



LIBERTY

The historic and much loved Liberty store first opened its doors on May 15th 1875. Acquired by Arthur Liberty, no 218A Regent Street was half a shop employing three people: a sixteen-year-old called Hannah Browning; a young Japanese boy called Hara Kitsue and William Judd, who had earlier worked with Arthur at Farmer & Rogers' Oriental Warehouse across the road in Regent Street.

With a stock consisting solely of coloured silks from the East, it attracted the attention of artists and designers such as William Morris, Alma Tadema, Burne-Jones and Rosetti and, within eighteen months, Arthur Liberty was able to acquire the second half of the shop at 218 Regent Street.

Arthur Liberty's wish was to influence the public's taste by giving them the opportunity to buy beautiful and affordable things. He became closely involved with the two key arts movements of the late nineteenth century: the Aesthetic Movement and the Art Nouveau Movement. As well as textiles, furniture, clothing, jewellery, metal ware and ceramics were produced for and by Liberty's, all of which have contributed to the Liberty Style.

It was fifty years after the opening of the store that the present Tudor building came into being. Having acquired freehold properties bounded by Argyll Place, Foubert Place, Little Marlborough Street and Kingly Street, Liberty was now able to create a store that would 'provide for posterity'; a building that linked twentieth century London with the street architecture of Tudor London.

The store was designed by the architects Edwin T and E Stanley Hall, father and son. Their design was aimed at giving the appearance of a series of shops rather than a single store. The wooden construction was built from oak and teak salvaged from two old two-decker men-of-war: HMS Impregnable and HMS Hindustan. A portrait of the two original ships still hangs in the store. All of the attention to detail that Arthur Liberty applied to his property made it one the most recognisable buildings in London.

After the First World War, Liberty's fabric buyer, William Haynes Dorell, introduced a lightweight cotton fabric, calling it Tana lawn after Lake Tana in Sudan where the cotton grew. Printed with predominantly floral designs, it became Liberty's best selling fabric. The textiles departments in Liberty really grew in the 1920's. Liberty introduced a range of smaller scale prints that complemented the twenties style fashions with simple lines, whilst in the thirties it followed the more flamboyant fashion mood of the time.

Liberty has continued to be one of London's best loved and completely unique retail emporiums, and has recently embarked on a dramatic 'Retail Renaissance' with a sharp new look and a global initiative. The revolutionary

'Retail Renaissance' programme is part of a broader, long term strategy from Chief Executive, Geoffroy De la Bourdonnaye.

"Liberty is one of the most loved stores in the world", he said. "The legacy of Arthur Lasenby Liberty makes the store the ultimate showcase for the finest to meet the rarest. The renaissance takes a multi-tiered approach with the focus on the product, the layout of the store itself and an impeccable standard of customer service." Liberty's muse for the revamp is Yasmin Sewell. Her retail experience and fashion-forward style perfectly complement Liberty's latest mission. With a new creative team, Sewell will spearhead the store's transformation, focusing on women's and men's fashion and accessories.

When it first opened, Liberty was described by Oscar Wilde – a friend of founder Arthur Liberty – as "the chosen resort of the artistic shopper". La Bourdonnaye aims to reinterpret Wilde's vision of the store by "bringing the store back to its original grandeur, but with all the advantages of contemporary design". He said: "the emphasis will be on the expansion of covetable fashion items housed within an intelligent and creative consumer environment."