

Canada House marks anniversary with extensive range of services

This year, Canada House is celebrating 60 years of service to the British (and visiting Canadian) public. Since its opening in Trafalgar Square in 1925, it has offered assistance and help through a wide range of facilities. Below, we review the main services that are available to the public today.

Canada has been represented in London since 1761, when what was then the colony of Nova Scotia established an agency there.

After Confederation in 1867, Canadian government offices in London multiplied, so by 1923 there was an obvious need for a building that would house all the offices under one roof. The government began looking for a central and commanding location, and decided that the Union Club in Trafalgar Square would be ideal.

The Club had been built in 1824 by Sir Robert Smirke, a leading British architect. He had ignored the then-current fad for gothic architecture and had designed a building in the bold, neo-Hellenic style of monumental proportions. In 1924, the Canadian government bought the building; and Canada House was opened on June 29, 1925.

In 1964, the government extended its facilities by buying the northern portion of the Sir Robert Smirke building from the Royal College of Physicians. That created Canada House as it is seen today.

Meanwhile, the needs of the government had continued to expand, and in 1959 it had bought the former United States Embassy building in Grosvenor Square — now called Macdonald House. So the Canadian High Commission in London now operates from two major buildings. However, public

affairs activities are concentrated in Canada House.

Each year, Canada House is visited by thousands of people who use its many cultural and information facilities. Below is a list of the main services that Canada House now offers.

Cultural Centre

The Cultural Centre was established to create a greater awareness in Britain of the different aspects of Canadian culture. Its facilities include two galleries, an auditorium and a cinema. Staff are on hand to provide information on all aspects of the visual and performing arts in Canada.

Visual Arts. The staff at the cultural centre organise or host monthly exhibitions of works by Canadian artists. These exhibitions range from the recent showing of paintings by the internationally acclaimed artist, Alex Colville, which also toured to public galleries and museums in Great Britain, to the display of craft work by the Mohawk, Micmac, and Maliseet Indians of 19th century Canada, which will be taking place July 3 to August 13, 1985 (see article elsewhere in this issue).

Performing Arts. The Centre regularly stages recitals, playreadings, lectures, poetry readings and other events featuring Canadian performers. It helps to organise tours of Canadian performers in the UK and provides contacts to UK groups that are considering going to Canada.

Cinema. The cinema features the works of a wide range of Canadian film makers and video artists. Organisations that would like to show Canadian films can obtain the film catalogue from the audio-visual office.

The High Commissioner's salon at Canada House as it was in 1925. Very few changes have been made to the decor and furnishings since that date



Photo: Bedford Lemere & Co, London / Public Archives of Canada / PA - 139324