

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NO. 21 · SUMMER 2009

Soane and his wife on the first-floor balcony of No.13 (the closed-in loggia was not created until 1834) dressed for an evening entertainment



Letter from the Director

Those of you who have recently visited the Museum will have noticed a new room has been opened to the public. This is the former Research Library on the first floor of No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields, accessible through a narrow door (formerly a cupboard!) on the west wall of Soane's sulphurous yellow South Drawing Room. Originally the Drawing Room of Mr and Mrs Soane's first house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, for many years (since 1971 to be exact) this fine room was used as the Museum's Research Library, which has now moved to its new premises in No. 14. Once the books and the huge mahogany bookcases were removed, it was revealed as an extraordinary Soane space, with gently curving end walls and an umbrella-like domed ceiling bordered by Sir John's favourite bead moulding. The ornamental boss in the centre of the ceiling incorporates a mask of Medusa, whose stony gaze must have disconcerted John and George Soane when playing here. The room also has a fine marble chimney-piece and architectural woodwork, so its re-emergence from years obscured behind books and furniture is nothing short of a revelation – something of its naked splendour can be seen in Ptolemy Dean's

recent drawing reproduced below. The room has been washed down and lino has been laid to protect the original floorboards, but nothing has been done to decorate it or hide the scars of years of occupation. In time, as part of the Museum's ambitious *Opening up the Soane* project, this room and the one next door will be fully restored and become the setting for the new Soane Gallery, but in the meantime it houses a modest temporary exhibition explaining what we are planning to do in *Opening up the Soane*.

Seven wall-mounted panels explain – in words and pictures – why *Opening up the Soane* is so important for the future of the Museum, what we have to do and how much it will cost. The benefits of the project – helping the Museum cope with its increasing popularity by improved circulation and visitor facilities, the provision of disabled access, and the restoration of an entire extra floor of Soane's private apartments, as well as the reinstatement of many other original historic features and arrangements – are clearly set out and illustrated with some of the original artefacts that will be put on show – some of them haven't been on view

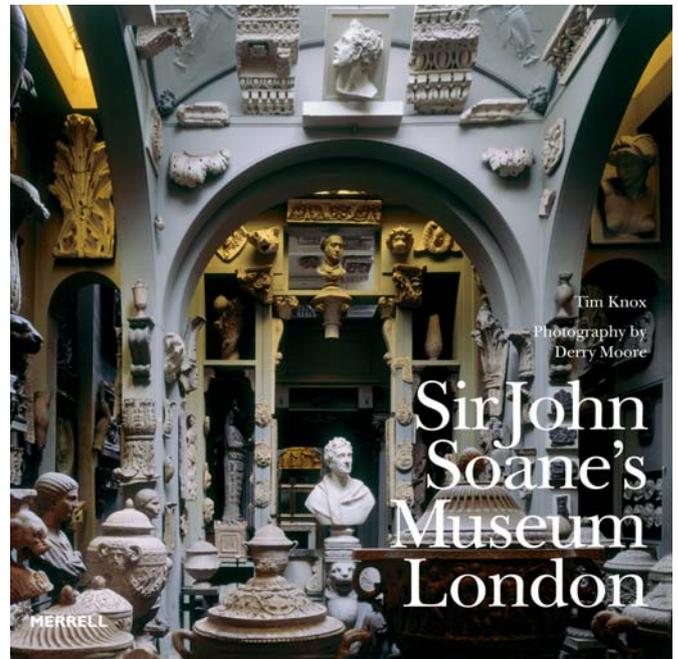


The former Research Library which will be the setting for the new Soane Gallery, but depicted here by Ptolemy Dean in its current state as a temporary exhibition room dedicated to explaining the *Opening up the Soane* restoration project

since the mid-nineteenth century! They include several architectural models, including a cork model of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, Soane's Hall chairs, and the picture that hung over the chimney-piece in Mrs Soane's Morning Room. It is also a good place to sit and rest, and hopefully learn something about Soane and his creation. We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for providing a development grant to help fund the installation of the exhibition. The *Opening up the Soane* exhibition is already proving very popular with visitors, and it helps us to explain our plans – which will cost £6.3 million to achieve – to potential funders. So far we have raised almost half the money needed, but we still have a long way to go – which in the present financial climate is proving something of a challenge!

As well as mounting the exhibition and raising funds, the Museum is progressing its *Opening up the Soane* project on other fronts. One important milestone was the appointment of the project team – the Architect, Project Manager, Quantity Surveyor, and Mechanical and Engineering consultants, as well as the advisers for the interpretation and activities that will accompany the new facilities and displays. Because of the high value of the works and to qualify for HLF funding, these vital appointments had to be through a formal process of advertising, tendering and interviews. The re-appointment of the Museum's house architects, Julian Harrap Architects, was only decided after a very thorough and rigorous selection process, and we are delighted to announce that they will be supported by Kevin Newlands of Nolans as QS, and the Spencer Clarke Partnership for M&E. Project Management will be provided by Fanshawe, and we warmly welcome Rupert Symmons and Trudie Dawson of Fanshawe on to the *Opening up the Soane* team. Martyn Bazley will advise the Museum on interpretation, including a new website and introductory film; Julia Holberry will take on the evaluation of our HLF bid; Tina Sawyer and Barbara Reid will be developing our Oral History and Volunteer programmes and Sian Harrington will help us to develop our Outreach programme. The final process of inviting tenders for the designs of the contemporary interventions in No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields – the new Gallery, Shop, Cloak Room and Interpretation Room – is currently underway.

In the last *Newsletter* I reported on the imminent publication of my new book: *Sir John Soane's Museum, London*. I am pleased to say that this is now available and selling like hotcakes. Published by Merrell Publishing and illustrated with over 150 atmospheric photographs especially taken by Derry Moore (who usually specialises in taking photographs of decomposing Irish country houses and forlorn Indian palaces), at £24.95 a copy it makes an ideal gift. Every book sold benefits the Museum, so I am pleased to report that it has already doubled the takings in the Museum shop! *Sir John Soane's Museum, London* is also available from the



Museum by post. Contact Julie Brock on 020 7440 4279 or jbrock@soane.org.uk if you would like to purchase your own copy.

Other recent excitements include the start of the project to convert the old West Chamber, a late nineteenth-century addition to the Museum opening off the Crypt, into a specially fitted-up, conservation standard, storeroom for works of art. We are grateful to the Trustees of the Pilgrim Trust and to two US benefactors for generously supporting this important preparatory project for *Opening up the Soane*. This, in turn, will permit the reinstatement of the strange 'triumphal arch' of sculptural fragments that Soane arranged at the foot of the Sarcophagus of Seti I. These include a gigantic bronze bust of Jupiter (or is he Pluto, King of the Underworld?), also my favourite sculpture in the Museum, flanked by two massive plaster candelabra. Nearby, we also hope to put back the lost so-called Head of Nephtis, a plaster of Paris cast of the upper part of the lid of an Egyptian sarcophagus. One of the few artefacts in the Museum to be destroyed – it was, ill advisedly, put outside in the late nineteenth century and had dissolved by the 1920s – you may remember from our report in a previous *Newsletter* that for a long time we have been looking for another cast of Nephtis to make a copy. The good news is that recent sightings of what may be other casts of Nephtis in old collections in Copenhagen and Berlin may now make this possible. I hope to be able to report a happy outcome to our search for Nephtis very soon.

At the end of May we had a very splendid festivity at the Soane Museum – a reunion of both the descendants of Soane's clients and the present owners of Soane's domestic

buildings. This event – which we playfully dubbed ‘the Soane Owners’ Club’ – was great fun and brought together an impressive array of Thorntons and Yorkes, Fortescues and Giffards, Cartwrights, Rowleys and Wreys, as well as the lucky people who live in Soane’s country houses today – including HRH the Princess Alexandra who graced the evening in a private capacity as owner of Thatched House Lodge, in Richmond Great Park, where Soane added a Dining Room in 1798. The arch-Soane-sleuth, writer, architect and broadcaster, Ptolemy Dean, addressed the guests with a wonderfully inspiring harangue, recalling his experiences travelling the country researching Soane’s country houses as a SPAB and then a Soane Monuments Trust scholar – work that was later embodied in his book *Sir John Soane and the Country Estate* (Ashgate, 1999). We hope, in future, to organise other reunions and events, strengthening the ties between the Museum and the descendants of Soane’s clients and present house owners. Indeed, we also hope that they will help us continue our project of cataloguing Soane’s architectural drawings in the Museum’s Research Library. May was a month of parties to raise funds for the Museum; in New York, our American affiliate, the Sir John Soane’s Museum Foundation, hosted an extraordinary Gala Ball in the famous Rainbow Room at the Rockefeller Center. This was a huge

success, and the money raised will go towards the fitting up of the new Conservation Studios planned for the second floor of No. 12 as part of *Opening up the Soane*. A brief report on the Museum’s own recent fundraising spectacular, the *Sarcophagus Party*, in aid of the recreation of the Soane private apartments, can be found elsewhere in this issue.

With so much activity the Museum is a very busy place – indeed, since the beginning of the year we have welcomed record numbers of visitors. The job of directing our visitors, accepting bags, coats and umbrellas, answering questions, and keeping an eye on the Museum, as well as making sure it is clean and looks its best at all times, is done by the Warders, the small team of very dedicated, and exceptionally well-informed, men and women. Often taken for granted, they are also responsible for so many of the little touches that make visiting London’s strangest and most atmospheric Museum so enjoyable – the polished brass and mahogany, the fresh flowers in the rooms, a smile as you come in or leave – and as we approach the summer season, also our busiest time of year, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the Warders for their hard work, cheerfulness and loyalty.

TIM KNOX
JUNE 2009

Goodbye Janey!

Jane Monahan, the Museum’s Children and Families Education Officer, has announced that she wishes to retire at the end of July 2009, after eight years working at the Museum. Janey was the Museum’s first educational professional, the first year of her work originally funded by Marks and Spencer. Her work over the past eight years can be fairly said to have established Soane Education and put it on the map. The inventor of – among other things - the ‘Concrete Crushathon’ and ‘Spaghetti Bridges’, her imagination and sense of fun will be greatly missed. Janey’s incredible patience is also to be commended: she inhabited the smallest office in the world of museums for several years – the lift shaft room – which is otherwise no bigger than a broom cupboard and so small, Janey had to leave her waste paper basket outside when she was in it! We wish her every happiness for the future – and very much hope she will be able to help us out on a freelance basis even after leaving the Soane.

Janey’s successor as the Museum’s Children and Families Education Officer is Lucy Trotman, who comes to the Soane from the South London Gallery where she was the Children and Families Officer. Lucy is a qualified teacher who also has

experience of architectural education, having worked at ‘Fundamental: Architectural Inclusion’ in Stratford. Lucy starts work at the Museum in July, allowing plenty of time for Janey to initiate her into the mysteries of Education at the Soane Museum!

TIM KNOX
DIRECTOR



Janey Monahan

Exhibition News

Immagini e memoria: Rome in the photographs of Father Peter Paul Mackey 1890–1901

19 June – 12 September 2009

This summer the Soane Gallery looks forward to an exhibition of photographs by the amateur photographer, archaeologist and Dominican father, Peter Paul Mackey. Mackey, born outside Birmingham in 1851, initially studied law at the Roman Catholic Seminary Oscott College before completing his theological studies in Louvain. However, he spent most of his life in Italy, settling in Rome in 1881 where he undertook work on the publication of the *Leonine* edition of the works of St Thomas Aquinas (a fellow Dominican).

However, Mackey also soon developed a passion for archaeology (something which on several occasions drew criticism as an interest not becoming a priest). His passion for the classical and pre-classical remains of the Italian peninsula resulted in his joining the Archaeological Society in Rome. He joined in excursions which took him from Veii, Tusculum, Tivoli, Albano and even to the mysterious pre-historic ‘nurhags’ which dot the Sardinian landscape. All these trips were recorded photographically by Mackey with the monuments he saw carefully recorded in exquisite detail on albumen and silver gelatine prints. He donated these photographs – an archive of some two thousand prints – to the British School at Rome in 1913, alongside a very detailed hand-written catalogue of his photographs. It is from his series of images of Rome that the exhibition has been selected by Valerie Scott, Librarian and Archivist at the British School at Rome.

Mackey’s images of the city, I hope, will show familiar monuments in a most unfamiliar context. The Rome that Mackey documented (from 1890-1901) was undergoing radical changes in its urban structure. The Tiber’s banks were being regularised through the construction of the *Lungotevere*. The narrow, medieval streets of the Ghetto, below the Capitoline, would disappear in order to make way for the *Monumento Nazionale a Vittorio Emanuele II*. Mackey’s photographs capture this change, recording views that have now disappeared from the tourist’s itinerary. More surprisingly he captured Rome as an industrial city. In one of the more startling images, Mackey has photographed the *Forum Boarium*, with its two well-preserved Republic-era temples to Hercules and Portunus, which would have been very familiar monuments to Sir John Soane (we have two wonderful models of the Temple to Portunus – in Soane’s day thought to have been dedicated to Fortuna Virilis – in the Museum).

Unlike the view Soane would have been familiar with, Mackey shows smoking industrial chimneys in the background of his images of the Temples – a sight far removed from the Piranesian image of Roman ruins within a bucolic landscape.

Although this is the first exhibition that we have organised with the British School, I hope that we will be able to continue working on future projects together. The prospect of exhibiting material drawn from our collections in the handsome Lutyens-designed building of the School is tantalising. I am sure that Sir John Soane would have approved of the link between our two institutions which have done so much to teach students of the Classical past.

JERZY KIERKUC-BIELINSKI
EXHIBITIONS CURATOR



Outlet of the Cloaca Maxima beneath the new embankment walls of the Tiber, the Forum Boarium in the background, © The British School at Rome Archives

Lincoln's Inn Fields: a brief history

Thank you to those of you who recently voted for Lincoln's Inn Fields to be one of the ten London parks to receive funding from the Mayor's Priority Parks initiative. Sadly, Lincoln's Inn Fields was not awarded a grant, but in spite of this we thought we'd take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about the Fields and the history of the square over which Soane's house looks. Lincoln's Inn Fields is the largest square in London, covering 7¼ acres. Where the square is now was originally, as its name suggests, open fields: Cup Field, plus part of Fickett's Field to the south and Purse Field to the west. As early as 1376 these fields were a common walking and sporting place for the citizens of London, and there is also some tradition of jousting. By the reign of Elizabeth I, Cup Field and Purse Field were pasture grounds in the hands of the Crown. One of the first historical events which can definitely be located in the Fields is the execution on 20 and 21 September 1586 of Anthony Babington and his fellow conspirators, although the exact spot is not known. One contemporary account tells of Babington being drawn 'from Tower Hill, through the citty of London, unto a fields at the upper end of Holbourne, hard by the high way side to St Giles: where was erected a scaffolde convenient for the execution'.

By the beginning of the 17th century the fields were obviously ripe for building development. The first attempts to get permission to build were made in 1613, to vociferous protests from Lincoln's Inn. Nothing came of it, but proposals were put forward to prevent anything of the kind happening in the future, and in 1617 a petition was put to the King that the fields commonly called Lincoln's Inn Fields might be converted into walks in the same manner as Moorfields ten years earlier, to the great pleasure and benefit of the City. As a result, a Commission was appointed in 1618 to survey the fields, raise contributions and lay out the walks. One of the Commissioners was Inigo Jones, and it is often erroneously stated that he was responsible for laying out the Fields. In fact, the Commission came to naught.

In 1638 William Newton acquired the leases of Cup Field and Purse Field. A licence was soon granted for him to build 32 houses, despite protests from Lincoln's Inn, and between then and 1657 a number of handsome houses were built.

In 1657, Cup Field came into the joint possession of Sir William Cowper, Robert Henley and James Cowper. They wanted to complete the three sides of Cup Field by building on its north and south sides. Anticipating protests from Lincoln's Inn they reached an agreement whereby the Inn controlled the manner in which the building was done. They also agreed to have Cup Field 'levelled, plained and cast into grass plots and gravel walks of convenient breadth, railed along on each side, and set with rows of trees', within two years. Incidentally

in September 1663, Samuel Pepys, who often walked in the fields for recreation, remarked in his diary that he 'took a walk to Lincoln's Inn walks, which they are making very fine'. But to go back to 1657, the three men sold the remainder of Cup Field to Lincoln's Inn, and Lincoln's Inn leased it back to them for 900 years. Building in the Fields was complete by 1659.

However, despite the building of the houses and the rudimentary laying out of the Fields, Lincoln's Inn Fields was notorious at the end of the 17th century as an ill-kept and unsafe place. Rubbish was frequently dumped there, many people were hurt by horses being exercised in the fields, various unlawful sports and games were indulged in, and it was a well-known haunt of robbers and vagabonds. The most famous description of all is probably that in Gay's *Trivia* of 1716: 'Where Lincoln's Inn, wide space is railed around, cross not with venturous step; there oft is found the lurking thief, who, while the daylight shone, made the walls echo with his begging tone; that crutch, which late compassion moved, shall wound thy bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground . . .' Cripples apparently congregated here, extorting money and threatening people with their crutches. They were known as 'mumpers'; 'rufflers' were beggars who assumed the character of maimed soldiers and imposed on the sympathy of passers-by.

Clearly, something had to be done, and in 1734 the inhabitants got together and, in a pattern which became common in other London squares from the mid-18th century, applied for an Act of Parliament 'to enable the present and future proprietors and inhabitants of the houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields to make a rate on themselves for raising money sufficient to enclose, clean and adorn the said fields'. This Act provided for the election of Trustees, described their powers, and prescribed penalties for encroaching and committing nuisances etc. The 21 Trustees, who were all inhabitants of the houses around the square, were elected on 2 June 1735, and they paid compensation of £250 to Anthony Henley and William Cowper, the holders of the 900-year lease of Cup Field from Lincoln's Inn.

The Trustees' first acts were to invite tenders for enclosing the centre part of the square with iron railings on a stone plinth; to appoint a Scavenger to keep the fields and streets clean and take away household rubbish; to arrange for the laying out of the central garden; to appoint Watchmen to keep the peace and enforce the Act; and to arrange for lighting. To get the necessary capital to begin they raised a mortgage on the rates, which was increased at least once in later years, the first year's rate being set at 2/6 in the £, based on the land tax assessment of each house.

Trustees elected from amongst the inhabitants of the

square continued to run the affairs of Lincoln's Inn Fields in similar fashion for almost two centuries, although their powers were gradually eroded in various ways in the 19th century: they lost the power to police the square in 1829 when the Nightly Watch of the Metropolitan Police took over, and in 1856 the Board of Works of St Giles District took on the lighting, cleansing, paving and watering of Lincoln's Inn Fields. From the middle of the century a strong public campaign, led by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association, was waged to open up the garden to non-residents (it had hitherto been locked, with only ratepayers having keys). Finally, under an Act of 1894 the newly-formed London County Council acquired the central garden, paying £12,000 to the Trustees in compensation. The money was divided up amongst the inhabitants, and the Trust was wound up. Management of the square passed to the Greater London Council on its creation in 1965 and to the London Borough of Camden in 1970.

Sir John Soane became a Trustee shortly after he moved into No.12 Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1794. Following his death in 1837, successive Curators of the Museum were also on the board of Trustees, and James William Wild (Curator 1878–92) designed the so-called bandstand in the centre of the garden. Though later used for a time as a bandstand, it was designed in 1879 as a rain shelter. Its original Moorish kiosk form (the drawings for which are preserved in the Museum) has been largely obliterated by the new roof which was added by the LCC in 1934.

The Museum was also a founder member of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Association (LIFA), formed in 1988 from representatives of organisations and businesses around the square to work to restore the square to its former glory, particularly after the devastation wrought by the hurricane of 14 October

1987. One of the great challenges which LIFA and others faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the colonisation of the central garden by homeless people, made easy by the removal by the LCC in 1941 of the boundary railings and gates. The crisis point came in early 1992 when as many as 150 people a night were sleeping in the Fields in makeshift tents and rough shelters. LIFA coordinated a movement to take the London Borough of Camden to court unless something was done, and it was agreed that the Fields should be closed for a period of time whilst Camden strengthened the bye-laws, which would make it incumbent on the police to move rough sleepers on. During this period of closure LIFA and the Camden Business Partnership raised some £71,000 towards the erection once more of railings around the Fields that could be locked at night. It was too expensive to copy the original ones exactly, so a compromise, without the stone plinth, was designed to match them as far as possible.

LIFA became moribund and was wound up, ironically just at the moment when the Fields was facing another threat. Camden Council's practice, begun in the late 1990s, of erecting large marquees on part of the grass to be hired out for corporate entertaining, escalated in the early 2000s, the structures becoming considerably more substantial and housing dodgem cars and other attractions, with a concomitant rise in damage to the gardens and disturbance of the inhabitants of the square. Towards the end of 2003 a determined campaign by a few individuals resulted in Camden Council accepting that what they were doing was illegal under the terms of the 1894 Act governing the management of the Fields. However, in 2005 the Council inserted a clause into the draft London Local Authorities Bill that would have had the effect of altering the 1894 Act to make this corporate hire possible for a certain portion of the year. Various frontagers,



View of London from the top of No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, drawn by Robert Chantrell, one of Soane's pupils, 1813. In the foreground can be seen part of the enclosed gardens in the middle of the square

prominent among them the Museum, got together and petitioned the House of Lords where the clause was examined before a Select Committee and eventually thrown out.

As a direct result of this, on 31 July 2006 a body known as the Friends of Lincoln's Inn Fields (FLIF) was formed to work to safeguard the future of this historic open space and to work with other bodies such as English Heritage to enhance and improve Lincoln's Inn Fields as it moves forward into the third century of its managed existence. Sadly, as you now know, the Fields was not one of the parks successful in gaining funds from the Mayor's Priority Parks initiative. However, FLIF has been very much involved in English Heritage's public consultations about the draft management plan for the Fields on which they are currently working. FLIF is also very keen

to improve the bio-diversity of the gardens, and is currently in consultation with the RSPB and others as to how this can best be achieved.

Details of how to become a member of FLIF can be found at www.flif.org. For a more detailed account of the management of the Fields see Susan Palmer 'From Fields to Gardens: the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' and 'Lincoln's Inn Fields Part II: The Management of the Gardens in the Twentieth Century' in *The London Gardener* vol.10, 2004-05 and vol.12, 2006-07, copies of which are available in the Museum's Research Library.

SUSAN PALMER
ARCHIVIST

London College of Fashion Students Bring Venetian Glamour to the Annual Sarcophagus Party

Bizarre and beautiful masks inspired by the opulence and magic of Sir John Soane's Museum played a central role at our annual Sarcophagus Party in May.

Now firmly established as a fixture at the beginning of the London Summer Season, this annual private event supports the Museum's major restoration project, *Opening up the Soane*.

Earlier this year, London College of Fashion students from the BA (Hons) Costume, Make Up & Prosthetics and Technical Effects for Performance courses spent several weeks working with the Museum's education team to create a collection of weird and wonderful masks, which were modelled at the event.

For 2009 the Sarcophagus Party – based on an extraordinary event hosted by Soane in 1825 to celebrate and display his acquisition of the ancient Egyptian sarcophagus of Seti I – took a Venetian masked ball as its theme. The astonishing profusion of art and antiquities collected by Sir John during his lifetime are still arranged and displayed at the Museum today according to his wishes, and, as the collection includes three fine Canelettos, the Venetian-themed project was especially appropriate.

Museum Education Manager Beth Walker used this glamorous idea as the springboard for a creative collaboration project with the London College of Fashion, inviting students from performance design courses to create extravagant masks and decorations to be worn at the event. The students took part in a series of workshop sessions at the Soane, delving into the Museum's drawings collection and most mysterious corners to seek inspiration.

Their responses were exciting and imaginative and we were particularly delighted that, in April, *Vogue* Editor Alexandra Shulman came to the Soane to meet the students, discuss



*London College of Fashion students model their striking mask designs
Photograph: Ralph Hodgson*

their work and nominate her favourite pieces for special recognition. This was a wonderful opportunity for them to display their work and explain their ideas to one of the UK's most influential fashion industry opinion formers.

An added bonus for students singled out by Ms Shulman was an invitation to attend the party itself at which Lord Linley was guest of honour.

Dr Jessica Bugg, Director of Programmes for Performance, London College of Fashion says: 'Collaborating on this fantastic project allowed our students a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with a wonderful archive. They were given a great deal of freedom to express their creativity and apply their skills to a spectacular event. We are delighted with the masks the students created and delighted that their efforts helped towards fundraising for such an important London Museum. It has been a great opportunity for our students

to have spent a sustained period working with a wonderful cultural resource.'

Beth Walker adds: 'When Soane left his house to the nation he was quite clear that it was for the benefit of "amateurs and students in architecture, painting and sculpture". We work hard to keep that vision alive through educational projects involving a wide range of groups. This project has proved that his house and its collection continue to be a surprising and

inspiring resource for young people born nearly 175 years after his death. We were thrilled by their reaction both to the museum and to this challenge. Their work brought the relevance of the museum to the very heart of our key annual fundraising event.'

KATE GRIFFIN
PRESS OFFICER

Soane's mourning ring for the Emperor Napoleon rediscovered

At the beginning of March 2009 we were contacted by Mark Bowis, head of the Jewellery department at Christie's South Kensington to say that a ring had been consigned for sale in June containing a lock of Napoleon's hair and inscribed as having been presented to Soane.

This was a thrilling moment as I knew immediately that this was one of only two significant items from Soane's collection which were bequeathed to his family as heirlooms (the other was a ring containing a diamond given to Soane by the Tsar of Russia) – and, indeed, it was the first time the Museum had had news of its whereabouts since Soane's death in January 1837.

The ring was not on display in the Museum at the time of Soane's death – it is not listed in his inventories – unlike the diamond ring. We therefore only know of its existence from Soane's Will of 11 May 1833, which, after directing where he should be buried, reads: 'I direct that my gold medal received of the Royal Academy as the prize for the best architectural design and my diamond ring which was a present from the Emperor of Russia and my gold ring with the hair of Napoleon Buonaparte therein and my plate shall be considered and kept as heir looms in my family as far as the rules of law will allow and for that purpose that my grandson John Soane hereinafter named shall have the use thereof during his life and after his decease that the same shall be delivered over to which one of his sons shall first attain the age of twenty one years.'

Soane's grandson John married Marie Borrer in 1844. He then died – they had no children. It is assumed that the ring

was then inherited by her family, along with the diamond ring (which we know from archive letters was still in the family in 1895 but had been converted into a brooch).

The inscription is on the inside, in French, and reads: *Cette boucle de cheveux de Napoleon Buonaparte a été presentée à John Soane Ecuyet par Mademoiselle Eliz Balcombe* (this lock of the hair of Napoleon Buonaparte was presented to John Soane Esquire by Miss Elizabeth Balcombe). The inside is also engraved *Prier Pour Moi* (pray for me) – possibly a quote from a poem by Heinrich Heim written in 1822 but this is not firmly established yet.

The ring has the London hallmark for 1822, the year after Napoleon's death on St Helena on 5 May 1821 and is a typical 'mourning ring', designed to hold a lock of hair as a memento of the deceased. Elizabeth ('Betsy') Balcombe was the daughter of an official on St Helena who, as a child became a pet of the Emperor and later wrote Memoirs of their friendship.

The Soane Archive contains the letter of presentation from Elizabeth Balcombe for the lock of hair but it is very short and undated and with no address.

Knowing how much Mr Soane / esteems the reliques of / great men Miss E. Balcombe / presents him with a lock / of Bonaparte's hair received / by her from the hands / of that great Personage.

The external wrapper is merely inscribed, in the same hand, 'For / John Soane Esqr'. The wax seal although quite crude, may represent the Napoleonic bee – if so, a rather charming tribute by Miss Balcombe to her friend the Emperor. Betsy Balcombe was in London from about 1818 to 1823 and must have sent Soane the hair either after meeting



The Napoleon ring.
© Christie's images Ltd
2009

him or having heard of his interest in the Emperor.

Soane must have had the ring made as the wrapper refers only to the lock of hair and Christie's have confirmed that the ring is of English manufacture. There is no bill from the 1820s for the ring in the Soane Archive but there is a bill from Rundell, Bridge and Rundell (SM Archive 16/12/54) for January to April 1815 which includes the item *A thick chased gold Oval Head Ring with Glass for Hair £3 6s*. This could well be this ring as although the rebate for the glass is not oval the head of the ring itself is oval-shaped and the description seems to match it. If so, then Soane already owned the ring when he was offered the lock of Napoleon's hair and the 1822 hallmark perhaps refers to the engraving. The French inscription is something Soane might well have chosen, particularly in the context of Napoleon, as he had a penchant for all things French.

The creation of a mourning ring in commemoration of the Emperor adds an additional dimension to Soane's fascination with the Emperor, so clearly expressed in a number of places in his Museum but in particular in an arrangement of items on the south wall of the Breakfast Room including two small portraits contrasting Napoleon as a young, idealistic military leader with Napoleon as an older corpulent figure after he crowned himself Emperor of the French in 1804.

Sadly, when the ring came up for sale at Christie's on 17 June it was sold for £24,000, many times the estimated price of £3,000–£5,000. The Museum was the under-bidder despite generous commitments of support from the Art Fund and other patrons and friends.

HELEN DOREY
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

News from Reading

Soane's connections with Reading were celebrated in an exhibition entitled *John Soane: Reading's Architectural Hero* at Reading Museum in the summer of 2007, which coincided with the unveiling of the newly-refurbished Simeon Monument by Soane in the town's market-place.

Now Reading Civic Society have honoured another of Soane's buildings in Reading, albeit one that is sadly no longer standing. On 26 February 2009 they unveiled an information board commemorating the history of H & G Simmonds Brewery, Bridge Street, in a ceremony which included

members of the Simonds family and a number of former workers at the brewery. Participants were given a copy of a specially produced booklet, *H & G Simonds Ltd. The Story of the Bridge Street Brewery, Reading, 1785–1980*, which explains the role that Sir John Soane had in designing the original brewery and house on the site and takes the story of the brewery up to its move to a new site in 1980. A copy has also been deposited in the Soane Museum Research Library.

SUSAN PALMER
ARCHIVIST



Soane's design for a new brewery and residence in Bridge Street, Reading, for William Blackall Simmonds, 1789. Over the principal entrance was a stone tablet with hops and leaves supplied by Edward Foxhall, and hop leaves also featured in the wallpapers for the principal rooms. The hop leaf was adopted as the brewery's trade mark and hop leaf signs are still just visible on some Reading pubs

Soane summer holiday fun: activities for children

The Education Department has been kept very busy this academic year with lots of school sessions and the very popular adult art workshop programme. In addition to running the usual courses, Beth and Janey have also worked with groups on some new offerings, including a photography day for a group of GCSE pupils and a three-day workshop for adults on stone carving.

The fantastic Education Room in the basement of Number 14 is the main reason new activities can be offered by the Education Department. In addition to adults enjoying using watercolours, oil paints and plaster during the art workshops, children have also been making merry with messy materials!

The children's holiday activities offered throughout the year have proved incredibly popular. During each whole- or half-day workshop, children explore and discover interesting things about the Museum and its collection. Each workshop also includes a practical element so that children leave having made something as a response to the Museum and as a memento of the day. The Museum is offering a bumper crop of workshops this summer, with much to distract children from getting bored by their six long weeks of holiday. See below for details.

BETH WALKER
EDUCATION MANAGER



Children making their own Soane-inspired capitals in the Education Room for the 'Capital Idea' Holiday Activity, May 2009

GENERAL INFORMATION

Booking for these workshops is essential. Please contact Beth Walker on 020 7440 4254 or: bwalker@soane.org.uk

Whole-day workshops run from 10:30am until 3pm

Half-day workshops run 10:30am–1:00pm or 1:30pm–4:00pm (please specify when booking)

All materials are provided

Children must bring their own lunch for whole-day workshops

Workshops are suitable for children aged 7+

£15 for whole day, £8 for half day, payable in advance (concessions available)

Tuesday 4 August

Mini Mosaics (2 × half-day workshops)

Sir John Soane had beautiful mosaics made from surprising materials. Play with patterns and use beads, buttons, bottle tops and more to make your own miniature mosaic.

With Rosie Fuller

Thursday 6 August

Dough! (2 × half-day workshops)

Learn how to make salt dough, then use it to create your own unique model inspired by figures in the Museum's atmospheric crypt. *With Caroline Dorset*

Friday 7 August

Hall of Mirrors (2 × half-day workshops)

Sir John Soane used mirrors throughout his home to create fantastical reflections and spaces. Have fun designing your own 21st-century reflective miniature interior. *With Caroline Dorset*

Wednesday 12 August

Hogarth on the Stage (whole-day workshop)

Discover the wonderful story of *A Rake's Progress* by Hogarth before recreating the scenes as miniature stage sets.

With Cecile Grant

Friday 14 August

Cast Away! (2 × half-day workshops)

Create your own clay relief sculpture, then make a plaster cast from it to take home. Inspired by decorative friezes and fragments in the Museum. *With Caroline Dorset*

Tuesday 18 August

Glowing Glass (2 × half-day workshops)

Don't look through the windows, look at them! Explore the Museum's stained glass windows, investigate colours and light, and create a suncatcher to hang in your window at home. *With Rosie Fuller*

Friday 21 August

Treasure at the Soane (whole-day workshop)

The Museum is filled with treasures from all over the world. To find and take home your own piece of treasure, come and draw your own treasure map of the Museum and make models in plasticine and card of special objects that catch your eye.

With Rosemary Bianchi

Wednesday 26 August

Carnival Mask Making (whole-day workshop)

August is summer carnival time and here's a chance to join in the fun. Let your imagination run free and create a fantasy Carnival Mask that could be sparkly or scary, magical or monstrous, in fact anything that you want it to be.

With Rosemary Bianchi

A New Book for Children at the Soane: The Journal of Mrs Soane's Dog, Fanny, by Herself

30 subscribers have each contributed £500 to pay for the publication of a new book for children *The Journal of Mrs Soane's Dog, Fanny, by Herself* to be published in autumn 2010.

Commissioned by the Museum, the book is based on the fictitious adventures of Mrs Soane's dog – *Fanny* – a lively Manchester Terrier whose portrait can be found in various locations around the Museum and who is buried in a touching monument in the Monk's Yard. *The Journal of Mrs Soane's Dog, Fanny, by Herself* has been written by the acclaimed author Mirabel Cecil with beautiful illustrations by the artist Francesca Martin.

The inspiration for publishing by subscription came from an example in the Museum's Research Library: by this means Robert Adam's handsome account of *The Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia* eventually

appeared in 1764, and there was a list of over 500 subscribers – including Frederick the Great!

The Museum's aspirations were more modest and needed only 30 subscribers to support the project. Thanks to the generous response from individuals, the Museum will now be able to produce 5,000 copies of the book, which will be hardback, 64 pages long, with full colour original illustrations throughout and which will retail at just under £10.00; the proceeds of which will go directly to supporting the *Opening up the Soane* appeal.

Look out for its publication later next year.

MIKE NICHOLSON
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR



Fanny and her friend Mew, the next-door cat