



# FOOTPRINTS

*Spring 2024*

News from St Albans and District Footpaths Society [www.stalbansfootpaths.org.uk](http://www.stalbansfootpaths.org.uk)

## CHAIR'S CHAT

### Whether the weather

This children's rhyme could be the motto for our walks this winter:

'Whether the weather be fine, or whether the weather be not, whether the weather be cold, or whether the weather be hot, we'll weather the weather whatever the weather, whether we like it or not'.

Flanders and Swann wrote a whole song in praise of 'mud, mud, glorious mud'. Sadly, this winter has given us too much weather and quite a lot of walking in mud, if not wallowing in it. The figures (see below) show that this February was more than 20 times as wet as last February!

There has been so much rain that the ground is really saturated and every spell of rain results in more flooding and waterlogged fields. This has made finding suitable walks much more challenging. One walk I'd planned to lead had to be substantially revised when we discovered that some of the paths were so very muddy and slippery that there was a real risk of people falling and hurting themselves, as well as getting covered in cold, wet mud from top to toe. However, we are lucky to be walking in Hertfordshire, which has an excellent network and choice of footpaths, so there are always alternatives that offer firmer ground.

While it is disappointing for walkers to go out in wet weather, the constant rain also presents a real challenge for many local pubs, as people are less likely to go out if the weather is bad. Some rural pubs depend on walking groups for much-needed weekday custom. After walking six or seven miles on a wet Thursday, the prospect of a traditional pub lunch is very welcome. The pubs mentioned in our walks' programme all cater for hungry walkers, and are often very accommodating in letting us use their facilities and pre-order before setting off on our walk. But the cost-of-living crisis, staff shortages and poor weather are all making their life (and livelihood) more difficult. In 2023, national statistics show that nearly 400 pubs closed in the first six months of the year, and one recent estimate suggests that 750 will close in the first half of 2024. Once closed, it is hard to imagine they will re-open again, certainly not any time soon. This would be a huge blow to our traditional way of life; and have a major impact on everyone who visits and values the countryside.

So, next time you listen to the weather forecast and wonder whether to go out walking, check out the local pubs too - and think of the warm and welcoming drink or meal that will reward your efforts, muddy or not!

Alison Hannah  
Chair

## DATES FOR THE DIARY

### MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

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

### AGM

Monday 10th June 2024 in St Mary's Church Hall, 1 Sherwood Avenue, AL4 9QA.  
Formal business will commence at 2.15 p.m. (for details see below).

### SUNDAY WALK

A Sunday afternoon walk is planned on 7th April, starting from Notcutts at 2pm, to walk parts of the proposed 'Hatfield Quarry' and Oaklands College.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new member **Peter Kendall**.

We have found that word of mouth is the best way of attracting new members – **please spread the word**.

## WINTER SOCIAL EVENTS

**CHRISTMAS LUNCH** was held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at The Wicked Lady following long & short walks. 35 members attended. There was no limit on numbers which was great and the varied menu seemed to suit everyone.

**SOUP & WALK DAY** was held on Thursday 8th February 2024 at Mike & Nicki Marriott's. It was a very wet day but 10 members joined the walk with an additional 10 turning up for the soup and chat afterwards. It was great that so many members contributed soups for all to enjoy.

**Thanks to Nicki Marriott for organising both events and to Mike and Nicki for hosting the soup day**

## **AGM 2024**

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) allows Members of the Society to review the work of the Executive Committee, to consider and approve the Society's finances and to elect members of the Executive Committee.

**This year's AGM will be held on  
Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024  
in St Mary's Church Hall, 1 Sherwood Avenue, AL4 9QA  
Formal business will commence at 2.15 p.m.**

The Society is running smoothly and our finances are in good order. The main concern at the moment relates to the positions of Chair and Vice Chair which may necessitate an amendment to our Constitution.

### **Amendment to the Constitution**

The current Constitution provides that the Chair of the Society cannot hold office for more than three consecutive years. This would require Alison Hannah who became Chair at the 2021 AGM to stand down this year. Conventionally, the Vice Chair would step into the Chair's shoes but there has been no Vice Chair since the AGM in 2021. No other candidate has so far been identified for either position although Alison Hannah is willing to stand again as Chair. For this reason a resolution will be put to Members at the AGM which would amend the Constitution to extend the maximum permissible term of office for the Chair from three to six years. It will remain the case, however, that the Chair is elected at the AGM from year to year.

### **Other matters**

Other business to be conducted at the AGM will include:

- Apologies for Absence
- Chair's Report
- Patron's Address (assuming the Mayor is able to attend)
- Minutes of the previous AGM
- Treasurer's Report
- Matters Arising
- Elections

### **Attendance**

We need at least 20 paid-up members of the Society to attend if the AGM is to be valid so do, please, try to attend.

### **After the meeting**

Once the AGM is concluded, there will be a chance for us to have a chat with tea and cake.

**Please support your society by attending the AGM. We aim to get the business side of the meeting over as quickly as possible to allow more time for socialising.**

## RAINFALL - THE FACTS!

It has certainly been a wet winter with some of our walks being cancelled or cut short.

Following on from Alison's 'whether the weather' comments in the Chair's Chat, here are the actual rainfall figures for the last 2 winters for our area.

<b>2023 – 24</b>	Actual mm	Average mm	%
December 23	101.3	75.7	134
January 24	72.6	74.1	98
February 24	130.0	57.0	228
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303.9</b>	<b>206.8</b>	<b>147</b>

<b>2022 – 23</b>	Actual mm	Average mm	%
December 22	101	75.7	90
January 23	79.6	74.1	107
February 23	5.7	57.0	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>186.3</b>	<b>206.8</b>	<b>90</b>

The figures speak for themselves as to why we have had cancelled walks and the state of the footpaths this winter.

## 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](mailto:wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk)

(We recommend using the latter as the phone line can take a long time to be answered)



## ART IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

On recent walks we have come across some quite impressive formal sculptures such as **Breaking the Mould** by Andrew McKeown on Waterford Heath in Hertford – see below:



On a recent walk between Kimpton and Ayot St Lawrence we came across more informal sculptures. The metal one in Priors Wood (Kimpton FP 011) and the carvings near Abbotshay Farm (Codicot Bridleway 038).



Seeing different things on a walk makes it more interesting (in past issues we have mentioned wild flowers and blue plaques). Let's see what we can come up with next!

## LOCAL RIGHTS OF WAY AND PLANNING

### OAKLANDS COLLEGE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW) CLOSURE

As many will know, a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) was put in place in August 2023, without any advance notice. This caused huge upset locally, as the links between Hatfield Road, Sandpit Lane, and Oaklands Lane are extremely popular and well used. Security staff and barriers were in place to prevent people using these routes, and the pre-conditions of diversions being in place were not available until December. One route is very hard to walk and all but impossible to cycle. The routes were also not open when demolition and construction works were not taking place. The extended TTRO ceases at the end of March 2024, and Quentin will be checking to ensure that the routes have been reopened.

**A Sunday afternoon walk is planned on 7th April, starting from Notcutts at 2pm, to walk parts of the proposed 'Hatfield Quarry' and Oaklands College.**

### STRTEGIC RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE (SRFI)

Work is beginning on this, and the Society and Ramblers are working with the developers, SEGRO, to seek agreement on the proposed new country park and associated new Rights of Way (ROW). While everyone locally seems agreed that we would rather not have the SRFI at all, it has been classed by the Secretary of State in 2016 as a National Strategic Infrastructure, so is very unlikely to be dropped. If new ROW can be agreed beforehand, we have a better chance of getting a good, coherent, linking set of ROW, than if we wait, and put in objections as work progresses. Some key elements are: -

- Ensuring no existing ROW are extinguished or diverted before alternatives are agreed and in place.
- Agreeing internal routes within each of the eight (8) areas for use by walkers, cyclists, and horse riders.
- Ensuring that the network of new ROW connect to the existing ROW surrounding the proposed areas.

### HATFIELD QUARRY (ELLENBROOK FIELDS) APPLICATION

The most recent application was refused, but the work already done by us is not wasted, as there is every chance that an appeal will be made.

### ST ALBANS LOCAL PLAN (LP)

The next version is expected in Autumn 2024. One major activity is to check whether the comments previously made by the Society have been "taken into account".

**Thanks to Quentin Keeling and Phil Escrit for all their efforts working on these issues PU**

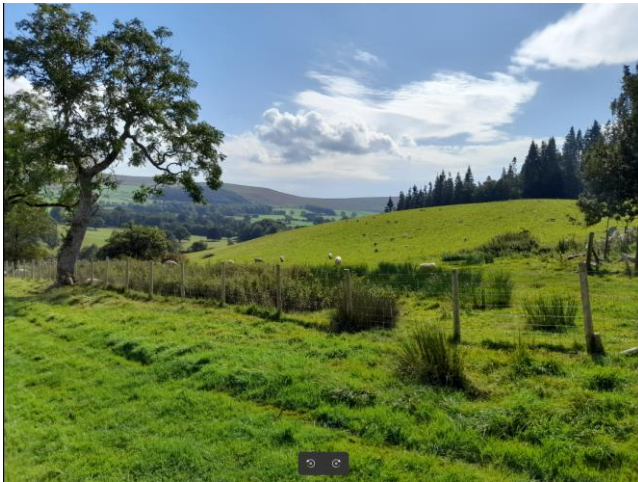


## WALKING FURTHER AFIELD

### A TRIP TO THE LAKE DISTRICT – BUT NOT THE HIGH FELLS!

#### Quentin Keeling recalls a trip to the Lake District last year

In early September, Sue & I had a couple of weeks in the Lake District. One book I retrieved from a dusty high shelf was “Exploring the Lakeland Fringe” by Robert Gambles & Beryl Richardson. This describes a circuit of the outside of the Lake District, and hence not high-level walks. As we were staying near the A66 between Penrith and Keswick, we looked at the route in that quadrant. They are split into moderate sections, and can also be further subdivided with a little more effort. We chose a section from Pooley Bridge (at the northern end of Ullswater) to Dacre, a small (tiny?) village to the north and east. By making this an ‘out and back’ walk of under 8km (5 miles), we could fit this into a half day, and still enjoy the tea rooms and bookshops of Pooley Bridge. We chose, or had, good weather, and an almost event-free walk. Both Pooley Bridge and Dacre rewarded our visits, especially the four bears (lions?) in Dacre churchyard. (see below)



Following on from the article above about local ‘Art in the Countryside’, Quentin’s lions show that you can find examples everywhere.

**If you have visited somewhere on a walking holiday and would like to share your experiences with other members, please let us know.**

## FOOTPATH TO NOWHERE!

Last year we reported that Hertfordshire County Council had been carrying out an upgrading of signposts / fingerposts throughout the County.

In addition to the figure posts showing the footpaths, other signs showing points of interest or special walking routes are sometimes added. In Redbourn on Footpath 049 at the Harpenden Lane end, there is a very prominent sign pointing to Porridge Pot (see below) .

I have walked this route many times as Footpath Representative for Redbourn and have always been curious as to what or where the Porridge Pot was as there is no sign of anything along the route or on maps for the area.



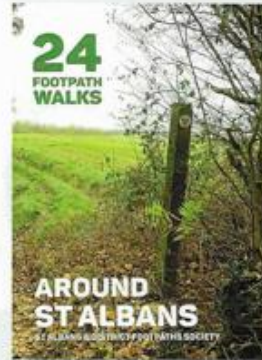
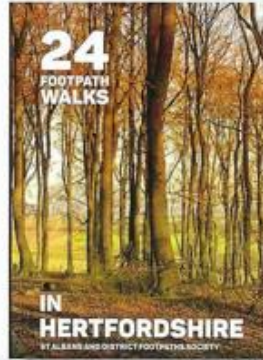
A delve on the internet and the Redbourn Village website came up with the answer. Porridge Pot, was a line of cottages (see above) in the corner of the horses' field before the stile into the golf course. Probably built in the 19th century, they were demolished in the 1950s, and little remains apart from some brick foundations and possibly the remains of the old well. It is remarkable that the name is still used for the location and more remarkable that a large sign points to nowhere!

There must be more of these missing points of interest in our area and I will be looking out for them on our walks.



## SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Our bestselling walking books are available at various local outlets.  
See our website for more information.



[stalbanfootpaths.org](http://stalbanfootpaths.org)

Enjoying, protecting and enhancing footpaths around St Albans

## DONATIONS TO CHARITIES

The profits from sales of our walking books provides a significant income to the Society and we have been able to make annual donations to both national and local charities that are working to improve the countryside in which we all love to walk.

Our finances are in good order and we have a considerable amount of money in our accounts and this year we have chosen the following organisation to make donations of £200 each to: -

- Open Spaces Society (OSS)
- Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
- Woodland Trust (Heartwood Forest)
- Ver Valley Society
- Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Society
- Watercress Wildlife Association
- Highfield Park Trust

The OSS and the CPRE are national organisations with local activists who are active in examining planning issues in our area, whereas the other 5 are local charities improving the environment of our local area.

## SOCIETY HISTORY

Here is another document from our archives about the early years of the Society. It is good to see that we are continuing with the original work of making sure that paths are maintained for all to enjoy, that newsletters and walk books being produced. The problem of getting walk leaders appears to have been a problem that has always existed!

*Meeting held 17<sup>th</sup> May 1967 attended by 30 people. Called by Dick Knapp , Nat. Sec. of YHA in response to letter in Herts Ad from Mary Hutchinson.*

*First General Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> June 1967. Elected June Jacobson – chairman  
Evelyn Durrant –secretary  
Committee members include Dick Knapp, Mary Hutchinson and Paul Barton.*

*By the end of 1<sup>st</sup> year there were 130 members. Sub was 5s or 7s 6d for a family.  
Walks on alternate Saturday afternoons, clearing paths the other Saturdays, walks also on Sunday mornings. Social evenings with talks in the winter.*

*Paths very overgrown and obstructed. Very few signs and waymarks. Society designed and produced own signs and waymarks and a lot of time was spent waymarking paths as well as clearing.*

*By 1969 'vigilantes' [FP reps] in place and organised.*

*1969 first newsletter produced.*

*Early 1970 onwards Society started to publish walks for the public to use in the Herts Ad. making use of newly cleared and waymarked paths. In Dec 1970 the 13 walks were published in booklet form [32 pages] - cost borne by Dick Knapp. By 1973 all 1000 copies sold and it was reprinted. By 1978 into its 7<sup>th</sup> edition- mostly privately funded by Dick and other members.*

*1977 Jubilee year – 18 walks published in the Herts Ad and these formed the basis for another booklet published by the Society in 1978-so both booklets in print and selling well. By 1978 there were 275 members.*

*Bill and Emily Frost got involved in the Society around 1986 and Bill took over from Dick Knapp coordinating the production of the walks book, as it now became.*

*In these early years coach trips were sometimes arranged to walk in other areas e.g. members walked The Ridgeway in stages.*

*Interesting to note that even early on there were problems getting enough walk leaders.*

*Transport charges came in during 1976 for those needing lifts- due to rise in petrol prices!*

*The Society was involved in the development of the Ver valley walk, and the paths along the Nicky line and the St Albans / Hatfield line - Alban Way.*

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.

**Mike Marriott, Footprints Editor**