

Catalogue

The Drawings of Robert and James Adams

Frances Sands discusses why the Sir John Soane's Museum decided to create an online catalogue of architectural drawings

One of the major advantages of publishing a catalogue online is that it can reach people around the globe. The Sir John Soane's Museum is a source of inspiration for architecture students and professionals worldwide and they can now study the collection remotely following the launch of our online Adam catalogue in December 2011.

We have more than 8,000 drawings from the architects' office of Robert and James Adam. Last year, 177 drawings went live and it is anticipated that a further 2,000 will be added during 2012. Each entry, complete with high quality digital images, is available free of charge.

Since July 2010 it has been my task to catalogue the Soane Museum's Adam drawings, which are spread across 54 typologically arranged folios. This is a daunting challenge as about one third of the drawings were previously unattributed.

The work has been bolstered by newly shot digital photographs, which have been used to illustrate the online

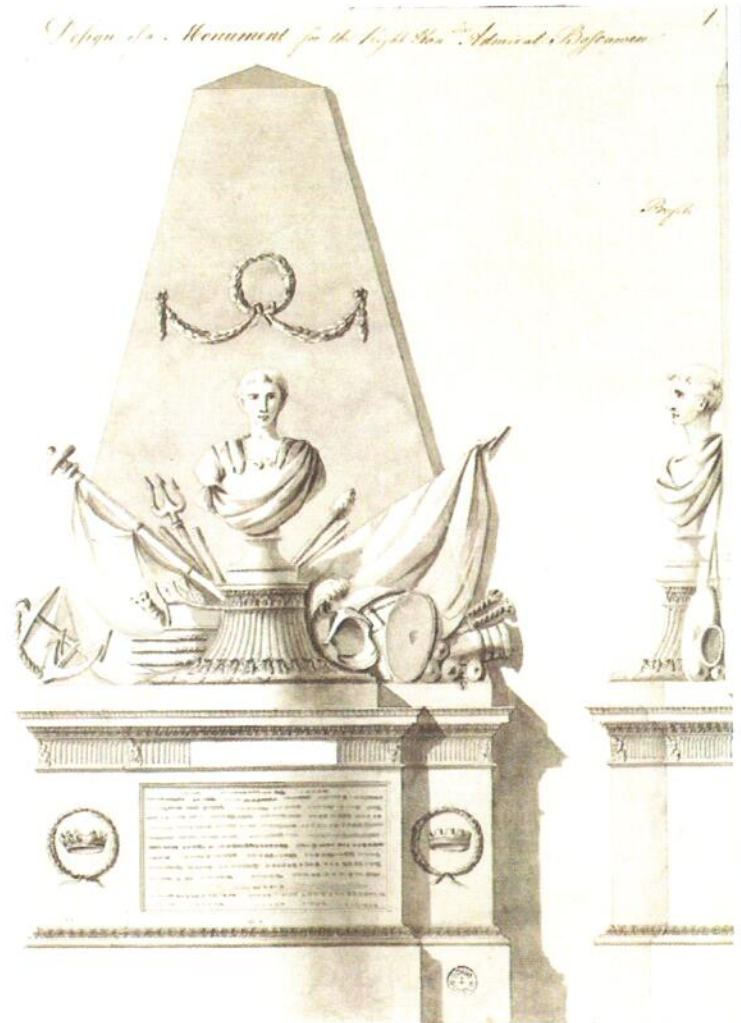
catalogue, funded by the Leon Levy Foundation. The digital collection is an invaluable tool in the cataloguing process as it helps with new attributions and enables groups of drawings for specific buildings to be collated for the first time since the 18th century.

Previous cataloguing of the Adam drawings was undertaken by Soane curators Walter Spiers and Arthur Bolton.

Bolton produced a lavish two-volume publication in 1922, including a discourse on many of Adam's executed works, and a list of around two thirds of the drawings collection. Its prohibitive cost of eight guineas seriously affected sales.

Similar problems affected the publication of the Italian Renaissance and dance drawings catalogues in 1998 and 2003, and parallels would have inevitably been drawn had we produced a printed catalogue of the Adam drawings.

Considering the rich breadth of the collection, they would have been very expensive, and would have illustrated a mere fraction



An elevation and profile of a funerary monument to the Rt. Hon Admiral Edward Boscowen, St Michael Penkevil, Cornwall, 1761

of the drawings. Online publication provides instant, free access for all, with a handsome digital photograph of every drawing. And it will allow the Adam drawings catalogue to grow as the work is done.

Frances Sands is the catalogue editor of the Adam drawings project at Sir John Soane's Museum, London

On my bookshelf Timothy Hornsby



The Hound in the Left-Hand Corner, by Giles Waterfield
When I was appointed chairman of the Horniman Museum, after an excellent briefing from the director, I was recommended this book by Giles Waterfield.

The novel is a wickedly funny send up that covers a tumultuous day in the life of the Museum of British History as it prepares for an exhibition centring on an almost unknown painting by Gainsborough, owned by the chairman of the trustees. The chief curator has worries about

the head of exhibitions is at daggers drawn with his deputy head, the German head of conservation has scruples, the head of security is constantly looking at his battery of video screens, and the museum director is torn between scholarly work and hopes for his career.

At the board meeting of trustees, the chairman unveils his plans for a major new gallery called The Nowness of Now – a new concept about “people, not objects, intensely of today, a place not for the elite, but for

the bandwagon, the academic trustee puts in a superb plea for the original purpose of the museum; to collect, preserve, display and interpret objects, underpinned by scholarship.

The novel ends with a fantastic slapstick scene at the exhibition banquet, when the catering goes awry, and the truth about the picture is revealed. It's a delightful and provocative romp through the undergrowth of museum people and practice.

Timothy Hornsby is the chairman