

I am resisting the urge to channel Noddy Holder and shout "It's Christmas..." loudly. I am a Christmas-ophile and am always the first in our house to open the mulled wine, watch *It's A Wonderful Life* again, and lobby the rest of the family for a tree (against which my husband holds out every year until at least the middle of December...). I am however conscious that Christmas can be a particularly difficult period, for a whole variety of reasons - often to do with loss or loneliness - but sometimes due to other basic human needs being unmet, through hunger, homelessness or conflict. Six months after Grenfell, **I wish you the best spirit of the season** as I understand it - a spirit of gratitude, joy, love, healing and hope. I hope you have a wonderful and peaceful holiday.

It has been a pleasure working with you this year. Thank you for your extraordinary efforts. We have achieved a great deal together and I have a strong sense that we are working increasingly well as one team. This spirit of unity, optimism and clarity of purpose is evident in our board. Since I last wrote to you, the trustees have held their November meeting, at which they approved the budget and a draft agenda for general council. Five of our trustees will reach the end of their terms in 2018 - so we will be looking for a new chair and honorary treasurer and three ordinary board members. Please consider putting yourself forward - you can find more about **General, Scottish and Welsh councils, trustee recruitment and our "Rambles together"** in this newsletter.

As well as attending the board meeting in November, Adrian Harvey (our head of policy and advocacy) and I were also lucky enough to be invited to join the **Kent area rights of way team meeting** brilliantly led by Averil Brice. With over 70 attendees, the meeting was exceptionally well organised, welcoming, positive and professional. We had a great discussion, and left with homemade apple strudel and a copy of a fantastic piece of policy work outlining how Ramblers volunteers can best respond to planning applications - which is something we can use to develop an organisation-wide policy to share with our rights of way volunteers across the country - this is a great example of staff and volunteers working well together for the benefit of walkers everywhere.

As well as working well together internally, I think we have also made good progress identifying key external partners and funders this year. A few weeks ago I went to Southampton to meet the chief executive and managing director of **Ordnance Survey (OS) and OS Leisure** respectively. We shared our vision and strategy and agreed that our volunteer-led charitable and campaigning activities are highly complementary to the amazing digital mapping tools and techniques produced by OS's c.900 employees. I hope our meeting will be the start of a productive and mutually beneficial working relationship. Whenever I meet other agencies, I am struck by the high regard in which they hold the Ramblers and their willingness to engage with us.

In similar vein, I also visited **Lord Gardiner, Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs** again this month. As the government's rural ambassador, Lord Gardiner's brief covers key areas of interest for us, including landscapes and National Parks. He is keen to help us to work productively with both Natural England (with respect to increasing partnership work on the England Coast Path, and supporting National Trails) and the Department of Health (with respect to encouraging more action on green prescriptions) as well as continuing to press our case for access as a public good, as part of the ongoing Brexit agricultural bill discussions. I was encouraged by his willingness to engage with us as a potential part of the solution to the difficult funding challenges which DEFRA currently face.

In staff news this month, Simon Barnett, director of delivery and development, has decided that the time is right for him to seek a fresh adventure. He will be leaving the Ramblers at the end of February. In his time with us, Simon has supported our volunteers and championed our Walking for Health programme, and I know you will join me in thanking him for his service and wishing him the very best for the future. As covered in the November newsletter, from now on **this update will be sent to all active volunteers** in anticipation of the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) requirements. If you know of volunteers who are not yet receiving this newsletter, but would like to do so, you can find instructions in this update about how they can register.

This newsletter also contains information about how you can get involved with a new Don't Lose Your Way advisory board, nominate your local town or city as one of Britain's best walking neighbourhoods, and recognise volunteers who have made exceptional contributions over the last year. And it is wonderful to be able to share **two terrific successes at Telscombe and Warminster**, as a result of the efforts of the Sussex and West Wiltshire Ramblers respectively. The path at Telscombe had been closed off for over 45 years, but thanks to the tenacity and perseverance of our volunteers, working in partnership with staff and other like-minded bodies, everyone can now walk again from Brighton to Peacehaven: a brilliant result and one worth celebrating this Christmas.

I wish you and your loved ones some wonderful winter walks and a peaceful holiday season and I look forward to working with you again next year.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. Williams', located below the text 'Kindest regards,'.