

MILL ROAD HISTORY SOCIETY
BUILDING REPORT No. 16

186 Gwydir Street

— Home of the Parr and Palmer families

— The David Parr House



Sheila Cane

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

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Cover picture: 186 Gwydir Street frontage (2018) (photo: Tamsin Wimhurst © DPC)

¹ *Capturing Cambridge* (<http://www.capturingcambridge.org/>) was the principal public vehicle for the work of the Mill Road History Project. Since the latter's conclusion, the website is now managed by the Museum of Cambridge, and continues to publish the reports and other products of the Mill Road History Society.

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1. 44a Mill Road *Ian Bent and Kieran Perkins* (2014; 3rd edn 2015)
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8. 206 Mill Road *Katie Blyth* (2015; 2nd edn Sept 2015)
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9. 81a Mill Road, Part I *Ian Bent and Allan Brigham* (2015)
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14. 299–349 Mill Road, Romsey Town *John McGill* (2018)
Development of the 'Magnet' and 'Holland Motors' Sites
15. Mill Road Bridge *Caroline Wilson* (2018)
16. 186 Gwydir Street *Sheila Cane* (2019)
Home of the Parr and Palmer Families – The David Parr House
17. The Mill Road Depot *Allan Brigham* (2019)
Wharf – Eagle Foundry – Workhouse 'Industrial Training Ground' – Allotments – Corporation Storeyard – City Council Depot

Also published by the Mill Road Society:

- A Guide to Researching and Writing a Building or Site Report for the Mill Road Area
Ian Bent, Katie Blyth and Allan Brigham (2017)
 [includes 'Glossary of Useful Architectural and Building Terms for local historians working in the Mill Road Area']

Abbreviations

CA:	Cambridge Archives
CC:	Cambridgeshire Collection
<i>CCh</i>	<i>Cambridge Chronicle</i>
<i>CIP</i>	<i>Cambridge Independent Press</i>
OS	Ordnance Survey
DPC	David Parr Charity

Acknowledgements

The researching and writing of this report would not have been possible without a great deal of help from the daughters of Elsie May Palmer, Rosemary Drake and Ann Ding, and from Tamsin Wimhurst and all the staff of the David Parr Charity, particularly Shelley Lockwood, also from the staff of the Cambridgeshire Archives and that of the Cambridgeshire Collection, in particular Mary Burgess.

Mike Petty, Sara Payne and Allan Bringham have helped me find focus when I couldn't see the wood for the trees! Paul Cane and Tony Pope have been very patient and helped with my complete lack of technical prowess. Also many thanks are due to all those in the Mill Road History Society, particularly Ian Bent and Lucy Walker.

Location of the site

Gothic Terrace is situated at the Mill Road end of Gwydir Street. It comprises the first four houses on the east side, north of the Bath House² and Gwydir Street car park. The David Parr House is the northern-most house of the Terrace. Its current postal address is:

186 Gwydir Street
Cambridge CB1 2LW

Global Positional System (GPS) references:

546301 (easting) 257978 (northing)
Lat: 52° 20' 0621" Long: 0° 13' 932467"
TL 46301 57978
TL463579

² See Julia Ewans, *Bath House, Gwydir Street*, Mill Road History Society Building Report No. 10 (2015)
https://capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Bath_House_1st_edn_2015-10-14.pdf

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Frontispiece: The Parr family: *left to right:* (standing:) David Daniel, David Douglas; (seated:) Mary Jane, Sarah Helen, Mary Emma (© Rosemary Drake and Ann Ding)



Figure 1 — Fan light over front door (photo: Helena G Anderson © DPC)

INTRODUCTION

I moved back to Cambridge in 2003 and bought a house in Gwydir Street. My next door neighbour was Phyllis Fuller, who had lived there since 1946 and was friendly with Mrs Palmer, the lady who lived in No. 186.

Mrs Palmer was very private and independent, but as she became older and her eyesight failed she became more reliant on Phyllis and me for help in both illness and practical issues. I got to know her and her family well and even had a key to the house.

Researching and writing this history of No. 186 has been a labour of love as a memorial to her and her stewardship of the house, so beautifully embellished by her grandfather, David Daniel Parr. The work has taken me on a journey back in time – to Barnwell Priory and its incumbents in the middle ages, to the management of the Priory's extensive lands after the dissolution of the monasteries, to the subdivision of those lands after the Enclosure Act at the beginning of the 19th century, and to the speculative building of modest terrace houses later in that century.

Above all, it has given me privileged admission to the intimate world of one particular family and to the highly unusual daily workings of that particular household in one of those otherwise entirely unremarkable Petersfield terraced houses. That privilege, that opportunity I owe to the many people whose help I acknowledge in the Acknowledgments on p. 4 above.

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PRE-HISTORY OF THE SITE

Pre-Enclosure

The first Augustinian priory in Cambridge was founded in 1092 by Picot, Norman sheriff of Cambridge, as a thanksgiving for his wife's recovery from illness. The Priory, with a Prior and six canons, was probably on the site of what is now either Magdalene College or St. Giles' Church. Picot was apparently involved in a plot against King Henry I (reigned 1100–35), and his estates were forfeited and given to an Englishman, Pain (Pagan) Peveral (c.1060–1133), who had recently returned from the First Crusade (1095–99) and brought back many sacred relics from Antioch which he wished to house in a larger monastery. In 1112 he obtained from the King a piece of land at Barnwell (somewhere between the river and what is now Newmarket Road), on which he re-founded the Priory with a Prior and thirty canons, this number gradually diminishing over time, only fifteen canons remaining by 1534.³



Figure 2 – Barnwell Priory, Cellarer's Chequer

All monastic houses had large amounts of land which the monks either worked or rented out in order to provide an income for their community. Much of this land was provided by individuals to religious orders in return for the monks praying for the souls of the departed, the belief being that without this a release from Purgatory and entrance into Heaven would be compromised. It was through such beliefs that many monasteries became powerful landowners.

The Barnwell estate became very large, more than 2,000 acres, and the piece of interest for this report, which lay between what is now Mill Road and Newmarket Road, was known as the 'East Fields'. The land was not particularly fertile: some was gravel, some clay and a good deal of it very damp. This area was often called Bradmore or Bradmoor (a derivation of broad moor) – see Figure 3 below. Some was used for growing crops and some for pasture, often divided into small plots.⁴

In November 1538 following King Henry VIII's seizure of most monasteries, the Prior and canons surrendered Barnwell Priory to the Commissioners for the Dissolution, and they took an inventory of moveable and immoveable objects and some cattle. One of the Commissioners and a local farmer bought some lots and leased the lands. In 1550 the Priory and lands were granted to Sir Anthony Browne, and then variously owned by Lord Clinton and

³ Knowles and Hadcock (1953), p. 126.

⁴ Hesse (2000).

Saye, the Wendys of Haslingfield, the Butlers of Barnwell and in 1763 Thomas Panton, the Master of King George II's running horses at Newmarket.⁵

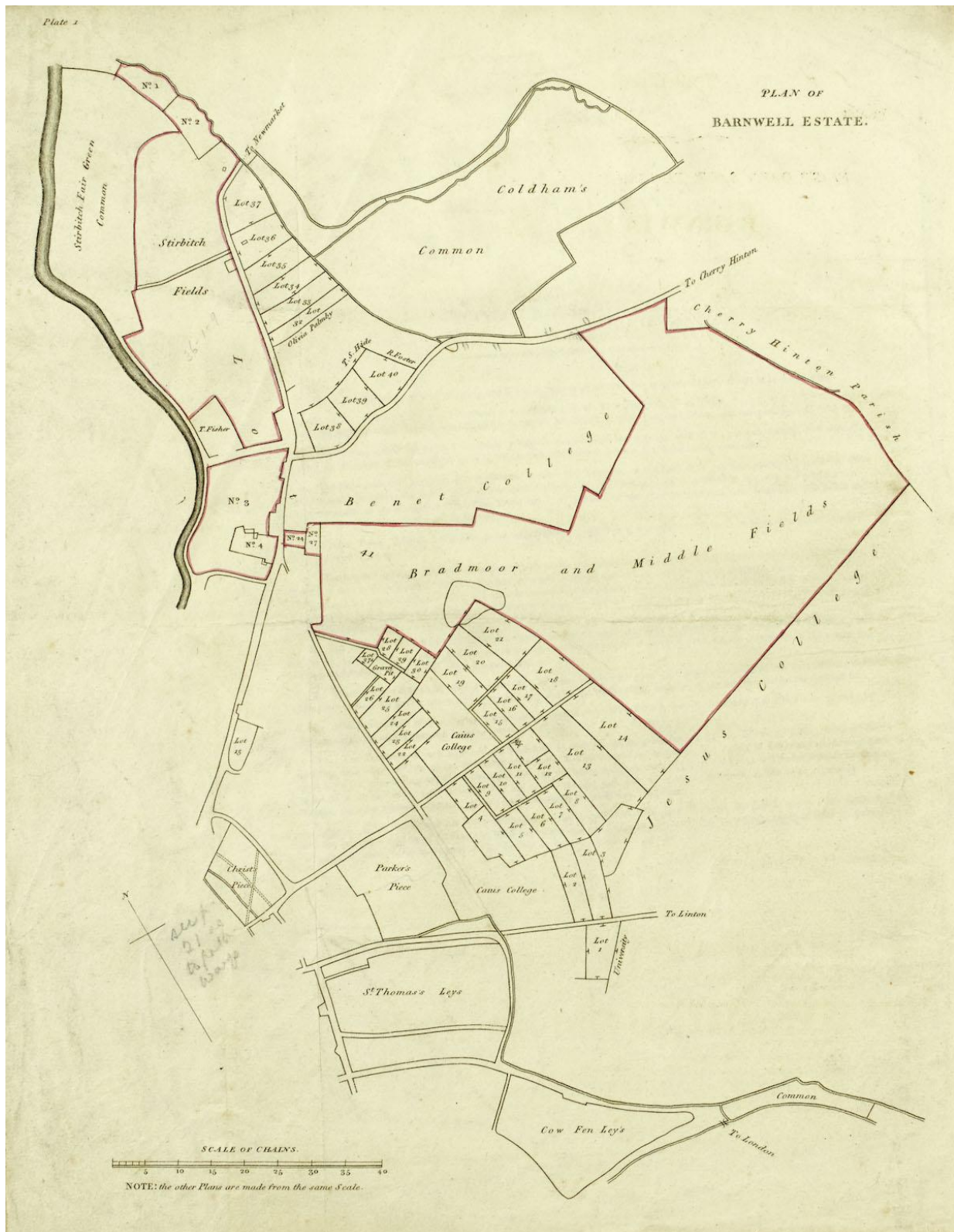


Figure 3 — Barnwell Enclosure Map (1809) : CA: bk.65_O4.pl.Barnwell.1809
(Mill Road runs diagonally bottom left to middle right, ending at the red boundary.)

⁵ History of Abbey House (1980?).

In 1800 a population of 10,000 was living in Cambridge, mostly in the overcrowded centre of the town, and there was pressure to expand housing towards the outskirts. In 1801 and 1807, the Enclosure Acts allowed for this to be achieved. Thomas Panton's son 'Polite' Tommy Panton was keen to have the Barnwell estate enclosed, allowing him to sell it for development. The colleges and Cambridge establishment were opposed to this plan, but using the influence of his rich and powerful Newmarket friends, Tommy Panton succeeded in obtaining royal assent for the Barnwell Enclosure Act in 1807. When Tommy died in 1808 without having children, the estate passed to his sister Lady Willoughby de Eresby, Priscilla Bertie, the wife of Peter Lord Gwydir, and was put up for auction in 1809 (see auction notice, Figure 4):

The lands near to the town of Cambridge will be sold in small lots, and are well situate for garden, nursery, and building ground. [...] The occupation of the lands in Barnwell may be had immediately.

There are no records as to who bought which parcels of land. However, from later property sales it is clear that Rev Dr James William Geldart (1785–1876), Fellow and Vice-Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge acquired large quantities of land between what is now Mill Road, Ditchburn Place, Newmarket Road and the Beehive Centre.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

TO be SOLD by AUCTION,
in convenient farms and lots, at the *Eagle and Child Inn*, in **CAMBRIDGE**, on **THURSDAY, FRIDAY, and SATURDAY**, the 9th, 10th, and 11th days of *November instant*,
By **Mr. JOHN SWAN;**
The sale to begin each day precisely at three o'clock in the afternoon;

All the very valuable and desirable FREEHOLD (and small part Copyhold) ESTATES, of the late **THOMAS PANTON, Esq;** deceased, situate in the several parishes of *Barnwell, Fen Ditton, Horningsea, Histon, Waterbeach, and Teversham*, adjoining to, and in the immediate neighbourhood of, the town of *Cambridge*; containing together about **TWO THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED ACRES** of very rich **ARABLE, MEADOW, and PASTURE LAND**, let to respectable tenants, at very low rents, amounting together to **Four Thousand Four Hundred Pounds** per annum, with the manors of *Barnwell, and Fen Ditton with Horningsea.*

The lands near to the town of Cambridge will be sold in small lots, and are well situate for garden, nursery, and building ground; the more distant lands are divided into eleven capital farms, with farm-houses and convenient out-buildings. Nearly the whole estate is inclosed, well fenced, and tithe free. The occupation of the lands in Barnwell may be had immediately. The lands in Ditton and Horningsea are partly held from year to year, and possession may be had of such at Michaelmas 1810. Other parts are held under leases, of which four years will be unexpired at Michaelmas 1810. The Barnwell Estate will be sold on Thursday the ninth, the Ditton, Horningsea, and Teversham, on Friday the tenth, and the Histon and Waterbeach on Saturday the eleventh days of November.

Barnwell, Ditton, Horningsea, and Teversham, are adjoining parishes. Barnwell adjoins Cambridge, from which Ditton is two miles, and Horningsea and Teversham three miles distant only. The lands in these parishes are bounded by the river Cam; and the turnpike road from Cambridge to Newmarket passes nearly through the centre of them. Histon is two miles from Cottenham, and four from Cambridge, and Waterbeach is three from Cottenham, and six from Cambridge.

Printed particulars, with plans of the several farms and lots, may be had at the *Ram Inn, Newmarket; the Angel Inn, Bury; Lamb, Ely; George, Huntingdon; Red Lion, Royston and Linton;* at the office of *Messrs. Bray and Son, Great Russell-street, Bloomsbury;* of *Mr. Truslove and the auctioneer, Cambridge;* and of *Mr. Clutton, Ryegate, Surry.*

Figure 4 — Sale of Thomas Panton's estates (1809):
CCh 4 Nov 1809

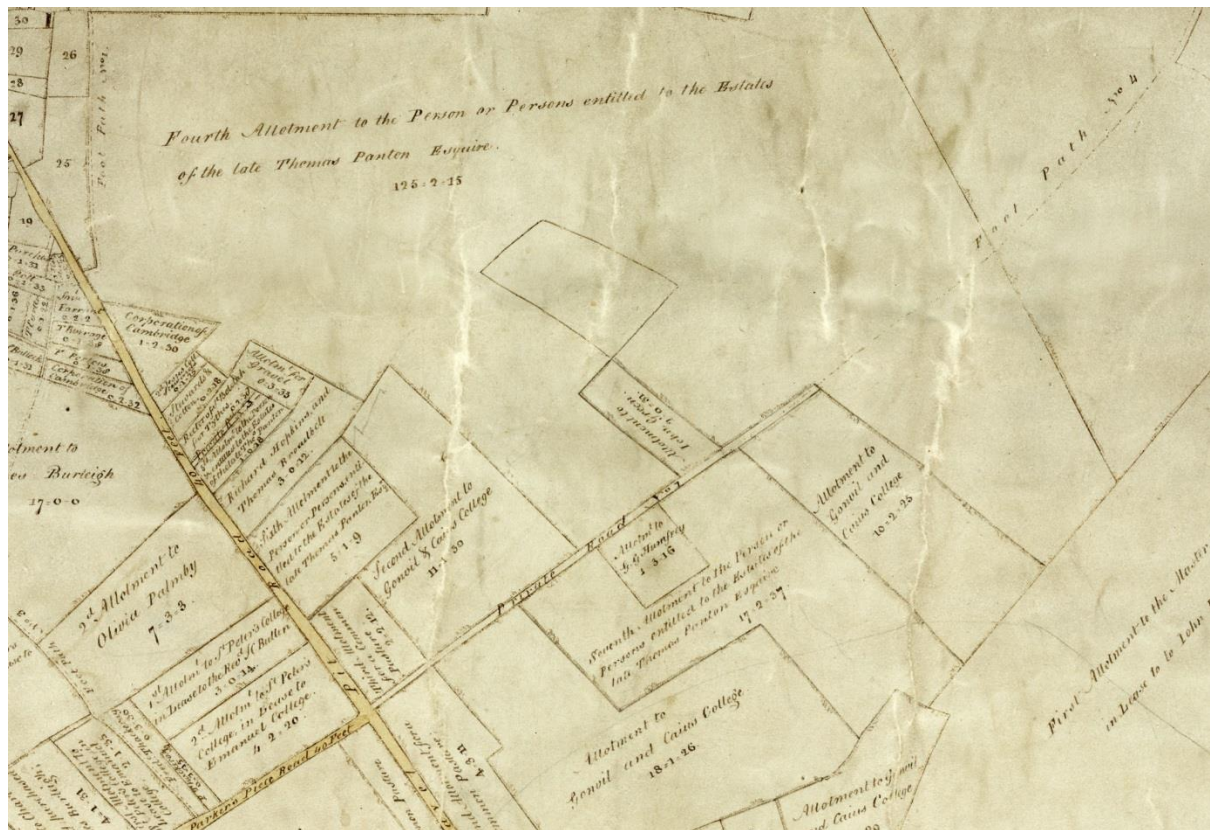


Figure 5 — Barnwell Enclosure Map (1812) : CA: ma.Q_RDc.Petersfield
 'Fourth Allotment to the Person or Persons entitled to the Estates of the late Thomas Panton Esquire'



Figure 6 — Baker map of Cambridge (1830) (CC:)

Post-Enclosure

At some point in the 1860s Rev Geldart sold some land to Joseph Sturton, a successful chemist in Fitzroy Street, who also became an alderman and the mayor. Sturton did not rely on auction houses like other landowners: he sold privately through his own advertisements, many of which show a talent for marketing-speak:

[...] the most healthy part of Cambridge [...] the healthy breezes from Gog and Magog Hills which reach St Andrew the Less before they reach other parts of Cambridge.

Figure 7 – Sturton advert : CCh 12 Sep 1968

Many of the owners of the lands have now given their names to local streets and public houses.⁶ Development grew rapidly and the north end of Gwydir Street Nos 1–88 were completed by 1874, accommodating mostly working-class artisans including coopers, masons, bricklayers, tailors, carpenters and railway workers.

Figure 8 — Sale of Gwydir House : CCh 18 Apr 1874

There were several different railway companies running different lines in and out of Cambridge, each determined to become the main contractor. Great Northern launched plans to create a line from the existing station into the area of Orchard Street and Christ's Pieces, which would have involved running tracks in a north-westerly direction, possibly through the Mill Road end of Gwydir Street, and this may account for the latter's later development.⁷ Figure 5, the Barnwell Enclosure map of 1812, shows Mill Road as 'Private Road No. 7' then continuing as 'Foot Path No. 4'. The area of Tommy Panton's estates is given as 125 acres 2 rods 15 perches. Figure 6, Baker's map of 1830, names 'Mill Road', and identifies its extension as 'Foot Path to Cherry Hinton'.

In 1862 Rev John Dunn, MA, bought Gwydir House, a large villa on Mill Road, on the corner of what is now Gwydir Street, and in 1865 bought from the Geldart family a large piece of land running from what is now Hooper Street to the entrance of Gwydir Street car park, which he held for nearly ten years, perhaps hoping that he could sell it to one of the railway companies. But in April 1874 he sold both the house and all the land at auction (see Figure 8) as separate building plots.⁸

⁶ Gray and Stubbings (2000).

⁷ Fellowes (1976), pp. 33–35; Shorland-Ball (2017), pp. 12–17.

⁸ Deeds to 186 Gwydir Street.

1874–85 : THE FIRST TEN YEARS

George Cooper (1850–1927?)

in 1874 a young man called George Cooper bought several of the plots of land on the east side of Gwydir Street and arranged to have them built into a four-residence block to be called Gothic Terrace. Who the builder was is unknown, but the houses are simple in design and decoration.

Who was this young man? George Cooper was born in Grantchester on 26 May 1850, and grew up in Gothic Street (now demolished), off Saxon Street.⁹ The house was very cheap to rent and would now probably be described as a slum. The 1871 census records George's father, James, a 58-year-old gardener and domestic servant, his mother, Ann, a 50-year-old laundress, and his elder sisters Mary Ann and Charlotte, domestic servants (one unemployed).¹⁰ His elder brothers Edward and Frederick have already left home. George himself is 21 years old and is listed as a 'wine porter'.

How does a young man from such a working-class background manage to acquire property? The Worshipful Company of Vintners declares:

A wine porter in the 1870s will have been a poor man. In London the wine porters were a squad (in fact, several squads) supervised from the Middle Ages by the Vintners' Company. They had the exclusive right to move barrels of wine around the City and for three miles around. They were not members of the Company, merely supervised by it. The system fell apart in the mid/late 19th century, as the new dock companies refused to recognise their monopoly from 1803 and the tipping point came in the 1840s when declining income came to combine with technological advantages such as lifts in wine cellars and more and more wine in bottles rather than barrels.¹¹

It has not been possible to identify any employers for any of the family. The colleges do not keep records of domestic servants and have never employed wine porters.

George was obviously a self-motivated young man and in 1875 we find him winning a prize in the Cambridge Industrial and Fine Art Loan Exhibition. He exhibited five pieces, declaring that they had not been exhibited before, 'made after hours by George Cooper, 24 Gothic Street, wine porter'. The items comprised:

Loo [card game] table inlaid with various kinds of wood
Brown oak whatnot
pair Jardiniers
Time Piece, cased in ebony and ivory
Small time piece.

The Loo table was awarded a silver medal in Class II.¹²

⁹ For more on Gothic Street, see <https://www.capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Newtown.-Cambridge-New-Town-A-Victorian-Microcosm.-PCAS.-XCIV.-2005.-P-Bryan-and-N-Wise.pdf>

¹⁰ See Appendix for transcript.

¹¹ Crawford (1977), Appendix C, pp. 271–79, 'The Wine Porters'.

¹² 'Cambridge Industrial and Fine Art Loan Exhibition - closing ceremony', *CIP* 26 Feb 1876; also programme of opening ceremony (1875).

Gothic Terrace



Figure 9 — datestone between Nos 188 and 190
(photo: Ian Bent, 2018)

Gothic Terrace, built in 1876, is constructed as two sets of mirror-image 16-foot-wide terrace houses, each set back from the road by a small front garden and having a 100-foot rear garden with flower beds and paths (Figure 10).¹³

This was an economical design, as the fireplaces backed onto each other, hence chimney stacks were shared between neighbouring houses (Figure 11).

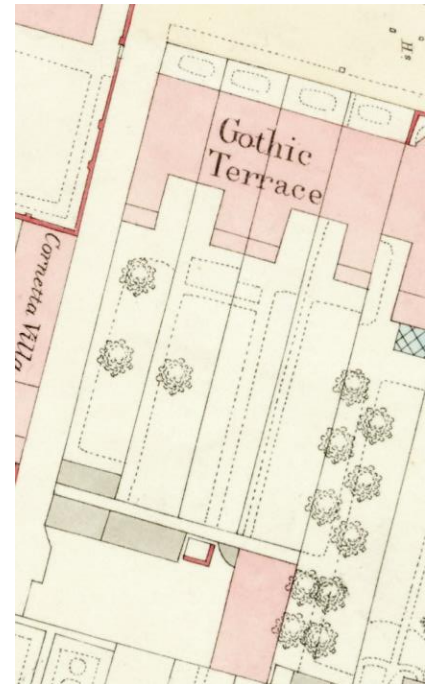


Figure 10 — 1888 OS map (detail)



Figure 11 — Gothic Terrace (photo: Ian Bent, 2018)

¹³ For more information about the Terrace, including occupants, see separate companion report (forthcoming).

There is no decorative brickwork, but the stone lintels have an unusual decoration of ogee curves¹⁴ and dentil (dog-tooth) edging (see Figure 12, below). Ogee curves are not visible anywhere else in the area, and although one house in Sturton Street has a similar dog-tooth pattern above the windows, it has not proved possible to identify a builder.



Figure 12 — Lintel with double ogee curve (photo: Tamsin Wimhurst, 2018 © DPC)

A close inspection of No. 188, the mirror-image house next door, makes it clear that there was very little decoration internally as well. There are fine high skirting boards and a nice painted banister, but there is no sign of any original mouldings, picture or dado rails.¹⁵

On entering No. 186,¹⁶ there was a hall, called a 'passage', lit by a semi-circular fan light above the front door (Figure 1, above). Halfway down on the right was a door to the front room, the drawing room (or parlour), with a fireplace, alcoves on either side, and a flat sash window to the front. Continuing along the passage under the curved archway and past the staircase, another door on the right led to the back room, where the family would spend their evenings. It contained a fireplace with alcoves, possibly cupboards on either side, and a window to the back. At the end of the passage on the left was a door to the cupboard under the stairs, used for storage, and a door to the kitchen where the family spent most of their days.

The kitchen contained a 'range' of some sort on the north-east wall, with a sink and a copper in the alcoves to either side. The copper supplied hot water and was used for clothes washing as well as filling the tin bath that would have been brought in when required. David Parr tells us in his notebook that there was a pantry, but there is no evidence as to where this was positioned. On the southwest wall was a window and a side door through which the outside WC and coal bunker were accessed. The WC would probably have been built on to the outside wall in the north-east corner to enable all drainage into that area.

Ahead, at the top of the stairs was a small lean-to bedroom. Following the stairs and landing round through 180° to the front of the house, there were two further bedrooms: a small double room with a single window overlooking the garden in the middle of the house, and a large double room with two windows overlooking the street. Both these bedrooms had fireplaces.

George Cooper appears to have funded his property portfolio by mortgages which may have been arranged by his solicitor, whose offices were in St Andrew's Street. For example, in December 1880 George borrowed £200 from widow Emma Kemp, who lived on St Andrew's

¹⁴ *ogee curve*: a line consisting of two curves, one convex, one concave; a moulding with an ogee profile. Paired ogees are used to form a pointed and 'shouldered arch', much used in gothic revival houses for door and window openings.

¹⁵ *moulding*: a shaped strip of wood, stone, plaster etc fitted as a decorative feature; *picture rail*: a continuous wooden moulding round the walls of a room just below the ceiling, for purposes of hanging pictures; *dado rail*: a decorative waist-high moulding round the walls of a room, dividing the upper from the lower half of the wall surfaces (often differently decorated), and also serving to protect the wall from damage (see Figures 22 and 29, below).

¹⁶ See Figures 16 and 17 on p. 22–23 to follow this description.

Street, at an interest rate of £10 to be paid annually, to fund the purchase of No. 184 (the house beyond Gothic Terrace), which he then rented out. He may perhaps have been unable to pay the interest on time, for he then borrowed another £20 from his solicitor. He sold No. 184 in 1882 for £380, making a substantial profit after repaying his mortgages.

In May 1880 George Cooper is listed in the Poor Rate records for St Andrew the Less as owning five properties (Nos 182, 186, 188, 190 and 192) and a small piece of land. It is not known when he acquired No. 182, but he was renting out all the properties with the exception of No. 192, where he was living with his wife and son.¹⁷

The 1881 census shows the houses as all occupied by families, most coming from within Cambridgeshire, and listing widely varied artisan occupations. George Cooper now declared himself to be a wood turner.

186 Gwydir Street					
Charles H Hawkins	Head	Mar	30	Carpenter	Cambs Melbourn
Jula Hawkins	Wife	Mar	29	—	Cambs Girton
Arthur Hawkins	Bro	Unmar	18	Photographer	Cambs Melbourn
Henry Richardson	Bro	Unmar	19	Baker	Cambs Madingley
188 Gwydir Street					
Thomas Gibbons	Head	Mar	30	Upholsterer	Norfolk Lynn
Annie M Gibbons	Wife	Mar	29	—	Suffolk Lye[?]
190 Gwydir Street					
Joseph Wallis	Head	Mar	44	Waiter	Cambridge
Ellen Wallis	Wife	Mar	37	—	Essex Eastwood
John Jos Wallis	Son	Unmar	16	Compositor	London Hoxton
Edith M Wallis	Dau	Unmar	9	[at school]	Cambridge
Frederick C Wallis	Son	Unmar	6	[at school]	Cambridge
192 Gwydir Street					
George Cooper	Head	Mar	30	Wood turner	Cambs Grantchester
Sophia Cooper	Wife	Mar	30	—	Cambs Burwell
William Cooper	Son	Unmar	2	—	Cambridge
Arthur Cooper	Son	Unmar	5mo	—	Cambridge

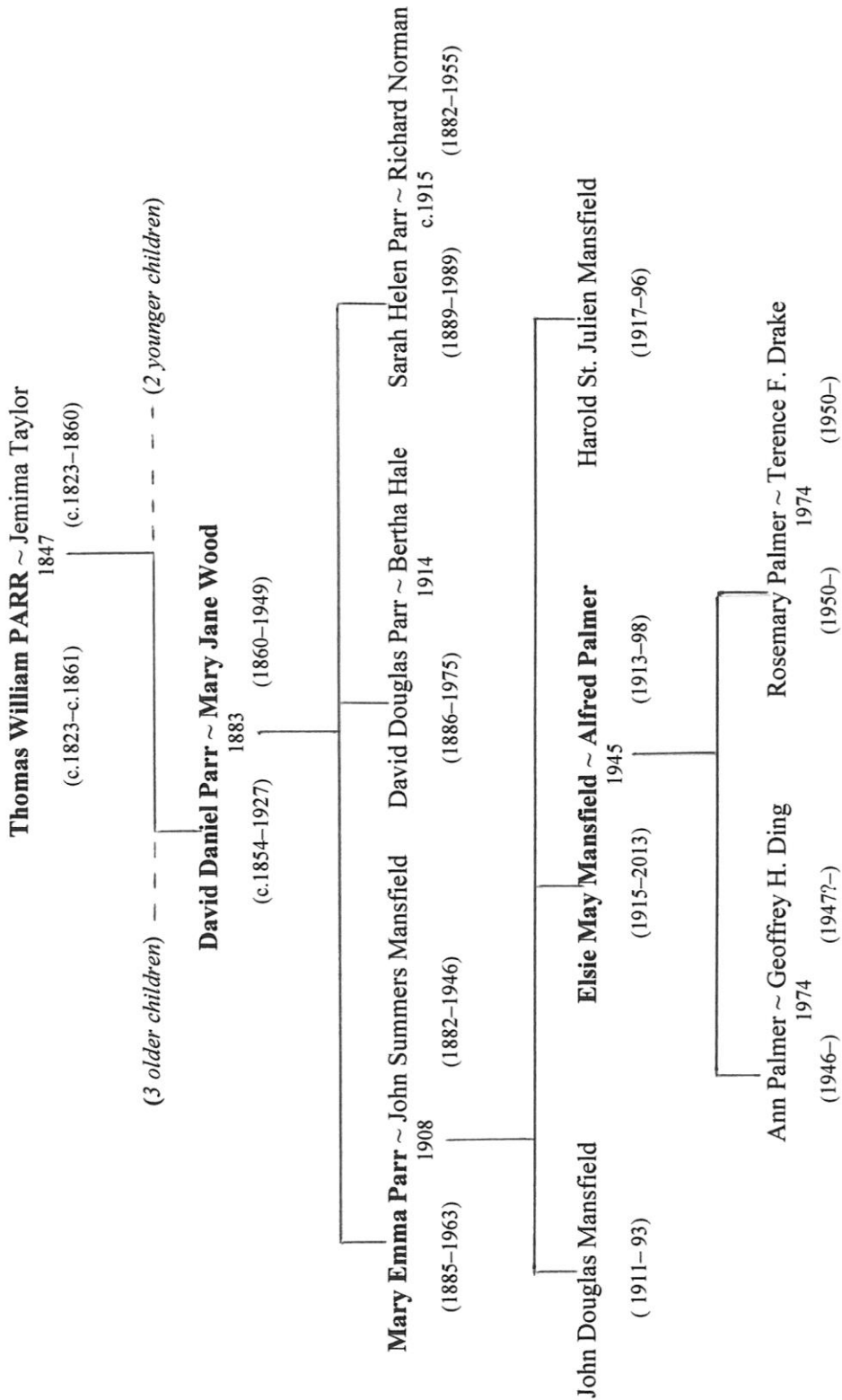
¹⁷ Poor Rate record May 1880 (CA:)

By 1891 George Cooper had sold all his property and moved with his wife and surviving son to Kidderminster where he variously listed himself as a carpenter, wood turner and French polisher. His brothers remained in rented property in the Mill Road area, listing themselves as gardeners. His father, James, died in 1891 as a pauper in the neighbouring Mill Road Union Workhouse.¹⁸

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¹⁸ Date and place of George Cooper's death are uncertain: a George Cooper died in December 1918, aged 66, in Kidderminster; another in March 1927, aged 76, in Kidderminster; another in December 1927, aged 77, in Caxton, Cambs.

PARR FAMILY TREE



1886–1927 : THE DAVID PARR YEARS

On 26 November 1885 George Cooper auctioned three of the Gothic Terrace houses and David Daniel Parr successfully offered the sum of £287.00 for No. 186 Gwydir Street.

David Daniel Parr (c.1854–1927)

David Daniel Parr was born in Chesterton in about 1854 to Thomas William Parr, an agricultural labourer, and his second wife, Jemima. David was one of six children, and when Jemima, his mother, died of TB in 1860, he was only 6 or 7 years of age – and there was one surviving younger child.

Future research will surely provide more details about the family, which is likely to have fallen on hard times at this point. But, as far as we know at the moment, David is next found in the 1871 census working as a 'joiner's apprentice' and listed as a 'visitor' at No. 2 Garden Cottages, Cambridge.¹⁹ His early training in joinery was to give him useful skills when it came to renovating his later home, but it seems that he moved into decorative painting when he joined F R Leach & Sons in July 1871.²⁰

F R Leach & Sons had been set up in 1862 by Frederick Leach, a master art craftsman specialising in ornate, colourful, gilded and painted interiors. He worked with highly regarded architects and designers such as George Frederick Bodley, Charles Eamer Kempe and William Morris in churches, colleges, private houses and civic buildings in Cambridge as well as on many projects across the country, including St James's Palace, Westminster.

The company was based in City Road, Cambridge with an office on King's Parade, a show-room and shop in St Mary's Passage and additional premises in Great Ormond Street, London. It was well respected, and by 1882 employed twenty-eight men, two women and six boys.

Some of the Cambridge colleges were unhappy that such local working-class artisans had been employed by William Morris to undertake their commissions. In 1866 the Dean of Jesus College wrote to Bodley: 'some astonishment is felt at the employment of a Cambridge workman in the execution of a work which was intrusted to *Mr Morris*', to which Bodley replied:

Morris finds Leach a very capable and able executant. The design and exact shades of the colours are all done according to the directions given to him [...] He is doing it quite as well as Morris' men would.²¹

David Parr's 'signature' ('D. PARR. SENR: 1871', hence soon after he joined the firm) can be seen on his work in All Saints Church, Jesus Lane – a famous Leach example.²²

THURSDAY NEXT.
GWYDIR STREET, CAMBRIDGE,
Five minutes' walk from centre of Town.
**THREE SUBSTANTIALLY-BUILT
FREEHOLD HOUSES.**
With GARDENS (100 feet in depth).
**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY
A. M. ROBINSON,**
At the Lion Hotel, Cambridge, on THURSDAY
next, November 26th, 1885, at Seven o'clock p.m.
punctually.
Lot 1.—HOUSE (No. 186), containing front and
back sitting-rooms, kitchens and offices, with three
bedrooms, and garden at back.
Lot 2.—HOUSE (No. 188), ditto.
Lot 3.—HOUSE (No. 189), ditto.
—There is a right of way at the back.
For further particulars and conditions of sale, apply
to the AUCTIONEER, 9, Bene't Street, Cambridge, or
to Mr. JOHN CONGREVE, Solicitor, Cambridge.

Figure 13 — Sale of Gothic Terrace 26 Nov 1885
(CCh 20 Nov 1885)

¹⁹ Garden Cottages: two small houses between Nos 26 and 27 Broad Street, off East Road, long ago demolished. For this and other census reports, see the Appendix.

²⁰ Information in original Apprenticeship Agreement (private family archive), with thanks to Shelley Lockwood.

²¹ From a letter dated 8 Nov 1866 from Bodley to E H Morgan preserved in the Jesus College Archives; with thanks to Shelley Lockwood. — William Morris supplied the decorations for the ceilings of the nave and tower of Jesus College's 12th/13th-century chapel, and these were painted under his direction in 1867.

On the night of the 1881 census, Parr was working as a 'decorative artist' and boarding at 19 Bath Place, Islington,²³ in London. Two years earlier he had been working at Hare Hill House in Cheshire when on 15 November he met nearby Tytherington-born cotton doubler Mary Jane Wood (1860–1949), and in the first quarter of 1883 the two were married in neighbouring Macclesfield. By 1884 they were living at 12 Cross Street, Cambridge with their first child, Mary Emma. By November Mary Jane was pregnant with their second child.

On 6 February 1886 David Daniel Parr and George Cooper signed the legal documents to 186 Gwydir Street, which include the phrase: 'and now in the occupation of Arthur R. Hill'. It appears that the Parrs did not move in immediately, since their second child, David Douglas Parr, was born on 12 July 1886 and christened on 15 August in Rainow, Cheshire. Perhaps he was working in Cheshire at that time. Whether Arthur Hill continued to rent the property is unknown, but David Parr's notebook shows that he did not begin any work on the house until the summer of 1887.

Notebook and Renovations

David Parr left a substantial collection of spare fittings, ornaments, fixings, tools, and other ironmongery as well as a notebook, meticulously written, containing details of what work he did in the house, in which room and when he did it. This notebook, entitled 'Date and description of work done inside and outside the house' (now the property of Rosemary Drake and Ann Ding) is proving to be invaluable as a resource in cataloguing and refurbishing the property. The Mill Road History Society has been given access to the dates and specific projects and some small sections of text.

Exterior Renovations

In 1887 David Parr began his renovations by repairing and painting all the exterior windows. Presumably very little maintenance had been carried out in the previous ten years, so there may have been some urgency to this. The front door had the old paint removed and three coats applied during the summer of 1888, and in 1889 it was painted with two coats of white paint and then varnished. In 1898 ivy was planted against the brickwork of the house at the front, which remained until 1946 when Alfred Palmer and David Douglas Parr removed it. It is not known when the palm/yucca-type plant was introduced. In the summer of 1899 the old wooden fence was removed and iron railings

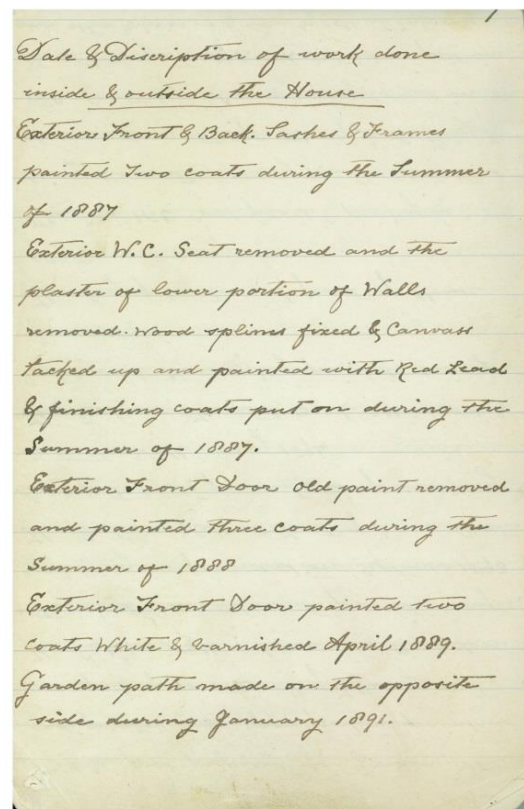


Figure 14 — Page from David Parr's notebook (1887–91 ©Rosemary Drake & Ann Ding)

²² All Saints' Church, Cambridge was built between 1863 and 1870. F R Leach & Sons provided the wall and ceiling decorations. These 'form complex, bold stencilled patterns throughout the church. As well as exotic floral friezes there is much use of religious symbolism such as the Sacred Monogram and the Fleur-de-lis. Around the upper walls are texts from the Book of Revelation (*Revelation* 7:9) and Psalms in the south aisle, and the Beatitudes (*Matthew* 5:3–12) in the nave' (wikipedia 'All Saints' Church, Cambridge', consulted 12 March 2019).

²³ Probably Bath Place, Copenhagen Street, Islington from c. 1847, renamed Carlsbad Street in 1890/91, now subsumed into York Way Court. See

[https://www.maps.thehunthouse.com/Streets/New to Old Abolished London Street Names.htm](https://www.maps.thehunthouse.com/Streets/New%20to%20Old%20Abolished%20London%20Street%20Names.htm)

were fitted by Allsop & Son for £3 17s 6d. (see Figure 23 below). We think that most of the houses in the street installed metal railings in the front gardens, but sadly they were all removed as part of the war effort in the Second World War: on the wall between Nos 177 and 175 across the road cut marks are clearly visible where they were removed. In 1902 box hedging was planted and gravel laid. The exterior of the house was now transformed and must have looked very smart. It was not until 1914 that the front door was painted in the style in which it would later be renovated. In 1916 and again in 1924, buckets of earth were removed from the front to the back garden and more gravel was laid. This may have been another effort to reduce damp on the front wall.

The outside lavatory was the next project in 1887. It was obviously in a very damp condition as Parr removed the seat and stripped the plaster before tacking on canvas to create a void, presumably to allow more air to circulate, as he records in his notebook:

Exterior W.C. Seat removed and the plaster of lower portion of Walls removed. Wood splines fixed & Canvass tacked up and painted with Real Lead & finishing coats put on during the Summer of 1887.

Hall and Staircase

In the autumn of 1887 Parr turned his attention to the hall and staircase. Whether there was a grand plan, or what his motivation might have been, is not known. Clearly some materials were left over from clients' projects; but was he trying out ideas in his own house to offer them to clients, or was it simply an attempt to decorate his own house in his own style? In his notebook he listed the time taken to achieve certain tasks and the costs that would have been incurred, which might lead to the assumption that he was preparing projects that he could offer clients. Many of his projects he describes as done 'at intervals' because he was often working away from home. We know that he spent time in London, Manchester and Oxford among other places. He certainly seems to have been working on several rooms at the same time, and it would be really interesting to hear the views of his wife on the subject! Certainly none of the neighbouring houses were decorated in a similar fashion.

The hall and staircase was the first area of the house to be decorated with mouldings as well as decorative paintwork. It is really remarkable that, throughout all of this work, after dark he worked only by candlelight or lamplight – he never installed gas on grounds that it degraded the colour and quality of decorative paintwork. He inserted plugs into the walls to attach the mouldings before attaching canvas, which was then sized before several coats of paint were applied. The work continued until the autumn of 1888. The stair treads were not painted and grained²⁴ until 1901. Work continued at intervals: in 1899 he removed two panels from the front door and inserted frosted glass, which will have increased the light levels. In 1904 he removed the plaster from the wall near the door, raked out the brick joints, and fixed Lincrusta²⁵ panels which had been salvaged from a customer's project, and in 1922 he added Anaglypta wallpaper²⁶ to the ceiling.

Bedrooms

In the Spring of 1888 Parr moved the doorway of the second bedroom so that it now faces you when you turn at the top of the stairs (Figure 16 shows the changes). Originally it was

²⁴ *graining*: the technique of imitating the natural grain of expensive woods by building up layers of paint on inexpensive wood. These were then varnished and the desired wood effect produced by a special brush called a 'mottler', or sometimes a special comb. The practice was widespread in the 19th century, and continued for some decades into the 20th.

²⁵ *Lincrusta*: a deeply embossed, patterned wallpaper made of gelled paste of linseed oil and wood flour, designed to be painted. The product was first launched in 1877 by Frederick Walton, who had previously invented linoleum.

²⁶ *Anaglypta*: a textured wallpaper, made of paper, designed to be painted. It was a cheaper product than Lincrusta, and less durable, invented by a Walton employee, Thomas John Palmer, who went into business producing it in 1887.

next to the front bedroom doorway, which faced towards the front of the house. With the doorway in the earlier position and the sash window to the rear, it made the second bedroom rather limited in its use, and a double bed would have felt very cramped. (This change has not been much adopted in the rest of the street but would have made a more acceptable double room.) This became the main bedroom and Parr made a great many improvements to it. An air brick was inserted (more reference to damp issues?). The grate and hearth were removed and replaced with a 'cast iron chamber' set in the chimney, and the grate replaced. The chamber received hot air from the range in the room below, and a vent in the chimney breast allowed hot air into the room. The vent could be open or capped, and is still in place today. Bookshelves were fixed in 1890.



Figure 15 — Jug & bowl of cabinet wash stand (© DPC)

A cabinet wash stand was made and fixed by a Mr H Catling in 1893. 1898 saw the recess walls and the windows painted. In 1905 the wardrobe cupboard was supplied by a Mr H Ambrose and installed by Parr in 1903. Tiles were added to the washstand and Lincrusta paper added in 1905. Mirrors and mouldings were added to the washstand in 1907. Painting and floor coverings continued at intervals between 1910 and 1918, and Parr finally commented that he was able to paint the pounced²⁷ ornamentation during 'the painters strike in June 1919'.

During the summer and autumn of 1896 Parr divided the front bedroom into two. He put up a partition wall to create a small bedroom over the hallway with one of the front bedroom windows, and also created a lobby with storage space at the doorway (see Figure 16). Decoration seems to have been done at intervals, and he finally finished the lettering around the top of the walls in 1915.

On the landing, outside the two front bedrooms, a 'manhole cupboard' was created by Mr Martin in January 1890 to provide storage and access to the roof area in order to create additional space for all his decorating equipment.

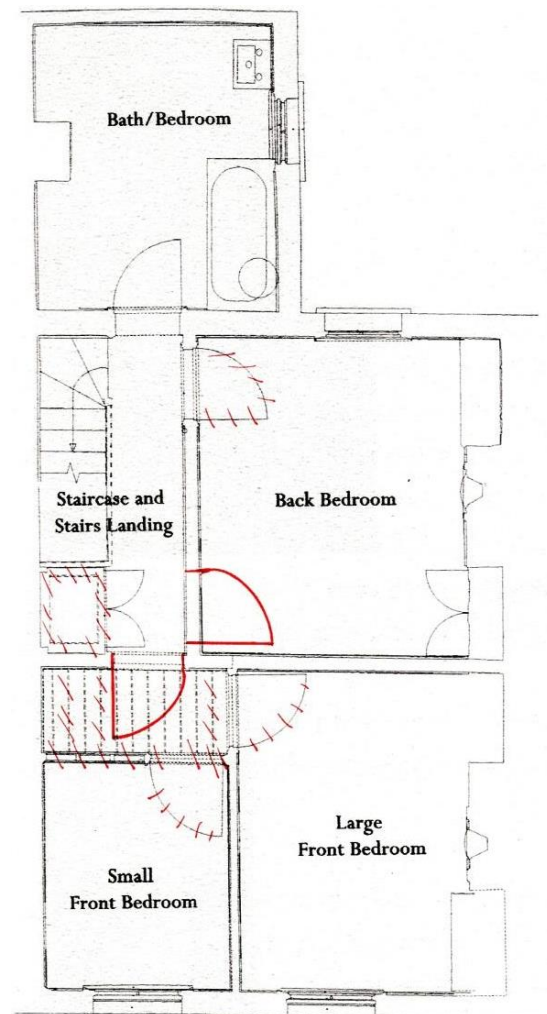


Figure 16 — 1st-floor plan showing the original placement of doors (red), and the repositioning done by David Parr (black)

²⁷ *pouncing*: an art technique used for transferring an image from one surface to another. Similar to tracing, it is useful for creating copies of a sketch outline to produce finished works. A muslin bag filled with chalk or charcoal is knocked or 'pounced' against a sheet of paper with a pin-pricked pattern, held against the wall. The chalk or charcoal penetrates the pinpricks leaving the desired pattern on the wall ready to be painted.



Figure 17 — Current floor plans: *left*: ground floor; *right*: first floor (for original plan, see Figure 16)
(*Conservation Management Plan 2016*)

Dining Room and Kitchen

The dining room remodelling began in the winter of 1899 and continued 'at intervals' until 1918. The cupboards in the chimney alcoves were transferred from the front room. There was obviously some damp under the window as the skirting and floor boards were taken out and 'all dirt removed from between wall, joist and the air brick cleared'. Mouldings and dados were attached and a lengthy period of decorative painting begun. A 'universal' range was fitted and linoleum laid. The range would have ensured that this room was warm and would have allowed for some cooking to take place. It is assumed that the family would have spent a good deal of time in here.



Figure 18 — Dining room walls (pattern) (1900–18) (photo: Howard Rice © DPC)

The kitchen sash windows were painted several times before major work took place on the scullery in 1898. The outside WC, coal place and pantry were dismantled in August. Whether this was due to the damp conditions is not known, but he arranged for a new scullery to be built with access off the kitchen and an inside WC to be accessed from there. Water pipes, cistern, stop cock and water to sink were all completed in September. An inside WC would have been a huge improvement, particularly in bad weather, and there were now three children in the house. Parr undertook all the internal work himself, digging holes, laying floors, fixing the sink, doors and window, as well as moving the old copper²⁸ from the kitchen to the scullery. He recycled the old shutters from the exterior of the house to make doors between the scullery and WC. Various projects such as adding shelves and painting took place through the years; at one stage the sink and copper were painted red!

Sadly in 1913 'by order of the Sanitary Authority a general smashing up of good (12-year-old) drain pipes and WC pedestal, seat and other good work' took place. The old drain was removed and replaced with a new one including a ventilation shaft. This work cost £7 18s and he was obviously most unhappy about it. But this was not unusual: the Sanitary Authority was responsible for the state of the sewerage system, and building works had been carried out since the 1850s with no building regulations and poor street drains. As a result, there had been all sorts of problems, including an outbreak of typhoid in York Street in

²⁸ *copper*: a free-standing tub with enamelled exterior, lined with copper, and with a gas boiler below. The water was heated up and clothes then added until they boiled, at which point they were agitated with a 'washing dolly', a pole with a metal cone on the end for pummelling the clothes. After this the clothes were rinsed and excess water was squeezed out through a mangle, before being hung out on a washing line to dry. Copper, dolly and mangle remained standard domestic kitchen items in England until the mid-1950s, used for Monday washing day.

1897. The Authority ordered a quarterly flushing of the sewers in 1896 to alleviate blockages and smells.²⁹

Drawing Room

Work on the masterpiece of the house, the drawing room, began in May 1888 when the fireplace was removed and a draught let in under the hearth for a 'hot air' fire. Throughout 1890 the chimney piece was decorated. This involved sizing, French polishing, gold leaf, beading and the background being painted. In February 1891 after a period of drying, he applied gold leaf again and polished. He did more work to try and resolve the damp problems in the front walls. The ceiling and walls were prepared for painting in 1892. Picture and dado mouldings were added. The first coat of paint was applied before the end of the year. Over the Christmas holidays he worked on the ceilings of the fireplace recesses.

The 'ornamentation' of the cornices and recess ceilings were painted in 1894. In early 1895 he prepared and gilded 'enrichment' details of the mouldings, and in April 1893 he completed the ceiling 'ornament'.



Figure 19 — Drawing room door: lock and fingerplates (photo: Adrian Powter © DPC)



Figure 20 — Drawing room door: hinge (photo: Adrian Powter © DPC)

He began again in 1901, applying glazed and varnished Japanese paper to the chimney breast. He added mirror glass and mouldings to the recesses in 1907, noting 'painted at intervals' in his notebook. Between 1912 and 1916 he began the major painting embellishment of the walls, decorated the inside of the door and gilded the dado.

²⁹ Minutes of the Sanitary Authority Committee 1896–98.



Figure 21 — Drawing room: south-east wall with ceiling (mid-1890s)
(photo: Howard Rice © DPC)

Figure 22 shows the subdivision between the upper and lower halves of the wall surface in the drawing room, with differing decorative patterns. The dado itself, made up strips of wood of alternating varieties glued together, not only separates the two decorations but also serves to protect the wall from damage by chairbacks.



Figure 22 — Drawing room: dado, mouldings and embellishments with sofa
(photo: Helena G Anderson © DPC)

In 1923/24 David was to be found in the roof, laying boards on the joists and building the wall on the south side up to the roof. On the north side, he cleaned and repaired brick joints.³⁰

There are fewer entries after 1925, and since David died of cancer on 6 December 1927 it is entirely possible that he was physically unable to undertake further decorative work in the house, although his notebook tells us that he did continue external repairs and simple internal tasks through to the year of his death. He was buried in the All Saints section of Mill Road Cemetery on 9 December 1927 (see Figure 31, on p. 35).³¹ Despite being a highly skilled artisan, he was accorded neither an obituary nor a funeral report in either of the main Cambridge newspapers.

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³⁰ Details of the renovations of 186 Gwydir Street in this section are taken from the David Parr notebook.

³¹ For the lifestory webpage of David Daniel, see <http://millroadcemetery.org.uk/parr-david-daniel-2/>.

1927–45 : THE MIDDLE YEARS

Mary Jane Parr (1860–1949) and Elsie May Mansfield (1915–2013)

David Daniel Parr died on 6 December 1927, leaving his wife, Mary Jane, who was some six years his junior, and three children all of whom had by this time married and set up their own homes. Mary Emma (1885–1963), the elder daughter, married John Summers Mansfield (1882–1946) in 1908 in Cambridge and had three children: John Douglas, born 1911, Elsie May born 1915, and Harold St Julien born 1917. In 1911 the family was living at 10 Parsonage Street, John working as a grocer's porter. Mary Emma died on 13 May 1963, leaving effects worth £3,120 4s. 11d.

The second child and only son of David Daniel and Mary Jane Parr, David Douglas Parr (1886–1975), was born on 12 July 1886 in Rainow, Cheshire, and attended St Matthew's Higher Grade Boys' School in Norfolk Street. At the 1901 census,³² father and son were recorded as 'visitors' at the home of stonemason Samuel Ind, 52 Howard Street, Cowley, Oxfordshire, described as 'decorative painter' and 'decorative painter's apprentice' respectively – i.e. the son worked alongside his father for F R Leach & Sons. Like his father's, his 'signature' appears in All Saints' Church: 'D. PARR JNR. 1900'.³³ David Douglas married Bertha Hale in 1914 and the couple lived in Hertford Street, Cambridge. He is mentioned in Alfred Palmer's diaries in the 1940s and 50s as coming to do work on the house so we assume that he would have regularly visited his mother during this period and perhaps continued but certainly repaired his father's work when necessary. A great favourite of the family, he was known as 'Uncle David', and died in 1975.



Figure 23 — Frontage (early 20th-cent.) showing ivy, yucca plant (both planted by David Parr) and iron railings (© DPC)

Sarah Helen (1889–1989), known as 'Nellie', was the Parrs' third child, born on 26 May 1889. (For a family portrait of the Parrs and their three children, see the Frontispiece, p. 6.) She worked as a typist before emigrating to Canada in 1914, marrying Richard Norman (1882–1955), whom she knew from Cambridge and who worked as a farmer in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The

³² See Appendix for a transcript of the 1901 census.

³³ The term 'signature', here and for that of David Daniel Parr reported earlier, is a misnomer for at least two reasons: (1) David Daniel could not have described himself as "senior" in 1871, since David Douglas was not born until fifteen years later; (2) the entire group of 'signatures' and other wording appears to be all in the same hand.

couple had five children, and the family returned shortly after the First World War to live in Histon.

When David Daniel Parr died, Elsie May's parents decided that she should live with her grandmother Mary Jane to keep her company. Very little is known about the relationship between the two women, but when asked about it in later years Elsie replied: "She was no trouble". From 1927 to 2012 Elsie May lived at No. 186 Gwydir Street and became very attached to it. She and her grandmother were in regular contact with their extended family. Sundays in particular were times when they would get together, either after or visiting church together.

The 1930s and '40s were marked by both the depression and war. Money and materials would have been harder to access, so it appears very little was done to the house in this period. We do not know for sure how the house was lived in, but Elsie's niece Monica who visited as a young child in the 1940s remembers only being in the kitchen and back sitting room.³⁴

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³⁴ Material from this section is drawn from interviews with Ann Ding, Rosemary Drake and Monica Law.

1942-98 : THE PALMERS

Alfred Palmer (1913–98)

Alfred Palmer came to Cambridge from Yorkshire to work on the railway as a guard during the War. He had lodgings in Kingston Street and met Elsie Mansfield in August 1942 at St Barnabas Church. They married in the spring of 1945 and he moved into No. 186 with Elsie and her grandmother. Alfred left a collection of diaries (see Figure 24) giving brief details about his life, including any work he did in the house.

In 1947 he worked with 'Uncle David' on various projects: taking down the ivy from the front of the house and re-decorating the kitchen and scullery. He was almost certainly not allowed to do anything on his own to the house while Grandma Parr was alive and so he seems to have turned his attention to the garden where he began building (as so many men still do!) his own shed.

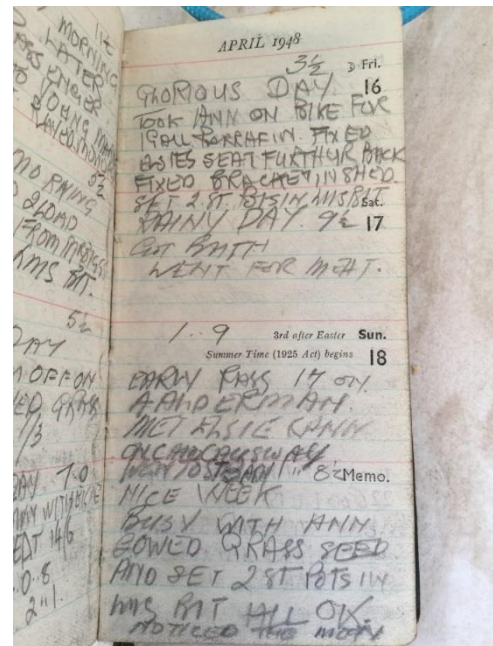


Figure 24 — Alfred Palmer's diary for April 1948
(© Rosemary Drake & Ann Ding)



Figure 25 — Alfred Palmer's garden sheds before restoration (photo: Howard Rice, 2014 © DPC)

He salvaged wood from the University Press (where his brothers-in-law worked) and the 'tins' referred to in his diary (below) are likely to have been sheets of corrugated iron.

1947
 29 Oct got piece of wood for shed
 30 Oct got 4 tins from Rigeons 2/6d each
 31 Oct fetched wood from University Press
 1 Nov dodged about in garden, put bolts in shed
 24 Nov put corner posts on end of shed
 26 Nov got 4x6' tins from Rigeons, made them up for roof, 100 x 3" bolts 1/-
 2 Dec got wood from Travis and Arnold
 3 Dec got wood from Mum's [mother-in-law] for shed
 6 Dec erected shed with Douglas' help, done very well
 8 Dec got barrow full of bricks for the floor and 1 gal of creosote 2/6d

(extract from Alfred Palmer's diaries @Rosemary Drake and Anne Ding)

The 'coal place' was a brick bunker built on the back of the house by David Parr, and the pet rabbits and guinea pigs were housed in their own separate hutch leaving the sheds for Alfred. The main shed was used for storage of garden and decorating materials and acted as a workshop when necessary. The smaller shed was originally the 'fowl house' housing the chickens, and was re-purposed into a bicycle shed later on.

By 1949, in which year Mary Jane Parr died, Alfred and Elsie, who worked in Laurie and McConnel's general store on Fitzroy Street, began making the house their home and replaced the copper, boiler and cooker. Uncle David continued to maintain some of the more decorative painting while Alfred took responsibility for the DIY and maintenance, which probably had not been done during the war.



Figure 26 — Elsie & Alfred Palmer with Mary Jane Parr
 (c.1948 © Rosemary Drake & Ann Ding)

The 1950s were busy. There were now two girls in the family, Ann born 1946 and Rosemary born 1950, who slept in the two bedrooms at the front of the house while Alfred and Elsie slept in the middle bedroom, which received some upgrading.

Alfred removed the bookshelves, painted the recesses and tells us that he cleaned the paintwork, which we assume referred to the David Parr decorations. The windows, dado and skirting boards were all rubbed down and repainted in gloss.



Alfred did a good deal of painting in the kitchen and lavatory. All the doors and woodwork in the passageway were cleaned and repainted. During the 1950s he also painted over the David Parr decorations on the passage walls. Cousin Monica who visited the house regularly as a child in the 1940s remembers the passage as having been particularly dark, and painting it a lighter colour would have made a great deal of difference, but we have no record of how this decision was arrived at.

Towards the end of the 1950s Alfred and Uncle David were working in the front room. Work was done on the fireplace, which may even have been replaced. There are references to replastering, which may indicate that they were trying to solve the damp on the outside wall.

Figure 27 — *top*: Elsie May Palmer, Alfred Palmer's mother and Mary Mansfield (Elsie's mother); *below*: Alfred Palmer (seated) with Rosemary and Ann (c.1950 © Rosemary Drake & Ann Ding)

In 1959 Alfred and Elsie decided to install a bath in the back bedroom. This involved gathering quotations and employing different tradesmen to install the bath and basin as well as a water heater. On 8 June, the diary entry reads:

Windy rainy day. Set plants in allotment. All had bath, 1st time, OK.

The 1960s continued the routines: windows were stripped and painted, sash cords replaced; slates, gutters and pipes were fixed, ceilings were distempered, doors were glossed and walls regularly repainted; skirting boards were replaced and shelves erected: outer walls were repointed and his much-prized sheds repaired (see Figure 25 above).

Between 1969 and 1993 only a few diaries survive but, according to his daughters, life continued very much as normal. Alfred continued to do odd jobs around the house and grew all their own vegetables in his allotment, while helping out extended family and neighbours. He was a much-loved member of the community.

Rosemary and Ann remember that a small table with room for the four of them to sit was set up under the window in the kitchen. In the evenings, the family would move to the back sitting room where there was a fire lit and games would be played. As children, they spent a great deal of time outside in the garden, where their rabbit and guinea pig were kept.

Alfred's dairies contain references in the 1940s to returning home from an outing with his wife to find that Grandma Parr had lit the fire in the drawing room; so it is possible that Mary Jane used it more regularly than the rest of the family. Rosemary and Ann only remember it being used on high days and holidays, special occasions.³⁵



Figure 28 — Frontage of No. 186 as left by Alfred Palmer in 1998 with ivy and yucca plant removed and brick wall in place of iron railings (photo: Tamsin Wimhurst, 2014 © DPC)

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³⁵ Information for this section drawn from Alfred Palmer's diaries, and interviews with Ann Ding and Rosemary Drake.

1998–2012 : THE FINAL YEARS

Elsie May Palmer (*née* Mansfield) (1915–2013)

As has been stated above, Elsie May's parents decided she should live with her grandmother to keep her company at No. 186 after David Daniel's death in 1927; and from her marriage to Alfred Palmer in 1945 Elsie and Alfred lived with Mary Jane until the latter's death on 13 November 1949 (see Figure 30, below, for her grave). After Alfred's death in 1998, Elsie continued to live in the house on her own. She was fiercely independent and very private. She was very fit for many years and walked all over town. She was proud of the house and its decoration, and although she had very little work done after Alfred's death, she refused to have either a telephone or a gas supply as she feared they would damage the decorative art work.

As she grew older, she was unable to manage the open fires and used a decorative paraffin heater in the kitchen and electric fires in the back sitting room. The house remained pretty cold throughout the winter and she would often wear her coat all day. The paraffin heater became useful to her in another way as she took no particular pleasure in cooking and used to place a saucepan of food on this heater to warm it through. She was very frugal, new clothes were rarely worn, luxuries refused. She did however visit sick neighbours frequently and would attend parties in the street although a cup of tea was preferred to alcohol.

A neighbour of No. 186 had informed the Cambridgeshire & County Folk Museum about the jewel that existed in Gwydir Street, and in 2009, when the Museum was arranging an exhibition entitled 'A room of your own', Elsie and her sitting room at No. 186 became the featured exhibit (as shown in Figure 29). She was very proud and enjoyed the occasion



Figure 29 — Elsie May Palmer in the drawing room (2009)
(note the decorative painting above, and the Parr notebook
in her hands) (photo: Alex Murphy © DPC)

enormously. Her daughters encouraged her to use the drawing room in the summer, which she did occasionally. In the front window she had a bunch of artificial flowers, which were a sign to her neighbours that she was fit and well.

In 2012 she became more frail and left the house to stay with her daughter Rosemary before moving into a nursing home, where she died on 3 December 2013. Elsie was buried with her husband in the Cambridge City Cemetery, Newmarket Road, in 2013.

The grave of David Daniel and Mary Jane, comprising a simple set of limestone kerbstones, is located in the All Saints parish area of Mill Road Cemetery. The inscription, elegantly engraved in capital letters, reads:³⁶

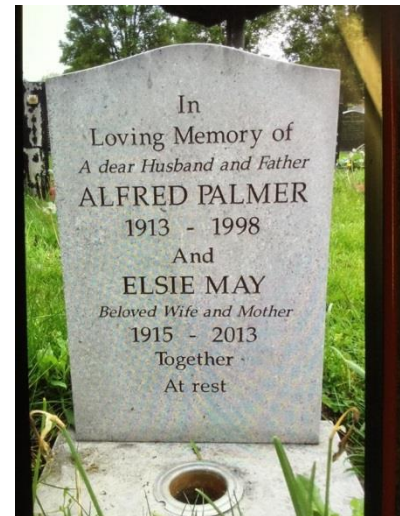


Figure 30 — Gravestone of Alfred and Elsie Palmer (© Rosemary Drake & Ann Ding)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF DAVID DANIEL PARR DIED DECEMBER 6TH 1927 AGED 73 YEARS
ALSO HIS WIFE MARY JANE PARR DIED NOVEMBER 13TH 1949 AGED 89 YEARS



Figure 31 – Grave of David Daniel and Mary Jan Parr in Mil Road Cemetery (photo: Ian Bent, 2016)

Many of the neighbours knew No. 186 was special but very few had ever seen it, and when the David Parr Charity acquired the house, a new chapter could begin. Elsie had lived there for 86 years, and it is certainly owing to her that the house remained in as original a condition as it did and was therefore now able to be restored. A lack of central heating, few visitors, few appliances and a complete lack of continual fashionable updating has left us a masterpiece to be treasured.³⁷

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³⁶ See <http://millroadcemetery.org.uk/parr-david-daniel-2/> for the family webpage.

³⁷ The section is drawn mainly from interviews with Ann Ding and Rosemary Drake.

2016–Present

DAVID PARR CHARITY — RESTORATION

In 2009 Tamsin Wimhurst, working with the Museum of Cambridge (previously known as the Cambridgeshire & County Folk Museum), first met Elsie May Palmer as part of the research for an exhibition to be called 'A Room of Your Own'. Together with a photographer, Alex Murphy, and a journalist, Jane Phillimore, Tamsin was shown into the front sitting room at No. 186 Gwydir Street by Elsie and her daughter Ann. It was clear that Mrs Palmer was very proud of her grandfather's work and his notebook – which can be clearly seen on her lap in the exhibition photograph (see Figure 29, above). She took Tamsin into the dining room, showed her photographs, and chatted about her school years and the sports she had enjoyed playing.

Tamsin says 'I really didn't know what I was looking at, except that it was extraordinary, and I realised that we needed to get people involved to save it'. The Museum of Cambridge's exhibition was a great success, and afterwards Tamsin followed it up by taking experts from the Museum to show them around No. 186 and evaluate the work. All the experts were interested but no one could see how a terrace house like this could be preserved and saved. Tamsin remarked: 'I knew Mrs Palmer wanted to see the house that she had so carefully protected become some sort of museum, but I don't think she ever said so in quite so many words'.

Tamsin spoke to the daughters, Ann and Rosemary, and made it clear that the work in the house was genuinely important and if and when the time came, she would be interested in helping to save it for posterity.

Rosemary says: 'It became clear [in 2013] that Mum was not ever going to be able to return to Gwydir Street and live independently, so we began the process of putting it on the market.' Tamsin heard by chance that an interestingly decorated house off Mill Road was about to go on sale, and putting two and two together rang the girls. Tamsin stated:

I knew it was really important locally; at that stage I had no idea that it would gain such a national importance, but I knew I had to buy it somehow. I visited Elsie in her residential home and recorded conversations with her and Rosemary to get as much of the story of the house as possible.

The sale was completed in 2013 while Elsie was still alive, and Rosemary felt that her mother was reassured that the house was going to be safe. Tamsin continued:

I told the girls to take what they wanted and leave everything else behind, because I wanted to keep the essence of the house intact if possible.

It took several months to set up the David Parr Charity and gift the house across. There followed many tours by art experts and months of putting together the story of the house and its decorations.

Tamsin set up a steering group of Susan Miller from the University of Cambridge Museums, Jane Phillimore, the journalist on the original visit, and Shelley Lockwood, then teacher and freelance historian, to help her plan each subsequent step. Jane became the project manager for the renovation work at the house and Shelley is now in charge of visits and all the volunteers, including their training. In 2015 the first round of Lottery funding was granted, and in 2016 the second round enabled the Charity to begin a two-year period of essential conservation, covering both building work and preservation of the decorations. This also entailed sensitive recreation of some of David Parr's work that had been lost. At the same

time, all the furniture, household and display items were packed up, conserved and catalogued. For details of the biography of the house since 2014, see www.davidparrhouse.org.

During this period the house was closed to the public. In the meantime a great deal of publicity was achieved and interest was enormous. In May 2019, after the official opening on the 8th of the month, guided tours of the house began again, and these have already been fully booked into the foreseeable future. However, because of the fragile nature of the artwork, the number of tours, and the number of people who can be shown round at any one time, is severely restricted, and this in turn limits the income received from such tours. The goal for the future is to build up an endowment yielding a sustainable long-term income stream.

At the end of 2018, the purchase was completed of No. 184 Gwydir Street allowing a visitor centre to be set up. After planning permission was agreed, building began on creating a self-contained maisonette on the 1st and 2nd floors to help provide that future income stream. The ground floor will become an area in which visitors can leave their coats and bags, use the facilities and have access to a library of materials about the David Parr House.

Archaeological dig

In September 2018 a series of test pits were dug and investigated under the direction of Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA), working with a team of volunteers.³⁸ Quite unexpectedly, the presence of burnt stone and worked flints identified Neolithic activity on the site. Two tiny fragments of late Anglo-Saxon pottery were also discovered, rather more of medieval pottery, and a good number of items of various kinds from between the 16th and 19th centuries, offering evidence of the use of the land by the Barnwell estates and subsequent owners. Unfortunately because no other gardens have been dug in the area, it is impossible to be more exact about the very early history of the site. Other artefacts included items used by the Parr and Palmer families, notably a 1950s Enid Blyton club badge, toys, and a farthing coin, not to mention several guinea pig skulls!

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³⁸ Alison Dickens (see Bibliography).

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APPENDIX

Census Reports for Parr and Cooper Families

PARR FAMILY

1841 census [*questionable identification?*]

Northampton Street, Parish of St Giles, Cambridge

Rebecca Pair	55	Laundress	Y
Sarah Pair	20		Y
Susannah Pair	13		Y
John Pair	20	Carver & Gilder Ap	Y
Thomas Pair	15	Lab	Y
Edward Beard	20	Ag	Y

Note: One wonders whether the spelling "Pair" was merely a mishearing or mis-copying, or whether the family at this time pronounced their name "Pair" (Cf. the name "Kerr", which was pronounced "Kair" by some people, and "Karr" by others).

1851 census

Histon Road, Chesterton, Cambs

Thomas Parr	H	M	28	Bricklayers Lab	Cambs Cambridge
Jemima Parr	W	M	28	School Mistress	Cambs Cambridge
George Parr	S		5	Scholar	Cambs Chesterton
Harriet Parr	D		3	Scholar	Cambs Chesterton
Emma Parr	D		1		Cambs Chesterton
Herbert Taylor Jones	Nephew U		12	Errand Boy	Cambs Cambridge

1861 census

Histon Road, Chesterton, Cambs

Thomas W Parr	H	Wi	37	Ag Lab	Cambs Cambridge
George Parr	S		14	Ag Lab	Cambs Chesterton
Thomas W Parr	S		9	Scholar	Cambs Chesterton
David Parr	S		7	Scholar	Cambs Chesterton
Charles Parr	S		4	Scholar	Cambs Chesterton

1861 census

Chalsworth Villa, Boundary Road, Hampstead, London

William Sheriffe	H	M	48	Gentleman	Warws Birmingham
Eliza Sheriffe	W	M	36		Ireland
Richard D Powell	St-son	U	18	Scholar	Essex Walthamstow
Charles F Powell	St-son	U	16	Scholar	Herts Welwyn
Robert S Geville	Vis	U	15	Scholar	France
Emily M A Powell St-D	U	14	Scholar		Devon Torr
Isabella Jones	Serv	U	24	House Servant	Cambs, St Peters
Susanna Bagge	Serv	U	30	Cook	Norfolk Shipdham
Emma Parr	Serv		11	House Servant	Cambs Chesterton

1871 census

2 Garden Cottages, Cambridge

Sarah Risby	H	Wi	39		Cambs Cambridge
Alfred W Risby	S	U	16	Joiner's Appr	London Holborn
David Parr	Vis	U	16	Joiner's Appr	Cambs Chesterton
Owen Thompson	Lodg	U	28	Joiner	Norfolk Methwold
John B Cooper	Lodg	U	30	Joiner	Suffolk Glevering

1871 census**Avenue House, Avenue Road, Cambridge**

Thomas Hodpson Archer Hind	H	M	56	Magistrate Landowner MA	Northumbs Elswick
Marianne Hind	W	M	55		Hants Godmanchester
Richard Dacre Hind	S	U	21	Student Cambridge Univ	Northumbs Norham
Marian Alice Mary Hind	D	U	19	Annuitant	Northumbs Norham
Frances Elizth Huntley	Sis-i-L	U	48	Annuitant	Hunts Kimbolton
Louisa Huntley	Sis-i-L	U	44	Annuitant	Hunts Kimbolton
Emma Parr	Serv	U	21	Cook Dom	Cambs Cambridge
Edward Page	Serv	U	19	Gen Serv Dom	Cambs West Wickham
Eliza Ann Carrington	Serv		17	Housemaid Dom	Cambs Histon

1871 census**Warrington Lane, Tytherington, Cheshire**

Enos Wood	H	M	44	Farm Labourer	Cheshire Withington
Sarah Wood	W	M	38		Cheshire Prestbury
Mary Ann Wood	D		10		Cheshire Tytherington
Enos Wood	S		4mo		Cheshire Tytherington

1881 census**19 Bath Place, St Pancras, Islington, London**

James Vigar	H	M	30	Railway Porter	Somerset Burton
Betsy Vigar	W	M	28		Northants Barton Seagrove
Mary A Vigar	D		4	Scholar	London Islington
Samuel J Vigar	S		9mo		London Islington
David Parr	Board	U	26	Decorative Painter	Cambs Chesterton
Julia Vigar	D		6	Scholar	London Islington

1881 census**Oakin Bank (Cottage), Rainow, Cheshire**

Enos Wood	H	M	54	Waggoner	Cheshire Withington
Sarah Wood	W	M	49		Cheshire Prestbury
Mary Jane Wood	D	U	20	Cotton Doubler	Cheshire Titherington
Enos Wood	S		10	Scholar	Cheshire Titherington
Emily Wood	D		8	Scholar	Cheshire Titherington
Elijah Wood	S		5	—	Cheshire Rainow
William Smith	Lodger		4		Cheshire North Rode
George Smith	Lodger		3		Cheshire North Rode

1891 census**186 Gwydir Street, Cambridge**

David D Parr	H	M	37	Painter	Cambs Chesterton
Mary J Parr	W	M	30		Macclesfield
Mary E Parr	D	S	6	Scholar	Cambs Cambridge
David D Parr	S	S	4	Scholar	Cheshire Rainow
Sarah E Parr	D	S	1	Scholar	Cambs Cambridge

1901 census**52 Howard Street, Oxford**

Samuel Ind	H	M	56	Stone Mason	Gloucs Avening
Sarah Ind	W	M	56		Gloucs Avening
Georgina A Ind	D	S	28	Tailoress	Gloucs Avening
Florence B Ind	D	S	19	Mantle-Maker	Oxon Oxford
David D Parr	Vis	M	46	Decorative Painter	Cambs Chesterton
David D Parr	Vis	S	14	Decorative Painter's Appr	Cheshire Rainow

1911 census**186 Gwydir Street, Cambridge**

David Parr	H	M	57	House Painter	Cambs Chesterton
			28 – 3 – 3 – [–] ³⁹		
Mary Jane Parr	W	M	50		Cheshire Titherington
David Douglas Parr	S	S	24	House Painter	Cheshire Rainow
Sarah Helen Parr	D	S	21	Typist (Draper's Store)	Cambs Cambridge

1939 register**186 Gwydir Street, Cambridge**

Parr, Mary J	Wi	18 Nov 1860	Unpaid Domestic Duties
Palmer, Elsie M	S	5 March 1915	Shop Assistant (Drapers)

COOPER FAMILY**1851 census****Gothic Street, Cambridge**

James Cooper	H	M	36	Gardener	Cambs Shelford
Ann Cooper	W	M	35		Kent Sunbridge
John Cooper	S		15		Kent Sunbridge
Mary Cooper	D		13		Kent Sunbridge
Edward Cooper	S		10		Cambs Shelford
Frederick Cooper	S		8		Cambs Shelford
Charles Cooper	S		6		Cambs Shelford
Charlotte Cooper	D		4		Cambs Shelford
George Cooper	S		1		Cambs Shelford

1861 census**24 Gothic Street, Cambridge**

James Cooper	H	M	45	Gardener	Cambs Shelford
Ann Cooper	W	M	44		Kent Sunbridge
Mary Ann Cooper	D	U	21	Dressmaker	Kent Sunbridge
Edward Cooper	S	U	19	Baker	Cambs Shelford
Frederick Cooper	S	U	16	Errand Boy	Cambs Shelford
Charlotte Cooper	D	U	14	[at school]	Cambs Shelford
George Cooper	S	U	12	[at school]	Cambs Shelford

1871 census**24 Gothic Street, Cambridge**

James Cooper	H	M	58	Gardener / Dom Serv	Cambs Little Shelford
Ann Cooper	W	M	50	Laundress	Kent Sundridge
Mary Ann Cooper	D	U	28	Serv Dom / stays at home	Cambridge
Charlotte Cooper	D	U	25	Serv Dom / out of empl	Cambridge
George Cooper	S	U	21	Wine Porter	Cambridge
Emily Cooper	Vis		2		Cambridge

1881 census**192 Gwydir Street (Gothic Terrace), Cambridge**

George Cooper	H	M	30	Wood Turner	Cambs Grantchester
Sophia Cooper	W	M	30		Cambs Burwell
William Cooper	S		2		Cambridge
Arthur Cooper	S		5mo		Cambridge

³⁹ Meaning: duration of marriage 28 years, children born alive 3, children still living 3, children who have died [none].

1891 census**30A Sutton Road, Kidderminster**

George Cooper	H	M	40	French Polisher	Cambs Grantchester
Sophia Cooper	W	M	40		Cambs Burwell
George E Cooper	S		14	Brass Founder	Cambridge
William S Cooper	S		12	[at school]	Cambridge
Percy O Cooper	S		9	[at school]	Cambridge
Annie M Cooper	D		6	[at school]	Cambridge
Alice Cooper	D		2		Worcs Kidderminster

Census 1901**28 Sutton Road, Kidderminster, Worcs**

George Cooper	H	M	51	Wood Turner	Cambs Grantchester
Sophia Cooper	W	M	51	—	Cambs Burwell
William Cooper	S		21	Tube Maker	Cambridge
Percy Cooper	S		19	Gardener	Cambridge
Alice Cooper	D		11	—	Worcs Kidderminster
Frederick Cooper	S		9		Worcs Kidderminster

Census 1911**33 Sutton Road, Kidderminster, Worcs**

George Cooper	H	M	61	French Polisher	Cambridge
			36 – 7 – 6 – 1 ⁴⁰		
Sophia Cooper	W	M	61	House Keeper	Cambs Burwell
George Cooper	S	S	33	Baker	Cambridge
William Cooper	S	S	31	Tin Smith	Cambridge
Alice Cooper	D	S	22	Carpet Weaver	Worcs Kidderminster
Frederick Cooper	S	S	20	Packer	Worcs Kidderminster

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⁴⁰ Meaning: duration of marriage 36 years, children born alive 7, children still living 6, children who have died 1.