

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall Minutes, 7.30 pm, Wednesday, 20 March 2013
Cherry Hinton Village Church Centre, Colville Road, Cherry Hinton

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall is a group that is concerned about the usage, environment, welfare and future of the Cherry Hinton Hall grounds for the benefit of those who use it

29 people were in attendance at the Village Centre, Cherry Hinton. There were apologies from Mark Ashton and Robert Dryden.

1. Minutes of 16 January meeting

The minutes of the 16 January meeting were accepted as accurate. There were no matters arising.

Chair's Statement:

David Taylor started the meeting by making reference to recent occasions where one or two non-members present at public meetings had been particularly disruptive and not respectful to others present or to the Committee. David then read out a proposed course of action in the unfortunate event of this sort of thing happening again whereby the Chair would politely ask anyone being disruptive to leave, and that if they continued their behaviour the Chair would then call one of the Cherry Hinton PCSOs and have them escorted from the building. *This course of action was agreed by those present via a show of hands, with no one against.*

2. Guest Speaker: Tony Kirby "*The Railways of Cambridge*"

Tony had brought along a number of photographic slides, and commenced by saying he would now take us on a historical rail tour around Cambridge, with a focus on the eastern side of the city and the surrounding countryside.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1870 appeared in the first slide which showed the railway system around Cambridge at a high state of development. Present were the Eastern Counties railway lines to Norwich and to Newmarket. As O/S maps were only updated every 20 years or so, they have to be treated with care as historical evidence. We can see marking showing that two lines had been constructed to the south of Cambridge for the 'Newmarket Railway' (known as 'Newmarket and Chesterford', mainly to allow race-goers to get to Newmarket) – one to Chesterford (older, first-constructed), and one (second, later) to Cambridge. However, only one of these was built fully and reached fruition – the Chesterford line, opened in 1848 but going bankrupt within a year. There was a re-launch of the project in 1850/1, with the line from Cambridge through Cherry Hinton to Fulbourn being built courtesy of track from the then old Chesterford line, which was then closed.

We then took a look at what was happening over Coldham's Common, the station and the Mill Road area. The original line to Newmarket (1851-1896) ran

alongside Mill Road and on to through Cherry Hinton. Opposition to the new line proposed by the GER over Coldham's Common to replace this came from the City (Borough) Council, and additional land had to be purchased by the GER and added to the Common to replace that which would be lost.

Cambridge station was bitterly opposed by the University, fearing access to London for the undergraduates would lead them morally astray. The result was that the University retained powers over the railway e.g. Proctors were allowed onto the station without a ticket to look for absconding undergraduates. Also, the Great Eastern Railway wasn't rich – there was only a single platform, which made making the station work well a difficult task as the traffic grew.

The station was built in 1845, and the colonnade we see today was originally a carriage entrance, but was filled-in at sometime in the 19th century. The area around the station developed interestingly – not so down at heel as other station surroundings – mainly due to the landowner, Jesus College, insisting on upmarket developments. All the properties were given 99-year leases, and the first office blocks only appeared after the expiry of the first 99 years.

On the other side of the tracks sat Romsey Town, not quite as high a specification development. This area was developed by many private speculators. If you look in street directories you can see houses with 'LNER Driver', 'LNER Signalman' etc. Other things slowly migrated to the railway – for instance the cattle market moved to an adjacent site in the 1880s, with cattle-pens placed right up to the tracks.

Foster's Mills dominated the skyline. The Fosters were an influential family of bankers (see St Andrew's Street where they built what is now the Lloyds branch next to M&S), with influence too as millers, town councillors, as Cambridge mayors, etc. By the 1850s the Fosters had started to move their operations to the station – and the mill was even afforded its own private siding.

Changes started to happen with the vision of a 'Remodelled Cambridge of the 1920s' – the LNER had plenty of money in comparison to the poorer Great Eastern Railway, and at this time freight (there was a lot of coal transport) was separated out from passenger services with the construction of separate lines. Two new signal boxes were created – Cambridge North and Cambridge South, with a state-of-the-art pneumatic operating system (sadly removed in 1981).

Tony then showed a colour photograph from 1943, taken by an American serviceman by Hills Road bridge. Many of these colour photos are now coming to light – a fantastic archive (another colour photo from 1944 showed Royston station).

Tony then returned to the first-taken-up theme of the old (first) Newmarket line. Whilst all the earlier change had been happening in Cambridge, not much had happened to the Great Chesterford line since 1845. Although there was a rather grand Italianate Great Chesterford station building, designed by the architect Francis Thompson. For mile after mile there is a line of trees marking the course to the line all the way to Newmarket, which is remarkably well preserved, as are some stations built what seems like in the middle of nowhere e.g. Bourn Bridge

station and Balsham Road station (NB beware of stations with 'Road in the name - Balsham Road station is 5 miles from Balsham).

We now looked at the second line mentioned earlier, constructed in 1851. We saw a photograph of Mill Road – a remarkably industrial scene, with lots of rail-served industries such as the Co-op Dairy, Co-op Fuel Depot, various builders merchants, etc. All now swept-away. The next photograph showed the curve over Coldham's Common, passing various brickworks on land close to what is now Newmarket Road and Coldham's Lane (the last brickworks – Cambridge Brick Company – finally closed in 1940, leaving behind just the chimney, demolished in 1973).

As Tony mentioned earlier, the original line ran along the back of Mill Road, past Malta, Cyprus Roads, etc., housing. But when this line was removed, more housing was added to this Edwardian terracing. The line actually went behind to Burnside, and there was a Brookfields signal box where two lines joined. Tony has lots of photographs of this area, dating from days when members of the public could purchase a 'Lineside Pass' for 5s which allowed access to up to 50 miles of track/year.

Next to the Brookfields signal box was the *Norman Works Quarry*, a major feature of the Cambridge landscape. There used to be a conveyor belt running under the Tins transporting marl which went up and over the railway line. The cement was transported away by road, but freight trains called regularly delivering coal to the cement works. Cherry Hinton was an industrial village! From 1851-1854 it had its own functioning station, and of course the station building is still there today.

There was a level crossing at Fulbourn Old Drift, unusual in that it was nearly always closed to road traffic, to enable the free-flow of rail freight. Next to here was Cherry Hinton Siding – a public delivery siding to allow coal to be dropped off to the Fulbourn Hospital. Eventually the level crossing at Fulbourn Old Drift was removed due to the high suicide levels.

Fulbourn station was an identical copy of Cherry Hinton station, and it retained an elderly 1870 signal box, next to which there was a steam mill ('SC Banks Silo') for the production of malted barley, which was then transported to Belgium to make beer.

Tony then showed a photograph taken near Wilbraham, the spot where the two Newmarket railway lines joined. Another photo showed the little station at Six Mile Bottom, complete with elderly signal box, which survived until 1981.

Finally we get to Newmarket, and we see a photograph of the terminus station of 1848. The racing interests wouldn't allow the line to continue directly on to Ipswich. The Warren Hill training ground was an obstacle and to get round this, a tunnel was constructed underneath by excavating the earth, building the tunnel, and then filling the earth back over. If you stood in the tunnel you could hear the horses galloping overhead.

Just as with others on the line, the original 1848 Newmarket station building was a

great architectural design. But ironically, this insistence on expensive grand architecture was one of the reasons for the start of the railway's decline, and eventually the railway was declared bankrupt, even though at one time vast numbers of people were travelling to Newmarket by rail. Sadly, the original station building was demolished and replaced by housing. The existing station building was constructed in 1902 to the left of the original – and today is a very modest affair with not much more than a platform and two bus shelters. It is a poor station really, for a place the size of Newmarket.

Questions & discussion

1 Chris Cracknell?

- Chris Cracknell was St Andrew's Church Warden, was one of the train drivers who lived in Burnside and could recall much of what was happening around the time of the First World War.

2 What came first, railways or cement?

- The cement works were built next to the railway. Up to the Second World War, Cambridge produced about 10% of the country's cement. The chalk pit lorries used Cherry Hinton High Street – which used to be white with all the chalk dust.

3 Why was Cherry Hinton station only open for three years?

- There was an assumption that it would pay...but it didn't. Meanwhile we have never ever seen an official notice of closure.

3. Folk Festival, Maintenance issues

David Taylor reported that members of the Committee (Ian Simmons, Sandra Day and David Taylor) had met with City Council representatives on 28 February, specifically about preparations for the Folk Festival. Particular concerns raised included preventing ruts and other damage if there was poor weather, and (as circulated to members prior to the 28th) incremental encroachment onto the wildlife area. It was pointed out that the Festival now has more space than ever, thanks to the opening-up of the former propagation centre area. We went to try and get agreement on these issues. It was pointed out to us that Elaine Midgley was new to managing the event in 2012, and would be more communicative and sympathetic to our concerns in 2013. We specifically asked if there could be a barrier whereby no Festival activity took place to the far side of the stream, and that the other side of this be open to the public for use during the Festival period, with access via the lower Daws Lane gate. Our position that there is no need for any structure to be built over the water was reiterated. We also heard that there had been no formal agreement with any sponsor, only verbal so-far, and we would be kept in the loop on this. The Friends can also have a small stall at the Festival on the Saturday and Sunday. We had agreed to meet again with the Council on 28 March.

4. Community Action Day, FCHH Events, volunteering, etc.

Community Action Day, Sunday, 17 March

- Sandra reported that notices had been placed on all gates, members had been emailed, and Stuart had made mention in the Cambridge News. Sadly only Ian, David, Stuart, Sandra, and a brilliant City Council Ranger (David Broadwell) had attended. However, we managed to clear the brook area from the weir all the way down to the Daws Lane bridge/grille, including removal of fallen trees and ivy, and lots of litter-picking. The brook is running much more smoothly, and we will chase Simon Bunn on removal of the grille.
- The fly-tipping by the Walpole Road gate has been removed by City Ranger John McAspurn.
- Bob Daines asked about the City Council's policy on ivy removal, as he has counted 8 trees which have fallen in the last 12 months due to ivy. Sandra and David said that there was a reluctance to remove too much ivy and that they didn't like removal during the nesting season. But what we would do is try to get agreement with Anthony and Guy as to which particular trees we could tackle and when. Ian added that Guy Belcher had written a clear policy statement for us, including emphasising how valuable ivy was for birdlife (copied below).

Whilst excessive growth of ivy can accelerate the eventual collapse of already declining trees and branches our tree officers recognise its value for wildlife, being a good native evergreen it provides year round cover for nesting and roosting, a late nectar source for insects and a heavy winter berry crop for the birds.

For this reason we try and maintain mature ivy on the site. Where it is necessary to inspect trees for structural faults or signs of disease it may be necessary to remove the ivy. This is best done outside of the nesting season (late Feb to early August). The simplest most cost effect solution is to sever the ivy close the base and allow it to die back. If no tree defects are detected it is then allowed to regrow.

If the group feel there are particular feature trees that would benefit from ivy removal than I'm sure officers would be happy to agree certain works being undertaken by the friends on future work parties.

Car Park usage Survey

- Stuart reported that a draft survey had been forwarded to Anthony for approval. Anthony had also agreed to write us a cover letter from the City Council, giving us authority to undertake the survey. This would be forwarded to us shortly for use as soon as the weather improves. If anyone is willing to volunteer for an hour, please let the Committee know.
- Bob Daines suggested we consider signs saying that the car park is for

use by users of the park only. David replied that the Committee would raise this next week when we have our next meeting with Elaine and Anthony.

Cherry Hinton Residents Association Newsletter, Schools Trip

- David reported that he had submitted an article for inclusion in the next CHRA newsletter. David also helped four teachers take a class of children from Bewick Bridge Primary School around the Hall grounds on 6th February. All the children enjoyed the day, including doing various drawings of the park.

5. AOB

It was mentioned that cyclists continued to churn up the grass by cycling along a desire line when entering the grounds from the pedestrian crossing on Cherry Hinton Road. David said he would see if some of the £20,000 the City Council has for new paths could be used to alleviate this problem.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting is will take place at 7.30 p.m., on Wednesday, 15 May, and includes a talk by Kit Stoner from the Bat Conservation Trust, followed by a 'bat walk' at dusk. Please bring a small torch and wear appropriate footwear if you wish to join the bat walk.

If you are able to, please help by bringing a small raffle prize to the next meeting to help cover costs.