

# NO. 12

CELEBRATING THE RESTORATION OF  
SIR JOHN SOANE'S FIRST TOWNHOUSE  
AT LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS



## Introduction

This special issue of the *Newsletter* is devoted to the recently restored No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, which reopens in late June 2012. The refurbishment of this fine late eighteenth-century townhouse – the Soanes' first home on Lincoln's Inn Fields – marks the completion of the first phase of the Museum's *Opening up the Soane* project – comprising new and improved facilities for the Museum, notably a Shop, Cloakroom, Gallery for temporary exhibitions and Conservation Studios. The restoration of No.12 also gives the Museum improved disabled access, more lavatories and better facilities for our team of Warders, as well as improving visitor circulation in the Museum which in turn will reduce the wear and tear on Soane's fragile house-museum next door. Indeed, the opening of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields significantly increases the size of the Museum, and relocates from Soane's fragile creation in No.13 the facilities we desperately need to successfully run a busy modern visitor attraction. But this is just the first phase of *Opening up the Soane*; in October 2012 the Shakespeare and Tivoli Recesses on the No.13 Staircase will be unveiled, while

in February 2013 we will embark upon the restoration of Soane's private apartments on the second floor of the Museum – putting back eight historic interiors exactly as our founder left them. In late 2014, we will complete *Opening up the Soane* with refurbishments to the rear of the Museum- the restoration of the Ante-Room and Catacombs and the fitting up of a Study Room where visitors can rest and learn about Soane and his achievement.

The guiding spirit behind the entire *Opening up the Soane* project is Sir John Soane himself, as we honour his wish to retain his arrangements exactly as he had them in his lifetime. Most of the building work and new interventions are in the two flanking houses, which serve as a sort of protective shell, enclosing Soane's extraordinary treasury within. When we have finished the entire project in 2015, we want visitors to feel as if nothing has changed.

TIM KNOX  
June 2012



## A History of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields

John Soane bought No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields in June 1792 for £2,100. He was thirty-eight years old and had been married to Eliza for eight years. The couple had two young sons, John and George. Two years before, in 1790, Eliza's wealthy uncle and guardian, George Wyatt, had died, leaving her a considerable fortune in money and property. No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was bought to commemorate this stroke of good fortune.

The property Soane bought in 1792 was a late seventeenth-century house, once owned by the 6th and last Lord Baltimore, proprietor of the province of Maryland, notorious libertine and occasional author. Another notable occupant was the London merchant Edmund Proudfoot, whose initials 'EP 1766' are inscribed on a lead cistern that still survives in the courtyard behind the house and in Soane's day was in the back kitchen. Not much is known of the appearance of the original house, which Soane tore down and replaced with a regular three-storey dwelling (it was raised by a storey in 1826), its façade faced with high quality Suffolk white brick, with a balcony of strigillated ironwork at first-floor level. It was additionally distinguished by an arched doorcase and windows at raised ground-floor level, and a distinctive Soanean frieze composed of bricks alternately laid to imitate triglyphs. The interior was spacious and elegant, rather than magnificent. At ground-floor level was a Dining Room and

Breakfast Room, which was also Soane's Library, while upstairs was the large Drawing Room overlooking the Fields, and Mrs Soane's Bedchamber-cum-Boudoir. Soane and the boys had bedrooms upstairs, and there was accommodation for servants in the garrets. The kitchen and other household offices were housed in the basement. At the back of the house, across a small courtyard – where the stables were in the other houses – Soane established his architectural office, a low top-lit building with a door giving on to Whetstone Park, the mews at the rear, so that his six articulated clerks or pupils could come and go without disturbing the family.

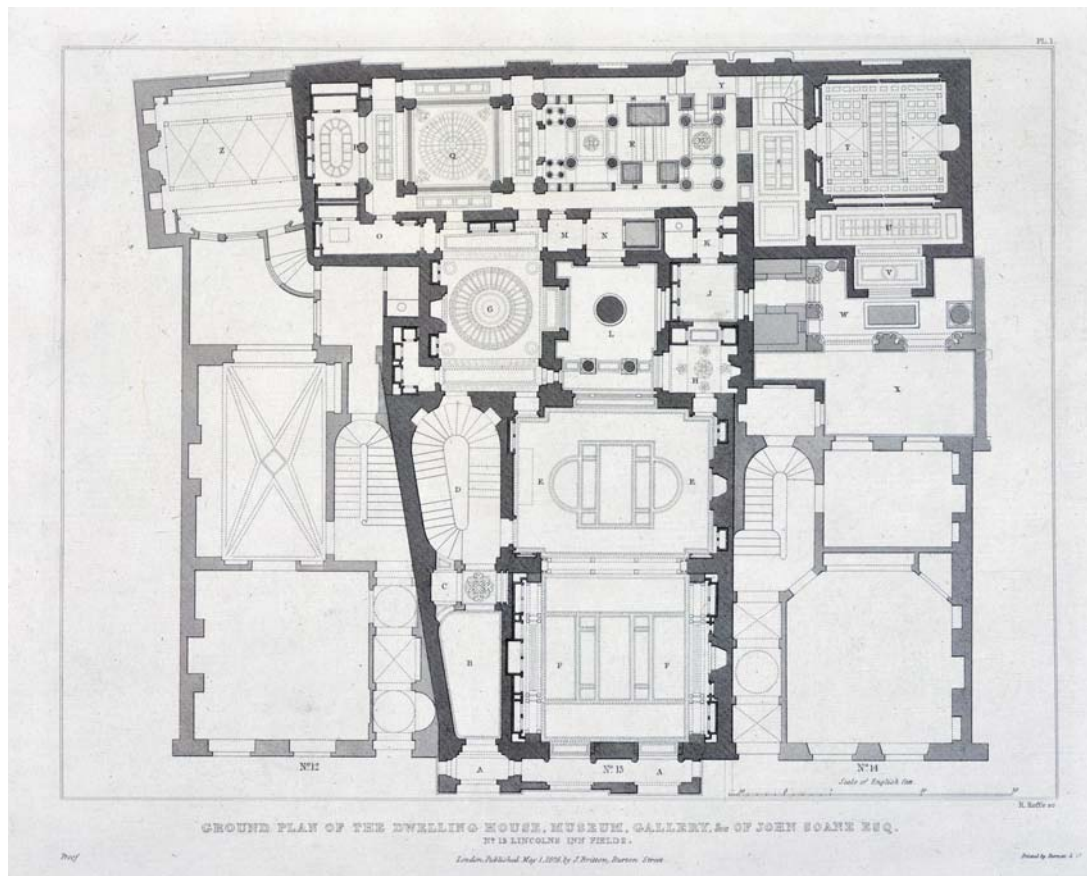
No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was ready for occupation in late 1794 and on 16 October Soane records in his diary that 'two lamps [were] lighted at this house for the first ever time'. The ground- and first-floor rooms of the new house were the most richly decorated and distinctively Soanean, although we have comparatively little information as to how they were furnished. The best idea of their appearance is in Joseph Michael Gandy's 1798 watercolour showing the Soane family in their Breakfast Room, and it is clear that Soane's *collectomania* was still in its infancy.

However, it was at No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields that he started to assemble his collection and after 1806, when he was appointed Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts, where he began to think of arranging it for the benefit of

Left: Detail of the ceiling, the Front Drawing Room, first floor, No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields.  
Photograph: Lewis Bush

The Soane family having breakfast in the Breakfast Parlour in No.12, watercolour by J M Gandy, November 1798





Ground Plan of the Dwelling House, Museum, Gallery, &c of John Soane Esq., No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, engraved plan published in J Britton, Union of Architecture, 1827 (plate 1)

his students. Indeed, by May 1807, Soane was in correspondence with his neighbour, George Booth Tyndale, enquiring whether he might purchase the stables and back garden of No.13 so as to expand the display space for his collection. This led to the acquisition of the freehold of the entire property of No.13, and the erection, on the back portion, in 1809–1810, of a double-height, top-lit tribune for the display of his architectural casts and antique marbles, most of them brought from Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing, the family's country villa, which was given up and sold in that year. Two years later, in 1812, he persuaded Mr and Mrs Tyndale to move into No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields as his tenants, and began construction of a new, much larger, house on the site – the present Museum – where he was to live until his death in 1837.

Tyndale, who was an antiquary and a hereditary Trustee of the British Museum, lived in No.12 until 1826. The house was then leased to Edward Stanley, a distinguished surgeon, who held it until well after Soane's death in 1843. During John Soane's lifetime the rear of the property – the old drawing office – had a complex history, but was eventually fitted up as a library for the use of the architect, and then, in 1819, as Soane's first Picture Room. This rear extension was the subject of a number of property exchanges between Soane and his tenants next door, and a succession of ingenious temporary passageways were devised to link No.12 with its outbuildings – the last being the curious curved link that can be seen on the 1826 plan of the Museum (*above*).

Nothing survives of it today as in 1889 the entire rear extension – which was said to be in poor condition – was taken back by the Museum, and almost completely demolished. It was rebuilt the following year as the New Picture Room and adjoining Moorish Ante-Room to the designs of the energetic Curator of the Museum, James Wild. The refurbishment of these late Victorian additions to the Museum, and the rebuilding of the curved link (which is the key to disabled access in the Museum), is planned as part of the third phase of *Opening up the Soane* and will take place in 2014–15.

Meanwhile, under the terms of Soane's private Act of Parliament of 1833, No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields had been bequeathed to the Museum – the rental income for the property supplementing the £30,000 endowment he had left for the upkeep of his Museum. In 1844 the lease of No.12 was taken by Edmund Whitaker, a solicitor, whose firm, Whitaker and Woolbert, retained it as legal chambers until 1900, when Francis Whitaker committed suicide leaving 'the affairs of the firm in great confusion'. They folded soon afterwards, and surrendered their lease, but poor Mr Whitaker's name is still to be found painted on a door on the first floor of No.12 as a sad reminder.

The house was thereafter continuously let to legal tenants until 1969, when it was taken back by the Trustees for the use of the Museum. The then Curator, Sir John Summerson, commissioned the architects William Holford and Partners to draw up proposals for its restoration and conversion: the



The door on the first floor of No.12 with the name of the solicitor, Mr Whitaker, who died in tragic circumstances in 1900.  
Photograph: Lewis Bush

house had been much subdivided into cubby holes and small offices, and was, in the words of Marcus Binney in his 1972 article in *Country Life*: 'as characteristic an office of its type as one could imagine – almost a museum piece in itself'. Holford's alterations included the conversion of the large first-floor rooms into a 'Students' Room' for the Research Library, which had, since the 1920s occupied the entire first floor of the Museum – where the famous yellow Drawing Rooms are now. The benefits of moving the Library out of the Museum

were enormous, and Summerson reused the massive mahogany bookcases and plan chests commissioned by the Curator A T Bolton in 1919. But no attempt was made to reinstate the original decorative scheme of the rooms – the walls were painted a stern Arctic white and all the woodwork was stripped – 'the quality of the wood and the precision of the joinery was such that it was decided to leave them in their naked state'.

The ground-floor front room received a charming display of architectural models, up until then mostly in store, while the painted vault of the Breakfast Room at the rear was revealed, although it had to wait until 1995 for full restoration. Summerson also had a lift shaft created in the stack of closets to the rear of the house. Never actually utilised - indeed upper floors were left empty and no rates were paid on them until the mid-1980s – this bold decision later proved to be helpful.

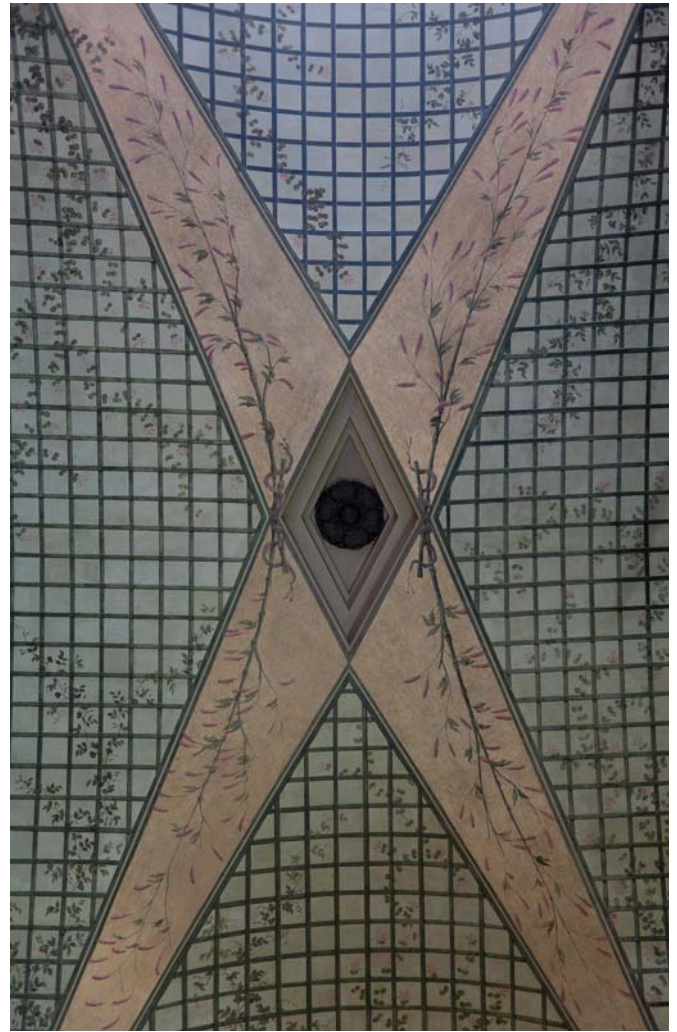
It was Peter Thornton who occupied the upper floors of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields after his appointment as Curator in 1984. The Museum's first paper conservator, Margaret Schuelein, was installed in the back room on the second floor, while the top floor was first let to the Leche Trust and later redecorated and converted into a small flat for visiting scholars – many eminent American architectural historians still recall its primitive arrangements with a mixture of amusement and horror. In 1987-88 a new display of models was created in a Model Room in the front room on the second



Left, view of the Research Library or 'Students' Room' on the first floor of No.12 as it appeared in 1972, and right, the adjoining room to the north. The new Soane Gallery is now located in these rooms with their original decorative schemes fully restored (see p.18)



Left, view of the No.12 Breakfast Room and right, detail of the painted ceiling of the Breakfast Room. Photograph: Lewis Bush



floor, while Eva Jiricna's Exhibition Gallery was installed on the ground floor in 1995. This enabled the Museum to mount temporary exhibitions of its treasures for the first time – especially from its unrivalled collection of 30,000 architectural drawings. The idea of Peter Thornton, but actually largely implemented by his successor Margaret Richardson, Eva's meticulously engineered steel and glass Gallery cases were deliberately cutting edge, and were conceived as a room within a room – inhabiting, but not masking, John Soane's No. 12 Dining Room, with its fine marble chimneypiece, plasterwork and joinery. Although it was originally intended to decorate the room in its historic livery of Pompeian red, in the end a neutral grey was chosen as the best foil for the Gallery cases. Ian Bristow was commissioned to carry out all the paint analysis on this and other rooms, and his researches – then still something of a novelty – informed the full restoration of the Breakfast Room next door, which was handsomely refurnished with replica furniture to match J M Gandy's 1798 watercolour – generously funded by Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation in America. The Staircase was also redecorated up to first-floor level, and a new Link Passage, stylishly fitted up with illuminated vitrines containing small treasures from Soane's collections, enabled

visitors to pass into No.12 from the Museum.

The later history of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was one of consolidation, and gradual colonisation. While the public areas, notably Eva Jiricna's Gallery, remained as smart as ever, hosting some 50 magnificently diverse exhibitions between



Eva Jiricna's Gallery, installed on the ground floor of No.12 in 1995

1995 and 2011, it is true to say that over the next decade the rest of the house got more and more congested. For instance, in 2005 the burgeoning size of the Soane reference library necessitated the provision of extra bookcases, spoiling the fine proportions of the room, while equipment such as filing cabinets, microfilm readers, photocopiers, and computers proliferated on every surface. We all had Soane bedroom furniture in our offices, while down in the basement the Cast Store was piled

high with mysterious packages and artefacts gathering dust. Sir John Summerson's empty lift shaft had long since had its floors partially reinstated and was now choked with pipes and services and shelved up for storage.

Still, there was something rather charming about the way the Museum made use of No. 12 – inhabiting it rather like *bandidi* bivouacking in ruins in the Roman *campagna* – and it reflected the way the Museum was changing.



Left, the north-west office on the fourth floor of No.12 and right, the head of the stair on the fourth floor

## *Planning the Restoration of the House*

The restoration and reorganisation of No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields could not have been contemplated without the acquisition of the other flanking house, No.14 Lincoln's Inn Fields. This house, built by John Soane in 1824, is a near copy of No.12, and stands to the east of the Museum. Never occupied by Soane, like No.12, it too had been let out as legal offices, but after Soane's death it had been sold by his executors to benefit the children of his eldest son, John. In 1996 the house was put up for sale and Curator Margaret Richardson was able to persuade the current vendors to take it off the market until the Museum had raised the funds to buy it – for what now seems an astonishingly reasonable £700,000 – with the help of the newly established Heritage

Lottery Fund. By 2005, the funds needed to repair and convert the house for the Museum's use had been raised by Sir John Soane's Museum Society.

The restoration of No. 14 was one of the first challenges I faced when I became Director of the Museum in 2005. It seemed to me that any plan involving the future use of No.14 had to take into account the way we used all three houses that now constituted Sir John Soane's Museum. Discussions with staff, and people who knew and loved the Museum, were vital at this point, as were the thoughts of clear-thinking individuals who looked afresh at the challenges it presented. Underpinning everything was Soane's injunction, as set out in his Will and 1833 Act of Parliament, that his Museum – the

middle house – should be kept ‘as nearly as possible in the state in which Sir John Soane shall leave it’.

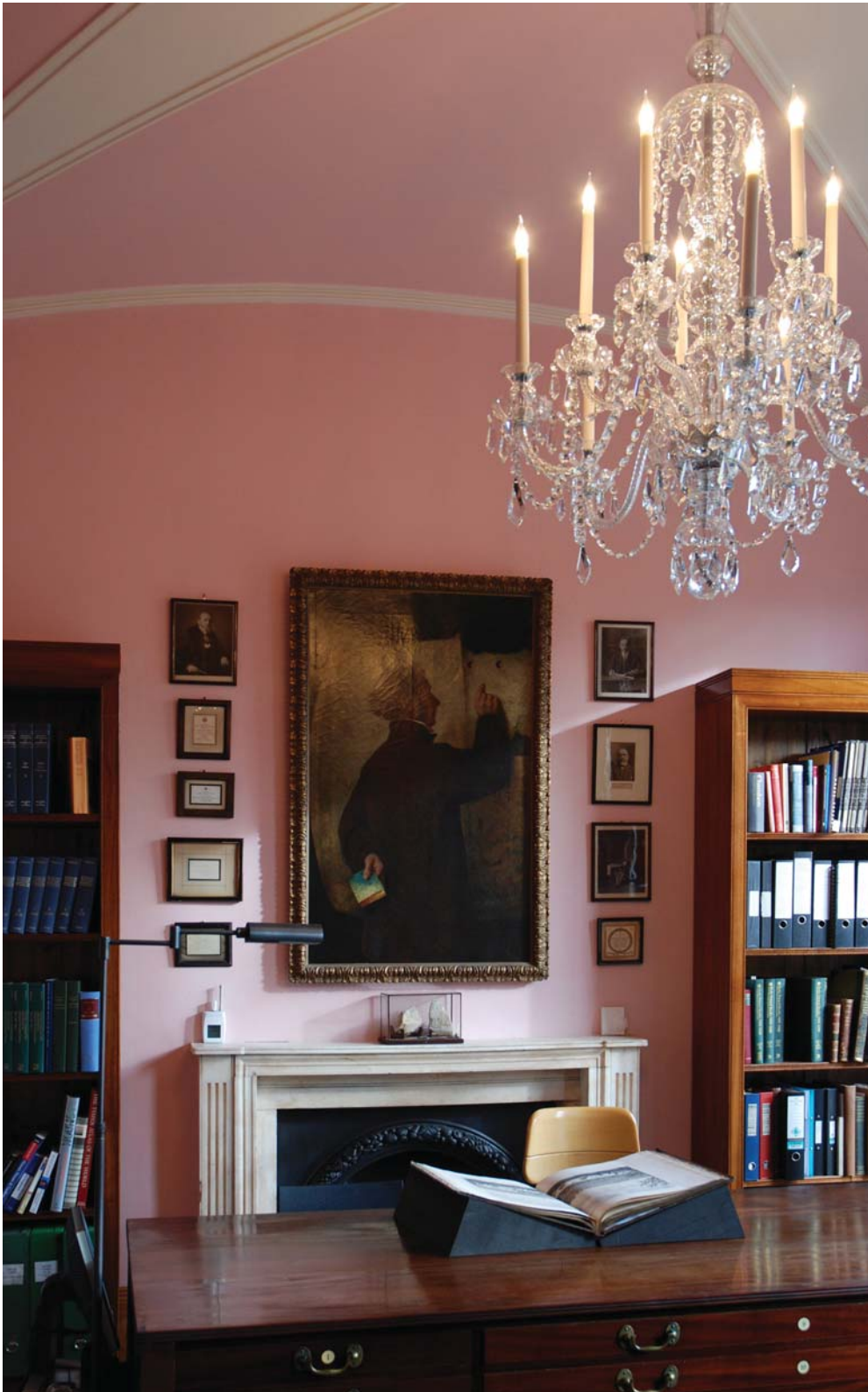
We finally decided that No. 14 would be best used to provide improved facilities for educational purposes (the basement and ground floors), for housing the Research Library (on the first floor) and the Adam Study Centre (a dedicated space for the 9,000 Adam drawings within Soane’s collection on the second floor) and for our offices (on the third and fourth floors). This would enable us to free up space in No.12 for improved visitor facilities, including a cloakroom, Shop and lift, a new Gallery for temporary exhibitions and Conservation Studios. The underlying principle was to move all the modern facilities out of the Museum into the flanking houses, and to improve circulation within No.13 to prevent wear and tear. This final plan, or ‘*Opening up the Soane*’ as it became known, took several years of planning and included a series of feasibility studies – initially funded by the Fidelity UK Foundation – which looked at disabled access, the commercial activities of the Museum, security and fire, and the advisability of moving the Library, Gallery and all the services. It wasn’t until February 2011 that we were actually able to embark on building work for the first phase of *Opening up the Soane*.

Meanwhile, we had also been hard at work raising funds for this ambitious undertaking – £7 million – more than

the Museum had ever attempted to raise before. Our most generous benefactor, the Monument Trust, offered £2 million towards the project, followed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which gave a grant of just under £1 million. The project received no direct Government grant whatsoever, but the funds were raised remarkably quickly, despite the extremely challenging economic situation. The balance was made up from gifts by generous benefactors, both grant-making trusts and private individuals, notably the Fidelity, Foyle and Wolfson Foundations, and the J P Getty, City Bridge and Leche Trusts. Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation in America responded particularly handsomely, notably Mr John and Mrs Cynthia Fry Gunn who supported the Conservation Studios, and a private benefactor who made the key gift for the Gallery. Many individual members of the Soane Patrons’ Circle also pledged support for the project over a number of years, which was a great boost to our fundraising efforts. Julian Harrap Architects, who have faithfully served the Museum as house architects for twenty-five years, were appointed as architects and we were fortunate to be working with a tried and tested team who know the Museum well, with a tried and tested team who know the Museum well, Julian Harrap, Caroline Wilson and Lyall Thow. Adam Caruso and Bernd Schmutz from Caruso St John were commissioned to design the Shop, Gallery and Study Room furniture and

*The Adam Study Centre in No.14*





*The Research Library in No.14*

Rupert Symmons and Trudie Dawson of Fanshawe LLP were secured as our Project Managers. Kevin Newland from D R Nolans & Co. undertook the role of Quantity Surveyor for the project, and this was all overseen by our very capable House & Visitor Services Manager, Colin Wood. We also tested out our ideas in a series of workshops with Trustees, staff and key users, including disabled visitors, younger people, and

curators from other Museums and historic houses.

Clearing No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields for the works was quite a challenge. Although the Library and offices had been successfully transferred to their new locations, the old Gallery, Warders' Mess and Conservation Studios all had to be dismantled and found temporary accommodation. There were also storerooms that needed to be cleared, a process that



*Fragment from the lost 'Charity' window serendipitously rediscovered in early 2011 when a storeroom in No.12 was being cleared in preparation for building work to start.*

*Photograph: John Bridges*

led to huge improvements in the documentation and storage of our collection, and the rediscovery of several long-lost artefacts – including the mahogany lid of Soane's Bath and a sizeable fragment from the destroyed *Charity* window. Both will be incorporated into features which are being restored in later phases of *Opening up the Soane*.

Studies had to be made to ensure that all the services crammed into the Summerson lift shaft could be relocated or condensed, and there were concerns about the safety of the Staircase and floor loading in parts of the building. While we couldn't re-use Eva Jiricna's Gallery cases we were especially keen to find a good home for these design classics that had served us well for over 15 years. We were therefore delighted to accept an offer for them from the Trustees of the Chatsworth House Trust, who have refurbished and re-erected the cases to house displays from the family archive at Chatsworth. Another challenge was the lift, or rather lifts – for there are two – persuading manufacturers to make one bespoke lift which had to rise four floors and open three ways in an extremely sensitive historic environment, and another, a platform lift, which not only had to bring visitors down to basement level, but had to look in repose like a simple slab of York stone.

The restoration of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields began in February 2011, and almost the first task for our contractors, Fairhurst Ward Abbots, under the management of Site Agent Peter Griffiths and Contract Manager Dave Brown, was to raise a huge scaffold in front and to the rear of the building, which incorporated a contractors' site office. Skylights, lanterns and fragile architectural features were protected, and inside, important historic features like chimneypieces, balustrades and joinery were also well wrapped up. Getting the site ready and removing later accretions took weeks to complete – anything of historical or architectural interest being carefully labelled and retained for our building archive.

Outside, we devised a striking collage of giant photographs of classical marbles and casts from our collection to decorate the hoardings, while within the pedestrian 'corridor' under the scaffold we created a fictive picture gallery of reproductions of Soane's finest paintings, supplemented with information about the project.



*Scaffolding erected at the front of No.12. Photograph: John Bridges*

## *Restoring the Historic Interiors*

The restoration of the interior of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, especially the fine Soane rooms on the ground and first floors, was the particular responsibility of our Project Architect, Lyall Thow of Julian Harrap Architects, who worked closely with the Museum – making particular use of the exhaustive historical and archival reports compiled on every room by the Deputy Director, Helen Dorey. Lyall's love of Soane's work, and his admirable attention to detail – amply demonstrated in his restoration of No.14 and other parts of the Museum over the last few years – has made him an essential partner in our work of restoration.

The challenge in restoring the historic interiors at No.12 was somewhat similar to the one we faced at No.14 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Although Messrs Holford's 1969 restoration had removed the worst of the subdivision and mutilation caused by years of office use, they had taken a robust, and not always wholly sympathetic, approach to the building – in order, it is said, to comply with stringent GLC building regulations. But it was thanks to their work that the Museum did not have to carry out major structural repairs, as we had in No.14. As a rule, the joinery survived in good, if somewhat battered and skinned, condition and needed only careful repair and repainting. Indeed, the beautiful folding shutters, with metal security bars and braces, survived in all the rooms, except the Breakfast Room, where we had a new set made. Wherever possible the original ironmongery was retained. Doors were also carefully overhauled, and the original locks and door furniture retained or replaced with specially-made replicas. More problematic were the floors in the front and rear Gallery on the first floor, which had been replaced by Holford with narrow strips of pine in their 1969 restoration. These had been much damaged by the adhesive from the linoleum which once covered them, so we took the decision to replace

them with salvaged nineteenth-century pine boards of a more appropriate width.

Four marble chimneypieces of exceptional quality survived in the principal rooms on the ground and first floor – each one different and demonstrating Soane's grace and ingenuity as a designer. Three were in reasonable condition and needed only gentle cleaning and consolidation. However, the chimneypiece in the first-floor Drawing Room – the front Gallery – had suffered from subsidence, and its marble jambs and shelf were badly out of kilter. Taylor Pearce Restoration dismantled the chimneypiece and reset it. A pair of carved wooden chimneypieces on the second floor were carefully stripped of layers of overpaint, and their marble slips revealed. All the (mostly late Victorian replacement) grates in the house were cleaned and consolidated, and, where they survived, the hearthstones were repaired. Missing hearths received new marble slabs, 'knocked back' with fires and soot so they didn't look too new and glossy.

The guiding principal in our restoration of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was to put the house back to its Soanean incarnation. Although none of the original furniture had survived, we could at least get the surfaces of the house right as a foil to the building's new role as part of the Museum. Dr Ian Bristow's investigations, carried out in the mid-1990s, indicated that the decorative features in No.12 were of outstanding interest and significance and his reports successfully informed the decoration of the Breakfast Room and Staircase in 1995. Unfortunately he hadn't been given the opportunity to research the original decorations in the first-floor rooms – what were once Soane's Drawing Room and Mrs Soane's Bedchamber. Dr Bristow having now retired from business, we employed Helen Hughes, formerly of English Heritage and now an independent consultant, to take samples from these rooms. Her reports formed the basis for the decisions taken there. Analysis was also carried out on rooms in the basement and on the upper floors – originally the Kitchen and household offices, and bedrooms – although the approach to decoration we eventually took here was more practical than historical.

Perhaps the most dramatic of Helen Hughes' discoveries was in the first-floor Drawing Room, overlooking the Fields. The principal reception room of Mr and Mrs Soane, we expected the decorative scheme to be impressive, although the stripping of all the joinery and the very thorough restoration by Messrs Holford in 1969 left only partial surviving evidence. Helen Hughes demonstrated that this had originally been a Pompeian red room, with doors and joinery painted and glazed with a grey striated effect imitating harewood – a popular cabinetmaking wood in the Regency era. There was also evidence of at least four further schemes, including some startling combinations of bright yellow and porphyry,



*First-floor chimneypiece. Photograph: Lewis Bush*

which may have been only experimental and incomplete, culminating, probably in Soane's last years in No. 12, with a brimstone-yellow scheme identical to that carried out in the first-floor Drawing Rooms in No.13 Lincolns Inn Fields. We took the decision to reinstate the red scheme, as not only was it the best preserved, but it also fitted chronologically with the retention of early schemes downstairs in the Dining Room and Breakfast Parlour. It was also interesting to show the taste in decoration of the young John Soane at the time he built his first house, in contrast to the effects he employed in the Museum next door right up until the end of his life. Putting back the red and harewood grained scheme in the front Gallery necessitated reinstating a lost dado moulding around the room. Scars on the plasterwork showed where it had been, but it had been removed – probably by Soane in about 1810 to accommodate his short-lived yellow scheme. A new moulding based on the surviving, contemporary, dado in the downstairs Dining Room was therefore made and installed. Another unusual feature of the former Drawing Room was that the walls between the windows and doors were not plastered, but finely flush panelled in wood – possibly so that Soane could fix pier glasses to them. When they were disinterred from beneath layers of paper, they were found to be badly warped and split, and were carefully repaired by Fairhurst Ward Abbotts' specialist joiners.

The domed canopy ceiling of the Drawing Room was also of great interest, although it had been much injured by later alterations. This was shown still to preserve extensive areas of a dark blueish paint, suggesting that tantalising archival reports of a 'sky' ceiling here had indeed been realised. We took the decision to dry strip the ceiling entirely, in an effort to reveal the character of the fictive sky – with only partial

success, so extensive was the darkening and damage. More responsive was the central boss of a Medusa head emerging from a foliate patera, which was shown to be picked out with fawn, dark red and gold, a livery that has been reinstated (see p. 2). More puzzling was the purpose of the three rectangular 'frames' on the walls, which were always painted white. The room was redecorated by specialist painters from Hare and Humphreys Ltd, especial trouble being taken with the glazes needed to build up the red colour for the walls. Wherever possible, the original paintwork on the ceiling has been retained, combined with new touching-in to achieve a convincing sky ceiling.

Next door, now the rear Gallery but once Eliza Soane's Bedroom, was revealed to be a very different room, lined out with pale pinkish-coloured paper, edged with a striped border in coral and black. Some of the border survived in good condition, enabling an exact replica to be made. Fragments of later papers found here, including a boarded pine-effect paper, and a busy pattern of green ferns, were dated to the mid-nineteenth century. Outside, on the walls and cornice of the Staircase, the grey speckled effect that had been partially reinstated in 1995 – supposedly painted this way to imitate sooty plaster, but possibly grey Swedish porphyry – had suffered damage and had also discoloured to an irreversible greenish hue. Therefore the decision was made entirely to redecorate the Staircase and Hall. Traces of relieving bands of a yellowish paint effect on the Staircase walls, interpreted as satinwood graining in 1995, were painted to resemble fictive Sienna marble – more appropriate surely in this stony compartment?

Downstairs, nothing was done to the celebrated No.12 Breakfast Room, apart from cleaning and making good any damage to the paintwork. The front room or former Gallery



*Work being carried out by by specialist painters from Hare and Humphreys Ltd to carefully recreate the Pompeian red and harewood decorative scheme in the first-floor Drawing Room – now the Exhibition Gallery – which has been restored to its original 1792 appearance based on research carried out by historic paint consultant, Helen Hughes. Photograph: John Bridges*



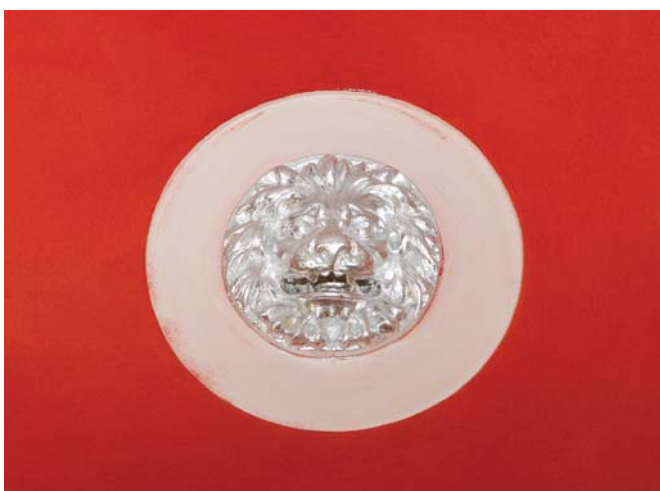
*Detail of first-floor decorative scheme. Photograph: Lewis Bush*



*Exploratory work being carried out to the central boss on the ceiling of the first floor of No.12. Photograph: Ralph Hodgson*

needed much more attention. Painted a pale grey in 1995, Dr Bristow had shown it to be a Pompeian red room, with bronzed lion masks and a white ceiling. The doors and joinery were grained to resemble satinwood, except the shutters

which were painted off white. All this has been reinstated by Hare and Humphreys, to serve as the backdrop for the room's new incarnation as the Museum Shop.



*Bronzed lion mask on the ground floor of No.12. Photographs: Lewis Bush*

## Staircase

Possibly the greatest challenge the Museum faced in No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was that its spectacular stone 'geometric' staircase was visibly failing. The tramp of legal clerks over the years had seriously eroded the treads, which had been crudely repaired, weakening the structural integrity of each step. Clearly some sort of crisis had occurred in the nineteenth century, as the ground-floor landing at the top of the lower flight of the Staircase leading down to the Basement was shored up with a plaster wall and metal props and bracing from below. This not only spoilt the appearance of the Staircase, but made the foot of the stairs dark and oppressive. Structural advice was sought from engineer Jeff Stott from Mann Williams, who surveyed the Staircase and recommended the individual replacement of some of the more dangerous steps and landings, allowing the removal of the supporting wall and most of the metal bracing. The works were carried out between August 2011 and January 2012 by Paye Stone. During this time, forty-three steps leading from the ground to the first floor were retreaded and nine steps

*The main staircase in No.12 awaiting the insetting of new Portland stone slabs. These were needed to replace the original, but severely worn treads before the staircase could be safe for visitors' use. Photograph: John Bridges*



*Soane's restored glass lantern overlooking the No.12 staircase. Photograph: Lewis Bush*



were replaced altogether. The half landing on the first to second floor was also repaired – the entire area being carefully supported with props to allow each failing slab to be gingerly slid out and quickly replaced with a new one.

Without careful propping the entire Staircase could have collapsed, as each step is supported on the one below it. Much of the final cutting of the stone had to be done on site, causing a great deal of noise and dust – from which the Museum is now only just recovering! To do this work, the elegant strigillated ironwork of the balustrade needed to be temporarily removed, and a new – much simpler section, as befitted a service stair – has had to be made for the basement flight as the original did not survive here. The solid mahogany

bannister, a remarkable feat of woodturning, was removed by Arlington Conservation and repaired and repolished, before being reinstated. Finally, the Staircase was topped with a wood and glass lantern, an exact replica of the lost original. The restoration of the Staircase in No.12 was one of the more nerve-racking aspects of the project, but now it is complete, it is revealed as one of its more unexpected triumphs. Nearby, out of sight on the roof of No.13 is another triumph – a battery of solar panels installed in February 2012. Fortunately, these were installed just before the abolition of the Government Feed-In Tariff and the panels have been successfully feeding electricity into our system ever since.

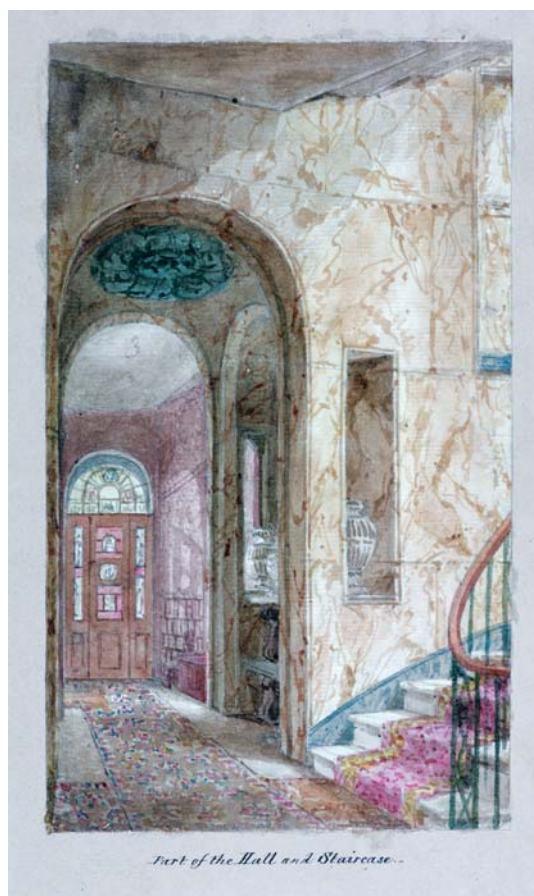
## *Shop and Visitor Facilities*

Improving the way we welcome visitors to the Soane Museum was perhaps the most urgent reason why the Museum embarked upon the *Opening up the Soane* project. Visitors to the Museum have burgeoned in the last few years: in 2005 we received 87,165 visitors, in 2010 107,447, and in 2011 109,604 – and these numbers are unlikely to decrease. Under the old arrangements, all visitors entered and left the Museum via Soane's front door in No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, and deposited their bags, coats and umbrellas in the Front Hall, where signing in, security, deliveries and sales of guidebooks also took place, a situation that was becoming increasingly difficult to manage. There is no back door to the Museum, and the congestion caused by people entering and leaving, especially on busy or wet days, was considerable. The new entry arrangements in No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields remove much of this confusion and clutter, allowing us to return the front of the Museum to something Sir John himself might recognise, as in the watercolour of the Hall and Staircase (*right*). But if coats and bags will now be left in the Hall of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, we still wanted to ensure that all visitors experienced Soane's extraordinary Museum the way he intended – entering the Museum by its front door, exactly as if they were visiting the house and collection of a Regency architect and collector.

The other change we have introduced is the circular route. Visitors drop off their coats and bags in No.12, enter No.13 and then explore the Museum much as they have always done. But now you leave the Museum by crossing into No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields at first-floor level – or second-floor after we open Soane's private apartments in 2014 – where you encounter the new exhibition Gallery, the No.12 Breakfast Room and the Shop, before making your exit via the front door of No.12, collecting your coat and bags as you leave. Not only does this reduce the wear and tear in the Front Hall of the Museum, but it also reduces crowding on the Staircase – which was causing havoc with the fragile painted marbling. The new

route also enables visitors to see much more than previously of Soane's first house in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

But for us one of the most attractive aspects of the changes is that visitors now leave via our Shop, strategically placed near the exit, and near their coats and bags. The Soane Museum is free, but we rely increasingly on sales from our shop, which has hitherto been located in a succession of less than ideal locations at the back of the Museum. The new shop,



*Watercolour by C J Richardson of the Hall and Staircase at No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields as it appeared in 1825*

installed in the former Dining Room of No.12, has been designed by Caruso St John in close consultation with retail consultant Jane le Bon and Enterprises Manager Julie Brock, and is a sleek but unmistakably modern homage to its Soanean setting. The handsome shop-fittings, made by Goppion SpA, provide a practical and flexible retail space, yet allow this exceptionally interesting room to be admired and appreciated. Along the east wall of the shop lies the cloakroom – designed as a piece of freestanding furniture, not rising the full height of the room, its depth exactly mirrors the strange division of Soane plasterwork on this side of the room.

The other advantage of relocating the shop near the entrance and exit is to allow passers-by to visit and make purchases without entering the Museum. Over the past few years the Museum has transformed the range and quality of the merchandise it sells in its shop and online via our website ([www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org)). The launch of the new Soane Shop will put the Museum on the map as the place to buy stylish and imaginative gifts, many of them inspired by Soane's own work, or treasures from his collections. These range from a new range of affordable souvenirs developed by designer Kit Grover, handmade glassware by Charlotte Sale, and a perfectly-detailed replica of Soane's beautiful model of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli. More recently the Museum has also



*Examples of new merchandise currently being developed for sale in the new Soane Shop. The shop will open in July 2012. Photographs: John Bridges*

*The ground-floor shop in No.12 in course of installation. Photograph: Lewis Bush*



been working in collaboration with the talented and aspiring young jewellery designers from the Royal College of Art – current masters students and recent alumni – to create an exclusive range of ‘Inspired by Soane’ jewellery. Soane has long inspired leading designers, architects, artists and others throughout the world and by developing our business and commercial initiatives we are now licensing existing Soane pieces for sale, such as Soane’s designs for fireplaces with fireplace manufacturer ‘Chesney’s’ and commissioning others to produce exclusive new and exciting designs especially for the Museum.

No less essential than the Shop has been the provision of new public lavatories in the basement, as well as additional

lockers for bags. Created in what was previously the Museum’s Cast Store, the three new lavatories include facilities for the disabled. Two late Victorian mahogany lavatory seats were reused, salvaged from the 1890s lavatories off the No.13 Staircase, which were removed to make way for the Tivoli Recess. We also rescued the amazing metal door dating back to when the basement Cast Store was a legal safe and adapted it to serve as the door to our Boiler Room. Nearby is the new Warders’ Mess in the old Kitchen of the house, which has been thoroughly refurbished and refurnished. Although it is not seen by the general public, a well-equipped and cheerful workplace for our front-of-house staff is as important as the new facilities for the public.



*Left, lavatory with Victorian mahogany seat salvaged from the 1890s lavatory off the No. 13 staircase. Photograph: Lewis Bush*

*Right, legal safe door adapted to serve as a door to the Boiler Room! Photograph: Lewis Bush*

## Gallery

Following on from Eva Jiricna's 1995 Soane Gallery was always going to be difficult, but our architect-designers, Adam Caruso and Bernd Schmutz from Caruso St John, rose to the challenge by creating a very different exhibitions space, which could hold its own in the much more spacious setting of the first-floor rooms in No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields. The two rooms – a former Drawing Room and Bedchamber once used by Mrs Soane – are important Soane interiors, especially the front room with its curved walls and canopy-domed ceiling. As we have seen, both have good chimneypieces and joinery, and it was important that the new display cases did not eclipse the architecture of the rooms. The Museum took the decision not to install climate control in the Gallery – none of the Museum is air-conditioned and indeed we pride ourselves on keeping Soane's collections in normal atmospheric conditions, like a country house rather than a gallery. Therefore, the cases themselves needed to be climate controlled, as well as accommodate the stringent lighting and security conditions that are now needed to obtain loans from other museums. We wanted the Gallery to fit in with the rest of the Museum, yet not be a pastiche of Soane's work.

Caruso St John's thoughtful and refined response took

Soane's fitted furniture in the Museum as its inspiration, filtered through Schinkel and the pared-down classicism of twentieth-century architects, with an innovative exploitation of new materials and technology. In all six large wall cases – one of them a mighty fourteen by nine foot – had to be supplied for the two rooms, with three pier cases and four table vitrines, two of which can be converted into tables, as well as seating, a small table for the invigilating Warder, and an education trolley. In the front gallery, the large wall cases are curved to follow and emphasise the curvature of the walls. Flexibility was important, as was circulation – for ease of looking at exhibits, for teaching sessions and workshops, and also disabled access.

One of the problems we encountered when sourcing traditional Soanean materials for making the cases – mahogany, mirror and glass – was that we were unable to source environmentally certified mahogany of the right quality to provide the fine book-matched veneers on the fronts and sides of the cases. Instead, we used Italian walnut, stained to match the reddish mahogany and which gives a very satisfactory result. Achieving the right degree of polish on the wooden elements was much debated and was achieved



*Caruso St John's perspective design for the new Exhibition Gallery, looking west*



*Exhibition display cases designed by Caruso St John and made by Goppion S.p.A.  
Photographs: Lewis Bush*



*View of the new exhibition space on the first floor of No. 12 in course of installation.  
Photograph: Caruso St John Architects*



with layers of a natural varnish called *gommelacca*, which provided a tough and attractive finish, but one that will improve with age and can be easily repaired in-house.

Although the cases make use of traditional Soanean materials they are in fact grafted on to high-specification engineering which has to satisfy the very high demands of security, lighting and environmental control. Since most of the exhibits will be works on paper, which require low lighting levels of 50 lux or below, it was essential that the cases provide a flexible and easily adjustable lighting system. For example, the use of LED lighting isolated behind frosted glass panels and the provision of extra ventilation will ensure that the insides of the cases do not overheat. Additional lighting will be provided by dimmable uplighters above the cases, as well as a lighting track which runs around the room at a higher level. None of the windows in the Gallery rooms are blocked, but the light they admit can be controlled by UV film on the glass, a series of special blinds of varying density, and, when utter darkness is needed, the original Soane shutters.

The installation of the Gallery took weeks, a crack team of technicians from Goppion SpA coming over from Milan especially to install it. Most of it arrived in kit form, but some of the larger elements, notably the huge panels of curved glass required for the wall cases for the front Gallery, posed quite a challenge to get into the building. Masterminding the entire project for Goppion SpA was the cool, efficient and bilingual



*An exhibition case is carefully lifted by crane into the first floor of No.12. Photograph: John Bridges*

Oscar Gerolin, who worked closely with the Museum, especially the exhibitions Curator, Jerzy Kierkuć-Bieliński. Caroline Wilson and Lyall Thow of Julian Harrap Architects who restored the historic setting of the Gallery liaised with Bernd Schmutz of Caruso St John, and were fully involved in its design and installation.

## *Conservation Studios*

The second floor of No.12 houses the new John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Conservation Centre, in two Soane-era bedrooms that had been previously used for Conservation and a display of architectural models. At present the Soane Museum employs only one full-time and one part-time conservator and a part-time consultant paper conservator, but it is clear that the importance of conserving and caring for the Museum and its collections will increase in future. The preventive conservation – or housekeeping – of the Museum has transformed over the last few years with the introduction of training in conservation cleaning based on a National Trust model and with the introduction of environmental monitoring and pest-management throughout all three houses. Indeed, one of the part-time Conservation posts at the Soane was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of *Opening up the Soane*, and Lucy Sims has now been caring for and monitoring the Museum during the building works for over a year, making regular checks on the building site. Paper conservation is also important at the Soane Museum – there are 30,000 architectural drawings in Sir John's collection – and over the years we have developed something of a specialism in the cleaning and repair of historic plaster casts.

The restoration of books, pictures, furniture, clocks and larger items of sculpture are generally entrusted to outside specialists, although many of the frames restored for the *Opening up the Soane* project are being treated *in situ*.



*Benefactors of the Conservation Centre, John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn*



*Nineteenth-century gilt frame undergoing restoration. Photograph: Lewis Bush*

*The newly installed John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Conservation Centre complete with specialised conservation furniture. Photograph: Lewis Bush*



Conservation now plays an increasingly visible role at the Soane and what is more our visitors are fascinated by it. This wide appeal recommended the project to our US supporters, Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, who have, with characteristic energy and generosity, raised all the funds required for the Studios. A particularly generous gift from Mr John and Mrs Cynthia Fry Gunn has led to the rooms being named in their honour.

The old Conservation Room – the back room on the second floor of No.12 – was spacious and had good light, but was poorly equipped and, until very recently, was also the staff kitchen, where the staff made tea and coffee – in somewhat alarming proximity to the works on paper being

conserved! For the new John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Conservation Centre, two rooms have been specially fitted up with state-of-the-art Conservation furniture, supplied by Maggie Design Ltd in consultation with senior Conservator Jane Wilkinson. This will allow the paper conservation to be kept separate from work on artefacts, but the front room will also be used for teaching sessions and workshops, and for regular open days for members of the public to see work in progress. After 2014, when the private apartments are restored and opened to the public, visitors will pass from the Museum into No.12 through a breakthrough and lobby created just outside this impressive and practical new facility.

## Lift

A surprisingly challenging element of the restoration of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields was the installation of two lifts to improve access for wheelchair users and other disabled visitors. Access has never been good in the Museum, with its narrow corridors and many stairs, and even improved accessibility seemed an impossible goal. However, there was the disused lift shaft created by Sir John Summerson in 1969 at the back of No.12. If we could remove all the services, pipes and storerooms that

had colonised it over the last forty odd years, couldn't it perhaps be used for its intended purpose? We were encouraged to pursue this idea by our architect, Julian Harrap, and the Access Consultant David Bonnet – himself disabled – gave us sensible advice on what we could and could not do, producing a useful report on access throughout the Museum at the early stages of our deliberations.

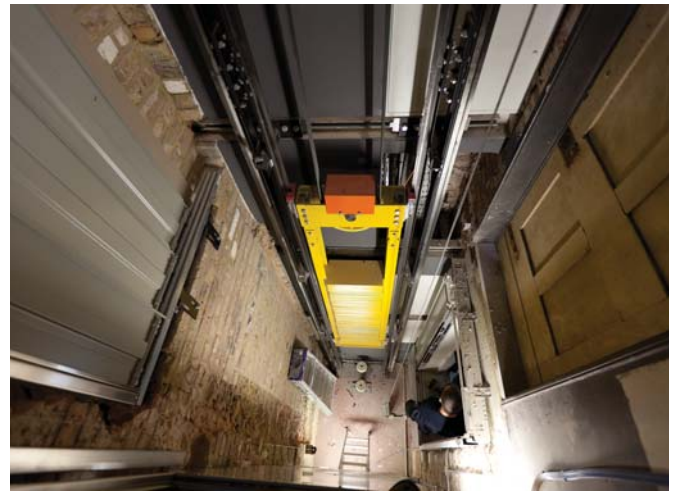
Installing a lift in such a narrow shaft which could open



*Entrance to the new lift installed at the back of No.12 at ground-floor level, cunningly disguised behind a bookshelf door. Photographs: Lewis Bush*

three ways on four floors was a challenge, but even more challenging was how disabled visitors would access the building in the first place. The answer lay in the front area or light well of No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, which is unusually large and generous. The installation of a simple platform lift here, making minimal changes to the forecourt railings and pavings, made access to the basement, and then into all three houses that now constitute the Museum, a possibility. Once a possible solution was found, we needed to get permission from English Heritage and the local authority to alter a Grade I listed building. We also tested the practicality of our plans on an invited group of people who might make use of the facilities – not just wheelchair users, but other disabled people including those who were blind and partially sighted, as well as Deaf and older people. It was also important to manage expectations – the Museum will never be 100% accessible, and even with the lifts, wheelchair users need to transfer to narrow gauge 'sky chairs' to get around the labyrinth that is the Museum. Use of the lifts will be in the company of a trained staff member or volunteer, and stringent fire regulations limit the number of disabled people able to access the upper floors of the Museum at any one time. Nevertheless, the installation of the two lifts – the external platform lift

made and installed by Elite Elevators and the internal lift by Axis Elevators Ltd – as well as the new access Lobby and accessible lavatory in the basement, is a major breakthrough and hopefully a model and inspiration to other sensitive historic buildings contemplating improving accessibility.



The lift shaft, first created in 1969 by Curator John Summerson. The groundbreaking design for the lift enables it to open three ways on four floors. Photograph: Lewis Bush

## Looking Ahead

As the first phase of *Opening up the Soane* draws to a close, the Museum will continue to work closely with Julian Harrap Architects, project managers Fanshawe LLP and quantity surveyors D R Nolans & Co. in order to realise the second phase of this major restoration project, which will begin in early 2013.

The principal element of the second phase of *Opening up the Soane* will be to re-create Sir John Soane's private apartments on the second floor of No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields – his Bedchamber, Bathroom, Oratory, Book Passage, Model Room and Eliza Soane's Morning Room. Once the restoration of these second-floor historic interiors is under way, there will, no doubt, be further delights and surprises to share. Design work for the third phase of *Opening up the Soane* (chiefly the creation of the new 'Foyle Study Room' in what is currently the New Picture Room; the restoration of Soane's Ante-Room; Catacombs and the curved link passage behind No.12 that will complete disability access) will start once the second phase has begun, with the aim of completing all outstanding works by early 2015.

The realisation of this project has been made possible with the help of an impressive number of individuals who have worked and will continue to work on all aspects of this project. There are many hundreds of individuals and organisations that have demonstrated their faith in our plans by generously supporting our appeal.

Thank you.



View of the Monument Court at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields under construction, 1812. Even in Soane's lifetime, the architect's house was undergoing constant re-building and structural changes

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The first phase of *Opening up the Soane* could only have been achieved with the help of the following exceptionally generous benefactors:

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