

HUMOUR IN UNIFORM

A comic look at Scouting activities



A used comic postcard published by Bamforth & Co Ltd., from their Comic Series No. 1520. Founded in Holmfirth in 1870 as a photographic studio by James Bamforth, the firm expanded into postcard production in 1903, which soon became the major part of the business. Postmarked 28th July 1958.

Scouting started in 1907, founded by British Lieutenant-General Robert Baden-Powell to teach adventure, outdoor skills, and values to young people. It was spontaneously embraced by boys all over Britain and across the world who formed Patrols and Scout Troops of their own. They improvised uniforms and went outdoors to camp, explore, pioneer and do good turns.

Scouting's widespread appeal and public image, created an ideal theme for cartoonists and postcard illustrators. Humorous postcards were soon poking fun at some of the Scout's activities. Not everyone took Scouting as seriously as the leaders may have wanted. Several illustrators including Ernest Ibbetson, Harold Earnshaw and Donald McGill were soon producing a range of comic Scouting postcards.

Scope of the Exhibit

This picture postcard exhibit takes a humorous look at Scouting through a selection of comic postcards published in Britain and Europe over the past fifty years until 1960.

Plan of the Exhibit

Our story starts with the importance of the *Scout Uniform* (pages 2 -3), *doing a good turn* (page 4), *although not always in the right place* (pages 5-6), while *understanding that Scouts are never 'lost'!* (page7). We turn our attention to the annual *Bob-a-Job Week* (page 8), then to the Scout's attraction for *collecting badges by demonstrating skills learned* (pages 9-10). We join them *out on the trail, with a young boy's healthy appetite, and consequent moral dilemmas, and things going awry* (pages 11-13). Finally, a glimpse of *camp life ... although not quite like home* (pages 14 – 15), before ending with the ageing Adult Leaders, on which much of Scouting depends, *trying to keep up* (page 16).

References:

Scouting's History - <https://www.scout.org/who-we-are/scout-movement/scoutings-history>

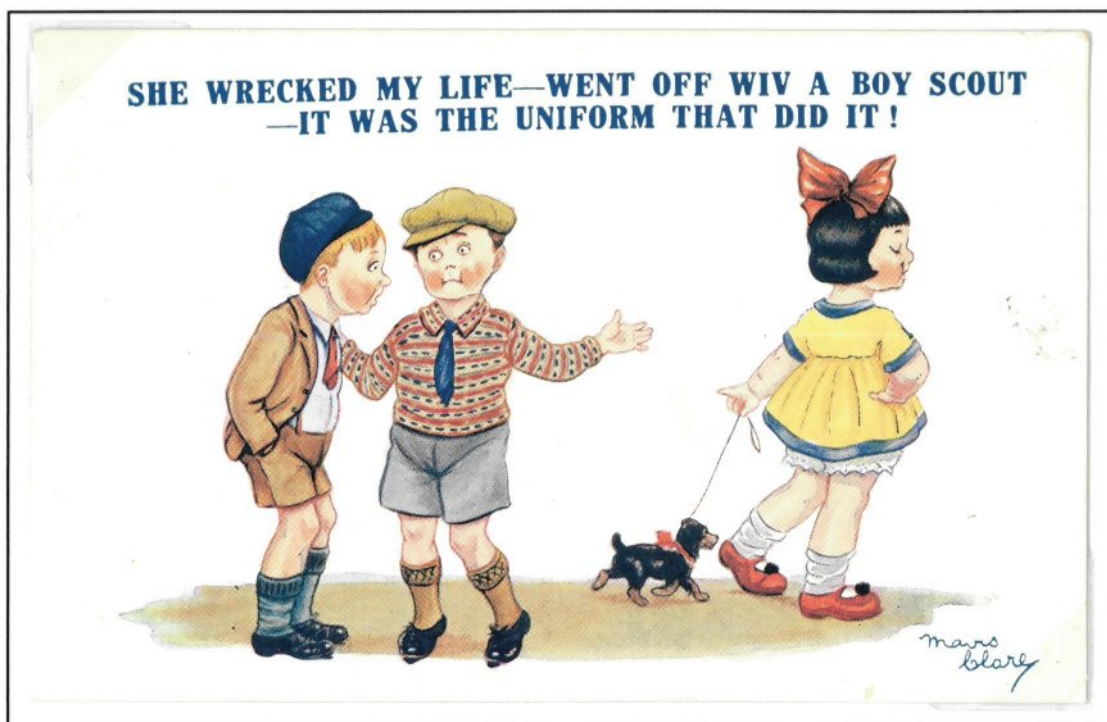
ITS ALL ABOUT THE UNIFORM

Uniform was an important part of the Scouting method, fostering a sense of belonging, equality, and pride among members, allowing them to be recognized and trusted in their communities.

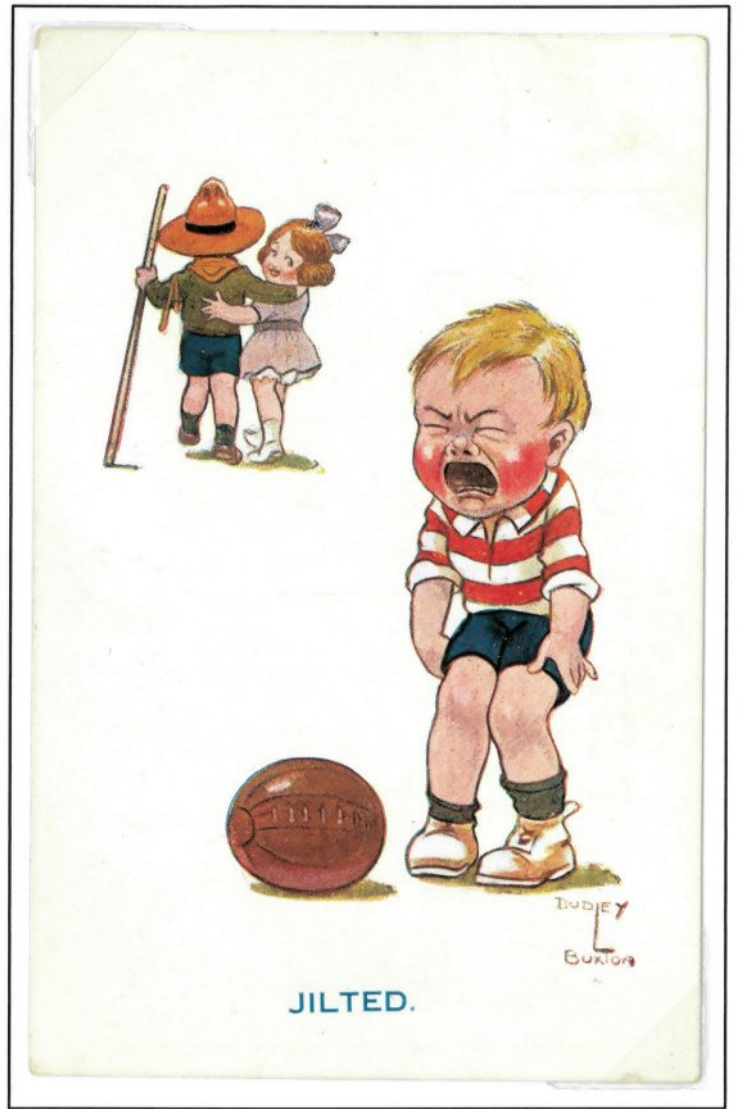
It acted as a visual symbol of the movement's values, reducing social barriers while displaying personal achievements through badges. Given Baden-Powell's previous military career, illustrators were soon poking fun at the neat, clean image of the Scout.

As illustrated in these cards, the 'ladies' are partial to a 'man in uniform'.

A used Fred Spurgin comic picture postcard (left), published by Inter-Art Co, London as part of the 'Tommy Series' No. 744. Postmarked Newquay on 4th January 1915.



Unused postcard, illustrated by Mavis Clarey and published by H.B Ltd, London. No.3494.



Used postcard (above left) published by Alfred Stiebel & Co, London, 'Modern Humour Series' No. 4283, poking fun at the unkempt Scout Master. Dated 9th June 1915. 'Jilted' a comic postcard (above right) by Dudley Buxton, continues the theme of the appeal of the uniform. Published J Beagles & Co. Ltd. The card has been used, but the postmark is not legible.



Unused postcard (above) from the 'Jane & Herbert Series' a set of 12 cards. Circa 1920's. By Thomas Hendry, a well-known illustrator of children's books.

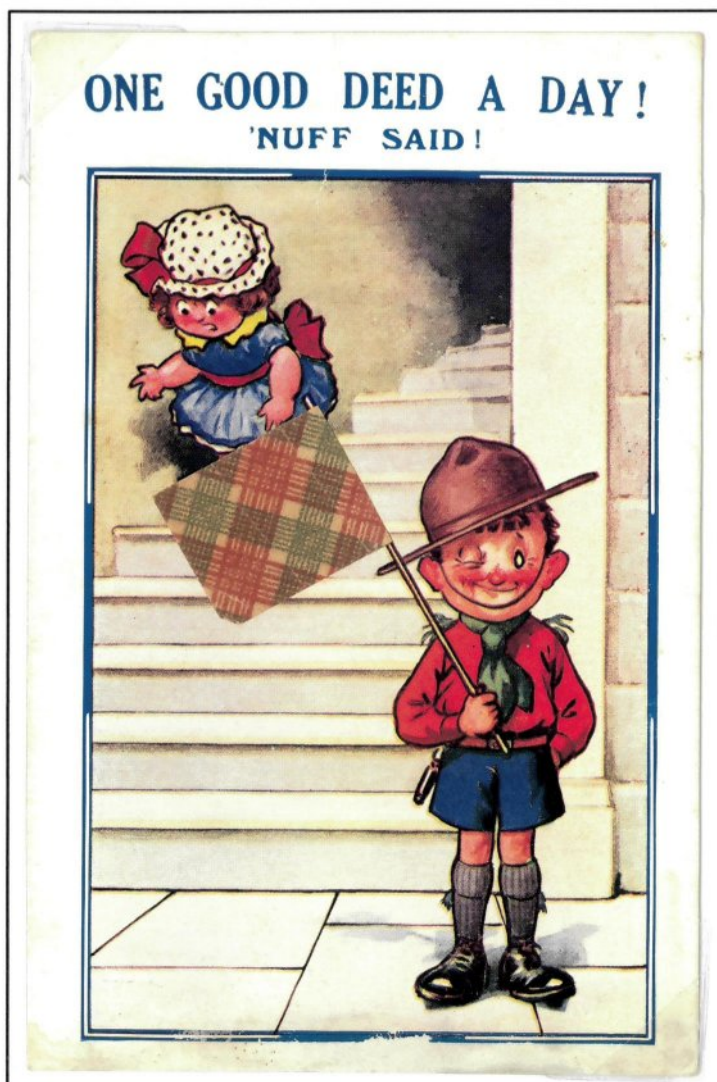
DOING A GOOD TURN ...

Service to others is one of the key values on which the Scout Promise and Law is based. Scouts are encouraged to do a good turn to somebody everyday.

Good Turns can be small personal actions or large community service projects, aimed at making service to others and to the broader community a lifelong habit.

This was a common satirical theme that comic postcard illustrators used to portray Scouting activities.

A used but unposted picture postcard (right) by Donald McGill. Published by the Inter-Art Co, from their Comique Series No. 4891.



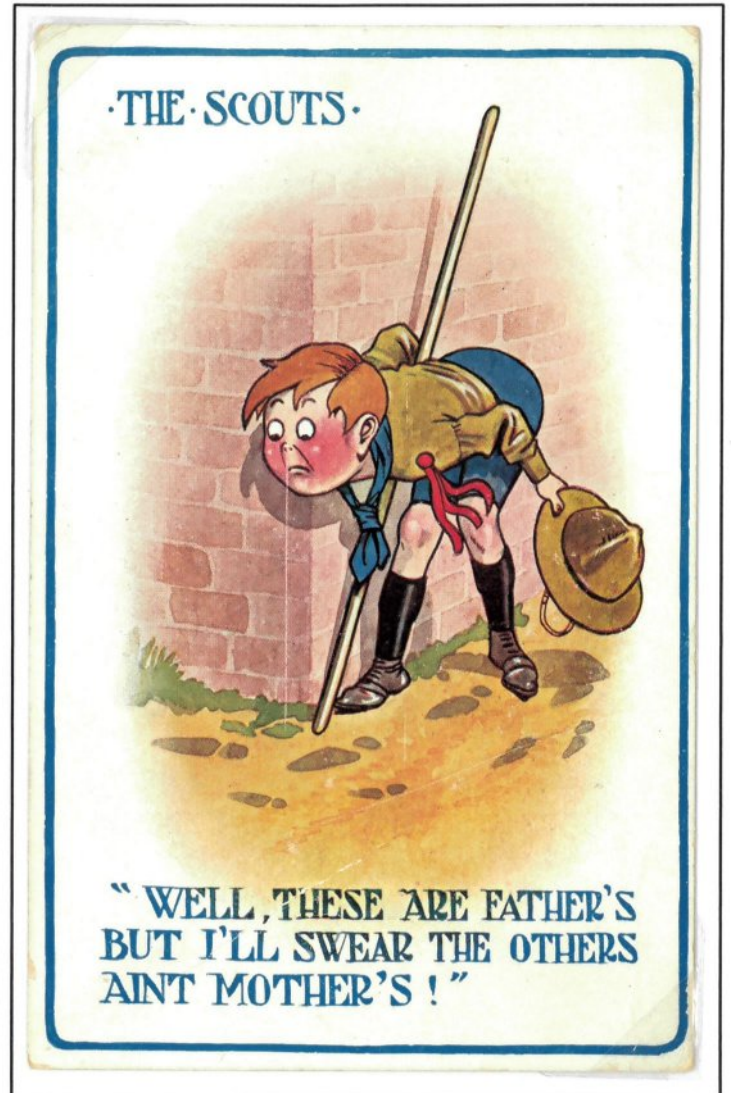
A novelty card from the 'Joke Card Series No. 24' published by Bamforth & Co Ltd. Lifting the top of the flag in the Scouts hand, reveals that it is covering the girl's knickers which have fallen down around her ankles (copy shown reduced original size).

... although perhaps not always in the right place,

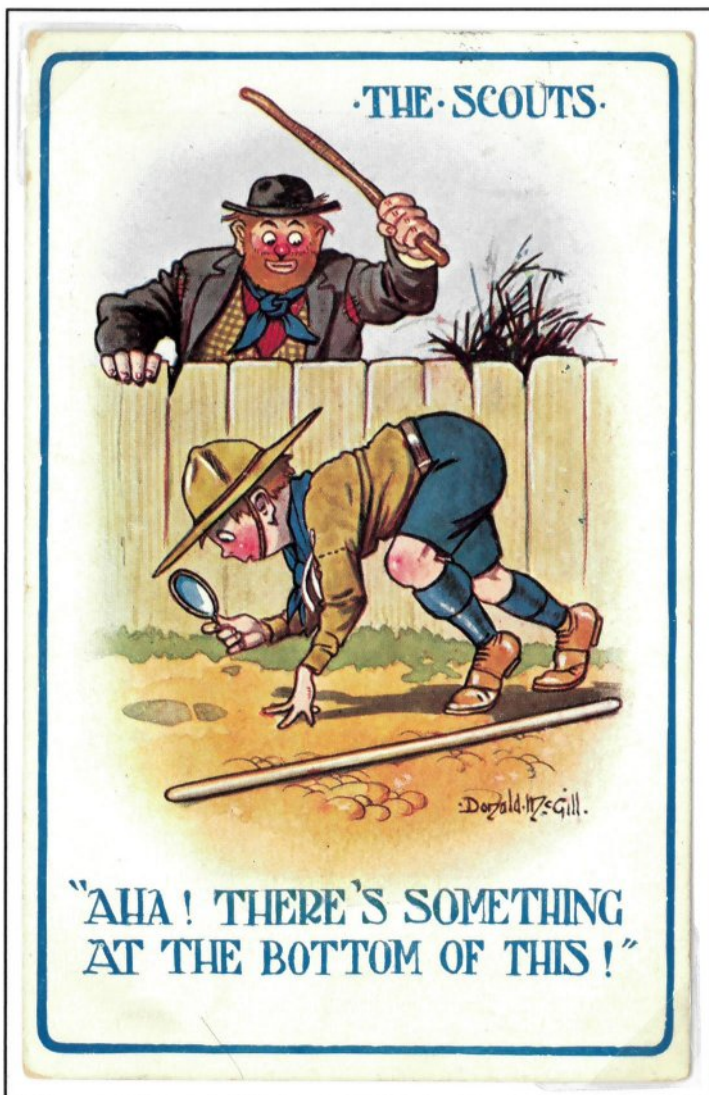
Scouting prioritizes structured outdoor adventures focused on camping, hiking, conservation, and outdoor survival skills to foster self-reliance and leadership.

Scout tracking activities focus on developing observation skills, and environmental awareness. Key activities include creating or following sign-based trails, stalking, and identifying animal tracks or spoor. These activities teach Scouts to be attentive to their surroundings and to work as a team.

I'm not sure that this was exactly what the Scout Leader had in mind in the postcards displayed ...



A comic picture postcard (above) by Donald McGill. Published by Joseph Asher & Co. Ivy Lane, London. Recorded as No. A 864. The card has been postally used, dated 15th December 1913.



Another used postcard by Donald McGill (left) and published by Joseph Asher & Co. Recorded as No. A 862. The postmark is not fully legible but can be dated August 1913.



'Outpost Duty' (above left), a used postcard by Bamforth & Co Ltd, from their 'Humorous Kids Series No.1060. Postmarked York, May 1917. A used but unposted Donald McGill postcard (above right), published by Joseph Asher & Co, London. Circa 1910's.



Used postcard (above) illustrated by Reg Carter and published by Alfred Stiebel & Co, London. From the 'Modern Humour Series' No. 4297. Postmarked Melton on 14th September 1914.

... while one thing's for sure, Scouts are never 'lost'!

Scout navigation activities teach essential outdoor skills, including map reading, compass usage, pacing, and route planning. These activities build confidence, teamwork, and spatial awareness.

This Scout's natural exuberance and desire to do his good turn, seems to have got him into some trouble with the adults.



Unused Gale & Polden Ltd postcard, illustrated by GM Payne.



Unused Bamforth & Co Ltd postcard, from the Comic Series No. 184. Illustrated by Philip W. Taylor.

BOB-A-JOB WEEK

The 'Daily Good Turn' meant performing a helpful, friendly act or service for someone else without expecting rewards or recognition. An exception was Bob-a-Job Week, a fundraising campaign through the 1950's and 1960's, where Scouts did odd jobs in exchange for a 'bob' (a shilling) to raise funds. Scouts performed tasks like gardening, car washing, and clearing leaves, often wearing uniforms and carrying job cards to gain public trust.



Unused postcard illustrated by O'Kay. No publisher's details are provided on the reverse, except a number 520.



Unused Bamforth & Co Ltd postcard, from the Comic Series No. 2094. Illustrated by Brian Fitzpatrick .

COLLECTING BADGES ...

As Scouts advance through the Scouting program; they earn badges which is a visible recognition for a variety of skills learned and proficiency demonstrated.

Both Scout Leaders are using the Scout's desire to 'collect badges' to achieve different behavioral ends ...

Report back to camp and turn in
your **GOOD CONDUCT** badge!



Unused postcard from Sunshine Comic, printed in Great Britain. No. 5808. Circa 1950's.

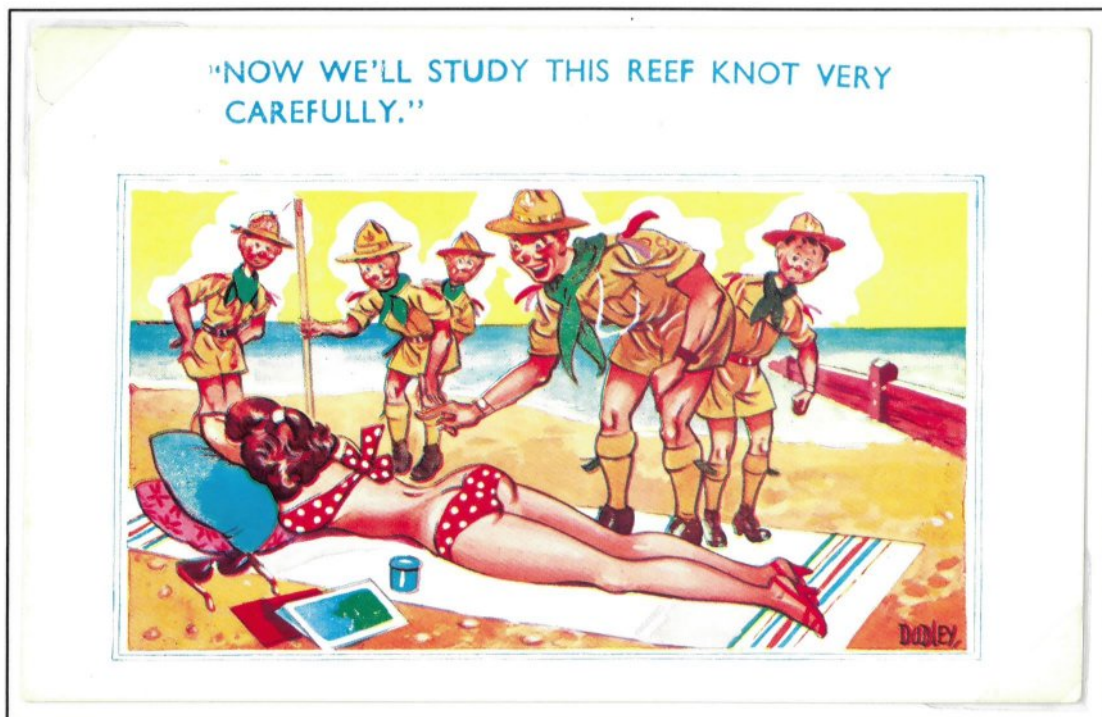
“ All right, I'll see that you get your
tracker's badge—now **BUZZ OFF !** ”



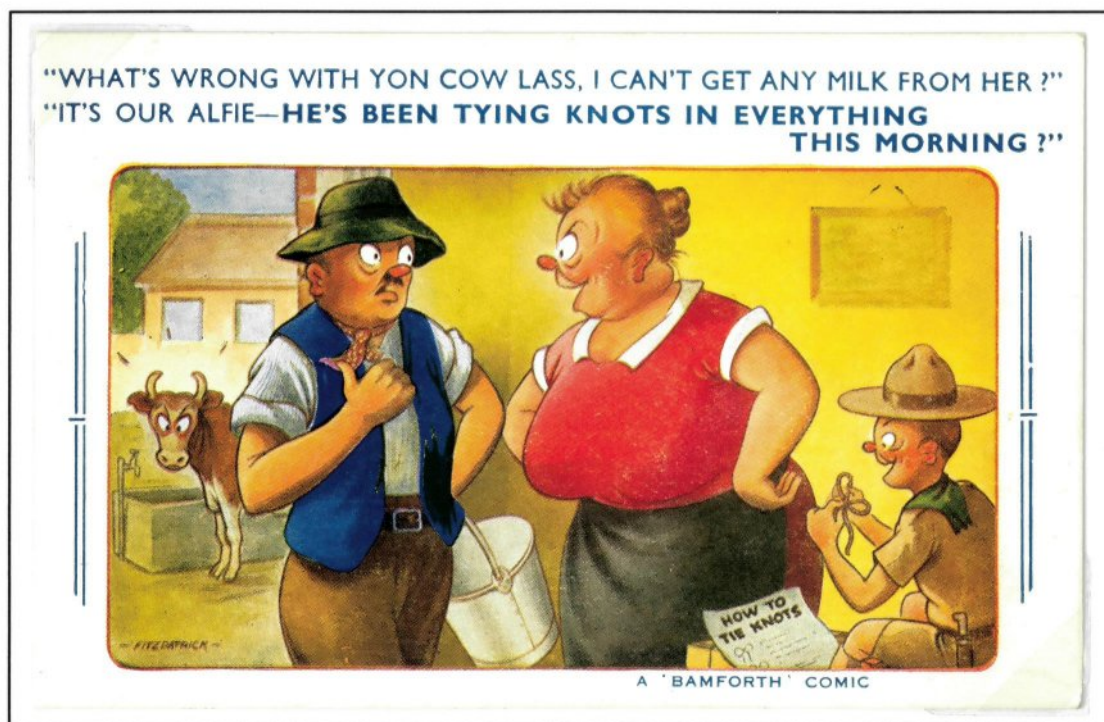
Another unused postcard by Sunshine Comic. No. 5388

... by demonstrating skills learned.

Every Scout ought to be able to tie knots, which are crucial for camping, pioneering, and rescue. The reef knot is probably the very first knot every Scout learns, although not necessarily in the situations illustrated in these postcards.



Unused postcard, illustrated by E. Marks and published by Fine Art Publishers, Kilburn, London. No. 2327.



Unused postcard illustrated by Brian Fitzpatrick and published by Bamforth & Co Ltd. From the Comic Series No. 1520. Circa 1950's.

OUT ON THE TRAIL ...

Hiking is a core Scouting activity that builds fitness, navigation skills, and appreciation for nature, ranging from short local walks for younger members to challenging overnight expeditions for older Scouts. In these postcards published in Belgium but used throughout Europe, a group of Scouts is shown crashing into each other on the downhill, while the thinking Scout in the second card, uses gravity to get his gear down the hill.



"The climb up was not easy, but how do we get back down in one piece?"
Used Belgian comic postcard, publisher's details not provided on the reverse.



"It was enough to think about it. One must know how to adapt."
Another used Belgian comic postcard. The title on the card is written in French and Flemish. Postmarked Rotterdam 8th September 1956.

... with a young boy's healthy appetite, and consequent moral dilemma

Used Donald McGill postcard by Joseph Asher & Co, London. No. A 6861. Postmarked 27th August 1913.



Donald McGill

THE SCOUTS.

"NOTHIN' IN IT ABOUT
TAKIN' APPLES, IS THERE
HORACE?"



HAROLD EARNSHAW

Unused postcard from a set of six illustrated by Harold Earnshaw and published by Reinthal & Newman, New York. No. 2061.

© REINTHAL & NEWMAN, N.Y.



Est pris qui croyait prendre.
De dief gevangen.

"Who thought to take from. It is easy to catch the thief"

Unused Belgian comic postcard, with no publishers' details provided other than No. 53679/10, possibly cards in a series number.

... and things going awry.

Adventuring in the outdoors, provides the opportunity for Scouts to solve real problems, develop resilience and critical thinking and practice teamwork.

Not everything goes to plan, as these Scouts are experiencing slogging through the mud and dealing with a runaway trek cart.

Used Dutch postcard (right), dated December 1951. No publishers details are provide don the reverse. The caption reads “and to think that some people take mud baths for their health”.



Unused Ernest Ibbetson postcard (above), published by C.W. Faulkner & Co, London. It is from a series of six cards, depicting Scouting activities. Circa 1910.

CAMP LIFE ...

Scout camping is an opportunity for personal growth, leadership, and camaraderie through outdoor education. It provides a practical, hands-on environment for Scouts to learn skills, build self-reliance, and practice teamwork, transforming the lessons learned in weekly meetings into real-world experience. Camping also encourages an appreciation for nature.



“Turning pancakes is also an art that you have to learn”

Used Dutch postcard, from campsite Kruithoed in Laren, a town in the province of North Holland. No other publishers details are provided. Card postmarked 26th July 1957.



“First night .. of camp. I am ready for the evening roll call or am I too early”

Unused Belgian comic postcard, with no publishers' details provided other than No. 54568/4. The caption on the card is written in French and Flemish.

... although not quite like home!

Despite all the preparations, camping cooking is not always like mother makes it. But Scouts learn to make the most of it. I guess none of them were expecting frogs' legs in this stew!



Postcard from a series by Ernest Ibbetson and published by C.W. Faulkner & Co, London. Series 970. Postmarked 28th January 1911.



“Brrr, I’m not hungry anymore”

Unused Belgian comic postcard, with no publishers' details provided other than No. 53679/2.

WITH THE ADULTS TRYING ... TO KEEP UP!

Adult 'Scout Leaders' play a vital, supportive role in providing the Scout program, acting as facilitators and mentors. Their primary purpose is to empower young people to lead their own activities.

The image of the ideal Scout Leader provides scope for satire. Here we see the adult who 'doesn't quite get what the Scouts already know' with a group of leaders 'battling to keep up' with their young charges in the final postcard.

Used but unposted Tucks Oilette postcard No. 8745, 'Advice to Scouts' (right). Illustrated by G.E. Shephard and published by Raphael Tuck & Sons, the official publishers to the British Royal Family. Postcard dated 12th April 1918.



Unused postcard (above), from Prague in the Czech Republic. No publishers details are provided on the reverse.