



KDK ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Archaeological Observation and Recording Report

Vintry Gardens
St Albans
Hertfordshire

Scheduled Monument NHLE 1003526



Quality Check

<i>Author</i>	Laura Dodd MSc ACIfA	<i>Version</i>	672/SAVG/2.1	<i>Date</i>	16.03.2022
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Unit 3 Leighton Road Leighton Buzzard Bedfordshire LU7 1LA

Tel: 01525 385443

Email: office@kdkarchaeology.co.uk

Website: www.kdkarchaeology.co.uk





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Summary

In March 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire in order to fulfil a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (Ref: S00242256). The development involved the installation of a paved footpath to formalise an existing eroded track across the main lawn. The new footpath also extends to encompass a memorial stone.

Minimal ground reduction was required during this programme of works and excavations did not go below the topsoil layer. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were encountered and artefacts in the topsoil layer were all modern.

1 Introduction

1.1 In March 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire. The project was commissioned by St Albans City and District Council, and was carried at the request of Historic England as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (Ref: S00242256).

1.2 *The Site*

Location

Vintry Gardens is located in the medieval core of St Albans within both the boundaries of the conventual buildings of St Albans Abbey, now a Scheduled Monument (NHLE 1003526), and the St Albans Conservation Area 2A. It is in the centred on National Grid Reference TL 14620 07024 (Fig. 1).

Description

The site is situated northeast of St Albans Cathedral, south of High Street and west of Holywell Hill (Fig. 2). It is a roughly square garden with high brick walls, bound on the north and east by the rear gardens of houses on High Street and Holywell Hill. On the south is Sumpter's Yard and on the west is the path that runs from Waxhouse Gate to Abbey Orchard, south of the cathedral.

Vintry Gardens is part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, identified as St Albans Abbey, site of conventual buildings (NHLE 1003526). It is also associated with two listed features, the Vintry Garden walls (NHLE 1173243) and a well and posts (NHLE 1103129). Both are Grade II. The listing descriptions for these features are:

NHLE 1173243

- 1. Walls surrounding garden of No 3 and 3A and known as The Vintry.*
- 2. These front on Waxhouse Gate, the north-east end of the Abbey and Sumpter Yard; and north extension towards Waxhouse Gate. C18 brick walls with roll moulded coping, ramped up at intervals to follow the slope of the hill; and. varying in height from about 8 to 13 ft, on the outside. In Waxhouse Gate the lower part of the wall is of flint and may be late mediaeval. Flat brick buttresses support the walls of this side and there is a brick plinth. Round arched opening to Waxhouse Gate. Recess with 4-centred head on inside at north-west corner.*

NHLE 1103129

- 1. Well and adjacent posts on side of The Vintry garden to Nos 3 & 3A.*
- 2. Circular stone ruin of ancient well; and 2 octagonal stone posts, with square bases and chamfered tops standing by it.*



Geology & Topography

St Albans city centre is on a ridge north of the River Ver. Vintry Gardens is located near the top of the south facing slope of the valley, at an elevation of approximately 112m AOD, sloping to 106m AOD at the southeast gate. The bedrock geology consists of chalk of the Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation and Seaford Chalk Formation (undifferentiated). Overlying the chalk are deposits of sand and gravel of the Kesgrave Catchment Subgroup (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>).

Development

The works comprised the installation of a paved footpath to formalise an existing eroded track across the main lawn (Figs 3-5). The area around the memorial stone and oak were be enhanced.



Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

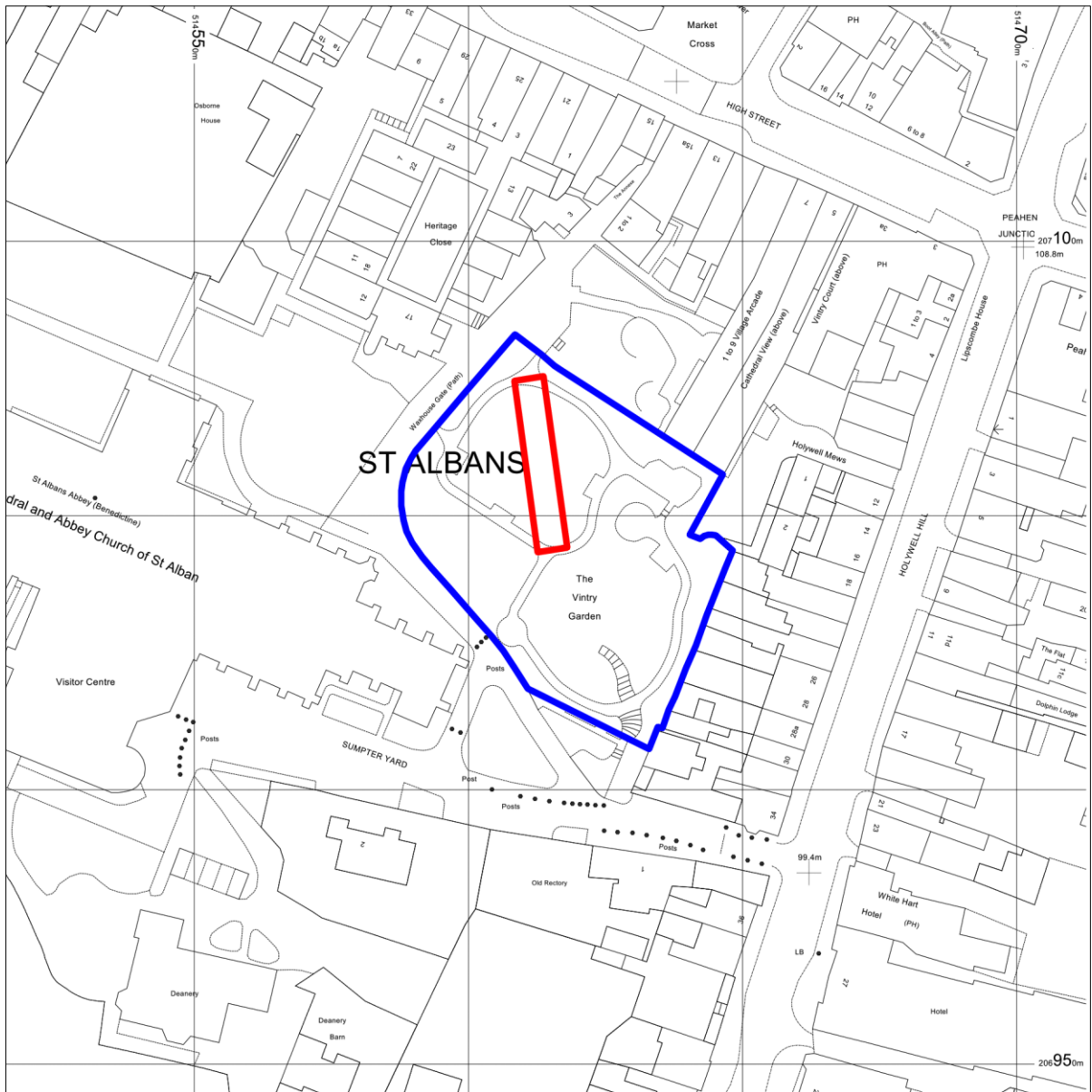


Figure 2: Site location, Vintry Gardens outlined in blue, approximate location of the works outlined in red (scale 1:1250)

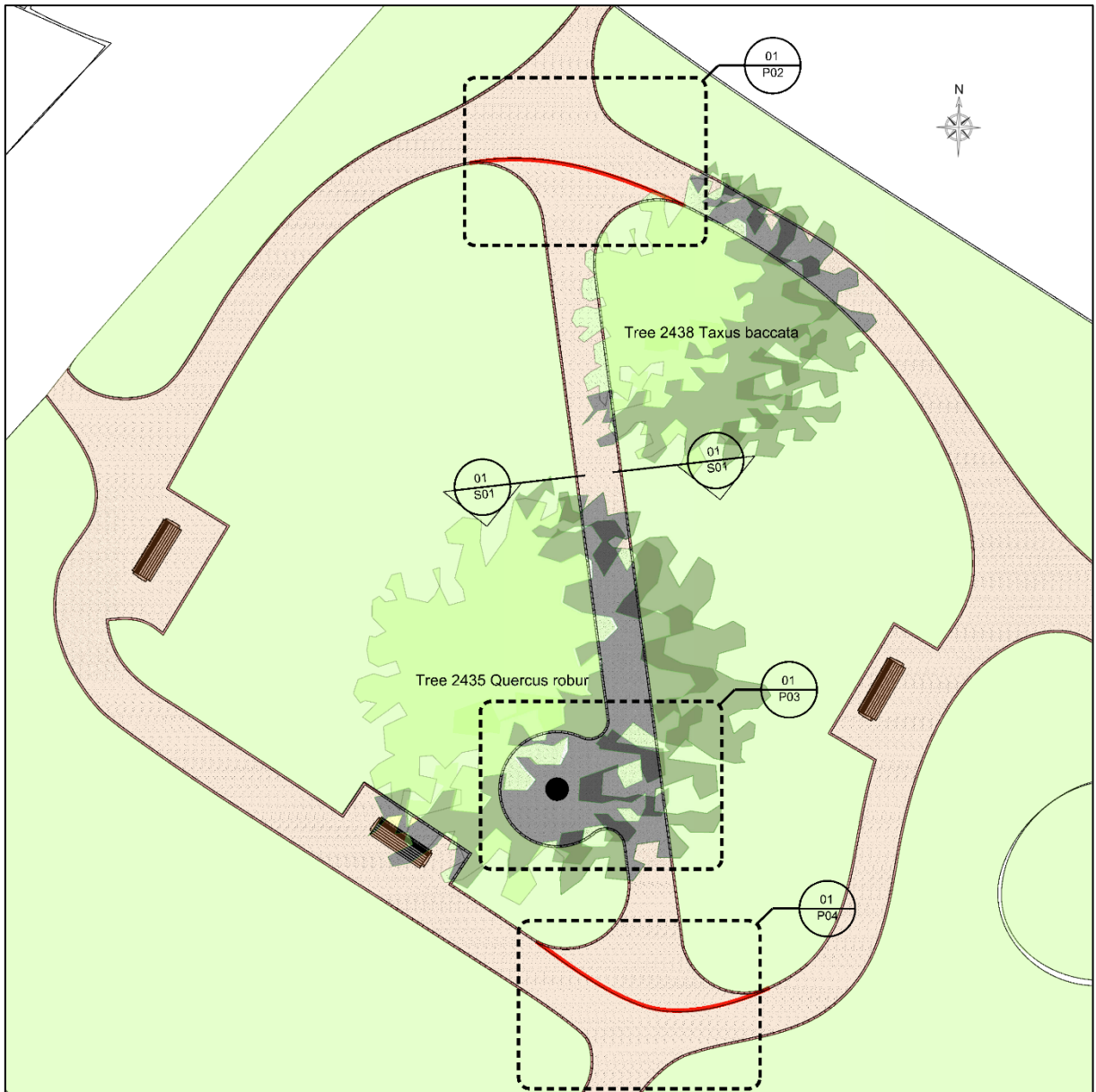
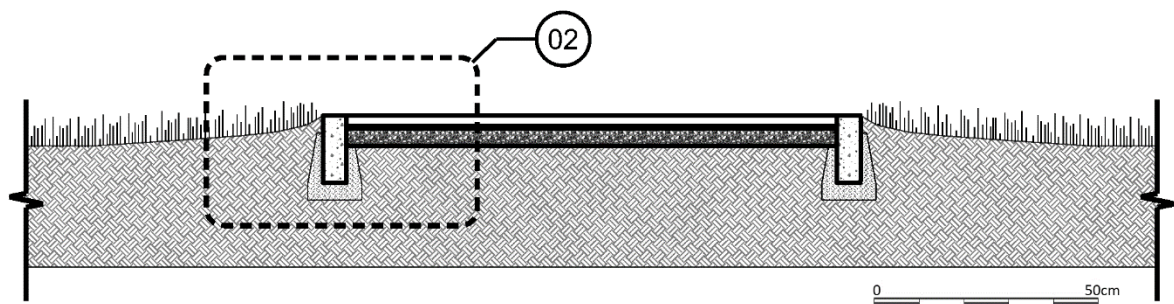


Figure 3: Path plan (not to scale)



01 Path section

Figure 4: Path section (scale as shown)

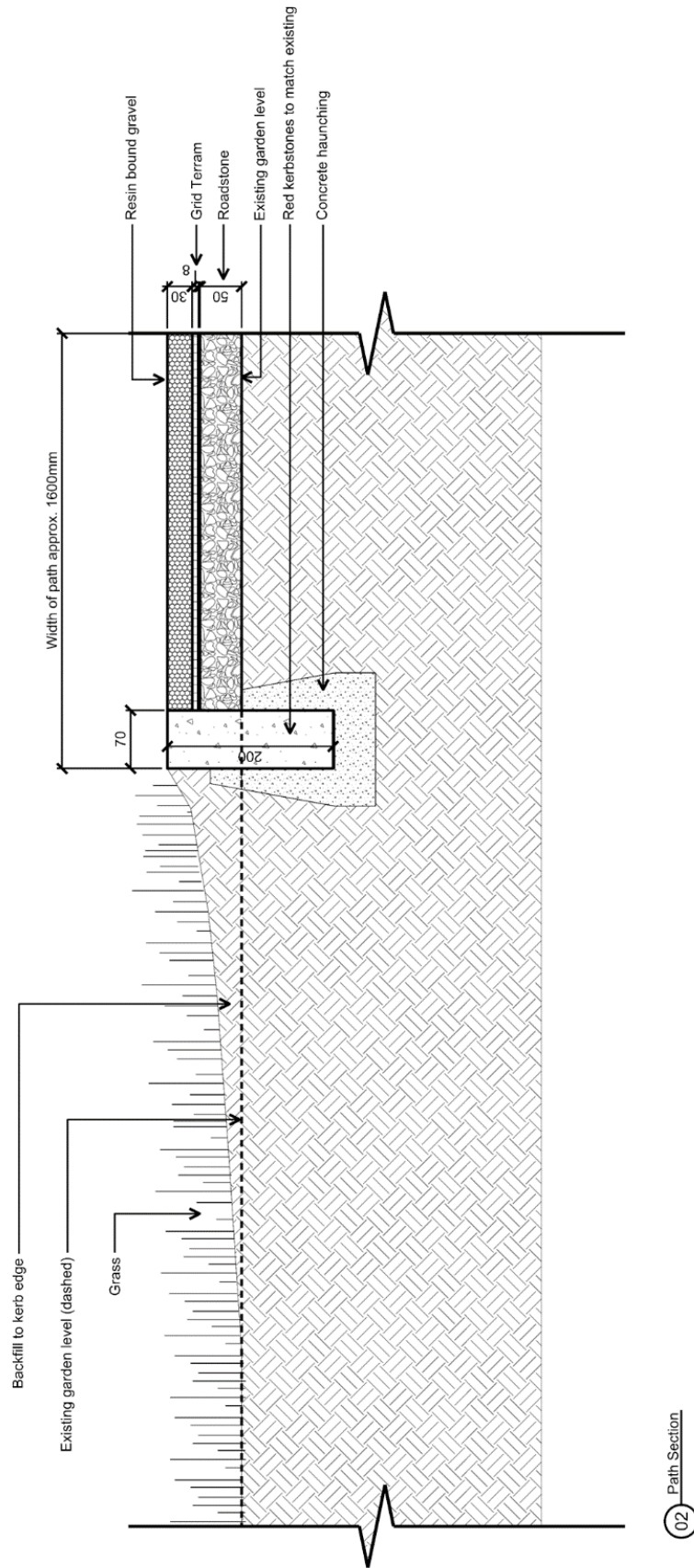


Figure 5: Section detail (not to scale)



2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

The aims of this project as defined in the approved WSI (Watson 2022) were:

- To establish the date, nature and extent of activity or occupation within the development area
- To establish the relationship of any remains found to the surrounding contemporary landscape

2.2 Methods

The methods used were as follows:

- The archaeological monitoring of all groundworks related to the development, including ground reduction, landscaping and any other ground impact.

2.3 Standards

The work conformed to the following requirements:

- The relevant sections of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2020a)
- The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (CIfA 2021)
- Current English Heritage guidelines (EH 2008, HE 2015)
- The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003)



3 Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 Although the beginnings of the modern city of St Albans can be traced to the establishment of the Saxon abbey, the history of settlement along the banks of the River Ver stretch much further back in time. By the Late Iron Age, St Albans was an important settlement, with evidence of a large population, political and ritual significance and links with a wider landscape of sites and features. During the Roman period, Verulamium, as it was called, became the third largest Roman city in Britain, straddling Watling Street, the main road from London to Chester. The abbey, founded on the supposed execution site of Alban, England's first Christian martyr, was a rich and powerful landowner until the Dissolution. St Albans was the site of two battles during the Wars of the Roses and was held by Parliamentarians throughout the Civil War. In the 18th and 19th centuries it remained an important regional market and became a manufacturing centre.

This section draws heavily from a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared on behalf of SADC for this project in 2021 (Shlasko 2021) utilising information from readily available sources, including the National Heritage List for England, the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the St Albans City and District Council Conservation Area documents (SADC 2011), previous KDK Archaeology reports, and KDK's own library. The location of the HER data is shown in Figure 6.

3.2 *Roman (AD43- c.450)*

Following the Roman invasion in AD43, the Iron Age settlement at Verlamion, on the south slopes of the Ver valley, was incorporated into the Roman world. The Roman settlement became known as Verulamium and Watling Street, one of the most important roads in Roman Britain, passed through the town on its way from London to Chester (St Albans District Council 2016). During the Boudiccan revolt of AD61 it was burnt to the ground, but it was rebuilt and it grew to become an important administrative town, the third largest city in Roman Britain. Even after Roman influence declined in the 5th century, Verulamium remained a substantial town.

Roman law required that burials take place outside settlements, and Verulamium has a number of cemeteries outside the city walls. One of these was found in the precincts of the Abbey, under the west range of the cloister and probably extending under the Abbey church (HER 14052).

One event during the Roman period was to have a lasting influence on the development of the city. Sometime in the late 3rd century, the execution of the first British Christian martyr, a man named Alban, took place on a hill to the east of the Roman town (*ibid*) and the site of his execution was to have great significance in the birth of the present town.

3.3 *Saxon (c.450-1066)*

By the end of the 5th century, Alban's grave was a place of pilgrimage, and in 793, King Offa of Mercia founded St Albans Abbey at the site of Alban's execution. The Abbey prospered during the Saxon period, controlling large areas of land around Hertfordshire. A small town was established within the Abbey walls, supplying the needs of the monks and their visitors (<https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/history/monastic-site>). However, during this period, the main settlement was located at Kingsbury, the location of which remains the subject of debate. Long thought to have been in what was later called Kingsbury, north of the river, recent scholarship has argued that the settlement was actually on the site of the Roman city



(Page 1908: 469-477; Mein 2021: pers. comm.). Wherever it was located, Kingsbury was of some considerable size, and was protected by significant earthworks (Page 1908: 469-477).

It was not until the latter part of the 10th century that the sixth abbot of St Albans, Abbot Wulsin, decided to enlarge the town surrounding the Abbey, establishing a market and attracting inhabitants by providing assistance with money and building materials to those who came. Eventually the town of St Albans eclipsed Kingsbury as the focus of local settlement (<https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/history/monastic-site>).

The proposed development is within the grounds of the Abbey and shares its history. In addition to the Saxon features associated with the abbey buildings themselves (e.g. HER 14046, HER 14053, HER 14102, & HER 14140), a hoard of 45 silver Saxon coins were found in Abbey Orchard (HER 14043). The outlying chapels of St Germain (HER 14160) and St Mary Magdalene (HER 14161) were located south of the river in what is now Verulamium Park, 240m west and 370m northwest of the proposed development site, respectively.

3.4 **Medieval (1066-1500)**

At the time of the Domesday Survey (1086), St Albans was already a large settlement. Not including the monks in residence at the abbey, there were 91 households in the manor, with 16 ploughlands and woodland for 1,000 pigs. Three mills were located on the River Ver and there was a fishery (www.opendomesday.org).

Although earlier abbots had been quarrying building materials from the ruins of the Roman city, construction of a new Abbey church did not begin until 1077, under Abbot Paul de Caen. Building continued into the 12th century. The Abbey Church is a Grade I listed building (NHLE 1103163; HER 4074). The 14th century Gatehouse is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1003523), as is the site of the conventual grounds around the church, which includes the Vintry Gardens (NHLE 1003526). During the medieval period, St Albans Abbey dominated the town and played an important local, national and international role.

The abbey church was surrounded by an array of buildings, gardens, burial grounds and workshops, extending down the hill towards the river in the area now known as Abbey Orchards. The abbey drains, consisting of passageways with stone floors and arched roofing, have been traced running down the hill (HER 14075).

The abbey precincts were defined by a wall that served to mark the boundaries of the holy precinct and as a defence against the townfolk. The original wall was probably stone, but the wall was rebuilt in the mid-14th century, part in stone and part as clay banks. The line of the perimeter wall is probably east of the Vintry Gardens (Saunders & Havercroft 1978: 26).

3.5 **Post-Medieval (1500-1900)**

In 1539, the abbey was dissolved and most of the monastic buildings were torn down. The church was purchased by the townspeople and was used as a parish church until it became a cathedral in 1877 (<https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/the-history-of-st-albans-cathedral>).

Despite the loss of the abbey, St Albans was still a large and significant town. It was granted a charter in 1553, which included the right to hold twice weekly markets, and gradually developed a number of industries, including straw hat manufacturing (Page 1908: 477-483).



A major source of the town's wealth was generated by servicing the coaching trade during the early 18th to mid-19th century (BEAMS 2012: 6) as it was a major thoroughfare for up to seventy coaches a day en-route between the Midlands and the North West (Rouse 2009). The scale of this trade may be gauged from the establishment of 16 inns along Holywell Hill during the heyday of the coaching period (Smith & North 2003: 5). However, few of the inns in the area survived the technological and economic developments of the 19th and 20th centuries and eventually Holywell Hill was supplanted as the main entry into town from London by the New London Road (www.stalbans.gov.uk).

In 1877 St Albans was awarded a Royal Charter conferring the status of City on the town and the Abbey Church became a Cathedral (Wilcox 2009).

3.6 *The Known Archaeology & History of the Site*

The early history of the site remains little known. Previous archaeological investigations have recovered very little prehistoric material, although small amounts of possible Mesolithic flint have been found in archaeological investigations (e.g. Saunders & Havercroft 1978: 33). The same assemblage contained small quantities of Roman tile (*ibid*: 32), although given the amount of Roman tile quarried from Verulamium and used in the construction of the cathedral, this is not surprising.

What is known about the early history of the site has been reconstructed from Abbey records, in some cases confirmed through archaeology. This area, directly to the northeast of the church, was within the Abbey walls and is included in the Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1003526). Documents suggest that before the 14th century, this area was part of the monks' cemetery (Niblett & Thompson 2005: 251). A trench excavated in 1974, in the southwest corner of Vintry Garden, found nine burials and disarticulated human bone (Saunders & Havercroft 1978: 27). Disarticulated human remains were also found prior to garden renovations in 2003 (EHT 5200).

The documentary records suggest that the use of the site changed in the 14th century, when Abbot Hugh de Eversden (1308-1326) levelled the cemetery and built the Lady Chapel, to the south of Vintry Garden (Niblett & Thompson 2005: 251). Evidence for ground reduction and levelling, seen in the 1974 excavations, corroborates this chronology (Saunders & Havercroft 1978: 27-28).

Once the cemetery was cleared, the site became a vineyard, known as Vintry by the 15th century (Niblett & Thompson 2005:251). Following the Dissolution, the site was donated to Sopwell Nunnery (HER 12071).

At some point, the site became attached to No. 3 High Street, built in the early 18th century for Thomas Cox (Morris 2018: 43). In the 1730s, the Cox family sold the house and the gardens to Joshua Pembroke. At the time, the gardens were said to be newly planted with fruit trees and encircled by a brick walk (*ibid*: 49).

The next owner of the garden was a local attorney named John Cowper, who purchased the property in 1786. When he died in 1805, the house was again put up for sale, with its 'extensive pleasure ground and garden, part inclosed with walling and clothed and planted with an abundance of fruit trees...' The property was purchased by Cowper's nephew, John Samuel Story, also an attorney (*ibid*: 49).



Story ran a bank out of No. 3 High Street, but after he died a bankrupt, having embezzled money from the bank (Evans 1850: 240-247), the house and garden were sold to Thomas Ward Blagg, himself a known embezzler (Langsdale 2018). When Blagg died in 1875, No. 3 was purchased by Marten Call and Company, which had taken over the business of the Unity Joint Stock bank. The bank's principal, George Nisbet Marten, moved into No. 3 and ran the bank, moving out in 1889 (Morris 2018: 51).

Prior to the late 19th century, the path from the High Street to the Abbey Orchard ran straight from Waxhouse Gate to Sumpter's Yard, passing between the cathedral and the Lady Chapel, which formed a separate building. In 1878, the two parts of the church were joined and the path was diverted around the east end of the chapel, necessitating the demolition of part of the garden wall and the construction of the wall that exists today. Despite this, the Vintry Garden walls are Grade II listed (NHLE 1173243).

After George Nisbet Marten moved out, the bank manager, Charles Harris, moved in. He lived there until the bank was taken over by Barclays in 1902. In 1917, a new bank manager described the garden, saying that there were the remains of a peach house and a vine house with underfloor heating, but that they were in bad condition and had to be pulled down (Morris 2018: 51-52).

Barclays continued to use the garden for events and recreation but worked out an arrangement with the Council, and Vintry Gardens was opened to the public in the late 1970s (HER 12071).

In 1985, a memorial oak was planted in Vintry Garden in memory of five children and a teacher who were tragically killed in a coach accident during a sports trip in France. A plaque was also placed near the tree. This has since been replaced by an inscribed granite block.



Figure 6: HER data plan (scale 1:2,500)



4 Results

An area encompassing c.57.80 square metres was excavated under constant archaeological supervision (Fig 7: Plate 1-2). The ground reduction was undertaken using a 0.5tonne mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m toothless ditching bucket. No ground reduction was undertaken to the north of the proposed pathway as the area was already at the required depth due to natural erosion. Impact on the ground was minimal with the excavation being up to 100mm in depth (Fig 8: Plate 3). Due to this only the topsoil was encountered, which comprised a mid-brownish grey, friable, slightly clayey silty sand. Modern debris including CBM, pottery and glass and aluminium were noted within this layer.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance was encountered and the modern detritus collected from the topsoil was not retained.

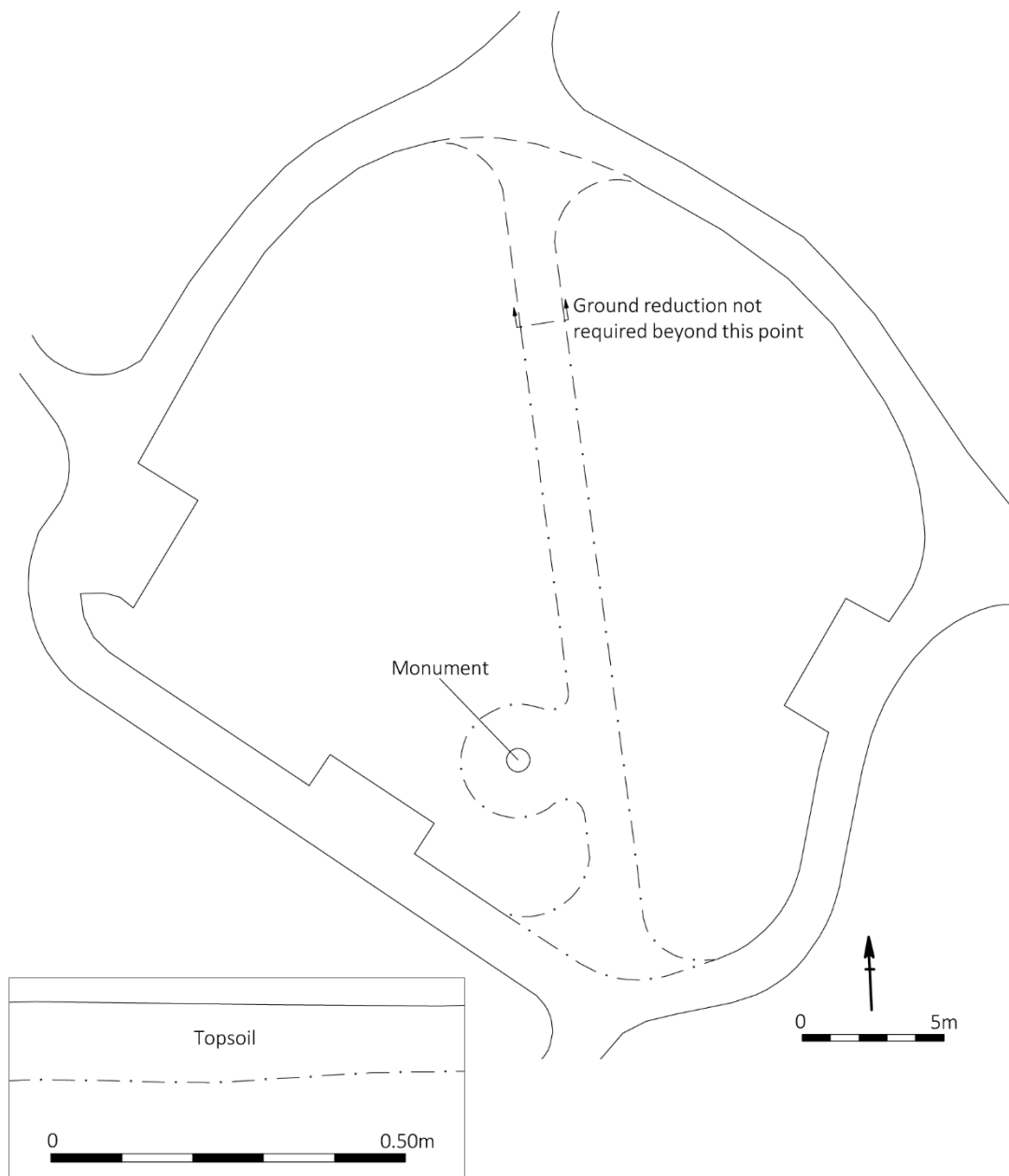


Figure 7: Groundworks plan (scale 1:250) & representative section (not to scale)



Plate 1: Ground reduction, looking north



Plate 2: Ground reduction around the monument, looking north



Plate 3: Site stratigraphy, looking west



5 Conclusions

The development is situated within an area of high archaeological potential but due to the depth of the excavation no finds, features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered.

Due to the lack of archaeological material on the site, on this occasion it has not been possible to advance the stated local or regional research aims.



6 Acknowledgements

KDK Archaeology is grateful to the St Albans City and District Council for commissioning this report. Thanks are also due to the Hertfordshire HER for providing historic environment records and other relevant documents and to Jack Davis of St Albans City and District Council for monitoring the project.

The fieldwork was carried out by Laura Dodd MSc ACIfA. The report was written by Laura Dodd, and edited by Karin Kaye MA MCIfA.



7 Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Written Scheme of Investigation
2. Initial report
3. Monitoring sheets
4. Site drawings
5. Client's site plans
6. List of photographs
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with St Albans Museum. The digital archive for this project will be uploaded to OASIS.



8 References

Standards & Specifications

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Appendix 1: Photograph List

Shot	View	Subject
1	N	Ground reduction
2	N	Ground reduction around the monument
3	W	Site stratigraphy



Appendix 2: OASIS and Site Data

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name & Address	Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire	Project Site Code	672/SAVG
OASIS reference	kdkarcha1-504426	Event/Accession no	VGA22
OS reference	TL 14620 07024	Study area size	72.75 sq m
Project Type	Observation and Recording	Height (mAOD)	112
Short Description	<p>In March 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire in order to fulfil a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (Ref: S00242256). The development involved the installation of a paved footpath to formalise an existing eroded track across the main lawn and around a memorial stone.</p> <p>Minimal ground reduction was required during this programme of works and excavations did not go below the topsoil layer. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were encountered and artefacts from the topsoil layer were all modern.</p>		
Previous work	HIA	Site status	Scheduled monument NHLE 1003526
Planning proposal	Pave new footpath	Current land use	Public garden
Local Planning Authority	St Albans City and District Council	SM Consent	S00242256
Monument type	None	Monument period	None
Significant finds	None	Future work	No
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation	KDK Archaeology Ltd		
Project Brief originator	-	Project Design originator	KDK Archaeology Ltd
Project Manager	Karin Kaye	Director/Supervisor	Laura Dodd
Sponsor/funding body	St Albans City and District Council		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date	14.03.2022	End date	15.03.2022
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical	St Albans Museum & OASIS	None	
Paper		Report, WSI, Sketch sheet, photographs	
Digital		Report, Photographs	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title	Archaeological Observation and Recording Report: Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire		
Serial title & volume	672/SAVG/2.1		
Author(s)	Laura Dodd		
Page no's	22	Date	16.03.2022



Appendix 3: Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record Sheet

Site name and address: Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire	
County: Hertfordshire	District: St Albans
Village/Town: St Albans	Parish: St Albans
Planning application reference: Scheduled Monument Consent S00242256	
Client's name, address, & tel. no: St Albans City and District Council Civic Centre, St Peter's Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3JE	
Nature of application: Pave new footpath	
Present land use: Public garden	
Size of application area: 72.75sq m	Size of area investigated: 72.75sq m
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 14620 07024	Site code: 672/SAVG
Site director: Laura Dodd	Organization: KDK Archaeology Ltd
Type of work: Observation and Recording	
Date of Work: Start: 14.03.2022	Finish: 15.03.2022
Curating museum: St Albans Museum	
Related HER no's: NHLE 1003526	Periods represented: None
Relevant previous summaries/reports: Shlasko E. 2021. <i>Heritage Asset Impact Assessment, Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire</i> . KDK Library Ref: 635/SAVG	
<p>Summary of fieldwork results: In March 2022 KDK Archaeology Ltd undertook a programme of Observation and Recording at Vintry Gardens, St Albans, Hertfordshire at the request of Historic England as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent (Ref: S00242256). The development involved the installation of a paved footpath to formalise an existing eroded track across the main lawn. The new footpath also extends to encompass a memorial stone.</p> <p>Minimal ground reduction was required during this programme of works and excavations did not go below the topsoil layer. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were encountered and artefacts recovered from the topsoil layer were modern.</p>	
Author: Laura Dodd MSc ACiFA	Date: 16.03.2022