

Ramblers Association
South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire Area

Minutes of the AGM held on 24th January 2015 at St Mary's Church Hall, Sprotbrough, Doncaster and hosted by the Dearne Valley Group.

These minutes to be approved at the AGM in January, 2016.

Welcome

Nigel Hebden, Chair of the Dearne Valley Group, welcomed everyone to the AGM. He explained that he had been elected Chair only last September, having come to walking, and the Ramblers, only in the last few years. He thanked Chris Grieg for leading the morning's walk.

Nigel said that the Dearne Valley Group was very successful. It encouraged dog-walkers, had recently introduced coach trips, they organised many social events to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, etc and held quizzes and walk/talk/eat events in the winter monthly. Forthcoming events included a photographic evening, a talk on South Yorkshire castles and a speaker from the Don Valley Landscape Partnership.

The Group has about 100 members, with an average of 22 on walks, plus dogs.

Nigel then introduced Allen Pestell, Chair, Terry Howard, President, David Gadd, Secretary and Richard May, a Trustee.

Allen Pestell thanked Nigel and praised the beautiful cake which the Group had provided to mark the 80th anniversary of the Ramblers Federation, which led directly to the forming of the Ramblers Association.

Cath MacKay and Allen Pestell noted with sadness the death, since the last AGM, of Roy Bullen, who was an Area Vice President. Roy was a gentle man, who loved poetry. He worked tirelessly for the things that people in Ramblers value and he was involved in the setting up of the Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland.

Present

40 members were present.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Roly Smith, (Vice President); David Hey, (Vice President); Rosemary Boyle and Philip Ryder, (Rotherham Metro); Nicki Speakman, (Barnsley and Penistone); Catherine Palmer and Dave Ward, (Doncaster); Ruth Law (Dearne Valley); David Moore (Chesterfield and NE Derbyshire); Christine Hewitt (Sheffield Visually Impaired Group).

Notification of any other business

None received.

Appointment of tellers

Mike Pye and Cath MacKay.

Address of Area President

Terry said that someone had asked 'How can you identify intelligence in a person?' The response was that the intelligent person, if on a station waiting for a train, would occupy their time by looking at the things and places around them, questioning how they came about and postulating ideas about them. What do you find on station platforms now - heads hung low with eyes gazing at mini screens of mobile phones and tablets. I am not inferring such people are unintelligent, but many people nowadays are losing their ability to connect with the world around them. Ramblers, walkers and explorers of our rural and urban countryside generally maintain that inquisitiveness of mind and place. Looking back at the early Clarion Ramblers Handbooks GHB Ward recognised this and used the rambles, not just as purely physical exercise, but for a healthy body and an enquiring mind. The walks were mainly in the Peaks and the countryside around South Yorkshire and Derbyshire, with occasional visits much further afield. Although most of the walks were well in excess of twenty five miles leaders had to make sure they researched the content of the walk beforehand, which included places of interest and history, as well as including a poetry reading and leading in a song on the walk

GHB Ward, George Herbert Bridges Ward, affectionately known as Bert Ward by his fellow ramblers, was born in Sheffield in 1876 and died in 1957. He formed the first working class rambling club in the UK, the Clarion Ramblers, on a ramble around Kinder Scout in 1900. He researched, wrote and edited the unsurpassed Clarion Ramblers Handbooks. He was also responsible for the formation of the Ramblers Association in this Area, eighty years ago, which we recognise and celebrate at this AGM.

Ward visited many places to walk, but he never talked down the importance of the more shorter or local walks. Although a "man of the Peak moors" an explorer and researcher he valued all areas and said that even a small area, which was often overlooked or ignored by walkers, could hold many stories of interest. Even if you spent a lifetime walking you will never see everything, even those places close to home.

I recognise within many people there is the need to visit and see the many spectacular places around the world, for those that can't they may feel a sense of loss. For these people it is not a "loss" as it is impossible to see and experience everything and what is on their doorstep can provide just as much excitement. Even visiting "spectacular" places can be a negative experience. I recall a friend who visited Machu Picchu in the Andes whose experience was spoilt by queuing to get in, pestered by souvenir sellers and then suffering "Montezuma's revenge". My personal "pilgrimage" would be to Ulahru (Ayre's Rock) in Australia but I am unlikely to get there. I won't be disappointed because I know I am already surrounded by places to explore and enjoy and, one lifetime could never be enough to see them all.

This is very well put by Will Self in an article for the Radio Times "Take a Hike" where he describes the real benefits of walking locally, no matter where you live. He finishes the article with "you find yourself intrigued by that alley you've passed a thousand times but never looked down: you strike up a conversation with the shopkeeper/homeless person/elderly lady with a lap dog, who in all other circumstances you would hurry past, you discern how habit has confined and shrunken your world because by taking to your feet you have in one undramatic act freed yourself". As regards the alley, he found it fascinating, and as long as he engaged his senses the walk would continue to develop.

We recognise the value of our urban green spaces for all people, for health, social wellbeing, education and creativity, but these are under threat, along with Local Authority owned woodland. Because of "political dogma" they are having to be seen by Local Authorities as potential "financial assets" possibly to be sold off to raise money. This dogma ignores the benefits they have for all people. All though some Local Authorities in our Area don't want to dispose of such land they may be forced to. As I said earlier the urban walking experience is of great value to all, so do we ignore these threats and simply continue to walk in the countryside, or do we respond?

In reading through the "Clarions" I felt as though I got to know GHB Ward, from a spirited young man into his old age. He never lost his enquiring mind and his campaigning spirit throughout his life. Although he did achieve much in his lifetime for rights of way, access, National Parks and the protection of the countryside, he recognised time was not always on his side. He often said in later Clarions that he hoped people in the future would carry on with the work he started. I am proud to say we did carry on and we did achieve many of the things he wanted. However, we haven't yet achieved everything so we must carry on as before with no let-up. There is one concern though - we followed on with the inspired work of GHB but is there any one following us? I look behind me but I don't yet see anyone. Some say we need to get more younger people involved. However, we must not get obsessed with getting younger people involved, as older people have much to continue giving. We should aim for a partnership of all ages in our campaigning. I'm not ready to call it a day, campaigning can be invigorating, challenging and yet satisfying.

So let's all continue to work together to meet the challenges facing our rural and urban countryside and access, not just for the Ramblers, but for all people and use the eightieth year of the Ramblers as the start of this new tomorrow.

Approval of the minutes of the 2014 AGM

It was proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Les Seaman that the minutes be accepted. Agreed.

Matters arising from those minutes

None.

Approval of the Annual Report

The Annual Report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Mike Pye proposed that it be accepted, Cath MacKay seconded it. Passed unanimously.

Approval of the Annual Accounts

The Annual Accounts had been distributed prior to the meeting.

Neill Schofield proposed and Judy Gathercole seconded that the Accounts be accepted.

Allen Pestell proposed and Neill Schofield seconded a vote of thanks to Andrew Milne for auditing the accounts. This was agreed.

Standing Order amendments

Details about the Standing Orders amendments had been circulated prior to the meeting. AP explained that they were being brought up-to-date to reflect electronic communication, for example replacing '... the minutes shall be signed by the Chairman' with '... the minutes of the previous meeting shall be circulated to members in pdf form'.

Les Seaman proposed and Judy Gathercole seconded that the amendments be accepted. Agreed.

Elections:

Area President	Roly Smith: proposed by Allen Pestell, Christine Whittaker seconded. Agreed.
Area Vice Presidents	Neill Schofield proposed and Allen Pestell seconded that Roy Cannon, David Hey, Cath MacKay, Terry Howard and Mike Pye be elected. Agreed.
Chair	Allen Pestell: proposed by Cath MacKay and seconded by Christine Whittaker. Agreed
Secretary/Membership Secretary	David Gadd: proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Allen Pestell. Agreed.

Treasurer	Gavin Johns: proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Chris Greig. Agreed.
Information Officer	Christine Whittaker: proposed by Judy Gathercole, seconded by Allen Pestell. Agreed.
Access Officer	Les Seaman: proposed by Judy Gathercole, seconded by Cath MacKay. Agreed.
Footpath Officer	No nominations. The role is covered by the ACROW committee.
Countryside Officer	Allen Pestell: proposed by Neill Schofield, seconded by Christine Whittaker. Agreed.
Members Without Portfolio	Cath MacKay: proposed by Allen Pestell, seconded by and Judy Gathercole. Agreed.
Representatives from Affiliated Groups	Terry Howard: proposed by Allen Pestell, seconded by Mike Pye. Agreed.
Group	Christine Hewitt, from the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking (SVIWG) was proposed by David Gadd, seconded by Christine Whittaker. Agreed.
Co-opted representative	Cynthia Ashton, from the Sheffield Co-operative Ramblers, was co-opted onto Area Council. Proposed Cath MacKay, seconded David Gadd. Agreed.
Delegates to General Council	Allen Pestell and Jeremy Kenyon were proposed by Cath MacKay and seconded by Mike Pye to represent Area Council at General Council in Cambridge on 28/29 March 2015. Area Council agrees to send a non-delegate to General Council. This will be discussed at the next Area Council meeting on 9 th February.

Affiliations to Kindred Organisations

Les Seaman proposed and Neill Schofield seconded SYNED's continued affiliation to the Open Spaces Society, the Peak District Green Lanes Alliance, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, the Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland and the Peak and Northern Footpath Society.

LS briefly outlined the role of each organisation and explained why we should support them. The proposal was passed unanimously.

Speaker's Address

Richard May presented a slide show to demonstrate what Ramblers had achieved since its formation in 1935.

Achievements include significant input into the designation of national trails, the marking of rights of way on definitive maps starting in 1949, the national parks, the CroW Act of 2000, completion of the Wales coastal walk in 2013 and hopefully the coastal route around the whole of the UK in the foreseeable future, the establishment of Ramblers Routes in 2012 and encouraging thousands of people to start walking. Ramblers lead many health walks every week, throughout the country (funded by Macmillan). Ramblers have recently produced a Volunteer Welcome Booklet – volunteers being defined as all members who lead, serve on a committee and/or campaign. About 25% of members are volunteers. Volunteer Development Days have been initiated (the next one in this area being in Doncaster on 15th May). Ramblers are also planning to introduce a scheme to complete data on every right of way in the country so that they can be monitored and the state of the whole network will be known.

Richard said that the website development was continuing, with access to mobile phones being available at the end of the month. Also, he pointed out that each Group has its own webpage on the Ramblers website with the basic information about the Group, but Groups are encouraged to up-load photos and increase the amount of information. Finally, he pointed out that membership figures have slightly increased in the last year.

Richard then took questions from the floor. The first concerned the 2026 deadline for claiming rights of way. RM said that this issue was raised at every meeting he attended but because it wasn't his area of expertise he would refer the matter to central office. A series of questions were then asked about the governance proposals. RM said that these proposals were intended to bring Ramblers into the 21st century. He said that this Area seems to be working well, but that many others are not. The proposals would make sure that the buck stops with the Leader of Area. He explained that in some Areas the Chair was the main person but in others it was the Secretary. The term Leader is being used to fit the most suitable person. However, members expressed doubts regarding who would want to take on such a role, which was more appropriate to a commercial organisation than to a charity, with all members working voluntarily. RM said that in no way were the proposals intended to break up what was working well, that the proposals would enable Areas to get involved with a Group to help.

While most members have no objection to the setting of higher standards, to change, etc they object strongly to the way the process is being carried out. A process such as this should have started with a set of ideas, to be presented, discussed and refined at workshops, leading to a framework document. There are many good things in the proposals but many members feel that the process is seriously flawed. Concern was expressed that a formal complaint system is being proposed. Area Council feel that such a process might be applicable to a commercial organisation, but not to people who take on roles for Ramblers in a voluntary capacity. There was also a feeling among members that the language in the proposals suggests 'us' and 'them'.

Concern was also expressed that well under 1% of members responded to the consultation process, although RM

pointed out that many responses had come from Areas and Groups, and hence more representation was greater than it appeared. The response to an email submission from SYNED's sub-committee, saying that there might not be time to review them was considered to be appalling, although RM assured the meeting that all responses had been read. Very few of the members had read the proposals, with the item in *Walk* magazine being considered pathetic. There is a fear that if members feel that the process has been seriously flawed a significant loss of members might ensue. However it was pointed out that the wording of a motion from SYNED should be temperate. To conclude RM said that he apologised if anyone was upset by anything he had said and that he didn't want people to believe that Ramblers was a top-down organisation. He doesn't think, when people fully understand the proposals, that there will be a mass departure. The process from now is that responses will go back to the working group and next weekend the working group will meet. Then the Trustees will devise the final proposals for General Council, where a 75% majority is needed for the proposals to be passed. He didn't know whether the issues will be considered in totality or whether they will be considered in separate sections.

Motions

1 Allen Pestell proposed and Jeremy Kenyon seconded that this AGM will submit a motion to General Council deploring the consultation process. This was agreed.

2 Terry Howard followed up what he had said in his address, namely that local authorities may decide to sell-off their open spaces and woodland, as Derbyshire CC has done, but that these should be preserved as community assets for present and future generations. This can be done if the local authority 'Dedicate' such land under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

This was proposed by Terry Howard and seconded by Les Seaman. This was agreed.

Any Other Business

Terry Howard explained that the first *Spirit of Kinder* event was west of the Pennines, in 2013, to commemorate the Kinder Mass Trespass of 24th April, 1932, the most significant event and the inspiration for the long battle for the Right to Roam. Members are invited to the third *Spirit of Kinder* day, which will be held at Edale Community Hall at 2.30pm on Saturday, 25th April, 2015. Entrance is free.

Closing Remarks

Cath MacKay offered thanks to Richard May, Trustee, for making his presentation. She said that it had been interesting and stimulating and hoped that he would take this Area's concerns about the governance proposals back to central office. Richard assured her that he would.

Allen Pestell thanked Nigel Hebden and the Dearne Valley Group for hosting the AGM so successfully.

ACROW and Area Council:	9 th February 2015	ACROW meetings start at 6.30, AC meetings at 7.30.
	8 ^h June 2015	
	7 th September 2015	
	23 rd November 2015	
General Council:	28/29 March, 2015	
AGM	23 th January 2016	Venue: Doncaster
Area website:	www.synedramblers.org.uk	
National website:	www.ramblers.org.uk	