

# FITZROY STREET AND BURLEIGH STREET CAMBRIDGE

by  
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*THEN—Fitzroy Street in 1906. Roof bandstand on left.*

Among the areas of Cambridge for which future re-development is planned are Fitzroy Street, leading from New Square to East Road, and Burleigh Street, which branches off from Fitzroy Street also to join East Road.

Both streets form part of what is now termed by the planners, because of its shape, 'the Kite'—bounded by East Road, Parkside and Parker Street, Emmanuel Road and Newmarket Road, the eastern end of the last-named forming the 'tail' of the kite.

The area was developed in the early years of the last century, on what were, before the Inclosure of 1807, the Barnwell Fields of Cambridge. Fitzroy Street is named after Augustus Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton and Chancellor of the University, who died in 1811.

The earlier name of the street, however, when it contained but a few buildings, was Blucher Row. Burleigh Street, laid out on part of the nursery garden known as the Garden of Eden, commemorates, with nearby James Street, the carrier James Burleigh, mayor in 1799, who lived in the large house in Newmarket Road later occupied by the Star, now Tollemache's, Brewery.

Few tourists visited the two streets and those which adjoin them. The area formed a compact little township, separated from the historic centre by New Square and Christ's Pieces. Today, with New Square

converted to a car park, perhaps some visitors are attracted to the shops in Fitzroy Street and Burleigh Street.

New Square, elegantly laid out with houses between 1825 and 1854, was grassed in the centre where the concrete now is. Cows occasionally grazed on it, and the children of the neighbourhood found it an ideal space on which to play. One of the hoped-for improvements in the development plans is that the grass will be restored.

Already, as so often happens when re-planning is proposed, a blight has settled on the lower end of Fitzroy Street, towards East Road. Houses have already been pulled down, as they have been in Gold Street, Napier Street and other roads leading from Fitzroy Street, and the few remaining residents are uncertain of their future. At the New Square end, the south side of the street was re-developed by Jesus College in the 1950s. Multiple stores such as Woolworth and Fine Fare then replaced the former, privately-owned little shops which once stood there.

Opposite, the large store of Laurie & McConnell dominates the scene. The shop opened in c.1883, in the former drapery, china and hardware premises of Samuel Young. In 1903, a disastrous fire, one of the biggest ever known in Cambridge, destroyed the premises.

But re-building took place at once, and led to the erection of the attrac-

tive little bandstand still to be seen on the top of the store. From it the Cambridge Town Band used to play for the entertainment of Saturday shoppers, while teas were served on the roof garden. A sixpenny ham tea was a favourite speciality. For a short time the Police Band performed, but their woodwind instruments could not be heard in the street below, so the Town Band, which by then had become the Silver Prize Band, was re-engaged.

Adjoining Laurie and McConnell was the grocery and chemists' business of Joseph Sturton. He it was who, in the 1880s, purchased much of the Mill Road estate for re-development, and who gave his name to Sturton Street. Not far from his shop was Elijah Tarrant's sweet shop. Mrs. Tarrant made delicious ice cream which was very popular with the Fair people at Midsummer Fair time.

For their benefit, Mrs. Tarrant made an especially good quality cream, and at mid-morning the Fair women would crowd into the little shop, sit down on the chair provided for them, and enjoy shilling glasses of the delicacy.

No. 104 Fitzroy Street, (now No. 53, for the street was renumbered in 1920), can claim the distinction of being the first premises of the now world-famous bookshop of W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd. William Heffer, the founder, opened there in July, 1872, as a stationer and newsagent. Soon he was adding books, mainly for Sunday and day school prizes, to his stock. When the adjoining toy and tobacconist's shop at No. 103 became empty, he took over the premises and, in 1886, a sub post office was opened by him.

In the 1890s crowds of dons and undergraduates made their way to 104 Fitzroy Street, for they were allowed a 25 per cent. discount on their cash purchases of books. This discount had already been allowed by London publishers, a fact which resulted, as William Heffer discovered, in local booksellers getting

comparatively small orders from students.

The initiation of the scheme in Cambridge did not, for obvious reasons, please the other booksellers in the town, and they tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent the publishers from supplying William Heffer. At the end of two years, however, they were obliged, in self defence, to allow the same discount, and, faced with this competition, William Heffer decided to remove his book business to a more central site in Petty Cury, while the stationery business continued in Fitzroy Street.

The lower end of Fitzroy Street, from its junction with James Street, as far as East Road, was never so prosperous as the upper end. Here were terraces of neat little houses and small shops, divided here and there by courts and passages containing two or three houses, and interspersed by public houses. There were once nine of these in the street—the Cherry Tree, the Danish Flag, the Fitzroy Arms, the Ancient Druids, the Duke of Wellington, the Harp, the Queen's Arms, the Golden Cross and, probably the earliest of them all, the Old English Gentleman. All of these are now closed or have disappeared.

The local school was the British School at the corner of Christ-Church Street, its building now used as the parish rooms of Christ Church. On the other side of the street, nearer to East Road, a tall, gaunt building has recently been demolished. This was a jam factory, originally that of Spencer, Ernest & Co., and later used by Chivers for preserve making and later for chicory roasting. In its last days, before it became a warehouse, it was a brush factory; in all of these capacities it provided employment for nearby residents.

At the corner of Fitzroy Street and East Road is the Working Men's Club and Institute, founded in 1862. In the building, completed in 1873, some of the earliest film shows in Cambridge were given. The institute, through its library, the holding of lectures and classes, and the arrangement of exhibitions of local trades and crafts, played an important educational role in this largely working class area of Cambridge, as well as providing an alternative social centre to the public houses.

Prominent on one corner of Fitzroy Street and Burleigh Street stands the Eden Baptist Chapel. It was built in 1826 by a company of Strict Bap-

tists who had, until then, been worshipping in the old meeting house in Green Street.

Burleigh Street, over the years, has changed its appearance with the growth of the Cambridge Co-operative Society whose large store now occupies Nos. 58 to 74 on the west side. It was in February, 1868, that the first meeting of the Cambridge Provident Industrial Society was held, largely through the enthusiasm of a group of the many shoemakers who earned a living in Cambridge, at that time, making hand-sewn boots for undergraduates.

The meeting was held at No. 2 City Road, the home of Charles Nightingale, bootmaker, and in the June of that year a president, committee, auditors and trustees were formally elected. By December, 33 people had taken £1 shares in the society. This number increased to 50 early in 1869, when co-operative trading began in a room rented at No. 8 City Road. Sales in that first year totalled over £1,000, and business grew so quickly that, in 1871, No. 11 Fitzroy Street, next to Eden Chapel, was taken as a store and the society joined the Co-operative Wholesale Society.

In 1882, the first move into Burleigh Street was made, following the purchase of No. 4 on the east side—premises which, until then, had been the John Barleycorn public house. By 1898, the society had stores and an assembly room on the opposite side of the street, at Nos. 62 to 68, where a row of small shops had been. Some of these disappeared for good; others, notably Rayment's, the straw hat makers, moved elsewhere in the street.

Today, the small private houses which once occupied part of Burleigh Street have been largely swallowed up in commercial premises; but a few private shops still remain. Such shops were characteristic of both Fitzroy and Burleigh Streets. It was mostly a cheap trading area, serving the needs of the local residents who, indeed, had little need to go often into the centre of Cambridge for their purchases. Food, clothing, footwear, furniture—all were available near at hand, at prices lower than those in the town centre.

For the very poor there were many secondhand shops—called marine stores—at the lower end of Fitzroy Street. So busy was the street on Saturdays that, it was said, you could walk on the heads of the pedestrians as they jostled their way through the crowds, the music playing on the Laurie & McConnell store adding gaiety to the bustle and lively talk below.

Today, plans have been proposed for the complete transformation of Fitzroy Street and Burleigh Street, in the hopes that the district will become a large shopping centre complementary to the one around the market place.

Large multiple stores, with car parks on their roofs, the streets roofed-over to form a 'shopping mall'—these are some of the things envisaged. A far cry from the little shops whose owners knew their customers, and their families, personally, where the elderly poor could buy in small quantities, and where fruit, meat and vegetables were sold at bargain prices on late Saturday evenings.



NOW—Fitzroy Street today. Bandstand still there.