

Freemasons' Hall, Grand Temple, Library, and Museum, and Sir John Soane's Museum

Thursday 17th May 2018

Freemasons' Hall: the Grade II* listed building was completed in 1933 in art deco style with Egyptian design as a memorial to the 3,225 Freemasons killed on active service during the First World War. It is a meeting place for over 1000 Masonic Lodges and the headquarters of United Grand Lodge of England.

The Grand Temple is approached through two bronze doors each weighing 1¼ tonnes which open on to a chamber 123 feet long, 90 feet wide, and 62 feet high, capable of seating 1,700. The ceiling is of mosaic and depicts figures from masonic ritual as well as the four cardinal virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, & Justice. The chamber contains a ceremonial dais for the Grand Master and a 19th century organ built by Henry Willis & Sons with 2,220 pipes and forty-three stops as well as a new case of four hundred pipes. The Vestibule contains the Memorial.

The Library & Museum of Freemasonry: a comprehensive collection of printed books and manuscripts on Freemasons. The Museum has a collection of objects with Masonic decoration including clocks, furniture, glassware, jewellery, porcelain, pottery, regalia and silver some belonging to King Edward VII and Sir Winston Churchill, both famous Freemasons.

Sir John Soane's Museum: every aspect of the interior reflects Soane's architectural ingenuity and extraordinary imagination. His collections of antiquities are contained in the principal rooms being:

The Dining Room & Library: mirrors ingeniously used to expand the apparent space; the portrait of Soane by Lawrence in 1828 newly cleaned and restored, and a model of Mrs Soane's tomb which inspired Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in the design of the iconic red telephone box.

The Study & Dressing Room overlooking the Monument Court: the Dressing Room ceiling incorporates an architectural model for a lantern light Soane designed for Freemasons' Hall.

The Picture Room includes 3 Venetian scenes by Canaletto, and 2 series of pictures by Hogarth: *A Rake's Progress* and *An Election*.

The Monk's Parlour & Yard: a satire on the growing taste for the Gothic, and 'home' to an imaginary monk, these spaces are a rare display of Soane's sense of humour.

The Crypt: constructed in former wine cellars, these dark and atmospheric spaces are reminiscent of ancient tombs or catacombs. The Sepulchral Chamber contains the alabaster sarcophagus of the Egyptian King Seti I (1303-1290 BC).

The Colonnade & Dome: packed with antiquities, these areas provide dramatic contrasts in architectural form and light and shade, typical of Soane's inventiveness, and

The Breakfast Room: possibly the most famous room in the house, and certainly the most architecturally influential, the Breakfast Room is still copied by architects today.

Robert Adam's Osterley Park drawings: by special arrangement Curator, Dr Fran Sands, showed us these drawings, an exercise in total design, with every aspect of the state rooms controlled by Adam.

Patrick Higham, Visits Secretary