
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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for 2008



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West Cambridge: the two World Wars and the inter-war lull

Philomena Guillebaud

This is the fourth of a series of articles tracing the history of the landscape of west Cambridge following the enclosure of the former West Fields.¹ In the two World Wars, west Cambridge suffered no physical damage but saw the appearance of large temporary structures: a military hospital in WW1 and an aircraft repair factory in WW2, each subsequently – and after much delay – demolished after peace returned. In the interwar period, a combination of financial constraints and an effective campaign waged by the Cambridge Preservation Society, nominally a town-and-gown organisation but weighted on the side of University interests, saw very little development on the west side of town. Clare College's Memorial Court was built, as was the new University Library: the first University building since the Observatory to be built outside the town centre. A small council housing estate was built in 1924 in the area south of Barton Road, and a limited amount of private housing appeared in the academic suburb, mostly after 1933 when five new roads provided more building plots. Compared with the visual transformations both before 1914 and after 1945, the landscape changed remarkably little. But three important invisible forces were at work: the intervention in University affairs by central government through the University grants system, the introduction of town planning and the transfer of over a quarter of the land area from college to University ownership. These forces were to result in the transformation of west Cambridge after 1945.

Introduction

Unlike North Oxford, the expression "west Cambridge" has no official status. For want of a better term, I have been obliged to use it to describe (initially) that area once known as the Parish of St Giles, with which the University and its colleges have traditionally had close ties. In 1800, the Parish (legally part of the Borough of Cambridge) consisted of over 1300 acres of open fields, known as the West Fields, and two small populated areas, that part of the old town lying between Castle Hill and the river Cam on the northeastern edge of the fields, and the village of Newnham on their southern fringe. Although no precise figures exist, the colleges

owned more than half the area of the Parish, some acquired through benefactions and some bought, and many of the academics took their exercise walking or riding through the fields.

The significance of the parish in this narrative lies in the fact that parishes were the units of enclosure under the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries. As the major owners, the colleges had a considerable impact on the outcome of the enclosure of St Giles, which took place between 1802 and 1805, not (so far as can be determined) by altering the statistics of ownership but very much by influencing the location of the lands allotted to the colleges – and to the University.² The latter was an insignificant landowner and moreover enclosure took place at a time when the powers of the University in relation to the colleges were at their nadir: things may have been done in the name of the University, but it was the colleges that called the tune, and continued to do so for the next century or so as far as the development of west Cambridge was concerned, though not always the same tune. While this power balance began to shift in the late 19th century, with the various University reform acts, the impact on west Cambridge was a long time in coming.

By the end of the 19th century, urban parishes had ceased to be secular administrative units, even for census purposes, and one might well ask whether the original Parish of St Giles is a meaningful geographical unit when considering changes over the last 200 years, which have been so closely bound up with the development of the University and its colleges. The perhaps surprising answer is that, by and large, it is. Huntingdon Road remains a genuine boundary, with hardly any university or college involvement north of that road, and the somewhat complicated eastern boundary nearest to the river (the Backs) is unchanged. The long western boundary that zigzags through the countryside bordering the parishes of Madingley and Girton and then southeast past Coton to Grantchester has no distinguishing physical features, but survives unchanged; even today university-related development has remained essentially within it.

It is on the southern boundary that there has been a change. In 1912 that part of Grantchester parish which recent building had turned into a suburb of Cambridge was detached and incorporated into the Borough.³ About half of its 166 acres was composed of allotments, water meadows and college playing fields, but it also contained a certain amount of “gentry” housing as well as the closely-packed working class district of Newnham Croft. For the first time, this brought a significant commercial area to the suburb, with numbers of small tradesmen.

Figure 1, based on a map of 1928 showing the tentative thinking of the town planners at that time, has been adapted to show, *inter alia*, the original area (the Parish of St Giles) enclosed in 1805, and the area added in 1912 which effectively became part of the suburb of

west Cambridge. St Giles disappeared as an electoral or administrative unit after 1911, most of it incorporated into Castle Ward, and in 1934, with a general revision of electoral boundaries, the latter was split into two wards, Madingley Road being the dividing line between Castle Ward to the north and Newnham Ward to the south. St Giles remained an ecclesiastical parish, though somewhat truncated when the new parish of St Mark’s was created by uniting the former Grantchester area with what had been the southern extremity of St Giles’s Parish.

In the text which follows, the term “west Cambridge” should be understood to include both the area covered by the Enclosure Award and the added area south of Barton road.

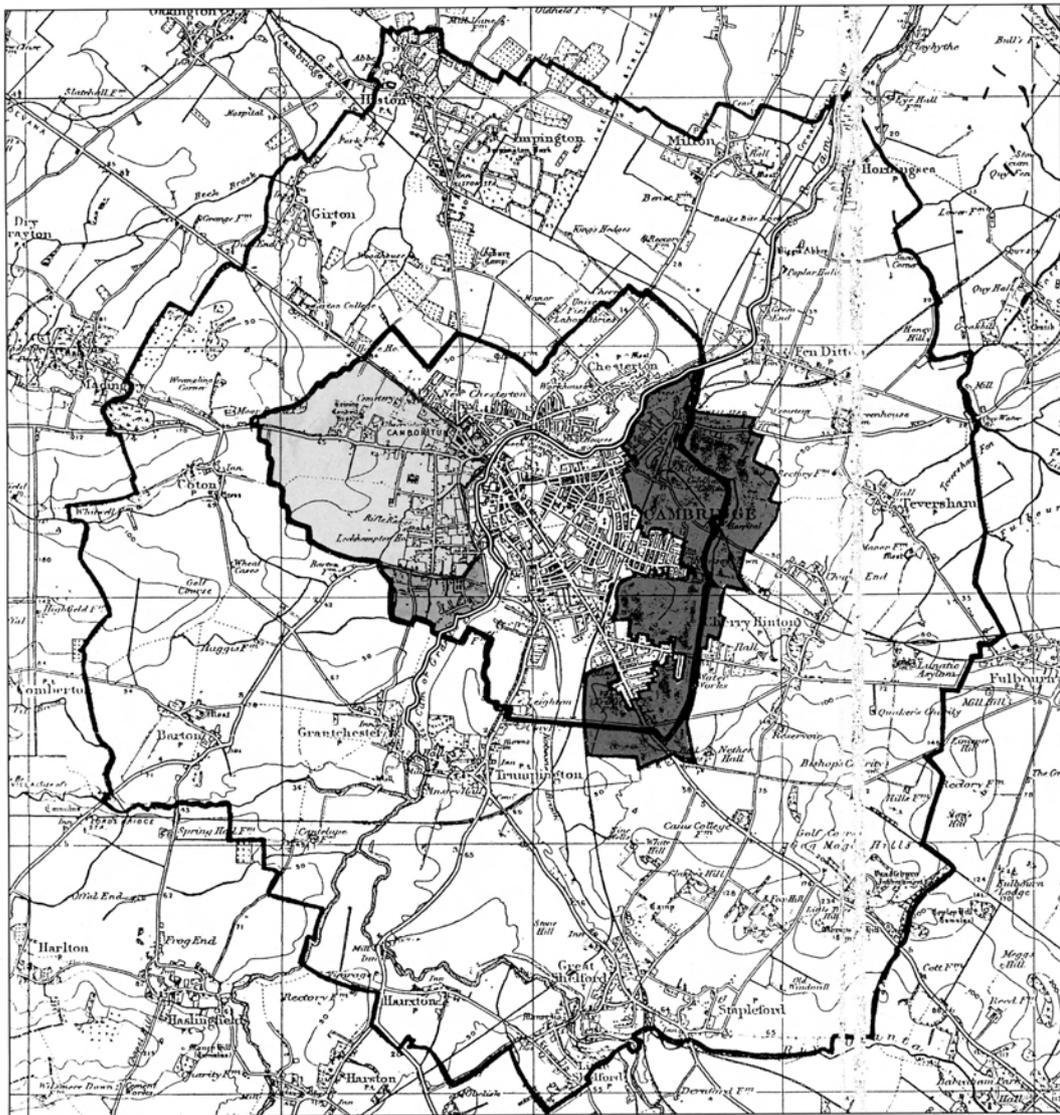


Figure 1. “Cambridge Borough Town Planning Proposals, June 1928” (CUL Maps 53(2).92.5). Shading has been added to distinguish the areas discussed here: The Parish of St. Giles in 1805; Area included in west Cambridge after 1912; “Area already Town Planned” as shown on the original Planning Proposals map. The inner thick black line marks the boundary of Cambridge Borough after 1912; the outer thick black line represents the area covered by the 1928 Town Planning Proposals.

World War I and its impact on the University

The town and its surroundings suffered no physical damage in the first war, the major impact being the disappearance of most of the younger male and some of the female population, town or gown, into the armed services or war industry. Not that the place was deserted: there were times in the first war when so many troops were stationed there that there were encampments as far away as Grantchester, and horses were picketed in Adams Road.⁴ There was however one significant change in the built landscape.

Anyone looking at the 1927 Ordnance Survey map of Cambridge will be struck by a feature not found on maps either before or after that date: a large grid-like structure east of Grange Road and south of Burrell's Walk (Fig. 2). This is the First Eastern General Hospital, built in 1914 on what had been the joint cricket field of Clare and King's Colleges.

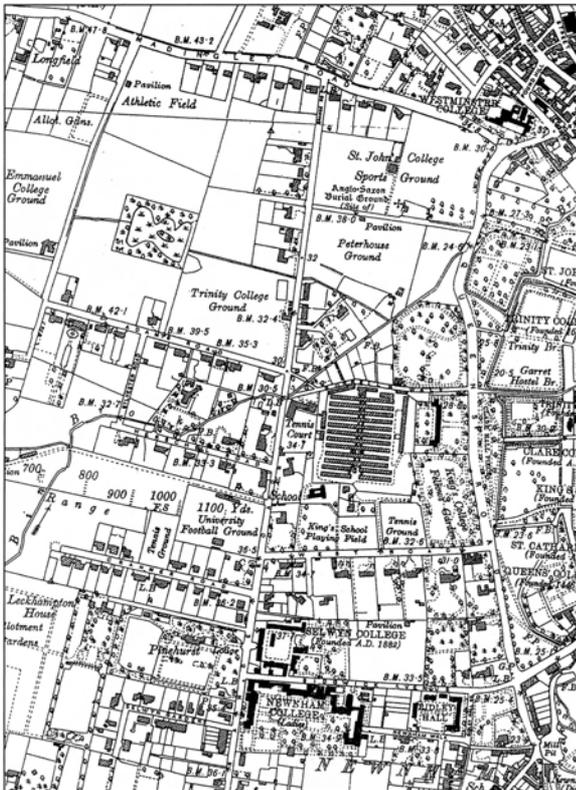


Figure 2. First Eastern General Hospital, subsequently used for temporary housing. Source: Ordnance Survey Map published 1927

When the first wounded arrived in Cambridge from France in September 1914, an emergency open-air hospital with 250 beds was improvised under the arcades of Trinity's Neville's Court while building of a hut hospital started on the requisitioned playing field site, where the first patients were received little more than a month later.⁵ The astonishing speed of the new hospital's creation resulted from the long

period of detailed planning, beginning in 1908, by the man who was to be the head of it, Col. Joseph Griffiths.⁶ At its fullest extent, it contained 24 wards arranged in two rows of 12 one-storey huts either side of a central spine, and held 1,700 beds. Vehicular access was from West Road. For the first two years it resembled the arcade hospital in so far as the wards were open on one side, the patients more or less protected from wind and rain by canvas blinds which could be lowered.⁷ While this resulted in remarkably low death rates compared with many military hospitals and was said to be popular with the patients, it was unpopular with the nursing staff, and after two years 20 of the 24 wards had been enclosed, though 4 remained unchanged till the end.⁸

The tenancy agreement signed in December 1915 between the Army and the two colleges provided for its continuance for as long as the former needed it but not more than 6 months after the end of the war.⁹ By the end of 1918 the hospital had been largely evacuated, having cared for over 62,000 patients of whom 437 died,¹⁰ and in August 1919 it closed, by which time the two colleges were clamouring for the return of their playing fields. In a letter of 23 August 1919 to the Bursar of King's, the then Mayor of Cambridge wrote that the Borough was facing a disastrous housing shortage: among other problems, war workers and others had been occupying University-licensed lodging houses, and now that the students were returning the lodging-house keepers wanted them out and there was nowhere for them to go. He pleaded that the Borough be allowed to rent the site for 12 months, if the Army agreed to let the buildings remain.¹¹ Reluctantly, and not unaffected by fear of a possible compulsory purchase order,¹² the colleges agreed, and agreement was reached to let the site until January 1922.¹³ In March 1921 the colleges, having been informed by the Town Planning Committee that 213 families were now housed on the site, with a waiting list of another 100,¹⁴ recognized the inevitable and sought an alternative site for their playing field, eventually settling on land owned by King's in the area south of Barton Road which had recently been amalgamated with the Borough.¹⁵

The Borough spent £17,000 on converting the buildings into units of between 1 and 5 rooms, with an average of 3.¹⁶ Spalding's Street Directories for the period 1921 to 1929, which list the site under Burrell's Walk, show consistently full occupation by approximately 200 tenants until 1927/28, when the numbers start to decline. While by no means all residents' occupations are identified, among those listed over the years are GPO inspector, coach painter, college servant, postman, "M.A.", school master, dental mechanic and 4 CUOTC sergeants.¹⁷ I revert to the role of this site later when discussing housing development.

In the meantime, certain University officers had started to look for a site for a new University Library building, the inadequacy of the existing premises in the Old Schools having reached crisis proportions. Given strong resistance in some quarters to any move from its historic site, this was a delicate mat-

ter. However, in November 1921 the Secretary of the University Financial Board, presumably aware that King's and Clare had given up hope of reclaiming their playing fields within a reasonable time, wrote inquiring whether they might be interested in selling the site, of which 5 acres belonged to Clare and 3 acres to King's, to the University for the Library.¹⁸ No decision was reached at the time, and indeed other locations such as that which became the Sidgwick site were canvassed during the following years. Meanwhile, whatever the eventual site chosen, the University was faced with a formidable and unprecedented fund-raising effort.

Because the history of the Library is entwined with that of Clare College's Memorial Court, it is necessary at this point to examine the latter. Alone among the colleges with land along the Backs, Clare erected no college buildings in the nineteenth century – and indeed none once its original court was completed in 1769.¹⁹ Between 1815 and 1915, it had only two masters (one presiding over the college for 40, the other for 60 years) both conservative by nature and the first specifically determined that the college should remain small. Nonetheless undergraduate numbers grew from 70 in 1870 to 183 in 1900,²⁰ the increase having to be accommodated in lodgings in the town,²¹ and by 1911 it was concluded that further building was unavoidable. Since tests had shown that the area between the river and Queen's Road occupied today by Clare Fellows' Garden was unsuitable for building because of the high water table, the site chosen was the so-called 'farther Fellows' garden' on the west side of Queen's Road, part of an 11-acre allotment received by the college at the time of enclosure in 1805. After enclosure, Clare owned about 32 acres in various locations in the Parish of St Giles, as well as other land in Chesterton Parish, but from the college's point of view the alternatives were even less convenient than the one selected.

With a generous offer from an anonymous donor, it seemed that financing was feasible, designs were requested from architects including Lutyens, but for unknown reasons, probably disagreement among the fellows, the project was abandoned in October 1912.²² However the notion of building on the farther garden survived, and in 1921 plans begin to be drawn up for a Memorial Court in honour of college members who had fallen in the war.²³ The architect chosen was Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, and the first wing of the court was occupied in 1924, though the project as he designed it was not completed until 1935. It was financed partly by selling college property in St Giles and Chesterton parishes and partly by donations from the likes of Paul Mellon, a former student, or relatives of college members killed in the war. No other college followed this precedent to expand into west Cambridge until after 1945, but then none faced similar physical obstacles to expansion within its traditional site.

By the mid-1920s recognition was growing that the old hospital site, immediately west of Memorial Court, was the best location for the new Library. The consensus was that its design should be on the same

axis as Memorial Court and aesthetically compatible with Scott's work there, which met with such approval that the Library Syndicate, ignoring normal practice, selected him as designer for the Library without holding a competition. This is one of the very few instances in Cambridge of deliberate urban design, all the more interesting in that it involved two autonomous academic entities.²⁴ By the time Scott produced his first proposals, which envisaged using the same brick and tile as Memorial Court, the University had successfully enlisted the massive financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation (£250,000 out of a total building cost of £320,000) but unfortunately John D. Rockefeller Jr, when shown the designs, objected that they were not sufficiently impressive.²⁵ Scott then revised his designs and produced the Library with which we are familiar today. George V when opening it in 1934 referred to it, a little too aptly, as "this powerhouse of learning."

Academic institutions were among those hardest hit by the fall in the value of money during and after the war. Already in November 1918 the new universities created in the 19th century had appealed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for help. The Government asked for detailed reports on their needs, and decided to extend its inquiry to the two older Universities by setting up in 1919 the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge Universities (commonly known as the Asquith Commission) which made its report in 1922.²⁶ Unlike the 1850 and 1877 Royal Commissions on those Universities, this one was primarily focussed on finance.

Before this time, Oxford and Cambridge had been entirely self-financing, but the Asquith Commission concluded that they were no longer able to pay their way. "Already before the War, the financial situation was serious; many staff were underpaid and overworked, and not a few had no pension prospects; research, particularly in the Humanities, was very poorly provided for and difficulties were beginning to be felt in maintaining and staffing Libraries and Museums. If these problems were present before the war, they have been rendered insoluble by the change in the value of money; but for the interim grant of £30,000 allowed by the State to each University for general purposes since 1920, it would have been impossible to continue their present work even provisionally."²⁷

The report noted that while the gross income of some colleges had risen since the end of the war, the aggregate purchasing power of University and college wealth had shrunk seriously and the number of students had increased significantly compared with 1914.²⁸ The key recommendation was that the interim grant be replaced by an annual grant of £100,000 to each University, in addition to a £10,000 grant for special purposes (mainly women's education and extramural work).²⁹ Thus began the system of University grants which continues if in modified form to the present day.

The report also contained a crucial statement: "We are opposed to any public grant being made to

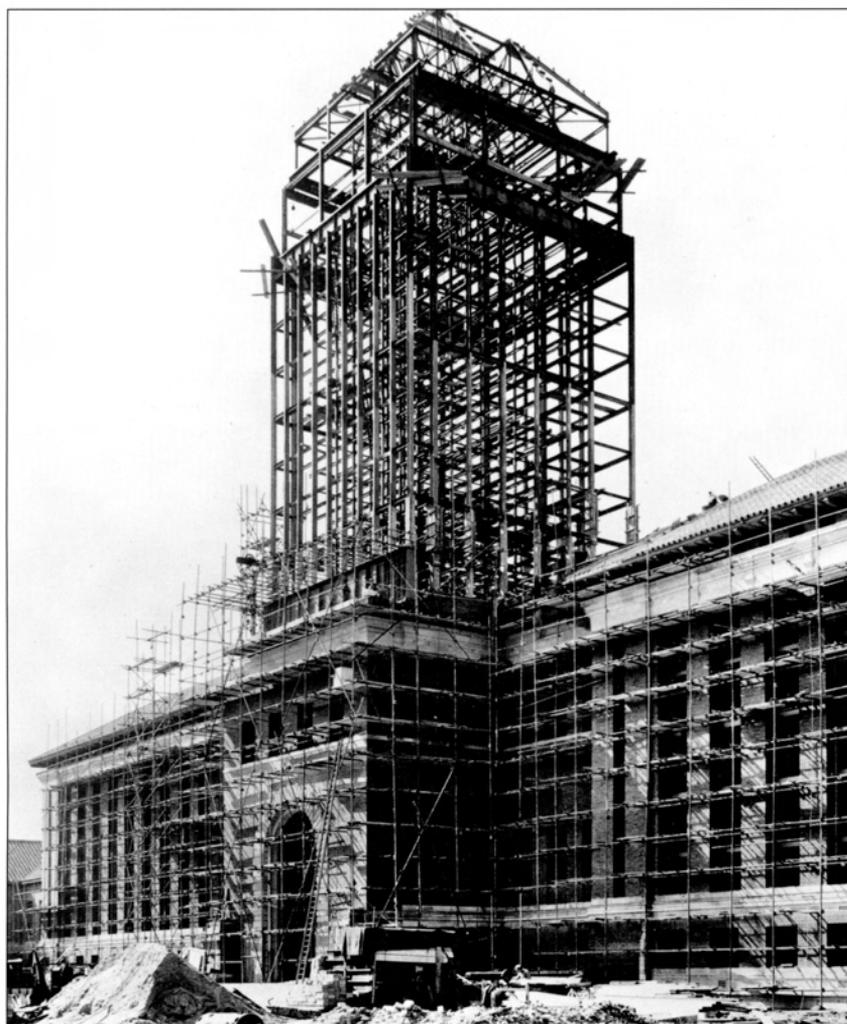


Figure 3. The tower of the University Library under construction, "Exterior work to Blocks A and E completed September 1933." CUL cam. a.934.2, with permission.

Colleges or Public Hostels.⁷³⁰ Given the parlous condition of most college finances at the time, this statement goes a long way in explaining the small amount of building they undertook. No new colleges were created in the interwar period, and such older colleges as did add new buildings utilised land within their traditional bounds, usually by the process which today would be called in-filling. Clare College constituted the only exception among the pre-19th century colleges and, as explained above, its reluctant decision to cross Queen's Road and build in west Cambridge was forced upon it by lack of practical alternative.

The colleges' preference for remaining within the close quarters of the town was echoed by University decisions: the majority of new laboratories, lecture rooms and faculty buildings made possible by the new grant system were to be found there, mostly in the New Museums Site and the Downing Site, though the new engineering laboratories were built on the southern outskirts. The University Library was the only significant exception to this pattern, and even there it took years of debate to overcome opposition to the move.

The War's impact on the town

Cambridge was far from being alone in facing an acute housing shortage at the end of the war, but the need to accommodate the flood of undergraduates coming up for the first time or returning to finish their interrupted studies gave an added urgency to the problem. Not only was there an absolute shortage, but in the decades leading up to the first World War, there had been growing awareness and unease about the conditions in which a substantial part of the town's population were housed and scepticism about the ability of an untrammelled market system to deal with the problem. Some of the worst housing lay in those parts of east Cambridge that were developed shortly after the enclosure of the former East or Barnwell Fields, and there was fear that similar uncontrolled development after the war would simply result in more slums.

The origins of town planning lay in the recognition of the link between bad living conditions and epidemics of disease which menaced the entire community, hence the fact that town planning at central government level came under the Ministry of Health until 1942. Cambridge, whose unsanitary conditions

were notorious, obtained parliamentary approval of its Improvement Act as early as 1788. The first Act focussed on paving (including road widening), drainage and lighting but in subsequent years further Acts, supplemented by local bye-laws, broadened the powers of the local authorities to include road and housing standards, and by the time the west Cambridge suburb was being developed in the late 19th century, builders of new roads and houses were obliged to submit their plans to those authorities for approval.

In 1909 the Housing, Town Planning, etc. Act appeared, the first piece of national legislation to bear the term 'town planning', and in 1913 Cambridge Borough Council established an official Town Planning Committee, whose members included from 1914 to 1919 Mrs. F.A. Keynes, wife of the University Registrar and herself a future Mayor of Cambridge, and later Hugh Durnford, Senior Bursar of King's College, who served on it for 4 years from 1921.³¹

Unlike a number of other municipalities in which foot-dragging was rife, Cambridge Borough seems to have leapt at the opportunity to use new legislation to tackle the problems of rehousing people from the numerous dwellings found by the Medical Officers of Health to be unfit for human occupation. Apart from a small venture in 1910–11 which will be mentioned later, the first scheme, for new cottages off Victoria Road in north-east Cambridge, was begun in 1914 and completed in 1915, but others planned had to be postponed after the outbreak of war. Although the Town Planning Committee met less frequently as the war went on, it continued to work actively – encouraged by central government authorities – on plans for schemes to be executed after the war ended.

In November 1918 the Town Planning Committee produced a list of eight proposed sites for new housing, four of which were on the east side of town (including sites on land owned by St John's, Corpus Christi and Jesus Colleges), two on the north side and two on the west side. Those on the west side were on Selwyn and Millington Roads, both in the newly added part of west Cambridge south of Barton Road.³² It must be assumed that consultation took place with existing land-owners before the list was prepared, though no evidence has been found.

Of the two proposed sites in west Cambridge, the 3-acre site on Selwyn Road, owned by King's College, was sold in 1924 to the Borough which built 31 terrace houses there, the only "Council housing" built in west Cambridge between the wars (Fig. 4). Millington Road, being jointly developed by King's and Trinity Colleges for what I have termed gentry housing, was not heard of again as a possible site, and it can only be assumed that the other colleges with land in west Cambridge showed no interest in selling.

In March 1919 a map headed 'Cambridge Town Planning 1919' was published, reflecting current thinking.³³ The area outlined, identical with the area marked pink on a 1928 map (Figure 1) covered what became known as the Cambridge (East) Town Planning Scheme. All of it lay to the east of the railway line, except for an area between the railway and

the river which included Stourbridge Common and was the site of some of the earliest Council housing (Stanley Road and Garlic Row). Although modified in detail over subsequent years, that area remained the most significant area of housing development between the wars.

In August 1919 the minutes of the Town Planning Committee record that the Housing Commissioner for the Cambridge District (within the Ministry of Health) wrote that certain of the sites proposed by the Council in east Cambridge were "unacceptable for working class housing", and suggested others, including *inter alia* one unidentified site near Storey's Way in west Cambridge. Since his reasons are not cited, it is impossible to tell the nature of his objections. Did he criticise the exclusion of west Cambridge from the plans? The fact remains that throughout all their subsequent reworkings, which continued right up to the outbreak of WW2 and focussed on three principal topics, the road network, zoning regulations and reservation of land for open spaces, west Cambridge remained barely touched, with the two exceptions which will be described later.

Why was west Cambridge omitted? I have found no contemporary evidence on the subject, but there is a plausible answer. Once again, we go back to the enclosures of the West and East Fields, in 1805 and 1811 respectively. Before then, the town was bursting at the seams, with a rising population hemmed in by the open fields. Under the enclosure of the Parish of St Giles (the West Fields) the colleges succeeded in establishing an almost complete *de facto* green belt beyond the river and maintaining it for almost 70 years, but after 1811, with the enclosure of the Parish of St Andrew the Less (the East or Barnwell fields) where the colleges were less powerful and less interested, the town was able to burst out of its confinement in a rash of new building.³⁴ This was given further impetus with the arrival of the railway in the 1840's and the need to house the labour force connected with it. So the east side became predominantly a series of working class neighbourhoods, interspersed with some areas of gentry housing such as Harvey Road, Hills Road and Maids' Causeway and retaining considerable undeveloped areas. In 1918, when the shortage of working-class housing was desperate, it is not surprising that the Borough preferred to concentrate its efforts on the east side of town, where there was more privately owned land and where moreover the colleges were much less reluctant to sell, than to spend time and energy on a probably losing battle to insert working-class housing into the academic suburb.

Entwined with the later history of physical planning in the inter-war period is the history of the Cambridge Preservation Society (CPS), which impinged more directly upon west Cambridge. In what follows, I have drawn heavily on Anthony Cooper's book *Planners and Preservationists*³⁵ and anyone interested in the wider aspects of Cambridge planning is referred to that book. Founded in 1928 largely by the efforts of Henry "Hugh" Hughes, a local architect and part-time member of the faculty of the University's

School of Architecture, and Hugh Durnford, Bursar of King's College, the CPS was partly modelled on the Oxford Preservation Trust. It came into being in response to two main concerns: the hope of avoiding the fate of Oxford, felt to have been seriously damaged by the inability of existing planning mechanisms to control the negative impacts of industrial development, and the threat posed by creeping ribbon development on some of the main roads out of Cambridge, particularly along the roads from Trumpington to Great Shelford (described later as "an almost continuous row of ill-proportioned and unsightly houses"³⁶) and from Shelford to the Gog Magog Hills, both on the southeastern outskirts of the town.

To quote Cooper: "The 'beauties of Cambridge and its neighbourhood' which those who resolved to form the Society were determined to preserve was the setting of Cambridge rather than the town itself... It will be seen that their efforts were to lead eventually to the establishment of the Cambridge Green Belt."³⁷ Its members included influential members both of the University and of the town, who were particularly concerned to preserve the views over Cambridge from the two small eminences on its outskirts, namely the Gogs to the south and Madingley Hill to the west of the town.

It is curious that in none of the literature of the period is there mention of the ribbon development carried out by Trinity College along the south side of the outer reaches of Huntingdon Road beginning in 1923 and continuing steadily through the decade.³⁸ Was it because these sales were for substantial houses of better quality than those on the Shelford Road? Or because there is no eminence on that section of Huntingdon Road providing a vista of Cambridge which could be spoiled? Or because, given the university connections of many of the activists, there was a reluctance to criticize the most powerful college?

For some time Hughes in particular had been working behind the scenes to persuade the local authorities to broaden the scope of their planning activity beyond the urban area, and to think regionally. The 1923 revision of the plans, in response to new legislation, remained focussed on the immediate urban area but by 1927 the views of Hughes and his supporters were making themselves felt. Figure 1, the map entitled 'Cambridge Borough Town Planning Proposals, June 1928' shows a new approach encompassing an area with a radius of between 3 and 5 miles from the town centre, and including several nearby villages including Coton and Girton, but not Madingley.

Nonetheless planning matters moved with glacial slowness, existing planning machinery was felt to be inadequate and perhaps the events that finally triggered the formation of the CPS in 1928 were the news firstly that the Borough was planning to build a sewer along Madingley Road and secondly that a landowner intended to build a bungalow at the foot of Madingley Hill. The Society's initial preoccupation with preserving the Gogs was set aside to concentrate on this more immediate threat. It had three weapons:

outright purchase of land, purchase of development rights by acquiring covenants not to develop, then known as "sterilisation", and bargaining with the local planning authority.³⁹ It used the first of these in the Madingley area.

In October 1925 a Mr Danby had bought from King's College a 5-acre plot on the south side of Madingley Road abutting the Coton parish boundary, and in 1928 his building plans became known. Conceivably a large house set in a spacious garden might have aroused less opposition but a bungalow! The CPS made every effort to dissuade him and managed to buy most of his land for £800 in October 1928 but he successfully retained a small strip on which he built the bungalow "Bonde Mteko" which is still to be seen, in complete isolation, a short distance west of the exit slipway from the M11.⁴⁰

The CPS moved swiftly to make the much more substantial purchases in 1929 of the 60-acre Rectory Farm in St Giles Parish immediately east of the bungalow, as well as a larger area on the Coton side of the boundary, thereby achieving the isolation of the bungalow. By 1932 the CPS owned some 590 acres in the vicinity of Coton. These purchases were made with donations or loans from private individuals, of whom the most significant was G.M. Trevelyan, historian and later Master of Trinity College, and trusts such as the Pilgrim Trust. Although Rectory Farm was eventually sold to a private party (under protective covenants) in the 1960's to help finance urgent work elsewhere, the Coton land remained in the possession of the CPS and is currently being made into the Coton Countryside Reserve.

Having safeguarded the Madingley Hill area from further encroachment by undesirable construction, the CPS now turned to another threat, that of the proposed ring road, an almost universal feature in town plans of the period. This road was to be created partly by improvement of existing roads and partly by construction of new ones. In early plans produced by the Borough, the route would have crossed the Cam between Cambridge and Grantchester, closely skirted Grantchester village, traversed the middle of Coton village and then proceeded north and north-east crossing Madingley and Huntingdon Roads. The CPS strongly opposed the stretch near Grantchester; the University, on behalf of its Farm (on which see below), objected to its western alignment. The battle over the road route continued unabated through the interwar period, and even when the alignment was altered to preserve Grantchester Meadows and give more protection to Grantchester village, while some sections were built on the eastern side of town, the opponents succeeded in blocking action on the southern and western parts until the outbreak of the second World War put a stop to further action and the disputed section was never built.

In resisting the threat to Grantchester, and particularly the Meadows much loved by walkers, the CPS made use of the second of its weapons, "sterilisation" or the acquisition of covenants not to develop. Having begun by buying up a 3-acre plot in the Meadows of-

ferred by Corpus Christi College for building plots, in 1932 it reached agreements, to which the Borough Council was also party, with the two largest landowners in Grantchester, King's College and Merton College Oxford, under which construction on 110 acres of King's and 41 acres of Merton land on the west bank of the Cam was to be restricted to agricultural buildings and sports pavilions. The CPS paid the colleges £7,549 and £4,100 respectively.⁴¹ This was one of the tactics it was to pursue when it was finally able to concentrate its efforts on the preservation of the Gogs, which was to be the major focus of its efforts until the end of the century.

In the meantime, in 1931 St John's College, owning land in both St Giles and Coton Parishes and opposed to the western road alignment, made a declaration that in the interests of preserving the amenities of that side of Cambridge the college had no present intentions of developing as a building estate the part of Grange Farm lying south of the Coton footpath, and that it would be prepared to reserve this area for 10 years without compensation, and for a further 10 years subject to the right to take part of the land for University or college buildings, though it could not commit the college in perpetuity.⁴² The land in question totalled 128 acres, and came to be known as the Coton Corridor.⁴³

A Cambridgeshire Joint Planning Committee had been established as early as 1928, out of which grew a Regional Planning Committee which included representatives from the relevant local authorities, the University and the CPS. This Committee commissioned the so-called Davidge Report published in 1934.⁴⁴ This is not the place to go into the details of the report, but as the first comprehensive regional report it strongly influenced the next official planning effort, the Cambridge and District Town Planning Scheme drafted in 1936, and also laid the foundations for the Cambridge Green Belt.

Considering only the parts of the 1936 draft that dealt with west Cambridge, these aroused opposition from the CPS, the University and colleges not only because of the alignment of the ring road to which they objected, but because of a proposal that virtually the entire unbuilt area between Barton Road and Madingley Road (excluding the old Rifle Range) as well as a considerable area north of the latter road be zoned for housing, at 4 houses per acre. Most of this area belonged to the colleges, and there then ensued a battle between the Borough Council and the University and colleges on whether and to what extent the former had the right to control future development of college property. This was of course only the latest phase of the centuries-old contest for power between the town and the University. A public inquiry was held in March 1939 by an Inspector appointed by the Ministry of Health, whose report remained unpublished, being overtaken by the outbreak of war. It dealt at length with the future of the land west of Cambridge and proposed a number of changes, particularly with regard to zoning, but before further negotiations could take place the war

broke out. To quote Cooper: "There is no indication that it [the 1936 Scheme] was formally approved. The scheme did, however, achieve a policy of containment which served well enough through the war years and their immediate aftermath..."⁴⁵

Housing

The greatest change in the housing situation in the interwar period, in Cambridge as elsewhere, resulted from construction of housing by local authorities, an issue initially of enormous controversy about how far to go in abandoning the market mechanism to provide housing for the working class. Council housing impinged minimally on west Cambridge, and yet it was in west Cambridge that the earliest initiative took place. To describe this we have to go back to the early years of the 20th century.

As mentioned, the old Parish of St Giles contained two ancient populated areas, one on the north-eastern and one on the southern edge of the Fields. At the time of Enclosure, because of their fringe position, these residential areas lapped over into neighbouring parishes, but the majority of the dwellings lay within St Giles. The northern one was the old town clustered below Cambridge Castle, a fortification since Roman times, while the southern one was the village of Newnham, near the mill of that name; between them these two areas accounted for almost all the population of St Giles, which in 1801 was recorded as 916.⁴⁶ Given their antiquity it is not surprising that some sections had deteriorated into slums, particularly in the Castle End/Pound Hill area, and it is noteworthy that the first housing to be built by the Borough authorities should have been there.

Correspondence in the archives of St John's College testifies to the existence in the 1890's of bands of young toughs from Castle End who made nuisances of themselves among the newly built houses of the academics along Madingley Road,⁴⁷ while Gwen Raverat's book *Period Piece* contains the following: "To reach our grandmother's [Mrs Charles Darwin's] or uncles' houses in the Huntingdon Road, we had to pass through a corner of Castle End, called Mount Pleasant... At the top of a steep green bank stood a short row of tumbledown cottages, inhabited by most unpleasant people. The place was quiet, there were only gardens with very high palings on the lower side of the roads, so there was little hope of help if we were attacked. We tried to rush through quickly, if possible when the boys were at school; for if they could, they threw stones at us; and I was knocked off my bicycle and my hair was pulled."⁴⁸

One wonders whether the representations of indignant middle-class parents, Darwins among others, had anything to do with the fact that the first instance of house building by the municipal authorities in Cambridge was in Castle End, where in 1910-11, under the terms of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, the Borough built 8 small houses for elderly people, 6 semi-detached and 2 single.

These houses, from external appearance well-built, still exist on the south-east side of Albion Row and Mount Pleasant, though it is unclear whether their location corresponds exactly with the area of Raverat's tumbledown cottages. Unfortunately after this initial foray the Borough transferred its activities to the east side of Cambridge, and no further rebuilding took place in the Castle End area until after WW2, though other evidence demonstrates that there was plenty of sub-standard housing there.

While the old part of Newnham also had several crowded and insanitary courtyards, conditions appear to have been less bad than in Castle End. Mention has already been made of the single instance of Council house construction in west Cambridge, the 31 terrace houses built in 1924 in Selwyn Road, considered part of Newnham. That Hugh Durnford, Senior Bursar of King's, was a University member on the Town Council and from 1921 to 1924 a member of the Town Planning Committee, as well as the prior existence on the south side of that road of terrace housing privately built in the 1880s, might explain the willingness of King's to sell the land on the north side of the road to the Borough. (Fig. 4)

West Cambridge's biggest contribution towards mitigating the housing crisis in the town as a whole lay in the approximately 200 temporary housing units created in the huts of the former Army hospital on Burrell's Walk. As fast as Council housing became available in east and northeast Cambridge (reflecting the priorities established by the planners), people were moved out of Burrell's Walk, but such was the backlog of housing need that new tenants were immediately moved in.⁴⁹ This remained true right until 1929, when most of the site had been demolished in preparation for the building of the Library, but the

Medical Officer of Health was given permission to hang on to the last remaining huts to the very last minute to house a few families whose seriously defective houses were being refurbished. After the initial rush immediately after the war, the former addresses of tenants being moved into Burrell's Walk give a good indication of the areas with the worst housing: most are in east Cambridge, but a sprinkling are in the Castle End area. None have been identified from Newnham.

Along with Council housing, the private sector was also producing new houses, slowly in the 1920's and more rapidly after 1931. In the immediate post-war period the building industry was in chaos. There were material shortages, skill shortages, labour unrest – in fact even the conversion of the hospital huts was held up by strikes in 1919. Where west Cambridge is concerned, such private housing as was built was almost exclusively gentry housing, the earliest being along Storey's Way, between Huntingdon and Madingley Roads, where a major building scheme on Storey's Charity land had been interrupted by the outbreak of the war;⁵⁰ this picked up momentum after 1918 and was essentially completed by 1939. Some houses were built along the eastern end of Barton Road after the opening in 1926 of Fen Causeway, a new vehicular road whose route across the Cam at Coe Fen aroused bitter controversy. Before this bridge was built, except for bicyclists and pedestrians, west Cambridge had been linked to the rest of the town only by the Silver Street and Magdalene Street bridges.

A plan dated 1928 found in the archives of St John's⁵¹ shows a suggested housing scheme for the area now occupied by Churchill College, indicating that St John's, the major landowner in west Cambridge and responsible for the lion's share of pre-



Figure 4. Council housing in Selwyn Road, erected in 1924/1925

1914 residential development in what I have termed the bicycle suburb, was beginning to think of resuming activity in this sphere. Between 1922 and 1931 the college granted building leases for nine new houses along Madingley Road but only after 1932 had housing demand strengthened to the point where the college was ready to embark on significant new development. Much of the existing housing stock in west Cambridge was too large for young academics with fewer children and fewer servants, and there was a shortage of building plots. Grange Road was fully developed, except for those stretches devoted to playing fields, and the side streets built in the 1880s and 1890s had few sites left. St John's therefore decided in 1933 to build two new roads, Wilberforce and Clarkson Roads, (named to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in which both Johnians had played a prominent part) and offer 99-year building leases on plots of about half an acre. To avoid the problems which had arisen earlier over the adoption of the roads built by the college in the late 19th century,⁵² it was agreed that the new roads, though financed by the college (with a contribution from Emmanuel College, whose playing field was skirted by Wilberforce Road), would be built by the Borough. When the college approached the Borough, it suggested that this construction might provide jobs for the unemployed, but the Borough seized on the opportunity of using its own under-employed workforce.

Wilberforce Road, running north from the end of Adams Road, replaced the drift linking the home-stand of St John's Grange Farm to Madingley Road (Fig. 5). A pair of semi-detached tied cottages had been built beside the drift in 1905 for labourers at the farm⁵³ and in 1926 Mrs Evelyn Hopkinson, living in one of the big houses in Adams Road, obtained from St John's College the lease of under half an acre with permission to build one single bungalow and a pair of semi-detached bungalows⁵⁴ immediately south of the tied cottages mentioned. This is the only known instance in which the college acquiesced in the construction of working-class housing unconnected with its own farming activities in west Cambridge. Had the college at that point contemplated the middle-class road development it decided on in 1933, it is unlikely that she would have received their agreement. Clarkson Road ran west from Grange Road and met Wilberforce Road at its midpoint. The building plots on both were of half an acre, and by 1939 17 plots had been let on 99-year leases.

Next to be built were two short *cul-de-sac* roads running south from Madingley Road, to the west of Wilberforce Road. Both were built on private land, and offered individual lots for sale. The first was Hedgerley Close, on the site of Hedgerley Lodge, a substantial house built in about 1880 by a prosperous businessman, Christopher Bulstrode and demolished in 1935 when the new road was built. The second was Bulstrode Gardens, between Hedgerley Close and Wilberforce Road, built in 1937. Both resembled the Wilberforce/Clarkson Road developments in terms of

house and plot sizes, and offered respectively 7 and 16 plots, not all of which had been taken up by 1939.

The last road to be built before the outbreak of war was Barton Close, running north from Barton Road west of Grange Road. For many years St John's College and Storey's Charity had owned adjacent plots of 2 and 6 acres respectively, abutting Barton Road on its northern side, and the former had been trying to develop its small site without running afoul of the 1935 legislation against ribbon development.⁵⁵ After long negotiations, in 1937 St John's bought 3½ acres of the Storey's Charity property and was thereby enabled to build a close with 17 house plots, 12 of which had been let by the outbreak of war.

Throughout the interwar period, the great majority of houses built in west Cambridge were free-standing two-storey houses on plots of between a quarter and half an acre, most designed on conservative lines although there were a few examples of Modernist houses (Figs. 6, 7, and 8). Apart from the bungalows referred to above, the only new feature was the building of the first blocks of flats. The largest development was Pinehurst, a 9-acre site west of Grange Road originally owned by Corpus Christi College and leased to A.A.Vansittart, a former fellow of Trinity, on which in the 1870's he built the largest private house in west Cambridge.⁵⁷ So large was it that by 1924 it had become a girl's school, but when the school failed the college decided to sell the site to a developer, who pulled down the original house and built two blocks of flats, Grange Court and Manor Court, with a total of 42 units. Occupancy started in 1934, but was slow to take off: evidently the idea of living in a flat was not immediately attractive to a community used to more generous spaces, and the flats only filled up after the war started. At about the same time, a second development was built, also on Grange Road. Containing 12 flats and named Grange Gardens, it replaced several small enclosed leisure gardens (not allotments) which since the mid-19th century had been rented by residents of the town who had no such facilities there – a feature still to be found on the outskirts of Dutch or German towns.⁵⁸

Finally, two sets of flats were built on Barton Road, Maitland House in 1936 and Croft Gardens in 1937, with 10 and 12 units respectively.

West Cambridge during the Second World War

Although there were a few air-raids and some casualties in other parts of the town, west Cambridge escaped damage, but the war nonetheless made a visual impact on it. There is a curious symmetry about the changes which took place in both World Wars, the appearance of a large physical feature which later disappeared, though in each case the disappearance was a long time in coming. In the first war, it was the Army hospital near Burrell's Walk, and in the second a massive aircraft repair factory in fields south of Madingley Road.

Short's were the manufacturers of the Sterling

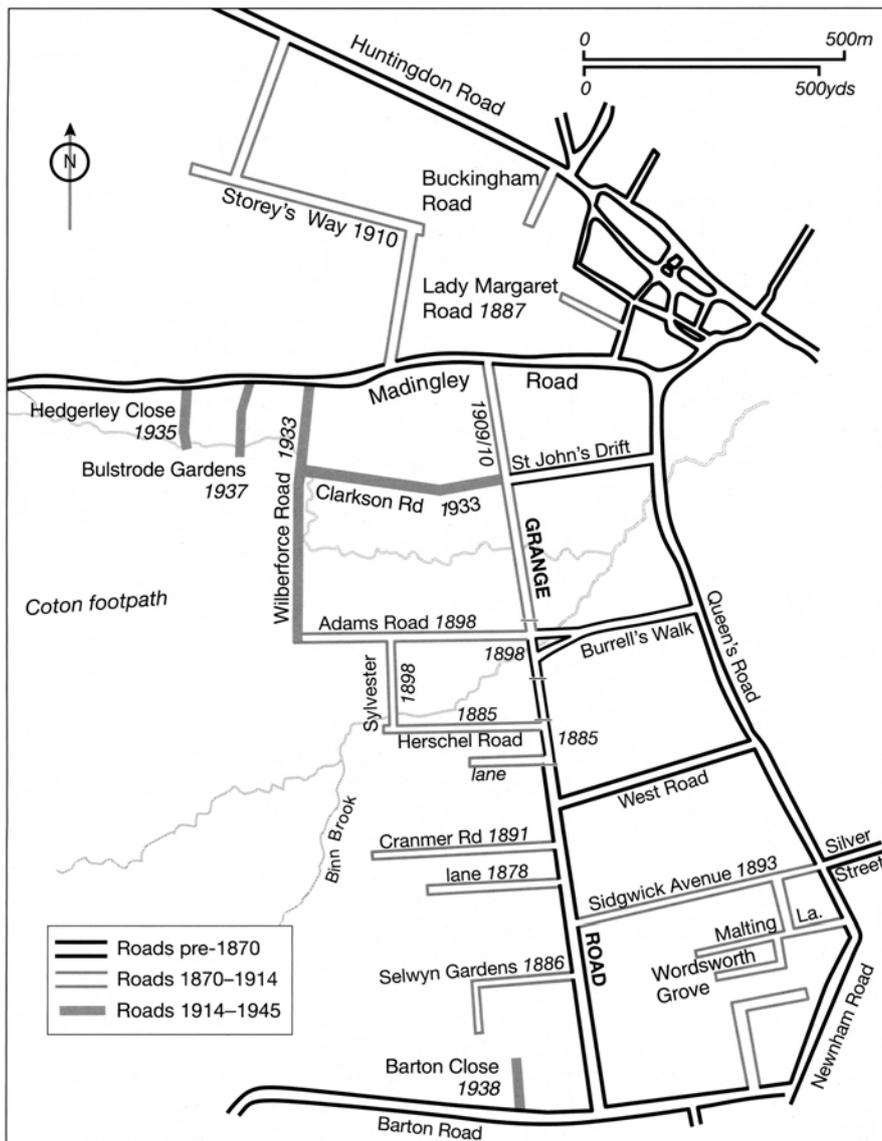


Figure 5. Road development in west Cambridge up to 1945.

bombers, many based at airfields in East Anglia. It therefore made sense to site a repair facility in that region, but what considerations brought the Ministry of Aircraft Production to select Cambridge and then the particular fields chosen is currently unknown. The first 20 acres of land requisitioned in March 1941 for Short's repair factory, known as SEBRO, belonged to Storey's Charity. A narrow rectangle running south from Madingley Road, it flanked Merton Hall Farm (100 acres belonging to Merton College, Oxford) on the latter's western side. That farm would have been a more convenient site, but no doubt the fact that it was a dairy farm exempted it. In January 1942 St John's College learned of the intention to requisition a second piece of land, a 17-acre east-west stretch of its land (part of Grange Farm) bordering Merton Hall Farm on its southern flank, which required the closing and rerouting of the Coton footpath. Since these two plots had no common boundary, a right of way across a corner of Merton land had to be negotiated in order to connect them. When the factory was fully

built, the main repair hangars were on St John's land while ancillary facilities were located on the 20 acres of Storey's Charity land, through which ran the access route to the hangars. Aircraft (or sections of them) were delivered and removed on lorries.

There could be no question of refusal, but the choice of sites caused consternation in the University and the CPS. Already in April 1941, the Secretary of the CPS had written to the Ministry of Aircraft Production pointing out that siting the factory in that location completely negated the results of the many years of negotiations which had finally achieved agreement that the land in question was to be protected from building for a term of years.⁵⁹ Anxiety increased with the second requisition of 1942, not to mention the diversion of the Coton footpath, a favourite constitutional for local residents, and reached a peak in February 1943 when the Ministry informed the respective landowners that it wished to purchase the whole factory site. A massive campaign was mounted, involving the Mayor, the Vice-Chancellor,



Figure 6. 29 Storey's Way, designed by M.H. Baillie-Scott, 1922. Photo courtesy R. Akester.



Figure 7. Willow House, Conduit Head Road, designed by George Checkley, 1932.

the University's Members of Parliament, the CPS, the Warden of Merton and perhaps most effectively the newly created Ministry of Town Planning. Every possible string was pulled, and by April 1943 the Ministry had decided to drop the idea of purchase.

As pointed out at the time by the Senior Bursar of St John's, much of the factory's labour force was billeted on families in Cambridge, and had the factory become permanent a housing estate would inevitably have had to be built nearby, thereby further undermining the efforts to maintain the rural amenities of that side of town.⁶⁰

By way of epilogue, by the mid-1960s all the factory buildings had been demolished except the former works canteen (the "Atlas building") still in use by

the University for storage, but in the meantime both St John's and Storey's Charity had sold their parts of the factory site to the University which has since incorporated them into its West Cambridge development plans.

Changes in land ownership

Although, apart from the Library, the University made little impact on the built landscape of west Cambridge in the interwar period, a major change in land ownership took place which was to have important consequences for its later expansion. As described elsewhere,⁶¹ in 1903 Trinity College had acquired



Figure 8. A representative house of the interwar period: 7 Wilberforce Road, built in 1937/38.

from a private owner in financial difficulties more than 400 acres of farmland at the western extremity of the old Parish of St Giles, abutting the Parishes of Madingley and Girton. This transfer, amounting to almost one-third of the parish area, from private to college ownership is the largest single factor explaining the expansion of academic ownership from 60% of the Parish in 1805 to about 85% by 1914. This trend continued in the inter-war period, albeit more slowly, but then a different shift began, from the colleges to the University, one that was to continue after 1945.

In the redistribution which occurred at Enclosure in 1805, the Commissioners allotted to the University a little over 5 acres, stemming from some small benefactions in the 13th century, and the University immediately leased and subsequently sold the plot to Trinity College for its Fellows' Garden.⁶² Until 1923 it owned no land in west Cambridge, but in 1909 it began renting part of Trinity's land referred to above for its University Farm, previously located in Impington north of Cambridge, to provide a more convenient location for practical training for students of the Department of Agriculture, which had opened in 1899. Trinity, having bought the land in question as an investment and with limited development interests in it, preferred to sell 404 acres of it to the University in 1923, retaining only a strip on the south side of Huntingdon Road for residential building.⁶³ Although the farm now covers a much wider area, its core to this day lies within the triangle between Madingley Road, Huntingdon Road and (nowadays) the M11, and in the latest local plan, this triangle is designated for future university development.⁶⁴

Another shift to University ownership occurred near the Observatory on Madingley Road. In 1890 H.F. Newall, Professor of Solar Physics, bought from

St John's a plot of about 1¼ acres, adjacent to the Observatory, on which to build his house, Madingley Rise, and in 1895 he bought, again from St John's, the paddock of just under 8 acres lying between his house and Madingley Road.⁶⁵ With the object of protecting the Observatory from unwelcome development to the south, in 1921 he also bought the 33-acre Vicarage Farm (allotted at Enclosure to the Vicar of St Giles in lieu of small tithes) on the south side of Madingley Road immediately opposite the Observatory.⁶⁶ In 1931 he sold the 33 acres to the University at the price he had paid for it, with the written understanding that his motives in acquiring the land be respected and that no use would be made of the land "which in the opinion of the Directors...of the said Observatories shall or may be undesirable or tending to prejudice the proper and efficient use of the said Observatories."⁶⁷ It is on this land that the new Cavendish laboratories and later developments were built after the second World War.

Conclusion

The period between 1914 and 1945 saw only minor modification of the landscape of west Cambridge (barring the temporary appearance of war-related structures) but major structural changes both in the University, with the active involvement of central government through the University Grants Committee, and in local government, with the introduction of the machinery of town planning. These, together with shifts in land ownership from the colleges to the University, were to lead after 1945 to the transformation of that area, which came to be the site of 8 new colleges⁶⁸ as well as new buildings for existing

colleges, the newly-created Department of Veterinary Medicine with its farm and the University's West Cambridge campus involving faculty, research and residential buildings, still in the process of development at the time of writing.

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Additional Abbreviations:

- CPS: Cambridge Preservation Society
 CCAD: Clare College Archives, Administration
 CCGB: Clare College Archives, Governing Body
 KCAR: King's College Archives, Administrative Records
 KCGB: King's College Archives, Governing Body
 RCHM: Royal Commission on Historic Monuments
 SJCA: St John's College Archives

Endnotes

- 1 Guillebaud 2005, 2006, 2007
- 2 The enclosure process is described in detail in Guillebaud 2005
- 3 VCH Cambridgeshire, Vol.V, p 198
- 4 Brooke 1993, p 335
- 5 Saundby 1914, p 942
- 6 Griffiths 1918 pp 3–7. The Cambridge hospital was only one of a network of hospitals for which preparatory designs were made following the creation of the Territorial Forces in 1907 in place of the earlier Volunteer units
- 7 *Op.cit.* p 9
- 8 *Op.cit.* p 14
- 9 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31.
- 10 Griffiths 1918 p 27
- 11 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31: 23 August 1919, letter from Ralph Starr, Mayor of Cambridge to Bursar of King's
- 12 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31: 9 September 1919, letter from King's College's lawyers to Bursar of King's
- 13 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31. Draft agreement 12 September 1919
- 14 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31. Note dated 21 March 1921 on meeting of Bursars of Clare and Kings with Town Planning Committee
- 15 KCAR/3/1/1 Section II.
- 16 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31. Summary on status of hospital site made by Bursar of Clare 19 July 1921 and undated newspaper clipping attached to 20 June 1921 letter from Inland Revenue to Senior Bursar of King's
- 17 Spalding *passim*
- 18 KCAR/3/1/1/8/31. Letter 2 November 1921 from Secretary of University Financial Board to Bursar of King's headed 'Sites: University Library.'
- 19 RCHM, 1959 Vol I p 38
- 20 *Clare through the Twentieth Century* p. 93
- 21 Clare College's gradual development of its properties at the foot of Castle Hill for student accommodation (now known as the Colony) began only in the late 1920s.

- ²² Clare College Order Book, Minutes of meeting of Master and Fellows of 8 October 1912 refers to the report of the Buildings Committee which might throw some light on the decision, but the report is missing
- ²³ Clare College Order Book, Minutes of 31 May 1919
- ²⁴ Unfortunately the building of Clare's new library in the middle of Memorial Court has meant the loss of the original visual unity.
- ²⁵ Brooke 1993 p 377–8
- ²⁶ Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge Universities, Report 1922
- ²⁷ *Op.cit.* Section IV para 36, p 48 (p 76 in Blue Book)
- ²⁸ *Ibid*
- ²⁹ *Op.cit.* Section V, para 46, p 57 (pp 84–5 in Blue Book)
- ³⁰ *Op.cit.* Section V, para 44, p 55 (p 82 in Blue Book)
- ³¹ Minutes of Town Planning Committee, 1913–1924
- ³² Minutes of Town Planning Committee, 26 November 1918. The Committee, chaired by Mr Negus, a prominent builder, included two Aldermen who lived in Adams Road, Mrs Keynes and 5 others.
- ³³ Cambridge University Library map bb.53.91.10
- ³⁴ Bryan 1999, 2005; Guillebaud 2006
- ³⁵ See bibliography
- ³⁶ CPS Brochure 1929, cited in Cooper 2000 p 16
- ³⁷ Cooper p 34
- ³⁸ Trinity College Archives Box 26 #100
- ³⁹ Cooper p 35
- ⁴⁰ *Op.cit.* p 36
- ⁴¹ *Op.cit.* p 40
- ⁴² SJCA, Council Minutes 1345/7 of 15 May 1931 and 1447/5 of 22 November 1934.
- ⁴³ SJCA, Bursarial Correspondence SBF 84/2, letter of 2 November 1939 from Carter Jonas to Senior Bursar of St John's
- ⁴⁴ See Bibliography
- ⁴⁵ Cooper p 76
- ⁴⁶ VCH, Vol. II, p. 138
- ⁴⁷ SJCA, Bursarial correspondence: SB21/Cb/W/17.51, W/18.23, 33 and 34, W/55.26
- ⁴⁸ Raverat p 168
- ⁴⁹ Minutes of Tenants Selection Sub-Committee of Housing Committee, *passim*
- ⁵⁰ Guillebaud 2007 p 200
- ⁵¹ SJCA, Map MPS 805, 1928
- ⁵² Guillebaud 2007 p 208
- ⁵³ Now numbers 20 and 22 Wilberforce Road
- ⁵⁴ Now numbers 24 and 26 Wilberforce Road.
- ⁵⁵ Restriction of Ribbon Development Act, 1935
- ⁵⁶ Howard 1940, p 18
- ⁵⁷ Guillebaud 2007 p 196
- ⁵⁸ Guillebaud 2006 p 165
- ⁵⁹ SJCA, Bursarial Correspondence SBF.36, letter 20 April 1941 from H.I.Fyjis-Walker, Secretary of CPS to Ministry of Aircraft Production
- ⁶⁰ SJCA, Bursarial Correspondence SBF.36, letter 15 February 1943 from Sir Henry Howard to H.I.Fyjis-Walker, Secretary of CPS
- ⁶¹ Guillebaud 2007 p 206–7
- ⁶² Guillebaud 2005 p 196
- ⁶³ Private communication from Dr John Bradfield, former Bursar of Trinity College.
- ⁶⁴ *Northwest Cambridge Area Action Plan*, pp 3–5
- ⁶⁵ SJCA D.170.1 and Deed Book 1868–97, pp 637–9. It is not known why the College, which normally insisted on granting leases, agreed in Newall's case to sell the land.
- ⁶⁶ SJCA D.192.7
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.* There is some difference of opinion on whether the University has been sufficiently scrupulous in observing this condition.
- ⁶⁸ Churchill, Clare Hall, Darwin, Fitzwilliam, Lucy Cavendish, New Hall, Robinson and Wolfson. A ninth, St Edmunds College, had already established itself in west Cambridge in 1895 in its earlier incarnation as a residence for Catholic students.

