

CHA Beginnings – How it all started

During the lockdown I set about digitising all the club records and where there were gaps, I sought help from some of the members own personal files.

OK, let me start with a few facts about the National CHA Association. The Co-operative Holidays Association was formed in 1891 by the Reverend T. A. Leonard. He left the movement in 1913 because the CHA had become too middle class and so he formed the Holiday Fellowship.

In 1964 the CHA renamed itself the “Countrywide Holidays Association” to distance itself ironically from its working-class image. It finished trading as an independent provider of outdoor holidays in 2002. At its height there were probably around 300 CHA clubs in the country; today I counted 20 CHA clubs advertising on the internet; with a further 8 advertising as CHA & HF combined rambling clubs.

The Coventry CHA Rambling Club was formed in 1911. Although we have a photograph dated 1910 of a “Coventry Rambling Club” on a picnic, the first authenticated Coventry CHA document we know of is in Angela C’s possession, a 1923 rambles programme, meticulously typed accompanied by beautiful hand written notes. The 1924/25 rambles programme shows as many as 40 people on a ramble. Let me quote from early 30’s rambling notes - “quiet” 11 miles ambles on Saturdays and “modest” 17 to 18 miles rambles on Sundays. Membership at the outbreak of World War 2 was 68. War was declared on 3rd September 1939. The ramble on the 6th September was to Chadwick End and Berkswell; one can imagine the topic of conversation. They continued regular Saturday rambles throughout the war years, but there is a gap of 12 years between the May/November 1939 rambles programme and the next one which was produced in 1951. We know that in January 1946 membership was 150 and 100 of those attended a “War End” peace dinner. They stopped putting the mileages on the rambles cards after the war and it was not until the 1990 AGM that the decision was made to re-introduce this. I noted that all the Sundays rambles on the programme following the AGM were listed as 10 or 11 miles and all the Saturdays as 5 miles.

In 1961, our 50th anniversary year, the club produced its first newsletter. The earliest one we have is from January 1966. I will quote from the editor - A lucky few saw sight of snow-capped Malverns and fields of golden daffodils. I remember we used to have blossom, daffodil and ice breaker rambles; the trouble was our English weather never seemed to coincide with the dates we put down for these rambles. The editor also notes romantic Moonlight Rambles, but more down to earth, the editor adds Georges Coaches are so helpful and so cheap. Half a crown a mile was the charge then to hire the coach; all well and good providing they turned up which was not always the case! It’s remarkable that the club has a complete record of rambles programmes dating from 1960, newsletters dating from 1966, and committee minutes and AGMs dating from 1970. There’s plenty of gossip in those minutes I can tell you, but that’s for another day.

Finally, let me end on a charitable note. I totalled up what the club has donated to charities over the years. It amounts to over £24,000. Myton Hospice was the main beneficiary receiving £14,000, it being the first of the 3 charities the club still donates to. The others were the Voluntary Air Ambulance Service and Zoe’s Place Baby Hospice.

Brian K