

## A CIRCUMAMBULATION OF CAMBRIDGE, MAY 2020



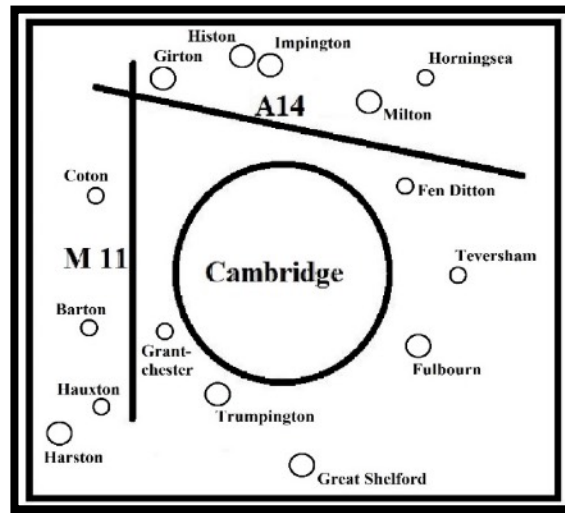
Early May 2020 was a time for some consideration. The UK and much if not all of the rest of the world had become subject to the spectre of social quarantine. So, what to do? Some thought of doing this and some of doing that, and many might have thought of doing something else entirely. We looked at each other and decided we'd go for a walk. But where? A walk can be undertaken for exercise, or for rumination, or indeed stimulation. We are not *that* energetic: the gritty purposefulness of runners and pounders and hikers seems very purposeful, but it seems to be all eyes forward and sweatiness and expensive clothing. We don't do that. We want to wander and gaze about.

Cambridge is an economically thrustful city – it's a boom town – and this, naturally, translates into it being a demographically thrustful city. It's bursting its boundaries – it's so attractive that great tracts of land all around it are being converted from farmland to housing. It's a very topical topic in Cambridge – is this a good or less than good thing?

So, let's go and have a look.

Picture Cambridge as a gourmand. It would say that it has a discerning palate and that it chooses its dishes with prescience and precision. It is well-fed. It is one of the first in line when goodies are being proffered, and it maintains it chooses only the most piquant and the most appetizing. You may suggest that Cambridge might have developed a bit of flab on its rich diet, yet at this point it demurs and looks back at its supposed sharper, yet bonier, past when it supposedly dined more on mind than on matter. Those days, however, are gone. Though Cambridge resolutely maintains it only searches out only the best cuts, it is evident that it has had quite a few blubbery pieces on its plate. This mounts up, and weight is clearly being put on, yet where is it going on?

Now picture Cambridge as shoved into a corner. The hard line of the M11 runs up from the south in a wiggly straight line along the western edges of the city. Just to the north west of the city it merges with the equally hard line of the A14 (newly upgraded) which runs from the north west to points in the south east. These two robust lines seem to act as a belt, constraining any corpulence, which surely must, therefore, spread south and east.



*Cambridge, boxed in by the M11 and the A14, surrounded by its immediate satellite villages.*

There was a time, not so long ago, when Cambridge's excess weight was simply parcelled off to outlying communities, or conveniently available spots such as Bar Hill. This continues to go on to a degree, though it seems that the bulk of the contemporary weight – and with the increasing heaped-up dish of tasty morsels there's a lot of it – is to be accommodated in the spread of the city's actual bodily shape.

There are pockets – spacious pockets – lying between Cambridge and the alignments of the confining M11 and A14 that can take a good deal of spread, and that is on-going. There is also the wide open space to the south and south east, compromised only by the slender greenbelt.

With all this in mind we decided, one day in May 2020 during the time of social quarantine, to walk the perimeter of Cambridge to gauge the degree of spread. In doing this we wandered freely in and out of the borders of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District – the border between the two bearing little relation to the city's enlargement. The walk was done over three days – May 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> – non-consecutive due more to being unhurried than to fatigue. The total distance walked was about twenty seven and a half miles: six and a half the first day (Burnside to Byron's Pool), ten the second (Grantchester to Histon), and about eleven on the third (Impington to Burnside). Ms Wells was very supportive and ferried us back from Byron's Pool and from Histon, and joined us for a picnic on Ditton Meadows on the last day.

### **The First day (May 8<sup>th</sup>): Burnside to Byron's Pool.**



*Map one: Burnside to Hauxton Road.*



*Map two: Nine Wells to Byron's Pool.*



The start was from Burnside along Snakey Path. This is a pleasant walk. All is verdant and the weaving and meandering passage becomes almost as though from “Through the Looking-Glass”.



The path is a leafy finger that temptingly meanders its way into, and out of, the body of the city. However, channelling Cherry Hintonites from their homes in and out of the city often makes it busy with cyclists and walkers and joggers, and traffic must run smoothly and this, one of the few places where stepping aside and mumbling “thank you” has become normal practice, may end up being ironed-out to be more efficient.

Past the Blacklands allotments (Peterhouse College owned), past the tree limbs chucked across the stream where the party people wobble across to whoop it up by the lakeside (partly Peterhouse College owned), over the narrow Cherry Hinton Brook bridge, then south and into the park of Cherry Hinton Hall. Such a cosmopolitan spot; all types seem to be here, in families, in groups, on their own, playing, picnicking, lounging around. A lot of dog-walking too, and greenery all around. This must be one of the small confections of the city, surely never to be adulterated. The only thing it needs now is a tea room.

In the centre is the Victorian gothic hall, built by one John Okes in the 1840s who laid out the parkland, annually trampled (though not in 2020) by gaily dressed folkies at the Folk Festival.

Running along its south side runs the straight and lengthy Cherry Hinton Road. Here we pass the perplexingly bland Mormon church.



The Mormons are known for their dramatically designed temples, yet these are almost exclusively in the USA, in Utah particularly. That custom doesn’t seem to have been extended to other parts, or could it be UK planning system’s aversion to assertive architecture? Yet the original building of the mid 1960s does express some good modernism – the sweeping, sheltering roof, the abrupt thin, white, spikey finger piercing that canopy, the chequered window motif. However a low dreary shed has been attached at a right angle, completely spoiling the design, and the surrounding featureless grass desert must surely drain the congregational soul.

We continue up to a busy cross roads – turn north to go into Cherry Hinton proper, east to Fulbourn, or south east along Queen Edith’s Way, which bends back into Cambridge suburbia and is lined with respectable 1960s houses. Had we taken the eastern route towards Fulbourn we would have noticed the Peterhouse Technology Park on the right hand side, the home, along with a few other businesses, of ARM, which is “architecting a smarter world”. This was green belt land, just inside the Cambridge city boundary. In August 2020 Abstract (Cambridge) Ltd, with funding from Peterhouse, acquired a slice of de-reserved green belt right next door for speculative office development<sup>1</sup>. This is in South Cambridgeshire, indeed within the Fulbourn village envelope. From this it appears that all the road frontage up to abreast with Capital Park – providing “high quality accommodation to office and high-tech companies seeking a world renowned Cambridge address” – might be on the menu.

But it is the Queen Edith’s Way route we take, and just a short distance along the Way we are funnelled up the narrow Lime Kiln Road. The road has a crest from which views over the city can be taken, often on Bonfire Night.



Cambridge is generally flat (hence the bicycles) yet it is nuzzled to its south and west by a few comfortable slopes, just enough to allow a few panoramas.

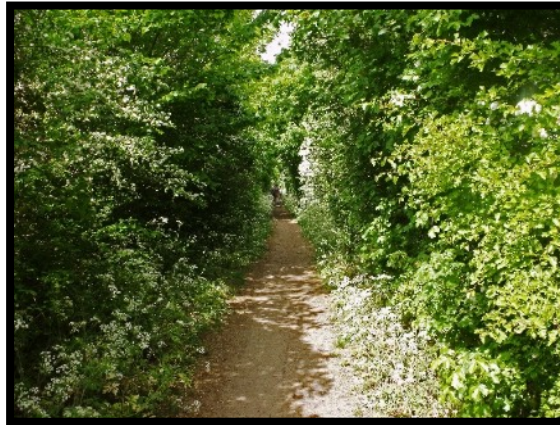
Also along this road are the small anomalies of the Cherry Hinton Chalk Pits (“A” and “B”) and the Cherry (surely Cheery) Hinton Caravan and Motorhome Club Site (also an old chalk pit). The pits, lying on the east (left) hand side, are nature reserves of very different natures, and both are the result of the digging for chalk. “A” is now heavily wooded with ups and downs and twisting paths, and was dug out by hand a few hundred years ago; “B” is open and scrubbier with surrounding chalk cliffs, brilliant white in the sun, and this was excavated by machinery up to the 1980s. It seems that the chalk, converted to mortar, can now be found between the stones and bricks of many of the colleges. These sites will likely remain reserved for nature, though parts of the caravan and motor-home site, lying on the city side of the road, may be eyed up for possible development; the corner between Lime Kiln Road and Queen Edith’s Way has already been swallowed up. There again are chalk cliffs, though there is a lot of land that could be incorporated into back-land development off Queen Edith’s Way – quite a desirable neighbourhood.

The current (2019) Cambridge City Local Plan has Lime Kiln Road running through the Cambridge Green Belt. Off to the west, between the road and the Queen Edith’s 1960s housing (glimpsed through the road-side foliage) are smooth the playing fields of the Netherhall School followed by a large crop field, up to where we reach the Wort’s Causeway cross-roads. Here we turn right (west) along the long, straight and narrow footpath that leads back towards town (had we turned left we would have passed an open field and come across the Beechwoods Nature Reserve with its lofty o’er shadowing canopy). However, going right there are still fields on all sides, though – and there is so often a “though” – as the Babraham Park and Ride site is just a little further on, it does put a question mark over whether these tasty parcels might sooner or later be swallowed up. Indeed, two hundred dwellings are proposed for the greater part of the field that lies between Wort’s Causeway and the Queen Edith vicinity, delivering a “homes in a variety of sizes and tenures to meet the needs and aspirations of people at different stages of their lives”.

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<sup>1</sup> Acquired from the Wright’s Clock Land Charity, established in 1525 to maintain the clock of St Vigor’s Church, Fulbourn. The charity had declined to sell in 2013, stating concern about the green belt, but seven years have elapsed since then.

The footpath, however, is charming and robustly hedged-in. It is narrow and, as with Snakey Path, you must step aside into the brambles and stinging nettles to let others to pass. Wort's Causeway, named after one William Wort, runs along right next door and is not busy so there's little disturbance. Perhaps that should be "not yet busy".



Soon enough the footpath divides and we must turn left (south) alongside a large open field, arable again. Four houses, one of them a large and seemingly modernist one, have prospects over the field and off to the views beyond, including the tree encircled Babraham Road Park & Ride. Surely, the householders must fret over whether that nice, large field might be on the menu for more housing – which would take Cambridge tidily up to the edge of Lime Kiln Road, or Cherry Hinton Road as it is by then.

We cross quickly over the speedy Babraham Road and head up the long straight Granham's Road. This is one of the several rat-runs surrounding the town that channel the hard-pressed home after a hard day's work over the hill to Shelford and commuter points beyond. It's a bleak road and cars come at a pace, so there's slight relief in trespassing along the field side of the roadside hedge. This affords enticing views of the Nine Wells housing – a bespoke edging the spreading citadel of Addenbrookes.

Turn sharp right (north west) down the side of another broad arable field and we see that we are heading straight towards the Nine Wells housing (though the source of the nine wells is a little distance off to the south west), with the less-recent parts of Addenbrookes Hospital looming beyond.



What we are nearing is the beginning of the widespread new development that is putting considerable fat all along the south west of Cambridge: the western approaches are being completely reconfigured right up to the edge of the M11.

Everything on the walk, though, is still quite rural and before coming too close to the houses we turn south along the footpath towards Nine Wells proper: we are separated from the urban spread by only the hedge and one flat rectangular field.





Within a few minutes we arrive at the little wood that encloses the nine wells. It is a nature reserve, rather confined, and evidently popular as on this particular day (early May 2020) it was sunny and there were quite a few young families wandering about, quite probably mostly from the new houses nearby. The nine wells, maybe less than nine these days, are springs that feed the conduit – Hobson's Conduit - that Thomas Hobson funded to take fresh water into Cambridge, and this runs all the way to Lensfield Road. There's a partly hidden monument to him.

The Nine Wells Nature Reserve lies just within the district of South Cambridgeshire, about two hundred metres from the Cambridge City boundary.

Cambridge City, as is readily evident, is a boom-town; it is greedy, its appetite is readily catered to, it needs to loosen its belt, and the only space to accommodate that loosening is the surrounding lands of South Cambridgeshire. The Addenbrookes complex – hospital and internationally renowned biomedical research centre – is a major appetite stimulator, and it's only two hundred metres from Nine Wells. A few years ago the thin slice of South Cambridgeshire land that lies between Addenbrookes and Nine Wells – green belt land – was proposed as suitable for “employment” uses: employment associated with Addenbrookes and its various activities. There was uproar from the those that closely follow these issues, and the proposal was dropped. This is a sensitive area, and the story is probably not over.

From Nine Wells, we turn north, alongside Hobson's Conduit on its way to the city, to the join the Great Shelford Art Trail DNA Path; a well-used cycle track connecting Addenbrookes with dormitory overflows like Great Shelford. In January 2018 the Cambridge News reported that one Mr. Frezza, employed at Addenbrooke's and a regular user of the cycle path, had a run in with a gang: “after our Christmas dinner...I was cycling back home. I encountered five to six guys on their bikes at the level of the bridge close to the train barriers in Great Shelford. They were cycling without lights so they were not clearly visible, but they were shouting and when they saw me coming, they occupied the entire path, trying to push me off the cycle path. Of course this was at a certain speed, and in complete darkness, and they purposely came on my side of the lane trying to hit me. I tried to fend them off, but I had to move off road to avoid the collision. After I gained control, another group did the same. Of course, I shouted at them back, but I was lucky they didn't react”. No such misdemeanour was evident on the day I strolled along, infact all seemed very genial, but Cambridge does, indeed, have its rough 'uns. Up onto the Addenbrooke's Way bridge over the London-bound railway line, and a fine view is afforded of the neighbourhood.



Here, above, we can see Addenbrooke's / Cambridge Biomedical Research Campus blocks on the right-hand-side and a spacious green expanse with ranks of new houses beyond, on the left. This green expanse is now called Hobson's Country Park, though that might only be by the developers,

Countryside, creating “places people love”. It’s all part of Great Kneighton, built on the wedge of land lying between Addenbrooke’s and Trumpington. This was waiting to happen. Most of the land was green belt, which used to poke right across Long Road and into the city. However Clay Farm (which occupied most of the vicinity, albeit with an unpromising name) took up land that was simply being squeezed on both sides, and the pull-push of city planning resulted in it being re-designated for urban use, guided by the Southern Fringe Area Development Framework. To fulfil this framework, a variety of developers divided up their slices – Countryside with Aura and Abode, Crest Homes with Halo, Hill with Virideo, Bovis with Paragon, and Cala Homes, and it’s a new city quarter, with around 2,300 homes and schools and “bustling” community centres. Quoting from Countryside’s account: “Aura, RIBA Regional Award Winner 2018, offers a collection of apartments, duplexes and houses designed with sophistication and style in mind. Homes are elegantly placed within tree-lined avenues, surrounded by green open spaces, cycle paths and a range of amenities”.

While walking through Great Kneighton it does seem that we may be...well, where? There are a lot of houses, and apartments, grouped in clumps of different styles, and they are probably very nice indoors; many, if not most, seem outwardly well-designed. Outdoors, there appear to be plenty of green spaces and linking pathways. Yet – and there is so often a “yet” – it’s not in Cambridge: it is near it. A Great Kneightonian must go some distance to find a road that leads into the city, and there is, as is so often the case, a dearth of shops, restaurants, pubs, etc. Hence, the Great Kneighton dweller must either cycle (good healthy activity, though perhaps not for everyone), drive (applying patience in the traffic) or catch the guided busway. More convenient might be the yet-to-be-built Cambridge South station, which could take the dweller to King’s Cross.

The green spaces, which are generous and evidently popular with birds and people, do seem to link up with the Sheep’s Green and the Backs, though it gets a bit squeezed beside Empty Common – nonetheless, it is another leafy finger meandering its way into, and out of, the belly of the city.

We proceed along Addenbrooke’s Road and pass into the neighbourhood, a line of dark wood-clad houses acting as an edging between the country park and that which lies within. There are several architectural styles scattered throughout the area, and this one kept putting us in mind of the fishing huts along Hastings beach. Wood cladding was pervasive a few years ago, yet little account seems to be taken on how it weathers. These houses do present a very dark frontage, though perhaps they are the dark chocolate encasing the fruity interior.



Venturing into the interior, the newly built blocks lining both sides of the road are all in yellow and grey brick, the Cambridge vernacular. It’s all very boxy, though with large windows and balconies from which to gaze at the passing traffic. Inevitably, there are some with that ubiquitous architectural fashion of textualized brickwork – patches in which every other brick is slightly raised above the other. It effectively breaks up any featurelessness in the façade and looks quite crunchy, yet, again, it is redolent of something else – Assyrian ziggurats perhaps.

It is around the new roundabout that the design becomes a bit more spicier, with the two attention-grabbing towers with their flappy bronzed boards. These are signature edifices, intended to establish a sense of place, and they look quite chic, and hopefully will continue to do so over the next few decades, or more. This, however, is not the lively commercial centre of Great Kneighton: there isn’t one. There are a few shops buried in the middle, but most Kneightonians will probably shop at the nearby Waitrose. Will Great Kneighton satisfy Cambridge’s appetite? No, more is needed.



Addenbrooke's Road has been pushed through the string of 1930s houses that line the Shelford Road and continues across to the Glebe Farm section of Great Kneighton – if that name is still appropriate at this stage. Here are mainly, if not exclusively, about two hundred and eighty two-to-three-storey houses in the customary grey/yellow brick and cubic style.



This area was actually the first to be built and must have established the ground rules of style which have been elaborated upon in GK proper. Nonetheless, the exceptions here are the apartment blocks that stand as markers at sentinel positions – the main one, of six storeys, being where we meet the Hauxton Road. As this is one of the principle ins-and-outs to Cambridge, a statement had to be made. The block seems to have a face-guard, as though standing watch at the gates of the city, glaring down at the in-coming traffic and staring out to the open fields that lie between it and the M11. This seems to imply that those fields will remain to be stared at; the near constant racket of the M11 likely to put off all but the most ravenous appetite. Note though that nothing around the city lies idle for long – a large travel hub is proposed around here, funnelling commuters and shoppers forwards and backwards.



Pass over the Hauxton Road and we enter into another wedge that's been tucked into the city's belt, though, just as with Great Kneighton, it hasn't – it's been tacked on to Trumpington, which itself is somewhat apart from the urban centre.

Trumpington is / was a village on Cambridge's periphery, and though it is within the city's boundary it has never really become part of the city and has always maintained a good degree of separateness. (Another such village is Cherry Hinton that also lies within the city boundary and has been more thoroughly subsumed into the city, though again it is still somehow apart.) Trumpington, being a bit



exceptional, might be considered a bon-bon or truffle, so far half eaten. It is now beset on both sides, Great Kneighton on the east and Trumpington Meadows on the west. What impact might this have on the main road running through the village? The traffic jam in the sandwich? Currently (2020) there are a few pubs / restaurants, a supermarket (Waitrose), some offices (Bidwells, estate agencies), and some smaller shops. It has one small shopping parade where Anstey Way meets the Hauxton Road. Were it to come to assume the role of a major suburban centre, things might change and considerably densify. It is into Trumpington Meadows that we now tread, and in doing we come out of Cambridge and into South Cambridgeshire. The picture above shows two of the Meadows blocks on the left, with the “guardian tower” of GK beyond on the right – the Hauxton Road runs in-between.

Trumpington Meadows does not appear to be quite the same as Great Kneighton. It's housing is blockier and there appears to be far more apartment blocks – many four storeys – particularly in the southern part, nearer to the M11, and perhaps this is where the affordable housing is. It seems that the Grosvenor Group (the Duchy of Westminster) is the lead provider with the Universities Superannuation Scheme being the lead investor. Barratt appears to be doing most of the actual building of the approximately one thousand two hundred units.

Nonetheless, the architectural style similar to that of the other newly laid out fringing portions pervades: a lot of that exposed yellow to grey to brown brick, sharply sloping roofs, and, pleasantly big windows. Parts of TM replicate traditional street layouts, which is not so common in GK. Indeed, parts of southern TM, towards the M11, seem to abandon the concept of cosy neighbourliness for more straightforward barrack-type blocks. As with GK, all advertising points to the nearby big Waitrose supermarket, which must be very pleased with the way things are going.

Lying between the blocks of TM housing and the River Cam are the actual meadows – actually one big meadow – with quite large sections designed with wild flowers and grasses, interspersed with paths and the occasional bit of art. It is evidently popular, though the M11 does give a constant background of rumble.



The meadows must form a part of the diminished green belt – both Cambridge's and South Cambridgeshire's – which extends west beyond the M11 towards and around Harston. Here though – just across the motorway on the Harston side – a large travel hub (park and ride writ large – 2,150 parking spaces) is proposed, which will surely compromise / reconfigure the green belt considerably. Furthermore, it would surely free up the current park & ride site next to Trumpington for other uses.

Nonetheless, beyond the meadow lies the River Cam and Byron's Pool – a green sylvan refuge with winding paths and the placid river flowing gently by, and still the growl of the nearby M11, surely enough to deter Byron should he think of returning.



Turn around from this idyllic scene and we can clearly see the serried ranks of Trumpington Meadows hovering in the not-so-far distance.



This is where the first day ended, with Ms Wells, Jess the dog, and a bosky riverside picnic.

## Second Day (12<sup>th</sup> May ): Byron's Pool to Histon.



*Map Three: Grantchester to Lookout Hill*

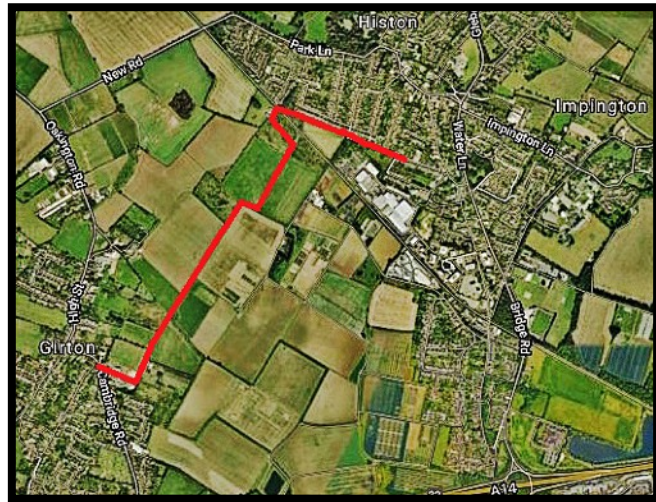


*Map Four: Lookout Hill to Wrangling Corner*





*Map Five: Wrangling Corner to Girton*



*Map Six: Girton to Histon*

Ms Wells kindly dropped Jess and me off at Grantchester, directly bordering Byron's Pool. Grantchester, like Trumpington, Cherry Hinton and Fen Ditton, is another village city-bordering village that lies on the Cambridge side of the M11 / A14 limit.

As briefly mentioned in describing Nine Wells, there is constant argy-bargy over the extent and responsibilities of the two districts of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire: Cambridge is physically, though not municipally, expanding on all sides into South Cambridgeshire. Hence, of the surrounding villages, Cherry Hinton is effectively split into two municipal halves, Fen Ditton lies a few metres outside of Cambridge, most (if not all) of Trumpington is within Cambridge, and Grantchester is just beyond. (On this subject, responding to the statutory obligation for local authorities "duty to co-operate" there is a move – 2020 – to combine the planning remit of the two districts, creating the Greater Cambridge Partnership.)

Nonetheless, Grantchester is just outside Cambridge, and it is not subject to any of the current growth schemes. It has the feel of a pleasant rural village; Betjeman called it self-conscious. A question maybe: how does it get away with it? Perhaps it doesn't have quite enough access to the city or to the M11. Perhaps it isn't due to be connected with the guided busway. A cynic might say it has some influential residents. The 2018 South Cambridgeshire Local Plan defines it as an "infill village" – too small and under-served to be on the menu for large-scale development, which would "be unsustainable", and "will generate a disproportionate number of additional journeys outside the village".

So, a stroll along Mill Way is most pleasant. Past The Orchard with its teas under the spreading apple trees (closed due to the prevailing contagion) a footpath leads off into the meadows beyond, and here we're out in the open, with only the M11 growl for company.



The path takes you straight across the meadow, over the M11 and eventually to Haslingfield. However, in order to more fully appreciate the scenery, we turn north and walk alongside the



motorway – fields on one side, thundering traffic on the other (albeit fairly less thundery than in “normal” times). Then there is another bridge, and we’re over, with the opposite of what we’ve just experienced. Soon we enter a somewhat spooky little copse planted as landscape around the M11 – Barton Road junction. Cross the Barton Road, and we’re where the Strawberries and Creem festival is held, on the Cambridge Polo Club ground (originally Haggis Farm). No festival this year, which the people of nearby Barton might not regret.

Here is a long straight footpath with fields and the polo club on north east and a belt of trees lining the south west. These trees mask the Barton Road Rifle Range, where the shooters would, were the range open, shoot at targets at the north west end. The facility is operated by Landmarc, a company whose experience has, according to its website, been “enriched by a long partnership with the Ministry of Defence in the UK to ensure their military training estates are safe, effective and sustainable places to train the armed forces”. It might all be quite entertaining to watch when the red flag is flying, especially as a branch of the footpath crosses the range, yet no flag was flying.

We ascend a small hill to a patch on the top with a point of view. As remarked upon earlier, Cambridge is not a hilly town, yet there are spots around the periphery that do afford a view, or sorts, and this is one<sup>2</sup>. Here is a bench, though we must stand, maybe on the bench, to best appreciate the panorama.



To the distant south lies the Addenbrookes complex, identifiable by its distinctive two chimneys, sometimes referred to as a two-finger salute; the city centre is to the left (north east). The scene looks largely pastoral, yet the devil is in the details: the M11 runs through the middle of this, along with Trumpington Meadows, Great Kneighton et al.



Turn to look further north and we can more fully see the extent of Cambridge’s western push. The immediate landscape looks rural yet beyond we can see the building of Eddington on the left and the expansion of West Cambridge on the right. Both these are big University of Cambridge developments, taking the city more or less to the edge of the M11, which traverses the scene. Eddington is intended to produce around 3,000 new homes, both houses and apartments, the latter mainly for university-related occupants. However, on close inspection, it does seem a cut above the rest, in design and in details – perhaps this is university investment speaking. To maintain the appetite-related theme – it’s tasty, and, of course, there’s a “green” wedge separating it from the motorway.

West Cambridge consists predominantly of academic, research and administration uses – some of them spin-offs. There are blocks of student accommodation in there too. As with Eddington, it seems to be done quite tastefully, and having non-resident zones, it can extend right out to the edge of the

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the best view is had from the top of the tower of Great St. Mary’s, though there you are in the midst of the town and no all-encompassing view is possible.

motorway. Many of the street names, here and in Eddington, echo renowned university personalities.

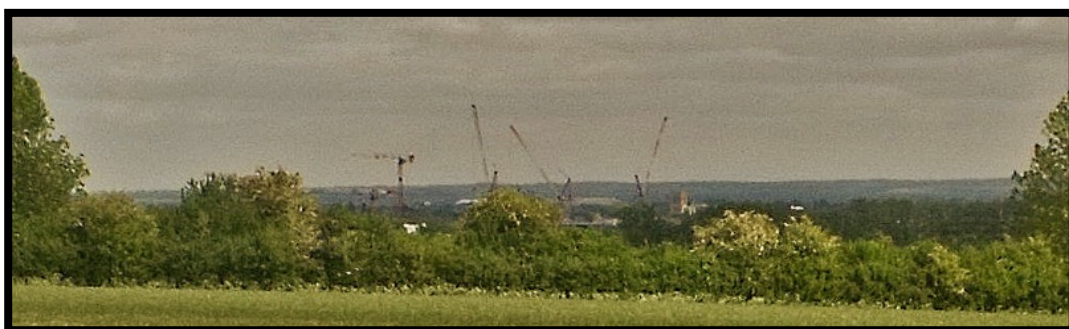
Yet there does appear to be an exception here. There remains the Laundry Farm area – a large tract of agricultural land within the Cambridge vicinity and stretching across the Barton Road towards Grantchester. This seems to be the most substantial area within the M11 / A14 boundary that isn't evidently ear-marked for re-development, yet. It largely lies within South Cambridgeshire, is mostly university-owned, and is still semi-rural. It appears to be zoned by both South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge as greenbelt. How long will this remain the fact?

The "Lookout Hill" is within Coton Countryside Reserve, a three-hundred acre network of fields and woods that straddles Bin Brook, and crosses over the M11 into the Laundry Farm area. The landlord is Cambridge Past, Present and Future, previously the Cambridge Preservation Society, and, being dedicated to both farming and public recreation, it definitely softens this part of the periphery. Any further bulges in the city's paunch will surely have to go round the reserve. But the M11 boundary appears to be holding fast, and the charming village of Coton, through which we now wander, is seemingly shielded, though not from everything.



We walk through the village, appreciating its (probably pricey) tranquillity, ascend the fields of Madingley Rise, and it is here that the trouble arises. All is bucolic, with fine views, until it becomes clear that the Cambourne to Cambridge guided busway is proposed to plough straight through. Hence the nervousness expressed in the village. Being sliced into two by the busway, the fields will lose their viability for farming, and ... well, things might change.

While passing the proposed busway route, we can turn and clearly see the cranes bowing over their creation of West Cambridge.



On top of the rise, across the Madingley Road, is the American Cemetery. Here are rank upon rank of gleaming white crosses and a most striking memorial hall. Three thousand, eight hundred and twelve soldiers are buried, with a further five thousand, one hundred and twenty seven recorded on memorial walls. It is immaculately kept, and was closed at the time. With a view to Cambridge's expanding girth, it would be a jarring juxtaposition to have this enclosed by housing.

Walking along the Cambridge Road, just over the hill from the cemetery, we have views to the north – essentially to the exciting M11 / A14 / A428 interchange. We descend further to Wrangling Corner.





Here we turn again, and observe Eddington hovering above the M11. The motorway does appear to fulfil a robust role of a barrier frustrating Cambridge's appetite. The green belt is less robust. Traditionally, this sense of urban confinement was lessened by directing building to the surrounding villages – some more than others: Cherry Hinton, Shelford, Hauxton and Harston, Hardwick, Cambourne, Willingham, Girton, Histon, Impington and Milton being perhaps more noticeably expanded. However, if they get built up too much they're likely to merge, creating a hard coating around Cambridge's more honeyed centre – but this may be stretching a point.



After lingering at Wrangling Corner we are ushered into a tunnel to pass under the M11, from where we ascend, slightly, up to the Huntingdon Road. This used to be a busy road, but all is quite quiet now due to ongoing works on connections to the A14 / M11 junction which is throwing a great swathe of land to the immediate north west into turmoil. The A14, carrying fleets of freight from Felixstowe, is now being up-graded, more-or-less to motorway standards, and the works are bringing about some questions on where we can or cannot walk. Our footpath, running from across the road to Girton, has been closed, though it is evident that people still use it. We ask a man walking his dog and he simply says "go ahead". So we do, and the noise of the A14 gets nearer, and then we come to a bridge over that noise, and then drop into the back of Girton. With suburban back gardens on one side and fields on the other, we pass through quite a pastoral patch; the neighbourhood (in South Cambridgeshire<sup>3</sup>) is enclosed by green belt.



While the village is relatively built-up and hasn't much of the quaintness of Coton, it is evident that it does have a vigorous community spirit, as can be seen in the fields that lie between it and

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<sup>3</sup> It is said that Girton College, being the first university college for residential female students, was required by the university authorities to be sited beyond the city's boundary – hence Girton and an imposing Alfred Waterhouse Victorian Gothic edifice.



neighbouring Histon. Here a network of paths and copses has been laid out, making the walk from one to the other both pleasant and convenient.



Again, it's green belt land and stretches south down to the A14, beyond which similar fields still lie though these are now to largely be built over: the sprawling Darwin Green phases one, two and three. This will result in around 2,700 residential units, many to be built on the old NIAB (National Institute of Agricultural Botany) site, which has shunted itself into new buildings nearby, field trials presumably to be conducted elsewhere. This is all part of the North West Cambridge Area Action Plan – Cambridge's voraciousness being fed by the fields.

We are met by Miss Wells at St. Andrew's church and, after a quick snack, take advantage of the Girton and Histon residents' initiatives to saunter along the paths and glades, eventually to fetch up on the guided busway that appears to act as Histon's westernmost boundary. Histon was where Chivers had much of its jam business, and many of the houses of Saffron Road – the last stretch of Day Two – look as though they were built for Chivers employees.

### Third Day (May 15<sup>th</sup>): Histon to Burnside.



*Map Seven: Impington to Bites Bait*



*Map Eight: Bites Bait to Airport Way*



*Map Nine: Airport Way to Burnside*

Dropped, kindly, by Miss Wells on Station Road, Histon, on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> of May, a march was required along the suburban streets to get to the route that we supposed was to lead through the green belt fields to Milton.

This is the un-named lane that goes south east-ish out to Field Steading, now the Wendy House children's nursery. The road is closed – private – and there is no amiable pattern of paths and glades lying between Impington and Milton. Yes, Impington. Impington and Histon are separate villages in South Cambridgeshire yet on the periphery of Cambridge and united by one village council. Indeed, Wikipedia describes the two as having “entwined”, and where a boundary may be found is a topic for longwinded discussion. Mind you, Impington Community College was designed by Walter Gropius and Maxwell Fry – so, onward, from Bauhaus to our house.

The closure of the lane necessitated a re-route to the road leading to the Holiday Inn and Chivers' Lake, also known as Cawcutts Lake. Here we are more or less right next to the pounding A14, and it's a busy area (as mentioned before – not quite as pounding and busy as a few months previous). The Holiday Inn: passing by it we might find ourselves recalling the late 1970s / early 1980s TV show Crossroads; an exercise in studied dullness. Of course, it is quite possible that the Holiday Inn is an exciting and engaging spot, as might be implied by its faux dark-wood barn motif. Leaving the hotel, we try to walk around the lake so the dog can have a swim, as we used to do a few years ago. No luck – it's been fenced off. The lake is owned by Chivers Farms and has been leased to Embryo Angling Habitats which has stocked it with two hundred and fifty or more carp – so we shouldn't and we don't, but we pass around the perimeter fence which has been erected, they say, to deter otters.





Our circuit, however, does afford a fine view of the Orchard Park Premier Inn on the Cambridge side of the pounding A14. Soon enough, we come across the same guided busway we crossed at Histon. This takes us under the pounding A14 into parts of King's Hedges: physically part of Cambridge but jurisdictionally in South Cambridgeshire – the border, as previously alluded to, makes little sense. Before we can proceed into Cambridge, we veer north along a path past the Cambridge Regional College, which takes us back under the A14 and to Blackwell.



This charming greeting (above) is in the tunnel beneath the pounding A14, and it ushers us through to the community of Blackwell, lying in a somewhat confined corner immediately bordering the motorway. This is one of South Cambridgeshire District Council's statutorily-required travellers' sites within which, according to the Cambridge News, are sixteen pitches, rented at £73 per week (not including council tax or utility bills). The council received a lot of local criticism for spending £894,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency on up-grading the site. There is a long waiting list, and, though we can't see any covered wagons on the site, there are quite a few horses grazing in the nearby fields.

Blackwell is thoroughly barricaded, and we head north east along the shady Mere Way, bestrewn with flora similar to that shown in the mural. The Mere Way is rural, and even the pounding of the A14 seems far off<sup>4</sup>. The fields to the right appear to be largely dedicated to horse pasture, while beyond we can still see the motorway traffic hammering along.



Beyond the fringing trees and bushes to the west (left) lie open fields stretching to Impington, and to the east (right) the horse paddocks, all in South Cambridgeshire green belt and outwardly not proposed for any other uses – the A14 seeming to be an effective city wall. Further along, we come to a belt of trees running along the east side, screening the landfill site of the Milton Waste Recycling Centre. We could steal through the woods to see what's going on – it's a massive site, and in 2018 there was a great conflagration.

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<sup>4</sup> The Mere Way is currently rural; one option for public transport links related to the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro scheme is to turn the Way into major north-south cycling, walking and bus route.



We don't steal through the woods, but do carry on up to Butt Lane. The issue, however, of the landfill site lingers. It is managed (and assumedly owned) by Cambridgeshire County Council – waste and mineral management coming under county, not district, remit – and hence there must surely be seamless liaison between the county council, the South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City councils, and, presumably, the Greater Cambridge Partnership. Currently it appears that it defined as a “waste management area” and a “waste consultation area”.

The general rule with landfill sites is that once they are deemed “full” they are first classified as contaminated land, then slowly decontaminated, and then designated as brownfield land available for industrial or commercial uses – but not, generally, housing. Therefore, it might be expected that in several years' time this block may be quite thoroughly urbanised, though not necessarily residentialised.

At the top of Mere Way we do indeed meet Butt Lane, but just to our left is a small concentration of commercial buildings. This was the Mereway Poultry Farm – egg production – until 2018 when an application by the Brightfield Group resulted in the site being reclassified by South Cambridgeshire as B1 use allowing for re-development for business use. The new Evolution Business Park soon came into being to house a variety of tech businesses: CMR Surgical Ltd. (“delivering high quality surgical care”), SSE Enterprise Contracting (delivering “...everything from straightforward to highly complex energy infrastructure projects”), Aveillant (moving “...radar technology into the information age by powering a full digital picture of the sky”), Intelligent Fingerprinting Ltd. (offering “...a safe, simple approach to drug testing that's quick, hygienic and enables social distancing during use”), and Bolloré Logistics (“a global leader in international transport & logistics”). The park has now been acquired by Cambridgeshire County Council to expedite its business development strategy. Here we can see local economic development in progress – from intensive agriculture to private investment to public sector strategic development, all in two years. It's enveloped by green belt, though this might change in time.

We turn right (east) along the lane with the extensive Harrold Fruit Farming Ltd acreage stretching further north – surely, possibly, a legacy of the Chivers' days – and the green lane that heads through the serried ranks of plastic-covered greenhouses towards Landbeach. Butt Lane itself is not very exciting, though soon we come to Milton Park and Ride, one of five or so placed around Cambridge.



In the picture above the park and ride is empty – the effect of pandemic. Under other circumstances it can be quite full, with buses ferrying car-parkers off into town. Later, in June 2020, this would be the site of one of the Covid-19 testing facilities – an episode that has its own history. It's an extravagant use of land.

There is considerable controversy around park and ride – and the travel hub proposed on the other side of town in green belt on the Harston Road. Do they reduce traffic entering the city, or do they increase it? There are still plenty of parking places in the city, and accessibility and cost don't appear to give consideration. It's a matter that has been vexing for many decades. Colin Buchanan's *Traffic in Towns* perhaps laid the basis for mitigating what we now have – unmitigated traffic.

Over the footbridge and into Milton. There is an original Milton, based on the spine of High Street, yet it was substantially expanded seemingly in the 1980s. The usual method was adopted: the re-routing of the Ely road as the A10 by-pass opened up a swathe of land ripe for infilling, which is what happened. We navigate a route through the infill – occasionally flummoxed by the many cul-de-sacs – and eventually arrive at the community centre from where we venture into the Milton Country

Park<sup>5</sup>. A very pleasant and evidently popular patch, managed by the Cambridge Sport Lakes Trust: woods all around fringing deep lakes – originally gravel pits – with footpaths and picnic areas. This is often held as an exemplar for urban country parks, and the nearby pounding A14 does not markedly impinge – a stretch of commercial buildings masking it.



We pass through the park and then the hedges onto Fen Road which proceeds east, over the Ely railway line, into, indeed, the fens, as it is here that we get a proper fenny feel – the openness, the straight lines, the rows of crops. The road stops at the River Cam – a decidedly rural spot, possibly the most rural around Cambridge – we could linger here and almost forget that Cambridge is lurking just over half a mile away. We turn south alongside the river to nearby Baits Bite Lock to cross the waters, via lock-like gangways, and into more fenny fields.

A pastoral footpath leads right towards Fen Ditton and all is most bucolic until we encounter the A14 bang in front of us. It's been our constant companion for much of our northern route, and before that it was the M11 that accompanied us.



The road is stretched over our walk by a forceful bridge that has a semi-brutalist appearance. On the other side it's back to a little bit of rusticity – visual, not audio. The Cam is there on the right, gently winding down from the city, and beyond it we see a crane dipping over the 217-bed four-star hotel built alongside the new Cambridge North station. This is the site of the spanking new Sustainable Urban Gateway that is underway on old railway sidings. Something in the region of 700 new houses are planned as well as thousands of square metres of offices. This corner of Cambridge is due to be filled up. Lying between the “Modern Urban Quarter with Sustainability and Health at its Heart” and our bucolic scene is the Fen Road community, with its concentration of mobile homes, cut off from the urban gateway by the Ely railway tracks.

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<sup>5</sup> The trust has plans to extend the park in lands lying to the north, towards Waterbeach. Citing the likely increase in demand for recreational services – due to all the planned new housing – the trust is proposing a series of waterways with fringing woods – the waterways being suitable for sporting activities.



This is all part of the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan drawn up by the Greater Cambridge Partnership. There is more. The Anglian Water Services' water recycling centre – sewage works catering to Cambridge's ever-expanding appetite – occupies the broad stretch of land between Cambridge North and the good old A14. The plan sees these works being exiled to beyond the A14, freeing up space for a bigger sustainable urban gateway. Yet where can it be exiled to? Presently there are three green belt options, and we've traversed one of them on our walk: on land just east of Impington (where we couldn't find a path); the fenny fields west of Landbeach; around the Low Fen Drove Way – an area also known as both Snout Corner and Honey Hill. Up to £227million has been allocated by central government to Anglian Water and the Cambridge City Council for the relocation. Things are going to change considerably around here, and many of the residents of Impington, Landbeach and Fen Ditton / Stowe-cum-Quy are not pleased.

We continue along a quiet lane into the back of Fen Ditton to St. Mary the Virgin's church and have a picnic with Ms Wells in the riverside Ditton Meadows. Replete, we pass through the village, cross the Horningsea Road, and cut across a field to the wooded belt of the dismantled railway that once went to Soham and Ely. This is now a popular footpath. We clamber up the side to carry on to the Newmarket Road Park and Ride, only to find our way blocked.



This is the conversion of the agricultural land that Marshall (longstanding aviation, and vehicle, Cambridge company) has control over between Newmarket Road and the old railway track: the company has a lot of other commercial enterprises alongside the road, but there is space for more. The development was called Wing (a nice avian reference), but seems to have changed its name to Marleigh, though this might only be the name of the developer. Anyway, to quote the website: "Marleigh won't be built in a day. With up to 1,300 new homes and a wealth of community facilities planned, it'll take time for Marleigh to evolve." The overall design seems to conform to the current vogue of streets of two or three storey buildings in brick (a version of Cambridge stock brick) with pitched roof. As with Great Kneighton, Trumpington, Eddington, Darwin Green and Cambridge North, there is a stated emphasis on density – the winding cul-de-sacs of the 1960s / 70s and 80s are well and truly gone – interspersed with green areas, some with an indefinite purpose, and little shopping.



All this is fine: houses must be supplied, affordably or not, yet many in Cambridge lie awake at night worrying about traffic. And in response, there is often a declared intention by the developers to minimise traffic by...well, this is not so clearly set out.

A large piece of swirling globular public art has been erected beside the Newmarket Road.

After some toing and froing a path is found that leads across the development site, taking us to the Newmarket Road Park and Ride, from which we finally extricate ourselves onto the road itself.

We are now thoroughly in the realm of Marshall's: Marleigh (or Wing) to the north and the open expanse of Cambridge City Airport stretching off to the south. The airport is a big local business and is particularly noisy on testing days – maintenance on Boeing 747s, Lockheed C-130 Hercules and Lockheed L-1011 TriStars for example – when it smothers the whole of east Cambridge in a deafening racket.

Where we meet the Newmarket Road all is quite open. Were we to turn right (west) towards town we would become surrounded by, on one side, Marshall's pleasingly restrained white Modernist aviation buildings. On the other side is a real mish-mash of styles for vehicle sales, much of which is to be swallowed up by Marleigh / Wing.

However, we turn left (east) and head out of town. Soon, though, all this will change. Marshall's has stated that it will re-locate, thereby opening up an approximately 800 acre site that Cambridge City Council has been eyeing for a long time. The matter comes back to housing quotas. Central government required the combined Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire area to accommodate an additional 33,500 homes or so from 2017 to 2022<sup>6</sup>. This is difficult to achieve without making inroads into greenbelt land, and hence, if a nice big space like Cambridge Airport can be turned over to housing, a considerable chunk of that 33,500 can be swallowed up almost without a hiccup. Yet there will be hiccups, of course, much of them brought about by those suffering sleepless nights worrying about traffic. A Cambridge East Area Action Plan was adopted by the city council in 2008 to manage these changes, and while it probably still forms the visionary basis, things have moved on a bit since then.

So, were we to be strolling along this part of the Newmarket Road in, say, 2035 we would most likely be in the midst of a thoroughly urban scene, with lots of traffic. However, in May 2020 we continue up to the roundabout and turn right (south) along Airport Way – an unremarkable stretch of road. It is, according to [streetlist.co.uk](https://www.streetlist.co.uk) “approximately 1,499 metres long...with an elevation of...roughly 10.82 metres above sea level”. Moreover, “there are five other streets named Airport Way in Great Britain”. Whilst we ramble along its border we encounter a man on a bicycle quite visibly swerving about. We step aside, he grins, a bit shakily, and seems to come unstuck in the middle of the road. Thankfully, there is no traffic about. We carry on to where a footpath leads right towards the openness of the airport and from there was come to see the extent of things.



It is on this path that we can, indeed, gauge the extent of what is, presumably, to be converted into an urban quarter. In the picture above we can see, on the left, the Ground Running Enclosure, said to be the biggest “quiet test building” in Europe – for those Boeings and Lockheeds – and the

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<sup>6</sup> These figures might not be exact, being open to interpretation, revision and amendment, usually upwards.

superstructure seems to be both substantial and yet collapsible and movable. The transformation of this land is difficult to envision, yet it seems it will be accomplished by, say, 2034 or so.

We proceed along the footpath and just before coming into Cherry Hinton we pass by a section of the airport land that has already been given the go-ahead for the Land North of Cherry Hinton (LNCH). As is so often the case, the 116 acre site is divided between Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire and partly implements the Cambridge East Area Action Plan (which is focussed essentially on the redevelopment of the airport area). The 1,200 house scheme is visualized as a “vibrant, high-quality and distinctive extension to the existing settlement, reflecting and enhancing the special character of the surrounding area, whilst working in synergy with Cambridge as a whole”.

The existing settlement is Cherry Hinton and the special character of the part that will abut LNCH is a mix of 1960s semis and 1980 / 2000 suburbia. Teversham will only have the slash of Airport Way separating it from Cambridge.

We enter into this mix and then walk up a narrow path next to Regency Autos, BSS Pipeline and Heating Solutions, Diba Fluid Intelligence and Inca Digital, that is “developing the future of inkjet”. Then we are on the decidedly suburban Coldham’s Lane (the apostrophe is so often left out), which we cross and continue along the path that separates the Cherry Hinton houses from a large open space. This is part of the site of what is mooted by the Anderson’s company as another substantial housing development, the final one we find on our circumambulation. Around the turn of the last century (1900s) there were two large cement factories here – the Saxon and the Norman. Both dug large quantities of cement-making clay from around-about leaving large, gaping pits. The factories have now gone leaving the pits, three of which have become lakes while the other three have been re-filled, mostly with waste, rendering them contaminated land. These re-filled pits, fundamentally brownfield land, may now be regarded by the Anderson’s company as potential sites for housing and commerce, or as solely for commerce, or open space, by Cambridge City Council (the area lies conveniently within the city boundary). The matter is under discussion. Nonetheless, things here are, as in so many other areas around Cambridge, in the midst of change, and this area is indeed labelled in the city’s local plan as an Area of Major Change.

Currently, however, all visible options are closed off.



Our path soon joins with another that leads from Cherry Hinton to Romsey Town, so we turn right (west) onto it and go by the spot where the Norman cement works used to be – now the David Lloyd Gym, the Qi Spa and the Holiday Inn Express Cambridge. There may be a slight irony that the site that used to cause so much pollution is now largely given over to healthy living and well-being. By the time we pass the Holiday Inn the footpath has gained the name The Tins which passes by another of the extensive re-filled pits, fenced off from all, it seems, but rabbits.

There is litter all about where the path bridges the Newmarket railway line, and we descend (slightly) onto the last stretch of our the walk. On this part of The Tins – a path quite tightly confined by wire fencing – we have the Army Reserve Centre on the right and “the lakes” on the left. The Centre, also the base for several Cambridge University quasi-military voluntary societies, includes one of the three water-filled excavation pits (this one dug by the Saxon works), and every now and then the



surrounding neighbourhood is awoken by loud bangs as the reservists undergo a training session. The Centre might consider its locational options were the Anderson's company to get the green light for re-development.

"The Lakes" (two big and deep water-filled pits) on the left hand side are included in the Area of Major Change, so, again, things might change. Currently, they are leased to a local angling club and access is barred (though seemingly not to the party people who take over the easternmost lake on most hot days). Proposals have been made that this area should become another Milton Lakes-type park, yet there is little progress on this. All we can do now is peer through the fence.



### **To conclude**

It was an interesting, even stimulating, walk – possibly a bit like beating the bounds as they used to do around a village, though the bounds seem to have become a bit unbound. Cambridge has certainly become extraordinarily voracious and is visibly bursting its belt on all sides. There seem to be some constraints – the main roads, the green belt – yet there is little or no evidence of a waning of appetite despite the pandemic, or Brexit. It has come to the point at which those concerned about the over-development are now countered by those pressing for more: could it be the nimbys -v- the yimbys?

Cities and towns and villages generally expand, quite often in a seemingly haphazard manner – a bit here, a bit there – and the planning system is intended to manage this, surely using the rational approach. As mentioned earlier, the Local Planning Authorities of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire are now (late 2020) coming together to formulate a new joint local plan to address the combined region – we did constantly meander across their jurisdictional boundaries on our walk. Hence, a new local (regional) plan is in the making, and one of the first stages in this (long) process is gauging the level of interest, and the "First Conversation consultation and Call for Sites" has been had, and many, many sites of proposed new development have indeed answered that call.

Now, the planning authority (authorities) stresses that this is very much the first step: a demonstration that everyone's view point is taken into account, and much will be whittled away when viewed through the prism of the guiding principles of the adopted planning objectives. Nonetheless, many of the open fields seen on our recent walk may, if not whittled away, be added to Cambridge's over-flowing plate.

Clockwise from the starting point:

- On Lime Kiln Road looking down on the caravan and motor-home site which may be eyed up for possible development: 390 acres is proposed for 1,500 units.
- The Lime Kiln Road / Wort's Causeway cross-roads, where had we turned left we would have passed an open field before reaching the Beechwoods Nature Reserve with its lofty o'er shadowing canopy: 33 acres is proposed for 380 units.
- The nice, large field between Wort's Causeway and the Fulbourn Road that the householders must fret might be on the menu: 38 acres for 490 units.

- The field alongside Granham's Road that gives slight relief from traffic and affords enticing views of the Nine Wells housing: 70 acres for 990 units.
- The Laundry Farm area, the most substantial area within the M11 / A14 boundary that isn't evidently ear-marked for re-development: 262 acres for 1,500 units.
- Linger at Wrangling Corner, with views of Eddington hovering above the M11: 494 acres is proposed for 4,200 units.
- On the other side of the brutal A14 bridge, where there is a degree of rusticity – visual, not audio: 163 acres for 1,320 units.
- And accounts of how much housing can be accommodated on the Cambridge Airport site vary, some estimates going up to 12,000 units.

Some of the called-for proposed development sites might have been missed out.

Whether there is a second, or third or fourth, spike in the on-going Covid pandemic, or whether the machinations of Brexit throw the UK economy into a different place to that which it presently occupies, a second circumambulation of the Cambridge periphery in a year or two might be revealing.