

Open House London



Archifacts sheet

Fitzrovia Chapel

Open House London is providing the first opportunity for the public to view the beautifully restored Grade II* Listed Fitzrovia Chapel

Overview

The Fitzrovia Chapel is located within the Fitzroy Place development on the site of the former Middlesex Hospital. The chapel has been preserved and extensively restored within a large mixed use development in London's Fitzrovia.

The Fitzrovia Chapel Foundation

A charitable organisation, The Fitzrovia Chapel Foundation, has been created to ensure a strong future for the chapel. The trust has a duty of care to conserve its fabric and contents as well as a responsibility for the day to day operations of the building. The foundation has been established for the benefit of the community.

The charity's objectives include providing access to the public for quiet contemplation as well as using the chapel for lectures, exhibitions, performances and life celebrations, such as weddings, memorials and baby-naming ceremonies. Seating 50 people comfortably, the chapel will also be used for chamber performances of music, song and speech. The Fitzrovia Chapel will be a secular chapel, welcoming humanists and people of faith alike.

The chapel was preserved as part of a development agreement for the wider project, and has been the subject of a £2m restoration by Fitzroy Place's developers Exemplar and Aviva. The developers have also provided £300,000 to support the Fitzrovia Chapel Foundation's activities.

Architectural History

The Chapel itself was designed in 1891 by celebrated architect John Loughborough Pearson and was completed in 1929 by his son Frank. Awarded the RIBA gold medal in 1880, J L Pearson, one of the greatest of Victorian architects, worked on some of Britain's finest buildings, including Truro Cathedral, Bristol Cathedral and Westminster Hall.

He also designed St Augustine's Church in Kilburn and added the eastern and western porches to St Margaret's Church within the grounds of Westminster Abbey, where he was buried after his death in 1897.

The chapel was designed as a memorial to Major Ross, MP, former Chairman of the Board of Governors of The Middlesex Hospital, and was built in red brick, the marble and mosaic decorations being added later. Lord Webb Johnson and Sir John Bland Sutton, two great surgeons from The Middlesex Hospital, were generous benefactors towards the decoration.

The chapel has a simple rectangular nave with a small ante-chapel at the west end, but among its most striking features is the restored mosaic ceiling in the chancel, which was first completed between 1897 and 1901.

FL Pearson, inspired by the Italian style favoured by his father and his own close study of medieval Italian architecture, designed the chancel ceiling mosaic. The decoration to the chapel overall was carried out by Italian craftsmen using imported materials.

The ante-chapel is also lined with memorial tablets of white marble with incised inscriptions, which have been restored and retained. These provide an invaluable record of the chapel's past.

In 1929 the open timber roof in the nave was replaced with vaulting and a mosaic to match the mosaic in the chancel, with this ceiling finally completed in 1939.

A plaque marking The Middlesex Hospital's role in the history of the site has also been added to the chapel. In addition, the developers have chosen to leave 'The Middlesex Hospital' signage on Fitzroy Place's Nassau Street frontage as a reminder of the site's past.

Architectural Facts

- **Seventeen different marbles** were used, including rare green Irish bog marble (fronting the Organ Gallery).
- **The mosaics** are Italian work, inspired by St Mark's, Venice.
- **The Aumbry** in the South-East wall was given in memory of Prince Francis of Teck, Queen Mary's brother.
- **The Font** is carved from a solid block of green marble with the symbols of the four Evangelists at each corner and inscribed with the Greek palindrome 'NIPSONANOMEMAMEMONANOPSIN', which means 'wash away my sin and not only my face'. It is copied from the font in the Church of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (now a mosque).
- **The lectern and piscina** are both carved in alabaster.
- **The Baptistery** is a memorial to Sir John Bland Sutton.
- **The windows** in the Baptistery depict four soldier saints: Joan of Arc, George, Alban and Martin; they form a memorial to the dead of the First World War.
- **The window** opposite the Baptistery is a memorial to Lord Webb Johnson, and was dedicated by the Bishop of London in 1964.
- **The three windows** behind the altar show the Glorified Lord adored by sick people and angels, bearing the words in Latin 'Holy Holy Holy, Lord God of Hosts; Heaven and Earth are full of Thy Glory'.
- **Other windows** commemorate those who died in the Second World War.

The Restoration

The refurbishment of the chapel was carried out by conservation architects Caroe & Partners, and includes notable improvements to the external brickwork and restoration of the mosaic ceiling and interior.

The principal problem faced by the restoration team was rain water risk. The roof was old and water had penetrated to the interior of the building, damaging and detaching many of the mosaics and marble panels. Once the roof had been replaced, the interior was restored, including the re-attachment and in some cases replacement of the marble panels. In some places 70 per cent of the gold leaf on the ceiling had been lost, and most tiles required re-gilding. The stained glass windows were renovated off-site and re-installed.

A low impact lighting system was introduced, as well as a new heating system in the space of the existing trench heaters around the perimeter of the interior.

The original 2 manual, 13 stop organ was made by the London firm of Lewis & Co in 1870, and was extensively rebuilt by Norman and Beard of Norwich in 1910. It was subsequently removed from the building. The Fitzrovia Chapel Foundation trustees intend to raise funds for its replacement.

Contact Details

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