

Thomas Merton's Cambridge - 1933

by

David Scott

71, Bridge Street
is now opposite a bookshop,
over a camera shop,
and beside a bookbinders which
was there when he was.
You can't really get a good look at it
except by stepping back
on the opposite side of the road
against a record shop window.
Looking up to the first floor
there is a 'To Let' sign.
You could rent it and have
a bit of the history,
but the empty room with its pile of rubbish
swept into the corner
reminds you of how much he hated the place.
It was 1933.
King Kong was on at The Central
and The Tempest at the Tivoli.

The jazz, cartoons, the room above
Athletic Stores and Hairdressers,
the bets and dares,
the bull-nosed journeys up to London,
all as empty as the room is now.
The river was seeing double
in the dark months of the year.
Yet,
it was the culture God grew warm in.
It took a while for the jazz
to whine its way back, and the cartoons
to strike a chord with Chuang T 'zu.
The hermitage was a world transfigured.
Here is the camera shop, the bookshop,
the binders that had been there
all the time. To see it
I have to step back against
the window of a record shop
to vibrate with the busy traffic of your soul:
but now the room has icons and slow noise,
a fire gently crackling,
some internal jazz.