

# **Buildings as Mnemonic Devices:** Architecture and the preservation of memory

by Fatima Hammoud





Fig 1. Illustration on front cover by Hammoud, F

Fig 2. Manifesto created by Hammoud, F, using a variety of Ai generated images and some of my own. Exploring the following themes:  
**Rough, raw textures, mystical, juxtaposing layers, lost memories, echoes of the past, fragments, storytelling, metamorphosis**



## Preface

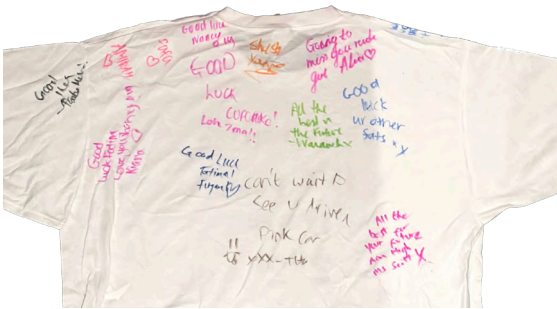
My interest in this research was sparked by personal experiences in architectural spaces that seemed to hold echoes of the past. A visit to St. Mary's Church in Somer's Town, with its quiet, timeless atmosphere, made me realise how buildings can preserve memory and evoke emotional connections. This encounter led me to explore how architecture acts as a mnemonic device, capturing and conveying history in ways that resonate deeply with those who experience it.

To ground this study in my personal understanding of memory, I have included a memory box. This collection of objects reflects my own emotional and sensory associations, offering a physical insight into how memories can be preserved and evoked through materiality. These items represent my personal intake on memory and the ways physical things, like architecture, can make intangible feelings concrete. Through this dissertation, I aim to understand how architecture not only reflects but also preserves memory, making the past tangible and emotionally present in our lives.

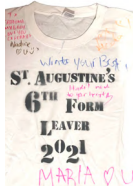
Inside the memory box



In my memory box I included the dress I wore on my first birthday. This serves as a physical memory of my earliest moments & a link to the identity I was beginning to form.



This t-shirt with signatures from my sixth form friends evokes fond memories of the time we spent together. Each message brings back specific memories, making me feel connected to those moments again.



The friendship bracelets from my childhood bring back happy memories of the friends I grew up with. Each bracelet reminds me of moments we shared and the carefree times we spent together. Looking at them, I feel grateful for those connections and the sense of belonging they gave me. These simple pieces hold stories and emotions that go beyond words, evoking a strong sense of nostalgia.



A necklace passed down from my grandmother to my mother and then to me. This piece carries deep sentimental value, connecting me to my family's history.

This bracelet of my home country flag holds a special story. Two years ago, while I was in Lebanon, I told my dad I wanted something to remind me of home when I returned to London. He went out and came back with this bracelet, and it now serves as a constant reminder of my roots & the love I have for my country.



These souvenirs from when I visited Germany bring back a sense of discovery, especially the one from Berlin's Futurium Museum. Visiting this futuristic space connected me to Berlin's culture and inspired me to think about how spaces can spark curiosity and tell a story.

Fig 3-9. Images of objects which evoke certain emotions. Created by Hammoud, F



## What memory means to me



Fig 10. Image of me in Lebanon

Alongside this text, these images of my home country, Lebanon add a personal layer to my understanding of memory and place. They capture the environments, traditions, and everyday moments that hold deep meaning for me. These photos remind me of the sensory details, feelings, smells and sounds that connect me to my roots. They represent the kind of memories that should be preserved in architecture, demonstrating how places can hold layers of personal and cultural history that become part of our identities. In the future, I hope there will be more spaces where others can experience similar connections to their own stories and histories.



Fig 11. Tyre city in Lebanon



Fig 12. Beach in home country, Lebanon

*“Memory is the treasure house of the mind wherein the monuments thereof are kept and preserved.”*

- Thomas Fuller







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## Abstract

Architectural spaces have the potential to become “living archives,” preserving memories that connect people with the lives of those who once inhabited them. An archive, in this context, is a collection of records or materials that document the past, often to preserve cultural, historical, or personal information for future generations.<sup>1</sup> Through sensory cues and tangible reminders, buildings can evoke memories that might otherwise fade with time. This research investigates how architecture functions as a mnemonic device, preserving and communicating memory through immersive and sensory experiences. The central question explored is: How can architectural spaces be designed to create and preserve history through mnemonic devices? Moreover, how can we connect with the memories of those who inhabited these spaces, and what role do immersive environments play in this process?

Through a detailed examination of the case studies of Dennis Severs’ House, Leighton House, and the John Soane Museum in London, this research demonstrates how each site uses immersive, sensory design to evoke both personal and collective memories. Here, history is not merely observed; it is felt and lived.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/archive>



## Introduction

Architecture has long served as more than just a physical structure; it acts as a repository of memory, serving as a bridge between the past and present. This dissertation explores how architecture can serve as a mnemonic device.<sup>2</sup> Mnemonic devices are a special technique used in architectural design to enhance memory retention and connect people to past communities. Through the interplay of sensory design, nostalgia, and storytelling, spaces can function as mnemonic devices, evoking profound emotional connections. These connections allow individuals to engage with the history of the space on an intimate level.

The idea that memory attaches itself to places, as proposed by Pierre Nora, forms the foundation of this research.<sup>3</sup> Memory does not simply reside in events but becomes rooted in physical locations, turning these places into living archives that preserve emotional connections to the past. In this sense, architecture is not just a backdrop for history, but an active participant in preserving memory. <sup>4</sup>Spaces can transcend their function as static monuments to become dynamic environments where history is felt, not merely recalled. The power of architecture lies in its ability to evoke emotional responses through design and sensory elements, allowing visitors to engage with the past in a deeply personal way.

Nostalgia is another crucial theme in this exploration. The use of mnemonic devices is central to preserving and evoking nostalgia, using sensory cues like textures, materials, sounds, and smells to trigger personal and collective memories. These elements make a space resonate emotionally, linking visitors to the past. As Sally Stone notes, adaptive reuse is a process of “un-doing” where buildings maintain traces of their past, transforming them into repositories of memory.<sup>5</sup> These spaces hold emotional weight by connecting visitors to past lives through the sensory details embedded in the environment. This approach not only preserves the structure but also strengthens the emotional connection to it, allowing visitors to experience a sense of continuity with the past. Understanding this dynamic is crucial when considering how spaces can retain memories. In adaptive reuse projects, buildings should not just maintain the physical structure, but also curate experiences that resonate emotionally with visitors. By intentionally designing spaces that elicit specific feelings or thoughts, we can strengthen our ties to history and enhance the impact of the environment on those who engage with it. Spaces that stimulate emotions or prompt you to revisit memories can serve as strong archives for memory.<sup>6</sup>

This research focuses on three primary case studies: Dennis Severs’ House, Leighton House, and the John Soane Museum, all of which use sensory design to evoke both personal and collective memories, illustrating how architecture can serve as a powerful mnemonic device. In these spaces, history is experienced on a deeply emotional and cognitive level. These examples show how architecture can create living archives, inviting visitors to interact with the past in a sensory and personal way. Furthermore, they demonstrate how adaptive reuse—transforming existing buildings for new functions while preserving their cultural, architectural, and historical value—can create dynamic environments where past and present coexist.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation investigates the potential of architecture to preserve history, not only through physical conservation but also through the sensory and emotional experiences these spaces offer. It examines how architecture can become a living repository of memory, allowing us to experience history.

Drawing on the immersive storytelling qualities of Dennis Severs’ House, Leighton House, and the John Soane Museum, this research will explore how these spaces evoke memory through sensory engagement and narrative layers. Each of these case studies demonstrates the power of architecture to act as a mnemonic device, guiding visitors through an emotional and cognitive experience that connects them to the past. These spaces not only preserve historical elements but actively invite visitors to engage with them, turning them into living archives.

7 University College of Estate Management (UCEM), 2023. What is adaptive reuse? [online] Available at: <https://www.ucem.ac.uk/whats-happening/articles/what-is-adaptive-reuse/>

2 Fiveable (2024) Mnemonic Architecture. <https://library.fiveable.me/key-terms/psychogeography-and-art/mnemonic-architecture>  
3 Nora, P. (1989) Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, Representations, 26, pp.7-24  
4 ibid  
5 Sally, S. (2020) Undoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory  
6 ibid

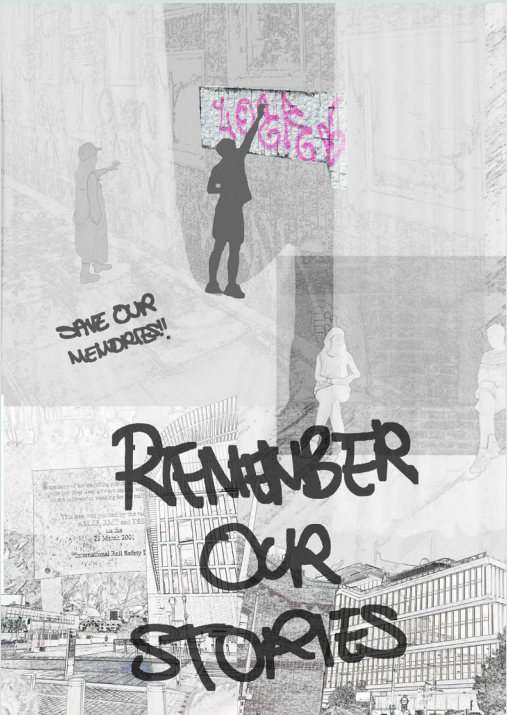


Fig 13. Poster showcasing the layering in Somer's Town and gentrification causing a loss of identity.





Nostalgia Cultural Identity

My journey  
of exploration

Reflection  
on the past  
and the future  
mystery

Atmosphere

1977





# Memory, Nostalgia and Mnemonic devices in Architecture

Memory noun

- a: the ability to remember information, experiences and people
- b: something that you remember from the past<sup>1</sup>

## The Role of Architecture in Memory

Although it may appear simple, memory is a process that demands effort and focus.<sup>2</sup> We tend to remember things that trigger certain emotions or thoughts, nothing in our memories is random. The relationship between architecture and memory is particularly profound, as spaces can trigger memories through sensory cues; textures, sounds, smells, and visual cues, that anchor individuals to specific places and moments. Memory, in this sense, is both cognitive and emotional, where the physical environment becomes a vessel for personal and collective recollections. This shift is observed by Pierre Nora, who highlights memory is more than a simple act of recollection; it is where history and memory are interwoven to create lieux de mémoire or sites of memory, offering a deep connection between the present and the past. Nora contends, “Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events,”<sup>3</sup> implying that certain places become repositories of collective memory, offering a tangible means of recalling history. In architecture, these spaces are more than just physical structures, they become markers of identity, heritage, and personal experience. Pierre here highlights the profound distinction between the two. This shift underscores that memory is more than a simple act of recollection; it is deeply intertwined with the tangible, with places where history and memory come together and solidify.<sup>4</sup> Such spaces transcend their function as mere vessels of historical fact to become repositories of collective identity. This allows them to forge an emotional resonance that bridges past and present. The interplay between the tangible and the intangible points to the critical role of architecture in safeguarding cultural and collective memory. Through their design and sensory elements, historic buildings have the power to evoke emotional responses, allowing visitors to engage with the past on a visceral level. These are not static monuments but dynamic environments where history becomes something felt rather than merely recalled. By examining how such spaces invite active interaction with memory, this study highlights the enduring potential of architecture to connect people to their shared heritage, ensuring that memory remains a living and evolving force.

Architecture often serves as a repository for cultural memory, much like a souvenir embodies personal or collective histories. Susan Stewart, In *On Longing*, explores how objects and spaces act as vessels for memory, allowing individuals to reconnect with the past.<sup>5</sup> Stewart introduces the concept of “objectified melancholy,” a form of nostalgia where the past is present in memory but remains out of reach. Architecture, like a souvenir, helps to materialise this longing, turning the built environment into a physical manifestation of memory.<sup>6</sup> Spaces become objects of desire, holding and preserving the traces of history and emotion. Stewart’s claim that “The past is not just remembered but present,” aligns with Zumthor’s notion of atmospheres as spaces that invite immersion, allowing memories to be experienced through an almost tactile engagement with the built environment.<sup>7</sup>

## Nostalgia and Emotional Engagement with the Built Environment

Nostalgia, a personal and incurable sense of longing for lost time, where the past is vividly felt yet remains out of reach. This bittersweet longing for the past, often idealised as a “Golden Age,” plays a critical role in architecture’s emotional impact.<sup>8</sup> In the preservation and reuse of historic buildings, nostalgia is often a driving force. The textures, materials, and decay within these buildings evoke a sense of longing for a past that can no longer be physically accessed. As Galli points out, the preservation of ruins and historic structures is not just a matter of conserving the past but a way of engaging with nostalgia.<sup>9</sup> Ruins, by their very nature, speak to the passage of time and the impermanence of human creations, allowing individuals to reflect on history, memory, and loss. The sensory qualities of a space - the texture of a wall, the scent of wood, or the sound of a creaking floorboard - play a crucial role in triggering memories. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, argues that the home, as a “psychic space,” is a place where memories are preserved and emotions are tied to its very form and materials.<sup>10</sup> The home, as an intimate space, becomes a vessel for lived experiences, where the familiarity of objects and sensory cues evoke memories, turning everyday surroundings into a memory archive. Bachelard emphasises that architecture is not a neutral backdrop to life but an active participant in shaping emotional experiences and recollections.<sup>11</sup> The spaces we inhabit become emotional sanctuaries, places where memories are etched into their very structure and materials, forming a bond between person and place. These elements contribute to the creation of a nostalgic atmosphere, serving as emotional triggers, allowing individuals to reconnect with a time and place long gone.

## Mnemonic Architecture as a Vessel for Memory and Identity

Peter Zumthor, in *Atmospheres*, explores how architecture transcends its physical form to evoke emotional and sensory responses, describing it as the “magic of the real.”<sup>12</sup> He emphasises the intangible qualities of spaces that create moods, memories, and connections. Zumthor notes that elements such as light, sound, materiality, and even temperature collaborate to produce atmospheres that resonate with the occupants on a deeply personal level. Through this lens, architecture becomes not only a vessel for memory but an active participant in shaping and reawakening it. Architecture’s power as a mnemonic device lies in its ability to embed memory within its forms and materials.<sup>13</sup> Peter Zumthor highlights the importance of sensory engagement in creating atmospheres that evoke memory. He writes of spaces where light falls in a particular way or where the scent of a material lingers in the air, leaving a lasting impression on those who experience it. These elements act as triggers, anchoring memories within the physical environment.

Jane Bennett’s concept of vibrant matter further deepens this understanding by suggesting that materials themselves possess agency and vitality.<sup>14</sup> In her work, Bennett challenges the passive conception of architecture, arguing that buildings and objects are not inert but are imbued with a form of life and energy. This vitality

1 Cambridge Dictionary, 2024. Memory. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/memory>  
2 Budson.A. Why We Remember and Forget, and What We Can Do About It, Harvard Gazette, February 2023. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/02/why-we-remember-and-forget-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/>  
3 Nora, P. (1989) Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, Representations, 26, pp.7-24.  
4 ibid  
5 Stewart, S., 1993. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.  
6 ibid  
7 Zumthor, P., 2006. Atmospheres. Basel: Birkhäuser.

8 Galli, G., 2013. Nostalgia, Architecture, Ruins, and Their Preservation. Change Over Time, 3(1), pp.12–26.  
9 Galli, G., 2013. Nostalgia, Architecture, Ruins, and Their Preservation. Change Over Time, 3(1), pp.12–26.  
10 Bachelard, G. 1994. The Poetics of Space.  
11 ibid  
12 Zumthor, P., 2006. Atmospheres. Basel: Birkhäuser.  
13 ibid  
14 Bennett, J., 2010. Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.

Fig 14. Illustration on facing page by Hammoud, F. Initial impressions on nostalgia



allows architecture to evoke emotional responses and trigger memories. Materials are not merely physical elements but are dynamic, resonating with the energies of the people who use them, creating spaces that actively participate in the formation and reactivation of memory. This notion is echoed by Littlefield and Lewis in *Architectural Voices*, who propose that buildings, through their age and wear, “speak” to us, emitting a distinct architectural voice that reflects the experiences and histories they have witnessed.<sup>15</sup> These “voices” are heard not through words but through the sensory experiences and emotional responses that the space elicits, adding another layer of depth to the way architecture becomes a living, mnemonic device.

Ruins, with their crumbling walls and visible decay, evoke a sense of nostalgia by embodying the passage of time. In *Nostalgia, Architecture, Ruins, and Their Preservation*, Galli argues that the preservation of ruins is not only a way to conserve history but also to engage with the emotions they evoke.<sup>16</sup> Zumthor echoes this sentiment, reflecting on how the impermanence of materials can amplify their emotional weight, making the viewer acutely aware of the transience of life and time. In Zumthor’s view, the most memorable spaces are those that create a “vibration of presence,” where history and memory intertwine seamlessly with the present moment. These spaces engage the senses so fully that visitors feel transported, not just reminded, of a different time.

Ultimately, the power of architecture to evoke memory lies in its ability to create a dialogue between history and the present. Spaces that engage the senses and tell stories do more than preserve the past; they make it accessible and relevant. This dialogue is especially critical in the context of adaptive reuse, where the preservation of historic buildings involves not just maintaining their physical form but also curating their emotional and cultural resonance.<sup>17</sup> By integrating memory, nostalgia, and mnemonic devices, architecture becomes a medium through which individuals and communities can connect with their shared histories, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity.

Upon entering St Mary’s church in Somer’s Town , I found myself drawn to its nostalgic aura - an echo of the past preserved in its weathered walls, worn textures, and intricate details. This space, existing in a state of “limbo,” is caught between its rich history and an uncertain future, felt like a vessel for memory, retaining the essence of the lives and events it once sheltered. Reflecting on this, I was inspired by its potential to preserve and convey layers of memory, inviting contemporary audiences to engage with its history through adaptive reuse - the process of repurposing existing buildings for new functions, preserving their cultural, architectural, and historic value.<sup>18</sup> This approach transforms spaces into dynamic environments where past and present coexist. For me, St. Mary’s exemplifies how such interventions can create a dialogue that bridges generations, offering visitors an emotional and sensory connection to a shared history.

<sup>15</sup> Littlefield, D. & Lewis, S., 2008. *Architectural Voices: Listening to Old Buildings*.

<sup>16</sup> Galli, G., 2013. *Nostalgia, Architecture, Ruins, and Their Preservation*. *Change Over Time*, 3(1), pp. 12–26.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> University College of Estate Management (UCEM), 2023. What is adaptive reuse? [online] Available at: <https://www.ucem.ac.uk/whats-happening/articles/what-is-adaptive-reuse/>



Fig 15&16. Image of mould in St Mary’s church Somer’s Town by Hammoud, F. Illustration of image on facing page





Case Studies



Fig 17. Dennis Severs' House.Silent Night visit. Available at: <https://www.dennissevershouse.co.uk/calendar>

‘Once I get you in there, I am going to bombard all of your senses until I create in your mind a picture or an impression – like a memory – which you can take away within you.’

- David Severs

Dennis Sever’s House

The following analysis of Dennis Severs’ House, Leighton House, and Sir John Soane’s Museum delves into how each site engages visitors through sensory immersion, narrative, and design. These spaces offer profound insights into architecture’s ability to function as a mnemonic device, bridging personal and collective memories through their unique characteristics.

Dennis Severs’ House, located at 18 Folgate Street in London, is a “still-life drama” that immerses visitors in the imagined lives of a fictional Huguenot family, the Jervises, who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>1</sup> Conceived by artist Dennis Severs, the house uses sound, scent, and lighting to create a visceral sense of stepping into the past. Every detail, from the half-eaten meals on the dining table to the faint smell of oranges, creates an illusion of lives just moments interrupted.<sup>2</sup> Visitors are instructed to remain silent and refrain from using phones or cameras, emphasising the meditative quality of the experience and allowing for complete immersion

1 Old Spitalfields Market. Things to do: Dennis Severs’ House. <https://oldspitalfieldsmarket.com/journal/things-to-do-dennis-severs-house>

2 Dennis Severs’ House. The House. Available at: <https://dennissevershouse.co.uk/about/the-house>.

Walking through Dennis Severs’ House, I initially felt like an uninvited guest, stepping into a deeply personal narrative that unfolded like an enigmatic play. The flicker of shadows and distant sounds heightened this feeling, creating a charged and unfamiliar atmosphere. However, as I moved through the house, room by room, that initial sense of trespassing transformed into something more intimate and connected. Each meticulously arranged detail— delicate lace gloves draped over a chair and the faint, earthy scent of polished wood lingering in the air—felt like an invitation to piece together the lives of the absent Jervises. The space seemed to whisper stories, not as a rigid script, but as fragments that I could interpret and reconstruct. By the time I left, I felt deeply intertwined with the imagined world of the house, as though I had been granted the privilege of stepping into an ephemeral moment of someone else’s history. It was a truly haunting yet profoundly moving experience.

Drawing on Pierre Nora’s views mentioned before on lieux de mémoire, Dennis Severs’ House brilliantly demonstrates the power of architecture as a repository of memory. Here, the intentional blurring of boundaries between historical authenticity and artistic invention enhances its emotional impact. By prioritising sensory and subjective engagement over strict factual accuracy, the house invites visitors to connect with history in a deeply personal way. The enforced

silence amplifies this connection; free from distractions, each visitor becomes part of the performance, interpreting the space through their own imagination. Rather than diminishing its authenticity, the house’s “curated memories” offer a profound exploration of how history can be felt rather than simply understood. Is it memory, or is it a form of historical fiction crafted for modern nostalgia? Perhaps it is both, an evocative interplay that resonates long after leaving its walls. This interplay is the essence of its magic, transforming it from a static monument into a living, breathing experience.





Fig 18. Arab Hall, Leighton House. Photo by Pryce W. Available at: <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/museums/history-leighton-house>

## The Leighton House Museum



Fig 19. Dining room, Leighton House. Photo by Hammoud, F

Leighton House Museum, in the refined district of Kensington, is a testament to the eclectic tastes of Frederic Leighton, a celebrated Victorian artist.<sup>3</sup> This space is as much a canvas for his aesthetic philosophy as it is a home. The Arab Hall, inspired by Islamic art and adorned with tiles from Damascus and Persia, is the centrepiece of the house, radiating a quiet, almost otherworldly grandeur. The interplay of light on the hall's fountain and golden dome creates an atmosphere that is simultaneously serene and theatrical. While I admired the breathtaking craftsmanship of the Arab Hall, certain restored areas felt overly polished, breaking the illusion of authenticity. For example, the staircase adorned with Turkish ceramics seemed more curated than lived-in. Although visually stunning, the space felt slightly detached, evoking admiration rather than emotional connection.

Leighton House is a compelling study in how architecture and design can mediate cultural memory. Its intricate details invite a slow, contemplative experience, much like a gallery. However, the reliance on restoration raises critical questions: does the rebuilding process enhance or erode the original's authenticity?

Unlike Dennis Severs' House, which demands silence for an inward journey, Leighton House invites a more conventional appreciation of artistic heritage. While its beauty is undeniable, its carefully restored elements risk feeling static, making it a different kind of mnemonic space, one that prioritises preservation over experiential depth.



The Sir John Soane Musuem

Sir John Soane's Museum, housed in the architect's former residence at Lincoln's Inn Fields, exemplifies how architecture can evoke memory through the interplay of light, spatial design, and reflective surfaces.<sup>4</sup> Soane meticulously designed this house museum to reflect his philosophy of space and memory, creating an intricate environment where objects and architecture blur into one cohesive narrative. The Picture Room, with its movable panels revealing layered artworks, and the atmospheric Monk's Parlour are among its most celebrated spaces.

Soane's Museum demonstrates how architecture can function as both a practical and philosophical exploration of memory. Unlike Dennis Severs' House, which prioritises sensory and emotional immersion, or Leighton House, which foregrounds aesthetic beauty, Soane's Museum is a space of intellectual provocation. The layered design encourages curiosity, reflection, and discovery. In this way, it echoes again the idea of sites of memory, engaging visitors in an active dialogue with the past. Its silence, however, seems more introspective, an invitation to understand the interplay of memory and materiality.

As I walked through the Sir John Soane Museum, I felt deeply connected to the space. The contrast between rooms filled with light and those bathed in a more subdued ambience created a dynamic rhythm, shaping my emotions and focus. The brightly lit spaces were energising, almost celebratory, while the dimly lit ones felt meditative, allowing time for deep reflection. The strategic placement of mirrors added a layer of intrigue, making the space feel infinite and alive. This interplay of light and design gave me a sense of walking through Soane's life, imagining how he might have felt and interacted with these spaces. It was as though the architecture itself was communicating his legacy.

While the Sir John Soane Museum achieves an unparalleled engagement with memory and atmosphere, it could be argued that its reliance on dramatic lighting and mirrors may overshadow other sensory experiences. For instance, the emphasis on visual elements could detract from the potential for tactile or auditory connections that might further enrich the experience. Moreover, the museum's intricate and densely layered design can feel overwhelming, leaving some visitors struggling to fully grasp the narrative or focus on specific details. A more balanced integration of sensory elements might enhance accessibility and deepen the emotional impact for a broader audience.

4 Sir John Soane's Museum. Available at: <https://www.soane.org>



Fig 20. Photo showing perforated floor placed create dim lighting on floor below. Photo by Hammoud, F

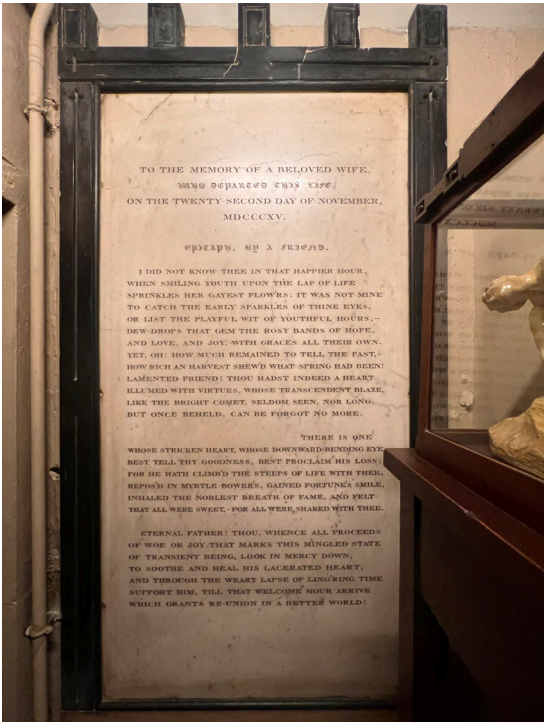


Fig 22. "To the memory of a beloved wife" In the basement - a poignant reminder of Sir John Soane's use of architecture to enshrine personal memory and loss . Photo by Hammoud, F



Fig 21. Colossal head of pluto ( Soane called it Jupiter) . Photo by Hammoud, F

Summary

These three spaces offer distinct perspectives on how architecture preserves and communicates memory, each contributing unique insights to the central question. Dennis Severs' House captivates through sensory immersion, drawing visitors into an imagined past that priorities emotional connection and subjective interpretation. Leighton House Museum marries artistic beauty with cultural memory, though its reconstructed elements highlight the tension between authenticity and preservation. Sir John Soane's Museum, with its labyrinthine design and intellectual emphasis, transforms architecture into a tool for reflection and discovery. Collectively, these spaces underscore how design choices, whether sensory, artistic, or intellectual, shape our engagement with memory, inviting us to consider architecture as an active participant in the preservation and creation of personal and collective narratives.



## Conclusion

This research has explored how architecture acts as a mnemonic device, preserving and evoking memory through sensory and emotional connections. From the layered spaces of the Dennis Severs' House to the atmospheric resonance of places like St. Mary's Church, it is evident that architecture can encapsulate collective and personal histories. The power of spaces lies not only in their physical structure but in how they engage the senses to awaken feelings and stories we thought forgotten. The inclusion of my memory box reflects a personal culmination of this study. It illustrates how objects and spaces alike carry layers of meaning, connecting the present to the past in profound ways. Through the curation of my own memories, I've gained a deeper appreciation for how the built environment serves as a living archive of human experience. This research reaffirms that architecture, when approached with intention, can bridge time and emotion, ensuring that memory remains a vivid and vital part of our world.

The question of how architecture preserves history and evokes memory is answered through the sensory integration of sight, sound, and smell. Of these, smell stands as the most potent trigger for memory. This sense is directly linked to the brain's limbic system, which processes emotions and memories, making it an incredibly effective means of recalling past experiences. At Dennis Severs' House, this is particularly evident. The house's use of specific scents, such as the faint aroma of burning wood or the mustiness of old fabrics, creates an atmosphere where time feels suspended. These smells, alongside visual cues, transport visitors back in time, evoking not just historical memory, but emotional responses tied to the experience of being in the space itself.

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## Illustration List

Fig 1. Illustration on front cover by Hammoud, F

Fig 2. Manifesto created by Hammoud, F, using a variety of Ai generated images and some of my own. Exploring the following themes:  
Rough, raw textures, mystical, juxtaposing layers, lost memories, echoes of the past, fragments, storytelling, metamorphosis

Fig 3-9. Images of objects which evoke certain emotions. Created by Hammoud, F

Fig 10. Image of me in Lebanon. Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 11. Tyre city in Lebanon Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 12. Beach in home country, Lebanon Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 13. Poster showcasing the layering in Somer's Town and gentrification causing a loss of identity. Created by Hammoud, F

Fig 14. Illustration on facing page by Hammoud, F. Initial impressions on nostalgia

Fig 14&15. Image of mould in St Mary's church Somer's Town by Hammoud, F. Illustration of image on facing page

Fig 17. Dennis Severs' House. Silent Night visit. Available at: <https://www.dennissevershouse>.

Fig 18. Arab Hall, Leighton House. Photo by Pryce W. Available at: <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/museums/history-leighton-house>

Fig 19. Dining room, Leighton House. Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 20. Photo showing perforated floor placed create dim lighting on floor below. Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 21. Colossal head of pluto ( Soane called it *Jupiter* ) . Photo by Hammoud, F

Fig 22. "*To the memory of a beloved wife*" In the basement - a poignant reminder of Sir John Soane's use of architecture to enshrine personal memory and loss . Photo by Hammoud, F

