

“For me, the highlight of the past year was the publication by the Area in April of *Clarion Call: Sheffield’s Access Pioneers*. Celebrating GHB Ward and Sheffield’s pivotal place in the fight for access to the Peak District moors and surrounding countryside, the book has been an outstanding success.

It was reprinted in December, and Gavin tells me that the book has already gained for the branch gross sales of nearly £5,000. If you haven’t got a copy, I urge you to buy one now! The cover price is £7.99 but members can obtain copies for £5.

The book was written by dedicated local access campaigners Dave Sissons, Terry Howard and myself. Dave linked many of Bert Diver’s photographs with actual walks as recorded in the famous and avidly collected Clarion Club Handbooks, which Ward almost single-handedly edited for 50 years.

The book also includes many previously unseen photographs of the early days of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers, one of the first working class rambling clubs in the country, and their charismatic leader, GHB ‘Bert’ Ward. The most popular by far was one of Ward skinny-dipping at Swain’s Greave on Bleaklow. As I’ve said before, those early Clarions were made of stern stuff!

But the book also records the leading role which the city of Sheffield has played over the years in the fight for access to mountain and moorland. Several leading national figures had strong connections with Sheffield, and with the fight for the right to roam, including John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter, John Derry and the Rotherham-born ‘Corn Law Rhymer’, Ebenezer Elliot. This is especially relevant now that Sheffield is campaigning to become Britain’s Outdoor City.

The book attracted a good deal of media publicity, including TV appearances by Terry Howard and myself with Ellie Harrison on BBC 1’s *Countryfile* in October. I did an interview on BBC Radio Sheffield with Rony Robinson (who wrote the foreword), and other publicity included a piece by Carey Davies in the *Guardian’s* Country Diary, and major features in the *Yorkshire Post Magazine* and the *Sheffield Star* and *Telegraph*. Other reviews appeared in *Walk, the Great Outdoors*, *Open Space* and the *Peak Advertiser*.

The book also prompted a section on Ward and the Clarions in a new exhibition titled ‘Changing Lives: 200 Years of People and Protest in Sheffield’, at Weston Park Museum. The exhibition opens on February 6 and run until July. It features many of Ward’s artefacts, including his glasses, suit, trilby hat and size 11 hob-nailed boots! The museum will also keep an archive of Ward’s papers and correspondence which will be available for researchers in the future.

There's also the possibility of a new CD of rambling songs, including some from the Clarions and Ward, by Mike Rimmington of Millhouses and friends. Mike has already produced a CD of songs inspired by the Lakeland fellwanderer Alfred Wainwright. It would be wonderful if the Ramblers could help to finance this, as we did with *Clarion Call*.

The 2017 Spirit of Kinder event was held at Edale on April 22, and was also hailed as a great success. It included a line-up of high-profile speakers, including Vanessa Griffiths, Chief Executive of The Ramblers; the newly-elected president of The Ramblers, author and broadcaster Stuart Maconie; Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General of the National Trust, and Stephen Trotter, former manager of the Trust's High Peak estate and now Director of the English Wildlife Trusts.

The Spirit of Kinder event this year will be organised by Manchester RA and will be held at the Friends' Meeting House in Manchester on Saturday, April 21. Speakers will include Kate Ashbrook of the Open Spaces Society and Jim Perrin, the outspoken environmental writer. It's good to see Manchester at last taking an interest in this event, and I hope all who can will support it.

Van Griffiths was again the guest of the Area in October, when she joined some of us on a walk from Longshaw to Carl Wark, Higger Tor, and later for an exciting rope swing over Burbage Brook. Van told me later that she had found it "Nourishing, stimulating and... joyful." I think we were all impressed, and it was really good to meet a Ramblers' Chief Executive who actually enjoyed getting her boots dirty...

Next year (2019) will mark the 70th anniversary of the passing of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, which set up our National Parks and Trails, so the 2019 Spirit of Kinder event will have a special resonance. So we'll soon need to start thinking about that.

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new president-elect, former Home Secretary and MP for Brightside and Hillsborough for 28 years, Lord David Blunkett. Unfortunately, David cannot be with us today as he has a previous engagement with the Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English, an organisation for which he has been patron for many years.

At the age of 22, David became the youngest-ever councillor on Sheffield City Council and later its youngest leader. He also went out with the "Left Foot Forward" walking group, with Mike Pye and others.

David has always said how he enjoys the glories of our countryside, which he is

anxious to continue once he has found a new guide dog to replace his beloved Cosby, who unfortunately passed away last year, so I'm sure you'll be in good hands.

Finally, I'd like to thank you once again for honoring me with the presidency for the second time, and I'd like to wish you all the best for the future".