



www.warwickshireramblers.org.uk

The Ramblers' Association Warwickshire Area

The Charity Working for Walkers

**Annual Report and Accounts
For the year**

2016/2017

The Ramblers' Association 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 2016/2017

Chairman and Membership Secretary

Nick Hillier 07736 794 763

23 Baywell Close, Shirley, B90 4UR

Secretary and Group Liaison Officer

Bill Burton 07917517310

30 Woodcote Avenue, Kenilworth, CV8 1BH

Treasurer

Les Harrison 07757 339753

17 Clinton Grove, Shirley, Solihull, B90 4RS

Footpath Secretary, Countryside Secretary & Access Officer

Michael Bird 0121 705 1118

16 Melford Hall Road, Solihull, B91 2ES

Publicity and IT Secretary

Andy Page 02476 304825

28 Seymour Close, Coventry CV3 4ER

Area email address—warwickramblers@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

www.birminghamramblers.org.uk

www.coventryramblers.org.uk

www.midwarksramblers.org.uk

www.rugbyramblers.org.uk

www.solihullramblers.org.uk

www.sbramblers.co.uk

www.ramblers.org.uk/southam

www.stratfordramblers.com

www.suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk

www.bearwalkinggroup.co.uk

www.wmwg.org.uk

www.wm40plus.org.uk

Notice

**AGM Saturday 27th January 2018 is to be held at
United Reformed Church, 1 Brassington Avenue, Sutton Coldfield
B73 6AA**

Refreshments and lunch:-

Tea & coffee is being served between 09.45 and 10.15. The meeting starts at 10:15.
Lunch will be provided immediately after the meeting. There will be a choice between hot main courses, including vegetarian, followed by a choice of desserts.

Afternoon Walks: After lunch members of West Midlands Walking Group (WMWG) will lead two walks of 2-3 miles around New Hall and a 4-5 mile walk around Sutton Park.

Travelling to the venue:-

By train: Members of the WMWG will “meet and greet” at Sutton Coldfield station. The walk to the venue only takes a couple of minutes

By car: The church is on Brassington Avenue the A5127 road. Car parking is limited, please consider using the train. The Gracechurch Centre car park, postcode B73 6AA is a better option and is located very close to the venue (£2 for 3 hours)

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 RA 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 2016/2017

Nominations, signed by the proposer and seconder, must be received by the Area Secretary not later than six weeks before the AGM motions.

Any motions for the Annual General Meeting should be submitted, in writing, and must be received by the Area Secretary not later than six weeks before the AGM. Please email motions to Warwickramblers@gmail.com

Warwickshire Area AGM, Sat 27th, Jan 2018 is to be held at United Reformed Church, 1 Brassington Avenue, Sutton Coldfield B73 6AA

Agenda

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 2018 General Council, Bangor, North Wales 7th and 8th April.

Guest Speaker: Dr Peter Rookes - Ramblers Trustee



I have been an enthusiastic Rambler, all of my life, including Scout hikes and rural health patrols during my eight years working in Papua New Guinea. I have been a member of my local Ramblers' group since Sept 1995, regularly leading rambles, participating in rambling weekends away, overseas rambling weeks and social events. I was elected as an independent member of the Area Council at the last AGM,

My whole life has been devoted to improving healthcare, particularly for the most vulnerable people, in the UK and overseas. I was for ten years Chief Nursing Officer for Central Birmingham and

Director of Nursing at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Later I carried out health related research in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Since my election to the Board of Trustees, I was appointed to the Mission Sub-Committee, and have been working with Simon Barnett and the Senior Management Team on developing proposals for the future of the Walking for Health programme when the current contract with Macmillan comes to an end.

Outside of the Ramblers, I have served for nine years as a trustee and non-executive director of Birmingham Voluntary Services Council, three years as a member of the Birmingham CrossCity Clinical Commissioning Group Governing Body, during which I was Chair of the Public Involvement Committee and Vice Chair of the Quality Committee. When my term of office came to an end, I was appointed as non-executive director for Healthwatch Birmingham. My role as Secretary of Birmingham Council of Faiths enables me to engage with people of diverse social, faith and ethnic backgrounds. I am also part of the Faith Advisors Group at West Midlands Police and Faith and International Advisor to Birmingham Scouts.

Area Chairman's Report

Elsewhere in the Area Report 2017 it is noted that whilst Warwickshire Area is the 7th biggest in the country that in common with the situation nationally, it's total membership fell by 1.4% to 3125. Whilst the loss of members is unfortunate, in that it also represents a drop in income from membership fees, when it comes to look at the health of the organisation the total membership numbers are only part of the picture. In each group, there are a hard core of members that we see regularly because they join walks or help as volunteers. So, if you could divide our membership into "activists" and members then I think that we would conclude that as an organisation we are doing well. My arguments for saying this are to be found in the reports prepared by group chairs that you can read in this report.

All the groups work hard to produce a programme of walks to fit their local circumstances. This isn't just about offering a range of different lengths of walk, but aiming to visit different parts of the UK, either chartering a coach as do the City of Birmingham or booking accommodation for weekends away as do a number of groups. At least one group is planning a trip walking in Europe. Most of the groups put their walks on the Central Office Find a Walk Web Page which has made a much wider range of walks available to members.

Two groups are trying hard to support the Walking for Health Scheme by having links to their websites on the Solihull Active Website (managed by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council) as well as their short walks programme being promoted by Solihull Active.

For a number of years now we have had volunteer groups working with local authorities on foot path maintenance and this continues to be the case. There is no doubt that with the budget cut backs some years ago, initiated by Warwickshire County Council, that directly impinged on footpath maintenance, that without these seven volunteer groups our foot path network would not be in as good a state as it currently is.

If our core activity is the footpaths and the walking environment, then the thing that underpins our walk programme and having paths to both maintain and walk on, is the work carried out by the Area Footpath and Countryside Secretary and his team of ten local group footpath secretaries.

So to conclude where I started. I feel that the evidence provided in the reports in this document, points to us having a very strong organisation that is not always recognised in our membership numbers. Our efforts start with ensuring that there is a paths network with paths properly recorded and kept open as developments like HS2 and its spin offs or other building developments affect the network. We have teams that physically work on the maintenance of the footpath network and finally we have programmes of walks to enable our members to enjoy our countryside.

Nick Hillier - Warwickshire Area Chairman

Area Secretary's Report

What an eventful year it has been for the Area. All groups are still very strong with many varied walks and social events being held. Several groups have holidays abroad and all have weekends away. Social events include skittles, dinner to visits to the theatre. Our area membership has stabilized at roughly 3100 which is good news but we all need to be recruiters' for the Ramblers as we lose approximately 10% of members each year.

I am now a member of Stratford footpath maintenance team. My home group Mid-Warwickshire could not raise a team large enough to work on or own so five of us have joined forces with Stratford. 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.

I have recently joined my Walking for Health team at my local surgery. They are very keen to have new leaders as the numbers walking regularly has increased 3 fold over the last 12 months. Five years ago I approached my surgery to volunteer to lead walks and they weren't interested. Now the situation has changed and I see potential for recruiting new members as the walkers become fitter. I have only been on one walk but already people have asked me if we could do longer walks.

Andy Page our IT and PR committee member has advised me that we have 367 tweet followers, as well as 93 Facebook likes.

It is with deep regret that I report the death of Denis Keyte who died on Sunday 28th May 2017. Denis lived in Wootton Wawen all his life and was the heart and soul of the village. He was educated in the village school and later attended King Edward School in Stratford and spent most of his life working life at Fort Dunlop where managed the Electron Microscope. Denis was involved with the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Stratford Beekeepers and the Wootton Wawen athletic and cricket clubs arranging fixtures and even providing teas. In 1970s he established the Footpaths Group and published many booklets on local paths. Until five years ago, Denis Keyte was the long serving, and very knowledgeable, footpath secretary of Stratford upon Avon Group. For over 25 years every Wednesday he walked the public footpaths of Warwickshire and Worcestershire and will be missed by family and friends.

It is sad to report that Terry Neville passed away in Castle Brook Care Home, Kenilworth on Tuesday 7th November. Terry had been suffering from Alzheimer's for several years, but his condition deteriorated markedly in recent months. He had walked for Mid Warwickshire Sunday group for many years before joining Stratford group. He walked with Stratford Wednesday walkers for at least 8 years until about 2014. Terry's was by then becoming more withdrawn. The funeral was on Wednesday 22nd November in Kenilworth, at St Nicholas Church in Abbey fields, at 1.15pm.

Bill Burton - Area Secretary

Area Treasurer's Report

THE RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION - WARWICKSHIRE AREA
REGISTERED CHARITY 1093577, COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE 4458492

| CURRENT ASSETS | 2017 | 2016 |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Debtors | 0 | 0 |
| Investments | 0 | 0 |
| Cash at Bank | 12,588 | 11,273 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 12,588 | 11,273 |

REPRESENTED BY

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Opening Balance | 11,273 | 10,548 |
| Surplus/deficit for the year | 1,310 | 698 |
| Unpresented cheque | 5 | 27 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 12,588 | 11,273 |

Income & expenditure account for year ended 30th September 2017

| INCOME | 2017 | 2016 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Area entitlement from national funds | 12,000 | 12,000 |
| Bank interest | 0 | 9 |
| Donation | 25 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 12,025 | 12,009 |

Expenditure

| | | |
|--|--------|--------|
| Financing Groups | 8,521 | 8,992 |
| Newsletter + website | 85 | 0 |
| Annual Report | 440 | 484 |
| Room Hire | 138 | 108 |
| Subscriptions | 36 | 36 |
| Travel inc GC attendance | 228 | 261 |
| AGM Costs | 785 | 998 |
| Admin | 50 | |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| Accountancy fees | 432 | 432 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 10,715 | 11,311 |
| EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE | 1310 | 698 |

Les Harrison, Area Treasurer

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination guidelines, I consider the WK Area accounts to have been properly prepared and to give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year to 30 September 2017.

Independent Examiner: John Phillips

3rd Nov 2017

Les Harrison, Area Treasurer

Area Footpath Secretary's Report

Of the 75 cases I have recorded on the Area's Footpath and Planning Database during the past year, 16 have been Path Orders for the diversion of public rights of way (indeed, some are multiple orders affecting more than one footpath). So far this year only seven of these Orders have been Confirmed (a further 14 Confirmations being for Orders made in previous years). In most cases the Area has been consulted by the Local Authority as to the suitability of these various diversions before the Orders were made.

This year I am able for once to record a few notable successes! Five Orders have at last been made by Coventry City Council putting public rights of way claimed by the Area onto the Coventry Definitive Map. Also, two housing applications to which the Area objected (on disruption of public footpath grounds) in the villages of Little Kineton and Stretton on Foss, have both resulted in more acceptable alternative diversions being offered by the developers.

However, inevitably there has to be some loss, and I have to admit that this year we have unfortunately lost a footpath – and I do mean physically **lost** a footpath – washed away by the River Dene at Butlers Marston! You may think that this is now merely a case of following a fresh route along the new bank that the River has cut for itself, but unfortunately the law does not allow for this – the definitive line of the path has been washed away and, unless the landowner is willing to allow a diversion (and in this case it appears not), the path is lost! ^[1]

Yet again I am indebted to our ten Local Group Footpath Secretaries, without whose support and rapid response I would be unable to deal with the amount of footpath and planning work that comes into the Area each year. I must also express my appreciation for the help we receive from (most of) our nine local authorities, whose willingness to cooperate sometimes stretches beyond their statutory duties. They in their turn, I trust, appreciate the valuable help provided by our seven Local Group Footpath Working Parties, to whom we are all indebted for such sterling voluntary efforts to keep our footpaths open.

^[1] *Rowland v Environment Agency* (2002). In such circumstances, is a walker entitled to deviate to avoid the length of path that has gone? No right to deviate exists (*R v Oldreeve* (1868); *R (Gloucestershire CC) v Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Ramblers' Association* (2000). RAMBLERS BLUE BOOK.

Michael Bird - Area Footpath Secretary

Area Countryside Secretary's Report

During the past year the pressures on Warwickshire's countryside have continued unabated.

HS2 received Royal Assent this year and, while we are reasonably happy that provision has been made for the restitution of the 58 public rights of way to be severed by the line in our Area, we must now endure many years of temporary footpath diversions and horrendous disruption during the construction phase.

Solihull MBC have seized on the opportunity provided by the building of the HS2 Interchange Station near Elmdon Airport to promote the growth of a 'Garden City' in that area. We had hoped that the development could be confined to the area north of the A45 Coventry Road, and not permitted to intrude into what is left of the Green Belt between the A45 and Solihull Town Centre. However, this hope was shattered this year with the granting of planning permission for the construction of a huge

Logistics Centre for JLR which will effectively cut off Elmdon Park from the Green Belt beyond. Taken in conjunction with Highways England's plans for a relief road running through this section of the Green Belt (to connect a new junction on the M42 near Catherine De Barnes with the Clock Interchange on the A45, and cutting five public footpaths in the process), these two schemes will effectively ensure the ruination of any remaining Green Belt between Solihull Town and the proposed Garden City/HS2 developments north of the Coventry Road!

Another Relief Road (and one which will cause immense damage to the Avon Valley below Stratford) was sneaked into the Stratford DC Core Strategy, adopted last year. This will affect five public footpaths, including *Shakespeare's Way*, *Shakespeare's Avon Way* and the *Monarch's Way* (three very important regional footpaths!). It is to be hoped that opposition bodies will seek a judicial review of this scheme, as public consultation was virtually non-existent. This *Stratford South-Western Relief Road* is to be funded by the developers of a 3,500 housing scheme to be built on the former Long Marston Airfield three miles south of Stratford – and, to protect the Avon Valley from the inevitable growth of Stratford out towards this new town, the Area has proposed that the Stratford upon Avon Green Belt should be extended around the southern side of Stratford.

The Warwick Local Plan, which finally cleared the Planning Inspectorate last July, supported unprecedented levels of house building in the District, and will lead to thousands of houses being built on what is currently Green Belt land, particularly to the south of Coventry and east of Kenilworth. In a Press Release, '**A Charter for Environmental Vandalism in Warwickshire**', CPRE Warwickshire (to whom our Area is affiliated) said: "*The Inspector came to these issues with a pro-growth agenda and has followed it relentlessly through thick and thin. This hopelessly one-sided outcome is nothing short of a disaster for the area.*"

Also, in the Rugby Borough Local Plan Consultation, the Area objected (on footpath, countryside, recreation, and health grounds) to the inclusion of the SW Rugby Allocation for 5400 houses on a three square km green field site south of the Town. There are some 10km of Public Rights of Way in this area of small mixed farming, fields and spinneys, which we particularly wished to see protected – but our pleas were ignored and the Plan was approved by Rugby Borough Council in June.

Michael Bird - Area Countryside Secretary

Area Membership Report – September 2016

As at 1st October 2017 Area Membership stood at 3125 which is down a bit on 1st October 2016 when our membership stood at 3169. This is a drop of 1.4%.

Those who come to Area Council Meetings will have heard it reported that although it is proving difficult to even hold membership numbers that these aren't necessarily an indicator of the health of the organisation in that groups do report good attendance on walks and good support for social events. Interestingly, the national picture is very similar to our own in that nationally the drop on the year is also 1.4%.

Just in case anyone is interested, Warwickshire Area is the 7th biggest in the country, the only Areas that are bigger are Surrey, Essex, Inner London, Hampshire, Kent and Greater Manchester & High Peak. The largest group, Surrey has 6,683 members whilst the smallest which is Pembrokeshire has just 129 members.

Nick Hillier Area Membership Secretary

Trustee's Report

It was a great privilege to be elected to the Board of Trustees at the General Council this year. Since then I have attended three Board meetings, been appointed to the Mission Sub-Committee and worked with Simon Barnet and his team on future plans for the Walking for Health programme, the current contract of which concludes at the end of March 2018. A number of workshops have been held around the country, including one in Birmingham, to seek views on the current programme and what the future should look like.

Principal issues discussed by the Board include a working group formed to consider feedback from the 2017 General Council, results from the volunteer survey, and a decision not to proceed with a bid to host Eurando in 2021. Three senior appointments have been made with the major objectives of updating our governance, increasing our membership, improving our financial position and increasing our visibility.

I have been impressed by how well the new Board, with its diverse range of skills and experiences has worked together and in support of the Senior Management Team. We are particularly privileged to have the leadership of Vanessa Griffiths, our CEO.

This report is necessarily brief, but I will enlarge on these points and others, during my presentation at the Area AGM in January

(Dr) Peter Rookes, Trustee

Reports from Group Chairpersons

Castle Bromwich

Our Group membership has increased slightly during the year somewhat bucking the national and area trends of slightly falling numbers.

We held a mixture of walks over the year, aiming to cater for members' different requirements and preferences. These included weekly Sunday walks, varying in length from 6 to 8 ½ miles, with an average attendance of 13, 13 Summer Evening Walks, generally of 4 miles, also with an average attendance of 13, and monthly Community Walks of 2-3 miles attended by between 4 and 13 walkers, with an average of 8. These are held in partnership with Solihull Council's Active programme. We trialled holding public transport walks culminating in a pub meal, in the winter months. These had only modest support and we will review whether to continue with them at the end of the current programme.

As usual we held 2 walking holidays, going to Llangollen over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend and to Devon, based in Torquay in September.

We introduced a new system whereby walk leaders could book their slots online. This has been largely successful, and has hopefully made the Rambles Secretary's job a little easier. We have been fortunate to have a large number of walk leaders – 29, not bad out of a membership in the mid-80s.

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

We held the following social events during the year- a beer & skittles evening in October, an annual Christmas Meal held at Tidbury Green Golf Club, a Quiz Night in February, and a cruise with afternoon tea, on the River Trent at Nottingham in June.

10 years ago the Group was somewhat in the doldrums. The development of our website provided the catalyst for resurgence, leading to an influx of new members who re-energised the Group. Thanks to the hard work of some of our members, we have managed to maintain a reasonable level of momentum and innovation over the succeeding years. However, as is often the case, a lot of the burden falls on a few shoulders and it is important that we don't become too dependent on too few people.

Chairperson – David Threlkeld

City of Birmingham

As another rambling year draws to a close, the City of Birmingham Group has been as busy as usual, but unfortunately there has been a drop in numbers using our Saturday/Sunday coaches. This has led to one Ridges & Tops walk having to be cancelled and a big loss over the year on our Sunday coaches.

There have been **7** Ridges & Top walks, enabling those members who like to get to the higher peaks by coach to do so. The usual **12** short monthly walks for the public, enabling non-members to experience walking with a group and then often joining our main Sunday walks. We have also organised **21** Wednesday and **47** Sunday Walks by coach, providing **141** different walks enabling people of all abilities to enjoy the great British countryside. We also had our usual self-led walking breaks to the Lakes in October, St David's in April and Berwick upon Tweed in September. Each had three walks each full day and one combined walk at the Lakes on the Friday of arrival, totalling **25** different rambles. This makes a total of **206** different walks over the year and involved **57** different leaders

Our social calendar has included our annual dinner at the Eaton where we were entertained by a talk from David Bartley a Black Country poet. A social evening with a talk by the "Tram Man" followed by a buffet, also our usual Sunday and Wednesday Christmas meals.

The group's task force have again been very active during the last year; they have carried out monthly sessions with a team of up to **7**, putting in about **15** man-hours on each occasion, much valued by the Council. Reports of their activities are made regularly to the Ramblers Central Office in London

New walkers are still being encouraged to join our Sunday rambles via our Meetup on-line presence. Our group website is kept up to date with all group activities and programme items. City of Birmingham Ramblers Facebook page is regularly visited and our full walking programme is posted on the Ramblers Walks Finder database. The monthly E-newsletter is still being sent to those members who have requested to be put on the circulation list.

There was a nasty accident on one of our Sunday Walks in June and a member was very seriously injured, but we are pleased say he is recovering well and we hope to see him walking with us again in the New Year.

Sandra Sutton – Chairperson

Coventry

Our Coventry group continues to offer a diverse range of walks throughout the year. In addition to our weekly Sunday morning long and medium car-share walks, we provide two Saturday walks each month, one car sharing and the other by public transport. These walks included visits to Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Cheshire, Oxfordshire and Wales, among many others.

We have a monthly Tuesday walk by public transport which includes a pub lunch and continues to be our best attended, averaging 17 people per walk. During summer months, we have a weekly Thursday evening walk, although turnout was less encouraging this year.

On a slightly disheartening note, our membership has continued to fall, although, this is reflected not only in the area, but in the national figures - we are now down from 308 to 295 members. Attracting and retaining new members is a tough nut to crack. We have also found it more difficult in recent months to find walk leaders to fill our programme. We had our Christmas pre-lunch walk at the Lake at Barston Golf Club in December, which was attended by 26 of us.

Regarding holidays and breaks, a four night holiday at Elan Valley in Wales was successfully attended by 14 members in April. Then in June, thirty two of us had a lovely day out to Goodrich Castle, near the Welsh border. July saw some of us partake in a walking weekend holiday in Llandudno, Wales, joining up with the Rail Rambles. Near the end of September our second coach trip of the year took 26 of us to Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. We were lucky to have the weather on our side, as it was a gorgeous day to be surrounded by fine scenery.

Some of our members took part in the Coventry Way Challenge. A forty mile walk, circling the city which is always worth mentioning.

Our footpath maintenance team continues to work hard out in the field and have been focused on repairing bridges. Going forward, we could look into the possibility of replacing rotting bridges with culverts, as these tend to require less maintenance and are more durable.

This has been my third and final year as Coventry Chairperson and I will be stepping down at our November 2017 AGM. I have enjoyed my time as chairperson and working with our committee, I have learnt a lot in the process and have gained confidence along the way. I would like to thank all the committee members, walk coordinators, walk leaders and volunteers who have produced a great team effort over the past three years. I would like to say special thanks to my wife, and website manager, Wendy Moroney - for without her advice and support, would have made it impossible for me to take on this role.

I sincerely wish our new chairperson - whoever they may be, all the best for the future

John Moroney – Chairperson

Mid Warwickshire

I am writing this at the end of my first year as Chair. We welcomed new officers, Glenys Barr as Treasurer and Peter Rolfe as Programme Secretary, both of whom have settled in well and have done excellent jobs this year. I have drawn upon my experience on the committee with previously held posts on membership, programme and publicity. One of my aims was for the group to be more involved with the Ramblers goal of “protecting and expanding where we walk”. As a group we participate in this area through reporting footpath problems and consulting on footpath changes. We have built on this activity with several group members working with Stratford Ramblers on footpath maintenance work.

Current membership remains fairly stable but we will continually look for ways to attract new members. Thanks go to Bill Burton for his work as Membership Secretary, and his contribution to publicity of the group. Angela Heaton our Footpath Secretary has kindly arranged and trialed several shorter mid-week walks in the summer programme. They have mainly attracted our regular walkers, but also those who cannot manage the longer walks and walkers who are new to the group. These will be pursued in the Winter Programme, and we will continue to raise awareness of the walks. Especially as evidence suggests that the groups with growing membership have a greater number of shorter walks. Some of the short walks will contribute to the Winter Festival of Walks 2017/18 and the Walkabout Festival 2018.

In terms of links to associated organisations, we have also joined the Ramblers Worldwide Holidays Walking partnership. In addition, several group members have made voluntary contributions towards a share option in the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway (GSWR), and we will use this line to base walks around in the future.

Thanks go to Jill Fitzmaurice for her ever continuing support as Secretary, ensuring smooth administration of committee matters. We continue to run as a streamlined and efficient committee, however of great concern is the lack of volunteers wishing to join the committee and currently there is no clear line of succession for any of the officer posts. Therefore if any volunteers are forthcoming, that would be much appreciated, and we will endeavour to provide all the training and support needed. I have served 15 years on the committee, and it is my intention to remain in post until November 2019, following our hosting of the Warwickshire Area AGM.

Alice Sin - Chairperson

Rugby

The Walks Programme for this review period opened with a Coach trip to the Vale of Llangollen, for which we enjoyed spectacular walking – including the “airy” crossing of the great Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, 126 feet above the valley floor, all in the most glorious weather. Perhaps that was a hard act to follow, but our usual annual programme of over 150 walks ranging from 4 to 16 miles also gave us

many great days – “thank you”, walk leaders and programme organisers! Numbers participating on “normal” group walks have dropped slightly, mainly in respect of “B” walks in areas some way from home. Although members are keen to explore more distant areas, as evidenced by the coach trips, it appears that some are reluctant to drive themselves for more than an hour or so, leaving formerly traditional summer walking areas such as the Peak District and South Cotswolds “out of reach”.

In April, our second Coach Trip, centred on Castleton, also provided splendid views in good weather, all 3 groups scaling the heights of Mam Tor. Group Weekends, - Ilfracombe in April and Tenby in September - were full to capacity, members from our “landlocked” locality enjoying the opportunity to walk by the sea. These two weekends concluded a series of eight, brilliantly organised by Sheila and Stephen Crosby, their record of always having fine weather being maintained but for one afternoon - another hard act to follow. However, new volunteers have stepped forward and the pattern of Group Weekends will continue in the coming year.

43 members attended our Group AGM, down from 63 the previous year. This fall in numbers participating in non-walking activities continued with reduced interest in the Quiz Night and the Annual Lunch. So these two events have been, temporally at least, dropped from our Programme, the Lunch after an unbroken run of at least 43 years, and the Quiz Night after 13 years, the latter organised by Tony Gibbons assisted by Barry Matthews. A new social event is planned to fill the gap. The Soups, Puds and Pictures night and the late August Darts and Skittles night went ahead successfully as usual.

A major event in February 2017 was Rugby Group’s hosting of Warwickshire Area’s AGM, and we were honoured to welcome some 130 Warwickshire Ramblers to Rugby. The Guest Speaker was Teri Moore, a Ramblers Trustee, who impressed and encouraged us by her enthusiasm. Barry Durman spoke about the Millennium Way and encouraged us all to consult its website. After lunch, two walks were led in glorious sunshine by Rugby Group members, one a “town walk” and one into the near countryside. The day went well, thanks to the help of many Rugby Group members.

In the review period, our Footpath Working Group of 10 have installed 8 kissing gates, 7 waymark posts, erected one 7m bridge, and cleared a Bridleway and 2 overgrown stiles. Unfortunately some time was lost as David Hughes, WCC Ranger, was off work with an injured back and for one month we could not raise a team due to injury and holidays.

Our Committee has lacked a Publicity Secretary all year, so programme feeds to local media have not been happening. I hope this post will be filled at our forthcoming AGM. There will be another change this year as I will be resigning as Chairman after 25 years in post. I took on the job as a “temporary stand in”, and somehow I have now been Chairman for more than half the life of the Group – definitely time for new blood with fresh ideas. In “my time” regular mid-week and Saturday walks have become a permanent part of the Programme, and membership has grown, although currently at 298, fractionally down on last year and a little less than the all-time high of 329 in 2005. There are now several other walking groups in our area, notably U3A, and many in late middle age who used to form the core membership now have more demands on their time such as caring for their parents and/or grandchildren. This could also explain the increase in average age of active members. The other huge change is the great part that the Internet and Social Media now play in everything, all unknown when I became Chairman.

So it remains only for me to say a big “Thank You” to all who have supported Rugby Ramblers over these 25 years, both on and off the Committee, and to wish my successor well, and to whom I promise my support as they take on the leadership of Rugby Ramblers.

Graham Bevan - Group Chairperson

Solihull

2016/17 has been another good year for our group, which I would describe as being ‘more of the same’. Our membership continues to increase, rising from 380 a year ago to 392 and we look forward to reaching the 400 mark in the not too distant future. We continue to offer a minimum of 3 walks per week, rising to 4 on occasions and 5 during the summer months. They are generally well supported, especially our longer walks on Tuesdays which are mainly in the range 10/12 miles and attract 25/30 walker’s week after week. We are perhaps fortunate in being able to persuade members of our group to take up committee positions as and when they arise without too much difficulty and hence we are able to spread the workload of running the group around rather than it being left to just a few people, for which I am very grateful.

This year has marked the 30th anniversary of the formation of the group in 1987 and to mark the occasion we presented albums of photographs from over the years at our annual post-Christmas meal to 3 of our members who have been and continue to be involved with the group from virtually the start, namely Brian Collins, Sheila Woolley and Malcolm Leonard. In addition Sheila led a repeat of the inaugural walk which was followed by a celebration lunch at which they were presented with framed certificates of commendation from Ramblers central office.

We have had our usual 2 weekends away – at Bath and Bournemouth this year and both were well supported. A new venture for us next year is that we have arranged a weeklong walking holiday in Majorca, something we have not tried before. Again this has been well supported with 24 members signing up to go and we have not let the recent demise of Monarch Airlines stop us!

Our footpath maintenance team continue to do good work on behalf of both Warwickshire and Solihull Councils under the guidance of Adam Pearce and I would like to thank them, our walk leaders, the committee members and everyone else who has chipped in to ensure the continued prosperity of our group.

Les Harrison - Chairperson

South Birmingham

Recently, while we were out on a walk, a member’s lunch box slipped out of her hands and into the canal! It was like the bible story of the loaves and fishes, within moments she was offered more food than she could eat, from other members who were out walking that day. We also managed to hail a passing narrow boat that rescued the lunch box.

At every stage SBR has volunteers who support our group and make it run so well. Our walk leaders, many of whom have taken a navigation course, recce walks carefully and fully understand their responsibilities of care towards the group they are leading.

Rob, our footpath secretary, has encouraged members to report footpath problems to him, or use the app on The Ramblers' website. Tricia has attended the Area meetings in Warwick and brought us back a report of business there and the address labels to send out programmes. Brian has dragged us into the 21st Century and we now use internet banking for our charity account. Marje, our membership secretary, welcomes new members with a letter and sends them our programme to keeps them in touch with us. Our membership is growing steadily and is now between 340 and 350.

We need three walks secretaries. The weekend walks' secretary, Sandra, organises our Sunday walks and longer Saturday walks in the summer. She also puts our walk programme on to the Ramblers' Website which means we are often joined by walkers from other groups. Ted organises weekly Wednesday walks and monthly Wednesday Workouts for stronger our walkers. John organises short walks. These include a weekly 5 mile walk and some 6 mile walks at weekends, and of course our summer evening pub walks. Jenny and friends organise and lead regular 2 mile walks for members who are recovering from knee/hip operations and people who are walking for health. John, our publicity officer, puts together the programme for printing.

Norman and friends organise our social events which range from weekends away to a skittles evening to a New Year Lunch. You name it, we've tried it! So much organisation to make these events the success they are. Janet, our secretary, sends out emails about our walks and social events, almost a daily task. She offers valuable advice, books our meetings and helps to ensure that things run smoothly. On our website Ted provides up to date information and photographs.

A good Ramblers' group is enabled by its volunteers, and ours are hardworking, thoughtful and energetic. They help to make us the happy and successful group we are.

For the future we have purchased a printer, and we're encouraging members to download the walks programme from our website, which will save much of the effort of stuffing envelopes each quarter. Next year is our 25th birthday.....so watch this space!

Liz Walkling – Chairperson

Southam

About 50 of our 77 members have walked during the year. Fortunately, they do not all walk every time and generally we have a comfortable 20 – 25 on our fortnightly Wednesday morning walks. Most walks are 5 miles or slightly less with start points generally no more than a 20-minute drive from Southam. One walk was in collaboration with the Southam Heritage Collection where we learnt a lot about the adjacent village of Ladbroke – including the fact that the founder of the eponymous bookmakers used to live there. John and Jeff organised what now looks like an annual event – a 9-mile walk in the Cotswolds which includes a pub lunch.

The Thursday evening summer strolls were less well supported this year but enjoyed by all who went on them. Every summer we aim to walk every footpath radiating from the town and invite local residents to join us. Special thanks must go to Richard and John who spent 4 hours clearing undergrowth on SM33 to Ladbroke only for torrential rain to prevent the walk going ahead. A by-product of all walks is the "gardening" done on pre-walks and I would like to thank all walk leaders for this work and, of course, for volunteering to lead. We are fortunate that this group contains a good number of people who are prepared to do their bit thus spreading the load.

Our Footpath Secretary, John, continues his diligent work following up, with mixed success, problems spotted by us or drawn to our attention by the public. Janet has stepped down as Membership Secretary and I would like to thank her for all she has contributed to the group since it was set up by Harry back in 1985. I am pleased to say that she is staying on the committee – and continuing to walk.

Details of all our walks are posted on the Southam page of the Ramblers website and we continue to distribute *News and Views* to members two or three times a year. I have referred to three “John’s” in this report so, if you are on a walk with us and do not know someone’s name you have a good chance of being right if you call them John!

William Pease – Chairperson

Stratford upon Avon

The number of members this year is still around 330. Numbers on walks have been about the same as last year; still down on 10 years ago, but nonetheless healthy. We have again led approximately 200 walks during the year, with one or two walks every Tuesday, an all-day walk on a Wednesday, with an additional Wednesday Coach walk in the summer months and half or full day walks on Sundays. Many people from adjacent groups join and lead some of our walks, particularly midweek. We have regular walks of between 4 and 10 miles. Last year’s summer evening 3 mile strolls were popular, so this summer we increased them to two Mondays per month.

Our summer month coach walks to places within about a 2 hour drive, have continued to be successful, with an average of 42 people for each of 6 outings. Most people do the 10 mile walk, with a significant number walking a 5 / 6 miler and a couple or so coming as non-walkers.

Our Stratford Walks book is still selling well, the local papers list our walks and we list walks on our website. Having a Publicity Officer on our committee is definitely a help. We still choose a particularly nice footpath each year for our Annual Best Footpath Award and obtain publicity with the presentation of the award to the landowner. Our Footpaths Officer is keeping an eye on the plans for the new town at Long Marston, the SW by-pass for Stratford and the Shottery Relief Road, which it will join. There have been more planning issues than footpath problems this year.

Our footpath maintenance group has increased to fourteen members. Half a dozen turn out on different days two or three times a month looking after 7 miles of paths.

Our usual social events have been held; annual lunch, skittles evening and summer garden party, all well attended. We have a bring and share lunch prior to our AGM. We organised two holidays this year; a week at Evia in Greece and a three night stay in the Peak District; both with hfholidays.

Another successful year for a friendly club.

Penny Stott - Chairperson

Sutton Coldfield

Taking the chair at Sutton Coldfield Ramblers has been quite an experience. For one thing, it’s made me look back over the year and the range of our activities. It has been enlightening and encouraging and, to me, uplifting, to look at the pictures of these activities on our website and reports in our monthly

newsletter and then to reflect on the commitment and dedication of our members. We've aimed for two walks every Sunday, throughout the year. Maybe we didn't quite make that but we came pretty close. And we've continued with our monthly Coach Walks, covering central England from Mam Tor in the north to Winchcombe in the south and Llangollen in the west to Southwell in the east. That's a lot of landscape variety we've seen and a lot of cups of tea we've drunk, in some interesting places. There are also walks closer to home, of course, as not everyone wants to neither travel nor walk far. To cater for this need we now run a couple of D walks each month, one on a Sunday alongside a B option and one on a Thursday.

For certain, it's the walking that's our main focus. It keeps us happy. There's the pleasure of motion, and the soothing of the countryside and alongside the walking goes the talking, with companionship and friendship and happy talk in the greenery around us. With this experience in mind, we set up an "It's Good to Walk" initiative alongside Macmillan, which the Sutton Coldfield Observer covered, and our local MP, Andrew Mitchell, attended. There was a public walk in Sutton Park and a gazebo full of Ramblers goodies for enquirers.

On the social front we have a programme of monthly winter talks in Maney Church Hall, with speakers who know their stuff.... about the Fauld Explosion, about the Gurkhas and about el Camino de Santiago de Compostela. From this we now have a bunch of Ramblers heading for Iberia in June aiming to complete their own Camino de Costa. In 2017 our holidays took us to Malham with HF and to Harrogate and the Old Swan Hotel. In the summer months we have monthly evening Pub Walks. These are very popular! And this year there's been a spring and an autumn Social Walk followed by tasty lunch out.

Our Working Party sets to every month to clear paths and work on stiles that need repair focussing on the countryside north of Sutton, working alongside Staffordshire County Council. We want the paths we enjoy walking to be available and accessible to the wider walking community.

We are very aware that health issues can arise on our walks. So we offered a First Aid Course for Ramblers. One of our members, a Consultant at a local hospital, compiled a take home booklet, covering responses to heart attack, stroke and a whole range of situations that we could meet. Everyone was supervised practicing CPR on a manikin.

I do hope this report gives you a flavour of Sutton Coldfield Ramblers. We've been around for over 25 years now but we are looking forward and actively seeking to involve more people with us. To tempt families with young children, we've run a couple of Family Walks with Moms and Grandmas and Grandads bringing along their little ones and their pushchairs and bikes and fidget spinners. We regularly leaflet locations in Sutton to spread the Walking Word. Social media is so important these days. Our Facebook page is a daily pictorial update of our activities. Sharing all our walks on ramblers.org.uk has meant we've met other ramblers from across the country who've opted to join us. It's always interesting to meet others and share ideas.

I'm looking forward to 2018. Check out our website, especially our Newsletter, which is e mailed out to members, but is accessible to all via the website suttoncoldfieldramblers.org.uk You can see our Facebook page from a link there too.

Colin Lowrey - Chairperson

The Bear

I always like to start this annual report by saying thank you to our committee members, walk leaders and social organisers for their contribution over the last year. I think it's important to remind the rest of the members that we need volunteers to keep it all running. This year has been particularly challenging at times as the current committee members are being stretched by other commitments and it's getting more difficult to find new people to take on some of the volunteering roles such as walk leading.

The committee are happy to support anyone who may be interested in getting more involved with volunteering either by leading a walk or running an event. It can be a really rewarding experience and you can learn new skills.

Our Membership figures have dropped from last year and are at the lower level of when we have had low membership in the past.

Pub lunches after the Sunday walk are proving as popular as previous years and are a regular feature throughout the walk calendar. We also had walks for a certain times of year such as seeing large numbers of Daffodils or Bluebells. We thought we would be a bit late to catch the Bluebells this year but still found plenty in Badby wood and finished off the day in the village hall with bluebell tea and homemade cakes.

Short distance walks still seem to attract new people but our walks calendar partly depends on the type of walk the leaders want to lead. We also managed to get in a few Challenge walks this year with the Cotswold challenge Diamond way of 17 miles and the Greens Norton Challenge of 24 Miles. Some joint walks with the Oxford and Gloucestershire group also opened up new places to walk.

We had two members attend the National Young Ramblers weekend in Edinburgh which was a great opportunity to learn about what different groups around the country are up to.

A rambler heading out on the weekly Sunday walk has many things to consider before setting out and interacting with the countryside. One particular danger I remember was when half way across an open field with an interested cow heading in your direction a farmer shouts "hey! There's a bull in that field" and these days we can encounter all kinds of new creatures. On a Bear walk in Cherington we encountered a field of Lammas or Alpacas not sure which as we had to make a very quick exit as they didn't want us coming in their field. Time to find an alternative route, how's your navigation?

This year we had only one weekend away and that was to the Isle of Man. Andrew Richards is to be commended for his organisational skills for an outstanding Easter Bank holiday trip that included coastal walks, steam trains, the Manx Electric Railway, horse drawn trams, camera obscura, Laxey Wheel, a walk up Snaefell and what was on the whole great weather.

In February the Bears enjoyed an inspirational film evening in Leamington Spa watching a selection of best short film entered in to the Banff Mountain film Festival world tour. This is now an annual social for Bear group and I would highly recommend it to other groups. Then in October we ventured into new territory with a trip to the Ocean film festival at the Crescent Theatre in the heart of Birmingham. This was a combined social event which included a nice meal at Café Rouge and a quick drink in BrewDog.

We had a variety of food choices this year at our restaurant nights from Indian, Italian, Japanese, Seafood, Thai and Vegetarian. We also made it to Warwick Beer Festival and despite the constant rain we made every effort to drink them dry.

Coming up is our Christmas meal out in Warwick this year and next year weekend away to Snowdonia is already getting booked up.

David Hamilton – Chairperson

West Midlands Walking

It's been another good year for the group, with a great range of walks of all types and lengths right across the Midlands – truly something for everyone. The walks have generally been well attended and attracted lots of new people; our efforts in making them accessible where possible has definitely paid dividends. All of this does of course help us to fulfil Ramblers' mission as well as boost our own membership.

We have also enjoyed a very varied social programme, with everything from meals, crazy gold and comedy nights to an evening at the Battle Proms and our first experience of 'The Season' at Badminton Horse Trials...

Our weekends away have continued to flourish, with successful trips to Sedburgh, Cirencester, Alnwick, Antrim and the Stour Valley - not forgetting a 'memorable' trip to Torquay and our wet weekend at Glossop Travelodge...

Thanks to everyone who has contributed an event, or helped in any other way – your ideas, commitment and enthusiasm make the group what it is.

Other developments during the year have included the launch of our new much-improved website, now much more accessible and easily browsable from mobile devices which should help in spreading the word. We have also continued to fund places on professional navigational courses to encourage new walk leaders to take the plunge and/or improve their skills – we have certainly had some success in recruiting new leaders but as ever we could really do with a few more! The group Facebook page has continued to be well used, providing a great forum for sharing between members and hopefully encouraging prospective new ones.

Next year brings our chance to showcase the group as we host the Area AGM – preparations are well underway but we will need lots of willing volunteers; further details to follow but please keep 27 January free in your diaries! Other planned initiatives are to encourage a greater rate of contribution of walks to Ramblers Routes – we have so many walks being led and reccied which could easily be added to this valuable resource and available for others to enjoy. And of course we are looking forward to our inaugural overseas trip to Amsterdam next April...

Thanks again and I look forward to seeing you on a walk or social soon!

Chris Thomas - Chairperson