

The main approach roads to many of our towns and cities are not always remarkable for their attractiveness; they tend to have been subjected to "ribbon development", industrial or residential or both. Newmarket Road, from just beyond the railway bridge westwards towards the city, is no exception; yet despite the many commercial buildings which stand alongside it, it is still, in its mixture of old and new, not without historical and even architectural interest.

HERE AND THERE IN NEWMARKET ROAD CAMBRIDGE

Pleasure gardens

by ENID PORTER

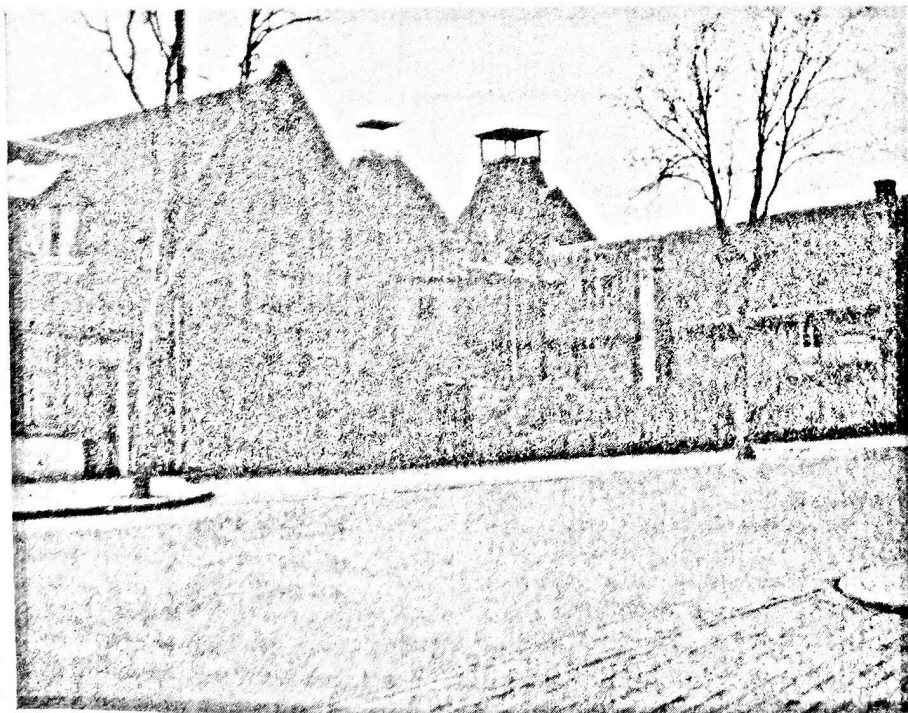
The oldest houses are, or were, in the neighbourhood of the church of St. Andrew the Less, the heart of the little village of Barnwell which developed round the Augustinian Priory described last month. In 1731, a fire destroyed a large part of the village, but a few of the more substantially-built houses survived, among them the 16th century Abbey House, then fronting on to Newmarket Road, and the early 18th century Priory Grange (No. 71), which stand today. The construction of the new Chesterton bridge has led

to the demolition of other pre-1731 property on the south side of the road.

On the north side of Newmarket Road, at its junction with Ditton Walk, stands the Globe public house. Opposite, on the site of the present car park, were once attractive, tree-shaded tea and pleasure gardens, with bowling and skittle alleys. Here,

until the early years of this century, boxing contests were held for prizes of up to £1, the participants being, for the most part, labourers from the immediate neighbourhood.

Behind the Globe, at right-angles to the road, is the now-empty Paper Mills House, built early in the 18th century. Its name recalls that, prior to the 17th century, paper was manufactured at this spot. The mill, to the north of the house, was later used for grinding flour until the water supply of the little brook and mill race was lessened by the opening of the waterworks at Cherryhinton.



Old maltings on the Newmarket Road which are now used by a firm of auto-electrical engineers.

Turnpike gate

Near the Globe, the Round House formerly a toll house, marks the site of the turnpike gate at which toll had to be paid for the upkeep of the road. The house was built in 1828 replacing an earlier one, and was originally of one storey only.

The little Norman chapel of St Mary Magdalene, which stands in it grassy area by the railway bridge, is all that remains of the leper hospital founded early in the 12th century

It was to this hospital that King John, in about the year 1211, granted the profits of the fair held, each September, on Stourbridge Common, a fair which, in its heyday, was one of the greatest in Europe.

Leper chapel restored

By the 14th century, with the decline of leprosy in England, the hospital was either demolished or allowed to fall into ruins, while the chapel came, eventually, to be used as a store place for the building materials for the Stourbridge Fair traders' booths. By the beginning of the 19th century, the chapel had become a barn and might well have been pulled down, had it not been purchased in 1816 by the Rev. Thomas Kerrich who presented it to the University. Some restoration work was carried out on it in 1843, so that the chapel might be used for services for the navvies engaged in building the Eastern Counties Railway. With their departure however, on the completion of their work, the building again fell into disuse. But in 1865, the Cambridge Architectural Society raised a sum of money so that it could be thoroughly restored and used, once again for worship. Further restoration was carried out in this century, and services are still held in the chapel which, since 1951, has been the property of the Cambridge Preservation Society.

Two more Anglican churches stand in Newmarket Road: St. Andrew the Less, originally built by the prior and canons of Barnwell for the use of the Barnwell villagers, and, on the south side of the road, nearer to the city, Christ Church, consecrated in 1839. The rapid increase in population which followed the development of the Barnwell Fields, after the Enclosure Act of 1807, made a second church very necessary. Not long after 1813, the "Barnwell New Church" was built on part of what is now Mill Road cemetery, but this was pulled down when Christ Church was erected.

It was in Barnwell that, in 1841, the first steps were taken to establish a permanent Roman Catholic Mission in Cambridge. The Rev. B. Shanley was sent to look after the

spiritual needs of some Irish harvest workers who had settled on the outskirts of the town. It was in a Barnwell cottage that he first said Mass for them and, probably, for Catholic workers on the railway, and it was in this neighbourhood that he struggled to raise money for the church which was ultimately erected in Union Road, near the present Catholic Church at Hyde Park Corner.

On the city side of the old Barnwell Junction railway station, Garlic Row leads off from the north side of Newmarket Road. At its farther end, until it was demolished in 1960, stood a building known as the Oyster House and, in earlier days, as the Tiled Booth. It occupied, roughly, the centre of the site of the Stourbridge Fair which, until 1855, was proclaimed by both the university and the town.

After the university proclamation, the Vice-Chancellor and other dignitaries would repair to the Tiled Booth to partake of oysters and ale. Having consumed these, and taken a brief walk in Garlic Row while the oyster shells were being cleared away and the tables laid, they returned to the house for a dinner of herrings, roast pork, beef, plum pudding and other delicacies.

After the university ceased to proclaim the fair, the Oyster House was used by the mayor and corporation for their proclamation, oyster feast and dinner, as well as by other visitors to the fair. The 19th century occupants of the house, owned then by a brewery, were obliged, by the terms of their lease, to allow the third floor of the building to be used for dancing during the time of the fair. When the Oyster House was pulled down, the lifting gear which used to raise the tanks of oysters was found in the cellars; innumerable oyster shells have been, and still are found on Stourbridge Common.

The houses numbered 315-331, on the north side of Newmarket Road, occupy the site of the timber building in which theatrical performances were given, in the last years of the

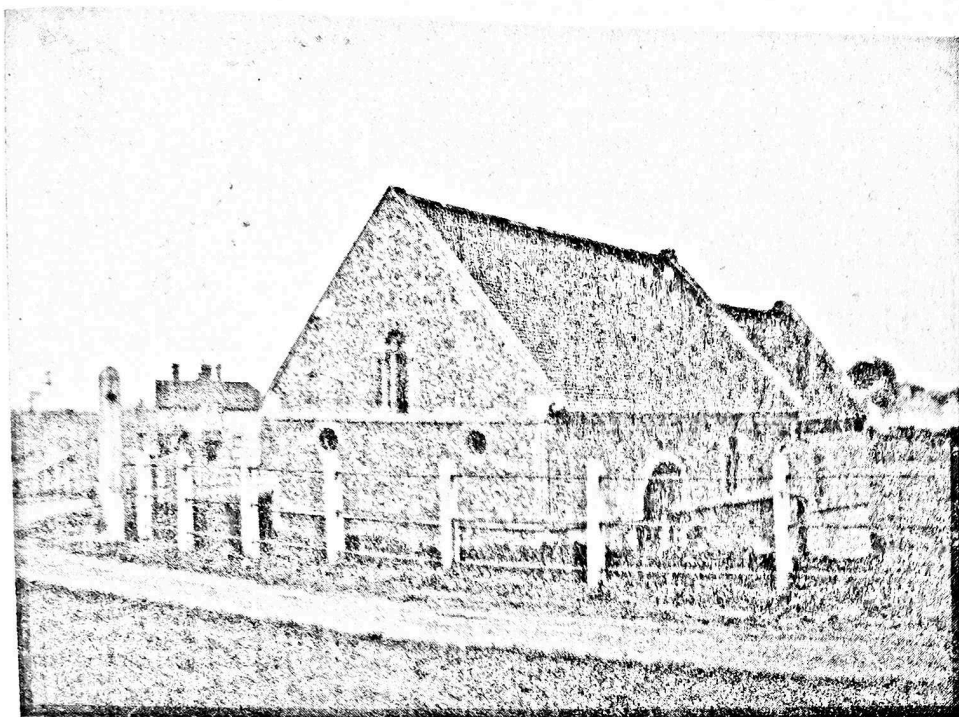
18th century, at the time of the fair, by a touring company from Norwich. In 1806, this Stirbitch Theatre, as it was called, was replaced by the first Barnwell Theatre Royal which stood, on the other side of the road, between Wellington Street and East Road corner. This theatre, in 1814, was, in turn, replaced by a larger Theatre Royal, a little to the west of the earlier one. This flourished until 1878, when it was sold for use as a mission hall. After a brief revival, in this century, as the Festival Theatre, it is now used by the Arts Theatre as a wardrobe and workshop.

For centuries, the road from Cambridge to Newmarket was the scene of bustle and confusion at the time of Stourbridge Fair. In addition to the university and civic processions, the last-named attended, until 1751, by the town minstrels, trumpeters, drummers and French horn players, there were the crowds of pedestrians making their way to the fair ground, fighting their way through the streams of carriages, merchants' wagons and the hackney coaches which last, Defoe tells us, "come from London and ply day and night to carry the people to and from Cambridge". Even within living memory, the Horse Fair, which survived until the first World War, provided some excitement for the Newmarket Road inhabitants. But by 1930, Stourbridge Fair consisted of a single traction engine with a cargo of swing boats; three years later it was proclaimed for the last time by the mayor of Cambridge before an audience of two women and a solitary ice-cream vendor.

Midsummer fair

The surviving Cambridge fair, held at midsummer, brings traffic chaos to the Maids' Causeway end of Newmarket Road, but no longer does the fair extend on to the road itself as it once did. Formerly, when large quantities of timber, brooms and articles of turned wood were sold at Midsummer Fair, these goods were displayed for sale along the portion of the road once known as Sun Street, between East Road and Wellington Street.

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The "leper chapel" of St. Mary Magdalene on the Newmarket Road.

Industrial development

As Newmarket Road and the whole Barnwell district developed from 1807 onwards, industry became one of the main characteristics of the neighbourhood. Geological conditions were right for brick making, and brick yards were increasingly established, from 1830 onwards, on both sides of Newmarket Road. Bates & Edis were one of the earliest of the large firms; their yards, next to those of J. S. Watts, eventually being occupied by the Cambridge Brick Company which had additional works in Coldham's Lane. Next to Watts' yards were those of Redding & Son who, in 1881, had succeeded Gray & Son, many of whose named bricks can be found in Cambridge buildings. By 1884, Redding & Son had works in Coldham's Lane, just over the railway line, their site being occupied, from 1898 until 1923, by the Coldham Brick Company.

Francis Thoday, a well-known Cambridge builder, had brick works in Cheddars Lane from 1882 until, in 1900, the Stourbridge Brick Company took them over until 1931. Thomas Buck made bricks in Stanley Road from 1898 until 1922, while from 1895 until 1903, Samuel Nutter

was making bricks near Garlic Row, opposite Beale's yards.

The Swann family, too, were important brick and tile makers, with works established, by the 1870's, on the north side of Newmarket Road, by the railway bridge. Until 1923, this firm had fenland peat delivered by barge to River Lane, for use in the initial firing of the brick kilns.

Most of the brickyard employees—some of whom worked, also, at the gas works—lived on Newmarket Road or in the streets leading from it, as did the employees in the several breweries and maltings which, until the early years of this century, were a feature of Newmarket Road. In the 1890s there were no fewer than 29 public houses in the road; today only eleven of these remain. It is not surprising that concern was often expressed at the amount of drunkenness that prevailed among the working men of the district.

Boom in coprolite

The period between 1850 and 1880 was a "boom" one for the coprolite industry in Cambridge-shire. Coprolites, or phosphatised

nodules of clay, shells, sponges and parts of extinct animals, found at the base of the chalk marl, were dug up and sold to chemists who ground them with sulphuric acid to provide a powder used as a fertiliser.

In Cambridge, Coldham Common provided one of the richest sources of coprolites, and the Corporation leased areas of it to coprolite raisers at a rent of from £100 to £300 a quarter. In 1862, the record yield of 500 tons of coprolites was obtained from one acre of the common.

Evils of drink

The men employed in digging up the "fossils", as the coprolites were often called, received high wages in comparison with those paid to agricultural workers of the time. The clergy, and others concerned with social welfare, were somewhat concerned lest these wages be squandered on drink and other evils, for they recognised that the boom was, probably, a temporary one. Indeed, Swann Brothers, the Newmarket Road brick and tile makers, gave up coprolite raising in 1895, by which date they were losing 6d. on every ton, and had had to cease paying inflationary wages. Many men who had given up their old jobs to become coprolite diggers, had come to regret what they had done.

Paid at the pub

But at the height of the industry in Barnwell, things had been very different. In the 1870s, for example, Robert Lee, who kept the Gardeners Arms on Newmarket Road, and who leased a portion of Coldham Common for coprolite digging, would pay 60 to 70 men, at the public house, at 2 o'clock each Saturday afternoon. The men's wives took care to be there too, in order to seize from their husbands sufficient housekeeping money for the coming week, before it was all drunk away.