.Beds:	winners;	1935 at Westoning	1st.Beds:	third;
1936 " "	15th "	second;	1937 " "	15th "	third;
1938 " Milton Ernest	15th "	second;	1939 " Milton B;	15th "	winners.

Many are the tales told of Scout Troops trapping a Commissioner in their badly or too-well-covered wet-pit but it was at the 1938 Competition at Yarrow Field, Milton Ernest, that a Crew really caught one in an 'Animal Trap'.

For the competition Crews were on the inevitable "Desert Island" and one of the tests was to construct a trap capable of catching some animal for food. Many and varied were the elaborate 'bird traps', 'tiger traps' and even 'elephant traps' but one crew had apparently nothing. It was a well-known fact (?) that the biggest enemy of competing crews were the Examining Commissioners. After 'lights-out' they would prowl around and with fiendish delight destroy the ingenious efforts of the Rovers. One Crew were not, therefore, very surprised to hear something creeping stealthily around their tent-area late at night, but they were rather surprised at a sudden outburst of un-Commissionerlike language and sounds of a struggle, which however, suddenly ceased as the Rover Mate put forth a hand (armed with a bowie knife) and snipped a thin cord.

(It is rumoured that the Crew was almost disqualified but the majority of the Commissioners did have a sense of humour - and awarded top marks, for after all a trap is to catch something and this one did). At the close of the competition at least one of them came quietly up to the R.M. and asked the secret of such effective rabbit snares.

By 1939 the Rovers were a real force in the Local Association and after the Munich Crisis in 1938 all had undertaken some form of National Service and were prepared for what was to follow only too soon. Probably the last corporate act of the Rovers - together with the Rangers and senior Scouts - was the marshalling of the evacuees from London in the early days of September. On this occasion the Fairground (or Cattle Market as it now is) became a large canvas camp and Reception and Re-distribution centre. Within a week every one of the Rovers was called up for some kind of National Service.