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CHAPTER I

THE GUILDHALL & THE MARKET
PLACE

CAMBRIDGE has sometimes been described as being built like Rome on Seven Hills, but, if the theory of its dual origin is accepted, a theory for which there is much weight of expert opinion, another description may be suggested. Starting from the supposition that Mercians and East Anglians occupied sites separated only by a stream slightly to the north of the course of the river as it now flows under Magdalene Bridge, we get the interesting juxtaposition of two towns each built on its own hills in close proximity, but with little intercourse, since they were inhabited by hostile nationalities. As Arthur Gray said, the impact of the nationalities was at Cambridge.

The relative antiquity of the two settlements is uncertain, but that which was certainly the more important commercially, was centred on its four hills—Senate House Hill, Market Hill, Peas Hill, St Andrew's Hill—hillocks rather than hills,¹ standing slightly above the surrounding marshy ground, levelled out of recognition now by the hand of time helped by the hand of man. Arthur Gray, writing in 1908, said:

For four centuries and longer Cambridge has been steadily

¹ When excavations were being made for the Arts Theatre, it was found that the summit of Peas Hill was somewhere about where the stalls at the back now stand. Since the dressing-rooms below the stage are at about sea-level, the height of the 'hill' is well indicated.

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raising the level of the grounds on the western side of the river. We have seen the process going on in recent years on Queens' Green and in Trinity Paddocks. It was going on in 1475, when the town covenanted with Queens' College to be allowed to deposit rubbish on the space between the College grove and the road leading to Newnham.¹

Gray goes on to quote Bowtell as saying in 1805:

The grounds on the back of the Colleges, lying on the west side of the river, have been considerably raised within the last 20 years, especially in 1791–2–3, by means of earth taken out of the churchyards of St. Michael, St. Edward, Great St. Mary, All Saints [then in Trinity Street], Great St. Andrew, St. Giles and St. Sepulchre.

The other town, although smaller, stood proudly upon its higher ground culminating in three hills—now called Castle Hill, Honey Hill and Pound Hill (Mount Pleasant, being merely the side of Castle Hill). It may be a remnant of the almost forgotten tradition of a separate fortified city or *burh* that led the men of Castle End in quite recent times to refer to themselves habitually as the 'Borough Boys'. But if the Mercians, as the keepers of the Castle and Bridge, were masters of the military position, the more civilized East Anglians held the trading centres. 'The market, the mills, the three Cambridge fairs [Sturbridge Fair, Midsummer Fair, Garlic Fair] all belonged to the southern town.'²

The amalgamation of the two centres probably took place very gradually over a long period, as the result of pressure from Danish invasion in the ninth century and of

¹ Arthur Gray, *The Dual Origin of the Town of Cambridge*, p. 19.

² Gray, *op. cit.* p. 13.

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later political and economic changes, but there can be no doubt that for the last seven centuries the corporate life of the whole town has been firmly rooted in the plot of ground south of Market Hill.

The first building there put to public use was a house already standing, the house of Benjamin the Jew, of which possession was granted to the town by Henry III in 1224 for a gaol. The story begins, therefore, with the enforcement of law and order.

It is interesting to note that a house belonging to Moses, the son of Isaac, was similarly given to the citizens of Oxford by Henry III in 1229. This house, which is supposed to have come to the King by escheat, occupied part of the site of the present municipal buildings, as in Cambridge. It was used as the Guildhall, and next to it Henry himself established a *Domus Conversorum*, or home for converted Jews.¹

The establishment of the Jews in England was one of the incidental effects of the Conquest. They had followed in the wake of the invading army, finding ready money for the impoverished English, and generally meeting a universally felt need for money-broking of all kinds. They had a free field for such activities, for the idea that advantage must not be taken of the necessities of one's kindred had been adopted in Europe by the Church, and in England it was unlawful at common law for a Christian to take interest on money lent, a prohibition enforced by various medieval enactments on usury.²

¹ C. W. Boase, *Oxford*, pp. 23, 24, in series of 'Historic Towns'.

² Bellot, 'Money-Lending' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed. p. 699.

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This feeling persisted for a long time. Sir Simonds D'Ewes, in his *Autobiography*, in 1633 said:

My credit would have suffered [sufficed, late M.E.] to have borrowed many thousands in London, had I needed it; but my scruple that I thought it not lawful to give or take use [usury] made the difficulty that I could not borrow in the ordinary way.

How it was that the house of Benjamin the Jew became vacant is not recorded. It may have fallen in to the Crown, as in Oxford. By that time, however, the wealth and consequent power of the Jews was decreasing, and they were expelled from Cambridge in 1275. Until that date, they seem to have been allowed to remain in the area between the old All Saints' Church opposite St John's College and the Round Church in Bridge Street, long known as the Old Jewry. The action of Edward I, who in 1290 expelled the Jews from the country, compelled his subjects to undertake their own financial life unaided by Jewry, so that when in Cromwell's time the Jews were allowed to return, the English had learnt to stand alone.¹

The old Synagogue which adjoined Benjamin's house was assigned by the Bailiffs of Cambridge to the Franciscan or Grey Friars, until about fifty years later they found a more commodious home by building an imposing Convent which they occupied for about three centuries where Sidney Sussex now stands. The building they had vacated was then adapted as a Town Hall, or Tolbooth as it was commonly called, its chief business being the collection of market tolls.

¹ Trevelyan, *English Social History*, p. 82.

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In 1374 this hall having fallen into decay was replaced by another on the same site. Again it was on simple lines, providing little more than a room for meetings, and being raised on arches it formed a shelter for the market below. The walls of the hall were covered with hangings and the floor was strewn with rushes; in addition to being used for public purposes, it was let to private persons for marriage feasts, known as 'brydales'. This primitive building was not demolished until 1782, having then served the Town for four hundred years. All this time the gaol stood beside it, part being portioned off for witches as late as the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1645 a woman was hanged in Cambridge for witchcraft. The Witchcraft and Vagrancy Act abolishing prosecution for witchcraft by making it illegal to *pretend* to the powers of witchcraft was not passed until as late as 1736; within the last fifty years fortune-tellers have been prosecuted under that Act.

The space left free for the general market was much congested. There was a large block of houses and shops on the west side, at the back of Great St Mary's Church, and near the front of the Guildhall stood a conduit, erected in 1614, known as Hobson's Conduit.¹ It was not until 1855, after a serious fire in 1849, that the west side was cleared of buildings—a great enterprise—and the conduit was then removed to the corner of the Town end of Trumpington Road, and replaced by another in the centre of the enlarged Market Place.

¹ Thomas Hobson left money in his Will for enlarging the conduit, but the money for the original erection was not provided entirely by him.

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Slightly to the west of the original conduit, and on the south-west corner of the Market, was a Cross of unknown date, standing on what was called Green Hill, the Herb Market, where garden-stuff was sold. Near the Cross were the stocks for the correction of evil-doers, and the pillory was placed there when required. The Cross was raised on a platform reached by several stone steps and was protected by a circular lead-covered roof supported on four wooden pillars. No satisfactory drawing of it is known, but the best outline is contained in a plan by Braun, published in Cologne in 1575. Although this is not reliable as a plan of the Town, it happens that the old Market Cross is given in slightly more detail than in any other map.¹

The Cross served many public purposes, and the whole erection with its steps, pillars and canopy must have been of considerable size as it was the setting for many celebrations. In 1529, in the reign of Henry VIII, when the Mayor was excommunicated by the Vice-Chancellor for refusing to answer a charge of having violated the privileges of the University, the document of excommunication was affixed to the Market Cross.² This use of the Cross, or more probably the pillars of the Cross, seems to have been a common practice, for in 1546 there was a charge in the Treasurers' accounts for 'small nayles to nayle on the proclamacions on the market crosse'. Sometimes the 'small nayles' seem to have been used for more

¹ See p. 20.

² The Mayor had to do penance in the Church of the Friars Augustine, 'holding a candle, the price of a half-penny in his hand, and kneeling on his knees openly before the image of our Lady', and afterwards signing a written submission before the excommunication was withdrawn.

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unpleasant purposes. Lord North, when Lord Lieutenant in 1569—soon afterwards to be High Steward of the Borough—was a strenuous defender of the liberties of the Town in its contentions with the University, and there is a letter of his addressed to the Vice-Chancellor in which he refers to the conduct of some student who had used ‘evyll and fowle wordes’ to the Mayor. He adjudges ‘the varlet’ to stand in the pillory for three hours with one ear nailed to the same, and to ask the forgiveness of the Mayor on his knees; afterwards, to pleasure the University, he remitted the ear-nailing, ‘so as he stand 3 howers on the Pillorye’.¹

The Market Cross appears frequently throughout the Borough records. In 1553 the Duke of Northumberland, High Steward of the Borough,² who had persuaded Edward VI to settle the Crown on the Lady Jane Grey, arrived in Cambridge with a large force, in her support. Her rival, Mary Tudor, was then at Framlingham Castle in Suffolk. When the Duke found his forces deserting him and reinforcements failing to arrive, ‘he came to the market crosse of the towne and calling for an Herault, himself proclaimed queene Mary, and among other he threwe up his own cappe’.³ On this occasion he ‘so laughed that the tears ran down his face for grief’. He hoped in vain to save his life; that evening he was taken from Cambridge to the Tower of London and ten days later he was beheaded there. At a more cheerful time,

¹ MSS. Baker, xxix, 398, and Arthur Gray, *Town of Cambridge*, p. 102.

² See also ‘High Stewards’, Ch. II, p. 38.

³ Stow, *Annales*, ed. 1605, p. 1033.

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when preparations were being made for Elizabeth's visit in 1564, considerable payments were made for painting the Cross and mending the lead. In 1593 almost 2200 lb. of lead was taken from the Cross and sold; the large quantity indicates that this was the time when the canopy was removed. At the Restoration, the proclamation of Charles II took place there, and also at the centre of the Market Place.

A few years later, in 1664, the old Cross disappeared and was replaced by one totally different, described in a Cambridge Guide, published in 1763, as a 'handsome square stone pillar of the Ionick Order; on the top of which is an Orb and cross gilt'.¹ From the steps of this new erection, James II was proclaimed, the Vice-Chancellor and Senior Bedell standing upon the steps, which may have been the original base of the old Cross. George III also was proclaimed there, with a procession on horse-back and music. In 1740, when a serious riot took place between the scholars and the Town, a proclamation to restrain the rioters was read from the Market Cross.

In 1786, after the second Cross had stood there for over a hundred years, having been repaired at considerable cost in 1754, the Corporation 'ordered that the Market Cross be removed to some more convenient place', and appointed a committee 'to consider of a more proper place, if they think a cross necessary'. William Cole, the antiquary, had protested in 1779 that the Cross was being neglected. He complains in his *Diary* of the people who have suffered 'the beautiful gilded cross on the Market Hill at Cambridge to be defaced, and the magistrates for

¹ *Cantabrigia Depicta*, p. 10.

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these 10 years or more have never had spirit enough to repair it. I mentioned it', he writes, 'this year to Mr John Forlow the Mayor, but he seemed to be too much of a Patriot and Liberty Monger to be concerned about such matters.'¹ This comment explains how it was that the Cross was not considered necessary, and no more was heard of it, but even after this second one had disappeared, the custom of proclaiming the Sovereign from the site of the Cross continued. Queen Victoria was proclaimed there, as well as in the middle of the Market Place.

There were many disputes between Town and University with regard to rights over the Market. Queen Elizabeth, who granted many privileges to the University (although she never founded the College she had promised), ruled in 1561, that 'the Chancellor, Masters and scholars should only and for ever, hold the office of clerk of the Queen's market, in the town of Cambridge and the suburbs'; this state of things lasted until the reign of Queen Victoria, when on the recommendation of a University syndicate a comprehensive Act was passed in 1856, for the 'Settlement of Matters in Difference between the University and Borough of Cambridge'. It was then enacted that 'the privileges, powers, and authorities heretofore exercised by the university and its officers with respect to the markets and fairs of and within the borough be abolished'.

To return to Elizabeth. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Roger Goade, having control of the Market, issued a rule 'that no students do walke upon the Market Hill or sitt upon the Stalls or other places thereabout, or make any stay at

¹ W. M. Palmer, *William Cole of Milton*, p. 71.

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all in ye said Market place or elsewhere within ye Town, longer than they shall have necessary cause, being appointed by their Tutors to dispatch some necessary business'. The same Vice-Chancellor, evidently thought that discipline needed tightening up, for upon taking office in 1595 he had also made it known that 'no student was to wear long or curled locks, great ruffles, velvet Pantables, velvet Breeches, coloured nether stockes, or any other coloured apparell' and 'that the hurtfull and unscolerlike exercise of Football and meetings tending to that end, do from henceforth utterly cease'¹—except as a concession in separate colleges—a rule which had been enforced by Dr Caius in his own College many years earlier.²

When Lord North became High Steward he had a scheme for building a Court-house for assizes and sessions in the Market Place, and to make space it was decided that all the fish-stalls should in future stand on Peas Hill. The Fish Market was important, and dealt in a great variety of fish: salmon, Colchester oysters, as well as mackerel, herrings, sprats, eels, jacks, and other fresh-water fish. The building was not carried out, but the fish-stalls were moved and evidently created a nuisance from their proximity to the residence of Dr Hatcher, who lived in the former Augustinian Friary, where Barclays Bank now stands.³ Lord North, having originally caused the trouble, was again active, and urged the Town to accept £20 from Dr Hatcher for paving and penthousing the Fish Market at Peas Hill, presumably to abate the nuisance. This appears to have been done.

¹ Cooper, *op. cit.* p. 538.

² Venn, *Early Collegiate Life*, p. 62.

³ See also 'Cambridge Waits', Ch. III, p. 72.