



RAMBLERS

Tonbridge & Malling

Annual Review 2025

Membership Overview

Our membership remains steady at 250, which seems to be our benchmark. While we have welcomed several new members—many of whom now walk with us regularly—we have also bid farewell to a similar number who have hung up their boots, relocated, or lost interest. Despite this, our Facebook page continues to flourish, with membership there almost double our official tally. The weekly updates on our activities have not only helped recruit new walking members but also serve as an uplifting read for others within our community.

Group Holidays

In May 2024, we surveyed members about continuing with our group holidays. The responses from interested parties were evenly split between those favouring one or two holidays per year, with no preference for spring or autumn if only one holiday was to take place. Acting on this feedback, we organised a return to Littlecote House in Berkshire for May 2025 and planned another holiday in the autumn. Unfortunately, the autumn trip did not proceed, as we were one short of the twenty required to secure Warner's valuable single-occupancy discount for their flagship property, Heythrop Park. However, enthusiasm remains high, with thirty-five members now signed up for our April 2026 visit to Heythrop Park in the Cotswolds. *As a reminder to those going, the balance payment will be due in January.*

Littlecote House 2025

Our spring trip to Littlecote House was, for a few, a nostalgic return to a place steeped in history. From the superb Roman mosaic floor in the gardens through the impressive Tudor mansion built in 1592 for Sir John Popham which was visited by none other than Henry VIII. The house also played a pivotal role during WWII for strategic planning of the American 101st Airborne Division's role in the D-Day landings.



Since only a handful of this year's visitors attended the 2016 trip, planning the walks was straightforward: we just tweaked the routes used nine years earlier. The walks were as stimulating and memorable as ever; one particularly vivid memory is of several members trying to climb over a churchyard wall to avoid inquisitive heifers as we returned to Great Bedwyn on the first day. The following day saw us walking from the hotel into Hungerford on market day, where we enjoyed both the local fare and a spot of antiques browsing before making our way back along the River Kennet. Mike H. led a smaller group in the opposite direction along the Kennet to the charming town of Ramsey. Thursday's walk took us even further back in time, beginning at the Avebury stone circle, then taking in views of Silbury Hill and exploration of the impressive Neolithic chambered tombs at West Kennet Long Barrow, built around 3650 BC.



These holidays are relaxing, informative, and enjoyable. So, if you are interested in an autumn holiday in 2026, please let me know, the more the merrier!

Group Dynamics and Walk Leadership

Those who walk regularly with us know we are a friendly, sociable group, united by our enjoyment of gentle exercise in the beautiful Kent countryside and surrounding counties. The group size fluctuates—sometimes as few as half a dozen, occasionally up to forty or more—depending on the walk's length, the weather, the day, and chance. We are keen to avoid implementing a cumbersome booking system for walks, preferring instead to equip our walk leaders with the training and knowledge needed to confidently handle any situation. Ramblers HQ has encouraged all walk leaders to undergo training and register, primarily for insurance purposes, but also to reflect and reinforce the responsibilities of the role. Since HQ was initially slow to provide user-friendly learning modules, we held a Walk Leaders Get-Together in March, to encourage a do-it-yourself approach using the available materials. **Thank you** to all who successfully completed the process. We would now like to encourage any remaining past walk leaders to take advantage of the latest online modules or group seminars before the January deadline, after which they will be officially de-listed. **Special thanks** go to the newer members who have taken on walk leading duties this year—we rely on all your support to share the load and ensure the ongoing vitality of our group. As ever the

more the merrier, so please come forward if you have any interest in leading walks.

Committee Thanks

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to all current committee members for your dedicated efforts. Your hard work is greatly appreciated by me and all members of the group. We are planning to discuss how best to meet the needs of the group within the committee in the New Year, so if you are interested in getting involved and helping to keep our group vibrant and friendly, please contact me or any of the committee members.

Neil Whittall: Chair

A few examples of volunteer roles in TMR

Webmaster.

After the initial set up, this site <https://www.tonbridgeandmalligramblers.org.uk/> requires relatively low maintenance. However, we do want to keep our pages up to date and relevant. Initially, Nicola wrote an article about joining our group; since then, I have received stories from Jacqueline and Stephanie, and I have also written one myself. These are found under the “**About**” menu. We encourage members to contribute their own experiences from our group holidays, walks, or any memorable moments shared with fellow members. If you have a story you would like to share, we would be delighted to include it in our communications. If you prefer, your story can be published anonymously. To submit your story, simply email it to webmaster@tonbridgeandmalligramblers.org.uk. We look forward to hearing your unique perspectives and adding your voice to our group's narrative.

Have you looked at the walking routes published under “**Walks / Our walking routes**” on our website? <https://tonbridgeandmallingramblers.org.uk/walks/our-walks.html> This lists 36 walks that range between 5 and 12 km, (3 and 7.5 miles). As well as viewing specific details, you can download a GPX version for use in your own preferred mapping app. Other routes are available from the Kent Area website <https://www.kentramblers.org.uk/KentWalks/index.htm>. These routes can help you get started as a walk leader for the group. Buddy up with a current leader to help you with a recce and you’re halfway there.

We have a “**Gallery**” menu to showcase photographs. Do you have any that you would like to see published here? Before you forward any, please remember that permission is required if people's faces are visible.

Walk attendance and mileage.

I collect all the info from the walk registers that the leaders send to me. From October 2024 to September 2025, 120 walkers covered a total of 9432 miles on our 99 walks, which is 1508 miles more than the previous year. Thursdays and Sundays remain the most popular days for the walks offered by our 27 Walk Leaders guiding you.

Kent Area Council Member.

Neil and I attend four area meetings a year: two are held in Lenham, and two are online during the winter. This is a great forum for exchanging ideas among the Kent groups and feeding important Rambler’s information both up to head office and down to members. Currently, Colin Sefton is the Area Chairman with Robert Peel as Secretary.

Parish Footpath Observer.

As a Parish Footpath Observer, my responsibility is to walk all the footpaths in Ditton to identify any issues that may affect public access. Whenever I discover a problem, I promptly report it to the Kent County Council Public Rights of Way (KCC PROW) team and notify our maintenance team leader, Frank. Attaching a photo of the situation greatly assists them in determining if it can be handled by the TMR Maintenance team or needs to be added to the long list managed by KCC.

One recent example of this work involved a potentially hazardous situation: barbed wire was caught in a fallen tree at head height beside the River Medway. This posed a significant risk to anyone using the path. Frank addressed the issue by removing the barbed wire, ensuring the path was safe for walkers. After this experience, I suspect Frank would prefer not to receive any more reports of that nature!

Footpath Volunteers Meeting.

The Kent Area management team organises this event annually in Lenham. It features an engaging day of information sharing. Typically, a member of the KCC PROW team delivers a presentation. Last year, we had a guest speaker discussing the opening of the King Charles III England Coast Path, and this year the topics ranged over Solar Farms, railway level crossing safety and plans for re-wilding the Cuckmere estuary, all with respect to the effects on the local PROWs.

Group Secretary. This role involves me taking minutes at our quarterly committee meeting and publishing them on our website under the “**Members Area**”.

Gillian Allardyce

How is our Ramblers group funded?

Our Core Funding

Our main source of income is the **annual rebate** provided by the National **Ramblers Association**. This rebate is linked to the number of members affiliated with our group and is designed to cover essential walk-related costs such as:

- Training for walk leaders
- Promotional materials to spread the word about our walks
- Equipment for path maintenance

For the 2025–26 financial year, Ramblers' basic allocation was set at **£1.45 per member**, which would have given us **£388 in total**. Thanks to a successful bid for additional support—covering items like first aid training and high-viz vests—we secured agreement for **£615 (around £2.30 per member)**. This is paid to us in quarterly instalments.

Why Extra Funding Matters

While this support is invaluable, it's not a huge amount. That's why donations from other sources, such as **Ramble Worldwide Holidays**, make such a difference (see the separate piece about this). As the saying goes, every little helps.

The Social Fund

Alongside this, we run a separate **Social Fund**, which is independently financed by participating **TMR** members. This fund is ring-fenced to cover our local social activities, think festive Christmas lunches and group

holidays, for example.

Transparency & Stability

We're accountable to the Ramblers Association for all income and expenditure, and we maintain a modest reserve to ensure financial stability. A full breakdown of our finances is shared at the AGM. If you'd like to know more or have any questions or suggestions, please don't hesitate to ask.

A missive from Jane Austen with regard to **Ramble Worldwide Holidays**

A Most Agreeable Holiday with Beneficial Consequence

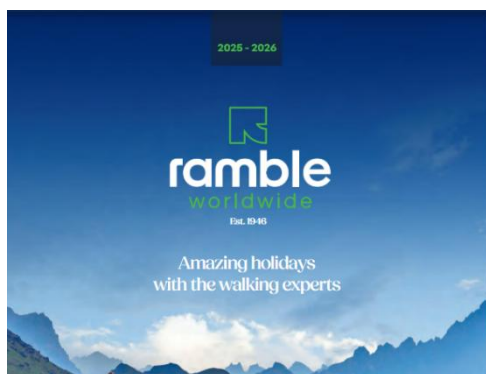
It is a truth universally acknowledged that a holiday well-chosen must bring both delight to the traveller and advantage to those with whom one is connected. In this spirit, may I commend to your consideration the offerings of **Ramble Worldwide** (once known as Ramblers Holidays), whose excursions, whether modestly domestic or gloriously abroad, promise not only scenes of beauty and adventure, but also a measure of generosity to our own society of walkers.

Through their **Walking Partnership scheme**, each booking bestows a donation upon the Ramblers group nominated by the traveller.

- £10 for journeys within the United Kingdom
- £20 for those of short-haul distinction
- £30 pounds for the more ambitious long-haul adventures

Such contributions, though modest in appearance, are of great consequence to **Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers**, being

entirely separate from the funds of the Ramblers Association. Indeed, last year we were gratified to receive £40, and the year before £70, with further benefactions already anticipated in this coming year. Every donation, however small, serves to strengthen our endeavours and preserve the happy company of our walks.



The Manner of Nomination

To secure this benefit, one need only nominate ***Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers*** at the time of booking. This may be accomplished by either:

- Informing the agent when reserving by telephone, or
- Entering the name in the *Special Requests* box when booking online, or
- Selecting it within the passenger details under *Manage My Account*

It must be observed that each traveller is required to nominate individually. Moreover, companions who are not members of our society may yet extend their kindness by choosing us as their beneficiary group. We entreat you to encourage them in this benevolent act.

Thus, your next adventure may yield not only the pleasures of travel to you, but also the assurance that our future walks shall be sustained. For particulars, one may consult

rambleworldwide.co.uk.

Let us, therefore, walk forward together—with gratitude, with cheer, and with the happy knowledge that our holidays may serve both memory and community.

Jane Austen

[assisted by **Colin Wilby** & Microsoft Co-Pilot]

[Did you know that Jane Austen has many family connections with Tonbridge? Notably, her father George was born in the town and taught at Tonbridge School and her grandfather William was a surgeon and lived in the High Street. He is buried at the parish church and there is a memorial to him and his family on the floor of the north aisle.]

Colin Wilby: Treasurer

Growing Stronger: Our Facebook Community Crosses 475 Members!

Celebrating connection, camaraderie, and the joy of walking together—online and on the trail.

*Dear Ramblers, we're delighted to share a milestone worth celebrating: our Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers Facebook group has now welcomed over **475 members**—and the numbers keep growing! This vibrant online space is a testament to the warmth, enthusiasm, and shared love of walking that defines our community.*

What You'll Find in the Group

- **Monthly Walk Schedules:** Clear, detailed listings of all midweek and weekend walks, including meeting points, terrain notes, and distances.
- **Photo Highlights:** Relive your favourite moments or preview upcoming routes through member-shared photos.

- **Helpful Updates:** From weather notes to last-minute changes, the group keeps you informed and prepared.

A Place to Share and Support

Our Facebook group is more than just a noticeboard—it's a space to connect. Members regularly post reflections, ask questions, and share their own walking experiences. Whether you're a seasoned Rambler or just starting out, it's a welcoming place to find inspiration and friendship.

We also proudly support local pubs, cafés, and venues that host or assist our walks, strengthening ties with the wider community.

Safe, Friendly, and Well-Monitored

Our administrators ensure the group remains respectful, inclusive, and safe for all. Every post is guided by our shared values of kindness, curiosity, and community spirit.

Join Us Online

If you haven't joined yet, simply search **Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers** on Facebook and send a request. We'd love to welcome you—whether you're sharing a photo, planning your next walk, or just saying hello.

Here's to many more miles—and memories—together! Warm regards,

Steve, Robin & Gillian
The Tonbridge & Malling Ramblers Facebook Administrator Team

Local awareness and publicity

In addition to our Facebook activity, TMR website and a presence on <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/>, we also raise awareness through local publicity and print media. This all helps to create a pipeline of

new walkers, whom we hope will join The Ramblers and contribute to the Group by volunteering as walk leaders or in one of the other volunteer roles.

Our main publicity project this year was the production and distribution of a poster and leaflet highlighting the benefits of joining TMR. We are grateful to Paul H, Steve B, Phil B, Geoff D, Gail B, Jacqueline W, Bridget P-J and Linda J. who posed for this 'North Downs in the snow' photo which appears in the leaflet. Many thanks also to Robert Peel, Area Secretary of Kent Ramblers, who helped us with the design, ensuring that we adhered to the style guidelines issued by Ramblers.



NORTH DOWNS IN THE SNOW

Thanks also go to several members who kindly helped with the distribution of these posters and leaflets - Linda J, David P, Mike T, Gillian A and Yasmin V. They are on display in about 30 locations, including local country parks and leisure centres, Tonbridge Castle tourist office, Kent Wildlife Trust, village libraries and information boards.

Maintaining awareness

Some of our new walkers this year first heard about TMR from one of the 31 local parish magazines, websites and village Facebook pages which offer us monthly walk listings,

free of charge. In addition, commercial publications such as The Net, Royal Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge Community Ad magazine, and Kings Hill and The Mallings Community Ad magazine grant us space in most issues – either as a general mention or by publishing specific walks and photos of the landscape to be enjoyed. This all helps to build background awareness – so that, when someone searches for a walking group, we'll have a head start in attracting their interest.

In February, we had the opportunity to contribute to Ramblers walk leadership training by taking part in a filmed walk recce and walk briefing. The mock briefing was aided by a chilly but willing group of TMR 'extras' – members who had just enjoyed lunch at The Bucks Head in Godden Green!

Several hours of filming ended up as only 4.5 minutes of video on YouTube. Since going live in March, these two videos have had a total of over 2,300 views. Many thanks to Leonie who braved the cold and muddy paths of Offham with me for the recce filming. It was an enjoyable experience and a chance to demonstrate TMR's commitment to Ramblers' walk leadership principles.

See the YouTube walk recce and briefing links here: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/walk-leadership>



Nicola Brown

Committee changes

For the last 15 years Ray Lawrence was our Membership Secretary, but earlier this year he handed over the baton to Phil Blakeburn. Ray fulfilled several other roles with TMR at various times including Walk Programme Secretary, editor of the annual newsletter, walk leader, Parish Footpath Observer and he regularly helped with path clearance work. In addition, he was Treasurer for the Kent Area from 2008 to 2019.



We thank Ray for his many years of commitment to the Ramblers and particularly for helping to maintain TMR as a thriving, friendly Ramblers group. I extend a warm

welcome to Phil Blakeburn, who succeeds Ray and will help lead the TMR membership into the future. A tribute to Ray's long and distinguished history of volunteering with Ramblers can be found on page 19 of the September 2025 issue of South East Walker under the banner of 'Amazing Achievers'.

Our thanks go to Linda James, who after three years in the role of TMR Group Treasurer, has now handed over to Colin Wilby. Linda remains on the committee as Members' Representative.

Neil Whittall

Walk Programme

As mentioned earlier in this review, collectively we walked significantly further this year than last (9432 cf. 7924 miles). Although about a third of these walks were led by two leaders, I am grateful for the contribution made by all walk leaders who have helped spread the load. Particular thanks go to the people who took up the

challenge of completing the walk leadership courses and then offered their first walk for the group: Celia H, Benita G, Leigh M, Phil B, Bridget P-J, Tim C, Gill B, Judy H, Ruth R. (apologies to anyone that I have missed off this list).

Last year 27 walk leaders offered a total of 98 walks. Although this is skewed a little by the four additional walks on consecutive days on the holiday at Littlecote House, it represents a pretty full programme if our aim is to provide two walks a week ($52 \times 2 = 104$). Doing the maths reveals that this target could be achieved if each leader offered one walk per quarter. With the new leaders coming in this may just be achievable, when we know that some of last year's leaders will be hanging up their boots as Old Father Time catches up with them. That said, we welcome any other members who want to join us. Just have a chat with any of the current leaders who will be willing to help you get started.

Oscar

Finally, let us celebrate the Oscar awarded to our Top Walker, **Jacqueline W**. Not only has she walked 377 miles during 67 walks, but she was usually up at the front chatting with the leader on most of the walks. She's also contributed many uplifting pieces for our Facebook page.



PRoW work

Path Maintenance

Once again, a big thank you to all our Parish Footpath Observers who cover the 28 parishes in the Tonbridge and Malling Ramblers Area.

We currently have two vacancies for the positions of PFO in Aylesford and Watlingtonbury. The role requires walking the Public Rights of Way footpaths in the parish at least once a year, doing a little light vegetation clearance as you go and reporting any problems to KCC and myself. Anyone interested in these positions or if you would like more information please contact me, Frank Turner, franklturner@hotmail.co.uk.

When reporting a problem to myself and KCC (<https://webapps.kent.gov.uk/countrysideaccesscams/standardmap.aspx>), attaching a couple of photos to your emailed report will greatly assist us in deciding the appropriate course of action. Big jobs will be handled eventually by KCC's appointed contractors, but this takes time and money, and they have a growing list of pending jobs. Typical problems dealt with by us this year were overgrown vegetation and small obstructions. A few remain which will be resolved in the new year.

Frank Turner

Local Footpath Officers

We must also thank **Yasmin V**, **Fiona W** and **Roy B** who quietly continue their LFO work assessing any proposed changes to the footpath network in our area.

And finally, do you fancy a nice Winter Walk?

You probably won't want to try this one.....

He Only Lived Twice – A ballad of Scott of the Antarctic

From Christchurch he sailed, to find the South Pole:
Captain Scott, Royal Navy: a man brave and bold,
With his men and his horses, his dogs and his sled,
And ten tons of food to keep them all fed.

They knew they'd be cold, but Antarctic cold
Drills deep into clothing, through skin, I'm told.
Their only relief is in camps struck on snow,
But wind whistles through gaps and knows how to blow.

The snow is their enemy, never their friend,
The blinding white desert goes on without end.
It freezes their toes, their fingers too,
And everyone watches them slowly turn blue.

The last horse was slaughtered, for dogs to be fed.
Then the last dog died and men pulled the sled.
Hungry and weak, worn out and sore, then -
The flag of their rivals was just the last straw.



Somehow, they had to fight their way back
Through hundreds of miles of snow and ice pack.
Their bodies were weary, their spirits tumbled,
But determined and courageous, not one of them grumbled.

The weather turned savage – how can this be?
The blizzards and hurricanes of the century
Hit Scott and his men, who started to slow:
Few rations, little fuel, and a long way to go.

Evans died first, though the strongest of men,
They buried him with a flag, and a heartfelt 'Amen.'
Then Oates thought: 'I'm a burden, with this frostbite of mine,'
Said: "I'm going outside, and I may be some time."

It was the end of March, and the end of theirs,
The end of all hope, and the end of all cares.
An endless gale kept them trapped in their tent,
While Scott wrote in his diary: 'I think we are spent.'

They were found in their tent, seeming asleep,
Buried there and then, a snow grave to keep.
Britain was proud of their spirit and courage:
Cried: "Scott and his men are heroes of the age!"

But a century later - disaster anew:
On a floor in Christchurch, Scott now lies in two!
Where a statue stood, there's now empty space
As the earthquake shook Scott from his last resting place.



SallyAnne Clark

(The Christchurch earthquake was in 2011, almost a century after Scott died during his second expedition to the South Pole, but have no fear, the statue was restored to its former glory in 2017)