



Fitzrovia, 1900-1950

An Artist's Domain

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- A social history of the area of London known as Fitzrovia and the artists that frequented and inhabited it

Fitzrovia is a notional area not to be found on any official document and, indeed, was not so called until the 1940s, named by a habitue at the Fitzroy Tavern, the journalist-cum-member of parliament, Tom Driberg. It was, for some half century, a haven for artists. This was partly due to the cheap accommodation it offered, along with cheap cafes and food shops, many run by French and German refugees, several of generous nature when it came to impoverished artists. But even more significant was the siting of the Slade School of Fine Art, just across Tottenham Court Road, in Gower Street. Founded in 1871, it offered a more liberal education than that provided by the Royal Academy Schools.

Although many artists of the period lived and worked independently in Fitzrovia, others clustered round charismatic personalities – Walter Sickert in Fitzroy Street, Roger Fry in his Omega Workshops in Fitzroy Square, Wyndham Lewis with his Vorticist plotters at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel in Percy Street; and, into the 1930s when some artists became activist, establishing the Artists International Association in Charlotte Street.

Many of these artists would be able to get their supplies at George Romney & Co. and Windsor & Newton in Rathbone Place and Percy Street.

And then there were the imbibers, Nina Hammett and Augustus John frequenting the various taverns of Rathbone Place and Charlotte Street, centering on the Fitzroy. Fitzrovia was awash!

Ruth Artmonsky trained as a psychologist. On her retirement from her associate directorship of a leading psychometric consultancy she ran a small art gallery. To date she has written over 30 books. She has written and published a number of books on British mid-20th century art.

