

## **Fyvie Hall, 309 Regent Street**

In 1910 the majority of 309 Regent Street was demolished and re-built, leaving only the cinema, gymnasium and swimming pool in place. The building works were estimated to cost £90,000 - London County Council gave a grant of £20,000, a loan of another £20,000 was obtained from the City Parochial Foundation under the Charity Commission, and the Polytechnic attempted to raise the remaining sum through private donations. This was given a considerable boost when, in November 1910, Lord Leith of Fyvie promised £30,000. His donation was “by way of constituting the scheme a memorial to the late King Edward VII”, who had been patron of the Polytechnic. A plaque dedicated to the late King was placed in the foyer in Regent Street, and the ornate Fyvie Hall was named in Lord Leith of Fyvie’s honour.

Alexander John Forbes-Leith (1847-1925) was a Scottish Royal Navy officer. In 1871 he married Marie Louise January, left the Navy and moved to the USA. Forbes-Leith eventually became president of the Joliet Iron and Steel Company, and later director of United States Steel Corporation. With the money that he made in steel, in 1889 he bought Fyvie Castle in Aberdeen, and in 1905 was raised to the peerage as Baron Leith of Fyvie. He died without heir and today Fyvie Castle is managed by the National Trust for Scotland.

The Fyvie Hall is an ornate oak-panelled room with stained glass windows. At the time of opening in 1912 it was considered to seat 300, although its maximum capacity today is 150. The room was used by many of the Poly’s club and societies, including the Polytechnic Parliament and the various Masonic Lodges. Hidden within the Hall is a secret panel which can be opened to reveal an autochrome of the Duke of Connaught, then Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England. Autochromes were an early type of colour photography, and this example was created by the Polytechnic School of Photography.

In November 1923, paintings were added to the Fyvie Hall representing ‘The Arts of Old London’. The *Polytechnic Magazine* comments  
“it seemed appropriate that in the Polytechnic of the Present the technical industries of the past should be remembered. We could hope no more than fittingly to decorate the Hall and possibly to stimulate interest in our predecessors thus commemorated.”

The panels were painted by Delmar Harmood Banner (1896-1983), a student at the Polytechnic School of Art, who later became well-known for his landscape paintings of the Lake District. They are oil paintings on canvas.

The panels are designed to form a coherent, chronological sequence representing the arts and industries which were most important in London at a given time. The sequence begins over the podium.

**Panels 1 and 2**

Art/Industry represented: Architecture

Subject: the Building of Westminster Abbey, and Sculpture in Westminster Abbey, 1245

The first panel depicts Henry II with Henry of Westminster (Architect and first Master of the Works), watching the builders in the early morning of a summer's day in 1245, when the foundations were being laid. The second panel shows the Master-Sculptor, John of St. Albans and the Prior of the Abbey, standing on either side of the sculptured angel swinging a censer, which may still be seen in a spandrel of the triforium arcade in the South Transept, nearly a hundred feet above the ground.

**Panel 3**

Art/Industry represented: Painting

Subject: The Painting of the Painted Chamber in Westminster Palace by Thomas of Westminster, c. 1300

The panel shows Edward I and Queen Eleanor visiting the painters - Thomas of Westminster (the son of Walter of Durham) and his assistants in the Chamber- and illustrates a time when work was done no longer chiefly for the Church, but for the State.

**Panel 4**

Art/Industry represented: Printing

Subject: The Printing of the Bishop's Bible, 1540

The panel shows Archbishop Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell looking at the proof-sheets of Cranmer's Bible; on the bench behind them sits Holbein, who designed the title-page.

**Panel 5**

Art/Industry represented: Goldsmithery

Subject: The Goldsmiths' presentation, c.1560

The painting represents a gift of goldware to Queen Elizabeth while on procession down Cheapside: two boys are seen carrying the model of the "Golden Hind".

**Panel 6**

Art/Industry represented: Tapestry Weaving

Subject: The Tapestry Weavers at Mortlake, c. 1630

From the 1600s onwards, the numbers of crafts developed and increased in answer to the patronage of the great families who were more and more dominating society. The chief arts were connected with domestic luxury; and then more and more with domestic use rather than luxury. The Tapestry-Weavers were chosen to commemorate this period, and the famous works at Mortlake, for which even Rubens designed, are represented.

**Panel 7**

Art/Industry represented: Pottery

Subject: Dwight of Fulham, c.1690

The seventh panel is devoted to the Potters, of whom increasing numbers developed distinctive schools of craftsmanship in the 17th and 18th centuries. There were men like Dwight of Fulham, and firms like Doultons at Lambeth

**Panel 8**

Art/Industry represented: Pottery

Subject: The Ship-Builders, c.1700

With the beginning of the age of Commerce and Empire, London's industries become part of a much wider network. The Shipyards at Deptford were chosen as Tsar Peter the Great visited them, incognito, in 1698 to learn shipbuilding techniques.

In 1934, a Compton organ was installed in the Fyvie Hall, presented by Lord Blanesborough, a governor of the Polytechnic. At its official opening on 19 October 1934, the organ was played by Mr. J.I. Taylor, director of the John Compton Organ Co. Ltd and organist in the BBC Empire Programmes. At the recital he gave a talk about the difficulty of building the organ.

“..in order to comply with the requirements that the pipes etc should be hidden behind the oak panelling of the hall, that the oak panelling hiding the organ pipes should not extend more than 2 ft. 3 ins beyond the line of the rest of the panelling, and that it should come within the two pillars at the east-end of the hall.”

The organ unfortunately fell into a state of dis-repair and is not currently in use.