

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NO.13

WINTER 2006

Letter from the Director

CATALOGING THE SOANE: A CHANGE IN APPROACH

Since the foundation of the Museum in 1837, its eleven successive Curators have sought to list and classify Soane's myriad collections – ancient and modern sculpture, plaster casts, pictures, works of art, furniture gems, architectural drawings and models, books, drawings and prints, and other items. My predecessor, Margaret Richardson, made a particularly notable contribution to this work. During her reign David Watkin's edition of Soane's Royal Academy Lectures was published by Cambridge University Press (1996), while Lynda Fairbairn's catalogue of Italian Renaissance Drawings was published in 1998. Jill Lever's catalogue of the drawings by George Dance, father and son, appeared in 2004. In the same year, the Concise Catalogue of the museum's entire holdings of architectural drawings was put online via the Soane website. Helen Dorey and Michael Peover's catalogue of the stained glass in the Museum saw publication as the 2003 *Journal of the British Society of Master Glass Painters*.

Completed cataloguing projects awaiting funding for publication include Valentin Kockel's catalogue of the Cork Models, and Gertrud Seidmann's catalogue of Soane's collection of antique and modern Gems. Cornelius Vermeule's 1950 catalogue of Soane's Graeco-Roman Antiquities has also been revised and augmented, although it too remains unpublished due to lack of funding. Draft typescript catalogues of the Soane



Gordon Higgott at work



A capriccio, in Robert Adam's hand, dating from summer 1755. Made when Adam was in Rome, it shows the influence of Piranesi

Architectural Models and Architectural Drawing Instruments are also in existence, and only need editing to make them ready for publication. Earlier this year Stephen Massil completed a three-year contract to catalogue the books in Soane's 'General Library', complementing many years of dedicated work by Eileen Harris and Nick Savage on Soane's Architectural Library. The final draft text of the first of the projected Catalogue of Drawings by Robert and James Adam in Sir John Soane's Museum – Alan Tait's catalogue of the 'Grand Tour' Drawings – is now in hand, while work is progressing well on Jill Lever's Soane and Gordon Higgott's Baroque Drawings catalogues.

Despite these achievements, it is true to say that the Museum's progress in cataloguing its collections has been frustratingly slow and expensive. Nor have our Catalogues, produced with so much care and expense, been as widely accessible as they should and could be. Over the last year the Museum has been exploring ways to streamline the production and publication of catalogues of our collections, without compromising on scholarship and quality.

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The challenge confronting the Soane Museum was crystallised by the project to publish the drawings of Robert and James Adam in the Soane Museum. The original specification for the five-volume Adam Catalogue was modelled on that developed for the previous Catalogues of the Soane Museum Drawings Collection – impressive, scholarly hardback volumes, with black and white illustrations and duo-tone covers, themselves based on the acclaimed RIBA Drawings Collection Catalogues produced in the 1970s. However, the soaring costs of producing these volumes (about £45,000 per volume, including photography), together with modest sales and difficulties with distribution, has encouraged the Museum to rethink its cataloguing strategy. This change of plan is underpinned by a desire to make information about our collections more accessible to the wider public.

This is why we will be concentrating our efforts on publishing future catalogues of the collections of the Soane Museum online, accessible via the Museum website. This will not rule out the Museum continuing to publish scholarly, well illustrated books on aspects of its collections – most particularly to accompany a programme of thematic exhibitions – but the main thrust of our energies will be put into making information freely available online. Scholars and interested members of the public increasingly make use of the internet for research purposes, and the Museum website now receives over 154,280 ‘hits’ every year. The Soane online catalogue will, moreover, make our holdings better known to an international audience or those who do not have access to the great institutional libraries of Europe and America. Wherever possible, catalogue entries will be accompanied by a digital image of the item. One of the great advantages of an online catalogue is

that it is capable of being edited – corrections can be made to entries, or new information, conservation data, or bibliographic references added.

To show we mean business, the first tranche of 50 catalogue entries of Soane’s library – the exhibits from the 2004 Hooked on Books exhibition – have just been put online. Later this year the Museum hopes to appoint a Librarian, on a three-year fixed-term contract, to complete the work of editing the rest of the Library Catalogue – transferring the edited entries online in batches – as well as caring for the books in the Museum. Meanwhile, this winter, the entries for Alan Tait’s catalogue of the Adam ‘Grand Tour’ drawings will be transferred to our database and edited, in readiness for making it available online. This work is being made possible by a generous grant from our patron, Mrs Gisele Gledhill, in memory of her late husband, Richard Harris, and from grants from the Furthermore and Dunard Foundations. They will be followed by Gordon Higgott’s entries for the English Baroque Architectural Drawings and Jill Lever’s catalogue of Soane’s early sketchbooks. Digital photographs have been taken of all the drawings to illustrate the entries. Plans are also afoot to transfer the entries for Cornelius Vermeule’s catalogue of Soane’s Antiquities on to our database and to digitise the entire photographic archive of the Museum. The cataloguing of the remaining c.8000 drawings in the Adam Collection remains a top priority for the Museum and our fundraisers, and I have pledged that this will be complete by 2012. This is a bold step for the Museum, but I think a timely, necessary – and exciting – one.

Tim Knox,
November 2006

Museum News

UPDATE ON NO.14

The contract for the restoration of No.14 began on 1 May, under the direction of Julian Harrap Architects with E Fuller & Son as contractor. The first stage saw the removal of unsightly fire lobbies, partitions, services, false ceilings and plasterboard wall linings. On the ground and first floors in particular the elegance of the original Soane spaces was immediately apparent.

Fascinating discoveries made during the course of the work have included the a Pompeiian red decorative scheme revealed on the ground floor and a green scheme on the first floor – complete with a vignette of a 1950s ‘new look’ woman on the west wall. We know that Soane left the decorations to his first tenants to carry out so it is particularly interesting to see that the ‘Pompeiian’ scheme next door in his Library at No. 13 may have inspired them. More will be revealed about the history of the decoration in No.14 when Dr. Ian Bristow, our historic paint specialist, completes his programme of research later this year.

Alongside the stripping out, Fullers have been overhauling and repairing all the sash windows in the house – carefully cutting out rotten areas in frames, parting beads and glazing bars and piecing in new elements.

The extensive work required to the main roof began in May and has continued throughout the summer. When we bought the house the roof was felted – its original lead having been removed many years ago. The felt has now been stripped off, the substructure repaired, the roof re-boarded (re-using as many of the original boards as possible) and the whole area leaded, as it was in Soane’s day. The slates have been removed from the mansards and the battens and dormers repaired. As much woodwork as possible has been saved and reinstated – including most of the boarding to the cheeks of the windows – and almost all the slates have been re-used.

Alongside all these repairs the work of re-servicing the building has been carried out and the mechanical and electrical installations are well on the way to completion.

We are delighted to report that at present the works are on time and within budget at what is almost the half-way point of the 56-week contract.

Helen Dorey

THE CATALOGUE OF THE CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES

Soane collected some 900 antiquities – architectural fragments, sculpture, cineraria, Greek vases, bronzes, terracottas, gems and Egyptian items. The Roman marbles, in particular, are of rare variety and high quality, especially notable for the large number of examples of Roman domestic decoration. Many items are not only important as Antique pieces but also because they were collected in Rome in the 18th century by such figures as Robert Adam or Giovanni Battista Piranesi. There are a number of important busts, reliefs and statues, including a priceless Greek fragment from the Erechtheion on the Acropolis in Athens (c. 410 BC). The 'Ephesian Diana' is a celebrated Roman copy of the original Greek cult statue at Ephesus – seemingly the one illustrated by Raphael in his frescoes in the Vatican loggia. Among the 59 Greek and Italian Antique vases is the 'Cawdor Vase', rare for its size and fine condition, which once belonged to the King of Naples. The antiquities are valuable not only for their quality and quantity but also because they remain together and are still displayed in the highly individual setting Soane created for them. Many of the comparable early 19th-century collections have been dispersed or removed from their original settings, notably the Townley, Lansdowne and Thomas Hope collections.

The Antiquities were catalogued in the 1950s by Professor Cornelius Vermeule, an American scholar. Vermeule returned in 1975 to update his catalogue and at that time Boston University paid for a number of typescript copies to be bound and distributed to the libraries of various universities in Europe and America. However, the catalogue has never been properly published or widely available to scholars.

In 1998 Professor Vermeule's catalogue was computerized and since that time a series of volunteers and experts have reviewed his catalogue

entries updating the notes and bibliographies, checking the measurements etc. Earlier this year the decision was taken to make the catalogue available online. This will enable the work of up-dating the entries to continue whilst making them available to the widest possible audience. Most have already been photographed and so the online catalogue will be accompanied by images of every item. The text is currently being entered into the database and should be available online early in 2007. The adding of the images will be done as a separate project to follow on immediately afterwards.

Vermeule's original catalogue included the 304 antique and neo-classical gems in Soane's collection (purchased from the Duke of Buckingham in the 1830s – he had acquired them from the Capece-Latro and Braschi collections in Italy). Work on an updated catalogue of the gems, with the help of Professor Martin Henig and Miss Gertrud Seidmann, both of Oxford University, is almost complete. No other collection of gems of this size and range survives intact from Soane's day except perhaps the smaller Beverley collection at Alnwick Castle: most other such collections have long since been broken up in the sale rooms, often with such poor records kept that they cannot be reconstructed, even on paper. It is hoped that this catalogue may be published by a specialist journal and it, too, will eventually appear on the Museum's website.



The 'Ephesian Diana'

Helen Dorey

LIBRARY CATALOGUE ONLINE

Years of work to re-catalogue Soane's Library to modern bibliographical standards is nearing completion and over the next three years groups of entries will be made available on the website at intervals as the editing is completed. The first tranche of entries went 'live' in May – a very significant and exciting moment for the staff of the Museum and for all those involved with the re-cataloguing project (see Letter from the Director).

Soane's Library is exceptional not only because the books are preserved in their original setting, but also because they are underpinned by a large collection of sale catalogues, receipts, booksellers' lists and prospectuses, enabling us to say, in the case of many books when

and where Soane purchased them and for how much. Great care has been taken to record this information in the catalogue entries and also to relate the books to the other objects in the collection and to Soane's personal and professional life.

Work is now underway on the next batch of entries, which will consist of Soane's interesting and complex collection of works by Piranesi. There are also plans to add more images to the site.

To consult the catalogue go to 'Stop Press' on the front page of the website www.soane.org or follow the link from the Library section of the site.

Susan Palmer

THE SOANE GOES DIGITAL

Whilst continuing to rely on the invaluable services of our freelance photographer, Jeremy Butler, the Museum has also branched out into digital photography this summer. In preparation for the launch of two online catalogues of drawings – Dr Gordon Higgott's catalogue of the Baroque drawings in the collection, and Professor Alan Tait's catalogue of the early drawings by Robert and James Adam – over 1,000 drawings were digitally photographed. We are most grateful to Hugh Kelly who endured record-breaking temperatures incarcerated in a small room at the top of No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields with unfailing good humour.

Besides being used as illustrations for the two catalogues, the images will form the basis of a new digital reprographics service to be launched early next year.

Susan Palmer



Hugh Kelly sweats it out for the Soane Museum's digital future

Fundraising and Patrons News

SOANE SUPPORTERS' CIRCLE

It has been nearly a year since the launch of the Soane Supporters' Circle, we are pleased to report that that numbers are healthy and rising steadily. We are enormously grateful to all our new Supporters whose subscriptions have already helped many of our important conservation and education projects.

However, the size and variety of Soane's collection, which includes many thousands of architectural fragments and casts, sculptures, drawings, paintings and books, means our job of caring for the Museum is never done. Therefore, we need to increase our Supporters' Circle – you can do this by introducing friends and family to the Museum – especially first time visitors – and encourage them to join the Supporters' Circle. The more supporters we have the better

equipped we are to continue our work of looking after this unique house and collection.

Another way to introduce new people to the Museum is to invite guests to Supporters' events. These events provide a perfect opportunity to enthuse visitors about the Museum and to meet the curators and other members of staff who care for the collection.

Finally, just to remind you that the annual Soane Lecture, *Getting the Measure of Antiquity* on 7 December (see Events) is open to all and we encourage Soane Supporters to attend.

For more information about the Supporters' Circle please contact me on 020 7440 4240, or send an email to ccelder@soane.org.uk

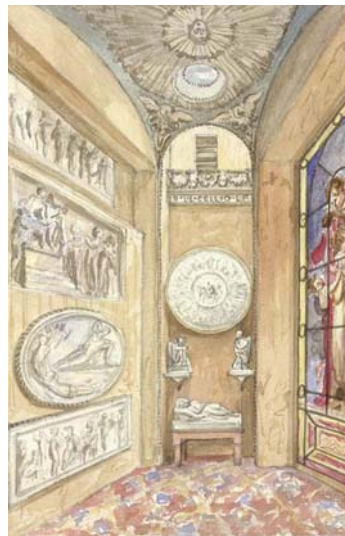
Claudia Celder

FUNDRAISING SUCCESS FOR THE SOANE

The Soane Museum was one of 43 museums and galleries in England recently to receive a grant from the DCMS/Wolfson Foundation Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund. The Soane was awarded £100,000 towards the costs of restoring the Tivoli Recess sculpture gallery (see below). This level of grant compares well with others awarded to other major museums, e.g. the National History Museum (£150,000) or the National Maritime Museum (£135,000) and shows, once again, that the Soane, although small, is a highly regarded and valued institution.

The project for which the grant was given will involve the restoration of one of the Museum's lost treasures. The Tivoli Recess was created by Soane in 1829 and located above the Shakespeare Recess on the landing between the 1st and 2nd Floors of No.13. Crowned by a glorious sunburst gold ceiling and containing sculpture by Thomas Banks, John Flaxman and Sir Frances Chantrey, as well as a floor-to-ceiling stained glass window copied from an original by Sir Joshua Reynolds, this intimate space was, in effect, one of the first galleries dedicated to contemporary sculpture. Sadly in 1918 the recess was emptied of its contents, reduced in size and converted into a lavatory!

The total restoration cost is estimated to be just over £300,000 so whilst we are off to a good start with our fundraising for this project,



A watercolour view of the Tivoli Recess in Soane's time

there is still some way to go – and of course we would be very pleased to hear from anybody who might be interested in helping with this exciting project in any way.

SOANE PATRONS' CIRCLE

Since its foundation in 2003 the Soane Patrons' Circle has now grown to an impressive membership of 82 individuals, each of whom support the Museum with an annual donation of £1,000 or who have helped in other significant ways such as sponsoring an exhibition. In return, the Museum is able to organise a series of special events to which Patrons and their guests are invited, including talks, concerts, film screenings, visits to private collections and other social gatherings. Recent events, for example, have included a talk

by A N Wilson, a vintage champagne tasting, and a rare book evening. Future events include curator-led private views of forthcoming exhibitions at both Tate Britain and the V&A.

If you would like information about joining the Patrons' Circle, the Tivoli Recess Project or any other fundraising and development matters, please call me on 020 7440 4241 or by email on mnicholson@soane.org.uk

Mike Nicholson, Development Director

Events

THE ANNUAL SOANE LECTURE

Getting the Measure of Antiquity

by Dr Frank Salmon

Thursday 7 December 2006 at 7.00pm

*At the London School of Economics Hong Kong Lecture Theatre,
Clement House, Aldwych, London WC2A 2AE*

This year's annual lecture will chart British involvement in attempts to gain accurate measurements of ancient Greek and Roman buildings, from their beginnings in the work of Robert Wood and James 'Athenian' Stuart around 1750 to the remarkably high standards achieved in that of Francis Cranmer Penrose a hundred years later. As the double meaning of the title of the lecture implies, these attempts were made not merely for factual or scientific reasons but also in order that a fuller comprehension of the design principles and cultural contexts of ancient classical architecture could be achieved.

In October 2006 Frank Salmon moved from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in London where he was Assistant Director

to take up the position of lecturer in post-mediaeval British architectural history at the University of Cambridge. His book, *Building on Ruins: The Rediscovery of Rome and English Architecture* (Ashgate Publishing, 2000), won the Spiro Kostof Prize of the Society of Architectural Historians.

The lecture will be followed by drinks at the Museum. Tickets cost £10.00 (£5.00 to students) and can be purchased on the door, or booked in advance by contacting William Palin on 020 7440 4246 or wpalin@soane.org.uk



Exhibition News

VISIONS OF WORLD ARCHITECTURE: SOANE'S ROYAL ACADEMY LECTURE ILLUSTRATIONS

From 12 January to 28 April 2007 the Museum is mounting an exhibition to celebrate a series of remarkable drawings produced by Soane to illustrate his Royal Academy lectures between 1809 and 1820. These coloured illustrations, beautifully rendered by pupils from his own office, and spanning subjects ranging from pre-history to the latest buildings of Regency London, offer a fascinating insight into Soane's architectural mind.

Following his election as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane set about preparing a series of lectures to be given each year, a requirement of this office. These lectures were intended 'to form the taste of the Students' and in order to elucidate his theoretical points Soane commissioned over 1,000 spectacular water-colour drawings. These drawings, rendered by pupils from Soane's own architectural practice, presented a unique record of world architecture and, for many, were the most appealing part of the lectures.

During the preparation of these illustrations Soane's crowded drawing office, not a large space, must have resembled something between a prison and a factory. His pupils were required to work for twelve hours a day and some of the drawings took weeks to complete. Nonetheless, this costly and labour-intensive exercise, subsidised by Soane, amounted to an extremely public spirited gesture. The resulting watercolours provided a rich visual source for his architectural students and were admired as fine works of art in their own right.

Although the drawings are rarely signed, thanks to the office daybooks it has been possible to identify the names of many of the pupils who undertook this painstaking work for Soane. Their drawings were in three main groups: first, those based on engravings from architectural folios on Soane's shelves, notably Piranesi; then, those drawn by pupils on many site visits in London; finally, a large number were based on Soane's designs and on drawings by earlier

architects in his collection. Since Soane illustrated work by almost every major architect of his day, especially in London, it is astonishing that he included nothing whatever by his prolific rival, John Nash, a striking consequence of jealousy but doubtless also of his low opinion of Nash's skills.

Nothing like these drawings and the vision of world architecture that lay behind them had appeared before, nor would again until the parallel but visually unappealing technique of Banister Fletcher in his celebrated *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (1896). Though the complete text of Soane's lectures is immensely long, sometimes repetitive, and occasionally even tedious, it contains

many provocative and unexpected passages, clarified and enlivened by his wonderful illustrations.

This exhibition will showcase 34 of Soane's most beautiful and important lecture illustrations. The curator is the leading architectural historian Professor David Watkin, author of *Sir John Soane: Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures* (1996). In addition to the paperback of this volume, a six-page colour guide with a text by David Watkin will accompany the exhibition.

William Palin



A view of the Rue des Colonnes, Paris, drawn for one of Soane's lectures

SOANE AND TURNER

Early next year the Museum will be lending both its Hogarth series to Tate Britain for a major Hogarth exhibition (5 February – 29 April 2007). While the Hogarths are away (they will be replaced with full-size photographic reproductions) it is our intention to mount a small but we hope dramatic and enticing show in our front kitchen space on the theme of the relationship between Soane and Turner. The Tate has agreed to the loan of major paintings, *Forum Romanum*, for Mr. Soane's Museum and *Ancient Rome: Agrippina landing with the Ashes of Germanicus*. The *Forum Romanum* was originally painted for Soane – probably intended to go behind the planes on the north side of the Picture Room. However, he felt it was unsuitable and commissioned Calcott to paint *The Passage Point* for that position instead. This will therefore be a unique opportunity to see the *Forum Romanum* in the building for which it was intended. *Ancient Rome* was exhibited two years after Soane's death but in the background there is a vision of Rome which incorporates a bridge remarkably like Soane's own RA Gold medal-winning fantasy 'Triumphal Bridge' and which has many resonances with J M Gandy's renderings of Soane's own works – prepared for Soane in the course of a thirty-year collaboration.

We are also borrowing a few other small-scale Turner works from the Tate. For example, a watercolour study of two tench, a trout and a perch, from the 1820s, will illustrate the close personal friendship between Soane and Turner who often fished together on Soane's estate at Pitzhanger Manor, Ealing.

While Soane was Professor of Architecture his friend Turner was Professor of Perspective, and the Tate is lending two of Turner's lecture drawings to illustrate this connection. One drawing, showing the Temple of Neptune at Paestum and dating from about 1810, may have been inspired by Soane's own Piranesi drawings of the temples as at the time it was drawn Turner had not himself visited Paestum. The other drawing,

entitled 'Reflections in a single polished metal globe and in a pair of Polished metal globes' (also c.1810), is fascinating in the context of Soane's imaginative use of reflections, particularly in convex mirrors, in his own house.

The purpose of our small show will be to demonstrate the close friendship between the two men and the resonances between Turner's work and that of Soane in terms of their architectural interests. We hope to also borrow the small George Jones oil of Turner's Gallery from the Ashmolean and Havell's original 1814 drawing of Sandycombe Lodge from the owner. In his lectures Soane praised 'the beauties and almost magical effects in the architectural drawings of a Clerisseau, a Gandy or a Turner'. Our own Turner of 'Kirkstall Abbey' and a *capriccio* of Roman ruins by Clerisseau will help to highlight the qualities Soane admired in their works.

Helen Dorey



Turner's Forum Romanum, mysteriously rejected by Soane

A GANDY MYSTERY

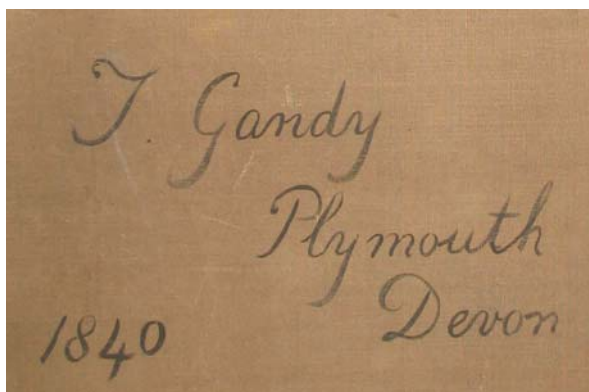
One exciting by-product of the publicity for the Museum's recent exhibition of the work of Joseph Michael Gandy was that we were contacted by the owner of a portrait of a Dr George Rees (1776–1846), Director of the Bodmin Asylum, painted in 1840 and inscribed on the back either 'J' or 'T' Gandy. At that date Joseph Gandy was incarcerated in Plympton House asylum just outside Plymouth and our first wild surmise was that he might have painted the portrait to pay his fees. However, there are no other known portraits by him, and it would seem more likely to be by his son Thomas, a portrait painter living nearby. Doubts still exist, however, as the portrait is not in the style of two other portraits by Thomas (of himself and of his wife, Catherine) in the Museum's collection.

A small label on the back of the picture revealed that it had been exhibited at the Midlands County Art Museum, Nottingham Castle in

1892. Michael Cooper, Registrar to Nottingham Museums, very helpfully tracked down further details of this exhibition, which was a loan exhibition of portraits of eminent medical men, hung to coincide with a conference of physicians in Nottingham. A small related cache of letters revealed that the portrait had been lent by a descendant of Dr Rees and that it was 'by a Mr Gandy', but nothing further relating to the artist or to the circumstances of the commission.

If anyone has any suggestions or further information about the portrait, please contact Sue Palmer or Will Palin (see www.soane.org/contacts for details). So little is known about the last years of Joseph Gandy's life – he died in the asylum in December 1843 but the place of his burial is unknown – and it would be wonderful if identification of the artist were to lead us to further clues to the mystery.

Susan Palmer



The enigmatic Rees portrait and inscription