

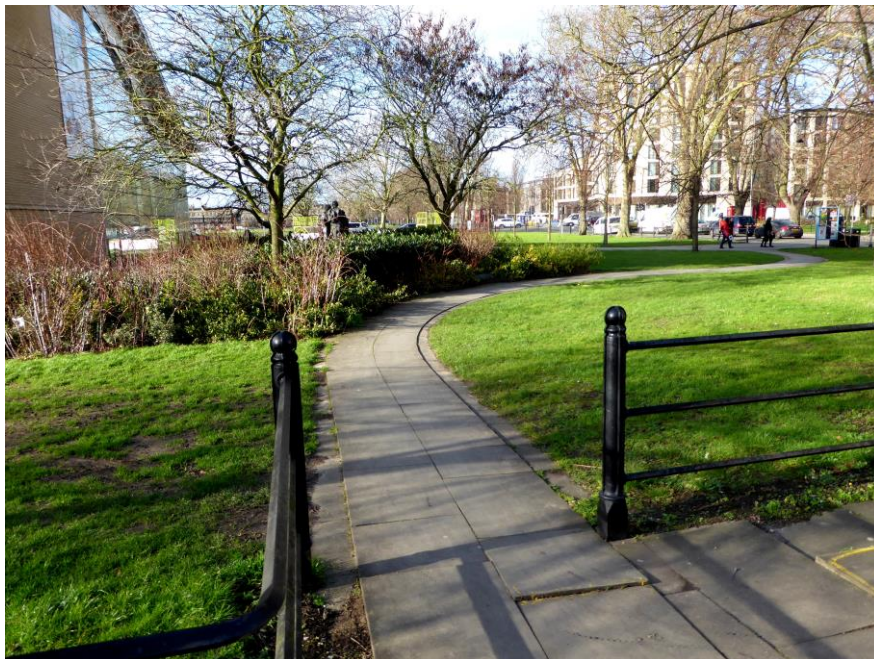
**MILL ROAD HISTORY PROJECT  
BUILDING REPORT**

# **Donkey's Common and adjacent land**

Town Gaol (1829–78) — Queen Anne Terrace (1878–c.1970) —

YMCA (1974–) — Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre (1975–)

ATS Huts (1942–58) — Parkside Swimming Pool (1963–97; 1999–)



**Allan Brigham and James Ingram**

This report is published in hard copy and on the website *Capturing Cambridge*.<sup>1</sup> It is a late product of the Mill Road History Project, which ran from 2012 to 2015, the Project's purpose being to study the heritage of Mill Road, its sites, buildings (residential, commercial and industrial), institutions and community – work that the Mill Road History Society now continues.

First Edition – August 2017

Authors: Allan Brigham and James Ingram

*Cover picture: Donkey's Common (photo: 2016), viewed from Mortimer Road with Parkside in the distance, and with the Parkside Swimming Pool in partial view to the left.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Capturing Cambridge* (<http://www.capturingcambridge.org/>) was the principal vehicle for the work of the Mill Road History Project. Since the latter's conclusion, the website is now managed by the Museum of Cambridge.

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## Abbreviations

CA:	Cambridgeshire County Archives (Shire Hall)
CC:	Cambridgeshire Collection (Central Library)
<i>CCh</i>	<i>Cambridgeshire Chronicle</i>
<i>CDN</i>	<i>Cambridge Daily News</i>
<i>CEN</i>	<i>Cambridge Evening News</i>
<i>CIP</i>	<i>Cambridge Independent Press</i>
<i>CN</i>	<i>Cambridge News</i>
<i>CWN</i>	<i>Cambridge Weekly News</i>
MoC	Museum of Cambridge
O/S	Ordnance Survey
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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## NOTE

This report was first drafted by James Ingram and further researched and redrafted by Allan Brigham, both volunteers on the Mill Road History Project (2012–14). The work is based principally on records available at the Cambridgeshire Collection at the Central Library, the Cambridgeshire Archives at Shire Hall, and Cambridge newspapers available online at British Newspaper Archives. All 2015 and 2016 photographs were taken by Allan Brigham.

### Location of the site

The Common Pasture site, of which Donkey's Common and the gaol site are the two parts, is located in Cambridge CB1, bounded by Gonville Place on the northwest, Mill Road on the northeast, Mortimer Road and Fenner's Cricket Ground car park on the southeast, and the boundary line of Owen Webb House on the southwest.

### National Grid references

median point of Donkey's Common: TL 457580  
545747, 258079  
52.2017, 0.1313  
52° 12' 06" N 0° 07' 53" E

median point of gaol site: TL 456579  
545685, 257979  
52.2008, 0.1303  
52° 12' 03" N 0° 07' 49" E

(obtained from website using the Ordnance Survey maps of the area from 1881 and 1913:  
<http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/sidebyside.cfm#zoom=16&lat=52.1968&lon=0.1494&layers=6&right=Opendata>

## INTRODUCTION

The approach to Mill Road from Parker's Piece has been framed by Donkey's Common to the southwest and Petersfield to the northeast since the fields of Barnwell were enclosed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 1812 Inclosure Map shows that they marked the extreme south-eastern boundary of the urban area, and that Mill Road was just a track running through a virtually uninhabited rural landscape before terminating in a footpath to Cherry Hinton. In this map (see Figure 1), the modern Gonville Place is 'Gravel Pit Road', Parkside 'Parker's Piece Road', and Mill Road 'Private Road No. 1'.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1** – Entrance to Mill Road (Inclosure map 1812)

Two hundred years later houses have replaced the fields and the Mill Road area has become home to thousands of residents. But despite huge pressures to use the former commons for much needed public buildings, or as a source of revenue for the Council by building houses, both survive, if much changed. Today the trees and grass provide significant and appreciated green public open spaces at the approach to the bricks and tarmac of one of the most densely populated parts of 21st-century Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> Barnwell Inclosure Award Map: CA: Q/RDc16.



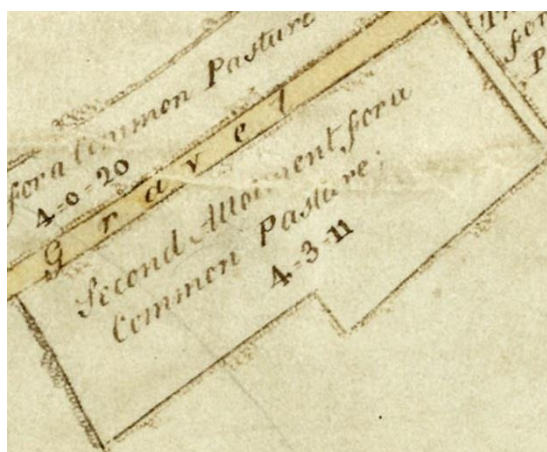
**Figure 2** – Donkey's Common and Petersfield (photo: Spring 2016)



**Figure 3** – Donkey's Common and Petersfield (photo: Autumn 2016)

## A Question of Names

The cumbersome title 'Donkey's Common and adjacent land' needs some explanation here. What has since 1862 been known as 'Donkey's Common' proves to be part of a larger site labelled on the 1812 Inclosure Map 'Second Allotment for a Common Pasture'. Significantly, the site is measured as a single area: '4 [acres] 3 [roods] 11 [perches]'.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 4** – "Second Allotment": Inclosure Map (1812) (detail)

As can be seen in Figure 4, the site is made up of two adjacent, slightly tapering rectangles, one larger than the other. The absence of a single name for the whole site presents a problem, and for purposes of this report the name 'Common Pasture' has been adopted for it. The report then refers to the larger rectangle as 'Donkey's Common', and the smaller one as the 'Gaol Site'.

## The Site Today

An aerial view of the site as it was in 2015 is shown in Figure 5. Remarkably, the geometry of the Common Pasture conforms precisely to that in the 1812 Inclosure Map: none of the land has been lost. However, the majority of the site, apart from Donkey's Common at the northeast end, has had its protected status gradually eroded and is now covered by buildings: Parkside Swimming Pool, Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre and Queen Anne Terrace Car Park, and the YMCA.

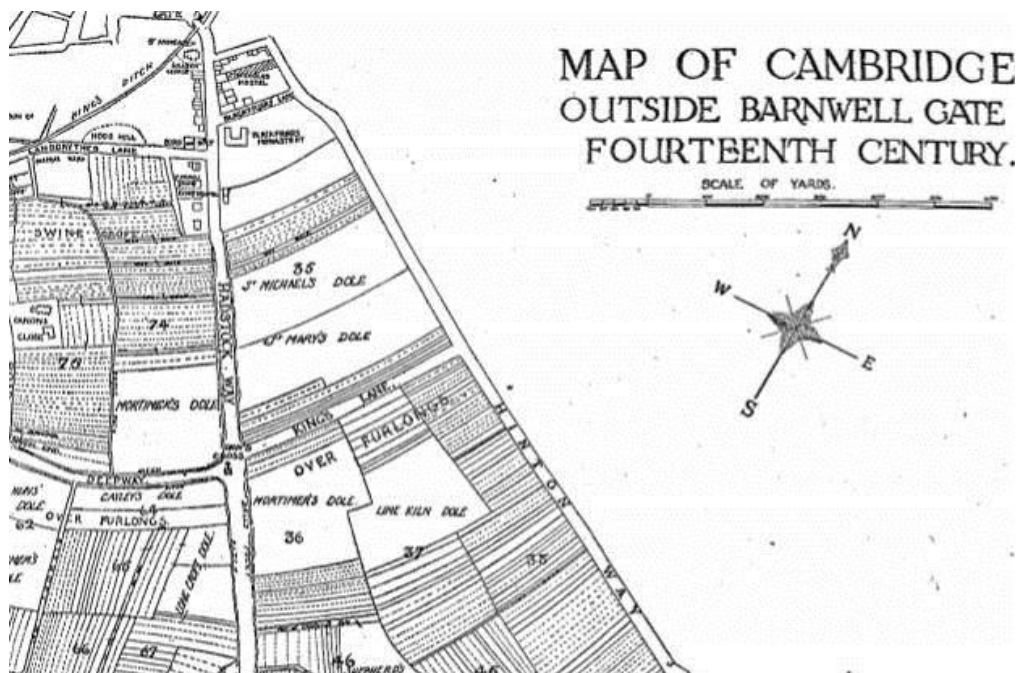
<sup>3</sup> 1 acre = 4 roods = 160 perches.



**Figure 5** – Aerial photograph of the Common Pasture in 2016  
(Google Earth, 2015)

## Medieval Origins

Figure 6 appears in *Outside the Barnwell Gate* by H P Stokes.<sup>4</sup> It was created by Stokes based on studies of medieval field books.



**Figure 6** – Barnwell Fields in the 14th century

In the centre of the map, running left to right, are the roads Deepway and Kings Lane. These are where Lensfield Road and Gonville Place run today. Donkey's Common can be seen to be part of the Over Furlongs, and much of its familiar shape can be seen.

<sup>4</sup> Stokes (1915), reproduced in Lander (1982), Map 2.



### Pre-Inclosure

Immediately before the Barnwell Inclosure Act of 1807, the east and southeast sides of Cambridge comprised three fields – Bradmoor Field between present-day Newmarket Road and Mill Road, Middle Field between Mill Road and Hills Road, and Ford Field between Hills Road and Trumpington Road.

Figure 7, from *Township and Borough* by F W Maitland (1898),<sup>5</sup> shows the fields as that author understood them to be in 1800, just before Inclosure. Some more modern features, such as street names and the railway station, were added to help the eye.

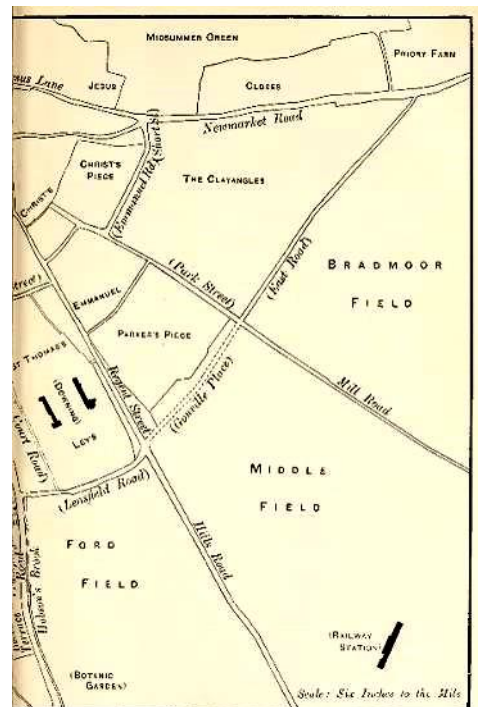


Figure 7 – Barnwell Fields in 1800

### Post-Inclosure

Though passed in 1807, details of the Barnwell Inclosure Act were not finalised until 1811. The Inclosure Award map of 1812<sup>6</sup> (see Figure 1 above) shows the proposed enclosures. The relevant allotment can be seen in Figure 4. As we have already seen, the map entitles it “Second Allotment for a Common Pasture” – the first allotment lying between Parker’s Piece and the present Gonville Place (4 acres, 0 roods, 20 perches), and the third allotment being the present Petersfield (2 acres, 2 roods, 12 perches).

In the Barnwell Award to the 1807 Barnwell Inclosure Act, the three allotments were described as “[to] be used and enjoyed as and for a Common Pasture to this Our Award and their respective Heirs and Tenants in respect of the Estates also mentioned in the said Schedule”<sup>7</sup>.

### The Division of the ‘Second Allotment for a Common Pasture’

The Proprietors of Commonable Rights on the waste ground purchased for the site of the New Gaol, are hereby informed, that the Deed of Conveyance now lies at the Town Clerk’s Office, to receive signatures, between the hours of ten and four, when Cheques will be given for their respective considerations. GB White, Town-Clerk. Cambridge, 22 May 1828.<sup>8</sup>

Less than twenty years after the Barnwell Inclosure Act was passed, the size of the Second Allotment was significantly reduced as the town authorities sought a site for a new gaol. This was to be only the first of many proposals to build public facilities on land originally designated ‘common pasture’.

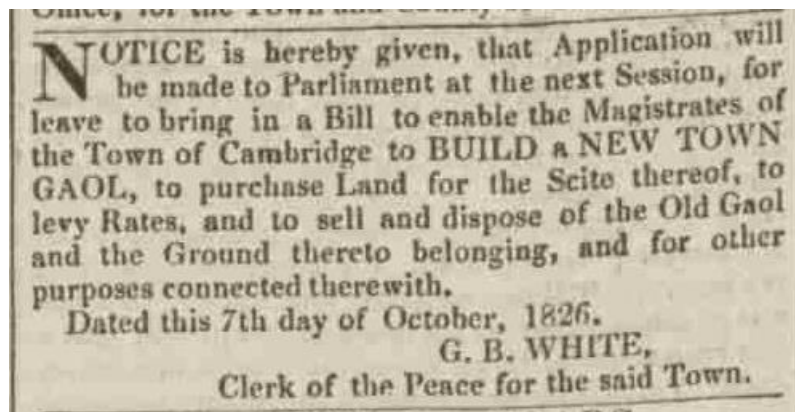
<sup>5</sup> Maitland (1898), between pp. 106 and 107.

<sup>6</sup> CA: ref Q/RDc16.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell (1985).

<sup>8</sup> CCh 23 May 1828.

In July 1823 the grand jury for Cambridge reported to the town's quarter sessions that the common gaol (then on St Andrew's Street, behind Hobson's Spinning House<sup>9</sup>) was 'too small, insecure, and unfit for the proper accommodation of the prisoners usually confined therein', that its limited space was 'injurious to the health of the prisoners' and that 'its present site was improper'. In October the jury recommended that a new gaol be erected on a larger scale 'so as to admit of the proper classification of the various prisoners'. The justices accepted that recommendation and applied to Parliament to bring in a bill to build a new town gaol, and 'to purchase land for the site thereof'.<sup>10</sup>



Notice of Application to Parliament to build a new town gaol

Identifying a suitable site to purchase was not straightforward as unsurprisingly neither the colleges nor the more prosperous residents of Cambridge wanted the new gaol close to their own premises. After considerable debate the 'Second Allotment for a Common Pasture' was chosen in December 1826:

The Magistrates for the town have, upon the suggestion of a committee of the inhabitants, finally fixed upon a site for the intended new gaol; and the spot selected is a piece of land containing about two acres, part of the common pasture, lying on the south side of the road leading from the Hills Road to Barnwell and on the west side of the road leading to Mr Humfrey's mill. It must be satisfactory to the inhabitants to find the Magistrates have thus determined on a situation for the gaol *which cannot render its erection injurious to any property in the vicinity*.<sup>11</sup>

The 'Act for building the new Gaol in the town of Cambridge' was finally passed on 23 June 1827, and the accompanying schedule describes the section of the 'Second Allotment for a Common Pasture' that was to become the gaol (which corresponds with where Kelsey Ker-ridge Sports Centre, Queen Anne Car Park and the YMCA stand in 2016):

All that piece of Ground lying in the Parish of St Andrew the Less, called Barnwell in the said town of Cambridge, set out in an Act passed for inclosing the said Parish, being that part of an Allotment for a Common Pasture which abuts North West upon a Public Highway, called Gravel Pit Road, North East upon other parts of the said common pasture, and upon land belonging to Caius College upon all other points, and containing by admeasurement Two Acres or thereabouts'.<sup>12</sup>

Despite being called a 'common pasture' the Second Allotment was not available for the use to all Cambridge residents. Those who could use it and the number of stock that could be

<sup>9</sup> The old gaol had been built in 1799, and would be closed in 1829 and materials from the demolition sold in September 1830.

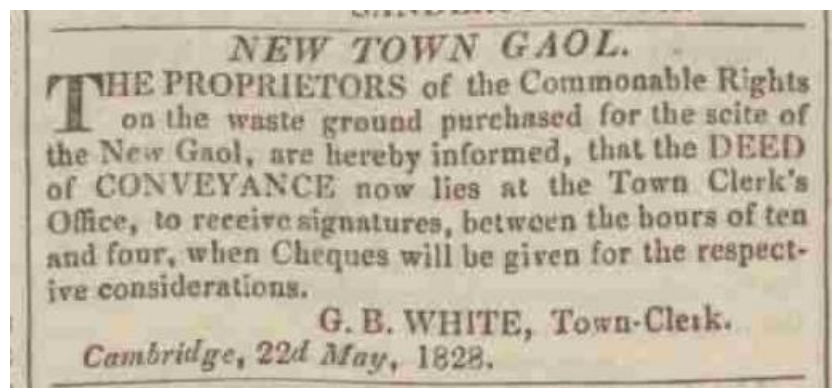
<sup>10</sup> CCh 13 Sept 1826.

<sup>11</sup> CCh 22 Dec 1826, italics added.

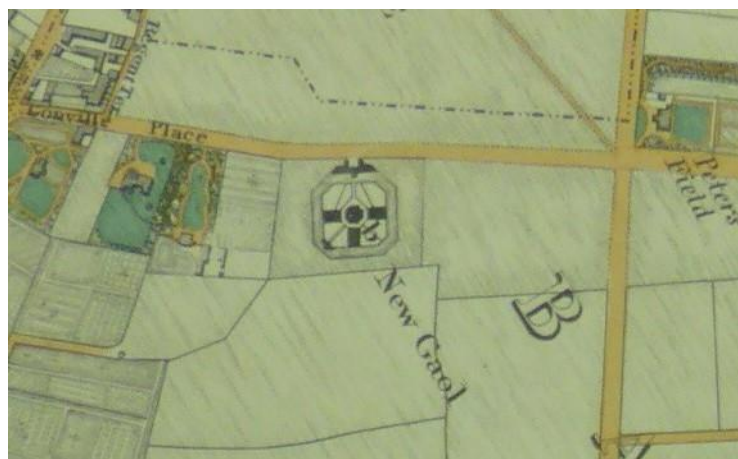
<sup>12</sup> Gravel Pit Road later became East Road and Gonville Place.

grazed was carefully regulated, and the Barnwell Inclosure schedule listed 116 properties with the names of owners, leaseholders and occupiers who were entitled to the 119 'rights of Common or Stray over Common Pasture ... and such Proprietors or their tenants or occupiers may stock the same Allotments with one cow or one horse in respect of each messuage or cottage for which right is allowed him, her or them'.<sup>13</sup> These 'Commoners', which included the University, had to give their consent to the loss of their 'rights'.

After lengthy negotiations it was agreed in that each 'right' was worth £3 7s 3d, and in May 1828 the University Senate agreed 'To accept the terms offered for the purchase of the rights of the University in a parcel of common land lying in the parish of St Andrew the Less, by the Justices of the Peace empowered by Act of Parliament to build a Town Gaol'.<sup>14</sup> This was followed by a request from the Town Clerk to:<sup>15</sup>



The acceptance of compensation by the 'Proprietors of Commonable Rights' led to the division of the land set aside in the Barnwell Inclosure Award for common pasture, and to the building there of the new town gaol – just the first of many later encroachments.



**Figure 8** – New Gaol on the Common Pasture (Baker map, 1830)

This detail from Baker's map of 1830 identifies 'Peter's Field' and shows the Common Pasture (as yet unnamed) with the new town gaol built a year earlier on the smaller, south-westerly rectangular area (compare with Figure 4 above).

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell (1984), p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> CCh 16 May 1828.

<sup>15</sup> CCh 23 May 1828.

## A. COMMON PASTURE: THE GAOL SITE

### 1. 1829–78: The Town Gaol



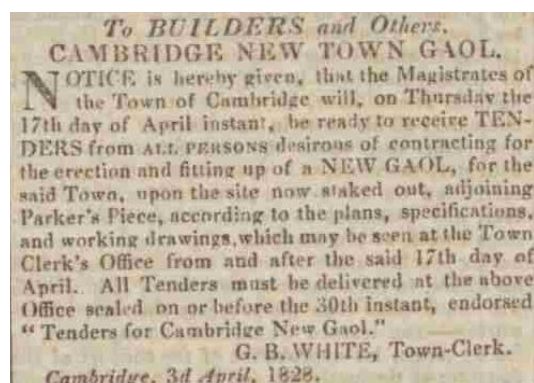
**Figure 9** – Cambridge Town Gaol (undated photograph: MoC 23.59)

Before the Act authorising the new goal had been passed, architects and builders had already been asked to submit plans

for the building of a New Gaol and House of Correction for the Town of Cambridge, agreeable to the present mode of classification, upon the average number of forty prisoners, including Felons, Minor Offenders, Vagrants and Debtors, Male and Female respectively.<sup>16</sup>

The architect finally appointed, William Mackintosh Brookes, was not local but perhaps applied for the contract because he had recently worked in Cambridge designing Gisborne Court for Peterhouse ( 1825–26).

Builders were asked to submit tenders to erect and fit-up the new gaol in April 1828 'upon the site now staked out , adjoining Parker's Piece'.<sup>17</sup> The total cost of erecting the gaol and of obtaining and executing the acts relating to it, including interest, was nearly £25,000.<sup>18</sup>



<sup>16</sup> CCh 29 Dec 1826.

<sup>17</sup> CCh 4 April 1828.

<sup>18</sup> Copper (1866), p. 143.



The completed gaol was celebrated at the Quarter Sessions in July 1830 by Sergeant Stock, the Deputy Recorder. He ended the Sessions by reflecting to the Grand Jury that:

looking now at the past and taking a view of the present, and recollecting the numerous difficulties etc which had arisen, I trust I might congratulate them and the town at large on the erection of a new town gaol.

However, he qualified this praise by referring to the controversial issue of cost: he wished he could add to his congratulations and say that it was paid for. Nevertheless he concluded by stating that 'a great service had, however, been rendered to the public', and he hoped at least he might say 'that posterity would not be burthened by the completion of this desirable measure'.<sup>19</sup> The debt he referred to was not paid off until 1847.

The earliest glimpse of the new gaol is a view through the crenelations of the entrance tower of a coronation dinner for Queen Victoria on Parker's Piece in 1838. Finely dressed families watch the less fortunate of Cambridge enjoy the feast, with the town's convicted criminals hidden out of sight below.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 10 – Queen Victoria's Coronation Feast on Parker's Piece (1838)

The earliest known full illustration of the gaol dates from 1842: it is shown in the background of a print depicting Cambridge University students playing cricket on Parker's Piece (Figure 11).<sup>21</sup> The print shows round towers at the entrance to the gaol which appear to be an artistic addition, romanticising the background to the cricket match, with windows shaped like Greek crosses above the entrance. Both the later illustration in Charles Cooper's 1866 *Memorials of Cambridge* (Figure 12) and the undated photograph (Figure 9 above) repeat the design of the windows but show rectangular towers tapering at the base, and are

<sup>19</sup> CCh 16 July 1830.

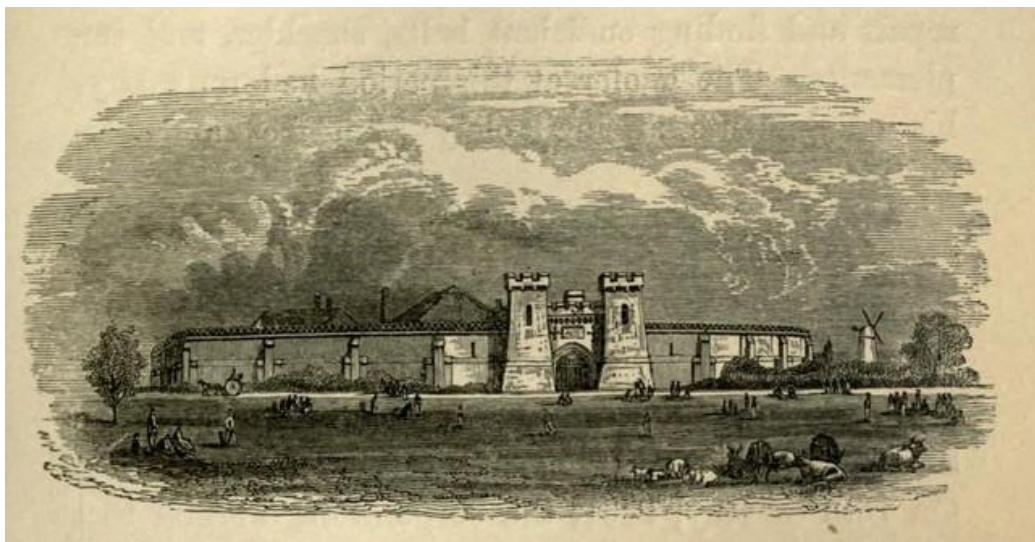
<sup>20</sup> CA : R54/4/1.

<sup>21</sup> CC: J.P.J42, from Cambridge Past & Present, No 23.

likely to be a more faithful illustration. All the pictures show an imposing building with high walls and an entrance resembling a castle keep.



**Figure 11** – 'Cambridge University students playing cricket. 1842'



**Figure 12** – Cambridge Town Gaol, cattle grazing on Parker's Piece  
Cooper, *Memorials*, vol. 3 (1866)

Cooper states that the gaol was 'spacious and commodious', although as he was Town Clerk his view may have been less than objective. In 1832 the gaol was reported by the Municipal Commissioners to contain eight yards, eight day rooms and to be capable of accommodating 47 criminals at a time.<sup>22</sup> Nine years later the 1841 census recorded twenty-nine prisoners and four debtors, the latter described variously as member of the University, publican,

<sup>22</sup> Municipal Commissioners Report on Municipal Corporations. 1833.

whitesmith, and accountant. The occupations of the prisoners were given as labourer (18), servant (3), shoemaker (3), hairdresser (1), sweep (1), tailor (1), unreadable (2). Only two of the prisoners, both described as servants, were female. Also living in the gaol were the Governor, John Edis, with three family members and a servant; and the turnkey, Thomas Smith, whose wife Sarah was the Matron, along with four children.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of the 1851 census the number of prisoners had risen to fifty-seven. Forty-three were male, fourteen female. The youngest were two 16-year-old boys, while the oldest was 63-year-old George Whitaker who was imprisoned with his 30-year-old son Thomas, both listed as 'General Dealers'. The largest occupational group was again Labourer (22), but other prisoners included Shoemakers (3), Prostitutes (3), Tailors (2), Boot Closers (2), a Brush Maker, a Grocer, a Baker, a Sawyer, a Painter, a Brickmaker and a Washerwoman. John Edis was still Governor and lived in the gaol with his wife and servant. The Smiths also remained in residence, with Thomas and Sarah remaining respectively Turnkey and Matron, and the eldest of their three daughters, 21 year old Emily, now described as Gaol Schoolmistress. There was also a 43 year old Chelsea Pensioner acting as Turnkey too.

### **'Murder at Cambridge': 'Unfortunate Girl': Emma Rolfe and Robert Browning**

Never before has the 'black flag' hung over the portal of our Borough Gaol, though it has been erected nearly half a century.<sup>24</sup>

Most of these prisoners were debtors or minor criminals. Those committing more serious offences would be sent to the County Gaol. The only recorded execution took place in December 1876: Robert Browning had been convicted of murdering a 16-year-old prostitute, Emma Rolfe, on Midsummer Common. A contemporary ballad headed 'Murder in Cambridge'<sup>25</sup> circulated while Browning was in prison, with a chorus lamenting that:

Poor Emma Rolfe had no time to repent;  
On Midsummer common to eternity sent;  
Robert Brown[ing] was her murderer, in prison he's cast.  
From virtue she strayed to be murdered at last.

<sup>23</sup> CCh 11 Jan 1840 reported that John Edis had recently 'entered upon his office as governor of the town gaol'.

<sup>24</sup> CIP – Reporter present at the execution.

<sup>25</sup> 1876, imprint: London: H.P. Such, Machine Printer & Publisher 177, Union-street, Borough, S.E. Bodleian Library. Broad-side Ballads online. V8618.

# MURDER AT CAMBRIDGE.

**Robert Brown, stands charged with the murder of Emma Rolfe, by cutting her throat with a razor, on a Common near Cambridge, on Thursday night, Aug. 28th, 1876. The Prisoner has confessed the crime to Police Constable Wheel.**

❁❁ The victim was an "UNFORTUNATE GIRL," ❁❁

Tune:—Driven from Home.

In the quiet town of Cambridge a deed has been done,  
That I'm sure has surprised and startled each one;  
An unfortunate woman but just in her prime,  
Alas! is the victim of this cruel crime.  
Well known in Cambridge, from virtue betrayed,  
In the path of dishonour too early she strayed;  
But whatever she's been we can all understand,  
Her life was as sweet as the best in the land.

CHORUS.

Poor Emma Rolfe had no time to repent,  
On Midsummer common to eternity sent;  
Robert Brown was her murderer, in prison he's cast.  
From virtue she strayed to be murdered at last.

God only knows what a hard life she led,  
The sale of her honor was the price of her bread;  
Exposed to the scoffs and the jeers of the world,  
Her short life was passed, in deep misery hurled.  
In cheap gaudy clothes obliged to dress gay,  
Poor women like her their days pass away;  
They must wear a smile tho' the heart is sick and sore  
Till they go to their graves and are heard of no more.

She met with her murderer on Thursday night,  
They both went together soon after twilight;  
They went to the common for a purpose we know,  
They quarrelled and then he gave her a death blow;  
He then cut her throat with a razor so keen,  
The poor woman's blood on the pathway did stream,  
Her sad wretched life, alas! it was o'er,  
Ere the morning had dawn'd, Emma Rolfe was no more.

A policeman was brought and the murderer confess'd,  
For the crime he committed he now has no rest,  
He would give all the world to recall that sad hour,  
But what has been done is beyond earthly power.  
She was murdered that night, with her sins on her head,

We hope they're forgiven now she's laying dead;  
Tho' lost to the world, despised and forlorn,  
Someone will miss the poor girl now she's gone.

Robert Brown will be tried for this unmanly crime,  
And if he's found guilty must suffer in time;  
We pity his brother and relations as well,  
Who are grieving for him as he lies in his cell;  
His poor victim lies in her cold narrow bed,  
Never no more to her ruin be led;  
Young girls beware you are not led astray,  
For plenty will quickly decoy you away.

Don't be too hard on this poor woman's fate,  
She might have reformed, but now it's too late  
Perhaps she had no one to snatch her away,  
To save her from ruin or going astray;  
When the first step is taken 'tis hard to return,  
Many a poor girl this sad lesson must learn,  
And many a kind mother has had a dear child,  
By some wealthy young flatterer to ruin beguiled.

London:—H. P. SUCH, Machine Printer & Publisher  
177, Union-street, Borough, S.E.

Figure 13 – 'Unfortunate Girl' : ballad sheet (1876)

Browning was a 25-year-old tailor's assistant, who worked for a tailor in Covent Garden, Mill Road. His death was recorded graphically in the *Cambridge Independent Press* by a reporter present at the execution. Outside a large crowd had gathered. The report continued:

'The morning was dull, cold and frosty' as Marwood, the hangman, made his preparations

with evident satisfaction that the rope he was using had already been used in the public service, it being the same with which he had executed a convict at Newgate on Monday, adding that it was capable of bearing the strain of two tons.

Measuring with a critical eye the depth of the drop, after making some slight alterations he quickly and silently withdrew. Immediately afterwards the sound of the [*illeg. word*] for the living man pealed forth distinct, and the death knell of the unhappy prisoner was heard all over the silent prison.

The condemned man had been removed to a day room, where Marwood pinioned him. During this trying ordeal the fortitude of the prisoner entirely gave way, and, although he did not make the slightest attempt at resistance, his tears fell copiously and it was feared he would utterly break down. By a strong minded effort he somewhat recovered his fortitude and admitted to the final preparations without uttering a word to either the executioner or the officials.

The mournful procession was not delayed, for in a few minutes the voice of the chaplain, reading the opening sentences of the solemn Burial Service of the Church of England was heard.

Immediately after the chaplain walked the prisoner, supported on either side by a warder, and it was evident from the first glance that there was need for their assistance. The expression of the convict's upturned face showed that he was labouring under the most abject fear.

By the aid of the warders he was placed under the drop, and Marwood lost no time in strapping his legs, adjusting the rope, and drawing the white cap over the culprit's face.

The lips of the wretched man were moving and with an ejaculation Oh! from the prisoner the bolt was withdrawn and he fell with a heavy thud.

Either the rope caught the cap, or, as Marwood hints, fearing the culprit was about to faint, he did not pull it down sufficiently over the face before he withdrew the bolt; but from one or other of these causes the face of the culprit was exposed to view, and consequently the extortions of his features were plainly visible; but for a few seconds only they continued, and in a few minutes he hung lifeless and motionless.

After the space of an hour his corpse was taken down and placed in a rough coffin to await the coroner.

Outside a large crowd had assembled, but of course nothing was to be seen, except the [*illegible word*] flag, which was exposed simultaneously with the fall of the drop.

The execution took place at 8 a.m., and the body was cut down at 9 a.m. Following an inquest by the Coroner later that morning the jury returned a verdict:

That deceased died from hanging, being the same person sentenced to death for the murder of Emma Rolfe, the sentence being properly carried out.<sup>26</sup>

### Closure of the Gaol: 1878

Public attitudes towards imprisonment slowly changed during the course of the gaol's existence. By the 1860s fears about the level of crime and the breakdown of the prison system led to a report by a Select Committee of the House of Lords. Giving evidence, Lord Chief Justice Cockburn said that imprisonment was about deterrence, and that this was achieved 'through suffering, inflicted punishment for crime, and the fear of the repetition of it'. These

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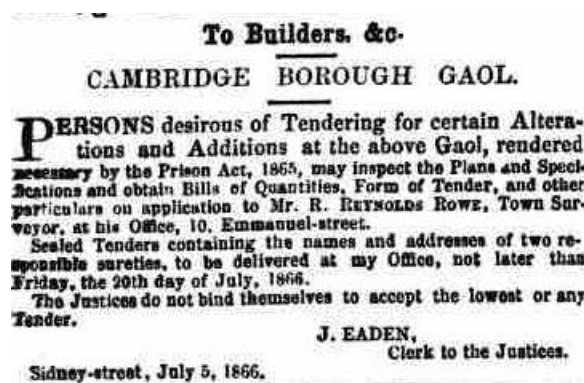
<sup>26</sup> CIP 16 Dec 1876.



values were reflected in the Prison Act of 1865, which stipulated a strict and uniform system of discipline in all 193 local gaols. The cost of implementing this led many to close, but in Cambridge the Town Council agreed to make the required improvements as they felt the gaol was efficiently run and profitable.<sup>27</sup>

The debate at a special meeting of the Town Council in March 1866 revealed that the annual cost per prisoner was £21 17s 3d. This was less than the £29 3s 9d at the County Gaol, and 25% less than the cost in all neighbouring gaols. It also transpired that all female prisoners received at the County Gaol were transferred to the Town Gaol and that this was a significant source of revenue.

Speaking to Councillors, Gaol Governor John Edis explained how the Act would change the conditions for the prisoners: 'Operation of the Act would make good discipline much more severe; it made hard labour compulsory, and insisted on either the tread wheel, the crank or the shot drill.'<sup>28</sup> Each prisoner would be set apart from his fellows, so that there would be no communication, whereas under present circumstances that was impossible'. The recent average number of prisoners was 35, but Edis added that in November 1865 there had been 41 male prisoners. As there were only 29 male cells they had been forced to sleep 'in every available place in the building, separate confinement was out of the question'. The £1,500 to provide single cells as part of this new stress on deterrence for each prisoner was the main cost involved in implementing the Act.<sup>29</sup> Invitations were posted in the local press to tender for alterations to the Gaol as required by the Prison Act of 1865:<sup>30</sup>



Notice of tenders for alterations

The 1865 Act was intended to lead to uniform conditions in gaols across the country, but these continued to vary, and in 1877 a new Prison Act took a further step towards reducing local control. It came into operation on 1 April 1878, with 38 out of a total of 113 local prisons closing immediately. Despite changes having been made since 1865, Cambridge Town

<sup>27</sup> <http://richardjohnbr.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/prison-reform-1850-1877.html>.

<sup>28</sup> All three were, in prisons, hard labour of no other purpose than punishment: 'tread wheel': a hollow cylinder with internal steps, within which the prisoner 'walked', thereby turning the apparatus; 'crank': a handle linked to a paddle inside a drum filled with sand or gravel, and a counter to measure the number of turns the prisoner made; 'shot drill': a drill whereby the prisoner had to lift a heavy iron cannonball to chest height, walk a prescribed number of steps, then lower it on to a second pile.

<sup>29</sup> CIP 10 March 1866.

<sup>30</sup> CIP 7 July 1866.

Gaol was among those that were closed, as were those at Ely and Wisbech, leaving only the County Prison in Chesterton to serve Cambridgeshire.<sup>31</sup>

The Secretary of State offered to re-convey the gaol to the Council on 1 November without furniture and effects on payment of £2,280 for the 19 prisoners accommodated on 12 July 1877.<sup>32</sup> This was accepted, and the building was demolished during the remaining months of 1878. In December 1878 the Town Clerk was requesting tenders to buy the materials, and notices were posted in the local press.<sup>33</sup> Auctioneer James Fetch acquired 10 of the 14 lots, for which the Council received £1,500, and the remaining lots raised another £270 10s 0d, making £1,770 10s 0d altogether.<sup>34</sup>

**NEXT TUESDAY & FRIDAY.**  
**TO CONTRACTORS, BUILDERS, AND OTHERS.**  
*A Large Quantity of good*  
**Building and Floor Bricks,**  
**Timbers, Iron Girders,**  
**Iron Doors, down Pipes and Guttering, Gas Piping,**  
**expensive Locks and Keys, Stone Pavement, and**  
**Door Steps,**  
**Cambridge Borough Gaol,**  
**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY**  
**JAMES F. FETCH.**  
**On TUESDAY and FRIDAY next, February 25th**  
**and 28th, 1879, at Eleven o'clock each day, on**  
**the premises.**  
 Further particulars to be had of the Auctioneer,  
 75, Regent-street, Cambridge.

**WEDNESDAY NEXT.**  
**CAMBRIDGE BOROUGH GAOL.**  
**BUILDING MATERIALS.**  
**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY**  
**JAMES F. FETCH.**  
**On WEDNESDAY next, the 19th of March, 1879, at**  
**Eleven o'clock, on the premises,**  
 Comprising good sound Building Bricks and  
 Bats, Ornamental Coping, ditto, York and other  
 Stone Slabs, Iron Girders, wrought and cast Iron, a  
 quantity of Chubb's and other Locks, Iron Gates,  
 Iron Ventilators and Air Bricks, Iron Brackets,  
 Gas Piping, Old Lead, Oak and Fir Scantlings,  
 Doors, Windows and Frames, and other useful  
 materials.  
 The above are worthy the notice of parties about  
 to build or repair, as on inspection they will  
 be found equal to new. They are assorted into  
 convenient lots, and will be sold from a written  
 catalogue.  
 On view any time previous to sale.

Borough (Town) Gaol: Sale of Building material February and March 1878

By August 1879 the remains of the once impressive building were dispersed, but the desolate site prompted 'A Ratepayer' to comment that it had become 'a playground for the very lowest of Barnwell youngsters, to the great risk of their life and limbs', and to ask: 'how much longer the site of the Borough Gaol is to remain in its present disgraceful and unsafe condition?'.<sup>35</sup> The writer continued: 'Besides the unsightly appearance it presents and its present unsafeness, it seems a waste of public money if, as was stated, the authorities propose to let it on building leases. Far less eligible sites for building superior houses are being purchased'

The following month a report to the Borough Council recommended 'To let the site of the gaol on building leases for a terrace of good houses'<sup>36</sup>. This was to become Queen Anne Terrace.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> CIP 9 March 1878.

<sup>32</sup> CIP 11 May 1878.

<sup>33</sup> CIP 28 Dec 1878, 28 Feb 1879, 8 March 1879.

<sup>34</sup> CIP 22 Feb 1879 and 8 March 1879.

<sup>35</sup> CIP 12 July 1879.

<sup>36</sup> CIP 9 Aug 1879.

<sup>37</sup> See Bibliography below for further research notes on the Town Gaol.

## 2. 1880–1970/71: Queen Anne Terrace

'A terrace of good houses'

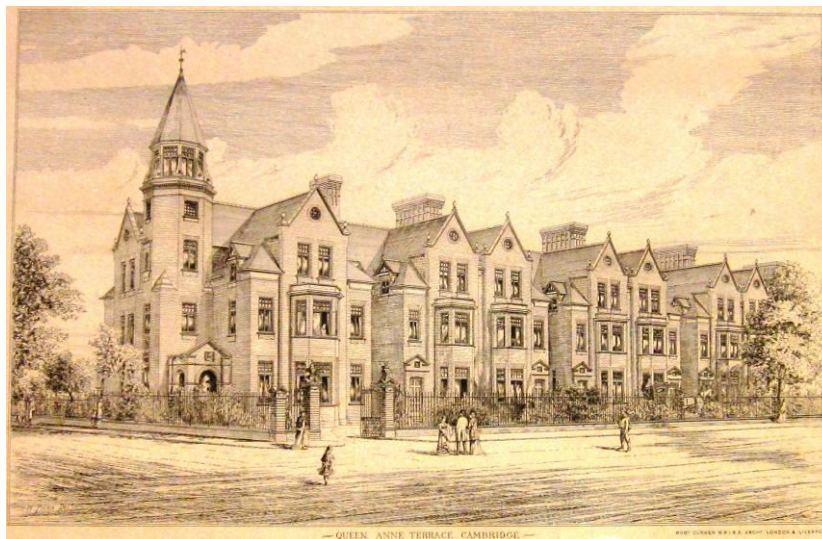
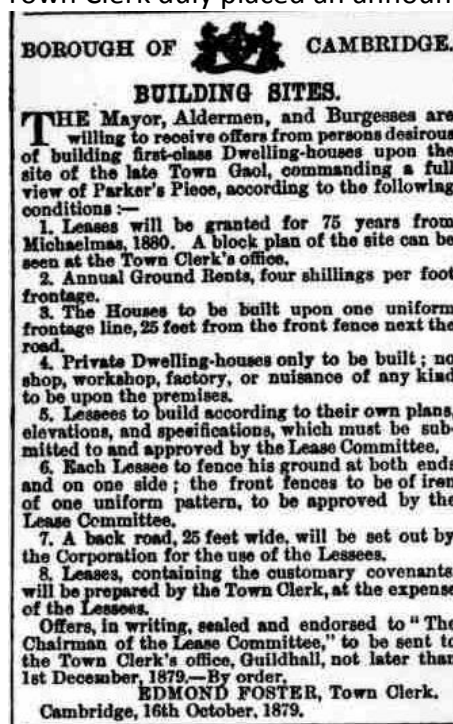


Figure 14 – Queen Anne Terrace (1932)<sup>38</sup>

The Borough Council decided that the site once considered suitable for the gaol because it was a long way from any valuable properties was now ideal for 'first-class Dwelling Houses [...] commanding a full view of Parker's Piece'. Looking for a long-term income stream with a definable conclusion they offered 75-year leases from Michaelmas 1880. The houses were to be private dwellings only, with a uniform frontage and to be set back 25ft from the front fence next to the road. The Town Clerk duly placed an announcement in the local press:<sup>39</sup>



<sup>38</sup> CA: J.Don.K.43666; CDN 7 Sep 1932.

<sup>39</sup> CIP 15 Nov 1879.



In February 1880 the Borough Council accepted an offer from Mr Curwen, a merchant from Liverpool, to build houses worth £12,000. The architect was to be 'the brother of gentleman who had designed on the new Leys School estate'. It was pointed out that 'the purchase of the gaol and the site would be found to be a most advantageous bargain, as it would not have cost more than £1,000. They would be receiving during the 75 years duration of the lease 6% on their capital, and at the expiration of the 75 years the property would fall into the hands of the corporation'.<sup>40</sup>

The following month the new houses were being offered for sale or to let with a promise to be ready for occupation by or before September next.<sup>41</sup> Despite complaints that the houses were out of character, with red brick at the front and white at the back, and that tradespeople felt the houses were not satisfactory, it was stated at Council that 'they had got a good exchange, by having twelve houses in exchange for the gaol'.<sup>42</sup>

The red brick was a feature of the 'Queen Anne' design which gave the terrace its name. At a sale of the new houses in September 1881 they were described as 'Family Mansions'.<sup>43</sup>

Cambridge.  
**ALFRED C. SWAN**

**WILL SELL BY AUCTION** (if not previously sold by private treaty), at the Lion Hotel, Petty-cury, Cambridge, on **THURSDAY, October 13th. 1881,** at Six for Seven o'clock in the evening, all those Four recently erected, attractive and highly desirable

**FAMILY MANSIONS,**

Nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10, Queen Anne-terrace, Parker's Piece, within easy distance of the University Buildings and Colleges and of the Railway Station; tram cars pass every few minutes.

The Houses are imposing and substantially erected structures of fine Queen Anne architectural proportions, standing back from the road, in an ornamental enclosure, and approached through massive iron gates by a good carriage drive; are built upon a gravel soil, in a dry, open, healthy situation, where the air is most salubrious and invigorating, and command extensive and picturesque views. Such a site as that occupied by these houses will not again be obtained in Cambridge, as the building ground round Parker's Piece is now entirely occupied.

Each house contains vestibule and inner hall, noble staircase and landings, four lofty reception rooms (one opening to a spacious balcony,) four first and three secondary bedrooms (with hot and cold water), box room, two w.c.s. (with ventilation to roof), kitchen, scullery (with hot and cold water laid on to sink), pantry, larder, cellar, &c., &c. The servants' offices are complete.

Water and gas are laid on. The sanitary arrangements are perfect. Light and ventilation excellent. Separate entrance for servants.

The property is held on lease of the Corporation of Cambridge for 75 years, from 29th September, 1880, and has recently been erected under special supervision of the Corporation architects, and other first-class surveyors. The houses are well fitted throughout, and replete with every modern comfort and convenience. Ground rent of each house £10. Immediate possession.

Particulars and conditions of sale of Messrs. FOSTERS and LAWRENCE, solicitors, Trinity-street; or of the Auctioneer, 53G, St. Andrew's-street, Cambridge.

<sup>40</sup> CIP 7 Feb 1880.

<sup>41</sup> 'For plan and particulars apply to Mr George Dalton, Clerk of Works Leys School or private address 34 Union Road, Cambridge': CIP 20 March 1880.

<sup>42</sup> CIP 18 Feb 1880.

<sup>43</sup> CIP 24 Sep 1881.

The houses came with a 'noble staircase', seven bedrooms, hot and cold water, two WCs and servants' offices. By 1887 they were occupied by:

**Spaldings Street Directory 1887**

2	Carpenter	George Ralph	
3	Sutton	Mrs T	
6	Bedwell	George	
10	Smith	Charles MA	Fellow, Tutor, Lecturer, Sidney Sussex College
11	Gibson	Edmund Wyatt	Banker
12	Caldwell	Captain Robert Town- ley MA	Fellow & Bursar of Corpus Christi College



**Figure 15** – Queen Anne Terrace (1960) (CA: B.Gon.K60.4459)

Despite being advertised as family mansions in 1881, the terrace fell into institutional or commercial use as the decades passed. Perhaps because they were too large for families or because of the lack of other suitable accommodation near to the town centre, by 1895 seven houses in the terrace were occupied by the offices of the University Correspondence College or the College's staff. The College had been founded in 1887 by Dr Briggs to provide a complete university education by postal tuition.<sup>44</sup> In 1913 the College occupied Nos 1–7; and by the end of the Second World War in 1948 the institutional occupation of the terrace had extended further with Nos 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 occupied by the Ministry of Health, the University Correspondence College remaining at No. 5, and only two non-institutional residents at Nos 6 and 8.

In 1960 there were no houses left in domestic use, with the Correspondence College at Nos 1–6, University Tutorial Press at No. 7, the National Industrial Fuel Efficiency Service at No. 8, and United Cambridge Hospital Nurses Hostel at Nos 9–12.<sup>45</sup>

At around the time the Parkside Swimming pool opened in 1963 a surface car park was established at the rear of Nos 1–8 of the terrace.<sup>46</sup> In 1964 the City Council Planning Committee welcomed the proposal to build a multi-deck car park on the site and in September 1965

<sup>44</sup> For post-war memories of Queen Anne Terrace see Mike Petty. *Lovely old Terrace*. *CEN* 26.1.2009.

<sup>45</sup> Cambridge Street Directories.

<sup>46</sup> Ian Kitching. <http://www.iankitching.me.uk/history/cam/commons.html#QATcp>.

the City Council agreed to acquire the leasehold interests in Queen Anne Terrace and to demolish the houses.<sup>47</sup>

The last buildings in the terrace were demolished by the early 1970s. In their place were built the Queen Anne Terrace Car Park (opened in 1971) and the YMCA (opened in 1976).

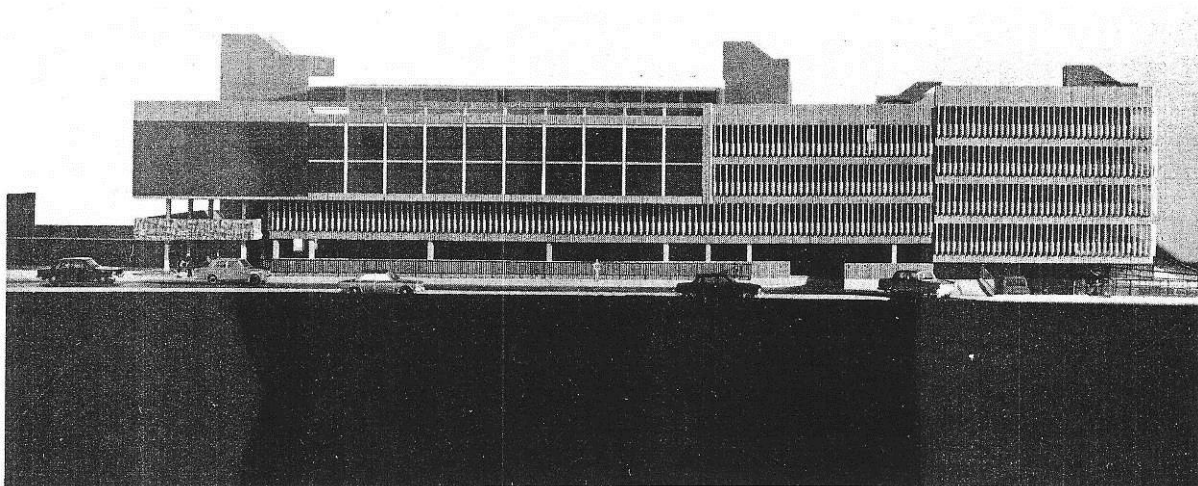
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<sup>47</sup> Mitchell (1985), p. 57.

### 3. 1971: Queen Anne Terrace Car Park

From grim, forbidding prison resembling a medieval castle and incarcerating criminals, to elegant terrace in fashionable architectural style for the upper middle class, to structures that no longer ape the architecture of the past, but aspired to reflect the modern age in style and materials serving the needs of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century residents – such is the transformation that took place over a century and a half on land that had been designated in perpetuity for the grazing of livestock. The Queen Anne Terrace Car Park, Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre, and YMCA were all built on the former goal site in the 1970s.



MODEL SHOWING QUEEN ANNE TERRACE CAR PARK AND SPORTS CENTRE COMPLEX

**Figure 16** – Model of Queen Anne Terrace Car Park and Sports Complex<sup>48</sup>

The growth of car ownership shaped 20<sup>th</sup>-century lifestyles in a way that would have been unimaginable in 1900. Personal motorised transport allowed people to live further from their workplace and also further from the shops in traditional town centre High Streets. In 1950 there were four million cars in the UK. By 1971 this had risen to 19 million, and the resulting demand for car parking near workplaces and close to retail outlets had become a major factor in local politics in Cambridge.

The proposals to create car parking spaces at Queen Anne Terrace or alternatively under Parker's Piece had been current since the late 1950s. The underground car park was a regular issue at Council meetings, and was rejected in 1957, 1959 and again in 1964, when instead the Planning Committee welcomed plans for a multi-deck car park at Queen Anne Terrace. The following year the Council agreed to acquire the leasehold interests of the Terrace and to demolish the houses.<sup>49</sup>

Although not everyone thought the car park was necessary, eventually plans were submitted to the County Council in 1967 for outline planning permission for the car park with an attached sports hall.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> CA: car park opening brochure: 6 Oct 1971.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell (1985), p.57: 17 Sept 1965.

<sup>50</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council, not the City Council, were the planning authority for this scheme in 1967.

**Queen Anne Terrace Car Park would 'ruin Parker's Piece':**

'Deputy Mayor Alderman Marcus Bradford said he had always doubted whether the 700 places in the proposed car park would be fully used. He argued that Queen Anne Terrace was too far out to solve the problem in the centre and if people were prepared to use it for central shopping they would ruin Parker's Piece by walking across it.' —*Cambridge Evening News* 10 Nov 1967

The entire project was estimated to cost £680,000, but first had to be scrutinised by the Fine Art Commission. The Council's preferred contractor was Truscon, which had already built the multi-story car park in Park Street. This had won 'considerable acclaim' from the Commission.<sup>51</sup> The Commission were not so enthusiastic about the Gonville Place building and asked for the bulk to be reduced. In response the City Council agreed to make modifications. However, the Commission's advice did not carry the same weight as their later intervention about Parkside swimming pool in 1992, and the plans were approved by the County Council on 30 July 1968.<sup>52</sup> The only condition was that a landscaping scheme should also be submitted 'to help assimilate the development into its surroundings'.



**Figure 17** – Queen Anne Car Park (photo: 2016)

After considerable delays centred on arranging funding for the project, Truscon was awarded the contract and started construction in March 1970. As the financing for the Sports Hall was not yet finalised the development was to be completed in two phases. The contract price for the first phase, which included the car park, the subway and the floor of the proposed Sports Hall was £515,000.

<sup>51</sup> *CIP* 21 Sep 1967.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell (1985), p.59.

**Queen Anne Terrace Car Park:**

'The car park, which forms the first phase of the development, has short internal ramps connecting the split level parking decks, allowing one-way traffic circulation.

The main structure is in situ reinforced concrete, clad with profiled exposed-aggregate, pre-cast concrete panels and precast concrete fins.

The scheme anticipated the widening of Gonville Place by incorporating two subways to give access to the new dual carriage way. This phase is due for completion in eighteen months and includes the foundations and other preliminary works for the whole project.

The second phase covers the construction of the sports hall which will provide an all-purpose hall, squash courts, ancillary halls and galleries, offices, restaurants and bar.

An unusual feature will be an external rock climbing wall. Work on the second phase is expected to commence before the end of the present one.'

—*Cambridge Evening News* 2 March 1970

**'A most desirable pedestrian subway'**

The scheme was led by Geoffrey Cresswell (see Figure 22 below), who also helped to shape many other schemes that changed central Cambridge during his years as City Surveyor from 1966 to 1989. Many of these had their origins in the City Plan written by Holford and Wright in 1950, and the later Cambridge Transport Study by Travers Morgan & Partners in 1967. The Lion Yard Shopping Centre, the redevelopment of the Fitzroy/Burleigh Street area as a secondary shopping centre and the proposal to widen East Road and Gonville Place to create a dual carriageway, all first emerged in these plans. If the latter had come to fruition it would have made it extremely difficult for pedestrians to exit the new car park towards the city centre, and for cars to turn right. To resolve this issue, the original plans for Queen Anne Terrace had included a subway for cars and pedestrians under Gonville Place, and in March 1971 the City Council sought to give itself authority to provide the necessary subway exit with ramps and roadway on Parker's Piece:

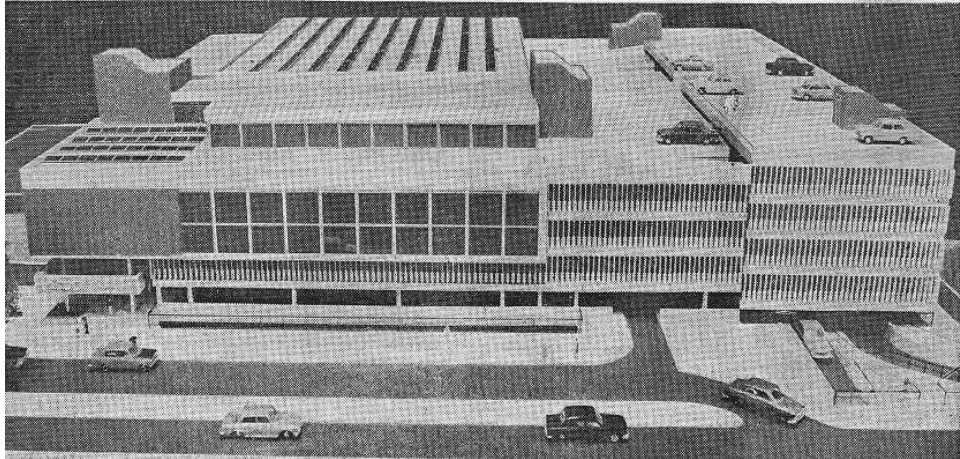
And whereas the Corporation are erecting a multi-story car park on a site on the south-east corner of Gonville Place (as shown on the map) and are desirous in the interests of road safety of providing underground access to and egress from the said car park from and to the North-west side of Gonville Place for vehicles proceeding or intending to proceed along Gonville Place in a North-easterly direction. Now therefore the Corporation are [...] hereby authorised to appropriate for the purpose of securing its use for ramps and roadways which will give underground access to and egress from the multi-story car park being constructed.

— Cambridge City Council Appropriation Order, 17 March 1971.<sup>53</sup>

Figure 18 below shows (bottom right corner of picture) the proposed subway exit under Gonville Place.

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell (1984), p. 66.





**Figure 18** – Model of car park and sports hall (CN 22 Jan 1968)

The plans for the subway immediately drew public opposition and by June 1971 5,000 people had signed a petition opposing the proposal. Parker's Piece was a City Council open space which many felt was sacrosanct as traditional common land. However, legally this was not the case as the City Council had failed to register it as such by the cut-off date for registration, 2 January 1970. Nevertheless, the Council abandoned the subway scheme in response to the number of objections. Despite the hopes that this omission was only 'for the time being', the subway remained unbuilt:

Due to difficulties over the appropriation of a small area of Parker's Piece the subway entry and exit for cars have been omitted for the time being.<sup>54</sup>

Figure 19 shows the car park exit with a feeder road for turning left into Gonville Place, after protests had led to the abandonment of the car and pedestrian subway.



**Figure 19** – Car park exit, ultimate 1970s solution (photo: 2016)

<sup>54</sup> CC. Brochure marking the opening of the car park on 6 October 1971. C.49.62 : 1971.

### The Opening of Queen Anne Car Park

The car park was opened on 6 October 1971 by the Mayor of Cambridge, Jean Barker, with a display of civic pride.<sup>55</sup> The Mayor was met by the Chairman of the Traffic and Parking Committee, Councillor J Pettitt, and was escorted to the 'ceremonial area', where she received on behalf of the City Council a gift of silver from Mr E Kirby, the Managing Director of Truscon. This was followed by a tour of inspection of the car park.<sup>56</sup> The pride was genuine, and listed in the commemorative brochure alongside the contractors and City Council staff who had been involved were the five chairmen of the Traffic and Parking Committee who had overseen the development since it was first proposed in 1964. In the late 1960s, multi-story car parks were seen as the solution to parking problems, and the Council stressed that Queen Anne Terrace was part of a far bigger city wide scheme:

This car park is the first of a series of multi-story car parks planned by the City Council to operate from the main road system around the central area. Although it has been designed to function principally as a long term car park it is only 800 yards from the historic centre and the Fitzroy/Burleigh Street shopping area and, until the Lion Yard car park is opened next year, it will form a valuable addition to the existing short term parking provisions in the central area.<sup>57</sup>



**Figure 20** – Completed Queen Anne Terrace Car Park without Sports Hall (1971)<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 21** – Queen Anne Terrace Car Park and Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall (photo: 2016)

<sup>55</sup> Jean Barker was Conservative City Councillor for Trumpington. She was made a Life Peer as Baroness Trumpington in 1980.

<sup>56</sup> CC. Brochure to mark the opening of Queen Anne Terrace Car Park (1971). C.49.62 : 1971.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*



'Park and Ride' was on no-one's immediate agenda and remained a long time in the future. In the meantime, car ownership continued to grow at approximately 3% a year, and by 2010 the number of vehicles on the road nationally had risen to 34 million. Cambridge in 2016 is still trying to find ways to manage this growth.



Figure 22 – Geoffrey Cresswell, City Surveyor 1966–89 (CEN)

***Cambridge New Architecture (1972): Philip Booth & Nicholas Taylor***

Very shortly you will come out onto Parker's Piece. This is one of Cambridge's most impressive open spaces, originally edged with low terraced houses on three sides and open to the south, which served to emphasise the vastness of the green in the middle. Now considerable new building has taken place, particularly at the corner at which you have just come by [East Rd/Mill Rd junction].

Quite the worst has been the Fire Brigade's headquarters just north of East Road by SN Cooke & Partners, put up in 1963–64. It is beyond belief how so terrible an example of 'liquorice allsorts' architecture could be built on one of Cambridge's best sites.

More satisfactory is the newest of the multi-storey car parks on the south side: it is similar to the one in Park Street in the use of precast concrete elements. Whether it was right to have a large lifeless element like this on Parker's Piece is questionable, even if the detailing is acceptable. It is however to be incorporated with a sports hall in the next stage.

The best buildings are the new Swimming Baths and the Police Headquarters. The latter in particular manages to echo the old scale of Parker's Piece buildings and remains nonetheless a positive addition to the townscape.

## 4. 1975: Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall

### 'For Mum and Dad to see little Johnny on the parallel bars'

Mr Cresswell told the Committee there is some misunderstanding about the functions of a sports hall. Some people had the idea that it would be used as an arena where people could pay to see professionals. This was not the case and the emphasis would be on family use. Although public seating would be provided it would be more 'for Mum and Dad to see little Johnny on the parallel bars' than general public accommodation.

— *Cambridge Evening News* 12 Sep 1997



**Figure 23** – Kelsey Kerridge Sports Centre (2016)

Plans for a sports hall at Queen Anne Terrace were first unveiled in November 1967. A regular complaint in 1960s Cambridge was that while the University students enjoyed high-quality sporting facilities there was nothing similar for residents. The building of Queen Anne Terrace Car Park offered an opportunity to rectify this by integrating a sports hall into the new development. Centrally located and accessible from all over the county, next to Parkside swimming pool and with modern parking facilities, the site seemed to be ideal.

The Car Park and Sports Hall were given planning permission by the County Council in July 1968, but as sources of finance for each element were distinct, the development went forward in two phases. The Car Park was completed by October 1971, with provision for the Sports Hall to be added when funding had been arranged. After a public appeal that had raised £130,000, a loan of £490,000, and commitments from the University and local authorities, work started in November 1973. The estimated cost was £664,700.<sup>59</sup>

Built by local builders Johnson & Bailey, the Sports Hall finally opened on 1 July 1975.

The City Surveyor's claims that this was not just for serious sportsmen were echoed by all those involved in the project with a strong emphasis on family participation 'for physical

<sup>59</sup> *CEN* 5 Nov 1973. The City Council was to pay £28,000 a year for 40 years.

benefit and personal enjoyment'.<sup>60</sup> The *Cambridge Evening News* reported that its 'sheer size [...] will be the first thing to impress the first visitors when it opens its doors to the public':

For within the walls of this unique building there is a multi-purpose sports area half the size of a football pitch, a large projectile gallery, squash and badminton courts, and many more facilities that will be second to none in the country. The building is unique in that it is the first sports hall to be built into the side of a multi-story car park.

The public can judge for themselves just how convenient this is. Together with the Corporation swimming pool at Parkside it will be one of the most accessible facilities in the city.<sup>61</sup>

The report placed the new building firmly in the modern age by stressing that amongst the facilities was a 'space age reception area where the receptionist can supervise the building by way of a closed circuit TV system'.

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<sup>60</sup> CC: Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall.

<sup>61</sup> *CEN* 16 Jan 1975.

## 5. 1974: The YMCA

The final part of the former Queen Anne Terrace to be developed became the site of the Cambridge YMCA in 1974, known as Queen Anne House.

The earlier YMCA at No. 1 Alexandra Street, in Falcon Yard, at the corner of St Tibb's Row in the Lion Yard, was demolished in the early-1970s redevelopment of that area.<sup>62</sup> Initially a new building was expected in the Lion Yard scheme but failed to materialize. Next the Association sought to acquire Owlstone Croft, a group of buildings lying between Newnham Village and the River Granta, which had latterly been a nurses' home for Addenbrooke's Hospital, when on



Figure 24 – Earlier YMCA, Lion Yard area

Trumpington Street, until the hospital moved from the city centre to its present Hills Road site.

The Owlstone bid having failed, a planning application was submitted in February 1970 for a new building on the site of Nos 8–12 Queen Anne Terrace. It was stated that the land would be bought from the City Council, and sold back to the City when no longer needed.<sup>63</sup> Why the City Council agreed to this rather than a leasehold arrangement is unclear.

The architect was Robert Hurley of Porte & Partners, London and Colchester, who were for many years the YMCA's 'go to' architect, and who designed buildings for the Association all over the country. The site presented Hurley with significant challenges. It was small considering the expectations for what it would be able to contain, costs had to be tightly controlled, while the sensitivities of the site overlooking Parker's Piece meant that any plans would be subject to rigorous scrutiny. A report in 1976 explained the rationale for the final plan:

The building had to cope with heavy use, and the rooms needed to be multi-purpose. The YMCA was particularly anxious that the area for social activities should be kept quite separate from the residents' private rooms. This presented difficulties especially when security demanded that one entrance should serve the entire building.<sup>64</sup>

The solution was to construct two buildings linked by a corridor along the east of the site: at the back of the site a six-storey residential block ('hostel') with 114 rooms for men and women (the design of which had already secured approval from the Royal Fine Art Commission<sup>65</sup> by mid-1970), and at the front a three-storey community centre ('club').

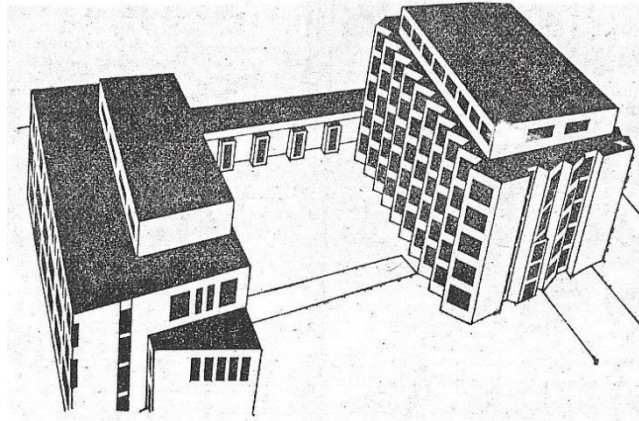
<sup>62</sup> *CN* 29 Sep 1965, also *CEN* 23 June 1970. The figure is reproduced here by kind permission of the Cambridge YMCA.

<sup>63</sup> *CEN* 16 Jan 1970.

<sup>64</sup> *CEN* 19 Nov 1976.

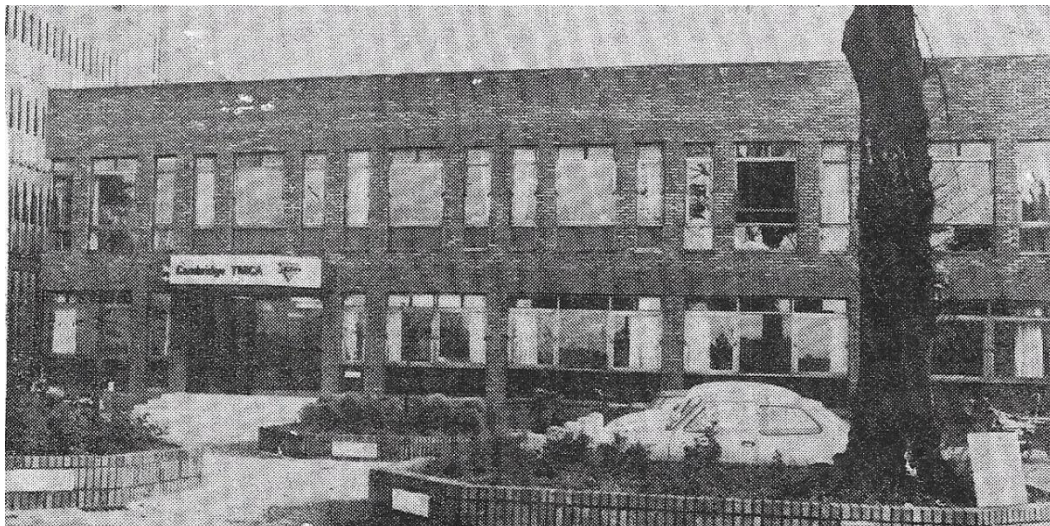
<sup>65</sup> The Royal Fine Art Commission was founded by the UK government in 1924, and became the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment in 1999, itself to be merged into the Design Council in 2011.





**Figure 25** – Porte & Partners' Y.M.C.A. block plan (c.1970)

Because the site lay between the multi-storey car park on the east and the late-Georgian Owen Webb House on the west, Hurley chose red brick to mark the new building out from concrete and Cambridge white brick respectively, and to give it 'domestic scale and character'. In the hostel, rooms were described as 'study-bedrooms' because the Y.M.C.A. made up to 60 of them available to students of the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology (later Anglia Ruskin University), also to business trainees and others. Plans for the 'club' included a crèche, a community hall, space for an 'old folks' club', an 'ultra-modern restaurant' and a recording studio. The plan departed from the Association's name in two obvious respects: it was to house women as well as men, and to give access to old as well as young people. A funding shortfall forced the architect to scale down the 'club' to two storeys.<sup>66</sup> Building took place in 1972–74, during which period temporary accommodation was placed on Parker's Piece. The building was opened by the Duchess of Kent on 4 December 1974.



**Figure 26** – Y.M.C.A. frontage with raised garden beds (1974)<sup>67</sup>

The hostel was designed with each vertical 'slice' angled towards the sun, creating a zigzag facade front and back (see Figure 27 below), the rear overlooking Fenner's Cricket Ground. Whereas the hostel was regular in form, the club gives an irregular impression: the brick-

<sup>66</sup> CEN 30 March 1971.

<sup>67</sup> CEN 19 Nov 1976. Picture No: 39747612.

work of the club is in simple stretcher bond, the window apertures are plain, as if punched into the brick surface, the windows all vertical, alternating narrow and wider, and the fenestration of the ground and first floor gives an impression of not aligning vertically (see Figures 27 and 28).



**Figure 27** – YMCA hostel front (photo: 2016)



**Figure 28** – YMCA 'club' front (photo: 2016)

The Association stated that the club was to be:<sup>68</sup>

a home for recreation and learning – a base for meeting community needs – a workshop for community action. It will provide a continuous programme of activity day and night for the differing age groups and interests without duplicating the facilities of the Sports Hall next door.

In 1991 the City Council granted permission for the height of the club to be raised by more than 20 feet – effectively substituting for the cancelled second storey of the original plan. In a second reflection of Association's changing priorities, the new accommodation was to include on one floor 15 hostel rooms for young people in the age group 16 to 21 with special housing needs (those leaving the care of a children's home or long-stay hospital, or recently ejected from the family home). On the other floor self-contained flatlets were designed for a more independent style of living by people in the age range 18 to 28.<sup>69</sup> The line of the original flat roof can still be seen, marked by a single course of upright red bricks ('soldiers').



**Figure 29** – YMCA 'club' extension (photo: 2016)

Above that, the red brickwork continues until the building materials and style abruptly change, with a cream string course. The architect of the extension, David Thompson, a

<sup>68</sup> CC: YMCA cuttings file.

<sup>69</sup> CEN 30 May 1991.



partner of what was by then Hurley, Porte & Duell, was faced with an insistence on the part of the City planners that the design be a 'Swiss Chalet' roof. He created a steep, four-sided slate pitched roof, culminating in a flat roof, and punctuated on all four slopes by alternating single and double dormer windows, the roof overhanging the walls below with wide, prominent eaves (Figure 29). Immediately below the eaves are shallow, framed windows interspersed with cream panels, the extension thus yielding two storeys, the upper one within the roof space. If the planners' intention was allegedly to mirror the dormer roofs of the terraces opposite on Park Terrace, it does not work, for the latter have balustrades rather than an overhang, preserving their Georgian character. The result today can be seen in Figure 30. The building was re-opened by The Duchess of Gloucester on 2 November 1994.



**Figure 30** – YMCA as seen from Gonville Place (photo: 2016)

## B. The Common Pasture: Donkey's Common 1828–1945

### 1. Donkey's Common: 1828-1900

The building of the gaol in 1829 had already significantly reduced the size of the Common Pasture. The remaining 3 acres is shown in 1830 on Baker's map (Figure 31). It is unnamed, unlike the 'Third Allotment', which Baker identifies as 'Peter's Field', and in official documents continues to be referred to by its location: 'the common near the gaol' (1833), the 'ground near the Borough Gaol, 3 acres' (1841), 'the site near the Borough Gaol' (1859) and 'land between Mill Road and the Gaol' (1861).<sup>70</sup>

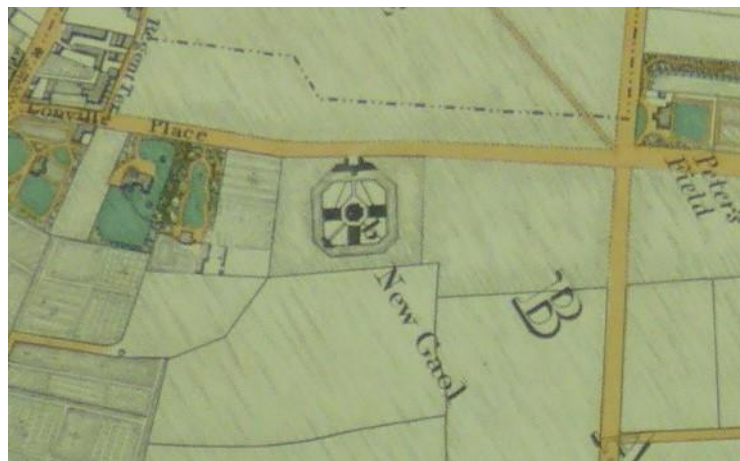


Figure 31 – New Gaol on the Common Pasture (Baker, 1830)

Whether the name 'Donkey's Common' was given to the area by the civic authorities, or whether it originated as the name used by local residents is unclear. The first record found in the newspaper archives is that of March 1862, when it is mentioned in a report about a possible site for a new railway station when 'Alderman Apthorpe suggests Donkey's Common, near the Town Gaol'.<sup>71</sup> However there seems to be some confusion about the exact name as the next year a report refers to the threat of the Great Northern Railway crossing land 'called Zion Piece or Donkey's Common'.<sup>72</sup> After this, however, the name occurs more regularly.

The plan to build the railway was one of a number of threats to the common during the 19th century. These ranged from seeking to turn it into a Church of England burial ground to using it as a site for the cattle market, or for housing.

<sup>70</sup> 1833: Evidence by Cambridge Corporation to Commissioners enquiring into the state of Municipal Corporations. 1841: Committee appointed by the Town Council to enquire into site for cemetery (*CCh* 3 April 1841). 1859: *CCh* 9 July 1859. Memorial to Cambridge Town Council re site for new cattle market. 1861: Town Council Minutes. 9 April 1861. Memorial from Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Cambridge to the Enclosure Commissioners. Mitchell (1985), p. 45.

<sup>71</sup> *CCh* 8 March 1862.

<sup>72</sup> *CIP* 11 Nov 1863.



### 1841: Proposed Site for Cemetery

In 1841 the Town Council authorised a committee to look into possible sites for a public cemetery. Their report concluded that the 'most eligible site for such a cemetery would be two pieces of ground near the borough gaol, containing respectively 3 [acres] and 2 [acres] 2 [roods] 12 [perches]. That the former of these pieces of ground should be appropriated for members of the Established church, and the latter for the use of persons of other religious denominations'.<sup>73</sup> Amongst those objecting was a 'Mr Humfrey' (perhaps Charles Humfrey?). He stressed that Parker's Piece was already a popular public space, and felt that 'it was not quite proper that persons carrying their departed friends to their final home should have to pass a place where all sorts of games and gaiety were in progress, as was daily the case on Parker's Piece'. But his principal objection lay in his recognition that Cambridge would continue to expand and that 'though now on the outskirts of the town in thirty years or so it would probably be actually within the town itself'.<sup>74</sup>

Humfrey did not object on the grounds that building a cemetery on Donkey's Common would itself be a loss, but that it was an inappropriate location next to Parker's Piece, and that the advantage that the site was, at that time, on the edge of the town, would soon be lost.

### 1859: Proposed Site for Cattle Market

Nineteen years later the site was again seen as a suitable location for a major public project. The cattle market had moved from the town centre to Pound Hill in 1843, but many felt this was not satisfactory. Presenting a memorial to the Town Council in July 1859, Major Pemberton said that the site near the Town Gaol 'would be in many respects advantageous from its contiguity to the railway station [...] he had no hesitation in saying that were a market established in that spot a considerably larger quantity of cattle would be bought from the neighbourhood, especially if the convenience were added to by the construction of a siding from the railway station'.<sup>75</sup> The next month the Market Committee agreed that the most eligible site for the cattle market is land 'lying between the Gaol and the Zion Chapel', and by January 1860 one of the leading campaigners for the new market, William Bennett, was publicly discussing more detailed plans.<sup>76</sup>

It has been suggested that the whole area from the gaol to Zion chapel be enclosed from the north by an ornamental brick wall, with running boarded gates, and that the part from Fenner's ground thoroughfare to Mill Road be properly fitted up as a market, leaving the remaining space for the present for showing horses etc and available for any future enlargement of the market.<sup>77</sup>

An ornamental brick wall from the gaol to the Zion chapel (encompassing Donkey's Common and Petersfield) was never built, as objections to the scheme rapidly mounted and the Town Council was presented with a succession of petitions. It was claimed the site would be no more convenient than at Pound Hill;<sup>78</sup> and that a cattle market would lead in quick succession to a Hay Market, a Horse Market and then a Pig Market, all obstructing the ap-

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<sup>73</sup> CCh 3 April 1841.

<sup>74</sup> CIP 29 May 1841.

<sup>75</sup> CCh 9 July 1859.

<sup>76</sup> Market Committee: CA: Minutes of Market Committee: 1 Aug 1859, CB/2/CL/7/39/59. William Bennett letter to *Cambridge Chronicle*: CCh 28 Jan 1860.

<sup>77</sup> CCh 28 Jan 1860.

<sup>78</sup> CCh 25 June 1859.

proach to the cemetery that had eventually been built on Mill Road and attracting 'loose characters':

when all these improvements are in full operation, and all the loose character of the neighbourhood have learned to consider this new market as an agreeable lounge, the annoyances I am speaking of will be in full force.<sup>79</sup>

While butchers, farmers and cattle dealers all objected that the new site was not the most favourable to their business interests, others focused on the impact on nearby public amenities. A memorial (i.e. a petition) from the residents of Park Terrace, like Humfrey in 1841, repeated the fears of a likely influx of disreputable characters to Parker's Piece. These threatened to make what was becoming the town's main open space no longer the 'safe promenade for women and children' that it was at present. Unmentioned, it also threatened the residents' view, a recurring concern to be echoed forcefully by Lord St John, then Master of Emmanuel College, in 1992.<sup>80</sup> Another memorial from Jesus and St Peter's College raised similar concerns, stressing that the cattle market would be detrimental to the recreation ground and 'being productive of injury to public and private property without any equivalent compensation'.<sup>81</sup>

Amongst these objections, a letter in the *Cambridge Independent Press* from 'An Inhabitant' broadened the debate beyond Parker's Piece to the loss of the adjoining area itself, now used by residents for their health and recreation:

The proposed site (an open space between the Town Gaol and Zion Chapel) is doubtless eligible in some respects, but has many drawbacks; and indeed, the blocking up and enclosure of a piece of ground now devoted to the health and recreation of inhabitants would be an exceedingly unpopular proceeding, as a late discussion in the Town Council has sufficiently proved; nor do I believe that that body would be found to endorse any such project.<sup>82</sup>

The writer also suggested that a meadow lying between Covent Garden and Cambridge Place might be more suitable for the cattle market. This was pursued, but negotiations with the landlords, Gonville & Caius College, were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, by May 1860 the plans to use all the land between the Zion Chapel and the Gaol (now Petersfield and Donkey's Common) had become less ambitious, and a report by Mr Gray to the Council recommended only using the land between Zion Chapel and Mill Road, which it proposed to enclose by an 8ft brick wall, and cover with gravel. These plans prompted Mr Green to respond that he 'would never consent to the removal of the cattle market to the vicinity of a piece of ground so long devoted to recreation as Parker's Piece'. He continued by saying that 'he considered Parker's Piece to be so to speak part of the 'lungs of the town', a phrase that was used more and more frequently over following decades to highlight the benefits that the commons brought to town and its residents.<sup>83</sup>

The plans for the cattle market never progressed further, but if they had done so the Council was recommended by Mr Gray to purchase the land from the 'Commoners' under the provisions of the Lands Clause Consolidation Act of 1845. Presumably the 'Commoners' were the 119 holders of 'common rights' identified in the Inclosure Award who had agreed to the sale of part of the Second Allotment.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from 'Civis', *CCh* 28 April 1860.

<sup>80</sup> Letter to Peter Studdert, Director of Planning, Cambridge City Council, 13 August 1992.

<sup>81</sup> *CCh* 5 May 1860.

<sup>82</sup> *CIP* 4 Feb 1860.

<sup>83</sup> *CCh* 5 May 1860.

**1859: Proposed Site for Housing**

While the land between the gaol and Mill Road was being suggested as the site for a new cattle market, the Council appointed a Special Improvement Committee to 'take all requisite steps for the purpose of rendering the commons more available for the general benefit of the inhabitants of the Town'.

The Committee concluded that:<sup>84</sup>

the condition of the commons has for many years been the subject of general complaint. Few of those who have the right to stock them can avail themselves of the privilege. The greater number of those who stock them have no right so to do. There is no stint or limit whatever. The herbage is usually eaten up in a few days after the Commons are opened, and it is certain that many cattle put on them are brought from parishes out of the Borough.

The only course open to the Council to deal with this was expensive and often futile litigation, and the Committee recommended a Parliamentary Bill which would abolish the existing 'rights of common', pay compensation to those affected and 'apportioned by an Enclosure Commissioner by authority of Parliament. The Committee could not concur in the suggestion of general enclosure'.<sup>85</sup>

Amongst its proposals, the Committee stated that Parker's Piece 'should be used as places of exercise and recreation for the inhabitants of the Borough and the neighbouring population'. But they did not see the adjoining sites on 'the land between Gaol and Mill Road', or 'Land near Zion chapel' in a similar light, suggesting that one or both sites were suitable for a new cattle market, but if not they should be disposed of on building leases.

Probably dissuaded by the cost of a Parliamentary Bill, the Council did not pursue this, and neither cattle market nor houses were built. But the underlying problem remained, and in 1861 the Town Clerk, Charles Cooper, submitted a memorial to the Enclosure Commissioners asking how the Council could stop the 'gross abuses' resulting from over-stocking of the commons without the cost and 'no little excitement, agitation and ill will' that would arise from legal proceedings. Cooper stressed that the Council did not want to enclose the commons as they were 'useful to the inhabitants as places of recreation and exercise and the great importance of preserving open spaces in the vicinity of this large and populous Borough is sensibly felt by your Memorialists'. The Commissioners replied that this raised 'questions of a very important character', and this too was not pursued by the Council.<sup>86</sup>

**1863: Proposed Site for Railway**

By 1863 when the proposal to build the railway across the common was discussed, the description of the commons as 'lungs' was becoming more central to the debate. At a meeting of the Commons Defence Association 'Mr Freeman rose to second the motion and said that he always had a great aversion to the commons being closed; he considered they were to be the lungs of the town, and should not see the commons cut up into paths. He should be most happy to do his best to protect the commons as long as he lived'.

Mr Freeman qualified this statement by adding that the commons were not sacrosanct, but that any loss should be replaced with land elsewhere, saying they 'could not object to any

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<sup>84</sup> CIP 26 Nov 1859

<sup>85</sup> See CIP 26 Nov 1859 and Mitchell (1984), p.34

<sup>86</sup> Mitchell (1984), Appendix A. Town Council Minutes 9 April 1861.

public work [...] therefore what they required was that, if the company took land, an equivalent should be given for it'.<sup>87</sup> This was endorsed by the Association, who were enthusiastic about the Great Northern extending their line into the town, but the railway company met many objections to its proposed route and the line remained unbuilt.

### 1870: Proposed Site for Housing

The Council's quest for extra revenue to fund its growing municipal responsibilities, including the cost of maintaining the commons, led to a revival of the plans for housing on Donkey's Common in 1870. A draft report suggested that the commons could be:

A source of public revenue, providing funds for the erection of a new Corn Exchange, and for other purposes. It is believed that the Corporation might add £1,424 per annum to its income in this way, in addition to a large sum of money every fourteen years by renewal fines. It is estimated that £6,149 would thus be realised, and that through the erection of houses on but a small portion of the commons the rate would be increased by about £1000. As the University is extended, it is argued, so must the Town, and superior house accommodation must be furnished to meet the requirements of those who are expected to come to Cambridge to avail themselves of the extension of the University.<sup>88</sup>

Amongst similar suggestions for the other commons the Committee estimated that twenty houses could be built on the 'the land between the Borough Gaol and Zion Chapel' (Donkey's Common and Petersfield), providing £372 pa through rents and rates, and £2,100 through renewal fines every fourteen years.

Those who felt that the growing town needed all the commons simply as open spaces rather than building sites were dismissed with the reminder that college gardens were an ample substitute: 'the fact that Clare Hall Pieces and the College grounds are open to the public, the Committee consider obviates the necessity of reserving all the commons as open spaces for public purposes'.

The report led to a proposal to apply to parliament for powers of improvement and enclosure of certain commons, sparking considerable controversy and reminders that the same issues had been raised in the past.

Few believed that building would be restricted to the street frontage of the commons. Others stated that the money raised would reduce the rates for those who paid most – the rich – while scarcely benefitting the poor, who would lose their common rights. In addition it was said that the price of milk would rise if those grazing their cows on the commons had to pay more for the right.<sup>89</sup>

Alderman Peed, President of the Commons Defence Committee, articulated the rich versus poor argument and pointedly recalled the days when a corrupt corporation had spent the town's revenues on feasts:

It is proposed that these green open spaces (the pride of our town) should be taken away from the working man in order that his richer fellow townsmen may get a great deal and himself a very little. – that is supposing the plan to produce as much net income as stated, which to say the most is doubtful.

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<sup>87</sup> Meeting of Commons Defence Association at *The Tiger*, East Road: CIP 14 Nov 1863.

<sup>88</sup> Draft Report by Commons Sub Committee. CCh 5 Feb 1870.

<sup>89</sup> CIP 22 Oct 1870.

Whether the produce of the scheme be as much or little; whether it be swallowed up in compensations and law expense, or whether it turn out to be large enough for reinstituting Corporation feasts out of town property: the working men have declared that they will not consent to any scheme of enclosure.<sup>90</sup>

Adding weight to the objections and reflecting the way that the debate had changed since 1841 was the contribution from Mr Mudd, Curator of the Botanic Garden. While many of those opposing the plans kept stock on the commons and were defending their own interests, Mudd emphasised the health benefits of the commons for all residents and gave added force to the idea of the commons as green lungs: 'He threw the whole of the cow keepers and horse keepers into the background and from a physiological stand-point argued in favour of preserving the herbage and air currents as much as possible; dilating scientifically upon the botanical properties of every blade of grass as a source of vitality to the human frame'.<sup>91</sup>

Under this onslaught of objections the Council's 1870 Report, like earlier proposals, never reached Parliament, and houses were not built around Donkey's Common. But the concerns the report sought to address remained unresolved, and this was not the last time that Councillors would see the commons as a potential source of revenue. However there did seem to be a growing consensus that Donkey's Common and Petersfield were adjuncts to Parker's Piece and should therefore be preserved. This was reflected in the comments by Alderman Balls who despite being in favour of some of the suggestions for other commons said that he:

held that Donkey Common and the other piece of land adjoining (both of which lay between the Borough Gaol and Zion Chapel) ought to be kept inviolate. Those plots of land were virtually parts of the large recreation ground known as Parker's Piece, being only separated from it by the road, and the same arguments which applied to preserving the latter applied to the former'.<sup>92</sup>

### **1873: Proposed Site for Cattle Market**

In 1873, the continuing quest to relocate the cattle market again identified Donkey's Common as a possible site and it was put forward as one of the options by the Council's Market Committee. Jesus and St Peter's Colleges very rapidly lodged memorials objecting. None of the options put forward progressed beyond the proposal stage, and it was not until 1885 that a new cattle market was finally opened on Jesus College land near the railway station on Cherry Hinton Road.

### **1860s and 1870s: the Common in Public Use**

Amidst these potential threats there are glimpses in the local newspaper of residents using the common. In 1865 Daniel Hayward, identified in the *Cambridge Independent Press* as 'the well-known cricketer', was found digging up a piece of the common to erect a new tent. Hayward said that he was merely putting it up to see how it would stand, and that the hole did not extend over four inches. The charges were withdrawn, but he did have to pay expenses.<sup>93</sup>

In the same year a case was reported of a night time quarrel and obscene language when Thomas Price was heard arguing with a woman and using 'very hard language' when re-

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<sup>90</sup> *CIP* 29 Oct 1870.

<sup>91</sup> *CCh* 12 Nov 1870.

<sup>92</sup> *CCh* 10 Dec 1870.

<sup>93</sup> *CIP* 15 April 1865.



quested to go away.<sup>94</sup> Ten years later a case of indecent assault again marked the common as a place where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour were sometimes tested when 'a young man named Bullock was convicted of assaulting a little girl of tender years by indecent conduct [...] and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, with hard labour'.<sup>95</sup>

Evidence that the common was used for grazing is illustrated by an advertisement for a lost 'Bay Mare Pony, from Donkey's Common, near the Town Gaol' in 1868. The owner, H Askham, lived nearby at 20 East Road. The incident also illustrates the risks through loss or theft of leaving stock on the common.<sup>96</sup>

By the 1870s the growing population led to the common being used for carpet beating, with nearby residents objecting in 1875 that it was going on until early afternoon and requesting Bye Laws to prohibit it.<sup>97</sup> Four years later 'A Sufferer' and presumably a resident of the recently built Mortimer Road adjoining the common repeated the complaint in a letter to the newspaper:

Can you give an instance of any town in England, besides Cambridge, where carpet shaking and beating is allowed to go on all through the livelong day in the heart of the town, in close contiguity to a public thoroughfare, and in front of high class residences?

We are proud of our open spaces in Cambridge and believe that they are calculated to promote the health of the inhabitants; but when they are used for the purpose of enabling one class of inhabitants to get rid of their own dirt at the expense of those who live by the side of the open space selected by them on which to shake their carpets, the said open space becomes a very open blessing.

You will have no difficulty in identifying the spot to which I refer, viz. that portion of Parker's Piece described as Donkey's Common. On the east side of this space have recently been erected some good houses, the occupiers of which are called upon to the local burdens at a much higher rate than are the occupiers of houses in the town, and yet the Commons Committee permits the nuisance of carpet shaking and beating to go on in front of these houses from sunrise to sunset, disturbing the inhabitants of these houses in their sleep and smothering the houses with household dust which penetrates to the interior.<sup>98</sup>



**Figure 32** – Mortimer Road (1879): recently erected 'good houses' with views across Donkey's Common

The letter reflects the ongoing tensions of living near a public open space, with the benefits of a view sometimes outweighed by the threat of what is seen as anti-social behaviour - behaviour which the perpetrator may see as their right.

<sup>94</sup> CIP 29 July 1865.

<sup>95</sup> CIP 20 July 1878.

<sup>96</sup> CIP 30 May 1868.

<sup>97</sup> Objection by Mr Banham. CCh 27 March 1875.

<sup>98</sup> CIP 12 April 1879.

### Commons Act 1876

In 1876 Parliament passed the 'Commons Act', and on 21 December 1876 James Turner, President of the Commons Defence Association, wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Inclosure Commissioners asking for directions about how to implement the Act in Cambridge.<sup>99</sup> In the letter Turner explained the difficulties of implementing the Act, and outlined the distinctive characteristics of the various commons, including the former First (integrated into Parker's Piece), Second (Donkey's Common) and Third (Petersfield) Allotments of the Inclosure Award:

Included in the above are three pieces the gaol side of Parker's Piece and the two pieces on either side of mill road being about 10 acres belonging to the representatives of persons whose names are kept in the Abbey Church who had the right of pasturage in Barnwell before the enclosure. They received compensation when the town gaol was built on their piece. The commons are now not at all used by them. It would be a work of some difficulty to find out the present representatives.<sup>100</sup>

The Act allowed the Council to apply to the Inclosure Commissioners for an order for the regulation of the commons, rather than their enclosure. This meant that regulations could be brought in through bye-laws and changes in management could be introduced in this way. At the time the Council took no action, but in 1878 they took steps to obtain the appropriate bye laws.<sup>101</sup> The uncertain status of the three former allotments was stressed yet again.

'Under the Commons Act 1878 application can be made to the Inclosure Commissioners for an order for the regulation of the commons, as distinct from Inclosure, which later course would be strongly objected to both to the whole or any considerable part.'

'By an order for regulation means may be obtained for the improvement of the commons on the following points:

1. Drainage, manuring or levelling
2. The planting of trees or in any other way improving
3. For keeping order
4. The general management

Power can be obtained, if decided advisable, to set out roads, bridle paths or footpaths, as may appear most desirable.'

'Parker's Piece should be kept solely for recreation, no horses to be exercised or cattle turned thereon. It must be born in mind that of this ground a portion containing 4 acres 20 roods, next Parker's Piece, and the two pieces on the other side of the road, containing 5 acres 2 roods 12 perches, on one of which the Borough Gaol is built, are expressly allotted by the Award made under the Barnwell Inclosure Act for the benefit of various owners of properties named (numbering 119) named in the schedule thereto.' — *CIP* 5 Jan 1878.

<sup>99</sup> See Mitchell (1984). Letter published in *CCh* 13 Jan 1877.

<sup>100</sup> *CCh* 13 Jan 1877.

<sup>101</sup> *CIP* 5 Jan 1878.

The new bye-laws for the commons were eventually accepted by the Town Council in August 1880, adding twelve new regulations to the twelve that already existed.<sup>102</sup> The list of activities covered by fines reflects what was considered undesirable behaviour at the time:

**Cambridge Town Council: Bye Laws for Commons 1880**

*[§§ 1–12 were not given in this report.]*

13. Every person removing or wilfully injuring or defacing the turf, or any tree, shrub or flowers thereon, fence, seat, tree guard, bridge, gate, noticeboard, or any other property of the corporation – forty shillings.

14. Every person who beats or shakes any carpet, rug, or mat, on any of the commons except Sheep's Green and that portion of Coe Fen lying near Stonebridge, and that portion of Midusmmer Common lying beyond Butt Green, and in a line with Jesus Grove – forty shillings.

15. Every person who, without permission, shall place on any common any offensive matters or things – forty shillings.

16. Every person burning on any common any wood, brushwood or other articles – forty shillings.

17. That there shall be opened and kept at the office of the town clerk a book or register in which shall be entered an account of all animals proposed to be turned on any common pasture within the said borough.

18. Every person turning or placing on any of the commons within this borough any animal without having previously registered the same under bye law 17. and paid yearly and every year to the treasurer of the said borough a registration fee of 4s for each animal so turned or placed upon the said commons, the said fee to come due and be paid on the first day of December in each year, or within seven days thereafter – forty shillings.

19. Every person turning or placing on any common pasture within the said borough more than 16 animals at one and the same time, for each animal above that number – forty shillings.

20. Every person placing any animal of Parker's Piece within the said borough (such common being for the purposes of recreation only) – forty shillings.

21. Any person gambling, betting or playing with cards, dice or any other article, on any common – forty shillings.

22. Any person interfering with, obstructing, or annoying any persons who by permission are playing at cricket or other lawful games on any of the commons – forty shillings.

23. Any person wilfully interfering with, obstructing or annoying any of the common constables or other officers or persons employed by the corporation in the discharge of their duties – forty shillings.

24. Any persons firing guns, pistols, using catapults, or similar offensive weapons, throwing stones, sticks or other missiles, or doing anything which may endanger the public or be deemed a nuisance, obstruction or annoyance on any common – forty shillings.

— CIP 8 May 1880.

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<sup>102</sup> CIP 7 July 1880.

The condition of Donkey's Common in 1880 can be inferred from the complaints made at a Council meeting by Mr Basham. Commenting that railings taken down from Parker's Piece should have been placed round Donkey's Common, he said the result was 'that horses and vehicles were driven all over the verbiage to the houses in Mortimer Road, and to Mill Road'. He contended it was 'high time something should be done to remedy the present state of things'. In response he was told the railings had been placed at the front of the old Town Gaol, and that there were not enough left over to go around the remaining common. At the same time the Town Clerk again pointed out that the status of Donkey's Common and Petersfield was not quite the same as that of other commons:

the two pieces of land on each side of Mill Road, and a portion of Parker's Piece were in a different position, legally.<sup>103</sup>

### Trees, Paths and Fencing

'We must make the town attractive.' – Mr Young (*CIP* 28 Oct 1882)

Improvements to the common were proposed by Mr Bailey during the West Barnwell election campaign in 1881. Reminding his audience that the town was poorly provided for in comparison with the University he stated that 'Cambridge had very few pleasant walks of its own independent of the colleges' and told his potential voters that he 'would like to see the two pieces of ground called Donkey's Common palisaded and planted and laid out with pleasant walks'.<sup>104</sup>

Bailey's plea obviously resonated with a wider audience, as the next year the Commons Committee recommended that trees should be planted 'along the East Road, next to Donkey's Common and at each side of the road from East Road to Mill Road, at a cost of £28'. It was estimated that it would require about forty-five trees to go round Donkey's Common, and that the trees would line the road from the Zion Chapel to the new houses at Queen Anne Terrace on the site of the former gaol, 'and from the corner to the Mill Road [...] it was important that they should make that portion of the town as attractive as possible'.<sup>105</sup>

Support for these environmental improvements was taken up in late October 1882 by Mr Young at a meeting of electors in East Barnwell: 'He strongly supported the ornamentation and beautification of the commons, and thought the planting of trees was a considerable aid to that effect. More trees were to be planted on each side of Donkey's Common, from the commencement of Mill Road against Mortimer-villas to the East Road, also from Zion Chapel to Queen Anne Terrace'.

Young added that trees would also act as a deterrent to the resurrection in the future of the earlier plans to surround the common with houses: 'He thought this would not only add to the effect but would also tend – if the question should ever arise – to prevent building on these frontages'.

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<sup>103</sup> *CIP* 8 May 1880.

<sup>104</sup> *CIP* 28 May 1881.

<sup>105</sup> *CIP* 14 Oct 1882.



**Figure 33** – The 'beautification of the commons'. Mature trees still border Donkey's Common from Mortimer Road to Gonville Place (photo: 2016)

Concluding his election address, Young championed the trees around Donkey's Common as a key factor in making Cambridge attractive to wealthy new residents, and, as a result, to the town's future prosperity:

Cambridge was a manufactory of learning, and students went from her colleges to all parts of the world. It would benefit their town for people to speak advantageously of it and might induce friends of students – persons who had money to spend – to come and live part of the year there. To do this they must make the town attractive (applause).<sup>106</sup>

The following year the Commons Committee continued the process of turning the common into an urban park by recommending that a limestone and tar path should run from Queen Anne Terrace to the junction of Mortimer Road and Mill Road. Young added his support to the recommendation by reporting that a survey the previous Sunday had found that 2,187 people had crossed Donkey's Common that day.<sup>107</sup>

While the Council was taking steps to improve the common, its exact status continued to be an issue. At a Council debate in June 1884, where Councillors had already expressed a desire to purchase the college rights to Christ's Pieces, Mr Turner asked yet again for clarification and for a 'report upon the common rights existing over Donkey's Common and Petersfield, with the view of any private rights therein of their being acquired by the corporation, and as to the steps by which this can be effected, and, if thought necessary, to make order thereon'.<sup>108</sup> The motion was accepted, but it is unclear if the report requested was ever completed.

### 1889–96: Grazing – towards Beautification

'These facts will undoubtedly strike terror into the hearts of many who have frequently had occasion to cross the common'

<sup>106</sup> CIP 28 Oct 1882.

<sup>107</sup> CIP 10 March 1883. The committee also recommended a path across Petersfield from Mill Road corner to Zion Chapel. The cost of the two paths was not to exceed £150.

<sup>108</sup> CIP 21 June 1884.





**Figure 34–** Donkey's Common, Queen Anne Terrace, Mortimer Road, and Trees (O/S 1888)

Despite the trees and footpaths, animals were still grazing on Donkey's Common throughout the 1880s. But, with the population of Mill Road increasing rapidly, the resulting heavy footfall across the common into the town centre was putting a strain on the relationship between pedestrians and livestock. An incident in 1889 when two members of staff at Ayerst Hall were knocked over by a horse was used by the *Cambridge Independent Press* to campaign for grazing to be discontinued.<sup>109</sup>

The newspaper gave a detailed account of the attack on Mrs Robinson, a cook at the hostel making her way home to Pulling Terrace on Mill Road. She was:

attacked by [a] pony belonging to Mr Smith, Sweep, of Kingston Street. The animal followed her and put its head over her left shoulder. She tried to drive it away, and it then bit her on the upper part of the right arm, making a slight wound. The pony succeeded in knocking the woman down, and dragged her for some distance by the cloak which she was wearing. She got up, when the vicious animal placed its head against the woman's back, knocking her down for the second time. Some men came to the unfortunate woman's assistance, keeping the horse away from her, and picking up her hat and basket, which had been dropped in the encounter.<sup>110</sup>

The report told readers that Mrs Robinson had been forced to visit Addenbrooke's Hospital afterwards for treatment, that her face was injured, and that she suffered 'from her head' for a couple of days. This incident was compounded when the same horse attacked Mrs Ison, a bedmaker at the hostel, knocking her over and causing her to faint. The newspaper concluded with an image of yet further danger from horses galloping around the common pursued by boys:

These facts will undoubtedly strike terror into the hearts of many who have frequently had occasion to cross the common, and will especially affect those whose children daily cross it on their way to school. We know full well that boys at times chase the animals, so that they may be seen galloping at full speed in the small enclosure – that in itself a source of much danger to those who are crossing at the time; but we feel that greater care ought to be exercised in ascertaining the disposition of

<sup>109</sup> Ayerst Hall was a hostel in Cambridge to assist poorer men with their education. It was opened by Rev William Ayerst (1830–1904), who was curate of Newton, Cambridgeshire, from 1888 to 1890.

<sup>110</sup> *CIP* 7 June 1889. Ayerst Hall: a hostel in Cambridge, intended to assist poorer men in their education, opened by clergyman and missionary William Ayerst (1830–1904) in 1884, closed in 1896. (*Wikipedia* "William Ayerst" [Oct 2016].

the animals which are allowed to graze on the common, across which so many people pass in the course of the day.

Indeed many inhabitants of the town would experience a sense of relief if the authorities were to discontinue letting the common for grazing purposes.

The suggestion that grazing should be discontinued probably resonated with many readers. But there was no quick response from the Council, and four years later in 1893 horses and cattle were still grazing on the common. The presence of the animals obviously remained a temptation to some of the neighbourhood children, described in a letter to the *Cambridge Independent Press*:

It is no uncommon sight to see the cows and horses on Donkey's Common being worried by cowardly little boys. A few days ago a quiet horse, which for a long while kept moving away from his tormentors, at last became worried past endurance, and had the cowardly little ruffians not then run away, they would probably have been severely kicked.

This hot afternoon two small urchins, of perhaps six and four years, were going round to some six or seven ruminating cows, kicking them in the body until the whole herd was compelled to leave its place in a far corner of the field. It is no use for passers-by to remonstrate for as soon as one's back is turned the action is repeated.<sup>111</sup>

Highlighting the absence of supervision on the common 'by the police or otherwise' the letter writer ended with a request that an example should be made of the boys as a warning to others.

The presence of livestock was a reminder that the common had a different status from that of nearby Parker's Piece, and this was reinforced by complaints that the turf on the common was regularly dug up to repair the cricket pitch on Parker's Piece. While this disfigured the common, councillors saw the state of the cricket pitch as a more important priority. But this view was now challenged by Councillor Burford who stressed that the common was no longer on the edge of Cambridge but 'was rapidly becoming the centre of the town', and that the tree planting had enhanced the area so that 'he thought it quite as necessary to keep that enclosure in order as it was to attend to Parker's Piece or Christ's Pieces'.

Councillor Bond agreed that turf cutting was out of place, and added that the common was a 'nice little playground for the smaller children out of reach of the cricket balls'.<sup>112</sup> His comments balanced the view that all the children did was chase livestock, and indicated that the area was becoming as much a formal park as a common. This was reinforced by the Council's agreement in February 1891 to at last erect a new iron fence, eleven years after Mr Basham had first raised the need for railings.<sup>113</sup> The tender was won by Messrs Headly and Edwards at the competitive price against three other local ironfounders of 6s 0d per yard run, 7s 6d each post and £2 18s 7d each gate.<sup>114</sup> The pictures below show the iron railings, with the traditional 'hot-cross bun' tops, which still surround Donkey's Common to this day. One wonders whether any of these are the originals made by Headly and Edwards.

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<sup>111</sup> CIP 7 July 1893.

<sup>112</sup> CIP 18 April 1891.

<sup>113</sup> CA: Agreed 12 Feb 1891 CB/2/CL/17/13/Page 474.

<sup>114</sup> CIP 13 Dec 1890.



**Figure 35** – Iron railing round Donkey's Common (photos: 2016)

Confirmation that the character of the common was changing came in August 1896 when the Council resolved 'that it considered it desirable that steps be taken to improve and beautify the two Commons known as Donkey's Common and Petersfield, and that it be referred to the Commons Committee to consider and report as to the steps to be taken for carrying out this work'.<sup>115</sup>

Figure 36 is a photograph taken from the tower of the Catholic Church while under construction. It must date from 1887–1891.<sup>116</sup> Gonville Place runs along the left. In the foreground is Queen Anne Terrace with turrets, fronting on to Gonville Place; Donkey's Common and Petersfield are beyond, with crisscross paths. Mill Road runs between the two commons towards Mortimer Road (right-centre). The trees along East Road and Gonville Place are planted, but not those between Mortimer Road and Gonville Place.



**Figure 36** – Queen Anne Terrace, Mortimer Road, Donkey's Common and Petersfield (photo: c.1888)

### **1896: For Purposes of Recreation only**

The Cambridge University and Corporation Act of 1894 included a list of all the commons and confirmed that the remaining size of the 1811 'Second Allotment' was 3 acres 0 roods 0 perches (reduced from 4 acres 3 roods 11 perches), while the 'Third Allotment' (Petersfield) was unchanged at 2 acres 2 roods 12 perches.

<sup>115</sup> See 30 August 1896. Mitchell (1984).

<sup>116</sup> Photograph: From Mike Petty Collection.

The Act gave the Council powers to 'improve the Commons or some of them so far as may be necessary or desirable for the purposes of health, recreation and enjoyment'. Under the provisions of the Act, the Commons Committee report of 17 December 1896 proposed a new byelaw that would end grazing on Donkey's Common and Petersfield, their purpose henceforth being for 'recreation only'; the byelaw stated 'No person shall place any horse, cow or other animal' on either common.

The report also recorded that the Committee had asked the Borough Surveyor to prepare a plan to lay out the ground, and that costs would involve the planting of trees and shrubs, with the 'necessary guards and fencing'.

The Council agreed to the report, but the byelaws were never formally confirmed. Perhaps this was because the 1894 Act did not give power to exclude animals permanently, and the Council remained concerned that it might be challenged by the 119 owners of common rights on these allotments.<sup>117</sup> But the steps taken to 'improve and beautify' the common do seem to mark the end of grazing on the common, and by 1898 it was reported that:

Both Petersfield and Donkey's Common are much improved in appearance since the cattle were prohibited, and though this may have resulted in a loss to owners of cattle, it certainly has been a gain to all who pass the place.<sup>118</sup>

The report confirmed that 'Donkey's Common has been improved in appearance by the making of beds where I hope as spring advances to see flowers blooming', and together with new granolithic paving near Petersfield the writer stated that 'the entrance to Mill Road will soon be a credit to the town'.



**Figure 37** – The approach to Mill Road, with trees planted (photo: 1900)<sup>119</sup>

### **In Retrospect: the Common in the 19th century**

Nearly ninety years earlier, in 1811, Donkey's Common had been created by the Inclosure of the Barnwell Open Fields as part of 'The Second Allotment for Common Pasture'. The site was on the edge of Cambridge, flanking what was then a country track leading past a rural landscape to a footpath to Cherry Hinton.

<sup>117</sup> Mitchell (1984), p 49.

<sup>118</sup> *CIP* 29 April 1898.

<sup>119</sup> CC.ph.B.Mill.K05.



By the end of the 19th century, this hinterland had been transformed into a bustling community with the building of terraced houses on the site of former potato fields. During this period of change part of the 'Second Allotment' had been lost as open space to become the site of the Town Goal and later of Queen Anne Terrace. The remaining part of the Allotment, Donkey's Common, faced similar threats as the Town Council looked for sites on which to accommodate public facilities such as a new cattle market, or ways to raise extra revenue by building houses.

None of these came to fruition, but the growing number of people using the common also led to the loss of its original role as pasture to graze livestock. By 1898 Donkey's Common survived as a green space marking the approach to Mill Road along with the neighbouring 'Third Allotment', Petersfield. 'Beautified' with trees, paths and flower beds, it had become an urban park and a 'credit to the town'. A picture taken thirty four years later in 1932, and published in the *Cambridge Daily News* (Figure 38), shows the mature trees and pathways that the Victorian city councillors left for future generations. The newspaper captioned it: 'At Donkey's Common, which is perhaps not so much a pleasure ground as a most convenient short cut'.<sup>120</sup>



**Figure 38** – Donkey's Common in 1932<sup>121</sup>

<sup>120</sup> *CDN* 7 Sept 1932.

<sup>121</sup> *CDN* 7 Sept 1932: CC: J.Don.K32.43666.



### The Common 1900-1942

The 20th century opened with a reminder of the politics that had always shaped Donkey's Common. Newton Digby, the sitting councillor for Petersfield ward, used his 1901 re-election address to emphasise his diligence as local councillor, and in particular to stress his role in 'beautifying Donkey's Common':

As a member of the Commons Committee I have closely followed the work of beautifying Donkey's Common and Petersfield, as well as the preservation of Parker's Piece for outdoor recreation.<sup>122</sup>

For the following four decades the common served as a recreation ground and as an attractive, tree-lined route approaching and leading away from Mill Road. Cattle no longer grazed on the grass, although they were still walking down Gonville Place in 1902 when one tried to jump the railings from the road on to the common and had to be rescued after getting stuck.<sup>123</sup> In the same year a temporary Bandstand was erected on the common as part of the extensive celebrations to mark the Coronation of Edward VII. The Salvation Army Band played for two hours, and afterwards it was reported that 'one of the best features of the celebrations were the promenade concerts'.<sup>124</sup>

Incidents were rare, and were typical of those associated with all open spaces. Amongst these were cases like that of 38-year-old Arthur Allen, an engine fitter who in February 1907 was charged with being 'drunk and incapable' after being found asleep on the common and incapable of standing when lifted up.<sup>125</sup> Other incidents included students riding bikes on the footway and boys playing cricket, which led to the Custodian being asked 'to make the big boys desist from playing on Donkey's Common and go on to Parker's Piece'.<sup>126</sup>

A more serious offence was indecent assault. A case in 1909 highlighted the position of the Courts on this, but also stressed the importance of credible evidence and the dangers of a witch-hunt against the accused:

Albert Hart, 30, a butler, was indicted for unlawfully and indecently assaulting Ruby Simpson. The charge was one which would deserve very careful attention because it was a charge of indecency upon a very little girl. It was a vast importance that young children, especially those whose parents were not rich enough to send them about under protection, should be saved from this sort of thing. It was also important that a man against whom a charge of such revolting nature was brought should not be convicted unless the facts fully brought home the guilt.<sup>127</sup>

It transpired that although Hart had been seen sitting on the same bench as four-year-old Ruby Simpson there was no evidence of assault, and the case was dismissed. Hart's arrest had been prompted by comments from Mrs Barrett of 6 Mortimer Road, who later claimed that she had seen the man and child sitting on the bench from her bedroom window, and was simply asking someone to keep an eye on the girl as she thought her very young to be on her own. This may have been true, but a recurring issue in these years was claims from the residents of Mortimer Road of anti-social behaviour on the common.

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<sup>122</sup> CIP 25 October 1901.

<sup>123</sup> CIP 28 November 1902.

<sup>124</sup> CDN 11 August 19.

<sup>125</sup> CIP 22 February 1907.

<sup>126</sup> CIP 28 November 1913; CIP 19 July 1908.

<sup>127</sup> CIP 2 July 1909.

The position of the bench on the common had already been raised two years earlier by Mr J Cunningham, a neighbour of Mrs Barratt at No 1 Mortimer Road. He had written to the Commons Committee asking for the bench to be moved 'because it was a great annoyance. Children were often playing and quarrelling on the seat, and sometimes made so much noise that one could hardly sit in the drawing room'. He added that 'he was in his 83rd year and quiet was essential to him'.<sup>128</sup>

While some councillors were sympathetic, one argued that the existing position of the bench was conveniently situated under the shade of a large tree, while local councillor Ne-gus took the side of those who did not have either the extensive views or large garden enjoyed by Mr Cunningham: 'Considering the large population of that district, and the fact that there was not much accommodation for them, he thought the privileges of the children ought not to be curtailed'.<sup>129</sup>

Mr Cunningham's complaint, like Mrs Barratt's fears, reflect the disadvantages that were attached to living next to a public open space in a growing city, and the need for the authorities to strike a balance between their needs and those of the wider population. Noisy children were probably a bigger problem than the occasional far larger but planned events. Records show fifty visitors from Luton's Salvation Army assembling on the common in 1909,<sup>130</sup> while the approach of war in May 1939 saw 3,000 members of the Territorial Army gathering on Donkey's Common and Petersfield before marching to Parker's Piece where they were watched by a crowd of 12,000.<sup>131</sup>

During these decades between 1900 and 1939 the legal position of Donkey's Common altered. In 1922 the Cambridge Corporation Act was passed, giving further regulatory powers over the commons in addition to those listed in the 1894 Act. The resulting 'Corporation Year Book' listed Parker's Piece, Petersfield and Donkey's Common as 'Recreation Grounds' rather than as 'Common Land'. This was probably an error.<sup>132</sup> In 1931 the General Purposes Committee rejected a proposal to seek power in the proposed Corporation Bill to build on Donkey's Common and Petersfield.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> CIP 17 July 1907.

<sup>129</sup> CIP 17 July 1907.

<sup>130</sup> CIP 4 June 1909.

<sup>131</sup> CDN 22 May 1939.

<sup>132</sup> Mitchell (1955), p.55.

<sup>133</sup> Mitchell (1984), p. 59.

## 2. Donkey's Common: The Huts 1942–1945

### World War Two

It is often stated that Cambridge was unaffected by World War Two. Bomb damage was light compared with that of major industrial cities, and none of the historic University buildings were destroyed. But the war was a constant presence, marked by absent servicemen and women, by the fear of bombing raids, by rationing, by troop movements, and by military quarters in and near to the town. Perhaps one of the most visible reminders of the war for many was the transformation of the green grass of Donkey's Common into a camp for the women's branch of the British Army, the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS).

On 10 November 1941 the Borough Council's Commons Committee reported an application from the SAQC (Sub Area Quartering Commandment), the War Department branch responsible for requisitioning military sites: 'Applications from SAQC, Cambridge, asking that military authorities be allowed to requisition Donkey's Common as a site for a small hutted camp and pointed out that a portion of the common land already had been earmarked by the council for the construction of a large water tank for static water supplies for fire fighting'. The request was rebuffed: 'In the circumstances the Council are unwilling to allow the Common to be requisitioned for the above purposes'.<sup>134</sup>

Fresh applications were made on 15 December 1941, and again on 9 January 1942, and were both refused. These repeated requests were probably prompted by the introduction of the National Service Act in December 1941, which for the first time conscripted unmarried women and childless widows between the ages of 20 and 30 to work on the land, in industry, or to join the armed services. As a result the Auxiliary Territorial Service grew from 23,900 in December 1941 to 212,500 by September 1943, and Donkey's Common became one of their many camps around the country.

In the process the Common was transformed, although local resident B. Nevinson recalled later that:

The Royal Engineers Colonel who had the hutments built, appreciating the unusual and informal beauty of the common, and the temporary nature of the War Office occupation, showed me how he had drawn up his plans in such a way as to destroy neither the main avenue of well grown limes nor any of the 'haphazard' trees, acacia, hawthorn, copper beech etc which so greatly contributed to its beauty.<sup>135</sup>

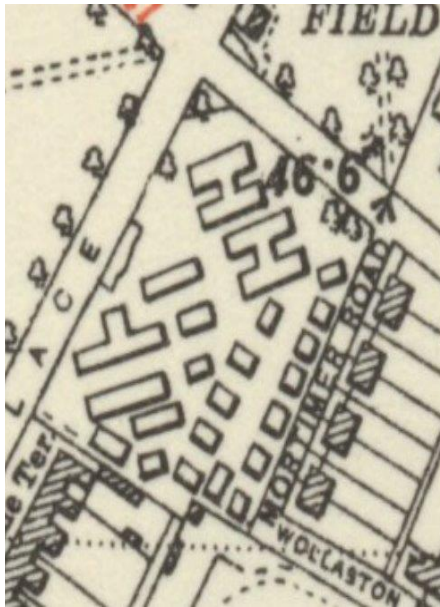
Speaking after the war the Secretary of State for War, Emanuel Shinwell, stated that there were forty-three huts on the common, intended to accommodate three officers and 224 'other ranks'.<sup>136</sup> This implies approximately six women per hut. The huts were wooden and were laid out in 'H' formations, with washing facilities in the middle of each group. These are glimpsed in the post war Ordnance Survey map and an aerial view of the huts that were still there in 1959, which also shows the avenue of limes crossing the camp diagonally from Mill Road to Gonville Place ( Figure 39).<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> CA: Cambridge Commons Committee. CB/2/CL/3/5/10.

<sup>135</sup> B Nevinson, letter to *CDN* 29 April 1959. Written 25 April 1959.

<sup>136</sup> Statement by Secretary of State for War, Mr Shinwell, *CDN* 2 June 1949.

<sup>137</sup> View Cambridgeshire XLVII-NW, O/S 6-inch England & Wales. rev. 1950, pub. 1952; Aerial View: 1959: CC.



**Figure 39** – 'H' formation huts as seen in O/S map, 1950 (left), and in aerial view, 1959 (right)

Yvonne Archer, one of the ATS recruits, described the interiors:

Inside there were wooden beds, and we slept on biscuits — a kind of mattress divided into three.

There was a stove pipe in the middle of the hut and a coal bin. In true Army style we dusted the coal for inspections. It was easier to conform rather than argue the toss.

Our bedding had to be 'barracked' each morning with a sandwich of sheets, pillows and blankets in a set order. Huts were inspected each day and there was trouble if the least little thing was wrong.<sup>138</sup>

Another resident, later Mrs Joyce Taylor, worked in various army stores around Cambridge including those at Thompson's Lane and Gwydir Street, and at Brickfields munitions factory. She remembered each wooden hut being shared by twelve girls plus a corporal, but that may mean each pair of huts. She recalled 'the billets as being quite warm — just as well for although out of bounds to male soldiers [they] were not properly secure — one Easter Sunday morning she awoke to find her clothes had been stolen overnight'.<sup>139</sup>

### Memories of the ATS camp: 'Other Ranks'

For many of the recruits leaving home was a new and potentially worrying experience. Bank clerk Yvonne Archer recalled:

I had filled in the form, walked to the nearest post box, hesitated because it was snowing hard — and decided it was not the day for volunteering for anything. But the next day I posted it. I had only been away from home for one weekend on my own before so this was quite a big step I had decided on — and I never regretted it. I was given a number, a travel warrant to Scotland, and once I was there I had three of everything in lurid pink, stout shoes, a uniform with lots of buttons to polish, and a kit bag. The ATS had its latest recruit.

It was a different world with a language of its own, but I had chosen it. I marched up and down, learned to salute, went to lectures and was told very strange things. Eventually we were given our

<sup>138</sup> [tallyvonne, WW2 People's War. Yvonne Fry \(née Archer\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/99/a4138599.shtml)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/99/a4138599.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/99/a4138599.shtml)

<sup>139</sup> Mrs Joyce Taylor, 'Memories by Mike Petty', *CEN* 10 April 1997.

postings and I was sent to Cambridge where there was a Holding Unit on a common called Parker's Piece, and our section was Donkey Common.

The idea was that people would be sent there before going on to somewhere else, but I stayed put as a Pay Clerk. I had previously worked in a Bank so I suppose the Army thought that was the best place to put me.

Living away from home in a strange town was a new experience, and so was mixing with people from different backgrounds: Yvonne was put in charge of 'News' at the Donkey's Common camp, and invented a 'Wall Newspaper':

so that everybody could (I thought) catch up with the news easily. What I hadn't realised in my ignorance of how the rest of the world lived was that a lot of people could not read. Notices with duties were put up daily on a board and those at the back used to ask for them to be read out as they could not see that distance – so I did just that. Later I was to find that it was not because they could not see, but because they could not read for various reasons.' [...] The ATS was a great mix-up of people from all walks of life, and all parts of the country. To me, it was a necessary eye-opener.

For many, part of the experience was meeting young men and romance. Mrs J Jenner came to Cambridge from Yorkshire. She was stationed on Donkey's Common while working on tanks, scout cars and bren gun carriers at the ATS depot near *The Golden Hind* on Milton Road. When she was later posted to Guildford and had a weekend pass she 'wrote to my then boy friend (later my husband) and he would book a double room for me and my friend, Punchy, at the Central Hotel. We had to go down the side to get in. Our room was looking out on the Guildhall and the market.' Like others from the Donkey's Common camp she later married her boy friend, settling in the area and living in Bourne fifty years later (1997).<sup>140</sup>

### Memories of the ATS Camp: The Officers

Yvonne Archer's comments about her superior officers provide an insight into the character of the higher ranks in the new women's army, or certainly how they were perceived by those serving under them on Donkey's Common. Her first Commanding Officer was 'a strange woman who wore her khaki knickers well below her knees' while the first Company Sergeant Major (CSM) 'knew that she was not liked so one weekend she said formal good-byes all round, packed her case, and went. Our spirits revived until she turned up again on the Monday pleased at having tricked us all.'

#### The next CSM at the Common

was mad on geese which were kept in a shed on the site. I am not sure why we kept geese as we never ate them, and they did not lay eggs. Probably they nibbled the grass in between the wooden huts. One summer we took our beds outside to sleep, awoke early in the morning, stole away quietly and let the geese out to patrol the CSM's bed. She initiated Company Evenings when we were told to be compulsorily happy. I remember having hysterics as it all got a bit much.

#### The Commanding Officer added to the livestock in the camp:

As we lived on Donkey Common our C.O. decided that we ought to have a donkey so one was acquired. Two of us used to have to take the donkey to the blacksmith's just off the main road near the station to be shod. We did not exactly 'take' him as he had a will of his own and preferred to go sideways or any way but forward.

When there was a national drive to encourage people to buy Savings Bonds our donkey was brought into the picture again with a slogan over his saddle (I was painting slogans even then) and me in at-

<sup>140</sup> Mrs J Jenner: 'Memories by Mike Petty', *CEN* 10 April 1997 and 1 April 2013. Living in Bourne in 1997.



tendance charging for rides. The donkey did not think much of that idea either. I was never an outright animal lover so I think I must have been chosen for my height to try and intimidate the poor creature.

Another resident at the camp, Private N Bridgewood, was sent to Cambridge on a temporary posting from Dunstable. Her comments reveal that there appeared to be very distinct but unspoken barriers around who could become an officer: 'Then came the blow, you have got to go to Donkey Common, Cambridge. Off I went, two weeks this time – great – never been to Cambridge, but more exams and interviews. I passed but I discovered if you are not Roman Catholic or Church of England, they are not interested in you as Officers!! Still, back I went to Dunstable.'<sup>141</sup>

### **Memories of the ATS camp: Conclusion**

For many of the young women who joined the ATS the experience was life-changing. As more men were called up for direct military service their role expanded into a wider range of support services, while new relationships with locals meant that many never returned to live at 'home'. Yvonne Archer's final reflections on her time on Cambridge were probably shared by many others:

I have never regretted that time in the ATS where I found out so much about other people — and about myself too. I don't think that I won the war single-handed, but I must have helped somewhere along the line.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> N Sparkes: 'ATS Remembered': [www.atsremembered.org.uk/sparkessheetpdf](http://www.atsremembered.org.uk/sparkessheetpdf)

<sup>142</sup> If you wish to use this content under 'fair dealing' terms - eg as part of a non commercial project such as an educational research project or a cost-recovery project such as a public exhibition or publication, you may do so, but should acknowledge the provenance and copyright holder of the content in the following way. – On a credits / acknowledgements page, or in a prominent position if used as part of a display: 'WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at [bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)' – Each entry or extract should be credited by name / site name eg 'John Smith, WW2 People's War'.

## B. The Common Pasture: Donkey's Common 1946–Present

### 1. Donkey's Common 1946–62

#### **The 1946 Squatters Movement at Donkey's Common: Myth or Truth?**

The national housing crisis at the end of the World War 2 was even more severe than that at the end of World War 1, when the gap between potential households and homes was estimated at 1.5 million nationwide. In 1945 the housing shortfall stood at over 2 million, as servicemen returned home hoping for a 'New Jerusalem'.<sup>143</sup> In addition to the returning British troops, 160,000 Poles who had fought with the allies were allowed to settle in Britain with their families.

During the war, bombs had destroyed or damaged nearly half a million houses while new home building had been delayed. This was compounded by the post-war Labour Government's plans to build far better quality houses than those that had been built in the 1930s, with the Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, who was also responsible for housing, seeking an upstairs and downstairs toilet in every council-built house. Unfortunately building materials were in short supply, while the higher costs of the new standards meant that house building on the scale required could not be achieved immediately. The result was the claim that by summer 1946 'the majority of local authorities had not completed a single house'.<sup>144</sup> Temporary houses, 'prefabs', were the government's response to the housing shortage, but these were also expensive and slow to build.

In May 1946 the scarcity of suitable housing led to a family in Scunthorpe taking over nearby abandoned military buildings. Two months later they were joined by twenty other families. Possibly prompted by national news coverage of these events in Scunthorpe, takeovers of other army camps followed in the north of England, and very rapidly similar action was being taken around the country. Public sympathy was on the side of the squatters, and even *The Daily Mail* commended them for their 'robust common sense [in taking] matters quietly but firmly into their own hands'.<sup>145</sup> Over the course of the occupations, more than 45,000 people were involved in the takeover of most of the military camps in Britain.

The movement reached its peak in September 1946, spreading to Cambridge and threatening, if not occupying, Donkey's Common. Records about this period in official archives are scarce, and memories sometimes confuse events on Donkey's Common in 1946 with those of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The *Cambridge Evening News* recorded in 1988 that Jack Warren, Labour councillor for thirty years and later Mayor, had been 'prominent in the squatters' housing rights movement, moving into disused army huts on Donkey Common in a bid to force the authorities to build more houses'.<sup>146</sup> However, the report stated that this was in the 1950s. In contrast, Robert Smiley recalled in 2015 that his father-in-law, 'Tug' Wilson, had been one of the squatters' leaders in 1946:

My late father in law was one of the leaders when ex-service men took it over in 1945/46 after the war, 'Tug' Wilson, a big deal, they faced off the civil Authorities. [sic]

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<sup>143</sup> Holmans (1987), p.93.

<sup>144</sup> Addison (1985), p. XX.

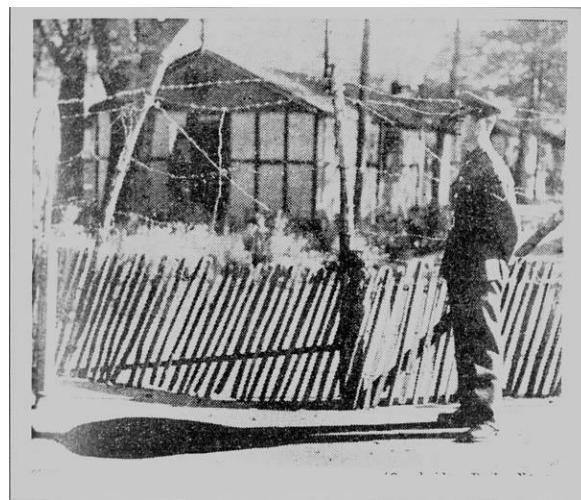
<sup>145</sup> *Daily Mail* 10 Aug 1946.

<sup>146</sup> *CEN* 3 March 1988.

The version I've heard through the years was that returning service men were angry that captured Italians etc and reserved occupation people were getting housed ahead of returning soldiers, air-men etc. They organised and took over Donkey's Common Nissan huts etc. They were resolute and the civic authorities turned a blind eye and got on with the prefab scheme.

My father called my father-in-law a bloody red although they became firm friends!<sup>147</sup>

Information about squatters on Donkey's Common is contradictory, and the common was not included in the list, prepared for the Council's Housing Committee on 13 September 1946,<sup>148</sup> of campsites they had occupied in Cambridge. But on 10 September 1946 the *Cambridge Daily News* had highlighted the threat posed by the squatters movement with the publication of a picture of a soldier guarding the camp on the Common from future incursions. The caption read: 'The Shadow of Authority! – A Military Policeman is daily guarding the wire-barricaded hutments on Donkey's Common, making sure that the ATS do not get any squatter neighbours.'



**Figure 40** – Military policeman guarding Donkey's Common huts from squatters: *CDN* 10 Sept 1946

Those whom the military policeman was trying to deter from breaking into the huts on the common probably shared many hopes with those occupying other former military camps in Cambridge in September 1946. Their desperation is revealed by conditions at the Air Ministry site on Newmarket Road, where a Council report found there were 'many hutments, the majority of which were aeroplane packing cases partially covered with roofing felt'.<sup>149</sup> More personal details about individual squatters were reported by the *Cambridge Daily News*. Off Madingly Road, Mr W Dockerill was moving into a brick and asbestos hut that had been the Area Headquarters of the NFS: 'His name had been on the Council housing list for seven years. His furniture ('enough to fill a six-roomed house') having been in store for that period. His wife and 14-month baby have been living with her mother.' Mr Dockerill added 'I

<sup>147</sup> Facebook Cambridge in the good old day from the 1960s. 25 July 2015.

<sup>148</sup> The Town Clerk reported that squatters had taken possession of the under-mentioned campsites (number of squatters in brackets; this may refer to number of housing units occupied rather than individuals): 'Leighton, Trumpington Road (1); 'Little Howe', Mount Pleasant (2); 36 Lensfield Road (1); 11 Madingly Road (2); 247 Hills Road (6); Coe Fen (10); Long Road (9); St Matthews Piece (1); Newmarket Road (21); Severn Place (1); Portugal Place (1). Cambridge Housing Committee: 13 Sept 1946.

<sup>149</sup> Cambridge Housing Committee: 26 Sept 1946.

don't care what they do to me, as long as I have somewhere for the wife and the baby. I was in the Battle of Britain and I thought it was a good time to start a home again'.

On the same day on the other side of Cambridge the newspaper met Mr Stearn and Mr Cracknell. They had both moved with their families into a former 'ack ack' site off Long Road:

Mr Stearn is an ex naval man released in May. He and his wife have been living with relatives and are pleased to have somewhere they can call their own. Near neighbours to the Stearns are Mr and Mrs Cracknell, who moved in on Saturday. Married for three and a half years, this is their first home together. Mr Cracknell was released under 'Class 'B' early this year after service in the South Lancshires. He was ten months a prisoner in Germany.

The reporter also met Mrs Thurston at the Long Road site bringing furniture from Shelford. Her husband had been in a Japanese prisoner of war camp for four years, while she had just left the ATS. Her exasperated comment that 'I didn't expect to come and live in one of these again' reflects the disappointment that victory had not brought the better life she had hoped for. Instead she was living in a camp where many of the huts had broken windows, and with no water or electric light.<sup>150</sup>

In mitigation Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, stated:

I have much sympathy with the situation in which many of these people found themselves, but it is also necessary to point out that if I had myself advised people to go into some of the camps they have gone into they would have attacked me for giving sub-standard accommodation. Many of the places into which squatters have gone are quite unfit for accommodation of families. [...] There is no single source of misery greater than the lack of homes in Britain at the present time. We are doing our utmost to solve it, and I am quite sure that in a few years' time we will have broken the back of the housing programme.<sup>151</sup>

Locally Labour Councillor Alex Wood repeated the need to allocate housing first to those who had been prioritised in the Council's housing waiting list. But for many both this and Bevan's 'few years' were too long, and in October 1946 Bevan told the House of Commons that 1,038 camps in England and Wales had been occupied by 39,535 people.<sup>152</sup>

### **The Huts: 1949 – from Military Accommodation to Emergency Housing**

The huts on Donkeys Common remained in place and a source of contention between the military and local authorities over the years that followed.

In February 1949 Cambridge Borough Commons Committee resolved 'That town clerk be instructed to make representations to the appropriate authority for the release of the common from present requisitioning'.<sup>153</sup> This led to questions in the House of Commons, and in June the Secretary of State for War, Emanuel Shinwell, was reported as stating that there were still 79 military staff living in the site: 'There is now one Women's Royal Army Corps unit and a small detachment of Pioneers, comprising three officers and 76 other ranks in all'.<sup>154</sup>

Later in the month Leslie Symonds, the Labour MP for Cambridge, pursued what remained an emotive local issue by asking Mr Shinwell 'if he will subdivide the camp site at Donkey's

<sup>150</sup> *CDN* 9 Oct 1946.

<sup>151</sup> *CDN* 9 Sept 1946.

<sup>152</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 10 Oct 1946. vol. 427, col. 339.

<sup>153</sup> CA: Cambridge Borough Commons Committee, 18 Feb 1949, p 175.

<sup>154</sup> *CDN*, Statement by Secretary of State for War, Mr Shinwell. 2 June 1949.

Common, Cambridge, and hand over those huts, which are surplus to military requirements, to the local authority for emergency housing purposes'. He added that

a former public footpath goes right across this camp and that 40 per cent. of the living huts are admitted by his own Department to be empty; and, as the path could be used as a dividing line, would he reconsider this decision and prevent somebody acting as a dog in the manger?

Mr Shinwell regretted that he was unable to release any of the huts on Donkey's Common, although he did offer to release nine huts 'on the opposite side of the road to the main camp' as they were surplus to requirements.<sup>155</sup> He concluded that 'I understand that only a few of the huts are vacant at present. If we do not require them, we shall certainly hand them over to the appropriate Department'.<sup>156</sup> Later in 1949 the persistence of the local authority and the Cambridge MP at last resulted in the surrender of the first huts, and the Borough Housing Committee recorded in September that:

Following representation to the Ministry of Health the Military Authorities had now agreed to surrender 4 huts and an ablution block for living purpose and a scheme was submitted to the Ministry for making the premises reasonably habitable.<sup>157</sup>

### **The Huts: 1950s – Local Authority Housing**

In January 1950 the Ministry of Health approved the expenditure of £800 to make the four huts habitable and proposed to hand the whole camp over to the Borough Council for emergency accommodation.<sup>158</sup> The following month the Borough Surveyor proposed to convert each hut into two bedrooms and a living room, with cooking facilities and repairs to the existing 'tortoise stoves' for space heating – named 'tortoise stoves' because they burnt fuel very slowly but economically. The outbuildings attached to each block of four huts were to be fitted with sinks and drainage boards, while provision was also made for food cupboards and for storing coal. Outside, the entrance to the camp was to be from Mortimer Road, and the footpaths leading to the entrance were to be lit.

On 10 February the Housing Committee agreed to these proposals and approved the cost of £4,250, to include the conversion of the four huts already approved in January. The number of huts on the common at this time is unclear, but the Housing Committee Minutes state that it was 'Not intended to use 3 Huts for temporary accommodation, the present scheme will provide 32 units of accommodation'.<sup>159</sup> Eight weeks later eight huts had already been converted, and the remaining huts were to be made habitable at the rate of four a week.<sup>160</sup>

By October sufficient tenants appear to have been living on the common to request that TV aerials be erected. The Housing Committee concluded that: 'The installation of television sets should not be allowed at Donkey common, as it would not be advisable to erect aerials on the roof of the huts. If erected independently they would have to be supported by guy-ropes which might prove a nuisance to other tenants and a danger to children'.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>155</sup> It is unclear whether these nine huts were on Parker's Piece or Petersfield.

<sup>156</sup> House of Commons debate, Hansard, 21 June 1949, vol. 466, cc8-9 g.

<sup>157</sup> CA: Cambridge Borough Housing Committee, 12 Sept 1949.

<sup>158</sup> CA: Cambridge Borough Housing Committee, 13 Jan 1950. The Minutes record that there were 33 huts, while the Secretary of State for War had stated that there were originally 43: *CDN* 2 June 1949.

<sup>159</sup> CA: Cambridge Borough Housing Committee, 10 Feb 1950.

<sup>160</sup> CA: Cambridge Borough Housing Committee, 31 March 1950.

<sup>161</sup> *CDN* 19 Oct 1950.



### Memories of the Huts: Looking back in 2015

Memories recorded in 2015 recalled events in the 1950s, over half a century earlier. Most of those who described the huts had been young children at the time, and their recollections are fragmentary and sometimes appear contradictory. The Borough Surveyor had specified two bedrooms, but did this mean partitioned rooms? Was the curtain described by Janice Hill and Edna Murfett considered adequate? Or are they remembering a period before all the huts were refurbished? Were they cold, or were they warm as Mick Stratton was told later? Despite this occasional inconsistency, the memories give a strong flavour of living conditions in the huts and reflect how they were seen afterwards by some of those who knew them.

New temporary houses, 'pre-fabs', were the government's solution to the post-war housing shortage, and came fitted with a bathroom, water heaters and flushing toilet. This made them very popular to a generation brought up in the 1930s with an outside toilet and a tin bath, but expensive to build, and only 125,000 had been assembled nationwide by 1948.<sup>162</sup> In comparison, the huts on Donkey's Common were very basic, and Tony Pickard remembered going to look at them when his parents were offered part of one by the Council in 1949: 'I remember going with my parents to look at the huts at Donkey Common in 1949. They [...] had windows in the side. My Mum just stood there and cried, luckily we were offered a prefab in Cherry Hinton soon afterwards. The huts were less than basic but the Cherry Hinton prefabs were something else, built in fridge, cooker, cupboards and work-top'.<sup>163</sup>

A report in the *Cambridge Daily News* in 1951 confirms that conditions were austere and residents felt anxious about their future:

Tenants of 34 huts on the Donkeys Common 'Estate', Cambridge, are feeling anxious about their security of tenure. They regard a letter from the City Treasurer as a veiled threat for them to leave their make-shift homes.

Residents say they have no bath facilities, water closets adjoin each other and are therefore not fully private, there are no doors on the bedrooms and that they suffer from dampness, mice, ants and 'many other forms of insect life'. They add: 'We intend to remain here until equal or better accommodation is provided by the City Housing Committee'.<sup>164</sup>

Figure 41 below show the Donkey's Common huts from the roundabout at the junction of Mill Road, East Road and Gonville Place, in a photograph dated 31 January 1958.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Howard Webber, 'A Domestic Rebellion: The Squatters' Movement of 1946', *Ex Historia*, vol. 4 (2012) ISSN 2041-0824.

<sup>163</sup> Tony Pickard, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960s' 25 July 2015.

<sup>164</sup> *CDN* 6 Sept 1951.

<sup>165</sup> CA: croc.ph.Planning\_Z305.



**Figure 41** – Donkey's Common huts in 1958

Others were more enthusiastic. Mrs Edna Murfet said that her family were the first to move into the refurbished huts. She exchanged the one-room flat in which she had been living with her husband and young son for the first hut inside the gate after promising to make her new home a show hut for the camp:

We were living in one room in Park Street with my son who was about eight. After over a year the Council lady came to see me and ask if I or my husband liked gardening. He did not but I did so I said yes.

She gave us the very first hut inside the gate, the first people on there, only if I could make a garden and hut nice for a show hut. I put large stones all round the piece of ground we had, and stones up to each little window to make a path to clean the windows, and painted them all white and put rose bushes in; it looked quite pretty.

It took 42 square yards of lino to cover the living area, which was their sleeping quarters; the end of hut was curtained off for bedroom for us; and other side for my son.

I loved being there so central for town, and my husband loved cricket on Fenner's and [the] Piece.

My son liked playing Cowboys and Indians, when other people came to live there, all along the corridors which divided us from our neighbours.

I had my second son there, then [the] Council found a house which I'm living in now and bought.

I have no photos as [I had] no camera then.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Edna Murfett (aged 93), 41 Keates Road, Cherryhinton, Cambridge, CB1 9ER. Letter to Allan Brigham 2015,



**Figure 42** – Edna Murfett and son (photo: Oct 2015)

In these early years of the 1950s 11-year-old Daniel Coase delivered papers to the huts:

Around 1950 I delivered the evening papers to these Nissan huts, they were linked with a tunnel walk way so walking from hut to hut I was always under cover. I collected the papers from a shop in King St, delivering to King St, Parkside and streets around ending up at the Nissan huts on the site of the swimming-pool. On Fridays at 11 years of age with a money satchel on my shoulder I would walk the round collecting the paper money. This would include dark winter evenings.<sup>167</sup>

Inside the huts facilities were austere despite the Council refurbishment. Victor Hart lived there when they moved from France, and remembered them as being 'freezing cold', while Janice Hill visited her cousin Joan and was struck by that fact that there were no room partitions, so curtains were put up to divide rooms.<sup>168</sup>

The lack of adequate heating was confirmed by John Burgess, who visited one of his classmates from Romsey Junior School: 'They didn't have proper heating either, most people used paraffin heaters. They were very cold in the winter and hot in the summer'. He added:

They had tin roofs and were very noisy when it rained. They were put up for the staff of an anti-aircraft gun that was moved out to Shelford, and also for the women operating a search light by Parker's Piece. They weren't as big as the prefabs in Golding Road. The rooms themselves were all the same size, and you got to the second bedroom by going through the first. They didn't have a proper kitchen, just a two-ring burner, possibly run off gas.<sup>169</sup>

Mick Stratton lived in the huts as a young child in the early 1950s. He remembered them as 'more square and not rounded there was a central boiler house with a tall brick chimney. And huts next to it. I was a baby but was told those huts were lovely and warm.' He also remembered 'some servicemen housed there after being released from the Japanese, they were in a terrible state mentally, always remember seeing them wandering around, poor men'.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Daniel Coase, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960ts', 25 July 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Janice Hill, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960ts', 25 July 2015.

<sup>169</sup> Information from Mary Burgess, 3 Aug 2015.

<sup>170</sup> Mick Stratton, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960ts', 25 July 2015.



**Figure 43** — Mick Stratton (1) outside hut in 1953/53, (2) on Mill Road in 2015

Shortly after the Stratton family moved to the camp, Mick Turner also moved to Donkey's Common at the age of three in 1956. He lived in Hut No. 7 in the 'H-block' next to Gonville Place with his parents, Bob and Jean Cornell. He spoke of his early memories as a young child: 'I remember my bed was under the window looking out on to Gonville Place and Parker's Piece. I'm sorry to say I was too young to remember the actual layout; I do remember clean washing hanging up above the kitchen on a wooden rack that was hoisted up on a rope'.<sup>171</sup>

Next door was a Scottish lady he knew as 'Nana Scott', while neighbours opposite were Terry Jones and a Polish family whose father he remembered taking an overdose. Living in close proximity with others meant that memories of a neighbour taking an overdose were disturbing and remembered, just as those of traumatised servicemen stayed with the young Mick Stratton.

Another young child living in the huts was Simon Thorpe, who recalls:

I was only around 3 yrs old when I left there, but I do have a few strong memories and impressions: I remember having conjunctivitis badly so that my eyelids were glued together on awaking and I used to feel my way to my parents room for help, so it was clearly a small space that enabled me to do that. I also remember an uncle coming to visit from South Africa and I remember how crowded we seemed in the living room.

A particularly unpleasant memory is when I wanted to use the toilet after dark. This was an outside facility and it may have been shared but I'm not sure. It must have been really close by, though, because my parents would give me toilet paper and open the door for me to go out on my own, and I remember vividly how frightening I found the dark.

Other memories are of watching the bin men through a wire fence – one made a face at me.

I don't remember much about other people there, other than one or two children my elder brother and I played with. We seemed to be outdoors a lot – mud pies were made, my head was cut by a thrown stone, and a girl, Jeanette, bit a snail!<sup>172</sup>

Simon's concluding comments would probably have been shared by many others who lived on Donkey's Common in the 1950s:

<sup>171</sup> Mick Turner, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960ts', 25 July 2015.

<sup>172</sup> Simon Thorpe, personal correspondence, 24 July 2015.



However, I do remember in later years my parents saying what a godsend the huts were at the time and I also remember family friends who lived in a prefab in Cherry Hinton. I visited up to the age of about 14 so have a clear memory of it and it was actually a very nice home.

Figure 44 shows the huts as viewed from Gonville Place towards Mill Road, with the avenue of trees leading to Mill Road, in a photograph dated 31 January 1958.<sup>173</sup>



**Figure 44** – Donkey's Common huts from Gonville Place (1958)

### From Huts to Swimming Pool

The huts were always intended as temporary emergency accommodation, and by 1953 the Borough Commons Committee was pressing that the 'Housing Committee be asked not to re-let huts when they become vacant so that the Common may be de-requisitioned at the earliest possible date'.<sup>174</sup>

Eighteen months later *The Cambridge Daily News* reported that the Ministry of Housing had declared that it was prepared to hand over the emergency housing units on Donkey common to Cambridge City Council. But there was still no immediate promise that the land would be returned to use as a common: 'Planning permission for the continued use of the huts as living accommodation has been given until 30<sup>th</sup> September 1957 or until such time as major repairs are required. The huts can then be removed and the land reinstated as a public open space'.<sup>175</sup>

Nevertheless the number of huts in use was slowly reduced, and in the mid-1950s John Turner from nearby Cross Street remembered 'lots of the prefabs were empty and we would go and play in there, we would get chased off by of the remaining resident'.<sup>176</sup> But by then the Council was under pressure to provide a modern indoor swimming pool, and saw Donkey's Common as a suitable site.

<sup>173</sup> CA: croc.ph.Planning\_Z304.

<sup>174</sup> Cambridge Commons Committee minutes, 22 June 1953. CA: CB/2/CL/3/5/10.

<sup>175</sup> Mike Petty Files. *CDN* 1 Dec 1954, p. 9.

<sup>176</sup> John Turner, Facebook, 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960ts', 25 July 2015.



In 1950 2,600 people had signed a petition to the Mayor asking for an indoor pool; and although there was no immediate response the swimmers continued their lobbying efforts.<sup>177</sup> Five years later, in February 1955, the Granta Swimming Club requested that the Council begin preparation for the provision of an indoor swimming bath, and in March the City Surveyor submitted a report to the Commons Committee suggesting possible sites.<sup>178</sup> One option was Gothic Street, near the junction of Lensfield Road and Trumpington Street. This area was due for demolition, and was considered 'ideal'. However, the report suggested that it might need enlarging by the purchase of nearby properties to provide sufficient car parking spaces.

The alternative option proposed by the City Surveyor was Donkey's Common. At three acres he also considered the site to be 'ideal', especially as it might form part of a cluster of public buildings that would give Cambridge, rather than Cambridge University, a modern civic focal point fronting Parker's Piece: 'with the possible erection of a new police and fire station at Parkside and the provision of an indoor swimming bath on this common an admirable group of buildings will be formed in this part of the city'.

Aware of possible objections, the Surveyor dismissed claims that the Common was subject to 'rights of common pasture':

these rights have not been exercised for at least fifty years and can now be regarded as lapsed. By Section 20 of the Cambridge Corporation Act 1922 the Council, subject to certain proviso, have power to set apart such parts of their recreation grounds or common land as they think fit for the purpose of games and recreation and to lay out and adapt the same for those purposes and to erect buildings thereon. The Town Clerk is satisfied, in view of the provisions of this Section, that the Council, if they so desire, can use this common for the erection of the swimming bath, but steps will have to be taken to close the footpath crossing the site.

The Committee agreed with the Surveyor's report, and resolved 'to recommend the Council to proceed with the erection of an indoor swimming bath on Donkey's Common, the building to be used only for swimming and incidental purposes and not in any dual capacity eg dancing, concerts, meetings etc'.

Not all members of the full Council were enthusiastic, preferring to see the common restored, and this was reported in the *Cambridge Daily News*:

some objected as they wanted to preserve all the open spaces they could. There were sometimes as many as ten cricket matches on Parker's Piece, and Donkey common was a place where mothers could allow their children to play in safety avoiding the flying cricket balls. The huts had been placed there as a war-time expedient and it should be returned to its former state.<sup>179</sup>

In support of these concerns Alderman James and Councillor Mrs Henn proposed an amendment that would have deleted 'Donkey's Common' from the resolution. The amendment was defeated, with fifteen in favour and thirty-one against, and the City Surveyor was charged to report on the facilities provided.<sup>180</sup>

The novelty of what Cambridge was proposing was highlighted when the City Surveyor reported that 'it appeared that no local authority had provided a new bath in the post war period'. After seeking advice from 'The Bath Service Journal of the National Association of

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<sup>177</sup> Mitchell (1985), p. 55.

<sup>178</sup> Cambridge Commons Committee. Granta request, Minute 1293: 7 Feb 1955. City Surveyor's response to Minute 1293: 28 March 1955.

<sup>179</sup> *CDN* 29 April 1955.

<sup>180</sup> Mitchell (1955), p.56.

Bath Superintendants' the editor advised that 'a number of modern indoor baths had been erected on the continent, and he felt that it would be useful to make an inspection of some of these baths'. This foreign trip never took place but the Surveyor was asked to obtain photographs, while councillors were authorised to visit selected public baths in the UK.<sup>181</sup>

In the meantime the huts remained on the common, and the *Cambridge Daily News* reported in November 1955 that:

The condition of the huts on Donkey common has steadily deteriorated and they should only be let to families requiring emergency accommodation who can be rehoused by September 1957. Some are so bad they will have to be closed before that and when the worst of them become vacant they should not be re-let. The Council should purchase 50 premises due for demolition and carry out minimum repairs to allow them to be occupied temporarily.<sup>182</sup>

At the 1957 deadline two years later the once 'temporary' huts were given yet another year's respite until 31 October 1958 'when the use hereby permitted shall be discontinued'. In 1954 the grounds for continuance of use of the 'derequisitioned hutments for residential purposes' had been that 'the buildings are constructed of temporary materials', and the requirement had been that the land should be reinstated as public open space. By 1957 the wording had changed to reflect the Development Plan that had resulted from the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. There was no longer any mention of returning the common to 'public open space', and instead 'approval of the proposal on a permanent basis would be contrary to the proper planning of the area as envisaged by the Development Plan and the land should be reinstated to facilitate future beneficial use'.<sup>183</sup>

The debate about whether the common should be restored to its pre-war state appeared to have been lost to the always hard-to-resist aspiration for modern public facilities. In July 1957 the *Cambridge Daily News* had reported that half the three-acre common would be covered by a one-and-a-half-acre 'scheme costing nearly a quarter of a million pounds for the building of a giant super-modern heated indoor swimming pool with a roof-top restaurant less than a mile from the city centre'.<sup>184</sup>

For a city whose residents were used to swimming in the river, or at outside pools at Jesus Green or Coldhams Common, the new pool offered a heated 210,000-gallon capacity swimming bath, with a water purifying plant and heating to keep the water at 72% Fahrenheit. The pool was to be 110ft long and 42ft wide, capable of taking 230 bathers at once, with accommodation for over 600 spectators. Further attractions included six racing lanes, diving boards and changing rooms: the provision of 49 cubicles for men and only 35 for women indicates the assumptions of those designing the pool as to its usage. At a time when many houses in the area still did not have bathrooms it was also proposed to provide 19 slipper baths, which would allow the pre-war public bathhouse at Gwydir Street to be closed. The pool was to be not merely 'modern', but 'super-modern'.

The emotive language coupled with the impressive statistics were part of a forceful case in the context of the period. Just twelve years after the end of the Second World War, in a new period of affluence, it was a time when many civic leaders were focused on building a new future. The views of those like local resident B Nevinson of Willis Road who forlornly

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<sup>181</sup> Cambridge Commons Committee, 13 June 1955. CA: CB/2/CL/3/5/11.

<sup>182</sup> *CDN* 15 Oct 1955.

<sup>183</sup> To be checked with CA.

<sup>184</sup> All details from *CDN* 20 July 1957.

remembered the common from the pre-war days before the building of the huts were dismissed:

It was on this little common, rather than on the edge of the Piece, of necessity made dangerous by cricket balls, that older people and mothers with young children could 'sit under the trees in the afternoon', as one of the Councillors said. It was, in fact, out of bounds to bigger children and to youths with footballs or cricket bats.

Now, it seems, whether it be used as a swimming pool or a car park, or both, these people will have to sit amongst exhaust fumes and formal beds of geraniums, listening to the ceaseless sounds of banging car doors and motor engines .<sup>185</sup>

### The Fate of the Common

In 1959, two years later, after the City Surveyor had claimed that rights of pasture had lapsed, Ministry of Housing and Local Government officials apparently agreed with his conclusion and gave permission for the swimming pool.

The common was subsequently omitted from registration under the Commons Registration Act 1965. Ena Mitchell suggests this was probably a mistake that originated with the Cambridge Corporation Act in 1922 and the resulting 'Corporation Year Book', which listed Parker's Piece, Petersfield and Donkey's Common as 'Recreation Grounds' rather than 'Common Land'.<sup>186</sup>



**Figure 45** – Trees on Donkey's Common (photos: 2015)

<sup>185</sup> *CDN*, 29 April 1959 B Nevinson, 10 Willis Road.

<sup>186</sup> Mitchell (1984), p. 59.

## 2. Donkey's Common, 1963–97: Parkside Pool 1

Work started on Parkside Swimming Pool in December 1960, five years after the Council had agreed to its being built on Donkey's Common.<sup>187</sup> The process had not been straightforward. Approval was required from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the use to which the Common could be put in fact still remained uncertain. The Town Clerk reported in September 1958 that the main point outstanding remained the long standing issue 'the use of the common land for the construction of the pool'.<sup>188</sup> Funding was also a problem, the Ministry stating in November 1958 that this was unlikely in the present financial year. However in 1959 the Ministry finally gave permission for the pool to be built.

In the meantime the huts had to be cleared. Despite planning permission having already been extended to 1958 they were still standing in 1959, disfiguring the common and central Cambridge in the eyes of some: 'Donkey Common is to be cleared and used as a car park until needed for the new swimming pool. Two years ago the Housing Committee had said they still needed the huts for emergency accommodation but the cluster of rusty scabs were an eyesore and disgrace to the city and should be removed as soon as possible, councillors were told'.<sup>189</sup>

### Earlier Plans for Indoor Swimming Pools in Cambridge

There had been previous plans for an indoor pool but none had been successful. As early as 1857 the 'New Music Hall and Public Rooms Company, Cambridge, Ltd' had acquired the site of The Hoop Hotel at the junction of Jesus Lane and Bridge Street with proposals for a two thousand person concert hall on the first floor, with both a second class swimming bath and wash houses, and a first class bath with a separate entrance, beneath. Also promised were a 'grand staircase leading to a promenade with supper, refreshment, and card rooms'.<sup>190</sup> This scheme was abandoned, but in 1863 the 'Roman Bath Co. Ltd' did open a swimming bath in Jesus Lane. This was open only a few months before going into liquidation and was subsequently let to the University Pitt Club.<sup>191</sup>

These 19<sup>th</sup>-century commercial schemes were followed in the early 20th century by proposals which continued to demonstrate the belief that there was an unmet demand for an indoor pool. In 1935 a plan was put forward for a 100ft x 42ft pool behind Parkside, with access from Mud Lane or Warkworth Terrace. This 'palatial swimming stadium' was to be capable of seating '400 with standing room for another 200', and a glass screen in the 60ft-long tea room at the front of the building would have enabled patrons to overlook the pool.<sup>192</sup> Two years later another scheme was announced, but nothing came of this either.

These earlier proposals are a reminder that swimming had been a popular activity for over 100 years, and that the petition for an indoor pool in 1950 reflected a perceived demand that the private sector had failed to meet.

<sup>187</sup> *CEN* 7 Dec 1960.

<sup>188</sup> CA: Cambridge Commons Committee, 22 Sept 1958.

<sup>189</sup> *CDN* 26 June 1959.

<sup>190</sup> Information from FA Reeve: 'Indoor Swimming Pool planned over 100 years ago', *CDN* 17 April 1962.

<sup>191</sup> 2016: Pizza Express, Jesus Lane, Cambridge.

<sup>192</sup> FA Reeve, *CDN* 17 April 1962.

### 1963: Opening of Parkside Pool 1



**Figure 46** – Parkside Pool (1965), entrance from Mill Road<sup>193</sup>

The pool was finally opened by Alderman Ridgeon on 1 April 1963 with dozens of young members of Cambridge swimming clubs who had been sitting round the edges of the pool jumping into the water ‘splashing and cheering’, followed by a colourful and exciting gala featuring Linda Ludgrove, the double gold medallist at the Empire Games, and several Olympic swimming stars.<sup>194</sup>

Headlines in the *Cambridge News* described the completed pool as a ‘The Cambridge Swimmer’s Dream’. As well as the promised main pool 110ft x 42ft, and the Learner Pool 36ft x 20ft, features included a café, seating for 532 spectators, a purification plant capable of purifying all 210,000 gallons in the main pool in just four hours, non-slip tiles, ‘footbath and shower before taking plunge’, and 14 miles of timber to improve acoustics.

The architect was R J Wyatt of the City Surveyor’s Office, and the cost of the building was £224,620. Although Boulton & Paul from Norwich provided the structural steelwork, and Crittall the aluminium curtain walling and windows, much of the construction work was done by local firms, employing a local workforce. The names were familiar at the time though few survived the economic crises of the following decades: Rattee & Kett built the swimming pool; D Mackay of East Road provided all the balustrading; Sindall Concrete Products built the reinforced concrete roofs, floors and Spectators Gallery; Kershaw Heating of

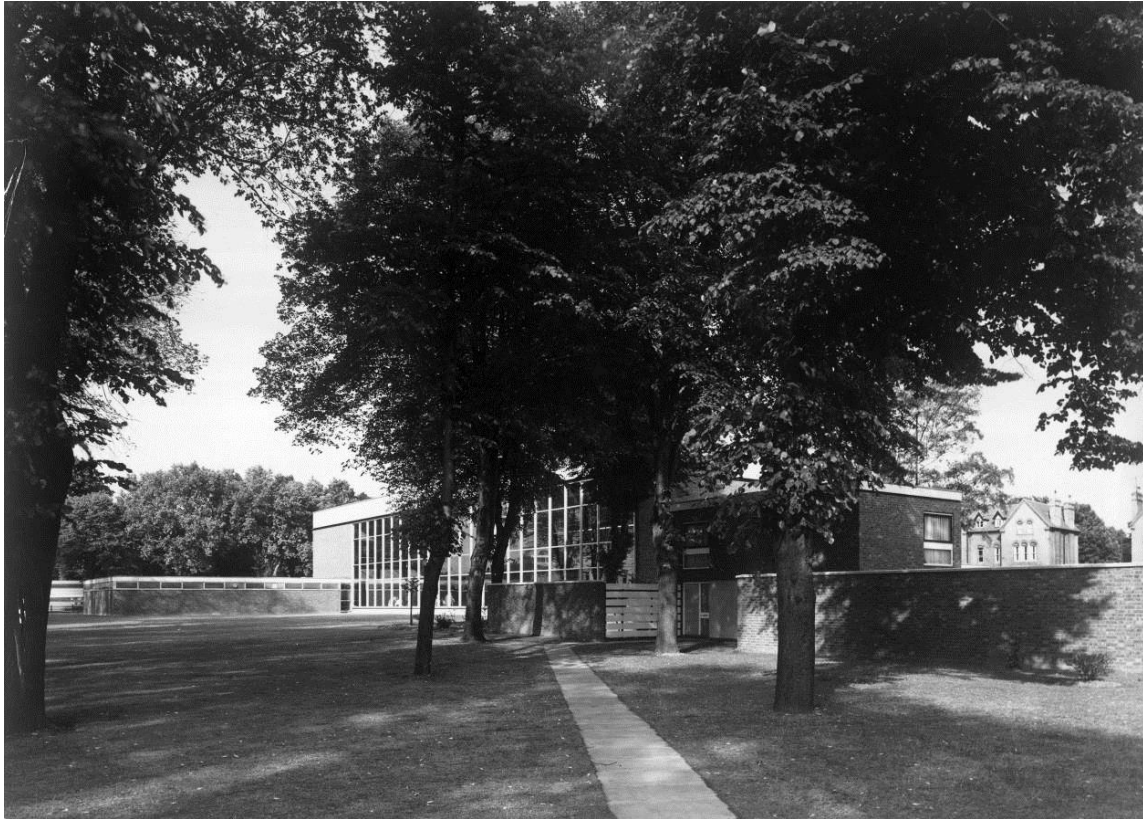
<sup>193</sup> CA: croc.ph.CB/2/SE/4/1/62/2.

<sup>194</sup> CN 1 April 1963.



Ainsworth Street was responsible for the heating and hot and cold services; while P H Allin of Bridge Street carried out the entire electrical installation.

Underneath all the glass, steel, concrete and water of the new pool, half of the former Common was lost. However, much was made of the fact that mature trees had been retained, and that there were attractive views across Parker's Piece through an almost completely glazed wall. Figure 47 shows the wall of glass giving views out of the pool across Parker's Piece. The first building from the right is the caretaker's house, with Mortimer Road visible behind.



**Figure 47** – Parkside Pool 1 and Donkey's Common from Gonville Place (CA: [croc.ph.CB/2/SE/4/1/62/1](#))

### Heaven and Hot Bovril: Looking back in 2016<sup>195</sup>

Figure 48 shows Parkside Pool, with the learner pool in front and the main pool at the rear, seating for spectators to the left, and the glass wall to the right.



**Figure 48** – Parkside Pool 1, interior<sup>196</sup>

Earlier generations like Maureen Sayers had been brought up swimming outdoors: 'I learnt to swim at Jesus Green pool. It was freezing. Then I used to swim in the River at Newnham and Coldhams Common, and Parkside when it first opened.' Liz Swann had used Coldhams Common (the Abbey Pool): 'I learnt to swim in the Abbey Pool, freeeeeeezing; we used to walk there and back from St Phillip's School in Thoday Street; Parkside was like paradise when it opened.'

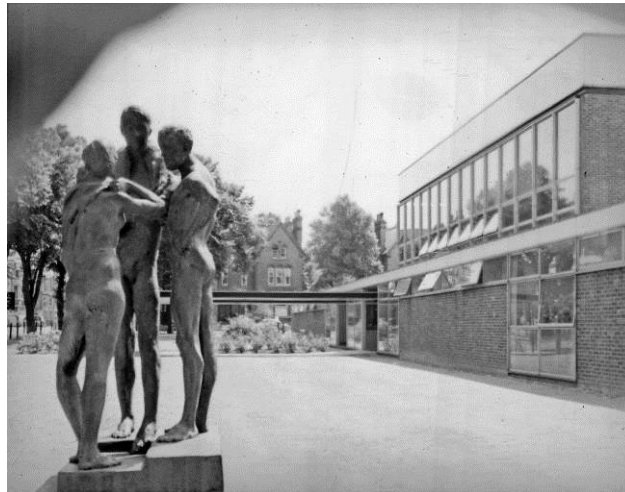
Hilary Forbes had been luckier, but she was also glad to be able to use Parkside: 'I belonged to The Granta Swimming Club. We used to use The Leys School pool for training and classes prior to Parkside as far as I remember. Parkside just seemed heaven compared to The Leys!!'

Before Parkside was built most swimmers only took the plunge in fine weather. The indoor pool allowed year-round swimming for the first time. Bob Anstee, whose early memories were of the outdoor pool on Coldhams Common, 'used to swim for my School, then my Sea Cadet units, then the County. Mostly backstroke and some front crawl. [At] the old Abbey Pool on Coldhams Common. [I] used to be the only one in the water in the early season. But [it] was popular in good weather. When Parkside opened it was like another world and was open to swimmers year round. With heated water hot showers and private cubicles. And a café as well. Great place to meet friends and make new ones.'

The café, and the sociability were amongst the strengths of the new pool. Patricia Facer 'used to spend most of the summer holidays swimming there when dad was at work, always went in the café upstairs afterwards. Happy days'. While Alison Main recalled the 1960s and 1970s: 'I learned to swim there in the 60s with an oldish male teacher (can't remember his name) [...] then swam for Granta in the 70s, training several mornings a week before school. There all day in holidays! Remember the café, wire baskets [...] Mr. and Mrs Barker (coaches), lifeguards, Gavin, Graham, Dave.' Figure 49 shows the frontage towards Mill Road in the 1970s, with the bronze statue 'The Swimmers', dating from 1966, by Betty Rea (completed after her death by John Mills).

<sup>195</sup> All memories unless stated otherwise from Facebook: 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960s', 17 Jan 2016.

<sup>196</sup> *The Story of a City* (CEN 2001).



**Figure 49** – Parkside Pool 1, with statue 'The Swimmers'  
(CA: croc.ph.CB/2/SE/4/3/137)

Others were at the pool all day too: 'Season ticket purchased at the end of summer term and every day spent at the pool! We didn't eat or drink all day but looked forward to hot Oxo and snacks at the end. Repeatedly kicked out of the shower room for hogging the hot water too! The custodian used to let us jump from the top board at closing time. Happy days!' (Beverley Fuller). For Wendy Lane it wasn't the Oxo that was her chief memory but 'BOVRIL . . . Hot BOVRIL!', a memory shared with Peter Constable: 'I remember wagon wheels and bovril'. But some looked forward to the hot chocolate: 'Learnt to swim there when I was about 11. Lived on Arbury Estate and a 131 bus stopped just outside. Would go there Sunday afternoons. Bloody freezing water, so made the most of hot chocolate after' (Paul Jordan). And for Alison Smith it was the fizzy drinks: 'I was a pupil at the Brunswick School and learnt to swim there in the mid 1960s. I also used to go there with a friend and a very kind lady in the café used to let us have half glasses of fizzy pop, so that we could afford to have two different flavours. (Think it was 3d a glass!).'

Teaching children to swim was seen as an important part of the pool's remit, and had come to be seen as a responsibility of the local primary schools: 'I learnt to swim during our weekly primary school swimming lessons there (Brunswick Junior School, PE teacher Miss Smith). I was awarded my 14 yards certificate. When I was twelve, I completed ten lengths of the big pool for charity and received a signed certificate from Bill Oddy' (Kathryn Serati-Shirazi). The value of these lessons was appreciated by Carole Middleton: 'Used this pool when at primary and secondary school in the early 1970s [...] gained certificates. Not a confident swimmer so this was quite an achievement for me.'

The dangers of water were ever present: 'I remember we used to go to Parkside with the school. Our teacher was Mrs Web. I was swimming across the 12 ft. When I got in the middle Lorraine Stern started to go under and started using me as a float pushing me under and every time I got up she would push me under again. One of my friends jumped in and saved me and Mrs Webb went in to save Lorraine' (Colleen Hart).

To try to prevent accidents the lifeguards were a constant presence at the pool, while many children also learnt lifesaving: 'I also did (or started) a life saving course around that time. This included retrieving a brick from the deep end, whilst swimming in pyjamas (as you do). I believe the instructor left unexpectedly, so we never got to complete the course and get

our certificate' (Alison Smith). Hilary Forbes also remembered the gruelling training: 'Had to leap off the 3m board in pyjamas and swim 2 lengths as well, as far as I recall!'

While leisure swimming was central to the pool, the need for accessible facilities for competitive swimming had been one of the justifications behind building on Donkey's Common: 'My daughter went every morning before school to practice as she swam for Cambridge and County[;] had her Bronze Silver and Gold Certs. Lovely pool' (Maureen Sayers). Carole Middleton also recalled that: "My oldest daughter (now 33) learnt to swim at Parkside [...] She went on to swim for her schools and college in competitions for young people with special needs both in and out of county.'

The changing facilities were recognised by the planners as an important feature of the new pool, and were often a feature that remained in children's memories: 'I remember the strange coat hanger things with a basket attached that you had to use for your clothes. You handed them to cloak room attendants. Pre locker days!' (Toni Birkin). Elaine Johnson recalled that the hangers were very heavy: 'Those metal hangers were very heavy to lift loaded with clothes and shoes', while Lou Bird commented that footbaths were effective: 'The cold foot bath that was too big to dodge!!'.

Despite the modern facilities the changing rooms in the early days of the pool still had their disturbing memories mixed up with those of swimming and chocolate bars: 'Funny thing to remember, but the Nestlé chocolate bar vending machine was awesome! Was there every week and more in the school holidays. I never wondered what happened to those men who would dry and dress in front of young boys, getting dressed from the top down [...] putting a tie on as your babygun was a swinging in the wind seemed a little unnecessary' (D S Willsher).

In the 1960s there was still a clear distinction between men's work and women's work. The men were lifeguards and engineers. The women ran the café and the Reception. Katrina King 'worked there for 10 years, part time in the café then later on in reception/turnstile. Then it went computerised and was a nightmare. But best time of my life there amongst luvvvvly people.'

Sometimes knowing the staff was advantageous: 'My nan Mary Reed worked in 'the Box' and most probably sold you your ticket (they were like the old cinema tickets). Me, my brother and cousin would be the first in the pool before it opened in the summer holidays as we would go with her many a morning. This was mid to late 70s. Good times' (Rebecca Curtis).

Some disliked the chlorine, or hated being made to swim as children. But 'good times' were what the pool was best remembered for. Dean Froggatt 'used to cycle there from Chester-ton with my younger brother once we knew how to get there. Hours of second and top board diving, and swimming about the bottom in 12" 6' of water. Loved it! Cheesy biscuits!' Derek Smiley also remembered the diving boards:

loads of memories, biggest ones diving off the top board for the first time. I stood up there ages and then 'pow'! And of course the legendary 14-yard certificate. We would walk up from Romsey School circa 65-66 we would be lined up to check for verukas and the unlucky ones would be sent out mostly in tears. Great times.

And some enjoyed the pool so much they wouldn't leave: 'My memory is of a very naughty boy [...] who would never get out of the pool when asked!!' (Bernie Constable).



**Figure 50** – Parkside Pool 1, fun and games<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Mike Petty *Images of Cambridge* (pictures from CEN), p.127.

### 3. 1984–99: Plans for a New 'Leisure Pool' – Political Football on Donkey's Common

The pool continued in use until 1997, but in the final two decades it slowly became the centre of a major political controversy. At stake were not just the pool, control of the City Council, or Councillors' reputations, but the fate of the remaining 1.5 acres of the original common which was still open space.

#### 1980–87

By 1980, only seventeen years after the pool opened, Councillors were asked to investigate a rising number of complaints.<sup>198</sup> While many like John Cochrane had fond memories of 'Grated cheese and tomato rolls in the upstairs café, torso-shaped wire baskets to hang your clothes, changing room attendants, a fairly unique 36 2/3 yards length', he was not alone in being critical of the design: 'such a shame they didn't care for it as the new pool was already faulty and falling apart on the day it opened'.<sup>199</sup>

Councillors also had concerns about the costs of running the pool. The need to raise the price of entrance fees without excluding disadvantaged groups had been a regular cause of debate from the moment the pool opened, and these financial worries eventually led to a proposal in 1984 to sell or lease the loss-making pool. This was followed in 1985 by a proposal by the new Chair of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, Labour Councillor Richard Smith, to seek a partnership with a private developer to help upgrade the pool.<sup>200</sup> Under headlines which stated: 'Tropical Pool Plan Makes Financial Waves' it was reported that Smith's 'brainchild' was 'the idea of linking Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall next door with a tropical type pool complete with artificial waves, plastic palm trees and artificial sunlight'.<sup>201</sup>

The response by developers to Smith's suggestion was positive, with 'massive interest' by late 1986 to bridge the funding gap by building a hotel and leisure complex on what was described as 'spare land' between the existing pool and sports centre.<sup>202</sup> The 'spare land' was part of the remnants of Donkey's Common.

The proposals submitted by the developers, Stock Harvard, crystallised into a multi-million pound 'tropical paradise' pool that controversially sought to strike a balance between the features required for a contemporary leisure pool and those needed for competitive swimming. The £10 million funding was to come from a complicated leasing arrangement which reflected the charged political atmosphere of the 1980s with a Labour-controlled local authority trying to find ways to provide local services despite the financial restrictions imposed by the Conservative government.

The leasing arrangement originally included a hotel and up-market town flats fronting Mortimer Road, in return for which they would build the pool and link it to an improved Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall with additional facilities.<sup>203</sup> The plans were forcefully defended by Mark

<sup>198</sup> CEN 2 Feb 1996.

<sup>199</sup> Facebook: 'Cambridge in the Good Old Days from the 1960s', 17 Jan 2016.

<sup>200</sup> In June Labour Councillor Richard Smith, the newly appointed head of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, suggested that the Council should be seeking a partnership with private developers as well as help from the Sports Council and the English Tourist Board CN. 4.6.1984

<sup>201</sup> CEN 2 Sep 1985.

<sup>202</sup> CEN 3 Nov 1986.

<sup>203</sup> CN 16 April 1988.



Todd, Labour leader of the City Council, who had headed the initial negotiations with Stock Harvard:

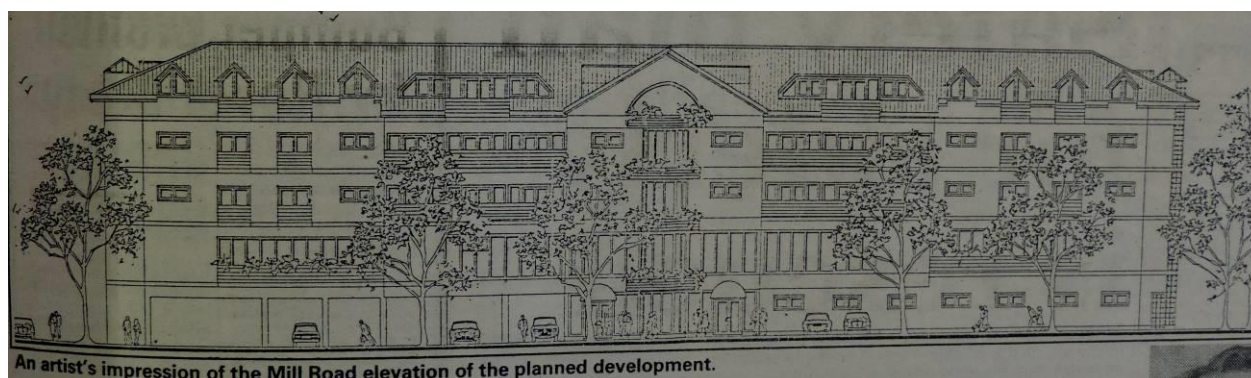
It is perhaps time a few hard facts were grasped about Cambridge City Council's approach to improving facilities at Parkside Pool. First, the Council subsidises swimming at the various pools it runs to the tune of nearly half a million pounds per year. Of that subsidy about half or slightly more is attributable to Parkside. Because this government penalises the city council £1.38 for every £1 spent by deducting grant, the actual cost to the ratepayer is around £1.1million for the whole service and £600,000 for Parkside each year. Thus a typical ratepayer might pay about £12 per year for the swimming service whether they use it or not.

After this outline of the harsh realities of local government finances, and the way that he believed Cambridge was run by the Conservative government, Councillor Todd justified the proposed deal:

...the declining numbers using the pools implies some dissatisfaction with facilities. A major investment by the Council alone will greatly increase costs to the ratepayer and we can anyway buy less with ratepayers' money (because of the government's grant penalty) than can be bought through other forms of financing. This is why the Council has explored co-operation with a private sector developer. The purpose is to add to the appeal and flexibility of the swimming pool at Parkside, bringing more people through its doors'.

To his critics he said: 'So why do some people oppose the scheme? There is some concern about the use of part of the site for the hotel development which funds the pool improvements. Perhaps these people might suggest where alternative funding might be found if we turn this away?' In conclusion, he stated that 'The Council is attempting to achieve a major improvement in facilities at minimal cost to the ratepayer. That seems to me to be a laudable objective. I still hope it can gain general support.'<sup>204</sup>

Figure 51 shows an artist's impression of the redeveloped pool from the Mill Road side, including houses and a hotel.<sup>205</sup>



**Figure 51** – Proposed redevelopment of Parkside Pool, Mill Road elevation (1988)

## 1988–89

By March 1988 the hotel was no longer going to be on the 'spare land' between the pool and the sports hall, but was positioned fronting Mill Road. It had expanded to 99 beds with a business and commercial centre, while flats that were going to front Mortimer Road had become twelve large town houses. In the process, the prospect of a nightclub and of a

<sup>204</sup> Letter to *CEN* 10 Sep 1987.

<sup>205</sup> *CEN* 10 March 1988.

'heritage centre' had also been floated as possible additional sources of income to compensate Stock Harvard for the cost of redeveloping the pool.<sup>206</sup>

But before these plans could be pursued further the *Cambridge Evening News* reported that the government 'was caught in the new Whitehall financial trap banning "leaseback" arrangements with property developers', adding that 'the Government has clamped down on leaseback deals to stop so-called "Looney left" councils around the country from disposing of their assets to beat Whitehall spending restrictions'.<sup>207</sup>

Led by Mark Todd, a Cambridge graduate and a managing Director of Longman's Publishing, Cambridge City Council was far from being 'Looney Left'. In fact Todd's case for working with the private sector would probably have been approved by a Conservative government under an earlier leadership. But over the next few years Parkside pool was at the centre of one of the most politically charged local issues of the 1980s and 1990s, and the names of many prominent councillors came to be associated with ever-changing plans. Amongst these were Frank Gawthrop, Chair of the City Council's Property Panel, who said in April 1988 that the Parkside pool plan 'has been killed off by the Government and there is nothing the Council can do about it'.<sup>208</sup>

Despite Councillor Gawthrop's pessimism, nine months later the Department of the Environment conceded that the City Council's plans did not in fact break the law, and sanctioned work on converting the pool into a 'tropical water sports and leisure centre'.<sup>209</sup> But they added that work had to be completed by March 1990 to comply with new legislation, an unrealistic timetable that was exacerbated by rising costs, and led Todd to state 'We shall persist and find a way round the problem and we remain adamant that Cambridge will get the new centre at no cost to the ratepayers'.<sup>210</sup> His statement laid down the aspirations of the ruling Labour group. These consumed time, energy and reputations over the next few years, and were eventually to be realised in a scheme very different to the one proposed in 1989.

## 1989

The search for funding for the pool revived the threat to the remains of Donkey's Common. In April 1989 the newly arrived City Council's Chief Planning Officer, John Popper, declared that it was environmentally acceptable to build houses on the land between the pool and Gonville Place. He spoke of the site being worth £5–6 million in capital value and said the city was unbalanced by having similar pools with no leisure pool complex.<sup>211</sup> Local Petersfield Councillor Frank Gawthrop was quick to lead his Labour colleagues in opposition to this: he 'said he was horrified and disgusted at the idea'. Reminding Mr Popper that he was recently arrived in the City he said: 'For generations people have guarded their commons against all sorts of development. If they hadn't been ever vigilant we would have no open spaces.'<sup>212</sup> Backing him, Committee Chair Eleanor Fairclough said building desirable town houses on the grass would be giving up too much [...] Labour councillors passed a proposal

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<sup>206</sup> *CEN* 10 March 1987.

<sup>207</sup> *CEN* 16 April 1988.

<sup>208</sup> *CEN* 16 April 1988.

<sup>209</sup> *CEN* 13 Jan 1989.

<sup>210</sup> *CEN* 23 Feb 1989.

<sup>211</sup> *CEN* 25 April 1989.

<sup>212</sup> *CEN* 25 April 1989.

that no extra redevelopment must take place on the site which led to any public space being lost.<sup>213</sup>

## 1991–92

'I shall not be throwing in the towel over plans for Parkside' – Councillor Barry Gardiner (18 June 1991)<sup>214</sup>

Despite the earlier setbacks, swimming facilities remained a key Labour Party priority. They were committed to a new pool at Abbey, which they anticipated becoming the main site in the City for competitive swimmers and learners, with a revamped Parkside being purely a leisure pool. In 1991 Labour Councillor Barry Gardiner, now Chair of the City Council Leisure Committee, offered a robust defence of this strategy in answer to criticism of mismanagement from David Howarth, leader of the Liberal Democrats:

The new pool at Abbey will provide the city with a beautiful modern facility suitable for local galas, health and recreational swimming, alongside a magnificent learner pool for children with excellent disabled access. [...] Parkside has been showing its age for over five years now, despite the superb efforts of staff to brighten it up. The new Abbey pool will in effect take on the role that Parkside performed 25 years ago – modern, purpose built, for the self-styled 'serious swimmers' and those learning to swim. But Parkside today is a different story. Within a year it will require major structural repairs. Roof repairs would cost at least £75,000 alone; a modest 'stay as it is' refurbishment has been costed at £354,000, and this work would require the pool to close for a year.

He went on to say that the surveys had shown that people wanted 'a wave pool with flumes and white water slides and whirlpools', and that he had 'instructed officers to report NOW on the possibility of a partnership with the private sector so that an otherwise expensive and wasted year of closure for repairs can become Parkside's year as a chrysalis before its transformation into a leisure pool. This is the mismanagement and waste that had made Councillor Howarth so "outraged"'.<sup>215</sup>

Two months later the Department of the Environment and the District Auditor told the City Council that their proposals did not infringe regulations, and the attempt to get a new water leisure centre at no cost to the Council through a complex land swap and planning deal was set in motion again.

Councillor Howarth remained sceptical: 'I cannot see many developers being very interested and I wonder how we shall get on this time'.<sup>216</sup> However, in February 1992 three developers presented their plans for public viewing, and Stock Harvard, the favoured partner in 1988, was once more showing interest (see Figure 52). Amongst the various proposals for the common were competition pools, wave machines, a 'giant water cannon and beach area', a river, rapids and flume, sunbeds, a sauna, a gym, and a café. Also included in the various proposals were a ten-pin bowling alley, a multi-screen cinema, a night club and disco, 248 study bedrooms for students, and either a 158-room hotel with business centre and conference facilities (Hilton), a 160-room hotel (Wilmott Dixon), or two international Hotels (Stock Harvard).

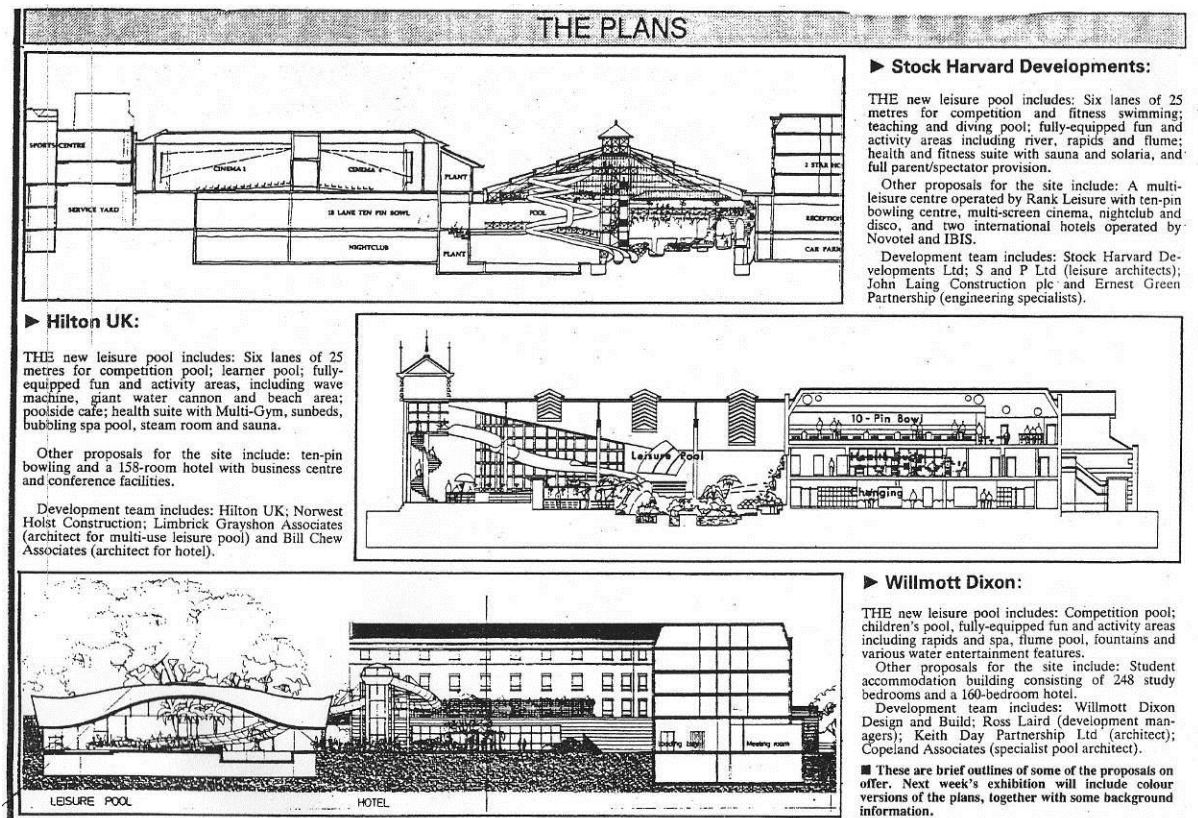
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<sup>213</sup> *CEN* 25 April 1989.

<sup>214</sup> Letter to *CEN* 18 June 1991.

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> *CEN* 13 Aug 1991.



**Figure 52 – Rival plans for redevelopment of Parkside Pool (CN 7 Feb 1992)**

In March, under a new City Council leader, Labour's Simon Sedgwick-Jell, the Council agreed that Stock Harvard's plans should go forward to the Planning Committee. These included a leisure pool, 10-pin bowling alley, a night club and two hotels. The scale of the proposals continued to fuel the political debate, and with local elections imminent Liberal Democrat leader David Howarth remained critical: 'this is cramming too much on one site. It could mean more than 1,500 people leaving a disco in the early hours of the morning. There will be massive traffic problems. [...] They have just rushed this through in time for the elections. We'd much rather have seen Parkside developed as it is and more leisure facilities provided elsewhere.'



Figure 53 – Stock Harvard's 1992 plans



Figure 54 – Stock Harvard, 1992 : artist's impression of the Mill Road / Gonville Place junction



## 1992: The Struggle for Planning Permission – ‘unredeemed vulgarity’

Cambridge City Council produced the following statement:<sup>217</sup>

### **Parkside Development**

#### **Written Submission to accompany Planning Application: Stock Harvard. 31.7.1992**

**Site Description:** [...] On each of the existing elevations of Parker's Piece there are a variety of building styles. The most dominant building is the University Arms Hotel which has a height of four and a half stories with larger than normal storey heights. Most of the other buildings around the square are three to four stories high, notably the terraced houses on Park Terrace – some of the best quality buildings on Parker's Piece. [...] The large trees contribute a great deal to the quality of the square, especially as there are none at all in the central area – all are on the perimeter – producing a great contrast between the horizontality of the grassed area and the verticality of the trees themselves.

The general impression of the built environment is that of horizontal emphasis because of the sheer length of each side of the square. We believe that the best proportions for these buildings is one of verticality, again the best examples being the terraces of Park Terrace. The more recent buildings (since the 1960s) have not generally held this pattern due perhaps to architectural assertiveness and we believe this has resulted in poor architectural quality with no real urban planning benefits. We do not believe the following buildings fit particularly well into Parker's Piece and we have therefore not tried to match them: i. Existing Parkside Pool. ii. Kelsey Kerridge Sports Hall and Queen Anne Car Park. iii. 61 Regent St. iv. Police Station. v. Fire Station.

Deploing the post-war buildings around Parker's Piece, and justifying the height and density of their own plans, Stock Harvard, in response to the City Council planners' request for a high-quality design in sympathy with the surroundings, stated that they had designed the hotel elevations facing Parker's Piece 'to match and sympathise with the best of the existing buildings on Parker's Piece, but also to present more "weight" at this important corner of the square which will balance that provided at the opposite diagonal corner – the University Arms Hotel'.

In addition to arguing that their plans would enhance Parker's Piece, Stock Harvard claimed that they would be creating 'a major new square with good quality townscape' on the remnants of the open space on Donkey's Common.

Despite these claims, David Howarth's concerns that too much was being crammed on to the site were shared by many local residents, especially as by August 1992 Stock Harvard's detailed plans for the £20 million redevelopment revealed that the bowling alley had grown from 18 to 25 lanes, and the cinema seating from 1,300 to 1,500. The small City Council Conservative group had also become unhappy with the plan, while Labour MP Anne Campbell contradicted her colleagues on the City Council by stating it was 'trying to squeeze a quart into a pint pot'.<sup>218</sup> Also opposed to the scheme was Lord St John of Fawsley, Master of Emmanuel College, whose properties had views across Parker's Piece towards Donkey's Common. As Chairman of The Royal Fine Art Commission, he declared that 'The Commission is profoundly dismayed by this scheme'.

<sup>217</sup> Cambridge City Council. Development Control. Ref: C/0631/92.

<sup>218</sup> CEN 14 July 1992.



Parker's Piece and the streets surrounding it form a precious part of Cambridge which is predominantly domestic in character. If the construction in the early 'sixties of a swimming pool in the north-east corner was barely tolerable, the subsequent development of the adjacent site with a sports centre and multi-storey car park compounded the damage and has been a blot on the area ever since.

The Commission's dismissal of the existing post-war buildings built on what had once been common pasture was followed by an equally scathing rejection of the new leisure complex.

To replace the swimming pool with a larger pool incorporating a leisure area and health suite, a 24 lane ten pin bowling alley, six cinemas, a night club and no less than two hotels would result, in the Commission's view, in rank overdevelopment, most of it the wrong kind, and in buildings of excessive bulk which would have a harmful effect on the long views from Parker's Piece, Fenner's and Peter's Field.

The voice of the Chairman can be heard in these words as he added equally forcefully: 'The Commission is also appalled by the architecture which, in the case of the leisure centre with its dark-green glaze pavilions, is of unredeemed vulgarity and totally out of place on Parker's Piece.'<sup>219</sup>



**Figure 55** – Stock Harvard, 1992 : artist's impression of view from Parker's Piece

<sup>219</sup> Letter to Peter Studdert, Director of Planning, Cambridge City Council, from Lord St John of Fawsley, Chairman, Royal Fine Art Commission, 13 Aug 1992.

The Commission's letter to Peter Studdert, Director of Planning at the City Council, concluded that the Council should choose another architect, and questioned the Council's dual role as planning authority and owner of the site in which there was such a heavy commercial involvement. The Liberal Democrats expressed delight, calling for a public enquiry by the Environment Secretary, while the *Cambridge News* for 13 August 1992 trumpeted:



Not everyone agreed with the Commission's report, with a war of words erupting and bringing new life to the always latent 'town and gown' conflict. Ray Catchpole, Director of Stock Harvard, portrayed Lord St John as an elitist college master who 'moved between Emmanuel College, the House of Lords and the Commission's luxurious offices in St James Square', adding that the victims would be the people of Cambridge 'because of a group of academics pontificating about the long views over Parker's Piece'. Mayor Barry Gardiner also felt aggrieved and responded by stating 'you have sought to besmirch the integrity of the city council', and accused Lord St John of abusing his role as commission chairman.<sup>220</sup> But amidst this public furore the leader of the City Council Simon Sedgwick-Jell admitted 'the sheer forcefulness of the statement makes the plans unacceptable in planning terms'.<sup>221</sup>

Peter Studdert, Director of Planning, was in agreement with Sedgwick-Jell. He admitted 'the development was not going in the right direction' and that 'There is no way I could recommend the plans to the Planning Committee for approval'.<sup>222</sup> However this was not the conclusion to the political debate. The Liberal Democrats now sought finally to end negotiations with Stock Harvard and argued for a revised plan to refurbish the existing pool. But in October the ruling Labour Group rejected this and decided to pursue their vision of a new leisure pool by asking the developers to prepare new plans.<sup>223</sup> The bowling alley and cinema complex were now dropped, but a hotel and student accommodation were still considered suitable. Justifying the need to work with developers and emphasising what they saw as the Conservative government's deliberate obstruction through the Standard Spending Assessment, Petersfield Councillors stated in 'Parkside After St John':

The issue of cost must be faced. Residents will be aware that the City Council faces strong pressure to reduce its expenditure in line with the government's Standard Spending Assessment. It therefore has not the means to build a swimming pool without involving a developer, and has been unable to interest developers in alternative sites. The responsibility of the Council appears to us now to be to

<sup>220</sup> CEN 14 Aug 1992.

<sup>221</sup> CEN 13 Aug 1992.

<sup>222</sup> CEN 15 Aug 1992.

<sup>223</sup> Cambridge City Council: Minutes City Board, 12 Sep 1992.

reconcile the interests of developers, residents and the city in keeping a swimming pool at Parkside.<sup>224</sup>

The politics fuelling the pool saga were emphasised by a leaked letter from Mayor Barry Gardiner to his party colleagues. Labour had lost seats in the May elections, and he wrote:

I believe that a major factor in our election losses in May was that for the past three years we have been seen to be preoccupied with internal council business: cuts imposed by Whitehall; internal re-organisation; problems of poll tax administration.

By engaging in a major capital building programme to create local facilities in priority areas of the city, we can regain the initiative and show that we know what is needed in the city and are acting to meet those needs.

To achieve this objective he stated that despite repeated statements that any new pool would be at no cost to the City Council : 'Reality suggests that we may have to put in between £1 million and £2 million to the reduced Parkside development in order to assure that the pool element is not also dramatically reduced.'<sup>225</sup>

Gardiner's proposal was rejected by the Labour group, but its leaking exposed dissent amongst his colleagues and possible resentment against him personally.

## 1992–95

Arguments about the pool's future continued to rage between 1992 and 1995. Throughout this period, Labour and Liberal Democrats stuck to their earlier positions, Labour championing a new leisure pool, Liberal Democrats a modernisation of the existing facilities. Central to the debate were whether the pool was to be primarily for 'leisure' or for 'serious' swimmers, and whether the needs of both groups could be reconciled.

The leisure pool in its various forms included rivers, flumes, waves and palm trees and was portrayed by Labour as a chance to offer the people of Cambridge a quality pool that could be enjoyed by all. From this populist perspective the Liberal Democrats' opposition appeared élitist. But by supporting the 'serious' swimmers the Liberal Democrats captured the support of many regular users of the pool, and also all those who thought that Labour were both financially irresponsible and set on destroying the remnants of open space on Donkey's Common. Shored up by these different positions but with Labour controlling the City Council, debate focused on how much development was needed on Donkey's Common to provide a new pool, and whether the compromises needed would require additional financing from the City Council.

Local residents groups also became involved, sometimes led by Liberal Democrat activists, campaigning vigorously against any change that threatened to increase traffic congestion or reduce any of the open space. But in February 1995, with Conservative support and despite a 500-signature petition opposing the scheme, Stock Harvard at last received planning permission for a pool, 160-room hotel and a café-bar. By now the wave machine and palm-fringed beach had been dropped, but the flumes, spa pool and sauna remained along with the 25-meter, eight-lane pool.

<sup>224</sup> Ben Bradnack, 'Parkside After St John: The View of Petersfield Ward Councillors', August 1992. Letter notifying residents of Petersfield Ward of Consultation meeting in light of negative comments by Royal Fine Art Commission and the failure of Stock Harvard to reduce night time and traffic pressure on the site by reducing the scale of the development. (No reference. In file with Cambridge City Council Swimming Pool papers, 1992).

<sup>225</sup> CEN 20 Nov 1992.

This was greeted with relief by the new Labour leader of the City Council, Kevin Southernwood, who had replaced Sedgwick-Jell a few months earlier. However, Chairman of the Parkside Pool Campaign Group Cathy Bowden said the fight would go on, and an exasperated Liberal Democrat leader David Howarth threatened to apply to the Department of the Environment for the plans to be scrutinised in greater detail.<sup>226</sup>

Kevin Southernwood's relief turned out to be shortlived. The eventual report in July 1995 by a government inspector for the Department of the Environment stated that the plans would 'unarguably increase traffic movements in an area which already suffers from congestion and high air pollution', and that this went against the whole ethos of the City Council's Local Plan. She added that 'I share the objectors' views that the open character of the site, enhanced by the trees, is a valuable asset to the character and quality of the environment'.<sup>227</sup>

Responding to the inspector's report in December, Labour and Liberal Democrats finally united to accept her advice to retain the existing pool and the open space around it. The few dissenting opinions came from Ray Catchpole of Stock Harvard, who said 'the pool project had been sacrificed for an easy life', and Conservative group leader Graham Edwards who called the decision 'spineless'.<sup>228</sup>

The saga of the 1993 plans for the leisure complex on Donkey's Common concluded in January 1996 when the City Council Planning Sub-committee formally scrapped the application on the grounds that it went against the Local Plan.

In his Report to Committee, Peter Studdert, Director of Planning, accepted that the Inspector had stressed 'the importance of the open space in front and alongside the existing pool [...] in linking the two larger open spaces of Peter's Field and Parker's Piece' and that she saw 'the function of that space as being of great significance'.<sup>229</sup> Studdert continued: 'She [...] substantiates her case by specific reference to the visual continuity, to the sense of space provided by the open grassed areas alongside and in front of Parkside Pool and the importance to the street scene of the soft landscape and trees rather than hard, busy vehicle turning and access areas'.

Studdert concluded that 'This is a different appraisal from that which I had previously made. [...] The force of the Inspector's arguments, which accord with the views of the overwhelming majority of the representations made both to the Local Plan Inquiry and the Application, leads me to a contrary recommendation, in this regard, to that which I made previously. I now consider that the proposal would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.'

Finally, in light of these conclusions about the existing sense of space provide by the grassed areas in front of the pool, Studdert now dismissed the arguments that had been put forward for a 'strong built form' at the corner of Donkey's Common that would provide a 'good visual "stop" [...] a strong counter-point to the University Arms on the western corner of Parker's Piece':

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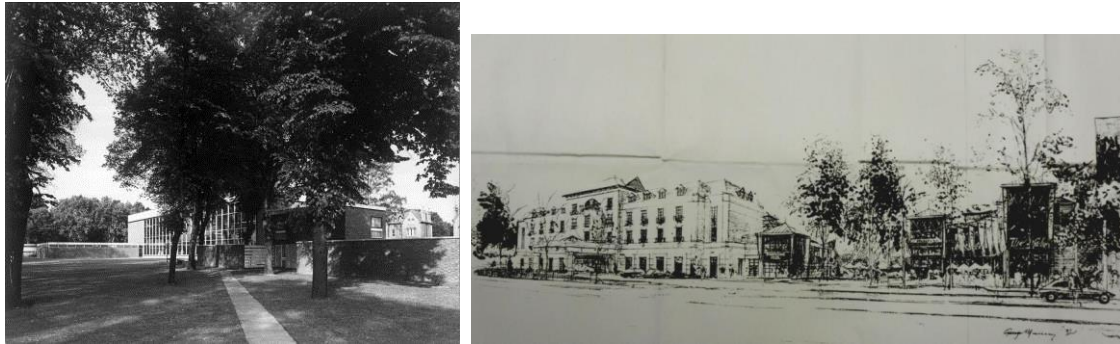
<sup>226</sup> CEN 3 Feb 1995.

<sup>227</sup> CEN 12 Dec 1995.

<sup>228</sup> CEN 13 Dec 1995.

<sup>229</sup> Cambridge City Council, Report to Planning Sub Committee, 31 Jan 1996. Parkside Swimming Pool site. Ref C/0733/94. Author: Director of Planning.

Clearly a built form at that scale would have a very strong impact upon the open spaces on the two frontages of Mill Road and Gonville Place, and seriously restrict any possibility of retaining the linkages through Parker's Piece–Donkey's Common–Peter's Field by which the Inspector sets such store. The decision has to be made between a positive statement, a focus created by a built form, and the linked spaces. [...] I now consider that the greater weight should be given to the spatial links and the open character of this part of the Conservation Area.



**Figure 56** – (a) Parkside Pool *versus* (b) Stock Harvard's design for the vista

### 1996: Lottery Funding and Housing

Letting the land be developed for housing seems to be the only option left open to us regarding Parkside pool. – Graham Edwards, Conservative Group leader<sup>230</sup>

After ten years of debate, Parkside pool was another decade older and still unmodernised. While the night club, bowling alley and cinemas had been rejected, the search for funding continued. In January 1996 Ian Cooper, the City Council's Director of Leisure, stated that the Council would apply to the National Lottery Sports Fund, a proposal which at last met with Liberal Democrat approval too. Coupled to this was the suggestion that the City Council could raise additional funds by building houses on the land at the rear of the existing pool adjacent to Mortimer Road.

The original vision of a palm-surrounded leisure pool had now receded even further, with Cooper stating: 'The Council is not proposing a "fun pool" – it is hoping to build a traditional 25-meter eight-lane pool with a separate diving pool. There will be some leisure features such as water flumes, a children's pool, spa pools and a health suite, but these are separate from the main traditional pool'.<sup>231</sup> Despite these reduced aspirations, the City Council bought the plans for the rejected Stock Harvard plan, with the services of the design team who had produced them.<sup>232</sup>

Labour had regained overall control of the Council in the May elections, and Councillor Ben Bradnack, Chairman of the Leisure Committee, was confident that the gap between potential lottery funding and total costs of the latest scheme could be bridged:

There will be space within the scheme for some housing development, and we will be looking at a small amount of car-free housing which will not only help defray the cost of the pool construction

<sup>230</sup> CEN 2 Feb 1996.

<sup>231</sup> Letter to CEN 23 Feb 1996.

<sup>232</sup> CEN 7 June 1996; 'bought': 'The beauty of buying the plans means there is now no longer any need to meet the previous developer's requirement to have a hotel there.' (ibid).

[but] also enhance the site, offer 'green' possibilities such as combined heat and power with the pool, and reflect state of the art practice in housing development.<sup>233</sup>

Bradnack concluded 'It's time we got on with it'. But there was still opposition to building houses on Donkey's Common, with the Parkside Pool Campaign Group Newsletter describing it as a 'land grab' and urging supporters to object:

In order to maximise the sale of the land the Council is bound to approve a very high density housing scheme. In order to do this they are attempting to grab as much of Donkey's Common as they can. In her Report the Local Plan Inspector has been very clear about retaining the open space at front and side of the pool along Gonville Place and Mill Road. However she has not been so helpful regarding the rest of the site along Mortimer Road. Council officials have jumped at this loop-hole.<sup>234</sup>

The complexities of the pool debate are revealed by the address of the Secretary of the campaign group in Lyndewood Road. Though unnamed, this was the same address as that of Bradnack's now-retired predecessor as Petersfield Labour Councillor, Frank Gawthrop.

### **1997: A New Pool: 'Parkside's £8m Jackpot'**<sup>235</sup>

Shortly after the election of a new Labour government in May 1997 the Lottery Sports Fund announced in June its biggest grant to date in East Anglia to provide 65% of the cost of the new pool. City Council and Labour group leader Kevin Southernwood vowed to find the shortfall from selling Council property (thirteen properties, possibly £3M-worth), from Council Tax and from reserves.<sup>236</sup> This had never been part of the original 1980s plan, as Ian Nimmo-Smith for the Liberal Democrats made clear: 'If there was any prospect of paying more than £4 million of city money on this project when we started there would never have been a scheme. Where is the money going to come from?'<sup>237</sup> Nevertheless in July the Council approved the £11million pool redevelopment with a commitment to bridge the financial gap, and the continued Liberal Democrat call for the pool to be refurbished was finally rejected.<sup>238</sup>

The old Parkside pool finally closed in July 1997 with the Mayor swimming the last length at a special ceremony. Draining the pool took seven days, and demolition began in the autumn. The main contractor was Willmott Dixon Construction of Hitchin, and the architects were S & P Ltd, London. The involvement of local firms that had been a feature of the 1963 pool was markedly absent, reflecting the changes over the intervening decades.

The process set in motion thirteen years earlier by Richard Smith's 'brainchild' was at last realised. But financial and political considerations over those years had led to a very different pool from the 'tropical type pool complete with artificial waves, plastic palm trees and artificial sunlight' that Smith had envisaged. To appease the criticism of regular 'serious' swimmers a City Council bulletin made clear that:

The primary functions of the new pool will be traditional swimming, diving and other water sports. To get the massive lottery grant the City Council has had to meet the Amateur Swimming Associa-

<sup>233</sup> *CEN* 7 June 1996.

<sup>234</sup> Parkside Pool Campaign Group Newsletter No 6. Nov 1996.

<sup>235</sup> *CEN* 4 June 1997.

<sup>236</sup> See summary of these events at: <http://www.iankitching.me.uk/history/cam/parkside-pool.html>

<sup>237</sup> *CEN* 4 June 1997.

<sup>238</sup> *CEN* 18 July 1997. The Liberal Democrats also called for an independent inquiry to discover if the City Council had found the best deal for Council Tax payers. The external auditor exonerated the Council. *CEN* 12 Dec 1998.



tion's requirement for a 'National Standard 25 meter, 8 lane pool'. The City Council's specification has also met the English Sports Council's Lottery requirements.

To appease Lord St John and the conservation lobby the bulletin stressed that:

The new pool is being built in the central Conservation Area of the City so the design has been scrutinised by the Royal Fine Art Commission, the Listed Buildings Panel as well as the City Council's Planning Sub Committee.

And to appease open space campaigners like Frank Gawthrop the Council stated:

A key feature of the new pool will be the opening up of Donkey's Common for recreational use. A new diagonal path will be introduced from Mill Road to the pedestrian crossing to Parker's Piece, the renovated Donkey's Common will be similar to Petersfield with easily accessed open space, there will also be many new trees planted.<sup>239</sup>

The remaining threat to the Common was removed in March 1999 when councillors recommended that the area fronting Mortimer Road that had been earmarked for housing should be kept as green open space. Conservative Councillor Graham Edwards still thought that the site should be considered for housing, and Liberal Democrat John Hipkin supported him, saying that it was 'inexcusable' not to use the land for housing to help fund the pool. But Ben Bradnack, Chairman of the Community Development and Leisure Committee, reversed his earlier opinion by stating to Councillors: 'I think you are absolutely lunatic to put housing on that site. That need is no longer there in financial terms'.<sup>240</sup>

Planning officers supported Bradnack's view and reported to the Council's ruling body, the City Board, that housing 'would involve the loss of open space and trees and would therefore be controversial in planning terms'.

The members of the City Board agreed and decided that the land 'should be landscaped and made available to the public'. The Board Chairman finally laid the housing threat to rest by stating: 'We thought the best option for everyone is to keep as much of the land as possible for open space, so we can set off the pool as well as we can'.



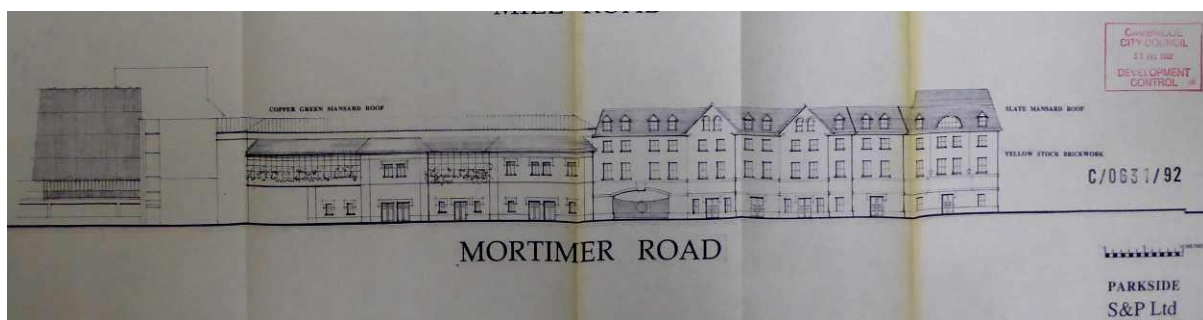
**Figure 57** – Land adjacent to Mortimer Road (a) as it was in 1965 (CA: croc.ph. CB/2/SE/4/1/62/3), (b) as it would have been under the 1992 Stock Harvard plan

<sup>239</sup> Cambridge City Council Leisure Services, Parkside Pool Redevelopment Bulletin, No 1. Aug 1997.

<sup>240</sup> CEN 6 March 1999.



**Figure 58** – Contested land adjacent to Mortimer Road in 2016 as open space

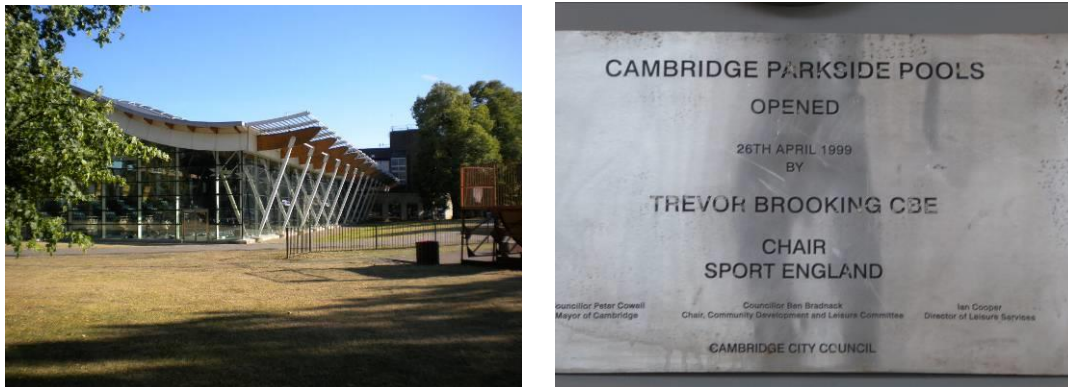


**Figure 59** – 1992 plan for the north side of Mortimer Road (S & P Ltd, for Stock Harvard)



**Figure 60** – Land adjacent to Mortimer Road in 2016

#### 4. Donkey's Common. 1999–Present: Parkside Pool 2



**Figure 61** – Parkside Pool 2. (photo: Gwydirdemon)

The new pool was finally opened on 27 April 1999. The lottery had provided £7.4 million towards the cost, backed by £4 million from the City Council, making this a major project after years of austerity under Conservative governments.



**Figure 62** – The official hand-over of the pool by main contractors Wilmott Dixon Construction to Cambridge City Council. Left to Right: Councillor Graham Edwards (Conservative); Mike Carlow (architect); Councillor Amanda Taylor (LibDem); Councillor Hannah Reed (Labour). CEN 9 April 1999.<sup>241</sup>

Indicating some sort of closure on the often acrimonious political disputes of the past all three political parties were represented at the official handover. Labour councillor Hannah Reed, vice-chairman of the Community Development and Leisure Committee, celebrated the event as an achievement for the local Labour party, stating: 'It is a really excellent facility and it has been a high priority for the Labour group since 1992'. Liberal Democrat Amanda Taylor highlighted the much-contested closure of swimming facilities while the new pool was built, but joined in welcoming a new facility for local residents: 'We're delighted that, once again, Cambridge people will be able to enjoy swimming in the city centre'. Only long-

<sup>241</sup> CEN 9 April 1999.



standing Conservative Councillor Graham Edwards brought up the contentious but soon to be forgotten issue of cost, commenting that 'It has cost the taxpayers an awful lot more than originally anticipated', while apparently joining in taking credit for 'a wonderful new facility'.<sup>242</sup>

The new pool immediately proved popular with the swimming public. Designed by S & P architects who had originally been retained by Stock Harvard, the pool with its wavy roof line provided a visually attractive but not overwhelming gateway building to Mill Road. Among the striking features were the view from the pool across the grassed open space of Donkey's Common and Parker's Piece. This wall of glass filled the pool with natural light, and by enabling passers-by to see into the pool helped to integrate it into the common.



**Figure 633** – View from inside Parkside Pool 2 across the Common and Parker's Piece (2016)

Comments were favourable and memory of the heated arguments of the last decades receded. In a special Cambridge architectural competition in 2001, the Parkside Pools building was voted 'Building of the Century'.<sup>243</sup>

However there was criticism too. The *Cambridge Architecture Gazette* commented on the failure to build a larger pool:

Strange that a complex which is neither fish nor fowl, neither recreation pool nor true sports facility, should receive such uncritical reception. The Sportspark pool opening shortly at the University of East Anglia, Norwich (designed by Cambridge architects RH Partnership) has a divisible 50 meter dedicated sports pool. The University of Bath, like UEA, a quarter of the size of the combined Cambridge universities, likewise has a brand new dedicated 50 meter sports pool.

It must be truly amazing to anyone that does not know Cambridge, that heads were not put together with the Regional Sports Council, the National Lottery Fund, the local authorities and higher education centres, to provide shared facilities of excellence of the various sorts that clearly separated the venue of sporting and informal leisure activities, which, after all, are only related by the watery nature of their environment.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>242</sup> *CEN* 9 April 1999.

<sup>243</sup> David Urwin Architectural Awards, 2001.

<sup>244</sup> *Cambridge Architecture Gazette*, No 44, produced by the Cambridge Association of Architects, the local chapter of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Inside the same issue of the *Gazette* Carl Rowland considered that 'Internally, the rhythm of the splayed columns and glulam beams add dynamism to the structure [...] and the restrained colours produce a calm interior that it is pleasant to be in'.

Equally impressive was the fact that 'after sunset the interior lighting creates an exciting effect from inside and outside and is one of the most pleasing aspects of the new building'. He also liked the landscaping outside the pool, and the restored diagonal path: 'A low key landscaping scheme preserves most of the mature trees and introduces a diagonal footpath which conveniently cuts the corner of Mill Road and Gonville Place'.

Nevertheless Rowland was ultimately critical of the pool as a civic building:

Overall the new Parkside Pool is an improvement on the old facility. However, the indifferent quality of previous modern public buildings around Parker's Piece, and given the considerable injection of Lottery funding, leads one to think perhaps more might be expected of a new civic building when seen against the standards set by the fine range of contemporary buildings of the University of Cambridge and its colleges.

But others felt differently, praising the City Council for the pool: 'The wavy roof is wonderful and hopefully it will age well. It's unusual for the city government to have enough vision to construct such a building'.<sup>245</sup> It is a view that most residents have endorsed and few have said that they would have preferred to see the old pool still standing on Donkey's Common.



**Figure 644** – Betty Rea's 'Swimmers' statue repositioned in shrubs to left of pathway (cf. Figure 49)

The once controversial statue of the naked 'Swimmers' was landscaped after the 1999 rebuilding. The sculptress Betty Rea (1904–65) was involved in international socialism and was passionate about the welfare of children. For many years she taught sculpture at Homerton College, Cambridge, and her work can be found in many local education authority buildings, teacher training colleges and in Homerton College itself. Her archive is held at the Henry Moore Institute.

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.cambridge2000.com/cambridge2000/index.html>.



**Figure 655** – Betty Rea's 'Swimmers' statue in its new position

## Conclusion

The new pool was shaped by the search for funds, by what was possible within what was always going to be a limited budget, and by the need to resolve the perceived conflict between the needs of 'competitive' swimmers and 'leisure' swimmers. Hovering over this were the fraught local and national party politics of the 1980s and 1990s.

The constraints imposed by central government were seen by Cambridge's ruling Labour Councillors as inflexible and dogmatic, and by the Conservatives as fundamental to sound government. Locally the Liberal Democrats raised their profile as the main opposition to Labour by focusing on whether a new pool was actually needed, and constantly questioned the costs and consequences of the original proposals that had involved paying for the new pool by building houses, nightclubs and hotels on what was left of the open space on Donkey's Common. How much this benefited either party is difficult to evaluate, but the following decade saw a fundamental change in the local political landscape, with the Conservatives losing all their city council seats, and Labour being superseded by the LibDems as the majority party. But despite this loss of power, Labour's long battle to provide the City with a new swimming facility was a major achievement.

This often tortuous and repetitive political debate provided the background to the prolonged negotiations by the City Council with developers Stock Harvard. All these were made irrelevant by the successful bid for funding from the National Lottery Sports Fund. If this had not succeeded Donkey's Common could have looked very different.





**Figure 666** – City Coat of Arms inside entrance to Parkside Pool

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## 5. The Leading Figures: Parkside Pool 1984–99

City Council officers Ian Cooper and Peter Studdert took much credit for the new pool, although it had taken intervention from Lord St John and the government Inspector to persuade Studdert to withdraw his approval for the earlier scheme that had included a night-club and hotels.













Ray Catchpole of Stock Harvard was among those most disappointed by the result. Others whose names headlined during the debate prospered. Richard Smith, who had first publicly suggested a new leisure pool, became Mayor of Cambridge in 1999. Barry Gardiner also became Mayor, before building on his local government experience to be elected MP for Brent North in 1997 when after eighteen years a Labour government replaced the Conservatives.






Despite successfully leading Cambridge City Council, Mark Todd had unexpectedly lost the Labour nomination to contest the constituency in 1992, but also went into national politics as MP for South Derbyshire in 1997. Simon Sedgwick-Jell was leader of Cambridge City Council from 1990 to 1994, and remained prominent on the Cambridge political scene until his death in 2014, sceptical of both Conservative and Labour governments, and later winning a seat as a Green County Councillor.

After years of hard campaigning, the Liberal Democrats had replaced the Conservatives as the opposition to Labour, and they took control of Cambridge City Council for the first time in 2000 under David Howarth.

The Liberal Democrat surge led to Howarth winning the constituency seat from Anne Campbell in 2005, although he surprisingly stood down in 2010 and returned to his career as a Cambridge University academic. Ian Nimmo-Smith succeeded Howarth as Liberal Democrat leader of the City Council, and on his retirement in 2011 became Mayor.

In 2016 both John Hipkin and Frank Gawthrop remain actively involved in local politics, both using their experience to focus on the planning issues that they see as central to the City's future. Hipkin had spells as Labour and as Liberal Democrat Councillor and Mayor, before successfully standing as an independent councillor in 2008. Gawthrop left the Council but has remained actively involved with his local residents' association in Petersfield.

 Facebook.2016	<b>Kathy Bowden:</b> Chairman Parkside Pool Campaign Group	<b>Petersfield Liber- al Democrat Can- didate, Cam- bridge City Coun- cil: 1984 &amp; 1985. 1996- 2016: EFL teacher in Lithu- ania and The Czech Republic.</b>		<b>Ian Nimmo-Smith:</b> 1997. Liberal Demo- crat Councillor	<b>Cambridge City Councillor 1990– 2012. Liberal Democrat Leader Cambridge City Council 2003–10. Cambridge Mayor 2011.</b>
	<b>Ben Bradnack: La- bour Chairman Lei- sure. 1996 Commit- tee</b>	<b>Cambridge City Councillor: 1992– 2010. Leader Labour Group: 2004–06</b>		<b>John Popper: 1998. Chief Planning Of- ficer, Cambridge City Council</b>	
	<b>Anne Campbell: 1992 Labour MP for Cam- bridge</b>	<b>Labour Cambs County Councillor 1985–89. Labour MP Cambridge: 1992-2005</b>		<b>Simon Sedgwick-Jell:</b> 1999. Labour Leader, Cambridge City Council	<b>Labour City Coun- cilor: 1983–95. Labour Leader Cambridge City Council: 1990–94. Green Cambs County Councillor 2009–13. Death: 2014</b>
	<b>Ray Catchpole: 1992. Director Stock Har- vard</b>			<b>Kevin Southernwood:</b> 1985. Labour Leader, Cambridge City Council	<b>Cambridge City Councillor: 1991– 99. Labour Leader Cambridge City Council: 1994–99</b>
	<b>Ian Cooper: 1996. Director of Leisure, Cambridge City Council</b>	<b>Director of Lei- sure Cambridge City Council 1992–99. Programme Manager World Leisure Organisa- tion: Awards 2007–16</b>		<b>Richard Smith: 1985. Labour Chairman, Amenities and Rec- reation Committee, Cambridge City Council</b>	<b>Cambridge City Councillor 1980– 2006. Cambridge Mayor 1999</b>
	<b>Graham Edwards:</b> 1995. Conservative Group Leader	<b>Cambridge City Councillor 1976– 2000. Leader Conservative Group Cambridge City Council</b>		<b>Lord St John of Faws- ley, Master of Em- manuel College, Chairman Royal Fine Art Commission</b>	<b>Master of Em- manuel College, Cambridge: 1991– 96. Chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission: 1985 –99. Death: 2012</b>
	<b>Barry Gardiner: 1991. Labour Chairman Leisure Committee Cambridge City Council</b>	<b>Cambridge City Councillor 1988– 94. Cambridge Mayor 1992. Labour MP Brent North 1997– (2016: still sitting MP)</b>		<b>Peter Studdert: 1992. Director of Planning, Cambridge City Council</b>	<b>1991–2004: Direc- tor of Planning, Cambridge City Council. 2007–2011: Direc- tor of Joint Plan- ning for Cam- bridge's Growth Areas</b>

	<b>Frank Gawthrop:</b> 1978. Labour Chairman, Property Panel, Cambridge City Council	<b>Labour City Councillor.</b> 1978–90. Secretary Glisson & Tenison Road Residents Association. 1992–present (2016)		<b>Mark Todd. 1987.</b> Labour leader, Cambridge City Council	<b>Labour City Councillor:</b> 1980–92. Leader Cambridge City Council 1987–90. Labour MP South Derbyshire 1997–2010
	<b>John Hipkin. 1999.</b> Liberal Democrat Councillor	<b>Labour Cambs County Councillor:</b> 1979–81. Liberal Democrat City Councillor 1992–2008. Cambridge Mayor: 2005. Independent City Councillor 2008–16 (remains Councillor). Independent Cambs County Councillor 2013–16 (remains Councillor)		<b>Margaret Thatcher</b> launching 'Clean Nineties' campaign prior to election	<b>Conservative Prime Minister</b> 1979–90. The swimming pool debate was framed by the politics and policies of the Conservative government
	<b>David Howarth:</b> 1991. Leader, Liberal Democrat Group, Cambridge City Council	<b>Cambridge City Councillor</b> 1987–2004. Liberal Democrat Leader Cambridge City Council 2000–03. Liberal Democrat MP Cambridge 2005–10, 2015: Professor of Law and Public Policy, Cambridge University		<b>The Sports Lottery Funding Team</b>	<b>The decision by the Sports Lottery Funding team to give Cambridge City Council its largest grant to date was central to the City Council's ability to build the new pool.</b>

## 6. The Skateboard Park

The use of this land for formal skating activities is entirely in accordance with the objectives of the Local Plan and PPG17, which recognise that skating is an important recreational activity for young people.

Demand for skateboard facilities echoed the demand for roller-skating facilities in previous generations. The belief that provision should be made by the Local Authority stemmed in part from an acknowledgement that they had a duty to provide recreational facilities for teenagers, and in part from the recognition that the provision of facilities was likely to reduce what was often seen as anti-social behaviour by skateboard users meeting on the streets.

Proposals for a skateboard park on Donkey's Common were first considered by the City Council in December 2002.<sup>246</sup> The Report to the Planning Committee by City Council officer Philippa Eve stated that the land was 'of important recreational value' and recognised that the common was already being used by skateboarders:

The proposed location of the skate-park is on land recognised by the Cambridge Local Plan as of important recreational value. Policy RL2 of the Local Plan supports the use of such spaces for formal and informal activities, and encourages the local authority to improve access for people to a wide range of recreational and sporting activities.

I am satisfied that the use of this land for formal skating activities is entirely in accordance with the objectives of the Local Plan and PPG17, which recognise that skating is an important recreational activity for young people. Whilst the applicant has acknowledged that no academic study has been made into the exact needs of skateboarding in Cambridge, there is clearly a demand for the facility, as Donkey Common is already a popular unofficial skateboard area.

The report also tried to answer earlier critics who saw this as the continued erosion of open space and felt that it would obstruct views of the swimming pool building:

The proposed facility will occupy a prominent position, particularly when viewed from the south down East Road. Views of the skate-park will also be possible from Parkers Piece and the Gonville Place/Hills Road junction. Following discussion with the Councils Conservation and Design Manager, I am of the opinion that the facility will not erode the setting of the swimming pool building, which is acknowledged as one of the best modern buildings in the City. I am also satisfied that the skate-park will not have a detrimental impact on the quality of the surrounding Central Conservation Area.

The skateboard park was given temporary planning permission in January 2003. Despite continued criticism that it was 'obstrusive and an eyesore', this was extended in 2006:

The skateboarding facility, whilst located in a prominent position, has a negligible impact on its surroundings. I do not consider that its colour has to necessarily blend in with the surroundings and neither do I consider that as a relatively small structure, it detracts from the setting of the swimming pool or character or appearance of the Conservation Area.<sup>247</sup>

Not everyone agreed with this conclusion, but the skateboard park was confirmed as a presence on Donkey's Common. Unknown when the Common was first established, skateboards were an accepted part of many teenagers' rites of passage by the early 21st century.

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<sup>246</sup> Cambridge City Council Planning Committee, 4 Dec 2002.

<sup>247</sup> Cambridge City Council Planning Committee, 4 Jan 2006. Report by City Council officer Toby Williams.





**Figure 677** – Skateboard Park: Donkey's Common (2016)

## 7. Donkey's Common: The Future



**Figure 688** – Donkey's Common in 2016: the remaining green space

The parish of Barnwell was transformed by the enclosure of its open fields. The original 'Second Allotment' of 1811 provided 'Common Pasture' for named individuals on the land that formed a boundary between the town and the new landscape created by the Inclosure Commissioners. Today although the 'Second Allotment' is lost to sight under the 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings recorded in this report its footprint can still be clearly seen on the map.

A fragment of space, open to all, remains at 'Donkey's Common'. This too was nearly lost during the debate about how to fund a new swimming pool in the 1990s. The words used change but the case made then for building over the whole common and the arguments against had been made before and are likely to be made in the future.

The arguments to build on the common repeatedly stress the need for a site for the municipal infrastructure of a growing town, and have included calls for a cemetery, a cattle market, a railway station, or a swimming pool. Alternatively the common could have been lost to new houses built to help provide much need revenue for the Council, a suggestion that surfaced in 1859, 1870 and again in the 1990s.

In the 20th century the case to build on the common turned on its relationship to Parker's Piece. In 1955 the City Council saw the erection of a swimming pool near to a new police and fire station at Parkside as part of a modern civic centre for the city.<sup>248</sup> A contrary view was expressed in 1992 by Stock Harvard who dismissed these civic buildings and justified their planning application to surround their new pool with a tall hotel and night club on the grounds that they mirrored the buildings opposite, Park Terrace and The University Arms Hotel:

The general impression of the built environment is that of horizontal emphasis because of the sheer length of each side of the square. We believe that the best proportions for these buildings is one of verticality, again the best examples being the terraces of Park Terrace.<sup>249</sup>

Some of the arguments against building on the common have also been based on its proximity to Parker's Piece. In 1841 opponents to locating a cemetery on the common felt this

<sup>248</sup> 28 March 1955, Cambridge Commons and Cemetery Committee. Mitchell (1984), p. 55.

<sup>249</sup> Cambridge City Council, Development Control. Ref C/0631/62.

was unseemly because those 'carrying their departed friends to their final home' would have to pass a 'place where all sorts of games and gaiety were in progress'.<sup>250</sup> Others stressed the impact of any new building on the view across Parker's Piece, culminating in the damning comments by The Royal Fine Art Commission and its chairman Lord St John of Fawsley in 1992 when they said that a proposed new leisure centre was 'of unredeemed vulgarity and totally out of place on Parker's Piece'.<sup>251</sup>

But the common was also valued in its own right as a public open space, and not just a common for grazing cattle. This was already being stressed in 1860 when an opponent of the proposal to use it as the site for a new Cattle Market said: 'The blocking up and enclosure of a piece of ground now devoted to the health and recreation of inhabitants would be an exceedingly unpopular proceeding'.<sup>252</sup> Shortly afterwards, contesting the proposal to build a railway across the common, it was claimed that the commons were 'to be the lungs of the town', a phrase that has been repeatedly used ever since.<sup>253</sup>

By the late 19th century local politicians were going further, calling for the 'beautification' of the commons and reminding voters that 'Cambridge had very few pleasant walks of its own independent of the colleges'.<sup>254</sup> Supported by national legislation and Council policies this was the view that held sway from 1880s until the army huts were erected in 1942 and the subsequent building of the swimming pool in 1963. But despite occupying a large part of the site the swimming pool remained surrounded by trees and grass, and in rejecting the swimming pool plans in 1995 a government inspector from the Department of Environment stated that these were important: 'the open character of the site, enhanced by the trees, is a valuable asset to the character and quality of the environment'.<sup>255</sup>

The Inspectors views were echoed by the City Council's Director of Planning, Peter Studdert, in recommending the rejection of Stock Harvard's plans when he recognised :

the visual continuity, to the sense of space provided by the open grassed areas alongside and in front of Parkside Pool and the importance to the street scene of the soft landscape and trees rather than hard, busy vehicle turning and access areas.<sup>256</sup>

The debate about building a skateboard park on the remains of the common in 2002 repeated many of these older arguments, with the local authority's case that it had a duty to provide recreational facilities and that the skateboard park would have a negligible impact on the surroundings over-riding objections that this was not a suitable place for the facility. The debate also highlighted the failure of Cambridge City Council to provide new open spaces as the population of the inner city continues to grow. In doing so it was also a reminder of how much Cambridge and especially Mill Road benefits from the plans of the 19th century enclosure commissioners.

These arguments about the fate of the land once known as 'The Second Allotment' are unlikely to end. In 2012 the proposal for a 'civic quarter' around Parker's Piece was revived by architect Kieran Perkins, who called for the front of the car park and Kelsey Kerridge Sports

<sup>250</sup> CIP 29 May 1841.

<sup>251</sup> Letter to Peter Studdert, Director of Planning, Cambridge City Council, from Lord St John of Fawsley, Chairman, Royal Fine Art Commission, 13 Aug 1992.

<sup>252</sup> CIP 4 Feb 1860.

<sup>253</sup> CIP 14 Nov 1863.

<sup>254</sup> CIP 28 Oct 1882; CIP 28 May 1881.

<sup>255</sup> CEN 12 Dec 1995.

<sup>256</sup> Cambridge City Council, Report to Planning Sub-Committee, 31 Jan 1996. Parkside Pool site. Ref C/0733/94. Author: Director of Planning.



Centre to be remodelled as a 'civic terrace' in the manner of the Pompidou Centre in Paris. Perkins stated:

The process of (finally) urbanising the fringes of Parker's Piece, which can be seen in the residential schemes planned and underway, should be taken up in the civic sphere – with the creation of a confident and very public city terrace addressing the city's most central public space.<sup>257</sup>

In 1968 planning permission for the site had made a token gesture towards the green surroundings by insisting that the front of the car park should have a landscaping scheme 'to help assimilate the development into its surroundings'.<sup>258</sup> This is uninspired, but still survives. It could be improved to match the original aspiration of the planners. Or it could, one day, be 'urbanised'. The language to support either has been recorded over the last 170 years. But if there is any lesson from the past it is that any concession, however worthy, to those wanting to build on an open space only gives momentum to yet further encroachments.



<sup>257</sup> 'Future vision for Queen Anne Terrace'. Image: Kieran Perkins, Architect, 5th Studio. *Cambridge Architecture* (Summer 2012).

<sup>258</sup> Mitchell (1985), p. 59.

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## Sources for Further Research of the Town Gaol

A limited number of sources relating to the buildings, reports on conditions, and accounts can be found among the Borough archives at Cambridgeshire Archives including a gaol delivery of 1503 [PBX/27] the deed and contract for the new gaol, 1828-9 and the gaol sessions (mainly reports of the gaoler and chaplain) which can be found in the Borough Petty Sessions minutes, 1844-78.

The accounts of John Payne, gaoler 1821-39 also survive [R96/19] and there are illustrations of the third gaol [R58/5/7 p.292, X20/107]. Registers of prisoners cover a limited period only; receiving book, male and female, August-September [1271/5/1]; register of prisoners, male and female, 1850-1859 [1271/5/2].

Prisoners are listed by name in the 1841 census [HO.107/85/24] and 1851 [HO107/1760/78b]. Initials only appear in the 1861 census [RG9/1024/68a] and 1871 [RG10/1857/29a]

From: Victorian Crime and Punishment.

<http://vcp.e2bn.org/justice/page11587-a-history-of-cambridge-county-gaol-1802-1829.html>

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