

Warrington HF Rambling Club
Minutes of the 73rd AGM – St Oswald's Social Club, Padgate
Tuesday 17th January 2023

Peter Winter welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Attendees and Apologies

28 present at the venue. 25 apologies were received

2. Minutes of the Previous AGM

Minutes of the previous AGM had been distributed via email. Acceptance was proposed by Craig Manchester and seconded by Dennis Carter

Matters Arising

None

3. Chairman's Address - Peter Winter

Welcome to this, our 73rd AGM. It is a delight that we have been able to gather together again throughout 2022 as a functioning club. Our new social base for events here at St Oswald's has been well received with record attendances at events.

We managed brilliantly to get much of our activities in place during 2021. 2022 has seen us settle into our full programme; during the year we have offered members 80 walks, 2 weekends away (Cumbria and Whitby), autumn and spring suppers, 5 club social nights, a First Aid course, a canal trip and a Christmas party. In total members have walked the equivalent of a little over half way round the world. With the planned walking week in Cyprus in April we will have truly fully recovered our club from its dormant state during lock down. To assist members we have successfully introduced a new system to put those needing lifts in touch with those able to offer them.

Everyone has played their part: the Committee, walk leaders, walkers and social events organisers. We have come a long way since our first post covid walk on 14 April 2021 when just 16 of us gathered for a Wednesday walk.

I am proud to be the chairman of this excellent club.

Diane will take us through the accounts, but crucially we are financially stable and the Committee has not been limited in its choices by cash availability. We have remained conscious of delivering value in the way the club is run. There have been large savings on the publishing and distribution of the programme by producing it ourselves and printing it early so it can be distributed at walks and events, thus largely eliminating associated postage and stationery costs. We have increased recce reimbursements during the year, such that they formed 41% of our total spend in 2022; we will keep the basis for these under review during the year.

In addition to coordinating the summer evening walks, Simon has done a fantastic job on the social front, culminating in the Christmas Party, with, of course, our favourite Red River Band.

Cathy, who is central to our Club's operation, will update you on membership numbers; the headline is that we have a strong membership, with a steady flow of new members. However, some of our members have not returned to frequent walks and we must all play our part in keeping our numbers strong by welcoming new members. We remain a diverse, inclusive, club of caring individuals who love walking and socialising: our two essential strands.

We are losing Jayne and Wendy from the Committee this year after many years coordinating the Wednesday walks with good humour and grace. We are incredibly grateful to them both for this key programme. We are also losing Peter from the role of weekend walks coordinator. I am sure you will join me in thanking all three of them most sincerely for everything they have done for the Club. Fortunately, we have proposals for their successors. I am deeply indebted to our wonderful committee who all go the extra mile (sometimes literally) to ensure this Club prospers.

Thank you for your continuing support of the Club. I am happy to take questions.

4. Treasurer's Report and Acceptance of Accounts – Diane Beswick

The Club's accounts for the year to 31st December 2022 had been prepared by Diane Beswick and were circulated prior to the AGM via email
Diane reported a surplus for the year of £188.35

The accounts show that the club's financial position remains very healthy. The committee has agreed that the level of subscriptions for 2023 should remain unchanged; £12 full and £8 social.

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Dennis Carter and seconded by David Woolf

5. Membership Report – Cathy Carter

As Peter alluded to in the Chairman's report, we have a strong membership with a steady flow of new members. So how do we get these new members?

The majority come from our Website, from people having googled Walking Groups in Warrington, a fair few also arrive through introduction to the club via an existing member, for which we thank you. As a committee, we are also grateful to Jane Burton for setting up and administering a Public Facebook Page, to strengthen our marketing. Jane regularly advertises our walks and points them to myself for further details.

This year has seen around 45 enquiries, which has resulted in 16 new paying members in 2022. (13 last year). We have a further 18 on a potential walkers list, who receive regular emails about future walks.

Peter also mentioned us being a friendly, inclusive club and it is heartening to see that 49 walkers have taken advantage of our offer to join up to two walks without charge, to try us out. (16 of these joined as members in 2022 and 1 has just become our first new member of 2023).

The records we keep also allows us to conduct some analysis of patterns in the walks, eg in terms of attendance, it is interesting that evening and Wednesday day walks have once again proved the most popular.

The figures show:

Wed Eve walks had an average 20 people,	(lowest number out 10 and highest 30)
Wed Day walks had an average 19 people,	(lowest number out 10 and highest 34)
W/E walks had an average of 16 people,	(lowest number out 7 and highest 24)
Higher Grade Walks averaged 8 people,	(lowest number out 4 and highest 15)

Craig retains his record as having attended the most walks. (Not 100% though since he takes time off for Wimbledon!)

It is vital that the club encourages new members, since, we have around 28 members (30 in 2022) who have either not come out at all, or only on 1 or 2 walks – so are in danger of leaving the club.

Past experience shows they won't all leave, but we cannot be complacent.
Thanks to all those of you who have encouraged friends or family to join.

6. Committee Reports are detailed below

6.1 Wednesday Walks Report - Jayne Adamson

We have had a packed Wednesday walking programme in 2022 with over 30 walks being offered. These walks have covered a wide geographical area and a wide range of ability. Most have attracted numbers of walkers in the high teens with over 30 on some walks.

There has been a bit of a change in the nature of some of the walks offered. Traditionally Wednesday walks have been fairly local to Warrington and tended to be shorter than weekend walks with less ascent. However as a club we seem to be attracting more people on the Wednesday walks who want longer more challenging walks so we have stretched the boundaries both geographical and ability wise. In May Craig took 18 people up Arnside Knott. In July Lindsay led a walk up the Great Orme in Llandudno. Colin and Tony later organised a lovely 10 mile walk with 1600 feet of ascent in North Wales for 20 people. We always have the longer walks interspersed with shorter less demanding ones which are often accompanied by the ever popular pub lunches.

We have had some Wednesday walks with a different twist this year. Some of these have been very educational with the leaders having done lots of research into the area. In April Howard explained to the walkers all about the Worsley area. In May Jan led an urban walk around Liverpool. In May Dennis took a group across the sea to Hilbre Island. Later in the month Sandra told the walkers all about Eccleston. In November Phil and Yvonne explained about the mystery and wizardry of Alderley Edge.

The year ended with a walk planned every week in December. It started with a bus ramble around Leigh and Wigan canal when we eventually found a bus. Next we had the very popular Christmas walk and meal at Whitegates ably organised by Simon. We then had a walk around Little Woolden Moss and finally the much postponed Twixmas ramble from Formby.

All our leaders have been fantastic again this year. As well as our long standing leaders we have been lucky that most of the new leaders we attracted last year have carried on leading walks this year. A massive thank you to you all. After several years Jayne and Wendy are stepping down as Wednesday walk coordinators. We are very grateful to all the support and encouragement you have given us both in leading and participating in walks. We are sure you will give your support to the new Wednesday walk coordinator and look forward to seeing you all on walks in 2023.

6.2 Evening Walks - Simon Payne

8 walks were held over the summer

Wed 4th May – Lymm

Jane Burton started our season with an interesting walk around her home patch of Lymm, with 21 of us meeting at the Crown on Booths Hill Road. Within a short time we were on quiet footpaths, disused railway lines and canal towpaths.

After leaving the canal at Spud Wood, we made our way back into the village, doing a loop of Lymm Dam before taking another route back to the Crown for a drink outside in their wonderful garden area.

Wed 18th May – Worsley. Simon Payne

Meeting at Roe Green Community Centre, 10 of us set out on good footpaths with minimal mud for a 4.5 mile walk through the Duke of Bridgewater Estate and then on the Monton Trail.

We passed through woods, planted by the Duke's mill workers to keep them in employment during the 19th Century "Cotton Famine" caused by a shortage of bailed cotton arriving from North America, caused by the American Civil War.

We also passed alongside, Old Warke Dam, which the Duke created by blocking off a local brook to give himself a fishing lake.

We eventually came to the Delph, in Worsley village, the entrance to the Duke's coal mines and the birthplace of England's canal system in 1761.

Then we followed the Bridgewater Canal to the southern end of the Duke's estate, where we picked up the Monton Trail (part of the bigger, Salford Trail), back to Roe Green. Unfortunately, no refreshments were "available" on our return.

Wed 1st June Appleton Peter Winter

26 of us met at the Cat and Lion in Appleton, for a walk led by Peter, giving a tour around his "backyard" and through areas you thought you knew, but he managed to surprise us. Taking us along paths we didn't know existed, let alone were familiar with.

We covered Appleton, the Dingle, parts of Stretton and other neighbouring boroughs. Returning to the Cat and Lion, we found the pub had been "taken over" by a travellers' wedding party. We did find some seats outside the front, though the company was a little choice.

Wed 15th June Daresbury Simon (again!)

30 of us (including some new faces) met at the Ring of Bells, Daresbury for a six mile walk to visit Lewis Carroll's birth place (and an additional place of interest)

Passing All Saints Church where Lewis Carroll's father was a rector. The church now has an interesting side chapel made over to the full history of Lewis Carroll.

Across field paths led us towards our subject's birth home.

Now for the "additional place of interest". Some years ago, I heard Pete Waterman (the record producer) say that he lived in the vicarage where Lewis Carroll was born.

Most would think this is the vicarage opposite All Saints Church, but, Lewis Carroll was born in 1832, and the family home was destroyed by fire in 1883, with the current vicarage only built in 1904.

On researching company records, I discovered PWL Group was registered at Black Jack Farm, Newton Lane, which was quite close to Lewis Carroll's family home.

Bottom line, although Lewis's dad was the rector, the occupant of Black Jack Farm was the Church Warden, who would have known Lewis really well though his association with the church.

As I said, the Lewis family home was actually no longer standing, but the National Trust maintain the grounds and there are several information boards explaining what the ruins show.

Our return route to Daresbury, took us through a farmyard and a tunnel under the M56. On entering the village, we were surprised to see a number of houses/gardens decorated on the theme of Alice in Wonderland, presumably to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Drinks were enjoyed in the Ring of Bells Pub.

Wed 13th July Risley/Pestfurlong Hill. Sorry, me again Simon

16 met at Birchwood Forest Park, Gorse Covert for a walk around the open spaces taking in Pestfurlong Hill, a relatively new beauty spot.

All of the area was formerly an ordnance factory during the war, including Risley Moss Nature Reserve. The reason given for its location was that due to its damp environment, it attracted mist, fog, log cloud etc which concealed the site.

One story associated with the area was that only one German bomb ever fell on the moss throughout the war, and that missed anything important.

If you travel along Ordnance Avenue towards Risley Nature Reserve, on your left, just before the entrance, you can see a silo amongst the trees, (much clearer in the 80s when I moved here).

These silos were covered with grass during the war to blend with the surrounding area and sheep grazed on them to give the impression of a small hill.

When my grandchildren were small they played here and referred to the area as Mary Mary park. A metal silhouette was positioned at the park entrance, it is obvious to me now, wasn't Mary, Mary Quite Contrary but Little Bo Peep looking out for her sheep (particularly as some sheep were with her.)

When the Ordnance Factory was demolished in the 50's 60's and later, all the rubble was dumped at Gorse Covert- a huge landfill which was the making of Pestfurlong Hill. Obviously all grassed over now with much vegetation having grown up.

From the top you get views of the Pennines towards Bolton and to the east is Manchester's city skyline and to the south/southwest Partington and beyond and the Thelwall Viaduct on the M6.

Wed 27th July Grappenhall. Sue Lawton

Another new leader and another take on an area we thought we knew. Sue led 20 of around Grappenhall, Appleton and surrounding areas for another good evening out.

When she initially offered to lead this walk, she was a little unsure of where to go. I suggested keeping to an area she knew, we don't all live in the same area so it would be new to us.

On the night, she led a very confident walk around places I was not familiar with so I was very surprised to learn that it was her first time (aside from the recce) to the area since she lived the other side of Warrington. She even passed an important test, we were back at the pub before closing.

I did not attend the last two walks so the reports are somewhat shorter

Wed 10th August Burtonwood. Cathy Carter

Cathy chose Burtonwood as the venue, however, since the normal parking place was unavailable, changed the walk to begin from the Community Centre. The start involved a short distance on a country road to reach Sam's track, then along lanes to cross the road past the old Fiddle in the Bag (sadly now derelict) to pick up a path along the old Sankey canal. Leaving the canal took the group through woodlands and then on country lanes to weave its way back through Burtonwood village to the starting point. A well earned drink was enjoyed on the refurbished outdoor decking area.

Wed 24th August Great Budworth. Andy Mueller

Andy led the last evening walk for the summer. Unfortunately the village of Great Budworth was hosting a Television crew which left nowhere to park, so the walk started from outside the village. Andy took 12 walkers along the road around the Mere and took a footpath through woodland and across the fields to arrive at the back of Marbury Country Park.

Crossing Marbury Park on the track next to its mere the group then arrived at the Canal. From here they crossed the canal to pass the Salt Works and past some shops, then fishing lakes, returning on paths across more fields and onto a road for a while then more fields to take paths back into Great Budworth near the church where they made their way back to the cars. (Some detoured to have a drink in the pub)

I hear it was around 7 miles and head torches would have been useful.

6.3 Weekend Walks - Peter Winter reporting for Peter Hough

In 2022 we were able to offer a full year of walks with 26 scheduled, unfortunately 2 had to be cancelled due to illness. In addition to these, we had two weekends away. Firstly in Whitby, organised by Phil and Jan and secondly in the Lakes organised by Cathy & Dennis Carter. Thanks go to them for the not inconsiderable work involved.

The 24 walks were led by 14 different leaders. A big thanks go to all of them for ensuring we had such an interesting programme. Particular thanks to Gordon for offering four walks within this year. Thanks too to Gary Webster for stepping in at short notice to cover a walk when a threatened M6 North closure prevented a walk in Cumbria. Sandra Black also deserves a mention, for not only leading two of her own walks, but again at relatively short notice, covering a walk when someone was unfortunately not fit to do theirs and for supplying a further walk to cover a slot left free in November. Thanks to Peter Hough for managing these many changes to the programme.

Weekend walks took us across various geographic regions, ensuring variety in the walking terrain with 3 in Lancashire, 6 in Wales, 7 in Cheshire, 7 in Derbyshire and 1 in Cumbria.

Whilst all walks offered variety and interest, one stood out as different to all the others, in that it was a linear walk, with very little ascent. The walk started with a train ride from Delamere to Chester and then Jo and Lindsay led 21 walkers along the Baker Way from Chester back to Delamere - 13 miles.

As a club, we are always very grateful to those who volunteer to lead walks, without them, we would not have such an active, vibrant club. Leaders take time to recce routes, sometimes more than once, prior to leading, thus ensuring they can lead safely. Thank you to all walk leaders.

Thanks too to Peter Hough for his organisation of the weekend walks programme, one of our flagship programmes.

6.4 Higher Grade Walks – Vini Martino

I've enjoyed my first year as HGW coordinator and pleased to report a successful year with a great selection of walks and kind weather. I would like thank all the walk leaders - Kerry, Wayne, Craig, Gordon, Paul and Tony and all the walkers that attended.

As a mathematician, I'd like to give last year's vital stats first.

Out of 13 planned walks, we only had 2 cancelled, one being on the Queen's jubilee when most people had other engagements planned.

We had 4 walks in the Lakes, 4 in North Wales, 2 in Yorkshire Dales and 1 in Peak District. Like previous years, the Lakes and Snowdonia have proved most popular.

We had 7 walk leaders and 25 walkers through the year with an average of 8 walkers per walk which I think is very good.

I have a few awards to give out -

The first goes to the leader who led most walks - Kerry with 3.

Second goes to the leader who attracted most walkers - Gordon with 15 when he led Goyt Valley

Finally, the walker who attended most walks - you won't be surprised that this goes to Craig with 10 walks.

Could the winners see me later and I'll give them my gratitude.

Finally, can I make an appeal for new leaders. We are always keen to increase the walk leader pool and I can assure anyone considering this that they will get full support from myself and I'm sure from the other leaders.

Please contact me if you want to discuss this possibility.

7. Social Events - Simon Payne

The Club enjoyed a full programme of social events this year, starting with the AGM last January in our new venue – St Oswalds. Seems hard to believe that we held it as a live and a virtual meeting (on Zoom) to cater for those who either had Covid or were still wary of catching it. 24 joined us in person and 5 on Zoom

This new venue proved popular, leading to increased attendances at all 6 club social nights.

These kicked off in January with Planning a Walk and Map Reading led by Peter and Linda Hough. It proved to be an informative evening with some really useful groundrules for ensuring our walks are successful and lots of tips on how to incorporate modern technology in terms of the OS Map App.

The talk was supported by a useful list of websites where further help could be gained.

In February, Captain Barry Smith ex BA pilot took us on an entertaining trip through 40 years in Aviation. Barry allowed us, "Behind The Flight Deck Door (The Ramblings of an airline pilot)". He regaled us with stories from his career with British Airways, during his life he flew various types of aircraft, from Tiger Moths in basic training, up to Boeing 747's, before retirement. It is fair to say, the talk was very amusing!!!

In March we were transported to Antarctica by Gillian Winter who shared with us the fascinating trip she and Peter had enjoyed to this area. From the comfort of our armchairs we were treated to this awesome trip. Gillian captivated us with the fabulous scenery and photographs of the wildlife. I believe it has even inspired one or two of our members to contemplate this fantastic journey

November saw two club evenings, due to St Oswalds cancelling our date in October.

Firstly, Colin Pownall treated us to his captivating evening, "From Hell's Leathers to God's Family – his life's journey from a broken home". His wife, Anita shared her view of events which may have differed slightly from Colin's recollections.

November saw David Wolf's "Ups and Downs of Walking" attract many of our former walkers to explore both club rambles from 1972 to the present plus some more exotic walks he and Ann had shared. The "Play your cards right" quiz kept us all alert.

A big thank you to all our speakers who gave their talks on a voluntary basis.

Then of course in December, we saw our Christmas Party with the amazing Red River Band. A spate of bugs and illnesses led to a lower turn out than we had hoped, however those there filled the dancefloor for the whole night.

By charging for attendance we raised £225 contribution to the costs and despite low numbers still managed to raise £95 from the raffle – to be donated to British Heart Foundation who organised our First Aid Course.

In addition to the social evenings, we also had our traditional Spring and Autumn Suppers. Spring being at the Walton Arms and the Autumn Supper at the Indian Tiffin, Culcheth – although the latter venue tried its best to lose us by moving location the week before and changing its name, however, like true ramblers we still managed to navigate there.

The club enjoyed two further events last year.

In August, 30 of us enjoyed a "cruise" along the Llangollen Canal and over the Pontcysyllte Aquaduct. A fantastic experience to glide along over the 336 yards, at 126 feet above the River Dee. The trip was of course even more popular due to afternoon tea (including prosecco) being served.

Then in September, on a more serious note, 22 club members attended Safety Central for a First Aid Course where we were shown, amongst other things, how to deal with someone who is choking and how to respond to someone who had collapsed, even using a defibrillator if necessary. A bonus for those who came early was a tour of Safety Central. The building is like a tardis and incorporates both indoor and outdoor environments where youngsters are encouraged to spot safety hazards and shown how to deal with them.

So successful was the event that the Club will be seeking to hold another bespoke evening in the Autumn this year to allow others to attend.

7. Election of Officers

Chairman - Peter Winter was the only nomination: Peter Winter
Proposed by Craig Manchester seconded by Jane Burton

Secretary - There was one nomination for this position – Cathy Carter
Proposed by Daphne Thomas seconded by Howard Thornley

Treasurer - There was one nomination for this post, Diane Beswick
Proposed by Helen Burton, seconded by Geoff Jones

All above were ratified by those present.

8. Election of the Remaining Committee

Peter Hough had resigned his position as Weekend Walks Co-ordinator in December and was thanked for his work over the last two years.

There was one nomination for this position - Lindsay Richards
Proposed by: Carole Rylett and seconded by Jan Pritchard
This was ratified by all present..

Jayne Adamson & Wendy Hilton had indicated that they wished to stand down from the committee as Wednesday Walk Co-ordinators. Peter Winter thanked them sincerely for 8 years of service.

There was one nomination for this position. Heather Trelease
Proposed by, Wendy Hilton and seconded by Jayne Adamson
This was ratified by all present.

Simon Payne, Evening Walks and Social Events Co-ordinator and Vini Martino, Higher Grade walks co-ordinator had indicated their willingness to remain on the committee.

Proposed by Craig Manchester and seconded by Jan Pritchard.
This was ratified by those present and all above were elected.

10. Any Other Business

Since there was no further Any Other Business, Peter Winter thanked everyone for attending the meeting closed at 8.40pm

Chairman

Date