

WIRRAL RAMBLERS' FIRST FIFTY YEARS



1954 - 2004

This account of the Wirral Group of the Ramblers' Association is written for the group's fiftieth anniversary in 2004. Official sources used are Committee Meeting Minutes, Annual General Meeting Minutes and Area Annual Reports over fifty years, and these hold the story together. But it is the contributions from past and present members of Wirral Group which are more valuable. All the memories, photographs, slides, and other items are gratefully acknowledged. Without all of these, this project would not have been possible.

Dilys Court

March 2004

THE FIFTIES – WIRRAL CLUBROOM

How did it all begin?

"We went through a curtain into a dark, old-fashioned room ... about a dozen of us."

They were in a small room at the Little Theatre in Birkenhead, on a September evening in 1954. They were young and enthusiastic.

But this story really begins a little earlier. In 1954 the Ramblers' Association over in Liverpool was thriving, with more than a thousand members, and Liverpool R.A. Clubroom met for social events on a Friday evening in the old Friends' Meeting House behind the Walker Art Gallery. Some of the people attending Liverpool Clubroom lived in Wirral, and they wanted to set up a Clubroom on the Birkenhead side of the Mersey, which would be more accessible for them than Liverpool.

In the spring of 1954 the Liverpool Membership and Publicity Committee decided to explore the possibility of a Wirral group, and they sent round a circular to R.A. members who were living in Wirral, saying, *"Would you be interested? ... Would you prefer it to be in Birkenhead, or Wallasey, or Hoylake? I said I thought Birkenhead was the most central. ... I don't think they got a great many replies. ... In the summer we were invited to a meeting in Liverpool. ... We sat round this table ... maybe twenty people and none of us knew each other ... they decided they had sufficient support and that they would try and organise us in Birkenhead."*

About a dozen people from Wirral went to the Liverpool meeting, where the beginnings of the Wirral Clubroom were organised. *"They said, 'You people who've come, you've expressed an interest ... would you be the Chairman? Would you be the Treasurer?' I was appointed Treasurer, because nobody else would do it. 'Would you be the Secretary?' so that was really how the Committee was formed. Probably there was no other way of doing it, but I felt it wasn't really very democratic."*

So, they had a committee. They contacted people living in Wirral who were on the Liverpool Ramblers' membership list, and held their first meeting in the dark, old-fashioned room in the Little Theatre in Birkenhead. They were keen to see how many people would come. *"It was a very satisfying meeting, all the people who came were very keen and enthusiastic, and everybody wanted to get involved."* It went well.

First there was a committee, and then there was an inaugural meeting. The next step was to find a suitable venue for Wirral Clubroom. All sorts of places were investigated but some were unavailable at the required time and some were too expensive. They needed a room where they could sit down for a lecture, and somewhere where they could dance.

Finally in November premises were found at the Guide Headquarters in Balls Road, Birkenhead, in a building which is now a Scout Office and Conservative Association. Clubroom evenings took place in a back room on Thursdays, which did not clash with Liverpool's Friday evenings.

Support on Thursday evenings was a bit slow in coming. Some people said their friends went to Liverpool, so they would not support Wirral. Some went to both Clubrooms, Birkenhead on a Thursday night and Liverpool on a Friday night. *"It was quite a while before we had twenty,"* which at 1/- per person would pay the £1 per week rent. Someone had to decide each week *"whether we could afford to buy a quarter of tea ... It was very dodgy financially."*

Often the group found it hard to get speakers because they could only pay expenses, and Clubro

om admission charges had to be increased, but every week there was dancing although the floor was not very good. *"After the Thursday lecture there would be dancing in the Clubroom for an hour – it was a good way to get to know people."* *"We did The Valeta, The Gay Gordons, things like that, and a bit of ballroom. There were more girls than men, maybe two women to one man."* *"We had three or four people who were dead keen on Scottish Dancing, which was a tradition in all the rambling clubs."* *"We had to buy a record player ... it was only second-hand and rather temperamental ... we only had £15."*

Many of these early members had moved to Wirral from other parts of the country. After the second world war quite a number of people came to work at Levers, and they were free at weekends and looking for interesting activities. They were *"quite an asset, all keen ... that helped us along quite a lot. ... and there were some girls as well ... away from home and living in digs, there were no flats then."* *"We called ourselves the Wirral Clubroom of the Liverpool District and North Wales Area of the Ramblers Association."* It was a small group of men and women in their twenties, with more women than men at that time.



First anniversary



Cutting the cake

No written records survive of Wirral Clubroom's activities during its first three years. Early Minute books were lost. A programme for the Ramblers' Association Liverpool District and North Wales Area for Spring/Summer 1957, the earliest found, gives information about Wirral Clubroom on the last pages.

Wirral Clubroom programme for spring/summer1957

WIRRAL CLUBROOM

Meets Thursday 7-30 — 10-30 p.m. Y.W.C.A., The Woodlands, Birkenhead. Charge 1/-, visitors welcomed, charge 1/6d. Lectures commence 8 p.m.

- Mar. 7—Scottish Dancing led by members of Birkenhead St. Andrews' Society.
Door Steward: Frank Rees.
Hostesses: Mavis Hewitt, Madge Marwood.
- „ 14—“North-West Scotland” Illus. by Mr. E. Brooks.
Door Steward: Norman Lloyd.
Hostesses: Penny Pendleton, Dorothy Brown.
- „ 21—Visit of Wirral Morris Dancers.
Door Steward: Keith Brunskill.
Hostesses: Diana Bromfield, Christina McPhie.
- „ 28—“Wales” Illus. by Ken Collins.
Door Steward: Robert Beattie.
Hostesses: Eileen Allchin, Joyce Kirkham.
- April 4—“From Pharoah to Nasser” Illus. by Mr. S. R. Griffiths.
Door Steward: Colin Cowell.
Hostesses: Joan Thomas, John Evans.
- „ 11—“Around Britain” Illus. by Max. Kirby.
Door Steward: Graham Duckworth.
Hostesses: Margaret Duckworth, Doreen Williamson.
- „ 18—Mixed Dancing.
Door Steward: Donald Merchant.
Hostesses: Shirley Hudson, Beryl Newsham.
- „ 25—Club Members' Entertain, arranged by Stella Cooke.
Door Steward: Gerry Roberts.
Hostesses: Rene Gleaves, Norah Healey.
- May 2—“Have you Heard This One,” arranged by Ted Crowe.
Door Steward: Charles Hope.
Hostesses: Sylvia Price, Kay Jones.
- „ 4—Social and Dance at Clubroom, Tickets 2/6d. M.C.: Ted Crowe.
- „ 9—7-30 p.m. Visit to Bromborough Power Station (20 only). Booking commences 11th April.

- May 16—Scottish Dancing led by Mrs. McAuslan.
Door Steward: Geoff. Austin.
Hostesses: Doreen Newton, Myfanwy Owens.
- „ 23—“About the W.E.A.” by Mr. F. Gallimore, M.A.
Door Steward: Ian Freeman.
Hostesses: Nora Freeman, Muriel Killip.
- „ 30—“Twenty Questions”, arranged by Madge Marwood.
Door Steward: Ken Collins.
Hostesses: Dorothy Rowlands, Joan Dunn.
- June 6—English Folk Dancing.
Door Steward: Norman Barrell.
Hostesses: Gladys Barrell, Audrey Greene.
- „ 13—“Malta” The George Cross Island, by Mr. W. F. Bushell, M.A.
Door Steward: John Allen.
Hostesses: Norah Murphy, Beryl Cronin.
- „ 20—“Let the Punishment Fit the Crime”, arranged by Donald Merchant.
Door Steward: John Clifford.
Hostesses: Pam Clifford, Beryl Kingan.
- „ 27—Scottish Dancing, led by Alec Brannah.
Door Steward: Roy Frodsham.
Hostesses: Mildred Frodsham, Ann Williams.
- July 4—“Tides”, by Mr. J. R. Rossiter, M.Sc.,
Door Steward: Stan Tyrer.
Hostesses: Eileen Tyrer, Barbara Motley.
- „ 11—English Folk Dancing, led by Mr. E. R. Lea.
Door Steward: Jack Allen.
Hostesses: Barbara Simcoe, Barbara Dickinson.
- „ 18—7-45 p.m. Hoylake Station for Rounders Match on Beach.
- „ 25—Meet 7-45 p.m. Arrowe Park Gates for Dodd's Farm Irby.
- Aug. 1—7-15 p.m. Visit to Head Post Office, Stanley Street Liverpool, (20 only). Booking commences 27th June.
- „ 8—7-30 p.m. Visit to Palm Grove Birkenhead Telephone Exchange (30 only) Booking commenced 27th June.

This programme shows that on seven Thursday evenings they were dancing, either Scottish Dancing (three times), English Folk Dancing (twice), and Mixed Dancing, together with a Social and Dance and a visit from Wirral Morris Dancers. On seven evenings a speaker gave a lecture (always called a lecture then, never a talk) on varied subjects, such as 'From Pharoah to Nasser' and 'Tides.' Four evenings were probably organised by club members, and on the six other evenings, all in the summer, members went on outside visits, such as to the Head Post Office, Birkenhead Telephone Exchange, and Hoylake Station for rounders match on the beach.

Clubroom evenings soon moved on from Balls Road, as the programme for Spring/Summer 1957 gives the venue as The Woodlands, Y.W.C.A., Birkenhead, and another programme for autumn/winter 1957/58 (not shown) gives the venue as Oxton Road Congregational Church Hall, Birkenhead, still meeting on Thursdays 7.30 to 10.30 p.m.

Numbers began to increase, though not consistently because some people came only in the summer, others only in the winter. By autumn 1957 between forty and fifty people attended the weekly Wirral Clubroom in the Congregational Church Hall. Members acted as M.C. at the various dances, and decorated the church hall. Following three well supported social and dance events during one year, Committee members were so encouraged that they arranged a dance at Birkenhead Town Hall in November. Liverpool group suggested that Wirral Group should share dances with them at the Y.M.C.A., but Wirral group, growing in confidence and independence, preferred separate dances, to be supported by both groups. However, by the end of the fifties dancing began to lose some of its appeal, and a dinner dance in 1959 was cancelled due to lack of support.

There was a request for more audience participation in the Clubroom, for instance in play-reading and debates. Sometimes outside speakers were organised, and on other Thursdays a member of the group might organise the evening, perhaps with music, games or slides. In 1957 there were evening visits to Bidston Observatory, Mersey Tunnel and Queen Elizabeth 11 Dock.

Numbers were increasing fast, and in 1959 the George Band Lecture 'Road to Rakaposhi' attracted an audience of two hundred and four. Added to this, *"a number of excellent lecturers have been appreciated on Thursday evenings. ...This type of evening ... seems to be most popular."*

With the increased numbers finances were improving, and by 1958 there was a £20 balance in the clubroom accounts and new gramophone equipment was bought for under £40. New records were bought, at a cost of £2, but instead of buying a screen for the projector, they were to save money and 're-whiten the existing wall.'

A summer barbecue in Chester was organised, and those who had cars were asked to take frying pans. Ninety members and friends came to the 1959 Christmas party. In July 1959 there was a river cruise to Eccleston Ferry and a theatre visit to a performance by Birkenhead Operatic Society.

By the end of 1959 Clubroom attendances on winter Thursday evenings averaged fifty, and numbers were well maintained in the summer, in spite of the fact that the Congregational Church Hall was *"cold and cheerless ... we used to decorate it, completely transform it."*

As well as Clubroom evenings, in the summer some members met to play tennis, and in March 1959 an arrangement was made with Birkenhead Corporation for them to play on a grass court in Birkenhead Park for three nights a week, at a cost of ten guineas. In winter they played badminton in the Congregational Church Hall in Balls Road for several years, though not on a normal club night.

Wirral Clubroom began in 1954 and was set up as a Clubroom. *"We were only given the brief of starting the Clubroom."* An unknown number of people at that time still walked with the Liverpool group, who organised coaches on Sundays for rambles. Some walked with both groups, but by 1955 there was a group who rambled on Saturday afternoons, mostly in Wirral. Teachers and some others did not work on Saturdays, but many office workers only had an occasional Saturday off, so they could only take part on some Saturday afternoons, and on Sundays.

The members of this Saturday afternoon group were devoted to it. On some of their rambles they went to the Green Lantern Cafe in Willaston village, *"You could have your tea in the garden ... you could get hot meals."* Another favourite place to stop was the tea room attached to a farm which was run by Miss Dodd, a retired local midwife, in Irby Mill Hill. *"We never went into pubs." "We didn't separate the Clubroom social events from the rambles, we just assumed it was the Wirral Ramblers. We didn't ... ramble on the Liverpool side... We had lots of fun on walks, it was a wonderful way to make friends ... Afternoon walks were seven or eight miles (people worked Saturday mornings) and they were popular with older people, you could do your housework first."* On one occasion they met at West Kirby station for sunbathing and swimming at Hilbre Island. It sounds rather leisurely.



Saturday afternoon ramble



On a winter ramble

In 1958 only about three members of Wirral Clubroom had a car, so for the first few years nearly all rambles, at that time taking place about every other week, were restricted to places accessible by public transport. One general problem was that if the walk began on a Sunday morning, it was difficult or

impossible to get to the meeting place because of the lack of early buses. In 1959 there was something a bit different. "A private coach to Snowdon was quite an innovation."

Spring/Summer 1957

PROGRAMME OF RAMBLES

Secretary: John Clifford,
6 Barnard Road, Oxtan, Birkenhead.

Programme of Rambles March to September.

Mar. 2—Week End at Hope C.H.A.

„ 3—Leader: Rosemary Harold.

„ 17—2-15 p.m. Woodside for Shotton. Leader: Sylvia Price

„ 24—9-30 a.m. train from Lime Street for Frodsham.
Leader: Ian Freeman.

April 7—2-15 Woodside for Bromborough.
Leader: Brian Litchfield.

„ 28—9-25 Holywell 'bus from Woodside for Ramble to
Pantymwyn. Leader: Jack Allen.

May 19—9-0 a.m. train from Woodside for ramble in Ruabon
area. Leader: Norah Healey.

June 2—Private Coach for Snowdon. Leader: John Clifford.

„ 15—10-0 p.m. Woodside for midnight ramble.
Leader: John Allen.

„ 30—2-30 p.m. Woodside for Irby. Leader: Anne Williams.

July 14—Sunbathing and swimming at Hilbre Island. Meet at
West Kirby Station at 10-40 a.m.

„ 21—10-45 a.m. Boat to Llandudno.

Aug. 11—10-15 a.m. at Exchange station for Freshfield beach.

„ 18—10-25 train from Seacombe for Caergwile.
Leader: Norman Barrell.

This programme shows the different places the group went to, by bus and train. *"I thought the trains were lovely, all those stations with fires in the waiting rooms."* Once the group met at Woodside for a midnight ramble, but we don't know where they went, and on another occasion, they took the 10.45 boat to Llandudno.

"I'd lived in Birkenhead all my life and I'd no idea that this group met ... and I went along ... and that was the start of it. ... The second walk I went on ... there were just ... two of us ... and we had to write out our own tickets because the boy in the ticket office couldn't spell Prestatyn. I was told that more people would get on at Rock Ferry station, but nobody else got on ... and I thought, oh dear, I wonder if it's going to be like this every week ... but it wasn't."

As well as the public trains, there were special Ramblers' Trains, which began before the Second World War, began again in 1949 and were available for members of Wirral group in the fifties. *"You could buy tickets for them at twenty or thirty stations around Merseyside."* They were *"a wonderful innovation ... all the Ramblers' Clubs on Merseyside would come on one big Ramblers' train ... and meet friends, and other people from other clubs ... it was a wonderful way to meet people."*



Ingleborough summit 1959

As well as Saturday and Sunday walks, there were weekends away. In 1958 there was a weekend at Grasmere and at least one weekend at Hope C.H.A., and in 1959 at Llangollen, Hope and Borrowdale. There was a well supported weekend at Conway but the weather was awful.

Any account of Wirral Branch weekends, in the fifties and later, must refer to the Ramblers' Chalet at Pant Du in North Wales. Built about 1927, it was acquired by the Liverpool and North Wales Area of the Ramblers' Association in a derelict state in 1948. In 1949 the Chalet and its grounds were presented as a gift to Ramblers' Association Services Ltd., in trust for members and other ramblers. Members of Wirral Clubroom went there from 1957 or even earlier.



The chalet in winter

To get there in the fifties you had to go to Birkenhead and take a bus, leaving it at the top of the hill where it goes down to Loggerheads, usually on a Saturday afternoon," and then walk from the bus to the Chalet, two or three miles, carrying all your things including food ... you could get milk ... You had to light a coal fire when you got there ..."

The original building accommodated fourteen people, seven men and seven women, and sometimes achieving a group of precisely this mix was difficult. "At first it was a struggle to find enough men." For Saturday and Sunday nights the cost in 1957 was £2 10s. 0d. Cooking was by Calor gas and Primus stove. "The first time I went, we had mince and sausages," and "Indian sandwiches – hard boiled egg and curry powder."

It had running water and proper sanitation, but "It was a very primitive building, with bunk beds three high ... it was awkward getting out of the middle one in the middle of the night if you had to ... ladies had access to toilets from their dormitory, but the poor old men had to go out into the storm and right round the building, there was no internal way except through the ladies' dormitory and that wouldn't be done. ... Sometimes there would be extra people sleeping in the common room. ... It was very windblown ... the wind used to blow in all the cracks ... we just had lino on the floor ... when you sat there with your blanket around you the lino would ripple right across." "It wasn't really warm enough to sit there all Saturday evening so we used to walk to the pub and spend the evening there, because it was warmer."

Midnight rambles from the Chalet are well remembered nearly fifty years later. "You set off at 10.0 and got back about 3 or 4 a.m. ... the only time in my life that I have ever seen glow-worms ... in the valley near the Seven Springs. ... It was absolutely magical."

"Once the Chalet accommodation was double booked ... we got back at 4 a.m. and the other lot very kindly vacated their beds and we got into the beds and I don't know what they did ... everybody was very good humoured."

During 1959 there was good weather at a weekend in the Chalet, when members sunbathed and, for the first time mentioned, "the number of men in the party exceeded the ladies." At the end of the weekend, "When you came home on a Sunday, you had to walk all the way down to Loggerheads to get the bus, to make sure you could get on it. ... It only went once about every two hours."

Clothing for rambles in the late fifties was not what most of us wear now. "I wore my first pair of trousers in about 1955, at the Chalet, and my first rambling boots, because I started rambling in shoes." "You had to go to the Men's Department in Timpson's for boots." "There were boots with nails, that clinked. I bought a pair of boots, then took them to the cobbler and he put nails on them ... but they weren't good on hard surfaces ... the first boots took the skin off my heels ... and then we had boots with Commando soles in the early 60s," "and a duffel bag, one of those canvas things."

Advertisements from fifties programmes show that you could buy from Osier Dover at 160, Kensington, Liverpool "tailor made shorts, divided skirts ... send S.A.E. for Patterns and Prices if you cannot call" from a shop which was "open till 2 p.m. most Saturdays." Ellis Brigham in Conan Street, Manchester advertised "Specialities for the Rambler, The New "BRIGHAM" Boot, Made on the popular Austrian style ... All sizes and half-sizes 4-12 ... 105/- ... P. & P. 2/6d"

"We had the first anoraks after the war ... before that I wore an army battledress jacket." Ellis Brigham also advertised the "ANORAK (Made by the people who supplied the Manchester Himalayan Expedition, 1957) DOUBLE texture Gabardine, ... "which had a "Kangaroo pocket" Sizes: Small & Medium 67/- P. and P. 1/6d 70/- Large. ... S.A.E. for latest lists. Open all day Saturday."

By 1959 Ellis Brigham were announcing that they could "kit the lone moor land walker or an organised Himalayan expedition ... Bewildering varieties of boots, rucksacks, anoraks, axes, crampons, ropes, breeches, etc. etc."

Recruiting for new members in the fifties was soon under way, and by 1958 publicity was organised. Twelve new posters advertising the Ramblers' Association and particularly the Wirral Clubroom were to be displayed in local public libraries, and information about group activities appeared in local newspapers each week.

In the fifties the Ramblers' Association organisation locally was the Liverpool District and North Wales Area, which included the Liverpool Group. In 1954 the Wirral subset was formed. "We called ourselves the Wirral Clubroom of the Liverpool District and North Wales Area of the Ramblers' Association."

The 1954 Liverpool District etc. Annual Report states, under the heading "New Clubs,"

that "Assistance has been given in the establishing of new Association Clubs in Llandudno, Denbigh and the Wirral, and, while their activities are at present devoted to rambling and clubroom events, it is hoped that, in due course, they will accept some of the work at present done centrally in Liverpool, particularly in connection with amenity and footpath matters."

This slightly admonitory tone became a little more friendly later in the same Annual Report however, when, referring to Wirral Clubroom, the report states that:

"Towards the end of the year, a Ramblers' Association Clubroom was opened in Birkenhead to cater for those ... who are unable to come to the Liverpool Clubroom. The venture is making very satisfactory progress; attendances are small, but the group is extremely enthusiastic."

In the 1955 Annual Report of the Liverpool group, this courtesy is reciprocated by Wirral. "Appreciation must ... be expressed to members of the Publicity committee who had the foresight to launch the Wirral Clubroom, and to many other Liverpool friends who, by their personal and financial support, have made the first year of the Wirral Clubroom such a success."

The relationship with Liverpool was not always totally smooth. Either at this time, or later, in the sixties, if we think of Liverpool as the parent group, their offspring on this side of the river Mersey was sometimes thought to be, at the very least, a bit too independent.

Wirral Clubroom began in 1954 with Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. Within three or four years there was a Rambles Secretary, a Social Secretary, and also a qualified accountant who audited the books. By the end of the fifties there was also a Publicity Officer. "We were well organised; I can tell you. ... It was all due to teamwork, and we had a brilliant, enthusiastic team to run all the activities."

By 1959 the group was far more than just social events in a Clubroom. "We had a pretty good programme ... the change came because we were not only running a Clubroom but we also started Saturday and Sunday rambles. ... We used to go for the major ones with Liverpool – and we had an annual trip to Snowdon with five coaches out," There were no other rambling groups at that time."

During 1959 the group decided to change its name from 'Wirral Clubroom' to 'Wirral Branch' which was considered to be a more suitable title. No more information is given about this name change, which did not actually make any difference. It only made an existing situation more consistent.

The Minutes of a Committee Meeting held on 1.12.59 state that the clubroom balance was £55 and the socials balance was £27 0s. 8d. It sounds as though they were solvent.

All this shows that by the end of the fifties Wirral Branch was a well-established group of about fifty enthusiastic young people, meeting on Thursday evenings for a variety of social events. Although many members still rambled with the Liverpool group, Wirral Branch organised two rambles per month, but destinations were limited to places which could be reached by public transport. Weekends away included those at the Chalet.

THE SIXTIES – WIRRAL BRANCH

After numbers slowly increased in the fifties, by the beginning of the sixties Wirral Branch was a lively group of young people who were mostly in their twenties and thirties. "The sixties were a great time ... everybody was young then." The first members' weddings took place. When members married each other and had children, that restricted their walking for a while, but this did not greatly affect the numbers because by the end of the sixties there were new younger members. "It really thrived; it grew very fast."

Clubroom Programme for Autumn/Winter 1963/64

WIRRAL BRANCH

Meets Thursdays 7.30 p.m. — 10.30 p.m. at Oxtan Road Congregational Church Hall, Birkenhead. Charge 1/6d. visitors welcome, charge 2/- Includes light refreshments.

Lectures commence 8 p.m.

- Sept 12—Inter Club Quiz. Teams from C.H.A., H.F., Liverpool R.A., Wirral R.A.
Door Steward: Beryl Cronin
Hostesses: Mary Macdonald, Irene Kenwell.
- „ 19—Mr. Holland, Northern Ireland Information Service.
Illus. Cine Film. 'Charm of Ulster'.
Door Steward: Donald Merchant.
Hostesses. Barbara Simcoe. Joan Cross.
- „ 26—Mr. Pritchard. Egypt and Nubia (Illus.)
Door Steward: Charles Hope.
Hostesses: Barbara Beattie. Valerie Norris.
- Oct. 3—M. Hilaire Marteau, The Resistance in Touraine.
Door Steward: Brian Litchfield.
Host & Hostess: Roy Edwards and Mary Litchfield.
- „ 10—Miss Vera Gordon Flowers of the Alps and Pyrenees.
(Illus)
Door Steward: Colin Cowell.
Hostesses. Pat Youd and Christine Burnett.
- „ 17—Dr. Peter Boulton, Merseyside Himalayan Expedition. (Illus).
Door Steward: Sylvia Price.
Hostesses. Beatrice Henley and Madge Marwood.
- „ 24—Mr. Cox. The Work of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. (Illus)
Door Steward: John Allen.
Host and Hostess: Peter Underhill and Kathleen Allen.
- Oct. 1—Halloween Social M.C. Stella Cooke.
Door Steward: Rosemary Harold.
Hostesses: Kathleen Porter and Brenda Sowden.
- Nov. 7—Cine Films. Presented by David Mills.
Door Steward. Bert Gregory.
Hostesses: Irene Smith and Cynthia Johnson.
- „ 14—Mr. Clarke Rhodesia (Illus)
Door Steward: Ann Muddiman.
Hostesses: Shirley Webb and Lorna Pickstock.

In the programme for Liverpool District and North Wales Area, this information about Wirral Clubroom is again included at the end. In 1963 Clubroom was still on Thursday evenings at the Congregational Church Hall in Oxtan Road, but it was not to be there for much longer. Speakers lectured on a variety of topics, and also several evenings were organised by members. One popular lecturer was Alfred Gregory, who came to give several lectures, beginning in 1960 when he gave a public lecture and film show entitled 'Some Himalayan Climbs.' For one of his events in the Town Hall over three hundred and fifty tickets were sold.

By the mid sixties Clubroom had been held in Oxtan Road for about eight years, but the time had come to move on. In September 1964, they decided to leave the Congregational Church Hall. It was not an ideal meeting place, although "We met there for years. ... It was a big decision to leave it ... but we got tired of it being so cold." They moved to The Woodlands at the Y.W.C.A. in Birkenhead, where members appreciated the brighter and warmer surroundings. They were pleased with their new

premises, and about fifty people came to the Special Opening Night. Ladies attending this event were asked not to wear their stiletto heels, as the Y.W.C.A. had a new floor.



Tramps' supper 1966

Some of the social events in the sixties are still remembered by those who were there. "We had some lovely evenings in the Clubroom at The Woodlands." "A special Thursday evening was a Music Hall Evening ... everyone did an Act." "And there was a Tramps' Supper, everyone went dressed as a tramp and then we went out for fish and chips ... one of the witches bought fish and chips still wearing her witch's mask" ... "and we had a hypnotist once – he managed to hypnotize one of our members."

One highlight of the sixties was the evening when Chris Bonington gave his first lecture at the Clubroom. This was arranged through a lucky contact at a wedding reception, where one of the ramblers happened to be sitting next to the groom's cousin who lived in the Lake District. Chris Bonington had just begun giving lectures. 'Do you think he would give a lecture to a group of ramblers?' she asked. 'I'm sure he would.' The secretary wrote to him, and "he came to the Clubroom that time, and he charged £35, and the hall was packed. And the next time we decided to have Birkenhead Town Hall." The Committee had to be prepared to share financial responsibility if the event ran at a loss, but fortunately it was a great success. He spoke about 'The Ascent of the North Wall of the Eiger,' and on a later occasion about 'The Blue Nile,' but this was not so popular as the mountaineering lectures.

On one occasion when he came in January or February there had been a heavy snowfall, "and we'd sold all the tickets, and it was getting nearer the time, and from the empty seats it was obvious that people weren't going to turn up, so we sold them, again, to the queue outside the door. We did very well that

year." His visits to Wirral Branch were a great success, but sadly later his charges became too great for the club to consider.

Once, in order to raise funds for the club, members held what would now be called a car boot sale," second hand stuff, we had it in the Clubroom one Saturday morning, we'd no idea what to expect, and a queue was waiting outside, and they were dealers, with bin bags, and they just swept things into the bin bags and handed you what they thought was enough, and you couldn't keep track of what was going ..."

Another fund-raising event was an Autumn Fair.

Although the Clubroom was thriving and numbers were increasing, it seems that members were not always very friendly to newcomers, as one past member explains: "I went for the first time in 1968, there were about thirty people there and I found them a very unfriendly group. ... My first impression was, if this is what they are like, it's not for me. So I went over to Liverpool the following week, and found them a far more friendly group ... I was made very welcome. But Liverpool was inconvenient for me ... and so I persisted with Wirral ... and found them somewhat better, in time. I think we were never a particularly welcoming group, and I think others found the same."

We do not know how many people were lost in this sort of situation, but it was accepted that lack of effort on the part of members to be friendly was largely responsible for newcomers not staying. Also, members were reminded not only to arrive in good time to hear outside speakers, but also to remember to talk to the speaker after his lecture.

But mostly events went well. "It was lovely ... we had Christmas parties at the Woodlands, and about ten of us would go down and decorate the place with home-made decorations and lanterns and holly, things like that, it was such a big hall, and I've still got some of them ... I should throw them out now ... everybody was told what to bring and a lovely supper emerged, and we had dancing to a record player."

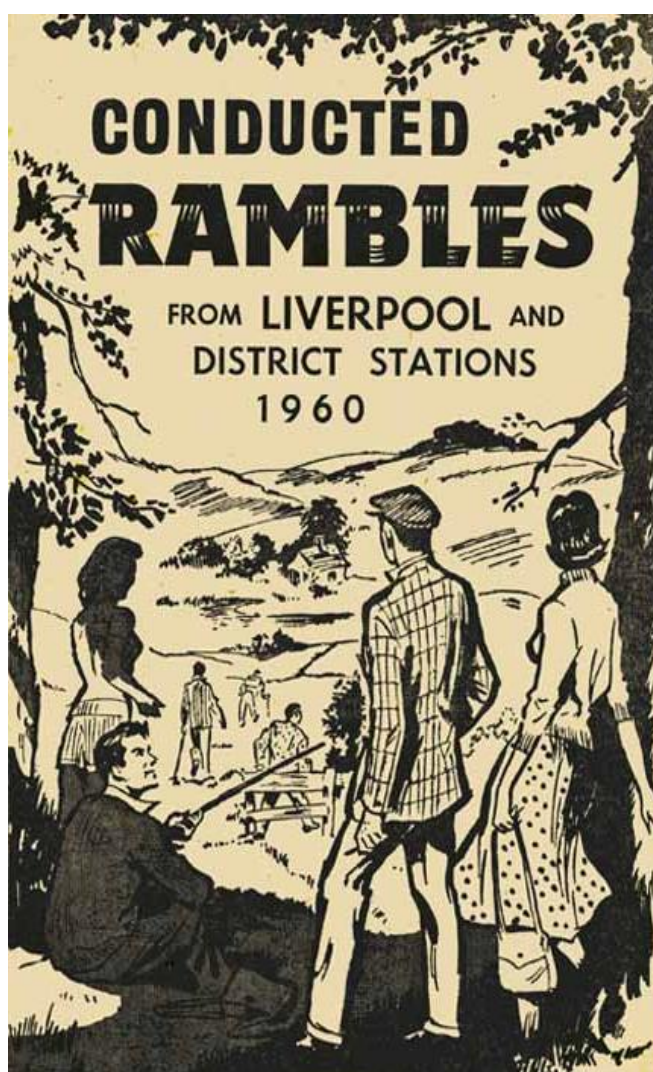
As in the fifties, to get to the start of a ramble the group travelled from time to time on Ramblers' trains, which were organised by Liverpool group. They ran on some Bank Holidays, and on other days as well. Different groups, such as the International Friendship League, Liverpool Botanical Society and the Holiday Fellowship, would be together on the same train.

Sometimes there were difficulties, as the Ramblers' Association had no control over the timetables. If a train was scheduled to leave at 11 a.m., it could arrive back very late. "Sometimes we had to change trains, and this could mean missed connections, or being cooped up in a guard's van if the train was crowded."

The style and clothing of people shown in the cover of the timetable show what the image of walkers was (or what they wanted it to be) in 1960. It seems to be summer in the picture, so perhaps shoes are appropriate, for there is no sign of boots, as they straggle off in an uneven line of seven people. It is hard to see who is leading this group.

The timetable is for a special excursion on a diesel train. Diesel trains were quite new then. This train is not due back in Liverpool until 11.20 p.m., which probably created problems for people trying to get back to Wirral at that late hour on a Sunday night.

A British Railways 1960 timetable



ORGANISED RAMBLES
Led by Official Guides of the
Liverpool Ramblers' Association

SUNDAY 26th FEBRUARY 1961
SPECIAL EXCURSION
BY
DIESEL TRAIN
TO
**MILLERS DALE BAKEWELL MATLOCK DERBY
LOUGHBOROUGH and LEICESTER**



LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE

FROM	Departure Times	RETURN FARES—SECOND CLASS					
		Millers Dale	Bake-well	Matlock	Derby Midland	Lough-borough	Leicester London Road
LIVERPOOL CENTRAL	8 a.m.	10/3	10/6	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
GARSTON	9 45	10/3	10/6	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
HUNTS CROSS	9 55	10/3	10/6	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
HOLGH GREEN	10 00	10/3	10/6	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
WIDNES NORTH	10 06	9/6	10/6	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
WARRINGTON CENTRAL	10 09	9/-	10/3	11/6	13/6	17/-	19/-
MANCHESTER CENTRAL	10 20	8/3	9/3	10/9	13/6	16/9	18/9
CHORLTON-CUM-HARDY	10 50	5/-	6/3	7/6	10/3	13/-	15/3
DIDSBURY	10 58	5/-	6/3	7/-	10/-	12/9	15/-
STOCKPORT TIVOT DALE	11 03	4/9	5/-	6/9	9/6	12/3	14/6
BAKEWELL	11 12	4/3	6/-	6/6	9/-	12/-	14/-
MATLOCK	12 10	—	—	—	—	7/9	9/3
DERBY MIDLAND	12 22	—	—	—	—	5/9	7/9
ARRIVAL TIMES	12 56	—	—	—	—	3/3	5/-
RETURN TIMES SAME DAY		8 51	8 40	8 34	7 57	7 28	7 10

FOR FULL DETAILS OF RAMBLES—SEE OVERLEAF

Children under three years of age, free; three years and under fourteen, half-fare (fractions of -1/- rounded as -1/-)

TICKETS CAN BE OBTAINED IN ADVANCE AT STATIONS AND OFFICIAL RAILWAY AGENTS

Further information will be supplied on application to Stations, Official Railway Agents, or to R.C. FROM, District Passenger Manager, Lime Street Station, Liverpool. (Tel. No. ROYAL 829). Ex. Enquiries.)

February 1961

F. 26/R (HD)

LONDON MIDLAND

PLEASE TURN OVER

On the back of the timetable conducted rambles in the Peak District National Park, graded 'Strenuous' (A), 'Moderate' (B) and 'Moderate' (C), are described in enthusiastic prose, but without giving any details of mileage, ascent or terrain. It looks as though the system could cope with over-large groups, as we are told that "If the numbers in parties are unduly large, additional guides will be provided to conduct these walks in a reverse direction ..." Also "Passengers intending to join one of the parties should ... be equipped with strong footwear and a light waterproof." A light waterproof in February seems optimistic.

In 1962 Ramblers began to be affected by the lack of scheduled Sunday trains such as the 9 a.m. to Chester, and infrequent trains to Liverpool on Sunday mornings due to the closure of branch lines. The effects of the Beeching Report of 1963-64 were beginning to bite, and the places which Ramblers could reach by train were seriously restricted. In Wales, five hundred stations were closed. These days, it seems hard to believe that there ever were five hundred stations in Wales.

In 1962 Ramblers' buses began. They were organised by Liverpool Area Transport Section and anyone could go on them. These buses, which were actually coaches, involved the agreement of two bus companies to run them, backed up by annual written submissions to the Traffic Commissioners to show there was need, and that other transport operators would not suffer as a result. With the closure of many rural railway lines and stations, this was not difficult to prove. The Minutes for October 1961 tell us that the question of three Ramblers' buses for 1962 had yet to be passed by the Traffic Commissioners.

As well as Ramblers' trains and Ramblers' buses, private transport was used to reach areas not accessible by public transport. Bookings were made in the normal manner, with drivers saying how many passengers they could accommodate. "We used to meet in Oliver Street, you didn't have to book ... there always seemed to be enough seats ... and you shared the cost of the petrol." (Sometimes) "we would use public transport ... and we managed very well."

"With the publication of the Beeching Report ... a move towards setting up public excursions by coach was inevitable. Otherwise, we'd have been on a hiding to nothing," so "By 1968/69 we were using coaches. We used to have to go down to Woodside to get on them ... and I used to chain my bicycle to the railings of the Crosville booking office, and the Inspector there used to say 'I'll keep an eye on it' and it was always there when I got back ... then ... there were picking up points for the coaches, and it just took off after that ... people didn't have to travel far and they were dropped near home at night. It proved the turning point for the Ramblers." "Once the coaches began, you could go out every week."

At the beginning of the sixties half day rambles were still listed. There was concern at the small number of full day rambles, with the aim that these should take place every three weeks. "My first walk was on the Lancashire Fells; we went by train and I thought it was lovely ... there were only six of us out that first Sunday ... then there was a week without a ramble."

One rambler well remembers a walk on the day he missed the bus. "I think we used to meet at Bridge Street, near the ferry ... two of us missed the bus and had to do a ramble on our own ... the most magical day possible ... we went up Moel Famau and looked around and there was a cotton wool mist in the sunshine and all the local hills were just protruding through and it was absolutely wonderful. I've never seen anything like it before or since. That's the only outstanding memory I have of the walks." (He doesn't say how they got to Moel Famau.)

Autumn/Winter 1963/64

RAMBLES — WIRRAL BRANCH

- Sept —Weekend at Llanfairfechan C.H.A. Private Coach
14/15—9 a.m. Woodside.
„ 22—Ramblers Train to Chinley Edge, Edale and Hope.
Details from railway handbills
Oct. 6—Clwydian ramble. 9.50 a.m. Loggerheads Service bus
Woodside.
Leader: Brian Litchfield.
„ 13—Y.H.A. Weekend to Llangollen Details later.
„ 20—Ramblers Bus—Rhydymwyn, Bodfari Llansannan
& Llanfair. Talhaiarn. Details from handbills.
Nov. 3—Corwen and Llangollen—Private bus 9 a.m.
Woodside.
„ 17—Ramblers Train. Wrexham, Ruabon Chirk. Details
from railway handbills.
Dec. 1—Holly Ramble-Hawarden Woods 10.34 a.m. train
Bidston
Leader: Ken Baty.
„ 15—Clwydian Ramble and Xmas Party at Llanbedr Hall
Advanced booking
„ 29—See Liverpool programme for Wirral Ramble.
1964
Jan. 5—Moel Findeg 9.50 a.m. Service Bus Woodside.
Leader: Roy Wilkinson.
„ 12—Nicky Nook 9.40 a.m. train Liverpool Exchange
Leader: Peter Underhill.
„ 26—Hot-Pot supper at Llannarmon. Private coach 9 a.m.
Woodside.
Feb. 2—Todmorden 10.05 a.m. train. Liverpool Exchange
Leader: Alan Whitely
„ 9—Ramblers Train Prestatyn & Abergele Details later.
„ 16—Helsby and Delamere 10 a.m. train Woodside.
Leader: Alan Forbes.
Feb. 29—Private Guest House weekend at Ingleton. Private
to Mar.1—Coach 9 a.m. Woodside—Advanced booking.

This programme shows that by this time rambles were taking place roughly every other week and that all but two were accessed by public transport, either train, Ramblers' train, bus or Ramblers' bus. The most popular destination was Wales, but they also rambled in Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Cheshire. They had weekends away at Llanfairfechan and Ingleton, going by private coach. On this programme there are no rambles listed for the Lake District.



On the Denbigh road

But there was a difficult time ahead. "In 1965 we had the first Foot and Mouth epidemic, which was a challenge for the Ramblers Secretary ...we had to walk on beaches ... but it was only once a fortnight and we managed." Early in 1968 there were more outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease, and in December that year, activities were seriously curtailed. "Foot and Mouth Disease played havoc with all rambling activities during the winter ... after many weeks of inactivity, limited walks were possible along the coast."

By 1965 members of Wirral Branch were also taking part in rambles and socials at Rivington Pike. "We used to join hundreds of ramblers at Rivington Pike, big rambles, and there was a Tithe Barn, and we finished up there in the evening for a hotpot supper and then dancing, with a huge number, once a year, and that was lovely. It was for ramblers, and members of the CHA and Holiday Fellowship, and from all over, Liverpool and Wirral. I never knew how they knew how many hotpot suppers to serve, because you didn't have to order in advance. There were little tables all round, and lanterns ..."

One past member thinks of the first time he went out with the group, in 1969. "Our first outing ... was to Helvellyn and Dollywagon Pike. We were told at the bottom, 'Right, we'll all meet on the top, make your own way up.' We knew nobody else, and we went rather fast, there were lots of people about ... we arrived on top and waited forty-five minutes before anybody else arrived ... we were getting rather worried that we'd been left behind."

Here is another memory of the sixties.

NOBODY TOLD ME

"You ought to join something now you've left school," said Mum. "There's a bit about the Ramblers in the paper." So that's how I became a Rambler complete with fell boots, Dad's duffel bag and a brown nylon mac. The mac met its Waterloo on an unspeakably wet day

in the Glyders and I came home wearing newspaper. After that I took spare clothes and carried a bicycle cape.

"You look like a load of daffodils going for a walk," grumbled a local naturalist when orange cagoules became all the rage and we went round the countryside frightening the wildlife. If you want to see what anoraks we wore take a look at the next episode of 'Last of the Summer Wine.' The man descended from Robin Hood wears one.

Not everyone went on walks. Joan Leek didn't. She was social secretary for about seventeen years until her death. Memories linger of musical or card evenings, talent nights and fancy-dress parties as well as the usual talks and slide shows. I don't remember much about outings except the trip to Bromborough Fire Station. My friend and I turned up on the wrong week but the firemen showed us around anyway.

Another key figure, a domestic science teacher, was a wonderful organiser. Her Chalet weekends were always popular. She had funny stories to tell about holidays on the canals and in horse-drawn caravans.

Dad however was not amused one winter's night. "What's happened to that girl?" he worried when my brother arrived home from the ramble an hour ahead of me. I'd travelled in a different car. I guess four people and all their gear was too much for the elderly Mini. There were lots of car rambles in the early days, and public rambles that used coaches and trains. There were always enough people to fill three coaches. And imagine a trainload of passengers joining a walk. That's what happened to Tom Green - ninety on a C party in Derbyshire.

In the early days there were five people my age in the Wirral club and one of those was my brother. As the years passed new members wanted a drink so The Woodlands clubroom emptied rapidly after 9.30 when folks rushed off to the Central Hotel. The R.A.F.A. Club has solved this problem. Equipment has improved and new members are better informed.

When I sat in the rear of Hilda's tiny Fiat as it screamed up the M6 on my way to my first ramble in 1967 I had no idea how badly I was prepared. "Have a good time," said Dad "and watch what you're up to."

Nobody told me!"

It was often hard to find enough leaders – for half day rambles, Sunday rambles, or to lead walks from the Ramblers' trains. Sometimes Wirral group members would be out rambling with the Liverpool group, and would ask their leader if he or she could lead the same walk for Wirral group, and they would agree. "They said ... it was like walking with a huge family ... everybody knew each other."

In the early sixties in winter at least one Rambler went walking in corduroy trousers with winceyette pyjama bottoms underneath. She once held a sewing session with about eight others. She bought proofed poplin from a stall in Birkenhead Market, and they shared two sewing machines and made their own anoraks, all from the same pattern. For waterproofs many people had plastic macs. Some rambles had cycling capes in the summer, but these were not good in the wind because they blew in your face. Many female rambles still wore skirts and boots in the early sixties.

Going away for weekends was continued in the sixties, either in the Lake District or Wales or elsewhere, and also at least one Easter weekend in Scotland. Sometimes it was difficult to find suitable accommodation and transport. In the Autumn/Winter 1963/4 programme two weekends are mentioned, at Llanfairfechan C.H.A, travelling by private coach, and also a Private Guest House weekend at Ingleton, again travelling by private coach

Weekends at the Chalet in the sixties are still remembered. "You took your sleeping bag and walked from the bus stop before Loggerheads ... and it was great ... we'd have thick snow ... hot summer days ... midnight rambles ... I can remember once when it was frozen solid, the toilets, the wash basins, the tap in the kitchen, everything ... so we decided to dig two paths outside, into the trees ... to his place and her place." "We used to have New Year Parties at the Chalet, we'd dress up and let the Old year out and the New year in."



On a midnight ramble

"In the sixties and seventies, we used to have family weekends at the Chalet. They went on for quite a number of years ... and we used to let off fireworks on firework night, and our Catherine wheels used to leave painted circles on the garage door ...we had indoor sparklers, and dances ... a really good time for two or three days ... and rambles of course." (The rambles do seem rather an afterthought.) "The wives usually did the cooking – but they walked as well. ... and I do recall the complaint that there was no door on the toilet."

There were no midnight rambles on family weekends because the children were quite small.

As well as the Chalet, "Wirral group went for weekends in the Merseyside Mountaineers' hut several times in the late sixties and seventies. It was "half way up Snowdon on the Llanberis side." The

accommodation, for twelve people, was "incredibly primitive, no indoor toilets. The ladies' toilet was a converted pigsty and the men's was a shed like a sentry box in the middle of a field. You could get a cow's head under the door ..." "There were cold bunk beds in the loft for six females, and you ate at a big table, all squashed together. ... Washing facilities were in the stream until about 1975."

"On one weekend there were two youngsters there who didn't have a change of clothing, and it poured ... and we had to lend them everything, they were soaked to the skin."

By 1961 there was a Publicity Committee, campaigning to recruit new members. Advertisements were placed in the local papers, there were postcards in shop windows, and local shops and offices displayed information. Birkenhead News printed a report of a walk on Conway Mountain, (the press was given weekly programmes of activities) and four hundred membership forms were given out at one of Chris Bonington's lectures. "The Echo used to publish a ramble every week and I used to cut them out and stick them in an exercise book." There was a Publicity Day at Loggerheads, leaflets were given out at Liverpool Central Station, and posters were displayed at various other stations in Wirral and Liverpool. Large advertising hoardings were put up for at least one Gregory lecture.

In November 1969 a brief note indicates that Wirral Branch was financially solvent, with £155 in the Bank.

Thus, by the end of the sixties Wirral Branch was well established, numbers were increasing and the first members' weddings had taken place. Some sixties' social evenings are still remembered today. Rambles took place about every other week, travelling by the various available methods of public transport, and rail closures after the Beeching Report affected the places ramblers could reach. By the end of the sixties there was a greater use of coaches. A comprehensive publicity programme presented Wirral Branch to the public.

THE SEVENTIES – WIRRAL BRANCH

The seventies began well. Publicity in the sixties brought in new members, many of them young and keen.

"I believe Wirral group were sometimes called the handbag ramblers. I'm not sure whether this was because their walks were not demanding, or because there were more women than men." Most of the new members at this time were young women, many of them aged under twenty, and members of the Committee found it strange that so few young men were attracted to rambling. They insisted that there was plenty of room for more people, 'as in these days when so many are moved around in their business life, there is unavoidably a good deal of change in the membership.' (It doesn't happen now.)

By the mid-seventies there was again concern about whether members gave the right kind of welcome to newcomers, and the young people agreed to try to make newcomers to the club feel more welcome. There was a danger that those who knew each other stuck together, and that new members felt left out.

In 1975 the Group celebrated its twenty-first anniversary with an Olde Tyme Music Hall evening. Membership continued to increase, with a steady influx of keen and active members of all ages and large regular attendance at the clubroom. 1979 was the best year for marriages. That year eight or nine couples 'thought it was time to effect the economy of the £4.40 membership fee.' A little later, new parents sometimes dropped out for a few years while their children were small, but even so, Wirral Branch numbers continued to rise.

But by the end of the seventies the numbers were beginning to be a problem. Between sixty and seventy members were coming on a Thursday evening, and there were just too many people in the Clubroom.

A first evening there is remembered. "That first time at the Clubroom, there was a slide show, and I took my Mum along for moral support ... and I sat there ... and ... they all seemed to be old people."

In 1970 Chris Bonington came back, with Nick Estcourt, and gave a Public Lecture on climbing the South Face of Annapurna. Three years later he was back again, to speak about an attempt to climb the South Face of Everest. One of Alf Gregory's lectures attracted an audience of two hundred. By the mid seventies "mixed dancing" was popular, and on one Thursday evening in the seventies there was a Victorian Evening, which included several members performing as a Barbershop Quintet.



Victorian Evening Barbershop Quintet

In December 1971 there were plans to visit Stratford Memorial Theatre the following year. At this time there were some slightly unusual letters to Trevor Nunn concerning Shakespearian productions, and deploring their apparent lack of tradition. Trevor Nunn replied that he could not promise a traditional interpretation of future productions, but he hoped that Ramblers would find something they liked. Members organised a trip to see 'Julius Caesar,' but we are not told whether this production was sufficiently traditional. Social Secretaries get some odd tasks.

In 1972 the Clubroom temporarily closed during a power crisis. The following year there was a drive to begin Thursday evening events promptly, with concern that starting time was slipping to 8.20 or even 8.30, and in 1975 members spent over five hundred hours renovating and decorating the Clubroom.

For Spring/Summer 1974 Wirral is still listed at the back of the Liverpool District and North Wales Area programme. This one is laid out in a new format, with Clubroom and Sunday rambles together.

Spring/Summer 1974

WIRRAL BRANCH

CLUBROOM

Meets Thursday 8—10.30 p.m. at Y.W.C.A., 42 The Woodlands (near Charing Cross) Birkenhead, Charge 10p. Visitors welcome charge 15p includes light refreshments.

Lectures commence 8 p.m. prompt.

For full details of R.A. Buses and Trains—see Liverpool Programme.

Bookings for rambles: four weeks before event;

Bookings for weekends: six weeks before event.

Youth Hostel weekend for a number of members may be organised sometime during programme; if interested, contact Rambles Sec.

Usual meeting place for rambles—Bridge Street, Woodside.

Advance booking essential. *For last minute bookings—contact Rambles Secretary.*

1974

February

- 3 Llantysilio Mountain 0930
Leader Robin Isaac—Private transport
- 7 The Cleveland Way—illust. by Tom Green
a: Martin Porter, b: Valerie Roberts and Valda Smith
- 10 The Berwyns 0930
Leader: Roy Edwards—Private coach

- 14 St. Valentine's Party—competition
a: Maurice Grisenthwaite
- 17 Wirral Coastal Ramble— 10.30
Leaders Helen and Margaret
(Meet at West Kirby Station)
- 21 Wirral Country Park—lecture by Major White and conducted tour of Centre Tea and biscuits to follow.
Meet at the Centre, Wirral Country Park, Thurstaston at 2000
- 24 Great Budworth and Cheshire Meres
Leader Peter Fielding—Transport to be arranged
- 28 "Life on Hilbre"—illust. by Mr. P. Bailey, Custodian Hilbre Island. Entrance fee 12p
a: Roy Edwards b: Joan Sands, Beryl Christy

March

- 3 Wirral Footpath Clearance 1000
Leader David Blythe—Meet at Station Road, Parkgate
- 6 Visit to Kenya—illust. by Miss Diane Skilbeck
a: Eric Foster b: Muriel Morrison, Julie Banister
- 10 Macclesfield Area 0930
Leader: Judith Owens—Private coach
- 14 An evening with Judith Owens—illust. lecture
a: John Allen, b: Anne Muddiman, Margaret Elston
- 17 R.A. 'bus Disley, Horwich End, Long Hill, Buxton

Spring/Summer 1974 clubroom programme continued

- 21 Illustrated Lecture
a: Jack Allen b: Joan Thomas, Judith Gillett
- 22/24 Alston Block and Edenside Weekend
Leader Patrick de Souza—Transport to be arranged
- 28 Members slides
a: Charles Hope b: Hilda Dawson, Linden Adams
- 24 Burton Area ramble
Public transport from Woodside
- 31 The Caradocs 0900
Leader Anne Muddiman—Private coach
- April
- 4 Illustrated lecture
a: Maurice Grisenthwaite b: Joan Butterworth, Eunice Wade
- 7 Dovedale 0900
Leader: Bill Hilton...Private Coach
- 11 Illustrated lecture
a: Bill Hilton b: Joan Hilton, Helen Elston
- 15 R.A. Train—Hellifield, Giggleswick, Long Preston and Clapham
- 18 Closed for Easter Holiday
- 21 Moel Siabod 0900
Leader: a: Ray Coppel, b: to be announced
Private Coach
- 25 "Across America by Car"—illust. Mr. J. J. T. Edgar
a: Tom Green, b: Molly Parrington, Mary Lichfield
- 26/28 Breconshire Weekend
Leader Bruce Fairbanks—Transport to be arranged

- 28 Holywell area ramble
Public transport from Woodside

May

- 2 Illustrated lecture
a: John Wycherley, b: Rosemary Harold, Joan Thomas
- 5 R.A. 'bus Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig, Pen-y-Gwryd, Nant Gwynant, Beddgelert
- 9 Musical evening
a: Charles Wade b: Marjorie Wallace, Beryl Christy
- 12 Grasmere to Coniston area 0900
Leader a: John Sherratt, b: Judith Sherratt
Private coach
- 16 'Stones and Birds'—illust. Mike and Tom
a: Brian Lichfield: b: Kathleen Gill, Kathleen Allen
- 19 Cader Berwyn and Moel Sych 0930
Leader: a: Eric Foster, b: Beryl Christy
Private coach
- 23 More sips from the Cup—Mr. L. H. Weaver
a: John Nickson b: Barbara Silverston, Julie Banister
- 27 R.A. Train—Chinley, Edale, Hope, Hathersage, Grindleford
- 30 Treasure Hunt

June

- 2 Cannock Chase
Leader Les Elston—Private coach
- 6 Beetle Drive
a: Bruce Fairbanks, b: Muriel Morrison, Eunice Wade

Spring/Summer 1974 clubroom programme continued

7/9	Weekend at Merseyside Mountaineers Hut <i>Leader John Nickson</i> —Transport to be arranged	
9	Ramble to be announced	
13	"How to find your Way"—problem solved by Dave and Eric <i>a: Brian Grey b: Joan Sands, Margaret Elston</i>	
20	Evening ramble—supper to follow Loggerheads	
	Public transport from Woodside	
27	Public Life—lecture by Mrs. K. Keenan, J.P. <i>a: John Sands, b. Rosemary Harold, Mary Lichfield</i>	
30	Ramble to be announced	
July		
4	Crazy Whist <i>a: Ogwen Williams b: Joan Thomas, Judith Gillett</i>	
7	Blencathra <i>Leader a: Charles Wade, b: Eunice Wade</i>	0830
	Private coach	
11	Swimming	
14	R.A. 'bus Briarlowe Bar, Alsop-en-le-Dale, Tissington, Thorpe	
18	Barn Dance <i>a: Peter Fielding. Admission 20p</i>	
21	Haworth Village and Bronte Falls <i>Leader Muriel Morrison</i> —Private coach	0900
25	To be arranged <i>a: Brian Tempest b: Julie Banister, Anne Muddiman</i>	
28	The Lancashire Plain <i>Leader Linden Adams</i> —Transport to be arranged	0930
August		
1	Dining Out	
4	R.A. 'bus Bala, Llanwchyllyn, Dolgellau, Cross Foxes, Tal-y-Llyn.	
8	Outside Visit	
11	Mam Tor and Edale Cross, to Edale <i>Leader John Charles</i> —Private coach	0930
15	Barbecue at Heswall Shore meet at	1945
16/18	Youth Hostel weekend <i>Leader: to be announced</i> —Transport to be arranged	
18	Ramble to be announced	
22	Outside visit	
26	R.A. Train to Llandudno Junction, Penmaen-mawr, Llanfairfechan, Bangor	
29	Bowling at New Brighton—meet Granada Bowl at 1945	
<i>a: Door Steward b: Host & Hostess</i>		
SUBSCRIPTION RATES		
Junior (under 18)		40p
Ordinary		£1.00
Husband and wife (Joint Subscription)		£1.20
Life Membership		£25.00
Membership forms can be obtained from the Hon. Registrar. S.A.E. please.		

For the clubroom there is a varied programme of lectures, often illustrated, presumably with slides, either by visiting speakers or, sometimes, by members themselves. There were several outside visits, plus treasure hunt, beetle drive, cards, swimming and a barn dance (though no mention of any other dancing.)

Members have mixed memories of Thursday evenings in the seventies. "At the Woodlands on a Thursday night, in winter, you were sitting with your coat on, you could see your breath ... it was very cold, and we couldn't wait for it to finish ... we could get in cars and go to the Central Hotel in time for last orders ... it was warm in the pub," and "Although the Woodlands was primitive, cold, and sober, I remember it with great fondness ... people were more involved then." "We made more of our own evenings ... instead of paying guest speakers." "But ... in the late 70s, all the records were stolen."

At the end of the seventies, in 1979 Wirral Branch held its Grand 25th Anniversary Dinner Dance at the Dresden Hotel in Bromborough.

At the beginning of the seventies, "We had cars ... not coaches. There were problems getting a lift if you didn't know anybody... people with cars offered lifts to people they knew." But transport was not only in cars because coaches were used as well. In 1974 "There was still a mixture of public and private transport ... meeting at Woodside, for Sunday walks." By the mid-seventies numbers of ramblers were still rising steadily, with full coaches almost throughout the year. The trend was set for Sunday coaches, going to Cannock Chase and Martin Mere, to Moel Siabod and Llantysillio Mountain, and more ...

Increased membership led to more walks in more places. As well as all the usual popular areas in Cheshire, the Lake District, and more, Offa's Dyke footpath opened in 1971.

In 1975 the Committee tightened up some aspects of rambles organisation.

Leaders were asked to give out, in advance, if possible, details of their intended walks. There was concern that more varied grades of walks should be provided on rambles and weekends, to cater for A+, A, B and C walkers. Later that year the first route instruction sheets were introduced, listing just two grades of walk, A and B, with mileage and ascent.

"Grading of walks varied a bit over the years ... once we began having C parties, we attracted people who wanted C parties. Prior to that, people might try a B, realise it was too hard for them, and then we never saw them again. ... A became both A and A+." Unfortunately, some people still chose the wrong ramble.

There was often a shortage of leaders, but "It was easier to lead walks then, they were closer to home ... once I spent two days clearing a heavily overgrown footpath for a walk, I was leading ... not something I've ever done since." Occasionally ramblers were unable to keep up, and were warned not to wander off and wander back because, according to the 1977 A.G.M. Minutes, "it puts a strain on the leader, don't wear them out." But most ramblers were happy to follow, "We had complete faith in whoever chose to lead... we just followed like sheep and off we went."

"Once we were on Snowdon in a thunderstorm, and you could feel the electricity in your hair, it was horrible, there was thunder and lightning, we couldn't move, the wind was howling ... and I remember being led down the railway track to the Mountaineers' Hut ... we could have died up there."

"I went walking with Wirral group until the late seventies, when I became somewhat disillusioned. I didn't like depositing fifty or sixty people in one part of the countryside, even though there were two or three groups. To me the countryside should be enjoyed in quietness, in remoteness, and fifty people didn't help that."

The Spring/Summer 1974 programme shows that popular destinations were Wales and Derbyshire, and there were also rambles in the Lake District, Cheshire, Yorkshire and Lancashire. There were several Wirral rambles, one day clearing footpaths, and some dates left empty. Four weekends are listed, at Alston Block and Edenside, Breconshire, the Mountaineers' Hunt at Llanberis, and a Y.H.A.



From Adam to Eve, Tryfan 1975

A new event in the mid seventies was "Our first Long Distance Walk ... the forty miles Lyke Wake Walk across the North York Moors from Osmotherly to Ravenscar ... We did it in a day, ... about fourteen and a half hours. We had a backup team. It was very hard, and very blistery on one's feet. ... Good fun though. ... About twelve to sixteen started. ... Most of us finished ... We did about five miles before breakfast. ... People were there along the way with food and drink."

And another memory of the same walk, "It was forty miles in one day, in a pair of Army and Navy boots. We camped the night before, we got up about 5 a.m., it was just light, very early in the morning and it was getting hot, and ... I was expecting to help with the food. I was going to support a walker who had a hip problem and I sat with her, and waited, and one of the others said 'Come on,' and she said 'No,' and I hadn't the heart to say I wasn't coming, possibly I'll drop out. I got into the stride of it. we laughed and joked and kept going, and then. It was half way, I couldn't believe I'd done twenty miles, I thought they were teasing. Then I'd done three quarters of it and I wasn't going to give up for anything. We got to the Youth Hostel, and I saw a few people pass out, and one fellow was hallucinating. and the next day we all went down to the beach. It was a lovely experience."

Then, in 1977 "We did the 3000s, fourteen of them, that was a tough one, in one day. We camped outside Llanberis overnight and set off when we wanted to. Three of us set out at 2 a.m. from Pen-y-pass youth hostel. Our route was Crib Goch, Crib-y-ddysgl, Snowdon, into valley, Elidir Fawr, y Garn, Glyder Fawr, Glyder Fach, Tryfan, Pen Yr Ole Wen, Carnedd Dafyd, Carnedd Llewelyn, Yr Elen, Foel Grach, down to Drum and down to Aber. It took me twenty-two hours. ... We finished at midnight ... Some of them did it faster, and some of them dropped out."

In 1977 another Long-Distance event was the White Rose Walk on the Cleveland Hills, which was also combined with a camping weekend.

Camping for the first time could be quite an experience. "I'd never slept away from home before; with people I didn't know. ... My first camping was in November in the Lake District, and it was absolutely

throwing it down, it rained all weekend. We went through three pairs of shoes because they all got wet ... somebody said, 'put your shoes outside, to keep the tent clean' ... next thing you knew, they were floating away."



Setting off for Ardgarton, Easter 1975

As well as weekends with Long Distance Walks, in the seventies there were weekends at Braithwaite, Beddgelert, Ambleside, the Chalet, Scotland, St. David's, Wasdale, Allenheads, Conway, Bala, Peterborough and Shropshire, and many more places as well. At Easter 1975 two mini-buses were hired to take ramblers to Ardgarton in Scotland.

From 1973 to 1976, six or so Ramblers helped the Scouts, "We manned high level checkpoints for the Scouts' Berwyn Trophy Hike, "and they also helped with the Arroe Hike by patrolling the Moel Sych area. The Scouts' organisers were duly appreciative.

Weekends at the Chalet in the seventies are still remembered. Sometimes it was all frozen, including the toilets. "In January it was always bitterly cold and damp." "We had to get snow from outside and melt it and boil it. ... Sometimes we had to take the car up backwards ... but it was like Wonderland outside, ... sugar-encrusted trees ... it was marvellous ... we used to go sledging, we had a wonderful time, particularly with the children." "We used to make punch in the bread bin ... nothing else was big enough." "On your first visit there was an 'initiation' in the oak tree ... in pitch dark ... you couldn't do it now, you wouldn't be able to walk into the woods in the dark ...but in those days you didn't care." "A lot of the Ramblers around now have never been to the Chalet in North Wales ... maybe have never even heard of it. In the winter you'd have to keep all your clothes on in bed to try and keep warm ... you just hoped you didn't have to go to the toilet in the night."



Merseyside Mountaineers' Hut Llanberis

As in the sixties, there were weekends at the Merseyside Mountaineers' Hut in Llanberis. One member says, "I took a deep breath and said, OK, but I was petrified ... everywhere was cold and damp ... it was quite a shock, washing in the stream ... the loo was in a pigsty outside", "the hut wobbled, so I didn't bother, I found some bushes," "there was no telly, you just made your own primitive fun ..."

Although the seventies began well, there were tragedies to come. The first was in May 1975 when "Five members of Kettering Rambling Club were killed in an accident on a country lane while out for an evening ramble." At the time a senior Northamptonshire policeman was reported to have said that "organised walks on country lanes were to be deplored." A request by a local officer of the RA to the police, asking for an apology, "met with an inadequate response." The Ramblers' Association national Field Officer" pointed out that the ... party ... were keeping to the Highway Code and were taking all possible precautions when the accident happened" and argued that "pedestrian rights on most country lanes were established long before motor cars came on the scene" and that "the onus should ... be on motorists to drive with particular care on country lanes, especially when these lanes have no footways or verges." Various suggestions were made regarding improvements to footpaths and field paths.

A Ramblers' Association Press Release dated 14 June 1976 states that the Kettering accident could have been avoided if the ramblers "felt able to use a nearby field path. But the field path had crops growing across it, and rather than cause damage, the ramblers chose instead the unforeseen death trap of the normally quiet country road."

The Press Release ends with the RA stating that (RA) branches 'will be asked to check their rambles programmes, to ensure that the poorly maintained state of any paths does not cause members of the public to walk along dangerous sections of road. If this does occur, the local authority should be pursued until improvements are made.'

Following this event there was increased concern about safety on rambles, with the request that ramblers should allow the leader to set the pace. 'People ... will insist on running ahead ... Some of our exploits in the wilder or mountainous areas are treated too lightly,' but it took some time for the situation to really improve.

The second tragedy was directly connected with Wirral Branch. It occurred two years later, on 2 July 1978, in North Wales. "It was a ramble in the Snowdonia area, I was leading the A party, and on the B ramble Stuart Gershman, a thirty-year-old solicitor in that B party, slipped and fell and was killed. Two people actually slipped as they were crossing a steep grassy slope. Stuart was completely clad in waterproofs," (the other walker) "only had a waterproof top on, and ... only the friction of his trousers stopped him, but Stuart just kept going, and he went about 1000 ft.'

Apparently" (the other walker) "managed to scramble down a very steep slope, and he raised the alarm ... The weather was cloudy. The helicopter was not brought out. The coach went further along the road ... the end of the Watkins Path, by the lake, and that's where Stuart had ended. We were interviewed by the police ... and at the end of the interview they said, 'Do you know your friend's dead?' and that was the first I knew of it. It was a very sobering time.

The following Thursday evening there was a walk to Hilbre, and for some years that was known as the Stuart Gershman walk. That was our lowest point."

After this event a Safety Committee was formed, to advise the Committee on safety aspects of rambling in the hills, and also the Ramblers' Association recommended that members should insure themselves.

Footpath work was high profile in the seventies. "You felt it was your duty, we did that regularly. Now a few people take it seriously and everyone else seems to go a bit deaf.... you got more roped into it then ... more aware then of your duties ...It's different now the Club is bigger..."

By the mid seventies several footpath clearances had been carried out, but by 1978 there was concern that footpath inspection was declining because members took on more than they could manage.

Publicity continued in the seventies with details of rambles in the local press. On one occasion, a ramble to the Berwyns was to be accompanied by a photographer and reporter from the 'Wallasey News' with the intention of printing an article in all the West Cheshire Newspapers, in order to attract more new members.

At the same time membership had increased to such an extent that there was concern that the group was becoming over-subscribed. Clubroom activities continued as before. There was a mix of private and public transport, until by the end of the decade the most frequent method of travel on Sundays was the private coach. The number of rambles increased, and innovations were route instruction sheets and grading of walks. The first Long Distance Walks took place. The Kettering accident in 1976 gave cause for concern, and then in 1978 the death of Stuart Gershman on Snowdon was a low point for everyone in Wirral Branch. The financial situation was sound.



Footpath clearance 1974

THE EIGHTIES – WIRRAL GROUP

At the beginning of the eighties Wirral Branch had about three hundred members, and by the mid eighties over one hundred members were attending the Annual General Meeting. Recruitment was still going very well, but increased numbers meant that, with over one hundred people in the Clubroom, there was concern about the safety aspect of such a large number. For the rest of the eighties, new members kept on coming.

Until 1984, Clubroom evenings were still at The Woodlands, in spite of it being so cold and members disappearing to the Central Hotel before the end of the evening. The format continued as before, with a wide variety of illustrated talks and games. One view of The Woodlands is that "It served its purpose because we kept it very much a walking club, whereas now it's at the R.A.F.A. it's gone more social ... I think the emphasis has changed ... The first time I came on a Thursday," (in 1983) "it was the A.G.M., but I've been a member for twenty years now."

But The Woodlands was becoming increasingly unsatisfactory. Clubroom rent had risen to £5 per week, and also there was a tree growing through the roof of the building. The search began for another Clubroom. For one month only in 1984 Wirral Branch moved to the Liberal Club, but the first evening was chaotic because the room was too small for such a large crowd. In November 1984 Wirral Branch Clubroom moved to the R.A.F.A. Club in Alton Road, Birkenhead, where it has remained.

Organisation problems on Clubroom evening in the eighties sound familiar today. Sometimes events began late and speakers went on too long. Nevertheless, some evenings are still remembered. "Chris Bonington's mother came and gave a talk in the eighties, about her son ... 'A mother's perspective on Chris Bonington.' ... and one of the best Thursday evenings was when Mike Harding came. ... It was wonderful humour, a brilliant evening, one of the best we've had."

In 1981 Wirral group began to print their own programmes. No longer would Wirral information be at the back of the Liverpool programme. The folded card is very similar to today's programme, with the Wirral Horn on its cover. Clubroom is now at Alton House, 17 Shrewsbury Road, Birkenhead, and admission has risen to 40p. including refreshments. This programme shows that, as before, on many Thursday evenings there was a talk, together with several parties and games evenings.

Social Programme Autumn/Winter 1987/88 (part only)

NOVEMBER

- 5 Bonfire Party, without the Bonfire.
Bar will open at 8 p.m.
Door Steward Peter Harvey.
Hostesses Celia Harvey, Sybil Johnson.
- 12 Mountains of The National Parks of North America with Max Kirby.
Door Steward Howard Pate.
Hostesses Christine Peters, Sue Whibley.
- 19 A.G.M.
Door Steward Brian Caldecott.
Hostesses Kath Caldecott, Jean O'Hare.
- 26 History of the Bibby Line by Sir Derek Bibby.
Door Steward Brian Donaghy.
Hostesses Diana McCulloch, Gillian Quesnel.

DECEMBER

- 3 In the Steps of John Peel by Donald Merchant.
Door Steward Ian Blackhurst.
Hostesses Betty Sim, Pat Irvine.
- 10 The Black Abbot of Mersey.
The Story of a Boat by Joy Hockey.
Door Steward Alan Candlish.
Hostesses Margaret Doughty, Barbara Booth.
- 17 Xmas Party - Disco Paul Johnson.
Door Steward Kevin Bunting.
Hostesses Belle Redmond, Ann Hadfield.
- 24 Xmas Eve - Club Room Closed.

JANUARY

- 7 Exploring Mountains in Alaska by Mrs Joan Bushby.
Includes Bush Flying, encounters with bears etc.
Door Steward Dave Silvey.
Hostesses Sandie Silvey, Libby Jones.
- 14 A Tale of Two Cities, San Francisco and Chicago by Otto and Gerda Horwich.
Door Steward Jim Hardie.
Hostesses Ann Lavell, Maria Makhaba.
- 21 British Telecom, speaker to be named.
Door Steward Ron Ashton.
Hostesses Frances Partyn, Margaret Cutts.

- 28 Games Evening, Quiz to be arranged by Fred Williams.
Door Steward John Myers.
Hostesses Joyce Myers, Jean Woods.

FEBRUARY

- 4 Probation Service by Mr Farnin.
Door Steward Roger Trapnell.
Hostesses Jane Townsend, Maureen Cousins.
- 11 Bob & Doreen Mains.
Valentines Evening, T.B.A.
Door Steward Mike Evans.
Hostesses Hilary Cooper, Margaret Brewer.
- 18 Long Distance Canoeing/Kayaking in Alaska and the Yukon (interval) by Joan Bushby.
Door Steward Les Rowlands.
Hostesses Sue Rice, Janette Gilbert.
- 25 The Irish Munro's by Harry Holland.
Door Steward Dave Hollet.
Hostesses Vera Hollet, Maureen Dittmer.

MARCH

- 3 Open Forum.
Door Steward Stan Sheard.
Hostesses Pat Sheard, Delia Peters.
- 10 Cheese and Wine Evening, wine from the bar.
Door Steward Peter Clarke.
Hostesses Johanna Norman, Doreen Cooper.
- 17 Trinidad and Tobago by Val McFarland.
Door Steward Jim Cousins.
Hostesses Maureen Cousins, Jean Beasor.
- 24 Art Subjects by the Curator, Williamson Art Gallery.
Door Steward Fred Williams.
Hostesses Margare Riley, Janet Elliot.
- 31 Beetle Drive.
Door Steward George Woods.
Hostesses Jean Woods, Jill Dorman.

There were several concerns about transport in the eighties. First there was the question of smoking on the coaches. In 1981 there was a suggestion that a non-smoking area be at the front of the coach, and people who wanted to smoke should sit towards the back, and this was successfully enforced. In 1985 smoking was restricted to the rear four seats on the coach. Two years later the subject should have been settled when a petition led to smoking being banned on all coaches, but in 1988 the ban was re-imposed.

There were problems with coaches arriving late, drivers speeding, coaches being too cold, and breaking down. "There was an incident when the coach came off the road, it was up North somewhere, it ... actually went into a ditch at an angle ... we got out at the back through the emergency exit ... it stopped just short of a big telegraph pole, and they actually led an impromptu walk, they carried on and did the walk."

"Coniston seemed fated ... Twice the coach broke down on the way to Coniston and we had to walk just from wherever it was on the motorway ... I think it limped into a service station ... we had lots of problems with coaches over the years."

But sometimes the ramblers themselves were at fault. At the beginning of the eighties there was concern that the general behaviour of coach passengers should be exemplary, as clearly it wasn't, otherwise it would not have been mentioned in the Committee Meeting Minutes. Rowdiness in the coach was a problem later in the eighties, and there were also complaints that members were returning late to the coach after a coffee stop.

Then there were the Ramblers' trains. After running continuously for thirty-six years, starting in 1948, the last one ran in August 1984 to Windermere, though nobody knew at that time that it would be the last one.

So coaches became the main method of transport, picking up at Heswall and Liscard as they do today. Second coaches were introduced, and by 1989 there were two coaches each Sunday for most of the year. With so many members, sometimes it was hard to find a seat on a coach for everyone.



Near Snowdon 1982

Rambles had to cater for a wide variety of walkers. "We have quite a range of ages ... young people, people who bring their children along on the coach, to quite elderly people ... in their seventies who are still active walkers." We know there were three hundred members at the beginning of the eighties but it is not clear how many went out Sunday by Sunday.

There was at least one overnight ramble, described in the walk plan below.

ALL NIGHT RAMBLE – MOEL FMAU Saturday/Sunday 21st/22nd June 1986

Starting point

The walk will start from Bwlch Penbarra, the top of the pass on the minor road along the South side of Moel Fmau. (G.R.SJ161606 on O.S. 1:50,000 Map No. 116 (Denbigh.) This road forks right off the A.494 Mold-Ruthin Road, three quarters of a mile beyond Loggerheads.

Lifts can be arranged for people without own transport. There is a considerable amount of car parking space at the start of the road and more a short way back along the road.

Walk route

From Bwlch Penbarra we will walk northwards along Offa's Dyke Path, over Moel Famau and on to at least Moel Arthur. When half the available time has elapsed (allowing for stops) we shall turn back and return, mostly in the light, by the same route. There are quite a number of ups and downs on the way but stops will be made as required.

Walk Grade

There will be one walk only which will be of 'B' standard. The walk will be beyond the capabilities of most 'C' walkers. Please think carefully whether you can manage the walk and if in doubt come and see me (Nigel) about it. Please keep behind the leaders at all times.

Equipment etc.

Temperatures at night are lower than during the day, so extra clothing will be required, in particular, 'A' walkers should note that the pace will be slower and there will probably be more stops than normal. All participants must bring a torch and should bring food and drink, as for a daytime ramble.

Other Arrangements

The walk will commence at 11-30 pm and should finish about 6-30 am. People may care to gather in a nearby public house (The Loggerheads) beforehand (closing time 11 pm.) It is intended to make arrangements for breakfast afterwards, for those who would like it. Further details will be available nearer the date.

Anticipated Distance

10-12 miles.

Anticipated Ascent

1,800 feet.

Sometimes different groups combined. "In the eighties we had one or two joint rambles with the Liverpool group. Wirral would have their coach and Liverpool would have theirs, and we met up, and split the leaders between the two, then we always had a joint one with one of the North Wales groups, usually centred on The White House. After the walk we'd have a Hotpot Supper. When tachometers began to be used on public service vehicles, in January 1982, these walks followed by Hotpot Suppers had to be monitored carefully so as not to exceed the driving hours allowed.

With the increased membership numbers, there was a need to tighten up some of the organisational aspects of the walks. People would go off on their own, and this was not approved of, particularly when someone else had taken the time and trouble to do a 'reccie.' There was concern that some members did not have adequate footwear or adequate food. There was the safety aspect, and some members had to be reminded to observe the Highway Code when walking on roads, and face oncoming traffic. Safety Rules needed to be drawn up. There was a shortage of leaders, and they needed training. Some members would walk ahead of the leader, and had to be reminded that their competitive spirit should be checked. "There was a lot of very keen rivalry ... on A+ walks as to who would get to the top of the mountain first. You'd be pushing as hard as you could."

At the beginning of the eighties the Committee began to consider a points system for grading walks, and by early 1983 there were A, B and C rambles, and sometimes an A+. "For the really keen hard walker we have an A grade walk, perhaps fourteen miles and about 3,000 ft., 3,500 ft. of ascent, then we have B walks, perhaps only twelve miles, with about 2,000 ft. of ascent, and the third grade, for someone who wants a nice leisurely day, is about eight miles and about 500 ft. of ascent, with a stop at a pub or a cafe en route."

Complaints came in, "about the lengths of A, B and C walks," "The C walks are too hard for older members," "they are ... too long and tough," "Some walk leaders go too fast," "The walks are too long and strenuous" and more.

Below is a description of a B walk taken from a route instruction sheet from 27 October 1983, Bodfari Circular.

SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER 1983

BODFARI CIRCULAR

B Party

Leaving the coach at Bodfari, we walk a short distance along the main road. Turning left we follow a bridle path which joins the footpath along the bank of the river Clwyd. The footpath has a few hazards but all B party walkers will be able to cope. I'm sure the gallant gents will help any damsels in distress. There are also ducks, lots of ducks, which take off as you approach them with a lot of noise and splashing. This path is two and a half miles with a terrific view of the Clwyd range. We turn up the road to the pub where we will be able to join the locals in a goodly beverage. Make the most of this stop, as we now start to climb. The road leads from the little village of Llandyrnog and as we get higher, we follow a narrow country lane. Ahead are the forest and the Clwyd Range.

Depending on time and weather we now have a choice. We can take the easy road which is a very pleasant walk following the valley ending at the foot of Moel-y-Parc, or we can carry on through the forest to the foot of Moel Arthur. Now we follow the Offa's Dyke Path over the tops and finish at the foot of Moel-y-Parc. The footpath then goes downhill all the way into Bodfari. For those who wish, the garage sells sweets and ice cream.

Leader Jean Bimpson

Distance 11 miles

Ascent 1000'

As well as organisational problems in the eighties, sometimes other aspects come to mind. "I was leading an A party ... in January, and the route took it right over the Kinder plateau ... which can be extremely boggy. ... We took an alternative route ... and thought, mid January, it's going to be frozen solid, ... but it was a very mild January ... and we ended up struggling, up to the top of our thighs in peaty bog, ... and one person vowed he would never walk in the Peak District again."

"I was leading an A+ plus walk and we were up on the Carneddys ... and they wanted to slow me down. We stopped for lunch, and when I wasn't looking (someone) put a rock in my rucksack, and I fastened it up and put it back on, and didn't notice. It didn't slow me down at all."

"I took over an A walk on Snowdon at short notice, and going down quite a steep gully, I slipped and fell on a spike of rock and cracked several ribs ... I had to be helped off by two others ... and I was the leader."

Also in the eighties, "We were in the Ceiriog valley near Llangollen, ... and the public right of way went through the side of this farmyard, and he" (the farmer) "was having none of it, and he came out with a camcorder and videoed us all. They claimed they were in dispute with the Local Authority about whether it was a right of way or not, and he turned us out and wouldn't let us go through."

And then there was this couple who "had just got engaged, and it was a case of, every kissing gate, they had to ..."

Rambles programme Autumn/Winter 1987/88

1987

OCTOBER

- 4 R.A. ACCESS DAY — STANBURY MOOR,
NEAR HAWORTH A: *Nigel Bird* B: *Keith Addyman* C: *Gordon Rebecca*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 11 CONISTON & WETHERLAM A+: *Dave Silvey*
A: *Andrew Hodgson* B: *George Davies*
C: *Brian Grey*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 18 MAESHAFN AREA (Followed by Hot-Pot and
disco at the White House Hotel, Rhualt)
A: *Betty Sim* B: *Dave Hollett* C: *Jean Bimpson*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 25 INGLEBOROUGH A: *Mike Kendrick* B: *Ken Elliott* C: *John Myers*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900

NOVEMBER

- 1 HOLMFIRTH AREA (Hopefully followed by
fish & chips at Compo's Cafe) A: *Jill Dorman*
B: *Keith Addyman* C: *John Clayton*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 7/8 WEEKEND AT THWAITEDALE COTTAGES,
NORTH YORKSHIRE
- 15 SOUTHERN CARNEDDS & CAPEL CURIG
A: *Brian Edwards* B: *Derek Burns* C: *Tony Stananought*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 22 ALPORT CASTLES A: *Brian Caldecott*
B: *Stan Jones* C: *Fred Williams*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 29 HIGH PIKE & SCANDALE FELL A: *Jim Cousins* B: *Ken Lloyd* C: *Brian Donaghy*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900

DECEMBER

- 6 SANDSTONE TRAIL A: *Peter Harvey*
B: *Mike Kendrick* C: *Belle Redmond*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 13 CALDERDALE WAY A: *Jack Hulse*
B: *Tom Houston* C: *Sybil Johnson*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 20 THE ROACHES A: *Brian Edwards*
B: *Harry & Linda Sutton* C: *Mike Evans*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900

- 27 RAMBLES SECRETARY'S CHRISTMAS
RAMBLE (Private transport)

1988

JANUARY

- 3 FOEL GOCH & GARNEDD FAWR A: *Nigel Bird* B: *Geoff Burns* C: *Joan McIlhatton*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 10 WIRRAL FOOTPATHS (Private transport)
Leader: *Tony Stananought*.
- 17 LLANGOLLEN AREA A: *Eric Baker* B: *Brian Caldecott* C: *Peter Harvey*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 24 ROUND PRESTON WALK A: *Mike Kendrick*
B: *Keith Addyman* C: *Alan Candlish*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 31 EDDISBURY WAY (DUDDON TO
FRODSHAM) A: *Joe Mortlock* B: *Tony Stananought* C: *Bonnie Scarff & Grace Rice*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900

FEBRUARY

- 6/7 WEEKEND IN LAKE DISTRICT
(TBA).
- 14 YR ARAN A: *Jim Cousins* B: *Brian Grey*
C: *Trevor Tew*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900
- 21 HOWGILLS (TEBAY TO SEDBERGH)
A: *Nigel Bird* B: *Malcolm Travis*
C: *Margaret Bell*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 28 ABER TO LLANFAIRFECHAN A: *Brian Caldecott* B: *Ken Lloyd* C: *Grace Rice & Bonnie Scarff*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900

MARCH

- 6 BOWFELL & CRINKLE CRAGS A+: *Jim Cousins* A: *Dave Silvey* B: *Brian Caldecott*
C: *Jean Woods*.
Heswall 0830 Liscard 0900
- 13 THE HIGH PEAK A: *Brian Edwards*
B: *Tom Houston* C: *Doreen Cooper*.
Liscard 0830 Heswall 0900

The most popular destination on this programme is probably North Wales. On Sunday walks there are A,B and C walks listed, and on two Sundays there are A+ walks. One walk is followed by Hotpot and Disco at The White House Hotel, Rhualt, and two weeks later the walk is followed by fish and chips at Compo's cafe in Holmfirth. There were two weekends away, in North Yorkshire and the Lake District. No public rambles are listed. Transport for ordinary Sunday walks was by coach, picking up just as happens now, and transport for weekends is not stated.

Members still complained that the points system for walks was misleading, and that B walks were really A walks. In 1989 one leader had fifty-four people on his walk at Ingleton, which was considered to be very dangerous. Improvements were still needed. "They brought the two B walks in when there were two coaches, because there were so many people." Sunday by Sunday the coaches went out, to Coniston and Wetherlam, to Maeshafn and Ingleborough, and more ...

With more and more members, new projects were begun in the eighties, such as two midweek walking groups, summer evening walks, and the family rambling group.

At the end of 1981 a midweek walk was suggested, and early in 1982 a small group of about half a dozen people, some retired, some housewives, began to walk together once a month. Numbers grew and walks became fortnightly, then finally weekly, and the group called itself the Wirral Wednesday

Wanderers. The Chairman of Wirral Ramblers was informed that the group was independent (of Wirral Ramblers,) but that every person was a member of the national Ramblers' Association, and the Chairman wished them well. After a while, Wirral Wednesday Wanderers went their own way. Many of them still meet today. "They are members of the National Ramblers' Association, but most of them have never walked with the main club. Most of them have joined the group because they've heard about it."

There is also another group of people, called First Saturday Hostings. Some of them are in their eighties now and one is ninety, and all of them are previous members of Wirral Ramblers. They still meet on the first Saturday of the month for a social gathering or a walk, and they have lunch together on the third Thursday of each month. This group is intended as a way of keeping people together when walking with the main group becomes unrealistic.

At the end of 1983 the Midweek Rambles Group was set up. Drivers of private cars filled spare seats with walkers who had no transport, and destinations were usually about an hour's drive from the Wirral. The walk was roughly a C grade walk. This time the group kept going and stayed with the main club, and has flourished ever since.

At the end of the eighties another new development was the summer walks on Tuesday evenings and Friday evenings, usually of three to four miles, in Wirral.

In 1989 seventy-four people took part in a Family Rambling Day, organised by Ordnance Survey and the Ramblers' Association. "I think the first one was on the Wirral Way, ... and we wore these T-shirts ... to advertise ... they changed the design every year ... and we had them to give out as prizes, and we had a quiz ..." The T-shirt shown is a very early design. This Family Rambling Day led to the beginning of the Family Rambling Group later in the same year, with walks of about four miles on the last Sunday of each month.



In 1982 there was an appeal from the North York Moors National Park to avoid the Lyke Wake Walk for organised crossings for the next five years, due to over-use. They said that in one event four hundred and fifty people walked this route, and stressed that there was a risk of path destruction due to large parties walking in popular areas.

"If you mentioned a long-distance weekend now, people would just faint." It was different in the eighties. Beginning with the Welsh 3000s and the Samaritan Way in 1980, an impressive number of long-distance walks was completed during the decade. In 1982 twelve walkers with a support team completed the Peakland Heritage Walk, "We went ... by minibus and camped, and it was atrocious weather, ... the whole of the Peak District was badly flooded on the Saturday... normally in the summer the river is dried up but ... all the valley was under water so we ... had to walk on the hillside. ... One or two set out just to do part of it ... and... completed the whole thirty-six miles. ... We left at 6.22 a.m. and I got in at 7.05 p.m. Then on the Sunday we all went to Chatsworth."

In 1982 several members took part in a long-distance walking event in Derbyshire, and in 1986 "One of the Long Distance Walks we did was the Three Peaks in Yorkshire" (with twenty members.) In 1987 eleven members completed the Welsh 3000s in fifteen hours, and despite bad weather they all returned safely. One memory is that "I went on the Welsh 3000s twice with the Club. We started at Pen-y-Pass at 4 a.m. ... The total time for the fastest people was fifteen hours five minutes, but the time going from... the top of Crib Goch to the top of the last peak, Foel Grach, was twelve hours forty minutes. ... it was about thirty miles, and about 12,000 ft of ascent. ... There is one not listed, that's counted now, but it wasn't then."

In 1988 the Long-Distance Walk was in the Langdale Valley, with both A and B walks. All those who started, completed the walk, and to end the eighties, in 1989 there was the Haworth Hobble Long Distance Weekend.

As well as the Long-Distance Walk weekends, members also spent weekends at a variety of places, such as Llanberis, Invertrossachs and Brecon Beacons. The Chalet acquired a red carpet (free), which made the accommodation more comfortable. The carpet had been used for three months in a shop and was destined for the tip.



Chalet weekend, Easter 1986

Club Weekends away were listed in the programme, and by the mid eighties (1984) there was a Weekends Booking Officer to organise them. By 1988 there was also a Club holiday in Scotland.

In 1986 privately organised holidays for group members began, when twenty-six members went to Austria and a further thirty booked for Chamonix. The following year, twenty-nine members went to (what was then) Yugoslavia. Since the mid eighties, the holidays have become a valuable part of the life of the group, beginning with planning and 'reccies', continuing with enjoying the time away, and ending with slide shows in the Clubroom and entertaining stories about what happened abroad.

In the early eighties local footpaths were said to be in good condition. Footpath work continued, and members were involved in environmental work in the North Wirral Coastal Park and Eastham Country Park. One arrangement for footpath clearance was cancelled due to Cheshire County Council objecting to voluntary workers taking jobs from authorised workers. By the end of the eighties, regular Wirral footpath inspections revealed problems and these were reported to the relevant Council. The condition of many paths was beginning to deteriorate.

In January 1982 an emergency committee meeting was held to discuss the club's finances, "as the coaches are running at a loss due to slow bookings and empty seats." From then on, bookings were to be accompanied by cash. In spite of this, in 1984 there was a suggestion that unemployed people should pay a reduced rate on the Sunday coach, but it was thought to be too difficult to administer. However, the next year, the Minutes state that the number of unemployed people being allowed a reduced fare on the coach should be increased from two to three members.

Various fund-raising events during the eighties enabled the group to send donations, such as "donation of £50 sent to Keswick Mountain Rescue in recognition of assistance in a recent incident on Skiddaw."

Other donations were given to The Rowntree Trust for handicapped children and St. John's Hospice Appeal.

By the beginning of the eighties the Ramblers' Association was spreading in the North-West. They were groups in Clwyd, Aberconway and Conway, and briefly one in Bangor, but only one Branch, which was Wirral.

The Ramblers' Association decided at this time that there should officially be Areas and Groups. The Committee Meeting Minutes for April 14 1980 tell us that the Chairman of Wirral Branch proposed that it should be renamed "Wirral Group", and it was agreed that this would take effect from 1 September 1980. This is when Wirral Branch ceased as a branch and became the Wirral Group of the Ramblers' Association, one of several Groups under the umbrella of the Merseyside and North Wales Area. An Extraordinary General Meeting was held, and copies of a new Constitution were passed. Wirral always had rather an independent reputation, and by 1983 there were complaints that Wirral Group's relationship with the Area was not as close as it might be.

Publicity efforts continued. In 1986 it was agreed that British Telecom should put Ramblers' Association in the telephone directory at a cost of £10, and over the next two years this generated many enquiries.

New members were still joining the group, and the publicity campaign continued until 1989. At that time, after much discussion, the Committee agreed to ease back on publicity for a while, in order to slow down the influx of new members in the Clubroom. However up to ten new members still continued to arrive every week, and this went on for the rest of the year. Once the increase in clubroom attendance began, it was hard to stop.

In September 1988 the first Wirral Ramblers news letter appeared, chatty and informative but, it said, lacking an editor, though the address at the end suggested that this was not so. Perhaps the News Letter was the origin of a cry for help, "Someone else should learn to use the Gestetner."

On 11 December 1989 the Treasurer reported that there was £1717 in the deposit account, and £1985 in the current account, so the finances were healthy at that time.

Thus, by the end of the eighties Wirral Branch had changed its name to Wirral Group, and was printing its own programmes. New members kept on coming, and in 1989 Committee members decided to stop recruitment advertising. Clubroom moved to the R.A.F.A. Club, with a Thursday evening format as before. Transport to walks was primarily by coach. Long Distance Walks continued, and several new rambling options were set up.

It is clear from the Minutes that, with so many new members and so much to organise, there were times in the eighties when the Committee members felt under considerable pressure.

THE NINETIES - WIRRAL GROUP

With new members arriving at the Clubroom at a rate of two to three a week there was no need for an advertising campaign, but ending publicity in an attempt to stop the tide of new members arriving at the Clubroom on Thursday evenings failed. In March 1990 as many as eighteen new people arrived in one week, and the following year there were thirty-eight new members in just four months. In 1992 there were nine hundred and thirty-two members, with "further information packs required urgently." By 1996 membership had gone over one thousand, eventually rising to eleven hundred.

As well as all the genuine members of Wirral Group, in the beginning of the nineties some non-members were also visiting the Clubroom and using the bar facilities. Random membership checks on Thursday evenings uncovered a few non-members, which was useful at that time because there was great concern as to whether the room was large enough for all the people who came to the Clubroom.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

Clubroom: Alton House, 17 Shrewsbury Road (corner of Alton Road), Oxtan, Birkenhead.

Clubnight: Thursdays, from 7.45 p.m. Admission usually £1.00 which includes refreshments. Visitors are welcome for four evenings after which they are expected to join the Ramblers' Association.

Stewards Duties: To collect entrance fee from EACH member AT THE DOOR. To prepare and serve the refreshments provided and clear away afterwards. Please find your own replacement if you are not able to attend.

1997

APRIL

- 3 ANTIPODEAN ADVENTURES — Barry and Margaret Lello.
Stewards: Fred Egan, Norman Wildgoose, Jean Wright, Sheila Perry.
- 10 THE GRAND NATIONAL — 150 Years — Mr. Reg Green.
Stewards: Doreen Sly, Ron Hunt, Thelma & John Cowan.
- 17 A VISIT TO ISRAEL & JORDAN — Eileen & Bob Ward.
Stewards: Joy & Jim Clark, Simon Olsen, Lynda Baruah.
- 24 AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL — Mr. Charles Rawes.
Stewards: Mike & Olwen Saunders, Jack & Hilda Breen.

MAY

- 1 FELINE FANTASIES — Mrs. Lancelyn Green.
Stewards: John & Alison Sones, Dave Jellicoe, Bonnie Scarff.
- 8 AS WE WERE III — Glynn Parry.
Stewards: Jean & Eric Baker, Jeff Jenkinson, Mary Tull.
- 15 QUIZ NIGHT — Frank McKechnie.
Stewards: Brenda & David Jones, Wendy Bates, Viv Murphy.
- 22 BEEKEEPING — Ken Waugh.
Stewards: Harry & Linda Sutton, Alan Murdoch, Anne Hadfield.
- 29 LIVERPOOL AIRPORT — PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE — Robin Tudor, Commercial Manager.
Stewards: Fiona Eves, Les Blakeman, Harry Wharton, Anne Burke.

JUNE

- 4 TREASURE HUNT — Linda & Harry Sutton.
- 5 OPEN FORUM
Stewards: Brian & Lesley Edwards, Paul Ashton, Andrew Hodgson.
- 12 WHAT IS GEOMORPHOLOGY? — Norman Harrison.
Stewards: Brian & Sue Cowan, Dorry McVeigh, Alan Wall.

- 19 WIRRAL & CHESHIRE BADGER GROUP — Leslie Brockbank.
Stewards: Alex Hill, Ian White, Duncan Armstrong, Lyn Rimmer.
- 23 HILBRE WALK — 6.30 pm Dee Lane, West Kirby.
Note: There is a Ranger limit of 50 people on this walk.
- 26 REFLEXOLOGY — Simon Duncan.
Stewards: Rosemary & Peter Watts, Dilys Court, Peter Knight.

JULY

- 3 SUMMER BARN DANCE
Stewards: Dave & Rose Roberts, Anna Corbett, Jim Fitzmaurice.
- 10 TURNER — ARTIST & RAMBLER — Ken Walters.
Stewards: Dave & Vera Hollet, Lynda Fawkes, Moyra Harrison.
- 17 QUIZ NIGHT — Bill Nock.
Stewards: Sylvia Price, Janet Ford, Merrill Kirby, Pat Murphy.
- 24 MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS — George Davies.
Stewards: Keith Colwell, Marie O'Hare, Dot Walkden, Derek Sladen.
- 31 EGYPT THROUGH 5,000 YEARS — Bryan Garner.
Stewards: Margaret West, Roy Elmes, Istra Toner, Ann Ellis.

AUGUST

- 7 BY AIR TO BATTLE — Monty Hughes.
Stewards: Mike Dinsmore, Ann & Stewart Ross, Anna Corbett.
- 14 BEETLE DRIVE — Sylvia Price.
Stewards: Bob Kelly, Fred Arnall, Clare Barton, Jean Barzey.
- 21 COAST TO COAST — Jean Beasor & Anne Hadfield.
Stewards: Harry Smith, Reg Starkey, Elaine Crichley, Frances Partyn.
- 28 QUIZ NIGHT — George Davies.
Stewards: Ian Alsop, Heather Newsome, Margaret Cheetham, Ruby Wood.

SEPTEMBER

- 4 T.B.A.
Stewards: Chris & Val Malpas, Barry & Margaret Lello.
- 11 HEDGEROW MEDICINE — Tim Kidman.
Stewards: Peter Corniskey, Bob Roberts, Julie & Brian Hughes.
- 18 THE GENIUS OF WILLIAM MORRIS — Reg O'Neill.
Stewards: Brian Bevin, George Davies, Pat Mann, Margaret Parkinson.
- 25 PUBLIC ORDER WITHIN THE COMMUNITY — Sgt. Tony Dean.
Stewards: Isabel Dickson, Rose Wilson, Audrey Donnan, Ken Elliott.

With ever increasing numbers, the organisation had to expand as well. Two Social Secretaries were needed, one for Clubroom nights and the other for all the outside social events. Discos were so popular

that all social functions were supposed to be ticket only, but Hotpot Suppers were phased out due to lack of interest and theatre trips only received a poor response. In 1991 it was agreed that a cup be bought as a Memorial to Keith Addyman, and at the Club Photographic Competition, the first Keith Addyman Trophy for photography was awarded.

Complaints over talks either beginning late or ending late resulted in the statement that they should start at 8.10 p.m. PROMPT. Some of the visiting speakers were unsatisfactory. Smoking was debated again, and by 1997 there was a non-smoking policy in place for Thursday evenings except in the bar areas.

As in previous decades, this nineties social programme shows an entertaining mix of serious and light-hearted topics, some with outside speakers and some organised by members.

On a Sunday ramble in 1990 two club members were left behind at Charnock Richard on an outward-bound journey and the coach had to make quite a detour to collect them, and the following year, two ladies were left behind in a toilet queue in Castleton. I am glad to say that there are no more Minuted reports of such incidents. Also, in 1990 there was a complaint from a driver about the state of the coach, perhaps about muddy boots, and the following year there were difficulties with time taken on coffee stops. The subject of coffee stops occurs again later, followed by a questionnaire about it. In 1996 there was a request that members should not use their own cars when there were seats available on the coach, as there were often places on the coaches at the last minute due to people not turning up. A possible toilet stop on return journeys was agreed, but was only to take place in desperate circumstances. In 1995 the coach contract was changed for the last time, and there were good reports on the new operator.

The Lake District and North Wales continued to be the most popular areas for walks. This programme also includes Derbyshire and Yorkshire.

Spring/Summer 1997

RAMBLES PROGRAMME

MARCH

- 28-31 EASTER: YHA WEEKEND — WASTWATER AND ESKDALE
Organiser: Linda Jones

APRIL

- 6 LLYN BRENIG — followed by HOT POT SUPPER & DISCO AT THE WHITE HOUSE (LLYN BRENIG & WHITE HOUSE*)
A: T.B.A., B+: Brian Caldecott, B-: Bill Nock, C: Jean Beasor
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 13 SERGEANT MAN (GRASMERE*)
A: Ian White, B+: Frank McKechnie, B-: John Henderson, C: Joy Clark
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 20 TRYFAN AND LLYN OGWEN (OGWEN*)
A+: Les Blakeman, A: Andrew Hodgson, B+: Frank McKechnie, B-: Jean Wright, C: Brian Marland
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 27 GIGGLESWICK SCAR AND STAINFORTH FORCE (SETTLE*)
A: T.B.A., B+: T.B.A., B-: Brian Grey, C: George Davies
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00

MAY

- 3-10 IRISH HOLIDAY — KILLARNEY, CO. KERRY
Organiser: George Davies
- 4 OFFA'S DYKE PATH AND KNIGHTON (KNIGHTON*) (BANK HOLIDAY WEEKEND)
A: Bill Nock, B+: T.B.A., B-: Barry Lello, C: T.B.A.
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 11 GRISEDALE PIKE (BRAITHWAITE*)
A+: Mary Dwyer, A: Les Blakeman, B+: Bob Roberts, B-: Barbara Meynell, C: Brian Grey
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 18 MONSALL TRAIL AND BAKEWELL (BAKEWELL*)
A: Brian Edwards, B+: Brian Grey, B-: Thelma Cowan, C: Ken Elliott
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 24-26 CLUB WEEKEND — SECTION OF HADRIAN'S WALL
Organiser: Linda Jones
- 25 KETTLEWELL (KETTLEWELL*) (BANK HOLIDAY WEEKEND)
A: Andrew Hodgson, B+: T.B.A., B-: Diana Dawson, C: Frank McKechnie
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00

JUNE

- 1 LLANRHAEDR-YN-MOCHNANT AND PHYSTALL RHAEDR (LLANRHAEDR*)
A: Brian Edwards, B+: Bill Nock, B-: Vivien Pitcher, C: Ann Ross
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 8 SKIDDAW (KESWICK*)
A+: Mary Dwyer, A: Dave Jellicoe, B+: Lyn Caldecott and Lyn Armstrong, B-: Jim Clark, C: Peter Costello
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 15 SNOWDON FROM LLANBERIS (LLANBERIS*)
A+: Tommy Downey, A: Frank McKechnie, B+: Bobbie Clayton, B-: George Davies, C: Bill Newsome
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 20-22 LONG DISTANCE WEEKEND — SNOWDONIA
Organiser: Linda Jones
- 22 BUCKDEN PIKE AND HUBBERHOME (BUCKDEN*)
A: T.B.A., B+: T.B.A., B-: Brian Cowan, C: Mary Tull
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 29 EYAM AND FROGGATT EDGE (EYAM*)
A: Frank McKechnie, B+: Fiona Eves, B-: Alex Hill, C: Sue Cowan
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 29 NATIONAL FAMILY RAMBLING DAY
Further information from Jean Beasor

JULY

- 6 SHAP FELL (SHAP*)
A: Alan Moore, B+: Bill Nock, B-: Barry Lello, C: George Davies
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 13 MOEL HEBOG (BEDDGELEERT*)
A+: Alan Moore, A: Ian White, B+: Frank McKechnie, B-: Jean Wright, C: Ann & Stewart Ross
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00
- 20 INGLEBOROUGH (INGLETON*)
A: Bill Nock, B+: John Cowan, B-: Beryl Henderson, C: Jenny Brown
Heswall 08.30 Liscard 09.00
- 27 MATLOCK AND HIGH PEAK TRAIL (MATLOCK*)
A: T.B.A., B+: Brian Grey, B-: Lesley Edwards, C: Pauline Milsom
Liscard 08.30 Heswall 09.00

By the early nineties the points system relating to the standard of the walks was in general use, but this did not stop the complaints. "The B walk was an A walk in disguise," "Rambles are repetitive ... and the programmes have been mostly for A walkers."

"We didn't have a B+ and a B- in those days, we had ... a B1 and a B2. There were two coaches, and B was the most popular walk. Originally, we split the B in half because there were too many people ... " Having two B walks every week began in June 1993, by which time B+ had 17 points maximum and B- had 14 points maximum.

Sometimes members would go on the Sunday coach, and then go off to do a 'reccie.' Sometimes they chose the wrong walk in spite of all the information they were given, and in 1996 the Minutes of one Committee meeting sternly stated that people on walks they could not manage would be reported to Police as Missing Persons if they were not on the coach at departure time. Leaders could decide whether or not the walker could cope.

In 1991 an incident led one walker to sue the Ramblers' Association for injuries and negligence, which caused great concern to Committee members. The advisers to the Ramblers' Association said that it would have to be fought all the way, otherwise nobody in the future would be prepared to lead a walk. "We thought ... it had all been settled, and then about a fortnight before the hearing, we all had

summonses to go to court ... fortunately he withdrew, just before the hearing ... but it shows what can happen ..."

The subject of leaders and their responsibilities was a cause for concern throughout much of the nineties. Sometimes Committee members feared that leaders were not preparing adequately for walks and they were referred to the Leaders' Handbook. In 1996 three weekends in the Lake District were reserved for leadership training. They had a leaders' party too. It was emphasised that all leaders had to be paid up members or they were not covered by insurance.

In 1995 D walks were suggested. Some members argued that C walks were becoming more difficult than previously, though this was denied. It was not until 1999 that D walks were included in the programme every four to six weeks. In the same year, people with learning difficulties and their carers joined members of the group on many Sunday walks and evening walks, and this seemed to be a success.

One walk around this time was a bit scary: "I remember one walk in the 1990s in Shropshire when we were nearly struck by lightning. ... We were just going along and there was a storm and it was literally a hundred yards to one side of where we were walking ...very unnerving, it cracked right down this tree, it was very frightening."

and on another occasion: "One of the leaders met a nudist on one of the walks. He was walking towards them, and the leader said, in a very gentlemanly way, 'Do you mind covering yourself?' and then I think he reported him to the police."

Sunday by Sunday ramblers went out on the coaches, to Bowfell and Giggleswick Scar, to Maiden Moor and Catbells, and more ... Walking, according to the Minutes of the 1992 A.G.M., "had overtaken fishing as the most popular pastime of the population."

The summer evening walks continued, and were well supported. (In 1991 they had a pub theme.) Numbers grew, and by 1996 one evening walk had fifty people on it.

At least one midweek Rambler enjoys the 'reccies.' "On a 'reccie' for a walk which included some Forest Enterprise land in Wales, we met up with the Warden. He told us about the flora and wildlife, and particularly about the dormice. They are a species under threat and there is a small active colony in the woodland ... and he showed us an acorn with tiny teeth marks to prove this."

The midweek walks continued, with tighter organisation. Sometimes there were problems finding enough leaders. As these walks rely on those persons without transport finding spaces in other people's cars, credit should go to the drivers, who drive thirty miles or forty miles, complete an eight mile walk and then drive thirty or forty miles back to Arrowe Park and home.



Midweek ramble 1999

Weekends continued, in Thwaite and Derwentbank, in Loch Leven and the Cairngorms, and more. In 1992 there were occasionally problems booking camp sites for groups, as badly behaved younger groups had put site owners off.

There were at least two Long Distance Weekends in the nineties – at Keswick in 1994 and Brecon Beacons in 1995 – and this in spite of the warning in 1997 that "the Long Distance Weekend should be called a 'Camping Weekend' as 'Long Distance' puts some people off ..." It did not deter one walker, who completed the Welsh 3000s twice in 1988, on both occasions in under eleven hours.

As well as organised Long-Distance Weekends, several members completed Long Distance Walks such as the Cotswold Way and Offa's Dyke, independently of the Club. In 1995 several members also successfully completed a week-long walk on Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, and finished keen for more.



New year break at Staveley Lakes 1996

After its beginnings at the end of the eighties, the Family Rambling Group steadily grew through most of the nineties, with children's ages ranging from a few months to about ten years. They went to Arrowe Park, Royden Park, Delamere Forest and Chester Zoo, and also beyond Wirral, to Llangollen and Beeston. Forty-eight people turned up for the Family Rambling Day in June 1994.

New families joined the group, and in 1995 thirty-five members of the Family Rambling Group went for a weekend to Snowdonia National Park. By 1997 the average turnout was between thirty-five and forty-five, but by the end of the nineties many of these children were at secondary school and the activity of the group changed from monthly walks to more weekends away. By the end of the nineties the number of new families was beginning to fall.

Holidays in the nineties were enjoyed both at home and abroad, in Ireland, Scotland, where all eighteen places were taken up on the first night of booking, and Slovenia, Austria and Turkey, and more ...

Although there was a report in 1991 that hardly anybody complained about Wirral footpaths and therefore Wirral Borough Council did not take any action, footpath work did continue steadily through the nineties.

Due to incorrect numbering of A.G.Ms. over the years, Wirral Group celebrated its fortieth A.G.M. in November 1992. But corrections were to be made. As the Inaugural Meeting was held on 24 September 1954, the Group can justifiably celebrate its fiftieth Birthday in 2004. Another anniversary came in 1995 when the Ramblers' Association celebrated its sixty years.

The question of Registered Charities had to be considered. The 1992 Annual Report (for the Merseyside and West Cheshire Area) states that Ramblers' Association is a Registered Charity, and that from 1 January 1993 all information for members or for the public must show this. By November 1995 there was an amended version of the Constitution, in which

"This Club shall be known as the Wirral Group of the Ramblers' Association; within which Association it shall be an autonomous unit consisting of fully paid-up members of the Ramblers' Association."

With around one thousand members in the mid-nineties, Committee members were afraid that any major increase in numbers would lead to pressure from R.A. Head Office to split the Group, and this, they felt, would not be welcome. They felt uneasy about the incessant drive to increase membership, and were happy to note that the Area view was that there was no need at that time to form any new groups.

By the mid nineties, with membership around eleven hundred and a vast number of situations and problems to be considered, the committee had expanded to at least twelve officers. How long the meetings went on is not recorded, but as well as matters arising from the previous Minutes and any correspondence received, there were often as many as twelve officers' reports, which had to be written out for the Secretary before the meeting. Minutes could take up to eight pages for each meeting, and sometimes the agenda for the next meeting could have up to nineteen items on it. It is easy to believe that they were, and still are, a dedicated team. They have a huge agenda and great responsibility, and as well as all this they get sent irrelevant information such as courses on willow growing in the North West.

In September 1999 (the nearest date to December 99 available), there was a financial surplus of £1850.

In 1995 Committee members discussed recruitment posters, fearing that too many newcomers would result in such a large membership that Ramblers' Head Office would put pressure on the group to split. While admitting that other groups had split quite happily, they preferred the status quo, and were not happy about RA HO's persistent emphasis on increasing membership. The (Area) view was that there was no need at that time to form any new Group.

In the mid nineties information about Wirral Group was circulated to all Wirral libraries, and in 1999 there is the first mention of walks printed in the Liverpool Daily Post. The News Letter, begun in 1988, in 1993 was renamed a magazine, and in 1995 three hundred copies were printed. The following year articles for the magazine were hard to find, and by 2000, sadly, it ceased to be, because nobody could be found to edit it.

By the end of the nineties, it was clear that efforts to stop the rising tide of new members had failed. Two Clubroom Social Secretaries were needed, and there was concern that the Group was so big that it would have to be split. Sunday rambles continued as before. Summer evening and midweek walks continued, and D walks were introduced. The Family Rambling Group grew during most of the decade. The group was still financially solvent.

2000 ONWARDS – WIRRAL GROUP

Over the last ten or fifteen years the membership has changed. "We've all grown that much older. Certainly, when I joined twenty years ago, there were lots of us ... mid thirties. When I went to the clubroom ... you didn't feel out of it at all. You'd be hard pressed to think of anybody in their thirties in the club now. There's an age difference definitely. I'd say the average age now is around 60. ... People are joining now, but they are older." Nevertheless, there are still members in 2004 who choose demanding walks. In March 2004 there are usually three or four people who choose an A+ walk on a Sunday if there is one, and about eight to ten members who choose an A walk, all depending on the leader and the area and how people feel on the day.

The new millennium began with a drop in clubroom attendance, though this was thought to be only temporary. Then the first major problem occurred. Before the 2001 AG.M. there were no nominations for the position of Social Secretary, and at that meeting, members of Wirral Group realised that from that date there would be no Social Secretary and therefore no future programmes would be organised. Nobody offered to do this work during the next few months. This was indeed a blow, and Committee members wondered if it would be the end of Wirral Group Clubroom and that members would find other ways to spend their Thursday evenings.

But soon afterwards, as an interim measure, one member offered to prepare a programme, using, when possible, the talents of group members, and this was welcomed. After a few months of uncertainty, it looked as though Clubroom was safe well into 2003. Fortunately, before too long, another member said she could take on the post of Social Secretary. In 2004 the programme is as good as it ever was, with outside speakers talking about, for instance, 'Venice of Brazil,' and members' contributions such as 'Art & Symbolism,' or 'Exam Howlers' together with other regular evenings such as parties, Valentine's Disco and the Photographic Competition.

There was a second major problem in 2001, when an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease began in Northumberland in February. It spread rapidly to different parts of the country, bringing restrictions which severely disrupted walking. The ingenuity of rambles organisers was considerably tested in rearranging the programmes so that, according to the 2001 Area Report, despite initial difficulties the Group had a coach trip every Sunday. It was not until May or June that year that the normal routine of weekly coaches was resumed, beginning with Snowdon. Since then the Sunday coaches have been out as usual, to Haweswater and Bleaklow, to Long Mynd and Malham Cove, and more ...

During the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis the Wednesday walks were diverted to coastal areas such as Hale, Liverpool including parks, and accessible parts of Wirral. Since the end of restrictions, the Midweek Rambles also continue as before, to Kelsall and Llanarmon, to Llangollen and Raw Head and more, and occasionally in Wirral.

When these two events occurred, there was great concern that members would find other things to do on Thursday evenings and on Sundays, but this has not happened. Wirral Group has survived both crises and is in buoyant mood.

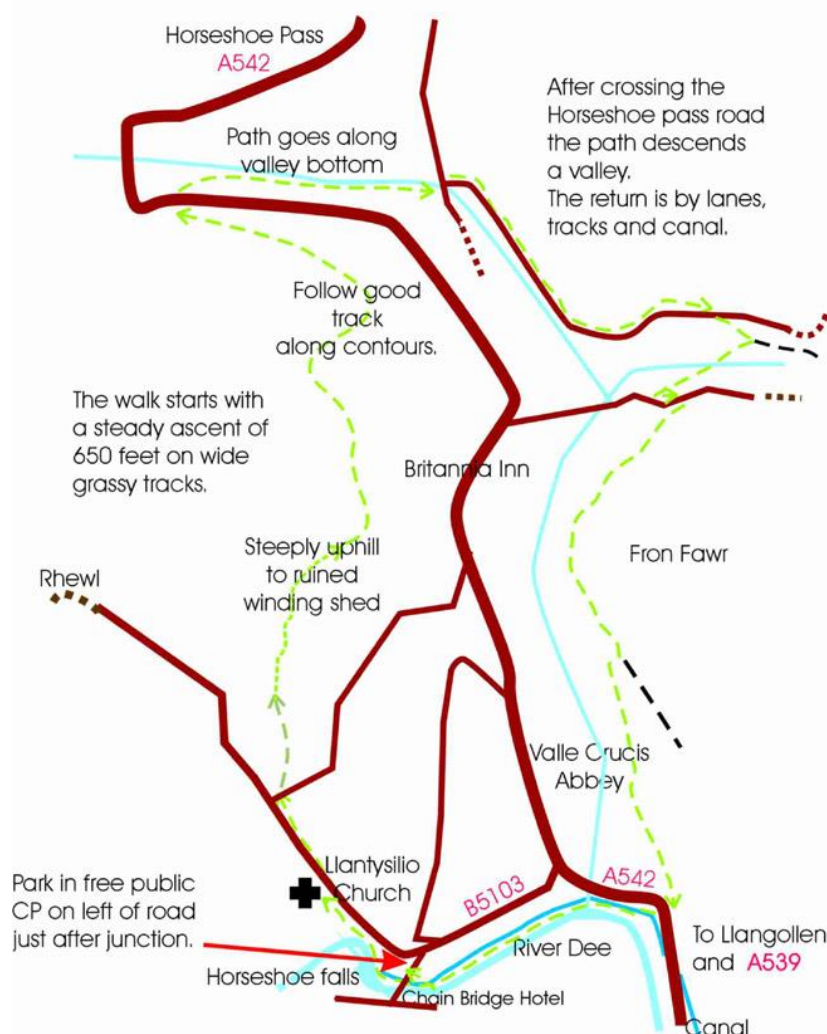


Liver Building outing 2001

In 2004 technology brings new gadgets. Global Positioning System receivers are used on walks. These can generate enthusiastic technical discussions, especially when the owners disagree with each other about the length of a walk. Leaders of Midweek Rambles are given a coloured computer printout of the route for the Clubroom library. On a recent walk with over thirty people another gadget was used for the first time. The leader and back marker had a borrowed walkie-talkie to improve communication between front and back. The leader was intrigued by the strange sound it made, until she realised, she was listening to the back marker's heartbeat.

Jim Watt: From Chain Bridge

25 June 2003.. 7 ½ miles. 1100 feet of climbing.



D walks, begun in the nineties, are still listed once a month on the current programme for Spring/Summer 2004. The summer evening walks are due to begin again in April, and as ever, more leaders are needed.

In March 2004 a fifty-three seat Sunday coach is usually fully booked. Demand for seats is high, and there can be any number up to twelve on a reserve list, hoping for cancellations. On the Sunday coaches now, probably about half to two thirds of the walkers are of retirement age, and on Wednesdays about 90% of ramblers are retired. One member believes that: "If any of us are feeling that we can't do what we used to do twenty years ago, it isn't only due to the years in between. The walks really are harder now." She argues that in 2004 there are more points in A, B and C walks than there were in the eighties, but this is hard to prove. Another view is that back in the eighties a fair proportion of A walks in The Lake District and North Wales had up to twenty-three points, and "In 1988 one A+ walk on Snowdon had twenty-seven points. It depends on the leaders at the time, and on the membership."

Sometimes members of the group are able to help other walkers in an emergency, as happened on Blencathra in 2003. A walker in another group on the mountain collapsed, and his friend asked if anybody in the Ramblers' group, which was passing by at the time, had medical knowledge. It happened that there were three ramblers with medical experience, and they assisted in resuscitation attempts but were not successful. A doctor who was in the vicinity stayed, with others, until the helicopter arrived. After this incident, the members involved said they felt quite shocked for a couple of days.

Members still enjoy Club Weekends. On the Autumn/winter 2003/2004 programme there is one at Patterdale. One memory is of a weekend two years ago. "I wanted to climb Haystacks because I thought it was Wainwright's favourite, but it was cloudy and rainy all the way up, wet, cold, dismal, with low visibility. And then at the top, the clouds cleared and parted like a curtain opening, and you saw the reflections of trees, and the village reflected in the lake, it was breathtaking, and a flock of geese flew over as the clouds parted."

The Family Rambling Group is growing again, with between twenty-five and twenty-nine people on a walk, and the holidays continue. "What makes the holidays so successful is that I've done a reccie ... all the walks are sorted, and the coaches ... and it's unbelievably good value ... over the last few years we've had fifty people on the holidays."

After reading the Minutes for the fifty years, it would be easy to think that everyone complains much of the time, but this is not the main aspect revealed. The Minutes show the vast number of organisational details and problems which Committee members have dealt with over fifty years, and they also indicate how much effort, time, concern and care have been involved. But they do not tell the whole story, because although they say what happened, and how problems were resolved, they do not tell us what it has been like to be a member of Wirral Ramblers.

In fifty years membership of the group has gone from zero to one thousand, one hundred and forty-two. On Sundays over fifty members go out on the coach. On Wednesdays fifteen to over thirty members go on the midweek walks, and the summer evening walks are usually well supported. Clubroom evenings continue. We have come a long way since 1954.

If you took a map of North West England and Wales and put a pin everywhere in the countryside where a Wirral Rambler has been on an organised walk, there would not be much map left unpinned.

Some things have changed over the fifty years, for instance the precise meaning of the word 'ramble'. The 1960s Concise Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning as 'Walk ... for pleasure, with or without definite route,' but the Pocket Oxford Dictionary for 2002 defines ramble as 'walk for pleasure in the countryside.' 'With or without definite route' has gone.

Tastes have changed. Clubroom evenings in 2004 do not include play-reading or debates, and members do not spend hours decorating the Clubroom as they did in the seventies. Also it is unlikely, though not impossible, that anyone spends two days on a 'reccie' clearing an overgrown footpath.

But over the fifty years many aspects of Wirral Ramblers have stayed the same. There have never been enough walk leaders. On the coaches, muddy boots and coffee stops have often caused problems, and sometimes rowdy behaviour as well. Out walking, members still occasionally fail to co-operate with the leader.

On Clubroom evenings security in the car park is even now a cause for concern. Our welcome to newcomers is still sometimes inadequate, as a recent member's view shows. "I went on a Thursday and no-one spoke to me, and I went on a summer evening walk and it was the same." Difficulties getting Clubroom evenings to begin and end on time crops up again and again.

So what are the best things about Wirral Ramblers in 2004? Here are some answers.



Llangollen 2000

"The best thing is the camaraderie and the safety – you can be part of the group, or just walk along alone if you want to."

And the worst things? "I wouldn't have stayed so long if there were worst things."

"I think once people start walking, they begin to make friends, at least that was my experience ..."

"It's nice to go to places where you wouldn't walk on your own."

"Because it's with a group, I've been able to do much harder walks than I ever thought possible."

"It's lovely to have people to go on holiday with."

"It has altered my view of the countryside. I appreciate hills and mountains more; I look at them in greater detail."

"The best thing about the A+ walks is the challenge, and the speed, you get to the tops of things and see the views"

"I think the best thing about the Ramblers now is the same as it was when I joined all those years ago. It's the circle of friends. You join it because you enjoy walking in the country, but the biggest benefit is the friends."



In the Peak District

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APPENDIX 1 Chairmen 1954 – 2004

D. McChesney, A. Whiteley, D. Merchant, B.K. Litchfield,
H.S. Maidment, J. R. Allen, J. Sands, B. Dawson, D. Blythe, R. Jones, N. Bird, P. de Souza, Sheila
Clough, J. Myers, G. S. Rebecca, G. Davies, B. Grey, K. Elliott

APPENDIX 2

Earlier groups, Ramblers' Federations, and founding of Ramblers' Association

Rambling groups, with various names, have existed in Britain since the nineteenth century. In 1922 clubs in and around Liverpool amalgamated to become the Liverpool and District Federation. As well as Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield also had Federations, and in 1931 they joined to become the National Council of Ramblers' Federations. This name did not last long however, and in 1934 the Council's name was changed. On 1 January 1935 the Ramblers' Association was officially founded.

"To protect the interests of ramblers and maintain their rights and privileges; to foster a greater love, use and knowledge of the countryside; to secure travel facilities, and to obtain public access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands."

The members of Wirral Clubroom did not form the first walking group in Wirral. The Ramblers' Handbook for 1927 mentions two groups in Wallasey. The first one was "Wallasey Rambling Club ... Rambles fortnightly Summer and Winter." The second one was "The Wirral Ramblers, Wallasey, Cheshire ... Rambles in Summer." Wallasey Independent Labour Party also organised "Rambles on Sunday afternoons and Bank Holidays." These two clubs could not have been part of the Ramblers' Association unless they continued beyond 1935, when Ramblers' Association began (which is not documented,) and they became part of the Ramblers' Association. They may have belonged to the Federation.

Later, there was also a Wirral Rambling Club, listed as one of many clubs affiliated to the Liverpool District and North Wales Area of the Ramblers' Association in their Annual Reports from 1949 until 1954 (the year Wirral Clubroom began.) However, Wirral Rambling Club is not listed in the Liverpool Annual Reports after 1954. None of these clubs had reports in the Liverpool Annual Report. The first reference to Wirral activity (at least during the fifties) in the Liverpool Annual Report is when Wirral Clubroom was set up in 1954.

It all began in this area. The first office of the national Ramblers' Association was in Lord Street, Liverpool, in 1938. It moved to London in 1945, and many people in the Liverpool group knew all about the beginnings of the RA and knew some of the people in the London office.



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