

A trip to Two Temple Place, the British Optical Association & Benjamin Franklin House

Two Temple Place can be found on the Embankment. Cross the road from Temple tube or up the road from Blackfriars.

The exhibition that we went to view runs until 19 April 2020 (closed on Tuesdays) and is well worth a visit. Admission is Free, although a donation is welcomed!

The theme is 'Unbound-Visionary Women Collecting Textiles'. A wide variety of displays are well captioned and although the subject held no particular appeal to me prior to arrival, I found it fascinating.

The displays include traditional Balkan costumes right through to contemporary artworks, providing an insight into the history of textiles. This history is played out through the work of seven pioneering women, who together revealed the artistic, social and cultural importance.

The theme explores these seven women, who in their differing ways collected and created their own distinctive themes. For those *really* into textile history there are further events on-site-walks, talks, crafting workshops, music evenings *et al.* There is a children's programme.

Hopping on the tube for one stop, we arrived at Embankment. Time allowed a hour-long visit to the British Optical Association Museum in Craven Street, where we had a 30 minute guided tour, charting its history from 1895-1980 when it amalgamated with its rival bodies. Our knowledgeable guide pointed out that the spectacles worn in Wolf Hall should not have had sides, glasses merely balanced on the nose in Tudor times! This area of London was, at one time, the Harley Street of Opticians and Optical equipment.

Our journey to Benjamin Franklin House took 20 seconds, almost next door! We know Benjamin Franklin as a Founding Father, but he spent many years lodging at 36 Craven Street, which is commemorated with an LCC plaque. Advance booking is advised and the only way to see the house is via a guided tour given by a talented actress in period costume. We went on the Historical Experience but separately on Mondays there are Architectural tours of this Grade 1 listed building. There is a modest charge with concessions.

The 18th-century spaces within the house serve as a stage for a drama, featuring live interpretation and sound and lighting effects and visual effects to tell the story of this house, largely unaltered but the Victorians had added small balconies. info@benjaminfranklinhouse.org will fill in the gaps.

We then popped across the road to Coutts Bank where the staff touched their forelocks to the Chairman-a valued customer- as we viewed the International Women's Day displays showing how many ladies have risen to seniority in the bank and its now parent RBS. The era of the clerks in morning suits has ended....!

To conclude our day out, Howard likes a piece of cake with his afternoon tea, so where better to go than the extensive crypt of St Martin in the Fields with its quiet ambience and refreshments and thence home.

Rex Bourne