

Death and Memory: Soane and the Architecture of Legacy

Exhibition dates: 23 October 2015 – 26 March 2016



George Basevi, *Bird's-eye view of the monument from the south-west with Rousseau's tomb in the background*, June 1816

Press Release, Mon 5 October: Coinciding with the 200th anniversary of the death of Sir John Soane's beloved wife Eliza, a new exhibition at Sir John Soane's Museum will examine the recurring themes of death and mortality in the renowned architect's life and work. *Death and Memory: Soane and the Architecture of Legacy* (23 October 2015 – 26 March 2016) will look at Soane's long-held professional interest in the architecture of mausolea, funerary sculpture and monuments, and at the architect's personal tragedy of losing his wife. On display will be a selection of items illustrating Soane's professional and personal relationship with mortality from the Museum's vast collection, with rarely exhibited items, including a design for a monument to the Duke of Wellington created by Soane's own architectural office.

A key object in *Death and Memory* is Soane's strange and perplexing manuscript, *Crude hints towards a history of my house in Lincoln's Inn Fields* (1812). In this text, Soane imagines his home as a future ruin, inspected by visitors speculating on its origins and function. What begins as a fascinating, light-hearted glimpse into his architectural work, descends into something much darker and more personal. The manuscript provides the framework for the exhibition's layout, with one room focusing on death in his personal life, and the other on his professional life. *Crude Hints* will also be republished for the first time in 16 years to accompany the exhibition.

The first room highlights the effect Eliza's death had on Soane. Her death on 22 November 1815 left her husband heartbroken, never entirely recovering, despite living on for another twenty-two years. The exhibition looks at the Soane family tomb, the illustrious monument in the St Giles-in-the-Fields' burial ground at St Pancras where Soane and his wife are buried. The monument is known for being the inspiration for the famous red telephone box, and visitors will be able to see the original drawings and designs created by Soane's architectural office.

Another highlight of this room are Soane's unusual 'sealed receptacles.' These receptacles – similar to time capsules – comprised three repositories that were sealed up before Soane's death, with instructions that they should only be opened on the 50th, 70th and 80th anniversaries of his wife's death. The contents of these repositories included a broad range of items – including false teeth,

drawing paper, letters, tickets to the opera, a masonic apron and gloves, as well as his manuscript *Crude Hints*.

The second exhibition room focuses on Soane's professional work - significantly, the vast collection of drawings and designs he collected for funerary architecture, mausoleum and monuments. All of these drawings are rarely displayed, and one design – a proposal for a display of cinerary urns covering an entire wall at the east end of his Museum – has never been exhibited before. Visitors will be able to see work from Soane's collection by Robert Adam, Piranesi, William Chambers, Nicholas Hawksmoor, John Flaxman and George Dance, amongst which are designs for a monument to Nelson, for the Washington Monument in the USA, and a Office design for a monument to the Duke of Wellington, which was drafted a month before Soane's own death. The exhibition will also include a drawing showing the reconstruction of Hadrian's Mausoleum, which Soane described as 'the most magnificent sepulchral monument of all antiquity.'



Soane Office, presentation drawing of a design for a National Monument

Together, these objects reveal Soane's preoccupation with memorialisation, and show his strong concern with creating a legacy and shaping memory through architecture. The Museum itself is the ultimate example of this, as Soane left his home and his collection to the nation, to be enjoyed by future generations. Today Sir John Soane's Museum continues this legacy, promoting Soane's life and work, and furthering creativity and learning.

Helen Dorey, Acting Director of Sir John Soane's Museum says : "The themes of death, memory and legacy were highly significant for Soane. This exhibition proposes a reading of Soane as a man who arranged his collection in response to personal tragedies and through a desire to memorialise himself and those he admired. It is also only right that we commemorate the death of Eliza Soane, 200 years ago, a seminal moment in the evolution of Soane's Museum, ultimately leading to his decision to bequeath his house to the nation. We are also delighted that *Death and Memory* anticipates the completion early next year, of the restoration of the 'Catacombs and Champs Elysees' in the basement, populated with Roman cinerary urns, which will mark the culmination of our long-term restoration project, *Opening up the Soane*."

Death and Memory: Soane and the Architecture of Legacy will be accompanied by a fully illustrated book featuring essays by key members of the Museum's curatorial team, as well as *Crude Hints* itself, which is being republished for the first time in 16 years with an essay by Acting Director and Inspector Helen Dorey. Both books will be available in the Soane Shop and online.

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Listings

Exhibition: Death and Memory: Soane and the architecture of Legacy

Dates: 23 October – 26 March 2016

Address: Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3BP

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10am-5pm. Last entry 4:30pm

Admission: Free

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Sir John Soane's house, museum and library at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields has been a public museum since the early nineteenth century. On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane (1753-1837) began to arrange his books, classical antiquities, casts and models so that students of architecture might benefit from access to them. In 1833 he negotiated an Act of Parliament to preserve the house and collection after his death for the benefit of 'amateurs and students' in architecture, painting and sculpture. Today Sir John Soane's Museum is one of the country's most unusual and significant museums with a continuing and developing commitment to education and creative inspiration. The museum is open free: Tuesday to Saturday inclusive, 10am-5pm. It is also open on the first Tuesday evening of each month from 6-9pm. www.soane.org

Sir John Soane's Museum is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) whose prime sponsor is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport