

RACHEL HOWARD AND BILL NASH



SECRET LONDON

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

KEYSTONE CRESCENT

①

The smallest crescent in Europe

Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, N1 9DT

Kings Cross St Pancras tube



The area around Kings Cross station is generally busy, overcrowded and dirty. But buried in the heart of this bustling district is a tiny row of charming 19th-century houses that make up the smallest crescent in Europe: Keystone Crescent is a uniform row of 24 houses in varying shades of brick that sweeps around into a curved semicircle.

This little street was built in 1864 by Robert James Stuckey, who learnt the bricklaying trade from his father and wanted to make the most out of the unusually shaped land. The houses are so tightly bound together that the road's radius is the tiniest in Europe (although the actual measurement is unknown).

There have been a few attempts to demolish the street over the decades but luckily the area is now Grade II listed. Its traditional charm is protected by the local council, which has special regulations to keep the crescent as it was when first built. There are rules, for example, about the front gates: they must be replaced with traditional metal gates when they need repairing, and where possible they must be painted black. All houses must have slate roofs, a four-panelled door and obey a zero-tolerance policy on car ports.

Signs attached to the walls at each end of the street explain that it was originally called Caledonian Crescent (a faded old sign around the corner also attests to this). Stuckey named the road after the Caledonian Asylum, a nearby orphanage set up to look after Scottish children whose parents had died in the Napoleonic wars. Eventually the asylum was demolished and the road's name changed to Keystone, thought to be linked to the Masonic symbol of the Keystone.

THE MUMMY OF KATEBET

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Black magic in Ancient Egypt

British Museum, Great Russell Street, WC1B 3DG
Every day 10am-5pm
Russell Square or Tottenham Court Road tube

In room 63 on the Upper Level of the British Museum, the mummy of a nearly toothless elderly woman is said to be that of Katebet. Her embalmers did not extract her brain during the mummification process, which is extremely unusual. Katebet has been identified as a woman who lived in Thebes, Egypt, around 1300–1280 BCE. She was a priestess–princess of the god Amon, singing hymns to his praise in his temple.

Mysteries surround the sarcophagus and all the decorations on the mummy. The position of the hands and the shape of the wig are those associated with mummies of men, not women. Likewise, some of the objects placed on the mummy were usually intended for a man. At one time, it was thought that the mummy was that of her husband, Quenna, with whom Katebet would have been entombed. But no

trace of his mummy has ever been found, and in fact, his very existence is seriously doubted. The gilded face is framed by a wig from which white ear studs peek out. The hands, crossed over the chest, are adorned with royal rings suggesting magical phallic signs. A small, dark scarab sits on her stomach. It is surmounted by a human face with outspread wings representing the soul (*Ka* in Egyptian). Two figures, a man and a woman, flank the scarab. They are probably priests of Amon, put there to provide magical protection. A mummy-shaped figurine is embossed lower down, at knee level. This *shabti* indicates that Katebet was mummified according to the dictates of the official religion of Thebes at the time. According to esoteric theosophical doctrine, however, this mummy is actually that of Kali-Beth (the ‘Black Princess’), sister of Thutmose II, fourth pharaoh of the



18th Dynasty. She was descended from an ancient sorcerer-king named Baal-Iman (the ‘Crow King’) who, it is said, finally succumbed to the evil in the black magic he practised.

Due to Kali-Beth’s beauty, vivacity and unsavoury ancestry, the sorcerers of Thebes who were her contemporaries hatched a plot to kidnap her and mummify her alive. They claimed to know spells that could trap her soul within her embalmed body. This would make her a statue with an immortal, eternally functioning mind. Her *Ka*, imprisoned by her improperly mummified body, would rear up and become a terrifying monster, driven by an insatiable desire for revenge. Kali-Beth’s murderers hoped to make her suffer such torments that powerful vibrations of pain, hatred and rebellion would forever emanate from her soul. Desecrated, the body would become a valuable source of evil energies. The curse of this mummy was so sinister that wherever it dwelt, all sorts of misfortunes would befall the populace. By inspiring such terror, the sorcerers of Thebes ruled every aspect of life in the region. They were the political, economic, military, social and even religious authorities.

Meanwhile, Thutmose III ascended to the throne of Egypt and married Princess Satiah. The couple’s great spiritual and human dignity led them to abjure the sorcerers, who supported their rival Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut was the half-sister and wicked stepmother of the young Thutmose. During his childhood, she had governed as a cruel despot.

Shortly before he was crowned king, Thutmose III and Satiah nearly met the same fate as Kali-Beth. Hatshepsut had ordered her royal sorcerers to kidnap the couple, mummify the prince alive and place him in the same sarcophagus as Kali-Beth. The idea was to replace the rotten body of the ancient princess, which was no longer useful. At the last minute, a group of warriors and priests loyal to Thutmose III burst into the sorcerers’ lair and killed them. They burnt down the temple and threw old Hatshepsut into jail. It is said that she was subjected to the same torture as Kali-Beth but that her mortal remains were thrown onto the funeral pyre in order to purify the perverted shrine.

The symbols on the sarcophagus do clearly suggest black magic. The scarab on the stomach is an avatar of Khepra, the goddess of cosmic harmony, peace and justice. However, the hand signals made by the mummy are known to counteract and disrupt Khepra’s powers. The position of the fingers on the right hand refers to the phallic symbol of Saturn and the attachment to lust and material instincts. The scarab symbolises the rebirth of the soul. Its position indicates that the soul of Kali-Beth is artificially trapped inside her body. With her left hand, the princess is making the sign of the bull’s horns. A symbol of virility, the horns also signify infidelity when made by the left hand.

MOUNTING BLOCK

32

A step fit for a duke

*Outside the Athenaeum Club, 107 Pall Mall, St James's, SW1Y 5ER
Piccadilly tube*



On the pavement outside the Athenaeum private members' club, it is easy to miss a two-levelled granite step about a metre long. A forgotten necessity from the days of horse riding, this was once used by the Duke of Wellington himself as he climbed off and on his noble steed and galloped about the city.

Defeating Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and serving as Prime Minister not once but twice, has made the Duke of Wellington (aka Arthur Wellesley) an icon of British history. Although his other memorials are far more famous (for example, the Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner or the Wellington Monument on Park Lane), his personal horse-step is completely overlooked by the millions of people making their way up and down Pall Mall.

Wellesley was a loyal member of the Athenaeum and, six years after the club was founded in 1824, he (then Prime Minister) suggested they place some stone steps outside the entrance to help the many elderly club members who arrived by horseback to dismount gracefully.

The Duke of Wellington had a war horse called Copenhagen, who he famously rode into the battle at Waterloo. A mixed thoroughbred with Arabian parentage, Copenhagen quickly became Wellesley's favourite horse. But as Copenhagen was mostly used for military service, processions and racing, it is not known whether he ever graced the steps of the Athenaeum.

The Athenaeum Club

The Athenaeum has been a prestigious private members' club since its founding almost 200 years ago. It was designed by Decimus Burton in the neoclassical style and has a statue of Athena (the Greek goddess of wisdom and the club's namesake) guarding the entrance. Although the club was designed to be non-partisan, it was still careful to admit only those who it thought would create an atmosphere of 'learning': alongside the Duke of Wellington, it boasts famous alumni such as Charles Darwin, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy.

MYDDELTON PASSAGE CARVINGS ①

The inscriptions of bored Victorian police officers

Myddelton Square, EC1R 1YE

Angel tube

At the bottom of Myddelton Square, a beautiful open space lined with Georgian-style terraces, is a scruffy wall marked with numbers and letters. For a long time, these mysterious carvings were thought to be the work of rebellious prisoners during the Napoleonic wars: it was assumed that they had etched their prisoner numbers into the bricks. Over the centuries, more and more vandals added their identification numbers to the wall. This theory was disproved by the sharp mind of Peter Guillery, an English Heritage researcher who was creating a mass survey of historic London: he presented a brand-new theory about the origins of the carvings. In 2006 Guillery reported that the marks had been made by on-duty Victorian policemen who were bored, possibly

drunk and looking for amusement. The idea was a suggestion by an old retired police officer and Guillery's research, aided by Margaret Bird from the Metropolitan Police Service historical archives, proved this explanation correct. If you look closely at the carvings, you'll see that most of them have a 'G' in the sequence. After some sleuthing, it was decided that this stood for the 'G division' of the Metropolitan Police who operated out of Kings Cross in the 19th century. The numbers before the division letter were the policemen's 'collar' number – the unique series of identification numbers given to every recruit at the start of their career. Usually, this number was also displayed on their uniform, so if the carvings really were personalised graffiti by officers of the law, then it would have been very easy to identify the individuals who carried out this petty crime! Incredibly, some of these police officers have now been identified through archival research – for example, Frederick Albert Moore of G Division ('365 Plymouth' on the wall).

Lucky for them that it took a few hundred years to figure out exactly what the sequences were ...



WOODEN PAVEMENT ①

One of the last surviving examples of London's old wooden pavements

*Chequer Street, EC1Y 8PD
Barbican or Moorgate tube*

At the far end of Chequer Street, at the point where it turns into Burnhill Row, is a square of pavement that is noticeably darker than the rest of the road. Pavements around London usually end up looking like a patchwork quilt as they are re-paved and filled in over the years, but this small spot is especially interesting.

Inspect it closely and you'll spot the rings of old trees moulded into the blocks. Walk along it and you'll feel that it's softer than the stone around it.

This is one of the last surviving examples of London's old wooden pavements, a remnant of the time when horses, carriages and bicycles ruled the roads (see below).

The design of the block pavement found on Chequer Street is thought to have emerged in 14th-century Russia, but it only gained popularity in England when wood became abundant and cheap, especially in comparison to the high price of stone.

For a long time, London's streets were paved with cobbles. But as new travel technologies took over the urban centre during the Victorian



age, wooden pavements became useful for quietening the racket of steel-rimmed carriage wheels on stone, as well as protecting the horses' iron shoes from the uneven cobbled streets.

Wooden roads were not found everywhere: they were usually only laid in areas where the street noise was expected to be particularly annoying to residents. Chequer Street once had an infant school for boys and girls, which explains why they would want quieter wooden paving at the entrance.

Wood became less suitable with the arrival of the motor car. It also became quickly apparent that wooden pavements were difficult to maintain and could get extremely slippery on London's many rainy days. Business owners realised they were basically paying a 'mud tax' – they forfeited profits lost during the rainy season when the wet wooden roads became impassable.

After the Second World War most of these roads were taken up, removed and replaced with asphalt or granite. Many of the wooden blocks used as pavements were hastily stolen by local residents to be burnt in their home fires, so hardly any material evidence of the old pavements remains.



Other examples of wooden pavements

Other examples of wooden pavements can be found on Belvedere Road, SE1 7GQ and Colliers Wood, SW19 2BH.

TIMBER FROM A ROMAN WHARF 22

A 2,000-year-old piece of timber

St Magnus the Martyr, Lower Thames Street, EC3R 6DN

Tues–Fri 10am–4pm

Monument tube



The stone walls of London's Roman city, Londinium, are a fairly common sight; although erected two millennia ago as part of a large defensive fortress, they were built to last. But Londinium's wooden structures have long since rotted, disintegrated and disappeared. All except one.

Tucked behind the church of St Magnus the Martyr is a 2,000-year-old piece of timber thought to be a historic relic of the old river wharf that was built near the first Thames bridge. After the bridge had been constructed, new buildings, platforms and wharfs were set up along the river. This quay would have been the centre of trade for Londinium, welcoming merchants, traders and visitors from around the Roman Empire: a vast number of people would have gathered here to trade basic necessities, luxury goods and enslaved people.

This piece of wood was found on Fish Street Hill in 1931 and brought to the churchyard to be preserved. Experts have dated the segment to AD 65–75; it's been maintained over so many centuries because of a lack of oxygen in the waterlogged area that prevented the wood from decomposing.

It might seem odd to shelter something so ancient outside, but the timber's cosy corner in the portico underneath the bell tower of St Magnus the Martyr protects it from the elements.

NEARBY

Old London Bridge model

Inside the doors of St Magnus the Martyr, an intricately detailed model of Old London Bridge (which stood from 1176 to 1831) shows over 900 mini medieval people crossing the river, including knights, pilgrims and even King Henry V (see p. 192). The church itself was an important location in the hectic world of medieval trade after it was rebuilt by Christopher Wren in the 17th century. The bell tower became the pedestrian entrance: people used to pass through the churchyard and up the tower to make their way onto the bridge's walkway.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

BELL TOWER

⑦

Look out across London's skyline

Ambrosden Avenue, SW1P 1QW

0207 798 9055

www.westminstercathedral.org.uk

Mon-Fri 9.30am-5pm, Sat and Sun 9.30am-6pm

Check website for admission prices

Victoria tube



With its neo-Byzantine copper domes and terracotta bell tower striped with Portland stone, Westminster Cathedral is surprisingly less visible than Westminster Abbey, just half a mile down Victoria Street. A market, fairground, maze, bull-baiting ring and children's prison once stood on the site, before the Catholic Church bought the land in 1884. Built between 1895 and 1903, the cathedral's interior was never actually completed. Its rich marbles and mosaics shimmer in the shadowy gloom.

In the northwest corner, concealed behind a gift shop, a lift whisks visitors up to the seventh floor of the 83-metre bell tower. (Originally, visitors had to climb the 375 steps to the top.) From viewing platforms on all sides, you can look across London from this great height and marvel at how the ugly modern office blocks have dwarfed the landmarks of a lost empire. Look carefully and you will spot the Union Jack fluttering atop Buckingham Palace, the dome of St Paul's, the spindly skeleton of the Crystal Palace transmission tower. The industrial bulk of the BT Tower, Canary Wharf, and Battersea Power Station make more of a statement. You can contrast today's skyline with blown-up photographs of the same views from 1912.

Don't be alarmed if Big Edward, the 2.5-ton bell named after Edward the Confessor, suddenly strikes overhead. When the lift was installed in 1929, Big Edward had to be relocated above the belfry, which explains why the bell now sounds faintly muffled.

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 thriller *Foreign Correspondent*, an assassin plunges to his death from Westminster Cathedral's bell tower as the Requiem Mass is chanted inside. Hitchcock's own Requiem Mass was held at Westminster Cathedral after his death in 1980.

Eric Gill's stations of the cross

Eric Gill was a prolific sculptor, typeface designer, and printmaker who helped design the font for London Underground. Gill also carved the colossal and controversial Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral, which has the widest nave in England. In many ways, they jar with the Byzantine ornamentation of the building. Gill's work has great simplicity of line, a cold, almost depersonalised style of figuration, and his relief work is almost medieval in its blankness. But he was an odd choice of artist for this hallowed site. Despite being an enthusiastic convert to Catholicism, who wrote extensively on the relationship between art and religion, Gill sexually abused his own children, had an incestuous relationship with his sister, and experimented sexually on his dog.

A MINIATURE ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Britain's forgotten smallest cathedral

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Vauxhall Bridge, SW1V 3JN
Vauxhall tube



Peer over the south side of Vauxhall Bridge and you'll just about be able to see a miniature version of one of the capital's most iconic buildings. It has been called Britain's smallest cathedral and is a precisely scaled-down version of Sir Christopher Wren's 17th-century masterpiece, St Paul's Cathedral, located almost 5 km away. The model is held by a figure of a woman, the physical symbol of architecture, one of eight huge bronze statues that decorate the sides of Vauxhall Bridge.

When the New Vauxhall Bridge opened in 1906, the London City Council was worried that it wasn't attractive or interesting enough. The council's official architect, William Riley, suggested that allegorical statues could be placed along the sides, adding some interest and prestige to the bridge when seen by boats coming in and out of the city. The council supported the idea and two members of the New Sculpture movement (which emphasised naturalistic poses and spiritual subjects), Alfred Drury and Frederick Pomeroy, were hired as sculptors. Each was tasked with creating four colossal figures weighing around 2 tonnes that could be mounted to look out over the Thames.

All the statues along the side of Vauxhall Bridge are of women holding objects that represent some of the key foundations of London's life and soul. Drury created the figures facing downriver: the Fine Arts (holding a palette and a sculpted figure), Science (an orb), Education (two children) and Local Government (a book). Pomeroy took the ones facing upriver: Architecture (St Paul's Cathedral), Agriculture (a sheaf of wheat), Engineering (a steam engine, mallet and anvil) and Pottery (an amphora).

When they were first installed, the statues were much discussed in the national press, particularly because Vauxhall Bridge was the only bridge in Britain to have sculptures. However, people worried that because the figures were placed below eye-level, pedestrians wouldn't be able to appreciate the high-quality artwork. This was a legitimate concern.

Although at night these figures are lit up from above, creating a dramatic view when seen from the water, the eight women are hardly ever noticed from above. Over the years this neglect has worsened and the statues, as well as the country's smallest cathedral, have been almost forgotten by the millions of commuters walking, cycling or driving over the bridge.



575 WANDSWORTH ROAD

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Dreamy DIY

575 Wandsworth Road, SW8 3JD

0207 720 9459

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/575-wandsworth-road

Tours for a maximum of six people run March-Nov: Wed, Fri, Sat and Sun. Call

0844 249 1895 or email 575wandsworthroad@nationaltrust.org.uk to book

Admission charges and a booking fee apply. Entry is free for National Trust

members, but they still need to book a place

London Overground/rail to Wandsworth Road



First things first. If you want to visit this singular house, book well in advance – ideally, months in advance. Visitors are strictly limited to 54 a week, with tours in groups of six people at a time. Since opening its doors to the public in 2013, the house of Khadambi Asalache, bequeathed to the National Trust, has attracted more visitors than it can accommodate.

From the outside, this unassuming house doesn't look like much. When the exiled Kenyan poet, novelist and philosopher of mathematics Khadambi Asalache bought it in 1981, the small, terraced house was in a bad way. Asalache, who trained as an architect but worked at the Treasury, fixed pine floorboards to the persistent damp patches on the walls and floors. He went on to cover almost every wall, ceiling and door in the house with delicate fretwork that he hand-carved with a plasterboard knife from pine doors and floorboards scavenged from skips. This pragmatic approach to his art characterises the whole project, and the National Trust has been careful to maintain it, retaining the Polyfilla used on the ceilings and a taped-up broken windowpane in the sitting room.

Asalache carved out this private sanctuary compulsively for the rest of his life. (He only once employed a carpenter, but dismissed his work as sub-standard.) Delicate ballerinas, angels, giraffes and birds dance over every surface. The astonishing fretwork was inspired by a mixture of the Moorish art of Andalusia, carved doors in Asalache's native Lamu, panelled interiors in Damascus, and the wooden mansions along the banks of the Bosphorus in Istanbul. During conservation, over 2,000 pieces of woodwork were catalogued. The woodwork is juxtaposed with the painted decoration of the walls, doors and floors, hand-carved furniture and carefully arranged collections, including pressed-glass inkwells, postcards, and the poet's collection of pink and copper 19th-century English pottery.

The amount of stuff crammed into the house ought to be overwhelming, but the effect is quietly soothing. As the director of the Sir John Soane's Museum has said, it is 'an extremely serious and carefully worked-out exercise in *horror vacui* (fear of the void)' – and it works. In fact, 575 Wandsworth Road shares the compulsive nature of its interior with the Soane Museum. There is a huge amount to see in such a small space. The best bit? Possibly the main bedroom, with its shutters decorated with the initials of Khadambi and his partner Susie Thomson, and the kennel carved for Thomson's Tibetan spaniel next to the bed.



THE CINEMA MUSEUM

9

Stars in your eyes

The Master's House, 2 Dugard Way, SE11 4TH

0207 840 2200

www.cinemamuseum.org.uk

By appointment

Admission varies for guided tours, talks, events and screenings

Kennington or Elephant & Castle tube



Hidden down a cul-de-sac in Kennington is one of the world's most extensive collections of film-related images and artefacts. Fittingly, the Cinema Museum has found a temporary home in the former Lambeth workhouse where a nine-year-old boy named Charlie Chaplin and his half-brother Sydney were 'processed' in 1896.

The building was once divided into wings for men and women of 'good' or 'bad character'. Today, the musty corridors and dormitories are crammed with mechanical projectors and Art Deco cinema signs, original lobby cards, piles of periodicals dating back to 1911, and around 17 million feet of film.

This extraordinary collection was amassed by Ronald Grant, whose lifelong passion for cinema began when he helped out at his local picture house in Aberdeen as a boy. Since then, Grant has accumulated over one million cinematic images dating back to 1895, the year the Lumière brothers screened the first 'actualités' in Paris. This vast anthology of production stills and portraits of movie stars keeps the Cinema Museum afloat: the images are hired out to the media. The archive is divided by subject matter, from abattoirs to ventriloquists. Leafing through the 'P' drawer, Grant offers up pictorial material on practical jokes, pratfalls, prisons and private eyes.

But it's the artefacts that really bring the early days of cinema to life. There are silent film scores and song lyrics that were projected onto the screen so that audiences could sing along as the organist played during the interval. Before X-rated movies, there was Category H: 'horrific'. There's a 1917 ticket machine that issued metal tokens of various shapes depending on the price, so ushers could feel the difference in the dark. These nattily dressed ushers would use floral sprays 'to disguise the smell of 1,000 wet raincoats and cigarettes on a Saturday night'. Cinemas may have had fancy fittings and names like the Majestic or the Picture Palace, but audiences could be rowdy. One old notice warns patrons: 'No shouting or whistling allowed – applaud with hands only. In the interests of public safety please do not spit.'

The Cinema Museum has led a precarious life, and is still struggling to maintain a permanent home here on Dugard Way. To raise funds, it has launched regular film nights and talks, held in a screening room with vintage cinema seats and illuminated signs. All proceeds go towards maintaining this glorious anachronism. A great night out for a good cause.

THE OLD OPERATING THEATRE

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No pain, no gain

9a St Thomas Street, SE1 9RY

0207 188 2679

Mon-Sun 10.30am-5pm

Check website for admission details

London Bridge tube/rail



This little oddity was rediscovered by chance in 1957, during repairs in the eaves of St Thomas' Church in Southwark, on the original site of St Thomas' Hospital. This is the oldest surviving operating theatre in the country, and was used in the days before anaesthetics and antiseptic surgery. The garret also served to store the hospital apothecary's medicinal herbs. The museum that stands there now displays a collection of terrifyingly primitive medical tools, including instruments for cupping, bleeding and trepanning, a hair-raising practice of perforating the skull to 'alleviate pain.'

The operating theatre was built in 1822, after the 1815 Apothecary's Act, which required apprentice apothecaries to watch operations at public hospitals. Prior to this, operations took place in the patient's bed right on the ward, which must have been a blood-curdling ordeal – all that blood and bellowing in such a confined space. The operating theatre was annexed to the women's surgical ward, so patients could be carried straight in via what is now the fire escape. Students crammed the viewing platforms to watch the operations, carried out without anaesthetic prior to 1847. Patients, who were typically from the poorer strata of London society, submitted willingly, as this was the only way to get the best medical treatment, which they otherwise could not afford. The wealthy underwent operations in the relative comfort and privacy of their home.

Open surgery

Surgeon John Flint South described the pandemonium on the sidelines of an operation here: 'Behind a second partition stood the pupils, packed like herrings in a barrel, but not so quiet, as those behind them were continually pressing on those before and were continually struggling to relieve themselves of it, and had not infrequently to be got out exhausted. There was also a continual calling out of "Heads, Heads" to those about the table whose heads interfered with the sightseers.'

Florence Nightingale was indirectly responsible for the operating theatre's closure. In 1859, she set up her nursing school at St Thomas', but on her advice the hospital moved to a new site opposite the Houses of Parliament in 1862. There is still a small Florence Nightingale Museum at St Thomas' Hospital (see p. 262).

THE FAN MUSEUM



Miniature masterpieces

12 Crooms Hill, Greenwich SE10 8ER

0208 305 1441

www.thefanmuseum.org.uk

Tues-Sat 11am-5pm, Sun 12-5pm

Check website for admission prices

Greenwich rail/DLR, Cutty Sark DLR



The Fan Museum in Greenwich is another of London's many specialist museums reflecting the obsessive, collecting side of the English. It claims to be the only museum in the world devoted to every aspect of fans and fan making (although a similar venture exists in Paris), and there may be good reason for this – the craft does seem limited. But the collection works as a set of miniatures and the building itself is worth visiting. Housed in a pair of listed Georgian buildings from 1721 that have been restored to their original state, the museum contains over 3,500 mostly antique fans from around the world. These date from the 11th century to the present day. However, the bulk of the collection is based around fans from the 18th and 19th centuries, when mass production of folding fans saw their use spread throughout society. Demand was such that the fan makers had their own livery company, which still exists, although its membership now mainly derives from the heating and air-conditioning industry.

Fans may be practical objects, but the blank canvas of the 'leaf' meant that they became a highly decorative form of display. Fans often directly referred to contemporary events and allegiances, with Nelson's victories a particularly popular subject in mass-produced fans. They also served as a kind of primitive advertising hoarding. At the fancier end of the market, leading society artists painted fans for clients – the museum holds a fan painted by Walter Sickert. The functions of the fans on display thus vary wildly: ceremonial tools, fashion accessories, status symbols, political flags, or advertising giveaways.

On the first Saturday of the month, the Fan Museum holds fan-making workshops. At the rear is an Orangery covered in delicate murals, overlooking a Japanese garden, with a fan-shaped parterre. Afternoon tea is served on Tuesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Fan language

The practical use of a fan is clear. However, at the apogee of their popularity at the turn of the 19th century, a whole language was involved in their use, much of which can be seen in contemporary paintings. A fan resting upon the lips, for example, means 'I don't trust you'; placed on the heart it declares, 'My love for you is breaking my heart'; hiding the sunlight implies that 'You are ugly'; and fanning with the left hand says, 'Don't flirt with that woman'. Go to the museum, buy a fan, and reinstate these practices in polite society.

RUDOLF STEINER HOUSE

⑩

Eurythmic architecture

35 Park Road, NW1 6XT

0207 723 4400

www.rsh.anth.org.uk

Mon-Fri 1-6pm. Café open Sat 9am-5pm

Admission free to library and café; prices for lectures and performances vary

Baker Street tube, Marylebone rail



At first glance, this curious landmark looks like a 1920s office block; but behind the austere grey façade Rudolf Steiner House is as iconoclastic as its namesake. The rounded door and stained glass portholes hint at Art Nouveau flourishes. Inside, it's more like a habitat for hobbits. The entrance is dominated by a sculptural staircase that snakes all the way up the heart of the building, creating the curious sensation of entering a cocoon or a womb. Organic forms and distorted shapes suggest movement and fluidity. Pastel surfaces are painted in lazure, a glazing technique using translucent plant pigments that creates the effect of sunlight shimmering across water. It feels as though the architect was on acid; in fact, the trippy design is inspired by nature.

This is the first and only example of Expressionist architecture in London. One of the earliest proponents of Expressionism was Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), an Austrian philosopher who developed the spiritual science of anthroposophy, or 'wisdom of the human being'. Depending on your point of view, Steiner was either a visionary who pioneered holistic education and biodynamic farming, or a racist crackpot who believed that mistletoe could cure cancer and that 'blonde hair actually bestows intelligence.' Like fellow occultist Aleister Crowley, Steiner was prone to wearing flouncy bow ties.

Rudolf Steiner House was purpose built for The Anthroposophical Society between 1924 and 1935 by Montague Wheeler, a fellow believer. The space positively radiates a sense of touchy-feely community. As well as workshops on spiritual development, meditation, and Rosicrucianism, the society offers classes in eurythmy. Derived from a Greek word meaning 'harmonious rhythm', eurythmy is part performance art and part dance therapy. In the café (biodynamic, naturally) the wooden beams, inlaid with seven different hardwoods, echo the Goetheanum, the Swiss headquarters of anthroposophy designed by Steiner himself in 1914. Originally built from wood, the Goetheanum burned down in 1922 and was rebuilt in poured concrete.

The small library is open to the public, should you wish to delve into Steiner's oeuvre. He wrote over 330 books.



LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE

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Theatre on a string

14 Dagmar Passage, Islington N1 2DN

0207 226 1787

www.littleangeltheatre.com

Times vary depending on performances and workshops

Admission varies

Angel or Highbury & Islington tube, Essex Road or Highbury & Islington rail



Long before Islington was colonised by overpriced cafés and designer boutiques, its backstreets harboured a secret venue. The setting is like something out of a fairy tale: on a pedestrian passage overgrown with creepers, the Little Angel Theatre has been staging puppet shows since 1961.

It was founded by John and Lyndie Wright, South African émigrés (and parents of movie director Joe Wright) who converted a derelict temperance hall, bombed during World War II, into this enchanting theatre for moving marionettes and pint-sized punters.

Everything about the theatre, with its bright blue door, pews for seats, and doll's house proportions, seems designed to delight children, who make up the biggest part of its audience. From re-workings of Shakespeare to operettas performed by marionettes, there's plenty to captivate adults as well.

All the puppets, props, and sets are created in the Little Angel Studios around the corner, which also runs puppetry workshops for all ages. Lyndie Wright (who still lives in the cottage next door) and her daughter Sarah continue to design many of the puppets and shows.



The puppet barge

In 1982, one of the Wrights' protégés, Juliet Rogers, established an even more unusual venue devoted to puppet theatre. Unable to afford London property prices even then, Rogers and her partner Gren Middleton bought a rusty Thames lighter – one of the iron barges originally used to transport goods from the Docklands to Henley and Oxford.

With its red and yellow striped awning, the Puppet Theatre Barge stands out among the colourful houseboats in Regent's Canal. Up to 50 children can squeeze inside the scarlet hold of this floating venue, which drifts down the River Thames to Richmond during the summer.

From October to June, the barge is moored opposite 35-40 Blomfield Road in Little Venice, W9 2PF; 0207 249 6876; www.puppetbarge.com.

THE MUSICAL MUSEUM

29

Feel the Mighty Wurlitzer

399 High Street, Brentford, TW8 0DU

020 8560 8108

www.musicalmuseum.co.uk

Tues, Fri, Sat, Sun 10.30am–5pm

Check website or call for guided tours & instrument demonstrations

Kew Bridge rail station



Music is something we take for granted these days; the stuff pours out of headphones, video games, restaurant toilets and lifts. We've reached this stage in a series of short, rapid steps, and this purpose-built museum is full of the baroque miracles that got us here. Founded by Frank Holland in 1963, this is one of the world's foremost collections of automated music systems. This means machines you might be familiar with – musical boxes, pianolas, iPods – and machines you might not. The Hupfeld Phonoslizst-Violina, anyone?

What's most impressive about the museum is that the trust responsible for it aim to get as much as possible of the collection up and running; for this reason, it's essential to check the timings for a guided tour with instrument demonstrations. Working highlights include a rudimentary German jukebox the size of a Transit van, a coin-operated violin player and king-sized gramophones. The ambition of the builders of these machines is impressive – an orchestration, for example, was designed to replicate the sound of a small orchestra using actual instruments, and sounds like twenty musicians trapped in a box. The sophistication of what were almost entirely mechanical devices is amazing – some player pianos, which slid over a piano keyboard and were operated by foot, were able to reproduce the nuances of the artists who recorded the musical rolls they used. And the guide will let you have a go on one if you're good.

But the glory of the museum lies sleeping in its own hall on the second floor. One of the main uses of these instruments was to accompany silent films. The grander the cinema, the grander the accompaniment, and grandest of all was a Wurlitzer, a massive organ which not only played music, but also produced sound effects including rain, birdsong and storms. The museum's Wurlitzer came from the Regal Cinema in Kingston on Thames; it can play itself, but in its day was often played by leading cinema organists who were stars in their own right.

Monthly tea dances and silent films accompanied by the Wurlitzer

The museum runs monthly Tea Dances accompanied by the Wurlitzer, which include a free dance class and a glass of prosecco, as well as occasional concerts. More excitingly, it runs seasons of the type of silent films it was designed for. On these nights, the Mighty Wurlitzer is woken, and rises up from the floor, lights blazing and pipes howling, to thrill audiences all over again.

THE ANTIQUE BREADBOARD MUSEUM

④

Look at my lovely bread

17 Lifford Street, SW15 1NY

020 8785 2464

theantiquebreadboardmuseum@gmail.com

Admission and availability: <https://antiquebreadboards.com>

Open most Tues and Sun, 2.30–4.30. Contact to make booking
Putney Bridge or East Putney tube



You've heard of a micro-brewery? A small brewer, focused on lovingly made artisanal beer? Well, this is a micro-museum, one room in Madeleine Neave's home devoted to lovingly made wooden breadboards. A museum dedicated to the most ordinary item in a kitchen may sound dull, but nothing is ever really boring or ugly, it's all a question of how carefully you're prepared to look at it. And the Antique Breadboard Museum lets you look carefully, and as a result is very interesting.

Madeleine is the daughter of Rosslyn Neave, an antique dealer with a wide range of interests, but who became increasingly fascinated by breadboards. Dedicated boards for bread don't appear to have existed much before 1820. It seems that the Corn Laws drove the price of bread beyond the means of many British families, turning it into a status symbol. And of course, if you can afford bread, you want to let everyone know by showing it off on a lovely hand-carved breadboard.

Early boards were often true luxury items. George Wing of Sheffield produced exquisitely carved boards for the aristocracy, one of which was put up for sale for 16 guineas, roughly equivalent to £2,000 in 2020. These custom-made boards would have been at the heart of the gargantuan breakfasts and teas that characterised genteel country house living for wealthy Victorians.

Naturally, the next step was the breadboard's adoption by the middle classes, and by the 1860s there was a thriving mass market. Decorative themes focused on simple patterns, but the boards get most interesting when amateur carvers make their own boards or personalise them. One board, decorated with ears of wheat and a rose surrounding a shield with monogrammed initials, must have been a wedding gift; another, apparently commissioned for a Rev. Woodfin by a loving congregation, has a quote from Corinthians slap in the middle of it. Many of the boards are deeply worn, and because you're encouraged to handle them, you get an uncanny sense of their history. The museum contains related items such as a trencher, the wooden plate from where we get the word trencherman. There's also a collection of breadknives, which came into being alongside breadboards – after all, if you're showing off your lovely board, you need a lovely knife, right?

Entry to the museum includes a beautifully served cream tea.

RACHEL HOWARD AND BILL NASH



SECRET

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