

## Application for Status of Building of Local Interest

### In response to the City Council Planning Application to demolish Burmaside House: Ref 15/2171/FUL

We, the Mill Road History Society (previously the Mill Road History Project) hereby make a formal request that Building of Local Interest status be granted to:

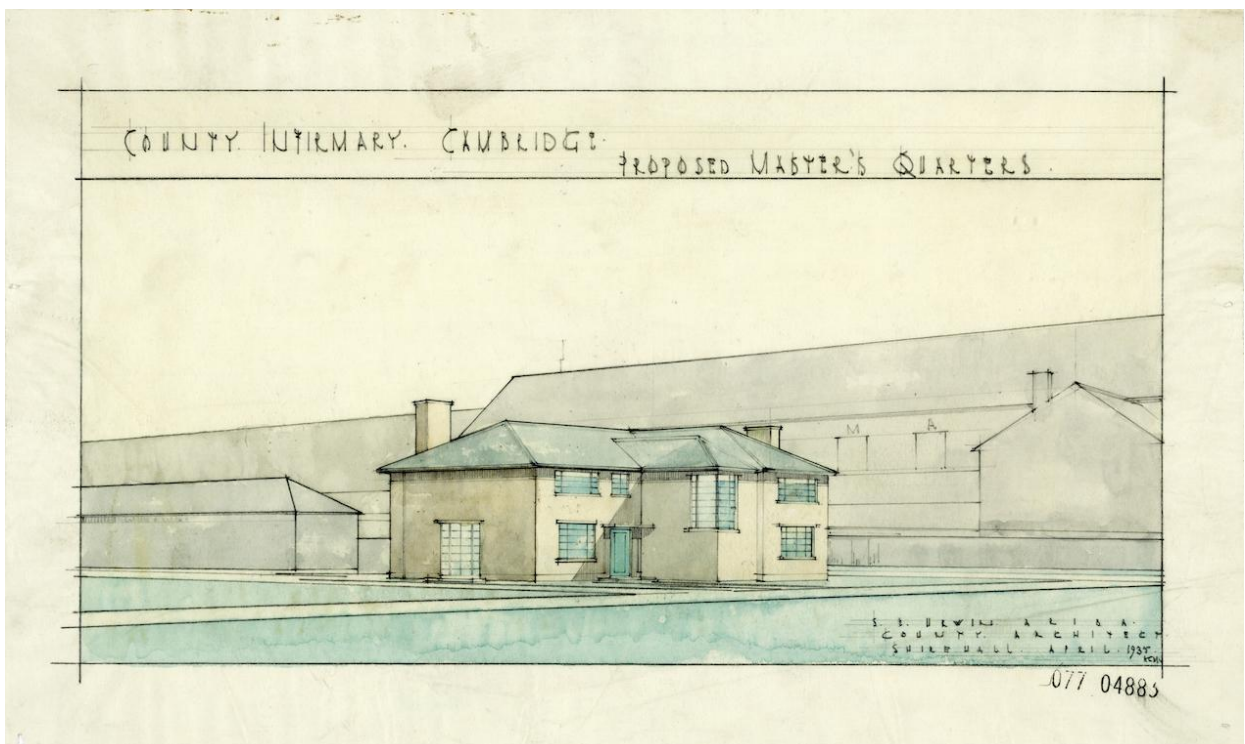
**Burmaside House (within the curtilage of Ditchburn Place)  
81A Mill Road  
CAMBRIDGE CB1 2AW**

Also known as the Master's House and Bemersyde House (see p. 8)

Our case is outlined below using the criteria listed on  
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/content/buildings-local-interest>

#### **Building age and integrity:**

Built in 1935. Externally apparently intact and in good condition, with distinctive chimneys and minimalist external surface features. The original horizontal-paned metal Crittall windows have been replaced by replica PVC windows. If the roof was originally slated with Cumberland greens as per the architect's drawing these have been replaced by the more usual dark coloured Welsh (or other) slate.



**Fig. 1:** S.E. Urwin's design for the Master's House, 1935. Source: Cambridge Archives KCC7 Arch SS2 7.07704885



**Fig 2:** Ditchburn Place from Mill Road, with a view of Burmaside House at the SE corner of the site.



**Fig 3:** Burmaside House, front and side from the SE. Note original tall chimney and minimalist external surface features.



**Fig 4:** *Burmaside House, front. Note minimalist flat roofed porch and front door.*



**Fig 5:** *Burmaside House, front. Note tall 'modernist' corner window, which "echoes" the tall ribbon windows of the Nurses' Home, in miniature.*



**Fig 6:** *Burmaside House, front from SW*



**Fig 7:** *Ditchburn Place with 1838 Workhouse frontage and 1934-5 Nurses' Home (both designated BLI). Burmaside House is out of the photo on the right hand side. Note the 'modernist' style of the Nurses' Home with tall, horizontal-paned windows and minimalist, flush external surface features.*

**Interior:** unseen.

## **Architectural quality**

Medium/high

## **Architectural style**

Modernist; unusual in Mill Road. A sister building to the Nurses' Home on the same site which is listed as a BLI.

## **Architect**

**S E Urwin** (1892–1968), Deputy County Architect and County Architect 1930-39.

Urwin also designed the original buildings of Bottisham and Linton Village Colleges (1937) (both of which Pevsner describes as 'in a Modernist idiom derived from Holland'), Long Road Girls High School (1937–40), and the Registry Office at Shire Hall.

## **Innovation**

Urwin continued the modernity of the Nurses' Home at Ditchburn by providing a domestic house with elements of Art Deco, devoid of unnecessary ornament, distinctive Crittall windows with horizontal panes, minimalist flat roof porch and Cumberland green slate roof. One window spans a corner, in a modernist style.

The brickwork and tall chimneys harmonize with the original buildings, and the transition with the 1838 south frontage of the Workhouse/Maternity hospital is discreetly handled.

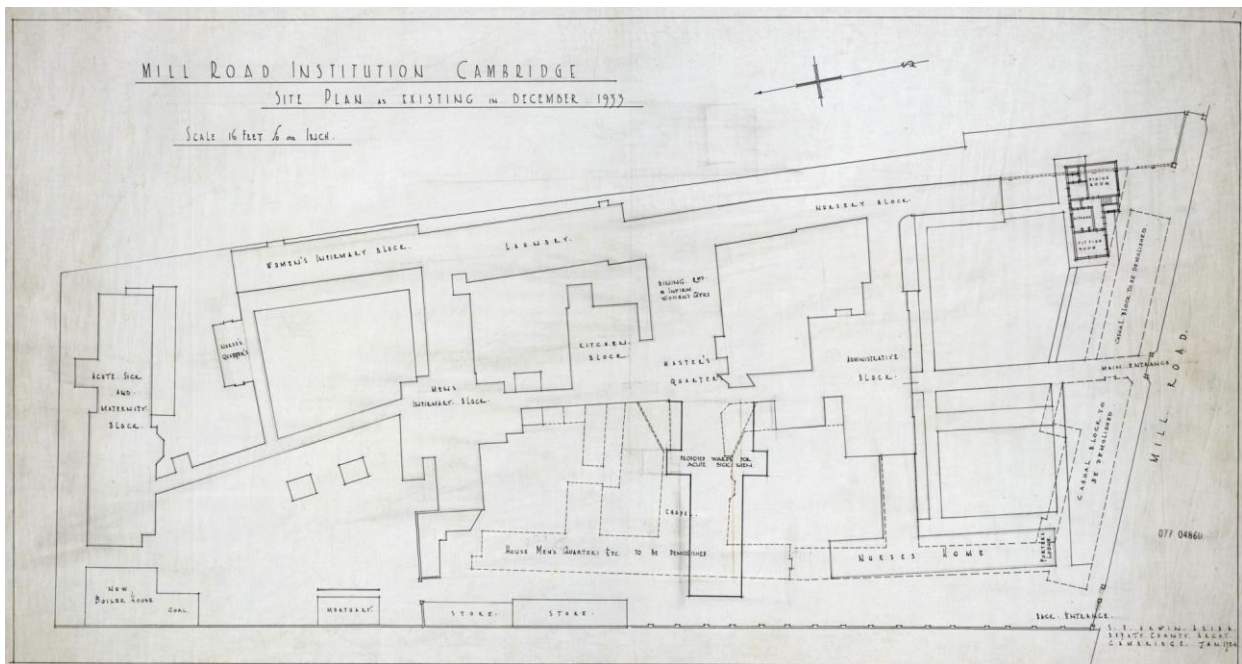
## **Group and Street Scene value**

The building is part of the complex of buildings which make up Ditchburn Place, and marks an important part of its transition from Workhouse to Infirmary and Maternity Hospital.

Burmaside House and the Nurses' Home (west front wing of Ditchburn, listed as a BLI) were jointly part of a major reshaping of the frontage of the old Workhouse site, carried out in 1934–35.

This involved demolishing the existing west wing and the two sets of tramps' cells along the front perimeter of the site, and replacing them with two matching buildings in modernist style at west and east, and re-modelling the entire front area.

Urwin's design unified and harmonized the front of the site facing onto Mill Road, the new buildings sensitively transitioning to the original range.



**Fig 8:** Ground floor plan of the Infirmary (1933) showing the buildings to be demolished at the front of the site, and the location of the Nurses' Home (built 1934-5) and the intended Master's House (built 1935). Source: Cambridge Archives: KCC7 Arch SS2 7.07704860

### Landmark value

Although Burmaside House is currently largely hidden behind fencing/walling, if seen together with the rest of the Ditchburn frontage, the whole would present an elegant vista to and from Mill Road, with the present small park in the foreground providing a focus for the group of buildings and the streetscape.

Burmaside House and the Nurses' Home flank the earlier building, and provide a distinctive, visual, 'modernist' architectural interest fronting onto the street. This effect is weakened by the Nurses' Home on its own.

### Buildings of historic interest

Burmaside House (1935) is of significant historic interest in the context of the social history of Ditchburn Place:

- [1838–1929 Cambridge Union Workhouse]
- 1930–1939 Cambridgeshire County Infirmary
- 1939–1945 Emergency Wartime Hospital

1946–1983 Midwifery Training School and Cambridge Maternity Hospital  
1988–now Ditchburn residential housing

The buildings and the site within which they sit illustrate important aspects of the nation's and the city's social, economic, cultural and health history – well documented in the Cambridgeshire County Archives and Addenbrooke's Hospital Archive. The Workhouse and the Nurses' Home are already listed as Buildings of Local Interest.

Architecturally, whereas the gabled frontage of Ditchburn Workhouse (John Smith 1836-38) represents the transition from Neoclassicism to Early Victorian (according to Pevsner), the Nurses' Home and Burmaside House, both designed by S.E. Urwin in 1934–35, are among the first Cambridge buildings in the modern style.

Burmaside House itself has important associations:

As **The Master's House**: its first occupants in 1935 were Douglas and Doris Ditchburn, the most well known couple associated with the site. The Ditchburns had arrived in 1934 to be Master and Matron of the County Infirmary, when it still had much of the character of the former workhouse. Whilst living in the new house built for the purpose of housing the Master and Matron, they transformed the Workhouse into the County Infirmary, with Doris as Matron and Douglas as secretary. They led it through the difficult emergency war years; then they transformed it again into a midwifery school, and, with the establishment of the National Health Service, into a maternity hospital. The Ditchburns retired in 1956.

As **Bemersyde House** (since distorted to 'Burmaside House'): the next occupant was the new Matron, Molly Lobban. She was a Scot, and she renamed the house after the historic house near Melrose, in Berwickshire, Scotland. She was followed by successive matrons who lived there until 1983.

After this time, the building formed an important part of the newly developed City Council site, providing special care residential accommodation.

**Conservation Area:** the whole complex is in a designated Conservation Area.

### **Ditchburn Place**

The history of Ditchburn Place is presented in more detail in a report by Ian Bent, hard copy archived in the Cambridgeshire Collection (Cambridge Central Library) and also available on the Capturing Cambridge website at [http://www.capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/81a\\_MR-1st-edn\\_2015-10-10.pdf](http://www.capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/81a_MR-1st-edn_2015-10-10.pdf)

The photographs in this document were taken recently by Lucy Walker.

## **This Report**

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Cambridge Mill Road History Society,  
by

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[www.millroadhistory.org.uk](http://www.millroadhistory.org.uk)

[www.capturingcambridge.org](http://www.capturingcambridge.org)

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