

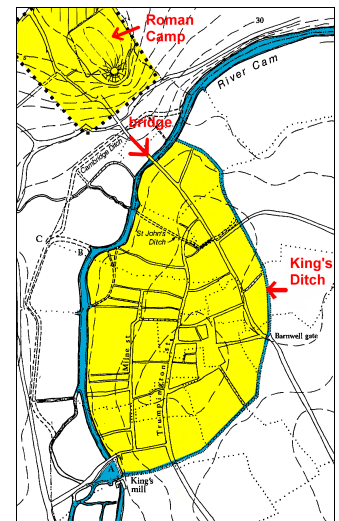
The History of Midsummer Common

Early Cambridge was located at the lowest and easiest crossing point of the river Cam before it flowed into the fens. In the words of the Royal Commission¹ it was "a nodal point of east-west land traffic and one of the chief terminals of water traffic". The Romans established a fortified encampment on a prominent spur of land on the north bank of the river, now known as Castle Hill, which guarded a bridge over the river².

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 875 refers to the town as *Grantabrycge*³. By Edgar's reign (956-75) it had become an established part of the national scheme of government⁴ and was becoming a prosperous port and trading centre⁵.

By the time of the Domesday Survey⁶ (1085-6) it had become a settlement on both sides of the river with the area inside the King's Ditch becoming the main focus of the town⁷ (see map to right). But it was still a small town surrounded by green fields. Maitland describes the scene⁸:

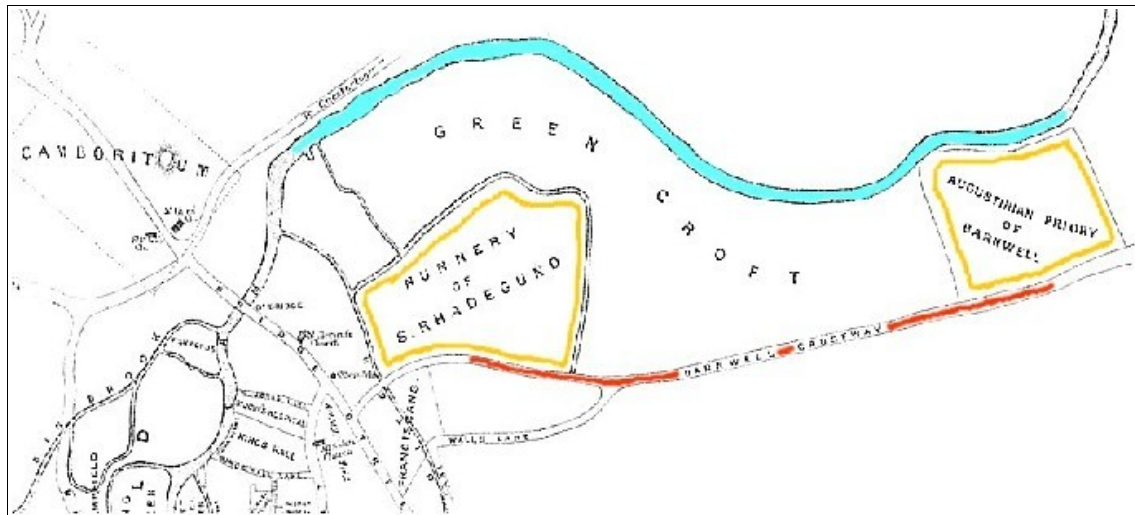
"Besides fields, Cambridge had meadows or keys which during a part of every year were commonable. Also it had pasture-land which was never inclosed or enjoyed in severalty, 'the green commons of the town'; for the more part they are green and open still."



It all remained open land throughout the Middle Ages. David Loggan⁹ sketched a "Prospect of Cambridge from the East" (see below). We can see in the background the houses, the colleges and churches, the castle-mound and the remains of the dismantled castle and in the foreground lies the open field - a long, originally unbroken strip of low-lying riverside pasture outside the town to the east. Herdsmen on horse and foot tend their cattle. It remained like this throughout the Middle Ages.



By 1285 the open field had been divided up and the common green fields became known as *Green Croft*. It had a distinct boundary and two landmarks - see map below¹⁰.



The extreme western boundary of Greencroft, between what is now Jesus College grounds and the river Cam, was not well defined at this time. The *Rotuli Hundredorum*¹¹ implies that the King's Ditch, ordered by Henry III in 1267, marked the western boundary. Part of a 1547 map by Richard Lyne¹² (shown to the left) has animals grazing west of the King's Ditch which suggests that Greencroft extended beyond the Ditch. The Corporation's records at the time fail to clarify the situation¹³. However, the records do report a later expansion of town buildings into this area and various maps¹⁴ suggest a western boundary of Greencroft to the east of the Ditch along what is now Park Parade.

The Nunnery of St. Rhadegund

The south western boundary of Greencroft was the nunnery dedicated to St Radegund and St Mary. It was founded about 1133¹⁵ and dissolved in 1496. Maitland¹⁶ says:

"It is not certain that the site of St. Rhadegund's nunnery came out of the green. King Malcolm [IV of Scotland] gave 10 acres next Greencroft (Midsummer Common) reserving a rent of two shillings. Bishop Nigel of Ely gave four acres next Malcolm's ten".

In 1496 its buildings and grounds were taken over by the newly-founded Jesus College¹⁷ which is shown arrowed on the 1575 Braun and Hogeneberg's map of Cambridge¹⁸ (see right). One of the first acts of the College was to sell the nuns' farming implements and lease its land, closes and sheepwalk.



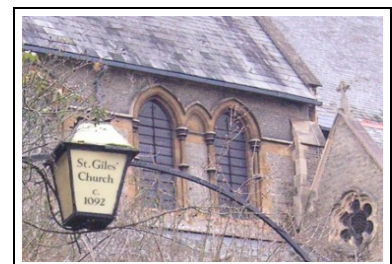


Archaeological excavations are currently being carried out on the College site¹⁹. They are revealing a wealth of finds spanning centuries, including previously unknown details about the medieval nunnery that occupied the site before it became Jesus College. It is hoped this project will provide a rare opportunity to analyse two different self-contained single-sex communities: the all-female medieval nunnery followed by the originally all-male college (the first female undergraduates arrived in 1979).

The change of ownership appears not to have affected the boundary with the Greencroft land. But the adjacent northern part of *Green Croft* became known as *Jesus Green* or *Jesus Common*. A small part close to the Nunnery and Barnwell Causeway came to be known as *Butt Green* or *Butt's Green* in the late Middle Ages from its designated use for military purposes. The remaining part was variously called *Midsummer Common*, *Midsummer Green* or *Midsummer Fair Green* (from its association with the Midsummer Fair). These names were not always used in a precise and consistent way. The Ordnance Survey, for example, still applied the name *Midsummer Common* across all parts until 1951.

Augustine Priory of Barnwell

The Priory was the eastern boundary of Greencroft. But the true history of *Midsummer Common* can be traced back to earlier times. In 1092 the Norman-born Baron Picot, who had been made the first sheriff of Cambridgeshire by William the Conqueror²⁰, dedicated a church near the castle in honour of St Giles and established six canons there with Geoffrey of Huntingdon as the first prior. The church is still standing there today - see right.



The monks describe Picot as a hungry lion, a prowling wolf, a crafty fox, a filthy swine, and a dog without shame, who stuffed his belly like an insatiable beast as though the whole country were a single corpse²¹. He was removed from office when he was found to be depriving the burgesses of the common pasture land to his own advantage²².

Pagan (or Pain) Peverel then appeared on the scene. His background is obscure but he was probably the third son of Ranulph Peverel who, the story goes, made his fortune by marrying a Saxon concubine of Duke William of Normandy and bringing up her sons by the duke as his own²³. He was a soldier and acted as a standard bearer on the First Crusade²⁴. On returning to England he was granted a barony by King Henry I and became the second sheriff of Cambridgeshire.

Peverel decided to move the canons from St Giles, where there was a shortage of fresh water, across the river Cam to the village of *Beornewelle*²⁵. He gave them 13 acres of land around the village springs which had previously been the home of a religious recluse named Godilo²⁶. This site had pre-Christian origins and had been used for semi-pagan festivities around the wellhead once a year on Midsummer Eve. Maitland describes it as "a piece of the green common of the town"²⁷. They

moved there in 1112²⁸, adopted the Rule of St. Augustine, and the household became a Priory. Its walls formed the eastern limit of Midsummer Common. Peverel endowed it generously with precious relics set in gold and topaz, which he had acquired on his travels to Antioch. He left *Beornewelle* when he inherited Whittington Castle in Derbyshire from his father²⁹.

Addison³⁰ describes Bernewelle as the site of an ancient fair that sprang up spontaneously where athletic feats were performed annually at the burial place of a hero. This customary meeting of tradesmen became known as Midsummer Fair (see later). Initially the new foundation prospered and developed into Barnwell Priory as a notable House of Augustinian Canons. While it was still powerful it attempted to acquire the area of 'common land' between the Priory and the river shortly before 1381 and the newly erected fences became a target during the Peasant's Revolt that year³¹. The suppression of the revolt by the Crown left the Priory in possession of the land, which later went to secular purchasers following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. This is why housing at Riverside today separates Stourbridge and Midsummer Commons.

A magnificent vellum manuscript begun in 1295³², *Liber Memorandorum Ecclesie de Bernewelle*, describes in great detail the foundation of the Priory and the rules governing it. Clark³³ has translated this manuscript and given a full historical account and map of the area. He tells us that the eastern fields beyond the Priory, commonly known as the Barnwell Fields, were four in number: Middle Field, Bradmore Field, Ford Field and Sturbridge Field. The area where the springs were located, where the young folk had their sports and pastimes, and where the traders held their fair each year, was on the common pasture of Greencroft to the west of the Priory.

There was a pond on the Common associated with the western edge of the Priory precinct. It is clearly marked on the early maps of the area and shown, but not named, on Baker's map of 1830. It is shown to the east of Walnut Tree Avenue and named both Abbey Fish Pond and Page's Pond on the 1886 Ordnance Survey map. By 1903 the pond was replaced by a cross on the map and the name became "Abbey Fish Pond (supposed site of)". By 1927 the cross had disappeared under the houses but the name remained but as "the probable site of" (see right).



As soon as the Prior and canons took over this site, they began an ambitious building programme. A church was built in the Priory grounds and consecrated by the Bishop of Ely in 1190³⁴. At a slightly later date another small church, known as the Abbey Church but more correctly as St. Andrew-the-Less, was built adjacent to the Priory Church. This building survives alongside the Newmarket Road and is still used. The rest of the monastic buildings were built or rebuilt at intervals up until 1270³⁵. Maitland³⁶ observes that "In the thirteenth century a suburb, well outside the ditch, had grown up around the by no means ancient Priory of Barnwell".



Apart from the Abbey Church, all that remains of the Priory today is the small but nicely vaulted Chequer's Hall (which was used for the financial business of the Priory). This building, which sits at the corner of Beche and Priory roads, has been conserved³⁷. In the 13th century 5 acres of land in Barnwell Fields were given to the nuns of St. Rhadegund in exchange for 3½ acres of land in Swinecroft as part of the rationalisation of land in some of the open fields³⁸.



The Priory grew in size and stature. Clark says that there were 30 canons in the 13th century, including 17 officers. The clerical subsidy of 1379 indicates 17 canons including officers and at the time of the Poll Tax of 1512 there were 11 servants³⁹. Records⁴⁰ show that King John stayed at the Priory in 1203. Henry III stayed a number of times. Edward I visited in 1293 and 1296; Edward II in 1315 and 1326. Parliament met there with Richard II in 1388 and Henry VI stayed in 1438. The Priory became very important within the diocese of Ely and it hosted various diocesan synods.

The priory, town burgesses and commoners were frequently in conflict over commoners' rights. In 1381 there was a serious riot when the mayor was compelled to assert the rights of commoners to pasture cattle in meadows which the "prior had fenced and planted with trees"⁴¹. As late as 1501, the Treasurers' Rolls show that the town sold to the Prior a parcel of "the common of the town, called Midsomer-green" for £2 0s 0d⁴² and this land was enclosed with a "brike wall".

On the dissolution of the monasteries, Barnwell Priory was surrendered to Henry VIII in 1538⁴³. It was rapidly dismantled; the library was dispersed (the main books have been traced) and the Cromwells took a gilded ceiling to Hinchbrooke House (where it can still be seen). There are records of the stones being used in Corpus Christi College⁴⁴. The sale of the Priory contents and payments made to the canons and others is well documented⁴⁵. By the end of the 16th century the site was used as a quarry and later as a brickworks.

On the dissolution, large allotments of open-field and common were appropriated by the colleges, University and private individuals, notably the Panton family⁴⁶. It is unclear, however, to what extent the dissolution affected the nature of land use on Midsummer Common. Its continued use as 'common land' or pasture is inferred. Corporation minutes seem to imply that Midsummer Green now included land that was formerly part of the Barnwell Priory site⁴⁷ but this is questionable, unless it was the land that had been sold to the Priory in 1501.

Inclosure of land

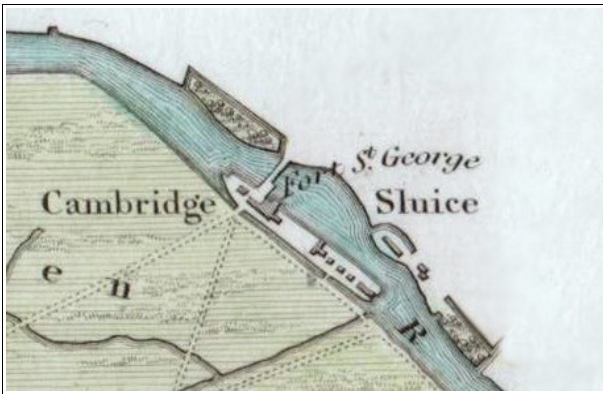
The 1807 Act for the inclosure of land in the parish of St. Andrew the Less⁴⁸ and the Award of 1811⁴⁹ changed the geography of this part of Cambridge. The northern limit remained constant - it was the river Cam. The principal fields enclosed were the Barnwell Fields to the east of the Priory and Greencroft, to the west of the Priory. Greencroft lost some of its land.

The land from what is now Brunswick Walk to Parsonage Street was allotted to St. Peter's College (now Peterhouse College) and leased to the Revd. J.C.Bullen. The next two plots were allotted to James Burleigh. The last two plots up to what is now Walnut Tree Avenue (Midsummer Common Lane on Baker's map⁵⁰) were awarded to Jesus College as compensation for the loss of open-field land. The second of these was previously known as Woolpack Close and held 5 properties fronting Newmarket Road which were also in the possession of Jesus College but leased to tenants. The Award map to the right shows these allotments.



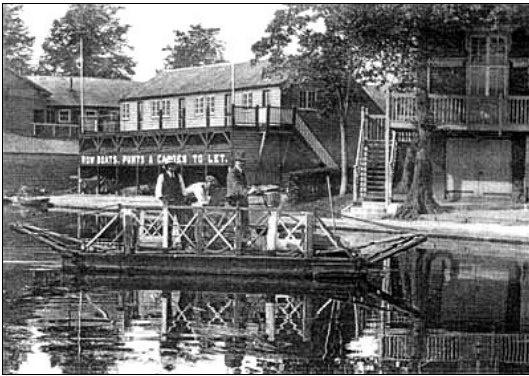
Sun Street (now Maids Causeway), part of Jesus Lane, the ditch and wall around Jesus College, and Park Parade completed the boundary around the Common. The Act preserved the rights of Midsummer and Stourbridge Fairs⁵¹.

Changes around the Fort St George pub

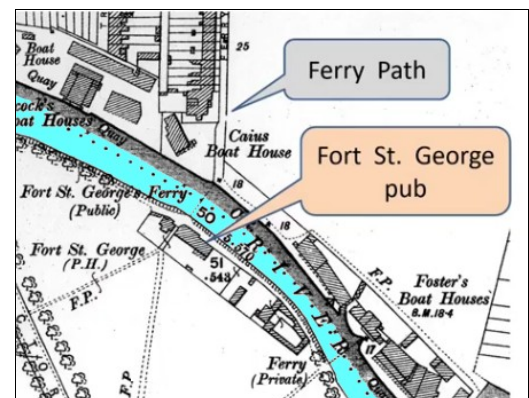


Thomas Moule's 1836 map of Cambridge shows the Fort St. George pub as a Mill on an island in the river (see left). And there was a sluice across the river's main channel. An Act of Parliament in 1813 gave the river Conservators greater powers and the South Level Act of 1827 created Commissioners with responsibility for the river. The Commissioners gave the Conservators permission to build a lock by Jesus Green, remove the Sluice and fill in the narrow stretch of river between the Fort St George and the Common.

At this time there were two ferries near the Fort linking Chesterton with Midsummer Common - one public, the other private (see right). One of these left Ferry Path (see below) for the Fort St George pub. The ferry man lived in Ferry House next door to the pub. It is dated 1894.

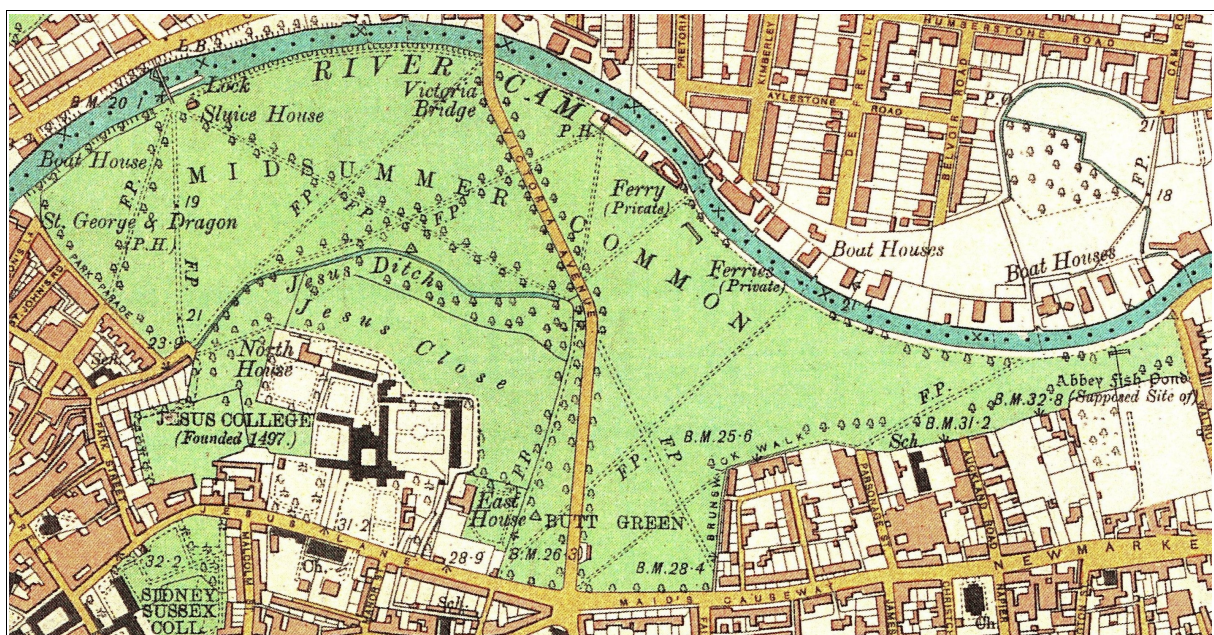


Just before it
was built, in



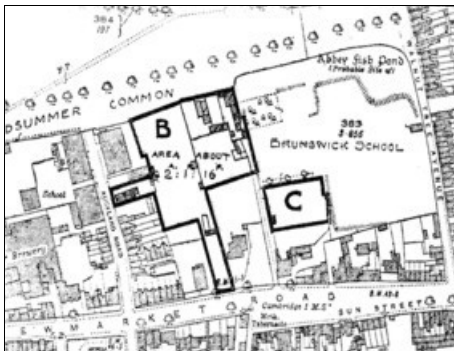
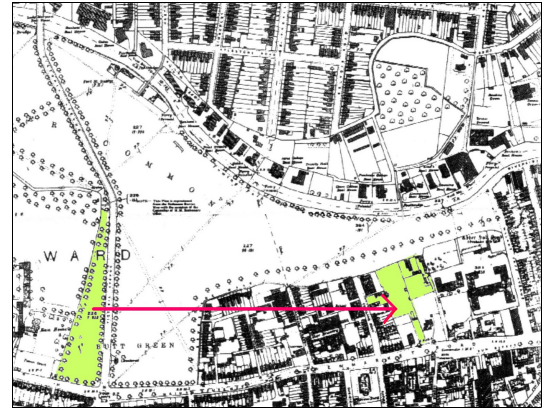
1888, the Council promoted a Parliamentary Bill for the construction of Victoria Bridge over the river and Victoria Avenue across the Common. When built in 1890, Victoria Avenue divided the Common into two

halves. The Council planted 85 chestnut trees on either side of the new road, many of which still survive. These changes are shown in the following 1920 Ordnance Survey map of the area⁵².

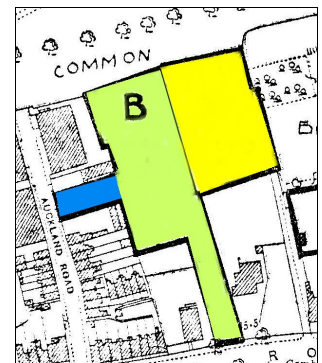


Changes in boundaries

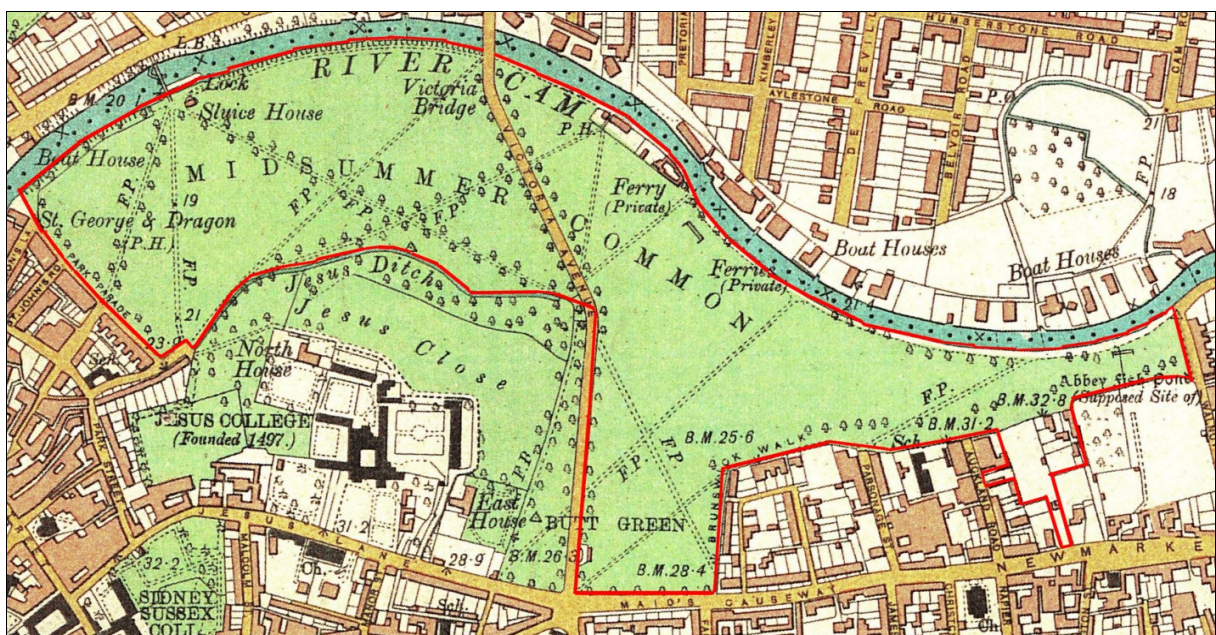
In 1930 the Corporation agreed to give Jesus College part of Butt Green to the west of Victoria Avenue in exchange for College owned land near to what was Brunswick School. This exchange proved controversial and led to a public inquiry and much legal argument. The Minister finally approved this transfer subject to what was the College land becoming 'common land' and forming part of "Midsummer Common". The Minister also insisted that the buildings on this site be demolished which they were. The land transferred is shown on the 1951 Ordnance Survey map to the right.



The boundary of this site is clearly defined in the legal papers - see site **B** on the legal plan to the left. During the war, part of the site was given over to allotments under the "Dig for Victory" campaign and it remains in use as allotments to the present day - yellow in the plan to the right. This did not change its status as 'common land'. In 1949 the City Council gave "period consent" for the placement of a Yasume Club building on part of the site - blue on the plan to the right. City Council papers show that the Minister gave approval "to the inclosure of the said land and the erection thereon of the social club building". This did not change its status as 'common land' and the City Council respected this status by keeping it open to public access at all times. Being no longer in use, the Yasume Club building was removed from the site in 2011. The green area on the plan remained as open space. The red line on the map below shows the boundary of Midsummer Common as it was in 1931.

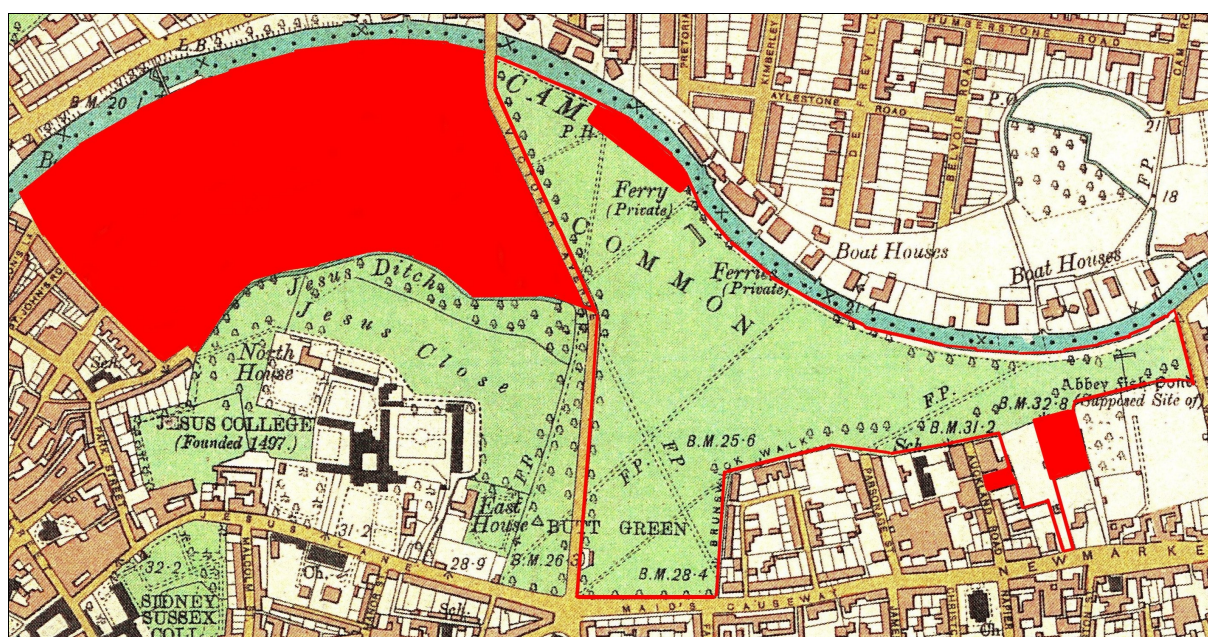


building on part of the site - blue on the plan to the right. City Council papers show that the Minister gave approval "to the inclosure of the said land and the erection thereon of the social club building". This did not change its status as 'common land' and the City Council respected this status by keeping it open to public access at all times. Being no longer in use, the Yasume Club building was removed from the site in 2011. The green area on the plan remained as open space. The red line on the map below shows the boundary of Midsummer Common as it was in 1931.



This boundary would change again when the Government enacted and enforced the *Commons Registration Act 1965*. The *Commons Registration Act 1965* established definitive registers of 'common land' and town and village greens in England and Wales. The register is a statutory document - each area of 'common land' is given a unique "unit number" against which is recorded:

On 26th June 1968, John Elven (Town Clerk) passed information to the County Council in order to register Midsummer Common under the Act. It entered the Register⁵³ on 2nd February 1970 and is described therein as "Land known as Midsummer Green or Jesus Green and Butts Green". There is an accompanying map⁵⁴ showing its boundary.



In 1970 a Cambridge citizen took exception to the exclusion of Jesus Green from the map and took the matter to court. The Chief Commons Commissioner decided that the 1965 Act gave him insufficient powers to correct this mistake. A similar case in Oxford was taken to the House of Lords⁵⁵ with a similar outcome but Lord Hoffman drew attention to what had been said by the Royal Commission on Common Land⁵⁶ that "as the last reserve of uncommitted land in England

and Wales, 'common land' ought to be preserved in the public interest". Jesus Green was reinstated as 'common land' when the mistake was corrected years later by primary legislation in the *Cambridge City Council Act 1985*.

Papers show that in February 1971 the City Council asked the County Council why the allotments and Yasume sites had also been left off the map. The County Council said that "the omissions were the result of a misunderstanding on the part of the draughtsman" but it was too late to correct the mistakes as the law required the register to be closed at 31st July 1970. Why the City and County Councils failed to correct these mistakes, as they had done with Jesus Green the previous year, is beyond comprehension.

In 2011, the City Council decided to sell the Yasume site and gave planning permission for a building to be erected thereon. Questions were raised about the legality of giving permission for a building to be erected on what was 'common land'. The Ministry was approached⁵⁷ and first took the view that "the fact that 'common land' is not in the register does not mean that it is no longer common, particularly when there was a clear intention that it should be and the only reason it is not is due to incorrect transcription of the boundary on the map". On being challenged⁵⁸, the Ministry changed its mind in saying that under section 1(2) of the *Commons Registration Act 1965* "the land ceased to be 'common land' for want of registration ... and the map must be taken to be conclusive of what is registered".

This story is not yet finished. The Ministry has pointed out that "there is scope to correct certain errors in the registers under Part 1 of the *Commons Act 2006* when that Part is brought into force in Cambridgeshire". Under section 19(1) "A commons registration authority may amend its register of 'common land' or town or village greens for any purpose referred to in subsection (2)" which includes "correcting a mistake made by the commons registration authority in making or amending an entry in the register". The County Council will be able to correct the mistake "on its own initiative or on the application of any person" once it has implemented this part of the legislation. Fifteen years later and we are still waiting for section 19(1) to be implemented in Cambridgeshire! However, the Ministry points out that the likelihood of amending the register might be reduced where land has been developed. Once the approved synagogue was built on the site there is little chance of recovering its 'common land' status. But there is nothing to stop the allotments reverting to their true status.



Part way along the river bank are 3 buildings and a walled garden which were also left off the map of 'common land' by the draughtsman (see left). The first of these (A) is Ferry House, the second (B) is the Fort St George public house, the third (C) is the Midsummer House restaurant. All three are now in private ownership. The fourth (D) is a vacant pond still owned by the City Council. It is a mute point whether or not these sites should be returned to 'common land' status.

The Plague on Midsummer Common

The plague wrought inconceivable devastation throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. There were four major epidemics and many smaller ones. The Black Death was part of the second

pandemic It entered England through Weymouth early in August 1348. By the end of 1349 it had spread all over the country. Williamson⁵⁹ has given us a good picture of its impacts in Cambridge.



Cambridge was in a very insanitary state at the time. Many of the streets were unpaved and drainage was through ditches running into the river. Refuse of all sorts was thrown into them and allowed to accumulate. Cattle, swine and horses were brought into the town at night, and turned out in the morning for the common herdsman to lead them to pastures outside the town. Heaps of dung and other refuse accumulated in the streets outside the stables and the cow-sheds.

Conditions were slow to change. On 12 August 1388, in preparation for the meeting of Parliament at Barnwell Priory in Cambridge, the King sent a writ to the Chancellor of the University requiring him to "remove from the streets and lanes of the town all swine, and all dirt, dung, filth and trunks and branches of trees, and to cause the streets and lanes to be kept clear for the future". And people had been dying from the plague for over half a century.

Conditions were still slow to change. In 1574 Doctor Perne, who was then Vice-Chancellor of the University, wrote to Lord Burghley the Chancellor in London saying that one cause of the plague was "the corruption of the King's Ditch which goeth through Cambridge and especially in those places where there is most infection". He goes on to say that he will "have it cleansed as soon as there is any hard frost".

The plague persisted through these years. At one time, the Vice Chancellor and Mayor required persons infected to stay indoors and write on the door 'Lord have mercy upon us'. Persons leaving the house would be fined 20s on a first offence, 40s on a second offence and banishment from the town on a third offence. All public assemblies in the town were prohibited, the market was moved to sites on the outskirts of the town such as Butts Green, and parishioners were only permitted to attend church in their own parish. In 1625 and 1630 windows were removed from the churches to cool and freshen the air.

Those badly infected were taken to a pest house to recover or die. The earliest recorded pest houses in Cambridge were erected on Midsummer Common. They were simple wooden sheds covered by thatch. The following items were quoted in the Corporation Treasurer's account

1594. Item, for carryinge boothe tymbre to Mydsomer Greene for visited people.

1645. Item, to Hamond Tanne for thatch and other work at ye pest houses. 14s.0d

1647. Item, for mending ye pest house Dore. 1s.4d.

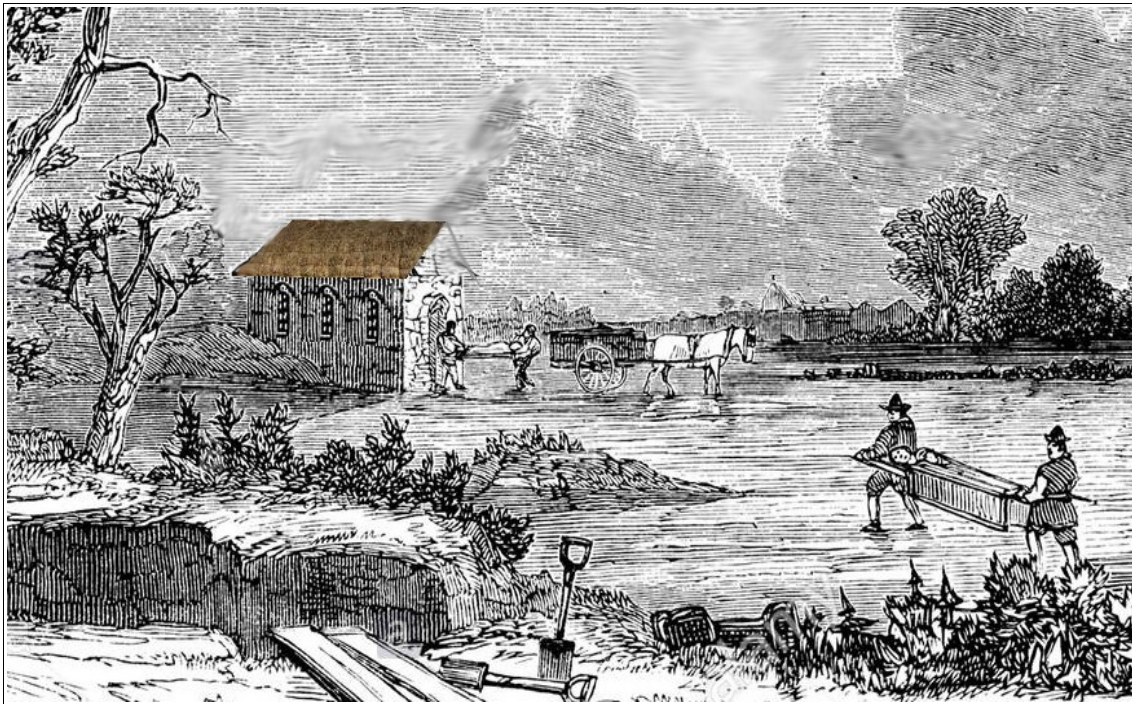
Item, for a new doore and lock at ye pest house. 9s.5d.

1655 On the 29th September, the Corporation ordered that the market bell and an old barred chest in the parlour should be sold, and the money applied towards building the pest houses, and on the 8th January, 1665-66 they ordered £30 to be paid to Alderman Pickering towards building the pest houses."

1659. Item, to ye Towne Clerk for entering a long order of Sessions about ye charge of building ye pest houses and ye disposing thereof according to ye said order made at ye Gen. Sessions. April the 26th 1658 by order of ye Court. 4s.6d.

1663. Item, paid to Mr. Bailiffe Addams and Thomas Hutton for work done at the Pest house and Gaole. £13 1s.8p.

Those dying of the plague were buried in the vicinity of the pest houses. The burials are recorded in Parish Registers; it appears from St. Clement's register that there were buried on Jesus Green seven in October, two in November, and one in March 1603-1604. During the very severe epidemic of 1630, when 347 people died, there were as many as forty pest huts on the Common. In 1952, when excavations were being made on Midsummer Common for the erection of a marquee for the Cambridge Trades Fair, portions of a number of human skeletons came to light which were probably remains of plague victims. Given this background, Midsummer Common might have looked something like the picture below.



Grazing on the Common

'Common land' traditionally sustained the poorest people in rural communities by providing them with a source of wood, bracken for bedding and pasture for livestock. At one time nearly half of the land in Britain was 'common land' but it now accounts for only 3% in England. Giving local people in a community the right to graze livestock on a shared piece of land – the Common – without fences or boundaries between them dates back to the Magna Carta in 1215. Midsummer Common has provided grazing for animals since that time.



In 1624 the Vice-Chancellor of the University and the Mayor of the Borough issued an ordinance touching on the Commons of the town. In Maitland's words⁶⁰:

"Every occupier of an ancient tenement having of old time broad gates may turn out two head of cattle. Every occupier of other tenements and cottages may turn out one. Every person having six score acres of land in Cambridge field may turn out six, and so in proportion for any greater or less quantity of land".

He went on to say⁶¹ that:

"the corporation shamefully neglected the Commons; anybody and everybody seems to have turned out any beasts that he had, unless indeed he feared having to haul them from the mire. In 1833 it was said that the mayor, who lived opposite Butt Green, would have been dead of cholera long since, had he not been of a strong constitution. One theory seems to have been that all the inhabitants had the right to turn out beasts; but there was a tradition which would have confined it to the freemen and 'the inhabitants having gable gates'".

In 1841, proposals for the inclosure of certain parts of the greens were mooted. Between 1841 and 1876 various attempts were made to resolve the problems caused by the overuse of the Cambridge Commons by those who had no legal rights to graze them⁶². A committee of the Town Council reported that "the legitimate right to use these Commons at all was centred in comparatively a very few individuals and that such rights were rendered absolutely valueless by other people trespassing most unwarrantably upon that which does not in any way belong to them". Attempts to trace the true holders of grazing rights proved too difficult.

Under an 1861 Common Seal of the Borough, the Rights of Common on Midsummer Green or Jesus Green were for geldings, mares and cows from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day and a small piece of land is 'commonable' for 2 days before Lady Day but in the day time only.

In 1904 Spalding published a Directory giving Commoners' grazing rights on all the Commons in Cambridge (see right). In 1923 the Council decided to exclude animals from Jesus Green. It shows separate rights for grazing on Butt's Green which must have been fenced off at that time - a possible end post is still visible.

Registration under the *Commons Registration Act 1965* says that persons residing, owning or occupying land in the City of Cambridge have the right to graze geldings, mares and cows from

Common Lands within the Borough.				
NAME AND SITUATION.	ESTIMATED EXTENT.			RIGHTS OF COMMON.
	A.	R.	P.	
Coldham's Common ..	98	1	36	For geldings, mares, and cows, from Old May Day to old Candlemas Day. Cows not allowed between sunset and sunrise.
Sturbridge Green ..	42	1	4	For geldings, entire horses, and cows, from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day. Cows not allowed between sunset and sunrise.
Midsummer Common & Jesus Green ..	57	2	1	For geldings, mares, and cows, from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day. A small piece of this land is commonable for two days before Lady Day, in the day time only.
Butt's Green ..	7	1	13	For geldings, mares, and cows, in the day time only, from Old Lady Day to Old May Day, and from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day, by day and night.
Queens' Green ..	4	1	10	For geldings, mares & cows, from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day.
Laundress Green ..	0	3	2	For horses, mares, geldings and cows of S. Botolph's and S. Mary the Less, all the year on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, from sunset to sunrise.
Sheep's Green ..	22	0	20	For sheep of butchers (freemen) all the year; for cows of S. Botolph and S. Mary the Less all the year on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from sunrise to sunset.
Coe Fen ..	13	1	22	For cows, geldings, and mares, from Old May Day to Old Candlemas Day. Cows not allowed between sunset and sunrise.
Coe Fen Straits ..	1	1	28	
New Bit ..	4	2	10	For mares, geldings, and cows, all the year, by day and by night.
Empty Common ..	5	0	9	

1st April to 30th November in each year to a total of 20 beasts over the whole of the land known as Midsummer Green. The *Cambridge City Council Act 1985* allowed the Council to set procedures for the registration of commoners entitled to graze animals, to set the location and number of grazing animals, to impose a reasonable charge and to make related byelaws. Earlier, in 1969, the Council had enacted a byelaw saying that "no person shall offer food or drink of any kind to any animal depastured upon any 'common land'" or be fined for the offence. And in accordance with section 7 of the *Animals Act 1971*, the Council may detain and sell any animal that is found grazing on the 'common land' without its consent. All these powers give the Council great scope for managing animals on Midsummer Common.

Grazing animals are both popular with locals and can be entertaining. Records show that 16 horses grazed Midsummer Common in 1956. In 1975 nine heifers escaped from the Common and set up camp on the four lamps roundabout - it took a gang of local citizens to drive them back onto the Common. FoMC Committee members have frequently been called into action to recover straying animals. Many local gardens have been harvested by intruders. In 1971 the fire brigade was called out on 4 occasions to rescue stock that had fallen into the river. One had to be recovered in 2020 (see right). Cattle were absent from the Common from the early 1980s until 1994⁶³ and in the early years of this century when foot and mouth disease and BSE became prevalent.



In 2007 a commoner introduced a small herd of Red Poll cows to graze the Common and this practice has been repeated. The Red Poll is derived from the original cattle of Norfolk and Suffolk - the Norfolk cow was crossed with the Suffolk polled bull. In the first half of the last century it was one of the dominant breeds in English dairy farming. It still maintains the dual purpose characteristics which now give the Red Poll such a valuable niche role in today's quality beef production. The owner won a British Farming Award for her efforts.

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SILVER AWARD

SILVER WINNER FOR BEEF INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

Angelika Von Heimendahl

Camcattle, Cambridgeshire

Cattle had not been grazed here since the foot-and-mouth outbreak, and setting out to rectify this Angelika was granted grazing access to the common in 2007.

To begin with she bought eight Red Poll steers, which she grazed from April to November that year, selling meat to friends and neighbours during the autumn months.

Now she grazes between 60-90 Red Polls on Grantchester Meadow which belongs to Kings College, and several other nature reserve around the area. Meat is sold at seven Farmers Markets a month under the CamCattle brand, and via a local butcher.

Events on the Common - Midsummer Fair

The majority of fairs held in England trace their ancestry back to charters and privileges granted in the Medieval period. In the 13th century the creation of fairs by royal charter was widespread with the Crown making every attempt to create new fairs and to bring existing ones under their jurisdiction. Over fifteen hundred charters were issued in that period⁶⁴. Fines and stall holders' fees made a charter a valuable possession.

Nobody knows when fairs first started in the Cambridge area. There were four annual fairs of significance that date from the Middle Ages: Garlic Fair, Reach Fair, Stourbridge Fair and Midsummer Fair⁶⁵. They all started as places of revelry. Then trade became dominant - Cambridge held a strategic location at the head of the fenland river system with good land routes to East Anglia, the East Midlands and the London area. The trade element then declined as communications improved elsewhere and other towns developed their own commercial facilities. Those fairs that remain today have reverted mainly to places of entertainment.

Addison⁶⁶ traces the origins of Midsummer Fair to the village of Bernewelle. An extract (translated) from *Liber Memorandorum Ecclesie de Bernewelle*⁶⁷ sets the scene:

"From the midst of the site there bubble up springs of fresh clear water, called by the English Bernewelle, the children's springs, because that once a year, on the Eve of St. John the Baptist, boys and lads met there, and amused themselves in the English fashion by wrestling matches and other games, and applauded each other in singing and playing on instruments of music. Hence, by reason of the crowd of boys and girls who met and played there, a custom grew up that on the same day a crowd of buyers and sellers should meet in the same place to do business."

The first formal recognition of the Fair came in 1211 when King John granted the Midsummer Fair to Barnwell Priory. For the next 300 years the Fair belonged to the Priory. At the same time Stourbridge Fair was granted to St Mary Magdalen of Steresbrigg on behalf of the nearby hospital "for the use and subsistence of the lepers dwelling therein"⁶⁸.

Ownership of Midsummer Fair enabled the Priory to take advantage, financially and socially, of the midsummer celebrations under a respectable religious veneer. Henry III confirmed the grant by Letters Patent in 1229⁶⁹ and allowed the Fair to be held over 4 days from the feast of Saint Etheldred (the day before mid summer):



"... deo et Ecclesiæ beati Egidii de Bernewelle et Priori et canonicis ibidem Deo seruientibus, quod ipsi et successores eorum habeant in perpetuum unam feriam apud Bernewelle singulis annis per quatuor dies duraturam, videlicet, in vigilia et in die Sanctæ Etheldredæ virginis in æstae et per dies duos proximos sequentes ..."70.

Disputes then arose between the town and the Priory over money. An agreement was reached in 1232; the town would receive compensation (half a mark annually) for an event held on common pasture land from which the Priory drew profit to the possible detriment of the common users⁷¹. As early as 1287 it was reported that wood for the Castle tower was purchased from the Fair and, in 1288, iron and steel was bought at the Fair for building the Castle prison and locks and keys were purchased for 4s 10d⁷². In 1324 it was reported that the carpenters of Ely Cathedral bought timber

from the Fair⁷³. In addition to serious trade, the Fair became a place for the hiring of labourers and servants. Some of these were absenting themselves from other employment. In 1295 three men were fined 3d a day for having been away from work for 3 days whilst enjoying themselves at the Fair⁷⁴. By the end of the 14th century the Fair had grown to become one of the most important in the country (although not in the same league as the nearby and internationally famous Stourbridge Fair).

At this time the Fair must have been held on the town's common pasture of Green Croft west of the Priory because the Priory was repeatedly asked to pay for its use. This is reinforced by Clark who describes what was seen by somebody walking from the town to Barnwell Priory in the 13th century⁷⁵:

"... he would soon reach the Franciscan House at the corner of S. Radegund's Lane. Turning into this lane, and crossing the bridge over the King's Ditch, he would see on his left the boundary walls of the nunnery of S. Radegund founded 1133. After passing this, as he pursued his way to Barnwell Priory, he would have on his left the Green Croft, an open space of pasture, on part of which, nearest to the Causeway, the fair called Midsummer Fair was held."

The Fair probably remained in this location into the 18th century.

About 1294, the University claimed jurisdiction over the Fair but the Bishop of Ely refuted this claim⁷⁶. In the same year, the mayor and prior fell out over the ownership of goods left at the fair by a felon⁷⁷ which led to a sealed "Composition between the Prior and Cannons of Bernewell and the Burgesses of Cambridge touching the Fair"⁷⁸. In 1299 the prior of Barnwell was summoned before the Justices to show by what title he held a fair. He produced the charter granted by Henry III which had been given to the Priory by Pain Peverell and the case was dismissed⁷⁹. In 1394 King Richard II received notice from the prior that commoners and students had caused nuisance at the Fair. As a result, the sheriff was instructed to make a proclamation and arrest delinquents⁸⁰. Richard II extended the duration of the Fair to 14 days⁸¹.

Control of Midsummer Fair gradually shifted from direct management by the Priory to that of the town. In 1483 Richard III granted a charter to the prior of Barnwell respecting the Fair at that place⁸². In 1496 and 1498 the Priory leased the Fair, which now lasted for 14 days⁸³, to the town mayor and bailiffs⁸⁴. In 1505, after great disputes between the Corporation and the prior, a composition gave the Corporation a perpetual right to Midsummer Fair, the Corporation paying 4 marks annually⁸⁵. In 1506 there were disputes between the University and the Priory regarding the privileges of the former⁸⁶. One of the privileges the University proctors claimed was the right to search the Fair for beggars, vagabonds and lewd women; the council members hotly disputed these rights. In 1516 an Award was made for the adjustment of various disputes between the prior and the mayor, bailiffs and burgesses⁸⁷. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, disputes between the Priory and town ceased and the town took full control of the Fair.

Records show that goods were still brought to the Fair by river and unloaded onto the "Greencroft or Midsomer greene" riverbank in the 18th century⁸⁸. Corporation minutes for 29th May 1739 state⁸⁹:

"Agreed and ordered that the Builders of that part of Midsummer Fair usually built on Midsummer Green shall for the time to come hereafter build the Booths on that part of the same Green on this side of the Spring and upon no other part of the said Green that being the most commodious place, upon pain of forfeiting to the mayor,

bailiffs and burgesses of the Corporation five shillings per foot for every Booth built contrary to this Order and that Builders do pay the bailiffs of this Corporation for their use four pence per foot in length of such Booths".

Once the railway came to Cambridge in 1845 it was no longer necessary to land goods from the river and so the Fair moved from the narrow eastern part of the Common westwards onto the main body of Midsummer Common. Nevertheless the Ordnance Survey map of 1889⁹⁰ still shows a wharf on the river Cam where goods were previously unloaded.



In the 18th century the Fair was commonly known as the Pot Fair due to the large quantities of china and earthenware which were on sale there to the housewives of Cambridge⁹¹. Henry William Bunbury (1756-1811), known as the "gentleman draughtsman", was a graduate of Cambridge and one of the most popular caricaturists of his

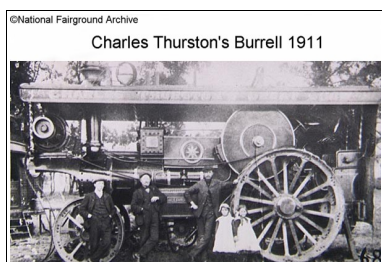
time. He drew many pictures of social life showing wit and insight and in 1777 the Pot Fair caught his fancy as shown above. A more realistic but dated picture of the Poy Fair is shown on the right. The Pot Fair remains an element of the main Fair today but is kept to a single day⁹².



Midsummer Fair has long had an entertainment element - it was there from the outset. Wrestling, singing and music was always present. In 1714 the Fair included Punch, a giant, a dwarf, wild beasts, dancing dogs, three legged cats and a female rope dancer. Freak shows, moving pictures, wrestling and boxing were all part of the amusements according to the reports of the times⁹³. A newspaper description in 1901 commented on the level of "the stir, the noise and the mirth making" and these are things that have not

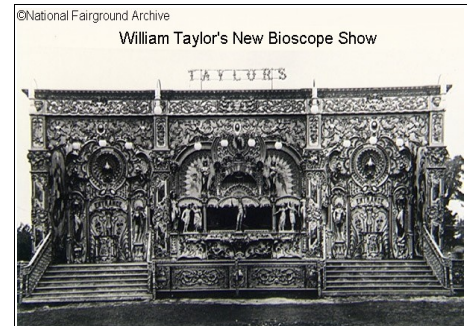
changed⁹⁴.

The introduction of steam to the Fair in 1870 enabled the rides to become more exciting and adventurous. The steam engines themselves became a notable feature of the Fair as they became grander in design and function.

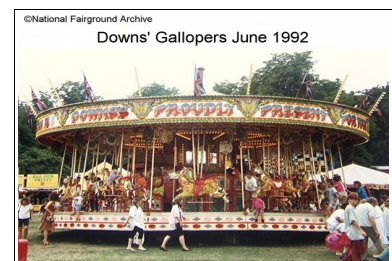
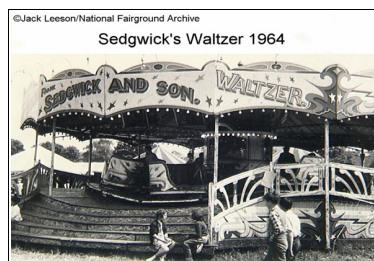
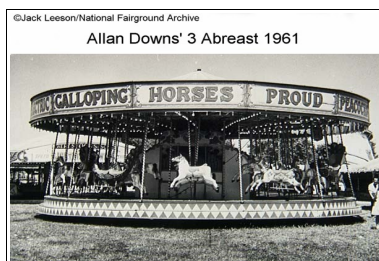


Horses and cattle were once a major feature at the Fair. The buying and selling of horses remained important till the end of the 19th century⁹⁵. In 1900, animals of all sizes were put through their paces on the sodden grass. Business was brisk, cart horses and nags forming the major portion of the stock⁹⁶. June 24th was the date for horse sales⁹⁷. Lance, a fifth generation showman, has shared his memories of Midsummer Fair and his family connection to the ancient event⁹⁸. The horse sales and Pot Fairs help explain the annual reunion on the Common of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. In 2020 they turned up in large numbers even though the Fair itself was cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic. They did the same again in 2021.

Charles Thurston's No 1 show first appeared in Cambridge in 1902. It was of the two-wagon front type with a rather small but very sweet toned Gavi organ and was attached to a Burrell engine. Like all shows at this time, there was no cover over the front stage⁹⁹. According to reports it was "England's Greatest Show". Taylor's Show of the same time had a projector, organ and light engine. Reports said that "the lovely Marenghi organ was fitted with hundreds of coloured electric lights which changed with the music of the two figures playing the drum".



It is hard to say when riding machines first came to Midsummer Fair. It is known that such machines existed in this country about 1800, so it can be presumed that some of them found their way to Cambridge¹⁰⁰. Before 1906 Henry Thurston & Sons brought his 4 abreast Gallopers to Cambridge. Steam-driven switchbacks were brought by John Barker in 1907 and by Charles Abbott in 1911 and 1919¹⁰¹. Charles Thurston brought The Golden Dragon Scene to the Fair in 1920¹⁰². It was claimed that it was the most beautiful machine that travelled this country¹⁰³.



The Merry-go-Round magazine¹⁰⁴ describes the Fair in the war year 1941:

"The firm of Chas Thurston and Sons have brought to Cambridge nearly every kind of ride that ever existed, including flying pigs, waltzing balloons, bicycles, gallopers, cakewalk, tower slip, joy wheel, steam motors and dragons, chair-o-planes, electric dragons, peacock scenic, swirl, Noah's Ark, dodgems, waltzer and electric speedway."

Two years later they introduced "Bioscope Shows" with moving pictures¹⁰⁵. Today the Fair attracts large numbers of people each June to its various rides, stalls and sideshows.

Midsummer Fair was not always an orderly event. In 1905 it was described as a "Bacchanalian orgy" as people were behaving "like maniacs". There were 14 tents supplying intoxicating liquors and the behaviour in the tents was "indescribable". Five perambulators were seen standing

unattended outside one tent. A letter that year¹⁰⁶ complained that Travellers were profiting too much from the Fair, gaining an average of £650 per evening:

“Sir – every year our Midsummer Fair is visited by a number of itinerant merchants selling pots, pans, linoleum, furs, drapery and various oddments. They pay little rent and no rates and taxes and yet they take away hundreds of pounds which are to be spent in local shops. In many cases, people actually pay more for the goods at these mock auctions than they would in a proper shop.”

But it was not until 1954 that the Council decided to prohibit "drinking booths" as it was considered they were the cause of excessive drinking on the fairground.

Legislation has reinforced the Council's ownership and focussed on the duration and location of the Fair. The *Cambridge Corporation Act 1850*¹⁰⁷ reduced the Fair back to 4 days, saying that "The Fair of Barnwell commonly called the Midsummer Fair shall commence on the 22nd June and continue for 3 days (exclusive of Sunday)". The *Cambridge City Council Act 1985*¹⁰⁸ then extended the Fair to 5 days:

"The fair of Barnwell commonly known as the Midsummer Fair shall commence at 2.30 o'clock in the afternoon (or such earlier hour as may be proclaimed by the mayor of the city) on the third Wednesday in June, or, if the third Wednesday falls on 15th, 16th or 17th June, on the fourth Wednesday in June and shall continue for the four days (exclusive of Sunday) next following the day of commencement and no longer."

In the year 2000 the Sunday exclusion was removed and the Fair was extended to 6 days in total¹⁰⁹ and in 2019 the Council transferred the organisation and management of the Fair to the *Showmen's Guild*.

Although the Fair has been going for over 800 years, that is not to say that it has been held every year in that period. For example, the Fair ceased to function during the war years 1939-42 but John Carey, a Traveller who has attended every year in his life, said that "During the Second World War there was one rock stall here every year just to keep the fair Charter going as many of the Travellers were fighting in the war"¹¹⁰. The Fair resumed in 1943¹¹¹. The Fair was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

For over 100 years the Fair has been free to move away from Midsummer Common. The *Cambridge University and Corporation Act 1894*¹¹² empowered the Council to "specify and define the Common or open space within the borough on which the Midsummer and Sturbridge Fairs ... shall be held". One such relocation is recorded. Early in 1931 silt was spread over Midsummer Common and grass seed sown. To give it a chance to grow, the Council decided to move Midsummer Fair to Stourbridge Common. The showmen refused this location and rented Cambridge United Football Ground instead. However, to preserve the charter, the Fair was proclaimed on Stourbridge Common but with only 1 stall - a nougat vendor. The Fair was back on Midsummer Common in 1932. The *Cambridge City Council Act 1985*¹¹³ renewed this location flexibility in stating that "The Council may from time to time specify and define the Common or open space within the city on which the Midsummer Fair or some part thereof shall be held".

Midsummer Fair remains one of the most popular events in Cambridge. Rides are bigger and noisier and the crowds more colourful. Its future rests with the Council and Showmen's Guild.



The mayor and other members of the Council still continue the tradition of parading and declaring the Fair open to the crowd.

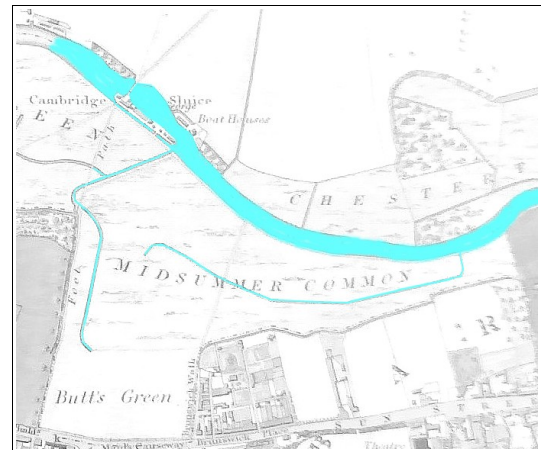


Other events on the Common

The public record shows many events happening on the Common over the last two centuries¹¹⁴. The Corporation records show that Mr Wentworth was fined 6 shillings and 8 pence in 1811 for "digging and carrying away the bank next the river". In 1817 it was decided that a person of the name of Willis and a gardener employed by Mr Deighton were to explain why they had dug up and carried away a quantity of earth from off Midsummer Common. In 1821 the Corporation allowed someone to build what is now thought to be Brunswick Walk on the Common. In the very next year the Corporation insisted on the removal of Rope Walk because it encroached on the Common. Yet two years later the Corporation approved the building of a footpath no wider than 15 feet "from the corner of Jesus College Wall by the side of Midsummer Common ... unto the south east corner of the said Common called Blackless Corner".

Corporation records show that in 1815 it was ordered that two or more bridges be laid across the ditches on Midsummer Common and Mr. Dogget was paid 10 guineas to erect a bridge 13 feet wide with an arch of 2 feet 6 inches between Butt and Midsummer Greens. In 1822 the ditch between Midsummer Common and Jesus Close was cleaned with the costs shared between the Corporation and the College. Other ditches on the Common were cleaned about the same time. In 1823 permission was given to the Commissioners of the Paving Act to "open the soil on Butt Green and Midsummer Common to carry the intended Barrel Drain". This drained the Common and neither of the two tributaries are evident on later maps. The ditches on the Common were cleaned and filled in. In 1825 leave was given by the Corporation to "remove the hills on Midsummer Common".

Baker's 1830 map of Cambridge shows two tributaries of the river Cam crossing Midsummer Common (see right). One of these flowed eastwards across Jesus Green with its own tributary coming from across Butt Green and joining the Cam near the Fort St George. The other started on Midsummer Common and flowed eastwards joining the Cam near Walnut Tree Avenue.



In 1837 the Chronicle reported that at a meeting of the Town Council "... a few observations were made respecting the state of the Commons, which it was thought required active attention on the part of the committee and Mr Wells regretted to be compelled to acknowledge that there had been both carelessness and neglect on behalf of those who acted with him on the Commons Committee. For the sake of saving a few shillings a week he feared those pieces of ground would soon again be in a very bad state". In 1841 the Council appointed a Special Committee "to enquire into the extent and present condition of the 'common lands' and as to the best plan to be adopted with respect to them for the benefit of the Town". Enclosure was proposed but "the proceedings at this meeting were characterised by extreme noise and tumult". The Council took no further steps to carry out the proposed enclosure.

In 1841 proposals for the inclosure of certain parts of the greens were mooted. Between 1841 and 1876 various attempts were made to resolve the problems caused by the overuse of the Cambridge commons by those who had no legal rights to graze them¹¹⁵. A committee of the Town Council reported that "the legitimate right to use these commons at all was centred in comparatively a very few individuals and that such rights were rendered absolutely valueless by other people trespassing most unwarrantably upon that which does not in any way belong to them". Attempts to trace the true holders of grazing rights proved too difficult.

In November 1844 Van Ambury built a large brick place on Midsummer Common for the keeping of his wild beasts and to show off his horsemanship. A year later Wombwell's wild beasts are on the Common. and in May 1847 Hylton's menagerie was in town and had "sent the elephant round this morning with a girl riding on its back". In August, Cook's Riding Circus turned up.

However, in 1850 the issue was raised again when it was proposed to Council that a Parliamentary Bill be framed that would extinguish all rights of common. This was narrowly defeated by 11 votes to 10. But the proponents were not to be defeated. A year later, in 1851, the Council approved a set of Commons byelaws and another set in 1880 both of which remain in force to the present day. They regulated the rights of common. Any person beating or shaking a carpet, rug or mat or gambling, betting or playing with cards, dice or any other article on Midsummer Common can still be fined forty shillings!

In 1859 the Council again tried to abolish rights of common. Committees and sub-committees were formed and met for over a decade. In 1870 the Committee made recommendations for "improving the finances of the Corporation ... through houses erected on but a small portion of the Commons". It was proposed that 17 houses be built along the road on the South side of Butt Green¹¹⁶ but without the authority of Parliament the plans could not be taken forward. This might explain why there are missing house numbers on the north side of Maids Causeway.

In 1876 there was a terrible murder on Butt Green. At 9.30 in the evening Emma Rolfe, aged 16, met up with 25 year old Robert Browning at the Four Lamps on Maids Causeway. Emma was known to offer her favours for a shilling. Robert, who was a local tailor, took her onto Butt Green and slit her throat. He had been drinking at a pub in Fair Street and after committing the dastardly deed he went back to the pub to finish his drink. He left and came across PC Wheel who had rushed to the scene after hearing great cries. Upon seeing the constable, Robert gave himself up and was promptly arrested. The body of poor Emma was taken to the Fort St George pub and Robert was subsequently hanged in Norwich Gaol.

In the same year the *Commons Act 1876* arrived on the scene. In 1878 the Committee took advantage of this Act to draw attention to measures that would improve the Commons generally. Establishing footpaths was one recommendation that the Council accepted. The iron fence next Butt Green and Midsummer Common was another outcome.

In 1888 the Council promoted a Parliamentary Bill for the construction of Victoria Bridge over the river and Victoria Avenue across the Common. When built in 1890, Victoria Avenue divided the Common into two halves as shown in the following map of the area¹¹⁷. The Council planted 85 chestnut trees on either side of the new road, many of which still survive.

New legislation arrived in 1894. The *Cambridge University and Corporation Act* gave the Council powers to:

- improve the Commons or some of them so far as may be necessary or desirable for the purposes of health recreation and enjoyment;
- make and maintain roads footpaths and ways;
- plant trees and shrubs for purposes of shelter or ornament and fell cut lop and manage the same and any other trees plants and shrubs on the Commons and make and maintain so long as shall be necessary temporary enclosures for the protection of trees shrubs and turf; and
- erect baths wash-houses and lavatories (provided that baths and wash-houses shall only be erected on the banks of or within thirty yards from any stream and shall be constructed of wood).

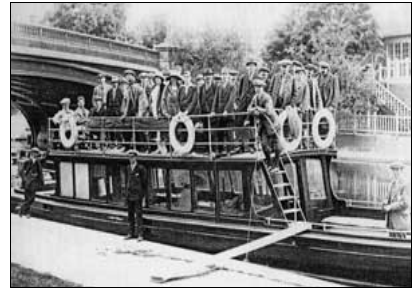
The Act also gave the Corporation power to enclose parts of Midsummer Common for certain purposes and with certain safeguards.



Mr E H Parker was the High Steward of the borough and Mayor in 1894 when the Royal Agricultural Society returned to Cambridge. On the 26 June 1894 the Chronicle reported: "Once more, after a lapse of 54 years, Cambridge welcomes the Royal Agricultural Society of England. Fifty-four years ago, five acres of Parker's Piece was sufficient ... this year the 64 acres afforded by Midsummer Common ... ". The Prince of Wales visited the show. In 1895, residual Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery was found during the construction of a sewer across Midsummer Common¹¹⁸.

In June 1897 there was a fête on Midsummer Common with shooting galleries, coconut shies and one of Thurston's steam roundabouts. During the afternoon a fancy dress bicycle carnival took place with handsome prizes for the best costumes. The first prize for the ladies was a diamond and ruby brooch, which was won by Miss L Unwin. She was dressed in a helmet, breastplate, shield and trident and made a "dignified Britannia". She received a "King of the Road" lamp and a "baby bell" from the Humber Cycle Co.

In 1898 Barnum & Bailey's Circus came to the Common. It arrived in 74 railway cars at the station. Elephants walked from the station down the High Street to the Common where 14 tents were erected. At the turn of the century, local dignitaries were photographed on the river with the new Victoria Avenue bridge in the background.



In May 1900 a huge bonfire was erected on the Common to celebrate the relief of Mafeking - a posse of police constables was stationed on the Common to ensure that it was not lit before the event. In 1900 Lord John Sangers Circus was sparsely attended because of an outbreak of diphtheria. This was in spite of a football match between a "centre forward" elephant and a Cambridge footballer! On June 22nd 1900 the Midsummer four-day fair was opened. There were "roundabouts a plenty" and two resplendent switchbacks. There was a menagerie and a cinematograph exhibition and "no less

than 15 refreshment saloons, some of which serve a double purpose of supplying liquor and accommodation for dancers".

In 1901 a cremation site with associated pottery, a bone, ivory or horn object and pottery was found on Midsummer Common¹¹⁹. In the same year, the Cambridge British School (founded in 1840) moved from Fitzroy Street to Brunswick Terrace and accommodated about 700 pupils. Subsidence of the premises resulted in a further move in 1929¹²⁰ to what became the Cambridge Regional College and now Berkeley Homes.

In 1904 the Cambridge undergraduates held ratting parties on the Common. Rats were offered to the undergraduates by dealers at a "bob apiece" they were then released, given a dozen yards start and then the dogs were released to "course" it to death. The Cambridge Mammoth Show was held for the first time on Midsummer Common on August Bank Holiday 1904. In 1905 an attendance of 25,000 was reported. Around 30,000 attended in 1906 when there was also a horticultural show, dog show, exhibitions of poultry, cats and mice, an athletics meeting as well as sideshows. However, the event caused some controversy when the financial deficit was revealed the following year.



In 1905 Midsummer Fair was described as a "Bacchanalian orgy" as people were behaving "like maniacs". There were 14 tents supplying intoxicating liquors and the behaviour in the tents was "indescribable" - 5 perambulators were seen standing unattended outside one tent. In 1911 there was a military tattoo on the Common to celebrate King George V's Coronation. An area was set aside for bayonet practice and a Gallows was erected on Butt Green. In 1921 the Common caught fire because of the intense heat!

In 1929 a young lady making a short cut across the Common became embedded in silt and mud thrown up by a dredger; another lady who went to her aid suffered a similar fate, but three young men waded out to them and others formed a human chain and they were saved.

On 2nd November 1939 the Cambridge Daily News carried a photograph of air raid shelters being constructed in the bank bordering Midsummer Common next to Brunswick School. For the next six years these were in regular use by the staff and pupils of the school. The Common became a military training camp during the war.



June 1974 saw the first Strawberry Fair held on the Common. It has been held annually since then with a few exceptions - 2010 (because of drunkenness and drug taking the preceeding year) and 2020/21 because of the coronavirus pandemic. A range of musical genres are represented at the fair across several music stages. There are activities for the kids

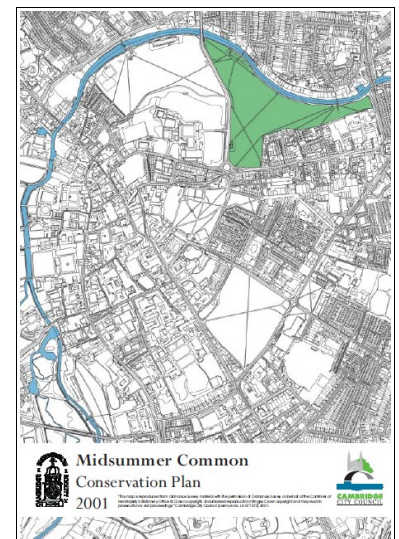
and stalls selling food and goods from all over the world.

In 2001 Cambridge City Council approved and then published a Conservation Plan for Midsummer Common. It provided 3 conservation policies for the Common:

- conserve and enhance the relationship between Midsummer Common and its surroundings;
- improve Midsummer Common as a high quality space; and
- maintain the informal character of Midsummer Common.

It went on to say how these policies might be implemented.

In 2003 the County Council adopted the *Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan* which, amongst its policies, states¹²¹ that:



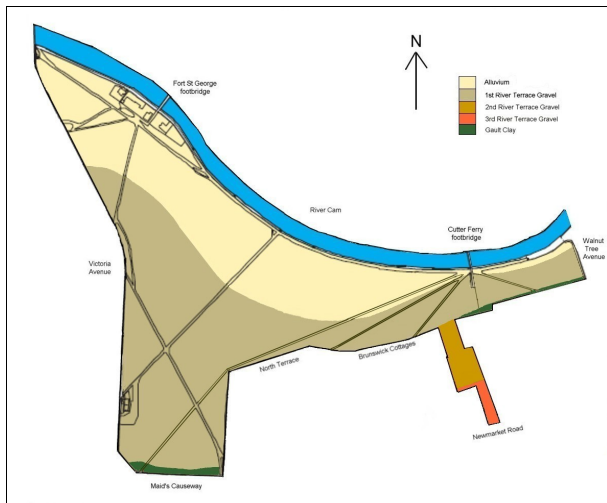
"No new development will be permitted within or which is likely to adversely affect:

- functional flood plains or other areas where adequate flood protection cannot be given and/or there is significant risk of increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Development will be restricted

- where there could be damage, destruction or loss to areas that should be retained for their biodiversity, historic, archaeological, architectural and recreational value."

In this context, it is worth saying something about the geology of the Common. The river Cam rises from springs along the Cretaceous chalk ridge south-east of Cambridge. The river once flowed around Castle Hill and has undergone significant remodelling and canalisation since the early medieval period. It is now firmly established as the northern boundary of the Common.



The Common itself is a floodplain with its surface comprising alluvium and gravel. The gravel is mostly 1st River Terrace Gravel but Jesus College gave the Common a small area of 2nd and 3rd River Terrace Gravels in what is now the Community Orchard. The solid geology on the higher ground is Gault Clay. These deposits are shown in the map to the left¹²². The height of the land rises from approximately 4.9m OD on the flood plain to 12.7m OD on the Newmarket Road.

In 2006 the City Council adopted the *Cambridge Local Plan* in which chapter 4 (on Conserving Cambridge) set three objectives:

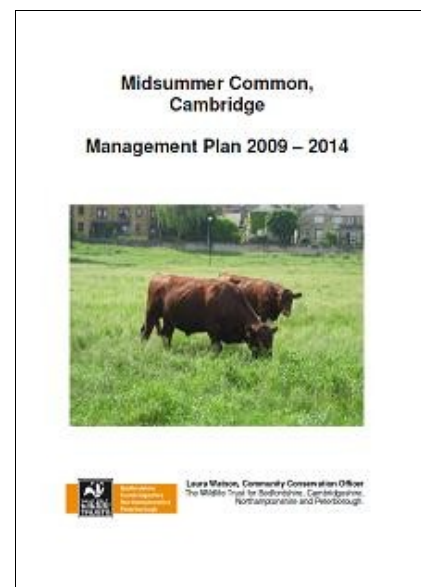
1. to ensure that the ... character of its ... open areas are safeguarded and maintained for the future;
2. to ensure the City has a strong green structure with an accessible network of green spaces rich in biodiversity; and
3. to protect open spaces ... which contribute to the setting, character and enjoyment of the City.



In the same year, local residents established Friends of Midsummer Common "to help foster good management practices" for the Common. FoMC volunteers work on the Common and helped organise events.

In 2008 the Cambridge City Council engaged the *Wildlife Trust* to prepare a Management Plan for Midsummer Common. This Plan set the Council 7 main objectives:

1. to enhance the species richness of the grassland to achieve a more natural floodplain grassland habitat;
2. to maintain and enhance the overall habitat diversity of the Common;
3. to maintain the trees so as to contribute to the character of the Common and its value for biodiversity;
4. to enhance the Pound through the creation of a community orchard;
5. to maintain and improve the site infrastructure;
6. to enhance the visitor experience; and
7. to put in place administrative arrangements to ensure the coordinated implementation of this management plan.



The Community Orchard

In 2010 a group of FoMC volunteers set about implementing the fourth *Wildlife Trust* objective which was to create a Community Orchard on the land once owned by Jesus College.

3.2.4 Objective 4:

To enhance The Pound through the creation of an orchard.

Rationale:

Although part of the common, The Pound is not utilised for grazing or events and is merely a link to Maids Causeway. This relatively small area of grassland has great potential to be the location for a more positive use such as a community orchard. This change in land use would link well to the adjacent allotments and would act as a demonstration of locally produced fruit. Fruit growing plays a significant part in the heritage of Cambridgeshire and it would be apt to reflect this on the common.



The site was covered with nettles, brambles, thistles and stones which had to be cleared. The Conservation Plan called for new tree plantings to be of native species and local provenance. The *East of England Apples and Orchards Project* was the ideal source.



Planting started in January 2010 with a group of FoMC volunteers assembled and trained ready for the task. It didn't take long to have a group of expert diggers!



There are now over 50 fruit trees growing in the Orchard. Apples, plums and gages, pears, and cherries are grouped together. Other trees fill the spaces in an orderly way. Gaps are left for community groups to hold a picnic with a couple of benches and a table provided. It is a popular place and gives a distinctive flair to Midsummer Common.

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10 September 2021

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