

Holy Well



Start of Alban Way



London Road Station



The Holy Well Connection Areas of interest

These five circular history walks have been designed to highlight the rich history and beautiful green spaces in the area south of St Albans called Sopwell. Sopwell, named after the 12th century nunnery where the nuns lived on bread and water (sops), became a manor in medieval times.

The project to research Sopwell's early history and collect more recent local memories for the benefit of future generations was begun by the Sopwell Residents Association (SRA) in 2009. The amount of material generated resulted, in 2012, in a self-published book *Sopwell a history and collection of memories* by Sandy Norman. ISBN: 978-0-9567399-1-9. It was on the strength of this original research, carried out with minimal help and resources, that SRA was awarded £10,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund All Our Stories Project. The money has been used to build a website www.sopwellmemories.org.uk and to produce these leaflets.

The book is on sale in St Albans at Waterstones bookshop, St Albans Museum and Tourist Information Centre and Sopwell House hotel, price: £15.00. It may also be ordered online via the link on the Sopwell Residents Association website: www.sra.org.uk



Sopwell History Walks



Walk 4

The Holy Well Connection

Approx Distance
2.5 miles / 4 kilometres

Published by Sopwell Residents Association and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



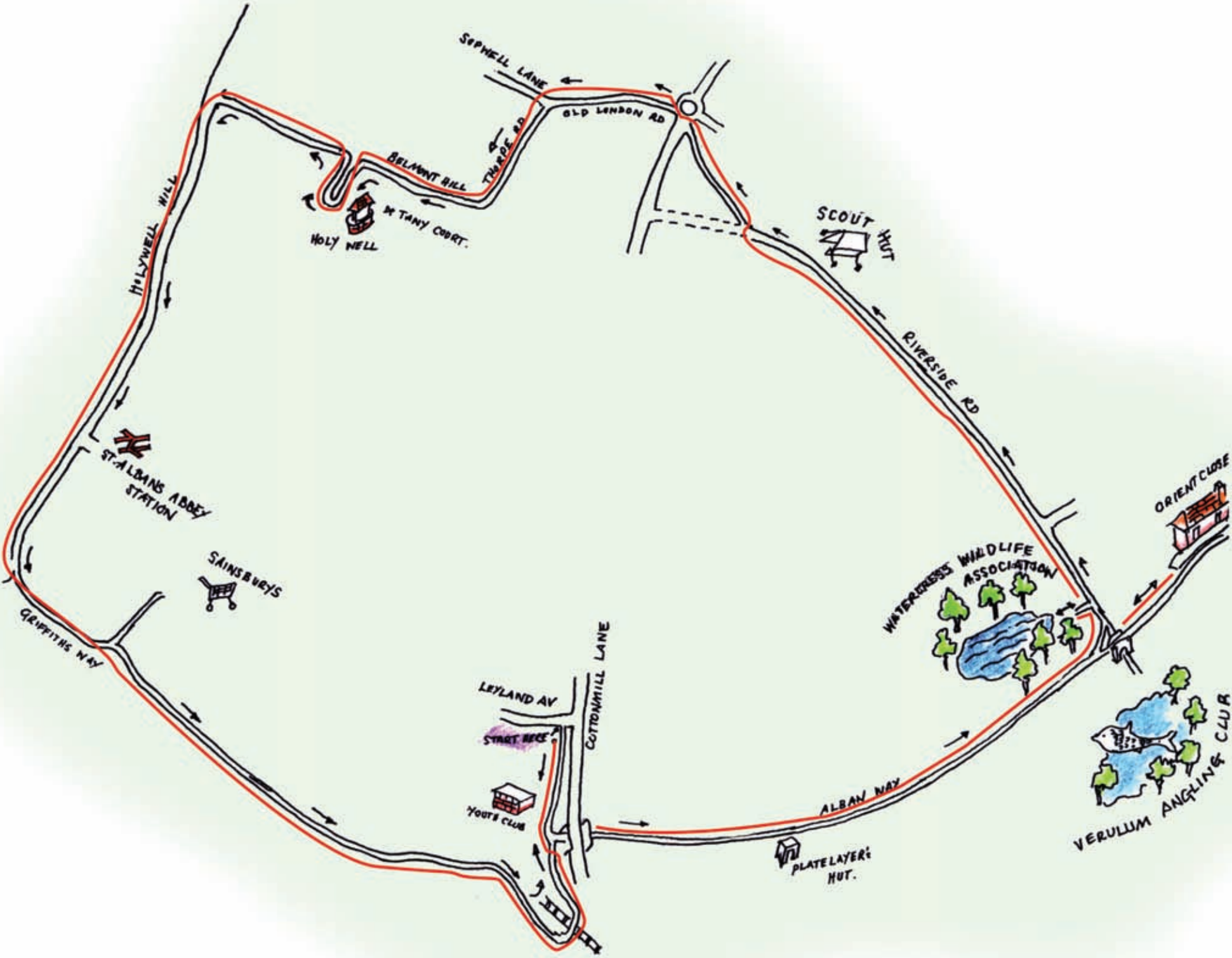
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Holy Well Connection

The S4 bus from the town stops just by the ruins in Cottonmill Lane. From there, walk uphill a short way to Leyland Avenue and follow the cycle path round to the railway bridge which marks the start of the Alban Way. There is also limited parking in Cottonmill Lane. Alternatively, park in Homebase/Argos car park in Griffiths Way, walk over the railway crossing and almost immediately turn left down a path which leads to the start of the Alban Way.

1. Start at the entrance to the Alban Way and follow the old railway track towards Hatfield. There are several things to note on the way: on the right, there is an old platelayer's hut; on the left, there are steps going down in various places which connect with the playing fields in Cottonmill lane and the Ver river walk; on the right, the lakes of Verulam Angling Club may be glimpsed through the trees. Continue on the track until you reach the houses in Orient Close and the old London Road station building. This station used to be the terminus of the railway line to Hatfield until the line was extended to the Abbey station in 1923.
2. Turn back along the Alban Way and take the next path on the right down to the end of Riverside Road. At the bottom of the path, turn immediately left and through the gate into the area known as the Watercress Wildlife Association. When the watercress industry ceased in the 1970s, this area below Riverside Road was used partly for allotments and partly as a builders' dumping ground. Eventually, the local residents decided to reclaim it and obtained permission to turn the area into a beautiful wildlife sanctuary. It is home to many birds, butterflies, moths and bats. It also has a mini apple orchard. Anyone may visit and enjoy the area. Take a look around and explore the many paths within the site.
3. Exit the wildlife area and turn left to walk along Riverside Road. This first part was called Longmire Road until the 1970s and originally ended in a cul-de-sac. The houses in Longmire Road were all originally rented out as workers' cottages. Follow the line of the original London Road along a footpath on the right-hand side of the road, past the Jim Green Memorial Scout hut and Henrys Grant, and then along an alleyway off to the right. This leads to Cottonmill Lane. Cross over Cottonmill Lane and, at the roundabout, turn left into Old London Road and continue to Sopwell Lane.
4. Turn left down Thorpe Road, then right into Belmont Hill, and enter De Tany Court. Here take the first right and follow the road round to the left to a brick enclosure which is site of the legendary Holy Well. The Holy Well is probably more ancient than any other part of St Albans. It predated the Romans and may well have been pre-Christian. Such holy relics were often Celtic in origin and were said to be associated with a feminine deity. Healing is said to take place when a hand or arm is immersed in the water or by throwing in an offering. There is some doubt over whether there actually was a well - it may just have been a spring. Whatever it was, Holywell Hill was named after it. There are many stories and legends surrounding its origins and healing properties. One legend is that when Alban was killed, his decapitated head fell down a hill where a sacred spring mysteriously bubbled! The spring was no doubt already there but maybe it took on sacred properties following Alban's martyrdom. Another story is that, prior to his execution, Alban desired water and a sacred spring bubbled up to quench his thirst. We do know that the well was once part of the terraced garden of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough who built their house, called Holywell House, in the 17th century. After the house was demolished in 1825, the land became the playing fields of St Albans School and the well disappeared. It was rediscovered when the land was set aside for redevelopment in the 1980s. This led to many complaints in the local press and suggestions that the original well be discovered and preserved. Later, an excavation was made which revealed that there was evidence of an earlier well underneath the modern one. The well was fenced in and the residential development of De Tany court was built around it.
5. Leaving De Tany Court, continue along Belmont Hill to Holywell Hill, and walk down to the roundabout at the bottom. On the left you will pass St Albans waterworks which were built in the early part of the 20th century, and the Abbey station which dates from when the railways first came to St Albans in 1858.

6. Turn left at the roundabout towards Sainsbury's and the retail park in Griffiths Way. This road used to be called Eywood Road and it marked the line of Eywood Lane, which was an ancient lane along the line of the borough boundary. St Albans gas works used to be on this site until 1971 when they were blown up. The gas holders were taken down in 2014.
7. Walk down the foot and cycle path past Sainsbury's to the gated railway crossing and cross over the railway. Turn left down the footpath which leads to the Alban Way and Leyland Avenue and the end of the walk.



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Key: ——— walk