



FOOTPRINTS

Summer 2023

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

St Albans and District Footpaths Society

CHAIR'S CHAT

In the previous edition of Footprints, I mentioned leading a walk round Wheathampstead. I'm not an experienced walk leader but decided earlier this year that I'd offer to lead one short and one long walk in each two-month programme. Of course, like all good resolutions, I immediately broke it by going on holiday and missing the deadline for the April and May programme. However, I'm determined to stick with my plan and have found there are some definite advantages to being a walk leader.

The first one is choosing the walk. I find this quite a challenge as I'm not a good map-reader and have a terrible memory of the walks I've been on, even those completed quite recently. However, there's no shortage of resources to find interesting local walks without having to plot one directly from a map. Quite apart from our own Green and Brown Books (I'm still working my way round them), there are many other walks guides, in printed and online formats. Most have a map of the walk as well as a written text describing the route. I find the combination is usually very successful. However, it is essential to try out a walk before the actual day comes round. My first attempt at walking the short walk I planned to lead on the day of the June picnic at Ashridge was a minor disaster as the footpath marked so clearly on the map did not exist in practice, leading us stranded in the middle of the golf course with no obvious exit route. However, some small adjustments were easily made so that on the day we all ended up at the picnic at the right time without any confrontation with angry golfers. And on my last walk, the field we were to cross had been planted over with sweetcorn so the path was nowhere to be seen. Luckily there was a road nearby and it wasn't difficult to pick our way through the plants.

The second advantage is that the walks leader sets the pace. Of course, it must suit the group but it also means that if you get out of breath going uphill you can pause to admire the view without the risk of ending up at the back of the walk you're supposed to be leading.

Many of our walkers know the area well and their local knowledge often provides an insight into the history, architecture, plants or wildlife as we pass by. I also hadn't realised until I started walking here that Hertfordshire seems to have a high proportion of horses – there are very few walks that don't go past horses (and sometimes alpaca or donkeys as well as cows and sheep).

So, I've found leading walks less daunting than I anticipated and would encourage anyone thinking of taking the plunge to do it. There will always be someone on hand to help with the route – or suggest an excellent pub for lunch at the end!

Alison Hannah, Chair

DATES FOR THE DIARY

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS

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

WALKS PROGRAMME

Due to holidays, please send walks for next programme no later than **FRIDAY 1st SEPTEMBER**

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome new members

Allen & Victoria Barton, Ingrid Benedict, David Hodges & Giulia Setzu.

And former members rejoining

Janice Graham & Valerie Zlotnik

We have recently been joined by several new walkers doing a trial walk with us before deciding to joining the Society. Please make them welcome and encourage them to join.

NEW MEMBERS – PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD

The recently printed some postcard sized flyers, announced in the last edition of Footprints, were used to advertise the Society at the Cathedral's first Community Showcase held on 10th June (see below). If you know a location where these cards could be placed, please contact us.



AGM 2023

After three years of holding the AGM remotely by zoom because of the risk from covid, it was a very pleasant change to meet at St Mary's Church Hall in Marshalswick. 27 members came to the meeting and stayed on for refreshments and a chat afterwards. The recently elected Mayor, the Right Worshipful the Mayor of the City and District of St Albans, Councillor Anthony Rowlands, also joined us and spoke at the conclusion of the business of the meeting.

The Chair, Alison Hannah, welcomed the members to the meeting and summarised the highlights of the current year. Despite the disruption caused from the pandemic, we produced a complete walks programme for Thursday walks over the 12-month period, although it has not been possible to resume weekly walks every Sunday. We continue to support the Council by checking the rights of way in each parish and, with the exception of Wheathampstead, have a complete list of current footpath representatives. We also continue to review planning applications or new developments that might encroach on rights of way, and write to the Council expressing concern or making suggestions as appropriate.

A number of social events were enjoyed during the year, including the summer garden party (thanks were given to the Marriotts for again hosting this in their garden), the picnic lunch at Ashridge, a well-attended Christmas pub lunch and the regular monthly coffee mornings at the Lower Dagnall Street café.

Our new 'Brown Book' (24 Footpath Walks in Hertfordshire) is now published and available at various local outlets –it can also be bought at a discount for members direct from our Books Distributor, Jane Kerr. Since the previous AGM, we have launched our new website, which is regularly updated by our Website Manager and Publicity Officer, Marie Owens. This gives details of upcoming walks so non-members can come to join us if they wish. She has also designed new publicity materials for us as we seek to expand our membership.

The second half of the meeting included the election and appointment of the Executive Committee – Christine Bain is now our Hon Secretary, replacing Valerie Coast, who temporarily took over the role when Brenda Brookes had to stand down for health reasons. Ray de la Salle and Mike Marriott are now the two elected members on the Committee. All positions, including those on the Footpath Representatives Committee, were unanimously elected.

Jane Kerr and Kath Hardy were also awarded Honorary Life Members by unanimous approval.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Mayor was asked to say a few words and expressed his support for the Society. He also outlined aims for his term as Mayor, including building intergenerational activities to reduce the incidence of loneliness and isolation, exacerbated by the pandemic and lock downs.



Alison congratulating Jane and Kath (note the new society posters behind)



Alison thanking Councillor Rowlands for attending and presenting him with a copy of our new Brown Book

RECENT SOCIAL EVENTS

SUMMER PICNIC

Both walks on Thursday 15th June were from Ashridge and were followed by a bring your own picnic. Despite the anticipated heat both walks were well supported attended and a shady spot was found to enjoy the picnic afterwards. A special thanks to Pat Coombs for the excellent cake that she provided for everyone to enjoy.



SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

The Summer Garden Party was held at Nicki & Mike Marriott's house on Sunday 23rd July. In June we were worried about the high temperatures effecting our Summer Picnic, for the Garden Party it was the cool temperatures and threat of rain that was of concern. The rain did hold off and the those attending were able to enjoy a grand spread of sandwiches, cakes, strawberries, and cream and much more.

Thank you for all your contributions and a special thanks to Nicki & Mike for their hospitality.

WALK LEADERS AND FIRST AID KITS

If you lead walks for the Society, have attended a recent First Aid training, and want a First Aid kit, the Executive has agreed to provide them at no cost.

Please contact Quentin Keeling (quentin.keeling@ntlworld.com), so we can obtain them from our trainer. She has an adapted kit that includes items suitable for our activities, including a foil blanket.

WALKING – THE LITTLE EXTRAS!

When out walking we comment on the beautiful scenery but it is often the small things that can make a walk more interesting

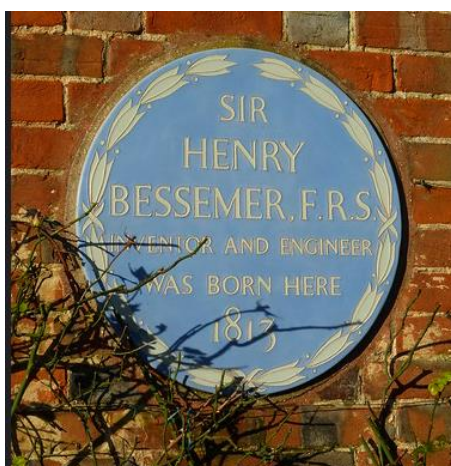
SUMMER FLOWERS

In last year's Summer Footprints whilst commenting about the wonderful displays of snowdrops we had seen that year, I asked if anyone had seen orchids on our walks. Those of us on the long walk at the Summer Picnic at Ashridge earlier this year were able to see both Fragrant and Early Purple Orchids on Pitstone Hill.



HISTORICAL INTEREST

On a recent walk through Charlton, near Hitchin we came across the blue plaque marking the birthplace of Sir Henry Bessemer (1813 - 1898) the inventor, whose steel-making process would become the most important technique for almost one hundred years. The plaque is on the side of a small cottage in the hamlet and was a most unexpected find.



If you have any photos of unusual items seen on our walks, please let us know.

OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH

The caterpillars of OPM are pests of Oak trees and a hazard to human and animal health. OPM is subject to a government-led programme of survey and control to minimize its population, spread and impacts. Currently OPM is found in London and surrounding counties including Hertfordshire.

The caterpillars live almost exclusively in oak trees and tend to move in nose-to-tail processions (hence their name). They often cluster together and build white silken webbing trails and nests on oak trunks and branches (not among the leaves).

The caterpillars have thousands of tiny hairs which contain an irritating substance called thaumetopoein. Contact with the hairs can cause itching skin rashes and, less commonly, sore throats, breathing difficulties and eye irritations. Please keep away from the caterpillars if you see them on oak trees.

A government leaflet on the pest can be found at [Oak Processionary Moth Information leaflet \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Thanks to Ray De La Salle for raising this issue

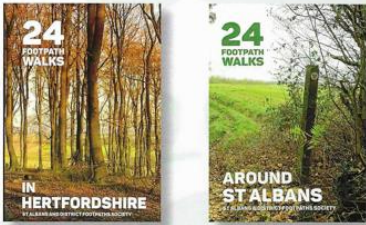
SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

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. The latest edition of the Green Book was completed in 2020 and since then we have sold over 2120 copies, (see below if you haven't already got a copy).

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.

Members of the Society can obtain a copy at the discounted price of £5.00 (Green Book) & £5.50 (Brown Book) from Jane Kerr (stalbansfootpathbooks@gmail.com / 01727 852438 *(+postage unless collected or on short walk)*)

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

PLANNING ISSUES

We are including articles about what the Society does 'behind the scenes. In the previous edition we highlighted the work of the Footpath Representatives and here we look at planning.

The Society looks at all planning applications in the district and comments on issues particularly with respect to footpaths. David Kealey, Quentin Keeling and Phil Escritt are our experts on these issues, some of which take up a considerable amount of time to analyse and comment on.

Here are some of the projects that are currently being looked at.

ST ALBANS & DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN

A first draft of this has been 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. This may seem both long-winded and bureaucratic, but the outcome matters for the long-term state of footpaths in the District. At present, we have NO Local Plan, meaning that developers can submit applications more or less as they please, with only Neighbourhood Plans acting as a local expression of residents' desires. The previous plan that failed catastrophically in 2019 had a target of around 15,000 houses in a 15-year period. We can hope that the (government-set) target will be lower this time, as the option to use the old Handley Page airfield is not there (the Strategic Rail-Freight Initiative takes national priority).

The Society, together with the Ramblers, is looking at the draft, and will make their views known by September. Thereafter, work will continue at various times as the Plan develops. Our focus is in line with the Society's objectives: to protect, preserve, and promote Rights of Way in the District.

OTHER PLANNING NOTES

Phil Escritt and David Kealey have been busy since April! Nearly always, we and the Ramblers oppose schemes in the Green Belt, but seek mitigation should the application be approved.

- Roundhouse Farm in Colney Heath. A THIRD (egregious) application for housing in this area would affect no fewer than five Public Rights of Way (PROW).
- Bamville Wood (Cross Lane, Harpenden). We have asked for a bridleway (PROW) between Cross Lane and Mud Lane (HARP BOAT 01).
- Cooters End Lane. This would be a major development that ends at the boundary with Luton. We have asked for several things, with emphasis on improving the line of the Chiltern Way
- Burston's & Copsewood. These two applications are adjacent along the A414. We have asked for improvements in adjoining bridleways. Lye Lane will be changed, hopefully to be more pedestrian-friendly, and to provide signal-controlled crossings from Lye Lane to Noke Lane, and near Burston's.
- Smallford Pits (NW corner). Two existing PROW are affected, as is the previous ability to roam in this area. The remaining area is under consideration by HCC as a solar farm.
- Ragged Hall Lane. This is close to Park Wood, where numerous PROW have been created in the wood. Two other existing PROW are affected.

RIGHTS OF WAY – 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)

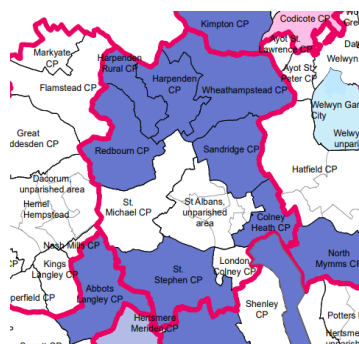
RAMBLERS ‘DON’T LOSE YOUR WAY’ (DLYW)

This has been slow to resume after the Government reinstated a deadline, albeit now December 2030 rather than 2025. If there is anyone who has the skills or the willingness to carry out historical research into tithe maps and Inland Revenue records from the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, PLEASE let Quentin Keeling know. We have a list of likely routes, but to make a claim, numerous sources need to confirm the same information. We are also concentrating on historic footpaths, as bridleways and restricted byways have largely been well researched and claimed by Dr Phil Wadey of the British Horse Society. He has 60% or more of all the existing claims lodged with HCC!

For now, the working group has one new member (Paul Hodgson), while some stalwarts have moved on to other topics (see below!)

HCC – SIGNPOST UPGRADES

Herts CC have been carrying out an upgrading of signposts / fingerposts throughout the County. Many posts were broken or missing and hopefully the upgrades will make walking in the area easier to follow. In our district most parishes have been completed (shown in blue on the map below).



They also report that the Google QR stickers applied to signposts, which we have reported on in earlier Footprints, have been downloaded 2.8 million times!

TWENTY YEARS AGO

The photo below from 2003 has recently been unearthed by one of our members. Walks were certainly well attended then and if you look closely there are members who are still walking today.



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