

## THE ALBERT MEMORIAL

When the idea for a memorial in Kensington was first put forward in 1851, to commemorate Prince Albert and the achievements of the Great Exhibition, Prince Albert had been firmly against a figure of himself for the original memorial, saying: "I can say, with perfect absence of humbug, that I would rather not be made the prominent feature of such a monument."

On Albert's sudden death from typhoid in 1861, his refusal to be the subject of such a memorial was totally ignored – and today we can still see the sculpture of Albert, ten tons of gilded bronze, on what must be one of the glitziest monuments in the United Kingdom. It was finally completed in 1876 with the figure of Albert holding the catalogue of the Great Exhibition. The overall architect was George Gilbert Scott. An eminent sculptor of the time, Baron Carlo Marochetti, was commissioned to sculpt the figure of Albert. The Queen was to pay for the statue herself but as there seemed to be a delay, she sent round a lady-in-waiting to see how things were getting on. Knowing that the Queen was chasing the work Marochetti got his assistant to make a great deal of noise behind a screen as if the work were being carried out but told the lady-in-waiting that at this stage the statue would be nude and the clothing put on later. Not wishing to see anything that might be embarrassing, she decided to take Marochetti's word on the progress that was being made. When at last it appeared, the seated figure was considered ungainly, clumsy and quite unacceptable. Nobody quite knew what to do about this when Marochetti died in Paris, due, it was said, to too much 'high living'. A new commission was then given to John Henry Foley to start the work afresh.



The memorial is a showcase of Victorian building skills and craftsmanship. It has on it some of the most beautiful and technically innovative sculpture of the time, representing the four corners of the world, the industrial arts, the sciences, the virtues, as well as angels in exultation and in mourning. There is a frieze of 169 three-quarter life-size people - and two dogs - around the base of the monument which represent great creative geniuses throughout the ages: painters, architects, composers, poets and sculptors. There is only one woman among them, Queen Nitocris of Egypt, who was believed to have commissioned the third pyramid at Giza. The undercroft is regarded as a landmark in mid-Victorian building history and its true complexity was only discovered during restoration work. It takes the form of a pyramid of 868 brick arches and a brick pier supporting the central figure and plinth and it is built on top of a 17' thick concrete raft since the geology of this area is gravel, sand and water. By the time the memorial was finished, styles had moved on; some people found it absurd and it was compared by some to "a pastry-cook's pagoda".

In the 1980s there were plans to dismantle the whole memorial. It had become neglected and shabby and after damage sustained in World War II, the cross and orb at the very top had been repositioned the wrong way round. A £11.4 million restoration was finally started in 1994 and completed in 1998.

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## NEW LIGHTING FOR TRAFALGAR SQUARE FOUNTAINS

One of London's best known landmarks is Trafalgar Square. It was originally laid out in the 1830s and has recently been undergoing a major refurbishment programme. Firstly, back in 2003, the north side of the Square was pedestrianised. A central staircase was built, creating a large terrace envisaged in the original early 19th century plan. This was followed by the restoration of Nelson's column in 2006. Now the fountains have been given a new, innovative 'green' energy lighting system, replacing the previous lighting, which was beyond repair. It will cut the carbon footprint of the fountain lighting by an estimated 90 per cent saving 16,400 kg of carbon every year, as well as saving thousands of pounds on energy bills. Work began in March this year to renovate the metalwork, as well as cleaning,



pointing and repairing stonework. In addition, work on the three pumps, which power the fountains with continuously recirculated water, means the fountains will cascade higher than has been seen for around thirty years.

The outer basin walls of the fountains are the originals, erected in 1845. The fountain pools hold approximately 50,000 gallons of water, which is recycled throughout the day. The outer basin walls are granite and the basins are Portland stone on a granite base. The groups of statues are bronze. The floor of the outer fountain basin is covered with blue glazed tiles. Lutyens' remodelling of Trafalgar Square began in 1937, but was abandoned in November 1939. Work recommenced in June 1947 and the sculptures were installed in 1948, having been stored during World War II. The fountains were formally unveiled on 21 October 1948 by HRH the Duke of Gloucester, with a dedication service conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

