

RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION CIRENCESTER GROUP

MINUTES OF THE 37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT THE WATERLOO COMMUNITY ROOM, CIRENCESTER ON WEDNESDAY 26th OCTOBER 2011

Attendees:

Mike and Rosemary Bailey, Pat Beckley, John and Pat Bookwood, Jill Byrne, Alan Cook, Brian Cooper, Richard Davies, Coralie Dustin, Stuart Dyer, Phil Gearing (Chair), Richard Holmes, John and Sylvia Hume, Jane Irving, Pam Orchard, Jane Rowland-Hill, Dave Russell, Charlie and Val Saunders, and Roy Shepherd.

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman (Phil Gearing) welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Richard Davies (Area Chairman) and Jill Byrne (Area Footpath Secretary).

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: John Appleby, Alan Brazier, Jane Bell, Linda Cook, Linda Chan-Jones, Jean Clemence, Sue Dyer, Rod & Irene Graham, Andrew & John Hartley, Paul Horrell, Bill Irving, Kathryn & Steve Meredith, Dave Richfield, May Russell, Jan Syred, Wendy Veitch, Sally Waldron, Collin West, Rob Wheatley, and Bill White.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the 36th Annual General Meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

4. Treasurer's Report (Alan Cook)

The audited accounts for 2010/11 were distributed in advance of the AGM to members with email and also with copies available at the AGM. A copy of the accounts is appended to the minutes.

The half yearly interest from Unity on September 30th was not included, as due to his holiday, the accounts were finalised just before the year end. Instead it is included in the 2011/12 accounts.

Income exceeded Expenditure by £51.47. This includes the additional income of £21 from the Recruitment Initiative.

Expenditure was less than expected in a few areas, the main one being programme postage.

With the committee Alan had prepared a budget for the next financial year which requests an Area Grant of £298. Last year we requested £326.70, and the reduction is due to the surplus on the 2010/11 accounts. The request has been approved, and the first quarterly payment has just been received.

5. Membership Secretary's Report (Mike Bailey)

Membership Numbers. On 30th September membership numbers were as follows:

Year	Life	Single	Joint	Single Concession	Joint Concession	Clubs	Total	Average Over 12 months
2010	0	72	60	20	30	0	182	191
2011	2	69	66	20	26	0	183	184

New Members. During the last 12 months a total of 28 new members joined Cirencester Ramblers against a total of 32 members who have lapsed or resigned.

Membership Subscriptions. There has been no change to the subscription rates on 1st October 2011, which remain as follows: Individual Membership - £31.00; Joint Membership - £41.00; Individual Concessionary - £19.50; and Joint Concessionary - £25.00.

- Tesco vouchers are accepted as a method of payment for renewal of membership.
- New individual and joint members who pay by direct debit continue to receive a one off £10 discount.

Distribution of Walk Programmes and Area News. Currently 61% of our membership receives the walks programme and area news by e-mail; and, if notified, any changes to the walks programme and other news.

Walks Leaflets. A total of 780 copies of our Walks Programme leaflets and Ramblers recruitment leaflets have been left on display in Blacks(was Millets), Cotswold Outdoor, Mountain Warehouse, Chedworth Roman Villa and the Cirencester Tourist Information Centre or handed out to potential new members on walks.

Ramblers Discounts. In addition to the normal 10% discount offered to Ramblers by various retail outlets, Blacks Leisure Group offers Cirencester Ramblers a free 15% off everything specialist groups discount card (excludes GPS related items and gift vouchers). These cards are automatically renewed each year.

Increasing Membership. Increasing membership has been one of the top 4 priorities in the Ramblers Business Plan 2010/2011 and will remain so for 2011/2012. On 1st October 2010 we had 176 Active Members and on 1st October 2011 we had 182 Active Members; thus we have increased our membership. We have been successful in recruiting new members; but not so successful in retaining them. In addition to the usual publicity to attract new members our group has pursued, with varying degrees of success the following:

- March Recruitment Incentive – one new member recruited, bringing in an extra £21 of funding for our group.
- 15th May Get Walking Keep Walking – one new member recruited.
- 8th & 11th September Heritage Open Days Walks and advert – were not a recruiting success and will not be repeated next year.
- E-mail reminder to lapsing members – limited success.

Emergency Contact Cards. A limited number of laminated emergency contact cards are still available to members for a small donation. To date about 40 cards have been handed out.

The meeting expressed their thanks to Mike for all the hard work he had done over the previous year.

6. **Programme Secretaries' Report (Pat Bookwood)**

November 2010 to February 2011 Pat Bookwood

There were 17 Scheduled walks in the winter period. Three were cancelled due to bad weather (see Publicity Officer's report for details). This was pretty good considering the early start to a long and very bad winter.

Of the 14 walks which took place, three were quite local to Cirencester, in the areas round Fossebridge, Bibury and the Duntisbourne Valley. Two were in the north, one of them part of our Diamond Way programme from Bourton to Wyck Rissington and the other started at Winchcombe. In the south, Tetbury was a starting point and in the east, Lechlade. There were two walks in the west, at Minchinhampton and Woodchester. A third, which should have started at Bisley, was cancelled due to icy conditions, but 4 stalwart ramblers, not be defeated by a bit of ice, walked round Cirencester Park instead. Out of county walks included one in Wiltshire in the Purton Area.

Three took place in Oxfordshire; the first walk of the programme and the last, both featuring Badbury Hill and the other, Burford.

The traditional 'Start of the Year Walk' was replaced by the Xmas lunch walk. This had been postponed from the 19th December, due to the snow. So on the 9th January, the walk followed the Hare Bushes to the Whiteway and the walkers returned to have Xmas lunch at Ingleside House, where 40 people enjoyed the belated festivities.

March to June 2011 Rosemary Bailey

This programme started with an enjoyable Away Day in Bristol organised by Stuart Dyer. The walk included a visit to the caves and wonderful views of the suspension bridge from various angles plus a short boat trip. This was followed by walks starting from Stow, Chedworth, Down Ampney, Sherston, Hailes Abbey, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Bisley, Selsey, Naunton, Winchcombe, Snowhill, Chipping Norton and North Cerney. We had one new leader during this period.

In May we were joined by a group of Ramblers visiting from Wales, and Phil arranged a walk for them on the Saturday from Cold Aston and on Sunday they joined us for local Cirencester walks taken from the walk leaflets 1 & 2.

In addition we had two evening walks on this programme. The first from Brokenborough and the second from Eastleach and as in previous years these proved popular. The programme ended with the Strawberry Tea walk starting in Kemble followed by a delicious tea hosted by Linda Chan-Jones in her beautiful garden and we thank Linda for her kind hospitality.

A number of members were fortunate to attend an Away Weekend in Beer organised by Phil, where they enjoyed some superb weather and great walks courtesy of John & Pat Bookwood. Our thanks go to them for the time and effort put in to planning and arranging these.

Finally on a personal note many thanks from Rosemary and Mike to those leaders who stepped in to lead walks they had planned, but Mike was unable to lead due to his back operation; and thanks to Stuart for stepping in to lead a walk in June when Tony Hudson was unavailable.

July to October 2011 Wendy Veitch

The Sunday rambles over the 'summer' months ranged from 5½ to 10 miles, plus one mid-week evening walk around Malmesbury, the Abbey House Gardens and River Avon, and a local Thursday morning walk in connection with Heritage Week starting through the Hare Bushes. The following Sunday walk - also in connection with Heritage Week - took place around the Lakes at South Cerney attracting 5 visitors.

Most have been quite well attended, unless the weather has been poor at the start, giving an average of 16 walkers and we have welcomed a number of visitors.

It is always interesting to read the walk reports and view the excellent photographs posted on the website. Various places of specific note have been visited including a Roman Villa and Coopers Hill; the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal; Dumbleton and the tiny 12th century Church at Little Washbourne; Old Sodbury and an 11 acre Iron Age Fort; the 1935 Folly near Faringdon, where some members acted as lock helpers. Also visited was Bredon Hill with its magnificent views over the Malverns, the Cotswolds and the Midlands, from Parsons Folly. A sunny day in Castle Combe and a visit to Kemble Airfield (now Cotswold Airfield) where the group was permitted to view various restricted areas courtesy of Glen Morman. The most recent walk started from the Church by Hailes Abbey and on this walk included a visit to another Iron Age Fort.

Due to various health problems or holiday commitments there were a couple of alterations to the original printed programme and Wendy was grateful to those leaders who came forward to cover

these changes. Also for those who contributed all the Walk Reports and, as mentioned before, the wonderful photographs of both views and the 'ramblers'.

Many congratulations to John on his 'length of Britain cycle ride' – all for a very good cause.

Wendy hopes to eventually return to walking with you – courtesy of the NHS.

On behalf of Rosemary, Wendy and myself (Pat), a very big thank you to everyone involved with leading and back-marking the great variety of walks. Also those people who give so generously of their time (and petrol). Thank you also to those who organise the meals, linked to some of the walks.

Our pool of walk leaders has reduced this past year, mainly due to age or health problems. This puts even greater pressure on the remaining leaders. New leaders are always welcome, in fact are essential if we are to continue offering walks every week. There is lots of help available, for instance with finding walks. It can also be useful to do some back-marking first to get a feel for what needs to be done.

However, we've had some great walks this year and we're now looking forward to the new programme, starting a week on Sunday.

7. Publicity Officer's Report (Pat Beckley)

Pat stated that this part of her report is much shorter than it used to be, due to the fact that the Walk programme co-ordinators now produce a report too and much of the information is duplicated. This report is for the period from 18th October 2010 to 16th October 2011. During this period there have been 55 Walks with an average of 14 people per walk. We also had 66 visitors on our walks. (These 66 are not included in the average per walk figure.)

Reports in the Standard 28 reports were printed which is just over half the walks, and on the weeks we were not in print they tried to put the details of the following weeks walk in somewhere. Pat believed we get the odd mention on local radio too.

Publicity Pat had just requested more leaflet dispensers to put in shops etc. she intended to put some in the Wiltshire area close to Gloucestershire border, but will give Mike details on them to make sure we get any new recruits.

Cotswold District Council They publish full details of all our walks and visitors to the area do use this facility to find walks.

Cirencester Town Council Has their new website up and running (this is in addition to the Cotswold District Council website). Our walks appear in their What's On section.

Cirencester Scene Magazine Still publish our walks in full. When Pat missed one month as she was away and missed the deadline, they phoned up to ask why she had stopped sending them.

Publicity for the group is quite difficult to improve. The walk programmes are usually drawn up before Head Office give details of the special events. Having said this she did not think we have had any real membership increase when we have participated in the past. Below are the events planned for next year.

Festival of Winter Walks 2011/12 Saturday 24 December 2011 - Monday 2 January 2012. We will include our New Years Day walk in this and arrange publicity.

Action: Pat to arrange publicity.

Coast for Most Weekend/The Big Welsh Walk Saturday 5 - Sunday 6 May 2012. A one-off event will be held to celebrate the Wales coastal path, which the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) plans to launch on Saturday 5 May. Groups to head to the seaside for a coastal walk anywhere in Great Britain on the weekend of the launch. In Wales these will be promoted as part of the Big Welsh Walk. This date might change if WAG changes its plans.

Get Walking for the Games Weekend (Get Walking Day 2012) Saturday 26 - Sunday 27 May 2012. The Ramblers' flagship walking event giving thousands of people across the country the opportunity to experience the joys and benefits of walking and to discover the Ramblers. Action is already in hand to put on a short (under 8km/5 miles), easy walk over the weekend.

8. **Footpath Secretary & Access Officer's Report (Richard Holmes)**

Richard started by thanking the footpath committee for all their help and support. The members currently are Coralie Dustin, Bill Irving, John Bookwood, Roy Shepherd, Bill White, Barbara Cobbett (minutes) and Jill Byrne (Area Secretary).

Special thanks to Roy Shepherd who is leaving the Footpath Committee after many years service. Roy has also been responsible for the Group Maps a task he understood was being passed to Coralie.

Over the past year the Footpath Committee has held four meetings and we are currently monitoring 12 footpath issues. We have reported footpath difficulties across the group area plus other parts of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire including site visits to Bagendon, Edgeworth, Southrop, Cirencester, Welford and Lechlade.

Committee members regularly walk paths thought to be at risk – Water Park and monitoring of temporary closures.

The most interesting issues have been regarding developers in the Water Park. You may have seen Richard's recent letter in the Standard.

Negative – Lakes by Yoo – BLE44/1 Bowmoor Lake between Lechlade and Fairford is an ongoing saga. A new path was created in 2008 and immediately closed on a temporary basis by the developers. This closed a long used path going around Bowmoor Lake. The developers are able to use the temporary closure on the grounds building work presents a danger to path users and they can continue to apply for temporary closures as they are only building properties when they are sold. Lakes by Yoo clearly want this path permanently closed as it provides public access to a private estate. Quote 'The Lakes is a gated community where nature and design work in harmony to provide the ultimate rural retreat and lifestyle.'

Recently he had attended a meeting with the Parish Council, District Councillor, PROW and the developer to look at the issues and walk the disputed path. The path has all but disappeared however the development has put in new access to serve the properties which would make a good route although the views of the Lake are now limited. Clearly the selling of properties has slowed down and he guessed it will be several years before the developer can show there is no longer a need for a temporary closure. The developer has now obtained more land to the south of the Lake and has proposed a diversion. This is not satisfactory it is significantly longer, is not as attractive and does not replace the disputed path. This initial proposal by Lakes by Yoo was not considered acceptable by the Parish Council or ourselves – hence the dispute continues.

Positive – Lower Mills Lower Mills Estate – BSK 17/1 south of Somerford Keynes. This runs from the country park at Neigh Bridge towards Swillbrook Farm. It passes the lake where the beavers are being introduced. We were aware that there was a threat to this path which runs very close to the lodges. Lower Mills have proposed a diversion to run on the West and South side of Swillbrook Pools. The committee have had the opportunity to walk the proposed route, we have also attended a 'stake holders' meeting and been provided with comprehensive information regarding the

proposal. The new path is the same distance and generally offers a more interesting walk; we have therefore given our support to these proposals.

Contact with Gloucestershire CC – The annual meeting with PROW was not very positive due to the financial constraints on the Local Authority. Mike Barton, our local contact, has been given significant other responsibilities and is therefore no longer able to commit as much time to our area. Given this it is even more important that we are aware of all issues impacting on access and act accordingly. It may also be that the Ramblers will be called on to provide pressure on the LA if further cuts impact on their statutory duties.

Gloucestershire Ramblers Database – This is still growing and he now had John Bookwood as backstop to maintain the database. This is slowly expanding and is now being actively used by most of the groups in the Area.

Way-marking – Bill Irving and Richard had spent a couple of days improving way-marking, He would like to see this as an ongoing project, if only to promote Ramblers to the local community.

Planning for future – Exploring the issue of dead end paths, i.e. paths that go nowhere because of errors back in the 1940 when definitive maps were being prepared. Very little progress has been made over the last year and the deadline of 2025 is coming ever closer.

The committee is planning an initiative to look in more detail at the problem of blocked and rerouted paths in Welford. We have contacted the Parish Council and hope to be walking the paths to obtain a better understanding of the issues.

To deliver these plans we need more support. With the loss of Roy and with these new initiatives we are seeking new members to assist with the task of protecting and improving our Rights of Way network. There are a number of tasks which need support, these include general monitoring of the footpath network in the 39 parishes in the Cirencester group covers and on a more specific level there is regular monitoring of certain paths and obstructions.

Richard had finally got a date for moving permanently to Cirencester which means he would have more time to work on footpath issues and join the Sunday walks.

He finished by saying - Please feel free to grab me afterwards if you are interested in joining the Footpath Committee or if you have any individual footpath issues.

9. Area Representative's Report (Phil Gearing)

Phil Gearing, as the group's Area Representative, presented his report. He had missed several meetings this year owing to work commitments. Phil advised the meeting that the Gloucestershire Area AGM will be held on 3rd December in Chedworth Village Hall hosted by us, he did not elaborate on Area Business as Richard Davies was present at the meeting.

10. International Secretary's Report (Stuart Dyer)

Stuart Dyer presented his report to the meeting and listed the activities that he had been involved in over the past year. This included walking from South Cerney to Tewkesbury with a vicar. Completing the length of Hadrian's Wall. Walking the Severn/Thames canal in two stages. A visit to Itzeho in Germany to celebrate Doerte's 80th birthday. He mentioned a letter from the Town Council which included a report on his trip. He was planning another trip to Itzehoe in 2012 from 26th August to 2nd Sept if anyone was interested. He had also organised a weekend away in Torquay, at the Carlton Hotel, and said that if anyone who had booked wanted to stay on Sunday night, they should contact the hotel individually.

11. Election of Officers

Phil asked the meeting if there were any volunteers for the vacant positions. He also stated that he would be retiring as Chairman after he had completed a ten year term (in 2015) unless of course someone else came forward beforehand.

The following officers were elected unanimously:

Office	Nominee	Nominated by	Seconded
Chairman	Phil Gearing	Mike Bailey	Coralie Dustin
Vice Chairman	Vacancy		
Secretary	Vacancy		
Membership Secretary	Mike Bailey	Pat Beckley	Pat Bookwood
Treasurer	Alan Cook	Rosemary Bailey	John Bookwood
International Secretary	Stuart Dyer	Coralie Dustin	Rosemary Bailey
Publicity Officer	Pat Beckley	John Bookwood	Pat Bookwood
Publications Officer	Bill Irving	John Hume	John Bookwood
Footpath Secretary	Richard Holmes	John Bookwood	Alan Cook
Footpath Committee	John Bookwood Coralie Dustin Richard Holmes Bill Irving Bill White Vacancy	Val Saunders	Richard Holmes
Programme Secretaries	Rosemary Bailey Pat Bookwood Wendy Veitch	John Bookwood	Mike Bailey
Area Representative	Phil Gearing	Mike Bailey	Alan Cook
Area Representative	Vacancy		
Committee Member	John Bookwood	Pat Bookwood	Coralie Dustin
Webmaster	Collin West	Mike Bailey	Alan Cook

12. Any Other Business

Richard Davies (Area Chairman)

Richard advised the following:

- There may be a Special General Meeting immediately after the Area AGM if no volunteers were found to fill the key post of Secretary and Treasurer with the aim of winding up the Gloucestershire Area. Groups would be transferred to other nearby Areas.
- The Area Website was a great success.
- There will be a new Chief Executive of the Ramblers.
- There was Legacy Income giving a favourable national balance - despite the drop in membership.
- He had taken part in a Webathon with fellow Ramblers.
- Reasons given for people leaving Ramblers included walkers were not friendly and the programme did not suit them.
- South Cotswolds group had started short Monday walks to encourage new members.
- The Countryside Report concerned monitoring planning applications.
- Gloucestershire had one Trustee representing them at Head Office.

Dogs on Walks

Mike Bailey advised the meeting on the subject of dogs on walks:- The Policy from Head Office was that The Ramblers do not ban dogs on walks. It is left up to the Areas, Groups and ultimately walk leaders to decide if dogs are allowed on a walk. A new member had challenged our blanket

ban on dogs. He had replied to her by e-mail stating that in our defence, experience has shown that our walks tend to be across farm land with livestock, and with stiles that would mean the dog would need to be on a short lead for much of the time and lifted over many of the stiles.

Ramblers are free to walk with any group, there are a few groups that operate restrictions (e.g Gloucestershire Walking Group (GWG) which is aimed at ramblers in their 20s, 30s, and 40s) he was unaware which groups in the Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Areas allow dogs on walks. Another option is to set up a Flexigroup focused on dog walking. Flexigroups is a new concept which has just been launched by the Ramblers so briefing material is very limited at the moment; but it seems to be aimed at addressing exactly this type of issue. The group would be set up under an Area and has no funds or constitution of its own; but provides a forum for ramblers who have a common interest in a particular type of walking.

Several members expressed their negative views on having dogs on walks, including travel to the start point with strange dogs in their cars; and the safety risks to ramblers if dogs should 'spook' cattle.

Brian Cooper stated that his dog had been no trouble when walking with him, and he was willing to allow dogs to join his next scheduled walk.

Vacancies on the Committee

Alan Cook suggested that we inform members who did not attend this meeting, and are on the next four walks, that there were still vacancies. It was proposed that we e-mail our members about the vacancies which exist.

Action: Mike Bailey to e-mail members with details of vacancies on the committee.

Queens Jubilee Celebrations

Cirencester were holding a fair in the Abbey grounds and it may be possible to have a Ramblers Promotion Stall during the event. Interest was expressed in helping by Pat Beckley, Mike and Rosemary Bailey and John Hume, although it was too early to confirm any arrangements.

The National Trust

Mike Bailey had been asked to liaise with the NT so that Bill White could take part in a project to supply four walks of different lengths starting from Chedworth Roman Villa.

Webmaster

A vote of thanks was recorded for the excellent work done by Collin West.

Next year's meeting will be held on Wed Oct 31st at 7-30pm at the Waterloo Community Centre.

The meeting closed at 9-30 pm.

