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# The History of London’s Covent Garden

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At some point during a trip, many visitors to London, England end up at Covent Garden.  However, modern visitors may not be aware of all the interesting history they are standing on as they explore the current day attractions there.

The land had formerly belonged to Westminster Abbey and was known as ‘Convent Garden’ because it supplied food for the Convent and Abbey of St Peter at Westminster.   Henry VIII seized it during his grab of the Church’s assets when he fought with the Roman Catholic Church and granted it to the Earls of Bedford.  The fourth Earl commissioned the well-known architect Inigo Jones to develop the land by building fashionable houses to attract rich tenants.   Jones decided to experiment and build a piazza similar to those he had seen during his travels to Italy.  The surrounding straight grid of streets stood out from the jumbled roads of London at this time.

Spend time at Covent Garden and you might see pineapples adorning the lights or buildings.  Fruit and vegetable markets were held regularly in the piazza. When the Great Fire of London destroyed other markets, Covent Garden became the most important vegetable and flower market in the country.   In the late seventeenth century greenhouses began to grow pineapples which were exotic and expensive and they became a symbol of wealth and hospitality similar to the South of the United States – the pineapple symbolizes the market’s history.

The Lamb and Flag pub is the oldest in Covent Garden; its license was granted in 1623.  Many parts of the original building are still intact.  The pub has a colorful history owing to the boxing fights that took place in the back room and earned it the title ‘the Bucket of Blood.’  People who visit Covent Garden today may not realize that Theatre Royal on Drury Lane is the oldest functioning London theatre dating to 1663.

An area as bustling as Covent Garden attracted all types of people.  In 1740 a local tavern owner published a list of the names and addresses of prostitutes in Covent Garden – he allegedly sold thousands of copies.  In the 1960’s Covent Garden served as the location for the scene where the Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle is introduced to Professor Henry Higgins in My Fair Lady.

Whether you are interested in history, grabbing a quick pint or street and theatre entertainment, Covent Garden today offers something for everyone on a visit to London.