



The Ramblers' Association
Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area

Annual Report

1 October 2018 - 30 September 2019

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 1st February 2020 in Great Missenden Memorial Centre, Link Rd, Great Missenden HP16 9AE

Come to our Area AGM to celebrate our local volunteers and find out what Ramblers is doing for *all* walkers!

Before the AGM there is a choice of 3 walks all starting from the Link Road Car Park:

09:00 - 9.3 miles The Eastern Villages surrounding Great Missenden

10:00 - 6.25 miles The Western side of Great Missenden

11:00 - 4.2 miles Roald Dahl's Countryside Trail

The hall will be available from 1pm, for people to eat packed lunches before the meeting starts at 2pm with the formal business to review the annual report and accounts for the year and appoint the members of the area committee for the following year.

Following the formal part of the AGM, we will celebrate all the amazing work our volunteers in our groups have achieved over the previous Ramblers year (October 2018 to September 2019). Members present at the AGM will vote for the winner from those nominated by each group and we'll display the details of what they have done to deserve the title of Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes & West Middlesex Area Volunteer of the Year 2019.

Following a break for light refreshments, we will hear from Ramblers Trustee Sophie Clissold-Lesser and there will be an opportunity for friendly questions and discussion. This is your chance to make your views known on how the Ramblers operates, whether locally or nationally.

If you would like to get involved there are some vacancies for Area Officers, including Area Secretary, any offers of help, or enquiries about what is involved are warmly welcome.

At the Area AGM we elect our two members of Ramblers General Council, who are entitled to speak and vote at the Annual General Council meeting, taking place on the 4th-5th April 2020 in Bristol; expenses are paid by Central Office. If you wish to put your name forward or to find out more about what is involved, please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

Directions: (Explorer 181, grid reference SP895014). The hall is a few minutes walk from the station, across Link Road from the main village car park. Parking at the hall is very limited and will not be available in the morning, as there is another booking; local public car parks charge on Saturdays.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 1st February 2020
in Great Missenden Memorial Centre**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 2nd February 2019 (incorporated in the Annual Report, pages 3-5)
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:

(a) Chairman	p6	(i) News Editor	p12
(b) Acting Secretary's Report	p6	(j) Publicity Officer	p12
(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts	p7	(k) Area Web Site	p12
(d) Footpath Secretary's Report	p9	(l) Walks Editor	p12
(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report	p10	(m) Member and ALO Reps	p12
(f) Membership Secretary's Report	p11	(n) Countryside Secretary	p12
(g) Access Officer's Report	p12	(o) Local Group Reports	p13
(h) Press Officer's Report	p12		
5. To consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Acting Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 25th January 2020)
6. Election of Officers:

(a) *Chairman	(h) Press Officer
(b) *Vice-Chairman	(i) Access Officer
(c) *Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)	(j) News Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(d) *Treasurer	(k) Countryside Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)
(e) *Footpath Secretary	(l) Publicity Officer (<i>vacant</i>)
(f) Membership Secretary	(m) Walks Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator	

Nominations are invited for all posts
Only those marked * are required by the constitution to be elected at the AGM
7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups:
 - (a) Not more than 5 representatives of Individual Members
 - (b) Not more than 5 representatives of Local Organisations affiliated to Ramblers
(In recent years none of the places in the latter category have been filled)
8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2020 General Council AGM
10. Any other business
11. Speakers and discussion

Section 2) Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2019

Held at 2.00 pm on Saturday, 2nd February 2019 in St. Anne's Church Hall, Wendover

[Note that, for data protection reasons, personal names, other than those of persons elected, have been omitted from this version of the minutes, whilst they are retained in the file copy to be signed at the meeting. The relevant names can be revealed at the meeting on request.]

22 members added their names to the attendance list.

The Chairman introduced the Annual General Meeting, welcomed those present and thanked volunteers for their work.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from 5 members.

The meeting noted with sadness the recent deaths of a former Aylesbury Group Secretary and a longstanding Hillingdon Group member and walk leader.

2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 3rd February 2018 were signed as a correct record.

3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. There were no matters arising not considered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. Annual Report and Accounts

The Chairman drew attention to the printed copies of the Annual Report which contained reports from Area Officers. Additional comments made during the meeting included the following:

(a) Chairman's Report:

The Chairman commented on the need to celebrate our achievements and for groups to learn from the successes of other groups. A future meeting of the Area Executive Committee would focus on group achievements.

(b) Acting Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts:

The meeting was asked to approve the accounts (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con.

(d) Footpath Secretary's Report:

The Footpath Secretary stated that a new Path Check co-ordinator was needed for South Bucks District and asked those present to approach potential volunteers. Buckinghamshire County Council were consulting about their Rights of Way Improvement Plan and members were encouraged to comment. There was discussion on the relative merits of reporting problems via PathWatch or the BCC website.

(e) North Bucks ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise (NB rRIPPLE) Report:

The NB rRIPPLE Coordinator reported that his group was seeking "local heroes": residents frustrated with the state of their paths and actively seeking improvements.

(f) Membership Secretary's Report:

The Membership Secretary reported that Area membership currently stood at 2368. Up to date information was available on the Ramblers website, with personal details available to membership secretaries. There was discussion on the possibilities of family membership and affiliate membership of groups. Some groups had found that, though overall membership had declined, numbers of members walking had not changed significantly.

(g) Access Officer's Report:

The Access Officer reported that work on bridges in Buckinghamshire was slow, a survey on work needed having showed more than expected.

(h) Press Officer's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(i) News Editor:
Nothing to add to written report..

(j) Publicity Officer:
Nothing to add to written report.

(k) Area Web Site:
Nothing to add to written report.

(l) Walk Descriptions:
Anyone wishing to adopt a route for inspection and correction should inform the Acting Secretary.

(m) Individual Member Representative and Affiliated Local Organisation reports
The Chairman thanked a member who was retiring as a representative of individual members.

(n) Greater London:
The London Volunteer Network had held a meeting and a social media workshop.

(o) Planning and countryside
Nothing to add to written report.

(p) Local Group Reports.
North West London Group was to hold a delayed AGM in late March to establish future viability. A question was asked on the membership profiles of Chiltern Young Walkers and Chilterns Weekend Walkers.
The Chairman asked the meeting to approve the Annual Report (duly proposed and seconded).
Carried nem con.

5. **Motions:** to consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by 26th January 2019):
“That clause 3 of the Area constitution be amended by deleting ‘ Ealing,’ replacing the comma after ‘Harrow’ by ‘ and’, and deleting ‘ and Hounslow’.” (duly proposed and seconded). Carried unanimously. The amendment had the required approval from the Board of Trustees.

6. Election of Officers

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman	Paul Rhodes	All duly proposed	All duly seconded
Vice-Chairman	John Elfes		
Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Treasurer	John Esslemont		
Footpath Secretary	Kate Ashbrook		
Membership Secretary	John Wainwright		
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook		
Area Access Officer	John Elfes		
Walks Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
NB rRIPPLE Coordinator	Bill Piers		
Area News Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>		

In the absence of nominations for the post of Secretary, John Esslemont agreed to continue as Acting Secretary until a replacement could be found. An offer was made to assist with the role.

7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups

- (a) Representatives of Individual Members
Roy Johnson (duly proposed and seconded) was elected.
- (b) There were no nominations for representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

Brian Baldwin, having indicated that he was willing to continue in post, was appointed (duly proposed and seconded).

9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2019 General Council AGM

Duly proposed and seconded and agreed by those present that Pat Endacott and Jacqui Stiefel be appointed. Members wishing to attend as Area visitors should inform the Acting Secretary before the end of February.

10. Any Other Business

The North West London Group Treasurer thanked Area officers for their support in seeking to secure the future of the Group. The Chairman had enjoyed the group's walks that he had attended.

The formal business of the meeting concluded at 3.00pm.

11. Speakers

The NB rRIPPLE Coordinator gave a talk on the work involved in installing a gate, illustrated by photographs of an installation at Ludgershall in honour of his grandson. In response to a question he explained the benefits of not using concrete.

One of his team explained the Donate-a-Gate scheme and discussed NB rRIPPLE's progress in encouraging localism. He explained the processes in setting a job up, and why it was not always possible for the group to undertake requested work. Their 150th installation was expected to be undertaken the following week.

The Area Footpath Secretary, speaking as a Trustee, reported that the Board, staff and volunteers were now working effectively as a team with a clear vision., with plenty of opportunities for development. Membership growth remained a priority, whilst future support for Walking for Health was in doubt in the absence of an external sponsor. The Festival of Winter Walks had focussed on making contact with lonely people.

The Area Chairman, also speaking as a Trustee, referred to recent press coverage for Ramblers and showed the information available to all members on the membership summary dashboard.

Speaking as Area Chairman he thanked those who had attended and helped with the meeting and the morning's walk.

Section 4) Area Annual Report 1 October 2018 - 30 September 2019

Chairman's Report

2018 to 2019 has seen our groups in Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area continue their work to get people walking and to protect and expand the areas we walk in. The year has seen many incursions into the countryside and to footpaths for the preparation of the HS2 railway line. Discussions of its future continue at a national level, the impact on the West Middlesex and Buckinghamshire Countryside has become far more visible. None more so than in Great Missenden where we are holding our AGM. The area has had support from Staff centrally on the impacts of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway which has widened out to the planning of the CaMKOx (Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford) Arc development which includes all of the proposals for housing and infrastructure across the wider region affecting the Ramblers areas on route.

Another year has seen our successful donate a gate scheme with the wonderful efforts of North Bucks rRipple and the addition of Gift Aid. The scheme goes from strength to strength and with a new approach to target as many gates in a parish as possible will help more people go on short walks where they live.

In an improvement on last year three of our groups saw a growth in membership as did those members who choose not to become a member of a specific group and to join the area. In the coming year we should all look at how we can replicate the success of the growing groups. Chiltern Young Walkers saw great membership growth and have been very active in the use of the New Ramblers App and walk register and the data gathered has provided an interesting and useful insight into the groups walks.

Paul Rhodes

Acting Secretary's Report

Having served as Acting Area Secretary in addition to Area Treasurer for almost seven years since we failed to fill the post of Secretary at the 2013 AGM, I remain keen to find somebody willing to take over from me. It need not be excessively onerous or time consuming, and job sharing is possible: I am very grateful to Jacqui Stiefel for agreeing to take on the editing of this Annual Report and for making arrangements for the 2020 AGM. Other posts left unfilled at the 2019 AGM have also failed to attract volunteers.

I see the Secretary's job as being to do what nobody else does, and I thank our other officers for all their work. The Area Executive Committee met four times during the year; one meeting was timed to allow discussion of the motions submitted for consideration by General Council. Part of an Area's task is to keep informed of the activities of our Groups. Communication is patchy, and I am grateful to those Groups which do let us know what they are doing.

A motion passed by the 2019 General Council meeting called for greater diversity of council membership, and we appealed in the December issue of *South East Walker* for members to consider putting their names forward for election at the forthcoming AGM as members with speaking and voting rights, or alternatively to attend the General Council meeting as visitors (without such rights) at Area expense. It has been Area policy that we are willing to pay for up to two visitors, but nobody attended in that capacity in 2019.

Just after the end of the reporting year, in early October, I attended one of a series of meetings for Area Chairs, Secretaries and Treasurers designed to facilitate the exchange of views on problems facing Areas and their Groups, and ideas of good practice in forwarding the Ramblers' objectives.

John Esslemont

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with Central Office recommendations, showing actual receipts and actual payments during the accounting year, October 2018 to September 2019. Thus gift aid on this year's eligible donations, £576.78 received in October 2019, will be included in next year's accounts, whilst the gift aid of £781.42, shown in this year's accounts, was for donations made in the previous year. Payments for hall bookings for both the 2019 (£45) and 2020 (£50) AGMs were made during the 2018-19 accounting year, together with a refundable deposit of £150 for the 2020 AGM. An invoice for our share of printing costs for the September issue of *South East Walker* had not been received by the end of September, so the payment of £751.57 covered just three issues.

Up to date accounts are circulated to committee members prior to each meeting of the Area Executive Committee for scrutiny and subsequent approval at the meeting. Two signatories are required to make any withdrawals by cheque or internet banking from the Area's bank account. Current cheque signatories are the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer while, in addition to those, the Membership Secretary is authorised for internet banking.

Ramblers' accounts are required to show expenditure under headings relating to our charitable objects. The fact that we had no expenditure under two such headings ("Countryside" and "Access") should not be taken as meaning we were inactive; rather this, and the low level of governance expenditure, reflect the negligible cost of email communication and the generosity of officers and other volunteers in not claiming expenses to which they may be entitled.

Our expenditure under the "Rights of Way" heading has again increased, thanks to the excellent practical work being undertaken by the NB rRIPPLE team, working in north Buckinghamshire; much of the expenditure has been offset by our "Donate-a-Gate" scheme, with donations mainly from individuals and parish councils. We are also registered to claim gift aid on eligible donations. Donations are treated as restricted funds, to be used only for replacement of stiles by gates.

Our other main expenditure is on funding to groups and for our share of the costs of *South East Walker*. Both are somewhat lower this year, reflecting not only non-payment for the September issue (referred to above) but also the transfer of West London Group to Inner London Area.

Our main fund reserves at 30th September 2019 stood at 94% of annual expenditure excluding payments to groups (41% including group payments), within the recommended range of 40-100%.

I would like to thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in notifying me of funding requirements for the year to September 2020 and for completing their end of year accounts and annual returns. Also, I thank the Area Independent Examiner for scrutinising and checking the Area accounts, and group Independent Examiners for similar work at group level.

The following table gives a brief summary of group main fund income and expenditure. Self funded activities such as socials and coach trips are not included. Columns are (A) main fund balance at start of year + (B) funding via Area + (C) other main fund income – (D) walks related expenditure including programmes – (E) other main fund expenditure = (F) main fund balance at end of year. (G) is any funds designated for particular use in future years and (H) is reserves (F-G as a percentage of D+E).

	A	+	B	+	C	-	D	-	E	=	F	G	H
Amersham	804		510		418		130		564		1038	229	116
Aylesbury	463		373		190		152		517		357	0	53
Chiltern YW	248		190		0		84		0		354	250	124
Chilterns WW	698		347		0		95		517		433	250	30
Hike MK	42		28		0		0		39		31	0	79
Hillingdon	1002		307		110		106		278		1035	700	87
Milton Keynes	146		336		0		147		129		206	0	75
NW London	482		100		0		457		60		65	0	13
Wycombe	838		414		60		186		787		339	50	30

John Esslemont

Note: The accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on the following page. The signed copy may be viewed on request.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED**30th September 2019**

	Year ended	30/9/19	30/9/18
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		5000.00	7000.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		7732.05	5970.00
Gift Aid on donations		<u>781.42</u>	<u>1033.56</u>
Total income		13513.47	14003.56
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		2606.35	3902.50
Promoting Walking (South East Walker)		751.57	1270.34
Rights of Way: main fund		928.47	627.39
restricted fund (gate installation)		9304.14	7983.71
Governance: Area committee meetings		105.00	71.25
Area AGMs		95.00	80.00
Refundable deposit for 2020 AGM		150.00	0.00
GDPR meeting		0.00	23.62
Annual Report		6.00	7.00
Bank charges		<u>2.40</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total expenditure		13948.93	13965.81
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		355.21	1017.90
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>-790.67</u>	<u>-980.15</u>
Total		-435.46	37.75
Funds brought forward from previous year		3130.70	3092.95
Funds carried forward to next year		2695.24	3130.70

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:			
Main fund balance in bank at 30 th September		1912.82	1557.61
Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 th September		<u>782.42</u>	<u>1573.09</u>
Total assets		2695.24	3130.70
Liabilities:			
		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total liabilities		0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 2695.24</u>	<u>£ 3130.70</u>

John Esslemont, Treasurer

17th October 2019**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S STATEMENT:**

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination guidelines, I consider the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area accounts to give a fair representation of the Area's/Group's financial activities for the year to 30th September 2019.

Brian Baldwin, Independent Examiner

17th October 2019

Footpath Secretary's Report

Path Checkers are asked to walk all the paths in their parishes at least once a year and to report problems. They will also be consulted about any proposals for path changes. New volunteers are always welcome and are invited to discuss what is involved with me, or with their group footpath secretary.

During the year our path checkers walked many miles, checking the paths in their parishes and reporting problems to the highway authorities. The results were collated by the path-check coordinator for each district and borough.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 53 out of 111 parishes and 1,016 out of 2,183 paths, walking 809 kms and reporting 333 problems. This took at least 894 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were poor stiles and gates, cropping, and missing waymarks, signposts and bridges.

In Chiltern District only nine of 18 parishes were checked, some partially. 111 problems were found, the most common being waymarks (41%), signposts (16%) and over or undergrowth (15%). There were only three ploughing problems, but nine fallen trees or branches. These results include a group pathcheck afternoon in Great Missenden (which had not been checked for some time). 14 volunteers checked 44 paths out of 82 and 43 reportable problems were found.

In South Bucks seven parishes were checked and problems were reported, such as overgrowth and other obstructions.

In Wycombe District we received returns for 19 out of 28 parishes; 83 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 64 problems were reported. Volunteers spent about 313 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

In Milton Keynes 760 paths of the total of 776 in the 48 parishes were checked and 472 problems were found. Volunteers walked 542 km and spent more than 346 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing signposts and waymarks, overgrowth, poor gates and stiles, cropping and unofficial diversions.

Our new checker for parts of the London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow undertook some useful surveying and reported problems to the councils., in particular the lack of signposts and waymarks.

Our Aylesbury and District group footpath secretary, Roy Johnson, has checked and tidied up or reported problems on the three group-related routes, namely the Round Aylesbury Walk, the Aylesbury Ring and the Outer Aylesbury Ring and its accompanying circular walks. In particular, this year he has improved the waymarking on the Round Aylesbury Walk and identified several places where extra signpost arms would be beneficial, to be fitted later in 2019.

There were 19 path-change proposals during the year and we objected to two of them. One was a path diversion onto an inferior route in Little Missenden, which was withdrawn in the face of objections. The other was a diversion from cross-field to headland in connection with the Waddesdon Greenway, and we are waiting to hear its fate.

We complained about the year-long closure, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, of Fawley footpath 12 due to a missing footbridge at Fawley Court, near Henley; the alternative is along the dangerous A4155 Marlow-Henley road.

We took part in a consultative meeting about the revised Buckinghamshire rights-of-way improvement plan, and the formal consultation was published after the year's end.

We continue to be worried about the shortage of rights-of-way staff in all our local authorities. On 1 April 2020 Buckinghamshire becomes a unitary authority and it will be important to ensure that rights of way and access are well embedded and adequately staffed.

I should like to thank, in particular, John Elfes, Martin Harris (who is now in Inner London Area and keen for us to find another volunteer to act as coordinator for South Bucks), Roy Johnson, David Reed and Jeff Smith for all their help in analysing path check, corresponding with path checkers, checking their own parishes, and generally giving me welcome support and assistance. We are indebted to all our path checkers for their vigilance on paths in their patch and for their advice on path changes.

Kate Ashbrook

Footpath improvement by North Bucks rRIPPLE ***(ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)***

Do we actually make a difference? That is the question. We've been doing a bit of soul searching. It's all very well replacing 1 or 2 dilapidated stiles each week but does it actually get more people out into the North Bucks countryside? Fixing 1, 2 or even 3 stiles in a row somewhere out in the middle of nowhere at BCC's behest is only somewhat satisfying. What we've decided to aim at and promote are routes that are most likely to be used by numerous people. To this end we are working with Simply Walk and with several keen parish councils where there is a realistic possibility of creating stile-free village circular walks that less able residents can readily use.

We may be known or even famous for installing gates, but to create such circular walks we have to do the ground work. We regularly negotiate with parish councillors, local residents, farmers and landowners to allow us to request a CAMS (Countryside Access Management System) Job Sheet from BCC to change stiles into gates. BCC doesn't have the manpower to chase down nice-to-have gates, being concerned with resolving reported problems that could be anywhere and possibly in isolated locations. We are currently developing such walks by talking to, emailing and meeting with people in Dinton, Ford, Hulcott, Oakley, Oving, Padbury and Westcott. Such negotiating is not something that appears to come naturally to Ramblers members – nor in fact to local residents, who seem reluctant to rock-the-boat. It isn't easy, can be frustrating and challenging and ultimately disappointing. However, when a series of gates is eventually put in place, it is extremely satisfying with local walkers expressing their heartfelt gratitude at being able to access fields and complete little loops that have been off-piste for years. You only have to look at the photos of the 200 plus stile-to-gate conversions we've completed to see a selection of the impregnable barriers that continue to deny so many walkers access to the countryside.

We are working on producing a simple document aimed at reluctant farmers which will include endorsements from farmers who are thoroughly satisfied with the stile-to-gate conversions on their land. Sheep farmers have a valid concern over the minority of irresponsible dog owners, making life difficult for the majority of responsible ones. Farmers who've had bad experiences with dogs off leads, are by far the most difficult to persuade to make life any easier for walkers, and who can blame them. Education and improved signage is the way forward we believe. Many walks, such as Haddenham to Dinton, on the Wychert Way are fully gated and pass through sheep fields without reported incidents.

A second Guidance Note is planned aimed at encouraging people to negotiate locally with landowners. Local knowledge is the key to finding out who the landowner or farmer is. Someone locally will almost certainly know them and can go and talk to them expounding the benefits of replacing dangerous dilapidated stiles with self-closing, self-latching, stock-proof, long-lasting, maintenance-free, galvanised-steel gates. Who could possibly say no?

A major achievement in May 2019 was to install four gates eliminating a long-standing problem section on the Wychert Way at Notley Farm. Jim Robinson, who did so much to set up the Wychert Way, and who very sadly died prematurely in January 2019, would have been chuffed to bits with the news that we eventually succeeded where he'd been frustrated for so many years. Jim's fellow Haddenham Rambler, Brian Bowman, is to be heartily congratulated for his timely and successful negotiation with the farmer. The gates were donated by Aylesbury Ramblers and fitted with appropriate plaques in memory of Jim.

Our Donate One Gate Get One For Free (DOGGOFF) has proved popular and we average just over one gate per week. Thanks go to our team of regular enthusiasts which has increased from seven to nine with occasional guest appearances, such as Ramblers HQ based Delivery Officer, Michael Hopkins. Jerry Michell diligently continues as my #2 and takes the Land Rover and team out when I'm not available. Within the Ramblers we remain one of very few totally self-sufficient footpath maintenance groups. We have our own 4x4 vehicle, trailer, full complement of hand and power tools and for £200/annum we have a storage site at Chinnor RFC in Thame, for gates, posts and tamping-in stones. Our quarterly Activity Report on our web page is timed to coincide with our report that's published in South East Walker – www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.

Bill Piers, North Bucks rRIPPLE Co-ordinator

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituents at 30 September 2019 and at 30 September 2018 for comparison. Area Membership relates to those members who have joined the Area in recent years and opted not to be allocated to a group. Non Group Members are those members who joined prior to the 1990s when members were not allocated to a group by default and who did not opt to join a group.

	2019	2018	Difference	% Difference
Ramblers	102,038	102,818	-780	-1%
Area	2,348	2,882	-534	-19%
Like for Like ¹		2,406	-58	-2%
Groups				
Amersham & District	397	409	-12	-3%
Aylesbury & District	262	282	-20	-7%
Hillingdon	289	314	-25	-8%
Milton Keynes & District	225	229	-4	-2%
North West London	208	208	0	0%
West London	0	476	-476	-100%
Wycombe District	297	310	-13	-4%
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	349	343	6	2%
Hike MK	44	42	2	5%
Chiltern Young Walkers	127	116	11	9%
	2,198	2,729	-531	-19%
Individuals				
Area Membership	61	56	5	9%
Awaiting Allocation	1	1	0	0%
Non Group Members	80	91	-11	-12%
	142	148	-6	-4%
Affiliated Clubs	3	5	-2	-40%

During the year the Board of Trustees approved a three year membership growth plan to reverse the fifteen year decline of Ramblers membership. The plan comprehensively covers all matters affecting membership. The rate of decline of Ramblers membership slowed during the year to 1%.

Following the decision taken at the 2018 Area Annual General Meeting and confirmed at West London group's own Special General Meeting, the group moved to the Inner London Area at the beginning of the 2018-19 financial year. As the West London group was the largest group in the Area, this has led to a significant fall in Area membership. Not taking into account the membership of the West London group, the rate of decline of Area membership slowed during the year to 2%.

Whilst the membership of most of the geographical groups declined, the membership of all of the younger people's groups increased.

John Wainwright

¹ Excluding the move of the West London group to Inner London Area

Access Officer's Report

No contribution had been received from John Elfes, the Area Access Officer, by the time the report was finalised. John has reported to the Area Executive Committee on the activities of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. Topics have included the county's sample survey of ease of use of paths, the introduction of CAMS Web, with improved problem reporting, the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the impact of HS2 on rights of way.

Press Officer's Report

I have nothing to report for the year but would remind members that I am always ready to publicise Ramblers' issues throughout our territory.

Kate Ashbrook

News Editor

This post was not filled at the 2019 AGM. The Acting Secretary has endeavoured to ensure that sufficient material has been forthcoming for our Area's page in *South East Walker*.

Publicity, Area Web Site and Walk Descriptions

The posts of Publicity Officer and Walks Editor were not filled at the 2019 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups. Lawrence Jones, who has continued as Area Webmaster in the absence of other volunteers, remains willing to advise groups on publicity matters. Walk descriptions and associated information on our website are likely to become increasingly outdated.

Representatives of Individual Members and of Affiliated Local Organisations

The inclusion of such representatives on the Area Executive Committee is specified not just in our own constitution but also in the Model Area Constitution approved as part of Ramblers' constitutional documents. In recent years none of our local organisations have appointed representatives. There is no formal definition of the role of "representative of individual members" and we have used it as a means of adding useful additional individuals to the Area Executive Committee, either by election or by co-option.

Countryside Secretary

This post was not filled at the 2019 AGM. The Footpath Secretary has made representations, where appropriate, on planning applications directly affecting rights of way. Broader issues are handled on an ad-hoc basis, or by our groups.

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

Amersham & District Group continue to offer a packed Programme with over 250 walks of varying lengths and levels of difficulty. As we frequently offer walks on every day except Monday, we regularly welcome walkers from other groups. The annual holiday in October 2018 to Selworthy was enjoyed by over 30 members, the beautiful day on Exmoor with spectacular views from Dunkery Beacon was particularly memorable. The long-distance walkers completed the Cotswold Way and are making good progress along the South Downs Way – Ramblers from other groups are welcome to join, so please get in touch. Our annual social events, the Christmas lunch and summer BBQ, were both well attended. In June, our Chairman hosted a Volunteers' lunch which was a great success and very much appreciated - as we are a large group it enabled us to meet all those who contribute to the smooth running of our group but walk on different days. Also, we now have a new website, it has been refreshed and updated by our new Membership Secretary, it is a great improvement and has already attracted new members.

Kate Lambourne, Secretary

Aylesbury and District Group

The group walk programme continued to be extremely well supported with healthy numbers walking and group membership numbers stable.

There has been an increase in the popularity of the weekly Thursday and Sunday walks with them now accounting for almost 90% of total walker numbers. Conversely the bi weekly Tuesday walks have seen numbers decline slightly. Only one walk was cancelled due to bad weather. Monthly path checking and maintenance walks continue with a regular team of volunteers.

Both group social events, the Winter Meal and Picnic by the pond were well attended and enjoyed by all.

Walking holidays in the South Downs in April and in Pembroke in early June were both well subscribed and bookings are already being made for a repeat of the South Downs holiday next year. We lost three very dedicated Aylesbury ramblers during the year – all of whom had held various positions on the Committee – Jim Robinson, Stephen O'Shea and Mike Roe – they will all be sadly missed.

Carolyn Brown, Chair

Chiltern Young Walkers

The Chiltern Young Walkers continues to Thrive. Overall our membership continues to increase albeit with fluctuations, and now stands at 127 (Oct-19), which has been a continued increase over the last three years.

We have successfully held a walk every weekend with total of 90 walks which is the highest overall number of walks in 4 years! We have also been successfully using the Ramblers Walks Register via the Ramblers App for a year. The data collated from the App enables us to understand what makes a walk popular, it is also a fantastic tool for increasing membership.

The group held six amazing weekends away this year all over the UK; first to the New Forest in Oct-18, second to Oundle in Mar-19, third to the Peak District in Jun-19. Also in Jun-19 we went to the National Young Ramblers Weekend Away in Cambridge where we met with other Young Ramblers Groups. In Jul-19 we spent a week in the Lake District and then in Aug-19 we went to the Edinburgh Fringe.

Our socials this year have been a great variety ranging from pub nights, to ceilidhs, to zoos and even hen dos! We have successfully held a social every month except for January but that was due to snow, the group has been as active socially as we have been walking.

Overall despite the challenges the CYW faces, the committee remain optimistic for the future of the group which continues to be a fun and friendly young Ramblers walking group. I would like to thank those who have led a walk, organised a social or served on the committee. The Group would not exist without the continued support and you all volunteer each month.

Jacqui Stiefel, Chair

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

During the past 12 months we managed to put on a very creditable 163 walks (compared to 146 in the prior year) which were led by 53 different walk leaders. Average walker numbers were identical to previous years and our overall membership numbers seem to have plateaued after recent steep declines.

There were 9 weekends and trips away covering a varied range of UK destinations for both the longer distance and more leisurely walkers within our group.

We held another very successful beginner's navigation course which has resulted in several new walk leaders.

We have postponed further development of our website until current developments with the Ramblers website are complete.

We remain compliant with Ramblers guidance on the implementation of GDPR.

We checked 86% of the paths within the Lacey Green parish ensured that they remain free of litter. 11 Issues have been reported to Bucks CC.

Although without a Social Secretary, there have been over 30 social events during the year including various pub nights, a Christmas lunch, a post Christmas party and a Summer BBQ.

Steve Dowling, Chair

Hike MK

No contribution had been received from the group by the time the report was finalised.

Hillingdon and District Group

Our group continues to offer a wide programme of walks ranging from 3 to 15 miles or more mainly on Wednesdays and at the weekends. We have an excellent cohort of walk leaders. Although we continue to operate without a chairman, we feel that the committee has worked well as a team. We have two further vacancies, namely footpath secretary and publicity officer.

In May Hillingdon Ramblers celebrated the life of one of our long-standing members, Ron Dyke, with a circular walk through our local area with a break for refreshments provided by our catering committee. It was a beautiful day and we were pleased that Ron's children, their partners, grandchildren and great grandchildren were able to join us.

In the spring we had a successful walking holiday in Dorset organised by two of our members.

This year the Committee agreed to use funds to finance 3 gates to replace worn out stiles in the Burnham Beeches area.

Social events included a successful Christmas lunch at a new venue, and in April the Catering Committee organised a treasure hunt in the Ruislip area followed by a hot lunch.

During the year the Hillingdon Ramblers website has been updated. The website and our web page on the Ramblers Association website are becoming more important as means of publicising our walks. We also attended the Pinner Village Fair in September in order to promote our group

and the work of the Ramblers Association. We have also produced a flyer to advertise our activities.

Next year we planning a range of activities and events in order to celebrate our Golden Jubilee.

Ralph Turner (acting Chairman)

Milton Keynes and District Group

This year saw the group celebrate its 40th anniversary. This was marked with a buffet after our Xmas walk.

The other event of note was the efforts put in to support the nomination for the Best Walking Neighbourhood. Filming, radio and TV appearances followed. Milton Keynes finally achieved 3rd place after the vote.

We have managed to maintain our membership at 230. Welcoming 19 new members into the group. We continue to publicise the group, Peter has ensured our programmes are in the outdoor shops and libraries.

Elaine has decided to retire as Programme Secretary therefore I would like to record our thanks for doing this role for the last 3 years. Also stepping down is Gail who had continued to support the group at area level, once again many thanks.

We held another successful coach trip, this year to Great Malvern and next year's planning is already underway.

Locally our path checker submitted reports for all 48 parishes, and excellent effort. We have had new walk leader come forward and enjoyed numerous local walks throughout the year.

We completed the 1066 Country Walk and Link in Sussex and commenced the Saxon Shore Way. Our annual Easter walking continued with the Wales Coast Path, as it will do for a few more years yet.

Ian Dunford, Chairman

North West London Group

The North West group has overcome its transitional problems. It now has an active committee and runs smoothly. We have been able to provide a walk each Sunday of the year but for one occasion when engineering problems complicated train access to the start of the walk. We are glad to report that attendance has also increased slightly and more people are turning up for the walks. The group membership remains stable, fluctuating between 203-209 members. We are looking forward to continuing this upwards trend over the next year.

Henriette Van Zaelen (acting General Secretary)

Wycombe District Group

Looking back over the last eight years or so there's no doubt our membership has declined - however our 'active' membership remains much the same. We run a very full walks program with four walks most weeks. The Wednesday 6-7 milers are the most popular with a few people now keen to add in the odd walk of 8-9 miles.

Social events since the last report have been a Festive meal at Christmas and a summer BBQ - both well supported. This year's weekend away in Derbyshire was very successful helped by the excellent weather. We used HF guides for the first time to ease the organisational burden and will do so again in 2020.

This November Alan Williams will stand down as Treasurer. We would all like to thank Alan for the hard work and commitment he has given over the last eleven years - but it won't be the last we see of him!

Pat Endacott, Chair

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2018 - September 2019

Chairman	Paul Rhodes	01442 398792	paul_j_rhodes@hotmail.com
Vice-Chairman	John Elfes	01494 771542	johnelfes@btinternet.com
Secretary	vacant: John Esslemont has continued as Acting Secretary		
Treasurer	John Esslemont	01494 881597	johnandjean@thamesinternet.com
Footpath Secretary	Kate Ashbrook	01491 638396	ashbrookk@aol.com
Membership Secretary	John Wainwright	01582 864972	bmkwmams@yahoo.co.uk
North Bucks rRIPPLE	Bill Piers	07799 110128	williamjsbpiers@gmail.com
Countryside Secretary	vacant		
News Editor	vacant		
Publicity Officer	vacant		
Walks Editor	vacant		
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook	(as above)	
Access Officer	John Elfes	(as above)	
Representatives of Individual Members			
	Roy Johnson	01296 486350	roy.johnson5@tiscali.co.uk
Representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations			
	vacant		
Group Representatives			
Each of our groups is entitled to appoint two members of the Area Executive Committee, and substitutes are welcome to attend meetings of the committee.			

Area website: www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk

Groups

Walks and other activities within our Area are organised by our nine groups:

Amersham and District Group	https://www.amershamramblers.org.uk/
Aylesbury and District Group	http://www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk/
Chiltern Young Walkers	https://www.chilterns2030s.org.uk/
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	https://www.chilternswalk.co.uk/
Hike MK	https://www.mk-northbucks2030s.org.uk/
Hillingdon and District Group	https://www.hillingdonramblers.org.uk/
Milton Keynes and District Group	http://www.mkrampers.org.uk/
North West London Group	https://www.ramblers.org.uk/north-west-london
Wycombe District Group	https://www.wycomberampers.org.uk/