



VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

SEMINAR ABSTRACT

2nd December 2013

Sarah Mills, Loughborough University

'Citizen Scout': The Historical Geographies of Scouting in Britain

As the largest voluntary youth organisation in the world, the Scout Movement remains an important case-study for historians, education scholars and social scientists. This paper examines the historical geographies of scouting in Britain, specifically focusing on its understanding of youth citizenship in the first half of the twentieth century and the role of adult volunteers in 'mixing the medicine of scouting' (Baden-Powell 1922). Drawing on archival research, I demonstrate how the organisation constructed and maintained a specific youth citizenship project through their image of an ideal 'citizen scout' – a duty-bound, self-regulated individual that would contribute as part of a wider collective body of British youth. I discuss the role of volunteers in the citizenship model of scouting and how adult leaders negotiated the boundaries between 'good' and 'bad' scouting at a local level. Furthermore, I reflect on scenarios where both young people and adults challenged and stretched the organisation through alternative visions and articulations of 'citizen-scout'.