



FOOTPRINTS

Winter 2023

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

St Albans and District Footpaths Society

CHAIR'S CHAT

Although I've been Chair now for over two years, I'm still surprised and impressed at the time and commitment our members spend in protecting local rights of way. Without this, our access to the beautiful countryside on our doorsteps risks being diminished or lost.

I was reminded of this recently when I went out, with another member, to check a walk I was planning to lead. We were following a route that had been included in a previous walks programme, and which I'd recorded on my smartphone app. The first section was well-marked and very attractive. However, about half way round, we arrived at the end of a field only to discover that the onward path had completely vanished. There was no indication of any route over the adjoining fields, no waymark in sight and although the map clearly showed a footpath over the next field, crops had been planted all over it, and it was impossible to see any way forward. For all the world, it looked as if no path had ever existed, even though the map (and my phone) indicated the opposite. In the end, we had to give up and retrace our steps; I chose an alternative walk for the programme.

We reported this to our Footpath Representative, who identified the right of way in question and reported it to the local authority. Although it happens infrequently, it is sometimes impossible to find a path that is clearly shown on the map. A local landowner may fail to clear one across a field of crops or a waymark may fall (or be removed), causing confusion as to the correct route.

The role of our Footpath Representatives is a very important one. At the moment, we cover nine of the ten parishes in our area. (We currently have a vacancy for Wheathampstead - if anyone is interested, please let me know!) Each one checks the rights of way in their area, usually twice a year, to make sure they are free from obstruction or other hazards. Problems are reported to the Footpaths Representative Co-ordinator and, in turn, to the local authority for appropriate action. As a former footpath representative for St Albans, I know that checking the walks can be quite time-consuming, and although St Albans has few problems, there are still cases where paths are fenced off, overgrown, or flooded.

The work of the Footpath Representatives is only one example of the 'behind the scenes' role carried out by our members. As is mentioned elsewhere, we also comment on local plans and planning applications where these can impact on existing rights of way or a new one would

improve a planned development. And our core activity of the group walks programme enables everyone to explore the countryside and discover new and interesting byways. As the seasons change, this can present quite a challenge. As I've discovered, Hertfordshire has two sorts of mud: the sort that it's possible to walk through and the sort that attaches itself to your boots and won't let go! But we won't give up walking all the same . . .

Alison Hannah
Chair

TRIBUTE TO THELMA

Thelma Kealey 9 February 1949 - 29 September 2023

The sad news of Thelma's death in September came as a shock to many of us. As a member of the Executive Committee and the Long Walks Programme Coordinator, she was a mainstay of the Society for many years. Together with David, she also regularly led walks, and her knowledge of the Hertfordshire geography, footpaths – and suitable pubs for walkers' lunches - could not be bettered. For the past nine years she and David also checked the rights of way in Sandridge parish, ensuring that footpaths and rights of way are not obstructed and remain accessible to walkers and others.

However, while the formal roles were very important, just as important was the part she played informally. Her finger was always on the pulse of what was going on. She was always thinking of ways to enhance and strengthen the Society. A natural diplomat, she was highly skilled in persuading people to take on additional responsibilities where needed, such as becoming a new walks leader or joining the Committee. Her good judgement, friendliness, tact – and her sense of humour - will be very much missed.

Alison

DATES FOR THE DIARY

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

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

CHRISTMAS LUNCH 14th December 2023

Prebooked lunch at The Wicked Lady following long & short walks

WALKS PROGRAMME

Please send your walks for February & March programme by Friday 12th January

SOUP & WALK DAY

Our annual walks followed by soup is scheduled for Thursday 8th February 2024

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members

James Strother and Helen Glenny

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

WALK LEADERS AND FIRST AID KITS

First aid kits have now been distributed to all walk leaders that requested them. Lets hope they are never needed

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

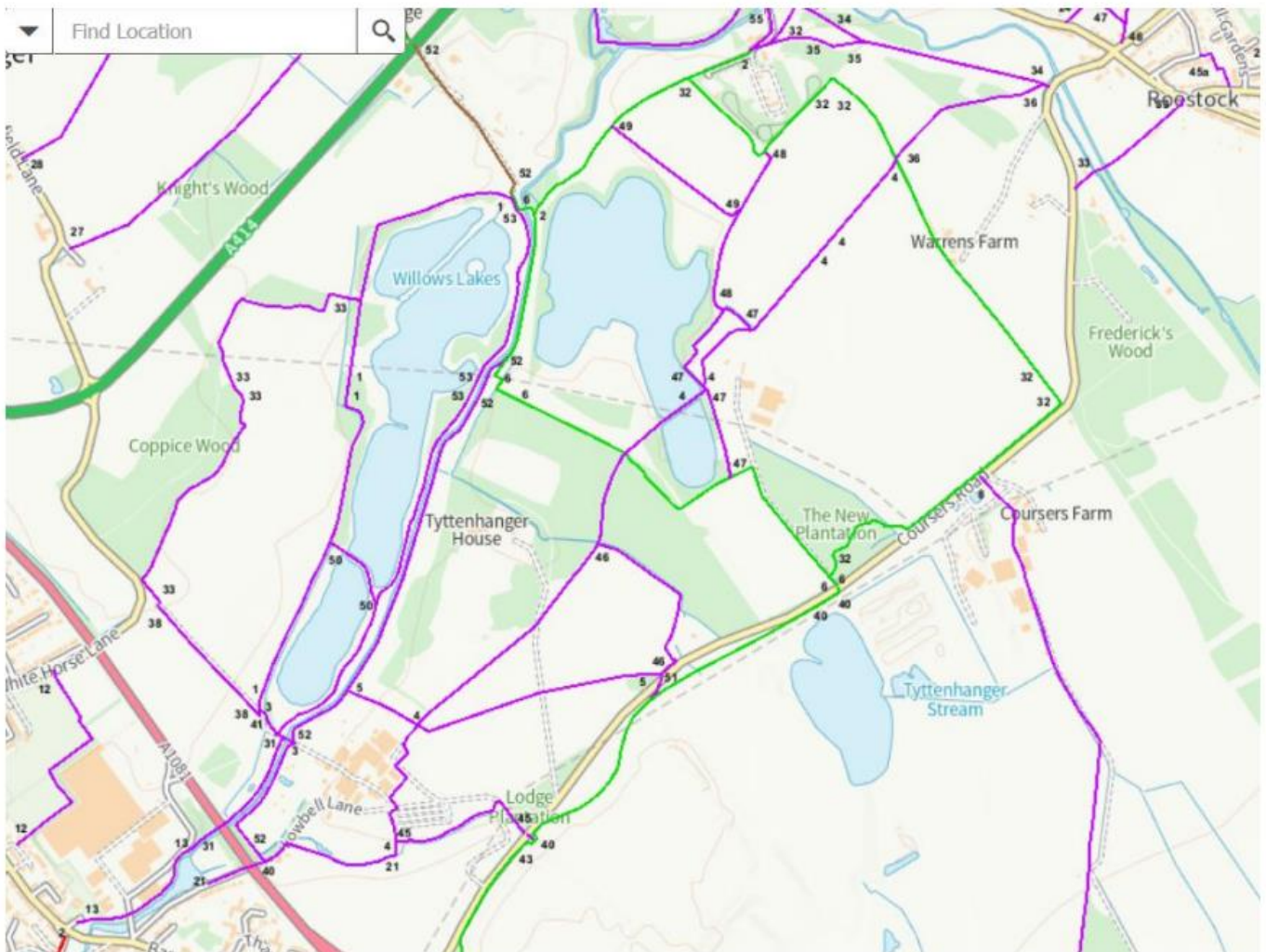
(We recommend using the latter as the phone line can take a long time to be answered)

Following up from Alisons comments in the Chairs Chat about the work of our Footpath Representatives, here are a couple of articles about work on improving the footpath network that they have been involved with.

IMPROVEMENTS TO FOOTPATH NETWORK

Phil Escritt reports on improvements to the footpath network on the Tyttenhanger Estate and have been added to the Definitive Map. The new footpaths around Willows Lakes make for an attractive short walk.

Public Rights of Way on the Tyttenhanger Estate



Extract from HCC on-line version of the Definitive Map, 16 Nov 2023

After almost a decade of negotiations and the technical and legal “hoops” that HCC has to undergo, almost four kilometres of new ROW are legally in place. These can be seen on the HCC Online Definitive Map (DM), and will also feature on the updated formal DM that is expected by the end of 2024. After that, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps will be updated. These are in exchange for the extinguishment of two ROW that went through the centre of the Willows Farm activity centre.

(The short walk on 30th November was around Willows Lakes)

IMPROVING THE FOOTPATH NETWORK FURTHER

Glyn Owens describes work done recently in the Park Street area to get new footpaths added to the nations Definitive Map.

Over the last two years a number of us in St Albans and District Footpaths Society have been involved with residents in Park Street who want paths that they walk regularly to be added to the Definitive Map (DM). The DM is important as it feeds into Ordnance Survey maps and makes footpaths visible to everyone including developers and planners. Getting routes on the DM now is of growing importance as landowners are making it increasingly difficult to add them. (You may have seen Section 31 of the Highways Act notices fixed to posts in the countryside).

One of the ways to add a footpath to the DM is to prove that the path has been used 'without force, without permission and without secrecy' for at least 20 years. How is this done? St Albans Footpaths were able to advise and help Park Street residents get the process right. First, it's important to clearly identify the routes being applied for. Witnesses - and their formal statements - are needed to show that routes have been walked for at least 20 years. Often this will be by dog walkers, but all kinds of usage - walking, cycling, horse-riding - may be applicable.

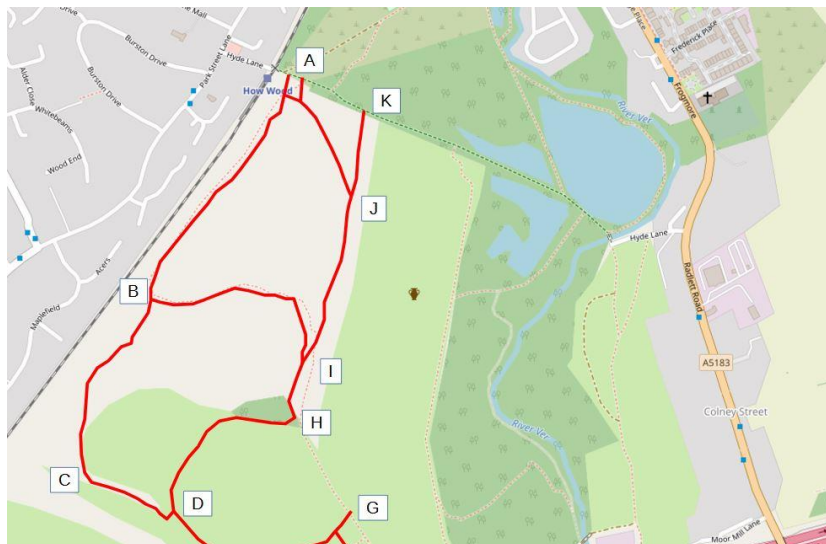
Then historical sources are looked at to see if there is any proof that those routes have been used over the years. Maps, tax records and satellite imagery can all be useful.

Once all this information is combined into a comprehensive application, the work is handed over to the organisation which is submitting the request to Hertfordshire County Council. An application can take years to process so it is highly recommended that a group which is local and will be around for a while takes responsibility. Also, only the original applicant can appeal any future decision.

This piece of work was particularly interesting and important because this area of Park Street will be part of a much bigger country park under the agreements with the new Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI). Loss of local land for the Interchange will be offset by new land for leisure purposes.

A lot of people are involved in such an application. This case was no exception. Jon Breen, a Park Street resident, brought us into the process and did all the heavy work involving finding and documenting witnesses. Phil Escritt brought all the application expertise and did survey work.

Routes in the Park Street application



REMEMBERING WALKS IN 2023

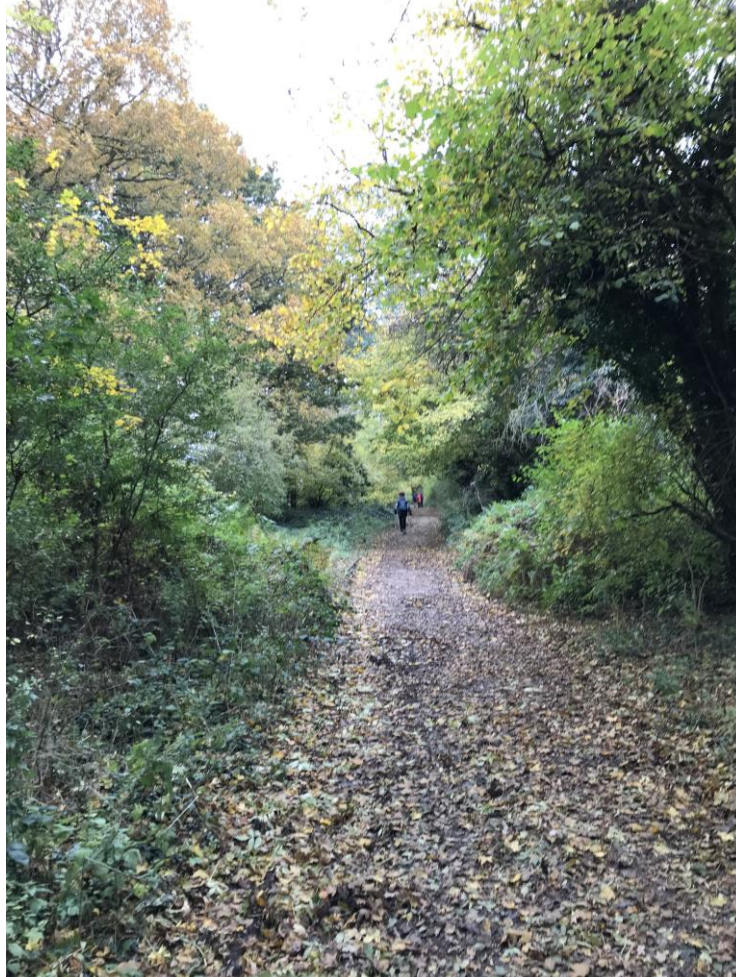
SUMMER WALKS

Photos by David Edwards



AUTUMN COLOUR

In the last couple of issues, I have highlighted some of the wonderful displays of wild flowers we have been lucky to see on our walks. On a much larger scale, the trees this autumn have provided a magnificent display of colour thanks to the weather patterns through the year. Below is a photo taken on a recent walk near Flamstead.



THE FRUITS OF AUTUMN

The berries have also been plentiful this year with hips, haws, elderberries and sloes to look at and blackberries to eat (a common sight to see a line of walkers reaching in the hedgerow to get the biggest fruit).

In addition, mushrooms and toadstools were also plentiful, which some members on walks were able to recognise the edible ones to pick for their favourite recipes.

With Christmas approaching, several walkers have commented on the abundant berries on the holy trees this year.

If you have any photos from on our walks, please let us know

PLANNING ISSUES

There has been a lot of coverage in the local press and from local campaign groups about major plans in the District in particular the threats to the Green Belt. Quentin Keeling updates us on some of the issues the Society has been working on.

SADC LOCAL PLAN (LP)

A first draft of this was made available on the Council's website, with an outline timetable for comments in the next couple of months, before revision, scrutiny, a formal Inspection, and a hopeful issue in late 2024 or 2025. The Society, together with the Ramblers, looked at the draft, and made their views known by the September deadline. This involved a great deal of work by Phil Escritt, ably supported by David Kealey, Glyn Owens, Mike Marriott, Alison Hannah and me. Work will continue at various times as the Plan develops. Our focus, as ever, is in line with the Society's objectives: to protect, preserve, and promote Rights of Way in the District.

OTHER PLANNING NOTES

Rather than detail specific applications, here are a few more general items that may be of interest. In all cases, a vast amount of effort has been put in by Phil Escritt.

Strategic 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 as 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 acceptable alternatives are agreed and in place.

Ensuring that the network of new ROW connect to the existing ROW surrounding the proposed area.

Hatfield Quarry (Ellenbrook Fields). Application. In a similar vein, a network of new ROW has been negotiated, both during and after the decades of quarrying. Recently the application was refused, but the work is not wasted, as there is every chance that an appeal will be made.

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan. This has actually been approved! It does not include the infamous Symondshyde "Village", so walks in this area will largely be unaffected by developments.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

With another order of new books arriving recently, Jane Kerr updates us on our publications

Sales of our Green & Brown Books provide a very significant income to the society and keep our annual subscription rates at the current low levels and enable us to make us to help finance a range of relevant local projects.

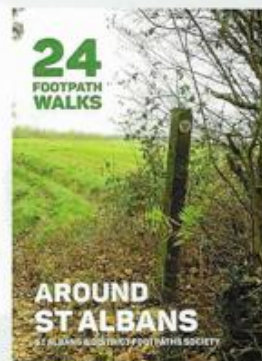
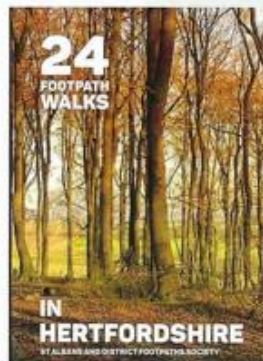
The current 7th edition of the green book was first published in September 2019, but due to faulty binding, was followed by a reprint in July 2020, with a second reprint recently published in November 2023 which shows how popular the books are.

Since 1988, when the first edition of '24 Footpath Walks around St Albans' was published, 27,000 copies have been printed, with total sales to-date reaching an amazing 25,000. The first edition of '24 Footpath Walks in Hertfordshire' was published in 1992 with a total of 15,500 printed since then.

Copies of both books will be available able to buy at the joint Christmas lunch on the 14 December, or from Jane Kerr (stalbansfootpathbooks@gmail.com) at from various local outlets. Members of the Society can obtain a copy at the discounted price of £5.00 (Green Book) & £5.50 (Brown Book)

Stockist are Carpenters Nursery (Sandridge), St Albans Museum & Gallery, Verulamium Museum, Waterstones (St Albans, Harpenden, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Hitchin, Watford, Welwyn Garden City & Berkhamsted), Cotswolds (St Albans), Darbys Stores (Sandridge), Meera Pharmacy (Beech Road) and the Roman Theatre.

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



stalbansfootpaths.org

Enjoying, protecting and enhancing footpaths around St Albans

SOCIETY HISTORY

This is a note about the first meeting to establish our Society held on 17th May 1967.

"About time, too" was the general feeling of a meeting at Trevelyan House last Wednesday evening, when it was proposed to form a St Albans and District Footpaths Society. Public rights of way in the countryside around St Albans must be maintained, both for the present generation and for posterity, Mr H.L. Knapp, National Secretary of the Youth Hostels Association, stressed in his opening remarks.

The meeting was attended by 30 people, including representatives of the Countrywide Holidays Association, parish councils, Ramblers' Association, St Albans Civic Society, City Guides and Youth Hostels Association (St Albans Local Group). Practical advice to those about to start a footpaths society was given by Mr Don Gresswell, Chairman of the Rights of Way Committee of the Chilterns Society, who has had considerable experience of the problems involved in tracing neglected paths and clearing obstructions. On the lighter side, Mr L.G. Dunford, Chairman of the Mid-Herts Footpaths Society (which is based on Welwyn Garden City) spoke of the enjoyment to be had from organized walks at week-ends. He expressed surprise that "an enterprising city like St Albans" had not formed such a society before.

There was a unanimous decision to go ahead and a steering committee was appointed. Anyone interested in being kept informed should write to the Hon. Sec., Miss Evelyn Durrant, 1 Park Avenue, St Albans.

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