

The first ten plus one years of Ramblers Trafford Group

## **Ramblers Trafford Group**

### **(A Short History)**



The Inaugural Meeting was on 21 June 2010, when it was agreed that John Johnson and June Mabon would hold the interim positions of Chair/Treasurer and Footpath Co-ordinator respectively (June was already Footpath Co-ordinator for the Ramblers Association in Trafford.)

A precis of the first Committee meeting held at Jacksons Boat, Sale on 28 June 2010:

#### **Present**

John Johnson	- Chair/Treasurer
Pat Hulland	- Secretary
June Mabon	- Footpath Co-ordinator
Peter Ball	- Area Treasurer
Steve Batty	

The name of the group was agreed as The Ramblers Trafford Group, and Steve Batty was agreed as Walks Co-ordinator having volunteered to do so. Peter Ball explained about the budget and agreed a short statement about RTG would be published in the next Area Walks' Programme.

In July 2010 John Johnson stood aside as Chair and Treasurer, but at the Committee Meeting on 10 August 2010, the following nominations were received and accepted.

Angela Hilton	- Chair
Elaine Batty	- Treasurer
Sheila Kabbani	- Membership Secretary
Lesley Beech	- Social Secretary

At the same meeting Steve Batty moved to the role of Webmaster/Publicity with Geoff Morton taking over as Walks Co-ordinator. A couple of items that were discussed were compiling a list of favourite walks which could be printed as a booklet and the laminating of individual walks which could then be sold.

It is interesting to note that by the time of the next Committee Meeting, 5 October 2010, 27 walks had been arranged for the period November to January 2011 of between 5/6 and 12 miles, and were all within a 40 mile travelling distance. Each leader had to complete a register noting who were members and who not.

The first Annual General Meeting to the period up to 30 September 2010 was held at Altrincham Girls Grammar School on 29 November 2010 with 20 ordinary members present in addition to the committee (minus the interim Chair for whose apologies had been tendered), 2 representatives from Area and one from Friends of Bridgewater Canal (Sale). Membership was recorded as 253; average attendance on the 21 walks arranged was 10 with 3 walk leaders. Keith Povey agreed to be Walks Co-ordinator after Geoff Morton did not wish to be elected. All of the interim officers were approved.

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In the following months, the number of walk leaders had increased to 6, with an average turnout of 8/9 walkers; Kas Kabbani took over as Treasurer following Elaine Batty leaving for family reasons and membership held steady around the 250 mark. By June 2011 it was reported that the evening walks had not been well attended but would continue until September. There were 3 new walk leaders.

At the AGM in November 2011, it was reported that both Wednesday day and alternate Wednesday evening walks were well attended as were the Sunday walks, but the Wednesday walks would be moved to Thursdays to avoid clashing with other groups. Average attendance was around 10 and that Sheila had led a walk using the Hume's Bridge Ferry, which had been saved as part of a Ramblers campaign thus restoring an ancient pedestrian link in the footpath networks in Trafford and Salford. Membership was 244 with a turnout of about 10- 15% of the membership for the walks. Finances continued to be strong. June Mabon had 12 members on her Footpath Team who had carried out an annual winter inspection of definitive Rights of Way within Trafford some 240 paths with a total of 100 kms. The paths were generally in good order but would require effort to maintain that standard.

In April 2012, a short weekend away had been organised at Grassington with 8 members staying for the 3 days and a further 3 joining the Sunday walk. A further weekend was planned for July at Ingleton to walk the 3 Peaks over 3 days. (It was later reported that it had been a successful weekend despite the awful weather.) The committee meeting in April 2012 heard that Ramblers HQ had selected our path maintenance team to show them our work, which, as well as giving us good local publicity, also enabled us to receive Ramblers' funding to allow us to buy our own tools which had previously been loaned by Trafford Council. Also, that Angela had led a Kinder walk from Bridge Car Park on the original route of the Manchester walkers up William Clough to Kinder Downfall and the plateau to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mass Trespass.

At the AGM in November of 2012, it was reported that membership was down to 237; we were in a healthy financial position; 2 mid-week walks each week (Wednesday or Thursday) and Sunday walks were held as well as shorter evening walks during the summer which usually ended at a pub. The areas covered for the walks included Morecambe Bay, Forest of Bowland, Clwydian Hills, Pennine Moors, the Peak District as well as local walks around Dunham Park, the Bollin Valley and the Cheshire Plain. 3 new walks leaders, including Vicky Longbottom, were also added to the Group during the year. Keith Povey stood down as Walks Co-ordinator and was replaced by Gordon Millar. The 19 members of the Footpath Maintenance Team continued their excellent work clearing vegetation, waymarking and surface improvement by laying bark chippings. June Mabon, as always, kept reminding Trafford Council of their responsibilities to ensure that reports of blocked footpaths and other barriers to safe passage were dealt with as swiftly as possible. In addition to the weekends away Lesley Beech had once again organised a successful Christmas Meal.

2013 saw the introduction of longer, more challenging mid-week/Sunday walks to the walks' programme, but they appear to have been better supported by guest walkers rather than RTG members. The Saturday Strolls led by Sheila, Lesley and Angela continued to be popular. Lesley, who had stood down as Social Secretary, had introduced a meal out following the Sunday walk and this was formalised by her

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successor, Moira Bloomfield, to it being held on a monthly basis. There was also a popular break on the Llyn Peninsular, North Wales organised by Vicky with varied and challenging walks in beautiful mountains, coastal paths and countryside. Another 3 day break was held In Ambleside which was enjoyed by about 10 members. Members attending the weekday walks varied between 6 and 16, however the stroller walks of about 5 miles were attended by 15 people on average, although on one walk in Urmston there were 64!! Richard Longbottom took over as Walks Co-ordinator from Gordon Miller. Unfortunately, membership numbers had fallen to 226 at the end of the year (30 September), but finances remained stable. One notable success for June's Footpath Team during the year was the inspector for Urmston made it a priority that a severely overgrown path which was the only formal link between Urmston and The Trans Pennine Trail, was cleared by approaching the Council and the landowner and refusing to take "No" for an answer. However, the efforts by her team were sometimes undermined by Mother Nature, who in one case, reclaimed what was a very walkable path after cutting back grass and nettles within 3 weeks of finishing the job. The moral – if you want to maintain a footpath then you have to walk it regularly, down the centre to make it difficult for growth and easy for walkers.

The high point in 2014 was when Ramblers Trafford Group were awarded the prestigious "Protecting Where We Walk" award for the work done by June's team. The presentation was made to June by the Ramblers President, Kate Ashbrook, at the annual Ramblers General Council Group. In the 12 months to September 2014 the team put in 225 man hours of work which was the equivalent of over £3000 of voluntary work. Membership was recorded in the AGM minutes at 236. There were fewer walk leaders with the consequence that some Sunday walks did not take place, although the stroller walks continued to attract good numbers. During the year Moira resigned as Social Secretary and the post remained unfilled at the subsequent AGM.

Pat Hulland stepped down at the AGM in 2015 as she was due to move to Devon early in 2016. Judith Hunter agreed to fill the position. Membership fell to 220 during the year although the percentage of active walkers in the group increased. However, the Sunday walks were proving to be less popular thus restricting the number of walks on offer. It was also noted that Trafford Ramblers were due to cease functioning as their organiser had decided to retire but a member of that group agreed to circulate their members with details of our group.

By the time of the following AGM in 2016 the Thursday walks maintained their popularity, but not so the Sunday walks which were irregular and generally poorly attended. The Saturday strolls of 2 to 3 hours attracted between 15 and 25 walkers. Membership showed an increase of 4%. Joint walks with Oldham Ramblers once again took place, and RTG had one of their strolls featured in the Greater Manchester Walking Festival. RTG leaders again led a walk for the Kindling Trust to their Farmstart site at High Legh which was followed by tea and cakes at Abbey Leys Farm. The working relationship with One Trafford, the company responsible for the Council's highways, continued to benefit local communities. There was success with the completion of pathwork and new signage in the River Bollin valley. There were no changes to the make up of the committee.

The slow increase in member numbers continued in 2017 with a figure of 234 reported as at the year end. Thursday walks remained popular as did the Saturday strolls, which

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was seen as the main route to attracting new members as new walkers were encouraged to try 2 or 3 walks before joining The Ramblers. Once again RTG took an active part in the walking festivals organised by Transport for Greater Manchester.

In her report to members at the 2018 AGM, Sheila was able to report a further increase in membership to 242, however the main impact on communication was the introduction of GDPR (General Protection of Data Regulation) which meant that members had to give specific agreement to having leaflets and newsletters by electronic means. Richard reported a full programme of Thursday walks for the year with only one cancellation due to severe storm weather. He also said that there had been an increase in the number of walk leader volunteers, and increased attendance on the walks. The Footpath Team of Inspectors continued to monitor all 200 plus Definitive Rights of Way within Trafford, and her Maintenance Team undertook 19 vegetation clearing days. She said that volunteers were always welcome to help with the work and that training and protective personal equipment would be available.

Those members attending the 2019 AGM heard that we had 13 walk leaders with walks taking place in the Clwydian Hills, Formby, and the Trough of Bowland as well as more locally around Cheshire, the Peak District and Greater Manchester. Walker numbers were also reaching the mid 20s. The number of members fell slightly to 236. The incumbent committee members were all re-elected with the addition of Phill Connolly and Vicky Longbottom..

2020 was a difficult year for RTG. Plans had been made to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our founding with weekends away, and dinners. However, Covid-19 put an end to all of them as well as a lot of the work done by the Footpath Inspection and Maintenance Teams. We were fortunate that we were able to have regular walks up to the middle of March. Following the lockdown in that month, walks were stopped until July when there was an easing of restrictions, followed by a further relaxation in August when the committee recommended that a maximum number of 12 walkers be allowed to walk in order to comply with anti-virus protocols. However, we were still able to walk outside of Greater Manchester until October when all activities had to be within that conurbation. All walking activity ceased in November. Membership increased to 244 possibly due to Covid-19 because of increased awareness of the benefits of outdoor activity, especially walking, on general and mental health. The Facebook page which was administered by Phill Connolly helped raise the profile of RTG and attracted enquiries about accessing group walks. He had also arranged for the production of polo shirts embroidered with the group's newly designed logo. At the AGM which was held using video conferencing technology, Angela retired as Chair of the group and was succeeded by Richard Longbottom, whose role as Walks Co-ordinator was taken on by Rosemary Hurley. Angela was unanimously elected as our group's first Life President. Under her stewardship the group has grown through some difficult times to the successful walking group that we have today.

Malcolm Hunter  
April 2021