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at the heart of walking

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# **Warwickshire Area Ramblers**

The Charity Working for Walkers

**Annual Report and Accounts  
For the year**

**2018/2019**

The Ramblers' is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales. Company registration number: 4458492. Registered Charity in England and Wales number: 1093577. Registered office: 2nd floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW

# Area Officers 2018/2019

## Chairman and Membership Secretary

**Nick Hillier 07736 794 763**

[nick\\_hillier@hotmail.com](mailto:nick_hillier@hotmail.com)

## Vice-chairperson

**Sandra Sutton 0121 458 5984**

[sandra.sutton3@btinternet.com](mailto:sandra.sutton3@btinternet.com)

## Secretary and Group Liaison Officer

**Bill Burton 07917517310**

[billburton@virginmedia.com](mailto:billburton@virginmedia.com)

## Treasurer

**Paul Drake**

[pauldrake@sky.com](mailto:pauldrake@sky.com)

## Footpath Secretary, Countryside Secretary & Access Officer

**Michael Bird 07581 304676**

[mabird.b43@gmail.com](mailto:mabird.b43@gmail.com)

## Publicity and IT Secretary

**Andy Page 02476 304825**

[andypage0203@gmail.com](mailto:andypage0203@gmail.com)

Area email address—[warwicksramblers@gmail.com](mailto:warwicksramblers@gmail.com)

## Local Groups

Castle Bromwich

City of Birmingham

Coventry

Mid Warwickshire

Rugby

Solihull

South Birmingham

Southam

Stratford upon Avon

Sutton Coldfield

The Bear

West Midlands Walking

West Midlands 40 plus

## Web Sites/Contact details

[www.castlebromwichramblers.btck.co.uk](http://www.castlebromwichramblers.btck.co.uk)

[www.birminghamramblers.org.uk](http://www.birminghamramblers.org.uk)

[www.coventryramblers.org.uk](http://www.coventryramblers.org.uk)

[www.midwarksramblers.org.uk](http://www.midwarksramblers.org.uk)

[www.rugbyramblers.org.uk](http://www.rugbyramblers.org.uk)

[www.solihullramblers.org.uk](http://www.solihullramblers.org.uk)

[www.sbramblers.org.uk](http://www.sbramblers.org.uk)

[www.ramblers.org.uk/southam](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/southam)

[www.stratfordramblers.com](http://www.stratfordramblers.com)

[www.suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk](http://www.suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk)

[www.bearwalkinggroup.co.uk](http://www.bearwalkinggroup.co.uk)

[www.wmwg.org.uk](http://www.wmwg.org.uk)

[www.wm40plus.org.uk](http://www.wm40plus.org.uk)

## Notice

# AGM Saturday 1st February 2020 is to be held at the Cadbury Club, Bournville Lane, Bournville, Birmingham B30 2LU

### Refreshments and lunch:-

Tea & coffee is being served between 09.45 and 10:15. The meeting starts at 10:15.  
A buffet lunch will be provided immediately after the meeting.

**Afternoon Walks:** After lunch there will be two walks of different lengths

**Travelling to the venue:-** Click on internet link <http://www.cadbury-club.co.uk/> to find directions to the venue.

**By train:** The walk to the venue from Bournville station takes about 3 minutes. (Make sure that you leave the station by the Bournville Lane entrance turn left and walk for 3 minutes the Club is on your left)

**By bus:** Buses 45 & 47 leave Birmingham from top of Carrs Lane (opposite McDonald's). Alight outside the co-op funeral directors, cross both roads walk and forward past the Co-op store and turn right in to Bournville Lane and walk up the hill. Walk time about 10 minutes.

**By car:** The car park is on Mary Vale Road but parking is limited, please consider using the train.

## Request for Nominations

Management of the Area is vested in an Area Council which meets quarterly and consists of:

- The Honorary Officers - as shown in the Agenda on page 4
- Two representatives from each Group in the Area
- Six Members representing individual members or affiliated clubs  
(Up to two additional members may be co-opted by Council)

Members are invited to nominate Officers and Individual Members of Council for 2018/2019

Nominations, signed by the proposer and seconder, must be received by the Area Secretary no later than two weeks before the AGM.

Any motions for the Annual General Meeting should be submitted, in writing, and must be received by the Area Secretary not later than two weeks before the AGM.

Please email nominations and motions to [billburton@virginmedia.com](mailto:billburton@virginmedia.com).

# Warwickshire AGM Saturday 1st February 2020 is to be held at the Cadbury Club, Bournville Lane, Bournville, Birmingham B30 2LU

## Agenda Meeting: starts at 10:15

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of the last AGM.  
Matters Arising from the Minutes.
3. Adoption of Annual Report & Accounts.  
Matters arising from Annual Report & Accounts.
4. Any Motions received by the Secretary.
5. Election of Officers.
  - Chairman
  - Secretary
  - Treasurer
  - Footpath Secretary
  - Countryside Secretary
  - Access Officer
  - Membership Secretary
  - Publicity Officer
  - Group Liaison Officer
  - Area News Editor
6. Election of six independent members of Area Council.
7. Appointment of Auditor.
8. Any other Business.
9. Appointment of delegates to General Council Bristol: April 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> 2020

## Guest Speaker: Chris Hodgson - Ramblers Trustee



**Chris Hodgson**, chair Ramblers Cymru

I walk in all parts of the United Kingdom and try and cover more than 1,000 miles every year. I've developed a great interest in the condition of our paths, and in their improvement, and in encouraging other people to experience the joy of walking. I like leading adventurous walks along with grade 1 and 2 scrambles and like to see others feeling a sense of achievement. I am currently chair of the Welsh Council Executive Committee as well as chair and membership secretary of Ceredigion area. I feel there is still much to do and I believe the Ramblers can further enhance itself as an organisation working for walkers.

## **Area Chair's Report**

I am stepping down after 4 years as Area Chair although I will be continuing as Area Membership Secretary. So, whilst this is my last report as Area Chair, I will still be preparing an annual report about our membership.

My report in that capacity can be found elsewhere in this document but I would like to pick up on the statistics which show, that at the time of writing (October 2019) we had 3,016 members. Interestingly when Warwickshire was set up as a separate Area in its own right in 1987, our membership stood at 2,700. My own view is that the figure of 3,016 now and 2,700 just over thirty years ago is I feel an interesting one.

I guess like many of you that are group membership secretaries or hold other officer ships, you will have received an email from Central Office pointing out the importance of giving a warm welcome to new members. Whilst I can't disagree with that, I do wish that things were as simple as these emails suggest. The feedback that I get from new members, who become established members, isn't so much the quality of the welcome that is the issue, but rather the pressures on peoples' time. For younger people the work life balance between work, families and leisure pursuits is an important factor. For retired people, increasingly they are involved with supporting families, even if it's only helping on the school run.

So, there is a competition for peoples' time, and I feel that we have to consider what is that we need to do, to make sure that walking with the Ramblers, appears high on peoples' priority lists, as one of the things that they want to do. In that respect I would commend to you the reports from the group chairs making up Warwickshire Area. As all groups report a varied choice of walks and with many groups now linking to Walks Finder the opportunity to find walks to meet a variety of needs and expectations, has never been better. Add to that a wide-ranging choice of social activities, which include meals out, holidays away, not just in the UK but further afield overseas.

Underpinning all this is the work carried out by Michael Bird our Area Footpath Secretary supported by Group Footpath Secretaries and Volunteer Group Footpath Working Parties and I would commend to you the report that Michael has prepared for this report. In October I was able to meet with Area Chairs from four neighbouring Areas, I can tell you, that in very many respects, we are in a much better place, in terms of our footpaths, than the Areas represented at this meeting. I have to thank Michael and his teams for the efforts they have made during 2019.

As well as thanking Michael and his teams of volunteers, can I also thank all the Group Volunteers whether that is serving on Group Committees, organizing and leading walks, organizing walking holidays or in other capacities that I am not aware of. I know that your efforts greatly appreciated. Can I also thank my fellow Area Officers for the support that I have received over my four year term as chair?

**Nick Hillier - Warwickshire Area Chair**

## **Area Secretary's Report**

This is the start of my sixth year as Area Secretary and I am still enjoying the roll, but if anyone would like to take on the post I would be happy to pass on the baton to new blood. It has been another eventful year for the Area especially with the celebration of 70 years since *1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* and the involvement of the Warwickshire area (see Michael Bird's report on page 8)

As Area Secretary I set myself a target last year to try and lead a walk for the six groups I have not lead a walk for yet, Sutton Coldfield, Castle Bromwich, West Midland, Bear, Coventry and Rugby. I failed miserably. So this year I have reset the target and will be contacting each group's walks organiser over the next month offer to lead a walk for them. I plan to attend the following group AGM's, Rugby, Mid-Warks and Stratford this month.

All groups are still very strong with many varied walks and social events being held, although some like Coventry don't have a Chair or Secretary but still manage to carry on with the help of the membership secretary. It is encouraging to have such healthy groups.

Another area where members do great work is in footpath maintenance and clearance. I would urge all members to consider joining one of the several maintenance teams organised by many of our groups. If you wish to help please contact me and I will put you in touch with your nearest maintenance team leader.

Last year I joined my Walking for Health (WfH) team at my local surgery Abbey End in Kenilworth. I am still in the team and am one of three rambler's members that regularly lead walks. I am a bit disappointed that none of the attendees on the walks has joined the Ramblers so far. However, the walks on the WfH scheme are very short only being 1-1.5 miles and maybe the step up to several miles has put people off.

Andy Page our IT and PR committee member has advised me that we have 435 twitter followers, and 136 Facebook followers.

We use our online presence to support National Ramblers campaigns, to provide information about local events and issues to our members and to campaign on local issues such as the ongoing battle against HS2. We also have a presence on the Guardian web site; we often post the Ramblers point of view on articles relating to countryside and footpath matters in the comments sections.

**Bill Burton - Area Secretary**

# Treasurer Report

## Accounts for the Warwickshire Area of The Ramblers' Association Charity No. 1093577, Company No. 4458492

	This Year	Last Year
<b><u>Income &amp; Expenditure Account for the Year ended 30th September 2019</u></b>		
<b>Income</b>		
Funding from Central Office	5,150	3,259
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Group Funding	4,818	7,830
Annual Report	385	442
Room Hire	120	120
Subscriptions	36	36
Travel inc General Council attendance	209	315
AGM Costs	1,244	1,415
Admin	87	
Total Expenditure	6,899	10,158
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year</b>	<b>-1,749</b>	<b>-6,899</b>
<b><u>Balance Sheet at 30 September 2019</u></b>		
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash at Bank	3,940	5,689
<b>Funds</b>		
Opening Balance	5,689	12,588
Surplus/deficit for the year	-1,749	-6,899
Closing Balance	3,940	5,689

The reduction in 'Income: Funding from Central Office' and in 'Expenditure: Group Funding' is in line with the budget and is part of a nationwide initiative to reduce surplus funds held by areas and groups.

### **Paul Drake, Area Treasurer**

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group Independent Examination Guidelines, I consider the above accounts to give a fair representation of the Area's financial activities for the year to 30 September 2019.

### **John Phillips**

25 October 2019

## Area Footpath & Countryside Secretary's Report

As both the Area's Footpath and Countryside Secretary I find it difficult to separate the two roles. There are very few countryside matters that do not impinge on footpaths in some way or other... our 'walking environment' as Ramblers Central Office call it. I already combine the two posts in my quarterly reports to Area Council, so this year I am combining them in my Annual Report as well.

The **Ramblers** are statutory consultees under the *Highways Act 1980* for Path Orders made by a Highway Authority – ie. Legal Orders necessary to Divert or Extinguish a Public Right of Way (PROW). Fortunately we do not receive all that many Path Orders from the four Highway Authorities in Warwickshire Area – although we did this year receive a consultation into the proposed extinguishment of the only Public Footpath in the Green Belt wedge between Redditch and Studley, on the grounds that the path had not had a footbridge to cross the River Arrow for at least 60 years! The **Ramblers** could never accept Warwickshire County Council's assertion that the cost of replacing the bridge would be greater than the value of the footpath! How do you put a value on a footpath – even dead end paths can be of value to dog walkers – and, of course, it would cost the Council nothing at all to leave the path precisely as it is! So that is what we suggested they should do.

The bulk of our work though consists of consultations from the District and Borough Councils in our Area who, as planning authorities have powers under the *Town & Countryside Planning Act 1990* to make Orders diverting or extinguishing PROWs affected by developments. We very much value the fact that these Councils regard us as non-statutory consultees on planning applications which affect PROWs as, by being consulted at an early stage of the planning process, we can often ensure a better deal for PROWs before they are caught up in a development.

Despite its many attractions, there is very little public access to the banks of the River Avon between Stratford and Warwick. Last year the District Councils of Stratford and Warwick, together with the Avon Navigation Trust commissioned consultants to examine the environmental impact and potential effects on the local economy of opening up this stretch of the River Avon to navigation. The consultant's report, presented to both Councils in February 2019, indicated that the economic case of an extension to navigation in terms of tourism, capital and environmental costs, was not a viable option for investment. But, while deciding not to support the initiative further, both Councils said that "*However, the report to open up a footpath between Stratford and Warwick is another matter, and this will be sent to Warwickshire County Council for consideration as the authority responsible for footpaths.*" Consequently, in March this year, the Area Chairman wrote to the Leader of Warwickshire County Council expressing hope that the County Council would consider the report favourably – but unfortunately the reply received from the County Council, instead of offering the Riverside Path we wish for, could offer no more than piecemeal improvements as and if the opportunity arose.

This year (2019) saw the 70th birthday of the *1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act*. As there are no National Parks in Warwickshire, you might wonder what this has to do with Warwickshire Area, but the 1949 Act was also responsible for designating *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (AONB), and we do have a small corner of the Cotswold AONB (5%) in the south of Warwickshire. In September the *Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs* was published by DEFRA and appears to recommend that the Cotswold AONB be up-rated to a National Park. Whether this would include the 5% in Warwickshire, we don't know; but the Government would have to find the funds from somewhere, and they have not been over-generous in their funding of National Parks in the past. The *Glover Review* also gave credence to a suggestion from a Birmingham City University

academic proposing that the Meriden Gap be designated as some form of National Park! True, the Meriden Gap Green Belt certainly needs protecting – and Warwickshire Area have been doing our very best to do so for years – but to put the Meriden Gap in the same category as the Country's premier landscape designation would be, frankly, an insult to the 70 year heritage of our wonderful National Parks.

The proposals for a South West Relief Road across the Avon Valley below Stratford upon Avon continue to cause the Area deep concern because of the damage it would inflict on both the environment and the footpath network. This road was introduced (without adequate public consultation) into the Stratford on Avon Local Plan in 2016 as an adjunct to the Plan's allocation of Long Marston airfield as a site for 3,500 new houses – and the housing developer waiting in the wings to cash in on this bonanza (CALA Homes) was, unbelievably, made the deliverer of this road scheme as well! In the event CALA made such an pigs ear of their planning application to Stratford on Avon District Council for the relief road that virtually all the Council's consultants (both statutory and non-statutory – including Warwickshire Area) felt it necessary either to object outright, or at least to put in holding objections to the application! In April this year, in an attempt at damage limitation, the District Council wrote to CALA outlining the many deficiencies in their application and insisting that they liaise with the Councils consultants (including Warwickshire Area on PROWS!) to discuss these shortcomings. It will come as no surprise to our members though, to hear that footpaths are so low on CALA's list of priorities that six months later on we have still to hear as much as a squeak out of them!

Last, and by no means least, I would like once again to thank all our Group Footpath Secretaries and Volunteer Group Footpath Working Parties, who continue to act as our eyes, ears and hands on the ground, and who contribute such sterling value to Warwickshire Area.

**Michael Bird - Area Countryside Secretary**

## **Area Membership Report – October 2018**

As at 14<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Area Membership stood at 3016 which compares with October 2018 when the membership figures stood at 3013. So, for once I am pleased not to have to report a drop!

Interestingly I was in conversation with Michael Bird about the formation of Warwickshire Area in 1987. In 2010 Michael produced a booklet titled "The Midland Area of The Ramblers' Association 1930-1987"; this was published in celebration of the Ramblers 75th Birthday in 2010. In this booklet Michael reports that at the time of the inauguration of the Area, membership stood at 2,700.

Things have moved on, in that on the I.T. front, I have access to a lot more statistical information and I can give you some snippets about Warwickshire Area as follows.

Gender wise ladies are in the majority at 52% of our membership.

With respect to age, more than half our members are over the age of 60, with some 30% of our members being older than the age of 70.

Interestingly Warwickshire Area mirrors the national picture. So is the key to growing the organisation, targeting the younger generation?

**Nick Hillier Area Membership Secretary**

# Trustee's Report

A very united General Council was held in Manchester in April this year. The programmes were forward looking with a thought provoking panel discussion, chaired by our President, Stuart Maconie. Two new trustees were elected. The 2020 General Council will be held in Bristol 4-5<sup>th</sup> April. We are keen to encourage one experienced and one new representative from each area.

I was elected as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees for a second and final year, and have given a regular Trustees Report at the Area Council. The main issues during the last year include:-

1. Two new programmes established by the Board of Trustees:-

a) Exploration of our Values, Culture and Inclusion led by Ronnie Forbes (trustee) and Rachael Bayley (director of volunteering and operations).

b) Devolution, Organisational Design and Location led by Kate Ashbrook (chair) and Van Griffiths (CEO). I am 1 of 2 trustees involved in this initiative; there are also a number of volunteers from different parts of the country. The discussions are at a final stage and proposals will soon be out for consultation.

2. This was the second year of the Best Walking Neighbourhood Award. There were 83 nominations this year, compared with 30 last year. The Award was won by Falkirk and the presentation made in the House of Commons, with MPs and Ramblers supporters present.

3. Our 'Friendship Walks' is a joint initiative with CRUSE, funded by the Big Lottery Fund is intended to encourage bereaved people to walk, encouraging them to take their first steps towards rebuilding their physical and mental wellbeing; The pilot project will be run in four cities, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and London.

5. Trustees are encouraged to attend different Area AGMs each year. I have attended 10 AGMs over 2 years. I am attending 5 this year at Gwent, Grampian, Essex, Somerset and Cheshire.

6. There is an ongoing programme of training roadshows. St John's Ambulance has been commissioned to run the First Aid training across the country.

**Dr Peter Rookes, Trustee**

## Reports from Group Chairpersons

### Castle Bromwich

Our Group membership has stayed quite constant at around the 80 mark over the year. Whilst losing some members, 20% of our current membership have joined in the past year, a fair number of whom have become regular walkers. Over half of our members joined walks during the year, whilst about a third is either very, or fairly, regular walkers.

We held a mixture of walks over the year, aiming to cater for members' different requirements and preferences. These included 44 Sunday walks, varying in length from 6 to 9 miles, 11 Summer Evening Walks, generally of 4 miles. During those months when there are no evening walks we held monthly

Community Walks on Tuesday mornings, often followed by a pub/café meal. These were slightly longer and located in a wider area than in previous years. We only cancel walks in fairly extreme circumstances. Perhaps as a sign of the climatic times we live in, this year we cancelled 6 walks, probably a quarter of the total cancelled in our 28 year history.

We have been fortunate to have a large number of walk leaders – 26, nearly a third of our total membership.

Unusually we held 3 walking holidays this year. In April we went back to Malta again and in May to Scarborough where we enjoyed beautiful coastal walks during the day and lively entertainment in the evenings, September saw us on the Welsh coast, staying in Barmouth and enjoying a variety of walks, meeting yarn bombs and stranded jellyfish.

We continue to publicise our activities through our website, display posters, leaflets and local press articles, as well as providing members with a quarterly newsletter.

I have set up a WhatsApp group to notify members of urgent information, e.g. walk cancellations.

There is a very healthy social side to the Group. We held the following social events during the year- a Beer & Skittles evening in October, an annual Christmas Meal held at the Windmill Hotel on the edge of Coventry, a New Year meal at Lowsonford Fleur-de-Lys following a short walk and a midsummer cruise on the Canal from Gas Street Basin.

The Group continues to thrive, and although there are signs that more members are willing to make active contributions to its activities, we need to avoid too much work falling on too few shoulders particularly on the administrative side

## **David Threlkeld - Chair**

### **City of Birmingham**

2019 (October 2018 to September 2019) has been my last year as chairman of C.O.B.R.A. and has been quite an uneventful year compared to the previous years.

Despite falling attendance, we have managed to keep the walks and Sunday coaches running. We have had 7 Ridges & Top walks to the higher peaks and the usual **12** shorter monthly walks for the public. We have also organised **22** Wednesday and **134** Sunday walks usually 3 different walks each week, (due to lack of a leader at the last moment one week had only 2 walks) by coach. Three weekends away providing another **18** making a total of **193** different walks enabling people of all abilities to enjoy the great British countryside for another year. This year we visited then Lake District in October, Exmoor in the spring and Pickering in the autumn. Sadly we only had leaders for 2 walks each day on the away breaks.

193 walks lead by 50 leaders who plan, recce and lead the walks and do not receive any expenses and for this we must give them our grateful thanks.

A special thanks those leaders who took over a walk at the last moment due to the named leader being unable to lead for some reason.

Our social committee has been working hard to organise other social events which have been our usual annual dinner at the Eaton Hotel. The annual day out to Laycock Abbey & Bath, which sadly we had to cancel due at the last moment due to a shortfall in bookings.

The group's task force has again been very active during the year clearing paths and installing gates when and where requested to do so by Warwickshire Council.

Publicity is being maintained in all the usual areas (meet up, face book and the walks finder) to encourage new walkers to join us.

As I step down from this post, I would like to thank all of the committee for all of their support and assistance during my tenure. At this juncture in the proceedings I would like to make a plea for more people to take up committee posts to help keep the group vibrant.

**Sandra Sutton – Chair**

## **Coventry**

Despite having no Chair or Secretary the Coventry group has continued to provide a full programme of walks this year with two walks on Sundays, monthly car share and public transport Saturday walks, monthly Tuesday walks and Thursday evening summer walks. Our committee meetings have been chaired by a rota of committee members, which has worked well. Janet and John P have taken it in turns to attend most Area meetings.

This year our Treasurer, Footpath Secretary for North Warwickshire, Social Secretary and Thursday Evening Walks Organiser are stepping down at our AGM, but we hope to replace some of them and to fill other roles. We thank Mary, Peter, John C and Andy for all the work they have done on our behalf.

Once again our membership numbers are down, this year from 277 to 273 members. This is a 1% drop, compared to about 6% last year. Roughly a third of our members come on our walks.

The Tuesday morning walks followed by a pub lunch have been the most popular, but attendances on Sunday walks (both long and medium) have remained fairly high. Attendance on the summer Thursday evening walks was mainly very low this year, and we are unlikely to offer them next year. Our Saturday Public Transport walks also had slightly lower attendances than last year. We are always in need of more walk leaders – it has been difficult to fill some of our programmes this year.

Our two Footpath Secretaries have continued to monitor issues in their areas, particularly regarding the potential loss of paths due to new developments. Work on the Definitive Map for Coventry has continued.

The countryside access working party has continued to work with the team from South Warwickshire.

Our Christmas lunch at Stoneleigh Golf club, preceded by a choice of walks, was popular. This year we will be going to Maxstoke golf club. Some of our long walkers enjoyed a week's holiday on the Llyn peninsula in May, with amazing weather and some good coastal walking.

We had a coach trip to Chester in June and one to Oswestry in September, with a choice of walks on both. The first was well supported but the latter had a disappointing turnout, so we may organise only one coach trip next year.

## **Janet Lockett – Membership Secretary**

### **Mid Warwickshire**

It has been another busy year for the Mid-Warwickshire Ramblers. In February the group was honoured with hosting the Area AGM. We were pleased with the attendance of ninety, which was probably helped with it being a bright crisp February day. The topics covered by the trustee speaker Ronnie Forbes were membership levels, walking for health, path network and maintenance and the new walking systems and maps, reflecting the topics of importance to us as a local group. The day was rounded off with choice of a town history walk (with help from the Leamington History Group) or a riverside walk led by Peter Rolfe. Both proved to be very popular. I give thanks to the marvellous team work of all those who volunteered which ensured that the proceedings ran smoothly.

As with the past few years, my concern is the stagnating membership. As always on the walks programme we strive to strike the right balance of long and short walks to appeal to existing members and to attracting new members to the group. As well as getting a variety places and other points of interest. However this is not always easy, and is dependent on the kind support of walks leaders. Our series of short walks led by Angela Heaton will continue next summer and we are looking into trying the Meetup to read out to wider audience. This platform should complement the use of the group website and Ramblers Walks finder tools, which still remain the main gateways to for new walkers to access our walks listings. Alison Tyler who we welcomed onto the committee in 2019 will assist with the social programme in the future. As always volunteers for organisation of events are always gratefully received.

In terms of footpaths, we must continue to report problems when we see them as this may not help us on the walk immediately but should be addressed to help other walkers after us. A number of group members volunteer on local footpath maintenance alongside members of Stratford group. In addition, Bill Burton continues to be involved in the walking for health initiative in Kenilworth, leading very short walks.

A few of our walks leaders have attended navigation training to improve their skills or to act as a refresher, which was funded by the group, and this option is still available to other members. New walks leaders may particularly find this of interest. We are also looking at other ways in which group funding could be used to benefit group leaders and members.

Thanks to all in the committee for their continued support and we look forward to the annual Christmas visit and lunch and walking in the year ahead.

### **Alice Sin - Chair**

### **Rugby**

As in the past we have had a mixed walk programme which has included 12 Saturday walks, every Sunday, 36 mid-week walks, 12 evening walks, 2 coach trips the first to Laurie Lee Country and the second to The Yorkshire Sculpture Park, both of which were very well attended and enjoyable. We also had 2 weekends away, this time to Abingworth and Scarborough both of which were very successful. I would like to thank all those members who have helped organise these events and also the walk

leaders for doing such a great job too.

Our membership continues to remain stable and we are active in finding ways to encourage more people to join us. Merel, our new Publicity Secretary has been distributing flyers to Doctors Surgeries and pharmacies in a hope that this might help.

Our Footpath Working Group continue to do an excellent job installing gates, bridges and trying to keep up with the growing vegetation which this year seems to have gone mad.

Alain Foote took over the Footpath Secretaries job last year and is doing a good job encouraging members to report any footpaths that they feel need work doing to them.

Lynn Gordon, our Secretary and Membership Secretary is stepping down at our next AGM. All those on the committee and our members would like to thank her for the work she has done. As yet no one has come forward for this position but we are hopeful that someone will step forward at our next AGM.

## **Kay Pinks - Chair**

## **Solihull**

This is my first annual report as Chair of Solihull Ramblers and I would like to thank my predecessor, Les Harrison, for the major contribution he has made to the group during his period as Chair.

It has been a busy year. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our Walks Programme Secretary, Malcolm Leonard, and the work of our volunteer walk leaders, we have led approximately 180 walks with a wide range of short, medium and long walks and a programme of evening walks during the summer co-ordinated by Chris Mallet. This year one of walks was a treasure hunt which was a very enjoyable innovation. The total number of walkers on all our walks this year has remained relatively constant at about 3300. We have had two very successful holidays this year, one in Windermere and one in Halkidiki, Greece, organised by Nick Hillier and Margaret Leighton. Following the success of the Windermere weekend, a small group of us returned to the Lake District to climb Helvellyn, in one case for the first time.

This extensive programme of walks can only be sustained if we have sufficient walk leaders prepared to give their time to recce and lead walks. To encourage more members to lead walks, we have planned a half-day session on 'Leading a Walk' for early 2020.

Our path maintenance team, ably lead by Adam Pearce, Les Harrison and Mike Fisher, continues to do much needed work, including path clearance and maintenance and replacement of bridges, gates, fences and stiles. This is vital work to keep paths open and accessible for us and the general public.

Our annual dinner this year included musical entertainment from a local ukulele band which continued well into the evening. The evening was a great success and raised a substantial sum for a local charity.

A significant development this year has been the upgrading of our website using Ramblers Webs. This has given the site much greater flexibility and responsiveness which has been much appreciated by our members. We are grateful for the assistance from the national volunteer specialists, particularly Chris Vaughan from Derbyshire, together with our local team of Colin Rock (web manager), Viv Dobson (web content editor) and our Vice-Chair, Mike Jay in making a success of this changeover.

Finally, I would like to thank Les for the personal support he has given me during my first year as Chair, all the members of the committee for their invaluable contributions and support, and all those members who have contributed in other ways, most importantly in leading walks. All of these have contributed to making the group the success it continues to be.

## Brian Furniss - Chair

### Southam



Don Bates walk leader, photographer Eric Forgan, Southam Group. The picture was taken beside the Trig Point on Beacon Hill, Shuckburgh.

We have had a very successful year with increased numbers on our Wednesday walks in spite of our overall membership being down. Normally our walks are no more than 5 miles and relatively close to Southam but, once again, we had two longer walks. One to Leamington with, after a pub lunch, bus passes being used to return to Southam. The second was our Cotswold walk which was an 8½ mile circular walk from Stanton with a break for lunch at Snowhill. This year's annual joint walk with the Southam History Collection was from St Peter's Church, Radway, around the lower slopes of Edge Hill where we were able to see where the first major action of the Civil War took place in 1642. The church itself has an excellent exhibition about the Battle of Edge Hill which is open daily.

Only one of our Summer Strollers was rained off this year and we again attracted a good number of local residents to join us. In fact, 70% of the people walking were non-members. One purpose of these walks is to ensure that all the footpaths radiating from the town are walked. We were pleased to notice an improvement in waymarking and the installation of some new stiles. This work has been done by a

group set up by Southam Town Council, led by Cllr Michael Ray with whom we have met this year and who told us more of his work and plans at our AGM.

We continue to make good use of the Ramblers website, listing details of all our walks on the Southam pages. Since 2017 links to GPX maps of all our walks have been posted on the site. There are now over 75 and we hope that other groups may find them useful.

I was pleased that a very good number of Southam Ramblers, past and present, attended the funeral of John Whittaker. John had been a loyal member of our group for many years until his health prevented him joining us on rambles.

Finally, I would like to thank the many members of the group who work together to lead walks and administer the Southam group. I am pleased that all those who serve on the committee or undertake other roles have agreed to continue for another year.

## **William Pease – Chair**

### **South Birmingham**

As usual I can report that South Birmingham Ramblers have had a very good year!

As usual our committee has organised walks and events that have made this possible. They **do** work hard – this is evident in our continued expansion.

Our summer programme shows that we had 45 walks and 46 different walk leaders. Many of our walk leaders have taken navigation courses, and spend plenty of their time receiving walks to ensure that walks can be as good as possible. New walk leaders are given lots of support.

Our weekly walks' programme has three walks a week, a five mile walk, a Wednesday walk of about 8 miles and then longer walks on Sunday. In the spring and summer months our weekly walks are extended by weekend short walks, Wednesday Workouts, Saturday Challenge Walks and also short pub walks. Our two mile mini-walks continue once a fortnight, too. So you can see how hard our three walks' secretaries work!

We have monthly social events that have included coach trips to Oxford and the Hampton Court flower show. We've had weekends away by the sea, at Weymouth and Eastbourne this year.....we're usually lucky with the weather when we walk by the sea.

Our membership is now 355 so it's still going up slowly. Our membership secretary ensures that new members receive a welcoming letter, and our members always tell new walkers what a wonderful group we are. Changes to data protection guidance from The Ramblers has meant that our secretary and membership secretary have had a great deal less work to do organising our emails that describe walks and give directions to the start.

South Birmingham Ramblers has always had a policy of car sharing to the start of walks. We meet up in a car park in Kings Norton. Climate change advice shows that this is an excellent policy. At the beginning of the year we investigated alternative arrangements, but car sharing is still continuing.

Several of our members have taken part in workshops at the Ramblers' Roadshow in Birmingham this year. The Ramblers has organised first aid courses with St John Ambulance, and nine of our members have taken part in these excellent courses and we're hoping The Ramblers will organise more.

Our footpaths' secretary has been in discussion with The Ramblers over their digital programme. He has continued to develop links with Worcestershire County Council. The South Birmingham Footpath Repair group has worked enthusiastically over the year and they've received favourable reports in the county's Volunteer News Letter for undertaking such activities as kissing gate replacements, installation of footpath signs and vegetation clearance.

We are developing links with CRUSE, the bereavement care charity. We will be leading short walks in the Kings Norton area. We all know how healing walking can be.

As a group we came together when we celebrated the life of Larry, one of our enthusiastic members. Discussing his exploits on walks made us smile and laugh. Our fun and enjoyment on walks makes us a very happy group. This is one of the reasons for our success.

## **Liz Walkling – Chair**

### **Stratford upon Avon**

At the end of my first year as chair, I feel that, with lots of help from members and the committee, we have had a good year. Offering a variety of walks, three days a week, of variable distance and pace. We are very aware that keeping membership levels is the life blood of the Group and Ramblers, so we try to be as inclusive as possible. We have had extra walks in the evening through the summer, including a bluebell walk and the highlight this year, permission to walk through Charlecote Park on what was a beautiful night.

Our Summer Coach Walks have continued with success and we are already in full planning for next year, with no lack of ideas and leaders. We shall continue to offer two levels of walking as this seems the way to optimise the trip and where possible provide a day out for non-walkers. The Train Rambles will take place in 2020 and we are hoping for steam.

We launched our new Stratford Ramblers website this year which is proving popular and we can load up photos of the Group Activities.

The Stratford Walks Book is still selling and we have plans in place now to revise and reprint the book during the next year.

Footpath maintenance has taken place regularly all year and some sterling work has been undertaken to keep footpaths open and clear.

Our main concern has been and still is the state of the Shakespeare's Avon Way, in particular Hatton Rock and Weir Brake. The response by Richard Barnard and team has been very unsatisfactory. This is being pursued through The Ramblers and the good offices of Michael Bird and the Area Chair.

We have also been working on the Lost Paths, identifying several anomalies, which have mainly been resolved with the help of Michael Bird.

Several events have proved popular again, with our Annual Lunch, Skittles at a new venue and our lovely Garden Party, where the weather was kind.

We organised two Group Holidays, one to Tavira on the Algarve and the other to Selworthy on Ex-moor, using Ramblers and HF Holidays, both well attended.

This year we welcomed new members into the club, some of whom have now become confident and comfortable enough with us to volunteer and lead walks in our very friendly club. We now have 305 members, so a successful year!

**Diane Smith - Chair**

## **Sutton Coldfield**

When I took on the role of Chair at Sutton Coldfield Ramblers, it was to be a three year project. Those three years have flown by. They've been busy. There's been a lot to learn but with an active Committee we've got by! There have been good times, and things to look back on with pride and there have been very sad times too.

In January we lost Terry Williams. Terry jauntily joined our first Coach Walk of 2019 to Ogston, in Derbyshire, but suffered a cardiac arrest on the walk. Ramblers and passers-by assisted to administer CPR and Terry was taken to Chesterfield Hospital where his sons were able to join him at his bedside. Sadly Terry suffered a further cardiac arrest in hospital and passed away a few days later. We miss him, his stories, his jokes and the joy of life he shared his with fellows.

Subsequently our Walk Leaders Social in February majored on working practically at First Aid, especially CPR. It was an evening that also included a look at Ramblers Values, at the ethos of Ramblers and what it means to join the Ramblers.

Anita and Pat have put together a varied social programme at the Royal Sutton Coldfield Club, There was an evening packed with songs and stories from Chris Greve, a singer songwriter from Oswestry and his pal, Fran O'Boyle, a story teller with engaging tall tales to tell. We've enjoyed informative talks about Annapurna and the Great Sutton Coldfield Train Crash and The Life of a Thames Pilot. And we've shared a knees-up on a Buddy Holly Evening compered by our own John Twort.

We've kept up our Walks Programme through the year with a couple of walks on offer nearly every Sunday and midweek walks and activities too. These activities have included a monthly Working Party with John Harden, our Footpaths Officer, liaising with Staffordshire County Council and their rangers to arrange clearing and stile building activities on our patch. Our walks have taken us across the Midlands from the Peak District to the Cotswolds and from the Shropshire Hills to the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Once a month there's a Coach taking ramblers to their walk venue. John Brookes has coordinated our coach bookings and keeping abreast of those on the coach. It's been a challenge this year keeping the finances on an even keel as the numbers of passengers has varied greatly. For Club Walks we meet in Sutton, sort out car sharing and then head to our chosen destination, be that a B walk of 8 – 10

miles, or a C walk of about 7 miles or a shorter D walk of 4 miles or so. We aim to cater for the needs of all our walkers with these options available. We advise prospective ramblers to talk to our walk leaders who have reced their walks and are in a position to advise on whether the route is suitable for their needs be they wheelchair users or if they have a pushchair and whether dogs can be brought along.

On a wider front there have been four holidays offered to Ramblers. Pat organised a Coach holiday with Grayshells, whose coaches we use for our Coach walks. This took us to Weston-super-Mare with a coastal walk, a skyline walk round Bath and a country ramble from Wells. The Camini Brigante took Sutton Coldfield Ramblers to Lazio in Italy with Caterina Cattel and a trek through the hills on paths used by local brigands, the Robin Hoods of Lazio. John Twort led our rambleros on the Camino Ingles to Santiago de Compostella, with a gentle stroll along the coast of Galicia before a couple of long and serious days climbing to Santiago. And then there was Guernsey and coastal walking there with Tony LeFeuvre.

As I step down from the Chair I do so with thanks to all those who've supported the changes and ongoing development of Sutton Coldfield Ramblers. In particular my thanks to our Committee for their continued and ongoing hard work for the club and their patience in working alongside me.

## **Colin Lowrey – Chair**

### **The Bear**

Thank you to all our committee members, walk leaders and social organisers for keeping the club running for another year.

This year we have continued to have joint walks with the Leicestershire and Oxon walking groups. The joint walks with the Oxon group took us on the Seven Shires way. The route criss-crosses the Oxfordshire county boundary such as at the slope of Edge hill. The route is divided into 21 day walk sections and our group lead the Northamptonshire to Oxford leg in June.

It was a grand day out to the Malvern's in March starting with a guided tour of the Morgan Motor car factory then a walk into the hills for a lunchtime view. A bit more walking to St Anne's for tea and cake and as we were still a bit thirsty we then headed to the pub for a quick drink. This gave time for some other group members to join us and we headed off to a local restaurant before going to the theatre for the Banff mountain film festival.

Where is the Quantocks? Yes I had to look it up. It's the AONB that you probably missed on the way to Exmoor or Dartmoor. It's well worth a visit and this year the members who made it onto the weekend away got to enjoy a mixture of hills, coast, woodland, churches, pubs, cake. Oh and a view of Hinckley point.

The Ramblers Roadshow was in Birmingham this year and one of our group members made it to the event. It was an enjoyable day out with lots of workshops taking place such as Navigation, Rights of way and First aid.

Adding events into or at the end of walks has been very popular. This is mainly the classic pub lunch or an ice cream but we have also had a Skittles match and a visit to Warwick University to look at the follow the Hare art exhibition.

**David Hamilton – Chair**

## **West Midlands Walking**

The group has had another good year, with a great variety of enjoyable walks and social events, together with weekends away in Bath, Salisbury, the North York Moors, Isle of Arran, Hadrian's Wall and the Dorset coast.

We have continued to see an encouraging willingness amongst members (including a number of new ones) to get involved with leading walks, putting on events and even taking committee roles, which undoubtedly helps to keep the programme fresh.

Membership has been fairly steady, but there is clearly a challenge to convert the significant numbers of casual walkers who attend through Meet-Up into paid-up members of the group and address what are perhaps different demands and needs of millennials, especially as the group demographic naturally ages. It is hoped that with support from head office it may be possible in due course to set-up a 'next generation' group to attract and retain younger walkers. In the meantime, we are focussing on effective use of social media, facilitating walks for members without their own transport and means of differentiating what Ramblers can offer from the plethora of other groups which are occupying a similar space in the walking and outdoor 'market'.

Next year will be WMWG's 20th anniversary and a celebratory event is planned. In the meantime, a big thank you to everyone who has contributed over the last 12 months.

### **WM40+ Report**

The West midlands 40+ Ramblers group has had a busy year with walks on most weekends. Our walks are all based in the West Mids. region usually between Cannock in the north and Warwick in the south. There have been 45 walks to date since last January covering 392.1 miles giving an average of 8.71 miles. There has also been 5 weekends away/holidays which have been organised by the members themselves, these events reach further afield. We have a regular pub night once a month in Birmingham.

Membership is currently running at 106 but lack of historical data means any increase or decrease over the year cannot be reported. On the group's Meetup site the membership is 981 of which the Meetup statistics say 200 are active.

**Chris Thomas - Chair**