



ramblers
at the heart of walking

THE RAMBLERS

Telford and East Shropshire Group

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

to be held at

**Coalbrookdale & Ironbridge Community
Centre, TF8 7DX**

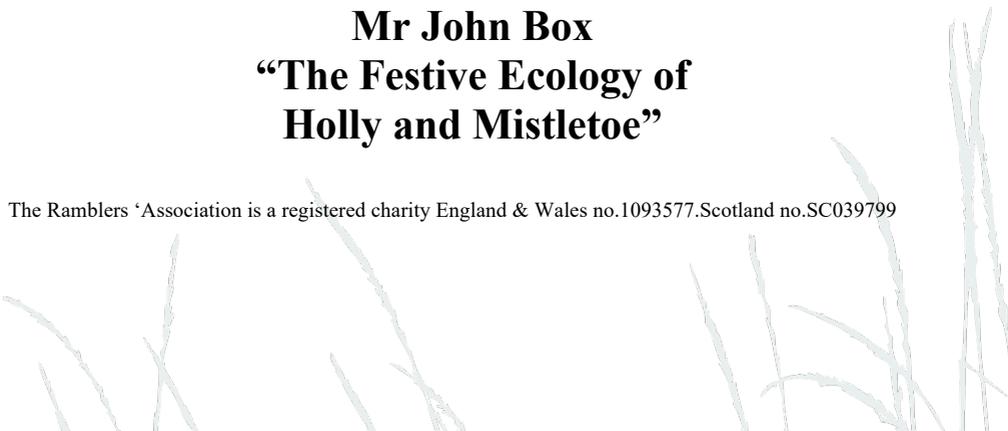
FRIDAY 19th NOVEMBER 2021

at 7.30pm

SPEAKER

Mr John Box
**“The Festive Ecology of
Holly and Mistletoe”**

The Ramblers 'Association is a registered charity England & Wales no.1093577.Scotland no.SC039799



Telford and East Shropshire Ramblers Annual Report 2021

Chair's Report

Summary

To say it has been a challenging year would be an understatement. I cannot thank our Committee enough for their hard work and dedication this year. They have managed to keep an imaginative and varied walks programme going and undertake significant work to protect our public rights of way paths network. This was achieved in spite of the changing regulations imposed by Covid impacting on our normal ways of getting things done. Unable to meet in person we met online via Zoom. Unable to car share we reorganised our walks to be more local, and start from free and large car parks. Our walk leaders responded to the challenges of keeping walks Covid safe, and new requirements to keep records and registers and record their walk reces and risk assessments.

Many of our regular walkers continued to walk during the pandemic, as individuals or with small groups of friends. However, many have not yet returned to walk with us on a regular basis, so numbers on walks are less than they were before the pandemic. However, we have welcomed many enthusiastic new members, some have become walk leaders and some have expressed interest in other volunteer roles. Our membership has increased to an all time high. The more members we have and the more active they become, the more we can offer our members as nothing in our group happens without the enthusiastic work of our dedicated volunteers. Whether we lead a group walk, help reopen a path for public use once more with our path maintenance group clearing overgrown vegetation or work with the Council Rights of Way to help report and resolve problems, it is all done by our members. These key aspects of our work are fleshed out in individual officer reports.

Improvements to path network

The Telford and Wrekin Local Access Forum has not met in 2021 and neither has the Shropshire Council Great Outdoors Strategy Board. However, Ramblers has continued to play an active role, liaising with Rights of Way Officers and local councillors. Although traditionally we remain neutral on planning applications, unless rights of way are directly impacted by closures or diversions, this does not mean we have nothing to say about the opportunities or otherwise they pose to our walking environment. As Chair, this has included efforts to make new 'permissive rights of way' on outline maps of the planning applications for the Ironbridge Power Station site, dedicated public rights of way by the landowners, post planning approval being granted. We made a public comment on the New Works Solar Farm application, about the importance of the area as a highly valued 'walking environment', with the need to give the Wrekin Strategic Landscape as a whole, proper status as protected from development if the application is rejected, and the need to have the outlined path improvements dedicated as rights of way, if passed.

I have worked with Paula Doherty, our Footpaths Officer to try to gain improvements to the areas in the north of Telford. It contains Telford's other two Strategic Landscape Areas, The Weald Moors and Lilleshall Hill, so its value as open green space is recognised, however, connected Public Rights of Way (PROWs) and open public green space is sparse.

Paula and I composed a detailed response to a Council Rights of Way consultation as to how we felt the Council and voluntary groups could work together to improve the paths network in the Local Authority, drawing on good practice elsewhere in the UK and advice from other Ramblers Areas and from Ramblers HQ. There is a statutory duty on Local Authorities to have an up to date Rights of Way Improvement Plan. So far there has not been a detailed response in kind, but until the Local Access Forum meets once more it is difficult to progress this agenda with other groups, not just walking groups but organisations

representing other users of the network including runners, horse riders and cyclists.

Promoting walking locally

We continue to work collaboratively with other walking groups and to support projects and initiatives that promote walking, including local Walkers Are Welcome groups and the Shropshire Way Association. We led three TES walks as part of Shropshire Way Festival. Four of our members are on the Friends of The Telford T50 50 Mile Trail committee, including the TES Chair and Footpaths Officer. We participated in a new initiative to create new short local circular walking routes on and linked to the Telford T50 50 Mile Trail, these are available to upload as gpx and walk description files from the Trail website. As Chair I led a walk as a contribution to the Friends of The T50 effort to walk the entire route as part of the BBC Country File Children in Need Appeal 'National Ramble'. I have continued to participate in an initiative by Broseley Town Council and Broseley Walkers Are Welcome to promote walking and outdoor leisure tourism, monitoring local paths and publicising local routes. I have contributed a number of circular walks in the area around Broseley, Ironbridge Gorge and Much Wenlock to the Broseley Walkers Are Welcome website with links with the Council website. I worked with other local groups and individuals to produce new signboards for their town trail and other information boards which include walking routes. I was invited to meet The High Sheriff of Shropshire to discuss with him community involvement and the role of walking in helping promote and sustain local economies. Our Facebook followers have increased from 671 to 860; most are non-members. We have shared and commented on posts with local councils and community organisations and have been shared in return. I was interviewed twice on Radio Shropshire about walking in Shropshire. We hope in these different ways we will be able to encourage 'new walkers' and contribute to our charitable aims of promoting walking.

Regional and national networking and campaigning with and through Shropshire Area

I was re-elected Vice Chair of Shropshire Area Ramblers and during last year stepped up to the role of acting Chair while the Area Chair had to step back temporarily for personal reasons. I have attended Shropshire Ramblers Area Executive and Area Council meetings on behalf of the Group. There will be a full report on the work of the Ramblers Shropshire Area at our AGM. I have also participated in on line conferences with other Ramblers Areas and National Ramblers lead officers. This has enabled our Group to feedback on important national issues such as improving the rights of way network, the role and training of walk leaders, the impact of proposed legislation on the walking environment and claiming historic rights of way.

Changes and your own role in the Ramblers

Next year will be a year of both 'change' and 'getting back to normal'. It will be sad to see many long standing members leave us as they have made an outstanding contribution and I cannot thank them enough. Pam Day has held many important and different roles in her time on the committee, her knowledge and expertise will be missed; I will especially miss her when it comes to editing my 'ramblings' in the Group Newsletter and various other reports. Anne Furlong and Anne Wheeler, similarly were active Ramblers members and volunteers long before me, and their knowledge of how things have worked or not worked before, and their common sense approach to practical problems, has been invaluable. Jane Warman's enthusiasm and good humour in getting and keeping our walks programme together and her knowledge of how other groups and local festivals function has been inspirational. I have come to rely on Paula Doherty as the mainstay of our Group when it comes to Rights of Way issues and working with the Local Authority. I have learned so much from her, not just about the Rights of Way legal framework but how other bodies perceive us and how best to work with them, to achieve our aims.

I am confident we will elect at the AGM, new committee post holders with fresh ideas and energy to carry us forward. However, you don't need to be on the committee, just willing to spend a couple of hours now and then to make our Group better for you and everyone in it. We would particularly like to work with people interested in claiming unrecorded historic rights of way (a Ramblers national priority for 2022). If you walk local paths regularly could you become a local Path Guardian and report overgrown vegetation to us, so our maintenance team can sweep into action? You might want to join our path maintenance team?

How about shadowing a walk leader on a recce with a view to finding out more about navigation and route planning? Who knows, it may lead to inspiring you to plan your own walks and lead them for us. Ramblers are looking to offer more online navigation and walk leading training events in 2022, look out for details. If we had more walk leaders we could offer more walks and more varied, perhaps on a different pattern of days, times? It would be great if we can re-start socials, a weekend away or even a group holiday week one day, all halted by the national response to Covid.

We have not produced a newsletter this year but we intend to print one in the New Year, including our Spring and Summer Walk Programme. We know our newsletter readers enjoy articles written by members about favourite walks, walking holidays, what they enjoy most about walking or why they joined us, or interesting things about our 'local patch'. No expertise or technical knowledge is needed to write articles for our newsletter, or post news, events, photos and information to help keep our Facebook and web pages up to date. If you can use a PC, tablet or laptop, and have the ability to write, attach and send files; to cut, copy and paste text or photos, you could be a great help. Just ask me or a committee member.

Finally, we miss seeing and hearing from some of our regular walk leaders and regular walkers. Please, if you have stopped walking solo, or with our group during 2020 and 2021, please consider restarting. If

walks are oversubscribed we will try to put on more, so please don't think you are depriving someone of a place by booking. We are also aware we need to offer a varied programme of different types of walks in different sorts of places. If you want more local, shorter or longer walks or to resume going further into the hills or into other neighbouring areas, or walks designed to rebuild fitness and stamina, please speak to us.

Finally during the past year thanks to ongoing repercussions of Covid it seems I have done more talking than walking. Next year I hope to do more walking than talking! I look forward to enjoying your company.

Anne Suffolk Chair TES Ramblers

Treasurers Report: 2021

Expenditure and to a lesser extent income has been effected by COVID-19 restrictions this year.

We have not produced the usual printed walks' programmes, although we did print a newsletter. It is anticipated that we will resume producing printed walks programmes next year.

Income has been about the same this year but we did not receive a donation from RWH re members' holidays. We have been notified that RWH and HF travel will not be paying for adverts next year.

It was decided by the Committee that we would like to mark the 50 year anniversary of our group next year by contributing to a kissing gate on the Telford Fifty Trail, which will include a plaque. It was agreed to contribute £300 to this, the balance being paid by Telford and Wrekin Council. We have not yet received the invoice from the Council, so this money is still in our bank account but spoken for. The remaining available funds are in line with a normal year and sufficient

to cover our running costs, with the anticipated reduced income next year.

Mike Cull, Treasurer, Telford and East Shropshire Ramblers

Telford and East Shropshire Ramblers
Statement of Accounts 01/10/20 – 30/09/21

Opening Bank Account balance 1st October 2020: £528.12

	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
Ramblers budget Allowance	£349.52	
RWH travel payments	£100.00	
Postage		-£107.02
Walks programme		-£6.00
AGM		-£68.00
Admin costs (Stationery etc.)		-£41.98
Publicity		£0.00
HF holidays payments	£100.00	
Newsletter		-£83.00
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	£549.52	-£306.00
Income over Expenditure		£243.52
Closing Balance Bank Account		£771.64
Funds allocated to 50 years commemoration Lydebrook Dingle Kissing Gate.		-£300.00

Total funds available as at 30th September 2021.

Notes to the accounts: £300 allocated as a contribution to replacing the kissing gate at Lydebrook Dingle, not yet invoiced by T&W Council.

Balance. £471.64.

Programme Secretary's Report October 2021 Jane Warman

Well – what another year it's been!!

After a gradual re-start, last autumn seemed to be the chance to get back to some normality, how little did we know! Heading into the winter we decided to re-vert to just one walk on each walk date and to try and resume our normal pattern of Thursdays and Sundays but still working on a weekly basis. Restrictions still applied but they had become the norm. However, November brought what was becoming more inevitable, the cancellation of all group walking and another lockdown. I think everyone found this so much harder than before, that sense of please not again. At least we all had found plenty of local routes by then to keep walking!

It was not until the end of March that we received the go ahead to resume walking. On the plus side the weather had been filthy and the ground really wet and soggy, so not the most inspiring of walking weather! Keen to get going again, TES restarted on 8th April, following the latest guidelines and keeping the same advertising and booking structure as before. To ease the re-start we were happy to offer a walk any day that suited the leader but predominantly they fell into the Thursday, Sunday pattern. We then introduced a members email, listing up-coming walks for the month ahead just to try and give everyone a bit more notice. And we were rewarded with some glorious weather in April!!

From then, we maintained our regular walk offer through the summer, offering walks on a weekly basis, until we were able to produce a 3 month programme covering September to November. So, nearly back to normal?!!!!

And the walks have been fantastic! Our walk leaders have risen above the challenges of less travel, more parking, booking to offer a fabulous series of walks. We've had castles and canals, history and hills – our backyard certainly goes under the radar! We've linked up with other Rambler groups, supported local events and participated in the Shropshire Way Festival of Walks. We've also re-introduced an

informal social element to some walks- ending in a handy tea-room or buying an ice-cream! Our walk leaders have been heroes throughout and I can't thank them enough.

Above all, I think we have shown ourselves to be resilient and learnt to be flexible, both of which will carry us onward. We have welcomed new walkers and new leaders and of course, shared some lovely walks in our glorious countryside, enjoying all that our local area has to offer, in excellent company.

Membership Secretary Report – Pam Day October 2021

The membership for TES Ramblers as at October 1st 2021 stands at 286. This is a further healthy increase on last year – in fact the last two years have shown a significant increase in membership in line with a surge of interest in walking nationally. Now that group walks have started again, it has been good to welcome our new members and get to know them – we hope that they will enjoy many happy years of walking with us.

There have also of course been members who have left the group for various reasons. Often this is due to age and the inability to join walks now, but some members have moved away to new areas and others have changed groups. Some quite short-term members have chosen not to renew their membership – it would be interesting to know their reasons so that we can try our best to offer what our members want from their membership.

TES Footpath Secretary Report – Annual Report September 2021

It was late last year, during a phone conversation with our Rights of Way Officer, which I was told that T&W Council would be putting a new Policy and Guidance document for the processing of changes to the Definitive Map out to public consultation. This was set against a backlog of some 125 applications for Definitive Map Modifications in T&W – which is not dissimilar from other local authorities. The main driver for these changes was the need to attempt to deal with this ever-increasing backlog of applications.

The Council also consulted on a new way of categorising Public Rights of Way. By categorising every route, they said that they would be able to undertake an audit of routes, be more aware of their maintenance obligations, use the information for funding applications and be able to allocate resources for ‘greatest benefit’. I worked with Anne and others to provide a detailed response to this major consultation.

At about the same time, after years of work, a ‘first version’ of a new digitised Definitive Map became available online. This map went through a few changes in the early months of its life and is still far from perfect, but its publication should be seen as a successful milestone. The Council accepts that there are still errors and omissions to be corrected, but these will take time as the map cannot just be amended without going through the appropriate legal procedures.

Lockdowns provided time and opportunity to help the Council improve parts of their website concerned with named cross-borough walks. Working with Alan Hill (who provided pictures and editorial guidance) we updated and improved how the T50, Hutchison Way, Ironbridge Way and Silkin Way are presented on the website. There are still two routes that haven’t been updated: The Perry Way and the Reynolds Way.

As a Group we occasionally survey specific areas and submit reports to the Council. This year we looked at a small area near Cheswell (Lilleshall area), where the truncation of routes by the A518 means that Muxton residents do not have easy access to the countryside.

In Donnington there are several routes that may be added to the Definitive Map, so I wrote appeals, for local social media and newsletters, calling on people in both these areas to send in information if they have walked these paths in the past.

Some successes this year: a new bridge in Great Bolas and three new kissing gates in Lilleshall including one dedicated to Jim Cox who was part of the T50 team. We have developed a stronger working relationship with the 'Wellington Walkers are Welcome' team - paths have been cleared and fingerposts have been re-erected or installed in several locations. Next year should see a new kissing gate on the Shropshire Way/T50 where Lydebrook Dingle opens out onto Leasows Farm, as we are part sponsoring a new gate to help commemorate TES Ramblers' 50th Anniversary.

This will be my last annual Report for TES Ramblers as I am stepping down from the position and from the Committee. I'd like to thank all those involved in Rights of Way access work within the Group: Anne Suffolk for her guidance and support, Hamish for taking on the organisation of the work parties, the Committee for keeping the whole show on the road and to everyone who walks and reports on the need to keep our rights of way well signposted and accessible.

I wish the new Committee every success. There are new challenges ahead, not least how to make a meaningful contribution to the 'Lost Ways Project', and how to continue to promote the needs of walkers through the T&W Local Access Forum.

Paula Doherty 23rd Sep 2021