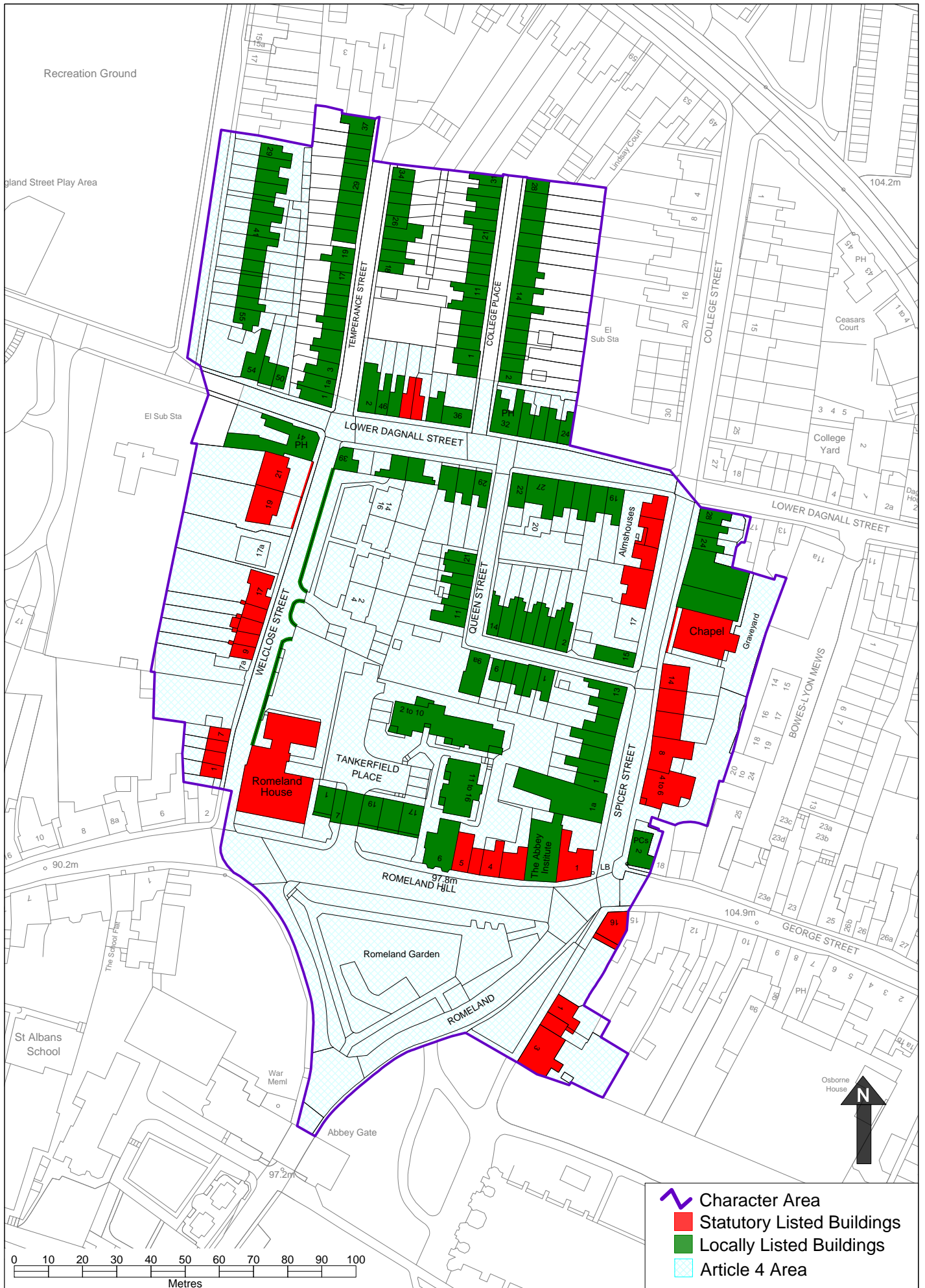


***Character Area 2c
Romeland and the Abbey
Gateway***





AREA 2C: ROMELAND AND THE ABBEY GATEWAY



Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

College Place, George Street (part), Lower Dagnall Street (part), New England Street (part), Queen Street, Romeland, Romeland Hill, Spicer Street, Temperance Street and Welclose Street.

Article 4 Direction - Covers majority of area (see map)

Scheduled Monuments

None

Listed Buildings

George Street
16 (Grade II)

Lower Dagnall Street
40 and 42 (Grade II)

Romeland
1, 2 and 3 (Romeland Cottages) (Grade II)

Romeland Hill
1 (Tankerfield House)
3-5 consec (Grade II)
Romeland House (Grade II*)

Spicer Street
Odds: 19 (formerly 'The Vine' P.H) (Grade II),
21-25 (Ramshaws Almshouses) (Grade II).
Evens: 4-14 (inc former Abbey National Boys
School (Arquen House)) (Grade II), Congrega-
tional Chapel and gates and railings (Grade II).

Welclose Street
Odds: 1-7 (Grade II), 9-17 (Grade II), 19 & 21-
including railings (Grade II).



Romeland House, Romeland Hill (grade II listed). Image courtesy of John Bethell.*

Locally Listed Buildings

College Place
Odds: 1-31 (incl)
Evens: 2-28 (incl)

Lower Dagnall Street
Odds: 19-41
Evens: 24-38 (incl), 44-46 and 50-54

New England Street
Odds: 29-55

Queen Street
Odds: 1-9a (incl) and 11-21 (incl)
Evens: 2-14 (incl) and 22

Romeland Hill
2 (Abbey Institute (New Place)), 6 and Tanker-
field Place (all: 1-19 incl)

Spicer Street
Odds: 1a, 1-13 (incl) and 15
Evens: 2 (public conveniences), 24-28 (incl),
ancillary buildings to Congregational Chapel to
the north.

Temperance Street
Odds: 1a, 1-37 (incl)
Evens: 2 and 18-34 (incl)

Welclose Street
Evens: Wall adjoining Romeland House and
fronting 2-16 (also curtilage of LB)



Cottages at nos. 11—21 Queen Street which are locally listed

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Character Summary

This character area is located to the west of the city centre (Area 4a), the south of Verulam Road (Area 5b) and to the east of Mount Pleasant (Area 5c) and Fishpool Street (Area 4c). Today it is primarily a residential area, although its proximity to the commercial centre and its history results in a more mixed character than some of the surrounding character areas. The residential character is evident in the northerly part of the character area whilst Spicer Street and Romeland Hill include offices. Romeland serves as an intermediary area, between residential Fishpool Street (Character Area 4c) and commercial George Street (Character Area 4a) which contains largely independent

specialised shops. The area's links with the Abbey has helped to form its character today; it was initially used in connection with the monastery and then developed with service uses for pilgrims visiting the Abbey. After the dissolution the area became more residential in function as the inn trade began to be focused more towards Holywell Hill to the east (Area 4d). As this character area was historically part of the medieval core of the city, many of the buildings are statutory listed due to their early date. In addition most of the area is covered by an Article 4 Direction which aims to protect its unique character from uncontrolled changes to the unlisted buildings and their curtilages.



The area has a mixed character with both residential and commercial/office use.

Above left: Romeland Garden is a transition point between the commercial centre and residential areas.

Above right: Spicer Street, the Abbey has a strong presence in the area.



Right: The area developed to service the monastery, of which only the Abbey Gateway remains, now part of St Albans School.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

History

This area is unlikely to have been the first to be developed in St Albans. In the C10 it was still outside the medieval core of the city centred on Market Place. The area was never divided into burgage plots, unlike Holywell Hill and St Peters Street (Character Areas 4d and 4a), which was the original medieval layout of the town in the C10. Limited archaeological excavation suggests that this area was not developed until the C13 and that initial development was around the Abbey (Character Area 2a). Excavation in 1978 prior to the construction of Tankerfield Place showed an early smithy workshop¹, presumably to serve visitors to the Abbey, which was later replaced by timber framed houses. Today the Abbey and the Abbey Gateway still visually contribute to this character area.

Therefore it is likely that Romeland Hill initially developed by providing services to the monastery – there was a monastic school from the C13 on Romeland - and then to service the pilgrims

to the Abbey, for example with inns. Its location as the link between George Street and Fishpool Street, which was a main route into the town until the early C19, enabled this. Traces of this service use can still be seen; for example no. 19 Spicer Street, was built in the second half of the C15 and was used as an inn. This earlier function is still commemorated with the porch decorated with vines. Similarly, the Old Green Man PH was situated on the site of no. 2 Romeland Hill. In 1911, it was replaced by the Lads Institute, designed by Percival Blow for the Abbey Parish; the building was then called the Abbey Institute and belonged to St Albans School, it is now called New Place and used as a drama studio for the school. As late as 1776 the triangular space formed by Romeland and Romeland Hill was undeveloped. It was then called Room Land and it originally formed part of a large open space just outside the Abbey Gateway where medieval fairs were held.



Romeland, an open space historically known as Room Land and used for medieval fairs.



No. 19 Spicer Street - the old Vine pub - whose previous function is indicated by the vine decoration above the door.



The New Place



The cathedral and Abbey Gateway are a visual focus in the area.

¹ Alban's Buried Towns Rosalind Niblett and Isobel Thomson

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

History contd.

After the Dissolution, the focus of this part of the town slowly moved away from being ancillary to the Abbey. Although inns and pubs still remained in the area, the focus of service functions associated with passing travellers relocated to Holywell Hill (Area 4d) and as a consequence this character area changed to a more residential function. During the C17 the Abbey Parish was densely populated (apart from Roomland), although it had fewer high status buildings compared to St Peter's Street (Character Area 4a). Trades may still have focussed on the Abbey as parish church with tradesfolk operating from their homes. Due to its proximity to the surviving Abbey buildings and the main town, the area must nevertheless have been sought after, especially during the C18 development of the town. New buildings were often of a higher quality, for example Romeland House, a particularly fine mid-C18 house, listed Grade II*, built for Van der Meulen a prominent Dutch artist who moved to England. It is two storeys with an attic storey and has a parapeted roof with a central pediment and is constructed of bricks with a purple hue and dressed in red brick. However, in common with Fishpool Street, some of the houses surrounding these later buildings were simply refaced to keep up with the style of the day, with-

out the expense of being completely rebuilt. Therefore several of the buildings on Romeland have older origins behind Georgian or Victorian facades. Romeland Cottages, nos. 1-3 Romeland, are rare survivals, in more or less their original form, of jettied timber framed buildings. Some other mixed uses remained or developed because of the proximity to the town, such as schools, churches and public houses. In the mid-C19 a Straw Hat factory was located on the corner of Romeland and Spicer Street, which was later used by the Abbey Parish for the Lad's Institute until it was replaced by a new building designed by Percival Blow at no. 2 Romeland Hill (see above). The former hat factory still survives and is converted into flats.

By 1800 some of the street layout which we see today was in evidence: Spicer Street and Welclose Street and Lower Dagnall Street had all been cut, although Lower Dagnall Street and Welclose Street were called Dagnet Lane. College Place and Temperance Street had appeared by the 1840s (Tithe map), although not completely built up, and New England Street and Queen Street were in existence by the time of the 1880s OS map.



Romeland Cottages have a jettied timber frame and, typically for this area and the adjoining area 4c, they have been refaced at a later date. Image courtesy of John Bethel.



1847 Tithe map—Herts Archives & Local Studies

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Buildings

Welclose Street and Spicer Street are parallel streets which link Romeland Hill to Lower Dagnall Street. Spicer Street in particular contains some interesting listed and locally listed buildings. On the western side are nos. 1, 3, 5 and 7 which are locally listed. They comprise a short terrace of larger Victorian houses. These are, unusually for the area, of three storeys and constructed in a pale yellow stock brick with red dressings. Significant listed buildings on this side of the road are no. 19 the Vine PH (see above) and the Ramshaws Almshouses, a row of three modest cottages built in 1846. They are an attractive design built in red brick with a diamond pattern of blue headers and stone hood moulds to the windows on the ground floor. The central cottage door has a pointed arch door hood mould. On the eastern side the larger scale Abbey National School (which relocated to Grove Road) has similar stone dressings and the southern range also displays a pattern in blue headers. There are three parts to the building, built in 1846, 1874 and 1884, and all are now in office and residential uses. The Congregational Chapel, also on the eastern side, dates from 1811. It is constructed of red brick, is two storeys high with a pedimented front, and the windows on the ground floor are round arched with interlaced tracery. This building and the step between no. 16 George Street and

Romeland Cottages, which marks the previous location of the Methodist meeting place, as well as the many other buildings previously used for religious purposes in the adjoining Verulam Road Character Area, suggests that the density of population and economic activity and possibly the presence of the Abbey may have encouraged other religious groups and buildings into this area.

Welclose Street was called "School Lane" in the C15 as this site was associated with the monastic school. Today it is a narrow street and at its southern end, nos. 1-7 and 9-17 are two groups of tightly packed cottages again constructed of red and blue patterned brickwork. At the northern end there are more widely spaced buildings, including nos. 19 and 21 which are two listed elegant villas from circa 1830 with decoration below the upper windows. The Verulam Arms P.H. (see below) forms an attractive landmark building terminating the street. The cottages and the larger buildings are somewhat dominated by the large 1980s office extension to the rear of Romeland House and the neo-Georgian 1960s development at nos. 2-16. However, both modern developments are partly screened from the street by the historic curtilage wall of Romeland House which is locally listed (and also a curtilage listed building).



Ramshaws Almhouses on Spicer Street.



The Congregational Chapel on Spicer Street.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Buildings contd.

Lower Dagnall Street is a wider street, which is today used as a route linking the wider area into the city centre. The west end of Lower Dagnall Street drops downhill to the recreation area (Character Area 5b), which forms a convenient separation from the buildings located on the other side of the hill, for example along Mount Pleasant and Hill Street, which are of a different date and display a more formal style of architecture. At the western end of Lower Dagnall Street are two public houses, the Verulam Arms and Farriers Arms. The Verulam Arms forms an important landmark building at the western boundary of this Character Area and is a red, brick built, early C19 building. A very attractive feature is the curved corner at the junction of the two road elevations which, like the house opposite and no. 16 George Street, was designed to suit its location on a corner plot. There is also a First World War memorial on the southern side of the road which is a modern replacement of an earlier memorial which was damaged. Otherwise the street is dominated by groups of houses of two storeys with a basement level and with high pitched slate roofs. They are most uniform on the northern side, whereas on the southern side the groups are broken with buildings in different styles, for example nos. 29,

31 and 33 are pretty, yellow brick, early C19 cottages with round headed door openings and fine sash windows, although no. 33 has been painted. The western end of Lower Dagnall Street is linked in style and scale to the streets which branch from it – College Place, Temperance Street and New England Street – as they all contain two storey, brick, terraced houses with narrow plans. Many have the distinctive blue brick patterning in addition to the local red brickwork which is characteristic of the earlier C19 and can be found in other parts of St Albans. In Temperance Street the cottages are more modest in scale and design.

Queen Street is a short road connected to Lower Dagnall Street and Spicer Street in an L shape. Like Welclose Street, it is narrow, with tightly grouped, small-scale cottages. However, because of the layout of the houses and surrounding streets, there are some gaps in the streetscene where the rear elevations and gardens of other houses can be seen. There is some variation in the buildings as well, for example no. 9a is gabled to the street and occupies a corner plot and no. 22 has good sash windows and classical proportions.



The Verulam Arms



The Farriers Arms



Nos. 19 & 21 Welclose Street are two c.1830 grade II-listed villas situated next to The Verulam Arms. Their size contrasts with the smaller cottages to the south.



Small-scale cottages in Queen Street.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Buildings contd.

A dominant site visible from Romeland Hill in this character area (although it is situated in Character Area 4c) is the St Albans School site. The frontage comprises a range of interesting brick built buildings dating from c1920, including the hall, all designed by Percival Blow. They echo the medieval Abbey Gateway with large Gothic arches and also utilise a local material, knapped flint, which is also used in the flint wall which borders part of the school grounds. The Abbey Gateway (Character Area 2a) is still used by the school and links visually with the school, although historically it is connected with the Abbey and is therefore described in Character Area 2a. However, it also provides a visually spectacular landmark building to this character area at its southern border.

Modern development has been limited because of the closely packed and historic nature of the area. The one notable exception was the builder's yard to the east of Romeland House which, in the late 1970s, was developed with the flat development of Tankerfield Place. The name of Tankerfield Place commemorates George Tankerfield, one of the Marian martyrs burnt at the stake in Romeland. The flats are built in red brick, with prominent balconies giving interest to the elevations, and set around a courtyard. It was designed by Hertfordshire architects Melvin, Lansley and Mark and fits in exceptionally well into the area and is therefore locally listed.



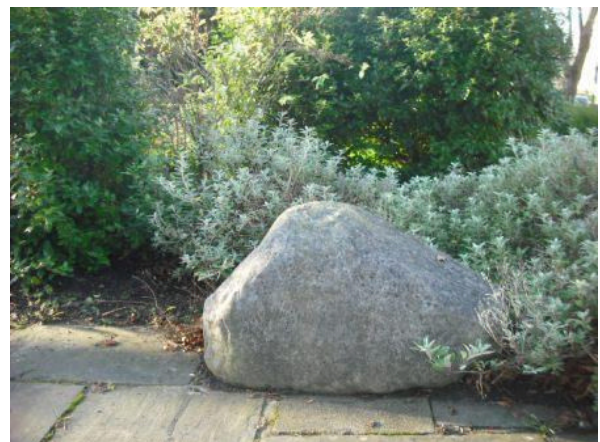
St Albans School as seen from Romeland Gardens.



Tankerfield Place is locally listed because of its interesting modern architecture, which is sympathetic to the surrounding area.



The Abbey Gateway is now part of the school. Percival Blow's 1920s school buildings link to the Gateway through the use of similar materials and Gothic architecture.



A stone in Romeland Gardens that is thought to mark the burial place of George Tankerfield who was martyred on Romeland and after whom Tankerfield Place was named.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Materials

There is a great variety of materials in these roads, but the characteristic local red brickwork predominates, often with blue brick patterning, plus there are also a few examples of yellow or purple (Luton Grey) brick. A few of the facades are rendered; most have been rendered historically, for example those in Welclose Street, but a few are later additions. Where this is the case a more fragmented streetscene results, for example in College Place and Temperance Street. Apart from Romeland House and the Spicer Street Chapel, which are set back and have fine railings, most of the buildings are located on the pavement edge. Most windows and doors are traditional timber; there are some fine windows and interesting details, some of which have been outlined above. Some buildings outside the Article 4 direction have been subject to unsympathetic alterations under permitted development.



Local red brick is the most common material but yellow and purple (Luton grey) brick is also used.



Many of the buildings display blue brick patterning.



Most of the windows and doors are traditional timber and some buildings display interesting fenestration like this curved window to fit the curved corner. Image courtesy of John Bethell.



Most of the buildings in this character area are located on the pavement edge.



College Place has a mix of rendered and unrendered buildings, which results in variety within the streetscene.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Public Realm

This character area close to the city centre is quite densely developed. The one small, public, green area in this character area is Romeland Garden, a small triangular site, which was an important open space in medieval times. Although later the site of the St Albans Pound, it was enclosed in 1812 and made into a graveyard and still contains some graves and gravestones. It is now contained behind an attractive flint wall, raised up from the road on the northern and western sides, and contains some good trees. It has the Abbey, school buildings and Abbey Gateway as a backdrop. Although not immediately apparent from Fishpool Street as a public green space, it serves as a good visual break within the building-dominated Romeland Hill and is an attractive footpath link to the Abbey and grounds beyond. There is also a raised bank in front of Romeland Cottages, facing onto Romeland, which is thickly planted as a further backdrop to the open space. Apart from these public areas, and due to its location close to the city centre, the area relies on landscaping which comes from the trees and gardens of the houses and which can sometimes be glimpsed from the street. The nearby Verulamium Park serves as an accessible amenity space to this character area, and the Abbey Orchard can be seen from Romeland as part of the backdrop of views of the Abbey and St Albans School.

Romeland Hill suffers from excessive traffic and parked cars as it is a route into the city centre from the west and services the bustling school. Lower Dagnall Street is also busy with traffic and parked cars, though to a lesser extent. Spicer Street, College Place, New England Street, Queen Street and Welclose Street are quieter, although all are quite cluttered with parked cars. Like many of the surrounding character areas, blue brick pavements and traditional kerbs give interest to pavements but there is little historic street furniture of interest.



Romeland Garden used to be a graveyard and still con-



Romeland Garden is an important public green space in the area, with mature trees and bounded by an attractive flint wall to the north and west.



Excessive traffic and parked cars are a problem within the area.

Area 2c: Romeland and the Abbey Gateway

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ The large concentration of historic assets, for example the concentration of listed buildings and the locally listed buildings which contribute to the setting of those listed buildings and the historic interest and quality of the area.
- ✓ Good modern buildings at Tankerfield Place.
- ✓ The uniformity of architectural styles within some of the residential streets, such as College Place.
- ✓ The variety of interesting buildings from different periods in some of the more ancient streets, many with high quality brickwork and detailing.
- ✓ The areas of landscaping: Romeland Gardens and the planted bank on Romeland.
- ✓ The views of the Abbey and Abbey Gateway.
- ✓ The accessibility of the park nearby and the sense of openness that the Abbey Precinct and Abbey Orchard contribute to the area on the south.
- ✓ The use of the Article 4 Direction which has prevented unsympathetic alterations and therefore the special character of this area has been largely retained.



Many of the buildings exhibit interesting and high quality architectural detailing.



No.16 George Street (grade II listed) is just one of the many historic assets in this area. Image courtesy of John Bethell.



The planted bank in front of Romeland Cottages contributes to the landscaping and greenery of the area.

Negative

- ✗ The number of parked cars and level of traffic in some areas.

Scope for change

- Maintenance and re-instatement of blue pavements and traditional kerbs and improvements to public realm.