

Ditchburn Place, Mill Road, Cambridge

Mill Road History Society application for Grade II Listing, with bibliography and sources. Response to Cambridge City Council Planning Application to demolish the Master's House (Burmaside) Reference 15/2171/FUL (Supporting figures in a separate folder)

Application: Historic England Reference Number: 1434670

Ditchburn Place, Mill Road, was built as the Cambridge Union Workhouse in 1838. Its institutional function changed to be the Cambridgeshire County Infirmary in 1930. It was then requisitioned as the Emergency Wartime Hospital for East Anglia in 1939, and after the war became a Midwifery Training School and the Cambridge Maternity Hospital 1946-83. When the maternity hospital moved to Addenbrooke's in 1983, the whole site was bought by Cambridge City Council, which retained the front buildings and demolished those at the rear to build an innovative and 'flagship' mixed housing development. This has been occupied since 1988.

Mill Road, Cambridge is designated a Conservation Area.

The group of buildings includes:

- 1) the main central block of the 1838 Union Workhouse;
- 2) the brick wall/curtilage of the whole property, including the west side, and a stretch in front of the Master's House, some of which dates to 1838;
- 3) the 1934-35 County Infirmary Nurses' Home on the west wing;
- 4) the 1935 Master's House, aka Burmaside House, at the front of the east wing (together with the Nurses' Home, part of a redesign of the front of the property to develop the Infirmary);
- 5) the modified 1964 east wing, part of the Maternity Hospital;
- 6) the purpose-built 1984-88 City Council housing scheme with its courtyard gardens;
- 7) the front garden which presents a green landscaped frontage to the street, some trees of which are residual from the workhouse period.

The vernacular buildings collectively create a social complex which illustrates and represents important aspects of England's and Cambridge's social, economic, cultural, wartime and medical history – much of which is richly documented in the Cambridgeshire County Archives, the Cambridgeshire Collection and Addenbrooke's Hospital Archive.

Details of the history of the site until 1939, with a useful bibliography, may be found in a report written by Ian Bent, with Allan Brigham, for the Mill Road History Project. This is available online at: http://www.capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/81a_MR-1st-edn_2015-10-10.pdf. We also attach a bibliography with this application.

We think that Ditchburn Place as a whole has Group Value arising from the functional relationships a) among the buildings within its curtilage, b) between the buildings and the town, and c) between the buildings and Mill Road. They represent the long-term history of changing Local Authority housing, health and care provision for the local population. Prior to 1838 the land was rural/agricultural, part of Cambridge's East Field. The provision of a workhouse on what until then was a farm lane between Cambridge and the village of Cherry Hinton, was Cambridge's prompt response to changing legislation concerning provision for the homeless and unemployed (the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834). It also became an integral part of the development of Mill Road, a growing 19th-century urban industrial and housing area outside the medieval university town. The transition to the County Infirmary, Midwifery Teaching Centre, Maternity Hospital and finally, in the 1980s, City Council mixed needs housing development, reflects the Local Authority response to changing health and social needs of the population of Cambridge in the 20th century. This site is as historically and socially important and as rich with community associations as any civic building in the City.

The Workhouse and the Nurses' Home are designated as Buildings of Local Interest (BLIs) and we have applied to the City Council to include the Master's House (currently under threat of demolition) in that designation (application attached).

The innovative and ambitious City Council housing scheme included i) a day centre (run by Social Services), ii) extra care housing (a new idea at the time), iii) sheltered housing, iv) provision for people with disabilities of a younger age, and v) traditional housing for letting from the waiting list (pers. com. D. A. Poole, City Housing Manager at the time, who was proactive in developing new ways of housing older people.). It may well represent one of the last and most ambitious Local Authority housing developments in the period after the 1980 Housing Act introduced The Right to Buy council homes. The project was initiated, developed and managed by the City Council. The City Council's Architect's department design team, Peter Frost, George Davidson and Paul Baines prepared the drawings and supervised the building work. It was planned as a flagship social housing project (pers. com. Jill Tufnell, Chair of the Housing Committee at the time) and remains successful today.

We request that Grade II listing be applied to the exterior of this complex of buildings, so that the site of Ditchburn Place remains intact. The City Council will need to modify the interiors to keep up with modern housing needs.

Architecture

We have added notes about the 19th-century Cambridge architect John Smith, the 1930s County Architect Samuel Ernest Urwin, and Peter Frost who led a team to design the 1980s City housing scheme, below the description of the buildings:

1) The Union Workhouse was designed by Cambridge architect John Smith in 1837.

The core building (fig. 1, 1880 photo of workhouse exterior), with its 1838 datestones, is probably the oldest surviving structure in the area. It is in a Georgian

style, classically symmetrical, and elegantly proportioned (Bent 2015) with a gabled roof. The central doorway is imposing (fig. 2) and the rows of windows have a distinctive brick arch on the ground floor, and a slight arch on the first floor (fig. 3). See John Smith's 1837 plan for the front buildings (fig. 4) and its location on the 1886 OS map marked as the Cambridge Union Workhouse (fig. 5). This map shows buildings (now demolished) on the road frontage. These were the tramps cells (fig. 6, 1897 plan), and both plans show clearly how men and women were separated. The tramps' granite breaking cells were attached to the west curtilage wall (see below).

Bradley in Pevsner (2014) says: 'On the N side of Mill Road, the former WORKHOUSE, latterly a maternity hospital. Built of yellow brick by John Smith in 1836-8, it survives in part within Ditchburn Place, housing of 1989-90. The frontage has the typical pedimental gables which mark the transition from Neoclassicism to Early Victorian. Behind was the archetypal New Poor Law plan of four arms radiating from a central octagon.'

The Mill Road Conservation Area Appraisal of 2011, in which parts of Ditchburn Place are identified as 'Buildings of Local Interest' (BLIs), states:

'This building was opened in 1838 as the Union Workhouse for Cambridge, and is one of the oldest buildings in the Conservation Area. It is built from gault brick with sash windows in a simple Georgian style, with a shallow pitched slate roof above. A gable faces Mill Road with the date 1838 on a plaque. This building became the Maternity Hospital in 1946 and closed in 1983. It was recently converted and extended to become part of the Ditchburn Place Sheltered Housing complex.' (p. 30). The Appraisal notes that the building is 'surprisingly not listed' (p. 7).

2) The brick curtilage:

A long buttressed stretch is clearly visible as the western boundary of the site running back (north) from Mill Road. Here it has traces of the former stone-breaking cells for the tramps (fig. 7). A section of wall also survives outside the Master's House, facing onto Mill Road, with 3 brick piers capped with limestone, one of which is incorporated in the neighbouring wall (fig. 8, 2016 photo).

In 1933 the County Architect Samuel Ernest Urwin planned a remodelled west wing and a new domestic house at the south east corner of the site, as part of the County Infirmary (fig. 9, Urwin's 1933 Infirmary site plan). These buildings were completed in the subsequent two years, the tramps' wards demolished, and the whole frontage re-landscaped (fig. 10, site plan as of 1939).

3) The 2- and 3-storey West Wing and Nurses' Home, 1934-35: architect S.E. Urwin's design for the County Infirmary.

The central front block with the 1838 datestones was kept when the single story west wing was rebuilt into a 2- and 3-story addition (fig. 11, Urwin's 1934 elevation plan; fig. 12, 1987 photo; fig. 13, 2016 photo). The main block is a sympathetic response to the Georgian original, described by architectural historian Jon Harris (pers. com.) as 'neo Georgian with modern accents'. Georgian style wooden sash windows, gabled roof, and the main 3-storey west wing drops to 2 storeys to flank the original workhouse front, suggesting continuity with the building 100 years earlier.

A false cornice on the 3-storey building leads to a modernist style end stair tower at the west end, facing Mill Road (fig. 14, 1978 photograph, Maternity Hospital; fig. 15. 2016 photo) It has a flat roof, tall horizontal-paned Crittal windows (now replaced with same style PVC) in the stair well, and distinctive concrete hoods to windows and doors. There is a 1-storey porch (formerly the porter's office) in the same style. The style of architecture developed here was to be used by Urwin in his village colleges (now listed Grade II).

The bricks are reused Cambridge stock, probably reclaimed from demolished buildings on site.

4) The Master's House, 1935, architect S.E. Urwin, for the County Infirmary. (fig. 16, 1935 pen and wash sketch; figs. 17.18 and 19, 2016 photos)

He designed a new domestic house in the grounds of the County Infirmary, at the south east corner of the site fronting onto Mill Road. The pitched gabled roof, wide white painted soffits and chimneys blend sympathetically with the earlier building, but it has distinctive features: a) horizontal-paned Crittal style (metal now replaced with PVC) windows (they mirror the windows on the end tower of the Nurses' Home), b) tall corner stair window, c) distinctive discrete concrete lintels and porch cover, e) sloping tile window sills, f) distinctive narrow rectangular window beside porch.

The bricks were new from local Cambridge brickworks (all closed by 1940). Stretcher bond, goes with cavity walling. Discrete exterior brick treatment. (Jon Harris pers. com.).

5) The East Wing (fig. 20, 1964 photograph; fig. 21, 2016 photo):

A 3-storey building replaced the original 1-storey wing in 1964 to provide ward accommodation for the Maternity Hospital. It was reworked in 1984-88, given a gabled roof to blend with the other front buildings, and sloping brick window lintels to match the new housing at the rear of the site.

6) 1984-89 Cambridge City Council Housing Scheme: designed by the City Architects team.

These distinctive, charming, courtyard buildings (figs. 22, 23 and 24, 2016 photos) are set behind, and sensitively attached to, the original front workhouse block (figs. 25 and 26, 2016 photos). The architect has used quality cream bricks throughout (from similar clay seams as the old Cambridge bricks, Peter Frost, pers.com.), and created a warm, interesting façade by carefully judged brick patternwork, for example 'herringbone' within a curved boundary over the doorways, sloping brick window lintels and horizontal soldier coursing punctuating the stretcher bond of the walls (fig. 27, 2016 photo). There are varied styles of building including tall 'town houses' and smaller terraces, with bay windows, distinctive lead-roofed dormer windows, and oriel windows sometimes with Juliette balconies.

The whole complex offers a range of accommodation and is neighbourly without appearing overcrowded. It is set around garden courtyards, providing a light and

'green' environment for all the residents. Most houses have direct access to the gardens, and the whole development is well maintained.

7) The front landscaping

The original workhouse had a garden at the front (fig. 1). Front gardens were part of the 1933-35 redesigns, including around the Master's House, and they are still maintained at the front of the property today. They were retained as an important part of the street landscape, and open to the public, in order to encourage the integration of the housing scheme with the local community (fig. 28, 2016 photo). They include some trees which were already present in photographs of the 1930s additions. When viewed from Mill Road, the whole complex – the strong and well-proportioned 1838 gabled frontage flanked by its east and west wings and the Master's House, set around the front gardens – still conveys the aura of a villa set in its garden, residual from the 19th century.

Information about architects John Smith, S. E. Urwin and Peter Frost

John Smith: The Cambridge Union Workhouse.

A 19th-century Cambridge architect involved in designing numerous buildings in the town, county and university, including the Chesterton Union Workhouse in the neighbouring village to Cambridge. Detailed architectural and building plans of the building exist in the Cambridgeshire Archives (KCC7 ARCH SS2 7...) and a handwritten book of working notes and correspondence is held in the Cambridgeshire Collection (L569.2/C43/C52.2).

Samuel Ernest Urwin (1892-1968): the County Infirmary Nurses' Home and Master's House.

Deputy County Architect (1930-33) and then the County Architect for Cambridgeshire (1933-39) when he redesigned the west wing of the County Infirmary (the Nurses' Home 1934-35) and the Master's House (1935). He was educated at Birmingham Technical School and School for Art and went on to become an RIBA Fellow and Member of Council. J. Macgregor, Director of the Cambridge University School of Architecture, described him thus when he proposed him as a fellow of RIBA: 'I had intimate knowledge of his outstanding abilities as one of the leading architects in Cambridgeshire. His work in connection with the Village Colleges and many public buildings well known throughout the County give adequate proof of a sound architectural education and of an imaginative and progressive outlook of very high quality.' (Macgregor 1943, RIBA file).

After his work at the County Infirmary Urwin went on to design two of the first village colleges in the country, for the famous, progressive Cambridgeshire County Education Officer, Henry Morris: Bottisham (plans dated June 1935) and Linton (plans dated Feb 1936). These predate Impington Village College designed by Walter Gropius, and there is some discussion about their mutual influence. 'Today there is a growing feeling he has been underrated, remaining in the shadow of Henry Morris (the Education Officer for Cambridgeshire 1922-54).' (Duchin 1979). In 1938 he designed the Cambridge and County High School for Girls (now Long Road 6th Form

College) described as 'revolutionary' (Millgate 2000:22), and in 1939 the Tuberculosis and School Clinic at Shire Hall (now the County Registry Office).

While Urwin was able to design buildings to merge harmoniously with earlier buildings on site, he also developed a distinct architectural style of his own, using traditional brick with modernist features such as horizontal-paned Crittal windows with simple concrete lintels. He was influenced by the Dutch and German Bauhaus architects in their use of vertical towers and horizontal ranges.

S. E. Urwin's Buildings in Cambridgeshire:

1. County Infirmary, Nurses' Home, Mill Road (1934-35) and Master's House (1935)
2. 22 Sedley Taylor Road (1936; residential house for his family; flat roof and concrete bricks)
3. Bottisham Village College including Warden's House (1935-37) (see *The Architects' Journal*, 6 May 1937)
4. Linton Village College including Warden's House (1936-37, hand-made bricks), (see *The Architects' Journal*, 14 Oct 1937)
5. Fen Ditton Junior and Infants School (1936). Plans for Head Teacher's house not built.
6. Swavesey Junior and Infants School (1937)
7. Cambridgeshire High School for Girls, including Caretaker's House (1938-41, concrete bricks), replaced existing structures. Now Long Road 6th Form College.
8. County Tuberculosis and School Clinic (planned by Nov 1936; built 1939) (see *The Architect and Building News*, 12 May 1939). Now the County Registry Office.

Peter Frost: 1984-89 City Council mixed housing scheme on the site of Ditchburn Place

Peter Frost was born in Cambridge, educated at The Perse School and worked for forty years for Cambridge City Council. He became Group Leader in the Cambridge City Council Architect's Department. He was interested in the character of local streets and aimed to design housing to fit in harmoniously with the street scene. In this context he designed domestic housing which linked the residents with the street. His 1970s Panton Street mixed housing scheme won a RIBA commendation. He went on to design council housing projects including Castle Hill, James Street, Ross Street, and Thoday Street (sheltered housing), Cambridge. Ditchburn Place was planned as an integral project, with mixed housing around neighbourly garden courtyards, all with easy access to Mill Road.

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Application and text prepared by Ian Bent and Lucy Walker, with input on the 1984-89 Cambridge City Council Housing Scheme from Peter Frost, David Poole and Jill Tufnell. Many thanks to Jon Harris for his architectural and building history expertise.

Mill Road History Society

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