



Thomas A P van Leeuwen // **The Magic Stove** Barry, Soyer and The Reform Club or How a Great Chef Helped to Create a Great Building

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This little book with the lengthy title *The Magic Stove: Barry, Soyer and The Reform Club or How a Great Chef Helped to Create Great Building* explores the architecture and technology of the London Reform Club building (1837-1840), a noted but generally misinterpreted work of Charles Barry, Britain's most famous unknown nineteenth-century architect. Barry's fame rests mainly on two over-familiar monuments: the Houses of Parliament and Highclere Castle, the decor of television drama *Downton Abbey*. The other name is Alexis Soyer, almost mythical chef-de-cuisine who introduced not only French style of cooking but also mechanization of food preparation on a large scale, which he first practiced in collaboration with Barry in the design of the futuristic kitchen of the Reform Club. The result was a machine like building of pro to-fire-proofing construction, in which a steam engine drove the spits of the kitchen, smoke and cooking odors were evacuated by a primitive form of air-conditioning and in which gas was introduced not just for lighting but for the first time for cooking. Contemporary visiting French architecture critic César Daly called the building 'almost a living being'.

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