

Hobson's Fountain of 1614

In the middle ages, Cambridge was a very smelly place. The college's toilets emptied into the river, and the dirty water spread diseases. To help clean up the city, the town and university had a substantial donation from a local man named Thomas Hobson to build a waterway that would bring in fresh water from the countryside. It was known as Hobson's Conduit, and you can still see a small section of it today, running in ditches on either side of Trumpington Street, outside the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Thomas Hobson and his son made lots of money by running an inn, a horse rental business, and were the official couriers for the University in Tudor and Stuart times. A fountain was built in 1614 to give clean drinking water to the people of Cambridge and marked the end point of Hobson's Conduit in Market Square. After a huge fire devastated the Square in 1849, the fountain was moved to the corner of Lensfield Road where you can see a reconstructed conduit from 1953. Today, you can find the pieces of the original Hobson fountain from Market Square on display in the courtyard at the Museum of Cambridge.

