

Napoleonica in the Soane

SIR JOHN
SOANE'S
MUSEUM

A TRAIL HIGHLIGHTING OBJECTS WITH NAPOLEONIC CONNECTIONS IN SOANE'S COLLECTIONS

Napoleon Bonaparte or '*the Corsican ogre*' occupied a complex position in the public psyche of Georgian Britain. Although vilified in popular ballads, mocked in satirical caricatures and frequently burnt or hung in the form of crude effigy it should not be assumed that Napoleon in 1814 was the kind of universal hate figure that Adolf Hitler was in 1945. For many Britons Napoleon was a figure of fascination. He was admired by the poets Keats and Byron and the writer William Hazlitt. In 1800 over 20,000 people are reported to have visited an exhibition of John James Masquerier's painting *Napoleon Viewing the Consular Guards* which was claimed to be the only true likeness painted from life in London at that time. William Bullock's 1816 exhibition of Napoleonica attracted vast crowds to the newly-opened Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. The exhibition of John Sainsbury's collection at the same venue in 1836 was similarly well attended and ran for several years.

Sir John Soane evidently shared this fascination and purposely sought out items with a Napoleonic connection to add to his collection. His library contains fifty publications relating to Napoleon, ranging from anonymous broadsheets damning French intrigue in Ireland to a unique copy of Perceier and Fontaine's *Palais, maisons et autres edifices modernes, dessinés à Rome* presented to the Josephine Bonaparte in 1798. Other items he acquired include a lock of Napoleon's hair, a pistol presented to Napoleon by Tsar Alexander I and one of the earliest known portraits of Napoleon.

Soane much admired the architectural changes that Paris had undergone during Napoleon's reign. He visited the French capital in 1814 and 1819 and in lectures delivered at the Royal Academy contrasted what he had seen favourably with what he perceived as the *laissez faire* attitude toward public building in Britain.

Our current temporary exhibition *Peace Breaks Out! London and Paris in the Summer of 1814* provides a unique glimpse into the celebrations that greeted the end of over a decade of conflict as well as containing more information on Soane's visits to Paris. This trail guides visitors to items of Napoleonica which Soane placed on permanent display within the Museum as part of arrangements of works of art which he described as 'studies for my mind' and which he stipulated should be kept as they were at the time of his death (1837).

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

During Soane's time in Paris he visited many of the buildings associated with the former Emperor including the Château de Malmaison on the outskirts of the city. Purchased by Josephine in 1799 as a home for herself and Napoleon, Malmaison required extensive

restoration work and the architects Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine were tasked with turning the property into a suitable residence for the then First Consul. Their design for Malmaison's impressive library clearly exerted a strong influence upon Soane and is reflected in the design for his own library.

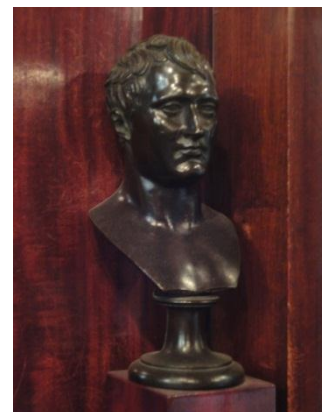
You will find the first two items featured in this trail on the pedestals on the projecting pier opposite the door from the Hall and to the right

1. The youthful and the corpulent Emperor



These busts of Napoleon are of unknown provenance. One depicts a relatively youthful Napoleon as First Consul whilst the other

shows the decidedly more corpulent Napoleon as Emperor.

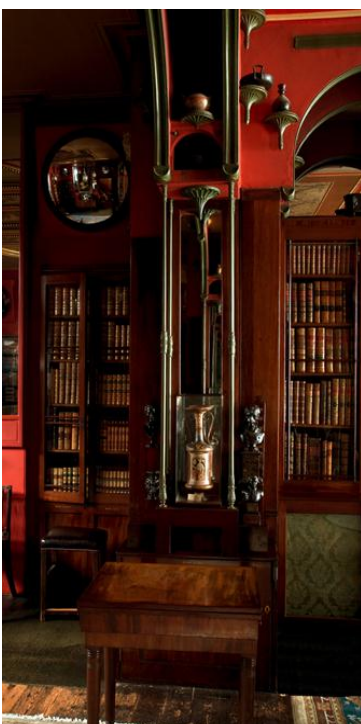


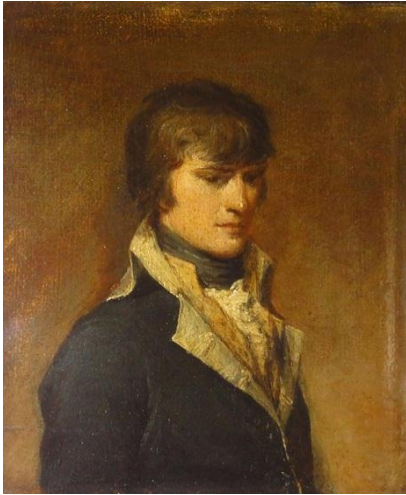
• *Walk through the door to the left of the window and into the Breakfast Room*

The next items can be found on the south wall (on your left as you enter from the Library-Dining Room)

2. Two more Napoleonic portraits

The first portrait (on the left) is by the enigmatic painter Francesco Cossia and is thought to be one of the earliest portraits of Napoleon, showing him at the age of twenty-eight as *Chef de L'armée d'Italie* at the time of his victories over Austria in 1797. The second portrait (on the right) was painted by Jean-Baptiste Isabey. Known as '*the painter of Kings*' Isabey worked consecutively for the courts of





Louis XVI, Napoleon, Louis XVIII and Charles X. The portrait is believed to be one of several produced as gifts for those favoured by Napoleon.



Between the two portraits

3. An empty display case

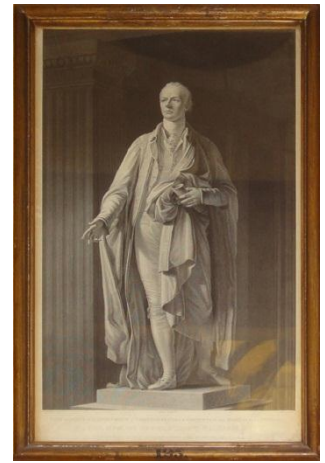


This display case once housed an ornate flintlock pistol. The pistol, which is sadly no longer in the collection, is said to have been taken from a Turkish General by the Russian Tsar Peter the Great after the second battle of Azov in 1696 and presented to Napoleon by Tsar Alexander I on a raft at the signing of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807. This memento of past glories travelled into exile with the former Emperor who is said to have later presented it to one his favourite officers. The pistol was eventually brought to London where it was purchased by Soane from the silversmith A H Dry in March 1826 for the sum of £20.

On the opposite side of the room, to the right of the large bookcase and high up close to the skylight

4. 'The Atlas of our reeling globe'

William Pitt served as Prime Minister during the French Revolution and the first decade of the Napoleonic Wars and was referred to by Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 1st Earl of Minto, as 'the Atlas of our reeling globe', likening him to the Greek god who holds the world on his shoulders. Pitt was also an early patron of Soane and instrumental in securing for him the position of Surveyor and Architect to the Bank of England in 1788.

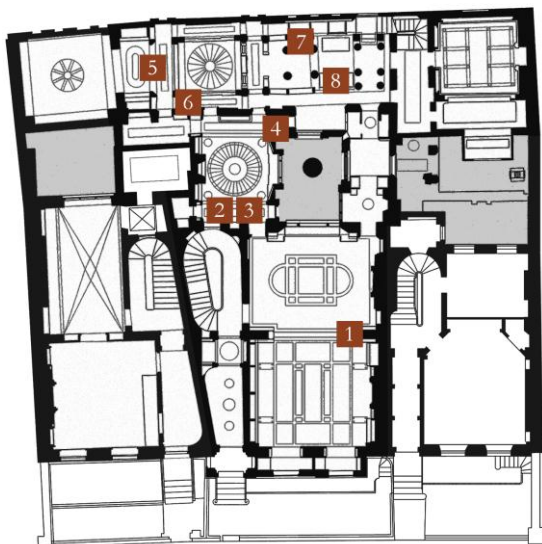


• *Turn to your left and walk through the small Ante-Room and turn right to enter the Dome Area*

Ahead of you on a round plinth

5. A celebrated statue

The plaster cast of the Apollo Belvedere is one of the most striking and visually dominant features of the Dome area. The original statue, discovered near Anzio in the 15th century is thought to be a Roman copy of a lost bronze work by the Greek sculptor Leochares. Championed by the neo-classical movement, the Apollo Belvedere became one the most celebrated works of art of the 18th century. Taken from the Vatican by Napoleon after his capture of Rome in 1798, the Apollo was brought to Paris and became a centrepiece of the *Musée Napoléon* (now the Louvre). It is likely that Soane would have visited the *Salle de l'Apollon* which housed the Apollo and other spoils of Napoleon's Italian campaigns during his 1814 trip to Paris. The Apollo was returned to the Vatican after Napoleon's final defeat in 1815. Soane's cast of the famous statue was originally made for Lord Burlington and



GROUND FLOOR



BASEMENT

placed in his villa at Chiswick. The cast was given by the 5th Duke of Devonshire to the architect John White who in turn presented it to Soane in 1811. Soane recalled later that he had to 'take down a large portion of the external wall in order to admit it into its present position'.



- Walk around the opening to the basement and into the Colonnade

On a high shelf above a statue of Aesculapius, (the figure with a curly staff) on the right, south, side of the Colonnade

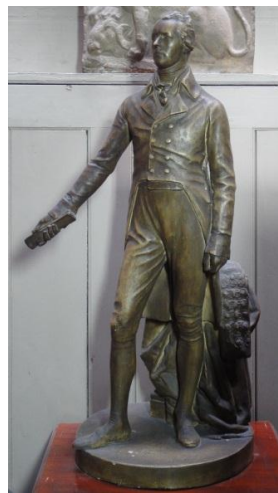
6. Not Canova but Chaudet



Soane originally believed this portrait bust of Napoleon to be after a work by the Venetian sculptor Antonio Canova but more recent research has shown that it is more likely to have been based on a similar work by Antoine-Denis Chaudet. A bronze bust of Napoleon by Chaudet formerly in the possession of Dominique-Vivant Denon, Napoleon's chief Egyptologist and later head of the *Musée Napoléon* and the *Paris monnaie*, can be seen in the *Peace Breaks Out!* exhibition.

A little further down and on the left (north) side of the Colonnade, next to the cupboard and standing on a pedestal

7. A statue of Pitt for Glasgow



This statue was designed by Flaxman for the City of Glasgow. (See also item 4).

- Walk back past the statue of Aesculapius, turn left and left again

Halfway along on top of a cupboard and on your left

8. Another celebrated treasure

Like the Apollo Belvedere the *Laocoön* was one of many treasures looted from the Vatican following Napoleon's capture of Rome in



1798. Installed in the *Musée Napoléon* it is likely to have been seen by Soane during his 1814 visit to Paris. It was returned to the Vatican in 1816. This is a much-reduced version.

- Continue walking, past the cupboard, turn left and go down the stairs ahead of you

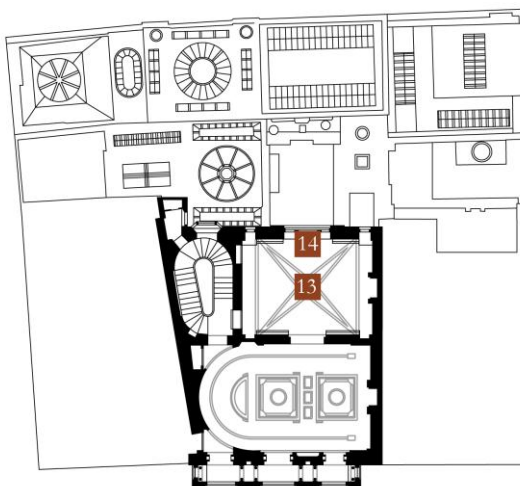
At the foot of the stairs leading from the Colonnade down to the basement

9. A great General



The Prince Regent commissioned a bust of Blücher from the sculptor Peter Turnerelli, who was able to capture a likeness of the subject during the visit of the Allied Sovereigns to London in June 1814. As the most celebrated of the allied generals next to Wellington, Blücher's presence in London was greeted with an outpouring of public adulation which saw his temporary lodgings at St James's Palace besieged by eager well-wishers and his carriage drawn along the street by the adoring throng. Turnerelli's completed marble bust of Blücher is in the Royal Collection. The plaster version acquired by Soane is almost certainly the bust exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1815.

- Continue walking away from the staircase, turn right (mind the step) and take the second narrow passage to the right and turn right again, into the Egyptian Crypt



FIRST FLOOR

On the south side of the Egyptian Crypt, facing the triple recess

10. Britannia Triumphant



In 1799, the year after Nelson's famous victory at the battle of the Nile, the sculptor John Flaxman designed a colossal 230 foot high statue of Britannia intended to stand on Greenwich Hill as a national monument to British naval prowess. It was Soane's former master George Dance the Younger who is supposed to have suggested the site of Greenwich Hill to Flaxman. Flaxman argued for the realisation of his idea in a pamphlet with illustrations engraved by William Blake, but what would have been a stupendous national monument remained unexecuted. This model of the statue was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1801.

• **Return the way you came through the narrow passage and turn right into The Basement Ante-Room**

On an 18th-century table topped with grey marble, in the centre of the front row of busts

11. A tireless champion for education and the natural sciences



A plaster bust of George Cuvier by Louis Parfait Merlieux. Born in 1769 at Mömelgrad in the Duchy of Württemberg (now Montbéliard) and educated at the University of Stuttgart, Cuvier became one of France's pre-eminent zoologists and was a tireless champion for the natural sciences and the importance of public education. He was commissioned by Napoleon to report on the state of science and education and his work

laid the foundations for the modern French education system. Cuvier's fame was such that his career was unaffected by the Bourbon restoration of 1814. He remained a prominent government advisor on science and education until his death in 1832. Soane was evidently an admirer of Cuvier, who is said to have reminded Napoleon of the importance of public museums, stating that they 'speak ceaselessly to the eye, and inspire a taste for science in young people'. An English translation of Cuvier's *Règne Animal distribué d'après son Organisation* is in Soane's library. The bust in Soane's possession is by Louis Parfait Merlieux, who, after graduating from the *École des Beaux-Arts*, began a period of study under the supervision of Cuvier. It is dated 1827 and is thought to have been acquired by Soane sometime between 1832 and 1836. Soane recorded that it had previously belonged to Sir Thomas Lawrence to whom it had been presented by Madame Cuvier.

Flanking the bust of Cuvier are

12. The sons of Laocoön

Two casts of the heads of Laocoön's sons from the *Laocoön* (see item 8 above).

• **Double back and up the staircase to the Colonnade continue straight ahead through the Dressing Room, Study and Library-Dining Room to the main Staircase. Go up the Staircase and turn left into the North Drawing Room**

On the cabinet in the centre of the room

13. Exquisite architectural models



These architectural models were produced by the Parisian firm of Fouquet et Fils. Jean-Pierre Fouquet was a gifted architectural model maker whose clients included the future American President Thomas Jefferson and the noted antiquarian the Comte Marie-Gabriel de Choiseul-Gouffier. In 1794, in the aftermath of the French revolution, Jean-Pierre was appointed chief model maker to the *École Central des Travaux Publics* (later the *École Polytechnique*). Jean-Pierre's son, François learnt model making from his father and from about 1810 to 1820 father and son worked alongside one another producing exquisite small-scale plaster architectural models after antique buildings. The work of the Fouquets

was known and collected in England. The architect John Nash ordered several of the models to decorate his house at 14-15 Lower Regent Street. The architect Robert Smirke was another admirer of the Fouquets' technique. The models in Soane's collection, which include the Tomb of Mausolus, the Round Temple at Baalbek and the Temple of Neptune at Paestum are believed to have been made by François Fouquet between 1801 and 1833. Soane bought his models in 1834 from Edward Cresy who may have purchased them directly from Fouquet et Fils. Soane paid the substantial sum of £100 (over £10,000 in today's money) for his models.

On the window sill, in a pair of wooden cases

14. Significant events of Napoleon's reign



A set of 140 medals struck by the Paris *monnaie* depicting significant events during Napoleon's reign. As head of the *monnaie* Denon relied on a team of nine designers including Chaudet and Pierre Nolasque Bergeret. Each design was personally submitted to Napoleon for approval. The *monnaie* produced a remarkable number of medals. Accounts for 1811 show that over the course of that year no fewer than 23,746 gold, 136,865 silver and 17,668 bronze medals were struck. It is believed that Soane acquired his medals sometime between 1816 and 1823. In his 1835 *Description of the House and Museum* he describes the medals as having been 'once in the possession of the Empress Josephine'. Research has revealed that Soane's medals are in fact the standard series sold in large numbers to English tourists in France in 1815. As they are bronze they are unlikely to have belonged to the Empress, who would undoubtedly have had a gold set.



This trail leaflet was compiled with the help of volunteer Oliver Carter-Wakefield, and designed by John Bridges

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