



The King's Gap, Hoylake Conservation Area

Conservation Area Appraisal

April 2000



32/32A Stanley Road -
notable unlisted building



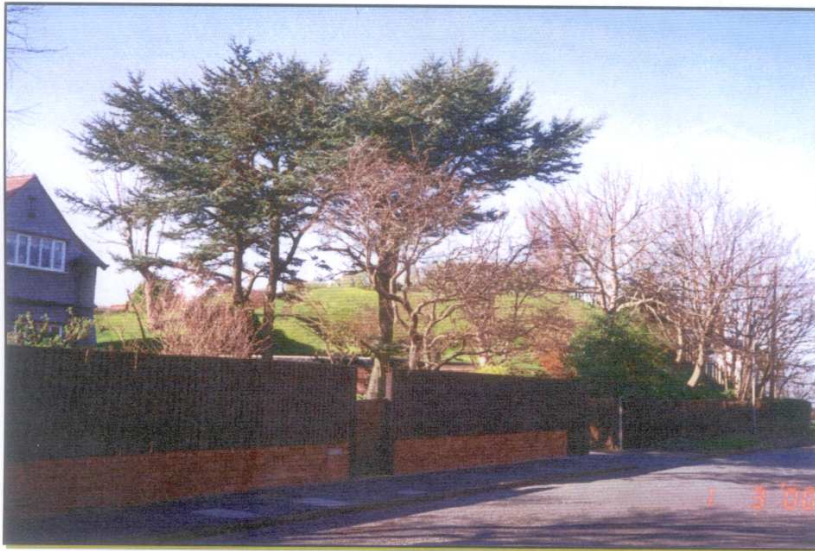
Marine Road -
sandstone wall, pine tree
& Edwardian back land
building

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Stanley Road -
street trees, boundaries &
views of North Wales



Courtenay Road -
relict dune & pine trees

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King's Gap Court Hotel & glimpse of Valentia Road Lighthouse



Stanley Road - flats at variance with area's character

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Introduction

The King's Gap, Hoylake, is proposed as a conservation area adjoining the sea towards the north west corner of the Wirral Peninsula. It consists mainly of 19th and early 20th Century houses in generously sized plots with two hotels, a church and lighthouse sandwiched between the sea and the links of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course.

The main theme of the appraisal is to identify the special qualities of the area and to assess their significance.

The appraisal is divided into three parts: a description of the area, an assessment of its special qualities and a conclusion.

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2. Location and Population

The settlement of Hoylake is on the northern coastline of the Wirral Peninsula with the River Dee Estuary to the west. The settlement runs along the coastline in a linear formation between the coast and the Liverpool/West Kirby railway line which separates Hoylake from the open land of the peninsula interior.

The main through road of Market Street/Birkenhead Road provides the bulk of its shops and connects Hoylake to the adjacent settlement of Moreton by the A553 to the east and to West Kirby via Meols Drive (A540) to the south west.

The junction of Market Street and Meols Drive is the focus of the settlement with the former Town Hall, Post Office and Hoylake Chapel lying nearby. On the landward side Station Road closely connects the 1930s railway station to this junction: on the other side The King's Gap curves down to the coast past the notable junction of Valentia and Stanley Roads bordered by the Green Lodge and King's Gap Court Hotels and St Hildeburgh's Church.

The proposed Conservation Area is sited to the western side of Hoylake, on either side of The King's Gap and is part of a tongue of development on sandy soil sandwiched between the shoreline and the fairways of the Royal Liverpool Golf Course.

Hoylake, as a whole, has a population of nearly 16,000 people, which has remained relatively static over the previous two decades.

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3. Origins and Development of Hoylake

Two hundred years ago the name Hoylake was not in general use. Early maps refer to Hoose as the most important component of the area. The population of the settlement in the vicinity of today's Hoylake consisted of farmers, fishermen and mariners, with a few innkeepers catering for the crews of ships moored in the Hoyle Lake.

A Stanley estate map of 1813 shows a pattern of narrow fields emanating from the thoroughfare following the line of Meols Drive and Market Street. The King's Gap and adjoining parts of the proposed conservation area lie in an undivided area of sand dune between agricultural land and the coast. The lifeboat house, upper and lower lighthouses attest to its importance as a landing point and centre of succour for those in difficulty on the sea. Hostelryes to support maritime trade and passenger and visitor traffic may be presumed to be the Green Lodge and the Royal Hotels. They are both named in Bryant's Map of 1831.

The Green Lodge (at the heart of the proposed Conservation Area) was originally a shooting lodge for the Stanley family. In 1792 Sir John Stanley opened the Royal Hotel. Long since demolished its site was adjacent to the western boundary of the proposed Conservation Area and is commemorated in the name of the cul-de-sac of 20th Century houses off Beach Road. The former Stanley Hotel on the northern side of The King's Gap and Meols Drive (shortly to become Montrose Court) was a further addition to the hotels and inns in the area to cater for visitors.

The growth of sea bathing, which was given royal patronage in 1792, swelled the population of Hoylake during the summer months. The importance of Hoylake as a bathing resort was boosted by the Napoleonic Wars, when resorts on the south coast of England were deemed too dangerous for heedless entertainment.

The Green Lodge promoted itself as a place to stay and undertake outdoor pursuits, such as shooting in the rabbit warrens, fishing in the sea and watching horse racing around an extensive circuit on what is now the links of The Royal Liverpool Golf Club. That club began in the late 1860s and the fairways of the present golf course (which has hosted the British Open in the past) provide part of the southern boundary to the proposed Conservation Area. These leisure pursuits provided the catalyst for further growth of the original settlement which originally evolved from agriculture and fishing.

The railway line was built in 1866. When the Mersey Tunnel opened in 1886 there was a direct link to Liverpool and in 1903 the line was electrified. This gradually and progressively resulted in the expansion of Hoylake, not only as a place of resort but also as a commuter settlement. The pattern of residential development and the type of houses mirrors 19th and early 20th century changes in taste, wealth and status of incoming inhabitants.

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4. Prevailing/Formal Uses

The original settlement within the Conservation Area consisted of 'The Gap', later to become The King's Gap. This road was the main route from Meols Drive to the coastline. The original upper lighthouse (on the same site as the present lighthouse), the anchorage off the Hoyle Channel) and the Green Lodge were all accessed from this road.

The early development of the Royal Hotel to the west of King's Gap resulted in the construction of two parallel access roads, Stanley Road and what is now Barton Road. The plots took the whole space between the two roads with frontages to Stanley Road and with coach houses and ancillary buildings accessing Barton Road to the rear. By the 1840s large closely packed villas closely fronted the coastline behind masonry coastal walls close to the Royal Hotel and were accessed from the rear at the western end of Barton Road. Their outhouses and cottages have been a source of conversion to bijou residences in recent years.

The North Parade with its slipways spread from The King's Gap but the houses here were set back from the sea behind sandstone and brick walls behind a public road overlooking the sea. They had long front gardens and long rear gardens with access and outhouses from Marine Road similar to those on Barton Road. Other large villa style properties were also built fronting onto The King's Gap and Green Lodge Parade (now Valentia Road). Warren Terrace had also been erected on Warren Road. This was the first terraced development in this part of Hoylake.

This initial highway layout, with King's Gap as the major north south route, and with the other roads feeding off it, set out the future development pattern of this part of Hoylake. The King's Gap was also the hinge between the grid of Stanley and Barton Roads at right angles to the west and Marine Road and Warren Road angled to the east. This change was engineered by the curve of Meols Drive/ Market Street inland and the rectilinear field pattern emanating from them.

Over time new houses were built, initially along the existing road network, but then along cul-de-sacs between Barton Road and the shoreline producing the settlement which has evolved into Hoylake. The last group of houses in the sequence of development was constructed on extensive plots along Stanley Road backing on to the golf course. Examination of early maps shows the loss of former properties such as Gothic Lodge on Stanley Road and their replacement by large detached dwellings of the 30s and 50s. Modern replacements tend to be blocks of 60s -90s flats or housing closes built on the combined sites of several properties. Further such developments could change the balance of the area's character.

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5. Architectural and Historic Qualities

Listed Buildings - There are two Statutory Listed Buildings within the proposed Conservation Area, both of which are Grade II. These are the Lighthouse and adjoining Keepers house on Valentia Road and the Church of St Hildeburgh on Stanley Road.

The Lighthouse, now disused, is an unusual and very notable feature for a conservation area, and is closely encompassed by surrounding houses. It is a strong design with an octagonal battered tower mainly of brick with pilaster strips on the angles and dentilled corbels. From the overhanging stone platform supported on deep stone brackets sits a delicate octagonal glazed light chamber with conical roof and weather vane. From Valentia Road the tower and light chamber oversail the substantial and symmetrical Keepers House below with its bay windowed central section and four tall chimney stacks. Its companion lower lighthouse by the coastline near to the lifeboat house at the bottom of Alderley Road used to direct vessels safely along the Hoyle Channel. The lower lighthouse has been lost to subsequent development.

St Hildeburgh's Church of hard red brick is prominently located at the junction of The King's Gap and Stanley Road at the focus of the conservation area. Its long curving boundary wall helps to create a triangular urban space bordered on its other sides by the other notable unlisted buildings of the Green Lodge and King's Gap Court Hotel. Set back from the junction in extensive grounds its relatively plain if not austere appearance is leavened by the presence of mature pine trees on the Stanley Road frontage and the presence of a notable War Memorial.

Unlisted Buildings of Note - The notable unlisted buildings reflect the development of styles of English domestic and other architecture from the villas and terraces of the 1840s to the mansions of the Edwardian era within a seaside context. Some of the more notable include:-

The Hoylake Lifeboat House is interlinked with the functional origins of the settlement and The King's Gap. Though added to in recent years its earlier part with a crenellated tower and decorative brickwork opposite the slipway express the maritime connections.

The Green Lodge Hotel at the focus of the area shows progressive development throughout the 19th century which parallels the growth of Hoylake a village of resort. It is composed of discrete sections of varying roof heights reflecting its piecemeal extension, the details of each section subtly different and reinforcing its phases of development.

4 Stanley Road adjacent to the Hotel, with its low scale has the appearance of a pioneer building nestling amongst former sand dunes from the ravages of coastal weather. Like others at 28/30 Stanley Road its earlier plain cottage style has been overlaid with late Victorian or Edwardian improvements.

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5/7 King's Gap are standard late Victorian/ Edwardian semi-detached properties of imposing scale. The conical corner towers with steeply pitched plain tiles, walls of red pressed brick with contrasting bands of stone and elaborately designed windows of small panes over shallow arched glazing bars are typical of the taste of the era. Less elaborate properties at 9/11 and 13/15 The King's Gap reinforce the rhythm of towers in the street scene.

32/32A Stanley Road (Dormy) originally one house and now divide is notable for its paired 2 story circular bays surmounted by part conical tiled roofs. It uses red pressed brick, sandstone detailing and decorative tile hanging in strong and notable manner. Similarly, 40 Stanley Road uses the same materials in a striking way. A symmetrical front surmounted by a decorated terracotta gable is pierced by a recessed balcony under an elliptical arch. The entrance is also recessed under an arch at the top of a staircase. Asymmetry is introduced by a circular bay recessed on the western corner surmounted now by a truncated turret of roof material foreign to the design.

19 Valentia Road on the corner of Queen's Road is an appealing oddity for the conservation area: symmetrically stone fronted with canted bays and a Tuscan columned porch it is reminiscent of Glaswegian suburban villa architecture

1 and 5 Stanley Road are the best examples of the culmination of late 19th century and early 20th century residential development in the conservation area. Set in larger and wider plots they emphasise breadth across the plot and appear lower by comparison with earlier large houses. The buildings of brick or render nestle under strongly articulated hipped and gabled roofs. In the case of No.5 the harmonious composition is completed by contrasting tall battered chimneys with deeply profiled cappings reminiscent of C. A Voysey's white rendered houses of the Arts and Crafts movement. This latest phase of development attempts a less formal relationship to the street with vertical boarded wooden fences and hedges; the grass verged pavement with street trees also softens the scene. The seaward side of Barton Road and the cul-de-sacs to the coast exhibit similar characteristics with a fine building at the seaward end of the cul-de-sac of Courtenay Road.

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6. Building Materials

The characteristic building materials in this part of Hoylake are drawn from a narrow palette of:

Roofing Materials	Plain red tiles Welsh slate (occasionally Westmorland)
Wall Materials	Red brick Pebbledash render White paint on rough render
Fenestration	Variety of timber windows some with small glazing panes

The properties use this limited palette in a variety of ways creating a mixed range of designs whilst preserving an underlying continuity. Modern materials tend to be alien to the area and alter its character. Profiled concrete roofs, in particular, strike a discordant note when viewed against those of plain tiles and slate.

There are specific details which are evident on particular buildings. These help to add architectural variety and interest as well as reflect the distinctive characteristics of this coastline settlement, for example,

26 King's Gap has decorative blind boxes at first floor, features characteristic of seaside locations from the Regency onwards

5 Stanley Road has very distinctive Arts and Crafts style chimneys.

40 Stanley Road has a 3 storey tower on its south west corner taking advantage of the vistas over the Royal Liverpool Golf Course.

Boundaries are of importance to the street scene and are usually formed of sandstone. Both the local red as well as yellow sandstone are used in coursed, snecked or random patterns. Triangular copings of short stones or else crenellations are to be found on some higher walls. High rear walls on Barton Road and Marine Road are notable in the street scene. Red brick has also been used on low front and high rear boundaries and has sometimes been rendered. Occasionally, these red brick walls have a recessed panel with decorative corbels in order to add visual interest. Later boundaries have included close boarded timber fences and render walls. There is a wide variety of sandstone gateposts, some of imposing design, heralding the entrances to properties.

Street materials and furniture are on the whole unremarkable save for the predominant sandstone kerbs which line the streets, the setts at the end of Beach Road and the cast iron railing of the North parade. On some roads setts have been overlaid with tarmac. Pavements and carriageway crossings are mostly of tarmac.

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7. Relationship of Spaces, vistas and views

The conservation area has little in the way of public space contained within it, but by its coastal location and adjoining golf course has views over land and sea to connect it to its wider environs. The focus of the area is the grouping of St Hildeburgh's Church, Green Lodge and King's Gap Court hotels where The King's Gap fans into Stanley Road. This leaves a distinct triangular road space as an incident along The King's Gap in the journey from the centre of Hoylake to the sea.

Within the network of buildings there are occasional side gardens which interrupt the regularity of the street scene and provide it with points of interest. These are mainly to be found on Barton Road and the culs de sac off it.

Views along roads remind the observer of the sea. Narrow vistas framed by large houses can be obtained along the roads at right angles to the coast such as The King's Gap, Curzon Road, Courtenay Road, Penhros Road and Beach Road. Depending on the state of tide the strong line of the horizon oversails the blue of the sea or else a bank of wet sand flows into the distance.

Views of the conservation area at this point are disappointing. For those walking the sands at low tide there are few very noteworthy buildings. Bare gardens with a few windblown shrubs margin the coast above the sloping masonry of the sea wall.

North Parade provides a wider and more varied panorama from the large houses surmounting Red Rocks on the north west tip of the Peninsula, the Hilbre Islands and the low sandhills of the Formby Coast. Local residents and Wirral visitors can admire the view over the cast iron railing and watch the state of tide, listen to the haunting cries of wading birds and draw deep breaths of saline air. The experience provides balm for the soul.

Inland views over the links of the Royal Liverpool Golf Club from Stanley Road and Beach Road anchor this exposed coastal location to the Peninsula beyond. The large houses of Meols Drive surmounted by lines of pine trees partly screen a spire nestling under Caldy Hill with its landmark column and Thursaston beyond. Further over the fairways, coastal sand dunes screen the Dee Estuary, their irregular outline echoing the profile of the Welsh Hills in the haze beyond. Benches along Stanley Road attest to the importance of these views.

Within the conservation area the lighthouse tower occasionally provides surprise glimpses between buildings and trees.

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8. Soft Landscaping

The area is windswept and coastal and therefore there is minimal vegetation, especially large specimen trees. Both Barton and Stanley Roads have grassed verges with street trees within them relating to the later Edwardian development of the area. The trees are not individually of merit, but as a group and as a means of framing the vistas along these roads they are important to the character of the Conservation Area. In addition to the street planting a number of the properties along these roads have trees and large shrubs which also provide a frame to the vistas. The streets are also softened by the extensive hedges backing up boundary walls. The shrubs and hedges in the gardens on the coast are shaped by the strong winds.

Whilst most trees are deciduous the occasional pine trees on Marine Road, Barton Road and the group at St Hildeburgh's Church exhibit a pleasing contrast. Less happy is the infusion of tall *Leylandii* hedges in gardens particularly in Valentia Road.

Adjacent to 1 Courtenay Road is a large grassed mound with a covering of vegetation, including trees. The mound is probably a relict sand dune but with time the grass covering has bound the sand together to create a stable soft landscaped mound. This is an important, and probably a unique feature within this part of Hoylake.

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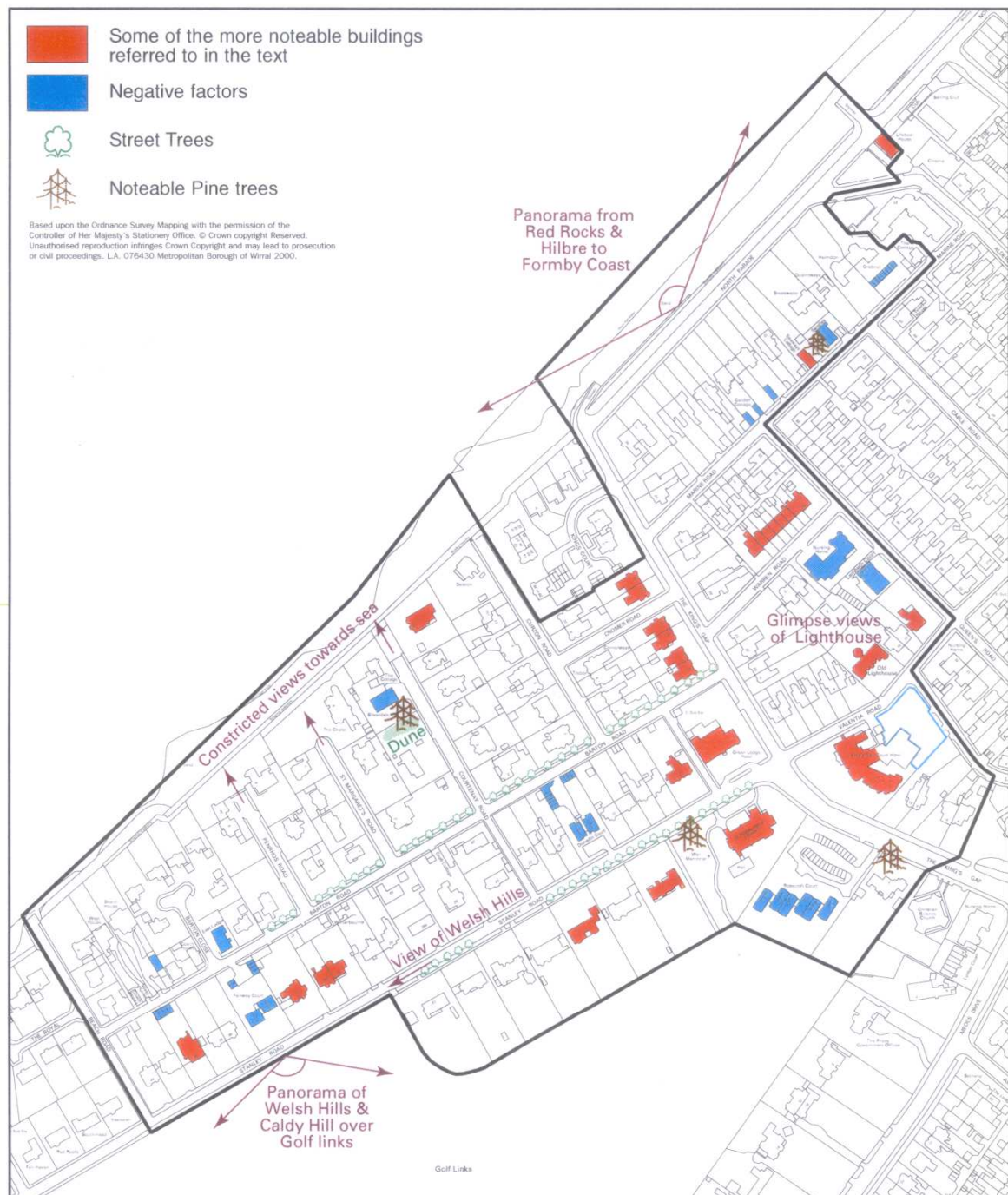
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9. Negative Factors

The detractions to the conservation area tend to be limited to the post war developments. Pre war, new dwellings were updated patterns of earlier times. Changing demography and patterns of wealth have seen the recent intrusion of blocks of flats and town houses whose materials and design have been at odds with the traditions of the conservation area. Recently, conversions and extensions to the modest outbuildings and cottages at the rear of substantial properties in Barton and Marine Roads have overlaid their intrinsic character with clothing of bland mediocrity.

Alterations to larger older buildings have also compromised the area's character: profiled concrete tile roofs, oversize flat roofed dormers, UPVC windows, and extensions can be at odds with the original design.

Flat roofed garages with up and over doors set into the rear boundaries on Barton and Marine Roads break up the continuity of the sandstone walls. Garage courts to new or converted flats can also have an unsightly impact.



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