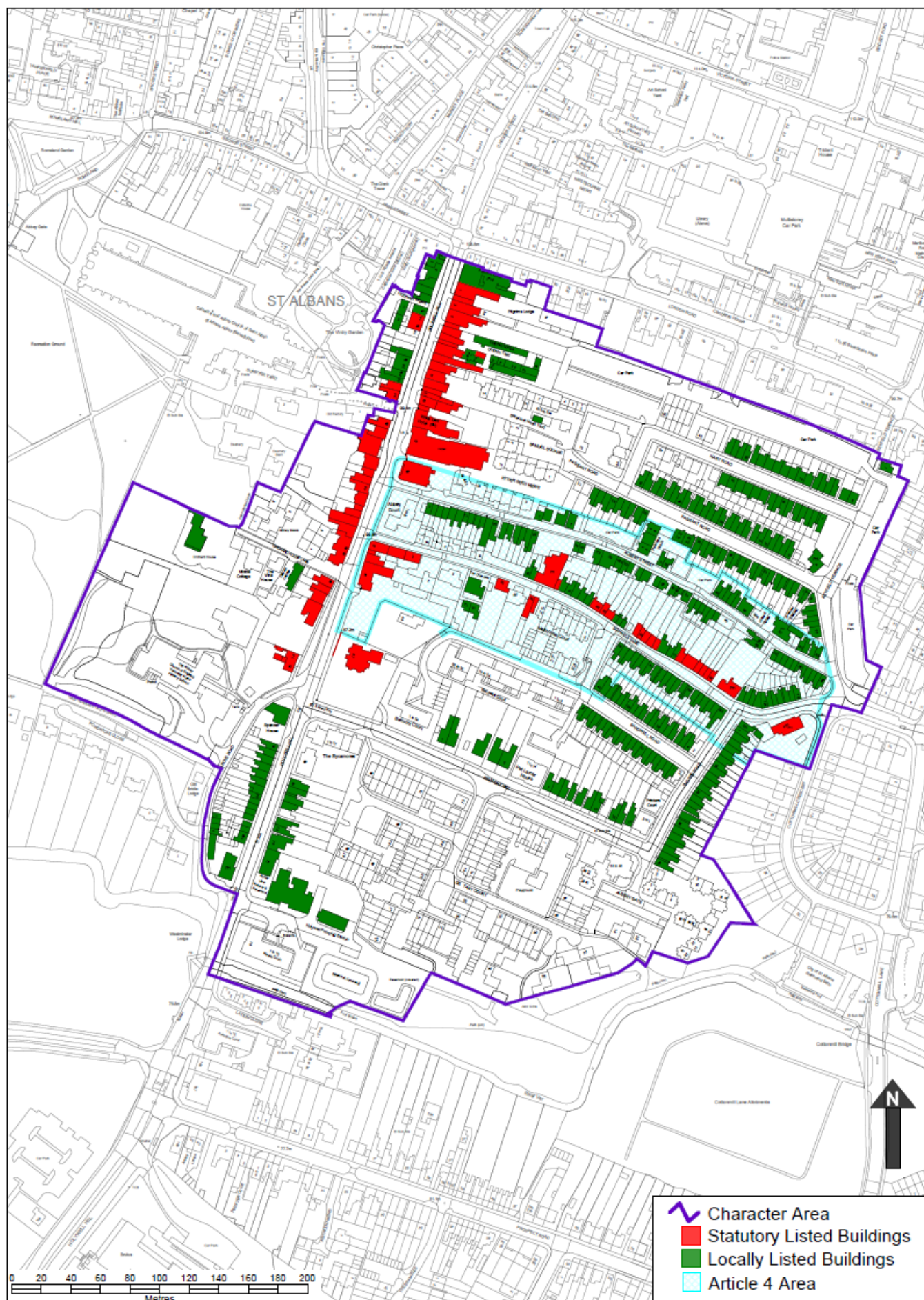


Character Area 4d

Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane





AREA 4D: HOLYWELL HILL AND SOPWELL LANE

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Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Albany Gate, Albert Street, Bardwell Road (including Bardwell Court), Belmont Hill, De Tany Court, Grove Road (part), Hart Road, Holywell Hill, Keyfield Terrace (part), Malthouse Court, Orchard House Lane (including Abbey Mews), Pageant Road, Pearces Walk, Ryder's Seed Mews, Sopwell Lane, The Sycamores, Thorpe Road.

Article 4 Direction - covers part of the area (refer to map)

Scheduled Monuments

The Cathedral and Abbey Church of Saint Alban and grounds, including the Vintry Garden (and wall) and Abbey Orchard; Monument Number 96 (part).

Listed Buildings

Holywell Hill

Odds: 1-9, 11 incl cottage to rear, 13-21, 23 & 25 (the White Hart P.H.) (Grade II*), 27 incl 27A, 29, 37 (see 2 Sopwell Lane) (Grade II*), 39-41, 47, wall to 47.

Evens: 14-16, 32a-38, 40 (Grade II*), 42-74.

Sopwell Lane

Odds: 37 (The Goat P.H.), 49-55, 63-71, 79, 81 & 81A, 83-91, The White Lion P.H.

Evens: 2 (see 37 Holywell Hill) (Grade II*), 26, 36, 104 (Hare & Hounds P.H.).



The White Hart P.H. (grade II listed). Image courtesy of John Bethell.*



The Cathedral (scheduled monument) seen from Holywell Hill through Sumpter Yard.



The White Lion P.H. (grade II listed) on Sopwell Lane.*



Nos. 52-58 Holywell Hill (all grade II listed).

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Locally Listed Buildings

Albert Street

Odds: 1-7, 31-33, 49a-59a, 61 (Garibaldi P.H.), 63-69.

Evens: 2-36, 48-50, 54-82, 86-108.

Bardwell Road

Odds: 1-37.

Evens: 4-40.

Belmont Hill

Odds: 1-5, 7-17.

Grove Road

1-4 (cons).

Hart Road

Odds: 7-35.

Evens: 2-36.

Holywell Hill

Odds: Peahen, r/o 7-11 (2-12 Dolphin Yard, 11a, 11b & 11c), Old Sub-Station (Saracens Head Yard) 61-67, 71-75, 77 (Waterworks Buildings frontage + 2 blocks to rear).

Evens: 2-12, 24-30, 76-106, Duke of Marlborough P.H (including ancillary building to rear).

Keyfield Terrace

Odds: 1.

Evens: 4 (White Hart Tap P.H.), 10-20.

Orchard House Lane

Orchard Cottage and Orchard House.

Pageant Road

Odds: Eastcott and Westcott, 3-43, 53-69.

Evens: 2-52.

Pearces Walk

1-6 (consec).

Sopwell Lane

Odds: 33-35, 39-47, 57-61, 73-77, 93-113,

Evens: Former Chapel, 14 & 16, 62-102.

Thorpe Road

Odds: 1-45.



Nos. 1-4 Grove Road (locally listed).



The Garibaldi P.H. (locally listed) on Albert Street.



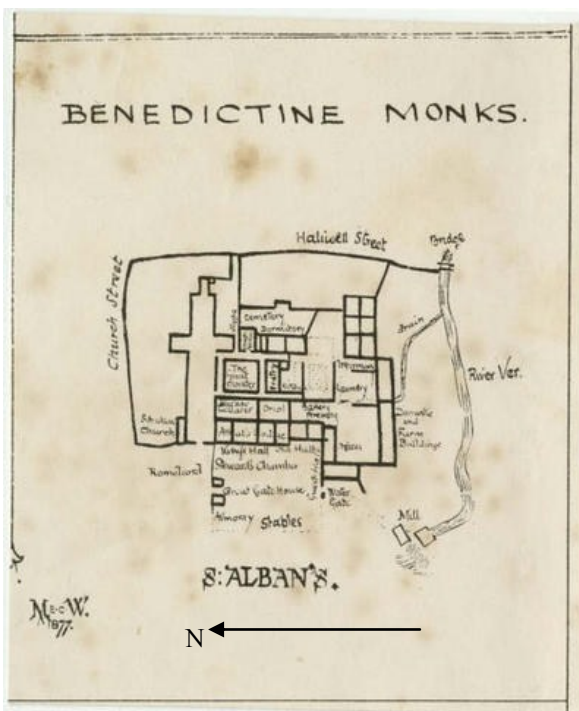
Nos. 76-106 Holywell Hill (locally listed).

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Character Summary

The special character of this area is comprised in part by its forming the southern end of the medieval town to the east of the extensive walled Abbey grounds. The main historic roads form part of the very earliest routes into the town established by the end of the C10. The oldest buildings, located on Sopwell Lane and Holywell Hill, date from the late medieval period and are situated in good groups of buildings from all subsequent historic periods, especially the Georgian and Victorian, and form part of the setting of the Abbey. In particular, this area is important in the history of the town as an adjunct to the medieval monastery as a place of pilgrimage and subsequently as an important stopping place on the way to the northwest of England and Ireland, as represented by the remaining inn yards.

There is a clear difference between the busy commercial character of Holywell Hill and the quiet residential streets to the east. The later infilling of nineteenth and early twentieth century development comprise good examples of artisan and middle class housing. The landscaped areas particularly to the south of the area serve as connections to and from the larger landscaped areas to the east and west and as attractive foils to the buildings. Finally, a substantial area of recent housing has been developed in the south-east corner of the character area which is largely sympathetic in scale and materials.



Map showing the plan of the monastery with "Halliwell Street" to the east. (North arrow not on original). Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



An old photo of Holywell Hill taken from near the junction with Sopwell Lane. It is a busy, commercial main route into the city and has been historically. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



The eastern part of the area is quiet and residential.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

History

Historic maps suggest that Sopwell Lane marked the southern boundary of the late medieval town with long burgage plots running back to the town ditch on the east side. However, archaeological evidence indicates that there may have been earlier scattered development south of this line.

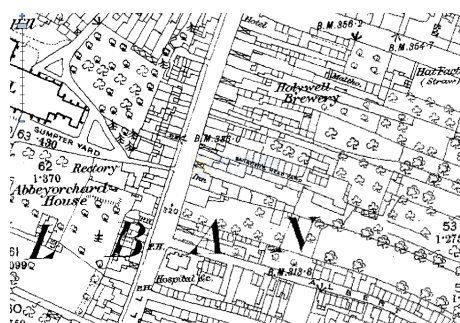
Abbot Ulsinus blocked Watling Street in the late C10 to encourage passing travellers into the town and the Abbey. Holywell Hill (early records refer to Halliwell Hill) then became the road to and from Watling Street; one of the main historic routes to the north of England.

Holywell Hill originally formed part of a continuous development, on the frontage of long burgage plots extending to the eastern boundary ditch (Tonman Ditch), which stretched as far as St Peter's Church. This was split in 1794 by the construction of London Road which forms the northern edge of this character area. There was more limited smaller scale development on the west side, on the strip of land outside the walled Abbey complex. Few if any buildings survive from this early period and originally they would probably have been houses.

Towards the end of the medieval period, an increasing number of inns and commercial buildings developed on the west side of Holywell Hill. This reflected the decline (and later dissolution) of the Abbey and consequent decline of its nearby associated inns in the town centre. Initially access to the inns was via Sopwell Lane, following a line which cuts across the present Verulam golf course, from the direction of Napsbury and beyond. However, following the Dissolution, the route was changed to detour around the estate of Sir Richard Lee, who had acquired the Abbey's lands at Sopwell, and instead entered along what is now Old London Road from London Colney, and from London through Barnet. The "Hare" Map of 1634 shows both Sopwell Lane and Holywell Hill already built up on plots on both sides, but with none of the intervening streets that exist today. It indicates "The Old Route to London" from the east end of Sopwell Lane and also the replacement route, now Old

London Road. During this era it is clear from successive maps that, in order to avoid the steepest part of Holywell Hill, coaches would enter the inn yards from the rear, turning north before Sopwell Lane, along the medieval boundary, into what is now Keyfield Terrace. This set the subsequent development of the area in the later nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries when initially Albert Street and then Pageant Road and Hart Road were set out in a linear form roughly following the grain of the original burgage plots and subsequent inn yards. By the height of the coaching boom at the end of the C18, all these routes had been bypassed by the opening of the (new) London Road in 1794 which forms the northern boundary of this area. It could be argued that this period also represents the architectural peak for buildings on Sopwell Lane and Holywell Hill. The area behind Sopwell Lane and Holywell Hill continued to be infilled to the rear of the narrow burgage plots behind the inns, which almost exclusively occupied the area until the middle of the C19, when the coming of the railways marked the end of stagecoach travel and its dependent inn trade.

The final phase of development in Holywell Hill reflected the increasing commercial change to shops and offices, although the Peahen (rebuilt) and White Hart still survive as inns. Although there was some redevelopment, a substantial number of late medieval buildings still survive, usually behind rebuilt frontages. A few of the inns retained the stub of their burgage plots for a longer time however, and some former inn yards still remain to varying extents to this day. Others were developed for a period with multiple service and light industrial uses and later residential development.



1880s OS map showing the long narrow plots to the east with surviving carriage arches, and stubby plots to the west.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

History contd.

The area is dominated by Holywell Hill, which rises steeply from the southern end (adjoining Character Area 7a). The earliest use of the name reflected the presence of a holy well, although its precise location is not known. The extensive monastic abbey grounds to the west of Holywell Hill extended down to the River Ver and, whilst there were frontage buildings on this side they could not be developed rearward to any great extent and development still remains shallow here. The exceptions are to the south of Orchard Close, where a small housing court and a primary school have been built in the C20 encroaching into the former monastic grounds. Some of the houses at the south end of the hill also acquired additional land for gardens.

The area to the south of Sopwell Lane remained largely undeveloped until the second half of the C19 because it was occupied by the grounds of Holywell House, with the exception of two malt-houses or breweries which had partly encroached by the end of the C19. One of these, in Sopwell Lane, was replaced by a mid C20 housing development, Malthouse Court. Holywell House stood in the south-west corner of the area, a large imposing mansion subsequently belonging to the Spencer family and shown on all the maps from 1634 onwards. It would have been an imposing sight at the southern entrance to the town and surviving drawings and paintings show a complex house with battlemented gothic elevations. The house was located foursquare across the present day line of Holywell Hill next to the river. Its construction necessitated the diversion of the main road around what is now Grove Road. Holywell House was demolished in 1837 when the road took its present route. The Duke of Marlborough P.H. was probably built soon after and some cottages in Holywell Hill are dated 1852. However, opposite, on the east side of the hill, it remained undeveloped until the end of the C19. Thorpe Road, which struck south from Sopwell Lane, and Belmont Hill, running east to west to join Holywell Hill roughly along the northern boundary of the former gardens of Holywell House, were cut in this period: the intervening Bardwell Road was put in shortly

after. It seems that the brewery and its grounds remained undeveloped until the mid C20, when local authority housing filled the remaining gaps.

The final phase of development took place in the early C20 when older buildings were replaced or gap sites infilled. A new waterworks was established and its frontage office building, which dates from 1911, has now been converted to a nursery school. Samuel Ryder of Ryder Cup fame established a seed business in St Albans. Its initial success was followed by a new office building, dating from 1911, on Holywell Hill, designed by local architect Percival Blow. He was subsequently commissioned to develop the adjoining vacant site with a glazed conservatory/showroom to exhibit the firm's produce. Percival Blow also designed a short parade of shops with flats above on the west side. Flats at Abbey Court date from the 1930s.

South of Belmont Hill, the former formal gardens of Holywell House were taken over as school playing fields. The playing fields were finally developed in the 1980s as a residential development called De Tany Court and the whole area is now built up.

A feature of this area along with the rest of central St Albans are the poignant street war memorials to local servicemen who lost their lives in the First World War and who are commemorated in the streets where they had lived.



Thorpe Road which was cut in the late C19 through the previously undeveloped area south of Sopwell Lane and east of Holywell Hill.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings

The area retains a wide variety of building types reflecting its long period of development. There is a strong contrast between the larger scale, commercial buildings on Holywell Hill and the small scale, terraced, Victorian and later residential development to the south and east.

A wide range of materials can also be found in this area reflecting its gradual evolution over many centuries and its importance as part of the historic core. The more historic buildings exhibit visible timber framing or render, although some were refronted in brick in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Generally, bricks are the local red or later C19 Luton Greys. A few buildings have decorative stone dressings or terracotta. Some post war modern infill housing in Sopwell Lane uses tile hanging and yellow stock brick as contrasting materials.

Holywell Hill dominates the area. It was the main southern entrance into the town and is an impressive and dramatic incline up to the top of the hill and city centre with historic buildings in an informal arrangement climbing up the slope. There is a clear difference in character between Holywell Hill and the rest of the area. With a few exceptions Holywell Hill is lined with historic buildings dating from before 1900. Despite the busy traffic and commercial uses, it is still one of the most attractive and historic streets in St Albans and worthy of special protection. Two buildings, the White Hart public house dating from the C16 and no. 40, a house designed by Sir Robert Taylor, are particularly important and listed Grade II*.



The C16 White Hart (on the right) is grade II listed and demonstrates the typical historic use of the area.*

There is a good continuous group of historic buildings at the northerly end of the east side of Holywell Hill, all listed and mostly former inns, many retaining their carriage arches. These buildings are nearly all surviving late medieval buildings with Georgian or early Victorian frontages. Nos. 1 to 5 are grand three storey buildings and all are brick faced, re-fronted onto early timber framed structures. The corner with London Road is completed by the Peahen Inn, an Edwardian rebuild but styled in such a way to evoke earlier medieval half framed buildings and representative of road travel in the early motoring era. Although not listed, it is a good corner feature and its contribution is recognised by local listing. The overall group forms a picturesque ensemble of buildings with tiled roofs and chimney stacks of different heights climbing up the hill to the London Road junction.



No. 40 Holywell Hill (grade II listed) was designed by Sir Robert Taylor. Image courtesy of John Bethell.*



Nos. 1-5 Holywell Hill (grade II listed) are former inns with retained carriage arches. Image courtesy of John Bethell.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Nos. 7 to 25 are two storey with a mixture of stucco and brick fronts, all with sash windows. The exception is the White Hart Inn which appears to retain C17 windows and an exposed timber frame, however, this is largely a mid-C20 restoration of its original appearance following removal of a later plain stucco front. It is a fine building and occupies an important and prominent position opposite Sumpter Yard, the eastern “gateway” to the Abbey.

To the rear of these buildings there are some remaining former inn yard buildings, and more recent replacement buildings most of which follow a similar scale and grain. It is important to preserve the remaining historic inn yard buildings and maintain this scale and grain in any further developments or alterations: good examples are to be found in Dolphin Yard.

Between Albert Street and Sopwell Lane lies Abbey Court, a three storey flat roofed block of flats with brick and pebbledashed elevations. This is screened from no. 37 by a high wall and a fine group of mature trees, which contribute also to the character of the street. The building occupies part of the former site of another important inn, the Bull, which in Elizabethan times was said to be the finest in England. Also

partly on the former inn site, and to the north of Abbey Court, is a much finer example of C20 architecture: the former Ryder’s Seed Hall, a concrete framed modern movement building of 1929 with a fine glazed barrel vaulted roof, a prominent and probably unique example of a conservatory in a street setting; it is now a restaurant with added art-deco details and is listed. Next to it to the north is the earlier former Ryder’s Office building, a quality high-Edwardian building, similarly listed. Both buildings were designed by the same architect, Percival Blow.

The formerly important Sopwell Lane/Holywell Hill corner on the east side of the hill retains a large former galleried inn. Now split into two houses, it is still partially jettied, with exposed timber frame, with some plain stucco brickwork and with windows from the C18 and C19 of impressive scale. It retains its carriage entrance doors which are an important recurring feature in the area.



The rear of The White Hart displays retained inn yard buildings and new buildings that respect the historic scale and grain. Image courtesy of John Bethell.



No. 37 Holywell Hill (grade II) is a former inn. Image courtesy of John Bethell.*



The former Ryder’s Seed Hall (grade II) is an unusual, modern movement building designed by Percival Blow.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

To the south, Diocesan House and Torrington House are set in well treed grounds and behind high walls in wide frontages. Both are listed buildings. The gap and trees between Torrington House and Bardwell Court to the east are important.

South of Belmont Hill is a group of late Victorian and early Edwardian homes in red brick with slate roofs.

Further to the south, a waterworks was established in the C20 and its former frontage buildings survive. The office building, which dates from 1911, has now been converted to a nursery school. Behind, to the east, are two Edwardian red brick blocks which are still the waterworks and are dominant within the area due to their scale and striking classical detail; the modern blocks of flats opposite, Nexus Court, complement the scale and style of the blocks.

At the northern end on the west side, from Sumpter Yard up to the London Road junction, is another good group of buildings, mostly later C18 and C19 replacements of earlier buildings but nos. 2-12 and 24-30 are locally listed for their contribution, especially as a group together with listed buildings nos. 14-16 and 32-34. They mainly have brick frontages with a few rendered facades towards the top of the hill. There are a fairly equal proportion of two and three storeys and some have dormers. The roofscape is predominantly of tiles but with some slate, the many and varied chimney stacks are again interesting and very much part of the setting of the Abbey. Development to the rear is still very limited. Behind nos. 12 to 16 is an old coachhouse (now residential) which formerly served a large Georgian house on the High Street.



The Edwardian, red brick waterworks buildings dominate the area because of their large scale and classical detail.



Torrington House (grade II listed) is set in well treed grounds.



The roofscape of the buildings at the northern end on the west side of Holywell Hill form part of the setting of the Abbey behind when viewed from the east.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Further south are more good groups of historic buildings. North of Orchard Close, on the west side of Holywell Hill, is a continuous run of listed buildings right up to Sumpter Yard, the former eastern entrance to the Abbey. These are largely two storey, timber framed, late medieval buildings, usually with later Georgian stucco or brick frontages. All are representative of the early development of the road from medieval times but also of its continuing importance into the Georgian era. One exceptional building in the group is Holywell House, a mid-Georgian, grand, three storey house built for the then Mayor of London and indicative of the status of the road in this period.

Nos. 64 to 70 form a good listed group of timber framed houses with later brick or stucco frontages. No. 68 is truly late Georgian and has a good portico to the raised entrance, also rising to a storey above the two storey timber framed houses adjoining. Beyond no. 64 lies Orchard Close, an unmade road which gave access to Orchard House, formerly a Georgian house, now altered and extended but still retaining Georgian character. It now adjoins a discrete late C20 residential courtyard development.

Nos. 72 and 74 are listed buildings which again seem to sit amongst the trees, largely due to the large garden of no. 70, which is full of good quality trees which compliment those at Torrington House opposite and form an attractive break in the street scene. Further north the Holywell Hill frontages become tighter and more urban.



Nos. 64-70 Holywell Hill (grade II) are timber framed. Image courtesy of John Bethell.

The Duke of Marlborough P.H. is an attractive landmark building, marking the beginning of buildings on the west side of Holywell Hill; it is located just beyond the River Ver which passes discreetly under the road. It is situated where Grove Road, the former diversion round Holywell House, turns off to the west: the detached Spencer House forms the equally prominent corner at the north end of Grove Road. On Holywell Hill, in-between these two landmarks, is a terrace of small, two storey, mid-Victorian cottages. On the east side of Grove Road are a few more small cottages, some of which are locally listed, and outbuildings which are now mainly converted to garages. The west side of Grove Road (see also Area 7b) is sylvan in character and from Grove Road there is pedestrian link into the park, via Lady Spencer's Grove. To the north of a charming footpath connecting to the Abbey Orchard and Verulamium Park is situated The Abbey Primary School built in 1967.



The landmark Duke of Marlborough P.H. (locally listed) at the bottom of Holywell Hill.



The Abbey Primary School was built in 1967 on land formerly part of the monastery.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Sopwell Lane is a narrow historic lane of two storey, small scale, and predominantly residential buildings. Many medieval timber framed buildings survive, mostly plastered or rendered with steep tiled roofs and some are still jettied. They are inter-mixed with simple Victorian terraces of brick and slate, which replaced earlier buildings, and some C20 development. There are two C20 developments, both of which are generally of appropriate scale. The first is Malthouse Court, a 1960s flat-roofed courtyard group and the second is nos. 3-9, a 1980s terrace of houses with steep tiled roofs, brick walls and projecting jettied rendered gables, which reflects the earlier heritage of the road. The Victorian terraces, predominantly with plain brown and red brick façades are a harmonious setting for the surviving older buildings. These are in two groups, at nos. 95-113 and nos. 62-102, and both groups are locally listed. The main timber framed group, most of which are listed, is between and including "The Goat" and "The White Lion" public houses, but also includes two separate listed buildings on the south side, no. 2 (also see reference under no.37 Holywell Hill) and no. 26. No. 36 is early C19 in a late Georgian style, although several of the earlier buildings were re-fronted and therefore also include Georgian windows and stucco fronts.

The western half of this south side of the street, is comprised mostly of detached buildings and to the east of the main Victorian terrace is "The Hare and Hounds", a C17 or earlier timber framed and stucco building, which sits detached on its own well treed plot at the entrance to Sopwell Lane. This would have formed the entrance to St Albans for coaches. It is one of the three old inns in the road which remain as public houses and evoke its former importance as the main route into the town. The Goat is probably the most picturesque of the old inns and still retains its carriage entrance, although no. 2 Sopwell Lane/no. 37 Holywell Hill, now in domestic use, was clearly the grandest inn in the street.

There are trees in the garden of the Hare and Hounds P.H. and there is a small landscaped area on the north side at the western end of the street. The trees contribute to the character of the lane, although it could probably be enhanced and contribute rather more. The trees in front of Malthouse Court also contribute because they soften and partially screen the frontage.



The design of nos. 3-9 reflects the heritage of Sopwell Lane.



The Goat P.H. (grade II) is the most picturesque old inn.



The Hare and Hounds P.H. (grade II) would have formed the entrance to St Albans for coaches.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Albert Street runs parallel and to the north of Sopwell Lane. It seems, from the 1755 and later maps, to have started life as a back lane occupying one of the burgage plots and gave access to the inn yards behind Holywell Hill and into the rear of The Goat Inn (which is still visible from Albert Street). Developed as a residential road which followed the coming of the railways in the mid C19, the name may commemorate the death of the Prince Consort in 1861. It remains largely a road of two storey, mid-Victorian, terraced houses, although nos. 2-8, an elegant group set back slightly at the western end of the south side, have basements and are approached via steps, and are somewhat taller. The junction with Holywell Hill is dominated on each side by larger buildings: the unusual Ryder's Seed Hall on the north, which is now a restaurant, and Abbey Court to the south.

Houses on the south side of Albert Street are predominantly of brick, varying from dark purple "Luton Greys" to soft reds and in combinations. There are some rendered and some painted facades but these are mostly later alterations and in the minority. Roofs are all slate, except in the few cases where this has been changed to concrete, a detrimental intrusion, now controlled by the Article 4 direction. Windows are generally timber sashes with divided panes. Sashes to the earlier buildings are hornless (for example at nos. 2-12) which also mostly have margin lights. A good proportion of original doors survive and are either six or four panelled. The houses are surprisingly diverse in size, with a variety of roof heights, and grouping. Most are short terraces with a few semi-detached pairs; most are parallel with the road but in some cases they have gable ends facing the road. There are a few small gaps, which help to split up the various groups and give some views of the garden trees beyond. There are two larger gaps both associated with the back of the inns in Sopwell Lane and important because of this. One of these serves as a small car park, which allows a view of the back of the Goat P.H. and, in combination with others on the north side, undoubtedly serves to reduce the problem of on

street parking. These parking areas are not particularly intrusive but could be enhanced with better materials and possibly some limited planting.



The junction of Albert Street with Holywell Hill is dominated to the south by Abbey Court.



The houses in Albert Street are a range of sizes.



There are gaps in the streetscene, giving views of houses on parallel streets. Where these are used as car parks, they could be enhanced with the use of better materials.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

The north side is more varied and less cohesive, with shorter groups and larger gaps. There are a greater number of rendered buildings but they have similar roofs and windows to those on the south side. At the west end of the street is Ryder's Seed Hall and the rear of the hotel on Holywell Hill, a large three storey brick and tile building but set back behind a small parking area. A C20 housing development, Ryder Seed Mews, infills a former inn yard area which was subsequently the former Postal Sorting Office land (originally Ryder's Seeds site). This is a two storey terrace development which has high, deep roofs, but because it is set back the effect of its scale is somewhat reduced and the materials used and the scale of elements are also similar to the surrounding Victorian houses. The area is bounded by Albert Street and Holywell Hill, and apart from one three storey block at the west end which has an access to Albert Street, the short rear gardens of nos. 2-18 back onto Albert Street and some are set up on a bank retained by an old flint wall with brick above.

The two car parks on this north side give views onto the backs of Pageant Road properties beyond. However, there is more planting and this could possibly be reinforced with an enhancing effect. A small late C20 infill housing development, Pearce's Walk, successfully bridges the gap between Albert Street and Pageant Road. Whilst it does not mimic the Victorian housing either in brick colour or window proportion, it successfully fits in alongside a useful footpath link between the two roads.

Albert Street is a quiet one way residential street, its narrowness reduces car traffic and speeds. The occasional shopfront and small business premises are characteristic of a typical late Victorian street. The public house at the eastern end is also a typical element and remains an important part of the traditional character both visually and culturally.

In 1990 both Sopwell Lane and Albert Street were included in an Article 4 Direction to control unsympathetic alterations which might otherwise affect their character.



Ryder Seed Mews is a C20 housing development but it uses similar materials and scale of elements as the Victorian houses around it, so its impact on Albert Street is reduced.



The mix of residential properties with the occasional shopfront or small business is typical of a late Victorian street.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Hart Road and **Pageant Road** were developed in the Edwardian era, again on the long thin burgage plots to the rear of Holywell Hill. Hart Road was named after the White Hart Inn and Pageant Road was named after the great pageant that took place in St Albans in 1907. The houses on both streets are of a similar date and therefore more uniform in design than Albert Street which evolved in a piecemeal fashion. The buildings are in groups but broken every two or three units to accommodate changes in roof level to reflect the gentle slope down from west to east. In some cases there are small gaps between pairs, which give some punctuation and glimpses of trees beyond, but the overall effect is of terracing. Materials are a mixture of red and red-multi brickwork, pebbledash and painted smooth renders, sometimes with rendered first floors above brickwork ground floors. Roofs are mainly slate but with a fair number of concrete replacements which detract from the overall consistency. Windows are generally timber sashes and several of the houses have bay windows. Both streets are notable for views of the Abbey.

The car parks which run behind and north of Pageant Road are generally negative in effect due to the amount of unbroken tarmac and parked cars. However, there are good trees along both north and south boundaries, which are very positive in effect but some are becoming over mature. The area could be enhanced by the use of better materials such as top dressed gravel surfaces and the introduction of more trees and other planting to break up the overlong ranks of cars into visually acceptable groups. Attention also needs to be paid to improvement of poor railings, bollards and signage. There is a footpath route to the car park from the west end of Pageant Road through to London Road, this route also connects with Hart Road and Ryder's Seed Mews and down to Albert Street. These pathways could be better defined.

Hart Road, Pageant Road, Albert Street and Sopwell Lane all terminate in Keyfield Terrace on

the east, which marks the medieval town boundary with "Keyfield". Keyfield Terrace also originated as the track which gave access from Sopwell Lane into the rear of the Holywell Hill inn yards. This is still represented by the White Hart Tap P.H., which formerly marked the entrance to the rear of the White Hart Inn. It was presumably linked with the many tradesmen that would have been associated with the busy inn yards in the early C19 when it was first built. Whilst the west side of Keyfield Terrace is taken up by this building, its garden and the short terraces of Victorian cottages (similar in appearance to those in Albert Street), the east side is an open car park with views of the rear gardens beyond, giving little sense of enclosure. However, some good trees flank the east and west sides of the southern half of the car park, although this part of the car park would benefit from further screening, especially on the west side. The north side of the car park has very little planting and here more planting would be beneficial. The south end of the car park is an unsatisfactory landmark at the important historic junction of several roads: Sopwell Lane, Old London Road, Cottonmill Crescent, Keyfield Terrace and Albert Street. For centuries it was a main entrance to the town for travellers and it could also benefit from the introduction of some tree planting to mark it.



The White Hart Tap P.H. (locally listed), on the corner of Keyfield Terrace and Pageant Road, formerly marked the entrance to the rear of the White Hart Inn.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Thorpe Road connects Sopwell Lane with Belmont Hill and a small part of the north end falls within the Article 4 direction. Its western side mainly comprises the gable ends and gardens of the adjoining roads. Here, Printers Court is a mid-C20 block of flats, unfortunately large and out of scale, with an open car park that weakens the sense of enclosure on this side of the road. At the corner with both Sopwell Lane and Bardwell Road there are former corner shops, typical of the Victorian era. The east side of Thorpe Road comprises uniform Victorian cottages, mostly grouped as semi-detached houses and short terraces, separated by narrow gaps as they step down the hill. In common with nearby streets, the houses are brick fronted with slate roofs but a small percentage of roofs have been replaced. A good number of original sash timber windows remain and there are some original features such as margin light windows. This group appear to be slightly higher in status than most of the Albert Street and Sopwell Lane houses of similar date because they are set back behind small front gardens and all have bay windows.



The houses in Thorpe Road seem to be higher status than contemporary houses in the surrounding streets because of their small front gardens and bay windows.

Bardwell Road connects Thorpe Road and Sopwell Lane, passing the east side of Malt-house Court. The houses lack some original detailing, largely due to the effect of permitted development. Essentially, the houses are a mix of brown or red brick buildings in short connected terraces, some of which are rendered over. They were originally slate roofs but many are now replaced with concrete tiles. Simple Victorian timber sash windows were typical. Although nos. 38&40 at the western end, which can be seen from Sopwell Lane, are included in the Article 4 direction area to protect those views, the road was not otherwise sufficiently original to be included in the Article 4 direction. However, it is of similar scale and form and does contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. There is a good tree and hedge belt defining the rear boundaries with those to the rear of Belmont Hill. Bardwell Court is a mid-C20 local authority housing scheme, which contains high, flat-roofed blocks in an unsympathetic brick, which detract from the character of the conservation area, but there are mature trees in the grounds which contribute positively.



Bardwell Road.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

Belmont Hill is a grander street which for over a century faced onto the open space which was formerly part of Holywell House and latterly school playing fields. This is a street of larger houses and the north side can be divided into two sections, west and east.

At the western end is the substantial Torrington House, a three storey late Victorian mansion, set well back in its well treed grounds behind a high brick wall but still visible in the streetscene. It was built in red brick with stucco decoration, two storey bays and parapets. Despite it being set back, the house, wall and grounds form a strong corner feature to the Belmont Hill/ Holywell Hill junction. Regrettably, in the 1960s, part of the grounds was developed with a four storey flat roofed block of flats, Belmont Court, which have a negative effect on the character of the road. Fortunately, this building is set back further than the buildings to the east and the high wall, formerly associated with Torrington House, has been retained. There is a reasonable gap between this building and the service wing of Torrington House through which substantial trees in the grounds of Diocesan House beyond can be seen. This is an important gap which should be retained.

The western section contains mainly Edwardian houses in the form of two pairs of semi-detached and one detached house, the most westerly of which is a white painted, stuccoed Victorian house. The Edwardian houses have original yellow brick facades with horizontally proportioned timber windows and prominent tile hipped roofs and dormers of a distinctly more picturesque, neo-vernacular style than the earlier buildings to the east. They are slightly further set back and sit up on higher ground, although this pleasing effect has been somewhat eroded by the introduction of garages and drives.

At the east end of the road is a good Victorian group. Many have gable ends onto the frontage which gives them more individuality. Materials are red brick mixed with some render, slate roofs and timber sash windows and there are

individual details such as bay windows, decorative barge boards and chimney stacks which are high and prominent. There is also a very large, three and a half storey block of flats which is out of scale. This building is faced in yellow stock brickwork with red details and a concrete tiled roof; the roof is very substantial due to the great depth of the building. It is unrelieved by chimney stacks but has dormer windows similar to adjoining earlier buildings to the west.

On the south side is a late C20 housing scheme (nos. 1-17, The Sycamores), which copes well with the corner to Holywell Hill and is suitably articulated to fit in with the scale of Belmont Hill. The materials are brick and slate.



There is a group of Edwardian houses with hipped roofs at the western end of Belmont Hill.



Nos. 12+13 Belmont Hill are a pair of Victorian houses displaying decorative barge boards.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Buildings contd.

The south side of Belmont Hill was not developed for housing until the 1980s. The largest element of this is **De Tany Court**, a courtyard scheme of mainly two and some three storey housing. It is set back from the Belmont Hill frontage and there are some reasonable sized trees but not enough to form a meaningful element. These could beneficially be increased in number. The height, depth and materials of buildings facing onto Belmont Hill are reasonably in character with the area. Whilst the roofs are long, there has been some attempt to introduce some division and interest, with the introduction of gables and with pyramidal roofs to the two square blocks framing the entrance to the development. There is one substantial green space within the development, a positive feature along with a few smaller enclosed green spaces. There has been successful retention of major trees along the western boundary with the rear of Holywell Hill properties, and remains of the supposed "Holy Well" are retained in a small enclosed green space. Despite the uncertain provenance, its associations with St Alban add local interest.. To the south is a more substantial green wooded area, which connects with a footpath to Holywell Hill and on to Verulam Park to the west, and with allotments and thence to Old Sopwell Gardens to the east. These are important and connected green spaces that contribute substantially to the character of the area and need to be preserved and enhanced in the future.

A further area of new housing of similar date, **Albeny Gate**, lies on the south east of Belmont Hill, partially on the site of a former factory. Its presence on Belmont Hill is over-emphasised by a three storey block in yellow brick, which, similarly to Printer's Court opposite, is out of scale with the rest of the road. The courtyard development behind is unassuming and has a presence on the same open space which forms part of the De Tany Court development.



The Sycamores is a late C20 housing development to the west of De Tany Court on the south side of Belmont Hill.



The design of De Tany Court has introduced some division into the roof forms in an attempt to create some interest.



Albeny Gate.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Public Realm

The area is now densely developed reflecting its location in the heart of the medieval town and Holywell Hill's function as one of the main routes into the centre. The northern two-thirds of the area are largely built up with tight terraces of Victorian and Edwardian cottages and consequently is heavily street parked. Most cottages are built directly onto the pavement or behind tiny front gardens and forecourts, presenting a mostly urban appearance. However, the piecemeal development of most of these roads gives a variety of elevational designs which, together with the retention of older historic buildings on larger plots, adds interest to the streetscene.

The main structural element of the area is Holywell Hill, which forms part of the southern entrance into the hilltop city. It is a dramatic hill up to the Cathedral, with small scale pitched roofs and chimney stacks climbing up the slope in an informal arrangement. Views north and south are highly picturesque despite the busy traffic. Although this area is varied in its architecture, the area to the east of Holywell Hill is characterised by more uniform residential development on the quiet, narrow, east to west lanes. Physically, the small scale of the buildings, traditional building materials, hard traditional street surfaces and dense street pattern with buildings on or close to the back of the pavement contribute to the pervading character.

The former inn yards permit views of picturesque rear elevations which add considerable interest to the area despite the presence of parked cars. There are important views of the Abbey from Sopwell Lane, Pageant Road, Hart Road and other vantage points which should be protected in any future developments. New development to the rear of Ryder's Seed Hall has been designed to allow pedestrian access linked to other footpaths through the area and this should be perpetuated and enhanced where possible. The lower end of Holywell Hill affords glimpses of trees along the River Ver to the rear of properties.

Valuable green spaces still exist and contribute to the character of the area, such as the sylvan grounds of Torrington House, the grounds of Diocesan House, the area south of Bardwell Court, behind the Belmont Hill houses and the wooded area south of De Tany Court. The river bank is a particularly valuable green space connecting Verulamium Park through the allotment gardens to Sopwell Nunnery.

The historic street pavements are generally of blue Staffordshire brick, some of which are of the original Victorian large format but most are modern with a smaller format, which is satisfactory in appearance. There is also surviving early York stone paving but this is mostly to the back of the pavement against the buildings, apart from a substantial section fronting nos. 64-72 Holywell Hill. Some of the other roads, such as Grove Road, retain traditional paving materials. In Sopwell Lane, the pavements retain much of the large format blue Staffordshire bricks and granite kerbs which were introduced in the C19 and the pavements are still raised above street level in several places giving interest to the streetscene. Street paving in Thorpe Road, Belmont Hill and Bardwell Road also uses the large format blue Staffordshire bricks and there are granite kerbs. Pavings in De Tany Court are mainly tarmac and concrete block paving in the cul-de sacs. Street furniture is generally not of high quality in the area but it is not negative.



Holywell Hill is the main structural element of the area.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ Views of the city centre and particularly of the Abbey from Holywell Hill, Sopwell Lane, Pageant Road and Hart Road.
- ✓ Historic Assets – a large number of listed and locally listed buildings which provide a strong sense of the history and development of the area.
- ✓ Generally tidy frontages to houses, public and commercial buildings, historic walls and sympathetic railings.
- ✓ Footpaths and side roads which form a good link for pedestrians and a pleasant and peaceful route away from busy road traffic.
- ✓ Footpaths and pavements which need to be maintained and enhanced
- ✓ Some historic street furniture and paving survives.
- ✓ Street War Memorials.



A view of the Abbey from Pageant Road.



The Ryder Seed Hall (grade II) is one of the area's many listed buildings.

Neutral

- Some post-war and recent flats and modern buildings are generally appropriate in design but not of special interest.



Nexus Court on Holywell Hill relates to the adjacent locally listed waterworks in its materials and scale, but does not positively contribute to the area's character.



Some of the houses in Hart Road are appropriate in design but not of special interest and therefore only neutral in contribution.

Area 4d: Holywell Hill/ Sopwell Lane

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Negative

- × Holywell Hill is busy with traffic throughout the day.
- × Side roads heavily parked.
- × A few C20 buildings are out of scale and unsympathetic in design and could be enhanced.



Heavily parked side roads.



Abbey Court is one of the C20 buildings that is out of scale and unsympathetic in design.

Scope for change

- A key entrance point for the City that could be enhanced generally.
- A few modern buildings in the area would benefit from redevelopment or enhancement perhaps through additional screen planting.
- Scope for tree planting on the south side of Belmont Hill.
- Scope for tree planting at junction of Keyfield Terrace and Old London Road.
- There is now little scope for redevelopment in this historic area. Previously undeveloped areas, such as the playing fields, and several commercial sites, such as the post office, brewery and factory sites, have largely been developed or redeveloped in recent years. The area also contains a high proportion of historic buildings.
- Historic views of the Abbey should be preserved.
- Some car parks and parking areas would benefit from enhancement through additional planting and resurfacing to improve the floorscape and visually break up the ranks of parked cars.
- Improved pedestrian links.

