



Unprecedented times

The Society sends its very best and healthy wishes to all our members and friends. It's been the most unusual of times with the River Ver flowing well but only those on their permitted local exercise able to enjoy the real beauty of it.

We've been receiving many stories and photos as more people than ever have been exploring their nearby stretch of the Ver and enjoying all the benefits to health and happiness a chalk stream can bring. (See p12).

Like many groups we have cancelled our activities which would bring people together – please keep an eye on the website to see when our programme might resume. In the meantime, we've used the opportunity of lockdown to bring you a bumper edition of the newsletter.

The Ver south of Redbournbury, May 2020; Signs of the times



OPEN MEETING CANCELLED

Tuesday 16 June 2020

St Stephen Parish Centre, Bricket Wood AL2 3PJ

Speaker Steve Brooks Natural History Museum Entomologist

In view of the current Covid-19 restrictions, the June Open Meeting is cancelled. There is good news – guest speaker Steve Brooks will be able to join us in Redbourn next year to reveal all on chalk stream invertebrates.

We have our fingers crossed that the situation will have eased by October for the AGM when Dr Wendy Morrison, archaeologist and expert on Iron Age hillforts will be reflecting on the location of the precious Chilterns chalk streams and their role in human settlement.

Wendy researching locally with a visit to The Aubreys Iron Age enclosure, Redbourn.



SAVE THE DATES

Next Open Meetings:

Thursday 22nd October 2020

St Michael's Parish Centre,
St Albans AL3 4SL

AGM. Speaker: Dr Wendy Morrison
Beacons of the Past: 8000 years of human activity in a chalk landscape

Thursday 23rd February 2021

Redbourn Village Hall AL3 7LW
Speaker: Steve Brooks Natural History Museum Entomologist
Riverfly Plus: one step beyond
Monitoring chalk stream invertebrates

Please note: all meetings are free entrance to members and non-members. Please check our website or social media a few days prior to the meeting in case of any late changes. We welcome donations towards the cost of refreshments, hall hire etc. Suggested £2 per person.

Wetter than average

It's a delight to be writing with the Ver in better shape than it has been for six or seven years. There's no doubt those who live near the river have been out enjoying the sparkling spectacle and hopefully as restrictions ease everyone will get to see the Ver at it's best. Despite the celebrations with good flow in St Albans and Park Street and the delight in Redbourn on seeing water again, we must not forget the good folk of Markyate and Flamstead who at present can only boast a stagnant pool in the river bed as their highlight. There's still 9km of river without proper flow north of Redbourn (see p11 for more).



No time to lose

Despite improvements in the river neither the EA nor Affinity Water have yet changed anything that might prevent a repeat of last summer. However, in 2024 there are abstraction reductions scheduled for St Albans, totalling 9 million litres a day. We have written to Affinity asking if those cuts could instead be used to close the largest pumping station at the top of the Ver catchment north of Markyate. This would give the Ver more chance of flowing in the parched upper reaches, allow more water to flow into Verulamium Park – to help the river and Lake – and keep groundwater levels down for the Cottonmill allotment holders. Naturally the Covid-19 has Affinity's and the EA's main attention at present, but we expect a response shortly.

Local groups

The Society has strong links with the river groups west of the Chilterns and is involved in the Chiltern Society's Chalk Rivers Action Group (CRAG) initiative to discuss innovative plans to restore the region's chalk streams. Last summer's dried up chalk streams have also spurred groups in the East to become much more active and it's been refreshing to engage with them too. The Ivel, Mimram, Beane, Rib, Quin, Ash, Lark, Cam among others all have serious issues, mainly linked to abstraction.



Friends from the East ©Mark Wilkinson

(far left) A better than average Ver. Still waters at Flamstead April 2020, ©Anthony Harris



JOIN THE VER VALLEY SOCIETY
- only £7 per year

This month as there's no printed newsletter, we've invited a wider audience to have a read of the pdf version. If you are a non-member, please consider joining. In normal times there are plenty of events, river work parties and associated activities to enjoy. The more members we have, the bigger the message it sends that we want to see our famous river thrive and not disappear, just to quench the thirst of a growing South East.

Join today at www.riverver.co.uk/join-us

PLEASE RESPOND! Environment Agency Consultation

We've made it as easy as possible to respond and it would be good to register as many replies as possible with the EA to say that our river needs water above all else to solve its problems. Please check out the news section of the website www.riverver.co.uk/category/news-events where there are instructions of what to do and text to cut and paste to make it easy. **Don't delay, reply today!**

The EA Challenges and Choices Consultation starts the process for setting up the River Basin Management Plans for the next 5 years – eventually drilling down to the ColneCAN (Colne Catchment Partnership) in our case. It's a long and complicated consultation with numerous videos to watch and information to digest – we've had the pleasure of wading through it to assist our members in responding!



Olives hiding under an in-stream stone

Winter 2020

Despite increased rainfall and subsequent increase in river flow (apart from Luton Lane, where there is still no flow) the Riverfly samples that have been reported up to the Covid-19 lockdown in March are mixed.

At three sites around Redbournbury the samples are still below or at the trigger. (This is the EA figure where in normal circumstances further investigation would follow). In St Albans, particularly Verulamium, Holywell Hill and under the Alban Way there has been little improvement, whilst south of St Albans both flow and samples have improved, with

Riverside Way back to expectations with deeper water and faster flow, the sample containing expected numbers of mayfly, olives and water shrimp in March.

The Riverfly Day at Boxmoor Trust, in March was a very informative day. Dr Steve Brooks (Chair of the Riverfly Partnership) talked about his latest publication a 'Riverfly Guide for Urban sampling', useful too for low flow or polluted rivers.

Double-checking

Of relevance to all monitors was the MSc. study of Steve's research student Caroline Cahill, who was assessing the

reliability of the ARMI protocol used by Riverfly monitors. She made rigorous counts of the invertebrates at each site on the same day as the Riverfly monitor to compare with their results and concluded that overall scores were not impaired by the sampler, the cased caddis scores were influenced by the technique of the sampler, as was the time spent on identification of the sample. However overall the data produced is reliable and robust. Her study included three sites along the Ver.

Training opportunities

Once the Covid-19 lockdown is lifted I would like to meet up with those of you who are interested in becoming Riverfly monitors. The VVS will pay for a full days training with either Allen Beechey (Chess) or Simon Stebbings (Mimram). The kit can be loaned to you once trained. Where possible it is recommended that monitors work in pairs. If you are interested, would you please contact me on sdfrearsen@virginmedia.com. There are vacant sites at Frogmore, Moor Mill and Riverside Way, Bricket Wood.

Training day



Riverfly invertebrate monitoring is a form of Citizen Science in which trained volunteers monitor the health of rivers across the country. Each site has a trigger level set dependent on the number of species and their usual abundance. If the score falls below the trigger level this usually indicates contamination of the water and the EA are informed. The VVS monitors 19 sites on the Ver.

Welcome

A warm welcome to the 17 new members who have joined since the last newsletter, bringing the number of paying members up to 263:

Jonathan Ketley, Suzanne Page, Hector Forsythe, Steve Smith, Simon Tilbury, Mark Wilkinson, Beatrice Savage, Gill Girdziusz, Julia Cagwin, Matthew Ennion, Rebecca Lyal, Barbara Cahalane, Jonathan Wheatland, John Eames, David Catley, Anna Barrett and Neil Levertton.

Many thanks for joining the society and, as soon as our events resume, hope you will enjoy them and join the monthly working group that helps keep the Ver as a wonderful local asset.

Nature finds a way

Due to the lockdown regulations we have had to advise our Bailiffs not to do their usual monitoring unless they can do it as their allowed daily exercise from home. So I have only received a few reports since mid March, when the wet winter weather was replaced by a beautiful warm and sunny spring. The butterbur was flowering then by the river, blackthorn and bluebells have been prolific and now in late April the hawthorn flowers are brightening the hedgerows, pussy willow is out, some early purple orchids have joined the bluebells

which are now finishing. The lesser celandines and some cowslips were lovely earlier but now stitchwort, lords and ladies (wild arum) and jack-by-the-hedge (hedge garlic, food plant for orange tip butterflies) are flowering as are marsh marigolds and lady-smock in the meadows, which sadly few people can see this year.

Butterfly bonanza

Birds and animals continue to thrive in our valley, probably more so with the lack of people about. Mammals include hares, signs of badgers



and moles to join the ubiquitous rabbits and grey squirrels. Some chub, brown trout and bullheads have been seen as well as newts and frogspawn. In the warm weather various bumble bees have been about and, as well as the orange tips already mentioned, there have been brimstones, peacocks and small tortoiseshells seen by some bailiffs.

The many bird reports include skylarks, yellowhammers, jackdaws, lapwings, grey wagtails, whitethroats, meadow pipits, chiffchaffs, an occasional kingfisher, a firecrest, a nuthatch and reports of swallows having returned. Some teal, gadwall, and cormorants remain among the usual waterfowl as do egrets, herons, red kites and buzzards.



Top: Orange Tip on Jack-By-The-Hedge; Bluebells in the Ver Valley and Early Purple Orchid – John Fisher; (right) Butterbur



LIST OF BAILIFFS

Below is the list of the team and their stretches. Please say hello if you see them when you are out and alert them if you notice any issues.

1. R Colne to Moor Mill	Sue and Martin Frearson*	sue.frearson@virginmedia.com
2. Moor Mill to Burydell Lane	Dick Downs	d.downs2@toilets.org.uk
3. Burydell Lane to New Barnes Mill	Bruce Banfield-Taylor*	via janegardiner@madasafish.com
4. New Barnes Mill to Sopwell Mill	Giles Harrison	gpharrison13@gmail.com
5. Sopwell Mill to Holywell Hill	Catherine and Derrick Davies*	via janegardiner@madasafish.com
6. Holywell Hill to Bluehouse Hill	Vivien Gates	via janegardiner@madasafish.com
7. Bluehouse Hill to Bow Bridge	Roger Hall	via janegardiner@madasafish.com
8. Bow Bridge to Redbournbury	John Pritchard*	johnp@riverver.co.uk
9. Redbournbury to Dolittle	Jane Gardiner	janegardiner@madasafish.com
10. Dolittle to Redbourn Bypass	Robert May*	bmay@i-c-a.demon.co.uk
11. Chequers to Porridge Pot (and Redbourn golf course to Luton Lane)	John Fisher	john.fisher@btconnect.com
12. Flamstead to Markyate (and Kensworth Lynch occasionally)	Peter Hill	members@riverver.co.uk

* indicates those who are also Riverfly monitors.

The Ver looking good

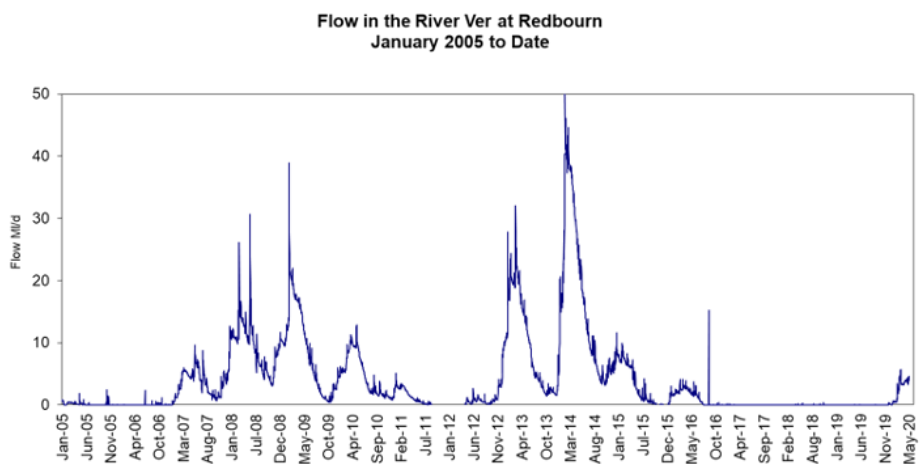
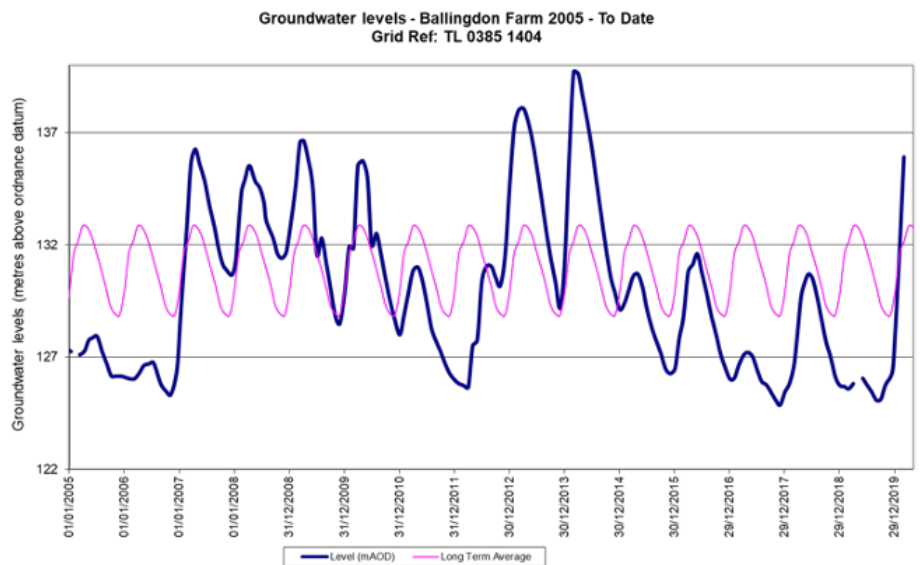
The head of the river at the time of writing is near the Redbourn bypass, just above Harpenden Lane. North of that, on Redbourn golf course several people who live nearby have reported flow from springs and pools there but the river runs dry again before Porridge Pot. The River Red in Redbourn is also flowing well and Hanstead Brook in Bricket Wood has flowed after heavy rain.

As you can see from the tables and graphs below, the groundwater has continued to improve despite the lack of rainfall since early March – there is always some delay in rain reaching the aquifer. The couple of recent flow measures in Bailiff reports indicate that although flow is falling back as is to be expected, the water was in excellent condition, sparkling clear with the lack of road run-off for most of the month. The rain in the last week of April was most welcome for the Ver and gardens and has helped the total figure for April to be only 7% down from the average.



Groundwater rising on Redbourn Golf Course, Steve Smith; Good flow in St Albans at Ye Olde Fighting Cocks, Alison Debenham

Months 2020	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Rothamstead)
		2018 Annual total 683.3 [-49.7]
January	127.95 [131.36]	79.8 [+9.83]
February	132.05 [132.38]	127.0 [+76.86]
March	135.91 [132.79]	43.8 [-7.00]
April	137.10 [133.60]	51.4 [-3.66]
May	136.71 [134.10]	Not yet available



We are grateful to the Environment Agency and Affinity Water for supplying groundwater and river flow charts.

Our thanks to Veolia Environmental Services for printing and distributing our newsletter.

2020 Programme

It was disappointing to have to suspend the events programme from the end of March and lose the Tree Walk in April and the activities around the Sustainable St Albans Festival in May. Kate Bretherton has kindly offered to run the Tree Walk in the autumn if circumstances allow, details to follow in due course.



Verulamium Park Bat Walk Saturday 22nd August

John Kalms, HMWT People and Wildlife Officer and VVS member, has kindly agreed to be ready to repeat last year's successful bat walk in Verulamium Park in August. Of course this very much depends on restrictions being lifted before then. We'll open bookings in July if the event can proceed and we hope that there'll be a chance to beat last year's count of 5 species. Watch the website and our social media posts for news.

For the latest details of all events see www.riverver.co.uk/events-list



Hedges Farm

Greening up

Our members in the Hedges Farm area have reported that the stretch is beginning to look green and the transformation from working site to aesthetically pleasing river is well underway. The latest photos we have still show the fencing rather to the fore, of course it's there for a good reason – to prevent the cows from undoing the work to narrow the stream and increase the velocity of the flow. We understand that over 3,000 specially chosen native plants have been introduced to the river corridor, so by the time you read this the softening process will be well underway. More news next time.



©Vivien Gates

TRIP REPORT

A Walk on the Chalk

Have you ever wondered where the water that supplies the River Ver comes from? Here's the answer! In early March members of the Ver Valley Society, with a party from the Chiltern Society, took a walk on the chalk of Dunstable Downs and with host Haydon Bailey, Chairman of the Herts Geological Society, to unpick the mystery.

Soft chalk, hard chalk

It's not an exact science, but peering into the massive Kensworth quarry, at the top of the Ver Valley, gives a good perspective of what the rain has to penetrate before it reaches a final impermeable marl layer many hundreds of feet below the surface. The rainwater takes around two

months to make the journey down through scrambled layers of soft chalk, hard chalk, nodular beds and marl seams to the aquifer. It's from here that, if the water finds a way out, it may emerge as springs to feed the River Ver – if it evades the boreholes taking water for public consumption.

Ammonites and urchins

All that chalk laid down millions of years ago still carries reminders of creatures that once lived on the sea floor – ammonites and sea urchins being just two. Today it filters the rainwater to provide the deliciously clean, clear, alkaline water that produces the unique habitat of our local chalk stream. A story that repeats itself right across the Chilterns.

Photos from left: Fossils in the chalk; Haydon points out the Greenstone ridge to the north; Hard chalk; below: The quarry





Golden plover at last

With a relatively mild winter there have been noticeably fewer winter visitors to the Ver Valley. Fieldfares and redwings which are usually seen all through the winter have been comparatively scarce and low in numbers. I have only seen flocks of golden plover a couple of times and they did not stay around on the crop fields as they do most years yet on 1st April, I did see a huge flock wheeling in the sky over the A5183 and I estimate there were at least 800 birds. A 100 or so did go to ground but too far away to be seen and I did not see any for the rest of the month.

77 bird species in April

I messaged John Pritchard and later in the day he did see a smaller flock of goldies from his garden at Shafford. Herts Bird Club ran a Great Garden Bird Count throughout April and John won the first prize with an incredible 77 species in or from his garden. John's front garden overlooks the Ver and the water meadows and with the river in full flow he was able to record species such as kingfisher, little grebe, cormorant, gadwall and teal which are out of sight for most gardens. He recorded 38 species on 1st April and later in the month the migrants arrived, so he got martins, a hobby, a yellow wagtail and an early swift on 29th. So well done John and it shows that the Ver Valley with water in it is a Herts Birding hotspot!

A few stonechats overwintered in the valley and an unusual sighting for the Ver Valley was an oystercatcher in Gorhambury, spotted by a wandering Rupert Evershed in February, before the permissive path was closed for Covid-19. Only the second time I have heard of an oystercatcher the Ver Valley.

Golden Plover in winter plumage, Tim Hill.
Distant Oystercatcher & Stonechat, Rupert Evershed



©Hertfordshire County Council

Wildflowers for Sopwell!

Excellent news in from Tony Bradford, Head of Countryside and Rights of Way, on a project that should help bees and other pollinators in St Albans. A wildflower meadow at Sopwell Mill Open Space that the VVS has long campaigned for has now been prepared and sown.

Cut very short

Normally I have to cut my reports down to size, but this time that work has been done for me as Storm Dennis stopped the February Action Group. It brought down branches where we would have been working so cancelling it was good call.

Currently all activity is suspended because of the Covid-19 lock-down and it looks as though this position will continue for some time.

January Success

However, we did have one enjoyable session in January when 21 members worked north and south of the Veolia plant to open up the footpath and remove overgrowth in the Shafford Mill Race. Many thanks to VVS

member Paul Barnes for the invitation to work on the site and enjoy another worthwhile Saturday on the Ver.

One of the tasks was to try and identify a site for an “artificial” kingfisher nest. Unfortunately, when the scrub was cleared the topology of the bank was not suitable. However, the work on the footpath clearance was more successful and it is now much easier to walk this section of the Ver Valley Walk.

Join in next time

Action Group work parties usually meet every third Saturday of the month, 10am – 12 noon. If you'd like to join in when they resume, please contact Richard Wallis – see details in the Committee panel.

Sessions are also listed at riverver.co.uk/current-year.



INVASIVE SPECIES

Giant Hogweed – help us eradicate it

The Victorians introduced Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), a close relative of cow parsley, as an ornamental plant. What they did not appreciate is that the sap can cause serious, recurring skin damage.

The plant is a perennial and will grow over several years before it is ready to flower. Flowering normally occurs in 3 to 5 years by which time the plant will be 2-3m tall. Each plant can produce up to 50,000 seeds. The seeds are dispersed by the wind but can be carried further by water, animals and people. If left uncontrolled the plant forms dense stands suppressing other species.

Let us know

Giant Hogweed has been reported on the Colne and on the Ver in Park Street. However, it is quite likely to be found in other spots. We would like anyone “exercising” to keep an eye out for these plants. Don't touch the plant but take a photo and record the location.

Then report the finding by email to the Action Group Co-ordinator who will arrange confirmation and if confirmed further action.

Specialist training is needed before you can remove Giant Hogweed and we are working with others to eradicate Giant Hogweed in the Colne and Ver valleys.

This is what you are looking for:



Solving the SE Water Crisis

The Ver is looking better than it has for at least 6 years and as far as official figures go, river flow is 'normal'. After all the protesting last summer and a surge in Society membership, you might wonder 'What are we doing now?'

Unfortunately, the bad times for the river far outweigh the good times and we'd like to ensure that there's more water in the river, more often. Aside of Affinity's planned abstraction reduction of 9 million litres a day in St Albans from 2024 (which we'd like to see adjusted to reduce abstraction further up the valley) there's nothing else guaranteed at present. However, there are plenty of initiatives to bring more water to the South East – and we are working to make sure that the chalk streams get a share to restore their flows and the wetland habitat.

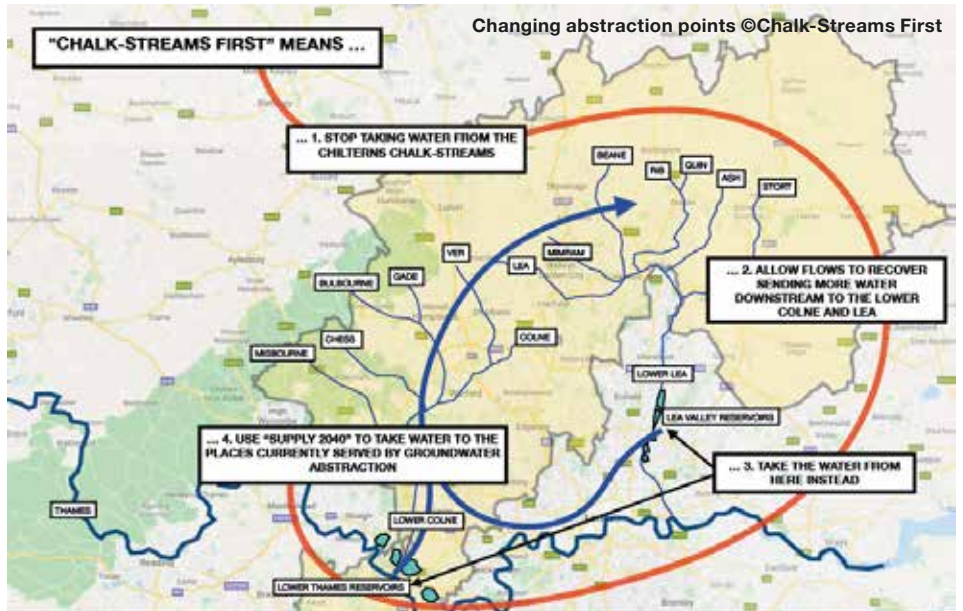
The jaws of death

Whichever figures you look at it, is abundantly clear that in the face of a growing population and climate change our water resources in the South East are under severe stress. Sir James Bevan, Chief Exec of the Environment Agency says we face the 'jaws of death' – the point when we run out of water - within 25 years. We'd say on the evidence of last summer, with our rivers sacrificed for drinking water, that we're there already.

Recognising that time is of the essence, Ofwat (the water sector regulator) is providing £450 million for water companies 'to explore new water resources such as reservoirs or moving water from where there is lots to places with less.' In that regard the



Waste water – a solution? ©Shutterstock



Jaws of death already? ©AlisonDebenham

water companies are co-operating at a regional level to assess which schemes offer the best opportunity to begin work on from as early as 2025.

Reservoir or effluent transfer?

Water Resources South East (WRSE) are assessing a number of schemes that could each deliver in the realm of 50 or 100 million litres a day, with Affinity Water the likely recipient of a significant share. The infrastructure projects under consideration include a large reservoir near Abingdon; transfers from the River Severn to Iver or Harefield, a possible new reservoir in Lincolnshire and the transfer of effluent from Minworth Waste Water Treatment Works via the Grand Union Canal.

An additional proposal has been put on the table 'Chalk-streams First', supported by The Rivers Trust, The Angling Trust and WWF UK among others, which focuses on ceasing abstraction at the top of the South East's chalk stream catchments and

increasing abstraction at the bottom instead. In this way the rivers should receive the maximum benefit and drinking water supply need not be compromised.

Any or all of these options could make use of Affinity's 'Supply 2040' programme which improves their pipe network allowing a higher volume of water transfers around their network, especially from west to east.

Genuine river restoration

All of the above sounds promising and without the public outcry last summer, especially in St Albans(!), it's doubtful that as wide and an as thorough a review would be underway. We aim to keep up the pressure to ensure that the Ver and our chalk streams receive a fair share of the additional supply to enable the restoration of river flow not just one of narrowing the channel of the river. The large infrastructure projects should deliver around 2040. In the meantime, we'll be looking for tactical opportunities to improve the Ver's lot while we wait for the chosen infrastructure projects to deliver.



Public outcry 2019

The tale of Porridge Pot

A number of people have asked about the place called Porridge Pot on the River Ver Trail, near Redbourn. We asked our man on the spot, John Fisher, if he could help.

In the good times on a sunny afternoon the Ver meanders like a blue riband across a meadow on the east side of the Redbourn bypass, a field that the locals call Porridge Pot. It is now part of the Rothamsted Estate and they call it Flint Field but originally it is one of the Harpendenbury Farm fields where the farmer was Tommy Taylor. There is now a concrete road leading to the farmhouse and the Tithe Barn but until recent years it was a rough track known as Taylor's Lane. There were a pair of farm workers' cottages known as Flint Cottages at the north end of the meadow near the kissing gate that leads to the Golf Course where you can still see the remains of the foundations. I would think that these cottages were condemned as unfit for habitation and demolished in the 1950s which happened with a lot of older properties without indoor toilets.

Chimney connection?

I am told that locals named the meadow Porridge Pot because the chimneys looked like porridge pots but for years, I thought it was due to the undulating nature of the field with shallow dips. I remain unconvinced about the chimneys resembling porridge pots – can someone explain to me? In the 1920s Fred Miles who was a champion hedger and thatcher and worked for Tommy Taylor lived in one of them. This was long before the Friars Wash, Kensworth and Redbourn Pumping Stations existed, and Fred would have looked out his front window every day to see a healthy flowing river. Even right up to the 1940s there were thriving water cress beds along the Ver as far upstream as Luton Lane so it would have needed constant flow year in year out for these to be a commercially viable operation.



Fred Miles



Flint Cottages 1920s
©GeoffWebbCollection

What would Fred say?

By the early 90s so much ground water was being pumped from the Upper Ver that the riverbed was constantly dry north of Redbourn. In 1993, after a vigorous campaign by the Ver Valley Society, Friars Wash Pumping Station (near Junction 9 of the M1) was put on "Standby Use Only". I remember that year so well as on my regular morning dog walk, I watched the Ver gradually spring back to life for the first time in my memory (I have lived in Redbourn since the mid 1950s). Sadly, the Upper Ver still only flows when the aquifer level is well above 'average' which since the 1990s means we get flow through Redbourn occasionally. I do not think that the annual rainfall is vastly different nowadays to what it was in Fred's time and the only difference between his era and ours is abstraction! If pumping stopped in the upper Ver Valley we could get back to the scenes that old Fred Miles saw every day.

The last field

The late David Scott who was a long time VVS committee man and past secretary used to call the Porridge Pot the "Last Field" as when the Upper Ver flows you always get flow from Luton Lane through the golf course and on the west side of the bypass before it flows through Porridge Pot. It almost made it in April this year and we did get puddles and a minimal flow for a few days but maybe next winter it will return

and once again we will see our magical chalk stream flowing across a meadow much like it did in pre-war times. You must dream!

Swimming hole

John Dunkley, who was the eldest of the three sons of the farmer at Scout Farm, remembers damming the river near Porridge Pot meadow to get a 4 or 5-foot-deep pool in which local lads learnt to swim.

Many thanks to Redbourn Museum and the Webb family for allowing me to use the pictures from the late Geoff Webb's superb collection which is available on the Herts Memories website. Also, thanks to Peter Fox MBE, John Dunkley, John Catlin, Roy Woods and James Millars for sharing their memories with me. They go back a lot longer than a Redbourn new boy like me!



Porridge Pot with the Ver flowing ©John Fisher



A flinty dry Porridge Pot Feb 2020

RAIN BUT NO RIVER

After a very wet winter there was no water in the Ver north of Redbourn. And now when we've had a couple of months of dry spring weather the lower river is running well and there's water appearing as far north as Flamstead. A number of members have been puzzled as to why.

Understanding how groundwater works is no simple task especially with so many variables at work – local chalk geology, soil moisture deficit, rainfall intensity, abstraction etc. However, the past 12 months have provided some excellent insight into the performance of the aquifer at the head of the Ver Valley and the functioning of our chalk stream.

Looking back to the summer of 2019, by September groundwater levels were at record lows, the ground was exceptionally dry and the River Ver was reduced to a few wet sections and only the last 5km trickling in to the Colne. Then the rain arrived in the final week of September and it kept raining through the autumn, over Christmas and we didn't have a dry week until the middle of March 2020.

Why are we waiting?

Take a look at this groundwater monitoring station data from River Hill at Flamstead, near the top of the Ver



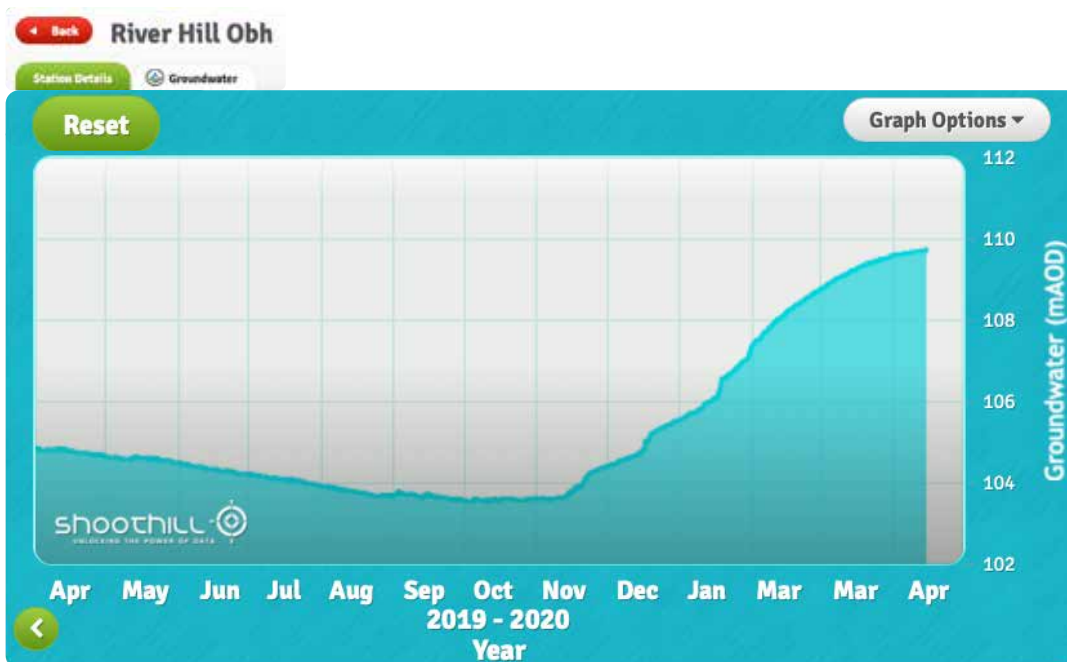
Valley where the river hasn't flowed for a number of years. You'll see that groundwater levels continued to fall from the end of September 2019 and despite the very wet autumn, didn't begin to rise again until the middle of December, over 10 weeks later.

Our older members and Redbourn locals have always said there was a 2 month lag between rain hitting the Chilterns and soaking down through the chalk to appear in groundwater springs that feed the River Ver. The chart appears to support this adage. Indeed, the catchment experienced a prolonged dry spell from mid-March to the end of April but despite that, water finally arrived in the river bed when groundwater reached the 109 metre mark in early April and has kept on rising.



Top: Redbourn Golf Club March and April ©Steve Smith & ©Maz Lopez

Above: Flamstead early and late April ©Anthony Harris



River Hill Groundwater Gauge on 05 May 2020 ©Shoothill Ltd

YOUR PHOTOS

The Ver in Lockdown

The River Ver emerging from a desperate drought and its returning wetland wildlife have been a real boon to health and happiness in difficult times. It's not hard to see why we love our chalk stream.



Mist over the Lake, Alison Debenham;
Redbourn Golf Club, Russel Tate



Left: Swans at Frogmore, Vivien Gates;
Moor Mill, Kim Aspery
Above: A Ver watercolour, Paul Rowe; Paddling,
Melanie Woods; Coot chicks, Alison Debenham

YOUR COMMITTEE

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Committee Member

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HOTLINES

EA Incident Hotline:
0800 80 70 60
(Report all environmental
incidents)

EA Floodline: 0345 988 1188

Flytipping reports
St Alban's Council:
01727 809019
email:
wastemanagementservices@
stalbans.gov.uk

Water Leaks (Affinity):
0800 376 5325