Start and finish: Verulamium Museum, St Albans
Full circular walk: 3.75 miles (6 km) - About 2 hours

ST ALBANS AND VERULAMIUM
The River Ver is special; it is a chalk stream, one of only about 200 on the planet and its pure alkaline water supports a very particular mix of flora and fauna. For 450,000 years, since the Anglian Ice Age, it has flowed (almost) uninterrupted along its valley, south from its source at Kensworth Lynch in the Chiltern Hills, through Markyate, Flamstead, Redbourn, St Albans and Park Street to where it joins with the River Colne near Bricket Wood – ultimately to empty into the River Thames near Windsor.

Man has used the river for navigation, for milling, for mineral extraction and for food production – these processes mean the river is much changed from its ‘natural’ state. Today we utilise the Ver in two other ways. Firstly, deep boreholes into the chalk strata (or aquifer) abstract over half of all the water that falls as rain in the area. Secondly, we use the river and its attractive surroundings for simple leisure and pleasure, by walking through its valley or along its banks, as you might do today by following this route.

Like a good book, the River Ver has a beginning, middle and end, and associated with its twists and turns many characters come and go; through these walks you will follow the story in eight chapters, from source to confluence. We aim to set the Ver in its local landscape and cultural context. For further information about the Ver and the people who lived near it, past and present, visit our website: www.riverver.co.uk

The River Ver links us to the past, present and future. It is...
From the start at Verulamium Museum, walk past St Michael’s Church into St Michael’s Street with the River Ver and its ancient ford, the 1765 bridge and Kingsbury Mill. Turn right into Verulamium Park; follow the path between the lakes and Abbey millstream. Lots of wildlife in this area—look out especially for herons, as well as crayfish on the river bed.

At the far end of the lake turn right over the outfall and, after 50 yards, turn left down the steps beside the river. Follow the grassy riverside path to Holywell Hill. Note Mud Lane pumping station hidden in the trees here; this plus Holywell and Stonecross pumping stations abstract 17 million litres a day from the chalk aquifer for our fresh water.

At Holywell Hill cross the footbridge left to walk past the Duke of Marlborough Public House and a short distance up the hill. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing, and turn into Belmont Hill. Follow the sloping path, right, into the grounds of De Tany Court; view the ‘holywell’ in the courtyard at the bottom. From the well turn right, right again, then left into the Pocket Park and the riverside path.

Cross Cottonmill Lane into Sopwell Nunnery Green Space. Note the sound of the ‘riffle’ along this otherwise straight, modified stretch of river. The ruins of Sopwell Nunnery and house are to the right.

Follow the riverside path to the bridge carrying the Alban Way, a former railway line. Climb the steps and cross the Ver. There is a grand view of the Abbey to the north.

Taking the sloping path, left, down the embankment to the spur of Riverside Road. The Watercress Wildlife Association nature reserve is well worth a short detour.

Follow Riverside Road, then the path beside the scout hall and Henry’s Grant to Cottonmill Lane. (Sopwell Lane, Henry’s Grant, Riverside Road and the footpath south across Verulam Golf Club mark the course of the medieval road from St Albans to Barnet and London.)

At Holywell Hill turn right and cross to the other side. Note the former Ryder Seed Hall and offices (restaurant and hotel), and the old White Hart coaching inn.

Follow Sopwell Mill (terrace) right, then left into the Locked Lane path into Sopwell Nunnery Green Space. The ruins of Sopwell Nunnery and house are to the right.

At the top of the hill, turn right along the hedge line and follow the path back down the hill to Verulamium Museum for the finish.

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