



Walk the Train Along Alban Way

Your very own guide to the former railway route between Hatfield Station and St Albans Abbey Station, and the landscapes and buildings close to the line.

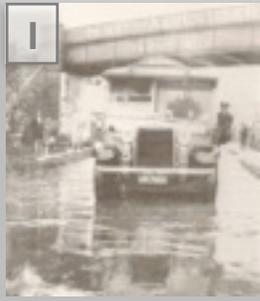
This brochure is published by the Smallford Group:
"Bringing the History of Smallford Station to Life"
October 2015 2nd Edition 2016

www.smallford.org

I Hatfield Station to Cavendish Way

J Over to the right, beyond the houses, are the huge structures of the Galleria Shopping Centre. Ahead, the original Cavendish Way rail bridge was only constructed in 1957, after passenger trains had ceased. It has since been replaced.

There is no evidence today of a bridge across St Albans Road West, and little of the embankment. There is even construction across the track bed, hence the short diversion. This road used to continue to meet Comet Way behind the bus – The Galleria now prevents that. From Smallford, the road curved its way towards Hatfield Town Centre and The Ryde as St Albans Road West, and then St Albans Road East. It was a very busy main road.



F The last station to open, in 1942, was Lemford Road, as demonstrated by the concrete sections which were typical of the time. It was intended specifically for the employees of de Havilland Aircraft Company, which was along Comet Way. Over 3,000 DH98 Mosquitos were built here, and hundreds of others of varied types.



G View of the steps leading to the platform at Lemford Road, taken from the bridge deck. Only the bridge abutment, the steps and platform now remain.

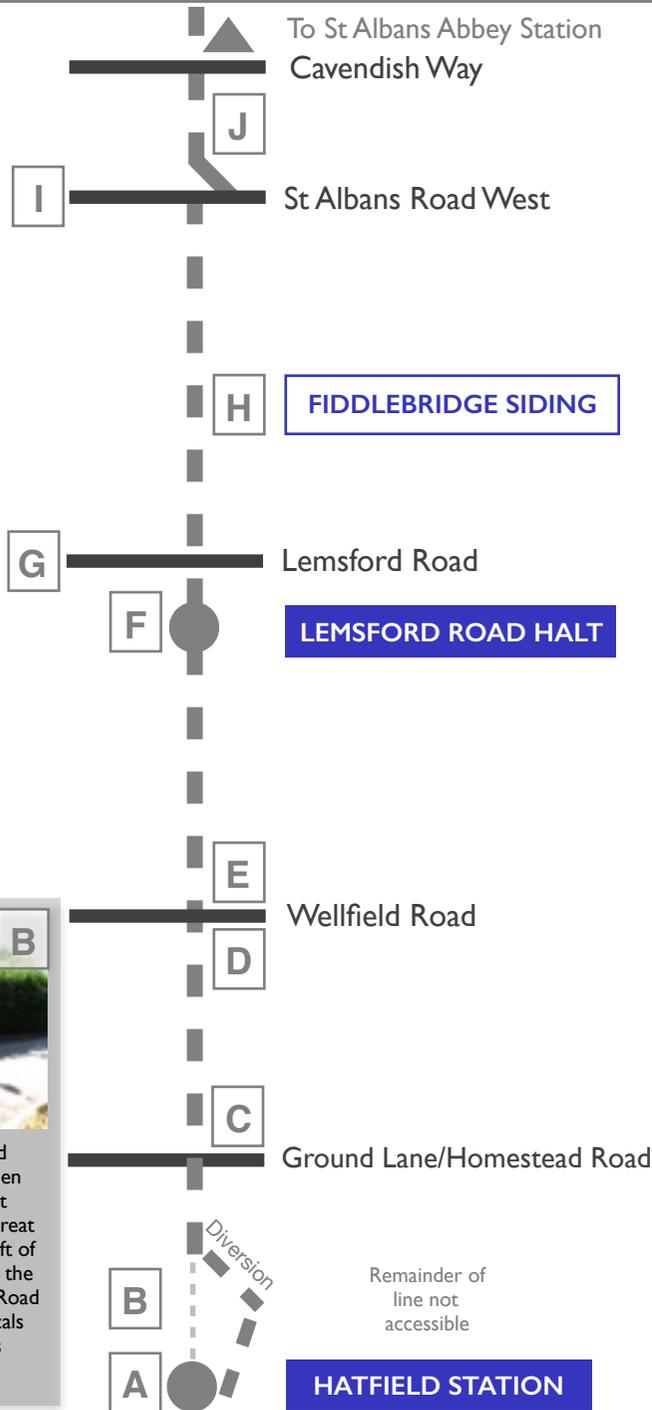


A A 1953 view of Hatfield Station, where St Albans passengers had their own platform, now used for other trains. To

reach the branch from the station, walk north along Great North Road, and cross the footbridge. Join the route almost ahead.



B The footbridge replaced a road bridge (Wrestlers) in 1966 when that collapsed. It carried Great North Road traffic over the Great Northern Main Line. To the left of this view you look downhill to the now-truncated Great North Road towards Tesco, which many locals still remember as Jack Olding's Corner.



H Looking north, Fiddlebridge siding on the left. The industrial estate partly occupies what was the main line, while Alban Way users walk on part of the former siding.

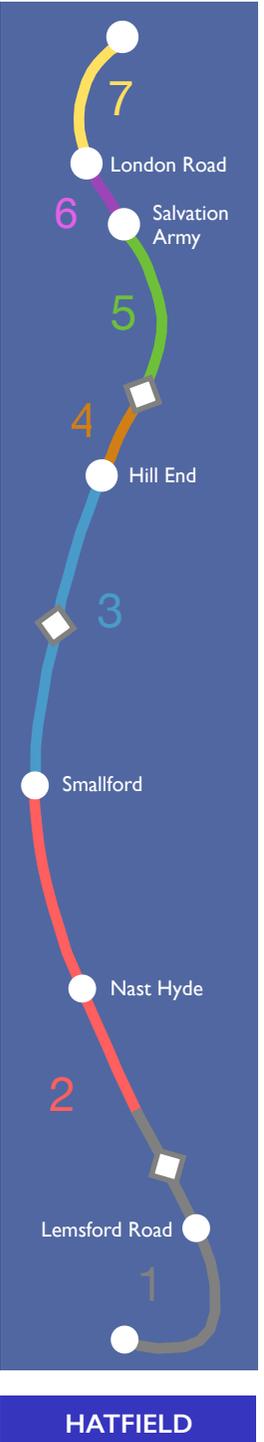


E Just two bridges along Alban Way have been replaced specifically for users: here across Wellfield Road, and further south at Camp Road.

D Walkers leave the route here for easy access to the Town Centre via Wellfield Road.



C There was an occupation bridge here which gave access to the former Birchwood Farm (hence Homestead Road). We are walking from left to right under the former bridge. The house in the photo can be seen on your left, on the south side of Ground Lane.



2 Cavendish Way to Smallford Station



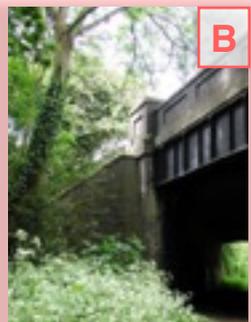
To the left along Smallford Road is the community of Sleafshyde. Old Sleafshyde is centred around a tiny green, its chapel (above) and farm. The newer houses are nearer Smallford Lane and the bypass (A14).



Just before reaching the Station Road bridge at Smallford, a row of former agricultural workers houses can be seen on the right, lining Wilkins Green Lane. A shortage of habitable dwellings for farm workers ensured these were built in the early 20th century.



A gated crossing was needed here as Ellenbrook Lane was a through road to Roe Hyde. A crossing gate keeper was employed; and he lived in the house which still stands beside the line.



When a relief road, jointly the A1 and Barnet Bypass (A14), was constructed in 1927, a bridge was necessary to carry what was then a three-lane road over the single track railway. The road links the Comet roundabout and the Roe Green Interchange.



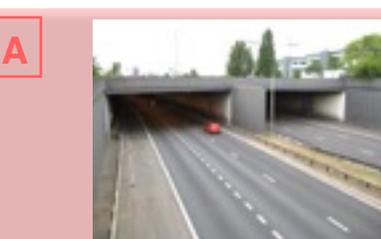
The Ellenbrook Stream rises a short distance northwards, and passes under the railway en-route to the River Colne. It flows beside Ellenbrook Lane. The Lane connected directly with College Lane and the Technical College, now the University, before the A1(M) was constructed.

Further information on Section 3

Across the field to the right is a large house known as Great Nast Hyde, followed westwards by the tiny Wilkins Green hamlet. Here was one of three forges (pictured). A separate walk along Wilkins Green Lane will also reveal Little Nast Hyde Farm and Wilkins Green Farm.

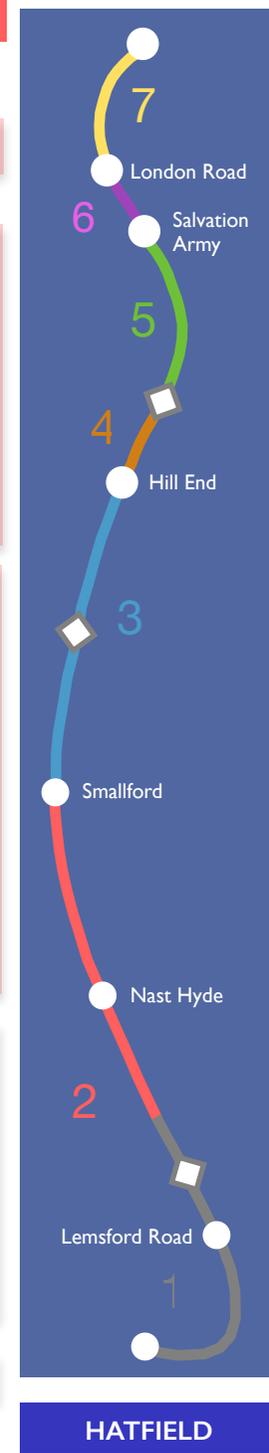
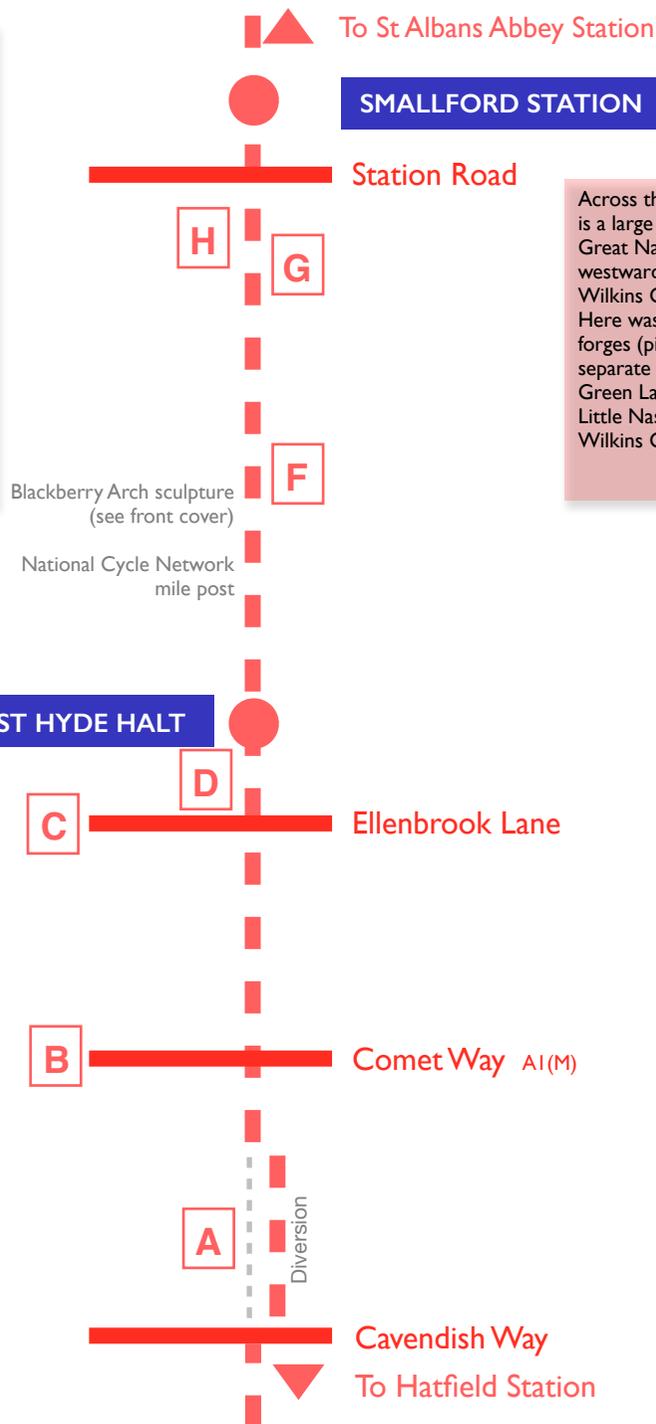


Nast Hyde Halt was opened in 1910, for the benefit of a new housing estate at Nast Hyde and Ellenbrook, which was not fully realised. The houses built lining the north side of Hatfield Road were eventually demolished for aerodrome development.



Hatfield Tunnel commandeered the former railway trackbed; hence the diversion.

Further information on Section 1

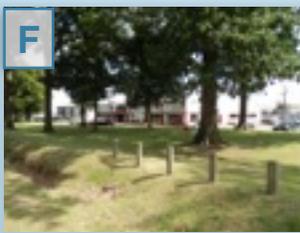


3 Smallford Station to Hill End Station

Just before reaching Colney Heath Lane bridge, which enables traffic to climb over the former railway, homes now line the once-rural lane on the left side. The right side is home to schools and playing fields.



Once all of the useful gravel had been removed, most of the pits were filled. Unfortunately, there are serious question marks about the quality of the fill, making future development uncertain. Some areas were turned into angling lakes, as here.



The wooded and isolated part of Butterwick Farm to the north of the railway became a home for factories after WW2. Part is now retail, and there are also church groups.



The stream (see D) flows towards Smallford Farm at the lower end of Colney Heath Lane, the original site of the hamlet.



Beyond the immediate landscape was Butterwick Farm homestead, demolished when the land was worked for its gravel.



Other than at the termini, this station was the first to open, and initially named Springfield, though later changed to Smallford. This picture shows the front of the building and entrance. Beyond the picket fence was the coal yard. Beyond that was a siding from the main line. Tickets survive for a wide range of destinations starting from Smallford. The Station has also appeared in both amateur and professional movies. It closed in 1951 when passenger services ceased.

HILL END STATION

TAKE CARE: BLIND ROAD CROSSING

Hill End Lane

Colney Heath Lane

BUTTERWICK SIDING

SMALLFORD STATION

Station Road

To Hatfield Station

To St Albans Abbey Station



There was thick woodland here (hence Firwood Avenue). Along the lane near Hatfield Road stood a small turnpike toll house where payments were made to give access to the turnpiked Hatfield Road for cart owners and animal drovers.

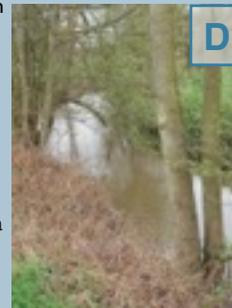


At Butterwick Siding a pair of tracks left the main line to serve a meat store and a banana ripening store, near to today's modern Alban Point complex.



Many market gardening firms moved to Smallford from the Lower Lea Valley, the largest being J Nielsen. Today Glinwell plc grows salad crops here and at several other locations.

A stream which gave Smallford its name flows from north of Hatfield Road towards the River Colne near Colney Heath. Here it flows through a former sports field of Ballito Hosiery Mills.



4 Hill End Station to Fleetville Siding

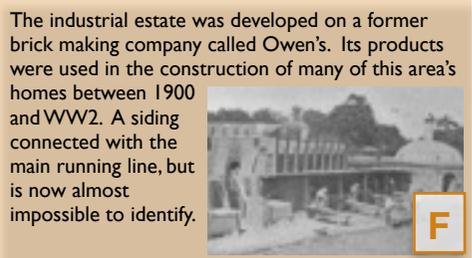
I At the corner of Hatfield Road and Sutton Road is the Rats' Castle pub. It was built on the site of an earlier and derelict turnpike road toll house, where the roof had become infested with rats. The field was known locally as Rats' Castle Field.



J Alfred Nicholson brought his coat business from Manchester in 1901, purchasing a large block of land bordering the railway, for sidings and factories. The factories never came, and even Nicholson's has now gone. Further back is the Camp estate, built in two of the former Beaumonts Farm fields.



The industrial estate was developed on a former brick making company called Owen's. Its products were used in the construction of many of this area's homes between 1900 and WW2. A siding connected with the main running line, but is now almost impossible to identify.



D The Garden of Rest is the former cemetery for the hospital, located outside of the grounds – the road forming the boundary. Although only a few gravestones exist, there were many hundreds of burials here. Further information is available on the interpretation panels in the Garden.



A Hill End Station, opened in 1899, looking towards Hatfield, with sidings behind. From here a track led directly into the hospital grounds behind, for deliveries of coal. Today only the platform is left; new homes have been built on the old sidings.



C The Hill End Mental Asylum, later Hospital, was opened on part of Hill End Farm in 1899. During the next 80 years it looked after and treated thousands of people having a range of mental conditions. During WW2 it became home to Barts Teaching Hospital from the City of London. Most of the buildings no longer exist, having been replaced by Highfield residential district, but two ward blocks (one pictured) and the chapel, now a performance venue, remain in active use.



Sutton Road

FLEETVILLE SIDING

For information see Section 5

Ashley Road

HILL END STATION

TAKE CARE: BLIND ROAD CROSSING

To St Albans Abbey Station

The Castle Road estate (see also I) is shown here incomplete. Here grew a dairy and a bakery for the district's Co-operative Society, and a number of printers and textile workers for nearby factories lived in the terrace homes.



Ashley Road is part of an ancient trackway which linked other routes and manors across south Herts, and maybe further afield.



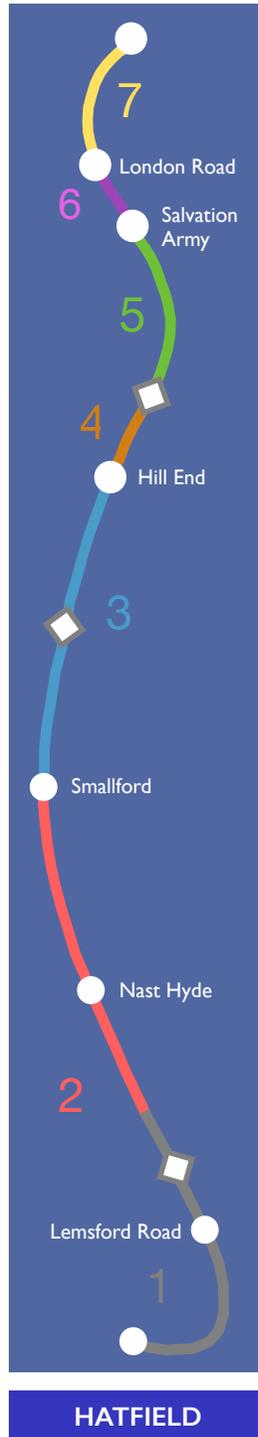
Most of the land on each side of the tracks in sections 4 and 5 was part of Beaumonts Farm, a former manor, for which records existed from the 14th century. It was owned by the Kinder family. The last part of the farm was sold in 1929.



On the land opposite Hill End Station, was a small brick works. Shortly before WW2 Marconi Instruments Ltd arrived here. The firm later had other premises nearby. It opened at an appropriate time to take advantage of technological innovations; the company is now part of a group based in Colchester.



Longacres open space was, for two decades, the home of dahlia growing by Ernie Cooper (pictured), whose home was also nearby. The popular Jescott varieties, named after his wife Jessie, were bred here. He also grew dahlias at Smallford Farm, before moving to the south coast.



5 Fleetville Siding to Salvation Army Halt

I



The original deck bridge, which included a pedestrian route, was demolished with railway closure. It was replaced by the current blue structure when Alban Way opened. Hatfield is to the right; St Albans to the left.

G



The right track is a siding for the Salvation Army print works (far right), now replaced by small modern warehouses. The photo is taken from the first, short, platform built for Sander's Orchid Nurseries, whose site is now a junior school. The replacement platform (J) is now in poor condition.

B

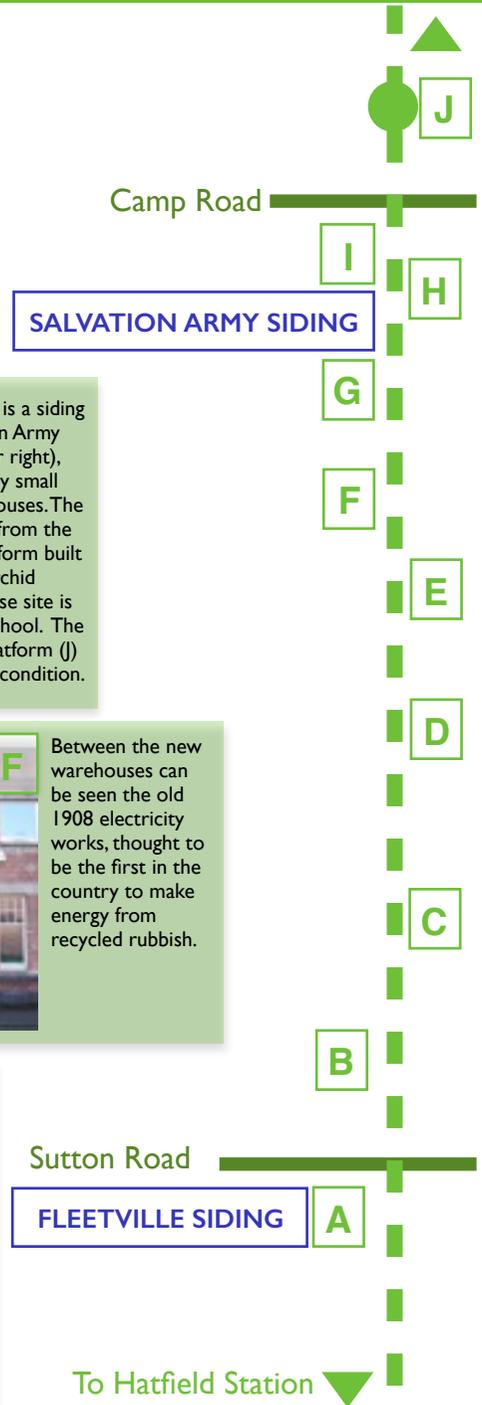


The deck of the bridge was removed in 1967, and the road levelled. The gates (right) are now part of Coach Mews.

A



Fleetville Siding, now Coach Mews, built to serve the nearby factories, many of which did not materialise. Local coal merchants used the yard to load their deliveries for homes in the district, when almost everyone required coal for heating.



J



Behind the platform was a short siding for Sander's. The platform was shared by employees of, and visitors to, Sander's and the Salvation Army Printing Works. The photo faces Hatfield.

D

1930s housing estate, and formerly Fleetville's first recreation ground. It was also part of Oakley's dairy farm. A stream once flowed along here to join the River Ver.

H



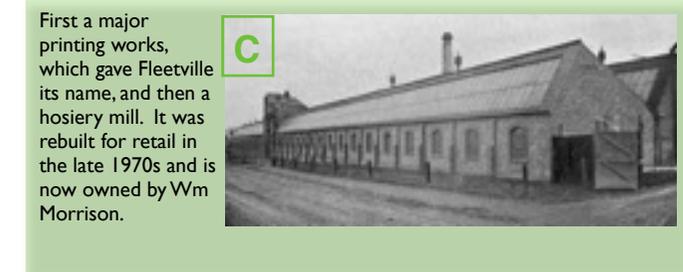
Sander's Orchid Nurseries were internationally renowned for the quality of rare and exotic plants. The site was often visited by European Royalty. Its platform was originally at H, but was later moved to J (see picture). The orchid collection was taken over by Eric Young Foundation of Jersey.

E

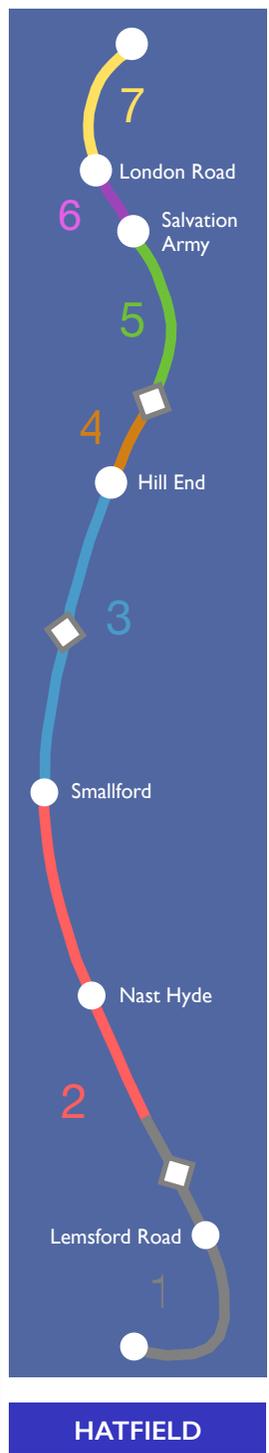


Nearest to Alban Way at Hatfield Road Cemetery is the green burial area, rich with wild flowers in early summer. Between C and D is Fleetville Junior School. The building opened as a secondary school in 1931, and has had five names during its history.

C



First a major printing works, which gave Fleetville its name, and then a hosiery mill. It was rebuilt for retail in the late 1970s and is now owned by Wm Morrison.



6 Salvation Army Halt to London Road Station



E London Road Station was originally built as the opposite terminus station to Hatfield, but the line was quickly extended to what is now known as Abbey Station, to give connections with Watford and Euston. The houses in Orient Close are built on former sidings. A low wall opposite the station was the edge of a second platform built in anticipation of traffic.

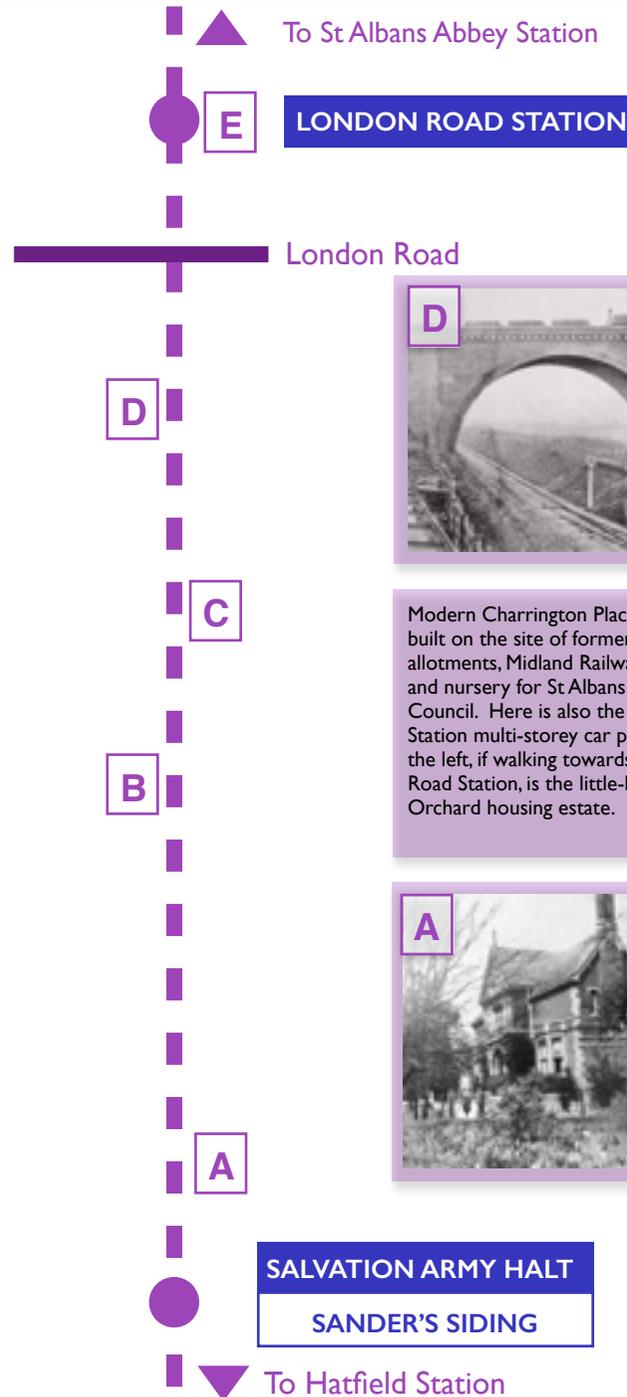


E Left: London Road Station after closure, from the road bridge.

Below: a later and busier station scene than above from the second platform. Notice that, as with the others, the station was confusingly called ST ALBANS. This was the only part of the route with two tracks. Orient Close has been constructed partly on the former station access road. *COURTESY R C CRAWLEY.*



B It may be presumed that the end of Flora Grove (pictured), which lines up with a spur off Dellfield, was intended to be linked. Unfortunately, the route is in a cutting here, and no official connection was made. However, it did become an unofficial crossing point for the nimble!

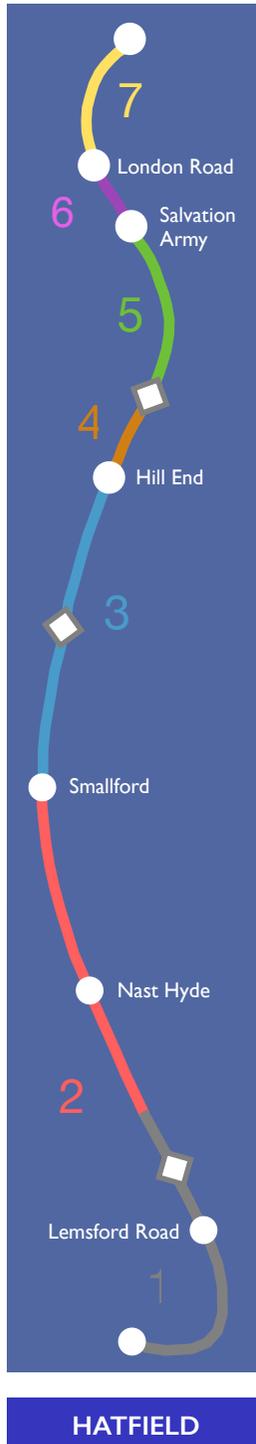


D The lofty and well-built arches support the tracks of the Midland Railway. Originally a two-track railway, the join to the later-constructed additional tracks can be clearly seen. Photo shows the earliest structure with branch line beneath. *COURTESY ST ALBANS' MUSEUMS.*

C Modern Charrington Place has been built on the site of former allotments, Midland Railway sidings and nursery for St Albans City Council. Here is also the City Station multi-storey car park. On the left, if walking towards London Road Station, is the little-known Orchard housing estate.



A Friederick Sander had his home, Orchid House, on one side of Camp Road, and his garden (foreground) on the other; the two sites are now SS Alban & Stephen Junior School and Infants' School. The footpath which crosses the route follows the line of Camp Road before it was altered to its present position to give sufficient headroom under the line.



For information see section 5.

7 London Road Station to St Albans Abbey Station



The station, next to Sainsbury's, was built for the line to Watford, which opened in 1858. Trains from Hatfield joined the station using the platform on the right. None of the original station buildings now survives.

K



Where the stores are today was the site of the St Albans Gas Works until the 1960s, using coal brought by the adjacent rail lines. However, it was not an attractive site, which occupied the full length of the present Griffiths Way.

J



The crossing follows the track of the former mill from Cottonmill Lane. **WARNING: LOOK BOTH WAYS FOR TRAINS! Crossing may be closed.**

I



Among the trees on the far side of the rec is the former homestead of Sopwell Mill Farm.

F

To the east of London Road Station, behind the new homes, is a very long building of over 400 feet. It was home to the Vickers Experimental Wave Tank from 1911, where models of sea-going ships were tested for resilience in a wide range of simulated weather conditions.



A



A major structure was required to bridge over the River Ver. Much of this section is in the Ver valley and a public path follows the route of this wonderful little chalk stream below us.

C



D

F

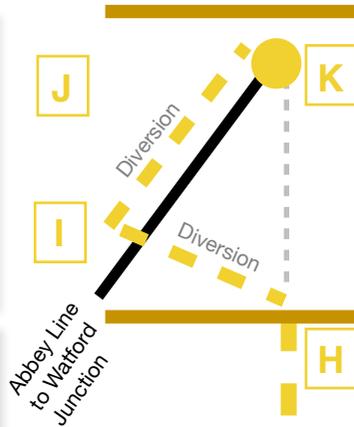
E

D

C

B

A



Holywell Hill

ST ALBANS ABBEY STATION

Remainder of line not accessible

Cottonmill Lane



The original narrow arched road bridge of Cottonmill Lane was replaced shortly before the end of passenger services. Notice the change of brickwork on the abutments, to accommodate a wider roadway.

H

Behind the allotments is the site of medieval Sopwell Nunnery, founded in 1140. It is now a public open space, and often referred to as Sopwell Ruins. Within its walls is a remnant of a house (Lee Hall) built by land owner Sir Richard Lee. He was appointed Surveyor of the King's Works in 1544.



E



D

The extensive allotment gardens close to the river provide a fine alluvial soil for crop growing. Note the height of the railway embankment required in this section. This compares with the long cutting in Section 6 from which the spoil undoubtedly came.

River Ver

On both sides of the railway were watercress beds, which were very important for the nutrition of the town's people. The pools and lakes are now the Watercress Wildlife Association grounds (on the right) and the angling grounds of Verulam Angling Club. The former is open to the public, but Verulam Angling Club is private.

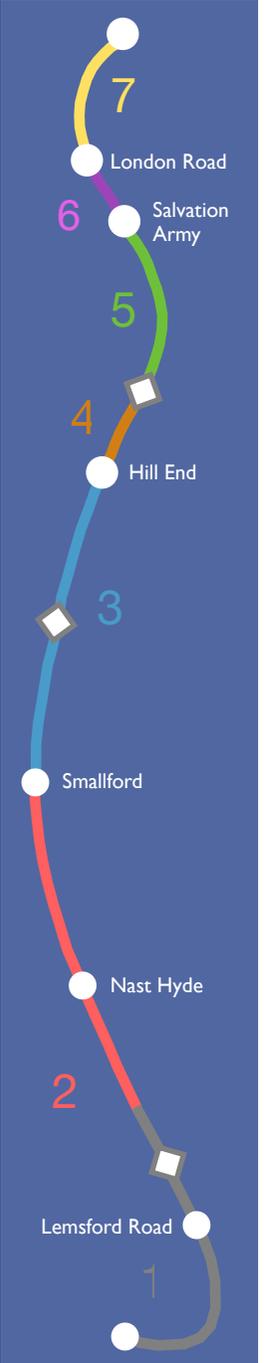


B

For information see Section 5.

LONDON ROAD STATION

To Hatfield Station



HATFIELD

Walkers

- Take care along the trail, remember cycles are very quiet and you may not hear them coming.
- Please keep dogs under control and clear up all dog mess.
- Please keep the Alban Way tidy, take your litter home.
- Please do not pick the wildflowers.
- Do not wander onto adjacent private land.

Cyclists

- Please be considerate to other users and allow plenty of room when passing.
- Fit a bell to warn others, considerately, of your approach, don't assume pedestrians can hear or see you.
- Take special care when approaching all junctions.
- Make sure your bike is in good order.

Alban Way is a six-and-a-half mile shared walking and cycling route between Hatfield Station and St Albans Abbey Station. It was created from the former Hatfield & St Albans Railway, 1865 to 1968.

Walkers, joggers and cyclists are asked to be aware of others' presence and use the width of the path responsibly, especially if in a group. Please observe the guidelines above.

Alban Way has regular connections with intersecting roads. Frequent bus services operate along Hatfield Road and Holywell Hill so that returning to your starting point by bus is easy (but admittedly less so on Sundays). Nearby parking can be found at several points along the route, although in the vicinity of the University you will find the Galleria (chargeable) and Station Road, Smallford good alternatives.

There are no toilets at any point along Alban Way. However, the following retail centres close to the route will welcome your custom, all of which have food and drink services, and toilet facilities: Galleria, Notcutts, Three Horseshoes, Dunelm, Morrison's, Verdi's (a short walk to the Crown junction), and Sainsbury's and McDonalds, Griffiths Way.

PLEASE NOTE: Network Rail may close the foot crossing near Griffiths Way, in which case please use an alternative route to Abbey Station via Cottonmill Lane, Prospect Road and Holywell Hill.