

The History of the York HF Rambling Club



Club members Mollie Tillott on the left of the photograph above (born 1883) and Emily Tillott shown 2nd left (born 1886) during a ramble in the club's early day.

The CHA & HF Story

It all started with T. Arthur Leonard who led a party on a walking holiday in Ambleside in 1891. By 1897, the non-profit making "Co-operative Holidays Association" (CHA) was created and he later set up Holiday Fellowship (HF). Both were national organisations which promoted walking holidays based on their country properties.

Leonard was clearly far ahead of his time, a real pioneer. Rambling clubs affiliated to either CHA, HF or both were established, and the York club was one of these.

(Please see 'About the Founder of CHA & HF' document for further details)

Being founded in 1908 the Club celebrated its Centenary in 2008. We're very active and we extend a warm welcome to all walkers and lovers of the countryside.

Club History

The bombs that fell on York during the Baedeker raid of April 1942 caused great loss of life, suffering and destruction. They also obliterated some invaluable historical documents.

Among them were the minutes of the York CHA and HF Rambling Club. These were kept, along with many other city records, in the Guildhall. An incendiary bomb hit the building, leaving it in ruins and destroying all the manuscripts kept there – the Rambling Club minutes among them.

Therefore, members today don't know much about the people who founded the club. They do know, however, that it began life in October 1908 – possibly as a result of a small group of young men meeting for reunions after sharing a CHA (Co-operative Holiday Association) holiday.

"These reunions took the form of Saturday afternoon walks in the fresh air and, at the end of the walk, finding a cosy inn and partaking of a good tea and ample refreshment," records the book, 'One Hundred Years of Rambling' which was brought out to mark the club's 100th birthday.

The early ramblers wouldn't have ventured far. They relied on public transport – and back in 1908, apart from the railways, that basically meant the horse-drawn tram. The lack of transport wasn't as much of a problem as it might have been, however. "The countryside of the time was much closer to the city centre than now," the book notes. "In those days, many of York's current suburbs were attractive country villages and well within an afternoon's walking distance."

They had to be. Saturday morning was part of the working week, and Sunday was reserved for church. "So, Saturday afternoons were the only free time available."

By the 1920s rambling became a hugely popular pastime, as improved public transport opened up the countryside. Tram networks expanded into the country around urban centres, offering "ramblers specials" and private coach operators offered char-a-bancs for hire. In the 1930s, the York club had the distinction of opening what may have been the country's first youth hostel, a cottage in Crayke near Easingwold known as the White House.

Today, the club has more than 100 members, and goes for regular Sunday walks throughout the moors, dales and further afield. We have members from a range of backgrounds and we'd particularly like to welcome new members of all ages to join us on one of our many walks during the coming year. For a modest annual fee, you can enjoy all the hidden delights of Yorkshire and beyond the best way there is, on foot!

The Surprise View at Gillamoor 18 November 1951 by leader Bernard Sellers

A final glance by members of York C.H.A. and H.F Rambling Club through the gathering gloom from Surprise View at Gillamoor brought to an end a day memorable for its austere beauty. It was a day foreboding the approach of winter. Beginning from the old church at Kirkdale, on Sunday morning, we wandered along the thickly wooded slopes of Hodge Beck, transformed from its usual placidity by incessant rain, until we reached the open moorland of Sleightholmedale.

Having climbed to the top of Skiplam Rigg, we were rewarded by the contrasting scene which stretched before us. On the one hand the russet tinge bestowed on the valley by the sparsely leafed branches gave a slight suggestion of autumn, but away to the north the bleak, dark, interminable moorland indicated the inevitable advance of winter.

In a slight drizzle and swirling mist, we ploughed eastward, often knee deep in mud until, footsore and weary, we halted at Gillamoor Church. As we regained our breath and gazed at the wealth of beauty before us, from the plaque on the church wall was read the following inscription:

Thou hast given me eyes to see
And love this sight so fair
Give me a heart to find out thee
And read thee everywhere
J Keable

With deep satisfaction of a day well spent we adjourned for tea.



Surprise View at Gillamoor

York Ramblers See Sea by Moonlight

On Saturday 24 November 1951, York C.H.A and H.F Rambling Club went to Seamer. In pouring rain, they followed the disused railway line to West Ayton, and went along a track past the ruins of Apton Castle, which were explored by some of the members, and the River Derwent, and through the beautifully wooded Forge Valley, delightfully golden at this time of the year.

They crossed the river and walked to Everley and had lunch in the pleasant country inn. The weather cleared up, and the ramblers went on to Hackness and followed Lowdale Beck through fields and valleys to the village of Silpho. As they were passing through a farmyard the farmer told them that "they'd see plenty o' muck afore they'd finished." How right he was! They plodded through farmyard manure heaps and mud which came over their boot tops, and eventually reached Scalby, and from there had a road walk to the cliffs and saw the sea by moonlight. They scrambled down the cliffs and discovered that they had to cross quite a wide stretch of deep water. One of their number, more adventurous than the rest, got very wet, but the others, by another means, didn't as much as get the nails in their boots wet!

After a most enjoyable day some of the members stayed at Malton Youth Hostel overnight and the others returned home.

Phyllis Evans (Walk Leader)

EXTRACT FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 26 MARCH 1965 MR RICHARD SANDFORD

It is now 56 years since a group of York citizens, who had experienced the wholesome joys of holidays with the C.H.A. and H.F. met together and started this club, with the object of preserving throughout the years to come the spirit of good fellowship, that they had with, and enjoyed on, Centre Holidays.

This Club came into being at a time when the motor car was a rarity, and the aeroplane a new wonder of uncertain utility.

Since that time many then undreamed of wonders have become commonplace. We have passed through two world wars. We have entered the Atomic Age and we stand on the threshold of the Space Age. Our way of life has changed almost beyond recognition, but inwardly we still treasure the same spirit of good fellowship and joy of comradeship that inspired the founders of this club.

Whatever the changes, this spirit will remain and grow stronger and finer with each stage of progress; for it is the essence of our being in its finest sense. Some here have been members of this club for many years; in their vigorous activity and happy faces we see clear evidence of that dominion that comes through exercise of unselfish friendly affection and sincere interest in the welfare of others. May they long continue to exercise this dominion.



The above photograph above was taken on a club walk at Howsham in 1915
(Archive photograph kindly provided by club members R. & V. Little)

Evening (Cycle) Ramble – 26 June 2001 (foot and mouth year)

As an alternative to the programmed evening ramble on 26 June 2001 seven “hardy cyclists” launched themselves into space around Knavesmire Gates and across the Racecourse to join the cycle way to Selby using the old railway line closed in 1983. At one point one is dazzled by an artificial sun and explanations of distances to the 9 planets in our Solar System. What was fascinating about this space travel along a beautiful track bordered by trees and bushes with red and white roses and other natural flora in abundance, was that each planet was spaced along the way in scale to its real distance from the next one, so that some planets like Earth and Venus were relatively close together whereas Jupiter and Saturn took some pedalling to reach. Space travel is thirsty work, so we branched off to the Black Hole known as the Blacksmith Arms at Naburn and enjoyed refreshing drinks in the pub garden before returning the way we came. Could this perhaps become an annual astronomical event – even without the restrictions of foot and mouth?

Rodger Dunning

(Astronautical Whipper In)