

Teas, buns, pints and pies:

Clock Tower: The Boot and The Fleur de Lys Public Houses, plus numerous cafés and restaurants.

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

Holywell Hill: The White Hart and Peahen Public Houses plus lots of other options including the Abbots Kitchen at the Abbey.

Park Street: The Falcon and The Overdraught Public Houses

How to get there:

By road: The Clock Tower is situated in Market Place, St Albans. There are several car parks within the city centre. For more information on car parks see www.stalbans.gov.uk.

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 the Abbey Station from Watford. 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: The watermeadows at Hedges Farm. Photos: Alison Debenham and Sopwell Memories/Pinnock Family (Park Street Watercress)

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VER VALLEY WALK 7

The Watermeadow Walk

Explore the beautiful rolling countryside of this river valley



Start and finish:
Clock Tower, St Albans, includes short train journey

**Full walk: 3.5 miles (5.6 km) –
About 2 hours**



www.riverver.co.uk

ST ALBANS AND PARK STREET

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.

From the middle of the 19th century production of watercress was an important agricultural crop in the valley. At Flamstead, Redbourn, St Albans and Park Street the ditches off watercourses, which were often remnants of the 'natural' course of the river, were utilised – usually modified and improved – for the industry. The pure, alkaline spring water of a chalk-stream like the River Ver, which maintains an even temperature, was perfect for virtually year round production. London and other big cities became essential markets as production increased. Half of the 15 million bunches of 'fresh wo-orter cresses' sold each year in London, were sold by sellers in the streets, usually

young girls, the old or the infirm. In the 20th century popularity of watercress declined and production industrialised further onto bigger sites, particularly in Dorset and Hampshire. Watercress production ceased on the River Ver around 1970.



1) The Clock Tower

The 1412 Clock House was a political statement. The townsmen wished to assert their freedom, power and wealth from St Albans Abbey. Sited on higher ground, the tower looks down at its larger neighbour. It is the only medieval town belfry left in England.



3) Sopwell House and Priory ruins

A local legend suggests that King Henry VIII courted and married Anne Boleyn whilst she lodged here in 1531/2, a safe distance from his court in London. The pair would meet at places not far from the Priory.



8) Abbey Station

This single track branch line running to Watford Junction, survived when others were closed in the Beeching cuts. Note the enamel station plaques near the platform designed by local school children.



11) St Albans Abbey

Note the Roman tiles and stonework that form a large part of the Abbey's fabric. The decaying Roman city of Verulamium was exploited for building materials. Vaulted passages and 'subterranean crypts' were overthrown and filled-up partly to salvage stone and bricks, and partly because they had become hiding places for 'robbers, cut throats and strumpets'.

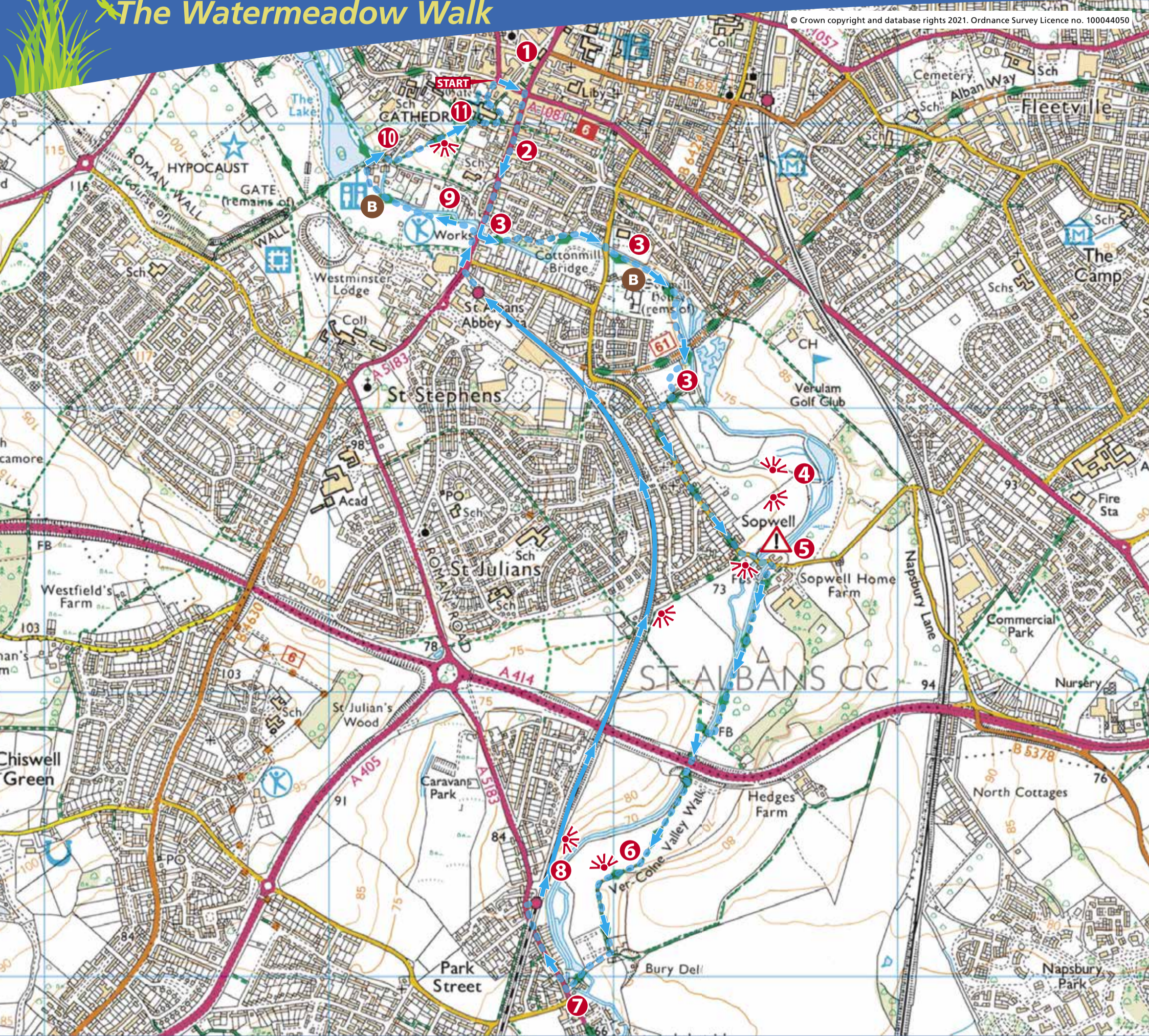


11) Waxhouse Gate

This was the main entrance into the Abbey precincts for medieval pilgrims. Here they purchased devotional candles to be placed at the Martyr's shrine for forgiveness of sins or to cure illness.

VER VALLEY WALK 7

The Watermeadow Walk



ST ALBANS AND PARK STREET

From the Clock Tower **1** turn left into High Street, then cross towards the Peahen Public House, and turn right down Holywell Hill. Our route takes us past the historic White Hart Hotel and the former Ryder Seed Hall and offices **2**.


Cross the River Ver at the base of the hill, then take the riverside footpath left.

Although the river has been highly modified during the last two millennia, and encroached upon, its valley bottom remains an important green corridor through St Albans **3**.

Follow the footpath to Cottonmill Lane, then alongside the River through Sopwell Nunnery Green Space. Shortly after passing beneath the Alban Way, turn right across the recreation ground to emerge onto Cottonmill Lane.

For fine views of the Ver Valley back to the Abbey and Sopwell Mill, and south to New Barnes Mill make a detour into the grounds of the Marlborough Club (via Old Oak) **4**.

Take care  at New Barnes Mill **5** as there is no pedestrian footpath. Turn right after the second bridge onto the riverside path.

 Watch out for the blue flash of Kingfishers flying up the Ver.

Cross the footbridge before the A414 embankment, then the farm access bridge after, and follow the path across the middle of the watermeadows.

These watermeadows **6** are rich in aquatic flora and fauna; they are grazed by cattle and sheep from nearby Hedges Farm. From the eastern side of the valley here, it is easy to imagine the 'natural' river filling the whole of the river corridor here, especially during winter months.

Pass through a kissing gate to follow the path beside allotments. Turn right into Burydell Lane. Park Street Mill **7** sits at the junction with Watling Street.

To return to St Albans either take the 'Abbey Flyer' from Park Street Station (there are views across the valley from the train **8** see www.abbeyline.org.uk) OR retrace your path north, but deviate left at the footbridge to the north of the A414 for fine views of the valley from this path and Butterfield Lane.

From the Abbey Station, cross Holywell Hill and the footbridge, to turn left onto the grassy path beside the river **9** inside Verulamium Park. At the Lake turn right over the Abbey Millstream and pass between the Mill and the Fighting Cocks Public House. Note the sound of the river falling over the weir here **10**.

Walk up the hill to St Albans Abbey **11**, follow the path around the east end of the Abbey, then north through Waxhouse Gate to finish at the Clock Tower.

There are fabulous views from the top of the Clock Tower, visit on weekends in the summer to find it open.

KEY

-  Ver Valley Walk 7 uses rights of way to link to the River Ver Trail to enable you to explore the river valley in bite-sized sections.
-  Ver Valley Walk 7 train journey
-  Waymarking Follow these waymarks on your way around the route.
-  Ver Valley View
-  Public Footpath
-  Public Bridleway
-  Take care when crossing main roads
-  Nature notes
-  Position of a Ver Valley Bench

