Mill Lane

A narrow lane with an industrial character, running down to the river and lined by buildings of various ages, including University buildings and others.

Mill Lane led down to the King’s and Bishop’s grain mills at the Mill Pool which are recorded as mills on Domesday Survey of 1086. The remains of the mill pond and the weir still exist by Laundress Lane. Today Mill Lane has a quiet, back street, character during the day with long, inactive frontages of University buildings. In the evening, the activity provided by the public houses and the University Social Club create a livelier atmosphere, although this has been reduced by the recent closure of several restaurants. Large brick buildings with parapets dominate the street scene, whilst The Mill public house is an important landmark at its western end. At its eastern end a narrow entry underneath an unusual ‘swan-necked bridge’ provides access to the courtyard at the rear of the Pitt Building, which forms an enclosed quadrangle of C19 buildings built for the University Press and now housing the University’s Graduate Association offices, as well as teaching facilities and other University offices.

General Overview

Mill Lane is a quiet side street leading off the much busier route of Trumpington Street. Large brick buildings dominate the lane with long frontages standing directly at the back of pavement and rising to two or three storeys with parapets and a horizontal emphasis created by stringcourses. Robust facades, including basement windows with arched heads and pavement grilles, and the lack of greenery in the street scene, contribute to the atmosphere of an historic industrial area. This is confirmed by the survival of a former brewery at Millers Yard, recently the frontage of a complex of housing, office and restaurant uses. The distinctive roof and cowl of an oast house are seen across the otherwise unprepossessing car park on the north side of the road, further enforcing the impression that this has been an industrial area with a strong connection to brewing in the past.

The courtyard at the rear of the Pitt Building is a hidden space accessed under bridged alleys from Mill Lane in the south and Silver Street to the north. The east side of the court is formed by the Pitt Building, including Gothick details such as four-centred arched openings with stone details including transom and mullion windows and iron framed casements. The north and west sides are enclosed by early C19 office buildings of the University Press, built in Gault brick with large sash windows, presumably illustrating the need for abundant light to offices or areas associated with printing or print checking.
The University Press buildings are simple but have early C19 neo-classical proportions and detailing including flat brick arched to window heads and plat-band cill courses in stone that unite the frontages, as well as a formal entrance with engaged pilasters. They rise to three storeys with a parapet at the roofline. The southern block is of early C20 construction in red brick (similar to the Stuart Building), with more elaborate Queen Anne Revival details, including small swan’s neck pediment details over the transom and mullion windows in moulded brick. It rises to just two storeys, with basements, which allows sunlight into the court, and also has a formal entrance from the court with a decorative doorcase. Climbing foliage spreads from the Pitt Building onto the northern range adding to the attractiveness of the space. The buildings around the court are well preserved and illustrate the history of the University Press from the construction of the Pitt Building in the early C19, although the dominance of the space by car parking detracts from the setting. As a development they span the academic character of upper Trumpington Street and King’s Parade to the east and the more industrial aesthetic of Mill Lane to the west.

Near the east end of the street a highly ornamented red brick office building stands out and frames one side of the forecourt of Stuart House, a fine Queen Anne style building built in memory of the mathematician James Stuart (1843 – 1913) who promoted extra mural studies in Cambridge. Its green forecourt provides an attractive open space in the street, which is bounded by an elaborate wrought iron screen and gate. The access for cars to either side is poorly integrated with the green landscape.

At the lower (west) end of the lane, No. 12 (The Graduates Club) and Nos. 13 - 14 (the Mill Public House) provide a lower, two storey scale and a more domestic character. No. 13 includes a jettied C16 frontage (albeit remodelled in the C18), topped with a massive brick chimney stack, which articulates the centrally located fireplaces. The public house has been formed by joining two C18 cottages together. This building is on a prominent corner position, so features in views of the street from the green space on the island in the Mill Pond. The entry to Laundress Lane is tightly framed between the corners of two former warehouse buildings, much altered but retaining some character.

The paving of the street retains stone kerbs with stone slab linings to gutters and cobbled crossovers for the entrances of the former brewery. Views to some uninspiring back yard areas are seen from the lane. Mill Lane provides vehicular access to the Garden House Hotel off Granta Place and the many university buildings along the street. Pedestrians also use the street to access the university buildings or the riverside, and it is a busy cycle route to Newnham.
**Townscape Elements**

- Majority of buildings are back of footway or highway with several access lanes.
- Two to three storeys with basements for most of the street.
- Long, continuous frontages contribute to a strong sense of enclosure with views channelled down the street to the river.

- Wide frontages with parapets and stringcourses create a horizontal emphasis.
- Brick is the dominant material but in various colours including Gault and deep orange red.
- Inactive frontages create a tranquil atmosphere.
- Greenery interrupts the urban character of the street at Stuart House.
- Nos. 12 – 14 form an important group that represent an earlier phase of development as a more domestic scale street.

**Enhancement Opportunities**

The university buildings offer a significant opportunity for redevelopment or re-use.

The main environmental enhancement opportunity is the floorscape, which could be made more consistent to provide greater visual cohesion. More formal arrangements for on-street parking could help to manage the currently cluttered appearance.

The car park adjacent to No. 16 is a negative feature, particularly the boiler house and its prominent metal flue.

**Traffic Measures**

Alterations could be made to reduce the number of vehicles using the street and improve the pedestrian experience.
Archaeology / Historic Topography
Anticipated deposit depth varies from 1.50m to 2.50m
Potential for prehistory is low
Potential for Roman is low
Potential for medieval is high

Mill Lane runs along the line of the King’s Ditch to where it meets the river. Investigations on the site of the Pitt Press in 1892 reported medieval remains of various kinds, including several ditches. One of these is likely to be the King’s Ditch, which would suggest that Mill Lane was outside rather than inside its line. The lane ran down from the main access route towards the King’s and Bishop’s Mills.

Building No./ Name | Status | Age | Height (Storeys) | Wall Materials | Roof Form / Materials | Architect | Notes
---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---
1 | Listed Grade II | early C19 | 3 | Gault brick | slate | |
4 | Positive building | late C19 / early C20 | 2 + basement | red brick | Dutch pedimented gables / tile | |
6 Stuart House | BLI | 1925 | 2 | red brick with quoin stones | parapet | George Hubbard |
8 Lecture Halls | Positive building | 1930s | 3 | engineering & reddish / brown brick | flat | stripped Classical style |
10-11 Miller's Yard | BLI | C19 | 2 + basement | Gault brick | parapet / slate | former brewery |
12 Graduates Club | Listed Grade II | east: c1775; west: C16 origin, remodelled C18 | east: 3 west: 2 | east: red brick west: refronted brick & render | east: parapet west: pitched / slate | originally 2 houses |
13-14 The Mill Public House | Listed Grade II | C18 | 2 + attics | painted brick & render | pitched / tile | |
Department of Land Economy | BLI | C19 | 3 | painted brick | hipped / welsh slate | W.side of Laundress La. |
University Social Club | none | early C20 | 3 | Gault brick | hipped / slate | E. side of Laundress La. |
16 & 16a Research Services Division & Corporate Liaison Office | Positive building | C19 | 3 + basement | grey Gault brick | parapet | |
Applied Mathematics & Theoretical Physics Dept | Positive building | C19 | 3 + basement | Gault brick | parapet moulded cill bands | |
17 School of Biological Sciences & Disability Resource Centre | Positive building | early C20 | 2 + basement | red brick | balustraded faience parapet | |
Yard rear of 17 & Pitt Building | Positive building | early C19 | 3 & 3+ basement | Gault brick | parapets | Formal entrance to W side. Neo-classical |
The Pitt Building (University Press) | Listed Grade II | 1831 | 3 | ashlar-faced | castellated | Edward Blore | wings, fenestration & interior altered 1934-7 by Murray Easton |