



FOOTPRINTS

Winter 2025

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

CHAIR'S CHAT

Here we are again, in the dark days before Christmas and yet again 'tis the season to be muddy. After some glorious days of late autumn sunshine, the rains came down and the fields turned wet and slippery. It hardly seemed worth cleaning my boots before they got dirty and heavy again the next Thursday. Some people suffer from seasonal affective disorder, when they feel down and depressed because of the short days and lack of daylight. There is something inherently miserable about waking up in the dark and seeing the daylight fade by teatime. It reminds me of being in school, when it was dark at both ends of the day and we couldn't go out to play after school. That gloomy feeling still lingers on into adult life, however irrational.

Of course, we know that from 22 December things will start to look up as the mornings become lighter and we start to get the afternoons and evenings back too. At the moment walking is more for exercise than the pleasure of seeing the countryside, as eyes are firmly fixed on the path ahead, trying to avoid puddles, boggy bits and at the same time take care not to get entangled in overhanging branches and brambles. But as time passes, the fields get covered in green shoots, buds start developing and catkins appear. There is something very comforting about the cycle of the seasons, knowing that one will inevitably follow the other and the rhythm of life goes on.

Looking back over the year, we have had many things to enjoy – some lovely walks, good conversations and lots of fresh air and exercise. However, the year has been tough for some of us. A few longstanding friends and walking companions have passed away over the past months (including Valerie Coast, Sue and Quentin Keeling, who have been such active and valued members, always positive and willing to help). Their loss leaves its mark on all of us, and they live on in our thoughts and conversations. Others have been ill and many of us have been anxious on their behalf.

As the year draws to its end, I hope that the new year will bring good physical and mental health to us all. The pleasure of walking and talking together is very real. It gives us a chance to catch up on each other's news, exchange views on personal and wider experiences and generally feel connected to life. These opportunities are very precious when so many things around us are changing; long may they continue.

Alison Hannah

Chair

DATES FOR THE DIARY

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

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

SOUP, BREAD & NATTER Thursday 29th January 2026

Following walks that day at Mike & Nicki's.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members

Mary Harber and Wendy Smart

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

A TRIBUTE TO QUENTIN & SUE KEELING

The numbers attending the joint funeral of Quentin and Sue on 17 November 2025 reflected the enormous contribution both made to the life of St Albans in many different ways. The event filled the nave of St Albans Cathedral and was also livestreamed and watched by those unable to attend (including some from abroad).

Married for over fifty years, Quentin and Sue had a long commitment to the Footpaths Society in addition to their religious and community activities. They were keen walkers and until Sue developed knee problems, both walked regularly, with Quentin one of our most experienced walk leaders. Sue took over as Membership Secretary in June 2021, a role she continued to hold until she stood down in 2025 for health reasons. Quentin became Treasurer in 2013 and continued in this role until he too resigned for health reasons in 2025. Both were Trustees of the Society. Quentin was also our Footpath Coordinator for twelve years until shortly before his death - organising regular checks of local rights of way and liaising with the local authorities to preserve their accessibility and maintenance. He kept a keen interest in local development and planning issues where these could affect public rights of way and was indefatigable in record-keeping and action-chasing to ensure good results. The deaths of both – within a fortnight of each other - are a huge and tragic loss for their family, for our Society and for all the other organisations in which they were so active.

They will be long remembered, and much missed.

Quentin Keeling: 17 December 1949 – 25 October 2025
 Sue Keeling: 2 July 1950 – 8 November 2025

WALK AND GET PAID FOR IT!

Whether you like a gentle stroll or a scary scramble, Ramblers Holidays offer trips to a huge range of destinations from Cheltenham to Costa Rica.

Getting paid to walk may sound too good to be true but our society has qualified to join the Ramblers Walking Partnership, and they'll pay us when you walk with them. Most years they send us a small but worthwhile donation towards our running costs.

If you're about to book a Ramblers holiday you'll get an opportunity to add a partnership nomination – in our case St Albans and District Footpaths Society. You can't go back and claim after the holiday, it has to be done when you book or before you travel. But subject to that condition it will cost you nothing and for each person booking, up to £30 drops into our pockets.

As the meerkat said – Simple!!

Tim Hayward -Treasurer

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Our annual Christmas Lunch this year was held at the Elephant & Castle at Amwell on 12th December. Both the long and short morning walks were around Wheathampstead and the weather was very kind to us, with sunshine all the way. Twenty-one people sat down to lunch and though service was a bit slow at times it did give everyone time to chatter and catch up with friends.

Thanks to Nicki Marriott for organizing the event.

Coffee stop on the long walk – with George Bernard Shaw!



Lunch at the Elephant & Castle



STATE OF OUR FOOTPATHS

David Kealey who has recently taken over as leader of the Footpaths Representatives Coordinator has now a full team covering all the parishes in The District with new members Helen Glenny (Wheathampstead), Darren Hopkinson (Colney Heath) and David Butler (Harpden).

At the recent committee meeting it was good to see that most of the footpaths in the District are in pretty good shape with only a few being overgrown and difficult to access or requiring some maintenance to steps, etc. These have all been reported to HCC who we hope will bring them all up to scratch.

Please let us know of problems you find with footpaths within the district or better still report them yourself – see below.

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

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

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.)



CHANGING WEATHER

One of the reoccurring themes of Footprints 2024 was 'Rain Again!', as when I was preparing the various editions it was always after a period of heavy rain. In fact, 2024 was a very wet year with yearly totals being 34% above the average.

In contrast, 2025 has been a very dry year with only 74% of yearly totals. The figures for the two years are:-

Month	Average mm	2023-24	2023-24	2024-25	2024-25
		Actual mm	%	Actual	%
December	75.7	101.3	134	68.1	90
January	74.1	72.6	98	74.5	100
February	57.0	130.0	228	51.3	90
March	47.1	90.0	191	6.3	13
April	54.0	67.4	134	27.7	51
May	53.3	114.8	215	19.6	37
June	54.8	21.5	39	26.5	48
July	55.5	91.0	162	46.5	84
August	72.0	23.2	32	27.5	38
September	57.7	185.2	321	67.7	117
October	81.3	62.0	76	57.3	71
November	82.1	66.7	82	90.1	111
TOTAL	746.6	1025.7	134	563.1	74

In order to make this edition I have used information from December of the previous year. With the heavy rain we have been having this month, the figures may be completely different for the true calendar year.

WINTER WALKING

A rather wet looking group of walkers on Helen Glenny's walk from Ayot St Lawrence on 4th December



TAKE A WINTER WALK & SEE THE GUINNESS WORLD RECORD POSTBOX TOPPERS

It just wouldn't be Christmas without our St Albans postboxes. Since it began in 2018, the St Albans postboxes campaign has raised more than £165,000 for good causes and in November 2024 a Guinness World Record was achieved for the largest number (102) of textile postbox toppers.



Look out for yarnbombed postboxes in St Albans, Park Street, Harpenden, Wheathampstead, Sandridge, London Colney, and Redbourn

Why not plan a walk to see as many postboxes as possible? It shouldn't be as muddy as the footpaths at present. Full details at www.stalbanspostboxes.org.uk which includes links to a map of all postboxes.

Nicki Marriott – 'champion yarnbomber'.

LATEST NEWS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The government is taking action to strengthen devolution by changing the structure of local government. It will abolish county councils and district councils. These are to be replaced with new Unitary Authorities. Parish and Town Councils will however continue to be part of the local government system. If no action were taken, St Albans and District Council (SADC) would be abolished and – as central St Albans has no parish councils – we would lose our voice as a distinct community.

In August 2025 SADC carried out a consultation to help it assess whether there was support for setting up a new Parish Council to take over when SADC is abolished. The Footpaths Society put in a response in favour of a Parish Council being created, as we felt that parks, footpaths, open and community spaces are community assets that are better managed at a local level. It seems likely that the County Council will be replaced by two Unitary Authorities (East Herts and West Herts). If no new Parish Council is set up for central St Albans, the Unitary Authorities are likely to make decisions affecting St Albans without St Albans having a direct say in them. This would mean that we would have less, rather than more, democracy.

The SADC now proposes to set up a new Parish Council for the unparished areas of St Albans – covering Batchwood, Bernards Heath, Clarence, Cunningham, Hill End, Marshalswick West, Sopwell, St Peters and Verulam wards. It also recommended that a new Parish Council should have around 25 Councillors and be based on existing ward boundaries.

A second consultation is being carried out from 8 December 2025 to 23 February 2026 to assess support for these proposals. Residents of the affected wards have been sent a ballot pack explaining the recommendations and how to respond. All members who want to respond can either do so by using the ballot paper sent to them or using the alternatives set out in the pack, which includes completing an online survey.

HERTFORDSHIRE'S 'BOGGY BOTTOM' VOTED AS THIRD FUNNIEST PLACE NAME IN THE COUNTRY

Following on from recent articles on things to look out for on our walks. I have come up with funny place names.

In a recent survey **Boggy Bottom**, near Abbots Langley was voted as the third funniest place name in the country (the winning place names are not really suitable for inclusion here, but a quick search on the internet will bring them up!).

In Hertfordshire we have a good range of bottoms, Beech Bottom, Offley Bottom, Claggy Bottom and Trowley Bottom to name a few.

There are strange names of hamlets and small villages such a **Cold Christmas**, near Thundridge (the name likely derives from high child mortality during harsh winters), **Nasty**, in Great Munden, **Cow Roast**, near Tring and **Ugley** near to Bishop's Stortford - may technically be in Essex but we're claiming it as our own - it's close enough!.

There are many lanes and roads with unusual names, on our Brown Book Walk 12 we go up Cum Cumm Hill and down Cucumber Lane and don't forget Friendless Lane covered in the last edition.

Look out for funny place names on our walks

SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL MEMBERS

Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from Mike Marriott (Footprints Editor) and your Committee Members.



I hope that you have enjoyed this edition of Footprints. I am 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.

Thanks Mike Marriott – Footprints editor