



Romsey Recreation Ground: A Brief History: 1898-2017

Also known as Romsey Rec or Vinery Park

Allan Brigham (2017)



Romsey Recreation Ground Today (Google Earth 2015).

The original fields that were purchased to create the park are still clearly visible:

1. Plot 17 (Purchased 1913): Marked 'Romsey Recreation Ground'.

The dark green square of grass between Vinery Rd & Hemingford Rd: Bordered by the footpath from Ross St to Vinery Rd; and the linking footpath to Hemingford Road.

2. Plot 18 (Purchased 1913):

The lighter green square of grass: Bordered by the garden of 129 Hemingford Rd; the footpath leading to Hemingford Road; and the Ross Street to Vinery Road footpath.

Site of former Bowling Green; 2017: 'Toddlers Play Area'.

3. The small square of light green grass between Plot 18 and Ross St (Added 1914-1960s?):

Today with seats. Footpath to Ross St added c.1913-1915; remainder probably added after Children's Home demolished.

1913 map shows this as 'Cambridge Corporation' property. Later site of 'Children's Home' (part of).

4. Former Allotments (Added to park late 1990s):

The dark green grass with trees: Between the footpath running from Ross St to Vinery Rd; the rear gardens of houses in Ross St, Vinery Park Estate; and Vinery Road.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Summary: Key Dates

1. *'The sun always shone on Romsey Road Rec!'*

2. History: The search for a site: 1898-1912

2.1 1898: People's Park on Coldhams Common

2.2 April 1912: Land in front of Romsey Council School (later Labour Club)

2.3 Nov 1912 -1914: The final search for a site and funding - Vinery Road

3. Creating the Recreation Ground:

4. The Park Grows:

4.1. Access from Ross St:

4.2. From Allotment Site to 'Natural' area:

4.3 'They've done a lovely job planting all these trees. It's like a piece of the countryside'. Shirley Bloxam (CEN.21.4.1997)

5. 2008: Park Review

6. The Future

7. Romsey Park Ground Today

8 Our Park: The best 'Community Centre'

Pictures:

9 Romsey Recreation Ground: People 2012-2016.

10 Romsey Recreation Ground: Spring in the Woods 2015-2016:

11 Romsey Recreation Ground: Tall Trees 2016

Appendix: Lots 17 & 18. 1913: Site of Romsey Recreation Ground - *'The Fields That Nearly Became A 'Building Estate'*

Key

AB: Allan Brigham

CA: Cambridgeshire Archives

CIP: Cambridge Independent Press

CWN: Cambridge Weekly News

OS: Ordnance Survey

Note:

Section 1: Written for Hemingford Road Street Party in 2012.

Section 8: Written for Cambridge City Council 'Romsey Newsletter' in 2008

Acknowledgements: With many thanks to Mike Petty, Cambridge City Council (Deeds archive), the staff at The Cambridgeshire Collection and Cambridge Archives.

Introduction

'The children of Romsey town are on the whole healthy and strong at present, and we desire they, as well as their seniors, may have an opportunity of breathing fresh air on this open space':

The Romsey Town Open Space and Citizens Public Welfare Committee.
Cambridge Weekly News: 26.4.1912

The English dream is to live in a spacious house in a rural community, surrounded by vistas of rolling green countryside.

In the mid 20th century the affordability of cars and fuel enabled urban dwellers to make this dream a reality by moving out of the cities to the new estates being built on the edge of many villages. But while families scattered to the countryside, jobs and shops remained stubbornly located in the nearest large urban area. The result has been queues of frustrated commuters driving in and out of nearby cities each day.

Cambridge offers an alternative to this, with beautiful buildings, plentiful parks, and cows grazing just five minutes away from King's Parade. The green open spaces in the central area help to define the City and to make Cambridge a desirable place to live.

Romsey Recreation Ground is not in the same league as Parker's Piece, Jesus Green, Lammas Land or Christ's Pieces. We only discovered it because we were house hunting, with a dog who needed daily exercise. We didn't own a car so walkability on gloomy winter days to an open space was important.

We had been used to Coleridge Rec, a huge park with tennis courts, children's play area, paddling pool, football areas and a bowling green. We took this for granted and assumed there would be similar parks in every residential area. So it was a shock to discover this was not true and that many areas, like the Rock Estate off Cherry Hinton Road or the McManus Estate off Huntingdon Road, had been built without anything similar to Coleridge.

Despite living in Romsey for seven years we had rarely strayed across Mill Road from our home in Cockburn Street and finding the Recreation Ground at the bottom of Hemingford Road was a surprise. The surrounding streets were added to our house-hunting areas and after a traumatic two years bidding and been outbid, we were lucky to be successful and walks around the park became part of our daily routine.

At first glance 'The Rec' looked nothing special, a small municipal park with a formal Bowling Green, a few swings and a large area for football or for dogs to run around on. But over the last 30 years it has become a central part of our lives, more so since I retired. The park has grown with the addition of the former allotments in the late 1990s, and now has an informally landscaped 'wild area' where sparrow hawks nested this year. The Bowling Green has gone but the children's play area is much improved. One of the key attractions of the park is that it is on the route to and from St Philips Primary School. Families can walk safely to school, with parents and children chatting to each other, and on the return journey many often stay to play and to talk until early evening. Without noticing quite when it happened

we have got to know other regular users who live in the area, to whom we nod, discuss the weather, and sometimes the state of the world. Having a dog means walking, not being locked in a car, and connecting with others you meet. One of the joys of Romsey Rec is that it is very much a neighbourhood park, with regular users and a feeling of safety.

It is easy to assume that there was something inevitable about Romsey having a park, and to this park being sited where it is. This is not a full 'History'. But I hope it starts to chronicle how alternative sites were considered and how any of those would have shaped Romsey very differently - whether a tree lined avenue leading to Coldhams Common, or a park on Mill Road where the Labour Club stands today.

It also records how the park only exists because of a few people who fought for it to happen, involving fourteen years persistent lobbying by Councillors and community activists. Central to realising their dreams was not just political will by local Councillors to enhance conditions in Romsey Town, but national government legislation that recognised the importance of open spaces for what is today called 'Health & Wellbeing' and provided funding to facilitate this.

Unfortunately this recognition came with what a Historic England Report in 2016 described as a 'lack of local authority statutory protection that has resulted in over 170 years of economic vulnerability', with a 'lack any long-term financial and political commitment to public park provision'¹. Whether the present generations recognise this and have the will to change it is beyond the scope of this 'History'.

What is recorded is how a very ordinary 'Recreation Ground' has been enjoyed and evolved over 100 years. I hope that in recording this success there is a reminder of what a difference the absence of this park - it was never a certainty - would have made to the lives of many local residents.

If Cambridge is going to continue to attract those who dream of living in the countryside it needs to replicate the success of Romsey Recreation Ground in the new early 21st century housing estates. And as housing densities rise within the city it is important to create new open spaces on, or close to, these sites rather than intensify usage of existing parks to the extent where their success is damaged.

Allan Brigham: 2017

¹ History of Public Park Funding and Management, (1820–2010). Katy Layton-Jones. Historic England 2016

Summary: Key Dates

1. 1898: First calls for a park by Councillors Negus and Ward.

Edwin Bays suggests a 'People's Park; on Coldhams Common approached by an avenue of 'stately trees' extending from Catharine St to the banks of Coldhams Brook

2. 1899: Town Council states a public park in Romsey is too expensive.

3. 1912 April: Petition to Town Council requesting park on Mill Road in front of Romsey Council School (2017: site of Labour club) rejected.

4. 1912 November: Town Council agrees to buy 5 acres of land ' having a main entrance from Vinery Road, and also an entrance from Hemingford Road'.

This followed sustained lobbying from 'The Romsey Town Open Space and Citizens Public Welfare Committee' led by two local ministers, Charles Howard (Church of England) and Gordon Mee (Methodist).

5. 1913 April: Local Government Inquiry re funding.

Inspector Edgar Dudley heard the Town Council's request for a loan of £1,875 to buy and lay out 5.5 acres of land at a cost of £375 per acre (CIP: 25.4.1913).

6. 1913 July: Hemingford Road field purchased - 1 acre

7. 1913 November: Vinery Road field purchased - 4 acres 1 Rood 5 Pole

8. 1914 March: Town Council agrees to spend £500 laying out Recreation Ground with shrubs, trees, gymnastic equipment, fencing.

9. 1914 (late) or 1915: Park opens

10. 1914 (late) or 1915: Ross Street entrance added to park.

Part of this land probably acquired from Cambridge Corporation when Ross Street Children's Home (now site of 'Cromarty Place') was built on part of their land. Extended to present size, probably when Children's Home demolished.

11. 1934: Triangle of land between the footpath from Ross Street to Vinery Rd, Ross Street council houses, and allotments.

Probably added when Council houses were built.

12. 1940 March: Adjoining field bought by Council for allotments. Part of war effort.

13. 1990s (late): Allotment site transferred to Romsey Recreation Ground.

14. 1990s (late): City Council Consultation on future of Romsey Recreation Ground.

Requested and funded:

- **An enclosed, defined area for small children.** Former Bowling Green, with existing secure fencing, transformed into young children's play area.
- **Separate facilities for the older children.** Additional games opportunities for were also installed on Coldhams Common
- **To keep a decent open play space** - for football and lots of running about.
- **A strong preference for a quiet, peaceful green space.** It was agreed to let the allotment site develop as a wild, wooded area. 'Green Screen' along boundary created to restore screen cut down to build Vinery Park estate in Vinery Road.

15. 2009: City Council Consultation re how to spend 'Developers Contributions' (Section 106).

Decided:

- Not to fully enclose hard surface area - would be a visual barrier
- To enhance 'wild' area; not a suitable site for equipment apart from existing swings

Requested and funded:

- **Improvements to young children's play area** ('Toddlers Area', former bowling Green)
- **New play equipment on bark; adjoining the hard surface area used for basket ball**
- **Improvements to Ross Street Entrance.**
- **Secure fencing along Vinery Road boundary**
- **Improved toilets**

Consultant's Conclusion

'We believe that the present structure of the park, with different areas allowing different activities, offers a diverse range of opportunities and should remain'



1. *'The sun always shone on Romsey Road Rec!'*

Jean Turner



The 'Rec' defines Hemingford Road. Other streets in Romsey stretch on indefinitely. Hemingford Road ends with the green privet hedges, glimpses of tree tops, and the open gate that leads into another world. An oasis of greenery.

Hemingford Road residents past and present all comment on the Rec.

Jean Turner(No 18) remembers playing tennis on the now lost tennis courts in the 1930s:

'And the Custodian was a Mr. Prior, a very forbidding man. And woe betide you if you trod on his garden to retrieve a ball! The garden, with flowers, was all round the Rec'. (AB Interview)

Margaret Squires also recalls the 1930s, wistfully watching others play on the tennis courts from her bedroom window at No 119:

'Sometimes of an evening, maybe on a Saturday, after we'd gone to bed, my brother and I, we'd stand in the window, because there was the two tennis courts there, lovely tennis courts, the hard one and a grass one, and there was always people playing tennis, and there were all the children out there. But of course we always had to be in bed! (AB Interview)



Romsey Rec: Tennis - 1930s. Jean Turner (nee Holder) left

Eighty years later residents are just as enthusiastic. Soo Martin, next to the Rec, says:

' I love the green space that surrounds our house on three sides. It's like living in the country but with all the benefits of being in a vibrant part of the town'.

I love the peaceful nights followed by the bird song in the morning and the sound of the kids playing in the park next door. There is a wonderful variety of trees all around us and I enjoy the local nature walks. The views from the upstairs window over the park are stunning especially at sunrise.'

(AB Interview)



2. History

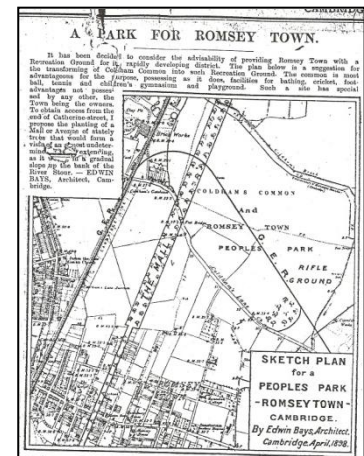
1.1 The Search for a site: 1898-1912

The 'Rec' that we all take for granted today only exists because others fought long and persistently for a public open space in Romsey Town. It could easily have been covered with houses, just as the surrounding area was to be.

2.2 1898: People's Park on Coldhams Common

In 1898 Romsey Councillor Mr Negus called for possible sites to be examined *'before the land was all cut up into small plots, a little kindness and consideration to Romsey would tend to do away with any friction which might have existed in the past'* (CIP: 18.3.1898).

He was supported by Councillor Ward, who added there was full justification to refer the matter to the Council Commons Committee when *'they saw the swarms of children turned out there, and with no playground except in the dangerous streets'*.



People's Park: 14.4.1898

Cambridge Daily News

The architect Edwin Bays went so far as to produce a plan for a 'Peoples Park' on Coldhams Common, with an *'avenue of stately tees'* extending from Catherine Street to the banks of Coldhams Brook. Unfortunately the following year the Commons Committee rejected Councillor Negus's proposal, deciding that providing a park in Romsey would be too expensive and that: *'In view of the nearness of Coldhams Common that there should be no further action taken'*. Councillor Negus was reported to be *'indignant that such a thickly populated locality should not be better considered'* (CIP: 1.7.1899).

2.3 April 1912: Land in front of Romsey Council School (later Labour Club)

Fourteen years later in April 1912 Romsey was still being ignored and the number of children with nowhere to play was increasing. Prompted by the reminder *'that within recent months some Romsey Town children had been in the Children's Court charged by the police with playing in Ross St or St Philip's Road to the annoyance of the householders, though there was no public playground within reasonable distance'* a public meeting was convened by the Vicar of St Philips Charles Howard and the Wesleyan (Methodist) Minister Gordon Mee. Paying tribute to Councillor Negus's efforts over many years, they resolved to petition the Town Council to take advantage of the proposed sale of land between Romsey Council School and Mill Road to secure the site *'as a recreation ground for the neighbourhood'* (CIP: 26.4.1912):

'Owing to extensive building operations the present opportunity seems one of the last chances of securing an open space, we therefore beg your consideration. The distance from Parker's Piece prevents many from enjoying the benefits of the town side, and the extensions of the Cement Works has made the countryside more distant from the inhabitants'

The children of Romsey town are on the whole healthy and strong at present, and we desire they, as well as their seniors, may have an opportunity of breathing fresh air on this open space' . (CWN: 26.4.1912)

1,081 Romsey residents signed the Memorial to the Town Council, claiming *that 'They contributed to the upkeep of other open spaces and felt it was their turn to have one. It was too far for the young children and old folk to go to Parker's Piece' (CWN: 17.5.1912)*. Like the earlier hopes for a 'People's Park' on Coldhams Common, their wishes came to nothing. But neither the obvious local need, nor lobbying by residents, went away. In the meantime the proposed site was fenced off by the owners to stop any of the children playing there, and part of this site was eventually acquired in 1921 for Romsey Town Labour Club.



Figure 1 - Land in front of Romsey Council School: 'Original Plot of land' in "The Cambridge Romsey Labour Club and Hall Ltd Silver Jubilee 1924-1949". E. Linsey, Cambs Collection: C.33.9.

Romsey Recreation Ground could have been built on the site in front of Romsey Council School. This later became the site of Romsey Labour Club. Would this position on Mill Road have been better or worse than the Vinery Road site ?

2.4 Nov 1912 -1914: The final search for a site - Vinery Road

The two local ministers, Charles Howard and Gordon Mee, continued to campaign for a Recreation Ground as leaders of the 'The Romsey Town Open Space and Citizens Public Welfare Committee'. Under mounting popular pressure in November 1912 the Town Council at last proposed to buy two fields in Vinery Road (CIP: 4.11.1912).

'After hearing the views of these gentlemen, the Sub-Committee suggested to the Committee that if a recreation ground was to be provided steps should be taken to acquire about five acres of land, having a main entrance from Vinery Road, and also an entrance from Hemingford Road.

The Committee adopted the suggestion of the Sub Committee, and ascertained that if the land was to be used as a recreation ground the owner would be willing to accept £1,875 for it.' (CIP: 8.11.1912)

The following year a Local Government Inspector, Edgar Dudley, heard the Town Council's request for a loan of £1,875 to buy and lay out 5.5 acres of land at a cost of £375 per acre (CIP: 25.4.1913).



Figure 2 - 1901 Ordnance Survey: Map showing extent of housing in Romsey.

Terraced houses or housing plots filled the streets running off Mill Road.

In 1913 the Council purchased plots No 5614 & 5613 for the use as a Recreation Ground.

These fields could have been filled with houses as were the surrounding streets.

CA: OS.LVD.Cambs XLVII.3.

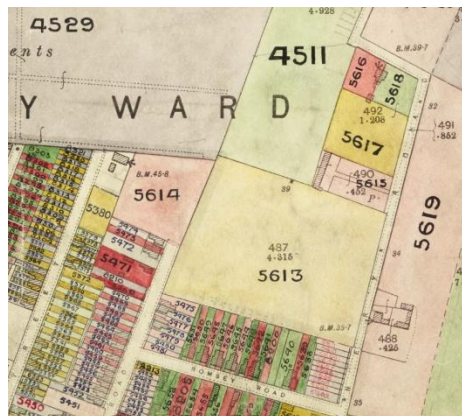


Figure 3 - 1901: Detail showing the fields No 5613 and 5614 purchased in 1913 by the Council for Romsey Town Recreation Ground. Access is from Hemingford Road and Vinery Road; there is no access from Ross Street. CA: OS.LVD.Cambs XLVII.3.

The Inspector was told that 35 years earlier there were very few houses in the area, but that now there were 8,000 inhabitants, including 1,360 children at the local schools. His first recorded response was to express surprise that this was such a 'modern district' as the narrow streets he had seen did not reflect the standards he would have expected: *'But one of the streets I saw was only 27 feet wide, and that is very narrow for a modern district'* (CIP: 25.4.1913).

The Inspector then asked where the nearest open space was. The Town Clerk replied that this was Coldhams Common, but that *'I don't think the Common can ever be in any sense a proper Recreation Ground'* as there was not only the hazard of cattle grazing on the common, but also two rifle ranges. The nearest Recreation Ground was Parker's Piece, which was 770 yards from the Ward boundary at Mill Road bridge.

The reasons submitted at the Inquiry for a Recreation Ground ranged from a need to reduce anti social behaviour to the welfare of the children. Councillor Negus highlighted the background of those living in the new area, stressing that many residents worked night shifts on the railway, as policemen or at the cement works, and were disturbed when trying to sleep during the day by children playing on the streets. The local Anglican minister, the Rev Howard, repeated these concerns, stating that 'one frequently had to beg the children to leave the neighbourhood', while adding that this was difficult as it was not safe for smaller children to walk to Parker's Piece on their own. He went on to add how important it was to have a healthy environment in which to bring up children:

'At present they looked rosy and well, like the country children and Romsey Town was proud of them. But he feared their health might fail if they gradually became hemmed in by houses' (CIP: 25.4.1913).

The proposed site was to be created from two existing fields, at present used for allotments and the local consensus was that: *'The big fields ought to be used as a cricket and football ground, and the other part as a nook for the older people'* (CIP: 25.4.1913).

The Inspector questioned whether £357 an acre was too much to pay for use as a Recreation Ground, but he was rebuffed by those who had recently bought land nearby. Mr P Gray, a land agent, said that in the last two years he had sold land in Vinery Road at £2 per foot, and that 'this road was coming in for building purposes' (CIP: 25.4.1913). Mr Negus agreed, saying that he had bought land 160ft deep at £2-10-0 per foot within five minutes walk of the proposed park (CIP: 25.4.1913).

Summing up for the residents Rev Gordon Mee reminded the Inspector that 'they had been wanting this recreation ground for 14 years', concluding with words that could be used again in the future when cost was used as an argument against providing open space in an ever more densely built up area:

'The fact that they were paying a high price for it seemed to him to be an argument for it rather than against it, for the land was bound to be rising in price as time went on' (CIP: 25.4.1913).

Asked whether he needed any further convincing as to the necessity for the Recreation Ground the Inspector replied 'No'. After a campaign that stretched back at least as far as 1898 the case was at last won. Councillor Negus had pursued the search for a site and for funding throughout these years. When he began Romsey was still a new development, with few houses more than eighteen years old. Since then the population of Romsey had increased dramatically, as fellow campaigner Rev Gordon Mee highlighted:

'There were over 960 children in the Church schools; and over 400 in the Council school, and the place was filled with children when the schools were closed. There were also so many perambulators that it had been suggested that adults should ride in them so as to be able to keep on the pavement' (CIP: 25.4.1913).



Figure 4 -1886: Romsey Town showing newly built houses. Ten years earlier this side of the railway tracks was open countryside.

Fields No 143 (part) & 145 became Romsey Recreation Ground 1914-1915. Ordnance Survey 1886



Figure 5 - St Philip's School. By 1913 there were 1,360 children in Romsey, but nowhere to play except on the streets. *'At present they looked rosy and well, like the country children, and Romsey Town was proud of them. But he feared their health might fail if they gradually became hemmed in by houses'*. Councillor Negus, CIP: 25.4.1913. Photo: Cambridgeshire Collection



Figure 6 - The late 1870s & 1880s saw a building boom in Romsey Town

3. Creating the Recreation Ground

When the Wesleyan Minister, Rev Mee, left Romsey in Aug 1913, the purchase was underway and the local newspaper recorded:

'The efforts he had made as Secretary of the Romsey Town Open Space and Citizens Public Welfare Committee had been greatly appreciated and they all rejoiced that now there was a certainty that a Recreation Ground would be secured by the Council, and that the play centres were in operation' (CIP: 22.8.1913).

The small, one acre Hemingford Road field (Lot 18) had already been purchased in July 1913; the larger field, 4 acres 1 Rood 5 Pole (Lot 17) was acquired in November 1913. Both were bought from the Rev Negus for the agreed ammount of the loan: £1,875 (Deeds; Cambridge City Council). Access to Ross Street was blocked at this time by land owned the Cambridge Board of Guardians (later the site of Ross Street Children's Home) and land already owned by Cambridge Corporation.

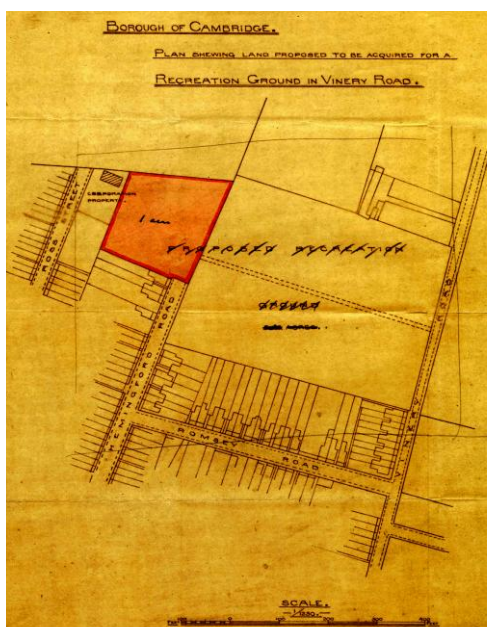


Figure 7 - Plot 18: Purchased by Council July 1913

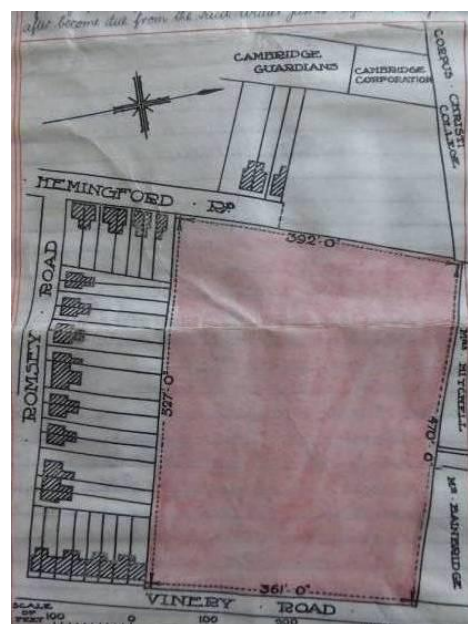


Figure 8 - Plot 17: Purchased by Council November 1913

Figure 7 & 8 - Deeds Romsey Recreation Ground, Cambridge City Council

In March 1914, as Great Britain unwittingly stumbled towards war , the Town Council agreed to spend £500 laying out the new Recreation Ground (CIP: 20.3.1914). Over the following months tenders were accepted for gymnastic apparatus, for fencing (£108 from MacKay), and for shrubs and trees. The park probably opened in late 1914 or early 1915 as by July 1915 the fences are having to be repaired to prevent access from the neighbouring allotments (CA. Commons Committee: 7.7.1915).



Figure 9 - Iron fencing was ordered from Mackay's in 1914. Posts stamped 'Mackay Ironmonger Cambridge' still mark the entrance to the park from Hemingford Road.

Mrs Amy Francis (nee Scarff) recalled the Recreation Ground being made:

'It was all long grass then, and my friend and I used to make secret houses by winding round the grass and then flattening it down in the middle. No-one could see us.

All the paths on the 'Rec' were made up of clinker and old bits of china.. We used to go round and see what pretty bits of china we could find'. Sara Payne. Down Your Street. Ross St. CWN 4.6.1981

The Council Committee reports reveal how the park slowly took shape during the following years. In 1915 it was agreed to place three seats on the Recreation ground, while in January 1916 the war touched Romsey when the Kent Cyclist Battalion was given permission to drill on the new park.

In 1918 a report that the Recreation Ground would close one hour after sunset was a reminder that the park was shut at night - railings allowing gates to be locked remained along Vinery Road until permission was given to remove them in Jan 1942 'in view of the urgent need for scrap metal' (CA. Commons Committee: 9.1.1942).

The need for rules and regulations, and a groundsman to enforce them, was repeated in 1919:

'A letter was read from Councillor Hill calling attention to the conduct of children on Romsey Recreation Ground. Agreed that the Borough Surveyor asked to make arrangements with the man who looks after the ground to be in attendance when children are there' .
CA. Commons Committee: 23.5.1919.

Employment of a groundsman on the Recreation Ground continued until the 1980s, when many older residents still fondly remembered 'Taffy', who looked after the bowling green. He also knew the names and addresses the children who played in the park, and would go round to see the parents of any who misbehaved.

4. The Park Grows:

4.1 Access from Ross Street

The original 1913 Deeds held by the City Council (Plot 18) show access to Ross Street blocked by a building and land marked 'Corporation Property'.

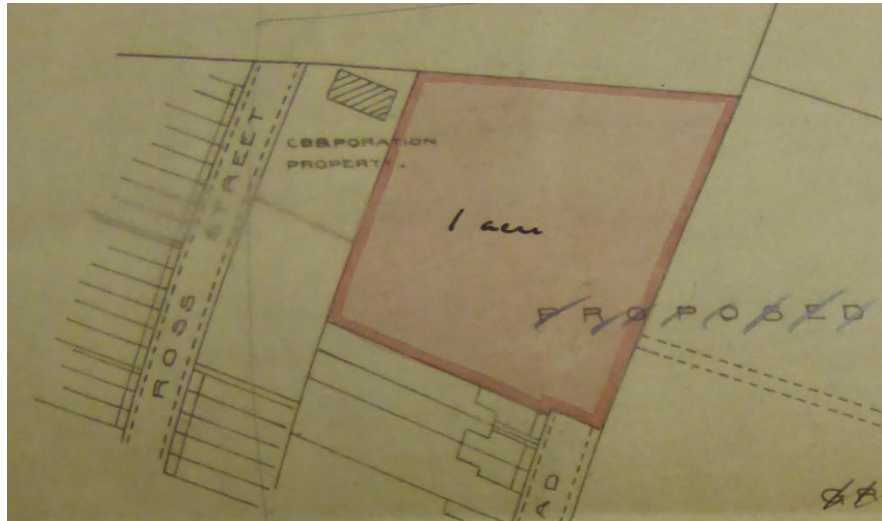


Figure 10 - 1913. Showing Plot 18, part of the original purchase. The access to Ross Street is blocked by the property shown as 'Corporation Property'.

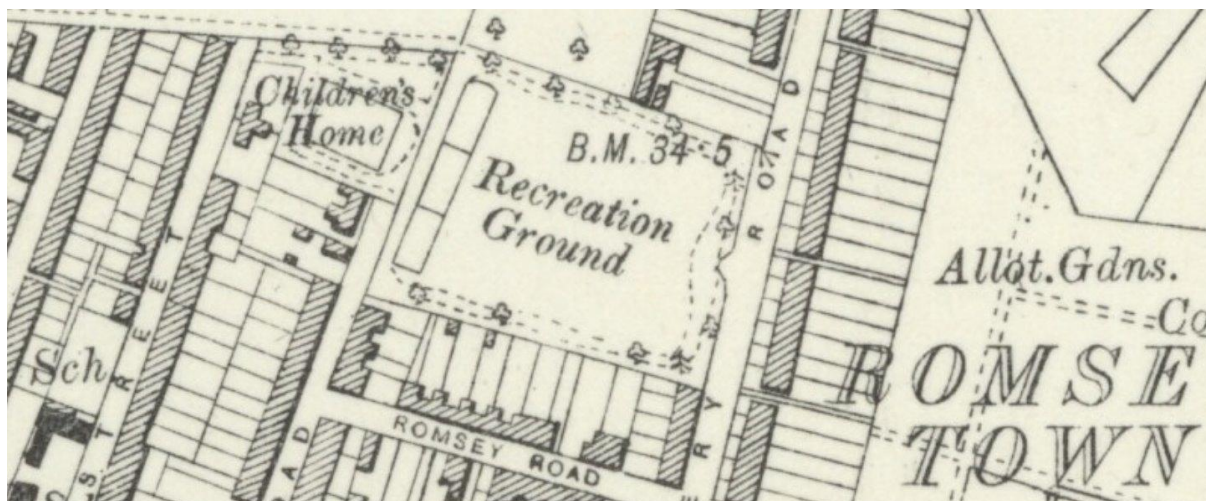


Figure 11 - Ordnance Survey 1927: Showing land acquired for Recreation Ground between 1913 and 1927, giving access from Ross Street. Date of acquisition unknown.

By 1927 the Ordnance Survey map (Fig 11) shows the park with the large field on Plot 17 (1913 Deeds) laid out as a central open space with paths and trees around the perimeter. What may already be the tennis courts remembered by Jean Turner and Margaret Squires in the 1930s are marked by the Hemingford Road entrance.

Plot 18 (1913 Deeds) shows a rectangular area that became the bowling green (2017: the Children's, or Toddlers, Play Area), with trees lining a footpath that leads to a entrance to the park from Ross Street. This entrance is on land shown as 'Corporation Property' on Plot

17 in the 1913 deeds. In the intervening years the building shown on this land in 1913 has been demolished and a 'Children's Home' has been built over the remainder of this and the adjoining plot. Plans for the 'Children's Home' for workhouse children were approved in May 1914, so the entrance from Ross Street was probably created shortly afterwards.

A year after the Ordnance Survey map was made the local paper recorded an incident that highlights the semi rural nature of the area despite much new building:

'The quietude and peace of Sunday evening on the Vinery Road Recreation Ground, Cambridge, was rudely broken when some half-dozen pigs from a neighbouring sty, having burrowed beneath the dividing fence, burst violently on to the ground.

At once they started to uproot flowers, dig holes in beds and generally make a nuisance of themselves. The custodian and several other men flung themselves on the invaders but the wily porkers were too much for them and a game of catch-as-catch-can over flowerbeds and paths, around clumps of perennials and bushes began. As if by magic half the juvenile population of Romsey Town began to drift on to the ground.

After half an hour's strenuous efforts the invaders were recaptured and restored to their proper place and peace again reigned over the trampled beds and broken bushes'.

7 Aug 1928 (Mike Petty Archive).

The pigs probably came from the allotments adjoining the park at what was then the end of Ross Street. One local resident, Mr Archer, kept 100 pigs there at one time (Sara Payne. Down Your Street, East Cambridge. Ross Street.4.7.1981). Later these became the site of Ross Street council houses (1934).

The Recreation Ground also provided a venue for community events. In 1926 during the general strike when many in Romsey were protesting about wage cuts The Cambridge Daily News reported:

'Several hundred people—railwaymen, their wives and friends—attended a meeting held on Romsey Town Recreation Ground on Tuesday afternoon. Several short speeches were made, the Railway Silver Prize Band played selections and a collection was taken for the strike funds'. (CDN: 4.5.1926)

4.2 Allotment Site:

A month after the outbreak of World War 2 the British government launched the 'Dig for Victory' campaign, encouraging everyone to grow their own vegetables in their gardens and on any spare plot of land. Probably prompted by this on 19 march 1940 Cambridge Borough Council bought the field adjoining Romsey Recreation Ground, and bordered by the gardens of Ross Street council houses and those of houses in Vinery Road, for local residents to use as allotments. The deeds show that the land was acquired from Florence Cornell of 127 Vinery Road, now the site of Vinery Park Estate (houses).

The deeds also show that the triangle of land between the field, the Ross Street Council houses and the path from Ross Street to Vinery Road was already part of the park. This probably occurred when the Council houses in Ross Street were built in 1934.

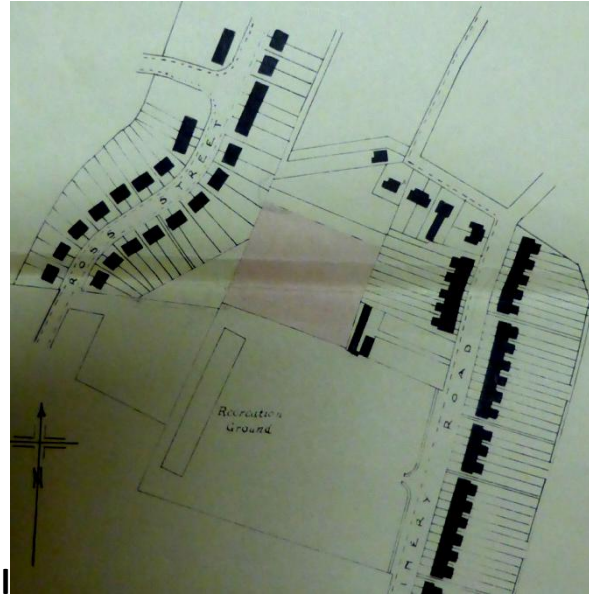


Figure 12 - March 1940. Land (pink) acquired for use as allotments (Deeds: Cambridge City Council)

4.3 Allotments become 'Wild Area':

'They've done a lovely job planting all these trees. It's like a piece of the countryside'.

Shirley Bloxam (CEN.21.4.1997)

By the 1990s the allotments were becoming disused, and the City Council was proposing that the site could be used for housing. However access was difficult, and eventually the City Council Community Development and Landscape Sections did a major options consultation looking at the whole park, involving many residents.

The Consultation was led by Chris Freeman, who recalled in 2017:

'The Consultation results indicated:

- People wanted to feel safer on the rec and lighting was the top priority – this was installed.
- An enclosed, defined area for small children was requested and separate facilities for the older kids – this was done too and additional games opportunities for the latter were installed on Coldhams Common.
- Keep a decent open play space – big enough for football and lots of running about at the heart of the site. Done too.
- Bowlers were unhappy to lose their green but were ultimately ok with the Coleridge Rec green being quite close. Some residents wanted us to keep the old bowling green pavilion and run it as a community facility. Not possible on £40,000 capital!



Figure 13 - Bert Fordsdyke:
President Romsey Bowls Club 1981.
(Picture: Down Your Street.
East Cambridge. Ross Street. 1984)



Figure 14 - The former Bowling Green, now Toddlers
Play Area (2012)

The City Council Consultation concluded:

'AND there was a strong preference for some quiet, peaceful green space so it was agreed to let the allotment site develop as a wild, wooded area'.

Chris added:

'Part way through the process I was visited by a developer with his plans to build houses all along the side. Couldn't stop Vinery Park Estate - and of course, people need homes - so in went those trees to make a green screen.

This area is an absolute gem now and it's very much appreciated by people who live in houses with small gardens and by families who can't get out to the countryside. We have a little copse and country walk right on our doorstep'.



Figure 15 - Cambridge Evening News 21.4.1997

Proposed housing in Vinery Road leads to Petition to maintain green backdrop to park. Shirley Bloxam of Ross Street and Allan Brigham of Romsey Road with local children. Green conifers that screened the park from housing visible in background. The Petition was successful.

Development Pressure resisted

'Anger Leads to Petition: Cambridge: Residents anxious to maintain Romsey Recreation Ground have presented a petition to city councillors objecting to plans for new homes in the area. They fear the proposed development next to the former allotment area in Vinery Road will destroy the green backdrop to the park.

Shirley Bloxam of Ross Street, who is Treasurer of Ross Street Community Action, said: 'I have lived in Romsey since I was four. The city council went to a lot of trouble asking residents how the area could be improved. They've done a lovely job planting all these trees. It's like a piece of the countryside. If they build these houses it will ruin all the scenery here'.

More than 70 residents have signed the petition and a public meeting on the issue has been organised at Romsey Mill at 7.45 on Wednesday.'

Cambridge Evening News:21.4.1997

Chris Freeman concluded:

'This overall structure for The Rec has made it a very popular venue and I'm not sure that it needs a lot of change?

It provides greenness and space and variety and opportunities to relax in a peaceful environment and opportunities to meet and play.

I've heard that there may be proposals to put some structures or art installations onto the wild area and would beg that this doesn't happen. There's already a large wall and net

structure at the entrance – is this one addition too many? It takes up a great deal of space, is fairly ugly and I've never seen anyone doing anything on it or with it'

Ten years after the landscaping that resulted from the 1990s Consultation a Report commissioned by the City Council in 2008/09 said of this areas:

'a small area of former allotments has been converted into a **natural space**. The area is tree lined, but there are informal paths into the tree areas; there is also a clump of shrubs and trees in the middle of this area. The result is a pleasant informal natural space for play or for quiet enjoyment of nature'.



Figure 16 - Late 1990s: The former allotments. New planting, with existing trees still screening park boundary



Figure 17 - Early 2000s: The former allotments. Maturing wooded area to replace tree screen cut down to build Vinery Park

The importance of this 'natural' space is highlighted again in the City Council's Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011), where 'Weaknesses' in Romsey are recorded as:

'The amount of informal open space in the ward is low given the local population density and the amount of natural and semi-natural green space is very low and is restricted to tree belts within Romsey Recreation Ground and Brooks Road'

By 2017 this area was being used for nesting by sparrow hawks, and for making dens, fulfilling the original aspiration to create a 'natural' corner to the park.



Figure 18 - 'Natural' wooded area 2017: Sparrow Hawks nesting and children's den

5. 2008: Park Review

The City Council commissioned a further review of the park in 2008 to identify how to spend recent financial contributions from nearby housing developments (known as 'Section 106' funding). The Consultant, Phil Back, was asked to:

- Explore current perceptions of the space on the part of local people and elected representatives
- Examine community priorities and social needs in relation to this space
- Explore residents' and stakeholders' ideas and reactions to suggested improvements to the site
- Use these to determine what section 106 resource might be deployed, and in what way, to improve the site to meet residents' and representatives' priorities.

The resulting Report describes the park in 2008:

Description of the site

Romsey Recreation Ground is a Victorian park located in the Romsey area of Cambridge, which despite its location near the city centre retains a strong community feel, emphasised by active local community associations and groups, a busy local high street, and strong community amenities and facilities, including schools, faith groups, and local services. The location of the site is shown here:

- The park sits in a largely residential area and provides much needed green space in a community that consists largely of terraced housing with small back yards rather than gardens. It serves not only as a recreation ground in its own right but also as a through route linking the streets on one side with those on the other.
- The site is flat and level with no ground landscaping. It is bordered by a road to the east side, with houses, a hotel and a school all facing the park. On the other three sides it is bordered by houses and gardens, mostly with some tree screening, although there are house walls bordering the site at the Ross Street side. On the south side of the park, the gardens on Romsey Road back on to the site, but some development has taken place close to the park boundaries so that a few properties are much closer to the park than other houses on Romsey Road.

Although the site is a single geographical entity, it is in practice divided up by fencing and by usage into several distinct elements. These are:

1. The main park area: a large rectangle with a perimeter path and a large open space in the middle. Mature deciduous trees line the perimeter of the park on the south, north and east sides, and the west side also has some mature trees separating it from the children's play area. These trees form an attractive boundary, especially in the autumn, but also create shadow and overhang along the pathways. The paths are lined with some bench seating, and with the relics of a trim trail that seems now to be of limited usability. The grassed area is large and open, but contains two football goalposts with very heavy scouring in the goal areas that must them difficult, if not dangerous, to use.

2. Toilet: The main park area also incorporates a toilet building. This has concealed entrances and is an unprepossessing building with somewhat basic and dilapidated facilities inside. It is not signposted, and is locked during the hours of darkness.

3. Hard Surface: At the west end of the main park area is a basketball court, utilising a hard surface that was at one time a tennis court. The court has hoops at both ends, with fitted backboards, but has no fencing at all, so that the balls used in this space frequently run off the surface and into other areas, including the main footpath and probably also the nearby toddler play area. Next to the basketball court is a short zipline, and a climbing frame and a tyre swing are located south of the court. A small set of swings has been placed near the north side of the hard surface.

4. Play Area: West of the main park area, a former bowling green has been converted into a toddler and infant play area. This is fenced in and gated to prevent dog access. The play area includes swings, spring rockers, a slide, and a small rustic climbing frame. Inside the fence there is also a concrete base, presumably from the former bowls pavilion, which sits incongruously inside a grassed area; this shows the worn out remains of a painted play surface. The shrubs and trees that line the play area are apparently popular as a place for children to play hide and seek and to climb trees in relative safety. The play area includes seating in the form of picnic benches.

5. Natural Area: On the north side of the site, a small area of former allotments has been converted into a natural space. The area is tree lined, but there are informal paths into the tree areas; there is also a clump of shrubs and trees in the middle of this area. The result is a pleasant informal natural space for play or for quiet enjoyment of nature. There is no seating in this area and there are also no bins apart from a poorly located dog bin.

6. The Ross Street entrance: Primarily a path but a small area adjacent to the entrance is laid to grass. The other side of this entrance is a very untidy shrub border. Nothing is offered here and it is unclear what the purpose of this space is. There is no seating in this area.

Romsey Action have carried out an assessment of the natural value of the site in terms of its flora and fauna. The park offers a variety of habitats to support wildlife, especially birds, and a limited range of wild plants. The trees and undergrowth provide a wildlife corridor for small mammals and birds, and shelter for hedgehogs, while butterflies are well supported by the areas of bramble and the more natural space to the north. Trees and shrubs include native and non-native species, and include scented species that are attractive to bees and cherries that are attractive to children. Foxes and even muntjak deer are reported at night. There is no information or interpretation on offer at the site but occasional guided tours are provided to explore and inform interested people about the biodiversity of the park.

The Report commented:

'There is a widespread perception that the park caters well for some groups of people – children and their parents in particular – but does not meet other needs in the local community. In particular, the needs of older people for recreational space are not addressed especially well by the space as it currently stands.

Teenagers use the park in the early evenings, focussing their attention on the hard surface for sports. Foreign language students also use the main park area and the basketball surface for sports. Teenagers use the swings as a place to “hang out” as well as the benches and other areas suitable for sitting'.

After extensive consultation the subsequent report concluded that:

'We are also very mindful of the consultation feedback that indicates that structural changes should be kept to a minimum and that the open space should be conserved in any changes. We believe

that the present structure of the park, with different areas allowing different activities, offers a diverse range of opportunities and should remain.'

The report's conclusions were that there was a need for improvements to: the equipment in the toddlers area (former bowling green); the area between Ross Street and the toddlers area; the toilets; The Vinery Road fencing; the football posts; the tyre zip-line; the seating and the path.

The report rejected a MUGPA (multi purpose games area), but did recommend fencing at either end of the hard surface at the Hemingford road entrance. It was suggested that while everything on the 'desire' list was not possible on Romsey Recreation Ground there should be a proper assessment of what might be feasible on nearby open spaces (Coleridge Recreation Ground and Coldhams Common). It was also suggested that it was important that the streets that led to the park were attractive, encouraging residents to walk to the park, but it was stated this was outside the City Council's remit.

There was extensive and often heated consultation with residents on the proposals. The debate centred around the conflict between maintaining the character of the park against a list of desires that ranged from BMX track to cricket pitch and paddling pool.

One of the criticisms of council officers was that they seemed focused on providing equipment rather than on green landscaping, and that they saw the park as a space to be filled with activity, rather than simply being valuable as a green space fringed with trees that could be enjoyed even when empty in an area of high density housing. The Council officers priorities were built into the structure of the funding stream proposed for improvements to the park (called 'Section 106' contributions from developers), and eventually officers, Councillors, and residents arrived at a successful balance between these conflicting demands, framed around the report's 'Caveat':

'It has to be said, though, that residents are generally happy with the park and want to see it improved, rather than completely revamped. They value a great many of the present features, such as natural space, open areas and trees, and whilst they have strong views on negative aspects of the site, they would not want to see the park urbanised or significantly altered in structural terms. Many of those identifying improvements do so with this quite strong proviso in mind, and this gives us pause for thought in considering what changes might be made'

Most of the improvements were accepted, with a new toilet block, improvements to the Ross Street approach, fencing along the Vinery Road boundary, a revamped 'toddlers area', the paths promoted for jogging, and new gym equipment with a trim trail around the park. Proposals for fruit trees in the 'natural area', planting of spring bulbs, nesting and bat boxes to encourage wildlife in the natural area were never realised, but subsequently new trees were planted.

The proposal to place a *'substantial item of public art that reflects the heritage of Romsey Town and provides a place to meet, to sit, and to enable interpretative material to be sited appropriately'* near the swings was ignored, the site being used instead for artificial climbing rocks. One of the failures of the process was that despite a request for play equipment using

'natural materials', the approved equipment supplier could not provide this, and the Council could not use other suppliers.

All these improvements were successful - the toddler area was very well used, joggers increased, the park is used by numerous adults for keep fit sessions, teenagers and young adults use the basket ball nets and play football, other residents use the park for daily dog walking, or for a stroll. The 'rocks' are rarely used, and are not a 'substantial item of public art' but do provide a feature point.



Figure 19 - Park Improvements - Basket Ball; Play Equipment; Toilets; Artificial Rocks



Figure 20 - Park Improvements after Consultation. Before and After: Vinery Road Fencing; Toddlers Area



Figure 21 - Park Improvements after Consultation. Trim Trail (old & new); Joggers; Exercise Group



Figure 22 - Park Improvements: A safe place to meet, talk and sit

5 The Future

As Cambridge continues to expand and housing densities increase it is important to build new open spaces for future residents. While the City Council requires open space provision on new developments, too often in the early 21st century they agreed to financial contributions for this to be provided elsewhere. A consequence of this was that in 2015 the Council's case that student flat developer McLaren should create a public open space on their new site next to Brookfields Hospital was rejected. McLaren argued successfully that other developers had been allowed to make payments in lieu of open space, and that they should be allowed to do so too. The danger of this is that existing open spaces get more and more crowded.

Romsey Recreation Ground provides a well used but not over-used park for local residents. One of its defining features is that it is part the daily school route for many families at St Philips School. In the heart of the city it provides a green backdrop on the way to school and is enjoyed by parents and children on the way home. There will be many pressures in future years, but the guiding principle should be that identified by Phil Back in his 2008 report on the park:

'We are also very mindful of the consultation feedback that indicates that structural changes should be kept to a minimum and that the open space should be conserved in any changes. We believe that the present structure of the park, with different areas allowing different activities, offers a diverse range of opportunities and should remain'.

(Phil Back: The Future of Romsey Rec. Report for Cambridge city council. Nov 2008)

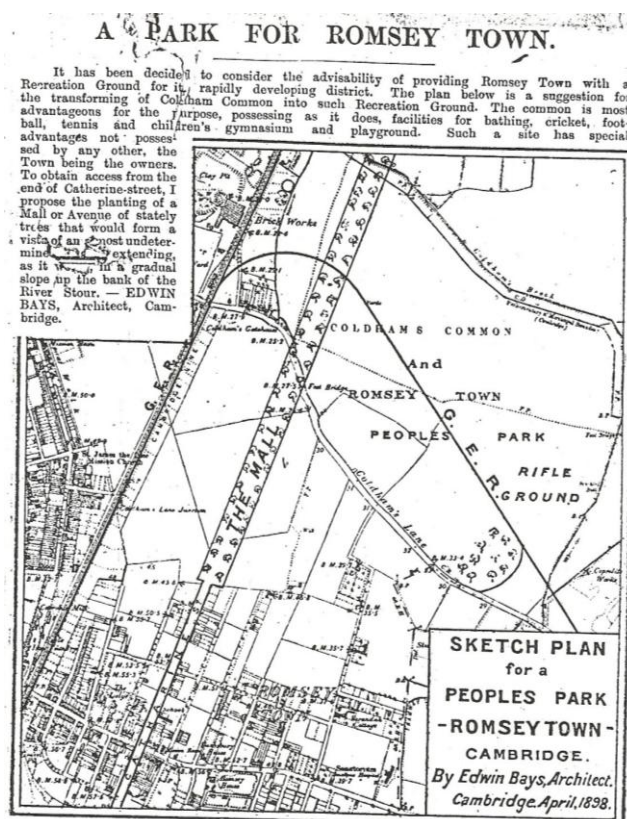


Figure 23 - 'A park for Romsey Town', showing 'The Mall', a proposed 'avenue of stately trees' from Catharine Street to Coldhams Brook. Edwin Bays 1898

7 Romsey Recreation Ground (Vinery Park) Today (2012)

Emma's Story

'Without Vinery, I don't think I'd have as much freedom as I do now'



'I've been going to Vinery Park for most of my life. It has changed a lot, most of all at the times when I was going most. Without Vinery, I don't think I'd have as much freedom as I do now.



I started going when I was very young , as I only live a few streets away. It's a very family friendly park, which is why we all went so often. I can remember it snowing, and us all trudging down there, Also, my nursery was down the road from the park, so we visited it a lot then.



As I got older, and joined Primary School, Vinery became a bigger part of my life. On my way to school, we'd go through Vinery, like many others. During school Vinery would also be part of our day. As my Primary was so close, we would often hold many sporting events or PE lessons on the field or we'd hold After School Clubs there. Sometimes we'd even go there on an afternoon if we'd worked hard enough in the previous weeks. The strangest time we went was for a Science lesson. We were studying push and pull forces. We walked over to Vinery and played on the equipment, deciding if it is push, or pull.

At about half past three on a weekday, the park would be full of children in navy blue jumpers and white polos. At the end of the School day, the School would empty out and Vinery would be a hive of swarming children. Some were more deserving of the park than others.....

In my last 2 or 3 years of Primary, Vinery was the only place we went. I say 'we', my friends and I. We wouldn't even have to say anything; we knew we would go and we knew where to meet. We even found quicker ways to get there: cutting through 'the passage' that ran between and behind two houses and the back of the park, We had names for certain parts and we really did feel like we owned it.



There was a mutual understanding that when you got to Year 6 in our Primary, Vinery became yours. If you didn't go to our school, you didn't count at Vinery. I remember some older kids creating 'The Vinery Crew'. It really was our life; we spent all day everyday there in the summer. Even in the winter we'd spend our short, dark hours playing in the snow. I had several friends that live in the bordering streets so we would go and warm up with hot chocolate at their houses before we split up and left.

Some of my biggest childhood memories happened at Vinery. I'm not sure where we would go or what we would do if it wasn't there. It only really became important when they rebuilt most of it and added some new equipment. That brought so many more kids to the park.

It's been such a big part of my life, I'm glad it's there and I hope it will be for much, much longer.'

Debbie and Seamus' Story

'The park is that rare thing - a space where people of ages, irrespective of their race or religion or wealth, can meet and use a common good as equals. In a time when developers squeeze as many properties as possible into new developments, when new parks are not being built, it is a precious resource that we should all treasure, care for and defend.'

'We moved to Cambridge in 2001. At that time our children were aged one and seven. Our new house had been built in 1999 and like a lot of new houses has a very small garden, but a big attraction for us was that it backed directly onto Romsey Recreation Ground.



We used the park a lot during the first year in Cambridge. We walked our daughter around the green in her push chair, we met other parents of young children, we used the kiddies play park. We organised and attended children's birthday parties. It was a great space to make new friends and relax, right on our doorstep.

As our children grew up the park provided them with a safe space to meet friends and play independently. Our son would meet friends to use the play equipment or play football. Now it is our daughter who meets her friends in the park to socialise and chat.



And our children have been able to watch the seasons change first hand. From our house they can watch the trees shiver and lose their leaves in autumn, winter snow provides an arena to build snowmen and have snowball fights, spring brings the first signs of rebirth, summer bring flowers and trees in full leaf.



Then there are the sounds from the park. We enjoy a dawn chorus in spring and summer, and in the afternoon or on a warm summers evening we can sit out in our garden and hear the sounds of children playing.'

Niamh's story (age 11)

'The earliest memory that I have of the park is learning to ride my bike without stabilisers. My mum pulled them away from the ground and she told me to start riding across the grass. I would fall off but I never gave up, I just got back on and kept riding until I could balance without stabilisers.

My birthday is in July and I remember having birthday parties at the park, having a picnic, playing on the swings and climbing frame and getting lots of presents.



When I was at St Philips we would sometimes have PE lessons at the park and we played rounders and cricket and other games. I played in goals for the girls' football team and my Dad would help me practice in the park. I am at secondary school now but I still go to the park with my bike and meet up with friends. We play games, ride each other's bikes around the park sit and chat about things.'

Amanda's story (Aged 12)

'One of my earliest memories about the park was when I was in year 2, and every day after school me and my friends used to have mini wars with the year below us. We used to ambush each other's dens and steal things that they had found around the area like sticks and little pieces of metal.



More recently I spend a lot of my time playing football and man hunt, man hunt is a game where there are 2 teams and each team has to catch one another it's really fun.



Sometimes I also like going to the park by myself to calm down and chill out. I've visited the park since I was a young toddler, and I remember always climbing trees and collecting cherries with my brother, Martin. I also remember going to nature activities with my Grandma, we use to collect bugs and examine them from a poster. One of my favourite memories was when every day I went to school I used to play around with Rosie the dog and throw the ball to her.



It's great to have this park at your door step, and it's always been a major part of my life.'

Dan's story

'My earliest memories of it go back to 1991 when my mother and her partner moved here. I can still just remember the allotments and bowling green. It always seemed very quiet, green and spacious



compared to the bustling city life of Valencia, Spain, where I lived and worked until 2004. One of the attractions of returning to the UK for breaks was the chance to walk the dog on the "rec" and get one's thoughts in order!



From 2000 it acquired renewed importance as a place to take our first children, Amanda and Martin, who loved the "infant" park and, later when we came to live in Romsey, a place for them to get away from grownups among the hawthorns and other trees, where they could build dens and play games. Likewise, it has always been great for us parents to be able to meet and chat to other grownups in the kind of safe, outdoor space which is quite rare in cities today.



With the arrival of our twin girls, Gabi and Sara, in 2006, the space became even more important. Both Malli and I sometimes feel as if it has become our second home. Now they are getting close to the "den building" stage, Martin and Amanda seem to spend most of their free time there, meeting mates and playing football. Going to the "rec", whether for a picnic, a game of soccer or a quiet walk is our default - and completely free - activity when we are in Cambridge during the weekends or holidays. It is great to watch the seasons change and makes for a quiet interlude on the way to and from school in the morning: I never get tired of it no matter how many visits I make!'





8 Our Park: The best 'Community Centre' Romsey Recreation Ground, Cambridge.

In praise of Cambridge City Council and its Councillors – past & present

Allan Brigham: 2008



Our park was my saviour and my sanctuary when I emerged from three long weeks in the local hospital. Everyone should have one within five minutes walk of where they live.

While I recovered I was pedestrianised, with a ban from the Doctors on driving or cycling. Used to 'home' being a retreat for evenings and weekends, 'home' now became the centre of my very shrunken world. I couldn't go far - it hurt! And I didn't want to go far –the busy main streets full of jostling people, noisy traffic and erratic drivers were scary.

From being fit and in a hurry, I suddenly became one of the people who I'd always rushed past before. The elderly, the disabled, young parents with small children - all can be invisible to the active. Their journeys are often by foot, and local. Now I joined them. The pavements, not the road with no horizon, became my way of moving around, and everything was very, very different.

The nearby park was my daily excursion beyond the security of the front door. I could reach it without crossing a main road, and it became the destination for a walk, to see people, for a sight of the sky, and for a sense of space in a very urban environment of terraced housing.

Go through the park gate, past the hedge with the small protruding tree that succeeding generations of children clamber to the top of, and there is a large square of grass. It is used for informal games of football, and by adults throwing balls for their dogs with varying degrees of vigour while they stand chatting. Ball games were beyond me, but it was liberating in the early months of the year to be in a wide open space and to sense the winter light, away from the confines of small houses and narrow gardens. It made me feel good.

The path around the central square of grass became my daily route, shared with the occasional jogger or passer-by to whom I could nod, or have a brief conversation. It provided contact with people again, with the knowledge that I could always get home if needed. Walking round once was a triumph. Slowly it reached five circuits and then five circuits twice a day. It takes being unable to walk to appreciate just how good it is to be able to do this.



There would always be someone in the park, whatever the weather. Children on the way to and from the local Primary School, teenagers playing basketball, or once a week a group of

young mothers who left one of their number guarding their parked buggies while the others went running together.



Low railings surround a fenced off children's play area which even in the depths of winter was frequently alive with pre-school children and their parents. Not so long ago this was the bowling green where older men and women in immaculate 'whites' patiently rolled their bowls in a captivating ritual. Next to it is the remains of the tennis court where they now play basketball. Beyond lie the former allotments which have been transformed into an informal 'wildlife' area of trees and brambles where dens are made in the bushes and where you can sit quietly and not see a single house or roof top.

The discarded beer cans which I found myself picking up at weekends were evidence of nocturnal use by local teenagers. Tolerated as long as remaining within certain (unspecified) limits, they must get cold.

The park looks like many others. It's kept clean, the kids use the playground equipment, the grass is cut regularly and the trees are maintained. It could be better. Why the park isn't cleaned at weekends when it is most busy remains a mystery. Now the bowling green is gone, what is provided for the elder generation? The basketball has been a real success, but perhaps some would still like to play tennis. Would both be a better option? The playground equipment could be modernised, new tree planting would be good, and so would be some colour – flower beds can't cost much, more spring bulbs would be a start.



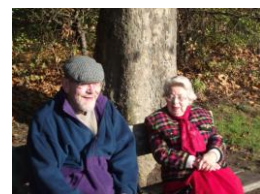
Hopefully these improvements will happen. But for now this is no Victorian gem. It is a very ordinary 20th century 'Recreation Ground'. But for me, walking round in the winter months, this was a very special place. Being outdoors, surrounded by green grass and trees, and seeing the sky, the clouds, and the sun on its all too brief appearances, all made me feel much, much better. Seeing and chatting to people helped me reconnect with the world.

I still visit the park daily, much better and walking with ease. I have never appreciated spring so much before, seeing the leaves appear on the trees that had seemed bare for so long. Summer is passing now, the leaves have dulled and some are already falling. I think I will remember this year and those trees like no other.

It is easy to take for granted what we have. But I'm immensely grateful to those long dead councillors and local people who fought to establish this park. And to those who have maintained and refurbished it over the years. It is here because people argued and lobbied for it. It could have been used for housing. Today it probably would.

The new developments I see have only token play areas, no where big enough for football, or for my daily perambulations, or to sit undisturbed amongst the trees away from hard surfaces and buildings. But we need all these. Not a car-journey away, but close to home so that children and the elderly (or recovering hospital patients) can get there safely on foot.

Today 'high density' housing is the mantra of the planners and the delight of developers. But to make it work we need well maintained, easily accessible, attractive open spaces too.



Others fought for these in the past. We need to leave our mark for the next generation. The developers leave us 'Community Centres' but probably the best, most accessible 'community centre' is a well designed park. You never know when you will need it yourself. I do now.

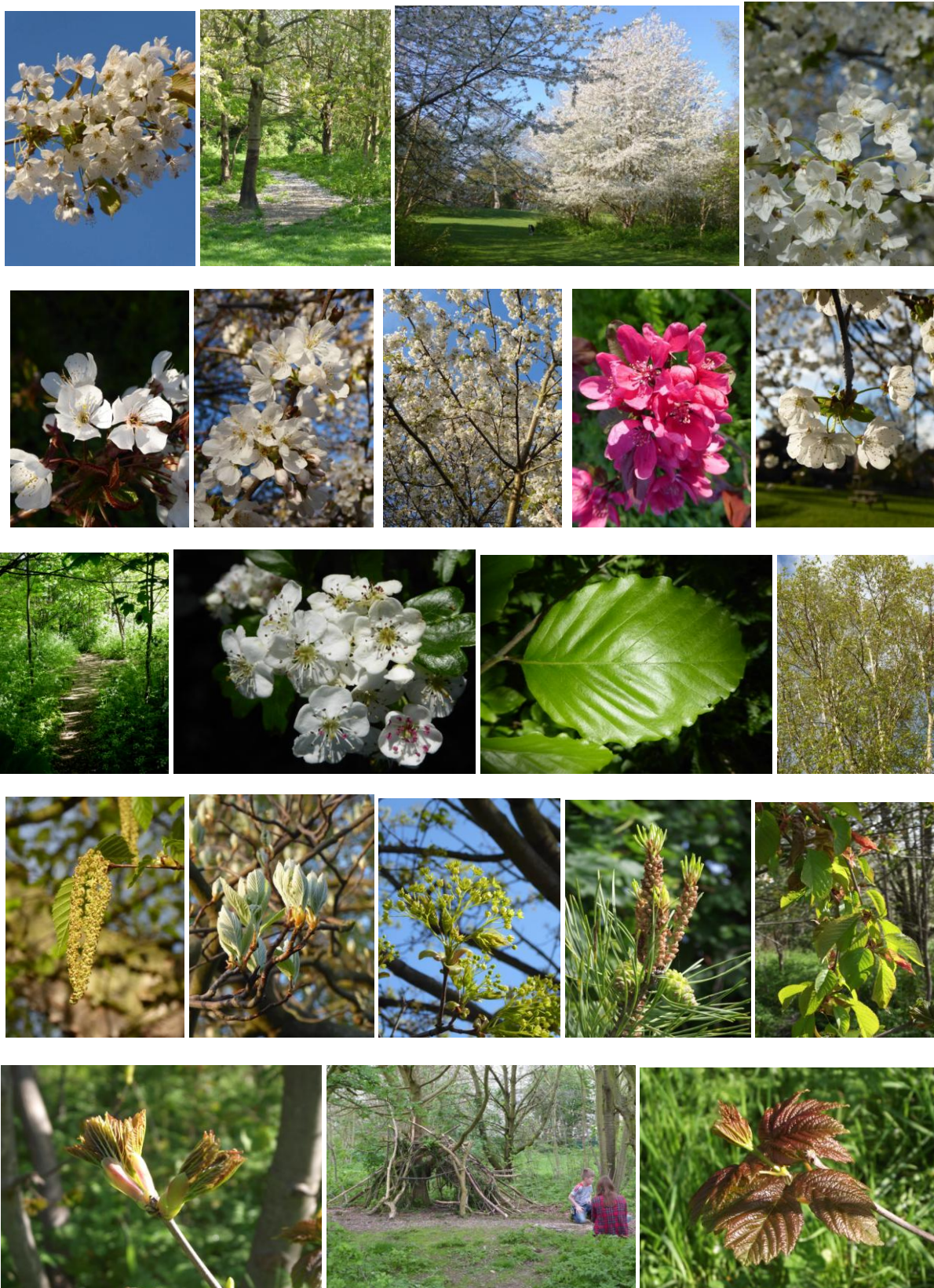
9 Romsey Recreation Ground: People 2012-2016.

Pictures Allan Brigham



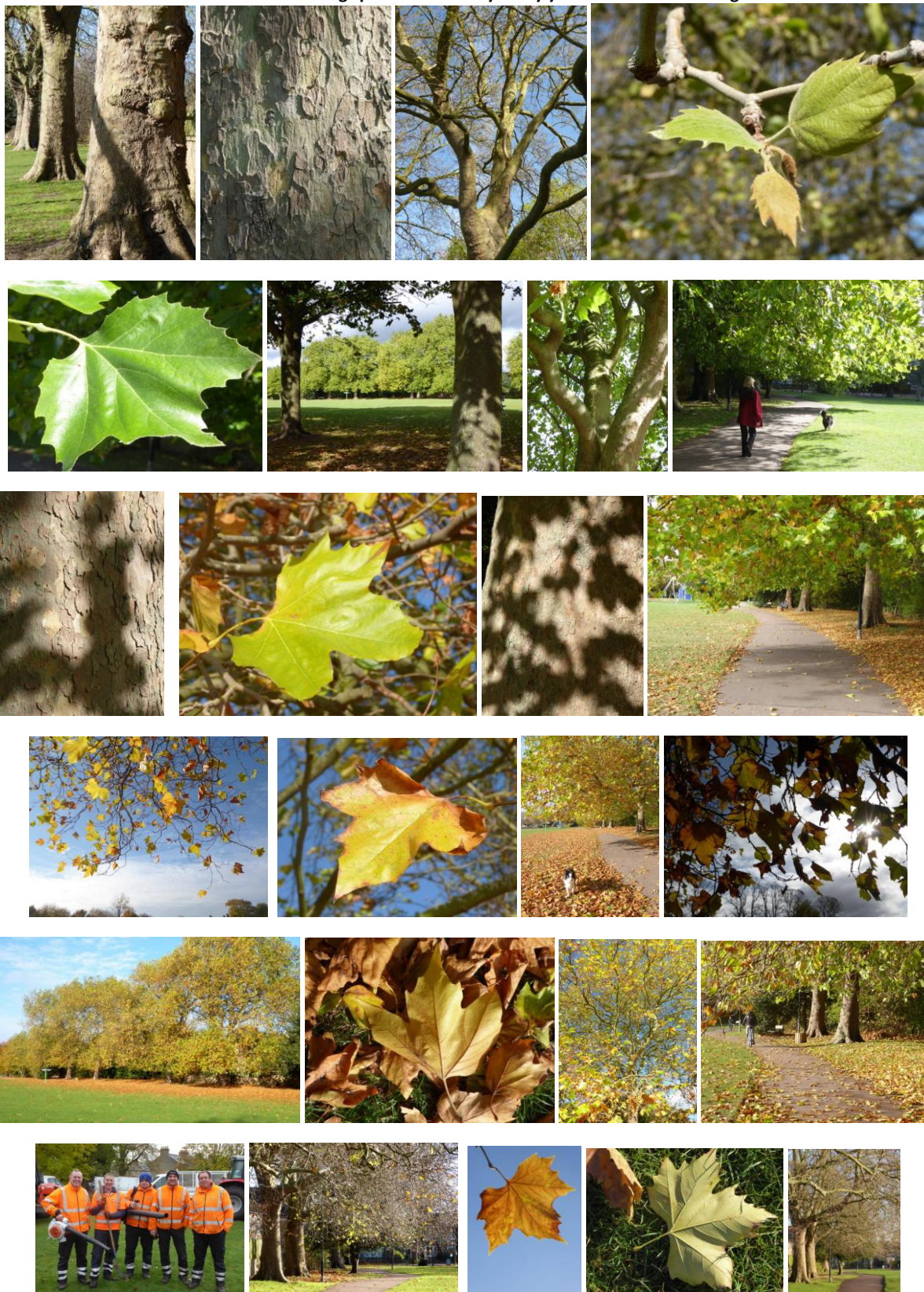
10 Romsey Recreation Ground: Spring in the Woods 2015-2016

Pictures Allan Brigham



11 Romsey Recreation Ground 2016: Tall Trees.

Romsey Recreation Ground Feb - Nov 2016. Tall Trees 1. This line of plane trees on the park frame the edge of the formal park and lead into the informally landscaped wooded area behind. I love these trees - their size, the texture of the bark, the ever-changing colour of the leaves. I used to take them for granted. I now realise they are only there because someone at the City Council made the decision to plant them 100 years ago, and found the money to pay for them. A bold decision that brings pleasure to many every year. Pictures: Allan Brigham



Appendix: Lots 17 & 18. 1913. Site of Romsey Recreation Ground

Deeds to Romsey Recreation Ground (Cambridge City Council unless specified)

The Fields That Nearly Became A 'Building Estate'.

Figure 1: 1908 Sale Plan

- The park was originally two fields: Lot 17 & 18, shown in this 1908 map.
- The area between Lot 18 and Ross St, and that to the north of the footpath leading from Ross St to Vinery Rd shown in the aerial view (Fig 2. Google), were added later.
- Mr Bainbridge's land fronting Vinery Rd, including cowsheds, is now Danesbury Court.
- Mrs Mitchell's land: the section shown became allotments. Subsequently it was absorbed into the park.
- 'Corpus Christi College' land which did not become the Ross Street council housing estate was absorbed into the park
- 'Cambridge Corporation' land between Lot 18 and Ross St also became part of the park, possible with part of the land marked 'Cambridge Guardians'.

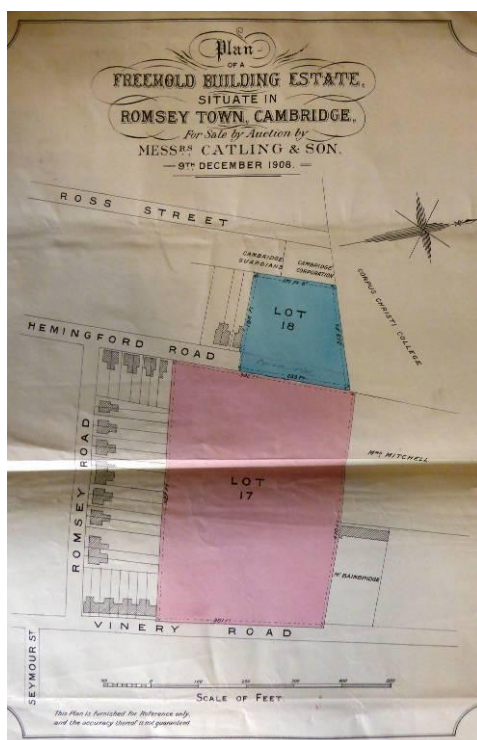


Figure 1. Lots 17 & 18: 1908 Sale Plan



Figure 2. Romsey Recreation Ground 2017 (Google)

The two fields had had separate owners:

Lot 17: Was owned by James Wallis, described as 'Gentleman' and a former Coal Merchant, 'of Cambridge'. At his death in 1887 this field was inherited by his daughter, Elizabeth Victoria Wallis 'for her own separate use' (Deeds).

It was subsequently inherited by her nieces and nephews, and they or their legal representatives (Rev Albert Edward Negus, Walter James Negus, Walter Legg - husband of Agnes Elizabeth Wallis) sold the field to Cambridge Borough Council in 1913

Lot 18: Was part of a much larger estate owned by George Johnson, a Surgeon, of Cambridge. At his death in 1864 this passed to his wife, Maria Johnson, and family. In Sept 1878 part of this estate was sold, including Romsey Cottage and 60 acres of nearby land. Part of this became Hemingford Rd, terminating where the road today gets wider at No 77 and No 68.

In a second sale by the Johnson family in June 1889 Joseph Sturton acquired the land which was to complete Hemingford Road, from No 77 and No 68 to the fields that are today Romsey Recreation Ground. He also added a new road, Romsey Rd.

The maps below show the land bought by Sturton. The map on the left shows a Blue Field leading from Hemingford Road, and a Red Field adjoining land owned by the 'Executors of J Wallis' and 'Various Owners' (which were to become the site of the houses in St Philip's Road). The map on the right shows Romsey Road and proposed building plots in the Red and Blue fields.

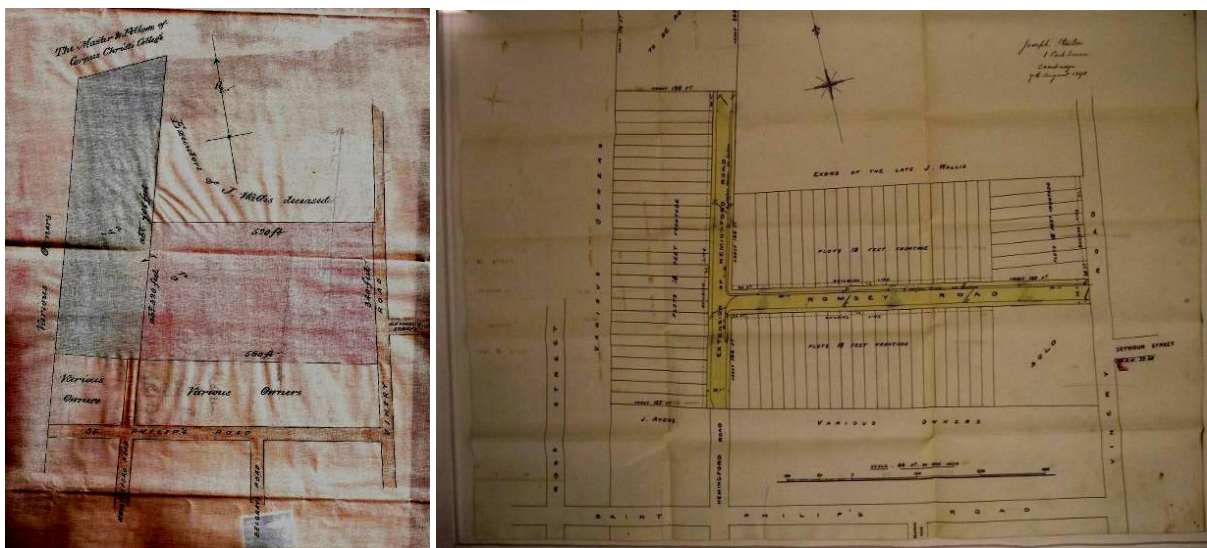


Figure 3. Map Left: Showing land bought by Joseph Sturton, 1889 - fields coloured Blue & Red.

Figure 4. Map Right: Dated 7 August 1890, Joseph Sturton. Shows new roads, and plots for sale. The final section of Sturton's Blue Field, adjoining the property of Corpus Christi College, is marked 'To be Retained'. This became 'Lot 18'.

Both maps also show what became Lot 17, the field owned by Executors of J Willis deceased.
(Deeds: 17 Romsey Road)

Joseph Sturton developed many of the streets in Petersfield, including Sturton Street and Sleaford Street.

Not all of the 'Blue Field' shown in the 1889 plan was developed for housing. One acre was shown as 'To be retained' on the 7 Aug 1890 map that marked the proposed layout for roads and houses.

This one acre plot was sold in 2 June 1902 by 'Joseph Sturton, Gentleman, of Cambridge' to 'Albert Edward Negus, Minor Canon of Bristol Cathedral' for £250. By 1908 it had become 'Lot 18' in the proposed sale of land for housing, but nothing further came of this. Albert Negus retained the plot until it was sold to Cambridge Borough Council in 1913.

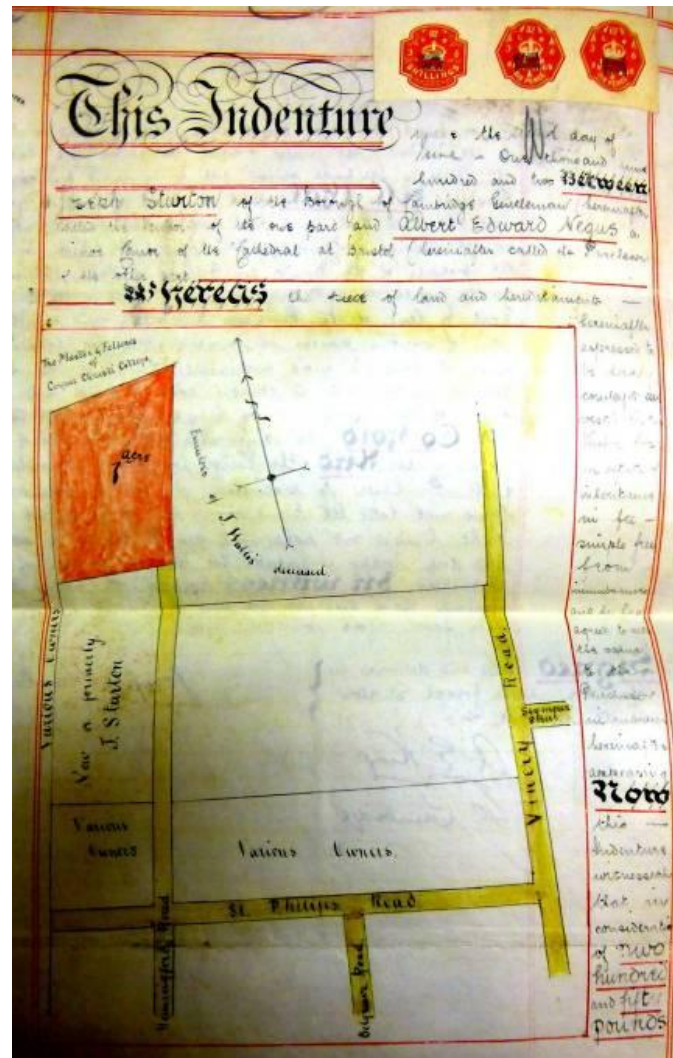


Figure 5. Plot 18: Deeds: 2 June 1902.

Sale of Lot 18 from J Sturton to Albert Edward Negus, Minor Canon, Bristol Cathedral

It was not inevitable that these fields (Plot 17 and 18) became the Recreation Ground. Wider national and local factors were important. So too were the actions of the owners, the value of land and the demand for more housing.

After buying Plot 18 from Sturton in 1902 Rev Albert Edward Negus had a stake in both fields, and in 1908 they were put up for sale. Sale Details described them as 'VALUABLE ARABLE LAND' (Lot 17) with 'An ADJOINING ENCLOSURE of LAND' (Lot 18), producing a gross annual rental of £265-11-0, and 'Ripe for immediate development as a BUILDING ESTATE'.

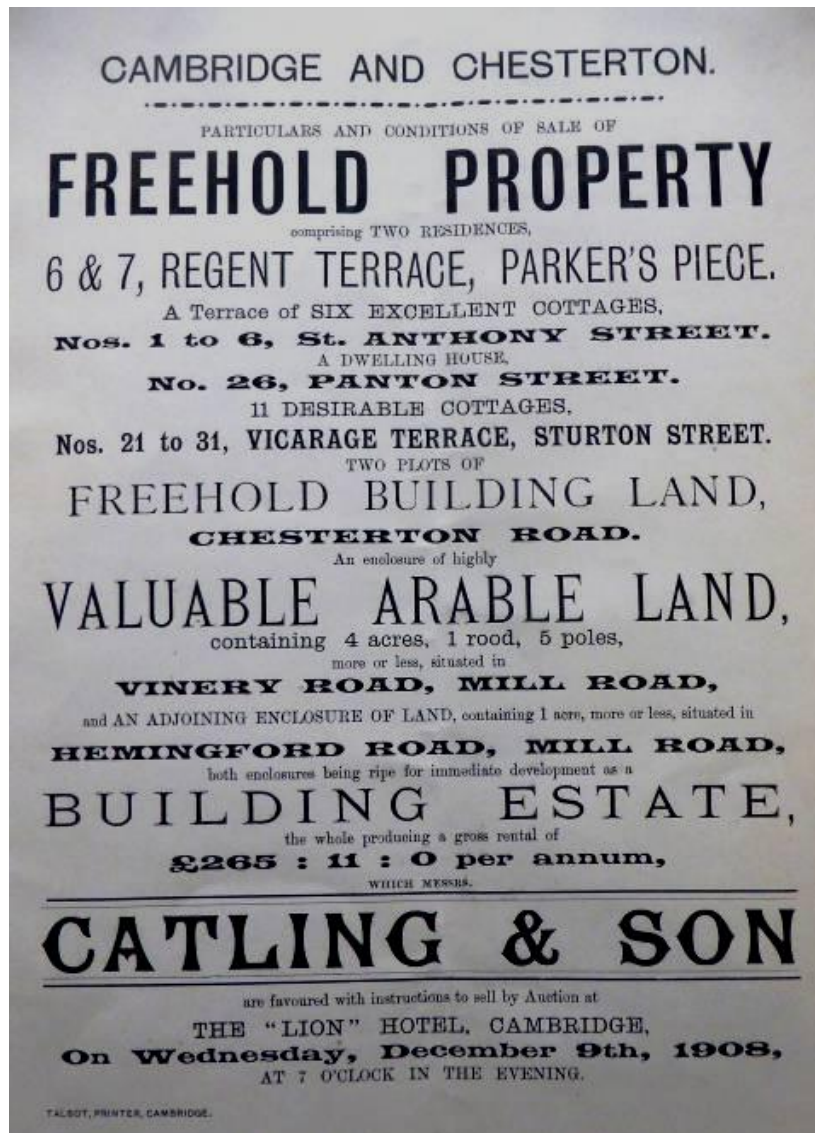


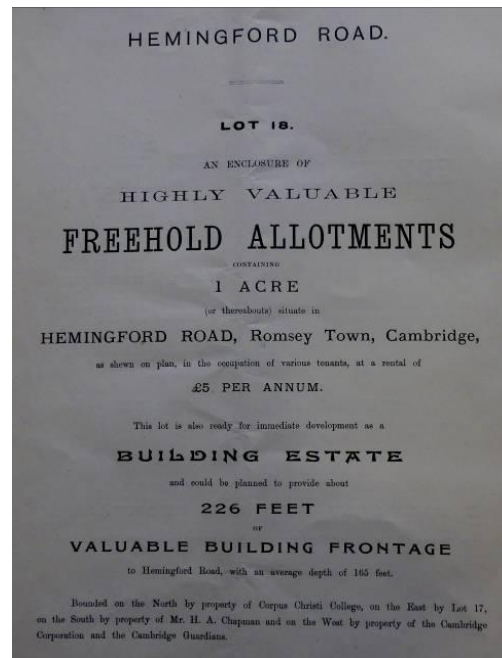
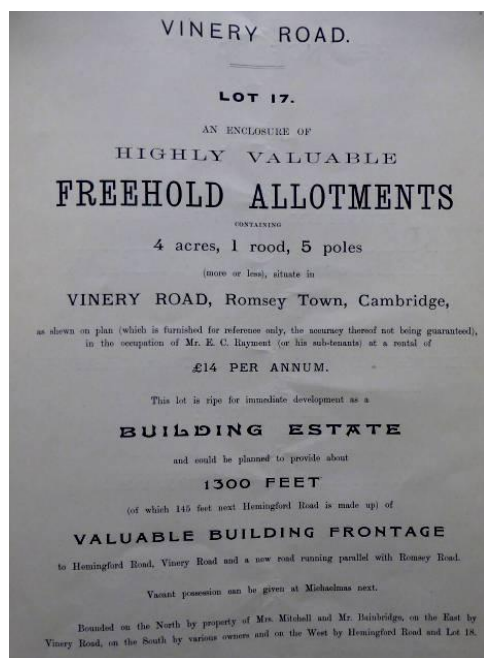
Figure 6. 1908 Sale Details:

Showing how very nearly these fields (Lots 17 & 18) became another 'Building Estate'.

Further details stated that both fields were 'HIGHLY VALUABLE FREEHOLD ALLOTMENTS'.

Lot 17 was 4 acres-1 rood-5 poles, and was occupied by Mr EC Rayment or his subtenants at a rental of £14 pa. It was proposed that this could provide about 1300 ft of 'VALUABLE BUILDING FRONTAGE', with the advantage that 145 ft next Hemingford Rd was already made up. The rest would front Vinery Road, and 'a new road running parallel with Romsey Rd'.

Lot 18 was 1 acre, and was occupied by 'various tenants' at a rental of £5 pa. This could be planned to provide about 226 ft of 'valuable building frontage', with an average depth of 165 ft.



Figures 7 & 8: Dec 9 1908: Sale of Lot 17 & 18

'HIGHLY VALUABLE FREEHOLD ALLOTMENT..Ripe for immediate development as a BUILDING ESTATE'

Lot 17 - Bordered by:

North: Property of Mrs Mitchell and Mr Bainbridge

East: Vinery Rd

South: Various Owners

West: Hemingford Rd & Lot 18

Lot 18- Bordered by:

North: Property of Corpus Christi College

East: Lot 17

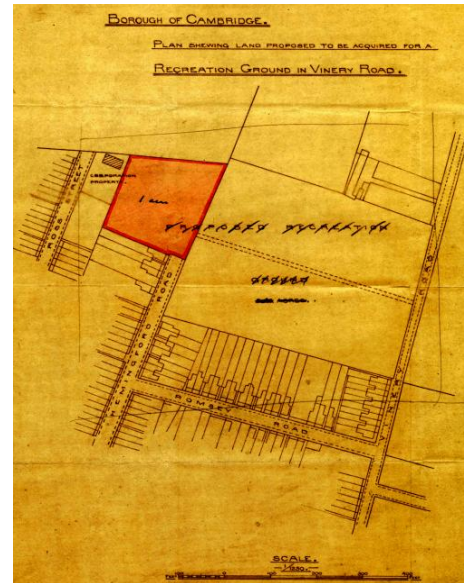
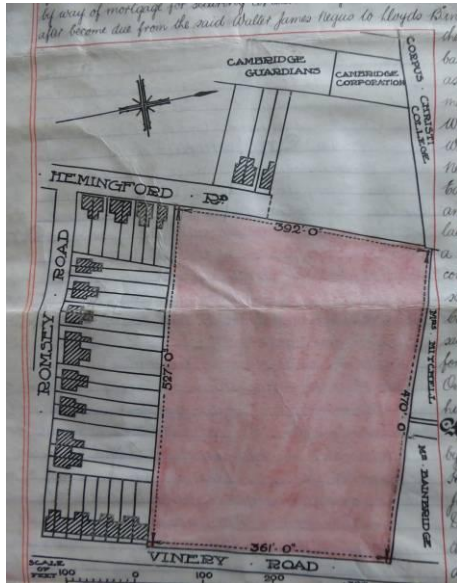
South: Property of H Chapman

West: Property of Cambridge Corporation and Cambridge Guardians

This sale was not successful. But it illustrates how very nearly they could have become the site of houses and a new road. On 30 May 1911 Lot 18 is recorded as being occupied by 62 allotment holders, and in 1913 both fields were still recorded as allotments. But it was clear that they were amongst the last fields that could be used as a public 'Recreation Ground' anywhere near to the new housing that had been built in Romsey over the previous twenty five years.

On 13 June 1913 'The Cambridge Independent Press' recorded that the Local Government Board had sanctioned the loan of £1,875 'for the purchase of land in Romsey Town for a recreation ground.

The sale of Lot 17 was agreed on 24 July 1913, under the power of Public Health Act 1875, Section 164', and conveyed on 11 Nov 1913 for £1,500. In the same year Lot 18 was sold to the Corporation for £375.



Figures 9 & 10. November 1913: Lot 17 (Left) & Lot 18 (Right).
Site bought for use as Recreation Ground by Borough of Cambridge

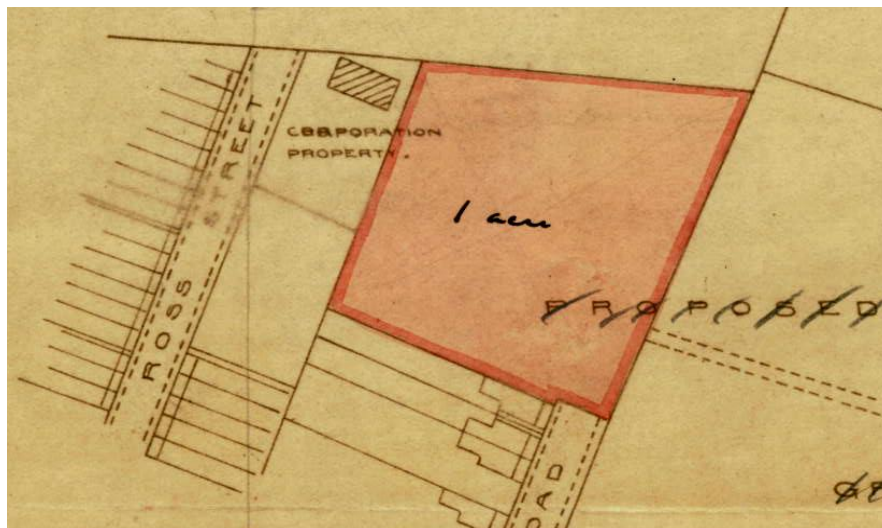


Figure 11. 1913. Showing Plot 18, part of the original purchase. The access to Ross Street is blocked by the property shown as 'Corporation Property'.

Lot 17 : Info from Deeds (Cambridge City Council)

'Title to commence with Will of James Wallis'

Abstract of Title:

1. 23 Feb 1884: Will of James Wallis of 7 Regent Terrace, Gent: 1861 census: Coal Merchant. 1871: Retired Merchant & Landowner

Elizabeth Victoria Wallis, daughter, to inherit land in Vinery Road

Appoints as Executors:

- Ann Wallis (wife)
- Wm Eaden Lilley, Warehouseman
- Henry Holt, Leather Merchant

1.1. 4 Feb 1887: James Wallis dies

1.2. July 1887: Will of Elizabeth Victoria Wallis of Albert House School, Albert Road, Southport, Lancaster

Property to pass to:

- Nephew: Walter Negus
- Niece: Agnes Elizabeth Negus

1.3. 7 Dec 1887: Will changed:

Additions to those named:

- Nephew: Albert Edward (Saunders).Read Negus
- Niece: Elizabeth Victoria Negus Wallis

1.4. 7 Dec 1887: Death - Elizabeth Victoria Wallis (dau James Wallis)

1.5. 28 Nov 1887: Elizabeth Ann Wallis (wife of James Wallis?) marries George Cotterell

1.6. 4 Sep 1900: Agnes Elizabeth Negus marries Walter Legg.

2. 30 May 1911: Land in occupation of 62 allotment holders

3. 24 July 1913: Sold by:

Rev Albert Edward Negus

Walter Legg (husband of Agnes Elizabeth Wallis)

Walter James Negus

Sold to:

Mayor & Aldermen of Borough of Cambridge under power of Public Health Act 1875, Section 164.

1. 7 July 1913 acquired by Cambridge Borough Council, subject to sanction of Local Government Board.

Price: £1,500

Sold by:

Rev Albert Edward Negus

Walter Legg

Walter James Negus

Conveyed: 11 Nov 1913. Title to commence with Will of James Wallis

Lot 18: Info from Deeds (Cambridge City Council)

'Title to commence with Indenture dated 24 June 1889 between Johnson etc and J Sturton'

Abstract of Title:

1. 11 Oct 1854: Indenture between:

1.1. Sarah Favill & Rev Edward Favell Ventris

1.2. David King

1.3. G Johnson

2. 29 Sept 1860: Indenture between:

2.1. G Johnson

2.2. Elizabeth Moor, Mary Moor

3. 25 Jan 1861: Indenture between:

3.1. Walter Sececold Pearce Serecold

3.2. G Johnson

4. 7 Jan 1864: G Johnson dies

5. 25 June 1869: Son G Johnson dies.

6. 24 June 1889: Sale by Johnson heirs to J Sturton of land inc Lot 18

Price: £1,400

- **Land 7a 1r 0p. (Part of larger parcels of land: 6a 0r 32 p & 6a 1r 25p: conveyed to Johnson 11 Oct 1854 and 25 Jan 1861)**

This larger parcel (7a 1r 0p) was:

1. Site of Romsey Rd etc (Red in 17 Romsey Rd Deeds)

N - 520 ft: Bounded by J Wallis

S - 560 ft: Various

E - 340 ft: Vinery Rd

W - 320 ft (Ross ST)

2. Site of Hemingford Rd (Blue in 17 Romsey Rd Deeds)

N - Bounded by Corpus

S - Bounded by late Johnson

E - Bounded by Wallis

W - Bounded by Various

7. 2. June 1902: Sale of Lot 18 (1 acre) by J Sturton to Albert Edward Negus for £250

8. 7 July 1913: Sale of Lot 18 by Albert Edward Negus to Mayor, Aldermen of Borough of Cambridge for £375