

Teas, buns, pints and pies:

St Michael's: Six Bells Public House and the Waffle House at Kingsbury Mill.

Verulamium Park: The Fighting Cocks Public House, Inn on the Park café plus ice-cream vans.

Holywell Hill: Lots of options including The White Hart Public House and the Abbots Kitchen at the Abbey.

Sopwell Lane: The Goat, White Lion and Hare and Hounds Public Houses

How to get there:

By road: Verulamium Museum is on the southwestern edge of St Albans, in St Michael's Street, close to its junction with the A4147. There is limited public car parking outside the Museum. Further car parking can be found on the other side of Verulamium Park at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, off Holywell Hill.

By public transport: St Albans is served by transport links from London as well as surrounding villages and towns. Regular trains run from London to the city station, as well as to the Abbey Station on the Abbey Flyer from Watford Junction. For details of public transport visit www.intalink.org.uk



Parts of this walk can be muddy or wet underfoot.



This is one of a series of 8 circular walks on the River Ver and part of the 17 mile long linear, River Ver Trail. You can also use the OS Explorer Map 182 to find your way around the Valley. For other walks in the series visit www.riverver.co.uk

The Ver Valley Society exists to protect and promote all aspects of the River Ver and its valley. We have over 200 members and are always pleased to welcome new ones. These walks were originally developed by the Ver Valley Society working with the Countryside Management Service in 2011. The walk leaflets were revised and updated and waymarking refreshed by members and friends of the VVS in 2021. We hope you enjoy them.

For lots more walk routes, photos, memories, information on membership and working parties visit the VVS website: www.riverver.co.uk

Front cover photo: View of the Cathedral from Verulamium Park

Photos: Alison Debenham and Gillian Thornton (River Ver)

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VER VALLEY WALK 6

The Two Cities Walk

Explore the beautiful rolling countryside of this river valley



Start and finish:
Verulamium Museum, St Albans

**Full circular walk: 3.75 miles (6 km) –
About 2 hours**



www.riverver.co.uk

ST ALBANS AND VERULAMIUM

Discover the River Ver

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 as much as half 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 liquid history.

The River Ver meanders through what is now sprawling St Albans, providing a green corridor for wildlife and people. The riverside path through Verulamium Park, between St Michael's and the Fighting Cocks, is certainly the most used stretch of Ver-side path – it often seems to be the inland equivalent of a seaside promenade. But you can follow the river further, all the way through St Albans in a 'linear park'. At Sopwell the riverside path is diverted onto pavement but detour into the next open space, the Marlborough Club, further down Cottonmill Lane to gain

more watery views out across the river, to Sopwell Mill, the Abbey and New Barnes Mill.



3 Holywell Pumping Station

Was established in the early 19th century and is one of three serving St Albans.



4 The Holywell

The 'holywell' in De Tany Court was, in the past, reputedly where Uther Pendragon (father of King Arthur) bathed his wounds and rested whilst doing battle with the Saxons in the old Roman city. But, more likely, it is an 18th century garden feature.



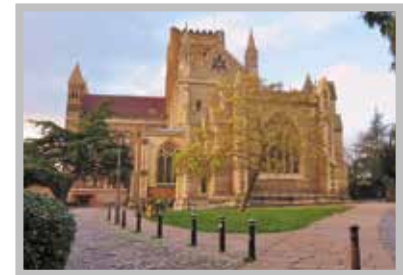
8 Watercress Wildlife Association

Opened in 1992, this four acre wildlife site was once commercial watercress beds and market garden. It is now managed by a group of local volunteers.



12 Ryder Seeds Exhibition Hall

This building and the imposing offices next to it are the ultimate symbols in the city of the company founded by Samuel Ryder. The Art Deco hall with its curved roof and high windows allowed visitors to see flower beds with plants grown from Ryders' seeds.



11 Sumpter Yard and the Abbey

A 'sumpter' is a pack-horse. Many of the provisions needed for the efficient running of the medieval Abbey of St Albans arrived here daily by cart and pack-horse.

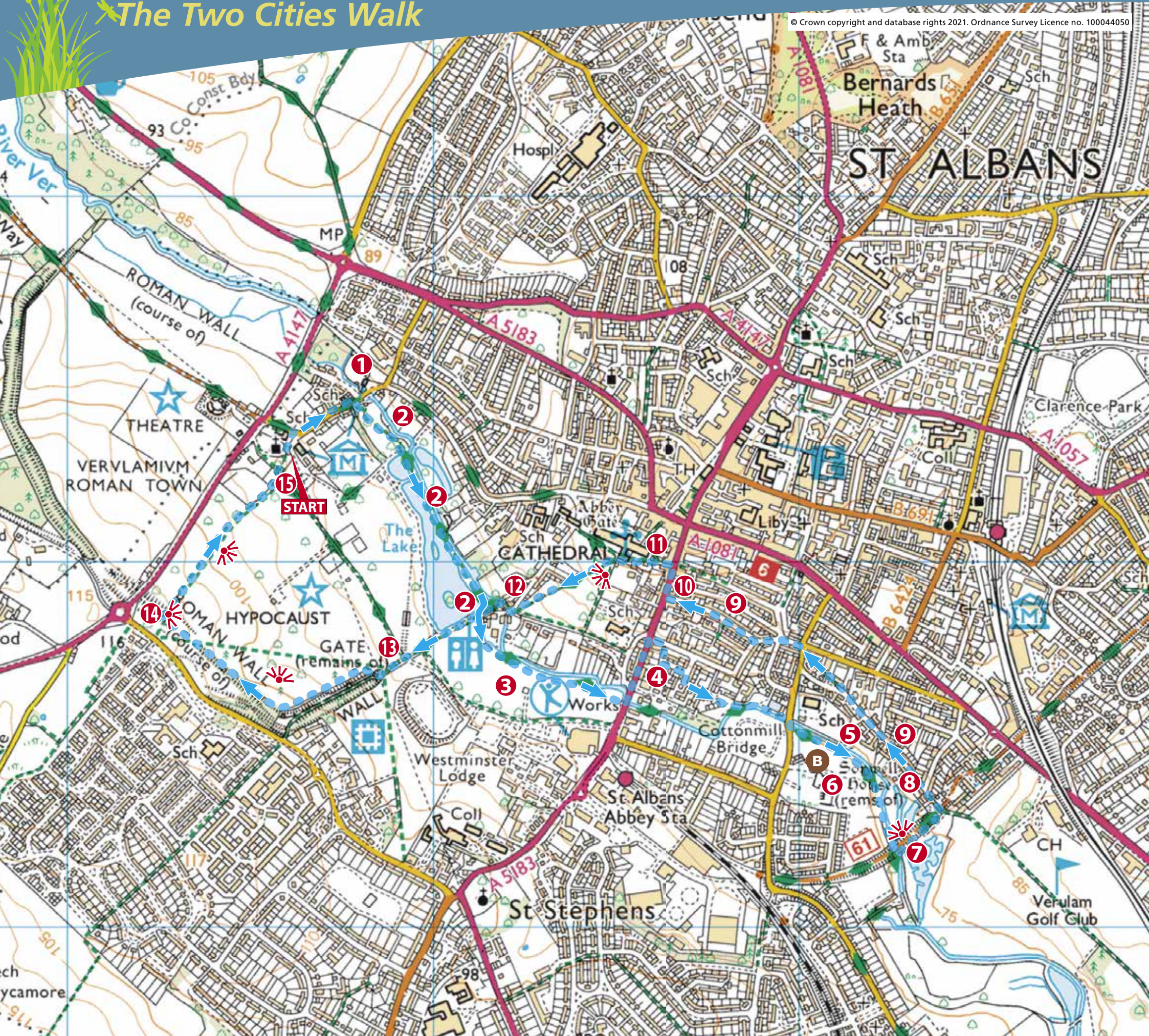


12 The Fighting Cocks

Not the oldest Public House in the country but, perhaps, more accurately the Public House in the oldest building in the country? The hexagonal medieval Abbey dovecote was moved to its present site in 1600.

VER VALLEY WALK 6

The Two Cities Walk



ST ALBANS AND VERULAMIUM

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 ①. Turn right into Verulamium Park; follow the path between the lakes and Abbey millstream ②.

🌿 Lots of wildlife in this area – look out especially for Herons, as well as American Signal 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 ③ hidden in the trees here; this plus pumping stations elsewhere in St Albans, at Holywell Hill and Stonecross, have been abstracting up to 20 million litres a day from the chalk aquifer for our fresh water.

Leave the park over the footbridge, opposite Holywell Pumping Station, and turn left up the hill. After a short distance, cross the road via the pedestrian crossing and turn into Belmont Hill. After about fifty metres, turn right down the sloping path into De Tany Court: the 'holywell' ④ is in the hedge-lined courtyard directly ahead; the route turns left. At the junction, turn right and then left, take the path between the houses through the Pocket Park to the riverside path: turn left.

Cross Cottonmill Lane and take the surfaced path into Sopwell Nunnery Green Space. Note the sound of the 'riffle' ⑤ along this otherwise straight, modified stretch of river. The ruins of Sopwell Nunnery and house are to the right ⑥.

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 ⑦.

Take the sloping path, left, down the embankment to the spur of Riverside Road and turn left. 🌿 The Watercress Wildlife Association nature reserve ⑧ is well worth a short detour.

Follow Riverside Road, passing in front of the scout hall to Henry's Grant then, having crossed Cottonmill Lane, follow Sopwell Lane to Holywell Hill. This section of the route, together with the footpath across Verulam Golf Course, marks the course of the medieval road to St Albans from Barnet and London ⑨.

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 here ⑩.

Turn left into Sumpter Yard part of the Abbey precincts ⑪. Follow the path to the left of the Abbey, past the Cedar tree and the Chapter House, then down into the valley, back to the river at the Abbey Mills and the Fighting Cocks PH ⑫ – note the sound of the water falling over the weir at the mill.

Enter the park once more and follow the path across the southern edge of the Lake. Before the remains of the London Gate ⑬ of Verulamium take the grassy path inside the ancient city walls. Ascending the slope there are fine views back, east, across the park to the Abbey and city ⑭.

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 ⑮.

KEY

Ver Valley Walk 6 uses rights of way to link to the River Ver Trail to enable you to explore the river valley in bite-sized sections.



Waymarking
Follow these waymarks on your way around the route.



Ver Valley View



Public Footpath



Public Bridleway



Nature notes



Position of a Ver Valley Bench

