

Discovering your Heritage



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Do you know when your Scout Troop first started, the name of the Scoutmaster and what Scouting was really like in those far off days? If not, perhaps we can interest you in ways that are open to you to find out more about the past with a view to preserving the information for the future.

Start your investigations locally. The first step should be to find out what records have been kept over the years. Even if few written records remain, the chances are that the walls of your Headquarters will be festooned with trophies and mementoes which could tell part of the story, but all too often simply gather dust. Long standing members of the group will have their own memories and may know of other people in the area who used to be Scouts. Former members might also be contacted by a letter published in the local newspaper.

Spreading your net a little wider, your local newspaper might allow you to search backnumbers for reports on Scouts, but if these do not go back far enough then try the National Newspaper Library at Colindale Avenue London NW9 5HE. If the Group was ever attached to a Church, references may be found in their records or in the Parish magazine. Your local Reference Library and Public Record Office might also keep files on local Scouting.

The Headquarters Records Office has kept records of Pack and Troop registrations since October 1919 - prior to this date the task was carried out by the District Secretary. All Packs and Troops were re-registered in 1928 when the Group system of registration was introduced.

With the passage of time and limited storage space at it has been necessary to dispose of a lot of out-dated Warrant records, and so it is now no longer possible to check the service of Scouters who held Leader appointments in the Movement prior to 1947. It may interest you to know however that up until 1939 all Leader Warrant issues and cancellations were listed in the *Headquarters*

Gazette and *The Scouter*, the forerunner of *Scouting Magazine* today. Microfiche copies of these publications are available for reference in the Archives Department at Gilwell Park.

All enquiries about Group Registrations should be addressed to the Archive Department and Adult Leader appointments to the Records Department at Gilwell Park, Chingford, London, E4 7QW, or by e-mail to info.centre@scout.org.uk

The Archives Department at Gilwell, keeps records and artefacts relating to the history of the Movement nationally and also has a Reference Library. Advice and information is readily available by enquiring to the Archivist, and anyone researching a Group or District history is welcome to make an appointment to research. The Archives are open from 09.30 - 1600 hours Monday to Friday.

County Records

Scout Counties and especially those with their own County offices will have kept records over the years. They will also have copies of Annual Reports to which you can refer. Further information can be obtained from the County Secretary.

Research Rules

You might not regard writing a history of a Scout Group as serious academic research, but never the less you will find that if you work in a professional manner you will gain more sympathy from Librarians and Archivists.

Treat all documents with respect, some may not seem very old or important now but they will be one day,. Never write on them, turn back corners or mark them in any way. Make you notes in pencil on separate sheets of paper. This prevents risk of spillages and means any marks made by accident can be erased.

The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email info.centre@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

Inevitably during the course of your investigations, problems will occur. Do not be disheartened, but try to look at the question from as many angles as possible. For example if you have found out about the Group's early years but become stuck later on, try working backwards from the present to see if you can fill in the missing years that way.

When you come to write your history do not forget to observe the laws of copyright when making use of material from any printed source.

Early Records

Enquires are frequently received at Headquarters from people wanting to know if their Troop was the first to be registered. Much as we would like to establish such claims it is not possible to do so for as already indicated it was the local Committees and District Secretaries who were responsible for registering Troops (and later Packs) as and when they formed in the early days of the Movement. Therefore Troops with an unbroken record of service dating back to 1908 should be satisfied to regard themselves as "Foundation Troops".

Epilogue

Do not just be concerned with the past - remember that every new Member invested, every weekend camp, is history in the making. Try to keep Committee Minute books, diaries, letters, log books, photographs, programmes and other mementoes in good order so that come the next anniversary, whoever takes on your task should find life slightly easier!

Further Reading

B-P 'Chief Scout of the World'
Changes in 'Scout' uniform 1909-1991 (illustrated)
First Troops - historical background to the first Scout Troops
Hat plumes
How Scouting grew - A brief history of Scouting
The history of the Queen's Scout Award
The passing years - milestones in the progress of Scouting

There are fact sheets on the History on Scoutbase site at www.scoutbase.org.uk and these can be downloaded and printed out. Or fact sheets on various aspects of Scouting history can be obtained from the Archive Department at Gilwell Park.