



PRECIOUS GEMS
The Science of Magic supplies a dash of wonder at the market

price was much lower," she says. "You don't need to pay water, electricity and council tax to do business. But somehow it has become very expensive, almost like the shop."

Mal reinforces this: "As the market is quite cheap, it gives everybody access to start their own small business. It means the market itself will then represent things that are really in fashion."

"No small businesses can afford rent in the town centre – and that means you end up with homogenised business spaces," Mal continues. "The market offers the only place in the centre of the town where anybody can do business."

Although prices are skyrocketing, the market is still ideal for those starting out with an idea. "It's a good push for the people who have the dream and never put food out," Neide says.

Apart from its economic importance, the market has historically been a social hub, putting craftspeople, suppliers and chefs in direct contact with customers. Many stall owners relay a wealth of specialised knowledge, while regulars – including a palaeontologist who stops by The Science of Magic – say hello when they're in need of a chat.

"People are always passing by and I like that you can watch people and what they're up to," says Anne. "Every now and again you get a parade."

As opposed to indoor shopping, variety is key – with the market open seven days a week since the 90s, traders change day to day, along with the people passing through, the weather and its surrounds. On the brink of King's Parade, the open market community also provides welcome relief from the tucked-away life of the university.

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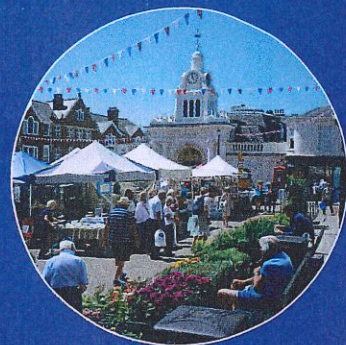
ROUGH TRADE

There has been an even more fundamental threat of change for decades, as planning proposals to transform the market have been tried and tested. "There's a lot of uncertainty," says Phil, who in his time at the market, saw it survive revamps in the 70s and 90s.

Covid-19 hurled another obstacle in the way. "Food traders and people who didn't sell essential items weren't supposed to trade," says Mal. "I think that's made us all aware there's a certain amount of insecurity to our jobs."

Many market traders agree that their workplace needs refurbishment, while also being fond of its "shambolic" nature, among them Anne and Mal. "The traders are working hard to make it vibrant and relevant today," notes Victoria. The balance, it seems, is between respecting history as a focal point, while lessening the tough work of traders today.

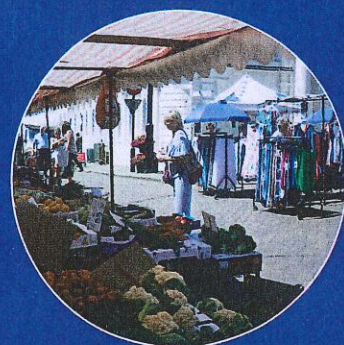
This year, Cambridge Market will be taking part in the Love Your Local Market national initiative, a festival run by the trade body for market organisers, NABMA, from 13 May to 5 June – another reason why things are starting to look up. Expect a jam-packed schedule of events. ●



Walden wares

FOR BAGGING A BARGAIN OR FRESH FINDS, SAFFRON WALDEN'S MARKET IS A WINNER

Bustling since 1141, Tuesdays and Saturdays are the times to head south of Cambridge for more market spoils. From fresh flowers to country collectables, Saffron Walden may be small, but its market is booming. Our favourites span Saffron Wholefoods, Tambas Jewellery and Sutton View Nursery – it will be difficult to leave without multiple shopping bags stuffed full, so be prepared to make a day of it. For a swig of something special, Saffron Grange – a family-run vineyard just on the edge of Saffron Walden – is a firm favourite at the market. Bardfield Vineyard's stall stocks crisp white wine, and young distillery Charles & Mike sells fruity spirits packed with flavour, that pull no punches. The town has also been home to a pop-up market, complete with food court, crafts and activities to keep little ones entertained. Reeling in local children's performers and attractions such as Saffron Hall, Saffron Screen and Audley End Miniature Railway, this is the perfect day out for the entire family. Keep your eyes peeled for the return of Window on Walden next year!



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