

HERITAGE STATEMENT

College Building
SOAS University of London



March 2024

INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Statement has been prepared by Neville Bruton Design on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), to support an application for listed building consent for interior refurbishment works within the Grade II College Building (Holden Building), SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, London, WC1H 0XG.

It should be read in conjunction with other application documentation.

Points of reference:

- English Heritage 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' 2008
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Planning Policy Framework 2021
- Camden Core Strategy 2010-2025 'Policy CS14 – Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy – Adopted 18 April 2011

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED WORKS

The proposals relate to the refurbishment of underutilised and mothballed areas of the lower ground level of the College Building including areas of the late 1980's west courtyard infill, to repurpose as Student Union support and activity space and to upgrade adjacent ancillary accommodation.

The proposals comprise:

- Repurposing of the redundant refectory and kitchen areas
- Repurposing current temporary storage areas to provide ancillary support areas.
- Remodelling of staff locker rooms to provide extended toilet and shower facilities
- Provision of dedicated prayer room area and associated ablutions

The proposals do not seek to increase the building's area or introduce significant changes in design or material finish.

The proposed works are described in detail within the accompanying Design and Access Statement and related listed building application documentation.

It is generally accepted that the best way of securing the upkeep of historic and listed buildings is to keep them in active and economically viable use. SOAS are committed to the preservation of its listed assets. The challenge is to design and specify a scheme which respects the integrity and maintains the preservation of the building.

BACKGROUND

The Grade II College Building (Holden Building) forms part of the SOAS central London campus, associated to the University of London and includes, the Philips Building (Grade II*), the Brunei Gallery, the Paul Webley Wing of Senate House (Grade II*), which sit within Sub Area 3 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and 53 Gordon Square (Grade II), which sits within Sub Area 2 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.





Bloomsbury CA



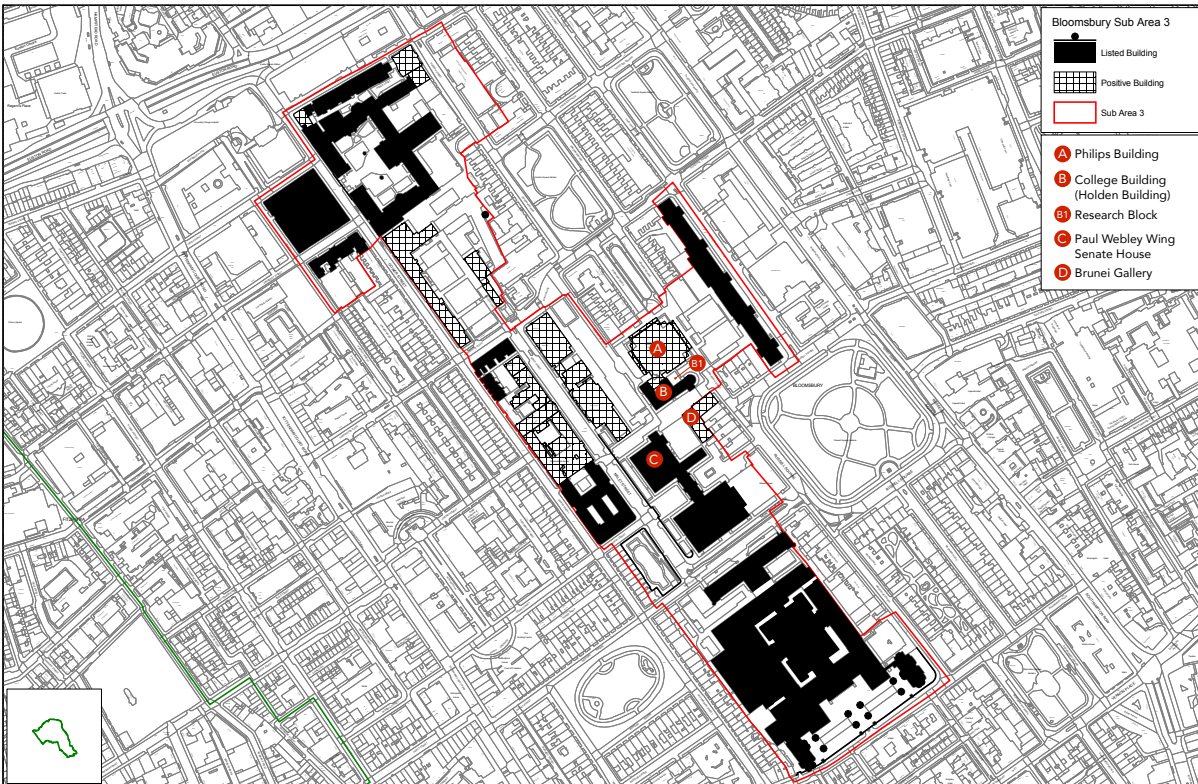
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Bloomsbury CA Sub Area 3 Townscape Appraisal



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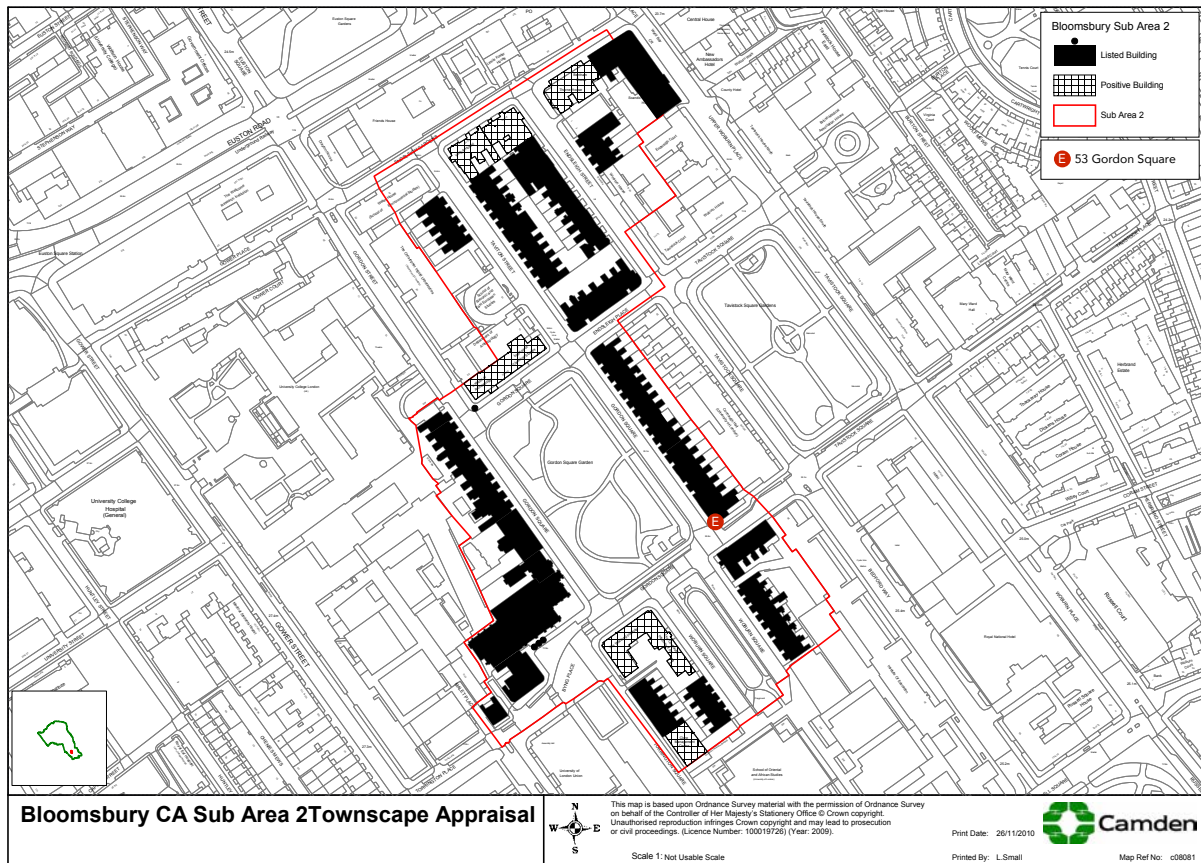
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Sub Area 3 is dominated by large-scale institutional buildings. To the north of the area is the University of London precinct and its associated colleges and faculties. To the south is the British Museum which occupies almost the entire street block north of Great Russell Street and south of Montague Place. As well as some exemplary 18th and 19th century buildings, there are several examples of 20th century architecture of international repute. The original street pattern is retained in most part, but 20th century development has involved the loss of some earlier, small-scale domestic terraces. In most cases, later buildings maintain and define street frontages, despite their larger scale and increased bulk and mass. There are a series of pedestrianised spaces and courtyards of varying scales between the buildings giving a quieter but nonetheless active campus atmosphere contrasting with the busy streets.

The School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) building addresses Torrington Square and the wide east-west, tree lined thoroughfare which links Malet Street to Thornhaugh Street. The original Building was designed in the late 1930s by Charles Holden as a continuation of his work for the university; however World War II interrupted construction so it was not completed until the 1950s. The SOAS building is grade II listed and forms the northern frontage to the thoroughfare together with the southern end of the Birkbeck College. They share a palette of materials (pale red brick with stone banding), together with building heights and the rhythm of vertically proportioned windows. The curved semi-circular east end of the block, which signals the entrance to the university precinct from Thornhaugh Street, is a distinct streamlined feature reminiscent of the architecture of Holden's famous London Underground stations. A lightweight infill extension was

successfully inserted in the early 21st century to the immediate north of this wing, designed by John McAslan and Partners. The northern side of Senate House forms the southern edge of this route and is of similar scale and height. To the east of Senate House, there is a grassed area that presents an opportunity to complete the frontage to this route, as a contextual response to the surrounding listed buildings. The Brunei Gallery, by Nicholas Hare Architects, which turns the corner into Thornhaugh Street, is a high quality 1990s building which encloses the eastern end of the pedestrian link and successfully continues the terraced frontage to Russell Square.

The rear library extension to SOAS known as the Philips Building, and the Institute of Education (grade II listed) are seen as a group in views from Torrington Square, Woburn Square and Thornhaugh Street. Both by Denys Lasdun, they share a common vocabulary derived from postwar British Brutalist architecture: stark concrete, strongly modelled structures with horizontal glazing, and distinct sculptural forms including vertical circulation towers. While radical interventions in the Bloomsbury townscape, the Lasdun buildings are now part of the established character of the Conservation area. The open spaces to the rear of the building provide a green link between Woburn Square and Thornhaugh Street.

Source: Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy – Adopted 18 April 2011

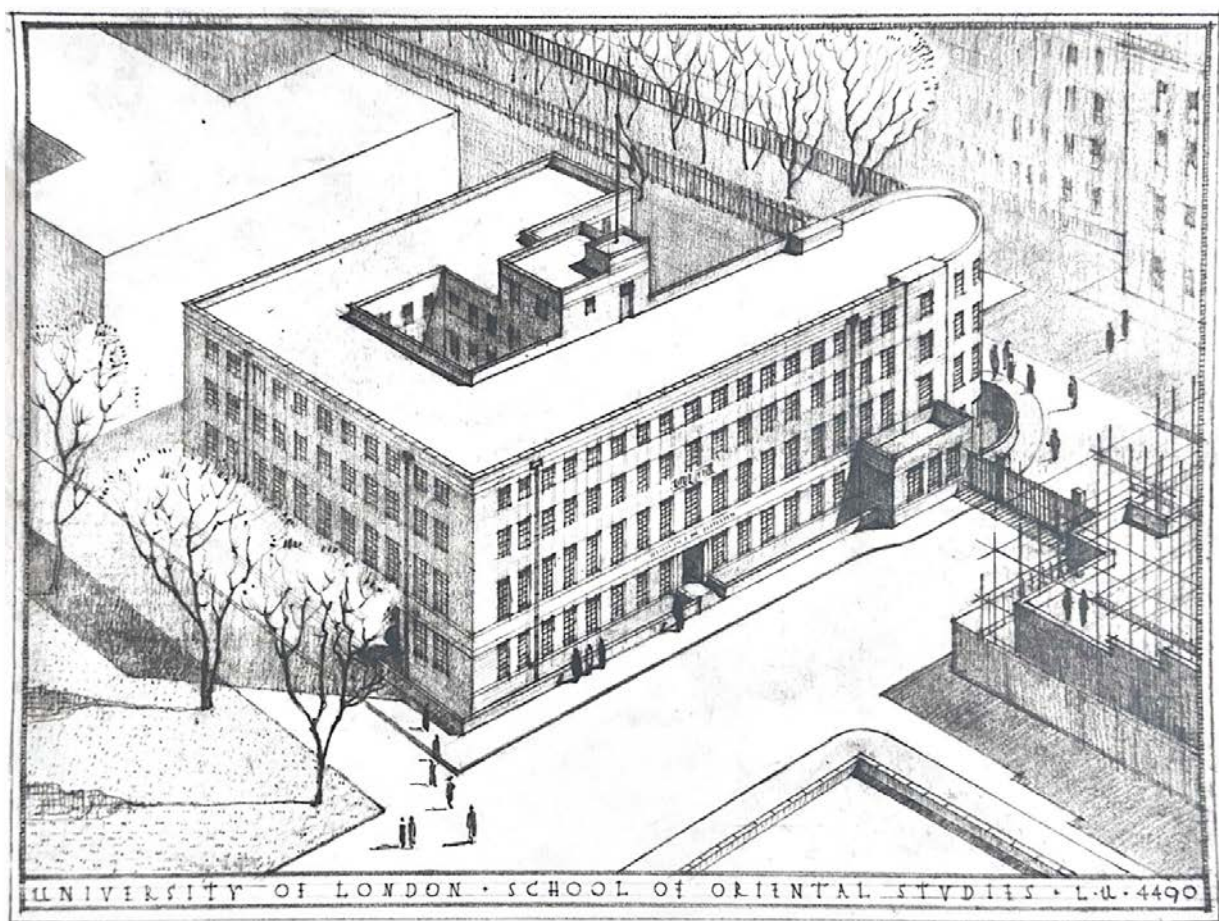
SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

SOAS was established in Finsbury Circus in order to train people working in Asia and Africa, and it received its London University Charter in 1913. Its original building was housed in the building of c1939-45, purpose-built by Holden to hold what was by then a well-established school. This building was designated at Grade II just 29 years after it was built.

The buildings official listing (as below) provides a short summary of the external structure and appearance but notes that the interior was not inspected.

University school. c1939-45. By Charles Holden. Brown brick with Portland stone dressings. 5 storeys and basements (4th floor set back). Main south front with 17 windows and curved corner bay (5 windows) treatment at east end. Single storey, 2 window projection at east end. Central entrance with plain stone surround and plaque with name of school over. Flush frame metal windows with horizontally set panes. Stone band and sill string at 1st floor level, echoed by dressing to parapet above 3rd floor. Cartouche with coat of arms centrally at 2nd floor level. Lead rainwater heads and pipes, dated 1940. INTERIOR: not inspected

Source: Historic England Listing Register



Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects illustration SOAS (College Building) circa 1938

The illustration shows the building prior to Holden's post war addition (circa 1950) of the set-back 4th floor extension, as referred within the 1969 listing.

BUILDING DETAILS

The building has undergone significant change since its original construction. Both exterior and interior spaces have been adapted over the years, in response to a continually evolving and growing University environment.

The completion of the Denys Lasdun Philips Building in 1973, which was designed specifically without its own external grand entrance, required the modification of the College Building to provide access at each floor level, by what is referred to as the 'Link Bridge'.

Other interventions include the late 1980s 'west courtyard' infill extending the footprint of the lower ground and ground floor levels and John McAslan & Partners Research Block, a contemporary building completed in 2003, that sits between the College and Philips Buildings, connecting through to the College Building at landing levels.

Materials

The carcass of the building consists of a steel framework encased in concrete. Floors and flat roof areas are constructed of hollow tiles and reinforced concrete.

The walls are constructed with second stock bricks in lime mortar, faced externally with handmade brick laid to English bond.

The flat roofs are asphalt with asphalt lined gutters and skirtings around the inside of the parapet wall.

The stone band, string and sill courses, copings and panels on the south elevation and dressing around the main entrance are in Portland stone. The Portland stone panels above the main entrance include carving.

Rainwater goods are in lead with 1940 dated hoppers.

Original windows throughout the building were originally wrought steel with deal frames, teak sills with weather bar beneath. These were replaced throughout, post c 2005 with powder coated metal frame casements.

Original internal partition walls are constructed from solid brick, plastered with paint finish. Timber and metal studwork partitions have been installed during later remodelling works.

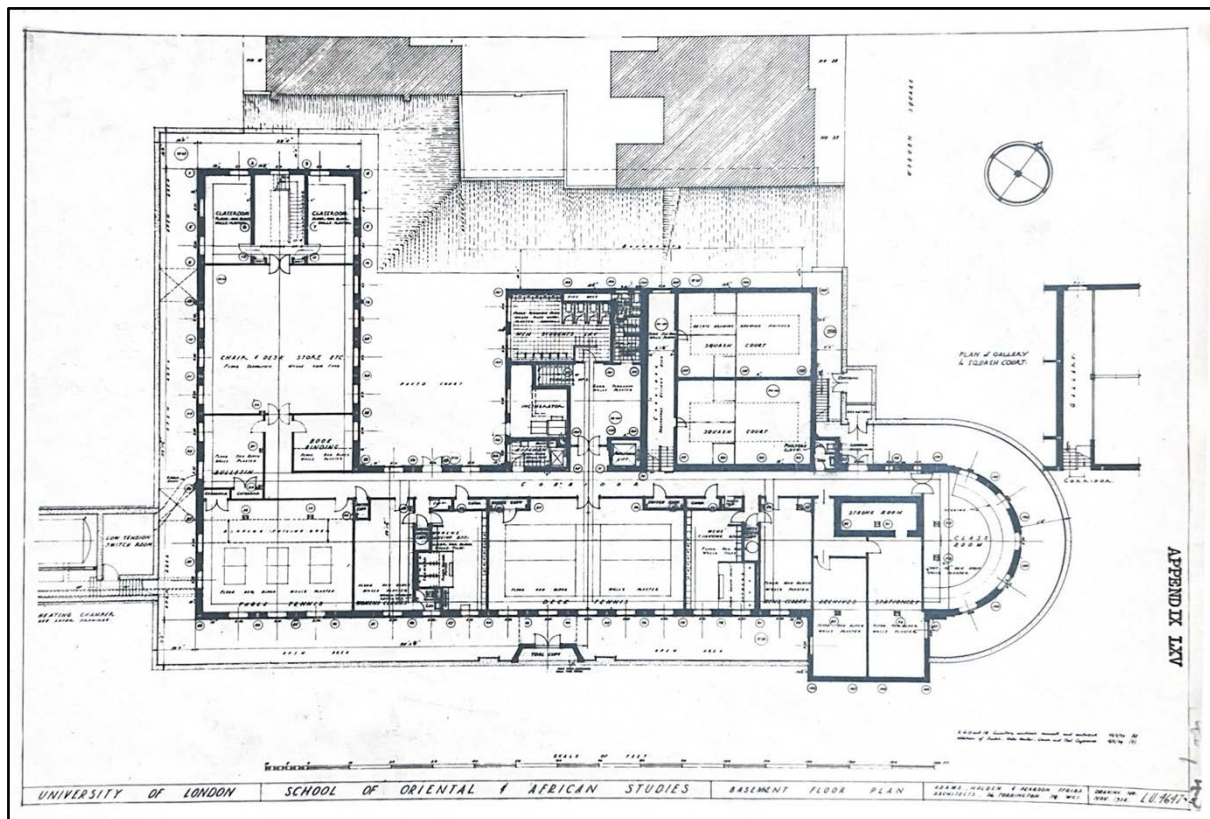
Examples of original doors, with integral framed fan lights over and brass ironmongery still exist, however contemporary replacements have been installed as the building has been modified.

There are areas of original oak parquet floor finishes, together with later contemporary additions, of sheet and tile flooring (vinyl, linoleum, carpet, etc.).

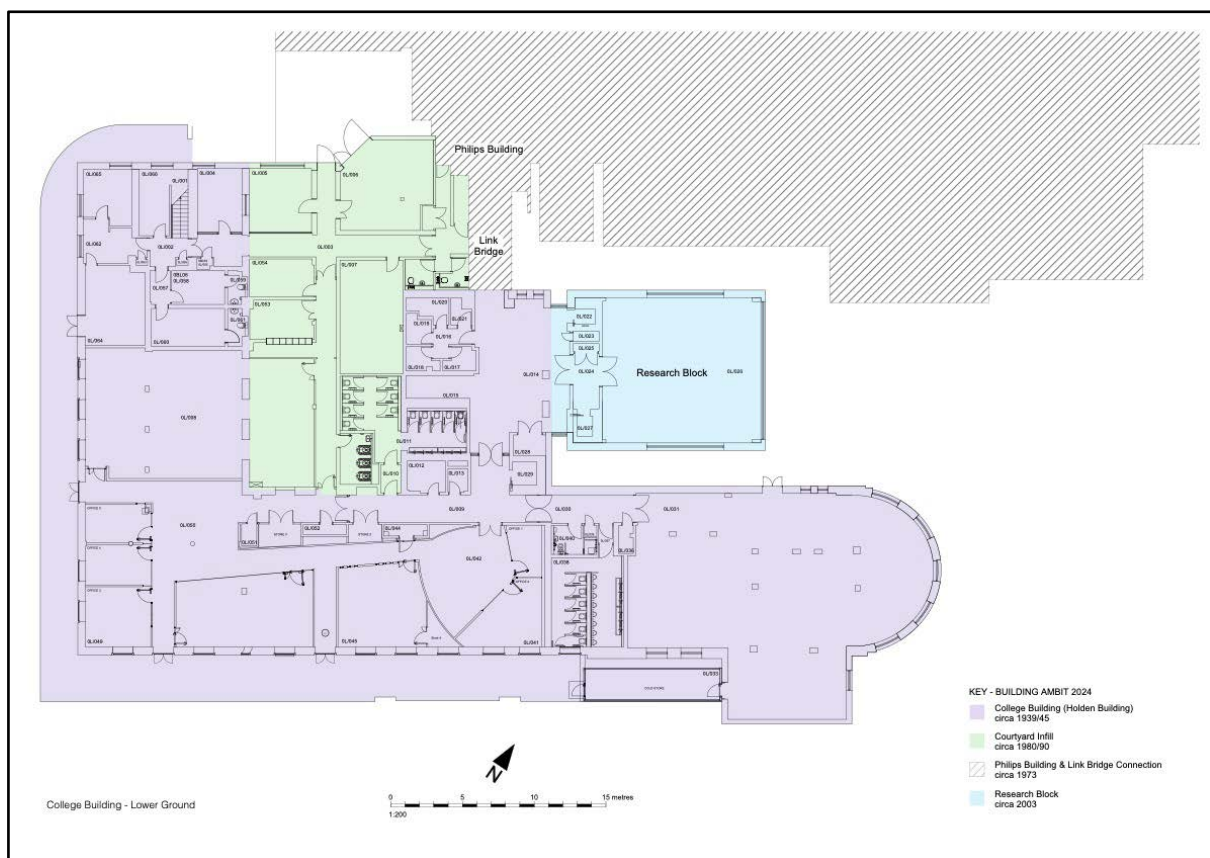
Areas of the main stair landings partially retain the original 'Biancola', a precast marble composition tile (Primarily within the zone of the stairwell), with in situ cast coved skirtings. The main staircase treads and risers and strings are also finished with in situ cast 'Biancola'. The original decorated wrought iron balustrade with bronze handrail remains, with bracketed bronze handrail to the outer wall.

Later addition Terrazzo tiles and in situ cast coved skirtings have been installed within the landing areas, circa 1973, to accommodate connections with the Philips Building.

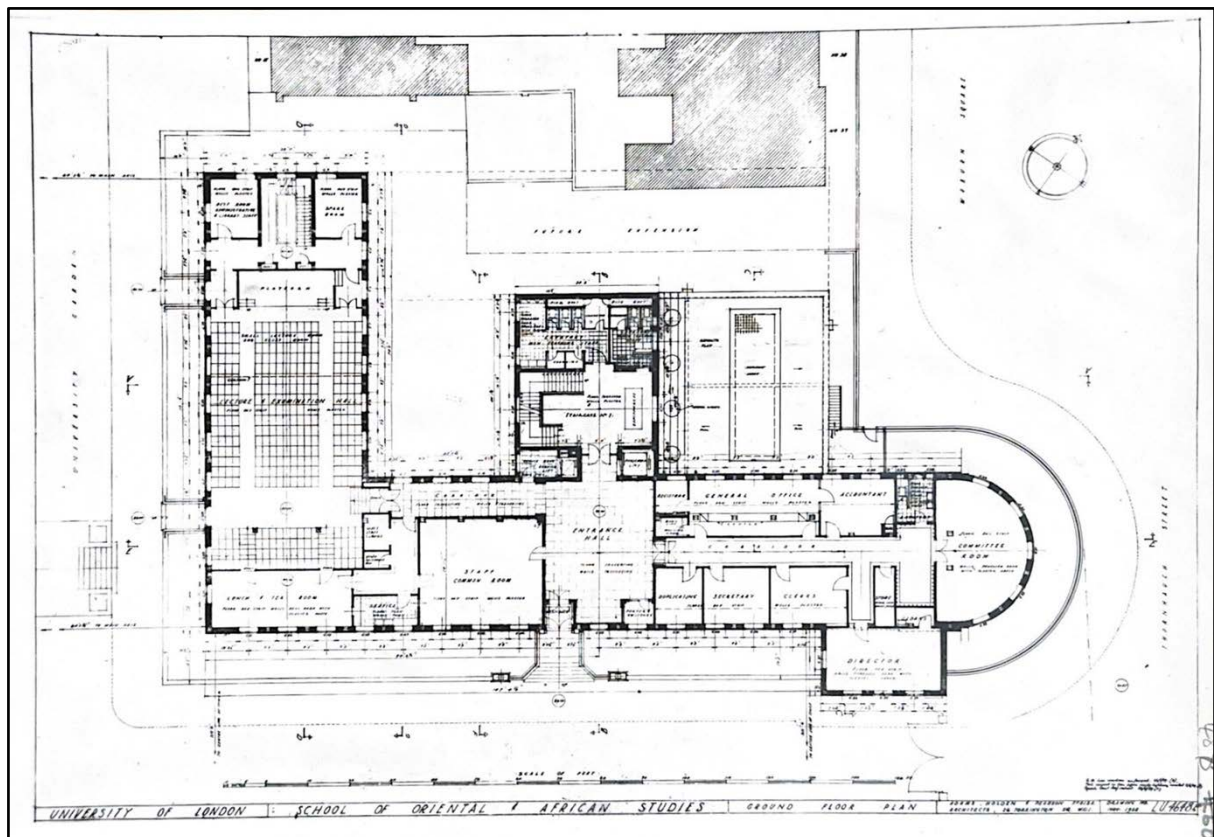
Sources: SOAS Archive – Messrs Adams, Holden & Pearson Precise Specification dated January 1939



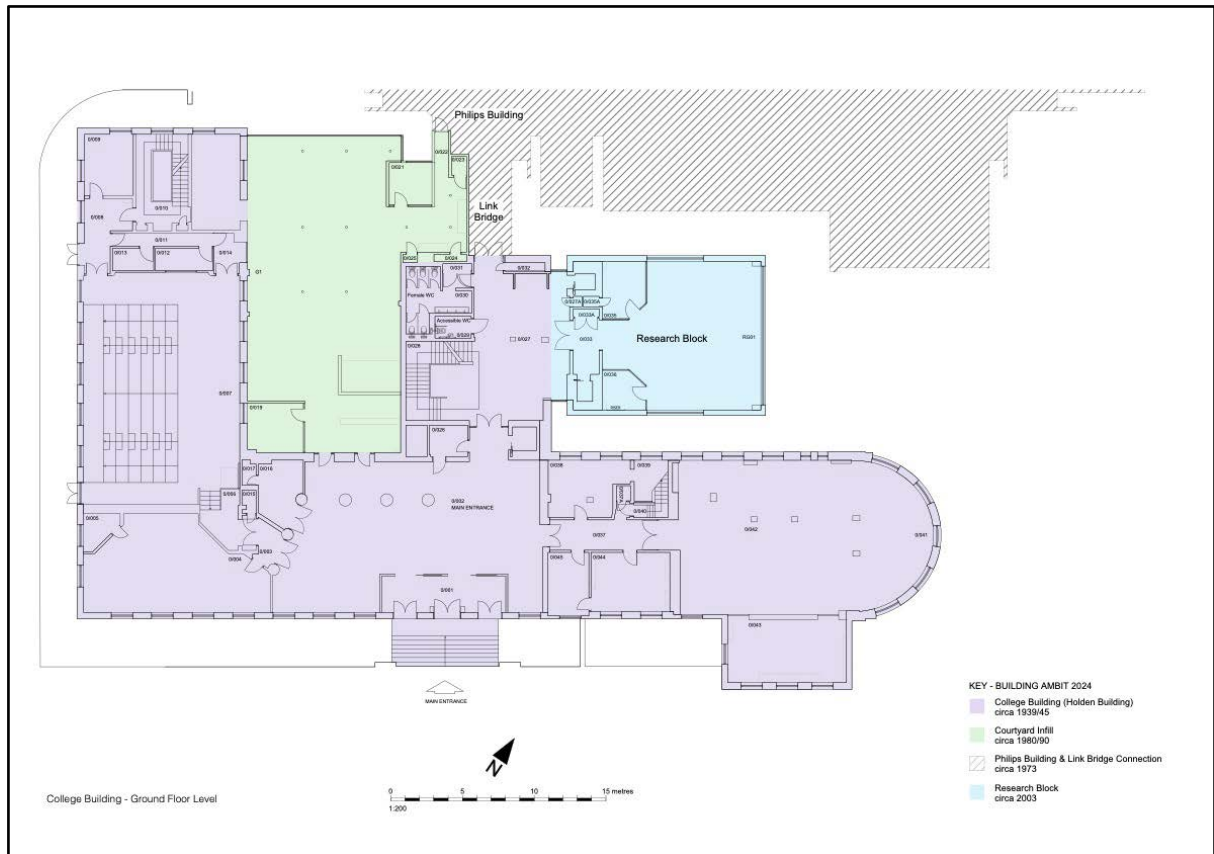
Lower Ground Floor 1938 Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects



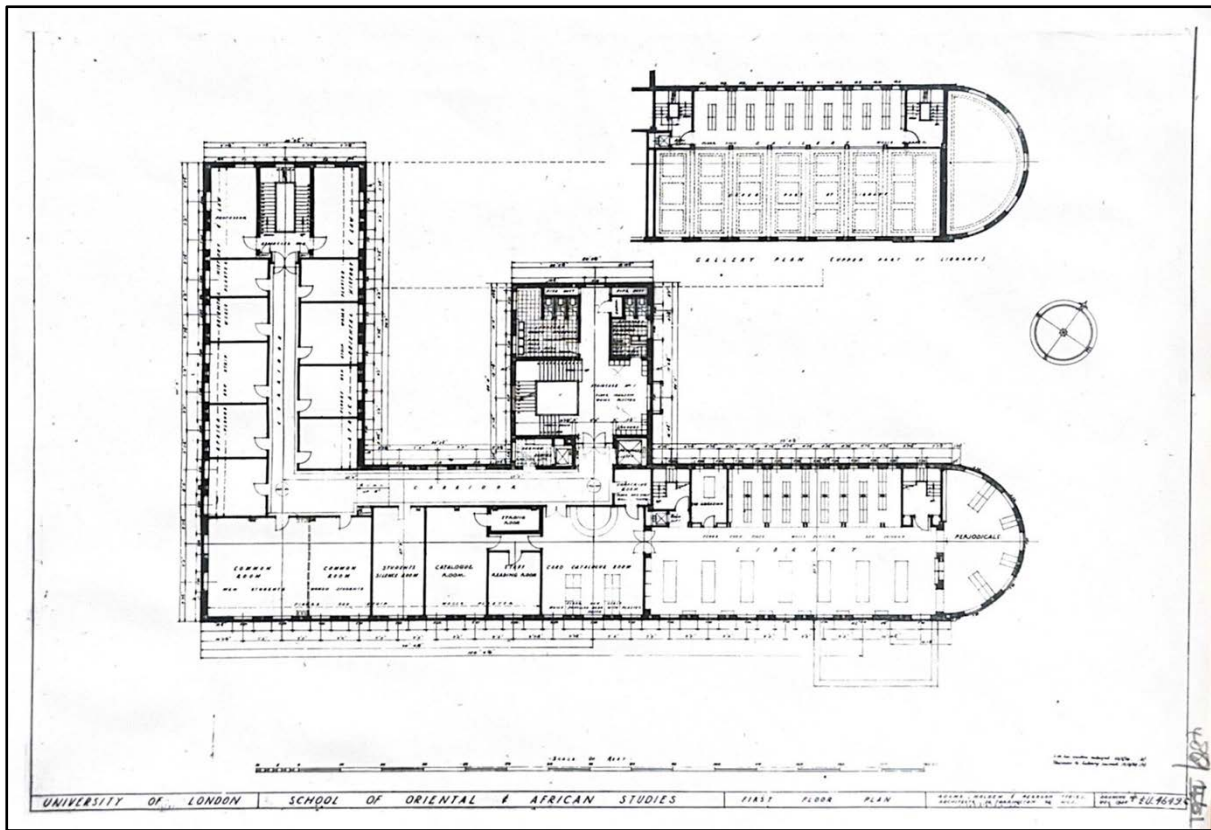
Lower Ground Floor 2024



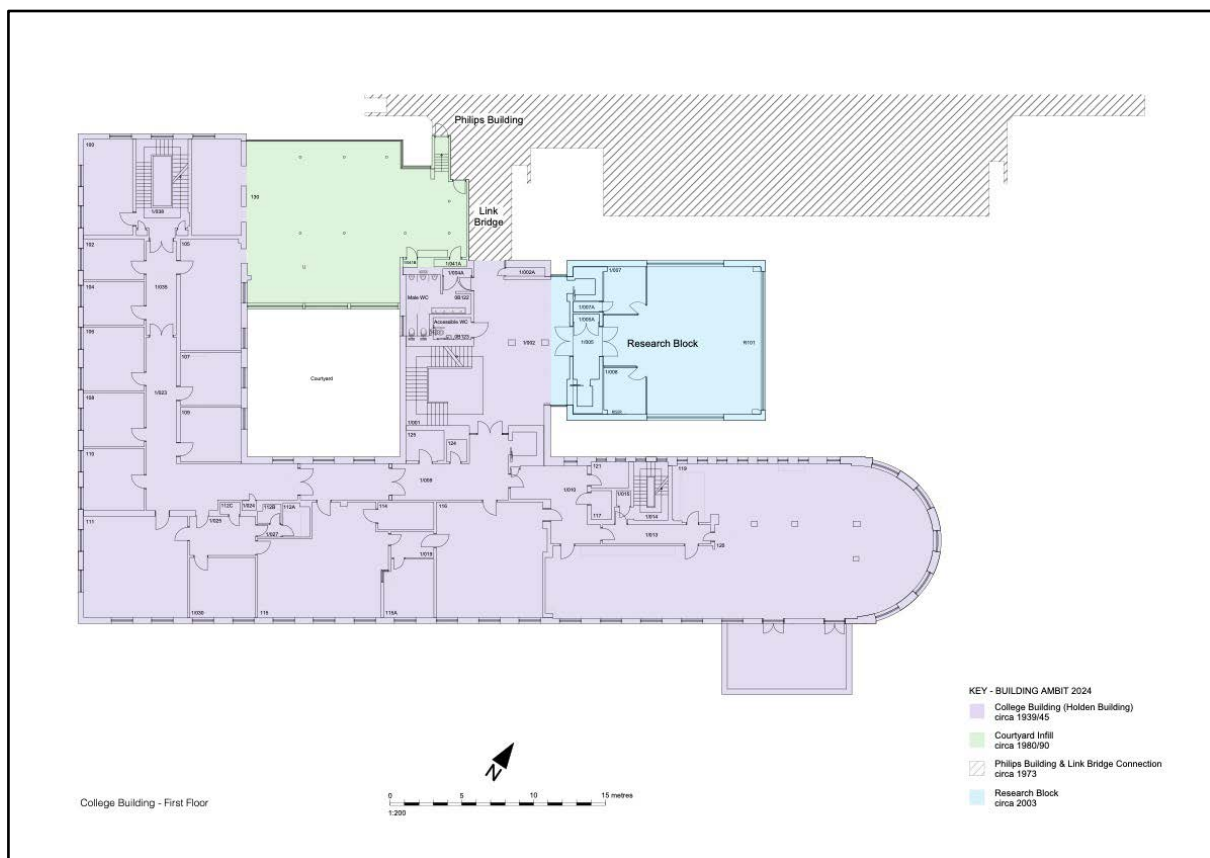
Ground Floor - 1938 Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects



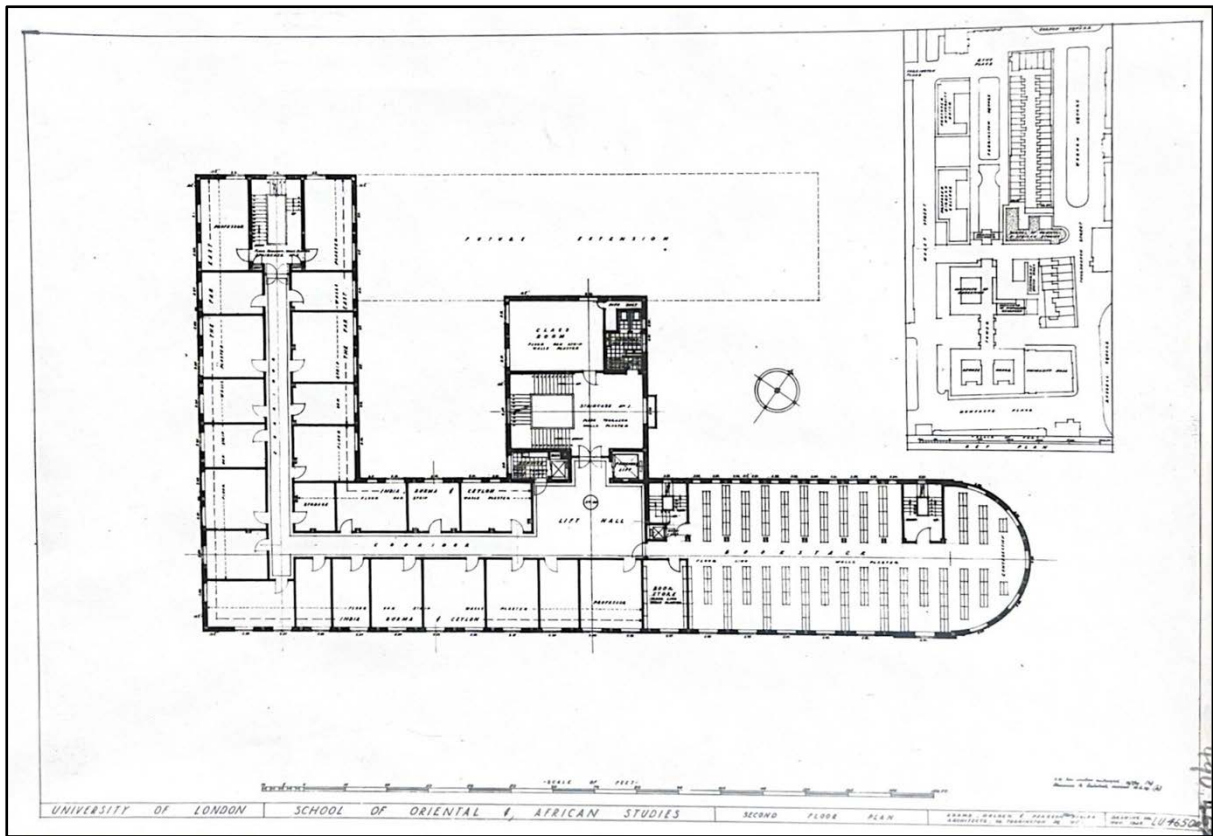
Ground Floor - 2024



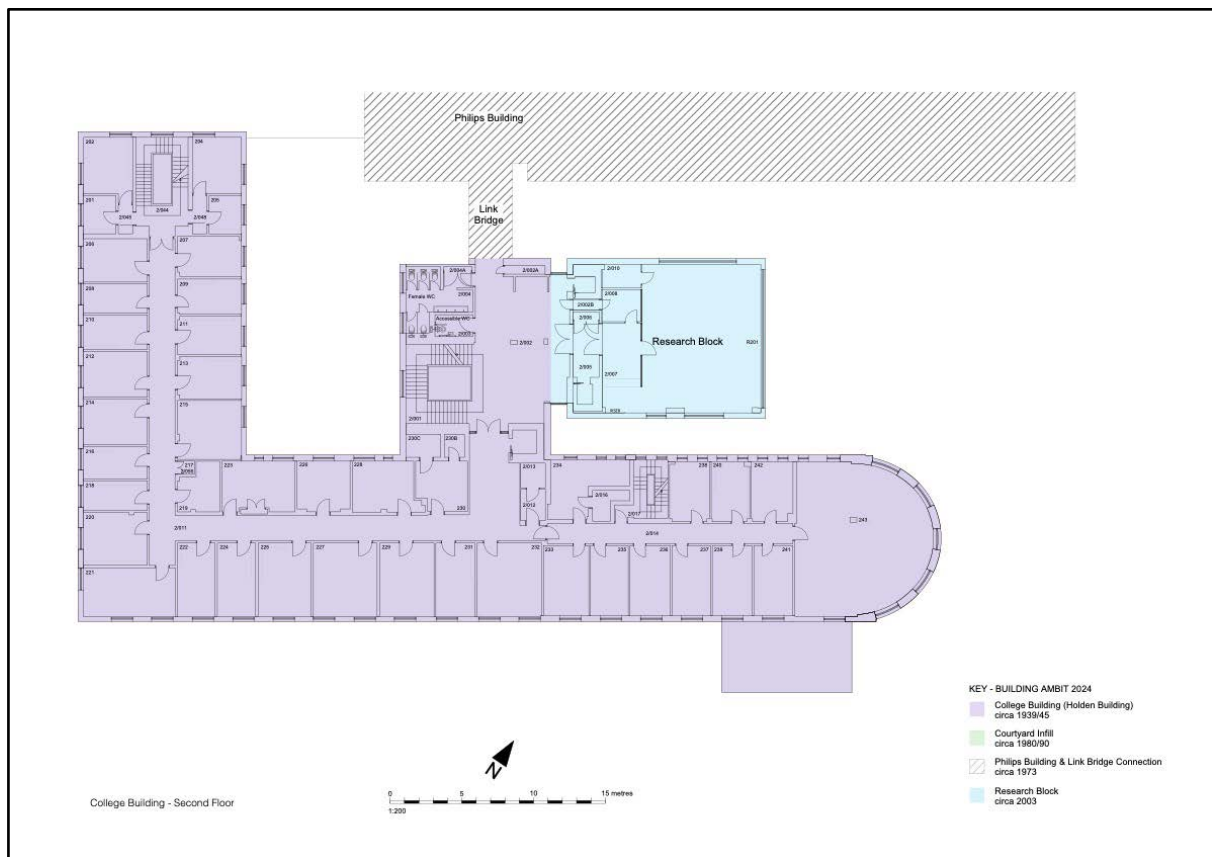
First Floor - 1938 Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects



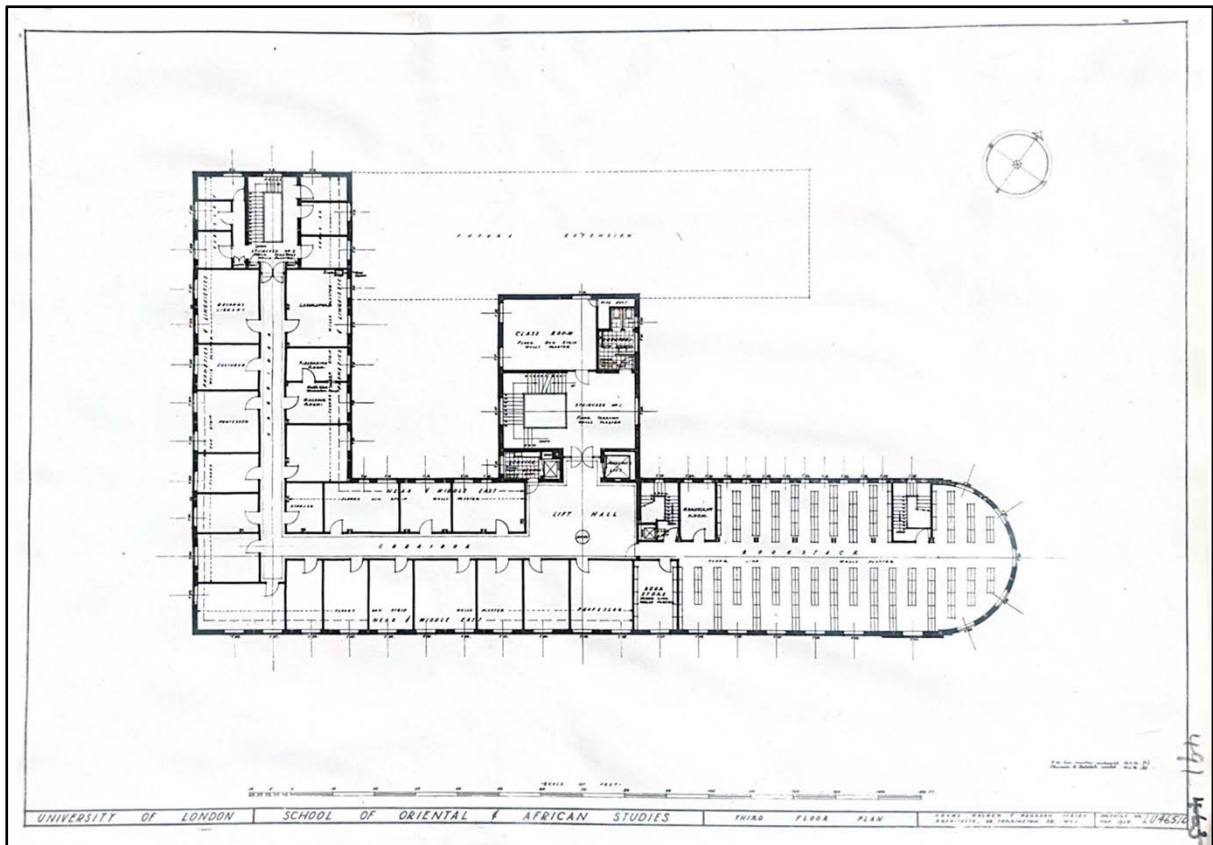
First Floor - 2024



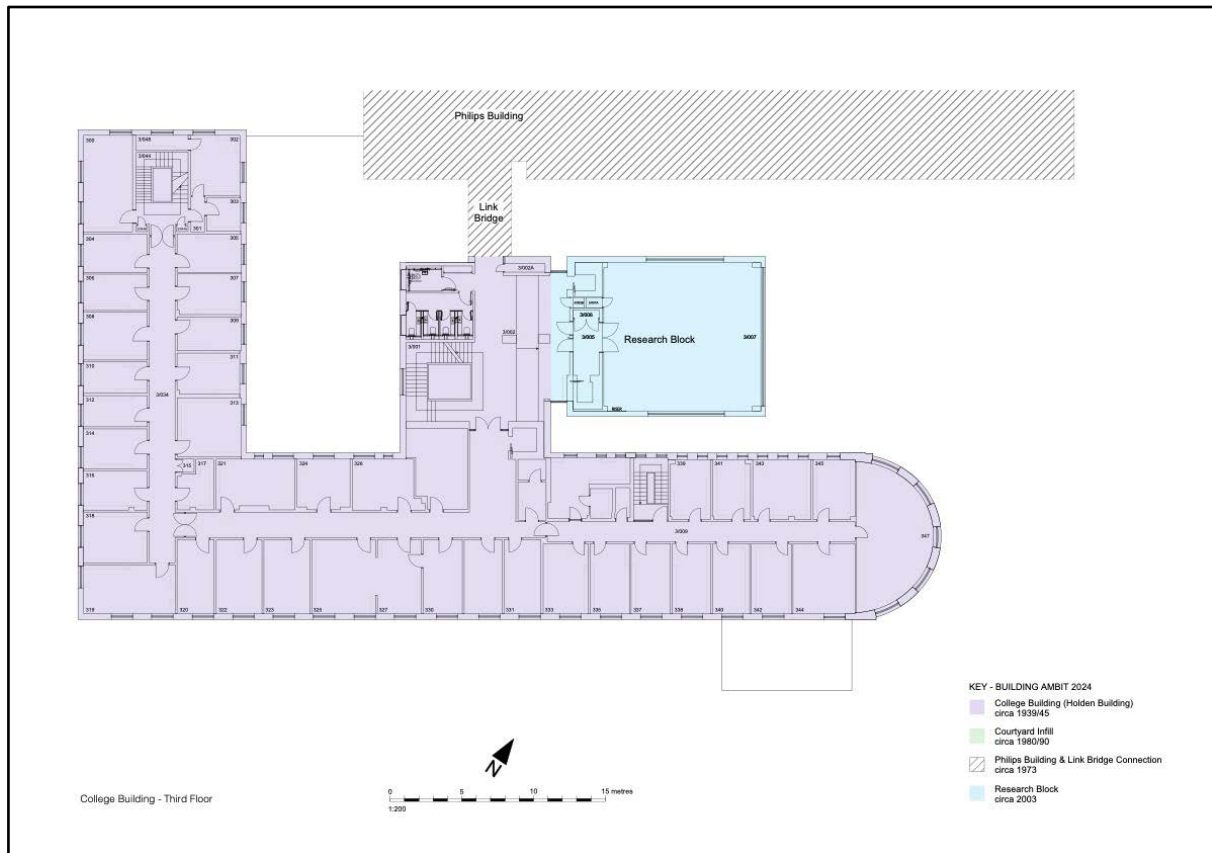
Second Floor - 1938 Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects



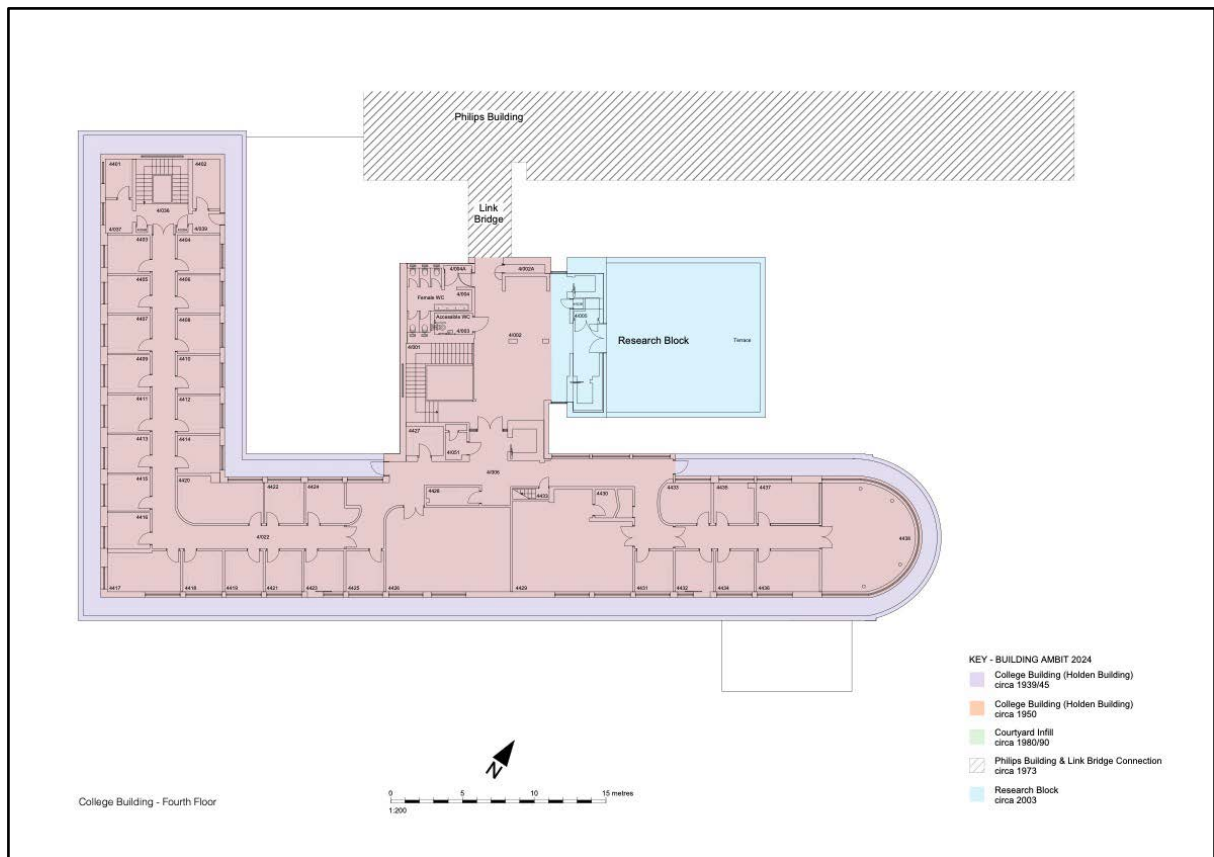
Second Floor - 2024



Third Floor - 1938 Adams, Holden & Pearson Architects



Third Floor – 2024



Fourth Floor – 2024