

Handel House Museum: Fascinating Insight Into Composer's Life

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Everyone has heard of famous museums like the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. But London has many fascinating small, specialist museums which provide a penetrating flash of insight into their selected topic.



English Heritage plaque

The Handel House Museum in shops in Oxford Street. It is an Brook Street provides an interesting building with a modern interesting diversion from the reception area and shop. The rest

of the premises have been restored to the time of Handel.

Climbing the stairs to the first floor, where visitors are greeted with a video on the composer's life, is like stepping into the world of 18th century London.

Handel moved into 25 Brook Street in the summer of 1723. As far as is known, this is the first London house he occupied in his own right. His career seemed

secure and at the age of thirty-eight, perhaps he felt it was time to have his own space. He lived at the Brook Street house for 36 years and, in 1759, died there.

Handel was the first occupant of the house, part of a four-building development by speculative builder George Barnes. Brook Street was planned and built between 1717 and 1726 to connect Hanover Square and Grosvenor Square and was in a good upper-middle class area. Although away



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from the artistic centres of Soho and Covent Garden, it was within easy walking distance of St James's Palace, where Handel conducted his official duties, and the King's Theatre, Haymarket, the focus of his Italian opera career at the time.

The plan of the house was usual for a modest London townhouse of the period. There was a basement containing the kitchens; from ground to second floor, a front and back room with a small

closet block at the rear; and the garrets at the top. The passage from the front door led to the dogleg staircase at the back. Aside from living, sleeping, entertaining, composing and rehearsing, Handel also conducted some business from his house. In the late 1730s, it is known that subscribers could collect scores from «the Author, in his House in Brook-Street, Hanover Square.» On Handel's death, the tenancy passed to his servant John Du

Burk, who also purchased the remaining chattels for £48. Around 1790, the closets at the rear were replaced by a bow window block and in the 1830s the garrets were raised to the height of a full storey. In 1905, art dealer CJ Charles turned the house into a shop, removing the first two storeys of the original façade and internal partition walls. Since 1971, the freehold has been owned by the Co-operative Insurance Society and in 2000 the upper storeys were leased to the Handel House

Trust. On 8 November 2001, Handel's spirit was brought back to 25 Brook Street when the Handel House Museum opened to the public.

In 1998, the Handel House Collections Trust acquired the Byrne Collection, a major Handel collection which consists of several hundred objects including a letter from Handel to Charles Jennens regarding *Belshazzar* and *Messiah*, an autograph leaf from *Esther*, Mozart's arrangement of a Handel fugue, John Mainwaring's

Handel





Memoirs of the life of the late George Frederic Handel (1760) annotated by Jennens, early editions of operas and oratorios, and prints, portraits and sculpture. 1996 and 1998 respectively, the Collections Trust also acquired two important oil paintings: a portrait of one of Handel's opera sopranos Faustina Bordoni (1700-81) by Bartolomeo Nazari (1699-1758) and a portrait of Jennens by Thomas Hudson (170179-). A selection of prints and paintings

from the collection is displayed in 25 Brook Street alongside loans from major national collections including a magnificent portrait of Handel after Thomas Hudson. By the time he died, Handel owned over eighty paintings suggesting that, in his time too, the principal rooms of the house would have been covered with fine art. A selection of manuscripts and printed scores from the collection is displayed in the adjoining 23 Brook Street.