

CAMBRIDGE WALK NOTES

Silver Street Bridge: current one dates to the late 50s but there has been a bridge here since the 14C. Upstream of the bridge it is the Granta and downstream the Cam, even though the Ordnance Survey seems strangely unaware. It used to be that the river was known as the Granta all the way from its source to its confluence with the Great Ouse. Cambridge was originally known as Grantabrycge and then Cantabrigge. With changes in dialect pronunciation someone then wondered why the river was not called the Cam. And so it was...

The Queens Bridge, known as the Mathematical Bridge, dates to 1749. It was not designed by Sir Isaac Newton as is often thought. He had been dead for 25 years. It was designed by William Etheridge. The current version dates to the early 20C because, as a wooden bridge, it is liable to rot. In spite of tales to the contrary it has always had fixings to hold the pieces of wood together.

Today you can see large bolt heads, but the original fixings were plain wooden spikes, hammered into the wood, so that they were not so visible to the naked eye. Stories about students/academics/servicemen taking it apart and failing to put it back together again are rubbish.

What is clever is that all the wooden pieces are straight edged and yet, when put together, form a perfect arch. Etheridge designed several other bridges of similar appearance, including a full sized one over the Thames at Walton to the south west of London. It lasted 50 years but the wood rotted and it was replaced by a stone version. A famous painting of the original can be seen in Dulwich Picture Gallery. Painted by Canaletto, who worked in Britain for a number of years (perhaps why he's popular with the British) and famous because Signore C put himself in the picture sitting at an easel, painting the view of the bridge in the background.

King's College: the chapel came a long time before any of the other buildings at King's. It was completed in the 16C but the rest of the blocks are much later. It is the ultimate high point of Gothic church architecture in this country. The next church of any significance to be built after it was St Paul's, built in Wren's neo-classical style (and based on St Peter's in Rome).

Where you stand looking at King's from The Backs is one of the few places effectively in any city centre in Britain where you might see cattle grazing.

Clare College Bridge: 14 stone balls on the top. But the second on the right approaching Clare is not complete. There is a cake slice missing. The story goes that the College refused to pay the builder the agreed full amount and to get his own back he left out a piece of the bridge. It is only visible from the river or from Kings Bridge. In fact, it was caused by cracking of the cement making up the ball. Several of the others have been repaired but, for some reason, this one never seemed to "take" properly and the replacement cement was left out as a sort of talking point.

Garret Hostel Lane Bridge, the next one downstream is generally known as Orgasm Bridge. Apparently by cyclists because of the great feeling of relief after reaching the top of the upslope in the middle of the bridge (believe that if you will). It's all downhill from there on.

Gonville and Caius: Caius pronounced Keys after John Keys, one of the founders. It was useful to have the Latinised spelling of his surname to use in formal documents (which were all written in Latin anyway) and it was not uncommon to spell one's surname several different ways in Elizabethan times, although most people couldn't write. Your own surname probably has several different spellings today.

Trinity College courtyard: Trinity is a very rich College and gets more money per annum than all the other colleges put together. It was founded by combining two earlier colleges, by Henry VIII, at the behest of his last wife Katherine Parr. H's original intention was to close the two because they had links with religious houses and he'd just ordered their dissolution but Mrs. H's wishes pre-

ailed. It owns the land on which Felixstowe Docks now stands, where the O2 stands, and Cambridge Science Park land. It also has a 50% stake in 450 Tesco supermarkets; plus lots of other land.

You cannot get from Cambridge to Oxford purely by travelling on land owned by King's College, in spite of the urban myth that you can.

The statue of Henry VIII above the gatehouse is very rare in that it is contemporaneous with his reign. The only other 16C statue of H is over the entrance to St Bart's Hospital in London, which he also has a hand in founding. Plenty of paintings of him but not statues. It holds a chair leg in his right hand (left as you look at it). The sceptre which he used to hold was stolen by one of the so-called Night Climbers and never replaced. A window cleaner put the chair leg there as a sort of joke but it has become a talking point and somehow it looks right!

The most famous student of Trinity was, arguably, Sir Isaac Newton. Great urban myth about him: that he invented the cat flap. Look it up on the internet. It's rubbish. The flap part of a cat flap is a very recent addition anyway. But the story goes that Newton was constantly being disturbed by his cat when working in his room at home in Lincolnshire (he had to leave Cambridge due to an outbreak of plague) so he made a hole in the door. When the cat had kittens it is said Newton made a number of smaller holes for the kits to get through. A good story but Newton was brighter than that and the cat flap, or animal hole as it used to be known was around much earlier than Newton and is even mentioned in one of the Canterbury Tales. The Miller's Tale in fact; when someone spies through an animal hole to see what is going on in the next room. Being the Miller's Tale you can guess what it was.

Newton was even MP for Cambridge University for a time but only ever said one thing in the House; asking for the windows to be closed because it was a bit chilly.

Magdelene Bridge: the first bridge to be built, 8C, and historically the most important, next to an old fording point of the river. The present incarnation dates to 1982. Magdalene College is named after St Mary Magdalene. One of the founders was Lord Audley of Audley End fame and it is said the odd pronunciation is a desire to get his name mentioned when saying the college name. The Oxford college with the same name and the same pronunciation uses the French way of saying Magdalene, which is more akin to Madelaine.

The Oxford college does not have the final e in its name (Magdalen) and nor did the one in Cambridge until the middle of the 19C when the e was added because the incipient Royal Mail was always getting the two colleges confused when trying to deliver things.

Pepys Diary is in the library, he being an old scholar. It took over two years for someone employed at significant cost to decipher the code which Pepys used to write his diary, Shortly afterwards an existing book in the library at the time was discovered to contain the key to the code anyway!

The Cam waterfront used to be wharves and warehouses. Cambridge was a major port until the railways came and things were moved, then, much more quickly. Varsity Hotel rooftop bar has a great view of the city centre.

Jesus Green: again used to be wharves and warehouses. The open-air swimming baths are interesting. 100 yds long and very narrow, in order to simulate swimming in the river. One of the original lidos in this country, where things like massage, spa baths, etc in addition to swimming were available.

Portugal Street/Portugal Place: named as a result of the import of port from Portugal. Unloaded from ships docking at Jesus Green and put on wagons, being brought up this street to then be distributed to the high tables of the various colleges.

Hawks' Club: set up in the 1870s for male cricket blues (a blue is someone who has represented Cambridge in a sport against Oxford) but then shortly afterwards opened to all sports. But only men. The club still exists, is still male only and holds regular meetings. Note the apostrophe on the sign. There is now, and has been for some time, a women's equivalent known as the Ospreys' Club.

Note the Latin/Greek note on the railings in Portugal Place. "All bicycles left here will be removed and destroyed".

The Round Church: design based of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Several round churches still exist in this country but this is the biggest and best. There is one at Braintree, one in Northamptonshire, one near Guildford and a couple of others.

Sydney Sussex College: founded by a woman: Frances Sydney, Countess of Sussex. Head of Oliver Cromwell is said to be buried in or near the chapel. You may recall that, after his death, C's body was dug up and then ritually hung, his head then being placed on a tall pole. By some means his head was reunited with his old college in 1960, several centuries after his demise. He was MP for Cambridge for a time, just before the Civil War.

Great St. Marys Church: the University church. The bell peal is the template for that used for St Stephen's Tower now Elizabeth Tower in the Palace of Westminster. So the Big Ben bongos started in Cambridge.

The church of St Edward, King and Martyr is a Royal Peculiar. It reports to the monarch rather than the local diocesan bishop (in this case Ely). Normally these are churches with a royal connection: Henry VI was the reason for St Edward's status. Westminster Abbey is a RP, as is King George's Chapel at Windsor, the chapel at Holyrood Palace, etc.

The statue of Henry VIII adorning part of King's outer stone wall is 19C.

The Grasshopper Clock, at the end of Bene't Street (Bene't is a contraction of Benedict), is full of symbolism and divides opinion about its aesthetic appeal. Some people love it and some feel it is totally incongruous. The workings are accessed from Corpus Christi College library.