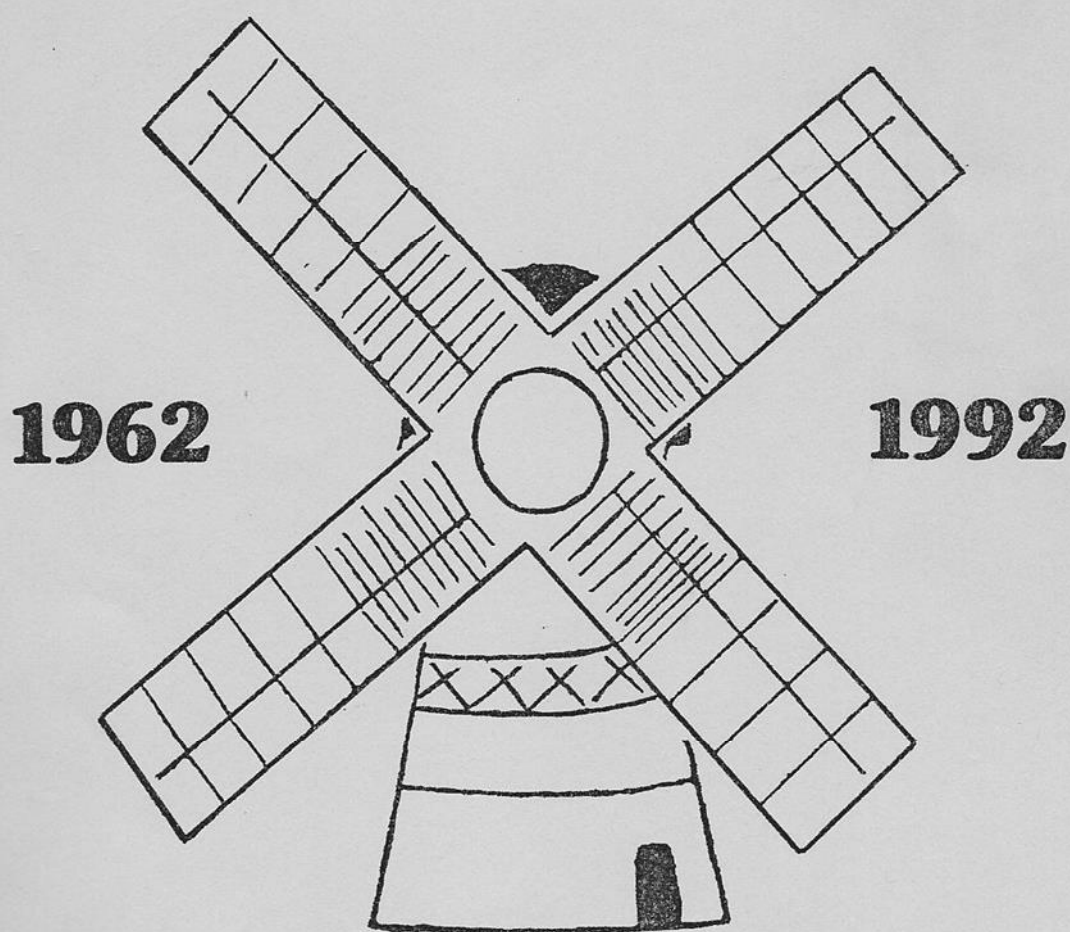


# **MEOPHAM & DISTRICT FOOTPATHS GROUP**



**30th ANNIVERSARY**

ON OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY...

This Anniversary issue  
With memories is permeated:  
So if with nostalgia you are satiated,  
Maybe this is not for you!

But persevere, be not deterred;  
What if in 1992 we are retrospective?  
We have our footpaths in perspective;  
From 1993 we shall be looking FORWARD...

To our 50th Anniversary!



30th ANNIVERSARY - 1992

Foreword by our Chairman - Ken Dare

It is a pleasure for me to have this opportunity of providing the Foreword to our 30th Anniversary celebratory magazine.

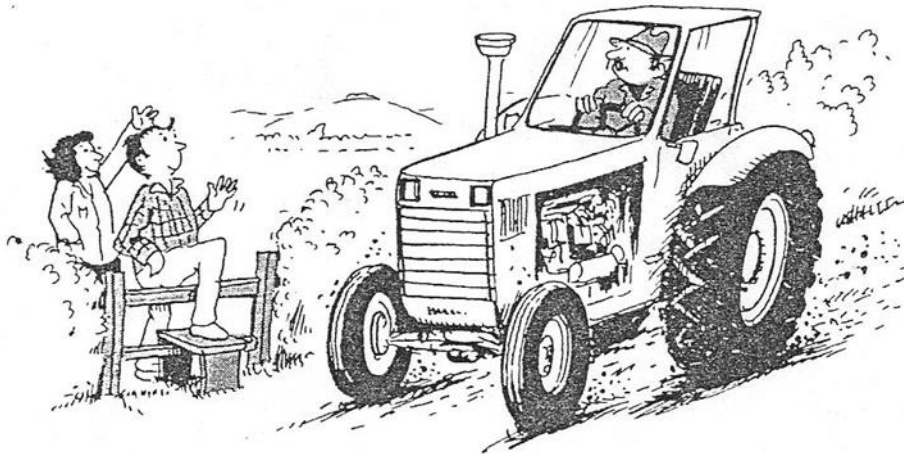
A debt of gratitude is due to the founders of Meopham & District Footpath Group for their foresight in establishing our organisation. An uninterrupted thirty years is an obvious tribute to them and their sterling efforts.

It is worth recalling, briefly, the aims of our Group: to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of public rights of way; to encourage walking; to conserve the countryside and to support other organisations which share our objectives. I believe the contributions of members both past and present to this publication will show just how far thirty years of continuous work have succeeded. The testimony to the Group's success is the pleasure of walking Meopham footpaths.

In 1982, on the occasion of the Group's 20th Anniversary, many past members and friends returned to join in a Grand Reunion; now that we have even more 'past' members, we hope to welcome back a record number in 1992. Various events have been planned to mark this milestone in our history, including a special survey of parish rights of way. The whole operation was carefully budgeted, and the group is indebted to the Parish Council for a generous grant towards our expenses.

The support and enthusiasm of the committee during my period as Chairman has made the position both enjoyable and satisfying. My thanks go out to them. Although my personal knowledge of the Group only extends over a decade or so, I have the distinct impression that the resourceful nature of past committees and their friendship has radiated in a positive way across the whole spectrum of our Group.

Finally, a tribute to our membership, which is flourishing. Whether you are a keen walker, or simply an 'armchair supporter', your continued support forms the backbone of our Group - long may the vibrance and enthusiasm we enjoy today continue into the future.



## THE BEGINNINGS: Legal Groundwork

Pat Wilson

In 1961 a landowner at Priestwood, Harvel, was denying public access to footpath "38" - now 232, leading off byway 287 at 'Scratch Arse Corner' to run north towards Luddesdown. The barricade he put up was daunting - corrugated iron, chain links, barbed wire et al. Remnants lingered until the 1980's. Consulting, for the first time, the 1952 definitive map, we discovered to our delight that the path was shown, thus confirming the legal existence of the right of way. Why, therefore, did Kent County Council demand evidence of its use prior to 1952? It took a year to track down witnesses; over thirty signed statements and at least twenty people turned up at an Inquiry in a packed Harvel Village Hall, to give evidence. Only one spoke in support of the landowner. Our chief asset, however, was having Arthur Skeffington M.P. as our advocate. He thumped the trestle table and challenged the right of the County Council to be demanding such evidence or holding such a hearing. They never did it again, and after six months, we again blazed up the trail. It was a legal triumph. However, out of about eighty public paths in Meopham, at least half were not freely passable; the key to getting them used was clearly clearing the routes and publicising them.



This led to my forming, in 1962, three footpath groups, in Culverstone, Harvel and Meopham (north); although separate at first, they quickly formed an "Association" with a uniform annual subscription of 2/6d (12 1/2 p to you); they held joint committee meetings, and in September of that year a joint AGM in Meopham "New" Village Hall, chaired by John Phillips of Weavers Cottage, Hook Green. Our speaker was none other than William Simmons, influential

Chairman of the Kent County Council Highways Committee, who had chaired the above Hearing! He recalled "crawling and marching many miles over the countryside with John Phillips in their younger days" - presumably in war-time. (Mr Simmons went on to become a supporter of rights of way, and gave me the first six signstones for the Parish.)

By 1964 the Groups were advertising Walks regularly in the Meopham Review, and sent out a joint questionnaire to prospective Meopham Parish Councillors to ascertain their sympathies on public rights of way - quite a daring move. Then Jim Carley brought his business acumen to bear, and the Groups amalgamated, holding their first unified meeting in October 1964. Up for discussion were: stiles, signstones, ploughing, obstructions, publicity, proposed diversion - the basics haven't changed in 30 years!

Soon, as a Parish Councillor (elected purely on a footpath ticket) I was able to suggest a small annual grant to the Group in appreciation of path clearance, and this has continued ever since.

### WE WERE OFF!

Rights of way, unfortunately, did not appear reliably on Ordnance Survey maps, and to overcome this, a junior member had been marking up and numbering paths for the princely sum of 1/6d (7 1/2 p); the Group also loaned a marked-up map on deposit. Gradually, a nucleus of members was able to identify paths, and resist claims that "they do not exist"!

Our next legal battle was to save FP 270 running south from the dog-leg in Heron Hill Lane to Ridge Lane below Plumrush. A landowner was barring the way every weekend with barbed wire; every week one of our members was walking the path, undoing the barbed wire and proceeding (a short way) on her way as the law requires. The landowner applied to Quarter Sessions to stop up the footpath. Only the County Council could defend the case, so we set about finding witnesses: Mrs Gunyon of Rabbits Corner, Bernard Thomas of Oak Trees, Heron Hill, Mr Harriman of Rosemount, David Street, Cecil Roots of School Close (late of Plumrush) and Mr Derham from Meopham Green bakery, who had walked the path to Harvel Village Hall to preach when, on some Sundays, it doubled as a place of worship. As all but one of our witnesses was over eighty years and the case was likely to take two days, I was dismayed to hear it might be heard at Canterbury. When in trouble, Arthur Skeffington was our mentor: "Write to the Court and explain" he said. I did; it was heard at West Malling.

When Arthur Harriman was questioned "Did you ever see people walking the path" he was delighted to answer: "I were a-courtin' Rose on that path - I weren't looking!" Before the last witness was called the owner had thrown in the towel. The Group now regularly clears the south end of this beautiful path.

Also on the legal front, the Group submitted evidence to the Gosling Committee, which paved the way for the Countryside Act in 1968; we also affiliated to the Ramblers' Association and the Commons Society and have supported them ever since. Whereas at first the Group had needed to keep a watching brief over a wide surrounding area (even a problem in the Darent Valley came our way), gradually other Groups were formed on our boundaries and it was more a matter of liaising with them; this we did by appointing a District Secretary.

List of organizations who submitted evidence or comment.

- Liverpool Catholic Ramblers' Association
- Meopham Footpaths Group
- Mid-Herts Footpaths Society
- Mill Hill Preservation Society
- \*The National Association of Parish Council
- \*The National Farmers' Union
- The National Parks Commission
- The National Trust
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Ordnance Survey
- Oxford Fieldpaths Society
- Oxfordshire County Council
- The Peak District and Northern Counties Footpaths Preservation Society
- The Pedestrians' Association for Road Safety
- \*The Ramblers' Association
- The Rochford Hundred Amenities Society
- The Rough Stuff Fellowship
- The Rural District Councils' Association
- The Society of Sussex Downsmen
- Staffordshire County Council



MINISTRY OF HOUSING  
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
WELSH OFFICE

Report of the  
Footpaths  
Committee

"GOSLING"  
COMMITTEE  
1968.

We worked hard to erect maps with marked-up rights of way at salient points in the parish - Meopham Station, the Porches of Meopham and Harvel Village Halls, and Culverstone Primary School. With techniques relatively primitive, we had problems of weather-proofing, and fading of coloured inks, but it was a brave attempt at bringing our message to the public. Education was our aim in broadcasting a Fact Sheet "Footpaths - Legal Position - How to keep them open", which later became incorporated in our membership application form.

In the 1970's, we gave our considered support to local Councils to resist undesirable development in our Green Belt - at David Street, Harvel, at Culverstone, west of the A227, and in Happy Valley behind Meopham Green for a golf course. These representations set a pattern for future Group action to protect our precious countryside.

The need to present a united front to Gravesham Borough Council after Local Government Reorganisation in 1974 led to the formation of the Gravesham Rights of Way Committee, which has met thrice yearly ever since in the Civic Centre. Representatives of Parish Councils and of societies concerned with public rights of way here meet Council Members and Officers; early years of frustration have latterly developed into useful cooperation, as local authorities in Kent have adopted the need for a 'higher profile' for public paths.

In a bid to spread the word to Gravesend itself, we agreed to take part in a National Footpath Heritage Week in June 1980. The Group not only organised a Walk from St Mary Platt to the Tollgate, Gravesend, but ran an Exhibition stand one Saturday in the Anglesea Centre, followed by a week in the Civic Centre. It was notable for its 'green-ness', enhanced by a small tree from which (taped) bird-song emerged! Anyhow, we distributed a lot of Walks leaflets and publicised the Saxon Shore Way, which the Archbishop of Canterbury was opening as part of the Heritage celebrations.

Looking back, the chief thing about the Group has been the pleasure and camaraderie of the walking and the working. No schisms, precious little umbrage, and much good solidarity. It really has been - and is - an integral part of life in Meopham. I must admit: I'm hooked on the Group!



MEOPHAM FOOTPATHS GROUP - EARLY ACTIVITIES  
by J Carley

In April 1970 Meopham Parish Council decided to publish a new version of the Meopham Book, and established an ad hoc Committee for that purpose, endowing it with a grant of £100.3.0d. The odd amount represented unspent funds from the previous financial year. Once this project had been completed, the Committee looked round for some other similar activity, and this provided the opportunity for a scheme which had been in my mind for some time. With the help of Ian Ballantyne I wrote the text of "Six Walks from Meopham Green" and this was published in July 1970. The initial run of 500 copies cost £25.10s.0d, part of which was covered by revenue from advertisers. It sold at one shilling, but with decimalisation looming up the alternative price of 5 new pence was also quoted. This leaflet proved an immediate success, and subsequent editions and re-prints brought the total sales up to over 3,600.

The popularity of the first leaflet soon led to the publication of similar ones for other parts of Meopham and for other parishes, sometimes with financial help from the relevant Parish Councils. The areas covered were Cobham, Harvel, Nurstead, Hodsohl Street, Shorne, Camer, Trosley Park and finally Shipbourne. The total print for these leaflets came to 16,398!

In a similar format the Committee published "Twenty Miles Round Meopham" and "Meopham Nature Trails", the latter being based on some of the Meopham Green Walks, but with copious illustrations of the flora and fauna likely to be met on the walk. By 1983 the text of the early walks leaflets was becoming out-dated, and it was decided to replace the local ones with a new series called "Meopham Walks". These were printed in card form and sold in sets of five. Set "A" was produced in October of that year, covering Meopham Green, and the series has continued.

The publication of these walks leaflets had a most beneficial effect on the local footpath network, and they were accepted as authoritative evidence of the public right to enjoy the countryside, especially in the years before the issue of the new Definitive Maps. Arising from this success I conceived the idea of a long-distance path leading from Meopham into the Weald, if not beyond. The obvious name for this path was the "Wealdway" and with a great deal of help from Alex Evans and others, I was able to publish the first section, from Gravesend to Tonbridge in December 1973. Meanwhile, attempts to find other people prepared to take on the sections from Tonbridge to the coast were proving difficult, and several would-be helpers dropped out. The Tunbridge Wells C H A finally published the section to Uckfield in 1976, but curiously did not use the "Wealdway" title at that time. It was not until April 1979 that Alex and I were able to attend a meeting of all those interested, and the project then seemed on course for completion. Meanwhile, motorway construction had caused some changes to the original route. The project was brought to a final conclusion

30th Aug. 1991

Dear Mrs Wilson,

Thank you very much for your letter and C set of walks. I enclose payment for the guides and postage.

A group from this area have found your guides very clear to follow and look forward to exploring new parts.

Following one of your walks recently we came across fields covered more wild flowers than grass. Mauves, Blues, Whites Pinks, etc. I have not seen anything like it.

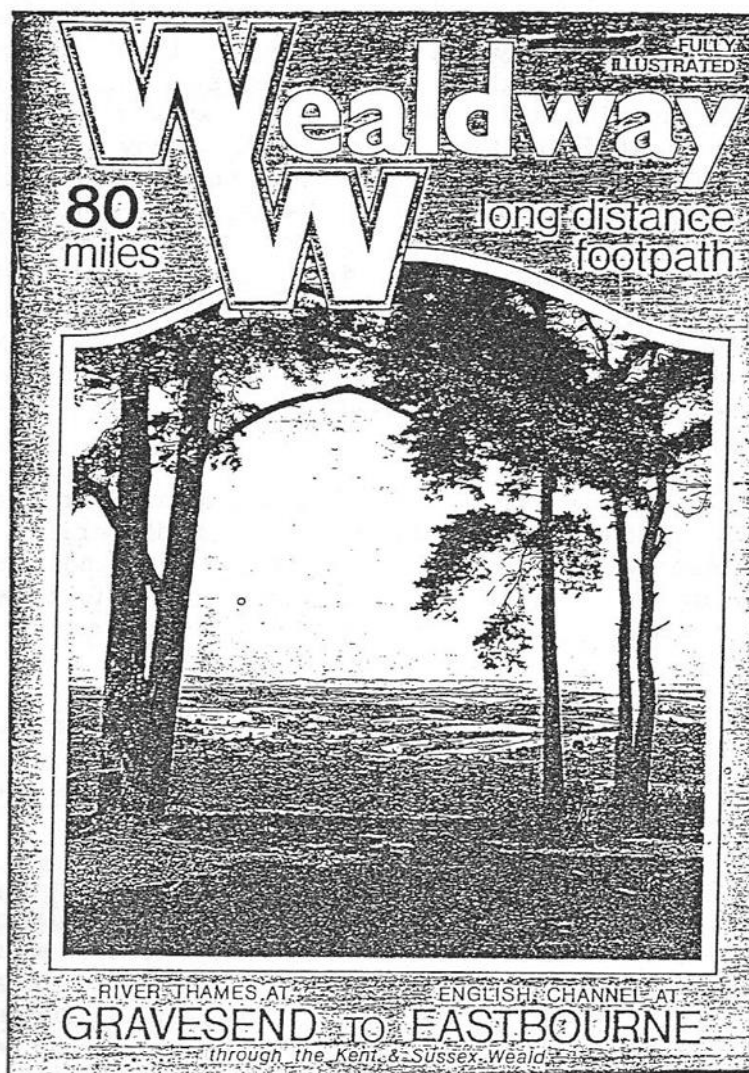
Do you think the farmers are not using chemicals.

Yours faithfully -  
M. Hall

in September 1981, almost 9 years from my first letter to the Ramblers' Association seeking support.

For many years I was the leader of most of the morning walks offered by the Group; Bob Air doing the same for the afternoon ones. Planning and leading these walks brought us face to face with all the problems on the ground. These were generally ones of obstruction etc - and one will always stand out. Croudace had built most of Vigo Village when their plans involved closing and diverting a public path. Their planning permission involved them in undertaking to provide the alternative paths before closing the original ones, but they slipped up and built two terraces of houses across the path. We objected, and in a moment of rashness I told the Press that we planned a protest march through the houses. (This was the time when protest marches were very popular). The press and radio took this up, so a protest march it had to be! We met on the outskirts of Vigo and, guided by Bob Roberts, our Chairman, we duly walked the path, watched by representatives of Croudace. The story made the national press, and reached the Ministry. The Minister told Croudace that she was mindful to revoke their planning permission, but then let them off with a caution. The houses remained unsold for at least 6 months, while the legal position was sorted out.

Not many years later, incredible as it may seem, they did just the same with FP 300 through Vigo, and I have pictures of the front and back doors of one of the houses with a Public Footpath sign pointing the way through it! Once again, it took rather longer to sell than was normal.





## THE EARLY YEARS...

ALEX EVANS reflects on the Footpaths Group 25 years ago, and the contribution it made in the following years to popularising footpath walking.

"When I moved to Meopham in late 1966, I knew little of country walking; only an occasional foray into the countryside with the Orpington YC's gave me any inkling of the pleasures and work which was to come from membership of a footpaths group.

The first exploratory walk in Meopham, with three year old Nicholas and baby Kate in harness, started at Meopham Green. The walk proved disastrous; leaving the south east corner of the Green, footpath 285 degenerated rapidly into undergrowth and was impassable beyond the fork to Wouldham Steps; obstructions at the bottom of the valley remained for many years. Joining Meopham & District FPG, with its main objectives of protecting and improving rights of way was obviously necessary.

The first purchase from Group supplies was the First Series 2 1/2 inch map, TQ66, price six shillings and sixpence. Neither decimalisation nor metrication had blighted our lives, but nor did Ordnance Survey maps then show the rights of way, which therefore had to be filled in by hand. Now knowing where one was apparently entitled to walk, the next purchase had to be a copy of "A Practical Guide to the Law of Footpaths and Bridleways" published by the Commons Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, to which the Group was affiliated. In 1966, walkers were looked on by some as a tiresome minority, often threatened on rights of way with impunity. Local Authorities, whose duty it was to protect our rights, were under-staffed, under-trained and usually un-motivated, despite the 1949 statutory survey by Parish Councils which resulted in our first definitive map in 1952. Many paths had never been properly reinstated after disuse during the war, and in spite of the Group's constant activity, things often got worse. Paths were regularly ploughed and not reinstated, for instance, in Luddesdown, where the hedgerow alongside FP228 in the Bowling Alley was uprooted and the path lost until vigorous representations were made. Dubious unofficial diversions had to be resisted, e.g. at Leywood School House, where walkers were shepherded by barbed wire fencing along too narrow a bridleway, over undrained ground, which rapidly became a quagmire. Stiles were often broken, and nobody admitted responsibility.

The area in and around Meopham has always had great attraction for walkers. A pre-war, one shilling booklet in the "Garden of England" series, called "Field Path Rambles" by Walker Miles, (a nom-de-plume?), describes walks over the Kentish Hills from Wrotham, Meopham and Sole Street. The Group's aims were to restore the paths to their former glory, and to prevent any further loss by legal extinguishment.

It would be hard to claim that the Group had any formal plan, but there were various actions to reverse the trend. There was the legal side, conspicuously led by Pat Wilson, chivvying councils and authorities to do their duty, and making submissions to influence the law makers.

In summer 1970, Christopher Hall of the Ramblers' Association gained a full page article in the Telegraph Supplement entitled "Must we Walk by Writ?"; and as late as April 1974, a Victory for Ramblers was proclaimed when the Lord Chief Justice ruled in the High Court that it was the duty of local authorities to keep all public paths in good repair! Vociferous farmers sought to intimidate walkers, whether alone or in groups. On one Group walk, one such farmer accosted our members walking legally over his land; after ranting on



about "not having fought in the war to have his rights infringed by walkers" he stormed off having thrown the ultimate insult, as he saw it, of calling the leader a "Russian git"! By this time, a year-round walks programme, including summer evening walks, was being led at breathtaking speed by Jim Carley. Often the walk would be in two groups - those attempting to keep up, the others who chatted at stiles and stopped to admire the views, later finding their own way home!

By late 1972, KCC had decided to offer stile kits as their 25% grant towards landowners up-keeping their stiles, but still stiles remained unrepaired. The Group had these kits delivered to the back of the mill for storage, and installed many on behalf of the landowners. A five feet long, five inches diameter stile upright was a heavy load to carry across fields, and many a Group worker strengthened his muscles carrying these and other kit components, not to mention the necessary spades, hammers and saws, in the cause of stile renewal. Even daughter Judith, the third addition to the family, and now a robust four year old, would stride out holding some implement as her contribution.\*\*

Shortly before the Group started, a wonderful path from Eastfield Farm, Priestwood, across to South Street, was extinguished; the Ramblers' Association secretary from London "did not know anybody active on footpaths to contact". It turned out too late that a friend from South Street used the path most weeks to visit Rose Harriman at Rosemount, David Street: the path was needed...

Stiles were useful, too, for waymarking a route; the design and colour were the subject of much debate and false starts, eventually being resolved by a Countryside Commission leaflet; they also promoted the now familiar Acorn symbol for long-distance paths. The Group's contribution to inland waymarking was a yellow painted aluminium arrow, with many dozens being installed where paths changed direction.

In 1969, the Countryside Commission put forward proposals for a long distance path along the North Downs, and the Government gave approval for the North Downs Way. Out of 141 miles, 36 miles of new rights of way were required to complete the route, leading to the warning that "trespass should be avoided". The ensuing bureaucratic dalliance was at odds with Jim Carley's impatience with officialdom and wish to see immediate results. He soon brought to the bookshops a whole series of leaflets, and many a Group member was drawn into "route proving", and detailing his outline descriptions, often on foggy November mornings, so that the new leaflet would be ready for the following Spring. There is an apocryphal story of a walker who set off from Meopham Green to the east instead of to the west. Coincidentally, the leaflet instructions matched the route opportunities on the ground, and it was only when Harvel Church failed to materialise that our walker, now in the parish of Ash-cum-Ridley, realised that something was seriously amiss!\*\*\*

It was also Jim Carley who conceived the Weald Way, an 81 mile long-distance route from Gravesend to the English Channel at Eastbourne, passing through Sole Street and Luddesdown on existing rights of way. With characteristic energy, and assisted by the Group, Jim soon had a Weald Way leaflet in the bookshops. I feel he unjustly never received full credit for his promotion of one of the loveliest long distance routes in the South East.

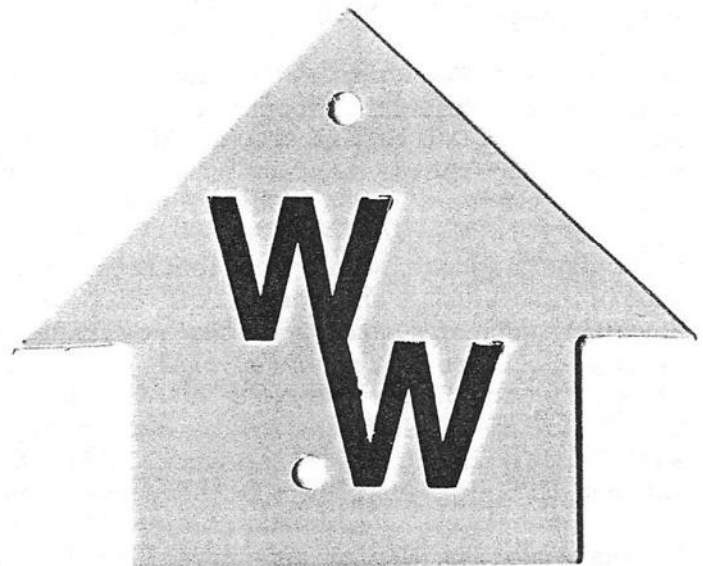
Country walking received a boost with the opening of Trosley Country Park in 1976, with its nature trails and waymarked walks. The annual sponsored Christian Aid walk, from Camer Park each May, waymarked and marshalled for some years by the Group, was a great success. The local paths began to take on a well-used look, and a number of long-standing problems were resolved.

The Group's sphere of activity extended beyond our Parish boundaries, in fact, everywhere we were likely to walk. Whilst we did not always agree with other local Groups, our cooperation in face of a common threat was a great strength, as when we supported the Luddesdown Action Group to save a large part of their parish from invasion by the Ministry of Defence. This was a notable David & Goliath success. (The local, regional, even national campaign to prevent the MoD laying mines, warning the public off rights of way, and training at weekends, has proved ever more justified with the Audit Commissioner's 1992 Report that, far from requiring extra land, the MoD does not use its present land-holdings to full capacity).

This overview of the early years shows that, in spite of many a frustration, the early members achieved much towards fulfilling the objectives of protecting and improving the wonderful legacy of public paths in the beautiful surroundings of Meopham.

\*\* The only trouble was, Alex was 6ft 4ins, his son nearly 6ft, but Group member Elsie Cook was under 5ft, and could barely surmount some of these structures. Ed.

\*\*\* This could have been funnier than it sounds: there was a Harvel Church - a "huted" one, between 1953 and 1978. Many a walker following an old guide, en route for the Amazon & Tiger, has stood perplexed in Sparrowhaugh Lane. Ed.



And from VALERIE BARNARD...

My memories of Meopham Footpath Group go back to 1964 when, just married, Bob and I moved into our first house in the new development in Tradescant Drive. Strangers in the district, but keen walkers, we attempted to explore with only the 1" Ordnance Survey map to guide us, trespassing across Camer Park, then still in private hands.

Seeing the Group's AGM advertised, we went to the Village Hall and joined, remaining members until we finally left Meopham in 1982. On our first Sunday walk with the Group - led by Jim Carley - we got to know Pat Wilson who quickly introduced us to everyone else in her inimitable fashion.

When I gave up work to look after my first baby (no creche in those days) the shock of my isolation at home after a hectic working life was broken - again by Pat who suggested now that I had time to spare, I should become Group Secretary. I did not have a typewriter - let alone a Word Processor - but with the unofficial help of H M Government, newsletters and other correspondence were produced.



Small children made it difficult to attend the Sunday walks and so the concept of pushchair walks was introduced for young mothers in a similar situation. The idea was to identify paths whose surface was firm enough for these vehicles. In practice this was never achieved. Reluctant toddlers were turfed out while their chairs were hauled or bumped over hummocks and ploughed fields. We never managed to remove the mud after trekking across from Meopham Church to Camer Park. Push chairs were more sturdy than the buggies of today, but also much heavier! The Sunday morning walks were varied by evening walks in the summer. In the late spring we organised night time walks to hear the nightingales in the woods above Great Buckland.

I was secretary of the Group for over ten years. At committee meetings we discussed blocked paths, broken stiles, intransigent farmers and difficult Councils (County and Parish), paths ploughed and not restored and diversions, both official and unofficial. There were a number of Public Inquiries. I remember one Inspector who seemed curiously ill prepared for the site inspection of the steep path from Great Buckland to Coombe Hill. He was wearing suede shoes and slipped and slithered on a wet Autumn day, saying he has "seen enough" when half way up the slope. The most important Inquiry was into the proposed extension of the Rugby Portland Cement Works at Cuxton. There were celebrations when we won - but it was a premature victory.

Not just another group of ramblers, Meopham Footpath Group promoted the idea of working with Councils and Landowners to retain and improve the network of paths as a valuable local amenity, so helping to foster the community spirit.

## JOTTINGS FROM ABROAD

Mike Groom

Mike Groom dropped his bombshell with maximum effect during a rare pause at one of our convivial Committee Meetings in late 1991. Mike, our newsletter Nabob of umpteen years:-

"I am going to Kuwait" he said; the silence was prodigious. We were lucky that our ever willing secretary, Gillian Willsher, plugged the gap until, miraculously, Phil and Julie Green volunteered to take over publication. Now, from 3,000 miles away, and in the middle of a sand storm ("my washing has dried like sandpaper") Mike sends his jottings on 20 years in the Footpaths Group.

"As an early resident of the new Vigo Village, I was recruited to the Meopham & District Footpaths Group, and was co-opted to the Committee at my first meeting. I have served ever since, in various roles. I recollect Jim Carley, Valerie Barnard as secretary, a driving force who it transpired was called Pat Wilson, Kenneth Fairfax, Alex Gibson, Harold Greenup and Charles Kentish. About the time I joined the Group, there had been a successful campaign to prevent the extraction of chalk from the beautiful Dean Valley down at Bush in Cuxton, where we supported the Parish Council and Action Group and saved this valuable stretch of the North Downs Way. The Group's prestige was high.

I have represented the Group in many ways over the years, but two were memorable; the first was to stand calf-deep in the mud of the path which runs from Hamilton Lodge (Harvel Road) to the A227, in order to collect a sample of the effluent flowing from the adjacent Fairseat Piggery on to the footpath; could we convince the Public Health Authority that this was a health hazard? The path never dried up, as most muddy paths do; as the sun got hotter, the green slime became more active, the smell got more impressive and the flies more numerous. It was during this time that I met two charming people, Peggy and Alf Burkin - close neighbours of the said piggery, as a result of which I am told Alf lost his sense of smell! In time, the regulations on swill-fed pigs put the piggery out of business.

The next task was to represent the Group at a meeting to preserve Hall Wood (Stanstead), which was to be felled for pulp; not only was it the first time of speaking at a public meeting on a very limited brief; but quite striking was the lady chairman, who had such a 'cut glass' accent that she made the word 'yes' into three syllables. So amazed was I that I became lost for words when called upon to speak. Hall Wood was subsequently coppiced and is all the better for it.

Fetes figure large; for many years I manned the FPG stand at local fetes. With the help of several small children, some home produced and some borrowed, I took over the monopoly from the Alex Evans' family. We had various ways of extracting coins from small children, the Evans' (Cat-a-Waul) (Wall?) being the best but the most labour intensive. Slippers were thrown at stuffed cats - no problem; the difficult bit was recovering them from the hawthorn hedge at the back! Then there was the train, (clockwork), which tottered around a small circular track; the punters had to gamble on where it would stop. A sly operative could manipulate this one so that all the children won in turn, by tilting the warped table. In later days we have advanced via flying footwear to photo competitions, which reflects the age of the writer and his children.

The Group has taken a stand on many issues threatening the countryside in general and rights of way in particular e.g. the proposal for the Meopham Western Bypass - how many people remember that? Or the original M20 plans for Wrotham with proposals for the A227 to be built on stilts from the Vigo to Wrotham Heath? Then, apart from the recent fiasco, there was a short-lived plan some 18 years ago for a High Speed Railway associated with a Channel Tunnel; there has been the long running saga of turning Cobham Mausoleum into a house - a very bizarre project to my mind; all the local footpath groups spent a weekend tramping around alternative routes, to secure the best bargain if the Grand Residence ever came to pass.

There was the Meopham 2000 project; the public meeting at Meopham School was the best free entertainment I have ever had in Meopham, though the Parish Council Chairman and the Developers would probably not share that view. I believe the Group treated all these contentious matters with the correct blend of dogmatism and pragmatism.

An important aspect of the Group's work has been to take decisions on the status of paths, and proposals to divert or extinguish rights. I will mention one only - the drawn-out saga of legally up-grading the path through Happy Valley to a byway. The high point of this was a public meeting in the hall of Meopham School presided over by Kent County Council. Walkers, horseriders, cyclists - all crowded in to give evidence. What made a lasting impression on me was the outrageously stupid nature of some of the claims: one implied a risk to cyclists and road users in general as they might skid on the horse droppings around Meopham Green; another that riders would be at risk, if riding around the Green, of being struck by cricket balls. What about the rest of the users on the A227? Then one woman wanted to open the route so that she could drive a pair of horses, walking behind them and controlling them with reins!

I have enjoyed my time in the Group; I have met many people and made many friends. These include Hans Gunter and Ilse Hansen and the other members of the Neumunster Naturefreunde, a German walking group from Gravesham's twin town. In the early eighties, we helped to welcome this group three times: on the first occasion, seven came and the Group provided accommodation; this led to lasting friendships being formed, and to two more visits, now by a group of forty, necessitating hotel bookings.

A full programme was provided by Group members, as diverse as a visit to Stonehenge, a boat trip to Greenwich and the Meridian, and an evening of musical entertainment at Meopham Village Hall provided by the local amateur dramatic group; and, of course, walks. Compared with their home land of Schleswig-Holstein, Meopham is positively mountainous, especially the North Downs escarpment; Group members gave our visitors a very comprehensive view of our local countryside, with plenty of stops for refreshment and lots of conversation. A good time was had by all.

Footnote:

Mike aims to return to the UK in 1992 and we have commanded his attendance at September's Reunion.

As for the Happy Valley byway: it was the vagaries of Lord Denning which led to such lengthy legal confusion, and Parliament had to legislate in 1981 to clarify the matter.

PCW.

## TRIBUTES

ARTHUR SKEFFINGTON - Member of Parliament and Barrister, was a founder member of the Meopham Group formed for the North of the Parish and later amalgamated with Harvel & Culverstone; the Group was launched from his house - the Old Vicarage - which his family shared with the Foxes. Not only had his expertise saved the Harvel to Luddesdown footpath, but his dedication to rights of way and access to the countryside was to come to fruition in the Countryside Act 1968: as Junior Minister in the Department of Land & Natural Resources, he piloted the Bill through the Standing Committee meetings in face of strong opposition. For instance, he insisted that Highway Authorities should be obliged to sign public paths at roadsides, that headland paths should not be ploughed, that walkers should be guided by waymarks, and that landowners should be responsible for their stiles, with a 25% grant from the Authority.

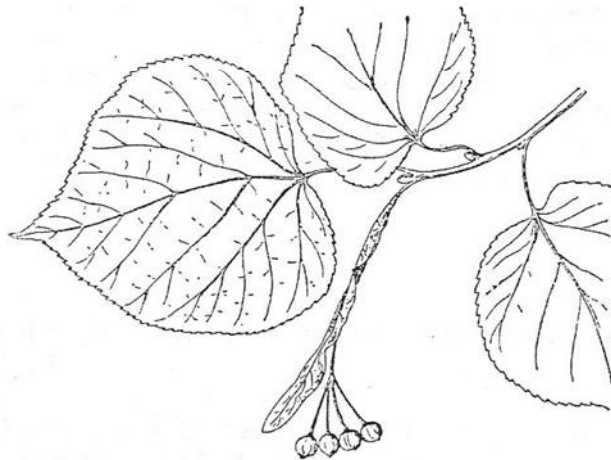
We were puffed up with pride when, in the House of Commons, Arthur praised the Footpath Map we had laboriously erected on Meopham Station - one of three in the Parish. This led us to inspect the map - alas, the coloured rights of way had completely faded and were invisible.

It is relevant to mention that the Countryside Act also provided for 75% grants from Government to Local Authorities to set up Country Parks and Picnic Sites; Kent Councils were slow to act, and it was Arthur who, when most of the Camer Estate was on the market, pressurised Strood District Council to acquire Camer Park - the first Country Park in Kent. The recently publicised Circular Walks from the Park make it a focal point for walkers.

Do you notice the pine trees in Pine Rise? After the road was named, when the road-builders moved in, they started slicing down the pines; an appeal to Arthur produced a telegram to Strood RDC of mammoth length and maximum effect. We have him to thank for those you see today.

Arthur's premature death in 1971 robbed the Group of a dedicated supporter. In his memory the Group planted one of four lime trees - Arthur was a keen beekeeper - along the A227 just south of the Primary School. His real memorial is our heritage of rights of way.

If his spirit hovers above Meopham, Kent even, the sight of so many footpath signs proliferating at our road sides must be soul warming.



"While the lime tree is in flower, it is frequented by myriads of bees which sit on the bloom, extracting liquid sweets, Deliciously."

KENNETH FAIRFAX

When Kenneth - a barrister - retired from his work at Bush House with BBC World Radio, to his attractive cottage at Hodsoll Street, opposite the Green Man, he was free to indulge his life-long passion for walking. As more and more complicated legal problems assailed the Group, we quickly dragged him on to our committee; he walked and worked tirelessly, and now began a period of our opening up dozens of blocked rights of way in Ash-cum-Ridley parish, and battling with the developers to save footpaths going through the newly-built New Ash Green. We thought we would have a fatality on our hands when the DoE Inspector - a recently retired Hong-Kong judge - got his wellies stuck deep in the building site mud; as one came out, the other went in....but we saved the paths we needed.

As soon as the first batch of houses at New Ash Green was built, we helped Kenneth launch the Ash-cum-Ridley Footpath Group, and shortly afterwards, the Istead Rise Footpath Group.

There was a fracas on our borders, near Idleigh Court, where the turbulent occupier had not only accosted our group walkers most unpleasantly; he had also brandished a gun at none other than the Council's Surveyor from Swanley! When Kent C.C. asked us for user evidence, Kenneth called again on Arthur Skeffington for advice, and once again the County was told that they had no right to ask for such facts, since the path's inclusion on the Definitive Map was sufficient proof of the legal right of way.

Sadly, at the height of his legal involvement with the reclassification of these ambiguous "roads used as public paths" all over the county, as well as in and around Meopham, Kenneth died in 1972. In his memory the Group, in collaboration with the Ash-cum-Ridley Footpath Group, put a seat on Hodsoll Street Green. It is worthy of a moment's pause, and thanks, when you visit the Green - or the Green Man.

\*\*\*\*\*

CHARLES KENTISH

Mike Groom remembers that, 20 years back:

"....There was a shadowy figure called Charles Kentish, and it was not for two years or more that I discovered that he was none other than "Charlie Kentish", a professional colleague in the electricity supply industry. He was known for his battered trilby hat and for wearing large boots and no socks.

Charles - as he was known in the Group Committee - was a life-long member of the Ramblers' Association, and could be counted on, in any tricky situation, to stand up for his principles, and for our legal rights on public paths. He was one of those invaluable members who contrive to turn up when most needed - at site meeting or public enquiry.

Alas, Charles was to die within a few years, and as Chairman, I was to preside over the planting of a tree in his memory. On a recent leave, I noticed that the chestnut tree on Meopham Green, in front of the Oast House and the Forge, is now quite sturdy, and no longer in need of its stake."

Footnote

The Group has, over the years, not favoured plaques; the seat at Hodsoll Street is inscribed, but the memorial trees are not labelled. PCW.



THE SAGA OF THE SIGNS  
by Pat Wilson

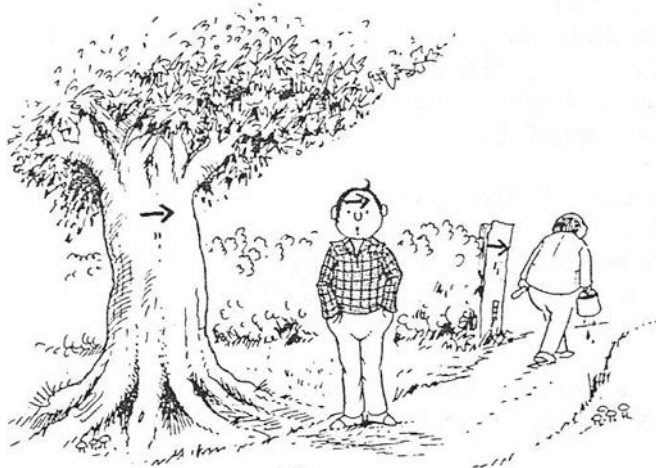
In about 1950 when I started walking in Meopham, there was a scattering of green metal signposts with arms showing destinations; Kent County Council supplied parishes with six at a time; but it was like the Forth Bridge - before they got to the end of the County's Parishes, half the signs in the first had been removed or vandalised. I estimated that at best the job could not be completed before the year 2030, and the County Council officers did not disagree. All too often, occupiers denied the existence of a path largely because there was no sign where it left a road.

It was against this background that, as a parish councillor, I received my copy of the Review published by the National Association of Parish Councils. In it I read an article about a village which had sought advice of the Charity Commissioners as to how they might dispose of funds they held for the benefit of their Village Fire Brigade, long defunct. They were told that no, they could not spend it on the Cricket Club, since not all villagers took part in it; but they could spend it on their footpaths! As a result they had bought the Senlac Stone Footpath Signs - the winners of a national competition run by the Commons, Open Spaces & Footpath Preservation Society (now known as the Open Spaces Society, to which the Meopham FPG is affiliated). Their attraction was that they were durable, and cost only 52/6d. (just over £2.50 to you!) Nagging produced a present of six of these stones for the Parish from the KCC and these were the first in Kent.

This started a partnership: for every one the Group bought, the Parish Council provided another. The most time-consuming work was working out and spacing the lettering of destinations and arrows to suit positions where, with luck one stone could indicate two footpaths. Checking each batch delivered was heavy work, but essential, if only to discover two stones with Sussex destinations - the swop took weeks.

The angle of positioning the stones was all-important, as every walker will know who has stood and scratched his head at Woodhill pondering the stone intended to guide strangers to Harvel or Luddesdown; this would not have happened except for an interesting act of sabotage; the evening before Council workman were due to concrete in a whole batch, we put in sticks with small boards showing the correct angle; by 9 a.m. the next morning, every one had been removed!

However, the stones mushroomed in Meopham, and in proselytising mood, the Group donated two stones each to Luddesdown, Cobham and Ash-cum-Ridley Parishes; one in Ash was removed, but it was unwisely dumped alongside another footpath, and consequently retrieved by the County Council!



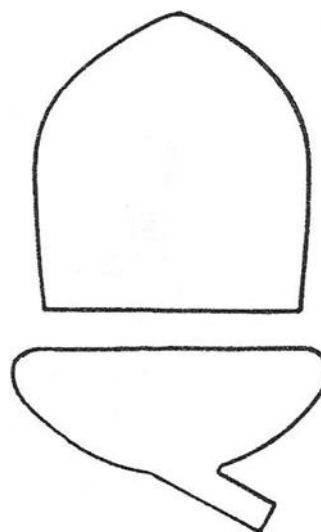
Of course, we had our fatalities in Meopham; one wit reversed the stone at Copt Hall footpath, chalking on the back "RIP"! Up at Ham Hill, the farmer/occupier regularly dropped a sack over a donated stone, and this helped lead to the 1968 Countryside Act's making it illegal to destroy, damage or deface signs or notices servicing the same purpose as signposts. The sacking stopped in due course. Our most vulnerable sign was near the entrance to what is now Camer Park, directing walkers across to Meopham Church; the night Kennedy was assassinated, we were having a Committee meeting at Weaver's Cottage on Hook Green, the home of our esteemed Chairman, John Phillips, who did much for the Group before a too-early death. We decided to sign this path - near his home - in his memory. Imagine our frustration when the stone quickly disappeared. The signpost replacing it also vanished; now the path is marked by what we referred to as a 'tombstone' - one of the next batch of stones supplied 'free' by the County Council. They have the merit of standing higher out of vegetation; the disadvantage of being so heavy that volunteers were no longer enthusiastic about transporting or erecting them. But now that the County Council had a duty (after 1968) to sign paths at the roadside, stones were proliferating all over the County.

With the promotion of colour coding by the Countryside Commission (1985) the Group, working with the Council, began to paint stones - yellow for footpaths, blue for Bridleways, and later, red for byways; between 1991 and 1992 all parish stones have been painted or repainted by voluntary labour.

In 1990, Kent County Council decided on a 'higher profile' for public rights of way, and agreed to spend more on signing; they reverted to the old type signposts with arms, but without expensive destinations. We are delighted. We are having our fair share of removal, 'arm-twisting' and traffic fatalities, but after decades of surveys, mapping, lobbying - in fact, toil and trouble - we feel the Ways Ahead are truly marked in Meopham.

The first long-distance path to be graced by the Countryside Commission ACORN symbol was the PENNINE WAY, 'invented' in 1935 by Tom Stephenson who, as Secretary of the Ramblers' Association, to which the Group was affiliated, came and inspired us at our 1965 AGM. He used to say that the only reason he could see for choosing an acorn symbol was, that it took as long to complete the Pennine Way as it took an acorn to grow into an oak!

Acorn symbol on our nearby North Downs Way long-distance footpath. →



MEOPHAM & DISTRICT FOOTPATH GROUP

1962 - 1992

30TH ANNIVERSARY

For three decades we've tramped the land  
from Upper Bush to Trosley.  
The company is always good,  
- well, mostly!

It started off in modest form  
in nineteen sixty-two,  
expanding so continuously  
from that devoted few.

Congratulations must be due  
to those who led the trail.  
Long may they be there to guide us,  
long may their cause prevail.

Our emblem is the Windmill,  
that dominates the Green.  
Many a happy rambling tour  
has this "Great Landmark" seen.

Let us not rest on "past esteem"  
or dwell on thoughts of "might have been",  
but rally now, around the Mill  
then go awalking with a will.

Take up the cause,  
get in your stride,  
and wear your Meopham shirt  
with pride.

Wilbur.



From Absent Friends....

Gwen Geaton, founder member and collector 'par excellence', who moved from Norwood Lane to Wadhurst:

"This is a lovely district in the High Weald, but I often think that the walks in Meopham were more varied... I am so sorry that we are rather too far away for a visit; John and I walk every day and take holidays in walking districts. That "Wealdway" was a great work; I have the plan of it. We sometimes walk on the Ashdown Forest part of it.

With all our best wishes and remembrances to those who remember us."

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Phyllis White of Ash Keys, Whitepost Lane, Culverstone, writes from Surrey:

"It is nice to hear that you are still actively engaged in the battle for rights of way. The efforts (of the Group) are much appreciated, as I use the footpaths in pursuit of my favourite hobby, which is wild plant hunting and recording, hopefully to help provide a basis for the assessment of conservation needs, as well as enjoyment. I wish the Society many more decades of activity into and beyond the next century, and congratulations on the first thirty years... Have a good time!"

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Ernie Hele, of Tradescant Drive, writes for Ivy and himself, from Ludham, Norfolk:

"...memories now form a very important and pleasant part of our lives, particularly the years 1962 to 1970. Having settled into Tradescant Drive, we were delighted to find that we had a local footpath group in the village, and we promptly joined, not realising at the time what an important decision this would turn out to be, even extending into my retirement. Our initial intention in joining the group was that it would enable us to discover the footpaths in the area, but we were soon caught up by the enthusiasm that abounded and were soon involved in committee meetings, discussions, footpath clearing, signposting, legal matters, and all those things that made life very much worth while. Little did I realise at the time, that the experience and knowledge I gained would be so useful to me when I retired to Norfolk, where I became very much involved in Ramblers' Association matters.

We still believe that Meopham has the finest network of footpaths to be found in the country, and we were lucky to have had so keen a Walks Leader as Jim Carley. In the days when cereal crops were grown very much taller than today, we used to stick to the line of the path in single file, and follow the head bobbing up and down in front. On one occasion, Jim insisted on our walking across the footpath on the pig farm, and we were knee-deep in pig slurry. Ivy actually lost one of her wellies and we had the horrible job of pulling it out by hand. Phew!

We both consider that we were very lucky to have lived in Meopham, and had the good fortune to be involved with the Meopham & District Footpath Group and its intelligent members; we are indeed so sorry that we are not up to making the journey in September.

Wishing you all the very best, and every success in your Anniversary Celebrations."

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BEWARE JOINING THE GROUP!

A contribution from Anne Waugh, one-time Secretary of the Group

"About 20 years ago, I joined the walking group with the intention of finding out where the footpaths were, and then returning to my walks on my own. Little did I know how that decision would change my life.

It was not long before I found myself on the committee. After a few meetings I decided I was quite inadequate as a committee member; everyone else seemed so clever talking about footpath numbers, "CRFs", Green Lanes, definitive maps etc. However, I was persuaded to stay on and then found myself as Secretary of the Group. I had to learn all the jargon. This led to my representing the Group at a Public Inquiry, and to meetings with Gravesham Council; also to leading walks.

On reflection, I must admit to spending many happy hours walking with extremely friendly people, enjoying the social occasions, and the Sunday morning clearance work in the winter months. I have also made many friends over the years.

The moral of this tale is; if you have friends thinking of joining, or have received a copy of this magazine, and are wondering whether to join, it will change your life, and you may very well be asked to join the committee, which I would recommend. You may even find out what a "CRF" is; the only problem being that now they are referred to as RUPPs!

Thank you, Meopham Footpath Group, for giving me so much pleasure over the years, and the knowledge to go on fighting for our precious Rights of Way.

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BEWARE SNAKES!



This notice - on footpath 259 (west branch) at Foxendown, "behind the houses", understandably deterred walkers. This gradually sloping path alleviates the vicious climb from Brimstone Bottom to Foxendown, and walkers may not know that its very existence was twice under threat: First, shortly before the Group was formed, when the Parish Council's support for its closure as "not being needed for public use" was resisted by one of our founder and present members - Dorothy Fox - who, as a Meopham Parish Councillor, objected to its loss.

It subsequently became choked with overgrowth and nettles; and an individual effort to spray these led to accusations of cats falling sick, and to threats of prosecution. (Moral: leave spraying to the Local Authority!). Worse, debris from an adjacent aviary was systematically emptied onto the path. However, evidence of use from parishioners living in Dean Lane, near Dene Manor, saved the day. They used, and continue to use, byway 286 and footpaths 258 and 259 to walk to the A227 and to The George Post Office/shop. The essential needs of collecting pensions, shopping, and catching the 'bus proved beyond doubt that this path was, and is "needed for public use".

Pat Wilson.

## THE COLLECTORS

No history of the Group would be complete without a special word of gratitude to our local band of collectors - past and present. Their unremitting efforts, year in, year out, have been the greatest possible contribution to maintaining our membership. That the same names appear for decades on the collectors' lists of members, bears this out clearly, when comparing their lists with the transient postal membership. Without a dedicated volunteer to collect their subscription - and perhaps knock many times before they are successful - members simply fall away.

For the Group to have an effective voice in matters of importance, it is vital to have a strong membership. For this achievement we must record our very warmest thanks to the Collectors.

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### THOSE LETTERS.....!!!

Much has been written about the endeavours of the Group - the walks programme, the footpath maintenance and the legal battles; but mention must be made of Valerie Barnard's letters. She wrote hundreds of them - I should know! As Parish Clerk, I was on the receiving end of many of them. After due consideration by the Parish Council, I was required to regurgitate most of them to the Divisional County Surveyor. That harrassed man rushed round one day and handed me a letter which said: "thank you for your letter concerning FP232, and for your fourteen other letters of even date."

Valerie's letters did much to establish the Group as a force to be reckoned with amongst all those who had power to influence matters affecting Public Rights of Way.

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BEER DRINKER OF ISTEAD RISE.....ran the Gravesend Reporter headline in 1970. Not quite the image I wished to project as the first woman parish clerk of Meopham! It was earned when I unwittingly agreed to Pat Wilson's short notice plea to sit in at a Local Inquiry in Southfleet, into a farmer's application for a path extinguishment order. Having moved into Gravesend, I didn't even know which path it was all about - but my ignorance was soon dispelled, when I realised this was the path I had used for eight years from home to the Black Lion at Southfleet. It was my route to Broadditch pond with my little daughter too, but that didn't offer such a sensational headline for the local paper.

I fidgeted in my seat all day, listening to the spurious arguments of the farmer's solicitor, and of our side, but lacking the intimate knowledge of the path necessary to refute them. Well, my turn came precisely at four o' clock, when the ancient inspector inquired if anyone else wanted to speak. Suffice it to say, the farmer didn't get his order!

Melda White

## WALKING - 1842 STYLE

As presented in the "Gravesend Omnibus" of 1842 (anon), with acknowledgments to Gravesend Library.

Researched by Ken Costin of the Meopham & District Footpath Group.

### A JOURNEY OVER LAND TO COBHAM VIA SINGLEWELL

Who has ever been at Gravesend without hearing of and seeing Cobham? This quiet village is situated about five miles from Gravesend by the road and about four and a quarter by footpath, and in getting there you must pass through the little village of Singlewell....the fields on either side are most beautiful, interspersed with hop plantations and woodland scenery, and now and then a little cottage, and a few merry children gambolling about to diversify the picture.

We commenced our exploring walk at the town pier,....and the following are the notes we made....elbowing our way on the footpaths we rushed into Messrs Carlin and Town's cigar divan, the first house on the right, for two principees, and having replenished our case, looked into Lovell's for a drain of 'summat short' previously to commencing our peripatetic excursion, and real good grog he has for sale.

Progressing upwards we could not fail to throw a sheeps' eye at the bewitching wife of the man of dough, who ever smiles loveliness on everybody, and we believe ever did.

A little higher, and as we have to see some of the gentle sex, must of course look into Simmon's the Truefit of Gravesend, where for the magnificent coin of sixpence, we obtained such a revisor of our nob by dint of the curling irons and bear's grease, seldom witnessed, and leaving this emporium of fashion we started upwards in petrified astonishment at the magnificent portico of the TOWN HALL. Sure such a place was never seen, certainly we never beheld its like before....but we won't walk too fast up High Street, otherwise we may omit to notice the ROSE INN....now presided over by one Mr Honeysett....a more rough spun, uncouth or unfit fellow for an hotel and tavern keeper, we certainly never came near. Higher on up the other side is the "Star & Diamond" Coffee House, where you may get a cheap breakfast....and no necessity of stumping up to the waiters.

Arriving at the top of High Street, the chief place in the town we turn and look back at the wooled houses, and narrow road, and inwardly exclaim that we never saw such a High Street before, and almost wish that some charitable individual would make a bon-fire at each end, and set flames to the whole affair, not excluding the Town Hall....Our cigars being out, we walked into the bar of the Prince of Orange at the top of this street to light them, merely casting a grin at the prettiest barmaid in Gravesend who presides over the spirit department at the house.

Crossing the main road we arrived at the Nelson Hotel;...the first buildings to the left are the Almshouses...We are now strolling up Windmill Street...on the right we arrived at an enclosed burial ground....passing up the rising ground (there) stands TULLEY'S BAZAAR; the melodious strains of music within and the crowds of ladies promenading, fill the mind with pleasing joyous feelings; (there is) a connecting link with the CLARENCE HOTEL,

"Easeher, young gentleman," said Jerry Hawthorne, " you are stepping out too fast up this mountain - recollect the thermometer of my brain is about a couple of hundred out of the shade, and before walking further, a glass of soda and sherry won't hurt us" - so in we march....

We arrive at that most magnificent of all Cockney Hotels, TIVOLI TAVERN

Carlins & Town's Cigar Divan  
Lovell's Pier Hotel

TOWN  
PIER

WEST ST.

EAST ST.

BULL YARD

"Man of  
Dough"  
Sign

Burgess~  
Baker.

No.4 HORN YARD

BANK STREET

Simmons~ SWAN  
Barber. No.19 YARD.

MARKET ALLEY

TOWN HALL.

ROSE INN. No.24.

H  
I  
G  
H  
S  
T  
R  
E  
E  
T.

"Ferry Boat  
Bookings"

STAR & DIAMOND  
Coffee House

"Bookings  
for Coaches"  
~ "up and down."

PRINCE of  
ORANGE

NEW DOVER

ROAD

NELSON Hotel

Almshouses

W  
I  
N  
D  
M  
I  
L  
L  
S  
T  
R  
E  
E  
T.

BURIAL  
GROUND

TULLEY'S BAZAAR. No.16.

CLARENCE HOTEL Nos.72A,B,C,D.

(Clarence Row)

(Clarence Place)

TIVOLI TAVERN.

Old  
PRINCE OF ORANGE

OLD DOVER ROAD

GRAVESEND  
1842.

Not  
to Scale

N.  
↑



1836.....on the brow of the hill we sit down on a rural seat, and looking over Northumberland-bottom, Perry-street, Swanscombe-wood, North-fleet, and the Thames, with the Essex-hills behind, we rest for the present.

Crossing the old Dover road which flanks the rear of the hill, and opposite the end of the Prince of Orange, commences the lane leading to Singlewell, and bearing a little to the left we come to a gate and a stile, which is the footway to the same village.....a lane, leading across from Perry-street to Parrock Farm, to get over to which is the most awkward stile in the whole county of Kent, and the universal dread of the Ladies. If we were as much out of favor with the fair as this stile, we should be miserable beings. Immediately opposite is a "nice little love of a stile" to climb over which, occasions no trouble, and in front of us stands the well beaten path, which pedestrians cannot miss.....

....Occasionally, we turn round to view the town and country we have left behind us, of which we have an excellent view, as the path is a gentle ascent the entire distance, and exactly two miles, and a quarter from the Town Pier we enter the village of SINGLEWELL,.....turning to the left we pass the old well, and on the right .....is the George Hotel Tavern and Coffee House, kept as is well known by HARRY WATERMAN,.....having refreshed ourselves with glasses of his celebrated beverage.....both Hawthorne and ourself quitted, without having occasion to stoop on leaving his portico or entrance, the same having been recently raised for our express accommodation. Passing the grounds attached to the George, we come to a revolving wicket, which is the entrance to the celebrated MILE FIELD, through which leads the footpath to Cobham, cutting off a large portion of the distance by road. This field is of great extent, probably a hundred and fifty or more acres, and the more you walk the longer it seems to be - Jerry Hawthorne very appropriately termed the same a "toe-biter"; at the end of the said mile field, we came to the pleasant village of HENHURT, vulgo HENNESS, which consists of half a dozen small cottages, at the third of which the weary traveller may obtain humble refreshment, for upon a small black board on the top of a stick, appears the poetic couplet:

TABLE BEARE  
SOLD HEAR!

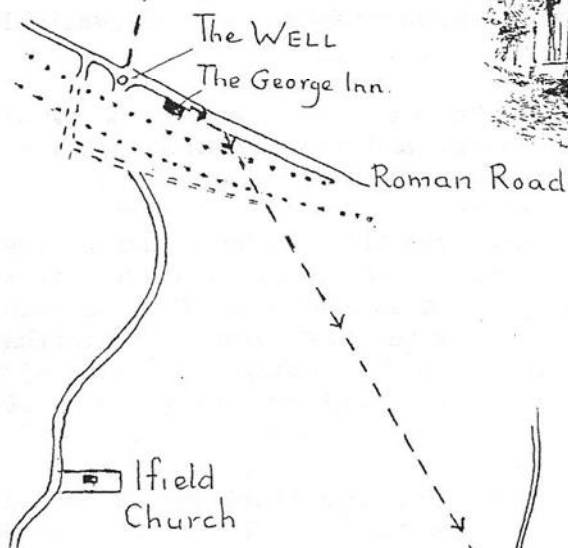
The lane at this juncture turns about, and on the left is a gate, leading by another well beaten path thro' an immense field of clover to Cobham - this field is not much less than the last, and about the centre is a large chalk hole, in which if any one fall in tracing their way home at night, the chances are they will get hurt. Another tolerably sized field, and two smaller ones bring us to Cobham; on entering which we pass the reservoir or well, supplying the village with dirty water;.....a little further on is the celebrated LEATHERN BOTTLE mentioned by Boz in the Pickwick Papers.....on the right is a small building comfortably furnished, it is called THE CAGE, which would have puzzled Jack Sheppard to get out of \*.

We must not forget to remark that on the right is a large windmill kept by Mr Shearman.....he shewed us in the politest way the whole machinery of the mill, and we drank success to him on its summit, our black coats having been made into white ones before we arrived at the bottom. A few yards further brought us to the Ship.....our walk had created a relish for dinner.....to mention the good wines and things we partook of here would be a work of superogation.....Mr Duke (Parish Clerk) shewed us very kindly over the old church and all its monumental brasses, and antique carvings, well worth a visit to the village to inspect.

\* An 18th Century thief who became a popular hero, escaping four times from prison before being executed at Tyburn.

From Gravesend

SINGLE WELL



*Drawings in the Works 1864*

SINGLEWELL 1864

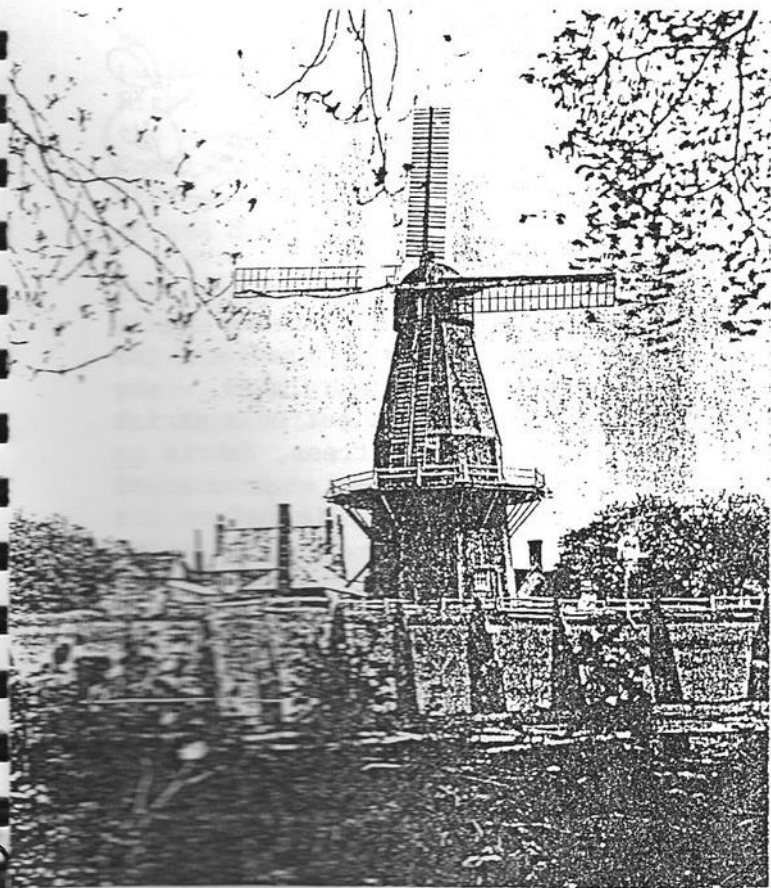
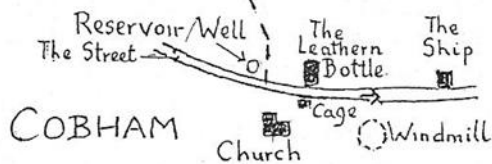
HENHURST.

Chalk Hole

Not to scale, but  
NW end to Cobham  
Church is c. 2½ mls.

--- 1842 Footpath  
 === 1992 diversion  
 using A2 underpass  
 ::::: 1992 A2

N



COBHAM WINDMILL c1900

MEOPHAM PARISH PUBLIC PATHS SURVEY

At the 1990 Annual General Meeting it was decided that the Group carry out a survey of all the public rights of way in Meopham Parish, and produce a written report to coincide with the Group's 30th Anniversary. This idea had arisen some time ago, and the Anniversary Year provided an excellent opportunity of putting theory into practice. Its purpose was to establish the condition of each right of way, and to create a database to assist in ongoing and future negotiations with local authorities and landowners.

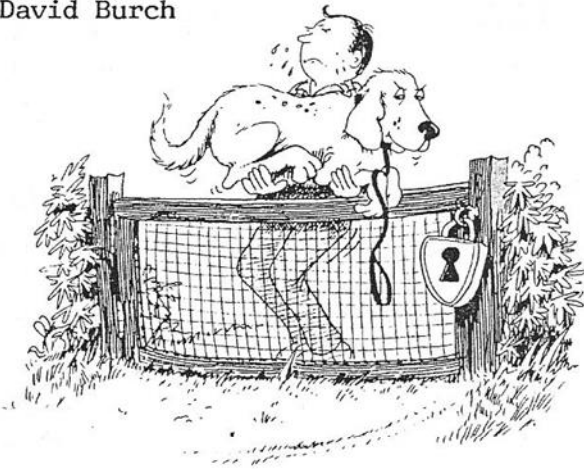
This undertaking is now complete, and the final report is being forwarded to the Parish Council and our Local Authorities. Additional copies are available on loan from the Group Secretary.

The work was carried out by twenty-two volunteer members, and as with all successful projects, there was a lot of hard work and time involved with the planning and preparation, as well as with the actual survey work.

For many of the volunteers, it was reminiscent of their school and college days, having to attend meetings, filling in forms, and taking part in a trial survey, in order to understand fully the legal niceties between, for instance, a "hazard" and an "obstruction"; the limitations of use relating to footpaths, bridleways, byways and Roads Used as Public Paths; and becoming conversant with the recommendations of British Standard 5709: 1979 relating to stile measurements.

Gravesham Borough Council were advised in advance of the final Report and of the problems identified from the survey. Thanks to the willing cooperation of the Public Rights of Way Officer, we are already seeing many of the problems rectified.

David Burch



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We feel that this does scant justice to Dave Burch's labour of love in coping with this long job from beginning to end. Having painstakingly formulated the survey questions, it was Dave - backed up by Eve's coffee and cakes - who patiently educated us volunteers at his home, before taking us out on a parish path beset with problems, barbed wire, broken stiles, fallen trees, debris on the ground and holes in it, and so on. It must be the only time we have asked the Public Rights of Way Officer not to take action quickly, ie before the trial survey was through!

Dave even offered to provide an escort for any lone female surveyor who might be apprehensive....now, if only he had made that offer at the AGM, we might have had as many volunteers as we have paths!

Ed.

## THE GROUP TODAY

The Meopham & District Footpath Group today is a very active group, with a membership of over 200 family members drawn from an area bounded by the Thames to the north, the Medway Towns to the east, Bromley to the west, and Maidstone in the south. It is spread roughly over the area covered by our walks with the greatest concentration in Meopham and Gravesend. The backbone of our activity is the regular Walking Programme, details of which appear in our thrice yearly newsletter, and are reproduced each month in the 'Meopham Review'. Our Sunday walks - two a month - are very well attended; too well sometimes, when we have had as many as fifty out at a time. In the summer, a monthly evening walk includes one late-evening bird stroll; alas it is becoming more and more rare to hear the nightingales of earlier years. In this year's programme, you will see two all-day walks, which is a new venture for the Group. We now have a team of some twenty keen and able walks' leaders. This results in a varied and interesting programme, without acting as a leader becoming a burden to just a few people. However, organising this team is a demanding job in itself. Mindful of our walks' leaders' responsibility for safety, they have, this spring, attended a First Aid course.

The Group continues to be actively involved in clearing parish footpaths; about half a dozen usually turn out one morning a month, out of the growing season, to reduce the work-load of our hard-working Public Rights of Way Officer at Gravesham, Anne Waugh. The Parish Council continues to make a donation to Group funds in recognition of our service. We have also helped to transport the Ramblers' Association London Commando Group of volunteers, who are called in by Gravesham when a path becomes virtually impassable; they need ferrying between Station and work-site; some of us work with them, and we have even provided overnight accommodation.

With the designing and producing of T-shirts and sweat-shirts, we have been represented in such far away places as Corfu, China and Australia, to name but a few. These have been very popular and have been a means of increasing the Group's funds.

Local fetes also see our banner on show, together with the familiar Walks Leaflets, which we also distribute to local sales outlets. As re-printing becomes necessary, we are re-surveying to bring the text up to date.

We are consulted by Gravesham Borough Council on proposals to change the public path network - a highly legal process; we are represented on the Gravesham Rights of Way Committee, a liaison committee which meets three times a year at the Civic Centre; also on the Parish Council's Recreation & Rights of Way Committee. In this way we keep aware of path problems arising in the area. Through our continued affiliation to the Ramblers' Association, and the Open Spaces Society, we keep in touch with developments on the national scene.

The social side of Meopham Footpath Group has developed following a successful dinner some three years ago. This proved so popular that a function has been organised every year, culminating in three events in this, our 30th Anniversary year - the Dinner in June, the Buffet Luncheon in September, and another Hot Pot Supper in November.

So, you see, the Group today is very active!

Gillian Willsher.

### Note

Our Secretary understates the case: our Chairman and Secretary have, together, virtually created the social side of our activities in recent years, and have definitely filled a gap. Ed.



## THE WAY AHEAD

Because our paths are so much better than they were 30 years ago, it would be easy to be complacent; this would be dangerous because, although we are now seldom confronted by major obstructions locally, other more serious threats loom on the horizon and are often more difficult to resist.

Our Green Belt and farm land comes under increasing pressure to be released for development in various forms, from road and railway building to mineral extraction, housing and superstores; from golf course complexes to clay-pigeon shoots, war games, and other 'organised' open-air recreation. The move towards a more closely-knit Common Market and attendant agricultural policy is unlikely to offer us any comfort. All this means keeping our eyes skinned for potentially damaging proposals. On the other hand, there are grounds for optimism. We now have a relatively up-to-date Definitive Map (1987) after waiting 35 years. The Countryside Commission's national survey having found that over half our paths were "effectively unavailable" to an average walker, they declared that "The Rights of Way network is by far our most valuable countryside recreation asset" and then set out a detailed agenda by which Highway Authorities should improve their networks by the end of the century.

This "higher profile" is now reflected in Kent County Council's "Public Rights of Way Strategy" and by substantially increased budget provision for public access for 1992/93. Meopham is all set to beat the target date for signing all path ends by 1994.

Furthermore, a new day dawned in 1990 when Parliament passed the Rights of Way Act, requiring better restoration of paths after ploughing, to keep them visible on the ground and clear of crops (except grass). The new County policy of taking firm action against offenders is bearing fruit, and the Group can surely look forward to pleasant cross-field walks - Meopham Church to Camer Country Park, for instance - such as they have seldom enjoyed over the past thirty years.

We should always remember that the footpaths are a glorious heritage for us and for generations to come to enjoy. The work we do to ensure these ancient rights of way remain open should not be regarded as a burden but simply a part of the fun we share. The way ahead is as exciting and enjoyable today as it was 30 years ago, and may it remain so in the decades that lie ahead.

Ken Dare



COMMITTEE MEMBERS 1991/92

Office

Chairman:  
Vice Chairman:  
Secretary:  
Minutes:  
Treasurer:  
Walks:  
Newsletter:  
Newsletter:

Ken Dare  
Peter Adams  
Gillian Willsher  
Margaret Barnard  
Melda White  
Peter Marsh  
Philip Green  
Julie Green

Other responsibilities

Path clearance  
Social activities  
Joint editor - magazine  
Joint editor - magazine  
Joint editor - magazine

Members:

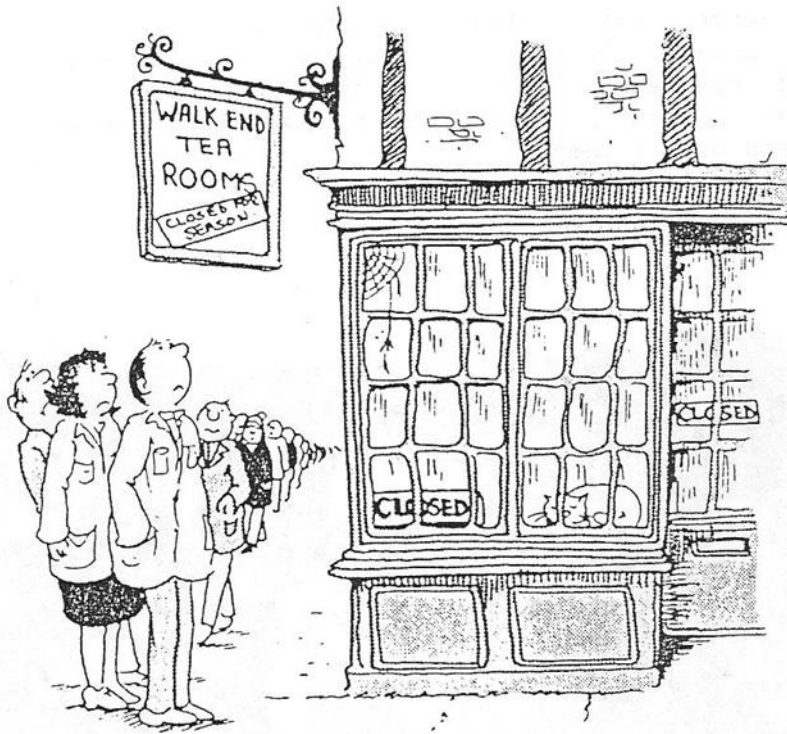
David Burch  
Pat Wilson  
Fred Howton  
Reg Brown

Survey  
Joint editor - magazine

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## World News Roundup



Chairman Chris Hall (top) and founder Wally Smith.

### Take a walk

Britain's Ramblers' Association is campaigning for walkers to be given legal right to use of all woodlands, coastline and river banks.

At the launch of its Ramblers' Manifesto, the Association urged political parties to make election promises to introduce a general right of access over all open areas.

Copies of the manifesto — described by Mr Chris Hall, association chairman, as "a charter for every citizen with two feet" — are to be sent to all prospective MPs.

The 14-point document urges legislation to enshrine a general right of access for peaceful enjoyment to all open areas "subject to reasonable restrictions for the protection of wildlife and other interests."

It says farmers should be subsidised, possibly with EC grants, to maintain and signpost footpaths at a time of rising interest in walking.

It also calls on political parties to promise to open all blocked footpaths by the year 2000 and create legally-binding, definitive maps.

Chris Hall will be our special guest at the Grand Reunion Buffet Luncheon on September 5th 1992