

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

WATCHING BRIEF: 40 HOLYWELL HILL ST ALBANS HERTFORDSHIRE

on behalf of Mr and Mrs D Foxton



Jonathan R Hunn BA PhD MIFA

February 2007

ASC: 850/SHH/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	SHH	<i>Project no:</i>	850
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	St Albans		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Unparished (formerly St Andrews)		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 1461 0693		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	7.5m x 5.0m		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Access and planting		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Construction of new access and alterations to retaining boundary wall		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	St Albans District Council		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	5/06/0007		
<i>Client:</i>	Mr & Mrs D Foxton 40 Holywell Hill St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1BX		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Mr S. Skanski (Cannon, Morgan & Rheinberg Partnership)		

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Jonathan R. Hunn	<i>Date:</i>	22 nd Feb 2007
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<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:5,000)

Summary

In mid February 2007 a widening of the access track to no. 40 Holywell Hill and the excavation of an associated foundation for a retaining wall was observed. The depth and character of the soils were indicative of the deliberate infilling of the ground for the purposes of levelling the terrain. According to the associated finds the dating of this activity is probably sometime during the 19th century. Nothing predating this period was observed.

1 Introduction

1.1 In February 2007 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at 40 Holywell Hill (NGR TL 1461 0693: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Mr S. Skanski of *Cannon, Morgan & Rheinberg Partnership* on behalf of the clients, Mr and Mrs Foxton, and was carried out according to a project design prepared by ASC (850/SHH/1), and a brief (West 2006) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *St Albans District Authority*, by their archaeological advisor (AA). The relevant planning application reference is 5/06/0007.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This watching brief has been required as a planning condition under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), in response to proposals for the construction of an improved access and retaining wall to 40 Holywell Hill, St Albans.

1.3 *Location*

The site is located at 40 Holywell Hill, St Albans. It is in the city centre, adjacent to the Abbey, and is centred on National Grid Reference TL 1461 0693 (Fig. 1). It is situated on the west side of Holywell Hill and comprises a rectangular shaped area of land measuring c.7.5 x 5.0m. The site currently provides access to buildings on Holywell Hill.

1.4 *Description*

The site is situated on the west hand side of the access track to 40 Holywell Hill. The track slopes up from the street frontage and then after some 20m turns 90 degrees to the north, passing by brick walls on either side. It is on the left hand or western side where the access route is being widened. At this point the western brick boundary is acting as a retaining wall with the access being in what is, in effect, a sunken lane. To the east lies a boundary wall, while to the west is the garden to the present dwelling.

1.5 *Geology & Topography*

The site is in an urban area and the natural undisturbed soils may not survive. If the soil is undisturbed it will comprise the *Hornbeam 3 Association*, mainly deep fine loams and clayey soils over chalky till (Soil Survey 1983, 582d). The site is on a slope that falls away to the south, and it lies at an elevation of c.109m OD.

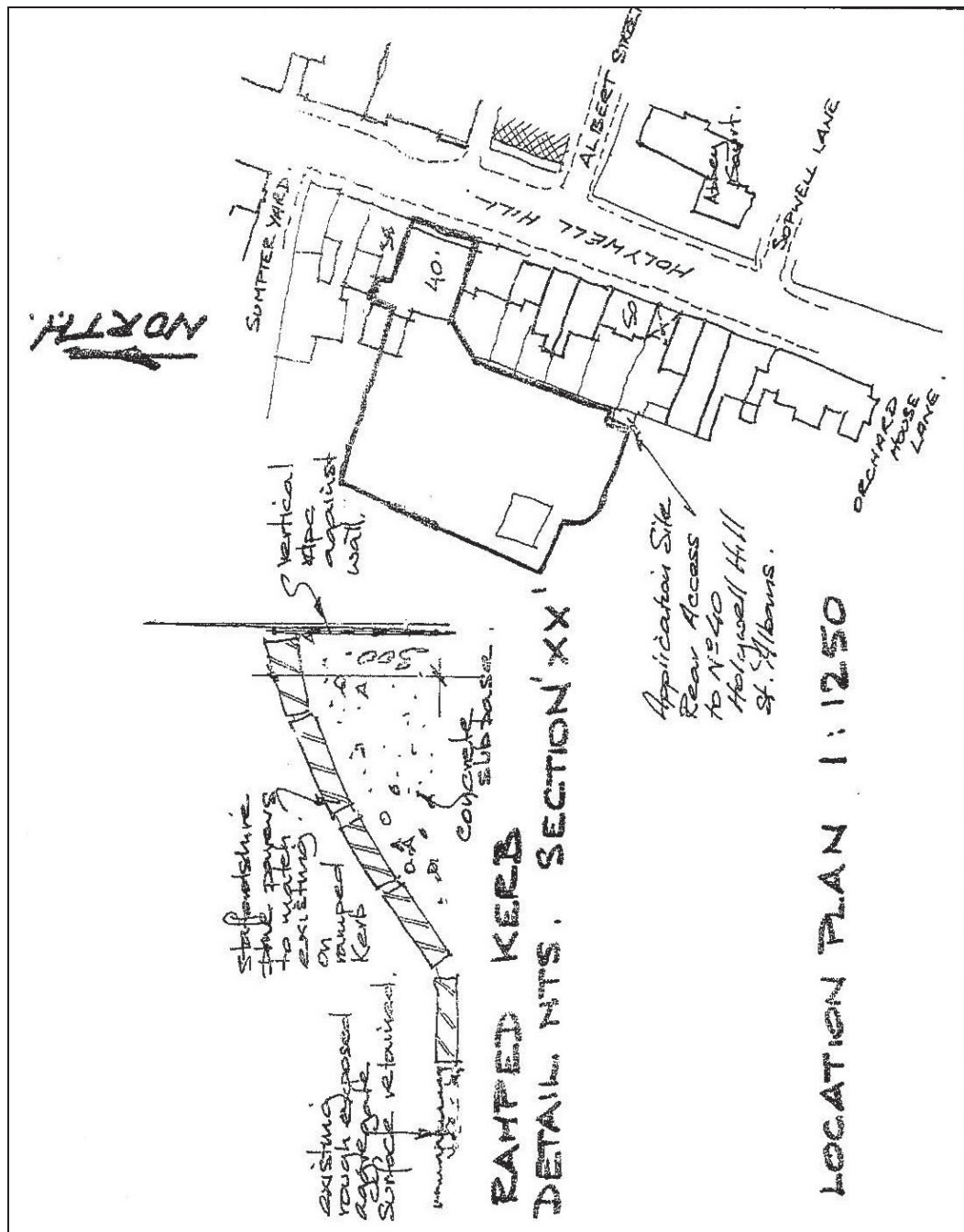


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1,250)

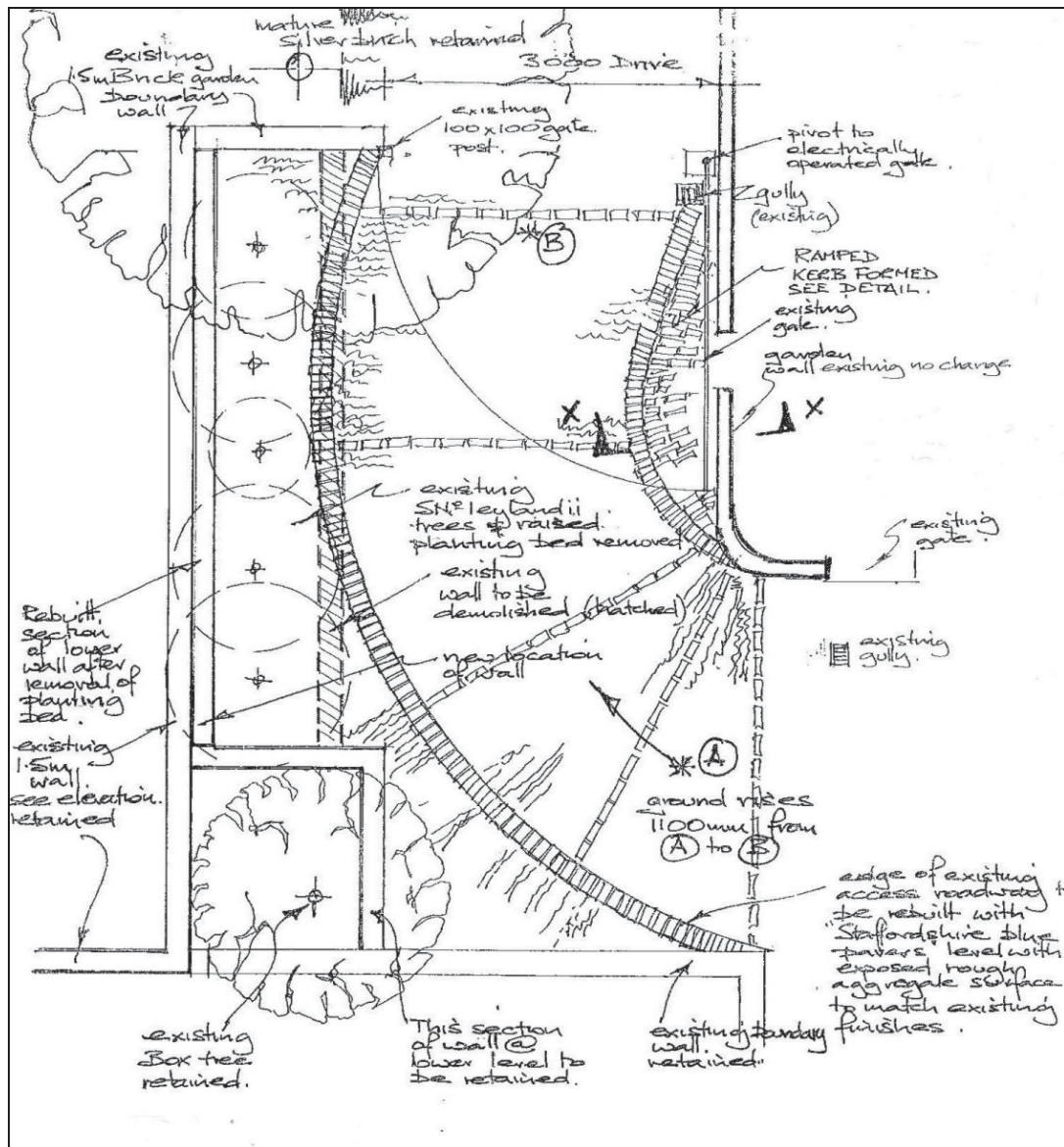


Figure 3: Plan of development (not to scale)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 6), the aims of the watching brief were:

- To allow the “preservation by record of archaeological deposits”.
- To fully record archaeological deposits and all associated artefacts in the area affected by the development.
- To record and analyze evidence for the past environment of the site revealed during the investigation.
- To record and analyze any wall/walls as revealed during groundworks.

2.2 Standards

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists’ *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC’s own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 9), which required:

- The full monitoring of groundworks.
- The full recording of any archaeological deposits uncovered with measured drawings, photographs, and written descriptions.
- Where appropriate, the recovery, conservation and storage of artefacts and ecofacts.
- The investigation and recording of both archaeological and environmental remains.

2.4 Constraints

There were no constraints encountered during this project.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 St Albans lies within an area of considerable archaeological and historical importance (Wheeler & Wheeler 1935, Niblett 1995, Niblett 1999, Niblett & Thompson 2005, Stead & Rigby 1989). The site is situated in the historic city centre and the focus of interest lies in the Saxon and medieval periods.
- 3.2 The area was of importance during the prehistoric periods and a number of prehistoric artefacts have been recorded in the city centre. During the Iron Age, settlement was dominated by the *oppidum* at Prae Wood, c.2km west of the site (Wheeler & Wheeler 1935). A number of high status burials of this period have been recorded in and around the present city, for example at Folly Lane (Niblett 1999).
- 3.3 The area immediately to the west of the present city was occupied during the Roman period. A Roman fort may have been present in the first century AD and a major Roman city known as *Verulamium* subsequently developed in the area (Niblett 1995). A cemetery of this period has been found within the Abbey grounds (SMR 6744).
- 3.4 During the Saxon period, the focus of settlement shifted from the Roman city and development focussed on higher ground to the east of the Roman settlement. Little is known in detail of the early Saxon settlement, but an abbey is reputed to have been founded by *Offa* in c.793. The present building dates from the 11th century, as a Benedictine monastery. The city is mentioned in the Domesday Survey, referred to as *Villa Sancti Albani*.
- 3.5 Holywell Hill probably developed during the Saxon or medieval periods and the centre of the medieval settlement was located north of the abbey. The site is situated on the west side of Holywell Hill. It is likely that medieval period buildings may have fronted onto the street, but the majority of the present buildings are post-medieval and later. The land to the rear of the buildings offers the potential to reveal evidence of medieval backyard activity (pits, timber buildings, etc.).

4 Results

- 4.1 Following the demolition of a portion of the western retaining wall to the existing access track a 1m wide by c.5m long and 1.6m deep area was excavated (Plate 1 and cover photo).
- 4.2 This exposed a continuous soil section (Plates 3 & 4; Appendix 1). At first glance the soils looked much the same, being composed of mainly a very dark brown sandy loam. However, on closer inspection it was possible to discern subtle differences within the exposed soil profile. Four contexts were identified:
1. A very dark brown topsoil some 0.3m thick.
 2. A dark brown orange sandy clay 0.2m thick.
 3. A friable earthy brown soil (buried topsoil) containing flecks of chalk, coal, pottery, tile and occasional animal bone.
 4. Chalky rubble.
- 4.3 The pottery from [3] consisted of two sherds of glazed, willow pattern type chinaware.
- 4.4 No pre 19th-century finds were observed, nor were any features noted.



Plate 1: General setting of the present excavation looking east



Plate 2: The grounds of no. 40 looking north



Plate 3: South section of excavation



Plate 4: View of soil horizons looking west

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The observations confirmed that there was little significant impact on the underlying archaeology of the area. Furthermore, they established that the southern part of the gardens belonging to 40 Holywell Hill had been substantially built up in the past. The purpose of this was almost certainly to create a level area for the garden (Fig. 4). In contrast, the northern end of the garden is more likely to have been truncated, though to what extent remains uncertain (Plate 2).
- 5.2 The precise dating for the levelling of the garden area is not certain. However, to judge from the ceramic evidence a 19th-century date seems the most probable.
- 5.3 The exact position of the abbey precinct wall along Holywell Street has never been established with any certainty. The mid 14th-century account of Thomas de la Mare, abbot of St Albans, construction of a new wall gives precise dimensions for the tenement plots fronting onto the High Street (Riley 1869, 186-92). There are five properties mentioned along Holywell Street whose dimensions are somewhat more ambiguous in relation to the street frontage. At present there does seem to be a disparity between Fowler's conjectured wall on the High Street (Niblett & Thompson 2005, fig. 7.2 opp. 199) and the dimension quoted in the *Gesta Abbatum* (Riley 1869, 188). Nevertheless, both on the grounds of boundary continuation and topographical survival a case can be made to support Fowler's interpretation (Niblett & Thompson 2005, fig. 7.2 opp. 199). According to Fowler's plan (*ibid.*) the 14th-century precinct wall was about 70ft (21.3m) from Holywell Street. If this was so then the rebuilding of the present retaining wall on the western side of the access into no.40 cannot be very far away from the course of 14th-century monastic wall.

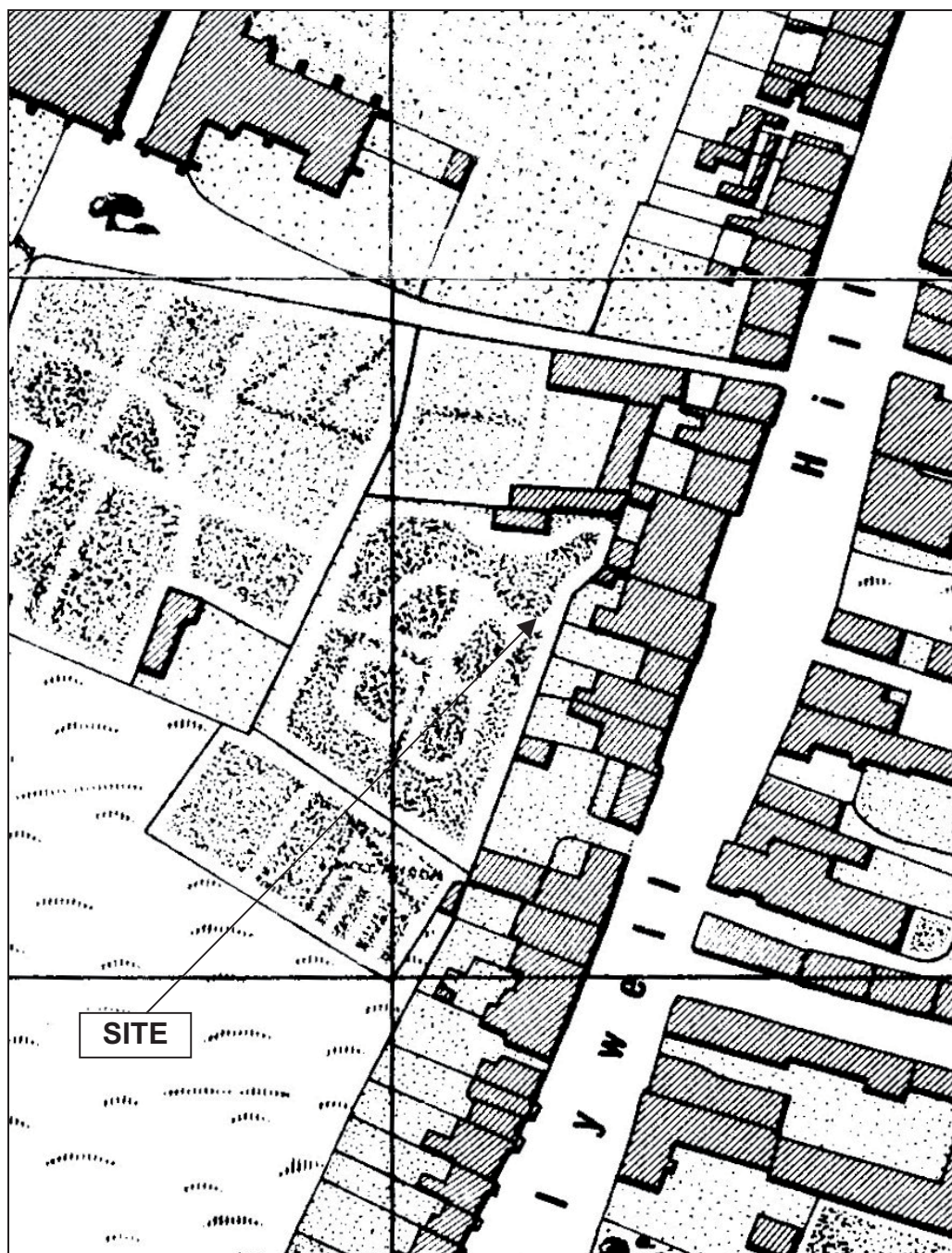


Figure 4: Detail of area in c. 1820 (SHAAS 1982)

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Mr S. Skanski commissioned this report who on behalf of the clients, Mr and Mrs D. Foxton. Thanks are due to the contractor, Steve Browning, for his cooperation and to the planning archaeologist, Simon West, for his advice. Finally, the author would like to acknowledge the help of Caroline Barclay who compiled the project design and Bob Zeepvat for editing the report.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Clients site plans
4. Site Monitoring Sheets
5. List of photographs
6. B/W prints & negatives
7. CDRom with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with St Albans Museum

8. References

Standards & Specifications

- ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper **14**.
- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition. English Heritage (London).
- IFA 2000 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.
- MGC 1992 *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections*. Museums and Galleries Commission (London).
- Walker, K. 1990: *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*. United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, Archaeology Section (London).
- West, S. 2006 *Brief for the Archaeological Recording at 40 Holywell Hill, St Albans*

Secondary Sources

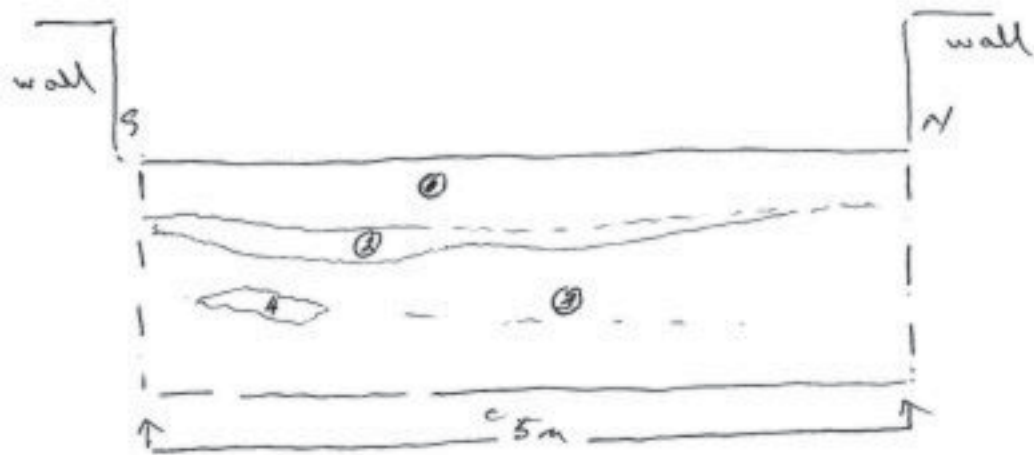
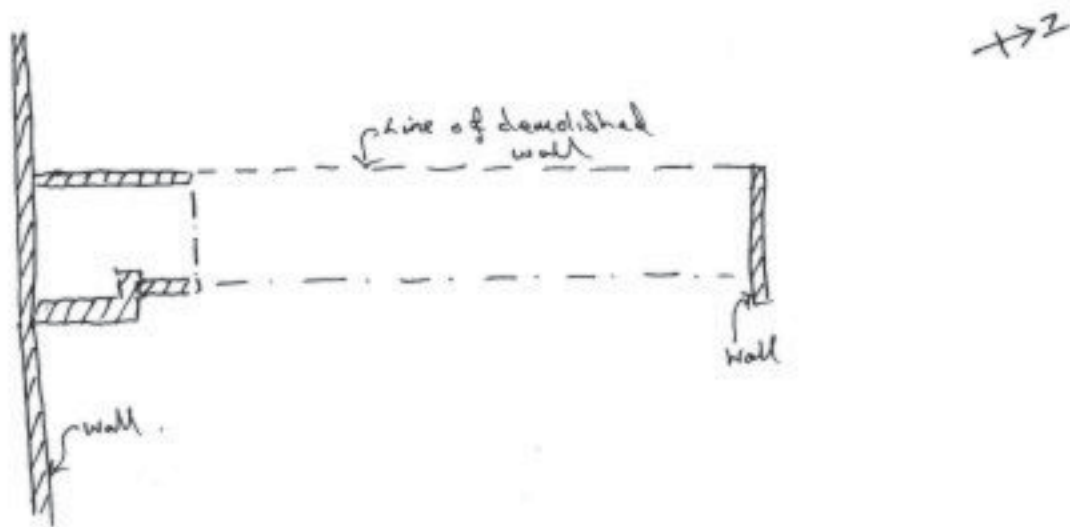
- Niblett, R. 1995 *Roman Hertfordshire* Dovecote Press Dorset
- Niblett, R 1999 *The Excavation of a Ceremonial Site at Folly Lane, Verulamium* Britannia Monograph **14** Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
- Niblett, R, & Thompson I, 2005 *Alban's Buried Town: an assessment of St Albans archaeology up to AD 1600*. Oxbow Books (Oxford).
- Riley, H.T. (ed) 1869 Gesta Abbatum Monasterii S. Albani. Vol III Rolls Series. London.
- SHAAS 1982: *St Albans c.1820. The Town*. St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archaeological Society.
- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpندن).
- Stead, I. M. & Rigby, V. 1989 *Verulamium: The King Harry Site* English Heritage Archaeological Report **12**
- Wheeler, R. E. M. & Wheeler, T. V. 1935 *Verulamium, a Belgic and Two Roman Cities* Research Report of the Society of Antiquaries of London **11**

Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD	
Project: 40, Holywell Hill St Albans		Project No/Code: 850/SHH	Sheet: 1 of 1
Client/Developer: Mrs & Mrs Fenton		Date of visit: 15/2/07	
Contact: Steve Browning		Phone: 07710-098744	
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: 10.50am	Finish:	
Completed by: SRH			
Development Type:			
Footings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Services	Roads	Levelling
			Quarrying
			Pipelines
			Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dmg and Sunny - mild.			
Observations:			
Observed a c. 5m length of excavation. It was about 1m wide and 1.6m deep (below upper garden level). The exposed section consisted of mainly undisturbed dark brown loam soil with occasional inclusions of chalk, flint, brick, tile, animal bone & oyster shells + pottery of late 18th/19th (without pattern china). The wall that has been taken down is relatively modern bonded with a hard yellowish mortar with a variety of different sized bricks (handmade).			
Comments:			
Almost entirely made up ground - built in 19th or 20th century.			

For sketch plan, use reverse

©ASC, 2003



- ① Dark brown loam 0.3m thick
- ② Dark brown orange sandy clay 0.2m thick
- ③ Finely earthy brown soil with patches of rubble & tile etc + coal flecks
- ④ rubble rubble

Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME: 40, Holywell Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire				SITE NO/CODE: 850/SHH
Shot	B&W	Slide	Digital	Subject
1			0132	View ESE across southern end of excavated area
2			0133	General setting of present excavation looking east
3			0134	The grounds of no. 40, Holywell Street looking north
4			0135	View NW across present excavation towards St Albans abbey
5			0136	View east towards entrance from Holywell Street
6			0137	View of soil horizons looking west
7			0138	South section of excavation
8			0139	Detail of main N-S section
9			0140	Setting of the present excavation in relation to the abbey
10	1			General view of the site looking west
11	2			View of wall foundation looking west
12	3			Detail of wall foundation looking west

Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	No. 40 Holywell Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire		
Short Description:	<i>In mid February 2007 a widening of the access track to no. 40, Holywell Hill and associated foundation to a retaining wall was observed on behalf of Mr and Mrs Foxton. The c. 1.6m depth and character of the soils were indicative of the deliberate infilling of the ground for the purposes of levelling the terrain. According to the associated finds the dating of this activity is probably sometime during the 19th century. Nothing predating this period was observed.</i>		
Project Type:	WB		
Site status: (eg. none, SAM, Listed)	Curtilage of listed building	Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	none
Current land use:	residential	Future work: (yes / no / unknown)	no
Monument type:	N/a	Monument period:	N/a
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	None other than 19 th century chinaware		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 1461 0693
District:	St Albans District	Parish:	St Andrews (formerly)
Site address: (with postcode if known)	40 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 1BX		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	c. 5 sq m	Height OD: (metres)	c.109m
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	S. West, St Albans DC	Project design originator:	ASC Ltd
Project Manager:	D. Fell	Director/Supervisor:	J.R. Hunn
Sponsor / funding body:	Mr & Mrs D. Foxton		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	15/2/07	End date:	15/2/07
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:		none	
Paper:	St Albans Museum	1 box file	
Digital:	St Albans Museum	CD (in box file)	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	Watching Brief: 40 Holywell Hill, St Albans, Hertfordshire. ASC ref 850/SHH/2		
Author(s):	J.R. Hunn		
Page nos	N/a	Date:	22 nd Feb 2007

Appendix 4: SMR Summary Sheet

Site name and address: 40 Holywell Hill St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1BX		
County: Herts		District: St Albans
Village/Town: St Albans		Parish: formerly St Andrews
Planning application reference: 5/06/0007		
Client name, address, & tel. no: Mr & Mrs D Foxton 40 Holywell Hill St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1BX		
Nature of application: remodelling access route		
Present land use: residential / garden		
Size of application area: n/a		Size of area investigated: n/a
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 1461 0693		Site code: 850/SHH
Site director/Organization: J.R. Hunn/ASC Ltd		
Type of work: watching brief		
Date of work:	Start: 15/2/07	Finish: 15/2/07
Curating museum: St Albans Museum		
Related SMR nos: n/a		Periods represented: 19 th C.
Relevant previous summaries/reports none		
Summary of fieldwork results: <i>In mid February 2007 a widening of the access track to no. 40 Holywell Hill and associated foundation to a retaining wall was observed. The depth and character of the soils were indicative of the deliberate infilling of the ground for the purposes of levelling the terrain. According to the associated finds the dating of this activity is probably sometime during the 19th century. Nothing predating this period was observed.</i>		
Author: J.R. Hunn		Date: 22 nd Feb 2007