

QUEEN EDITH

**The story of a Saxon king,
his lover
and a
Cambridge suburb**



A short paper

by

JEREMY LANDER

Revised March 2026

Foreword

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This short paper on the Queen Edith area of Cambridge comes with a health warning: I am not a historian. Consequently, it is bitty, anecdotal and scandalously short of references. I cannot read Anglo Saxon, and, in any case, there is very little primary evidence from the 11th century - the principal focus of my study. My main sources have been the Domesday Book or, to be more accurate, the Victoria County History which contains the information in more digestible form, together with various bits and pieces gleaned from books and websites on the Saxon period, of which there are many. Most of the published material on the 1066 story has, in some shape or form, been derived from either the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', a patchy series of accounts by various anonymous scribes of the time, usually with axes to grind, or the Bayeux tapestry, almost certainly a piece of Norman propaganda. Neither are to be fully trusted and the full, true picture of this fascinating period of British history remains tantalisingly out of reach.

My interest in the subject began when I moved to Nightingale Avenue in the Queen Edith area, a south-eastern suburb of Cambridge, in the 1990s. At the time I had no idea of the connection between the area where we lived, the 'Queen Edith' school in Godwin Way (where my children went), and Harold II king of England in 1066; let alone an obscure Saxon noblewoman named Edith, or how our house came to be built on land that belonged to St Thomas' Hospital in London. But I wondered about the naming of the area and why it was called Queen Edith's. Left rather unsatisfied by the explanation that it was named after Queen Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor (especially when I found that there was no connection between her and the area) I dug a little deeper.

I owe my 'eureka' moment to novelist Julian Rathbone and his book 'The Last English King'. In his fictionalised account of the life of Harold II he describes the love affair between Harold and the beautiful Saxon princess Edith Swan-Neck and it was while I read the paperback on holiday that the scales fell from my eyes. Could this have been the Edith that lived in 11th century Cambridgeshire, and the naming of the area be just a case of mistaken identity? A quick delve into the Victoria County History and all was revealed: the name Edith Swan-Neck, or 'Eddeva the Fair' as she was often called, landowner in and around Cambridge in 1066 and common-law wife of Harold II, was everywhere.

In 2018 I moved from Nightingale Avenue to Burwell, a fen-edge village 10 miles northeast of Cambridge and - what do you know? - Edith Swan-Neck also owned land here in our new village. I like to think that we still live on some of Edith's land, and I feel strangely comforted - if at the same time a little spooked - by that thought.

In 2021 I became aware of some fascinating new research on Edith Swan-Neck by the historian Bill Flint. His 2015 book 'Edith The Fair- Visionary of Walsingham' casts new light on this fascinating 11th century princess and I have included some of this material, as well as some startling new research on the run up to the Battle of Hastings emerging in March 2026.

My thanks go to the Cambridgeshire Collection and its fabulous store of local history, and to the rather less reliable but wonderful websites that are now available to both enlighten and befuddle the casual historian.

Jeremy Lander
October 2009 (Revised 2026)

1. EDITH AND HAROLD

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It is sometimes said that the Queen Edith area in Cambridge was named after Edith the wife of Edward the Confessor and Queen of England from 1045 until 1066. In one respect this is true; the developers of the 1950s suburb believed there was a strong connection between the area and the Saxon Queen, her family and associates, so road names like Queen Edith's Way, Godwin Way and Wulfstan Way appeared. But what was the basis for this assumption? Did the wife of King Edward really have a connection with this part of Cambridge? To try and answer this question requires some research into one of the most fascinating periods of English history - the middle of the 11th century, and the leading family of the day; the Godwins.

Earl Godwin was a Wessex magnate who lived in the Chichester area of Saxon England from the late 10th century until 1053. He and his wife Gytha had eight children; Edith was the eldest and had a younger sister called Aelgifu. Their six sons were called Swegen, Harold, Tostig, Gyrth, Leofwine and Wulfnoth (*see fig. 1 Godwin family tree*). They were a close family but extremely ambitious, and often schemed against one another, as well as with and against everyone around them. Godwin was the chief power-broker in the Saxon Witan (or court) and was able to secure two of England's Earldoms for his eldest sons Swegen and Harold. He also persuaded King Edward, the very religious and somewhat austere king who was crowned in 1042, to marry his daughter Edith and she became Queen in 1045.

King Edward granted Harold the Earldom of East Anglia and it was probably there that he met and married a local noblewoman known by several names: Edith (also spelt Eddeva and Ealdgyth) 'the Fair', but also 'the Beautiful', 'the Rich', and most commonly, possibly because of her graceful neck, Edith 'Swan-Neck'¹. She was born in about 1025, a Norfolk princess from a Danish bloodline. Recent research by historian Bill Flint suggests that she was the granddaughter of Aethelred II (the Unready), her mother being Wulfhilda, daughter of Aethelred and his first wife Aelgifu of York². From the many entries in the Domesday Book we do know that Edith owned a huge amount of land in East Anglia³, and especially around Cambridge, including Hinton Manor in present day Cherry Hinton. (*See Map 1*).

¹ The original Saxon for her sobriquet is 'Swanneshals' which may translate better as "Gentle Swan"

² Aethelred's second wife was Queen Emma of Normandy, mother of Edward the Confessor (as with royalty today there are many interconnections). Confusingly Emma was also known as Aelgifu.

³ It is interesting to note that women in pre-Conquest England were able to own large landholdings in their own right.

We do not know where Edith spent most of her time, as with aristocrats throughout history she probably moved from one manor to another, but due to the concentration of her lands south-east of Cambridge she must have spent a significant amount of time here and may have occupied a manor house known as ‘Uphall’ on the higher ground near St Andrew’s Church in Cherry Hinton. Her influence would have been felt all around East Anglia. There is evidence to suggest that she and Harold founded the abbey of Waltham in Hertfordshire to give thanks for a seemingly miraculous cure of Harold’s eyesight soon after they met. Bill Flint has also posited the fascinating theory that Edith Swan-Neck was the fabled ‘Rychold’ in the ballad that describes a vision of Mary, the mother of Jesus, appearing to the Lady of the Manor at Walsingham in Norfolk in 1061⁴. Harold was known to be the Lord of Walsingham Manor, gifted to him as part of his Earldom, and so it is perfectly possible that Edith was in effect the foundress of the Walsingham Shrine, one of the most important Christian shrines in Europe.

Harold and Edith Swan-Neck were not married legally, but *in more Danico* (in the Danish manner), sometimes called a ‘handfast’ marriage, a practice frowned on by the church but common amongst Saxon nobility. It seems that they had a long and successful union, producing six children: Godwin, Edmund, Magnus, Ulf, Gytha and Gunhild, born between 1047 and about 1055. The family may have been based in the Cambridge area but probably moved around with their parents. Harold, as advisor to his father Godwin and King Edward would in any case have divided his time between his family responsibilities, the court in Winchester, and his various forays abroad, notably to Normandy, a region that played such a momentous role in 11th century politics.



Edward the Confessor

King Edward, the ‘Confessor’, had spent his childhood in exile in Normandy and had come to admire its customs and its people, especially its ruler Duke William. Once he became King he was often seen to favour the Norman court over the Saxon nobility and it was even suggested that he promised the throne to William following his death. This would have particularly aggravated the Godwins who were constantly challenging the King and his Norman faction. In 1051 matters came to a head when the Godwins refused to punish the people of Dover for mistreating a Norman delegation and in retaliation the King exiled the whole male Godwin family while his wife and queen, Earl Godwin’s daughter Edith, was dispatched to a nunnery in Wilton.⁵

The Godwins were all pardoned shortly afterwards, following which Harold may have spent more of his time in East Anglia keeping out of Edward’s way. A quiet life in East Anglia would have become less possible however when Harold’s father died in

⁴ ‘*Edith The Fair, Visionary of Walsingham*’ by Bill Flint pub.2015

⁵ *Queen Edith’s connection with Wilton would remain strong and she was to spend most of the rest of her long life there. As with Edith Swan-Neck and other Saxon noblewomen she owned a great deal of land. Although some of it was held in East Anglia, particularly in Essex, there is little evidence of any strong connection with Cambridge.*

1053 and he became head of the family, second in power only to the king⁶. Edward was a weak king whose vow of celibacy meant there was no clear succession and during his reign political ferment was rife. As a popular leader Harold was clearly in line for kingship but there were strong challenges to him from all sides. In this climate many political alliances were made, and broken, and it was probably in forming such an alliance that in 1064 Harold married, officially this time, another Edith, (sometimes named Aldith or Ealdgyth) sister of the Northumbrian nobles Edwin and Morcar. This brought Harold into conflict with his own brother Tostig, Earl of Northumbria, who, after a local rebellion, was forced into exile in Norway by Harold.

In the same year Harold made a mysterious trip to Normandy, possibly as part of a botched attempt to get some family members released from captivity. Fatefully during this stay Harold was to swear, over some holy relics, his allegiance to Duke William. It may have been a trick, or carried out under duress, but the moral high ground that Duke William was able to claim from this was to play a significant part in the events that were to follow.

In 1065 Edward the Confessor fell seriously ill. He died in January 1066 and Harold Godwinson was proclaimed Harold II, the new King of England⁷. Hearing of this Duke William must have been enraged; had he not been promised the throne by Edward, even by Harold himself? Immediately he began to make plans for an invasion. Expecting this, Harold ordered his army to stand in readiness on the south coast, but with bad weather in the English Channel keeping William in Normandy, the army was disbanded so they could bring in the harvest.

Meanwhile Harold's exiled brother Tostig had joined forces with the King of Norway Harald Hardrada. Seizing an opportunity, they landed a large invasion army on the Yorkshire coast. Edwin and Morcar, Harold's brothers-in-law and allies, met the invaders at Fulford, just outside York, but they were defeated, leaving Harold's northern flank exposed. With the weather in the Channel still preventing an invasion, the new king decided to move his army north to meet Tostig and Hardrada's army. Victorian writers claim they marched the 250 miles in four days, an astonishing feat, but new research suggests that the (not insubstantial) Saxon fleet was able to transport the bulk of Harold's forces by boat from London, and other ports on the east coast⁸. However this was achieved, they arrived in very quick time and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Norwegian forces at Stamford Bridge, just south of York. By then the weather in the English Channel had improved and William's Norman Army landed, unopposed, on the south coast at Pevensey, near Hastings.



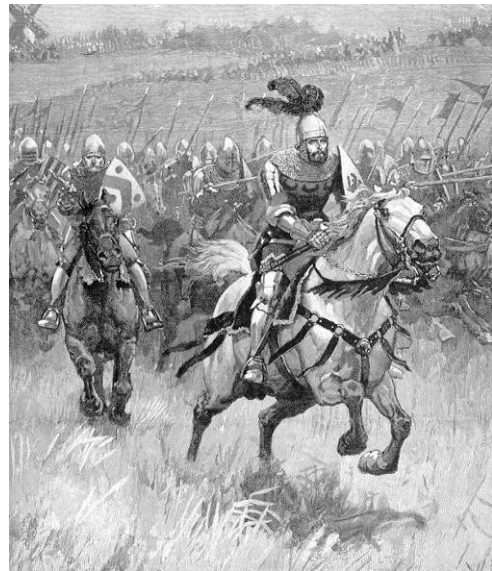
Two of Harold's ships on an earlier excursion to Normandy, depicted in the Bayeux tapestry

⁶ His elder brother Swegen had died in 1052 on the way back from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, an attempt to atone for his sins (of which there appear to have been many).

⁷ In Saxon England the monarchy did not necessarily follow a strict hereditary line. Instead, a new king would be chosen by a selected group of nobles known as the Witan.

⁸ According to research by Tom License at the University of East Anglia published March 2026. He suggests that, although some soldiers may have made the journey by road, most of the army would have used the sea route.

Harold's army, somewhat exhausted and depleted from their battle at Stamford Bridge, set sail (according to the new research⁹) back from the Humber estuary to London and thence by foot to the south coast in a desperate attempt to see off this new and bigger threat. On October 14th 1066 the two armies met on a hillside a few miles north of Hastings. Harold's force tenaciously held the ridge while Duke William, the holy relics on which Harold had sworn allegiance, around his neck, rallied his army for one assault after another. It was a very even match and, in the days when battles usually took an hour or two, they fought from early morning until dusk. Either side could have won but



Harold's forces began to break, then Harold himself was wounded, possibly by an arrow in the eye. His warriors believed their leader had been killed and their resolve finally crumbled. Harold, two of his brothers, and the few remaining Saxon soldiers around them were overcome by the Normans and hacked to pieces.

Legend has it that the next day Edith Swan-Neck arrived at the battle scene and was the only one who could identify Harold's mangled headless body¹⁰. It is possible that she took it back to Waltham Abbey for burial, though it is more likely that William refused a proper interment for the 'oath-breaker' as he called him, ordering the body to be left under a pile of stones on the beach at Hastings.

It is not certain what happened to Edith Swan-Neck after the invasion. A column of Norman cavalry swept into the Cambridge area in late 1066 and built a castle on the hill just north of the river crossing, from which they subdued the local population¹¹, as they were to do in similar fashion all over the country. Was Edith driven mercilessly from her lands by the Normans, along with her compatriots, or were deals done with the invaders? As a royal princess with many important friends and connections she may have been offered a more noble way out. Bill Flint seems certain that she went into exile in Denmark in 1070, a full four years after the invasion, so perhaps she was spared the ignominy of many of her Saxon subjects¹². Her lands may have been held temporarily by her daughter Gunhild who was given refuge at Wilton Nunnery in 1066, possibly by her aunt, the dowager Queen Edith who was one of its patrons¹³. Another inhabitant of the convent was the daughter of King Malcolm III of Scotland who wanted to marry her to Alan Rufus 'the Red', one of the Counts of Brittany (later known as the Dukes of Richmond), who fought beside Duke William at Hastings. Alan was evidently not impressed with Malcolm's daughter and fell instead for Gunhild, stealing her away to be his wife. He died soon after (in 1089) after which Gunhild married his younger brother Alan the Black - though whether she was

⁹ *Ibid.* As well as their own ships they had the many abandoned ships of Hardrada's invasion fleet sitting conveniently on the shores of the Humber. Still a voyage of a few days, and subject to the vagaries of tides and weather, but much less tiring for troops exhausted by battle.

¹⁰ The Victorian romantic novelist Edward Lytton imagined Harold's distinguishing marks to be the words 'Edith' and 'England' tattooed around his heart, but this must surely be simply that: romantic.

¹¹ The Sheriff of Cambridge was the infamous William Picot, one of William's most enthusiastic followers and 'Scourge of the Saxons'. He was called by the Abbot of Ely a 'hungry lion, a ravening wolf, a cunning fox, a dirty pig and an impudent dog'.

¹² 'Edith The Fair'-Bill Flint

¹³ Gunhild developed an eye tumour there, said to have been miraculously cured by Bishop Wulfstan who waved a crucifix over it.

officially married to either Alan is a matter of some dispute. Flint argues that Edith Swan-Neck's land passed to Gunhild, and thence to Alan the Red, in a brokered deal with William. In any case, by the time the Domesday Book was written in 1086, all of Edith's land had been transferred to Alan the Red, including Hinton Manor¹⁴.

Edith Swan-Neck's sons Godwin, Edmund and Magnus escaped to Ireland from where they launched various unsuccessful rebellions. Her other daughter Gytha is known to have taken refuge in Denmark, perhaps accompanied by Edith¹⁵. There are also various records in Domesday of an "Ulf" and a "Godwin Child" - possibly Harold and Edith's youngest son - still holding lands around Cambridge after 1066, but in effect the Godwin line was finished.

After Hastings Harold's official wife Edith, fearing for her life, hurried north to seek safety with her brothers, Edwin and Morcar. But Alan the Red was soon to descend on them too and she was forced to flee, with her son, also called Harold, to the continent where they both died in relative obscurity.

King Edward's widow, Harold's sister Edith, fared rather better than the other two Ediths. It is possible that William wanted to make amends with the woman whose husband had promised him the crown (she may also have had a hand in Tostig's invasion that so devastatingly depleted Harold's defences) and she was allowed to keep most of her land around Winchester. She died a rich, well-respected woman in 1075 and was buried next to Edward in Westminster Abbey.

¹⁴ *Many dispossessed Saxons escaped across the fens to the Island of Ely joining the rebellion that was to be led from there by Hereward the Wake.*

¹⁵ *Gytha is thought to have married Vladimir II of Kiev in 1074 and ended her days as a Russian Queen, linked ultimately via Queen Victoria's family with the present-day House of Windsor*

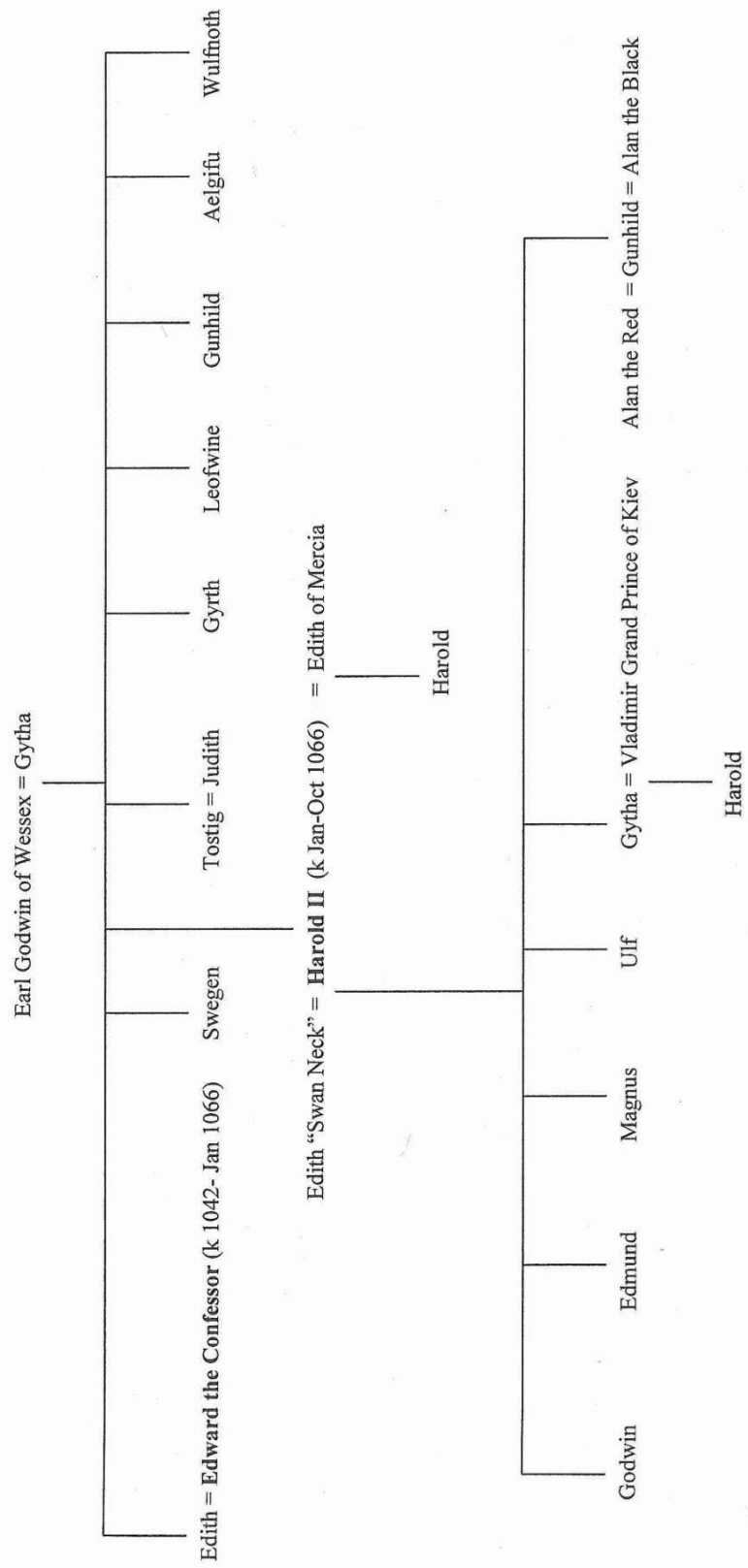
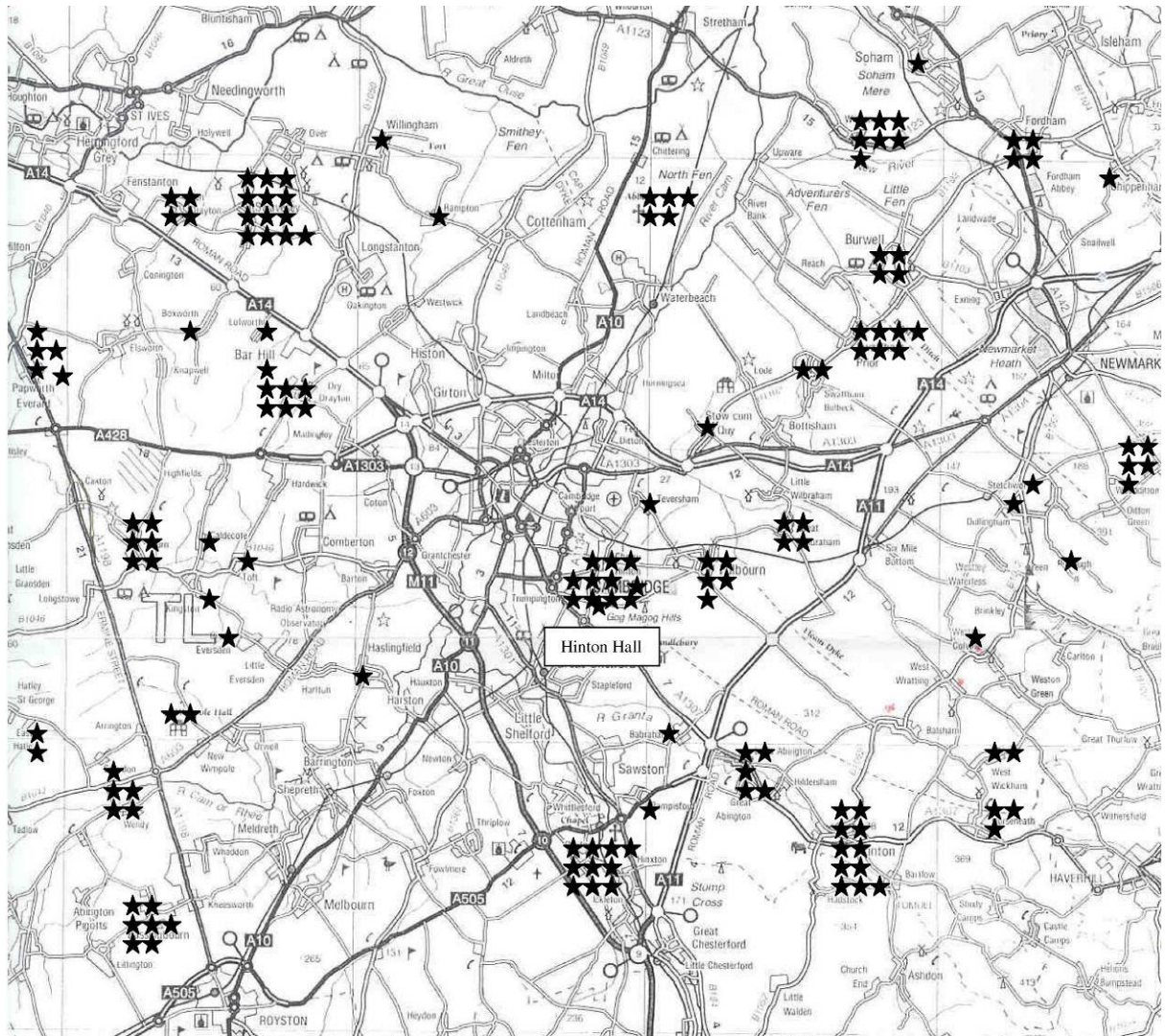


Fig 1 The Godwin Family Tree



Map 1: Edith Swan-Neck's lands around Cambridge in 1066. Each star represents one hide, a variable quantity of land needed to support one household but thought to be between 100 and 120 acres (information taken Victoria County History, Cambridgeshire)

2. SAXON CAMBRIDGE

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In 2003 in Cherry Hinton, just off Coldham's Lane, 664 skeletons were found; the largest cemetery to be excavated in Cambridgeshire. Some of the graves had 'pillow' burials in which the head rests on a stone, and although some of the carvings on the stones could be dated to the 9th and 10th centuries, the sheer density of burials, sometimes four deep, implies that the site was used over a long period. At the centre of the cemetery a small wooden structure, possibly a church, was found and in a nearby pit a cross (pictured above) thought to date from the 8th century and probably put aside to make way for the building.



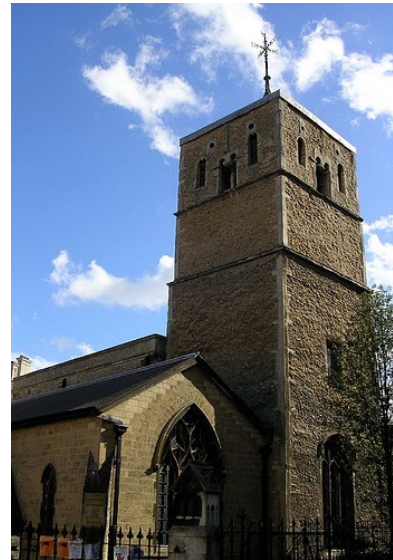
Skeletons of new-born babies found around the wall-lines of the church was evidence of the Saxon practice of burying infants under the eaves of churches so that their unchristened souls could receive 'constant baptism' from rain dripping off the consecrated structure. At that time many believed that un-baptised babies went straight to hell and Harold and Edith had gained some notoriety from the clergy for burying an un-baptised child of theirs next to St Dunstan's church in Canterbury.

Clearly there was a substantial Saxon settlement in Cherry Hinton, and this is unsurprising. Here on the drier ground above the fens there were springs for fresh water, chalk pits and woodland for building materials, and rich supplies of eel, fish and fowl in the meres and watercourses that stretched to the north and west. In fact it had been a site of settlement since the Bronze Age - a converging point of ancient

trackways, with tumulii, hill forts and tribal meeting places on the nearby Gog Magog Hills. ¹⁶

¹⁶ For information on pre-Roman settlement at the 'War Ditches' see Appendix 2

A short way from Cherry Hinton lay Cambridge (or Grantabrycge as it was then known); a town established by the Romans at the key crossing point over the River Cam where Magdalene Bridge is now. The Romans had a walled garrison on Castle Hill overlooking the bridge and Roman farms and settlements spread extensively over a large area. After the Romans had left Grantabrycge continued as a Saxon town and several churches were built including one named after St Benedict known as St Bene'ts. Saxon churches were usually made of wood and did not survive, but Cambridge must have been important and wealthy enough to warrant a stone church so the tower of St Bene'ts, dating from around 1025, remains today as one of England's oldest structures¹⁷.



The Saxon tower of St Bene'ts

The map of the area around Cambridge (*see Map 2*) gives an idea of the medieval landscape around the city in the days before the big drainage schemes that began in the 17th century but were not complete until the early 19th century. The blue tone represents all the land that lies below the 10m above sea level contour. It would not have all been underwater by any means, but much of it would have been 'fen'; boggy marshland unsuitable for agriculture or settlement and very difficult to traverse except by boat or punt.

The land between the fen and the higher, densely wooded ground to the east was immensely important, providing a trade route and strategic corridor between London and the central parts of England and the prosperous wool and wheat-producing areas of Norfolk¹⁸. During the Iron Age huge earthworks called dykes were built to defend and control this route, and these were heavily reinforced in the early Saxon period. The best known of these earthworks is Devil's Dyke but Fleam Dyke, running from near Cherry Hinton to Balsham, is an equally impressive structure.

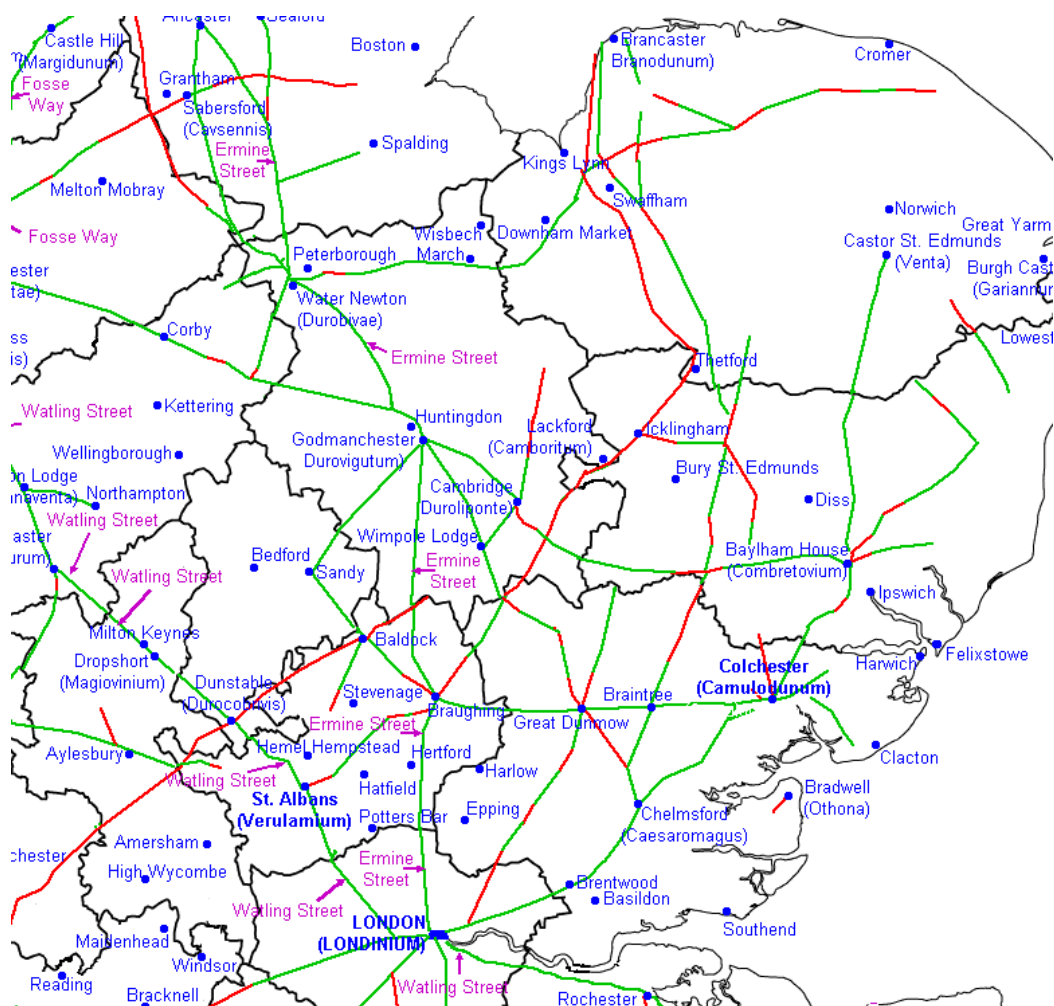


Fleam Dyke (from the Wuffings website)

¹⁷ Hills Road, leading south east out of Cambridge, was formerly known as the Hadstock Way. Hadstock church (St Botolphs) was founded in the same year as St Bene'ts by King Cnut, probably to celebrate his victory at the Battle of Assunden, and it is interesting to think of these two great Saxon foundations being closely linked.

¹⁸ The trackways that ran from south west to north east across this corridor were known collectively as the 'Icknield Way' the actual route varying depending on the season.

fenny marsh. Indeed gardens between Perne Road and Cherry Hinton Road are still known to flood following periods of exceptionally wet weather.



Map 3: The Roman Road network

The lands of Alan the Red and the Dukes of Richmond that had belonged to Edith Swan-Neck eventually passed away from their successors and by the 14th century the estate of Hinton Hall had been divided into two. The upper part, now Cherry Hinton village, was called “Uphall” and the lower part “Nether-Hall”. The prefix ‘Cherry’, first recorded in 1576, may have arisen from the large number of cherry trees in the area. For a time it was also known as ‘Saffron’ Hinton as in the 17th and early 18th centuries the saffron crocus was grown in great abundance between the village and Saffron Walden both for medicinal and culinary purposes.

The lands passed on through the generations by a complicated path (*see Appendix 1*) eventually being confiscated in 1543 by Henry VIII and given a few years later by his young son Edward VI to St Thomas’ Hospital on London’s south bank, to provide income for his new foundation. It provided shelter and treatment for the poor, sick, and homeless and later, being handy for Southwark’s booming red-light district, prostitutes and their clients. This may have led to its reputation as a ‘bawdy house’ and its closure by Henry VIII in 1540 before being re-founded by Edward VI in 1553 just before his death at the age of 15. The hospital was also the site of the printing of the first English Bible in 1537.²⁰

²⁰ The hospital was already described as ‘ancient’ in 1215 and was named after Thomas a’Becket suggesting it may have been founded after 1173 when Becket was canonised. Originally it was run by a mixed order of Augustinian monks and nuns.

3. DRAINING THE FEN

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It is difficult to tell how much land was owned by St Thomas' Hospital or how it was distributed but after Enclosure in the early part of the 19th century the land was consolidated into one main area (see Map 5). By roughly calculating Edith's lands in hides it can be seen that by 1847 the area owned by St Thomas' was probably a lot smaller, but it was still a substantial estate.

Cambridge grew rapidly in the late 19th century and early 20th century and the pressure for suburban development became irresistible. Map 6 shows the spread of this development between Cherry Hinton village and Cambridge²¹ and how most of the St Thomas' Hospital land, being further out, remained as farm and orchard land until the 1950s. Some road names bear testament to the St Thomas' Hospital connection, including Nightingale Avenue, named after the famous Florence who established her nursing school at the hospital, and the adjoining Kinnaird Way after Olga Kinnaird, founder of the YWCA which began as a hostel for Florence's nurses returning from the Crimea.

To provide land for the expanding developments the draining of Hinton Fen was essential. H. Gunning, writing in 1786, painted a picture of what the area must have been like since Saxon times:

“If you started from the other corner of Parker's Piece you came to Cherry Hinton Fen, from thence to Teversham, Quy, Bottisham and Swaffham Fens. In taking this beat you met with great varieties of wild fowl, bitterns, plovers of every description, ruffs and reeves and, not infrequently, pheasants. If you did not go very near the mansions of the few country gentleman who reside in this neighbourhood you met with no interruption. You scarcely ever saw the gamekeeper but met with a great number of young lads who were on the lookout for sportsmen from the University whose game they carried and to whom they furnished long poles to enable them to leap those very wide ditches which intersected the Fens in every direction”.²²

As well as being good for sport the ditches and ponds could be extremely hazardous and were the site of not infrequent drownings, including one tragic case recorded by the Cambridge Chronicle on Sept 24th 1813:

“We are much concerned in stating that..Mrs Ventress...was found drowned in a ditch in the Parish of Cherry Hinton. She had left Cambridge on the preceding day and took one of her children with her, a girl of about sixteen months old, who we regret to say was also found drowned...within a few feet of her mother.”²³.

²¹ *Between 1801 and 1811 the population of Hinton parish declined from 319 to 234 but it doubled to 474 by 1821. By 1901 it was 2,597, and by 1921 4,269. In 1981 there were 7,000 inhabitants in Cherry Hinton and 14,000 in Coleridge and Queen Edith's wards.*

²² *From 'Reminiscences of the University, Town & County of Cambridge from the year 1780', pub. 1854*

²³ *From Cambridge Chronicle ed E. Filby*

Whether the incident was purely accidental or resulted from some Hardy-esque scandal we can only guess but finding a way across the fen could clearly sometimes be challenging. There were no proper roads, and the tracks from Cherry Hinton into Cambridge varied according to the weather. When Long Drove, now Cherry Hinton Road, came into being at Enclosure a ploughman drove his straightest furrow across common fields as a guide to the road makers and it was remarked that it used to be a 'pretty footpath across the fenny ground' until about 1850²⁴. Mill Road was a similar footpath known as Hinton Way and this crossed the fen at a narrow point called White Bridge, where the Brookfields/Perne Road junction is today.²⁵



Ditton Meadows, Cambridge; Hinton Fen would have looked much like this.

The programme of draining Hinton Fen began in 1825 when fifty men were employed in a scheme to improve the land owned by St. Thomas' Hospital and over the subsequent twenty years or so more drainage schemes were carried out and several streams were covered over to make way for housing and roads. One such stream ran along the north western edge of Nightingale Avenue Recreation Ground, crossed Queen Edith's Way and ran parallel to Mowbray and Perne Roads. Now piped the water can sometimes be heard trickling under the manhole covers near the Queen Edith Way roundabout. A similar ditch ran through the site of present-day Queen Edith's School where there was a large pond.

The only visible watercourse remaining in the area is Cherry Hinton Brook. Springing from the chalk downland at the bottom of Lime Kiln Hill, the brook flows north-westwards through the grounds of Cherry Hinton Hall, joining the Nightingale Avenue/Perne Road watercourse at the Brookfields junction and flowing north behind Sainsbury's supermarket. It then meanders around Coldham's Common, past the Abbey swimming pool and the football stadium to Stourbridge Common where it

²⁴ From 'Over the Hills to Cherry Hinton' H.C. Coppock 1984.

²⁵ Another hazard for local people was the 'ague' or 'Fenlanders' Disease'. Initially thought to be caused by the 'miasmas' coming off the marshes it was, in fact, malaria and was still prevalent in the early 19th century. Laudanum, which is tincture of opium, was used by many to stave off the effects and it was still being sold in the Cambridge area in 1827. Many fen gardens also had a crop of white poppies for home production.

flows into the Cam. The pond and weirs in Cherry Hinton Hall, enjoyed by generations of duck feeders and Folk Festival goers, were put in place in the 1840s by John Okes, a surgeon at Addenbrookes Hospital, who built the Hall as his family home. Later they were improved by its subsequent owner Charles Balls, a director of the Cambridge University and Town Water Works Company²⁶.

In 1885 the higher ground adjoining Hills Road began to be developed. The Rock Company laid out the new roads and by 1892 the Rock and Cavendish estates were completed.²⁷ Between the 1890s and the 1930s the area grew with large detached houses being built at the western ends of Blinco Grove, Glebe Road, and Hills Avenue, and on Cavendish Avenue as far as Baldock Way, but during the First World War a large army camp was established here in the open fields around Blinco Grove. After the troops had left for the Western Front it became a high security camp for soldiers suffering from venereal diseases, much to the distress of many local residents, particularly following the escapes that seemed to occur on an alarmingly regular basis. After the war, following the drive initiated by the Tudor Walters 'Homes for Heroes' Report of 1918, a small enclave of council houses was built here, around a large area of allotments.

As well as good drainage all this new housing needed improvements to sanitation and water supplies and in 1852 the Cambridge University and Town Water Company obtained permission for water to be piped from the spring-head at Cherry Hinton. The project was completed in 1855, with a reservoir being built on Lime Kiln Hill and pumping stations on Cherry Hinton and Fulbourn Roads. In fact there was so much water coming from the Wandlebury aquifer that it was able to serve most of Cambridge and water was pumped to a high-level reservoir at Madingley. Following a typhoid scare in 1907 however these were replaced by the Fleam Dyke pumping station further out into the countryside.

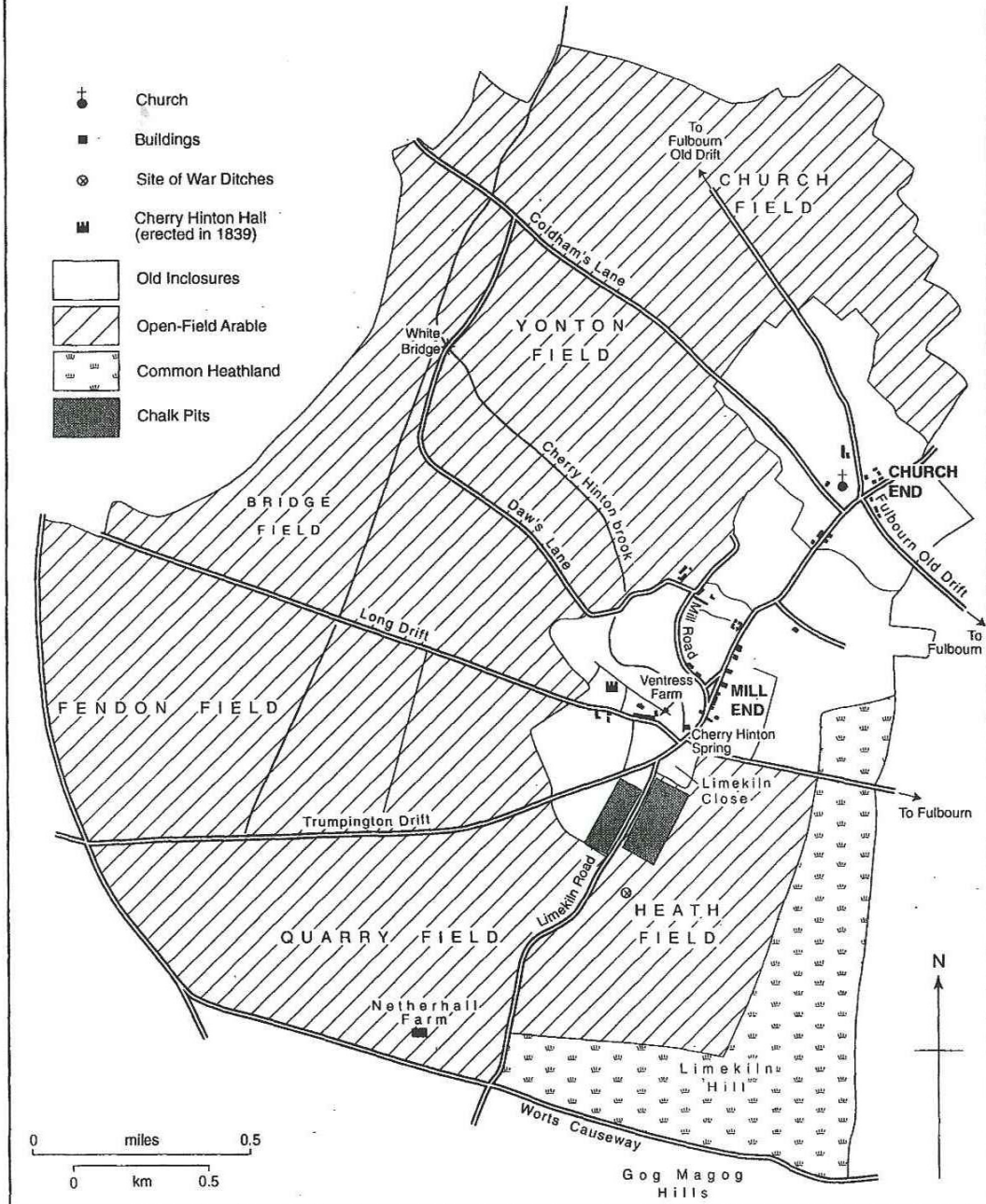


Hunting for game on the fen

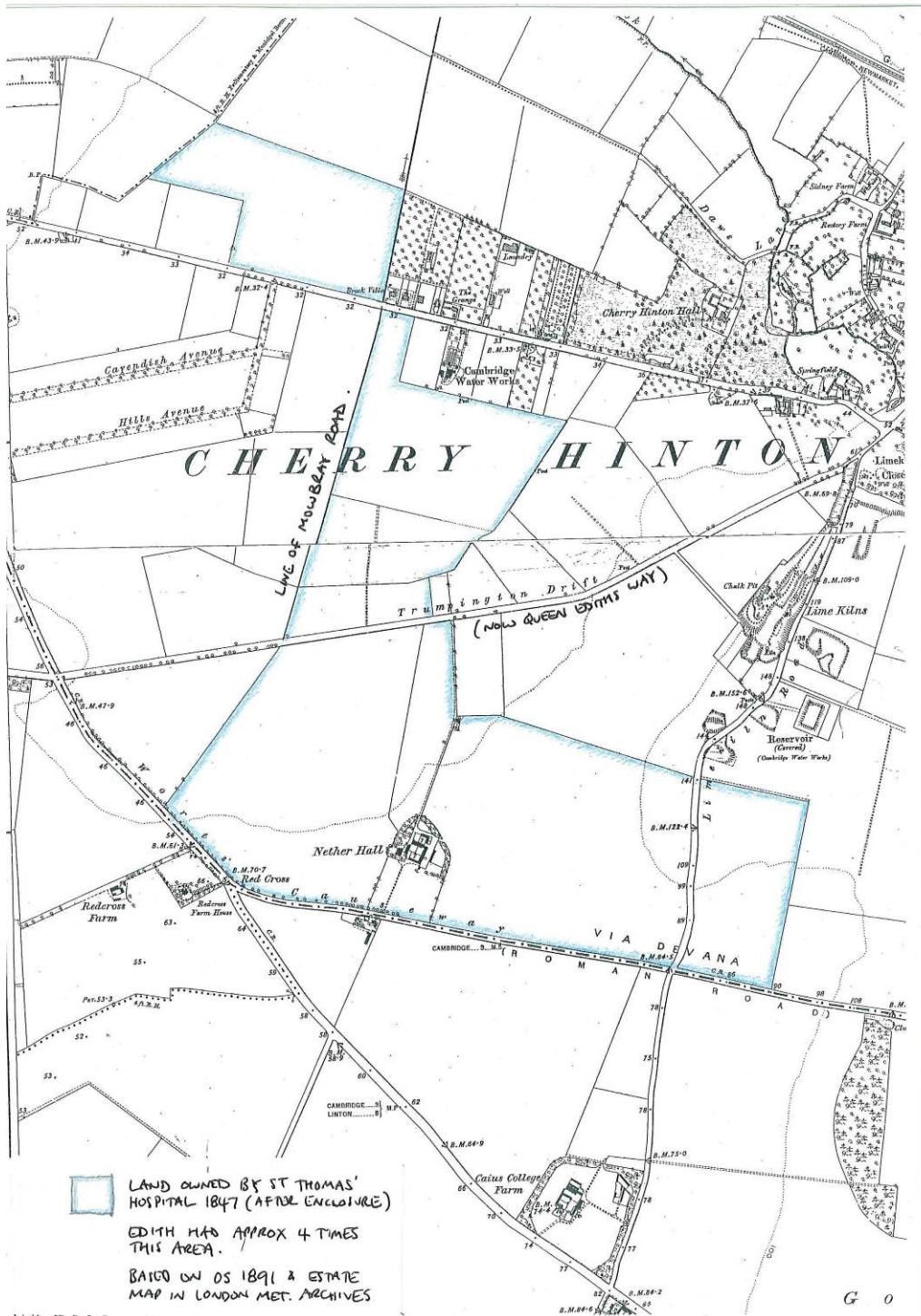
²⁶ *Cherry Hinton Hall and its grounds were sold to the City Council in the 1930s. The Cambridge Folk Festival began in 1954 and has been held there every year since. It attracts musicians and music lovers from all over the world.*

²⁷ *Before then just a few houses and Cavendish College existed along Hills Road. Cavendish College (named after the then-Chancellor of the university) was a failed attempt at allowing poorer students to sit Cambridge tripos exams without the expense of joining a Cambridge college. In 1894 the Congregational Board of Education purchased the estate and it became Homerton College, moving from London to become a women-only teacher training college.*

CHERRY HINTON BEFORE INCLOSURE c. 1810



Map 4 Cherry Hinton before Enclosures of the early 19th century



Map 5 St Thomas' Hospital land after Enclosure

4. SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

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The Cambridge-Newmarket railway line opened in 1848 and passed through Cherry Hinton Village. It crossed Cherry Hinton Brook close to 'White Bridge' in Brookfields but kept on a westerly course toward Cambridge station rather than swinging in a northwards loop across Coldham's Common as it does today. By 1928 the tracks of the old line had been removed making the way for new developments in Romsey Town. The line it took can be traced today along Marmora Road and the rear gardens of Greville Road.

Peterhouse College was a major land-owner in the area and they sold off all the land along what was to become Mowbray and Perne Roads (Andrew Perne was a Master of the College) to private developers who between 1932 and 1938 built the semi-detached houses typical of the so-called 'ribbon' development of 1930s suburbs, the road being improved with wide verges to form part of the city's new ring road.

During World War II a long ditch was dug as a tank trap right across the Queen Edith area from north to south and out into the open countryside. It is difficult to see why such an enterprise was undertaken to protect a city that cannot have had great strategic importance. It may have been intended to defend the railway junction from any paratroops landing in the open area around Wandlebury, or it may have been devised just to keep unoccupied troops busy after Dunkirk. In any case it remains a hazard for unwary house builders when they encounter the loose earth that was used to back fill the ditch after the war.



The tank trap is visible as a white scar running north south across what was then open fields either side of Queen Ediths Way (Addenbrookes would eventually occupy the land bottom left of photo)

After World War Two the building of local authority housing continued with the construction of a large council estate north of Queen Edith's Way, complete with a small shopping centre, pub and parish church in Wulfstan Way, and two schools: one

named Queen Edith's and the other Netherhall²⁸. South of Queen Edith's Way the houses were built by private developers in various packages between the late 1950s and the 1970s. It is these two areas, either side of Queen Ediths Way, and mainly on St Thomas' Hospital land, that became known as 'Queen Ediths'. (See map 7 for an early layout of the estate)

In 1945 Peterhouse sold off the land to the east of Perne Road and initially 100 prefabricated houses were built there, replaced in the 1950s by more substantial semi-detached council houses around St. Thomas' Square²⁹ and along Walpole Road, set back from the road, with wide tree-lined verges. In 1983 the college sold its remaining holdings, with some low-cost houses built at St. Bede's Gardens and in 1993 a further 100 houses were built off Daws Lane.

The houses built in the 1950s and 1960s are typical of post-war housing in the UK. There is a good deal of local authority housing in pale brown brickwork, some clad in precast concrete planks, many with what were called 'Finlock' gutters made of concrete which had the multiple purpose of bridging first floor windows, providing support for the rafters and forming a gutter all rolled into one. Although speedy to build they were liable to leak and the solid construction led to condensation problems. Many houses have now been re-clad in render or new brick, either by the local authority or by those occupiers who purchased the houses in the 1980s government sell-off of council housing.

Many house builders proclaimed the excitement of modern-day living with fitted kitchens and central heating powered by the new wonder-fuel: oil! A fabulous picture of 'Mrs 1970' in front of her new oil fired boiler comes from a 1960s brochure proclaiming a brighter and warmer tomorrow with no more smelly and dirty coke boilers or trips to the coal shed in the middle of the night.

More new housing followed in the 1960s and 1970s on the south side of Queen Ediths Way built mainly by private developers buying parcels of land from St Thomas's Hospital. These follow the 'Garden-City'³⁰ style of low density semi-detached and detached housing with substantial gardens, plenty of open space in between, wide green verges and plenty of interconnecting footpaths. Low front walls and 'prairie' style fencing were essential to this open look made popular by American suburban development. In spite of many house deeds insisting these features be kept, higher fences and hedges have, as the years have gone by, given the area a different feel; the low density and open spaces remain though.

²⁸ In 1952 twin schools were established on Godwin Way for infants and juniors and amalgamated in 1989 into Queen Edith's County Primary School. In 1957 the Cambridge Grammar School moved from Parkside to new premises on the south side of Queen Edith's Way and the Netherhall Secondary Modern School was built at the end of Gunhild Way. In 1974 the two amalgamated to become a split-site comprehensive school. The old secondary school was demolished in 2010 and replaced with Queen Emma, the sister primary school to Queen Ediths CPS.

²⁹ It would seem logical that St Thomas Square was also on Hospital land but the evidence seems to contradict this, more research of landholdings prior to council development would be useful.












³⁰ The Garden City Movement began in the late 19th century based on Ebenezer Howard's philosophy of good quality low density housing, clean air, broad leafy avenues and segregated industrial areas. Its first manifestation was Letchworth Garden City begun in 1908 which in turn was the model for the post WWII 'new towns' such as Stevenage and Milton Keynes










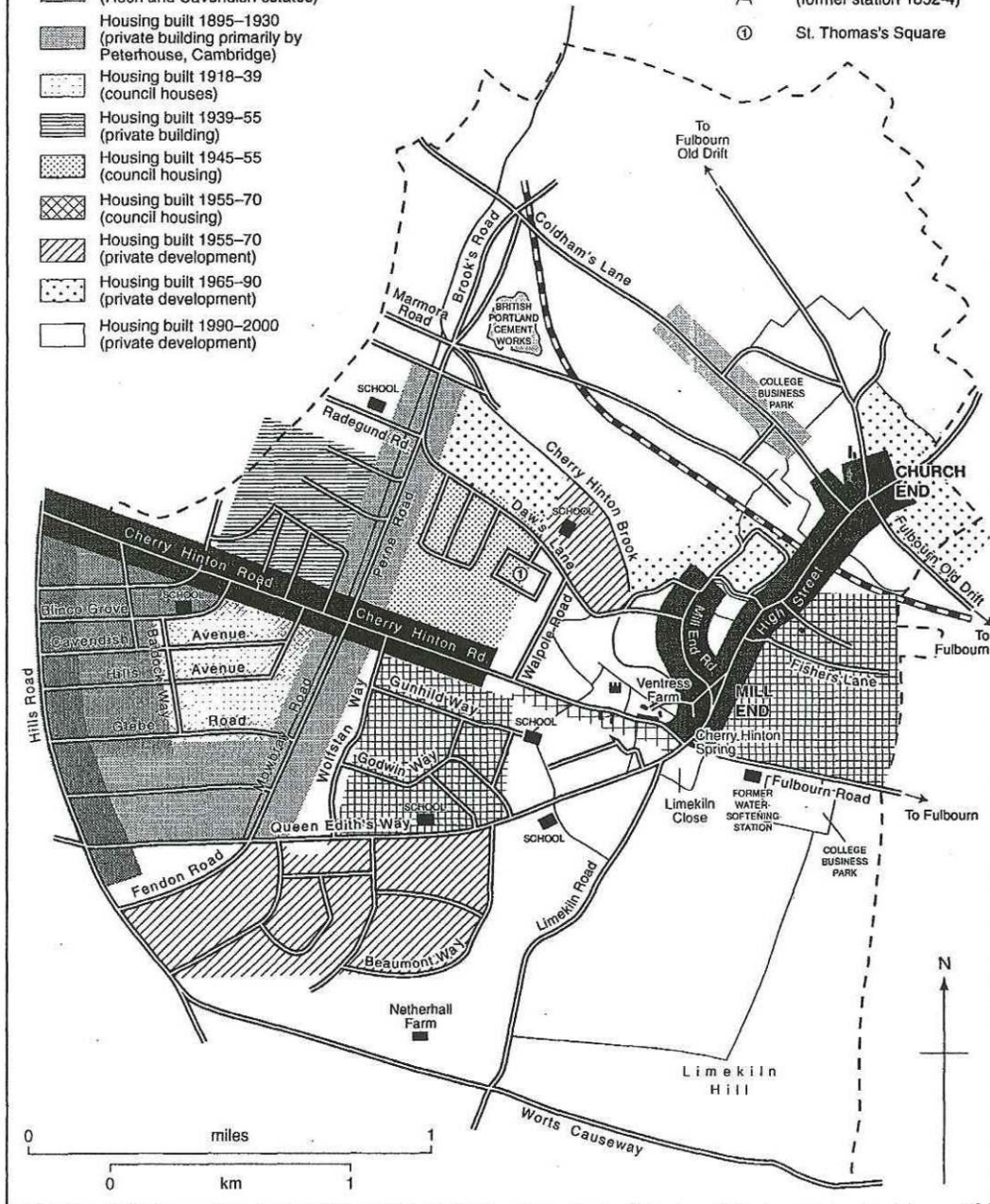
Addenbrookes Hospital moved from its city centre location in Trumpington Street to the south-western edge of the suburb in 1959 and has grown almost exponentially ever since becoming one of the world's leading teaching hospitals. In 2014 the hospital employed 10,000 people and by 2020 this has nearly doubled with the relocation to the campus of Papworth Heart Hospital and the pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca. The Cambridge guided bus system now operates a service to Addenbrookes and the fields between the hospital and Great Shelford are being built over rapidly. Plans to build a third Cambridge railway station at Addenbrookes are in development.

The huge building boom in the city in general, has been fuelled, in the face of repeated economic recessions, by the hi-tech industries growing in what has been dubbed 'Silicon Fen'. The lop-sided nature of Cambridge caused by the location of the railway station in what were then green fields well to the south of the historic centre, and now Addenbrookes, has put added pressure on the south eastern edge of the city. This pressure will inevitably lead to a greater concentration of population around Queen Ediths. How long the low-density estates laid out by the mid-20th century developers will hold out against this trend is anyone's guess. The English ideal of suburban living, with gardens, green verges and parkland, is a strong one, rooted deep in the national psyche, but more back-land development and apartment buildings suggest that, where the opportunity arises, density will increase. The large development known as GB1 on Worts Causeway, given planning consent in 2021, has 72 apartments included in the scheme.

CHERRY HINTON: SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT c. 2000

-  Housing built by 1870
-  Housing built 1870-85
-  Housing built 1885-95 (Roch and Cavendish estates)
-  Housing built 1895-1930 (private building primarily by Peterhouse, Cambridge)
-  Housing built 1918-39 (council houses)
-  Housing built 1939-55 (private building)
-  Housing built 1945-55 (council housing)
-  Housing built 1955-70 (council housing)
-  Housing built 1955-70 (private development)
-  Housing built 1965-90 (private development)
-  Housing built 1990-2000 (private development)

-  Church
-  Buildings
-  Cherry Hinton Hall (erected in 1839)
-  Parish Boundary
-  Old Railway Line
-  Level Crossing (former station 1852-4)
-  St. Thomas's Square



Map 6 Pattern of development 1870-2000



Map 7 Preliminary proposals for the estate layout (From Cambridge 2000 website)

Postscript

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In the Queen Edith area today there is no memorial to King Harold II, and no plaque or statue exists to remind us of his beautiful mistress Edith the Fair who owned all this land until the cataclysm of 1066 tore it apart. There is the massive Fleam Dyke earthwork, and the tower of St Benets Church in central Cambridge, but otherwise there is little physical evidence of the old Saxon and Danish hegemony remaining anywhere above-ground, most of it being swept away after the Norman Conquest. The people that had come to think of itself as 'English' were overthrown and dispossessed, completely and utterly. It is easy to forget that no king of England spoke English until Henry V, 300 years later. No rebellion managed to overthrow the Norman 'yoke', no outside alliance came to the Saxon's rescue. Instead it was the passage of time that gradually assimilated the Norman and Saxon peoples and created the culture that is the basis of our life in England today—our language, place names, family names, land ownership, the judicial system, all of this and more came about from the ultimate fusion of the conquerors and conquered of 1066.

The street names are the only clue to the Saxon history of the area and these have been misrepresented and misunderstood. This has unfortunately been made worse recently by the naming of the new primary school at the end of Godwin Way as 'Queen Emma'. Emma was the mother of Edward the Confessor and had even less connection with Cambridge than her daughter-in-law Edith, Harold's sister. Emma spent most of her life in Normandy, and then in Winchester.

Does all this matter? Why would we need to be reminded that a Danish princess once owned this land, or that much of the area was marshland, criss-crossed by paths and causeways along which she may have wandered on horseback surveying her property, reflecting on the extraordinary and beguiling family whose fate became inextricably intertwined with her own? Does it help to enrich our experience, knowing that the bones of such an amazing story lie just beneath the streets and gardens which, at first glance, appear so very ordinary? Perhaps knowing a little of what lies under the surface will remind us that in our landscape nothing appears from nowhere. If you look hard enough there is a story behind everything.

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Appendix

1. Land in Cherry Hinton, Cambridge

<u>Date</u>	<u>Owned by</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Before 1066	'Eddeva The Fair'	Also known as Edith Swan Neck, Mistress of Harold II
By 1089	Alan of Richmond	Alan the Red (Rufus) d. 1089 Then Alan the Black (Niger) d.1093
	Heirs of Duke of Richmond	
13 th Century	Passed to Henry III's servant Neville	
1241	Peter de Savoy	
	Sir Bertram De Cryol of Kent d.1256	
1265	Temporarily seized by supporter of Henry III	Battle of Evesham
13 th /14 th Century	Successors De Cryols	
1341	Will Clinton 1 st Earl of Huntingdon	
1343	Lord Mowbray	
	Successors to Mowbrays	
1476	Richard Duke of York (son of Edward IV)	Anne Mowbray (aged 5!) married Richard 1 st Duke of York (then aged 4 and later one of the Princes in the Tower)
1483	Recovered by Mowbrays and assigned to William (Lord) Berkeley	
1504	Maurice (Lord) Berkley then to son: Thomas Berkeley	
1508	Sold to Robert Fenrother	Alderman Robert Fenrother, a goldsmith, who by will of 1524 estate to his son-in-law Henry White, whose son Robert in 1543 was forced to give to Henry VIII
1553	Lands transferred to St Thomas' Hospital by Edward VI	Combined with Savoy Hospital (founded in 1512)
1592	Leased to William Catlyn	
1774-1877	Tenants: Hedley family	
1931	Sold by St Thomas' Hospital	North of Cherry Hinton Rd and east and west of Perne Rd
Up to 1940s	Sold by St Thomas' Hospital	Last land between QE Way and Worts Causeway sold piecemeal 1962-1979

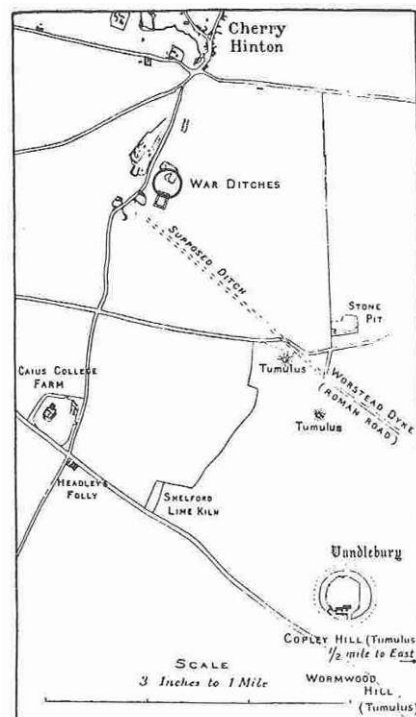
From Victoria County History

2. The War Ditches & Worts Causeway

The top of Lime Kiln Hill has been a site of settlement since the late Bronze Age. In the Iron Age it was made into a hill fort (similar to Wandlebury) consisting of a circular rampart 165m diameter and a ditch 3m deep. In 1894 archaeologists excavated the area in advance of it being destroyed by quarrying. They called it the 'War ditches' hill fort and found Bronze Age barrows and early Iron-Age pottery sherds in the lower levels of the ditch. Round huts had stood within the enclosure, and the ditches were deliberately filled in on at least two occasions.

By 110 A.D. the hill was occupied by a Roman farm. Four buildings, possibly five, indicated two periods of occupation. A large rectangular building, thought to have been a thatched farmhouse, and a smaller one, probably a barn, were both burnt down in the 2nd century AD. Other post holes on a slightly different axis marked out the largest rectangular building, occupied in the 3rd and 4th centuries. North-west of the complex there was a 2nd-century well which had been deliberately filled in. There were no traces of occupation in the 5th and 6th centuries, but in the 7th century the Bronze-Age barrows were reused for burial, one on a wooden bed with iron fittings had grave goods including a crystal ball, sling, and spear head.

The Iron-Age hill fort was probably built in order to control the prehistoric trackway which ran between Haverhill and Cambridge. In the Roman period its surface was paved over. In the 13th century it was called Wolves Street (known by 19th century antiquarians as Via Devana). In 1709 William Wort gave money to improve the route and the new road was renamed Worts Causeway.





Map 8: The area today