

The Origins of the Woggle



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In the early days of the Scout Movement in Great Britain, the Scout scarf used to be tied loose knot at the neck and naturally became very creased. However it was known the Americans were experimenting by using a ring made from bone, rope or wood to keep their scarves together. Bill Shankley, aged 18 and one of two permanent camp site employees at Gilwell Park, had the job of running the workshop and coming up with ideas for camping equipment. He found out about the American rings and decided to try and go one better. After various attempts with different materials he finally made a Turks Head knot - adopted in the days of sailing ships when seamen developed decorative forms of rope work as a hobby - made from thin sewing machine leather belting. He submitted this to the Camp Chief and, no doubt, the Chief Scout, for approval and had it accepted.

The American rings were called 'Boon Doggles', most probably because they were made of bone, and the name was a skit on 'dog bones'. To rhyme with 'Boon Doggle', Shankley called his creation a 'Woggle'. An article in *The Scout* on 9th June 1923 by 'Gilcraft', called 'Wear a scarf woggle' made reference to the idea of having become very popular among Scouts who had been quick to imitate the fashion set by the 1st Gilwell Park Scout Troop (i.e.: Wood Badge holders).

The following are the changes regarding scarves and woggles as published in *Policy, Organisation and Rules* from 1910. Note too that the scarf was originally called a neckerchief,

February 1910 *Neckerchief* Of the colours of the various Patrols. The neckerchief is worn loosely knotted at the throat and also at the ends.

March 1911 *Neckerchief* Of the colour of the Troop, worn loosely knotted at the throat and also at the ends.

July 1912 *Neckerchief* Of the Troop colour, worn loosely knotted at the throat and ends.

January 1919 *Scarf* Of the Troop colour worn loosely knotted at the throat and ends.

January 1924 *Scarf* Of the Troop colour, worn loosely knotted at the throat and ends, or a Troop ring (other than the Gilwell pattern) of one pattern may be used instead of the throat knot.

January 1928 *Scarf* Of the Group colour, worn loosely knotted at the throat and ends, or a Group ring (other than the Gilwell pattern) may be used instead of the throat knot.

January 1930 *Scarf* Of the Group colour, worn loosely knotted at the throat or a Group ring (other than the Gilwell pattern) of one pattern may be used instead of the knot.

1943 *Scarf* Of the Group colour worn with a woggle other than the Gilwell pattern or a loose knot at the throat.

From the Minutes of the Committee of the Council:

13th July 1923 The use of a ring for holding the scarf was approved provided all members ... used a similar ring.

The word 'woggle' was used by Baden-Powell in the 14th edition of *Scouting for Boys* (1929): It (the scarf) may be fastened at the throat by a knot or woggle, which is some form of ring made of cord, metal or bone, or anything you like. The 13th edition (1928) merely uses 'ring'. The standard World Brotherhood edition used the wording of the 14th edition but put woggle in inverted commas.

Scarcely any of the standard dictionaries - not even those dealing with less common or difficult words - include the word 'woggle'. In the 16th century 'waggle' was used as a transitive verb meaning 'to move anything held or fixed at one

end to and fro with short quick motions'. By the following century 'woggle' had also come into use as a variation of 'waggle' but as a verb. By the early 1900s 'woggle' had come to be used as a noun but it was not in standard usage.

As for 'boon doggle', the *Oxford English Dictionary* states:

US slang (origin unknown). A trivial, useless or unnecessary undertaking, wasteful expenditure.

1935 - R. Marshall in *New York Times* 4 April: Boon doggles is simply a term applied back in pioneer days to what we call gadgets today.

1935 - *Word Study* 2nd Sept.: Boon doggle was coined for another purpose by Robert H. Link of Rochester. Through his connection with Scouting the word later came into general use as a name given to the braided leather lanyard made and worn by Boy Scouts.

Websters Dictionary says:

Coined in 1925 by Robert H. Kink b. 1897 Am. Scoutmaster 'a handicraft article esp. of leather or wicker fashioned for utility'.

The design of the Gilwell woggle (i.e.: that formed by a Turk's Head knot) and the wearing of it became restricted to leaders who had completed preliminary or basic training from 1943 until 1989 when the structure of leader training was revised.

As for the inventor of the woggle, in the 1920s Bill Shankley accompanied Sir Alfred Pickford, the Headquarters Commissioner for Overseas Scouts, on an official tour of Australia and New Zealand, and afterwards stayed on to try his hand jackerooing and farming in Western Australia. In 1952 he moved to Hobart and became a trade and craft teacher at the Friends School before retiring to Bellerive in 1977.

**Archives Department
The Scout Association**