



These boots are made for walking... and walking and walking!!

East Surrey Walkers held their 37th AGM on 16th November 2019. One of the things we like to do at our AGMs is to recognise members who have gone beyond the call of duty by giving their time and expertise to improve the success of our Group. This year we decided to give an award to two of our long-standing members – Stuart and Alice Pickford – for having been members of The Ramblers for over 40 years. We presented them with a gardening voucher and a Christmas panetone. Job done, you might think....NO! Stuart stood up to say thank you... and casually slipped into his speech that he and Alice joined The Ramblers in 1948 – that makes 71 years of membership!!!! Is that a record, or has anyone been a member for longer? Sensing a bit of a story here, I took a photo of the lovely couple

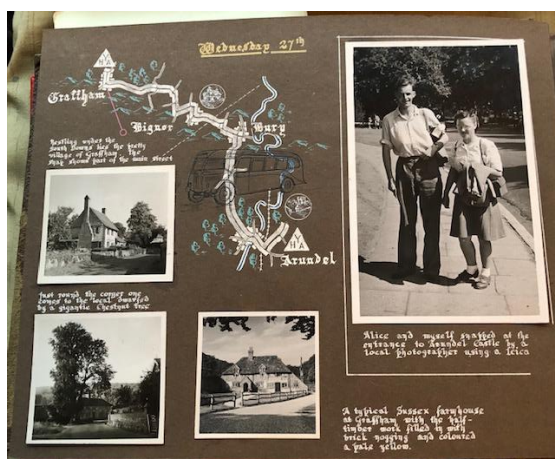


and asked Stuart if he could let me have a few notes of his time in The Ramblers – and a week later a beautifully hand-written letter (yes, a letter, not an email!!) came in the post giving not just a few words but an amazing social history. Read on...

Stuart, a proud Yorkshireman, was born in Leeds in 1924. He left school in 1941 taking employment to become an architect at 2/6d per week – 12.5p in new money!! Called up for the armed forces in 1942, he was graded C3 – unfit for military service because at the age of 13 he had been diagnosed with a 'weak heart'. So, he stayed home, and walked! Thus began his love affair with walking. He joined the Youth Hostel Association in 1943 and explored Yorkshire landscape and churches, making extensive use of buses of the West Yorkshire Road Car Company. By this time he was earning £1 a week and says that Youth Hostels were all he could afford. The price per night was something like 1/- for bed (5p), 1/3d for breakfast (6.5p), 1/6d for evening meal (7.5p) and he had to supply his own sleeping bag.

When his friends were demobbed after the War, four of them joined Stuart on weekends away in the Yorkshire Dales. In 1946, to further his architectural career, Stuart took a holiday in Cambridge to

study the many colleges, and there he met the girl who was to become the love of his life, Alice. They met up again the following year in the Cotswolds, and the following year he showed her the beauties of Yorkshire with a walk from Otley to Bridlington.



By now, it's 1948 and Stuart and Alice joined the Ramblers to take advantage of their organised walks on the continent as neither of them had left the UK before. Was this the start of package holidays!? They signed up for 14 days Youth Hostelling in Belgium and Luxembourg for £21.15.0d, all in from London, (£21.75p), which was just about all Stuart could manage on his now wage of £5 per week.



2nd January 1949 - Ingleborough

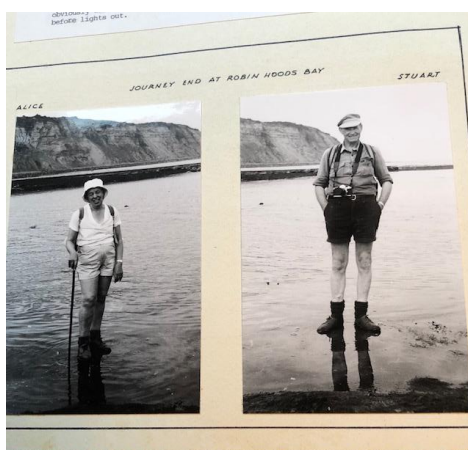
Stuart and Alice married in 1952, the same year Stuart passed his examination to become a qualified Architect. They lived in Leeds until 1954 when he took a job in the City and they moved to Chingford. Essex was unknown territory to Stuart and so many weekends were spent exploring with The Ramblers' Association and Grey-Green coach excursions.

By now, Stuart had reached the golden salary of £1,000 p.a and he and Alice were able to indulge in more continental holidays: they walked in Austria 1954; Florence and Pisa 1957; Mountains of Majorca 1960; Rhine Valley 1963. Nearer home they had Youth Hostel holidays: Isle of Man 1958; Wharfedale 1961; Cambrian Coast 1964.

In 1956 Stuart and Alice moved to Caterham, Surrey, where they still live, and began to get to know the Southern Counties with Ramblers' Excursions by special charter train from East Croydon. After

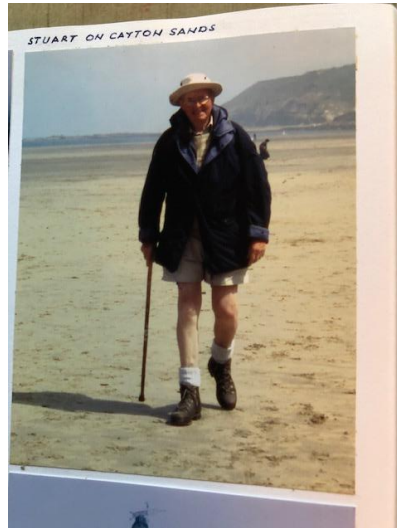
about 25 years, Ramblers could no longer service a full train and the accommodation was reduced to one or two reserved carriages. Sadly, by the end of the 20th Century, these reservations were withdrawn and no provision for reserved Ramblers' carriages exists now.

The Pennine Way Long Distance footpath opened in 1965 and Stuart and Alice walked this in 1966 until turned back by Foot and Mouth disease. They resumed the walk in 1968 and completed it in 1975. The Pembrokeshire Coastal Path was completed in 1973 followed by walks in the Brecon Beacons in 1974. They went to Yugoslavia in 1976 with The Ramblers' Association and to the Pyrenees in 1979; the Cevannes in 1983 and Corsica in 1984. By then many other Long Distance Paths had been created and walked: Wealdway 1983; The Wolds Way 1984; Vanguard Way 1985; Dales Way 1986; Cumbria Way 1987; Coast to Coast 1990/1991; Lady Anne's Way 1996; West Highland Way 1998; Peddars Way and Norfolk Coastal Path 1999.



End of Coast to Coast – Stuart and Alice in the sea at Robin Hood's Bay 1991

Unfortunately, Alice developed a problem in her knees and 1996 was the last long distance walk she and Stuart did together and subsequent walks for Stuart were done without her, but were not as enjoyable and so he too gave up weekend walks. However, Stuart still had a yen for meaningful walks and when, in 1999, he became aware that East Surrey Ramblers (now Walkers) had a programme of walking long distance footpaths at fortnightly intervals on a midweek day (Wednesday), he joined the walks and completed 2,877 miles between 1999 and 2014. If you're keeping up with the maths, you will realise that by 1999 Stuart was 75! Between these fortnightly walks, Stuart joined annual walks arranged by Alan Wales, another long-standing member of East Surrey Walkers, but who has, sadly, recently passed away. These annual walks included: The Dales Way 2004; The South West Coastal Path 2005/6; The Cleveland Way and North Yorks Coastal Path 2007; Cumbria Way 2008 and St Cuthbert's Way 2009 – adding another 630 miles to Stuart's total since 1999 – 3,507 miles.



Cayton Sands – North Yorks Coastal Path 2007

An operation to replace his left knee left Stuart unwilling to contemplate 10/12 miles a day, day after day, and so 2009 was his last long distance walk (aged 85). He was able to continue the fortnightly walks until he had completed the Downs' Link in 2015 when he finally decided to call it a day and hang up his walking boots. In total, Stuart reckons he had walked at least 6,000 miles. By then he was 91 years old and says he had had a good innings and he blessed the day he joined the Ramblers' Association in 1948 – 71 years ago!

Now, at 95 years of age, Stuart is still a force to be reckoned with. At the recent AGM, he gently reprimanded the Committee and reminded us 'youngsters' that not everyone is up to speed with modern technology and that he (and a few others) still want to know what's going on in East Surrey Walkers, especially on the social side, and that the postal service is still a good alternative to email!! However, with true Yorkshire grit, Stuart proudly proclaimed that he had enrolled on a local computer course to try get to grips with technology!

Being a Yorkshire woman myself, I know there are many reasons to celebrate the numerous brilliant people that come out of the UK's largest county - God's own country - but top of my list has to be Stuart Pickford, a feisty Yorkshireman, and a true gentleman! Stuart and Alice Pickford – a walking legend!

Ps..... A few words from Stuart's account of what the best-dressed walker was wearing all those years ago...



In the 70 years of walking, clothing and accessories have changed out of all recognition – from the adaptation of normal everyday wear to scientifically designed garments and footwear.

The Rucksack – in the 1940s there was nothing specifically available in city stores and one borrowed knapsacks from parents and slung them over one's shoulder. After the War came a more commodious sack, with a detachable 'A' frame, followed by ex-Army Commando rucksacks with a rigid metal frame which stood the test of years until, in the 1980s, came the 'H' frame where the rucksack became a cylinder and stood up to head level or higher. It was comfortable but unsuitable for woodland trails as the sack kept snagging branches and, from the rear, one looked like a walking pillarbox! Finally, a compromise came between the 'A' and the 'H' frame resulting in a ventilating space between you and the sack and padded support at the waist and reaching just up to the shoulders. Made of water-repellent fabric, Stuart says his latest acquisition of a 'Berghaus55' suits him fine.

The Walking Stick – essential in the 1940s for fending off frisky cattle and hacking through brambles, for in those Wartime days, restrictions as to how cattle should be penned, or obligations to keep footpaths clear, did not exist.

Footwear – with clothing coupons used only for essential items, walking was undertaken in stout but everyday shoes, worn with galoshes if muddy conditions or slippery rocks were encountered. In the 1950s a double skin waterproof leather shoe, 'Veltschoen', with Commando rubber sole came on the market and Stuart says he wore out three pairs before he turned to boots.

Trousers – trousers were just trousers! Ordinary trousers getting a bit threadbare were quite suitable for walking. If it rained, it rained. In summer, shorts were worn, combined with long socks to protect from nettles or biting insects. Waterproof overtrousers sweated and it wasn't until designer trousers that dried quickly came on the market that 'Regatta' seemed to have solved the problem.

The Jacket – In the 1940s an old sports jacket was worn, preferably three buttoned, with maybe a pullover underneath. Not until clothing coupons ended in the 1950s was any alternative available. Then it was an ex-RAF Bomber jacket, with buttoned waist and zippered front. They were warm lined and waterproof but they sweated and became uncomfortable. Ten years later came the 'Grenfell' jacket. Almost knee length, with copious pockets and double skin of water-repellent fabric and sweatproof. Stuart wore out two such jackets and was on his third, almost threadbare, when he fell for a 'waterproof' jacket, which failed to absorb sweat and he had a number of uncomfortable years before he bought a 'Paramor' jacket, which has defied many gallons of Yorkshire rain and is a delight to wear. However, before this satisfactory garment, one had to protect the sports jacket of the 1940s from rain. Ordinary raingear was a gaberdene raincoat, too cumbersome to carry in the small

rucksacks of the time. But available, if you knew where to look, was a fold up pure plastic mac with stitched seams. This was secured round the waist by a string of binder twine, and lasted until the stitched seams rotted in the rain. Luckily, by the 1950s, ex-army Gas Capes came on the market, voluminous in the extreme, they had the advantage of a large pouch at the back which fitted over the rucksack. They were waterproof and didn't sweat much as they were so voluminous and flapped around when one was walking. Eventually, the plastic mac returned with welded seams, also reinforced with nylon, and this raingear has been renewed several times and remains the guaranteed waterproof covering.

Headgear – Stuart says that his office trilby was first used until one windy holiday he nearly lost it! So next was a cloth cap and then a beret, keeping the hair dry but offering little protection to the neck. A Sou-Wester with tie on cord did the trick for many years until the arrival of the 'Tilley' hat. Cool in summer, dry in rain, screwable up to stuff in the pocket, this was the headgear of choice for Stuart.

So, by the age of 90, Stuart was wearing boots, comfortable trousers, a rain and sweat-proof jacket, and a Tilley hat. He carried a folding plastic mac, sometimes overtrousers and all in a well-balanced and very comfortable rucksack. Oh, and a walking stick...