

# ***Character Area 7c***

## ***Victoria Street***







Character Area  
Locally Listed Buildings

# AREA 7C: VICTORIA STREET



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

*Alma Road (part), Lattimore Road (part), Liverpool Road, Marlborough Road (part), Ridgmont Road (part), Victoria Street (part).*

### Scheduled Monuments

None.

### Listed Buildings

None (but see Area 4a The Commercial Centre: Victoria Street)

### Locally Listed Buildings

*Alma Road*

Horn P.H., 1-3 Midland Place.

*Lattimore Road*

Evens: 26-36.

*Liverpool Road*

Odds: 3-43 (incl.).

Evens: 2- 36 (incl.).

*Marlborough Road*

Evens: 26-36.

*Ridgmont Road*

(see Area 7d)

*Victoria Street*

Odds: 53, 79-87, 95-109, 141-143, Trinity United Reform Church, 145-153 (145 includes corner building to Beaconsfield Road).

Evens: 80, 82 Victoria P.H. (formerly Acorn), 84-96, former Midland Railway P.H. (146 Victoria Street/now 1-3 Midland Place), Horn P.H. (formerly Horn of Plenty).



*No. 80 Victoria Street (locally listed).*



*The Victoria P.H. (locally listed).*



*Trinity United Reform Church, Victoria Street/Beaconsfield Road (locally listed).*

## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Character Summary

Victoria Street is one of the main roads into St Albans city centre, leading uphill from the Midland mainline rail station (see also 6b) on the east side, right into the city centre where it ends at the junction of St Peter's Street and Chequer Street. It has earlier origins than might be assumed from its name and it has been renamed several times over many years. The railway station opened in 1868 and being on a direct line to London was a key factor in the expansion of Victoria Street and continues to have an impact on the area. Victoria Street is in mixed residential and commercial use but in the main commercial. The uses are predominantly office with retail and service uses and some have flats above.

This character area encompasses most of Victoria Street as far as Marlborough Road, beyond which the westernmost section is included in The Commercial Centre (Area 4a). It covers Victoria Street and Liverpool Road on the north side of it and parts of the northern ends of Lattimore Road and Marlborough Road on the south.

Due to Victoria Street's straight alignment (almost exactly east-west), from the city centre there are long views along the street to the bridge which rises up steeply over the railway by the station at the eastern end (Area 6b). Conversely, viewed from the east having bridged over the railway, it falls steeply to the Beaconsfield Road and Alma Road crossroad. Beyond this it gradually levels out to the lowest point at the Lattimore

Road junction before rising steadily, in places quite steeply, up the hill into the city centre.

Victoria Street is urban and predominantly commercial in character, flanked along virtually its entire length by buildings, most being set up to or close to the back of the pavement or behind forecourts which are contiguous with the pavement. A number of predominantly residential roads run north and south from Victoria Street: Alma Road (Area 7d), mid to late Victorian, and Upper Lattimore Road and Beaconsfield Road (Area 7f), predominantly late Victorian. Liverpool Road is also residential with smaller scale late Victorian houses, whilst Lattimore Road and Marlborough Road are slightly more mixed in use.

At the end of Victoria Street closest to the station, the buildings are at the edge of pavement on the north and therefore the road seems narrower. The streetscene widens out in its middle section where the shops are set back further behind a wide pavement on the north. Then it narrows past Lattimore Road and into the city centre.

There are no listed buildings within this character area but, in recognition of the positive contribution many of the buildings in the vicinity make to the character or appearance of the conservation area, many have been locally listed. These have enabled the area to retain its Victorian character and they reflect the history of the area.



*Victoria Street (above left) is mainly commercial in character, while Lattimore Road (above right) has a mixed character.*



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### History

There are records of a route into St Albans, along the line of Victoria Street, dating from the C13 (Wars of the Barons 1215-17). As a narrow lane from the centre called "Shropshereslane", it was first mentioned in 1381 and continues to be noted as such on maps until the 1830s when it was called Sweet Briar Lane. However, it was not developed until the Victorian era, having been renamed Victoria Road at the east end and Victoria Street at the west end in 1876. It was all renamed Victoria Street after 1897. The buildings in the character area date from after 1840. The Midland Railway (1868) was a key factor in the expansion of Victoria Street and the gaol (still represented at the eastern end of the road by the gatehouse and the walls) dates from 1867 (Area 6b). In this character area, frontage development started in the later C19 along the southern side and by 1880 (as shown on the 1880 OS map), there was almost continuous development from Marlborough Road to the station and on both sides of Lattimore Road, and some on the east side of Marlborough Road. At that time the north side of Victoria Street was still open land, Lattimore Road and Marlborough Road (later the parts to the north are denoted "Upper") had crossed it and Alma Road had been cut on its south side. During this latter part of the C19 and into the early C20, the northern side east of Up-

per Lattimore Road was occupied by The Elms and New Zealand Nursery and Marlborough House down to Victoria Street apart from a lodge on the corner (see Area 7f) and was not developed until later. Liverpool Road and Beaconsfield Road on its north side were formed in the later 1880s. Development occurred on the northern side during the early to mid C20 and has been followed by some redevelopment on both north and south sides through the latter part of the C20.



A painting by J H Buckingham c.1850. The arrival of the railway caused the rapid development of what had been fields up until that point. Viewed from Lattimore Road, the hedge down the left side marks the line of the lane which was to become Victoria Street. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



1880s OS map showing the development of Victoria Street. Large areas to the north of the road are still undeveloped.

## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Buildings

#### Victoria Street

Along Victoria Street many of the buildings survive from the C19 which helps to retain its Victorian character. On corner sites, these include four buildings of similar domestic two storey scale which date from the mid Victorian period, three of which were, or remain, public houses: The Horn P.H. (previously in the 1850s called the St Albans Arms, then The Midland Station Hotel, then The Horn of Plenty, then the Horn Reborn), the Victoria P.H. (licensed as The Acorn in 1872, and renamed recently) and Midland Place, now housing, (previously The Midland Railway, but the Masons Arms before 1870), and no. 80, a shop (which includes ground floor shopfronts). These all have shallow pitched, hipped, slate roofs with chimneys and sliding timber sash windows (multi paned at the Horn and Midland, two over two at no. 80 and with margin lights no. 82, The Victoria P.H.). These prominent corner buildings are all landmarks.

There are other good Victorian buildings, including on the south The Robin Hood P.H., tucked in between taller neighbours. It is a strongly symmetrical building with paired doors and door hoods, mock timbering, hornless six over six pane sash windows and a distinctive wide ground floor bay. To the west are nos. 82-94 of varied height and design, all with slate roofs and red brick or painted. No. 96 is a larger, wider fronted C19 building with a bay window and originally the town council depot manager's house with a yard, stables and outbuildings at the rear. To the east is a terrace of houses, with small front gardens, consistent with the 1880s map, with darker brick and red detail, some retaining sash windows with margin lights but all with modern concrete roof tiles. Dating from the late Victorian period, on the north side of the street, are nos. 141-143 Victoria Street. These are a pair of houses of modest scale, two storeys in height, of red brick (no. 141 partly painted), with a slated roof and front dormers, now both with later shopfronts in line with their use as a restaurant and service. Along their west side, an attractive red brick wall runs alongside a footpath which links to Marlborough Gate. This marks an

historic field boundary line which ran between Victoria Street and Hatfield Road and formed the boundary of the Marlborough House Estate to the east which was sold off as building plots in 1880 (see Area 7f).



*The Horn P.H. (locally listed) is a landmark building on a corner of the Victoria Street-Alma Road junction.*



*The Robin Hood P.H. is a Victorian building now dwarfed by the Iceland building to the east.*



*Midland Railway Hotel (locally listed) has now been converted to residential use. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.*



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Buildings contd.

Of particular note from the Edwardian era is the Trinity United Reform Church (1903) (by Smee, Mence and Houchin, London and St Albans architects), a large and very colourful orange-red brick building with cream terracotta detail. This not only forms a key landmark at the junction of Victoria Street and Beaconsfield Road but its tall, red tile clad spire is a local point of reference in views.

From Beaconsfield Road, the street climbs eastwards up hill and onto the bridge over the railway. Here there is a post-1880 group of buildings of similar grand stature, in residential and shop use, in different styles but typifying the status of these late Victorian/Edwardian retail premises in a prime situation adjacent to the station. On the opposite corner (with Beaconsfield Road) and also addressing the corner is no. 145, a very imposing, elaborate, orangey red brick building, with exceptionally fine terracotta detailing, some surviving sash windows and a red tile roof. To the east (also no.145) is another grand example. This is Edwardian and has all the Arts and Crafts hallmarks of local architect Kinnear Tarte: rough-cast, vertical mock timbering with arched and decorative heads and two very fine oriel square bays and red tiled roof. Nos. 147-149 in red brick has a terracotta flower panel, a red tiled roof with early tile hung dormers. Nos. 151-153 is plainer, with a slate roof and completes the group.

The north side of Victoria Street to the west of the church also contains a number of two and three storey brick buildings from the 1920s and '30s, of which a small group at nos. 95-109 have been locally listed. No. 91, previously known as Victoria Parade, is not locally listed but is another prominent corner building on the corner of Upper Lattimore Road. Here the wide pavements set this section of Victoria Street apart from the remainder and, together with the low buildings on the south side, this gives the street a spacious and airy feel.

At this end of Victoria Street there has been some limited new development, some of which

has unfortunately replaced older traditional buildings, but in the main this respects the scale, height and character of the street and is limited in footprint. However, unfortunately, on the southern side a short distance to the west of Alma Road, there is an uncharacteristically deep plan modern building with a “developer’s mansard” roof: a foodstore with flats over approved in the late 1970s just prior to the designation of the conservation area. On the north side another modern development (Faulkner House (office) and Garland Court (residential)) replaced Faulkner Hall: again with a fake “mansard” and artificial “slate” roof.



*No. 145 is an elaborate building with fine terracotta detailing.*



*No. 91 Victoria Street is not locally listed but is a landmark.*

## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Buildings contd.

Westwards from no. 80a on the south side (a well detailed, three storey, mid C20, red brick office, with a classical stone doorcase and steep red tiled roof) the pattern changes to larger modern office buildings. Charter Court (nos. 74-78) is three storeys, 1980s, in dark multi brick with bays which give it some vertical emphasis but with blue banding and window sills which do not. Of similar height, but earlier, are nos. 62-72, red brick offices, notably with the front supported on tiled and round pilots. This was altered with an added atrium and extended westwards in the 1990s with another red brick block (no. 60) in a similar idiom, but which breaks forward and has a pitched roof, blue banding, blue headers and cills and a full height atrium. This group all have useful landscaping to the front and that to nos. 62-72 includes a sizeable tree. Whilst the designs have incorporated modern features, these modern developments have sought to fit within the context established by the historic buildings at three storeys and stepping down the hill with pitched roofs and quality brick. The side elevation of no. 36 Marlborough Road heralds the junction with that road. On the northern side, immediately west of, and turning the corner into, Liverpool Road, is an office block, Tonman House (nos. 63-77). This is over large in relation to the general grain of the street, due to its frontage length (albeit with a narrow and more acceptable span) and in a pinkish brown brick uncharacteristic of the area. Again this was approved in the early 1980s prior to conservation area designation.

The boundary between this character area and Area 4a (The Commercial Centre) is located at the junction of Victoria Street and Marlborough Road, which was the borough boundary until 1835. In the late C19 there was a concentration of hat factories on this junction; one on each of three of the corners and one behind houses on the other. In 1881, Kelly's Directory names these as Smith, Scott, Slade and Gardner. There are buildings from three of these factories still in existence and they are locally listed. The large, red brick building on the east corner of Upper Marlborough Road and Victoria Street,

now no. 53 Victoria Street, was Kershaw and Co. Straw & Brazilian Hat Manufacturers factory from 1882-1905. It has good details (large sash windows with arched heads and brick keystones, piers and decorative string courses). During the Victorian period, hat making became a very important local industry: at its height there were forty straw hat factories employing 11,000. Straw plaiting for hat making was the most widespread cottage industry in C19 century Hertfordshire. Whilst plaiting had been taking place in St Albans since the C17, at this time plait was in great demand and the process involved many different people: straw harvesting, sorting, splitting, plaiting and dyeing. Women and children from poor families plaited straw to help support the family. It was sold to buyers at the weekly St Albans plait market or to agents who came to their homes. In addition to the workshops, the hat factories were also used as showrooms and offices and designed to a specific hat factory pattern, still apparent in the surviving buildings. They have half basements, showrooms at ground floor, and offices, accessed by different doorways. Doorways for the customers were particularly grand (as can be seen at no. 53 where it is emphasised by a gable above, and indeed at no. 58 diagonally opposite (in The Commercial Centre Area 4a). Slades, which made straw hats for sailors, was the first factory in St Albans in 1776 and continued for five successive generations. Competition and fashion caused the industry to decline nationally from the end of the C19, so Slades diversified, making hat boxes and then boxes for other industries which became their core business. Milliner's Court, another large former hat factory site, is situated in Character Area 5a London Road.



*Advert showing no.53 Victoria St.  
Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.*



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Buildings contd.

#### Marlborough Road

This slopes down from Victoria Street and the vista is closed by nos. 92-94 London Road, a pair of brick Edwardian villas with bay fronts and arched doorways. Only the north east side of Marlborough Road was developed by the 1880 OS. Nos. 26-32, which are stepped back, appeared first and these form an attractive group (nos. 26 & 28 have gothic details). Nos. 34-36, a semi-detached pair of houses in Luton Grey brick with slate roofs (one altered), are slightly later and flank onto Victoria Street (having an early blue enamelled street sign on the gable). Both have unfortunately lost their original windows. Nos. 10-22 on the east side and the Methodist Church on the west are included in Character Area 5a (London Road), together with the late C20 large scale flat developments at the southern end of the road.



*Nos. 34-36 Marlborough Road (locally listed).*



*Nos. 26-32 Marlborough Road (locally listed).*

#### Lattimore Road

Lattimore Road is an early Victorian street that connected Victoria Street with London Road. Built up quite early on in the period, Lattimore Road displays a range of small and medium sized terraces. The northern end of the east side, included in this character area, contains a varied group of early, small scale, two storey cottages (some converted to shops), most with surviving slate roofs. Red brick with yellow detail is in evidence, some original sash windows, some with margin lights, (some replaced). One has an historic shopfront. Pavements are concrete block.



*A house in Lattimore Road displaying red brick with yellow brick detailing and a sash window with margin lights.*

## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Buildings contd.

#### Liverpool Road

Liverpool Road which extends north of Victoria Street was cut in c.1880 and is tightly lined with reasonably sized terraces of c.1885. One group on the west, Jubilee Villas, have a date plaque of 1887 for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The road has a strong Victorian character. Some houses are of red brick and some Luton Grey brick (sometimes with red brick detail). All are set back behind small front gardens with low walls, and steps up to the door. Many have original patterned tile paths. All have ground floor bay windows, most have stone window and door headers (some with decoration), and arched recessed doorways, many still with four-panelled doors. The road slopes up from Victoria Street quite steeply. The roofs step up the hill in short groups and their chimneys are a prominent feature. Originally slate, about half of the roofs have unfortunately been replaced with concrete tiles but fortunately roofs are generally uninterrupted at the front (only a few have rooflights and only two (nos.4&6) have front dormers). Windows are mainly surviving timber two over two paned sashes. Although this road has escaped the redevelopments nearby, the office blocks that now loom above detract from its Victorian character. Especially detrimental is the very tall, yellow brick Telephone Exchange (1958) that is

situated and accessed from the northern end of Liverpool Road and thus fills the vista otherwise framed by the attractive historic terraces. Adjacent is a small car park with poor tarmac surfacing, basic barriers and lack of landscaping which could benefit from enhancement. Historic blue pavements have been replaced with concrete blocks but there are surviving sett channels.

Liverpool Road's 1880s date and uniformity sets it apart from the rest of this character area. As a small development of late Victorian terraces amongst somewhat unrelated surroundings, it has much more in common with Essex Street and Clifton Street in Character Area 7g north of Hatfield Road. Small enclaves such as these are important to the conservation area as a whole because they show the gradual growth of the City, which was often dictated by the land available.

Fronting Victoria Street between Upper Lattimore Road and Liverpool Road is a similar terrace of houses, nos. 79-87, for some time blighted partly by a mid C20 ring road proposal and restored in the 1990s. These are two storey, originally in red brick, but three have been roughcast or rendered and painted. They all have slate roofs with a clay ridge crest.



*The terraced houses in Liverpool Street are very uniform.*



*Nos. 79-87 Victoria Street are similar terraced houses.*



*The large yellow brick Telephone Exchange looms over Liverpool Street, having a negative impact on its character.*



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Public Realm

The road and footway network comprises a key aspect. Victoria Street, as part of the main road network, is particularly busy at rush hour owing to its function as access to and from the station, commuter car parks and offices. Currently a one way street, Marlborough Road is also busy with traffic and pedestrians because it functions as a south to north link between London Road and Victoria Street and serves one of the Maltings Car Park entrances. Junctions at Alma Road/ Beaconsfield Road, the Marlborough Roads and Lattimore Roads are all traffic light controlled junctions, which although essential for vehicular and pedestrian safety, also restrict the movement of pedestrians across and along Victoria Street and between the city centre and the station. There is a footpath linking Marlborough Gate to Victoria Street.

Pavements are small concrete slabs with blue brick edges to Victoria Street, although blue channel setts have been lost in resurfacing. Side roads have concrete block paving.



*All the major junctions in this character area are traffic light controlled.*



*Pavements in Victoria Street are concrete slab paving with blue brick edges.*



*There is a footpath next to nos.141+143Victoria Street linking that road to Marlborough Gate.*



*The offices in the area are one reason for the busy nature of Victoria Street at rush hour.*

## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

#### Positive

- ✓ Views along Victoria Street.
- ✓ Historic Assets, such as locally listed buildings, provide a strong sense of history.
- ✓ Corner landmark historic buildings: notable buildings include those that were Victorian public houses.
- ✓ The former hat factory (no. 53 Victoria Street) which shows characteristics of its former use and relates to other factories in adjacent character areas.
- ✓ The landmark Trinity United Reform Church and spire provides a reference point.
- ✓ Liverpool Road: a strongly consistent late Victorian residential road (1880s).
- ✓ Signage in the area is for the most part restrained and traditional in appearance. Most signage is modest in size, non-illuminated or externally illuminated and it is in the main flat signage not bulky box signage and it does not use strident colouring.



*No. 53 still displays architectural characteristics which indicate its original use as a straw hat factory.*



*Victoria Street is long and wide providing good views along its length in which the Trinity United Reform Church spire is a reference point.*



*Locally listed buildings, like nos. 104-124 Victoria Street, provide a sense of history.*



*There are numerous landmark buildings on the corners of roads in this area.*

#### Neutral

- Where new developments have been constrained in height and depth and have used appropriate materials, this has retained the strong character of Victoria Street.



## Area 7c: Victoria Street

### Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

#### Negative

- ✗ Busy roads and traffic controlled junctions restrict the movement of pedestrians across and along Victoria Street and between the city centre and the station.
- ✗ Traffic and associated noise detracts from the character of the area.
- ✗ Whilst necessary for direction and public safety, the large amount of traffic signage and the traffic lights detract. Opportunities should be explored to improve quality and reduce the visual effect of these.
- ✗ Lack of greenery.
- ✗ Car parking on frontages; some parking on pavements has had to be controlled with bollards which are in turn themselves visually intrusive.
- ✗ Some signage is not sympathetic.
- ✗ Loss of traditional paving and functional street surfacing.
- ✗ The car park area in Liverpool Road with poor tarmac surfacing, basic barriers and lack of landscaping.
- ✗ Telephone exchange.



*The Telephone Exchange is very dominant in the streetscene because of its height and scale.*



*Bollards to prevent parking on pavements are visually intrusive. Busy roads are also a negative feature.*

#### Scope for Change

- The City Vision provided an opportunity to look at ways to enhance the character and put forward possible improvements for the City Station, Victoria Street and the bridge given its status as a key arrival point for the City.
- Some modern buildings in the area would benefit from redevelopment or enhancement.
- There are some areas which would benefit from enhancement through planting and resurfacing, such as the private and public car parks, and the wide pavement on the north side of Victoria Street.
- Improvements ought to be made to signage which is over dominant and/or unsympathetic.

