

Below the Bridge: A Mill Road life, 1961-65



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Note

This is an expanded version of a talk given by the author to the Mill Road History Society on 14 April 2026. It is based on personal memories, family records, and a limited amount of archival research.

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Abbreviations

CA	Cambridgeshire Archives, Ely
CC	Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridge
MRHS	Mill Road History Society, Cambridge

Cover image: Measham Terrace (136-150 Mill Road) from Mill Road bridge, undated (1960s?). (CC. CP.H219)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as every life is different, none of the books about growing up in Cambridge that I have come across has resonated with my memories of life in Mill Road in the early 1960s. Writing about a much earlier period, Gwen Raverat gives an account of a childhood in her classic *Period piece* (1952) that is about as far away from my experiences as it is possible to get. ‘The town ... did not count at all’, she wrote.¹ For us, the same could be said of the university. We knew that it existed, but, apart from having to walk past endless ancient walls when we were in the centre of town and taking occasional visitors to admire such well-known destinations as King’s College Chapel and the Backs, it might just as well have not.

Two more recent books spark occasional moments of recognition, but again the Cambridge that emerges is very different from the town that I recall. Brian Thompson’s *Keeping mum* (2006) is a compelling read but centres on a very different world: set largely in the 1940s, it details the eventful lives of the various very colourful characters that made up his working-class family. Alec Forshaw’s *Growing up in Cambridge* (2009) is a more conventional memoir and he is closer to my age, but here too there are many differences to my own experience: the location of his home in west Cambridge, his travels by car (we didn’t have one), and his family’s various connections with the university all serve to distance him from the world in which I then lived.²

Both Thompson and Forshaw attended the Cambridgeshire High School for Boys on Hills Road, as did I, but that is irrelevant to this narrative, as by that point I’d left Mill Road. My years in Mill Road coincided neatly with my junior school days, virtually all of which were spent at Romsey School. Looking back, I have to resort to a fairly substantial leap of the imagination to think of the seven years at the County that followed as taking place in the same city as the years spent at Romsey. In actual time, just a few months of living in Brundall, a village in Norfolk, separated the two experiences. In my memory, they belong to different worlds.

¹ Raverat 1952, ch. 3.

² Mill Road features only occasionally in the two books: Thompson 2006, pp. 96 (a War Department surplus shop), 113 (a junk shop), 227 (delivering a telegram), 229 (a GI surplus shop), and Forshaw 2009, pp. 10 (an electrical shop), 49 (general shopping), 64 (the maternity hospital), 88 (the Playhouse cinema), 116 (the Post Office sorting office).

2. THE HOUSE

The house that we lived in was in a terrace of eight Victorian houses facing on to the old Mill Road bridge (see cover image). Although these houses had in the past been known as Measham Terrace (during which time our house was no. 4), I do not recall that name ever being used by us. Our address was simply 142 Mill Road. In the photograph reproduced on the cover, ours is the fourth bay window along. The railway is behind the photographer; the road bridge is to the left; the view is towards Romsey. The steps just visible below lead down from the road to the front doors of the houses. This was my home from October 1961 until April 1965, from the ages of seven to (just) eleven.

Before we moved to Cambridge, I had never visited the city, and I think it very likely that it was on my parents' first visit that they sent me a postcard that I still have, showing on the front a very Gwen Raverat-style river scene (fig. 1). At the time I was staying with my grandparents in Wolverhampton and my parents were on a recce, as my father, who worked for British Railways in a clerical capacity, was about to take on a new role in Cambridge. The message that my mother wrote on the back of the card was somewhat at odds with the leafy idyll on the front: 'We have seen the house and it isn't too bad. Near the railway line, overlooked by the road bridge. I will write properly tomorrow ...' Clearly, we had previously discussed the Mill Road house at



1. Postcard, postmarked 14 August 1961. (Author)



2. Detail of map with Measham Terrace in the centre, 1903.
(CA. OS.CambsXLVII.3.1901)

home and, on actually seeing it, 'isn't too bad' was the most positive gloss she could apply.

An early map (fig. 2) shows the steps at the front, which we would use if we wanted to go over to the other side of the bridge and walk into town or to the station. If we needed to go in the other direction, into Romsey or along Rustat Road, a path that ran along the backs of the houses and ended in Argyle Street was much more convenient. Although it appears on other maps, the suggestion of a passageway between two of the houses is, I think, an error. I remember no way through from the front of the terrace to the back except through the houses themselves and, moreover, there is no sign of a passageway in the photograph on the cover. The path along the back of the houses, which turned a couple of corners to allow for the layouts of the houses, is, however, shown fairly accurately in the map, although its westernmost end is for some reason omitted. In my experience the back door was much more commonly used than the front, not because it provided a less formal entrance, which with such houses was often the reason for using the back door, but for the practical reason that it led to most of the places where I wanted – or had – to go.

Between this path and the backs of the houses was a back yard and on the other side of it were the gardens. As is often the case with terraced houses, this garden was fairly long and narrow. In common with those of the three houses between us and the railway, ours backed on to a piece of waste ground that seems never to have been built on. Beyond that were the frontages of the houses in Fletcher's Terrace, a cul-de-sac with houses on the far side only.



3. David (left) and me in the back garden of 142 Mill Road, Easter 1962. (Author)



4. David (left) and me in the back garden of 142 Mill Road, 1963 or 1964. (Author)

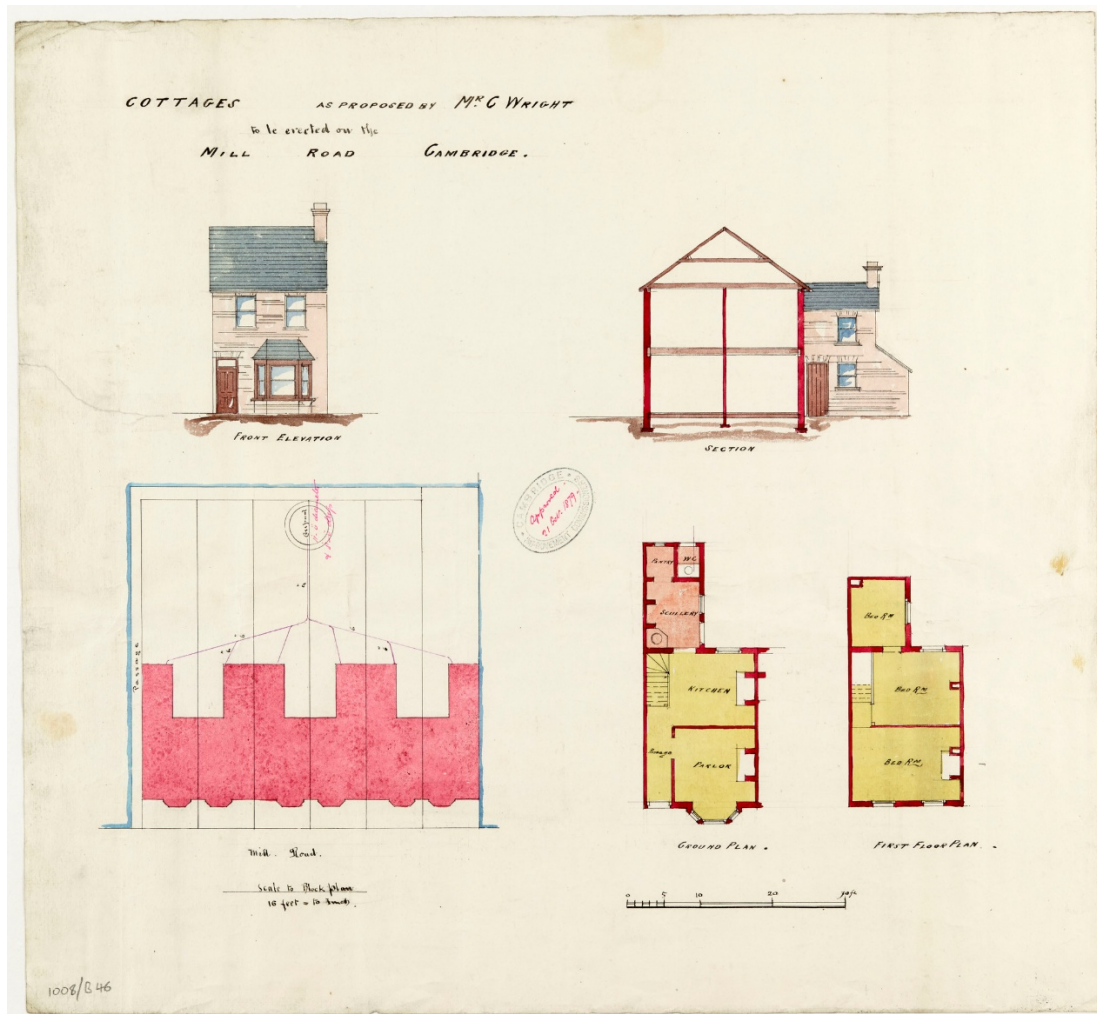
A photograph taken in the 1962 Easter holidays, so just six months after we had moved in, shows that little work had yet been done on the garden (fig. 3), as, understandably, the house would have been my parents' first priority. My brother David was just nineteen months older than me and we would often play together. Here we are dressed as pirates, although it seems that Romsey School scarves were regarded as appropriate elements in the costumes. A shed, constructed by our father, is visible behind us to the left and the rather ramshackle fence that divided our garden from the neighbours' can be seen to the right. Beyond the tall palings is the waste ground, with the fronts of the Fletcher's Terrace houses rising behind.

Looking in the other direction (fig. 4), the garden ended in a low fence and a gate, which gave on to the communal path. Beyond this can be seen the taller wooden palings that hid the back yards and the houses themselves. Our kitchen window is visible to the left and, above it, David's bedroom window. To the right, jutting forward, is the window of my bedroom, with the sloping roof of our outdoor lavatory and a pantry or kitchen cupboard below. The windows to the right – and the washing – belonged to our neighbours. That this photograph, in which David and I are playing with our Meccano, was taken in 1963 or 1964 is indicated by the County School socks that David is wearing. Two school years older than me, he left Romsey School in 1963 when we were still at Mill Road. By this time the garden had been thoroughly worked on, with grass each side of the central path at the end and flower beds in the part nearer to the house.

The house was a standard late nineteenth-century six-room bye-law house with an outrigger and return at the back.³ It was of the half-hall-entrance type, so the front door did not lead directly into the front room but neither did the hall extend all the way through to the back, making it necessary to go through the kitchen to reach the scullery. Although there are some differences, the general arrangement can be illustrated by the architect's drawings for houses in a similar Mill Road terrace (fig. 5).

On entering the hall through the front door, there was a room to the right that in this drawing is called the parlour, although this was not a term we used; for us, I think it was simply the front room. The difference between this room and the rooms to the rear of the house was not as pronounced as could often be the case in such houses, where the front room was so little used that it was in effect a waste of space in a house in which space was at a premium. Our front room was somewhere that David and I could play and it was there that one day we put on a play in a model theatre that our father had made, complete with proscenium stage, flats, curtains and lights. When the time came to begin, we weren't quite ready, so David put up a sign on the outside of the door into the room saying that the production had had to be 'postponed' for a while. I had not come across the word before and I remember thinking it rather grand that we were doing something that had had to be 'postponed'. The front room was also where we as a family entertained visitors, and a settee that converted into a 'put you up' bed meant it could also serve as a guest bedroom. However, it is certainly true that the front room was less used than what is described in the plan as the kitchen. I'm not sure what word we used for it. In a letter to my mother written before we moved in, my father referred to it as the 'middle

³ For the following discussion of the house and its amenities, I have relied greatly on the accounts of Victorian houses in Muthesius 1982 and Dauntton 1983.



5. Plans and elevations of Mill Road houses, 1879. (CA. 1008/B46)

room', but whether that name stuck or we also called it the kitchen I cannot remember.

Here there was the dining table, the television, the telephone, at least one easy chair, and – importantly in a house with no central heating – a coal-burning stove. A clothes airer suspended from the ceiling could be brought down by means of a pulley mechanism. Before we moved in my mother had written, 'I am adamant that we shall have to fix the airer up somewhere at 142, I couldn't do with the clothes horse about all the time!', and, as the scullery ceiling was too low for it, it ended up here above the dining room table. When the house was first built, it is likely that this room would have contained a small range, as gas was generally not supplied to working class houses until the 1890s and, in any case, coal was cheaper and therefore more appealing for cooking. With the arrival of gas, cooking would have moved into the scullery and this is where our gas cooker was located. Sculleries were generally supplied with a single tap, and I think this was how ours was when we first moved in, although my parents soon had an Ascot water heater installed above the sink. The plan in fig. 5 shows a copper in the corner for boiling water to wash clothes. Our house would have been similarly equipped, but this had gone by the time we were there and once a week my mother would bring out from its corner the electric-

powered top-loading washing machine with mangle attached. Our pantry and lavatory were in the same positions as in the plan, but the lavatory door faced out to the side rather than to the back of the house. Water closets were becoming the norm at the time the house was built, but the modern type with the flushing rim emerged only around 1890. Earlier designs could often be unsanitary and smelly, meaning that there could be sound reasons for locating them outside.

Upstairs was arranged slightly differently from the plan in fig. 5. My bedroom opened on to a half-landing and, as shown in fig. 4, its window looked out to the back of the house. The general principle here was that the back bedroom window should not be directly above the door into the lavatory and this was followed both in the plan shown here and in our house albeit in different ways. Our landing then doubled back on itself, David's room led off on the left, and the two windows of our parents' bedroom looked out at the front directly on a level with the sloping roadway. This was ideal for seeing the Salvation Army marching past at the weekend, although I remember thinking it rather feeble that something that called itself an army had to stop playing its music when it was marching uphill. I liked to hear a brass band.

The only photograph that I have of the inside of the house dates to 1964 and shows David with Nelly, a French girl who was staying with us as part of an exchange agreement, in the front room (fig. 6). Nelly's father, who worked for the French railways, had let it be known through some railway connection that he was searching for a British family in order to establish an exchange programme for his daughter, and our parents had responded. The photograph was taken by Fred Allcroft, a family friend (his wife Dorothy worked in the same railway office as my father and, for a time, my mother). Fred was a keen amateur photographer and my brother has clearly dressed smartly for the occasion. During their visit the Allcrofts must have been entertained with a slide show, for a screen is visible to the right in front of the curtains that hide the bay window. Visible to the left is some of the wallpaper with which my father had decorated the room.



6. David and Nelly in the front room at 142 Mill Road, 1964. (Author)



7. David and our parents in the back yard of 142 Mill Road, 1963. (Author)

The back yard of the house is shown in a photograph of my brother and our parents taken by me in 1963 (fig. 7). Behind them is the kitchen window and to the right is the back door leading into the scullery. The outdoor cupboard to the left was where various household items were kept and also served as a safe place for the house keys, so that David and I could let ourselves in when we got back from school if, as was often the case, our parents were still at work. That hour of unregulated children's television was greatly appreciated.

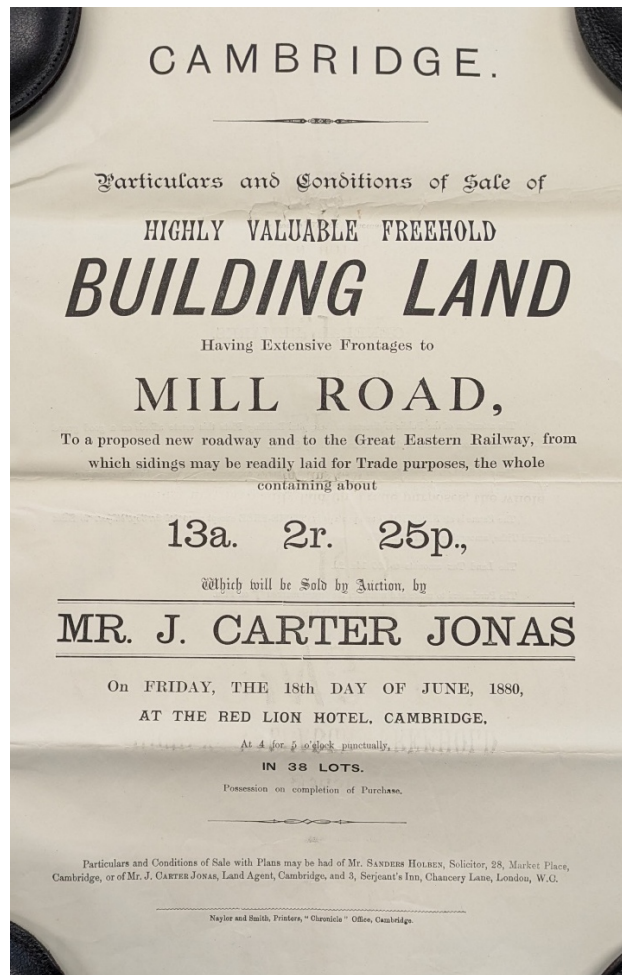
A question that hardly interested me then, but has engaged me recently, is when exactly was the terrace built. The frontages of the houses, as seen in the cover image, indicate that they were not part of the same development: nos 1-4 (what would become 136-142 Mill Road) have uniform facades, with two pairs of houses in mirror image to each other; nos 5 and 6 (144 and 146) form another pair, a little taller and placed at a slight angle and with differently designed bay windows; and, again, nos 7 and 8 (148 and 150) are set further forward and are without bay windows. The plans seen in fig. 2 bear out these differences: nos 5 and 6 have the largest footprint, nos 7 and 8 are of an intermediate size, and nos 1-4 are the smallest.

Spalding's directory of 1878 makes it clear that at that point Measham Terrace did not yet exist (fig. 8). The Mill Road listings begin on the south side of the road, travelling from west to east. Passing St Barnabas' church and Devonshire Road, they

DIRECTORY OF CAMBRIDGE.	
<i>Mill Road, (continued.)</i>	
14 Ellis, John, smith (railway)	Smith, John, the Lodge
15 Ward, Frank, grocer	<i>Here comes Rifle Butt Row.</i>
16 Bilton, John	Twinn, Joseph
17 Brennan, William H., printer	Mr. Pratt's farm
18 Pilgrim, Henry, smith	Shearman, William, foundry man
19 Reeves, B., builder, &c.	Derrington, George, gardener
Blewitt, Thomas, engineer, Swiss Cottage	Poulter, J., ostler
	Headley, James J., iron founder, Eagle foundry
	Lyon, Jasper
S. Barnabas' Church.	KINGSTON TERRACE.
DEVONSHIRE ROAD.	4 Markin, H. M., telegraph inspector
<i>Midland Tavern</i>	3 Gillings, Joseph, tailor
W. Austin's coal yard	2 Ballock, John
R. Cunnington's coal yard	1 Wiles, J.
CLUNEY VILLAS.	<i>Here comes Kingston Street.</i>
1 Afleck, Dr., surgeon	Cawthorn, James L.
2 Headdey, A. G.	Waters, Mrs.
INVERNESS TERRACE.	Kimm, George, station master, G.E.R.
3 Dunn, W., combination man, King's	Stoddart, William, schoolmaster, Gwydir house
2 Roe, John, master, Russell Street School	<i>Here comes Gwydir Street.</i>
1 Chandler, John	Calver, E., Clifton House
Scudamore, Mrs., Morecamb house	Bramley, E. C., District Superintendent, United Kingdom Alliance
RAILWAY COTTAGES.	Holder, John S., Camford house School
25 Mansfield, Walter, inspector on line	BARNABAS VILLA.
26 Daldry, Mrs., and Darnell Joseph	McKinney, Rev. J.
27 Westwood, J., and Farrow, Edwd.	Cann, Robert, butcher
28 Lindsey, and Buller, J.	45 Carpenter, Robert, cricketer
29 Fointain, William	46 Humphrey, Thomas, railway servant
Blackett, George, locomotive foreman	47 Brooks, George, engine driver
Morrell, A., signalman	48 Slater, Mrs.
LODGE COTTAGES.	49 Clarke, C. W., <i>Durham Ox</i>
1 Jaggard, Reuben, railway man	The Cambridge Union.
2 Farrer, James, wheel-tapper on Railway	Hosegood, Luke, master
3 Naylor, Joseph, railway man	PULLING TERRACE.
4 Swan, William, engine driver	Denson, John R., builder
5 Chapman, Francis, fireman	1 Huckell, Joseph
6 Day, Mrs.	2 Visne, Paul de, professor of languages
7 Tabor, William, railway servant	3 Cowan, Robert
8 Stalley, James, engine driver	4 Williams, W., clerk of works
9 Stalley, George	5 Saville, Josiah
10 Gevies, William, fireman on line	6 Bowtell, cook at Jesus college

arrive at Railway Cottages, the subject of a Mill Road History Project report,⁴ after which they must cross the railway. However, the next property to appear, Lodge Cottages, consists of ten houses and so cannot be equated with Measham Terrace. Moreover, as the following entry is Rifle Butt Row (now Ross Street), to be succeeded in turn by Kingston Street and Gwydir Street, it is clear that by now the listing is moving along the north side of Mill Road, travelling from east to west. Lodge Cottages must therefore have been either on the south side of Mill Road to the east of what would become Argyle Street or on the north side to the east of Ross Street.

The situation is clarified by the catalogue of an auction of a large piece of 'highly valuable freehold building land' that was to take place on 18 June 1880 under the auspices of the long-established estate agent John Carter Jonas (fig. 9).⁵ The land in question covered a little more than thirteen acres and the conditions of sale made it clear that 'The title as to all the Lots shall commence with the Will dated the 25th September, 1838, of the Rev. James Geldart, who died on the 12th of November, 1839, and every Purchaser shall assume that the Testator was at his death seised in



9. Land sale catalogue, 18 June 1880, title page. (CA. 1008/B22)

⁴ Wilson 2016.

⁵ The sale was advertised on 12 June 1880 in the *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, p. 5, and the *Cambridge Independent Press*, p. 4.



10. Land sale catalogue, 18 June 1880, map. (CA. 1008/B22)

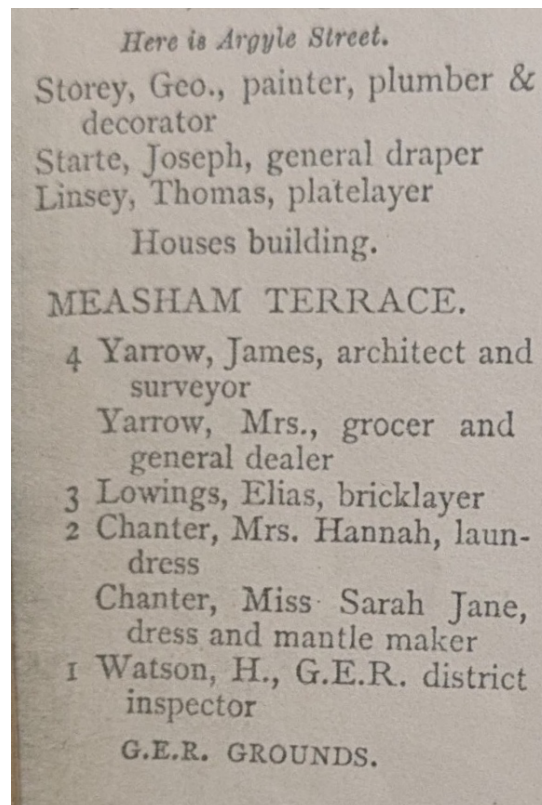
fee simple of the property included in the lot purchased by him without requiring any evidence of the seisin or ownership of the Testator.' At Geldart's death, the land had passed to his son James William Geldart, Regius Professor of Civil Law from 1813 to 1847, who had died in 1876.⁶ For the 1880 sale, it was divided into thirty-eight lots, with 'Frontages to Mill Road, To a proposed new roadway and to the Great Eastern Railway, from which sidings may be readily laid for Trade purposes' advocated as a great advantage.⁷ That the land was 'within a short distance of the Town and Railway Station' was also noted. Every purchaser was expected to have constructed a substantial fence around their plot within three months.

A map included in the auction catalogue shows a proposed roadway, which would become Argyle and Hope Streets (fig. 10); the intervening Stockwell and Cockburn Streets had yet to be planned. Lot 1 comprised the land on which the four houses that would become 1-4 Measham Terrace were built and lot 2 was where the other four houses, nos 5-8, would be constructed. Lot 1 was described as a plot of 1,373 square yards with a frontage of about 62 feet to Mill Road; it was 'in a first-rate position for trade purposes, being situate adjoining the Great Eastern Railway, from which sidings may be readily made'. Lot 2 was the same size with the same length of frontage to Mill Road, but also with 200 feet facing the proposed new roadway (Argyle Street). Clearly, lot 1's proximity to the railway was regarded as a positive

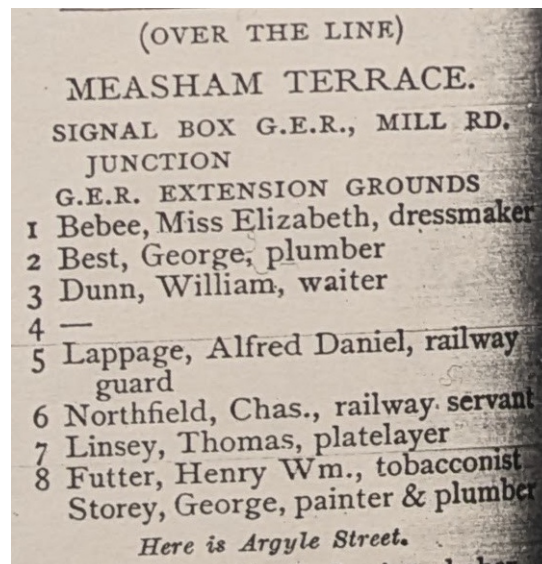
⁶ For more on the Geldarts' extensive ownership of land around Mill Road, see Brigham 2015 and Blyth 2015, p. 10.

⁷ The importance of the arrival of the railway in Cambridge in 1845 for the development of the Mill Road area is outlined in Shorland-Ball 2017, pp. 15, 17, 28-9.

<i>top of Rails</i> SPALDING'S STREET AND GENERAL <i>Mill Road (continued).</i> 13 Daniels, John 14 Ellis, John, smith 15 Ward, Frank, grocer and baker 16 Warnes, William, draper 17 Brennan, William H., printer's reader 18 Pilgrim, Henry, blacksmith 19 Reeve, Benjamin <i>here is Union Terrace.</i> — — — — Blewett, Thomas, engineer, Swiss Cottage S. Barnabas Church. Schools. BEACONSFIELD VILLAS. 1 Parker, Mrs. Ann 2 Lax, Mrs. Mary Ann Mill road Coffee Palace (building) DEVONSHIRE ROAD. Fuller, Frederick Searle, publican, "Midland Tavern" 2 Scott, James, clerk 3 Nobbs, Stephen, railway engine driver Rolls, Ellis, shoemaker, Violet Cottage CLUNY VILLAS. 1 Ledwick, Thomas, medical assistant for Mr. Deighton 2 Hard, Robert Alfred, caterer INVERNESS TERRACE. 3 Dunn, Henry William, college butler 2 Jiggings, John, butler, Jesus College 1 Giffen, William Robert, joiner Scudamore, Mrs. Mary A., school for young ladies, Morecambe House RAILWAY COTTAGES. 25 Mansfield, Walter, carpenter 26 Preston, John, railway servant Daldry, Mrs. Sarah Ann	1881 27 Barker, Alfred J., railway porter Simpson, George, railway porter 28 Butler, William, labourer Linsay, Thomas, platelayer 29 Blackett, Edmund P., engine fitter's foreman Fountain, William, engine fitter's foreman Worrell, Edward, railway signalman RAILWAY CROSSING. MILL ROAD JUNCTION. Linsay, Thomas, platelayer — — — — ARGYLE STREET. WALTER COTTAGES. 1 Buckle, John, driver 2 Clobberley, George R., fireman 3 Clobberley, Henry J., fireman 4 Timm, Robert, railway servant (Houses building.) Ourwain, Alfred — — — — Mission Room and Chapel. COCKBURN STREET. (Five houses building.) ROMSEY TERRACE. 1 Waters, Miss Georgiana 2 King, Mrs. Susan, laundress 3 Freestone, Charles, brewer 4 Masters, George, financial agent 5 Jarvis, George, builder 6 Miller, Robert E., journalist 7 Disbury, Henry, labourer 8 Medlock, Richard G. MALTA ROAD (laid out). <i>Mill Road (continued).</i> Watson, Charles, publican, the "Royal Standard" CYPRUS ROAD. Storey, George, plumber and glazier Orms, Frederick F., carpenter Howes, Moses, coprolite digger Lowings, William, bricklayer Clark, Mrs. Harriet Odell, James, marine store dealer
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12. Spalding's directory, 1884. (CC)



13. Spalding's directory, 1887. (CC)

point, but the suggestion of 'trade purposes' was not to be taken up by the developers, who clearly had other ideas.

The annual Spalding's directories for the ensuing years give an indication of how building progressed. By as early as 1881 two houses had been built between the railway crossing and Argyle Street (fig. 11). One of these was unoccupied while the other was home to Thomas Linsey (misspelt here as Linsay), who is described as a platelayer. Around the corner in Argyle Street, Walter Cottages are recorded as not yet completed. The listing then returns to Mill Road, with what would become the Baptist Church and Cockburn Street. The 1884 directory (in which, confusingly, the listings run in the opposite direction) shows that by this point there has been a good deal of further activity (fig. 12). The four houses next to the railway are finished and inhabited; next come houses still under construction (not quantified but evidently two in number); and finally, before arriving at Argyle Street, there are two more inhabited houses, the first still occupied by Thomas Linsey, with George Storey and Joseph Starte seemingly sharing the second. By 1887 all eight houses had been completed (fig. 13).

Taken together, these entries show that the first two houses to be built, constructed by 1881, were nos 7 and 8, next to Argyle Street; nos 1-4 were up by 1884; and nos 5 and 6 had followed by 1887 as a sort of infill. This enabled all eight to be subsumed into Measham Terrace, a name originally intended for nos 1-4 only, as indicated in the 1884 directory and by the central placing of the name stone, which is just visible at first-floor level in the cover image. Measuring approximately 9 x 12 inches, this stone is now in the Museum of Cambridge, seemingly the only piece of Measham Terrace to survive (fig. 14).



14. Measham Terrace name stone, Museum of Cambridge. (Author)

It is fair then to conclude that two, or perhaps three, different developers were involved in the construction of the eight houses. The purchaser of lot 2 was quick to begin building, but failed to complete two of the houses until the buyer of lot 1 had finished and let his four, the original Measham Terrace. Whether the same developer was responsible for all four houses constructed on the land in lot 2 or resold half of the land to someone else remains to be discovered.

An Ordnance Survey map dated 1888 (fig. 15) shows all the houses in place. As this is the year before the road bridge was built, the level crossing and footbridge across the railway are also featured. Walter Cottages and Geldart Cottages in Argyle Street appear, but as yet there are no houses beyond Swann's Terrace. Between Measham Terrace and the railway is what appears to be a field with a row of trees along one edge, although the directories show that this is already owned by the Great Eastern Railway (it is described as 'G.E.R. extension grounds'). As the map predates the bridge, which would complicate access to the fronts of Measham Terrace, there is no communal path running along the backs of the houses and nos 1-6 are provided with front gardens. For a brief period before it was decided that the volume of traffic



15. Detail of map with Measham Terrace in the centre, 1888. (CA. OS.XLVII.2.20.1888)



16. Mill Road, with Emery Street on the left. (CA. C/ES20S/3/2/1)

made a bridge a necessity,⁸ the outlook of the houses would have been pleasant enough. A photograph of around the turn of the century showing those next to Emery Street (with the bridge in the distance) gives an idea of how Measham Terrace would have looked for just a few years in the 1880s (fig. 16). The bridge changed all that, the only vestiges of the front gardens when I lived there eighty years later being the rather sad remains of the front paths (visible in the cover image).

As well as offering important information as to when the terrace was built, the annual directories also give insights into the sort of people who were living there. The earliest known occupants of my old house (no. 4) are James Yarrow, an architect and surveyor, and his wife, who had her own business as a grocer and general dealer, who were living there in 1884 (fig. 12). The 1887 directory gives the house as unoccupied (fig. 13), but in April the following year the local press recorded the death of the 20-year-old Alfred Hardy of that address.⁹ By 1891 Alfred Barker, a railway guard, was in

⁸ See Wilson 2018.

⁹ Notices in the 13 April 1888 issues of the *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, p. 4, and the *Cambridge Independent Press*, p. 8. That Hardy does not appear in the directories seen by me serves as a reminder that I have not seen every year and also that it is possible that short-stay occupants may never have featured. Another example of an individual absent from the directories available to me is Joseph Rolfe of 2 Measham Terrace, who wished it to be known that he would not be 'answerable for any debts contracted by my wife, Mary Ann Rolfe, after ... July 28th, 1888'; *Cambridge Independent Press*, 3 August 1888, p. 4. This provoked a response a week later from a certain Joseph Rolfe, who had 'lately opened ... temperance refreshment rooms' at 3 Pulling Terrace, Mill Road, and wanted to make it clear that he 'has no connection with the Joseph Rolfe of No. 2, Measham-terrace, Mill-road, who advertised last week that he would not be answerable for his wife's debts'; *Cambridge Independent Press*, 10 August 1888, p. 4.

residence. That year's census reveals that the 36-year-old Barker was sharing the house with his wife Caroline and no fewer than seven children – four sons and three daughters – aged between two and fifteen. Twenty years later, the 1911 census, the first to investigate the subject thoroughly, would consider more than two people per room to be overcrowded.¹⁰ As the kitchen (but not the scullery) was included in the room count, this means that the Barker household, with nine people in five rooms, would not have been considered officially overcrowded, and yet it must have been a squeeze. For us, several decades later, four people fitted nicely, especially as two of us were quite small. Another difference, recorded in a local paper, was that Barker kept pigeons in his back yard;¹¹ we had no pigeons.

The Barker family remained in residence throughout the 1890s.¹² By 1895 the terrace was incorporated into the new numbering system for Mill Road, the house that would be ours becoming no. 142. However, directories still referred to them as Measham Terrace until 1934, after which the name disappears. No. 142 continued to be occupied by railway employees. In 1913-14 William James Thurlow, a platelayer, was in residence. In 1915 he was replaced by another platelayer Thomas Hawkes, who remained there until at least 1924. The 1921 census records Hawkes, aged 49 and a widower, living there with his 17-year-old son Cecil Albert, who worked as a porter at the Great Eastern Railway station at Histon. By 1927, four years after the amalgamation of the railways into four large companies, a London & North Eastern Railway inspector named William James Edwards is at no. 142, but by 1929 he has been replaced by a LNER telegraph linesman G. Paine. In 1930 another linesman, Allan Arben, is recorded as the occupant, remaining until 1937. The following year another LNER employee A.J. Bullen is in residence. The post-war directories do not give employment details, so the occupation of Ralph Curry, who lived there from at least 1948 until we arrived in 1961, is unknown.

It is clear from the above that many of those living in the house were railway workers like my father but also that this had not been so in the early days. Since the same is true for the other houses in the terrace and since, as noted above, different developers were involved in the construction of the houses, it seems unlikely that the railway company was involved in their construction. Where they needed to, railway companies would build houses for their workers. Crewe offers a prime example with more than eight hundred houses being built when the railway works were established there in 1843 in what had been an agricultural area. On a more modest scale, the Eastern Counties Railway, which had brought the railway to Cambridge in 1845, had built the Railway Cottages (now 124-134 Mill Road) in the 1850s, passing them to the Great Eastern Railway as the result of an amalgamation of 1862.¹³ But elsewhere railway companies would buy pre-existing houses if they were available and this appears to be what happened with regard to Measham Terrace.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1911GEN/6>, accessed 25 May 2026.

¹¹ In 1892 a 14-year-old labourer living at 10 Malta Road was found guilty of stealing two pigeons from a cage in Barker's back yard at 4 Measham Terrace; *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 25 March 1892, p. 8.

¹² I have seen no directories between 1898 and 1913, so cannot comment on the occupants of the house in the intervening years.

¹³ Wilson 2016.

¹⁴ The Measham Terrace houses were relatively recently built when acquired. At the other end of the scale is a sixteenth-century house in West Horsley, Surrey, converted in the late nineteenth century

Although caution is necessary as such a high proportion of the people who came to live in the Mill Road area had a railway worker as the head of the household, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions as to when the railway company acquired the terrace by examining the occupations of its inhabitants. In 1884 (fig. 12) we find the four houses of the original Measham Terrace occupied by, at no. 1, a railway district inspector; at no. 2, two women working as a laundress and a dress and mantle maker; at no. 3, a bricklayer; and at no. 4, Mr and Mrs Yarrow noted above, architect and grocer respectively. At the houses adjacent to Argyle Street are Thomas Linsey, the platelayer, at what would become no. 7, while at no. 8 George Storey was a painter, plumber and decorator and Joseph Starte a general draper. So, only one of these households is headed by a railway worker. Three years later, in 1887 (fig. 13), nos 1-3 are lived in by a dressmaker, a plumber and a waiter respectively; no. 4 is empty; and Linsey is still at no. 7, while at no. 8 Storey has been joined by Henry Futter, a tobacconist. Interestingly, however, nos 5 and 6, are both occupied by railwaymen.

Whilst I have not been able to see every directory and given that some of the entries are unclear (for example, a clerk might or might not have been a railway employee), I have discovered no one who can be identified with certainty as being employed outside the railways ever having lived in no. 1 or no. 2. This might be taken to suggest that they, the last to be built in the terrace, were acquired by the Great Eastern Railway during or shortly after construction. The next to be bought by the company would seem to be nos 1-4, for, although non-railway workers are in a majority up to 1887, from 1891 (the next directory that I have seen) onward all the occupants are either certainly or very possibly employed on the railway. Nos 7 and 8 seem to have taken longer to fall into railway hands, for, although Walter Mansfield, described as a 'permanent way carpenter', is at no. 7 from at least 1891 to 1898, Edward Baker, a blacksmith, is at no. 8 for the same period, being joined by Edward Baker junior, presumably his son, a 'journeyman baker', from around 1895. Taking this all in all, it would seem that the railway company realised its need for more accommodation for its workers around 1887, buying two houses in Measham Terrace around 1887 (nos 5 and 6), four more in the late 1880s or early 1890s (nos 1-4), and the last two perhaps around the turn of the century (nos 7 and 8). I have found no evidence of occupation by non-railway employees in any of the houses in the twentieth century.

As an employee of the nationalised British Railways (British Rail from 1965), my father qualified for a railway house and Mill Road was not our first. Whenever he received a promotion, it tended to be in a different location within the part of the country previously covered by the LNER, that is, in the Eastern or the North Eastern Region. As there was always a fixed starting date, his practice was first of all to find lodgings for himself, so that he could take up the job, and at the same time to search for somewhere for us to live as a family. I was too young to remember it, but the house we lived in from 1954, the year in which I was born, until 1957 was at 101 Handsworth Road, Sheffield, and was, to judge from the photographs, a semi-detached interwar house. This my parents were in the process of buying, but the next

into two railway houses; <https://www.horsleyheritage.info/railway-cottages>, accessed 28 May 2026. According to Simon Bradley, *The railways: nation, network and people* (London, 2015), p. 400, the railways owned 58,000 staff houses at their peak.

three houses in which we lived were owned by the railway: 4 Railway Bank, Biggleswade (1957-60), 19 Park Street, Hull (1960-61), and 142 Mill Road, Cambridge (1961-65). During the periods in which my father was in temporary lodgings, he and my mother would exchange letters on a more or less daily basis. These letters serve to indicate that other possibilities – buying or renting privately – were always under consideration, although the prospect of having to move again after a few years was a factor in making renting an employer-owned house an attractive option. The letters also give a good idea of the wide range of houses owned by the railways in terms of size, amenities and condition and help elucidate the mechanism through which they were allocated. A brief consideration of the Biggleswade and Hull houses helps put the Mill Road house into context.

A photograph taken in July 1959 (fig. 17) shows David and me playing in the zinc bath in the garden, with a covered clothes horse serving as a tent in the background. As the house had no bathroom, the zinc bath was a necessity – and would later come in handy in Mill Road for the same reason. The garden was at the front of the house. The wooden fence that can be seen in the photograph divided it from the communal path that ran along the front of the terrace. Behind this can be seen a taller fence, beyond which was a cutting with the railway at the bottom; a railside telegraph post is visible along with houses the other side of the tracks.

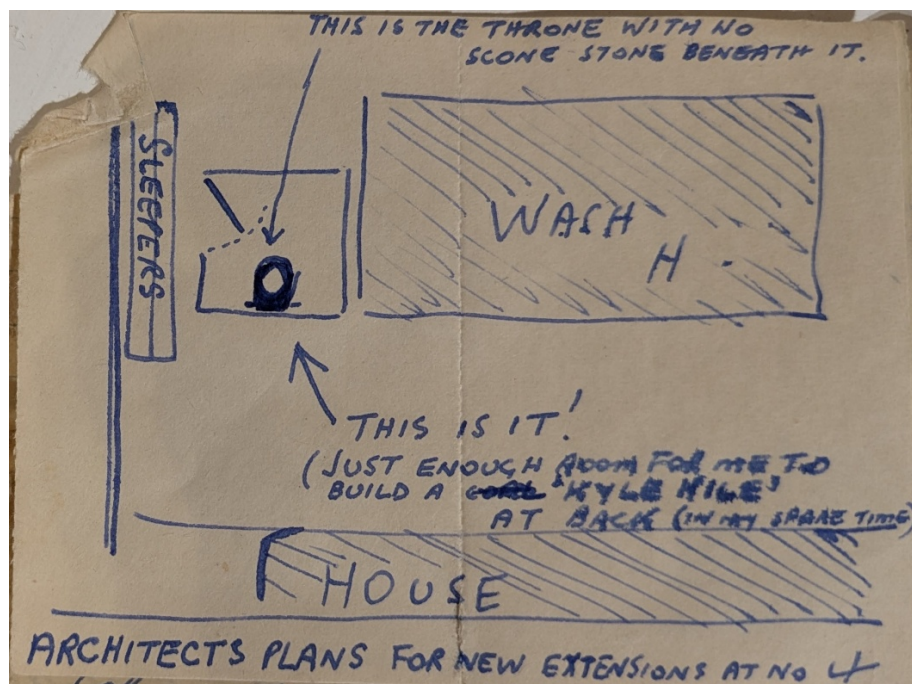
It is clear from the letters exchanged by my parents that the Biggleswade house had been allocated to us by the beginning of 1957, for on 7 January my father wrote to my mother back in Sheffield: 'Today I had a chat with the previous occupier of the cottage and he has told me a lot of its faults. That's a thing you wouldn't get from the previous occupier if you were buying the house. I have noted the details and we can discuss at the weekend.' The house evidently needed a good deal of work before my father deemed it suitable for occupation. Some of this work would be put



*17. David (left) and me in the front garden of 4 Railway Bank, Biggleswade, July 1959.
(Author)*

in hand by the railway, as he explained in a letter of 17 January: 'I had [a letter] from the District Estate Surveyor. ... He says "... I should be pleased if you could give me some indication of the repairs you have in mind ... If it is possible to let me know, by return, the extent of the repairs, I will then arrange accordingly, and, if possible, my Assistant will visit."' This is followed ten days later, on 27 January, by 'Have written to the Surveyor about the glass, and moving the gas piping from kitchen and stairs, and the rotten woodwork in some of the windows ...' and, on 2 February with: '... when we know the [Sheffield house] sale is OK I can ask the Surveyor to press the business forward all speed this end.'

Other work, however, had to be done by my father himself. So, on 8 February he wrote, 'I went to the house last night and finished stripping the ceiling in the front room so that room is completed. As the kitchen is to be plastered all over I shall not bother getting any more off that and will press on with the bedrooms next week', and the following day: '... on Tuesday I commenced to thoroughly rescape & sandpaper landing doors & frames & then downstairs. The lot took me three evenings. ... I think I pulled out or hammered in about another 50 nails that either I had missed before or came to light through paint being removed. ... Today (Sat) since I got home I have started the first coat of white priming paint. ... It is now 9.15pm. How much painting shall I do tonight I wonder.' In the same letter he included a sketch illustrating the most important change that he had required: the construction in the back yard of an outdoor lavatory (fig. 18), as until this point the lavatories were shared and (as I understand it) grouped at the end of the terrace. The humorous notes accompanying his 'architect's plans for new extensions' show it next to a wash house with railway sleepers serving as a path.



18. My father's sketch of the location of the new lavatory, Biggleswade, 9 February 1957. (Author)



19. David (right) and me in front of 19 Park Street, Hull, May 1961. (Author)

The house in Hull into which we moved three years later was a great contrast in almost every respect. Like the Mill Road house, it faced on to the side of a road bridge crossing over railway tracks, but here there remained not only a sizeable front garden but also the original roadway that had previously led to a level crossing, which now formed a cul de sac (fig. 19). The house had greater architectural pretensions than either Biggleswade or Mill Road and was much larger than both. As well as a bathroom, there were lavatories on two floors, three good-sized bedrooms, plus two attic rooms 'good enough for 4th & 5th bedrooms' as my father described them, but which, I think, we may never have used. Behind the bay window seen in fig. 19 was a large playroom solely for the use of David and me.

The letters that my father wrote to my mother in early 1960 make it clear that in this instance little, if any, work needed to be done on the house, although I do remember that in the brief time we lived there he did complete a certain amount of decorating. Again, the letters give some indication of the allocation process, with my father writing on 22 February: 'Today I was talking to our chief – Mr Clarke – and he was saying we hadn't heard about the NE railway houses yet but he said there may be some vacant houses as there has been some redundancy in Hull & district recently. ... We assume the rly at York are weighing up the pros & cons of whether they can let NE region houses to E region staff.' Being in different regions, the District Estate Surveyor for Biggleswade was based in Peterborough whereas his counterpart for

Hull was in York. Ultimately though, this seems not to have created a problem, for the following day my father wrote: 'Have just had a letter passed to me from Estate & Rating Surveyor York saying there is a railway house available at 19 Park Street ... Am going to have a look at it in daylight today.' He updated my mother the same evening: 'One thing about it is – there will be no shortage of storage space or [of] a playroom for the boys where they can leave their toys & shut the door & forget them. It seems generally so much better condition than the B'wade house was when we moved in. The only trouble is you may think it a little too large for you to cope with.' At the same time, a flat in Bridlington had become a possibility. This would seemingly have been a private rental, and my father continued: 'If FS says on Wed a.m. we can have the flat & it is a satisfactory one I shall phone the railway at York – "How do I stand – shall I get the railway house or am I one of a long list of applicants."'

As he did get the railway house, the possibility of living by the seaside was not to be realised, but David and I made full use of the large playroom for the eighteen months we lived in Hull. We did not yet have the model theatre, but we hardly needed it, as there was plenty of room for us to take the parts ourselves in life-size productions. I still have a letter dated 27 March 1961, in which my great-aunt Edith (always known as Auntie Edie and a great favourite with us) asked me: 'Shall you & David do the play (William, the Conqueror) for me when I get to your home? I hope so.' Six months later my mother wrote to my father, now lodging in Cambridge, on a similar theme: 'David's nose is still rather dripping but he seems better in himself. He and Philip were buried with full military honours in Westminster last night after the Battle of Trafalgar! Very noisy but apparently most enjoyable.' I no longer remember either of these entertainments, but it is certain that David will have taken the lead – distant precursors that perhaps foreshadow his future career in television drama and film.

3. THE MOVE

After Hull, which my mother described in a letter to my father as ‘a rambling old place’, 142 Mill Road in Cambridge, our third railway house, was something of a come-down, though memories of Biggleswade will have tempered any adverse reactions. The postcard sent to me by my mother in August 1961 (see fig. 1) shows that by this point the house was already a distinct possibility. The letters exchanged between my parents continue the story. My father arrived in Cambridge late on the evening of Sunday 17 September and booked into the Station Hotel (now long demolished) for the night. He began work the next day and, having had his lunch at ‘a Municipal Pavilion café’, wrote to my mother from a bench on Parker’s Piece, informing her that at the office that morning he had been given a list of lodgings and had fixed himself up at 108 Vinery Road, where Mrs Rayment would provide him with bed and breakfast and an evening meal for £4 a week. In a later letter he gives full details of the household, which, besides Mrs Rayment, consisted of her engine driver husband, a son aged twenty working at the University Press, and a teenage daughter working in the railway engineers office. Although the house had a bathroom, the only lavatory was downstairs and outside. ‘Getting in training for 142?’, was his comment.

In his letter written from Parker’s Piece he added: ‘Mentioned the railway house to my boss this am but didn’t find out anything – will try again later.’ On his second day at work he received more information, but none of it very helpful: ‘The staff man who deals with them says re the house at Great Chesterford “applications closed some time ago”. Applications for 142 are going in today & mine has been recommended. He says he has just heard that 122 – the better house – has been allocated but doesn’t know who to.’¹⁵ Although he had missed out on two houses and as yet heard nothing concrete about no. 142, he was sure that a railway house was the best option: ‘I will of course ring you if there’s any news about a house. Think we shall have to go all out for a railway one, otherwise renting is impossible. Even if we considered buying we should have to be careful. The cheaper ones are leasehold & in many cases have only about 30 years to go when the landowners will have them down to build modern flats to bring them yet more money.’ The railway offered its employees some help in finding a home. In a letter of Wednesday 20th, he wrote that he had been told by ‘the Traffic Accountant ... that if there was any way in which I thought they could help me regarding housing they would be pleased to do EXCEPT financial help of course said he with a smile. He meant time off to look at a house or anything of that nature.’

My mother’s reaction to the possibility of living in a place such as Great Chesterford had been one of resignation: ‘if it is not in Cambridge itself perhaps it wouldn’t be such a good proposition, however we must take what comes and sort ourselves out afterwards!’ My father responded with a comparison with Mill Road: ‘like you I am sorry the house at Great Chesterford had gone, think it would probably

¹⁵ 122 Mill Road, formerly 1 Inverness Terrace, was adjacent to the Railway Cottages the other side of the bridge. According to the directories, Walter Paige, an LNER clerk, had lived there from before the Second World War, but from at least 1948 until the early 1960s it was occupied by Mrs E. Paige, presumably his widow. She was followed by Barrie Fletcher, who must have been the anonymous new occupant referred to in my father’s letter.

be better to have a house in the country (if poss) than against the railway wall at C. Have seen the man who deals with the houses & he has promised to keep me advised.' This he clearly did, for on 26 September my father wrote again to say that a railway house, 10 Needingworth Road, St Ives, had become vacant. He jotted down his thoughts: 'Small town I think ... on river ... Would you fancy living there – 14 miles from C but good train service so far as work is concerned. ... Am going over to S.I. to see house tomorrow. ... Rent 17/6 excluding rates. ... 3 Bedrooms 2 Living Rooms & Scullery. WC. Electricity. Gas point for cooking. What do you think? Shall I apply for it. Applies have to be on by Oct 5 so there's time to consider it. In some ways (holiday travel &c) it would be better to live in Cambridge.' After going over to see the house the next day, he sent a favourable report: '... as railway houses go it's a very nice one. No h&c of course & there are one or two things we should want done. You wouldn't recognise it as a rly house – nice clean red brick about 6 in a row – a path next to the yard & then a nice bit of garden. ... It would be nice to live in C near my work but of the two houses this is in a much cleaner area ... than 142 Mill Rd.'

He had been back to the Mill Road house the day before and so was in a good position to make the comparison. His summary of no. 142 unconsciously echoes the faint praise bestowed on it by my mother in her postcard to me six weeks earlier. 'The house doesn't look too bad', he wrote, 'Front room dark but other rooms at back much lighter.' Within a few days it had been offered to us and my father formally accepted it on 2 October. The certainty of the house in Cambridge as opposed to the possibility of a house in St Ives was perhaps the deciding factor.

On 3 October he went to see *The taming of the shrew* at the theatre (the Arts Theatre?), but this was the last opportunity he had for leisure activities of this sort. As with Biggleswade, a fair amount of work needed to be done to make the house ready. Some of this could be put in hand by the Estate Surveyor, but much of it he had to do himself. The extent of the work can be gauged by such extracts from the letters as: 'Under the scullery lino is some tarred felt which seems to be glued to the floor. If we take the old lino up shall not know what to do with the mess underneath so think I will ask Surveyor to have it all up & put us a damp proof concrete floor like he did at Bwade.' My mother responded: 'I had to laugh when I read what you have written about the scullery floor. I thought the Surveyor would think you were slipping when he had our letter asking for only 3 minor repairs and alterations; if, when you see him you ask him to renew the kitchen floor he will think you are back in form! Seriously though, do you think it necessary to have the floor done? Couldn't you ask for the floor to be scraped by the contractors and if in fairly good order we could put our grey lino on? I'm only thinking that I want us all to be together again and it would delay that happy day if we have to wait for it to be concreted – I leave it to you to do as you think best.'

The first letter that my mother addressed to 142 Mill Road is dated and postmarked Monday 9 October, although, as the house appeared empty because my father was still lodging at Vinery Road, the postman delivered it to the neighbours at no. 140. It is evident from this letter that he had brought some plants for the garden down with him on his return from his weekend in Hull. His letter written the same evening reported on what he had achieved that day 'with the help of a little time off': 'Have put in a formal application for the removal on Tues Oct 24. (Didn't mention about wagon for firewood as I am not sure where it will go this end but will follow it up with a letter about that.) Electricity – Power will be connected tomorrow so I can

start work tomorrow night. Gas Meter will be changed some time this week. ... Plants. Went to 142 at dinner time and put them in. Trod them in well so they should survive. Have bought two light bulbs & have put them in middle room & scullery ready for when power is put in. ...' He had also found out about a school and had seen the previous tenant, Ralph Curry, who had confirmed that the tarred felt in the scullery had been there when he'd arrived and also pointed out that there was some damp in the kitchen wall opposite the window.

The following day he was able to report that he had made enquiries as to the cost of renting a telephone and arranged for the coal and firewood to be delivered from Hull on the day of the removal. Evidently this was to be transported by rail and the heavy lifting would be done by others. As my father explained, 'Don't think we shall have to load it ourselves as there is no siding this end where we can unload. The nearest lines to our house are the goods running lines', to which my mother replied: 'What a shame we shan't have to load the firewood! I quite enjoyed tripping in and out of that truck at Biggleswade!'

In his letter of 11 October he again reported on progress: 'At 142 last night I: Completely demolished sink cupboard. It left a lot of dirt &c behind which wants sweeping up. Scrubbed out the kitchen pantry shelves & floor. Scrubbed the kitchen window frames & round the sink. Got up the lino, some damp musty paper under it & the tarred felt. It was proper damp & rotten in places and now it's up I feel sure it's a good thing. To complete the job I went to the only hardware shop I could find locally but the cheapest broom they had was 5/11 plus 1/- for stail [broomstick] = 6/11d. So I decided to leave that sweeping up & go on with other scrubbing & measuring & bring a broom back with me at the weekend.' The next day he informed my mother that he had left the key with the neighbours at no. 140 in case anyone called about connecting the electricity and gas and that the waiting time for a telephone was about one month – but the question remained as to whether the rental for the line was affordable. He summed up the state of the scullery, writing that the 'floor is now clean of all lino, felt &c & is part red tiles (some a bit cracked) & part concrete'. He had not done any work on it the previous evening, as 'the son of this house (108 [Vinery Road]) said would I like to go a walk round with him to see some of the new parts of C & we went out & walked out to Cherry Hinton & back by another route'.

His letter of Friday 13 October carried some disappointing news regarding what house improvements the railway would do, which he had received from the man in charge of estate management: 'Mr Regan called to see me personally this am. He said recently they had been told to economise but when he wrote me about the power points asking me what I would like he thought such a job for a new tenant was quite reasonable. BUT SINCE THEN he says he has had definite orders from BTC [British Transport Commission] HQ that he is too carry out NO FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS WHATEVER to property but only essential maintenance. I talked it over with him at some length & he said he would give the Elec Board the order to check all the lights & wiring to bring them up to a "safety" standard, but he cannot have any additional points installed. So I thought in view of that – we would write the Electricity Board Cambridge at the weekend asking if at the time they are doing that check they could put in the points at our expense. I know it is a bit of a blow after expecting only a slight increase on the rent. But I think we shall need the place properly provided with power points at whatever cost. ... I suppose if it costs us a £10 or so & we are there 2 years it will only be equivalent to 2/- a week average.'



*20. David (left) and me in the back garden of 142 Mill Road, late 1961 or early 1962.
(Author)*

This must have been discussed with my mother back in Hull over the weekend. His letter of the following Monday reveals that among the things he had brought back to Mill Road with him were a box of plants, a bundle of curtain rods, a broom head and various other tools: 'Am looking forward to making a little more progress with the cleaning &c tonight & shall be taking my electrical adviser down to the house to look round. ... Put the plants in at dinner time – all quite a little way up as the rly will probably tip the timber on the garden nearest the house.' An early photograph of the back garden (fig. 20) shows a substantial pile of wood in the back garden next to the shed, but whether it was delivered to that spot or had to be moved after it had been 'tipped' nearer to the house it's impossible to know. The backs of the houses in Argyle Street can be seen behind.

The update of the following day shows that more progress had been made: 'Gas men have installed quarterly meter in place of old one – it's smaller. Coalmen have delivered 5 cwt of coal. Neighbours at 140 have lent me some steps to put up the c rods.' He added that he was about to write to the electricity company for a quotation for the new power points. On the same day, Tuesday 17 October, my mother expressed her relief that the removal was now imminent: 'I can't believe that next week ... you will be coming in to dinner and tea and it will be the same as it always is. I suppose 5 weeks isn't so bad really to be apart but it has seemed longer to me than it did at Biggleswade, I suppose it's because I've no particular friends here to talk to to break the monotony.'

Her anxiety was increased by a serious outbreak of polio in Hull. My great-aunt Beatrice (my grandmother and Auntie Edie's sister and another favourite aunt) had telephoned from West Bromwich to make sure that we were all okay. The next day my mother wrote to my father: 'I feel as if we are in a "beleaguered (how on earth do you spell it?) city". ... I've been and had my Oral Polio vaccine this morning at Hammonds. I was there about 9 o'clock and decided to have it but I had to queue just under an hour, the queue was longer still when I came out and as I passed at the bottom of King Edward St. I noticed that there was a long queue outside the clinic in Waltham St. The City was practically deserted and the shops very quiet. I think it has really scared people, I know I feel rather nervous myself. I have signed the forms for the boys, hope they have it at school before they leave but if they don't think I shall take them along to the Childrens' hospital ...' I remember none of the scare but I do remember enjoying the inoculation, coming as it did on a sugar lump.¹⁶

At the same time my mother was making the final arrangements for the removal itself: 'Pickford's manager came just after 4/30 – good job he didn't interrupt Mrs. Dale! – he said they would ask for two containers, he didn't say what type, but I told him we had some extra things and it was a tight squeeze with the largest container last time. I asked him what time they would likely to be here and he said that his men would be ready at 8/30 and it was up to the railway to bring the containers as early as possible. He asked if you would have a word with the railway about this. I said that we had 6 tea chests last time and it wasn't enough, so he said he would bring plenty of them.' The move itself took place a week later on Tuesday 24 October. It appears that for the few preceding days and the day itself David and I were being looked after by our grandparents in Wolverhampton, arriving in Mill Road the day after.

It will be clear from this account that the differences between the railway houses in which we lived between 1957 and 1965 were substantial and it is hardly surprising that the Hull house is the only one of the three not to have been demolished. However, it should not be concluded that living in these houses involved any particular hardship – once, that is, various alterations had been made and my father had engaged in a lot of hard work. An outdoor lavatory and the absence of a bathroom may be considered inconvenient nowadays, but for many people at the time this was the norm. According to Office of National Statistics figures for 1961, 9% of homes in Biggleswade were without a lavatory either indoor or attached to the building and 21% were without a fixed bath. The figures for Cambridge are better, but are still 2% and 16% respectively.¹⁷ We were by no means exceptional, for, although bathrooms and indoor lavatories had begun to be typical after the First World War, in the 1950s and 1960s a substantial proportion of the housing stock predated that conflict and was without either. Nor is it correct to regard the inhabitants of houses without bathrooms and indoor lavatories as a fixed group. So many houses did not have these amenities that it was not uncommon for people to move from a house that had them to a house in which they were lacking as circumstances demanded.

¹⁶ For a summary of the outbreak, the immunisation programme that saw 300,000 people vaccinated in a few days, and the pioneering use of sugar lumps, see <https://www.hullmedicalsociety.co.uk/latest-news/a-polio-revolution-takes-place>, accessed 14 June 2026. Contemporary filmed reports on the sugar lump vaccine are available on YouTube.

¹⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/censusunearthedexplore50yearsofchangefrom1961/2021-08-09>, accessed 27 May 2026.

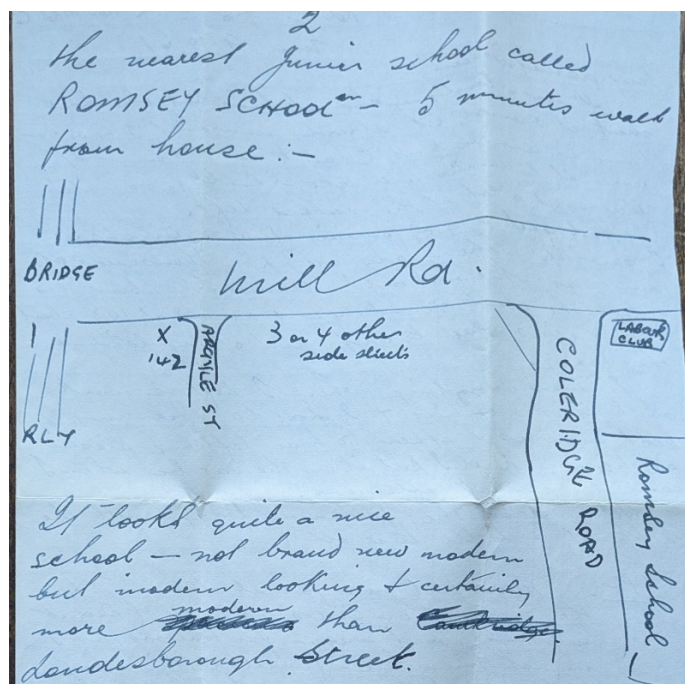
They were regarded as desirable but conditions were such that they could hardly be thought of as essential.

A further point, self-evident but often forgotten, is that it is a human characteristic always to compare our present situation with what came before rather than with what might come after, which is by its nature unknowable. It is this thought process that renders meaningless the reactions of participants in historical reenactment reality television programmes such as *The 1940s house* of 2001. Unlike the previous occupants of the Cambridge house, we had electric power points throughout; at Biggleswade we had our own lavatory even though it was outside. Things were easier for us than for those who had lived in those houses before us. Inasmuch as we thought about these things, this was the key point. The separation of public from private space, which was such a preoccupation of nineteenth-century house planning and can be seen at play in the main change that we required at Biggleswade, is part of a broader continuum that continues today and is evident in the current trend towards *en suite* bathrooms. It is impossible to predict in 2026 how the idea of having to share a bathroom and lavatory with a house guest will be viewed by the end of the present century, but it already seems that this is something that many of us regard as an unwelcome necessity, which we can escape only by making structural changes to the house in which we live or by moving elsewhere. Changing notions concerning the public/private divide, like changing technologies, have always contributed to making the past a foreign country.

4. THE SCHOOL

When we arrived in Mill Road in October 1961, David was at the start of his third year in junior school and I had just begun my first. Thomas Stratton School was in Londesborough Street, Hull, not far from our house in Park Street, and catered for both infants and juniors. I have no recollection of my few weeks in the junior school there. That some of the pupils could present challenges is suggested by a report that my mother sent my father: 'David told me last night that two of the boys ... had had a fight in the play-ground and they'd both had to be taken to the Children's Hospital! I think it's a good thing we're getting out.' A few days before we left, she visited the headmaster, writing again: 'I went to see Mr. Francis yesterday lunch time and also saw Mr. Whitcomb and Mr. Hodgson, all three said they were very sorry to see our boys go and Mr. Francis said – if all the boys in the school were like your two, we should have a very easy time, they are a delight to teach.'

By this time, my father, still lodging in Vinery Road, had discovered which school in Cambridge we would be attending, explaining to my mother on 9 October that he had 'called at Ed[ucation] offices at Guildhall & the boys will go to the nearest Junior school called ROMSEY SCHOOL – 5 minutes walk from house', adding: 'It looks quite a nice school – not brand new modern but modern looking & certainly more modern than Londesborough Street'. He was correct on all points. It was definitely not brand new, but it had been built twenty years later than Thomas Stratton School, which dated from 1880 (it would be demolished in 2000). Included in the letter was a sketch map showing the relative positions of the house and the school (fig. 21). My mother was relieved in that, as with the Hull school, we would not have to be accompanied to and from the school: 'From your map, I can see that David and Philip



21. My father's sketch of the relative positions of 142 Mill Road and Romsey School, 9 October 1961. (Author)

will be able to go and return on their own as there aren't any main roads to cross, so that is one load off my mind. I'll go and see the Head Teacher when we are settled in, either the Thursday or Friday and they can start the following Monday, so only losing one week at school.'

I remember that meeting at Romsey School, which must have taken place on Thursday 26 or Friday 27 October 1961. Mr Granfield (not Cranfield as his name is sometimes wrongly given) has recently been described as 'fearsome looking',¹⁸ and it is true that he had a large birthmark covering one cheek and cropped silver hair, giving him a somewhat militaristic appearance. This could easily have been intimidating, especially to an impressionable seven-year-old like me, but at that initial meeting he immediately came over as gentle, smiling and kind, and nothing occurred in the following years to alter that first impression. A photograph taken in the 1962 Easter holidays shows David and me wearing our Romsey School ties with their alternating dark and light blue stripes (fig. 22). Absent from the photograph are our school blazers, which, as I remember them, bore a white shield with a blue border and a blue stepped stripe placed diagonally across it.



22. David (left) and me wearing Romsey School uniforms in the back yard of 142 Mill Road, Easter 1962. (Author)

¹⁸ https://grevilleroad.uk/?page_id=206, accessed 10 June 2026.



23. Romsey School, about 1905. (CC. G.ROM.KO 12370)

Like its headmaster, the school itself had a welcoming appearance, which I remember being a reassuring contrast to the rather grim Hull school.¹⁹ A photograph taken around the time of its opening in 1905 shows it from what would become Coleridge Road (fig. 23). Built in a soft red brick with white stone dressings, it was a long low building primarily one storey in height, with Dutch gables and a variety of windows adding to the visual interest. The girls' entrance is visible in the photograph, with, above it, the school's single tower bearing a stone tablet on which was carved the city's coat of arms. Evidently, the council was proud of its new school. In a photograph taken during its construction, this tablet is being hoisted into place (fig. 24). Another photograph, taken at about the same time, shows a group of workmen at the front of the school and, behind them, some school children (fig. 25). The roof is yet to be completed and the windows glazed. Trees can be seen both in front of the school and behind. A report on the new school that appeared in the *Cambridge Daily News* in August 1905 noted that, 'a number of beautiful trees which occupied the site have been allowed to remain'.²⁰ According to this report, the intention was to place seats around their trunks and also to alleviate the bareness of the playground with flower beds. I remember that there were a few large trees in a strip of rough ground at the bottom of the playground where it adjoined Malta Road. Perhaps these were the trees visible in the background of figs 23 and 25? However, when I was there, there were certainly no seats around them, nor any flower beds.

The original plans for the school, drawn up by Colchester architects Goodey & Cressall in September 1904 and approved by Cambridge city council on 20 October

¹⁹ Romsey School is included in Peter Cunningham and Melanie Keen's MRHS talk on the history of education in the Romsey area; Cunningham and Keen 2022.

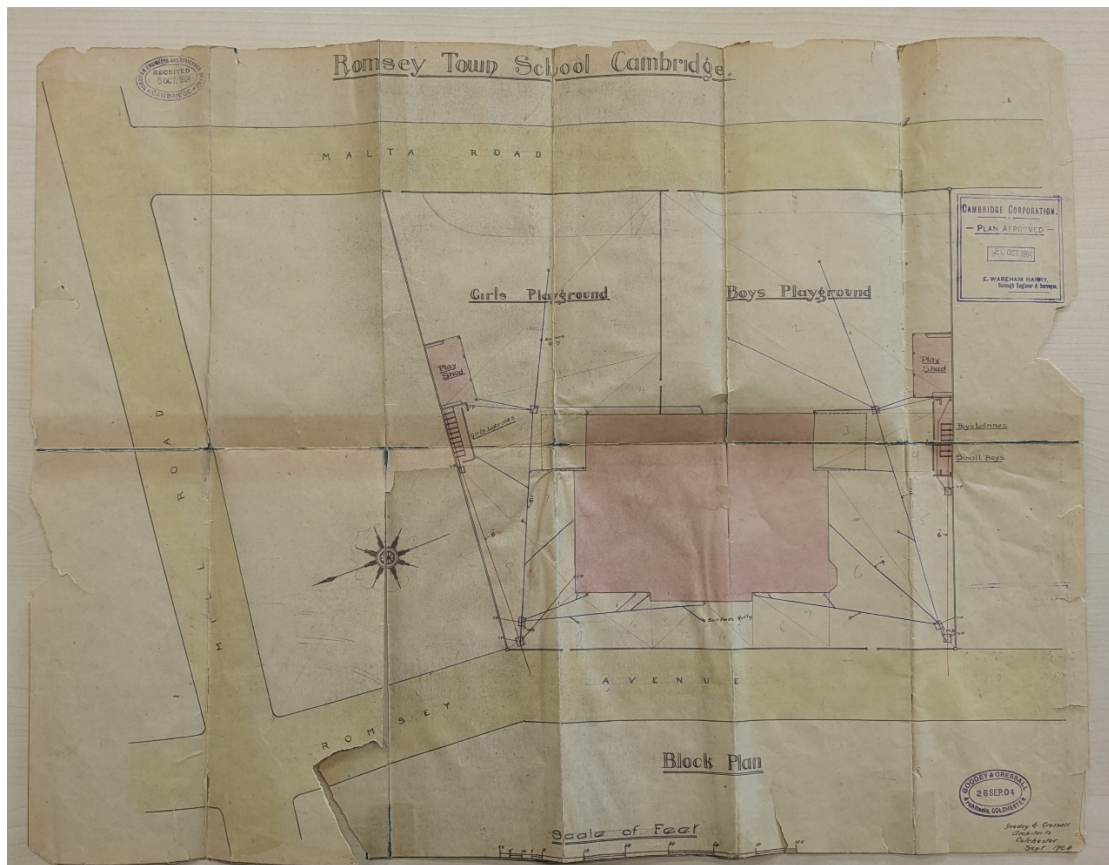
²⁰ *Cambridge Daily News*, 31 August 1905, p. 3.



24. Romsey School under construction, 1905. (CA. C/ES20S/3/2/16)



25. Romsey School under construction, 1905. (CA. C/ES20S/3/2/16)

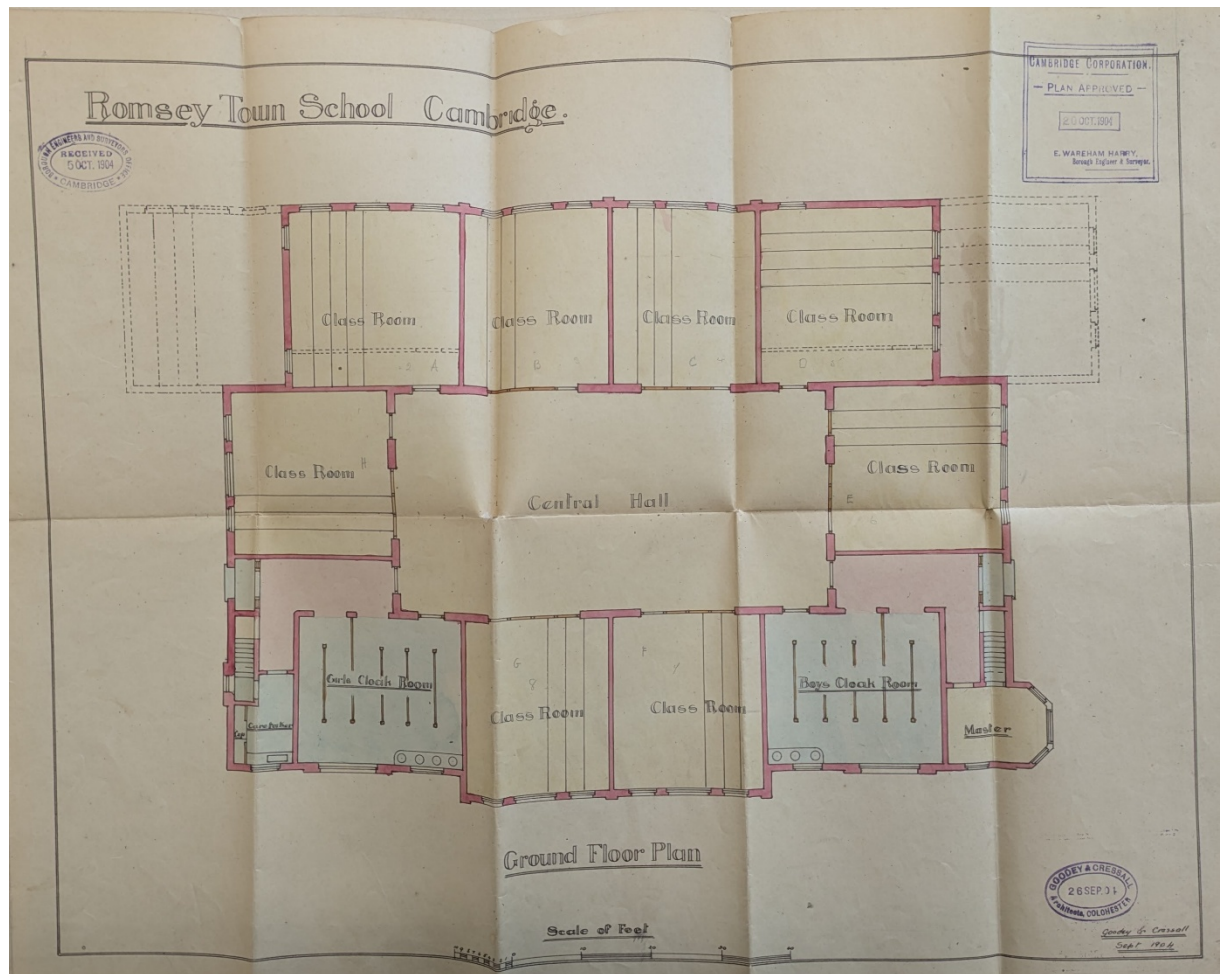


26. Architect's plan of the Romsey School grounds, 1904. (CA. CB/2/SE/3/9/2274)

the same year, are preserved in the Cambridgeshire Archives. A plan showing the layout of the site, with Mill Road at the left and Romsey Avenue, the future Coleridge Road, at the bottom (fig. 26), shows the site very much as I remember it. At each end of the playground was a large play shed open wholly at the front and partially at the sides and with fixed benches at the sides; next to each shed were the lavatories. The only difference between the plan and the arrangement that existed when I was there was that the former includes a wall dividing a boys' playground from one for girls. In the 1905 *Cambridge Daily News* article this was described as 'a wall to separate the boys from the girls during play hours', whilst another article that appeared the week after the school opened described an 'interesting ceremony ... witnessed by a numerous gathering of the inhabitants of the district' that took place on 13 September 1905, at which the mayor of Cambridge 'visited the school for the purpose of laying a stone. His Worship placed in position one of the cap stones of the wall which divides the two playgrounds.'²¹ This wall had gone by the early 1950s, when it is recorded as having been replaced by a white line.²² In turn, this line was no longer there when I was at the school or, if it was, had faded both physically and figuratively and was ignored. In the 1960s, there were separate boys' and girls' school entrances – girls to the left and boys to the right as on the plan – and, of course,

²¹ *Cambridge Daily News*, 13 September 1905, p. 3.

²² https://grevilleroad.uk/?page_id=206, accessed 10 June 2026.



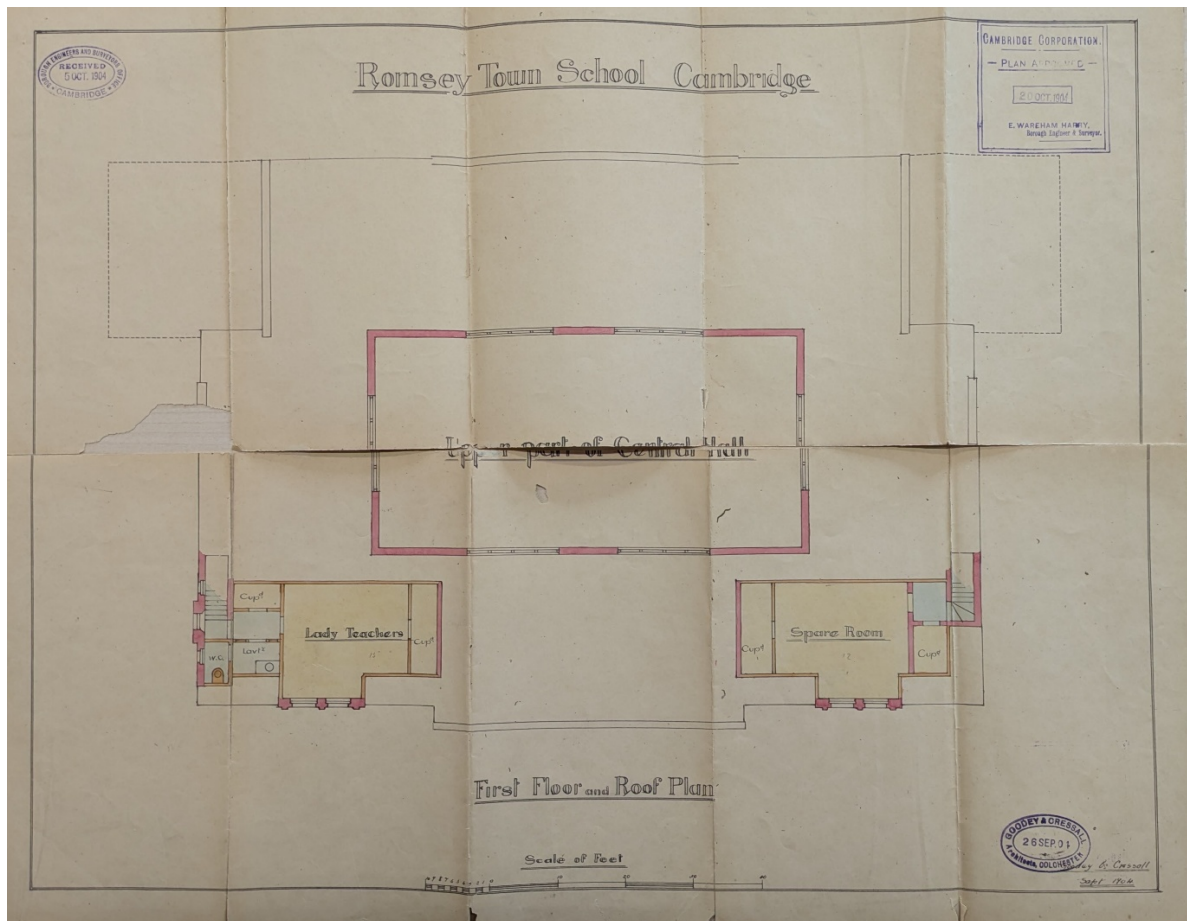
27. Architect's plan of the ground floor of Romsey School, 1904.
(CA. CB/2/SE/3/9/2274)

separate lavatories. Perhaps the play sheds were also regarded as separate domains, but boys and girls all joined together in the playground as they did in the classrooms.

In the school itself (fig. 27), the headmaster's study was located to the left of the boys' entrance; this was where I had that first encounter with Mr Granfield. The two entrances led into the girls' and boys' cloakrooms, which then opened into a large central hall. This hall was used for morning assemblies,²³ physical education and dance classes, and Friday afternoon entertainments. Christmas plays were also put on there and I remember playing a shepherd in a dramatic version of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. At the time I was surprised that one of the very few lines I was given – 'It's all right for you, you've got your pension' – drew a laugh, but, looking back, I suppose that in an exchange between two nine-year-olds it did perhaps have a moderately humorous side.

Arranged around the hall were the eight class rooms, which, when I was there, were used for the four years (seven- to eleven-year-olds), which were divided into two streams (A and B). Photographs of the classrooms taken in the early years of

²³ A 1950s photograph of morning assembly in the hall is at https://grevilleroad.uk/?page_id=206, accessed 10 June 2026. It was little changed in the 1960s.



28. Architect's plan of the upper floor of Romsey School, 1904.
(CA. CB/2/SE/3/9/2274)

the school make them look quite forbidding in a way that does not accord with my memories. They also suggest that in those days the segregation that existed in the playground was also maintained in the classes.²⁴ Although, as was customary for schools built at the time, the external windows were placed too high for the children to see much more than the sky outside so as not be distracted from their lessons, they were large and let in a good amount of light. Most of the classrooms also had windows into the hall. These were not there to enable the headmaster to check what was going on in the various classes, as, if Mr Granfield had been peering in at us, a classroom of children would have been peering out at him and not attending to their lessons; they were there to let additional light into the hall, which was otherwise lit only by clerestory windows.

Two staircases led up from the entrance lobbies to the only two rooms on the upper floor; the pair of windows of each of these rooms can be seen in fig. 23. On the architects' plan (fig. 28), the room on the girls' side is described as being for 'Lady Teachers'. By the time that I was there, this must surely have also been used as a staff room by male teachers such as Mr Rawlinson, my fourth-year class teacher

²⁴ These photographs are in CC (G.ROM.K1 7598 and G.ROM.K0). They can be seen in Cunningham and Keen 2022.



29. Architect's plan of the west and east elevations of Romsey School, 1904.
(CA. CB/2/SE/3/9/2274)



30. Architect's plan of the south and north elevations of Romsey School, 1904.
(CA. CB/2/SE/3/9/2274)

(nicknamed Rolo or Rawlplug, as I informed my grandparents in a letter of October 1964); there would have had to be somewhere for any men to retreat to. I cannot recall ever having ventured up to that room, but I did once go up to the equivalent room on the boys' side and remember it as a slightly unnerving experience. On the architects' plan it is labelled as a 'Spare Room', but by the 1960s it was being used for a ninth class called RA, which was for pupils not deemed bright enough to be placed in either the A or the B stream.²⁵ There they stayed for the four years under a teacher called Mrs Rayner. I cannot believe that this was a good system, but I remember that several years later one of the boys from RA turned up in my year at the County School, so clearly it was possible to overcome the disadvantage. For all I know, Mrs Rayner may have been an inspirational teacher.

The architects' elevations show the school largely as built. The two upper rooms appear on the long side facing west towards Coleridge Road, whilst the eastern façade facing the playground side hugs the ground more closely (fig. 29). The west elevation is also notable for its varied fenestration: rectangular, arched, and Diocletian windows for the two cloakrooms. The south (or boys') side shows the bay window of the headmaster's study to the left and the north (or girls') side has its tower (fig. 30). Interestingly, this appears without the coat of arms, suggesting that it was relatively late in the day that the city realised that it would be a good idea to proclaim its ownership of the school in this way. Rising above everything and visible from all sides is the cupola placed centrally over the hall, echoing the similar structure that caps the tower. A notable feature of each of the elevations is the use of asymmetry, a distinguishing characteristic of the so-called Queen Anne style of architecture, which enjoyed great popularity at the time and was frequently used for schools. As an example, the left-hand side of the eastern elevation is quite blank, in marked contrast to its counterpart to the right. Clearly, this was because it was more desirable for the classroom behind to be provided with windows around the corner on the southern side of the building, which would allow it to benefit from the longer-lasting light. Taken all in all, the arrangement of the different architectural elements on each of the four sides reflects the practicalities of the various rooms behind, but it was also the case that the careful balance of symmetrical and asymmetrical forms lent the building a pleasingly picturesque quality.

For the Friday afternoon activities mentioned above, the whole school would gather in the central hall. Every other week there would be a quiz for selected pupils from each class, which alternated between tests of general knowledge and spelling. The contestants would go up on to the stage to answer their questions, which were generally geared to the subjects covered by the respective classes over the preceding weeks. For the spelling quizzes, the words would be projected on to a screen, where they could be seen by the rest of the school but not by the contestants. These were not always easy. I remember the name Pheidippides being included one week (the class in question must have been learning about the Battle of Marathon). However, I was quite happy to have my spelling tested, whereas I never wanted to be selected for general knowledge, which seemed to me scarily open-ended.

²⁵ Taken together, this use of one of the first-floor rooms as a spare room or classroom and the presence of the headmaster's study on the ground floor indicate that no hierarchical segregation by floor of teachers and pupils was intended, as suggested in Cunningham and Keen 2022. Interestingly, the report on the new school in the *Cambridge Daily News*, 31 August 1905, p. 3, notes that the 'spare room' would 'probably be used as a class-room for boys'.

MILL ROAD HISTORY SOCIETY
Below the Bridge

FILM STRIPS (CONT'D)

Item No.	ITEM (To be entered alphabetically)	Stock 1st Sept. 1958	Requisitions Written off	Author's or Refere nce	Stock 1st Sept. 1961	Requisitions Written off	Author's or Refere nce	Stock 1st Sept. 1964	Requisitions Written off	Author's or Refere nce	Stock 1st Sept. 1967	Requisitions Written off	Author's or Refere nce	Stock 1st Sept. 1970	Requisitions Written off	Author's or Refere nce
32	ANTARCTIC	/		/				/						/		
33	CHALKLANDS	/		/				/						/		
34	COAL - MINING AND USES	/		/				/						/		
35	COFFEE	/		/				/						/		
36	COTTON GROWING	/		/				/						/		
37	HIGHLAND JOURNEY	/		/				/						/		
38	INDIA - VILLAGE LIFE	/		/				/						/		
39	IRON AND STEEL	/	29 5 61	/				/						/		
40	KENT-FRUIT AND HOP FARM	/		/				/						/		
	SHROPSHIRE SHEEP REARING FARM	/		/				/						/		
41	LIFE AMONG ARABS	/		/				/						/		
42	LIFE AMONG ESKIMOS	/		/				/						/		
43	OIL	/		/				/						/		
44	POTTERY	/		/				/						/		
45	THE POTTERIES	/	28 5 61	/				/						/		
46	RICE	/	23 5 61	/				/						/		
47	RUBBER	/	23 5 61	/				/						/		
48	SEAWAY TO INDIA	/		/				/						/		
49	SUGAR	/		/				/						/		
50	SOMERSET DAIRY FARM / MIDLAND BEEF	/		/				/						/		
51	TEA	/		/				/						/		
52	TIMBER	/		/				/						/		
53	WHEAT	/		/				/						/		
54	WOOL	/	23 5 61	/				/						/		
55	CAVE MEN & HUNTERS	/		/				/						/		
56	CHALLENGE TO SPAIN (EX. 1st.)	/		/				/						/		
57	CRUSADES	/		/				/						/		
58	EGYPT - ANCIENT LIFE IN	/		/				/						/		
59	JOAN OF ARC	/		/				/						/		
60	MAGELLAN	/		/				/						/		
61	OLIVER CROMWELL	/		/				/						/		

Checked by

31. Romsey School inventory, 1958-70, open to show some of the film titles.
(CA. KCES/20S/1/3/2)

Every fortnight, that is on the weeks when there was no quiz, we were treated to educational films, which I remember as being rather dull. One that lingers particularly in my mind had as its subject the British steel industry. Somewhat surprisingly, the Cambridgeshire Archives now hold the inventory that the school kept for the years 1958-70, and this includes the titles of all those films. There appear to have been eighty-six by the end of the period, and, according to the inventory, they were cared for by Mr Rawlinson in his capacity of school librarian. Listed at no. 39, and seemingly acquired on 29 May 1961, is *Iron and Steel*, which in all probability is the film that I remember (fig. 31). Above it in the list is a film on village life in India. The topics immediately below are a fruit and hop farm in Kent and a sheep farm in Shropshire.

When I first came across this inventory, I was hoping that I might find references to writing implements among what is gathered together as 'apparatus'. One of the things that I am sure had not changed from 1905 was the desks. The early photographs mentioned above appear to show the desks that I remember, with two children sitting at each. The writing part lifted up on hinges to reveal a shelf for books below, but, as this moveable part was formed from one block of wood, both children had to remove their papers from the desk if either wanted to reach the shelf. As was common in all schools, the desks had holes into which inkwells could be fitted; in this

MILL ROAD HISTORY SOCIETY
Below the Bridge

APPARATUS																			
Item No.	ITEM (To be entered alphabetically)	Stock at 1st Sept. 1959	Requisitions Written off 1961	Author's Reference	Stock at 1st Sept. 1962	Requisitions Written off 1963	Author's Reference	Stock at 1st Sept. 1964	Requisitions Written off 1965	Author's Reference	Stock at 1st Sept. 1966	Requisitions Written off 1967	Author's Reference	Stock at 1st Sept. 1968	Requisitions Written off 1969	Author's Reference	Stock at 1st Sept. 1970	Requisitions Written off 1971	Author's Reference
1	BLACKBOARDS	13	3	3	13	2		11			11	4	1		12		12		
2	BLACKBOARD COMPASSES	3	4		3			3			3	3		3			3		
3	BLACKBOARD RULERS	6	1		1			4			4	1		5	8	5	8		
4	BLACKBOARD T SQUARES	1	1		1			1			1	1		1			1		
5	BOOKBINDING PRESS	1	118		1			1			1			1			1		
6	SCHOLARS COMPASSES	10	36		36	13		123			123		4	124	36	160			
7	DRAWING BOARDS (STANDARD)	31																	
8	SCHOLARS' BLACKBOARDS	4																	
9	EASELS (TEACHERS)	16	10		10			9			9	9		9			9		
10	EASEL PEGS	21	28		30	3		27	4	33	23		23	23	3	20			
11	ELECTRIC IRONS	2	2	1	2			2			2	2		2			2		
12	GLOBES	1			1			1			1	1		1	1	1	1		
13	INK CANS	1	1		1			1			1	1		1	1	1	1		
14	INK TRAYS	3	2		2			2			2	2		2	2	2	2		
15	INK BOWLS	2	246		241			236	40		2	2		10	3	13			
16	MAPS - WALL	1	15		15	1		16			16	6		10	3	13			
17	MAP POLES	1	1		1			1			1	1		1	1	1	1		
18	MEASURES (SETS OF METAL)	2	2		2			2			2	1	1	2		2			
19	NEEDLEWORK BOXES	5			5									5		5			
20	SCHOLARS EASELS (PAINTING)	5			5			7			7	2		6		5			
21	PEN TRAYS	6	1		7			1			1								
22	PENCIL SHARPENING MACHINES	1			3	1		2	1	2	2	2		4	3	7			
23	PLASTICINE BOARDS	1	3		3			125					23	102		102			
24	MODELLING TOOLS	168			100			5			5			5		5			
25	SCALES OR WEIGHTS	9	4		2			2			2	2		4		4			
26	SCISSORS - LARGE PAIRS	2			2			7			7			7		7			
27	SCISSORS - SCHOLARS	22	7		7			184				12		196	24	22.0			
28	SCREENS -																		
29	SET SQUARES	234			236									57		57			
30	THERMOMETERS				57			1			1	2		3	1	4			
31	ZINC BOARDS				3														
32	PHYSICAL LARGE SCALE MAP ENGLAND & WALES	3						1			1								
Checked by		24																	

32. Romsey School inventory, 1958-70, open to show 'apparatus' held 1962-70.
(CA. KCES/20S/1/3/2)

case, there were two per desk, one for each child. I have a vague memory of using a (very scratchy) ink pen when I first arrived at Romsey, but the first biros soon arrived. These were valuable items and Bic monitors were appointed to make sure that they were returned at the end of the day. Sadly, the inventory does not include any mention of pens, but the change in writing practice is recorded through the dramatic change in the number of inkwells held by the school (fig. 32). Listed as no. 15, they numbered 246 in 1962. This reduces slightly over the next two years, presumably through breakages, but then in 1965 they have all but disappeared. (At the County School, the use of fountain pens would be compulsory, but pupils were required to supply their own ink in either inkpots or cartridges, so there also the holes in the desks remained vacant.)

I cannot remember my first- and second-year class teachers, but my reports, which I still have, give their names as Kearney and Hyslop. My third-year teacher, whom I do remember, was Miss Palmer. She lived at Highsett on Hills Road, which was then a relatively new development, and I think it may have been she who took me to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Miss Palmer had a very businesslike demeanour, but I liked her very much, and, to judge from my report for that year (fig. 33), a report signed Phyllis Palmer and countersigned by Mr Granfield, she thought well of me. With the exception of needlework, which, in a sign of the times, I see was available only to the girls, I did fairly well in all subjects, something that was to make the more serious competition at the County School something of a shock when I

ROMSEY COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL, CAMBRIDGE

REPORT on Philip Attwood for the year ending July, 1964.
 Age 10.4 Form 3A Final Position in Class 2nd Cams.

	Cambridgeshire Mark	Tests Position	Term Test	REMARKS
ENGLISH				
Written English	121	3		Philip has produced Excellent English results this year.
Reading Verbal Reasoning I ..	132	1		
Verbal Reasoning II ..	134	1		
Comprehension	31/33	3	20	A very good speller.
Spelling				
ARITHMETIC				
Mechanical	125	1	100/100 1st	Excellent
Problem			38/100 1st	
Mental			17/20 3rd	
PRACTICAL				
Art				Interesting
Handwork & Craft				Thoughtful, purposeful work. Good.
Needlework (Girls)				-
Physical Education & Games ..				Very good
SPECIAL INTERESTS ..				Reading. History.

Punctuality Excellent Attendance Conduct First class

PROGRESS:—

Philip has done consistently well both in Arithmetic and English this Term. His work is well-displayed purposeful and thoughtful.

Therese Palmer Class Teacher.
M. Granfield Headmaster.

Next Term begins Tuesday, 8th September 1964

33. My Romsey School report, 1964. (Author)

arrived. The results I obtained for spelling in my third-year report give an indication of why I was so happy to take part in those particular Friday afternoon quizzes.

Of equal, if not greater, significance than the school report for me at the time were the annual prizes awarded by Cadbury's. This was because those who did well in the company's national essay competition were given a good-sized tin of chocolates, as well as a certificate (fig. 34). As I remember it, every year the pupils in participating schools such as Romsey were tasked with writing an essay on the story of the cocoa bean, explaining how chocolate began in a faraway plantation and ended up in the local confectioner. The essays would be based on literature distributed to each pupil



34. Cadbury's national essay competition for schools certificate, 1964. (Author)

by Cadbury's. Those who did well (and I think it very likely that you did not have to do that well) received a prize. The chocolate disappeared very promptly, the tin was retained longer until no longer deemed of use, but I still have my three certificates for the years 1962-64, each with an identical rendition of contented workers harvesting the pods. One can think of a number of reasons why a competition organised along these lines would be unlikely to take place today.

Generally speaking, I enjoyed my time at Romsey. That is not to say that I was anything but delighted when, on 15 October 1964, the school was closed for a day to allow for voting in the general election (Harold Wilson's first win). Sometimes the children formed gangs as children do, but these were generally harmless. A gang in Seymour Street was rumoured to be particularly vicious, but I never experienced them directly and had only the vaguest idea as to where Seymour Street was; I don't think its members can have attended the school and, indeed, the gang may not even have existed but rather been invented in the playground to provide some excitingly scary stories. My memories of Romsey are almost wholly positive. It was a congenial environment and I think that the glasses through which I look back at it are not overly rose-tinted. The teachers whom I remember were sympathetic, the pupils good-natured on the whole, and the building played an important role in creating a pleasant and relatively child-friendly atmosphere. Back in 1905 the local newspaper report on the new school had been wholly complimentary, calling it 'a very fine addition to the educational machinery of the Borough' and continuing:

‘Architecturally the school is distinctly the best of those over which the Borough Education Committee has control. The claims of utility have been amply satisfied, and at the same time aesthetic considerations have not, as is conspicuously the case with some of the older schools of the town, been absolutely ignored. The building, in fact, has, both externally and internally, an exceedingly pleasing appearance. ... The gables and turret pleasantly vary the outline ...’²⁶ In 1907 the school inspector’s report described the building as ‘cheerful and commodious’,²⁷ and that is how I remember it.

It is sad then that Romsey School had to close in 2002 and be demolished the following year. Although it was an attractive building, I can see that it did not always meet modern standards. The playground was wholly of asphalt, with the only grass, as I remember it, being unavailable at break times as it was the other side of Coleridge Road, where the school canteen was situated and where we had our school dinners (and also sat the 11 plus exam). The children’s lavatories were external and across the playground, and, to judge from the architects’ plans, the staff were served little better, with only one lavatory between them, this being at the top of the stairs on the girls’ side and therefore a long way from the headmaster’s study. Not long after it was built, the approved layout for schools changed to an arrangement whereby all the rooms led off an outdoor corridor running around a central grassy area, as at the nearby Sedley School, which opened for infants in 1932.²⁸ It is perhaps surprising that Romsey lasted as long as it did and unfortunate in that, being principally a one-storey building, it did not lend itself to conversion to domestic dwellings, the fate of so many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century schools.

²⁶ *Cambridge Daily News*, 31 August 1905, p. 3.

²⁷ Cunningham and Keen 2022.

²⁸ Glasswell 2002.

5. THE AREA

All of my Romsey school friends were in the same year as me (David had his own friends) and most of them lived relatively close by: Roger in Cockburn Street, Sandra in Catharine Street, Norbert in Vinery Road, Timothy in Brookfields, Judith in Coleridge Road, Diane in Golding Road, Robert in Sterne Close. Many of them came from Cambridge and I was envious of the way in which they could see their grandparents on a daily basis, although at the same time I was aware of the cachet that my frequent travels (free on account of my father's work) gave me – even though Wolverhampton was not necessarily everyone's choice as a holiday destination. One exception to this somewhat narrow world was Norbert, who had arrived from Latvia. Sometimes after school I would go to his house at the Mill Road end of Vinery Road, as it had the attraction of a swing in the back garden. I think that I was completely unaware that this was the street in which my father had lodged when he first came to Cambridge. At Judith's house, which was very close to the school, I particularly remember an enjoyable dressing up party. I also recall a party at Diane's home, which was a prefab in Golding Road long since demolished. My Cambridge was geographically quite restricted, but I should insert here a definite caveat. I would have said that I had never ever been to Coldham's Common, but, according to the diary that I began to keep in a very rudimentary fashion in 1965, that was where I went with Norbert on Sunday 28 March that year, shortly before we left Mill Road. There must have been many other visits to places that I have since forgotten.

Our immediate neighbours at 140 Mill Road were Alice and Alfie Smith. My father had first met them when he was still in lodgings and my mother's letter had been delivered to them rather than to our empty house. He described the Smiths to my mother: 'The lady at 140 seems quite pleasant. Her husband looks a more taciturn type but he seemed all right when he talked.' Alfie was an engine driver and the directories show that they had lived there since 1936. After we had moved in, my mother would have long conversations with Alice over the back yard wall. In spite of this friendship, I intuitively sensed a difference between us and them. Perhaps I was somehow aware of the blue- and white-collar divide and, although I was as fascinated by the then rapidly disappearing steam engines as any child of the time, I did not share the ambition of many to become an engine driver. Or perhaps it was the Smiths' budgerigar – something that I had not previously encountered, but that we looked after at home at least once while they were away on holiday. Alice and Alfie visited us in Melbourn the year after we left Mill Road (fig. 35), but after that we lost touch. On the other side of us, at no. 144, was the Lupson family. Beyond them, at no. 148 lived Mrs Scotcher, an elderly (to me at least) widow, whose husband Arthur had moved in in the mid-1920s; he died around the time we arrived, but the directories show that Mrs Scotcher was still at that address in the 1970s long after we had left.

The first shop that I would pass on my way to school was Cornwell's furniture shop, located on Mill Road just the other side of Argyle Street. A little further along was Adkins, one of a small chain of butchers in the city. This was a shop that my mother used, but the Coop, further down Mill Road and on the other side, was where most of the food shopping was done. If we wanted more variety, there was also the



35. Alfie and Alice Smith, me, David and my father in the back garden at Melbourn, June 1966. (Author)

Fine Fare store, which opened on the corner of Covent Garden while we were living in Mill Road.²⁹ Situated the other side of the bridge, this involved a longer walk, but it offered possibilities not available at the Coop. Alec Forshaw comments on the absence of exotic foods in the Cambridge shops in those days,³⁰ but this was not restricted to Cambridge. The 1963 edition of Elizabeth David's *A book of Mediterranean food*, which must formerly have been my mother's and I now have, claims that its recipes make use of 'ingredients from all over the Mediterranean now available in England', but, for example, David advises her readers that they should go to one of just three stores in London for tahini. Yogurt also required a careful introduction: 'Throughout the Balkans and the Middle East yoghurt, or yaourt, is served as a sweet, or as a sauce ... ; it is eaten for breakfast or at any meal, and is refreshing and light in a hot climate. Try it with brown sugar and hot stewed fruit.'³¹ We had eaten yogurt on holiday in France. One of the perks of my father's job was free or cheap travel on the continent, so holidays abroad were not expensive. While we were in Mill Road, our main 1963 holiday was in Biarritz at the homely Hotel Les Flots Bleus (we also stayed with Nelly's family in a small town not far from Toulouse) and in 1964 we were at the rather grander (as the name suggests) but still friendly and inviting beachside Grand Hotel Moriaz in the small village of Cavalière on the

²⁹ See <https://capturingcambridge.org/mill-road-area/mill-road/44amillroad/>, accessed 15 June 2026. Directories of the mid-1960s show a delicatessen called the Cambridge Continental Store at 9 The Broadway, so not far from where we lived, but I have no recollection of this unless it was there that we bought the ready-made and packaged individual apple pies that were regarded as a great treat.

³⁰ Forshaw 2009, p. 35.

³¹ Elizabeth David, *A book of Mediterranean food*, rev. ed. reprinted (Harmondsworth, 1963), back cover (quote), pp. 158 (tahini), 174-5 (yogurt). When it came to ideas for meals at home, my mother relied more on Marguerite Patten.

Riviera. The food on offer was for me just one of the many excitements of these holidays. Difficult to imagine today, but even a basic item such as the croissant was not to be had at home. Although yogurt had arrived in Fine Fare, natural was the only flavour and the addition of a fair amount of sugar, as recommended by Elizabeth David, an absolute necessity. But it was not just comestibles that were on the store's shelves. In September 1964, my brother wrote to our grandparents and me in Wolverhampton to say that he had just bought his fourth cactus there. It had cost 3s.6d.

Another destination that involved crossing the bridge was the public library in Headly Street.³² My mother was always an avid reader and throughout her life a great user of public libraries, and so we would visit regularly. It is the first library of which I have a distinct memory and it was there that I discovered Enid Blyton's Famous Five books. At that age I was, of course, unaware of the architectural significance that ten years later would lead the building to be listed, but the late Victorian grandeur of its exterior, marred only by several decades of grime, was impressive and, as I remember it, formed something of a contrast to the light and spacious but somewhat austere and institutional inside. It is a shame that it would have to close in 1996.

Nearby were the public baths in Gwydir Street, which I think had changed little since they opened in the 1920s.³³ When my brother and I grew too big for the zinc bath, which had come in useful in Biggleswade and was now hung in the back yard at Mill Road until required, this was where we were taken for our weekly baths. This was a time way before daily showers were felt necessary for survival. In those days the part of the building to the left of the entrance, subsequently used as a sauna, was occupied by slipper baths for men, whilst the part to the right supplied the same facilities for women. As David and I were young children, we would go with my mother into the women's section, where we were each provided with a soap and towel and an assistant filled our baths. We would each then go into our own bathroom. As the dividing walls did not stretch as far as the ceiling, it was possible to call for more hot water, upon which the assistant would turn the tap located just outside the door until advised that the desired temperature had been reached. I remember it all as a rather enjoyable experience, as it provided a few minutes of grown-up independence with me in total control – a rare thing for a child.

Just a few doors along Mill Road from Gwydir Street was the Kinema, our nearest cinema, which had been converted to show films in 1916 (and would be demolished in 1996).³⁴ I remember being taken as a child to see the classic 1957 film *The Smallest Show on Earth*, in which a young couple inherit a decrepit cinema called the Bijou Kinema, but I do not remember where I saw it. It would be too good to be true to think that it was at the Mill Road Kinema, for there were various similarities between the fictional and the actual Kinema – in the state of the building, that is, rather than the staff. The only film that I can remember with certainty seeing at the Kinema was Cliff Richard's *Summer Holiday* (released in 1963), but the various entries in my 1965 diary reading 'Went to the pictures' suggest that we often went to the cinema, so maybe there were others. For instance, on 20 March 1965 we saw the

³² See <https://capturingcambridge.org/mill-road-area/mill-road/bharat-bhavan/>, accessed 15 June 2016.

³³ See Ewans 2015.

³⁴ See Middleton and Brigham 2015.

Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*, but where is not specified. The Kinema was definitely the poor cousin of the cinemas in the centre of town, such as the 1930s Victoria Cinema on Market Hill, where afternoon tea was served upstairs and the Still and Sugarloaf next door was advertised as 'the city's smartest rendezvous'.

Opposite the Kinema was another building that became very familiar. The one passage in Gwen Raverat's book that resonates with me is the one in which she describes going to church as a 'supreme bore'.³⁵ Although Raverat was writing about King's College Chapel and I am remembering St Barnabas' Church in Mill Road, our responses were very similar. When we first arrived in Cambridge, David and I were sent to the Sunday School attached to the church, but, after we rebelled against that, we were excused so long as we agreed instead to attend the morning service at the church itself. Meanwhile, our parents stayed at home. As this was then their only morning of leisure, for, when we first moved to Mill Road, my father, like many men at the time, worked a five-and-a-half day week that included Saturday mornings, it is perhaps understandable that they wanted the children out of the way. After we left Cambridge in 1965, we were never again subjected to compulsory church-going and perhaps it failed to survive the whole time we were in Mill Road. But here again my memory may be defective. A letter that David wrote to our grandparents and me in October 1964 refers to him having been to church with our parents as though it were a regular occurrence.

On a more worldly level, another nearby place that I must have visited at least once was the Trustee Savings Bank, which, from at least 1953 until the late 1960s, was at 112 Mill Road, just the other side of Devonshire Road. I know about this connection from two entries in my diary written many years later in 1970 when I was sixteen. The first reports that on Friday 28 September I walked from the County School down Rustat Road to close my account. As I was unaware that the branch had recently moved across the railway to 224 Mill Road, just beyond Hope Street (it first appears at this address in the 1970 directory), and as I had only been able to start out when lessons ended at 3.30pm and the bank closed at 4, I was too late and therefore had to repeat the walk the following Monday. On that occasion I was successful in cashing in the account, which had lain dormant for eight years, noting in my diary that my investment, which had stood at £6 9s. 6d. in 1962, had accrued £1 5s. 5d. interest in the intervening period. 'Not bad' was my conclusion as I walked up Mill Road to Drummer Street to get the bus back to Melbourn.

A location beyond Mill Road that was a regular destination in the years that we were living there was the Coleridge Recreation Ground, which we always knew as the Davy Road Rec. The play area was located where it still is, but the facilities – swings, roundabout, climbing frame – were very different. Much of the land between Davy Road and Greville Road had not been built on at that time. Consisting of uneven ground and long grass, it was an ideal place for romantic assignations, but as my schoolfriends and I were only nine or ten these were fairly innocent events, besides which my mother made sure to set an early curfew.

A little further away was the hall where David and I went for weekly Cubs meetings. This was somewhere in the Cherry Hinton Road area and so involved a walk along what seemed to be the interminably long Rustat Road. David may have joined earlier, but by 1963 we were both Cubs. A photograph taken in the back garden at

³⁵ Raverat 1952, ch. 11.



36. David (left) and me wearing Cubs uniforms in the back garden of 142 Mill Road, 1963 or 1964. (Author)

Mill Road showing us in our uniforms must belong to either that year or the next, as David is wearing his County School socks – always a sure indicator (fig. 36). Fletcher's Terrace can again be seen in the background, with a large railway building to the right. By the time we moved away from Cambridge, we were getting too old for the Cubs and neither of us ever wanted to become Scouts, so this was our one involvement with this particular movement.

A place that seemed to me very distant even though it was less than two miles away from where we were living was Cherry Hinton. This was where Mrs Speake lived. Mrs Speake was paid to look after us in the school holidays when our parents were at work, so David and I would take the 131 bus to spend the day at her relatively new house in a quiet cul-de-sac, where a very different atmosphere prevailed from that of Mill Road. Generally we would pass the time playing in the house or going on short walks, but sometimes she would take us into the city centre for a treat, for example, to see *The Great Escape*, another film released in 1963. Less enjoyable were the occasional trips to Sainsbury's, which was then in a different location in Sidney Street from where it is now and where shoppers had to queue at each counter to make their purchases. As I was not fully grown, my abiding memory is of the utter tedium of waiting for what seemed to be inordinate lengths of time with only a view of women's legs and coats, as Mrs Speake went from the dairy counter to the cooked meats counter and so on.³⁶

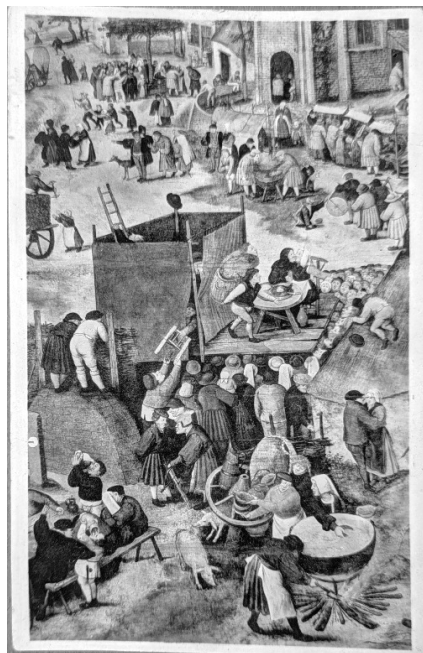
Other faraway destinations involved walking from home in the other direction. If we were beginning a trip to see my grandparents or going on holiday, we would get

³⁶ The Sainsbury's experience is also remembered in Forshaw 2009, p. 49.

to the station along Devonshire Road and Tenison Road; in those days there was no short cut through a car park.³⁷ The same route would take us to my father's office, which was behind the houses on the south side of Station Road. I think that I never saw the office, as we would always wait for him at a large iron gate on Station Road, but in a letter written to my mother when he was first there he described seeing it for the first time: 'Was shown over the new paybill office which is not yet finished being built brand new, all mod cons etc., even one tap in the wash basins for both hot & cold – something new to me.' He moved into this office, which, he noted, overlooked a coal yard, on Monday 2 October 1961. Needless to say, there is now no sign of it as the whole area has been redeveloped.³⁸

If we wanted to go into town, we would continue past Devonshire Road, proceeding along Mill Road to its end, and then walk diagonally across Parker's Piece with its central lamppost, which seemed impossibly tall when I first arrived at the age of seven. Very occasionally we would go to a Chinese restaurant called The Pagoda, which was on either Regent or St Andrew's Street. My memory is that there was nowhere to eat out on Mill Road, and the total absence of eateries is confirmed by the annual directories – another huge contrast to nowadays.

Other outings into town took us to cultural venues. We must have visited the Fitzwilliam Museum at least once, as I remember my parents allowing me to choose a postcard from the museum shop. My choice fell on a detail of Brueghel's *Village festival in honour of St Hubert and St Anthony*, or *A Village Fete* as the postcard calls it (fig. 37). The detailed rendition of so many figures busily engaged in their various



37. Postcard of Brueghel's *A Village Fete*, 1632, from the Fitzwilliam Museum.
(Author)

³⁷ Maps of 1925 and 1927 and an old photograph, all reproduced in Shorland-Ball 2017, at pp. 70, 82 and 88 respectively, show the extensive goods yard and sidings and give a clear illustration of why no short cut was possible. The walk from 142 Mill Road to the station can be followed on both maps.

³⁸ Both the roadway that led south from Station Road to the office and the coal yard that the office was to overlook are shown on the 1925 and 1927 maps reproduced in Shorland-Ball 2017, pp. 70, 81.



*38. Postcard of 'Capt. Scott's 1st Sledge Party to the Bluff',
from the Scott Polar Research Institute. (Author)*

activities must have appealed to my young imagination and to my sense of humour. The Scott Polar Research Institute must have been another destination. I do not remember the visit, but I still have a postcard showing dogs being harnessed to sledges (fig. 38), on the back of which I wrote my name and address – 'Master Philip Attwood 142 Mill Road CAMBRIDGE' – in case it was lost or stolen. It would almost certainly have been David's taste for adventure that suggested this as a place to be visited, just as it took him to France by himself to stay with Nelly's family.

These were not our first visits as a family to museums. I remember visiting Wilberforce House in Hull, and may have gone there more than once, for, shortly before we left, my mother wrote to my father in Cambridge: 'Incidentally, David and Philip say they would like to take me to see Wilberforce House, so thought we would go on Saturday afternoon'. My father replied with directions as to how to get there, adding: 'Go to the Transport Museum as well if you can. A little further down on the same side.'³⁹ Moreover, while we were in Hull, we had a holiday in Rotterdam (taking Auntie Edith, another former railway employee, with us), as at that time my father was seconded to Associated Humber Lines, which operated ships across the North Sea and the Humber for British Railways, making it an inexpensive break. Although the main purpose of this holiday was undoubtedly to gaze at the bulb fields, we took the opportunity to visit the Rijksmuseum to see *The Night Watch*, always a favourite painting with my parents, and to take in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. Whether these visits to museums while we were living in Hull and Cambridge have any particular bearing on my much later choice of museum work as a career I do not know.

³⁹ Now rebuilt as Hull's Streetlife Museum.

6. THE END

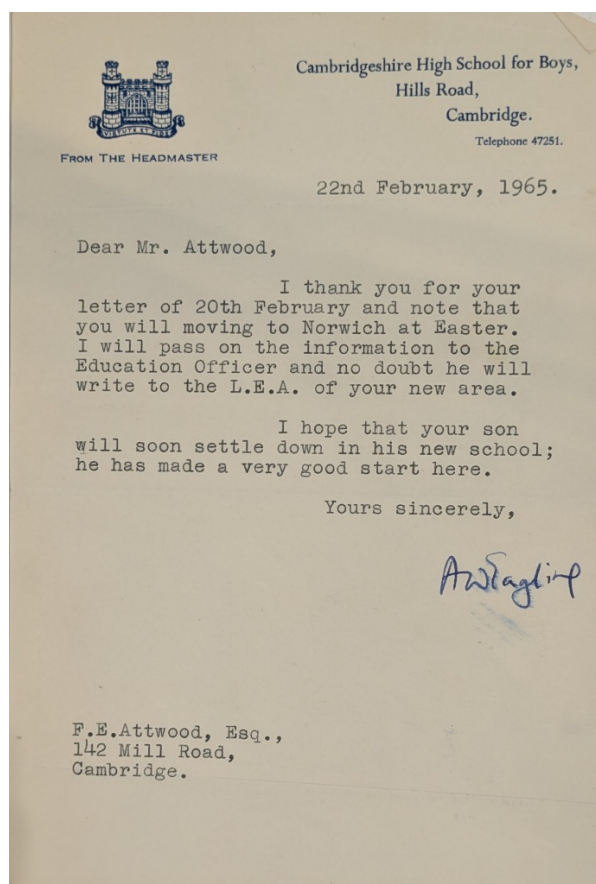
David started at the County School in September 1963. A photograph of the two of us in the back yard at Mill Road shows him proudly showing off his new school uniform (fig. 39). By October 1964 we knew that my father's work would be taking him to Norwich and that we would be moving to the nearby village of Brundall. This was all formalised in the new year and my father wrote to the County School on 20 February to say that David would be leaving. In his reply the headmaster, Arthur William Eagling, expressed the hope that David would 'soon settle down in his new school' (fig. 40).

I left the Mill Road house for the last time on 3 April 1965, the day after the Spring term at Romsey School ended, going first of all to stay with my grandmother in Wolverhampton (my grandfather had died that January) and then with her to Weston-super-Mare for a fortnight's holiday. In the meantime, David went to stay with Nelly's family in France. This left the way clear for our parents to manage the move from 142 Mill Road to Brundall, which took place on 9 April.

My final term of junior school passed quite happily at Blofield School. Blofield was a small village just a mile from Brundall and I was welcomed as something rather exotic, having come to Norfolk from as far away as Cambridge. At his large secondary school in Norwich, David had a very different experience, not settling in at all in the way that Mr Eagling had hoped. Coming from outside the immediate locality, he was regarded with suspicion and found it hard to make friends. The unhappiness that he was experiencing was the one blot on my very enjoyable summer at Blofield, as it made me dread the prospect of having to go to the big school in Norwich the



39. David in his County School uniform (right) and me in the back yard of 142 Mill Road, 1963. (Author)



40. Letter from the headmaster of the County School to my father, 22 February 1965.
(Author)

following September. I wonder now whether my mother was also feeling a certain degree of discontent with her new life, as in Cambridge she had begun work as secretary (it would be personal assistant nowadays) to the head of the Applied Psychology Unit (APU) in Chaucer Road and had enjoyed it, whereas in Brundall she was at home all day. Whether or not this was a contributory factor, it was clear that David was suffering and my father began to look for a transfer within the railways that would allow us to return to Cambridge. As the job that he was successful in landing was based in Stevenage, our parents found a house in Melbourn, which would make for a relatively easy commute for him from Meldreth and Melbourn station (as it was then known) and would also allow both David and me to attend the County School, as the village was just inside Cambridgeshire.

I therefore narrowly avoided the secondary school in Norwich and in September 1965 started at the County.⁴⁰ As the move to Melbourn could not be arranged in time, for the first couple of months David and I stayed with a family in Harlton during the week, returning to Brundall at the weekends. This family consisted of Stella, who had succeeded my mother at the APU and who had become a friend

⁴⁰ For the County School at this time, see Peter Bryan and John Walker, *Cambridgeshire high School for Boys. Hills Road Sixth Form College. The second half century* (Cambridge, 2000), where for no particular reason I make an appearance on p. 53. David can be seen in the part of a 1966 school photograph reproduced in Forshaw 2009, p. 67 (back row, third from left).

during the time my mother was introducing her to the job, her husband Alan and daughter Lesley. Soon after we were all back from Brundall, my mother returned to the APU, this time as head of the general office, and so she and Stella were once again working alongside each other. It was in this way that an enduring friendship came about between our two families.

As with Brundall, the Melbourn house was newly built and was being bought. Perhaps the experience of Mill Road had finally persuaded my parents that there was a better option than renting a Victorian railway house. Or perhaps they were hoping for greater permanency now that both their sons were at secondary school. We remained in Melbourn until David and I left home to further our education, after which our parents moved away from Cambridgeshire, thereby severing our immediate connection with the city.

Some of the other pupils in my year at Romsey School had passed the 11 plus exam, but no one else went to the County School and, with one brief exception, I did not resume contact with any of my old friends. I had been in Norfolk for several months at a pivotal age and had not expected to return, and now I was making new friends at the County and living in Melbourn. There was no particular reason for me to go back to Mill Road, as my centre of gravity had shifted to Hills Road, Brooklands Avenue, Chaucer Road, Drummer Street, the city centre. Mill Road might as well have been many miles away and seemed to belong to another life. In my mind I was a different person and Mill Road was to all intents and purposes irrelevant.

As mentioned above, a rare exception to this occurred when I was sixteen and went back to close my Trustee Savings Bank account. My diary entry for 28 September 1970 reads: 'The houses in Argyle Street by our old house are derelict; the ones the other side of the bridge from ours are demolished.' The derelict houses must have been those between Mill Road and Fletcher's Terrace, the demolished ones those facing ours the other side of the bridge (123-131 Mill Road). The rebuilding and widening of the bridge had been under discussion from the early 1960s and in 1966 British Rail had sold the railway properties, including our house, to Cambridge City Council. Progress was slow, but the outcome was inevitable.

On 2 June 1972, just a few months before I left home for university, I was amused to see a photograph in the *Cambridge Evening News* showing our old house under the sardonic headline 'Beautiful Cambridge' (fig. 41). My old bedroom window was clearly visible. I cut the feature out and kept it. It was one of a series of photographic reports showing what the accompanying text described as 'some of the not so delightful parts of the city'. The upper picture shows Argyle Street looking towards Mill Road, with the entrance to Swann's Terrace to the immediate left and the opening to Fletcher's Terrace further on. Most of the bay windows are bricked up prior to demolition and the houses beyond Fletcher's Terrace, built as Geldart Cottagers and Walter Cottages, are all gone. A comparison between these houses and those the other side of Swann's Terrace, out of shot but still surviving, seems to reveal little difference, making it difficult to understand why they had to go, although, as the demolished houses were built later than those that still exist (see fig. 15), the explanation may lie in factors unseen in the photograph. In the background of the photograph part of the Measham Terrace houses can be seen, whilst the whole row appears in the lower photograph. All that remains of the Argyle Street houses is rubble and the divisions between the gardens have been obliterated, though our old

Beautiful Cambridge

A series in which 'News' photographers turn their cameras on some of the not so delightful parts of the city.

★ ★ ★

This derelict site at Fletcher's Terrace off Argyle Street, Cambridge, is scheduled for city council housing developments—eventually. The housing committee have suggested it might be suitable for old people's accommodation grouped together and looked after by a warden.

But no decision has yet been made on the site's future.

A planning department spokesman explained "The site has its problems for this sort of development with things like the railway nearby."

(Pictures by Dave Parfitt)



41. Extract from the Cambridge Evening News, 2 June 1972. (Author)



42. The Mill Road bridge area, about 1972. (MRHS. Courtesy of John Hullock)

garden fences seem still to be there. An aerial photograph exists that must have been taken at about the same time, for again the Argyle Street houses are gone but the Mill Road gardens are still there, with what appears to be a line of washing hanging at the back of no. 144 (fig. 42).

The *Cambridge Evening News* piece explained that the site was ‘scheduled for city council housing developments – eventually’, and indeed it took some time for new housing to be built. In the meantime the directories show that the old houses were occupied long after this. The various occupants of our house are given as John Marriott in 1967, Patrick McHugh in 1968-73, and Thomas Garrett in 1975 (the last directory that I have seen). Fletcher’s Terrace seems to have been pulled down earlier; in 1974 only two of its five houses were occupied and the following year just two houses are listed, both empty. Another photograph must have been taken in the late 1970s, for the bridge is still standing but the houses and gardens are gone (fig. 43). A path has been made diagonally across the site by people cutting the corner into Argyle Street, giving a new use for the steps that used to lead to our front doors.

The bridge that I knew was finally demolished in 1980.⁴¹ It is understandable that the construction of a wider bridge should have entailed the removal of the row

⁴¹ See Wilson 2018, pp. 76-82 and (for a first-hand account by Barry Hurst) 132-4.



43. Mill Road bridge from Argyle Street, late 1970s. (MRHS. Courtesy of Barry Hurst)

of houses in which I had lived and it is certainly the case that the close proximity of the old bridge to the houses was not ideal. However, extending the destruction further down Argyle Street shows that other motives were at play. As is well-known, this sort of wholesale demolition has continued into recent times, as, for example, with the notorious Pathfinder programme of the 2000s.⁴² The words of the spokesman from Cambridge's planning department, as relayed by the *Cambridge Evening News*, reveal the negativity of the official approach to the area: 'The site has its problems for this sort of development with things like the railway nearby.' He may have had a point in the age of steam, but why this should have been seen as a problem in 1972 is difficult to understand. Nor do I remember being disturbed by the shunting noises of earlier times,⁴³ which must have diminished by the 1960s as goods transport moved away from the railways on to the roads. Moreover, there were certain advantages to having the railway as a neighbour. In the run-up to our move to Biggleswade, my father had written to my mother about the prospect of living in 'an

⁴² Officially known as the Housing Market Renewal Programme. For a 2007 reaction to it, see <https://web.archive.org/web/20090717082126/http://www.blitzandblight.com/terrace-housing>, accessed 19 June 2026.

⁴³ Gwen Raverat recalls that on windy nights she 'could hear, a long way off, the trucks being shunted at the station and the whistling of the engines on the line' and Rob Shorland-Ball, having quoted Raverat, writes that 'in the 1940s & 1950s I remember the same sounds when I was lying in bed, "in the quiet of the night", at my home in Cherry Hinton Road'; Raverat 1952, ch. 2; Shorland-Ball 2017, p. 163.

old cottage right alongside the railway'. Perhaps she would be taking David and me for walks. 'Or perhaps they won't want to go walks. Just want to stop and see the trains all day.' The view of the railway at Mill Road was not as impressive as that at Railway Bank, but its proximity was never felt to be a problem. Railways formed an important part of our lives and it seemed a natural thing that they should be nearby. It is possible to imagine the man from the planning department returning to his car after he had finished making his statement and quickly driving away.

The view shown in fig. 43 makes a poignant contrast with a photograph of the same spot taken around fifteen years earlier (fig. 44). David can be seen taking my portrait against the familiar backdrop of the row of houses. The evening sunlight adds a suitably sentimental end to this account of life in Mill Road sixty years ago.



44. David (right) and me in the back garden of 142 Mill Road, about 1963. (Author)

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