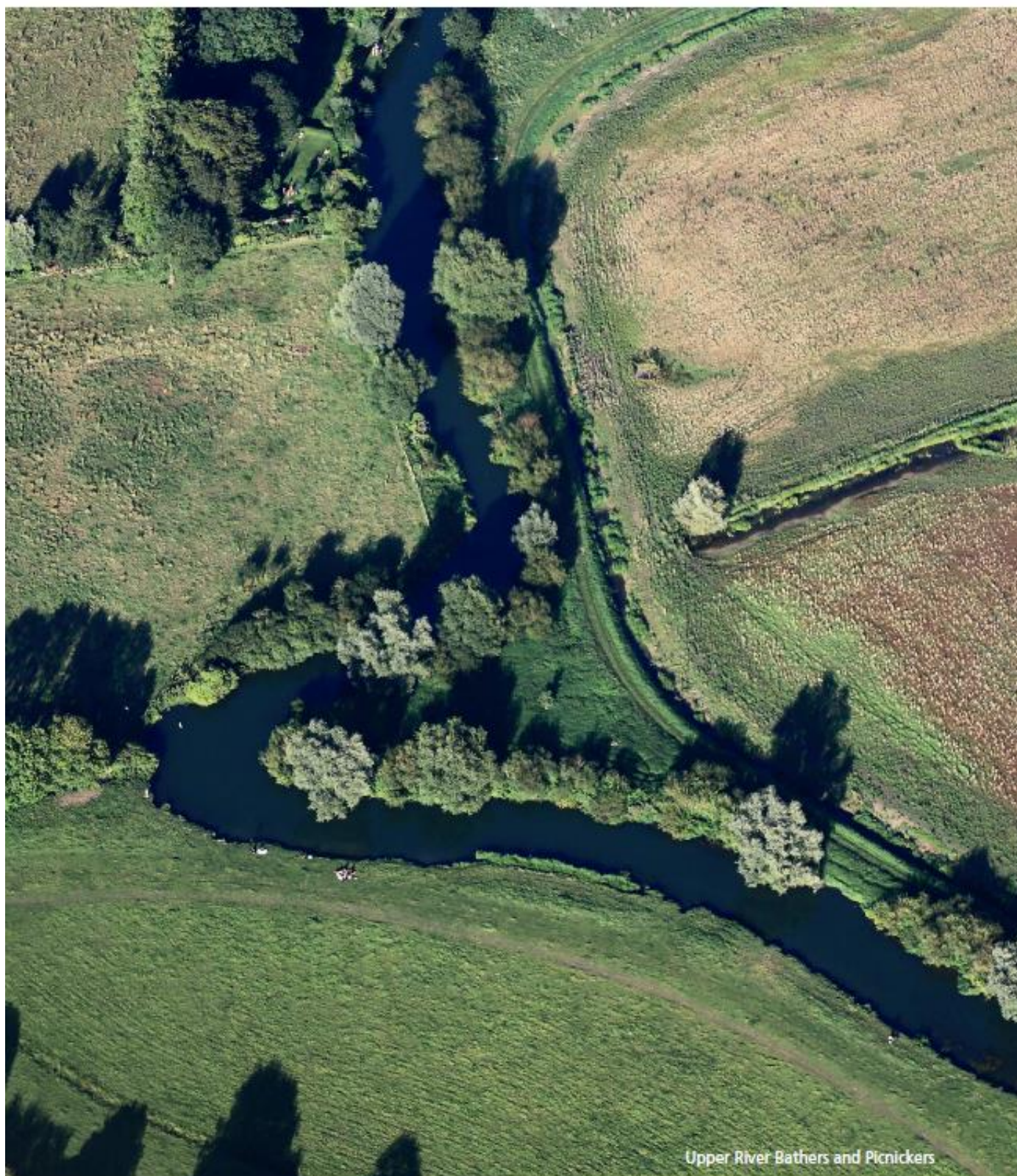


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I. INTRODUCTION



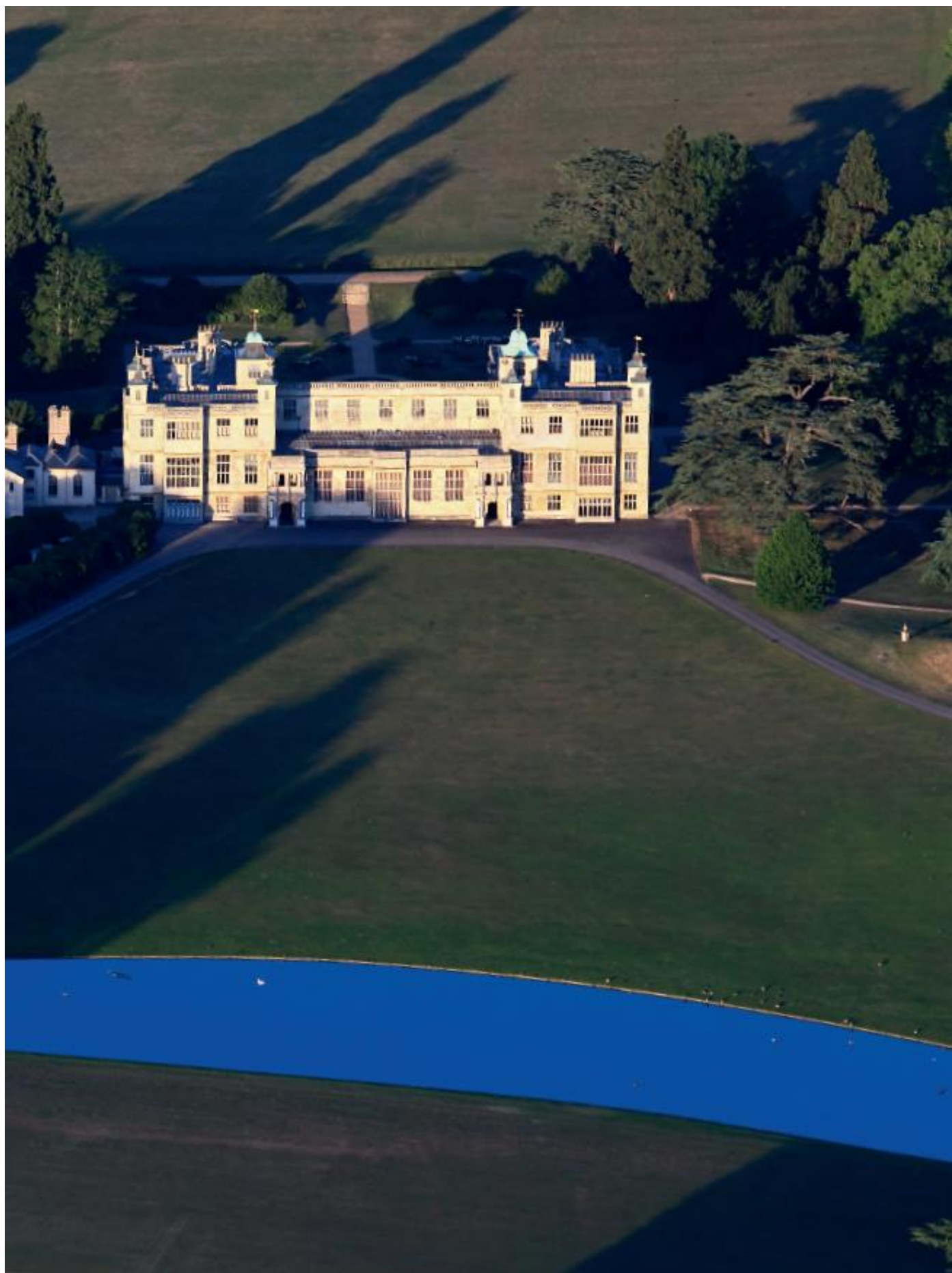
Upper River Bathers and Picnickers



The Cam Valley may not fit your mental picture of a true valley with steep slopes cut by erosion into the countryside. Rather it is a network of shallow pool-like saucers surrounded by low hills, few higher than 100 metres above sea level. These gather water slowly towards Cambridge itself. The Cam is just over 5 metres above sea level and is still more than 50 miles from the sea. It is small wonder that inundation of the extensive flat Fens to the north of Cambridge was its enduring past condition. Exactly where a river runs is governed first of all by the underlying geology and then by consequent events, from ancient marine sediments to the outcomes from recent Ice Ages. The Cam is just the youngest of a sequence of ancient rivers that have flowed here for tens of millions of years. The headwaters of the Cam mostly arise from springs at the foot of a long East Anglian ridge of Cretaceous chalk hills, running to the east and south of Cambridge. Spring lines follow the foot of this permeable rock where it meets the deeper and impermeable Gault clay. To the west of Cambridge the older rocks have a capping of a much younger Boulder Clay left behind by one of the more recent Ice Ages. Here streams gather from the surface and flow off eastwards towards the Cam, or northwards to the Ouse. Today the water-table of the chalk is much lowered by water abstraction to supply the growing human population with water. However there is still a steady flow from springs, especially in winter. When that flow is at its peak, and the summer vegetation is not drinking up the rainfall, heavy winter precipitation may bring real floods to what in summer are only tiny streams.

South of Cambridge, in a clockwise sweep from the east, the tributaries are the Linton Cam, better called the River Granta, then the Saffron Walden Cam with its many tributaries in the south, then the Ashwell Cam, better called the Rhee, which also has many contributing streams like the Mel and the Shep. Finally, the Bourn Brook flows off the Boulder Clay land from the west to join the Cam at Byron's Pool. Just two miles downstream the Cam flows through Cambridge, completing over half the course of its whole journey.

On the way north to its confluence with the Great Ouse the Cam goes out into the Fenland. Here it is itself much tamed by engineers and is joined by embanked and canalised water-courses. These new streams, the 'lodes', were constructed only since Roman times and played, in early history, a major role in water transport and communication. The Fens are flat - and famous for





above: One Receiver from the Merlin Array

below: The Small Array of the Mullard Radio Telescopes

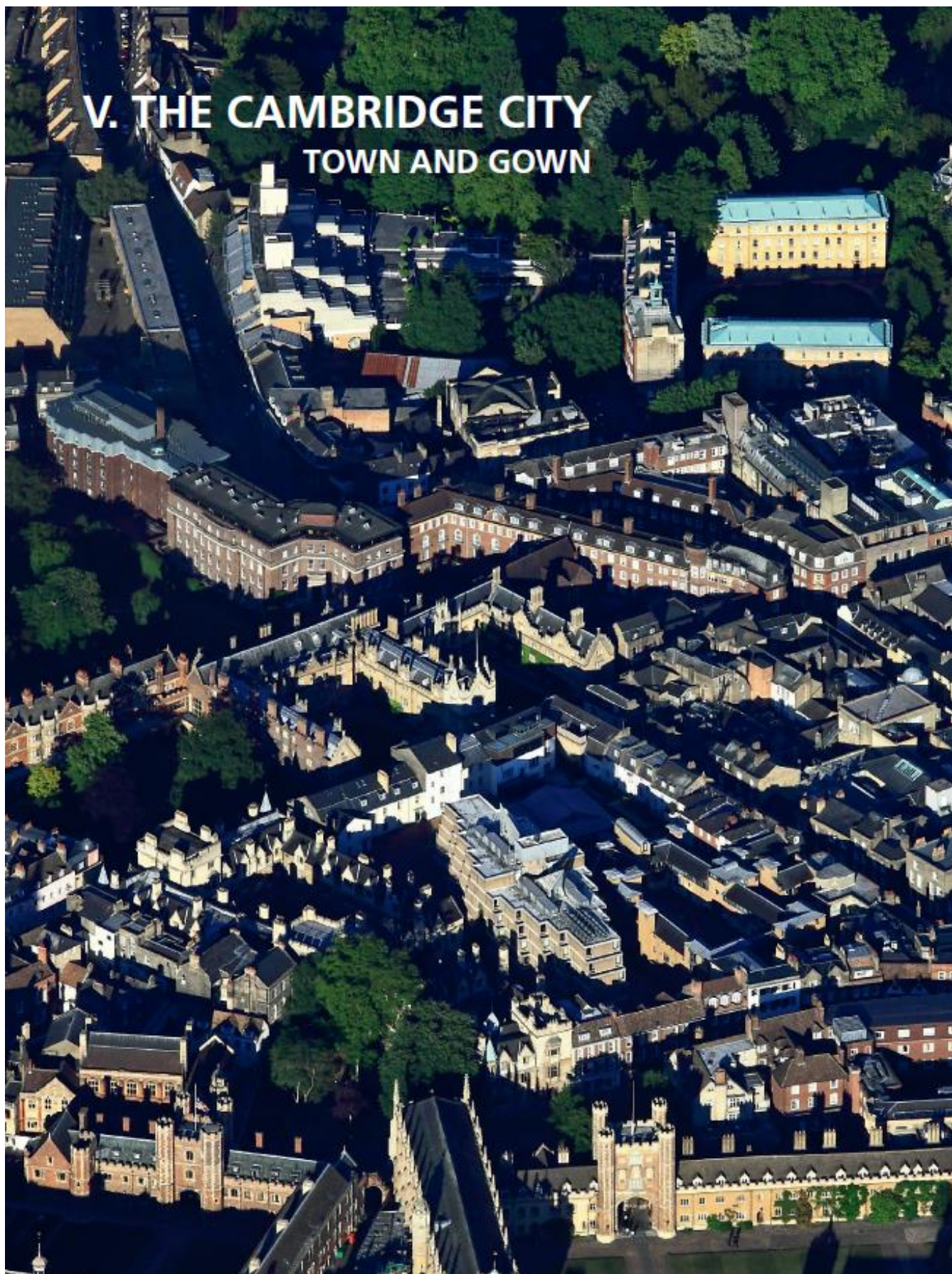






V. THE CAMBRIDGE CITY

TOWN AND GOWN





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