



SOANE'S ARK
BUILDING WITH SYMBOLS

AT
SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM
LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, LONDON

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN
FACTUM FOUNDATION
THE LIBRARY AND MUSEUM OF FREEMASONRY
AND **SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM**

INCORPORATING
A RECONSTRUCTION OF
THE ARK OF THE MASONIC COVENANT
MADE BY HOUGHTONS OF YORK

SUPPORTED BY
UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND
AND **FACTUM FOUNDATION**

11TH OCTOBER 2017 - 21ST JANUARY 2018

SIR JOHN
SOANE'S
MUSEUM
LONDON



FACTUM
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FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
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SIR JOHN
SOANE'S
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**THE LIBRARY
AND MUSEUM
OF FREEMASONRY**



Houghtons of York



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INTRODUCTION

On the 3rd May 1883, a fire broke out at the Masonic Hall in Great Queen Street that destroyed the last evidence of Sir John Soane's built work for the Freemasons: the Ark of the Masonic Covenant. The Ark was a piece of ritual furniture designed by Soane shortly after his initiation, the purpose of which was to hold the document concluding the union of the 'Antient' and 'Modern' Grand Lodges, two rival organisations of Freemasonry that had emerged in the course of the eighteenth century. The ceremony that took place on the 27th of December 1813 was Soane's responsibility as the first Grand Superintendent of Works and saw the installation of Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, as Grand Master of a new United Grand Lodge of England.

This exhibition consists of a reconstruction of Soane's lost Ark, based on the evidence of a handful of extant designs and other paintings and drawings in which it was depicted, as well as a selection of Soane's Masonic books and artworks aimed at reconstructing the network of meaning in which the Ark existed. The exhibition was inspired by the research of David Watkin and James Stevens Curl on the subject of Soane, Architecture and Freemasonry and follows on from Factum Foundation's 2014 exhibition at the Soane Museum 'Diverse Maniere: Piranesi, Fantasy and Excess', which translated a number of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's furniture designs into three-dimensional objects through rapid prototyping techniques and traditional craft skills.

This publication brings together three texts: 'Soane's Ark: Reconstructing its Meaning and Form', in which I will contextualise the Ark within an interpretation of the symbolic language of Freemasonry and explore some of the issues involved in bringing the lost object 'back to life'; 'The Ark of the Masonic Covenant', the republication of an article by Douglas Burford (like Soane a former Grand Superintendent of Works at the United Grand Lodge of England) that recounts the place of the Ark in Masonic history; and Dr James Campbell's 'Sir John Soane and the Freemasons: The New Temple and the Lost Ark' that will place the Ark in the broader picture of Soane's work for the Freemasons.

Factum Foundation would like to thank a number of people instrumental in the production of the exhibition: Diane Clements and Martin Cherry at the Library and Museum of Freemasonry, Roger and Susan Silk, Peter Cole, Andrew Thompson, Andrew Martindale, Helen Staples, Toni Beverley, Russel Swift and Mortimer Cartridge at Houghtons of York and Bruce Boucher, Helen Dorey, Jo Tinworth, Owen Hopkins, Sue Palmer, Frances Sands, John Bridges and Lorraine Bryant at Sir John Soane's Museum. Thanks also to Dick Reid and Richard Salmon for their advice at the early stages of reconstructing the Ark, to Douglas Burford and James Campbell for their guidance on the exhibition and for their contributions to the publication and to Blanca Nieto for its design. My particular thanks goes to Adam Lowe, for supporting the exhibition and publication and providing an extremely inspiring place to work.

The reconstruction of the Ark was carried out by Houghtons of York and generously supported by the United Grand Lodge of England in celebration of the tercentenary of the establishment of Freemasonry in 1717.

Ferdinand Saumarez Smith

SOANE'S ARK

FERDINAND SAUMAREZ SMITH

Reconstructing its meaning

Sir John Soane's Ark of the Masonic Covenant must first be understood in reference to the rich body of symbolism that constitutes the core of Masonic teaching. Employing a mixture of architectural, cosmic and Old Testament biblical imagery, Freemasonry expresses the moral development of the initiate through a series of rituals. In the language of these rituals, architectural elements and the tools of construction are invested with symbolic meanings that are organised around the idea of the building of a temple. In Masonic literature this is described as a structure 'not made with hands', and corresponds to the building of the moral self. Within this context, the initiate is symbolically 'shaped' from the rough 'ashlar' (an uncarved block of stone) into a perfected component that takes its place within the lodge, also conceived in the form of a temple, though in this case representing an idealised form of society organised on the principles of equality, tolerance and brotherhood. The rituals, traditionally consisting of three levels or 'degrees', mimic the apprenticeship of the stonemason, with the third degree conferring the status of Master Mason.

The symbol of the temple's significance in reference to cosmic and Biblical imagery comes in the former case through the image of nature as a temple built by God, in Masonic language this is expressed through the phrase 'the Great Architect of the Universe' and is reflected in the layout of the lodge. In the latter, the idea of a 'temple' of the self is expressed in the form of the Temple of Solomon: the only building extensively described in the Bible, whose reconstruction from the book of Ezekiel was seen as the herald of the millennium – in Masonic terms construed as a world of universal brotherhood. The ritual of the third degree is based around a mythical adaptation of the story of its construction, in which the initiate plays the role of the principal architect, Hiram Abiff, who is murdered and then resurrected. This was a feature that many eighteenth-century Masons saw as connecting their institution to the Mystery Religions of Antiquity and as variously representing the transformation of the initiate, the idea of a future state and the union with God.

From this perspective, Freemasonry's teachings can be seen as inherently private in so far as they have their reality in the transformative effect on the individual's life. There are then, in this sense, as many forms of Freemasonry as there are individual engagements with the meaning of the symbols. However, it is important to stress that although it is the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of Freemasonry that give it its characteristic language, it was and is a large institution, the success of which is based on its widespread appeal and whose members then as now are as likely to be attracted to its social or charitable aspects as to those outlined above.

Therefore, we can measure individual Masons – amongst whom many of the eighteenth-century's greatest minds number – against this presentation of the intellectual core of Freemasonry, without necessarily assuming that all have the same form of commitment to those ideas. Its symbolic character explains both the unity of the movement and the diversity, in that the symbolism is a centre from which a variety of interpretations branch



Plate 2: The frontispiece to Alexandre Lenoir's 'La Franche-maçonnerie rendue à sa véritable origine', one of the Masonic books in Soane's collection. The syncretistic religious imagery is reminiscent of J. M. Gandy's watercolour. 'Comparative Architecture Continued, an Emblematic Sketch' (1837).

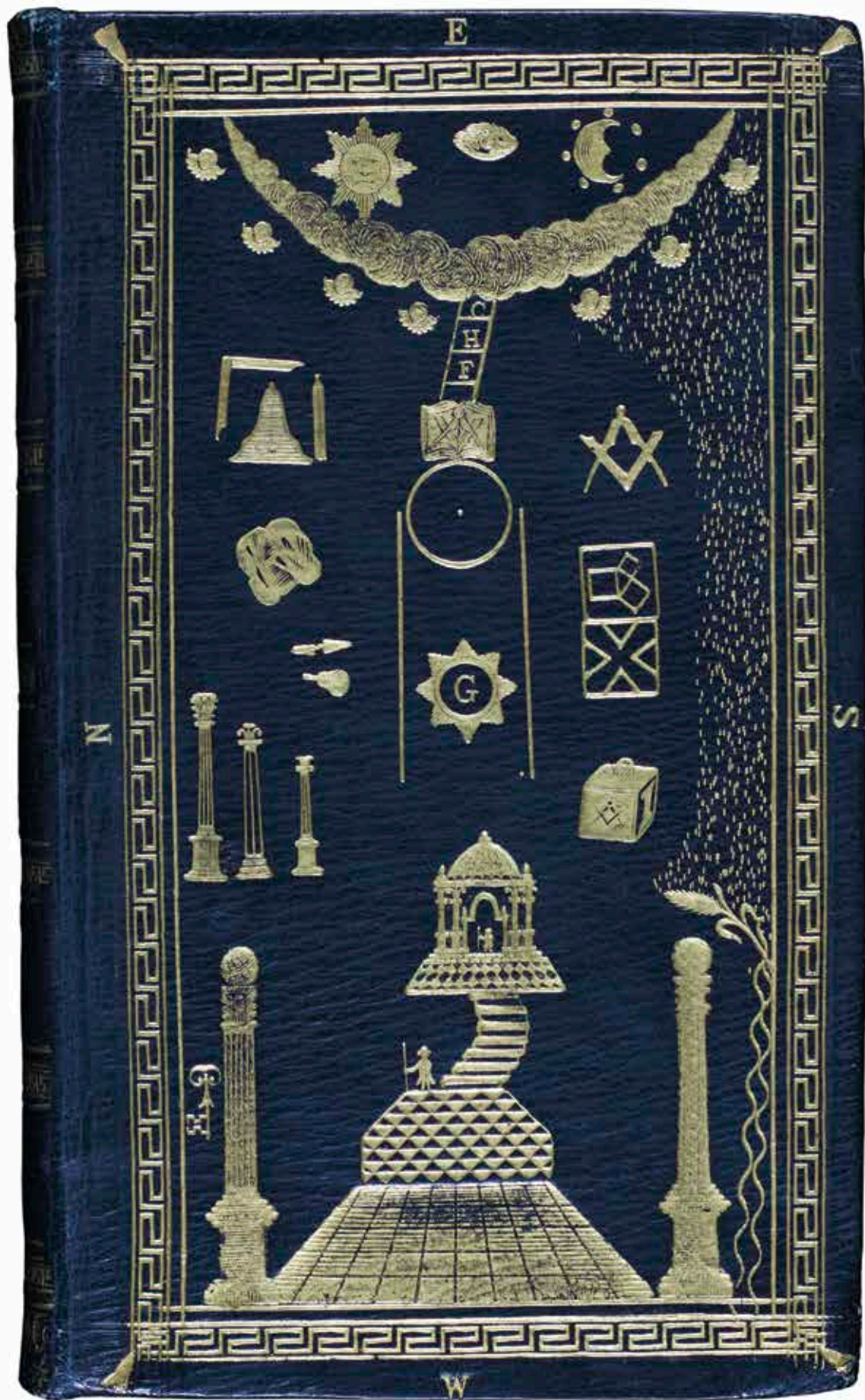


Plate 3: The binding of William Preston's 'Illustrations of Masonry' is by John Lovejoy. This is an edition that is thought to have been commissioned in anticipation of the foundation of the United Grand Lodge.



Plate 4: J. M. Gandy's 'Comparative Architecture Continued, an Emblematic Sketch' (1837) was conceived as a visual accompaniment to his unpublished treatise of universal history 'The Art, Philosophy, and Science of Architecture'.

off. The utopian ideals of Freemasonry, to remodel man and society, were shared by all Masons, but the means by which to achieve this end, inevitably, varied from country to country, lodge to lodge and, no doubt, individual to individual.

If many of these themes - the moralist's science of man, the natural theologian's attempt to find the handiwork of God in nature and the antiquarian's interest in the religious forms of antiquity - are recognisable from the eighteenth century more broadly, that is because eighteenth-century Freemasonry absorbed and codified the intellectual currents of the period. It shaped and was shaped by the Enlightenment. Having emerged in the seventeenth century, a time beset by sectarian conflict, Freemasonry held the promise of a universal (insofar as philosophical truths must be universally recognisable through the faculty of reason) 'religion' for the eighteenth.

This interplay of ideas is expressed beautifully within Soane's collaborator J. M. Gandy's series of watercolours 'Comparative Characteristics of Thirteen Selected Styles of Architecture' (1836), 'Comparative Architecture Continued, an Emblematic Sketch' (1837: plate 4) and 'Architecture; Its Natural Model' (1838), the former two of which are displayed in the exhibition and are on the cover of this publication. 'Comparative... Architecture' can be thought of in connection with James Anderson's *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (1723), the first 'official' publication of Freemasonry that tells of the legendary history of the order as intertwined with the history of architecture. Gandy's 'Comparative Architecture... an Emblematic Sketch' exhibits a very similar visual language to Alexandre Lenoir's *La franche-maçonnerie rendue à sa véritable origine* (Soane's edition, 1814: plate 2). Both Masonic books, Anderson's and Lenoir's, are held in Soane's library and displayed in the exhibition. William Preston's richly bound *Illustrations of Masonry* (Soane's edition, 1812: plate 3) and Laurence Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon* (Soane's edition, 1778) are further books from Soane's collection, displayed as representative literature from both the eighteenth-century English Grand Lodges.

Reconstructing its form



Plates 5 & 6: The Soane family mausoleum in St Pancras Gardens, featuring an 'ouroboros' motif encircling the finial.

Furthermore, in its distinctive layout of symbols the binding of *Illustrations* offers another visual point of comparison to the stepped pyramid and the sun with the signs of the zodiac in Gandy's 'Comparative Architecture... an Emblematic Sketch'. The latter emblem can also be thought of in connection to the lantern in Soane's New Masonic Hall, which was likewise decorated with the signs of the zodiac. The model of this lantern can be found embedded in the ceiling of Soane's Dressing Room.

In light of this discussion, the character of Soane's personal attitude towards the institution of Freemasonry is a question that will be left open. However, it is the argument of the exhibition that the above understanding of Masonic symbolism provides a valuable art historical tool with which to understand the iconography of Soane's direct work for the Freemasons as well as other artworks and books in his collection that display characteristically Masonic themes.

The exhibition's contemporary reconstruction of Soane's Ark of the Masonic Covenant can be seen as entering into dialogue with a distinctive eighteenth-century pursuit: the imagining of the great lost structure of the Old Testament, the Temple of Solomon. As has been discussed, this was a particular concern amongst Freemasons. However, it was also an endeavour with importance in the field of architecture, in which Solomon's Temple represented the lost archetype of the perfect building from which all subsequent structures could be seen either as a lesser derivation or an attempted emulation. Soane himself comments on this in the context of his Royal Academy lectures, regretting its absence as a model for architectural study but concluding that attempts at imagining its form were 'flights of fancy, the off-spring of heated imagination'.

The Temple of Solomon was also a recreation of a prior form, being a permanent structure that modelled itself on the mobile predecessor of the Tabernacle, but that fulfilled the same role of housing the Ark of the Covenant. The biblical Ark was the container that preserved the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, the design of which was also given directly by God. In light of this, each of these examples can be understood symbolically as lost containers of knowledge, the imagination of the form of which represents the attempt of recovery. This antiquarian context informed the Masonic ideas of the period, where looking towards the reconstruction of the biblical temple took on the meaning of striving for perfected moral knowledge.

The design of the Ark of the Masonic Covenant displays both a number of identifiable hallmarks of Soane's style and a familiarity with the symbolic language of Freemasonry. The mahogany Ark was organised on a triangular plan with the three classical orders of columns at the apex of each point, the Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, representative in Masonic symbolism of wisdom, strength of purpose and beauty. When viewed from the front elevation, the different classical orders flanking the doorway referenced the columns Jachin and Boaz that guarded the entrance to the Temple of Solomon. Placed on a three-stepped base, referring to the three degrees of Masonic initiation, the columns held up an entablature and dome, which in turn was surmounted by a lantern.

In some of the designs, this included a fanciful flame emerging from the top, though the reality of the lantern can be more accurately seen in the background of John Jackson's 1828-29 portrait of Soane in Masonic regalia, displayed in the Picture Room in Soane's Museum. The general plan of the Ark, of a pillared and domed container, is reminiscent of another of Soane's designs, his own family mausoleum in St. Pancras Gardens (plate 5) designed initially to commemorate his wife Eliza's death in November 1816. This consists of a square-based dome resting on four pillars topped by a pinecone finial around which is curled an ouroboros, a snake devouring its own tail (plate 6). This feature links to another of the preparatory designs for the Ark of the Masonic Covenant, which is crowned with a caduceus motif (intertwined snakes around the staff of Hermes); symbols which take on significance within the Masonic context of the third degree's ritual of death and resurrection (plate 7).

The variety of the documentary evidence, in some cases misleading or conflicting, posed a number of problems within the process of attempting to create the most accurate possible reconstruction of the Ark. The final decision as to which of the designs to base the reconstruction on was informed by the realisation that the most finished pen and watercolour depiction of the Ark (SM 14/4/6, plate 16), produced by George Allen

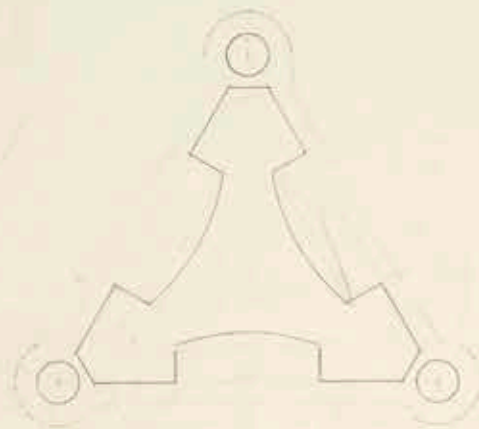
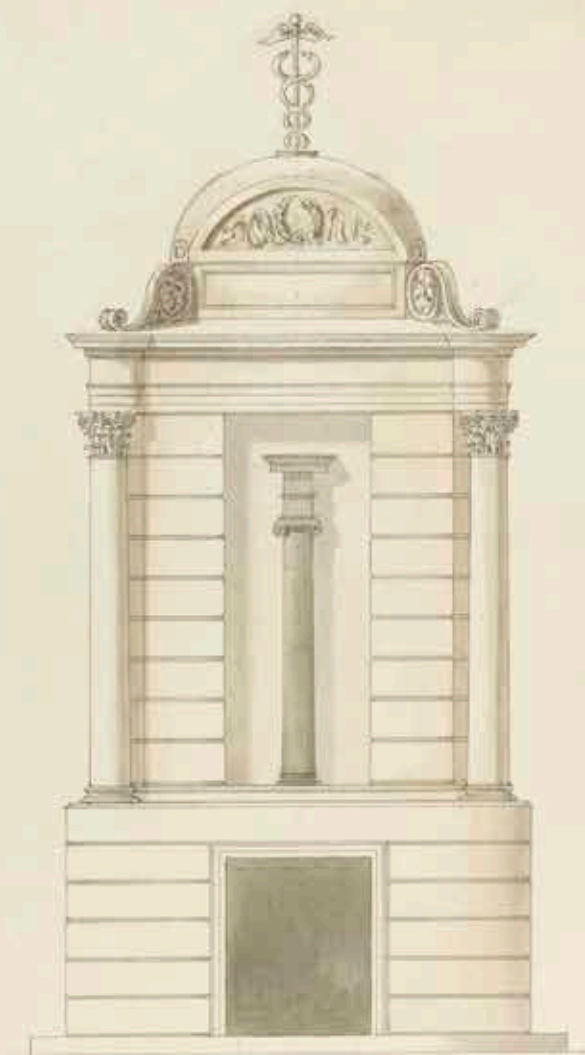


Plate 7: (SM 52/4/6) A preparatory design for the Ark of the Masonic Covenant featuring a single Ionic column in one of the recesses beneath the entablature and with a dome surmounted by a Caduceus motif.

Design for Masonic Ark. — 1813



Plate 8: The frontispiece to the 1819 edition of James Anderson's 'Constitutions of the Free-Masons', showing the Ark being looked upon by a bust of the Duke of Sussex.

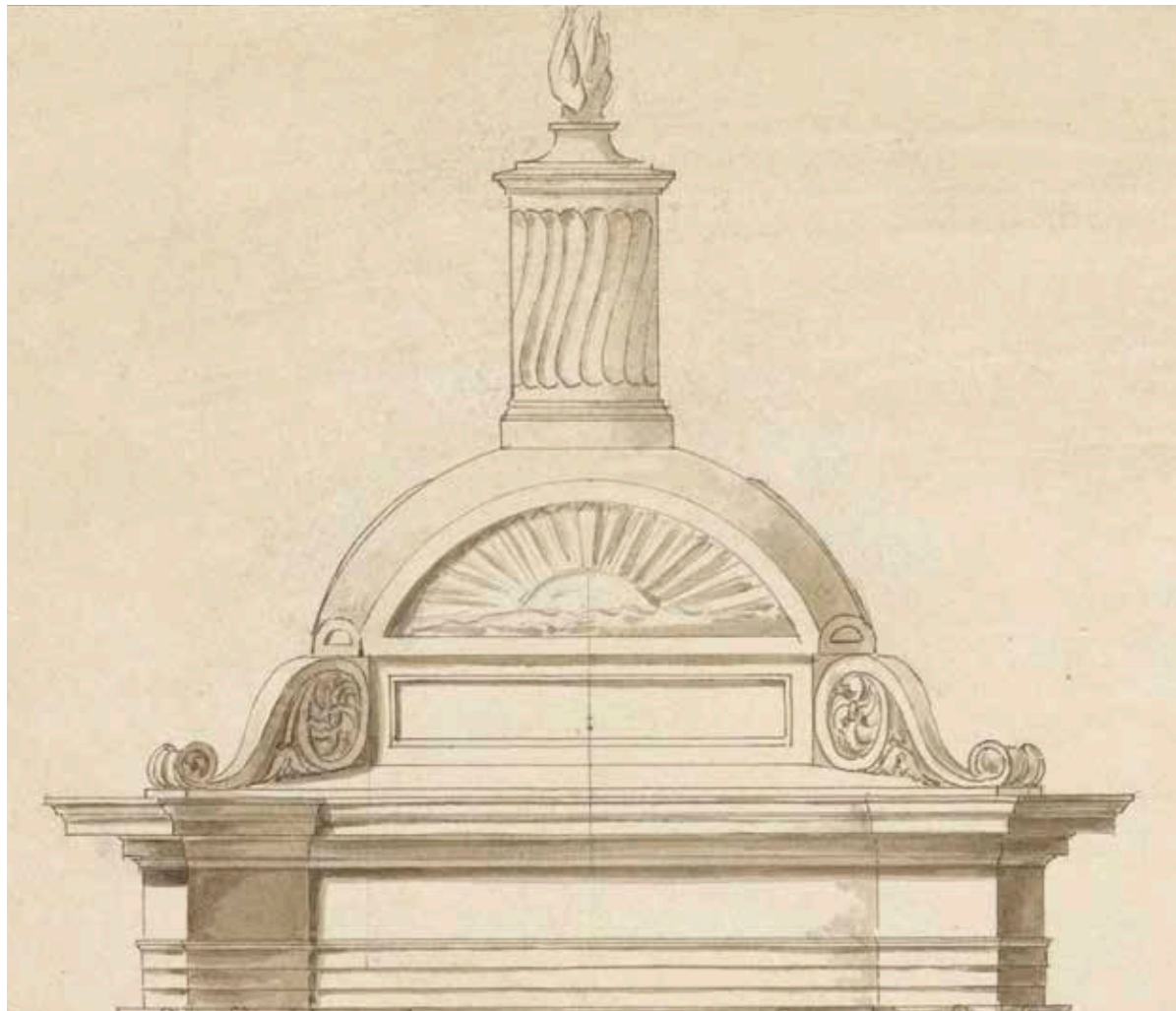


Plate 9: (SM 52/4/3) An early design of the Ark of the Masonic Covenant featuring the striking 'all seeing eye' motif in the recess of the dome.

Underwood following the completion of the Ark as an image for use in Soane's Royal Academy lectures, had an exactly one foot distance between the columns corresponding to the two feet distance given within the aerial view of the base in two of the earlier plans (SM 52/4/3 & SM 52/4/4). Therefore, there was a strong likelihood that it was made as a half-size scale drawing, as would befit its function in an educational context. Furthermore, in two of the nineteenth-century images that the Ark appears in (plates 17 & 19), the horizontal panels of the Ark number twelve, which provides further confirmation; although these images raise problems of their own as the fluting of the columns in Underwood's watercolour appears to be absent. Further questions are raised by depictions such as the frontispiece to the 1819 edition of the *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (plate 8) and J. M. Gandy's 'Interior of the New Masonic Hall' (plate 10), which appear to show a much smaller Ark, without the two-tiered base and mounted on a table. Interestingly, the motif of the 'all seeing eye' that appears on the dome in SM 52/4/3 (plate 9) and SM 52/4/4 reappears in the frontispiece, which would seem to suggest that this detail had been included. This feature was eventually rejected from the reconstruction of the Ark, as the absence of a detailed enough drawing from which to work would have required a considerable amount of invention.

On balance, Underwood's watercolour seemed to provide the most reliable guide to the proportions for the reconstruction, with the absent elevation of the Doric column filled in



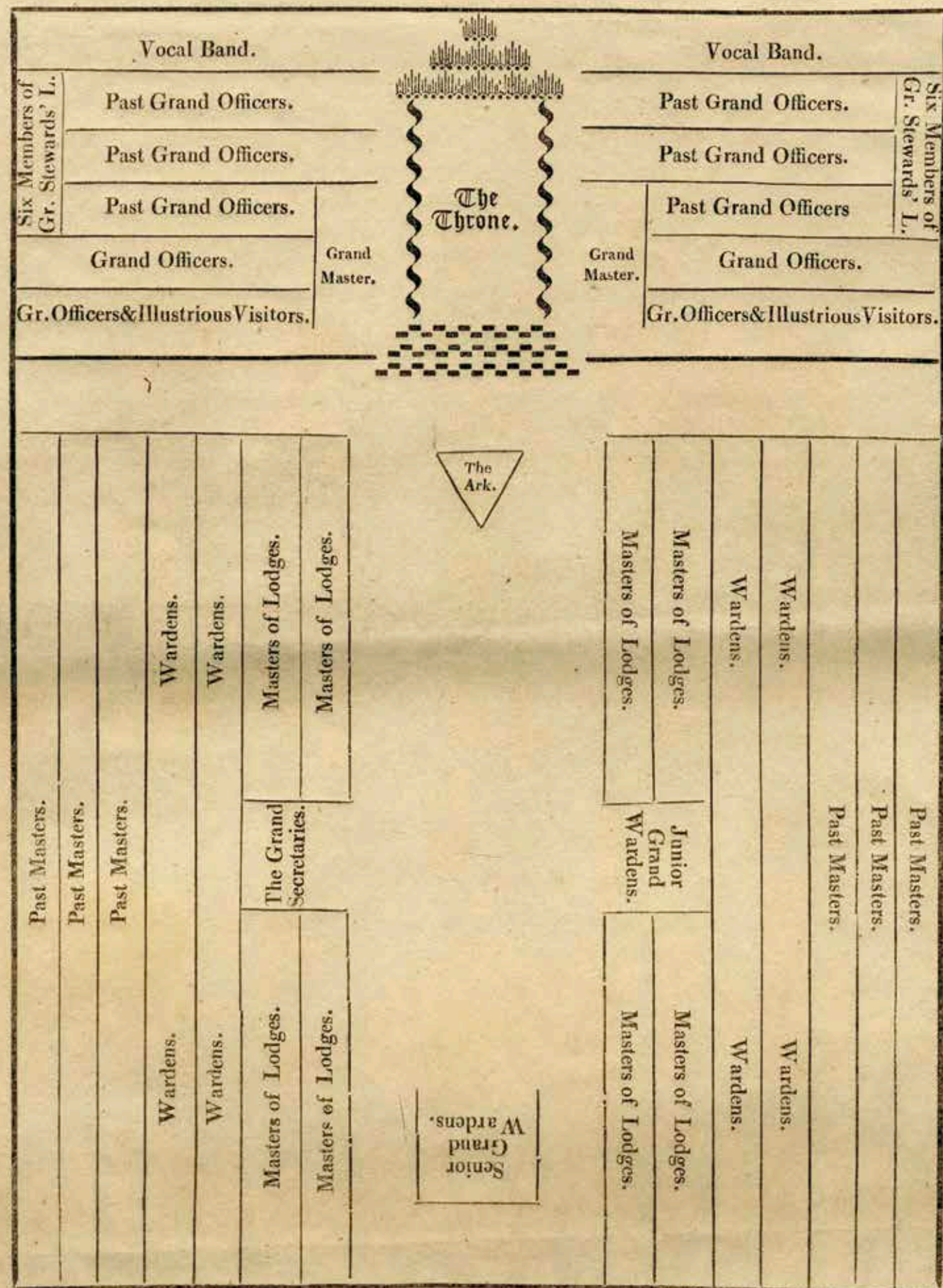
Plate 10: (SM 52/5/36) 'View of the New Masonic Hall shewing the arrangement of the seats, 27 Jan 1829' shows the placing of the Ark amongst the other lodge furniture.

by borrowing the details in SM 52/4/4 (plate 15). The fact that Soane was happy to use the image in his lectures also seems to give his tacit approval to this decision. Subsequent images of the Ark in the Grand Lodge are in a more naturalistic style and show it in use in a manner that seems to confirm the height: with two images (plates 17 & 19) showing the Ark at lectern-height with its top removed and being used as a stand for the Volume of Sacred Law, and another (plate 18) showing the Ark on the two-tiered base at head-height (though without the lantern, which had perhaps been lost by this point). An 1829 sketch SM 52/5/36 (plate 10) also shows the Ark at head-height and clearly depicts its placement amongst the other furniture of the lodge. Ultimately, it must be accepted that like the eighteenth-century Freemasons that imagined the form of the Temple of Solomon, any reconstruction is partly a production of the imagination and where conflicting evidence is unresolvable, taste is the arbiter.

Plate 11 (overleaf): J. M. Gandy 'Interior of the Edifice Devoted Exclusively to Freemasonry... an Evening View', 1832.



Plan of Freemasons' Hall, on the occasion of the Grand Assembly of Masons, for the Union of the Two Grand Lodges of England, Dec. 27, 1813.



Br. T. Harper, Junr, Printer, 15, Great New Street, London.

Plate 12: Plan of Freemasons' Hall, on the occasion of the Grand Assembly of Masons, for the Union of the Two Grand Lodges of England, Dec. 27, 1813.

THE ARK OF THE MASONIC COVENANT

DOUGLAS BURFORD

ON 9 DECEMBER 1813, Their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Sussex and Kent met at Kensington Palace together with the same six Commissioners who, earlier, had drawn up the preliminary Articles of Union between the two Grand Lodges of England. Their purpose was to agree and settle the 'Order of Proceedings of the Grand Assembly of Freemasons on the Union on St. John's Day, 27th December, 1813', which prescribed, *inter alia*, 'that the two Grand Masters with their respective Deputies and Wardens:

will advance to the Ark of the Masonic Covenant to be prepared for the edifice of the Union, and in all time to come to be placed before the Throne.

will apply the square to that part of the said Ark which is square, the plumb to the several edges of the same and the level above it in three positions and, lastly, will give it three knocks with the mallet saying: 'May the Great Architect of the Universe enable us to hold the Grand Edifice of the 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'.

will then place the said Act of Union in the interior of the said Ark,

will according to ancient rite, pour forth corn, wine, and oil on the said Ark saying: 'on this Ark of the Masonic Covenant, may the bountiful hand of Heaven ever supply this United Kingdom with abundance of corn, wine, and oil, with all the necessaries and comforts of life; and may He dispose our hearts to be grateful for all His gifts', and the Assembly will say 'Amen'

Appended to the Order of Proceedings was a seating plan (plate 12), showing the arrangement of the brethren placed under their respective banners in Freemasons' Hall, with the proposed Ark marked as an equilateral triangle set immediately before the Throne.

The Minutes of that Grand Assembly record that 'the Ark of the Masonic Covenant' was 'prepared under the direction of W. Brother John Soane, Grand. Superintendent [sic] of the Works'. It may safely be said that exceptionally few freemasons of today would have any knowledge whatever of the Ark of the Covenant as ever having existed, of what it looked like, or indeed what its purpose was. They would be at a total loss therefore to recognize it as such in any illustration of Grand Lodge in session prior to the disastrous fire that broke out in Freemasons' Hall on the night of 3 May 1883. It is perhaps somewhat ironical that, probably, the earliest photograph ever taken of Thomas Sandby's original Freemasons' Hall, built in 1766, was that taken on the morning immediately after the fire (plate 13), the Ark, alas, neatly reduced to a pile of ash concealed beneath the debris in the foreground.



Plate 13: The Grand Temple at Freemasons' Hall after the fire of 3 May 1883.

At the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge in June 1883, the President of the Board of General Purposes, Bro. Sir John Monckton, presented, verbatim, the report of the previous month's Premises Committee which stated, *inter alia*, that

A disastrous fire broke out at Freemasons' Hall on the night of the 3rd inst., resulting in the almost entire destruction of the time honoured 'Temple' in which meetings of Grand Lodge have taken place for over a hundred years — together with the valuable pictures of Past Grand Masters contained therein, as also a great part of the furniture and fittings; the statue of His late Royal Highness, the Duke of Sussex, being likewise greatly damaged by fire and smoke.

The premises were, as a matter of course, fully insured but the Craft have to deplore the loss of many articles which cannot be replaced, among them, the 'Ark of the Covenant' wherein there were deposited the Articles of Union between the two Grand Lodges of England on the occasion of their being united on the 27th December 1813, the documents themselves being, however, fortunately preserved in another part of the Building.

The Committee are glad to be able to report that, by great exertions, the fire was confined to the Temple itself, and that the other portions of the Building, containing the Archives, Offices, Lodge and Board Rooms, &c., are entirely uninjured.

If that report was strictly true then, from an historical point of view, it was a supreme blessing that the Articles were not where they should have been at the time of the fire. From the Minutes of the Grand Assembly in 1813, it is not unreasonable to infer that the Act of Union was engrossed in duplicate, with each copy being signed, countersigned and sealed and that quite possibly one copy was indeed lost in the fire. Be that as it may, and for reasons which will probably never be known, the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge in June 1883 was the last occasion at which the Ark was mentioned in any official document of the Grand Lodge. Leastways, no further discussion has ever been reported on the question of replacing the shrine for what was, after all, the very foundation upon which the United Grand Lodge of England had been erected and which had been proclaimed, and sanctified as '*the edifice of the Union, and in all time to come to be placed before the Throne*'.

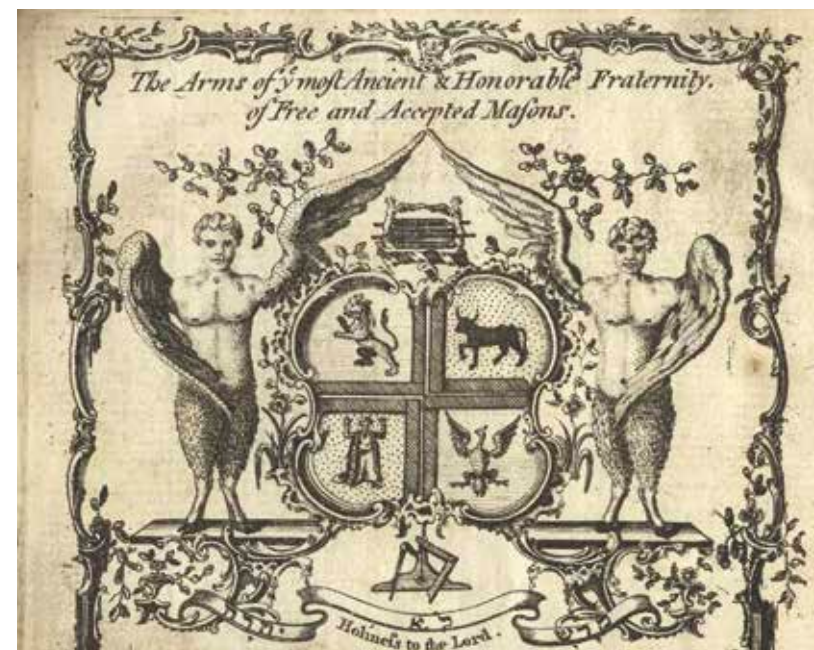


Plate 14: Arms of the Antients' Grand Lodge, 1751-1813.

The Board might well have taken the view that, in spite of the great pomp and ceremony amidst which the Act of Union had been promoted, the effluxion of time and the constant revisions of the *Book of Constitutions* that followed it had already reduced its effectiveness, *de jure*, to that of a museum piece. Most of the twenty-one Articles simply provided the machinery to enable the two Grand Lodges to merge not only with each other but also with the Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter of the Holy Royal Arch which the premier Grand Lodge had been bound, as a condition precedent to the Union, to recognize as a part of Antient Masonry.

If the Board had been under the delusion that there was no image extant from which a new Ark could be made it might have accepted the Premises Committee's comments quite literally, that the Ark was 'irreplaceable' but it did not extend that reasoning to the pictures of the Grand Masters which were also lost in the fire and which, in the course of time, were faithfully reproduced and remain to this day hanging in Lodge Room No. 1 at Freemasons' Hall.

The Board may have simply adopted the more pragmatic view which had been proved overwhelmingly in the event, that so valuable an historical document as that which contained the Articles of the Act of Union could not be put at risk by keeping it in an unprotected wooden cabinet, particularly if it was in fact the only one of two still remaining.

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the Ark of the Masonic Covenant bore no likeness to the biblical ark that appears in the crest of the Arms of the United Grand Lodge of England, and had previously figured in the Arms of the 'Ancient Grand Lodge according to the Old Institutions' (plate 14). That was based upon the directions given to Moses in Exodus 25, to make an Ark of shittim wood (acacia) for the repository of God's Testimony. The blazon in which the Ark is exemplified in the Grant of Arms made to the United Grand Lodge of England in 1919 is:

For the crest, on a wreath of the colours a representation of an ark supported on either side by a cherub proper with the motto over in Hebrew characters —
'Holiness to the Lord'

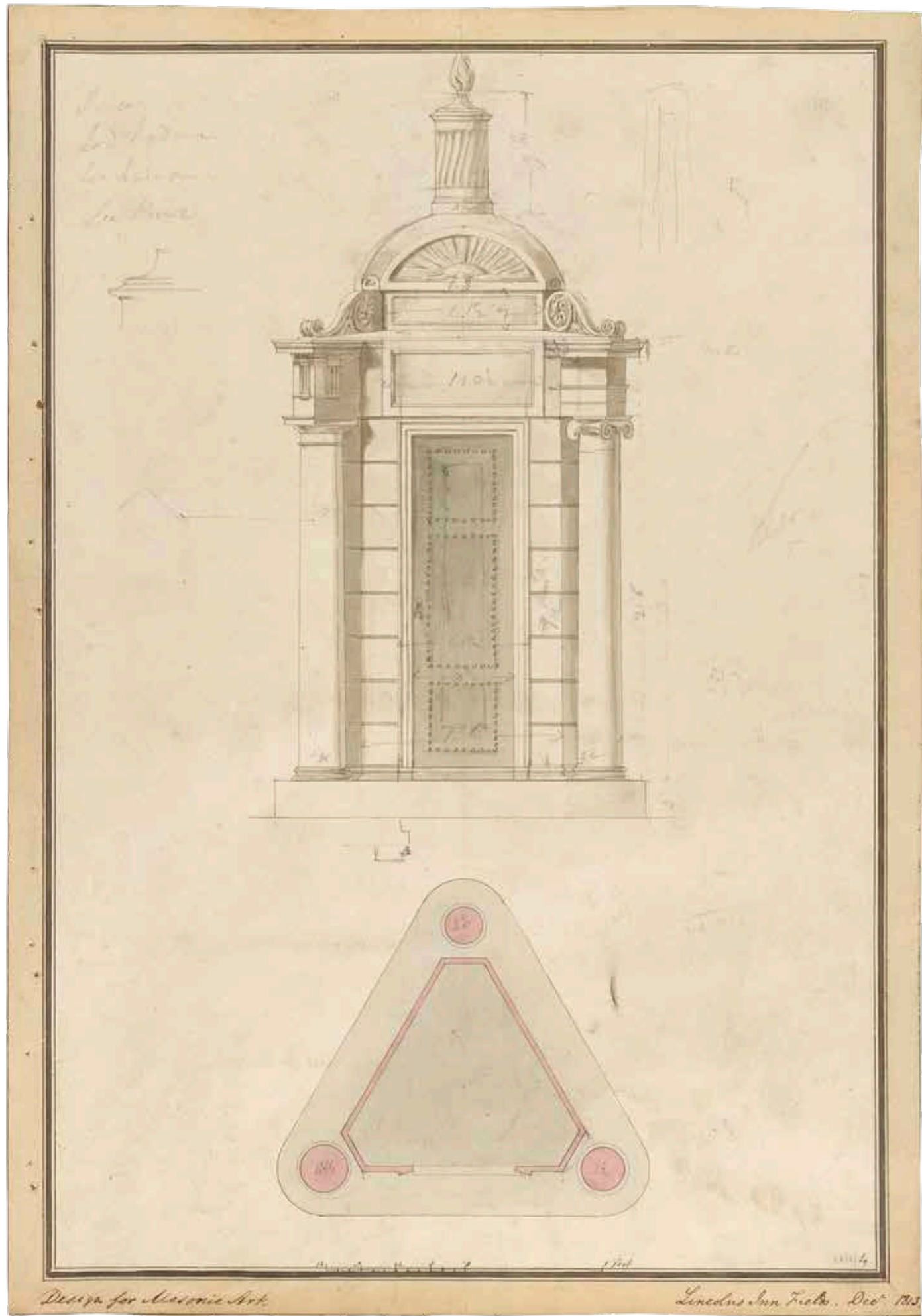
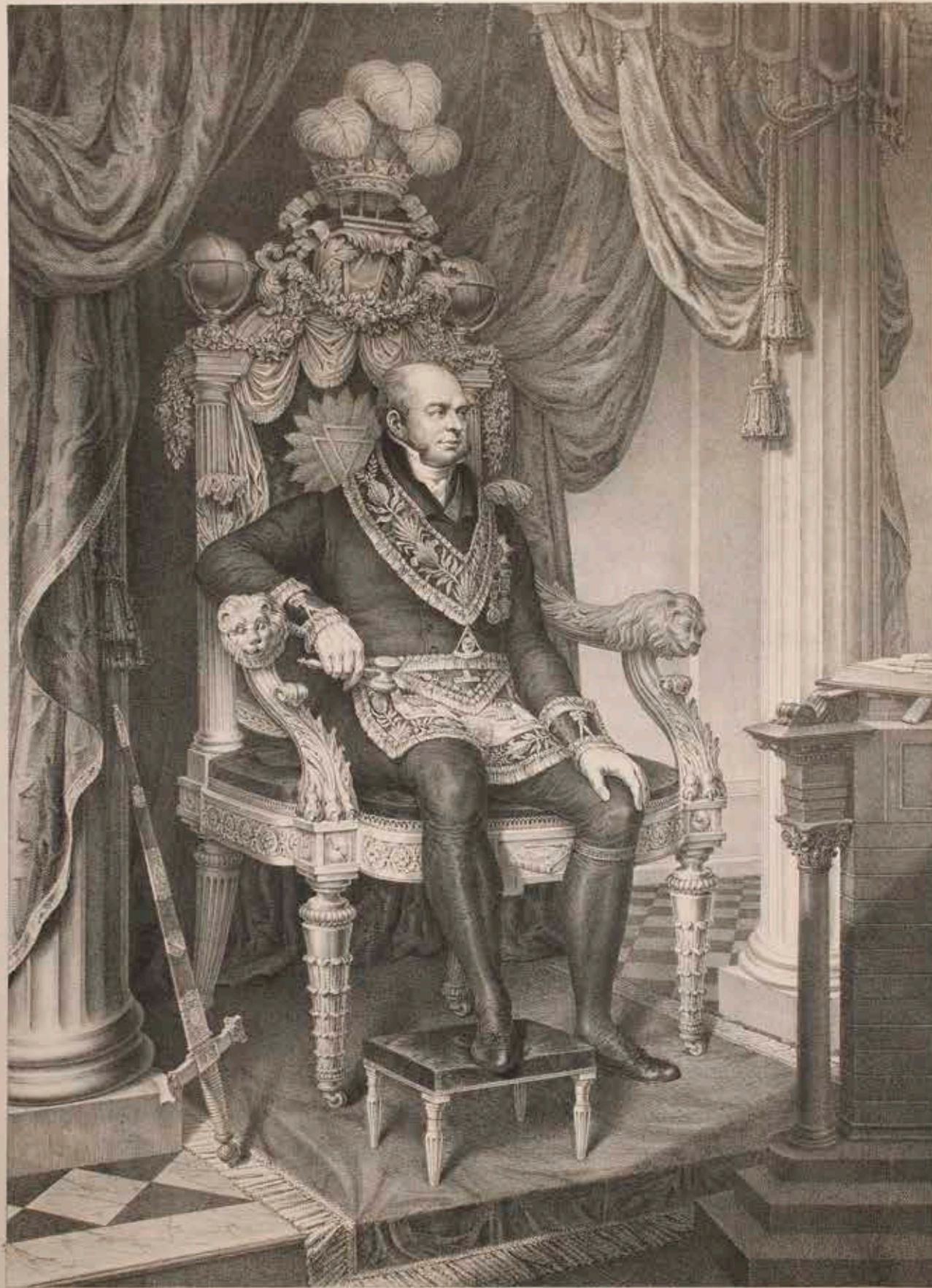


Plate 15: (SM 52/4/4) John Soane's original design for the Masonic Ark.



Plate 16: (SM 14/4/6) A sketch of the Ark, drawn in January 1814 as an architectural study.



That the immediate recommendation of JOHN HARRIS, ENGRAVER, to the Grand Master, is hereby approved of, and that the Grand Master, H.R.H. Prince Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, K.G., do hereby, as Grand Master, of the United Grand Lodge of Masons in England, do most respectfully beseech the Grand Lodge of England, to their most Obedient, Humble & Devoted Servant, Brother JOHN HARRIS, P.M.

Plate 17: H.R.H. Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, K.G., Grand Master, 1813-43 (Engraving by John Harris, 1833).

That which was lost in the fire on 3 May 1883 and was seemingly irreplaceable was a quite unique and static piece of mahogany furniture, triangular in plan and in the form of a pedestal cabinet, and was not meant to be transportable like the biblical Ark. Its entablature was supported at the corners by the three classical orders of architecture which respectively symbolized wisdom, strength and beauty, and was surmounted by a triangular-based dome. The Ark measured in height about 3 ft. 6 in. or just over a metre to the top of the entablature and about 4 ft. 3 in. to the top of the dome. The sides of the equilateral triangular base measured about 3 ft. 4 in. or one metre and the columns at the corners were set at about 2 ft. apart. As may be seen from the original design (plate 14), it was apparently Soane's intention to crown the Ark with a lantern, a typical 'Soanian' feature, although there is some evidence that it was eventually lost.

At the time when he designed the Ark, John Soane was a Royal Academician at the height of his career, arguably the most eminent architect in practice in London, and was Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy of Art Schools. Fortunately he had the good sense and indeed the fortune to persuade Parliament to pass an Act by which he was enabled to bequeath his property and his amazing art collection to the Nation. The latter included a portrait of himself in the regalia of 'the Grand Superintendant [sic] of the Works', two large paintings of Grand Lodge, one with the Ark clearly in evidence, and many sketches of the Hall which he had designed to be built next to Sandby's Hall. Happily, so far as the Craft is concerned, there were also several sketches which he had prepared for the Ark, including one which was purpose-drawn in January 1814 for Soane's use as an architectural study in conjunction with his lectures at the Royal Academy School of Architecture (plate 16).

In the permanent exhibition at Freemasons' Hall there is an engraving by John Harris in 1833 of the Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, enthroned; the 'Corinthian' angle of the Ark, without its Dome and supporting 'the Three Great Lights', can be seen in front of him (plate 17). Also in the exhibition is an oil painting by Sigismund Rosenthal of the Investiture of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, as a Past Grand Master in 1869, which depicts the Ark with its Dome intact (plate 18). Possibly one of the best images of the Ark, other than in Soane's own drawings, is in the frontispiece to *The Illustrated London News* of 8 May 1875 (plate 19), which reported the installation, a few days earlier, of the Prince of Wales as Grand Master. Here the Ark can be seen without its Dome, and with the Volume of the Sacred Law placed thereon for the Prince to take his obligation. The Consecration Vessels were on that occasion placed between the Ark and the Throne whereas in Rosenthal's painting they are placed in front of the Ark.

So far as can be ascertained from the archives in Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he was a not infrequent visitor to the Headquarters of the premier Grand Lodge in Great Queen Street long before he became a freemason. In those days, Sandby's Hall was frequently let out for public use, particularly for musical soirées and Institutional Banquets. It was in his professional capacity that Soane was first summoned to attend upon the Grand Secretary, to survey the premises on the east side at 62 and 63 Great Queen Street which had been posted for sale in October 1812. In March 1813 he was asked to make a valuation of those premises in preparation for a bid. Frequent meetings took place during the spring of 1813 between Bro. Sir William Rawlins, PSGW, one of the elders of the premier Grand Lodge, Bro. William Henry White, one of the two joint Grand Secretaries and Mr John Soane. For reasons unknown no further positive steps were taken to procure the adjoining premises, even though it was becoming increasingly obvious that the accommodation at Great Queen Street would soon become hopelessly inadequate.



Plate 18: *The Investiture of the Prince of Wales as Past Grand Master at Freemasons' Hall, London, December 1869.*

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INSTALLATION OF THE PRINCE OF WALES AS GRAND MASTER OF THE FREEMASONS: SIR ALBERT WOODS PROCLAIMING THE NEW GRAND MASTER.

Plate 19: Installation of the Prince of Wales as Grand Master of the Freemasons: Sir Albert Woods proclaiming the new Grand Master.

The spring of 1813 had introduced a new dawn into English Freemasonry after over sixty years of rivalry and more than a decade of protracted and oft-times acrimonious wrangling, the latter supposed to be efforts to bring the two societies of freemasons together under one Grand Master. At the time, the Grand Master of the premier Grand Lodge was George, Prince of Wales, but when the Regency was finally conferred upon him he resigned and the Duke of Sussex, who had previously been installed as the First Grand Principal of the 'Excellent Grand and Royal Chapter' in 1810, was elected to succeed his elder brother and was enthroned on 12 May 1813. At his first Communication of Grand Lodge in June 1813 the Duke proclaimed

his wish that an union of the two Societies of Masons of England should be effected upon terms equal and honourable to both parties and his willingness to use every exertion in his power consistent with the honour and dignity of this Grand Lodge towards the accomplishment of so desirable an object and which he thought might now be obtained.

On 14 August 1813, Soane was bidden to Kensington Palace, together with Sir William Rawlins and W. H. White for an audience with the Duke of Sussex. No Minutes survive and it is quite impossible to speculate upon the nature of the business discussed, but it is reasonably safe to assume that they talked not only about the need to enlarge the premises at Great Queen Street to accommodate the new Grand Lodge that would shortly be formed but also about the creation of some sort of shrine to symbolize the new Order which, at long last, appeared to be within grasp. It is also likely that the audience would not have passed without some mention being made of the fact that Soane was not then a freemason but, in the event, he was ultimately put up in The Grand Master's Lodge No. 1 of the Antients, the 'rival' Grand Lodge then still under the rule of the Duke of Atholl. His sponsors were James Perry, PDepGM, and Thomas Harper jun., the son of the Deputy Grand Master. He was proposed at the stated meeting of the lodge on 15 November 1813 and, together with several other gentlemen, was initiated, passed and raised at an emergency meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand on 25 November. He next attended Grand Master's Lodge on 1 December 1813, arguably one of the most momentous days in the history of English Freemasonry, and doubtless for the Grand Master's Lodge as well, for on that day, the Duke of Sussex, together with several of his own Grand Officers, attended the meeting. They each took the obligation of 'A Mason in Antient Form' so that they could attend the Antient Grand Lodge that day, also at the Crown and Anchor Tavern. There they witnessed, first, the Installation of the Duke of Kent as Grand Master of the Antients and, subsequently, the ratification by that Grand Lodge of the Preliminary Articles of Union. The premier Grand Lodge had done so earlier in the day.

It would seem likely that the Duke of Sussex also found time on that day to speak with Soane and bring to bear his not inconsiderable influence on the design for the Ark, for there were then only twenty-six days remaining before the forthcoming Union. When the Royal Dukes and their six Commissioners met again on 9 December to set up and agree the 'Order of Proceedings for the Grand Assembly on the 27th', they could thus be assured that, when the 'Act of Union' had been 'Proclaimed, Confirmed, Signed and Sealed', there would be an 'Ark of the Masonic Covenant' in place ready to receive it. That was itself to be consecrated according to ancient rite with corn, wine and oil, and sanctified and dedicated as the edifice of the Union.

On 11 December Soane was again bidden to an audience with the Duke of Sussex, this time at Great Queen Street, where he was offered the brand-new appointment of 'Grand Superintendant of the Works' in the forthcoming United Grand Lodge. Article VII of

the Act of Union, which prescribed the composition of the new Grand Lodge, had made no provision for such an appointment. Nevertheless, after less than three weeks a freemason, he promptly accepted and, as the Minutes of the Grand Assembly confirm, the so-called 'Worshipful Brother' John Soane was duly nominated to that office for the year ensuing.

After that audience on 11 December, the Duke accompanied Soane back to Lincoln's Inn Fields where he was shown three more drawings for the Ark which had been prepared that day. According to the Office-Day Book kept by Bailey, Soane's chief assistant, work started immediately on the working drawings. Nothing was done the following day, a Sunday, nor on the Monday, but they were completed on the 20th after quite a few nights of literally burning the midnight oil. The details were fed through piecemeal to Soane's favoured joiner and cabinet maker, Richard Martyr, who faithfully translated the design into reality. Richard Martyr's Account with Soane is interesting:

		£.s.d
1813		
Dec 25	3Ft 3/4 Mahogany 17 ft sup Inch	
	ditto 22Ft Sup 1 1/4 ditto	
	1Ft 3" ditto 1 1/2 Ft 4" ditto	7. 0.3
	4 1/2 Ft Sup 6" ditto 2 1/2 ft sup 9" ditto	8.15.6
	2 Doz 1 1/2 screws 2doz 2 1/2 screws 12 candles	
	for the glue	1. 5.2
	70 days Carpenters	21. 0.0
1814		
Jan 1	2 Days Carpenters	12.0
April 16	Altering the model 4 1/2 days	1. 7.0
	Cash paid for carving do.	10.14.6
	do for turning Columns, molds	
	dome knobs chops &c	2. 6.6
	Refreshment for the men working Sunday	10.0

Six Shillings per day is allowed in this bill as it includes the extra expenses incurred by the men working during several nights.

Although it is hardly surprising that the carpenters were obliged to return to put a few finishing touches to the Ark after the Grand Assembly was over, there is sadly no record of what was done by way of 'alterations' in April 1814, nor is there any clue as to what was meant by a 'model' for, although it was not unusual for Soane to have models made of his work, time would not have permitted one to be made on this occasion. It might well have been Richard Martyr's nickname for what he possibly thought was a miniature since it was generally known within Soane's office as 'the Masonic Monument'. No doubt that Soane saw it as such when he developed the design, shortly after the Union, for his lectures. This was quite out of scale with a comparatively small piece of furniture as is self-evident in plate 16.

Following the Grand Assembly on 27 December 1813, 'The Grand Officers and the Brotherhood repaired to the Crown and Anchor Tavern, where a dinner was provided and, according to the Minutes, 'The auspicious day was concluded with the most festive harmony and brotherly love'. Sadly, not so for Soane. He was obliged to return to his home at Lincoln's Inn Fields suffering from acute pain caused by gallstones and went to bed early and very ill indeed. In his own words, 'he continued a prisoner until Monday, 28 March', and 'during that time he managed to get out only an hour or two before 1st March, on which day the operation was performed' by his surgeon friend Mr. Pennington, 'and I did not go out until the 28 March'.

In her biography, *Sir John Soane - Architect*, Miss Dorothy Stroud, at one time the Librarian at the Soane Museum, wrote:

1813. It may have been partly as an escape from his domestic duties that Soane was now attracted to the companionship of Freemasonry. His participation in the meetings over the years was an undoubted solace in return for which he not only assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the premises but designed a fine new Council Chamber and contributed handsomely to the charitable funds of the Fraternity.

Despite his charitable instincts, Soane was a man of intractable temper and apparently not altogether happy in his domestic relationship. He lost his wife in 1815 and his elder and favourite son died in 1823 aged 36. He was knighted in 1831 although it was heavily rumoured that he had turned down a baronetcy in order that his younger son, with whom he had established a lifelong feud, might not inherit anything from him.

After the Union, and largely because of the massive contribution that Soane had made towards the purchase of 62 and 63 Great Queen Street, he set about the rebuilding of the greater portion of those premises, including a new Hall at first floor level roughly in the position presently occupied by the Grand Staircase in the Connaught Rooms. Sadly, although Soane's Hall was extended in 1838, a year after he died, by Bro. Philip Hardwicke, everything that he had created at Great Queen Street, except the Ark, later disappeared. Under another Grand Superintendent, Frederick Pepys Cockerell, a pupil of Hardwick and a trustee of Soane's Museum, the whole of the premises was demolished and rebuilt between 1867 and 1869 with the exception of Sandby's Hall of 1776 which was to stand until the present Freemasons' Hall was completed in 1933.

SIR JOHN SOANE AND THE FREEMASONS

JAMES CAMPBELL

The New Temple and The Lost Ark

No one looking at the 1828 portrait of John Soane in his regalia as Grand Superintendent of Works of the United Grand Lodge of England can be in any doubt that Soane was proud to be a Freemason and happy to be associated with the organisation (Plate 1). Indeed the idea of a public figure commissioning a portrait of themselves in Masonic regalia seems extremely odd today as Freemasonry has largely disappeared from public view. In Soane's day the situation was very different. Even as late as the 1930s Masonic events were regularly advertised and reported in the national newspapers. When the current Freemasons' Hall was opened in 1933 pictures of the then Grand Master the Duke of Connaught in full regalia appeared in the daily press. He appeared on the opening pages of *Country Life* and half of the *London Illustrated News* was devoted to the proceedings.¹ Throughout the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century, Freemasonry was a mark of esteem and the rank Soane had obtained within it mirrored the status he held in Society as a whole, soon to be reflected in his knighthood. To understand this portrait and Soane's relationship with Freemasonry that led up to the design of the Temple and the Ark, we thus need to understand what Freemasonry is, how Soane became involved in it and what that involvement entailed. Let us start with Freemasonry.

Freemasonry

In Soane's day, Freemasons' Lodges were understood to be the direct descendants of the meetings held by the Medieval Masons who built the Gothic Cathedrals.² Since then historians have become more sceptical of the links and continuity with Medieval practices, but certainly Freemasonic Lodges appear in the historical record as early as the 17th century. Robert Plot in his *Natural History of Staffordshire* in 1686 describes the growing popularity of gentlemen joining Masonic Lodges³ and we have various mentions of people becoming "Free and Accepted Masons" in this period.⁴

Freemasonry was characterised then, as now, by having its own initiation ceremony in which the newly-made "brother" learned the passwords and signs by which Freemasons could

1. *Country Life*, Vol. LXXIV no.1906 (29 July 1933), pp. 83, 90-92; *London Illustrated News*, No.4918, vol.1 (22 July 1933), pp.121, 137-144.
2. The extent to which this link was believed is difficult to understand today. For how it was understood see Frank Albo, *Freemasonry and the Nineteenth century British Gothic Revival*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2013.
3. Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1686), Chapter VIII, sections 85-87 (pp.316-317).
4. The best introduction to the development of Freemasonry is John Hamill, *The Craft: a History of English Freemasonry* (London: Crucible, 1986).

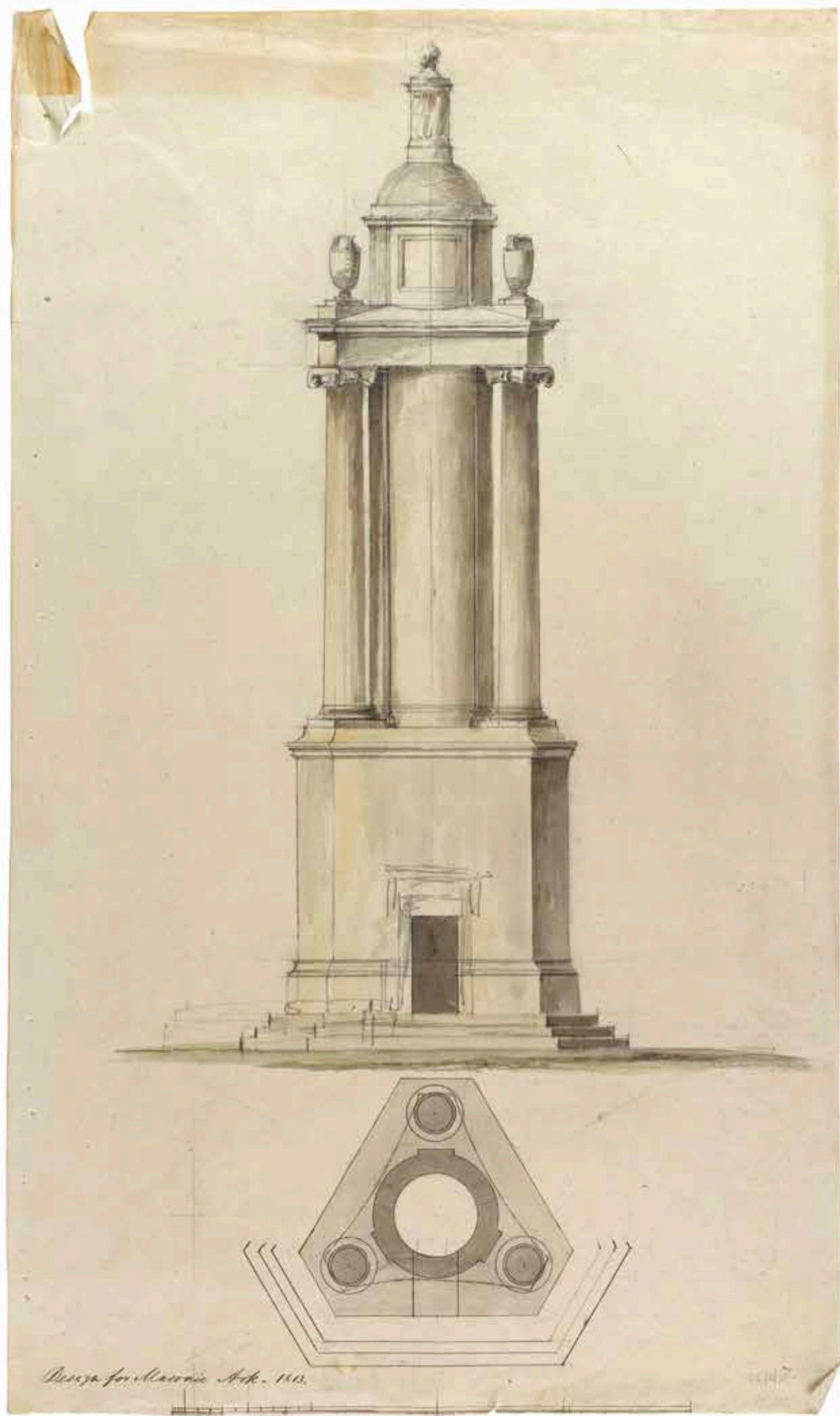


Plate 20: (SM 52/4/7) Design for a Monument - this design is for a full size monument and may have been re-used from elsewhere.

recognise each other. These meetings of “Lodges” were also accompanied by drinking and dining. Clubs and societies of various sorts prospered and proliferated in late seventeenth-century England. Freemasonry was just one of many, but it differed in that it was relatively easy to set up a new “private” Lodge and pass on the secrets of Freemasonry to new members and that it managed to survive.⁵ As an organisation, it was, initially at least, entirely unregulated, consisting of private lodges that could act more or less as they pleased.

Private Lodges

Freemasons’ Lodges in the seventeenth and eighteenth century met in taverns. These Lodges initially took the name of the place where they met. The members of the Lodge would meet occasionally or regularly to initiate new members. The initiation ceremony was carried out by the Lodge officers for the year, consisting of a Master and two Wardens. During a meeting the door was guarded from the outside by a Tyler. His job was to prevent the Lodge being disturbed while an initiation was underway lest the secrets were revealed to the “uninitiated”. The members of the Lodge would generally all have a small part to play in the ceremony, if only as part of the crowd, but the Lodge officers (the Master and Wardens) had quite elaborate lines to learn. The ritual was by tradition passed down orally and never written down. No doubt rituals varied slightly between Lodges but the format remained roughly the same. Once a member, a Freemason was expected to come regularly to meetings of his Lodge, often held monthly, and if they were keen members to progress in time through the offices of the Lodge to become the Master. New Masters were elected annually or in some Lodges twice a year. As well as a Tyler, and the Master and Wardens, each Lodge also had a Treasurer to look after the money and a Secretary to send out notices of meetings and generally handle the booking of rooms. As meetings became more organised the Secretary also took the minutes and looked after the records.

There is no doubt that many men who came to Lodge meetings, were made Freemasons and never appeared again. Other people enjoyed the opportunity of meeting friends and attended regularly, the Lodge acting as a convivial dining society. Once you had been initiated you could join any Lodge and many keen Freemasons were members of several Lodges. You could, however, only be initiated once.

By the end of the seventeenth century there was a second degree (passing) and by the 1720s a third (raising) degree had been added producing the system of three degrees that persists today. The three degrees allegorically traced man’s path through life and emphasised the importance of moral integrity, charity and faith. This then was the system of private lodges that existed at the beginning of the 18th century.

Grand Lodge

The first and most significant change occurred when four London Lodges gathered together in 1717 and decided to form a Grand Lodge. It is important to understand that a Grand Lodge was not a private Lodge: it was designed to be a completely new type of

umbrella organisation that would oversee and licence private Lodges under its jurisdiction, providing some sort of regularity to a previously unregulated system.⁶ By the early 1720s it had settled into a recognisable shape, recruiting an aristocratic Grand Master and holding meetings four times a year at which the constituent Private Lodges were represented by their respective Masters and Wardens. The Grand Master was to be elected each year at the meeting in March and installed at a special Grand Investiture in April at which he would appoint his Grand Officers from amongst the Past Masters of the private Lodges to act for the ensuing year. This was followed by a banquet called the Grand Festival that was the highlight of the Masonic calendar.

The great coup was persuading an aristocrat, the Duke of Montagu, to act as Grand Master in 1721. The event was accompanied by a great banquet at Stationers’ Hall. By 1730 the Grand Lodge was overseeing over 60 private Lodges, not just in London but all over the country and overseas. Separate Grand Lodges were also recorded as being formed in Ireland (1725) and Scotland (1736) although both claimed simply to be new versions of older organisations. These first three Grand Lodges were to form many private Lodges overseas which adopted their various ceremonies and would in time lead to the formation of separate Grand Lodges across the globe. In the meantime the Grand Lodge in England continued to prosper, with the number of Lodges steadily increasing and more prominent people joining Freemasonry and rising up its ranks. In 1737 the Prince of Wales⁷ joined, the first of many Royal Princes who joined in the 18th and 19th century, four of whom went on to become Kings. Many prominent artists and statesmen were Freemasons, including the Duke of Wellington, Nicholas Hawksmoor, Horace Walpole, Edmund Burke, James Thornhill, William Hogarth, Sir Walter Scott, Anthony Trollope and Edward Jenner. It is important to note Freemasonry in continental Europe developed from English Freemasonry but rapidly diverged from it. In Europe, new degrees were invented and Freemasonry became associated with Republicanism, political activism, Egyptian symbolism and occultism. None of these were present in the English system, Grand Lodge from the outset strictly forbidding the discussion of politics and religion in any Masonic gatherings and in consequence remaining strongly loyal to both the Crown and to its original precepts.

A Rival Grand Lodge

In the 1740s the first Grand Lodge became increasingly autocratic and the then Grand Master was uninterested and rarely held Grand Lodge meetings. Its weak leadership and exclusivity provided the circumstances for the formation of a rival Grand Lodge in 1751.⁸ This gathered together disaffected and excluded Lodges and those individuals who were deemed too socially inferior to join the older institution (mostly Irish immigrants, many of whom were already Freemasons back in Ireland).

The reason or excuse they gave for the necessity of having a new Grand Lodge is that the older Grand Lodge had strayed from the original ceremonies. In the 1730s a series of books had been published revealing the secret passwords of the degrees. These “exposures” were highly successful publications and the older Grand Lodge had changed the passwords in response to prevent the uninitiated passing themselves off as Freemasons. The stated aim of the new Grand Lodge formed in 1751 was to return to the traditional ceremonies with the

5. The term “private” Lodge is used here simply to distinguish the normal Lodge from the later “Grand” Lodges. The difference is explained in the text. Many architectural historians have been confused by the difference between the two.

6. The Grand Lodges would claim that they were part of an older system but there is no historical evidence for these claims (see Hamill, *op. cit.*, p.42).

7. The ill-fated Frederick son of George II and father of George III, who died in 1751 before taking the throne.

8. For the circumstances see Hamill, *op.cit.* and Ric Berman, *Schism: the Battle that Forged Freemasonry* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

original passwords and as a result they dubbed themselves “Antients”⁹ and the older Lodge they ridiculed as “Moderns”. Thus in 1751 there were two Grand Lodges: the original or Premier Grand Lodge (the “Moderns”) and a new Grand Lodge calling themselves, confusingly, “The Antients”.

The new Antients Grand Lodge was a highly successful organisation, growing rapidly in the last decades of the 18th century and persuading many members and Lodges to pass over to its jurisdiction. It attracted aristocratic members but unlike the older Premier Grand Lodge, it could never fully get a Royal seal of approval. By 1800 many ambitious Freemasons were senior members of both organisations and the friction between the two was becoming increasingly tiresome for all concerned. An amalgamation of the two Grand Lodges seemed the obvious solution, but it was not clear how it could be brought about. By 1812 a route had been found. The Prince of Wales (later King George IV) had been made Grand Master of the older Premier Grand Lodge in 1787. On becoming Prince Regent in 1811, he stepped down, taking the title Grand Patron of the Order. He passed his duties as Grand Master on to his younger brother, the Duke of Sussex, who had been made a Mason in the Lodge of Victorious Truth in Berlin in 1798 (Plate 17). On his return to England, he had joined his elder brother’s personal Lodge (the Prince of Wales’s Lodge). The Duke of Atholl was Grand Master of the Antients Grand Lodge. A plan was hatched whereby he would gallantly step aside just before the Union, naming the Duke of Kent, the Duke of Sussex’s elder brother, as his successor. Thus it was arranged that in 1813 the heads of the two institutions would very briefly be two Royal Princes, and that on the day of the Union, the elder would generously nominate his younger brother as the head of the new combined institution. This then was the plan beginning to be hatched in 1812.

The newly combined institution would need a new home. The Antients Grand Lodge had never had its own building. They met at the time in the magnificent ballroom of the Crown and Anchor Tavern on the Strand, which was one of the few venues in London large enough to take them. The older Grand Lodge had its own premises in Great Queen Street and the obvious solution was for the new United Grand Lodge to meet there and hopefully for the premises to be expanded to accommodate the much larger combined institution. It was no doubt with this thought in mind that the owner of the properties adjoining Freemasons’ Hall saw an opportunity to sell at a premium and it was in this context that the older Grand Lodge first decided to approach John Soane in 1812.

Soane is contacted by the Masons

On 29 October 1812 the Board of Works of the Premier Grand Lodge met at Freemasons’ Hall to discuss an approach they had received from the owner of the neighbouring two houses (62 and 63 Great Queen Street). The meeting had been chaired by the then Grand Treasurer, John Bayford and the minutes taken by the Grand Secretary, William White. They resolved to approach Soane to ask if he would provide a valuation and, if not, approach another architect. The committee was made up, as all Grand Lodge’s Committees were, of volunteers. The Freemasons all acted in their spare time, combining their duties to Grand Lodge with busy lives elsewhere. As a result resolutions were not necessarily acted on immediately and it was not until March 1813 that William White got around to contacting Soane. The letter is preserved along with all the others in the Soane Museum.¹⁰

9. The “Antients” deliberately used an archaic spelling of “ancient” to describe themselves.

10. The letter (SM Private Correspondence IX.A.2) attached a copy of the minutes (SM Private Correspondence IX.A.1).

Soane’s first contact with Freemasonry thus began with a completely mundane request for a property valuation. The reason that Grand Lodge chose Soane for such a simple task is unclear. He was by this time a highly successful architect. He was carrying out large scale and prominent rebuilding works for the Bank of England, had been named Clerk of Works of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea and had recently taken over as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy. Although many of his larger commissions and his knighthood were still ahead of him, he was at 58 years of age and firmly established in his profession. It may have been that the Freemasons thought that as Thomas Sandby, a previous Professor of the Royal Academy, had also been their architect, they should approach the man that had succeeded him. Alternatively Robert Furze Brettingham, who sat on the Board of Works, may have suggested him. Or it may simply have been because he was the nearest architect: his house was, and still is, within a few hundred yards of Freemasons’ Hall.

Freemason’s Hall

At this time Freemasons’ Hall was a popular venue for all sorts of events including charity dinners and concerts. It was a strange building. The hall was enormous but it was completely hidden away. It was approached by a discreet door in Great Queen Street. On opening this, the visitor found themselves in a long passage, ending in a top-lit stair that led up to the first floor. What lay beyond that was quite unexpected: great doors opened to reveal a vast rectangular hall with a niche at the far end. As one of the largest enclosed spaces in London, it was heavily sought after for gatherings of all sorts. Externally it had no presence at all, having been built on the garden of an unremarkable terraced house. A large space hidden within the city block, it exhibited much the same sense of surprise as Soane’s own house did, where one entered expecting one thing and discovered something quite unexpected and larger beyond.

This remarkable Hall had been designed and built by Thomas Sandby between May 1775 and May 1776. Freemasons’ Hall was Sandby’s most acclaimed building. Through Royal patronage, Sandby had become Professor of the Royal Academy and John Soane was one of his pupils, attending his Monday evening lectures between 1771 and 1775. These provided a basic grounding in architectural history and design. Sandby’s career was highly dependent on his association with the Dukes of Cumberland,¹¹ but apart from Freemasons’ Hall he left no other significant buildings behind him. The Hall, however, was judged a great success and Sandby, who was a Freemason, was rewarded with the post of Grand Architect in Grand Lodge, a position which was especially created for him. This he held until his death in 1799 when he was replaced by Robert Furze Brettingham who only served in the post for a couple of years before he stepped down to be replaced in turn by William Tyler. Of the two, Robert Brettingham was the more significant in our story because he was a close friend of Soane’s and had been one of his travelling companions in Europe. Brettingham trained and practised as an architect but in 1800 he married the widow of a rich banker, thus gaining a fortune, and retired from practice, which is no doubt why he also gave up his position at Freemasons’ Hall.¹² He remained on the Board of Works of Grand Lodge and may have been responsible for suggesting Soane’s involvement in 1812, when the subject of the Tavern came up.

11. Sandby worked for William Augustus and Henry Frederick, Dukes of Cumberland as well as George III. Henry Frederick was Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge from 1782-1790. Sandby was Deputy Ranger of Windsor Park and appointed Architect of the King’s Works in 1777. For a full biography see Sir Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), pp. 896-898.

12. For a biography of Brettingham see DNB and Sir Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), pp.159-160. For Brettingham and Soane see Gillian Darley, *John Soane: an Accidental Romantic* (New Haven: Yale, 1999).

Freemasons' Tavern

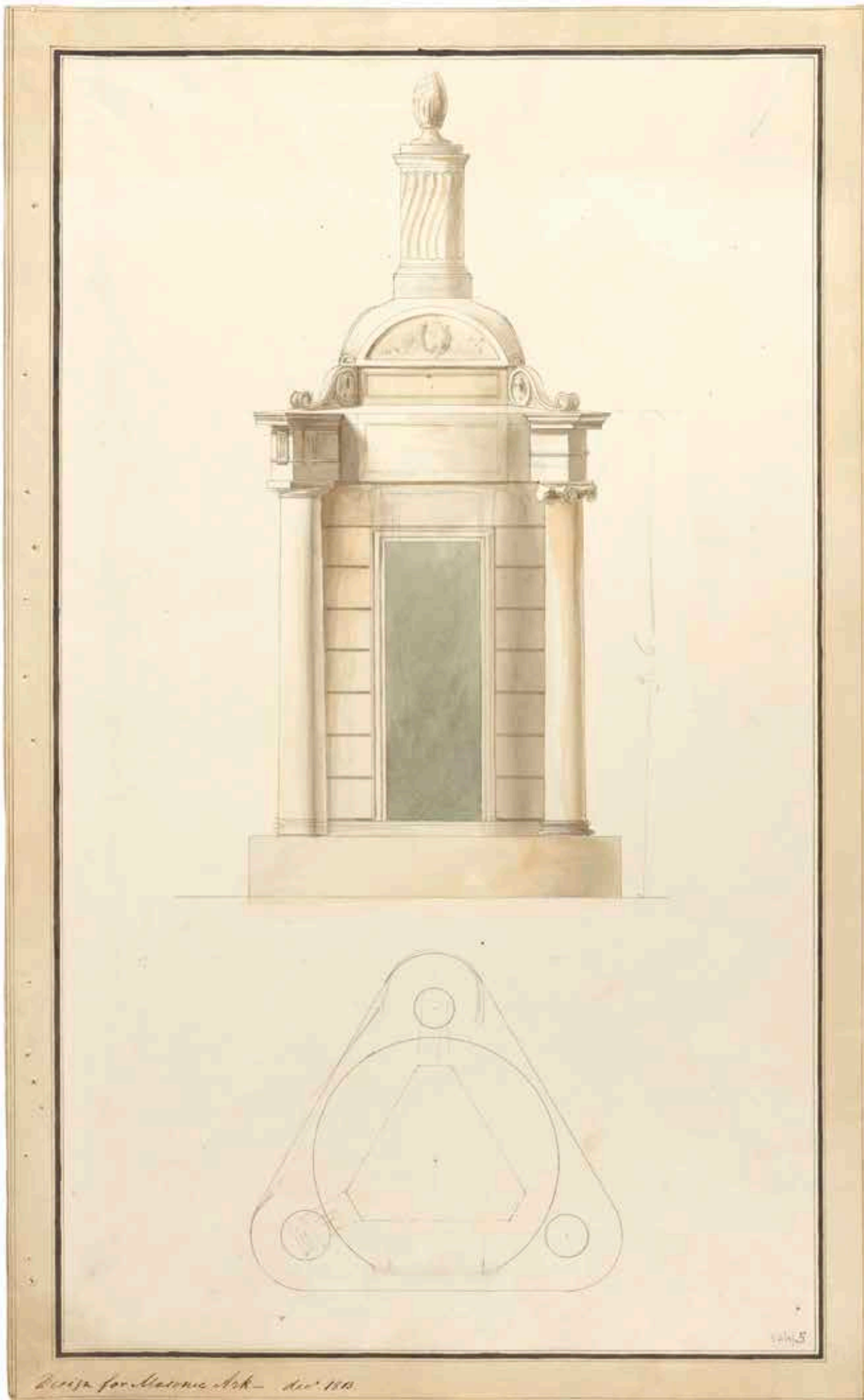
Initially Sandby's Hall sat behind two pre-existing houses, one of which fronted onto the street with a small courtyard behind. The second house overlooked the garden in which the Hall was built. Shortly after the Hall was finished these houses were entirely reconstructed to create the Freemasons' Tavern, which was leased out to a landlord to run. The Tavern provided the catering facilities for the Hall and a series of smaller rooms for Private Lodges to meet and dine in. A Committee Room was created on the first floor behind the front building, looking onto a light well. By 1812, the tenant of the Tavern had leased the basement and garden of the neighbouring house and was using it as additional kitchen facilities. In 1812 the then owner of the neighbouring two buildings decided the time was right to try and sell the property to the Freemasons at a handsome premium.

Soane left behind all his business papers and they show how extraordinarily busy he was on a day-to-day basis, managing dozens of jobs and racing between appointments. We know Soane must have found time to reply to White's letter inviting him to do a valuation, although his reply does not survive, because the Office Day Books record that he sent his assistants Charles Tyrrell and George Underwood to Freemasons' Hall to "survey the Hall and Houses adjoining".¹³ John Buxton was set to work drawing up the plans from the 7-9 April.¹⁴ However, Soane was too busy to write the covering letter and valuation. On 4 May, the Grand Secretary William White sent a chasing letter.¹⁵ It was not until 12 August that Soane finally presented his report.¹⁶ On 14 August he accompanied White to visit the Duke of Sussex in Kensington Palace, the first of many such visits.¹⁷ Unfortunately we do not know what was discussed at this meeting. Leases were probably only part of the discussion because by this time the Duke and the Grand Secretary were busy planning the events leading up the Union of the two Grand Lodges. Presumably the subject of Soane's membership of the organisation arose and the fact that at this point he was not yet a Freemason. Perhaps also at this meeting the subject of decorating the Hall for the Union may have been first suggested. However, this is all conjecture because no records survive. What we do know is that following this meeting moves were made to make Soane a Freemason.

Soane becomes a Freemason

Usually you became a Freemason in the nineteenth century by approaching or being approached by someone you knew who was already a member and being invited to join their Private Lodge. Soane's situation was rather different. The recommendation that he should join almost certainly came from the Grand Master himself but the choice of Lodge was unexpected. So far all Soane's communications had been with the Premier Grand Lodge but for reasons that are unclear the Lodge that was chosen for him was in the most prestigious of all the Lodges in the Antients' Grand Lodge: the Grand Master's Lodge No.1.

13. SM Day Books 1813-1814/ 27 March.
14. SM Day Books 1813-1814/ 7-10 April.
15. SM Private Correspondence IX.A.4.
16. SM Private Correspondence IX.A.6.
17. SM SNB 117, 14 August 1813.



Design for Masonic Ark - Dec. 1811

Plate 21: (SM 52/4/5) Design for the Ark – here Soane suggests using a round body for the Ark.

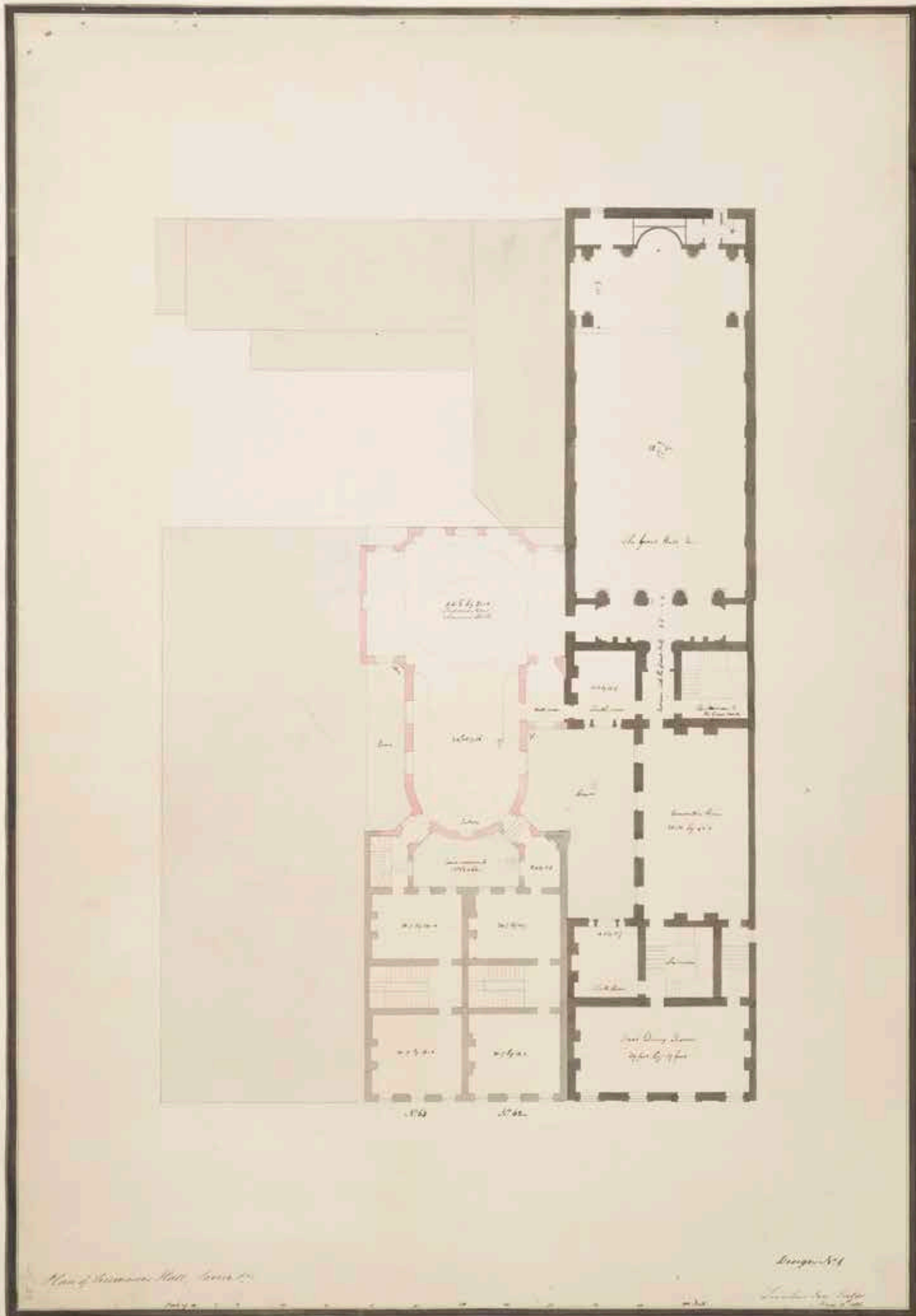


Plate 22: (SM 52/129) An early design for the Temple. The New Temple is shown in red on the left. Sandby's Freemasons' Hall and its relationship to the surrounding buildings can clearly be seen.

The Grand Master's Lodge No.1 was a very unusual Lodge.¹⁸ The practice of numbering or ranking Lodges had begun with the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717, their oldest Lodge being given the number 1. When the Antients' Grand Lodge was formed they also adopted the practice, but they started their numbers at 2 with the first Lodge formed, deliberately leaving the number 1 aside until they had appointed an aristocratic Grand Master when this became his personal private Lodge. At the time of the Union the Grand Master's Lodge was still the Duke of Atholl's private Lodge and it would play a leading part in the ceremonies leading up to the Union. It was, no doubt, partly with this in mind that it was suggested that Soane join it in 1813.

Every member of a Lodge had to be proposed and seconded by two existing members. Soane was proposed by James Perry and seconded by Thomas Harper, both Past Deputy Grand Masters of the Antients' Grand Lodge and key figures in organising the Union. There was no time to wait for the regular meeting so two emergency (extra) meetings were held, the first on 15 November to propose Soane's membership along with several others and the second on 25 November.¹⁹ At the latter Soane went through all three Masonic ceremonies in one evening, rather than going through the normal process of doing them over a number of meetings during the course of a year. This allowed him to attend the extraordinary day of meetings in the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 1 December 1813 held by the Antients' Grand Lodge, when the Duke of Sussex came to a meeting of the Grand Master's Lodge to take an oath of allegiance and officially join that body so that he could see his brother installed as Grand Master on the same day. Soane was in attendance.²⁰

Planning the Ceremony of Unification

With the Duke of Kent duly installed as Grand Master of the Antients' Grand Lodge and the Duke of Sussex installed as Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge, everything was in place to establish the Union of the two Grand Lodges. December then involved a desperate rush to make the final preparations for a suitably grand ceremony to mark the occasion. It was decided that the ceremony should take place in Freemasons' Hall which was to become the headquarters of the new combined institution and the dinner afterwards in the Crown and Anchor Tavern partly as a last farewell to the headquarters of the Antients and partly because it was much larger and could seat the required number of attendees. As part of the grand ceremony Soane was commissioned to design a symbolic piece of furniture which Soane initially dubbed "a monument" but which subsequently became known as "the Ark".

The Ark

It is not clear what the Duke of Sussex and the Board of General Purposes had in mind when they commissioned Soane to design them an "Ark" to act as a centrepiece of the ceremony of the Union. Five different schemes for the Ark survive together with a sixth

18. For a history of Grand Master's Lodge see E. Williams and B. Davis, *The Grand Master's Lodge: A Revised History of the Lodge* (London: Smith, n.d. [1957]). I am grateful to the Master and Secretary of Grand Master's Lodge for giving me access to the minutes of the Lodge, held on deposit in the Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

19. Library and Museum of Freemasonry, MS GBR 1991/AR/460/LXIV-V.

20. Library and Museum of Freemasonry, MS GBR 1991/AR/460/LXVIII.



Plate 23: (SM 52/5/44) View of proposed kitchen. Soane designed this dramatic new double height kitchen to sit directly below the New Temple. Its great width necessitated the use of trussed timber girders to carry the floor of the Temple above.

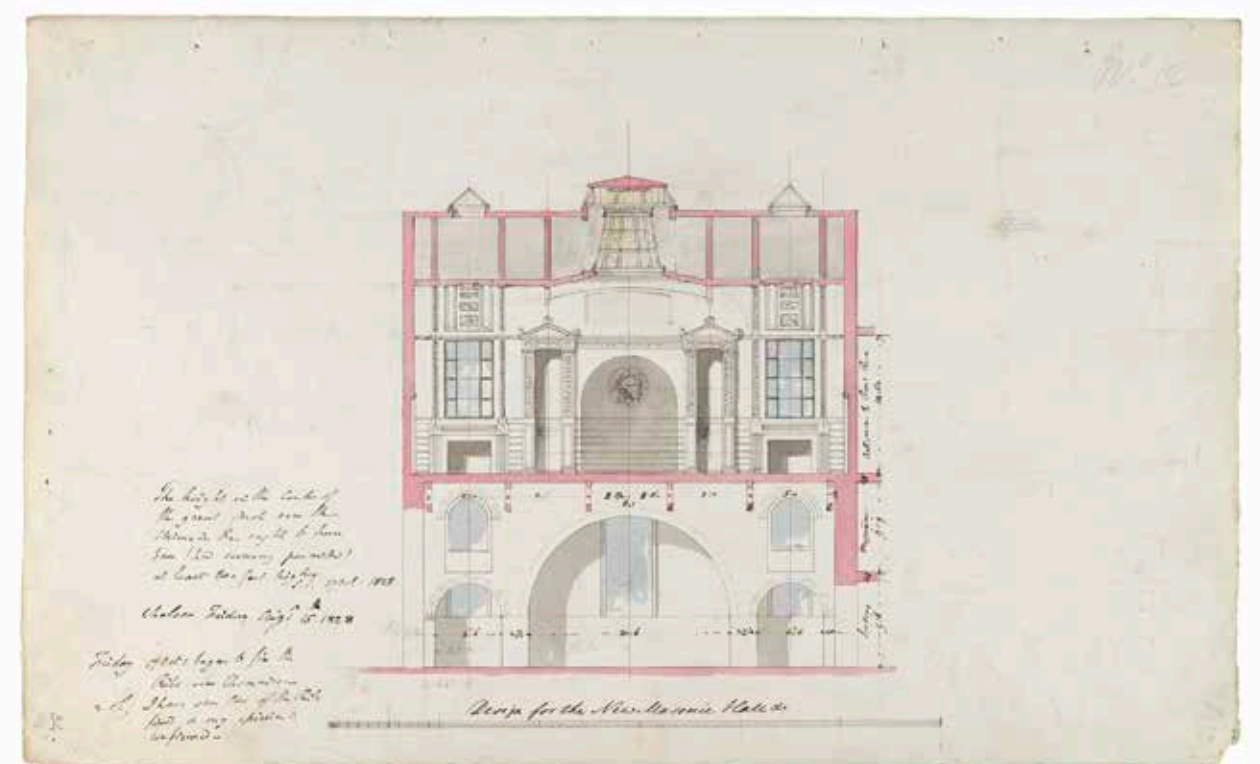


Plate 24: (SM 52/5/34) Section through Soane's Temple with the kitchen below. This section clearly shows Soane's dramatic and complex ceiling arrangement and the lantern decorated with the signs of the zodiac above.

drawing which shows the Ark as built. Any ordering of these drawings must be hypothetical as many of them are undated. However, they do seem to fit into a logical sequence.

The first shows a tall thin structure (plate 20). This was literally a monument and far too large to fit inside a building. Clearly titled "Design for Masonic Ark, 1813", if it is an early sketch it was made before the intention was understood.²¹ The rest form a more obvious set: they are drawn roughly to the same scale and with similar borders and the designs themselves are variations on the same theme, a freestanding cupboard with a segmental triangular dome (plates 7, 9, 15, 16, 21).²² All these drawings were completed in the first weeks of December the dimensions finally being signed off with the two Dukes on 16 December.²³ Soane's favourite carpenters, Richard and Thomas Martyr, then set to work to produce the Ark in time for the event on 27 December, ten carpenters labouring day and night over the Christmas period to put it all together in time.²⁴

On 27 December the Ark was put in its position in Freemasons' Hall, forming the centrepiece of the long and carefully choreographed ceremony of the Union (plate 12). Soane processed in alongside the other members of the Antients' Grand Lodge. The Duke of Sussex was installed as the new Grand Master and he then proceeded to appoint his various Grand Officers, Soane's name being called out for him to be presented and invested as the new Grand Superintendent of Works. Then Soane sadly was taken ill. Whether he made it to the great dinner afterwards is unclear but from that evening onwards he was bedridden until he could be operated upon, only recovering in March.

21. SM 54/4/11.
22. SM 54/4/3-6.
23. SM IXA/39 (this letter has been misdated 1814).
24. SM Bill Book H, p.49.

Soane as Grand Superintendent of Works

Being stuck at home did not stop Soane attending immediately to his new duties and in early 1814 letters flowed back and forth about buying the neighbouring properties to expand Freemasons' Hall. Soane's work roughly fits into four phases: works to the existing tavern (1814-1819), repair of the staircase (1821-1822), works to the Hall (1822-24) and finally the construction of the New Temple (1824-1830).

From 1814 onwards Soane was involved continuously in works at Great Queen Street. The first works were necessitated by the failure to buy the neighbouring house which meant that the existing kitchens which were in a rented temporary shed in the neighbouring garden had to be brought back within the footprint of the tavern in front of Sandby's Hall. This involved reconfiguring and rebuilding the entire basement of the front building while leaving the rest of the building untouched. Soane carved out an elegant two-storey kitchen within the existing shell. In the meantime he managed to buy the neighbouring two properties himself at auction for Grand Lodge. It was only having purchased the properties that he found that Grand Lodge was largely without funds and it was with considerable annoyance that Soane had to wait until the early 1820s to be repaid in full.

In 1821 the staircase to Sandby's Hall began to collapse and quickly Soane had to organise its complete rebuilding. Soane also became involved in reconfiguring the Hall, moving the organ from its place in the niche to make way for the Grand Master's throne. Then the roof of the Hall itself began to leak. While all this was going on, he continued to negotiate with the freeholders of the various properties around the Hall in a desperate attempt to get space

Plate 25 (overleaf): (SM P89) Gandy's dramatic view of the Temple.



to build an adequately sized new Temple. By 1824 all the deals had fallen through and Soane was asked to create what he could on the space behind the two houses he had already managed to acquire. It was too small but there was nothing that could be done. Soane tried a number of larger designs but the one that was accepted was smaller but more symmetrical: balance triumphed over size and practicality (plate 22).

The New Temple

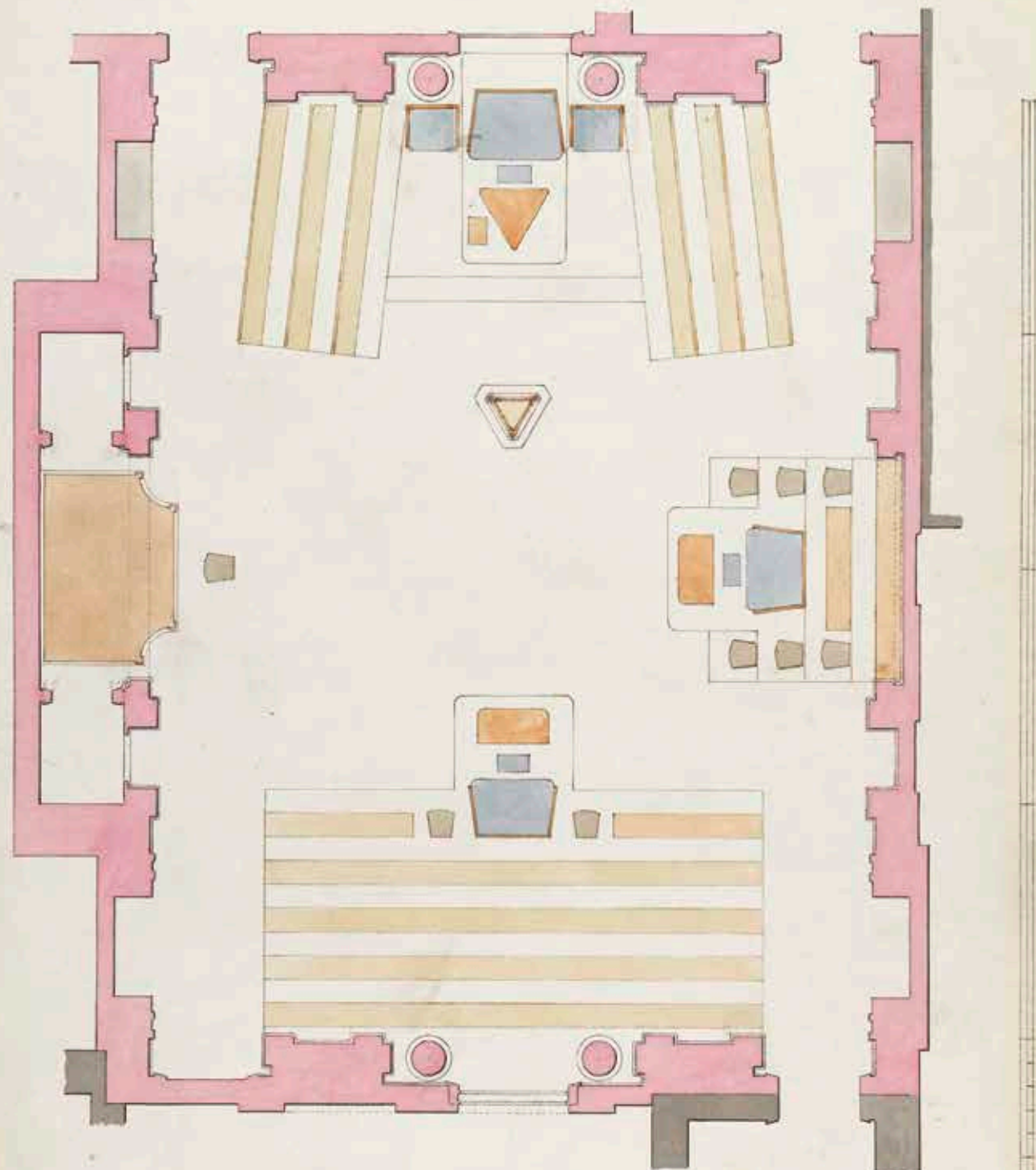
Soane's New Temple was an exquisitely detailed and beautifully proportioned space with a shallow dome echoing the new breakfast room at Soane's house in 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields (plate 6, 10, 25, 26). Light was carefully controlled and came from all sides and the lantern above (plate 24). It was one of the richest interiors he designed and it is generally much admired by architectural historians. Soane produced careful drawings for every aspect, and particularly for the case for the organ that sat in a niche on one side (plate 27). Beneath the Temple, Soane constructed a magnificent double height kitchen (plate 23). When the new Temple opened the Grand Lodge recorded a vote of thanks to Soane and the Duke of Sussex wrote to him personally to express his admiration. However, there is no doubt that after its completion it was not entirely satisfactory simply because it was too small to be used for anything other than a private lodge and even then it was too idiosyncratic to be particularly useful. Lodge rituals were written for simpler rectangular rooms with one door and from which light could effectively be shut out. Soane's remarkable space could not be blacked-out easily for those ceremonies that required darkness and had multiple entrances. It was not in other words very practical for its purpose. Soane's relative inexperience as a Freemason was clear to see.

Soane's Experience as Freemason

Soane's rise from first contact with the Freemasons in March 1813, initiation in November 1813 to appointment in December 1813 as Grand Superintendent of Works was one of the fastest promotions in Masonic history. It was not entirely unique: joining members of the Royal family were normally accelerated through all the degrees and appointed to very senior rank in short order. It was unusual nonetheless. It set Soane apart from others whom he would have met at Freemasons' Hall who would have joined and then spent many years working their way up through the ranks, first of their private Lodges, and then the lower echelons of Grand Lodge, before eventually being promoted to senior positions. In the process they got to know the members of their own lodges and a large number of their fellow Masons. None of this applied to Soane. In fact, Soane only seems to have attended his private lodge three times after his initiation, once on 1 December 1813 mentioned above, once in April 1814 and once for the last time in December 1814. Tracing through the minute books of the Grand Master's Lodge there is no evidence he ever went again. When he received a knighthood in 1832 the Grand Master's Lodge sent him a letter of congratulation and invited him to come on any occasion, but apart from thanking them, there is no evidence he took up the offer.²⁵

Various authors have suggested that Soane enjoyed Freemasonry and that he found in it something that satisfied his interests in mysteries, secrets and ceremonial or that it provided some form of solace after the death of his wife.²⁶ All the evidence points to precisely the

25. SM Letters IXB/140.



Plan of the New Masonic Hall, showing the arrangement of the seats &c

Plate 26: (SM 52/5/35) Plan of Soane's Temple with the furniture shown. This drawing gives a better sense of scale than Gandy's views. The Ark is clearly shown in the middle.

35
29 Jan 1830

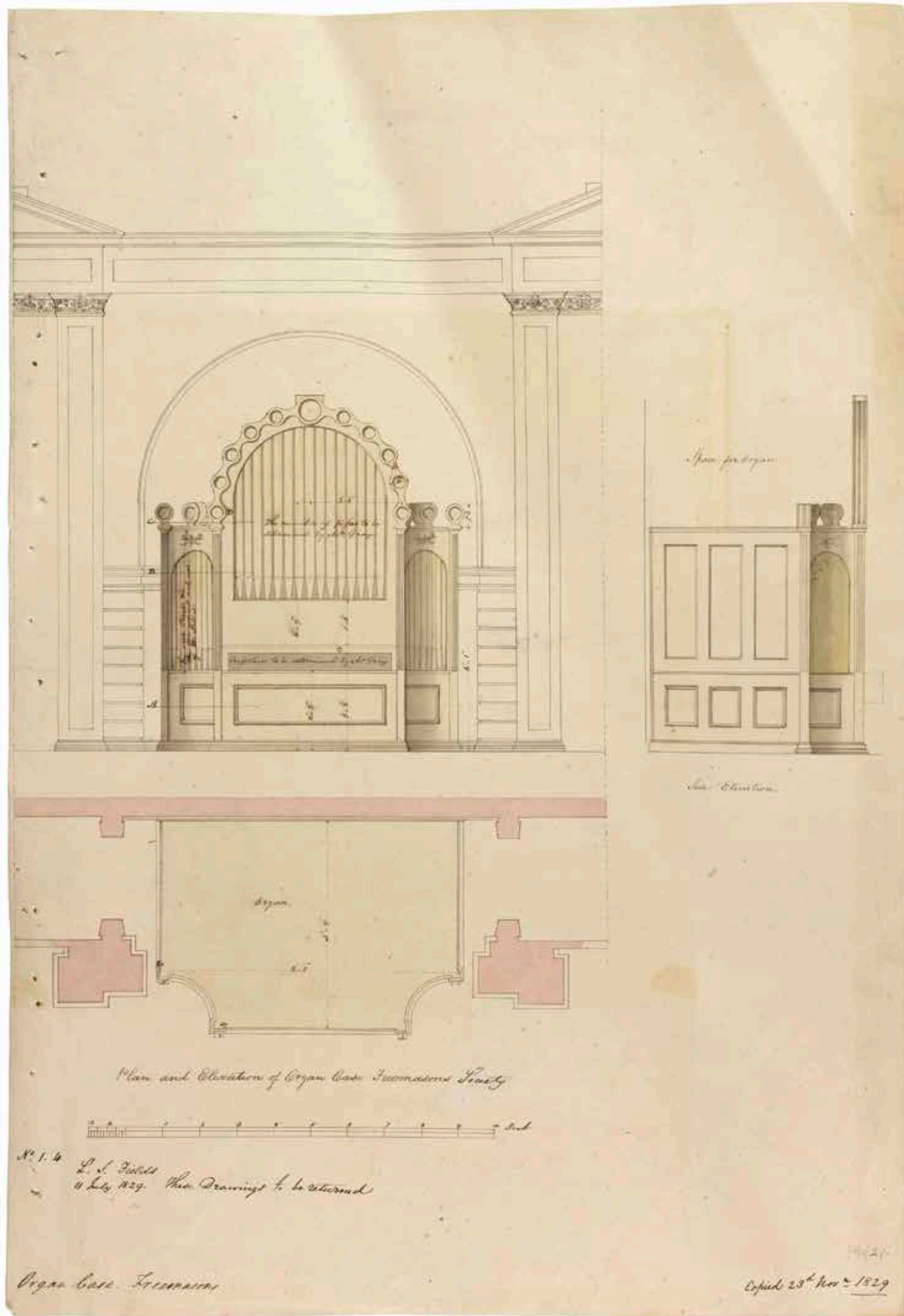


Plate 27: (SM 52/4/21) Details of the Organ. Soane produced a whole series of different designs for the organ for the new Temple of which this is one.

opposite: Soane saw himself as a senior official and professional consultant to Grand Lodge and nothing more. From his minimal attendance even at Grand Lodge meetings, there is no evidence he was in the least bit interested in anything remotely ceremonial or indeed even particularly enjoyed the social aspects. Grand Lodge met five times a year. As Grand Superintendent of Works he was expected at the very least to turn up to the Grand Investiture to be personally invested by the Grand Master with his collar and apron of office. Yet Grand Lodge Minutes show that he barely ever attended, going only 6 times in 24 years. Even when he did attend it was usually because they were discussing some business that related to the buildings and asking for a vote. Soane enjoyed the status that being a Grand Officer gave him and the contact it afforded him with the Duke of Sussex and he performed his role as their professional advisor diligently, gave generously to Masonic charities and transformed Freemasons' Hall, but Freemasonry itself does not seem to have interested him at all.

Lost Legacy

By the 1830s, Soane had created a unique interior for Freemasons' Hall. He had expanded and transformed Sandby's Hall and entirely reconfigured the interiors of the buildings around it and he had been instrumental in purchasing the various neighbouring properties which indeed would allow Grand Lodge to continue to expand its headquarters over the ensuing decades. His Ark sat at the centre of every Grand Lodge meeting, a symbol of the whole organisation and its history. Both Soane and the Duke of Sussex were less able to attend in the 1830s and were suffering from health problems, but when he died in 1837 Soane's legacy seemed secure.

Ironically it was Soane's success at acquiring properties that led to the destruction of so much that he had achieved. Out of reverence and respect, while he was alive, Grand Lodge had continued to appoint him as Grand Superintendent of Works, but after his death they needed a successor and appointed Philip Hardwick (1792-1870). Hardwick was a reasonable designer and a well-respected figure but he had none of Soane's delicacy of touch or eye for detail. Virtually his first act in office was to destroy the rear wall of Soane's carefully balanced Temple and create a semi-circular apse in a clumsy effort to increase space. A room that was too small but perfectly formed was now too small and oddly proportioned. Hardwick's health suffered and he resigned in 1856 having served nearly 20 years in office, to be replaced by William Daukes (1811-1880) who persuaded Grand Lodge that a major rebuilding was required, redeveloping all the buildings Soane had so diligently acquired and demolishing his Temple in the process. Daukes hoped to carry out the works himself but Grand Lodge had no faith in his abilities and held a competition won by a young architect called Frederick Pepys Cockerell (1833-1878). It was Cockerell who oversaw the demolition of Soane's kitchen, Temple, staircases and all the works he had done so that by 1865 not a trace survived of Soane's work except for the Ark. This still held pride of place in Grand Lodge before the Grand Master's throne and continued to do so until the fateful fire on 3 May 1883 (plate 13), which finally removed the last traces of Soane's design from the Hall, severing a connection that had begun 70 years before. The rebuilding of the Ark in 2017 restores that lost connection. Soane's work may have been lost but he was far from forgotten. He was the most distinguished architect ever to hold the title of Grand Superintendent of Works and each year past Grand Superintendents of Works and their Deputies and Assistants meet together as the "Soane Club" and hold a dinner in his honour. Now there is a physical artefact to remind all Freemasons of Soane's important contribution to their fascinating history.

**SOANE'S ARK
OF THE MASONIC COVENANT**
August 2017





Ibarra Font is the result of a collaboration initiated by the printer San Francisco Artes Gráficas and the Technological Institute of Aragon (ITA). The aim was to recover an ancient Spanish font commissioned by the renowned eighteenth-century Aragonese printer Joaquín Ibarra y Marín from the engraver Antonio Espinosa de los Monteros. The work was carried out by Nacho Pulido and Sandra Baldassarri, both involved with the Advanced Graphic Computing Group at CPSUZ, managed by Francisco José Serón Arbeloa.

photographic references
Sir John Soane's Museum, London
The Library and Museum of Freemasonry

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