



Architectural Drawing by Nic Pople

# Architecture

35 Park Road London NW1 6XT



## Rudolf Steiner House

### Rudolf Steiner

Rudolf Steiner House, located at 35 Park Road, London was built as the home of the Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain. Steiner himself is probably best known for the Steiner Waldorf schools. He was an Austrian philosopher and spiritual teacher whose work spans a vast number of fields from science, the arts, agriculture and medicine.

His philosophy is known as anthroposophy – i.e. the science of humanity. In addition to the Steiner schools, his legacy includes Weleda medical products, biodynamic farming and gardening (organic with a spiritual dimension), the Camphill Communities for people with 'special needs', and anthroposophical medicine and therapies. His dates are 1861 – 1925.



### The House Itself

The House is correctly classified as the only example of Expressionist architecture in London. The 'isms' in art came and went, – however, one can claim that the principles and values embodied in this unique building are anything but ephemeral. These were originally demonstrated by Steiner in the extraordinary building, called the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. If one just googles 'Goetheanum', one can see from the pictures what a unique and impressive building this is. Building on a hilltop in Switzerland, Steiner could be as radical as he felt he needed to be. Sir Montague Wheeler, the architect of Steiner House in London, had the task of following Steiner's indications on architecture as far as possible, whilst producing a building which would enhance a London street – whilst 'fitting in' with its surroundings.



Compromises naturally needed to be made. Steiner said, for example, that rectangles and squares should be avoided as there are no rectangles and squares in the human body. There are, of necessity, rectangular and square windows in the House. It is this element of compromise which makes the House unique, with the ideals of an architecture appropriate to the needs of human beings, stimulating creative endeavour, alongside the constraints imposed by the environment of the metropolis.

### Architecture inspired by Rudolf Steiner

Steiner architecture has certain features:

- a) The idea of metamorphosis, in which one shape leads on to another, which seems to grow organically from the first, giving a quality of liveliness as with the idea of the metamorphosis of a plant with its root leading on to the stem and calyx, culminating in the flower.



- b) Symmetry within asymmetry – forms which do not repeat one another but work together in harmony with each other.
- c) The use of natural forms – an architecture in tune with nature.
- d) The play of the light is of primary importance. The paintwork features a specialised process called 'lazure work'. This technique uses water based plant colour pigment and does not suck in the light as with a matt paint, or have the light bouncing off it, as with a gloss finish. The light moves freely, like the natural light outside. There are many windows and the building has a light and airy feel.
- e) Whilst pointing out the uniqueness of Steiner architecture, one has to admit that it was naturally influenced by the zeitgeist of the time – the Art Deco and Art Nouveau movements have been referred to by visitors and the works of Antonio Gaudi (1853–1926) are often mentioned. Steiner was clairvoyant, with unique inspirations, and whilst influenced by the avant-garde architects of the Expressionist era, was also profoundly informed by the ideas of J.W. Goethe and the conviction that the human spirit needed an environment in which it could move freely.

There are many other examples of Steiner architecture worldwide. Pieter van der Ree's book, 'Living Architecture' is a beautifully illustrated treasure house featuring buildings in Europe, North America, Asia, Australia and Africa.



## The Building of the House

Rudolf Steiner House was built in stages between 1926 and 1937. It incorporates Steiner's theories on architecture, however work was only started on the House a year after Steiner's death. The architect, Sir Montague Wheeler, as well as being a distinguished architect, and a partner in the established practice of the sought after firm of Hoare and Wheeler, was an active member of the Anthroposophical Society and chairman of its British branch from 1935-7.



The theatre and the first floor were the first parts to be constructed. Steiner was the author of four plays, referred to as Mystery Dramas, and the bringer of the new art of eurythmy, a form of dance movement. The theatre was completed and opened in 1926. (The name of the theatre was changed in 2022, from Rudolf Steiner House Theatre to the Marylebone Theatre).

After the Theatre and first floor, the second and third floors were added, followed by a sideways extension, including the bookshop, library and eurythmy room. It was completed in 1937; the need to fund such a large structure was a reason for the length of time needed to complete.

## Features Of the Building

### The Facade

The facade has elements of the expressionist style, particularly in the form of some of the windows, and especially in the rounded archways and ground floor windows. Of particular interest is the circular stained glass window (best seen from inside the building). The idea of a balance through asymmetry is clearly present – the front is not symmetrical in terms of repetition of forms, but has a harmonised, formal structure.



### The Entrance and Foyer

The original terrazzo floor leading to the theatre was uncovered and restored in the renovations of 2007/8. The metamorphic design gently moves one forward to enter into the theatre. The foyer is used for theatre illustrations and artworks.



### The Theatre

The theatre has been twice refurbished, in 2008 and more substantially in 2020, after which it was relaunched as a public theatre and renamed the Marylebone Theatre; previously it was known as Steiner Hall or Steiner Theatre. It has a raked stage, surprising deep in relation to the auditorium. This is because it was originally intended for eurythmy performances (an art of movement conceived by Steiner), and Steiner's Mystery Dramas, which needed such depth.



### The Staircase

The staircase is the most spectacular feature of the House. When visitors stand on the first floor landing, just outside the library on Open House day, inevitably the mobile phones and cameras get to work. The sun comes through the large window and the light plays around the azure work and to look up and down the extremely impressive spiralling form of the staircase really is a joy.



### The Library, Bookshop and Café

The Library and bookshop both feature a wide range of books by Steiner and anthroposophical authors.

The café was added in the 2008 refurbishment, winning a design award and featuring a column with the seven different planetary woods (ash – Sun, oak – Mars, sycamore/ maple – Jupiter, hornbeam – Saturn, cherry – Moon, elm – Mercury and birch – Venus).



### Other Rooms

Other rooms feature aspects of the style. The exception is the eurythmy room, added later. It was to have been clad in cedar wood, however the panelling is modern.

### Refurbishments

Architects of the recent refurbishments in 2008 and 2020 were Nic Pople and Helen Springthorpe with the structural engineer David Tasker (Giffords Ltd.). The construction works were undertaken by ITC Concepts Ltd.



### Visiting

Rudolf Steiner House is a welcoming environment, with anthroposophical activities, theatre, café, library (available to all) and bookshop.

For details of opening times, current activities etc. please see the website:  
[www.rsh.anth.org.uk](http://www.rsh.anth.org.uk)