

Before Sainsbury's Came

by

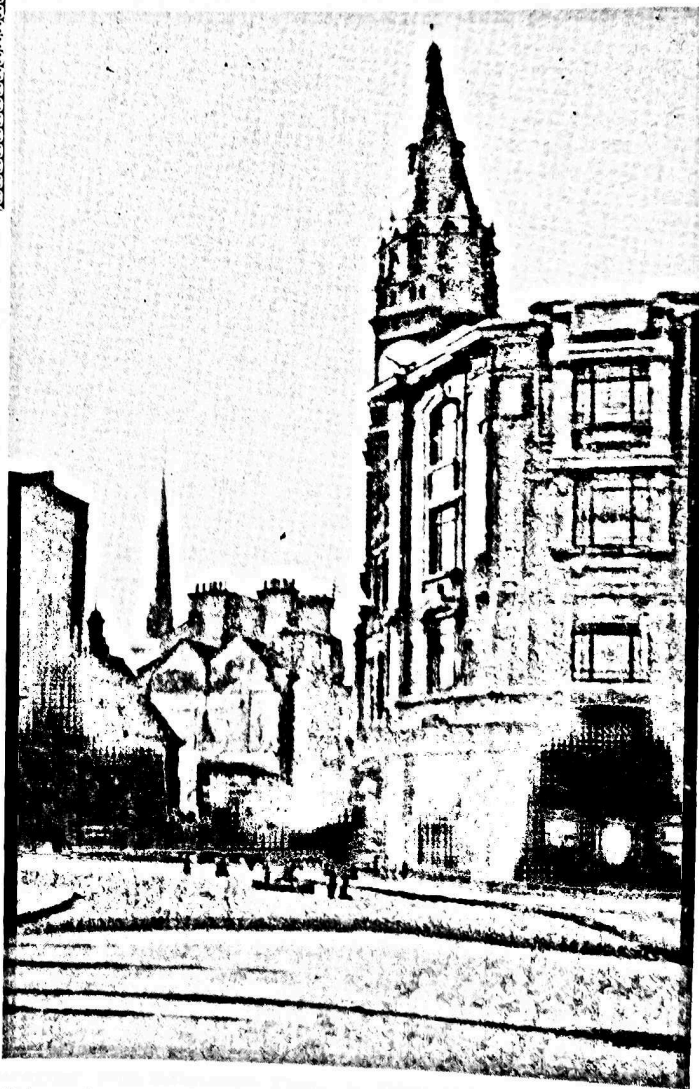
Enid Porter

The news that Sainsbury's have recently applied for permission to move their grocery store into part of the new Trinity College development in Sidney Street must have reminded many older Cambridge residents of the first arrival of this firm in Cambridge. This was over 40 years ago, in 1925; in the same year Woolworth's, too, appeared next door. The coming of these two multiple firms considerably altered the appearance of that part of Sidney Street facing Holy Trinity Church; indeed, over the next few years, during which the Dorothy Cafe was largely extended, and Marks and Spencer's arrived, many changes took place on both sides of this section of the street. Some old established firms closed their doors for ever; others had to find premises elsewhere. In fact, the period 1920 to 1931 was one of demolition and re-building comparable, though on a smaller scale, with that carried out in the 1950's around Bradwell's Court.

The building of Sainsbury's and Woolworth's stores caused the disappearance of a familiar landmark: the County Court offices and those of the firm of Eaden, Spearing & Raynes, solicitors. Both of these occupied an interesting old house which was approached by a courtyard into which the visitor entered,

from Sidney Street, under a stone arch surmounted by a carved coat of arms. The arms were those of George Pryme, M.P. for Cambridge and first Professor of Political Economy in the University.

He bought the house in 1820 and, as he describes in his autobiography, made several alterations to it. He tried, however, to keep as much of its original interior as possible, because it had, in its early days, been one of the medieval hostels which housed University students before the Colleges were built. Perhaps it was because the house was so old that it gained the reputation of being haunted. Professor Pryme found it difficult to persuade servants to stay in it until he and his wife hit on the



Sidney Street early in 1930. The demolition taking place on the left is in preparation for the extended premises of Boots the Chemists.

idea of themselves occupying the room in which a "black lady" was said to walk; by so doing they convinced the servants that the house was perfectly ghost-free.

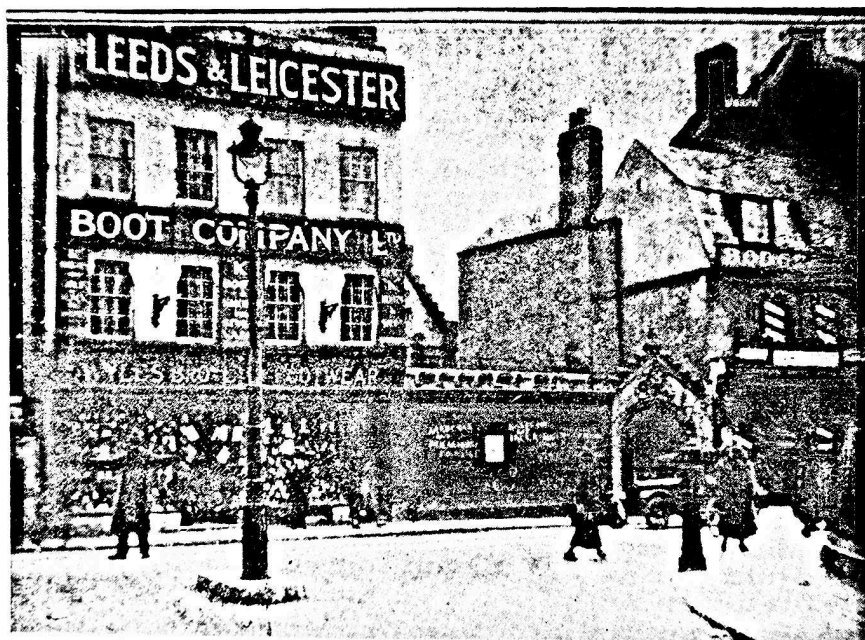
Not only was the Pryme house and its archway swept away by the new buildings of Sainsbury's and Woolworth's, but a long-established hosier, Charles Thompson, was forced to move into Sussex Street. A shoe shop disappeared and so, too, did the chemist's business of W. Pain, which had been in existence since the 1860's, together with one of Bodger and Company's outfitting and tailoring shops at No. 14. They still retained, for a time at least, their

courtyard which, on market days, was crowded with carriers' carts and farmers' gigs.

In 1934 Marks and Spencer's opened their store in Sidney Street, replacing, at Nos. 8, 9 and 9a, a draper's shop, the National Provincial Bank and a hairdresser's. Two years later the new store extended to Nos. 10 and 11, replacing the Prudential Assurance Company and A. G. Almond, tailor and outfitter, who then moved across the road to the corner of Green Street. A century before, in the 1840's, No. 11 had been occupied by Joshua Lee, a tobacco pipe maker. On the string course of the parapet of his shop, and

Recent additions to the adjoining Marks & Spencer's have been made by the acquiring of Stiles' cake shop, which has now removed to a few doors down from Sussex Street, and by the even more recent acquiring of Miller's music shop.

The 1930's saw even further changes in Sidney Street. By 1935 Lloyds Bank which, as Foster's Bank, had moved in 1892 from what is now the Turk's Head Grill in Trinity Street, was occupying Nos. 1 to 5 Sidney Street. Here, before the Bank came, had been a series of small shops, among them a tailor's, a draper's, a grocer's and a stationer's. In the 1920's, and until 1934, the



Sidney Street in 1925, before the coming of Sainsbury's and Woolworth's. The stone archway led to the County Court offices, formerly a medieval students' hostel and in the last century, the home of Professor Pryme.

second shop at No. 12.

On the other side of Hobson's Passage, too, changes took place in the late 1920's by the gradual extension of G. P. Hawkins' Dorothy Cafe which had opened, at Nos. 20 and 21, between the years 1901 and 1904. In 1919 the firm acquired Lambert's bakery shop at No. 22 and, in 1930, took over Nos. 23 and 24. A fruiterer, A. E. Whitehead, had been occupying part of No. 23 while No. 24, at the corner of Sidney Street and Sussex Street, was the New Era Shoe Company. Previously, though, this shop had, for many years, been a bookshop, No. 23 until it closed in 1919, had been the True Blue Inn, a pleasant, red-tiled building with a

on the top of the lead down-pipe from the roof gutter were carved the emblems of his trade—two churchwarden pipes. The rainwater pipe and the string course were "rescued" when the shop was demolished in 1935 and are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

In that same year, 1936, W. A. Coad opened a drapery shop at No. 12, Sidney Street, in between Marks & Spencer's and Woolworth's, forcing Bodger & Company to move to the opposite corner, facing Almond's, of Green Street where the firm continues today. This shop had, previously, been Fuller's Cafe. Only a few years ago Coad's shop was, in its turn, absorbed by Woolworth's.

corner of Sidney Street and Hobson Street was occupied by Dipple & Conway, the opticians.

Over on the other side of Sidney Street the 1930's saw many changes on the site now occupied by Boots the Chemists. This firm had arrived in Cambridge in the early 1890's, when their shop was at No. 23 Market Hill. In 1898 the shop moved to Petty Cury and, early in this century, was extended so that it had two entrances, one in Petty Cury and the other on Market Hill.

Then, in 1929-30, re-building began in Sidney Street where the entrance to Boots now stands. Three shops on the Holy Trinity Church side were pulled down and, by 1931,

customers could enter Boots as they do now, either from Petty Cury or from Sidney Street. The Sidney Street frontage, however, did not, at first, acquire its present appearance. Until 1940, on the left of the entrance, were Kittridge's tobacco shop and the premises of C. B. Warrington, butcher, both adjoining the Petty Cury corner shop of Turner & Son, chemists. This corner shop was eventually acquired by the True Form Shoe Company which also took over Kittridge's and Warrington's.

Kittridge moved to No. 17 Petty Cury, where Separate's shop now is. The premises were renovated in 1940 and above Kittridge's was placed an elaborately carved wooden fascia. This was embellished with carved negro heads, similar to those which used to appear on 18th century tobacconists' signs. Two of these heads are now in the Folk Museum.

Ten years ago, in 1959, further alterations were carried out to Boots' frontage, which was set back to a new building line, and to the adjoining buildings of the Royal Exchange Assurance Group and Wallis' dress

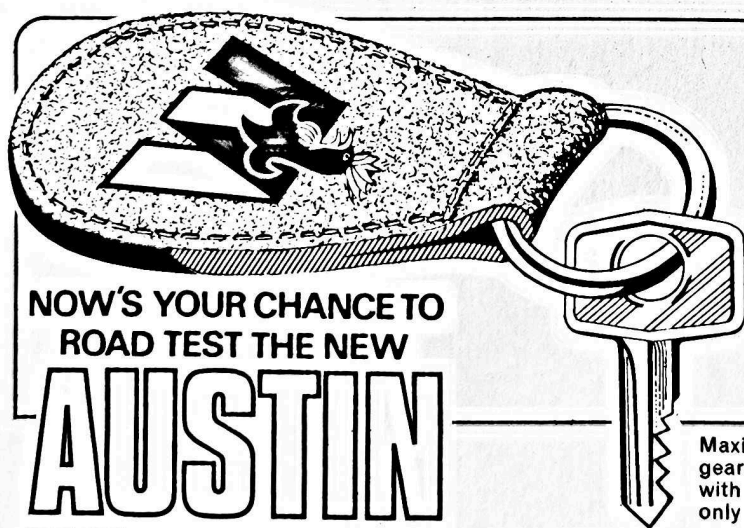
shop. On the front of the old building, now the Royal Exchange Group, the name **Philo Chambers** was painted on the bricks, recording that the Philo-Union or Cambridge Literary Society once had its headquarters here. The Society, which was founded in 1826, began in the old Crown and Woolpack Inn where part of Lloyds Bank now stands. It moved in 1846 to rooms in the Wrestler's Inn in Petty Cury and then, in 1851, to Sidney Street where it continued until it was finally dissolved in 1887. The painted bricks could not, unfortunately, be preserved when the Sidney Street premises were pulled down and rebuilt in 1959, but another memento of the past, on the same building, could be saved. This is now in the Folk Museum and is a stone tablet, carved by Eric Gill, recording that

**CHARLES DARWIN
LIVED HERE IN 1828**

The late 1920's and the early 1930's were certainly a period of change in central Cambridge, for while drastic alterations were going on in Sidney Street, both Sussex Street and Hobson Street were being re-built. Photographs taken at that

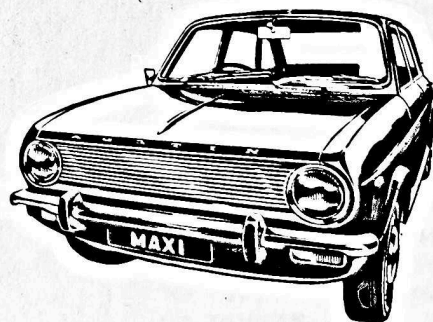
time show how many unexpected views of Cambridge were temporarily revealed while buildings were being demolished: Holy Trinity Church, for example, was clearly visible, for a time, from Petty Cury, while interesting glimpses of old roofs, gables and chimneys were exposed to view as the "island site" of Hobson Street and Sussex Street was pulled down.

In view of the great changes which are planned to take place in Petty Cury in the not-too-distant future, it is worth while, perhaps, to recall those which occurred thirty or so years ago, or even those of more recent date. So quickly do we become accustomed to change that it is often difficult to remember, without the aid of photographs, what once stood on a particular site. How many of us, for example, can, without a good deal of thought, describe St. Andrew's Street, between Christ's College and Emmanuel Street, as it was only 15 years ago? In next month's issue we shall be recalling this area with its now vanished and almost forgotten Rance's Folly, its Christ's Lane and its original Bradwell's Yard.



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