

Pitzhanger Manor, Ealing Green : (now the Ealing Public Library) the country retreat from 1800 to 1811 of Sir John Soane / an account with 12 ill. and 2 ports. written by Arthur T. Bolton.

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Bolton, Arthur T. 1864-

Publication/Creation

[London] : [publisher not identified], [between 1900 and 1999]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/n6kaj6nc>

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Pitzhanger Manor Ealing Green

(Now the Ealing
Public Library)

The Country Retreat from 1800 to 1811 of
SIR JOHN SOANE, R.A., F.R.S., F.S.A. (1753-1837)
Architect to the Bank of England, etc.

AN ACCOUNT WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS AND TWO PORTRAITS,
WRITTEN BY

ARTHUR T. BOLTON, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.
Soane Medallist, Institute Medallist (Essays),
Sir John Soane's Museum,
Inn Fields, W.C.2

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PITZHANGER MANOR
EALING GREEN
1800-1811



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Prefatory Note

THIS little booklet has been drawn up and fully illustrated by the Curator of the Soane Museum, both on account of the personal interest attaching to the Country Retreat of the founder of the Soane Museum, and as throwing much light upon the origins of the design of the unique house in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

It is the Curator's experience that visitors and students are often puzzled by the original character of Sir John Soane's architectural conceptions, and he has reason to believe that this earlier example at Ealing will be found very helpful as illustrating the origins and development of Soane's artistic ideas. If it leads visitors to the Soane to pursue the subject at the interesting house so fortunately preserved at Ealing, it will have answered the object of its publication. It may be of interest to the reader to recall that both these houses belong to the war period of the last great European conflict, Pitz-

hanger Manor being built in the years before Trafalgar, and No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, just before the final victory of Waterloo. The appointment to the Professorship of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, in the middle of this period, greatly accelerated the formation of Soane's collections, and eventuated in the foundation of his unique Museum as established by the private Act of Parliament obtained by him in 1832.

Pitzhanger Manor Ealing Green

IN July¹ of the first year of the nineteenth century John Soane, A.R.A., was led to purchase this estate of twenty-eight acres at Ealing together with an existing house, owing to its association with his master, George Dance, Jun.,

¹ *Notes from the Office Day-Book.*

Aug. 2.—Mr. Soane went to Ealing to take plans of Mr. Gurnell's house.

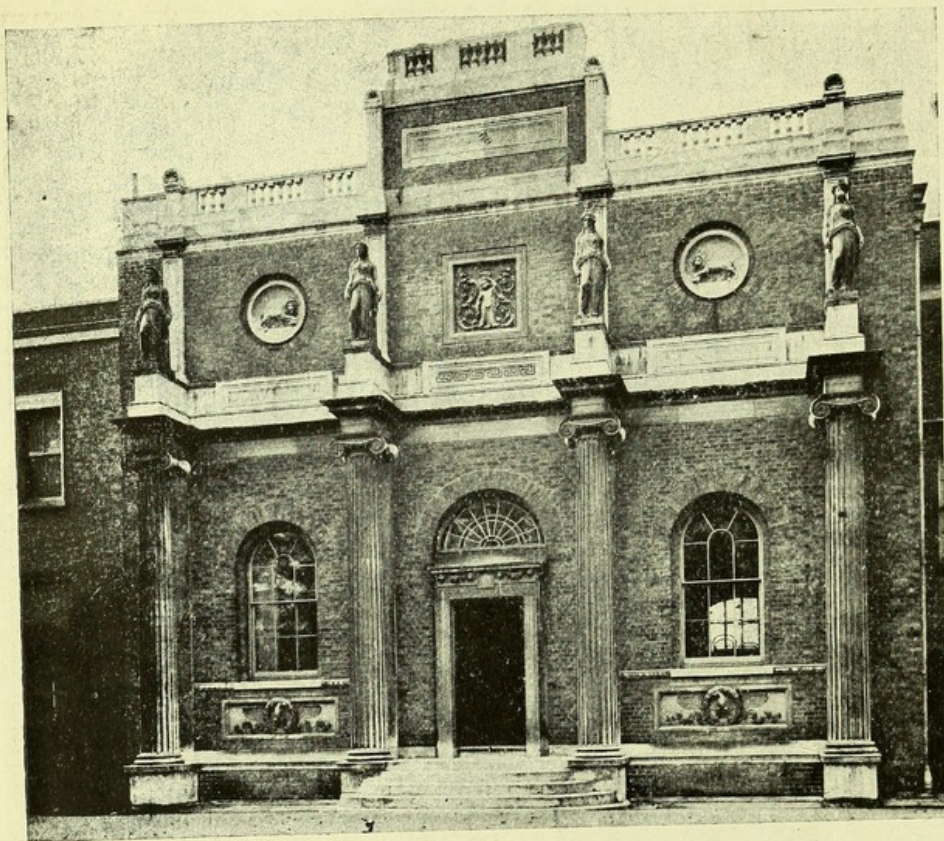
Aug. 17.—At home all day about plans for another house at Ealing. (Soane walks to Acton and Ealing, dines with friends, and returns.)

Oct. 6.—Payne to begin pulling down at Ealing.

Nov. 25.—Mr. Soane about elevations of a design for his house at Ealing. (Joseph Gandy, in the office, makes the views.)



THE ENTRANCE GATEWAY FROM EALING GREEN.



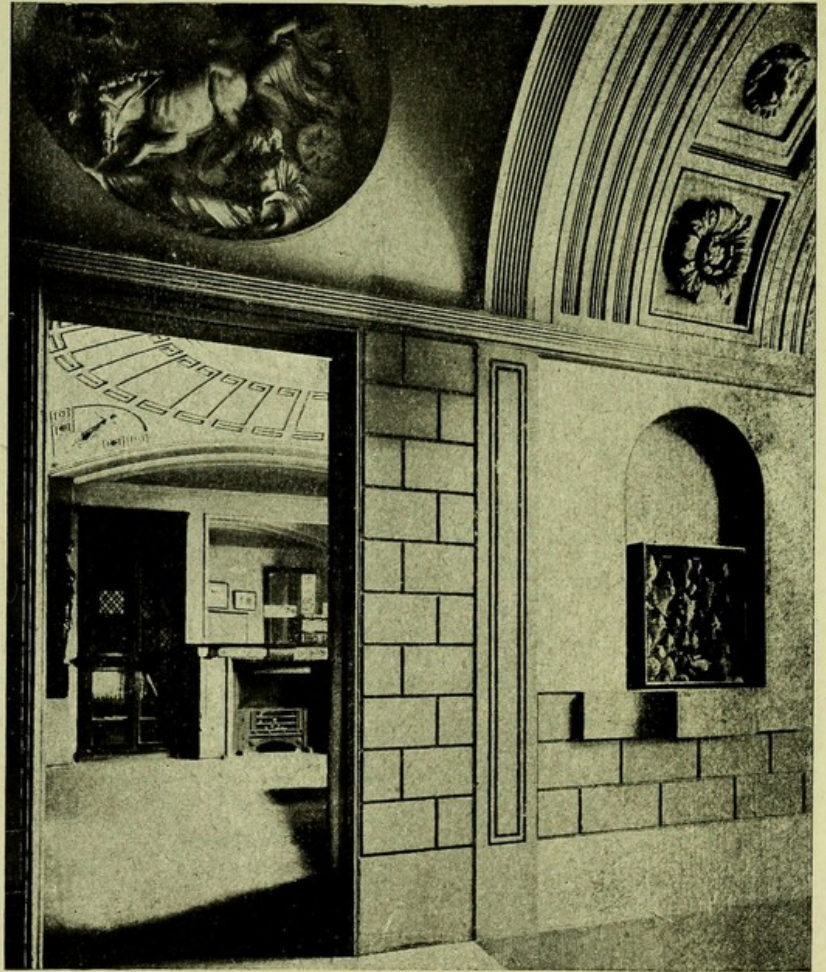
THE ENTRANCE FRONT.

R.A. (1742-1825), who was building it in 1770 for Thomas Gurnell (1725-1785), member of a well known Quaker family, about the time that as a boy Soane was entering the architect's office. Dance had married Mary Gurnell (born 1752), the eldest of the two daughters of his client, in 1772. As first built the house appears to have consisted of an advanced centre block of three stories, and two wings each of two stories. Soane describes the main part of the house as very plain, and he did not think that anything more than the south wing, containing the drawing-

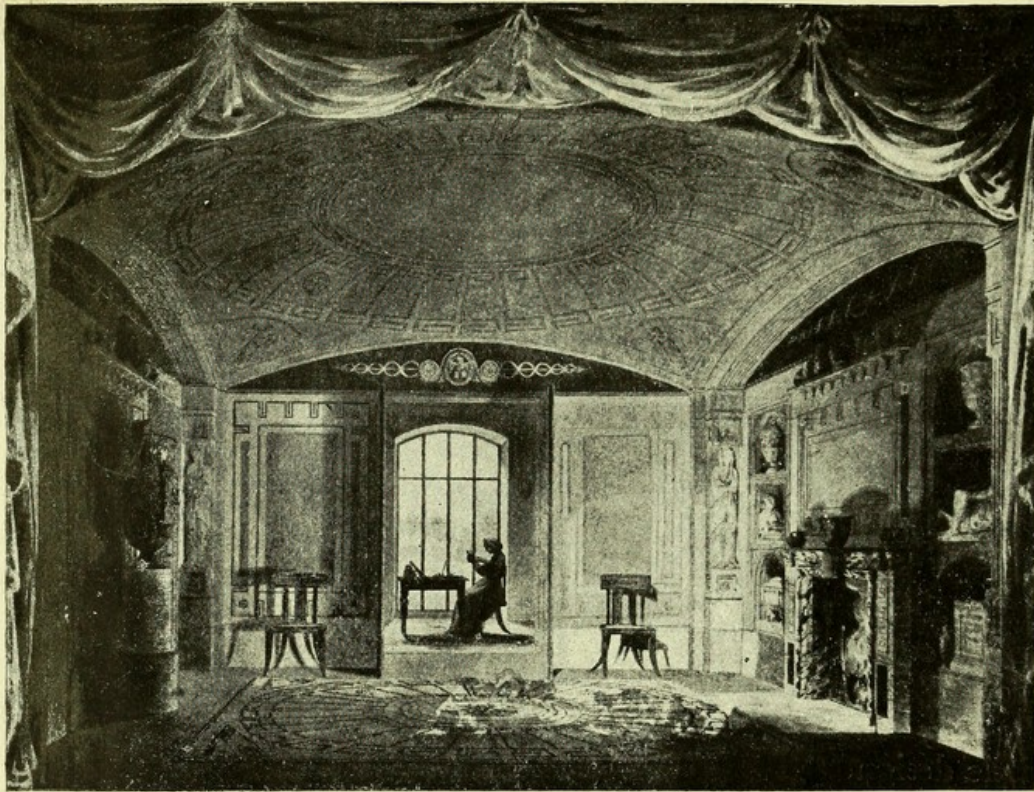
room and eating-room, was worth preserving. These two interiors he considered to be "of an exquisite taste." They have, in fact, a marked Adam character, and might be mistaken for genuine work of that master if it were not for a certain inferiority in detail and proportion.

Soane's additions are, as will be seen, of very considerable interest. Apparently the work was completed by June 30, 1802, that being the date of the new owner's "Description" of the house. The entrance façade is clearly related to Robert Adam's famous composition, the centre block of the south front of Kedleston, in Derbyshire, a characteristic design which Soane admired and defends in his lectures to the students of the Royal Academy. In the Hogarth Room at the Soane

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THE ENTRANCE HALL.



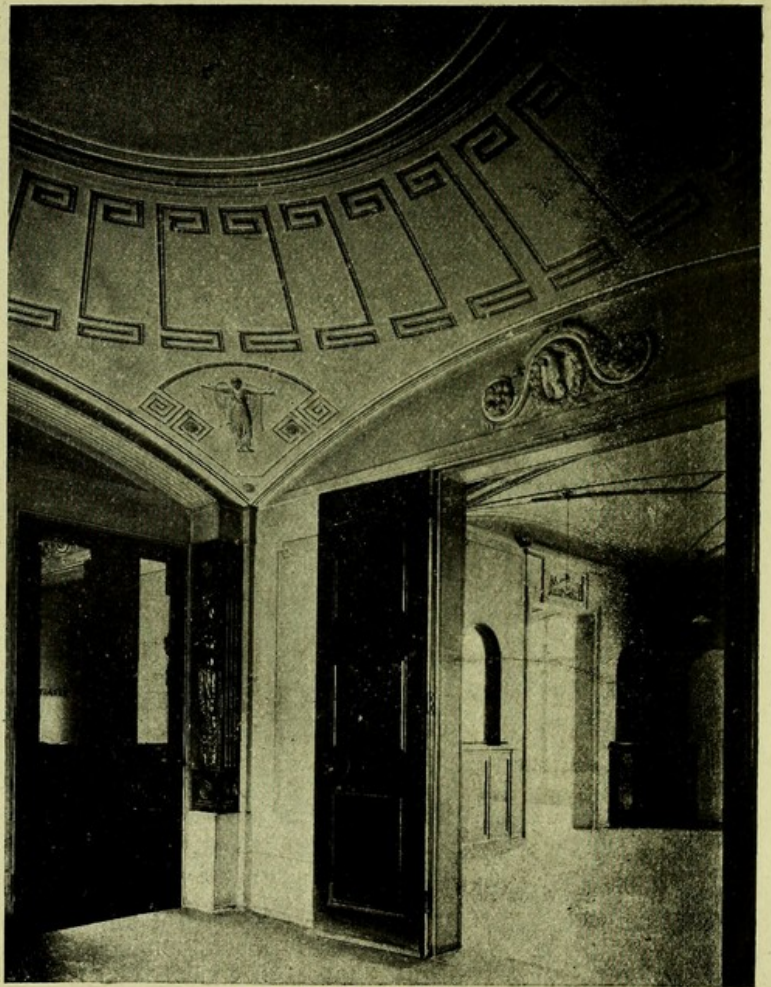
THE FRONT PARLOUR.

From the original water colour in the Soane Museum.

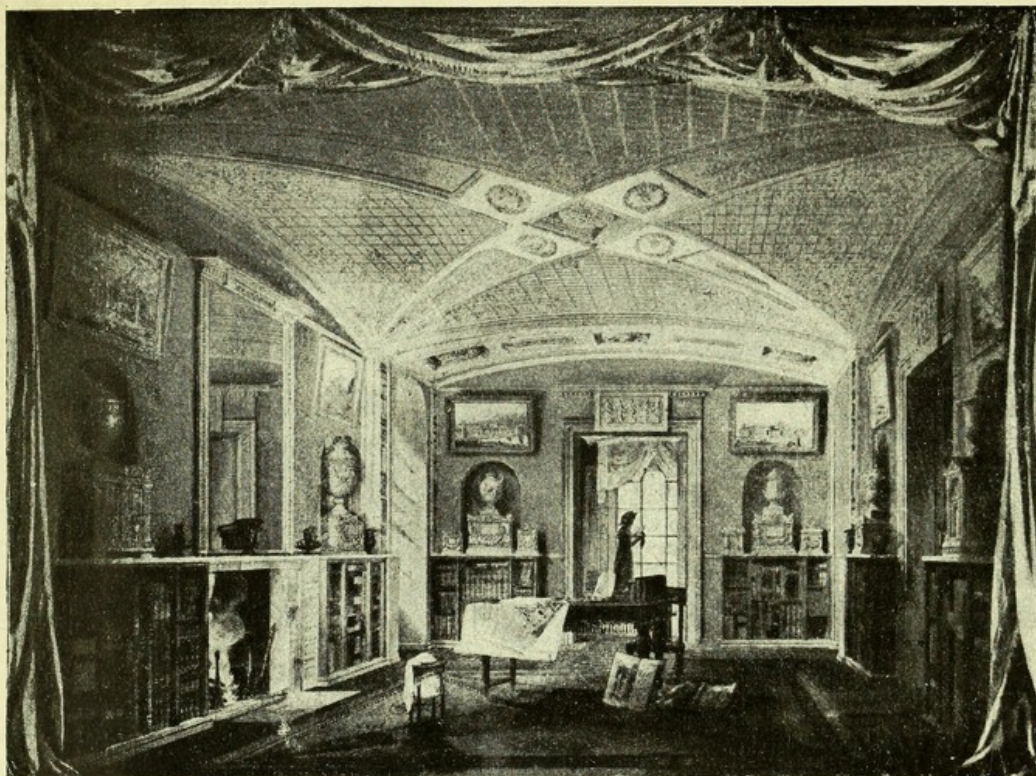
Museum are two interior perspectives of the chief rooms of Soane's villa which, decorated in a scheme of blue, are attractive and characteristic. In addition there are in the Model Room of the Museum two models of designs for an entirely new house, one for Acton and the other for Ealing. A prominent porch with angular columns is a feature in one of these proposals. In 1776 Soane had won the gold medal and travelling studentship of the Royal Academy, and he was

in Italy from 1777 to 1780. Following on his return in that year he commenced practice as an architect, and in five years was paying his expenses and able in addition to save. He married in 1784 Elizabeth Smith, niece of George Wyatt of Albion Place, a builder, and thus inherited the latter's fortune on his death in 1790. Soane's idea in purchasing the Ealing property was that his elder son, John Soane, should occupy the house, if he followed the profession of an architect. John, however, became engaged to Miss Preston, of Sewardstown, "as a result," so his irate parent declared, "of an excursion to one of those watering places where young ladies are to be found who are in haste to be married." This crude view of the case on the father-in-law's part was hardly likely to mend matters, in addition to which young Soane followed it up by the announcement

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THE FRONT PARLOUR.

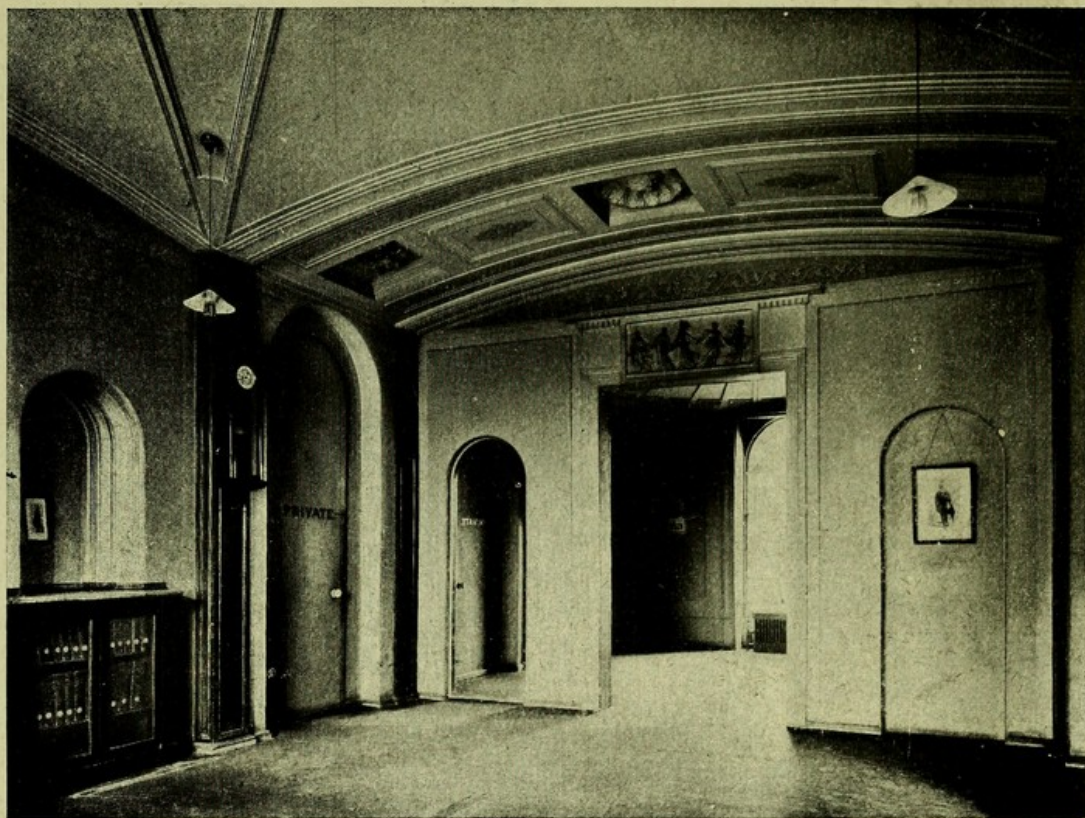


THE BACK PARLOUR

From the original water-colour in the Soane Museum.

that he had decided not to pursue his studies in architecture, but to devote himself to literature. This occurred between August, 1810, and February, 1811, and Soane, deeply mortified at the defeat of his plans, complied with an urgent wish of his wife and disposed of the Manor House at Ealing, while expressly recording that he had purchased it chiefly in the hope and prospect that his son would follow him in his profession. In fact, writing in his

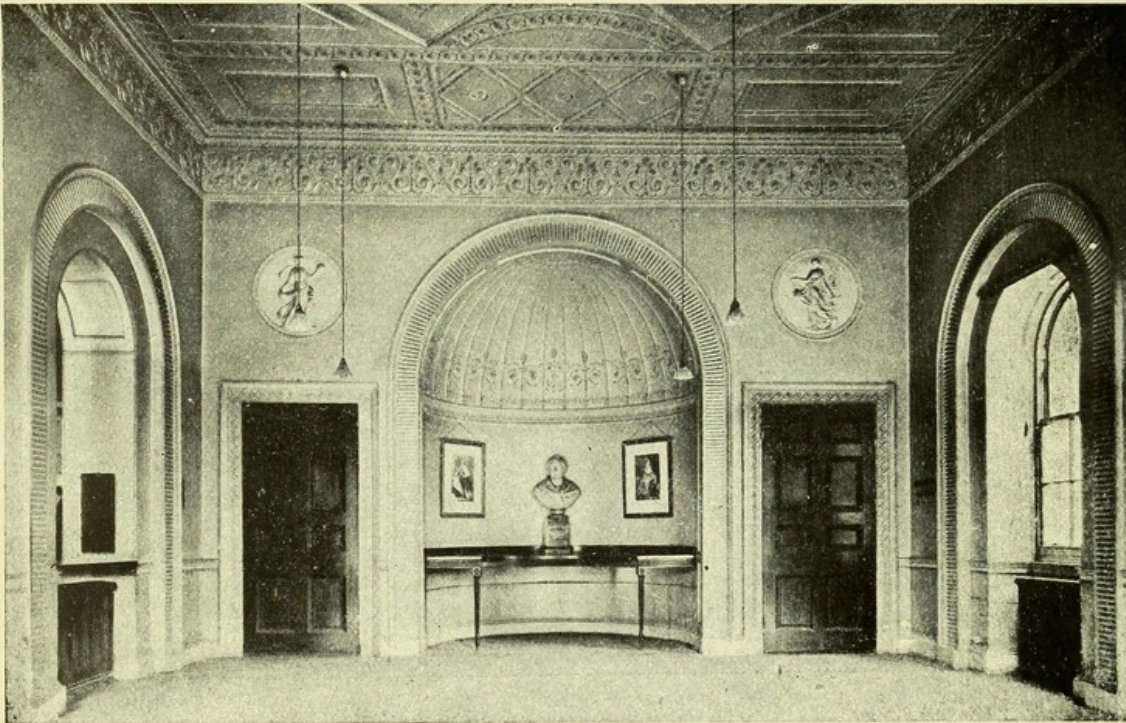
“Memoirs” some twenty years later, he says, “from his infancy I had endeavoured to create in his mind a taste for the Fine Arts, and to that end directed his subsequent education. . . . He commenced his classical studies at Margate, under the care of the Rev. William Chapman, with whom he remained several years; then he was entered at Trinity College,



THE BACK PARLOUR.

Cambridge, and afterwards removed at his own earnest desire to Pembroke Hall, during which period he made considerable progress in Mathematics and Mechanics. Having finished his studies at the University, he expressed a devoted passion for the Fine Arts,

and particularly Architecture, which he declared it his intention to study as a profession. To give him every facility in my power, and to prepare him for finishing his studies in Italy after well grounding him in the principles of Architecture at my own office, I placed him under the tuition

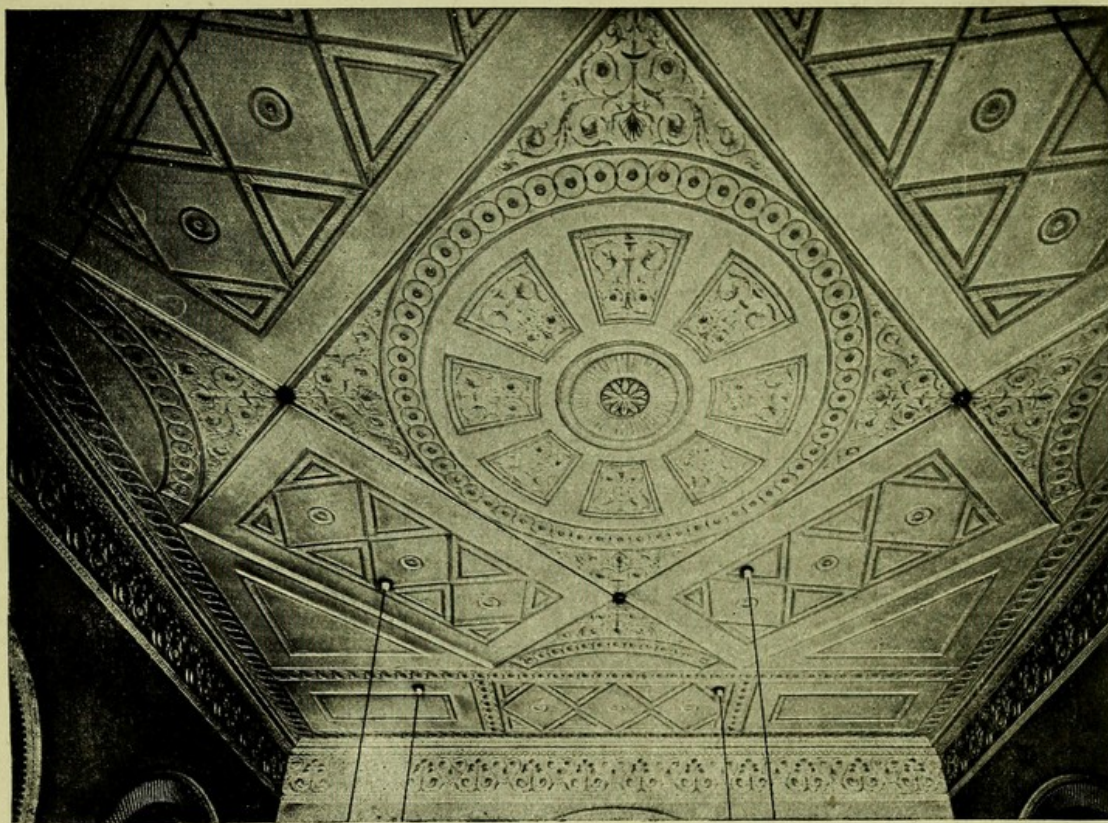


THE EATING ROOM.

Built in 1770 by G. Dance, R.A., and preserved by Soane.

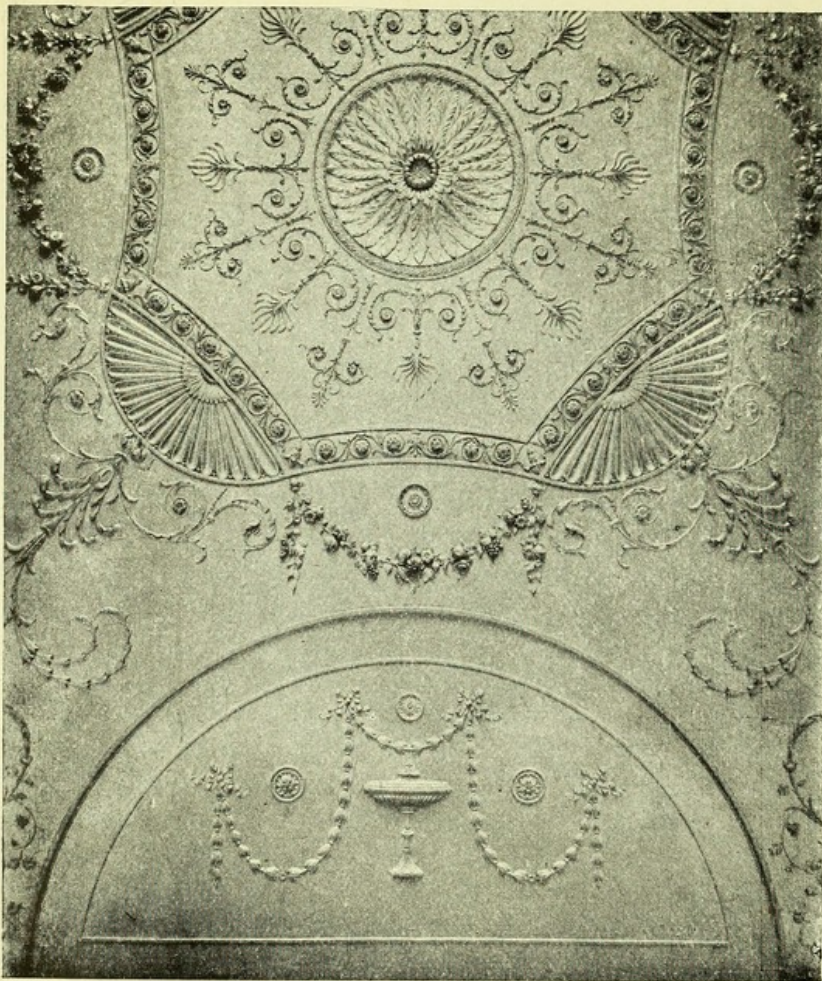
tion of Mr. Joseph Gandy, A.R.A., well known for his talent in architectural composition, and one of the most distinguished draughtsmen of the present age who then resided in London."

It appears that Gandy (1771-1843) afterwards moved to Liverpool in the hope of improving his position, and that he took young Soane



CEILING OF THE EATING ROOM.

A cast from the frieze of this room was placed by Soane in his Museum.



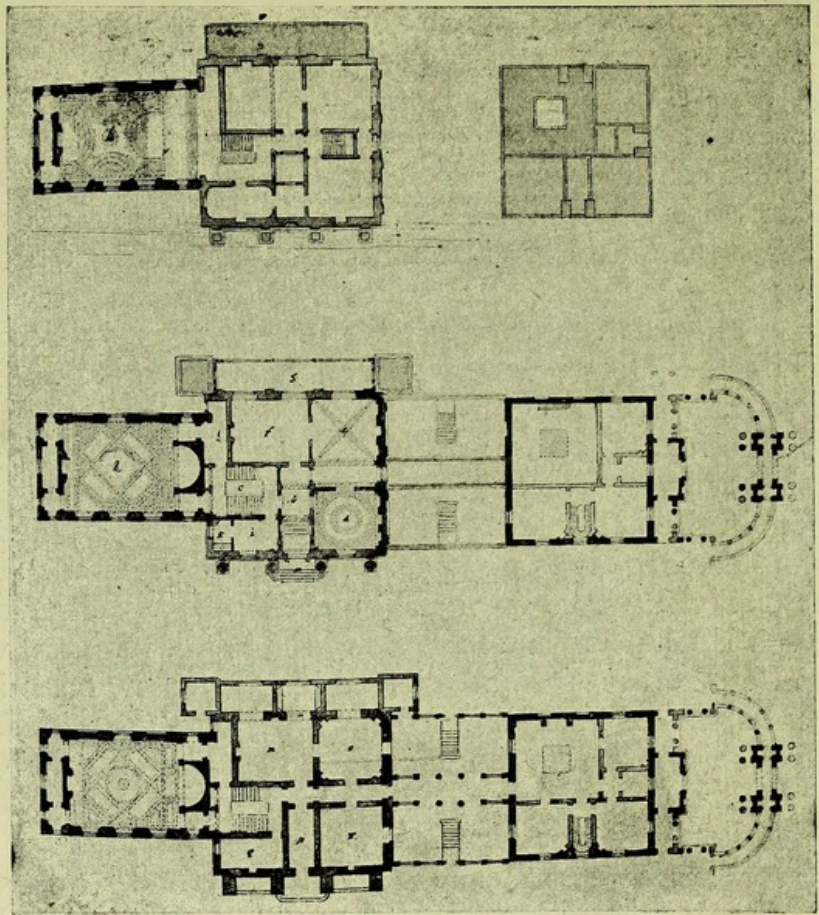
DETAIL OF THE CEILING OVER THE EATING-ROOM.
The work of G. Dance, R.A.

with him. Apparently at first the reports of his progress were satisfactory, but Soane senior concludes with the dry remark that his satisfaction was illusory, as his son married after a short courtship and gave up architecture. John Soane, jun., died on October 21, 1823, leaving his widow with three daughters and an infant son. The grandfather seems to have transferred his hopes to the latter, whom he educated and treated liberally, in spite of various difficulties with his mother.

Sir John, in 1832, publicly referred to his grandson as his natural heir, a term which was considered to have some reference to his much more serious differences with his own second son, George (1790-1860), troubles which appear to have begun at the early age of seventeen. Sir

John's "Memoirs," in fact, are dedicated to the grandson, "Master John Soane," in the following sympathetic terms: "To you my dear child I dedicate these 'Memoirs,' trusting that my success will be to you a stimulus and my mortifications serve you as beacons."

Glancing at the boy's guardians he writes: "I hope and trust that those who have taken out of my hands the care and responsibility of your education will provide you with proper masters to instruct you in the ancient and modern languages, in mathematical knowledge in the principles of Architecture, and all the arts and sciences on which that noble art depends, taking the advice of Vitruvius as their model, and finally being thus prepared you should finish your studies in



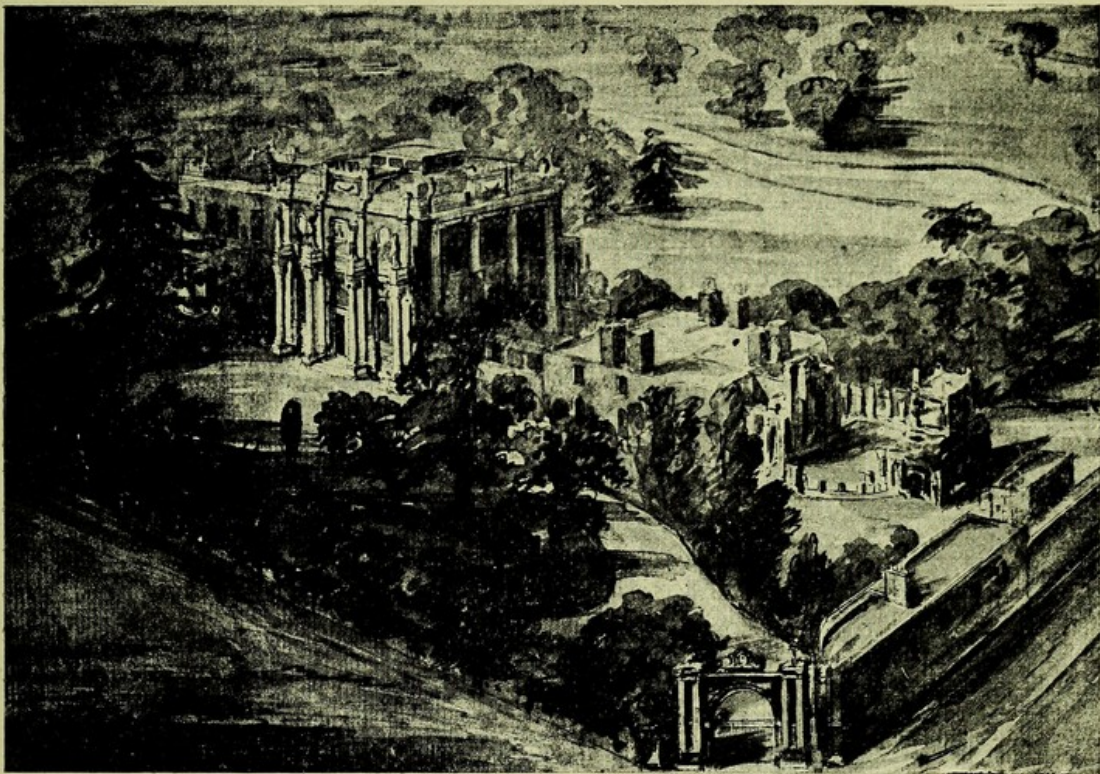
ORIGINAL PLANS OF THE BASEMENT, GROUND AND FIRST FLOOR OF PITZHANGER HOUSE AND RUINS.

Italy, France and Germany, so that on your return to England you may be fully qualified to enter the practice of your honourable and useful profession."

Lovers of Jane Austen's novels will see in all this a document of the period, and realize how well she has portrayed the parental attitude of the early years of the nineteenth century, one which was surely merely a backwash of the revolutionary epoch. It never seems to have dawned upon Soane that his sons might take after their mother, rather than after himself, and that his "ruling passion strong in death" for Architecture was merely boring and impossible to them.

There is something inexpressibly naïve in Soane's expectation that his eldest son, while at College, would find time to make "Restorations" of the "Ruins" at Ealing Green, however entertaining such a fancy might be to himself. Could Dickens have heard of this, for are we not shown Pecksniff making his famous proposition to the new pupil as follows? "There are a cartload of loose bricks, and a score or two of old flower pots in the back yard. If you could pile them up, my dear Martin, into any form which would remind me on my return, say, of St. Peter's at Rome, or the Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople it would be at once improving to you and agreeable to my feelings." Even if young Soane in holiday time and, perhaps, with a prospective tip in view at the end of the vacation, acquiesced in the paternal architectural thesis, it must seem strange that a man of Soane's real shrewdness should have been so upset at the very natural failure of such a project to materialize in term time at Cambridge.

Pitzhanger Manor, which is now the Ealing Public Library, is well built of brick with Portland stone insulated columns, which carry terra-cotta figures, after those of the Erectheum. The façade is further adorned by a bas-relief of an eagle, after an antique on the Church of the Apostles at Rome, and by panels from the pedestal of a candelabrum



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF PITZHANCER HOUSE AND RUINS.
From original drawing in the Soane Museum.

at the Temple of Bacchus. The house at Ealing is an important incident in the development of Soane's art, inasmuch as the work just precedes the building of 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields (1812), with which as a design it has much in common.

The difference in favour of the later work lies mainly in the further elimination of that "Mausoleum" element that hampered Soane's earlier domestic designs. The entrance hall at Ealing, though barely 7 ft. wide, is a miniature vaulted chapel, with a raised lantern story; it might almost have been a model for the Princes Street entrance of the Bank (1803). In the front room on the right (sketched out in December, 1801) the dome arches rest upon flat caryatid figures, marbled as Sienna, while the back room is heavily cross-vaulted with a segmental barrel extension, coffered and supported on Greek antæ. All this excess of monumental fantasy is discarded in the interior of the London home, the building of which followed so soon after. The details of the door and window finishings in the later example show an equal advance in simplicity and suitability. It is singular that Soane apparently saw nothing incongruous in adding work of such a highly individual character, as this at Ealing, on to the "elegant" and "exquisite" work of his first master. There is evidence that in the early part of 1810 Soane was considering an extension of the back, or garden front, of the Ealing house, which was to be carried up to the full height, like a Spanish "Mirador," above the low terrace over the basement extension. It was all to be of glass, except for the pilaster strips and architraves that were to form the main framing. His son John, had he been an artist, might reasonably have felt that the house savoured already of a cage, and was altogether too strongly parental in idea to allow of the free growth of his own personality.

General Cameron, the purchaser, took possession at Christmas, 1810, and Soane, writing in 1835, adds that: "Various alterations were made by the General, and by



A PORTRAIT BY W. OWEN, R.A. (1769-1825), OF JOHN SOANE,
R.A., DATED 1804



A PORTRAIT BY VAN ASSEN OF MRS. SOANE AND THE
TWO BOYS, JOHN AND GEORGE (1793?).

From the originals in the Soane Museum.

those who succeeded him, both in the exterior and the interior of the house, offices and pleasure grounds, many of the venerable and lofty trees were cut down and sold, a large portion of the columns and other architectural relics which formed the ruins were removed, and the site thereof metamorphosed into a flower parterre, and ultimately to a depôt for coal, wood and ashes. By these changes the character of the place has been destroyed and the former Gothic scenes and intellectual banquets of Pitzhanger are no more."

To understand the veteran architect's mournful allusion to past scenes and festivities it must be explained that on the right of the Soane addition to Dance's south wing and occupying the site of the original north wing, was an open court with a colonnade leading to a court of sham ruins, of the type of the well-known example at Virginia Water, devised by Paul Sandby.

Soane gives drawings and descriptions of the Ealing ruins and adds: "Whether the description and drawings are the offspring of a lively fancy, or whether they really represent a structure raised by the Romans, it can hardly be necessary for me to state, one of my objects was to ridicule those fanciful architects and antiquarians who, finding a few pieces of columns, and sometimes only a few single stones, proceeded on these slender data to imagine magnificent buildings and by whom small fragments of tessellated pavements were magnified into splendid remains of Roman greatness which were given to the world in the most pompous and expensive style.

"The drawings of the ruins in their present state and the attempts made to represent the edifice in its ancient grandeur were sources of amusement to the numerous persons visiting this place, particularly on the three days of the Ealing Fair, held on the Green in front of the Manor House. On those days it was the custom for our friends

to visit us by a general invitation, and it was not unusual to entertain two hundred persons to a *déjeuner à la fourchette*; many of whom, after contemplating the ruins and drawings, communicated their sentiments on the subject, which created a constant source of intellectual enjoyment."

Were there really so many righteous in the first ten years of the nineteenth century? In the sale particulars of the property in June, 1832, preserved in the Soane Library, Pitzhanger is described as "for many years the admired residence of John Clifton, Esq., dec." Evidently he was one of those mentioned by Soane as successors of General Cameron. The property is given as twenty-eight acres, situated six miles from Cumberland Gate, Hyde Park. The drawing-room is given as 19 ft. by 15 ft.; library, 21 ft. by 15 ft.; and breakfast parlour, 15 ft. by 13 ft. The last being described as "a Marble Room," from which it appears that both walls and ceiling were marbled, no doubt like the caryatides which still remain. This fact throws a good deal of light on the development of the famous breakfast-room at the Soane, which is clearly an offshoot of the earlier work. The flat, incised treatment of both domes is quite in character with the idea of surfaces of marble inlay.

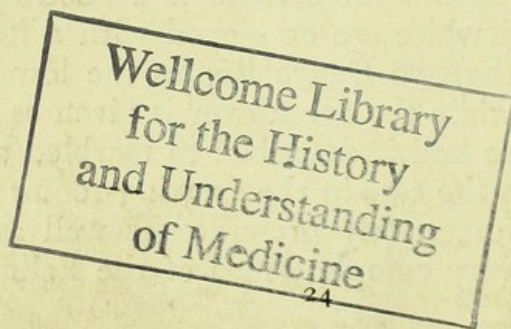
At Ealing the chimney-piece in this same room is a good specimen of the use of coloured marbles—red, yellow and white are employed with a fret inlay. The "Conservatory" is mentioned, and of the two Dance Rooms the lower is called the dining-room (30 ft. by 22 ft. by 16 ft.), while the room over is given as a billiard-room (30 ft. by 21 ft. by 12 ft.). The entrance hall is described as marbled and bronze. Probably the mouldings were bronzed as was the case in the drawing-rooms at the Soane.

With these particulars thus fortunately preserved as well as the two perspectives in colour it is possible to form a very complete idea of the Ealing house as lived in by

John Soane, R.A., in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Antiques and casts were displayed in most, if not all, of the rooms; in the upper drawing-room or salon were pictures, books and rare MSS., as this was, in fact, the start of the future Soane Museum. The majority of these exhibits were removed to Lincoln's Inn Fields when Soane sold the Ealing house.

In the basement the breakfast-room was a "Monk's Parlor," and next to it was "a model room" with statues, architectural details and the like. This, again, was the original of the more complete locale of "Padre Giovanni," who was re-established at No. 13, in 1824, beneath the new Picture Gallery, or present Hogarth Room, built in that year. There is, therefore, a very valuable connection between the Ealing country house and the final London home of Sir John Soane. Each explains the other, and both throw a profound light upon the interesting personality of the founder of the House, Museum and Library of Sir John Soane in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

ARTHUR T. BOLTON, F.S.A.,
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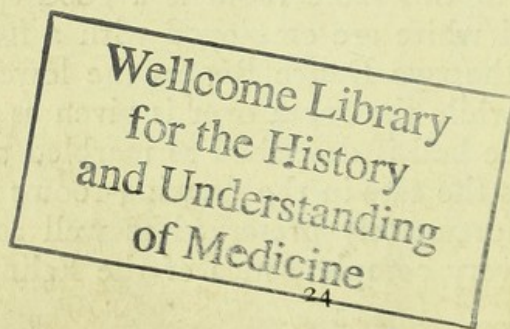
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