
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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for 2009



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The CAS Collection of Cambridgeshire 'Sketches'

John Pickles

The Society's large collection of photographs and negatives, mostly c. 1890–1940, have long been deposited in the County Record Office and Cambridgeshire Collection of the city's public library. It retains in its own library a rich collection of prints and engravings of many periods, and a number of unique drawings and paintings in various media. They include ten pencil sketches of Fenland topography done in 1822 by 'Shepherd', watercolours by Edward Vulliamy (1876–1962) and Louis Cobbett (1862–1947), and a prize-winning watercolour of the view from Laurie & McConal's roof (1938) by Beryl Pickering. The Society's three bound albums of well-known topographical watercolours from the first quarter of the nineteenth century, principally by Richard Relhan the younger, now kept in the Map Room of Cambridge University Library with a typescript catalogue of their contents, deserve separate and fuller treatment.

It is intended to illustrate some of these images in a short series and finally to print a list of them all. We begin with three early examples. The identity of the three artists is difficult and further information would be welcome. I am grateful to Andrew Morris who provided digital photographs of the originals for reproduction.

Catledge or Kirtling Hall (1760)

Watercolour by 'Matthews' (ref. SB1 mounted, 180 x 106mm). Plate 4

One of the great lost houses of Cambridgeshire, this Tudor mansion near Newmarket mostly built by the first Lord North (d. 1564) was the largest country house in the county in the 1660s. The Cambridge antiquary William Cole visited in August 1752 while making notes for his 'Parochial Antiquities', but failed to gain access as the family were at dinner. He described it as a 'noble old seat' and correctly noted that part of it had been 'lately [*i.e.* in 1748] taken down' but what remained was 'very capacious'. After the death in 1762 without children of Maria, widow of the sixth Lord North who occupied the house as her jointure, the property reverted to another branch of the family, and was hardly used by them. It was demolished in 1801 and the site was largely planted with trees. The estate was bought from the Norths by Lord Fairhaven in 1941. The large 'tower' or former gatehouse still exists with later modifications.

The neat and pleasing watercolour of 1760 by the unidentified 'Matthews' predates a more familiar sketch by Rev. Cooper Willyams, Vicar of Exning from 1788 to 1806, published as an engraving by Ravenhill in Sir Egerton Brydges's *Topographical Miscellanies containing ancient histories and modern descriptions of man-*



sions (1792). The Willyams drawing is reproduced in a full account of the house in *VCH Cambridgeshire, X* (2002), 63–9, and the Relhan collection (see above) includes a watercolour of c. 1800.

Layton's Stone, Ely (1807)

Pen & ink drawing by H. Burgess (ref. SB 2 mounted 332x 242mm, border included). Ink stamp of 'Cambridge Photographic Record' on reverse. Plate 5

At Ely on the afternoon of Sunday, 30 June 1799, an apprentice basketmaker called Robert Jervis found a man hanging in an open lodge at a nearby kiln. The body was taken down by Edward Lupson, gardener, and John Lee, a fisherman. One young man present noted that the man's left foot was supported by five tiles on which he appeared to have stood and the right foot hung straight down with his toes touching the ground. These and other details became known on the Monday following, 1 July, when Hugh R Evans, the Ely coroner, held an inquest at *The Anchor* on the death of John Layton, a local porter, 'then and there lying dead.'¹ Layton's cousin Mary Woodbine related that on the previous Saturday night he had asked her neighbour if he could borrow a cord which he had had previously 'to tye the Pig up with'. What he needed it for this time he would not say. Mary 'further saith that she thought she observed a great Wildness in the Deceased's Eyes.' Yet on Sunday morning he had helped a maltster, Thomas Cunnington, shift some grain and seemed 'quite as sensible as he ever saw him'. Robert Bristow who was well acquainted with Layton deposed that on the fatal day their talk had turned to a woman who had lately hanged herself at Barnwell, and Layton said 'it was a pity she made away with herself': to Bristow he appeared 'in his perfect senses and in every respect as usual.'

Did no one at the inquest comment on the barely efficient, painful way in which Layton had choked

to death, presumably struggling to regain his footing? Surely they must have asked 'Why did he do it?' There is no clue in the official record about his motives. One may surmise that Mary Woodbine's statement about the 'great wildness' in his eyes was intended to show he had gone mad and she had good reason to say so. There had been another suicide in Ely only days earlier when the inquest found that William Johnson, a thirty-nine year old tailor who had forced himself into the small opening of a well, suffered from 'lunacy'. That kind verdict allowed him to be buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity on 27 June. No such fate awaited Layton since it was concluded that he 'feloniously, wilfully, and of his Malice forethought, killed and murdered himself'. The parish officers were instructed by warrant (a printed form with the blanks filled in by hand) to take the body 'to be buried in some public Highway' and to certify where. On the reverse is a manuscript note by Robert Dix, churchwarden, and William Willson, constable, dated 2 July 1799 recording that Layton was 'interred in a place between Ely and Stretham near to a certain place called Barton Pitts in the Parish of Ely Trinity in the said Isle in the King's Highway'. (CRO, Coroner's Records, Isle of Ely, ES/CO/P21).

It is not clear who Layton was for of course he does not appear in burial registers whereas Johnson does, and there are several possibilities. He may have been an unmarried man of middle years. The sequel is odd since Johnson was probably soon forgotten while Layton, whose last act had been to exclude him in death from the society to which he belonged, lived on as a very visible warning. *The Cambridge Chronicle* of 21 September 1799 (p3) recorded that to mark his death 'a stone has been placed by subscription, on the road leading to Cambridge and Chatteris, engraved on three sides'. The inscription (taken here from the drawing) read, 'All Ye/ That pass by/Pray to God/



To Preserve/And Keep you/From the Crime/ Of Self Murder/ On which occasion/ This Stone/ Was Erected/ In Memory of/ IOHN LAYTON/ 1799'. 'Crime' seems to be emphasised in italic and the whole has rather the appearance of a gravestone. How long the stone survived after 1809 when this picture was done I am unable to say; it is not mentioned later in the century and may have been removed when the roads were widened or otherwise altered. Note the figure on the right, a Fenman with his tools who adds a contemporary, everyday feeling to the subject.

I am grateful to Anne Holton-Krayenbuhl for identifying the crossroads in the picture as 'probably the junction between Cambridge Road and Witchford Road (TL 534 797)', and for suggesting that H. Burgess is almost certainly 'Hilkiah'. He is sometimes mentioned in connexion with his father, the better known William Burgess of Fleet (d. 1813), with whom he collaborated on a series of engraved drawings of churches in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, including Ely Cathedral, in the first decade of the century. Hilkiah (1775–1868) whose long career has hardly been studied was described in the 1851 census as an 'architectural engraver'. *Layton's Stone* may have been intended merely as a rough sketch. An album of more than 130 of his ink drawings with the date 1808 has been sold and resold by booksellers in recent years but its present whereabouts is unknown to me. The query about whether he also wrote verse (*Notes & Queries*, 8 March 1947, p107) deserves the answer 'no' since the texts referred to are in fact by others.

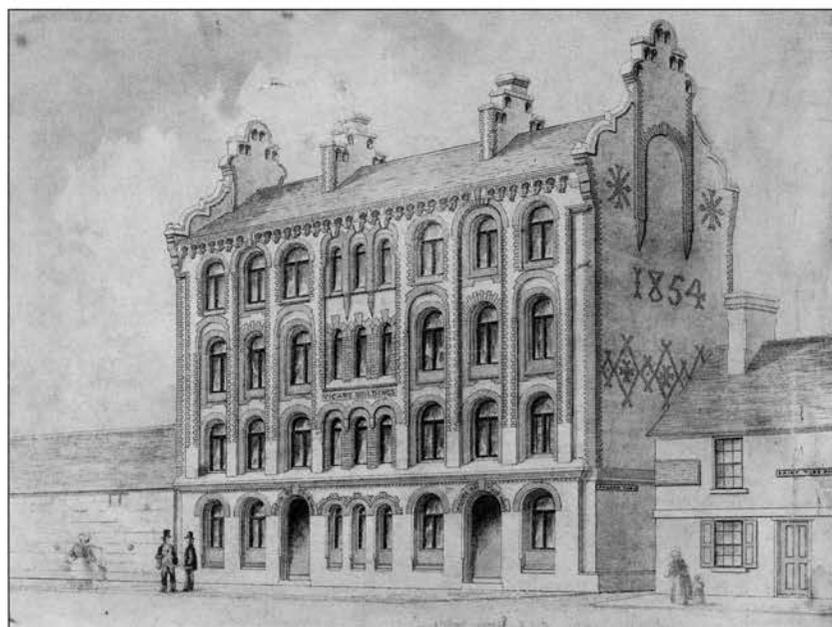
Vicar's Buildings, St Tibbs Row, Cambridge

Watercolour, anonymous (1855) (ref. SB13 mounted 381 x 316mm). Plate 6

'A rickety and filthy mass of buildings, called Sharpe's Rookery, at the Falcon-yard, leading from Petty Cury, under three archways, into the Black-ditch, in the parish of St. Andrew the Great, has been razed by the Rev. John Cooper, the vicar of the par-

ish, who has made a public carriage-way in lieu of a narrow, low, covered passage, and erected a model lodging-house for sixteen families, under the title of 'Vicar's Buildings', from designs by Mr R. R. Rowe, architect. Messrs. Gray and Sons were the builders. The exterior is brick, but moulded in various forms of divers colours: no particular style of architecture has been adopted: it is a brick construction, the chief feature being a combination of semicircular arches and vertical lines, which the *Cambridge Chronicle* compares to the old houses in Bruges. Two open arches lead into the entrance-halls, whence two stone staircases rise to the upper floors: one staircase leads to four suites of apartments, the other to twelve. Each door upon the landings is the front door of a distinct dwelling, consisting of a sitting-room, two bed-rooms, scullery, water-closet, sink, coal-place, cupboard, and dust-shoot.' ('Model Lodging House at Cambridge', *The Builder*, 17 Feb. 1855, 84).

The *Cambridge Chronicle* of 10 February 1855 (p5, col 2) which *The Builder* drew on here provides other non-architectural details beginning with a Dickensian reminder of what Sharpe's Rookery had been—a 'lofty, ugly, decayed, unsavoury, rickety, black-looking, propped-up mass'—before settling into a more measured style. Although the whole cost of acquiring the site and erecting the building had been borne by Cooper at somewhat under £2,500, he had found 'some eight or ten gentlemen in the University and town' willing to take £50 shares and the cooperation of others was invited. An entry (24 February 1855) in the diary of Joseph Romilly, University Registrar and like Cooper a Fellow of Trinity College, shows he was not minded to be one of them: 'Wrote to John Cooper declining to take shares in his Lodging Houses: by the way I am much pleased with the superscription over each door "Peace be to this House".' (M E Bury & J D Pickles, *Romilly's Cambridge Diary 1848-1864* (2000), 198). If the *Cambridge Chronicle* is correct in estimating an annual rental of only £125



before reductions for rates and taxes, it surely erred in saying that income was 'a most satisfactory interest' for shareholders. Rents varied from two shillings a week for a one-bedroom apartment to four shillings and sixpence for an apartment with two. 'The dwellings are nearly all occupied, and tenants are clean and manifestly cheerful and happy. Their moral and intellectual faculties have also been provided for: the Vicar has deposited in every room a Bible and Book of Common Prayer, and has specially invited the inmates to obtain other books from his parish lending library'. To keep them and as importantly the shareholders 'cheerful and happy' a careful list of fifteen rules had been drawn up. Prospective tenants needed to apply with a week's rent in advance and a reference of their good character to the Superintendent, John Arliss, who occupied no 13. He had 'authority to make suggestions for the better management of the rooms, and to interfere in case of misconduct.' Animals and dogs were not allowed. Drunkenness and ill conduct would lead to immediate ejection. Other regulations prohibited trade and sub-letting, putting liquid down the dust shafts or flower-pots on window ledges. Before it became black with soot (as it appears in the few later photographs that survive) the place must have been attractive, notwithstanding its somewhat barrack-like appearance. Its facilities could have been equalled in few private houses in the town in 1855.

To the articles in the *Builder* and *Cambridge Chronicle* further details may be added from the unpublished minutes of the town's Sanitary Committee of 8 February 1855 (Report book, CRO, 128–30). Its members visited 'and minutely inspected the building' at Cooper's invitation and were mightily impressed, congratulating him for his 'successful and praiseworthy efforts ... to benefit the working classes in his Parish'. The report noted that the building was fireproof and on four floors, with lofty and well-ventilated rooms, lighted from windows that opened, and all had fireplaces and boarded floors while the sculleries were paved with non-absorbent slate. There was a constant supply of mains water and waterclosets were on the 'most ample scale' and carefully drained. The only fault found was the absence of facilities for washing and drying linen but the Vicar had given them to understand that he contemplated building a nearby public washing and bath house. They trusted that similar healthy homes would be built 'in various parts of the Town'. They were not.²

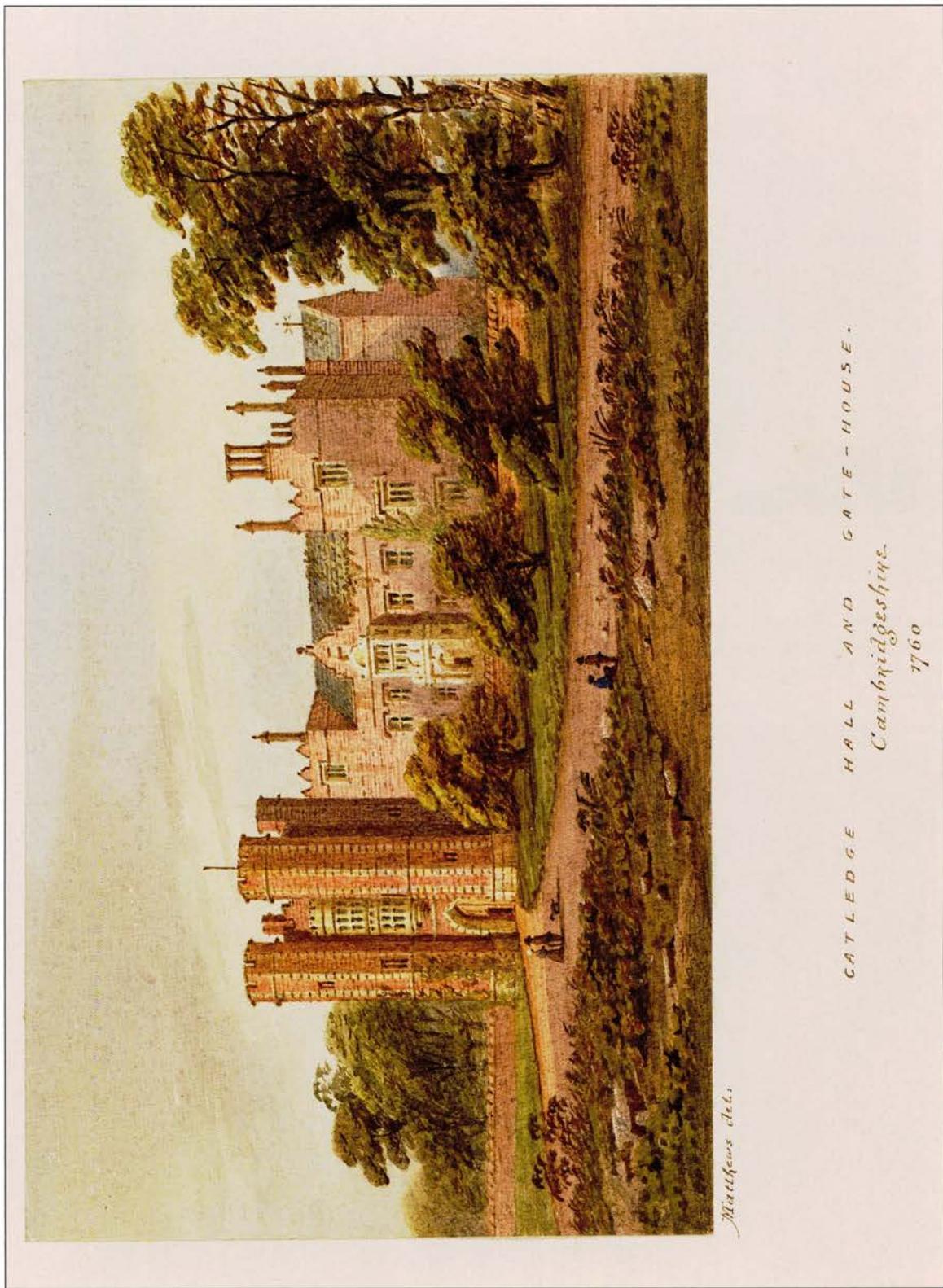
Building enterprises of this kind, usually known as 'five per cent philanthropy', were not uncommon in the mid-century especially after the Great Exhibition when the Prince Consort's model designs had been shown, and the subject attracted the pens of statisticians, reformers, and moralists. The intention was to provide sound housing at affordable rents for the working classes with a reliable return for investors, not charitable refuges for the infirm, destitute or unfortunate, though the term 'inmates', as it was used above, indicates only too well an authoritarian approach. Such schemes often foundered since even modest rents were too high for many. If the breadwinner died or was ill how was his widow to afford

the rent? Who would pay when the tenant was old? The Cambridge Union's pamphlet *List of out-door poor receiving relief* (1885) includes two elderly women at nos. 14 and 15, both 'infirm' and on long-term support from the rates, while the decennial censuses of 1861–91 suggest that some inmates would hardly have an income consonant with the payment of regular rents above the smallest.

Although the later history of Cooper's project and its probably rapid failure are involved in obscurity which others may wish to explore,³ such was the local attention paid to it in 1855 that it ought to be better remembered. Cooper left Cambridge and his living at St Andrew the Great in 1858 and was Vicar of Kendal for nearly 40 years before his death in 1896. His architect, Richard Reynolds Rowe (1824–99) who at the time was merely the town surveyor, went on to become one of the most favoured and ubiquitous Cambridge architects and when the long overdue study of his work is made one trusts that his early 'Vicar's Buildings' will not be overlooked. I have found no other early view of the façade of the building. It was demolished c. 1971 during the Lion Yard development when so much Victorian work in central Cambridge was destroyed, and the whole site is now covered by the new Grand Arcade of 2007/8.

Endnotes

1. Evans was coroner of Ely for over thirty years and convened 271 inquests between 1796 and 1823. Of those some six per cent (17) were cases of 'self murder' (the term 'suicide' never being used); of them only five were adjudged *felo-de-se* like Layton. See Robert Halliday, 'Wayside graves and crossroad burials', *PCAS* 84 (1995): 113–19. The Layton inquest and his memorial stone are briefly referred to on p116. Roadside burial was abolished by statute in 1823.
2. Cooper's pioneering effort on behalf of the virtuous working class was not repeated until 1878 when the Cambridge Industrial Dwellings Co. Ltd was incorporated. It worked in a different fashion, buying up and renovating or replacing old property on a substantial scale for rent. If it is doubtful whether local worthies involved as shareholders remembered the origins of the Vicar's Buildings, the philosophy of their prospectus was not dissimilar. 'Decent tenements will draw decent tenants who will leaven the neighbourhood in which they dwell; and on all their own property the Company will be able to impose rules which will tend to the cleanliness and health of the inhabitants and thereby help them to a higher social and moral level.' (Quoted in F A Keynes, *By-ways of Cambridge History* 2nd edition (1956, p107). Eglantyne Jebb was well aware of slum life in Victorian Cambridge and of attempts to remedy it, but she did not refer to the Vicar's Buildings in her *Cambridge: a brief study in social questions* (1906).
3. The Arliss family, descendants of the first Superintendent, lasted longest and at some point took over much of the building for their own printing works. What evidence there may be for the unlikely notion that early in the twentieth century part of the building was used by the police as a sort of 'licensed brothel' I am unable to say. The idea is canvassed in Henry Bosanquet, *Walks round vanished Cambridge: the Lion Yard* (1974), p24; crude sketches of the front and rear of the building immediately before its demolition are included.



CATTLEGE HALL AND GATE-HOUSE.
Cambridgeshire.
1760

Plate 4. Cattlege or Kirtling Hall (1760). Watercolour by 'Matthews' (ref. SB1 mounted, 180 x 106mm).



Above, Plate 5. Layton's Stone, Ely (1807). Pen & ink drawing by H. Burgess (ref. SB 2 mounted 332x 242mm, border included). Ink stamp of 'Cambridge Photographic Record' on reverse.

Below, Plate 6. Vicar's Buildings, St Tibbs Row, Cambridge Watercolour, anonymous (1855) (ref. SB13 mounted 381 x 316mm).

