

London in the Soane

A TRAIL THROUGH SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

This trail through Sir John Soane's Museum takes you around the Museum on a London theme. You will see buildings, standing and vanished, imagined and fragmentary. You will come face to face with London people; artists and architects, kings, and heroes, rogues and adventurers. Here are evocations of great events in the capital and aspects of London life, noble and sensational.

Follow the trail from object to object with the aid of the plans on pages two and three; some objects are large and impressive, others small and intimate - they are all part of Soane's personal and amazing collection.

• **The trail begins in the Library-Dining Room**

As you enter the Dining Room you will find the first two items featured in this trail opposite you, above the fireplace

1. Government buildings: a model of the Board of Trade and Privy Council Offices, Whitehall



This elaborate plaster model shows the scheme proposed by Soane in 1822 for the construction of two buildings for the civil service on Whitehall, either side of Downing Street. The block to the right was to contain the Board of Trade and Privy Council Offices and Soane intended its façade to be repeated to the south, on the other side of Downing Street, to create a symmetrical arrangement. Only part of the northern (right-hand) section was actually built so Soane's symmetry was never achieved. After Soane's death his building was remodelled by Sir Charles Barry to form the Treasury in 1846-47. Today it is the Cabinet Office. Soane's scheme also envisaged the construction of great triumphal arches at either end of Downing Street – commemorative of the glorious victories, by sea and land, achieved by British valour. Once complete, this grandiose scheme would provide an appropriate processional route for the King to use on his way from Windsor to Westminster for the State Opening of Parliament. Soane noted that 'The Buildings in this design are so arranged that when completed, a view of the north entrance into Westminster Abbey Church would be obtained from Whitehall.' This model, displayed in a place of honour on the dining room mantelpiece, immediately advertised Soane's status as a Government Architect to visitors entering his main reception room.

Look above the government buildings model and you will see

2. A London artist: portrait of Sir John Soane by Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1828-29

Sir Thomas Lawrence was the leading British portrait painter of the early 19th century, producing accomplished and flattering portraits of royalty and all the leading personalities of Soane's day from his studio in Russell Square (where he lived from 1813 until his death). He was known for his charming personality and ease with sitters. This painting was commissioned by Soane in 1828. It cost him £420 – much less than the 700 guineas recorded as Lawrence's standard charge for a portrait in the late 1820s. Perhaps Lawrence reduced his fee because Soane was a good friend. As Soane recorded later this work was 'almost the last picture painted by that distinguished polished gentleman'. Lawrence died suddenly in 1830.



Lawrence was President of the Royal Academy of Arts, from 1820 until his death. (See 3. *The Royal Academy: 'Love and Beauty' by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c. 1785*) Soane was its Professor of Architecture from 1806 to 1837, his friend John Flaxman was Professor of Sculpture and another close friend, J M W Turner, was Professor of Perspective. The Academy was central to Soane's personal and professional life. Opposite this portrait it is no coincidence that Soane hung a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, also a celebrated portrait painter, the Royal Academy's first and most famous President. See also 28. *Bust of Sir Thomas Lawrence*.

Turn around and look at the painting opposite you

3. The Royal Academy: 'Love and Beauty' by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c. 1785



This painting, alternatively known as *The Snake in the Grass*, was purchased by Soane from the collection of Reynolds' niece when it was sold in 1821. Reynolds exhibited another version at the Royal Academy in 1784, which now hangs in the Tate Gallery, and also painted a third variant, now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg, Russia. Sir Joshua Reynolds was one of the most admired artists of 18th-century Europe. First President and one of the founding members of the Royal Academy, he had a great influence on public taste as well as on the next generation of artists. The Academy was founded in 1768 by King George III. This independent, privately-funded institution was led by eminent artists and architects. Its purpose was to promote the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate. The Academy's first show was held in 1769 in a building in Pall Mall and drew 18,000 persons at the price of one shilling each. An admission fee was charged to avoid 'improper persons...' attending the exhibitions. The Academy's annual exhibition of works for sale, held at Somerset House from 1781, became one of the obligatory social events of the London season. As the Academy flourished and the number of collectors grew, the art market expanded and the number of London shows increased. Temporary exhibitions started to be held at the Academy in 1870 and are still popular today.

In the Library part of the room, facing the square and against the bookcases on your right you will see a row of

4. Eight Chinese chairs



The eight chairs against the west wall of the Library were made in China c.1720, at least in part to designs sent out from England. They are of rosewood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl. They bear the arms of Sir Gregory Page, of Wricklemarsh, Kent, impaled with those of his wife, Martha, née Kenward, of Yalding, also in Kent. The chairs come from their vanished Palladian mansion at Wricklemarsh, one of the great private palaces of the 18th century, on the outskirts of London at Blackheath. Unfortunately, the contents of the house were auctioned off, by Sir Gregory's nephew and heir Sir Gregory Page Turner, in 1783. The house was eventually dismantled and left in ruins in the 1790s. Soane went there on 29 May 1787 and bought salvageable building materials on behalf of one of his clients. These splendid chairs are first recorded in Soane's collection in 1822, when they are shown in views of his first picture gallery. They have stood in their current position since around 1825: lined up in a row against the wall, they were presumably intended only for display. Soane obviously valued them highly, placing them in his principal reception room.

To the right of the Chinese chairs, in a glass case on the pedestal under the projecting 'canopy' which divides the two halves of the room

5. Model of the Soane family tomb



Soane erected this family tomb in 1816 in the Burial Ground of St-Giles-in-the-Fields (now St Pancras Gardens behind King's Cross Station), following the death of his wife, Eliza, the previous November. He and his eldest son John are also buried there. The design is characteristic of Soane's architecture at the height of his career. The shallow dome on a square base was a favourite form which is also beautifully incorporated into the Breakfast Room ceiling which you will see later. Incidentally, this design also served as inspiration for the iconic red telephone box in the 1920s. See also 30. *Watercolour of the Soane Family Tomb*

- Pass through the door to the right of the window on the south, through the Study and on into the second small space, the Dressing Room.

Above you

6. Freemasons' Hall lantern model

In the ceiling is a lantern light, the central part of which is a model for the domical light in Freemasons' Hall built by Soane in 1828-31. This was demolished in 1863. Soane was a friend of the Duke of Sussex, Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge and became a Mason in 1813, being appointed Grand

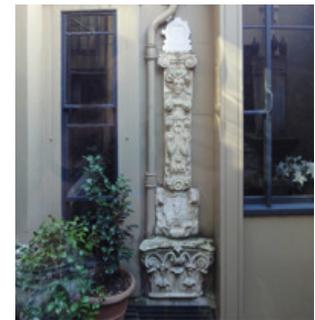


Superintendent of Works in the same year. He had read works by many advanced French Enlightenment thinkers, some of whom were Masons, and came to appreciate the Masonic love of ceremony and fraternal affection. Note the tiny rosettes and the signs of the zodiac on the glass panes – exact replicas in miniature of the stained glass manufactured by William Collins for the Hall. You will see a drawing of the design for the interior of this building later in the trail (14. *Design for the Freemasons' Hall*).

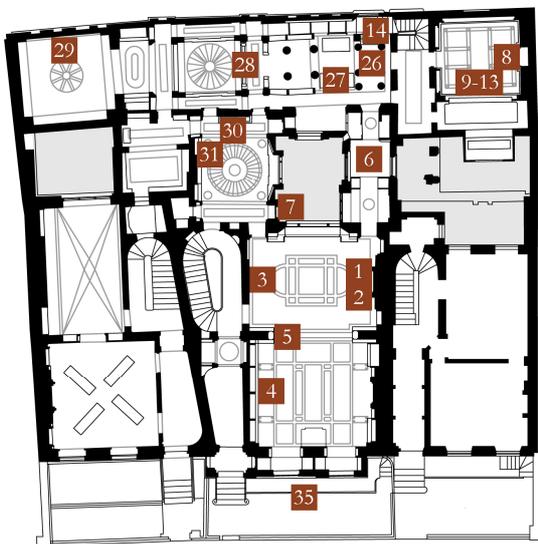
Look through the window on your left into the Monument Court

On the wall opposite you, on the left:

7. A vanished London building



This is a fragment saved from a local building demolished in Soane's time (in 1817). It is a pilaster in the form of 'term' figure, of Anglo-Flemish style from Furnival's Inn, a mid-17th-century building in Holborn.



GROUND FLOOR



BASEMENT

- Walk through the narrow passageway ahead, turn right, walk through the Corridor, and enter the Picture Room

Hanging in two rows on the wall ahead of you is a set of eight paintings

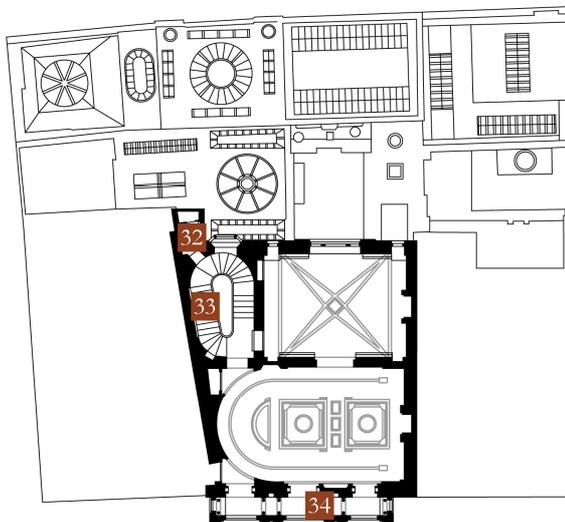
8. Hogarth's London



William Hogarth was one of the great satirists of the 18th century - the visual interpreter of contemporary urban life. As an English artist and a Londoner himself, he never tired of mingling among the city's populace, watching daily life go by on the streets, observing the scenes from which he extracted the absurdity, the folly and the vice of human existence which he took such pleasure in painting. 18th-century London was oozing with satirical possibilities to draw inspiration from and this was the core of his art. The City of London in the east, strongly mercantile and financial in character, contrasted with the fashionable 'West End' with its aristocratic residences as well as the shops, theatres, coffee houses, artists' studios, brothels and 'molly houses' (taverns frequented by homosexuals and transvestites) of Covent Garden, the Strand and St Martin's Lane. London comes to life in his celebrated 'modern moral subjects', *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake's Progress* and *Marriage A-la-Mode*, famous in his own lifetime through the dissemination of vast numbers of engraved versions, both Hogarth's own and pirated sets. Each series presented a kind of tour of London life featuring locations as



diverse as The Rose Tavern in Covent Garden, St James', Marylebone, the Fleet Prison, Bethlem Royal Hospital for the insane ('Bedlam') and the Thames embankment at old London Bridge. *A Rakes Progress*, on display in the Picture Room, was purchased at auction by Mrs Soane for £570 in 1802. Its eight scenes depict the folly of a young man from the country squandering his recent inheritance in London in brothels, gambling, and every kind of indulgence, until he is left bankrupt, imprisoned for debt, and finally thrown into the mad house, in the company of deranged lunatics who believe they are a pope, a poet, a musician, an astronomer and a king. Though often considered a mere caricaturist, Hogarth was in reality a powerful preacher of fundamental truths, revealing and questioning the foolishness and immorality of society around him.



FIRST FLOOR

- Soane ingeniously designed the Picture Room to house far more pictures than would at first appear possible; the walls on the north, west and south are fitted with large 'movable planes' on, and behind which, are more pictures

When the planes on the south side of the room are opened you will see watercolours of Soane's designs. In the upper row second from the left is

9. Design for a Royal Residence



This is a bird's-eye view of Soane's design for a 'Royal Residence on Constitution Hill in Green Park' of 1821. When George IV became King, Soane hoped to design a Royal Palace for him and as the official architect responsible for Crown properties in the Westminster area would have expected to gain the commission. It went instead to John Nash whose work Soane did not admire. Nash re-modelled Buckingham House to create the new royal residence, later renamed Buckingham Palace.

Below the Palace design is

10. Design for a Grand National Entrance to London



In addition to the Royal Residence (9 above) Soane planned a grand processional route which the King would take from Windsor to Westminster for the State Opening of Parliament (see 1. *Government buildings: a model of the Board of Trade and Privy Council Offices, Whitehall*). This design of 1828 is for a new gateway marking the entrance to London at Kensington Gore which Soane described as combining 'the classical simplicity of Grecian Architecture, the Magnificence of the Roman Architecture and fanciful intricacy and playful effects of the Gothic Architecture'. In proposing such schemes Soane was trying to persuade the British Government to begin the construction of grand neo-classical buildings in London to rival those of Paris. Needless to say, this, like the Royal Residence, was not built.

Below the Grand National Entrance design is

11. Designs for the Bank of England

The Bank of England was Soane's greatest building. He was its official architect from 1788 to 1833, retiring only at the age of 80, and described this post as '...a situation which has long been the pride and boast of my life'. This drawing shows designs for 'Various Offices' and shows how Soane exploited the necessity of lighting the halls at the Bank from above, for security reasons, to produce a wonderful variety of domed and vaulted spaces in his brilliant, original and idiosyncratic style.



In Soane's time the halls would have been open to the public for business to be carried out and they were one of the great landmarks of late Georgian London – Soane was even called upon to escort the Tsar of Russia on a tour of the Bank in 1814. Soane saw his Bank of England as the modern counterpart to the great Roman baths or palace complexes of the ancient world and even commissioned drawings of it as if an ancient ruin. Tragically, Soane's great banking halls were demolished in the 1920s and only parts of the outer wall remain. One hall, the Bank Stock Office, was reconstructed in the 1980s and is now open to the public as part of the Bank of England Museum. See also 19. *Bank of England models*.

Look to your right at the inside of the right-hand plane, in the centre is

12. Design for the Freemasons' Hall



Here is Soane's design for the Freemasons' Hall in Great Queen Street for which we saw a model for the lantern earlier in the tour (6. *Freemasons' Hall lantern model*). Here Soane again shows his idiosyncratic and highly original style and creates one of his masterpieces of spatial manipulation. He uses an extraordinary pendant dome like an unsupported canopy, segmental arches resting above the window openings, and even chimneypieces directly below the windows (a bit of showmanship made possible by bending the flue so that the chimney runs up to one side of the fireplace rather than above it).

Below the Freemasons' Hall design is

13. Design for the New State Paper Office



The new State Paper Office in Duke Street, St James's Park, was Soane's last public building built in 1829, unfortunately it was demolished in 1862. It was in a very different style from his other buildings, being inspired by Vignola's Villa Farnese in Caprarola which Soane had seen on his tour of Italy fifty years before. The bracket cornice gave the impression of an Italian pantiled roof but in fact hid a flat roof lit by skylights. The doorcase was also inspired by the Villa Farnese. The overall impression of the building looks forward to the style the Victorians would use later in the 19th century. On the left is a section of the building and in the foreground is the plan: this is said to be the first drawing in the history of architecture to combine plan, section and view on the same sheet – an innovative way of enabling viewers at the Royal Academy exhibition to appreciate the building in its entirety.

• *Leave the Picture Room and take the staircase going down to your right*

At the head of the staircase

14. Coat of Arms from the Court of King's Bench



This splendid Royal Coat of Arms, made from some form of papier-mâché, came from the Court of King's Bench in Westminster Hall. This was a court of Common Law (known as the Court of Queen's Bench during the reign of a female monarch) housed in Westminster Hall, part of the old medieval Palace of Westminster, from 1318. The Court of King's Bench was rebuilt by Soane in 1824 as part of his new adjacent Law Courts which were constructed between Westminster Hall and Parliament Square and he must have salvaged this coat of arms at that time. The royal coat of arms shown is that used from the accession of the Hanoverian king George I in 1714 until the Act of Union with Scotland in 1801: it incorporates not only the lions of England and Scotland, the fleur-de-lys of France and the harp of Ireland but in the lower right-hand quarter the two lions 'passant gardant' for Brunswick, the lion 'rampant' with 'a semy of hearts' behind for Lüneberg, the white horse

of the Duchy of Saxony and in the centre the crown of Charlemagne – all introduced with the Hanoverians. This coat of arms would have been redundant from 1801. The original bright colours were revealed when the Coat of Arms was cleaned in 1991. Soane's Law Courts were demolished in the early 1880s when the new Royal Courts of Justice on Fleet Street were constructed.

• *Continue down the stairs*

At the foot of the stairs on your right

15. Blücher and the heroes of Waterloo



Although Soane admired Napoleon - there are paintings and prints of the Emperor in the Breakfast Room and he also collected Napoleonic medals and books from the imperial library - the relief at his final defeat at Waterloo in 1815 must have touched all London and indeed the whole country. This is a plaster bust by Peter Turnerelli (1771/2-1839) of Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, Fürst von Wahlstatt, (1742 – 1819), one of the great heroes of Waterloo. After a long and dramatic military career in the Prussian army the aged Field Marshal (he was 72) saved the day by arriving at the battlefield at a crucial moment, turning the tide of the battle and ensuring a decisive victory. Two days before, at the battle of Ligny, Blücher had been wounded and lay trapped under his dead horse for several hours.

• *Continue heading away from the stairs and turn left into the Monk's Parlour*

On your right looking into the courtyard

16. A stained glass window

Sir John Soane had a fascination with the manipulation of light and colour in an architectural setting to create a variety of 'fanciful effects', using coloured and stained glass in many of his interiors to create different moods. His interest in such glass was inspired by the English Picturesque movement and by the example of Horace Walpole and William Beckford, both of whom installed panels of ancient stained glass, within contemporary settings, into their houses. A short break in the Napoleonic wars with the signing of the Treaty of Amiens in 1802, provided the opportunity for the release of large quantities of stained glass on to the English market. The sacking of countless religious houses in France, Germany and the



Low Countries had resulted in large numbers of small scale Northern Renaissance glass panels being removed and sold, which in turn, fed the demand among the English gentry for such artefacts in the early stages of the Gothic revival. This increasing interest in stained glass also encouraged the production of new glass, for both secular and ecclesiastical buildings. Between the 1770s and 1830s exhibitions of stained glass became very popular in London and no doubt Soane visited some of them. Soane's collection of stained glass was bought at auction and includes 14th-, 15th-, 16th- and 17th-century glass much of which he said had come from monasteries and other religious institutions destroyed during the French Revolution. This large window contains an elaborate composition of ancient stained glass, mainly Flemish 16th- and 17th-century, within coloured glass borders which would have been made for Soane by a stained glass artist (the borders present today are modern reconstructions). In Soane's time the window was described as having as 'a very brilliant effect... both mysterious and beautiful'.

To the left of the window, quite low down

17. Wooden panel from the ceiling of the Painted Chamber, Palace of Westminster

Soane substantially remodelled parts of the old Palace of Westminster between 1824 and 1827. He created a Royal Gallery and ceremonial entrance at the southern end of the palace together with new library facilities for both Houses of Parliament and new law courts for the Chancery and King's



Bench. See 14. Coat of Arms from Court of King's Bench. This patera comes from the ceiling of the Painted Chamber, one of the most beautiful and important rooms of the medieval palace. It was originally the King's State Bedchamber and was later used as one of the first meeting places for Parliament. It was destroyed in the fire of 1834. The patera would originally have been painted and probably dates from the 1260s.

• Look through the window

In the courtyard known as the Monk's Yard

18. Westminster ruins

In the yard are what appear to be the ruins of a medieval building. They are in fact fragments of real medieval masonry which, like the wooden panel item 17 above, are from the Palace of Westminster. In re-using these fragments Soane wanted us to believe they were the ruins of the monastery of Padre Giovanni, a medieval monk, who supposedly lived in the Monk's Parlour. He even wrote a



tongue-in-cheek description of the ruins mentioning the column forming the grave of Fanny, the Monk's 'faithful companion, the delight, the solace of his leisure hours', which can be seen to the left of the ruins. Fanny is buried here but was in fact Mrs Soane's dog! Padre Giovanni is of course, Father John, Soane himself. At the end of his description Soane added a quotation from the Roman author Horace *Dulce est desipere in loco*, which when translated means 'it is pleasant to be nonsensical in due place'.

• Look back towards the door you came in by

Above the door, quite high up

19. Bank of England models



Surprisingly, considering Soane's desire to create a medieval atmosphere in the Monk's Parlour, he placed some models for the Bank of England here. These models, above the door, show the Tivoli Corner, one of Soane's greatest compositions, either side of which are two halves of a model of the Princes Street Vestibule and above the right-hand section of this model the right part of the Lombard Street façade. Above the Tivoli Corner model is one of the Pitt Cenotaph in the National Debt Redemption Office in Old Jewry just opposite the Bank itself; it is open to reveal the interior. See also 11. *Designs for the Bank of England*. These models and the medieval heads immediately below them have recently been returned to their original positions from which they were removed more than a hundred years ago.

• Leave the Monk's Parlour and walk straight ahead passing a recess with a semi-circular skylight on your left and turn left into the Basement Ante-Room

On the table in the centre of the room in the centre of the back row of busts

20. John Philip Kemble



This is a plaster bust by John Gibson of the actor John Philip Kemble (1757-1823). Kemble came from a theatrical family and was the brother of the actress Sarah Siddons. He was hugely successful on the London stage and went on to become manager of Drury Lane Theatre in 1788. He was particularly famous for the title role in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, indeed it was said that the character of the 'noble Roman' influenced his private manner and mode of speech. On this table he is surrounded by busts of ancient Romans and the two sons of Laocoön (from the famous sculpture discovered in 1506 near the site of the Domus Aurea of the Emperor Nero in Rome). It is interesting that Soane should place the actor Kemble's bust in the company of such noble and dramatic characters - a compliment to Kemble's acting skills perhaps? In the middle of the front row is a bust of Baron Cuvier (the French naturalist and zoologist who was Napoleon's scientific advisor and urged him to found more public museums) which was previously owned by Sir Thomas Lawrence. See 2. *A London artist* and 28. *Bust of Sir Thomas Lawrence*.

On the wall above the fireplace is

21. A plaster eagle from Carlton House



This is a spandrel in the form of an eagle from the grand staircase of Carlton House, fronting Waterloo Place, just off Pall Mall. It was rebuilt as the Prince Regent's London palace by one of Soane's early teachers, the architect Henry Holland (1745-1806) between 1783 and 1796. The staircase was oval in plan with eight of these eagles between semi-circular-headed openings in the walls, two of which contained figures holding a clock and a wind-

dial. Carlton House was demolished in 1828, when Soane must have obtained this eagle and its pair.

To the left of the eagle, above the door

22. G F Handel

This portrait medallion is of George Frederick Handel (1685–1759), one of the greatest of all 18th-century composers. Although born in Germany he settled permanently in London in 1712. In 1727 Handel was commissioned to write four anthems for the coronation of King George II. One of these, *Zadok the Priest*, has been sung at every British coronation since. His most famous work, the oratorio *Messiah*, which contains the celebrated *Hallelujah Chorus*,



was written in 1741 and was repeatedly revised by Handel, reaching its most familiar version in a performance to benefit the Foundling Hospital in 1754. The Foundling Hospital, established in 1739 by the philanthropic sea captain Thomas Coram, in Bloomsbury, was a children's home established for the 'education and maintenance of exposed and deserted young children' which was patronised by many of the great and the good, including, much later, Mr and Mrs Soane. Handel bequeathed to the hospital a fair copy of *Messiah* and became a Governor of the Hospital, as did William Hogarth. In scene II, *The Levée*, of *A Rake's Progress*, (see 8. *Hogarth's London*) a musician (perhaps Handel himself) is seen playing a Handel opera on the harpsichord.

• **Turn round and leave the Basement Ante-Room, turning left. Turn right at the door into the external New Court and you will find yourself in the West Corridor**

Beyond the large bronze bust, against the north wall are

23. Two obelisks

These obelisks formerly stood outside in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Although Egyptian in origin, obelisks became popular in Georgian London and were used for a variety of practical and decorative purposes; these served as lamp posts supporting oil lamps before the installation of gas lighting in the square.



• **Turn to your right**

Standing in the centre of the space in a glass case

24. Egyptomania and Belzoni

The alabaster sarcophagus of the Egyptian King Seti I was discovered in Egypt, in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings by Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823) in 1817. Soane stepped in and bought it when the British Museum refused to pay the £2,000 asking price. There was an enormous upsurge of interest in all things Egyptian in England as a result of Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign (1798-1801). When he returned to England from Egypt in 1820, Belzoni was considered a celebrity among London's social elite and became a popular guest of the literate and wealthy. He wanted to be acknowledged as an antiquarian of distinction rather than as the travelling circus performer he had been before he set out for Egypt. He published his adventures in several books and brought his accumulated treasures to London. These were exhibited in May 1821, at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, and included plaster casts from the tomb of Seti I. The private view attracted the cream of society and the intelligentsia. The show was an immediate success attracting 1,900 visitors on the first day, at a crown each.



In Soane's time, relatively little was known about the sarcophagus and his own description of it was as follows: 'This Marvellous effort of human industry and perseverance is supposed to be at least three thousand years old... and is considered of pre eminent interest, not only as a work of human skill and labour, but as illustrative of the custom, arts, religion and government of a very ancient and learned people.' It was one of his greatest treasures, the ultimate mysterious and romantic centrepiece for his funereal basement.

• **Walk towards the east, away from the sarcophagus to enter the Crypt**

On your right between two iron chairs

25. A Statue of Britannia Triumphant

This large model of a proposed statue of Britannia was submitted in a competition for a national monument in 1799 by John Flaxman and later exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1801. The statue was to have stood on Greenwich Hill and would have been 230 feet high. Flaxman may have proposed a statue of such excessive size and grandeur in a patriotic



desire to make the monument worthy of the achievements of the men it would have commemorated. However, as a number of contemporary critics pointed out, the scale would have been overpowering, especially for Wren's famous Greenwich Hospital at the foot of the hill below. The project was quietly dropped - possibly because the committee did not find a suitable design or there was not enough money available, or they couldn't agree on the site - and Britain was left without any general memorial to the heroes of the Napoleonic Wars. An idea of the size of this colossal statue can be gauged by the scale of the stairs at the base and the door at the back of the plinth. Greenwich is today best known for its maritime history and for giving its name to the Greenwich Meridian (0 degrees longitude) and Greenwich Mean Time. It was the site of a Royal palace from the 15th century and was the birthplace of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

• **Retrace your steps and go back up the staircase next to the bust of Blücher**

Either side of you at the top of the stairs

26. Ten Corinthian columns

This colonnade of ten Corinthian columns came from the pre-Soane buildings for the Bank of England designed by Sir Robert Taylor and were taken out by Soane himself, during the building of his own bank. They appear to support the floor of the Students' Room above. Light is admitted to this small architects' office from above on either side via two long skylights, cleverly placed to light not just the office but also the passages below to north and south. Light is also provided by the



large dome skylight beyond the Colonnade and from the window looking into the Monument Court. 'The effect in this part', wrote Soane, 'is rather solemn than gloomy, and the pictorial breaks of light and shade will be duly appreciated by the students and lovers of art.'

• **Pass to your right**

Between the columns on the top of one of the large cupboards

27. Lord Mansfield

William Murray (1705-1793), first Earl of Mansfield, had an illustrious legal career culminating in his appointment as Lord Chief Justice from 1756 to 1788. His pioneering judgement in the Somerset case in 1772 (James Somerset, a former slave, was clapped in irons by his former master and set to be shipped out to be sold in Jamaica) held that English Law did not recognise the state of slavery. This restricted slavery in Britain at a time when owning an African slave was the height of fashion in London. His tolerance towards Roman Catholics led an anti-Catholic mob to burn down his town house in Bloomsbury Square during the Gordon Riots of 1780 – he and Lady Mansfield barely escaped with their lives. When Mansfield died he was buried in the north transept of



Westminster Abbey. His standing was reflected in the commissioning of a marble memorial from the neo-classical sculptor, John Flaxman, installed in 1801 between pillars and set against the Gothic windows of the Abbey. In this small-scale model for the memorial, which Soane placed in its present position, Flaxman's skill as a modeller is immediately obvious. The final monument, in white marble, would have been executed by assistants under his direction. The design is highly unusual in being free-standing rather than a wall monument which was the original intention – indeed, it was the first monument in an English church in the form of a free-standing group. Flaxman received the commission while in Italy and was able to study papal tombs in Rome by sculptors like Bernini while working on his design. Lord Mansfield is depicted enthroned in judicial robes, flanked by the figures of Justice holding her scales and wearing a helmet and Wisdom holding the book of law. At the back of the monument is a seated youth representing Death. The monument was moved from its original position in the Abbey in 1933 and today stands surrounded by other monuments in a setting where it is difficult to appreciate it fully.

• **Continue along the Colonnade and cross the Dome Area (you can see the sarcophagus below) to stand with your back to the statue of Apollo, looking back towards the Colonnade**

In the rectangular opening high up

28. Bust of Sir Thomas Lawrence



This is a plaster copy of a bust of Soane's friend Sir Thomas Lawrence by Robert William Sievier (1794-1865) The original of this bust is in the Entrance Hall and was one of the first things a visitor to the house would have seen in Soane's lifetime. It was sculpted posthumously and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1830, the year of Lawrence's death. It is a tribute to their friendship and to Soane's opinion of Lawrence that the plaster version of the bust is also placed in an important position, with a commanding view over the Dome area. Soane's own bust by Sir Francis Chantrey is placed lower down, on the balustrade which runs around the opening to the basement below. The arrangement on this side of the Dome, with two small figures of Michaelangelo and Raphael by John Flaxman below Soane's own bust, was intended to represent what Soane wanted his Museum to embody, 'The Union of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting' – and, incidentally, also places the Royal Academy, and therefore artistic education, at the heart of Soane's Museum. See 2. *A London artist: portrait of Sir John Soane by Sir Thomas Lawrence.*

• **Turn round and walk around behind the Apollo and into the New Picture Room**

On the wall on the right

29. A view of the River Thames



Samuel Scott is an important and influential 18th-century marine artist. In his day he was greatly admired and often imitated, yet he remains relatively unknown today. Scott painted topographical scenes of London, earning himself the name of the 'English Canaletto'. This painting shows the Thames with the Tower of London on the right and the dome of St Paul's on the left. His views of London and the Thames illustrate the importance of London, as a huge and expanding empire created through trade and naval superiority. The Thames is the aquatic artery of London. For centuries, the powerful Thames tides helped the world's sailors provide an expanding London with the food and raw materials it required - the Suffolk bricks used by Soane to build his first house in

Lincoln's Inn Fields would have arrived by river. Whilst the river today plays little part in the servicing of the city, in Scott's day it served as the main highway of southern England.

• **Return to the statue of Apollo, turn right and pass through the doorway into the Ante-Room. Turn immediately left to enter the domed Breakfast Parlour**

Above the bookcase (on the wall behind the statue of Victory)

30. Watercolour of the Soane family tomb



This shows the Soane tomb in the Burial Ground of St-Giles-in-the-Fields. See 5. *Model of the Soane Family Tomb.* Unlike the model it shows the balustrade, topped by typically Soanian acroteria, which surrounds the stairs to the burial chamber. It is significant that Soane placed the figure of a winged victory in front of this picture on New Year's Day 1837, just twenty days before he died.

In the spandrels (the lower, triangular areas) of the dome and on the arches supporting it

31. Mirror Mirror



Soane sought to exploit the imaginative possibilities of light through the use of mirrors and coloured and stained glass to create 'those fanciful effects that constitute the poetry of architecture'. He shared his interest in optics and the possibilities of reflection and refraction with his friend, the painter J M W Turner – three of whose pictures are in the Museum. The use of convex mirrors in many parts of the house perhaps grew out of the Picturesque movement in the eighteenth century whose followers used hand-held convex mirrors to view landscapes and transform them into framed works of art. The manufacture of mirror glass was becoming ever more sophisticated in Soane's lifetime – some of his early convex mirrors were supplied by a Mr Dollond (one of the founders of what is today Dollond and Aitchison, the high street opticians). Many of Soane's mirrors

were supplied by William Watson who was Soane's regular painter and glazier from about 1806 – like many suppliers of that era he was much more than a mere contractor, frequently bidding on Soane's behalf at auctions and acquiring 16th- and 17th-century glass for his windows as well as modern coloured, sheet, silvered (e.g. mirrored) and plate glass.

- **Leave the room by the door leading through to the main staircase, walk up the first flight and at the turn of the stairs off the half landing is the Shakespeare Recess**

On the left is

32. Shakespeare in London, Painting by Henry Howard *The Vision of Shakespeare*



William Shakespeare spent most of his life as an actor, playwright and manager in London. He performed at a number of London theatres and wrote his greatest tragedies, such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, for the Globe Theatre in Southwark on the South bank of the Thames. The 18th and early 19th centuries saw a great revival of interest in Shakespeare, with celebrated actors like John Philip Kemble and his sister Sarah Siddons performing regularly in his plays. John and Eliza Soane enjoyed visits to the theatre and Soane continued to go to the theatre even after his wife's death in 1815. Soane's admiration for Shakespeare as the greatest literary genius in England's history is embodied in this small recess, dedicated to his memory. The recess contains two paintings by Henry Howard: *Lear and Cordelia* (top) and *The Vision of Shakespeare*, in which the bard can be seen seated in the lap of Fancy with Tragedy and Comedy above, urging him on 'to the highest pinnacle of invention'. A strong Shakespearean theme runs through Soane's collection of paintings, two of which came from Alderman John Boydell's famous 'Shakespeare Gallery' – including the large picture of a scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by James Durno which hangs on the staircase next to this recess. Boydell commissioned George Dance, Soane's first architectural master, to design the Shakespeare Gallery, on Pall Mall, to house a collection of pictures illustrating scenes from Shakespeare which he commissioned from all the leading artists of the day and many of which he later had engraved to illustrate his new edition of Shakespeare's plays. The Gallery eventually went bankrupt and the paintings were sold in 1805. See also 20. *John Philip Kemble*.

- **Continue up the stairs to the first-floor landing and look up the staircase**

On the opposite wall is hanging

33. Royal Procession at the opening of London Bridge, 1831



This painting by George Jones was commissioned by Soane in 1831 and exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year. Soane is shown at the heart of the picture, close to the royal party and surrounded by his friends, the sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey, J M W Turner and Mrs Sarah Conduitt, who looked after Soane's household and became the first Inspectress of the Museum after his death. Central London has a number of bridges spanning the river Thames. London Bridge (between Cannon Street railway bridge and Tower Bridge) has been rebuilt many times since the Romans first constructed a river crossing on the site almost 2,000 years ago. The Old (medieval) London Bridge was one of the most famous structures in the world, completed in 1209 and lined with timber houses and shops. Its 19 narrow arches restricted the river's flow in such a way that it could freeze – providing the setting for great 'Frost Fairs' held on the ice. By the end of the 19th century it was clear the bridge needed to be replaced as it was too narrow and blocked river traffic. It was eventually replaced by a much simpler bridge with five stone arches, designed by the engineer John Rennie. The new bridge was built 100 feet (30 metres) west (upstream) of the original site by John Rennie's son (also John). Work began in 1824 – the old bridge continuing in use as the new one was being built. Old London Bridge was demolished after the new bridge was opened by King William IV on the 1st of August 1831, at a grand and festive opening ceremony, captured in this vibrant painting, which included a banquet in a specially constructed pavilion on the new bridge. The 1831 bridge was sold to an American entrepreneur in the late 1960s and another, this time concrete, London Bridge constructed which opened in 1973.

- **Walk ahead into the South Drawing Room walk towards the windows through the centre opening into the Loggia**

High up to your left, on one of the cross shelves is

34. A bust of Christopher Wren

One positive outcome of the inferno of the Great Fire of London in 1666 was that it allowed the master architect Sir Christopher Wren to build his magnificent churches.



Wren's plan for rebuilding the City was deemed too expensive; nevertheless, he was responsible for rebuilding 51 churches in the City of London after the Fire, including his masterpiece, St Paul's Cathedral, completed in 1710, where he is now buried. His memorial in St Paul's Cathedral features the Latin inscription *Lector, si monumentum requiris circumspice* which translates as 'Reader, if you seek his memorial, look around you.' Soane admired Wren as one of the greatest of all English architects and collected not just this bust but Wren's silver pocket watch (probably a gift from Queen Anne to mark the completion of St Paul's) and a walking stick containing a set of drawing instruments which he believed had belonged to Wren.

- **That is the end of this tour of the Museum – please return to the ground floor via the main staircase and as you leave the Museum**

Look at

35. Exterior façade of the Museum



The Museum itself is the middle one of three houses demolished and re-built by Soane. He constructed No. 12, to the left, in 1792-94 and he lived there for 19 years. It is built of white Suffolk bricks with Portland stone dressings. He later re-built No. 13 and moved there in 1813. No. 13 has a much more impressive façade with a projecting loggia. This was originally an open balcony (hence the description of it as a 'loggia') but Soane glazed the openings in 1829 (the ground floor) and 1834. The style is uniquely Soane's with simple flat areas of stone and incised decoration; so advanced is the style that sometimes people think it was added in the 20th century! One critic in Soane's day described his buildings in this pared down classical style as 'scored like loins of pork'. The third house, No. 14, was built by Soane in 1824 to match No. 12 – although it is occupied today by the Museum, Soane rented it out and on his death it was bequeathed to his family. The three façades together form what is almost like a palace front at the centre of the north side of the square, advertising Soane as a sophisticated and wealthy architect, antiquarian and collector, the projecting façade of No. 13 acting as an 'eye-catcher' to any visitor walking into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Trail leaflet text by Lisa Attard, John Bridges and Helen Dorey, September 2010