



# Sketching Cambridge

By Michael Large





## Introduction

Cambridge is too often seen as nothing but a university city. The town outside the gown is packed full of rich historical, global and personal colour, which I have always wanted to share as a native of the city. Buildings tell the most fascinating stories from our shared histories, so I have chosen 25 buildings and neighbourhoods from across the city to tell the story of Cambridge, my home.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Without you this project could never have become what it is now

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# Corn Exchange



Skirt the pushy, pungent bins behind the mysteriously always-closed 'dance club', avoiding death under the wheels of the parade of SUVs shuttling shoppers home from the Grand Arcade car park down the street, and you will find the side of Cambridge's Corn Exchange. Or, you could stride boldly out of the market square hubbub, past Cambridge's most obscenely popular ice cream vendor and various highly-regarded East Asian restaurants to be confronted with the building's full-frontal grandeur. Before you, the likes of Adele, Pink Floyd, David Bowie and Queen have all made that same journey (but certainly the latter of the two, or probably even a limo). Maybe you can hustle your way inside, enjoy a concert or share some comedy-show laughs with your glitziest and most presentable friends.

Throughout the 19th century that side street was called Slaughterhouse lane, cobbled, lined with picturesque cottages including a coal merchant's and other sweet local shops. The foundation stone for the city's swish new building to house the grain trade was laid in 1874 by the Mayor, to be buried beneath elegantly piled arches, windows and brickwork in a simply textbook gothic-revival-Italo-Byzantine style (pointy rooves, loads of arches, nice yellow and red splashes - like a boiled sweet).

November of the next year: That same Mayor, Mr Death (De-ath, if you please), cracks down hard on rioting and rowdyism during a concert, an effigy of the mayor is burnt in the market. Several of the fined students break into his house and smash the place up - several end up behind bars.

November, twenty-six years later: Crowds flock to watch grown men punching each other - Bill Topper easily floors fellow local W. Shipp, the crowd goes berserk, a flurry of activity surrounds the event for days, then subsides

May, eight years after that: An audience of two thousand attends the meeting of the Cambridge Association for Women's Suffrage - a vocally outnumbered minority failed to bully their way over the line - the resolution in favour passed easily.

May, thirty years later: Winston Churchill draws over two-and-a-half thousand as he gives an apparently inspiring speech on the merits of conscription - a scuffle breaks out beyond the doors amongst those unable to squeeze in.

November, four war-years later: The American Red Cross are the kind hosts of a 'Barn Dance' celebration of all things Americana, including Hallowe'en - slow foxtrots and quicksteps are

refreshed with barrels of apples and pears, as well as new-fangled 'donuts', cider and good coffee.

Possibly summer, about twenty-one years afterwards: A prototype Triumph GT6 takes pride of place amongst one of the numerous motor shows of the building's history, hidden amongst the jungles of jaunty bunting and men in suits, feigning intense fascination and expertise.

October, nine years later: Up to two hundred young people take advantage of the evening skating sessions - it's cheaper than the cinema, and there's 'nowhere to go on a Monday'.

Today: Step through the arch into the entry lobby. Buy yourself one of those tiny ice creams. Find that colleague you arranged to meet, although you're quite late now. Apologise, but it's ok. Hurry quietly into the main hall. Subside into the electric silence. Enjoy the show!

# Market

The centre of Cambridge has been central to town life for millennia, in all its many facets:

Maelstrom of activity: The Bull Ring, Butchery, Butter Row, Cheese Market, Combers lane, Cordwainers' Row, Corn Market, Cutlers' Row, Cutlers' lane, Fair Yard Lane, Goldsmiths' Row, Leathermarket, Malt Market, Milk Market, Oat Market, Peasmarket, Potters' Row, Poultry Row, Saddlers' Row, Shraggery (timber market), Smiths' Row, Spicery, Tripers' Lane, Apothecaries Row, Cloth Market, Lorimers' Row (makers of harness), Smeremongers' Row (sellers of tallow). All within this one 'market'.

Architectural exhibition: A former Victorian cinema, 17th century houses, the city's first modernist building, the stocky wartime Guildhall and a late-gothic church all crowd around the matchbox-sized stalls, huddling in their elegant shadows.

Global microcosm: Venezuelans, Malaysians and Belgians vie for the attention of passers-by, pumping out alluring smells and displaying jauntily printed pictures to lure them into a filling lunch. The energetic owner of 'Africfood' laughs when I ask whose jollof rice is superior - 'Nigerian of course!' - as she ladles it into a takeaway container. After several return visits I can confirm her assertion. In Medieval times this was an important site for the Jewish community: the earliest known property on the Guildhall site was owned by a Jewish man called Benjamin, whose land was confiscated by Henry II in the 1200s, although a synagogue persisted around the area.

Slammer: Henry used this ill-gotten gain to build a town gaol, which skulked here for centuries, renowned for the squalor of its dungeons and cells. Inmates had no running water or fireplaces. The only 'modern' convenience was a special prison wing for witches.

Site for student rebellion: In 1569, a student was nailed by the ear to the Market cross for uttering 'evyll and fowle wordes' at the Mayor. The infamous 1898 protest by the University's students - necessarily male - against the inclusion of women in the university was infuriatingly more successful: the strung-up effigy of a female student on a bike wouldn't be seen in reality for another fifty years (thankfully not in effigy-form).

Memorial: The odd concoction of colourful shapes by today's Guildhall is a memorial to the beloved Snowy Farr, the man who raised over £60,000 with the cats, mice and rabbits running around his hat and his scarlet suit, up until his death in 2007.

Community news board: As with many cities, this is where the government chose to communicate with its thronging populace, informing them of any new monarchs or wars that had popped up since they last checked in.

Indicator of change: Stalls selling wares have been here since Saxon times, and at its height it was many times larger than today's modest square: this golden-age market was L-shaped and chaotic, with temporary stalls alongside permanent shop-houses, sand swilling around the floor to soak up spillages, and live animals threatening to stampede. As the market waned so too did its size, with municipal buildings encroaching onto the space, to bring order to the joyous mess.

Raging inferno: The ultimate blow was going up in flames, which the market did in spectacular style in 1849. Josiah Charter described in his diary: 'I must confess though, that while it was burning it was a glorious sight, and when the chemist's was on fire, every time a bottle cracked there was an explosion superior to fireworks.' - some blamed Mr Lodge, the owner of the clothier where it started, who was in dire financial straits. Ultimately it was ruled an accident.

Site for celebration: Political, Sporting and Military victories have always drawn crowds to the marketplace to scream, dance and party the night away, linking Cambridge United FC and the British Army, amongst thousands of others, in long nights of revelry.





## Round Church



As their compatriots are striding pompously around Antarctica or bringing new backwaters into the loving fold of imperial oppression, a shady assortment of students and powerful college alumni have turned their sights closer to home. These self-proclaimed 'ecclesiologists', the 'Camden Society', are fervent in their desires to promote gothic architectural ideals over the crass modernity of 1841. The increasingly tragic chunk of rubble insulting the name of the 'Round Church Street', looks ripe for a redesign. Its true name, 'The Holy Sepulchre', recalls the timeless city of Jerusalem, which had presumably made the area more attractive to its formerly significant Jewish community, which had imbued the town with strong mercantile traditions before they were all unceremoniously kicked out of the country in 1290, over five centuries ago.

The church seems to have done nothing but sag quietly into dust since then.

Two years and some drastic restoration later, the octagonal bell turret is proud once again, the Medieval carved angels are newly fresh-faced and the crenellations are sharp enough to slice silk. The Reverend Faulkner was outraged. Central in the shiny new chancel stood an altar, rudely, offensively, *provocatively* crafted from stone. Such an 'innovation at variance with the canon law' simply would not stand. Letters from the society's Thomas Thorp. A meeting of the Restoration Subcommittee. The sanction of the bishop. Being outvoted at a vestry meeting. A special ruling from the Chancellor of Ely. Nothing could dissuade Faulkner from his crusade.

On the 31st January 1845 Sir Herbert Jenner Fust, Dean of Arches at the Court of Arches, answerable to the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, ruled in favour of Faulkner. The egregious stone thing was rapidly discarded. A victorious Faulkner subsided into smug obscurity. The shame-faced Camden Society, under mounting pressure from tiring donors and this brand new embarrassment, was dissolved. The church, built 700 years before, had weathered civil wars, revolutions and church schisms; it sat stoically and made no comment.

**"The West may have the heat of the sun, but the East has its light, the dawn, the dance of time, the beginning."**

**- Tim Binding in 'Waterland' by Graham Swift**



# University Arms Hotel

Before the 4-year, famous-architect-designed, £80 million renovations, the university's eponymous hotel left many a distinguished visitor underwhelmed. They didn't care for its mish-mash of architectural styles, couldn't abide the offensively drab fittings, weren't taken with the tacky crest jammed onto its wannabe-Bauhaus exterior.

It was at the foot of that building, on the seventh of March 1935, that police officers, alert and tense, were standing before a belligerent mob of wild-eyed socialist twenty-somethings. Their opponents in this war on the cobbles were wining and dining several meters away; amongst them *he* was laughing and stuffing his hateful face. Sir Oswald Mosely was the honoured guest of the University's Fascist Society, and the target of hatred for the University's Socialist Society, who were milling around outside giving emboldened speeches and grinning chants, while through the wall one or two of the bigoted revellers were starting to squirm. Their torches grew brighter as the grass sloughed off the sun, and the mob trickled off to give more speeches elsewhere. Departing into the distance could be heard

'We want Mosely dead or alive'

They melted into the night like travellers had done here for decades, although their presence was always cause for closed gates and quiet complaints rather than protests. After a small practice of vets moved out, this lump of turf was converted into a fifteen-room coaching inn in 1834, and has been expanded and redone myriad times in the two centuries since. Most of human traffic was wafting between this university town and the capital, doing so increasingly quickly as stables morphed into garages in 1904, to accommodate the new-fangled horses with engines. The 1913 upgrade was designed partly by George Banyard, who sourced much of the iron and steel from the ever-popular Mackays of East Road - Isabella Mackay was thrilled to put her engraving and miniature-making skills on display by designing the ornate balconies that pepper the hotel's exterior.

Since then, this modest coaching inn has sprouted a library, a bar, a ballroom, a restaurant, 192 rooms, several college-themed suites and a chef named Tristan, who once worked with a man off the telly. Every morning commute I watch it sprawl, like the overflowing bins behind an antique shop, each piece of the hodgepodge an under-appreciated relic, still glittering proudly



in the fresh morning.

**"It was an overpriced modern block, and my gloomy room was lamentably at odds with its description in my guide book."**

**- Bill Bryson in 'Notes from a Small Island'**

## Wilko



greenhouse roof of the Grafton Centre, resting intently on a candy-coloured confection to his left. In the window, he surveys gaudy posters of families in the countryside, alongside enticing statements which he hasn't learnt to read yet. The model's goofy expression makes him giggle. Now his father pulls him away towards the warm, pungent smell of a large café chain across the street. The boy turns and follows.

His soft shoes make a squeaky crunch on the street caked in sandy snow. The quiet, stone cottages doze on either side; the colours are those seen through eyes half-closed against the wind. Sinuous shades of drab. Without commotion, the buildings draw themselves up to their full heights, reaching a pinnacle to his left in a dusty, but gaudy, brick front. Arranged proudly in the windows sit happy-coloured wooden toys, reflecting the promise of joy onto the snowbanks. The little boy trots over to press his greasy nose against the glass, while a soft, warm music wafts through the gloaming air from the bandstand, elegantly perched atop the buttery red bricks. The moment melts away like the snowflakes on his tongue, then moves on.

The firm of 'Laurie and McConnell, purveyors of general ironmongery, stationery and fancy goods' had taken over the site in 1891, gradually bringing neighbouring shops under their ownership over several decades, expanding to serve their happy customers as the market demanded. Unperturbed by the razing of the shop to the ground in 1903, R. Frank Atkinson was called on to produce today's burnished marvel, his credentials established with the thoroughly deluxe London department store 'Warling and Gillow'. 'Laurie's' was a staple of the Cambridge shopping scene until deep into the 20th century, finally crashing into an unexpected chunk of planning issues in 1977, before sinking unceremoniously.

Next to take up the baton was Habitat, who restored the building in 1982, followed by a parade of hopeful local businesses and national mega-conglomerations, none of which could establish themselves comfortably in this red castle. It even kept its head above water when the Grafton Centre washed away its neighbours, or absorbed them into its glassy flanks. Even the beloved HMV, purveyors of general CDs, DVDs and electronic goods were forced out in 2013, despite a wealth of local support. Today, Wilko is trying its luck, with luxuriously tall windows displaying kitchen accessories, bathroom towels and hiking equipment to the seasoned customers of Cambridge's second-favourite shopping district. Perhaps their 'family-run' offer of 14,000 homeware products will find favour.

A little boy wanders up the street tethered to his father's hand, comfy Converse grinding cigarette butts into the paving. His eye is drawn away from the alluring glowsticks, strung up from the

**“Even in the window you hear the plates; a hum of talk, too, from the diners; the Hall lit up, and the swing-doors opening and shutting with a soft thud.”**

**- Virginia Woolf in 'Jacob's Room'**



## Arbury Court

Hair blond as the corn fields whipping in the wind as you speed down the broad highway, knowing that you're barrelling towards a quiet, tree-studded street on the edge of the city, housing plots so generous as to make the neighbours barely visible on the horizon, across your manicured lawn; the suburban dream. Perhaps Arbury doesn't first spring to mind as having this same dream in mind, but just as in America, the area was built in a large pre-planned block to service the growing housing demands of post-war Cambridge - the quintessential suburb. The Arbury estate was built initially with little regard for the nascent community it would create, especially as the city's most notable academics and professionals weren't expected among the new residents, so they provided only rather un-American terraced housing and winding little streets. This was always to be for the University's unwanted neighbours, who they decided to keep at arm's length in truly suburban style.

However, this swelling community rolled up its sleeves and marched into the streets and newspapers to assert its right to exist with pride. An army of small community groups campaigned successfully for nurseries, trees, community centres and playgrounds, the local pub and library blossomed into community staples, and the originally planned hub for the area, Arbury Court, was lovingly curated and fleshed out with an independent grocer's, butcher's and a supermarket. To demonstrate the hard-won strength of their new home, the people paraded down the streets to celebrate the Queen's silver jubilee, alongside the community's rich diversity of cultures, without which the area would be just a shadow of its true glory. From that year onwards, the Arbury carnival has been organised by volunteers every year, and thousands attend each one to watch the masked, costumed, dancing, singing, eating, drinking, hula-hooping, speech-giving, dodgem-riding, charity-donating, stall-vending celebration.

The culmination of years of fundraising for the Sikh community was born here in 2013 with the establishment of the city's first permanent gurdwara, much in-demand as more and more Sikhs had been drawn to the city's tech sector, amongst other attractions. On the 6th of January, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the holy text) arrived in the expectant building, and days later the formal opening ceremony set today's fully-formed religious centre in motion, beloved for the Sikh's global tradition of handing out free, delicious food to those in need. Five years later, to celebrate the reopening of local gallery Kettle's Yard, the French artist El Seed decked out the Court with his spell-binding Arabic calligraphy, spelling out the words of Cambridge poet Veronica Forrest Thomson.



Arbury is routinely regarded across the city as some sort of gangland ghetto, with little to offer besides knife crime and teenage pregnancies. The city is still reluctant to accept the consequences of its own inequalities. But, living on the edge of Arbury where the vibrancy spills over into the sprawling fields, it seems a pretty good place for me to call home.

**"The place, as we approached, seemed more and more  
To have an eddy's force, and sucked us in"  
- William Wordsworth in 'Residence at Cambridge'**



## Chesterton Tower



get jurisdiction over the locals to some extent. As the house was built and rebuilt, becoming 'The Abbey', 'Stone House' and 'The Grange', times eventually changed, and another Henry, the sixth, finally gifted it to the University in the 1440s. Untroubled by the next few centuries, today's 14th century tower can be seen cloaked in 60s flats and hidden down a side street, the village of Chesterton long since absorbed into the Cambridge conglomeration. Still, it looks stubbornly unwilling to acknowledge any time having passed for the past 500 years, notwithstanding some rather severe restoration in the late 1940s. The council uses it for office space now, this gift from a king.

Henry's reddish face is rarely lit by such a toothy grin, and he has to catch himself quickly, carving the regal frown of state back onto his plump face. The barons had got him scared. They're perpetually wrangling and roistering, jostling for position just below him on the ladder. Sometimes he can feel their greedy talons clawing at his heels, and has to kick them down a rung or two. Surely they could've kept it together for the coronation? Of course everyone has their moments of disloyalty, but trying to install some *Frenchman* in Henry's divinely-gifted place was just downright insulting.

Another infernal Louis. Anyway, with a few minor scuffles behind them, the coronation had gone rather well he thought. He especially liked the crunchy leaves outside Gloucester Cathedral round October time. That funny Italian had been very kind really. He'd treated Henry almost like a son since his father, King John (unfortunately), died promptly after being forced to sign the Magna Carta. A favourite nephew at least. Definitely worth that classy modern tower up north near Cambridge. Henry had thought that some fluffy dogs or a note in good handwriting might have been a better thank-you gift, but his advisors thought differently. He supposes the money made from St Andrews church, part of the gift, was probably more attractive to a boring adult with boring important things to worry about.

I'm sure that was the right decision, mused Papal Legate Cardinal Guala Bicchieri, his thighs beginning to chafe as the land flattened out to reveal the spires of Cambridge on the horizon. Good thing too, because his horse was truly on its last legs. Perhaps 'King' was a bit much for a nine year-old, but he'd grow into it, he thought. Some very promising instincts in that boy. A promising future for this strange, damp land. In the here and now, night was galloping up to meet him, just as the dotted peasant cottages started to group together into what you might call a village. Must be Chesterton. Guala was certainly excited to see his brand new property, only built in the past few decades. The revenue from that church, St Andrew's, will certainly go along way to furthering the work of the lord, alongside the wishes of his grace Pope Honorius the third. Probably it would buy him a nice new robe too. The lights of his tower are visible now; some local must have lit the torches for his arrival. Looked cosy for sure. Shame he'd probably end up gifting it to the Abbey at Vercelli. He didn't really need it, he admitted to himself. Tonight, however, it would do nicely.

Guala was followed by a procession of proctors down the centuries, all sent over from balmy Vercelli in the alpine foothills to this fenland village, although they did in the 1440s. Untroubled by the next few centuries, today's 14th century tower can be seen cloaked in 60s flats and hidden down a side street, the village of Chesterton long since absorbed into the Cambridge conglomeration. Still, it looks stubbornly unwilling to acknowledge any time having passed for the past 500 years, notwithstanding some rather severe restoration in the late 1940s. The council uses it for office space now, this gift from a king.

## Golden Hind Pub

Twenty-Nine Architecture™ claims that the look of Lovell Lodge, a recent housing project in Chesterton, was “inspired by the history and complexity of the opulent Elizabethan Golden Hind Public House...”, referencing the innovative and unique ‘triangular rooves’ of the small new development, otherwise indistinct in a city sprouting four-cornered speckled-stone mini-developments like dust on an old grandfather clock. Planners weren’t particularly eager to pounce on this sub-prime real estate in suburban Chesterton, after the family-run hotel that previously occupied the site burnt down years previously, but the ugly carcass that remained finally embarrassed somebody into doing something about it. Quite understandably they turned to their lefts, and were confronted immediately by a confection of imitation-Tudor red stone, creaking wooden signs, jagged gables and ornate chimneys, held together loosely under the name of the ‘Golden Hind’. Even though it is just a pre-war roadside pub.

Pictures from the late 80s allow you to peer into a scene more akin to a Jazz-age speakeasy than anything in North Cambridge, with fitted Art-deco lights casting a boxy glow onto the swaying columns and curving chairs, enjoyed by a few select diners with fuzzy hair-dos. You could’ve seen MP Robert Rhodes James pulling the first pint in the newly reopened pub, sloshing his pint up towards the camera, alongside his political halo of minor politicians flashing East-Anglian smiles.

Today those grins live on, dotted amongst the regulars, the tourists and the only-if-the-footy’s-on drinkers who frequent the cosiest corner of the Milton Road / King’s Hedges Road Crossroads. Pete, a native of the area, helps run a team in the Chesterton Eagles youth football club, and regularly did the grocery run for a vulnerable family during the Pandemic. ‘Mole’ (not her real name) has been here for a drink once in a blue moon, but loves the energy of the Folk Club upstairs (although maybe not on her own...). My own dad, a lifelong introvert and Liverpool supporter, found a tribe of like-minded fans to watch the 2019 Champions League Final with, putting away San Miguel and Birra Moretti to put the Europeans to shame. The celebrations lasted all night, turning the pub into a boombox of unbridled joy. The staff were wiping lager off the walls, ceilings and floors for days.



**“The tightly clustered roof-panes and chimneys of the town huddled far below”**

**- Nora Kelly in ‘In the Shadow of King’s’**



# Histon Road Cemetery



I was scuffing my feet on the gravel, never one too eager for a stranger to wave scissors around my head in aid of 'hairdressing'. Maybe it was me. Maybe it was my mum. Someone suggested a shortcut through the cemetery, a place I always liked because of how soulfully my mum could speak about the dark yew trees and the little wildflowers lining the path amongst the slabs. Rounding the corner through the gates, our joint pace quickened as my time slot was already beginning, they were nice in our hairdresser's, didn't deserve any inconvenience from latecomers. Maybe I gasped. We certainly stopped. He was stretched out on a crumbling grave in the shadow of the yews, face impassive, topless enough to show the congealing blood dripping down his limp arm.

1840s Cambridge was in crisis. The pressure of twin revolutions - industrial and agricultural - forcing torrents of people to flood into towns and cities was causing the bodies to pile high. Or to be shoved in shallow graves, or the same graves, or no graves. They were starting to smell. The Cambridge General Cemetery Company Ltd saw its opening, and pounced to sell of shares for £10 each, eventually financing the purchase of land in fields outside the town for a new cemetery, to service the large non-conformist population who wouldn't be seen dead with the Anglicans in *Mill Road* cemetery. Two men brought the plan to fruition, with creative John Claudius Loudon on the design and the logical Edward Buckton Lamb bringing architecture to the party with a lodge and a chapel (now demolished). This dream team set to work, keeping in mind both the emerging idea of parks (and by extension cemeteries) as recreational and educational spaces, as well as entrenched social class divisions that left small graves languishing in the weeds far from the ostentatious sculptures lining the path. By 1843 all was complete, and the cemetery was set to welcome its 8200 new residents over the next decades and centuries.

Among their number was Sergeant Arthur Henry Aylett, 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment, one of countless victims of the Great War. Born in 1884 to John and Lydia, he married his wife Maud in 1909 and went on to earn The British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the 1914 Star (for those under fire in France and Flanders between 5th August and 22nd November 1914). His high-flying life only came crashing down in 1916, when he was shot by a German sniper whilst heroically looking for a lost member of his patrol; he was rushed home to the 1<sup>st</sup> Eastern General Hospital (the field on which today's University Library was built) but died of septicaemia on the 10th of June. His proud headstone sits in the tranquil shade of the yews, carefully maintained and embossed with his army glory for posterity.

Edmund John Dorban was less lucky. One of 5 children born to John and Alice, he was a grocer's apprentice before carrying stretchers to and from the front line in the French mud, where he was unceremoniously killed in action on the 9th of September 1917. His name lives on in the recesses of his family grave, a stone rectangle left away among the grasses, free from prying, crying, mourning eyes. His body was never found.

Today the cemetery is under the council's care, with the Friends of the Cemetery doing much of the vital upkeep work. Their Chairman, Michael French, loves wading deep into the history and grave-spotting in the undergrowth. He remembers Mrs Wisbey and Mrs Martin, who shared childhood tales of lodge life in the 30s,40s and 50s, and he loved reading about the crowd of 1000 who attended the funeral of local baptist benefactor William Adams in 1849 - "this might have been the biggest crowd the Cemetery has ever seen". Sue, a volunteer, also finds it an enchanting haven of calm - the story of the lady who taught children in Himalayan India, buried here, especially caught her interest.

There was a man muttering urgently down the phone to an ambulance. A different woman was loitering helplessly, looking concerned. Mum judged that our presence would be more hindrance than help; we trudged off to the hairdresser's where I cried (I always cried at the hairdresser's). Scouring the local papers for days brought up no results though. We hope he lived. We think he did.



## Kingsway Flats

Fields oozing into fens heaving into rivers stretch away to the horizon, flat as an anvil, sprinkled with dots hauling ploughs and wielding hoes, going home to their tiny round homes after a day of toil. Threading through the heaving landscape, like threads or chains, are paths and tracks connecting farmsteads with villas with farmsteads with small towns like Cambridge (*Duroliponte*), which the invaders left to hold down the land after they swept through, like the boulders left dumped in fields after the glaciers retreat. The greatest gash of all is Akeman Street, shot through the soft soil from the fortress at Cambridge to the fens, barrelling on north to the fortress at Brancaster (*Branodunum*). Just off to the east from this gash, we zoom in on one of the larger villas watching warily over the surrounding farms. Tiled bath houses emerge tucked into the larger complex, light glinting off the mosaics on every wall, suggestions of heat radiating off every rust-red roof tile. We race down towards the town, passing down Akeman Street with its halo of gravel side-streets in the newly reorganised and romanised town, each one accompanied by small house plots. At the edge of town we find the *mansion*, a staging post for travellers on imperial business, replete with stables and more heated baths. Outside, the cold fen waters swirl menacingly around the gates.

Just off the gently curved surface of Roman Akeman Street, the invaders having fled or melted into the population centuries back, the town long since swelling out of its walled confines to reach even the villas outside the gates, the council built some blocks of flats to house residents crowded out by the already-soaring house prices of the city. Horse-drawn carts and soldiers armoured in metal are rarely seen passing by the flats anymore, but the road still seems unnaturally straight, even through the leaning tree branches and neon traffic-calming measures.

My friend lives the other side of the flats from me. Cycling to his house usually takes me weaving through them, bending round low bushes and behind the green and black bins. The sheer wall of rust-red brick is usually broken up by pops of colour on floral-print blouses, monochrome school jumpers and tasteful IKEA bedsheets, strung up on the balconies above assortments of friendly pot plants and garden furniture. The soundscape is usually punctuated by booming laughter or murmurings in Polish, quiet ABBA hits or video game pops and zooms. Later into the night even smells waft across the space from the kebab van, competing against Bangla curries and browning chicken thighs wafting down from the windows. My senses refreshed, I carry on to his house to watch a film or cook some pasta. He usually has some windows open, allowing the rich, unchanging fenland air to wash in.



**“The Roman settlement at Cambridge (*Duroliponte*) was never a place of grandeur, but a workaday place”**

**- Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner in ‘The Buildings of England – Cambridgeshire’**



## Barnwell Priory



The cellarer goes about his business, striding through fossilised arches with well-earned self-satisfaction. As an accountant, ration-dictator and trade-liaison operative of sorts for this wealthy monastic community, his mental clarity is his proudest asset, justifying a generous programme of instructions and orders. This single-vaulted chamber, his 'Chequer', serves as his seat of governance, close to the kitchen and the parlour so they can continually receive his wisdom, and roomy enough to thrash out trade deals with wily suppliers.

It is said that the name of this place came from the tradition of children coming to play by the clear springs on St John the Baptist's Eve. As time runs by, the buyers and sellers looking to swindle each other move in, but pesky little brats still scamper in amongst their towering legs. It is said that the community was founded a few centuries prior, by Picot of Cambridge in 1092, the sheriff of the town, who promised God that he would build a priory if his wife, the fair Hugoline, recovered from the threshold of death's door. Within days she was radiant like never before, and within years six fresh faced monks had moved in to their newly-built home.

This little civilisation has hosted three kings across centuries of thriving trade, charity, education and landowning. And prayer, which hasn't always worked. In February of 1287 it was razed to the ground by a lightning bolt, burning down their neighbours and leaving the priory destroyed for over two years. The sparks were like 'apples of gold'. During the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, a mob broke down the gates and raided their stores, after the decision to enclose communal land had led to some unfortunately disgruntled and destitute neighbours. Even Mayor Edmund Redmeadowe couldn't resist grabbing a pitchfork. Centuries later the priory was sacked again, this time under the direction of Henry VIII, whose men were less than shy about grabbing anything within reach. Nor were the neighbours (after they king's men had made off with most of the loot). Ungrateful bunch.

Centuries ahead, these pious men will graciously lend their names to winding streets of grey housing, for those scraping by in the city of learning: Thorley Road, Stanesfield Road, Peverel Road.

Such thoughts do not strike the cellarer. Except for the raiding of the priory stores. He should make someone repay the lost capital on that. But not now. He has deals to make.

**"...generations of illustrious men / Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass / Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept, / Wake where they waked, range that enclosure old, / That garden of great intellects, undisturbed."**

**- William Wordsworth in 'Residence at Cambridge'**

## Bharat Bhavan

The face of a kindly older gentleman appears on my laptop screen. Rasik Kotecha, one of the leaders of the city's five-thousand strong Hindu community and former trustee of the Bharat Bhavan cultural centre and temple is apparently inaudible at first, but with the volume cranked up we are soon chatting smoothly, and he tells me the sordid tale of the building formerly under his care. Following the closure of the beloved Mill Road branch library in 1998 after decades of decline, which Rasik's own daughter had loved to frequent, the Grade II listed building seemed to be teetering on the verge of bureaucratic oblivion. On the hunt for some much-needed square footage, the Indian Community and Cultural Association enthusiastically put themselves forward for the too-good-to-be-true leasing deal, promptly won it and set about whipping up a little slice of India in this corner of Cambridge. £1 a year, plus maintenance, was where the problems began. False ceiling need removing? Disabled ramp need fitting? Kitchen need installing? £180,000. A freak storm - 'a hurricane' recalled Rasik - smashed windows in the roof cupola? £25,000. Heating the cavernous space, with its looming windows and doors? You must be joking. Shackled to preserving the building's unique history, capping their use of the space at 60 people (when Indian weddings can draw crowds of hundreds) and hiking up every possible cost, the community's golden ticket to security had rotted into more of a poisoned apple. With a big bite taken out of it.

"We were not very accommodating as a community" admits Rasik sadly, recalling the days the centre was left empty instead of pulling in rents from other groups. However, even bridge-building worthy of Martin Luther King couldn't have saved the centre, which the council repossessed in 2019.

The Mill Road Branch Library was built to mark Victoria's diamond jubilee, servicing Cambridge's booming Barnwell district, physically and socially far removed from the lush college libraries of the city interior. The Mill Road site was sold to the town council for 10 shillings by the 'Guardians of the Poor', when the former Barnwell Reading room (a low, tiled shed) simply wouldn't do any more. All decked out in coloured lamps, fairy lights and 270 ornamental local dignitaries, the library was opened with much pomp by Mayor Horace Darwin in 1897. Over 19,000 books were borrowed in the first year, with attractions like the evening reading room for 'clean and well-behaved children' proving a massive success.

I met Piero D'Angelico, ambassador of the Mill Road Traders' Association, in his swish da Vinci-themed barber shop on Mill Road to discuss his latest project: the preservation of Bharat Bhavan's crown jewel, the half-tonne, half a million pound, intricate, embellished stone altarpiece, still lustrous in the delicate pink of the Rajasthan stone from which it was made, before being shipped to England. Much like the community itself, this fabulous behemoth is looking for a new home, and Piero is confident he can make that happen (in Dichburn Place garden, a choice spot nearby), he explains while handing me his lovingly curated collection of memorabilia from the altarpiece (pictures and paperwork, even one of the stone ornaments). The building itself has had many inhabitants, and new ones will soon take up the task of protecting it.

The Indian community is nothing if not ambitious, and it is certain to find a new home soon, or to make one. The altarpiece, with its new guardian, seems similarly destined for a bright tomorrow. "I always like to take on these mission-impossible projects" says Piero through a wry smile, as I head out onto bustling Mill Road.





## Central Mosque



We stand up from the benches and began to stroll around the side of the 'Cambridge yellow-brick' walls, the ninety-nine names of God spiralling elegantly up towards the roof on our right, with various smiling faces, amongst them giggling children and the off-duty Imam, calling a friendly 'Salaam' at us as we passed. The building was designed by the same minds as those who brought us the London Eye, advocated for by Doctor Timothy Winter, an enthusiastic convert and University lecturer. Shahida recounts the bittersweet story of Baraka Khan as we continue on, a student whose cancer diagnosis drove her to raise well over half a million pounds through sponsored walks, alongside her faithful walking stick Gerald, but who tragically never saw the Mosque in its finished glory.

Honoured to have been given a personal tour, I make my way out towards the greyscale traffic through the open gates, thinking about the truth of what Aminah told me several weeks before: 'I think being part of the Muslim community is very special because it almost feels like a family - the sense of unity and knowing that we're all here together. It's just a really nice feeling.'

Having rained that morning, my thick raincoat felt slightly ridiculous in the scalding (yet uncertain) afternoon sunshine of a Friday in June. Waiting to meet me were my school friend Aminah, a published poet heading straight for international success, and her mother Shahida, already a well-respected writer and historian. The Rahmans greeted me warmly in the quiet buzz of the Mosque garden, traffic noise melting into roses, lavender and contented bees within only a few meters. As our conversation hit its stride, Shahida began to point out features of the incredible building we were sheltering under, bringing in all the various facets of this modern wonder that make this one of the city's most recent gems.

Casting lengthening shadows on our faces, the thirty-two intertwining, writhing, radiant beams holding up the roof commanded our attention, looking like if King's Chapel's famous vaulted roof had shed its mummifying rock and sprouted branches. Already a few birds have been fooled, ignoring the swift boxes on the roof to set up shop in the knots of these would-be trees. Carved from sustainably-sourced Swiss timber, they transform the inside into an outside, the spacious main hall becoming a forest glade so tranquil it can be hard to know where the cottage garden ends and the garden-mosque begins. As Europe's first eco-mosque, it utilises rainwater collection, solar panels, passive ventilation, sedum rooves and a biodiverse garden to bring this collage of traditional gothic, Islamic and modernist architectures firmly into the 21st century. Then again, the sunlight filtering through the decadently turquoise, octagonal windows is as timeless as any in Mecca, the glittering gold dome just as fitting in Jerusalem as on Mill Road.

Our conversation turned towards the community this is all here for, the city's estimated eight thousand Muslims (one thousand of whom can fit in here at a time), who'd previously had no purpose-built mosques; devotees had been left praying in the street in front of the last one. Representing over 60 countries and 8000 worldviews, the city's Muslim community is as diverse as it is inclusive. The Mosque is non-denominational and even serves visitors coffees and cakes in its café, where they can enjoy the garden, the gallery and the guided-tours; even the traditional call to prayer was dropped in favour of happier new neighbours. The neighbours themselves can be just as varied as those within the Mosque, as the Romsey area has become renowned as the city's most up-and-coming district, knee-deep in pop-up coffee shops inhabiting former railway industrial sites.



# Cherry Hinton Hall

Songsmiths as diverse as Paul Simon, Sinéad O'Connor and Ladysmith Black Mambazo have all trodden this sodden soil, on the outskirts of both Cambridge and the proud village of Cherry Hinton, whipping up crowds of revellers from New York, New Delhi and New Town (just off Hills Road) into screams and whoops. Founded in the 60s (of course) by countercultural folk musicians and socialists, the festival has ballooned to one of Europe's most prominent, putting Cherry Hinton Hall squarely on the proverbial map (stained charmingly by soy-milk coffee rings and smelling faintly of weed).

Before even the hall was here this area was part of the ancient system of open fenland fields, grazed freely by cattle belonging to the villagers, and resided on by the village's common herdsman, in amongst farm huts and watermills from the thirteenth century. In the early nineteenth century that was a man called Robert, who farmed here quite happily by the marshy reeds and waterways until he was forced out in the face of ongoing Acts of Enclosure in 1814, allowing a large chunk of land to be parcelled off and sold. A decade or two later, the surgeon John Okes swept in to construct his house here, large enough to accommodate all of his children, himself and his wife Mary, having recently returned home from medical work in India under the aegis of the Empire. To properly serve his grand home, replete with stable, lodge, two orchards and a coach house, he transformed the environment itself, building four weirs to manage his artificial lake, into which he placed some trout and pike, adorning his strolls with glimpses of writhing, monstrous silver fish. Luckily, this was all agreed with the Cambridge University and Town Waterworks Company (of which his brother was the director), so it was all perfectly above-board.

After Okes' death in 1870, an odd selection of local businessmen and minor gentry called this their home, including the wonderfully eccentric Sir William Phene Neal and his wife Lady Eleanor Vise, the former of which became the Lord Mayor of London in 1930, a commute he managed almost exclusively by large horse-drawn carriage trips to and from the station. A few years later control passed to the council, who were initially perplexed as to how they should use a neo-gothic mansion on the edge of town; starting with a youth hostel, they moved quickly on to a WWII fire depot and then a stretch of orphanage and nursery school, before finally being opened to the public as a park.

Michelle Bullivant, local historian, author and community champion is very familiar with the greenery surrounding the hall today: bounding from one project to the next, she has organised history fairs, community archaeology digs, display boards and her ever-upbeat local history blog. Such buzzing get-up-and-go seems fitting in this zesty community, far removed from the prying eyes of most tourists, a place rooted deeply in the traditions (and music) of the folk.



**“The factory chimneys give place to orchards and elms as we draw near this cherry village with a church of chalk”**

**- Arthur Mee in ‘King’s England – Cambridgeshire’**



## Leper Chapel



control over organisation. The chapel was used as a pub and then a storeroom for the fair (advertised as a lowly 'shed' in 1783), a garrison church during WWI and a community facility today, hosting re-enactments, exhibitions and fairs. Nearby street names like 'Garlic Row' and 'Oyster Row' recall the pungent and sprawling Stourbridge fair. The squat, humble chapel recalls it all.

In the rolling shade of the bowing trees walk the sick and dying. Shunned from town society (as in towns across the island), those touched by the plagues of syphilis or leprosy were dumped out here to die as quickly as possible, or at least to live out their days scared and ostracised from everyone they've ever known. In the face of such abandonment, these 'sinners' band together to work the land and eke out livings here on this distant scrubland, the glittering stone walls of the University barely visible in the distance. Just as lepers of Judea attracted charity from Jesus, so too does this straggly band of outcasts draw in do-gooders from across the area (blighted with some of the highest numbers of leprosy cases in the land). Monks and nuns are the prime example, many of whom tend to the ill in this chapel (attached to a leper hospital) at great personal risk. The mangled faces, their disabilities purportedly representing deep internal evil, are free to eat, pray and work within the church community; the chapel was built visible from the road so that passers-by might too be tempted to show some charity towards the leper beggars, trying to supplement the income from their 50 acres of community farmland. Any who dare leave the grounds are required by law to wear distinctive clothing, face away from the uninfected and stand downwind of anyone they speak to. They must also either ring a bell to signal their approach, or shout

"Unclean!"

Outside the crumbling pebble-dash walls, jammed in anywhere large enough to support a box or two, are stalls. This many-coloured chaos descends onto the chapel grounds every year for a month of summer trade and celebrations, and has been doing so since at least the 13th century, when King John himself bestowed charity on the lepers here with permission to hold a fair and keep the profits. Relegated to the side-lines, the diseased skulk in the shadows of medieval Europe's largest fair, as silk, oxen and spices are passed between grubby hands, clean carts pull up in their hundreds with visitors from the capital and the continent, unwashed mouths feast on mead, oysters and horse hooves, and dancers and jesters wend their merry way through it all.

Through the darkened door, many people of all different guises and purposes still pass today. Even after the leper colony was dissolved in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century as cases declined, the University and town fought over the profits from the Stourbridge fair, with the 1381 Peasants' revolt (and later royal interventions from Elizabeth I) finally ceding them to the town, but with the University gaining some

**"goldsmiths, toyshops, braziers, turners, milliners, haberdashers, hatters, mercers, drapers, pewterers, a china warehouse, ... coffee-houses, taverns, brandy-shops and eating houses innumerable"**

**- Daniel Defoe upon visiting the fair**



## Perne Road Co-op

Corporate Cambridge: surfaces which reflect, investments which mature, properties which become realised. Often degraded as the country's worst 'clone town', the city has been quietly crystallising into a glittering glass shell for decades, much like the gorgeously fossilised corpse of some ancient sea-creature. The co-operative movement was supposed to shatter that glass ceiling for the workers, their 5 million members banding together to avoid being crushed under the corporate machine, the monster food-retailers, the insurance-providers and the body-buriers. Rooted in an industrial northern soul, the movement intertwined itself with the adolescent labour party, and profited from female strength long before it was trending; the city's own Cllr Clara Rackham founded the Cambridge Co-operative Women's Guild in May 1902, and the city's co-operative society poured £16,000 into housing for the numerous slum-dwellers of the University town up until 1938. These days the co-op looks suspiciously large. And covered in glass.

Likewise, this building was kindly given its name by Andrew Perne, mid-16th century Cambridge's one-stop shop for university matters, as a former St John's student, repeated master of Peterhouse and one-time Vice-Chancellor of the University, showering the city with his money and wisdom as he went. It was his brainwave to transport the waters of Sheldford into the city, to provide drinking water and to clean out the rancid depths of the King's Ditch, a medieval fortification built to keep troublesome barons at bay. After the go-ahead from the Lord of Trumpington Manor to divert the spring water across the common fields in 1610, water was able to flow all the way from rural south Cambridgeshire, bubbling past the Botanical gardens and the future Fitzwilliam Museum to gush out of the grandiose fountain in the middle of the market square. The stout octagonal column was moved away from the market's hubbub after a fire in 1856, and now stands forlornly by a roundabout off the Fen Causeway. The market fountain sits respectfully quiet, growing arid and cracked at the loss of its prize attraction.

Streets away, the new shop sharing in Perne's patronage is a fountain in its way, providing an outlet for grateful 21st century shoppers to quench their thirst for slices of ham, sharing packs of Maltesers and 2 litre cartons of Innocent orange juice. Outside, the good fight is being fought in its own way too - a minor dispute over parking provisions, with both sides becoming increasingly entrenched. The co-operative still bringing together politicians and the people, over a hundred years on.



**"I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed / Delighted through the motley spectacle; / Gowns grave, or gaudy, doctors, students, streets, / Lamps, gateways, flocks of churches, courts and towers"**

**- William Wordsworth in 'Residence at Cambridge'**



## Addenbrooke's Hospital



For 2020 and for always we owe the people here an unending gratitude. For Joyce and for John, for the thousands of lives saved, and for every new life begun, including mine. Thank you.

Joyce Brown stepped off the boat from Trinidad in 1960, filled with hope for a new life in the 'motherland'. Filled certainly with the hope of not being so seasick, now she was off that horrible rocking thing. Throwing herself straight into her life's vocation, she would come to give decades of her life to her new community, first in London then in hospitals around Cambridge, a city full of friendly (but uncertain) smiles. The houses were far more drab than she'd expected of the capital.

Fog was new too, and frightening at first. For years it was hopeless searching for yams or sweet potato in the University city's small greengrocers, and she couldn't begin to see how you were supposed to put together a good pea pelau with only rice-pudding rice. When she was trained at Addenbrooke's there were only two black nurses, and the children meant she couldn't really go out to any of the local black community's parties. Her colleagues were always nice though, she thought. Some true friends. Plenty of good coffee meet-ups too, over a lifetime of supporting the sick and elderly.

John Addenbrooke was the original generous spirit behind this bustling city-within-a-city, giving a small fortune for the founding of a voluntary hospital in the city in 1719. It treated eleven patients just in its first week in 1766, tucked away in a grand building down Trumpington street. Over decades and centuries, the institution grew to be worthy of its growing, haughty façade, striding from early adoptions of general anaesthetics and radiotherapy to organ transplants and cancer research, migrating to today's Hills Road site when the grand colonnades became a spatial straitjacket.

Today you can visit this world-renowned centre for healing and education (and the city's largest employer with over 17,000 medical staff), take a browse through the shops and cafes, crane your neck up at the jumbled giants hulking on the edge of the city: the Royal Papworth Hospital, the Cambridge Academy for Science and Technology, AstraZeneca and a plethora of buzzing University research facilities. You can cycle over the broad railway bridge, falling down and down through the glass jungle to the brilliant biodiversity on the leaf-strewn floor: nurses, scientists, doctors, builders, tourists, receptionists, therapists, chefs. You could pass just about anyone in the entire city; everyone's been here, and many of us work here too. You could pass just about anyone living within a hundred miles around. Patients and visitors from across the world blend right in.

**"Quietly I am leaving, / Just as quietly as I came; / Gently waving my sleeve, / I am not taking away a single cloud."**

**- Xu Zhimo in 'On Leaving Cambridge'**



## Anstey Hall

John de Bruyne is a well-known name in these parts. This wedding venue/B+B is his terrain, having purchased the resplendent Stuart mansion at a highly-strung auction in the 90s. He is reportedly still an avid tour-guide of his prize, becoming a beloved host to a rotating carousel of overnight guests and loved-up newly-weds, recounting tales of assorted family exploits. His father invented Araldite adhesive - eventually to be used on the Sidney Opera House amongst other highpoints - after research at the renowned Cavendish Laboratory, where DNA's spiral was first pieced together. Before this fresh-faced dynasty came the Foster family, after the Anstey family and the Thompson family, right back to Antony Thompson who envisioned Anstey Hall around 1670, and even his great work perched on the shoulders of medieval manors and dwellings stretching back into misty pre-history.

Under John's proud care is a decadent ballroom with Murano glass chandeliers, a cosy wooded library with its intricately-worked ceiling and garden view, a pine-panelled reception area and a walnut-panelled saloon bar (panels installed by Rattee and Kett around 1910, a local twosome who also adorned the Palace of Westminster with wooden walls). During the Second World War the government had taken on this mantel, requisitioning and purchasing the Hall from the Foster family to be used as official offices, employing a plethora of locals, who surely wondered at the grandeur lurking behind a hedge in their own humble village. The library is still laid out like a lecture room. The pine panelling in the reception still covers ministry-regulation green paint. Splodges of important ink still spot the desks.

In 2015 the Hall reached new levels of stardom with the Channel 4 show 'Four in a Bed', for which father-son team John and Johnny de Bruyne fought pairs from Birmingham, South Devon and Wye Valley to be crowned Britain's best-value B+B. The conflict was waged as a series of proxy-wars: an afternoon of goose-herding in the Hall's grounds, a dolled-up formal dinner and stories of royal connections left the other teams scrabbling to make a comeback. Unfortunately they did. While South Devon won that day, Anstey Hall reigns supreme over this quiet corner of the city, often glowing with party lights and reflected champagne deep into the wee-small-hours. John de Bruyne's kingdom is happy, and he relishes his role as king.



**"Beside the pleasant Mills of Trompington / I laughed with Chaucer; in the hawthorn shade /  
Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales / Of amorous passion"**

**- William Wordsworth in 'Residence at Cambridge'**



## CB1 Development



'One Station Square', or 'the taxi rank' to most people). The railway's much-anticipated arrival in the city in 1845 was contentious to say the least: the University's Vice Chancellor was concerned that it would threaten the purity of his noble city, bringing in unwanted even on the Sabbath. The station was pushed far out of the pristine city centre, threatened initially with fines if it dared to carry the University's students within its plebeian carriages. Doing its best to remain dignified, the station building adorned itself with fifteen Italian-style arches and roundels with the town arms and those of various dignitaries - even some college crests. As if mellowed by this olive branch, the University has come to accept the station as the keystone of the city's transport infrastructure, welcoming most of the twenty thousand students who arrive each year through its curving façade.

Wending our way back towards college, we passed several fruits of the £1.5 million public art budget: a statue of the Roman corn-goddess Ceres in front of the refurbished Spiller's Mill, a huge iron turntable pivot needed to turn round steam engines of the past. They form oddly Soviet-style adornments to this otherwise paragon of capitalism (Amazon, Microsoft and Deloitte have all set up shop, high in these clean, glass towers). Called a 'future slum' by one newspaper, the gentle grass spaces and grateful students (with shiny new flats to live in) perhaps suggest a more nuanced view of this 'embarrassment to the city'. Gulping hot chocolate back at college, those issues seemed far off and of little consequence.

We traipsed our way out of our 6th-form college at about twenty past nine, with the stale certainty that we'd be squelching back through the gates well over an hour later. My sodden socks had already fused with my skin. Talking chirpily to ward off the weather, we summited the bridge and caught our first view of the goal of our mission: the regeneration scheme that Geography teachers across the city have been dining out on for several years already, firing off hoards of unenthused teens to find meaning in the well-kept side streets and ostentatious office blocks.

Before beginning our itinerary, we reached the Earl of Derby pub with its ye-olde design and cheery window boxes, seeming to resolutely ignore the hectic asphalt crossroads and £725 million pound megaproject boxing it in on all sides. Across its 150 year history, it was used as a loft for pigeon racers, who would spin a bottle every Sunday to decide the direction of that week's race: the pigeons would dutifully flap off to return sometime later to the pub garden, their owners several beers in and considerably worse for wear.

Passing by, we had already reached our destination, setting up camp under some straggly new trees (no help against the downpour) to assess the environmental quality of the area (quite good, plenty of green space, residential buildings still well-maintained). The masterplan for the development, childishly bright and playful, sketches out plenty of fluffy, lime-coloured trees to fill in the gaps between the off-maroon housing blocks and clinically squared-off office blocks. The promised pedestrian plaza (now a taxi rank) and vital bus stops (now an overly-wide, eerily empty concrete gorge) are strategically placed at the back of this corporate collage. The 'artists', a development company called Brookgate (modestly calling only one of the new streets after themselves), published their plans in 2013 (after the original choice went bust four years previously), having been twice refused by the city council. Their revenge came later, when the Victorian street of Wilton Terrace, well-loved locally, was pulled down to make way for the development, despite the council's protests, and the promised health and visitor centres are still nowhere to be seen. Good lawyers are a must-have for any forward-looking development company.

Our observations recorded, we wandered round a bit more, ending up huddled under the overhang in front of the Sainsbury's, facing the original station building (in the award-winning



## Great Kneighton

The hunter-gatherers might have called 'here' one thing. The Romans another. The Vikings, Middle Ages peasants and 18th century tenant farmers still more names. Today, the futuristic yet meaningless 'Aura', 'Halo' and 'Virido' vie for supremacy within the larger 'Great Kneighton' 'family'. 'Clay Farm' to its friends. 20 years ago this area was green belt, but this has since been roundly spliced through, allowing the bloated city to flop out into the fields. The several thousand residents of this new community don't see themselves as agents of urban ooze, however; they are young families and career hopefuls, residential pioneers striding boldly where no other twentysomethings have been before. Many toil away absurd hours in Addenbrooke's, which squats majestically just across the fields, coming home for some well-earned quiet amongst the empty, squarish streets and exuberant green spaces.

Trampled gently by these over-worked feet lie millennia of humanity: a small Early Neolithic pit (at least 6000 years old) supports Middle Bronze Age field systems, enclosures and settlements that point to a thriving agrarian culture. In the layer above them, archaeologists dug out whole Iron Age villages lousy with pottery, animal bones, tools, flint, granaries, ovens, roundhouses, enclosures, cremation pits and cemetery gardens. Deposited precariously on top of these are Roman remains, evidence of quarrying in the Middle Ages and even suggestions of the site's use as the county agricultural showground in the 50's and 60's. All shoved down deep into the muck, leaving only imprints, forms, indications. Their fears can even be seen swirling in the mud: huge ditches dug in the Bronze Age, likely to protect valuable cattle from Cambridgeshire's ancient selection of vicious wild animals, always prowling, always just out of sight, always ready to rip the throat out of your livelihood, or even your child.

Looking up from the dust to cast a glance over the records, we can learn yet more; they hold the fortunes of the farmer Lilley Edleston and the bailiff/steward William Winnel, 19th century residents of these former-fields. Mr Edleston was farming 171 acres in 1851 with the help of 7 employees; by 1871 his farm is 40 acres and his employees number only 3. Perhaps he aged out of the lifestyle, gambled away his fields and fortunes, or a pragmatic son pressured him to downsize. Such wisps of serendipity waft through the pages, but can never quite be nailed down with government pen or ink.

Neither can they be tied to screens or spreadsheets: 104 affordable homes, 89 privately rented homes, 100% reduction in carbon emissions, 2300 homes total. None quiet encapsulate the joy of a child's first day at Trumpington Community College, the epiphany of a new bird spotted in the wood, the regained mobility after a few hours on the allotment, the long-awaited victory over the opposing hockey team on the sports field, the way the light plays through the feathery birch leaves onto the fresh-faced stone. For it is they who will carry Clay Farm/Great Kneighton/Virido/Halo/Aura into tomorrow's reality.





## Rock Road Library



Councillor Clara Dorothea Rackham, representative for Romsey ward, notable academic and widely regarded as some of the foremost brains behind the national movement for women's suffrage, is cramped rather uncomfortably into a wooden dining chair. It is upholstered with strident green tartan, and not built for any remotely serious use by a lady who is getting on in the world (her sixtieth birthday is already receding like the hair of the distinguished gentlemen she is seated among). On one side is the City Librarian William Arthur Fenton, long chipping away at the coal-face of dismantling town/gown divisions by promoting adult education, films, theatres, slide-shows, exhibitions and lectures, especially among those less fortunate than himself. Mrs Rackham has been smiling briskly for almost twenty minutes now, making a brave effort to reflect her colleague Councillor Swift's joviality as he expressed his belief that it is "important that there should be in every district a building which would help to circulate among the surrounding people, the best ideas and information for their guidance and thought".

Opened by that inauguration on the 20th of May 1936, the new branch library at Rock Road was meant to echo the riotous success of the original at Mill Road, associating itself with a school to support child literacy in this Victorian housing development swarming with unwashed, uneducated urchins (apparently). In the year after opening, over 100,000 books made their way into local households, and despite the financially rocky road leading up to today, 90,000 books from the likes of David Walliams, Emily Brontë and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are still issued by the library each year.

The library has made cautious strides into the twenty-first century, hosting groups which play with Lego, watch Polish films (like the award-winning *Zimna wojna*) and get woke after talks on social justice, as well as more traditional crowd-pleasers like sewing, bird watching and the annual Christmas social. The library's official Friends run many of these events, channelling huge wells of community-spirit into one petite, red-brick block with plastic roofing and delicate, lace-like ramparts.

Having donated a large collection of children's books (illustrated by her brother) to the library in 1944, Clara was a similarly nurturing force to the then-nascent library. Shortly before her death in 1964, she remarked: "I should not like to see the skyscrapers projecting over Cambridge skyline and I should really like to see the centre of Cambridge left as far as possible as it is at present". While a MacDonald's within a minute's walk of King's is unlikely to fit into her vision, this staunchly pre-war relic seems determined to carry her generous light far into the foreseeable future.

**"The library was tall and cool, lapped in shadow, its faded, ice-blue silk curtains half drawn across the windows. It contained a large writing-table, several deep armchairs, a fireplace over which hung a portrait of a Victorian gentleman"**

**- Nora Kelly in 'In the Shadow of King's' describing the library of a Cambridge academic**

## Royal Albert Homes

Mayor Charles Balls is late. The 'Hallelujah Chorus', enthusiastically out of tune, is already faintly audible at the cusp of his hearing. The service at St Mary's had been fine, but a procession all the way through town, almost to the newly built train-line had seemed such a trek, so he had excused himself for an hour or so to find a toilet and some tea. Being a gala day in honour of Her Majesty's coronation (two decades prior), all the shops were closed, and jaunty Union jacks hung out of windows seemed to mock his brisk almost-running down the street. He was beginning to feel it had been a distinct waste of his time. And now he is late. The most distinguished 'Royal Albert Benevolent Society of Decayed Tradesmen and Others' had spent in excess of a decade fundraising for this day, unshakable in their quest to provide homes for the old or infirm, all for the bargain price of 5 shillings per subscription. And now he is late for the big day. For he, Mayor of Cambridge (that still sounded good), on this day, the 28th of June in the year of our lord 1859, was to lay the foundation stone for a new set of almshouses, out in the newly growing southern suburbs. What a turn up for the books. His upbringing as a poor cobbler's son had instilled in him punctuality and a solid work ethic, giving him the ground from which to haul himself up into the upper echelons of Cambridge business and politics. No sooner had he got here, than he seems to have left all his old values in the dust. But here he is! The sorry-looking building site was packed with upturned, expectant faces; he wiped the sweat of his own face, stepped forward, thanked the Cambridge Amateur Music Society for their delightful singing, gave a short speech on the importance of the elderly as teachers to the young, received polite applause, laid the stone, and went off somewhere to have a well-earned sit down.

Three years later, the first residents began to trickle in, under the watchful eye of austere Victorian gentlemen, squinting through their wiry eyebrows and from between their generous sideburns. Eliza, 61, from Cambridge. Charles Coleman, 62, retired whitesmith from Norfolk. Mary Kemp, widow, retired, from Ickleton. Harriet Pilgrim, granddaughter, 15, companion, born in Great Chesterford. From as far afield as the next county over, these new faces would be the first in a long line of people for whom these red and yellow gables would, for the rest of their lives, mean home.

Still providing 'subsidised homes for independent persons, normally of retirement age, with modest income who have connections in Cambridge', many find this arrangement cheaper, friendlier and more dignified than other options. They can spend the 'winter' of their lives toasting their feet in front of the Victorian fireplaces, the scent of roses pervading the air, taking gentle walks in the botanical gardens next door, peering at the Latin names and feeling the brush of soft leaves against their faces.



**“...this Fen country, is now a land teeming with untold histories, untold mysteries, a land full of people with songs to tell of who and how they were, their hymns ancient and modern.”**

**- Tim Binding in 'Waterland' by Graham Swift**



## The Sun House



Reclining orchids, decadent Egyptian figures and off-pink polygons. Art-deco seems out of place in Cambridge, sheltered here far away from the University's staunch yellowed stones. Unfortunately, yet understandably, the city never felt in touch with the movement's love for lustrous sunbeams and majestic foliage tied together with ancient curling motifs, huddled in this boggy corner of England. The designer W. A. Cairns had different ideas for 23 Queen Edith's Way, lovingly crafting this chunk of 1920s Paris into being, resplendent with a glass staircase, enormous bay windows and a built-in cocktail bar, and there were radiogram speakers in all the main rooms. Locally it caused quite the commotion.

The well-established company now run out of the Sun House is far more Cambridge, offering various training options for the hordes of city professionals trying to wield Microsoft Office for their daily tasks. 'Silicon Fen' is what some more optimistic analysts have christened the city, but reality is galloping by the year towards meeting that label prestigious label. Heard of Raspberry Pi? Cambridge started that. A friend ever tipped you off about some Amazon thing or maybe a Microsoft? They've got HQs in Cambridge now. With so much brain power working on computer power in this city, more and more entrepreneurs are plugging in to this surging stream of possibility. One of them is doing it here, struggling to see the screen under the dancing sunbeams streaming through her endless windows.

As a Dutch entrepreneur, Karen is quintessential Cambridge, and it's not a coincidence that the city is bursting with dynamism. In this secluded garden the cranes and diggers are only just audible; enough to be drowned out by a spirited blackbird, of which many flit between the thick trees. The bees jostle up against the traffic hum, wandering happily between splatters of lemon-yellow, indigo and scarlet. The house exudes a kind of cool earthiness, intangibly ethereal but inarguably solid.

**"I only know that you may lie / Day long and watch the Cambridge sky, / And, flower-lulled  
in sleepy grass, / Hear the cool lapse of hours pass, / Until the centuries blend and blur"**

**- Rupert Brooke in 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester'**

## Eddington

Most weeks take me through Eddington; I pad heavily down tiled boulevards of swaying trees, sharpened corners and lone pedestrians. Like a hall of mirrors, each turn takes you back where you came from - above you, juxtaposed facades hurl shattered light at each other across the flowing streets. Approaching the kernel of this muddy geometry, quiet chatter punctures the stillness, and the golden smell of the bakery rolls through the air, enjoyed by grinning faces.

While the workmen were fashioning the earthy concrete into tightly-knit cubes, they unearthed soil studded with tinkling glass shards and garish lumps of mosaics, which adorned the floors of flowing figures with chiselled noses and complicated Italian grammar. The villa reclined amongst these soft fields, overseeing the sweaty ploughmen and short-tempered oxen that paid for fine Indian glass and fired Roman ceramics from home, bought to be left decadently on an occasional table here or a feature-column there.

The people here, colliding constantly with the ghosts of these long-dead imperialists, form the test subjects for the University's first foray into designing entire communities. They have shops, a school, cycle paths, a market, sports facilities, a lake, underground bins, rainwater capture and efficient building design with nesting holes for swifts and bats. It's not even priced them all out yet: those hopeful young families, unable to find more than a back-alley bedsit anywhere closer to the centre. Vikash loves how international it is, and how he has space for the kids. Lisa thinks the sunrises over the not-insanely-priced-housing is breath-taking. Their cautious excitement pervades this place, a new-born community ready to find its way in the world. The teenagers lighting up by the lake are trying on.

Arthur from Weston-Super-Mare was ecstatic when he became head of the University's observatory in 1914, especially as his firm Quakerism saved him from an untimely end in the French mud. 5 years later, in the muggy warmth of Principe off the west African coast, he became the first person to confirm Einstein's suspicions, that gravity would be able to bend light itself. Albert considered Arthur Eddington's 'The Mathematical Theory of Relativity' the best presentation of his theories in any language. Arthur spent much of his life with his head tilted upwards, agog at the swirling impossibility of the Milky Way, or the breathless beauty of an eclipse. After death, he kindly lent his name to this place of angles, stars and promise.



**"His mind stretched out over the deserted fields and the desolate dikes to the wide, moon-bleached sands of the Wash and the creeping fringes of the North Sea"**

**- P.D. James in 'Death of an Expert Witness'**



## The Granta Pub



Heaving on their oars, exhausted and frozen, the men without horns on their helmets glide towards the shore, which yields under their leather boots. Muscular shoulders load sacks of grain, fish and reeds onto the riverbank of this silent pool, a quiet escape after days of barren swamp. Later on in this bustling port, other burly, stoic men might take a fancy to their Norse wares and exchange a few necessities, justifying the proud smiles these men might bring home to their starving fjordland families.

Before these men had ever even set sail, far older creatures gathered by this pool to shout, feast and get drunk. Mugwort, Honey, Meadowsweet - all are ground energetically into the frothing copper pot, the sweet, earthy flavours almost masking the muddy alcohol they will gorge themselves on.

Rivulets of the sickly brew flow down unkempt Celtic beards and blue-dyed skin late into the evening, deep under a still-star-spangled sky.

Millenia after all of these men bled their last, a little girl jumps and trips and gets up and laughs amongst the feathery grasses by the pool. Little Gwen Darwin loves her island in the river, adores watching the loading and unloading of the grain sacks from the big, cumbersome boats, delights in the sleek suggestion of an otter flowing past her. Her family form much of the Cambridge upper-crust, a loose association of the city's most eccentric, wealthy and well-meaning citizens. At any one time, it seems the city would be dotted with Darwins taking tea up the river, dining at King's or careering along on a newly-evolved bicycle. And little Gwen simply plants herself on the wall and observes, content as can be.

Now her laughter is echoed from the mouths of students, tourists and a smattering of locals, sharing jokes and beers in the pub garden. Some of them look out across the Mill Pond, watching the clouds play with the fish in the river's shine, the tall grasses shivering in the warm breeze, or a little girl locking eyes with ancient warriors across the centuries.

**"Golden leaves spattered the surface of the water below the Granta, where she had sat drinking beer on many a warm afternoon; the ducks were still there, swimming under the willows"**

**- Nora Kelly in 'In the Shadow of King's'**

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