

Stile

Journal of the Ramblers
Hertfordshire and North Middlesex Area

Issue 64 December 2023



RAMBLERS

**2023
Reports**

from across our Area

**Rights
of Way**

new paths & commons

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About **Stile**

Stile is the journal of the Hertfordshire and North Middlesex Area of the Ramblers.

Articles printed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Area or the Ramblers.

Moving home?

Please **do not write to the Editor**. Just inform Central Office via **www.ramblers.org.uk** using the link in the Members Area, or write to:

Ramblers, 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA

Say which Group you wish to belong to: you'll receive the right Group/Area news.

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Editorial

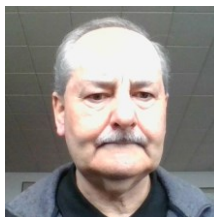
Doing well—mostly

This year's Group annual reports all reached me in record time. My warm thanks to all authors—it's a great help. Reading the reports, I realise how well we're doing overall. Most Groups have a thriving walks programme, though one or two (including mine) struggle to find leaders. There's no shortage of imagination and enterprise on the social front either. Problems in other areas remain, however (see especially Dave Ashby's report on membership, page 24). We mustn't neglect the important work done by Ramblers.

Irreplaceable? The work goes on!

The late David Allard and Chris Pagan get several mentions in this issue, proof of how widely appreciated they were. Many might think their work and dedication won't be repeated, that we're slowly losing the great campaigners and footpath maintainers. This doesn't have to happen: we simply need to steer members' thinking towards the types of work for which the Area lacks volunteers, and see if we can lighten the

load with a few more hands. Central Office runs webinars on subjects some may find daunting: leadership, rights



of way law and others. Why not have a look at them? The national website has a whole section aimed at potential volunteers. And if you're already involved, look out for new helpers!

Thank you, Kim

In January 2024 we'll be saying goodbye to Kim Chilvers, Area Secretary. In her two years in the post, Kim has more than kept up the high standards demanded by the role, thus earning the respect of everyone at Area Council. Her quiet efficiency, hard work and unfailing calm have been an enormous help to officers and other key members. Thank you, Kim, from all of us; and we hope you enjoy taking things a little more easily.

Justin Lumley

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As a member of Herts and North Middlesex Area Ramblers, you will always receive *Walk* magazine and *Stile* (which includes AGM information in the December issue).

You must **opt in** to receive email information. Preferences can be changed by registering or logging in at ramblers.org.uk/login.aspx

Stile is also available in **PDF** form on our website (see below).

If you do not wish to receive a printed version please contact the Area Membership Secretary at hnmmembership@btinternet.com

www.hnmramblers.org.uk

Area news

Walks Fest 2023: a day of superb walking and camaraderie!*Claire Wainwright*

Our annual Hertfordshire and North London Walks Fest (previously known as Area Walks Day) on Sunday 17 September was a great success. Featuring seven walks of varying lengths—from five to 14 miles—and with varying routes and themes, the one-day festival of walking centred on the lovely village of Watton-at-Stone, equidistant (more or less) from Stevenage, Ware and Hertford. This area is a paradise for walkers, offering gently rolling countryside and farmland, woodland (including the beautiful Bramfield Woods), the Beane river valley, and rich local history, with plenty of public transport options. The cream tea afterwards was an

opportunity to mingle with new friends and old. Over 100 people came along, with plenty of new walkers among them attracted by Facebook promotion and the great work of local Groups in promoting the event to local members. At least two new walkers asked if all Ramblers group walks finished with a cream tea! And so far at least four new walkers have joined Ramblers as a result, taking advantage of a first year discount specially arranged for the event. Thanks to our walks leaders from across the Area for a splendid job done, and to the organising group from the Area Committee, Al, Roger and Claire for their work in making the arrangements and taking care of the catering. Thanks too to members from Stag Walkers for helping with the set-up, teas and clean-up. Great teamwork!

The 9.5 mile party at Bramfield. Photo by Roger Bangs. For more pictures, see back page.



Extraordinary General Meeting called by Ramblers Trustees

Claire Wainwright

The Ramblers, a company limited by guarantee, has a General Council, which is the body of people who are defined as company members for legal purposes. Members of the General Council are entitled to attend the annual general meeting and remain company members at other times.

With the Ramblers' current 10-year strategy nearing the end of its lifecycle, an EGM was called by Ramblers Trustees to ask Council Members to consider and approve a refreshed strategy which 'builds on the Ramblers' success and its mission to open the way for everyone to enjoy the simple pleasures of walking'.

The EGM took place on 25 November in Manchester and Council Members Al Maceachern and Patricia Segui attended from our Area.

The strategy was approved with 79 Members in favour, 11 against and 9 abstentions.

STOOP: looking good after 15 years

Harold Stokes

STOOP (Stevenage Outer Orbital Path) was officially launched by the Mayor of Stevenage in September 2008. The fully waymarked route is just under 27 miles long, circling Stevenage on public rights of way, and never more than three miles from the Town Centre. It passes through quiet Hertfordshire countryside, with only very occasional sights (usually the Lister Hospital to the north, or Glaxo to the south) of the town itself. There are 10 Leg Wardens responsible for maintaining STOOP itself and its Link Paths, regularly walking them, checking waymarks, and reporting any problems to Herts CC.

How to walk STOOP

It is easily accessible by reasonably frequent public transport. Think of a circle with Stevenage in the middle, Graveley at the top, Woolmer Green at the bottom. Reach Graveley on the Letchworth (55) bus from Stevenage new bus station. Come back from

Woolmer Green on the 301 bus. It's 13 miles on STOOP between Graveley and Woolmer Green, going clockwise or anticlockwise. There are convenient pubs at both ends.

Link Paths

Thirteen miles is a long way for most walkers. Shorter walks can be worked out using STOOP Link Paths: a set of spokes leading from the Town Centre to STOOP itself. Take a walk out on Link Path 1, say, walk a section on STOOP itself, and make your way back to Town on Link Path 2. All are fully waymarked.

Everything you want to know about STOOP (including maps, route descriptions and even a fly through) is available on the North Herts Group website: stoop.nhrp.org.uk/

Print outs, on receipt of an A5 SAE with two first class stamps, are available from me on request: haroldstokes8232@gmail.com



Royston Group at 40

David Allard

On 23 June I was asked to lead a 5 mile walk (40 furlongs) on Therfield Heath in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Royston Ramblers. A very pleasant meal followed at the Heath Sports Club.

As one of the original founder members, I have been asked to write a few words. I recall that a meeting was called by Peterborough Ramblers in 1983 when it was decided to create the Royston Ramblers and a committee was elected. This included Bert Richardson (Chairman), Steve Lockett (Treasurer), although I became Treasurer about a year later, and Brian Ward. I was automatically on the committee because I was already a Footpath Secretary (and still am). Footpath meetings were in St Albans with Jean Jefcoate in the chair. Bert Richardson was the driving force in the Group but various members offered walks, with a variety on offer every couple of weeks. At that time the majority of members lived in Royston. To start with all the walks were on Sundays since almost all members were working and nearly all walks started

from Royston Town Hall car park. A huge amount of trouble was taken to design and produce attractive front pages for our walks programmes. We had coach outings to Sheringham and other seaside destinations, London and Derbyshire. A week's walking holiday was also arranged. Subsequently I used to lead a 20 mile (or longer) walk every year and the support was quite reasonable for several years. Such long walks would not find favour now. We also had night walks (from 10.30pm) led by Ray Hanchet.

In those early days many paths were blocked but Herts CC would allow us to clear paths or erect stiles with permission of the landowner. Stiles are no longer in vogue but at that time they were a big step forward, opening up many paths. We erected many and, later, a kissing gate.

Royston Ramblers is still going well, especially morning walks on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but is very different from the Group I joined in 1983.

Sadly, David Allard passed away not long after submitting this article. For a tribute from Royston Group, see page 9.

A thriving Group: Royston members among the bluebells in Mill Wood, near Much Hadham. Photo from the Group website, by kind permission.



Herts Weekend Walkers is 10 years old

Liz Nolan

On Saturday 7 October 2023 HWW celebrated its 10th anniversary. To mark the occasion we decided to walk the same route as the inaugural walk. On the original walk 28 people turned up and

retired to the White Horse pub in Welwyn for a post-walk drink, whereas this year 35 people attended the walk with 23 members enjoying a post-walk dinner at the White Horse pub (see photo). A good time was had by all—we are already planning the 20th anniversary celebrations!



Maps, books and walking equipment for the taking!

Dear Fellow Ramblers,

I have been a happy member of North Herts Group; walking, leading and being a committee member for over 30 years.

Now it's time to hang up my boots due to arthritis.

I have lots of stuff I would like to dispose of — from boots, rucksack, drinking system, waterproofs etc. to Silva compass, gaiters and even a banana guard. I also have many books on walking and loads of OS maps.

Please contact me if you would like the full list of items or to call and see them. All are free but a donation to charity would be welcome.

Rosalind Redwood

redrose161@btinternet.com

01462 440 113

From January 2024 we need an

Area Secretary

The role involves:

- Working with other committee members to arrange and run meetings
- Helping to organise the AGM including booking the venue and sending invitations
- Keeping Area records up to date and safe

At present there is no requirement to take minutes

You need to be:

- Organised and methodical
- Able to manage email lists
- Confident writing agendas and keeping records

In return you can expect:

- The satisfaction of doing a vital job for the Area
- Full support from Area Council

Interested? Please contact the present Area Secretary, Kim Chilvers, at:

HNMSecretary@gmail.com



Have you seen the **Area website** yet? Visit:

www.hnmramblers.org.uk

It includes all the features found on the ramblers.org.uk website, with improved tools for planning walks on your computer and smartphone.

Also:

- ♦ information about committee members and how to contact them
- ♦ a gallery of photos from previous annual Area walks
- ♦ links to our Groups and other organisations.

In memoriam

David Allard, BEM

David Allard died in mid-September aged 90 – with his boots on, and walking a footpath. Vivienne Brown, Royston Group Chair, looks back at his life.

In the early 1960s David worked in Nigeria for Barclays Bank. In 1964 he returned to England and worked for the Midland Bank until retirement in 1993.

From the first, he was actively involved in his local community and had wide interests, sometimes combining them, for example learning languages with organising walking holidays for foreign visitors in this country.

David's passion for walking was lifelong. He walked the Pennine Way three times; became a lifetime member of Ramblers aged 17; and in 1983 established the Royston and District Ramblers Club to help others enjoy rambling. In 2020 he walked the entire 195 miles of the Hertfordshire Way.

He worked for, and organised sponsored walks in support of, a number of local charities and organisations. He was instrumental in planning part of the Icknield Way as well as being a conscientious Footpath Secretary for eight parishes. His 'pragmatic and common-sense approach' was greatly valued by officials at Herts CC.

This year he was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to the community (see *Stile*, June 2023).

Despite being the oldest walk leader in the Group, David consistently led more walks than any other leader in Royston Ramblers in each of the last few years.

He was a legendary figure, and news



On a Royston Group walk from Chrishall, April 2023. Photo by Mike Flexmore.

of his death came as a severe blow to all who knew him. He will be remembered by all those whose lives he touched as someone who made a difference. Those of us who were able to celebrate his 90th birthday are grateful indeed for the opportunity to let David know that he had improved our lives.

The precise details of his death are unknown at the time of writing; but he died with his boots on, doing the thing he loved best. It feels like a fitting end.

A longer version of Vivienne Brown's tribute is available on the Area website.

Remembering Chris Pagan

Sarah Lea

Alfred Christopher (Chris) Pagan passed away in June after a short illness, aged just over 90. Many of us will have memories of Chris from all the walks he led for East Herts Ramblers over the years. His knowledge of the local rights of way network was extensive and he was always happy to lead us down a little used path we may not have been aware of.

Chris was Ramblers Footpath Secretary for East Herts District Council and Broxbourne Borough Council.

The fact that we have an excellent footpath network in our area is in no small part due to the time, patience and skill that Chris gave freely over nearly 50 years, a legacy we can all enjoy. He was always keen to share his knowledge and encourage others to take up the fight for our rights of way.

Chris was not afraid to state his views and argue for them. Over the years he wrote several articles for *Stile* and they were interesting and informative.* He had strong views on shared use paths, particularly in relation to cyclists sharing paths with walkers. He worked hard to ensure that walkers were given



Chris at St Mary's Church, Widford in 2022. A right of way was established here in 2013, one of the first to be through a churchyard.

priority and could walk freely and safely.

I personally will miss Chris and his dry sense of humour. He was always kind and supportive of me as a walk leader, footpath secretary and as Chair of East Herts Ramblers, though he did sometimes question the route I was driving when giving him a lift to a walk!

** Available from the Editor (see page 3).*



Hertfordshire &
North Middlesex



Visit the Area Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/hnmramblers

To see updates from the Area and its nine Ramblers Groups, please 'like' and 'follow' the page

Hertfordshire Way

The Great Big Walk: £68,000 raised for Herts charities — and the FHW helped

Justin Lumley

Helping Herts, an umbrella organisation working with a number of small charities across the county, held its second Great Big Walk on 30 September.

The aim was for members from each charity to walk a leg of the Hertfordshire Way, between them covering all 195 miles in a single day and raising as much sponsorship as possible. Each party was led by a volunteer leg warden from Friends of the Hertfordshire Way (FHW).

Some 148 walkers took part. Blessed

with fine weather, they achieved their aim—almost. Because of train strikes, two legs were left unwalked: 2 (Wallington to Little Wymondley) and 10B (Broxbourne to Hertford); leg 2 was postponed to 13 October.

A group from Hertfordshire Mind Network was joined on leg 12 (Widford to Bishop's Stortford) by the Mayor of Watford, Peter Taylor. He afterwards commented: 'It was such a well organised event and a fantastic opportunity to raise money for lots of good causes'.

By mid-October at least £68,000 had been raised (match funded), to be shared between the charities.

Information supplied by Helping Herts and FHW

Members of Hertfordshire Mind Network at Perry Green on leg 12 of the Hertfordshire Way. They were led by Steve Kiln of FHW.



Open Spaces Society

Information from Open Spaces Society (OSS) press releases: updates on three areas of land.

Wildhill Road, Hudnall Common and Bury Wood

On the south side of **Wildhill Road**, Hatfield, are 1.8 ha of grass, shrubs and trees, about 6 km from Hatfield House, where lives the Marquess of Salisbury. In 1969 the land was provisionally registered as common, but this was cancelled after an objection was made. It was too late to register the land under the Commons Registration Act 1965.

A 4 ha area lies on the northern boundary of **Hudnall Common**, near Little Gaddesden. The land contains trees, ferns and undergrowth and was separated from the Common in the 1920s when parts of Ashridge Estate were sold. In 1967 all Hudnall Common was provisionally registered as common land, but part of it was excluded following an objection. The remaining part of the Common (47 ha) had been bought by the OSS in the 1930s and transferred to the National

Trust in 1937, with only the NT land being registered as common.

Meanwhile, about 2 km south of Boxmoor, near Hemel Hempstead, lie 6.3 ha of woodland known as **Bury Wood**. In 1968 an application to register the Wood as common land was withdrawn due to an objection.

All three pieces of land benefited, however, from the Commons Act 2006, which brought new opportunities to restore lost commons.

Under this Act the excluded land became eligible for reregistration. In all three cases the OSS was able to show the excluded land to be waste land of a manor, meaning it could be registered as common land.

Permission for the OSS to register as common land was granted for Wildhill Road in June; for the missing part of Hudnall Common in July; and for Bury Wood in September.



Bury Wood, near Boxmoor. Photo supplied by Herts CC.

Herts CC: Countryside & Rights of Way Service

Information supplied by **Richard Cuthbert**, Team Leader, Definitive Map Enforcement, Countryside & Rights of Way Service at Herts CC

Bridleway near Newnham and Bygrave

A bridleway has been added to Herts CC's recorded network of public rights of way near Gravelpit Hill between Newnham and Bygrave. Evidence for the bridleway was found on several historical maps, including the Newnham Tithe Map of 1847, and an order to add it to the Definitive Map was confirmed by an independent

Inspector. The bridleway connects other bridleways and restricted byways in the area so will provide a useful link for walkers, horse-riders and cyclists when it is reopened to public use, over a century after it last appeared on maps of the area.

(Continued on page 14)

Become a Local Footpath Secretary!

YOU could make a real contribution to the Ramblers' work.

If you can: walk your local paths regularly, report any problems to the Rights of Way Service at County Hall or the relevant London Borough and react to any proposed path orders (but these are rare) — then **your help is needed** to keep our rights of way open and in good order. You'll get maps and comprehensive guidance.

Local Footpath Secretaries are currently needed in:

Hexton	Bayford	Bramfield
Enfield LB	Brickendon Liberty	Albury
Bishop's Stortford	High Wych	Thorley
Sawbridgeworth	Little Berkhamsted	Lilley
Anstey	Ashwell	Offley
Aldenham	Holwell	Ickleford
Tring Rural	Tring Town	Bygrave
Barkway	Barley	Nuthampstead
Royston	Eastwick & Gilston	Great Munden
Hunsdon	Thundridge	Little Munden
Widford	Hertford	Standon
	Ware Town	

BUT... wherever you live or walk, your District or Borough Footpath Secretary would like to hear from you. Do get in touch — see page 38 for contacts, or email: **mark.westley@ntlworld.com**

New footpath for Aldenham Country Park

This year Herts CC added a new public footpath to the Definitive Map and Statement in Hertsmere. The new section of public path adds to the Public Rights of Way network in Aldenham Country Park, creating an approximately 1.8 km link in a circular walk around the lake (see map opposite). Starting from Aldenham Footpath 52 by the dam and Elstree & Borehamwood Footpath 1, it runs along the west and south side of the lake to a junction with Elstree & Borehamwood Footpath 5, opposite the former 'Fisheries PH', now the 'Bhageecha' restaurant on the Watford Road. The new route allows beautiful views across the lake and through the woodland edges.

The process was initiated by the Aldenham Country Park Trust in 2011 who recognised the need to protect the

route in perpetuity. Together with volunteers from the local area, they collected evidence demonstrating its use spanning over 60 years. The application was made to Herts CC in 2013 and while this was initially refused based on the evidence, ACPT appealed to the Planning Inspectorate and, with the help of the Ramblers, were successful in 2017. Attempts were then made to negotiate between the landowner and Herts CC to ensure that the path would be maintained at public expense, but these have so far not come to fruition, meaning the path is not maintainable. The Order was finally confirmed, unopposed, in January 2023; a long, but worthwhile process, with credit to Debbie Pearlman-Hougie and all the Trustees of ACP for their determination to see this case through.

Diverted Bridleway near Crossoaks Farm, Ridge

A bridleway has been legally diverted so that it now runs from Crossoaks Lane, north-east of Crossoaks farm, rather than through the busy farmyard. At its northern end it connects to an area of common land adjacent to

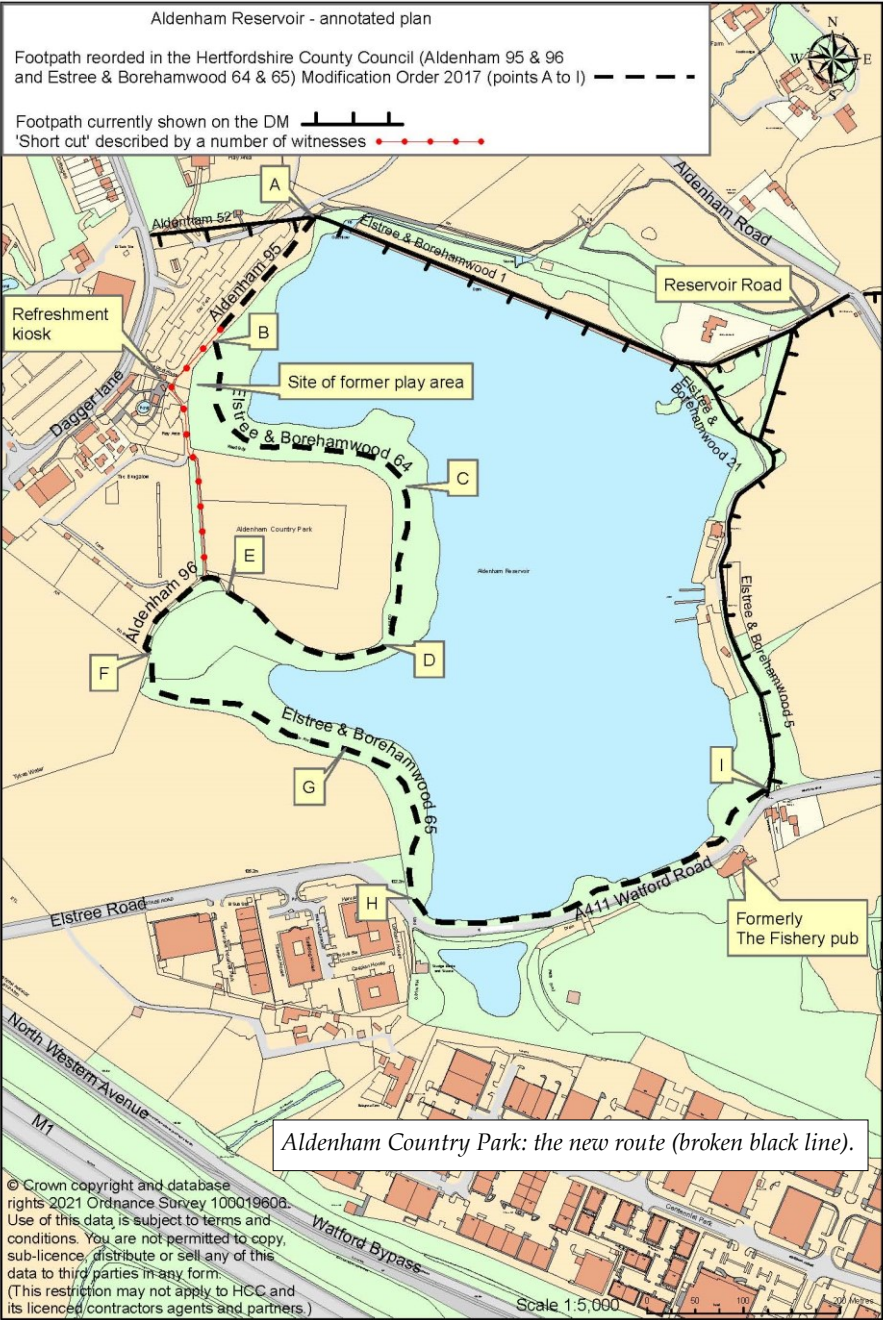
Mimms Lane, which allows horse-riders an alternative exit into Mimms Lane with better visibility. This new definitive route has been available for use as a permissive bridleway for the last few years.

Don't Lose Your Way— help from the Area

The Area has two copies of *Rights of Way: Restoring the Record* by Sarah Bucks and Phil Wadey, which will tell you all you need to know about the process of getting paths onto the Definitive Map.

You can borrow a copy for up to two months.

To reserve a copy email Roger Bangs at:
rogerbangs130@gmail.com



Definitive Map and Commons cases activity

<i>Date</i>	<i>Case</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Stage</i>
13/12/2022	Bury Wood, Sheethanger	CLP061A	Commons	Inquiry/Hearing/Reps
01/12/2022	Tring Town 48a	DAC157	DIV	LEMO
01/02/2023	Stapleford BR14	EH/489	DIV	Make Order Decision
01/02/2023	TCPA Sandringham School	STA170	EXT	LEMO
01/02/2023	Rabley Park Common	HTM079	MOD	Make Order Decision
20/03/2023	Loudwater Lane	3R69	MOD	No Order Decision
17/04/2023	Kelshall, Keepers Lane – submission to PINS	NH/216	MOD	Inquiry/Hearing/Reps
17/04/2023	Kelshall, Whites Lane – submission to PINS	NH/217	MOD	Inquiry/Hearing/Reps
17/04/2023	Kelshall, Whites Lane – Submission to PINS	NH/218	MOD	Inquiry/Hearing/Reps
27/04/2023	Hexton 2 Upgrade	NH/311	MOD	Confirmation
04/05/2023	Buntingford 15 TCPA DIV	EH/487	DIV	LEMO
17/05/2023	The Verges of Pembridge Lane, Hoddesdon	CLP039	Commons	No Registration Decision
12/06/2023	Hudnall Common	CLP054a	Commons	Amend Register
29/06/2023	Hatfield Town Centre Redevelopment	W+H087	EXT	LEMO
29/06/2023	Little Hadham 43 LEMO	EH472	DIV	LEMO
25/07/2023	Markham's Wood	EH279	MOD	No Order Decision
07/09/2023	DM3 007 Hemel Hempstead 47a	DM3 007	EXT & DIV	Sealed LEMO
26/09/2023	Millhouse Lane	STA/93	MOD	Make Order Decision
03/10/2023	Walkern 8b Upgrade	EH453	MOD	Make Order Decision

Glossary to table above

DIV: diversion

EXT: extinguishment

LEMO: legal event modification order

MOD: modification

PINS: Planning Inspectorate

Reps: representations

TCPA: Town and Country Planning Act

Hertfordshire and North Middlesex Ramblers**Annual General Meeting****Saturday 27 January 2024 at 1.30 pm**

Village Hall, Woolmer Green, Knebworth SG3 6XA.

Off the B197, between Welwyn and Knebworth (TL253185). Large car park. Bus 300 or 301.

Guest speakers: **Richard Cuthbert**, Definitive Map & Enforcement Team, Herts CC Countryside & Rights of Way Service; and a nominated **Ramblers Trustee** (TBC).There will be a **walk** starting at **10am**. For details please contact David Lauder on 07762 884104 or visit the Area website (see page 3).**Lunch 12.30—1.30:** Please bring a packed lunch and (if you wish) snacks to share.**AGM papers**All the papers for the AGM are in this issue of *Stile* (see pages 17 to 34), with the exception of minutes of the last AGM. These can be found on the Area website (see page 3) along with a copy of the other papers.**Advance voting**

For those unable to attend, we are keeping the option of voting in advance. The Area Chair will act as your proxy and vote on your behalf in the manner you requested.

Please complete the online proxy form at <https://tinyurl.com/46e77z3r> by **Saturday 20 January 2024**. If you don't have internet access, please fill in the paper form (pages 19 and 20) and return to us by the same date. **Please complete the form online if at all possible**. Any forms received after the deadline will be deemed invalid.

Please submit any matters arising from the previous year's meeting, and questions on any reports in advance, on the proxy form. Questions/comments submitted will be read out and answered at the meeting.

All members who have an email address registered on the central Ramblers system will be emailed two weeks before the AGM, with links to the minutes, papers and proxy voting form. If you have NOT already registered your email address, please provide it to Ramblers by calling 020 3961 3232 or emailing:

support@ramblers.zendesk.com**Nominations for Area officer and committee posts**

We warmly welcome nominations from members to stand on Area Council. All officers and committee members stand down each year, and although we have indicated where existing volunteers are willing to stand for re-election, please put yourself forward if you'd like to get involved. A list of positions is available on the Agenda.

Voting will take place at the meeting, in a block vote for those posts with only one nominee. Contested posts will require further voting.

Agenda and nominations

1. Welcome by the Chair
2. Apologies for absence (sent in advance to HNMSecretary@gmail.com or via the Proxy Form)
3. Approval of minutes of the 2023 AGM (on the Area website)
4. Matters arising
5. Consideration of officers' reports (comments and questions sent in advance)
 - Chair
 - Treasurer
 - Membership Secretary
 - Area Footpath Secretary
6. Approval of Treasurer's annual report and statement of accounts
7. Brief report on national EGM re Ramblers' future strategy (oral)
8. Appointment of independent examiner for the accounts (post vacant)
9. Questions and observations on Group reports
10. Election of officers and committee members — current officers willing to stand for re-election are indicated with '(name)'
 - Chair (Claire Wainwright)
- Vice-Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer (Noreen Dawes)
- Footpath Secretary (Mark Westley)
- Publicity Secretary/Media Contact
- Membership Secretary (Dave Ashby)
- Assistant Membership Secretary
- Minutes Secretary (Justin Lumley)
- Countryside Secretary (Roger Bangs)
- *Stile* Editor (Justin Lumley)
11. Election of Individual Members (5 max.)
12. Note of Group Representatives and representatives of affiliated groups
13. Nomination of representatives to General Council, Saturday 20 April 2024
14. Any other business (sent in advance)
15. Trustee update and questions
16. Guest speaker: Richard Cuthbert, Countryside & Rights of Way Service, Herts CC

We are looking for an

Assistant Area Membership Secretary

to provide support for Dave Ashby

and an

Area Publicity & Media Contact

to take over from Claire Wainwright

If you would like to join Area Council and are interested in either of these fulfilling roles, please contact:

Dave at hnmembership@btinternet.com or

Claire at HNMChair@gmail.com for further details about each role.

Ramblers Herts & North Middlesex Area AGM

Proxy Form

Please read the papers and explanatory notes in this issue of *Stile* before voting.

Complete the form **online** at: <https://tinyurl.com/46e77z3r>

If you **don't have internet access**, please complete this **paper form** and send to:

Ramblers Area Secretary
86 Hazelwood Lane
Abbots Langley
Herts WD5 0HD

Forms **must arrive** by: **Saturday 20 January 2024**

I,(name)

with membership number

being a member of Ramblers within the Area of Hertfordshire & North Middlesex and entitled to vote at the Area annual general meeting hereby appoint the chair of the meeting as my proxy to vote on my behalf. I request such proxy to vote in the manner indicated below.

Signed:

Date:

(Continued on next page)

- Apologies for absence: Will you attend the meeting? Yes No
- **Please vote individually for each item, placing an 'X' in the appropriate box.** An absence of a response will be deemed an abstention.

<i>Agenda item</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
3	Approval of minutes of 2023 AGM			
6	Approval of the Area Treasurer's annual report and statement of accounts			

On a **separate sheet**, please **add anything** you wish to say on the following:

- Matters arising
- Questions or comments for the Treasurer or other officers
- Questions to the Trustee
- Questions to Richard Cuthbert, Countryside & Rights of Way Service, Herts CC
- Nomination for officer post or committee member position (self-nomination)
- Nomination for Individual Members (self-nomination) - **NOT** Area Representatives of Groups
- Nomination of Representative to General Council (Saturday 20 April 2024) - self-nomination; please provide a statement outlining the reasons why this person should be selected
- Any other business (AOB)

Chair's report

Claire Wainwright

My thanks, as ever, to all our local members for supporting the Ramblers and its work through your membership, and particularly to those who take on formal and informal roles, whether that is as part of a local Group, through one of our local committees or working groups, contributing to *Stile*, looking after our footpaths, or offering support where it is needed. Your efforts are very much appreciated.

We have lost some devoted colleagues this year, including the great David Allard and Chris Pagan, who will be much missed by their Ramblers friends.

It was a pleasure to work with representatives from Stag Walkers and Watford & Three Rivers Group this year to organise the Hertfordshire and North London Walks Fest in Watton-at-Stone in September. You can read more about this event in this issue of *Stile* (see page 4). One aspect that we had in mind when planning this event was how we could get people from diverse backgrounds to come along, and we did some additional work to promote the event in areas of higher deprivation. Diversity is an important cornerstone of the Ramblers' development strategy. The new strategy is to be considered by Ramblers' General Council at its Extraordinary General Meeting in Manchester at the end of November.

Membership and walks participation remain steady locally despite the downturn in the economy, thanks to the



hard work of our local Groups and that done centrally to spread the word about the joys of walking, though there is some volatility in membership numbers. Dog walks, weekend walking, and age specific walking, for example, are all doing well.

I have met some amazing people this year as part of my role as Area Chair, and I hope to have the chance to meet more of you at the Ramblers Area AGM in Woolmer Green on 27 January. If you are looking for a new challenge, why not join us as part of our Area Committee? We are seeking a new Area Secretary to take over from the awesome Kim Chilvers, for example, and we are also seeking an Assistant Membership Secretary to work jointly with Dave Ashby — if you can help, we'd love to hear from you.

Stile

wants to hear from you!

We are keen to improve *Stile* by giving all members a voice. Would you like to share a favourite walk, an event, opinions, photos, your footpath work, a book or website, or simply a letter that might be of interest to members? Contact the Editor (see page 3).

RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION — HERTFORDSHIRE AND NORTH MIDDLESEX AREA
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

	2023 £	2022 £	Notes
Income			
Central Office: Area	6,599.91	5,235.61	1
Central Office: Group	2,284.94	2,370.83	1
Donations	<u>70.00</u>	<u>200.00</u>	
	8,954.85	7,806.44	
Expenditure			
Transfer to Local Groups	2,284.94	2,370.83	2
Stile Magazine	6,568.91	5,945.47	3
Don't Lose Your Way Project	81.78	131.96	4
Footpaths and Countryside Protection	30.00	30.00	5
Meetings inc AGM/Zoom	217.13	184.76	6
Mailchimp	318.78	319.87	7
Admin	74.70	0.30	8
Subscriptions	45.00	45.00	9
Walks Fest	<u>274.92</u>	<u>290.64</u>	10
	9,896.16	9,318.83	
Surplus/(Deficit)	-941.31	-1,512.39	11
Balance Sheet at year end			
Funds at start	6,830.41	8,342.80	
Deficit for the year	<u>-941.31</u>	<u>-1,512.39</u>	
Funds at end of year	5,889.10	6,830.41	
Analysis of bank balance			
Area funds carried forward	5,293.25	6,422.88	
Ring fenced funds:			
Herts Weekend Walkers	277.53	207.53	12
Don't Lose Your Way	<u>318.22</u>	<u>200.00</u>	4
Bank balance at year end	5,889.10	6,830.41	

Treasurer's report

Noreen Dawes

Thank you to all the Group Treasurers for their work throughout the year and for responding promptly to Area request for information. Thank you also to Claire Hillier for her work as independent examiner of the accounts.

The 2023 annual accounts are set out in the table opposite with comparison to the previous year. This year activities have returned to normal although many meetings are taking place online. The following notes highlight relevant points against the lines of the accounts.

1. This represents the funding from Head office for both Area and the Groups. Central Office use a simple formula to decide how much each group and area receive based on number of members, with an option to request more funds for specific activities.
2. Transfers to Groups is slightly lower. Some groups opted to use their reserves built up over the pandemic and not take their annual allowance.
3. We continue to publish *Stile* during the year, costs have risen slightly.
4. Don't Lose Your Way costs. This area of work is now being funded separately. We claimed £200 for this work during the year and we are now required to carry the underspend of £118 forward. We are also carrying forward the previous donation of £200 from

St Albans Footpath Society received in the previous financial year.

5. One meeting of the Footpaths Committee was held in person.
6. Area meetings were held via Zoom and this is the annual cost of it.
7. We continue to use Mailchimp and Facebook for the circulation of newsletters and member publicity.
8. This is Committee travel expenses.
9. The cost of membership of the Open Spaces Society.
10. Area Walks Fest costs include hall hire, publicity leaflets and catering.
11. We had a shortfall of £941.31 during the year. This is in line with our aim to reduce reserves to no more than one year's anticipated expenditure.
12. This figure represents funds held for Herts Weekend Walkers. They received a donation from Ramblers Holidays of £70 during the year.

See also the Area and Group main accounts: comparison on page 25.

Report of independent examiner

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent guidelines, I consider the Hertfordshire and North Middlesex Area Accounts to have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year ended 30 September 2023.

Claire Hillier Date: 30 October 2023

Membership Secretary's report

Dave Ashby

Ramblers GB membership has slipped a little since Covid high levels, but at 104,487 is still above the important 100k. The Area 'New Membership' increased marginally above 2022 rates, at approx. 40 joiners/month (fig. 1).

However, leaver rates have now increased correspondingly after the Covid bulge, resulting in almost flat net growth (including small numbers of rejoiners and inter-Area transfers) (table 1). This figure exceeds the 2023 national average which reports a reduction of approx. 0.6%. Interestingly, the predominant impact of the leavers after their first two years has now widened to three years, perhaps in response to the economic situation. Whereas most Groups saw small

membership declines, NLSH and Stag Walkers saw significant increases.

It is noticeable that numbers volatility has increased significantly over the last two years (fig. 1) so monthly fluctuations indicate little, e.g. the Area is already showing a net membership decrease since September 2023.

The proportion of Area volunteers shows a marginal increase to 12.5%, in line with the national average. Our previous outstanding figure from Royston is now encouragingly matched by HWW and Stag Walkers, with approx. 20% of their membership registered.

New joiners 'reachable directly' by email is good at 98%, and the Area figure of 77% now shows the benefits, up by 2% pp. However, the proportion of those accepting all Ramblers digital

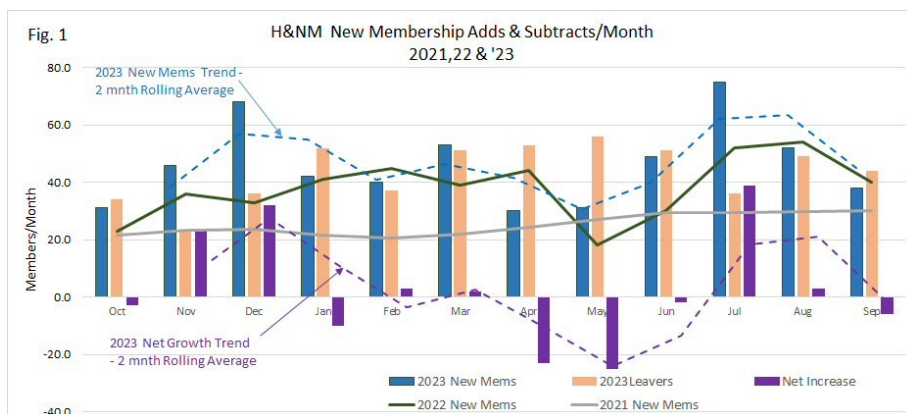


Table 1. H&NM Net Membership Changes 2021-2023, & Volunteer Levels (Sep 23 2023)

Group	West Herts	East Herts	North Herts	N London & Herts	Royston	Watford 3 Rivers	Finchley & Hornsey	Herts Weekend	Stag Walkers	Un-assigned	Total Area
Sep/2021	451	237	420	485	153	303	407	152	117	85	2810
Sep/2022	465	265	437	486	149	306	410	179	127	156	2980
Sep/2023	443	258	438	520	139	308	397	163	142	182	2990
Net Change Sept 2021-22	14	28	17	1	-4	3	3	27	10	71	170
% Change Sept 2021-22	3.1	11.8	4.0	0.2	-2.6	1.0	0.7	17.8	8.5	83.5	6.0
Net Change Sept-2022-23	-22.0	-7.0	1.0	34.0	-10.0	2.0	-13.0	-16.0	15.0	26.0	10.0
% Change Sept-2022-23	-4.7	-2.6	0.2	7.0	-6.7	0.7	-3.2	-8.9	11.8	16.7	0.3
% Registered Volunteers 2022	7.0	7.0	16.0	11.0	33.0	12.0	8.0	19.0	22.0	1.0	12.2
% Registered Volunteers 2023	8.8	7.4	16.0	11.3	20.9	14.6	9.8	19.6	23.9	3.8	12.5

communications remains low at 53% (the data entry has been shown to be questionable!). There is a sizeable 14% of our membership that can only be reliably reached by post (e.g. mailed Stile).

Age and gender profiles remain largely unchanged.
The 'Affiliated Groups' currently stand at eight.
All data sourced from Ramblers Insight Hub.

Area and Group main accounts: comparison

Compiled by Noreen Daves

	Area	W Herts	E Herts	N Herts	NL&SH	Royston	W&3R	F&H	Stag W
Membership June 2023		430	249	212	488	133	298	371	124
MAIN	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income									
From Area/CO	6,599.91	567.68		550.52			424.26	510.12	232.36
Donations	70.00	380.00	100.00					320.00	46.50
Publications				131.00					
	6,669.91	947.68	100.00	681.52	0.00	0.00	424.26	830.12	278.86
Expenditure									
Newsletter/ Publicity	6,568.91		10.00	404.34	143.66			144.60	329.10
Mailchimp	318.78								
Walks Programme				74.68			214.63	224.13	
Walks Related	274.92		162.94	50.00	48.00	86.00	66.00	173.32	
Publications									91.00
Campaigns	30.00			591.00					
DLYW	81.78								
Training		28.99	50.00				173.00	125.00	
Practical Work			421.00					128.74	
Meetings/ AGM	217.13	391.14	10.00	203.70		50.00			
Admin	74.70			13.75					
Other	45.00			12.95					
	7,611.22	420.13	653.94	1,350.42	191.66	136.00	453.63	795.79	420.10
Surplus/ Deficit	-941.31	527.55	553.94	-668.90	-191.66	-136.00	-29.37	34.33	141.24
Main Bank	5,889.10	2,234.52	643.27	1,921.53	918.72	907.20	137.80	1,246.46	204.91
Reserves %	70%	294%	60%	142%	479%	667%	30%	157%	49%
Self Funded									
Income		22,884.25		16,095.00	25,616.21	1,282.00			669.00
Expenditure		27,596.69		16,032.75	25,623.48	1,230.49			651.33
Bank Balance		3,154.52		1,462.70	3,278.42	329.45			17.67

Area Footpath Secretary's report

Mark Westley

Hertfordshire and North Middlesex have no mountains or moors and very little heath or downland, as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. So, the only advantage that our inhabitants and visitors obtained from the access provisions in that Act was improved access to Common Land. Unfortunately, many pieces of land named as commons on maps have long since ceased to be used as such and cannot be reclaimed.

Since late 2022, the Ramblers have been calling on the Government to expand the freedom to roam to give more people the chance to walk in nature, close to home. Opening access to woodlands would, on average, give the most deprived groups in England and Wales easy access within a 20-minute walk from their front door, falling from well over an hour currently. Herts has many privately owned woods.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are a 10-year strategic approach to cycling and walking improvements. According to the Department for Transport, 'while the preparation of LCWIPs is non-mandatory, Local Authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment'. Herts' 10 local councils have all started to develop such plans and four have now adopted them. Broxbourne BC have costed cycle tracks 'very approximately' at £300,000 per km. No figure has been projected for walking infrastructure, but it must be cheaper.

I reported last year that the Government had announced that the cut-off date for adding pre-1949 paths to the Definitive Map would be abandoned. In 2023, they broke that promise and reset the cut-off date to 2031. None of the reforms under the

Deregulation Act 2015 to achieve this or any other promised reforms to the procedures for recording and changing public paths have come into force and it is most unlikely that they will be before the next General Election. The future of the RoW network and access to land generally could be topics to raise with candidates seeking your vote.

Since 2013, Plantlife (a non-profit company) has been encouraging councils to let grass verges become mini-meadows where wildflowers and wildlife can flourish. Unfortunately, this can reduce sightlines and increase trip hazards for walkers, who must use the verge where there is no pavement. The duty of the highway authority is to provide a proper footway. This has to take precedence over the desirable aim of restoring nature but does not require the whole of a wide verge to be mown.

Six years after the orders for the Tyttenhanger changes were confirmed, they are not yet recorded on the Definitive Map (DM). Local people are becoming concerned about this. OS maps now show these changes even though Herts CC has not fulfilled its duty to make available for public inspection, in each district and (as far as practicable) each parish, a copy of the DM and every order updating it.

We are still seeking Local Footpath Secretaries for parishes throughout our Area. This year my regular appeal is all the more poignant because our two oldest FP Secretaries, David Allard and Chris Pagan, died this year. They each looked after several parishes directly and mentored other FP Secretaries throughout two districts or boroughs. Both had been Ramblers representatives for many years more than me and I will miss their experience and advice.

Contact any local Ramblers officer if you can take on a parish or assist one of our experienced FP Secretaries.

Group reports 2023

East Herts

Sarah Lea

Our walk leaders, expertly coordinated by John Milton, have continued to provide a varied and interesting walks programme for East Herts. One of the joys of walking with a group, for me, has always been discovering new paths in familiar areas and that has certainly happened this year.

We have a very small band of regular walkers which has slowly increased this year. Our midweek walks have continued to be popular.

Chris Pagan, a founding member of East Herts Ramblers and inaugural walk leader, died earlier this year. Chris was also Footpath Secretary for East Herts and Broxbourne. His quiet encouragement and expertise will be missed by many but he leaves behind

an improved rights of way network; a lasting legacy we can all benefit from.

Finchley & Hornsey

Justin Lumley

Finchley & Hornsey has had a pleasing year, in spite of a walks programme that lives somewhat 'from hand to mouth'. We have managed a walk every Sunday, taken part in the Walks Fest and organised the traditional Summer and Winter Solstice walks. All have been well supported, often attracting members from other Groups. It has become a pleasant tradition to thank the leader not only at the end of the walk, but also later via the WhatsApp group.

A long weekend based in Salisbury and a week-long trip to Scarborough, taking in much of the fine coast and



A wet stretch for dedicated East Herts walkers.



A Finchley & Hornsey party en route from Robin Hood's Bay to Filey, September. Photo by Justin Lumley.

giving a good taste of the North York Moors, were enjoyed by members of all walking abilities. The trips included meals out and theatre evenings.

Other activities have included a first aid course for leaders and a stall at church events in Mill Hill; results from the latter varied according to season.

We could do with a few more leaders. But some members contribute in other ways—social events, filming walks, enriching them with personal knowledge.

Warm thanks are due to all who contributed to this fine year, whether on the committee, as leaders or organisers, or simply joining walks regularly.

Herts Weekend Walkers

Liz Nolan

Walks have been scheduled regularly over the past year and frequently attract 25-30 people; the highest number was 40 to a walk around Knebworth. We find the most popular walks tend to be on Saturday afternoons and are about 7 miles in distance, although longer and shorter walks are also offered including some on Sundays. Over the past year members have also enjoyed a few walks in London, the most recent tracing the route of the old Tyburn.

In May we were able to hold our annual Challenge Day. Starting at Chadwell Springs between Ware and

Hertford four petal walks of varying lengths commenced at different times throughout the day. 43 people turned up on a hot sunny day to walk one or more of the petals, with 16 hardy souls completing all four!

Members have also enjoyed trips away to the Gower Coast in Wales and to Norfolk.

Demand for our walks remains strong and we look forward to the future with optimism.

We would like to thank the Coordinating Committee, walk leaders and members for making the Group such a success.

North Herts

Gabriela Lovelace

2023 was good for our Group. From last December we have organised over 200 walks with large numbers of participants. Big thank you to our leaders for a range of interesting walks. We have acquired a few new leaders, but we will of course need more to

produce extensive, interesting new programmes to suit walkers of all interests and abilities.

We provide four walks a week: Wednesday morning, two on Saturday and a longer one on Sunday. In the last four-monthly programme we have introduced short Sunday morning walks. They proved to be popular. Wednesday mornings and Dog Friendly walks are especially popular.

The Group holiday in Sedlescombe was very successful. The weather was kind to us and the walks were varied and interesting with plenty of National Trust or English Heritage venues for those who preferred shorter walks. Our evenings were enlivened by quizzes and Maggie's attempt to teach jive dancing. Dog Friendly group members will go for a holiday to Cober Hill Hotel in Yorkshire.

A number of social activities were arranged including visits to Hitchin theatre, Hitchin British School,



Herts Weekend Walkers celebrated their 10th anniversary by retracing their inaugural walk (see page 7).

Hemingford Grey Manor, Royal Gunpowder Mills and Christmas lunch with walk still to come.

Our membership stays stable: few losses, few gains, still vigorous, an active and viable Group.

The annual Stevenage Walking Festival was again very well supported by our Group, providing administration, help with the publicity and leading the walks.

We continued with advertising the Group and our walks.

We now look forward to another successful year with plenty of interesting walks, social events and holidays.

North London & South Herts

Lucy Welch

During the year we ran 126 walks ranging from 3 to 14 miles. Included were the last five sections of the London Loop, a walk with the London Blind Ramblers Club and three sections of the London Countryway. This is a 285 mile orbital trail round London which runs through the countryside of counties neighbouring Greater London. Details of walks are published on WhatsApp Group 'NLSH Walks' and Group Facebook page. The digital walks library with over 200 walks continues to be available to Group members.



North London & South Herts walkers at Wath, near Pateley Bridge, Nidderdale, September. Photo by guide Jackie Jeffery (using member Jo Price's camera).



North Herts members near Old Warden, Beds. Photo by Chris Young.

Social events included a Christmas lunch, Spring dinner, Leader and Volunteer Tea Party as well as three coach trips to Oxford, Canterbury, and Winchester. In April Group members hosted French walkers from Barnet's twin town, Chaville, for a weekend and a return visit to France is being planned. A holiday in Nidderdale in September was a success and some members managed to complete the Nidderdale Way trail.

The Group ended the year with 502 members.

We would like to thank all the volunteers and members who have supported the Group during the year.

Royston

Vivienne Brown

A particularly busy year for Royston, 2023 became, latterly, a year of great loss. I refer, of course, to the wholly unexpected death, in September, of David Allard while walking alone in the

countryside. He leaves a very large hole that we will struggle to fill. A tribute to David appears on page 9.

Highlights of the year included our annual Christmas walk with bring-&-share lunch followed by a mind-stretching quiz in early December; a delightful New Year's Day Walk from Chrishall ending at The Red Cow for lunch and much good cheer; David's 90th birthday celebration in April (a walk followed by lunch with a large crowd of David's well-wishers and friends); a well-attended coach outing on a warm, sunny 4 June to Dunwich and Walberswick, offering a choice of walks in both morning and afternoon—a thoroughly enjoyable day out; and on 23 June a 40-furlong walk led by David himself on the Heath with barbecue to follow, to celebrate our 40th anniversary.

We have led slightly fewer walks this year than last, although membership remains steady. We hope to persuade



Royston walkers at Leiston Chapel in June. Photo by Mike Flexmore.

more members to join our wonderful leaders, whom we thank sincerely for their sterling contribution over the year.

Stag Walkers

Aminah Khan

We're proud to say that membership numbers have reached a record high,

surpassing 140 members. Our short introductory walks were especially popular for attracting new walkers. Overall, 80 walks have been led, and 8 new walk leaders came forward. Using Meetup for bookings works well, allowing walk leaders to pre-empt the



Stag Walkers at Childwick Green, September.



Watford & Three Rivers members at Cissbury Ring, North Downs. Photo by Carol Flanagan.

number of walkers, and encouraging commitment via booking.

The fun social calendar has been a hit. We've hosted walks combined with street food festivals and tapas evenings, and trips away. We've had a spring weekend away in Shropshire, a late summer weekend in Kent and an away day to Brighton. There's an upcoming December weekend away to Suffolk as we finally complete the Icknield Way Path, which was broken down into 13 linear walks covering 114 miles.

Collaborating with local groups and festivals has strengthened our local connections. We've had joint walks with Walk Cambridge and Chiltern Young Walkers, and held publicity stalls at Hitchin This Girl Can, and Baldock and Hitchin EcoFests.

Watford & Three Rivers

Claire Bonnick

2023 has been a good year for our Group with a variety of half day and full day walks for members to choose from—many thanks to our team of leaders without whom we could not function! We have also had several evening walks throughout the summer months, including a solstice walk with pub drinks to celebrate.

Our new Treasurer has now taken over, but we are fortunate to retain the experience of our former Treasurer on the Committee. This month will see the handover of the Walks Co-ordinator role. We thank those who have served us so well during their term in office.

On the social side, we enjoyed a Christmas lunch at the Coach and Horses in Rickmansworth and were

pleased to welcome back some longstanding Group members. In May, we returned to the Elan Valley for a walking weekend and have recently returned from a weekend in the South Downs, making the most of the late summer sunshine. Next year's plans are likely to involve the Yorkshire Dales and Suffolk.

West Herts

Marion Adams

I am pleased to report that West Herts Ramblers has continued to thrive in 2023: membership has been maintained and furthermore has been enriched by some enthusiastic new members. Our walks programme offers a walk on each Sunday and most Tuesdays. Ambles are established on the first Thursday of each month for those seeking a more leisurely walk. We reintroduced the coach walk with a visit to Winchester in June; hopefully this will become an

annual event. We have had occasional pub lunches, a great Christmas lunch and a visit to the 3 Brewers Music Festival in September.

Car sharing has increased this year. This is good news for us as parking is now more difficult than it used to be.

We participated in both spring and autumn Chilterns Walking Festivals with walks from Ashridge and Tring.

In the spring we went to the interesting old town of Shaftesbury for a short break and at the time of writing we look forward to a holiday in Ironbridge, with next year's breaks already booked.

We are encouraging new leaders to join our pool of dedicated volunteers. Training has continued for walk leaders this year with a focus on individual training. We continue to offer a free first year's subscription to OS Maps for our leaders.



West Herts members on a visit to Cambridge.

History

**In the steps of Herbert Tompkins
(2) Panshanger Airfield to Mackerye End**

John Dean concludes his retracing of the route in Herbert Tompkins' 1902 Highways and Byways in Hertfordshire, adding his own historical notes.

From Panshanger Airfield one can look across the Mimram (or Maran) Valley to St Peter's Church at Tewin. The path drops down steeply to the main road where I turned right, then left along a bridleway which goes past Tewin Mill House. The mill was demolished in 1911. Its history can be traced back about 500 years; at one time it was converted to a glass mill for making spectacles.

On reaching a lane I went left, then used field-paths to take me to Tewin Church, to the east of which once stood Tewin House, built c. 1635 and reputedly one of the most elegantly furnished mansions in Hertfordshire. The estate was sold to the Fifth Earl Cowper in 1807, whereupon he had the house demolished. All that remains is a wall, a cedar tree and some terraced ground that was once an ornamental garden. Parts of the church date from the 11th and 13th centuries but it was extensively restored by the Seventh Earl Cowper in 1903.

I walked along the church drive to a road, then right for a short distance before taking a footpath on the left. Further paths took me to Lower Green.

Houses line the road that form the triangular green, including the Old School House opened in 1773 for 10 poor children and the village school dating from 1848 which was used until the new school was built in the 1970s. Both buildings are now private houses.

The **Rose and Crown** is first mentioned in 1713 and it was here I stopped for lunch, just as Tompkins had done over 100 years ago.

The most direct route by road between Tewin and Digswell was, and still is, Churchfield Road and the Hertford Road. Clearly Tompkins went this way as he recorded crossing the river shortly after he continued his journey. Both roads are too busy nowadays to walk along so I opted for field-paths which took me to a bridleway roughly parallel with the Hertford Road. This goes beside fields, then alongside a wood where the path drops steeply before going uphill again.

Tompkins encountered Digswell almost by surprise as he rounded a bend in the road to reveal the viaduct whose 40 arches span the Mimram Valley. He would have seen the original red bricks made from local clay. An outer skin of harder, blue bricks was completed in 1935.

The **Great Northern Railway** between London and Peterborough was surveyed by William Cubitt who also designed the viaduct, which was built by the contractor Thomas Brassey.

Tompkins made a detour to Digswell Mill (now demolished) before walking along Digswell Park Road to the parish church of **St John the Evangelist**. Finding the door locked, he wrote little about the building and does not even mention the imposing **Digswell House**



that stands beside the church. The earliest surviving parts of the church are believed to be 13th century. It was extended when Welwyn Garden City encroached, and during the building work it was discovered that the medieval structure had virtually no foundations! Digswell House was built c. 1803, replacing a 15th century manor house.

It seems Tompkins made his way to the Hertford Road which then went across **Lockleys** estate, north of the present route, but whether he arrived in Welwyn by road or field-path is unclear. Roman remains have been found at Lockleys and other sites nearby, notably the bath house discovered in 1969 on the line of the proposed A1 motorway. It has been preserved underneath the road and is open to visitors.

I made my way towards Welwyn along a footpath beside the playing field of **Monks Walk School**. On reaching the Hertford Road I turned left and took the underpass that crosses the motorway slip-road, then went under two bridges to reach the village.

Some 50 years before Tompkins' visit, Welwyn was well served by coaches travelling between London and the north. Both the **Wellington** (called the Swan until 1816) and the **White Hart** were important coaching inns with extensive stabling. The latter even ran its own coaches to London.

However, Welwyn's prosperity was seriously damaged when the railway bypassed the village. Plans to build the line through Welwyn, Kimpton, Kings Walden and the centre of Hitchin had been scuppered by Lord Dacre, a 19th century nimby who was not opposed to

railways as such (he was chairman of the Royston & Hitchin Railway) but *was* opposed to a route running close to his estate, The Hoo, at Kimpton!

Tompkins spent an hour ‘exploring the side streets near the old mill’, but had little to impart as a result. Even the church gets no mention except for its connection with Edward Young, Welwyn’s most famous Rector who lived at Guessens on the Codicote Road. This austere building still stands, close to an old milestone. Little remains of the original Norman church which has been extensively restored over the last 150 years. One benefactor was Charles Willes Wilshere, also noted for his chronograms (Latin inscriptions where one takes the letters that are also Roman numerals, then totals their numerical values to reveal a year). Thus the inscriptions on the gables of Welwyn Church reveal that Wilshere paid for certain improvements, in the year indicated by the chronogram. However, the game is given away by the answer appearing on the rainhead.

The Wilshere family had lived at **The Frythe** on the outskirts of Welwyn since the 14th century; their medieval manor house was replaced by a magnificent new building in 1846. Since 1946 it has been owned by various commercial organisations.

A timbered house in Welwyn churchyard is probably 15th century. There is a long hook under the jetty, once used for removing thatch from burning buildings.

Two houses in the village have connections with Anne Van Gogh, sister of the artist. She worked in a school at **Ivy Cottage** in Codicote Road and lived

in **Rose Cottage** in Church Street where her brother paid her a visit, having walked from London.

Tompkins did mention ‘the imposing Post Office ... one of the few really modern buildings in the streets’. Ironically this has recently been demolished to make way for a housing development.

I decided to call a halt to my exertions until another day; but clearly Tompkins was made of sterner stuff! Exactly how he got to Wheathampstead is unclear but it seems that it was mostly on lanes. He said little of the journey which, as today, would have been largely through open countryside. About a mile from Wheathampstead he caught a glimpse of **St Helen’s Church** between the trees. However, he wrote nothing of interest about the village thereafter. The church was in a sorry state when Canon Owen Davys arrived as Rector in 1859 but his restoration made St Helen’s one of the most attractive churches in Hertfordshire. Canon Davys was also responsible for the impressive school building, now used as offices.

Tompkins continued to Batford Mill but it is not clear whether he went on to visit **Mackerye End** which has associations with his hero, the 19th century writer Charles Lamb, who had visited his great aunt there. She lived at the farm and was housekeeper at the manor house.

It seems that Tompkins retraced his steps to Wheathampstead, another mile or two. It was dark when he finally reached his inn—for a well earned rest!

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A longer version of this series originally appeared in Hertfordshire Countryside.

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marking 'Attention of [[Officer],Area/
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Footpath problems (1) — contact one of the **Footpath Secretaries**:

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Hertsmere Borough, Welwyn Hatfield Borough

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Footpath problems (2) — see tinyurl.com/2j9kwbmj or contact the **local authority**:

Legal problems across Hertfordshire

Rights of Way Service

Hertfordshire County Council

0300 123 4047

row@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Maintenance or obstruction issues (except Dacorum and Broxbourne)

tinyurl.com/6cud6m6s

Enfield

Traffic and Transportation

Enfield Borough Council

020 8379 3565

highway.services@enfield.gov.uk

(RoW maintenance)

transportation@enfield.gov.uk

(other RoW issues)

Broxbourne

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01442 228 356
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Barnet

Street Based Services
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Frontline Business Support
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Group information

Ramblers members can walk with any Group throughout the country. There is summary information and a list of the published walks for all the Groups on the Area website: **www.hnmramblers.org.uk** Follow the link 'Our Groups' to see the location of each Group, the types of walks they do and link to each Group website. Here are the Groups in our Area with contact details. Almost all walks are listed on the Ramblers national website: **www.ramblers.org.uk** and click on 'Find a group' or 'Find a group walk'.

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A Group aimed at people in their 20s and 30s

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WestHertsRamblers

100+ walkers at Hertfordshire & North London Walks Fest, Watton-at-Stone. See page 4.



Bramfield Park Wood



The Stables, Woodhall Park



All the Greens



The Broadwater, Woodhall Park



Towards Benington



Photos on this and front cover by:
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