

“In Pursuit of the Unorthodox”

Sir John Soane’s Grand Tour and recontextualisation in his house-museum

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Master thesis Religious Studies: Religion & Cultural Heritage

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July 31, 2020

No. of Words: 23.981

Preface

During one lecture in the course on Museums & Religion, I stumbled upon the connection between the Grand Tour and musealisation. It was only fitting that, with my background in Classics and my interests in the world of early museums in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this would become the basis of my thesis. The addition of Sir John Soane’s Museum opened up this world of knowledge I would never have come across otherwise. I would like to thank Dr Andrew Irving for giving that one lecture, for his enthusiasm in guiding me through this research process, and for his invaluable feedback.

Summary

In the world of museums, there is one kind that stands out: the house-museum. In these museums, there is a tension between the domestic and the public. In this thesis, the house-museum of English Neoclassical architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837) is viewed in light of the rise of the public art museum in the early nineteenth century. The study analyses the Grand Tour as a significant influence on Soane’s collection and display, and uses Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory to analyse the basement space of the museum. Our main questions are: *How was the collection at Sir John Soane’s Museum acquired, how was it recontextualised, and how is it displayed? How did this shape early museum practice?*

To answer these questions, after the first chapter, which gives an overview of the existing research on the subject, we take a telescopic approach. The second chapter begins at the geographical widest level, viewing Soane’s Grand Tour on the Continent in light of his later ideas on a museum. The third and fourth chapter zoom in on the museum in Lincoln’s Inn Fields in London, while retracing the early collection and looking at Soane’s religious beliefs. Lastly, a specific room within the museum, the basement space, is analysed using Lefebvre’s spatial theory. In this space, Soane’s ideas and life challenges come to the fore and create a mesmerizing and fascinating space where death and afterlife are central. In conclusion, this study finds that the house-museum of Sir John Soane, the tension between death and conservation is uniquely visible.

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1. Introduction

On reviewing what has been done, though I cannot say with Horace,

‘Exegi monumentum aere perennius’, nor with Ovid, ‘Jamque

opus exegi, quod nec Jovis ira, nec ignes,

nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas’,

I have yet the high gratification to know, that the best efforts in my power have been exerted, on every occasion, to promote the interest and advantage of British Artists, by giving commissions to some of the living, and by collecting together as many of the works of our highly talented deceased countrymen as I had the means to purchase, or suitable place wherein to deposit and exhibit them to advantage.

John Soane¹

In the conclusion of his *Description of My House at Lincoln’s Inn Fields* (1835), Sir John Soane employs the rhetorical device of understatement to reflect on the creation of his house-museum. Eschewing Horace and Ovid’s claims to immortality through poetry, he claims satisfaction in having worked to promote and benefit British artists, by commission, collection, and exhibition of the works of ‘deceased countrymen’. Today, more than 180 years after its official foundation in 1833, Sir John Soane’s Museum is still in existence: preserved by an Act of Parliament, it endures the test of time.

Sir John Soane was born in Goring as the son of a bricklayer. His clients, patrons and connections, however, were learned men from the upper classes, who

¹ John Soane and Barbara Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane ... With Graphic Illustrations and Incidental Details* (London: Privately published, 1835), 99.

spent their days in politics or the arts. His environment was one filled with Enlightenment thought, Romantic notions, and picturesque settings and by the time of the creation of his museum, Soane had reached the intellectual classes of eighteenth-century English society. In his architectural work, Soane was a Neoclassicist, and many of his designs and displays were influenced by his fascination with ruins, death, and funerary monuments – he was, as Margaret Richardson has observed, always “in pursuit of the unorthodox”.² His interests merge in his museum, constructed and preserved by his design, in Lincoln’s Inn Fields in London, and in particular in the basement of this three-story building. Here are combined Soane’s abiding interest in death and melancholy and the spatial elements that form the central focus of this study.

Our principal research questions ask: *How was the collection at Sir John Soane’s Museum acquired? How was it recontextualised, and how is it displayed? How did this shape early museum practice?* Within these questions, our main objective is to outline John Soane’s Grand Tour, his influences and his ideas about creating a museum, and to uncover early museum practices Soane applied to his museum. In addition, by taking visitor experience into account, we intend to provide a broader perspective on how Sir John Soane’s Museum was received in his own day and shortly after his death.

The first chapter gives an overview of the above-mentioned topics, outlining the research field and defining key aspects. In the subsequent chapters, John Soane’s Grand Tour experience, his influences and patrons, as well as the factors that led to his establishing his extensive collection and museum at Lincoln’s Inn Fields are explored. In the final chapter, we look at the distinctive spatial character of the basement area using Henri Lefebvre’s

² Margaret Richardson, ‘John Soane and the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli’, *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 132.

spatial triad of spatial practice, representational space, and representations of space. Throughout, close attention is paid to Soane’s religious inclinations and involvement in freemasonry. With the addition of Lefebvre and the connection to early museums and museum studies, this study provides a new approach to the significance of Soane’s museum.

2. Context: Soane, the Grand Tour and Early Museums

As is often the case with figures of national prominence, Sir John Soane has had many identities after his death in 1837. He was born in 1753 of a modest middleclass background in rural England. The young son of a brick-layer was educated under the British architect George Dance the Younger, and in time became a highly successful architect. He is perhaps most famous as the architect of the Bank of England, only retiring from this position in 1833 when he was 80 years old and had worked for the Bank for forty-five years.³ His influence in the field of architecture has been researched extensively, and has been placed within many cultural and political contexts of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe. Similarly well-documented are Soane’s values and beliefs, such as his fascination with death and his association with freemasonry are.³

In the 1990s, there was a resurgence of interest in Soane, with the appearance of important new scholarship by Gilian Darley and David Watkin in particular.⁴ Darley places Soane’s life and his buildings side by side, thus

³ Eva Schumann-Bacia, *John Soane and The Bank of England* (New York: Princeton

³ Giles Waterfield, *Soane and Death* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1996); David Watkin, ‘Freemasonry and Sir John Soane’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54, no. 4 (1995): 402–417.

⁴ Darley, *John Soane*; David Watkin and John Soane, *Sir John Soane: The Royal Academy Lectures*, ed. David Watkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); See also Ptolemy Dean, *Sir John Soane and the Country Estate* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Dean, *Sir John Soane and London* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2006). Dean focussed on the places surrounding Soane, on where he built and what he built there, in particular the relationship between Soane and London, thus showing how Soane was engrained in the urban structure of the city. In addition, Soane started his career with

University Press, 1991); Gillian Darley, *John Soane: An Accidental Romantic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 304.

attempting to understand the essence of the buildings through Soane the man. While, in so doing she provides an extraordinary amount of fresh understanding of his architectural work, Darley’s focus remains the biographical story of Soane.⁶ David Watkin, in contrast, specializes in the Royal Academy, of which Soane was a Professor. Watkin was the first to pay close attention to the unpublished papers of Soane, which were used as preparation on the twelve lectures given at the Royal Academy.⁷

Daniel Abrahamson, in a review of three biographies of Soane, shows us the different faces Soane has had over the centuries.⁸ The early twentieth century named Soane as a great classicist through the work of Bolton, the mid-twentieth

remodelling country houses; Dean takes this as the starting point of the development of Soane’s style over time.

⁶ Darley, *John Soane*, vi.

⁷ Two other contributors, both writing in the 1980s, are Pierre du la Ruffinière du Prey and Dorothy Stroud. Du Prey focused on Soane’s architectural practice and designs, but arranged his sources thematically. Du Prey’s work on Soane is innovative in the sense that he starts at the beginning of Soane’s life. He clearly demarcates the period: from Soane’s birth in 1753, until the year after his marriage, 1785, when he has established himself as an architect. Stroud, after working at Sir John Soane’s Museum for 40 years, wrote the leading monograph on the subject in 1984, including a long biographical chapter, before moving on to a selection of 72 architectural commissions. See Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982); Dorothy Stroud, *John Soane - Architect* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984).

⁸ Daniel M. Abramson, ‘John Soane: An Accidental Romantic by Gillian Darley; Sir John

Soane and the Country Estate by Ptolemy Dean; Sir John Soane: The Royal Academy Lectures by John Soane and David Watkin’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60, no. 3 (2001): 352–355.

century had Soane the proto-modernist. Today, the architect is seen as “a master of quotation, adaptation, and fragmentation.”⁵

2.1. Eighteenth-century Europe and the Grand Tour

For many a traveller, the so-called Grand Tour was, as the eighteenth-century French author and commentator Abbé Gabriel-François Coyer (1707-1782) put it, the “most interesting of all possible voyages.”⁶ In light of John Soane’s Tour, this section discusses the main sources and ideas on the eighteenth-century Grand Tour.

At the outset, we must note that much early research on the Grand Tour, multi-disciplinary as it is, has been subject to some recurring biases. The first is that a Grand Tour had to include “a young British male patrician (that is, a member of the aristocracy or gentry)”⁷ Thus, research has focussed on the members of the upper class. Influential writers such as Christopher Hibbert took over this definition, even though it is extremely narrow and does not include the whole picture that the term “Grand Tour” entails. Recent research has, however, underlined that the Grand Tour was not exclusive to the males of the upper class. Lower classes also undertake these Tours, albeit in a less elaborate manner. A

⁵ Ibid., 352; ‘2019_12_06_Soane Bibliography’ (Sir John Soane’s Museum, 2019), last modified 2019, <https://www.soane.org/collections-research/research-library-andarchive>.

⁶ Abbé Gabriel-Francois Coyer, *Voyages d’Italie et de Hollande*, 2 vols. (Paris: Duchesne, 1775), 1:4.

⁷ Bruce Redford, *Venice and the Grand Tour* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 14.

second bias is that only men made a Grand Tour. However, as Rosemary Sweet points out, at the end of eighteenth century it was quite normal for women travel,

“as companions, for their health, to escape domestic embarrassment at home, but also because they too, like men, were fascinated by Italy [...]”¹²

Another major bias, that the Grand Tour was a British invention, is based on the fact that the earlier research has focussed primarily on England. Edward Chaney, for example provides an extensive bibliography of all major English works on the Grand Tour published in the twentieth century. Published as a two-part article in the *British Art Journal*, this “critical reading list” begins with publications from the early twentieth century, listing works in chronological order covering the history of travel, biographies, works on specific periods of the Grand Tour and a few exhibitions in the early twenty-first century. The influential bibliography leaves out, however, non-English publications, and is strongly focussed on England, America and Italy. While a justification for this one-sided perspective may be that the works mentioned were hugely influential for an early (Anglophone) understanding of the Grand Tour, and while it is true that many British people did take a Grand Tour, they, of course, did not have the monopoly on travelling or on reflecting on its significance.

¹² Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27. Other publications on women in Italy are Brian Dolan’s *Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), which uses diaries and personal correspondence to sketch the life of these women, whereas the authors of *Italy’s Eighteenth century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) chose a broader viewpoint to uncover the ways in which gender and culture shaped the perception of Italy during this time. An

exceptions is also Katherine Turner’s study *British Travel Writers in Europe 1750-1800: authorship, gender and national identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), whose aim it is to show that the history of British travel writing is “more complex and less homogeneous” than most other studies have made it out to be.

Anglophone researchers still dominate the field of Grand Tour studies, although critical voices can be heard.⁸ German, as well as French and Dutch research, has shown a much more diverse picture of the Grand Tour.⁹ Increasingly, scholarship has underlined that the Grand Tour involved travellers from a wide range of classes, socio-economic backgrounds, cultural and language groups, ages, and both women and men. As Giovanna Cesarani writes:

This was a community of travellers consisting of the Enlightenment’s most sensitive minds and influential writers, of reluctant youths and intrepid women, of scientists and artists, along with the many other, mostly unnamed figures, among them diplomats, merchants, sea captains, and servants, who made these travels possible.¹⁰

Giovanna Cesarani and her team at Stanford University, The Grand Tour Project, have created a digital and dynamic database, with digital visualisations, of the architects on a Grand Tour in the eighteenth century and their lives. The project provides a time chart, maps, and a graph of the educational background of these

⁸ Gerrit Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’ Nieuwe Tendensen in Het Historisch Onderzoek Naar Toerisme (1750-1950), *Stadsgeschiedenis* 4, no. 1 (2009): 65.

⁹ Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’; German: Joseph Imorde and Jan Pieper, *Die Grand Tour in Moderne Und Nachmoderne* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008). French: François Nizet, *Le Voyage D’Italie et l’architecture européenne: 1675-1825* (Brussels: Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 1988).

¹⁰ Giovanna Cesarani et al., ‘British Travelers in Eighteenth-Century Italy: The Grand Tour and the Profession of Architecture’, *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 2 (2017): 425.

architects, as well as a graph on their funding. This visual aspect of the data presentation gives the viewer an insight in these architects and their trips. As the project leaders write: “[It] enriches our understanding of the phenomenon known as the Grand Tour by bringing us closer to the diverse travellers, elite and otherwise, who collectively constituted its world.”¹¹ This program has been especially useful in visualizing Soane’s route and the places he visited.

Gerrit Verhoeven, a scholar of urban history, travel and tourism, points out two main narratives that do not comply with modern findings anymore. On the one hand, current research belies the older notions that the nineteenth century marked a sharp turning point in the developments in travel and tourism, and that this period presents a clear-cut break from “primitive” to “modern”. On the other hand, new research is revealing that exclusive destinations became more popular with the lower classes only at the end of the nineteenth century.¹² In other words, there is, overall, much more continuity than previously accepted.

Jeremy Black, in particular, has written several handbooks on different countries during and in relation to the Grand Tour that highlight the differences between each country’s experience of the phenomenon, and thereby provides a more variegated perspective on these destinations.¹³ Black, together with Christopher Hibbert, whose earlier works were published in the 1980s, introduced cultural history methods to Grand Tour studies, combining political, cultural, and art historical approaches.¹⁴ This entailed an innovation in research

¹¹ ‘The Grand Tour Project’, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://grandtour.stanford.edu/>.

¹² Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’ , 64–65.

¹³ See for example: *The British and The Grand Tour* (London: Routledge, 1985); *Italy and The Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); *France and The Grand Tour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London: Methuen, 1987).

on the phenomenon, as for the first time they introduced the field of (historical) tourism to the academic study, a development that would bear much fruit. John Towner, for example, examined the landscape preferences of Tourists in relation

to changes in taste and linked this to the spatial pattern of the Grand Tour over time.¹⁵

The experience and practice of the Grand Tour not only varied across groups and cultures but also changed over time. Edward Chaney’s diachronic approach focuses on developments over time by examining the relationship between England and Italy, mainly in the Stuart and Jacobean periods.¹⁶ Treating the Grand Tour exclusively as “Anglo-Italian cultural relations” reveals the focus on Britain, but the essays combined in this volume clearly show the evolution of the classical Grand Tour. Shifting the focus of attention, the cities in Italy most frequently visited by tourists, including Soane, have been combined in Rosemary Sweet’s work. By focussing on Florence, Rome, Naples and Venice, Sweet sheds light on how these cities handled the growing mass of Tourists.¹⁷

One further note seems worth underlining: the educational nature of the Tour. In a fundamental sense, a classical Tour around Europe constituted the last part of a young man or woman’s education. Often, the male students who went on a Tour had just finished university, but did not yet have a career. The education of many middle and upper-class British subjects and Europeans was classical and

¹⁵ John Towner, ‘The Grand Tour: A Key Phase in the History of Tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 12 (1985): 297–333.

¹⁶ Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations Since the Renaissance* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

¹⁷ Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820*.

included the reading of famous authors of ancient Rome and Classical Greece. It is therefore not surprising that these former students of the classics later visited the ancient ruins in Italy.¹⁸ Moreover, the educational aspect may also be observed in the fact that the Tourists did not travel alone. Many had *ciceroni*, or ‘bear-leaders’, with them whose task it was to accompany them on their travels, and to act as early tour guides.

Lastly, a Grand Tour was the opportunity to make connections with important people who could be of help and provide opportunities later in life: it was, to use contemporary language, a “networking opportunity”. These connections and the cultural experience were thought to make real gentlemen of the students. For an architect and for Soane specifically, the way to secure patronage was through the sale of classical fragments and through offering measured drawings to showcase his work.¹⁹ As we will later see, Soane was motivated to learn as much as he could through what he saw and through the people he met.

2.2. The Grand Tour, collecting, and musealisation

An important aspect of the Tour was the acquisition of sculptures and paintings. As J.B.S. Morritt, a contemporary of Soane, observed about collecting antiquities: “Some we steal, some we buy, and our court is much adorned with them.”²⁰ The traveller bought for himself, but also for friends and family or potential clients

¹⁸ Jonathan Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 53–54.

¹⁹ See for instance Iain Gordon Brown, *The Grand Tour and Its Influence on Architecture, Artistic Taste and Patronage* (Edinburgh: Italian Cultural Institute, 2008).

²⁰ John B. S. Morritt, *The Letters of John B. S. Morritt of Rokeby: Descriptive of Journeys in Europe and Asia Minor in the Years 1794–1796*, ed. George Eden Marindin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 179.

back home. A whole market existed to comply with the wishes of the people who could afford to buy.

Jonathan Scott’s *Pleasures of Antiquity* is one of the most comprehensive studies of British collectors and collecting antiquities.²¹ Scott’s study opens with a treatment of the papal collections as the fundamental starting point for

understanding the origins and development of the phenomenon. These collections were established before the height of the Grand Tour and would have formed the ideas about establishing collections for Tourists and other visitors.²²

An important question is *why* people collected these sculptures and other objects from antiquity.²³ Focussing on this question, Ruth Guilding sets out to discover, primarily on the basis of British sources, the reasons and the evolution of this fascination. Guilding’s scholarship reveals that sculpture, and the collecting of it, is ingrained in “the ideals of connoisseurship and taste”. The possession of sculpture lends one an authority and has a connotation of “civilized power”.²⁴ A Grand Tour was the perfect opportunity to collect, be that sculpture or other valuables, and therefore can be understood as a tool to obtain this power.

As we will see below, Soane did not collect on his Grand Tour, as he was a starting architect without the means to indulge in such pleasures. For him, it was the experience of travel that formed a large part of his education and what would ultimately influence his museum. In the research on the Grand Tour, the collections that were formed after these tours are mostly mentioned as side notes, or as a given. While it is clear that Grand Tourists were interested in antiquity and

²¹ Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity*.

²² 27 *Ibid.*, 1.

²³ Ruth Guilding, *Owning the Past: Why the British Collected Antique Sculpture, 1640-1840* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2014).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22–29.

were looking to take home souvenirs, it remains unclear in Grand Tour scholarship how, when and why these objects were displayed in buildings open to the ordinary public, set in a designed space.

Yet, these early collections form the basis of many museums that still exist today. The Musei Capitolini began in 1471 in Rome, but opened for the broader public in 1734. The British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris, now leading institutions, were established and opened for the public in the eighteenth century; in 1759 and 1792 respectively. These large art museums evolved from the smaller practices of collecting, often seen in the cabinets of curiosities, the *Wunderkammers* and *studioli*, but as we will see, the country house played a role in this evolution as well. Today these country houses are seen as sites of national identity, and the first wave of growing tourism in the late eighteenth century may be the prelude to the growing awareness of the importance of these country houses and their collections.

It is critical, however, not to dismiss the fact that the opening of country houses was only possible because of the improving infrastructure, and increased professionalization of the way of broadcasting information to the public in the period.²⁵ In their work on the origin of the museal institution, Hanneke Ronnes & Bob van Toor even go as far as to define the English country house as a “protomuseum.”²⁶ In the context of Dutch travellers to England, they see the rise of modern museum practices on these estates, such as guidebooks, ticket selling and tour guides. Their principal focus, however, is on the Dutch country house of William III, Paleis Het Loo. The first ‘guidebook’ for this palace was a reprint of

²⁵ Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England’s Country Houses in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 5.

²⁶ Hanneke Ronnes and Bob Van Toor, ‘Op Bezoek Bij de Adel. De Buitenplaats Als “protomuseum” Vanaf de Late Zeventiende Tot de Late Negentiende Eeuw’, *Virtus* 21 (2014): 87–110.

multiple drawings from the late seventeenth century and was published in the 1780s.²⁷ At the same time at Horace Walpole’s estate Strawberry Hill, a system of ticketing was developed.²⁸ Ronnes and Van Toor argue that, while the cabinets of curiosities were significant for the rise of the museum, it was the practice of

visiting castles and townhouses in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries that played a key role in the evolution of the public aspect of the museum.²⁹

Musealisation both as a phenomenon and as an approach for critical analysis will be important for the present study. In his introductory article to the 2005 volume *Bezeten van Vroeger*, Pim den Boer traces the origins of the concept and its introduction into academic discourse back to Hermann Lübbe and his influential lecture *Der Fortschritt und das Museum* in 1982.³⁰ Lübbe’s aim was first to elucidate the reason for the growing number of new museums. Secondly, he used the term *Musealisierung* to explain the institutionalisation of the historic interest of contemporary society in the long eighteenth century, the period of the height of the Grand Tour. Lübbe argues that as all over Europe revolutions broke out, monarchies were overturned and new inventions and ideas changed society, people tended to look back to fixed points in history; they anchor their own beliefs to the past, thus creating a heritage. This is something David Lowenthal also

²⁷ Ibid., 97.

²⁸ Ibid., 98.

²⁹ Ibid., 92.

³⁰ Pim Den Boer, ‘Geschiedenis, Herinnering En “Lieux de Mémoire”’, in *Bezeten van Vroeger*, ed. R. Van Der Laarse (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2005), 40–58. Hermann Lübbe, *Der Fortschritt und das Museum: über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen* Bithell Memorial Lectures, 1981 (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1982).

observed in the 1980s.³¹ Today, questions such as “what is heritage?” and “whose heritage is it?” are at the front of the research field.

A pioneer in the philosophy of museum studies is Tony Bennett and his *The Birth of the Museum*.³² Employing a Foucauldian perspective, Bennett explores the museum not simply as a place of education, but also as a way to reform the people and their social routines, as a place of disciplined surveillance. In this way, the institutionalisation of the museum is closely linked to politics and governmental decisions: “[...] the museum’s formation [...] in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power.”³³ Through this “Exhibitionary Complex”, museums had to readdress their increasingly middle-class public and form their displays accordingly to this public, and in this process “they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power ... throughout society.”³⁴ In essence, modern public museums were shaped as, to use Lefebvre’s term, new spaces of representation to harness new social purposes.³⁵

2.3. Sir John Soane’s Museum

The musealisation of John Soane’s house and the opening of his collection to be viewed by the public must be placed in this changing tide of “educating the public”. It is true that Soane’s house at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in the centre of London is not comparable in size to the manor houses of the aristocracy, and

³¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³² Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33. See final chapter and conclusion on Lefebvre and Bennett.

Soane did not have an aristocratic background; he was the son of a bricklayer. Sir John Soane’s Museum was never located in a country house. Nevertheless, it was a private home, opened for visiting, and may be usefully understood as part of this broader phenomenon.

As a house-museum, it falls therefore into a different category than the art museum conceived and intended from the outset as primarily a public space. A museum containing the personal collection of one person tells the visitor a different story than an art museum that may focus on one or more artists, periods, styles, or attempt to be representative of a broad range of artefacts from

the past. A house-museum does not (aim to) tell a national story. It contains objects and artefacts that the collector, for known or unknown personal reasons, considered worthy to preserve. As Anne Higonnet elegantly puts it in her discussion of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collector’s museum, these houses were not built for the collector, but for the collection.³⁶

In this respect, the recent publication by two cousins Gamboni offers a fresh approach to the Soane and other similar museums.⁴² They explain their choice to focus their work exclusively on museums created by artists or collectors rationale as follows:

Artists’ and collectors’ museums enjoy an ambivalent reputation and a paradoxical topicality. Their number constantly increases and the oldest of them attract ever new visitors, yet the unchanging nature of their

³⁶ Anne Higonnet, ‘Introduction to A Museum of One’s Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift’, last modified 2009, accessed March 29, 2020,

<https://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/hispanic/essays/a-museum-of-ones-own.php>.⁴²

Dario Gamboni and Libero Gamboni, *The Museum as Experience: An Email Odyssey through Artists’ and Collectors’ Museums* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019).

collections and presentation is often decried and seen as running counter to the “progress” in the name of which large museums outbid each other in establishing new branches and organizing events.³⁷

Soane was at once collector, designer, architect and curator of his collection and museum, and his own house. This makes for a unique coherence in the museum, as Gamboni and Gamboni note, however much of a labyrinth the buildings might

seem to be. By buying and transforming the buildings at 12-14 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Soane integrated his house and his museum, thus making a personal statement as a collector and as an architect. Sir John Soane’s Museum still exists today and due to an Act of Parliament Soane drew up in 1833, very little has changed in the collection or the display.

Literature about Soane’s museum is focused on the collection and the museum has naturally published catalogues for most exhibitions. A very extensive bibliography, as well as most of the collection, can be found on the website of the museum.³⁸ The publications are divided into four categories: the museum, the collection, Sir John Soane and his architecture, and the exhibition catalogues and associated publications. The most recent monograph on the museum has been written by Tim Knox, a former director of the museum.³⁹ Providing a broad

³⁷ Dario Gamboni and Libero Gamboni, ‘Magic Mirrors: Sir John Soane’s Museum, London’, in *The Museum as Experience: An Email Odyssey through Artists’ and Collectors’ Museums* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 6. The scholars’ focus on the visitor’s experience is refreshing and will be used in the following chapters.

³⁸ ‘Sir John Soane’s Museum Collection Online’, <http://collections.soane.org/home>; ‘2019_12_06_Soane Bibliography’, <https://www.soane.org/collectionsresearch/research-library-and-archive>.

³⁹ Tim Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London* (London: Merrell, 2009).

introduction, ranging from John Soane as a person to the museum after his death, this work accurately describes the museum to a diverse audience. Knox reiterates how unique this museum was and still is: “The extraordinary accumulations and arrangements of John Soane were hardly typical for an architect-collector of his era.”⁴⁰ In general, there is a strong focus on specific objects, sections and highlights of the collection, and on the history of the buildings at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in relation to renovations and the city of London, perhaps with an eye to contemporary tourist visitors. The spatial aspect of the museum, as well as displays, are not as heavily researched and these aspects will thus be the main focus of this study.

3. John Soane’s Grand Tour, 1778-80

I was sent to Italy to pursue my studies ... This was the most fortunate event of my life, for it was the means by which I formed those connections to which I owe all the advantages I have since enjoyed.

John Soane⁴⁷

After Soane had won a travelling scholarship from the Royal Academy for his design of a Triumphal Bridge in December 1777, he went on a three-year Grand Tour from 1778-1780.⁴¹ The scholarship consisted of £60 per annum for three years and included a further £30 to cover additional travel expenses for each way. On his tour, Soane visited the important Continental cities like Paris and Rome, he went to the ancient ruins of Pompeii, and visited the island of Sicily in May

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁴¹ Darley, *John Soane*, 17; Stroud, *John Soane - Architect*, 284 et seq.

1779 and again in June of the same year.⁴² As Darley has noted, not unlike many travellers and tourists today, “Soane’s attention was quickly absorbed by his intense excitement at finally standing in front of the remains of Roman classical antiquity.”⁴³

⁴⁷ John Soane, *Memoirs of the Professional Life of an Architect, between the Years 1768 and 1835, Written by Himself, Privately Printed* (London: James Moyes, 1835), page unknown.

Early in his stay in Rome, however, Soane was to make the acquaintance of a figure whose patronage was to exercise an important role in his future career. In the autumn of 1778, when Soane was getting adjusted to the rhythm of Rome, he met the Bishop of Derry, the later 4th Earl of Bristol, Frederick Hervey. Soane quickly became friendly with the bishop, a patron of the arts and architecture, and left Rome on April 19th 1780, well before the end of his scholarship, to work for the newly appointed Earl Bishop. Soane was commissioned to recreate the Temple of Vesta, which will be discussed later in this chapter, a summer dining room and opportunities for clients in Ireland where the Earl Bishop had his seat. Fifty-eight years later, Soane wrote in his *Memoirs of a Professional Life*: “Experience ... taught me how much I had overrated the magnificent promises

⁴² Giovanna Ceserani, Giorgio Caviglia, and Nicole Coleman, ‘Interactive Visualization for British Architects on the Grand Tour in Eighteenth-Century Italy: Timechart of Travels’, *Mapping the Republic of Letters Data Visualizations*, last modified April 2017, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/publications/grandtour/timechart/>; Darley, *John Soane*, 21–55; Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 109–147.

⁴³ Darley, *John Soane*, 25.

and splendid delusions of the Lord Bishop of Derry.”⁴⁴ John Soane returned to London in 1780. This chapter aims to discover some of the influences of the Tour on Soane’s architectural designs, and to shed light on Soane’s early interests. Our question is specifically, how did Soane’s Grand Tour influence the design and display of his museum?

3.1. Travelling through Europe: networks and people

In 1768, when John Soane was just 15 years old, he worked in the office of architect George Dance the Younger (1741-1825).⁴⁵ Dance had taken a Grand Tour and lived and worked in Italy for a period (1759-1765), and thus Soane had a wealth of knowledge at his disposal. Not only could he learn from Dance’s personal instruction and recollections, he would have known his employer’s extensive library.⁴⁶ This library familiarised Soane with English, French and

⁴⁴ De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect*, 118; Soane, *Memoirs of the Professional Life of an Architect*, 16.

⁴⁵ James Stevens Curl and Susan Wilson, ‘Dance, George, Jun.’, *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ Darley, *John Soane*, 9.

Italian texts and folio's that were at the base of eighteenth-century architectural education. A copy of *Treatise on Civil Architecture* by Sir William Chambers (1723-1796), published only in 1768 and preserved in Dance's library, would, for example, become a staple source on classical architecture and an introduction into architecture for Soane.⁴⁷ Chambers, like George Dance and his brother Nathaniel, was one of the founders of the Royal Academy in London, which would become a central element to Soane's career.⁴⁸ When Soane asked what aspects of classical architecture he should study, just before leaving for Italy, Chambers advised: “Always see with your own eyes... [you] must discover their true beauties, and the secrets by which they are produced.”⁴⁹ Being a rather esoteric approach to architecture, this comment stayed with Soane; he was more eager to

see and draw and discover the buildings of Italy than his fellow architects on a Tour at this time.⁵⁰

In June 1776, Soane was working on his entry into the Gold Medal competition of the Royal Academy, which he entered with a design of a Triumphal Bridge, and for which he was to win the scholarship that would enable him to travel, like his master, to Italy. One Sunday, he was invited to join a 21st birthday party, but decided to stay home to work, as Sunday was his only day off. On this trip, the other friends hired a boat, which tragically overturned in the Thames.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ John Harris, ‘Chambers, Sir William (1722–1796), Architect’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ Darley, *John Soane*, 21. Chambers wrote this in a letter to Edward Stevens, who was also an architect traveling to Rome. Soane received a copy of this letter from Chambers when he set out to Italy himself.

⁵⁰ Darley, *John Soane*, 26.

Soane’s friend James King could not swim and drowned. Soane went on to win the Gold Medal with his design, but, unsurprisingly, the tragedy had a profound effect on him. Soane himself could not swim. His realisation that he escaped death on this day while working on the project that would win him the Gold Medal and scholarship, made this loss significant in Soane’s starting career as an architect. Before he departed for Italy, Soane designed a mausoleum for King as what has been called an “architectural elegy”.⁵¹ It is the first direct link that can be made between his experience with death and his later funerary architecture, a theme to which we shall return.

At the time John Soane left England, he was twenty-five years old. Verhoeven argues that in the late eighteenth century, the classical Grand Tour was already beginning to change from a coming-of-age experience into more of a leisure trip.⁵² This evolution of the Grand Tour, boosted by an ever-improving infrastructure that surrounded travel and tourism, allowed more layers of society to explore other countries for pleasure. Indeed, the route taken would be more

predictable and guidebooks led the tourist to most highlights.⁵³ This evolution was not, however, a clear-cut break from the educational Tour, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. It is now accepted that eighteenth-century

⁵¹ Giles Waterfield, *Soane and Death* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1996), 115.

⁵² Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’ , 64–65.

⁵³ Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1–3. See for the development of the Grand Tour and the history of tourism: Towner, ‘The Grand Tour: A Key Phase in the History of Tourism’; Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’ .⁶¹ Verhoeven, ‘Vaut Le Voyage!?’ , 64. This Dutch article provides a large number of sources into tourism studies, while at the same time offering light critique on the stereotypical views on this research field.

travel was more sophisticated than previously thought, and that nineteenth-century travels, earlier thought of as revolutionary, displayed much more continuity than assumed in earlier research.⁶¹

Given that he travelled to Italy on a scholarship, Soane's goals can be interpreted primarily as educational and professional. One of the requirements of the Royal Academy was that the architects had to send in designs for a competition during their time abroad. In the Council Minutes of the Royal Academy, in the entry for 3 July 1772, we read that scholarship recipients, like Soane, were expected “to send home annually a Performance for the Exhibition” or risk losing their stipend.⁵⁴ This was important for Soane, as he had little money to travel on his own; this was his chance to explore classical architecture and he was determined to use it. Having left London on 18 March, after two months of travelling through Europe and visiting Continental landmarks such as Paris and Versailles, Soane arrived in Rome on May 2, 1778, and remained there until Christmas of the same year. His companion on this first leg of the Tour was, among others, Robert Furze Brettingham (1750-1820), a fellow student of

architecture at the Academy.⁵⁵ The two remained in contact later in life and both were active in freemasonry.

Soane did not write home often during his Grand Tour, which makes reconstruction of the exact route difficult. Travelling to Rome, Soane and Brettingham stayed in Paris in early 1778. For this city, no guideline existed for

⁵⁴ Royal Academy, Council Minutes, vol 1, p. 139 cited in De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John*

Soane: The Making of an Architect, 168.

⁵⁵ William Palin, “Brettingham, Robert William Furze (c.1750-1820), Architect.”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Tourists, and little information survives on this particular stay. Soane and Brettingham met the engineer of the city Jean-Rodolphe Perronet and admired his Pont de Neuilly which linked Paris with the country to the west.⁵⁶ Paris was at this point experiencing enormous Neoclassical building activities, and presumably, as it was such a contrast to London at that time, this would be of interest to Soane.

As we have noted, soon after his arrival in Rome, Soane met, and developed a friendly acquaintance with Frederick Hervey, the Bishop of Derry had a reputation of not following up on his commissions and making empty promises. Even so, he was presumably a charismatic person, or Soane may have seen his usefulness as a patron, as Soane travelled with him for quite some time. The first trip they took together was to Naples on December 22, 1778. They returned to Rome on March 12.

Two friends made at this time to prove helpful back in England were Thomas Pitt⁵⁷ and Philip Yorke⁵⁸. Both were politicians and had an interest for

⁵⁶ Margaret Richardson and MaryAnne Stevens, *John Soane Architect Master of Light and Space* (London: The Royal Academy of Arts, 1999), 96.

⁵⁷ Roland Thorne, ‘Pitt, Thomas, First Baron Camelford (1737–1793), Politician and Dilettante’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ James Macmullen Rigg and Hallie Rubenhold, ‘Yorke, Philip, Third Earl of Hardwicke (1757–1834), Politician’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

architecture. Soane travelled with Thomas Pitt’s companions: his doctor Mr Pennington, and a banker friend, Sir William Molesworth with whom he travelled to Pompeii and Paestum. Pitt, later the First Baron Camelford, came from a family of politicians and was the nephew of William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806), who held the position of Prime Minister of Great Britain between 1783-1801 and of the United Kingdom from 1804-1806.⁵⁹ Prior to being elevated to the peerage in 1784, Thomas Pitt had himself served as a Member of Parliament of the House of Commons. Soane’s friendship with Pitt was particularly valuable, for Pitt was one of the few friends Soane met on his Tour that would give him work upon his return. Even though Pitt was from a very different background and was fifteen years older than Soane, he would ask his advice and invite suggestions on architectural topics.⁶⁰

In essence, Pitt was undertaking the role of Soane’s patron. It was an advantageous relationship for the young architect. As Darley notes:

Pitt, in contrast [to the Bishop of Derry], was a decisive and erudite man, equal to any architect in his theoretical and historical grasp of the subject,

but he also knew exactly what his limits were and when to hand over to a professional.⁶¹

When he returned to England, Pitt’s connections would give Soane the work he so desperately needed. Being a member of the Dilettanti Society since 1763, Pitt had the connections and the means to act as a patron for Soane.

⁵⁹ John Patrick William Ehrman and Anthony Smith, ‘Pitt, William [Known as Pitt the Younger] (1759–1806), Prime Minister’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ Darley, *John Soane*, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Philip Yorke (1757-1834; 3rd Earl of Hardwicke from 1790) and his family would become the other important employers of John Soane in this early period of his architectural practice after his return. Yorke was the nephew of an important patron by the same name, the Lord High Chancellor and 1st Earl Hardwicke, and was also a nephew of one of the founders of the British Museum, the 2nd Earl Hardwicke. Soane and Yorke met at Paestum in 1779, Yorke recording that he met an architect “by the name Soane who is an ingenious young man now studying at Rome”.⁶²

Yorke’s early impression of Soane stayed with him after his return to England. In the early 1790s, Yorke commissioned Soane to remodel the inside of his newly inherited Wimpole Hall, near Cambridge. Soane designed a yellow drawing-room for the country house, completely changing the colour scheme and used arabesque patterns as decoration, inspired by the antique decorations both Soane and Yorke had seen in Rome.⁶³ These early commissions from both the Pitt family and the Yorke family were the start of John Soane’s career in architecture, meaning he could now afford two floors, dinner and service at 53 Margaret Street, London, for £40 a year.⁶⁴

The primary sources available, such as tour guides and diaries, suggest that Soane realized that this opportunity to travel to Rome and other places was an excellent way to connect with future clients. Even so, as Du Prey writes: “Soane is an example of someone who brought to realisation almost none of the projects he initiated for acquaintances on the Grand Tour.”⁶⁵ This was not for lack of trying

⁶² This quote from Yorke is cited in Darley, *John Soane*, 38; and in Du Prey, *John Soane’s Architectural Education*, 182.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 64; Stroud, *John Soane - Architect*, 54.

⁶⁵ De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect*, 109.

on Soane’s part and can mostly be linked to unfulfilled promises from these acquaintances, such as the Earl Bishop Hervey.⁶⁶

Not all of Soane’s connections in Italy were English however. Soane brought to Italy a letter of introduction with him from Sir William Chambers to the ageing Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778).⁶⁷ He met the famous Venetian engraver in what was to be the last year of his life, and struck up a friendship with him. Piranesi’s *Carceri* and *Vedute* engravings and drawings were hugely influential on Soane, especially viewed in light of his house-museum. The *Carceri* depict Piranesi’s fascination with scale and monumentality, but they never show a complete building and are often structurally impossible.⁶⁸ This monumentality returns in the later published *Vedute di Roma*, which depict landscapes and monuments in Rome. These *Vedute* were widely known by Grand Tourist, but the “double vision of ancient and contemporary Rome” as Piranesi presents it, imposed a sense of disappointment on the Tourist when they saw Rome and her monuments.⁶⁹

Soane later wrote in his *Description* of 1835, in the section on the Picture Room, that he was presented with original drawings by Piranesi when he met him⁷⁸:

The cabinets on the north side contain four prints of buildings in Rome, by Piranesi, comprising the Arch of Septimius Severus, the Pantheon, the

⁶⁶ See for other unfulfilled commissions: *Ibid.*, 113, 118–121; Darley, *John Soane*, 60–61.

⁶⁷ Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity*, 246.

⁶⁸ Louis Marchesano, ‘Invenzioni Capric Di Carceri: The Prisons of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778)’, *Getty Research Journal*, no. 2 (2010): 154.

⁶⁹ Richard Wendorf, ‘Piranesi’s Double Ruin’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 161–162.

Tomb of Cecilia Metella, and the Arch of Constantine, presented to me by that great Artist.⁷⁹

The *Vedute* depict the monuments as ruins, but Piranesi skilfully added missing parts of the building. While Soane was himself not a great draftsman, when we compare the etchings with the architectural drawings of Soane’s pupil and

⁷⁸ The Soane Museum website has digitalized versions of most of the etchings, among which are the etchings Soane got from Piranesi personally. Soane bought a dresser with drawings by Piranesi after the death of one of the Adam brothers: Adam vol.26/163 and Adam vol.56/146. The reference numbers of the Piranesi drawings in the Soane collection are: P31-34, 51, 54, 69-72, 74-77, 125, 132, 133, 139, 140, 146, 391, 396, 397, and 413. ⁷⁹ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 15–17, 20, which specifies that two works are drawings: in the same Picture Room are also “two of the series of original drawings of the Ruins at Paestum, by Piranesi, from which he made the engravings.” The other descriptions shine a light on the way these drawings and etchings are displayed, namely: “On the outer side of the movable planes on the south side of the room are eight more of the views of the Ruins of Temples at Paestum, by Piranesi;” and “at the west end of the room, within the cabinet on the right-hand side, are a print of the Coliseum at Rome, and two views on the Temples at Paestum, by Piranesi; [...] The lefthand cabinet contains a view of Ruins of a Temple at Paestum, by Piranesi. [...] On the doors of the cabinets at this west end of the Picture-room are two drawings by Piranesi of the Ruins of Paestum.” In 2011-2012 the drawings and etchings were replaced with facsimiles in the original frames and the originals were moved to the Research Library.

business companion Joseph Gandy, especially his drawing of Soane’s Bank of England, Piranesi’s influence becomes clear.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See Kerianne Stone and Gerard Vaughan, *The Piranesi Effect* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015) on the general influence of Piranesi; John Wilton-Ely, *Piranesi*,

While he often returned to Rome in the period between 1778-80, Soane travelled through Italy with various different groups of architects and artists. He did not take a regular route through Italy. He visited the major cities like Rome, Naples and Florence, but also travelled to Sicily, quite an unusual destination at the time. In the database of Cesarani, we find that Soane visited a remarkable number of places, over thirty, with multiple stays in Rome and Naples. This is significantly more than any other architect on a Tour in this period. Brettingham, for instance, only visited Rome and Naples, and George Dance visited only 5 locations in Italy.⁷¹ This again shows Soane’s eagerness to study the classical sites and architecture, as well as his awareness of the fact that this was his chance to do so, given his social status at the time.

Soane’s first trip outside of Rome was in the summer of 1778 to Tivoli, where he saw Hadrian’s Villa, “the most evocative of Roman sites with its massive brick standing structures, its subterranean passages and above all its redolent atmosphere.”⁷² Here he saw the Temple of Vesta for the first time, a building which would stay with him for the rest of his life. Soane, together with the Bishop of Derry, set off for Naples on 22 December 1778. On the way, they visited the collection of Stefano Borgia in Velletri, an eclectic and exquisite collection of

ethnographic and artistic objects from all over the world. From Velletri, the two followed the Via Appia south, a route with ruins and ancient monuments for the travel companions to visit. Once arrived in Naples, it appears from Soane’s notes

Paestum & Soane (Munich: Prestel, 2013) is a great source on Soane and Piranesi.

⁷¹ Ceserani, Caviglia, and Coleman, ‘Interactive Visualization for British Architects on the Grand Tour in Eighteenth-Century Italy: Timechart of Travels’, <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/publications/grandtour/timechart/>. See this visualisation for other architects in Italy.

⁷² Darley, *John Soane*, 26.

and diaries that this city could not grip Soane’s attention. It seems that Soane had a lot to learn on the subject of making social calls and participating in the Neapolitan social scene.⁷³ From Naples, Soane travelled to Pompeii and Paestum. He visited Pompeii in a truly Romantic style, seeing it for the first time in the moonlight, the more exciting as this was forbidden. He sketched the Temple of the Egyptian-Roman goddess Isis and a plan of the Via delle Tombe. Combined with the monumental Via Appia, it is evident that Soane had struck up a fascination with the ancients’ commemoration of the dead.⁷⁴ Following the visit to Pompeii, Soane went to Paestum, where he met Yorke, as we noted above.

Familiar with the drawings and engravings of Piranesi and the drawings of his former master George Dance, Soane saw and was supposedly fascinated by the three temples of Neptune, Ceres and Hera. A few days after Easter in 1779, Soane and his companions sailed from Naples to Palermo.⁷⁵

To familiarize himself with Italy, the language and the people, Soane used a popular guidebook, *Letters from Italy*, written by Lady Anna Riggs Miller (1741-

⁷³ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁵ De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect*, 110–111, 139–142. These companions were Thomas Bowdler, Roland Burdon, Henry Greswolde Lewis, John Patteson, and John Stuart (the heir to the baronetcy of Allanbank). This trip to Sicily was led by the guidebook of Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta*, leading the group to Agrigento, Syracuse and Mount Etna, among other places. In July 1779, Soane set off from Rome again to the northern regions of Italy, visiting Bologna, Parma, Milan, Brescia, Verona and Vicenza.

1781), who had visited the country only a few years prior to Soane.⁷⁶ It had long been common to use one or more guidebooks on a Grand Tour, but as earlier versions of such literature consisted mostly of journal entries and letters, they were not the most reliable of sources. The observations made were highly subjective and sometimes contained falsehoods and misinterpretations. As the Grand Tour evolved during the eighteenth century, however, so did its manuals. The rise of tourism, as discussed above, and the evolution of the Tour in an extended leisure trip, also led to professionalisation in the tourism industry, with the guidebook as an excellent example of this phenomenon.

As the title suggests, Lady Miller’s guidebook consisted mostly of observations written to a friend. The letters were not received well by everyone; Horace Walpole, for instance, noted that she did “not spell one word of French or Italian right through her three volumes of travel.”⁷⁷

Lady Miller’s book was one that the young architect clearly frequently had in his hand when travelling: brief notes in Soane’s hand appear in the margins of the text, such as “Exceedingly fine indeed” or “A most beastly composition,” but he also made corrections and additions where he thought necessary.⁷⁸ When Lady Miller wrote that the dome of the Pantheon did not have “the smallest vestige remaining of any metal”, Soane’s observed more precisely that “the cornice ... is

⁷⁶ Anna Riggs Miller, *Letters from Italy: Describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings, &c. of That Country, in the Years MDCCLXX and MDCCLXXI: To a Friend Residing in France* (London: Edward & Charles Dilly, 1777).

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Lee and Rebecca Mills, ‘Miller [Née Riggs], Anna, Lady Miller (1741–1781), Poet and Salon Hostess’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2004).

⁷⁸ “Letters from Italy ...”, 1777, Annotated by Soane, 1778-80”, <http://collections.soane.org/SKETCH17>.

all of Bronze & part of the Gilding rem[ain]”.⁷⁹ These amusing comments show us that Soane was a focussed budding architect, minute and precise in his observations. The fact that he wrote these comments down make clear once again that he was not on a leisure trip, but intended to have a serious future in architecture, starting with this Tour. Soane still had the book when he returned home and it is still in the Soane Museum’s archive today.

3.2. Collecting on tour

While Soane carried Piranesi’s atmospheric depictions of ruined antiquities and monuments of Roman architecture with him when he returned to England, he did not arrive with any antiquities. In fact, the only object he took home was a piece of stucco plaster from Pompeii, dated at pre 80 AD.⁸⁰ As the museum catalogue describes it, this may be the first piece to enter the collection. In the first inventories of the museum, drawn up directly after Soane died in 1837, this stucco fragment is listed in a group of different small objects in the drawer of a table in the Library, but a note was added that it was found in “different places” around the house.⁸¹

The fact that Soane did not bring back a larger collection might seem strange, as many travellers went to Italy to see and to buy. Collecting was not, however, Soane’s primary goal: he was a starting architect travelling on a scholarship and had not started his own architectural practice yet. His interest in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Tim Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London* (London: Merrell, 2009), 19.

⁸¹ *A Stucco fragment from Pompeii*, stucco, 5.5cm x 6cm x 1.8 to 4cm (pre 80 AD), L130.

classical antiquity had, however, been sparked, and collecting was something to which he was to return later in his life, when he had enough income to buy

objects.⁸² In this sense, the Tour served as a kind of exercise in reconnaissance. In a letter to Henry Wood dated 1 August 1778, Soane writes that his “attention is entirely taken up in the seeing and examining the numerous and inestimable remains of Antiquity.”⁸³ This keen observation was recorded and preserved not by the acquisition of artefacts, but through Soane’s drawings. By his own account, Soane drew a great deal during his Tour. Sadly, little survives: on the way back home to England “[t]he bottom of his trunk came loose and many of Soane’s prized possessions fell onto the road and were never recovered [...]’.⁸⁴ The earliest dated drawing is from 21 May 1778 and is a study of S. Agnese Fuori le Mura in Rome.

3.3. The Temple of Vesta at Tivoli

On one of his many trips outside Rome, Soane visited the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, probably in his first summer in Italy, in 1778. This Temple of Vesta, though small, is one of the best-preserved ancient circular peripteral temples in Italy, and

⁸² In part through marriage, in part through hard work Soane acquired quite a substantial amount of money: in 1785, George Wyatt, his wife’s uncle, gave Soane £1000. In the same year, he bought 1,1235 percent Bank stock, which amounts to £992 16s 3d. See Darley, *John Soane*, 76; In 1800, Soane’s income was just over £11,695, which amounts to £350,000 today. See Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 24.

⁸³ Darley, *John Soane*, 25–26; Soane, *Memoirs of the Professional Life of an Architect*, 11; Arthur T. Bolton, ed., *A Portrait of Sir John Soane R.A. (1753-1837) Set Forth in Letters from His Friends (1775-1837)* (Frome, London: Butler & Tanner, 1927), 16.

⁸⁴ Richardson, ‘John Soane and the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli’, 135.

the site was, therefore, in combination with its rugged surroundings which were especially compelling to romantics like Soane, a hit among architects on the Tour.

In drawings as in real life, the temple is perched on a promontory overlooking the River Anio, and was surrounded by rocks and trees.⁸⁵

His first master George Dance had visited the temple earlier and aspired to produce a new measured drawing of it, and Soane would have known the temple through these drawings⁸⁶: Soane’s own drawings show measurements and floorplans after the drawings by George Dance.⁸⁷ Hervey had asked Soane to design and make a similar style temple at the bishops’ property in Ireland, but this, like almost all other promised commissions, came to nothing.

Five of Soane’s drawings survive. This temple is smaller and much more plain in decoration than the Roman temples. Its Corinthian columns have much squatter capitals and no bases. Decorative motives, such as the intriguing bullheads and the Corinthian order, were used by Soane in his later designs.⁸⁸ All in all, it was an unusual design and the more compelling for it.

⁸⁵ See for example Luigi Rossini (1790-1857) *Engraving of the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, s & d: Rossini Dis. e Inc. / Roma*, engraving (1824), 92/2/5.

⁸⁶ Dance office, *TIVOLI (Italy): Temple of Vesta*, drawings (1762 and 1794), D3/2/1-7. The drawings were purchased by Soane after Dance’s death in 1836 for £500.

⁸⁷ John Soane, *Temple of Vesta, Tivoli*, drawing (1780-2) 81v (SM Volume 40); Soane Office, *RA Lecture Drawings of TIVOLI (Italy): Temple of Vesta: Plan, Copy after George Dance the Younger, Insc: CIRCULAR - PERIPTERAL - TEMPLE/ - AT - TIVOLI*, drawing (1780?).

⁸⁸ De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect*, 281, 305.

The most famous imitation of the design of this diminutive ancient religious building we see in what was perhaps Soane’s most important commission after his return to England: the Surveyorship of the Bank of England. In 1786 Soane got a commission to work on Holwood House, the country estate of William Pitt the Younger, the Prime Minister, probably through his connection with Thomas

Pitt. The fifteen trips Soane took to the estate, much more than to any other building site, are a good indication of the opportunities that came with the eventual security of William Pitt’s patronage.⁸⁹ It was through this connection that Soane gained the Surveyorship of the Bank of England in 1788, after the death of Sir Robert Taylor. During the forty-five years that Soane worked as the architect for the Bank, he rebuilt and expanded the whole complex. Significant for his design is that, despite the grand scale of the building, with halls far larger than was needed for their transactions, Soane returned to the architectural language of this small Italian temple. As the drawing by Gandy shows, the north-western corner of the Bank, named “Tivoli Corner”, was designed with the temple in mind. It is a semicircle and has the Corinthian order columns.⁹⁰

The Bank was not the only trace of the impact of the temple at Tivoli in Soane’s architectural imagination, however. In his second lecture as Professor at the Royal Academy in 1810, more than twenty-five years after he had first seen the temple, he juxtaposed this little temple with the grand temple of Castor and

⁸⁹ Darley, *John Soane*, 82.

⁹⁰ Joseph Michael Gandy. *Soane Office, Design for the NW (‘Tivoli’) Corner of the Bank of England: Exterior Perspective, as Built 1805*, watercolour on paper (1824?), P118. ¹⁰¹ David Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 511–512. From the second Royal Academy Lecture.

Pollux in the Roman Forum, finding the little round temple much more compelling: “Yet the uncommon taste, lightness and elegance of every part of this beautiful composition has never been surpassed, nor can be sufficiently admired.”¹⁰¹ The Tivoli-temple is also found in the museum today: as a cork model made by Giovanni Altieri in the Model Room⁹¹ and as a complete model of

the temple in Parisian Plaster, made by François Fouquet.¹⁰³ The Tivoli Recess, located above the Apollo Recess and the Shakespeare Recess on the second floor of the museum, is another reiteration of the Temple.¹⁰⁴

Today, as it was when Soane visited, the Temple of Vesta is a ruin. Of the original eighteen columns, today only ten survive. This aspect of ruin comes back time and again in Soane’s life. A watercolour made by Soane’s pupil Joseph Gandy survives, where the complex of the Bank of England is shown as a deconstructed building.⁹² When Soane was in the process of demolishing no. 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields and establishing his museum, he wrote an essay called *Crude Hints toward a History of my House at Lincoln’s Inn Fields*.⁹³ In this

26cm x 6cm (no date), MR29. Soane bought this together with a model of the Arch of Constantine at the Govan Sale at Christie’s on 16 February 1804, for £16. The Tivoli model is signed by Altieri.

¹⁰³ François Fouquet, *Model of the Roman Circular Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, near Rome*,

⁹¹ Giovanni Altieri, *Model of the Roman circular Temple of Vesta at Tivoli*, cork, 39.5cm x 52.3cm x 51.3cm (177?), MR2; *Model of The Arch of Constantine, Rome*, cork, 18.7cm x

⁹² Joseph Michael Gandy, *A Bird’s-Eye View of the Bank of England*, watercolour on paper, 84.5cm x 140cm (1830), P267.

⁹³ John Soane, *Crude Hints Towards an History of My House in Lincoln’s Inn Fields*, ed. Helen Dorey (Oxford: Archaeopress, 1812).

Restored, plaster of Paris, 27cm x 19.4cm x 19.4cm (c.1800-1834), MR13.¹⁰⁴ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 142–143. This recess is a display for contemporary artists like Chantrey and it features a large glass painting of Charity, after a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The ceiling has a plaster design of the head of Apollo, surrounded by sunrays; eagles and snakes feature in the four corners. The small space also has a cast of a frieze from the Tivoli-temple. Under the curatorship of James Wild in 1887-1892, this room was ‘butchered’ (in the words of Helen Dorey, Inspectress at the museum today) and converted into a private bathroom for the curator. In World War II, the window and the ceiling were almost completely destroyed. The Recess was restored in its original state in the ‘Opening Up the Soane Project’, in 2013-2015.

manuscript, “an Antiquarian” (Soane) describes the house as a ruin, trying to imagine what it once was.

“A tortured and bitter lament about failure”, *Crude Hints* (meaning “rough draft”) was written in 1812, on three days in August and September.⁹⁴ This essay describes the house as a decaying ruin, whereas, in real life, the building was just starting to emerge. Soane hints at the purpose and the aim of the building and imagines that it could have been a temple, a graveyard, or even a magician’s lair. Soane also used the text to allude to his personal aims as to why he opened his house as a museum, which he announced in 1812, the same year as he was writing this manuscript. The antiquarian speculates that the objects found amongst the ruins “might have been for the advancement of Architectural knowledge” among students “who had no mean of visiting Greece and Italy”.

This manuscript shows us how Soane thought about his own life in the future, about his own heritage. The frankly dark picture Soane paints of his museum allows us to think eventually decay and fall to ruin. The fact that the museum stills stands today is due to the Act of Parliament of 1833, showing us how much Soane wanted to create his lasting cultural heritage as an architect and

⁹⁴ Darley, *John Soane*, 215. Namely on 30 August, 7 September and 22 September.

as a collector, thus establishing his immortality, even as he was describing its ruin. Du Prey has shown that these early ideas only intensified in “the mature and idiosyncratic Soane”.⁹⁵

Soane returned to London in the spring of 1780. He was at that point £120 in debt. But, after various disappointing commissions, he started his company and architectural practice in London. His first commissions after his return were to renovate country houses, but he began building his first country house, Letton Hall, the relatively modest country villa of Brampton Gurdon Dillingham and his

family, in 1783. A year later, Soane found his money through marriage. On 21 August 1784, John married Elizabeth Smith, the heiress to her uncle and guardian George Wyatt's substantial fortune from the construction industry, with whom Soane came into contact when he worked on Newgate Prison. Wyatt died in 1790, which meant that Soane could explore his love for antiquities and the arts. It was also at this time that Soane started to go to sales and began his collection in earnest.⁹⁶ More than twenty years after his return from Italy, Soane finally established his museum. Making the connection between the Grand Tour and the museum even more visible than the Antiquarian did in *Crude Hints*, Furján described it as “an internalized and miniaturized Grand Tour”.⁹⁷ Soane's ideas and intentions concerning the display and design of the buildings at Lincoln's Inn Fields will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁹⁵ De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect*, 321.

⁹⁶ Knox, *Sir John Soane's Museum London*, 21.

⁹⁷ Helen Furján, *Glorious Visions: John Soane's Spectacular Theatre* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2011): 3.

4. Recontextualisation: establishing a museum

His own house and museum in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, though built some years back, has continued to receive additions and architectural embellishments up to the end of the year 1833, and may be regarded as an index, epitome, and commentary on the architect’s professional abilities.

John Britton⁹⁸

Today, Sir John Soane’s Museum comprises of three buildings, no. 12, 13 and 14 Lincoln’s Inn Fields. The middle building (no. 13) is built from London stock bricks, with a portico from Portland stone. Two statues, inspired by the caryatids of the Erechtheion in Athens, adorn the front. The wings on either side are built from white bricks from Suffolk, now blackened by soot. The unified façade of the

⁹⁸ John Britton, *Brief Memoir of Sir John Soane ... From Fischer’s National Portrait Gallery* (London: Fischer, Son & Co, 1834), 10.

building was done in three separate building efforts, although it gives to appearance of always having been intended to be one building.

As we noted above, the origins of the public art museum are often located in the religious instability in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Still popular is the opinion that the secular museum replaced the church, but, as Carol Duncan argues, the line between museums and religious space is blurred: while the museum was and still is a place for education, rituals and religious practices are present within its walls.⁹⁹ Neither is it the case that religion is located only in the collections of art museums; it is also present in the architectural structures of museum buildings themselves. As Gretchen Buggeln has observed, “In our

conversation about religion and museums, space and place call for attention.”¹⁰⁰

This spatial element is of course embedded in aestheticism. In the eighteenth century, the ability to recognize true beauty was intimately connected with moral sensibility. In the midst of education and rituals, what were Soane’s intentions with the formation of his house-museum? And where did the idea to open up his house come from? Whereas earlier studies of Sir John Soane’s Museum have tended to focus the origin-story of the museum without considering Soane’s Grand Tour, here we attempt to integrate these approaches within the larger museological narrative.

⁹⁹ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰⁰ Gretchen Buggeln, ‘Museum Architecture and the Sacred: Modes of Engagement’, in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 11.

4.1. Pitzhanger Manor: an architectural dynasty?

John Soane bought the property located at 12 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London in 1792 using money that he inherited from his wife’s uncle. In this well-established part of central London, which in the late eighteenth century was becoming the domain of wealthy lawyers, attracted by the proximity of the square to the Inns of Court, Soane started to make a name as an architect.

In time, the buildings at 12 Lincoln’s Inn Fields would be completely redesigned by Soane and filled with all kinds of objects, as he would later remark, in “a strange and mixed assemblage”.¹⁰¹ Soane’s idea for a display of his collection started, however, considerably earlier and elsewhere, when Soane bought the

¹⁰¹ Soane, *Crude Hints*, 27.

country house Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing. Initially, this building seems to have served a professional and practical purpose. At Pitzhanger, Soane created a gallery of architecture, intended to educate and inspire his sons, John (Jnr) and George to study architecture with the hope that they might join him in his practice. In Soane’s own words, he wanted “to have a residence for myself and family, and afterward [sic] for my eldest son who [...] had also shown a decided passion for [...] architecture, which he wished to pursue as a profession. [...] I wished to make Pitzhanger Manor-house as complete as possible for the future residence of the young architect.”¹⁰²

In 1768, working under George Dance, Soane had already worked on an extension to the seventeenth-century house at Ealing.¹⁰³ When he bought the house in 1800, he tore down everything except the extension on which he had worked. This appears to have been a strategic decision in a professional sense:

preserving a vestige of his earlier work enabled him to display it to clients. The move and construction may also have had more personal reasons: by buying the house on which he had worked as a beginning architect expressed no doubt a moment of pride in his own accomplishments. As Soane observed in his *Plans, Elevations, and Perspective Views of Pitzhanger Manor House*, it was “the first whose progress and construction I had attended at the commencement of my architectural studies.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Soane, *Memoirs of the Professional Life of an Architect*, quoted in Darley, *John Soane*, 151.

¹⁰³ Darley, *John Soane*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ John Soane, *Plans, Elevations, and Perspective Views, of Pitzhanger Manor-House, and of the Ruins of an Edifice of Roman Architecture, Situated on the Border of Ealing Green, with a Description of the Ancient and Present State of the Manor-House, in a*

In any case, when it was finished in 1804, Pitzhanger was a real showroom for Soane’s designs. The drawing rooms were specially designed for the sepulchral vases and cinerary urns and outside were imitations of classical ruins, possibly intended to arouse curiosity. The plaster casts collection, which was growing rapidly, however, was what inspired Soane to create a designated space.¹⁰⁵ This gallery was a rectangular room, lit from above by three lanterns. There was to be additional light flowing in through a large window which overlooks the classical ruins, referred to on the plan as “Ruins of a Temple.”¹⁰⁶ The gallery also had a separate entrance. This dual display of ruin and gallery, certainly a poetic setting, implies that architecture was an expressive art form for Soane: the architectural casts and models became “springboards for the imagination.”¹⁰⁷

For some unknown reason, however, this gallery was never built. Instead, Soane housed the architectural fragments in the basement of the main house and the collection of funerary urns and other antiquities in the other rooms.

At Pitzhanger, Soane displayed to his guests, which included influential people and potential clients, not only current designs but also his most innovative designs from early in his career.¹⁰⁸ In this way, Soane is already adding a kind of biographical retrospective to his designs. Years later, in 1813, when Soane had

Letter to a Friend (London: James Moyes, 1833), 5; De la Ruffinière du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 21.

¹⁰⁵ Feinberg, ‘The Genesis of Sir John Soane’s Museum Idea: 1801-1810’, 226–227.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁷ See *Ibid.*, 228. Including original plans and drawings.

¹⁰⁸ On the ‘Pitzhanger Dream’, see Darley, *John Soane*, 150–168; Feinberg, ‘The Genesis of Sir John Soane’s Museum Idea: 1801-1810’, 225–228.

already sold the Manor, he used it in his teaching, asking his students to consider the function of the front of the house. He hinted that it was inspired by the Villa Medici on the Pincian Hill, which he saw on his Grand Tour.¹⁰⁹

To judge of this species of building we should endeavour to discover the object to be attained; for example, in the building before you, if we suppose the person about to build possessed of a number of detached pieces of ornaments, such as eagles and wreaths, demiboyes and foliage, columns and statues, pedestals and acroters &c. and that from a desire to preserve them from ruin, or to form a building to give a faint idea of an Italian villa... this building may thus be considered as a picture, a sort of portrait.¹¹⁰

We are thus urged to see Pitzhanger Manor as a self-portrait. Soane used the Manor not only to advertise his architectural competency but also as self-expression; that is, as a kind of representational art. At the same time, this

biographical aspect has, naturally, seeped through in his designs for Lincoln's Inn Fields.

It is not completely clear how much of his collection Soane had already acquired prior to working at Ealing between 1800 and 1804. To judge from the first sale Soane attended, the Bute sale on 19 March 1796¹²⁴, where he bought two paintings by Canaletto¹¹¹, and the Cawdor sale (5 and 6 June 1800), where he

¹⁰⁹ Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*, 187.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 188. SM AL Soane Case 170, fols. [134]-35.

¹¹¹ Canaletto, *A view of the Rialto, Venice*, oil on canvas, 64.1cm x 109.7cm (1734-35), P61; *The Piazza di San Marco, Venice*, oil on canvas, 70.2cm x 114.6cm (1734-35), P63. ¹²⁶ *An Apulian (Greek) Mascaroon krater known as the 'Cawdor Vase'*, 92cm in height, 48cm in diameter, 136cm in circumference (late fourth century BC), L101.

bought the famous Apulian krater dating from the fourth century BC found near Lecce around 1790 and known as the Cawdor Vase¹²⁶, Soane’s building and collecting seem to be a simultaneous effort: the Manor slowly rose from the ground as Soane went to buy his antiquities on auctions and sales.¹¹² Even as he was filling the villa at Ealing with antiquities, Soane was at the same time still designing and rebuilding it. Soane bought the statue of the Ephesian Diana¹¹³ at the Bessborough Sale on 7 April 1801, for a little over £60. At the same sale, Soane also bought a statue of Asklepios¹¹⁴, a Roman second or early third century AD variation on the Hellenistic figure. In 1802 Soane bought a number of urns, some of which from the collection of Piranesi himself. Scott suggests that these

¹²⁴ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 27.

statues and urns were arranged in a symmetrical order at Pitzhanger.¹¹⁵ This can clearly be seen in a watercolour drawing by Joseph Gandy of the Library and Drawing Room, as well as on the drawing of the Breakfast Room.¹¹⁶ Possibly with

¹¹² Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity*, 247.

¹¹³ *Restored torso of a statue of the Ephesian Artemis (or ‘Ephesian Diana’)*, pentelic marble, the hands a face restored in black marble, height including restoration 123cm (no date), M613.

¹¹⁴ *Statue of Asklepios (or Aesculapius)*, coarse-grained Greek mainland marble, full height 93cm (second-third century AD), M603

¹¹⁵ Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity*, 247.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Michael Gandy, Soane office: design perspective for the decoration of the Library and Drawing Room at Soane’s country house, Pitzhanger Manor, Ealing, watercolour on paper (1803?), P94; Soane office: design perspective for the decoration of the Breakfast Room at Pitzhanger Manor Ealing, Soane’s country house, watercolour on paper (1803?), P95.

the idea to further enrich his collection, Soane designed niches to be filled with busts and Greek vases.

In other words, in some instances, Soane already had a purpose-built place in mind (and on the drawing board) in which to display the antiquities before he purchased them, and did not only adapt his rooms to fit his growing collection.¹¹⁷ We might term this process one of “auto-musealisation”. Just as Soane kept the part of Pitzhanger that he had worked on early in his career in order to be able to show it to future clients, this reverse process of display mutated the house into a domestic yet museal space. In addition, the way Soane used the Manor to create a self-portrait ties in perfectly with the essentially introspective aims of (auto-)musealisation.

After Pitzhanger Manor was completed in 1804, Soane was bitterly disappointed that neither of his sons showed aptitude or interest in his profession. Already in 1806, he responded to a buying inquiry that he was “delighted with the place and if it depended on me no money would tempt me. I yet hope the other parts of my family will be induced to think of Ealing as I do.”¹¹⁸

Eliza was often alone in the mansion and both sons were away at Cambridge, but with minimal supervision there, and under the high pressure of ambitious parents, the boys failed to fulfil their parents’ dream. John Jnr. came back from Cambridge in 1808 without a degree, and in ill health. He was sent to Liverpool to work under Soane’s former pupil J.M. Gandy but was sent back again to London, where he married unsuitably. George was more interested in writing and theatre, and also married without his parents’ permission.¹¹⁹ Soane put the Manor on sale

¹¹⁷ Cornelius Vermeule, ‘Sir John Soane, His Classical Antiquities’, *Archaeology* 6, no. 2 (1953): 70.

¹¹⁸ SM Archives, *Letterbook 1802-15*, 20 November 1806. Darley, *John Soane*, 179.

¹¹⁹ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 28.

in 1809 and sold it the following year.¹²⁰ By this time, Soane had already bought the property adjacent to Nr. 12, Nr. 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and was busy rebuilding and remodelling both properties into a single connected building.

As we noted above, this was a period in which Soane’s reputation and influence as a teacher were growing considerably. He had been elected a full Royal Academician in 1802, and only four years later dethroned his former master George Dance from the position of Professor of Architecture at the Academy.¹²¹ In this position, Soane delivered twelve lectures on the history of architecture and various other subjects within the field. He gave his first course of six lectures five times: in 1810, 1812, 1813, and, after significant revision, again in 1817, and 1819. He delivered his second course only once, in 1815.¹²² The subject matter of these lectures ranged from the history of architecture and the classical orders and the use of these orders in monuments to a discussion of the urban plans of London and Paris, and the correct use of decoration and ornament.¹²³

Watkin notes that “Soane’s notes and resultant lectures, everywhere reflective of an Enlightenment mentality, are related to his personal design theory in numerous complex and intimate ways [...]”¹²⁴ The property at Lincoln’s Inn Fields soon became an integral part of Soane’s approach to teaching. Both the day before he gave a lecture and the day after, Soane would open his house at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, in order to provide students with the “correct” books, images

¹²⁰ Darley, *John Soane*, 192.

¹²¹ On Soane’s complicated relation with the Royal Academy, see Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*, 65–97.

¹²² Watkin, *Sir John Soane*, 289.

¹²³ See for an extensive analysis of all twelve lectures *ibid.*, 291–395.

¹²⁴ Watkin, *Sir John Soane*, 427.

and models of buildings he mentioned. In an early notice, the house is described as “an Academy for the study of *architecture* upon principles at once *scientific* and *philosophical*”.¹²⁵ Not all were convinced, however, by Soane’s design for his building. In *Crude Hints*, Soane mentions that “much offence was taken by many to the composition” of the façade, and that attempts were made by the District Surveyor William Kinnard to change the design.¹²⁶

How Soane displayed his collection in his house most closely resembles the cabinets of curiosities of earlier centuries. Nineteenth-century drawings show that the objects cover the museum walls from floor to ceiling, from the basement of the building to the private apartments on the second floor. Most plaster casts and architectural fragments hang on the walls, without casing or vitrines. Soane’s ideas about display are led by the union of architecture and poetry: the seeing of the objects, indeed the reading of the object, aligns with reading poetry: “One of the objects I had in view was to show, partly by graphic illustrations, the union and close connection between Painting, Sculpture and Architecture – Music and

Poetry;”¹⁴² The objects depend on other objects to give them meaning, to make sense of them.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ “Observations on the House of John Soane, Esq. in Lincoln’s-inn-fields,” *European Magazine* 62 (1812): 381-387 at 382. Original italics.

¹²⁶ Soane, *Crude Hints*, 10–12. The dispute was about the open loggia: in 1774 the Building Act was passed, saying that windows or other openings were not extend beyond the front of the buildings. Soane’s loggia was approved in the end, on the grounds that other projections at Lincoln’s Inn Fields were approved as being ornamental to the buildings.

¹²⁷ Cf. Hodder’s theory on thing, or objects, and other relations between things and humans Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

To this end, the Picture Room has an ingenious system designed by Soane, that makes it possible to house as many as 118 paintings in this 4 x 3.5-meter room. The wooden panels attached to the walls are movable and open up to show different paintings. Contemporary photographs show that very little has changed over time; in fact, the earlier drawings were used to reconstruct the exact set-up and display where this was changed by later curators.¹²⁸

Elsewhere in the museum, Soane placed objects in juxtaposition to each other, and each object can be explained or viewed in a collective and suggestive arrangement.¹²⁹ The Dome Area provides a good example of this arrangement. This area, packed from floor to ceiling with architectural fragments, houses the Apollo Belvedere and the statue of Soane by Sir Francis Chantrey. They are placed directly opposite each other.¹³⁰ In *Crude Hints*, The Antiquarian answers the question of who might be represented in the statue of Apollo: “[...] They speak of a large statue placed in the centre of one of the Chapels which they say might have been this very necromancer changed into marble [...]”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, Exordium.

A second space where such an arrangement is clearly visible, is in the Sepulchral Chamber, in the basement of the house. The sarcophagus of Seti I and the bronze statue of the Head of Pluto, Roman god of the Underworld, are placed in line with each other when looking from the Crypt into the Chamber.¹³¹ In the

¹²⁸ See for excellent photographs Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*.

¹²⁹ Sophie Thomas, ‘A “Strange and Mixed Assemblage”: Sir John Soane, Archivist of the Self’, *Studies in Romanticism* 57, no. 1 (2018): 125.

¹³⁰ Sir Francis Chantrey, Bust of Sir John Soane, marble (1830), M931; Cast of the celebrated statue of the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican, plaster cast (no date), M875. ¹⁴⁷

Soane, *Crude Hints*, 22. Soane moved the bust of himself from the Tivoli Recess to the Dome after the Act of Parliament was passed.

¹³¹ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 108–109.

1835 *Description*, Barbara Hofland wrote that one felt “a sense of veneration” when looking at the display of the sarcophagus, and, when viewed at midday, when the light was at its best, “every surrounding object, however admirable in itself, becomes subservient to the sarcophagus”.¹³²

Some visitors found this arrangement, without attention to chronology or the characteristics or quality of the object, chaotic if whimsical. The director of the Königliches Museum in Berlin Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794-1868), who travelled to London before Soane died, wrote in his influential three-volume *The Treasures of Art in Great Britain*:

notwithstanding the picturesque fantastic charm of the arrangement, the impression of the whole, in consequence of the arbitrary mixture of numberless heterogeneous objects, resembles the confused effect of a feverish dream.¹³³

Waagen goes on, raising the subject of the Act of Parliament, and praises Soane for his “English whimsicalness”, in Waagen’s opinion only attainable through the English wealth and way of thinking. Thus, in securing the collection “as in so many other things England gives a noble example to the rest of the world.”¹⁵¹

Later, in his Act of Parliament (1833) Soane would appoint Trustees who were to ensure “that such Museum and Library and Works of Art should be kept together, and preserved and maintained for public use and advantage [...]” and they were to

¹³² Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 38.

¹³³ Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, trans. Elizabeth Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1838), 2: 181.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

[...] provide for the due preservation of the same in the said house [...] so that free access shall be given at least on two days in every week throughout the months of April, May, and June, and at such other times in the same or in any other months as the said Trustees shall direct, to Amateurs and Students in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, and to such other persons as shall apply for and obtain admission thereto [...] for consulting and inspecting and benefiting by the said Collection [...]

The Act was read for the second time on 15 March 1833, introduced by Joseph Hume, the MP for Middlesex. Soane and Hume were supported by Sir Robert Inglis, MP for Oxford University, and the bill was read.¹³⁴ However, on 1 April when the bill was to be read a third time, William Cobbett, MP for Oldham, presented George Soane’s petition against the Bill. The passing of the Bill “would be ... a violation of those laws by which the society was held together” and argued

that his father must have been improperly importuned and persuaded at the ninth house ... to alienate so large a portion of his property, since, if he had contemplated such an act ... previously, he must have made up his mind ... before he had arrived at a period of natural decay.¹³⁵

George essentially tried to prevent his father from giving away what he considered his inheritance. Besides George’s angry petition, Sir Robert Peel proposed to add a clause which would place the museum under control of the

British Museum. This, in turn, sparked the debate on the difficulty of visiting this museum, as its opening hours were very limited and practically unattainable for workers and tradesmen. The accessibility of the collection and museums to the

¹³⁴ Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, XVI, *Sir John Soane’s Museum*, 668.

¹³⁵ Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, XVI, *Sir John Soane’s Museum*, 1334.

public proved to be the main issue at stake here.¹³⁶ In this way, the early Soane Museum contributed to these fundamental debates regarding accessibility. In the end, the Act was passed on 20 April 1833.

Whereas the Act was finalized in 1833, the idea to preserve his housemuseum for the future likely entered Soane’s mind earlier. Darley suggests that in early 1824, a few months after his eldest son John died and at the time of what would be the last remodelling of the house, Soane asked advice on appointing trustees, who would care for the museum after his death.¹³⁷ Four years before his death, he was ensuring the future of his legacy.

4.2. Visiting (the) Soane

As stated in the Act of Parliament, the reason for publicizing the museum other than for academic purposes, was the benefit of the public. Waagen was not, of course, the only visitor. As early as April 1837, only a short three months after Soane’s death, 260 visitors were admitted to the museum. An article appearing in *The Observer* in 1838 provides valuable information regarding the “the regulations as to the admission of the public”.¹³⁸ Whoever wished to visit had to leave their name and address at the Museum, or call upon the trustees or the curator in advance. An appointment would then be made and the card of admission was to be sent to the address. Upon visiting the museum, visitors had

¹³⁶ Darley, *John Soane*, 303.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 300–301.

¹³⁸ George Bailey, “Sir John Soane’s Museum,” *The Observer*, 1838, 2.

to write their name in a book, after which they were welcome in every room, and stay “as long [...] as is agreeable to themselves”.¹³⁹

This description seems to be perfectly in line with the common nineteenth-century visiting practices. In addition, such practices and regulations are present when first opening of the country houses to outside visitors and tourists. Soane, and country house owners, thus defined the (spatial) practices of visiting a house or museum (or a combination of both). It is at this point that the collection is not merely private property anymore, but that the collection is being held in this house for the public. At Soane’s house-museum, however, the house itself as designed by a famous architect was part of the collection. This meant that some regulations had to be prescribed by Soane. He standardized opening times and wrote various editions of a description, which led the visitor through the housemuseum.

As early as 1839 the “Soane Museum” makes its first appearance in a city guidebook, Abraham Booth’s *Stranger’s and Intellectual’s Guide to London*.¹⁴⁰ The description is rather minimal but does mention that there are only four rooms open to be visited. The visitor is encouragingly, if rather vaguely, informed that “the Museum is one of the most unique and interesting collections of any in London [...]”.¹⁴¹ While Waagen did not unequivocally appreciate the “feverish” fullness of the rooms, the early art historian Anna Brownwell Jameson wrote a more positive chapter on the Soane Museum in her 1842 handbook on the art

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Abraham Booth, *The Stranger’s Intellectual Guide to London for 1839-40* (London: H. Hooper, 1839).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 123.

galleries in London.¹⁴² Naming it the “Lilliputian Museum,” which at first glance may imply disparagement, Jameson found the museum a pleasant surprise.

Nevertheless, Jameson goes on to remark rather damningly:

this, however, is in itself characteristic: the want of a pure and elevated taste, and of all feeling for genuine simplicity, which Sir John Soane exhibited as an artist, are conspicuous in the decoration and arrangement of his museum, pretty and interesting as it is.

It might be that part of Soane’s intentions were that such a heterogeneous assemblage would prompt the visitor to attempt to make sense of the display, without much help from the curator. In another sense, Soane’s fascination with ruins may provide another lens through which to view his mode of exhibition.

In the previous chapter, the manuscript *Crude Hints Towards a History of My House at Lincoln’s Inn Fields* was discussed in light of the Grand Tour and Soane’s career as an architect and his legacy. The work is at once sentimental, romantic, and at the same time also concerns religion and death. When Soane describes his own house as a ruin, he imagines himself long dead, and without having left a legacy.¹⁴³ On one level it would seem to express Soane’s rather

¹⁴² Anna Jameson, *Handbook to the Galleries of Art in and near London* (London: J. Murray, 1842), 544–579.

¹⁴³ The connection between ruins and Romanticism has been explored in literature, such as Chateaubriand’s *René* and Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7: “Incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin – *ständige Unganzheit* – not only receive special emphasis in Romanticism but also in a certain perspective seem actually to define that phenomenon.” This ruined state went hand in hand with a strong sense of longing, which in turn implies that life is inherently broken. For a new and different approach to architecture and discussion of John Soane and other architects, see Jonathan

fraught relationship with his sons. *Crude Hints* was written at the time when Soane and his wife Eliza had strained relations with their sons. The paternal pain this caused Soane is clearly expressed when the author exclaims: “the man who founded this place fondly imagined that the children of his children would have inhabited this place for ages – Oh! What a falling off do these ruins present.”¹⁴⁴ Another hint at Soane’s disappointment comes from the inscription found within the ruins, “et filii filiorum” which “with its biblical tone [...] is seen as a melancholy epitaph for Soane himself”.¹⁴⁵ The full inscription reads “Et filii filiorum et semen illorum habitabunt in saecula”¹⁴⁶, and is situated on the Palazzo of the Canossa family in Verona, which Soane almost certainly visited on his Grand Tour, as he bought a measured drawing by Gaetano Avesani of the building, made in 1779, when Soane was in Italy.¹⁴⁷

What is striking about the Antiquarian’s vision is that it invites a different view on heritage, a view that is opposite to it: an “anti-heritage”. This term is usually used to describe issues on heritage after war crimes, genocide and other traumatic experiences, but in the case of Soane, the concept can be applied on a smaller scale. By creating a ruin from his supposed legacy and by showing the pain and disappointment his sons caused him, in combination with his Romantic side and fascination with death, Soane created his own anti-heritage in this manuscript. In connection to the museum, *Crude Hints* prescribes ways in which

Hill, *The Architecture of Ruins: Designs on the Past, Present and Future* (London:

¹⁴⁴ Soane, *Crude Hints*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Translation: [Built] so that the children of the children and their children can live here for eternity.

¹⁴⁷ Soane, *Crude Hints*, 52. Gaetano Avesani, *Measured drawings of Italian palaces: VERONA: Palazzo Canossa (Sanmicheli), Front elevation, drawing (1779), 44/10/2.*

Routledge, 2019).

the visitor has to make sense of the jumble and the ruin. Soane invites the visitor to look at the ruins in a way that constitutes a certain inheritance, which is not passed on smoothly. We can view the eventual Act of Parliament as a means to not let this anti-heritage take hold.

4.3. John Soane and Freemasonry

We have noted above that museums and religion are tightly connected. The degree in which the museum, the building, or its collection are connected to ritual and/or religion varies. However, Carol Duncan’s influential work *Civilizing Rituals* sees these public museums as ideological and ritual sites. For Duncan, “the totality of the museum” is understood “as a stage setting that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind, whether or not actual visitors would describe it as such (and whether or not they are prepared to do so).”¹⁴⁸ As might, perhaps, be expected in a museum so profoundly and self-consciously shaped by its owner, inhabitant, designer and collector, the relationship between the museum’s its former owner/collector and religion plays a significant role in understanding the Soane.

While Soane’s interest in Christianity seems to have been somewhat tepid, in 1813, Soane was initiated into the Grand Master’s Lodge of the Freemasons in London.¹⁴⁹ The event seems to have been occasioned by Soane’s being contacted by John Bayford, Grand Treasurer of the Lodge, with a view to commissioning

¹⁴⁸ Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 1–2.

¹⁴⁹ For Soane, there is no baptismal record. However, this is not a sign of deliberate neglect much less non-belief. As Darley has suggested, the absence of baptismal records in Soane’s birthplace or elsewhere, may simply be an indication of some kind of disturbance of family life, such as a move. Certainly, his elder brothers and sisters were all baptised in their birthplace of Goring, where John was also born.

Soane to survey and value a new piece of property. He rose extremely quickly

through the ranks: elected to the Grand Master’s Lodge on 25 November 1813 with the rank of “sublime Master Mason”, he was appointed Grand Intendant of Works on 27 December 1813 by the Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex Augustus Frederick. Soane held this position until his death in 1837.¹⁵⁰

On this same 27 December, the union of the Ancient and the Modern Lodges in the Grand Lodge took place. For this significant ceremonial event, Soane was commissioned by the Duke to design a monumental “Ark of the Masonic Covenant”, which served to house and symbolize the union between the two lodges. The new ark was four feet, three inches high and three feet, four inches wide and made from mahogany instead of the acacia wood used for the more conventional Biblical ark. Its shape was triangular with a Doric, Ionic and a Corinthian column supporting each corner, symbolising wisdom, strength, and beauty. It also featured a tall door, resembling, in classic Soane fashion, a tomb.

Between 1828 and 1830 Soane designed a new Great Hall in London. The designs for the interior of this building are, as Watkin observed, an amalgamation of classical and Gothic elements fitted to the commissioning institution. The use of light and painted glass attributed to an eerie mood, clearly visualized by Gandy

¹⁵⁰ Watkin, ‘Freemasonry and Sir John Soane’, 408; Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*, 423; John. E. Taylor, ‘Sir John Soane: Architect and Freemason’, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 95 (1983): 194–202.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Michael Gandy, Interior of the edifice devoted exclusively to Freemasonry adjoining Freemasons’ Hall, in Great Queen street – an evening view made after the completion of the building (1832).

in his drawing.¹⁶⁹ Where the early plans for decorations were lavish and ornamental featuring the Corinthian order, the final room had Ionic columns and

a simple decoration plan. In 1863, the whole building was demolished, to great disappointment of architectural scholars today.¹⁵¹

Freemasonry and the society surrounding it were excellent opportunities for Soane to gain more clients in the higher classes of early nineteenth-century London.¹⁵² However, while the initiative to join the Society may have been professional, it is clear that Soane also took an intellectual interest in Masonic literature. The society of Freemasons had its intellectual basis in French Enlightenment thought and extensive research in Soane’s private library reveals that Soane was interested in these principles of “ancient truths, primitive forms and social and civic ideals” of Freemasonry. Among his collection were *L’architecture considérée sous le rapport de l’art, des mœurs, et de la législation* by Claude-Nicholas Ledoux, Alexander Lenoir’s *La Franche-Maçonnerie rendue à sa véritable origine, ou l’antiquité de la franche-maçonnerie par l’explication des mystères anciens et modernes*, Baron d’Hancarville/Pierre-François Hugues *Recherches sur l’origine, l’esprit et les progress des arts de la Grèce*, and the works of Voltaire and Rousseau.¹⁵³

Moreover, Soane remained active within the Lodge. He contributed £500 to the cost of his design of the Masonic Hall and made various other improvements,

¹⁵¹ See Watkin, ‘Freemasonry and Sir John Soane’, for a more extensive description of the building activities and the designs for Soane’s Freemasons’ Hall.

¹⁵² Darley, *John Soane*, 223.

¹⁵³ Darley, *John Soane*, 223; Watkin, ‘Freemasonry and Sir John Soane’, 402.

architectural as well as decorative. He donated to Masonic causes, took an active part in the ceremonies, and in 1828 commissioned John Jackson to paint a portrait of himself in Masonic attire.¹⁵⁴

In light of the development of Soane’s museum around this period, it has been argued that Freemasonry played a large role in the design and display. In Masonic Enlightenment, the museum was an instrument for individual growth and improvement, thus shaping space and the spatial experience was a clear agent to promote citizenship and to shape character.¹⁵⁵ As almost every founder of major museums in America and Europe was a Freemason, it is not surprising that these values and ideas shaped the evolution of the museum. Preziosi argues that in Soane’s museum, these intentions and articulation have been uniquely preserved.¹⁷⁵ In the next chapter, this will be analysed in detail.

4.4. Funerary Architecture: Dulwich Picture Gallery

Funerary monuments and tombs figured heavily in Soane’s designs from the start of his career. We have already noted the tragedy of 1776, when at the age of twenty-two, and at a pivotal moment in his life, at the last minute Soane decided not to go on a boat trip with a group of friends in order to continue work on his designs for a Triumphal Bridge. To commemorate his friend, Soane designed a “Mausoleum to the Memory of James King”, and exhibited the design at the Royal Academy in 1777. The design consisted of “[...] a central domed building set on a

¹⁵⁴ Watkin, ‘Freemasonry and Sir John Soane’, 402; Darley, *John Soane*, 224.

¹⁵⁵ Donald Preziosi, ‘Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible’, in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald (London: Blackwell, 2006), 57. ¹⁷⁵ Donald Preziosi, ‘Seeing Soane Seeing You’, in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 228.

heavily rusticated podium joined by diagonal wings to four pyramids.”¹⁵⁶ Sadly, the mausoleum was never built.

Two other prominent figures that would play central roles to Soane’s design of mausolea were the painter Sir Francis Bourgeois and the diplomat-cum-art dealer, Noel Desenfans, who lived together with their collection of paintings at 38 Charlotte St (now Hallam Street) in Marylebone.¹⁵⁷ When Desenfans died in 1807, Bourgeois, whom Soane had invited to come to view Pitzhanger in 1804, commissioned a mausoleum from Soane.¹⁵⁸ This was not to be a free-standing funerary monument but was intended as an extension at the back of the house at Charlotte St.¹⁵⁹ The interior was to be a rectangular chamber, with Doric columns and a groin vault, decorated with classical reliefs.

Desenfans was buried in this mausoleum. However, no permission was given for the collection and mausoleum to stay at Charlotte St. Four years later, in his last days, Sir Francis Bourgeois chose Dulwich Gallery to be the two friends’ last resting place. Bourgeois died in 1811 and Soane had another chance to design a mausoleum and gallery as one: Dulwich Picture Gallery. With this commission, Soane designed the first purpose-built public art gallery to house a permanent collection in London. The interior of the mausoleum does not differ in design

¹⁵⁶ James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt As the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005), 184.

¹⁵⁷ Darley, *John Soane*, 181. Darley remarks aptly that “neither was English, neither was quite what he seemed.”

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁵⁹ See Waterfield, *Soane and Death*, 93–99 for the exact design and building process.

¹⁸⁰ John Summerson, ‘Sir John Soane and the Furniture of Death’, *Architectural Review*, no. March (1978): 147–155.

from the original at Charlotte St. and is attached to the gallery. The exterior of the gallery is executed in a “primitivist” style, whereas the mausoleum is “as a Roman tomb type reduced to bare essentials”.¹⁶⁰ There are three doors, representing the three people within, that do not open and have nothing behind them. The mausoleum, where today Noel Desenfans, his wife, and Sir Francis Bourgeois rest, has been described as “toy-like but sinister” by John Summerson, later

director of the Soane Museum.¹⁶⁰ In his description of the new building, Soane asked the viewer to

Fancy the Gallery brilliantly lighted for an unrivalled assemblage of pictorial art, - whilst a dull, religious light shews the mausoleum in the full pride of funeral grandeur, displaying its sarcophagi, enriched with the mortal remains of departed worth, and calling back so powerfully the recollections of past times, that we almost believe we are conversing with our departed friends now sleeping in their silent tombs.¹⁶¹

The Dulwich Picture Gallery was severely damaged by a bomb in the Second World War but was rebuilt as it was before. In the Dulwich Picture Gallery, religion, art and Soane’s “furniture of death” come together in a fascinating and layered design.

Death accompanied Soane in this decade. In September 1815, after Eliza had been in ill health several months, two articles appeared in the Sunday

¹⁶⁰ Darley, *John Soane*, 325; Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 84–88.

¹⁶¹ ‘Bourgeois and Desenfans Museum’, *The Mausoleum & Monuments Trust*, accessed June 24, 2020, http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/324/Bourgeois_and_Desenfans_Mausoleum.

newspaper *The Champion*, edited by John Scott, which were especially negative towards Soane's work.¹⁶² Soane deduced from the tone and the buildings mentioned, that the articles had been written by their son George. Soane was able initially to keep his discovery concealed from his wife, but Eliza soon discovered their son's betrayal, exclaiming: “Those are George's doing. He has given me my death blow. I shall never be able to hold up my head again.” On November 21,

1815, she died. Understandably perhaps, John Soane blamed his son for the premature death of his wife. His will stipulated that the Museum would go to the Trustees and the State and that George would only receive £50. When George contested his father's will following his death in 1837, the court rejected the case and, for lack of money and again substantial debts, George Soane gave up.¹⁶³ After the tumultuous 1810s, Soane's elder son John Jr also died of tuberculosis in 1823.

With wife and son prematurely deceased and the other family members estranged, Soane became more and more focussed on the houses at Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was now decided most firmly that it should become a museum and his collecting activities increased.¹⁶⁴ In the following year the sarcophagus of Seti I would be acquired, found by Belzoni who offered it to the British Museum to buy for £2000. They refused to pay this sum, and Soane acted quickly and bought the large alabaster sarcophagus. This acquisition, in turn, spiked new designs and changes to the basement area of the museum, the space that will be the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁶² Darley, *John Soane*, 234. *The Champion*, September 1815.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

5. Death at the Museum: Soane’s Crypt and Catacombs

It is evident that the hand, or rather the mind, which has arranged the beautiful fragments, massive pillars, ancient sculptures, and various decorations around us, intended that sentiment to pervade our bosoms, proper to the visitants of the dead, who are not therefore the personally regretted; and under this impression we reach the catacombs.

Barbara Hofland¹⁶⁵

The previous chapter gave an overview of the creation of Soane’s museum and ended in the period of Soane’s life when he had just lost his wife and one son, and had a conflictual relationship with his other son. Primary sources, such as Soane’s memoirs, allude to Soane’s mental state as gloomy, depressed and reclused in this period; he lived for his work and his museum.¹⁶⁶ On the day of his wife’s burial, he

¹⁶⁵ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 36.

¹⁶⁶ Darley, *John Soane*, 214–215. A product from this dark period is the earlier mentioned manuscript *Crude Hints* that Soane wrote at the time of building No. 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

wrote in his notebook: “The burial of all that is dear to me in this world, and all I wished to live for!”¹⁶⁷ The section of the museum that is most closely connected with this period in Soane’s life and the architect’s state of mind is the basement area. Here are located the rooms of Padre Giovanni, Soane’s alter ego, as well as the catacombs and the Sepulchral Chamber with the sarcophagus of the Egyptian pharaoh Seti I. These small dark spaces with narrow passages run beneath all three buildings at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and were originally coal and wine cellars. The older parts of the basement were built in 1808-1812 but came into the shape it has today in the mid-1830s.

In this chapter, the discussion on John Soane’s ideas behind the display and the recontextualisation of the objects, the effect this has on visitors, and the architectural design of these spaces is split into two sections. The first section deals with the spaces as an Academy of Architecture and a Grand Tour substitute. The second section deals with the argument of Freemasonry, discussing if the spaces are designed to be a journey to Enlightenment. After establishing Soane’s main objectives, we will explore the basement area following Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad. In this way, we come closer to an understanding of the spatial logic of the Soane Museum, while paying close attention to the recontextualisation of objects.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 236. Recorded on Friday, December 1, 1815.

5.1. Description of the basement area

Firstly, the sketches for Lincoln’s Inn Field No 12, dated 11 June 1808, already designate the basement as “catacombs”, and show plans to build a mausoleum.¹⁶⁸ Considering the timing of this design, it seems possible that the idea was in some way prompted by the recent death of Soane’s friend Noel Desenfans in 1807, and Soane’s designs for a monument commissioned by Desenfans’ friend Francis Bourgeois, which would later evolve into the commission of Dulwich Picture Gallery.¹⁶⁹ In later plans of the museum, the mausoleum has vanished, but as will be shown, almost all of the basement space under the three buildings is dedicated to the central theme of melancholy and death.

The final edition of the *Description of the House and Museum* published in 1835, written by Soane himself, leads the reader/visitor through the museum via a specific route.¹⁷⁰ We enter the basement via the “Monk’s Cell”, where there is a niche for holy water to the side and a wooden carved crucifix on display. In these abandoned monk’s quarters, a religious space indeed, numerous artworks are on display, taken from disparate ecclesiastical monuments, which are said to make the visitor feel reverence for the monk.¹⁷¹ Padre Giovanni, as the fictive monk is called, is a clear reference to John Soane himself. From Hofland’s commentary on the space, we can deduce that this space and the monk are to be revered as if the monk was indeed a real person, but is now deceased.¹⁷²

The rooms of the monk are Gothic in architectural style and house mostly medieval objects. The decoration was inspired, as Tim Knox has argued, by the

¹⁶⁸ Summerson, ‘Sir John Soane and the Furniture of Death’.

¹⁶⁹ See previous chapter.

¹⁷⁰ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷² Darley, *John Soane* 308.

monastic ruins he had seen on a tour of the north of England in 1816, and doubtless by accounts of “Sir Walter Scott’s (1771-1832) picturesque arrangements at Abbotsford [...]”, greatly enlarged to house Scott’s extensive library and collection of curiosities in 1816-1819, and again in 1822-1824.¹⁷³ Ruins of the Palace of Westminster, a building designed by Soane, are placed in the courtyard and the windows are decorated with stained glass. In a certain sense, then, these stylistic features and this assemblage of objects seem intended to (re)create space that corresponds both to its imagined medieval inhabitant, and that enables the visitor to step into (an idea of) the religious past.

On the other hand, we may view Soane’s “Monk’s Cell” from a more critical and indeed self-ironic perspective.¹⁷⁴ Who was this Father John? Soane’s alter ego, or “a fanciful proto-Soane”, as Summerson writes, is said to have lived here many years ago as a recluse and alone after the death of Fanny, the monk’s companion, whose tomb we find in the “Monk’s Yard”.¹⁷⁵ The Cell provides thus a fitting, if playful, image for Soane at the time. We might also refer here to the quote Soane himself gives us in connection to this room: *dulce est desipere in loco*, it is sweet to play the fool at the right moment.¹⁷⁶ It is a very imaginative step to imagine the (abandoned?) space of an alter-ego monk, and to anticipate that other people will visit your space. Perhaps this is Soane, handling his grief as an architect, that is, spatially.

¹⁷³ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 102.

¹⁷⁴ John Summerson, ‘Sir John Soane and the Furniture of Death’, *Architectural Review*, March (1978): 147–155.

¹⁷⁵ This is actually the tomb of Fanny, Mrs. Soane’s dog. The inscription reads “Alas, poor Fanny!”

¹⁷⁶ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 27.

Next in his *Description*, Soane leads us to the Catacombs. Soane certainly visited the Via Appia lined with mausoleums and most likely visited catacombs in Rome during his Grand Tour.¹⁷⁷ The space they occupy in Soane’s basement is, however, no bigger than a broom cupboard, measuring not even 2 x 5 meters. The niches in the walls are filled with Roman cinerary urns, skulls, and other objects on the theme of death, such as skulls. At the time of Soane’s death in 1837, the Roman urns or *cippi* were located under an unusual star-shaped aperture in the ceiling, which was closed off in the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁸ The *loculi* were unfortunately destroyed during the curatorship of James Wild (1878-1892), who altered many aspects of the museum, and thus did not follow Soane’s explicit wishes as stated in the 1833 Act of Parliament. As part of the large restoration project *Opening Up The Soane*, the museum restored the catacombs to their original setting.

The *Description* next has the visitor enter the Sepulchral Chamber, where the sarcophagus of Seti I is displayed. Directly behind this remarkable centrepiece stands a large bronze bust of Pluto, the Roman god of the underworld.¹⁷⁹ The Chamber is brightly lit through the Dome area above, in sharp contrasts to the West Corridor leading to the Sepulchral Chamber, which is very dark. In this area are also a cast of the statue of the Crouching Venus, a Roman altar dedicated to

¹⁷⁷ Darley, *John Soane*, 31.

¹⁷⁸ This top-lit design closely resembles the mausoleum at Dulwich Picture Gallery, where the chamber housing the three sarcophagi was “brilliantly lit from a lantern light in the roof.” See Summerson, ‘Sir John Soane and the Furniture of Death’.

¹⁷⁹ Knox, *Sir John Soane’s Museum London*, 108–109.

Hercules purchased in 1801 for £4,400, and various casts and fragments on display.¹⁸⁰

In his *Description*, Soane gives us a rather matter-of-fact account of the space. He gives us the objects on display, but does not go into much detail. To get a feel of the space, we turn to Barbara Hofland (1770-1844), Soane’s good friend. Hofland and her description, penned at Soane’s request and presented side by side with Soane’s, of the Sepulchral Chamber provides a richer understanding of impression of the space of visitors within it:

By degrees this space becomes peopled – figure after figure emerges from the crypt and corridors, where they had loitered in the gloom: they assemble around the sarcophagus, which sheds from within a pale, unearthly light upon the silent awe-struck beings that surround it.¹⁸¹

With this eery description of her feelings when entering this space, Hofland perfectly encapsulates the effect of Soane’s designs. Highly dramatic in her characterisation of the space, she sketches a scenery: the visitor enters another world already filled with other visitors turned into spirit-like creatures. In this way, the space transforms visitors into ghoulish creatures, aided by location, contents, and lighting. To address the importance of the acquisition of the sarcophagus for Soane, Soane held three lamp-lit parties in 1825, inviting

¹⁸⁰ *Cast of a statue of the crouching Venus*, plaster cast (no date), M364; *Roman altar to Hercules*, pentelic marble, 61cm x 37cm x 37cm (117-138 AD), M515. The cast of Venus previously belonged to the painter George Romney (1734-1802).

¹⁸¹ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 38–39.

London’s society. He illuminated the sarcophagus from within and, being from alabaster, this light shone through the material: a truly Romantic atmosphere.¹⁸²

Last, but by no means insignificant, is the presence in a basement recess, of a small monument that Soane designed for his wife Eliza, with, beneath it, a memorial for Mr John Soane Jnr. Described as “memorial tablets”, they are only mentioned briefly by Soane in his description and not explicitly by Hofland.¹⁸³ It seems to be rather set apart from the other objects, in a recess.¹⁸⁴ Especially the loss of his wife in 1815 can be seen as the catalyst for the design and display of the basement space. Seeing as this loss coincided with the building activities at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, this connection between Soane’s private and professional life is remarkably visible in this dark and gloomy space.¹⁸⁵

5.2. The Pedagogical Space

The first argument we must discuss concerning the general goals in designing his space, is that Soane aimed for the building as a whole to function as an Academy of Architecture. In the Preface of *The Union of Architecture*, the contemporary English antiquary and author John Britton, a close friend of Soane’s, lamented that “Architecture, as an art, has not been treated fairly and liberally in this country. In the Royal Academy it has been, and still is, slighted [...]”¹⁸⁶ He then

¹⁸² Ibid., 39.

¹⁸³ Memorial tablet to Mrs Soane, marble (1815), X64; Memorial tablet to John Soane junior, marble (1823), X65.

¹⁸⁴ This was, of course, not the only thing reminding Soane of his family; he designed the Soane family tomb in 1816, now in St Pancras Fields, described as his *Domus Aeterna*. Waterfield, *Soane and Death*, 107–110.

¹⁸⁵ See Summerson, ‘Sir John Soane and the Furniture of Death’; Waterfield, *Soane and Death*.

¹⁸⁶ John Britton, *The Union of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, Exemplified by a*

goes on to note Soane’s wish to establish an academy to rectify this state of affairs:

These considerations, and the daily evidence before our eyes of failure and degradations in this noble art, show the necessity of speedily founding an Architectural Academy, wherein the elements, the art, and the science of Architecture might be taught — where able professors might be supported and rewarded — wherein models, casts, drawings, books, &c. might be preserved — where emulation and talent would be placed in laudable competition, and find their proper level and reward; — and where diplomatic honours should be conferred on ability, and be its passport to the world.¹⁸⁷

Soane’s relationship with the Royal Academy was hardly smooth. He had been suspended from the Council due to a conflict between this governing body and the General Assembly in May 1804.¹⁸⁸ On 29 January 1810, he further provoked opprobrium by criticizing his fellow architect Robert Smirke (1780-1867) and his former master George Dance in the Fourth lecture of his first lecture series at the Academy. Due to the controversy that ensued among both his architectural

Series of Illustrations, with Descriptive Accounts of the House and Galleries of John

Soane ... (London: Printed for the author, 1827), xiii.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁸⁸ Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*, 68–69. The Academy was governed by two bodies: the Council and the General Assembly. This conflict was initiated when the Council refused to accept a report from a salaries committee appointed by the General Assembly, because the Council had the highest authority, not the General Assembly. When it was recommended by the Council that the matter was to be taken before the King, the General Assembly suspended members of the Council, among whom was Soane.

colleagues and the wider public, which had a deeply personal impact on Soane, he refused to give his fifth and sixth lecture until 1813.¹⁸⁹

The dispute was fundamentally damaging to Soane’s reputation as an educator. Further, it coincided with the composition of the earlier mentioned *Crude Hints* and the period when Soane felt the disappointment in his sons most deeply. The idea of founding an Academy of Architecture agrees with this role as an educator and founder of the museum: he was the producer/designer of this space. In *Crude Hints*, the Antiquarian hinted that the museum “might have been for the advancement of Architectural knowledge”.²¹¹ If we consider the fact that it was, of course, Soane speaking as the Antiquarian, we conclude that the role of educator and the use of the museum as an Academy was one of his primary goals, at least at the beginning.

Furthermore, at the end of a lecture on 16 January 1812, he announced that the drawings used to illustrate the lecture would be on show at his house instead of at the Royal Academy, due to “the unavoidable haste in which the drawings [...] have followed each other”, “time enough has not been allowed for the students to consider them sufficiently.”²¹² This is the earliest written evidence that Soane opened his museum for outsiders. This educational use of his collection, however, was not new. Soane’s offices had pupils year-round, who worked in the mezzanine Student Room surrounded by architectural fragments for inspiration. From late 1784, Soane took one pupil roughly every two years and employed assistants and clerks of works.²¹³ This on-site education, with direct access and use of the collection, works as a kind of educational workshop for the production of spaces and the creation of new buildings. The functional role of a museum as an

²¹¹ Soane, *Crude Hints*, 27.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 72–96.

²¹² Watkin, *Sir John Soane - Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*, 356, 579.

²¹³ The students worked from 7am to 7pm in summer, and from 8am to 8pm in winter. They were allowed holidays and were given considerate amounts of time off for studying. See for an account of Soane’s pupils and office Margaret Richardson, ‘Learning in the Soane Office’, in *The Education of the Architect*, ed. Neil Bingham (London: Society of Architectural Historians in Great Britain, 1993).

educational tool comes to the fore here, but in fact, the Academy of Architecture never took shape in a formal institutional form. This specifically architectural teaching ended, of course, when Soane died without having established an architectural dynasty comparable to Robert and James Adam and their father William or the Dance brothers. The educational aspect of the museum, however, is still visible today in the more general objectives of the public museum.

5.3. The Masonic Space

The second argument deals with Soane’s (religious/ritualistic) belief system, namely that the museum was designed as a uniquely Masonic space. As Donald Preziosi has observed, it is perhaps not surprising that almost every founder of major museums in America and Europe was a Freemason, for, in Masonic approaches to the Enlightenment, the museum was understood as an instrument for individual growth and civic improvement.²¹⁴ Thus, shaping a space for museums and the creation of a spatial experience was a clear agent for the promotion of good citizenship and for the formation of character. In Soane’s museum, these intentions and articulations have been uniquely preserved, as Preziosi shows.²¹⁵ The first argument for such a Masonic influence in Sir John Soane’s Museum is the spatial and visitor-path connection from the dark Crypt in the basement with the sarcophagus of Seti I to the Dome Area with its various fragments and statues, and its large yellow-tinted window. If read symbolically, this is a carefully constructed vertical path from death to enlightenment.

²¹⁴ Preziosi, ‘Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible’, 57–62; Preziosi, ‘Seeing Soane Seeing You’, 227–232. Preziosi bases his argument on the comparison of Soane and his museum and other early museums, such as Lenoir’s Museum of French Monuments in the former Convent of the Lesser Augustines, the Ashmolean and Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Altes Museum in Berlin.

²¹⁵ Preziosi, ‘Seeing Soane Seeing You’, 228.

Secondly, we may note the significance of the Ante Room in Soane’s construction. In Masonic thought and initiatory practice, the Ante Room, or Chamber of Reflection, is entered by a Masonic initiate to meditate on the process of initiation. In Masonic lodges, it was usually dark, and it contained various objects carefully laid out, such as a skull, an hourglass, and sometimes the inscription V.I.T.R.I.O.L.²¹⁶ Soane’s Ante Room is located in the basement and displays various busts, such as that of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), himself a freemason, and the architect Sir William Chambers (1723-1796). The ceiling is decorated with compartments in the form of a St. Andrew’s cross. “A perfect treasury to the lovers of antiquity”, this room, if indeed inspired by the Masonic Chamber of Reflection, would have had a meditative or initiatory function.

Given that Soane was a Freemason for almost twenty-five years, it is perhaps hardly surprising that he incorporated some elements and appropriate symbolism in his museum. Elements of this conceived space can be seen in the 1828 painting of Soane in Masonic dress by John Jackson, his Masonic gloves and other Masonic attributes he owned. In the 1955 *New Description*, the portrait is mentioned hanging in the Picture Room, on the West Side on the outside plane on the left.²¹⁷ In this case, the conceived space, with Soane as the producer of this space, is inherently Masonic in tone; though it must be acknowledged that the museum was never used as a Masonic Lodge. But was that Soane’s main objective in the creation of the space? In addition, only visitors with knowledge of Masonic

²¹⁶ *visita interiora terrae, rectificandoque, invenies occultum lapidem*. Translation: “visit the interior of the earth, and purifying, you will find the hidden stone.”

²¹⁷ Sir John Soane’s Museum, *A New Description of Sir John Soane’s Museum* (London: Published by the Trustees, 1955), 28; Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 21. John Jackson, *Portrait of Sir John Soane, in Masonic Costume, as Grand Superintendent and President of the Board of Works*, oil on panel, 61.5cm x 46.5cm (1828-29), P142.

rites and Freemasonry in general would have known the connections; other visitors, which Soane explicitly expected, would not be able to read the subtle symbolism.

If we consider the two arguments above, the existence of an Ante Room and the clear visitor path, described by Soane himself, from the Crypt to the Dome, and the occasional hint to Soane’s personal and professional interest in Freemasonry, suggests a more symbolic use of Masonic thought, rather than it being the main objective for Soane to incorporate in his museum. The rise of the modern-day museum is in some ways linked to Freemasonry, and there are a few hints to this in Sir John Soane’s Museum. However, to conclude that Soane wanted to display his collection and design his house in a Masonic fashion would be a bridge too far. It is entirely possible that the hints dispersed throughout the museum were laid especially for “cognoscenti”, and that Soane did not expect everyone to understand them.

5.4. Henri Lefebvre’s Spatial Theory

Having considered two different arguments regarding the purpose of the foundation of Soane’s Museum, we turn to the spatial implications of Soane’s designs. Seen from a museological perspective, the theme of death creates a tension within the museum space: the museal functions of preservation and protection do not neatly cohere with death and decay, nor even with memorialisation. In Soane’s museum, there is a sense of immortality, as the museum preserves its dead creator and his extraordinary collection and thus, it

inherently contains his ideas on display – and makes them able to be visited. Above, we discussed the poetics of architecture and the profound idea that architecture was an art to Soane and his contemporaries. Susan Sidlauskas argues that in line with Romantic thought both Soane and his friend, painter J.M.W. Turner believed that “[...] death occurs, and matter disperses and decays, but art emerges from chaos through the power of the artist’s skill and imagination.”¹⁹⁰ While Sidlauskas related this to Soane’s work on the Dulwich Picture Gallery, where death and art go hand in hand, it may equally be applied Soane’s museum as well, particularly to the fundamental importance of the basement, its Catacombs, and Sepulchral Chamber, and to the design and experience of the museum as a whole.

Indeed, Furján has argued that Soane, in creating his museum, set up a performance of sentimentality after the loss of his wife. He channelled his pain and grief to collect, display, enshrine objects that served to interpret and express his feelings. In this way, in the basement of his home, Soane set the stage for death. The fact that the basement is, of course, located on the subterranean level, literally in the under-world, makes it even more appropriate to display these objects here. The elevation of the space was itself eloquent.

But how exactly does this opposition of death and preservation come together in the Soane Museum? One way to approach this question is to use the three concepts of spatial analysis developed by Henri Lefebvre in his influential theoretical work *The Production of Space*. His concept of “social space” is useful for considering the connection between the basement and the museum as a whole. For Lefebvre, “social space” is not limited by walls or other boundaries. Such boundaries, for Lefebvre

¹⁹⁰ Susan Sidlauskas, ‘Creating Immortality: Turner, Soane, and the Great Chain of Being’, *Art Journal* 52, no. 2 (1993): 63.

give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by

barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space.¹⁹¹

The space to which we refer here pertains to the basement area of the museum, but also resides in John Soane’s imagination and bleeds through in the other rooms of the museum.

We argued in the previous chapter that Soane took control of his space in various ways. As Ronnes and Van Toor¹⁹² argue, and Anderson further elaborates¹⁹³, the origins of the museum in the country houses are illuminative here, for in the country-house collection the collector is presented as the creator, and thus the producer, of a space.¹⁹⁴ The necessity of making an appointment when wishing to visit the museum, as mentioned previously, can be seen as one of the ways Soane conceived of spatial practice. By setting these rules, Soane placed his house-museum in line with visiting the country house-museums of the social élite and thus prescribed the way people were ‘supposed’ to behave.

¹⁹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 86–87.

¹⁹² Hanneke Ronnes and Bob Van Toor, "Op bezoek bij de adel. De buitenplaats als 'protomuseum' vanaf de late zeventiende tot de late negentiende eeuw," *Virtus* 21 (2014): 87– 110.

¹⁹³ Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England’s Country Houses in the Long Eighteenth Century*.

¹⁹⁴ See also Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space*, 360–363.

In designing and composing the basement spaces, Soane took control over the space; this is what Lefebvre calls “representations of space”, or the conceived space (*l'espace conçu*). In Soane’s museum, this representation of space can be found in the floorplans that point out the different rooms and recesses. This also constitutes the *Description* Soane wrote for his museum, along with drawings of

the displays by J. M. Gandy, and the floorplans in *Descriptions* and modern-day literature on the museum. Soane controlled this conceived space by numbering the rooms as to provide the visitors with a route through the museum.

By designing his museum space, Soane, in turn, asked and expected from the visitor, whether a student of architecture or tourist, a certain behaviour when visiting the museum. The visitor, in turn, by interacting with the space by viewing, walking and thinking within the space, whether calmly or with some fright as Hofland describes, produces the space as well.¹⁹⁵ The museal space is thus a “lived space” (*l'espace vécu*) to use Lefebvre’s term, and it is constituted as much by the practices of those moving within it, as by the conceptions of its collector-architect. For this reason, to gain a more complete perspective on space, it is necessary to incorporate the visitor experience in analysing museal spatial practice. Soane’s description, his careful planning of the visitor’s path through the various spaces of the house, suggests that he saw his museum as a performance. Indeed, he intended for the visitor to see death, to feel eery when entering the basement as the quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates; the lighting in the basement in combination with the objects, the atmosphere created by John Soane still produces exactly this effect, but the conceived effect was only activated by the visitors themselves, and by their practices: the ways in which they

¹⁹⁵ Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England’s Country Houses in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 14.

“people”, “loiter”, “assemble”, and “surround”, as Hofland puts it, “awe-struck”.¹⁹⁶

An illuminating piece of evidence for how Soane’s house-museummausoleum may be understood as a “representational space”, by which Lefebvre means “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols”, can be found in Henry James’ novella *A London Life* (1889). In this story, the character

Laura Wing visits the Soane museum with her companion Mr Wendover on a dark and gloomy day. While looking at the “heterogeneous objects collected by the late Sir John Soane”, a summer storm passes over. The keeper who accompanied them on their tour leads Laura and Mr Wendover down to the basement, which

presented itself to Laura as a series of dim, irregular vaults – passages and little narrow avenues – encumbered with strange vague things, obscured for the time but some of which had a wicked, startling look [...].¹⁹⁷

The space frightens Laura; it looks to her like a cave of idols. At a certain moment, she looks at a statue, but when she draws closer to it, the statue shrieks and lightning flashes. The statue is, in fact, her sister Selina, in the company of a gentleman. In this striking account of Soane’s space, the novelist describes the museum’s sepulchral chambers experienced by the protagonist Laura as representational space, which, as Lefebvre describes it “overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”¹⁹⁸ In this sense, Laura’s own imagination when visiting the museum overlaps with the symbolism of the producer of the space, John Soane.

¹⁹⁶ Soane and Hofland, *Description of the House and Museum*, 38–39.

¹⁹⁷ Henry James, *A London Life* (London: Macmillan, 1889), 85–87.

¹⁹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 38.

Further, we may approach the Sepulchral Chamber using another of Lefebvre’s concepts, that of absolute space. For Lefebvre, absolute space is inherently concerned with politics and religion:

Absolute space was made up of fragments of nature located at sites which were chosen for their intrinsic qualities, but whose consecration ended up

by stripping them of their natural characteristics and uniqueness. Thus natural space was soon populated by political forces.¹⁹⁹

It is this combination, this layering of nature and politics that constitutes absolute space. Thus, it is the bedrock of representational spaces (religious, magical and political symbolisms) and is essential to this spatial analysis of the Soane.

Furthermore, absolute space is closely associated with the space of death, and with “the space of death’s absolute power over the living”.²⁰⁰ Lefebvre attributes the mystic and sacred aspect of this space to the fact that it originates in nature,

even though it is the exercise of political power therein which has in fact wrenched the area from its natural context, and even though new meaning is entirely predicated on that action.²⁰¹

Accordingly, funerary architecture resides in absolute space. Soane created a space layered with religious symbolisms: it is a consecrated space of sorts, a space specially designed for veneration, and, according to Hofland, to evoke a sense of reverence for the dead. He has managed to create a residue of absolute space in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 48.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 235.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 234.

his basement and it is here that the opposition between death and preservation come together in a way that provokes the visitor.

Death is at the heart of the Soane museum; it would not go too far to say that it is at the foundation, spatially speaking. In this sense, the display, the final recontextualisation of the object, is its last resting place. It is here, in the basement of Sir John Soane’s Museum that the urns, the sarcophagus, the models and the casts are laid to rest. But in this static-ness, there can also be found immortality: a space between the living and the death, an afterlife.

As some writers have argued, there is a downside to the recontextualisation in Soane’s very specific display; it has been called a “feverish dream” and a “moulding mass of things”.²⁰² This can have the effect of a pile of fragments in which all meaning gets lost. Besides, Soane was not concerned in displaying objects in their original context, but he was conscious of this; the original context is always in the background, but often abstract and interpreted in Soane’s unique fashion. From a museological perspective, the spatial practice in the basement area of Sir John Soane’s Museum mutates the original object and its meaning into an installed, graveyard-like, composition.

²⁰² Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England - Vol 3*; Helene Furján, *Glorious Visions: John Soane’s Spectacular Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2011), 162.

6. Conclusion

Sir John Soane’s Museum might not be made from *aere perennius*, as its owner/collector already acknowledged in the opening quotation of this study, yet it is still in existence and well-attended more than 180 years later. Confronted by this extraordinary piece of collecting and musealisation, I set out to answer the following questions: *How was the collection at Sir John Soane’s Museum acquired, how was it recontextualised, and how is it displayed? How did this shape early museum practice?*

Having established the key concepts and terms for this thesis in the first chapter, Soane’s Grand Tour was our first focus. It was here, in Italy, that Soane came into contact with later patrons, but more importantly, it was here that he

marvelled at classical architecture. Particularly influential were the Pitt and Yorke families and the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli. This temple would prove prominent in his later designs and was reiterated many times in his museum.

In the third chapter, I demonstrated that Soane started buying objects and casts for his mansion at Ealing, Pitzhanger, influenced by his experience in Italy, with the goal to further the education of his sons. This period of Soane’s life sees the realisation of the buildings at Lincoln’s Inn Fields into a combination of domestic and public space. Looking at the manuscript *Crude Hints*, discovered that the Antiquarian/Soane himself saw these buildings in a ruined state, while his house was being constructed at the time of writing. This fascinating piece of writing shows the pain and disappointment Soane felt after he realized neither of his sons had the wish nor the aptitude to follow in his footsteps. Having sold Pitzhanger twenty years after his return from Italy, Soane moved his collection to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, where it resides today. Throughout the second and third chapter, we looked closely at Soane’s involvement with Freemasonry and funerary architecture, two topics that were of much interest to Soane.

Ultimately, I discussed two possible objectives for the creation of the museum; that of a pedagogical space and that of a Masonic space. As demonstrated, Soane used Freemasonry in a more symbolic way, rather than wishing to create a functional Masonic lodge and tried more sincerely to found an Academy of Architecture. Using Henry Lefebvre’s spatial triad, we peeled back the layers of the basement space, incorporating visitor experience in these layers as Soane’s representational space provided and expected certain behaviours of visitors. We found that the early nineteenth century practices for visiting the upper classes and country houses were adopted here, such as calling upon the trustees to visit the house-museum.

The sarcophagus, the urns, and other objects in the basement of Soane’s residence-museum were recontextualized in a remarkable manner. By using

Lefebvre’s spatial theory, Soane’s personal reasons, his expectations of visitors, and his objects, I attempted to uncover how Soane’s unusual connections lead to the even more unusual composition. I argued that a tension exists in this museum: that between death and preservation, and specifically how this tension that shaped the space of Soane’s museum can be connected to the experience of the Grand Tour.²⁰³ The passage of time experienced by Tourist in Italy, amongst ruins, reminds of the decay of material objects, of death. In this museum, it is as if time has stood still. This awareness of loss and survival is especially prevalent in the crypt of the museum. In this light, the museum and its extraordinary collection have been deemed a miniaturized version of a Grand Tour. An experience of the past that is completely immersive, as on a Grand Tour, can be had in the Soane Museum.

Soane had a particular desire to shape his legacy. Deducing from the previous chapters, Soane wanted the visitor to experience his house as he

experienced it, to feel what he felt. Soane provides a deeply engaging experience in his house, where there is a sense of loss and death in the decontextualized objects on display, as attested by Barbara Hofland and Henry James, among others.

The tension between decay and preservation is the opposite of Tony Bennett’s Exhibitionary Complex, which, with its disciplined surveillance, reforms people; it exhibits the process of evolution in a distinct order, with objects in neat vitrines. Soane’s museum allows us to see, perhaps more clearly that such an orderly display of objects does not do the objects (and the past) justice. Objects are not, after all, stable as Ian Hodder reminds us, they are always in need of

²⁰³ Furrjan, *Glorious Visions: John Soane’s Spectacular Theatre*, 4.

preservation.²⁰⁴ To pretend that this is not the case, in careful displays of well-ordered preservation, is, in fact, an artful fiction. This is what is unique about the space and the objects in any house-museum, but especially in Sir John Soane’s Museum: Soane has managed to maintain the tension between death and preservation. These museums are spaces where time has not moved; it is installation art. In these standstill places, there is no glass vitrine that separates us from the past.

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²⁰⁴ See Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*, 3–7. His five themes are: things are not isolated; things are not inert; things endure over different temporalities; things often appear as non-things; and the ‘forgetness’ of things. For this study, “things are not inert” is most important: “[...] things are really just stages in the process of the transformation of matter.” This is connected to the fact that things are not isolated, as things decay due to a falling away of some necessary chemical or biological absence or loss. Most importantly: “Artifacts are a particular class of things – those made by humans. They in particular are not isolated, needing human attention and care [...]” See Hodder, *Entangled*, 64-87.

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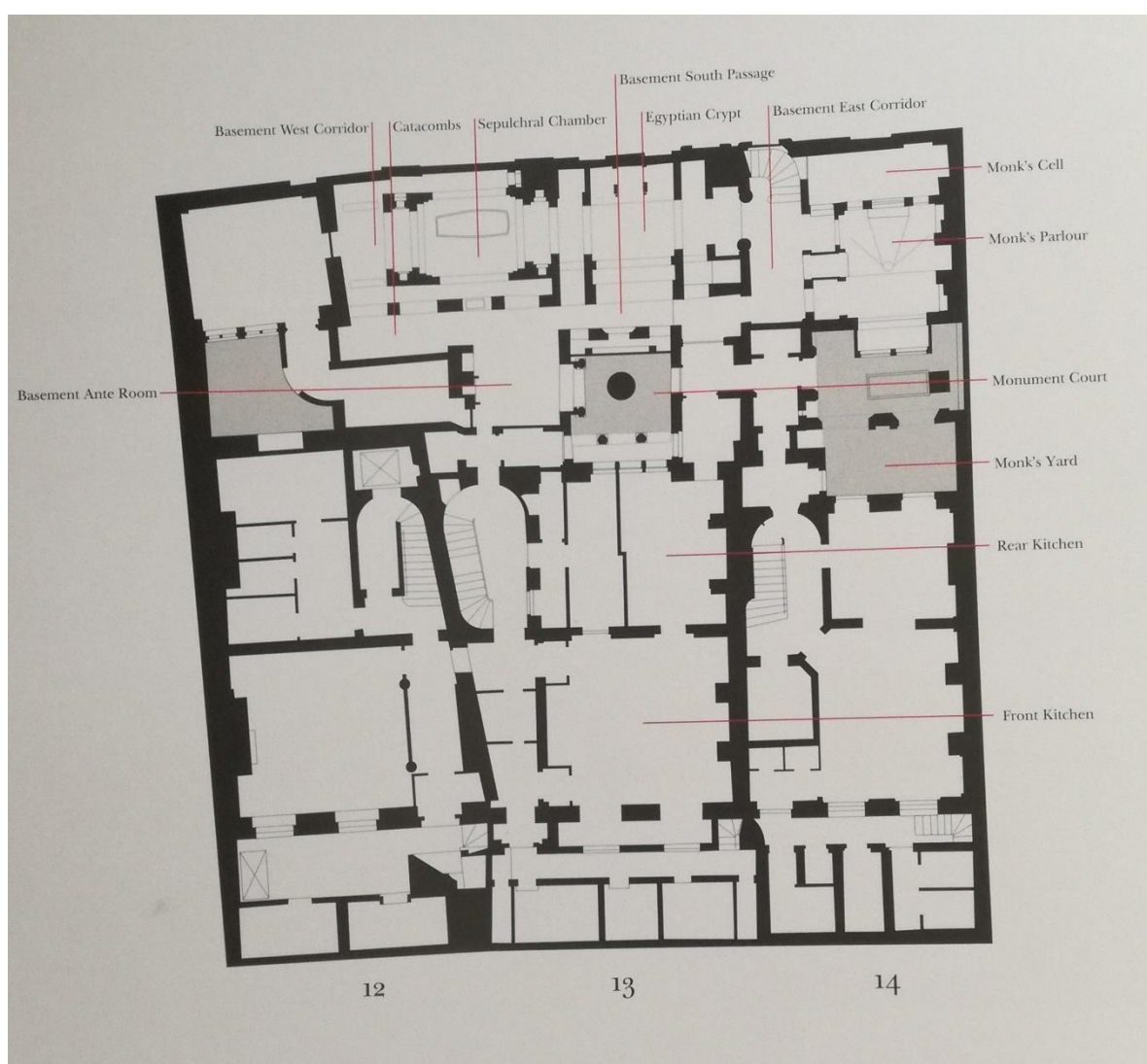
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Appendix - Floor plans of the museum²⁰⁵

Basement

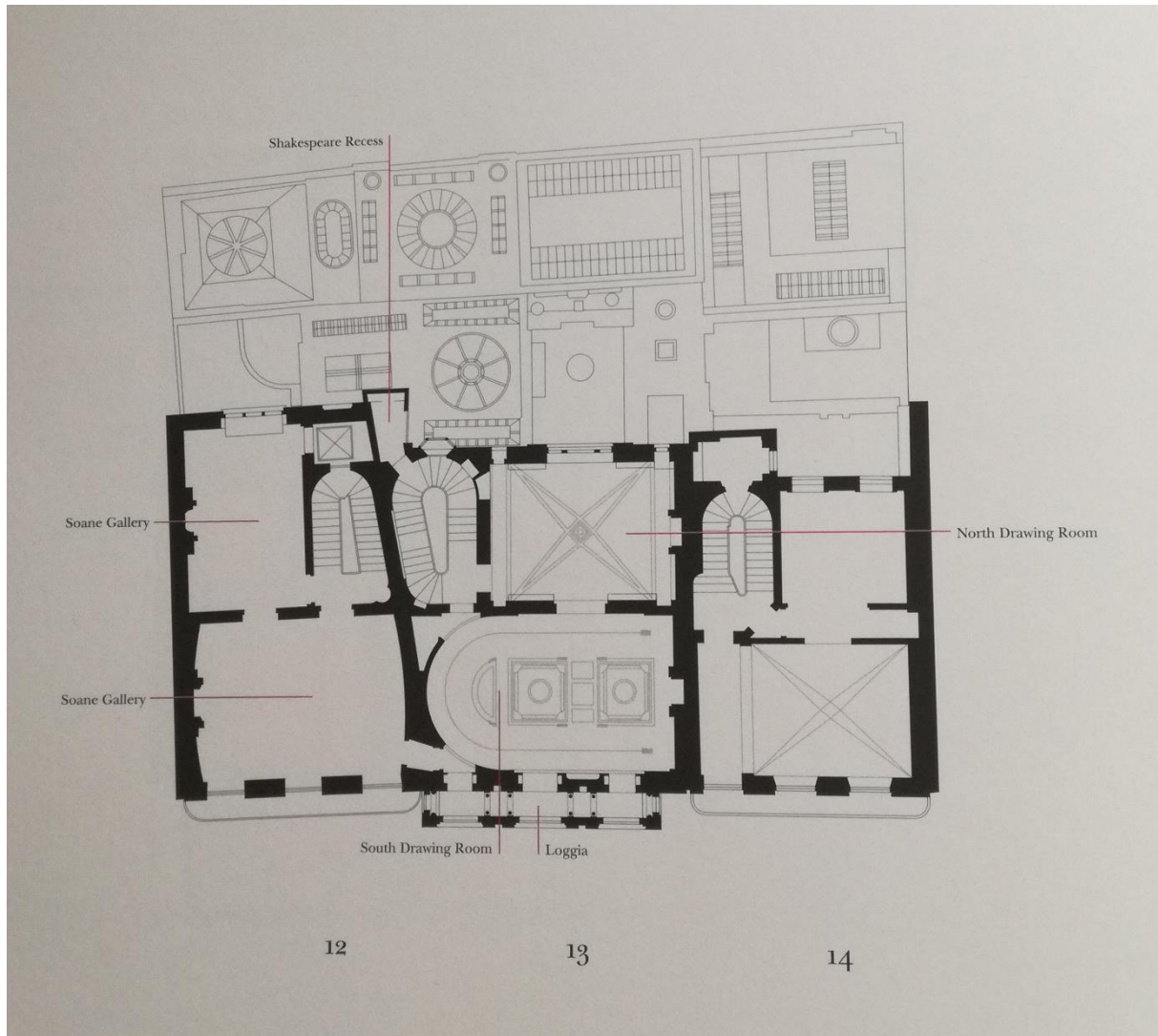


²⁰⁵ Knox, *Sir John Soane's Museum London*, 152–155.

Ground Floor



First Floor



Second Floor

