

# 3 Brecon Road

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 centre<sup>1</sup>.

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?*

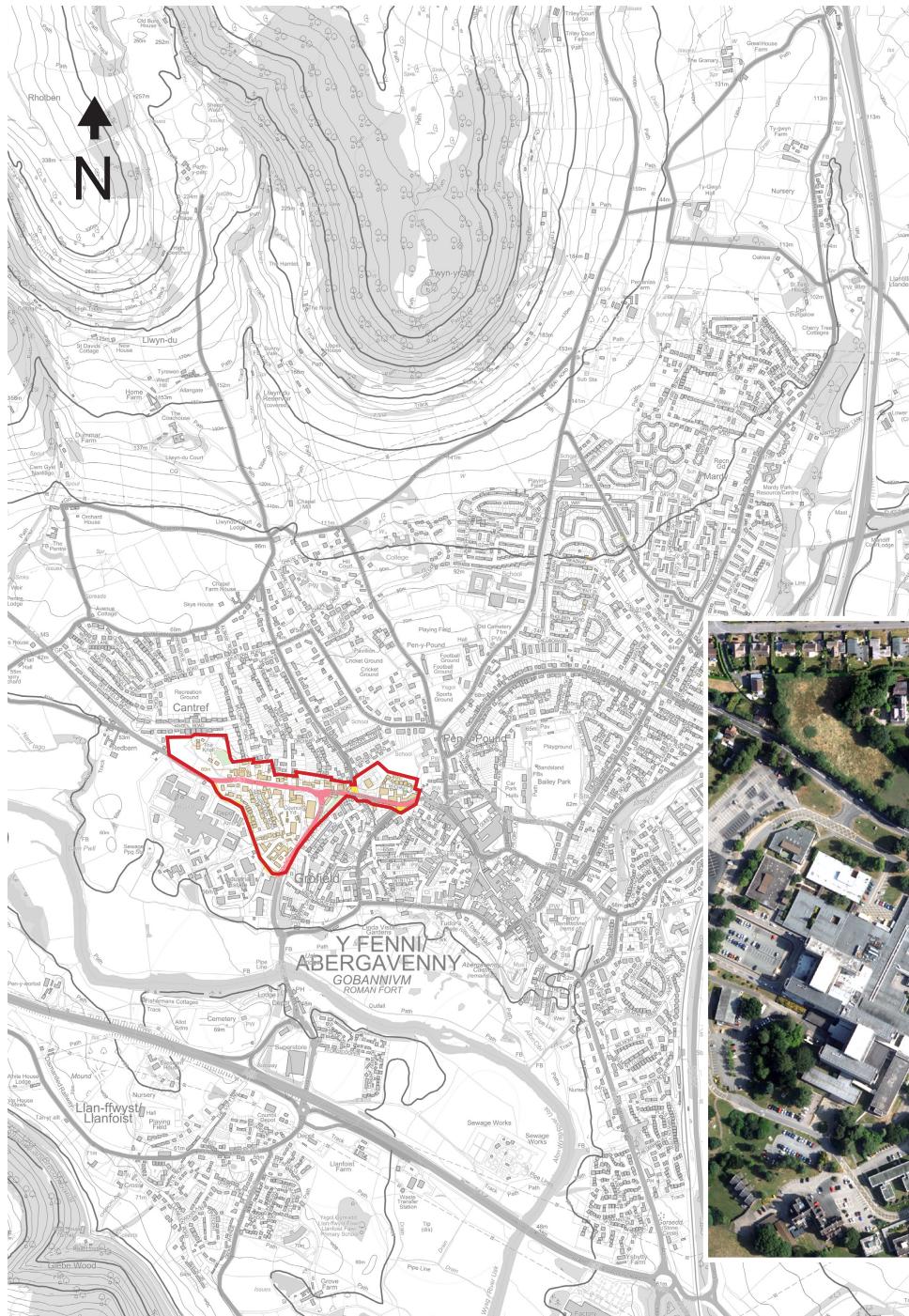
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to [abercivsoc@gmail.com](mailto:abercivsoc@gmail.com) or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

### 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 Lerman 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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## BRECON ROAD

THIS AREA EXTENDS from the western end of the town centre to Nevill Hall Hospital. It includes the businesses and homes strung along the trunk road towards Brecon and west Wales together with the mixture of uses west of the A4143 link road between Brecon Road and Union Road West, another ancient route west from the medieval town.

As described below, the Brecon Road area has no single overriding character, but Brecon Road itself certainly has a strong character, starting from the west as large well-spaced mid/late-Victorian houses, with mature trees and tall hedges, then, after the line of the old railway, becoming a continuous earlier corridor of mixed commercial and housing uses. This eastern end has a somewhat run-down appearance that detracts from this entry to the central area – the derelict property opposite the Merthyr Road junction is a particular blemish.

Knoll Gardens, opposite the hospital, illustrates the recent fashion for adopt-



ing past styles, just as the late Victorians and Edwardians did.

Also not in the best condition is the former workhouse complex, further marred by the business signs on the link road. Sadly this part of the Abergavenny story is not well-presented, but at least it survives, unlike most of the railway structures that employed so many of the townspeople for about a hundred years.

Hatherleigh Road is a pleasant residential street, mostly Victorian or Edwardian but with infilling up to the present day and therefore lacking a consistency of character. Union Road West houses are mostly of one period and of similar designs.

## Historical Background

It seems likely that sometime in the second half of the 18th century the present Brecon Road may have succeeded what are now Tudor Street and Union Road as the main route to the west. The town had begun to grow in this direction beyond Frogmore Street by that time, but the arrival in 1811 of the first section of the tramroad that by 1829 was to connect the canal wharf at Govilon with Hereford stimulated development in the area. Abergavenny's 'wharf' was initially where the road to Brecon, which at that time followed today's St Michael's Road, met the tramroad, but in about 1830 the main road was diverted away from this facility to its present route. Merthyr Road, the town's first relief road, was constructed a few years earlier.

By 1844 new building was extending towards the tramway on both sides of the new Brecon Road. Beyond the tramway the Cantref Inn seems to date from about the same time, but otherwise it was open countryside to Red Barn Farm, with the exception of the 1837/38 first phase of the Poor Law Union Workhouse on Brook's Lane, which then became known as Union Road.

The tramway route was upgraded to become the Merthyr, Tredegar and Abergavenny Railway in the 1860s, later to become part of the London and North Western Railway. A massive double overbridge crossed Brecon Road and Chapel Road, and the Brecon Road Station, near the site of the old wharf, served passengers. There was also a large office building in the station yard, overlooking the Brecon Road. From then until the decline after the Second World War, Abergavenny was a railway town as well as a market town, largely because of the goods yards and locomotive sheds that were provided at the old wharf site and between Brecon Road and the gas works south of Union Road. By the mid-1960s the locomotive depot was a council depot and by the 1970s the railway was

## 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 2: character analysis



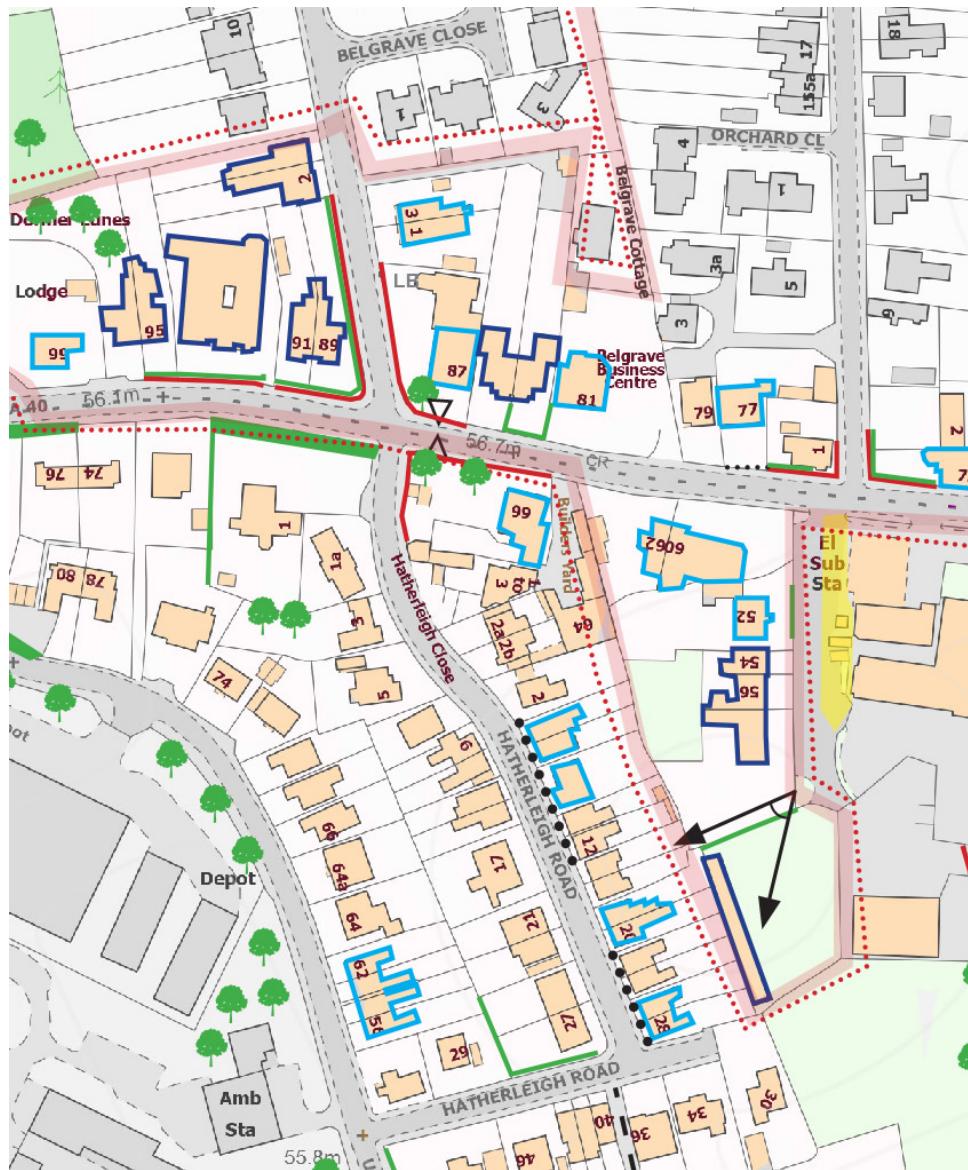


Figure 2b: Brecon Road detail 1

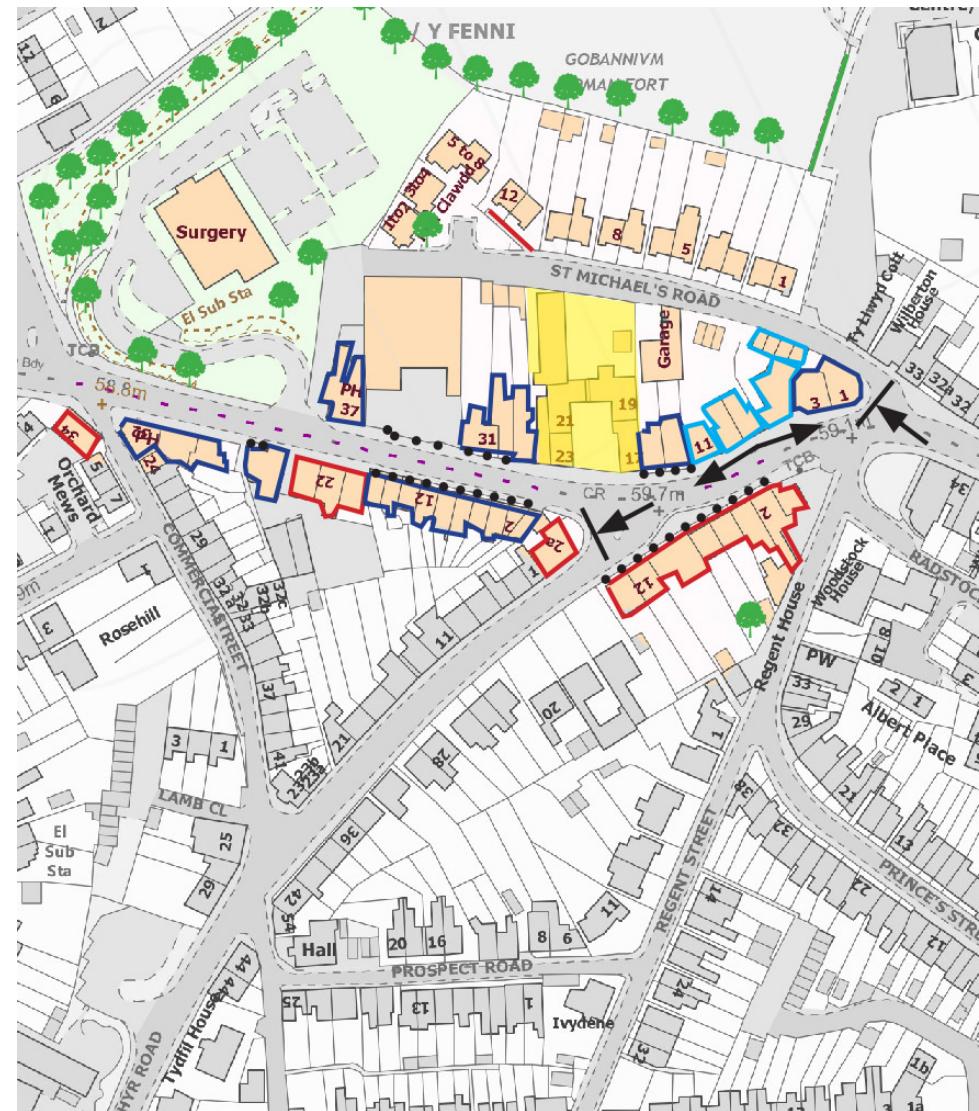


Figure 2c: Brecon Road detail 2

closed. The bridges and offices were demolished in about 1977; the station was cleared for a doctors' surgery, while the remainder of the railway land continues to be developed for commercial uses.

By 1880 there was a scatter of sizeable houses along Brecon Road, most on the north side, ending with The Knoll, a large house set in extensive grounds. Chapel Road, Mount Street and North Street led to new suburbs to the north. A large building to the south, now divided into homes and a hall for Jehovah's Witnesses, was a barracks for railway workers. By the turn of the century there had been more infilling on Brecon Road, Belgrave Road had been set out and more modest housing was being provided in Hatherleigh Road, as usual in Abergavenny at that time by a few plots at a time, in this case probably on the Marquess of Abergavenny's land.

The Marquess had bought nearby The Brooks, a large Tudor-Gothic 1860s house, in 1890 and renamed it Nevill Court. It was sold after his death in 1915 as Nevill Hall and appears to have had a number of uses, including as a convalescent home, until the present hospital opened in 1969 when the old house became the hospital's conference and training centre. Nevill Hall's Lodge is on Brecon Road just beyond its junction with Union Road West.

The Workhouse closed in about 1945 and the buildings have since been converted and extended for a variety on commercial and residential uses.

Apart from infilling on Hatherleigh Road, little further development took place until about 1960. Then a nursery garden west of Hatherleigh Road was developed for housing, soon followed by building along Union Road West. Infilling in this area has only recently been completed, as has a housing development in part of the grounds of The Knoll.

The old railway line south of Brecon Road became the A4143 link road between the A40 and A465 in the 1980s and new commercial buildings were built east and west of the roundabout. In the present century the old railway sheds have been replaced by the first of two further commercial buildings.

The mixture of residential and commercial uses in Brecon Road nearer the town centre was probably at its most prosperous between 1860 and 1960. Since then a public house, a small brewery and at least one shop have closed. Some shops may be only marginally viable and a group of buildings have become derelict.



Figure 3: Knoll Gardens

### Setting, Streets and Spaces

Brecon Road runs along the contour at a little below 60m above sea level. To the south the ground rises about 5m to the former workhouse from where Union Road falls to about 53m before climbing a little to Brecon Road. The railway line was on an embankment to cross Brecon Road from the elevated station, and in a cutting bridged by Union Road, where a footbridge now crosses the link road.

The Knoll house takes its name from a curious wooded hillock behind its lodge.

Brecon Road meanders slightly but is straight enough to provide a direct approach to the town centre until its 1820s diversion intercepts Merthyr Road where a parade of early 19th century houses steers the traveller left towards Frogmore Street. Starting with Nevill Hall Hospital to the south and overgrown hedges and trees to the north, from The Knoll to Chapel Road the road is characterised by a number of tall late Victorian houses and a 'gateway' of trees at the Belgrave Road/Hatherleigh Road intersection. On the south side a petrol filling station and retail warehouse detract from the overall character before reaching



Figure 4: Cream and red brick from the 1870s

more trees and the link road roundabout. After the Chapel Road/Commercial Street junction the buildings close in and are almost continuously joined, abutting the footways; some are shops or public houses and the central shopping area is foreshadowed.

The larger Brecon Road houses, some now in other uses, are generally set back about 8m from the road and fronted by a stone or red brick wall, sometimes with railings and often a tall hedge or shrubs. Several houses are not set back and these add considerably to the character of the road.

As the A40 trunk road, Brecon Road is busy with traffic and not particularly wide; turning movements at junctions require patience. The A4143 link road relieves the trunk road east of the roundabout of some of its traffic, but queuing is common, enticing motorists to take other routes through the narrow streets of Cartref to the north. There are few parking restrictions before the roundabout and about half the houses have no off-street provision, but little on-street parking appears to take place. Nearer the town centre there are continuous yellow lines, pedestrian refuges and barriers.

The modern commercial buildings adjoining the roundabout have generous manicured landscaping.

Union Road has substantial tree belts on the south side, screening commercial buildings, and in front of the former workhouse, obscuring its considerable architectural character. Hospital-related parking intrudes where there are no restrictions and the road is used as a short cut between the link road and the hospital and the A40.

In between these radial roads, Hatherleigh Road is a residential backwater, its character set in the 1890s, and the former railway land is being devoted to large single story commercial premises. The former workhouse area is somewhat unkempt with poorly surfaced access ways.

In Hatherleigh Road pre-1914 houses have short front gardens and no space for parking. Railings top low boundary walls and the street has only a few hedges or other vegetation, except clipped hedges in the southern section, which is at a right angle to the main part of the road. Rear gardens are also quite short. This, together with the changing levels, makes the residential part of the area feel relatively densely developed.

Views out of the area are, unusually for Abergavenny, limited to glimpses of the Blorenge, except that much of the view from Hatherleigh Road is terminated by the Sugar Loaf. On the other hand the A4143 affords good views of the hills to north and south.

## Building Character

While Brecon Road, Union Road and the railway history provide some shared identity to the area, building varies considerably. Character can, however, be described via several sub-areas, each with some common characteristics.

*Brecon Road east of Chapel Road* is densely developed and transitional between the town's western suburbs and the town centre, always having had some commercial uses. The north side includes the striking nos 1/3, late-Victorian red brick (Flemish bond, dentils at eaves level) shops with gabled dormers containing arched windows and a hoist to the attic level, a remnant of earlier brewery use (though no 1 was a temperance hotel and no 1a a grocer in 1901); nos 13/15 are a pair of *ca* 1830 three storey houses once similar to those opposite, and later shops; a derelict (part fire-damaged) courtyard of old buildings awaits renewal; nos 27-31 are a little-altered group of rendered shop and houses probably from about 1850; the Station Hotel, coursed sandstone, has wide eaves and a shallow

hipped roof (the station opened in 1862). The Heronhurst premises are modern, though fronted by an old stone wall and modern iron railings, currently proposed for redevelopment in a more sympathetic style. Using the station approach road, a large modern single storey surgery is twin-hipped in slate with dull brown brick and a band of vertical yellow bricks.

The south side is initially Merthyr Road, all listed and with good iron railings: nos 2-8 are a terrace of plain three storey town houses, *ca* 1830, roughcast rendered or pebble dashed with modest pedimented doorways and a hipped slate roof; no 10 is a wide two-storey house of similar date, grander in scale with a full height pedimented section and an open flat-roofed porch supported on slender iron columns; nos 12/14 are three-storey coursed rubble stone with red-brick dressings and a shallow hipped slate roof, probably about 1840.

Opposite here at no 2a Brecon Road is a prominent listed Tudor-style house of about 1840 with a stucco front (faux ashlar lined), casement mullions and a hood moulding, a single bay and decorative bargeboards and tented porch, railings with a lantern arch over the gate; the red brick garage to the right is modern. A row of six mid Victorian two-storey houses with gabled attics follows, in coursed rubble but with varying brickwork, and with railings; three three-storey houses then front directly to the pavement, one a vacant shop, the others perhaps once shops; nos 20-24 are a handsome parade of listed (as 22-26) later Victorian three-storey shops (a redevelopment of earlier houses), little altered with good shopfronts and decorated upper floors, stucco bays and buff brickwork details (cogged at the eaves); no 26 is a stucco former public house/ shop and house, the latter (*ca* 1840?) with stylistic similarities to no 2a while the possibly later gabled section has Gothic details. Lastly, two houses and the Railway Inn (possibly *ca* 1860 though a corner building appears on 1844 and 1854 maps) are roughcast rendered and painted, the houses with slightly projecting full height gables with shallow round-arched doorways and twin arched windows above. The inn has a Classical porch with the same gable and twin windows above, and a three-sided ground floor bay. The end of the row curves neatly into Commercial Street. On the opposite corner no 34 Brecon Road is a Listed mid-19th century house and shop, now occupied by a dentist, with four 6+6 first floor windows.

Mention must be made here of *St Michael's Road*, known as Old Brecon Road in Victorian times. On the north side a row of semi-detached houses was probably built in the 1930s as council housing. Six pairs have hipped slate roofs as on slightly earlier council houses elsewhere in the town and appear to have



Figure 5: Cream brick Tudor Revival from the 1890s

been built in brick but subsequently, apart from two, rendered and/or white painted. All have gabled porches, and most or all are now privately owned. At the end of the road Hen Clawdd is a small group of modern social housing styled to blend with the rest of the road. The south side has various outbuildings related to Brecon Road properties; those at the beginning of the road date from the first half of the 19th century, once perhaps part of the brewery referred to above or even simple housing.

*Brecon Road west of Chapel Road* is more interesting on the north side than the south, with a remarkable variety of buildings. Nos 45/47 are in grey stone (probably *ca* 1880) and wide fronted, each with elaborate doorways in central front gables that have decorative bargeboards, ground floor bow windows (replaced) and a central doorway, perhaps formerly an archway through to the rear but now accessing a third dwelling. A car park to the left gives access to two late-20th century houses behind. No 51 is a handsome listed Italianate mid-Victorian villa, double-fronted in stucco with faux ashlar lining and with a finely decorated arched doorway. Nos 53-59 are a terrace of 1890s Revival style houses



Figure 6: Early Brecon Road

in buff brick with two mock Tudor second floor gables. The Cantref Inn and probably the adjoining cottage may date from the 1840s but have lost some of their character. No 65, fronted by a white picket fence, could be *ca* 1860 but is considerably altered. The terrace of nos 67-73 is *ca* 1880 in irregularly coursed sandstone with buff brick dressings (some painted white) and two-storey bays. No 75, rendered and painted grey, is also *ca* 1880, bow-ended to the east with elaborate eaves details and an unusual portico doorway (no 2 North Street was probably once part of this property).

No 1 North Street faces Brecon Road and probably in part dates back to the early 20th century. No 77 is an Italianate double-fronted stone house dated 1871. No 79 is an anomalous split-gabled 1970s house in red brick and rendering. No 81 is a three-storeyed double gabled 1870s stone house with white painted dressings, clearly suffering subsidence since built and now a business centre. Nos 83/85 are examples of late-Victorian English Revival architecture, red brick with slated hip-roofed bays, decorative red ridge tiles and timbered gables. In contrast no 87 is a simple stone villa, *ca* 1870, with a low-pitched hipped roof, now a care

home and extended at the rear in the late 20th century in a contrasting multi-gabled cottage style.

Nos 89/91 are impressive late Victorian Revival houses with projecting first floor gables (with slightly projecting windows and timbering above) over ground floor bays and with central slate roofed porches and tall chimneys; no 89 has a side bay with a galleried balcony above. Nos 1/3 Belgrave Road are a neat red-brick pair from about 1900 with a shared open slate roof porch, and nos 2/4 are a fine pair of Revival style homes (only no 4 has original railings) with tile hanging in the front gables and other features similar to nos 89-93 Brecon Road. No 93, now a nursing home, is a double-fronted red-brick (English bond) house from the same period (perhaps the same architect) with tile hanging in the gables, Tudor drip mouldings over windows and an arched doorway; a simple brick ground floor extension does not detract from the main building. Elevated nos 95/97 are also 1890s with similar features, red brick with stone (or similar) details. In complete contrast no 99 is the recently extended former lodge to The Knoll notable for its curious semi-circular upper floor window, a rustic porch and the Abergavenny estate 'A' moulding; traces can be seen of an earlier canopy spanning the width of the building.

The Knoll and two post-war houses on its driveway cannot be seen from the highway. The Knoll is listed and described as a little altered mid-19th century Classical villa.

Knoll Gardens is a pleasant group of nine new small detached houses in the grounds of The Knoll. The houses make design references to past styles and materials found locally.

On the south side Hatherleigh Lodge (no 66) is a substantial red-brick house with Bath stone detailing and wide bracketed eaves that pre-dates the 1881 map. It was supplemented by a builder's yard by the 1960s (and an abutting block of flat-roofed flats at the rear – see below). Nos 60/62 are also from about the 1870s, an unusual pale mottled cream brick pair with attic half-dormers and a recent cream brick single storey veterinary business extension. Off Brecon Road no 52 is a red-brick late-19th century hipped-roof house with brickwork details at the eaves suggesting LNWR origins, perhaps the stationmaster's house (note the need for a tall chimney stack). Next door is the plain (apart from decorative timber bargeboards to front gables at each end) but imposing 1870s three-storey sandstone railway barracks (overnight accommodation for train crews). This is now residential apart from the Jehovah's Witnesses hall, mapped as a club around 1970.

The roadway between the former barracks and a typically out-of-scale petrol filling station canopy provides access to a post-war DIY warehouse and a recent farm supplies depot, the latter the first building to replace the railway buildings used as a council depot until the early 21st century. Only one railway building survives – an unused long narrow brick building built in two phases around the turn of the century, probably workshops, backing on to the gardens of 18-28 Hatherleigh Road. The red brick is arranged in attractive cogged and dentil bands below the eaves, exceeding those at no 52.

West of Hatherleigh Road no 72 is a neat stone-fronted dormer bungalow (1920s?) behind a more recent stone wall (allowing footway provision), and then in about 1960 the nursery garden before the Union Road junction was split into plots for development which continue around the corner.

The link road enabled the Welsh Development Agency to provide Gavenny Court on its western side, a large low-slung commercial building with markedly overhanging fascias and a profiled steel roof, both in white, built in about 1990. A well-proportioned two-storey dark red-brick office block, with deep eaves and a shallow hipped roof, was built at about the same time on the eastern side of the roundabout.

*Hatherleigh Road* was opened up, like many other roads in the town, in about 1880 and had seven pairs of houses and a terrace of three by the turn of the century. These are mostly typical Abergavenny homes of the period in sandstone with ground floor bay windows, yellow-brick dressing and slate roofs. Nos 18/20 have arched upper windows and doorways and no 15 has a recent sympathetic small side extension. The exceptions are nos 4/6 and 26/28, probably *ca* 1900, in red brick with front-facing gables, and the rendered terrace (nos 40-44). No 8 is double fronted in red brick with buff quoins and dated 1910. The inter-war or early post-war period contributed about a dozen homes including detached, semi-detached and bungalows. No 48 has Arts and Crafts influences and a two-storey flat-roofed side extension. More recently no 1a is notable for its variety of details and chapel-like windows, while no 7 (dated 2000) is a convincing reproduction of local brick housing of a century earlier. In contrast the alien flat-roofed flats at the rear of 66 Brecon Road are in reconstituted purple/grey stone with weathered grey rendering, and a service/parking area on Hatherleigh Road. A new house at the Union Road end has commendable style echoes of small Victorian Italianate houses found elsewhere in the town.

Hatherleigh Lodge on Brecon Road and pre-1914 houses in Hatherleigh Road display evidence of connections with the Marquess of Abergavenny and



Figure 7: Brecon Road houses and shops

his residence from 1890 at Nevill Hall. Several houses bear moulded terracotta 'A' or Tudor rose motifs; the Lodge also has a moulded coat of arms, though the house dates from well before 1890.

*Union Road West* owes its name to the Poor Law Union workhouse, the front part of which dates from 1837, is listed and in an unusual Tudor style with two arched main entrances and mullioned windows. This section retains its integrity, at least externally, with interesting details on the front elevation. The remainder of the stone buildings were in place by 1881 (some of which have since been removed) and comprise a mixture of both decaying and renovated original buildings and newer additions. The section occupied by the Lesters, fashion designers, is rendered in white with some quasi-classical details; other premises are less imposing, though providing useful low cost business premises. The matrons' home at the northern end is now a dwelling.

A commercial garage next to the workhouse dates from sometime in the mid 20th century. There is one short turn-of-the-century terrace of four houses, and a bungalow west of this that may be from the 1930s, but otherwise the houses on



Figure 8: Hatherleigh Road

this part of Union Road are *ca* 1970 and mostly white-rendered. The levels allow three at the western end to have garages underneath the living space. No 68 has a recent first floor conservatory-style extension.

### **Heritage Assets**

The area west of the old railway has four listed buildings: the oldest part of the workhouse, The Knoll, Nevill Hall Lodge and No 51 Brecon Road. Some of the large villas, especially those in English Revival styles, surviving railway buildings and later workhouse extensions may merit similar protection. The County Council has recently extended the Conservation Area in the Brecon Road area.

East of the railway the area is entirely in the conservation area and there are about ten listed buildings: the group of early 19th century houses on Merthyr Road, no 2a and the group of Victorian shops on the south side of Brecon Road. Another twenty are of similar interest.