

The Egyptian House in Penzance

John Davenport

The Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly in London was probably the best-known example in England of a building in the pseudo ancient Egyptian style. Another was built around 1830 in Penzance in Cornwall. It was a mixture of styles, but the Egyptian influence was clear.

The Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly from *Survey of London*, Vol. XXX, general editor FHW Sheppard, published by The Athlone Press, London, 1960.



The "Egyptian House" in Penzance. Photographs by John Davenport, June 2009

A somewhat colourful description of the building was given by Keith Miller:

Not a great deal has been written about the so-called "Egyptian House" in Chapel Street, Penzance. A local man commissioned it in about 1830; the architect was one John Foulton, or Foulston, of Plymouth. It imitated one of the most celebrated Egyptian buildings of the time, Robinson's Egyptian Hall, in London's Piccadilly.

Like its prototype, it was used to house a museum of natural curiosities. Apart from its extraordinary facade, the inside was that of a fairly normal Regency town-house, except that the ground floor was divided in two by a deep central doorway and vestibule.

The building is about as far from the crisp lightness of most Regency architecture as you could possibly imagine. It makes even Brighton Pavilion look delicate. Nor would it cut the mustard as an exercise in archaeology - a passing mummy would take one look at it and wrap his bandages speedily back up. "Correct" Egyptian details - the trapezoid "pylon" shape, which must puzzle patrons quitting the boozier across the street, the cavetto mouldings, the lotus columns and the Amon sundisks here and there - go head to head with a heraldic crest over the main entrance, an eagle rampant on top of that, glazing bars from a Carpenters' Gothick pattern-book and two herms straight out of the Flemish Renaissance. The whole thing is slathered in painted stucco, and has the look of an enormous cake.

[Extract from Keith Miller, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/3309117/Making-the-grade-The-Egyptian-House-enzance.html>]

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