

Walker

Walking the walk - in memory of a 'Kinder Scout' moment

Next time you're walking in Epping Forest, long associated with iconic figures like Dick Turpin and John Clare - tip your hat to the shades of Thomas Willingale, William George Smith, Edward George Norton and a host of like-minded philanthropists, whose perseverance in the face of rapacious landowners resulted in this wonderful walking area remaining accessible to the common people - that's you and me.

Their efforts over more than a decade led to the passage of the Epping Forest Act in 1878, effectively ending unlawful encroachment and enclosures by landowners on forest land, which by then had been reduced to an area of 3,000 acres. Today, it covers 6,000 acres, with buffer zones strategically placed to discourage over-development. It has more than four million visitors a year.

Stimulated by the opening of a railway line to Chingford and, in particular by the visit of Queen Victoria in 1882, the forest rapidly became a magnet for Londoners keen to alleviate the hardships of inner-city industrial life with the forest's pastoral tranquillity. Indeed, throughout the first half of the 20th century it became almost a holiday destination, supplying (relatively) clean air, access to a natural environment, and simply, peace and quiet.

In 1978 two members of West Essex Ramblers - Harry Bitten and Fred Matthews - devised a Centenary Walk to acknowledge the debt owed to the architects of the Epping Forest Act as well as the City of London whose stewardship has been so central to its success.

Since then, West Essex Ramblers have each year (except during Covid) organised the Centenary Walk, following the route established by Bitten and Matthews. The route runs from Manor Park in the south and finishes at Epping station on the Central Line in the north. The Centenary Walk follows well-established paths (and the route is indicated on Ordnance Survey maps) and is easily accessible by public transport. The total length is 14.5 miles which will be within the capabilities of many walkers.

"However", says David Keane, project leader for this year's organised walk which will be held on Bank Holiday Monday, 27 May, "the intention is to make the walk as inclusive as possible so we've built in a series of joining and dropping-off points that make the walk suitable for families and you can tailor your participation to your own walking range. There are also refreshment points along the way where you can replenish energy levels - or eat your own food.

This year is the 48th iteration of the Centenary Walk. Former organiser and veteran walker Mike Whiteley recalls: "From little beginnings the

Centenary Walk grew in stature until we now attract walkers from many parts of London, Essex and Hertfordshire. So many people recognise how they have benefitted from the knock-on impact of the Epping Forest Act in terms of their own common land being protected from unwelcome development".

Adds David Keane: "The passing of the Epping Forest Act was, for many

Londoners, a moment as significant as the Peak District's Kinder Scout trespass in the 1930s. We're hoping that many neighbouring groups will join us on 27 May - particularly as much of the walk forms part of the newly announced Greenway linking to inner London.

Willingale, Smith, Buxton et al would no doubt have been delighted to see just how

successful their efforts have been in opening up Epping Forest. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

David Evans
West Essex Ramblers

2024 Centenary Walk

Joining/Dropping-off points

- 9.00 Walk begins at the junction of Forest Drive and Capel Road, near Manor Park station on the Elizabeth Line.
- 10.00 The centre of the Green Man roundabout, Leytonstone.
- 11.15 Highams Park Lake Boathouse, The Charter Road, IG8 9RE (coffee break).
- 12.30 Royal Forest Hotel, Chingford. Lunch stop. For those not bringing their own lunch, refreshments can be obtained from the Butlers Retreat and nearby cafes.
- 13.15 Walk resumes towards High Beach.
- 14.15 High Beach
- 16.15 Walk ends at Bell Common, Epping.

For enquiries, contact David Keane at d.keane3@btinternet.com, mobile 07759 297443.



A recent Centenary Walk.



Epping Forest: a magnificent area to explore on foot.



This new bridge carries the Thames Path over Chelsea Creek.

Photo: Des Garrahan.

New bridge over Chelsea Creek

The London hidden river Counter's Creek rises in Kensal Green and flows into the Thames at Chelsea and the tidal mouth is a watercourse often shown on maps as Chelsea Creek. The Thames Path on the north bank in this area has been steadily extending with the seemingly endless development delivering riverside access as it marches steadily eastward.

First, we had Chelsea Harbour, then the Imperial Wharf station on the Overground appeared and now, as the Lots Road Power

Station development gets closer to completion, there is a new bridge across the Chelsea Creek. Lots Road Power Station is a disused coal power station on the River Thames in Chelsea which supplied electricity to the Underground system.

In 1999 London Transport sold the power station site to Circadian for £34 million and, despite several setbacks, by 2016 a hundred apartments were completed and work began in earnest on the disused power station.

And now we have an elegant new bridge to add to the Thames Path on the north bank.

Des Garrahan

Ferry across the Thames in east London

As part of an action plan to deliver the Thames Vision 2050, which aims to maximise the economic, social and environmental potential of the tidal river, the British multinational Arup was commissioned by the Port of London Authority and the Thames Estuary Growth Board to undertake a study to understand the benefits of zero-emission pedestrian and cycle ferry crossings of the Thames.

New river crossings can:

- improve the connectivity of London's transport network
- mitigate severance issues

- support the growth of residential development, especially in east London
- relieve congestion and overcrowding of popular travel corridors
- increase the use of active travel or public transport
- reduce emissions.

And, of course, ferries are much cheaper than bridges initially, while offering walkers more crossing points so they can visit sites on both banks of the Thames Path. Not to mention they link more easily with the England Coast Path (now called the King Charles III England Coast Path) on both banks. With a lifespan of 30 years, the

investment required for each ferry option - estimated to be between £120 million and £132 million - would be around a third of the cost of a bridge capable of carrying a comparable number of people over the river. They could also be operational in a fraction of the time. In 2019, the price for a proposed bridge between Rotherhithe and Canary Wharf topped an estimated £460 million.

From a long list of sites, three crossing options - Isle of Dogs to North Greenwich, Royal Docks to Charlton and Barking Riverside to Thamesmead - were shortlisted for their alignment with the project objectives to support the community, enabling growth,

addressing a network gap, integration with the broader network, congestion relief and reduction in carbon emissions. Initial assessment suggests that sufficient energy supply exists at all the shortlisted sites to enable delivery of a low emission ferry.

All are located close to major development areas in the capital where north - south transport connectivity is currently severely lacking. This would, importantly, also support the Mayor of London's goal for 80% of all trips in the capital to be on foot, cycle or public transport by 2041.

The report has been welcomed by politicians of all stripes in the capital and is supported by the Ramblers, London Cycling Campaign and Footways, amongst others.

Des Garrahan

Puttenham Barn - on track for 2024

This amazing environmental venture providing simple overnight accommodation alongside the North Downs Way in Surrey is renowned for its welcome to walkers and cyclists.

Spring 2024 will be the 19th season since our first opening of the barn, the organisation being run as a charity entirely dependent on volunteers, some of whom act as wardens. The project's essential ethos is of 'environmentalism in action', hence a green discount

is offered for those arriving on foot, cycle or public transport - this meaning someone can stay for under £20 a night (less if accompanied under 18 year old) which includes use of the kitchen and hot showers.

The big change in recent years - following the arrival of coronavirus - was the conversion from eco camping barn to bunkhouse barn. The project trustees are very grateful for the donations and grant aid - including from the Gatliff Trust - that made this possible. And

reviewing last year, particularly memorable was the increased number of folk staying who were on pilgrimage between Winchester and Canterbury, a usage which is being encouraged further for 2024 by the production of a 'pilgrimage postcard' for distribution to churches.

If you would like to help to keep Puttenham Barn 'on the map' please see <https://puttenhambarn.uk/> or phone 01483 811001.

Chris Meeks
Trustee, Project Oasis North Downs



Puttenham Barn is located between Farnham and Guildford. Photo: David Kirkham.



BUCKS briefs

News from Bucks, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex

Outer Aylesbury Ring founder honoured

Roy Johnson, a life-long Aylesbury Rambler, who set up and maintained the Outer Aylesbury Ring over many years, was honoured over the Christmas period by having a Donate-a-Gate dedicated to him. Roy received the news at Aylesbury Ramblers AGM and was quite taken aback when the dedication on the gate was read out to him. We wish Roy a

long and happy retirement from footpath checking, hedgerow snipping and waymark fitting. Well done Roy.

The gate was jointly funded by the group and North Bucks rRIPPLE team. The gate was one of five recently installed in Whitchurch and is one of three in a line that completes a very handy 1.2km-long stile-free village mini-circular walk with stunning views across the Vale. All

five new gates were Donate-a-Gates, three sponsored by two landowners and one by the parish council.

For further information about the exact location of Roy's gate and some before, during and after installation photos, please go to the Aylesbury Ramblers website.

Bill Piers
Coordinator, North Bucks rRIPPLE



The plaque thanking Roy Johnson for all his hard work over many years.



Team tea break generously provided by a local resident.



The new gate in Whitchurch. Photos: Bill Piers.



KENT calling

Area Secretary's diary



Bison in the mist.

Photo: Donovan Wright.

Path volunteers meeting: The last quarter began with a meeting for Kent Area's footpath volunteers in Lenham on 4 November when Sophie Reindorp from the Paths Team at Central Office spent the day explaining the ins and outs of footpath law. Feedback indicates that this was much appreciated by the audience and I will be attempting to summarise what we learned for future issues of our newsletters for footpath volunteers. We are planning to hold our next meeting, again in Lenham, on Saturday 27 April.

Mystery package: I don't often get mail nowadays - mainly the occasional cheque for purchase of our walking guides. So just before Christmas I was intrigued to receive a large brown envelope containing a large number of cuttings from the Kentish Times from the late 1970s and early 1980s. All were brown with age and were descriptions of walks, mainly in West Kent, and all written by either G H Ballard or V W Morecroft. I know nothing of G H Ballard but I can say that Victor Morecroft was, back in the 1960s, Area Secretary for the Southern Area of the Ramblers' Association before it was broken up to create the Areas that we are familiar with today. That happened in 1984 so Kent is presumably not the only Area celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. So who sent me the cuttings and why? I don't know. There was nothing enclosed with the cuttings to throw any light on either question. Perhaps the sender would like me to update the walks and put them on our website, which I will certainly consider. But why the mystery?

Rewilding: There is currently a vogue for rewilding and I have been approached by Kent Wildlife Trust about two projects they are involved in. One of these is the introduction of bison into the woodland of the Blean, north west of Canterbury.

The bison are already in place and have started breeding. Kent Wildlife Trust has an ambition to greatly extend the area of land available to the bison from the current 50 hectares to 200 hectares, including woodland owned by the RSPB and the Woodland Trust. There is obviously a concern that, although rights of way would be protected, this would mean fencing off other land across which walkers are currently able to wander. It seems that in the Netherlands bison don't have to be fenced in and representations are being made to have the law here brought into line, which not everyone may see as a better option. Anyway, it is good that the trust is seeking to engage with walkers and if anyone has issues they would like me to raise with them, please get in touch. More details at www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/wilder-blean-initiative.

The other rewilding project about which engagement has just begun is the possible reintroduction of pine martens into the High Weald. This seems less likely to have an impact on walkers but discussions are at an early stage. More details at www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/south-east-pine-marten-restoration-project.

Return to sender: Much of my time in the run-up to Christmas was spent working on the Annual Review which went out in late December. (There are links to an online version at kentramblers.org.uk/news). In early January copies that Royal Mail was unable to deliver started coming back to me. Every year there are a couple of dozen of these, each causing quite a bit of work following up with Central Office. It would be most helpful if members would let Central Office know when they move house or have adequate arrangements in place for the forwarding of mail.

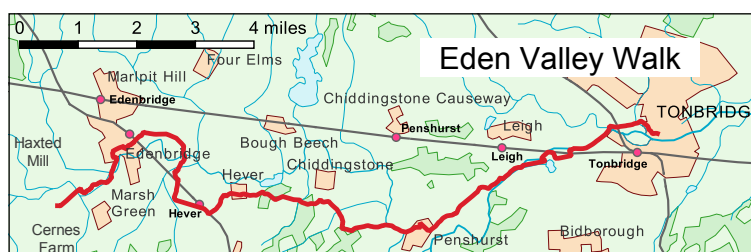
More volunteers needed: There are several articles in the Annual Review focussing on the work our volunteers



Pine marten.

Photo: SquareSpace.

do protecting the footpath network against the many threats they face and the need for more people to take on these volunteering roles. Readers may feel that I go on rather too much about needing more volunteers, but what else can I do? Many walkers take our footpath network for granted but in truth many of our privileges are quite precarious and constant vigilance is required. There are far too few volunteers looking after this work, with the risk that issues will be missed or that overloaded volunteers will find the pressure too great and quit their roles. Please, please consider taking on a small share of this work to keep our operation sustainable. I am pleased to advise that one wonderful member has stepped forward to take on half of the portfolio of parishes in Tonbridge and Malling that Dave Wetton recently relinquished, as reported in



Eden Valley Walk map.

the Annual Review. Now we need someone to take on the other half as well as plenty of vacancies elsewhere. Contact us for more information pro@kentramblers.org.uk.

Interview: There's no rest for volunteers, even at Christmas. At lunchtime on Boxing Day I did an interview for BBC Radio Kent to encourage listeners to get out into the fresh air and the fine Kent countryside. But were there any listeners? While I plugged our website with its many fine routes to download, the visitor numbers for the day were the lowest of the week. I have tried to recruit a panel to field requests for media interviews but there are only four of us and no one else was available on Boxing Day. We would welcome more members for our panel. While on the subject of website visitor numbers, I remain surprised at the popularity of our Saxon Shore Way page compared with pages for other equally attractive walks across Kent - it is third only to our home page and our walking routes page with 454 viewings in December, nearly 10 times as many as for our Wealdway page.

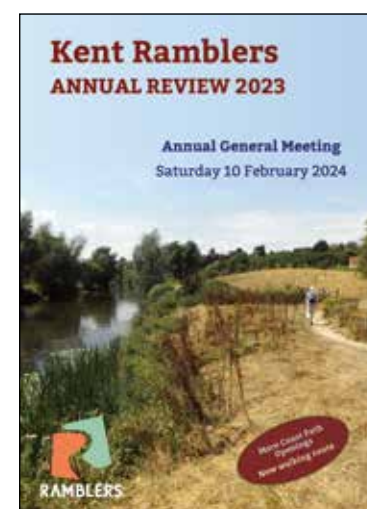
Peaks challenge: I got another email from BBC Radio Kent as I was writing this. One of their presenters has decided to undertake the challenge of 'climbing the three highest peaks' in Kent and wanted advice which I was happy to offer. The highest peak, Betsom's Hill at 251 metres is little more than 500 metres, almost on the level from the nearest roadside parking space. The second, Toy's Hill at 248 metres is a 10-minute walk from the National Trust car park. and the third, Westerham Heights at 245 metres, is beside a busy main road and the only difficulty is avoiding the traffic. If only all challenges in life were so easily accomplished!

Eden Valley diversion: I think most people agree that getting more people out walking is a good thing. In my view one of the keys to success is improving footpath conditions and signage, especially on named and other promoted walks. It is

therefore disappointing that when part of the Eden Valley Walk was diverted last summer, Kent County Council installed signage lacking the Eden Valley Way branding with the result that walkers were missing the diversion and having to retrace their steps on finding the original route no longer available. The county council concedes that this was a mistake and needs to be rectified but after several months nothing has been done, apart from some easily missed marking in felt tip by our Chairman, Colin Sefton. The Eden Valley Walk, running from a remote spot west of Edenbridge to Tonbridge, crosses wonderfully peaceful countryside and deserves to be much better used. A guide is available from our website (with an insert detailing the diversion) and those who already have a copy can view the diversion details from a link on our books page at kentramblers.org.uk/books.

Robert Peel

Secretary, Kent Ramblers



Annual Review.

Photo: Robert Peel.

SOUTH EAST walker

Distributed quarterly to members of the Ramblers in Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex, Essex, Inner London, Kent, Oxfordshire and Surrey Areas.

THE RAMBLERS

Address: 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA.

Switchboard: 020 3961 3300

Membership Services:

020 3961 3232

Email: ramblers@ramblers.zendesk.com

Web: www.ramblers.org.uk

Company registration no: 4458492

Registered charity no: 1093577

EDITORIAL

Editor: Les Douglas

Email: southeastwalker@gmail.com

Tel: 020 8809 2338

DESIGN AND PRINT

Designed by DPS: 01529 300452

Printed by Blackmore Ltd

Opinions expressed by contributors are not specifically endorsed by

The Ramblers.

ISSN 1747-4140

© 2024 The Ramblers.

All rights reserved.

Copy Date: For issue No. 126 is 12 April 2024.



Silk Stream bridged

This new footbridge on Cool Oak Lane, close to the Welsh Harp reservoir and open space in north west London, means that Capital Ring walkers no longer

have to use the pedestrian phase lights to cross the adjacent listed road bridge. It provides a safer crossing of the Silk Stream and has been provided as part of the nearby regeneration of West Hendon. Photo: Colin Saunders





SURREY snippets

Walk to remember David Leedham



On the Greensand Way.

Photo: Mike Boon.

In February 2023 the first of our Walks to Remember - David Leedham took place. These walks were originally devised by David and led by him back in 2006 and 2007. There are eight routes, some circular, some linear, which together cover the whole of the Surrey section of the Greensand Way. We walked them on a monthly basis until September 2023. These walks had some of the highest turnouts over the year, further endorsing the warmth that was felt for David and led by members of SABRE who were friends of David and his wife Jackie. Jackie led the penultimate section around Reigate.

David died in September 2022

having been an active member of SABRE and previously Surrey Area Weekend Walkers (SAWW), as well as holding roles as the Surrey Area Webmaster and Secretary. David's contribution to the Ramblers across Surrey was immense and his contribution remains with us in the form of these walks. Our thanks to Elizabeth Toogood for coordinating this on behalf of SABRE, and our walk leaders for recceing and leading these walks. In the coming months we plan to put details of these walks on our website under the Trails section and hope to install a kissing gate along the route in David's memory.

*Shirley Creed
SABRE (Surrey & Beyond
Ramblers)*

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Surrey County Council is responsible for around 2,164 miles (3,482km) of public rights of way within the county (not the adjacent London boroughs) and their Rights of Way Improvement Plan sets out how they intend to manage, improve and add to these footpaths, bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to all Traffic. The last improvement plan was issued in 2014 and it is to be reviewed/renewed this year. It will set the county council's targets for managing and improving the network until at least 2031.

To gather information on what we, the walking public, think

about the state of our public rights of way and how we use them, the county council is carrying out a survey that is now live and will be open until 10 March.

Andrew Bowden, Surrey Area's Footpaths Officer, says: "We encourage every member who walks in Surrey to respond to this survey. It takes about 15 minutes to complete. The more responses, the more we show the county council that the paths matter to us and hopefully the more our footpaths and bridleways will be funded and improved."

To find the survey, go to <https://shorturl.at/nIUV4>.

David Cooper

Steps

Five members of Woking Ramblers repaired and replaced two short flights of steps and a handrail on a path just south of Mayford on each side of the A320 Woking to Guildford road in October.

It was hard and heavy work to dig and level out the old steps and to lay and tamp down aggregate, but very satisfying and we later heard that the person who had reported the issue to Surrey County Council expressed his appreciation the very next day.

The following month I led a group walk which included the path, Footpath 41, in order to show other group members what we had achieved and maybe encourage them to join us on future tasks!

Brian Reader



The steps on the west side of the road before the work.



...and after. Photos: Thomas Chatfield/ Surrey County Council.

The last five years

I want to travel back in time to February 2019. We are in Farnham on a cold windy day. As usual the Surrey Young Walkers set off from the station, led by me on a walk which was to finish at a nearby community centre where the Surrey Area AGM was to take place. A couple of my friends decided to skip the walk and head directly to the AGM venue.

The walk started to run behind schedule as I think I had miscalculated the distance (not at all like me!) My friend called me from the AGM and said they had got to the part of electing a new Chair but I wasn't there! Ten minutes later we arrived and rushed through the door to hear the news that in my absence I had been elected Chair!

The world has changed a lot in the five years since that day and in ways that I couldn't have foreseen. It's been a journey and an experience with lots of highs and a fair amount of lows. I have met some wonderful people who have been a great help

and support during these years. I have been to new places, found my voice, increased my confidence and felt like I was a valued member of the bigger picture.

I'm not sure what I was expecting, however what happened and what I have gained was so much more. I believe that the more you put into something, the more you will get out of it. Being Area Chair, making the role my own and adapting to the changes means that I will leave the role in the knowledge that I did as much as would allow in the best way given the circumstances.

It is with great sadness that two very dear members of Surrey Area Council did not get to see me complete my term as Chair - David Leedham and Richard Lovell. Each one a huge loss and deeply missed as they did so much for the Area.

By coming together and sharing our thoughts, best practice and learning from experiences, we have found a way through the last five years. I would like to say thank you to everyone who has been there with me on this journey.

Holly Matthews

(Holly came to the end of her term as Area Chair at the Area AGM in February.)

Footpath improvements by Ramblers volunteers

In the latter part of 2022, Surrey County Council appointed Thomas Chatfield as their new Volunteer Coordinator. Thomas spent the first few months in the job familiarising himself with the world of rights of way and the many aspects that come with it. This meant that he didn't meet many volunteers until early 2023, but had heard from colleagues who had previously worked with our volunteers that the enthusiasm they bring was infectious and the quality of work of a high standard.

In his Christmas 2023 message to volunteers he said that these comments were true and that over the last 12 months volunteers had contributed over 2,000 hours of work from over 500 volunteer attendances. Together we have built 17 bridges, installed 28 gates, 60 fingerposts and over 150 steps. We have cut over 18km of overgrown vegetation and improved

over 60km of public rights of way in the county.

Thomas has brought with him a new energy and enthusiasm for improving Surrey's rights of way, which has meant that for the first time since Covid, the various Ramblers volunteer teams are able to get on and do what they want to do. That may be by cutting back vegetation, replacing bridges, installing steps or changing stiles for gates. Some of the 28 gates installed last year were paid for by donations from organisations such as Rotary Clubs or parish councils, some were funded by local Ramblers groups by holding fund-raising events, and some have been provided by the county council.

Thank you Thomas, the Surrey County Council public rights of way team and all the volunteers who work so hard to keep our paths walkable.

Deb Skinner

Samuel Palmer: Visionary Landscapes

The Victorian artist Samuel Palmer who lived for a decade in Shoreham, Kent, and drew inspiration from the Darent valley, is the subject of a free exhibition running at the Kaleidoscope Gallery in Sevenoaks Library until 12 March and then at the Sir Peter Blake Gallery in Dartford Library from 16 March until 16 May. The exhibition includes contemporary works inspired by Palmer, a virtual reality experience and supporting events. Visitors are also encouraged to download the free Darent Valley Trails app which includes a number of self-guided walking routes, including the five mile Samuel Palmer Trail.

Drawn to the Ridgeway

Nick Schell, an artist who has made the landscape around the Ridgeway a favourite subject, has an exhibition of his drawings and paintings at the West Berkshire Museum in Newbury, until 31 March. This free show features works inspired by the landscape between Streatley and Avebury. Also at the museum until 19 May is an exhibition called 'Waterways' which celebrates the 300th anniversary of the Kennet Navigation. More details on both exhibitions can be found at westberkshireritage.org/west-berkshire-museum or 01635 519562.

Spring Tide - a villanelle

*We long for spring and so decide
a winter walk would be a treat-
to see the rising of the tide.*

*Stepping the pathway side by side,
ignoring snow and winter sleet,
we watch the iver's icy glide.*

*The air is chilled - too cold to bide.
Frost steals all comfort from the seat.
We turn away; at least we tried.*

*Another day when we're not tied,
with fresh resolve the evening greet:
"Full moon - high tide - in spring collide!"*

*The moon's globe rises. River's wide.
Three lock gates open. Waters beat
right to the brim we walk beside.*

*March air blows mild. The seagulls ride
warm gusts of wind in growing heat -
carried upstream on swelling tide.
Now seasons turn: change undenied.*

Words © Lizzie Ballagher



Photo by Filipe Resmini, Unsplash.

Ephemera: two bits of history with some money in-between

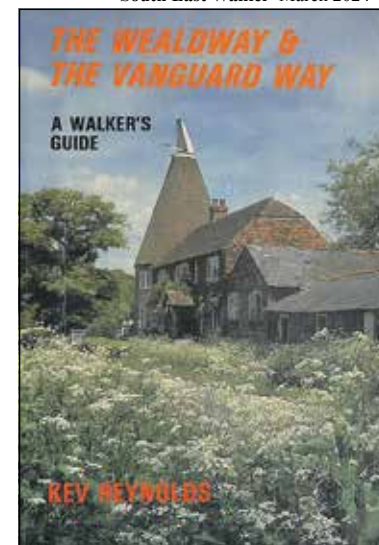
Quite by chance we were doing some research on the Vanguard Way when we came across references to the Saturday Walking Club which has an interesting history. The club was linked with the now defunct Institute for Social Inventions which was chaired by Nicholas Aubery who died in a car accident in 2001. The Saturday Walking Club still exists but we are going back to the 1990s when Nicholas approached what was then called the London Area of the Ramblers to request some support and assistance in helping with the publication of what was described as a 'Londoner's Book of Country Walks'. It would be published in 1997 as a charity fundraising book containing 52 walks. These would be mostly of around nine miles in length, have a lunchtime pub and be within a range of London by train. The help required was to check the routes which needed to be reviewed. According to the correspondence there was some urgency to meet the publication deadline.

Some of the walks needed more attention than others and these would be prioritised with the details

being sent to willing route checkers. Nicholas stated that the checkers would receive no pay or expenses but would get a free copy of the book for each walk checked. We don't have much information about the number of checkers involved but we know that some did receive copies of the book (though yours truly who did two reviews only received one copy). The Book of Country Walks is now long out of print.

The money in question relates to a sale via Amazon of a route guide with the asking price of £59.82! The book is The Wealdway and The Vanguard Way, A Walker's Guide by Kev Reynolds, the well-known writer who is sadly no longer with us. A few people who have long held copies of this guide have said they are surprised at this asking price and might now hang on to their copies until at least £100 is put on the table! If this is an indication of serious money out there for items like this then there could be lots of interest around the second-hand walking books market if it does actually exist.

Most of our walking communication now goes via the internet and much has changed since the 1980s. As we look at the London Rambler Issue 58, April - June 1984, this piece of ephemera shows how things have changed.



Would anyone really pay £59.82?

This is an eight page document with a front page intro, six pages of details of train and coach excursions and a Ramblers membership application followed by a subscription form to receive copies of the publication by post. The front page narrative gives some indication of likely changes to come including requesting views on whether the programme was suitable or would members prefer to walk in smaller groups. Documents like this have now largely disappeared and are replaced by local, regional and national websites which provide much of the information. My copy of London Rambler no. 58 is heading for the recycling bin unless somebody out there would like to look at it.

John Pestle

johnpestle@btinternet.com

Reflections on walking with a group



On Frensham Common in December.

A short time ago, relocating to the Surrey Hills, I knew not one single person here. From the A24 road I spotted walkers high up on Box Hill and wondered how they found the path!

I researched Mole Valley Ramblers, who kindly welcomed me on their walks. The fresh air and exercise were beneficial, the group's friendliness warm. Applying the formula, walk four miles (that's a

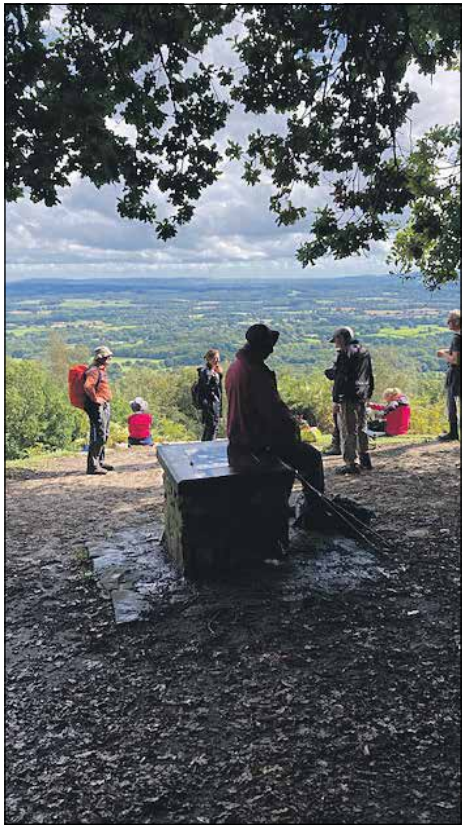
walk to the shops), then six miles before going for eight miles. I kept going. I was totally against buying those funny trainers, or having jingly gadgets hanging from the straps of my small rucksack!

Booking a three-day walking holiday, I was told my boots were good but jeans were unsuitable as they chafe. Maybe purchase some walking trousers!

Returning home enthused, I talked to fellow walkers who had lived in

this area their whole lives, those who had worked on the other side of the globe, varied ages and experiences, we are all these. Conversation is varied, the laughter welcome, the serious discussion necessary.

Walks revealed the churchyard where a famous scientist lies peacefully, the name of a wildflower, a breathtaking view, a house where a renowned architect lived, an author's birthplace, an ancient yew tree, not to mention the sites of



At the Temple of the Winds in August.



A November walk took us past the the Crowhurst Yew.



Walking near Westcott last August.
Photos:Christine Gittins.

previous criminal endings, Gibbet Hill says it all. The Ramblers enable many opportunities, to walk and enjoy nature, protect paths and countryside, to find friends to walk with, join a path maintenance team, socialise, be guided or lead walks. I bought a local Ordnance Survey map and was able to pick out Roman roads, ruins, forts, hills, and a distant hill tower. A day course organised by a local walk leader on map interpretation helped translate the spider's web of lines on a map to meaningful footpaths, tracks and gradients. Places I had previously visited took on new meaning. The countryside continued as a source of interest. Someone in the walking group always communicated a nugget of information. Spotting deer becomes the highlight of the week. the first snowdrops, swooping red kites, carpets of bluebells, ripening blackberries. A walking group contains experts on an array of subjects, their enthusiasm is infectious. The changing seasons and weather are a perpetual topic. A person can arrive alone at the start of a walk, sure of a welcome, and leave with a bunch of friends. The joy is that you choose the level of your participation, one step at a time.

Christine Gittins
Mole Valley Ramblers

AI - is it any better than no intelligence?

There has been a great deal of speculation recently on whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) may let machines take over the world or at least may allow fake news stories to rig elections. What is perhaps less well appreciated is how AI might be used to transform walk descriptions on our own dear ramblers' programmes.

Let us take a description for a recent Reigate Ramblers group walk: "We start by heading east on the North Downs Way, pausing to look at the 'arty bench' before eventually turning north to use lesser-known tracks and smaller paths through the woods, passing some spectacular old yew trees along the way. A few ups and downs but none too taxing. Likely to be a few muddy stretches. Bring coffee/snack and perhaps a picnic for the end."

Fine, but could AI make it more inspiring? For example, given the simple instruction to 'write this as a Shakespeare sonnet', the commonly available (and free) Chat GPT program came up with:

*Upon yon trail, where eastward path commence,
North Downs Way, our course will purpose true,
A pause to spy the 'arty bench', a pretence
Of art amid the green, where skies are blue.
Towards the north, through tracks not oft
explored,In woods where secrets whisper through
the trees.
Old yew trees, with tales of the days of yore,
Stand sentinel, the guardians of these.
A gentle rise and fall, a pleasing dance,
No task too burdensome for hearts that roam.
Muddy stretches may bid your shoes askance,
Yet, in this trek, our spirits find a home.
Bring coffee, snack, and let a picnic bloom,As
through the wild, we weave a tale of room.*

I don't think this will leave the shade of William Shakespeare weeping over a wasted life, yet in the context of Rambler communications, it has a certain something. But perhaps it is a little long for your taste. You might prefer the conclusion of Chat GPT:

East on Down's green trail,
Neath 'arty' bench, Northward veer
Yew trees whisper tales.
All very well but I, at least, miss the lack of reference to snacks and picnics.

You can also use an AI program to summarise documents, write minutes, or provide an online presentation on walking topics. But where's the fun in that? Other AI programs and poetic forms are available!

Richard Sharp
Reigate Ramblers



Reigate Ramblers at the yew referred to in the programme notes.
Photos: Richard Sharp.



That 'arty bench'.
Photos: Richard Sharp.



Area AGM

Bedfordshire Area's AGM was held on 26 November in Husborne Crawley village hall, hosted by Leighton Buzzard Ramblers. The day took on our usual format, starting with a walk followed by lunch and an opportunity to meet up with members from other groups before getting to the official business.

We were joined for the whole day by Vanessa Slawson, the Ramblers Regional Engagement Officer for the south east. It was great to meet Vanessa and it gave us all plenty of opportunities to engage with the Central Office.

Around 15 walkers, representing all four of the groups in the Area, were taken on a beautiful five-mile ramble led by Karen Veal of Leighton Buzzard Ramblers. The weather was reasonably kind with a light drizzle only inconveniencing us in the final mile.

Back to the hall for a tasty lunch masterminded by Julian Chritchlow, Chair of Leighton Buzzard Ramblers. Home-made offerings came to the fore: fantastic

vegetable soup, bread and cheese with home-made chutney, and the most wonderful cakes!

After the AGM of 2022 we reported that the Area was 'in abeyance' due to retirements of the Area Chair, Footpath Officer and Publicity Officer, leaving only the Treasurer in post. During 2023, the group Chairs, in association with Vanessa Slawson at Central Office, have kept the Area ticking over. We were fortunate to recruit Stephen Franks to the Area Footpath Officer role during 2023. The combination of Area/group officers worked in two main spheres during 2023, namely in Footpaths and Rights of Way and in delivering a slimmed-down Festival of Autumn Walks.

So, to the business of 2023 Area AGM, 25 members joined the meeting, chaired by Vanessa, with three group Chairs present. The Treasurer, Kevin Barrett, was not in attendance, having retired ahead of the AGM due to a relocation. The Area would like to thank Kevin for all his work keeping our books in order.

Although the Chair and Secretary posts had been advertised there were no volunteers and these roles remain unfilled. Julian Chritchlow volunteered to take

on the Treasurer role for a year to allow the Area to continue on a financial footing. Anne Griffiths and Patrizia Franks (North Beds Ramblers) volunteered to represent the Area at the General Council.

Despite the lack of a full Area committee, it was pleasing to note that group walks remain popular and membership continues to increase with a total of 878 members across the Area and groups. A small committee delivered a very successful Festival of Autumn Walks over a nine-day period in September with 38 walks attracting over 525 participants. Planning has started for the 2024 festival which would hopefully deliver more walks for more walkers!

If you feel you would like to support walking in Bedfordshire and are interested in either the Area Chair or Area Secretary roles or if you would like to support our Area Footpath Secretary, please contact your group Chair, Membership Secretary or Vanessa (vanessa.slawson@ramblers.org.uk) who will be able to provide you with more information.

*Anne Griffiths
(on behalf of Bedfordshire group Chairs)*



The morning walk to the AGM. Photo: Pamela Bates



Julian with the buffet. Photo: Anne Griffiths

RIPPLE

Over the last 12 months our volunteers have improved paths from Chalgrave and Totternhoe in the south to Biggleswade and Potton in the east, and to Duloe and Shelton in the north. One of our recent tasks was at Hargrave, virtually on the county boundary with Northamptonshire.

Our excellent team has been to 68 locations, doing clearance work on 56 occasions and putting in 54 yellow-topped marker posts and adding discs. Activities have also included removing trees where they have obstructed paths, putting in a bridleway gate, mending a stile and painting posts. What started as a monthly event has become almost a weekly one, yet still our team asks when and where the next task will be.

Our regular team members come mainly from Ivel Valley and North Beds groups and this is because Central Bedfordshire council took the decision last year to resurrect their P3 groups and have put a lot of time and money into this and appointed a dedicated officer. They have more than 20 such groups and so we are not needed there as much as we were. Some of our members living in Central Bedfordshire have joined the P3 group local to them and so continue to work on paths locally rather than travel across the county. In the early stages we were involved with some of the P3 groups and gave advice on installing posts, cutting vegetation, using tools and what tools were needed. Bedford Borough has a few groups doing work in their own parishes and we have provided advice and assistance when requested. We are hoping to persuade Bedford Borough to hold a get-together of these groups in April or May with our RIPPLE team taking a lead so as to encourage discussion and provide training.

Tuesday is our morning for group tasks, whilst any day can be used for smaller tasks involving two or three people. Generally we start between

9.30 and 10.00am and finish by 1.00pm. Refreshments are provided and members bring their own tools for clearance tasks when working with Bedford Borough and we provide tools for putting in posts. Central Bedfordshire insisted we use their tools when working with them but recently that rule has changed provided we register our tools with them and agree to let them service them once a year. All our RIPPLE members are registered with Ramblers for insurance purposes and many are registered with Central Bedfordshire as well.

We welcome new volunteers and encourage them to do whatever they feel able to do and to enjoy the experience with us. It is enjoyable, helps improve your health and allows you to 'put something back' by enabling others to enjoy a walk in the countryside. And on a walk you can bore the pants off your fellow walkers by telling them 'We cleared this path' or 'We put in that marker post'!

The enormous contribution made by our volunteers in improving the rights of way network does not go unnoticed and is much appreciated by parish councils, local councillors, landowners and dog walkers.

We know how all councils are being stretched financially and it is most irritating to learn that money and time which could be used on rights of way is having to be spent because there are organisations who appear to automatically object to any change to a right of way without putting forward sensible and reasoned argument or suggesting alternatives to the proposed changes and probably not even physically viewing the location. If there is a good case against the proposed changes that is a different matter because others will be objecting too, but these spurious objections can sometimes cost thousands of pounds and it is you and me, the council tax payer, who has to pick up the bill!

*Barry Ingram
Bedfordshire RIPPLE (Restoring and Improving Public Paths for Local Enjoyment).*



Cutting the sides and improving the height on Cople bridleway 6. Photo: Barry Ingram



RIPPLE volunteers at work on Stevington bridleway 2. Photo: Barry Ingram



BERKSHIRE *bites*

Pang Valley's Honorary Life President



Ray Clayton.

Photo: Diana Lincoln.

After over 25 years of service to our group, Ray Clayton decided to step down from the committee at our 2023 AGM. At that meeting the members voted unanimously and with enthusiasm to appoint him as our Honorary Life President in recognition and sincere appreciation of his long service and outstanding dedication to the group. I had the honour to present him with a certificate regarding his appointment.

Ray joined us in 1996, and in 1998 became the Walks Coordinator, fulfilling this role without help until 2015 when he shared it with Michael Howes for a while before Michael took over. This included editing and formatting the programmes and dealing with distribution and postage. In the early days he often had to write the walk descriptions when walk leaders offered only vague and sometimes erroneous information.

As his knowledge and memory of footpaths around Tilehurst is so extensive, he would pick up walks when the walk leader wanted to cancel at the last moment. He more recently initiated a series of short Saturday walks. It is not an exaggeration to say that without his enthusiasm and efforts over many years, Pang Valley Ramblers might not exist.

He also had a wider role in the walking community: he was asked to help with a Reading Borough initiative to produce maps of local public and urban paths; he was a major player in the West Berkshire gate installation project and still comes to the path clearing work parties; he was our group representative for the public inquiry into Thames Path diversions. He even attends the Local Access Forum as an observer.

It was on this basis of his significant and continuing contribution that he was awarded a Ramblers Commendation in 2017. We are honoured to have him as our Honorary Life President, Thanks Ray.

*Alistair Lax
Pang Valley Ramblers*



OXFORDSHIRE *on-line*

Footpath matters

This is the last report I will be writing as a Footpath Secretary for the Oxfordshire Area. Having reached the age of 80 I wish to hand it over while I still have a functioning brain and knees, so I retired at the Area AGM on 20 January. I may produce the odd piece thereafter (possibly with the accent on 'odd').

Diversions, claims etc

The order for the second diversion on Shilton FP2 at Stur Farm has been made. We need to claim the inclosure award path on the proposed diversion of Ramsden FP2 as it serves a different purpose to the existing FP2. There are objections to the proposed diversion at Marsh Baldon and Nineveh Farm, Nuneham Courtenay. There are also objections to the diversions of Wardington FP4 at Tuthill Porsche, presumably about

the proposed route through the car park, as the rest of the definitive line climbs buildings. There is a curious application near a proposed estate at Grove to divert FP3 and FP11 over land which is not due to be built on.

Diversion and modification orders at Shilton FP2 at the A40, Buckland BR1 at Ragnell Farm (moving the path closer to its historic line) and South Stoke FP11 at the sports field have been confirmed.

Other matters

Not only has the work on Sunningwell FP8 been completed (see last issue) but so has the bridge at Marcham Mill which had been closed for about 10 years. The two detached sections of Upper Heyford BR1 have now been joined up as BR9 by a creation agreement of November 2022. There are several proposals for housing to the north of Oxford.

*David Godfrey
Area Footpath Secretary*

Vacancy for Area Footpath Secretary for the south of the county

Do you value our Oxfordshire public rights of way enough to give some of your time to protecting them against closure and poor diversions? The Area Footpath Secretary role is an extremely valuable job that can be very satisfying. It will suit someone who pays attention to detail and who can keep a number of balls in the air at the one time.

As our current, long-serving Area Footpath Secretary, David Godfrey, writes in his Footpath Matters report, he will have retired from that role during the Area AGM. To help his successor the role has been divided in two: one person for the north of the county, one for the south. Terry Pollard has taken on the mantle for the north, so we are seeking someone to look after the south.

The two Area Footpath Secretaries are the key points of contact with Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access department. The latter informs them by email of actions that have a bearing on our public rights of way (excluding planning applications). This is to elicit the opinion of Oxfordshire Ramblers, which will be taken on board by the county council when they make a decision on how to act, e.g. a request from a landowner

to close or divert a public right of way. An Area Footpath Secretary will also be informed when the county council proposes to implement a temporary or permanent Traffic Regulation Order e.g. to close a right of way temporarily whilst remedial work is done, or to ban recreational vehicles for all or part of the year from a byway.

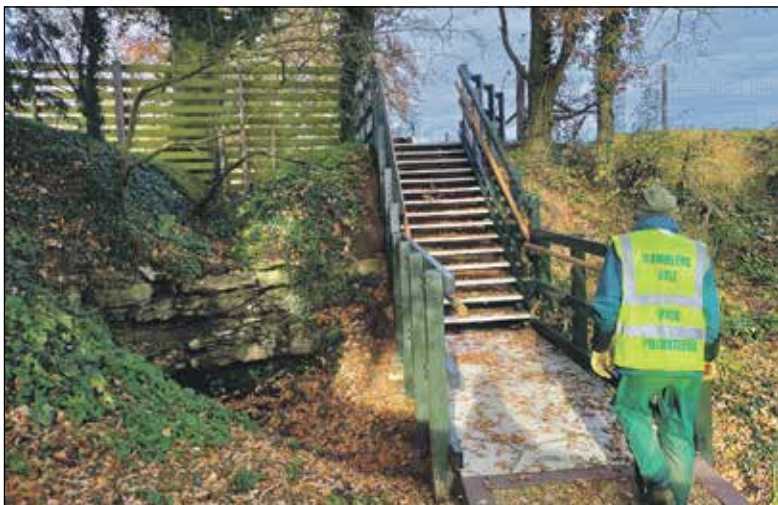
An Area Footpath Secretary then considers how to respond to the county council. This might involve just a 'desk exercise' using online maps, visiting the right of way in question or getting someone else to do so. In the latter case the first port of call might be the Footpath Officer of the Ramblers group where the issue is located. There are also Parish Path Wardens in some 80% of Oxfordshire parishes and one of these might offer to be the eyes on the ground if asked.

If you would like to know more about the role, contact Area Chair Richard Birch at oxfordshirearearamblers@gmail.com.

David Godfrey is very willing to answer questions and to advise during the early phase of a new Area Footpath Secretary's tenure.

Dave Cavanagh

Path maintenance teams



The Vale Path Volunteers cleared the reopened footpath through Bayworth Quarry, in part along the wonderful new steps fitted by Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access team.

Photo: Dave Cavanagh.

Recently John Gregory reinstated the path maintenance team of Banbury & North Oxfordshire (B&NO) Ramblers. Six volunteers took part in the team's first outing in early December on FP7 in Shenington with Alkerton. This task had been suggested by Tracy Sutton, the

local Oxfordshire County Access Officer. John is arranging further outings to clear paths identified by Tracy. "I hope to increase the number of volunteers as we go forward and may attempt larger tasks as we progress," said John. If you would like to join the Banbury & North Oxfordshire Ramblers team you can contact John via the 'Contacts' page of the group's pages on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website.

Blitz & Klean, the path maintenance team of Bicester & Kidlington Group, has been in action near Wendlebury, and the Vale Path volunteers have been busy in Woolstone (twice), Bayworth Quarry near Sunningwell, Radley Lakes in conjunction with the trust there, Compton Beauchamp, Ginge, Carswell Marsh and on Boars Hill

*Dave Cavanagh
Vale of White Horse Ramblers*

Those we have lost

John Elfes (1935 - 2023)

When we wander over Buckinghamshire's access land we should remember John Elfes with gratitude. John, who died last October aged 88, was the access officer for Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area of the Ramblers for 18 years from 2002 to 2020. He did a sterling job responding to the many requirements of the complex access-mapping under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, attended numerous hearings and argued the Ramblers' case as to why the land should be mapped. Kate Ashbrook writes that she is personally grateful to him for his part in winning access to Cobstone, Ibstone, close to her home as well as to the magnificent Beacon Hill above Ellesborough.

He wrote in the Area annual report for 2003-4 that Ramblers had made 93 suggestions for access

draft maps, of which 19 were accepted; this was disappointing though above average for the country. He mentions the steady stream of appeals by landowners, all of which he dealt with.

His comment the following year, when the conclusive map had been published, was that it made sorry reading after 'several appeals by landowners were successful'. But he was ready to celebrate when access began in our area on 31 October 2005 - and rightly so, because he achieved so much for us.

He was also Area Vice-Chairman (2002 - 2020), and served on the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum from its inception in 2002 until 2022, chairing it for part of that time.

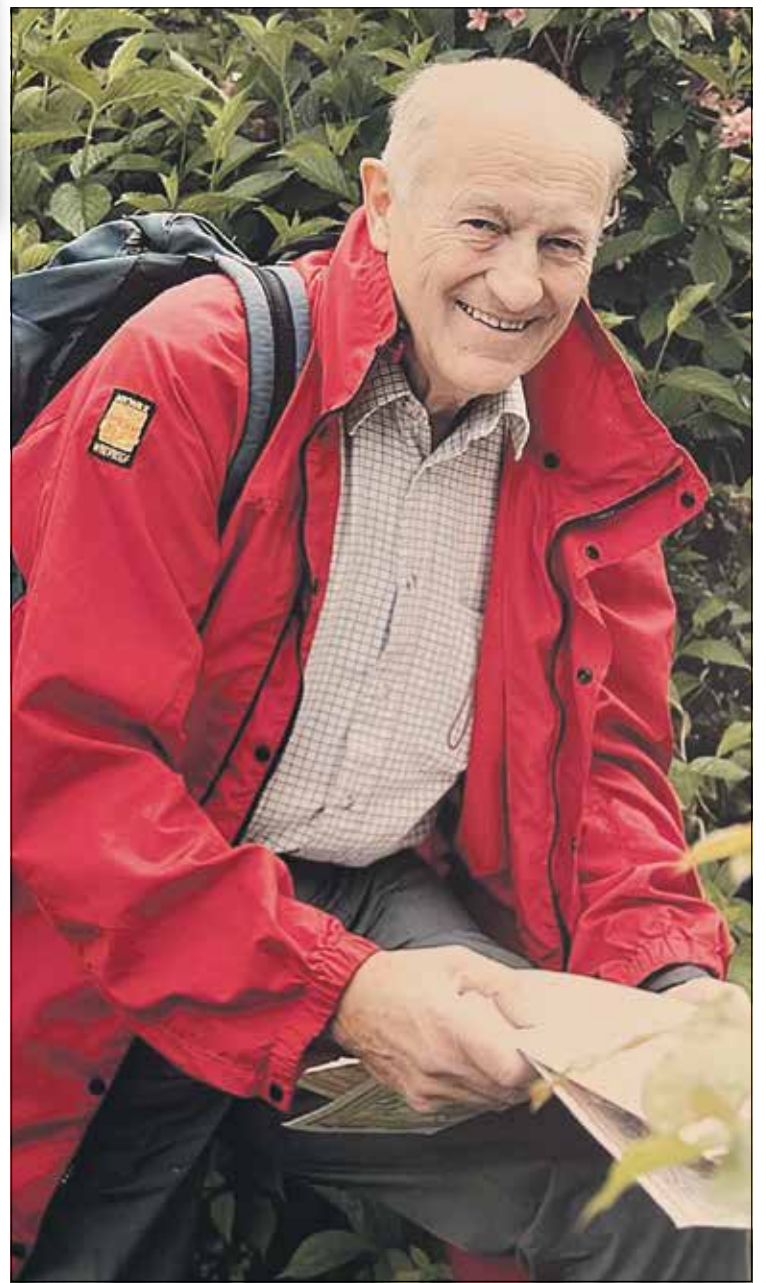
John was an active Amersham and District Ramblers committee member and his campaign for democracy in the Ramblers and the civilised way in which he dealt with opposition was always respected. John was Footpath Secretary for

many years. He was meticulous in keeping records and in the reporting of footpath problems. He was very helpful to new footpath checkers, giving advice and taking volunteers to show them the ropes.

As a regular walk leader on the day-long Sunday walks, John's knowledge about rights of way and the countryside was extensive as was his knowledge of the local pubs for lunchtime stops where, magically, he was always first in the queue for a welcome pint. The local view is that he was one of the best Ramblers members ever met and a 'great bloke'.

John worked for the BBC for 38 years, ending his career as Chief Engineer, Regions. He was Chairman of the Association of Broadcasting Staff in the late 1970s and led the union in many negotiations, often under the aegis of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. So advocacy for paths and access came naturally to him, and he was brilliant at it.

Kate Ashbrook and Madeleine Moody



Roy Garman (1931 - 2023)

In mid-November members of North West Kent Ramblers joined the congregation at the funeral of long-standing member Roy Garman. Attendees were asked to wear something green to symbolise Roy's love of the countryside. The fact that ramblers were very much in the minority at the service was testament to the extent of Roy's interests and his wide circle of friends through these activities, above all his music.

Roy was born in Horsham and, from the age of eight, played in the Horsham Borough Silver Band with his father, brother and cousins. Following National Service in the Royal Artillery, he formed his own semi-professional dance band. Four years later, he turned professional and played in a variety of bands.

Unconventionally, the service started with refreshments at the back of the church, enabling mourners to mingle while being entertained by recordings of Music While You Work from the 1950s and 60s, featuring Roy on solo trumpet and horn. In contrast, the music at the beginning and end of the service was provided by a string quartet playing Schubert. In recent years Roy had become interested in listening to chamber music, often travelling up to London on his own, despite being registered blind (he

suffered from age-related macular degeneration). The congregation joined in singing Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven accompanied by the Orpington Band, which Roy had conducted for over 50 years, continuing to do so even after his sight deteriorated.

Roy's wife Gillian spoke movingly of their 33 years together. They had met at a local folk club and he later encouraged her to take up the tuba and to play in his band. Among his many interests outside music, he was an accomplished linguist. He spoke perfect German and was often taken for a native speaker when walking in Germany. Representatives of organisations in which he had been active, including Bexley Music Centre, the Samaritans and Kent Association for the Blind, all paid their tributes. North West Kent Ramblers Vice-Chairman, Jack Yan, recalled that Roy had been one of the first persons he and his wife Mei had met when they joined the group in 2008 and said how welcoming he had been. We had last seen him at the group's annual picnic in July, an event which brings together our walkers of all abilities.

In the words printed in his funeral programme, 'A long life, well lived'.

*Malcolm Todd
North West Kent Ramblers*





Walking the Saffron Trail



Along the Saffron Trail.

Photo: Peter Jepson.

In late October the Brentwood and Chelmer & Blackwater groups combined to complete the Saffron Trail between Saffron Walden and Southend-on-Sea. The trail was developed by Essex Ramblers in 2000

as a north to south route to complement the east to west Essex Way.

The trail passes through quiet open rural countryside, river valleys, woodlands, parks, and the busy environs of Southend, ending at the iconic pier. The

groups walked the 72-mile trail in two three-day sections at the end of May and end of October, with 51 members participating of whom 24 walked the whole route.

The walkers split into two groups: medium-paced and slower-paced. Each day lifts were shared to park cars at the end of that day's walk, and Lodge Coaches provided transport to the start. Many thanks to them for their excellent service and to the Compasses at Little Green and the Battlesbridge Antique and Craft Centre for allowing free parking and use of their facilities. Battlesbridge is thought to be named after St Botolph, the Anglo Saxon patron saint of travellers. Maybe he was keeping an eye out for the walkers as the expedition was a great success.

Peter Jepson

Chair, Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers

A change of stile

Finding a troublesome stile is a challenge many ramblers will have come across during an otherwise pleasant countryside walk. Walking in our local area of Essex we have often had to use three poorly maintained stiles across a field, followed by three more stiles across another paddock, all of a strange design, partly nibbled away by hungry (or bored) horses and very difficult to negotiate. They were also not on the correct route of the public right of way.

In 2021 we became part of Essex Area's Parish Path Adopters scheme and during lockdown in the pandemic began walking all the paths in the nearby parish of Elsenham, near Stansted Airport. Lo and behold, these troublesome stiles were on one of the routes. They had deteriorated over time, with one being impossible for my husband to use. With his help I was bundled over and while he took a different route I continued across the field, over the other stiles (again with difficulty), avoiding a bridge that was falling down! The other three stiles were also now in

very poor condition. On returning home these issues were duly logged on a very large spreadsheet and also reported to Essex Highways using their rather cumbersome website. At the time, Essex Highways had a very poor reputation for dealing with footpath problems and we received a standard email saying that they would 'investigate and decide what action was required'. As usual, this was nothing at all.

Alan Goffee, Essex Area Footpath Secretary, took over the baton and after much correspondence with Essex Highways and the appointment of a new rights of way officer, progress was at last made with the landowner. Alan later informed us that all the stiles had been replaced by kissing gates and were now also on the correct route. We made a visit to check they really existed and were delighted to find them all in place.

To celebrate this a walk was put on our programme in September 2023 with the route passing through all the gates, accompanied by Alan so we could all thank him for his hard work. We were also pleased to see that the broken bridge had also been repaired. How nice it is to have a positive story to tell for once and to show that persistence does pay.

Sylvia Hayes

Uttlesford Ramblers



The two stiles in 2021.

Photo: Sylvia Hayes.

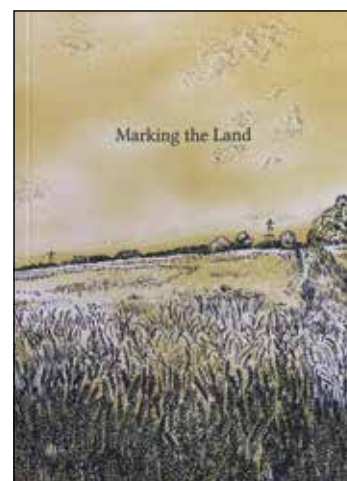


Alan Goffee with one of the newly installed kissing gates in 2023.

Photo: Sylvia Hayes.

Treasure

Marking the Land is a small treasure of a book. It is based around a four and a half mile circular walk around Fairstead and Terling, the result of a project to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Essex Way in 2023. Packed with ideas, a major theme is the topical subject of our freedom and constraints in accessing the countryside and considers the role of ramblers and The Ramblers. There are insights into the history and origins of features encountered on the walk from hedgerows to electricity pylons. It is amazing what you can come across in under five miles, and just shows that walking can not only be a form of exercise and a social activity but also mind-opening and even a radical act. The book is illustrated with beautiful line



Marking the Land by Shaun Badham and James Ravinet was published in 2023 by The Old Waterworks and is available from bigcartel for £8 plus post and packing. <https://markingtheland.bigcartel.com/product/mark-the-land>

drawings by Phillippa Stewart.

Peter Jepson

Chair, Chelmer & Blackwater Ramblers



INNER LONDON *insights*

London mayoral election



Ramblers volunteers Jo Cottell and Jackie Gower with Walking and Cycling Commissioner Will Norman. Photo: TFL

This is beginning to look like the year of the election. Along with the probable general election, London will be, once again, electing a mayor and the London Assembly. Yes, it was only three years ago that London elected its last mayor in the pandemic-postponed 2021 election. And the Ramblers in London have already begun work on their campaign of mayoral candidate 'asks'. This time round we will be looking to build on our successes of the last few years.

Back in 2016 we asked for a walking commissioner to be appointed and the newly-elected Sadiq Khan appointed Will Norman as London's Walking and Cycling

Commissioner. Regular meetings between the Ramblers and the commissioner were established. The Inner London Area went away and set up the Capital Ring and London Loop ranger scheme and now over 100 volunteers monitor and report regularly on these two strategic routes.

In 2020, as the country was emerging cautiously from Covid 19, the Ramblers, along with others, proposed six new walking routes - Greenways - for London. The Mayor approved this initiative and it is hoped that early 2024 will see the first of these routes adopted and launched.

And then in November 2022 London became the first city in the world to adopt a Leisure Walking Plan and the Ramblers were in the forefront of those discussions. It is under this comprehensive plan that our walking manifesto is presented to potential London Mayor candidates.

The mayoral elections are scheduled for Thursday 2 May and further information about how you can help will be relayed nearer the time on the Area website (www.innerlondonramblers.org.uk).

Des Garrahan

Capital Ring, London LOOP and Green Chain Walk project update

Our team of volunteers continues to make improvements to the three routes and to promote them - and we are grateful to the members who have recently put themselves forward to join our ranks.

As soon as the weather improves and the mud dries, our crack team of waymarking volunteers is planning one further day out to tackle section 11 of the London Loop (Hayes & Harlington to Uxbridge), now the only section of the 24 on which we're yet to improve the waymarking. Improvements have been made to all sections of the Capital Ring, and the Green Chain Walk is well-signed.

We are receiving positive feedback from those who have enjoyed walking the 'missing' section 12 of the Green Chain Walk using the maps and route description we developed and published on our innerlondonramblers.org.uk website. All of the signage to waymark this route was manufactured many years ago and is believed to be held in storage by Greenwich council. We are meeting with The Royal Parks to discuss waymarking the route through Greenwich Park and will also be speaking to the council.

Our focus over the last few months has been on drawing up/

updating borough-by-borough lists of issues to be resolved on the routes, which we have provided to Transport for London to share with the relevant people at the borough councils. These lists include a large number of missing posts which we are not in a position to replace, misaligned and faded signposts that are too high for us to reach, bridges and stiles that need replacing, and difficult road crossings where safety improvements are needed.

We've compiled a report about our achievements in 2023, something we now plan to produce on an annual basis.

We've also been working with some councils to ensure their websites contain up to date information about the routes and links to the maps and guidance. We continue to promote the routes too. The Capital Ring and London Loop X (previously Twitter) accounts each have over 1,000 followers and regular interactions with the walking public, and the Capital Ring webpage has had approaching 250,000 hits, with 125,000 for the London Loop.

As ever, please contact vicechair@innerlondonramblers.org.uk if you would like to get involved. We'd particularly like to hear from anyone with an interest in publicity.

Clare Wadd



Volunteers Justin Lumley and Richard Hersey at work on the London Loop in Enfield.



New waymarks added to a signpost.



Disks added to a marker post.

Photos: Jackie Gower.

Wish you were here?

Torquay, Devon

Over 30 ramblers and partners stayed on a Croydon Ramblers holiday in late October based at a hotel which I am led to believe was once owned by the Romanov family. There are still bits of architecture that remain from when the place was built, such as a rather fine mosaic floor. The weather forecast was not particularly good - unfortunately it was also correct! I had a pleasant room, rather compact but with everything there and a view to the sea (if you did the Fawlty Towers thing of standing on a chair with your head out of the window and looking to the left. I was invited to say a few words of thanks at our final dinner together and I was feeling in a rather poetic mood and wrote the following which is more Pam Ayres than Wordsworth.

A large group of walkers came down to Devon
We were told it was rambling heaven
On top of the headland we found the hotel
The name of it I'm sure you know well
The rooms were quite bijoux
The springs in the bed went going to annoy you
For breakfast and dinner we had delicious food
That always helps to lift the mood
There was plenty of booze, wine and beer

I think I had too much and feel rather queer.
Tuesday's walk, we saw the little train
Even through the pouring rain
We took the ferry across the Dart
And finished in the caff with tea and a tart.
For Wednesday's walk the numbers were down
I think they thought we might all drown
We dressed up quite warm because it was chilly
We saw swimmers in the sea, how very silly!
We walked south to a graveyard plot
Where we met up with the other lot
After coffee and bananas we wandered off quite smart
And we all had our lunch overlooking the Dart.
For the walk today, we went to Torquay
Where we discovered if you want a pee, it's 30p!
We then went to Torre Abbey for coffee and cake
And up to Cockington, past the lake
The gardens are lovely, but not in the rain
With a torrent of water gushing down the drain
Here we had lunch and looked in the church
Then down to the bus stop, with a quick lurch.
So I've come to the end of my little ditty
And it's the end of our holiday, such a pity
So thank you Tony, Julia, John and Gerry too
Please accept these gifts as a token of goodwill.

From us to you.

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*



All were keen for the first day's walk.

Photo: John Tickner.

Abingworth, West Sussex

In late October, 27 Epsom & Ewell Ramblers arrived at HF Abingworth Hall in Sussex with fingers crossed for good weather following the recent wet and windy days experienced in the south east. Providence was with us and our Monday to Friday stay proved mainly dry with sunny spells. Following a welcome cream tea on arrival, a substantial three course evening meal and a full choice of English breakfast the following morning we set off with full stomachs for our first walk of the week.

Three levels of a circular walk from the house were offered, one of which took in St Mary's

church at West Chiltington with its fascinating medieval wall paintings, Pulborough Brooks and Pulborough village. Walking along the ridge the views were outstanding and enhanced by the winter sunshine and early autumn colours. That evening the usual talk was arranged in the bar area to discuss the following day's walks and after a hearty evening meal a quiz was organised by leaders.

All three walks on day 3 were along the beautiful Arun valley finishing in the historic town of Arundel where we had time to look around. On this particular evening a guest speaker gave a fascinating talk about her life as a professional beekeeper which included looking after hives

all over Sussex and recovering swarms that had left their hives.

On day 4 we were taken by coach to starting points at Halfway Bridge, Cowdray Park and Midhurst with all walks finishing at the National Trust property of Petworth House. It was during this walk that we experienced our first rainfall and for some this came whilst walking through the vast vineyards at Nyetimber which are totally without shelter. However, by the time we reached Petworth House, the sun had reappeared and we all managed to 'steam dry'.

An evening game of indoor curling was arranged by the staff to round off our stay which for many of us was a new experience and great fun.

Friday morning after breakfast we all packed our bags, collected our boots from the boot room and said a fond farewell to the staff who had worked hard to make our stay a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

*Corinne Shaw
Epsom & Ewell Ramblers*



Medieval wall paintings at West Chiltington.

Photo: John Wood.

Emsworth

Henley & Goring members who moved to West Sussex suggested a holiday in Emsworth and guided us on three leisurely varied and interesting walks with beautiful scenery, historical buildings and wonderful eateries. Our first walk was followed by afternoon tea at a tiny community church where we tucked into delicious home-baked cakes.

From our base in Emsworth we had several choices of walks and visits. The Weald & Downland Museum was very popular either as a whole day visit or as a starting point for a country walk which was somewhat extended by a search for bus stops for the return journey. One eight-mile walk took us to a hilltop Iron Age fort with views out to Chichester Harbour. We followed the Monarch's Way (which traces the route taken by Charles II to flee to France), the Centurion Way and the former Chichester to Midhurst railway line to reach Chichester where, after a



The group on the outskirts of Chichester, where they were greeted by a troop of metal centurions constructed from old railway fittings. Photo: Chris Rickards

lot of searching for the bus stop (elusive bus stops were a feature of this trip!) we got the bus back to Emsworth. Highlights of the trip include Chichester Cathedral and City Walls, West Dean Gardens, the Centurion Way, the 12th century Benedictine priory and the ascent to Hanaker Windmill to enjoy spectacular views of the South Downs and the coast.

The walks from Emsworth harbour in either direction gave plenty of opportunities

for identifying seabirds and the landmarks of Portsmouth looming in the distance. Apart from one short sharp rainstorm we were blessed with sunshine and mild temperatures for the entire four-day holiday. Our trip was another enjoyable group experience, thanks to our ever efficient walk leaders and organisers.

*Glen Teasdale, Cyndy Gray and Fiona Franks
Henley & Goring Ramblers*

Morocco

Following the 6.8 magnitude earthquake that reduced much of the Al Haouz region of the High Atlas mountains to devastation and rubble in September, members thought their trip would have to be cancelled. Over 3,000 Moroccans died and more than 5,000 were injured; some of the most remote communities were hardest hit. After such an appalling loss of life, it was difficult to justify our visit and we certainly didn't want to impede relief efforts. However, the Moroccan view was clear: tourists were needed more than ever to bolster the country's economy and support the recovery. Within 14 days a new itinerary was

planned in a different region of the mountains.

We started our trek in the Ait Bouguemez valley, staying in two local eco lodge hotels. These were iconic in their red mud and clay magnificence with a background of jagged mountain ridges towering across the landscape, creating a sense of mystery and stillness. Each day, two walks were offered, differing mainly in length and level of ascent. The terrain was dramatic and, at times, challenging, in above seasonal temperatures. Both groups enjoyed crossing Berber villages and the visit to the shrine of Sidi Moussa. For those on the shorter walks, it was intriguing to explore the rural lifestyle, to see the apples, nuts and even saffron being harvested.

But perhaps the five-star al fresco lunches were the highlight of the trip! The chefs and drivers not

only prepared an enormous variety of salads and typical Moroccan dishes such as shakshuka, but also organised mint tea, dining tables, chairs, loungers and washing facilities in shady havens before our arrival for lunch.

In the evening, we could swim in hotel pools, relax quietly or chat on the terraces. We loved the forays into Marrakesh at night that bookended the holiday; the elegant Hotel El Andalous on the last day made a luxurious ending to a superb trip. The outstanding success of this venture is a tribute to Wim, Hafida and the team in Morocco, especially in view of the late change of location. It is entirely fitting that any surplus monies went to the Earthquake Relief Fund.

*Janice Allison
Henley & Goring Ramblers*



Admiring the Iminifri landbridge on the first day of the trip around Morocco. Photo: Wim Klaucke

Around the groups

Stirring the grey matter



Jeff, Kitty (the scorekeeper) and 70 quizzers. Photo: John Tickner

For the past 14 years we have kicked off the seasonal festivities with a quiz. The one in December was presided over by our genial quizmaster, Jeff B, who has run the quiz every year since it started. Jeff not only runs the event but devises all the questions. In fact, no sooner has one year's quiz finished then he starts work on the next. Jeff delights in scouring the scuttlebutt of the daily newsflow, looking for items on the edges of our recall.

Our team didn't score well in the end. Come to think of it, we didn't do that well last year either. But we didn't mind because it was a jolly, sociable evening accompanied by an excellent fish and chip (or veggie burger) supper. And you always learn something, usually by getting an answer wrong. So keep the questions coming Jeff, they help to stimulate the grey matter and assure us of an evening that is both educational and entertaining. And it's a lot more sociable than Wordle!

*Peter Southgate
Croydon Ramblers*

Some like it wet!

Nothing deters our members and on a recent walk in the Cobham and Luddesdown area they were tested to the limits by torrential rain. Still with a smile they braved the muddy fields which are now largely given over to vineyards and orchards and provide lovely walking and meadow flowers in spring and summer. An area to be recommended.

*Beverley Johnston
Dartford & Gravesham Ramblers*



Still smiling. Photo: Beverley Johnston

Armistice Day walk

Our group enjoyed a four-mile walk in the Essex countryside on Saturday 11 November. It was a lovely sunny morning and at 11.00am we stopped at a most beautiful spot, overlooking Essex and Kent, to commemorate Armistice Day. We spent a minute there in silence, reflecting and

remembering all those who gave their lives to their country. We finished the walk back at the Nags Head in Ramsden Heath and some of us stayed for a lovely pub lunch. Thanks to Mike and Lesley Bunney for leading us on a walk to remember!

*Sharon Brook
East Essex Friends Group*



A poignant moment. Photo: Sharon Brook

Docklands walk

Fourteen members met at Wapping station on Saturday 12 August for a five and a half mile walk in London's docklands. It was an area rich in history, and we visited spots where Samuel Pepys and JMW Turner frequented, Captain James Cook worshipped, Charles Dickens stood on a pub table and sang to the customers, and film director David Lean lived. A very diverse area, once the home of East End dockers and now boasting a Gordon Ramsey waterfront restaurant.

We walked alongside the many dock basins, looked briefly in the Docklands Museum, and then traversed the amazing Canary Wharf development, viewing the complex from the various squares, beautiful gardens



At Canary Wharf. Photo: Beila Best.

and vibrant waterfront. We felt it was like being in a futuristic world and all agreed it was a splendid day out in a very different part of our marvellous capital city.

Beila Best
Godalming & Haslemere Ramblers

Walking the Capital Ring



Emerging from the Woolwich Foot Tunnel on the Capital Ring. Photo: Joan Clark.

Our group completed the 78-mile Capital Ring in London between January and November 2023. We travelled from Henley/Reading by train on one Saturday each month and started and finished the circuit at Richmond. We found something to surprise and interest us on every stage.

I asked those who had done all or most of the route what stood

out for them. The overwhelming response was how many green spaces - parks, commons, woodlands, waterways - there were. The urban sections were also enjoyable, full of changing street scenes with lots of architectural, historical and social interest. Special sights stand out: having a picnic lunch as we watched planes coming together for the King's coronation fly-past; the



Use this code to watch a video by Chris Rickard of Henley & Goring members on the Capital Ring in west London.

magnificent 'cathedral of sewage' that is Bazalgette's chateau-like Abbey Mills pumping station; the sheer number of Londoners using the green spaces for walking, cycling, jogging, playing football, canoeing, picnicking; watching the changing seasons in the parks; the dinosaurs at Crystal Palace; deer and a fox in Richmond Park. The list is endless.

I think we were all surprised and delighted at how much there was to see and enjoy along this route and we are all sad to have completed it.

Joan Clark
Henley & Goring Ramblers

End of year quiz

In a departure from our traditional Christmas lunch, we held a quiz instead. We met in St Martins church hall in Ruislip on 2 December and there was a good turnout. There was a wide range of questions on general knowledge as well as questions about rambling. A fish and chip supper was delivered for those who had pre-ordered and we took our own drinks and nibbles.

It was a very enjoyable evening culminating in an exciting tie for first place which was resolved with the quiz equivalent of a penalty shootout - a tie-break question.

Thanks to Jenny and Rob for producing an excellent range of questions, Rob for being a superb quizmaster with his experience of keeping order in the classroom, Barbara who organised tea and coffee and Steve who handled the takeaway bookings.

Simon Thornhill
Hillingdon Ramblers



Comparing answers.

Photo: Simon Thornhill.

Celebrating 60 years

The Kingston Quaker Centre was an excellent venue for our 60th anniversary event. It was thrilling that 60 Kingston members (a record) and 13 guests packed the hall on Saturday 11 November 2023. They were first entertained with a Powerpoint presentation of group photos followed by the AGM. Paul Draper remains on the committee (as Webmaster) but stood down after three amazing years as Chair. It was great that Barbara Crow volunteered to take over the role of Chair.

We were honoured that Brian Reader, Surrey Area President, accepted our invitation to attend. Vanessa Slawson, Regional Engagement Officer at the

Ramblers, also came and presented inscribed and suitably certified mugs to some of our members for their valued contribution to the group. We had some time before more guests were expected so Vanessa very kindly told us about her involvement with the Ramblers.

We then welcomed the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress of Kingston-Upon-Thames, the former giving a short congratulatory speech and we discovered that they both like walking. He then cut the anniversary cake.

Finally, tea and cakes were offered to all as they chatted with friends. One member said that she was emotional and thrilled to belong to such an organisation.

Brenda Horwill
Kingston Ramblers



Celebrating 60 years. Photo: Moiz Saifuddin/Kingston Courier.

Crossing London bridges

On a fine and dry Sunday just before Christmas, 15 of our members boarded the train for London for a walk linking ten bridges over the River Thames. We were in fine festive spirits and the walk began at Battersea where four more walkers joined us.

In Battersea Park we came across several Santas of many shapes and sizes, all preparing for an organised Santa walk. At the beautiful Peace Pagoda we climbed the steps to take in the views. This was built in

1985 and has statues representing phases of the Buddha's life. Once out of the park we crossed our first bridge, Chelsea, after which they just kept coming all the way to Tower Bridge. It was an extremely interesting walk and we came across some great statues and memorials along the way.

Many thanks to Ajay for organising and leading us. I'm looking forward to our next London walk with bated breath!

Valerie Dawson
Lea & Icknield (Luton) Ramblers



Crossing the bridges.

Photo: Ajay Gandhi.

A good day out

We held our AGM on Saturday 4 November in the church hall in Sanderstead as per usual.

About 100 members attended and were welcomed with a cup of tea or coffee served by our Chairman, Roy Endersby. Then attendees could peruse the goods for sale, where bargains could be had in the 'used gear' department' previously loved books and maps, works of art, crafts and pottery, home-made jams and marmalade! Why go anywhere else?

The expert catering team laid on a lovely lunch of three different soups followed by a variety of sandwiches and fresh fruit. After clearing the tables, Roy called for the business of the day to commence. This started with the presentation of a substantial cheque from our much-loved and sadly missed Natasha, presented by Natasha's niece, Judith. Natasha left instructions for Croydon Ramblers to 'have a party'. The committee is still deliberating. The meeting seemed to progress well until someone mentioned the new online Walks Manager which many members either cannot use or understand. The matter is in hand - I shall say no more!

Then it was my turn to entertain the troops with a



Judith presents a cheque to Chairman Roy Endersby.

Photo: John Tickner.

presentation. This time I showed a sequence I produced in 2015 entitled 'Rambling through the seasons'. This was followed by a tribute to our good friend Natasha who left us in December 2022. I found it quite emotional and hope some of the audience did too.

As always, we finished with a lovely cup of tea and home-made cakes - perfect! A good day out.

*John Tickner
Croydon Ramblers*

Mulled wine ramble

December was a busy month for us though it was often wet underfoot when walking. Thirty four members turned up for our mulled wine walk based at Old Warden village hall. Roy was leading the walk whilst Tina stayed to prepare the hall with

all the goodies and mulled wine ready for our return. Along the way Roy stopped to point out Queen Anne's Summerhouse, once a folly with four towers, Today it is run by the Landmark Trust.

Some road walking followed and we were delighted to see a bright

blue Morgan open top coming towards us, with the driver wearing helmet and goggles accompanied by his dog in reflective goggles.

Back at the hall we were greeted with mince pies, mulled wine, cheese and all manner of Christmas nibbles.

Well done Roy for organising the walk and to Tina for laying out the feast.

*Tom Collier
Ivel Valley Walkers*



Near Queen Anne's summerhouse.

Photo: Sandra Axtel.

History in the walking



Inside the Old White Horse.

Photo: Pamela Bates.

We are fortunate to walk in a region steeped in history which has been shaped by generations before us. As we ramble off the beaten track we encounter ancient hillforts, ruined castles, old drover tracks, beautiful churches and many other buildings of interest. Evidence of the past is everywhere and

we learn so much from our discoveries.

Fuelled by this intense curiosity of the past, but equally by the promise of cake, members of our group enjoyed afternoon tea and a private tour of the Old White Horse in Hockcliffe. A former coaching inn, the house can trace its history back to 1420 and boasts Daniel Defoe as a former guest. The

building has also seen service as the mail office for passing stagecoaches, a village forge and even a boarding school. The rooms are crammed with an eclectic collection of curios from the past, including a very nostalgic toy and doll museum.

After tea we were guided on a ghost hunt by a team of paranormal investigators and mediums. Some of us sat in the dark basement while others were taken to one of the bedrooms to communicate with the spirits of former souls who inhabited the house. Alas, and despite an array of investigative equipment with names more suited to an episode of Dr Who, we did not connect with anyone in the spirit world, but our minds and hearts remain open. After all, who knows who might have joined one of our walks and is quietly accompanying us?

*Pamela Bates
Leighton Buzzard Ramblers*

On Christmas morning

We had a successful year with regular walks in and around Milton Keynes and introduced Christmas morning and New Year's Day walks that were well attended. We are

also pleased to see new members joining us since the start of 2024 which bodes well for the future.

*Andrew Gardiner
Milton Keynes Ramblers*



Coffee stop on Christmas morning.

Photo: Andrew Gardiner.

Christmas festivities



In the church at Blunham.

Photo: Martin Newman Brown.

Twenty six members headed to The Kingfisher in Bedford on 7 December for our annual Christmas evening meal. The food was excellent along with, of course, the company and we had a splendid evening. We also took time to say very special thanks to all our walk leaders, without whom we wouldn't have a group. Those present at the meal were presented with a card and small present to show our appreciation.

Then, on 16 December, we had a Mince Pie and Mulled Wine walk from Blunham church with the unusual name of St Edmunds or St James. We rambled along

well-defined and almost mud-free paths to Great Barford, noting the very swollen River Great Ouse, and back to the church where we all partook of plenty of festive refreshments. Thirty four walkers turned out to join us. The church was most accommodating with a beautiful Christmas tree and we all enjoyed watching a newly-restored clock being reinstalled.

Looking ahead we have two special diary dates to include walking part 6 of the John Bunyan Trail and heading to London on 27 April for the 41st Unlock walk.

*Sandra Kelsey
North Beds Ramblers*

Cafe offline

Walkers using a popular public footpath (KH236A) which runs close to Leeds Castle in Kent should be aware that the catering facilities near the castle entrance are regarded as out of bounds to passing walkers who may be confronted by over-zealous security staff. An unpleasant

experience there led to reader Michael Render complaining to the estate who say that anyone straying from the footpath is likely to be treated as a potential entrance fee dodger. The castle does however say that they are happy for users of the footpath to visit the Boathouse Cafe which is located just off, but alongside, the public footpath.

The Holy Maid of Kent

Our circular walk around Aldington, on the escarpment overlooking Romney Marsh, took in what little remains of the isolated and overgrown Chapel of Our Lady at Court-at-Street. This was where Elizabeth Barton (born 1506), a young servant girl, is said to have been cured of a serious illness after praying before an image of Our Lady. Following this Elizabeth became known as the Holy Maid of Kent for her prophecies and miracles, and became a national figure.

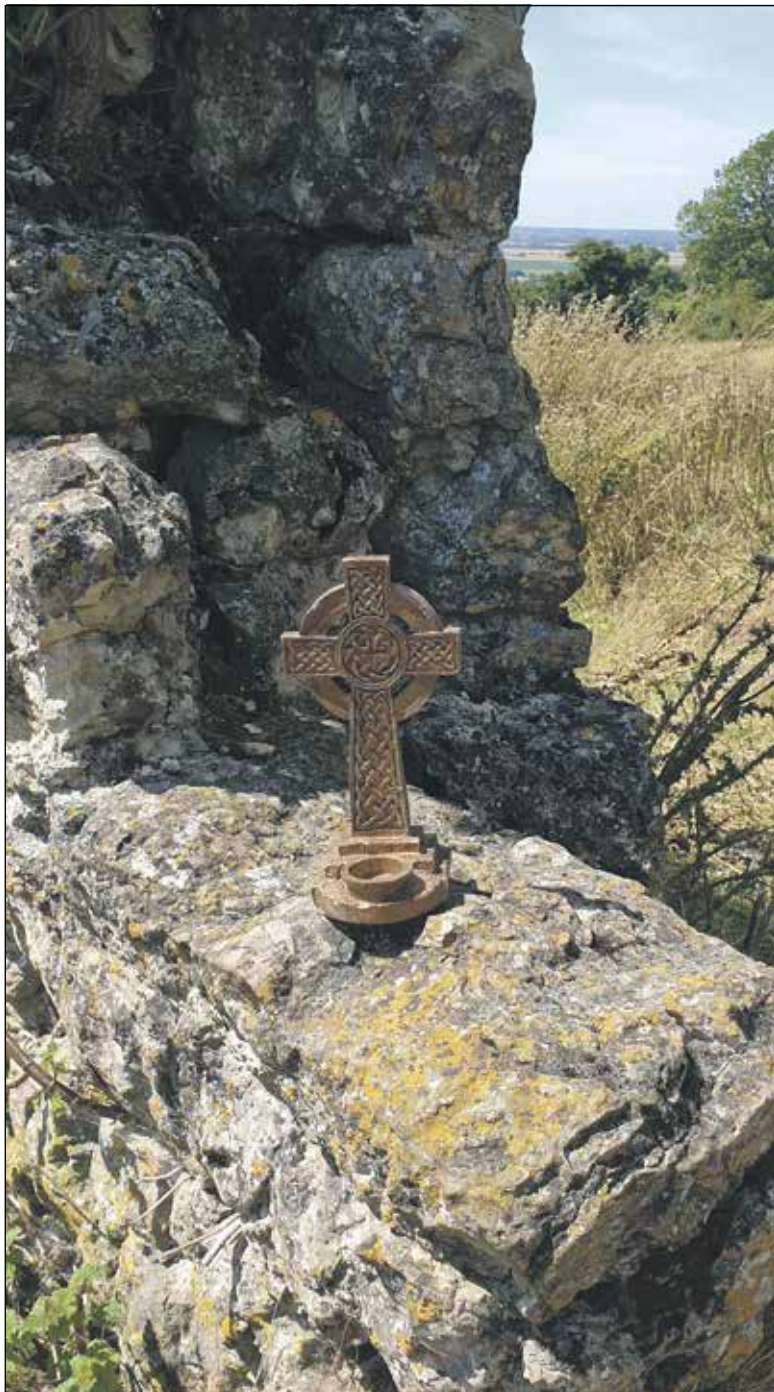
Elizabeth fell foul of Henry VIII after speaking out against his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Unsurprisingly, this

led to her execution in 1534, alongside five of her supporters. Hanged and beheaded she is the only woman known to have had her severed head displayed on a spike on London Bridge!

Her legacy, however, survives as she is still venerated in some Catholic churches. Also, when we visited the chapel it contained a small cross, fresh fruit etc, indicating that she is still remembered there today.

The group moved on to a picnic lunch in the churchyard of St Rumwolds, which nestles on the banks of the Royal Military Canal. Finally, on the way back to Aldington, we viewed the remains of the Augustinian priory in Bilsington.

*Paul Philip
North West Kent Ramblers*



A cross left at the Chapel of Our Lady at Court-at-Street. Photo: Paul Philip.

Who said AGMs are boring?



The walk to the AGM started wet! Photo: Ruth Le Guen.

An interesting venue was booked for our group AGM on 4 November - Brixton Windmill Centre, right next to the mill. The newly-built centre was just the right size for members to sit around tables and watch slideshows of photos from walks through the year, organised by a tech-savvy committee member. Another committee member with a penchant for quizzes prepared

one, using the wording for Ordnance Survey symbols. This gave members something to chat about and work on together. This is useful in a large group (37 members attended), as not everyone knows everyone else. The venue also has a catering-grade kitchen where the first class catering team got to work, providing three kinds of soup, bread and cheese and a wonderful array of cakes.

Members were encouraged to bring their own mugs for the soup, which saved on washing up, or using disposables.

To get members to the venue, a five-mile linear walk was organised from Sydenham Hill station, and the leader took an interesting route through woodlands, parks, streets, an art gallery and a velodrome! Although the walk started in pouring rain, 21 members turned up and after half an hour the rain eased and the sun came out.

The AGM was efficiently run by Chair Hilary Jarvis and different committee members gave their reports. Two long-standing committee members, Roger Bennett and Nick White, were honoured as they stood down, but both are continuing as walk leaders. Thanks to the committee on behalf of all members, was given by Sue Ellenby and tribute was paid to Christine de Groot, a valued member and walk leader, who had recently died.

The meeting took less than an hour which just left time to stack the tables and chairs!

*Jill Gregson
South Bank Ramblers*

High attendances

We are looking forward to 2024 with optimism. Our first walks of the year saw high attendances not seen since pre-Covid days, despite conditions underfoot being quite challenging at times with the high rainfall resulting in muddy paths.

Our pre-Christmas walks were sometimes accompanied by mince pies and mulled wine, all very welcome on a cold and wet day! In February we held a post-Christmas lunch at the Crown & Cushion in Minley. Looking ahead we have a group holiday in Italy arranged for May and a coach trip to Hayling Island scheduled for June.



A good turnout for a January walk at Frost Folly in Warfield. Photo: Brian Poulton.

*Brian Poulton
South East Berks Ramblers*

Gaining members through social media



A group walk in December. Photo: Alexis Gould.

Over the last couple of years, our group has grown in members and popularity. Part of this success, we believe, was down to our use of social media. We have recruited 29 new members over three years from our presence on Meetup and some more from our Facebook page.

When the current committee took over, the decision was made to embrace social media and to publish details of all of our walks on both our open Facebook and Meetup pages.

Meetup is now used on a regular basis by around 50 of our walkers, both group members and visitors. The big advantage with Meetup is

that it uses the push model rather than a pull method of communicating. With push notifications, when we schedule an event on Meetup a message, either email or to the app, is sent to all walkers who have subscribed to our group. From this message they can register for the walk and add it to their calendar

When a prospective member joins a walk, we make a conscious effort to welcome them, and any visiting members, during the briefing. On the walk, any attending committee members and several of our regular walkers make sure the visitor doesn't walk alone and always has someone to talk to. This gives us an opportunity to describe

how the group works and about the types of events we run, such as our walks, coach trips, short breaks and holidays. At the end of the walk we give them our flyer which describes what we've talked about and invite them to join us for a drink or to eat at a local pub.

In the background, we also check each walk on Meetup to see who is attending and if we find someone hasn't joined the Ramblers after three walks, we flag that up to ensure the person is reminded of the 'three walks rule'.

On Facebook, the approach we've taken is to make the group open to all. Here we publish on a Sunday evening the following week's walks, with a link to our website which gives further walk details. In addition, after the walk we encourage anyone who has taken photos to publish them on either our Facebook page or their own. When they post on our Facebook page it gives our page a dynamic feel, helps with search engine optimisation, and gives potential members a pictorial view of our walks programme.

*Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers*

Bagshot footbridge demolished

A footbridge over the M3 in Surrey was demolished in early December after a structural survey revealed that it might not withstand being hit by a tall vehicle. The bridge (at grid ref SU 913623) carried footpath 184 over the M3 connecting Whitmoor Road, Bagshot, and Lightwater

Country Park. A new bridge is scheduled for autumn 2025 though National Highways hope to provide a replacement before then. In the meantime walkers are directed to underpasses either side of the bridge and crossing points at Lightwater interchange.

Explore with map and compass:

East Sussex rambler, John Harmer, is organising another one-day course for beginners on either Saturday 9 or 23 March at

Battle. Contact John if you are interested (01424 773998 or email john@harmerfamily.plus.com).

Striding on

Our AGM was held once again at The Bowlers Arms with an increased attendance over last year. The Chairman was pleased to announce that despite a shortage of walk leaders the group had managed to put on 200 walks covering a total of 1,653 miles over the year. The rights of way working parties continued to meet on alternate Fridays throughout the year, working through the parishes on a four-year cycle, and the gate installation team continued to undertake the essential task of replacing old stiles with new pedestrian gates and were running at the rate of 10 to 12 installations per year, having so far completed 326 installations.

The group has continued to put on regular Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday walks



Christmas Eve celebration.

Photo: Richard Trimmer.

every week despite the weather. However, towards the end of the quarter a number of local routes were becoming impassable and walks needed to be significantly rerouted due to localised flooding.

In early December one of the Saturday walks was followed by a festive lunch at The Hind's Head in Aldermaston whilst the Christmas Eve walk was celebrated with mince pies and cheese straws.

Members can look forward to the return of our annual quiz in March, a picnic in April and a five-day walking holiday in Harrogate in June. Our popular series of coach walks returns in April with a trip to Stratford-Upon-Avon, followed by outings to Christchurch, Petersfield, Swanage and St Albans.

Richard Trimmer
West Berks Ramblers

Memorial walk and gate unveiling



Rose and baby Oscar walk with the group with a view of Elham from Margaret and Les' memorial gate.

Photo: Lee Pickup Richard Trimmer.

During last summer, members of our group undertook the arduous task of installing a kissing gate in the Elham Valley, dedicated to Margaret Lubbock and Les Preston who gave so much of their time to the Ramblers. Our autumn programme featured a memorial walk and an inauguration ceremony at the gate to unveil a plaque and gather members and family together to celebrate and remember Margaret and Les.

The turnout was great and made more special by the attendance of Margaret's brother and sister who travelled from Cumbria and Margaret's daughter, Rose and baby Oscar, aged eight months, our youngest participant on the walk. Our Chairman, John Pye,

family and close friends of Margaret and Les took part in the ceremony with John commenting on the "massive impact" that Margaret and Les had made on our lives.

It was an emotional and bitter sweet day that was a fitting tribute to our much-missed members. Thank

you to everybody who played a part in making this happen, it was an amazing effort ending in a touching occasion of remembrance. Margaret and Les would have approved.

Lee Pickup
White Cliffs Ramblers



Members of Windsor & District Group enjoyed a walk around Burnham Beeches on 17 December and celebrated the season with mulled wine and mince pies.

Photo: Howard Sadkin.

Tasha's gate

A new two-way gate has been installed between the adjacent footpath and St John the Evangelist churchyard in Wotton, near Dorking. This gate will provide a lasting memorial for Natasha Claridge who passed away in December 2022. Although a resident of Dorking, she had been a member of Croydon Ramblers since 1976. A ramble in her memory took place in April 2023 (see SEW September 2023). She was a keen walker, intrepid traveller, photographer, artist, poet and a friend to everyone she met. Tasha often led walks around Dorking and Wotton and would have passed the church on many occasions.

The gate replaces an old stile that was beginning to fall into disrepair. Five members of our group, ably directed and assisted by Tom Chatfield of Surrey County Council, braved the pouring rain on 19 December. The old stile was quickly dismantled and pits dug for the new gate posts. Fortunately, the sandy ground enabled the continuous rainfall to drain away such that the posts could be fixed and the gate attached. Given that the churchyard leads onto a fenced path it was decided that a strong wooden two-way gate was most appropriate and would allow easier access.

A commemorative plaque to Tasha will be added shortly. It is intended that a walk will be arranged which will call at the church to enable Tasha's friends to visit the gate.

John Stone
Croydon Ramblers



The gate is installed.

Photo: John Tickner.

Bucking the trend



Surrey Heath members with one of their newly installed gates.

Photo: Ian Prince.

A successful year for our group was topped off with a packed AGM where the seven committee members and 36 group members plus two guests squeezed into the clubhouse for a well-run meeting. Along with the legal necessities associated with the meeting we also found time to reflect on the year's successes. These included - for the second year running - bucking the national trend by achieving a net increase in our membership, walking holidays in Macedonia and Suffolk,

short breaks in Wells and Ely, a coach trip to the New Forest and the completion of our featured walk of the year, the Fox Way in Surrey. In addition to our walks, our footpath team has installed four kissing gates and cleared a couple of overgrown paths.

Looking forward, we have a holiday in Sardinia and short breaks in Canterbury and Lulworth planned while our featured walk for the year will be the Brenda Parker Way in Hampshire.

Graham Evans
Surrey Heath Ramblers