

Cambridge “Gault” bricks; their manufacture and use up to the present day. A critical appraisal of the approaches that have been applied in response to the decline and loss of manufacture of these bricks, identifying changes in attitude to new development in the City and the extension and repair of existing Cambridge “Gault” brick buildings in the light of relevant philosophical developments in Building Conservation policy, principles and legislation.



Fig 1: Quintessential Cambridge “grey Gault brick” - Park Terrace facing onto Parkers Piece, c1835.

Cambridge is often characterized by its “Gault brick” buildings¹, [Fig 1]. This essay examines; what constitutes a “Gault” brick; when and where “Gault bricks” were manufactured; what they were replaced with following their decline in popularity and the demise of the city’s brickworks; how changing attitudes in Building Conservation have affected material selection in Cambridge; a critical appraisal of current practice in the repair

¹ Pevsner, Cambridgeshire 1991 p290: Alec Clifton-Taylor writing about Building Materials used in Cambridge: “there are also those washed-out yellow-grey bricks ... which were ... to become so familiar in and around Cambridge”

and extension of “Gault” brick buildings; and which materials are regarded as appropriate for new development in the city today.

DEFINITION

Nowadays the term “Cambridge Gault brick” is frequently misused to describe any buff, orange, yellow, grey, or “white” brick which loosely matches the genuine “Gault” bricks manufactured in Cambridge from the late 18C up until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Geological Period	Main Building Clays	Percentage of 1938 Brick Output
Recent & Pleistocene	Alluvium Brickearth Glacial Clays	17
Pliocene & Miocene 24 MILLION YEARS	MILLIONS OF YEARS 25	—
Oligocene & Eocene 35 MILLION YEARS	LC RB 60	4
Cretaceous 60 MILLION YEARS	WC 120	3
Jurassic 25 MILLION YEARS	OC 145	32
Triassic 25 MILLION YEARS	KM 170	6
Permian 40 MILLION YEARS	210	1
Carboniferous 75 MILLION YEARS	EM CM 280	33
Devonian 40 MILLION YEARS	325	2
Silurian 25 MILLION YEARS	350	
Ordovician 60 MILLION YEARS	410	
Cambrian 90 MILLION YEARS	500	—
Unknown 2		100

Upper Gault – the source of Cambridge “Gault Bricks” which were mass produced in and around Cambridge from c1790 – c1940

Fig 2: The relative age and incidence of “the Gault” in comparison with other brick clays²

“The Gault” refers to geological strata laid down in the Early Cretaceous period, [Fig 2], being sub-divided into the Lower Gault which produces red bricks and the Upper Gault which

² Keeling PS “The Geology and Mineralogy of Brick Clays” 1963 p65

outcrops in and around Cambridge, [Fig 3], and as Keeling observes, “*under suitable conditions produces bricks of a creamy white colour*”³, a colour which was highly fashionable at the beginning of the 19C but which, in the case of the Cambridge “Gault bricks”, rapidly turned greeny-grey as a result of atmospheric pollution, [Fig 4].

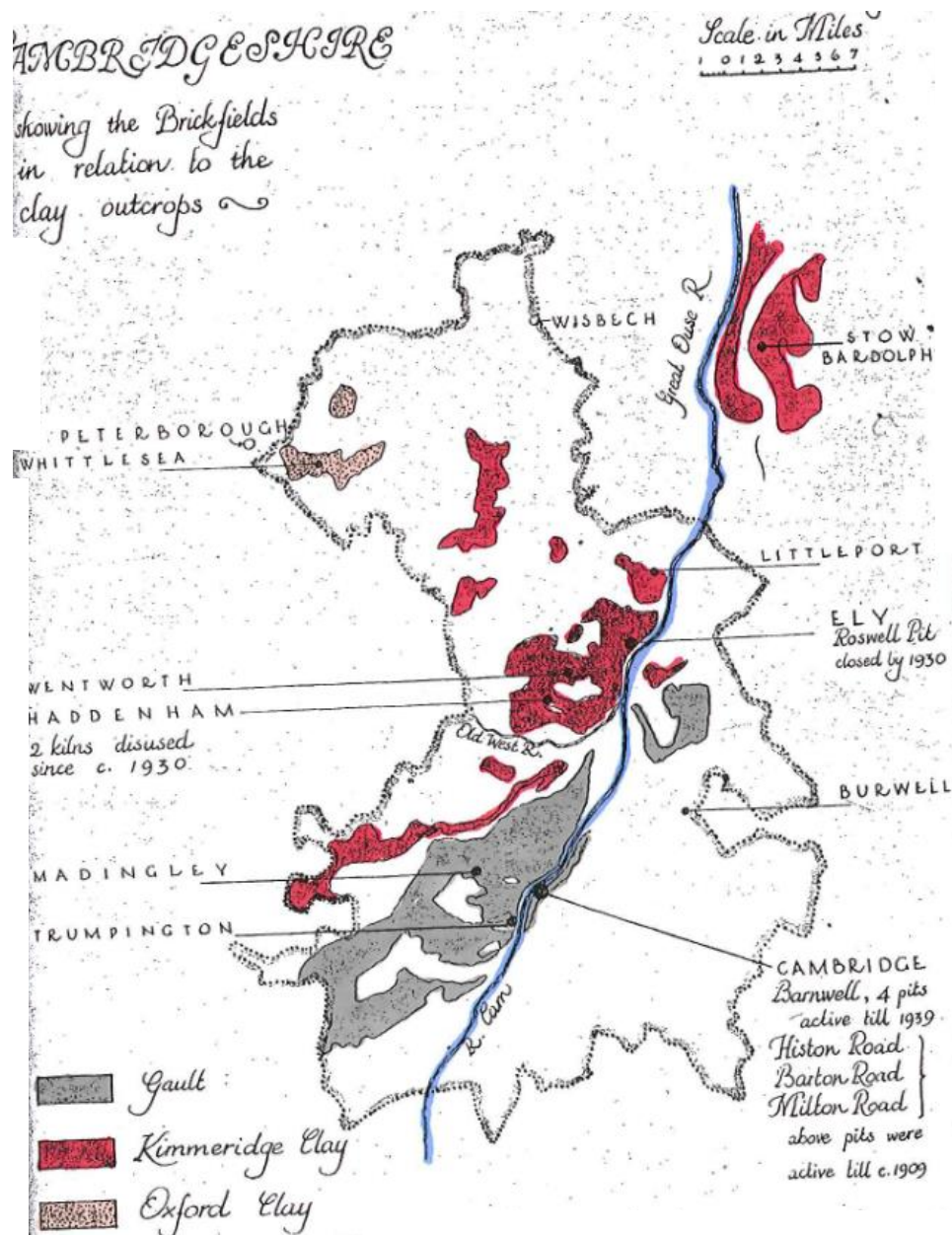


Fig 3: The location of “the Gault” in Cambridgeshire⁴

³ ibid p70

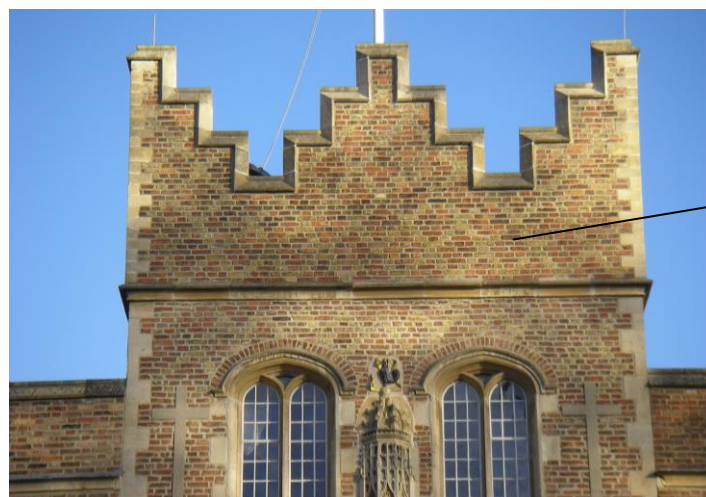
⁴ Spittle SDT “An Historic study of brickwork in Cambridge”, 1949 – paper in the Cambridgeshire Collection



Fig 4: The original “creamy-white” of recently cleaned “Gault bricks” contrasts with the more prevalent sooty “greeny-grey” colour which has come to characterise Cambridge.

WHEN AND WHERE

The earliest recorded use of “white” bricks in Cambridge is on Jesus College Gatehouse where they are used for diapering, [Fig 5], although it seems unlikely these bricks were made from the local “Gault” clay⁵.



Diapering in “white” bricks

Fig 5: Jesus College Gatehouse

Analysing the Listing of buildings in Cambridge revealed around two hundred properties described as being constructed of “buff brick”, “Gault brick”, or “grey Gault brick”. Ignoring a probable mis-dating of 1620, the earliest example of “buff brick” being used is at the “Papermill” on Newmarket Road dated c1720. This building is sited very close to the area where most of Cambridge’s brickworks came to be located, and, assuming it was built using bricks manufactured on site, as was the custom of the time, it may represent the earliest surviving example of a genuine “Gault brick” building in the city, [Fig 6].

⁵ It seems more likely that they came from Ely and are therefore Kimmeridge clay



Fig 6 The Papermill, Newmarket Road, c1720 with close up of the brickwork probably manufactured on site



Otherwise, the use of “Gault brick” as recorded in the Listings, started in the 1790s and continued until c1890 when it ceases to be mentioned⁶. Walking around the areas of 19C development in Cambridge, [Fig 7], it is clear that apart from some university and church buildings, whatever the building type or status, the material of choice in the 19C was the locally manufactured “Gault bricks”. Figs 8-17 illustrate the range and inventiveness of “Gault brick” buildings constructed in Cambridge 1790-1900.

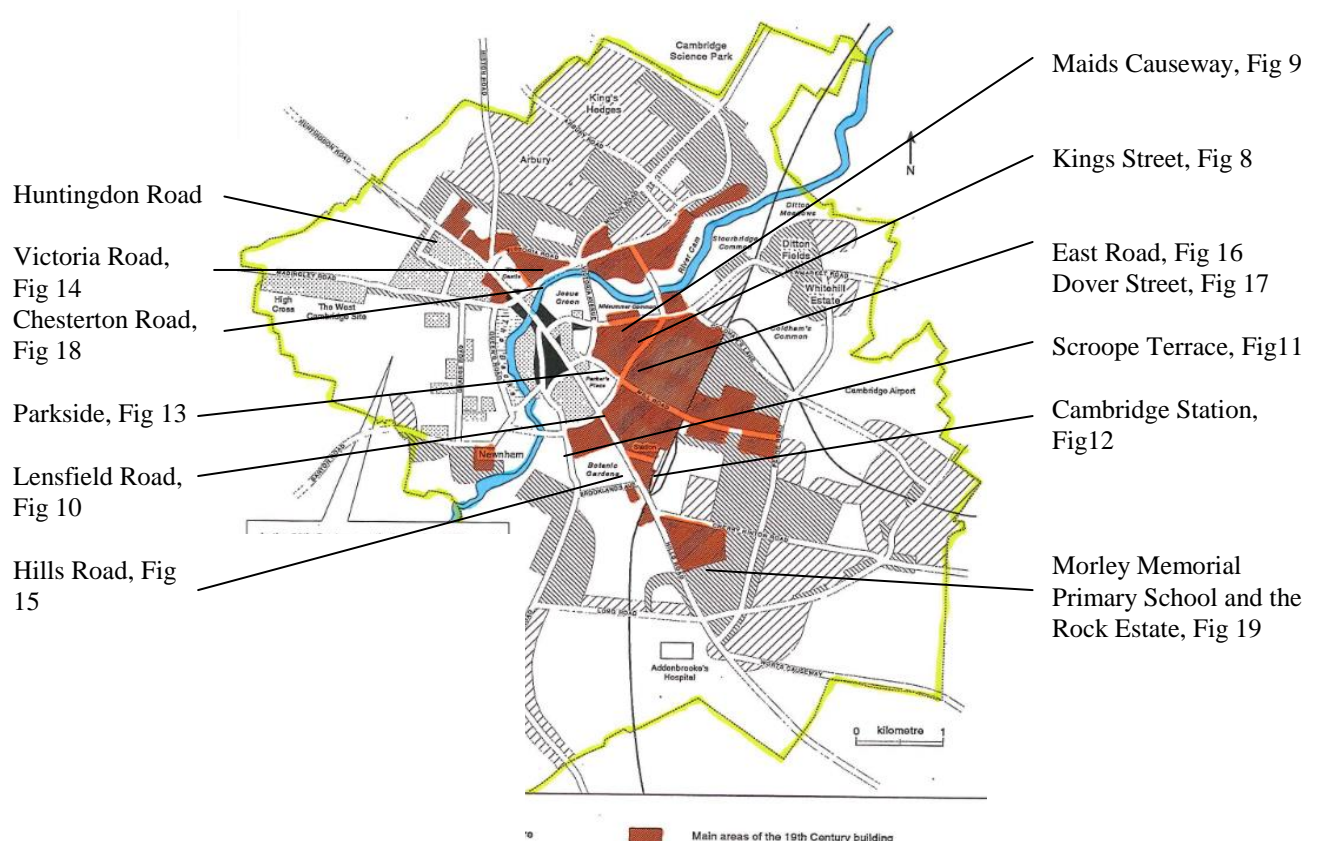


Fig 7: The extent of “Gault brick” built building in Cambridge during the 19C⁷

⁶ other than at Fen Court, Peterhouse designed by Hughes and Bicknell 1939-40

⁷ Adapted from Bryan, Peter 1999 “Cambridge The Shaping of the City” p128



Fig 8: Jakenett's Almshouses, King Street, 1790



Fig 9: 8 Maids Causeway, c1810⁸



Fig 10: 49 Lensfield Road, 1819



Fig 11: Scroope Terrace 1839



Fig 12: Cambridge Railway Station, 1845



Fig 13: 27 Parkside c1850

⁸ Part of the Doll's Close development carried out by Charles Humfrey, architect and builder, RCHME p363



Fig 14: St Luke's Church, Victoria Road 1874



Fig 15: Royal Albert Homes, Hills Road c1875



Fig 16: Zion Chapel, East Road, 1879



Fig 17: Tram Depot, Dover Street, 1880



Fig 18: Chesterton Road, 1881



Fig 19: Morley Memorial Primary School, 1900

CAMBRIDGE BRICKWORKS

The Cambridge Enclosure Act of 1802 and the Barnwell Enclosure Act of 1807⁹ paved the way for the expansion of the city generating the need for it to produce its own bricks, as by c1890 bricks had replaced timber-frame as the preferred construction method, and it is clear from Bakers map of Cambridge¹⁰ that by 1830 there were well established brick fields and kilns in several parts of the city, [Fig 20]. There were other brickworks on Milton Road and Huntingdon Road¹¹ and brick earth was quarried in Madingley¹² for manufacture in Cambridge. Extensive brickworks at Burwell also produced true “Gault bricks”.



Fig 20: 1830 Bakers Map of Cambridge



Fig 21: 1890 OS
Map of Cambridge

⁹ Bryan, Peter 1999 “Cambridge The Shaping of the City” p102

¹⁰ Searby, Peter Editor (1999) *Baker’s Map of the University and Town of Cambridge 1830*

¹¹ Spittle SDT “An Historic study of brickwork in Cambridge”, 1949 – paper in the Cambridgeshire Collection

¹² Porter, Enid 1971 *Cambridgeshire Life*, p22-23

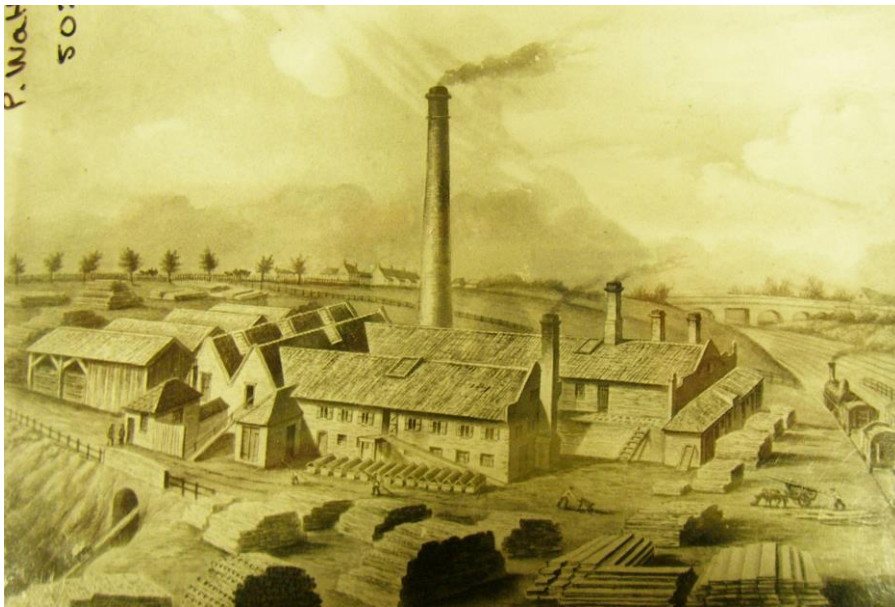


Fig 22: Watts & Son Brickworks, Newmarket Road, 1870¹³



Fig 23: Swanns brickworks, Newmarket Road c1934¹⁴

Clearly some of these kilns must have been active as early as the 1790s. However increasingly the mechanisation of brick manufacturing, especially with the invention of the Hoffman kiln in 1858¹⁵, replaced handmade with machine made bricks and brick production moved to brickwork factories. In Cambridge it was the brick fields on Newmarket Road which prospered as their clay pits were extensive; they were located slightly out of town; and they were close to the river and, after 1845, the railway; [Figs 21, 22, 23], giving easy access to fuel supplies and facilitating distribution of the finished article.

¹³ Photograph in the Cambridgeshire Collection

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Brunskill, R.W., *Brick Building in Britain*, p31

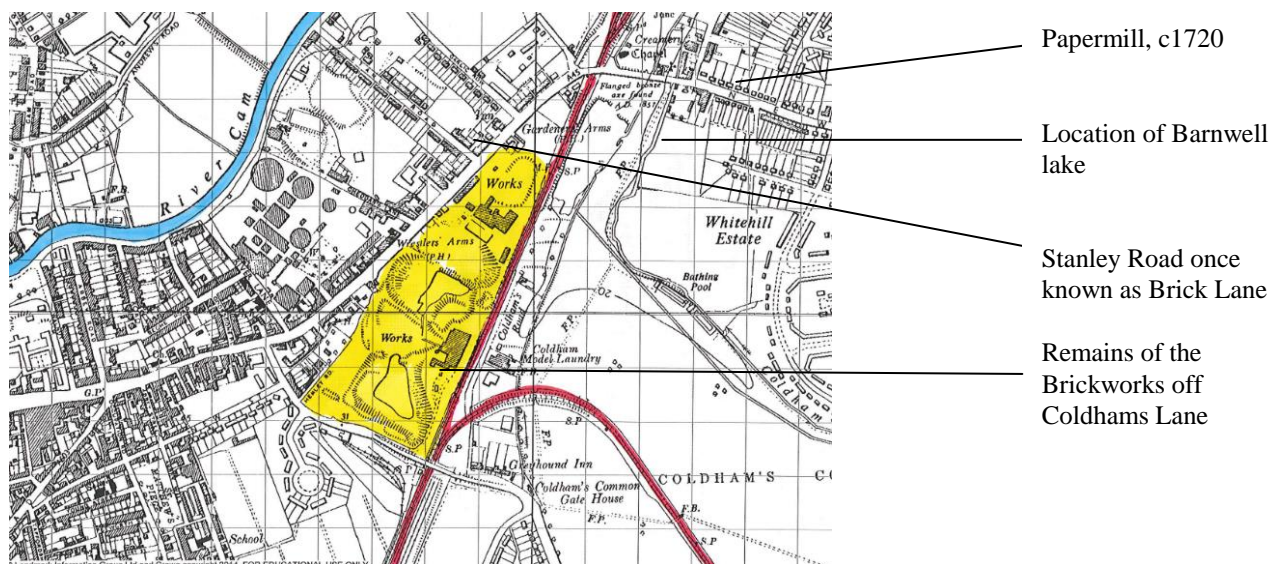


Fig 24: OS map of Cambridge, 1960



Fig 25: Barnwell Lake

However changes in fashion and the working out of the pits caused the Chesterton Road brickworks to close c1887¹⁶, and other pits followed in 1909¹⁷. The Newmarket Road brickworks survived until WWII. Today Barnwell Lake, [Fig 25], is a lonely reminder of a once thriving industry. Until 1971¹⁸ genuine “Gault bricks” continued to be manufactured at Burwell Brickworks although by the time it closed its bricks were much pinker than the famous white “Gault bricks” of its heyday. Today the Cambridgeshire Brick and Tile Company Ltd which restarted in Burwell c1995 only produce handmade tiles¹⁹.

¹⁶ Gillingham, MJ, June 1990

¹⁷ Spittle SDT “An Historic study of brickwork in Cambridge”, 1949

¹⁸ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol10/pp347-356>

¹⁹ http://www.cambstileandbrick.co.uk/about_us.html

THE DECLINE & LOSS OF “GAULT BRICK” BUILDING IN CAMBRIDGE

By c1890 “white” bricks were out of fashion and advances in manufacturing and transport meant that the much more desirable red bricks were readily available. Unhampered by planning restrictions Cambridge citizens demonstrated their wealth and status by building themselves substantial red brick mansions in amongst their now unfashionable 19C “Gault brick” neighbours, [Figs 26 & 27]



Fig 26: Iona, Gresham Road 1895



Fig 27: Blantyre, Glisson Road, 1903

The developers quickly caught on to the changes in fashion and faced their upmarket houses in red bricks, utilising the cheaper local “Gault bricks” for side and rear elevations, [Fig 28], whilst continuing to build large estates of high density terraced housing, [Fig 32] in the cheap “Gault bricks”. When house building resumed after WWI fashions in housing design had changed completely, [Fig29] and before production of “Gault bricks” in Cambridge ceased in 1939 their use was more or less restricted to internal walls and Council housing, [Figs 30 & 31].



Fig 28: Red brick façade, Rock Road



Fig 29: Semi-detached houses, Cherry Hinton Road



Fig 30: Demolished garage revealing the use of Gault bricks for internal wall construction, Queen Edith's Way c1930

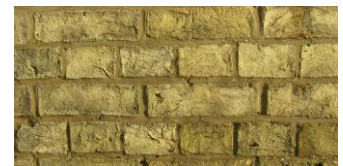


Fig 31: "Gault bricks" used for Council housing in Akeman Street, c1930

CHANGING ATTITUDES - THE EXPANSION OF CAMBRIDGE IN THE 20C

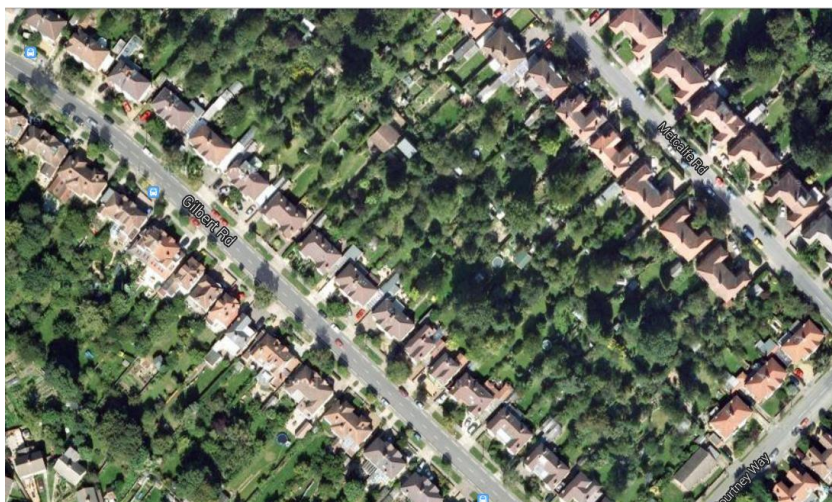
As can be seen from Bryan's map²⁰, [Fig35], Cambridge more or less doubled in size 1900-1950 and again between 1950-2000. Apart from the 1930s Council housing, [Fig 31], very little of this development was constructed in "Gault bricks". Post WWI the inexorable impact of the motor car led to the replacement of urban terrace housing, [Fig 32], with wider tree lined roads, [Fig 33], of semi-detached houses faced in a mixture of red "Rustic" brick manufactured by the London Brick Company and pebble dash render, [Fig 29 – left]. As with Cambridge's pattern book, pre-WWI, terrace housing, the 1920s and 1930s developments greatly resembled similar housing development all over the country, the only difference being that the cheapest fashionable materials were now sourced nationally rather than locally. After WWII the wider brick selection available in the sand faced Fletton range, also produced by the London Brick Company, replaced the red "Rustic" and was used extensively in Cambridge's 1960s housing developments to the north in Arbury and to the south in Queen Ediths, [Figs 34, 36 & 37]. Furthermore advances in construction methods after WWII led to the replacement of lime with cement mortar, and solid Flemish bond walls with half-brick stretcher bond cavity walls thereby fundamentally changing the appearance of 20C facing brickwork. Also the Clean Air Act of 1956 reduced atmospheric pollution allowing brickwork to retain its original colour.

²⁰ Adapted from Bryan, Peter 1999 "Cambridge The Shaping of the City" p128



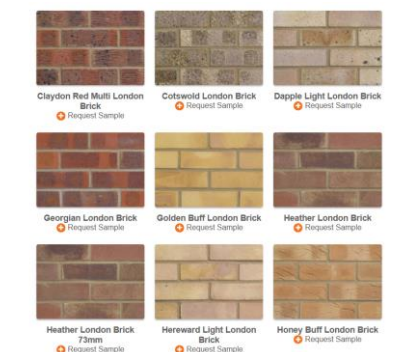
Gault bricks – as used to build the Tram Shed, Dover Street, 1880

Fig 32: Late Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing around Mill Road



Antique Rustic bricks as used by the developers off Gilbert Road, c1930

Fig 33: Semi-detached ribbon development around Gilbert Road



Example of the palette of sand faced Fletton bricks as used by the developers off Nightingale Avenue, c1960

Fig 34: Detached houses developed c1950-70 off Nightingale Avenue²¹

²¹ Figs 32, 33, 34 taken from Google Earth; Red Rustic and Sand faced Fletton brick illustrations from: <http://www.hansonbuildingproducts.co.uk/bricks/brick-selector?manufacture-type=fletton-pressed&brands=london>

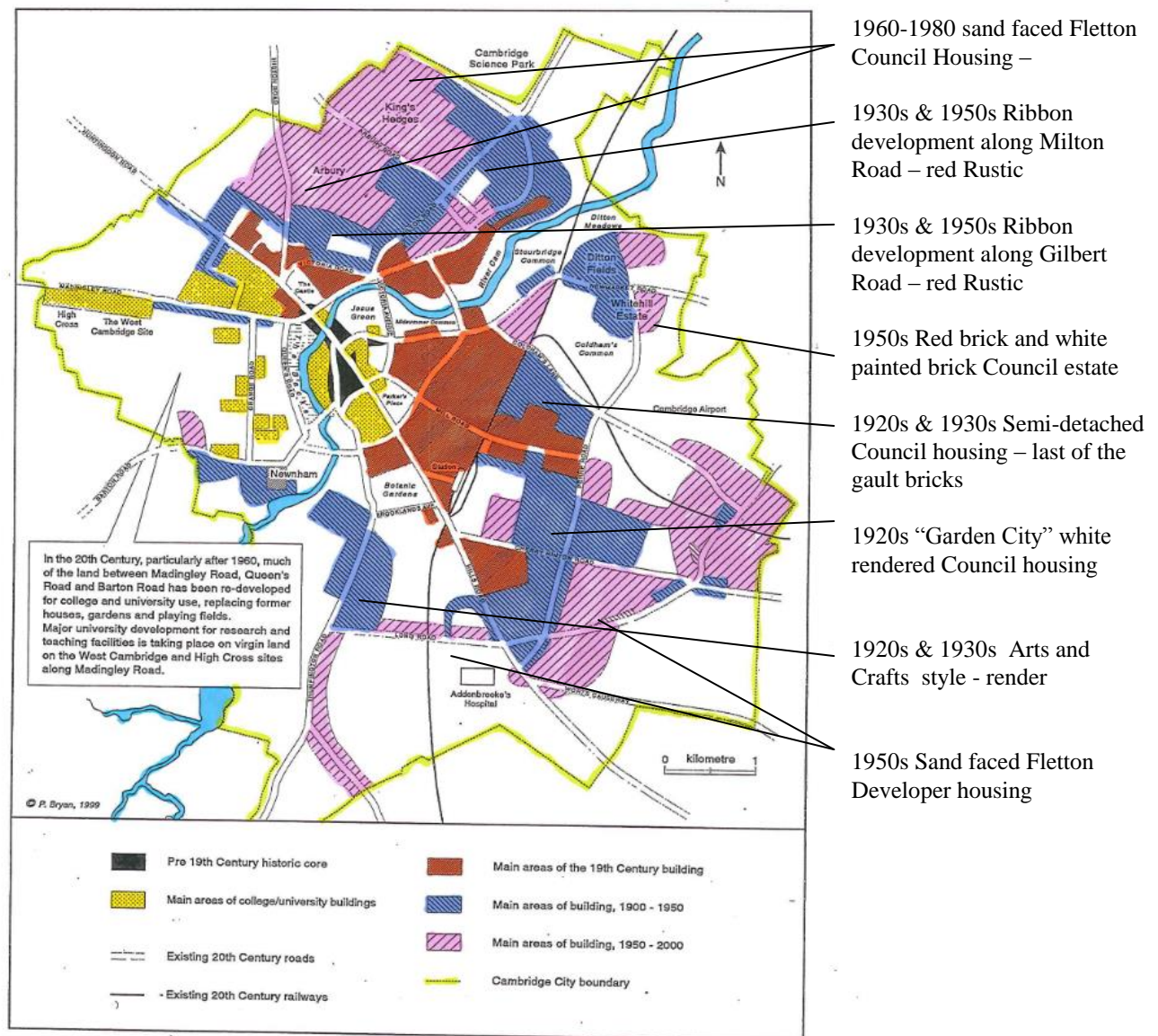


Fig 35: Cambridge development in the 20C



c1960 Sand faced Flettons used in:

Fig 36: Brimley Road, Arbury²² &

Fig 37: Wulfstan Way, Queen Ediths

²² Image taken from Google Earth

CHANGING ATTITUDES - 20C RE-DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL CAMBRIDGE



Fig 38 Cambridge Post Office, 1934²³



Fig 39: Guildhall, 1936-9 & 1946-8



Fig 40: 82-88 Hills Road, c1950



Fig 41 Mixed use development, St Andrews Street 1959²⁴



Fig 42 Lion Yard Shopping Centre, 1975



Fig 43 The Grafton Centre c1980²⁵

²³ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol3/pp1-2>

²⁴ Durrant, John: *Cambridge Past & Present*, p57 quotes Pevsner as saying of this mixed development by Prudential "It might be anywhere and would be noticed specially nowhere"

²⁵ Image from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grafton_Centre

Even though “Gault bricks” were still in production at the beginning of the 20C their colour and their association with unfashionable Victorian architecture resulted in alternative bricks being sourced for city centre re-development projects. As with 20C housing design, the opportunity provided by mass production and cheap transport, meant a much wider palette of bricks was available to the designers. In 1934 the main Post Office was rebuilt in a Neo-Georgian style, [Fig 38], using a silvery-grey brick. In 1936-9 and 1946-8 the rebuilding of the Guildhall, designed by C Cowles-Voysey, [Fig 39], used a brown brick²⁶. This trend continued into the 1950s with the construction of a number of brown brick office buildings in Hills Road, [Figs 40 & 41]. However by 1970 fashions in brick colours were changing once more and the Lion Yard development, designed by Arup Associates, was built using an orangey-brown brick, [Fig 42], a choice which was repeated in the 1980s in the Grafton Centre, [Fig 43], and again in Castle Park, where the overbearing development in orange bricks jostles uncomfortably with the diminutive “Gault brick” Allways house, [Fig 44]. It was not until the 1990s, under the influence of changes in Conservation poicy that yellow bricks returned to favour, [Fig 45].



Fig 44 Castle Park surrounding Allways House c1980 Fig 45: Cambridge City Hotel, 1990

As in housing development advances in construction methods for larger buildings after WWII led to the replacement of load-bearing brickwork with steel frame construction which, although normally concealed by brickwork, [Fig 47], could be clad in a wide range of materials.

Up until the late 1980s changes in fashion; advances in construction methods; the pressure to expand; and broadening horizons; resulted in the 20C growth and re-development of Cambridge deploying new materials; architectural styles; and town planning principles to

²⁶ <http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-461906-guildhall-cambridgeshire> - the bricks are described as being “grey” in the listing.

those of the previous century. It was only with changes in Conservation policy and with Victorian architecture coming back into fashion that the use of “Gault bricks” once more became imperative in Cambridge.



Fig 46: Clean & dirty “Gault bricks” in load bearing Flemish bond



Fig 47: “Matching” bricks in stretcher bond – rain screen cladding over a steel frame

THE IMPACT OF BUILDING CONSERVATION POLICY

The demolition of large swathes of historic Cambridge, Medieval in the case of Lion Yard, and 19C in the case of the Grafton Centre, resulted in outrage and organized opposition within the city and this along with incoming legislation, such as the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990, tipped the balance in favour of conserving the historic environment as opposed to wholesale demolition and re-development. Nationally there was an accelerated re-survey of Listed Buildings in 1981-1989 when more of Cambridge’s 19C “grey Gault brick” buildings were listed²⁷. The city also designated large parts of central Cambridge as Conservation Areas and the Local Plan sought to ensure that any alterations or new construction was carried out in “matching” materials. This requirement for “matching” was reinforced in 1995 when Permitted Development Rights were introduced allowing householders to carry out small extensions without needing Planning Permission, providing they were built in “matching” materials.

Ignoring the fact that “Gault bricks” were no longer made, and that atmospheric pollution and time had changed their appearance soon after construction, (hence the “grey” colour of the “Gault bricks” recorded in the listings); from the 1990s onwards the city planners insisted that any new development should be built in bricks to “match” the original creamy-white

²⁷ The majority were listed in the 1970s

appearance of the “Gault bricks” as they would have appeared when first constructed. This has led to a wide variety of buff and yellow bricks being sourced nationally and internationally²⁸. Furthermore the requirement to “match” has not been restricted to the central area of 19C “Gault brick” development, as might reasonably have been expected, but has been applied unilaterally across the city including areas with no indigenous “Gault brick” buildings, [Figs 48 & 49].



Fig 48: Flats in Rustat Road, c2005 built in stack bonded “matching” yellow bricks in an area developed in the 1950s and characterized by render and red brick



Fig 49: “Matching” buff bricks in Wulfstan Way, c2008 in an area developed in the 1960s characterized by sand faced Fletton brickwork

Conservation legislation has helped save buildings and raise public awareness but in my opinion it is misguided when it is used to encourage developers to mimic 19C buildings knowing full well different bricks and different construction methods will be used to create a different type of modern accommodation. This approach is retrograde and is leading to an homogenization of the cityscape, [Figs 50, 51]. It remains prevalent today; for example, located in central Cambridge, the University Arms Hotel have recently been granted planning permission to knock down their brown brick 1970s building and replace it with a pseudo Victorian extension, [Figs 52 & 53]. As always, how good a “match” will be achieved with the new brickwork, and where the bricks will be sourced from are subject to a planning condition and are therefore in the hands of the planning officer. I believe this to be deceitful architecture and poor Conservation. The University Arms Hotel, as an international hotel

²⁸ Including Holland, Germany and Spain –noted during the RIBA arranged Ibstock CPD lecture, 12 December 2014

chain, is joining the Cambridge City Hotel in employing "Disney Classicism"²⁹, to pander to what they perceive to be the aesthetic sensibilities of the average Cambridge tourist³⁰.



Pseudo Victorian "houses": Fig 50: Devonshire Road³¹ Fig 51: Victoria Road³²



Fig 52 University Arms Hotel, 1970

Fig 53 Pseudo Victorian replacement 2014³³

The consequence of this policy is that the "Gault bricks", which were indigenous to Cambridge, and reflected its vernacular building tradition, are being replicated by unidentified bricks sourced from across Europe. It is difficult to see how this is an improvement on the earlier 20C practice of using grey and brown bricks sourced nationally. Furthermore advocating the use of replica "Gault bricks" in areas of Cambridge which were developed in the 20C, and which currently may be out of fashion, (but as is evident from the Victorian buildings of 19C Cambridge may well be appreciated in the future), is a shortsighted and misguided Conservation policy.

²⁹ Jones, David: *Hideous Cambridge: a city mutilated*, p92

³⁰ "In Cambridge we are aiming to create something with *timeless appeal*; architecture that *honours the traditions* and *creates an aura* that is present in so much of the historic architecture in the city". John Simpson, Architect; <http://www.newuniversityarms.com/>

³¹ Image taken from Google Earth

³² *ibid*

³³ <http://www.universityarms.info/>

THE REPAIR AND EXTENSION OF “GAULT” BRICK BUILDINGS IN CAMBRIDGE: PATCH, MATCH, OR CONTRAST?

There are a number of inherent problems when trying to repair, alter or extend original “Gault brick” buildings in Cambridge:

1. Gault brick earth is no longer extracted and new “Gault bricks” are no longer made.
2. New bricks are now manufactured to rigorous standards, tolerances, colours, textures, and metric dimensions, rendering them incompatible with the original “Gault bricks” made in the 19C.
3. The original “Gault brick” buildings have been discoloured to varying degrees by atmospheric pollution from “yellowy-white” to “greeny-grey” and it is the latter colour which has been recorded in the listing of “Gault brick” buildings.
4. Re-cycled “Gault bricks” do not readily match in with original “Gault bricks” because of this discolouration.
5. Cleaning “Gault bricks” can damage the surface increasing porosity and reducing lifespan.
6. The requirements of modern living standards and Building Regulations are often at odds with 19C construction



Fig 54 Undisguised repointing



Second hand bricks salvaged from another part of the same building



Fig 55 Two roof extensions using recycled “Gault bricks”

These are all very real considerations when repairing, extending, or building in amongst Cambridge's original "Gault brick" buildings.

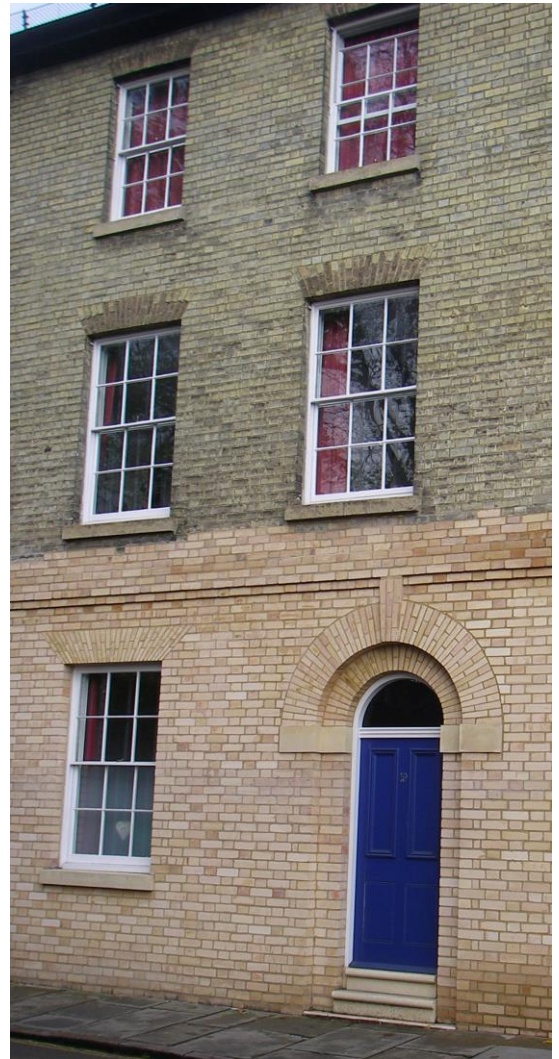
Conservation policy advocates that any repairs to historic buildings should be carried out in a manner which makes it clear the alterations were not original to the building. This is presumably the intention behind the repointing of no.1 Emmanuel Road, [Fig 54]. There is a supply of secondhand "Gault bricks" in Cambridge, and they are frequently used to alter and extend "Gault brick" buildings, [Fig 55], however, as with the repointing example, the architectural intervention can be more or less discreet. [Figs 56 & 57].



Figs 56 & 57 Recycled "Gault bricks", the Varsity Spa Hotel, Thompsons Lane

Despite the Conservation principle that extensions should be distinct, recently this idea has given way to a presumption in favour of "matching in" suggesting alterations, extensions, and repairs should be indistinguishable from the original fabric. Unsurprisingly this is almost impossible to achieve when dealing with "Gault brickwork" as demonstrated by this attempt in Jesus Lane, [Fig 58], to reinstate the original façade of the building as it would have been before the shop window was inserted. The "matching" bricks are pinky-orange³⁴ and, although they more or less course in, and have been laid in Flemish bond, they have not been toothed in (as they would have been originally) and the fenestration incorrectly reproduces the first floor window pattern rather than that of the ground floor so clearly evident in the adjacent building. The result is disquieting and demonstrates the need for a more robust policy in favour of finding solutions which complement and enhance the historic fabric not ape it.

³⁴ The bricks could be from Burwell where the final "Gault" bricks came out much pinker than the original creamy-white 19C bricks.



New ground floor window made to match first floor windows, and therefore not in keeping with the ground floor fenestration

Orangey pink bricks contrast with the 19C Cambridge "Gault bricks"

Straight joint leading to poor coursing of the bricks – should not be necessary in lime mortar

Fig 58 Infill of a shop window in Jesus Lane, 2014

Cambridge has examples of inventive solutions more in keeping with the 19C approach which produced the imaginative buildings so highly valued today. On balance, when patching and extending, using secondhand “Gault brick” seems to be the most sympathetic approach and can even be used for new buildings as has been done quite successfully with the Eden Chapel in Fitzroy Street, [Fig 59].



Fig 59 Eden Chapel³⁵ opened 1982³⁶



Fig 60 Fellows flats, Benson Street, 2010³⁷



Fig 61 Harvey Goodwin Avenue, 2005³⁸



Fig 62: 27 Maids Causeway, 2014³⁹

Demand in Cambridge is such that it has created a market for lookalike “Gault bricks” which when built in lime mortar using snapped headers to replicate Flemish bond, [Fig 60] can work if the bricks are not in direct comparison with neighbouring “Gaults” as the colour and texture of the new bricks will never be an exact match. It has even been possible to use new genuine “Gault bricks” in what might be the last complete building to be built in them but, as can be seen, [Fig 61], they are now pinky in hue and do not match their 19C counterparts. In the end

³⁵ Image from Google Earth

³⁶ <http://eden-cambridge.org/about-us/a-history-of-eden>

³⁷ Design by AC Architects Cambridge Ltd., using bricks from Cambridgeshire Brick and Tile Company at Burwell. Photograph by Tim Rawle

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Design by Molearchitects

I believe the long term and most sustainable solution is to use sympathetically contrasting materials, [Fig 62].

WHICH MATERIALS ARE APPROPRIATE FOR CAMBRIDGE TODAY?

Cambridge continues to mushroom and the default stance in order to get a speedy planning permission is to use a lookalike “Gault brick”. This approach does have validity in the areas of the city, where “Gault” bricks were originally used, and can be successful, [Fig 63].

However the results are not always so good. It is difficult to ascertain whether the new student flats on Hills Road were meant to “match” or contrast? [Fig 64]. We need to accept that “Gault bricks” are no longer available and that the use of other materials is appropriate and possible.



Fig 63 Flats, New Park Street, c1995



Fig 64 Student accommodation, Hills Road, c2010



Fig 65 Accordia c2012⁴⁰



Fig 66 Example of the “Accordia effect”, CB1 c2012

⁴⁰ <http://www.dezeen.com/2008/10/11/accordia-wins-stirling-prize/>

Planners need to encourage imaginative solutions, [Fig 65-67], and refuse stage set architecture, [Fig 68], where arbitrary changes in material signal a cosmetic understanding of building construction.



Fig 67 Eden Street Backway, c2010

Fig 68 Flats, Rustat Road, c2010



Fig 69 Brick sample panels under consideration for the Northwest Cambridge development

It would appear that thinking is moving forward and consideration is being given to alternative bricks, provenance unknown, for the northwest Cambridge development, [Fig 69], and it is to be hoped they will be used in combination with more sustainably sourced materials. Historically Cambridge built in stone or timber-frame and render. It did not exploit its brick clay until fashions changed in the late 18C following which serious “Gault brick” production lasted about 100 years. Since then Cambridge has sourced its materials nationally and now internationally. A truly sustainable city should look to its local resources and seek a modern solution. Pretending that it is sound policy to extend the city in “matching bricks” is indefensible.

CONCLUSION



Fig 71 Unfired “Gault” clay from Burwell, 2005

Genuine “Gault bricks” are no longer made, and it seems unlikely that any more suitable “Gault” clay pits will be opened to allow them to be made in the future. “Gault brick” buildings should be respected for the contribution they made to the Cambridge cityscape and the implementation of Conservation policy should be adjusted to foster a more sympathetic approach to redevelopment within the City centre, as well as allowing the expansion of the city to move forward in an environmentally responsible way with appropriate material selections for a sustainable future. If Cambridge continues to pursue a policy of Disney-style reproduction architecture it risks long term damage. Cambridge is an international city and needs to protect and enhance its unique character. Its 19C “Gault brick” buildings are one aspect of its 1000 year history and they should be protected and respected but never aped. The City needs to find a new expression and strong 21C identity.

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