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Freemasonry and Sir John Soane

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Though long perceived as an important commission in Soane's career, his Masonic Hall in London (1828–30) [Figure 1] has never been fully discussed by historians of architecture. Yet the hall was not only the climax of Soane's preoccupation with the poetry of domed top-lit spaces; as a building hemmed in on all sides by others, it was characteristic of the circumstances which produced many of his finest works. Nor has the relation of the Masonic Hall to Soane's great kitchen beneath been noticed, though each interior had an unusual ceiling, totally different from the other, yet designed as part of a hierarchy ascending from the functionalism of the kitchen to the poetry of the Masonic chamber which surmounted it both physically and spiritually. No less important is the fact that this commission raises the whole question of Soane's activities as a Freemason and the meaning which Freemasonry may have held for him.¹

It is surely reasonable to assume that Soane, initiated as a Freemason in 1813, took Freemasonry very seriously. He carried out numerous architectural and decorative improvements at the London headquarters of the Freemasons in Great Queen Street, contributed £500 to the cost of his Masonic Hall, and gave extensively to Masonic charities, in accordance with the fraternal ideals of the brotherhood. He took part in Masonic ceremonies and even went so far as to commission a portrait of himself in Masonic dress [Figure 2]. In this portrait, he is shown sitting in his Masonic Hall beside the remarkable Ark of the Masonic Covenant, which he had designed in 1813.² He even chose to vault the dressing room leading out of his study at Sir John Soane's Museum with a miniature version of his canopy and lantern at the Masonic Hall.

No less significantly, Soane's extensive course of reading in the theory of the French Enlightenment made him aware that Freemasonry could be regarded as the religion of the Enlightenment. He reflected its deistic philosophy in his own references to God as "the Architect of the Universe," and in his numerous designs for funerary monuments, tombs,

sepulchral chapels, and mausoleums, from which he always scrupulously excluded all Christian references. His intensive study of *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et les progrès des arts de la Grèce* (3 vols. London, 1785), by "Baron d'Hancarville" (Pierre-François Hugues), had familiarized him with the search for a common origin of the varieties of religious experience which was characteristic of Enlightenment thought. D'Hancarville's activities in this field reflected the visionary world order of contemporary Freemasons, while his study of religious and sexual symbolism gave Soane material for detailed study as part of his own growing preoccupation with the question of finding appropriate ornament for modern classical buildings.³

Soane also owned the great *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert with its title page adorned with Masonic symbols. His collection of Masonic books also included the key study by Alexandre Lenoir (1761–1839), *La Franche-Maçonnerie rendue à sa véritable origine, ou l'antiquité de la franche-maçonnerie par l'explication des mystères anciens et modernes* (Paris, 1814). It was Lenoir, a Freemason, who had established the celebrated Musée des Monuments Français in 1795 in the former Couvent des Petits Augustins in Paris.⁴ It is not known whether Soane saw this theatrically arranged but instructive museum of architecture and sculpture on his visits to Paris, but it afforded a number of visual and intellectual parallels with his own house and museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields.⁵

Soane was also one of the few in England to own a copy of C.-N. Ledoux's monumental *L'Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l'art, des moeurs, et de la législation* (Paris, 1804), with its striking frontispiece in which Ledoux was depicted with the attributes of Freemasonry. Ledoux's book was, indeed, the architectural culmination of the growing interest in Freemasonry and secret societies in eighteenth-century France. Soane copied out chunks of the rhapsodic, incantatory prose in which Ledoux evoked a city based on Masonic social ideals. Soane's passionate belief in the exercise of civic virtue and in the design of public buildings as the noblest task of the architect was also in harmony with Masonic idealism.

In this context, the recent summary by James Stevens Curl



FIGURE 1: John Soane, Masonic Hall, London, "evening view" by Joseph Gandy, 1832

of what Freemasonry meant to the thinkers of the Enlightenment applies in every particular to Soane:

Freemasons sought a return to simple, primitive, elemental truths, and a reconstruction of a noble, unfalse, altruistic progress from those truths along the civilized paths of architectural history in which the language of the Orders, the Temple of Solomon, and Reason would play their parts. Freemasons desired to rebuild a moral edifice, no less, as an exemplar of what was noble and splendid and true in the first ages of the world.⁶

Other books by French Freemasons in Soane's possession included *Monde primitif, analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne, considéré sans son génie et dans les allégories auxquelles conduisit ce génie* (Paris, 1777), by Antoine Court de Gébelin, and *Lettres sur l'architecture des anciens et celle des modernes, dans lesquelles se trouve développé le génie symbolique qui préside aux monuments de l'antiquité* (Paris, 1787), by Jean-Louis Viel de Saint-Maux, a member, like Court de Gébelin, of the Neuf Soeurs Lodge in Paris. Soane bought Court de Gébelin's book on 17 December 1814, just eleven days after he was reappointed Grand Superintendent [sic] of Works at the Grand Master's Lodge in London. In the writings of Court de Gébelin and Viel de Saint-Maux, both of whom were indebted to Soane's favorite archaeological writer, d'Hancarville, he would have found accounts of the origin of the sacred architecture of the ancients which stressed the role of allegory and symbolism. They promoted a vision of world architecture rich with the signs of religion, myth, and cosmology.



FIGURE 2: John Jackson, R.A., portrait of Sir John Soane in Masonic dress, 1828



FIGURE 3: Thomas Sandby, Masonic Hall, London, 1775–76, interior in 1900

ogy, while for Court de Gébelin, the sublime drama of initiatory rituals provided a continuity from the Egyptian world to that of Demeter, Persephone, and Orpheus, and so to that of modern Freemasonry.

Soane's friend James Christie (1773–1831) explored similar topics in a series of books of which he sent copies to Soane. These included the remarkable *Disquisition upon Etruscan Vases; displaying their probable connection with the Shows at Eleusis, and the Chinese Feast of Lanterns, with explanations of a few of the principal allegories depicted on them* (London, 1806), *An Essay on that earliest Species of Idolatry, the Worship of the Elements* (Norwich, 1814), and *An Essay on the Mysteries of Eleusis* (London, 1817). Soane referred to Christie's writings in his *Description of the House and Museum on the North Side of Lincoln's Inn Fields* (1835), and invited him in 1825 to the grand showing by lamplight of his newly acquired tomb of Seti I, an Egyptian antiquity of major significance which he knew as the Belzoni

sarcophagus, after the name of its discoverer in 1817.⁷ Regretting that he was unable to attend, Christie wrote to Soane that the "exhibition would be so particularly interesting to me as it would coincide so nearly with my speculations upon the lamplight exhibitions at Eleusis."⁸ The control of light in ceremonies, particularly of initiation, which was also a preoccupation of Lenoir, also featured, as we shall see, in Soane's Masonic Hall.

Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778–1823) belonged to the Masonic group centering on the Duke of Sussex, who attended Soane's installation of the Belzoni sarcophagus in 1825.⁹ Other members of this lodge who became Soane's friends included James Perry (1756–1821), proprietor and editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, the leading organ of the Whig party. He was one of the few of Soane's friends who was part of the official procession at Mrs. Soane's funeral in 1815. On 14 August 1813 Soane called on the Duke of Sussex; on 15

November he was proposed for election to the Grand Master's Lodge by James Perry and Thomas Harper; and on 1 December he was initiated. Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex (1773–1843), the sixth son of King George III and Queen Charlotte, was educated in Germany at Göttingen University and did not settle in England till 1804.¹⁰ Doubtless influenced by Professor Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer, a Freemason who had taught him at Göttingen, he was initiated into continental

Freemasonry in the Lodge of Glorious Truth in Berlin in 1798.¹¹ A man of unusually advanced liberal views for a royal prince, he had a sympathy for reform of all sorts;¹² like Soane, he also had a romantic admiration for Napoleon.¹³ Unwelcome at court, he devoted himself to literature, science, and the arts. He was appointed president of the Society of Arts in 1816, served as president of the Royal Society from 1830 to 1839, and formed a library of 50,000 volumes,¹⁴ which in-

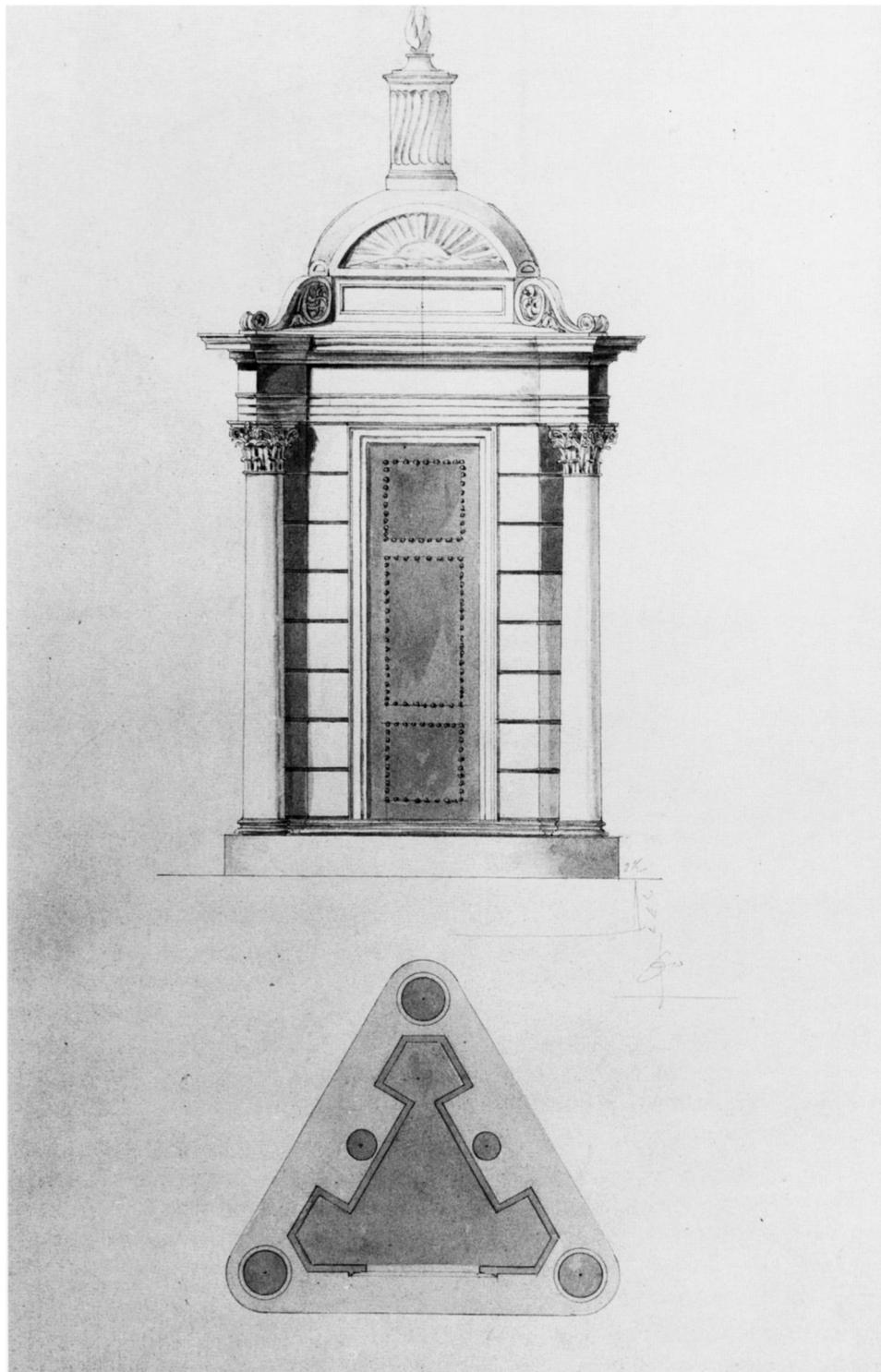


FIGURE 4: John Soane, design for Masonic ark, 1813, elevation and plan (SM 52/4/3)

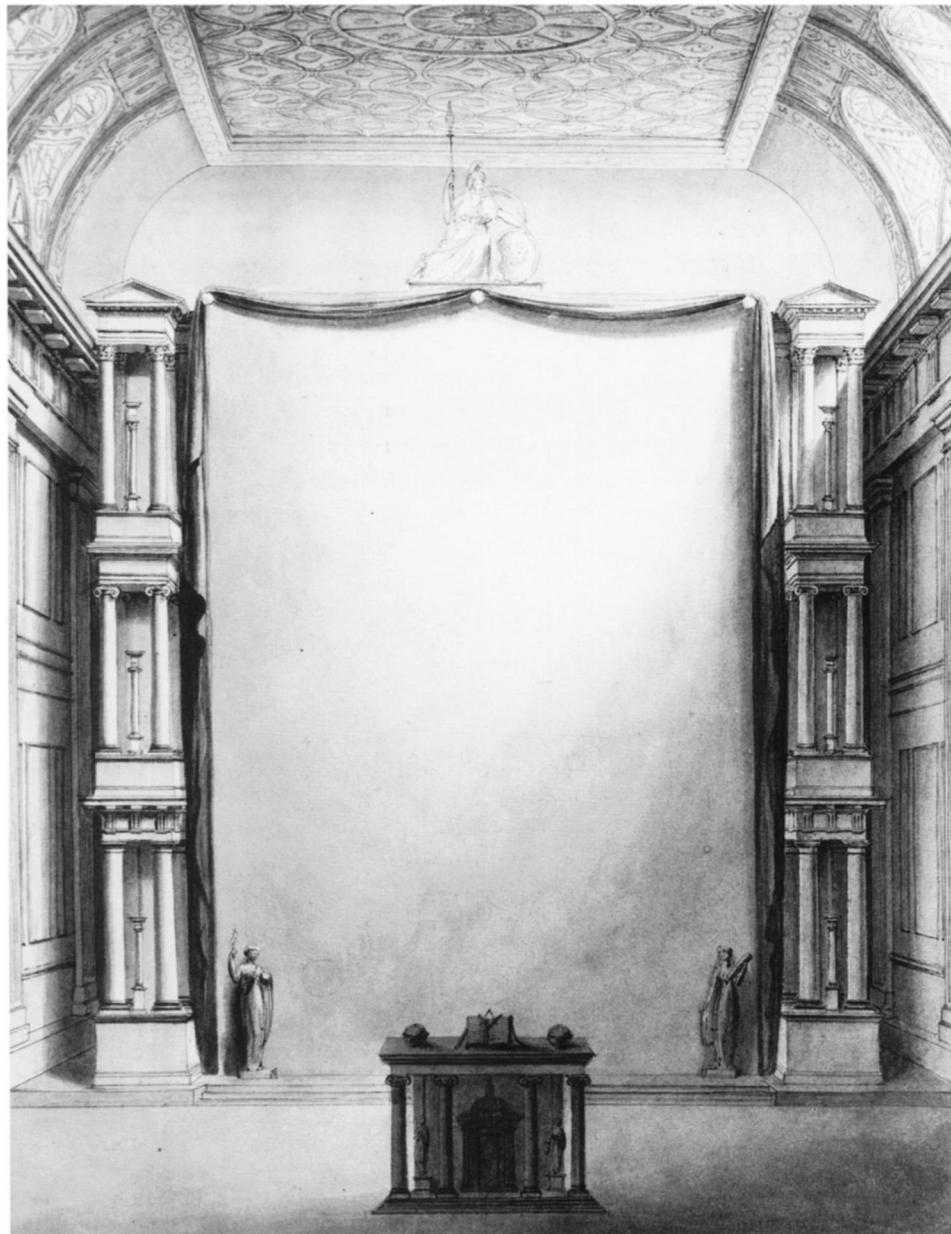


FIGURE 5: John Soane, design for decorating Sandby's Masonic Hall (SM 52/411)

cluded several works privately printed by Soane.¹⁵ He became a close friend of Soane and, though he did not engage him to carry out any private commissions, he was almost certainly responsible for inviting Soane to work for the Freemasons.¹⁶

Following his initiation in 1813 Soane was immediately put to work to design an ark of the Masonic covenant to be used at an important ceremony that was to take place on 27 December.¹⁷ This was the union of the two fraternities, known as the Grand Lodge, founded in 1717, and the Antient Grand Lodge, founded as its rival in 1751.¹⁸ The union was important as symbolizing Masonic ideals of sociability and fraternity, which had been violated by the painful separation. The decision to commission an ark, a most unusual step, emphasized the high solemnity of this novel ceremony.

HISTORY OF THE SITE OF THE MASONIC HALL

Before proceeding any further we should set the scene for Soane's Masonic activities by glancing at the history of the site which was occupied by the Freemasons in Great Queen Street.¹⁹ At its core was the magnificent two-story Masonic Hall, built in 1775–76 from designs by Thomas Sandby, who was appointed Grand Architect of the Order of Freemasons in 1775 [Figure 3]. Opened at a solemn ceremony in 1776 at which it was dedicated to Masonry, Virtue, Universal Charity, and Benevolence, the Masonic Hall resembled the interior of a great Roman Doric temple.²⁰ Sandby, who had promoted a kind of speaking or symbolic architecture in his Royal Academy lectures, adorned the metopes in the frieze with Masonic emblems, triangles, intersecting circles, suns, and stars.²¹ In the center of the ceiling a representation of the sun in

burnished gold was surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac.²²

To the north of this, a building with an undemonstrative, domestic-looking façade on Great Queen Street, known as the Freemasons' Tavern, was built in 1786. The architect of this modest Palladian composition was William Tyler, a Freemason, who had already promoted the building of Sandby's Masonic Hall in 1775. Sandby enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Cumberland, who was Grand Master from 1782 until his death in 1790. It was his father, Frederick, Prince of Wales (1707–51), the patron of Sir William Chambers at Kew, who began the connection of the royal family with the Freemasons which contributed so much to the growth of their popularity. Two years after the Duke of Cumberland's death in 1790, he was succeeded as Grand Master by his nephew, the Prince of Wales, the future George IV, who had been initiated on 6 February 1787.

The Prince of Wales's opinions had doubtless been influenced by his friendship with the liberal and anglophile duc de Chartres, later Philippe-Egalité, who had been installed as Grand Master of the Grand Orient in October 1773. Two years after his appointment as regent in 1811, the prince was in turn succeeded as Grand Master by his brother, the Duke of Sussex. On resigning the grand mastership, the Prince Regent took the title of Grand Patron of the Order, a position he retained after his accession to the throne in 1820.

SOANE AS A FREEMASON

On 11 December 1813 Soane met the Duke of Sussex at the Freemasons' Tavern, taking with him three drawings, possibly for the new ark. Soane's surviving designs for the ark include one, dated December 1813, which is triangular in form with a column at each corner [Figure 4].²³ It was a version of this design which was executed.²⁴ Although destroyed in the great fire of 1883, it can clearly be seen in the painting by Sigismund Rosenthal, *The Reception of the Prince of Wales as a Past Grand Master in December 1869*.²⁵ Since the ceremony in which this unusual object was to feature was due to take place in a little over two weeks, Soane was given very little time for the design and execution. We know from the office day book, kept by his chief assistant, George Bailey, that the ark was designed between 14 and 20 December, with the burning of much midnight oil. The drawings were fed through piecemeal to Soane's favorite joiner and cabinetmaker, Thomas Martyr.²⁶

Soane's ark bore no resemblance to the conventional Biblical ark, a modest, portable object, of which an image featured in the arms of both the United Grand Lodge of England and of the Antient Grand Lodge. Those representations were based on the directions given to Moses for an ark to contain God's Testimony, to be made of shittim wood (acacia) and flanked by two cherubim.²⁷ Soane's mahogany ark was totally different.

Four feet three inches high and three feet four inches wide, it was triangular with a column at each corner, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, symbolizing wisdom, strength, and beauty, each bearing its appropriate entablature. With its tall central door, it resembled a large cupboard, pedestal, or, characteristically for Soane, tomb. It was also formally similar to the triangular Simeon Monument, which he built in the Market Place in Reading in 1804, an obelisk and lamp post rich with symbolic ornament.²⁸ More significantly, Soane's ark is close to the curious pedestals, triangular with domed finials, which feature in his Pitt Cenotaph at the National Debt Redemption Office of 1818.²⁹ These mysterious commemorative pedestals add to the gloomy solemnity of the cenotaph in a manner that is wholly characteristic of their architect.

Other drawings show Soane's rearrangement of Sandby's hall, presumably for the great ceremony of union. A tall reredos, hung with a veil, is flanked by coupled columns arranged in three tiers [*Figure 5*].³⁰ At the ceremony, Brother Soane, who had bought a purple apron trimmed with gold fringe, bore the pillar of the Junior Grand Warden of the Antients. He witnessed the ceremony, accompanied by organ music played by Samuel Wesley, which centered on his new ark:

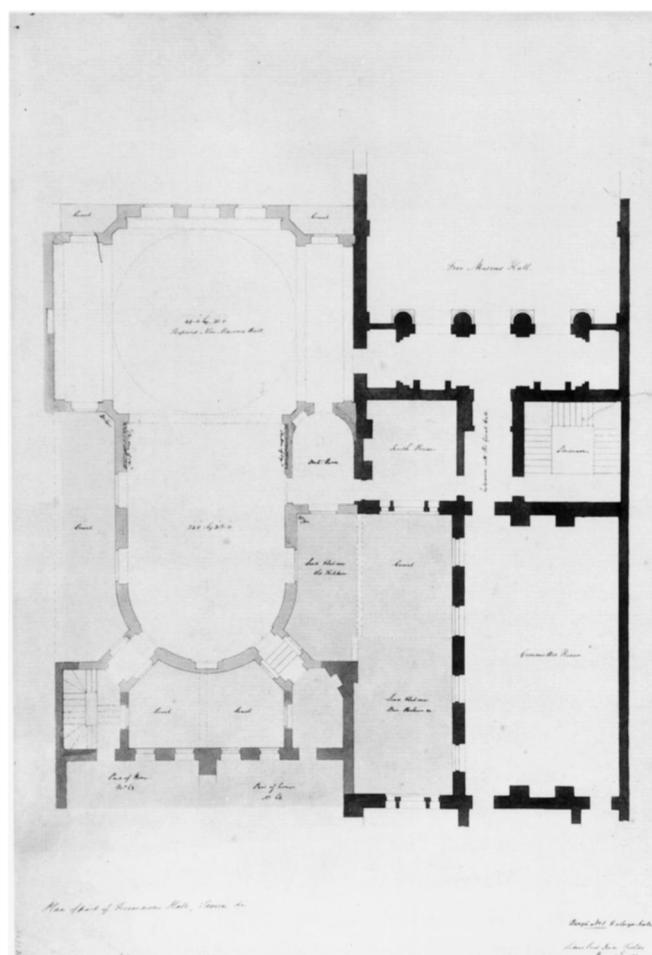


FIGURE 6: John Soane, Masonic Hall, early plan, May 1826 (SM 51/1/30)

The Square, the Plumb, the Level and the Mallet, were successively delivered to the Deputy Grand Masters and by them presented to the two Grand Masters who severally applied the Square to that part of the said Ark, which is square, the plumb to the sides of the same and the Level above it in three positions, and lastly they gave three knocks with the mallet; saying "May the Great Architect of the universe enable us to uphold the Grand Edifice of union of which this ark of the Covenant is the symbol, which shall contain within it the Instrument of our Brotherly Love, and bear upon it the Holy Bible, Square and Compass, as the light of our Faith and the rule of our works may he dispose our Hearts to make it perpetual!" The two Grand Masters placed the said act of Union in the Interior of the said ark. The Cornucopia, the Wine and Oil, were in like manner presented to the Grand Masters, who, according to antient rite, poured forth corn, wine and oil on the said ark.³¹

The Duke of Sussex then installed Soane as Grand Superintendent of Works, a post he held until his death in 1837. The significance of the post went beyond the design of an ark or the rearrangement shown in the other drawings prepared at the time, for at the same meeting on 27 December a Board of Works had been established, with Soane as a member. This had the two following objectives: "the proper accommodation of the Grand Lodge and its several Boards and Committees at their

respective meetings" and "the correct and appropriate decorations and Furniture of the grand Lodge and the Masonic Jewels, Emblems and Clothing of the Grand Officers and other Brethren."

These implied a new building and a decorative program centered on appropriate ornament, just the topic with which Soane was so preoccupied at this time, when he was preparing his Royal Academy lectures. In 1813 he had delivered his first course of six lectures, and was to deliver the second course for the first time in 1815, in which year he was also appointed President of the Board of Works at the United Grand Lodge. In 1814 he surveyed the houses adjacent to the Freemasons' Tavern on the east, at 62 and 63 Great Queen Street, with a view to their purchase so as to enable new premises to be built. They were purchased in 1815 and on 20 June Soane recorded that he "went by Hackney carriage to the Duke of Sussex at Kensington Palace," presumably to show him drawings for a new building, and "returned to the Tavern in his coach." We also know that on 17 May 1816 Soane showed to the Duke of Sussex four drawings for a new Masonic Hall.³²

In fact no new chamber was built for twelve years, despite the pressing need for increased accommodation following the



FIGURE 7: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view in neo-Tudor style, June 1828 (SM 52/5/43)

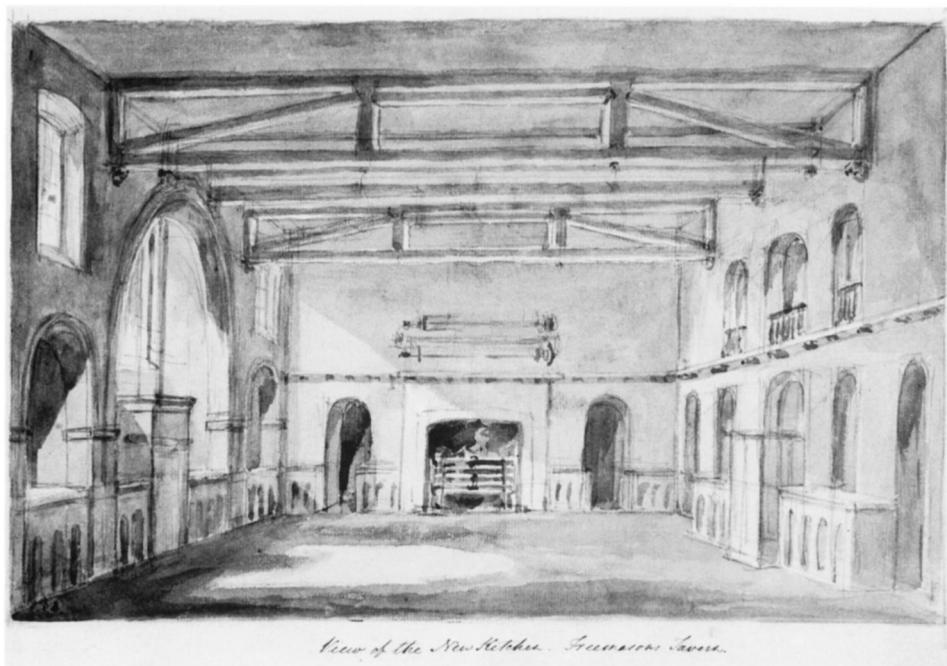
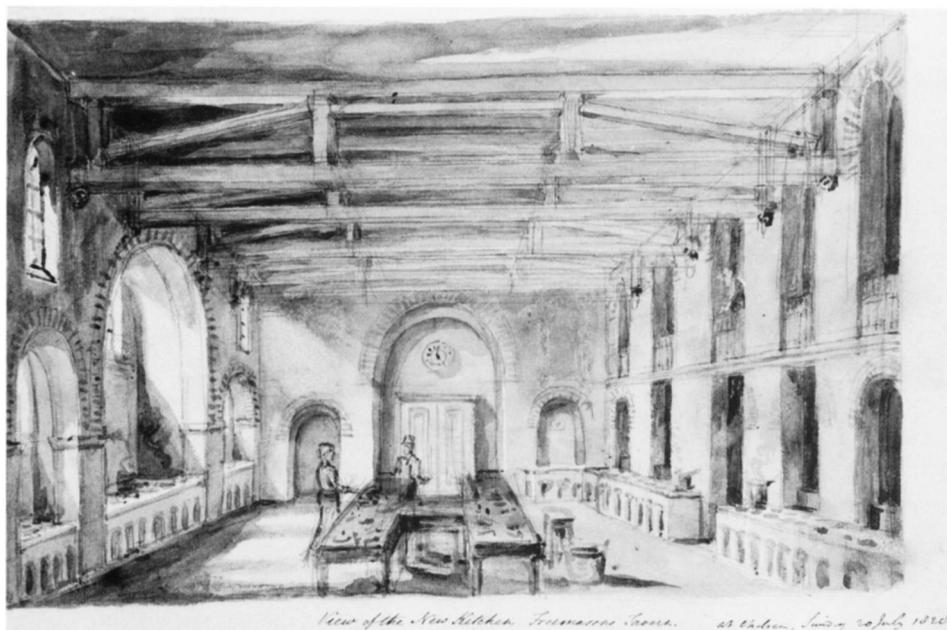


FIGURE 8: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view of kitchen, 20 July 1828 (SM 52/5/44)

FIGURE 9: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view of kitchen (SM 52/5/42)

union of the two grand lodges in 1813. Instead, Soane carried out repairs and alterations to the existing buildings in 1816. In 1821 he turned his attention to Sandby's Great Hall, taking plans to the Duke of Sussex for his approval on 19 October.³³ Soane remodeled the gallery and arcades and also moved the organ. Fifteen years earlier, he had begun his preparation for his role as professor of architecture at the Royal Academy by making copies of the six lectures which had been delivered by Sandby, his revered predecessor as professor. Soane would have felt an appropriateness in following Sandby, first by becoming a Freemason and later by making alterations to Sandby's Great Hall.

THE NEW MASONIC HALL

In 1826 Soane began to prepare further designs for the new Masonic Hall which had been envisaged as early as 1814 on the property on Great Queen Street, bought in 1815 on his recommendation. The four designs which he had made in 1816 are now lost, but we have four plans by him for the new chamber, dated 16 April and 27 May 1826 [Figure 6].³⁴ The drawings are bizarre geometrical exercises in H and T plan forms, including one for a tripartite hall, comprising three spaces of contrasting shapes: at the south, a rectangle with curved apsidal ends; a domed square in the center; and, at the north, a rectangular space with canted ends.

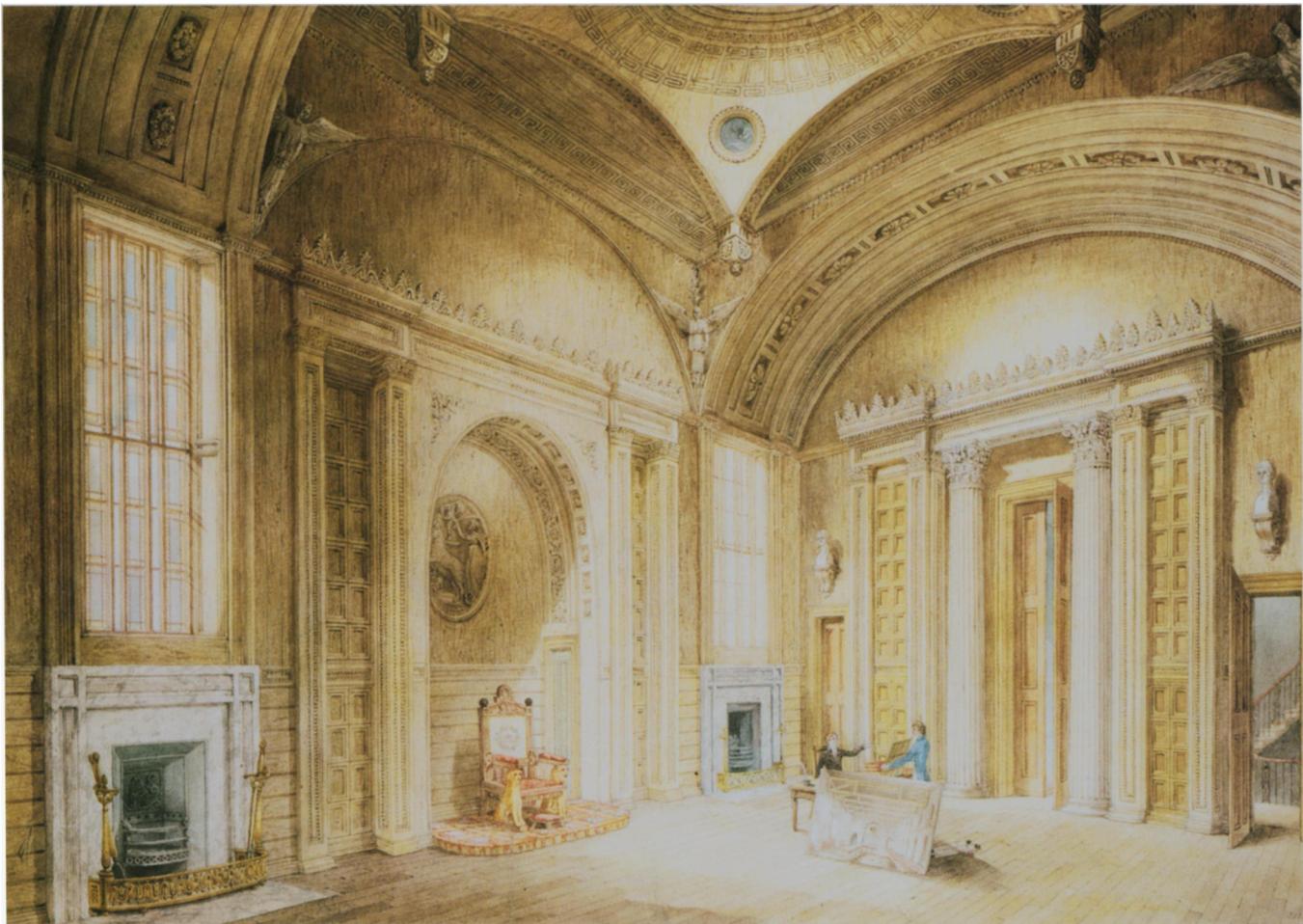


FIGURE 10: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view, with Corinthian order (V&A Soane Drawings 2821)

FIGURE 11: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view, with early ceiling design (SM 52/5/37)



Design for the New Masonic Hall.

Following a two-year delay, he drew up further plans in 1828, many of them dated from the office which he maintained at Chelsea Hospital in his capacity as Clerk of the Works. By this time the idea of a single large room, whether of tripartite or bipartite form, had been abandoned in favor of a smaller Masonic Hall with a separate room at right angles to it on the south side. The hall formed the upper part of a substantial new building with a kitchen and scullery on the ground floor and a new staircase on the west side. The hall was 45 feet by 35 feet, with a recess nearly four feet deep for an organ on the west side. The room to its south, with three south-facing windows, was 32 feet 10 inches by 17 feet 6 inches.

Soane's initial ideas for the hall are revealed in one of the most extraordinary designs of his whole career, inscribed in his hand as "Exhibited as a general idea to HRH the Duke of Sussex at Kensington Palace June 1828" [Figure 7].³⁵ It is for a neo-Tudor interior in an unmistakably Soanean manner, boasting a roof of notched timber beams surmounted by groin vaults and shallow domes, and lit with mullioned windows containing diamond-paned glass. The walls are lined with the kind of simplified linenfold paneling which featured in Soane's Law Courts at Westminster Hall of 1822–25. The room thus belongs to that late phase in his career when he seemed to be moving toward a style that was a synthesis of classical and Gothic appropriate to historic or national institutions.

The Tudor flavor was largely dropped in the executed design, which was, nonetheless, one the most personal and richly ornamented interiors of his career. The handsome new kitchen [Figures 8–9] which supported the hall had arcaded side walls of contrasting design and a timber-trussed roof, strikingly exposed, of a Palladian type first introduced to England by Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren.³⁶ Soane was familiar with Jones's use of truss construction at the Banqueting House, for he rebuilt its ceiling in 1811, incorporating iron tie rods. The drawings of Swiss timber bridges which he made for the Earl Bishop of Derry would also have been useful to him in this context. Soane chose a characteristically inward-looking way of hinting at the significance of his kitchen design, as well as its relation to that of the Masonic Hall above: this was to include a perspective view of it propped up as an exhibit in drawings by Gandy of the Masonic Hall itself.³⁷ It may not be too far-fetched to see the progression from the timber trussing of the kitchen to the hovering canopy in the hall above as representing Masonic ritual ascent from manual labor to spiritual enlightenment.

Soane's surviving drawings of 1828–29 for the Masonic Hall as executed record a familiar path in the designs of many classical architects from initial richness of ornament to comparative simplicity. Some early designs show the room articulated with the most sumptuous Corinthian order [Figure 10], instead of the Ionic eventually adopted, while others include pilasters crowded with rinceaux in a somewhat Adamesque manner. In

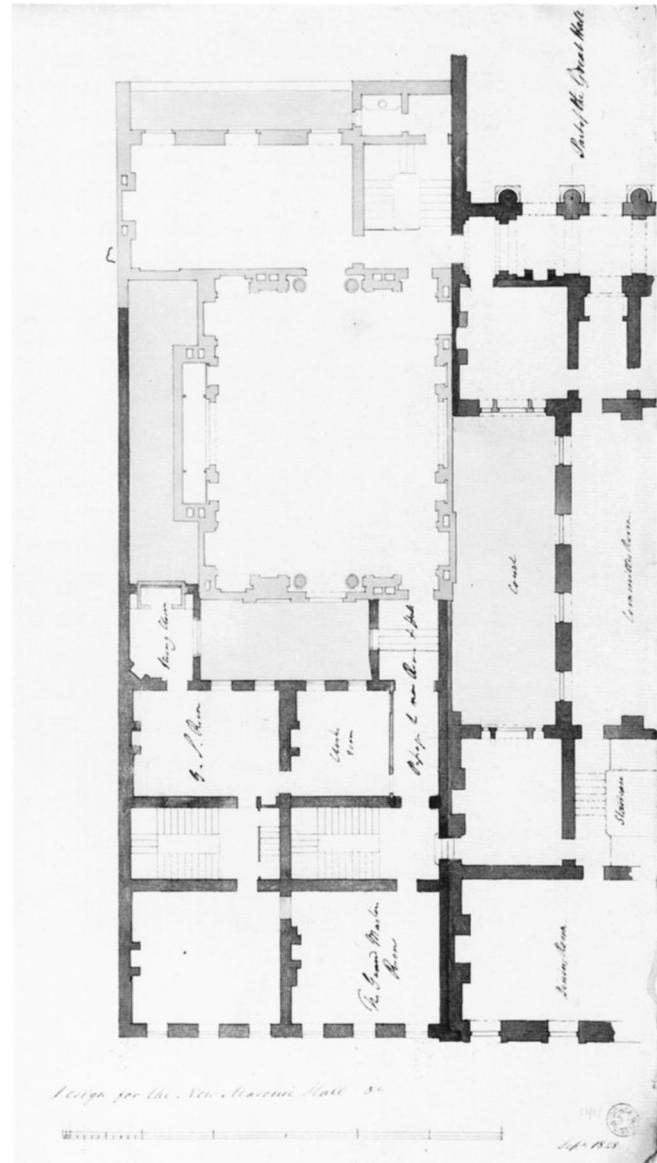


FIGURE 12: John Soane, Masonic Hall, plan, as executed (SM 52/5/5)

some, the spandrels of the central, canopied dome are pierced by circular openings, like those in the breakfast room in Sir John Soane's Museum [Figure 11]; and in others the lantern above is ringed with miniature caryatids.

What remained throughout was the basic, and highly unusual, disposition of the room [Figures 12–13]: the two long sides featured end bays containing chimneypieces, with windows oddly placed over them; the centers of the long sides were occupied by tripartite compositions, rather like triumphal arches, in which pedimented false door cases flanked arched and coffered recesses containing on the west side an organ and on the east side a ceremonial throne. The shorter north and south sides each received a similar tripartite treatment, with a throne in the center of the former, and the main entrance in the center of the latter. Additional light filtered through four segmental clerestory windows, one high up in the center of each

wall, and, more significantly, from the tall, glazed lantern which surmounted the central hanging canopy.

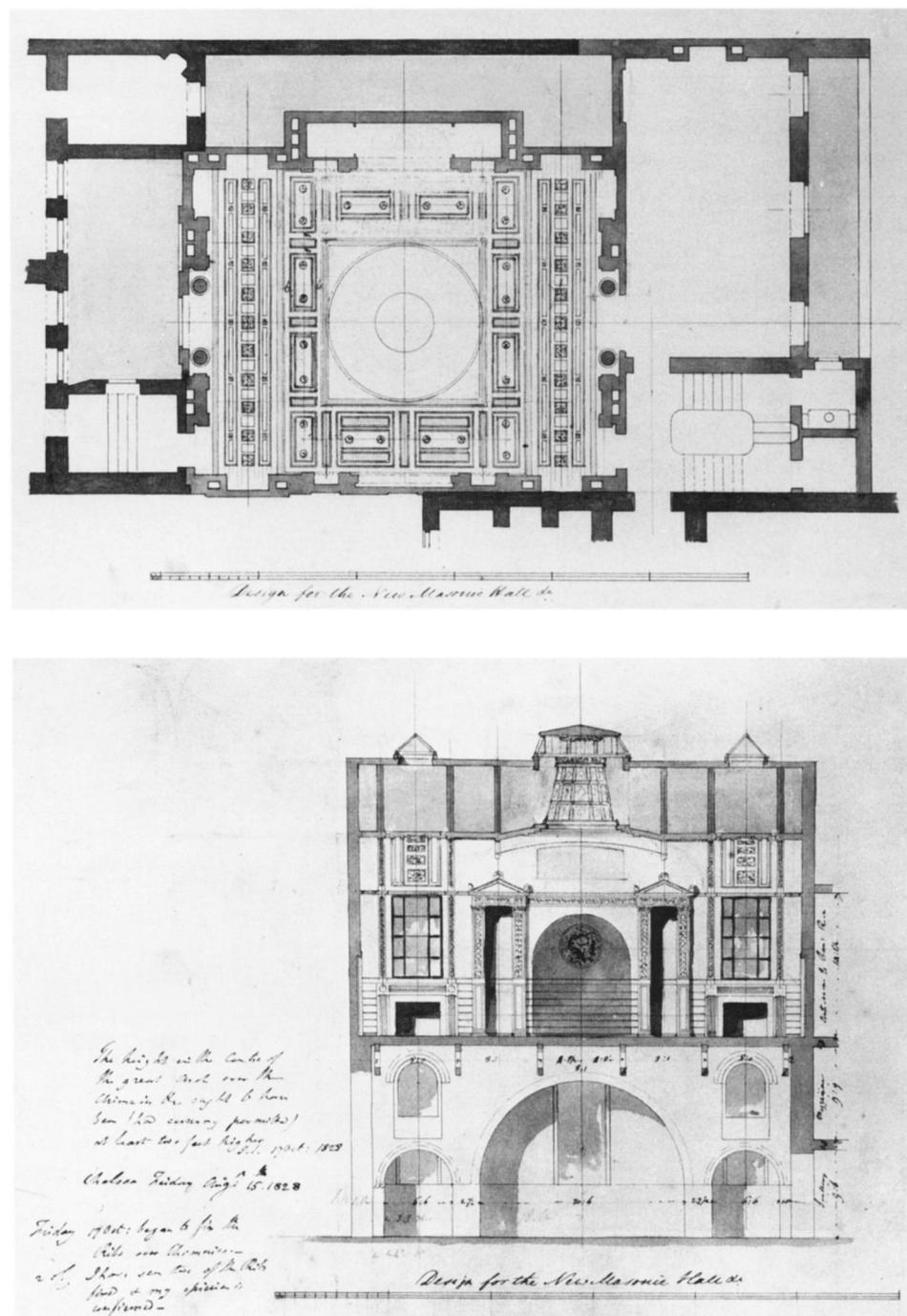
As was customary with Soane's profoundly three-dimensional interior spaces, the vaulted ceiling provided the index of the whole design. The bays containing the windows and chimneypieces were linked across the room by broad segmental arches, ornamented with coffering. Here began the uncanny feeling which permeated the room: by inserting a window immediately over a chimneypiece Soane reversed normal functional procedure, for the area devoted to the window was that customarily reserved for the flue. He further stressed the

constructional daring by resting the coffered vaults not on solid walls but on the heads of the windows, thus suggesting that solid masonry was supported on glass.

The most memorable feature of the room also challenged expectations of constructional propriety. This was the pendant dome in the form of an unsupported canopy, resembling Soane's favorite "sarcophagus lid" motif [Figure 14]. Silhouetted against the golden light filtering from the lantern above, this canopy would have hovered above the room "like a great out-spread bat's wing."³⁸ Fortunately, we can appreciate the highly unusual form of the lantern from the miniature echo of it

FIGURE 13: John Soane, Masonic Hall, plan, showing design of ceiling (SM 52/5/8)

FIGURE 14: John Soane, Masonic Hall, section, including the kitchen (SM 52/5/34)



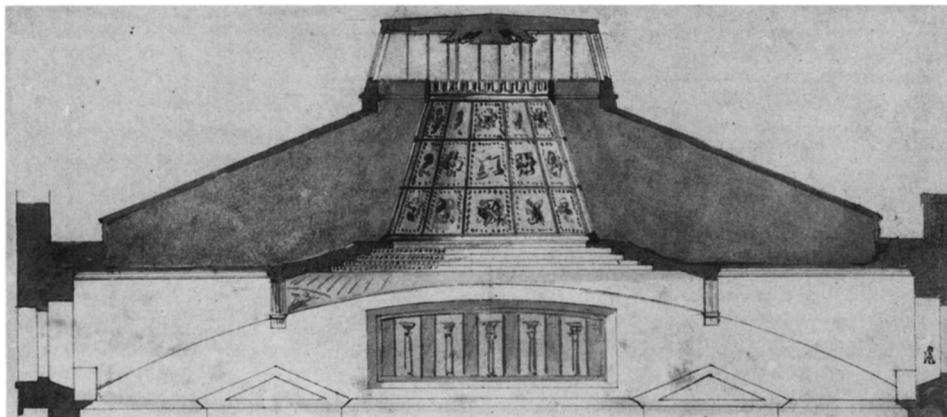


FIGURE 15: John Soane, Masonic Hall, section of lantern (V&A Soane Drawings 3307.199)

which Soane chose to reproduce in the dressing room in the Soane museum. From this we can see that, with its high, canted sides, it had a steep profile which is Gothic or Baroque in flavor, not classical.³⁹

By this time in his career, colored light was central to Soane's understanding of the effects which architecture should create. Thus the four side windows were glazed with richly colored and patterned glass, including a yellow diaper on an orange ground, while the compartments in the central lantern above the "sarcophagus lid" contained the signs of the zodiac in yellow ground glass alternating with rosettes [Figure 15]. The painted glass in the four clerestorey windows contained representations of five columns, a Masonic reference to the five orders of antiquity.⁴⁰ Columns lined up in this way were a familiar device on the craft certificates and invitation cards of eighteenth-century English lodges.⁴¹

The image of constructional daring suggested by the central pendant dome or canopy was reinforced by heavy bronze chandeliers that Soane chose to hang from its four corners, ostensibly its weakest points. We know from the bill supplied on 2 January 1830 by William Collins, Glass Enameller and Glass Manufacturer, that the chandeliers were, in fact, suspended by concealed iron rods which were covered with crimson cords and tassels.⁴² Early drawings showed a more conventional arrangement by which the chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling beams.⁴³ Collins also supplied eight "japanned back lamps for lighting the dome" at a cost of £4, further heightening the ethereal atmosphere which evidently prevailed in the room at night.

This is the eerie mood which Joseph Gandy caught in his evocative watercolor of the room, which he exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1832 under the title, *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* (see Figure 1).⁴⁴ Its mood supports the suggestion that "there is an all-pervasive religiosity about masonic sociability...[in which] we may find that 'heavenly city' offered by the secular philosophies of the eighteenth century to their worldly

and cosmopolitan followers."⁴⁵ Gandy shows us what resembles a stage scene, artificially lit and framed by a proscenium arch of curtains. Furniture is elaborately laid out but as yet unoccupied by the actors. At the far end is the ceremonial chair and pedestal for the Master of the Lodge, flanked by a chair on his left for the Immediate Past Master, and one on his right for a visiting dignitary. On the pedestal, which is a Masonic term for a small desk, the Bible, square, and compasses are placed at major ceremonies. This disposition is echoed in the foreground, where there is a ceremonial chair and pedestal for the Senior Warden, flanked by the Junior Deacon on his right and the Inner Guard on his left. Halfway down the righthand side a pedestal for the Secretary and Treasurer of the lodge, and chairs for the Senior Deacon and for the Master of Ceremonies and his ADC.⁴⁶ Beside each pedestal there is a candle stand, traditionally in the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders, representing the three lesser lights: the sun, moon, and Master of the Lodge.⁴⁷ The three greater lights are the master and the two wardens. Near the center of the room is Soane's ark. The careful attention which Soane paid to the disposition of the furnishings is shown in a surviving plan [Figure 16] and a "perspective to show the arrangement of seats &c chairs, benches, throne [Figure 17]."⁴⁸

There can be no doubt that in the Masonic Hall Soane intended to create, in classical terms, a daring and sublime Gothic aesthetic effect akin to the Tudoresque flavor of the design which he had presented to the Duke of Sussex in June 1828. The room, as executed, was a piece of speaking architecture, rich with symbolic and natural ornament as in Gothic churches. Its ornamental complexity helps explain why it took so long to complete: the foundation stone was laid in the summer of 1828 but the room was not finally completed until early in 1831. On a drawing of 10 August 1828, Soane noted, "Motives of Ceremony Determined the height, in order to have the decoration complete as to character. It must be observed the great room is very much enriched."⁴⁹ Bills from the plasterer, Thomas Palmer, for work carried out from June 1828 to March 1829, include references to classical ornament such as

"4 genii" and "Roman candelabra," but also to ornament based on English plants and trees such as thistle, shamrock, rose, and oak.⁵⁰ On one of Soane's drawings for a wall elevation, an ornamental panel is inscribed as decorated with "bundles or rods and ribbons and oak leaves & shamrock twisted around them."⁵¹

In the portrait by John Jackson of Soane in Masonic dress he is wearing a collar strikingly embroidered with wheat and acacia (see Figure 2). This painting is also of interest in showing the golden-brown coloring of the interior of the Masonic Hall: we know that the walls and vault were grained and varnished in a light oak color, while the pilasters of the door cases were painted in imitation of Siena marble. We can also see in Jackson's painting the glowing spots of color provided by the painted glass in the windows, which he shows as divided by a strong central mullion, providing a certain Tudor or seventeenth-century flavor.

In May and June 1829 Soane spent much time working out designs for the decoration of the organ case.⁵² These include a highly original wave border [Figure 18], which is probably a hermetic symbol of eternity, recalling the similar patterns which he included on the Soane Family Tomb in 1816. The organ is an important reminder of the role played by music in this

interior, in which he gave a final, moving expression to his preoccupation with colored light, music, and poetic effects. The ambition of creating a unity of the arts was one he had found expressed in that key work by his fellow Freemason, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le génie de l'architecture; ou, l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (Paris, 1780). Soane had spent much time in translating sections of this book in 1806 in preparation for his Royal Academy lectures.

Sandby's Masonic Hall echoed to the sound of music on 20 June 1835, when, rather improbably, it was the scene of a ball held in Soane's honor by his brother masons and architectural colleagues.⁵³ Soane was too frail to attend the ball, but was present at a ceremony held beforehand in 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields at which he was presented with the newly instituted Gold Medal of the Institute of British Architects. The great Masonic Hall by Sandby was gaily, if incongruously, decorated with bunting, but also with drawings and designs by Soane, together with wreathed busts on circular pedestals of architects such as Michelangelo, Palladio, Jones, Wren, Taylor, Chambers, Adam, and Wyatt. Chantrey's bust of Soane, borrowed from the Soane museum, had pride of place at the far end. Sadly, despite these tributes, Soane's own Masonic Hall was altered three years later by the addition of an apsidal end on the south side from designs by Philip Hardwick.⁵⁴ It seems that its users had increasingly felt that its position was awkward and its size inadequate.⁵⁵ As a result, in 1863 it was entirely demolished to make way for a new Masonic building by C. R. Cockerell's son, F. P. Cockerell, who should have known better.

CONCLUSION

The loss of an interior of such startling intensity was a tragedy for, as we can now see, it was probably a more complete physical expression of Masonic metaphor than anything achieved by Soane's contemporaries. For a parallel one has to return to the unexecuted designs of 1774–75 for a Masonic temple by Charles De Wailly, who, like Soane, was a master in the handling of light to create poetic and emotional effects.⁵⁶ De Wailly had been initiated to Freemasonry in Paris in 1774 in the same lodge to which Soane's hero, Le Camus de Mézières, also belonged. This was the "Respectable Loge des Coeurs Simples de l'Etoile Polaire à l'Orient de Paris," of which the architect Chalgrin and the sculptor Pajou were also members.

It is even possible to consider whether there are Masonic overtones to the intense struggle which is visible throughout Soane's mature work as he attempted to reconcile apparently contradictory elements in Greek, Gothic, Tudor, and Baroque architecture, as well as to unite the senses of sight and sound with the worlds of structure and illusion. We may, perhaps, find in these endeavors an echo of the Masonic ideal of harmonizing discordant features in the spheres of human history and society. We should recall in this connection Soane's constant enthusi-

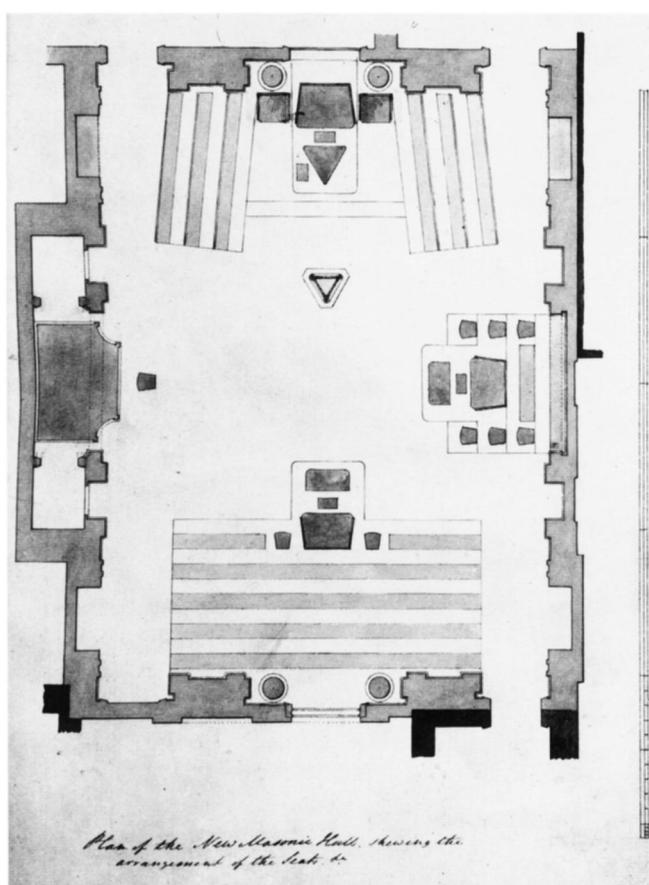


FIGURE 16: John Soane, Masonic Hall, plan to show arrangement of furniture (SM 52/5/35)



View of the New Masonic Hall showing the arrangement of the Seats &c. 27. Jan 1829.

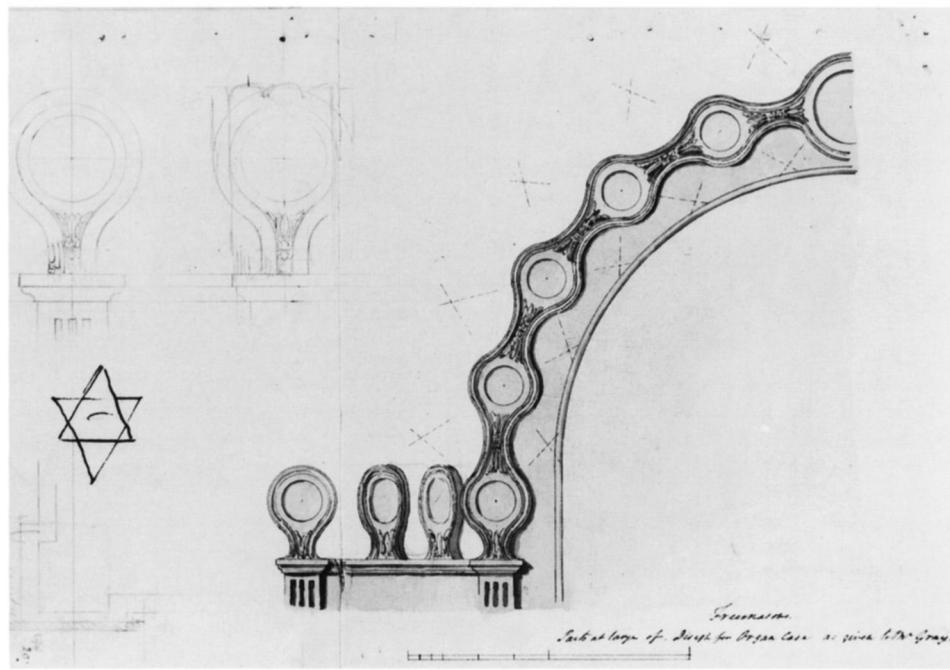


FIGURE 17: John Soane, Masonic Hall, perspective view showing arrangement of furniture, 27 January 1829 (SM 52/5/36). FIGURE 18: John Soane, Masonic Hall, design for wave border on organ case, May 1829 (SM 52/4/20)

asm for the writings of Rousseau, particularly the *Confessions*, with their “emphasis on the heart as the key to human progress [which] appealed to the masonic love of ceremony and fraternal affection.”⁵⁷ At the same time, we must remember that Soane was not initiated as a Freemason until 1813, when he was

already sixty. Yet it is perfectly possible that his solitary, questing mind and his intensive course of reading had already brought him to occupy a position which echoed that of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as expressed in the ideals of continental Freemasonry.

Notes

I am much indebted for help in writing this paper to J. M. Hamill, Librarian and Curator, United Grand Lodge of England; Margaret Richardson, Curator, Sir John Soane's Museum; and Susan Palmer, Archivist, Sir John Soane's Museum.

¹ The first architectural historians to consider the links between architecture and Freemasonry in the age of the Enlightenment were Joseph Rykwert in *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980) and Anthony Vidler in *The Writing of the Walls* (Princeton, 1987). For some basic facts on Soane as a Freemason, see John E. Taylor, "Sir John Soane: Architect and Freemason," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 95 (1983): 194–202.

² Painted in 1828 by John Jackson, R.A., and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1830, this hangs in the picture room at Sir John Soane's Museum. The fact that Dorothy Stroud made no mention of it in her biography, *Sir John Soane Architect* (London, 1984) is characteristic of a general reluctance to address the question of the significance of Freemasonry to Soane.

³ For a full account of the reading which Soane undertook in preparation for his lectures, see my forthcoming book, *Sir John Soane: Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁴ For a suggestive interpretation of this museum, see Vidler, *Writing*, 169–73.

⁵ These parallels were first noted by Stephen Bann, "Views of the Past": Reflections on the Treatment of Historical Objects and Museums of History (1750–1850)," in *Picturing Power: Visual Depictions and Social Relations*, ed. Gordon Fyfe and John Law (London, 1989), 39–64.

⁶ James Stevens Curl, *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry: An Introductory Study* (London, 1991), 118.

⁷ See Helen Dorey, "Sir John Soane's Acquisition of the Sarcophagus of Seti I," *Georgian Group Journal* (1991): 26–35. Belzoni had conceived the fantasy that the Tomb of Seti I was not a tomb but a Masonic temple, in which Seti was wearing a triangular Masonic apron, and the scenes on the walls depicted initiation ceremonies. See Stanley Herbert Mayes, *The Great Belzoni* (London, 1959), 295, and John A. Weiss, *The Obelisk and Freemasonry according to the Discoveries of Belzoni and Commander Gorringe* (New York, 1880). This interpretation was kept alive by Belzoni's wife, Sarah, who presented a manuscript, "Egyptian Royal Masonic regalia," to the United Grand Lodge of England.

⁸ Sir John Soane's Museum (hereafter SM) Archives, Private Correspondence I.C.8.1.

⁹ However, Mayes, *Belzoni*, 318, n. 9, was wrong to claim that Belzoni had joined the Grand Lodge in 1821. See Frederic Seal-Coon, "Giovanni Belzoni: An Extraordinary and Mysterious Freemason," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 98 (1985): 1–12.

¹⁰ There is no serious study of the intellectual and political positions of the Duke of Sussex, but for basic biographical information see Mollie Gillen, *Royal Duke: Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex (1773–1843)* (London, 1976).

¹¹ See P. R. James, "The Grand-Mastership of H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex, 1813–43," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 75 (1962): 37–45. It was during the grand mastership of the Duke of Sussex that Christian forms of ritual and ceremony were finally removed from the ceremonies of his lodge.

¹² For example, he took a close interest in the reforming work of the General Cemetery Company and, most unusually for a member of the royal family, was buried at their new cemetery at Kensal Green, where the Anglican chapel of 1836–37, by J. W. Griffith, is markedly Soanean in character. See J. F. Ashby, "Death and the Freemason," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (forthcoming).

¹³ The Duke of Sussex was a dissident to the bill calling for Napoleon's detention (Ashby, "Death," 186).

¹⁴ See *Bibliotheca Sussexiana. A descriptive catalogue . . . of the manuscripts and printed books . . . in the library of H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex*, 2 vols. (London, 1827–39). This was compiled by the duke's librarian, Dr. Thomas Pettigrew, a scholar and Freemason. Following the duke's death in 1843, his library was sold in 1844–45.

¹⁵ See *Bibliotheca Sussexiana*, sale catalogue, Messrs. Evans, Pall Mall (London, 1844–45), 124 and 130.

¹⁶ On 29 January 1832, he wrote a Masonic letter to Soane, ending, "I sign myself, My dear old friend, Your affectionate brother and friend" (A. T. Bolton, *The Portrait of Sir John Soane, R.A.* (London, n.d.), 85. The political position of Soane, a friend of the great conservative statesman William Pitt the Younger, was, as far as we can see, a conservative one, despite the radical Whig leanings of other friends such as the Duke of Sussex and James Perry. More work needs to

be done on the role of Masonic lodges in the political and social life of London during and after the Napoleonic Wars.

¹⁷ See D. W. Burford, "The Ark of the Masonic Covenant," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 105 (1992): 203–16.

¹⁸ See Alexander Stewart Frere, ed., *Grand Lodge, 1717–1967* (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁹ See James Wilfrid Stubbs, "Great Queen Street: Freemasons' Hall and Its Environs," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 82 (1969): 1–19.

²⁰ Luke Herrmann, *Paul and Thomas Sandby* (London, 1986), 74.

²¹ The best account of the building is still that in J. Britton and A. C. Pugin, *The Public Buildings of London*, 1 (London, 1825), 321–33. See also *Survey of London*, 5 (London, 1914), 59–65.

²² Sandby's Great Hall was the center of a major fire in 1883, but it was immediately restored, with the exception of the gallery. It was finally demolished, with reluctance, in 1931.

²³ SM Journal no. 6.

²⁴ A variant design was surmounted with a caducifer. There are designs for a simpler ark, dated January 1815 (SM Drawer 52, set 4, nos. 3–7).

²⁵ In the collection of the United Grand Lodge of England, Freemasons' Hall, London.

²⁶ Soane paid Martyr £53.20 for the ark (SM Journal no. 6, 14 January 1817).

²⁷ Exodus 25:10–16.

²⁸ See Alan Windsor, "The Simeon Monument in Reading by Sir John Soane," in *English Architecture Public and Private: Essays for Kerry Downes*, ed. John Bold and Edward Chaney (London and Rio Grande, 1993), 271–82.

²⁹ See John Wilton-Ely, "The Architectural Models of Sir John Soane: A Catalogue," *Architectural History* 12 (1969): 28–29 and fig. 21d (not 18c; the plates are wrongly numbered).

³⁰ SM Drawer 52, set 4, no. 8. Paper watermarked 1809.

³¹ Minutes of Grand Assembly, 27 December 1813, quoted from Taylor, "Soane" (see n. 1), 197.

³² SM Journal no. 6, 17 May 1816.

³³ SM Journal no. 6.

³⁴ SM Drawer 51, set 1, nos. 24–26 and 29.

³⁵ SM Drawer 52, set 5, no. 43.

³⁶ David Yeomans, *The Trussed Roof: Its History and Development* (Aldershot, 1992), 173–74.

³⁷ For example, Victoria and Albert Museum, Soane Drawings, no. 2821, and the perspective view by Gandy in the picture room, Sir John Soane's Museum.

³⁸ Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *Catalogues of Architectural Drawings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Sir John Soane* (London, 1985), 84. The United Grand Lodge of England has recently acquired a drawing from Soane's office, dated 2 December 1828, showing his Masonic Hall in section, with the lantern. I am grateful to J. M. Hamill for showing it to me.

³⁹ In the bill for the lantern in the Masonic Hall, submitted by the firm of J. & G. Martyr, carpenters and joiners, it is described as "1 2" conical light horizontal corbels glued in thicknesses vertical divisions diminished ribbed and molded for stained glass upper diameter 4'10" lower ditto 7'8" & 5'8" high in 36 compartments put together in 4 divisions with joint screws rails glued and screwed in thicknesses £18.5" (SM Bill Book K).

⁴⁰ See H. Kent Atkins, "The Five Noble Orders of Architecture," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 82 (1969): 35–50, where the role of William Preston (1742–1818) in the introduction of the five orders into the Masonic system is discussed.

⁴¹ See T. O. Haunch, "English Craft Certificates," *ibid.*, 169–253.

⁴² SM Bill Book K. The cost of the four chandeliers was £84.

⁴³ SM Drawer 52, set 5, no. 38.

⁴⁴ For a suggestive account of this view, see Brian Lukacher, "Joseph Michael Gandy: The Poetical Representation and Mythography of Architecture," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1987 (Ann Arbor, 1993), 149–51.

⁴⁵ Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-century Europe* (Oxford, 1991), 22.

⁴⁶ For a brief reference to Soane's Masonic furniture, see Clare Graham, *Ceremonial and Commemorative Chairs in Great Britain*, Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1994).

⁴⁷ Gandy has shown the candle stand in the foreground on the wrong side of the pedestal. It should be on the right.

⁴⁸ Dated January 1829 (SM Drawer 52, set 5, no. 36).

⁴⁹ Victoria and Albert Museum, Soane Drawings, no. 3307.203.

⁵⁰ SM Bill Book K.

⁵¹ SM Drawer 52, set 5, no. 25.

⁵² SM Drawer 52, set 4, nos. 14 and 17.

⁵³ A drawing by John Goldicutt shows Sandby's Masonic Hall as decorated for this occasion (Victoria and Albert Museum, 3307.240). Pierre du Prey states incorrectly that the drawing shows Soane's Masonic Hall (du Prey, *Catalogues* [see n. 38], 112).

⁵⁴ See *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal* 1 (1837–38): 204.

⁵⁵ Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Sandby's Great Hall was used not only for Masonic gatherings but for a variety of social purposes.

⁵⁶ For De Wailly's designs for the "intérieur du temple maçonnique," see *Charles de Wailly: peintre architecte dans l'europe des lumières*, exhibition catalogue,

Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites (Paris, 1979), nos.

61–62.

⁵⁷ Jacob, *Enlightenment* (see n. 45), 155.

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Figure 3. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHME Crown Copyright)

Figure 10, 15. By Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London