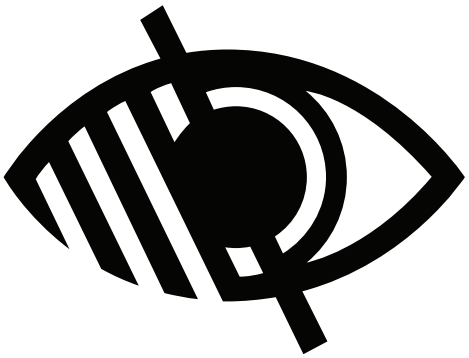


Building the Bank

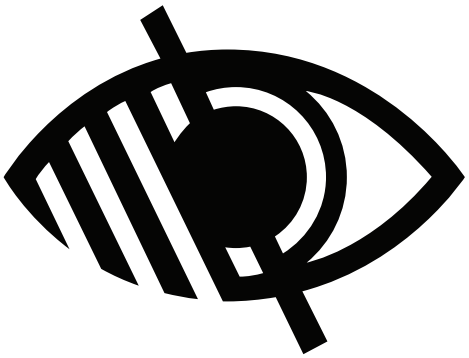
Large print guide

Building the Bank

The building you are in right now is not quite as old as it feels. Work began in 1925, when the demolition of the old Bank of England began so that Herbert Baker's new Bank building could be constructed in its place.

Today's building is a blend of influences. Ancient Greek and Roman symbolism has been reinterpreted by both the Bank's original architects of the 1700s, and the artists and craftspeople of the 1920s. The building itself
is a landmark within the City of London, decorated with symbolism that proclaims its purpose.

The last 100 years have brought technological changes that have transformed the way the Bank works, here in London and at the Bank's other locations around the country. But the Threadneedle Street site remains a central meeting point and treasury: come with us to explore the architectural and artistic significance of this remarkable building.



Discovering John Soane in today's bank

Large print guide

Discovering John Soane in today's bank

Sir John Soane (1753–1837) is the most famous of the Bank of England's architects. Between 1788 and 1828, he expanded the building to fill the whole block that the Bank sits on today.

When Herbert Baker (1862–1946) rebuilt the Bank between 1925 and 1938, he wanted to retain the character of Soane's Bank. He and his team copied several spaces (like the one you're standing in) and recreated them in the new building.

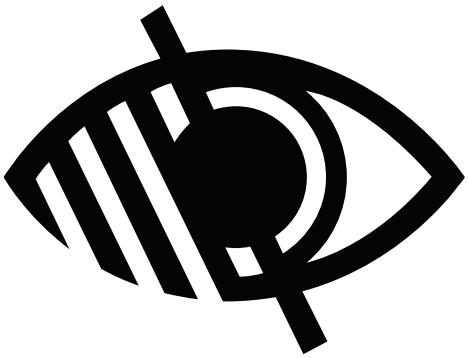
The stone columns and decorative friezes (panels) in this space were saved from the old building and reused here.

The caduceus (a winged staff with snakes wound around it) is the symbol of Mercury, the Roman god of messengers and finance.

Celebrated architectural photographer Frank Yerbury (1885–1970) took hundreds of photographs of the old Bank before its demolition. The photos were a record of the old buildings and a reference for Baker and his team.

Photo of the passage between the old Rotunda and the Threadneedle Street courtyard, by Frank Yerbury, c.1921

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/5/4 (53)



The old Threadneedle Street building

Large print guide

The Old Threadneedle Street building

After spending its first 40 years in rented space, the Bank moved to Threadneedle Street in 1734.

1734:

The first Threadneedle Street building was created by little-known architect George Sampson. It took up only one small part of today's site.

1765:

By the 1760s, the Bank's staff, and its role in the City of London continued to grow. Architect Robert Taylor (1714–1788) was commissioned to build two wings onto Sampson's Bank. The east wing was completed in 1765, including the huge Rotunda, where traders met to do business.

1788:

Taylor finished the west wing in 1788. It was built around a new courtyard – once the graveyard of a neighbouring church, St Christopher le Stocks – which became known as Garden Court.

1800:

John Soane became the Bank's architect in 1788. Over the next 40 years he expanded the Bank to its current footprint. He also rebuilt parts of Sampson and Taylor's buildings which were damaged, including the Stock Office. By 1800, the Bank reached up to Princes Street and Lothbury.

1828:

Soane extended the Bank further and created a decorative corner at the north-west of the site, known as 'Tivoli Corner'. This completed the modern island site, after diverting Princes Street to accommodate the newly, expanded building.

1833 – 1925:

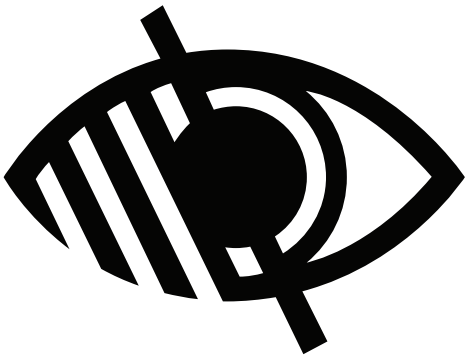
Over the next century, the Bank's supervising architects adapted the building for changing uses:

Arthur William Blomfield (1829-1899) introduced electric lighting in the 1880s.

In 1916, Francis Troup (1859-1941) moved the Banknote Printing department from Threadneedle Street to a larger off-site factory near Old Street, London.

During the First World War (1914–1918), staff numbers went from around 1,200 to nearly 4,000 due to the work of funding the war effort.

By the end of the First World War, space was running out at Threadneedle Street. It was time to rebuild.



The Builders

Large print guide

The Builders

The rebuilding project began in 1920, when the Bank's Rebuilding Committee appointed a lead architect.

The Bank's supervising architect, Francis Troup, submitted proposals. The committee also considered Edwin Lutyens, who was then constructing a new British colonial capital in New Delhi. But in 1921, the Bank turned to Herbert Baker, who was working with Lutyens in India. Baker had experience developing major public buildings in South Africa and India, combining neo-classical architecture with modern sculpture and decoration.

John Soane's building was well-loved and its demolition was controversial. But Soane's Bank was a complex of buildings that had been added to bit-by-bit. Advances in structural engineering and the emergence of modern, taller buildings made it seem old-fashioned.

The new Bank needed to maximise the space available.

It also needed to look like a strong, permanent part of the landscape, representing the stability it aimed to bring to the economy.

'The architectural policy of the Bank... was to preserve continuity in change – a sense of permanence in progress...'

Herbert Baker, in his autobiography Architecture and Personalities, 1944

The Builders by A K Lawrence

Architect Herbert Baker is seated, surrounded by key figures in the rebuilding team. Behind them, the Bank is part-way through construction, with the edge of Soane's curtain wall still standing.

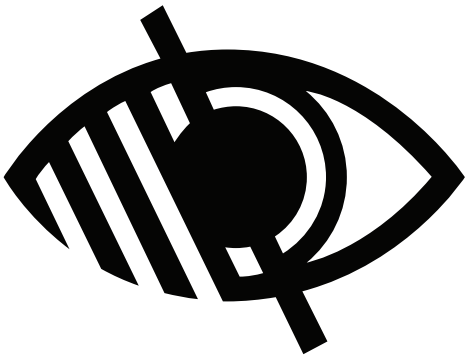
The painting balances the ancient and modern influences in Baker's work. It shows two ages of building, with a classical-style column in the foreground, and the modern steel frame of the new building in the background.

The men's clothes reflect their trades and the social class distinctions of the time – Baker, Bank officials and other 'professionals' wear dark woollen suits, and the craftsmen and builders wear brown overcoats. Charles Wheeler is wearing a sculptor's white smock and red bandana.

BoE Museum: 1087

1. Francis Troup (Supervising Architect. Appointed in 1918 to oversee surveys, repairs and maintenance of the existing building)
2. C E Dunkin (The Bank's Clerk of Works. Ensured the project would be finished on time and within quality and safety standards)
3. Robert Wallace (Member of the Bank's Rebuilding Committee)
4. George Macauley Booth (Chairman of the Rebuilding Committee)
5. Charles Wheeler (Sculptor. His work gave a modern feel to Baker's grand, neo-classical design)
6. Alexander Scott (Architect. Baker's partner in architectural practice since 1912)
7. Herbert Baker (Architect of the new Threadneedle Street building)
8. R H Pillar (Works Manager. Organised and oversaw day-to-day operations on site)
9. Herbert W G Tanner (Clerk of Works for the Rebuilding. Ensured construction phases were finished on time and within quality and safety standards)

10. Oscar Faber (Engineer. Ensured the structure was well designed and properly built)
11. Joseph Armitage (Craftsman and Sculptor. Responsible for the moulding and carving of stone, plaster and woodwork)
12. Henry Thomas Holloway (Chief Builder. Oversaw the construction plans and building work)



Herbert Baker: an imperial architect

Large print guide

Herbert Baker: an imperial architect

Herbert Baker (1862–1946) trained as an architect in London, and moved to the Cape Colony (modern South Africa) in 1892. There, he met businessman and imperialist Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, who commissioned Baker to build his house in Cape Town.

This led to commissions for private homes and public buildings across Southern Africa, including the Union Buildings in Praetoria, seat of the colonial government. Baker's experience with major public buildings led to his commission, in 1912, to design the British colonial capital at New Delhi, India, alongside Edwin Lutyens.

The Bank of England is Baker's best-known work in the UK, blending neoclassical architecture and modern sculpture. Its symbolism reflected the Bank's place in the global and imperial economy of the 1920s.

1. **Roman pot with hunt decoration, 3rd Century CE**

   Found during archaeological excavations during Baker's rebuilding of the Bank. It is similar to the pot in the portrait of Baker to the left of this display, which reflects Baker's love of classical design and archaeology.

   BoE Museum: 355

2. **Preparatory sketch for the Empire Clock, with a photo of the clock in situ. By Herbert and Henry Baker, mid 1930s**

   The clock was designed by Herbert Baker and his son, Henry. The photograph shows the clock in the Bank of England's Court Room. It was there until the 1950s.

   BoE Archive: 20A20/118

3. Section of the Empire Clock depicting India, Hong Kong and Singapore, by Charles Wheeler, around 1937

Baker and his son designed several 'Empire Clocks', indicating the time in what were then British colonial territories around the world. His designs were produced by sculptor Charles Wheeler. This is part of the clock made for the Bank of England, which has since been disassembled. The sun represents India, and the anchor represents the port cities of Hong Kong and Singapore.

BoE Museum: 2007/001

4. Suggestions for new coinage, by Herbert Baker, 1936

The Royal Mint asked Baker to submit designs for new coins for the United Kingdom in 1936. These draft designs were found in a folder of Baker's sketches for the Bank of England. He always worked on several projects at once, which often influenced each other.

BoE Archive: 20A20/118

5. Globe mosaic inside the Bank of England, by Boris Anrep, 1930s

This mosaic hints at the Bank's role, in the 1920s and 30s, at the heart of a world-wide Empire.

6. Baker's Secretariat Building in New Delhi, India, photographed in 2018

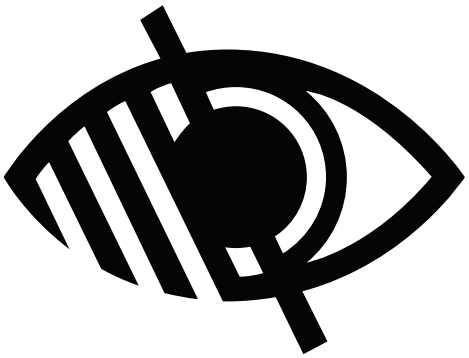
The Secretariat building in New Delhi, where key offices of the government of India are based, was one of Baker's most important commissions in India.

(Anjali Kumari/ Alamy)

7. The Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle, unveiled in 1927

After the First World War, both Baker and Lutyens became key architects for cemeteries for the fallen troops from Commonwealth countries. Baker designed 24 memorials across England, and 113 war cemeteries throughout France and Belgium. These include Tyne Cot Cemetery, and the Delville Wood South African National Memorial.

Thomas Capiaux at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Herbert Baker painting

Large print guide

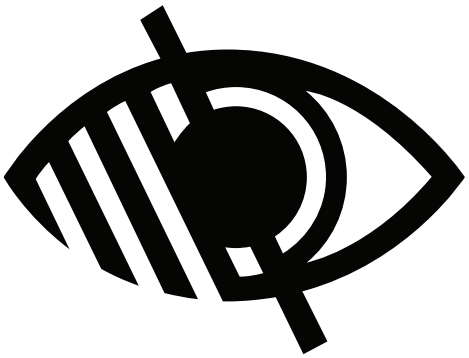
Above: Herbert Baker, Architect of the Bank of England, by Alfred Kingsley Lawrence, c. 1938

This portrait is one of a series recording the Bank of England at the time of its reconstruction. Baker stands at his desk in front of the new building, surrounded by objects that reflect his career and influences. A Roman pot filled with flowers references his interest in classical archaeology, and the books his love of reading and writing. On his left is a model of the golden statue known as Ariel, which is on the roof of the Bank today. For Baker, it represented the spirit of the Bank carrying credit and trust all over the world.

At the bottom is a painting of the Rhodes Memorial, designed by Baker in 1906 to honour his early patron, Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes' views and ambitions for Africa under colonial rule are now understood as racist, with his imperialism establishing the foundations of apartheid in South Africa. During Baker's time in South Africa, he worked with Rhodes to establish a visual language for its public buildings.

Rhodes also sponsored Baker's tour of archaeological sites in Italy, Egypt and Greece, which had a lasting influence on his work, including the memorial shown in this painting. Rhodes' patronage and commissions helped to establish Baker's career, leading to major commissions around the world and his reputation as a key architect within the British Empire.

BoE Museum: 0604



Demolition and rebuilding

Large print guide

Demolition and rebuilding

Redeveloping this huge site was not easy. Some departments moved to other locations, but the Bank's place at the heart of the City was essential for many nearby businesses. Most staff stayed on site while the building work happened around them. Even the gold was transferred from the old vaults into the new ones as they were completed.

The demolition of the Bank happened in three phases, so staff could move around the building while other parts were demolished. The first stage began in 1925, to the east of the site. The building was finally completed in 1938.

Phase 3 (Western half): 1933–1938

Excavations at the Bank by Henry Rushbury, 1934

Henry Rushbury (1889–1968) recorded this third stage of rebuilding. To the left of the image, Soane's perimeter wall is held in place by scaffolding while the area is excavated several levels below ground level for the new vaults. The tiny size of the figures working on site shows the scale of the structure.

BoE Museum: 0794

Phase 2 (Central, including the Threadneedle Street entrance & portico): 1926–1932

Steel framework seen from Lothbury, 1934

The new Bank building was created at a time when architects were moving towards steel-framed buildings. The Portland Stone walls of the Bank may look traditional, but like the glass and steel skyscrapers around the City, there is a modern steel frame behind the stone.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/3/2/124 (1)

Phase 1 (South-east): 1925–1927

Photograph of the Stock Office being demolished, around 1925

The Stock Office and Rotunda were part of the first phase of demolition, which began in 1925.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/3/11

Sculpted keystone with a portrait of Oscar Faber, by Charles Wheeler, 1930s

Oscar Faber was Chief Engineer for the rebuilding. His trade is symbolised by the steel girders on either side, and the winged wheel of mechanical forces.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/1/68/35

Discovery of a Roman mosaic, 1933

Two mosaic floors from Roman houses were found during the rebuilding. Both had been damaged by the foundations of John Soane's buildings. One of the mosaics is now in the Museum's entrance hall.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/3/2/135

Archaeological finds from the rebuilding

As one of the longest inhabited parts of the City of London, this area is rich in archaeology, which was revealed during the demolition of the old building. The items came from different places around Britain and Europe, reflecting a history of London's trade with the rest of the world.

1. **Conical jug embossed with a floral pattern, possibly from the 1400s.** It was found in 1929, during the second phase of the rebuilding.

   BoE Museum: 421

2. **Fragment of an amphora, c 50 CE,** a large storage vessel for liquid such as wine or olive oil. The shape of the handles suggest that it came from the east of the Mediterranean, possibly from Greece.

   BoE Museum: 302

3. **Roman cup, 159–180 CE.** The maker's mark in the centre, 'ESCVSI', indicates it came from Lezoux, in central France.

   BoE Museum: 292

4. **Small Roman dish with footed base,** and lotus bud decoration around the edge. From Lezoux, France, c.100 CE.

   BoE Museum: 300

5. **Clay pipes (about 1650–1750)** are found in many archaeological sites. At the time they were made, tobacco was becoming cheaper and more readily available due to the labour of enslaved people in the Caribbean, where it was produced.

   BoE Museum: 400, 408

6. **Roman wooden writing tablet, and iron stylus (pen).** Roman writing tablets had a sunken area filled with beeswax. A pointed stylus was used to engrave letters into the wax. Mistakes could be smoothed with the flat edge at the end.

   BoE Museum: 113 and 124

7. **Roman oil lamp.**

   BoE Museum: 233

8. **A bowl made from the old Garden Court Lime tree.** The old Bank included a courtyard, Garden Court, which had once been the churchyard of St Christopher le Stocks church. When the Bank was rebuilt, the burials which still remained there were taken to Nunhead Cemetery.

   BoE Museum: A237

9. **Cigarette box, 1953.** This box is made of reclaimed oak, from the foundations of John Soane's Bank of England buildings from the late 1700s and early 1800s.

   BoE Museum: 1986/064

10. **Roman brooch, with the face of Medusa, 100s CE.** Medusa is a woman from ancient mythology who had snakes instead of hair. Her image was often used in jewellery and architectural decoration to protect people and places against evil, as can be seen in the Museum's Stock Office.

    BoE Museum: 003

11. **Roman cosmetics spoon,** made of bronze. The narrow bowl was designed to fit into tiny bottles.

    BoE Museum: 067

12. **Roman wooden comb.** Combs like this had the same design for thousands of years: one side with wide teeth for combing hair, the other with narrow teeth for removing lice.

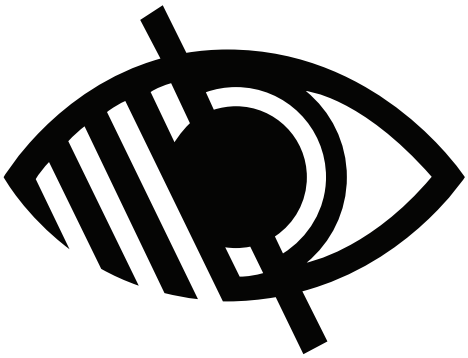
    BoE Museum: 049

13. **Small glass bottle, 1600s.** The size suggests it was used for something expensive that was used in small amounts, like cosmetics, perfume or medicine.

    BoE Museum: 398

14. **Conical bricks from Soane's Rotunda.** Soane developed a new type of brick when building his Rotunda in 1795. When stacked with the round ends together, they form a curved dome of lightweight, fireproof material. Several were saved as examples when the Rotunda was demolished.

    BoE Museum: 1989/116, 1989/122, 290/002, A291/1, A291/2



Bank Junction

Large print guide

Bank Junction

Today, entry to the Bank is strictly controlled, but at the time of the rebuilding it was a publicly accessible space. Business was carried out in person, and the corridors would have been crowded with visitors coming and going between the banking halls and offices.

As the duties of the Bank of England increased throughout its history, it became a focal point within the City, providing essential services for the financial institutions around it. The building itself sits at the junction of several routes around the area, both above and below ground.

The last few years have seen significant changes in the area. Wider pavements, reduced road traffic and new street trees aim to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, and encourage sustainable methods of travel.

The streets around it may have changed, but the Threadneedle Street building remains an imposing, constant landmark.

‘We are now sending you drawings showing two alternative architectural treatments for the Soane

wall as affected by the staircases down to the Tube. The one opening up the colonnade to the entablature I think is undoubtedly a very much more beautiful and respectful treatment of Soane’s wall. It in effect treats this corner with the same open dignity as we have treated the Tivoli Corner.’

Herbert Baker to Edward Holland-Martin (Rebuilding Committee), 15 November 1938

Bank of England Archive 1A86/31

1. Sign from the Bill Office

Before so many banking processes became digital, the Bank was busy with visitors, customers and messengers from other banks depositing bills and cash. This sign would help them find their way around this huge building. Today, electronic systems mean business doesn't need to be done in person, and tighter security means access is restricted to staff only.

BoE Museum: 2022/263

2. Tivoli Corner, with a new pedestrian walkway. Henry Rushbury, late 1950s

During the rebuilding, Baker created a walkway through Tivoli Corner, which had previously been closed off, and opened up the dome for light. This improved pedestrian access around this busy area, but Baker was criticised for changing Soane's designs.

BoE Museum: 0851

3. Modern copy of a plaster model of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, Italy that belonged to John Soane.

The original model was made by François Fouquet in the 1830s. Before photography, models were a way for tourists to bring home a souvenir of the places they visited. Soane copied the design of this monument for the sharp corner at the north-west of the Bank. The feature was admired by critics and a favourite of Soane himself.

Loaned by Timothy Richards, restorer of two Fouquet models.

4. Sketches for banknote designs showing
5. the new Bank of England, by Frederick Griggs, c.1931

In 1931, the Bank invited artist Frederick Griggs (1876–1938) to submit designs for banknotes. One of these (4) shows the new Bank from across the road at Mansion House. The other (5) shows Baker's newly-altered Tivoli Corner, including the dome and statue of Ariel on top. The designs were never used.

BoE Museum: 2025/142/031 and 2025/142/033

6. Bank Junction

Bank Underground station was named after the Bank of England when it opened in 1900. Like many parts of London, the surrounding area is now synonymous with its nearest Tube station. The rebuilding project created a new entrance to Bank Underground through the walls of the Bank itself. The new entrances had to be discreet, so that they didn't alter Soane's walls too much.

Image: Monica A. Walker Vadillo

7. Eastbound Central Line London Underground platform

The Eastbound Central Line platform at Bank is so curved that you can't see one end from the other. The tunnels run under the roads, to avoid damaging the foundations of surrounding buildings. They curve sharply from Cheapside to the west, around the foundations of the Bank of England, then north-east towards Liverpool Street station.

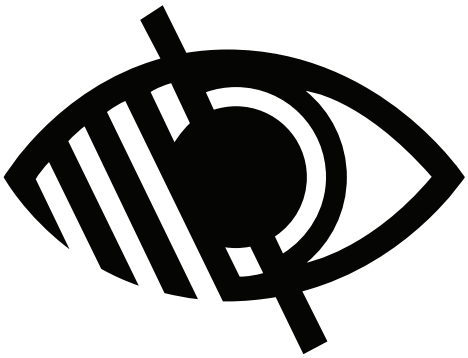
8. Scenes from the video games Assassin's
9. Creed: Syndicate (set in 1868) and Watch Dogs: Legions (set in 2029)

The Bank's location and significance have led to several different representations in video games! The reimagined locations mix imagery of Soane's Bank with details from the modern building in Assassin's Creed Syndicate, and provide a futuristic vision in Watch Dogs: Legion.

10. £1 banknote, 1928, showing the old Bank on the back

The 1928 £1 note celebrates Soane's Bank of England, at the same time the building was being radically transformed.

BoE Museum: 2022/101



Rotunda Caryatids

Large print guide

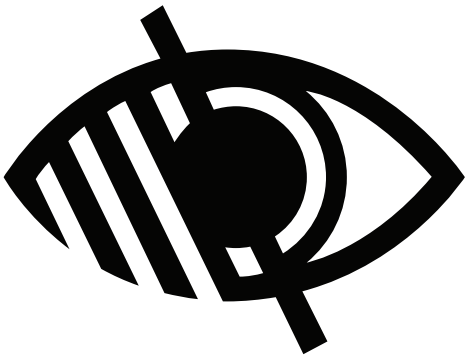
Caryatids being lowered from the top of the old Rotunda during the rebuilding

The statues around this room are called Caryatids. They are copies of sculptures from the Erechtheion, an ancient temple in Athens, Greece. These copies were made by Eleanor Coade, who had patented a hard-wearing artificial stone ideal for making sculptures like this.

Soane, who loved the art of ancient Greece and Rome, used them as decoration for many of his buildings. As well as here at the Bank, you can see them at his town house at Lincoln's Inn Fields (now the Sir John Soane Museum) and his country residence in Ealing, Pitzhanger Manor.

Baker salvaged and reused all 40 of Soane's Caryatids in the new Bank of England building. Some are here in the Museum, and others can be seen in the area where the public can exchange old banknotes.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/3/25



Set in stone: sculpture and mosaics

Large print guide

Set in stone: sculpture and mosaics

Herbert Baker worked closely with artists throughout his career. Their work reflected the Bank as it was seen in the 1920s: both a meeting place and an authority, with an air of stability and permanence.

Sculpture by Charles Wheeler (1892–1974) added a modern feel to Baker's neoclassical architecture. As well as the monumental statues on the outside of the Bank, Wheeler also modelled smaller sculptures and functional items around the building – overall the most significant sculptural commission of its era.

Mosaics by Boris Anrep (1883–1969) decorate the ground floor of the building, covering the three main public entrances and the corridors between them. The scheme is the largest Anrep and his team produced, and took ten years to complete.

‘I must here put on record the good fortune I have enjoyed during my life’s work in the many happy collaborators

I have had; of generous, inspiring and trusting masters, and enthusiastic and able fellow-artists and workers... of all the Bank of England has been the glorious climax.’

Herbert Baker, in his autobiography Architecture and Personalities, 1944

1. **Section of mosaic with the Irish harp, c.1937**

   This is the only section of mosaic that was not used, probably because it showed the symbol of Ireland still under the British crown. In 1937, Ireland was on the brink of independence after violent hostility. The Republic of Ireland became an independent sovereign state in 1949.

   BoE Museum: 2022/024

2. Model of the Threadneedle Street frontage, 1958

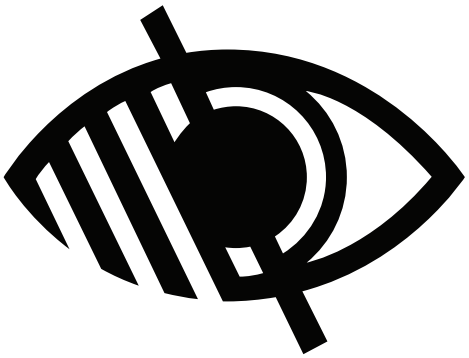
Wheeler's sculptures used classical symbolism with a distinctly modern style. This model shows the modern Britannia in the pediment at the top, with four Caryatids and two Telamons (their male counterparts) just above the front doors. Wheeler also cast the monumental bronze doors for the Bank's main entrances.

BoE Museum: 1982/038

3. Door handle with two facing lions, by Charles Wheeler

4. Doorknob with the head of Mercury, by Charles Wheeler

Wheeler modelled many fixtures for the Bank, from monumental sculptures to balustrades to door handles. Seen from the side, the door handles have two lions facing each other. These doorknobs have the face of Mercury, patron deity of communication and finance.



Art, craft and decoration

Large print guide

Art, craft and decoration

The highest quality of design and craft extended throughout the building. Public spaces and the Governors and Directors' rooms were most elaborately decorated, with sumptuous plaster friezes. But Baker's love of symbolism stretched into areas that were not intended for public view, making functional objects striking in their own right.

A series of mural paintings also captured the Bank and its staff at this time of great change. They showed many different roles, from the senior officials who governed the Bank to the gold porters and messengers. There were 16 paintings by the artists Alfred Kingsley Lawrence, Francis Dodd, George Clausen, William Rothenstein, Walter Russell, William Thomas Monnington, and Colin Gill.

At the time of the rebuilding (from 1925 to 1939), the Bank of England was a private company. It was nationalised in 1946. The result is a building with impressive decoration and grandeur, which would never be created today.

1. Study for the mural painting of St Luke's Printing Works by Thomas Monnington

The Printing Works employed many women, particularly to check the quality of banknotes being printed. These processes need high levels of accuracy and were carried out entirely by sight and by hand. While all the male staff in the murals were named, the women shown here remain anonymous. They were posed by models, rather than being true portraits of the women involved in the process.

BoE Museum: 1994/197/001

2. Mural paintings in their original setting, photographed by Humphry and Vera Joel, between 1939 and 1942

The paintings were originally designed to be placed together: works by Alfred Kingsley Lawrence, Colin Unwin Gill and Walter Thomas Monnington can be seen here in this photograph. They have since been moved around the Bank. Some are in this gallery today, but they can all be seen at the ArtUK website, artuk.org. Humphry and Vera Joel photographed the demolition and rebuilding of the Bank over several years.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/1/66/46

3. Decorative air vent, early 1930s

Many functional objects were made decorative, both in public spaces and behind the scenes. This vent is carved from wood, with keys to represent security at the Bank.

BoE Museum: 2025/141

4. Decorative tiles from the Officials' Lunch Room

The designs were sketched by Baker, then painted by Harry Parr at the Malkin tile works. Several are copies of larger designs used elsewhere in the Bank. On display here: a caduceus (representing Mercury, god of communication and finance); two lions guarding a pile of coins; a lion with a stylised, geometric mane; and a modern Britannia, like Charles Wheeler's sculpture on the front of the Bank.

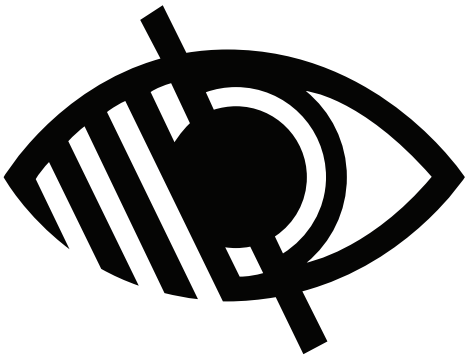
BoE Museum: 1985/034/001, 002, 007, 009

5. Portrait of Joseph Armitage, by Charles Wheeler

Joseph Armitage (1880–1945) was a sculptor and woodcarver from Yorkshire, who collaborated with Baker many times, and carried out extensive carving and modelling in stone, plaster and wood throughout the Bank. Wheeler carved nine portrait keystones of individuals involved in the Rebuilding, each with symbols of their craft. Armitage is holding sculpting tools, and surrounded by a wreath.

6. The Court Room ceiling, modelled by Joseph Armitage

Armitage took down and remodelled plasterwork from all around the old Bank to be reinstalled in the new building. His role was essential in preserving the feel of the spaces originally created by Baker's predecessors, as well as creating new work in keeping with the style. This was one of Armitage's most significant jobs for the Bank: he took down the old Court Room ceiling, originally created by Robert Taylor in the 1780s, and produced a slightly simplified version for Baker's replica of Taylor's Court Room.



Drawings and plans from the Bank of England archive

Large print guide

This is a selection from many thousands of drawings and architectural plans held in the Bank of England Archive.
Herbert Baker drew many of these himself to guide the artists and craftsmen he was working with.

1. Rough sketch depicting a caduceus, possibly a design for a keystone.

2. Rough sketch of a seated figure of Britannia, with an eagle on her knee. Possibly a proposal for mosaic or sculptural detail, but never used at the Bank of England.

3. Proposal for the dome at the north-west corner of the site, above Tivoli Corner (drawn roughly below).

4. Proposal for a ceiling design, showing moulded panels and specifying custom light fittings.

5. Drawing of an uplighter for the Bartholomew Lane vestibule, to be modelled by Charles Wheeler. This is now in the Museum's entrance lobby.

6. Early plan for the mosaics at the Threadneedle Street entrance hall, to guide Boris Anrep in creating detailed designs. The central roundel would become the Lion mosaic shown in the centre of this exhibition.

7. Early design for the bronze doors at Threadneedle Street, produced by Baker for the sculptor, Charles Wheeler.

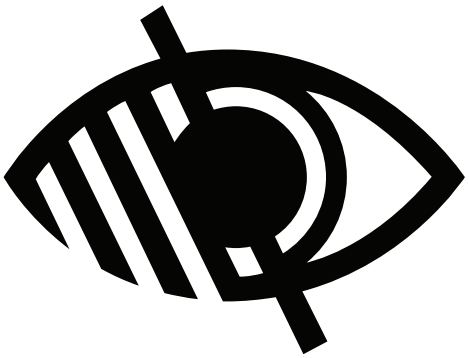
8. Pencil and watercolour proposal for a new Threadneedle Street façade (design unused).

9. Early sketch for the main ventilation stack (the exhaust from the heating system) on the Bank's rooftop.

10. Design for a niche on the north façade (Lothbury) for a statue of Sir John Soane.

11. Early design for the balustrade and gallery sculptures above the Threadneedle Street entrance hall, with options for the bronze uplighters.

All Bank of England Archive: 20A20.



Bank of England buildings

Large print guide

The Bank of England began opening Branches around the country in 1826, to circulate banknotes and provide banking services. They were also a base for Agents who kept Threadneedle Street informed about economic conditions around the country. The Bank's Agents around the United Kingdom still carry out this vital function today.

From its Branches to the banknote Printing Works, the buildings that the Bank commissioned around the UK represent many architectural styles from the last 200 years. Many can still be seen today.

Left: Castle Street, Liverpool, photographed in the 1960s

The Liverpool Branch, built in the 1840s by Charles Robert Cockerell (1788–1863), was described by art historian Nikolaus Pevsner as 'combining Greek, Roman and Renaissance in a remarkably vigorous and inventive way'. It is still an imposing landmark building, but nowadays is a restaurant rather than a bank.

BoE Archive: 15A13_12_9_2

Top: Architect's drawing of the King Street building, Leeds, c.1970

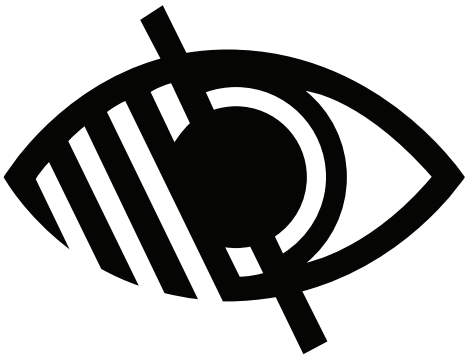
The Bank has had a presence in Leeds since 1827, and between 1971 and 2023 it was based at King Street. Designed by the Building Design Partnership, the building has the distinctive brutalist style of the post-war period. Leeds is still a key location for the Bank: it now occupies space in another city centre office, with plans for there to be 500 staff in Leeds by 2027.

BoE Museum: 2022/294

Above: The Printing Works at Debden, Essex, drawn by Feliks Topolski, 1957

In 1955, banknote printing moved from London to a new factory in Debden, Essex built by modernist architect Howard Robertson (1888–1963). The Bank's notes are still produced at Debden today.

BoE Museum: 1978/025



Making the Mosaics

Large print guide

Making the Mosaics

The Bank of England mosaics were produced in Boris Anrep's workshop in Paris, using a method called 'indirect transfer'.

The first stage of this was preparing a cartoon: a full-size drawing, made in mirror image, with enough detail for the artist to place the tesserae (small tiles) accurately.

The artists then cut and shaped the tesserae and stuck them to the cartoon. This is a very detailed, labour-intensive process. They were then put carefully into crates and shipped to London.

Once at the Bank, the finished panels were flipped over and set into prepared concrete floors, paper side up. The cartoons were destroyed as they were removed. Anrep and his assistants made final changes and corrections before grouting the tiles. At this stage, the finish was still rough and uneven.

The final step was polishing the floors. This created a smooth, uniform surface, and enhanced the colour of the marble and glass tiles in the finished design.

1. **Stages of the mosaic-making process:**

    1. The tiles are placed on the cartoon, in a mirror image
    2. The mosaic is set in concrete, and grouted into place
    3. The finished mosaics are sanded down and polished into a smooth, hard-wearing surface.

These mosaics were produced by staff, students and volunteers at the London School of Mosaic.

2. **Boris Anrep in his studio, 65 Boulevard Arago, 1949, Pierre Roy, 1949**

    Roy's portrait shows a bust of Anrep surrounded by paintings and the materials for his trade. We can see tesserae (tiles) stuck to a paper cartoon, and various colours of stone and glass arranged in brioche tins on the desk.

    Tate, Bequeathed by Mrs M.J.A. Russell 1982. Photo: Tate

3. Unused tesserae for the mosaics

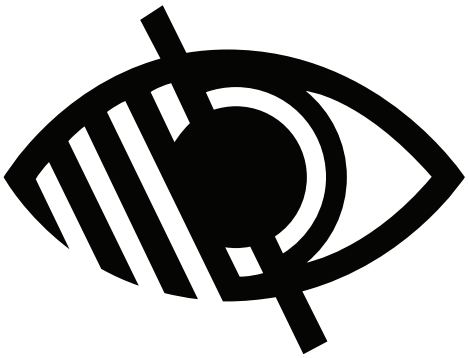
Anrep left a substantial quantity of tesserae with the Bank for future repair and maintenance of the mosaics – they are both functional artworks an integral part of the building.

The tiles are made of many kinds of marble and granite, with glass and gold tesserae from Venice.

Demolition of the Rotunda

The old Rotunda was demolished as part of the first phase of the rebuilding, that began in 1925.

BoE Archive: 15A13/1/3/40 (1)



Designing the mosaics

Large print guide

Designing the Mosaics

Boris Anrep (1883–1969) was born in St Petersberg, Russia, and left to study art in Paris in 1908. He became friends with the famous Bloomsbury group of artists and writers, including the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Anrep met George Booth (who became Chairman of the Bank's Rebuilding Committee) during the First World War. Booth later introduced Anrep to Herbert Baker, who commissioned his mosaics for the Bank.

Anrep is best known for his mosaics in the National Gallery, Tate Britain and Westminster Cathedral but the Bank of England was his largest project. The spectacular mosaic floor covers three entrance lobbies and the ground floor corridors between the main banking halls, and was completed between 1927 and 1937. Anrep's links with the Bank continued until 1957 when the last of his mosaics, originally intended for the Bank's Bartholomew Lane entrance, were laid at the Bank's building in New Change.

1. Electrotype copy of a Henry VIII George Noble, 1526

For the mosaics around the Bank's corridors, Baker selected 50 coins representing significant developments in British monetary

history. The George Noble was the first time St George and the dragon appeared on British coinage.

On loan from the Royal Mint Museum: RMM 5341

2. Drawing of the George Noble by Herbert Baker

Baker created enlarged drawings of the coins, that he sent to Anrep at his studio in Paris. The feedback on the initial drawing was not complimentary. One of the Bank's Directors said that '[George needs a] shorter face... the hind legs of the horse on the drawing are like a sheep's, the dragon's face is wrong.'

BoE Museum: 1986/029

3. Boris Anrep's studio, with a mosaic design stuck on the wall

This photo shows the team who produced the mosaics: from left to right, Olga Velsera, Leonide Inglesis, Ludmilla Bouazel, Boris Anrep, Mariya Volkova ('Maroussia') and Valia Vulliamy. Maroussia (1899–1956), was Anrep's long-term partner. She worked closely with him for many years, and was described as one of the only woman mosaic-artists at the time. In the background, there is a full- size cartoon (drawing) for the George Noble mosaic pinned to the wall.

4. Detail from George Noble mosaic, Boris Anrep

From a tiny coin less than 3cm across, the final mosaic is 140cm in diameter, with thousands of tiles in 27 different colours. This is just one of 50 similar mosaic panels Anrep created for the Bank.

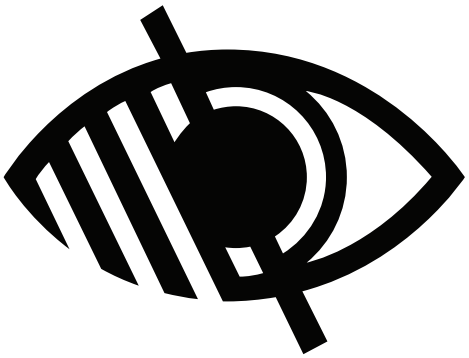
The figures above the Threadneedle Street entrance were carved in place from rough blocks built into the wall, several floors above Threadneedle Street. The scaffolding only allowed Wheeler six feet or so to stand back and view the work in progress, all hidden behind tarpaulins. The process of carving Britannia, and the Caryatids and the Telamons on the levels beneath, took nearly a year.

Wheeler, seated on the pediment, above the Threadneedle Street Façade

Courtesy of the estate of Carol Wheeler

'Very often did I eat my sandwich lunch sitting on the apex of the pediment over Threadneedle Street watching the life of the city go on below.'

Charles Wheeler in his autobiography, High Relief.



Charles Wheeler and Herbert Baker

Large print guide

Charles Wheeler and Herbert Baker

The sculptor Charles Wheeler (1892–1974) first worked with Baker in 1924. Despite the generation gap, they formed a deep friendship and collaboration that lasted until Baker's death in 1946. Baker was a mentor and patron, who took Wheeler to see the monuments of ancient Greece and Rome that would inspire the Threadneedle Street sculpture.

The Bank's decoration was a huge commission. It brought financial security for Wheeler and established his reputation. In turn, Wheeler's work brought a contemporary edge to Baker's neoclassical architecture. It was modern enough to provoke sharp criticism when his Threadneedle Street figures were unveiled.

Yet his Britannia, the 'New Old Lady', is a distinctive part of the landscape, and Wheeler's work is integral to the building – from the monumental sculptures outside, to functional details indoors like the balustrades and door handles.

Gilt bronze and onyx model for the Winged Springbok at South Africa House, by Charles Wheeler, c.1935

The springbok became South Africa's national animal in the 1930s in part through uses like this – using a classical style understood by the white minority rulers of the time. In 1930, Baker was commissioned to build the home of the South African High Commission, and commissioned Wheeler in turn for its decoration. It was a significant project that overlapped with their work at the Bank of England.

On loan from Leeds Museums and Galleries LEEAG.SC.2002.0101

Winged Springbok in situ at South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, Charles Wheeler, c.1933

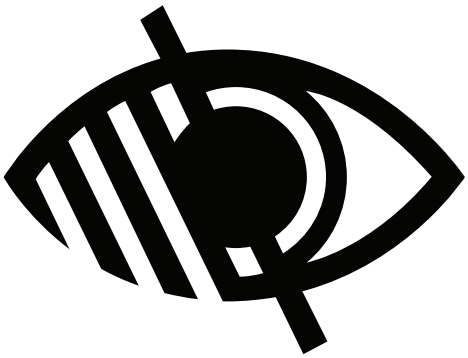
In the time of apartheid in South Africa, the springbok came to symbolise oppressive white minority rule and its use as a national symbol – particularly by the national rugby team – became controversial. But beginning with Nelson Mandela at the 1995 Rugby World Cup, South African leaders have reclaimed it as a symbol of unity and resilience. The springbok remains an instantly recognised emblem of South Africa around the world.

Leeds Museums & Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive)

Sir Herbert Baker by Charles Wheeler, c.1944

This portrait was commissioned by George Booth, Chairman of the Rebuilding Committee. Wheeler wrote in his autobiography: '...Booth with Baker came to my studio to see work in progress very frequently. He too was full of trust, and generous of encouragement. We discussed everything together and together made a team of enthusiasts.'

BoE Museum: 1790



Floor graphic

Large print guide

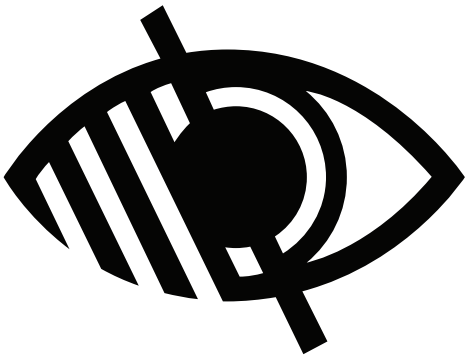
Boris Anrep

The Lion mosaic, by Boris Anrep, from the Bank's main entrance hall at Threadneedle Street.

This mosaic welcomes visitors with ancient symbolism and a statement of power. A pillar representing the Bank of England is guarded by two lions – echoing a famous sculpture from the ancient Greek city of Mycenae. At the top, two constellations reflect the Bank's global role within the British Empire at the time: the Plough and Southern Cross represent the northern and southern hemispheres.

The mosaic shows Anrep's wry humour, with the whimsical expression of the lions, and Anrep's trademark allusions to well-known people.

The two constellations can be used for wayfinding, but the way they are arranged in this mosaic points towards the Governor's office, at the heart of the organisation. Anrep also placed a single red tile in the map, above the lion's tail on the right, representing Herbert Baker's family home, Owletts, in Kent.



The rebuilding of the New 'Old Lady'

Large print guide

The Rebuilding of the New 'Old Lady'
The Bank of England Film Society, a group of amateur filmmakers among the Bank's staff, recorded the process of the rebuilding. Their remarkable footage includes nerve-wracking scenes of the early demolition, various stages of the new building, and landmark events like the setting of Ariel in its place above the north-west corner of the site.

This video has no sound, and is 8 minutes long.

Bank of England Film Society, c.1936-1936.
BoE Archive: 10A258/2

Follow the story of the Bank's architecture further, through our audio guide, online stories, a programme of related events, and more.