

Ramblers Association

South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire Area

Minutes of the AGM held on 25th January 2014 at The Discovery Centre, Ecclesall Woods, Sheffield, hosted by the Sheffield Group.

These minutes to be approved at the AGM in January, 2015.

Welcome

Neill Schofield, from the Sheffield Group, welcomed everyone to the AGM. He said that the Sheffield Group was a lively and energetic one and they believed in working together to get things done. There were now three Groups in Sheffield, the original long-standing Group, the 20s-30s Group and the 40s Group.

The Discovery Centre was opened in September, 2011 and was a marvellous facility for the area, being a place for walkers to meet, for learning, and even for weddings! Sheffield was famous for its ancient woodlands, with a great heritage and history. Neill expressed his hope that everyone would enjoy the AGM.

Present

44 members were present.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Roly Smith, Rosemary Boyle, Philip Ryder, Angela Coles, Pauline Gibbons and Nicki Farmery.

Notification of any other business

The Chair had received notification of one item.

Appointment of tellers

Mike Pye and Christine Hewitt.

Address of Area President

As Terry Howard started his address, a great downpour started and great rolls of thunder rumbled above. Terry asked members of this Area whether they had ever considered where we have come from, and perhaps more importantly, where are we going? The first part of the question may be easier to answer than the latter, as the retrospective view may seem clearer than what the future holds. However that future is in our hands and it is incumbent on us to build on our past, not just in promoting walking and rambling and the enjoyment of the countryside but to protect the countryside and our rights within it.

Our story starts with the formation of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers in 1900 by GHB Ward. His work and inspiration is still with us today and is best displayed in the Clarion Ramblers Handbooks he edited and wrote. Many of the gains in access and protection of our countryside can be attributed to his foresight. In the Handbooks you get a sense of GHB Ward always looking and working towards the future. In his lifetime much was achieved in what we enjoy today but he recognised that not everything was going to be easily achieved. He often hoped that Ramblers of the future would finish the work he started. This we have done to some measure, but still a lot needs doing and that which has been gained needs protecting. In 1926 he proposed that the many rambling groups in Sheffield and surrounding towns should come together to form a Ramblers Federation to give a greater voice in protecting ramblers rights and to further their interests in rambling. Although each constituent group maintained its own identity this 'coming together' of groups had the effect of initiating the

formation of the Sheffield Area of the Ramblers Association in the mid 1930s. This became the South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire Area of the Ramblers Association in 1975 with the formation of the Chesterfield and Doncaster Groups.

With the growth of our Groups and subsequent growth in membership we have always remained a 'collective' of Groups with the main administration being at Area level. The Area should be proud of the democratic involvement of all its Groups and the achievements it has made in promoting walking, access, rights of way work and protecting the countryside. However the world is changing and there are new issues and challenges not thought of some twenty years ago. Terry said that he believes we should start to look at and maybe question what we do to make us more effective, perhaps even considering the role of Area and officers within it. With developments in technology communication is quicker, easier, cheaper and more effective, particularly when dealing with issues of concern. However, we are at risk of losing members who either can't or don't want to use electronic communication, preferring paper communication. This Area has to address this, along with the Groups, so that no one is left out.

We have witnessed a drop in membership in several of our Groups whilst others, such as the younger age Groups, have shown steady increases. Looking at my own Group, Sheffield, for example, we have more walks and a more varied programme than we have ever had with large and increasing turn outs. So where's the problem? I believe it to be more with age and members no longer rambling. Also there exists in this City very many walking clubs and groups who don't see the need to be part of the Ramblers. So how do we address this problem? Some may say our younger Groups should encourage their members as they grow older to move up into the older Groups. That may be an option but it has to be with the full support of members of whatever Groups. But of concern is who is going to carry on with the footpath, access and countryside work currently undertaken by our older members? Again an issue we need to address.

Another of the issues which has been of great concern is the use of motorised vehicles on byeways, particularly those in the Peak District. Although we have invited our members independently to respond to such matters, as an Area we haven't done as much as we ought to have done. We have responded at Area and Group level to issues when such byeways were in our 'territory' but have felt unable to respond to matters 'not in our Area'. This anomaly is based on the protocol (constitution) whereby we can't act in another Area's territory without the support of the Board of Trustees and the Area in question. We asked London Office to look into this so that we would be able to respond to the use of Motorised Vehicles in the Peak District NP. To date, unfortunately, we have had no clarification on this issue. As a matter of urgency this Area should ask London Office to resolve this issue to allow all interested Groups and Areas to respond to such matters affecting our National Parks. We did this when campaigning for access, so why not for our byeways?

We have twelve years left, not for 'Armageddon', which it could turn out to be, but to make those final claims for historical rights of way before they are lost forever. I don't see anyone researching these 'lost ways' so it is going to be up to us. Neither can we rely on easy support from Local Authorities with their budgets being gutted and rights of way suffering. We have to be involved in the research ourselves and work with others in carrying it out. I have just carried out a simple survey of old maps and the definitive map of Sheffield and have found at least eighty potential 'lost ways', including those routes we take as rights of way but which have no status. These could be lost forever if not claimed. In finishing my address I have raised a few points which I believe Area needs to take on board.

However, you, and your Group, are part of Area and working together we may achieve more of what GHB wanted us to do. As I said earlier we are in a changing world and we must be involved in that change to make sure the interest of all ramblers and the countryside are not compromised.

We need to keep in mind that walking and rambling is the greatest of activities:-It refreshes the mind and spirit, allows us to breath in fresh air, to exercise our bodies, opens up the 'great book' of nature, stimulates our creativity and helps us understand all people. It is the great equaliser and the university of life.

Approval of the minutes of the 2013 AGM

It was proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Christine Hewitt that the minutes be accepted. Agreed.

Matters arising from those minutes

1 As a consequence of the formation of the Access, Countryside and Rights of Way committee the following minor amendment to the constitution is necessary, for which approval at the AGM is sought:

'The Area Council shall have the power to appoint such sub-committees as it may from time to time decide and may determine their powers and terms of reference. The sub-committee shall have the power to co-opt members who may or may not be members of Area Council. All Honorary Officers shall be entitled to attend the meetings of any sub-committee'.

Cath MacKay explained the background to this amendment, and proposed it. It was seconded by Marion Thompson and passed unanimously.

Approval of the Annual Report

The Annual Report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Neill Schofield proposed that it be accepted, Marion Thompson seconded it. Passed unanimously.

Approval of the Annual Accounts

The Annual Accounts had been circulated as part of the Annual Report. Gavin Johns outlined the main factors, noting an error in that £750 was paid to the Doncaster Group for the Heron Way leaflets, not the Rotherham Group. He also noted that the Bolsover Group had been dissolved.

Gavin Johns proposed and Neill Schofield seconded that the Accounts be accepted.

Gavin Johns proposed and Neill Schofield seconded a vote of thanks to Andrew Milne. Agreed.

Elections:

Area President - Terry Howard was proposed by Allen Pestell and seconded by David Gadd. Agreed.

Area Vice Presidents - Neill Schofield proposed and Cath MacKay seconded that - Roy Bullen, Roy Cannon, David Hey, Cath MacKay, Mike Pye and Roly Smith be elected. Agreed.

Chair - Allen Pestell -proposed by David Gadd and seconded by Neill Schofield. Agreed

Secretary - David Gadd - proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Allen Pestell. Agreed.

Treasurer - Gavin Johns - proposed by Terry Howard and seconded by Cath MacKay. Agreed.

Information Officer - Christine Whittaker - proposed by Mike Pye and seconded by Gavin Johns. Agreed.

Membership Secretary - David Gadd, proposed by Allen Pestell, seconded by Les Seaman.

Agreed

Access Officer - Les Seaman, proposed by Terry Howard, - seconded by Mike Pye. Agreed.

Footpath Officer - No nominations.

Countryside Officer - Allen Pestell - proposed by Mike Pye, seconded by Sue Haywood.

Agreed.

Publicity Officer - No nominations.

Members Without Portfolio - Cath MacKay and Terry Howard were proposed by Christine Hewitt and seconded by Terry Howard. Agreed

Representatives from Affiliated Groups:

Christine Hewitt, from the Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group (SVIWG) was proposed by David Gadd and seconded by Neill Schofield. Agreed.

Co-opted representative - Cynthia Ashton, from the Sheffield Co-operative Ramblers, was co-opted onto Area Council. Proposed Cath MacKay, seconded Neill Schofield. Agreed.

Delegates to General Council:

Allen Pestell and Nicki Farmery were proposed by Cath MacKay and seconded by David Gadd to represent Area Council at General Council in Liverpool on 29/30 March 2014.

The secretary was asked to see if a further younger member in the SYNED Area would like to attend General Council. This would be at no cost and would be non- voting.

Affiliations to Kindred Organisations

Les Seaman proposed and David Hey seconded SYNED's continued affiliation to the Open Spaces Society, the Peak District Green Lanes Alliance, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, the Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland and the Peak and Northern Footpath Society.

LS briefly outlined the role of each organisation and explained why we should support them. He said that the PDGLA should be congratulated on their efforts against off-roading in the Peak District. He pointed out that SCAM had been established in the 1980s, with Roy Bullen, currently a Vice President, writing letters to newspapers to highlight the lack of access. He said that John Harker, of the PNFS, did excellent work regarding legal aspects of claiming and maintaining the rights of way network. The proposal was passed unanimously.

Speaker's Address

The Chair introduced Des Garrahan, from Central Office. Des worked for Ramblers previously, now works for the RSPB but has returned to Ramblers as a trustee.

Des said that SYNED should be proud of its democratic principles and said that this Area has always been particularly energetic in fighting for the rights of walkers. Des thanked Jackie for leading the morning's walk. He also thanked everyone present for supporting the work that Ramblers does, for example by turning out for an AGM rather than being out walking or whatever.

He said that Ramblers has 107,000 members, of whom about 25,000 are volunteers, a far higher percentage than similar organisations. However, membership continues a slow decline, although walking programmes and maintenance activities are more active than ever before. Despite this decline in numbers (which may be in the process of being checked) in the last year Ramblers can celebrate safeguarding 140,000 miles of footpaths and a million hectares of open access land, 102 footpath maintenance teams have been at work improving

over 600 paths, saved over 800 paths from being blocked, closed or being badly diverted. Over 45,000 group walks have taken place, 88,000 people have been encouraged to go on a health walk and 1,800 Ramblers Routes have been put on the new online walks library. And the English Coastal path has been saved.

Ramblers' mission is four-fold: We are guardians of the footpath networks; we are the advocates of the right to roam; we are the protectors of the countryside; and we are the champions of walking. In addition, we are healthy, friendly and fun to go walking with. The challenges we face are to deliver all of the mission, everywhere, forever; to attract people and resources; and to discover the courage to deliver our work in new ways and with new people. Priorities are to create stability, support volunteers and to communicate better. regarding communication, Des accepts that we have a responsibility to communicate with all members, those not online as well as those online. Nevertheless, in this day and age, anyone not online has made a conscious decision to avoid modern forms of communication.

Des noted that of the four Area AGMs he has attended recently, no Areas had filled the post of Publicity Officer. It was agreed from the floor that publicity was more important to Groups. Both the Dearne Valley and Chesterfield Groups had developed a system whereby walk leaders email the Publicity Officer after each walk with a brief description of the walk - the weather, number of walkers, etc giving the Publicity Officer material to send to the press on a regular basis. The Sheffield Group is developing a system of producing quarterly mini-walks programmes, which are emailed directly to members; at the moment these are running alongside the paper programme, the cost of printing being high.

Of the hundreds of Discussion Kits sent out only 27 replies had been received and these were predominately from outside organisations. These replies gave a valuable insights to barriers to people going walking like the availability of public transport and toilets.

Des said that discussions are taking place about the position of affiliated groups. There are clearly historic connections with many affiliated groups, and many groups choose to affiliate out of support for the work Ramblers do. Clearly the income from affiliated groups is also important.

Des commented on the Area President's comments about the 2026 cut-off date for lost ways and said that the work could not be done centrally, or even at Area level, but needed to be done by Groups. From the floor it was commented that a grid to prioritise routes to be claimed had been drawn up by Ken Whetter, of the Rotherham Group, and passed on to Janet Davis at central office, who is working on a document to advise Groups re claiming lost routes. Overall the finances of the Ramblers are in good shape. There is a slight structural defect, but this is covered by legacies. It is noted that 90% of people who leave Ramblers after being members for at least 5 years are under 40. This is probably a consequence of people having many more choices about using their leisure time, of joining other walking groups, etc. However it raises the issue of who will do the work of guarding our rights of way network in 20-30 years time.

Motions

No specific proposals were made but it was agreed that Area Council would make a proposal to General Council regarding claiming historic rights of way.

Any Other Business

Terry Howard explained that the first *Spirit of Kinder* event was west of the Pennines, in

2013, to commemorate the Kinder Mass Trespass of 24th April, 1932, the most significant event and the inspiration for the long battle for the Right to Roam. Members are invited to the second ***Spirit of Kinder*** day, which will be held at Sheffield Town Hall at 2.30pm on Saturday, 26th April, 2014. Entrance is free.

The event is organised by the Kinder and High Peak Advisory Authority and includes representatives from the Ramblers, National Trust, Sheffield Campaign for Access to Moorland, British Mountaineering Council, Peak and Northern Footpath Society, Peak District Mountain Rescue Organisation, Peak District National Park Authority and Woodcraft Folk.

ACROW and Area Council: 10th February 2014
9th June 2014
8th September 2014
24th November 2014
General Council: 29/30 March, 2014

AGM 24th January 2015

Area website: www.synedramblers.org.uk
National website: www.ramblers.org.uk