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## Youth on Streets and Bob-a-Job Week: Urban Geographies of Masculinity, Risk, and Home in Postwar Britain

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# Youth on streets and Bob-a-Job Week: Urban geographies of masculinity, risk and home in post-war Britain

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*After World War Two, youth in Britain was constructed as unruly, troublesome and deviant, particularly in public urban space and streets. However, not all children and young people were discouraged from entering these environments or engaging with the general public. Drawing from literature published by the Boy Scout Association and a case study of Bob-a-Job Week in Britain launched in 1949, I examine the institutional geographies of responsibility, risk and reward embedded in this youth activity, orchestrated by the most popular youth organisation in Britain. This fundraising scheme involved Boy Scouts completing domestic tasks for householders and encouraged uniformed youth to be visible, proficient and useful. Significantly, this also took place in largely urban areas – complicating our understanding of scouting as an idealised ‘rural’ practice with camping as its central activity. Furthermore, this paper explores how this fundraising spectacle also functioned as a hybrid space that permitted ‘feminine’ domestic tasks as appropriate for ‘British boyhood’ until the schemes eventual demise in the 1990s. Overall, the complex geographies of Bob-a-Job Week reveal how this organisation negotiated the boundaries between domestic and public space, providing an insight into broader constructions of youth and gender in the post-war period.*

## **Keywords**

Youth, urban geographies, street, masculinity, Scouts, Britain

## **Introduction**

Historians have described how youth in post-war Britain was constructed as deviant, troublesome and problematic as a wave of new social and economic freedoms altered the experiences and position of young people (Bugge 2004; Osgerby 1998). Youth culture, and in particular emerging sub-cultures of the 1960s and 1970s, were used by scholars in cultural studies to understand broader class-based ‘moral panics’ in urban space (Cohen 1973; Hall and Jefferson 1976; for a summary of this work and critiques of subculture, see Nayak 2003),

arguments which still resonate today in contemporary discourse surrounding children and young people in the UK and beyond (Massey 1998; Nayak 2003; Rogers 2004). Both these sets of literature however, represent the extreme (yet still pervasive) representations of youth during this time. Here, I want to focus on the everyday, perhaps mundane, encounters young people had with urban space during the post-war period through exploring how the Boy Scout Association – a popular organisation active before, during and after the emergence of ‘youth culture’ – used the street as a fundraising spectacle to mobilise its vast youth membership. Whilst geographers have engaged with a range of ideas about youth, the street and urban space in a variety of contexts in the Global North and South (Herrera, Jones and Thomas de Benitez 2009; Skelton 2000; Valentine 1996a; van Blerk 2005), this historical focus is unique in examining the past life worlds of children, their relationship with the street, and critical geographies of young people’s spaces and activities over time.

I have argued elsewhere that scouting in the UK functioned as a youth citizenship project (Mills 2013) that has been negotiated over time by adults and young people in terms of its policies and practices (Mills 2011). Here, I want to argue that the regular activities of the organisation such as Bob-a-Job Week were a vital part of that training in ‘good citizenship’ with youth ‘doing their duty’ at a local scale, but that furthermore, these activities also reveal wider attitudes towards youth in post-war Britain and their engagements with public urban space (if ‘public’ is indeed an appropriate term to describe streets and suburbs, see Valentine 1996a). Through looking at one practice of Scout groups – their involvement in this fundraising event – this paper also highlights how gendered ideas about domestic responsibilities and masculinities were played out and understood during this period. Launched in 1949 as an annual fundraising scheme to raise money for the Boy Scout Association, Bob-a-Job Week involved young people sourcing and completing small domestic tasks in their local neighbourhoods over the course of a week. The scheme became

one of the most familiar catchphrases of the organisation and ran successfully until 1964 when it became a voluntary option for Scout groups. By 1970, and with impending decimalisation, the name changed to Scout Job Week and the focus switched to sponsorship events that ran annually until the late 1990s. However in May 2012, the UK Scout Association undertook its inaugural ‘Scout Community Week’, a nationwide fundraiser that encouraged similar domestic, gardening or conservation tasks but through group-based community projects to help “Scouts ‘do 1 thing’ to have an impact on their community” (Scout Association 2012). These contemporary connections are interesting, not least because they reflect wider state-led policies about participation, youth, and the current coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda. This study therefore usefully traces the emergence of some of these ideas through a focus on the original Bob-a-Job Week and its explicit institutional geographies in Britain during the second half of the twentieth century. This paper makes three explicit contributions to geographical literature and academic debates and each will now be taken in turn to provide the contextual and academic rationale for this paper.

### **‘The art of making the city work’: Young people’s urban geographies**

Building on work by historians about the post-war ‘age of affluence’ and its identifiable youth culture (Bugge 2004; Osgerby 1998), encapsulated by the advent of the ‘teenager’ exported from the United States (Abrams 1959; Marwick 1990), this paper analyses the performance of Bob-a-Job Week in terms of debates on the geographies of youth, public urban space and the street (Fyfe 2003; Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999; Skelton, 2000). In doing so, its central contribution lies in providing a more nuanced and historically informed understanding of adults’ constructions of everyday experiences of youth in post-war Britain. Whilst youth culture remains a contested concept, variously described and located by

historians and writers (Fowler 2005; Savage 2007), it is undeniable that this period marked a shift-change in the ways in which young people were understood and their place in contemporary British society. And yet, geographers have been relatively silent on debates surrounding post-war youth culture(s), despite the growth of children's geographies as a sub-discipline over the last decade (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Skelton 2009). This paper therefore firstly makes an important contribution to work in children's geographies on these themes and addresses the lack of geographical research on this important time-period and the historical geographies of childhood, education and youth spaces more broadly (although, for exceptions, see Gagen 2000, 2004; Ploszasjka 1994; Mills 2013).

The dominant focus and perceived 'site' for youth culture was cities: urban centres of activity, freedom, emergent identities, experiences and tensions – brilliantly captured in Colin MacInnes' 1959 novel *Absolute Beginners* set in a dynamic and youthful London. Historical geographers David Gilbert (2006, with Breward and Lister) and Richard Hornsey (2010) have both examined London in the immediate post-war era and its associated diverse cultural identities, although studies of the geographies of young people and children at this time are still limited. Colin Ward's classic account of youth and urban space – *The Child in the City* – briefly mentions youth movements, alongside other hobbies, as influential in “cultivating the art of making the city work” (1990 [1978]: 108). In this respect, and throughout this paper, I define youth movements as voluntary uniformed organisations that emerged in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most commonly mobilised around a particular set of ideological, political or religious moral values and activities. Ward's description of these spaces as “cultivating the art of making the city work” provides one of the starting points for examining the urban geographies of scouting, hitherto neglected, through a direct focus on children and young people (aged 8-18) that took part in Bob-a-Job Week and tracing their place in the wider urban cultural geographies of Britain.

In examining this fundraising scheme, I argue that some of the pervasive ideas surrounding the ‘moral landscape of childhood’ (Valentine 1996b) at this time were challenged, or temporarily suspended, during Bob-a-Job Week through a counter-narrative of the street. Indeed, I argue that the street was constructed by the Boy Scout Association as an *appropriate* and *good* place for young people to be (during this allocated week), rather than a space of *contestation* where their presence was threatening, troublesome or potentially criminal (on street curfews for example, see Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999; on homeless youth see Ruddick 1995). Indeed, whilst the street is seen as a space that is ‘normally’ or ‘naturally’ an adult space (Valentine 1996a), for this week each year, Boy Scouts were encouraged to see streets and homes in Britain as their own, and indeed, as their space to ‘do their duty’. Conversely, Bob-a-Job week was understood by some parents as a space of *risk* or *exploitation* for children and these alternative visions of the street had to be negotiated by the organisation. I therefore also discuss in this paper how concerns over children’s safety manifest themselves during the course of this scheme and led to the alternative group-based approach to fundraising from the 1970s onwards. Social and parental anxieties about children in urban space are therefore not just a contemporary phenomenon (Pain 2006; Valentine 1997) but can be identified as part of much longer-standing ideas about risks for children over time and across diverse socio-economic conditions (Gillis 1974; Cunningham 1992). However, this paper also makes contributions to current disciplinary debates beyond ‘children’s geographies’ (on debates about sub-disciplinary anxieties and audiences, see Horton, Kraftl and Tucker 2008). I therefore want to discuss wider literatures on gender and domesticity as well as rural and urban landscapes where this paper also offers an original contribution.

### **Gender, domesticity and ‘appropriate’ masculinity**

Youth organisations are explicitly framed in terms of gendered expectations, roles and activities. Whilst academic research on a range of youth organisations has already highlighted the importance of gender (Proctor 2002, 2009; Kadish 1995), the discussion in this paper on Bob-a-Job Week does not limit itself to the gendered socialisation of youth membership, but illustrates how in this example certain ‘feminine’ domestic tasks were permitted as appropriate for male youth – a distinct departure from scouting’s early construction of a hard-bodied masculine ideal. The organisation is a highly gendered space, established by Robert Baden-Powell following a camp in 1907 with a specific class-based vision to create appropriate youthful masculinities for a stronger citizenry, nation and Empire (Proctor 2002; Warren 1986). Whilst these ideas were contested by early girl scouts, the Girl Guide Association and co-educational scouting (Mills 2011), the Boy Scout Association has remained a key site for the production and negotiation of gendered identities in the United Kingdom – with almost one in three adults having belonged to either scouting or guiding when interviewed in 1967 (cited in Springhall, 1977: 3).

Interestingly, the post-war period and Bob-a-Job Week appear to have been a time when the organisation professed an alternative type of appropriate youthful masculinity – with Boy Scouts’ encouraged to be comfortable and competent in domestic tasks such as cleaning and babysitting. This runs counter to its original messages of physical strength and adventurous outdoor woodcraft (Phillips 1997). Whilst camp cooking and cleanliness have always been a part of the moral education of scouting, in this article I show how during Bob-a-Job week, Boy Scouts were expected to complete an entire skill-set of ‘housewives tasks’ in order to be useful (and financially successful) team players. This paper’s second contribution to wider debates in contemporary human geography is therefore to demonstrate the complexity (and in some cases contradictory) understandings of domesticity and responsibility embodied within youth movement spaces, and in doing so, add an important

historical focus to debates on the geographies of masculinities, domesticity and unpaid work (Atherton 2009; Berg and Longhurst 2003; Hopkins and Noble 2009; van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005).

### **The Time-Spaces of Youth Movements**

Third, and finally, this paper contributes a re-thinking of youth movement spaces by explicitly focusing on non-rural settings and the neglected activities of uniformed youth in cities and towns. The imagined and idealised geographies of scouting (and indeed youth) are overwhelmingly rural (Jones 1999; Matless 1995; Philo 1992), with camping ‘in the wild’ often framed as a central scouting activity (Cupers 2008). Here, I expand the ways in which youth organisations are thought of to include urban settings and suggest that it is perhaps more insightful and appropriate to think about how specific practices and mechanisms were used as part of the scouting method in both rural *and* urban environments. In illustrating the spaces through which Boy Scouts operated and were visible in Bob-a-Job week, this paper challenges the imagined rural geographies of scouting and the idealised ‘natural’ landscapes where youth is often assumed to reside. In many cases, cities, towns, streets, roads and suburbs would have been the most familiar environments for Boy Scouts in post-war Britain; indeed, the majority of its membership lived in urban areas. Nature hikes and adventures in rural environments, whilst clearly important to its youth citizenship project (Cupers 2008; Matless 1995, 1998) were not the only form of scouting. Scout groups in villages, towns and cities perhaps camped only once or twice a year. However, they would have been involved in a number of other practices and collective shared experiences daily, weekly and monthly: meeting, playing, teaching, fundraising, planning, parading, cooking, celebrating and commemorating. These are practices which may not have explicitly drawn on ‘nature’, but

rather, on the everyday familiar surroundings and experiences of young people in *their* environments, close to their homes. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that in some post-war suburban council estates, Scout Troops went ‘camping’ on urban parks and football fields, as well as completing ‘observation’ badges through correctly identifying road signs rather than tree types. To return to Colin Ward in *The Child in the City*, he argues that youth movements fostered “all-important urban know-how” (1990 [1978]: 110) and that “their real utility”, beyond ideological teaching, “is in spacing out the week, in accustoming the member to forward planning, and to acquiring the habit of using the city’s facilities” (1990 [1978]: 113). As geographers have exposed and grappled with the rural constructions of childhood and the idealised care-free environments in which children are seen to play, inhabit and shape (Jones 1999; Philo 1992; Matthews et al 2000b), this paper seeks to complicate the pervasive images of scouting, and indeed other youth organisations, by explicitly focusing on their use of, and engagements with, urban space. In doing so, this paper contributes to wider debates in human geography on urban practices and landscapes of British modernity, as well as interdisciplinary research on youth movements and their histories.

In contributing to these three sets of literature and debates, I draw on original archival material from the Scout Association Archive, Gilwell Park, Essex, UK. This includes a range of original publications, correspondence, circulars, press releases, posters and photographic material relating to Bob-a-Job Week and Scout Job Week produced between 1949-1990. This body of written and visual material was collected through archival research and then analysed, with a clear focus on the research themes. In other research, I have been keen to highlight young people’s ‘voices’ from the archive of the Scout Association (Mills 2012) as a specific methodological strategy. However, in this case, there is little or no evidence of young people’s own sources or ‘voices’ within the collections used. There is clearly scope therefore for a separate oral history project on the lived experiences and memories of Bob-a-

Job Week. Instead, the remainder of this paper carefully crafts a sense of the institutional geographies of urban scouting at this time and presents an argument about the complex geographies of youth on the streets of post-war Britain.

### **‘Fired with the Joy of Service’: Bob-a-Job Week and British Youth**

Bob-a-Job Week was established in 1949 to raise funds for a struggling Boy Scout Association following the war effort and a loss of adult leaders, finances and support. Smaller job schemes had been undertaken prior to 1949, noticeably the first call for Scouts to support C. Arthur Pearson, publisher of early scout literature and magazines, who became blind in 1914. Robert Baden-Powell invited all Scouts to do Mr Pearson a ‘Good Turn’ on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1914 by letting themselves out on ‘hire’ for the day, raising £1,200 for his fund for the blind. These individual small-scale economic forms of fundraising were commonplace in early spaces of youth work and religious philanthropy (for example, on tea treats and Sunday School, see Harvey, Bailey and Brace 2007) and can be seen as part of the much broader tradition of associational voluntarism in Britain (McCarthy 2011). Bob-a-Job week – a nationwide and more organised job scheme – explicitly encouraged uniformed Boy Scouts to engage with their local neighbourhoods, streets and homes to provide clear examples of service to others as ambassadors of the organisation. Indeed, we can also see this scheme in the wider context of post-war reconstruction under a socialist Labour government, encouraging citizens (and youth in particular) to ‘do their bit’, for example through National Service (Hickman 2005).

For one week a year in April, all Scout groups across Britain ‘hired out’ their Scouts, issuing them with job cards and instructions to go round to local homes and ask for any jobs the householder needed doing in exchange for a ‘bob’ – the colloquial term for a shilling – a

unit of British currency until decimalisation in 1971.<sup>1</sup> The official organisational history of Bob-a-Job week recalls that “the Scout Movement earned a fine reputation from the general public, who were pleased not only at having an ‘odd-job-man’ on call but at being able to help the Movement at the same time”.<sup>2</sup> Later in this paper, I critically assess this contention through exploring correspondence from some members of the general public who regarded Bob-a-Job Week as exploitative and a nuisance. Clearly though, the scheme was framed as a chance to solidify and maintain the organisation’s reputation through its youth membership performing an ambassadorial role. As the promotional leaflet from the first Bob-a-Job week shows (Figure 1), through using a photograph of uniformed Boy Scouts making up the image of the British Isles, the scheme uniquely linked ideas of service with nationhood at an informal and local level.

Figure 1: Bob-a-Job Week leaflet (1949)



Source: SAA/TC/103/National Bob-a-Job Week 1949 Folder, Publicity Bulletin

<sup>1</sup> Prior to decimalisation, there were 20 shillings to the pound.

<sup>2</sup> Scout Association Archive (hereafter SAA)/TC/103/*The First Bob-A-Job*, January 1961, 3

Bob-a-Job Week was communicated as an important and worthwhile activity to Boy Scouts, intrinsically tied to the organisation's broader philosophies, especially 'duty to others'. Indeed, Lord Rowallan, Chief Scout at the time of the scheme's launch and only the second Chief Scout since the death of Baden-Powell in 1941, wrote to Boy Scouts after the first Bob-a-Job Week, exclaiming that "all over the country stories [came] in of the splendid spirit in which you tackled this task and proved that Scouts do try to obey the Scout Law".<sup>3</sup> The event was articulated in terms of a strong national effort of service, with the publicity bulletin for Bob-a-Job Week 1956 stating "Bob-a-Job week is with us again and British boyhood is fired with the joy of service...the effort is magnificent."<sup>4</sup>

The scheme was also seen as a way to teach young members about the world of work and earning money – or 'their keep' – as the future generation of Britain's industrial economy. Indeed, the language shifted in the early 1960s to more clearly identify who Scouts were *not* and locate the organisation's own moral landscape of childhood. In a suggested 'mock letter to your local editor' in 1962, adult Scout leaders received a clear outline of how to 'pitch' Bob-a-Job Week through constructing Boy Scouts as the antithesis to 'juvenile delinquents' and emerging youth sub-cultures:

"In these days of increasing juvenile delinquency...it is refreshing that the Boy Scout Movement continues to up hold the principle that its members "earn their keep". Few people can fail to be aware of the value of this Movement which has as its aim the training of boys and young men to produce good, honest citizens."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> SAA/TC/109/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, Chief Scout Lord Rowallan to all Scouts, 12 January 1950. The Scout Law is a series of statements members promise to 'keep'. For more on this 'code of living', see Mills 2013.

<sup>4</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1956 Folder, Cited in Publicity Bulletin 1956

<sup>5</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-a-Job Week 1962 Folder, Mock letter to your local editor, Publicity Bulletin 1962.

In analysing how the organisation encouraged its adult leaders to frame and articulate its central message for Bob-a-Job Week, we can see the broader attitudes of scouting authorities towards youth in Britain and the perceived value of the organisation.

### **Streetscapes, Spectacle and Safety**

Although Bob-a-Job week was a nationwide scheme, and Scouts went looking for jobs in their local neighbourhoods – whether rural villages, suburban estates or inner cities – it is a clear example of Scouts being encouraged to be visible on the streets, rather than secluded campsites or expansive fields of rural Britain. As discussed earlier in the paper, the street has been examined as a space of contestation where the presence of young people has usually been seen as potentially threatening, criminal and troublesome (Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999; Ruddick 1995). In Bob-a-Job week, however, the presence of young people on the streets of Britain, such as those captured in Figure 2, was largely welcomed and celebrated by the Boy Scout Association and the general public.

Figure 2: On the Streets in Bob-a-Job Week



Source: SAA/TC/109/Bob-a-Job Week

Here, two young Cub Scouts are captured walking dogs in a suburban estate, and an older Boy Scout is photographed shining a lady's shoes on a high-street. These images represent the idealised performances and central messages of Bob-a-Job Week: smart, smiling and uniformed Scouts 'doing their duty'. The symbolism and visibility of the street (Fyfe 2003), and the unthreatening and reassuring presence of the Scout Uniform, were both important for the performance and success of the scheme. In many ways, the week functioned as a spectacle, with the uniform a clear sign of belonging and authentication, and the street the arena through which new jobs could be secured.

However, the sight of young people touting for jobs on street corners was, for some, an exploitative and risky scenario tantamount to organised begging. One gentleman, Mr Storer from Putney, London, mounted a strong attack on the scheme in 1958 after encountering an individual Cub Scout:

“I am utterly appalled at the impudence of the Bob-a-Job scheme. It is hard to imagine anything nearer the child beggars of the Dickens era and for an Association like yours to sponsor this type of money raising makes me disgusted to say the least. To trust a boy of that age [nine] in busy thoroughfares like Putney High Street makes me horrified and at the same time wonder who would be responsible both legally and morally should an accident occur.”<sup>6</sup>

Mr Storer raised an important question for the organisation about risks to Boy Scouts, and to homeowners, should an accident occur. Public liability insurance and accidental damage to

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<sup>6</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1954 Folder, Letter, Reg. C. Storer to BSA, 8 April 1958.

property or persons later began to influence the style of Bob-a-Job week, however, in their reply to Mr Storer, the Administrative Secretary of the organisation stated that within the first ten years of Bob-a-Job week, only two claims had been made, during which time nearly half a million boys had been involved.<sup>7</sup> Despite the organisation's rebuttal, reports did arrive from parents of the everyday and inappropriate experiences their children had encountered whilst 'out' on Bob-a-Job week. Mrs Heneker, a mother from Surrey, had written to the organisation a few years earlier that she felt it was a scheme to "exploit these young boys' sense of duty" and explained that:

"Some householders are extremely unpleasant. Last year my elder son, then aged 10, returned home in a very upset condition due to an unwarranted rebuff. I also know a boy who, as a cub, was made to do a most arduous job under strict supervision. Is this meant to be an introduction to 'life' and is there no protection for little boys as they go about their jobs as your representatives?"<sup>8</sup>

The perceived risk to Boy Scouts out and about on the streets of Britain led some homeowners to negate the risk and fake a boy's record card. Indeed, Mr Storer made clear to the organisation that "What happens my friends is what we do...pay up the money and put something down on the card and say... 'that's alright laddie'. We may be wrong but we will have a thought for the lad's parents should anything happen to him."<sup>9</sup> Overall then, whilst the street was an important and visible space for the success of the scheme, and countered a number of negative perceptions and stereotypes about young people on the street, it was, for some, a risky space that had to be carefully managed – hinting at contemporary relationships

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<sup>7</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1958 Folder, Letter, Administrative Secretary of BSA to Mr. Storer, 14 April 1958.

<sup>8</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1954 Folder, Letter, Mrs J.C. Heneker to BSA, 16 March 1954

<sup>9</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1954 Folder, Letter, Reg. C. Storer to BSA, 8 April 1958.

and parent's understandings of children's ability to negotiate public space safely (Valentine 1997). Surprisingly then, there were very few concerns about strangers' homes in the early Bob-a-Job period, but rather early fears were about the *street* and potential encounters in public space. During the 1960s however, fears about strangers' homes and lone working became more commonplace and eventually led to a transformation of fundraising practices in the Scout Association.

Indeed, with the move to Scout Job Week in 1970 – prompted by impending decimalisation – the movement acknowledged the changing space of the street and parental concerns regarding safety in (other) homes. Prior to the re-launch, Scouts were encouraged to travel in groups of two or three, then to only visit homes they knew, and then to finally restrict their jobs to friends and family. The shift to Job Week in 1970 aimed to completely alleviate the criticisms over safety by creating centralised local events and supervised activities such as mass car washes, shoe-shine stands and litter-picking operations. The language used to describe 'old' Bob-a-Job week changed, with the Scout Job Week publicity bulletin from 1971 exclaiming that it was “most undesirable” that Cub Scouts should “seek jobs from strangers”.<sup>10</sup> The BSA placed parental fears at the heart of the move, stressing in the mid-1980s that:

“With almost daily news of child molestation and worse, many parents are justifiably worried for the safety of their youngsters during Scout Job Week. They must be assured that no risks will be taken, that boys will not be sent where they could meet trouble, will never work alone...and that help will never be far away.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> SAA/TC/103/*Organisation and Publicity Scout Job Week 1971*, 2

<sup>11</sup> SAA/TC/103/*Bob-A-Job Week, Booklet, Make a better than ever job of Scout Job Week 1985*, 3

In many ways, this shift represents broader fears and contemporary moral panics over streetscapes and children's safety, which Stuart Aitken describes as a media-fuelled spectacle where "currently, society worries about an immediate crisis around the treatment of children, despite a recognition that any visible increases in child abuse reside in the reporting rather than the occurrence itself" (2001: 151). Overall then, questions of concern surrounding the safety of Boy Scouts shifted from the street to the home – and from exploitation to physical abuse – and this example provides an interesting piece of historical evidence in highlighting post-war social attitudes to 'stranger danger' in Britain.

### **Masculinity, domestic space and representations of youth**

In this section, I turn attention to the mundane, perhaps banal, domestic tasks that Boy Scouts actually completed during Bob-a-Job Week. In doing so, I highlight how a new, alternative form of appropriate masculinity was encouraged – that of Boy Scouts actively seeking domestic and traditionally 'feminised' household chores. Furthermore, the encounters Scouts had with housewives and inside homes provided an opportunity for the organisation to regulate the behaviour of Boy Scouts and comment on the shifting landscapes of British modernity.

Jobs recorded for the first Bob-a-Job week in 1949 were mainly domestic and garden chores – cleaning, tidying, washing - but also included the rather unusual "two hours of slug catching" and "unpacking 1,400 eggs for a grocer without breaking one".<sup>12</sup> By the second year of the scheme, a booklet had been produced with "77 ideas for patrols, sixes, Cubs, Scouts, Lady Cubmasters and Rover Scouts in Town or Country".<sup>13</sup> There was a range of job suggestions based on age and ability: Cub Scouts could carry coal, Scouts could saw logs and Senior Scouts could clean and sharpen garden tools and make paths. These errands relied on

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<sup>12</sup> SAA/TC/103/*The First Bob-A-Job*, January 1961, 2

<sup>13</sup> SAA/TC/109/Bob-A-JobWeek 1950 Folder, *77 Bob-A-Job ideas*

bodily strength and dexterity, a demonstration of perceived traditional masculine skill. However, interestingly, domestic tasks usually associated with female housewives in post-war Britain such as washing up, cleaning windows and looking after small children were also encouraged as appropriate 'Bob-a-Job' tasks (on the histories and negotiation of female domestic space see Chapman and Hockey 1999). Whilst schools were teaching domestic science to female students, Boy Scouts were given both masculinised and feminised activities and chores, inside and outside the home, through which to prove their usefulness to the homeowner and British public. In contrast to the images of Boy Scouts 'in action' in early scouting literature that drew on adventurous outdoor woodcraft (Phillips 1997), the Boy Scout in action during Bob-a-Job week, represented here in Figure 3, would be a helpful assistant to the housewife through washing-up, cleaning windows and sweeping floors:

Figure 3: The domesticated Boy Scout (c.1961-1968)



Source: SAA/TC/109/Bob-a-Job Week

This image of a domesticated Scout – with a floral apron as part of his Cub Uniform – troubles gender boundaries and traditional understandings of Boy Scouts, usually framed in a hard-bodied masculine ideal. However, in Bob-a-Job Week, particularly in the 1960s literature, this domesticity was seen to be an appropriate element in the construction of young masculinity by the organisation. We can locate this within a wider and often hidden relationship between masculinities and unpaid or voluntary work (see Connell 1995; Donaldson 1993). Indeed, the very nature of unpaid work challenges the stereotyped male identity of provider and protector that during this time period would have been the expected ‘norm’. There are also similar debates here in relation to other research on the gendering of household work, for example the complex relationship the military has with domestic environments (Atherton 2009) and the domestic aspirations of white working class ‘lads’ (McDowell 2002). I would suggest that this re-framing of domestic tasks as an appropriate element in the construction of Boy Scouting needs to be seen as part of the re-definition of the Scout movement in post-World War Two Britain. The post-war Scout’s tools were to be brooms, mops and lawn-mowers compared to the ambulance, signalling post and bicycle they used as part of their service in the war-years (Proctor 2002). I would therefore argue that Bob-a-Job week illustrates a change in how the organisation constructed Scouts as useful to the British public and ultimately their changing new role as young citizens in post-war Britain.

The ability and skill of young Boy Scouts to complete these tasks for money was, conversely, a concern for the organisation in terms of potential abuse of the scheme outside of its designated week. Scout leaders wrote to Headquarters concerned about the effects of Bob-a-Job week once both young people and some parents realised their earning power. First, a minority of leaders wrote to the organisation with accounts of children continuing to complete ‘jobs’ for ‘bobs’ for their own pocket money. In 1950, one Lady Cubmistress, Ms

Mackender from Stepney, London, described “the difficulties with which we [as leaders] are confronted, and the type of boy we get in our Pack”.<sup>14</sup> She reported the absence of four cubs after Bob-a-Job week, following their “very flourishing shoe-shine stand”. The following year, she saw the same cubs again running a shoe-shine stand, but they were not in uniform “so I couldn’t very well do anything about it”. She attributed this to the fact “a boy of Cub age is not old enough to resist holding back at least part of his earnings, and in this area, parents in the majority, are no help”.<sup>15</sup> We can therefore see a series of moral geographies based on class and family, as well as the organisation’s assumed role in regulating behaviours. On the other hand, one can read these activities as young people using the street as a conveyor of their day-to-day activities, as a site of opportunity, resistance and informal learning (Crouch 2003; Willis 1990) or the street as a ‘thirdspace’ which Matthews, Limb and Taylor argue is “‘won out’ from the fabric of adult society” (2000: 55). Second, the organisation received letters about parental abuse of the scheme, for example, Secretary of Stepney District Mr Hampton wrote to Headquarters the same year as Ms Mackender that:

“I have had it said that parents told some of the Cubs ‘if you earnt [sic] this money you can keep it (or part of it)’ and ‘if you can earn money for the Scout Movement you can earn it for me – pass it over!’”<sup>16</sup>

Here, Scout leaders and authorities were extending their interest and moral compass beyond the boy and into the homes of parents and families, negotiating and shaping the boundaries between the home, street and scouting. In many ways, this reflects that broader relationship

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<sup>14</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, E.L. Mackender, 38<sup>th</sup> Stepney to Mr Hampton, Stepney District Secretary, 17 May 1950.

<sup>15</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, E.L. Mackender, 38<sup>th</sup> Stepney to Mr Hampton, Stepney District Secretary, 17 May 1950.

<sup>16</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, A.J.V. Hampton, Stepney District Secretary, to Secretary of the BSA, 6 June 1950, 1

between voluntary organisations, civil society and the home: spaces which all involve competing visions of appropriate places for, and behaviours of, children and young people.

The idealised romantic image of the helpful and proficient Boy Scout in kitchens and gardens was not always the reality during Bob-a-Job Week. Throughout the scheme, there was a strong emphasis in the organisation's directives, and on the job cards themselves, that Boy Scouts should only "tackle" those jobs they "can do well".<sup>17</sup> Indeed, a badly done job suggested a badly trained Scout, undermining the reputation of its youth citizenship project. As early as 1950, the year after the first scheme, the organisation reported that "The movement is getting a BAD name by jobs not being done properly".<sup>18</sup> Complaints included scruffy uniforms, substandard cleaning and also bad behaviour 'on-the-job'. Two out of fifty or so telephone complaints to Headquarters during 1958, a particularly bad year for behaviour, were recorded in detail by the Chief Clerk. First, "Scouts who received 2d for removing boxes of wastepaper which they left in the gutter outside the house and then disappeared" as well as another from a woman living in flats who complained that "boys were swarming all over the building making a terrible noise and a thorough nuisance of themselves and were doing nothing except going up and down in the lift to the exclusion of everybody else".<sup>19</sup> This example is interesting: firstly, for the way Boy Scouts were held to higher standards, and secondly, the way individuals were seen as impacting on the collective body and wider organisation, as the Association stressed:

"Courtesy and energy are automatically expected from us; and for that reason the scheme succeeds. But when it is realised that one ill-behaved or lazy fellow can provoke a letter to a national paper read by millions, it is obvious we can take no

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<sup>17</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week, Boy Scout Bob-a-Job Week Job Card, 1958

<sup>18</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, BO, 20<sup>th</sup> Stepney Sea Scouts to A.J.V. Hampton, Stepney District Secretary, 31 May 1950.

<sup>19</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1958 Folder, Memorandum, from G.E.Frost, Chief Clerk to C.C.Goodhind, Administrative Secretary, 11 April 1958.

chances with our good name. We cannot assume that all our Scouts will automatically know how to behave when we send them out on their own to stand up to public scrutiny.”<sup>20</sup>

As well as unruly behaviour, another criticism of the scheme was the increased nuisance that Boy Scouts were to the homeowner – and in particular the housewife. Scout leaders wrote to Headquarters with concerns that supporters were becoming “alienated by constant bell-ringing at the front doors”<sup>21</sup> and that this irritation means the public “become oppose[d] to the idea, to the detriment of the Movement”.<sup>22</sup> In some streets, two or more Scout groups overlapped with each other, creating a continual doorbell menace and leading to householders giving a ‘bob’ to get rid of Scouts. The 20<sup>th</sup> Stepney Sea Scouts wrote to the organisation in 1950 reporting that “one lady in particular was brought downstairs 12 times in one morning, the last boy nearly being thrown out”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, housewives were seen as the most affected. The Group Secretary of 5<sup>th</sup> Seven Kings Scout Group, North East London, stated:

“Now we find that Housewives are complaining bitterly about the nuisance of Scouts calling incessantly, even before the Official Bob-a-Job week starts. Night-workers have been disturbed during the day when they should be sleeping and much unpleasantness has been the result.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1952 Folder, Publicity Bulliten, *National Bob-A-Job Week 1952*, p.1

<sup>21</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1954 Folder, Letter, Mr Clarke to Lord Rowallan, 21 April 1954.

<sup>22</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1954 Folder, Letter, Mr O’Donoghue to BSA, 20 April 1954.

<sup>23</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1950 Folder, Letter, BO, 20<sup>th</sup> Stepney Sea Scouts to A.J.V. Hampton, Stepney District Secretary, 31 May 1950.

<sup>24</sup> SAA/TC/103/Bob-A-Job Week 1953 Folder, Letter, Group Secretary of 5<sup>th</sup> Seven Kings Scout Group to Lord Rowallan, 1 May 1953.

Such reports contrast the idyllic representation of the door-door interface of Boy Scout and housewife that was often presented in Scout literature, such as Figure 4 and its nostalgic sepia illustration:

Figure 4: Housewives aid or annoyance?



Source: SAA/TC/103/Bob-a-Job Week 1954 Folder, Publicity Bulletin

These accounts, such as those from *Seven Kings*, reveal the shifting spatio-temporalities of British home in post-war Britain – with night workers asleep in the day and changes in the nature of ‘work’ and technology in the post-war home (Langhamer 2005).

The change to Scout Job Week in 1970, discussed in the previous section in relation to safety, was also articulated and framed through the changing space of the home and women’s increased employment, as this press release in 1981 reveals:

“In many places, the original Bob-a-Job Week method of earning money from door to door canvassing for jobs is no longer practical due to the growth of apartment and flat-dwelling and, with many wives out at work, often there is nobody to answer the door.”<sup>25</sup>

Indeed by 1982, the blame was left squarely at the feet of housewives who “can no longer be relied upon to provide job offers”.<sup>26</sup> The increase in numbers of employed women in Britain was seen to have a distinct effect on Bob-a-Job week, where in many cases “the doorbell often goes unanswered”.<sup>27</sup> Bob-a-Job Week in the 1950s and 1960s was subsequently constructed as part of a romantic, nostalgic and safe past, where Scouts knocked on doors and easily found jobs. We can see a shift then in how this particular organisation valued or saw certain spaces as appropriate, safe and worthy arenas of informal citizenship education over time.

In many ways, Bob-a-Job Week became a household name synonymous with the Scout organisation and was a key factor in how the British public came to know about, and engage with, the Scout movement. It was the visibility of the Boy Scout, on the streets, in neighbourhoods, and inside the homes of the British public, which encapsulated its message and broader philosophy of duty to others. However, becoming a nuisance to homeowners and questions about safety were all unforeseen debates that challenged the organisation to consider the scheme and its future. As previously mentioned, to re-invent the fundraising scheme in a modern format, the Scout Association held ‘Scout Community Week’ in association with DIY chain ‘B & Q’ in May 2012 to encourage locally based projects that have an ‘impact’ in local communities. The connections between youth, service, domestic

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<sup>25</sup> SAA/TC/103/Scouts News Release *Changing Style of Job Week*, 9 April 1981.

<sup>26</sup> SAA/TC/103/Scouts News Release *Scout Job Week in the Year of the Scout*, 2 April 1982.

<sup>27</sup> SAA/TC/103/Scouts Facts – *Job Week*, June 1983, 1

tasks and citizenship therefore remain attractive and popular to this one youth organisation and its activities in twenty-first century Britain.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has contributed a study of one fundraising scheme that mobilised youth in the second half of the twentieth century across the streets and neighbourhoods of Britain. In doing so, it has added to literature within children's geographies on this neglected time-period, but beyond that, has given a wider focus to the everyday geographies of urban youth in post-war Britain, complimenting and extending work within historical studies as well as current debates in human geography on domesticity, masculinity, service and moral landscapes of childhood. The paper traced the justifications for the scheme in the immediate post-war era, the types of domestic tasks Boy Scouts engaged with, as well as how amendments in style over time reflected concerns about the safety of young people, commenting on 'good parenting' and broader socio-economic shifts in the gendered landscapes of contemporary Britain. Through examining Bob-a-Job Week and presenting an analysis of rich empirical material, this discussion has highlighted alternative relationships between young people and urban space in post-war Britain: significantly, how the organisation encouraged the performance of uniformed visible Boy Scouts out on the streets and 'fired with the joy of service'. In many ways, there was a suspension of the ordinary time-spaces of youth in the city and we can see how a more positive counter-narrative of the street was crafted in sharp opposition to wider fears over urban youth in post-war Britain. Indeed, the paper hints at the different moral landscapes between the city and the suburb which would warrant further investigation. However, examples in this paper regarding Scouts' behaviour, parental attitudes and abuse, as well as other tensions over the scheme, demonstrate the diverse and complex engagements with this annual fundraiser – and

significantly – reveal how the organisation attempted to map and navigate the boundaries between its young people on the street, in uniform, and at home. Indeed, any moment that offers a ‘suspension’ such as this in terms of general narratives about youth, often reinforces and throws into sharp relief more negative and commonplace constructions of childhood.

In considering the wider significance of this paper and its contribution to debates in contemporary human geography, it is perhaps pertinent to reflect on the broader, complex geographies of youth organisations and the ways in which these informal spaces of citizenship education negotiate relationships between civil society, families and young people. Indeed, adult ideas (whether from parents or volunteers) about spaces that are appropriate or inappropriate for children, good or bad, safe or risky, and judgments about whether youth can be a help or hindrance, ambassador or nuisance, continue to permeate the everyday lives of young people. These notions remain at their most powerful in urban areas. For example, the disturbances and riots in British cities during Summer 2011 (Reicher and Stott 2011) were framed as an urban menace that created unsafe streets – echoing language about youth culture and moral panics in post-war Britain.

The contemporary language of ‘Scout Community Week’ in May 2012, tying the Scout Association into ideas of active citizenship, community participation and the ‘Big Society’ agenda, is also of interest in a shifting landscape of voluntarism and youth work. Whilst this study has usefully traced some of the philosophical ideas about the perceived role of young people at both the local scale and through a sense of ‘national’ contribution and responsibility, there is great scope for further research on contemporaneous moves to re-envision the place of youth on the streets and in local neighbourhoods. Furthermore, to consider how they are positioned more broadly as citizen-subjects, for example through the ‘National Citizen Service’, David Cameron’s latest scheme to encourage young people to engage as active citizens at the local, national and global scale. This could further contribute

to recent debates in geography and across the social and political sciences on governance, identity and citizenship (Pykett 2010; Mycock and Tonge 2011). Overall, there is a need for further work that places these philosophical and more general narratives about youth alongside the urban dynamics, temporalities and multiple realities of childhood, including how young people themselves understand and cultivate “the art of making the city work” (Ward, 1990 [1978]: 108).

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