

# Scouting during the First World War

## Learning and Engagement Resource Pack



# Introduction

As Britain entered the First World War on 4 August 1914 Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout Movement, volunteered Scouts to support the war effort, they weren't to have a military role but could undertake work which released men for service in the Armed Forces. The skills the boys had learned through Scouting proved very useful in carrying out a range of jobs, from working on farms to guarding railway lines.

It is important to remember that in 1914 the age range for Scouts was 11 to 18 years. The majority of Scouts undertaking war work would have been aged 14 to 18 years old as the school leaving age was 12 and Scouts were discouraged from missing school.

This pack contains images of Scouts during the First World War and letters discussing their desire to undertake war work and the logistics involved. The images and letters are from the Heritage Collection, which contains a wealth of information covering over 110 years of Scouting.

## Using the Pack

Each section of the pack contains an introduction to the topic and some activity ideas which can be adapted for different age groups.

Each image is supported by information about the subject and a few questions to stimulate ideas and discussion about the role Scouts played between 1914 and 1918. Some questions are repeated on similar images e.g. images of coast watching and images of farming.

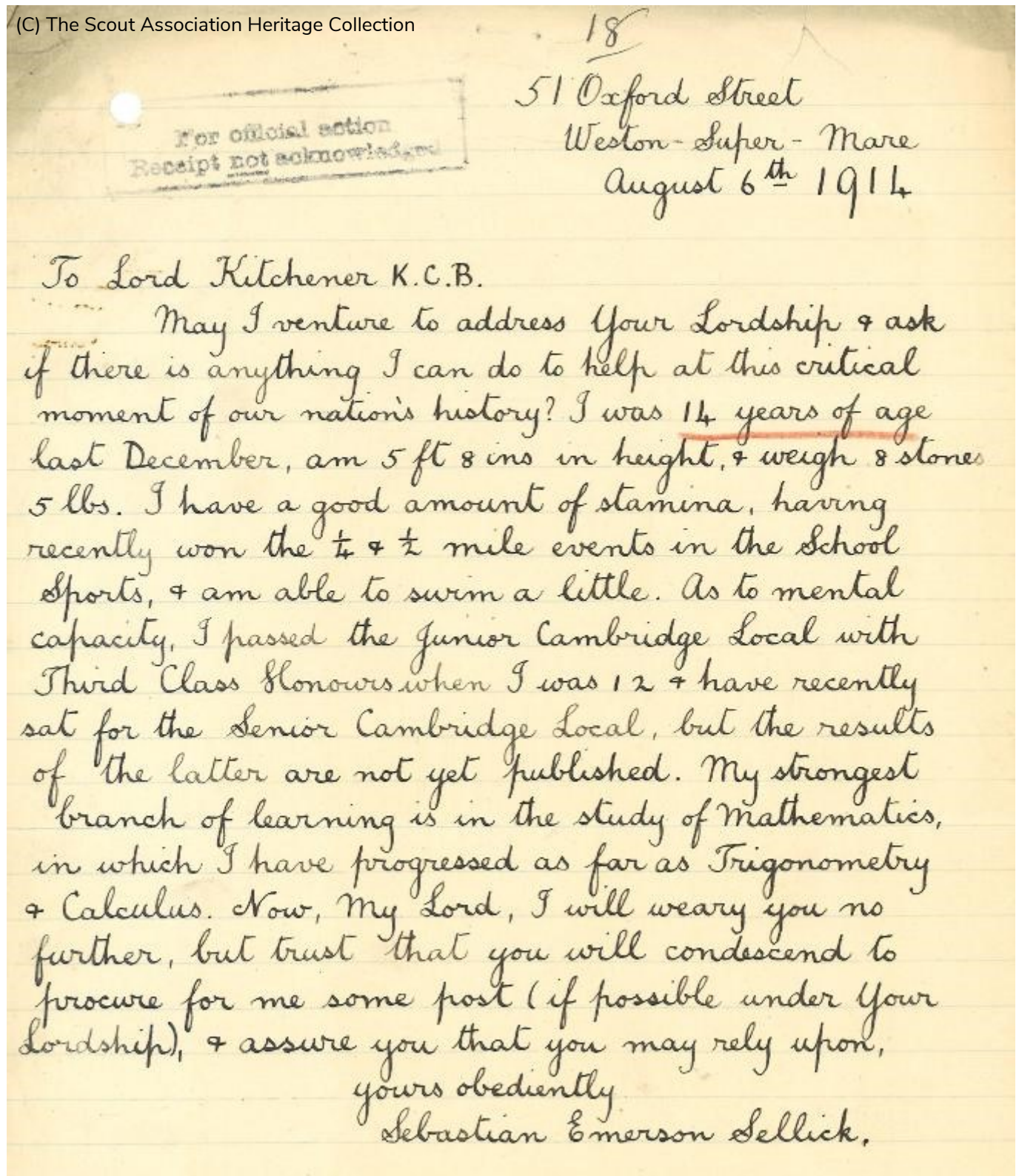
Questions can also be used to prompt discussion about the differences and similarities between the Scouting experience today and 100 years ago.

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## A letter from a Scout offering his service to Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War.

(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection



### Talk about...

- Why do you think Sebastian wrote this letter?
- Look at the skills Sebastian lists, what kind of war work do you think he could have helped with?

# Coast Watching

## The Sea Scouts

The Sea Scouts were founded two years after the Boy Scouts in 1909/10. They were a separate branch of Scouting and focused on developing water-based skills such as sailing or rowing. Sea Scouts didn't have to live near the coast, they could practice their skills on lakes, rivers and canals.

## Coast Watching

During the First World War Sea Scouts took on roles which supported the Coastguard. Many people were concerned about the threat of invasion by Germany so watching the coast for enemy vessels was very important. Other roles involved taking and

receiving messages, signalling along the coast and to ships at sea and even questioning people about their presence on the coast. By taking on these roles the Sea Scouts released men for military service. Once they found out about the work the Sea Scouts were doing other Scout groups came forward to volunteer.

The Scouts were supervised by the Coastguard and were lead by their Patrol Leaders who were responsible for giving orders and ensuring tasks were completed.

## Activity ideas

### Signalling

- Create a series of four short messages relating to coast watching duties e.g. a) *Ship in distress*, b) *send message to HQ*, c) *Launch lifeboat* d) *Send for ambulance*.
- Divide your group into teams and then split each team in two and place them at least 15m away from each other. Each side should have a set of messages, a guide to semaphore signals, flags, pencil and paper.
- Using semaphore the teams should attempt to quickly and accurately relay the messages to each other with the receiving team deciphering and writing down the message.
- This can be done as a race with points given for speed and accuracy.

# Divisional Coast Watching Officer inspecting a Sea Scout Patrol, 1914.

(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection



## Talk about...

- Why do you think Scouts were asked to help with watching the Coast during the war?
- What do you think it would have been like to be a Scout coast watcher?
- What sort of things do you think Scouts had to look out for?
- How would you have felt if you were asked to be a coast watcher?
- What time of year do you think this photo was taken?
- What do you think about the way the Sea Scouts are dressed?

## Sea Scouts on coast watching duty, 1914— 1918.

### Talk about...

- Why do you think Scouts were asked to help with watching the Coast during the War?
- Why do you think the Scouts are in a hut on stilts?
- What do you think it would have been like to be a Scout coast watcher?
- What sort of things do you think Scouts had to look out for?
- How would you have felt if you were asked to be a coast watcher?
- What skills do you think Scouts had to have to be good at coast watching?



## Sea Scouts firing a rocket to warn life boat crew of a vessel in distress, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- How do you think the Scouts felt knowing they were helping people in danger?
- How would you feel if you had to do the same thing?

## Sea Scout sending a message using semaphore, 1914—1918.

### Talk about...

- Why do you think Scouts were asked to help with watching the Coast during the War?
- What do you think it would have been like to be a Scout coast watcher?
- What sort of things do you think Scouts had to look out for?
- How would you have felt if you were asked to be a coast watcher?
- What do you think about the way the Sea Scouts are dressed?
- What skills do you think Scouts had to have to be good at coast watching?
- If you had to send a message whilst coast watching how would you do it?





## Sea Scouts having their dinner after coast watching duties, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- Which boy do you think is the patrol leader?
- How do you think he felt about having to lead and look after his patrol?
- How old do you think the boys in the photograph are?
- How do you feel about the boys being asked to help with coast watching?
- If you had been out coast watching all day what meal would you like to come home to?

## Sea Scouts receiving their subsistence pay for assisting with coast watching, 1914-1918.



Scouts weren't paid a salary for helping with coast watching, but some of them were given subsistence pay towards the cost of their food, transport and place to stay.

### **Talk about...**

- Do you think the Scouts should have been paid for coast watching?
- How old do you think the boys in the photograph are?
- How do you feel about the boys being asked to help with coast watching?

# Deal (Kent) Scouts in effort to save men from torpedoed ship

Copy

Walmer Court, Walmer,

November 17th 1914.

Dear Chief Scout,

We thought it would please you to know that some of your Sea Scouts (of the Deal and Walmer Association) now stationed at the Deal Coastguard Station, put off in the Coastguard boat under the command of the Chief Petty Officer of this Station, to render assistance to H.M.S. Niger, when torpedoed in the Downs on Wednesday last. From what I hear the Scouts behaved admirably under very trying circumstances. They remained out for three hours in a very heavy sea. To their great disappointment they had no opportunity of saving life as their boat was only a row boat and therefore slower than the steamers and sailing craft that did the saving. Although the Scouts were not able to save any of the brave men they were able to render some help by taking and receiving and transmitting signals to the Examination Tugs. The lads showed real pluck and fine discipline. As I have said there was a very heavy sea and they were the only crew to put out under oars. I am glad to say they are none the worse for their experience though they got a real good soaking, and were chilled to the bone at the time of getting back to shore. I am told that the patrol leader went through all these hardships only in shirt, shorts and without boots as he was cooking the rations when the alarm was given for the Scouts to man the boat. We here are all very proud of our lads and feel you might like to know of their brave deeds. Another of your Sea Scouts here joined the Naval Brigade and became signaller in ten days after joining. He went to Antwerp, but we fear he was one to be added to the Roll of Honour as we have not heard from him since, and he is not in Holland.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) W. Ryder Richardson,

\* Assistant District Commissioner and Hon. Secretary

Deal and Walmer Boy Scouts.

C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

## Talk about...

- How do you think the families of these Scouts felt about their coast watching activities?

# Message of congratulations and thanks “The Chief Scout’s Message”



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

At the end of the war Scouts who had taken part in coast watching duties received a message of congratulations and thanks from Robert Baden-Powell. The message says:

The Germans having surrendered their fleet to the silent Sea Power of Britain I take this opportunity of congratulating and thank you, coast watching Scouts for what you have done to back up our Naval Forces, throughout the War, by acting as their second line ashore. You have done valuable work and you have done it well. You may always feel proud of the bit you did in the Great War. Yours fraternally, Robert Baden-Powell  
Nov. 1918

### Talk about...

- How would you feel to if you received this message?

# Farm work

## Working on the land

Many Scouts volunteered to work on farms, particularly around harvest time. Before the First World War most farm work was done by hand and many men were employed on the land. When war broke out in August 1914 men started to leave farming to join the Armed Forces. Scouts were able to take on some of the farm work. Some troops from urban areas, such as the St Luke's Mission Troop from Chelsea, adapted their summer camp into a working farm holiday. In August 1914 some Scouts headed to France to help gather in their harvest as so many French farm workers had joined their Army.

Before the war Britain imported food from all over the world. As the war progressed German U-boats (submarines) targeted ships bringing food to Britain. It became even more important for Britain to grow more food. In March 1918 the Government approached Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout Movement, to call for at least 15,000 Scouts to help on the land.

Food wasn't the only resource which needed to be grown. Flax was a very important crop, as it was used to produce a tough canvas like cloth which could be used for jobs such as making tents, equipment and even covering aircraft wings.

## Activity ideas

### Harvest Board Game

- Devise a giant board game relating to food supplies. For younger groups use forfeits and bonuses based on war-time scenarios e.g. 'a U-boat sinks a food supply ship go back two places', or 'a local Scout group helps gather the harvest go forward two places'. For older groups use quiz questions about Scouting in the First World War to generate extra turns or miss a turn if the question is answered incorrectly.
- Divide your group into smaller teams, name them after war time jobs e.g. messenger boy, coast watcher etc.
- Create a board layout with rope to make a grid.
- Place the forfeits or bonuses around the board.
- Each group nominates a member to be their life-size game counter.
- Groups take turns to roll a giant dice and move their player around the board.

**A letter from a Scout Group offering to help with the harvest in France.**

MSA 26/1/14

(27)

"McLrose"

JSS

Woodchurch  
near Ashford  
185558  
Kent.

25 AUG 1914  
24<sup>th</sup> Aug 1914

Dear Sir,

Seeing a notice that about two thousand scouts are ready to go to Dieppe to help with the French harvest I write to ask for further details - I think I could get a party of my boys (8 to 10) to go free if we were kept on a small allowance made us for food - Who pays passage money? We could not manage to pay this but it would be very little above the sea crossing (return) as Abbeville is only 1/2 full angle from Ashford We are willing to take our own tent & can fend for ourselves - I would prefer to be in the neighbourhood of Calais if they require any help as I camped there with my last troop (5<sup>th</sup> Hampstead) last summer & I know the local decontaminator, Commissioner, Council Mayor (in fact everyone) & all of them were most

kind to us. Of course I know there will be nothing in Calais for us to do but there should be towards Langatte - If you like I will write direct to the Mayor of Calais but I would like to know whether we have a fund to defray fares or whether I should ask for those - I may add all my boys here are village boys & know all about farming having lived all their life on the land.

Apologising for troubling you at such length

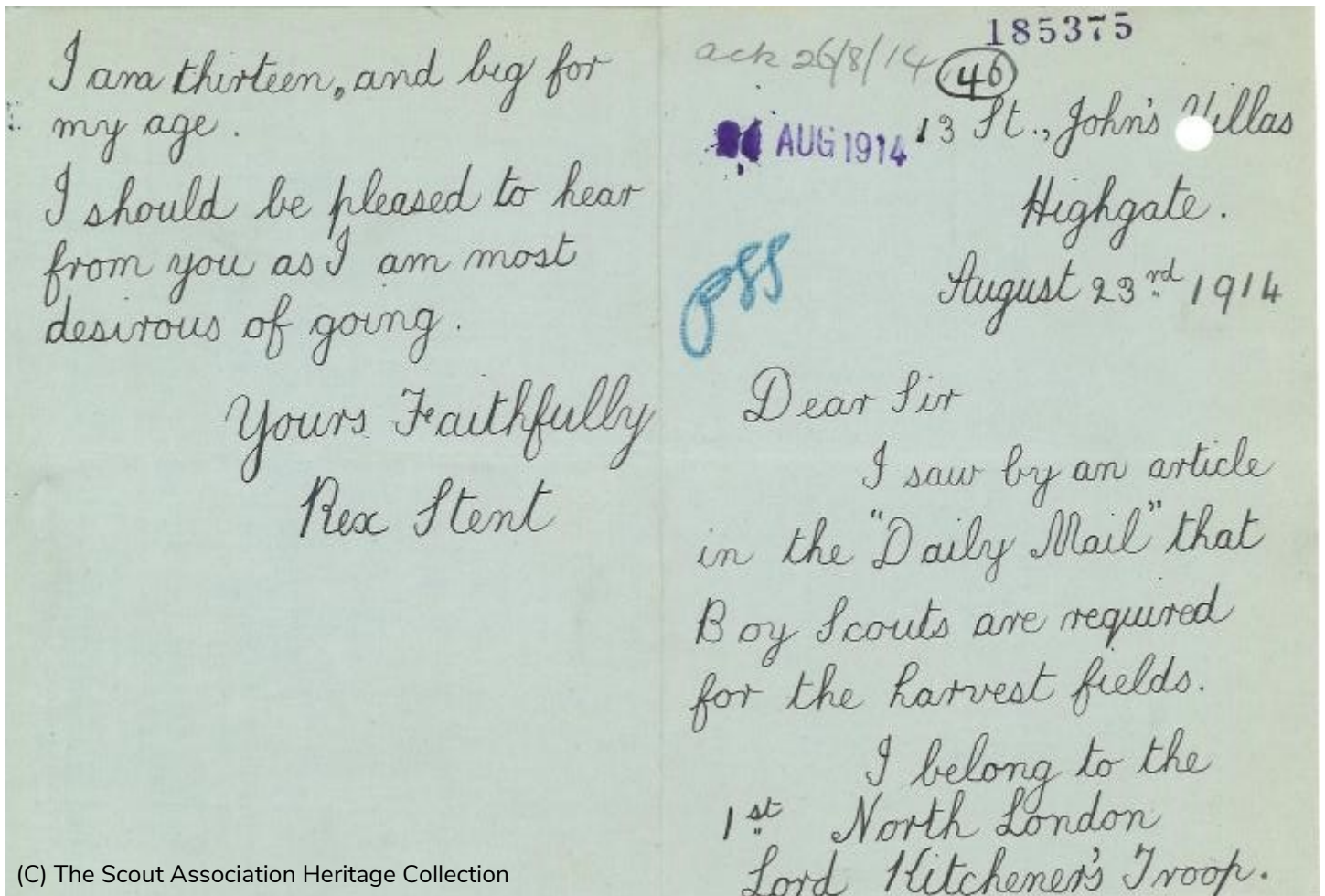
Yours faithfully  
W. J. Watson-Thomson

1<sup>st</sup> Woodchurch Pop (B.C.) Coy Scouts

P.S. How soon should the required?

Capt Wade.  
116 Victoria Street  
Westminster  
S.W.

## A letter from a Scout offering to help with the harvest in France.



It is unlikely that Rex would have been allowed to go to France to help with the harvest as he was only 13 and might have been due to return to school in a few days.

### Talk about...

- Why do you think Rex wanted to help gather the harvest in France?
- How do you think Rex's family would have felt about him going abroad.
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?

## Scouts harvesting turnips, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- How would you feel if your summer camp became a farm working camp?
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?
- Think about the food you eat. How much of it do you think is grown in Britain?
- If you could only eat food grown in Britain what types of foods would disappear?
- What are the differences between Scouts uniforms today and 100 years ago?



## Scouts harvesting flax, 1914-1918.

(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection



### Talk about...

- How would you feel if your summer camp became a farm working camp?
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?
- How do you think you would feel after a day harvesting flax?
- Why do you think two of the boys have wrapped their jumpers round their heads?

## Scouts harvesting flax, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- How would you feel if your summer camp became a farm working camp?
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?
- How do you think you would feel after a day harvesting flax?

## Scouts harvesting flax, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- How would you feel if your summer camp became a farm working camp?
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?
- How do you think you would feel after a day harvesting flax?

## Scouts working on a farm, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- How would you feel if your summer camp became a farm working camp?
- What differences do you think there would be with working on a farm now and 100 years ago?
- Think about the food you eat. How much of it do you think is grown in Britain?
- If you could only eat food grown in Britain what types of foods would disappear?

# Messenger Boys

## Pedal Power

The role of messenger boy was very important in a time before mass Telecommunications. In 1914 few homes or public buildings had telephones and telegrams and letters had to be delivered by hand.

Messenger boys were stationed at Government offices, Police Stations and other places from which messages might have to be urgently communicated. The messenger boy need to be healthy, strong, reliable and have a good sense of direction, criteria that many Scouts fulfilled.

## Activity ideas

### Messenger Race

- This activity works well over a wide area for instance on camp.
- You will need maps showing 'delivery points' and messages for each team to deliver.
- At each delivery point a pick up area should be set up so the group can collect their next message and map.
- Divide your group into smaller teams.
- Each team is given a message and a map for their first delivery. Send each group to a different delivery/pick up point. At the point they should deliver their first message and pick up the next message and map.
- During the game use a whistle to signal for an air-raid: during the air-raid nobody is allowed to move.
- For older groups add obstacles to cross or challenges to face on each route.
- The first team to accurately deliver all their messages is the winner.
- Afterwards discuss what kind of skills a First World War Scout messenger would have needed e.g. fitness, reliability, map-reading.

## Scouts working as messenger boys, 1914—1918.

### Talk about...

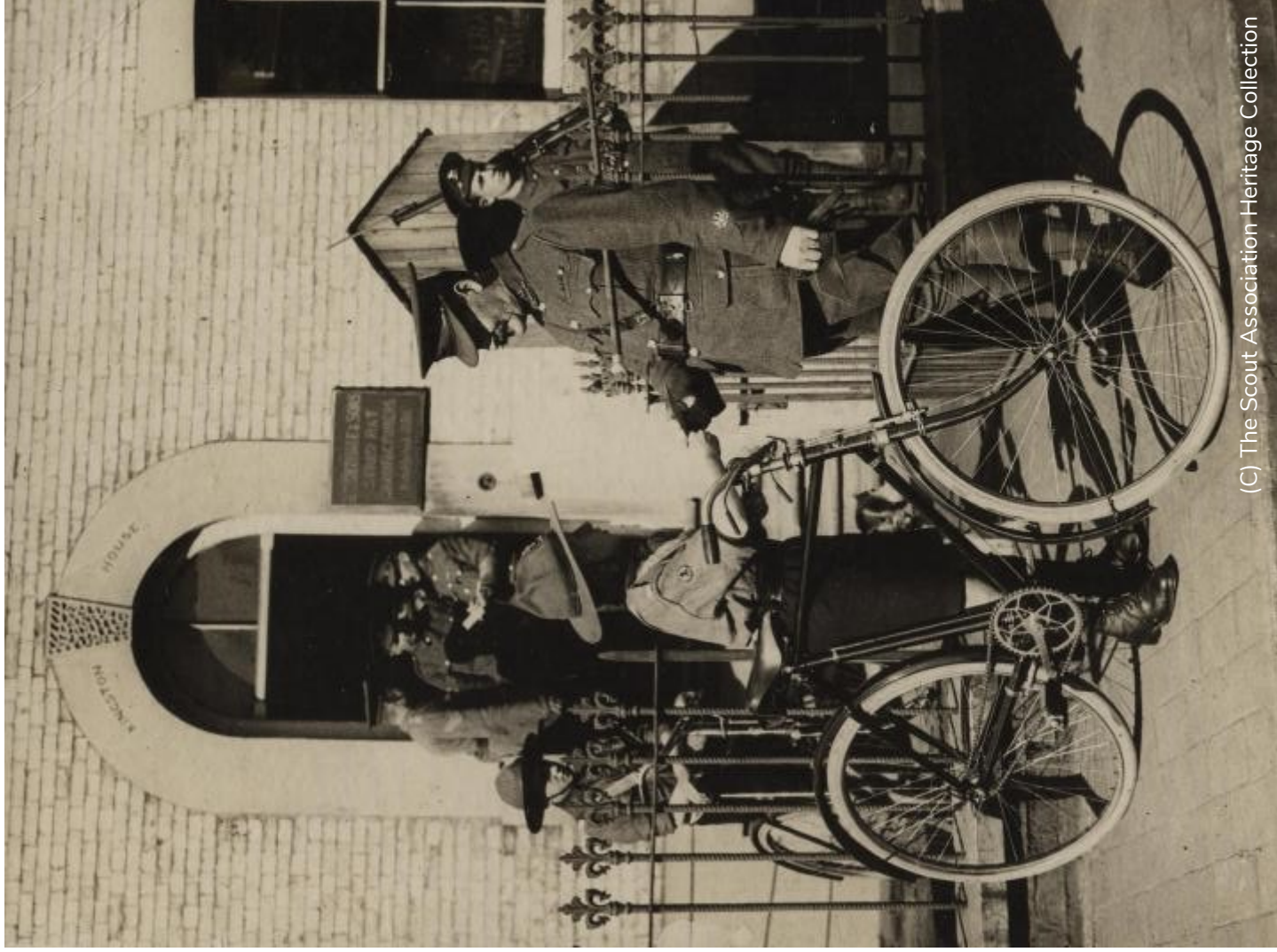
- What kind of building are these Scouts standing outside?
- What kinds of messages do you think the Scouts had to carry?
- Some messages were very important, why do you think Scouts were trusted to be messenger boys?
- What kind of skills do you think a Scout needed to be a good messenger boy? Could you do the same job?
- What do you think the good things about being a messenger boy would be?
- What do you think the bad things about being a messenger boy would be?



## Scouts working as messenger boys, 1914—1918.

### Talk about...

- Who do you think they men in the picture are?
- What kinds of messages do you think the Scouts had to carry?
- Some messages were very important, why do you think Scouts were trusted to be messenger boys?
- What kind of skills do you think a Scout needed to be a good messenger boy? Could you do the same job?
- What do you think the good things about being a messenger boy would be?
- What do you think the bad things about being a messenger boy would be?



# Scouts working as messenger boys, 1914—1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

## Talk about...

- What kinds of messages do you think the Scouts had to carry?
- Some messages were very important, why do you think Scouts were trusted to be messenger boys?
- What kind of skills do you think a Scout needed to be a good messenger boy? Could you do the same job?
- What do you think the good and bad things about being a messenger boy would be?



# Fundraising

## Every Penny Counts

Through the desire to support the Armed Forces the Scout Hut and Ambulance Fund was set up. As today Scouts during the First World War came up with some innovative ways of raising money.

One Cub Pack spent a whole day collecting acorns (these could be used in animal feed) and sold them contributing the proceeds to the Fund. The Scouts of Belfast raised over £600 by selling bottles making a significant contribution to the fund.

The fund bought much needed ambulances which ended up in service as far afield as the Middle East. Working with other charities, such as the YMCA, Scouts bought and supported the running of huts at Army camps in Belgium, France, Italy and Britain. The huts provided refreshments and entertainment and a place for men to relax when they weren't at the Front. Many of the huts were staffed by former Scouts.

## Activity ideas

- Young people continue to be involved in fundraising, both for their own group and for other good causes. Involve your group in a fundraising activity such as Scout Community Week.
- Research some First World War songs such as 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag', 'It's a long way to Tipperary' and 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' and First World War poems by poets such as Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon. As a group put on a First World War entertainment evening for a local audience.

## Boy Scouts Fundraising— Ambulances



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### Talk about...

- Which other charities are listed on the ambulance?
- How do you think Scouts felt when they saw one of their ambulances?
- Some Scouts helped the ambulances and worked as stretcher bearers, what kind of skills do you think they needed? Do you have any of those skills.
- Do you think Scouts did similar fundraising activities to young people today?

## Boy Scouts Fundraising— Ambulances



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- Which other charities are listed on the ambulance?
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# Boy Scouts Fundraising— Scout Huts

(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

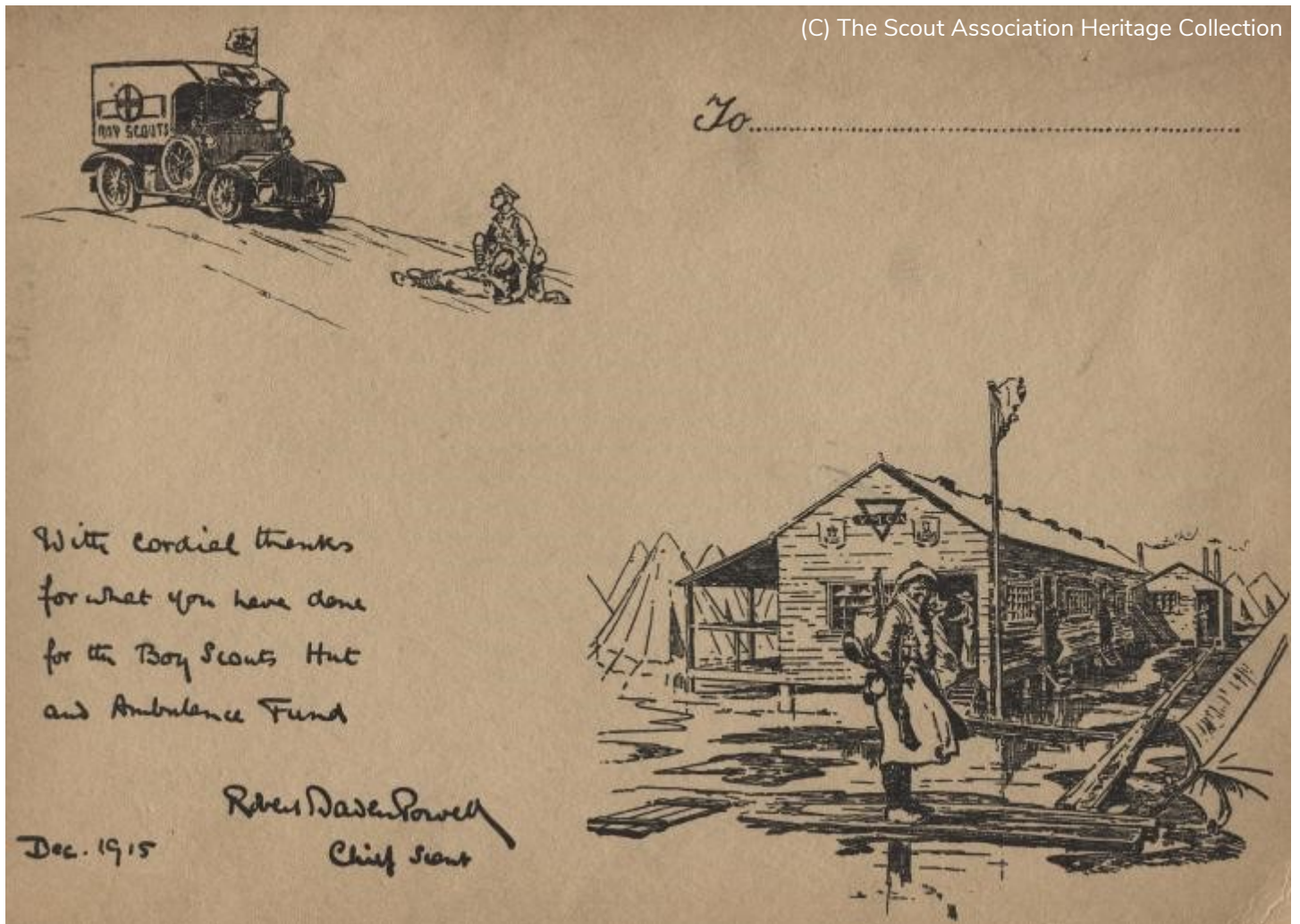


## Talk about...

- The Scout huts provided refreshments and entertainment for soldiers when they weren't fighting. Why do you think this was important?
- Which other charity is listed on the hut?
- How do you think soldiers felt when they saw one of the huts?

# Boy Scouts Fundraising

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## Talk about...

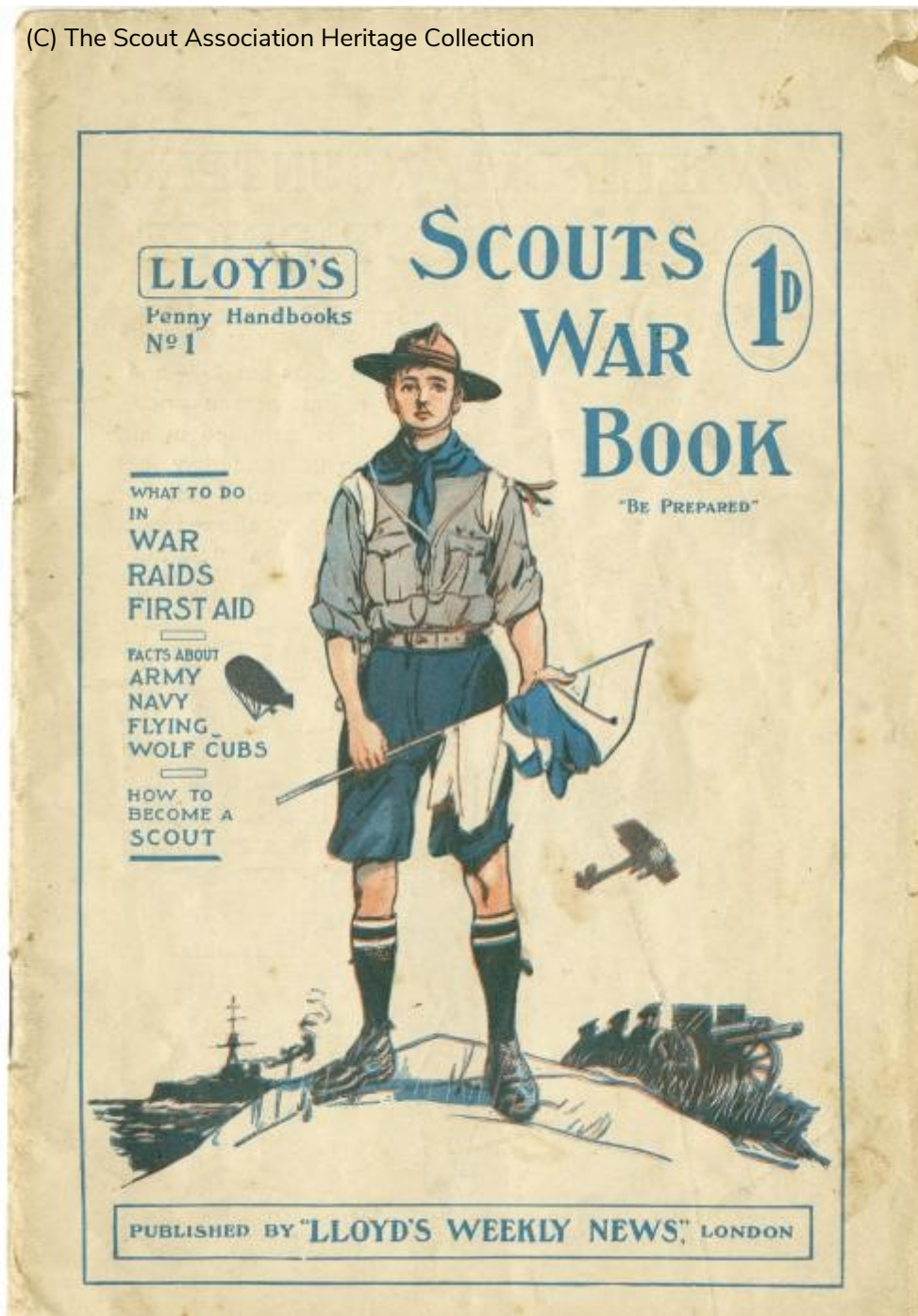
- Who designed this thank you note?
- How do you think Scouts felt when they received the note?
- What is pictured on the note?
- Why do you think the note was sent?

# Other duties

Whilst farming, coast watching and carrying messages were the main tasks Scouts undertook, some groups were asked to take on other roles including guarding railway junctions, telegraph and telephone cables against enemy sabotage and suspected spies.

As today one of the early skill sets a Scout developed was First Aid. Scouts were asked to help care for the sick and injured men of the Armed Forces as well as civilians caught up in attacks such as naval bombardments and Zeppelin raids. They worked as stretcher bearers and performing basic First Aid as required.

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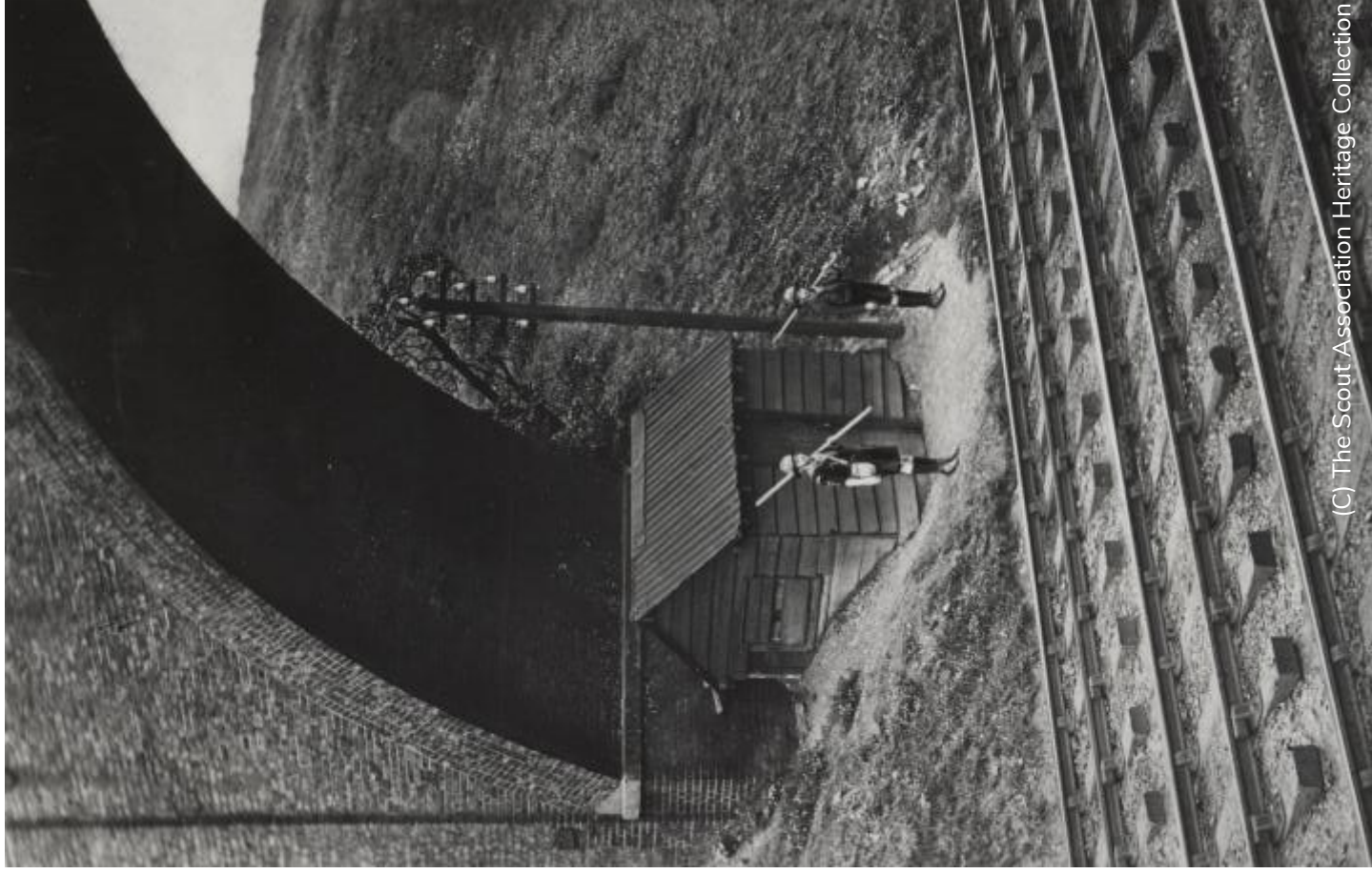
The Scouts War Book was written to give helpful advice to Scouts on skills and knowledge which would be useful during war work.

It also highlights badges which may develop useful skills such as

## Scouts guarding a railway line and viaduct, 1914—1918.

### Talk about...

- Why do you think it was important to guard railway bridges, telegraph and telephone lines.
- What do you think it would be like to be stationed on guard duty?



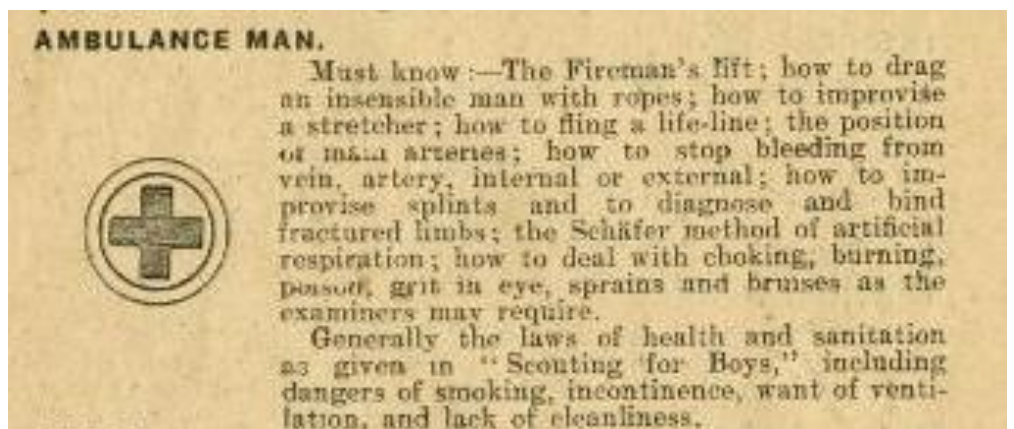
## Scouts working as stretcher bearers on the Home Front, 1914-1918.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- What kind of skills do you think stretcher bearers had to have?
- Do you think you have the right skills?
- Can you think of any badges Scouts can gain today that are similar to the ambulance man badge?





# Bravery Recognised

The bravery of Scouts undertaking war work and those who had joined the Armed Forces was recognised during the First World War. Former Scouts were awarded at least 19 Victoria Crosses, the highest military decoration awarded for valour "in the face of the enemy" to members of the British and Commonwealth armed forces.

It was the bravery of one former Scout, Jack (John Travers) Cornwell, which led to the development of Scouting's highest award for bravery, the Cornwell Badge.

In 1916 Jack was 16 years old and serving on the Royal Navy's HMS Chester. On 31 May 1916 HMS Chester was involved in one of the war's major sea battles, the Battle of Jutland. HMS Chester was badly hit and Jack's gun crew were all killed and he was badly injured. Despite his injuries he remained at his post awaiting further orders. His injuries proved to be fatal and he died on 2 June 1916. Three months later he was awarded the Victoria Cross in recognition of his bravery and dedication to duty. The recommendation from Admiral David Beatty read:

*"...the instance of devotion to duty by Boy (1st Class) John Travers Cornwell who was mortally wounded early in the action, but nevertheless remained standing alone at a most exposed post, quietly awaiting orders till the end of the action, with the gun's crew dead and wounded around him. He was under 16½ years old. I regret that he has since died, but I recommend his case for special recognition in justice to his memory and as an acknowledgement of the high example set by him."*

## Activity ideas

### Remembrance Research activity

- Look on The Scouts Roll of Honour to see if any Scouts or leaders from your area were killed during the First World War.
- Find out where your local War Memorial or Roll of Honour is. Are any of the Scouts mentioned on them? Some places have specific memorials to Scouts.
- Discuss why Remembrance Day is on 11 November and why we still mark it.
- As a group plan an act of remembrance. Remembrance doesn't need to be a religious act, discuss with your group how they would like to mark it.

## A sketch showing the deck of HMS Chester and Jack Cornwell's position.



(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

Sketch sent to the Captain of the "Chester"  
after the Jutland Battle, to show the position  
of Jack Cornwell in the fight - to help me  
in drawing by picture

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(C) The Scout Association Heritage Collection

### Talk about...

- Do you think it is important to remember Scouts who were killed during the First World War? Why do you think this?
- Jack Cornwell was 16 years old when he was killed, do you think his age makes a difference to how we remember him?

# Scouts in the public eye

## **Raising the profile**

The Scouts were formed 6 years before the First World War and had already gained a reputation for reliability and helpfulness. During the First World War Scouts played a very visible role on the Home Front which demonstrated what a valuable contribution the movement made to society.

## **A public message**

During the first year of the war (1914-15) the Government ran a poster campaign to encourage men to join the armed forces. On two posters published in 1915 the image of a Scout was used to reinforce the message that everyone should be doing their bit for the war effort. The use of a Scout to convey this message means that there must have been a high level of awareness of work Scouts were contributing to the war effort.

## **'Are You in this?'**

Robert Baden-Powell was a talented artist and had work exhibited in the Royal Academy and drew his own illustrations for 'Scouting for Boys'. During the First World War he designed a poster which was used as part of the official recruitment poster campaign run by the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee. His poster 'Are YOU in this?' was poster number 112 and was produced in 1915. A Scout messenger appears amongst the group of people who are all 'doing their bit' in various different ways. The other people are: a soldier; a sailor; a worker with a sledge hammer; a woman packing bullets on a table; a woman working as a nurse and an idle-looking man in a suit, hands in pockets, smoking a cigarette.

## **'Everyone should do his bit'**

The second poster to use the image of a Scout was Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster No. 121 published in 1915. It shows a Boy Scout leaning on an Army drum and standing in front of a series of earlier recruitment posters.

During 1915 the impact of the recruitment poster campaign started to wane. People no longer responded to the messages and in some cases, particularly those showing women sending their men to war, posters were defaced by women angry that their voice was being used. It became clear conscription, compulsory war service, would have to be introduced to ensure enough men were joining up. This meant the persuasive message of the recruitment poster became obsolete.

## Recruitment poster: Are YOU in this?

### Talk about...

- What are the different jobs you can see people doing?
- What do you think the Scout is doing?
- Is there someone in the poster who isn't doing war work?
- What do you think the message of this poster is?
- If you were a Scout in 1915 how would this poster have made you feel?



**EVERYONE  
SHOULD DO HIS BIT**



**ENLIST NOW**

**Recruitment poster: Everybody should do his bit**

**Talk about...**

- Why do you think the Scout is leaning on a drum?
- What is on the posters behind the Scout?
- What do you think the message of the poster is?
- What do you think the Scout is thinking about?
- If you were a Scout in 1915 how would this poster have made you feel?