



1985 - 2010

Ramblers



ramblers
at the heart of walking

25th Anniversary

(The Ramblers' Registered Charity No 1093577)

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers 25th Anniversary Illustrated Chronicle

Editor: Tony Harding

Contributing Authors & Contents

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1985 – Formation of the Leighton Buzzard Ramblers.

In the early part of 1985 the Bedfordshire Area of the Ramblers Association recognised that there were sufficient RA members living in and around Leighton Buzzard to justify the formation of a new Group.

**RAMBLERS'
ASSOCIATION**

Formation of a

**LOCAL
GROUP**

RAMBLES FOR ALL

2pm Saturday, October 5
10 am Sunday, October 6
Sunday 5-6 and 10-12 miles
(bring lunch)
starting at Canal Bridge

A Group Formation meeting
will be held at

**TRINITY METHODIST
CHURCH HALL
North Street**

4 pm, Saturday, October 5

This small advertisement appeared in the local newspaper, the Beds & Bucks Observer, as it was then known. It invited local people to join a walk to Old Linslade and back, followed by a Group Formation meeting to be held at the Trinity Methodist Church Hall, North Street on Saturday the 5th October 1985.

Forty Two people turned out for the short walk which set off at 2 pm along the Grand Union Canal to Old Linslade Church, the meeting afterwards was also well attended. Linda Hart from the RA's Executive Committee explained the work of the RA, how it protected the Rights of Way paths and encouraged people to walk in the countryside. She also advised how a local Group could be set up and the benefits it would bring to all walkers.

It was proposed that a Group should be set up and so the first Committee was formed. The two main stalwart committee members were: Ian Lindsay (Chairman & Treasurer) and David Aston (Programme Secretary).



Ian Lindsay



David Aston

In addition to the committee there were also several 'Founder Members' who also made a considerable contribution to the new Group, leading walks and helping establish a successful social element. It was their enthusiastic commitment that set the standard that continues today, some quarter of a century later. Such individuals as; Mike Henry, Doug Bone, Tony Harding, Chris & Derek Vickery, Maureen Wong, Joan Tearle and Peter & Nora Phillips. In the following years new faces appeared, in particular a series of dedicated Chairmen like; Tony Burge, Peter Clarke, Helen Cox, Alan Carter, Tom Brown, Lynda Bawden, Carole Dixon and Malcolm Davison, all ensured the Group maintained its friendly, well organised status in the local community (see also their Role of Honour at page 48). Right from the very beginning, the Group took on the role of Footpath Guardians in South Bedfordshire, actively monitoring and reporting Rights of Way problems. Guidance notes for Walk Leaders were produced and several Map and Compass Navigation courses were arranged over the years, which all helped to maintain the Groups professional status as one of the leading RA groups in the county.

During November and December of '85, a few hurried walks were duly arranged but no walking programme was produced nor were any details of these walks recorded. The

committee met several times and existing RA member's details were obtained from the RA Head Office and applications from new members to join the RA were submitted. A Group Constitution was drawn up and suggestions and proposals for the way ahead were discussed and so the Leighton Buzzard Group of the Ramblers Association was born.

1986 – The first years walking programme.

The first walking programme produced, covered the period from January to March with walks arranged fortnightly on Sundays, meeting at the Library car park before driving to the starting place. The following picture is believed to be the first group walk photograph; it was taken at The Bell pub in Studham on the 23rd February 1986.



The walk was led by Tony Harding (far right), which was an 11 mile circular walk; it took place on a cold, snowy day from Ashridge. The route was via Little Gaddesden & Hudnall, to Studham for a pub lunch at The Bell, the afternoon return was via Dagnall and Hoo Wood.

The first Group AGM was held in the Eggington Cricket Club on the 20th March. It was announced that the Group funds stood at the princely sum of £47.25, bit different to today's £1,000 plus!



One of the few experienced walk leaders was Mike Henry who had regularly led walks for the North London Group, LDWA and the Aylesbury Ramblers before the Group was established. It was Mike who led the Groups first 'Figure of Eight' walk in April which became a popular type of walk with the Group. This gave walkers the choice of two short walks or an all day long walk, this particular walk was around Buckland. It consisted of a morning 6 mile walk returning to the starting place for a pub lunch at the Rothchild Arms (now a private house); the afternoon loop was 7 miles. Mike became renowned for his long pub lunch stops, he quite literally became a legend in his own lunchtime! Many of the afternoon walks were usually at a slower pace and often accompanied by much hilarity with regular dives into the bushes for 'comfort stops'. This photo of Mike was taken at the Glen Nevis Gorge in June 1990.

On the 11th May the Group travelled to Derbyshire for its first away-day to walk in Dovedale. Tony Harding led the 12 mile circular walk through the picturesque gorge beside the River

Dove and across to Wetton for a pub lunch at The Royal Oak. The afternoon return followed the high escarpment above the Manifold Valley, before the return drive to Leighton Buzzard.

The Group rounded 1986 off with a Christmas Social at the Eggington Cricket Club which including a slide show, music, dancing and a buffet. Participants were asked to bring a plate of food; this was to become the first of many very successful 'Pot Luck Suppers'

A few statistics for the first year: 44 walks were arranged covering a total of 366 miles. The highest number of walks led was 9 by Mike Henry, 7 by Tony Harding, 5 by Chris Vickery, 3 by Ian Lindsay, 2 walks each by David Aston & Peter Phillips. Group membership was 55.

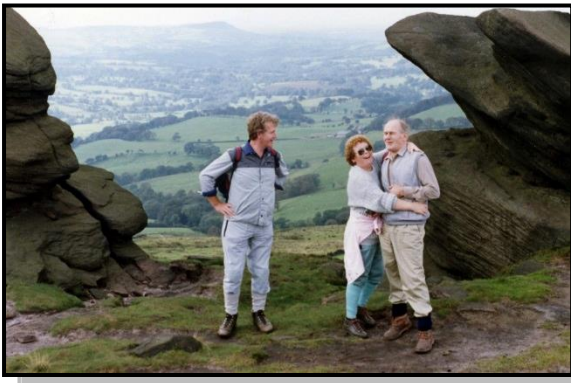
1987 – Walking the Roaches with the Milton Keynes Ramblers.

The summer months saw the first regular evening walks, starting with one a month between May and August, These were well attended, attracting new members, as much for the pub social afterwards as the walk itself.

It was Doug Bone who led the longest walk to date of 17 miles on the 17th May. The walk followed a circular route starting from Ivinghoe Beacon to the half way lunch stop at Great Gaddesden. The afternoon return via Studham and Dagnall took place in pouring rain.

The first of three sections of Bedfordshire's new long distance trail, the Greensand Ridge Walk was walked on the 2nd August from Millbrook to Linslade (16 miles). David Aston led the walk, he also led the other two sections from Sandy to Millbrook (18 miles) & Sandy to Gamlingay (13 miles), the following year in 1988.

On the 27th September the Milton Keynes Ramblers invited the Group to join them on a coach trip to walk the Roaches in Staffordshire. About 45 people headed north for a 10 mile walk



along the Roaches which marks the southern end of the Pennines. The walk took place in glorious weather and followed the ridge top, the highest point at 1658 feet provide fine panoramic views. The unusual weathered gritstone rock formations seemed eerie and of an unreal appearance. Above; a cheeky Peter Phillips tells Maureen Lindsay to hold on tight!

The year ended with the Groups Christmas Dinner at La Buse, a French restaurant in the High Street (now a Chinese Restaurant). The local French staff helped to make the evening a great success although it has often been compared with an episode from 'Alo Alo' rather than a Christmas dinner.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 59 walks were arranged covering a total of 507 miles.

1988 – The first weekend away, walking the Malvern Hills.

With over 60 splendid walks having taken place throughout the year, it is difficult to select just a few favourites to write about. The most memorable walks are probably the day trips and weekends away, since walking pastures new always has a certain air of excitement about it. The first of the day trips took place in March, a 10 mile walk along the Manifold Valley in Staffordshire. The walk started from Ilam Hall a National Trust property and followed the course of the old Leek and Manifold Light Railway which once ran along the wide valley between 1904 & 1934. After its closure the trackbed was surfaced to make a trail for walkers and cyclists. Three miles along the valley and a steep 300 foot climb saw the party arrive at Thor's Cave, a famous viewpoint for walkers. From here it was a short stroll across meadows to the village of Wetton for a pub lunch at the Royal Oak. The afternoon return was the same as the first day trip from Dovedale in 1986.

Walking this area became quite popular with the Group over the coming years, in fact in May another day trip was arranged to the Peak District to walk the Tissington Trail. This 10 mile walk began in Dovedale and started with a Group photo taken on the Stepping Stones across the River Dove.



This time the walkers headed up Lin Dale and across to the village of Tissington. The walk was arranged to coincide with the annual Well Dressing ceremony for which Tissington is renowned to be the best in Derbyshire. Five highly decorated wells were visited, each has a religious theme made from a collage of flower petals, bark and mosses set on a clay-covered board. Well Dressing in its modern form started after the great drought of 1615 throughout which the village wells never ran dry. The walk then continued along part of the Tissington Trail, the old Buxton to Ashbourne railway, opened in 1971 for walkers and cyclists. After the obligatory pub lunch at the now closed New Inns Hotel, the party descended the steep ravine to Milldale. The final 2 miles of the walk followed the River Dove through the spectacular limestone gorge.

In September the Group was again invited by the Milton Keynes Ramblers to join them on a coach trip, this time to walk the Long Mynd near Church Stretton in Shropshire. Unfortunately it was a wet day and the large party set off in light rain on an arduous 1000 foot ascent to reach the heather clad top of the Long Mynd. We were promised glorious views of the Welsh Mountains from the top but unfortunately the top was shrouded in cloud, in true Ramblers tradition everyone pressed on and headed for the nearest pub. (By now you should have recognised a recurring theme with the Group!) The return half of the walk re-crossed the misty

Long Mynd then followed the picturesque rocky stream side path which descended through the beauty spot of Ashes Hollow and back to the waiting coach.

The most memorably occasion of the year was undoubtedly the Group's first ever weekend away to the Malvern Hills in October. The whole event was organised by David & Janet Aston, who made all the accommodation and travel arrangements as well as leading the walks. On Saturday the 15th everyone met at West Malvern for a 12 mile walk to the Worcestershire Beacon, along the Malvern Ridge south to the Herefordshire Beacon. The views from the 1115 foot Beacon were unfortunately limited due to the misty weather, as you can see below.

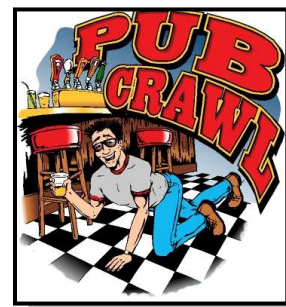


The day ended with an evening visit to a local pub which by chance had its own skittle alley. The Group took over the pub and a knockout competition was then arranged from which Sue Lang was crowned the "Skittle Queen". The starting place for Sundays walk was the beautiful little town of Ledbury with its Elizabethan buildings and almshouses. The gentle 6 mile walk passed through splendid rolling countryside, ending with a pub lunch back in Ledbury before the return drive to Leighton Buzzard.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 62 walks were arranged covering a total of 551 miles.

1989 – The Group is invited to walk with other RA Groups.

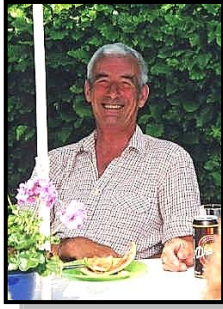
The year got off to a good start when Tony Harding decided to set a new standard for the Groups social status, by leading a New Years Day 'Pub Crawl Walk'. Four pub stops were made during the 6 mile walk, visiting; The Northall Inn, The White Swan at Ivinghoe Aston, The Bell in Edlesborough and the White Horse in Eaton Bray. Angela and Bob Feaviour enabled all 26 walkers to sober up at their home in Edlesborough after the walk, where they kindly provided hot soup and a buffet.



In January the Group was invited to join the North Beds Group on a 6 mile walk at Stevington Country Park. In April the Ivel Valley Group (which was formed the year before us in 1984) invited the Group to join them on an 11 mile walk from Beeston Green to Old Warden and back. Then in July it was the South Beds Group (which was disbanded in the late 90's) turn to host a 6 mile walk around Dunstable Downs. The Milton Keynes Group again showed us favour by inviting us twice to join them, in September for a 5 mile 'Quiz Walk' around Willen Lake then again in October for a 10 mile walk in the Cotswolds.

The Groups first serious accident occurred on a February walk near Cholesbury when just 15 minutes into the walk, Helen Cox slipped on some mud and broke her ankle. A chivalrous Brian

Lawrence gave Helen a piggy back up the hill to their car and drove her to Milton Keynes hospital where her ankle was set in plaster. Undeterred by her accident Helen continued to walk with the Group and even led her first walk for the Group the following year in September, then went on to become the Group's first lady Chairman (or Chairperson for the PC brigade!) in 1998.



Ironically it was Brian, pictured, who several years later in 1994, had a serious fall himself, embarrassingly self-inflicted! This put him out of action for several months. You can read all about it on page 16 and yes it did occur just after the pub stop!

Brian was also a keen long distance walker and often entered challenge walks organised by the Long Distance Walkers Association. He also completed the 190 mile 'Coast to Coast' with Helen in 1993.

The Groups second weekend away took place on the 6th & 7th May in the Church Stretton area, again this was organised by David and Janet Aston, who made all the arrangements and led the walks. 27 members attended the walking weekend in fine weather which included an 11 mile walk along the Long Mynd and a 7 mile walk to Ragleth Hill, shown below.



On the 18th August the Group enjoyed another first when Tony Harding led a short 3 mile Night Walk around Ivinghoe Beacon. Two important factors were taken into consideration; firstly there was a full moon that night and secondly alcohol was to be consumed beforehand (purely medicinal of course). Everyone met at 10pm at The Bell in Edlesborough for some Dutch courage before heading off to the hills with torches, surprisingly nobody got lost.

There were two highlights in October. David and Janet Aston led a choice of walks of 13 or 8 miles in the Charnwood Forest area in Leicestershire and a joint 10 mile walk with the Milton Keynes Group took place in the Cotswolds.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 63 walks were arranged covering a total of 501 miles.

1990 – The 5th Anniversary celebrated in Cheadle.

By the start of 1990 the Group had been going long enough for many members now to have the confidence and desire to do longer and more challenging walks. This will become evident as you read on. In addition it had the added advantage of also developing into a 'social' as well as a walking group. It was almost a hanging offence to lead a walk that did not have a pub stop!

In late January Mick King, Reporter on the LBO (known until 1989 as the Beds & Bucks Observer) was invited to join us on a 7 mile Brickhills walk, led by Joan Tearle, Publicity Officer at that time. Joan was hoping for a good write-up from Mick in the next edition!! He is still on the paper and gives us good coverage – our thanks to him!!!

March 25th and a new leader; Jim Valentine. Sadly he was taken ill during his walk in the Harrold Odell area and was unable to walk with the Group again. Jim, a good deal older than our average walker had settled in well and obviously enjoyed the company. He was very knowledgeable about architecture, especially churches and was always a pleasure to have along.

Easter in Majorca for a group of 10, which was arranged by Ian Lindsay. This was the first trip abroad. An excellent Ramblers Abroad Leader made for an enormously successful holiday.

The 3rd weekend away since the formation of the Group was very well supported with 29 Ramblers heading for pastures new, the Brecon Beacons. David and Janet Aston organised a marvellous 3 days with the highlight being Pen-y-Fan, pictured below.



Other walks were from Llanthony Priory up onto Offas Dyke Path and the 'doddle' up Sugar Loaf. Superb walking in good company and fantastic weather!!

Early June and Tony Willey led his first 'away day' in Derbyshire. Knowing the county well, Tony was called on for a goodly number of other days out to what became one of the favourite walking counties for our Group. A breakfast stop at the Leicester Forest East service area on the M1 became a popular custom!! Good start to the day!! It was a 10 mile walk, starting at the Plague village of Eyam and the lunch stop at the Barrel Inn, Bretton. We've used this excellent pub on a number of occasions since. Beautifully situated, standing alone with wonderful views. Before the drive back home we all enjoyed a cream tea in Eyam (many giving the local speciality, fruit cake and cheese a try.) Very good it was too!!!

First of this years evening walks was on Friday 15th June with Tony Burge, starting from Hockcliffe Church. A total of 6 evening walks took place during the summer, all on Fridays.

The following day, Saturday 16th, some 30 members enjoyed the 2nd evening canal cruise this time organised by Peter Clarke (our Chairman at that time) from Pitstone Wharf.

Following on the social scene, an evening meal was arranged at an Indian restaurant in July.

A 17 mile linear walk from Berkhamsted, having arrived there by train from Leighton Buzzard was led by Tony Harding in August. A week later Tony led some fun and games with bats and balls on a picnic walk around Aston Hill and The Crong.

In September our friends from the London Sports Club for the Blind were met by us at Leighton Station for what has since become an annual tradition. 5 guide dogs were free to frolic in the canal on the return stretch from Great Brickhill.

An early October weekend away at Cheadle in 'North Staffy Cher' celebrated the Groups 5th Anniversary which was planned by David & Janet Aston. The Roaches from Tittesworth Reservoir was just one of four walks on offer. At dinner on the Saturday, a cake decorated with the RA Logo was cut by our founder Chairman, Ian Lindsay, with Maureen Smith (now Wong) David Aston, Maureen Lindsay and Tony Harding.



With a view to continuing the celebrations the North Cotswold group were asked if they could host an 'away' trip for us. We met members of their group at Bourton-on-the-Water for an 8 mile walk to the Slaughters and surrounding area.

A Firework Party with bangers 'n mash was hosted by Chris and Derek Vickery at their home. The year finished with a Christmas Dinner at the Globe on the 22nd December. A jolly evening with paper hats and crackers etc.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 63 walks were arranged covering a total of 542 miles.

1991 - Corfe Castle to Swanage and a steam train ride.

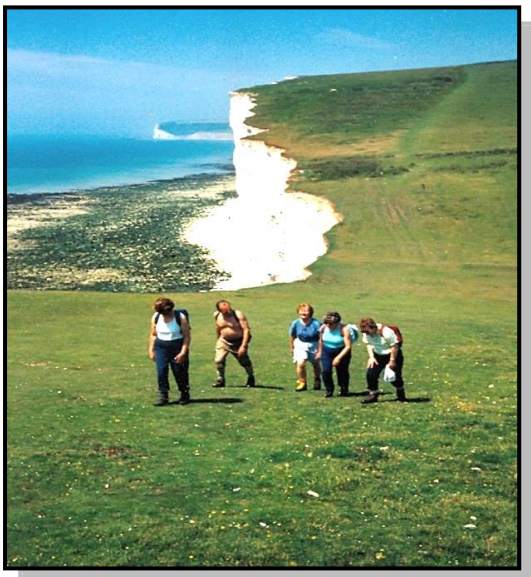
A quiz evening was held at the Eggington Cricket Club on Friday 15th March. The next social, which was in April, was a Cheese and Wine evening hosted by Diane and Peter Clarke. (Some had to take it easy on the alcohol as it was an early start for the next days walk!!!) This saw Tony Harding leading the group into a new area with a 12.5 mile walk from Leatherhead, to the famous viewpoint of Box Hill and part of the North Downs Way.

A second weekend away in Church Stretton was once again splendidly organised by David and Janet Aston with the choice of both long and short walks. This took place in May with everybody

staying at the conveniently situated *Belvedere Hotel*. (As a point of interest it's still there and being run as a *Hotel*, as at 2009) David and Janet could not resist the pull of the area and have since moved to *Church Stretton*. A few of the older, long standing, members, still pop in to say hello when in the area. David still leads walks for the local Group and it is wondered whether his reputation of being able to sleep any time, even during coffee stops, has gone with him.

Another of Tony Harding's train out, walk back 17 milers kicked off the summer. This time we walked back from *Milton Keynes* and had our closest look yet at *Mursley Water Tower*! An on-going joke with the Group is that **wherever** we may be walking and come across a water tower, some wag will say 'that's got to be *Mursley* – even if we're on the *South Downs*!! The following Saturday Tony Willey led another great *Derbyshire Day Out*, a 12 miler in the *Butterton - Ilam* area.

An Italian Evening at a local restaurant took place on the 29th June.



The chance of some sea air in July with a day trip to the *South Coast*, meeting at the *Seven Sisters Country Park*, just west of *Eastbourne*. With perfect weather, a goodly number set out along the *Cuckmere Valley*, and with just a few puffs conquering four of the seven sisters. (Which way does your mind work?)

Are we nearly there?

It was then a great lunch stop at *The Tiger Inn* at *East Dean*. (One to recommend) Glad of some shade as the day really warmed up and it was a relief to enter *Friston Forest* for the afternoon stretch. *Chris and Derek Vickery* were the leaders.

Returning the hospitality given to us by the *North Cotswolds Group* in October last year Tony Harding led a July walk for them through *Woburn Deer Park* and along *The Greensand Ridge*. After this 9 mile walk we finished up at the *Royal Oak* in *Woburn*.

In August an away day to *Charnwood Forest*, courtesy of *David Aston*, was thoroughly enjoyed as usual but was noteworthy for another reason. As long as a leader does not lose more than 10% of his flock he is held to be within tolerance. However on the last section of this walk some 33% of the group was nowhere to be seen. However, search parties found the missing 'ramblers.'

On Sunday 4th August a large number of the group were invited to *Cheddington Church Hall* to celebrate the wedding of *Maureen Smith and Ken Wong* which took place on the 27th July. Although they met whilst walking, it was not with this Group but on a HF holiday. We then gained, with *Ken* joining us the expertise on photography and computers.

Tony Harding held his first map and compass course on Saturday the 17th August which aimed to improving walk leaders' understanding of *Ordnance Survey* maps and navigation skills. A theory session was held at *Eggington* and with superb guidance notes. This was followed by practical work on *Ivinghoe Beacon* a few days later.

Sunday 25th August saw us again under David Aston's leadership, half a dozen stalwarts braved the Group's first ever 20 mile walk following the Ridgeway from Saunderton to the top of Ivinghoe Beacon. Greeted at the summit by Janet Aston, the party then descended to the car park where Chris Vickery surprised them with ginger cake and fresh brewed tea made on a primus stove – very welcome too!!

In September Tony and Doreen Burge inaugurated what has now become a well used Day Out. Meeting at Marlow for a delightful 8 mile walk along the Thames Path to Henley, stopping off of course, for lunch, at 'The Flower Pot' at Aston. The return to Marlow was on the Thames by a steamer and was followed by a Pot Luck Supper at Tony and Doreen's home in Naphill.

On September 29th Ian Lindsay led the Blind Walk taking a route through Wing and Ledburn with lunch at the Hare and Hounds.

October saw yet another marvellous 'Aston' weekend away, this time in Swanage. Saturday's walking was fairly wet, so much so that certain individuals will never live down the ignominy of doing the last part by bus! In contrast, the sun shone on Sunday's unforgettable walk from



Corfe Castle, up and along Ballard Down and Nine Barrow Down to Swanage (pictured above Swanage). What could then be more natural for David than to bring us back from Harman's Cross to Corfe by steam train? (David is passionate about his steam trains!!). As you can see it was a well supported weekend and the lunch time pub we used, The Greyhound in Corfe, became one that we visited a number of times in the years to come.

Once again it was to the Globe for the Christmas dinner on the 7th December. As you can see there has been a great deal of coverage for the social side of the walking, however, there was a still plenty of 'normal' walks throughout the year.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 67 walks were arranged covering a total of 597 miles.

1992 – The year of the Cotswold Way.

New Years Day. What a way to start the year, a 6 mile walk in the dry, well outside anyway! 4 pub stops were planned! As it happened only three were reached, some said it was because the walk was too long, but the real reason was that the 3rd pub stop was too long!! The leader was Tony Harding who insisted that it was the WALK he was leading, but those there know better. It shows the type of members we had then as 26 turned out and all were there at the last pub. Beer was a £1 a pint at this time. Interestingly the four pubs, the Red Lion at Marsworth, the Half



Moon at Wilstone, the Grand Junction at Bulbourne and finally the Anglers Retreat back at Marsworth are all still in business!! Not sure whether this was expected to be the future pattern to our walks as over the next 2 or 3 months it was not unusual to have a turn out around, and in excess of 30 people on each walk, and that's including the long walks!

In March it was back to the social side, a Quiz evening held at the Eggington Cricket Club, this being organized by Maureen Lindsay. The cricket club was used for many of our meetings and social events in the early years.

19th April Easter Day and David and Janet Aston gave the people of Leighton Buzzard a rest as they took the group to Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire, giving the choice of 2 walks, 12 or 7 miles. The day finished with a delightful stop at Bradgate tea rooms, although not sure how everybody managed to get back at the same time, 5pm!

On the 16th and 23rd April, Tony Harding ran another of his map and compass sessions with a practical session on the following Saturday to see if what we had learnt could be put into practice!!

2nd May saw the Group off on their 1st weekend away to start the 100 mile Cotswold Way walk. This outing covered the first 30 miles from Bath to Wotton-under-Edge and was organized by Ian Lindsay. The intention was to do the walk over a period of 12 months in 10 'easy' day stages. As this write-up progresses perhaps we will see whether this happened!

During the course of June the numbers on the walks averaged about 20 and this included another day in Derbyshire - Matlock, Cromford area when there was a choice of an 8 or 10 mile walk organized by Tony Willey with the pub stop in Bonsall and the tea stop at the Old Station House (2 cups of tea and a scone 90p!)

*18th July (another Saturday excursion) saw the group off to Selborne in Hampshire with Anne Pamplin and Sue Whiting as leaders. Our numbers, much reduced by normal standards, due possibly by a 7am start and heavy rain. This 11 miler started at Jane Austen's House in Chawton. At the end of the walk a couple of Ramblers had a look over Jane Austen's house and found themselves there at **exactly** the same time, 4.30pm and on the exact date that Jane Austen died - but 175 years later! Spooky!*

Saturday 1st August Chairman's 2nd Annual Day out. Starting at Marlow, walking along the Thames to the Flower Pot at Aston for lunch and on to Henley before getting the boat back to Marlow. Having had a good day out it was finished off with a Pot luck supper at Doreen and Tony Burge's home at Naphill.

The last weekend in August, a Bank Holiday, saw the 2nd leg of the Cotswold Way, another 3



days walking covering a total of 33 miles, starting from Wotton-under-Edge and ending up at Crickley Hill. This section turned out to be a real tester, following a fairly easy first day of 8

miles, the next day proved to be a very hilly 11 miles and therefore, day 3 was rather daunting as it turned out to be about 15 miles. Everybody went home tired by delighted that they had achieved so much! The picture above was taken at Haresfield Beacon.

Saturday 26th September and it was off to Derbyshire again!! A very misty day for the 10 miles, led by Tony Harding. The route was through Halldale to Wetton, where a pub lunch was taken at The Royal Oak, then returning along the Manifold Valley.

The following day we were hosts for our friends from the London Sports Club for the Blind meeting them from the train at Tring station. Lunch stop was at the Greyhound in Aldbury and was nice enough to sit outside, there the landlord changed his rules to allow our blind folk (and the group) to eat their sandwiches within the gardens This was their 3rd visit to our Group and as is shown on the 2010 programme the arrangement is still going. Chris and Derek Vickery were leaders. Chris is kneeling in the picture below.



Outskirts of Aldbury

October saw the first of the one day trips to continue the Cotswold Way this covered Crickley Hill to Dowdeswell reservoir. There was also an evening social at Eggington Cricket club. Music provided by a group called 'Folklore' all serving police officers. A donation of £200 was made by the group to Bedfordshire Police Benevolent Fund.

Into November and another day trip to the Cotswold Way, to cover the route from Dowdeswell to Winchcombe, a total of 13 miles. It was afterwards voted as the worst day of the year weather-wise.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 64 walks were arranged covering a total of 517 miles. Derek had kept a record throughout the year of walk attendances, there were 989.

1993 – The ascent of Helvellyn.

It was a good start to the year with 5 walks scheduled for January, the first being a figure of 8 in the Brill area led by David Butler. David Aston then changed the rules by starting his walk with a coffee stop, at his home, it was then off around Stockgrove. Others were Cockshoots Wood for 8 miles by Tony Burge and Aspley Guise led by Chris Vickery. Just to show the longer walks were still required Tony Harding's walk followed a trip to Tring station by train and the walk back to Leighton via the Ridgeway and the Two Ridges Link.

A Valentines Day 14 miler led by Tony Willey was the northern half of the Aylesbury Ring. 28th March and it was the 5th outing, the 3rd one day and the 9th section of the Cotswold Way being from Winchcombe to the delightful hamlet of Stanton. Sadly no pub stop on this section.

April 18th a breakfast walk led by Chris and Derek Vickery starting at Tring station (in the days when parking was free!) arriving at The Greyhound in Aldbury for a 9.30 breakfast. Oddly though the pub stop at lunch time was back in Leighton at the Stag!

We did not have to wait long for the second half of the Aylesbury Ring as on the 25th April Tony Willey led the group round the southern half which was a little longer at 16 miles.

May brought quite a crop of 'away days' with another trip to Charnwood Forest arranged by ... you've guessed it...David & Janet Aston.



Also in May, Ian Lindsay (on the left in this picture) led the 10th and final 10 mile section of the Cotswold Way from Stanton to Chipping Campden, this being just a year after the first section was started and over 10 days, precisely as predicted!

The final pub stop at Broadway

Ann Pamplin and Sue Whiting took us again to Selbourne in Hampshire, the repeat being at the request of those who were unable to go in July last year.

The Spring Bank holiday trip saw a number of the Group going to the Lake District for the first time. Based at Glenridding on the edge of Ullswater with the fell walks being led by Tony Harding and his knowledge of the area proved very useful as it was necessary to make a few changes to the planned programme, all down to the misty and very wet weather most of the time. There were however a few spectacular walks, the ascent of Helvellyn (3148ft) via Striding Edge and climbing to High Street (2719ft) was achieved at the second attempt after the weather improved.

Pictured on Striding Edge just below the Helvellyn summit are: Hanna Harding, David Butler, Derek Vickery, Amanda Carey and Tony Burge.



3rd July saw the group off to Derbyshire again with Tony Willey, meeting at Hollinsclough for 9 miles. Although after lunch, which was at The Quiet Woman (who said

there was no such thing?) the group split into two with the A group going to High Wheeldon and the B group going back via as many tea rooms and craft centers as they could find!

Sunday 29th August and Tony Harding led the Leighton - Linslade Loop for the first time. A 19 mile walk which he devised, this circular walk started at Stockgrove, with a lunch stop at the Carpenters Arms in Slapton and passed through 10 local parishes.

19th September and this time it was Peter Clarke who led the Annual walk for London Sports Club for the Blind. Starting from Berkhamsted then over to Ashridge, with a lunch stop at the Valiant Trooper in Aldbury.

8th October and it was another trip away, this time going south hoping for better weather. Chris & Derek Vickery arranged the weekend in the Eastbourne area with both long and

short walks over the 3 days. In an effort to make things simple it was decided to go for a small



hotel (who remembers that song?) so as to avoid going out for the evening meal. Simple? Not the first breakfast! A very exacting owner took orders for breakfast at the previous evening meal expecting everybody to be sitting at the same place for breakfast! NOT so! It was a quick shuffle round, or you got someone else's breakfast!

A trip to the delightfully lavish Royal Theatre in Northampton to see 'Dial M for Murder' was arranged by Pat Bridgeman in November and the Christmas meal was at the Boot in Soulbury.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 61 walks were arranged covering a total of 497 miles.

1994 – Back in Derbyshire again.

January gave the group the first half of the Cross Bucks Way with this section of 14 miles being led by Tony Willey, it being from Stratton Audley to Addington.

Fairly new to the group, Alan Carter, not only volunteered to become Treasurer he also volunteered to lead walks and this, on the 13th Feb was his first one, 9 miles around Studham. At this time we had one member, Brian Lawrence, who found it difficult to conform to the rules of common sense, this walk being no exception. Unable to resist the rope hanging from a tree - he enjoyed the swing, but not the fall, ending up in hospital and out of action for some while. Unconventional to the end, because of the very muddy area, the ambulance could not get near and so parked on a lane some way away. Brian left the group being carried through hedges and across the fields with a number of the ramblers acting as stretcher-bearers!!

The middle of May saw the group back in Derbyshire again with Tony and Chris Willey, this time for a weekend. Some of the routes were along Curbar, Froggatt and Shatton Edges,

Stanton Moor, Chatsworth and Grindlow. With both long and short walks the total distance covered was 47 miles.



Froggatt Edge

The month ended with the first leg, 12 miles, of the Icknield Way led by David Butler.

During June and July there were a total of 7 evenings walk, the second, and another 12 miles of the Icknield Way with the social event being a BBQ. Taking advantage of the summer, no it was not always raining, and following the acquisition of a number of tools the group went out on 5 occasions armed with all manner of weapons to attack the overgrown vegetation on various footpaths throughout the area.

1994 was obviously a popular year for long distance walks as in August Tony Willey led the 2nd half (15 miles) of the Cross Bucks Way and in September Alan Carter started the Greensand Ridge Walk, to be walked in 3 parts.

There has been mention of walks being led by David and Janet Aston. David was Treasurer for a number of years and when they left to live in Church Stretton it was not long, in fact in the October, when they arranged a weekend of walking in that area for the group. Staying at the Long Mynd Hotel it was not surprising that the Long Mynd moorland plateau was part of the walking. Completed in two sections, each of 12 miles. David and Janet did lead a number of walks over the years in Church Stretton and obviously the area had a too bigger pull on them. An added dimension to the weekend was the Murder Mystery Weekend organized by the Long Mynd Hotel where the Group was staying. The actors played in character at all times. One of our party probably has a longer lasting memory of the weekend, when, upon summoning the lift in the hotel, the doors opened to reveal a 'corpse' covered in blood lying on the floor!

Here we are again and time for the walk with the London Social Club for the Blind, this time led by Helen Cox for 6 miles around Linslade and Great Brickhill.

As you would have noticed, over this 5 year period, we had many enthusiastic members who were prepared to lead either short or long walks, weekends away and social events. This was backed-up with great support from the rest of the group as you will see from this photo below which shows nearly 40 people on the trip to Eyam in Derbyshire in May, led by Tony Willey, pictured centre kneeling.



Not only did many people get to know Leighton Buzzard's footpaths well but also those of surrounding areas and a few places they may have heard of, but not been to. Not forgetting of course the now extended knowledge of many pubs around! There are a few of those still with us but with it being 16 years on, their mileage has reduced as the years have increased!

Having now completed my 5 year section I would like to thank particularly Tony Harding for many of the statistics used throughout and to Joan Tearle for saving all the early programmes which gave me the opportunity of resurrecting so much of the walks details.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 68 walks were arranged covering a total of 561 miles.

Editors note; the following anecdote appeared in the Groups 10th Anniversary booklet produced in 1995 and has been reproduced here for your amusement.



The Ramblers Survival Guide

Walking through the countryside on a bitterly cold winter's day, a Rambler came across a frozen cockerel. He noticed steam rising from a nearby dunghill, so he made a hole in it with his walking stick and dropped the cockerel into it up to its neck to warm up gradually. He then went on his way pleased with the thought that he had probably saved the cockerels life.

Sure enough, the cockerel started to warm up, it wriggled about and got its wings out. Flapping them to give a greater pull and crowing with delight, it attracted the attention of a passing fox, which grabbed it by its neck, pulled it right out and took it off for his dinner.

This story has three morals:

- ***Firstly***, he who drops you in it up to your neck may not be your enemy.
- ***Secondly***, he who pulls you out of it may not be your friend.
- ***Thirdly***, when you are in it up to your neck – don't make a song and dance about it !.

1995 – The Group celebrates its 10th Anniversary.

On 31 August 1995 membership stood at 168, an increase of nine on the previous year. During the year, 24 members led walks, including Tony Harding, Chris Vickery, Peter Phillips, David Butler, Helen Cox, Alan Carter and Joan Tearle, who all led five or more walks. The evening walks started from the beginning of the walk (the trail head as US hikers would say), not the Library Car Park. In addition, four members took part in the Grand Union canal walk between October 21-26 covering 145 miles from London to Birmingham.

An away day in July included a 9 mile walk from Connaught Water, Epping Forest, via High Beach, Rushey Plain and Strawberry Hill it was led by Pat Gay (third from left). The lake was named after the Duke of Connaught, who was the first Ranger of the forest.



Highlights of the year included a long distance walk along the Ridgeway Path from Avebury in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon. Dave Merrington led the walks over three sections: Overton Hill to White Horse Hill (21 miles), White Horse Hill to Goring (21 miles), and Goring to Princes Risborough (22 miles). This was a delightful walk, with the white chalk track stretching away into the distance and many interesting archaeological sites to see en route. In September new member Lynda Bawden led the Group around the recently opened, 17 mile, Ashridge Boundary Trail.

Another very successful Derbyshire weekend in May was enjoyed thanks, to Chris and Tony Willey. Excellent walking was mixed with some nostalgia when Group A came across the Tramway Museum at Crich. Both David Aston and David Butler (anoraks!) had to be dragged



away from the scene. For the remainder of the walk they could be found at the back, indulging in “trainspeak”. This photo was taken on the first day (19th May) at The Miner’s Standard pub, Winstar. Tony & Chris are pictured bottom right.

A successful Family Rambling Day event was organised by Jenny Head and Peter Clarke in June, with a short 4 mile walk along the Linslade Canal and Firs Path.

A three-day event in October marked the Tenth Anniversary of the Group, beginning with an evening meal at The Cock Inn, Wing, followed next day by a night ramble up Ivinghoe Beacon and the day after that by a walk from the Three Locks to the Boot in Soulbury for breakfast, then on to the Red Lion in Great Brickhill for lunch and finally on to Redwood Glade for an elegant sufficiency of champagne and cake. This picture shows founder members, Ian & Maureen Lindsay, Joan Tearle, Diana Mehew, Maureen Wong and Tony Harding at the traditional 'Cake Cutting'.



There was a good attendance, helped by the display put on by Joan Tearle and Tony Harding in the Leighton Buzzard Library to publicise the anniversary. There was even a special T-shirt design produced to mark the occasion.

Another highlight of the year was a compass and navigation class run by Tony Harding, with theoretical sessions at Eggington Cricket Club and a field session at Ivinghoe Beacon to put members' new-found skills into practice. Tony also organised several footpath clearances.

Other social activities included a barbeque held in Alan and Heather Carter's garden, an enjoyable Christmas meal at The Boot in Soulbury and a theatre trip to see Time and Time Again by Alan Ayckbourn.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 88 walks were arranged covering a total of 755 miles.

1996 – Five long distance walks in a year.

Membership in this year was 172, again a small increase on the previous year. A record number of national long distance trails were walked in the year as follows:

- 1. **The Peddars Way** (Norfolk Coast Path) led by David Butler on 4-6 May, covering 48 miles from Knettlishall Heath to Hunstanton.*
- 2. **The Jurassic Way** (Banbury to Stamford) led by Helen Cox completed in four sections on the weekends of 27/ 28 April and 8/9 June, a total of 58.5 miles.*
- 3. **The North Norfolk Coastal Path** led by Alan Carter in three sections on 24, 25 and 26 August, a total of 45 miles from Hunstanton to Cromer.*
- 4. **The Ridgeway Path**, Dave Merrington led the final section of 19 miles from Princes Risborough to Ivinghoe Beacon on 3 March.*
- 5. A section of **Offa's Dyke** was walked during a weekend trip to the Black Mountains in October led by Tony Harding. The walk started from Llanthony Priory.*

The England-Wales border still mostly follows Offa's Dyke through the Welsh Marches much of the earthwork can be attributed to Offa, King of Mercia from 757 to 796. This picture was taken on a steep climb on the Offa's Dyke path, with first 5 in line: Hanna Harding, Joy Bown, John Duxbury, Mike Griffin then Maureen Wong.



The Group at Llanthony Priory, this is one of the earliest houses of Augustinian canons to be founded in Britain, and is one of only a handful in Wales.



On 1 September 1996 Tony Harding led a walk round the Leighton Linslade Loop. This is a 20 mile walk which encircles Leighton Buzzard & Linslade passing through ten local parishes, it was devised and first led by Tony in August 1993 as a 19 mile challenge walk. It was a magnificently sunny day, starting from Stockgrove Country Park and picking up Jim Phelps at Waterloo Farm en route, with a break for lunch at the Carpenters Arms in Slapton, the halfway point. It was extremely thirsty work and by Heath and Reach everyone was gasping for another pint of ale (or a fruit-based drink).

Alan and Heather Carter organised an additional activity outside the walks programme - a week's walking in Brittany, leading all the walks themselves and making all the travel and accommodation arrangements. The walks covered the Crozon Peninsula, the Forest of

Huelgoat, the picturesque village of Locronan (the setting of Polanski's Tess of the D'Urbervilles) and the 1,100-ft summit of Menez-Hom, a smooth rounded hill, with commanding views of the coast and inland. In all, the tour covered 54 miles.



The Footpath Officers, David and Carolyn Warren, raised various points with the County Council about reinstatement of ploughed up paths. The Council indicated that their policy was that when the crop causes an obstruction (4-6 inches tall), the landowner must clear the path. The current legal position is that cross-fields paths should be cleared within two weeks. David & Carolyn looked after footpaths in their local Heath & Reach area.

A questionnaire to all short walk leaders showed 90% support for appointing a back marker when large numbers of walkers turned up. It was suggested that back markers should be non-leaders to encourage them to become walk leaders. This policy has now lapsed.

Social activities included pub nights at the Cock Horse, Heath and Reach and the Cock Inn, Wing; a slide show by John Goode on the Milford Track in New Zealand; and Christmas dinner at the Cock Horse.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 94 walks were arranged covering a total of 871 miles.

1997 – Controversy over the walking pace!

Membership stood at 196, compared with 172 the previous year.

On Sunday 18 May John Goode and Tom Brown organised a walk from Eggington to Hockliffe and Battlesden, to support the national 'Free Your Paths Weekend', and show some of the good work done by the County Council on local paths. The group visited Church Stretton and walked on Offa's Dyke and Ragleth Hill. This photo was taken at the junction of Offa's Dyke and the Shropshire Way on the 17 May. The trip was organised by David Aston who had moved back to Church Stretton.



June was a particularly active month. Lynda Bawden organised a 23-mile 'On Your Bike' ride and picnic at Grafham Water; John Goode and Chris Sames led a walk for the London Blind Rambling Club from Leighton Buzzard railway station to Southcott, Wing and Ledburn; and John Goode led a walk of 12 miles with the theme of 'Shakespeare's Stratford' from Stratford-

on-Avon Racecourse to Anne Hathaway's cottage and Mary Arden's house, with lunch at the Mary Arden Inn in Wilmcote. Family Rambling Day on 29 June was an enormous success, with over 50 parents and children walking around Woburn.

Other notable walks in the year included an excursion to Dovedale in Derbyshire with Tony Harding, a weekend in the Wye Valley with David Butler and a 10-mile local ramble led by Chris Sames and Sylvie Taylor as part of the RA's National Access Day.

At the Group AGM in November concern was expressed that some walk leaders were exceeding the standard pace of 2½ miles per hour, thus making it difficult for several members to keep up. It was agreed that walks above this pace should be described in the programme as brisk. **Editors note;** although good intentioned this contradicted RA guidance notes for walk leaders which advised that, "A walk leader should always walk at the pace of the slowest person". The term 'brisk' was eventually dropped from the programme.



This problem however had been mentioned earlier in the year, also complaints about too many consecutive long walks on the programme; this was overcome by introducing a policy of alternate short & long walks and ensuring that the first walk of the month included both a long and short walk each Sunday. **Editor's note;** as a result of these issues a separate splinter group was formed in June, consisting of about 20 of the older, long standing members. They became the KOS, walking monthly, at a leisurely pace with a mandatory pub lunch stop but still remaining loyal to the main Leighton Ramblers Group. Like the Group, the KOS is still going strong, although a few are now, non-walking social members. Just to clarify the acronym, the appropriately named KOS stands for, 'Knackered Old Sods', an old RAF service term used by young airmen when referring to their older SNCO's!



At a Committee meeting in December it was also agreed to encourage members to carry mobile phones for use in an emergency but to suggest that these were switched off during walks, on the grounds that ramblers were already well noisy, particularly when everyone was fresh at the beginning of a walk. It was also suggested that Committee members should try to get out on more walks (how different from our present exemplary behaviour), with the particular aim of welcoming new members.

The busy social calendar included a ten-pin bowling evening in Milton Keynes, an 'Eat as Much as You Can' Chinese buffet at Shan Shui Cottage in Leighton Buzzard, regular pub evenings at the Star, Heath and Reach and The Cock at Wing, a barbeque at John & Chris Duxbury's home in Carlton Grove and a Group Christmas dinner at the Cock Horse.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 80 walks were arranged covering a total of 672 miles.

1998 – Bedfordshire's own long distance, Bunyan Trail, is walked.

The general pattern of Sunday walks, with a short and a long walk on the first Sunday of the month was continued, with occasional away trips.



Helen Cox, pictured, began the 70-mile Bunyan Trail on 28/29 March, meandering through the places associated with John Bunyan's travels as a tinker and preacher. He was arrested and tried at Harlington for preaching illegally and imprisoned at Bedford in November 1660, which is where he wrote his masterpiece *Pilgrim's Progress*. The walk is almost entirely in Bedfordshire, with only about a mile of the route near Hexton being in Hertfordshire. The walk was completed on 26/27 September after three full weekends of walking and those participating celebrated with an Indian meal.

Alan Carter led an Easter linear walk along the Weavers Way from Cromer to Great Yarmouth, covering 56 miles in four days; while John Duxbury and Bob Petrie organised a week in the heart of the Cotswolds, based on Nether Swell Manor.

One innovation tried by Joy Bown was a walk starting at 2.00pm on a Sunday afternoon, allowing for a lie-in, beginning at the Black Horse Inn in Milton Keynes. John Goode also experimented with a figure-of-eight walk from Brill, covering five miles in the morning and 4.5 miles in the afternoon at a leisurely pace. Peter Thompson reprised this idea with a figure-of-eight walk from Stockgrove Park, covering six miles in the morning and 5.5 miles in the afternoon. On 20 September John Goode highlighted the value to the community of public access to 'open country' on National Access to the Countryside Day with a walk round Aston Abbots, Wingrave and Rowsham. The walks programme that year ended with a walk round Woburn Park led by Pat Bridgeman and Majorie Spoons as part of the RA's Festival of Winter Walks intended to promote new membership.

One administrative point was that the accident log was reinstated. This had not been used since 1994 but it was agreed by the Committee that all accidents should henceforth be recorded in the log, to be kept by the Group Secretary.

Social activities included many pub evenings - at the Duke's Head in Heath and Reach, the Old Swan in Cheddington, the Star in Heath Road, the Red Lion in North Street (described as; Progressive - Raucous - Riotous- and Revelling!) and the Hope and Anchor in Eaton Bray. Ten-pin bowling in Milton Keynes, a barbecue, a trip to see Me and My Gal at the Library Theatre (to see one of our members treading the boards in the chorus) and finally Christmas dinner at the Cock Horse all contributed to a packed social calendar.



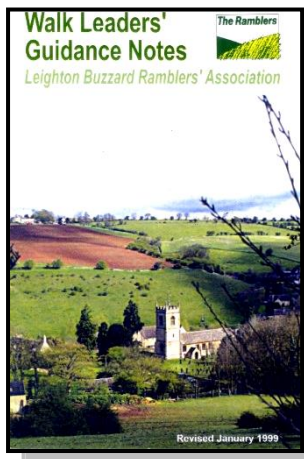
A couple of statistics to end the year: 101 walks were arranged covering a total of 921 miles.

1999 - The Group produces its own "Walk Leaders Guidance Notes".

Membership of the Group stood at 200, again a small increase over previous years. Alternating long and short walks continued to be the mainstay of the walks programme.

Lynda Bawden's Cotswolds Way walk was completed on 18 April with a meal at Chipping Camden, after walking the last stretch from Stanway to Chipping Camden and covering 100 miles in all along the Cotswolds escarpment with beautiful views. Certificates were presented to those who had completed all sections of the route. A walk round Caldecote Lake was organised in June as part of the RA Family Rambling Day.

Away breaks included the Wessex Ridgeway and a full week of walking the entire length of the Dales Way. Our first day walk with transport was organised by Jim Phelps and took place on the section of the Thames Path from Greenwich to Tower Bridge, with a coach being provided from and back to Leighton Buzzard. After a shaky start, when support for the day was low, the walk proved very successful but the arrangements did not lead to a great demand for replacing our shared car system.



In January 1999 the Group issued a booklet entitled 'Walk Leaders' Guidance Notes', largely written by Tony Harding and a revision of an earlier tome. It was designed to help new leaders with the planning and leading of walks in lowland countryside. An unkind observer might have noted that this advice seemed to be needed. In his introduction, the Secretary, John Duxbury, said that a third of the party dropped out of the first walk he led, he lost a third of the group halfway round his second walk, and on the

third only seven people turned up. The booklet warns prospective new leaders that you will be expected to be the 'expert', who resolves all transport arrangements, answers any questions on flora and fauna and knows everything about stately homes and archaeological sites encountered en route. As Sally Clay, the Programme Secretary, observed: 'A moving, microscopic portrait of a walk leader's fate'. To which, Jim Phelps added: 'Marvellous ... exquisite pacing ... ideal length'. Curiously, in the light of these reviews, the publication was not short-listed for the Booker Prize that year.

The walks programme that year concluded with walks in Woburn Park and Eggington as a contribution to the 1999 Festival of Winter Walks organised by the Ramblers' Association, with the aim of increasing membership, and sponsored by Millets.

Committee changes included Kathy Ritchie taking over as Programme Secretary when Sally Clay stood down after four years of hard graft and gentle persuasion. Sylvie Eames took over from Chris Sames as Footpath Officer in early 1999 and walked all the rights of way in the various parishes with the footpath guardians. She began a sustained campaign with the County Council to reinstate many paths in Billington, Eggington and Hockliffe that had been ploughed up. In particular, she reported that walking in Hockliffe was no longer a pleasure as six paths had been ploughed up, two were blocked by farmyard debris, one path was overgrown and lacked a stile, one was blocked by barbed wire and one field was occupied by an intimidating bull. By December most of the paths in Hockliffe had been reinstated but other problems remained, which the County Council was asked to remedy as soon as possible.

A Millennium stile was installed at Billington during the year with a specification devised by the local P3 (Parish Paths Partnership) that allowed for older people with limited leg-lifting ability (the most common problem being getting that second leg over the top rail). It also allows dogs to get through. Over a dozen of these stiles were eventually installed in the parish and they have survived ten years of use remarkably well. You can recognise them as they look like miniature level crossing gates.



At the Area AGM meeting in November the Chief Executive of the Ramblers' Association, Frank Syrratt, suggested walking should be considered as a form of transport, i.e. getting to work. He also commented on the continuing lack of people prepared to take on Area jobs and suggested greater publicity in order to foster interest. There was nothing to stop areas changing the job descriptions for jobs in order to make them easier to fulfil. As regards better communication with members, the RA intended to hold training events and seminars round the country.

Social activities included regular pub nights, a Pot-Luck buffet lunch at Norfolk House Farm in Eaton Bray and a cycle and sizzle day.

There was a barbeque, with Lynda Bawden coordinating the 'girlie stuff' and Alan Carter the macho bits (one couldn't say that these days).

The year ended with a Christmas dinner and disco at the Hunt Hotel in Linslade.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 97 walks were arranged covering a total of 930 miles.

2000 – The 15th Anniversary and a walking brunch.

The first walk of the new millennium was led by Ken and Rita Barry, just a short 5 mile jaunt to begin the year and the century, thereafter the programme settled down to the usual weekly walk with an additional one on the first Sunday of the month. Much work had been done by John Duxbury and the team on the 36-page Millennium Walks booklet (20,000 copies were produced) which contained ten local walks devised and written by Group members. The walks ranged from a 1½ mile 'Southcott Stroll' to the 20 mile 'Leighton- Linslade Loop'. On the 20th

of January a copy was delivered free to all Leighton Buzzard households with the Citizen newspaper. The not inconsiderable expense was met with a grant from the Lottery Fund. The early months were not short of activities which included a pot luck supper, a Barn dance and a day trip to France.

In August Lynda Bawden, pictured 2nd from the right, led a walk with a difference – A 13 mile



Cycle Ride! This photo of them was taken outside the Old Crown in Great Horwood after the traditional pub lunch stop.

Footpath Officer Sylvie Eames began representations with the County Council about proposed closure to the public of the track alongside the egg-packing station in Turnbull's Lane, Heath and Reach. Despite some pro forma statements of evidence of local use for 20 years the subsequent public inquiry in 2003 decided, despite an earlier order made in 2001 in favour of adding it to the definitive map, that it was not a right-of-way and this was reaffirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment. Unfortunately we were not able to produce any evidence that it had ever been waymarked as a public path; although several former users said there were once 'public rights of way' signs at both ends of the lane but these had subsequently disappeared.

With the 15th anniversary of the creation of the Group falling in October a special walk was



organised by Heather Carter on the 15th of the month from the Library Car Park to Soulbury, where a 'brunch' was taken at The Boot where the Mayor, Mark Freeman joined the party. The walk then continued on to Great Brickhill, through Stockgrove Country Park and then followed the Greensand Ridge Walk back to the White House for a champagne reception.

October also had another celebration as Tony Harding led his 100th walk for the Group which in total had covered 964 miles, this was also reported in the local LBO newspaper. The walk was a repeat of his very first walk in February 1986 from Ashridge over Berkhamstead Common to Studham and Dagnall.

At the AGM in November, Sylvie Eames stood down as Footpath Officer and was replaced by Ted Herbert and Carole Dixon, two officers were now required, as with the demise of the Flitvale Group, there were more paths to cover. Another first was also recorded as John Duxbury created our first web site, accessed through the national Ramblers site.



Just to round out the year Ken and Rita Barry finished as they had started and led the last walk on the programme with a 6 mile walk from Wendover along sections of the Aylesbury Ring and South Bucks Way paths.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 81 walks were arranged covering a total of 651 miles.

2001 – Foot and Mouth disease stops countryside walking.

The year 2001 continued in this successful vein, Alan Carter had agreed to a second year as Chairman, Chris Vickery came on board as Programme Secretary, the rest of the committee was unchanged, with this team there was to be no backsliding!



After the success of the 'Brunch' walk the previous October, Lynda Bawden, pictured, decided to organise a 'Breakfast Walk' on Sunday the 21st January. This was a 12 mile circular walk starting from Woburn with a late morning stop at the Fir Trees pub in Woburn Sands for a cooked breakfast. This was obviously much enjoyed as Lynda arranged yet another breakfast walk on the 28th October, starting from Woburn Sands. This was another circular route but stopping at the Royal Oak in Woburn this time for a full English cooked breakfast.

The Royal Oak had been a favourite pub of the Group since the late 1980's, visited on many walks in the Woburn area. However this Grade II Listed building, built in 1774, was destroyed by fire in January 2006, fortunately for us the brewery, Greene King, completely restored it the following February which also included a new thatched roof.

In February disaster struck, foot and mouth disease broke out and suddenly the whole countryside was out of bounds, (**all** public footpaths were closed between February and June, it was September before all were finally reopened).

Half of the spring programme had to be scrapped, inventive walks were substituted and the Group arranged a programme of 'Urban' walks, visiting Cambridge, Oxford and London. A trip was also made to walk the Southend Millennium Walk, a trail devised by the Ramblers Association, being mainly a coastal path it was not closed.

One place however which became popular with walkers during this period, was Milton Keynes. In particular the many miles of redway paths and the lakes at Willen & Coldecotte which offered countryside walking in an urban area.

However these cows at Milton Keynes, pictured below, were unaffected by the foot and mouth disease! They have since been relocated into the Shopping Centre for their own protection - from vandals.



In the late summer some normality returned and the programme got underway again supplemented by a Cheese and Wine party at Chris & Derek Vickery's. There was a theatre trip to see 'Chicago' at Milton Keynes and an evening Chinese meal arranged. Two other items to note were, first our website won an award for 'Website of the Month' for July. The RA praised its ease of use, content and attractively laid-out pages, all thanks to John Duxbury. Secondly Jim Phelps, pictured, led the first of his popular walks over Blows Down from Dunstable Priory. Sadly Jim died several years later in 2008; see his obituary on page 37.



At the AGM Alan Carter stepped down and was replaced by Tom Brown as Chairman and Ian Lindsay, a founder member of the Group, retired from the committee after 17 years continuous service to both the Group and on the Bedfordshire Area committee. The Group continued to thrive with 240 members.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 58 walks were arranged covering a total of 575 miles.

2002 – Group fights planning application to save local footpaths.

The walk programme was supplemented by special expeditions to long distance paths including the North Downs Way and the Heart of England Path with Lynda Bawden and the Wessex Ridgeway with Alan Carter. John Duxbury arranged several walking weekends to, Sweden, Turkey and Lulworth Cove in Dorset.



To keep everyone on track Tony Harding gave another navigation course in June, with a theory map reading and compass session held in the evening at the Swan Hotel. This was followed later at the weekend with an outdoor practical course using both map and compass to navigate around the Ivinghoe Beacon area.

In the autumn Footpath Secretary Ted Herbert, pictured, scored a notable victory by beating off proposals for open quarrying of Fullers earth at Wavendon Heath near Woburn. (Fuller's earth is used almost exclusively by the paper industry.) The mining company Steetley Woburn Bentonite Ltd had been extracting Fuller's earth from the area since 1952 but only one site at Old Wavendon Heath was currently operating which was expected to run out of permitted reserves by 2004, it finally closed in December 2004.



The company applied for planning permission to extend its workings into Wavendon Heath (south) which would have seen the removal of several public footpaths in this attractive area of woodland. Ted gave written and oral evidence at the subsequent public inquiry at Woburn Village Hall. As a result of the 12-day public inquiry, the proposals were disallowed and work was also stopped at the existing mining site on the other side of Woburn Road. Councillor Richard Payne, holder of the County Council's environment portfolio commented that the decision 'preserves the environment in the area from further encroachment'. The company found another 'unique source' of the mineral near Oxford.

Bedfordshire County Council considered the application and refused planning permission mainly due to the environmental impacts of extraction in a locally designated area of great landscape value. The picture below is the Wavendon Ponds, a SSSI near Longslade Cottage which would have been lost if quarrying were to have gone ahead.



Part of Wavendon Heath south as it is today, saved for all to enjoy.

At the AGM Lynda Bawden took over as Chairman from Tom Brown, who had decided to move away from the town. Tom was a popular member of the Group having also served as Publicity Officer and regular walk leader, always keen to help new leaders to reccy walks, well remembered for his enthusiasm and sense of humour, especially his witty 'one-liners'.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 83 walks were arranged covering a total of 783 miles.

2003 – Following in the pilgrims footsteps.

The programme continued as full as before under the watchful eye of Chris Vickery as Programme Secretary, with walks every week plus the long distance paths and a new venture, walking the Milton Keynes Boundary Walk in company with the Milton Keynes Group. This 63 mile walk encircles Milton Keynes and was walked in 5 seperate stages, each about 12 miles. The route is around the MK town boundary on existing Rights of Way, through the valleys of the Rivers Tove and Ouse.



Left, the foot tunnel under the Grand Union Canal.

Right, the Iron Trunk Aqueduct, carrying the Grand Union Canal over the river Great Ouse.





The final section of the North Downs Way was completed in May, unfortunately Lynda Bawden was taken ill with pneumonia and so unable to lead the final section of the walk but John Duxbury stepped in and led the walk for her. Lynda had led the first four stages of the trail, covering 121 miles annually between 2000 & 2002 and was obviously disappointed at being unable to complete this classic ancient walk. However there was a happy ending as Lynda did finish the walk several months later with fellow ramblers Alan & Heather Carter and

Mary Kemp, who had also missed the last section.

This photo was taken during the first stage near Farnham with Lynda fourth from left.

This popular long distance trail is 153 miles long between Farnham and Dover; it follows the crest of the North Downs ridge across Kent, with wonderful views of the Surrey Hills. Part of the route follows the old Pilgrim's Way, trod for hundreds of years by travellers from Winchester to the shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury, who was murdered at Canterbury Cathedral in 1170.



The final 32 mile section, led by John Duxbury followed the route from Boughton Lees to Dover via Canterbury, being a linear walk good use was made of "good old British Rail" or whatever it's called these days! This photo shows the group on arrival at their final destination in Dover on the 5th May. (Leader John is hidden at the back with the blue cap)

Apart from some excellent walking the Group enjoyed a full social year, thanks to Social Secretary Alan Carter. There was a Chinese Meal at the Shan Shui Cottage, Chinese Resturant in the High Street and an Annual Dinner at Heath Park House in March, which was the Groups third visit to sample their excellent menu. In April there was a Ten-Pin Bowling competion at the Megabowl in Milton Keynes and in June there was an Annual Barbecue hosted by John & Chris Duxbury in their garden. Then in September the Group literally 'went to the dogs' with an action packed evening of Greyhound racing at the Milton Keynes Stadium which included a 3 course meal. In November there was an evening visit to the Indian Pavilion in Lake Street and the year was finished off on the 21st December when John Duxbury invited everyone back to his home for Mulled wine & mince pies after leading a 13 mile walk to Soulbury and back.



If all these social functions were not enough, four 'Pub Nights' were also arranged through out the year, which required no organisation other than members turning up at the Dukes Head in Heath & Reach for a chat and a drink in friendly company. Sadly these were discontinued !

At the AGM in November Chris Vickery stood down after serving three years as Programme Secretary and Chris White took over the role. John Hartley joined the committee taking over from Chris White as Committee Member. The Group had now achieved a membership of 270, a high point.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 82 walks were arranged covering a total of 703 miles.

2004 – Walking in the French Alps.

2004 continued in the same busy vein with weekly walks, long distance paths, and the South Downs way was now on the agenda, meals out and a Theatre trip. There was also a visit to the Shuttleworth Proms, a picnic style concert with the combination of rare and unique vintage aircraft flying in time to the National Symphony Orchestra, the evening concluded with a stunning firework finale.

Tony Harding led the first ‘Bluebell Walk’ in the Ashridge Estate in early May, when the blooms are at their best; this popular walk has been repeated several times since. The two separate woods where the bluebells grow in profusion are both accessed from the Beacon Road; at Dockey Wood and Crawley Wood. They are recognised as being some of the best concentrations of bluebells to be seen in the three counties area and are managed by the National Trust.

Crawley Wood is the smaller of the two woods and less frequented than Dockey Wood but the bluebells are equally spectacular. The Ordnance Survey (OS) triangulation pillar in the far corner of the wood is about 50 feet higher than the one on top of Ivinghoe Beacon a mile away to the north. These familiar concrete triangulation pillars were built through out England by the OS between 1935 & 1945 and used by cartographers as bench marks to produce maps. At the time there would have been no trees as they needed unrestricted views between the hill top pillars, for their theodolite, which measures angles between points to determine their relative positions.



Dockey Wood



Crawley Wood

On the social front, in March there was a Greek Meal at the Cock Hotel, Heath & Reach and in July member Sue Pengelly hosted the annual barbecue at her home in Broughton Village, Milton Keynes. In the afternoon on the 19th December, following John Duxbury’s walk, there was a mulled wine & mince pie social at St. Leonard’s Church hall in Heath & Reach to kick start the festive season.



Early in the year there was also three Pub Nights held at the Cock Hotel in Heath & Reach. It’s thanks to Social Secretary, Alan Carter, who arranged the various events.

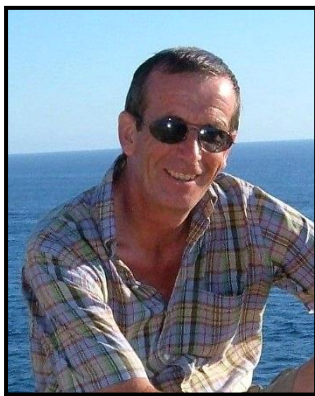
There was also a visit in June to walk in the French Alps at the village resort of Morzine. The trip was organised by John Duxbury the Group Secretary, who arranged all the walks. The group took over a large spacious chalet looked after by a superb Canadian chef, meals were accompanied by unlimited amounts of wine! Morzine is a well renowned winter ski resort but in the summer after the crowds had left the walking was excellent, over snow covered mountains which the summer sun slowly melted away as seen below.



Despite being high up in the snow covered Alps a few hardy members of the Group found it warm enough to wear shorts (true Brits!). Some even tried 'bum boarding' down disused ski slopes, a sort of sitting down version of snowboarding - for the older rambles!

The trip concluded with one of the great challenges in the French Alps: paragliding. Half the group gritted their teeth – the others rose to the challenge. Roped to a big French man and running fast down a mountain slope scattered with boulders seemed foolhardy until airborne – a great experience the few will never forget.

The AGM in November saw Group Secretary John Duxbury leave the committee after 7 years of dedicated work. John achieved much for the Group in his time, not just as a Group Secretary and walk leader but he project managed and edited the Millennium Walks booklet, he also obtained a Lottery Grant and donations amounting to almost £8K to fund the booklet production. John organised several overseas walking trips to Sweden, Turkey and France, he also set up and managed the Groups first web site which won an award from the Ramblers Association. (You can still view the website at: <http://jduxbury.users.btopenworld.com>. Note: the site is no longer maintained). Shortly after leaving the committee John retired from walking with the Group, no doubt to direct his enthusiastic talents to other interests. At the AGM John Hartley agreed to take over from John Duxbury as Group Secretary and Membership Secretary.



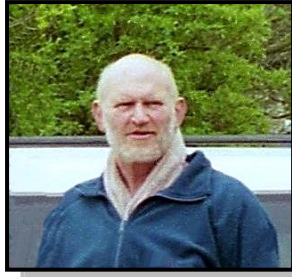
over from John Duxbury as Group Secretary and Membership Secretary.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 71 walks were arranged covering a total of 650 miles.

2005 – The Group celebrates its 20th Anniversary.

The walking year began with a brisk 6 mile walk around Pitstone Hill on the second of January and finished with a 9 mile walk in December around Whipsnade and the Tree Cathedral. A full

and varied programme of walks throughout the year was once again on offer, and included a number of mid week and evening walks during the summer months.



Sadly in March, fellow rambler Tony Ibotson died. Tony known affectionately as 'Swampy' to his friends led several walks for the Group but unfortunately had to give up walking in his last few years as his diabetes worsened. Many knew Tony as a 'gentle giant, very knowledgeable about farming and countryside matters, an interesting man to talk with, he was sadly missed.

In April, Mike & Ferial Hyde led a 7 mile themed walk of Flora Thompson's 'Lark Rise to Candleford' at Cottesford in Oxfordshire. The day was blessed with lovely weather, and a sighting of the redoubtable Maggie Thatcher and entourage taking a stroll in the grounds of Tusmore House, the local Manor. Large 'Men in Black' all in identical dark suits, were very conspicuous by their presence, and not at all welcoming of groups of passing ramblers.

Note: Lark Rise to Candleford became a British television costume drama series, adapted by the BBC from Flora Thompson's trilogy of semi-autobiographical novel about her Oxfordshire childhood, set in the small hamlet of Lark Rise and the wealthier neighbouring market town, Candleford, at the end of the 19th Century. The first episode was aired some 3 years later in January 2008 on BBC One. Elaborate sets of the villages of Lark Rise (representing Juniper Hill where Flora was born in 1876) and Candleford were actually made from fibreglass and filmed at two farms in Box & Neston Park near Corsham in Wiltshire. Interior scenes were shot in a warehouse at a BBC location in Yate, South Gloucestershire.

The London Blind Walk was held in July when the group accompanied a number of blind and partially sighted walkers from London on a 7 mile walk in the Wing area.

Long distance events were also well catered for in the year:

- *Lynda Bawden led Part 1 of the Leicester Round, covering 28 miles in August.*
- *Chris & Roger White led 47 miles of the South Downs Way over two weekends.*
- *Mike & Wendy Ley led 13 miles of the Chiltern Way in June.*

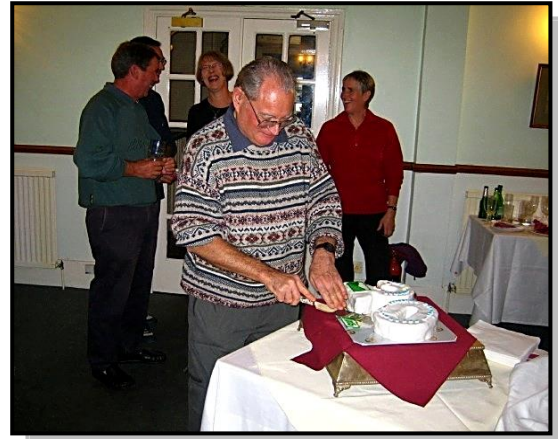
The Social programme was also well taken care of with Dinner at the Himalaya Restaurant in Leighton Buzzard organized by Alan Carter who also arranged a canal cruise and cream tea walk in June. Lynda Bawden organised another of her breakfast walks in early March at the Green Man in Eversholt and Julian Chritchlow ended the year with a mulled wine and mince pie walk, held just before Christmas.

The group celebrated the 20th anniversary of it's formation on October 23rd with founder member Tony Harding leading a 6 mile walk from Stockgrove Park, via Sandhouse Nature Reserve and Kings Wood. A record number of members attended the walk.



This picture shows some of the 55 on the walk, which finishing in time for a buffet at the White House back in Leighton Buzzard, where the Town Mayor Mark Freeman met and congratulated the Group on reaching its 20th anniversary.

Afterwards at the Swan Hotel in the High Street, members toasted the anniversary and ex-Chairman Peter Clarke 'marked' the occasion with a traditional 'cutting the cake' ceremony, (Peter was Group Chairman from 1995 to 1998).



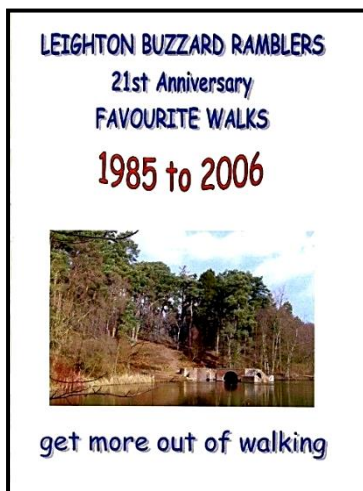
A couple of statistics to end the year: 61 walks were arranged covering a total of 575 miles.

2006 - A book of local walks is produced.

John and Linda Hartley led the way into our 21st year with a seven mile walk on New Years Day, perfect for blowing away those post celebratory cobwebs. The walk starting at the Tring museum, ended as is customary, at a local pub, where the open fire was much appreciated.

Late winter and early spring was notable for long dry weather spells, with no 'knee deep in mud' walks across ploughed fields this year!

The new committee is now firmly in place with Ken Barry, Catriona Spencer, June Ayres Wendy Ley and Roger White, replacing Lynda Bawden, Alan Carter, Mary Kemp, Sally Clay and Rita Barry.



To celebrate the Group's 21st year, a splendid little book of 'Favourite Walks' was produced under the editorship of John Hartley and a team of around 50 assistants! Fifteen local walks were featured, all with accompanying route maps and photographs. The book also included the rules of The Country Code and a section on Safety when Walking. A brief introduction was provided by Carole Dixon the Group Chairman. The project was supported by the Greensand Trust, South Bedfordshire and Leighton Buzzard Councils and the Ramblers Association.

July saw the Group again playing host to The London Blind Rambling Club. A seven mile circular walk was arranged, starting from the Leighton Buzzard Rail Station, taking in the canal path and the Three Locks. The walk was led by Chris White; Chris also provided tea and cakes at her home after the walk, a nice gesture.

Long distance events this year were once again well taken care of with Lynda Bawden leading the following parts of the Leicester Round:

- *In April, Part 2 covered 26 miles over a weekend.*
- *In August, Part 3 covering 26 miles over a weekend.*
- *In September, Part 4 covered 28 miles over a weekend.*

Mike and Wendy Ley led the following parts of the Chiltern Way:

- *In March, Part 4 covering 11 miles.*
- *In July, Part 5 covering 11 miles.*
- *In September, Part 6 covering 10 miles.*

A Mid May Walking Break was highly successful, the four nights away at Lynton, North Devon was organised by John and Linda Hartley. The Group stayed at the very comfortable Valley of the Rocks Hotel in Lynton. Two walks a day were on offer, one long walk and one slightly less ambitious. One particular high level walk on Exmoor was memorable for the monsoon conditions encountered. Spirits however remained un dampened and it was agreed that another holiday should be planned for next year.



Catriona Spencer organised two Blue-Badge guided tours of historic London during the year. The first, a spring walk, began with the rail journey to London and a picnic in the royal park, pictured below. After meeting up with the tour guide, the group enjoyed a fascinating walk



along the Thames embankment as far as Southwick Cathedral, en-route were views over the Thames from the Oxo Tower, crossing the famous wobbly foot bridge.

The group rounded off the day with a meal in a London pasta house; the pasta house itself was rather unusual being formerly a bank, the bank vaults now housing very secure ladies powder rooms.

The second tour was an evening “Halloween walk” in old London, then supper and the rail journey home, both events were very enjoyable and well attended.

This picture was taken during the ‘Historic Tours of London’ showing Yvonne Banks, Sally Clay and walk leader Catriona Spencer.



The walking year drew to an end with a minced pies and mulled wine walk hosted by Julian Chrichlow. The final walk of the year being Ken and Rita’s Winter Wonderland Walk in Woburn Woods.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 60 walks were arranged covering a total of 576 miles.

2007 - The Group hosts the Greensand Ridge Walk’s 21st Anniversary.

A gentle start to our 2007 walking programme, with Carole Dixon leading a good turnout on a five mile stroll in the Three Locks area. In July Carole also led, together with Malcolm Dunn,

the now annual London Blind Club walk, which this year started from Milton Keynes Station. Cheering up dreary February was a dinner at The Queen's Head, Wing.

Long distance events during the year included; Part 5 of The Leicester Round, led by Lynda Bawden. This section was from Aston Flamville to Newton Linford, covering 29 miles, over one weekend. Leg stretching walks included Alan Carters 16 miler in the Aldbury area, a 15 mile walk with Mike and Wendy Ley in the Mursley area and from Chris White, a 15 mile linear walk from Lower Slaughter to Chipping Camden in the Cotswolds.

In May of the year the group enjoyed a splendid four day walking holiday in Clyro, Hay on Wye. Accommodation in the atmospheric Baskerville Hall Hotel will long be remembered for the entire group of about 30 ramblers reclining on a four poster bed occupied by Jim and Diane Phelps. (Photographic evidence is available for a small fee payable at the local magistrate's court!) A varied assortment of walks, both high level long walks, along Offa's Dyke and lower level, shorter walks were on offer, all blessed with glorious English weather.



July and Chris Vickery led ramblers on a delightful walk along the River Thames from Marlow to Henley-on-Thames, the return by river cruise boat amid the hustle and bustle (and wealth) of Henley during the regatta period was most enjoyable. Clivendon House could be seen on the opposite bank and those of a certain age will recall its associations in the 1960s with the MP John Profumo, Secretary of State for War and Christine Keeler the reputed mistress of an alleged Russian spy .

Also in July, the Summer B.B.Q. held at Julian Chritchlow's, the deserts were particularly appreciated by all.

At the annual Linslade Canal Festival, held at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park in July, the Group had a Ramblers Stall, aimed at increasing our prominence in the community. It was staffed throughout the event by teams of Rambler volunteers. H.Q. provided posters and various giveaways; Julian and June prepared and assembled a splendid photographic montage.

October, and the Greensand Ridge Walk celebrated 21 years of existence. Ramblers from Bedford arrived by a special train provided by Silverlink. Several of our Group's walk leaders met the arrivals at Leighton Buzzard Station and led three columns of walkers, leaving at 15 minute intervals, on a walk to Stockgrove Country Park where the main celebrations took place. The walkers returned to Leighton Buzzard station via a shuttle of vintage buses provided by the Greensand Trust. You can view a two minute video of the occasion and should recognise a few familiar faces (Hold the CONTROL key and click to follow the link) at:



*<http://www.local-news.tv> and enter; **greensand ridge walk** in the search for video box then click the find icon.*



On Saturday 13th October, Julian Chritchlow led a six mile walk near Wendover, followed by an excellent lunch, drinks and a tour of the Chiltern Brewery which included an opportunity to sample their products! The brewery is located at the foot of Coombe Hill; the Chiltern Brewery is Buckinghamshire's oldest independent brewery. This photo must have been taken before the tour as everyone looks remarkably sober!

The year ended with mulled wine and mince pies at Carole Dixon's home in Linslade. The last walk of the year was 9 miles in the Barton Hills area near Pirton led by Chris White on Dec. 30th.

Group membership remains steady at around 250, all of whom receive our walks programme, of this number roughly 25% are regular walkers with the group, similar to the RA national average. Fortunately we don't get 100% turn outs on our walks!

A couple of statistics to end the year: 75 walks were arranged covering a total of 636 miles.

2008 – A cultural walking tour around Cambridge.

The year got off to a sad start. Fellow Rambler Jim Phelps died on the 2nd January 2008 at the



age of 79. Jim, a loyal and energetic member of the Ramblers for many years he never ceased to amaze us with his energy and stamina, despite his 'Senior Citizen' status. There were occasional variations between the actual and the published length of his walks! Jim also cycled a lot and was unique in never having taken a driving test. He led his popular walk across Blows Down near Dunstable several times; it was often referred to as 'Jims Walk' as nobody else seemed to know the area as well as Jim. He was well thought of within

the Group and a Memorial walk was arranged and led by Chris White on the 12 Oct '09 following his favourite walk from Dunstable Priory, over Blows Down to Caddington and back. Jim's cheery company will be missed.

Another successful social calendar:

- *February saw members meeting for dinner at the Queens Head in Wing.*
- *March and another Ceilidh at the Village Hall in Haddenham.*
- *April and Lynda Bawden arranged another Breakfast Walk with breakfast at the Fir Tree, Woburn Sands. Thirty walkers enjoyed the short walk to the Fir Tree Hotel and a traditional English breakfast after which, it was noted, several full tums opted to cut short the 10 mile walk and return to the start point!*

In May there was a walk with a difference. A Dawn Chorus and Migratory Bird Walk with Martin Kincaid of the Milton Keynes Parks Trust. A surprising number of people turned out for a 5.00 am start at the Peace Pagoda at Willen Lake. Walkers enjoyed sun rise over the lake, an excellent and informative guided walk, and breakfast at the lakeside Restaurant. Non breakfasters dashed off to join one of two other walks being held later that day.

Also in May, the Spring Walking Holiday took place in Montgomery. Yet another successful week away, good companions, a good hotel, good food and a varied selection of walks in this lovely part of the land. Further sections of Offa's Dyke were completed, following on from last years Clyro sections. John and Linda Hartley's connections with the Met Office paid off once again, supplying us with wonderful weather.

A cultural trip to Cambridge took place in July. The group enjoyed fine weather and the services of an excellent and amusing Blue Badge Guide. The unexpected inclusion of a visit to Kings College Chapel was a definite highlight. A late lunch at the Anchor riverside pub was enjoyed, and for some of the group, a punt excursion on the river Cam where adding to the interest, their boatman fell into the river. The loss of a boatman apart, it was a very enjoyable outing.



Another couple of events took place in July. The Group had a Ramblers Stand at the Linslade Canal Festival which was staffed by teams of rambler volunteers. Once again we hosted the London Blind Club Walk. This time a guided walk with the Milton Keynes Parks Trust in Linford Woods.



In September & October Tony Harding gave the fifth of his navigation and map reading courses with two theory sessions held at Gilbert Inglefield School and a practical compass session around the Ivinghoe Beacon area. They were very informative and well attended - no excuses for lost ramblers now! (Editors note: Ramblers do not get lost, they temporarily misplace their bearings. Any such occurrence should be viewed as a 'route correction opportunity')

Footpath Secretary Ted Herbert was actively involved and even more supportive of the findings of a Public Inquiry regarding the route of a footpath through Sewell Cottages (just north of Totternhoe) that revealed the existence of a footpath forgotten since 1799.

A Midsummer 21 mile Challenge, organised and led by John and Linda Hartley in June. There



were three separate consecutive walks of 10, 6 & 5 miles between Ivinghoe, Berkhamsted, Aldbury and back to Ivinghoe. Some traveled by train from Leighton Buzzard to Berkhamsted and lifts were arranged by car to return everyone to Leighton Buzzard afterwards. Ten walkers completed all three walks and were awarded certificates. The picture shows a few of the walkers after the walk at Ivinghoe (not all those shown did the full 21 miles!). Those who completed the 21 mile challenge were: Ross Hobbs (right), Ken

Barry (2nd right), John Hartley (3rd right), Mary Kemp (4th right), Trish Makin (7th right), Caroline Edwards, Dom Davies, Barbara Barber, Paul Farmer and Linda Hartley (bottom left).

Other long distances walks: Lynda Bawden led several sections of the Nene Way and Chris White led sections of the Greensand Ridge Walk. Michael and Wendy Ley led a Walking Weekend from Marlow to Bledlow Village.

The AGM was held at the Hunt Hotel in Linslade. This saw Carole Dixon standing down as chairman and Malcolm Davison taking her place. Mike Hyde joined Ted Herbert as joint footpath secretary. The year ended in December with the now traditional Minced Pie and Mulled Wine Walk with June Ayres and Julian Chritchlow.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 80 walks were arranged covering a total of 693 miles.

2009 - A kissing gate is donated by the Group.

A chilly start to the year, with snow affecting several walks throughout January & February. Ungritted country roads often making driving to start points just too risky. A pity, as 10 mile treks in blizzard conditions can be quite exhilarating!

The social calendar consisted of Dinner at the Queens Head Hotel at Wing in February. A barbecue after a walk in the Blows Down area near Dunstable, with Janet and Malcolm Davison, and the sun shone all day! Once again Julian Chritchlow ended the year with a mulled wine and minced pie walk after a walk from the Sundon Hill Country Park in December.

A walk with a difference in May as the Group set off on a repeat of last years, 'Dawn Chorus Walk' with Martin Kincaid of the Milton Keynes Parks Trust and a 5.00 am start!

In June, Dom and Tracey Davies organised a 21 Mile Challenge Walk. There were 3 Stages of 9, 6 and 6 miles in the Woburn area with 32 walkers at the start, as pictured below.



19 walkers completed stages 1 & 2. The remaining 13 walkers went on to complete the course and afterwards trudged to the local ale house (Royal Oak in Woburn) only to discover that they had sold out of beer! A 21st birthday party the previous evening had quite literally drunk them dry. The walkers who completed the 21 miles were Tony & Pam Kimble, Mary Kemp, Ken Barry, Barbara Barber, Dom & Tracey Davies, Ross Hobbs, Mike & Ferial Hyde, Wendy Ley, John Hartley and Paul Farmer.

July saw the Group hosting the London Blind Walking Club with Dom and Tracey leading the group on a 6 mile walk in the Woburn Deer Park. September was the Bedfordshire Ramblers Walking Festival. This was a nine day event with the Leighton Buzzard Group providing seven of the festivals walks. Barbara Barber's contribution being, a six mile walk starting and finishing at the splendid Pitstone Green Museum. Try the tea room and home made cakes.

For the Spring Holiday Malcolm and Janet Davison organised a trip to Buxton in Derbyshire. The Group enjoyed four days of excellent walking in the Peak District. Not all were under clear blue skies it may be remembered. That said moments when the sun breaks through can be very beautiful indeed. Two Theatre visits were also organised which included Ken Dodd starring in one of his quite amazing and epic performances.

At the Linslade Canal Festival in July the Ramblers stand enjoyed a satisfying level of interest from would be members, assisted it must be admitted by lovely summer weather. Interest in rambling it should be noted, came mainly from the bus pass holder age group!



In September the Group funded a kissing gate, complete with Rambler plaques, as a replacement for a decidedly rickety stile at the site of the Old Water Mill in Southcott Village, Linslade.

The opening "cutting the ribbon" ceremony carried out by Leighton Buzzard Mayor Cllr. Karen Cursons, was attended by Charles Ashby of Ascott Estates, Ramblers Area Secretary Barry Ingram and local ramblers. The Leighton Buzzard Observer covered the event, additional photos, as pictured below, and write ups appeared in Bedfordshire County Council's, "Get Out Magazine" and the Ramblers South East Walker Magazine. Following the ceremony ramblers and guests, Mayor and Chain included, enjoyed a short inaugural walk through this very pretty and little walked part of town.



November saw the Area A.G.M. which this year fell to the Group to host. This was held in the Village Hall, Great Brickhill. Ken Barry led a four mile walk in the area after which ladies of the Group provided an excellent lunch. Martin Kincaid of Milton Keynes Parks Trust gave a fascinating talk with an over head projection accompanying superb photos of the park's bird and insect life.

In December there was a housing development proposal by J.S. Bloor for 199 dwellings on land at Stoke Road, Linslade. Footpath Secretaries were involved with other local action groups in opposing the development. Ramblers Head Office Adviser was invited to Chair a

meeting of the groups at the Hunt Hotel on the 2nd December. A Public Inquiry was held the following year in 2010 which rejected the proposal.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 79 walks were arranged covering a total of 639 miles.

2010 – The 25th Anniversary Year.

And so to 2010 and our 25th anniversary, which coincided with the foundation of the Ramblers' Association, 75 years ago. There may be people reading this in 25 years' time who are planning our 50th anniversary celebrations.

If so – good luck to you and HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

You may be interested in a few items which affected our situation in 2010 and here are just some of them:-

- *In 2009 there was financial panic worldwide with the collapse of banks and repercussions extended into 2010 with much criticism over the size of bonuses heads of financial institutions granted themselves.*
- *In Iceland, Mount Eyjafjallajokull erupted, preventing egress to and exit from, European air space for weeks on end – with dire consequences for the aspirations of thousands of holiday makers.*
- *The weather in the early part of the year had a marked affect on our walking.*



The year got off to a bad start, with the heaviest snowfall in 30 years, it was not surprising that several walks in early January had to be cancelled. Most local schools closed and the high street pavements in Leighton were too icy to walk on as the council had run out of salt, even the bins were left un-emptied for several weeks. Driving to a walk starting place was therefore too dangerous, if not impossible.

Apart from a few glitches early in the year caused by the bad weather, 2010 goes very much as planned with all scheduled Sunday walks being reasonably well supported and Tuesday walks continue to take there place in our programme.

Two new members joined the committee, Ferial Hyde took over as Social Secretary and Chris Vickery rejoined the committee, this time as Publicity Officer. Ferial's first function was to organise the Annual Dinner at Mama Rosa's Italian Restaurant in March. 33 members were at the dinner, there was a good atmosphere, very enjoyable, the food was excellent and there were no complaints at all.



This year's spring holiday break saw us at Chichester in Sussex for our annual short vacation, between 16th and 20th May. We joined the local Chichester Ramblers Group who took us for an 11 mile walk on one of the days. Seven walks were arranged by four different leaders.

Unfortunately an embarrassing problem occurred when Bob & Anneliese Bird accidentally locked their car keys in the boot. Even the AA couldn't gain access, so Good Samaritan Ted Herbert came to the rescue and drove Bob to Leighton Buzzard and back to collect their spare car keys from home. This photo below was taken on the South Downs Way near Amberly with walk leader Chris Vickery, 2nd from right.



For the third consecutive year a 21 mile Challenge Walk was arranged on the 20th June, this time it was centred on the Monument in Ashridge and organised by Michael and Wendy Ley.



There were three walks of 10, 6 & 5 miles, 27 members took part with the following 9 completing the full 21 miles: Wendy Ley, Dom & Tracey Davies, Tony & Pam Kimble, Ken Barry, Ross Hobbs, Trish Makin and Paul from Lea and Icknield Group. Pictured above, just some of the walkers who took part in the challenge walks, having a well deserved rest break.

July saw us continue our tradition of meeting with the London Blind Club – 15 from each of our clubs and a great day out for all. The blind walkers were met at Tring Station and were led by Tracey & Dom Davies on a 5 mile walk around the Ashridge area.



On the 25th July there was a “Chairman’s Barbeque” which took place at Malcolm and Janet Davison’s home in Dunstable after they had led a 6 mile walk. The walk started in Dunstable then went via Kensworth to Whipsnade Heath and visited the Tree Cathedral; the return route was along the Dunstable Downs before dropping back down into Dunstable, to Malcolm and Janet’s home. As you can see on the left, Malcolm was also Head Chef for the day!

Pictured below, is a few of the Group enjoying a drink in the garden, from left to right is Ferial Hyde, Trish Makin, Chris Vickery, Janet Davison and Hubby Malcolm.



The following week was the Linslade Canal Festival, once again the Group had a stall run by members to promote the Ramblers and encourage local people to join us. Posters were also on display, invited the public to come on one of the 25th Anniversary Walks in October.



Pictured at the stall are from left to right, Rita Barry, Diana Mehew, Barbara Barber, Chris Vickery and Hanna Harding. Diana (Group Secretary) and Chris (Publicity Officer) are both Founder Members, having joined the Group in October 1985, a quarter of a century ago - surely they must have joined up as teenagers!!

The second Bedfordshire Walking Festival was arranged to coincide with the Ramblers Associations 75th anniversary with a range of walks from the 4th to 12th September 2010. The Leighton Buzzard Group participated in this national festival, leading 5 of the 59 walk. Our Group walks were led by Mike Hyde (8 miles from Wingfield), Malcolm Davison (6.5 miles from Whipsnade), Chris Vickery (6.5 miles from Ridgmont), Julian Chritchlow (6 miles from Woburn) and John Hartley (8 miles from Dunstable



Downs). Chris Vickery's walk on the 7th September was part of the Ramblers 75th Anniversary Baton Walks and was well attended with 33 walkers joining from various parts of the county.

How the RA Started.



When the Ramblers first came into being, much of Britain was out of bounds to walkers. Enclosure, followed by the Industrial Revolution, had swallowed up vast tracts of formerly common land in a process that had placed, for example, 99% of the Peak District off limits onto private company or estate land. Early walkers risked prosecution, gamekeepers and even man traps, but despite the hardships, tens of thousands of ramblers fled the towns for the countryside every weekend. In 1932, the conflict between ramblers and landowners over access to the Derbyshire grouse moors led to a mass trespass on Kinder Scout in which several ramblers were arrested and subsequently imprisoned. Federations of ramblers clubs sprang up all over the country to lobby for access and explore the land, and in the early 1930's the National Council of Ramblers' Federations was formed. In 1934 the decision was taken to change the council's name, and so on 1 January 1935 the Ramblers' Association was officially founded.

Over its 75 year history, the Ramblers has witnessed a seismic shift in the nation's attitude towards the countryside from 'theirs' to 'ours'. The Ramblers now has 137,000 members and there are 500 local groups, all enjoying the benefits and right to walk in our countryside which the Ramblers have fought tirelessly to obtain.

The Leighton Buzzard Ramblers 25th Anniversary.

The first of the Groups 25th Anniversary Walk's, a 20 mile circular challenge walk, was held on Saturday the 2nd October. The walk followed the route of the Leighton – Linslade Loop,



starting from Stockgrove Country Park via Wing to Slapton. Ten members took part with Mike Hyde (right) leading the first 10 miles. After a pub stop at the Carpenters Arms in Slapton, Ken Barry (4th from left) took over the leadership for the next 10 miles via Stanbridge and back to Stockgrove. Six members completed the full 20 miles and were awarded with 25th Anniversary Memorial Certificates, these were: Ken Barry, Ross Hobbs, Trish Makin, Dave Neilsen, Andrea Deeley and David Dumpleton. The picture above shows all of the participants at Slapton.

The second of the anniversary walks took place on Sunday 3rd October, again starting from Stockgrove Country Park. The route for this 6 mile walk was via Great Brickhill and through the recently opened Rushmere Park which was purchased by the Central Beds Council the previous year and added to Stockgrove Country Park. The section through Rushmere Park included some of the recently opened new Permissive Paths which most members where not

aware of. This picture was taken at the start of the walk in light rain; the walk was led by Tony Harding, (rear 5th from left).



The final anniversary walk was held on Tuesday the 5th October, exactly 25 years to the day that the Group was formed. Another local walk of 7 miles was led by Chris Vickery from Tiddenfoot Waterside Park. The route was via Wing and Ledburn, then along the canal to the Grove Lock. The picture below is of the Group at the Grove Lock, before visiting the pub for lunch and a celebratory drink with leader Chris in the centre waving.



The same evening (5th October) saw 66 members, new and old, meeting at the Conservative Club in Leighton Buzzard for the 25th Anniversary social. This was a really great do, marred only by a speech from your Chairman! but which was nicely offset by speeches from the Mayor of Leighton Buzzard, Gordon Perham and Barry Ingram, our area Chairman.

The turnout was really great with a good smattering of founder members and a large number of members who we do not often see on walks but whom, clearly, still associate themselves with the group. The subsequent buffet was superb and a good time was had by all!!

The customary cake cutting, pictured, was performed by the Town Mayor, accompanied by the Group founder members and the current Chairman Malcolm Davison. The specially decorated cake is shown inserted.



The picture below has also been included as it is quite unique in that it shows the first and current Chairmen; left is Ian Lindsay (Chairman 1985 - 1989) and right is Malcolm Davison (Chairman 2008 - 2010).



The Groups AGM was held at the Hunt Hotel in Linslade on the 11th November, all of the current committee members stood again for re-election. It was noted that the Group now had 218 members, (there were just 55 members at the first AGM in '86). The Groups financial funds totalled a healthy £1,621 (there was just £47 at the first AGM). We now have between 20 to 25

walk leaders, although concern was raised that we may not be able to continue to have regular weekly walks without more walk leaders. Treasurer Ken Barry had also managed to obtain additional funding from the Ramblers Headquarters to pay the printing cost for 5 copies of this 25 year history booklet, for loan to members without the internet to access the Groups website.

A couple of statistics to end the year: 73 walks were arranged covering a total of 578 miles.

One final statistic

Over our first 25 Years the Group has arranged 1,814 walks which covered a grand total of 15,847 miles, that's an average of 8.73 miles per walk.

Note; 15,847 miles is equivalent to walking from Lands End to John O'Groats 18 times !!

Acknowledgements

In addition to the authors listed on page 2, an acknowledgement and thanks must go to all those who helped by contributing information, photographs and their time in producing this history article. In particular to Tracey Davies (Programme Secretary) for chasing members for walk details and photo's, at times Tracey compared herself to Miss Marples! Diana Mehew (Group Secretary) for delving through old committee meeting minutes, Chris Vickery (Publicity Officer) for digging out old photographs and her memory! David & Janet Aston for providing details, about some of the early weekends away and to John Duxbury for providing photographs and a write up about the trip to the French Alps in 2004. Helen Cox who replied to email requests, whilst on holiday in Cambodia! Also to Mike Henry, Lynda Bawden, Diane Phelps, Tony Burge, Peter & Diane Clarke who were all most helpful. A final thanks to Tony Kimble who set up and Chaired the 25th anniversary sub-committee meetings but was unexpectedly hospitalised at the Eleventh Hour and unable to attend any of the anniversary walks or the social evening. Thankfully Tony made a full recovery and was out walking again at the end of the month.










A Challenge!

Now that the history of the Groups first 25 years has been successfully completed, a standard has been set and so; **the gauntlet has been thrown down**. A challenge for the future committees who follow in our footsteps to record the activities of this splendid Group of the Ramblers. With today's digital technology and tomorrows, yet to come future technologies, there can be no excuse to ignore this challenge – don't let us and your loyal members down. We look forward to 2035 and your 50th anniversary history article, even if we may not all be around to read it!



Tony Harding
Editor
December 2010

**Leighton Buzzard Ramblers
The Chairmanship Role of Honour**

<i>1st</i>		<i>Ian Lindsay 1985 – 1989</i>
<i>2nd</i>		<i>Tony Burge 1989 – 1992</i>
<i>3rd</i>		<i>Peter Clarke 1992 – 1995</i>
<i>4th</i>		<i>Helen Cox 1995 – 1998</i>
<i>5th</i>		<i>Alan Carter 1998 – 2001</i>
<i>6th</i>		<i>Tom Brown 2001 – 2002</i>
<i>7th</i>		<i>Lynda Bawden 2002 – 2005</i>
<i>8th</i>		<i>Carole Dixon 2005 – 2008</i>
<i>9th</i>		<i>Malcolm Davison 2008 – 2010</i>

(Chairmen were elected or re-elected at the Groups AGM's each November)