

CAPTURING CAMBRIDGE

THE MILL ROAD COUNCIL DEPOT

Snapshot 2015



Images courtesy of Elena Moses and Shelley Lockwood

Shelley Lockwood
August 2015

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Preface

When I first settled down to think about how to approach this project, two contrasting images from my childhood came into my head: a memory of the cover of a Ladybird book and a memory of running errands in Brighton during the winter of discontent in 1978-9. The first, a technicolour, sunny, warm, optimistic image of 'People who help us The Dustman': the smiling dustman wearing big black work boots and a donkey jacket, striding past the neat front garden flowerbed (rear of shiny-clean pale blue Ford Cortina visible in the tidy drive) towards the impressive tail end of the dustcart, balancing a shiny galvanised metal bin on one shoulder whilst cheerily returning the waves of the two children stood at the window to watch, one brown-haired boy in bright red hand-knitted jumper, one slightly shorter blonde-haired girl in impossibly bright yellow hand-knitted jumper, both smiling manically and both white, of course (as they all were). The second image, an entirely monochrome, cold, bleak and threatening memory of making my way gingerly past mountains of piled-up, uncollected rubbish bags, bulging menacingly or split and partially disgorging their putrid contents (this memory comes with added smell!) across the pavement along my usual route to the shops.

Now it turns out that clear and vivid memories can be illusions, or rather, self-created fictions, based on combining half-remembered actual images with feelings or other extraneous information that you were told at the time or have learned since. There was no 'The Dustman' in the Ladybird books 'People who help us series (the closest image I can find is The Postman) and, although I know I did pick my way through uncollected rubbish on the streets of Brighton in 1978, I think that the reason the memory is in black and white and feels worrying is that it is a combination of local newspaper and TV images and parental discussion of the winter of discontent over the dinner table at the time.

Despite (indeed perhaps because of) these 'false memory' issues, it was interesting to me that as soon as I sat down to think about the work of the Council Depot, it was these contrasting images from my childhood which came to mind, contrasting in mood but both focussed entirely on collecting the bins or, as we would now say, refuse collection and recycling. There was a definite sense of the world being cleaner, more colourful and generally a better place to be when the binmen were around, compared with the grim, grey horrors of wading through our own waste when they withdrew their labour and stopped being those people who help us.

My first big surprise, once I got started on the project in March 2015, was receiving a copy of the site plan and seeing both the number of buildings tucked away in that rhombus of land between Mill Road, the railway line, Hooper Street and Kingston Street and the very long list of services run at or from the site . . . [unfinished]

Shelley Lockwood August 2015



Introduction

This snapshot of the Cambridge City Council's Mill Road Depot site was put together as part of the Mill Road History Project in order to capture and record the buildings, services and equipment on the site itself as well as the people who work there and the jobs they do both on site and out across the City. It consists of a series of images, encounters and conversations during the summer of 2015, 110 years after the Depot was opened.

A summary with images and audio will be posted on the Capturing Cambridge website www.capturingcambridge.org.

There is a planned closure of the Depot in the near future with many of the services being relocated to South Cambridgeshire District Council's depot next to the AmeyCespa Waste Management Park near Waterbeach on the A10.

The City Council Depot, previously also known as the Council Store Yard, has been located on its present site in Mill Road since 1905.



The dedicatory cornerstone on the gatehouse at the entrance to the site. Reads: 'Cambridge Corporation 1905 E. Wareham Harry Borough Engineer & Surveyor'

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood

The Depot currently houses most of the City Council Environment Department.



“The Environment department plays a vital role in safeguarding the unique character of Cambridge and supporting the quality of life of our local communities. The department works to meet the housing needs of local people and ensure the city's continued economic success through planning and ensuring good quality design of new developments. While looking to deliver future growth and prosperity, we also aim to preserve Cambridge's historic identity, its natural open spaces and ensure the cleanliness of its streets. We aim to be at the forefront of low-carbon living and will continue to seek improvement in recycling opportunities, public transport, cycle routes and other environmental initiatives. Through

strong liaison with our local communities, we aim to deliver high-quality services that give everybody who lives in, works in or visits Cambridge a positive experience of it.”

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/environment-department>

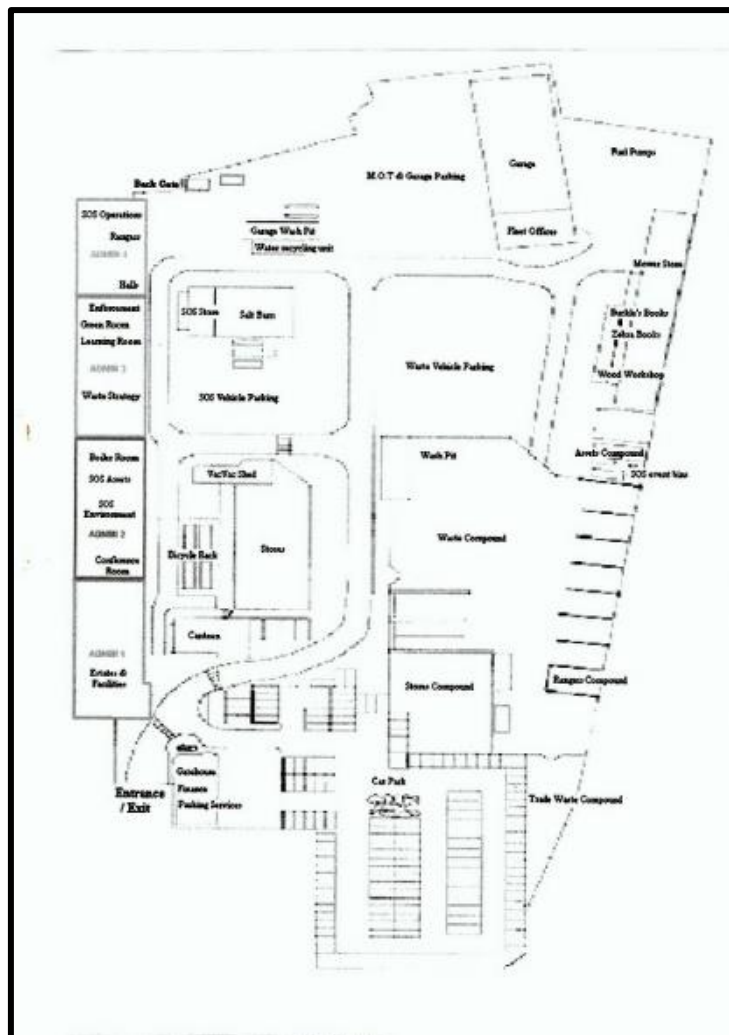
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people who agreed to participate in the project by having their photographs taken and sharing their experiences of working for the City Council at the Mill Road Depot and, in particular, I would like to thank Althea Mejias for her considerable help on site with capturing the work of the Depot.

I also thank Elena Moses for her wonderful photographs of the site and the people who work there; it is these photos, together with the oral history recordings, which truly capture the character and heart of the place.

I would also like to thank Allan Brigham for giving his time so generously and sharing his knowledge, experience, enthusiasm and commitment to the project with me and also Becky Proctor, Project Manager for the Mill Road History Project, for her unfailing support and encouragement throughout.

The Mill Road Council Depot, CB1 2AZ: the site, the buildings and their uses



Mill Road Depot Site Plan 2015

The Mill Road Depot Site Plan shows the range of buildings and designated areas on site and their current usage. These include the gatehouse (reception, finance) with its barrier entrance and exit just off Mill Road, beyond Bharat Bhavan (the former Mill Road Library), the old coachhouses (estates and facilities, conference room), the old sawmill and paintshop (waste strategy, enforcement), the Rangers office, the canteen, the salt barn, the MOT and fleet services garages and wash pit, the Fleet Offices, the garden maintenance mower store, the assets compound, the waste, trade waste and stores compounds, vehicle parking, stores, bicycle parking and car park. There is a back gate to the site leading onto Hooper Street.



Images courtesy of Elena Moses



Gatehouse Reception early morning

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



View from Reception of a lorry leaving the Depot

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



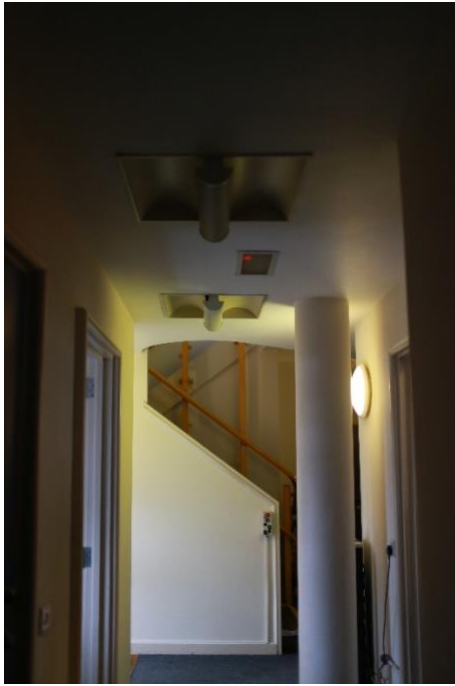
Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood

Graham Watts (*left*), former Director of City Services and Allan Brigham, former street sweeper, in the garden at the Depot at the end of their tour of the site and trip down memory lane 17th June 2015. Click the link to hear some highlights from the tour.



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

View of the Gatehouse from inside the site



Gatehouse interior

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



View into the site from the first floor of the Gatehouse showing the old coachhouses on the left and the canteen straightahead with the stores behind

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Looking towards the rear of the site from outside the entrance to the canteen with the old coach houses on the left and the bike racks on the right



Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood

View down the length of the coach houses towards the back gate with the toilet facilities at the rear of the salt barn on the right



Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood

Back gates onto Hooper Street



View from the back gates back towards the gatehouse

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



View from rear of site back towards gatehouse with rear of salt barn and ladies toilets on the left and offices (formerly paintshop) on the right

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



The gatehouse with garden on the left and old coach houses (offices) on the right

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Gatehouse showing connection with Bharat Bhavan, garden on left and car parking in foreground

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Rear site boundary. Hooper Street garages

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



The salt barn

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Garage area wash pit

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Fleet Offices with red ChYpPS (Children and Young People's Participation Service) van in front and garage to the left

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Refuse crew returning

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



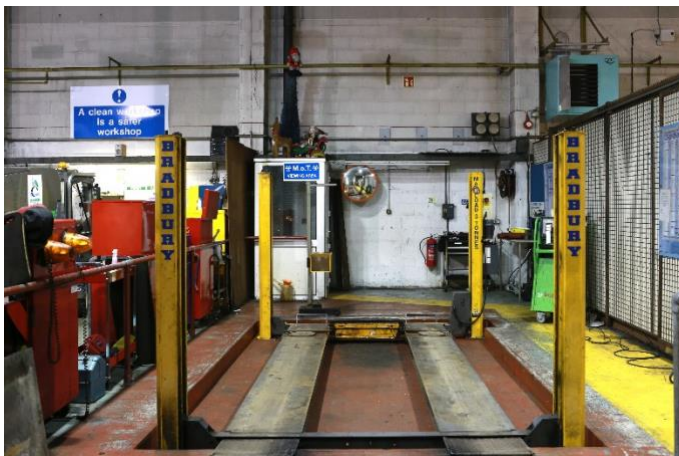
Lewis, a Refuse Driver who has worked for the Council for 14 years returns to base at the Fleet Offices

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



View from in front of back gates towards Fleet Offices and garages with wash pit in the centre

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Garage workshop interior

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Tools on the wall of the garage workshop



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Women's Resource Centre and railway line from outside garden maintenance at the rear of the site



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Garden maintenance and mower store



Interior of mower store showing white line marker back left

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Verge cutter leaving the Depot

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



View from in front of the salt barn towards the car park with the waste compound on the left and the stores on the right

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Waste Compound Recycling Centre

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Recycling signage at the waste compound

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood



Images courtesy of Elena Moses

Lorry cleaning

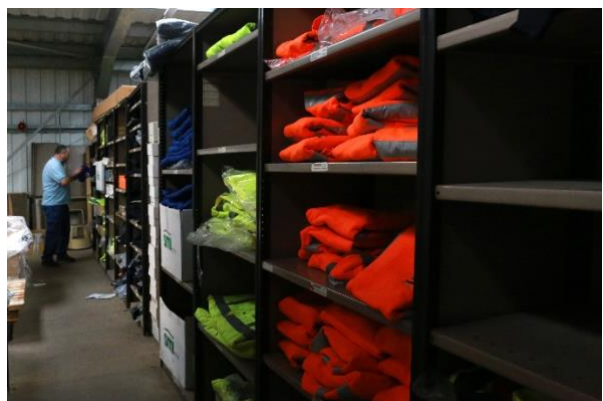


Images courtesy of Elena Moses



Trike and bike racks with stores building on the right and painted safe walking route directions

Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood





Images courtesy of Elena Moses

Clothing and housing supplies in the stores



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Building maintenance vehicle parked outside the GMB Union Office and canteen



Image courtesy of Shelley Lockwood

From left to right:
John Benson, Kevin Roberts, Graham Watts and Althea Mejias
in the car park 17th June 2015



Men's toilet and locker room

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



GMB Union Office door from canteen

Image courtesy of Elena Moses





Images courtesy of Elena Moses

In the canteen/ mess



Images courtesy of Elena Moses and Shelley Lockwood

The Mill Road Depot: the people and the jobs they do



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Billy Knowles (*left*) and
Richard Richards

Commercial Waste Officers

21 and 24 years at the Depot
respectively



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Althea Mejias

Facilities and Business Support
Manager

26 years at the Depot



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Sean Cleary

Commercial Operations Manager
for Specialist Services

5 years at the Depot



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Ceri Ann Littlechild

Mill Road Co-ordinator

9 years at the Council.

Previous jobs:

Helpdesk Assistant, PA to Director
City Services, Assistant to Director of
Environmental Services



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Joel Carre

Head of Streets and Open Spaces

Since September 2014



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Katy Driver

Executive Assistant to the Director
of Environment

Since November 2014



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Lee Hillam

Refuse Leading Hand for trade waste and GMB Union Steward

12 years on Refuse including 3 years as Union Steward



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Mark Arnold

Refuse Driver and Union Steward for Refuse

20 years at the Depot



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

John McCaskill

City Ranger

15 years



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Dave Cox
Fleet Manager
25 years



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

John Benson
Refuse Team Leader
13 years but 27 years with the
Council, started on litter-picking



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Julie Hullier
Refuse Team Leader
9 years but has worked for the
Council for 18 years



Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Chris Ketton
Building Maintenance
13 years

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Linda O'Connor
Purchasing and Stores Manager
26 years

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Marcus Passley
8 months at the Depot

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Bruce Carter

Site Supervisor

9 years but 28 years at the Depot,
previously with the on-site uPVC
Windows Factory

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Laura Hills

Technical Co-ordinator – Gas

2 years

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Nicola Lenton

Technical Co-ordinator – Electric

8 years at the Depot but 32 years
with the Council

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Tony Mulholland

Technical Co-ordinator Housing Repairs

15 years doing the same job but it has been called Helpdesk, Liaison Officer and Production Controller in the past



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Guy Belcher

Biodiversity Officer working with the City's 12 nature reserves

7 years



Alistair Wilson

Development Manager Streets and Open Spaces

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Declan O'Halloran

Asset Management and Project
Officer (AMPO)

7 years

Responsible for play areas, benches,
bus shelters and allotments

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Rebecca Weymouth-Wood
Recycling Officer
8 years

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Emma Will
Recycling Co-ordinator

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Joe Obe
City Ranger
9 years but 15 years with the Council, started in the on-site uPVC factory

Image courtesy of Elena Moses



Image courtesy of Elena Moses

Joe Obe (*left*), Chris Clements
(*centre*) and Richard Allen

City Rangers

9, 10 and 15 years as Rangers and
15, 15 and 27 years with the
Council, respectively

A Photographer's Response Elena Moses



Between April and July 2015, on four separate visits, Elena took over 400 photographs at the Mill Road Depot. Many of these images have been used in the snapshot document as a record of the site, its buildings and some of the people who work there. But she was also taking the photographs as a personal response to the brief of 'capturing' the site and, with an outsider's and a photographer's eye, already informed by the imminent loss of the place, she captured something of the feel, the texture and multi-layered significances of the history of the site.

I asked her about her experiences of working on the project.

"I had a sense of privilege entering this arcane, mainly male world. I had glimpses of an infrastructure which supports the whole City. I knew from taking early morning photos (and from being a gardener) that there was a world of workers which kept this city as clean, tidy and beautiful as it is, that perhaps not many people appreciated. So to be an authorised guest, visiting the home patch of these infrastructure and maintenance workers, felt a great privilege.

My first visit was in daylight and was a quick scout around. I found myself trailing behind the Mill Road History Group that I was with. It was exciting to realise that this was not only a hub for the everyday work that the Council undertook, but it was also a museum of industrial artefacts, some whole, some broken, in amongst the machinery and structures and administration of current work.

I also learned that this was a community. On my second visit, before dawn, I witnessed the camaraderie; men arriving early on site to hang out together in the dark before starting work, supporting each other.

I wanted to stop and talk to the men and women for much longer than I had time. It was occasionally possible to capture men at work from a distance without speaking to them. But I don't like the secretive approach; making a little contact is better than nothing, especially as some of these men on site had no idea of why I was there and what I was doing. I'm very aware of how uncomfortable it is to be photographed.

Portraits were the most satisfying to take as I could not capture people directly and close-up without having contact with them. I was able to talk to a few people for a few minutes or so.

I was very concerned not to be taking people away from their work but being curious about it was a way of showing respect and appreciation for their work. I

felt some awkwardness and concern about issues such as voyeurism and exploitation, surveillance, racism and sexism, of which they had perhaps been on the receiving end before.

As a photographer, I also like to examine the beauty of the ordinary and take macro images which, in a BritArt manner, reveal that the mundane can be beautiful when it is not actually working or functioning as what it is".

(July 2015)

Call and Suggestions for Further Research

This is only a snapshot of the life of the Mill Road Depot and the work that goes on there. It is the product of a series of recorded encounters on site. The pre-Depot history of the Mill Road site must await its own history and building report, but, in brief:

1830 map, workhouse gardens, timber yard, Headley's Eagle iron foundry



The Eagle steam locomotive, constructed in Cambridge in 1849 for the Eastern Counties Railway by Messrs Headly Brothers of the Eagle Foundry in Cambridge. It was used to carry railway engineers and officials on inspection tours of the company's lines and the saloon behind the footplate was added later, so that the officials could travel in some comfort. The driver and fireman, however, were left exposed to the elements! In April 1850 this small tank engine ran over and killed Mr Newall, the district superintendent at Norwich, in an accident while inspecting signalling between Reedham and Haddiscoe.

Image © National Railway Museum and SSPL

[http://www.nrm.org.uk/ourcollection/photo?group=Liverpool Street&objid=1995-7233_LIVST_RX_67](http://www.nrm.org.uk/ourcollection/photo?group=Liverpool+Street&objid=1995-7233_LIVST_RX_67)

Coprolite works (Enid Porter notebooks) and Headley's house (not demolished till 1950s)

For the Cambridge Union Workhouse (now Ditchburn Place), see [Ian Bent's building report for Capturing Cambridge MRHP]

For the Eagle Iron Foundry, see Ken Alger, Allan Brigham, Brian Hockley and Julie Wilkinson, Cambridge Iron Founders (Cambridge Industrial Archaeology Society, 1996) pp44-50.

For the Headley coprolite works also on the site, see Bernard O'Connor, The Fossil Diggings on Quy Fen p31 on GoogleBooks:

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=JFBuAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA39&lpg=PA39&dq=fossil+digging+on+quy+fen&source=bl&ots=cGwpCdhJJ&sig=117YSctVtS9e-Paw9-RtOumPCw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=4Ml2VZ2OA8eP7AaSkYDICw&ved=oCCIQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=fossil%20digging%20on%20quy%20fen&f=false>

Likewise, the pre-Mill Road history of the work of the Depot is not within the scope of this project and can only be sketched in brief:

Sanitation/public health timeline from 1575 street cleaning to 1788 Improvement Commissioners to pave, light and clean to 1889 Improvement Commissioners transferred to Council and sewers finished 1895.

Cambridgeshire Record Office (CALM) CB/4/18/49 Cambridge Improvement Commissioners A Report to the Special Joint Committee by J Bailey Denton 4th October 1871. Observations on population, water supply, sewage etc., based on schemes by Mr Rowe, Mr Bazalgette and Mr Stephenson.

Previous depots = behind library/Guildhall? Hills Road?

Cambridgeshire Collection – photographs and newspapers

The history of the Mill Road Depot begins in 1905 and there is more research needed to flesh out the history of the work done on and from the site between 1905 and current living memory. What follows here are suggestions for further research and possible lines of inquiry and useful sources. It is hoped that volunteer(s) may take up the challenge of telling a fuller history of the Mill Road Depot from its beginnings in 1905.

Cambridgeshire Record Office (CALM) Q/Rum145 Purchase of additional land at Mill Road Goods Depot November 1908. Plan. Engineer: W B Worthington (1854-1940), Chief Engineer of the Midland Railway Company 1905-1917.

What services were run from the Depot and how were Council employees' occupations defined/ described?

Use census returns 1901 and 1911 as well as Street Directories

Use self-defining job titles to search in Cambridgeshire Collection for news stories and photographs

1911 census relevant Occupation codes:

- 963 Local Authority Scavenging and Disposal of Refuse
- 961 Local Authority Drainage and Sanitary Service
- 956-7 Local Authority Electricity supply
- 954 Local Authority Waterworks Service
- 950-1 Local Authority Gas Works Service
- 748 Paviments, Road Labourers – Under Local Authorities
- 747 Road – Contractors, Surveyors, Inspectors
- 409 Municipal, Parish, and other Local or County Offices

Also, possibly:

- 761 Sawyers; Wood Cutting Machinists
- 732 Builders Labourers
- 537 Others on Roads
- 526 Others connected with Carrying or Cartage
- 330 General Labourers
- 210-1 Carpenters, Joiners
- 190 Blacksmiths, Strikers

Dennis Strange 'Roads of Cambridge in the 1930s' article in Life magazine Dec 1987

Boards produced for the centenary 2005 (Museum of Technology)

Boxes of photographs and newsletters and documents from the Depot

How have working conditions, pay and the working day changed since 1905?

How have workers organised themselves; unions, working men's clubs etc?

How have tools, equipment, clothing, vehicles, bins and other street furniture changed over the life of the Mill Road Depot?

What about the aims and mission statements, branding/ logos and slogans of the Council?

How have workers (and their families) been treated or looked after when ill or when retired?

How have Cambridge's green spaces (over 500 acres of land including 93 parks and playgrounds) evolved and been maintained over the past century?

How did housing services develop and the stores to supply them?

How has refuse collection – domestic and trade/commercial – changed?

What work used to be done at the Depot and why and when did it cease to be done there?