

Central Television Building, formerly the Masonic Temple, frieze running along top of facade

Building of King Solomon's Temple

Gilbert Bayes

1927

Portland stone frieze

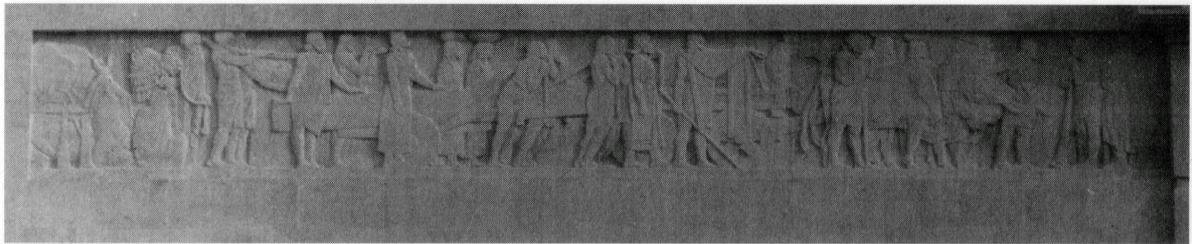
Two parts, each 61 cms high and 980 cms long

Status: not listed

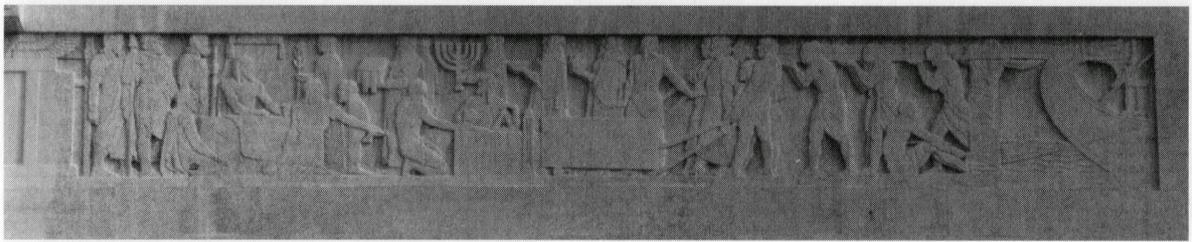
Condition: fair. Surface dirt and some weathering

Owned by: Central Television Ltd.

Exhibited: Royal Academy, 1928



Above Bayes, King Solomon's Temple (left section) Below Bayes, King Solomon's Temple (right section)



In 1923 Rupert Savage won a competition, open only to architects who were Freemasons in Warwickshire, for the design of the new Masonic temple in Birmingham. His design, which originally did not make provision for sculpture, was not realised owing to a lack of subscription but in 1925 he produced more economical plans, in which a sculpted frieze was incorporated. Bayes, also a freemason, was given the commission and it was completed by the formal opening on 23rd September 1927¹ The following year he exhibited a portion of it at the Royal Academy.² The two panels illustrate the building of King Solomon's Temple,³ considered by Freemasons to be the origin of their practices. Bayes used a neo-Assyrian style in which the tightly grouped imagery, compressed in a flat space against a plain background, appears appropriate to the austere facade of the building. Other sculptural details originally included two large Ionic columns framing the entrance, above which was a seated figure with two globes symbolising 'Masonry Universal'; a lintel bearing the inscription AUDI VIDE TACE (See, Hear and Be Silent), and a plaque in the centre of the parapet bearing the dates '1914-1918', indicating that the Temple also served as a War Memorial.⁴ These were all removed when the Freemasons moved to a new building on the Hagley Road.

The Masonic Temple became the Engineering and Building Centre in 1961 and now houses the offices of Central Television.

1. *New Masonic Temple for the Masonic province of Warwickshire*, Birmingham, 1926;

2. *Royal Academy exhibitors 1905-1970*, vol.1, Wakefield, 1973, p. 103;

3. *Kings*, Chapter I verses 5-9; *Chronicles*, Chapter I verse 22; *Chronicles*, Chapter 2 verses 2-6;

4. 'The new Masonic Temple, Broad Street, Birmingham', *Architectural Review*, vol.62, 1927, pp. 178-81.