A new exhibition coinciding with the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare will open at Sir John Soane’s Museum on 21st April.

‘The Cloud-Capped Towers’: Shakespeare in Soane’s Architectural Imagination, (21 April – 08 October 2016) will focus on Soane’s extensive Shakespeare collections, including his ownership of the first four Folios of Shakespeare’s collected works, the way Soane and his family participated in the eighteenth century Shakespearean revival, and the influence of the Bard on Soane’s architecture.

Guest-curated by Dr Alison Shell of UCL, the exhibition will largely consist of Soane’s own collection, supplemented by important loans from the Garrick Club.

Whilst Soane’s fascination with Shakespeare is evident throughout his house-museum, this is the first time the elements have been drawn together to provide a cohesive study of the way Shakespeare influenced Soane. It is also a rare opportunity to see Shakespeare’s first four folios displayed together in one exhibition.

The first room of the exhibition will introduce the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, setting it in the context of the 200th anniversary celebrations in 1816, and discuss the intersection between literature and architecture with a particular focus on David Garrick, the celebrated actor-manager of the Drury Lane Theatre who was so instrumental in the popularisation of Shakespeare in Georgian London.

The Garrick club has loaned two paintings, ‘David Garrick between the Muses of Tragedy and Comedy’, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, and ‘John Philip Kemble as

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Hamlet’, from the studio of Sir Thomas Lawrence. These are instantly recognisable portraits of two of the greatest actors of the eighteenth-century, famed for their interpretations of Shakespeare. The Adam brothers’ designs for Drury Lane Theatre will also be on display, as well as a rare coloured edition of The works in architecture of Robert and James Adam.

The second room in the gallery goes on to consider Shakespeare in Soane’s architectural imagination. In 1788-89 ‘The Shakespeare Gallery’, only the second purpose-built art gallery in England, was built in Pall Mall to designs by George Dance the Younger, Soane’s first architectural teacher and mentor. These in turn influenced Soane’s later designs for the Dulwich Picture Gallery – itself the first public art gallery in Britain.

The exhibition closes with a selection of Soane’s large-scale Royal Academy lecture drawings, allowing access to these appealing and striking images which can usually only be viewed by appointment.

Helen Dorey, Acting Director of Sir John Soane’s Museum says: “Soane’s fascination with Shakespeare is evident throughout his house, in his collection of books, paintings and sculptures and of course, in the Shakespeare Recess – a small shrine-like space centred on the Vision of Shakespeare, a painting of the apotheosis of the Bard commissioned by Soane. Soane’s collections of Shakespeare related material has never before been drawn together to provide a cohesive study of how Shakespeare influenced Soane and I am delighted that we are taking the opportunity to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of a man whose status as the greatest English literary genius was celebrated by Sir John Soane in so many ways in his Museum. The exhibition is a wonderful opportunity to present works not usually available to the public in an exciting exploration of Soane’s world.”

‘The cloud-capped towers’: Shakespeare in Soane’s Architectural Imagination will be accompanied by a fully illustrated book with an introductory essay by Professor Alison Shell and others by members of the Museum’s curatorial team and outside scholars.

-ENDS-

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Listings
Exhibition: ‘The Cloud-Capped Towers’: Shakespeare in Soane’s Architectural Imagination
Dates: 21 April – 8 October 2016
Address: Sir John Soane’s Museum, 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3BP
Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10am-5pm. Last entry 4:30pm
Admission: Free

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Sir John Soane’s Museum

Sir John Soane’s house, museum and library at No. 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields has been a public museum since the early nineteenth century. On his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, Soane (1753-1837) began to arrange his books, classical antiquities, casts and models so that students of architecture might benefit from access to them. In 1833 he negotiated an Act of Parliament to preserve the house and collection after his death for the benefit of ‘amateurs and students’ in architecture, painting and sculpture. Today Sir John Soane’s Museum is one of the country’s most unusual and significant museums with a continuing and developing commitment to education and creative inspiration. The museum is open free: Tuesday to Saturday inclusive, 10am-5pm. It is also open on the first Tuesday evening of each month from 6-9pm. www.soane.org

Sir John Soane’s Museum is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) whose prime sponsor is the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Professor Alison Shell

Professor Alison Shell is a postgraduate tutor in the Department of English at UCL and the author of *Shakespeare and Religion* (2010). Her earlier book *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England*, 2007, was awarded the Dietz Prize by the journal *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, and she is also the author of *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (1999) and of many other scholarly articles. Alison was also one of the specialists who worked on the cataloguing of Sir John Soane’s Library: the complete catalogue is available on-line.