

Photograph of the roof prior to bomb damage in 1941

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The historical development and sequence of change following construction of the original galleries is identified in the British Museum Conservation Plan – Appendix B and is summarised below:

- The stair and sequence of galleries represent significant early, 1847 spaces designed by Sir Robert Smirke,
- It would appear that the South Stair and Central Saloon were originally designed to be separated by a screen of double circular columns (subsequently modified to two square columns), framing three stepped openings.

However, a screen wall with framed openings was actually constructed between the South Stair and Central Saloon as is evident in photographs recording post bomb damage. This screen was demolished with the reordering of the spaces following extensive bomb damage in 1941. Early design drawings also illustrate additional openings between Galleries 40 and 38 & 39, although these are not indicated on early plans of the completed galleries.

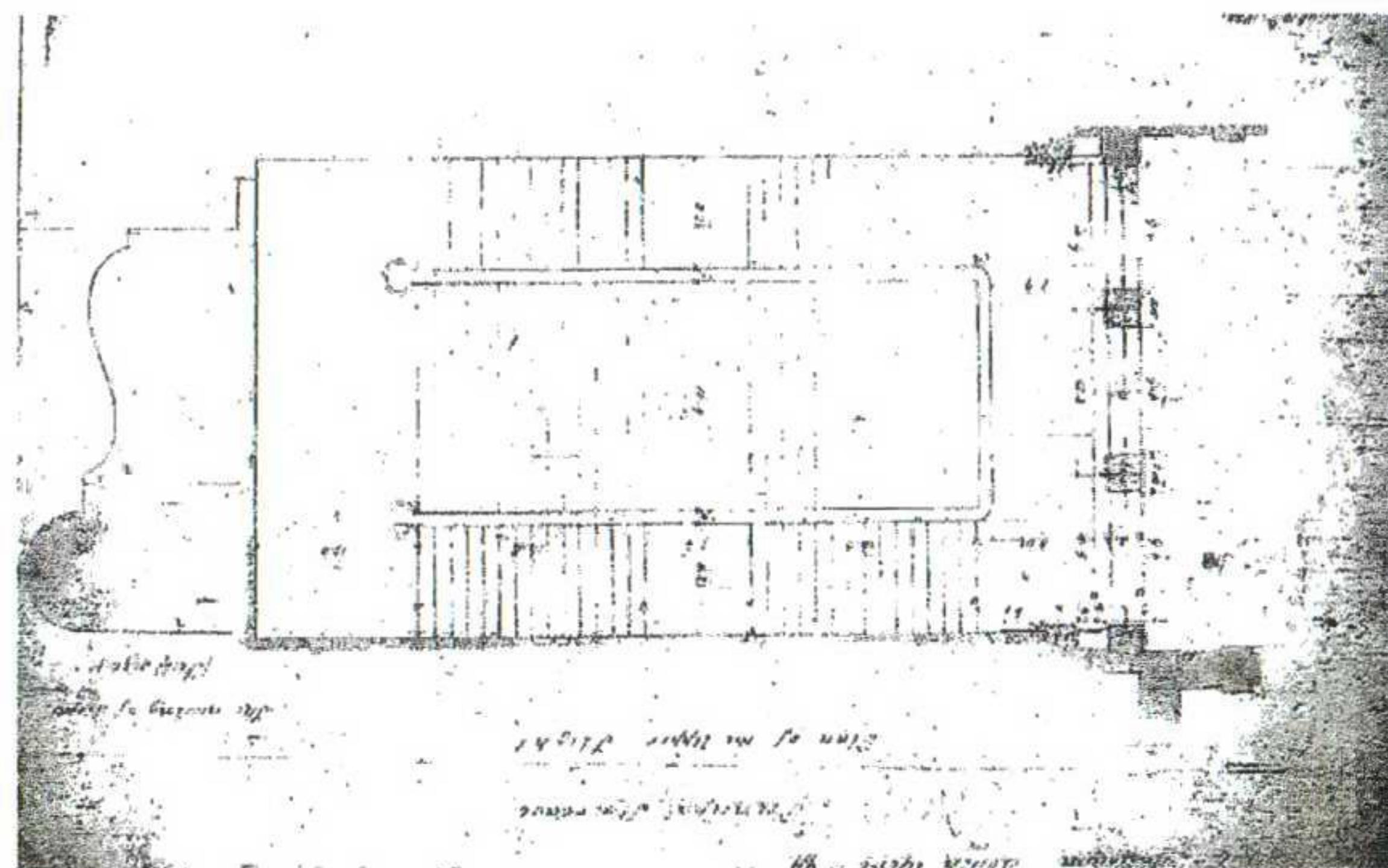
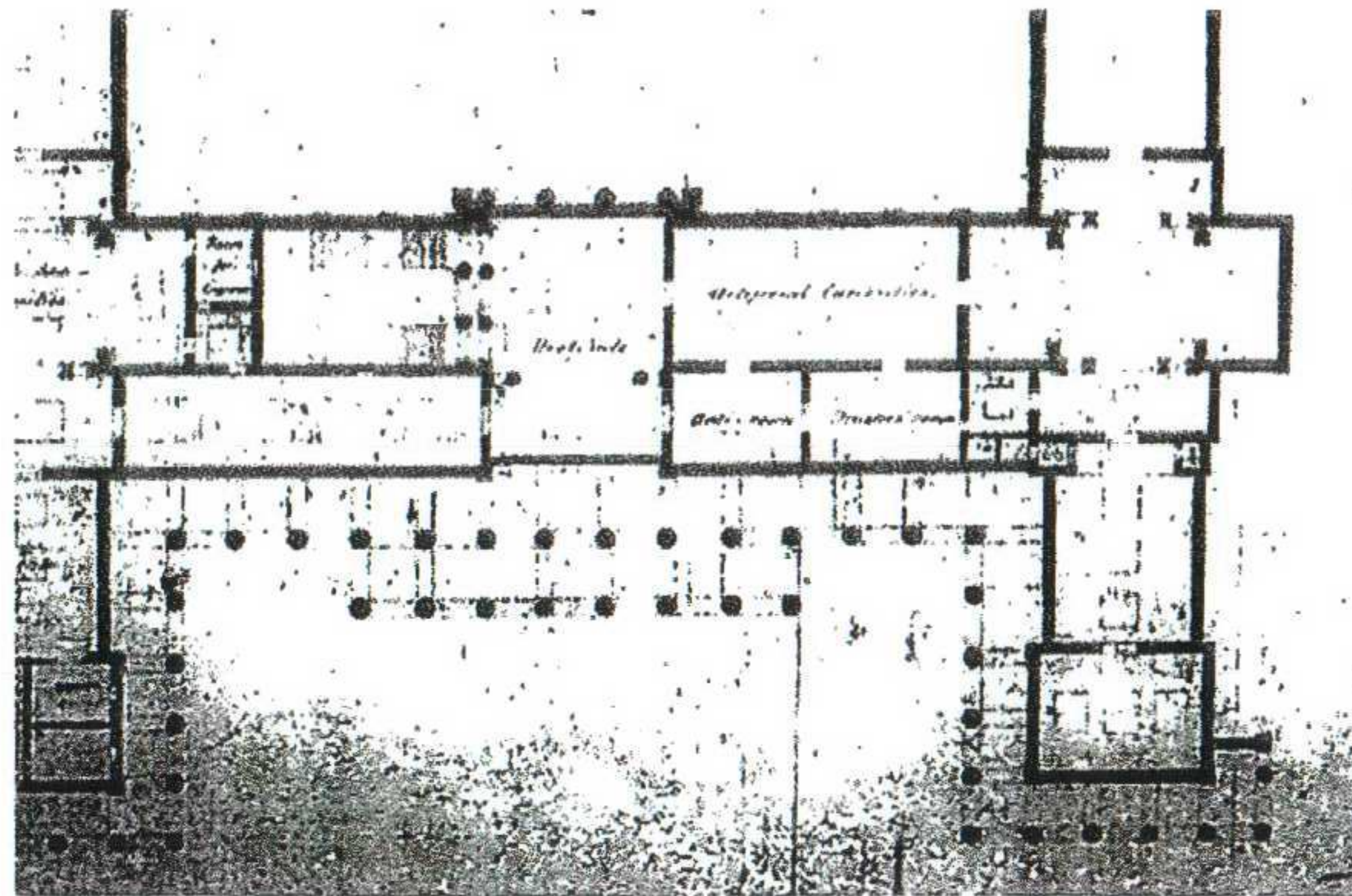
- A north extension to the Central Saloon was added in 1877, involving the removal of the north wall and replaced with two columns. This extension was subsequently modified, a lift lobby added within a reconstructed South Portico and the north wall reconfigured all as part of the Great Court project.
- The original roofs and ceilings to the Central Saloon, South Stair and Gallery 40 suffered extensive bomb damage in 1941 and were entirely remodelled during reconstruction after the war.

The ceiling to the South Stair was originally designed with five equal bays, divided by down stand beams running across a central glazed roof lantern. Whilst it is likely (from post bomb damage photographs) that this design was originally implemented, the reconstructed ceiling incorporating a single lay light omitted the dividing down stand beams. Similarly, a large single lay light was introduced in the Central Saloon. Gallery 40 appears to have lost all traces of original features above floor level.

The roof light and ceiling to Gallery 37, however, would appear to have not been materially effected by bomb damage.

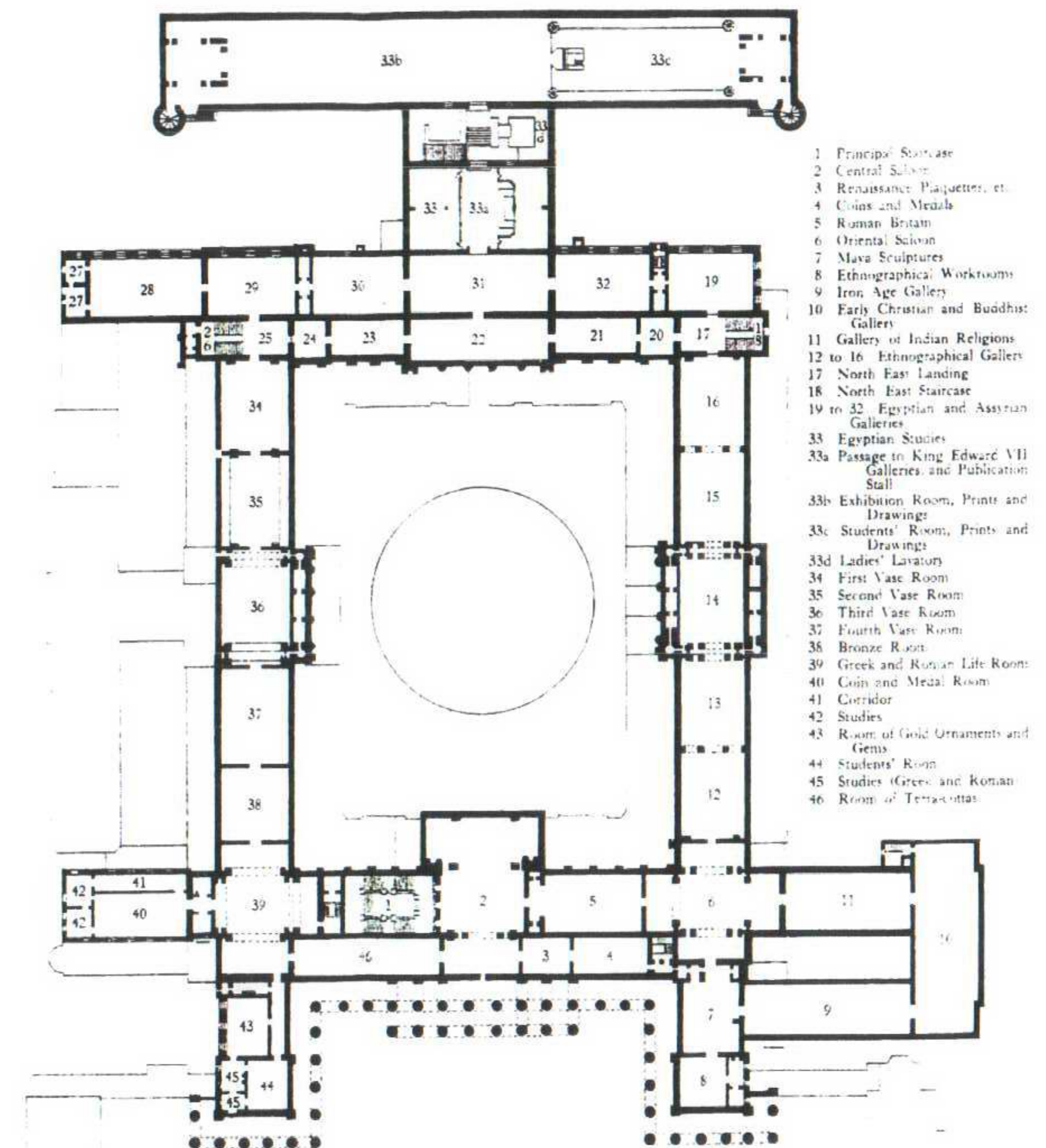
- Galleries 38 & 39, originally designed as the Botanical Rooms, retain their ceilings, roof structure and early roof lights, floor grilles and central wood boarding including elements of skirting and door architraves.

Galleries 38, 39 & 40 were, however, subdivided to maintain access through the spaces whilst providing temporary storage facilities for the Great Court project.

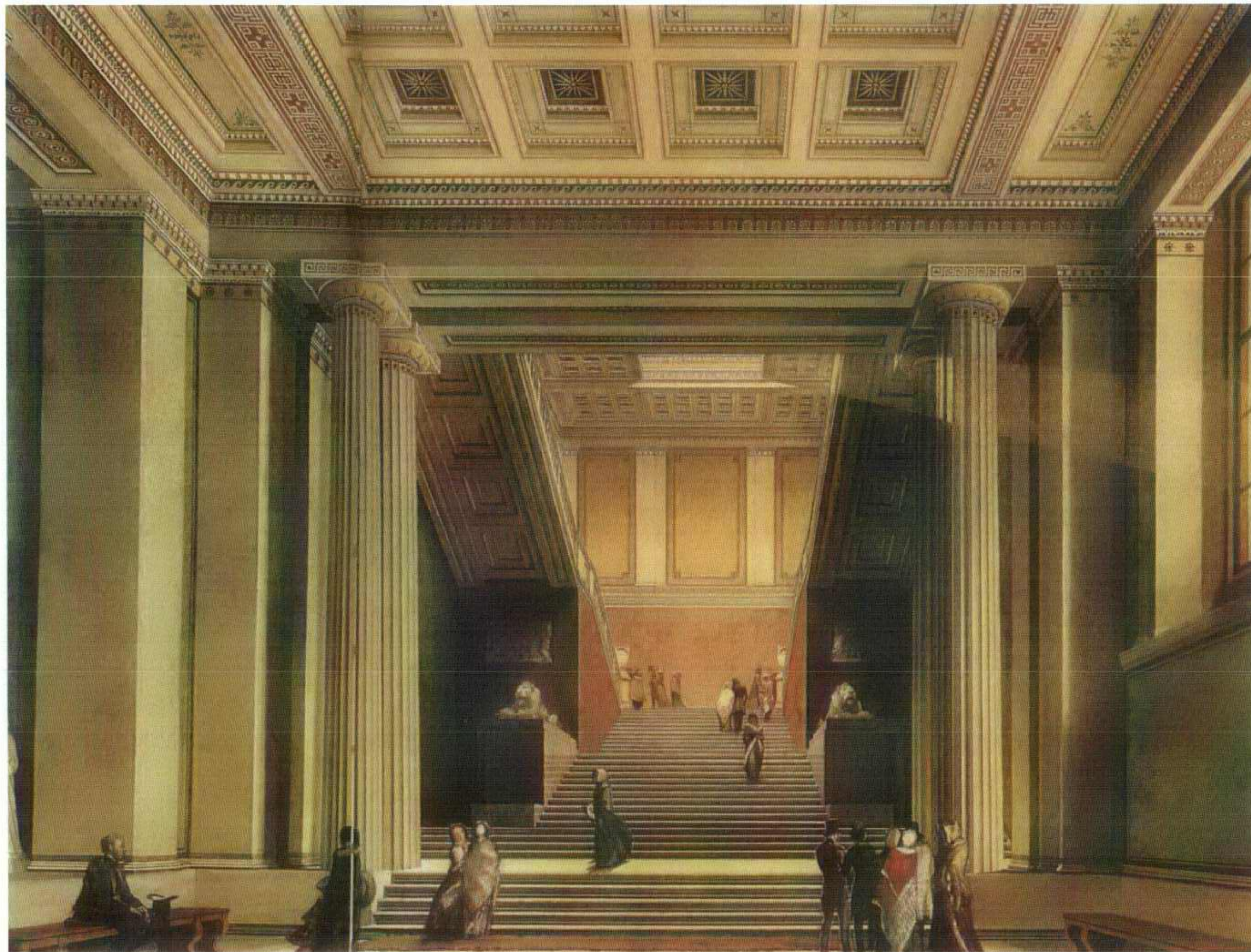


Design drawings for the proposed galleries dated 1827 and 1843 illustrating two proposals for the screen between the South Stair and the Grand Saloon together with additional openings between galleries 38, 39 and 40.

BRITISH MUSEUM PLAN OF THE UPPER FLOOR



Gallery plan of 1930 illustrating the implemented scheme for the screen between the South Stair and the Grand Saloon prior to the bomb damage of 1941.



Painting by J.W. Colman showing the scheme for the proposed polychrome decoration of the Front Entrance Hall and South Stair, approved and executed in 1847 and since recreated as part of the Great Court Project

CONSERVATION AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

Following discussions with the Museum and in line with the policies set out in the 'Conservation Plan', the following strategies have been agreed and adopted in defining the approach both to the refurbishment of the gallery spaces and the refurbishment of the roofs above. Further more detailed descriptions of the architectural proposals are included in later sections of this report:

- Restoration, where practical, of the original 'Smirke' interiors to create a sequence of interlinked spaces from the Entrance Hall, up the South Stairs, through the Central Saloon and into Gallery 68 or Gallery 41 through Galleries 38, 39 and 40.
- Utilisation of spaces which have been significantly modified in the past (i.e. Gallery 40) to accommodate the majority of new elements associated with the integration of building services including new plant areas.
- Galleries 37, 38 and 39, retaining many of the original floor, wall and ceiling finishes, are to retain their 'Smirke' interiors and all building elements needed to accommodate primary services to these spaces are to be fed from the adjacent Gallery 40.
- Restoration of the roofs over the South Stair and Central Saloon and Gallery 40, with a single continuous roof and a consistent ridge level, including the reinstatement of roof lanterns originally removed following bomb damage after the Second World War.
- Utilising the proposed new roofscape over the South Stair, Central Saloon and Gallery 40, which has been significantly modified in the past, to accommodate new enclosures for building services. The enclosures are to be composed within the general roofscape and rhythm of roof lanterns.
- Use of lead roof coverings over South Stair, Central Saloon and Gallery 40, as agreed by the Museum with English Heritage.
- Roofs over Galleries 37, 38 and 39, retaining much of their original structure, roof profile and copper finishes, are to be refurbished and upgraded including the replacement of roof lanterns.

The British Museum Conservation Plan - Appendix B and C also identify the sequence of change to adjacent spaces and the Botanical Stair.

ORGANISATION, CIRCULATION AND ACCESS

The Central Saloon, South Stair and Gallery 40 are pivotal spaces in the sequence of upper galleries. The galleries were, however, significantly remodelled immediately following the Second World War and for the Great Court project and their current form, materials and decoration differ significantly from adjoining galleries. The current ordering and visual appearance disrupts the spatial flow of the upper galleries.

The sequence of upper galleries including Gallery 68, which survives substantially as originally designed by Smirke and Gallery 41 would benefit from a consistent architectural approach.

The current strategy is to re-establish and/or re-interpret the spatial organisation and decoration of these spaces, as originally designed by Smirke. The proposals incorporate a number of basic principles in implementing this strategy including:

- Re-introducing the scale, orientation, and rhythm of original roof lanterns and ceiling decoration to reinforce the pivotal importance, hierarchy and spatial organisation of the spaces in the sequence of the upper galleries.

This is illustrated in the design drawings in a later section showing the existing and proposed roof and ceiling plans.

- Re-establishing the visual separation between the South Stair and the Central Saloon by acknowledging the transition between the two spaces and reinstating the original screen wall and openings. This also provides a more successful termination to the recently reinstated interpretation of the original 1849 Collman and Davis polychromatic colour scheme within the South Stair and Front Entrance Hall below.
- Developing the Central Saloon as a space for 'pausing and orientation' within the gallery sequence, incorporating the lift lobby in the South Portico into this space through the introduction of two additional openings in the north wall and therefore reinforcing the north-south axis and the views into the Great Court.

Although there is no current brief for the intended activities in this space, early studies carried out on behalf of the Museum indicate the potential scale and location of facilities that could be accommodated. These include the introduction of seating areas, information facilities and possibly some form of light catering.

Such activities would help to reinforce the Central Saloon as a pivotal space in the sequence of the upper galleries and re-establish the hierarchy of adjacent spaces, axis and circulation.

- Improving circulation and primary flow between Gallery 40 and Galleries 38 & 39 by relocating the existing opening between in Gallery 39 and 40 to a more central axis.
- Utilising the scale and detail of door openings to reinforce the clarity of the circulation route into, around and out of the gallery.

As highlighted above, the primary access to the galleries at this level is directly from the Front Entrance Hall via the South Stair or the two lifts previously incorporated into the South Portico as part of the Great Court Project. Access is also possible from the north of the Museum through the interconnected galleries on both the east and west side of the Great Court at this level.

The current proposals do not alter the current access strategy to this area but significantly improve the legibility and circulation between these spaces as highlighted above.

