



# **Guildford Travel Club**

## **The Early Years**



## INTRODUCTION

To celebrate Guildford Travel Club's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary I felt it would be a good idea to record something of its early years.

I am sure that many current members are not aware of how it all began. These are personal memories of Norah and me from the many papers I have kept.

We joined the Club in its second year, Norah being introduced to it by a member, Kath Williams, a colleague at George Abbot School. After only four meetings I was asked if I would serve on the Committee! I agreed and this was the start of my long association with the Guildford Travel Club.

I was Treasurer for several years, Programme Secretary for one year and served four terms as Chairman.

I was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in June 1978. In 1987 I was elected President of Guildford Travel Club.

In 2009 whilst serving as Chairman, we moved to Leicestershire and I handed back the Chairmanship to Robert MacAndrew.

A short time later I was invited to serve once more as President, a great honour.

It gives me great satisfaction to see how the Club has prospered and I am always pleased when we can visit Guildford to see old friends and attend a Club meeting.

## **GUILDFORD TRAVEL CLUB, THE EARLY YEARS**

**By Gerry Holman FRGS**

The Club was founded in March 1966, the brainchild of Bay Hyde, who had been involved with the All Nations Club of Guildford for many years and had made it successful. Her idea was to bring together people with an interest in travel, 'Travel for Travel's Sake', which became the motto of the Club.

Bay was a great Guildford character who had recently retired from teaching in the Kindergarten of Guildford High School. She approached Paul Allix who was to become the first Club Chairman and Frank Salter from Lloyd's Bank, who agreed to be Treasurer and other friends like Joan Hamilton and Jo Carter gave their support, Founder Members on the Committee. Other founder members I remember included Howarth and Dorothy Freeman.

The first Committee Meeting took place in Paul's garden in Clandon and the first meeting was in the old St Saviour's Hall where the meetings were held for many years. Membership charges for the year were £1 and £1-10-0 for couples and the cost to hire the Hall was 5 guineas a month. By April 1<sup>st</sup> 1966 there were 32 members.

During the first year the Speaker would be given a £3 – £5 Book Token or Voucher – rather than today when £300 or more is not uncommon. An early Programme Secretary was Mary Rae. Her policy was that she would engage speakers only if she had already heard them give a talk. She was exceptionally well travelled and an excellent photographer,

with some photographs, particularly of polar bears, published. Only in recent years we learnt that she had worked at Bletchley during the Second World War.

The Club went from strength to strength with a varied programme and many countries covered – for example Portugal, Italy, South America Lapland and China. At the meetings Committee members worked hard to recognise new members and make them feel welcome.

There was a strong social side to the Club, with a Christmas party and a dinner dance and 'Members' Evenings', where slides were shown of their travels by members in their own homes – an excellent way of getting to know other members and to make new friends as well as exchanging travel information. Bay Hyde didn't take photographs but she could entertain us with stories of her escapades! She was a very determined lady – on one occasion, as Albania was beginning to open its doors to outsiders, she decided to visit, so she went to the Embassy in London for a visa. She filled in the necessary papers, asked how long it would take, to be told she would receive her visa in about 3 months. Her response was that as she wished to go 'next week' she said, 'Young man, I will sit here and wait and you can process the application NOW!'

Jo Carter, a Committee member, took on the task of 'Outings'. This was a great success and included, over the years, a number of trips to the Watermill Theatre with supper, a visit to the Surrey Constabulary at Mount Brown, bell ringing at the Cathedral, visits to Polesden Lacey, the Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton, the GPO Sorting Office, a viewing of the Guildford Town Plate at the Guild Hall, Gomshall Tanneries and

a memorable trip to Glyndebourne, with 'black tie and picnic'! A visit to Rottingdean Toy Museum was followed by a guided tour of Brighton's Sewers – they were quite clean and not smelly, but the highlight was climbing out of a manhole in the Square where the Brighton Buses stopped! The expressions on the faces of the bystanders were a sight to behold – something Norah will never forget!

Geoffrey Hollis, a member of the Ramblers' Association and who contributed a column to the Surrey Advertiser, with his wife, Eileen, organised regular weekend rambles for club members and their families. These were always well supported.

As the Club became more widely known the membership grew – by 1971 numbering over 150. The Club provided a new professional screen for the Hall to do justice to the quality of the slides and Mrs Jean Parker was engaged to provide the interval refreshments – and wash up! She was invaluable!

A number of Speakers were keen to return to give further talks following their enthusiastic reception. It was the custom of the Club to offer the Speaker a meal before the evening's presentation. It was always a delight when they accepted especially for a first visit.

Some of our early well known speakers included Eric Shipton, General Paterson, Ranulph Fiennes, John Julius Norwich, and then David Nicholls, a member, who worked at the Ministry of Defence and was involved in overseas army expeditions, introduced us to 'Major' John Blashford Snell. His first visit was to recount the expedition to the Darien Gap.

This introduction to 'JBS' led to a long standing association and friendship between him and the Club and his election as President in 1971. Through John, in 1973, we were granted Corporate Membership of the Scientific Exploration Society, based at Sandhurst. After each Army Expedition led by John, we were always invited to the first presentation given at Sandhurst – a really great experience.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1971, the Club organised a meeting at the Guildford Civic Hall for a special presentation of 'The South Face Expedition to climb Annapurna' led by Mick Burke. This was good publicity for the Club and 350 people attended.

And then we were invited to be involved with the Guildford Festival.

On the first occasion, in the early 1970's we held an Austrian evening at the University of Surrey. Some 30 conifer trees (hardboard, painted green!) were made by members of the committee in the garage of David Brown, the Chairman, to be used as decoration in part of the main concourse. Films and slides about Austria were shown in a number of the lecture Theatres and appropriate refreshments were provided.

On the second occasion, in 1973, the theme was Italy. The main concourse was decorated with vast numbers of large coloured paper flowers, made by members, and displayed in huge baskets made from chicken wire. The effect was quite spectacular! Refreshments included Italian wine, Italian cheese and mini pizzas – a novelty in those days and again, made by members. Lecture theatres were again used to show films and slides of Italy.

For the Festival we were also asked to give daytime guided tours of Guildford for members of the public. A number of members volunteered to act as guides and prior to the event we had a training evening given by Mrs Penneycote. These tours proved to be very popular. On the Saturday I had a group who were visiting from USA, and they were most impressed by the Festival and 'Old Guildford'. On Tuesday and Thursday evenings the tours took the form of a 'pub crawl' to Guildford's old inns, many of which do not exist today. Also three guided rambles were organised by Geoffrey Hollis for the Club.

At this time membership had increased to 137 and all meetings were very well supported. The committee decided that it would be interesting to discover which countries had been visited by members and a questionnaire was produced. The results were quite amazing – there was scarcely a country that had not been visited by at least one of our members!

At the 1976 AGM the annual subscriptions were increased to £3 per person with a 35 pence charge for a visitor!

By October 1977 a full membership of 250 was reached, with 25 on the waiting list.

At the 1980 AGM the annual subscriptions were increased to £5 per head.

Sadly in 1980, Bay Hyde and Geoffrey Hollis died, both missed greatly.

In July 1980 we financed a seat in memory of our Rambles Leader, to be sited on Leith Hill.



Following the death of Bay Hyde, a Memorial Party was held at the Bellamy Theatre on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1980. The Club decided to make a donation of £250 to Guildford High School for an annual award to be given in memory of Bay.

In August 1979 Guildford was twinned with Freiberg, Germany. The Travel Club joined as a member. A candle-light dinner was held in the long gallery of Sutton Place, the home of Paul Getty. A number of Travel Club members attended. Norah and I were shown into his private study by one of his secretaries. It was an interesting room with a large display of photographs of Paul Getty with posing with world leaders.

In November 1982 we were informed that St Saviour's Church Hall in William Road was to be demolished and we had to search for a new venue. After rigorous search we relocated to the Methodist Church Hall off the Woodbridge Road where we remained until we moved to our present meeting place in the Onslow Village Hall.

## **OPERATION DRAKE**

In 1978, because of our association with John Blashford Snell we became involved with Operation Drake. This was the brainchild of JBS and its flag ship, the 150 ton Brigantine, the Eye of the Wind, was at the centre of the two year round-the-world expedition involving young people from all over the world. It was divided into 10 separate stages, each lasting between 10 and 12 weeks and the young explorers would work alongside scientists and other experts carrying out scientific exploration, research and community projects. At each stage there was a changeover for the young explorers whose ages ranged from 17 to 24.

Worldwide there were 58,000 applicants for the 216 vacancies! All went through a stringent selection process to show that they could cope in all conditions, for example in the jungle, or encountering snakes or scorpions, and living in the very confined space on board, being compatible with others in the group. They could not be fussy eaters! Audrey Olley and Peter Hyem, another committee member and subsequent Chairman, were involved in the selection process, which involved some wet and muddy weekends! If selected they had to raise funds to take part. We elected to sponsor two people, Patrick Morrissey and Katherine Barker on condition that they returned to the Club to tell of their experiences.

In May 1978 the Club organised a presentation at Guildford Civic Hall given by John Blashford Snell and Richard Snailham, explorer and senior History tutor at Sandhurst. In the afternoon they gave a presentation to children from many schools in the area and in the evening the Club welcomed members of the

public. On display at the entrance was a giant Zodiac Gestetner inflatable boat as used on the expedition. It was delivered from Sandhurst by the army in a lorry with one driver only – we had to get it from the car park to the front of the hall, inflate it by ourselves!! Quite a task!!! The profit from the sale of tickets enabled us to send to the Operation Drake office a cheque for £750 towards our sponsorship.

On October 20<sup>th</sup> 1978 Terry Burke, who was Chairman, and his wife, Vera, Audrey Olley who had been involved with the Selection Process, myself and my wife, Norah were invited to a reception in the Guild Hall in Plymouth and were introduced to the former American Ambassador, Walter H. Annenberg who was supporting the Expedition. The following day we watched the Eye of the Wind set sail, with Prince Charles at the helm.



The Club received regular updates on the progress of the expedition and on the return of the Eye of the Wind on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1980 and Audrey Olley, Norah and I were invited to welcome her home. We watched her sail up the Thames with Tower Bridge open in tribute. Afterwards we went on board – how anyone could live in such a confined space for 3 months....!

On October 24<sup>th</sup> 1983, Operation Raleigh was launched by JBS. This was to last for four years and 400 young people worldwide were involved. Regular updates were sent to the Club but on this occasion we did not sponsor anyone.

## CLUB CELEBRATIONS

For the Club's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary a celebratory dinner was suggested, at a cost of £3 per head. Sadly this was rejected by the members as being too expensive!

However we did celebrate the Club's 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary with a dinner held on Friday May 8<sup>th</sup> 1987 at the Hog's Back hotel. The President, Derek Fordham attended and proposed a toast to the Club and to its continuing success. As Chairman I responded. We had an excellent meal and a 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary cake was cut. An enjoyable occasion, well supported.



To celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary a dinner was held at Clandon Park on Saturday April 13<sup>th</sup> 1991. The President, Tony Escritt attended and gave a very entertaining speech. As Vice chairman I responded on behalf of members. In the Minutes I found that it was recorded that I was kissed by more lady members than ever before!! Following the devastation at Clandon now, this is an even more poignant memory!



## **EARLY CLUB PRESIDENTS**

Paul Allix

Mike Banks

John Blashford Snell

Derek Fordham

Gerry Holman

Andrew Mitchell

Richard Snailham

Tony Escritt

Robin Hanbury Tenison

Audrey Olley

### **Elected Honorary Life Vice President**

Bay Hyde

Early Members who served on the Committee, some becoming Chairmen include:

Jim Boyden, David Brown, Terry Burke, Jo Carter, Tib Cotton, Ken Eamer, Brian Fazan, Ken Garland, Joan Hamilton, Vic Heier, Don Henderson, Veronica Hope, Peter Hyem, Audrey Olley, Mary Rae, Christine Thompson.

## EARLY MEMORABLE SPEAKERS

\*One well known fairly early speaker, his fee being £25 asked for cash rather than a cheque.....!

On the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1969, a new member, Audrey Olley, gave her first public talk, 'Living with the Laps'.

Audrey joined the Club in 1968, following a trip through Finland to Lapland. Having heard of this Bay Hyde persuaded her to give this first talk. This was the beginning of Audrey becoming a popular speaker at the Club and at other organisations and she still is!! Her accounts of her travels – crossing the Sahara by camel, through Afghanistan and to Syria, to Japan to see the red faced monkeys and latterly her trips to see the tigers in India have enthralled us over the years. Of course we remember her as a Committee member, Chairman and President and still a most loyal member of the Club.

In February 1971 we were taken Plant Hunting in the Balkans by local well known Oleg Polunin.

In November 1971 John Julius, Viscount Norwich, gave us a passionate and moving talk about 'Venice in Peril'.

In February 1972 Sir Ranulph Fiennes, in the early days as young explorer, spoke to us of his Jostedals Glacier Expedition

In February 1973 Mike Banks gave his first talk to the Club – High Arctic Adventure. He returned many times to enthrall us with his adventures, subsequently serving as President. An



enthusiastic climber, many years later, with a friend, a retired Admiral then 90 years old, climbed the Old Man of Hoy!

In November 1973 Trevor McDonald of TV fame, spoke on the Romantic Islands of the West Indies.

In December 1974, Rosie Swale with her husband Colin, recounted their journey round the world in their 30 foot catamaran with their 2 children aged 6 months and 2 years at the outset. On the evening she wore a fashionable silver 'cat suit'. During the talk the zip was getting lower and lower – a memorable event!!

In March 1975 Richard Snailham spoke about the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, his first visit to the Club. After this a strong friendship was forged through his connections with Sandhurst and the Scientific Exploration Society and later Operation Drake. He returned to speak on many occasions and served a term as President.

In November 1975 we had a fascinating evening with the charming Marika Hanbury Tenison recounting her journey round Indonesia. She was a journalist who became famous for writing cookery books, but sadly she died at a young age. Her husband, Robin, also spoke at the Club and in fact became President in 1995.

Andrew Mitchell spoke to the Club first in March 1978, about the Tana River Expedition. He was a charismatic speaker and made a welcome return to the Club in October 1978 to tell of the Mulu (Sarawak) Rain Forest Expedition, which had been led by Robin Hanbury Tenison. Andrew pioneered the scientific

exploration of forest canopies and later co-founded Earthwatch Europe. He now acts as an advisor to governments and international institutions and is special advisor to the Prince of Wales' Rainforest Project.

Tony Escritt first visited the Club in April 1980. A teacher at Harrow School, he told us of a Sixth Form Expedition to Iceland. What an opportunity for the young people! His talk entitled 'Iceland, its Volcanoes, Glaciers and People' says it all! He returned many times and as our President attended our celebrations at Clandon for our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner.

In October 1983, Viscount Norwich, just before his second visit to the Club, told us that he required 2 screens! We persuaded him that the large screen we had, could show two slides side by side (no Power Point presentations then!) His talks, always about 'Venice in Peril', gave us much food for thought and we still remember his passion and concern for the sinking city.

Finally, not quite an early Speaker, but because of my interest in reptiles, I must include an evening with Mark O'Shea in 1993. He arrived with several sacks, containing a variety of snakes, including a 7 foot python! A number of snakes, out of their sacks, were passed around the audience, from row to row! Mark was the first speaker to bring live 'props' for his talk!

