

Roger Heath

Text of 50th Anniversary Speech

Great to see you here, everyone. I hope you've enjoyed the lunch.

Back in 1990, when John Major unexpectedly became Prime Minister, he looked at the circle of bemused faces round the table at his first cabinet in charge and said five words "Who would have thought it?"

And, of course, no one connected with that first hikers' treasure hunt – and that's what they called them in those days – could have imagined the circular walk from Reigate Station – which many of us rewalked yesterday – would be the start of an unbroken series of quizwalks that have endured for fifty years.

The organisers that day were our founder, John Cooper, and a guy called Derek Wilmot. They belonged to a south London social club called Elmbourne Young People's Club. The club met one evening a week in – and I remember this quite well – a rather grimy church hall in Tooting.

Now, as the afternoon wore on on the day of that first walk – Sunday 29th September, 1957 – people got lost, the weather closed in and only a handful of people finished the walk in the gathering gloom. So it all ended not with a bang but a whimper.

Just five days later there was a pretty big bang when Russia started the space age by launching the first Sputnik. OK, so the Russians had their launch pad but so, with hindsight, did we.

We've been playing some fifties music this afternoon and back in September 1957 a young man called Elvis Presley was in the charts with *All Shook Up* and *Teddy Bear*.

Elvis died in 1977 and four years later on Sunday 16th August 1981 the anniversary of his death coincided with a quizwalk. So what was a dedicated Elvis fan like John Davis to do? Obvious really: he took part in the walk, yes, but as a mark of respect to Elvis he did it attired in full evening dress, bow tie, dinner jacket, the lot! Where's the gear today, John?

But back in the early days they didn't need dinner jackets so much as stamina. Here's Brenda Marks, an early quizwalker, writing in the club magazine *News and Views* at the end of 1958, the first full season of quizwalks:

One must be agreeable to rising early on about 12 Sundays of the year. After shaking off the effects of the 'Saturday night out' during a B.R. journey you are expected to walk a course of 10 miles at about 2 m.p.h. This walk is undertaken in the sweltering hot English climate through several varieties of mud to find clues.

Now these are usually little rhymes written on flimsy pieces of paper and usually number about 16. On most occasions they are hidden in the most awkward places, on top of

12ft high brick walls, outside public conveniences, inside pigsties and outside public houses which shut five minutes before you arrived. You are expected to scratch about until you unearth the now soaking wet clues.

So no "afternoon only" walks in those days, no luxury of having all the directions and cryptic clues handed to you at the outset.

And, guess what. Sometimes the containers holding those clues, usually tobacco tins, became just that bit harder to find, human nature being what it is, for teams further back in the field!

The solution? A "panic" envelope system. If you got lost and couldn't find the directions for the next stage you had to open an envelope given to you at the start of the walk and have points taken off your score for your pains.

And it says in the stage directions here:

Reach into pocket and extract envelope with an air of triumph.

And here it is, Peter Juneman. It's from your walk from Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon station around 1959/1960– and it's unopened to this day, 48 years on!

But if you hold it up to the light you can make out the words “SANDOWN TEA ROOMS ESHER” on a slip of paper inside. So I wonder if anyone who got lost back then was smart enough to do the light test?

Anyway, as Peter will remember, in the first full season of Treasure Hunts in 1958 they didn't compete for a trophy, they actually played for money! But after a year of that they realised the error of their ways. This is from the club minutes dated 8th may 1959:

It was decided to withdraw the £5 prize for winners of the league and substitute a trophy, this to be held for one year together with a replica.

1959 also saw the introduction of the Andicap Treasure Chest which is on display here today. And, separated by 47 years in time, we have the first winner, Peter, and the current winner, Brenda Wooden, both here with us at this lunch.

And talking of money this is my favourite piece from club minutes. They're dated 4th September 1964 and show that, unlike boy scouts, early treasure hunters didn't always come prepared – or, if they did, they spent it before the day was out:

Any other business: It was proposed by Les Bradbury and seconded by Andy Wilson that Ken Halls be paid 16 shillings from club funds. This is to repay him for the money he gave to a number of Treasure Hunters who were unable to pay their fares home.

And it was in 1964 in fact that Brenda Marks's early morning trips on British Rail became unnecessary. The “afternoon only” walks we're familiar with today came in and either then, or even before that, all the paper work was handed out at the start of the walk. We've got it EASY now!

And then in next decade, the seventies, we completed our transformation by changing the name of our walks from Treasure Hunts to quizwalks.

And now to the eighties. And that brings us to the man who in 2007 has risen Phoenix-like from the ashes, the author of those caustic quizwalk chronicles in the 1980s called Quizzical Ramblings. There he is today, come back, like the ghost of Banquo in Macbeth, to haunt us at this feast. I speak, of course, of no other than Kenneth White.

And now, entirely WITHOUT having consulted him first, I'm going to give you some snippets from his three newsletters. To start there's this one from the May 1982 edition – the first sighting of a whale hunt:

The next hunt, this coming Whit Sunday, is being organised by Robert and Sue Whale, who along with Rosie Treasure, enjoyed an extremely successful first season in 1981.

And happily they're still with us today after travelling goodness knows how many miles to and from Berkshire over the years to attend quizwalks.

Then there are these from the newsletter entitled memories of the 1987 season:

Joyce's indefatigable indifference as Roger Heath trudges the 4th, 5th and 6th stages seventeen times.... And then in brackets these are usually the easier stages!

And then in a reference to Geoff Hunt, and also to Andy Hooper, who made a guest reappearance on yesterday's walk:

Andy and Geoff's MI5 tactics to break into the top five of the league – one team we appear to overtake more than others. Where on earth do they go to get in front of us? Over to you, Geoff!

And then this one referring to two former quizwalkers happily here with us again today, Martin & Karen Gardner.

Martin's overhang, and Karen's too come to that and then, you're familiar with the style now, the punch line in brackets: Hers is undoubtedly the more attractive of the two!

And then, just to prove the pen wasn't always slightly dipped in venom, a reference to Dave Saunders and Rosie Treasure, also, as ever, here with us today:

Rosy and Dave's happy smiling faces in the pub beforehand and (nothing in brackets here!) their continuing exuberance throughout the walk.

How many shekels exchanged hands for that one folks?

Now from the third and last Quizzical Ramblings issued in 1989, in a section entitled Memories of the Eighties, more than a light dipping of venom this time for Nick Worsfold, also here with us today after a gap of many years:

How about OBERSTURMFUHRER, HERR GENERAL! Nick Worsfold, he of the "I'll take any of the answers you have, as long as you choose the wrong one" fame.

And another, and this is where Homer nodded, a reference to a walk held by me in 1979 actually – and one which none of you who attended, including John Roberts here, will ever forget:

The walk where Roger Heath lost his shoe(almost his leg)and I, through being too smart, lost a good long range camera lens – six foot of mud!!

And lastly a reference to new faces –Derek and Sheila Harding joined in the Eighties as Laties – and "to the personalities who have fallen away like autumn leaves."

And that's my cue to let you in on one of quizwalking's best-kept secrets. From time to time we go hunting not for the answers to clues, but for our life blood, new recruits.

And a past master at this is our MC today, Roger Abbott. It's the late 1990s, he's high up on the North Downs, emerges from a thicket, surprises another walker, in this case Peter Evans, and then subjects him to a three minute non-stop presentation on the virtues of quizwalks.

And it WORKED!! And, as befits a quality recruit Peter brought other quality people into our group.

We have his own children Kieran and Zara – and Kieran of course scored a first this year when he set the children's clues on Peter's walk. And, by the way, thanks to Rosie Treasure here for coming up with the idea of children's clues in the first place.

Peter also introduced what I will call the Familia Biggsione. And what a family!

James, our charismatic chairman.

The peerless Penny, already, as we see, rearing a brood of future quizwalkers.

The Queen of the quizwalkers' purse, our Treasurer Kath Biggs.

And, whisper this quietly, the power behind the throne, the godfather who must be obeyed, Denis Biggs himself!

Now a brief look at some of the numbers that fifty years have brought us.

79 different people involved in organising walks; around 450 quizwalks, most of them in Surrey, of course, but others in Kent, Sussex, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Middlesex, not forgetting London itself.

Upwards of 11,000 cryptic clues – and I don't mind betting that the word PRIVATE has featured in a good percentage of them. And, by the way, hope you enjoyed the selection of 60 favourite clues that twenty of our past and present organisers chose from their own walks.

One stat I haven't cared to calculate is how the average age of a quizwalker has changed over the years! But I draw encouragement from the excellent group photo on the back of your souvenir editions that Roger took at Buckland earlier this year.

As you see, Darren Goodsell, Jamie Whale and Charlotte Ryan and baby are doing *their* bit to keep the average down, and it would have been even better if James's and Peter's families has been in the shot, too.

Time now for a few important acknowledgements.

First our founder, John Cooper. Pharmacist, election agent, club leader but above all a man in love with organising treasure hunts for other's enjoyment. He devised no less than 46 hunts in the sixteen and a bit years between September 1957 and his death in January 1974.

Then, a man known to many of you, Les Bradbury, he succeeded John Cooper as chairman in 1974. Winner of that first walk, first winner of the league trophy in 1959, a man in love with the traditions of what we do and preserver of our history through his carefully-kept archives.

Without Les Bradbury, no anniversary walk, no souvenir edition, no Honours Board, no Organisers Table, no "three favourites clues" exercise. I could go on.

So, let me say to you, Win – Les was magic for all of us who knew him and, like you, we miss him dearly.

And so to Roger Abbott, a quizwalker along with, Jenny, for over 32 years now and our tireless chairman for twenty of those years between 1986 and 2006. So tireless that it's taken four of us, James Biggs, Alan Reeves, Geoff Hunt, and me to replace him!!

And just a word for you, James. This year in particular you've had to juggle demanding family commitments with the pressures of running your own business – and you've still managed to do us proud as chairman. Well done!

Also, I want to mention two very important absent friends, Andy and Joan Wilson. Like me Andy was on that first walk fifty years ago and Joan started quizwalking after she married Andy in the early sixties. I'm sure we all wish them both well and I hope we can soon rekindle their long association with our group.

Last, but definitely not least, Joyce. She's faithfully walked virtually every blade of grass with me for the last 28 years and, much more important, made me a very happy man.

As for quizwalks, I feel proud and very privileged to have been associated over a fifty year period with a leisure activity that's proved so enduring and brought enjoyment to many.

So doing that rewalk yesterday was very special for me and it's also very special to be here with you today to celebrate our past and, more important still, look forward to the future.

And the icing on the cake's been working with a great bunch of guys over the last 18 months – Roger Abbott, James Biggs, Geoff Hunt, Alan Reeves and Peter Rose – who've contributed such a lot to the success of this celebratory weekend. Thanks, guys.

I began with five words from a politician and I'm going to end with five from another one, Tony Blair.

When he made his swansong appearance in the House of Commons his last five words were:
“That is that. The end.”

Well, everyone, this is the end of my speech and its also, in its way, the end of a fifty year journey.

But it’s not, emphatically not, the end of quizwalks. And so to all those who can, I simply want to say: “Stay out there in the countryside for us and keep the quizwalkers’ flag flying!