JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

LONDON

THE SECRET ATLAS

WESTMINSTER TO CAMDEN

ANGEL TO TEMPLE

SHOREDITCH TO TOWER BRIDGE

SHEPHERD'S BUSH TO MARYLEBONE

HAMMERSMITH TO WESTMINSTER

SOUTH BANK TO BRIXTON

WHITECHAPEL TO WOOLWICH

GREATER LONDON (NORTH)

GREATER LONDON (SOUTH)

12.

60 Great Queen Street, Holborn, WC2B 5AZ
Holborn or Covent Garden tube

FREEMASONS' HALL

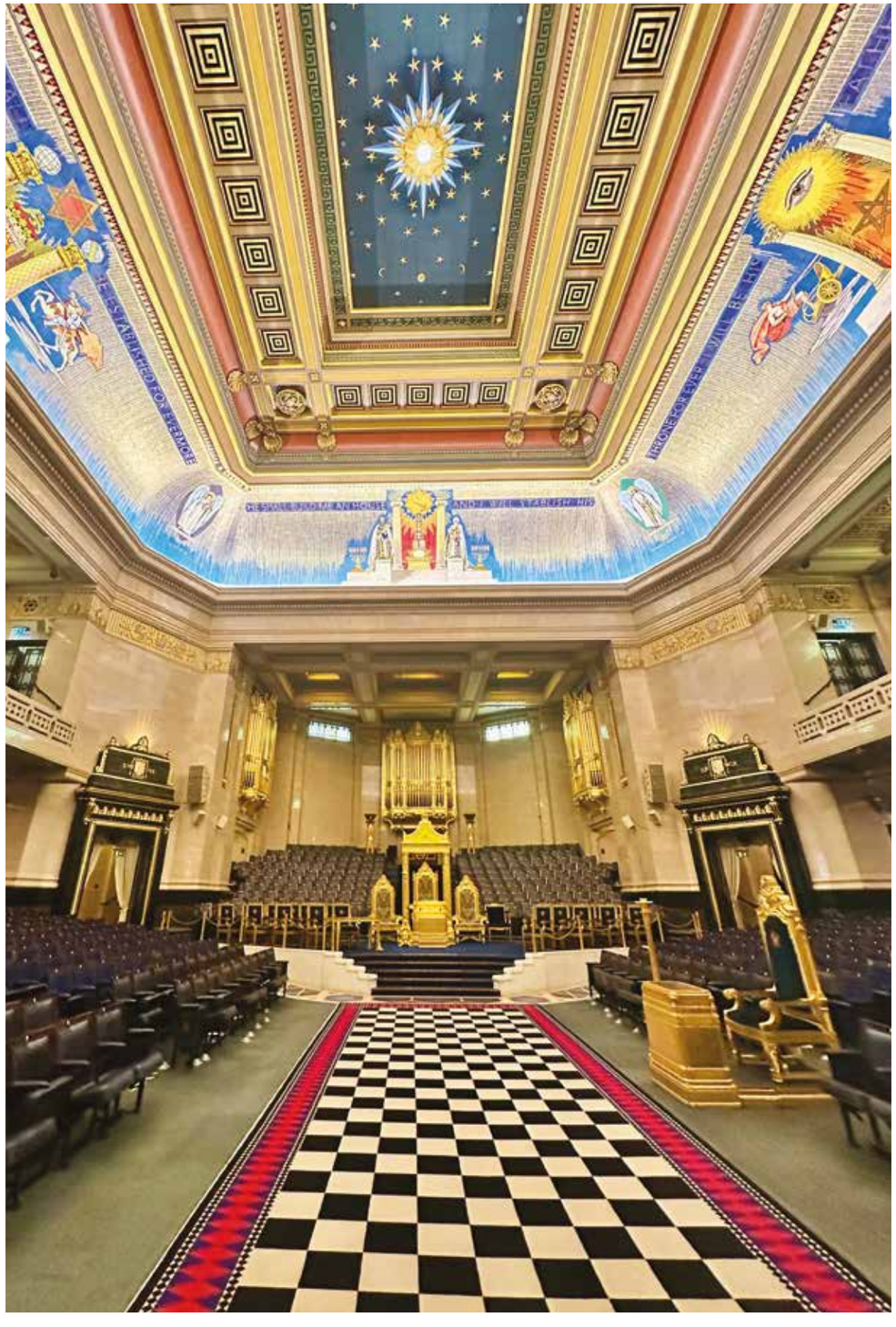
Yes, the Freemasons' Hall is open to the public

Time was when everyone thought there was nothing more secretive than a Freemason. But since the 1980s, the holiest of holies, the Freemasons' Hall near Covent Garden, has been open to the public, with a dedicated museum, an exhibition space in its library, and free hour-long tours of the building including the Grand Temple.

Opened in 1933 when freemasonry was flourishing, the hall is an art deco beast of a building that dominates the street. It is often used as a film location and has doubled as Saddam Hussein's palace. There is something melancholic about the place; membership numbers are in decline, which undoubtedly lies behind the decision to modernise and open up. The museum does a good job of explaining the history of freemasonry in the UK, and how the medieval stonemasons' guilds, with their secret words and symbols, were adapted to become the guiding model for the organisation.

Highlights include a display of Masonic regalia, including ornate aprons and gauntlet cuffs, items belonging to famous Freemasons including King Edward VII and Winston Churchill, and best of all, the colossal Grand Master's Throne. Built in 1791, its first occupant was the Prince Regent, later George IV. George was notoriously fat – in his later years, he had to sleep sitting up in order to breathe – and the chair looks as if it was designed with his elephantine backside in mind.

The glory of the hall, however, is the Grand Temple. Enter it through bronze doors that each weigh over a tonne, and gaze up at its 18-metre mosaic ceiling. The grand days of the brotherhood may be behind them, but they're still well housed.



14.

Fitzroy Place, 2 Pearson Square, W1T 3BF
Goodge Street tube

FITZROVIA CHAPEL

Pocket-sized luxury

Tucked away in the heart of a new residential development north of Soho, Fitzrovia Chapel is a little golden jewel box of a building which is all that remains of the Middlesex Hospital. Opened in the 1740s, the hospital evolved from a 15-bed operation to a leading teaching hospital, with the first dedicated AIDS wards in the UK. It finally closed in 2005 and was consolidated with University College Hospital round the corner on Euston Road. Officially opened by the Bishop of London in 1892, the chapel was designed by John Loughborough Pearson, who was well known as an ecclesiastical architect at the end of the 19th century. Typically, he appears to have worked on a massive scale, designing Bristol and Truro Cathedrals, as well as St Augustine's, Kilburn, an overwrought barn of a church sometimes called the Cathedral of North London and worth a visit.

For the Fitzrovia Chapel, Pearson was forced to work in miniature on a cramped site at the north-western corner of the main hospital building. Limitations of space don't appear to have dampened his enthusiasm for the ornate, however: although the exterior is plain red brick and dressed Portland stone, he seems to have managed to squeeze a whole cathedral's worth of gold and marble into the interior.

This took time – the mosaic ceiling was still being worked on in 1936 for the lying-in-state of Rudyard Kipling – but eventually, Pearson's 'expensive' design was finished, just in time for the Second World War and the Blitz, during which the hospital was bombed. The chapel has been fully restored as part of the conditions of sale of the hospital site to the current developers, and is open to the public one day a week.

GOTHIC REVIVALIST

Pearson was a prominent Gothic Revivalist. This style of architecture, which originated in the UK, sought to recreate medieval Gothic architecture. Pugin's Palace of Westminster is the best-known example in London, but the capital is full of it. Strawberry Hill House in Richmond is the earliest example of the style in the UK – frankly, it's bananas and well worth a trip. Tower Bridge and St Pancras station are good examples of how the Victorians sought to romanticise the most functional of buildings, using the style. Bear in mind that these two were built at around the same time as the Eiffel Tower and the Brooklyn Bridge, both of which still feel modern by comparison.

21.

42 Craven Street, WC2N 5NG
Charing Cross or Embankment tube

THE BRITISH OPTICAL ASSOCIATION MUSEUM

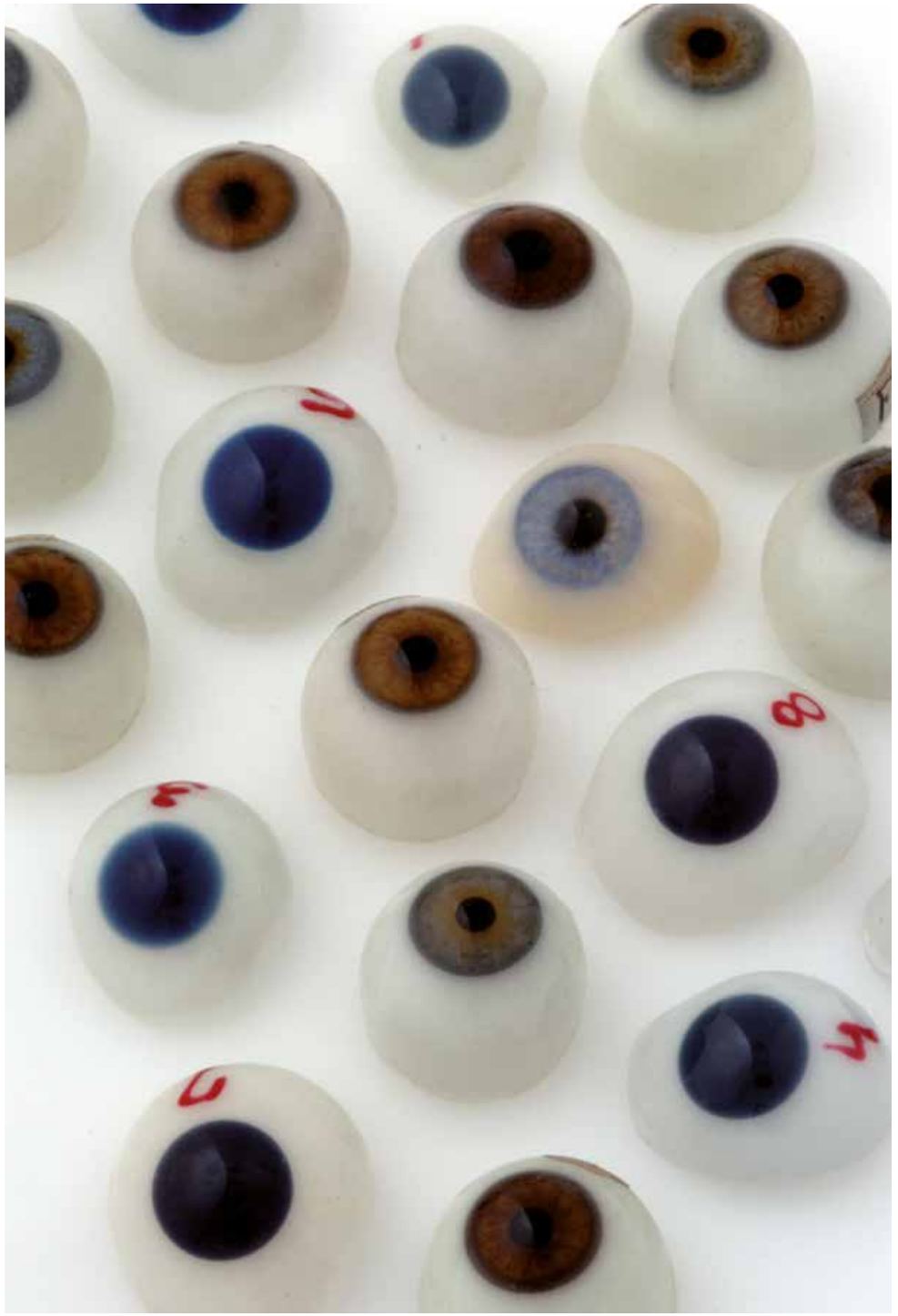
Eyeballs galore

In the basement of a fine Georgian terrace a stone's throw from Trafalgar Square, this obscure but delightful museum contains thousands of eye-catching objects relating to the history of optometry. Founded in 1901, the collection includes over 3,000 pairs of eyeglasses. There are pince-nez, lorgnettes, magnifiers, quizzing glasses, goggles and monocles, opera glasses with secret snuff compartments, 'jealousy glasses' with lenses concealed in the sides, rose-tinted sunglasses, wig spectacles that slid into your hairpiece, and all manner of fancy spectacle receptacles.

There are celebrity specs, including Dr Johnson, Ronnie Corbett and Dr Crippen, and Leonardo de Caprio's contact lenses. Some models – like the windscreen wiper glasses with battery attached and a spring-loaded contraption to catapult contact lenses into the eyeball – did not take off.

Curator Neil Handley gives every visitor a personal guided tour, pointing out rare items such as an ancient Egyptian amulet of the eye of Horus, ensuring the dead could see in the afterlife, and a 16th-century statue of Saint Odilia, bearing two eyeballs on a bible. The optometric instruments are historical eye-openers, such as a Victorian self-testing machine with a religious text, designed to improve users' morals as well as their vision. Visitors can test their eyesight in a 1930s optician's chair with a built-in refraction unit, try on different frames, or explore foreign cities through an early View-Master. A drawer full of artificial, diseased, deformed and injured eyes, dating from 1880, is definitely not for the squeamish.

For a fee, you can also view the portraits of bespectacled sitters and optically-themed prints and satirical drawings in the meeting rooms on the first floor.



05.

18 Folgate Street, E1 6BX
Liverpool Street tube/rail

DENNIS SEVERS' HOUSE

Still life

One house stands out among the spruce Georgian terraces of Folgate Street. With its flaming lantern and cutout silhouettes framed by crimson shutters, number 18 seems strangely detached from the commercial throb of nearby Bishopsgate, where City traders scurry about their business. When Dennis Severs, a Canadian artist, bought this ten-room house in the late 1970s, Spitalfields was a slum. He filled his dilapidated home with chipped antiques and anonymous portraits picked up from flea markets, determined to recreate an authentic 18th-century household. Armed with a candle and bedpan, Severs slept in every room, soaking up the energy and imagining the lives of its previous inhabitants. Gradually, these imaginary companions took shape as the Jervis family, Huguenot silk-weavers whose make-believe lives became an elaborate 'still life drama' for visitors to explore.

Although Severs died in 1999, visitors can still immerse themselves in his decaying fantasy world. Each room is designed to evoke a moment in time as experienced by successive generations of the Jervises from 1724 to 1914. The experience is an assault on the senses where every object is apparently charged with hidden meaning – not just a visual overload, but also the smells of ginger biscuits and mulled wine, the sounds of horse hooves, church bells, and whispered snatches of conversation. The effect is deliberately theatrical as you follow a trail of clues that suggest the ghostly presence of the Jervis clan – a half-eaten boiled egg and soldiers, a black cat asleep on an unmade bed, and what appears to be a chamber pot full of pee.

There is social commentary, too. In the gloomy servants' quarters, soiled white undergarments are strung between cobwebs, a blackened pot of mouldy cabbage sits beside a filthy hearth, and gunshots sound a death knell. It all conjures up a deeply bleak existence.

Sadly, the compelling atmosphere is punctured by patronising notes telling patrons to shut up and use their imagination. For example: 'A visit requires the same style of concentration as does an Old Masters exhibition, and a most absurd but commonly made error is to assume that it might be either amusing or appropriate for children.'

A young man still lives in the attic. Well, someone has to feed the cat and canaries.

16.

1 Sky Garden Walk, EC3M 8AF
Monument or Bank tube

SKY GARDEN

Beauty on the beast

London's skyline has exploded upwards in the last ten years as property developers have sought to capitalise on the insatiable demand for housing. The City of London took the fight to Canary Wharf by building more 'signature' skyscrapers. There are always more to come – 2008 mayoral candidate Boris Johnson promised the electorate that he wouldn't allow the building of Dubai-on-Thames, but then, you know, he kind of did. In 2016 alone, there were over 430 new tall buildings planned for the capital. Some of these are welcome, but many of them simply dwarf the place.

Among the most notorious of the new showpiece builds is 20 Fenchurch Street, known as the Walkie-Talkie because of its shape. Completed in spring 2014, it promptly won the 2015 Carbuncle Cup for the worst new building in the UK. The concave glass wall at the front directs sunlight downwards, and in 2013 the construction company had to pay the owner of a car parked in the street below whose bodywork was melted by the building. The bulbous behemoth looms menacingly over Eastcheap, an ogre of a building that makes passers-by feel like ants.

However, the beast has a beautiful secret. The developers have constructed a huge light- and air-filled atrium at the top of the tower, with a balcony and a 360° view of London. Unlike the Shard, which sits directly across the river, entry is free, although the limited number of spaces means that online booking well in advance is essential. There are a couple of bars, a brasserie and a restaurant placed between two rising terraces of plants: they include figs and other flowers, shrubs and ferns that flourish all year round. The whole thing is wrapped in glass, with excellent unobstructed views (unlike the Shard). The effect is as if a minor greenhouse from Kew Gardens had been dropped on top of a skyscraper.

A CHURCH FULL OF SHOES

At the foot of 20 Fenchurch Street is St Margaret Pattens, a minor Wren church with an odd name (Pattens wasn't the saint's surname). These wooden-soled overshoes, later soled with iron rings, allowed the wealthy to walk the streets of London without muddying their shoes. The sound supposedly made the streets seem as if they were filled with horses. The church has long been associated with The Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers, and there is a display of pattens in the vestibule.

© Adobe Stock / Pawel Pajor

04.

Bonnington Square, SW8 1TE
Vauxhall tube

BONNINGTON SQUARE PLEASURE GARDEN

A secret urban jungle

A few minutes away from the concrete cityscape of Vauxhall, Bonnington Square consists of houses that have been taken over by vines, shrubs and flowers. Almost every building has some sort of wild or cultivated plant display to admire. In the corner of this wonderfully overgrown square is a tiny public park which has been designed to create a friendly jungle oasis in the middle of the city: this is Bonnington Square Pleasure Garden.

The pleasure garden is eccentric to say the least. To enter the park, you must first walk under a giant sculpture of a human hand – a sign of the garden's community spirit and a welcoming gesture for newcomers. Inside, the path weaves around the different sections of this small garden: the swing set, the secluded bench underneath drooping trees, the stone seats set in flowerbeds and the intriguing giant wheel (saved from an 1860s marble factory), all framed by native and tropical species.

In the 1980s Bonnington Square was scrap land still recovering from being bombed in the Second World War: the garden space was a derelict playground and the houses were mostly occupied by squatters. Eventually, however, the people living in the area managed to get together the resources to buy some of the houses from the council and they set up a co-operative organisation to create a sense of community spirit. Shops and cafes were supported communally and Bonnington was recognised as one of the UK's most successful experiments in 'social living'. The Bonnington Square inhabitants had the idea for a community garden in the mid 1990s. A builder had recently requested permission from the council to store equipment on the unused waste ground and the locals were quick to stake their claim to the space. The Bonnington Square Garden Association was formed and, after receiving funding, set about creating a pleasure garden for the locals. Now it is a vibrant space, expertly cultivated and still contributing to the friendly community atmosphere of Bonnington.

The name Bonnington Square Pleasure Garden is supposed to be a sly nod to what were the nearby Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, famed in the 18th century for leisure pursuits, entertainment and general debauchery.

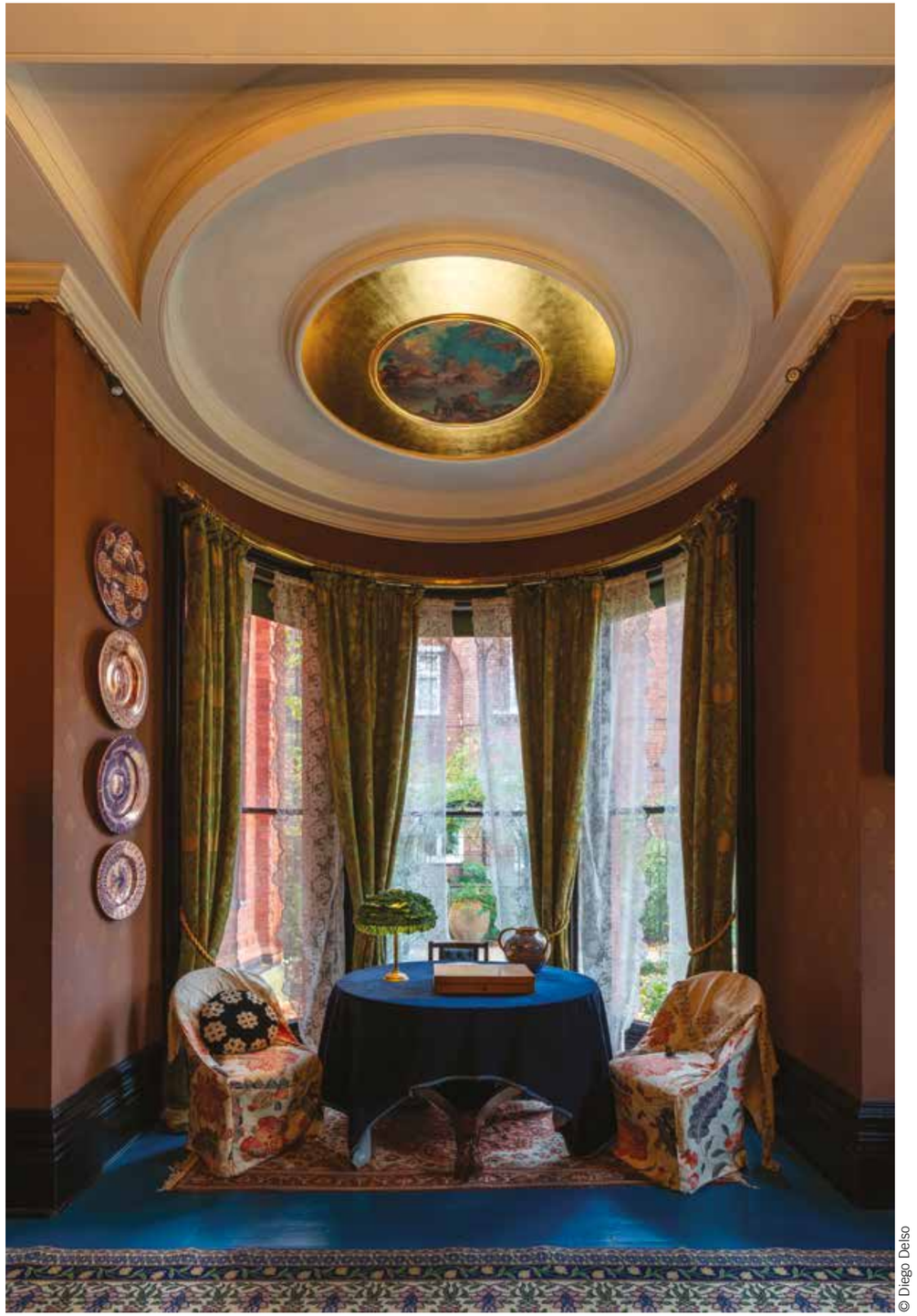
04.

12 Holland Park Road, W14 8LZ
High Street Kensington, Kensington Olympia or Holland Park tube

LEIGHTON HOUSE

Arabian maximalism

Many of the Victorian mansions around Holland Park were built by artists who gravitated to this urbane neighbourhood towards the end of the 19th century.
The 'Holland Park circle' included Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), President of the Royal Academy, whose red brick show home looks fairly unassuming from the outside, apart from its dome.
Inside, Leighton House is designed to make a very big impression. Mary H. Krout, an American who visited in 1899, remarked: '…it was like a bit of Aladdin's palace, which some obliging genius might have set down in London and have forgotten.'
The entrance hall is clad in dazzling peacock blue tiles, while a real stuffed peacock guards the wooden staircase.
To the left is the Arab Hall, a floor-to-ceiling vision of rare Islamic tiles, inlaid mosaics, and Arabic inscriptions, with a black marble fountain as its centrepiece.
The rest of the house is decked out in equally opulent style.
Flock wallpapers, oriental carpets, and ornate fireplaces create an orgy of patterns and textures, against which the pre-Raphaelite paintings by Leighton and his contemporaries look positively sedate.
By contrast, Leighton's bedroom is unexpectedly austere – perhaps he too needed a respite from so much oriental exotica.
Among Leighton's extensive art collection are works by Edward Burne-Jones, Albert Moore, and George Frederic Watts, who lived around the corner on Melbury Road. Leighton's own light-filled studio appears to be decorated with friezes filched from the Parthenon. This magnificent room was the setting for Leighton's annual music recitals; the tradition continues today with occasional chamber music and jazz concerts, with a smattering of socialites in attendance.



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10.

Trinity Buoy Wharf, 64 Orchard Place, E14 0JY
East India Dock DLR, then 10-min walk

LONGPLAYER

Music for a millennium

Housed in London's only lighthouse, Longplayer is probably the most protracted celebration of the third millennium. Launched on January 1, 2000, this musical installation features a composition for Tibetan singing bowls and gongs, digitally remixed so that the same sequence of sounds will not be repeated for 1000 years. On December 31, 2999, Longplayer will return to its starting point – and begin all over again. That is, as long as the technology that powers it survives or evolves, or some very dedicated musicians volunteer to perform the score in perpetuity.

Creator Jem Finer, a founding member of The Pogues, is exploring the possibility of building six two-armed turntables 6 to 12 feet in diameter, with automated mechanisms to raise and lower the arms. Even if Finer figures that out, he will have to build a device capable of cutting 12-foot records. A likelier solution is a dedicated global radio frequency, or a 'small computational device' along the lines of those used in deep space missions. The possibility of endless live performance is also being explored.

Listening to this mesmerising soundscape in a disused lighthouse, with views across the Thames to the docks and the Dome, is both captivating and slightly creepy. Built in 1864, Trinity Buoy lighthouse was used to develop lighting for Trinity House, an association founded in 1514 to safeguard shipping and seafarers. Its headquarters are still located in the city (trinityhouse.co.uk).

CONTAINER CITY

Trinity Buoy Wharf was named for the wooden buoys made and stored here in the early 19th century. Urban Space Management, using the huge metal shipping conatiners that helped kill off London's docklands, built the first prototype Container Cities here in 2000 and 2002. They consist of stacked, recycled containers, whose brightly coloured, corrugated walls and porthole windows conceal low-cost studios and homes for a community of artists and designers. Most of them open their studios for Open House weekend. A few more containers have been sound-proofed and can be hired as music studios.

12.

The Crossness Engines Trust, Thames Water S.T.W., Belvedere Road, SE2 9AQ
Abbey Wood rail. On Steaming days, a minibus usually operates from Abbey Wood to the Crossness site every 30 mins. Otherwise it's a brisk 30-minute walk from the station through an industrial wasteland

CROSSNESS PUMPING STATION

Healer of the Great Stink

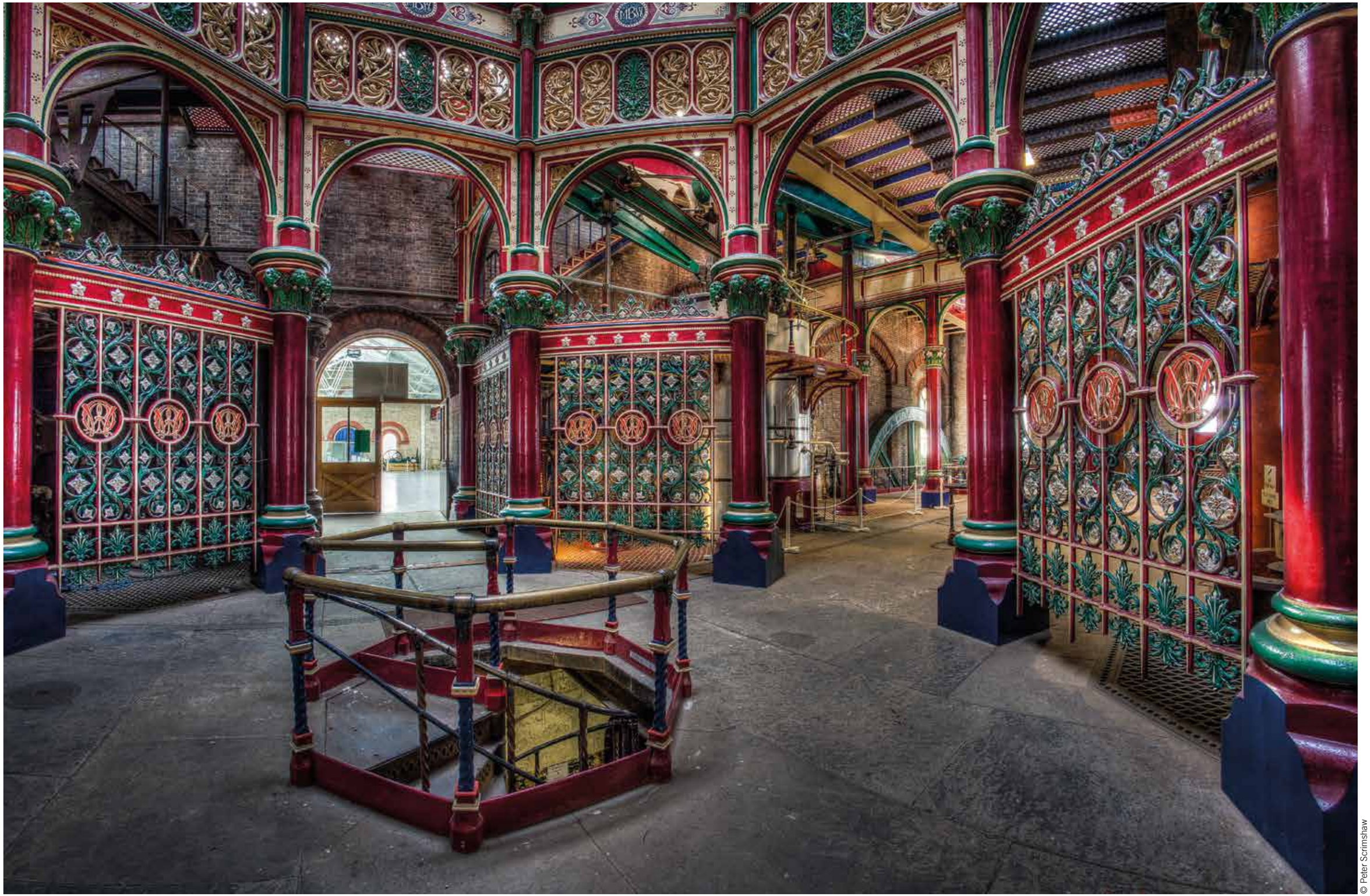
There aren't many opportunities to make a trip to a sewage farm, but Crossness Pumping Station – opened in 1856 by Edward, Prince of Wales – offers the chance. The obsolete Pumping Station is located in the middle of the Crossness Sewage Treatment Works, which is still very much operational: if you miss the shuttle service from the station, simply follow your nose.

The Pumping Station was part of legendary engineer Joseph Bazalgette's innovative sewage system for London. By the mid-19th century, London's exploding population meant the Thames had effectively become an open sewer. The contaminated water caused cholera outbreaks that killed over 30,000 Londoners. Plans to address this were finally put into action following the 'Great Stink' of 1858, when an unusually warm summer and clogged-up River Thames made the House of Commons unusable. Bazalgette built 1,100 miles of brick-lined, underground sewers that diverted untreated sewage downstream.

Crossness was the business end of the southern half of the system (a similar station at Beckton performs the same function for North London). Sewage arrived at the site and was pumped up into a 17-foot-deep reservoir, which could hold 27 million gallons of waste. The reservoir gates were opened twice a day, and the contents were swept out to sea on the Thames' ebb tide. Eventually, only liquid waste was disposed of in this way; the prosaically named 'sludge boats' dumped solid, untreated waste beyond the mouth of the river until 1998.

Crossness Pumping Station is an incredible place. The Beam Engine House, home to four steam-driven pumping engines, contains some of the most spectacular ornamental ironwork in the capital. At the heart of the building is the Octagon, an exuberant framework for the engines made of brightly coloured iron columns and screens. This is characteristic of the Victorians' love of Gothic adornment in the unlikeliest places.

The building was abandoned in the 1950s after it became obsolete. Ongoing restoration work, largely by unpaid volunteers, began in 1987. The scale of the engineering is unnerving: the four engines (each weirdly named after a member of the royal family) are the largest rotative beam engines in the world. They have 52-ton flywheels and 47-ton beams, and were capable of pumping around 20 milk lorries of sewage a minute into the reservoir. Only one – the 'Prince Consort' – is currently restored, but the Crossness Engines Trust is now focused on bringing 'Victoria' back to her former glory.



07.

Holy Trinity Church, Beechwood Road, Dalston E8 3WD
(entrance on Cumberland Close)
Dalston Junction Overground

CLOWNS' GALLERY AND MUSEUM

Fool's paradise

The Holy Trinity has been London's Clowns' Church since 1959. The only clue to this curious association is a stained-glass window in the main hall, depicting scenes from the life of Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837), the godfather of all jesters. In a tiny room at the rear of the church (accessed via Cumberland Close) is one of London's smallest museums: the Clowns' Gallery. Over a tinkling soundtrack of fairground tunes, a clown/curator entertains visitors to the monthly open day with uproarious anecdotes. Among the clown stamps, cartoons and tributes are a few religious references to 'The Holy Fools': a tapestry proclaiming 'Here we are fools for Christ' and The Clown's Prayer (a slightly cloying ode to laughter). The real highlight is the collection of clown portraits painted on over 200 porcelain eggs. A tradition that originated in the late 1940s, these eggs are faithful representations of the trademark make-up worn by each clown – a suitably humorous way of patenting their personal face-paint. In addition to paint, the artist uses samples of each clown's costume and wig to produce an 'eggs-act' miniature portrait.

Traditionally held at Holy Trinity, but recently relocated to All Saints Church on nearby Livermere Road, the annual clown service takes place on the first Sunday in February. Among the local congregation in their Sunday best, a 'pratfall' of clowns in full 'motley and slap' cause havoc in the pews – blowing bubbles, honking horns, wearing stilts, and singing along to 'Send in the Clowns'. One popular hymn at the Holy Trinity goes like this: 'When we are tempted in our pride to dizzy heights of sin, beneath our feet, oh Lord, provide a ripe banana skin...' Get there early – the clown service is always packed.

JOSEPH GRIMALDI, THE GODFATHER OF CLOWNING

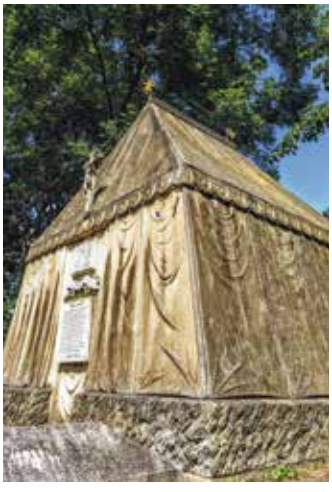
Joseph Grimaldi, who made his debut at Sadler's Wells aged three, pioneered many modern clowning techniques, from visual pranks to the dreaded audience participation. A blue plaque marks Grimaldi's former home at 56 Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell. His grave is largely overlooked in the grubby little Joseph Grimaldi Park on the corner of Pentonville Road and Rodney Street, Islington. With a happy and sad mask dangling from the iron railings, it's a rather forlorn tribute to the fools' hero, but every June a lively festival is held here in Grimaldi's honour.

LONDON

THE SECRET ATLAS

We have prowled the city streets, seeking out the hidden, eccentric, and overlooked. Far from the crowds and the usual clichés, London still reserves any number of hidden treasures for those who know how to wander off the beaten track.

Pray at the Hyde Park dog cemetery, attend a clown service in a church, visit a real Freemason's temple, discover the rock from which Arthur is said to have extracted Excalibur, stand in awe of a pharaoh's sacred penis, play on the city's last grass petanque pitch, admire a rare cucumber straightener, a stuffed mermaid or Britain's smallest cathedral...



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