



FOOTPRINTS

Summer 2025

News from St Albans and District Footpaths Society www.stalbansfootpaths.org.uk

CHAIR'S CHAT

We are well into August now and it seems that we're having a long hot summer. For weeks the fields have had that golden mid-summer look and the hedgerows are producing a fine crop of blackberries, sloes and elderberries. Indeed, some of the chestnut trees are already turning colour, signaling the change that autumn will bring in a few weeks' time.

Hertfordshire is not one of the counties formally listed as suffering drought or with a hose pipe ban in place. However, some local farmers are worried that the prolonged dry weather will lead to poor harvests. A lack of rain in recent months carries the risk that wheat may turn yellow, shrivel up and die from lack of moisture without ever properly ripening. It must be hard to manage a farm when the weather is so unpredictable – it's only a year since we were heaving a sigh of relief that all the mud and floods had finally disappeared after a spring that caused alarm to many farmers whose crops could not get growing in the flooded fields.

The dry weather made me wonder whether this was the reason why there seem to be so few small birds in our garden. Our feeder is usually well used by blue tits, goldfinches and great tits – and of course our resident robin. However for the past few weeks they are nowhere to be seen.

I decided to look up the results for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) annual Big Garden Birdwatch to see whether there has been any significant decline in numbers. According to this, blue tits are the most common garden birds in Hertfordshire, followed by woodpigeons, garden sparrows, starlings, magpies, great tits, blackbirds and goldfinches. Although there has been some small decline in the number of blue tits, they remain the most common garden bird and overall, there is little evidence of any substantial fall in their numbers, though the number of garden sparrows recorded fell this year by over 12%.

What then is the reason for the lack of garden birds at this time of year? It seems that there are a number of natural causes including moulting (when birds tend to keep out of the way while new feathers grow), an

abundance of other food sources so there is less need for the feeders, and the end of the nesting season when young birds are able to live independently and find their own places to feed.

So it seems that garden birds are not particularly at risk this summer. However, there are a number of other birds that are. Again, according to the RSPB, the ones showing the biggest drop in numbers in Hertfordshire include tree sparrows, redwings, chiffchaffs and reed buntings. The figures for lapwings are not shown, presumably as there none recorded in the Watch. However, I was very pleasantly surprised to see one while walking near Panshangar a few weeks ago. I have to admit that I only know this because I have the Merlin app on my phone. For those that haven't come across this, it's a free app that listens to the birds nearby and identifies the birds you hear. It's very satisfying to be able to put a name to the song. It even works in other countries so if you're walking in Europe – or further afield – it's a good way to get to know your feathered friends.

Alison Hannah

Chair

DATES FOR THE DIARY

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

10 am First Friday of the month at the Dagnall Street Baptist Church café.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members

Fran Fullerton, Angus Murray, Darren Hopkinson, Sue Rossiter, Sheila Gabriel, Janet Wren & Helen Burn

We hope that you have all settled in and made friends with your fellow walkers.

HELP TO ATTRACT NEW MEMBERS

The Society is really keen to attract new members.

While there has been a significant increase in people who join a walking group – for health and/or social reasons – there are now so many walking groups that the Society has to work hard to make sure we find the members who want what we offer. We walk on Thursdays, so we're unlikely to appeal to workers. But we offer so much more than just walks, which most groups do not. We check footpaths, keep them safe and lobby for new ones and we produce walking books.

So, who is the perfect St Albans and District Footpaths Society member? Probably someone largely done with a fulltime job, who wants good company on a lovely Hertfordshire walk, often followed by a pub lunch and who might want to develop an interest in planning issues or wielding secateurs to keep nature at bay along footpaths.

And how do we find these potential members? We do most things: advertising and general PR and promotion. But we know that the majority of our members come on their first walk because they know an existing member. **Word of mouth is the most powerful marketing there is.**

Please think about this if your friends, relatives or ad hoc discussions cover walking. Bring a new person along if you walk regularly yourself. If you don't, the website address is easy to remember: stalbansfootpaths.org

Every new member keeps the Society safe for the future and vibrant for today.

Marie Owens

Website and Publicity Officer

REPORTING PROBLEMS

RIGHT OF WAY PROBLEMS

If you find any problems on footpaths in the county these can be reported online at: -

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/report-a-problem/report-a-highway-fault/public-rights-of-way/public-rights-of-way.aspx>

REPORTING FLY TIPPING

St Albans District Council (SADC) outsource their refuse collection to Veolia. If you see fly tipping locally, you can phone them on 01727 809 019. Or email:-

wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk

AGM 2025

Once again, we held our AGM in St Mary's Church Hall in Marshalswick. We met on Monday 9 June, with 24 members in attendance. At the start of the meeting the Chair, Alison Hannah, also welcomed the newly elected Mayor of St Albans, Councillor Teresa Heritage, who joined our members afterwards for a chat, tea and cake.

The Chair gave a report on the past year, which has been a busy one. We continue to provide a full programme of short and long walks on Thursday mornings throughout the year. However, membership numbers have gradually declined over the past years, with more members dropping out of active walking and fewer members joining. So earlier in the year we placed an ad in a local news magazine and from this have gained a few new members; we plan to encourage more.

Last year, we drew up a risk register to alert us to potential challenges, of which one was the declining membership. Other issues were also identified for attention. These included the need for new policies on privacy, complaints and conflicts of interest, which have now been agreed and circulated. We also prepared descriptions for key roles and responsibilities, to assist handovers and succession planning.

As it turned out, these preparations were – sadly - very timely. Quentin, our Treasurer for many years, became seriously ill towards the end of 2024; his wife Sue, our Membership Secretary, also became very ill earlier this year. Both stood down at the AGM for health reasons and their departure is a serious blow to the Society as they have been active and invaluable members for a long period of time. Quentin was Footpath Representatives Coordinator until last autumn. He has also been instrumental in drafting and checking the walks for our walks guides and a keen walk leader.

We are very fortunate that we were able to fill their roles at the AGM when Tim Hayward was elected as Treasurer and Vicki Barton as Membership Secretary. We are very grateful to them for stepping into the breach. The Chair also thanked members of the Executive Committee for their contributions throughout the year. In addition to electing these two officers, the AGM re-elected the other members of the Committee and approved the other appointments previously notified to members and read out at the AGM. There are still a couple of vacancies for Footpath Representatives, which will be discussed by the Footpath Representatives Group. The AGM also approved an expression of appreciation to be given to Quentin and Sue, and honorary life membership for Phil Escritt for his outstanding work in relation to planning issues.

The formal business being concluded, the Mayor gave a short presentation and expressed her support and commitment to the work of the Society, which she followed up informally with suggestions of practical assistance after the meeting.

Alison Hannah

Chair

AGM PHOTOS



ANNUAL PICNIC WALKS

The idea of the picnic walks was that both the long and short walk groups could get together and socialize after their individual walks. Ashridge was chosen because of the variety of walks in the area and substantial parking. This year's walks were held on the 5th June.

The weather forecast for the day was not good, however the rain held off for the walks and enough shelter was found under one of the large trees around the carpark so that picnickers did not get too wet whilst enjoying their lunch.



GARDEN PARTY (or not so 'garden' party!)

Our annual garden party held on Sunday 3rd August was kindly hosted by John Lickiss and his wife Chris. Although the weather was fine at the start of the afternoon, the rain set in and we retreated to the kitchen to enjoy the lunch provided.

In the garden before the rain

(Nicki and Helen with John's wife Chris)



Enjoying the 'garden party' during the rain!



Many thanks to John and Chris for hosting the event and to all those members who contributed to the spread.

NATURE NOTES - RED KITES



There cannot be many walks on which we do not see a Red Kite circling above us, or flying so low we can admire the beauty of these magnificent birds. The red kite is one Britain's most distinctive birds of prey with an unmistakable reddish-brown body, angled wings and deeply forked tail, and known for instantly recognisable mewing call. However, it is only 35 years that they were reintroduced into the area.

Red kites used to breed across much of the UK, but persecution over a 200-year period saw numbers fall as they increasingly became a target for egg collectors, reducing them to a few breeding pairs in central Wales. By the 1980s, the red kite was one of only three globally threatened species in the UK.

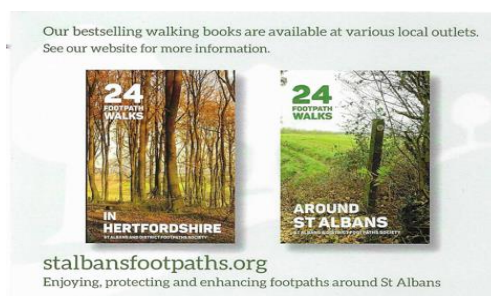
In July 1990 in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 13 young red kites - recently flown over from the Navarra region in Spain - took to the skies in their maiden flight in England, as part of an ambitious reintroduction programme.

The re-introduction 35 years ago was hugely successful and helped established a thriving population of the birds in the Chilterns area. It is estimated that from the initial 13 birds the population in the greater Chilterns area is approximately 2000 individuals.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Sales of our Green & Brown Books walking books continue to be strong, but stocks of the Green Book (24 Footpath Walks around St Albans, Seventh Edition 2019) have reached a point where a decision is required as 'what to do next'. At current sales rates we have enough stock for the next 2-3 years. At our last Committee meeting it was agreed that we would go ahead and produce a new updated edition of the Green Book, of the same standard as the Brown Book (Sixth Edition 2022) to be ready for when the current stock run out.

Members of the Society can obtain a copy at the discounted price of £5 (Brown Book) & £5.50 (Green Book) from Jane Kerr (stalbansfootpathbooks@gmail.com / 01727 852438 (+postage unless collected or on short walk.)



FRIENDLESS LANE FLAMSTEAD

I often lead walks from Flamstead starting from the carpark on Friendless Lane (which local people prefer to pronounce as “frindles.”) and have wondered how this unusual name came about.

Early records refer to the road as Cheveralls Lane, a narrow country lane linking Flamstead with the hamlet of Cheveralls Green but from about 1750 local legend has it that the name was changed due to a particular incident.

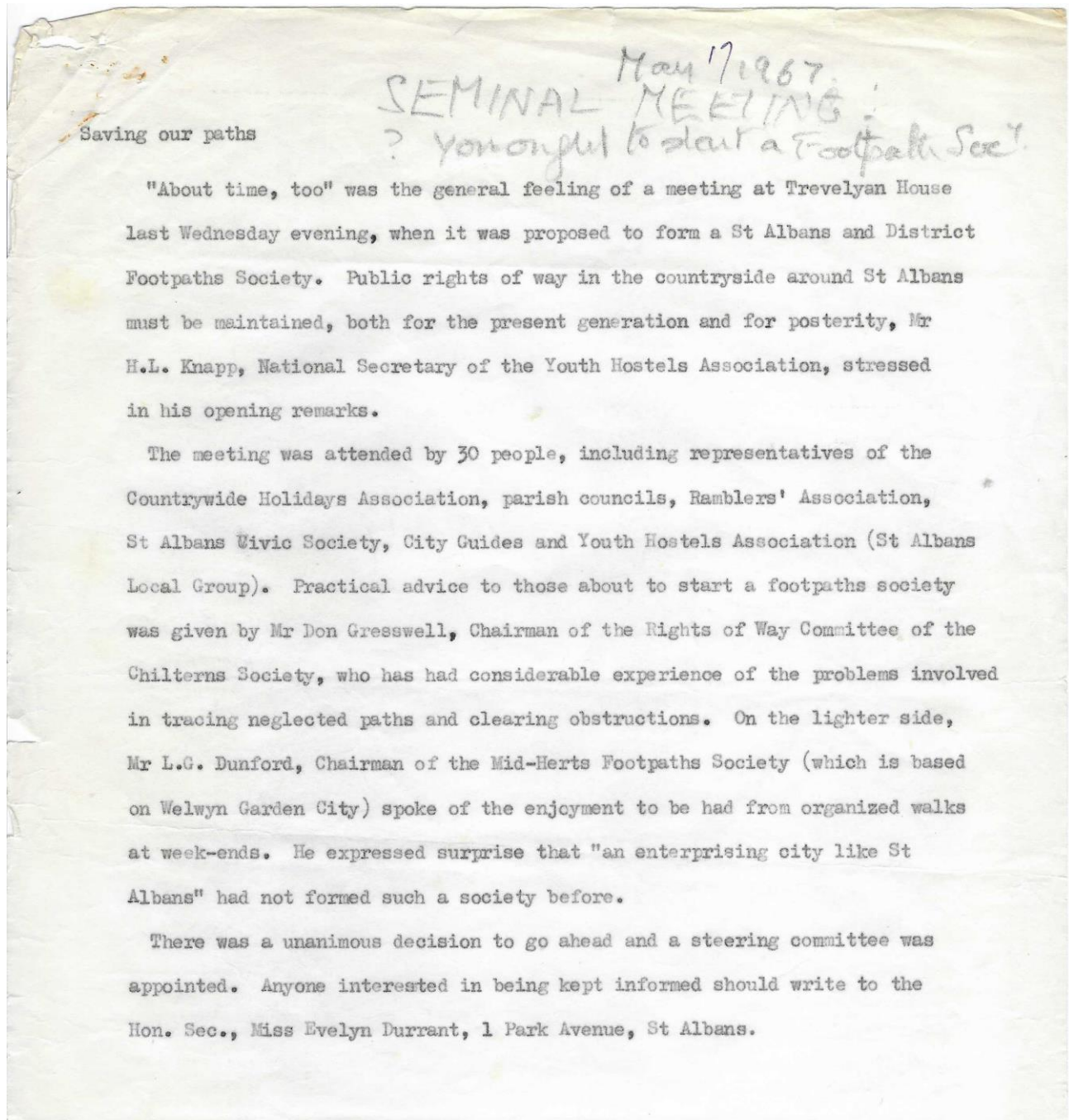
Abel Goodyear an innkeeper from Markyate, who supplemented his income by informing on local criminals, had a feud with hostler Fred Fox from Flamstead. It reached such a point that Goodyear employed local villain William Conn to waylay Fox in Cheveralls Lane and injure him to provide an example to others not to cross the innkeeper. Goodyear decided that he wanted to witness the beating but Conn mistakenly attacked Goodyear rather than Fox and beat him to death. Legend has it that Goodyear’s body was buried like that of a common highwayman at the scene of his intended crime. From that day onwards a little mound on the roadside gave birth to a new name – Friendless Lane.

Look out for similar unusual names on our walks and try to find out about their origin



SOCIETY HISTORY

Looking through the Society achieves; I came across notes from the seminal meeting to form the Society held on 17th May 1967.



We hope that you have enjoyed this edition of Footprints. We are always looking for articles and photographs for Footprints from members, which in the past have covered subjects as walks they have enjoyed, holiday experiences, society history, etc.

If you have an article you would like to submit, please look out for email requests for the next edition.