



Newsletter

2/2018



**SMALLFORD STATION
& ALBAN WAY**
Heritage Society

December 2018

BRINGING SMALLFORD STATION BACK TO LIFE

SSAWHS AGM and Special Presentations on 26 October 2018 - a great evening had by all!

The Smallford Station & Alban Way Heritage Society (SSAWHS) held their AGM, as well as a special presentation on 'The Varying Fortunes of the Hatfield-St Albans Railway' by SSAWHS committee member Alastair Cameron, on Friday 26 October 2018.

Programme

The evening was opened by Jeff Lewis, Founder-Member and Chair of the Society, who expressed his thanks to the University of Hertfordshire Heritage Hub for providing the facilities, parking, and delicious refreshments – and who also introduced the evening's programme, as follows:

- **6.00-7.00pm:** Our First AGM
- **8.00-9.30pm:** Presentation by Alastair Cameron: 'The Varying Fortunes of the Hatfield- St Albans Railway' - supported by our Exhibition and Display of Alastair's two model stations (Smallford & Nast Hyde Halt) and a range of items provided by Roger Taylor



Introducing the Society

The Society members were delighted to find so many newcomers in attendance.

For their and everyone's benefit, Jeff Lewis provided the following useful background to the Smallford Station and Alban Way Heritage Society (SSAWHS):

1. **We've been active for nearly 7 years** researching the history of Smallford Station, the Hatfield-St Albans Railway (which opened 153 years ago and closed 50 years ago this year), and the impact these had on the surrounding communities. We started as the 'Bringing the History of Smallford Station Alive' Project Group, initially funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (without whom we would probably not have existed).
2. **18 months ago we became 'The Smallford Station & Alban Way Heritage Society' (SSAWHS).** One of our major hopes and aspirations is to renovate and restore Smallford Station (a Grade II Listed Building) to create a Community Heritage Centre. For various reasons beyond our control, this is currently 'in abeyance'.

Read more on [Page 2](#)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



AGM & Presentations

Feedback and reflection on our AGM & Evening of Presentations.

[Pages 1-2](#)



Latest News

An update on our activities and progress.

[Pages 3-4](#)



Events & Activities

Dates for your Diary in 2019

[Page 5](#)



Taylor's Tales

Some great Christmas reading provided by rail expert Mr Roger Taylor

[Page 6-8](#)



Stay in Touch

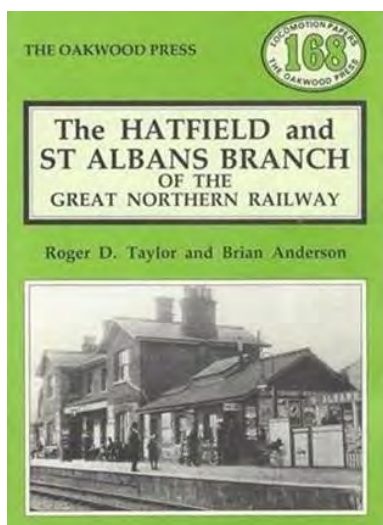
- How to contact us for
- General Information
 - Membership
 - Guided Walks
 - Facebook & Website

[Page 9](#)

...cont'd from page 1

3. However, **we are currently putting together plans to improve the area around Smallford Station** – such as planting spring-flowering bulbs and providing additional information signs. If this is successful, then we hope to implement some even more exciting plans!
4. **We provide a range of publications and activities** – including Guided Walks and Presentations on what we've been doing – to a wide variety of interest groups, including community organisations, WIs, Railway Interest, Engineering, History and Civic Societies. If you'd like a presentation for your group, simply email info@smallford.org.
5. The event held on 26 October was **made even more special through the presence of some key people**, who warrant special mentions and introductions:

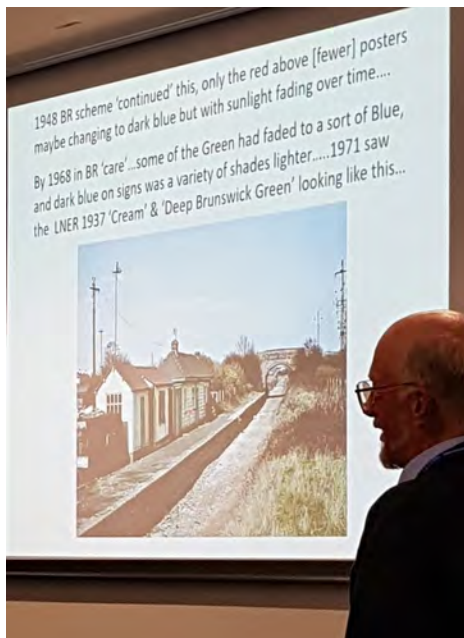
- a) **Roger Taylor** – who is the co-author of the definitive book *'The Hatfield & St Albans Branch of the Great Northern Railway'*: he is closely involved in our work and has generously made available all of his book archive materials to us; as well as
- b) **Alastair Cameron** – a founding member who has many passions, including Railway History, plus, as a result of his work for our Society, has become an excellent railway station modelmaker!



Cakes, good cheer and a 'not over-academic' presentation by Alastair Cameron

In the wake of the SSAWHS AGM and associated Presentations, the Society was able to reflect on the event as follows:

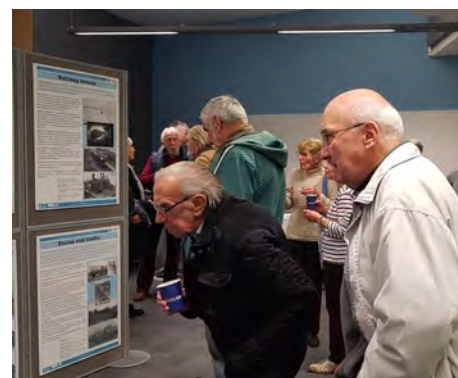
- The successful evening had been widely publicised – via Facebook, previous contacts (e.g. groups we had previously made presentations to), mailing list, and the media (e.g. Welwyn/Hatfield Times).
- We aimed to provide every enquiry with a speedy and personal response.
- We hope the 'Joining Instructions' for new members and friends worked well!
- We were delighted to welcome so many new-comers to our AGM.



- We also had a very good turnout for the Presentation – we think a total of around 43 people (including a number of new faces) + 10 apologies, 3 non-attenders
- We all enjoyed the excellent presentation by Alastair Cameron – which was very clear, informative, full of energy and well-received by our delightful audience, several of whom engaged with interesting questions. Our understanding is that Alastair may well receive invitations to make the presentation to other groups (e.g. in Watford).



- Quite a few visitors stayed around afterwards, for an extra look through the excellent exhibition and displays, as well as an opportunity to network.
- We collected £113 in donations – which is a welcome boost to our Society funds.
- **We wish to thank all those who attended and who contributed to what was a most pleasant and successful evening!**



6. Like the 26 October event, **everything the Society provides is free** – although we happily welcome voluntary contributions to the aid the work of our Society.

Dates for your diary

We are currently in the process of planning our events and activities for 2019 - but the following is a tentative schedule, to be confirmed in the New Year.



**SMALLFORD STATION
& ALBAN WAY**
Heritage Society

Events & Exhibitions

Presentations:

Spring 2019 Presentation to Watford Industrial Heritage Society (TBC)

Workshops:

3 March CMS: Leadership Course

Exhibitions:

27 April Luton Model Railway Club: Flitwick

1/2 June St Albans Steam & Country Fair

September St Albans Heritage Open Days (TBC)

Guided Walks

At the time of writing, **two walks are tentatively planned for the month of May 2019.**

For the very latest updates on our guided walks schedule, please check our Facebook page at [@ouralbanway](https://www.facebook.com/ouralbanway), or email: albanwaywalks@smallford.org



Other Events from our community partners in Herts



- **May & August Bank Holidays:** Nast Hyde Halt.

For the latest updates, please check our **website** and **Facebook** page.



info@smallford.org



[@ouralbanway](https://www.facebook.com/ouralbanway)



albanwaywalks@smallford.org



smallford.org/smallford-station/

Latest News & Updates

Greenspace Action Plan

A new Greenspace Action Plan for the Alban Way is being prepared by Countryside Management Service on behalf of St Albans District Council. The matter will be discussed at SSAWHS's next Committee Meeting.

World War I Use of the Railway

Despite extensive efforts, the SSAWHS Chairman, Jeff Lewis (JL) reports there has been no progress on the matter of the role of the railway in wartime. JL has as yet had no reply from any of the potential sources that he has contacted, so will send some further reminders. Our hope is to be able to research the role of the Hatfield-St Albans Railway during the Great War years, and invite our readers to provide any information and/or photographs they may have for the period 1914-1918, by sending them to: info@smallford.org.

Making our Information & Collection more accessible

We are making continuous efforts to improve accessibility to our information and collection. We will shortly be improving our website, including incorporating the QR codes already available on the information boards along the Alban Way. Next year, we also hope to start the process of archiving our collection of objects and photographs for online accessibility.

Activities for 2019

We are currently busy planning our activity calendar for 2019 - and have already pencilled in: two guided walks in May; two exhibitions; and our participation in the St Albans Heritage Open Day. For more information, please see our TENTATIVE calendar of activities on page 3. The exact activities and dates will be confirmed early in the New Year.



Latest News & Updates

Listing of Smallford Station

We have submitted a Freedom of Information Act request concerning the exact definition of the listing of Smallford Station to St Albans District Council. This has been referred to the Cambridge office of Historic England - and we are waiting for their response.

National Archives

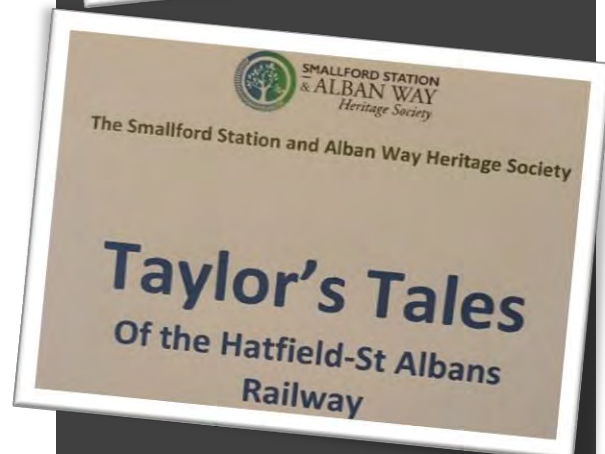
We are currently making enquiries with the National Archives to see if any new material relating to the railway has been released in the last couple of years.

The Hatfield & St Albans Branch of the GNR

A lot of interest was shown in Roger Taylor and Brian Anderson's book, 'The History of the Hatfield and St Albans Branch of the Great Northern Railway', at our recent AGM. We - along with Roger Taylor himself - would be delighted if the book, which is currently out of print, were to be republished. In fact, our understanding is that Roger Taylor now has enough material that the book could be 'twice as thick'!

Meanwhile - and as an early Christmas cracker to all our readers! - we have the pleasure of publishing the first of three separate papers on the railway written by Roger Taylor under the heading of 'Taylor's Tales'. The first such tale is titled '**After the Line Close in 1969**', and can be read on pages 6-8.

The next two papers ('Railway Memories' and 'The Branch Line on Film') will be published in our forthcoming Newsletters.



TAYLOR'S TALES:

After the Line Closure in 1969

After the Hatfield-St Albans line was finally closed in 1969, it was sad indeed to see the rails being taken up by two men and a bulldozer, an operation that took three months to complete. Only a short section was left intact – from Lemsford Road Halt to Hatfield Station - presumably to be used as a long siding. This didn't last long and was soon removed. An attempt to re-open the line by a preservation group was started in July 1969, there was a meeting at St Albans Town Hall (which I attended) and a few lines in the Herts Advertiser but it was all too late. The rails had been lifted.



Figure 2: Hill End 1968: Track lifted 1967
Roger Taylor



Figure 1: Lemsford Road Halt 1969 track being lifted
Roger Taylor

Despite the closure of the branch line, I was still determined to delve into the history of the line and try to discover as many photographs as I could. In pre-website days this wasn't easy. It became a real labour of love and very difficult - a lot easier these days! My contemporary notes record lots of requests for photos and information (always sent a SAE) many of whom went unanswered.

In 1972 I moved from the area to Cambridgeshire but carried on with my research. My parents and brother still lived in St Albans and kept me up to date with any developments and articles in the local press and I visited the remains of the line on many occasions as my parents lived nearby.

At the time (1970) I wrote:-

"In the very near future it seems likely that parts of the line will be built on, one possible future for the branch would be to turn it into a public footpath but this seems unlikely to happen. In a few years nothing will be left of the St Albans to Hatfield line".

Aren't we lucky that it has nearly all survived!

Hatfield-St Albans Railway: Roger Taylor's Story ... 2

Through the years there were different plans for the track-bed including turning it into a road - in retrospect it would have made a great guided bus way! In the 1980's there were many interesting articles in the Herts Advertiser and Hertfordshire Countryside magazine about the line and people's memories of it in its heyday. It seemed interest in the line was re-awakening.

Histories of local railway branch lines were now being produced and in 1975 a book titled '*Forgotten Railways - Chilterns and Cotswolds*' by R Davies and M D Grant was published. This included a marvellous chapter on the Hatfield-St Albans branch with many details of opening and closure dates, logs of the last passenger train, locomotives etc. No photographs, unfortunately.

To my knowledge this was the first account of the history of the line apart from articles in the various railway magazines. This was my incentive to publish a book on the branch.

In c. 1985 somebody wrote to me stating that another person was researching the history with the aim of publishing - his name was Brian Anderson. Brian lived locally and was an active member of The Colney Heath Local History Society. Brian was very knowledgeable and quite an academic and, without his input the book would almost certainly not have been published. We were quickly introduced and began researching thoroughly the history of the line, regularly visiting the Public Records Office at Kew and the National Railway Museum at York. These turned out to be a mine of information.



Figure 3: Hill End Platform, 1988: Roger Taylor

A final draft for the book was drawn up in 1986 and it was published in 1988. Local bookshops did us proud with their window displays and the book sold out very quickly.

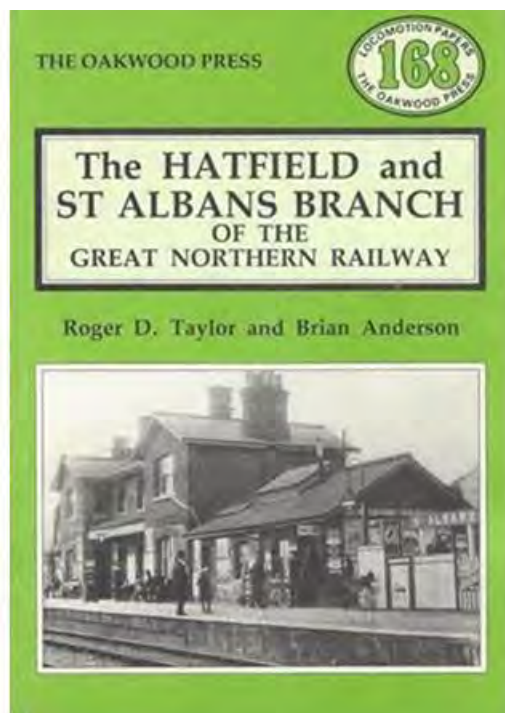
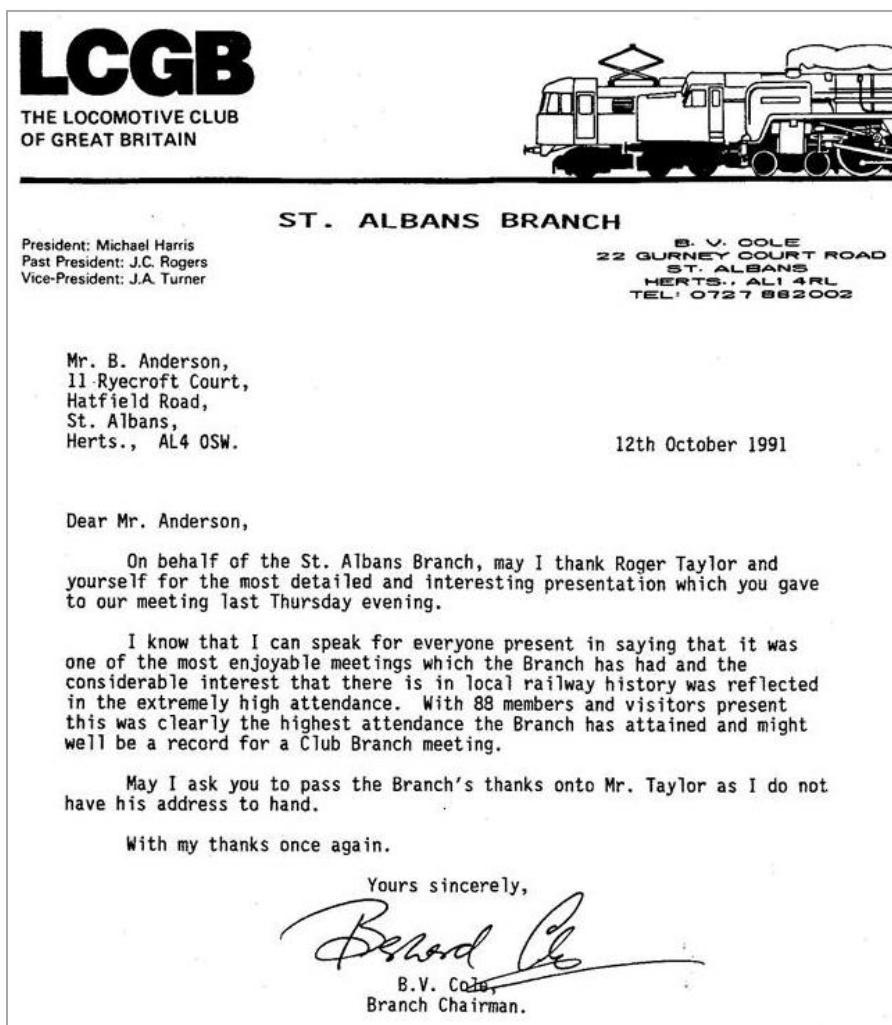


Figure 4: Brian's & Roger's book, and the flyer publicising it.

Hatfield-St Albans Railway: Roger Taylor's Story ... 3



A talk to a local railway society produced a record attendance! Now people were becoming interested.

Meanwhile the track-bed was at last converted to a footpath/cycleway and opened as The Smallford Trail in 1985. Some parts had been opened before in Hatfield but the whole route was not ready until mid-1986.

In 1987 I walked the whole length of the footpath and took many "before and after" photographs.

During this time my brother, Peter Taylor, was researching the history of St Albans City FC and weekly visited the National Newspaper Library at Colindale. He came across numerous news stories regarding the branch - accidents, events, etc - that proved to be very useful and added to my archive.

Then, in 2012 after a 'tip off' from my brother, I contacted and met Jeff Lewis and was delighted to hear of his plans for 'Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life' project.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Figure 5: Letter of thanks to Brian and Roger from the St Albans Branch of LCGB

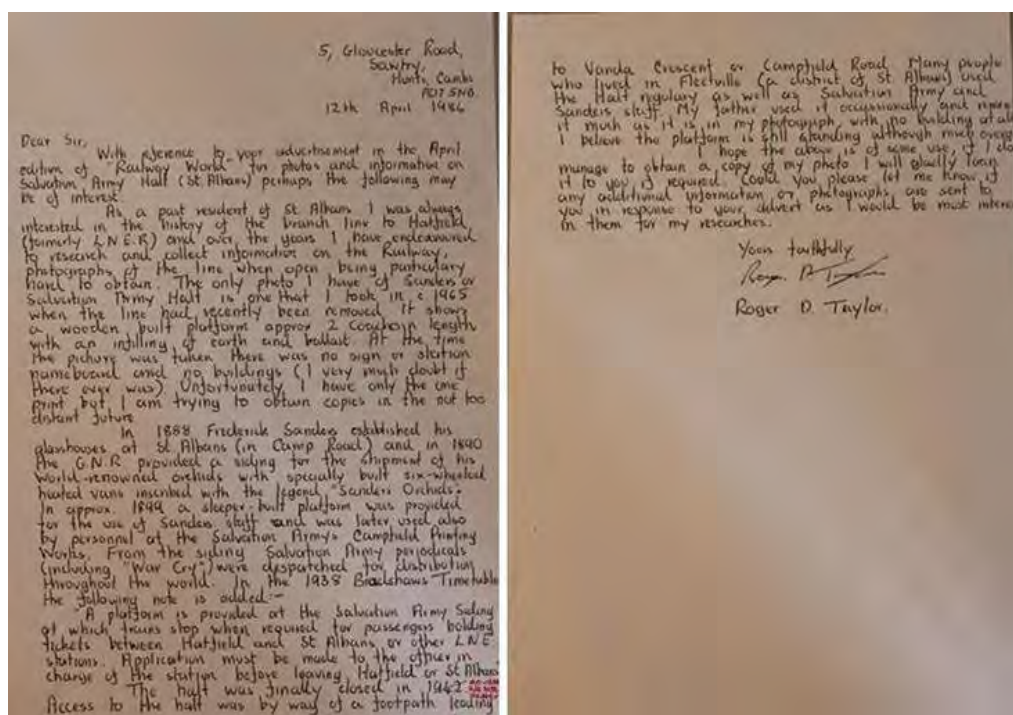
As part of their research, the 'Bringing the History of Smallford Station' Project Team visited the Salvation Army Archive in South London. To my amazement, as well as theirs, one of their finds was the letter I wrote in 1986: ->

Unfortunately Brian Anderson died before the 'Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life' Project and the subsequent interest in the history of the branch happened - but I am sure he would have been delighted with the result.

50 YEARS LATER, MY RESEARCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE LINE IS STILL ONGOING!!

© 2018: Roger Taylor

Figure 6: Roger Taylor's letter to The Salvation Army written in April 1986



Stay in Touch!



Please let us know of any News or Events, Tips or Ideas, that you feel may be of interest to our Subscribers.

Here is where you will find us:



General enquiries **info@smallford.org**



Guided Walks **albanwaywalks@smallford.org**



Membership **info@smallford.org**



Via Facebook **[@ouralbanway](https://www.facebook.com/ouralbanway)**

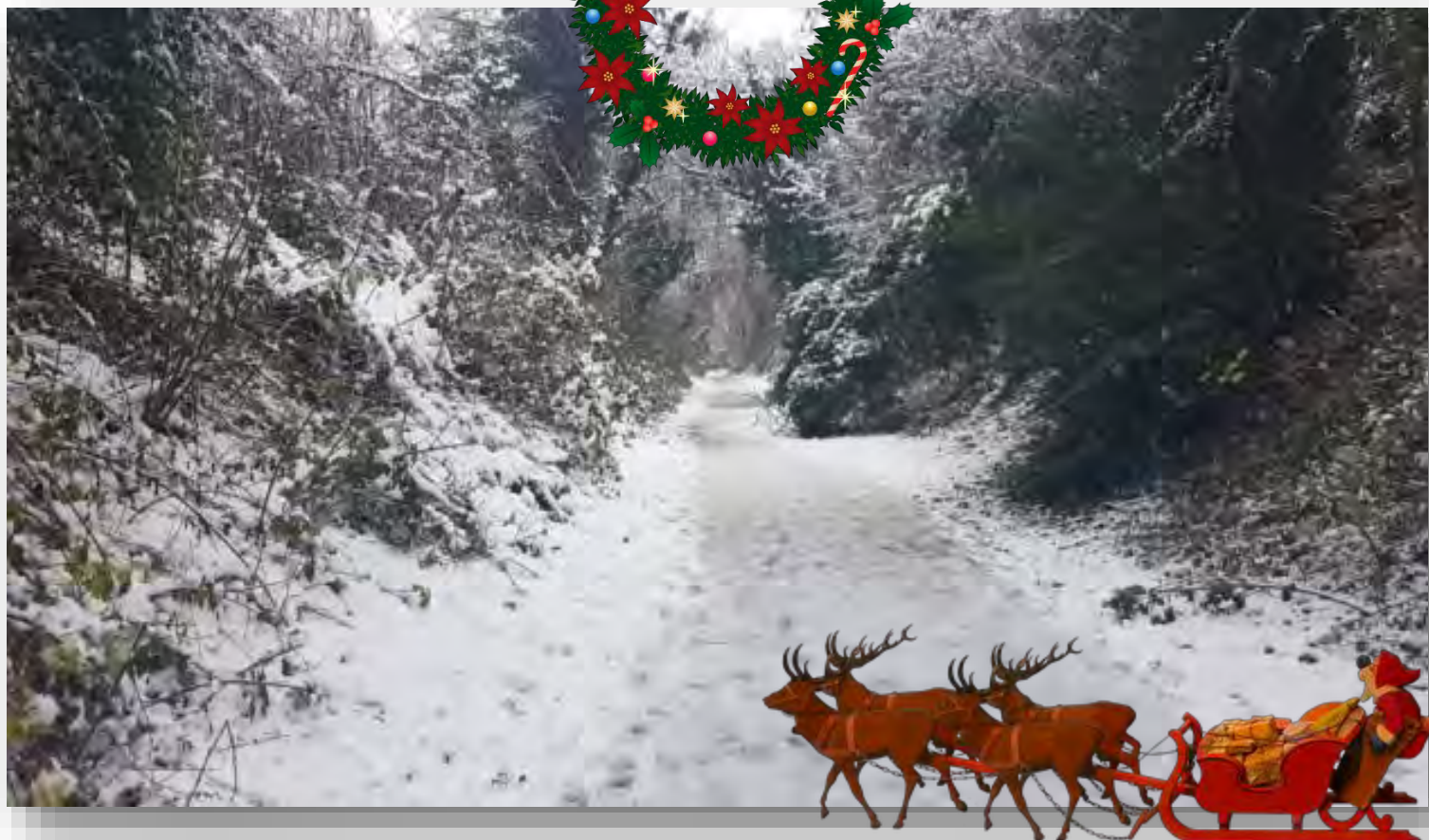


Via our Website **smallford.org/smallford-station/**

We look forward to hearing from you!

From All of Us
To All of You:

*Seasons Greetings &
All the Best for 2019!*



SMALLFORD STATION
& ALBAN WAY
Heritage Society