



FOOTPRINTS

Spring 2025

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

CHAIR'S CHAT

Finally, it seems that Spring is on its way and the ground is beginning to dry out. Although this winter and early spring has been less muddy than last year, there have still been times when the soil has been so waterlogged that any new downpour led to more flooding. Many river levels have been high and those around St Albans are no exception. While this has caused flooding in some cases, damaging crops, blocking roads and paths, the high rainfall has also had a good effect in topping up the underground aquifers that feed our local chalk streams.

There are about 200 chalk streams in the world, of which many are in Hertfordshire. They are a very precious local attraction. Because they are fed from underground, they have unusually clear water, with gravel bottoms and little silt. Many of our walks cross or follow them – such as the Lea, Beane, Colne, Mimram, Gade, Chess and of course the river Ver. They usually support a variety of wildlife, including the traditional Hertfordshire watercress industry.

Sadly, however, a number of these precious rivers and streams are currently under threat from various causes, including pollution, water extraction and climate change. The Chess watercress beds are no longer in business as the water is insufficiently clean. In Markyate, Thames Water has been discharging raw sewage into the Ver and overhanging trees and shrubs have also prevented the river from supporting its usual wildlife.

I was pleased to read that the Council has embarked on a project to revitalise it by cutting back branches and shrubs on the river bank through Verulamium park. The path has been blocked off to allow the work to go ahead and we hope that this will soon restore the river to its former health.

However, the lakes in Verulamium also have severe problems, as they are seriously flooded and have been for a long time. It seems that the problems are complex, partly because of the number of agencies involved in negotiating a solution, with responsibility shared between the St Albans and

Hertfordshire Councils, the Environment Agency, and Affinity Water. The St Albans District Council website reports that a scheme was finally approved in January this year to reduce the flooding and improve the quality of the water. The lakes will be dredged, with the silt removed and used to provide planting areas round the edges. The river is to remain in its current channel but with wetland development in nearby meadows to help control flooding. These changes will help improve the flow of water through the lakes and lower the water level.

This action is long overdue. The rivers and streams are very precious to everyone who enjoys the Hertfordshire countryside and the lakes in Verulamium are badly in need of this drastic renovation. Whenever we cross a chalk stream, we pause to admire and appreciate the clear water flowing below us. We hope that by summer we'll be able to see a return of the fish, plants and wildlife that makes this such a special pleasure

Alison Hannah

Chair

DATES FOR THE DIARY

AGM

1. Monday 9th June 2025 in St Mary's Church Hall, 1 Sherwood Avenue, AL4 9Q.

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

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

'WALK & SOUP'

Once again, we have to thank Nicki and Mike Marriott for both leading the walks and for their hospitality for our annual Walk & Soup Day on 8th February.

Nicki writes: -

The annual soup kitchen was a success with all seats filled.

The walk along the Ver and onto the wildlife area and the longer walk to Gorhambury and beyond are rarely done and were enjoyed by all.

Thanks to everyone who bought homemade soup and bread. We used almost everything up with many trying all the different flavours. We look forward to putting this in the diary for next year.

Nicki

AGM 2025

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 9th June 2025

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. However, this year we will need to consider some new appointments to the Executive Committee in particular for the posts of Treasurer and Vice Chair. If you are interested in either of these roles or (with their consent, of course) wish to suggest someone else for them please contact the Chair, Alison Hannah on stalbansfootpaths@gmail.com.

Formal Business

Formal business to be conducted at the AGM will include:

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

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 nibbles.

Please support the Society by attending the AGM. We aim to get the business side of things over as soon as practicable to allow more time for socialising.

WINTER WALKING

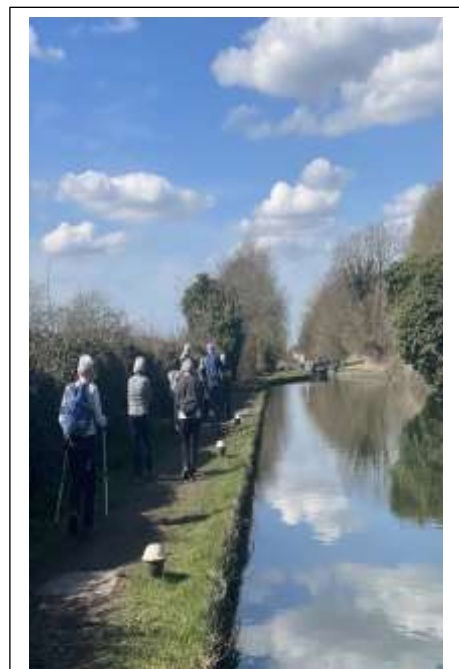
This winter has been exceptionally wet (see reports on rainfall figures in last year's editions of Footprints). Here are a couple of photos from Beryl Grey showing conditions on the walk from Bulls Green on the 9th January. Not just mud to contend with but also water covering the whole of the footpath!



SPRING WALKING

Compare the above with recent walks in Spring – dry underfoot and blue skies!

Helen Glenny's Tewinbury walk on March 13th (left) and Christine Bain's Walk from Wilstone on 20th March (right – Photo by Nicki Marriott)



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.

RAMBLERS 'DON'T LOSE YOUR WAY' (DLYW)

Ramblers have been working on their DLYW campaign over the last few years and have identified over 49,000 miles of historic footpaths that are missing from the map in England and Wales and could be lost forever. Originally all rights of way needed to be identified before a revised government deadline of 2031, after which it will no longer be possible to add old paths to the official record.

On Boxing Day 2024, the government announced that it would repeal the deadline to record historic paths, ending the immediate threat to thousands of miles of unrecorded rights of way.

The removal of the deadline has removed the pressure on getting submissions on missing paths registered, but the work still needs to be done.

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

NATURE NOTES

Although the muddy conditions have been a nuisance to our walking, it has preserved animal tracks very clearly. I have been surprised by the number and variety of deer tracks seen on our walks. We occasionally see individual animals and sometimes small groups but the number of tracks I have seen would indicate that wild deer are far more widespread. Deer found in our area include Muntjac, Roe, Fallow & Sika.

Deer footprints have 2 oblong and pointed toe impressions that sit alongside each other, making the shape of an upside-down heart.



Different species of deer can be hard to tell apart but generally, the size of the footprint can be a clue: -

- Muntjac: 3cm long, 2cm wide
- Roe deer: 5cm long, 4cm wide
- Fallow deer & Sika deer: 7cm long, 5cm wide

Look out for deer tracks on our walks and try and recognise the species.

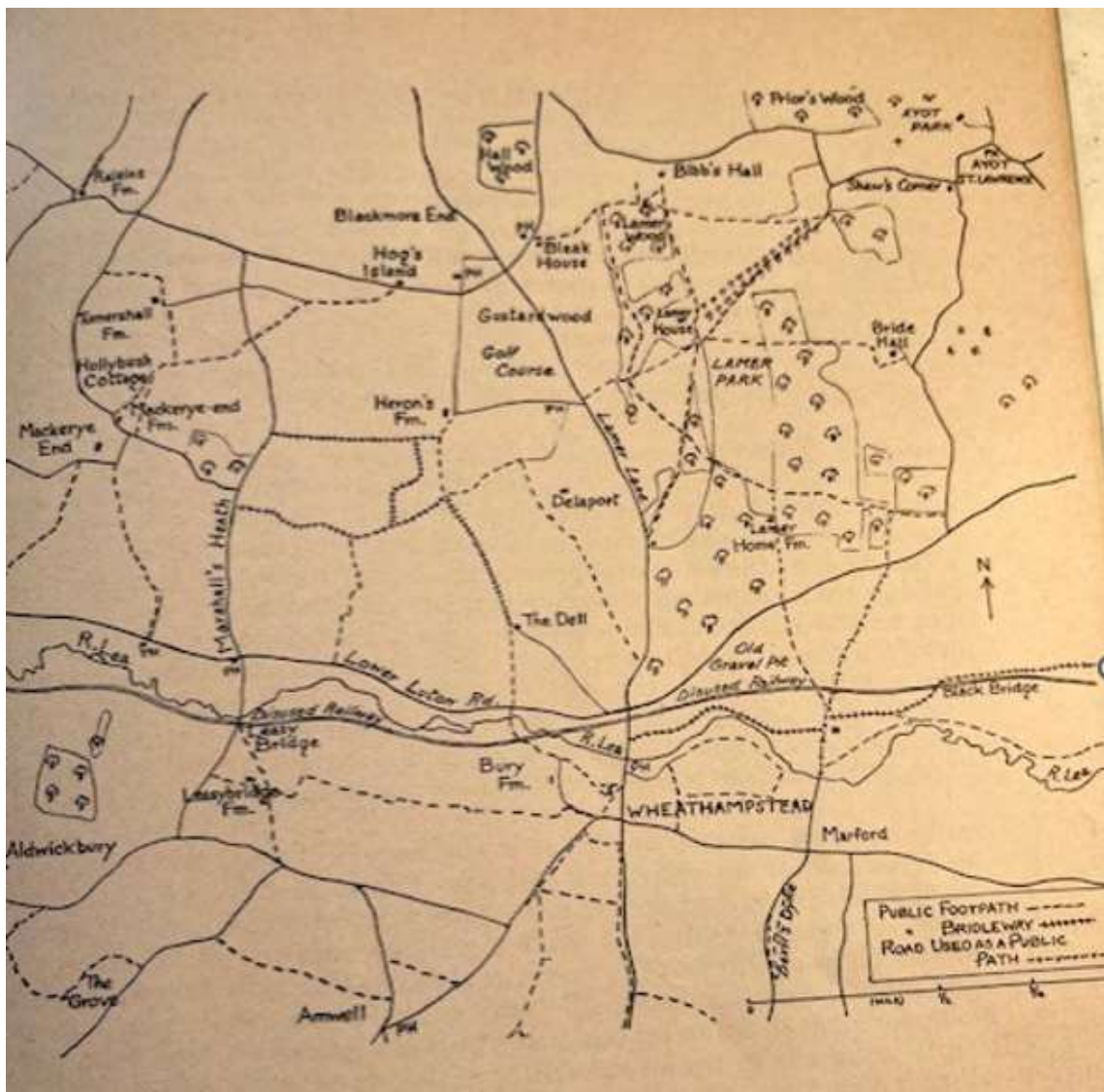
SOCIETY HISTORY

The first booklet of 13 walks produced by the society was in 1970, entitled Footpath Walks Around St Albans. The following is taken from the introduction to the 1977 reprint (cost 35p).

These walks are reproduced from the series prepared by the St Albans and District Footpath Society and published in the Herts Advertiser during the summer of 1970. Our thanks are expressed to the Editor for his co-operation. The itineraries are merely examples, of course, and all rights of way have been shown on each map so that other walks can be planned. Our hope is that this booklet will encourage and enable many more people to walk the paths regularly and to report any obstructions to the District Council. In this way only will the paths be saved.

H.L. Knapp – Chairman.

Shown below is the beautifully drawn map for *Walk 11 Wheathampstead, Leasy Bridge, Mackerye End*.



SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

After the article above about the first booklet of walks produced by the society. A reminder about our current 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 donations to local charities (see article above).

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*).



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.