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# ARCHITECTURE

## Reminders of mortality

BRITAIN'S MAUSOLEA HAVE LONG BEEN NEGLECTED, BUT TWO CAMPAIGNS ARE UNDERWAY TO SAVE IMPORTANT MONUMENTS.

1 The Hope family mausoleum in Dorking, built by Thomas Hope in 1817. This 1919 photograph shows the building before it was concealed. Photo: Mole Valley District Council

2 The Hope mausoleum as it is today, partly submerged by earth and rubble. Photo: the author

Visiting Yorkshire's Castle Howard, Horace Walpole wrote of its forbidding circular Doric temple – designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor as the last resting place of the Howard family – that it was ‘a mausoleum that would tempt one to be buried alive’. By today's standards this is an unusual reaction by an Englishman to the architecture of death. Though our cathedrals were once filled with funerary monuments and tombs, we now seem uncomfortable with tangible reminders of mortality. Modern crematoria are sterile, depressing places, while cemeteries and graveyards are neglected and vandalised and expensive monuments to the dead left to disintegrate.

Perhaps it would be good if there were more institutions like Sir John Soane's Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, where that odd combination of a public building and a mausoleum containing the institution's founders now seems to attract little comment. Soane, of course, was perhaps unhealthily obsessed with the architecture of death, but there have been many other architects who have been very happy to design mausolea. The rugged circular tomb of the philosopher David Hume, designed by his friend Robert Adam, which stands in the Old Calton Burial Ground in Edinburgh – the city he helped become known as the ‘modern Athens’ – comes to mind. And then there is the hugely expensive mausoleum designed by David Hamilton – the most conspicuous monument in the forlorn Lanarkshire town of Hamilton now that the grand palace of the eponymous dukes has disappeared.

Other grand family tombs were sited in remote



pastoral settings, such as the mausoleum at Cobham in Kent by James Wyatt, a powerful combination of Doric temple and pyramid. These days such a setting is not necessarily an advantage, as it leaves monuments prey to serious vandalism. When I first saw the Darnley Mausoleum, some 30 years ago, it was a dreadful sight. The interior had been burned out by a bonfire of car tyres and petrol and bikers were roaring around it. Today, this supreme English monument has been superbly restored by a partnership of concerned bodies and the landscape is to be acquired by the National Trust.

Building monuments to the memory or glory of the departed and to house their remains has always been an essential part of human culture. How sad, then, that these often splendid – if sometimes absurd – products of credulity, optimism or vanity are not treated with more respect in Britain, if only as significant works of art and craftsmanship. But they have their friends, and there are worthwhile campaigns to restore two particularly interesting 19th-century mausolea containing the bodies of two most remarkable men.

One is the mausoleum near Dorking in Surrey built by that intriguing Anglo-Dutch Regency collector,



patron, designer and historian Thomas Hope. Following the death of his younger son in Rome in 1817, Hope built a mausoleum on the edge of Chart Park on the estate of the Deepdene, his country house. Dug into the side of a small hill, it has a front rather like the entrance to an early railway tunnel, with an arched door under a massive, severe stone pediment and flanking retaining walls (Figs 1 & 2). It was a deliberately primitive design that reflected Hope's interest in early Classical architecture as well as the contemporary concern with the symbolism of commemoration. Hope himself entered the mausoleum for the final time in 1831, to be followed by other members of his family and his heirs, ending with the 8th Duke of Newcastle (in 1941).

The 20th century was not kind to Hope's memory. His famous collection of furniture and art was dispersed at a sale in 1917 and the Deepdene itself, remarkable for Hope's Italianate alterations and experiments in the art of the Picturesque, eventually fell into the malign hands of British Railways, who demolished it in 1969. As for the mausoleum, the Newcastle trustees sealed the door in 1957 following vandalism and, for security, partly demolished the flanking walls and buried it – leaving only the great stone pediment above the ground. In 1960 the mausoleum was given to Dorking Urban District Council, and was then largely forgotten – until today.

To its credit, Mole Valley Council has now taken an interest in this maltreated structure. The surrounding landscape is being restored for public benefit, while much of the earth that covered the mausoleum has been cleared to expose its blocked door. Working with the Mausoleum & Monuments Trust (of which I am a trustee), an appeal is planned to repair and restore this extraordinary structure that is now the only surviving building designed by this pioneer of the Greek revival.

The other appeal is for a very different type of mausoleum. Tucked away between the Thames and the railway in Mortlake, south-west London, is a cemetery attached to the Roman Catholic Church of St Mary Magdalen. Here lie distinguished Catholic architects such as J.F. Bentley and Leonard Stokes, but the most conspicuous monument is a life-sized and wonderfully realistic Arab tent, with the folds of cloth and the intervening lengths of rope that articulate the sloping walls all beautifully carved in stone (Fig. 3). It is in the tradition of Turkish tent structures in the West (which I discussed in *APOLLO*, May 2009), but this one is for the dead rather than the living. It is the last resting place of Sir Richard Burton, the intrepid Victorian explorer, Orientalist and writer, the discoverer of the source of the Nile and the translator of *The Arabian Nights*, who died in 1890.

Given that Burton was an agnostic and Islamophile, who devoted much of his time to translating those Oriental sex-manuals *The Perfumed Garden* and the



**3 Exterior of the 'tent' mausoleum of Sir Richard and Lady Isabel Burton in Richmond-upon-Thames, Greater London. Photo: The Friends of Burton/The Environment Trust**

**For information on the restoration of the Hope mausoleum, go to [www.mausolea-monuments.org.uk](http://www.mausolea-monuments.org.uk). For information on the Burton Mausoleum Restoration Appeal, visit [www.environmenttrust.co.uk](http://www.environmenttrust.co.uk)**

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*Kama Sutra*, his exotic mausoleum is a rather unlikely object to find on consecrated ground. But his wife, Isabel Arundell, came from an old Roman Catholic family, while the tomb was largely paid for by public subscription. After Burton's death she burned the manuscript of his new translation of *The Perfumed Garden*, which he had regarded as 'the crown of my life'. But perhaps Lady Burton redeemed herself by designing and building the tent mausoleum for her much loved husband, remembering how he had once said: 'I should like us both to be in a tent, side by side.' And so they now are, in an interior that, originally, was decorated with murals and a mixture of Eastern and Western iconography, embellished with camel bells and lamps from Damascus. On the exterior, a crucifix is placed over the (blocked) door, with the Star of Bethlehem rising above the tall tent roof, while the pelmet is decorated with carved stars.

Lady Burton's tent was restored in 1974 but now needs help again. An appeal has been launched by the Friends of Burton to repair the stonework, to restore the painted decoration of the interior and to reinstate the fascinating mixture of Christian and Islamic symbols that so well reflect Sir Richard Burton's exotic enthusiasms. Given the present sad lack of understanding between the religions and cultures of East and West, which that Victorian maverick famously bridged, this seems a particularly good and appropriate cause.