

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT ALTON METHODIST CHURCH
ON THURSDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 2016 at 7.pm.

PRESENT: Chester Whapshare, Chairman.

Rosemary Cornick, Secretary.

Trevor Plumbley, Treasurer.

Anthony Collins, Membership Secretary.

John Jones, Website Officer/ Programme Secretary.

Rob Hannah, Footpath Secretary.

Roy Kirby, Social Secretary.

And 24 members of the Alton Ramblers.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Lynn Francis, Francoise Galley, Stuart Tuttlebury, Valerie Woods, Sue Bradford, Caroline Lemka, Mary Mc Allister, Carol Jones, Ling Barrett, David Bell, Tony May, Libby May, Chris Lowther, Ann Lowther, Jenny Rigby, John Williams, Christine Williams, Robin Hamilton, Howard Lindsey, Eric Smith, Helen Smith and Mui Clough.
2. **MINUTES OF THE AGM** held on Tuesday 10th November 2015 were proposed by Penny Cushing, seconded by Penny Varnam and accepted.
3. **MATTERS ARISING:** Penny Varnam asked if the map reading course had been viable and there been any new leaders? Chester replied that the first course 10 had attended and 6 had gone on to lead walks. The second course had not been so successful, but people may lead walks for the next programme. The Committee would look to see if it would be run again.
4. **CHIAIRMAN'S REPORT** – Chester Whapshare reported as follows:

We have all been on some glorious walks this summer and I hope that winter will be as good.

In February I went with Rosemary to the Hampshire AGM where we were given an excellent report on the progress of the coastal path through Hampshire. That same month we brought back the leaders meeting which was well attended with much lively discussion.

Ray and Di led a walk for Alton Walking Festival and soon after that we were host to 10 French Ramblers from Pertuis which is twinned with Alton. In June some of us took to a Ramblers Holiday to Derbyshire and when autumn came some members went on the first aid course and others completed the map reading course which was led again by Rob Hannah.

There were also 3 social events. 6 kissing gates were installed and a lot of path clearing done. Our bank balance is healthy thanks to the sale of 'Walks from Alton' books but I am less confident about our membership numbers.

Next year we are invited to walk from Pertuis in May and an invitation has been sent to the Italian Ramblers of Montecchio Maggiore to come and enjoy our remarkable footpath network.

I would like to thank everyone who played a part in leading walks and helping with events.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT.

Trevor Plumbley presented the Accounts for the year ending 30th September 2016. He gave the following report:

Copies of the 'Profit and Loss Account' and the 'Statement of Assets' are available to members.

MAIN- INCOME.

There were three main sources of income- an allowance from Central office, book sales and a kick-back payment from Ramblers holidays in respect of holidays booked by group members.

The book sales still provide a major source of income to the group. It is noted that the Alton Group would be short of funds without income.

MAIN – EXPENDITURE.

Our regular expense is that of printing and postal distribution of Walk Programmes. The Committee has again succeeded in reducing these costs by distributing printed copies of the programme to only those members who have requested them, the remainder being circulated via email. The Committee is encouraging more members to accept the Walk Programme by email to further reduce these costs.

The group has also further invested in some First Aid training for interested members that we trust will be to the benefit of all. In addition, some map-reading training sessions have also been held for potential walk leaders. A 'Walk Leaders' meeting was also re-introduced into our programme. These additional activities have increased our spending on training this year.

SELF – FUNDED ACTIVITIES.

Our self-funded activities (the enjoyable social events) during the year appear to have made a loss on the "receipts and payment" snapshot view basis of the accounts. However on an "accruals" basis it would have shown a small profit (we have paid £50 deposit for the 2017 New Year lunch). Also included in our self-funded activities is our subscription fee to ATTA (Alton Town Twinning Association).

RESTRICTED FUNDS.

We are grateful for the grants we have received this year from HCC for the purchase of kissing gates and also from Alton Town Council towards the cost of transportation of our visiting French Ramblers from the airport to Alton.

We have also contributed £1284.40 from our own funds towards the purchase of kissing gates which have been installed by our newly formed volunteer group. We have also spent a further £708.99 of

our funds on tools and consumables for this practical work of the group and for clearing vegetation on our local path network.

OTHER.

- a) In the coming year we have set aside £2000 for re-printing of the “Walks from Alton” book and £300 for the purchase of a brush cutter tool for our volunteer work group. This reduces our “Reserves Ratio” (money, we have in the bank divided by our annual expenditure) to an acceptable level for continued allocations of funds from Central Office.
- b) The accounts have been submitted to The Ramblers Area Treasurers in the required Ramblers Association spreadsheet format.
- c) The accounts have been examined and approved by Mrs Elspeth Mackeggie Gurney on 30th October 2106.

The Accounts were proposed by Roy Kirby, seconded by Anne Noon and adopted by all.

6. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER FOR 2017.

Elspeth Mackeggie Gurney had volunteered to undertake the duty of Independent Examiner for 2016 after David Woodward had moved from the district. It was agreed Trevor to approach her to see if she would carry on as no-one else put themselves forward as an Independent Examiner.

7. REPORTS.

7:1 PROGRAMME SECRETARY – John Jones reported as follows:

Despite the fact that we are still suffering from lack of leaders, the winter programme has been filled apart from only three walks midweek and Boxing Day. Thank you very much to those Leaders who will be leading winter walks. Unfortunately, mostly due to illness, we are still short of walk leaders so if any of you feel inclined to start leading walks you will be most welcome and there will be plenty of support from the experienced leaders and including Rob Hannah’s excellent map reading course.

I will find it helpful if someone would take on the co-ordination of the mid-week walks. This involves receiving offers of walks from leaders and checking that walks closely dated do not conflict and so give variety to the membership, and giving advice on timings and even car parking, if you have the local knowledge. Please let me know if you could do this.

Unfortunately, there was no Hampshire Rambler to distribute with our newsletter this time due to a lack of copy.

7:2 WEBSITE OFFICERS – John Jones reported a follows:

The website has been used to report a number of issues relating to paths such as the Broadview Farm development which was discussed at a South Downs planning meeting in October and the decision was deferred, and the continued closure of Kingsley path 26 and bridleway 1. If you learn of any issues that would be of interest to members, please let me know. Please keep an eye on the website for changes to walks, social events, and news, including path changes, temporary closures and planning applications which may be of interest to us.

You might like to note that The Mid Hants Railway will be holding their Annual Sponsored Walk on Saturday 12th November 2106. More details are available on their website. I have been pleased to receive some photographs from members so the gallery is not just a display of my work. If you have photographs to send me, please send them at full size by e-mail, or use a Dropbox or Outlook folder link. If you can give them meaningful file names or tell me something about them e.g. subject, location, date, that would be helpful.

7:3 MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – Anthony Collins gave his report for the year 1st October 2015 – 30th September 2016.

Nationally (up to 1st August 2016) Ramblers national membership has reduced by 1230 members to 106131.

By Area Hampshire has reduced slightly by 130 members to 4268 and just remains the 4th largest in the UK.

By Group – Alton Membership stands at 220 – a net reduction of 22 since last year representing a drop of 9%. This compares with a net loss of 12 members last year. So we have 19 new members (slightly less than last year), there have been 2 reinstated and we have lost 42 through resignation, transfer from area or non-payment (mainly the latter) compared with 37 last year.

What does concern me is that we have not had any new member joining since August.

Walking Statistics. There have been 132 planned walks compared with 141 last year and 4 of those were cancelled through illness or rain (3 of these being evening walks). Total number walking for the year was 1517 compared with 1599 last year so giving an overall average of 11.9 people compared with 11.3 last year.

So for this year: Short down 159 (+51) Ave 14 per walk. Long/mid up 32(+2) Ave 8 per walk. Evenings down 41(+50) Ave 9 (3 walks cancelled) Sundays up 86(-52) Ave 12 per walk.

Out of an average membership of say 230 over the year, there have been 90 who have walked at least once or more in the year, but there are 67 active walkers who have done 5 or more, so about 30% of the membership are active.

Turning to the number of led walks, I reckon that we have 14 principle walk leaders out of 34 persons who have led walks in the recent past so you can see that the bulk of the walks are falling on a stalwart few and this doesn't seem very fair. What can we do about it?

Over the year we have been lacking 6 short walk leaders, 4 long/mid, week leaders and 3 Sunday walk leaders making a total of 13 walks that never got off the ground as there was no leader. So that indicates the dilemma we are experiencing, reduced membership, reduced walk leaders so leading to less number of walks and of those walking.

As ever, my thanks go to all walk leaders who send me their walk numbers so enabling me to give you these statistics. Please let me know if you change your e-mail address.

We have annually given a small token to the most active walker this year in 3rd place Denise Brooks 43 walks. 2nd place Judith Schweimier 52 walks and 1st place Alf West 53 walks.

7:4 Footpath Secretary – Rob Hannah reported as follows:

Last year Ramblers used Big Path Watch to assess the state of National Rights of Way. It showed that half our problems are with poor waymarking and a quarter with vegetation blockage. This is why our volunteers are concentrating on these two problems.

I must thank the 23 vegetation clearance volunteers, 13 stiles to gates and waymarking post installer volunteers, Parish Wardens and those who do survey work and often some clearance whilst there.

Voluntary hours worked during the year: Vegetation clearance -190, 10 sessions. Stiles to gates- 209. *Pies Farm, Farringdon 4 sessions. Waymarking – 24, 8 sessions. BVPI and other surveys – 71. Other- 42. Total 536. * Funded partly by 1st Grant from SGS to a Ramblers Group.

Last year it was difficult for me to know where these problems were but this year we are being helped by the newly appointed Countryside Engagement Rangers to identify where problems have been reported to Countryside Access. They help in other ways: I have 16 posts in my garage delivered by them awaiting our installation over the next few weeks. We sometimes work jointly with the Rangers on bigger projects.

To help us we have made a bid to HCC Small Grant Scheme to buy a Brush Cutter and Countryside Access has just given us an unused heavy duty push along petrol strimmer.

Over the next few weeks I will be asking for volunteers to assist with the in depth BVPI (ease of use) survey of South and West Selborne paths. At the same time we will be assisting CA to collect accurate data on path “Furniture” stiles, posts, steps and bridges. Next year they will give us Tablets to enter path data directly into their Management System from the paths.

A question was asked if the dates for vegetation clearance could be put on the website? Rob answered that he usual contacted those who have volunteered with dates to see when people were free. It was suggested that a report be put in the Local Paper as people are not aware of what Ramblers do. It was felt that it would be best if it were written by the Ramblers and then submitted to the Paper.

Chester presented Rob with an award from the Ramblers Organisation Volunteer Award Scheme for outstanding contribution to walking.

7:5 Publicity Officer- Chester Whapshare reported as follows:

We continue to advertise the benefits of Rambling and what better place than the Ramblings section of Round and About. ‘Ramblings’ have agreed to put us in for gratis and there may also be an advertisement in the spring if the price is right. I send the programme to Moria in the Herald every week but I did feel that their advertising rates were high.

The programme is also in the library together with a Ramblers flyer and there is a new one in the Community Centre. The Four Marks fish and chip shop has agreed to advertise Ramblers on their shop TV set but it has yet to happen. Darren Dance creates has adverts as a hobby and for free so I will continue to visit his shop every week for fish and chips.

Some of us have been to two summer events with a gazebo and banners which have been paid for from our funds. It is always hard to gauge responses but I feel that we are improving our technique every time. Next year I plan to go to some more events and this time with more rambling equipment on show and perhaps a quiz with photos of our countryside for people to identify.

7:6 Social Secretary - Roy Kirby reported a follows:

There were three social events this year compared with five last year. Attendances were down on two events and I was reluctant to organise anything else for the autumn period.

The New Year Lunch at the Alton House Hotel attracted 38 people as opposed to 33 the previous year. The food was very good and the service excellent and no complaints were received afterwards. In fact a number of complimentary comments were made, and I wrote to the manager to tell him how well the occasion had gone thanks to his staff.

The quiz plus fish and chips supper had 28 attendees with two people having to withdraw at the last minute. This was 5 fewer than the year before but the competition was as friendly as ever and the quizmaster had to contend with various challenges over points awarded. All in all a good night.

The barbeque in July was blessed with very good weather, and the walk proceeding it attracted about 8 members. Once again we had a fine selection of salads to complement the burgers, sausages etc. and the desserts were excellent. Many thanks to those who supplied the food and a very big thank you to Gill and Trevor Plumbley for allowing us to use their garden. I must also thank their son in law who did the cooking for us.

The New Year Lunch has been booked for January the 7th at the Alton House Hotel and to date I have received notice of 6 attendees. I did look for another location, but it was dearer, and there were no parking facilities.

Many thanks to those of you who turn up to support the events, please continue to do so.

8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

The following officers were elected on block.

POST	NAME	PROPOSED BY	SECONDED BY.
Chairman	Chester Whapshare	Barry Keen	Roger Baker
Deputy Chairman	John Jones		
Treasurer	Trevor Plumbley		
Membership Secretary	Anthony Collins		
Footpath Secretary	Rob Hannah		
Website Officer	John Jones		
Publicity Officer	Chester Whapshare		
Social Secretary	Roy Kirby		
Programme Secretary	John Jones		
Secretary	Rosemary Cornick		
Walking Environment Officer	Anne Noon	John Jones	Penny Varnam.

These elections were unanimously accepted by all.

9. Future of the Hampshire Rambler.

There had been no Hampshire Rambler due to lack of articles and advertisements. Three proposals had been put forward to regards its future. 1) It is stopped being published. 2) Carries on as it is. 3) a round robin e-mail from Area Chairman and Footpath Secretary be sent to all members. The meeting agreed on the third option of a round robin e-mail

10. General Council Meeting 1st April 2017.

The General Council Meeting is to be held on 1st and 2nd April 2017 at Southampton University. Chester asked if anyone would like to volunteer to help e.g reception, car park etc. John Jones suggested that an e-mail be sent to all members asking if they would like to volunteer. Chester and Rob will be attending.

11. Ramblers Twinning with Pertius and Montecchio.

A suggestion has been made that a group of ramblers may come over from Montecchio and we would organise a walking programme for them like we did for the group from Pertius. There would be about 10-12 ramblers and they would come the same time as the normal twinning from Italy. There would be no funding for this but a grant could be sort from Alton Town Council. Members to let Chester know if they would like to be involved.

12. Alton Ramblers Holiday September 2017.

Chester suggested a group holiday walking Hadrians Wall. This would be organised through the Ramblers Holidays. If members had any other suggestion or would like to organise a holiday to let Chester know.

13. Definitive Map.

Trevor Plumbley had written article for the News Letter pointing out the importance of not losing historic paths. 20,000 paths could be lost from maps if applications are not received by 2026 to make them rights of way. He urged members to check that paths are on the Definitive Map. Local Ramblers should organise themselves into small groups to work together with respect to local pathways. A copy of the Definitive map could be found in the Library or online by searching for Hampshire Definitive Map. There would be a training session in Hampshire next year.

14. AGM Minutes on the Website.

Stuart Tutlebury had suggested that the AGM Minutes are put on the website so those who had been unable to attend the meeting would know what is happening in the group. There were concerns about putting the minutes in the public domain. It was then suggested that the minutes be e-mailed to all members with the agenda before the next AGM. The Committee to discuss this.

15. Any Other Business.

Alf West and Lynn Francis had made a suggestion that the evening walks be discontinued. Members suggested that a latter start and a shorter walk of about 4 miles may attract more people. There was also a shortage of walk leaders. The Committee to discuss this matter.

Rob asked if the meeting was in favour of Permanent Traffic Regulations Orders on BOATS. Some had gates with combination locks. He specified Wield 17 which members felt should be closed or controlled.

The meeting closed at 9:35pm.

MINUTES APPROVED.

Chairman -----Date-----

Secretary -----Date-----