

# SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NO.20 · SPRING



Joseph Michael Gandy, *View to the 'Plaster Room'*  
(the precursor of the Dome) by lamplight looking south-east, 1811

## Letter from the Director

It is fitting that this year, 2009, should find the Soane Museum curatorial and administrative staff fully installed in their new offices, which, as regular readers of the *Newsletter* know, were recently created along the upper floors of all three houses now owned by the Museum. Two hundred years ago, in 1809, Soane completed additions to No. 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields which included a new 'Office' in the courtyard at the rear, as well as the strange 'Plaster Room', a two-storey annex for the display of his burgeoning collection of plaster casts of architectural ornament, erected in the back garden of his next door neighbours, Mr and Mrs Tyndale. I always think that the Tyndales must have been saints to give up their back garden to accommodate their neighbour's growing collections. The Plaster Room is depicted in Joseph Michael Gandy's atmospheric watercolour of 1811 (which features on the front cover of this *Newsletter*) and shows it to have been very much the precursor of the current display of piled-up casts and antiquities that makes the Dome one of the most memorable interiors in any Museum.

Then, three years later, in 1812, Soane somehow persuaded the Tyndales to sell him their house, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, and move into No. 12 as his tenants. He then rebuilt No. 13 – which had a larger floor area – as his own residence, and this is the Museum that we know and love today. The Plaster Room was recast and aggrandised to form the present Dome, but is recognisably in the same spirit as its predecessor. Soane constantly added to and altered his house, and made changes to the displays to accommodate recent purchases – the history of the Museum being a highly complicated game of architectural musical chairs! Today, as we raise money to assemble the necessary funds to reinstate more of Soane's original arrangements, and to improve facilities for our visitors – the Museum's highly acclaimed *Opening up the Soane* project – it is worth remembering that we want to complete the works in 2012, the 200th anniversary of Sir John Soane's acquisition of 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields. The move of our offices to the upper floors of the Museum frees up important spaces downstairs and is the essential first stage in a comprehensive plan to reinstate the Museum, as far as possible, exactly as it was on Soane's death in January 1837.

This ambitious project received a considerable boost in December by the very welcome news that the London Committee of the Heritage Lottery Fund had given us a green light to proceed to the next stage of their application process. After the disappointments of last year, when the Trustees of the HLF turned down a request for £3M for the same project, this comes as something of a welcome consolation. In practice, the HLF have awarded a grant of £192,000 that will allow us to develop our plans to the next (and final) stage when we can make a final application for a further £800K in December of this year. This further endorsement of our plans by the HLF is welcome if bitter-sweet and we look

forward to galvanising all of our friends and supporters behind *Opening up the Soane* in the months ahead.

Vital to the survival of the Museum is our ability to raise our own funds, and one important way of doing this is through activities such as sales in the shop and hire of the Museum for very special dinners and receptions. These bring much-needed unrestricted income to the Museum's coffers, which we can apply to urgent conservation projects within the building. The Museum looks wonderful by candlelight, and, following a champagne reception in the South Drawing Room, and a curator-led tour through Soane's Museum, the Library-Dining Room, resplendent with silver and flowers, makes for a perfect setting for an important dinner. What is more, every dinner and reception benefits the Museum, and helps its long-term preservation.

Over the last five years, all these special events have been organised by Julie Brock, the Museum Secretary, who through hard work, a sharp eye for detail, and a flair for pulling off really stylish occasions, has more than trebled the income raised in this way. It is appropriate, therefore, that Julie has just been appointed the Museum's first Enterprises Manager, with responsibility for fostering sales of merchandise, venue hire and licensing to benefit the Soane Museum. She starts work later this month. If you are interested in hiring the Museum and helping us in this way, contact Julie on 020 7440 4279 or [jbrock@soane.org.uk](mailto:jbrock@soane.org.uk)

Another change at the Museum is the arrival of our new Administrator, Satinder Bhatti, who will succeed Julie Brock in running the office and taking bookings for our busy education programme. Appointed after interviews held last month, Satinder has over ten years' administrative experience in the customer services sector, and before that worked as a receptionist and general office administrator. She also has a BA Hons in Business Marketing from the University of Westminster. Satinder, who lives in Hayes in Middlesex, impressed us with her confident and practical approach to the job. We wish both Julie and Satinder the best of luck and every happiness in their new roles.

Last month's *Newsletter* concentrated on the newly reopened Research Library, which is reporting record numbers of visitors and highly appreciative comments from those who use it. We are also trying to increase the amount of information on our collections available online, and over the last few months Stephen Astley, the Curator of Drawings, has added major groups of Adam and Soane material to our online catalogue, available via our website [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org). New material includes the bulk of the Grand Tour drawings of Robert and James Adam – the subject of our recent Soane Gallery exhibition *The Adam Brothers in Rome*, ten of Soane's sketchbooks, and important sections of Jill Lever's *Soane Drawings Catalogue*, including 'Architectural Education', 'Soane in Italy', 'Measured Drawings', and 'Designs for Downhill'.

Much progress has also been made with watermarking and attaching the enlarged images of each drawing described – our excellent new volunteer Rupert Craven doing much of this valuable work.

The Library has also recently been presented with a new acquisition, a modest-looking scrapbook compiled by Joseph Michael Gandy of *Designs for Lamps*. This charming little album contains designs for a variety of whimsical coloured glass and ormolu lamps, drawn by J M Gandy, and has been given by his descendants, Mrs Jill Gandy and her son William. Probably compiled in c.1805–10, possibly for a manufacturer of luxury goods like William Bullock of Liverpool, or possibly even intended for the Turkish market (many of the designs are decidedly exotic), it is of considerable interest to students of Gandy and of period lighting.

This is the latest of a series of generous gifts from the Gandy family – in 2008 Mrs Gandy gave the Museum the Henry Pickersgill portrait of the artist which now hangs in the Seminar Room in No. 14, and, in the same year, another descendant, Mr Barry Saxton, presented the Museum with a silver Royal Academy medal and an ivory Academician's pass which belonged to John Peter Gandy-Deering – J M Gandy's younger brother. These items form part of a discrete collec-

tion of Gandy family memorabilia that the Museum has gathered together over the years, and will be displayed or kept – separate from Soane's collections – in No. 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Finally, next month we expect the publication of a new, lavishly illustrated book on the Museum. *Sir John Soane's Museum, London* is written by me and illustrated with over 150 new photographs of the Museum, taken especially by the renowned photographer Derry Moore, as well as many hitherto little-known engravings and watercolours. Published by Merrell, it is expected at the end of March 2009 and costs £24.95. It will be available from the Museum shop and via our website, as well as from good bookshops all over Britain, Europe and America. The first well-illustrated account of the Museum for almost fifteen years, every sale benefits the Museum, and we are grateful to a generous group of our American supporters for covering the costs of the new photography. *Sir John Soane's Museum, London* will make a perfect gift or souvenir of the Soane, and is an elegant and compelling way to promote and share the Museum with your friends.

TIM KNOX  
February 2009

#### EXHIBITION NEWS

## *George Scharf: From the Regency Street to the Modern Metropolis*

20 MARCH – 6 JUNE 2009

Much of my work over the past year has been devoted to the Soane Museum's forthcoming exhibition *George Scharf: From the Regency Street to the Modern Metropolis*. Scharf has, in the past been a strangely neglected artist. The late Peter Jackson published the first, and indeed only, book devoted to Scharf's work in 1987. Although his wonderfully evocative topographical drawings of the streets and monuments of London, as well as the lives of every-day Londoners, have often been included in exhibitions, there has yet to be a show dedicated solely to his life and work. This forthcoming exhibition, and the accompanying catalogue, will, I hope, bring Scharf to a new audience of Londoners and those who come to visit our city.

And what an extraordinary life Scharf led! He came to London from his native Bavaria in 1816, following the Napoleonic Wars, mainly making his living as a lithographer of botanical and medical specimens. In his capacity as a printmaker he worked for such luminaries as Charles Darwin (by coincidence this year sees the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*.) However, Scharf's ambitions lay elsewhere. He wanted to be taken seriously as a 'gentleman' artist rather than as an 'artisan' printmaker. This would lead to

tensions in his professional life with clients such as Darwin. It would also result in the wonderful legacy of drawings of London that forms the subject of our exhibition.

Throughout his life, Scharf drew the buildings of city that surrounded him as well as its inhabitants. This was his real passion and Scharf hoped that these watercolours would find a ready market in this country and also in his native Germany. Unfortunately, this proved not to be the case. Nevertheless,



George Scharf, *Old Covent Garden Market*, 1825



Sketchbook by George Scharf, 1820–30

they are a fascinating and beautiful legacy. The city he drew was one undergoing rapid change and development. When he arrived, London was still very much a Georgian city in the style and scale of its buildings. This was to change and Scharf drew the newly built Regent Street, with its fashionable, new shop fronts so different from those we are familiar with from images of eighteenth-century London. He also documented the Strand just before Nash's redevelopment of it, realising that he was witnessing the old London disappearing before his pencil and sketchbook. He drew the Regency city with which Soane was familiar, and in fact the Bank of England was the subject of a series of drawings that will form part of the exhibition. Indeed, as a frequent visitor to the Royal College of Surgeons, Scharf drew that building and Lincoln's Inn Fields at least twice and he did in fact visit the Soane. One of the more delightful discoveries I made when researching the exhibition catalogue is finding two references in Scharf's journals which record that he called on Soane on two occasions to try and sell him his painting of 'The Ruins of St Stephen's Chapel'. Scharf famously gained access to the ruins of the old Palace of Westminster the morning after the fire of 1834 when the building was, in part, still smouldering. Like Turner, Scharf found the image of the wrecked Parliament a source of great inspiration. Apart from the painting of St Stephen's Chapel, which is now lost, Scharf produced one other painting on the theme. This work, the 'Panoramic View of the Ruins of the Late Houses of Parliament, 1834', is undoubtedly Scharf's most important painting and we are fortunate that the Palace of Westminster has kindly agreed to lend it. Another discovery, pertaining to his series of Westminster drawings, is a small, annotated sketch which potentially shows the ironwork from Soane's entrance to the *Scala Regia* just before it was swept away to be replaced by the present building by Barry and Pugin.

The building of this landmark was also documented by Scharf and in a wonderfully lucid and detailed pencil drawing he shows the Victoria Tower as it was being erected. In spite of the fact that it is only half-built when sketched by Scharf, it

dwarfs the building of the old Palace, including the cloister that led to Soane's entrance to the House of Lords.

Although Scharf was not successful in his attempts to sell a work to Sir John Soane, we do possess one work by Scharf in the collection – a lithograph showing the *vivarium* of Sir Joshua Brookes' Museum that was formerly located on Blenheim Street (now Ramillies Street). The presence of this unusual lithograph showing a large, rock-work fountain to which are tethered a vulture, lemur and other wild animals and next to which is a 'gothic chapel' constructed in part with whale bones, raises the question 'how did Soane come to own



George Scharf, View looking west along Church Lane, 1828

it?’ The answer was found when Helen recalled that the archive did contain a letter written by Brookes to Soane. The content of this revealed all. Disposing of his collections, Brookes wrote to Soane in 1830 offering to sell him both the rockwork of the *vivarium* and the ‘Pilgrim’s Cell’ explaining that they would make ‘. . . a noble rural ornament . . .’ Along with the letter, which carefully detailed both ‘follies’, Brookes included a copy of the lithograph.

Working on this project has been particularly significant for me as it is the first exhibition that I have fully curated in the Soane Gallery. It has also allowed me to retrace some of the earlier stages of my career. Of the 62 works by Scharf that form the display, 58 come from the collections of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. It has been a wonderful experience to be able to work so closely with my former colleagues there and I hope that our two sister institutions will be able to further our links in the future. I have also had the opportunity to work with one of my former teachers at the Courtauld Institute of Art – Dr Caroline Arscott – who has contributed an essay to the exhibition catalogue. Caroline taught me when I was a first-year undergraduate and the course I took with her, on art his-

torical methodology and museology, naturally looked at the Soane. Again, I hope that our strong ties with the Courtauld continue. Finally, it has been a great pleasure to work closely with our Archivist at the Soane, Sue Palmer, who is contributing an essay which sketches the development and growth of London during the decades covered by Scharf’s work.

It is fitting that after all this time, Scharf is finally being given an exhibition devoted solely to his drawings of the London that Soane would also have recognised. However, exhibitions such as this one require financial help. It is poignant to think that when Scharf first came to Britain the country was also in the grip of an economic recession. It is only through the generous support of our many friends, patrons and sponsors that projects, such as this exhibition, can come to fruition. I hope that this show will prove to be popular – Scharf certainly deserves to be recognised more widely as one of the great recorders of London.

The Museum is grateful to Apax Partners for helping to make this exhibition possible.

JERZY KIERKUĆ-BIELIŃSKI  
Exhibitions Curator

## *New arrivals from ‘The Camels’: Bonomi’s furniture is given to the Soane*

The Museum has recently received a most generous gift from Jasper Scovil of a glass-fronted bookcase and a wardrobe which were amongst the furnishings of ‘The Camels’, the south London home of Joseph Bonomi (1796–1878), from whom he is descended. Bonomi was a sculptor and Egyptologist who was Curator of the Museum from 1861 until his death in 1878. He travelled widely in Egypt when he was young, adopting eastern dress and manners, before returning

to England in the 1830s and taking up employment with the British Museum and others. In 1842 he designed a striking Egyptian-style façade for John Marshall’s Temple Mills at Leeds, based on the temple of Edfu, which later enabled him to claim that he was an architect and to be appointed to the curatorship of this Museum. During his time here he devoted himself particularly to the study of the Seti sarcophagus, of which he published a detailed account in 1864. The



*The two Bonomi pieces installed in No.14*



*Two views of Bonomi’s house, ‘The Camels’ with its distinctive frieze. Photos: National Monuments Record*

curatorship gave him a regular income and enabled him, with his brother Ignatius, to buy land at Wimbledon Park, Surrey, and build 'The Camels', which he adorned with a frieze of a camel caravan representing the path of life – sculpted by himself. These two pieces of furniture from Bonomi's home are a wonderful addition to the Museum's collection of diverse items owned by past Curators and show what a treasure trove 'The Camels' must have been. Bonomi was never wealthy and he probably decorated both pieces of furniture himself. The wardrobe is adorned with images from Greek vases probably cut from a copy of Sir William

Hamilton and Baron D'Hancarville's *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines* (4 volumes published 1767–76) – one of the most influential publications of the period. These images are somewhat incongruously combined with the ancient Egyptian winged sun-disc painted above the doors. This motif is thought to have symbolized the flight of the soul to Higher realms – the sun being the symbol of light and enlightenment and therefore of resurrection and rebirth.

HELEN DOREY  
Deputy Director

## The Soane Furniture Catalogue

A catalogue of the furniture in the Museum is about to be published for the first time. It has been compiled by Helen Dorey, the Deputy Director, with the assistance of our newly appointed Chairman of Trustees, Simon Swynfen Jervis, one of the most distinguished of all British furniture historians. The volume will be a special edition of *Furniture History*, the Journal of the Furniture History Society, and will be dedicated to the memory of Peter Kai Thornton, Curator 1984–95, also a distinguished furniture historian. Peter would, we hope, have been delighted to see this volume appear. His series of authentic restorations of the Museum's interiors, on which Helen worked as his Research Assistant, has inspired her to make the interiors the subject of what is now more than twenty years of research into their evolution and arrangement. As Soane wished his Museum to be preserved as it was at the time of his death it has been decided to present the furniture room by room as it was recorded in the inventories of 1837, drawn up at around the time of Soane's death. This makes the catalogue not only a record of the individual pieces

of furniture but also of Soane's interiors as they were at the time of his death and a large amount of detailed information about their history and construction will be published here for the first time. Many exciting discoveries have been made during the writing of the catalogue – for example that an armchair in the Director's office long thought to have belonged to the first Curator was Soane's own and stood in the Breakfast Room at the time of his death (he is shown sitting in it in the Owen portrait in the South Drawing Room). We have also identified the small pull-out table once in the knee-hole (now filled in with a cupboard) of the Breakfast Room desk – and much much else. After the catalogue is published it is planned to restore many more pieces of furniture to their original positions. The furniture has almost all been photographed specially for the volume, which should appear in March and will be available from the Museum.

HELEN DOREY  
Deputy Director



Left: Gothic cast-iron chair, early nineteenth century, probably made by the Carron factory. Right: Pair of Dutch chairs c.1700–1710

## A Piranesian Mystery Solved

Professor Robin Middleton of New York, Soane scholar and a long-standing friend of the Museum, has turned up the answer to a question that has long tantalised him and the staff of the Soane Museum – when and from whom did Soane acquire his 15 pen and wash drawings of the temples at Paestum by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, which hang on the inner plane on the north side of the Picture Room?

Robin spotted the information in a footnote in a newly-published facsimile of Piranesi's *Taccuini di Modena*, edited by Mario Bevilacqua (Artemide Edizione, October 2008). The footnote revealed that Soane purchased the drawings at a sale of the collection of drawings and engravings of the late Charles Lambert, held at Christie's, 24 to 26 March 1817, paying £14.5.0. Unusually, there is no copy of this sale catalogue in Soane's Library, and although his accounts reveal a payment of £14.5.0 to Mr Christie on 26 March 1817 there is no further indication of what this was for.

Eileen Harris has found out a little more about Charles Lambert – born in 1757, he was the son of Edward Lambert, gentleman, of Hoxton, Shoreditch. He was admitted to the Inner Temple on 10 November 1788, the same year in which

he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He died on 14 December 1811. It is evident from the bequests in his will, which Eileen tracked down in The National Archives, that he was a man of some wealth, and that he had quite a collection of pictures, drawings and engravings. However, so far we have no further leads to follow up to enable us to discover when and where he might have acquired the Piranesi drawings, other than the description in the catalogue of a previous sale at Christies from the same collection (7 March 1812) which talks of many of the pictures being 'purchased during his tours on the continent, and a few from distinguished collections in this country'. A call to the archivist at the Royal Bank of Scotland revealed that he didn't have a bank account with either Childs or Drummonds – very often useful starting points for historians investigating figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

So if you can help us with further information or possible leads we would be delighted to hear from you (spalmer@soane.org.uk or 020 7440 4245).

SUSAN PALMER  
Archivist



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *View of the interior of the temple of Neptune at Paestum*

## 'Concrete Crushathon' 2009

Fourteen heavyweight sacks of building materials appeared in the entrance hall of No.14 Lincoln's Inn Fields this week – not an optimistically advanced delivery for *Opening up the Soane*, but supplies for the current series of Concrete Crushathons, generously funded by MLA, which began on 26 January.

Anderson Inge – architect, teacher and designer of the Crushathon – returned to supervise the series. It will take place in the basement Education Centre where the Soane Museum now has the space and the facilities to pioneer the teaching of building skills in practical and innovative ways to young architects of the future.

Eleven Y7/8 students (aged 12/13) from Leytonstone Business and Enterprise School mixed concrete and poured it into moulds containing reinforcing bars of varying strength. Processes and procedures common to modern building sites were used to calculate the mix and prepare the moulds in this very 'real' and hands-on activity. When the beams are cured they will be tested to destruction using the students' own body mass. They will measure and compare the strength of different beams and develop appreciation of the accuracy, workmanship and economy necessary to build

to a standard similar to that demanded by Soane.

One student commented: 'I never expected it would be this exciting.' The teacher remarked on the high levels of enthusiasm and concentration not normally reached in the classroom.

JANEY MONAHAN

Childrens and Families Education Officer



Year 7 students from Leytonstone Business and Enterprise College taking part in the 'Soane Concrete Crushathon 2009' funded by the MLA

## Andrea Palladio: his life and legacy at the Royal Academy of Arts, London

31 JANUARY – 13 APRIL 2009

The Royal Academy of Arts and the Royal Institute of British Architects are collaborating on the first exhibition to be held in London since 1975 to celebrate the quincentenary of the birth of Andrea Palladio (1508–80). Palladio was one of the greatest Italian architects. Active in Vicenza and Venice,

he created an innovative architectural language derived from classical sources answering contemporary practical and social needs. His impressive *œuvre* includes public buildings and churches; but it is Palladio's town palaces and country villas that influenced subsequent generations of British and American architects. Large-scale models and computer animations will complement original drawings and works in other media to present the full range of the work of this exceptional architect and his legacy.



Left: Model of the Church of the Redentore, 1772, wood and plaster, Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Palladio, Vicenza. Photo: Alberto Carolo

Right: The Church of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, c.1740 by Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto



To book tickets call 0870 848848 or visit

<http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/andrea-palladio-his-life-and-legacy/> for more information

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