# THE BRITISH MUSEUM THE SOUTH STAIR, CENTRAL SALOON AND GALLERIES 38 to 40: PLANNING AND LISTED BUILDING DESIGN REPORT

LN08732/A/REP/20/001 23 November 2006



The British Museum: The South Stair, Central Saloon and Galleries 38 to 40

Design Report

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# CLIENT PROJECT STATEMENT

### Introduction

The Museum is presently undertaking an extensive programme of permanent gallery refurbishments to improve the overall visitor experience and the operation and management of the building. This will be achieved both in the quality of the collection displays and the comprehensive repair and refurbishment of the building which will be carried out in accordance with the Museum's Conservation Plan thus ensuring the security of collection and building for the foreseeable future.

This particular project involves proposals for the complete refurbishment of the South Stair, Central Saloon and Galleries 37 to 40 including: their roofs; and the provision of all new services. This work in turn supports three new permanent gallery exhibitions and the creation of a wholly new orientation space. The new galleries are: "Time" (Room 38); "Clocks and Watches" (Room 39); and "Medieval" (Room 40). The Central Saloon (Rooms 36 and 37) will form the orientation space leading off the South Staircase.

In undertaking this scheme the opportunity arises to sympathetically repair the fabric, to re-introduce daylight and reinstate the "Smirke" internal detail lost to wartime bombing and insensitive and expedient post-war reconstruction.

# Conservation and Design Approach

This project proposes to remove the inappropriate post-war repairs and interventions of the 1950's and 1960's and return to the original Robert Smirke detail and character that is fortunately still extant in Rooms 37, 38 and 39. Not only is it the intention of this project to respect the original fabric's detail but also to reinstate wherever possible the original spatial sequence so these upper rooms will regain their architectural coherence, an approach that again accords very closely with the policies of the Conservation Plan.

Over the South Stairs the provision of a large single roof-light introduces daylight and allows the reinstatement of the ceiling with its correct arrangement of dividing beams and coffers complete with ornamental enrichments.

Between the South stairs and the Central Saloon, the screen wall with is three openings will be reinstated, creating once more the articulation of enclosure and arrival at the Central Saloon; which in turn will receive again its large roof-light and attendant ornamented coffers and beams.

The wall between the Central Saloon and South Portico will be pierced to form a further three openings allowing views into the Great Court and better and more convenient access to the lifts from the Weston Great Hall.

Within the Central Saloon cornices over the central doors to stairs and portico will be installed to match that returning over the doorway to Room 40 and the existing doors to Rooms 68 and 38. Rooms 37, 38 and 39 will with all their existing detail be carefully repaired.

Room 40 gutted by bombing and entirely re-modelled in the 1950s will be returned to a 'Smirke' room but will contain all the necessary plant spaces and service ducts for all three galleries. This approach contains the main interventions in the least original space reducing loss of fabric in the extant Rooms 38 and 39.

The new roofs over these spaces will be traditional in construction and as installed elsewhere in the Museum will conform to the Conservation Plan's agreed use of covering materials: lead to the South Stairs, Rooms 36 and 40; copper over Rooms 37, 38 and 39.

With such a sizeable area of the Museum available for improvement the M&E services will be completely modernised and new infrastructure created to deliver them. Existing vertical ducts terminating in Room 40 and the nearby back-of-house Botanical Staircase will be used to bring electrical services from the basement.

In keeping with the Museum's need to contain energy consumption the mechanical systems will seek to capitalise on the building's inherent thermal performance combined with natural ventilation to give, wherever possible, stable and suitable comfort conditions for visitor and collection alike. This approach has the further benefit of reducing intervention with the listed building and containing future running and maintenance costs.

Two areas of external plant: cooling condensers and smoke extraction; will be also be housed low within the roof and following the rhythm of roof-lights to greatly reduce their visual profile.

### Access Statement

The British Museum states as one of its core principles the aim to achieve 'diversity at every level, in our staff and governance, curation, education and audiences.' One of the key areas of 'diversity' is access for disabled visitors.

The British Museum is fully committed to enforcing the Disability Discrimination Act. This significant act came into full force in October 2004. The Museum has to date ensured that all areas, where possible, are fully physically accessible. Furthermore, we have also prioritised 'intellectual' and 'sensory' access for other disabled audiences, commissioning large print information, tactile drawings and Braille for visually impaired audiences, sign interpretation and creative workshops for deaf audiences, and handling programmes for blind adults and students recovering from mental illness.

For blind people and learning disabled audiences, we have also commissioned audio description for temporary exhibitions and have an audio described tour on our 'Compass' website. Finally, we have a touch tour for blind and learning disabled audiences in our Egyptian Sculpture gallery.

We are a leader in the field of 'museum access' and have actively sought to ensure that this project reflects the Museum's policies in all matters related to the Disability Discrimination Act and as part of the ongoing improvement to the wider 'visitor experience'.

Currently, all existing public areas within the proposed area of work at this level are fully accessible. The design proposals described in this document do not alter this existing access strategy and even propose to maintain this during the complex process of construction. The final proposals will, however, significantly improve the legibility, orientation and circulation between all these spaces and will include the opening up of three galleries for new 'permanent' exhibitions.

# Programme

Construction works start on site in April 2007 with completion in August 2008.

Chris Terrey
Capital Projects & Estates
October 2006



# INTRODUCTION

# Objectives of the Report

This report outlines and explains the current proposals for the refurbishment and reconfiguration of the sequence of spaces above the main Front Hall within the South Wing. These include the main South Stair, Central Saloon and Galleries 37 to 40 in order to provide:

- A new visitor orientation space at the top of the South Stair
- A new series of interlinked gallery spaces for 3 new permanent exhibitions.
- Improved circulation and connections to other galleries at this level.

The main objectives of this report are to:

- Outline the proposed design and conservation strategies
- Outline the proposed scope of work
- Explain the proposals in the context of the available historical record
- Assessment of the impact of the proposals on the historic fabric (as proposed in the Museum's Conservation Plan 'Mitigation Strategy Table')

# Project Background

BDP were originally appointed in January 2006 to develop concept proposals for the re-ordering of the Central Saloon, in order to provide a catalyst for further discussion with the Museum on the organisation and use of this space and its relationship with the Great Court and adjacent galleries.

Following this initial exercise, BDP were appointed in April 2006 to undertake a further feasibility study to identify, review and develop options for the reinstatement or reinterpretation of the original plan, volume and architectural details of the South Stair, Central Saloon and Galleries 37, 38, 39 & 40, including the reinstatement of roof lanterns where these had been previously removed.

The proposed options included in this original report responded to a number of issues including;

- Historical precedent and existing physical constraints.
- Orientation and circulation, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the 'Smirke' Interiors and the Great Court.
- Potential for provision of information, catering (light refreshments) and display.
- Artefact and exhibition design, lighting and security requirements.
- Environmental standards and energy conservation.

Initial analysis and investigations informed the development of the options, including;

 Available Historical information and the 'Conservation Plan' provided by the Museum

- Reports and studies relevant to each of the Galleries provided by the Museum.
- Appropriate precedents within the Museum.
- People movement public and museum staff through the Galleries and adjacent areas.
- Exhibition, display and operational requirements.

This BDP Feasibility Study was produced in parallel with a separate report prepared by Frank Timothy & Associates proposing options for the reinstatement of the roof profiles and coverings to the above spaces. The final BDP Feasibility Study report was issued in May 2006 and included confirmation of the Museum's preferred strategy and options, where possible at the time, and the proposed scope of work to be developed in the next

This Stage 1 Design Report develops the agreed options agreed in parallel to ongoing site investigations and further historical research. This report also confirms the other preferred options agreed by the Museum since May 2006. These include the following:

stage of design development for each element of the proposals.

- Options for reinstating the screen wall at the top of the South Stair following the commissioning of various three dimensional visualisations.
   This has now been confirmed and further developed following discovery of additional record information.
- Options for modifying and controlling the internal environment within the gallery spaces to address issues of user comfort, environmental sensitivity of exhibits and the potential spatial requirements of exhibition display case design to allow for necessary plant and distribution. Following agreement with the Museum's Conservation Department this has now been confirmed as a part natural/part mechanical ventilation strategy (TGA Option 20e) which has been incorporated within the proposed physical constraints of the building and its historic fabric.

Although the primary distribution strategy and design proposals have now been agreed with the Museum, further coordination and refinement will be required early in the next stage of detailed design in order to fully integrate these with the proposals for the new permanent exhibitions in Galleries 38, 39 and 40.

# Project Team

This report has been prepared in parallel with separate design reports by the Museum's other consultants appointed for this project including:

- TGA Consulting Engineers: Building Services Engineer's Stage 1 Design Report
- Alan Baxter & Associates Consulting Engineers: Structural Engineer's Stage 1 Design Report
- Lawrence Webster Forest Fire Consultants: Fire Strategy for the British Museum

Other consultants appointed by the Museum for this project and who have contributed to the development of the current proposals include:

- Potter Raper Partnership: Cost Consultants
- PFB Construction: Health and Safety Planning Supervisor
- Faber Maunsell: Security Consultants

The Museum has also confirmed that they will shortly be appointing an Exhibition Designer for the proposed new permanent exhibitions within Galleries 38, 39 and 40. The design team will work closely with the appointed Designer and the Museum early in the next stage of design development to ensure all detailed building services requirements are carefully and sensitively integrated into the fabric of the building and the exhibition proposals.



