

References

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The Freud Museum

THOMAS FAHY, Registrar, The Maudsley Hospital, London SE5

Sigmund Freud spent the last year of his life at 20 Maresfield Gardens, an impressive redbrick Hampstead residence. The house was bought by his friends after the penniless psychoanalyst and his family fled from Vienna in 1938. His personal assets had been extorted from him by the authorities following the *Anschluss* of Austria to the Third Reich. When the family took up residence, Freud's daughter, Anna, organised his new study to resemble his Viennese consulting rooms. Before her own death in 1982, Anna arranged for the house to become a museum in honour of her father. Once again the study was refashioned to Freud's original specifications. This time capsule was opened to the public in July 1986.

During his year in the house Freud, then aged 82, finished his last book *Moses and Monotheism*. This, he proclaimed, was an attempt to "reduce religion to a neurosis of humanity". Its publication in March 1939 coincided with Jewry's worst hour and many Jewish scholars visited Freud at his new home asking him to reconsider his decision to proceed with publication. He entertained several other distinguished guests during this period, including Dali and H.G. Wells. He also saw an average of four patients daily, mostly Jewish refugees like himself. In September 1939, the month the first German bombs were dropped on London, Freud finally succumbed to the "dear old cancer" which had plagued him for more than 16 years.

The museum is an elegant memorial to Freud. The souvenir car stickers and badges cannot detract from the skill and restrained good taste which have evidently been lavished on the restoration. Most work has been done on the preservation of Freud's study. The spectacles and open books on the desk are an effective theatrical ploy in such an evocative setting. The highlight of the room is the couch, with its colourful monogrammed blankets. It was a present from a patient and Freud brought it with him from Vienna in what must have been a superstitious reluctance to break up a successful partnership. Hanging incongruously above it, in full view of the reclining patient, is a lithograph depicting Charcot with a swooning hysteric performing in front of a distinguished audience at the Salpêtrière.

The study is lined with books, mainly on psychoanalysis, archaeology and literature. Freud maintained that he read more archaeology than psychology. However, the psychoanalytic collection is extensive and all the more impressive for the fact that Freud, directly or indirectly, had generated most of this material during his lifetime. But this was only a part of his original collection of books. Freud had to discard more than 800 volumes before coming to London. Freudian scholars suggest that he brought with him those books which had been an important influence on his work. The books he left behind were delivered to a Viennese bookseller who advertised

them as belonging to a famous explorer because of the strength of anti-semitic and anti-psychoanalytic feeling abroad at the time. A New York librarian guessed the books were Freud's and purchased the lot.

Freud's collection of antiquities clutter the study's shelves and display cases. The exhibition of Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Chinese sculpture has been assessed by a British Museum specialist who pronounced it to be superb.

The top floor of the house has been given over to a private residence, in order to comply with local authority housing policy, but several other rooms are open to the public. One contains a display of memorabilia including letters from Einstein and Wilhelm Fleiss. There are also photographs of family members, including a short-trousered Clement Freud, alongside an early work by Lucien Freud, the distinguished painter. The Anna Freud Room is most notable for the former resident's ascetic taste in furnishings. Although she was not a university graduate she received a dozen or so honorary doctorates and these crowd one wall of the room.

The most interesting of the portraits hanging in the museum is Dali's sketch of Freud. The surrealist's visit to the house is documented in his autobiography. Dali wrote that on a whim he tried to impress Freud as a "dandy of universal intellectualism". He attempted to persuade his host to read an article on paranoia which he had penned for a magazine. Fearful that Freud might consider this a surrealist diversion, he opened the magazine at the page of the text and handed it to Freud who regarded it with "imperturbable indifference". He said of Dali "I have never seen such a complete example of a Spaniard. What a fanatic". During the visit Dali managed to sketch Freud surreptitiously. The portrait shows an ET-like Freud with a bulging cranium. Dali likened Freud's head to a snail. Freud's colleagues did not show him the sketch as they considered the portrait to have captured a sense of impending death.

The dignified calm of the museum belies the controversy which preceded the opening. Kurt Eisler, an American psychoanalyst, was head of the Freud Archives before the museum was established. He planned to instal Jeffrey Masson, a former professor of Sanskrit and a rising star in the analytic world, as curator of the Archives. Before taking up his new post, Masson published a series of articles in the *New York Times* alleging that Freud had intentionally suppressed a key finding in his early work, the seduction theory. Freud initially maintained that hysteria was a result of sexual abuse during childhood. He later changed his views, stating that patients recollections of these events were fantasies. Masson believes

that Freud's original views were correct. He chose to make these views known in 1981. Not surprisingly, he was immediately sacked from his post with the Archives. A journalist from *New Yorker* magazine, Janet Malcolm, became interested and wrote about the unfolding drama, later converting her articles into a racy book, *In the Freud Archives*. This and Masson's *Assault on the Truth* both sold well. Predictably Masson's book was drubbed by his former colleagues as "monumentally stupid". In fact his book does not provide a particularly convincing thesis and the most intriguing question is why Masson decided to announce his views with such poor timing. The controversy has encouraged many people to visit the museum, an unforeseen result welcomed by the present curator.

Before Anna Freud's death the house contained a huge amount of unpublished material by Freud, mainly in the form of correspondence. Anna Freud and the Freud Archives carefully regulated access to the material. After her death the original manuscripts were transferred to the Library of Congress but the Museum retains copies. Access remains limited to a handful of people. Amongst the most valuable documents in cold storage are the letters which passed between Freud and Anna. It has been suggested that publication of this correspondence might 'blacken' Freud's reputation. The allegiance of the Archives is primarily to the preservation of Freud's good name. The staff of the museum are said to favour a policy of openness, not least because many are curious to draw their own conclusions from the controversial material. They also have ambitions for the museum as a teaching and research centre. A publication programme is planned and a series of lectures has commenced. If the unpublished material was made available for viewing, the museum would be guaranteed an important role in research.

I was disappointed that so little attention was drawn by the museum to Freud's opinion of the Britain he encountered during his last year. Ronald Clarke, one of Freud's many biographers, makes it clear that he was always an Anglophile. He first visited England in 1875 and considered settling here on a number of occasions. To a colleague who suggested that the Englishman's reputation for hypocrisy was well earned, Freud replied "But surely you cannot doubt that England is rightly held to be morally pre-eminent". In 1988 these comments are less likely to impress and the influence of psychoanalytic teaching on the changing face of modern society seems a worthy subject for exploration in a museum celebrating the life of a man who was a thorn in the side of conservative society during much of his lifetime.