

*The letters transcribed in this document were kindly shared with Meldreth Local History Group by Jenny Pollock whose grandfather, Cyril Hagger, was Chairman of Melbourn Parish Council in the 1950s.*

**50-07-12 From County Surveyor Enclosure**

## **COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

SHIRE HALL,

CASTLE HILL,

CAMBRIDGE

### **Flooding on Public Highway, Meldreth**

I understand that you are the owner of land through which the River Mel Passes.

As you will know, the condition of the river, particularly of the section between Sheen Mill and Burnt Mill, is the cause of flooding on the road between Melbourn and Meldreth. The river is completely blocked by weeds and is also in need of dredging. The water level is so high that after heavy rainfall it is likely that flooding will continue to occur and to cause inconvenience to everyone in the district and especially to those who live nearby.

There is at present no drainage authority responsible for the maintenance of this length of the River Mel and even if the suggested new Internal Drainage Board were established it seems likely that there would be a delay of some years before the Board could commence to function.

It is generally held to be the liability of riparian owners to keep the section of a watercourse passing through their land in good order and I therefore ask if you will please be good enough to clean out the length of the river adjacent to your land.

I write on behalf of the highway authority because the condition of the river is giving rise to flooding on a public highway. I understand, however, that the flooding is also injurious to agricultural interests and that it is therefore unlikely that the County Agricultural Executive Committee would be willing to make a grant towards the cost of the necessary works, although I cannot, of course, speak for that Committee.

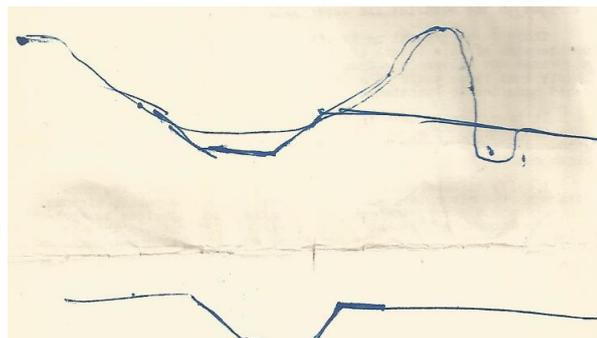
The most economical way of cleansing and r-grading the water-course would no doubt be by the use of mechanical plant and the work on behalf of all the riparian owners if the owners agreed to bear their share of the cost.

I hope that you will be willing to co-operate in this matter and I enclose a form and a stamped, addressed envelope for your reply. If you and the other riparian owners will agree in principle to share the cost I will ask the Agricultural Executive Committee to let you have an estimate of the likely expenditure involved.

Yours faithfully,

F. E. Bayliss,

County Surveyor.



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Meldreth Local History Group

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**52-07-12 From County Surveyor**

## **COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

SHIRE HALL,  
CASTLE HILL,  
CAMBRIDGE

Councillor C. Hagger,  
The Maples,  
Melbourn

Dear Mr. Hagger,

### **Flooding on Highway - River Mel**

I enclose a copy of a letter I have sent to the following riparian owners:-

- (1) Rev.F.A.L.Jukes, Th Vicarage, Melbourn
- (2) The Clerk, Melbourn Parish Council, Mr.S.G.Waldock,  
"The Elms", Water Lane, Melbourn.
- (3) B.J.Stanford, The Moor, Melbourn.
- (4) W.G.Conningsby, Westholme, Station Road, Melbourn.
- (5) P.Ward, College Farm, Meldreth.
- (6) G.C.Palmer, Sheene Manor, Meldreth.
- (7) Mrs.E.L.Worland, Valley House, Meldreth.
- (8) D.A.Elbourn, Orchard House, Melbourn.
- (9) A.J.Palmer, Cawdon House, Melbourn.
- (10) E.H.Ellis, High Street, Meldreth.
- (11) The Misses Elbourn, "Elmcroft", High St., Meldreth.

I have also written to Mr.J.W.Ward of Melbourn Mill, asking him if he would be willing to bear part of the cost in view of his alleged liability for maintaining part of the river downstream from his Mill.

I will let you know what replies I receive.

Yours sincerely,

F. E. Bayliss

County Surveyor

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**52-07-16 From County Ag Officer**

## **AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Montague Road,  
Cambridge.

16th July, 1952

Dear Mr. Hagger,

### **River Mel**

Since our conversation in my office last week, I have been able to make some further enquiries about the position regarding the preparation of a drainage scheme for the improvement of the rive Mel. Unfortunately Lancaster, the Committee's Drainage Officer, has been away for a few days leave and I have not been able to make further progress.

On looking into the position, I find that the Executive Committee is obliged to confine its activities to farm ditching and under-drainage schemes, and I find that we have definite instructions to refrain from undertaking under the farm ditching procedure, and work on arterial watercourses. There is no doubt that the River Mel must be described as an arterial watercourse and as such, the ministry through its Regional Drainage Officer. We have been in touch with the Regional Drainage Engineer, Mr. Chalcraft, and he will be making the necessary arrangements for a drainage scheme to be prepared. My impression, at the moment, is that Mr. Chalcraft proposes asking the Ouse River Board to prepare the necessary scheme and when this has been done the Committee will expect to get instructions from the Ministry's Regional Drainage Engineer to proceed to get in touch with the riparian owners and endeavour to get their agreement to pay their share of the cost.

When speaking with you last week, I regret that I overlooked the instructions to the Committee concerning arterial watercourses and I may have given you the impression that the Committee and its Drainage Department could be entirely responsible for a drainage scheme for the River Mel.

I understand that Lancaster has arranged to see you on Thursday of this week, and as he already knows of the present position I have suggested that he should go forward with his arrangement to meet you.

Yours sincerely,

L.W. Osborne  
County Agricultural Officer

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**52-08-07 From County Ag Officer to RDC Clerk**

**COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE  
AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Montague Road,  
Cambridge.

7<sup>th</sup> August, 1952.

Dear Sir,

**River Mel**

I have received your letter of August 5<sup>th</sup> in which you explain your Council's concern at the present unsatisfactory condition of the River Mel, and in which you suggest that my Committee should prepare and carry out a scheme for clearing out the river as a matter of urgency.

I should like to assure you that my Executive Committee is likewise very concerned about the present condition of the River Mel and as you may know, it has on a number of occasions in the last ten years endeavoured to influence those responsible for the river to take steps to improve matters. Unfortunately the riparian owners who are responsible for cleaning out the section of the River Mel which is now in bad condition, have not previously been prepared to cooperate in carrying out a scheme of improvement.

Recently, however, my Committee has been approached by a representative of the riparian owners who suggested that my Committee should prepare a scheme and an estimate of the cost of cleaning out part of the river. My Committee is normally concerned only with the preparation of scheme for improving farm drainage and farm ditches, and the Committee is not entitled to prepare schemes of improvement for arterial watercourses, and they have therefore asked the Regional Drainage Engineer of the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare a scheme for the River Mel.

When this scheme has been prepared and an estimate of the likely cost of carrying it out has been obtained, it is proposed that a meeting of the riparian owners should be held when, presumably a decision would be made by the owners as to whether they would be prepared to co-operate in carrying out the scheme. If the riparian owners fail to agree to the proposal, then my Committee have no power to carry out such a scheme and we should need to consider other possible steps. At the moment my Committee is reasonably optimistic that the riparian owners will be prepared to give favourable consideration to the scheme that is being prepared by the Regional Drainage Engineer.

Yours faithfully,

L.W. OSBOURNE.

County Agricultural Officer

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**52-08-07 From Residents to RDC Clerk**

Scawby Holme,  
Station Road,  
MELDRETH,  
Nr. Royston,  
Herts.

7<sup>th</sup> August, 1952.

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned ratepayers and householders do hereby express our indignation of the deplorable state of the River Mel which at the time of writing is once again flooding Station Road, Meldreth to the extent as follows

- (1) Causing the road to be impassable to pedestrians and vehicular traffic.
- (2) Flooding and damage to adjoining property.
- (3) Ruining garden and field crops.
- (4) Backing up soil drains, causing objectionable smells.

It was expected that during the two months intervening dry spell since the last flooding experiences that an effort would have been made to clean out the offending stretch of the River Mel to prevent a reoccurrence of this inconvenience. The responsibility, however, seems to have been passed from pillar to post with the result that after many meetings and inspections by officials of various departments the position remains the same.

We would suggest that the position is one of extreme seriousness and urgency and would petition you to see that immediate action is taken to remedy the situation at the very earliest opportunity.

Yours faithfully,

Wilfred D. Thurley.

G. Thurley	C.W. Mallett	M. Harrup
F. Harper	L.J. White	G.E. Harrup
F.A. Harper	R. Mallett	B. Pilgrim
E.E. Pepper	A.T. Pepper	F. Sell
W.S. King	J.A. Pepper	W. Neal
J.H. King	A. King	E.C. Neal
G.C.W. Palmer	M. King	A.E. Elbourn
C.A. Housden	J. Douce	E. Tyler
J.W. Ward	N.J. Hayden	L. Stockbridge
Percy W. Cox	S.E. Cox	

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**52-08-11 Cover Letter from RDC Clerk**

**South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council**

County Hall,

Hobson Street

Cambridge

11th August, 1952

Dear Mr Hagger

I beg to enclose copy of letter I have received from the County Agricultural Officer, also a copy of a letter signed by thirty residents of properties in the vicinity of the River Mel.

Yours sincerely,

B. G. Craft

Clerk.

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**52-08-15 From County Ag Officer**

## **AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Montague Road,  
Cambridge.  
15th August 1952

Dear Mr. Hagger,

### **River Mel**

You telephoned me a day or two ago asking about progress on the proposals for dealing with the River Mel. The Ministry's Drainage Engineer has been away and I have only heard from him this morning. He informs me that the Great Ouse River Board are making a survey of the River Mel and getting out the cost of putting it in order. The question of the River Mel being reclassified as a main river is likely to come before the Great Ouse River Board at a meeting in September, and the Engineer to the River Board considers that if riparian owners are prepared to put the Mel in order as we have suggested, it will no doubt influence the River Board considerably in the decision they make.

I am sorry I have no more definite news of progress, but I shall be on to the Ministry's Engineer again in a week or so to make sure that the matter is not left dormant.

No doubt you will have seen the paragraph in last night's local paper to the effect that Mr. Howard, M.P. is also taking up the question.

Yours sincerely,

F. L. Hobson.

Asst. County Agricultural Officer.

(Executive)

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**52-08-22 To Howard MP from Shire Hall**

## **COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

Shire Hall,  
Castle Hill,  
Cambridge.  
22<sup>nd</sup> August 1952.

Dear Mr. Howard,

### **River Mel**

Mr Phythian is away from the office until the end of this month so in his absence I opened your letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> instant, and I will endeavour to deal with the points you raise.

Your question as to who are the persons responsible under the present state of the law for keeping the river in order is a most difficult one to answer, and is really one on which should be obtaining your professional information rather than attempting to advise you.

I have before me a file of correspondence dating back to the year 1930 and during this period various remedies have been attempted with only little success. I think that this has resulted on the general feeling in this office that little can be done under existing law to improve matters. The position is admirably summed up by one of the Ministry's inspectors in the last paragraph of his report to the Minister in June 1941 when he states "I have read through the Cambridgeshire County Council's file in connection with this river, and since 1930 no less than one hundred and twenty four letters and reports have been written; notices have been issued and police action taken leading to one conviction, but after all this the situation remains unchanged. It therefore appears that if the river is to be put in order and flooding prevented, full powers to act must be given to either the Cambridgeshire County Council or the War Agricultural Committee."

The ideal solution would be for the River Board to take over the river as a "main river" and I am pleased to know that you are doing all you can to bring about this result.

The powers of the County Council appear to be limited to action under either Section 35 or 52 of the Land Drainage Act, 1930. It is quite true that the mill owners, having control of parts of the watercourse, are responsible for certain stretches, and in 1937 the County Council served two of the owners, J.W. Ward and W.O.S. Ellis, with notice under Section 35 of the Act to clean out the length of watercourse under their control. W.O.S. Ellis complied with this notice but J.W. Ward refused to do so. The work was accordingly carried out by the County Council and he was charged with the cost amounting to £15.2.6. This amount he failed to pay, Proceedings were accordingly instituted against him when he was ordered to pay £10.15.6 as the Magistrates held that the amount claimed for the work done was excessive. Although the County Council obtained a conviction, the result was not very encouraging.

In June 1941 an inspection of the area was made by one of the Ministry's Assistant Drainage Engineers and as a result of his report an order was made on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1942 in pursuance of the provisions of Section 19 of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous War Provisions) Act 1940 empowering the County Council to remove the wheels with the cast iron sheets facing the wheels from Topcliffe Mill and Burnt Mill (formerly known as Quaker Mill) and to remove the facing plate from Sheen Mill,

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although the Agricultural Committee of the County Council were of the opinion that this work would not of itself alleviate the flooding. They considered that there must be extensive dredging of the river and repair of the banks; the difficulty of advancing such a scheme was pointed out to the minister as adjoining owners and occupiers denied liability. The War Agricultural Executive Committee, however, were of the opinion that the suggested works would assist matters, and accordingly the work was carried out during the summer of 1942.

Since this work was done, the mill owners have adopted the attitude that as they no longer control the water they are not responsible for the condition of the river, and in fact I think it would be very difficult to take action against them.

The problem was revived in August 1947 when complaints about the river were made to the War Agricultural Executive Committee and they asked the County Council to consider having the length of river dredged from Ward's Mill downstream to the Third Mill as in their opinion such work would lower the water level and stop the seepage that was stated to occur through the banks and was affecting the lower land in the area. It was suggested to the War Agricultural Executive Committee that they should take the matter up direct with the River Ouse Catchment Board with a view to the necessary work being done under the provisions of Section 14 of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous War Provisions) Act 1940, as this act provided a much simpler procedure than that contained in Section 52 of the Land Drainage Act 1930. On the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1948 the War Agricultural Executive Committee stated that the Ministry would not give approval to a scheme to clean out the River Mel free of cost the riparian owners, using surplus prisoner of war and other labour during the winter months, because it was considered that the proposal would be equivalent to giving a hundred percent grant to the riparian owners and there would be no certainty that proper maintenance of the watercourse would be ensured for the future. The War Agricultural Executive Committee, therefore, requested the County Council to carry out a scheme under the provisions of Section 52 of the Land Drainage Act 1930.

As a result of this request the County Land Agent and myself had a conference in London with Ministry Officials. When it was pointed out to the Ministry that a scheme under Section 58 of the 1930 Act was considered to be impracticable to deal with the conditions as they existed, as the flooding chiefly affected agricultural land some distance away from the river, and the riparian owners were not materially affected. It was pointed out that the river runs through the property of a number of small owners whose gardens or orchards are on either side of the river. The banks were reasonably high and very little flooding took place, with the result that they would most certainly oppose and suggestion that a considerable portion of the cost of dredging the river shall fall upon them, and would no doubt be able to show that the cost was out of proportion to any degree of benefit which might be received.

The Ministry stated that they fully appreciated the position but that there was nothing which they could do with regard to the matter. All they could suggest was that if a voluntary scheme were submitted they would be prepared to make a fifty per cent grant towards the total costs of the works. They agreed that in the circumstance a scheme submitted under Section 52 of the 1930 Act would probably not be approved if strongly opposed by the riparian owners, and they further agreed that existing legislation was most unsatisfactory. They stated that the whole matter was under consideration and in the event of a voluntary scheme not being possible there was nothing that could be done until new legislation was introduced. They were probably anticipating the Heneage Report which was subsequently published and if the recommendations of that Report ever become law, the position would be solved.

When I reported the result of this interview to the Agricultural Committee of the County Council, they decided to do nothing further about the matter as they were satisfied that the opposition to any proposed scheme would be too great.

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It would seem that the only action that the River Board can take is either to include the river as “main river”, which would solve the whole problem, or set up a drainage board in the area. The County Council are pressing the Board to adopt the first mentioned course but I think their objection to this will be that they are afraid of repercussions which might result in requests to take over many similar sized rivers in, for example, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire. With regard to the proposal to set up a drainage board, this too would solve the problem, but whilst the County Council would oppose the setting up of a drainage board, they have always adopted the attitude that the area was too small for a drainage district and would therefore place too heavy a burden upon the owners and occupiers of land in the area.

Meldreth Local History Group

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**52-09-02 From County Surveyor**

## **COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

Shire Hall,  
Castle Hill,  
Cambridge.

2nd September, 1952.

Dear Mr. Hagger,

### **Flooding of Highway River Mel**

In case you are still trying to persuade the riparian owners to bear the cost of cleaning out the River Mel between Burnt Mill and Sheene Mill, I should let you know that so far I have not received an estimate of the cost from Mr. Chalcroft and that I have not therefore been able to inform them of the likely charges.

I understand, however, that the question of the adoption of the River Mel as main river is the considered at the Great Ouse River Board meeting to be held on 11th September, and I propose to defer any further action until their decision is known.

Yours sincerely,  
F. E. Bayliss  
County Surveyor

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**52-09-19 From Assist County Ag Officer**

**COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE  
AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Montague Road,  
Cambridge.

19th September, 1952.

Dear Mr. Hagger,

**River Mel**

Following our very short talk on Monday, I have been able to contact Mr. Chalcroft, the Ministry's Regional Drainage Engineer. He understands that at the meeting of the Ouse River Board on the 11<sup>th</sup> September the Board's Engineer submitted an estimate of approximately £4,500 for putting the River Mel in proper order for it to be taken over. I understand that the high estimate is due to the fact that some of the bridges are too small and that certain other work would be necessary. Before applying for power to make an arterial watercourse into a "main" river, the Board have to be satisfied of the agricultural importance of the proposal. They have, therefore, set up a special Sub-Committee to inspect the area and to report back to the Board on the agricultural interests and any other reasons such as the flooding of the roads and houses etc. which would give power to the proposal.

We shall now have to await the result of the report from this special Sub-Committee and the decision by the Ouse River Board.

Yours sincerely,

F. L. Hobson.

Asst. County Agricultural Officer.

(Executive)

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**52-11-04 To Howard MP from Min of Ag**

**4<sup>th</sup> November, 1952**

As it happens the problem of the River Mel, about which you wrote to me on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, has been engaging my attention recently, following representations similar to your own by the Cambridgeshire Agricultural Executive Committee.

The River Mel is primarily the responsibility of the riparian owners and occupiers, being neither under the control of a river board nor within a drainage district, and therefore lies the root of the trouble. The difficulties that have arisen in this case are only one example of a country-wide problem and any suggestions that special arrangements should be made to deal with them would be hard to accept. Satisfactory provision has been made for channels that are main river of a river board or are included in an internal drainage district, and also for those ditches that can be dealt with by Agricultural Executive Committees under the rules of good estate management and good husbandry. Outside these categories there are throughout the country many watercourses and ditches of varying size and importance from the drainage point of view for which there is no clear statutory provision. In the absence of fresh legislation, the method of dealing with these channels might be:-

- (a) definition as main river by the river board;
- (b) inclusion within a new internal drainage district; or
- (c) the promotion of a voluntary scheme by the riparian owners and occupiers concerned (there are no compulsory powers).

With regard to (a) the river board clearly could not be expected to take over any substantial length of individual channels as main river under present financial arrangements. As you probably know, the Heneage Report proposal that all watercourses should become the responsibility of the river board and that additional revenues to meet extra responsibilities should be secured by the imposition of an agricultural charge. These proposals are being discussed with the interested associations and the Government has reached no decisions on policy. So far as the River Mel is concerned, local interests are pressing the Great Ouse River Board to "main" this watercourse and the Board have decided to make an inspection. Whether or not to proceed with the maining is a decision that only the Board themselves can make. Their resources are already heavily strained to meet existing commitments and they may well be unwilling to add to them.

With regard to (b), the Great Ouse River Board has considered the inclusion in internal districts of various parts of its area and has met considerable local opposition, particularly in the county of Cambridgeshire. This probably accounts partly for the fact that the River Board, after holding a local meeting, has decided not to proceed for the time being, with its proposals for the formation of a new drainage district that could include the River Mel.

With regard to (C), the Agricultural Executive Committee are proposing to lay a scheme for improving the River Mel before the riparian owners with a view to getting them to contribute to that part of the cost not covered by Government grant. We are not too optimistic about the outcome, however, because similar steps were taken by the Agricultural Executive Committee in 1947 which came to nothing owing to lack of cooperation on the part of the landowners. Even if, after negotiations, agreement were reached on a scheme of works, there would be no provision for subsequent maintenance until the River Board could be prevailed upon to adopt the improved channel a "main river" and, as I have explained above, that is something the Board can only decide for themselves. Voluntary schemes are normally promoted by county councils and not Agricultural Executive Committees; but some doubts have been expressed as to the powers of the county councils to do such work and, in any case, it seems obvious from the letter you have had from Cambridgeshire County

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Council that they would be unwilling to act. By stretching the meaning of the word "ditch", it is sometimes possible for the Agricultural Executive Committee to do work on arterial watercourses under the farm ditching procedure but this is not attractive as a general practice and very often gives rise to practical difficulties.

The hard fact about arterial watercourses like the River Mel, the neglect of which is worrying to a great deal from the food production aspect, in that many of them cannot be dealt with effectively under existing legislation and it may be that the present unsatisfactory position will have to be accepted in these particular circumstances - for the time being at any rate.

Out only course at present is to await the River Board's decision whether or not to maintain the River Mel and, if they decide not to do so, to try to get a voluntary scheme going.

In view of our expectation in 1947, however, it would be necessary to ensure that such works were fully supported and that some arrangement could be made to ensure their future maintenance.

G.R.H. NUGENT

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52-11-10 Cover letter From Howard MP re From Min of Ag

## **House of Commons**

London S.W.1  
10<sup>th</sup> November, 1952.

Dear Mr. Hagger,

I send you a copy of a letter I have received from the Ministry of Agriculture, which as you will see does not seem to carry the matter very much further. If you think there is anything else I can usefully do at this stage perhaps you will let me know.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

S. Gerald Howard

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**52-11-24 SCRDC Parish Ditches Sub-Committee Notice**

**South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council**

COUNTY HALL,  
HOBSON STREET,  
CAMBRIDGE.

24<sup>th</sup> November, 1952

Dear Sir,

**Parish Ditches Sub-Committee**

A meeting of the Parish Ditches Sub-Committee will be held at the County Hall, Hobson Street, Cambridge on Friday morning next, the 28<sup>th</sup> instant, at 11 O'clock.

Yours faithfully,

B. G. CRAFT

Clerk.

**AGENDA**

1. To consider the question of commuting the cost of cleansing parish ditches adjoining the River Mel in the event of an Internal Drainage Board being set up.
2. To receive a complaint from Mr. J.D. Webb of the condition of the parish ditch at Streetly Hall Road, West Wickham.
3. To receive a complaint from Mr. W.E. Towler of the condition of Parish Ditches.

C. HAGGER

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**52-11-24 To Howard MP**

The Maples,  
Melbourn,  
Nr. Royston,  
Herts,

24th. Nov., 1952.

Dear Mr. Howard,

Thank you for your letter of the 10th. inst. enclosing letter from the Ministry of Agriculture. Although, as you say, it does not carry the matter much further, it is very interesting reading.

The surprising feature of the letter is the somewhat arbitrary and unrealistic view expressed in the second paragraph, which states: "The River Mel is primarily the responsibility of the riparian owners and occupiers ..".

The portion of the River Mel which gives rise to the present difficulties has, possibly, always been the responsibility of the mill owners. Mr Hann's letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug refers to this part of the river in the following terms: "It is quite true that the mill owner, having control of certain parts of the water course were responsible for certain stretches ..". This point of view is borne out by what is known to have happened in the past. There are features of the river channel which indicate that it has been constructed for the purpose of providing a stream of water for the mills, considerable stretches of the channel being of such dimension as to act as a reservoir; the procedure being periods of storing water alternating with periods of working the mills. Further it will be seen that the stretch of river, immediately below the tailrace, is of sufficient dimensions to carry the increased flow when the mill is working.

I think the foregoing makes it clear that the present channel with embankments, soak ditches etc. constitute a works which is of much greater magnitude than would be required for the normal flow of this river. To emphasise this point I would suggest that the normal flor of the Mel, for most of the year, is less than two million gallons per day. The difference in levels for the stretch of river from Sheene Mill to Topcliffe Mill would, in a channel of normal construction and even grading, give a flow in excess of 2ft per sec. It will be seen therefore that a channel 3ft to 4ft in width and only a few inches in depth would accommodate the water. The present width of the Mel is in places, including banks etc, approx. 40ft. As the Mel is mainly fed from springs and due to the porous nature of the soil in the catchment area there is very little runoff, the amount of flood water to be dealt with is negligible. I think it must be accepted that the part of the Mel with which we are concerned is an artificial water course and the present form is due to the fact that the driving of the mills was looked upon as the main purpose of the river.

I think it is very improbable that the riparian owners have ever been require to accept responsibility for the maintenance of the Mel and I think it would be very difficult to establish this responsibility with the river in its present state.

Now that the mills are not using water and the owners have been requested to remove the wheels I think it would be difficult to establish the principle that the mill owners are responsible for maintenance.

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The difficulties concerning the Mel and the problems of solving these difficulties falls into two parts.

- (a) The flooding of Station Road, Meldreth with house property in this road.
- (b) The flooding of agricultural land, the wastage of land due to the excessive width of the river, disused osier beds and swamps in the vicinity of the river.
  - (a) This is due to a combination of two causes; a branch in the bank of the dam behind the Sheene Mill and thick weed growth in the river below this mill.
  - (b) The immediate cause of this flooding is a breach in the bank approximately a quarter of a mile below Sheen Mill. Various attempts have been made to repair this breach but, owing to lack of maintenance, these attempts have not been very effective.

I feel that the most effective treatment of general problem of the Mel would be to regrade the channel for a distance of about half a mile above Burnt Mill. The new channel would, for the most part, lie in the existing bed but, in order to bring this channel on to an even line with easy bends, it would be necessary to cut parts of the channel through fresh ground. I have had no opportunity to take levels but there are indications that there is sufficient fall on this part of the course to give a small, fast stream which would scour the bed free from weeds and silt. The channel would be sufficiently low to obviate the danger of breaching the bank. It would also serve the purpose of draining and swampy patch now existing on this stretch of the river.

An improvement of this nature would not be very expensive, probably in the region of £500. Land now lying waste would be brought into cultivation and all flooding would be obviated. No high embankments would be required and where these now exist they could be levelled. The excavated material from the new channel could be used to fill in the excessive width of the existing channel. Works of this nature, upon completion, would require little or no maintenance beyond cutting rank growth on the banks and this would be done by owners and occupiers by way of good estate management.

The whole matter of improving and maintaining the River Mel is, in my opinion, a relatively simple and inexpensive process and does not justify the expensive set-up of an Internal Drainage Board.

As the question of maining the river is still under consideration by the River Board I take it that this would not be an appropriate time to again approach the Ministry but I do think it would be worth another effort in this direction if the River Board decide not to main the river. Mr Hanns letter is very useful information but does not deal with every aspect of the matter and I feel that it should be possible to put a more complete picture before the Minister. In view of the circumstances of the case I think it would be reasonable to ask for a scheme, upon the lines I have indicated, to be sponsored and financed by the Ministry; the executive part being carried out by the Agricultural Executive Committee.

If you feel that this suggestion is worth pursuing I should be glad of an opportunity to discuss with you the next step to be taken.

Thank you for your offer of help in this matter and the assistance you have already given me.

With kind regards,

Your sincerely,

C. Hagger,

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**52-12- 8 to 10 AJ Pepper Correspondence via S J Green Solicitor**

**S.J. Green**  
**55A St Andrews Street**  
**Cambridge**

Clerk to the South Cambs RDC.  
Cambridge.

10th December 1952

Dear Sir,

**Re River Mel**

I have been instructed by Mr Joseph Andrew Pepper of Orchard Cottage, Station Road, Meldreth, near Royston, to write to you with reference to the damage caused to his house as a result of flooding. At the moment my investigations are by no means complete. It is obvious that an examination by an expert drainage engineer is required but it would appear that the flooding to which my client's house has recently become subject is due to a combination of the following circumstances.

1. The neglect of the river bed and banks of the River Mel.
2. the failure of your Council to take steps to abate the nuisance which is caused by the defective state of the ditches close to my client's property, as a result of which the kitchen waste etc from various houses is unable to get away into the river.
3. The construction by or on behalf of the Council of a dam in the bank of the river below my client's house which has stopped up what was previously an overflow stream taking away a great deal of water in times of heavy rainfall.

I am enclosing a copy of a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> instant which I have received from the Clerk to the Great Ouse River Board and also a copy of my letter of today's date to the Clerk to the County Council. My client is not anxious to find himself involved in a substantial litigation against one or other Public Authority. He is only concerned to remedy the present state of affairs. I shall be very grateful if you will bring this matter again before the Council with a request that either alone or jointly with the County Council they will take steps to abate the nuisance which is being caused.

Yours Faithfully,

S. J. Green

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## **Great Ouse River Board**

Elmhurst,  
Brooklands Avenue,  
Cambridge.

S J Green,  
Solicitor,  
55A St Andrews Street,  
Cambridge.

8th December 1952

Dear Sir,

### **River Mel**

I write in reply to your letter of the 25th November, for which I thank you. I should first of all explain that the Board only has power to carry out land drainage works on that portion of the river within its jurisdiction defined as "main river" in accordance with the provisions of the Land Drainage Act, 1930, and delineated on the map approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. The River Mel is not "main river" and the Board is therefore not empowered to carry out work to reduce the incidence of flooding.

The Board has, however, drawn up a scheme for the formation of an Internal Drainage Board under the provisions of Section 4 (1)(b) of the Land Drainage Act, 1930. An Internal Drainage Board, as you probably know, is a self-governing body, collecting its own rates and controlled by Members elected by the ratepayers within its area. Such Board, when formed, would be able to carry out the necessary work on the River Mel and its tributaries. The Board's proposals were explained recently at a public meeting in Royston, but as there appeared to be a considerable amount of opposition to them, the future of the proposed scheme is unsettled and the matter will be considered at the forthcoming Committee Meeting this week.

I should also point out that the Cambridge County Council is empowered by virtue of the provisions of Section 52 of the Land Drainage Act 1930 to carry out schemes for the drainage of small areas, and as, at the present time, there is no other authority in the position to do the work, I would suggest that you advise your Client to apply to the County Council. Even if the Board's scheme for the formation of an Internal Drainage Board proceeds, it will be a considerable time before the Board will be in a position to function.

Yours faithfully,

K.M. RODDIS

Clerk of the Board

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The Clerk of the Cambridge County Council  
Shire Hall,  
Castle Hill.  
Cambridge.

10th December 1952

Dear Sir,

**River Mel**

I have been instructed by Mr Joseph Andrew Pepper of Orchard Cottage, Station Road, Meldreth, near Royston, to write to you with reference to the flooding which now occurs from the River Mel and adjoining drains and ditches at Station Toad, Meldreth. My client informs me that the flood water not only floods the highway, but on a number of occasions in recent months his house and garden have been flooded, causing a good deal of damage, which is understandable as my client's house is an old one. I understand that my client has already been in touch with the County Surveyor, who wrote on the 1st July of this year denying responsibility on the part of the Council. Whilst it may be said that the Council may be liable to deal with the flooding as an aspect of keeping the highway in repair, my client is, of course, only concerned to see that early steps are taken in order to remedy the existing state of affairs.

I have been in touch with the Clerk of the Great Ouse River Board and enclose of his letter dated 8th December.

I shall be very grateful if you will bring this matter before the Council with a request on behalf of my client that the Council will take steps either alone or jointly with other authorities to deal with the matter. My client has also tried to persuade the South Cambs RDC to deal with the matter, so far without success.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Clerk to the South Cambs RDC.

Yours faithfully,

S.J. Green

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**53-01-16 From County Land Agent**

**COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

SHIRE HALL,  
CAMBRIDGE

Councillor C. Hagger,  
The Maples,  
Melbourn.

16th January, 1953

Dear Sir,

**River Mel**

With further reference to our conversation with regard to the above. Would you be good enough to give me what, in your opinion, is the acreage of land suffering damage in "The Moor" area by the excessive amount of water in the Guilden Brook.

I do not wish to approach the riparian owners at this stage, but would be glad of your valued opinion in the matter.

Yours faithfully

C.R. Bennett

County Land agent

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**53-01-19 To County Land Agent**

The Maples,  
Melbourn,  
Nr. Royston  
Herts

19th Jan, 1953

The County Land Agent,  
Shire Hall,  
Cambridge.

**River Mel**

Dear Sir,

I reply to your letter of 16th January I give below an approximation of the acreage affected by flooding from the River Mel.

Vicarage Meadow	2 acres flooded or waterlogged
W. Conningsby	30 acres flooded, 10 acres waterlogged
P. Ward	20 " " 20 " "
P.G. Gadsby	10 " "
H.T. Kitchener	9 acres waterlogged
J. Stanford, Foxfields	16 acres flooded or waterlogged
J. Stanford, The Moor	6 acres flooded or waterlogged
Recreation Ground	1 acre flooded or waterlogged

In addition to the acreage enumerated above there is an area of a few acres in extent which can be improved by attention to banks, disused osier beds, etc.

I trust the above information will be useful and hope you will not fail to let me know if there is any matter in which I can give assistance.

Yours faithfully,

Cyril Hagger

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**53-03-10 From County Ag Officer**

**COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE  
AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**MONTAGUE ROAD,  
CAMBRIDGE**

10th March, 1953

Dear Mr. Hagger,

**River Mel**

The Executive Committee were this morning very glad to receive from you representations concerning the need to improve the present condition of the River Mel. You will, I feel sure, be glad to know that they have decided to accept your suggestion that a draft scheme for the improvement of the river should be prepared by the Ministry's Regional Drainage Engineer for eventual submission to a meeting of the riparian owners.

The Committee were very much in agreement with your suggestion that you should call a meeting of the riparian owners when a scheme has been prepared, and I hope to be able to make more definite arrangements with you concerning this when Mt. Chalcroft has been able to prepare the draft scheme.

As you will know, the Committee asked Mr. Chalcroft to prepare a scheme as long ago as last September but the proposal to make the River Mel "main river" rather side-tracked the issue and no scheme suitable for submission to the riparian owners has yet been prepared.

I hope to be able to write to you again without too much further delay.

Yours sincerely,

L.W. Osborne

County Agricultural Officer

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**53-03-25 From Clerk Cambs County Council Enclosing From County**

## **COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**

SHIRE HALL,  
CAMBRIDGE

Councillor C. Hagger,  
The Maples,  
Melbourn.

Dear Mr. Hagger,

### **River Mel**

Referring to our discussion yesterday afternoon, I enclose a copy of a letter which I have today received from the County Agricultural Officer. It is very disappointing to find that the Agricultural Executive Committee are now trying to throw the responsibility of preparing a scheme back upon the County Council.

The letter appears to be somewhat contradictory. In the second paragraph it is stated that the Committee agree that the County Council cannot make use of the Land Drainage Act 1930 while consideration is being given to the constitution of an Internal Drainage District, and yet in the penultimate paragraph the Committee are pressing the County Council to prepare a scheme for submission to the riparian owners. I realise that such a scheme may be termed a voluntary scheme, but even then it seems to me the Council must nevertheless still be acting under Section 52 of the Land Drainage Act 1930 and of course they are duty bound under such section to recover the cost from the riparian owners. Moreover if the Council are expected to prepare a voluntary scheme, it seems to me that the County Agricultural Executive Committee could equally well prepare such a scheme. In fact they are in a better position than the County Council in that they have more technical officers available.

Before I reply to Mr. Osborne's letter, I shall be pleased to receive your observations.

Yours sincerely

W.S. Hanns

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**COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
**AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**MONTAGUE ROAD,**  
**CAMBRIDGE**

The Clerk of the Cambridge County Council  
Shire Hall,  
Castle Hill.  
Cambridge.

24th March, 1953

Dear Sir,

**River Mel**

You will remember in earlier correspondence in recent months your Council and Committee have had an exchange of views on the question of improvement of the River Mel.

in your letter of January 15th, you informed my Committee that your Council could not make use of the powers given under Section 52 of the Land Drainage Act 1930 for the reason that consideration was being given to the constitution of a Drainage District. My Committee agrees that under Section 52 your Council has no other alternative course of action.

More recently my Executive Committee has been discussing the problem with representatives of the District Committee, and at a recent meeting Mr C. Hagger and Mr H.T. Kitchener, members of the Caxton and Melbourn District Committee, discussed in detail the whole problem of the River Mel.

After much discussion the Executive Committee decided that there was some likelihood that the riparian owners would consider favourably a scheme for cleaning out the river, provided the cost was not excessive. Mr Hagger, who is a member of the South Cambs R.D.C. offered to call a meeting of riparian owners, before which could be laid a scheme for cleaning out the River Mel.

Mr. Hagger, it appears, has already been in touch with a member of the riparian owners and is confident that most of the riparian owners might be persuaded to carry out a scheme of improvement and might in fact be prepared to undertake work which was the responsibility of other riparian owners.

My Committee is not permitted to carry out drainage schemes on an arterial watercourse such as the River Mel, and having discussed the position with the Ministry's Regional Drainage Engineer, Mr Chalcraft, I find the County Council are the only drainage authority which can undertake the task of preparing a drainage scheme for submission to the riparian owners. I am writing to ask whether your Council would be prepared to undertake the preparation of a scheme which my Committee suggests should be put before the riparian owners in an effort to get the improvement work carried out voluntarily.

At the present time we have not available a complete and up to date list of riparian owners but if your Council is prepared to consider the suggestion contained in this letter, my Committee will be glad to arrange for a list of riparian owners to be prepared by one of their officers.

Yours faithfully,

D.W. Osborne

County Agricultural Officer

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## **Undated - Presentation to Ag Exec Committee**

Mr Chairman and Gentlemen,

I would, first of all, thank for the invitation to attend this Committee and, as you are probably aware, my purpose is to ask you to promote a scheme for the improvement of the River Mel.

I am glad to have the opportunity of putting this matter before you as I feel that the County Agricultural Executive Committee is the appropriate authority to prepare and carry out such a scheme. It is, in fact, the purpose of seeking out and dealing with matters which adversely affect production that gives substance to the existence of the County A.E.C. The problem of The Mel is of this nature; the production of food is being adversely affected by the present state of the river and I submit, Mr Chairman and Gentlemen, that it is within the duty and competence of this Committee to carry out any improvements to the River Mel that the situation calls for.

We have for consideration, a river which by its state of neglect and disrepair is adversely affecting the production of food on some 100 to 200 acres of land. Some of this land becomes flooded, other areas become waterlogged in varying degree owing to the water in the ditches being to allow the land drains to work effectively. there is also land wasted by disused osier beds, by the excessive width of the river and by embankments and soak ditches which are now redundant.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with the river I will give a brief description of the Mel. It rises in Melbourn Bury. For the whole of its length it flows through either Melbourn or Meldreth or as a boundary between the two parishes. it flows into the Rhee at a point about 3 furlongs above the bridge at Malton. The length of the river is approximately 3 miles.

The channel of the river is, for the most part artificial; having been constructed for the purpose of providing a flow of water for the mills. With a view to using the water to best advantage, considerable stretches of the river above each mill are of such dimension as to act as a reservoir, and the stretch below the mill is of such dimensions as is required to accommodate the increased flow of water when the mill is working, the procedure being: periods of operating the mill alternating with periods of storing water.

The river has in the past been maintained in the following manner; the portion within the curtilage of Melbourn Bury by the riparian owner; from leaving this portion for the next portion of about two miles by the millers; the remaining portion of about 5 furlongs by the R.D.C. as an awarded ditch.

The present situation arises due to the neglect of that part of the channel which, in the past, has been maintained by the millers. Now that the mills are no longer in uses, the wheels and facing plates having in fact been removed, there are no longer millers to accept responsibility for maintenance of the channel. To assist in clarifying the position here I would ask with your permission, Mr. Chairman read to you a paragraph written by the Deputy Clerk to the County Council.

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I think you must agree Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen that the Ministry have here, by their own Act and volition removed all responsibility from the Millers or Mill Owners and have fairly and squarely accepted responsibility for the maintenance of the river, the responsibility of course passing to this Committee as the local representative of the Ministry.

It has been suggested, in some quarters, that the maintenance of the river is the responsibility of the riparian owners as such and in view of the foregoing it would be manifestly unfair to try to establish

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this responsibility. I am, however, of opinion that in the event of a practicable scheme being produced the riparian owners and occupiers would be willing to give financial support.

I understand that preparations are being made for the establishment of an Internal Drainage Board which would include the River Mel within its district. I would point out that the expenses attached to a proceeding of this nature are excessive and out of all proportion to the benefits which accrue.

I would submit, Mr Chairman, that it is for this Committee to take the necessary steps to promote a scheme for the improvement of the River Mel. It has been suggested that as the Mel is an artificial watercourse the Committee has not the authority to act. In this connection I would refer to a letter recently written by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry in which he says "By stretching the meaning of the word "ditch" it is sometimes possible for Agricultural Executive Committees to do work on artificial watercourse under the farm ditching procedure ...". As the lower part of the Mel, for a distance of five furlongs, is already an Awarded Parish Ditch it would not seem that the word 'dich' needs much stretching, at least not more than two miles, to cover the remainder of the Mel.

The lines up which the improvements should be planned would rest, Mr. Chairman, with your Committee and officers. I would only suggest that the main essentials are to re-align and re-grade approximately one third of a mile of channel immediately above Burnt Mill. with the available fall a comparatively small, fast stream would be possible, which would scour the bed free from weeds. Maintenance would then consist only of cutting, or burning, rank growth on the banks and would be carried out by the owner or occupier by way of good estate management.

I would thank you, Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, for hearing me on this matter and I would in conclusion add that attention to the matters I have put before you is urgently needed and I trust you will find it possible to go forward with a scheme.