

Alvechurch Village Society

55th Annual report

March 2025



President's Address

It was a great pleasure to accept the invitation to be the AVS President and I am sure it will be an enjoyable experience as well as being the last lap so to speak in my AVS Journey. Like others before us, we got involved with AVS by dipping our toe into some simple event, and I recall the daffodil planting that led onto me joining the committee and later becoming Chairman.

For those of you who don't know my wife Norma and myself, we have lived in Solihull for the past four years after spending many happy years in Alvechurch. Our heart is still half in the village, and we get so much pleasure from coming over to see friends, supporting AVS events as well as getting our teeth sorted and having many catch up conversations in the dentist's waiting room.

Alvechurch has always been a great place to live. It is a wonderful blend of an old village with a young or young at heart population. We are blessed with it being a good place for young families to develop as well as being the home of so many clubs and activities for the not quite so young.

AVS certainly plays a part in protecting the beauty of the surrounding countryside as well as opening it up for the enjoyment of everyone, through the work done to maintain footpaths as well as organizing litter picks and monthly walks for the benefit of everyone (not just our members). Norma and I are still involved in the walks programme as well as the footpaths team and in conversation we often get people wondering how two outsiders know so much about AVS and the village.

Over the past year, I have watched the present committee at work in meetings and it is a pleasure to see the keenness of individuals putting great effort into organising events for others. It is notable how the programme of events has developed to match the membership of the Society, and the Committee as a whole should be thanked for these very interesting talks and major events. In addition to this, thanks must go out to members of the Footpaths team for the continued commitment of their Saturday mornings.

I would like to say thank you for your support if you are an AVS member. If you are just reading this, then I would encourage you to join and support AVS in everything it does for the village and its people.

Ray Yarnell

Cover photo: courtesy of Alan Helmore

Chair's report

2024 has been another successful year for the Society. In March last year, we elected Ray Yarnell as our President, the nineteenth in the Society's life. Ray has been a stalwart member of AVS for years, a longstanding member of the footpath group, a member of the committee for many years, and served as its chairman for at least 5 years. So, it is fitting that he now fills the boots left empty by Grace Hampson reaching the end of her presidential tenure. At the same time, we welcomed two new *ad hoc* members onto the committee, Norah Foster and Nigel Cutress, and I'm pleased that they have both agreed to stay on. Assuming the membership agree, we will now welcome them as permanent members of the committee. However, Alice Wilkinson has decided to step down, and I'd like to thank her for her contributions, especially in arranging the calendar of social events.

I also want to thank Tony Brannon for his work in coordinating the AVS walks, with many successful outings. This year Tony shifted the schedule to have an extra walk in the autumn, and one less in winter, which is more popular. Joan Feely and Tony regularly update our noticeboards, and both Tony and Stephanie Miall have been making AVS more prominent on local social media.

Mariea and Martin Clarke have continued to arrange regular litter picking sessions and have managed to get more involvement from Alvechurch schoolchildren. It is rather dispiriting that the local roads are subject to so much littering, especially as you can see that a lot of it is food and drink bought in the village centre and then just dumped on the roadside as the people responsible walk or drive away. But by repeatedly collecting the rubbish, at least it doesn't overwhelm the countryside around us.

Martin continues in his role as both Treasurer and Membership Secretary, and the society is in robust financial health, with maintained membership numbers. We think the £10 subscription represents very good value: if nothing else, members get free entry to all our standard evening events – and a free biscuit and cup of tea! That subscription keeps the Society afloat, despite rising costs such as speaker fees, insurance and hall booking costs. But we often make a profit from the ticketed events (the Christmas and summer parties and quiz night) and so we continue to make occasional donations to the village hall and the Lounge. We also continue to look for new society members, via social media, on our own web-site and at events like Picnic in the Park.

Gerard Nash continues in his role as Secretary, documenting our progress, and keeping in touch with the membership. We are increasingly using email for our communications, with most members having email accounts. If you are not yet receiving our email messages, but do use email, it would be good to hear from you. And on that note, one issue that we struggle with is keeping track of people who have moved. Each year one or two members drop off our radar and it's only when we attempt to deliver things to the membership that we find out. So, if you are about to move, or leave Alvechurch, please do give us a forwarding address.

I haven't mentioned everyone by name, but I send my thanks to the whole committee for their hard work running the Society's activities, and I'd like to echo Ray Yarnell's words

about their keen and willing efforts. And of course, thanks to you, our members, for your support in keeping AVS a valuable part of Alvechurch. On that note, can I end with a pointer to the request for help with our social events on page 6.

Chris Miall

Events Programme Review for 2024

The annual report doesn't really align with our annual programme, because the report covers a calendar year, and the programme runs from September to July. Nevertheless, we had a full and varied set of events in the second half of 2023, and throughout 2024, all expertly organized by Alice Wilkinson. Highlights from 2023 were a fire safety talk by Chris Atkins of Hereford and Worcester Fire & Rescue Service, a talk with music from Shulah Oliver of the Midland Sinfonia, and the Christmas Ceilidh in December. With music by the Orchard Band and attended by 55 members, we danced – chaotically – all night long.

The new year started with the annual quiz night, which is always very popular, and in fact we could easily fill more tables than there is room for in the hall. As a result, with the money from entry and raffle tickets, the quiz night makes a substantial profit, and we are able to use this to support occasional donations, this year giving £250 to the hall, as well as gifts to the Lounge and to the Canal Society, who provide us with most of our day-to-day printing. In February, David Jones from the Bromsgrove Astronomical Society gave an interesting, if chilly, introduction to our night skies in and April Chris Miall gave a talk about the Galapagos Islands. This was memorable mainly for the difficulty in getting the projector to work! As a result, we were prompted to help the hall purchase and install a new projector and screen, which has been used since, with much greater success. In May, Dr Richard Comont from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust gave us a very interesting but rather alarming account of the decline in bees in the UK.



Then in June we held 'A Night at the Races'. The hall was packed out and although we didn't charge an admission, we managed to cover our costs and, more importantly, everyone had a great night out.

The events programme restarted in September, with a talk by the author of the Canal Murder books, Andy Griffie, entitled 'Dead in the Water'. October brought an excellent talk on 'Working with the Red Cross in War Zones' by Dr Frank Ryding, an anaesthetist from Worcester who has visited many of the world's most traumatic areas.



And in November we had an amusing account of the history of Halloween by Paul Harding, covering modern, Victorian, medieval, Roman and pre-Christian festivals that can all be traced to what we falsely think of as an American imported holiday!

We ended 2024 with a Caribbean Christmas, a night of reggae and ska from the Tropikal Visions steel band, with DJ'd music from Tony Brannon. This was another great evening, and felt almost tropical, despite the weather!



AVS Walks

Yet again, for this season, it has been another very successful year for the monthly Sunday walks with Alvechurch Village Society. Walks have been very well attended and have taken in, not only local areas, but also further afield as well. We have been to lots of places including Hanbury, The Lickey's and Spermal Ash, as well as several walks around Alvechurch. We took the decision to slightly change the season, dropping the January walk and adding an extra summer walk.



The season isn't over yet and we still have walks planned for April, May, June, July and August. All our Sunday walks start at 2pm. There are one or two exceptions to the programme as we have an annual Boxing Day walk, around The Lickey Hills, that starts at 10am and our end of season walk (August 1st) which starts at 6.30 pm and includes a visit to a local hostelry.



As walks co-ordinator, I will very soon be putting together the programme of walks for the 2025/26 season very soon. If you would like to 'take the plunge' and lead a future walk, please get in contact via email: avswalks@gmail.com. The season runs from September through until August every year.

Tony Brannon

Your Society Needs You

For many years Eileen McHugh provided refreshments at our AVS events, but now that she has retired from this, the committee has decided to try to share the responsibility amongst society members. To enable this, before each event the reminder email from the secretary will ask for volunteers. If you would like to help, all you need do is reply to the email, and then help make and clear up the refreshments. The drinks and biscuits will be provided, and you can be shown around the kitchen. All help would be very much appreciated.

Joan Feely

Alvechurch Village Hall

The village hall is a very popular facility, with increasing numbers of regular and one-off bookings, and is well used by the AVS for monthly meetings and events.

A quinquennial building survey in 2022 highlighted various potential maintenance issues. These continue to be addressed, including a drainage survey, remedial drainage and rainwater ingress works, decorating downstairs, and completion of a new ramp for the lower entrance. Thirty new chairs were recently purchased for the smaller meeting room, and an application made for lottery funding to replace the main hall chairs. The new projector and screen (funded by a generous donation from the Co-op) have been successfully used for several AVS events. The AVS committee has agreed to continue to donate to the Hall and donated £250 in February from the funds raised at our January 2024 Quiz Night.

Stephanie Miall

Social Media

Are you aware that Alvechurch Village Society has a website? The address is www.alvechurchvs.org. We try to ensure our site is kept up to date and we hope you find that it is a valuable source of information. There is also plenty of information about Alvechurch and the local area. Although our society does not have its own social media pages we do post regularly to the 'Alvechurch Around & About' Facebook page. We also send information to 'The Village' magazine which publishes articles about us from time

to time, usually published in the back section of the magazine with up-to-date information about our walks and social events. This is especially helpful as we understand not everybody 'does' social media. But please remember that you can always find our programme of walks and social events on the website.

Tony Brannon

Litter Picking



We have had two successful Litter Picks this year, keeping Alvechurch clean and maintaining our high standards. People often compare Alvechurch favourably to other areas, and this is down to your efforts as a community.

Alvechurch Village Society has continued to be lucky this year in keeping the support of local schools. Both Crown Meadow and Alvechurch Middle School publicise our events

through parent mail and this results in support from families eager to clean up the village at both the April and October events.

This shows the importance of community action. Our certificates and sweet rewards are ever popular. Thank you to all our volunteer helpers and to The Lounge which opened so that everyone could enjoy hot drinks and cake.



Recently we have had several extra 'unofficial' cleanups around the outskirts of the village, in response to the aftermath of stormy weather. I was particularly pleased that Alvechurch Walking Buddies borrowed our equipment and had a go!

Participants have also been very good at disposing of the collected rubbish themselves. If you are interested, you can sign up to 'My Bromsgrove' on the Bromsgrove District Council website (www.bromsgrove.gov.uk): just search for "litter picking". You can then litter pick and arrange collection of the result online.

Mariea Clarke

Contact us

If you have any comments about this report, or any other aspects of the Society, please contact us at: chairalvechurchvillagesociety@gmail.com

Footpath Group Report

I am really pleased to bring you a pictorial display that shows some of the work our ever-increasing AVS band of wonderful volunteers have carried continually over the last 50 years, keeping our parish paths in good condition.



The first shows the team having a well-earned mid-job coffee break. We continue to build new stiles and fences, repair and replace bridges crossing streams, install steps and handrails plus we try and keep our countryside paths free of overgrown vegetation through the efforts of our brilliant team of trained power-tool users. Worcester County Council now provide metal gates and we install them to replace

the old wood gates, offering long term and efficient solutions for our countryside pathways.



As always, my thanks go to all our merry band of willing volunteers that include many long-term members of Alvechurch Village Society, myself being one. The adjacent photo shows my initiation into the footpath group in 2004, and it's been the most joyous experience ever since, even though some of the older members stood by and took great delight in watching me set that bench on Newbourne Hill in memory of a former footpath warden sadly no longer with us.



This year we managed 17 outings even though the weather tried to dampen our spirits with the wettest of wet all years! We had 190 volunteer appearances and worked on 34 different parish footpaths. The final photo is of some of our team at one of the end-of-season breakfasts

we enjoy as a thank-you for another year's hard work. So well done, AVS Footpath Team! Please let me know if you notice any problems while you are out and about enjoying the Alvechurch parish country-side walks and we will try and fix them.

Adrian Smith

penlock@btinternet.com

AVS Finance Report: year ending 31 December 2024

We started the year with a bank balance of £4218 and had a closing balance of £3885. This reflects the fact that our ongoing running costs are not being fully covered by our main income from members subscriptions. Total subscriptions were steady at £1534, and I thank our members for their continued support. We gained six new paying members, but nine members did not renew this year.

We had three very enjoyable social events in addition to our programme of walks and talks. The annual quiz in January made a profit of £478, the Night at the Races made a profit of £15 and we broke even on the Caribbean Christmas party. These profits enable our policy of helping local charities with donations of £250 to the Village Hall, £200 to the Lounge, £100 to the Canal Society and £60 to the Picnic in the Park.

Our outgoings were similar to 2023, although there were slight increases in costs of guest speaker fees and hire of village hall. We paid £220 for Public Liability Insurance, £450 for the Tropikal Visions Steel Band and £110 for the breakfast for the Footpath Group volunteers.

Our expenditure exceeded income by £333 compared to a surplus of £254 in 2023. The difference is partly explained by the absence this year of any input from the National Rail Community Grant, but again it demonstrates the reality that the membership subscription of £10 per person has not increased for over ten years. That said, I would like to end on a positive note by saying that our closing bank balance of £3885 remains very healthy for a society of our size.

Friends of Alvechurch Station

The 'Friends of Alvechurch Station' continue to maintain the raised planters along Platform 2 and the nearby wildflowers alongside Station Road. Thanks to some more funds from the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership, we now have 8 poster boards displaying the work of local artists and photographers and an additional board on each platform is reserved for notices about local events, including AVS events. Since the station upgrade in 2013 Network Rail have never delivered on their commitment to pave, drain, light and add CCTV coverage to the car park. As residents well know, the car park often floods resulting in "Alvechurch Lake," because the drainage gullies are badly designed and block up with silt. Despite numerous meetings over several years with the various stakeholders including Network Rail, the village is no further forward with securing an adequate station car park. However, the Friends continue to add our voice to highlight the issues, and we try to meet with APC, local district councillors and anyone else who might have some influence.

Stephanie & Chris Miall, Philip Aubury

Income and Expenditure Account Year Ending December 2024

	2024	2023
<u>Balance B/Fwd</u>	4218.31	3963.74
Income		
Subscriptions	1534.00	1500.00
Donations received	0.00	600.00
Sale of Walks Leaflets	85.00	126.00
Social Events & Quiz	1501.00	1449.00
National Rail Community Grant	0.00	1000.00
	3120.00	4675.00
Expenditure		
Admin and Postage	195.01	200.77
Room Hire	364.00	293.00
Speaker & Caribbean Band Fees	865.00	700.00
Publicity & Printing	314.29	429.50
Donations	610.00	530.00
Social Events & Quiz	363.29	658.78
Public Liability Insurance	220.00	212.00
Community Grant Disbursed	55.00	813.09
Miscellaneous	466.54	583.29
	3453.13	4420.43
Excess/(Deficit) of Income over Expenditure	(333.13)	254.57
Current Bank Account Balance	3885.18	4218.31
<u>Balance C/fwd</u>	3885.18	4218.31

Martin Clarke, Treasurer

Auditor's Report: I confirm that I have audited the books of AVS and they are correct as of 31 December 2024.

Keith Rixon, Auditor; 6 January 2025

Minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 23rd March 2024 7.30pm, Alvechurch Village Hall

Present: 30 members

1. Welcome by the Chairman and Apologies

Gerard Nash (Secretary) welcomed everyone to the AGM on behalf of the Chairman Chris Miall who sent apologies as he was abroad. Apologies had also been received from Stephanie Miall, Alan Helmore, Philip and Elizabeth Aubrey, Mysie and Simon Raine, Philip Bladon, Ann Thurell and Jayne Graham.

2. Chair's Report: Gerard Nash summarised Chris Miall's report from the previously circulated Annual Report.

Chris wanted to start by thanking Grace Hampson for her three years as President. The President's role is important in several ways. They must act to elect the committee each year which is critical to the day-to-day running of the Society and also give the Chair and the committee their guidance. Indeed, Grace was to be thanked not only for her support over the last three years, but also for her previous 15 years as committee member, including as Chair. In recognition of this long service, the committee proposed that she was elected as a life member of the Society. In addition, Chris wanted to thank all the members of the committee for their efforts over the last 12 months.

The committee met every 2 months for an hour or so, and business was sorted out with no arguments, lots of sensible suggestions, and a real sense of sharing by all.

Chris was happy to report that the Society's activities had fully recovered from the disruption of the Covid pandemic. The Society had held well-attended evening talks and music events; had cruised up and down the canal and spun around each other in barn dancing. In January the quiz night was highly successfully, raising nearly £500 that had been shared by The Lounge and The Village Hall. Members had joined the monthly walks in great numbers, except for one walk in miserable weather in December. In the Annual report Chris had noted that no-one turned up but Gerard, as organiser of that walk, corrected that he, Yvonne Nash and Martin Clarke had actually attended, although they abandoned the walk and went to the pub instead.

Chris also wanted to thank Adrian Smith for all his efforts as the footpath warden and also the tremendous group who help keep our local paths passable. He noted that this past year we had received two more generous donations for the footpath group, taking the total over about 12 months to £1000. We also received an additional £1000 to support the Friends of Alvechurch Station.

It was very encouraging to see the efforts of both groups being noticed and rewarded by the wider public.

In summary, the Society was highly active with excellent attendances at events and as Martin Clarke would report, with a healthy bank balance.

3. Motion to adopt the minutes of the previous AGM in 2023

The acting Chair moved to adopt the minutes of the 2023 AGM, which was seconded by Cheryl Godfrey and carried unanimously by those present.

4. Report of the Treasurer

Martin Clarke referred members to the finance report in the Annual Report.

The Society remained in a healthy financial condition. He noted that Public Liability Insurance was the highest single regular expense, while a major one-off expense had been purchasing of sun hats for the footpath crew. Member-ship subscription rates had been unaltered at £10 per person for ten years, which after inflation is worth only the equivalent of £7 in 2014. Martin suggested that it might be necessary to consider raising the rate at some stage in the future. He also pointed out that funds were held for the Friends of Alvechurch Station rather than being part of the Society's own budget.

5. Motion to approve accounts for the calendar year, 2023

The acting Chair moved to approve the 2023 accounts, which was seconded by Andy Humphries and carried unanimously by those present.

6. Reports on the Society's activities in 2023: Tony Brannon reported that we had continued to hold a well-attended series of walks and that he would soon be asking for volunteers to lead walks for the 2024/25 programme.

Mariea Clarke reported that recent litter picks had been well attended but featured increased input from family groups with children. This led to some difficulty in covering the less 'safe' roads which we unsuitable for children to operate on. She also stated that the Society now had a complete set of its own equipment for litter collection and said that this could be made available to any member who wished to carry out some free-lance litter collection.

In the absence of Adrian Smith, Martin Clarke reported that the Footpath Group had been well attended throughout the year with a larger number of volunteers than ever. Martin asked that if anyone spotted a footpath that needed attention, they should let Adrian know, and he would sort it out. The Society had covered the cost of the volunteers' end of year breakfast once again as Worcester County Council no longer help out with this. Martin finished on a sad note by advising that Stuart Roebuck, a stalwart of the group, had passed away in March. He will be missed by all.

7. Motion to approve 2024 Annual report

The Motion to approve the Annual Report was proposed by Ray Yarnell and seconded by Joan Feely and was carried unanimously by those present.

8. President's address

Gerard introduced the President, Grace Hampson, who was completing her third and final year in the role. He expressed the Society's thanks for her long support, as President and also previously as Chair and member of the committee and presented Grace with flowers and a certificate of Life Membership.

Grace then addressed the members saying that the role of President had given her much pride and pleasure, having been involved in the Society for about 20 years, with 15 years as a committee member, 3 years as Chair of the Committee and 3 years as President. In this time the Society had gone from strength to strength in retaining members and through the commitment of its committee members.

Grace's early involvement had been with Eileen McHugh, organising the planting of daffodils in the village and litter picking which had been a real bug bear. Over time, it had been so good to see the way in which the Society had played an active role within the village, continuing to review planning applications to ensure they do not destroy the character and nature of the village. The footpath team also continued to do an important job over many years, maintaining public footpaths and ensuring the public had easy access to the countryside around us. The Society also actively supported other organisations within the village such as the Lounge and Village Hall and had given donations to support their sustainability.

Grace concluded by thanking Chris Miall for all his hard work in leading the committee and all the committee members for their enthusiasm, commitment and hard work. She would remain as a member and hoped to see many at future events. She expressed her gratitude to the committee and members for the presentation of lifetime membership and beautiful flowers and wished the Society every success for the future.

9. Election of new President

Ray Yarnell was proposed as President by Grace Hampson and elected by general acclaim.

10. Election of Officers and Committee

Ray Yarnell supervised the election of Officers and Committee of the Society for the next year after he and Norma Divine were presented with certificates recognising their earlier award of Life Membership.

Officer nominations

Nominees	Proposer & Seconder
Chairman Chris Miall	Pat Riley & Andy Humphries
Treasurer Martin Clarke	Norma Divine & Ken Holmes
Secretary Gerard Nash	Yvonne Nash & Cheryl Godfrey

Committee members (*En Bloc*)

Nominees	Proposer & Seconder
Tony Brannon	Alan Helmore Norma Divine & Steve Dewar
Cheryl Godfrey	Stephanie Miall
Mariea Clarke	Alice Wilkinson
Joan Feely	

All the nominations were approved by those present.

Gerard Nash took the opportunity to note that several members had agreed to consider joining the committee. Norah Foster, Steve Dewar, Nigel Cutress were thus invited to attend future committee meetings to consider whether they would like to join.

11. Any other business: Andy Humphreys made a vote of thanks to the committee for their work over the previous year.

The Meeting closed at 8.15pm, followed by refreshments.

Alvechurch Village Society Committee, 2023-2024

President



Ray Yarnell
Chris Miall
(vacant)
Martin Clarke
Gerard Nash

Alan Helmore
Alice Wilkinson
Cheryl Godfrey
Joan Feely
Mariea Clarke
Stephanie Miall
Tony Brannon

Past Presidents

1969 Sir Michael Higgs DL
1973 Mr Peter Merry
1976 Sir Patrick Lawrence
1979 Mr J F Milward DL
1982 Mr L C Boardman
1985 Dr N J Cartwright DSc
1988 Mr F C Ott, DSc
1991 Prof R Davies
1994 Mr James Burton

1997 Mr Antony Sealey
2000 Mr Michael Scanlan
2003 Ms Julie Kirkbride
2007 Mr John Sidwell
2009 Mr Philip Aubury
2012 Ms Joanne Malin
2015 Mr Andy Humphries
2019 Prof Chris Miall
2020 Mrs Grace Hampson

Membership of the Society costs just £10 per person per year (or £5 per year for young members aged 14-20 years).

To join, please visit our website page:

www.alvechurchvs.org/membership

or contact the Treasurer and Membership Secretary Martin Clarke by email:

treasurer@alvechurchvs.org

or email the Chairman Chris Miall:

chair@alvechurchvillagesociety@gmail.com

Visit our website for more information: www.alvechurchvs.org