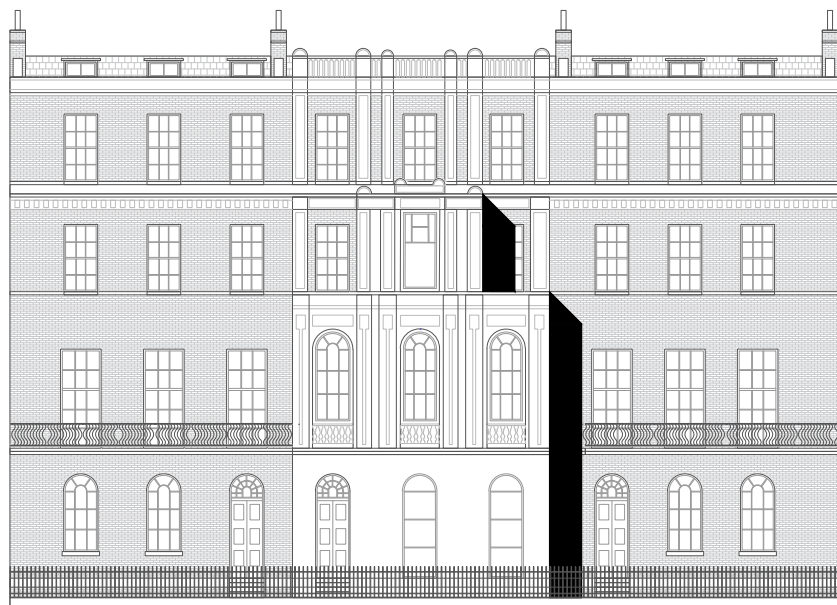


Research Plan

The Sir John Soane's Museum

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Introduction

This year's graduation studio focuses on the architectural archive, which, due to its specificity, presents its own set of challenges. The understanding of this typology began with the analysis of different institutions, and in the process of unpacking the idea of an archive, it is possible to confront different questions in regard of archiving and the different culture of archive within the architectural framework. Preservation, documentation and display were only a few of the topics encountered in this analysis. Reflecting on archives means also understanding the procedures behind the presence of a document or object in an archive.

As Sofie De Caigny, former director of the VAI, mentioned, "archives extend far beyond mere repository of buildings". It is about places that collect different precious elements such as documents and records as well as stories and ideas.

The archival institution that is analysed in this research is the Sir John Soane's Museum, which presents a unique and different way of archiving and exhibiting worth looking into. By un-packing and re-packing the house-museum using a physical model as a tool of research, combined with the analysis of this peculiar institution informed us of its development and particular way of archiving.

The Sir John Soane's Museum was established in 1833 and is situated within the building that formerly housed the architect's residence. The museum displays his comprehensive collection of art, antiquities, and architectural models, which he consistently expanded during his lifetime.

The museum finds its origins in John Soane's purchases of three distinct properties in Lincoln's Inn Fields, designated as N°12, 13, and 14, respectively. At that time Soane was working on the project for the Bank of England, Lincoln's Inn Fields was therefore a convenient location both for his office and house. Over time, he undertook a series of reconstructions, modifying the buildings to serve as a residence, an office, and a growing repository for his expanding collection.

The process of demolition and later reconstruction of the 17th-century house at No. 12 began in 1792, with the intention of creating a residence and studio for Soane. In the space of less than two decades, he proceeded to acquire N°13, which afforded him the opportunity to establish a more spacious office (the current dome area) and to relocate his residence. The available space was not enough for the collection, which included Roman and Greek sculptures, paintings, and antiquities from various periods, as well as an Egyptian sarcophagus. In 1824, N°14 was also incorporated into the complex, having been demolished and rebuilt to accommodate a new painting room for his expanding collection of paintings. In 1833, Soane negotiated an Act of Parliament with the intention of ensuring the perpetual preservation of his house and collection, preventing any alterations or rearrangements that would compromise his vision.

Rather than its programme, which was typical for the period in London, this house-museum was distinguished by its exceptional design and approach to exhibiting objects. The house-museum was in fact one of the most popular forms of museum in Europe during the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century.

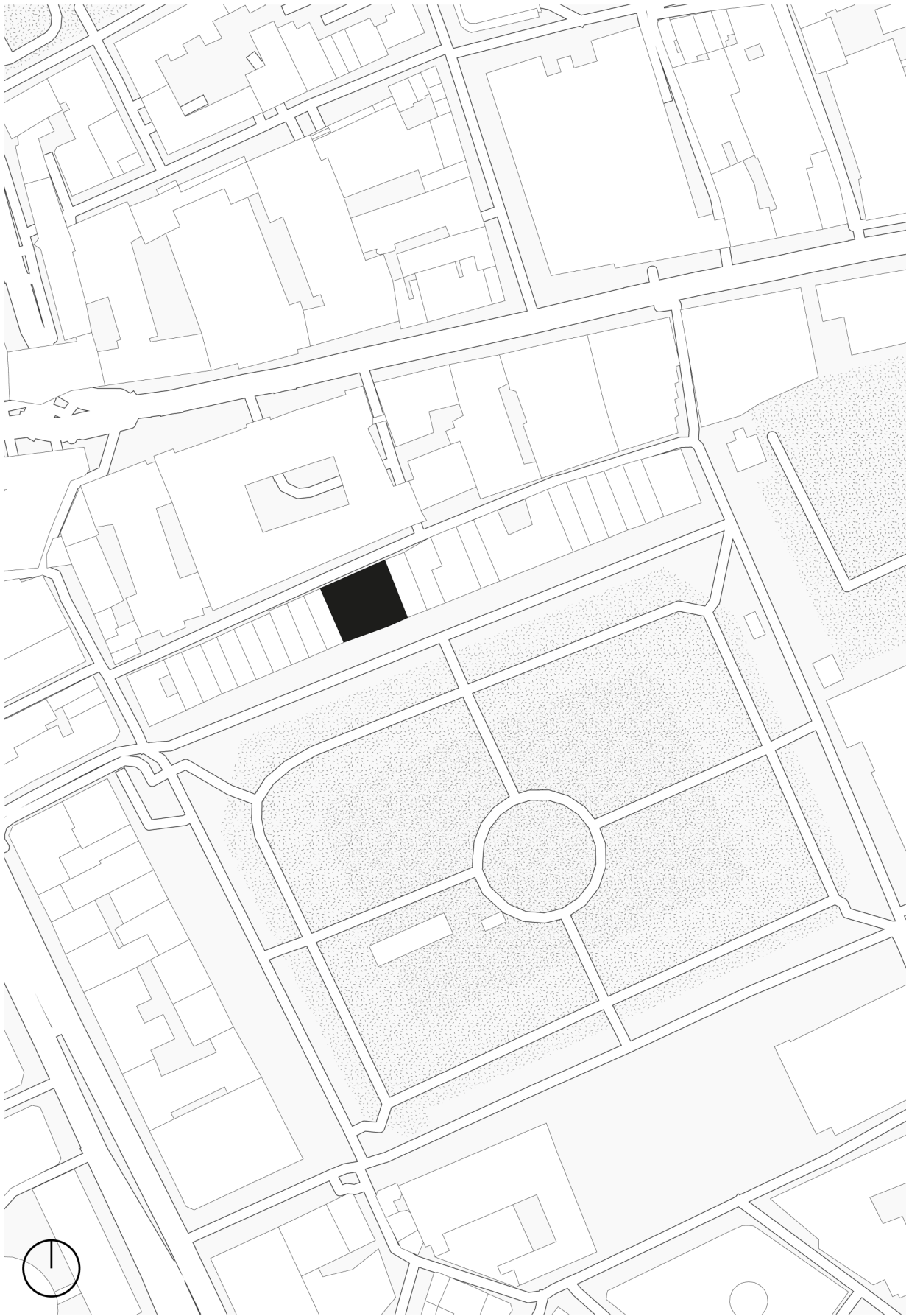


Fig.1. Site plan, scale 1:2000

1. New picture room
2. Dome
3. Colonnade
4. Picture room
5. Recess
6. Monument court
7. Breakfast room
8. Ante. Room
9. Yard
10. Dining room
11. Library
12. Hall

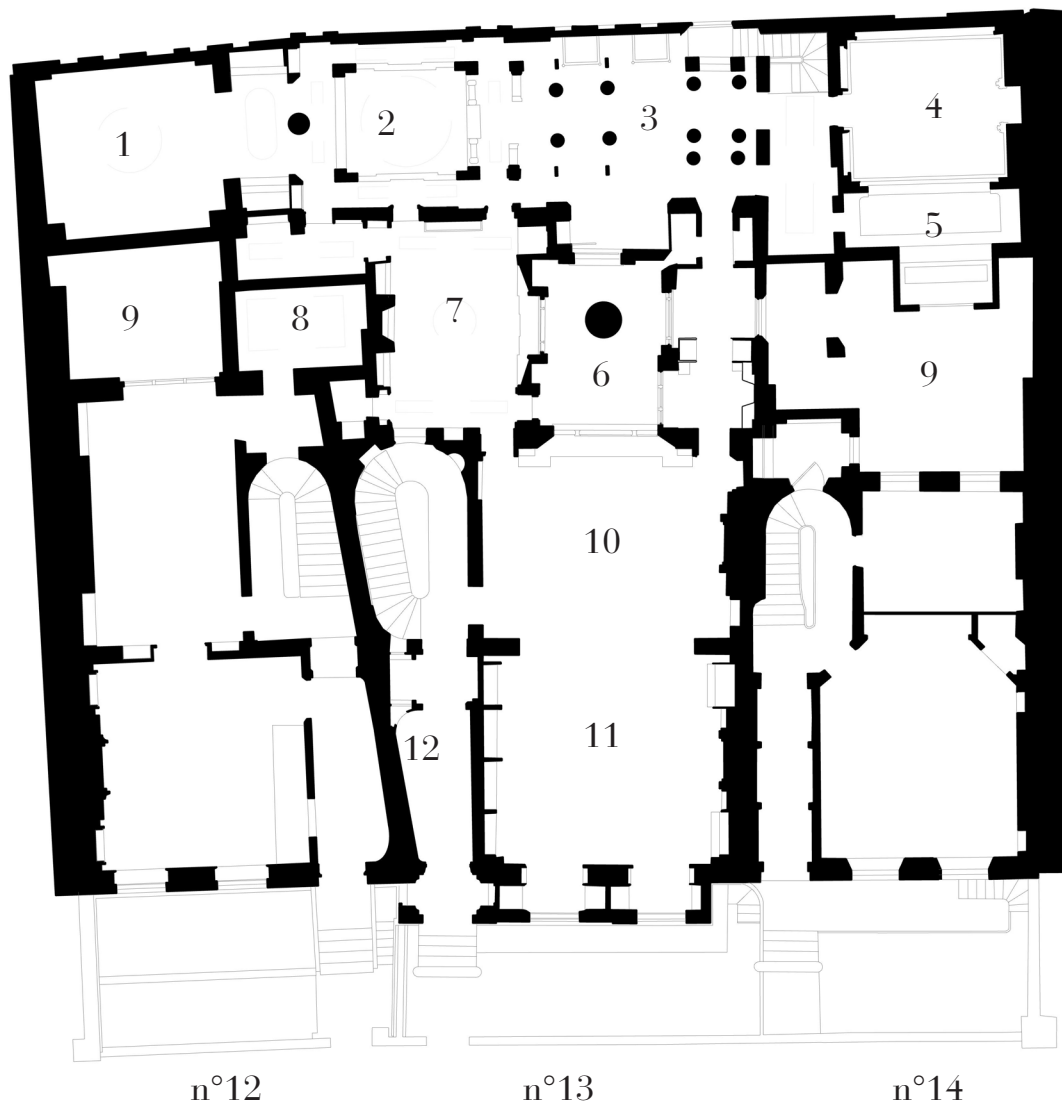


Fig. 2. Ground Floor Plan Sir John Soane's Museum, scale 1:200

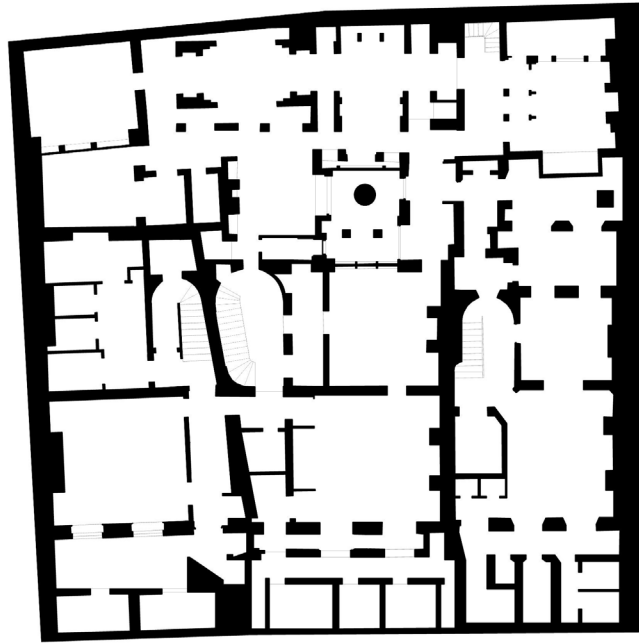


Fig. 3. Basement Floorplan Sir John Soane's Museum, scale 1:400

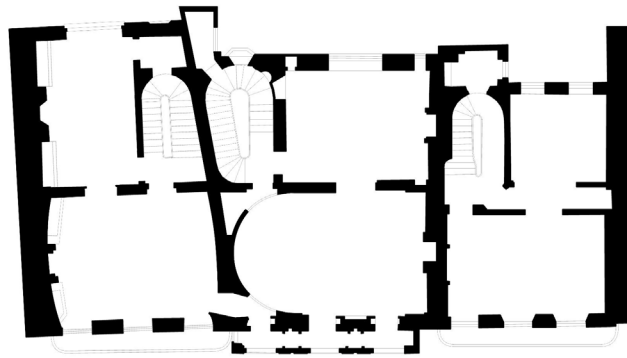


Fig. 4. First Floor Plan Sir John Soane's Museum, scale 1:400

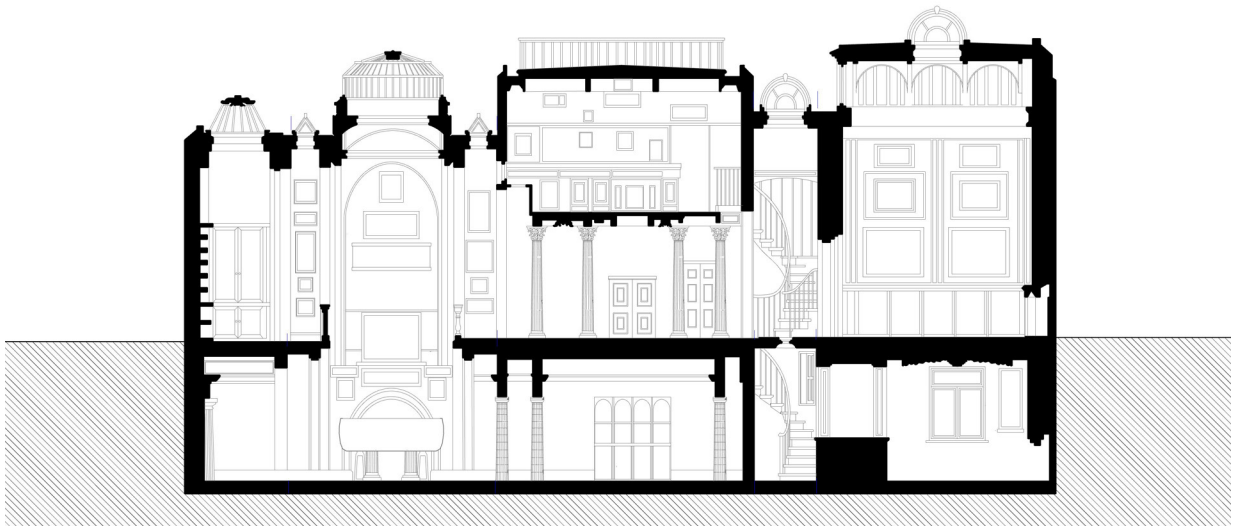


Fig. 5. Section A Sir John Soane's Museum, scale 1:200

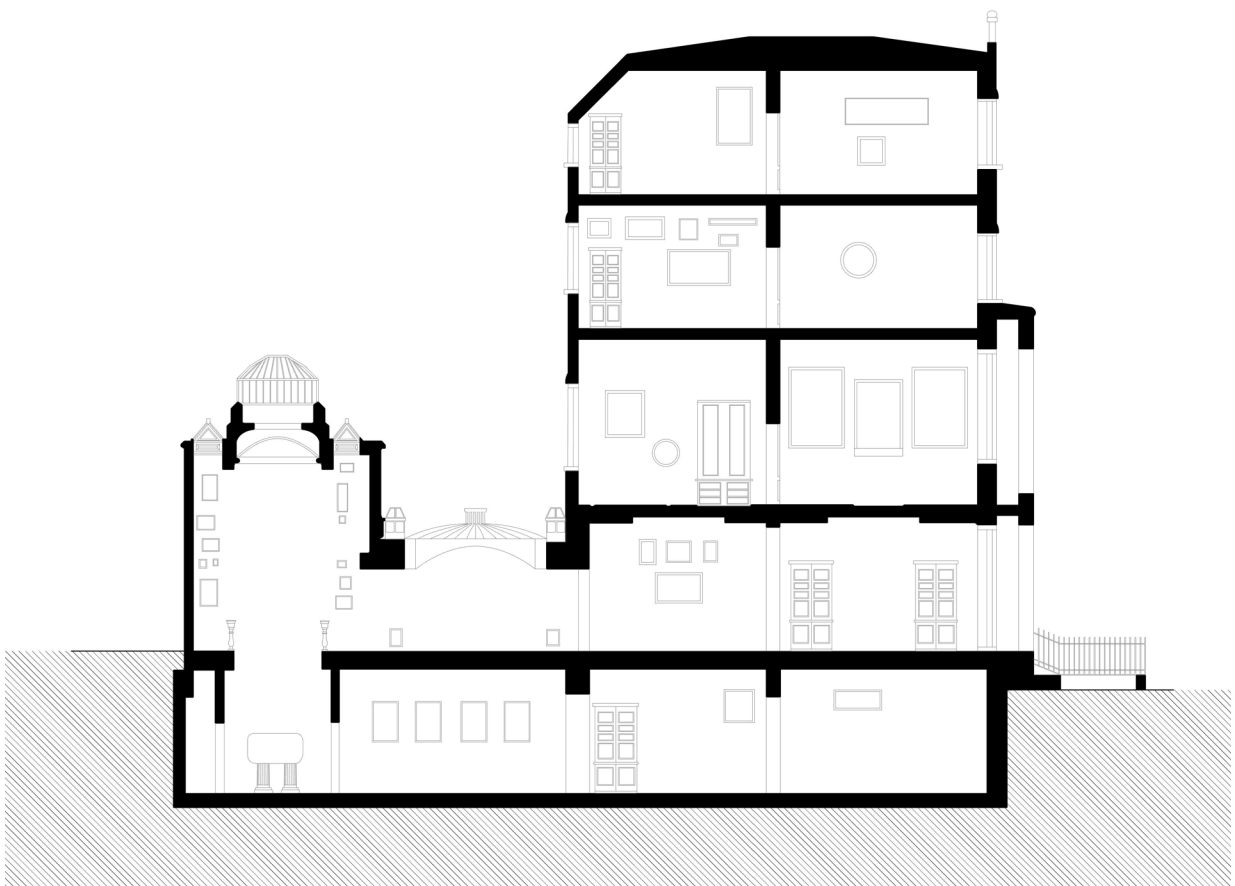


Fig. 6. Section B Sir John Soane's Museum, scale 1:200

Research & method



Fig. 7. Reproduction of the original photo

In order to thoroughly problematize 'the archive' and eventually offer an adequate solution by means of a design, this collective research attempts to question how the culture of archiving works. Questions that aided this research are:

- What does the architecture of an archive tell about the culture of archiving within them?
- What practical aspects are considered?
- How do archival spaces function on a symbolic level?
- What do we learn through a study of circulation, arrangement of spaces, organisation and containment of materials, systems of access and preservation?

Attending lectures, doing workshops and reading literature, we have acquired information about the architec-

tural archive within social, political, cultural, historical and theoretical contexts. Besides this, we have taken the Sir John Soane's Museum as an exemplary precedent to distinguish particular aspects concerning the culture of archiving by means of reflective discussion, writing and drawing. Redrawing the project in plans and sections (Fig. 1-6) and rebuilding the project in a large-scale model (Fig. 7) formed the basis of a careful analysis of this particular precedent, addressing architecture, artefact and light. Taking a specific photograph of the Dome Area in Soane's museum, we have interpreted this specific space and have tried to produce our own version of this image, using the method of model making. Along the process of building this model and reproducing the original photograph, we were faced with various challenging questions.

Architecture: size and spatiality

To recreate the Dome Area and adjoining spaces of Soane's collection at a 1:12.5 scale, we faced challenges regarding size and spatiality. The original photograph perspective not only captures the dome but also a portion of the picture room through the connecting gallery. Constructing a full-scale model would result in an excessively large model, demanding a compromise. We decided to shorten the adjacent spaces incrementally: the dome area was accurately modelled, the gallery was reduced in length, and the picture room was depicted as a flat drawing placed behind the gallery (Fig. 9). This approach taught us valuable lessons about the spatiality of Soane's Museum, but also allowed us to manipulate perspective to highlight spatial properties in our three-dimensional model.

Artefacts: a plethora of artefacts

The architecture primarily showcases Soane's large collection, with the dome area displaying detailed sculptural and ornamental artefacts. Our initial plan involved sculpting each artefact in clay to capture their highlights and shadows accurately. However, given the large number of artefacts and time constraints, we adopted a more efficient method combining 3D modelling and 2D drawing. We distinguished between urns/vases and other artefacts, as urns/vases had greater three-dimensional challenges. These were modelled in 3D software, printed as gypsum models, and integrated into the architectural model. The remaining artefacts were hand-drawn and stuck to the walls, made out of silhouettes and shading since they wouldn't cast shadows themselves.

Light, shadow and colour atmosphere and cohesion

To unify the elements, we needed to recreate the specific lighting conditions of Soane's Museum. The dome area benefits from a central skylight, creating soft shadows. We used a bright light source to simulate this effect and applied a single layer of translucent paper to diffuse the light. For the surrounding halls of the dome area, we used translucent paper with an orange colour print to evoke warmer tones. The gallery remained dark, illuminated only by bounced light from the dome area. The picture room, in contrast, was directly lit by a small source through an opening in the ceiling, highlighting its drawn representation.

Ultimately, our methods enabled us to gain insightful information about Sir John Soane's Museum, addressing size and spatiality, the variety of artefacts, and overall atmosphere. The final image we produced serves as one possible interpretation of the project, enhancing our understanding of the complexities involved.



Fig. 8. Collection of the artifacts in the model

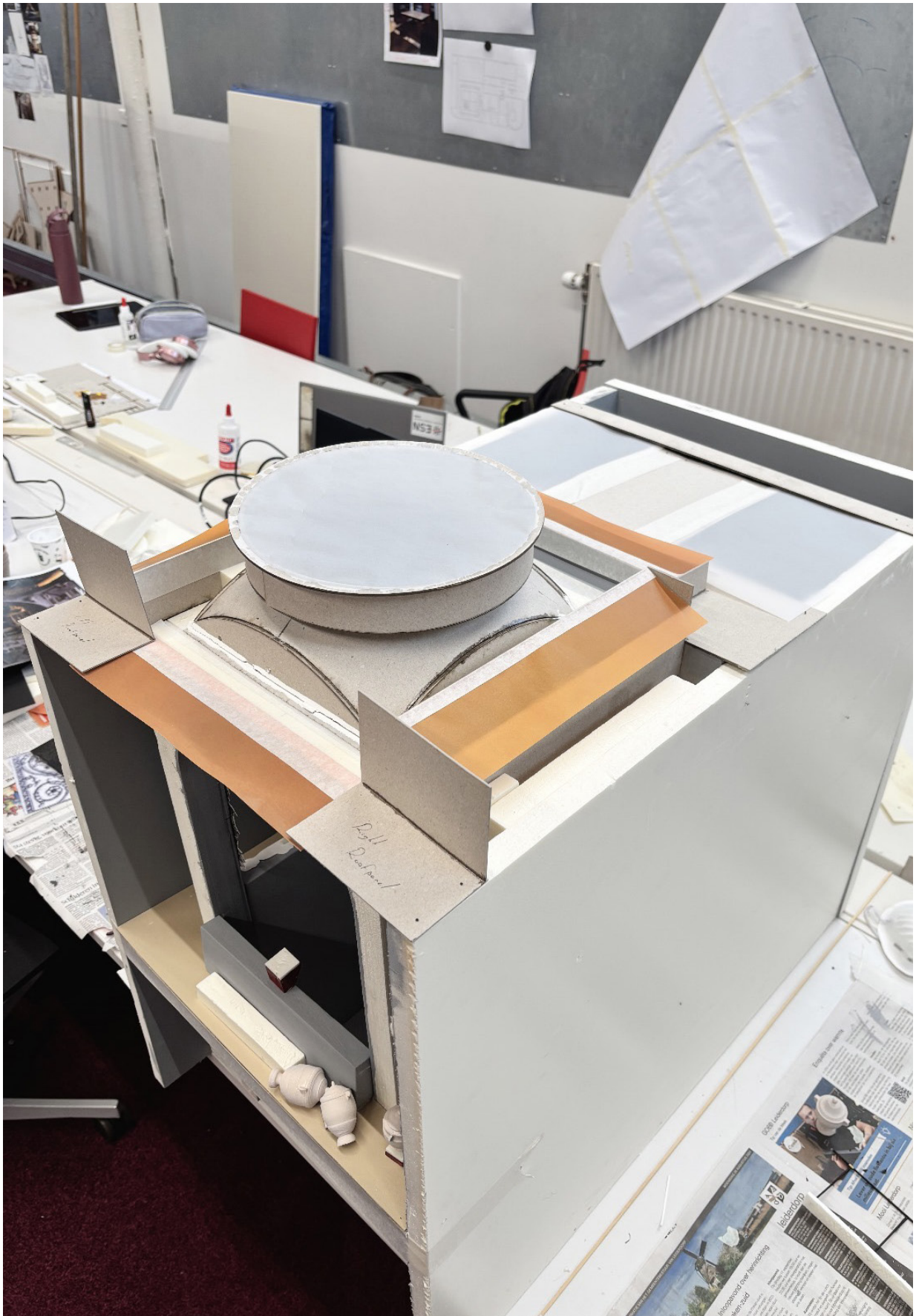


Fig. 9. Model making process of the dome area, corridor and picture room (form left to right)

The Culture of Archiving

A collection on display

The educational and preservation purposes of an archive present a paradox; display inevitably leads to natural deterioration, while preservation is a means of combating this deterioration. From the outset, accessibility and preservation have been a dialectical unity.

Soane's Museum has always embodied a unique culture of archiving. Its official designation as a museum reflects its multifaceted role as a home, office, and collection space, which complicates its classification as an archive. Nevertheless, it possesses strong archival characteristics through its cultural attributes, such as preservation, organization, research and access. Thus, the architecture of this space reveals the complex nature of archiving culture in Sir John Soane's Museum.

In terms of accessibility, this space historically served as Soane's creative heart, accessible only to a select group of individuals, including him, his students, assistants, and family, serving as a source of inspiration for their lives and creations. Today, as a museum, it is open to the public and hosts various activities, such as clubs specifically designed for children and adolescents to develop their knowledge of history, art, and architecture, along with other exhibitions, tours, and workshops available to the general public (What's on | Sir John Soane's Museum, 2024). Even before the 1833 "An Act for Settling and Preserving Sir John Soane's Museum" was enacted, Soane's son, George Soane, argued that "it was morally wrong for a man to divert his estate from his family" (- Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014, p. 136). The Act also stipulated specific conditions for public access, including a requirement that the museum be open for a certain amount of time to amateurs, as well as students of painting, sculpture, and architecture, allowing them free access for research and study. The museum has historically served as a site for research and design, and it currently

hosts young artists in residence who reinterpret its collections (The Drawing Office | Soane, n.d.). Above the colonnade, Soane designed a mezzanine, where the walls and floors are painted in bright gray and white tones, allowing beams of natural light to illuminate the objects displayed on the walls, which were significant sources of inspiration for Soane and his students. Black desks equipped with drawings and drafting tools are accentuated against the gray and white backdrop. All of these elements create an ideal environment for study and research.

Regarding preservation, one of the defining characteristics that grants Sir John Soane's Museum its archival status is the intense utilization of space. The dense arrangement of artworks reflects an archival tendency to maximize the use of limited space. This is particularly evident in the series of museum spaces on the northern side of the building, where closely arranged sculptures and plaster casts adorn the walls and columns. Sculptures and vases are densely packed on the railings. In the Picture Room, Soane even designed movable wall panels to accommodate more paintings (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014, p. 21).. The architectural design of the museum also incorporates intricate details to optimize space usage.

The sequence of spaces is transparent; the layered spatial arrangement allows visitors to absorb a large amount of visual information simultaneously. As shown in a photo by Derry Moore of the dome area (Fig.10), over a hundred of artifacts can be seen at once. Additionally, the methods of storage prioritize the protection and arrangement of objects over scientifically optimized conditions for temperature, humidity, and light. According to records, "When he set up his Museum in 1833, Soane left

strict instructions that his arrangements should be preserved exactly as he left them, and subsequent curators of the Museum have generally respected his wish... Many casts and items of sculpture have recently been returned to their original positions throughout the Museum" (A New Description of Sir John Soane's Museum, 2001, p. xiii). Furthermore, the terms negotiated between Soane and Parliament included specific regulations on the preservation of object placements, demonstrating the significant efforts made by both Soane and his successors to maintain and restore the spatial arrangement (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014, p. 136). From a modern architectural perspective, this space cannot be viewed as homogeneous; the placement of each object carries its own distinct characteristics, value, and narrative. For instance, the Egyptian urn and sarcophagus are located in a subterranean space designed to evoke a tomb (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014, p. 53). Their fixed positions stand in stark contrast to contemporary trends in homogeneous archive design. Therefore, one could argue that in this space, preservation is not merely a static goal but also a way to enhance exhibition, with the exhibition itself functioning as a form of preservation.

This unique understanding of preservation has ultimately transformed the museum into what might be considered a "dead archive" — one that, aside from the carefully curated collection selected by Soane, no longer acquires new objects. Stopping the acquisition of items has become part of the protective strategy to preserve the integrity of the collection.



Fig. 10. Dome Area



Fig. 11. Painting room



Fig. 12. New painting room



Fig. 13. Dining room



Fig. 14. Drawing room



Fig. 15. Monk's yard



Fig. 16. Dome area from the basement

A symbol of death

The dome area of the Sir John Soane Museum serves as both a primary exhibition and archival space, rich in symbolic meaning, particularly related to the theme of death. Architecturally, the dome, with its high sail vault and central skylight, evokes a sense of elevation and transcendence, symbolizing the soul's journey after death. The upward draw of the space encourages contemplation of the afterlife and eternity, much like classical domes that often represented the heavens or divine realms (Athenaeum Review, n.d.). Soane's design suggests a reflection on mortality and the possibility of an existence beyond life (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014).

The sail vault and the series of circles and semi-circles formed by the four supporting columns mirror the motifs used in Soane's family mausoleum. Light and shadow also play an essential role within this symbolism. The natural light that filters through the skylight can be seen as a metaphor for enlightenment or divine presence, symbolizing the soul's ascent, while the darker areas below signify earthly existence or mortality. This duality highlights the contrast between life and death, grounding the dome area as a space for profound reflection (Athenaeum Review, n.d.). Soane, who was fascinated by the construction of ruins and the contemplation of death, used these architectural elements to further explore these themes (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014).

This preoccupation with mortality is reflected in the artefacts displayed in the dome, such as classical fragments and funerary objects, most notably the Egyptian sarcophagus of Seti I. These items transform the space into a kind of burial chamber, where death, memory, and the afterlife are visually represented (Soane Museum, n.d.). For Soane, this was not just a public statement but a personal one as well, reflecting his own preoccupation

with death, particularly following the loss of his wife, Elizabeth (Country Life, 2023). Today, John Soane, like this architectural space, has become a monument—a petrified relic, much like the lifeless monuments Aldo Rossi described. Almost prophetically, Soane placed a stone sarcophagus directly beneath the dome, in the underground chamber, symbolizing a connection across time and space established through death—a gravestone, a dome area, and an archive.

The dome area operates not only as a symbol of death but also as an educational tool. Soane designed the museum to teach future architects and the public the principles of classical architecture and the lessons of antiquity. Like the rest of the museum, the dome was a teaching tool, showcasing the cultural and intellectual values that Soane believed should be passed down through generations (Athenaeum Review, n.d.). This educational role ties into the concept of social reproduction. By creating a space filled with objects from different cultures and periods, Soane embedded these ideas into the consciousness of visitors, ensuring that the appreciation of history, art, and architecture would continue to shape future generations (Athenaeum Review, n.d.). The dome area, therefore, functions on multiple levels: as a symbol of death, a space for reflection, and a tool for passing down cultural values.

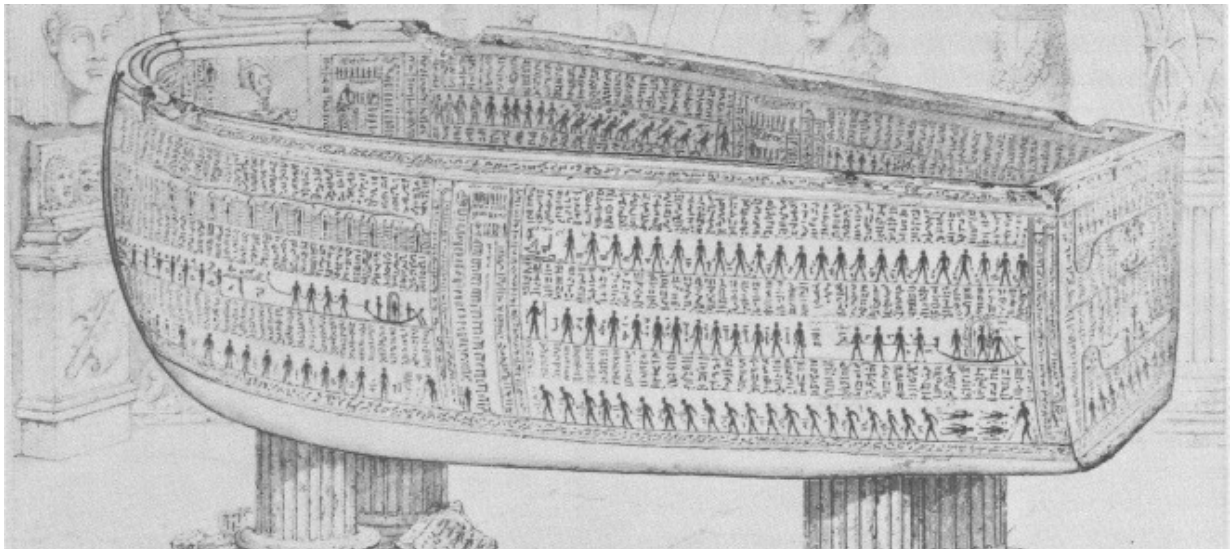


Fig 17. Belzoni Sarcophagus

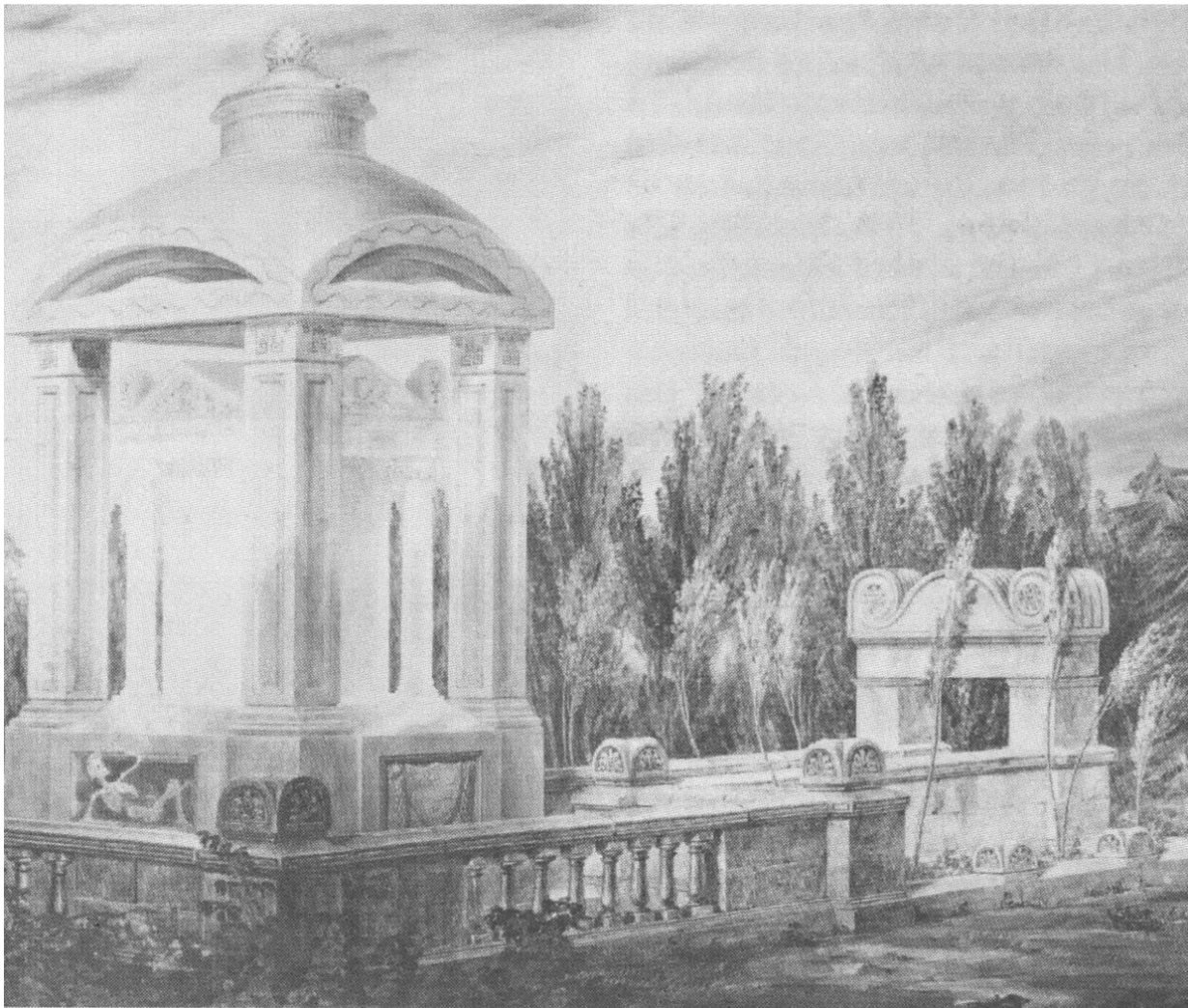


Fig 18. Soane's monument in the burial ground at St Giles- in-the-Fields

Guidebooks for the house-museum

As is described, the collection — the paintings and sculptures, arranged and curated in concord with the architecture that contains them — attempts to communicate a narrative from which multiple meanings can be derived. To capture this imaginative approach to curation even further, Soane experimented with writing dramatic narratives for the house-museum. In 1812, these experiments culminated in *Crude Hints Towards an History of my House in Lincolns Inn Fields* (Fig. 20), a “fanciful and curious manuscript” (Willkens, 2016). In this manuscript, Soane disguised himself as an antiquarian that imagined his home as a future ruin, questioning the origins and function of this particular house-museum. As such, *Crude Hints* is reminiscent of Joseph Michael Gandy’s *Architectural ruins*, a vision (Fig. 19). This watercolour on paper shows the Bank of England — designed by Soane — as a Roman ruin. Both of these works underline Soane’s endeavours to emphasize the imaginative affects that his collection might arouse in spectators. Imaginative nature of the previous book, this new edition aimed to provide a more objective and functional view on the collection. Quite fitting was the renaming of the work into *General Description* in 1840 (Bailey, 1840). These changes were telling for the bigger transformations that the house-museum was facing after Soane died; rather than being an inventive unity of painting, sculpture and architecture, the house-museum had turned into simply a container for collections sustaining a business of cultural tourism.

Due to the development of the photographic medium, a whole new kind of image became prominent in the *General Descriptions*. These images, however, were added as a preface to the text instead of being interwoven in it. They functioned as pieces of evidence, advertising the validity of the collection to the declining number of

visitors. But they did not orient the public when they actually visited the museum, nor did they help to convey what used to be a shared experience.

Things started to change with the rise of a ‘preservation movement’ in the first half of the 20th century. Soane’s work was rediscovered and reinterpreted, and efforts were made to publish descriptions in spirit of Soane’s original works. Photographs, drawings and text were used to intrigue readers of the work and encouraged them to discover the different meanings that were hidden in the museum. This trend was fully recognized and acknowledged when *A New Description of Sir John Soane’s Museum* started to issue in 1955 (Summerson, 1955). Continuing to evolve, the *New Description* republished under the name of *A Complete Description of Sir John Soane’s Museum* and featured more of Soane’s original narrative. It is no longer a catalogue which is used to advertise the museum, but introduces visitors and remote readers to the body of knowledge that has culminated within Sir John Soane’s Museum and its descriptions for over two hundred years.

After waiting for over a decade, Soane produced a new book — containing both text and image — to accompany the compositions of painting, sculpture and architecture in the house-museum. *Description of the House and Museum, on the North Side of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the Residence of Sir John Soane*, was printed in 1832 and functioned as elaborate advertisement for the museum (Soane, 1832). Furthermore, as a guidebook, it leads visitors through the building and provided them with writings, perspectival imagery and orthogonal projections, elaborating the artefacts that they would encounter along the way. Using this form and these attributes, Soane challenged visitors of the house-museum to develop knowledge about architecture and aesthetics. To



Fig. 19. Gandy, Architectural ruins, a vision

add another layer to the multiplicity of meanings that could be derived from museum's body of work, the Description provided the perspective of Barbara Hofland, a friend of Soane, on the narration and collection. Together, the house-museum and the Description functioned as a didactic assemblage that "intended to spark curiosity, elevate taste, and elicit notions that England's contemporary architecture could be read as the blossoming, technologically refined heir to the principles of beauty, utility, and strength found in the most admired examples of ancient design" (Willkens, 2016).

Over the years, the Description underwent different revisions. Through all of these editions and experiments it becomes clear that Soane took on different roles: architect, collector, narrator and educator. Taking on all these roles simultaneously, Soane could be considered a true Cicerone, taking visitors on a small Grand Tour. From the 17th to 19th century, it was a custom for European people of sufficient means and rank to go on a Grand Tour — a journey along quintessential sites and artefacts of the Classical period and the Renaissance — accompanied by a tutor which would guide his 'student' through an educational rite of passage. The knowledge, experiences and items that one would bring back from such a tour would secure a status of worldliness, earnestness and influence. As such, a Grand Tour would introduce a person to the aristocratic and fashionably polite society. Many people, the 'unfortunate' people, had no means to undertake a travel of this magnitude. Soane's house-museum allowed people to still experience, albeit remotely, a similar tour along precious exemplars of classical and Renaissance art.

After Soane died, a former student edited and published a new version of the description, which was not much more than a list of artefacts, printed in big amounts and sold at the museum. Getting rid of the narrative and imaginative nature of the previous book, this new edi-

tion aimed to provide a more objective and functional view on the collection. Quite fitting was the renaming of the work into General Description in 1840 (Bailey, 1840). These changes were telling for the bigger transformations that the house-museum was facing after Soane died; rather than being an inventive unity of painting, sculpture and architecture, the house-museum had turned into simply a container for collections sustaining a business of cultural tourism.

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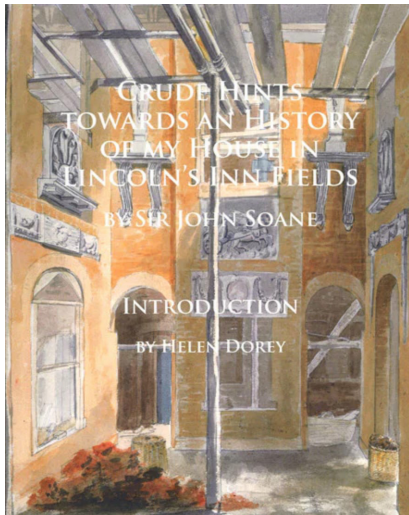


Fig. 20. Crude Hints Towards an History of my House

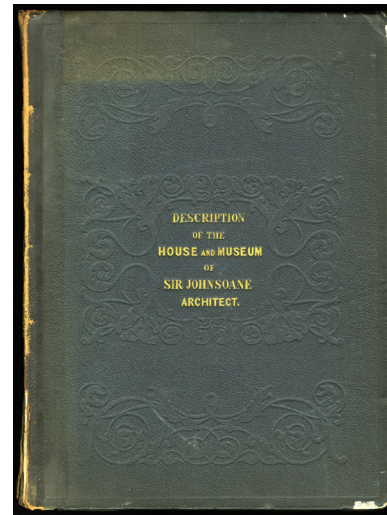


Fig. 21. Description of the Sir John Soane's Museum

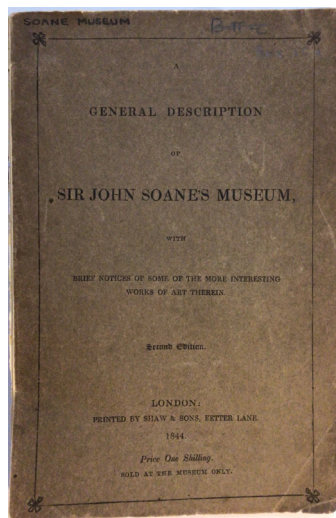


Fig. 22. A General Description of the Sir John Soane's Museum

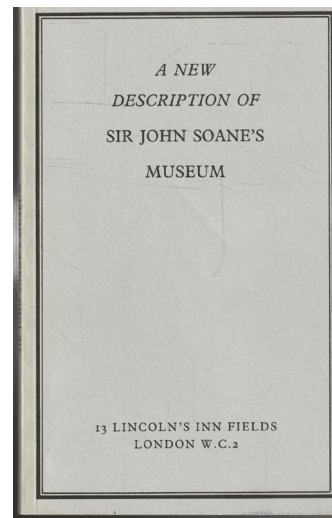


Fig. 23. A New Description of the Sir John Soane's Museum

Conclusion

Architecture, sculpture, painting

Various tools have been applied to conduct our research into Sir John Soane's Museum. First, writing about the development of the building and creating a set of drawings helped us to fit the project within a context. Building a physical scale model of the Dome Area helped us to focus on the museum in more detail and learn about its spatial and physical qualities, the artefacts it contains, and the atmosphere that characterises the space. Recreating an existing image of the Dome Area forced us to think about the translation of these properties from a three-dimensional model to a two-dimensional image.

Delving deeper into literature about Sir John Soane's Museum allowed us to discover more about its archiving culture. The museum seemingly presents itself as a paradox. On the one hand the building serves as a conventional archive, a storage for antiquities that have been collected in the past. On the other hand, the building serves as an educational museum space that makes the antiquities accessible to visitors, but also to light, humidity, temperature and other deteriorating factors.

The house-museum contains explicate objects, acquired over a lifetime. Coming from different places and times, they are retrieved from different continents to be concealed within the sequence of spaces that the building has to offer, only to be kept there forever by law. Bringing these paintings and sculptures together and intertwining them with architecture in particular complications allow new meanings — new kinds of knowledge — to emerge. Different kinds of books that underpinned the collection indicate a few examples of the different ways one could look at the collection. As such, the Sir John Soane's Museum offers a multitude of implicated meanings: narratives and symbols of death, memory and the afterlife are represented. The museum is a teaching tool, showcasing

the cultural and intellectual values that Soane believed should be passed down through generations.

Real objects are preserved. They are brought into relation with each other through specific spatial arrangements and a multiplicity of narratives — containing different knowledge — are allowed to emerge. The culture of archiving in the Sir John Soane's Museum is one of using exhibiting as a means of preserving. Explicate objects are saved and through their exposition a multitude of stories is implied.

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- Fig. 21. Fig. 21. Description of the house and museum of Sir John Soane Architect (1835). Retrived 19/09/2024, https://archive.org/details/gri_descriptiono00soan/mode/2up
- Fig. 22. A General Description of the Sir John Soane's Museum
- Fig. 22. Sir John Soane's Museum. (1840). A general description of Sir John Soane's museum, with brief notices of some of the more interesting works of art therein. Retrived 19/09/2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/60212147>

Personal Statement

Ertug Ciftci

My interest in architectural archives goes beyond their traditional role as places to store historical documents. I believe the future of these archives lies in making them dynamic, accessible, and multifunctional spaces that actively engage with the public. To achieve this, we need to rethink archives not just as storage or study rooms but as cultural institutions that can influence political and social issues.

A key part of this vision is accessibility and transparency. Architectural archives have often been more focused on scholars and professionals, keeping them somewhat out of reach for the general public. My goal is to open up the archive in a way that captures people's curiosity and invites them to engage with the architectural heritage of Flanders. By designing spaces where everyone can explore and learn from architectural archives, we can make people more aware of architecture's role in shaping our environment and collective identity.

During the visit to the VAI, I noticed the importance of making archives transparent, active spaces, where visitors can observe the process of archival work in action. This hands-on engagement with the collection helps the public to understand the value and impact of these archives in real-time, much like the approach in Sir John Soane's Museum. The museum's display and layout immerse visitors in the collection and create a connection to the objects, which makes the architecture itself part of the story. Similarly, I envision archives as places that show the work being done and the narratives being preserved, encouraging a tangible connection with visitors.

We can look at examples like the Danish Architecture Centre (DAC) in Copenhagen, which successfully engages the public with architecture through interactive

exhibitions, workshops, and events that bring shared topics to life. Following this model, I see the VAI archive evolving beyond static, uniform spaces into flexible, interactive environments that focus on exhibiting and interpreting the collection of Flemish architecture. By combining exhibitions with educational programs, workshops, and public events, archives can serve as cultural hubs rather than passive storage spaces.

By doing this, I believe the archive has the potential to address broader societal and political issues. Through thorough curation and design, archives can highlight narratives around national identity, social justice, and political change. For instance, an archive focusing on state-funded projects could prompt conversations about who defines public spaces and why, sparking dialogue around the politics of space and identity.

With these ambitions, the archive will become a multifunctional space, with not only storage- and study rooms but also functions such as event spaces, collaborative work areas, and even community centres, maximizing their use and appeal to a wider audience.

In the end, my vision for architectural archives is one that brings together preservation, public engagement, education, and cultural exchange. By creating spaces that are open, interactive, and multifunctional, archives can become more than places to store history, they can be active institutions that shape contemporary culture, identity, and political thought. As a student, I'm excited about designing spaces that preserve history while shaping how people think about it in the future.

Personal Statement

Alessandra D'Acunto

The discussion on the general typology of the archive and more specifically of the architectural archive frequently resulted in an unresolved ambiguity regarding the definition of an archive and its distinction from a storage for instance. Attempts to delineate the characteristics of an archive ended up being quite challenging, as there are numerous points of overlap with the functions of a storage/warehouse. Additionally, in the context of open archives, the distinction between them and an exhibition became again difficult to identify.

The example of Sir John Soane's Museum, in the attempt to define it by describing its typology, perfectly reflects this state of unresolved ambiguity. Many aspects of this peculiar museum would lead to the definition of an architectural archive due to the presence of a literally permanent collection invading the space, that cannot be altered under any circumstances. However, other elements, such as the display of the collection, inherently challenge the association with an archive and instead position the institution as a museum. This raises the question of this being a repository for exhibited artefacts or the archive of John Soane's character and culture of archiving and therefore brings back the ambiguity of the identification of an archive as a less introverted space.

Several are the contemporary examples of architectural archive trying to position themselves as extroverted entities but to what extent can they actually achieve this? Herzog&De Meuron's "Kabinett" for instance, which collects together different functions beside the archive of the studio, might be a relatively close contemporary example to the Soane's Museum, also in regards of one of the purpose of this space as an informative one. The level of accessibility they are able to reach is however not the same as the London House/Museum, which is also determined by the nature of the institution. This has prompted the suggestion that if an archive, even an ar-

chitectural one, might become more openly accessible, there is a significant possibility that it will lose its distinct identity and character as an enclosed repository which is one of the aspects that distinguish it from other types of institution. Once the archive become as accessible as a museum what would differentiate them for each other? Catalogued and curated would represent the distinction between the two? These questions bring back this unresolved ambiguity that on some level ask us to not be left completely unresolved but that at the same time will not find a complete resolution due to the blurred line that defines these spaces.

But how does the future of Architecture Institutions looks like in terms of exhibition and archive? As Kieran Long mentioned "the future is about openness and acceptance to the objects and the stories". Two adjectives that can be read with different interpretation and lenses, probably the first one is the most argued one in the contemporary debate around this thematic. The concept of openness and accessibility, in the sense of greater permeability for the general public, is an intriguing theme, not only from an architectural perspective but also from an anthropological one. This is in fact in alignment with one of the core objectives of the VAI, namely to foster a closer relationship with a broader public. However, archive and exhibition do not attract the same public, which in the first is much more narrowed to researcher with a specific purpose while in the latter one is larger and more differentiated, but the final purpose remains quite similar, creating narratives to inform the public about events that happened but also ideas that remained as such. It is clear that the archival material cannot be exhibited completely, preserving the material is often more important than displaying it. Finding a solution to an easier access to the archive instead of bringing fragile material outside of this safe environment would be of

fundamental importance.

This argument finds simpler solution when the archival material is digital or producible countless times, therefore fragility takes on a different connotation. In light of Soane's proposition of an open archive for educational purposes, it may be worthwhile to revisit the concept of the archive and its connotations.

Personal Statement

Liren Chu

My initial question regarding the Sir John Soane's Museum is whether it is equipped with a modern, scientifically controlled climate system. During our research, we did not find any clues regarding this. However, how does it manage to keep the artworks in good condition? Or, does every type of archive necessarily require a modern scientific system? What conditions are needed for preserving different types of materials? How can these conditions become a starting point or core focus of design?

The major difference between Sir John Soane's Museum and other archives lies in the fact that it is not a homogeneous space. Every object has its unique placement and spatial existence, allowing the narrative of this architect to be preserved more completely. Is this method achievable in a contemporary context? If space is difficult to preserve, can it be retained through virtual reality? This approach adds many dimensions to the index of an object. How many dimensions does an object in an archive actually need? What is the basis for their spatial organization?

When designing archives, we constantly encounter a challenge—how to balance preservation and display. Preservation implies closure, shelving, and exclusion, thus achieving temporal robustness. This robustness is also an essential goal of archives: collecting objects deemed important, arranging them in a certain order, and making them a carrier of memory or a clue for interpretation. Display, on the other hand, implies openness, where materials must be made public, even if there are barriers to access and retrieval, efforts should be made to lower them. Frequent usage naturally leads to wear and tear, which contradicts the goals of archiving. However, whether through damage or preservation in isolation, the act of collecting and exhibiting in archives is eternal.

The subject is not the producer of materials but their reproducer. Aside from the need for long-term preservation, its meaning seems to resemble a highly subjective curation. Thus, I propose that the archive embodies three essential attributes, each indispensable: intentional collection, long-term preservation, and scholarly interpretation or public exhibition. Given these criteria, how might we, as architects, engage with the archive? What spatial relationship should these three elements maintain? In the Sir John Soane's Museum, Soane continually adjusted the placement and spatial arrangement of his objects, creating a dynamic system that showcased his architectural experimentation and innovation (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2014, p. ix). Holding dual roles as both architect and archivist, Soane curated his collection and carefully juxtaposed objects to weave their stories together. This intentional arrangement allowed each piece to transcend its individual identity, creating dialogues that transformed the archive into a cohesive whole.

I argue that contemporary archives should cultivate similar capacities. Spaces within the archive should allow the public, professionals, and archivists to reimagine and redefine the relationships among the collection in more creative ways. While the public nature of modern archives differs significantly from the private origins of Sir John Soane's Museum in terms of spatial upkeep, the spatial narrative of an archive need not remain fixed; it can evolve over time as a collective story shaped by broader societal engagement. The architectural space and soft configurations of the archive should therefore possess a degree of malleability, with transparency guiding this evolving process. Specific spatial design considerations emerge from this flexibility: for instance, researchers' work—or the evolving state of ongoing research—should be visible; the positioning of objects might not

be fixed, but should remain accessible through a system that allows for easy tracking and retrieval, even for objects in dynamic locations. However, given the need for materials' long-term preservation, the archive's scientific systems are indispensable, often placing strict limitations on spatial flexibility and object arrangement. Such constraints challenge the archive's adaptability, underscoring the need for a built environment that balances spatial narrative dynamism with consistent climate stability.

Personal Statement

Sem Verwey

What is an Archive?

Getting accustomed with the lines of thought developed by Bernard Stiegler, just before the start of the graduation studio, I tentatively started to question the 'Archive' as such, with its first letter written in uppercase. Following Stiegler, our evolution is made possible thanks to our efforts of archiving memory (or knowledge). Memories are archived in our genes, preserved across lines of descent and we acquire more memories in our individual lives. But another kind of memory that drives our evolution is archived in the artefacts that we create. Existing outside the spatiotemporal confinements of our individual lives and ancestral lines, artefacts have the capacity to carry over knowledge to other individuals, living in other places and times. As such, the man-made world as a whole functions as an archive. We shape our world, and thereafter it shapes us.

Taking this co-evolutionary process, it becomes problematic to define the 'Archive', uppercased. Co-evolution is dependent on specific actors that affect each other. Each particular complex of contexts, artefacts and individuals determines which memories from the past are presently carried out towards the future. An archive – lowercased – is yet another specific context in which particular memories are retained and projected forward: in its architecture, in the collection that it houses, and the archival processes which individuals bring about.

The ontological question 'What is an Archive?' may become less important, conducting further research. Rather, ontogenetic questions about the co-evolutionary processes effectuated by the conditions and workings of archives arise:

- Which are the elements that constitute a particular archive?
- How are these elements brought together?
- Which relations can potentially emerge from the complex of these elements?
- How does this contribute to the acquirement of old memories and the preservation of new memories?
- What could an archive do?

Taken as an exemplar for archives, being used originally as a house, and having transformed into a museum, the Sir John Soane's Museum proved to be an interesting case study, aiding the quest find answers to the above-mentioned questions. Especially the idiosyncratic way of combining various media to preserve and share memories is something that stood out. Originating in a place and time where classical antiquities were regarded as ideal instances of art, it becomes quite clear which knowledge the person of John Soane tries to preserve: the architecture follows classical principles, and the collection mostly constitutes artefacts from the Roman world. The composition of architecture, sculpture, painting, drawing and writing excite a fantasy of the classical period that has long passed.

How different could it be if an archive is institutionalized and becomes essentially a collectivized organ? The gta Archive in Zürich and the VAI Archive in Flanders are examples of such institutionalized archives. Bringing together important objects into one democratized organisation, they allow a wide array of people to access knowledge. They are essentially part of a bigger whole and their

culture of archiving is shaped by collective impulses that will, inevitably, change according to societal paradigm shifts. In the 20th century, institutional archives served scholars in search for objective truths, hidden within collections of important objects. With the inception of the digital age, however, a wider public demanded access to archives and questions about authenticity, authorship, digital conservation and digital consultation became important. In this day and age, the archiving culture shifted its focus towards the inclusion of minorities and attempts to apply a more and more holistic approach to the preservation of architectural knowledge.

What should an archive do?

These precedents elucidate how archiving could be done. Having to design a new archive throughout the remainder of this graduation year, the question how archiving should be done must be asked. The short answer to that question would be: carefully.

Sir John Soane's Museum, the gta Archive and the VAI Archive address the abovementioned questions differently and express what an archive could do in various ways. On the one hand there is an archive that is the result of the individuated person known as Sir John Soane. Shaped by particular ideas it can be considered to be striking, imaginative and conveying, yet exclusive and unchanging. On the other hand are the institutional archives that are shaped by collective efforts, resulting in a democratized and accessible archiving culture, yet being limited to general ideas. These contentments and concerns need to be addressed throughout the rest of the year. Perhaps it is possible to propose an archive that has the imaginative qualities of Soane's museum, while also being able to change to the needs of time like the gta

Archive and the VAI Archive.

While an archive has the power to retain certain memories, to preserve certain knowledge, it does not have the capacity to retain all memory and preserve all objective knowledge. The design of an archive – its architecture, its collection, its processes – presupposes certain goals, intentions, motifs, norms and values. When individuals are unaware of these presuppositions – an unawareness that is, perhaps, aimed for in our contemporary society – they may be unaware of what memory an archive is actually preserving. This, in turn, may lead to the danger to regress as opposed to the possibility to evolve together with the world around.

A careful archive considers its own capacity to preserve memory, and the limits thereof. Mediating this knowledge in a careful and attentive manner such an archive might allow individuals to create new memories that could lead to bright futures.