



# The Working Communities of Mill Road and East Cambridge

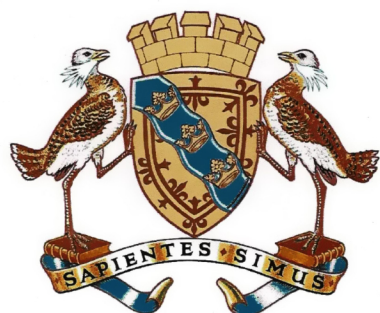
12<sup>th</sup> April 2025

St John's Centre, St John the Evangelist,  
Hills Road,  
Cambridge, CB2 8RN

9.30am to 4.30pm

A Joint Conference

between



Cambridgeshire Association  
for Local History





# The Working Communities of Mill Road and East Cambridge

9:30 am Arrival, Coffee and biscuits

10:00 am Introduction to the day

10:15 am Working lives in Barnwell, evidence from archaeological excavations on Newmarket Road  
*Aileen Connor*

11:15 am Home Industries and Businesses in Sturton Town in the 19th and 20th centuries  
*Helen Weinstein*

12:15 pm Lunch (*please note lunch is not provided*)

1:30 pm Railway Cottages and the Station Master's House  
*Caro Wilson*

2:05 pm Mapping Relief: The Files of the Cambridge Charity Organisation Society  
*Laura Housden*

2:40 pm Tea/coffee and cake

3:10 pm A Chalky Dusting on the Academic Gown  
*John McGill*

3:45 pm Women's Working Lives in East Cambridge 1900 - 1950  
*Deborah Thom*

4:20 pm Wrap up

**Drone footage** of the urban landscape along and around Mill Road and parts of East Cambridge will be shown during lunch and tea breaks. This was taken in the summer of 2023, organised by, and courtesy of, Gordon Davis, Cambridge Museum of Technology; edited by Simon Middleton, Mill Road History Society.

## **Working lives in Barnwell: evidence from archaeological excavations on Newmarket Road**

*Aileen Connor*

In recent years, redevelopment of Newmarket Road has afforded the opportunity to get glimpses into the past lives of the people of Barnwell through the remains that they left behind. The story of Barnwell as a settlement housing working people starts with the priory which required a workforce to help build and service it. But Barnwell continued to have a life of its own, with a community of people living and working there well into the 20th century. In this talk Aileen Connor will focus on those aspects of the excavations which can help us to know more about the working lives of the Barnwell community.

*Aileen Connor is a retired archaeologist. She spent 40 + years working as a Field Archaeologist and Project Manager - with over 25 years in Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. She most recently worked as a Project Manager for Oxford Archaeology and during that time managed several excavations along Newmarket Road, Cambridge. Aileen has a long-term interest in post-Roman urban archaeology. She is currently the Chair of the Eastern Region Branch of the Council for British Archaeology (CBAEast).*

## **Home Industries and Businesses in Sturton Town**

*Helen Weinstein*

Helen Weinstein will describe how Sturton Town was built from the 1870s onwards including a huge variety of home businesses from foundries to laundries, bootmakers to dressmakers, and describe what happened to the businesses as some moved out of Sturton Town in the century following, like slaughterhouses and dairies and iron works; others moved to bigger premises like building companies and breweries and knitting companies and shoe menders; corner shops and bakeries and butchers staying in business until the development of the Supermarkets; and smaller more niche family businesses like funeral parlours and rope makers and carriage works staying in business until the 1970s to 1990s

*Helen Weinstein, former Professor of Public History at York University, works with communities to create local histories and develop a sense of place. Through her company, Historyworks, she works with the BBC and clients interested in heritage, to develop participatory and community engagement and interpretation practices. She is working with local people in Sturton Town to explore its history, and runs projects with primary schools in Cambridge, using census data to create blue plaques for local streets. Much of the research about Sturton Town is shared on Capturing Cambridge: <https://capturingcambridge.org/projects/sturton-town/>*

## **Railway Cottages and the Station Master's House, Mill Road**

*Caro Wilson*

Railway Cottages (124-134 Mill Road), on the west side of the railway bridge, have been a notable feature of the road since they were built as housing for railway employees in around 1845. This talk will look at their chequered history from being flagship buildings for the Great Eastern Railway to their uncertain future in 2025 and will also offer a brief glimpse into the lives of some of its inhabitants.

*Caro Wilson is a founder member of the Mill Road History Society and the author of two reports for Capturing Cambridge, Railway Cottages 2nd Edition (2016) and Mill Road Bridge (2018).*

## **Mapping Relief: The Files of the Cambridge Charity Organisation Society**

*Laura Housden*

Cambridge Charity Organisation Society (CCOS) was formed in 1879 as a successor to the Cambridge Mendicity Society founded in 1818/1819. In its initial form, it had been established to deal with the post Napoleonic War problems of beggars and disease, though as CCOS, it aimed to relieve distress of the 'really deserving poor'. Through detailed enquiries into the circumstances of the persons who applied for relief, of which we have nearly 3000 surviving, the charity aimed to provide the necessary help to individuals in Cambridge. This talk will provide an insight into the personal lives of those who applied, as well as a brief introduction to the research undertaken to unlock this collection.

*Laura Housden was recently Archives Assistant at Cambridgeshire Archives after completing her MA in Archives Administration at Aberystwyth University in 2019. Prior to that, she worked at Cambridge University Botanic Garden in the Curation Team and as Receptionist. Laura is now working as an Archive Officer in Public Records, Newcastle. She has a particularly keen interest in social history and researching into the lives of those often missing from the more official narratives. See the CCOS 'Mapping Relief' entries on Capturing Cambridge.*

## **A Chalky Dusting on the Academic Gown**

*John McGill*

Cambridge has had little experience of sooty, dusty industry. The several ironworks there were around town were small and similar to those found in many a market town. However, for about 100 years, starting in the late 19th century, three cement manufacturing plants operated in, or on the edge of, the town – Romsey Town and thereabouts. This talk will look at those plants, their means of production and marketing, the natural resources they exploited, their likely environmental impacts, their employment, and their legacy in the development of the neighbourhood.

*John McGill qualified in the 1980s as an urban planner and spent most of his professional life working abroad. Upon returning to the UK, he took an interest in local development issues (a noticeably pressing matter in Cambridge) and also in local history. Through the Mill Road History Society, he has researched and written up several reports on: the Romsey Town cement works; the changing fortunes of the Mill Road site where the Cambridge Central Mosque and student accommodation block now stand; and the histories of Madras Road, Brookfields and Burnside, and Greville Road. All of these are published on the Capturing Cambridge website*

## **Women Workers in the Interwar Period**

*Deborah Thom*

The talk will use census data, photographs and biographical information as well as newspapers to describe women's livelihoods in East Cambridge and ask how much difference the two world wars made to opportunities for working women.

*Deborah Thom is a retired fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge University, and taught 20th century British history in the college and the History Faculty. Her special interest is World War I.*