

OBITUARIES AND APPRECIATIONS

This has not been a kind winter. A number of groups have had members die but two stalwarts perhaps stand out.

One was our Vice President, Alan Loasby and the other Graham Morrison who joined us much more recently.

It is hard to sum up such a long life as Alan's with such diverse interests, but a good number of members have contributed.

I hope I have done them both justice and thank members for their contributions.

Roy Denney

Alan Loasby

It is with much regret we mark the passing of Alan in his 94th year, after a period of declining health. He was survived by three sons from his first marriage.

He had been a member of the Leicester Group for over 40 years and for many of those years he served as footpath secretary first of the Group and later of the Area, tirelessly campaigning to keep them open and properly recorded. Long after he ceased to be the Area Footpath Secretary, every six weeks he still enjoyed hosting a motley gathering of Group Footpath Secretaries, plus Dave Farmer and then Stan Warren as his successors.

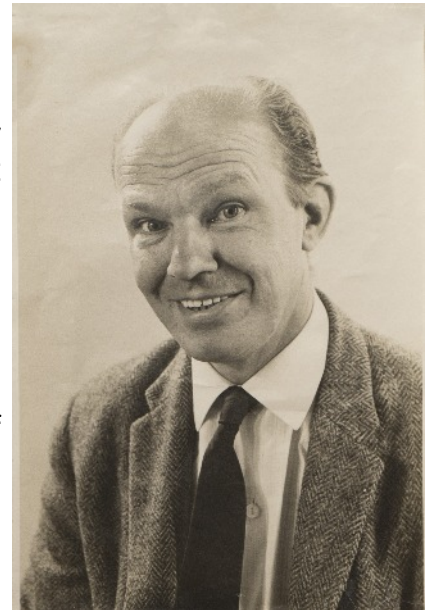
Meeting around his dining table they argued the merits of the latest batch of diversions and planning applications, fortified by his tea and biscuits.

Many of us remember Alan as an elder statesman, and a man who had achieved a lot for the RA and walkers in general, but some recall him in his younger days as a quite determined athlete. Stan Warren first met Alan in the mid 1980s when Stan joined the RA and started walking regularly with the Leicester Group on their weekly (Sunday) walks. He says it was obvious that Alan was one of the strongest walkers, although by then he had already reached retirement age.

Alan was made Vice President of the Area Ramblers many years ago in recognition of the many, many years of service he gave to the organisation. He was the inspiration to many then younger members not least Stan who went on to carry the baton as Footpath Officer of the Area for more years than he can count.

During Alan's time as Footpath Secretary, the team at County Hall always considered Alan a credible and serious source of complaints and defects and someone who would respond consistently and professionally on consultations. Indeed, at a time when LCC staff were all being instructed to develop Performance Indicators, the monthly letter from Alan on behalf of the RA became just that - the number of reports and defects included within Alan's letter was a good shorthand, reliable double check on the much more onerous Government approved performance indicator. The fact that the numbers of problems went down during his time was a good measure of the results that the Ramblers Association and the County Council were able to develop in partnership - with Alan's commitment and practical interventions being the vital oil in the wheels.

Our last remaining Vice President, Mike Statham, had known Alan for half a century and does say that Alan's detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the county's countryside was second perhaps only to that of Stan Warren.



Mike first got to know Alan when Mike was an aspiring young athlete in the late 1950's and Alan was the team coach and manager for the old Leicester College of Art and Tech Athletics Club. They were both cross-country runners. This club was the forerunner of the Coritanian Athletic Club. Like with so many other things, Alan remained committed and involved with the sport and was an active Amateur Athletic Association official right up to his seventies.

Mike and Alan met up again when Mike joined the Leicester Group of the RA in 1972 and Alan was the leader on his first walk and that was the start of a very long friendship; working together for the RA at Group and Area level for over 30 years.

Alan was always totally committed and involved with the RA, but not just with the footpath work. He was also leader on many of Leicester's monthly coach trips. He helped with the setting up of the new Groups at Lutterworth, Melton and Coalville and this increase in Groups and membership in the 1970's enabled us to form the Leicestershire & Rutland Area of the Association and divide up the old East Midlands Area.

Then he was Area Footpath Secretary for the next three decades!

He led and organised many of the Forbidden Britain campaign walks in the late 1970's and was one of the first representatives for the RA on the first Rights of Way and Access Group that was set up in conjunction with the County Council, National Farmers Union and the then Country Landowners Association.

He also did much for the RA at national level. He was a frequent Area delegate to National Councils and spoke regularly in debates and on submitted motions. He was particularly successful in getting the RA to support Leicestershire's bid to get the National Forest to come to the county and then monitored its progress and development regarding public access to the new forest sites. He was a great help with the running and organisation of National Council annual meetings when we hosted them at Leicester and Loughborough Universities. In later years of course he had been a fitting Vice President for the Area.

At local level, he must have led hundreds of walks over the years, mainly for the Leicester Group, but also for Hinckley. He organised Area events and rallies and map reading and walk leading training days. He was a regular walk leader and organiser on many of the Leicester monthly coach rambles and their holiday week-ends, from the Dorset Coast Path, Brecon Beacons and the Yorkshire Dales, and in later years he particularly enjoyed his visits and walks in Austria.

Physically he was a very fit and strong walker right up to fairly recent times, but he was always very considerate as a walk leader to control and set a sensible pace for all concerned. And this was true of everything Alan did; the many things that Alan did for the Ramblers as listed above were always done in a quiet, unassuming and efficient way. The great thing about working with Alan on RA matters was that firstly he never had to be cajoled or persuaded into taking on a task - he always saw the need and volunteered - and secondly, you always knew that the job would be done, quickly, quietly and very effectively.

He really was the original "safe pair of hands"

Back in the 80s when some of us first got to know him, he was with his second wife Sheila, who was equally committed to the campaigning aims of the RA, but he sadly lost her to cancer a few years later. At Sheila's funeral, Alan quietly went up to Stan and said he would be on the next Saturday walk, which Stan was leading - Stan thinks he needed the therapy which walking delivers after the stressful period of the latter stages of Sheila's illness.

It was a different world back then. Alan was a tireless campaigner and activist for footpath improvements in the days when you needed map, compass and strong willpower to negotiate endless cropped or ploughed fields, scramble over fences, through hedges and across ditches in what seemed to be their most vulnerable spots, hopefully somewhere near the definitive line of the invisible path - the Melton Area was always regarded as the toughest challenge for both leaders and followers.

We owe the incredible transformation of our paths largely to the pressure Alan brought to bear at County Hall. Unsuitable diversions were duly opposed, public inquiries fought (but rarely won), but Alan would never give up – typing endless letters to express the views of the RA.

Stan eventually took on the mantle, following Dave Farmer, when Dave's eyesight forced him to stand down; Stan taking comfort in the knowledge that Alan remained in the background with his vast experience and unfailing support. The Area felt able to introduce a rigorous surveying policy, and Alan contributed greatly to this work until he found age was finally catching up with him as he moved into his eighties. I am sure he delighted in keeping County Hall on their toes by his long (still typewritten) lists of problems – Alan never joined the users of e-mails and the internet. Stan always smiled at his feedback, because every damaged waymark or signpost was always reported as 'vandalised' – no latitude for natural decay, some evil force had been at work wrecking what he regarded as his handiwork.

Stan and Alan got on like a house on fire, having many common interests. Books were one, as they hunted down elusive volumes at various Book Fairs, with a pub lunch as reward for their endeavours. Stan wonders if Alan ever did track down the last of the series of Regimental Histories which they chased, quite often fruitlessly. Alan did his service in the Royal Artillery and the military must have got into his genes as his sons Neil and Ian both ended up in the Royal Corps of Transport

Alan was committed to and involved in many other activities as well, such as his work on restoring windmills and his involvement with his local church.

Wicken Corn Windmill in Cambridgeshire was one of his projects. It is a large mill built in 1813. The windmill business closed in 1933, but was restored from 1987 by the millwrights of the Wicken Windmill Partnership with Alan playing a major part.

Dave Pearce of the partnership remembers Alan very well, and points out he went to Wicken as recently as three years ago with his nephew Michael. Alan contributed a great deal, both at Wicken and Thelnetham Windmills - they will miss him.

The photo shows him assembling a new fantail blade at Wicken in the early 1990's.

Alan had a great understanding of machinery and woodworking, which he had taught for many years in Hinckley



Alan was very knowledgeable about canals and he and Stan walked many a towpath. They always loved visiting old churches during the course of a walk, and of course enjoyed the beautiful villages they walked through, appreciating the finer points of the architecture. Both loved classical music, Alan as long as there was a good tune in the piece, and he and Stan shared many fine performances from the gallery of the De Montfort Hall until he was unable to attend – Stan still sits in the same seat and thinks of him, even more so now he is no longer with us.

He always kept well abreast of how the Tigers and 'the County' were performing but it seems though that his active nature stopped him attending many games as a spectator.

The comment was made that not many people nowadays realise what a very thorough and conscientious Rambler he was with regard to his Footpath Secretary duties. However nobody ever dared suggest that he train up a successor.

There must be scores of rights of way and access areas in the county that have been saved, protected, improved or favourably diverted because of Alan's methodical and thorough work on footpath matters.

Any one who walks in the local countryside has a great deal to thank Alan for from his work. He was dedicated and demanding if polite, but people from kindred sports who worked with him tell me they were a bit intimidated by him. He was always extremely courteous though - even with the occasional irate farmer or landowner - and there were a few of those around in the 1970's!

Eugene Suggett, Senior Policy Officer of the Ramblers nationally, remembers meeting Alan on a number of occasions. In about 1988 there was a visit to the office by key officials from the Areas which Alan attended, and at meetings at GC or similar gatherings as well,. He also spoke to him at a Forbidden Britain-type event at Mount St Bernard Abbey, calling for access to the nearby rocks at High Sharpley. That would have been in about 1990. *(Eugene is our port of call for support and detailed knowledge whenever we fight cases for the RA.)*

They did correspond a good deal over the years, but Eugene comments that "he was one of those exceptionally knowledgeable Ramblers volunteers who seldom needed any assistance from here. He was always most appreciative of whatever bit of advice we could add to his own large stock of expertise!"

What more can we say? The likes of Alan with his commitment are rare on the ground these days.

To summarise, Alan was a very good man indeed who led a very worthwhile life and has left a great legacy in so many ways and aspects of life.

So many of us owe him a great deal and our lives have been better and improved because of so much of Alan's work for us all.

Mike Statham says it was a great but privilege and pleasure to have known and worked with him for all those years and I am sure other members echo that.

Alan will be very sadly missed but always remembered; a sterling campaigner for the RA, and a good friend of many.



1999,
Alan campaigning for the
right to roam which
ultimately led to the
CRoW Act and open
access land.

Alan cutting
his cake on
his 80th
birthday



Graham Morrison

Graham Morrison, who, in recent years was a very active member of the Coalville group, has died after a brain tumour was discovered early in 2017.

After re-locating from Yorkshire, back in 2011, Graham and Jean joined the Ramblers in Coalville, fitting in right away. Graham was enthusiastic about the variety of walks on offer and said that he enjoyed meeting people and listening to their life stories.

If there were any children on a walk they were told that Graham was a Headmaster so they had better behave... or else!



He was co-opted onto the committee in 2012 and was a natural choice to fill a committee vacancy of Group Secretary in 2013, which he continued to do in his light, professional style. He was very organised and did a lot to improve member communications with email notices and newsletters. He and Jean organised and led walks for the group.

Graham did a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes. When the National Forest Company was looking for a volunteer to organise waymarking and signage as part of their 'Black to Green' programme, I introduced him to them and he was snapped up and did an excellent job. He also undertook waymarking of part of the new National Forest Way long distance footpath.

Not a very well kept secret, but there is a clandestine movement in the Ramblers that meet for lunch every Friday in a local hostelry code name; 'the office', which Graham was initiated into.

This is where all the important stuff gets sorted out and planned such as, days out, latest deals and bargains, walking challenges, holidays etc. and he thoroughly enjoyed it.

There was always plenty of banter during these 'meetings' and on and off the walks especially about football. Meeting him there, on walks or at meetings of committees we both served on, Graham was always very good company.

EDITORS NOTE

It is not our policy to write obituaries for all members who pass on but where they have been especially good servants to the Area or their group we will try to do so. Fortunately for you but not for your editor, you may well outlive many of your contemporaries making it difficult to do justice and make accurate comment.

If you do not feel it presumptuous or tempting fate, I am happy to hold your own notes against the day which must inevitably come.

Also if you feel somebody else worthy of such an appreciation and fear they may outlive you and you want to put your knowledge of them on record do let me know.