

Soane, John 1753 - 1837

John Soane [also known as Sir John Soane] was born John Soan. He was the son of John Soan, a bricklayer, on 10 September 1753, probably at Goring-on-Thames, near Reading, Berkshire, England. He changed his surname to Soane in 1784. Through his professional inks with architects Soane's father managed to obtain for his son a place in the office of George Dance the Younger (1741-1825), the London City Surveyor, with whom he trained as an architect from 1768 to 1772.

In October 1771 he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools in London, and the following year was awarded the RA Silver medal in the competition for a measured drawing of the façade of the Banqueting House, and in 1776 won the Gold medal for his design for a triumphal bridge.

As study at the Royal Academy was not full-time, he also worked in the office of Henry Holland from 1772 to 1778

In 1777 Soane was awarded a Royal Academy three-year travelling scholarship to Italy, and on 18 March 1778 left London for his Grand Tour. After visiting Paris he arrived in Rome on 2 May 1778. Soane used the opportunity presented by the scholarship to make a thorough study of the architects of the Italian Renaissance; visited the ruins of Pompeii and Paestum; and whilst in Rome met Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778). Piranesi, who was nearing the end of his life, gave Soane four plates from his *Vedute di Roma* (c.1748-78).

Soane returned to London in June 1780. He initially found it difficult to establish his architectural practice and for the next four years worked on relatively minor commissions, however, eventually the connections he had made on his Grand Tour, and prior to that at the Royal Academy, began to pay off and from the mid-1780s he received a steady stream of commissions including alterations to Holwood House in Keston, near Hayes, Middlesex for William Pitt the Younger in 1786, and the remodelling of the interior of Fonthill Splendens in Wiltshire for William Beckford in 1787.

Following the death of Sir Robert Taylor (1714-1788) in 1788, Soane was appointed to succeed him as Architect and Surveyor to the Bank of England, a position he held until 1833. Over the 45 years of his tenure, Soane was to make a major contribution to the architecture of the Bank.

In October 1791 Soane was appointed Clerk of Works with responsibility for St James's Palace, Whitehall and The Palace of Westminster and in 1807 was made Clerk of Works to the Royal Hospital Chelsea, a post he held until his death thirty years later, during which time he designed several buildings for the hospital.

Throughout his life Soane was a keen collector and by the early nineteenth century he had amassed thousands of objects ranging from Ancient Egyptian antiquities and Roman sculpture to numerous architectural models. Many of these items he had acquired on his Grand Tour in the 1770s. Others he had purchased in auction or from dealers. In 1792 he purchased 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields in London both as his home and to house the collection. He subsequently purchased the neighbouring houses, nos. 13 and 14 and substantially altered and enlarged them. In 1833, Soane negotiated a private Act of Parliament: to preserve his house and collection, exactly as it was arranged at the time of his death, in perpetuity - and to keep it open and free for inspiration and education. Upon his death in January 1837, the house and its contents thus became Sir John Soane's Museum.

Soane was knighted in 1832. He died in London on 20 January 1837.

For a detailed list of architectural projects by John Soane see Colvin, 4th edition, 2008 pp. 965-971

Worked in

UK

Works

In 1811 Soane received a commission to design an art gallery to house a collection of paintings bequeathed to Dulwich College in 1811 by Sir Peter Francis Bourgeois, RA. Dulwich College Picture Gallery, built between 1811 and 1814 was the first independent building for the public display of pictures in England.

Soane's later work included three London churches - St Peter's (1823-24), Walworth, Holy Trinity (1826-27), Marylebone, and St John's (1826-28), Bethnal Green; and the State Paper Office in London (1829-31).

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