In this issue we celebrate the behind-the-scenes conservation operations that breathe life into Sir John Soane’s Museum, the treasury of art and architecture in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London.

In 2008, director Tim Knox in consultation with Mike Nicholson and Ken Gray, suggested that the Sir John Soane’s Museum’s Foundation assume responsibility for one facet of the Museum’s ambitious campaign to return Soane’s exquisite private collection to its former brilliance, creating more ample exhibition and education facilities, creating a new conservation center and improve visitors’ services.

The Board of Directors of the Soane Foundation saw “Opening up the Soane” as an opportunity for the Museum’s American supporters to make a fundamental contribution to its future. So we debated what to support. We thought big. And, finally, we unanimously chose conservation in the focus of a five-year fundraising effort, now in its third year.

In retrospect, we could not have made a more astute investment. In calling for the accurate reinstatement of eight of the historic rooms and their contents by 2014, the Museum’s expansion program set a demanding timetable for the curators and conservators who are responsible for preparing the objects for display.

We have come to appreciate the way in which the Soane Museum, as an historic house, has a particular philosophy for conservation and a uniquely devised set of conservation challenges. Oftentimes, the goal is not only to preserve an object, but also to ensure that it harmonizes with its surrounding objects. As Soane would have arranged them. We have also learned that conservation, undertaken today, can provide further evidence and data to inform future treatments. The Museum is taking down detailed records, both written and photographic, on the condition of objects before and after treatment.

The entire conservation process, and the push to open the new rooms, is enabling the Museum to develop an overall strategy for the conservation of objects as groups, as well as for individual works, that will serve it well in the future.

**A VOICE FOR BALANCE**

Margaret Holborn Ellis (Peggy) is Director of the Morgan Library & Museum’s Thaw Conservation Center and Thaw Professor of Paper Conservation, Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. With nearly four decades of conservation and research experience, she is one of this country’s preeminent conservators of works of art on paper.

**Peggy Ellis:** Yes, and the interesting thing about the Soane is that it wasn’t always a museum, it was a functioning house. So evidence of use becomes part of the story, in the same way that we may love something that was heavily used in our own family’s history.

The Soane is charged with caring for architectural models, which everybody agrees are some of the most difficult three-dimensional objects to conserve. Models are usually very intricate and made of a number of materials and often they have not been well cared for because they’re big and awkward to move. And while it is a general trend nowadays to recognize architectural models as important historical artifacts, in the past they were often pushed aside because they were not considered to be “fine art.”

**Peggy:** Documentation and examination techniques have changed a great deal with the digital imaging revolution. And, of course, just the way in which we diagnose a problem is more accurate and less invasive. We can really get below the surface now, and, with infrared and ultraviolet special imaging techniques, without great expense, see things in ways we never could before. A lot of these analytical instrumentation wasn’t portable before and now it is. We can actually carry around an x-ray fluorescence spectrophotometer, which can be used to identify pigments—it’s the size of a loaf of bread.

Nowadays we are better at recognizing what not to do. For instance, rather than putting all your money into restorating your best picture, it might be more prudent for your institution to ensure that the entire collection is well cared for in storage and while on display.

Today we value the patina of use. Not everything has to look like new, especially in a place like the Soane, which for so long has been lit by candle and gas lamps. You don’t want it to look like it’s been spit cleaned. It’s supposed to look like a house that people have lived in.

**JOIN US IN MEETING OUR GOAL**

Please consider making a donation to help reach the Foundation’s goal of completing the “Opening Up the Soane” campaign in the coming months. We are just over 88% towards fulfilling our pledge to the Museum.

All contributions are accepted and appreciated. A new level of support—the UK/USA Circle at £500—provides membership and newsletters from both the Foundation and Museum, plus adds to the coffers for the conservation fund. Other levels of support start at £100 and go to £250, £500, £1,500, £3,000 and £10,000.

For more details, please visit the JOIN US page on our web site at www.soanefoundation.com or contact Chas Miller at 212-225-2002 or chas@soanefoundation.com

**SOANE FOUNDATION MEETS CHALLENGE**

For almost a century, visitors have seen a display on the second floor staircase recess in No. 13 featuring the vibrant portrait of the Soane family that the Soane’s had commissioned to hang above their heads in the 1810s. It is now in the works to rehang the arrangement to match the portraits above the doors and windows that Soane had placed during the “Opening up the Soane” project, it was learned that this arrangement was actually done in the 1920s. The emphasis should be on preventative conservation. Doing everything to arrest or slow down the processes of deterioration. Rather than labs and conservation single item treatments, it’s more about addressing issues and the basic things.

**SF:** What are the basics that are necessary for a conservation center?

**Peggy:** You need an overall collections care plan and the ability to carry out conservation procedures, such as examination, documentation and basic treatments, all of which we can do.

The emphasis should be on preventative conservation. Doing everything to arrest or slow down the processes of deterioration. Rather than labs and conservation single item treatments, it’s more about addressing issues and the basic things.

**SF:** How would you say conservation has changed in the last few decades?

**Peggy:** Yes, and the interesting thing about the Soane is that it wasn’t always a museum, it was a functioning house. So evidence of use becomes part of the story, in the same way that we may love something that was heavily used in our own family’s history.

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**WHICH IS THE ORIGINAL?**

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**CONSERVATION BEGINS AT HOME**

Sometimes the virtual world of the web as a collector’s best friend, especially when a simple click can help you save anything from a collection of old-master drawings to a distinguishing gown.

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works website at www.conservation-us.org is a case in point. This veritable treasure chest of resources offers advice on how to choose a conservator and how to find one in your past of the country. It offers helpful tips for caring for all types of things, including architectural structures and detailing, manuscripts, prints, books, tools, jewelry, tableware, quilts, costumes, samplers, and flags.

The AIC also offers you the opportunity to establish connections with other who share your interest in preservation through publications, conferences, workshops, and daily networking opportunities. The Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation is a proud member.

**JOHN & CYNTHIA GUNN: NO ORDINARY PHILANTHROPS**

Two dedicated supporters of the Soane Foundation have stepped forward to ensure the lead gift to fund the new conservation labs at Sir John Soane’s Museum, now under construction in No. 12 Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Conservation Center will revolutionize the way in which the Museum cares for and interprets many of its delicate and storied artifacts.

“We see the Soane as so unique and central in the history of museums and architecture that we are delighted to support its restoration and renewal,” says the Gunns. “Conservation is really at the heart of a historic museum like the Soane.”

John and Cynthia Gunn give to what they love: and when they love, they become very involved. The Gunns have certainly experienced their engagement with architecture first hand in marvelous trips to Sweden, Derbyshire, Sicily, Russia, Ireland, and Istanbul, where the Gunn’s erst for travel enhanced everyone’s enjoyment. More than once, we have enjoyed watching them kick up their heels on a dance floor at our New York and London galas.

John, Cynthia and their children, Matthews and Lisa, attended Stanford University. Although, the couple’s philanthropy is extraordinary in any measure, their devotion to Stanford is a model of informed involvement: they have served as trustees, advisors, and founding members of new programs, as well as generous supporters.

Most recently, the San Francisco area couple have given the university a stunning new structure. The John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn building, which houses the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, has been designed by the Kligerman Barkley Architects of New York. Many readers will know the architects, Ike Barkley and John Iker as good friends of the Soane, and their partnership of Tom Kligerman, as the president of the Foundation’s Board.

“We can’t thank John and Cynthia enough for this generous gift and look forward to their continued friendship in the years to come,” says Tom Kligerman.
SOANE CONSERVATORS DIVE BACK INTO HISTORY AND FORWARD INTO SCIENCE

They will then re-

Plaster Cast of a Neo-Classical Cipher

Robert Adam’s ceiling drawings (detail)

The Soane Museum

PASSING THE BALL...AFTER THE DUST CLOTH

SOANE TRASURES VERY CAREFULLY DISPACTHED AROUND THE WORLD

The Soane Foundation recently caught up with Deputy Director, Curator and Head Conservator Jane Wilkinson via

Jane Wilkinson: For me to come to understand that the Soane’s objects are valuable from an art historical context—that, in a sense, the collection is more than the sum of its objects. No, in considering a treatment, we look at the whole room. For example, we are currently cleaning, repairing, and straightening. Next, we will consider placing objects in their actual places, so we can apply tones that are appropriate to those objects and those rooms. We are always looking at the whole room.

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SF: Jane, how have conservation efforts changed at the Soane during your time there?

Jane Wilkinson: I think we’re seeing a lot more research informed by science in the way we’re looking at objects. We have some really exciting research going on at the moment that I think will really change the way we approach conservation, which is to look at objects in context and look at how they’ve been used and how they’ve been handled over time. I think we’re also seeing a lot more collaboration with other institutions and with other departments within the Museum.

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