

Grand Vestibule

The Grand Vestibule, in the Gothic style, has soaring arches of pale ribbed stone, which come together in an octagonal domed skylight 14 metres above. The upper walls are a salmon pink colour which offsets the impressive groupings of hundreds of weapons, giving the space a softer elegance. There are rifles and swords in criss-cross herringbone patterns, and pistols in concentric circles. On the floor is a thick green carpet decorated with a pattern of beige crosses.

Lining the lower part of the walls are ornately carved dark wood cabinets with glass fronts. They display exotic, rare treasures collected over the centuries from all over the British Empire. More than three hundred works of art are on display from around the world, objects spanning every continent and every reign from George III to Her Majesty The Queen. Together they represent the diverse ways the British monarchy has interacted with the wider world, from travel to diplomacy, empire, commonwealth and modern state visits. Each item is a work of art in its own right, reflecting the materials, traditions and techniques treasured by people all over the world.

The Empire reached its furthest extent during the long reign of Queen Victoria, and the cabinets were installed the year after her Golden Jubilee, in 1888. There is a large white marble statue of Queen Victoria, seated on a chair on a pedestal about one and a half metres high. She wears a full-skirted dress with tight bodice and short sleeves, with a cloak draped from her shoulders. Beneath a small crown, and framed by a veil, Victoria's round face is turned slightly to the left. Also on the left, cradled diagonally in the crook of her arm is a long pole – a sceptre. Although her pose is stiffly formal, her other hand on the right reaches down to her side to where a collie dog lies at her feet, looking up at her. This is Queen Victoria's favourite dog Sharp.

To the right of the statue is a glass display case containing a life-sized tiger's head, made of gleaming gold. It emerges from a collar about half a metre in diameter. The face is embossed with a leaf-like design

suggesting fur. It's glaring pale glass eyes are a teardrop shape. The snout is embossed with small dots, and sweeping lines represent the whiskers. A wide golden tongue protrudes from its partially open mouth, between four sharp canines made from rock crystal.