

NEWSLETTER January - June 2021

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

We thought the first half of this year was bad enough being locked down for most of it in an effort to control the Coronavirus Pandemic and then on 4th July we were partially released but unfortunately it came back to haunt us and now, as I write, we find ourselves locked down once again. This all makes it very difficult to plan for the future and you will notice that there is no Programme of Walks attached to this Newsletter as we don't feel confident about what the next six months might hold.

Many of you have been walking in small groups or 'bubbles', others in larger groups often split into sub-groups of six to abide by Boris's Rule of Six and, all in all, I think most of those of you who wish to walk have managed to get out into our beautiful Kent and Sussex countryside and enjoy the fresh air, exercise, stunning views and excellent company, albeit in some case somewhat limited.

We have taken the decision to book King Charles the Martyr Church Hall for our Social Evening incorporating the AGM in the hope that this year it will actually take place. This is a popular event with one of Len's fiendish quizzes and food and drink of both the soft and alcoholic variety included free of charge. We have also booked High Rocks for our Summer Supper and, once more, fingers crossed that the event will be able to go ahead. Due to the enormous number of outstanding weddings booked for the summer of 2021 we have deviated from our norm and booked this event for a Friday – Friday 13th August. Rather than a set meal it will be of the sit-down buffet variety so people will get a choice. Further details will be circulated nearer the time but I do hope that you will attend as it gives us all an opportunity to mix with others within the Tunbridge Wells Rambling Club instead of just the groups with whom we walk. What we have not done, however, is book a coach trip anywhere. We will wait and see how matters progress and consider it in the coming months.

We will not be asking you to renew your membership for 2021. Anyone who has been a fully paid-up member for 2020 will automatically become one for next year, too, at no further cost.

I sincerely hope that 2021 will be a better year for us all and that we will have an opportunity to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the formation of the Club, any suggestions for an appropriate event would be appreciated.

Janet Wilson

GROUP REPORTS

LONGER WEDNESDAY WALKERS

In between Lockdowns we have been walking in very restricted numbers following the 'rule of 6'. However I am pleased to say we did manage to do many of our favourite walks on the South Downs - Firle, Cuckmere Valley, and Pett plus a new walk from Udimore.

I've just heard news on the TV the vaccine could be here by Christmas. Let us hope so and we can get back to something approaching normality!

Eric Botley

WEDNESDAY 5 MILE WALKERS

With many of the Covid restrictions being lifted on 4th July the Wednesday Five Milers commenced walking again on a 'Friends Together' basis rather than under the umbrella of TWRC as the insurance had not been reinstated. This started very gradually with just a handful of people and then progressed, while some of our group who live east of Tunbridge Wells broke away and walked together which they are still doing. We started just allowing six people on the walks and then progressed to twelve in two batches of six with an extra leader, although generally the first person of the second group kept the last person of the first group within sight. Sometimes we had a waiting list to join us and then we allowed three groups well distanced and this has worked well. We have tried to keep our walks fairly local and have enjoyed the Ashdown Forest, Leigh, Groombridge, Hartfield, Rusthall, Matfield, Brenchley, Langton Green and Penshurst to name just a few of those closer to home and many thanks to our leaders and sub-leaders.



Sadly our Christmas Lunch at High Rocks has had to be cancelled. I did ask Giuseppe whether we could book five tables of six under different names but still in The Bell Room but he was not prepared to allow that as a way of getting around the rules, saying he didn't want to have to pay a £10,000 fine. Hence some of us will be having individual small gatherings of up to six in various venues.

As I write we are on the first day of the second Lockdown which is frustrating especially as Tunbridge Wells is one of the safest places in the country but quite understand the need for it as we don't want 'strangers' contaminating our area. This means that, at best, we will only have a couple of walks in the remainder of this year. Let's hope that 2021 will see an improvement – it's difficult to type with fingers crossed.

Janet Wilson

FRIDAY WALKERS

Friday walkers No 1

As for so many other millions of people, our nicely organised little world came to an abrupt halt on Monday, 23 March 2020. Since then, the Friday Group has not met as an entity. However, we have not been entirely idle and many of us took advantage of the wonderful spring and summer weather to get out locally. Various sub-groups have emerged: a handful of stalwarts have been meeting, when permitted, in the Tonbridge/Hadlow 'quadrant'; others of us have been meeting in the Tunbridge Wells/Penshurst /Crowborough area; yet others have met in the Paddock Wood area.

Zoom meetings on a Friday sustained us for a good portion of lock down, but they are inherently unsatisfactory and we do all seem to crave normal contact.



For the July-November period there were occasional, mildly hopeful signs which encouraged us to consider restarting but for understandable reasons, the collective will to do so wasn't really there and we have continued to restrict ourselves very largely to local walks. We've managed a few daring pub lunches, while they were still permitted, variously at The Chafford Arms, The Hare in Langton Green, The Greyhound at Charcott and even the (much improved) William IV in Pembury. A few of us



have been lucky enough to get away to other parts of the country, such as the Yorkshire Dales, which, unlike of the rest of Yorkshire were not under restrictions, including a visit to the spectacular, and aptly named, Hardraw Force at Hawes in Wensleydale. Seen here after heavy rain!

My favourite joke about lockdown was a wonderful Matt cartoon, showing a policeman making an announcement. The caption read: 'Any person wandering, must be lonely as a cloud, Daffodils, where essential, may gather in a host'. I hardly need add that the cartoon appeared in March.

More recently, this year's wonderful autumn colours have been a welcome distraction.

Let us hope that the New Year brings better news and enables us to meet up with our friends again. Meanwhile, we'll just have to keep battling on!

Friday walkers No 2

After Lockdown 1, we were able to walk again in a group of six (not always the same six – we had a few other regular Friday walkers join us for the walk). We were even able to call in at the pub again – almost back to some semblance of normality. All the time that the weather was good, there was no problem and everybody could sit outside. However, the day arrived when the weather turned a bit colder and/or it rained and we had to scurry inside.

A number of establishments became quite inventive. The Malt Shovel at Eynsford had benches underneath an awning and electric heaters on their outside wall. Some pubs went above and beyond and set up large marquees in their gardens – the really posh ones (such as the Little Brown Jug at Chiddingstone Causeway and the Vineyard at Lamberhurst) had wooden flooring and hot air blowers!

Lovely to revisit some of our favourite walks and venues – everything was done ad hoc with no walk outs. We even incorporated a scheduled mid-walk coffee stop on a number of occasions – see the picture taken just before Halloween of a doorway in Chiddingstone adjacent to the Tulip Tree Tea Room. Occasionally, the walk leader got lucky and passed an open pub/coffee shop en route and we could wet our whistles. Dodgiest pub? Definitely the John Brunt VC in Paddock Wood. Still, at least we got to view of a set of pub quiz questions on the big screens dotted about the premises to keep us entertained while we waited (and waited!) for our meals. Their maitre'd reminded me of Jay from the Repair Shop. One of the best pubs – the Greyhound at Charcott.

Although this may seem as though the walking was focussed on the pub, we did put in a fair few miles to get there. It was really good to visit some of our old stomping grounds such as Charcott, Chiddingstone and Brenchley in the summer. As autumn came around, there have been the usual fantastic autumn colours and the fruits, berries and nuts have been especially abundant this year. Likewise some of the fungi – there have been a number of spectacular red and white spotted toadstools and some displays worthy of the Chelsea flower show (see picture).

In the future, it would be great to think that we can walk more normally and not to have to jump off the track just because somebody else is walking towards us. Let's look forward to the development of the Covid -19 vaccines!



Halloween decorations in Chiddingstone



Fungal display near Shipbourne

Maurice Dickens and Nick Churchill

ALL DAY SUNDAY WALKERS

A Sunday Walker Writes...

When lockdown started in March and everything got cancelled, even the 50th anniversary of my joining the Club ramble, I didn't want to lose the use of my legs! Thankfully we were allowed out for exercise, so like many of you, I expect, I went walking on my own nearly every day, including Sundays for the first two months, enjoying the beautiful weather, those brilliant blue skies, watching the spring blossoms unfold and hearing the birdsong. But it wasn't the same. I missed the companionship of the group and gradually made contact and walked with one or two others- and oh, the joy, when we found a cafe open for our first coffee!

In August, with Celestine's Sunday list, we started trying to organise a walk each Sunday. We started with Shipbourne enjoying coffee in Knole Park, then Goudhurst with coffee in Cranbrook, from Boarshead, no coffee, but scarecrows at Motts Mill! With the wettest October, the long forgotten mud returned, and it was back to cleaning those boots again-an unwelcome chore.



But just as we had built up to our rule of 6 for 3 weeks running, along came the second lockdown. So it was a case of trying to keep in contact and see who was free to walk and trying out different walks nearer to home-even pinching each other's ideas! At least we are still allowed out and hopefully we will soon be able to meet in groups again, when we will have all these exciting new walks to offer!

Mary Blinks

FAMILY NEWS

George Holt

This summer, we were very sad to hear of the death of George Holt, one of our most respected and well-loved Friday walk leaders. We remembered him when viewing the lavender fields in full bloom near Stone Street (see picture) and also on the day of his funeral when we walked near Hadlow and stopped in the cemetery to listen to part of his funeral service. He is greatly missed.

Maurice Dickins



A Tribute to Geoff King

Little did I realise when I wrote in the Newsletter a year ago-'An Appreciation of Geoff and Betty King'- that I would be writing the sad news that Geoff died in July this year. Geoff was such a big part of the Club that I couldn't let his passing go without repeating a little of that appreciation.

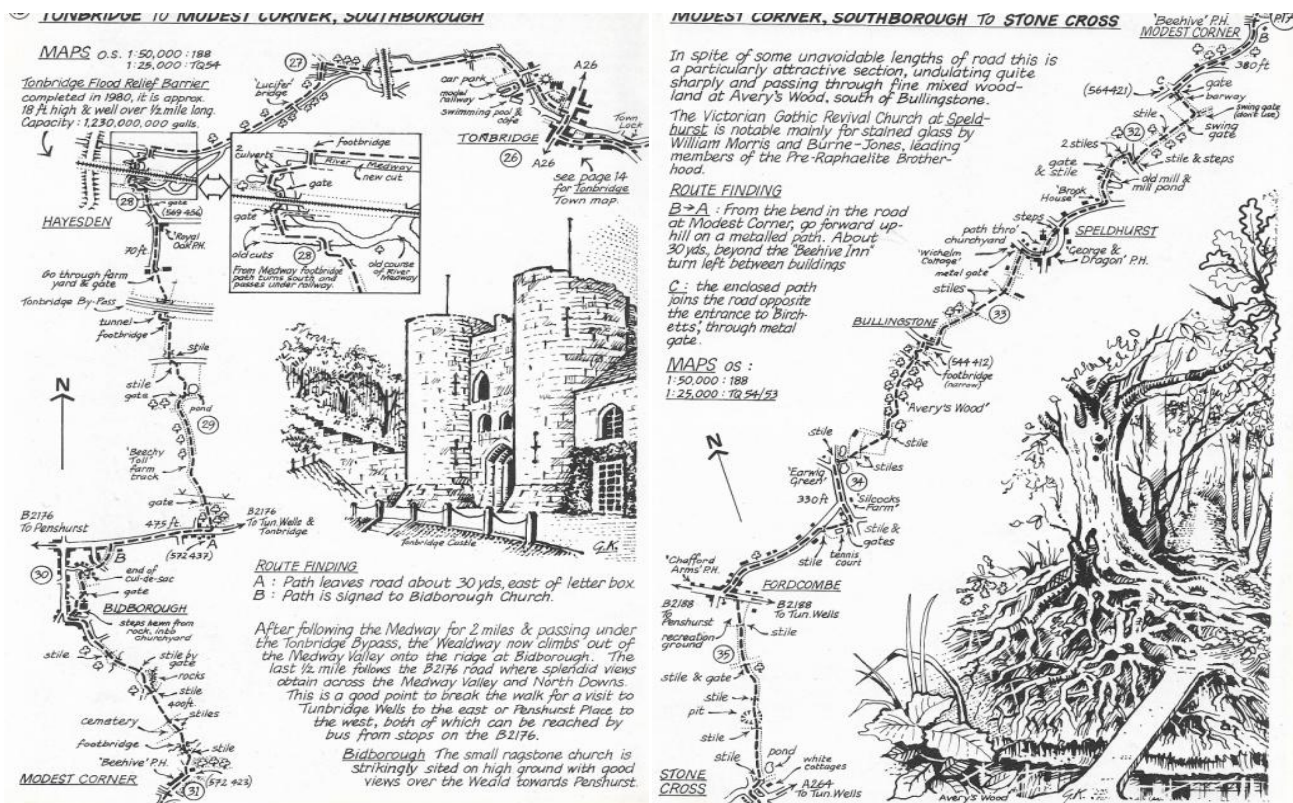
Born in the Peak District, Geoff was a keen walker and climber. He had a career which included military cartography, and when he joined our Club in the early 1970s he had his own design consultancy, and he brought all that expertise to the Club.



He served on the Club Committee as Special Projects Organiser for a few years in the 1970s, and apart from leading walks and coach rambles, he gave slide shows, organised a leadership course and wrote numerous articles in our newsletters with advice on planning walks, safety and clothing and rucksacks. He and Betty hosted the popular annual August tea party in their lovely garden. He also designed the name tags we carry in case of emergency.

When the Club received a request from Meopham Ramblers in 1972 to consider the creation of a long distance path from the Thames to the Channel, to be called the Wealdway, Geoff took on the task, which took 9 years of meticulous work before the grand opening on Camp Hill, Ashdown Forest, in 1981 which was attended by 500 walkers. Later KCC and ESCC produced a big glossy guide book with Geoff's photographs, and it is now marked as a long distance path on the OS maps. When we come across that WW sign on our rambles, just remember, Geoff was here! No wonder he was our '**King of the Wealdway**'

Below is an extract from the guidebook he produced for the Wealdway Steering Committee:



Jackie Houlston

It is with great sadness that on Monday 16th November we lost Jackie and our thoughts are with Bob at this sad time. Jackie was a wonderful member of our group and, with Bob, always willing to lead walks. They invited us back to their home on a couple of occasions after a walk to enjoy their fabulous garden and partake of homemade cakes etc. One of the youngest members of our group it is a tragedy that she should be taken from us – she will be sadly missed by us all. She will always be remembered for the Bluebell Walk and I am sure we will do it again in her memory.

Sylvi and Geoff

In addition to the general problems we have all been facing, Sylvi has had severe back problems in the last few months. More happily, she has now been operated on at the Horder Centre and is recuperating. Geoff suffered a self-inflicted wound when descending his loft ladder, fracturing a bone in his leg. This has now healed after prolonged rest. He is now striving to get back to 'match fitness' (snooker?). We wish them both a speedy recovery.

Wednesday Walkers

Casualties seem to abound. Nesta, one of our regulars, decided that Sainsbury's was as good a place as any to break her pelvis. Whilst I was hearing the news about Nesta, Janet asked if I had heard about Rosemary who had also broken her pelvis but at home. Heather, not to be outdone, has broken some fingers.

We wish all 3 a speedy recovery.

AND FINALLY

Since I last sat down at my computer to compile a Newsletter I must say things have been a bundle of fun in the Editor's household, **NOT**.

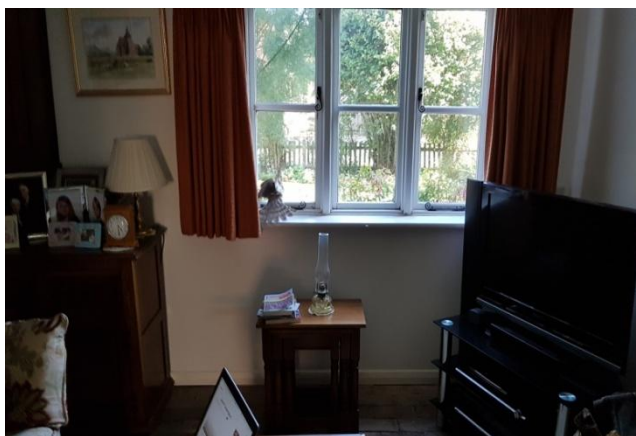
The garden continued to flourish – must have been the time and attention it got for a change. The tomatoes in the greenhouse started to produce copious amounts of fruit and the freezer is full of them ready for making soup and sauces in the coming colder months. We had our last cucumber from the greenhouse 2 days ago – I was amazed that they kept going for so long!

The trees have nearly finished dropping their leaves and I can see Pat out of our office window raking up yet another load to either go on the already overflowing compost heap or in the garden waste bin for the Council to cart away in due course. Strangely enough, the oak in next door's garden, that delights in covering our garden in leaves has, as far as I can tell, not had one acorn on it this year– everywhere else acorns seem to abound on the ground under the oaks.



We managed to get away with our motorcaravan for nearly 3 weeks from mid-September. We had a couple of good walks along the Grand Union Canal at Warwick with a bacon sandwich for lunch at a café going one way and a full Italian meal at a restaurant in Leamington walking in the other direction the next day. The highlight of our holiday was the two beautiful days we walked to Flamborough Head approaching from the south on one day and from the north on the next.

The real excitement of the summer though was having a sparrowhawk chase a racing pigeon into our sitting room through the open kitchen door. Percy, the pigeon, had been hanging around for a few days gorging himself on the seed dropped from our bird table. One afternoon I heard a kerfuffle outside and went to investigate and there was Percy being held in the talons of the sparrowhawk. Percy was released and flew past me pursued, not by a bear, but by the predator, into the house. The hawk came to rest on our sitting room window cill and, with a lot of trepidation I managed to take hold of it and escort it to the garden. Percy, meanwhile, was covering in a corner and was retrieved and also returned to the outside world. Percy had lost a few feathers and had had a little blood on one wing but was otherwise unhurt. The sparrowhawk can just be made out in the picture in the window on the left.



REALLY REALLY FINALLY

The Committee wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Healthy 2021 free of Covid, Lockdowns, Tiers (whatever their number) and any restrictions in us getting back to a full walking programme.

