

WALKING TOURS 5

In the footsteps of artists and writers in Fitzrovia

Walk westwards over Tottenham Court Road on Grafton Way, and at the end of the street is Fitzroy Square. The Square was first developed by the soldier and statesman Charles Fitzroy, who purchased the land in the 1700s. He commissioned the Adam brothers to design the neo-classical buildings now seen on the east and south sides. The other two sides were added by 1830.

A century later, the area around the Square had established itself as the haunt of artists, architects, writers, political activists and bohemian characters. They probably invented the term "Fitzrovia", in ironic imitation of well-heeled "Belgravia", one evening in the Fitzroy Tavern, on Charlotte Street, south of the Square. Downstairs at this pub is the Writers' Bar, named in honour of poets and novelists. The Newman Arms on Rathbone Street is also proud of its associations with famous authors. Both hostelries have cosy corners in which to sit and enjoy a classic work of fiction or polemic.

George Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, Ford Madox Brown, Roger Fry, Roland Collins, George Orwell, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Aneurin Bevan, Karl Marx and Julian Maclaren-Ross all lived in or frequented the Fitzrovia area.

The artistic spirit of the area lives on in the form of a number of small, independent art galleries. Look out for Contemporary Applied Arts on Percy Street, left at the bottom end of Charlotte Street.

Wandering around the Square and sampling one or two pubs may have worked up a healthy appetite. Fortunately, Charlotte and the adjoining streets are also famous for their vast number and variety of restaurants, serving the tastes and budgets of local residents, medical students from UCLH, and the clients of nearby advertising and legal firms. There is a choice of French, Italian, Greek, Indian, Spanish, Japanese, Mexican, Thai, Filipino, Scandinavian! While at the bottom of Whitfield Street (east and parallel with Charlotte Street) is the long-established Gig's fish and chip shop.

And for those in search of gifts and souvenirs, stop by the corner of Whitfield and Scala streets and pop into the extraordinarily charming Pollock's Toy Museum.