

14 Holywell

Exploring Abergavenny



EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY

For several years the Abergavenny and District Civic Society has been studying the streets, spaces and buildings of Abergavenny and Mardy outside the town centre. This process is known as 'characterisation', defined by the Welsh Government as 'capturing the local distinctiveness by identifying how places have been shaped over time.'

This record of what makes each part of the town distinctive, and often rather special, increases our awareness of the qualities that need to be considered and respected when new development is proposed. We hope that the planning authority will share our impressions and take account of our views. We also hope that our studies will increase residents' understanding and appreciation of their town, encouraging them to take an active interest in how change is managed in the future, or to conduct more research into aspects of the town's development.

The survey started in partnership with the Civic Trust for Wales as a pilot project to test whether community groups could carry out urban characterisation. The outcome was the Trust's *Exploring your town* manual and toolkit (2013). A County Council conservation area appraisal adopted in 2016 has also been taken into account, and this also covers the town's commercial centre¹.

We have divided the town into thirty-six character areas. This report presents the history and character of one of those areas.

Now we would like *your* contribution:

- *Have we made any mistakes?*
- *Can you add to the history of the area?*

- *Do you agree with our impressions of the area?*
- *What have we missed that should have been recorded?*

All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

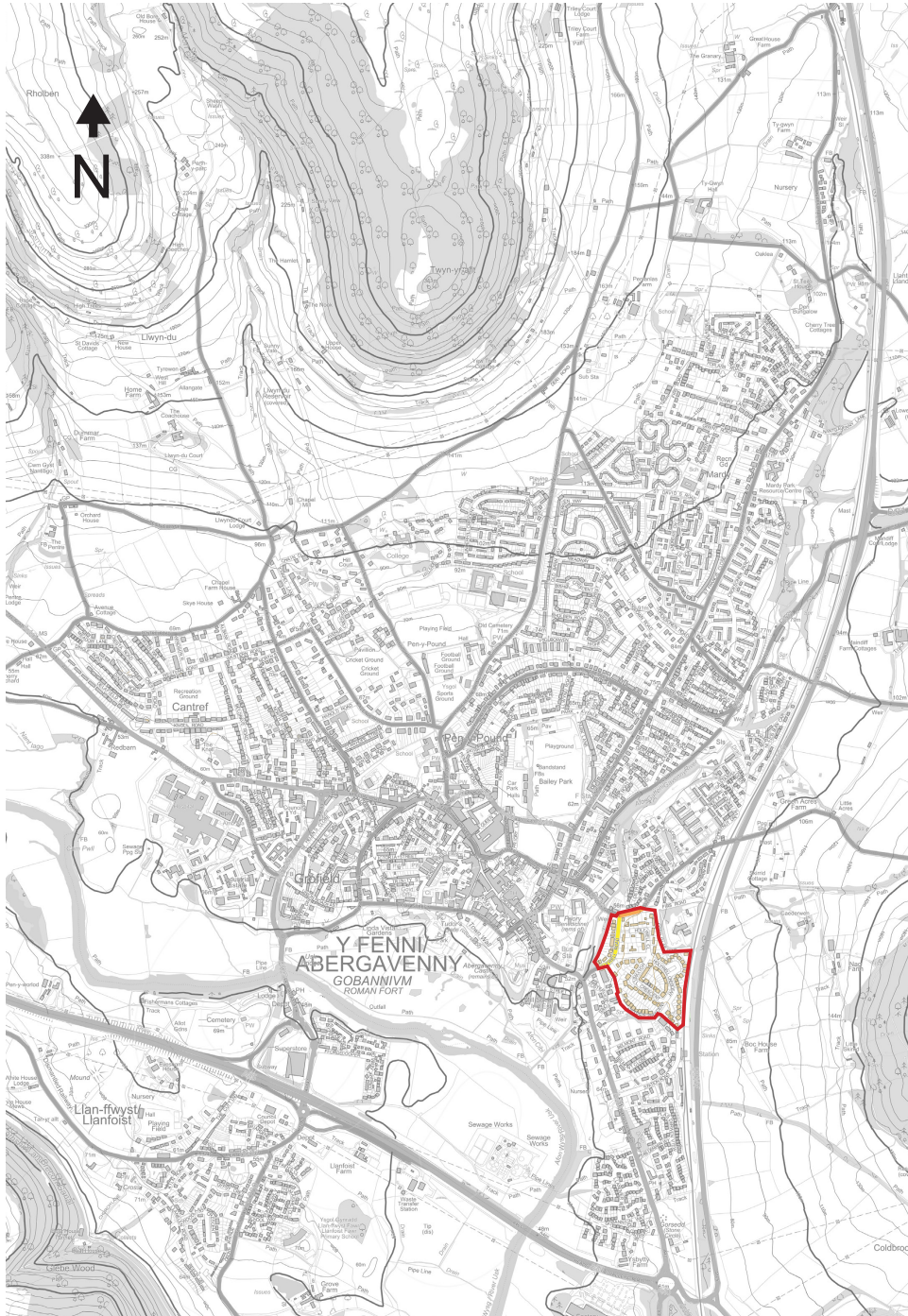
Acknowledgements and copyright information

The Society is especially grateful for the survey contributions of Clive Bransom, Dick Cole, Tony Konieczny, Nigel Patterson, Anna Petts, Duncan Rogers and Jay Shipley. Dick Cole has carried out much of the research and final report writing, and accepts responsibility for any errors. None of the team had prior experience of heritage studies; all have learned much from the project.

We also thank Anna Lermont and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

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¹ <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/abergavenny-conservation-area-appraisal>



HOLYWELL

THIS IS A HOUSING AREA between the Gavenny river and the railway, and between the old and new Monmouth Roads.

Exceptional wide views, well-spaced and well-maintained white houses on good roads and the absence of garden trees characterise this part of the town. In detail, not everywhere enjoys the views; many of the houses, especially the bungalows, are not white or even cream; many of the original spaces between houses





Figure 2: View from the top

have been built upon; and there are mature tree belts nearby. But much of the area probably retains most of its original appeal.

Historical Background

Holywell Road is on the line of an ancient lane joining the old Monmouth Road with its successor and the Mill Street entry to the town. Apart from a public house on the corner of Lower Monk Street and Holywell Road, the area was fields until development began in the 1930s. A 1932 aerial photograph shows no sign of development in the area but there is map evidence that there were some houses on the western side of Holywell Road by 1939. Dating the remainder of the development is less easy. The 1953 County Development Plan indicates that in 1950 there were 16 completed houses on the western side of Holywell Road, that all but four of the houses provided for police officers opposite and in Holywell Road East and Holywell Close had been built, and that the remainder of the area (mainly Holywell and Belmont Crescents) was allocated for 75 homes

Key to map

Conservation area boundary



Listed Building



Building of special local interest



Building of local interest



Metal railings



Local landmark building



Good sense of place



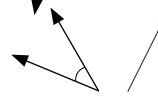
Terminated street view



Deflected street view



Vista, long view



Visual pinch point



Building rhythm



Important walling



Important trees or shrubs



Important hedges



Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis

to be built. There are now nearly 100 houses in the latter area. Almost all those in Holywell Crescent are pre-war in style, but seem to have been built in the 1950s.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

Holywell Road is just below 60m above sea level, dropping sharply at each end to join the roads that cross the Gavenny. The ground continues to rise quite steeply to the east until the 70m contour is reached, then a lesser rise to the railway. An incised, densely wooded stream from the lower slopes of Ysgyryd Fach marks the southern boundary of the area, overlooked by Belmont Crescent.

The most outstanding quality of the higher parts of area is the views that at best virtually extend through 270 degrees from the Blorenge to the Ysgyryd Fach, with clear views of the Town Hall, St Mary's and St John's towers, and the Castle in the foreground. These prospects are perhaps the best in the town.

Another striking feature is the green in the south-east of the area. This follows the line of a long-lost field boundary, watercourse and path, and the mature trees are probably survivals from the field boundary, which disappeared in the mid 19th century. 'Missing' nos 49 and 50 Holywell Crescent suggest a past intention to build above the watercourse. Bungalows at the top of the area face another grass area, but it lacks trees. Most of the Crescent also has grass verges as well as footways, a rare feature in Abergavenny, and there is a green footpath link between the Close and Holywell Road, where the houses on the eastern side have a neat grass bank between their hedges and the footway.

With the Gavenny as the area's boundary, it includes the grassed area and trees on the river's eastern bank, part of Swan Meadow.

A public path of ancient origin cuts through the top of the area, connecting Coed Glas Lane with the Crescent and thence across the railway and A465 to the slopes of Ysgyryd Fach. There is also an important path connection in the south east corner to the railway station yard.

Holywell Road is 6-7m wide with a building line about 5m behind the footway. The roads elsewhere are not particularly wide, but the footways and verges together with a building line at about 7m from the highway, give the estate section a very spacious feeling. Facing houses are about 25m apart. Recycled plastic kerbs are an unusual feature of one part of the estate.

Holywell Road has become a well used 'rat run' for traffic wanting to avoid the 90 degree bend of the trunk road at the Cross Street/Monk Street junction.

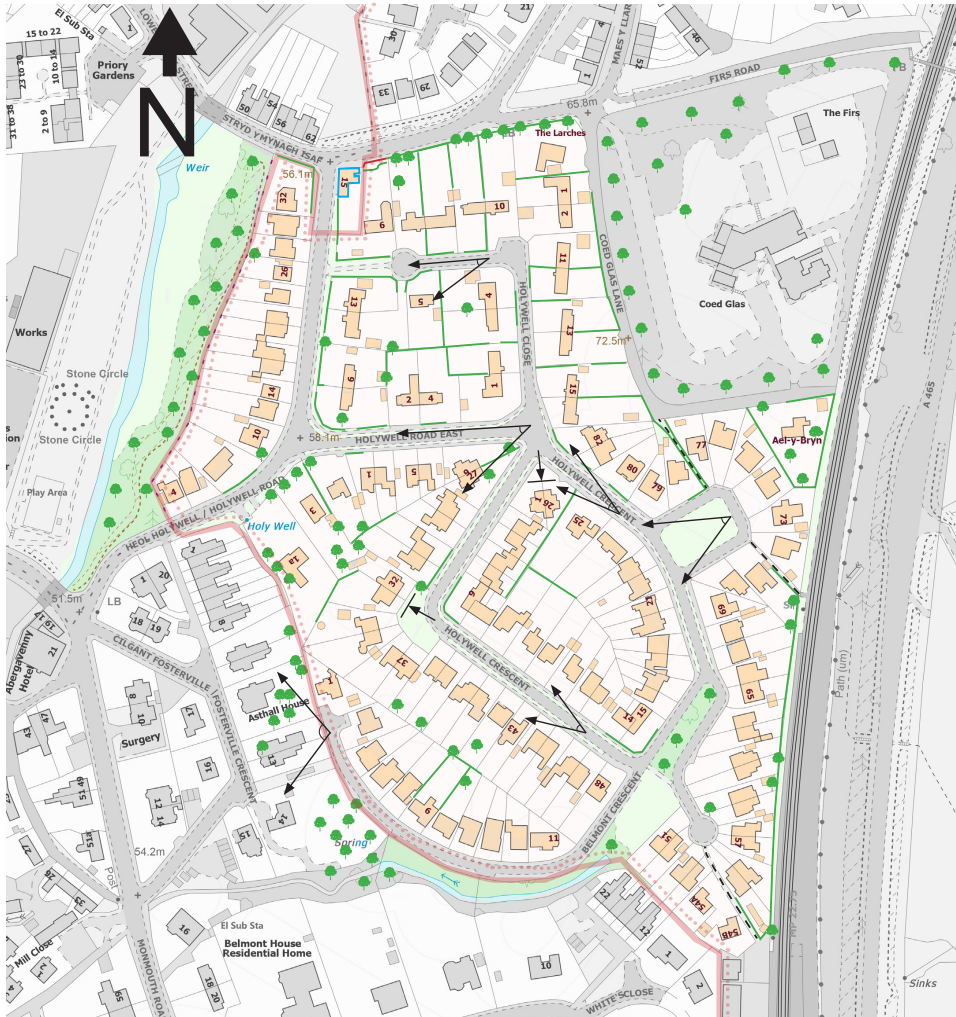




Figure 4: Green space

Some on-street parking makes the road a little hazardous. Yellow line restrictions are necessary on the estate to control rail commuter parking, and there is some on-street parking elsewhere, but the roads appear adequate for local traffic and a bus route.

Except beside the stream on the southern edge, along the banks of the Gavenney in Swan Meadow, and on the green mentioned above, where a community initiative has recently planted more, there are few trees in the area apart from some in back gardens. The extensive trees in the grounds of Coed Glas provide a backdrop to houses in the north-east of the area.

Front gardens inevitably vary considerably but driveways and trimmed hedges are the commonest elements. Holywell Road has low rubble stone walls, usually augmented with timber fences, brick courses and piers or hedges. The former police houses may originally have had no front boundary enclosures; most now have hedges or low walls (two in rubble stonework) or fences. Holywell Crescent homes have quite consistent 1m red brick front garden walls, and most in Belmont Crescent have something similar. Back gardens vary in size but



Figure 5: Holywell Crescent

most are about 20m long, though some bungalows have very little rear space.

The Holy Well in Holywell Road is neither holy nor a well, more a parking area with a self-filling water feature.

Building Character

The only old property in the area is the faux timber-framed building on the mini-roundabout where Holywell Road meets Lower Monk Street. This former public house does not appear on the 1844 tithe map but the northern end was present by 1880. It reached its present size in the early 20th century. The 1844 map shows a building on the site of Ael-y-Bryn at the end of Coed Glas Lane, but this vanished by 1880 and the present house is mid-20th century.

Holywell Road There are now fifteen houses on the western side of this road, plus three on the opposite side south of Holywell Road East. No 30 is the only one that is not shown on the 1965 Ordnance Survey map, though the asym-



Figure 6: Bungalows on the Green

metric roof of no 28 and the dormer form of no 32 suggest a similar date. The remainder, all with differences, have a 1930s character even if built after the war. Nos 4 and 6 are classic 1930s style detached houses with deep curved and leaded bay windows, wide eaves, hipped roofs and tall chimneys. Brickwork around the doorways suggests the same builder as much of Holywell Crescent. Nos 16-22 are pairs with similar qualities to nos 4 and 6 and the remainder have period features such as brick arched doorways and bays.

On the opposite side of the road are three bespoke houses from the 1950s or early 1960s. No 1a is a large dormer bungalow set well back from the road, no 3 has faux window shutters and no 5 has a balcony above a front extension.

Former Police Houses Nos 7-13 Holywell Road, 2/4 Holywell Road East, 1-16 (consec) Holywell Close and 1/2 Coed Glas Lane were built soon after the Second World War for police staff. The county headquarters was then in the town and there are similar pairs of houses in Monmouth Road and Union Road East. All but two of the houses are wide-fronted semi-detached pairs and they were

probably all once whitewashed brick with plain red tiles (no 2 Holywell Road East appears little altered apart from the windows). All are probably now in private ownership and have been considerably renewed or extended. Nos 1/2 Coed Glas Lane have been greatly altered with exposed brick; most of the original flat door canopies have been replaced with lean-to tiled porches; coloured rendering and pebbledash have been introduced, most have been reroofed (with some loss of chimneys), and double garages have been provided. A dormer bungalow with tile hanging, The Larches, was built on the corner of Coed Glas Lane in about 1970.

Holywell Crescent The first five houses of this estate are actually Holywell Road East. The remainder, in the Crescent, are unusually numbered consecutively, starting with the central section and ending with no 82. Apart from the recently added nos 54a and 54b, all were probably built in the 1950s, though the character is more typical of the 1930s. Forty-six are semi-detached houses, eleven are detached houses, twelve are detached bungalows and sixteen are semi-detached bungalows. The bungalows are all on the upper eastern side of the area.

There are several variations of the semi-detached houses. Most have hipped tiled roofs with a central chimney, are roughcast rendered (white or cream) and two-storey bays, angled or curved. Three pairs have twin gabled fronts with the outside of the gable brought to first floor level. Two pairs facing the crossroads at the top of Holywell Road East have interesting side elevations each with three descending hipped roofs. Elsewhere there are L-shaped pairs on corners. Detached houses are more varied but nos 8-11 in the Crescent are similar with half-hipped roofs, gables, brick doorway surrounds and ground floor angled bays. Two are red brick, No 24 probably as a result of extensive remodelling. Otherwise, apart from garages and new windows and doors, most houses have not been greatly altered. No 1 appears to retain original Crittall Art Deco windows.

Many of the bungalows, which took several forms, now vary considerably from their original state, though all have hipped or pyramid roofs to which some dormer windows have been added.

Early in the present century a vacant parcel of land between the Crescent and the railway station was purchased to secure the access to the station by cyclists and pedestrians, and two dark red-brick houses with slate roofs were built with a shared courtyard.

Belmont Crescent Eleven individual homes were built here in the 1950s or

early 1960s. Nos 1 and 2 appear to match and others have details suggesting the same architect, but otherwise they have little in common apart from being bungalows or dormer bungalows typical of the period.

Heritage Assets

The former public house at 15 Holywell Road and the eastern part of Swan Meadow are in the Conservation Area. Otherwise the area has no particular value except that the area includes possibly the town's best example of estate development in the pre/early post-war period.

ENDNOTE

Coed Glas, a former County Council property in grounds of about 2ha, is situated to the north-east of this character area, fronting Firs Road. This former mid-Victorian villa (also known as The Firs) was extended and supplemented in a strikingly modern style in the 1970s. Permission has been granted to demolish the buildings and provide 51 houses on the site. The trees surrounding the site are protected by a preservation order.