

Scouting In Hamble

17th June 2008 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

Brian Hoey, the Group Scout Leader for the Hamble Sea Scouts, gave a talk on the history of the Scouting Movement in Hamble, particularly the significant role that Hamble played in the origins of scouting. The presentation was based on work by a 14-year old scout, Mark Mehan, who wanted to produce a history of the sea scouts as one of his service awards.

Robert Baden-Powell's distinguished military career formed a foundation for the skills he built into the Boy Scout movement. In 1907 he held the first boy scout camp on Brownsea Island, in Poole Harbour which was attended by 22 boys. He wrote "Scouting for Boys" in 1908, specifically aimed at a younger audience. Today the Scouting movement covers 216 countries, and has over 28 million scouts, of which over half a million are in the UK.

In 1907 Baden Powell visited C B Fry to look over a ship with which he was associated, named TS Mercury. The ship was later made available for water based activities for the scouts, under Rev Bloomfield, although it could only accommodate 50 boys. Lord Montague made available an area in Buckler's Hard for land based activities for a further 50 boys, and there was an arrangement that, at weekends the "Dry Bobs" would swap with the "Wet Bobs".

Baden-Powell was so impressed with the water activities at the TS Mercury that he set up a distinct section for Sea Scouting in 1910, based on those activities, and the scout troop at Mercury was registered as the first Sea Scouting troop.

Shortly after Baden-Powell married Olave Soames, in 1912, he became ill and stayed with Sir Harry Crichton, the County Scout Commissioner for Hampshire who lived at Netley Castle. After the First World War ex-Admiralty motor launches were used as a meeting place by Mr Edgar Aitkin, who was in charge of the scouts at that time. The scouts found that as soon as they tidied a particular boat for their use, the craft was promptly sold because looked so much better than the others.

Brian spoke of the scouting activities on the River Hamble in the 1910s and 1920s. Reg Calvert, took over as scout troop leader from 1922, who, it is believed was killed by pirates in 1980 while on his yacht in St Lucia. Reg's legacy was his love of sailing, which he passed on to the scouts.

A 1925 photograph showed a mix of uniforms in the Hamble Sea Scout troop. Most scout troops had the same coloured buff and khaki neckerchiefs at the time, but as the number of troops across the country increased, they were allowed to pick their own colours. The Hamble Scout troop chose the colours of St Andrew, and also the ones nearest to the colours of the Royal Navy.

An incredible insight to scouting in the 1930s was revealed by a diary kept by one of the scout troop. This had day by day accounts of the various activities of the troop. It included a report from the Daily Echo about a gift given by Baden-Powell to the troop. This gift was a stuffed alligator. Unfortunately it was later stolen, and although replaced by another, this too was stolen. Brian also showed some of the original score cards from a rifle shooting tournament mentioned in the diary.

An amusing report included in the diary was of a trip to the Isle of Man in August 1939. Skipper Cook had organised this trip for the troop, and the diary details the journey from Hamble, which took 25 hours. It included details of a trip to a cinema in Douglas to see "Goodbye Mr Chips", and a trip to see the "Mikado", although the latter did not seem to have been appreciated by many!

During the Second World War the Sea Scouts and cadets performed coast watching duties, and some of these duties did not finish until 4:00 in the morning. In the late 1940s the Hamble primary school headmaster, Mr A R B Cook was the scout leader.

The 1950s saw the troop leaving its previous meeting place, the old original wooden Memorial Hall, taking possession of a Nissan hut at Bartletts Recreation Ground, which remained their meeting place until a new building was erected on the same site in 1960s.

1968 saw two significant events, the closure of TS Mercury, and the troop receiving the distinguished privilege of Royal Navy Recognition. All Remembrance Day parades used to be held on Hamble Airfield, and many of the scouts recall that it was nice to get down to the church afterwards, and out of the wind!

Brian started his involvement with the scouts 26 years ago, just "to help them out", and 26 years later feels that the job has been a privilege and has given him a lot of pleasure. The scout troop today is over 130 strong, and consists of four sections. The Cubs from ages 7 to 10, Scouts from 10 to 14, Explorers from 14 to 18, and Network Scouts from 18 to 25. They currently have 15 girls in the troop, last year being the first time they have admitted girls, who seem to enjoy many of the adventure activities which are not available in in Brownies and Guides.

Further details and pictures on the history of scouting in Hamble can be found on the 'Links' menu to the Hamble Sea Scouts' website.