

# SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NO.23  
WINTER 2009/10



## Letter from the Director

2010 is going to be a rather exciting year for Sir John Soane's Museum. The most important news of all will come in March, when we will learn if our application for a grant of just under £1 million for the *Opening up the Soane Project* to the London Committee of the Heritage Lottery Fund has been successful. We already have a Round 1 Pass for this grant, but the March decision (or Round 2) will confirm – or deny – it. If we are successful this will be a welcome boost to our fundraising efforts for *Opening up the Soane* (OUTS), currently standing at £4 million raised towards a total of £6.3 million. The influential Heritage Lottery Fund decision will also hopefully unlock grants from other trusts and foundations, helping us to reach our target in time for the planned commencement of the OUTS project in November 2010.

Although many of the major pledges towards OUTS will come from charitable trusts, individuals can also play an important role by making a donation, however large or small. Indeed, 2010 will see the launch of a concerted appeal to our many visitors and supporters, who will want to contribute towards the revival and long-term preservation of their favourite museum. Fundraising events planned for 2010 include the 'Soane Banquet', a lavish and stylish dinner on a Baroque theme, which will be held in the autumn at the Banqueting House in Whitehall (this architectural masterpiece by Inigo Jones was thoroughly restored by Sir John between 1829 and 1832).

More immediately exciting perhaps, is our new storage facility for artefacts in the West Chamber in the basement of the Museum, which is being unveiled this month. Funded by a generous American donor and the Pilgrim Trust, this is a conversion of a late nineteenth-century addition to the Museum as the Museum's first properly equipped storeroom

for works of art. Although it won't be accessible to the general public – except by appointment – all visitors will be able to enjoy the 'triumphal arch' of architectural fragments that has been recreated at the west end of the Sepulchral Chamber, putting it back to exactly how it was in Soane's lifetime. More about the West Chamber in a forthcoming *Newsletter*.

Then on 19 February 2010 our next exhibition, *Mrs Delany and her Circle* will open, which will see an extraordinarily beautiful and thought-provoking assembly of collages, drawings, embroideries, and other items by, or relating to, the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish bluestocking and amateur, Mary Delany. The exhibition, which is curated by Alicia Weisberg Roberts and Mark Laird, is the result of a collaboration between the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, USA and the Soane Museum. We are grateful to the Yale Center for the opportunity to bring this unique show back to Britain, and to the many lenders for parting with their treasures for an extra three months, providing an opportunity for British and Irish audiences to admire Mrs Delany's virtuoso botanical collages, her charming sketches and letters, and – for the first time ever – the surviving parts of her astonishing court dress, stiff with embroidered silk plants strewn over a black silk ground.

To coincide with the show, we plan to stock the New Court at the Museum with authentic Regency greenery, while artist Jane Wildgoose will transform Soane's Breakfast Parlour in No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields with shells, spars, porcupine fish and other curiosities, creating an evocation of the cabinet of Mrs Delany's great friend and confidante, the famous collector Duchess of Portland. The exhibition will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue, and a

*Tim Knox with two mummified cats from Soane's collection: an example of the many fascinating objects and works of art that will eventually go back on display as a result of the Opening up the Soane project*



*Front cover image: Joseph Michael Gandy The Ante-Room, 1826, watercolour (see Helen Dorey's piece: Discoveries during 'Opening up Works' in the Summer of 2009, p.8)*

programme of lectures and related educational events for all ages. Jerzy Kierkuc-Bielinski writes more on *Mrs Delany and her Circle* in this edition of the *Newsletter*.

More is to come, for, on 16–17 April 2010, a related conference, *Curious Specimens: Enlightenment Objects, Collections, Narratives*, will explore the culture of collecting in the Age of Enlightenment. Hosted by the Yale Center for British Art, the Lewis Walpole Library, Birkbeck, University of London, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Curious Specimens...* is programmed to coincide with the exhibitions *Mrs Delany's Circle* at the Soane, and *Walpole and Strawberry Hill* at the Victoria and Albert Museum. For more information about

the *Curious Specimens* conference see: [www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/fileadmin/.../events/.../Curious\\_Specimens.doc](http://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/fileadmin/.../events/.../Curious_Specimens.doc). Registration is available online at [www.vam.ac.uk/tickets](http://www.vam.ac.uk/tickets), or by telephone, at 020 7942 2211. Space is limited and pre-registration is required.

As always our Development team, Mike Nicholson and Claudia Celder, will be keeping Soane Supporters up to date with any other events and activities taking place in 2010 and you can find out about educational activities and workshops taking place at the Museum by contacting the Education Department.

TIM KNOX

## Farewell Eileen Harris

At the end of 2009 we said goodbye to Dr Eileen Harris, the distinguished architectural historian and writer, who has completed her work cataloguing Soane's architectural library.

Eileen – the author of such classic works as *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (Yale University Press, 2001) and, with Nicholas Savage, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556–1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1990) – has worked for the Soane on a consultancy basis, one day a week, for 25 years, cataloguing Soane's architectural library, a project she has worked on with Nick Savage, Librarian of the Royal Academy of Art. In more recent years, other bibliophiles have joined the project, Stephen Massil between 2003 and 2006, and our own Dr Stephie Coane from 2007, editing entries, transferring them to the database and publishing them online; but much of the credit for the catalogue of Soane's extraordinary book collection must lie with Eileen and Nick. She also curated and wrote the catalogue for the exhibition, *Hooked on Books*, which was shown at the Weston Gallery, University of Nottingham, in the Summer of 2004, and which has remained the standard reference work on Soane's books and bibliomania.

Most recently Eileen has catalogued the contents of the 'Soane Case', a substantial glass-fronted bookcase crammed with copies of Soane's own publications, notably the numerous editions, each of them slightly different, of his many pamphlets and self justificatory addresses. These include Soane's notorious pamphlets about the unedifying conduct of his own son, George, and grandson, Frederick. Comparing all the different editions has been an extremely fiddly and difficult task, necessitating endless comparison and recourse to the archives. Reading and re-reading Soane's censures has also, I am afraid, left Eileen with an extremely low opinion of our founder's character!

Eileen was first called in to help at the Soane in 1982 by my predecessor, Sir John Summerson, but it wasn't until

1985 that she was finally commissioned to undertake the catalogue. Some of her memories of the Museum in these years are to follow in an article that she has specially written for this *Newsletter*.

Eileen has generously suggested that, instead of a leaving present, we club together to establish a fund for the conservation of Soane's unique book collection – some of which is in a precarious state of repair. The Eileen Harris Book Conservation Fund will be launched via the online giving site *Just Giving* in the New Year.

If you would like to contribute to the Eileen Harris Book Conservation Fund please see the details on the printed flier enclosed with this *Newsletter*, and also available by contacting the Development Office, 020 7440 4240/41.

Eileen will be sadly missed by us all, but we hope we may be able to entice her out of retirement to work on discrete projects connected with her other great specialism, Robert and James Adam, whose archive of office drawings is one of the great treasures of the Museum.

TIM KNOX

Director



Eileen Harris. Photograph: John Harris

# Being Hooked on Books

EILEEN HARRIS

*'George finished the catalogue of the Books by throwing the Ink on the floor and breaking the inkstand to pieces.'*

(Sir John Soane, 18 August 1808)

I have finished cataloguing the whole of Soane's architectural library, and though there were times when I would have liked to throw the temperamental computer to the floor, it and its mouse remain unharmed.

The idea of a revised catalogue of Soane's library was put to me by Sir John Summerson in February 1982 at the start of the 'Soanic boom'. This was to replace A T Bolton's manuscript catalogues of 1924 (which are still in use), and to be of a bibliographical standard 'meriting eventual publication'. It was my work on British architectural books that prompted the invitation and a meeting was duly arranged at the Museum to discuss the project. The Curator's office was in the spacious front room on the second floor – until recently occupied by Tim Knox. Sir John sat at a table in the centre of the room and in the corner by the window sat Dorothy Stroud, the Inspectress and Deputy Curator. Apart from the two of them and a few warders, there was only one other member of staff: Christina Scull, the Library Assistant, whose principal task was to produce books for readers in the first-floor Study Room and to invigilate. Like Madame Defarge, she achieved a prodigious amount of knitting between-times. Upstairs and downstairs did not mix.

It was agreed that I should do the job, but first the job had to be defined: how many works were there to be catalogued, how long would it take, and, most important, how much would it cost – imponderables that I naively attempted to resolve by different time and motion studies based on a limited number of books which I knew well. My estimates of how much I could achieve in an hour now make me cringe with embarrassment. I had no idea of the complexities of the plate books of Pérelle and Piranesi, let alone Soane's own books which in the event took many months to catalogue.

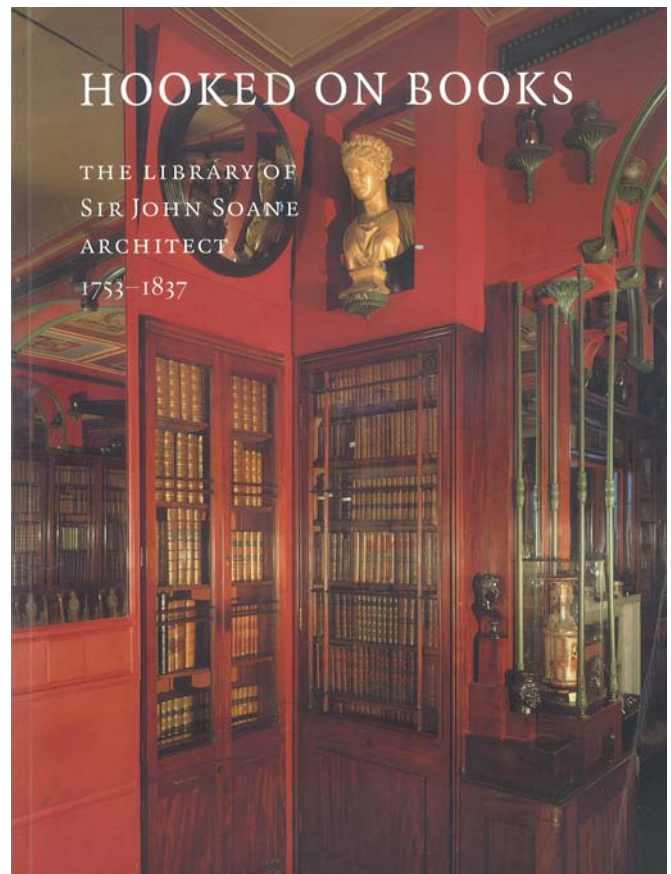
John and Dorothy retired in 1984 and were succeeded by Peter Thornton, who had guided me over the obstacles at the V&A to write my little book on *Going to Bed*, and Margaret Richardson whom I knew from the RIBA Drawings Collection. The library had a special attraction for Peter as a treasure-chest of potential source material for his book on *Authentic Decor*. Every Monday he would come down to see if I had found anything and to discuss my progress. The very best thing Peter did for the library was to employ Nick Savage as my moonlighting collaborator.

Upon Nick's arrival a template – loosely modelled on the RIBA's multi-volume catalogue of early printed books in

the British Architectural Library of which Nick was the original editor and principal contributor – was decided upon, and work began in earnest. As a moonlighter Nick experienced the full frisson of the spookiness of the Soane after dark; I never did, though I vividly remember arriving at a summer party of Peter's only to be confronted by Isaiah Berlin frantically fleeing from the sinister vibes.

The unexplored treasures of Soane's library were enticing and we had no trouble recruiting other moonlighters from the British Architectural Library Catalogue: Gerald (Ged) Beasley, an excellent bibliographer and jazz musician who succeeded Nick as Early Works Librarian at the RIBA, and Alison Shell, a lively-minded Shakespeare mullah and expert on recusant literature who started cataloguing the General Library, later to be completed by Stephen Massil.

It was the library catalogue that forced the Museum to enter the modern world of technology and acquire a word processor and printer. The printer was slower and noisier than a typewriter, the word processor had no search facilities, and the Museum had none of the reference works we needed. Though Nick and I brought in various books of our own



*The catalogue of the 2004 exhibition of Soane's Library at the University of Nottingham*

(which are still in use), visits to the RIBA and British Library were essential. Hardly a Monday passed in my twenty-five years at the Soane when I didn't ring Nick at the Royal Academy with a problem. These telephone-surgeries were the envy of Jill Lever who could have done with an expert managing-director to consult about her drawings catalogue.

My work-station – I cannot call it a desk – was one of two large plan-chests in the back room off the 'Study Room' in Number 12. The other plan-chest was used by Ptolemy Dean who was working on his first Soane book, *Sir John Soane and the Country Estate*. Conversation with Ptolemy and later with Christopher Woodward and Will Palin, who succeeded one another as the Museum's Exhibitions Curators, was stimulating; there was a lively exchange of ideas, jolly lunches at the 'greasy' (now gone) on Proctor Street, visits to exhibitions at the British Museum and to Adam houses about which I was writing when not at the Soane.

When Stephen Astley joined the Museum in 1995 the back room was given exclusively to him, and I was moved into the Study Room to a proper desk. There I remained until 2008 when the library was moved to Number 14 and I was reinstalled on a plan-chest. The most recent addition to my working environment was a large portrait of Sir John Summerson by Leonard Rosoman, rescued from the stores of the National Portrait Gallery and hung over the chimney-piece behind me. Though honoured to be in Sir John's

company, I was glad not to have to look at him for he is not the handsome, supremely elegant man I knew, and is more like one of the simian Soane sons in J M Gandy's view of the No. 12 Breakfast Room.

In 2003 a database was developed by Ben Linton and Stephen Massil and our Word Perfect files were transported. This was a crucial step forward which up until then had been strongly resisted by the Museum. At long last we had essential information at our fingertips. Web publication edited by Stephe Coane, the Soane's very first Librarian appointed in 2007, is well underway; but whether the limited number of printed copies wanted by Margaret Richardson and some of the Trustees will ever materialize, I know not. Nor am I aware of any movement towards the celebratory volume of essays related to the Library suggested by Tim.

*Hooked on Books*, an exhibition 'interpreting' Soane's library, mounted at the University of Nottingham in 2004, was the highlight of my twenty-five years at the Museum. The visual and intellectual stimulus of selecting exhibits, relating them to Soane's personal interests, and arranging them in informative and eye-catching compositions was often quite intoxicating. Was this, I wonder, what caused Margaret Richardson to question our use of the word 'Hooked'? Our Monday preparations captured the imaginations of Robin Middleton and David Watkin who know the books well and had fruitful suggestions. I wish we could have included



The 'Study Room' in No. 12, c.1971. Eventually tall bookshelves lined the walls to accommodate the burgeoning reference library.  
Photo: Alex Starkey/Country Life

Ledoux's plan of a brothel suggested by David, but it didn't fit. As architectural specialists we knew very little about the contents of the General Library and were all the more excited by our totally unexpected discovery there of a copy of Goethe's *Faust* illustrated by Delacroix.

Though the spines of the many thousands of books owned by Soane can be seen in virtually every room of his house, the contents which caused him to buy them remain invisible. The proposed new Gallery promises to redress this lacuna. While waiting you can view *Hooked on Books* as a PDF on your computer, though it is not the same as the books themselves.

Cataloguing Soane's 21 volumes of Piranesi etchings – one of the largest and most important collections there is – was an unalloyed delight despite the enormous bibliographical complexities which Nick ably unravelled. It was especially gratifying to have a visit from Andrew Robison of the National Gallery in Washington whilst I was working on Piranesi; Robison's remarkably painstaking catalogue of early Piranesi etchings was our paragon.

My last and most difficult task was the sacrosanct 'Soane Case' containing copies of the numerous books and muddled variations of books, printed by the chronically discontented and disputatious old architect for private distribution, constantly altered, but never published. This proved to be

the tip of an iceberg, for out of dusty safes in different parts of the Museum came piles and piles of related material brought to the surface by the omniscient and indefatigable Archivist, Susan Palmer. The contents of the Soane Case certainly did not endear me to Soane. As a parent myself, I am flabbergasted by his repeated exposures of family dirt in print: be it his son George's illegitimate child by his sister-in-law, or his grandson Frederick's gay proclivities. Was he downright nasty, or just plain naive?

I leave the Soane content with what Nick and I have achieved, and completely confident in the abilities of the Librarian, Stephanie Coane, to edit it and publish it on the web.

*Work continues on the catalogue of Soane's library, which is being edited and published incrementally on the Museum's website by Dr Stephanie Coane, who greatly misses her weekly visitations by Eileen. Stephie's work has been generously funded by the John R Murray Charitable Trust and nearly half of the catalogue entries can now be viewed online at [www.soane.org.uk](http://www.soane.org.uk), including Soane's 21 volumes of Piranesi, but not – yet – the perplexing contents of the Soane Case.*

## Welcome Home Sir John

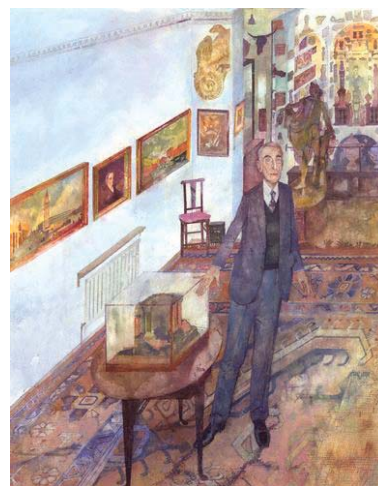
Although we've said our farewells to one important and much loved colleague recently, we have at the same time been very pleased to welcome back another highly revered figure within the history of curatorship at Sir John Soane's Museum. A fine portrait of *Sir John Summerson* (1904–1992, Curator of the Museum 1945–1984) has been lent to the Museum by the National Portrait Gallery. Painted by Leonard Rosoman RA (b.1913), it was commissioned by the Trustees of the Gallery in 1984, shortly before Sir John's retirement. Although Summerson is still revered as one of the greatest architectural historians and writers of the last century the picture has rarely been on display in recent years. We were keen to borrow it for our display of portraits of past Curators of the Museum which now hang in the new Research Library in No. 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields.

It is a large and handsome portrait, although its value lies less in the likeness – Summerson's closest friends claim it doesn't look very much like him – but as a portrait of the Museum. Indeed, the arctic white walls and linear arrangements in the New Picture Room, and its threadbare Ushak carpet, are all lovingly rendered by Rosoman and evoke the rather Spartan atmosphere that prevailed at the Soane during

Summerson's 40-year reign. The picture is initially on loan for three years and can be seen by any visitor by making an appointment with the Research Library: 020 7440 4251 or email [library@soane.org.uk](mailto:library@soane.org.uk).

We are very grateful to the Director and Trustees of the NPG for lending the picture.

TIM KNOX



*Leonard Rosoman's portrait of Sir John Summerson now hanging in the new Research Library*

## A glimpse of the future . . .

A complicated restoration project like *Opening up the Soane* requires an extensive amount of preparatory work. This is especially so for one particular aspect of the project, which is that as a result of the restoration work the Museum will see many works of art being hung and displayed in their original arrangements. I have been carrying out detailed research to analyse Soane's original arrangements of works of art in the rooms affected. I was also able to use Soane's original inventory records (there are four finished copies and one draft dating from 1835–57, all recording the arrangement of the Museum at the time of Soane's death) as well as the evidence of views and photographs in order to help me have a complete understanding of exactly where the objects were displayed – on which wall and in which part of the house – towards the end of Soane's lifetime.

The examination of the sequence of works of art on the staircase for example, revealed that a shallow recess on the west wall of the staircase of No. 13, right at the top, was originally hung with sixteen casts – almost all acquired by Soane in 1834, when he was 81 years old, from the collection of a fellow architect, Lewis Wyatt. There are no views of this arrangement, but analysis of the inventory record shows that it probably lasted until the curatorship of James Wild in the late 19th century, when the objects were taken down and distributed elsewhere in the Museum.

With the aid of modern technology and our volunteer John Bridges, this particular arrangement was then 'virtually'

installed in the recess. This in itself was a fascinating exercise. We know that George Bailey, who compiled the earliest inventories for Soane, normally numbered the works of art beginning at the top of each wall and working his way down row by row, going from left to right in each row. Using this as our basis, John began dropping the scaled images of each piece into the space, one at a time, resisting the desire to cry 'Eureka!' as each one fitted beautifully and symmetrically into place and revealed Soane's arrangement for the first time in almost two centuries.

However, the process revealed two pieces which didn't fit the spaces they must have occupied. This was a puzzle. Fortunately, when Lewis Wyatt sold the casts to Soane he provided a list which included a sketch of each piece. Even more fortunately, Bailey marked this list with the new Soane inventory number allocated to each one. Investigation revealed that the two pieces had been mis-identified in an inventory drawn up in 1906 – each being allocated the inventory number belonging to the other – a mistake perpetuated until now. Once this was corrected, Soane's arrangement once more fitted the recess perfectly. All that now remains is for the OUTS project to be completed in physical form and this virtual recreation will become reality and these sixteen casts, most of which are currently in store, will once again grace Soane's glorious staircase.

HELEN DOREY  
Deputy Director



Left: The top staircase recess arrangement as it appears now Right: The recess 'virtually' rehung according to Soane's original arrangement

## Discoveries during 'Opening up Works' in the Summer of 2009

The *Opening up the Soane* project has been gaining momentum in other ways too. Over the summer of 2009 a major programme of opening up and investigation works was carried out in preparation for the restoration project, which should begin on site in January 2011. Julian Harrap Architects oversaw works carried out by the Museum's maintenance contractors, Fullers, ranging from the lifting of floor boards to investigate the structural strength of the second floor to the excavation of what will be the lift shaft to reveal part of the foundation of No. 12. Helen Hughes carried out a programme of paint analysis, looking in particular at the first-floor rooms of No. 12, which will become the new temporary exhibition gallery: she discovered what appeared to be a red/purple scheme followed by a yellow scheme and traces on the ceiling of what may have been a painted sky (indicated on Soane's early design drawings).

At the same time, investigations were carried out in the Ante-Room on the ground floor to see whether large sections of two roundels by Thomas Banks had been lost when the south wall was rebuilt in the 1890s or whether they might still be present, buried in the wall plaster. Our sculpture conservators, Taylor Pearce, were briefed somewhat pessimistically but when they started work it rapidly became clear that the sculptures survived intact and they have now both been disinterred from their adjacent plaster.



Specialist furniture restorers from Arlington Conservation took out a bookcase in the north-west corner of the Ante-Room (moved there in the 1890s) so that our architects could investigate behind it and see the floor beneath it. Fortunately, our recent analysis of the sequence of works once displayed on this wall based on the original inventories and a surviving view of the room from 1826 (see front cover image) was confirmed, as the removal of the bookcase revealed marks still left on the wall by Soane's original arrangement of works of art, along with some of the original fixings! Sadly, the lifting of the floor boards to see what survived of the shaped opening down to the catacombs below the Ante-Room revealed that the opening had been thoroughly filled in and not a trace remained.

On the second floor the wallpaper historian Mark Sandiford worked over a number of weeks painstakingly peeling back the wall surface in the large rear room, which was created in the 1890s, when the partitions dividing the space into Soane's bedroom, bathroom, oratory and book lobby were removed. To his surprise this revealed the original wallpaper surviving in large areas. This wallpaper was supplied to Soane via his decorators Duppa Slodden and Co. from 1813 right through until the time of his death in 1837, described in bills as 'Duff yellow on maroon' or 'Duff paper yellows' with a 'black on orange' fillet as a border. Although



*Left: The plaster cut away from around one of the roundels by Thomas Banks to reveal the surviving section*

*Above: A large area of Soane's original Bathroom and Bedroom wallpaper, uncovered by Mark Sandiford*



An area of the original wallpaper showing the 'black on orange' fillet border



Soane's Bath or Dressing Room, watercolour, 20 Oct 1825

the paper is shown in the views of 1825 the fillet is not, although it is specified in the bills, so it was particularly exciting to uncover an original section of it. The Order Book of the original makers of the paper, Cowtan, survives in the V&A and in it is a sample of Soane's paper, kept for colour matching purposes. The combination of the uncovered original paper and this sample will enable us to reproduce Soane's wallpaper exactly to cover all the new partitions. On the other walls we will uncover as much as possible of the original paper so that both can be seen by visitors.

In Mrs Soane's Morning Room, for many years the Secretary's Office, investigations were carried out on the walls of the cupboard which until recently housed the office safe and stationery supplies but which was once Mrs Soane's 'lavatory' closet (in those days this would have been just a wash basin). These revealed an area of the 'Dutch tile paper', which we know from Soane's bills was used in closets on this floor in 1813 ('1 p<sup>c</sup> [piece] Dutch tile paper on sattin for

archway closets') and in 1832 ('6 yds Dutch tile paper Hens[?] &c. on white sattin 6s / ... papering water-closet with Dutch tile paper. 10s').

Investigations into many other aspects of the restoration of rooms on the second floor and elsewhere are continuing. Carpets, architectural models, picture frames, ceramics and bronzes all need to be restored and their history and condition assessed. All the furniture has been inspected and proposals made for its restoration. Analysis of the Pompeii model and its great stand, which once stood in the centre of Soane's Model Room, has been carried out and the work of making the extra section to replace the part of the model destroyed in the 1890s is underway, generously funded by a Soane Patron. More details will appear in a forthcoming *Newsletter*.

HELEN DOREY  
Deputy Director



The Cowtan Order Book in the V&A, detail showing Soane's order for Bedroom wallpaper in August 1830, with accompanying colour sample showing the original colours of the wallpaper used in Soane's Bedroom and Bath Room



A section of the 'Dutch tile paper' uncovered in the watercloset cupboard in Mrs Soane's Morning Room

## The Charms of Mrs Delany

It is fitting that our Spring exhibition will be about one of the great observers of flowering plants. *Mrs Delany and her Circle* focuses upon this eponymous figure. Born Mary Granville (1700–88), she was a significant figure in the practice of natural history in Georgian England and, in the words of Edmund Burke, ‘the woman of fashion of all ages’. Unlike many other notable women of the eighteenth century, Mrs Delany was not a prominent patron or political figure and did not pursue a literary career. Instead, she achieved a paradoxical form of fame by becoming, for many of her contemporaries, a model of private life. Although she never sought public celebrity, Mrs Delany cultivated a broad circle of friends and correspondents. She was friends with both Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope and with the Duchess of Portland. These friendships would inspire her activities. However, since her death she has been somewhat marginalised by art historians. Perhaps her work and interest in botany has been seen as too ‘feminine’ and craft-based.

It was a very different story during her long lifetime. In the

18th century she was regarded as a pattern of accomplishment and curiosity for her contemporaries and became a model to subsequent generations – including the daughters of Queen Charlotte. This exhibition, organized with the Yale Center for British Art, is the first to survey her entire life and to essay the full range of Mrs Delany’s creative endeavours. It will bring together art, fashion, and science: fields that are now generally conceived as separate realms of cultural practice, but that were intimately connected in the varied circles in which Mrs Delany thrived. Through paintings, drawings, paper cuts and collages, textiles, and manuscripts, the exhibition will demonstrate the variety of Mrs Delany’s craft activities.

Mary Delany’s curiosity about the natural world arose during her first and unhappy marriage to Alexander Pendarves, a Member of Parliament forty years her senior. Seeking an office at court she appeared at a ball held either in 1740 or 1741. Her appearance astounded those present. Mary Pendarves had appeared in a most extraordinary court mantua with a magnificent black satin petticoat, embroidered with a cascade of flowers that united her interests in floriculture and fashion. Several large sections of this dress have recently been rediscovered and will form the centrepiece of the exhibition. More than just an item of fashionable clothing, the embroidery, more properly termed needle-painting, shows a keen sense of observation of the natural world and is related very closely to contemporary representations of botanical specimens. The use of a black background and the clearly identifiable individual plant specimens can be compared to the work of such botanists as Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708–70), Thomas Robins the Elder (c.1716–70) and Barbara Regina Dietzsch (1706–83) whose work is also represented in the exhibition.

Following the death of Pendarves and a period of widowhood, Mary was married again in 1743 – against her family’s wishes – to Dr Patrick Delany, an Irish clergyman. They settled at Delville, his small estate in the parish of Glasnevin, just north of Dublin. In this new and happy environment, and with the support of her husband and a close circle of friends drawn from the Irish gentry and aristocracy, she was able to concentrate on her artistic works as never before. She built a workroom, decorated the ceilings with stucco work, and began to pursue oil painting. She also produced numerous topographical drawings, some showing such scenic locales as the Giant’s Causeway and others depicting local costumes and customs. The chief subject of both her drawings and letters however, was Delville and it was her work on the gardens at Delville that was the most important feature of her time there. Having visited and been influenced



John Opie, Mary Delany, 1782, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London. The frame was designed in tribute to Mrs Delany’s accomplishments by Horace Walpole



Detail of the left half of the front petticoat panel of a court mantua, designed by Mary Delany née Pendarves, 1740–41, silk embroidery on satin, Private Collection

by Pope's villa at Twickenham, Mrs Delany adorned the house and garden at Delville with pleasant seats, a shady grotto covered in her own shell work, and a 'bow closet', picturesque and sociable spaces for conversation. Alongside Jonathan Swift she was the first to introduce the English landscape garden to Ireland. Although small, Delville's gardens would have an impact far outreaching their scale.

After Dr Delany sadly died, Mary moved back to England to spend a portion of her time at the Duchess of Portland's estate at Bulstrode – a centre for the propagation of the new Linnean system. It was during this period of widowhood, and in the context of the highly cultivated company of botanists that were drawn to the Duchess' house, that Mary Delany undertook her most well-known creations. Over a ten-year period she executed no fewer than 985 highly refined collages or 'paper mosaics' of flowering plants: the 'Flora Delanica'. These united her artistic virtuosity with her lifelong study of the natural world. Most of them are now in the British Museum. With the death of the Duchess of Portland, Mrs Delany finally became part of the Royal Court, a desire which saw her first forays into botanical art as the young Mrs Pendarves. She became part of the intimate circle of



Mary Delany, Spiraea, collage of coloured papers, the Trustees of the British Museum



Mary Delany, Pisum Marium, collage of coloured papers, the Trustees of the British Museum

George III and Queen Charlotte, who shared her profound interest in botany.

This important exhibition draws on rarely seen material from private collections, such as the sections of her famous court dress, public collections such as the substantial holding of her paper cuts from the British Museum and items of great personal resonance such as the needlework pocketbook given to Delany by Queen Charlotte from the Royal Collection or the magnificent portrait of Delany by Opie whose frame was designed by her friend Horace Walpole. In addition, the London-based artist Jane Wildgoose will install a site-specific artwork in the breakfast room of No. 13 that

will evoke the relationship between Mrs Delany and the Duchess of Portland, and the workroom and shell grotto she created at Delville when so happily married to Dr Delany. The exhibition is accompanied by a magnificent catalogue, the first major academic publication on Delany's life and work, published by the Yale Center for British Art and Sir John Soane's Museum. I hope that this wonderful exhibition, which has attracted a great deal of public and media interest, will mark the start of a 'flowering' relationship between the Soane and Yale.

JERZY KIERKUC-BIELINSKI  
*Exhibitions Curator*

## *Improvements in Lincoln's Inn Fields*

When, in 1824, Lincoln's Inn Fields needed repaving, the Trustees responsible for the running and upkeep of the square debated whether they should opt for the new process of 'McAdamizing' (which would have meant covering the roads of the square with small, broken stones, so as to form a smooth, hard, convex surface) and deputed one of their number to interview James McAdam. Mercifully, however, they opted in the end for traditional York stone. Some years ago much less distinguished setts were substituted, so it is with great pleasure that we report that these in their turn have recently been replaced once again with York stone paving. At the same time the rather ugly, utilitarian street lights have been replaced with replicas of the gas lamps introduced to the square in the 1820s. And so it is that as the Museum looks forward to restoring some of Soane's original interiors the view from the Museum is also much closer to that enjoyed by Soane himself.

SUSAN PALMER  
*Archivist*



*One of the new lamp posts outside the Museum*

## The Napoleon Ring: home at last

Regular readers of the *Newsletter* will know about the disappointment of our failure to secure Soane's mourning ring for Napoleon at auction earlier this year. However, when the Museum wrote to the new owner to enquire whether he or she might consider letting the Museum know its whereabouts and indeed, might lend it to us, the result exceeded all our expectations. The new owner, an English Napoleonist who has been collecting Napoleonica since childhood, responded immediately. He had never visited the Museum and after coming to see us decided that he was willing to sell the ring back to us so that it could, after 170 years, be returned to Soane's collection. The Art Fund, which had agreed to support the Museum's bid at auction, agreed most generously to fund the purchase to the same level as previously agreed, leaving the Museum to raise the matching funding for the remainder. Letters to a small group of Patrons and friends of the Museum quickly bridged the gap and we're now delighted to report that the ring was collected from Christie's South Kensington two months ago to be brought back to its original home.

The story of the return of the ring to the Soane was taken up by the Press and after the Director was interviewed on Radio 4's *Front Row* the original vendor of the ring, Mrs Rosemary Gutch, contacted the Museum and helped us add much more detail to its history. The ring belonged to her mother, Peggy Wise, who inherited a small collection of souvenirs associated with Napoleon from an old lady, Phyllis Avory, who had been a friend of the family and who had died

in her nineties in the 1980s. She was engaged at the time of the First World War, but tragically her fiancé was killed and she never married. She converted to Catholicism and became fascinated by Napoleon – hence her collection of souvenirs. Sadly she never spoke to Mrs Wise about the ring in all the years of their friendship – since the 1920s. Soane left the ring in his Will to the descendants of his elder son John, to be passed down as an heirloom. The question remains, how did it end up in the ownership of Phyllis Avory? She was the daughter of Sir Horace Avory (born in 1851) who became one of the most famous judges of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and died in 1935. As far as we know he had no family connection with Soane's descendants but further research may yet yield some clue to help us unravel the mystery.

The Museum is most grateful to all the donors who enabled the ring to return home including: the Art Fund; Sir Christopher and Lady Ondaatje; Tomasso Brothers Ltd; Niall Hobhouse; the Marquess and Marchioness of Douro; Philippe Sacerdot and Giles Ellwood; Stephen Somerville and Regis Cochefort and to Nicolas Norton and Diana Scarisbrick for their advice about the ring and its purchase.

The ring is currently on display in the North Drawing Room at the Museum where it will remain until the end of March 2010.

HELEN DOREY  
*Deputy Director*



The Napoleon Ring, © Christie's Images Ltd 2009

## The Student Architects' Progress

The residents of Ealing were recently treated to some frantic activity in Walpole Park, the grounds of Pitzhanger Manor, when students from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, erected eight architectural follies in the park at the end of a month-long project. As a stimulus for their work the students used *A Rake's Progress* by William Hogarth (1733), the series of paintings which had hung originally hung in Pitzhanger Manor when it was Soane's Country House and before they were moved to the his house in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The installations were the result of a partnership that was struck for the first time in 2008 between the Soane Museum, Pitzhanger Manor and first-year architecture students from the Bartlett when it was agreed that Pitzhanger Manor was the ideal venue for an art installation that would require lots of space.

Since the success of the first project carried out in 2008 all those who were involved were delighted to run it for a second year and this time the students were challenged, within eight groups, to create a response to the eight panels that comprise *A Rake's Progress*. The groups also had to draw inspiration from Soane and his architecture and particularly from Soane's interest in ruins and follies.

In order to prepare for the installations in Walpole Park, students spent time getting to know the site. They were also given a lecture on Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* and tours were led around the Museum. After much preparation and hard work one hundred students, their work and their tutors finally descended on Pitzhanger at the beginning of December. The work was installed in the morning and stayed in place over the whole weekend, allowing plenty of time for people to visit the site and learn about the work from the students themselves.

The eight follies showed great imagination and inventiveness. The first scene in the series, *The Heir*, sought to depict Tom Rakewell's chosen path, which in this case was recreated as a camera obscura with two merging view-points. The second scene, *The Levee*, captured the tensions between the different characters, all vying for Tom's attention and money. *The Orgy* forced viewers to become 'Peeping Toms', with a diorama echoing one of Pitzhanger's windows. The sedan chair which features in *The Arrest* was transformed into a perilous curve. The group who recreated *The Marriage* scene focused on the veneer of the happy marriage compared to Tom's real intentions and a beautifully-crafted telescope (parodying the one-eyed wife) was placed looking down from the bridge to the dirt and grime below. *The Gaming House* became a game of chance, played through the hedge, where participants were unable to have control of their own view. Grid-like panels made up *The Prison* scene – the panels either imprisoning the viewer or capturing different views around the park. The grids contained bird seed and the birds were intended as the characters in the scene, all pecking at Tom. Finally, *The Mad House* took over two benches in the park – padded 'peaks', alluding to the padded cells, the mad tailor and the key characters in the scene could be found on one bench whilst the other became a civilised viewing point for the aristocratic ladies also depicted in the final and tragic scene of *A Rake's Progress*.

We think that even Soane himself would have been delighted to see one hundred students taking inspiration from his collection and we're pleased to be able to use both the Museum and Pitzhanger Manor as spaces in which to explore and experiment with architecture.

BETH WALKER  
Head of Education



The Mad House, architectural folly erected at Pitzhanger Manor by students from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, which takes its inspiration from Hogarth's 'The Mad House', the final scene from *A Rake's Progress*

## The Soane Shop

The new Soane Shop opened on 28 July 2009 in its temporary location on the first floor of No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields – in a room that has never before been open to the public. We have been busy sourcing and developing new items of merchandise, some more successful than others, and are seeing the period before the completion of *Opening up the Soane* very much as an opportunity to experiment with different ranges and items of merchandise that will help us to ascertain which items appeal most to our visitors. So far, I am happy to say, our visitors seem to be enjoying the space with its view over the back of the Museum, and sales have increased.

We now stock an expanded range of publications; ladies' bags and scarves; pewter ware; architectural bookends and – very much the biggest experiment – beautiful plaster and resin casts, large and small, which range in price from £6.50 to £240. The best-selling 'skeleton' tea towel has been joined by a matching apron, and a second tea towel featuring the satanic Mephistopheles flying through the night sky has arrived! If you visit the Museum from mid-February, do investigate the merchandise that will be available relating to the new exhibition *Mrs Delany her Circle*, which will go on sale after the exhibition opens.



*The new Soane Shop*

We are delighted to be able to offer members of our Soane Supporters' Circle a discount of 5% on all purchases, and would genuinely welcome any ideas, comments or criticisms by contacting Julie Brock ([jbrock@soane.org.uk](mailto:jbrock@soane.org.uk)). We are grateful for all the comments received so far.

JULIE BROCK  
Enterprises Manager



*Plaster casts for sale in the new shop*

## The Soane Patrons' Circle

Regular readers of this *Newsletter* may know that the Museum has a membership group called the 'Soane Patrons' Circle'. In return for an annual subscription members are invited to a range of exclusive events here at the Museum and elsewhere. During the first few months of 2010 our programme includes talks by Kevin McCloud (*The Grand Tour*), Dan Cruickshank (*The Euston Arch*) and Amanda Vickery (*Mrs Delany and her Circle*). There will be a talk by Laura Ashley's biographer Martin Wood, and architect George Clarke will be giving a presentation on the restoration of old and unusual buildings. Patrons are also invited to private visits elsewhere and in February there will be the chance to preview one of the National Trust's latest acquisitions – the remarkable house of the Kenyan born poet and author Khadambi Asalache, who lived in south west London.

Since its launch in 2003 the Patrons' Circle has acquired nearly 150 members. For practical reasons, membership will be closed when we reach 200 Patrons – a target that we expect to reach in the next year or so. The income derived from Patrons' donations and subscriptions has become an extremely valuable source of support for the Soane and has enabled the Museum to accomplish a wide range of



A room in the home of poet, artist and writer Khadambi Asalache

conservation, education and exhibition projects that otherwise would not have been possible.

If you are interested in helping the Museum in this way and would like to receive further details about joining the Soane Patrons' Circle, please contact Mike Nicholson, Development Director, (020 7440 4241 [mnicholson@soane.org.uk](mailto:mnicholson@soane.org.uk)).

MIKE NICHOLSON  
Development Director

## And finally . . . a forgotten festivity

As this edition of the *Newsletter* comes just after the New Year, Sue Palmer takes the opportunity to remember a type of celebration once carried out at this time of year, which is now all but forgotten in England. In Soane's time, it was common for the last of the twelve days of Christmas – 6 January or Twelfth Night – to be celebrated with plenty of food, drink and merrymaking and at the centre of this festivity, as with all good celebrations, was a special cake, known as 'twelfth cake'. In fourteenth-century England it was customary for the lord of the manor to provide his household with twelfth cake, and as the master of his house in the nineteenth century Soane records in his diary on 6 Jan 1821 that he 'Treated the servants with cake etc 12/-', although a few years before on 6 Jan 1817, Soane's Butler paid £0.7.0 for a twelfth cake. It was traditional to put into the cake a pea and a bean (or some other similar token – one bill in Soane's archive records 'a button for the 12th cake') and for the youngest member of the household to slice and serve the cake. The man who found the bean was then declared the

'King' and the woman who found the pea was 'Queen'. If a woman found the bean then she could choose her King, and if a man found the pea he was entitled to pick his Twelfth Night Queen.

To this day in France all the supermarkets are full of these cakes after Christmas, but it seems that in this country the tradition is sadly no more . . .

SUSAN PALMER  
Archivist



'Twelfth Night', an English print from 1794