

SOUTH STAIR, CENTRAL SALOON AND GALLERY 37

Historical Development and Record Information

With reference to the Conservation Plan, additional archive information, previous reports, ongoing site investigations and existing photographs, the historic development of the above spaces can be summarised as follows:

- The South Stair, Central Saloon and Gallery 37 represent significant early, 1847 spaces designed by Sir Robert Smirke. These spaces, for the most part, still retain their original plan configuration although many original details including the ceilings and roof lanterns were removed during reconstruction after the war.

The Museums' Conservation Plan Policy 21 states the following: 'To restore the coherence of the upper exhibition galleries, recreating Smirke's interior styles where this has not already been achieved (69, 51, 52, 35, 37, 38, 40) when opportunity permits.'

- As highlighted above, the original roofs and ceilings to the South Stair and Central Saloon, suffered extensive bomb damage in 1941 (pg.19) and were entirely remodelled and altered during reconstruction after the war. This can be summarised as follows:
 - 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 (pg.18). 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. This has recently been decorated in an interpretation of the original 1847 Collman and Davis polychrome colour scheme as part of the Great Court Project.
 - Similarly, a large single lay light was introduced in the Central Saloon although this has now been replaced with a grid of modern ceiling tiles (pg.21), cutting out all natural daylight where there was once a roof lantern. The original pre-war configuration of this ceiling is recorded on a survey of this area carried out in 1931 (pg.20) and a pre-war photograph on page 5.
 - The roof lantern and ceiling to Gallery 37, however, would appear to have not been materially effected by bomb damage. Minor alterations to this ceiling appear to have been the local infilling of some edge coffer alongside the doorways into adjacent Galleries 38 and 68. The original coffers are illustrated on the 1931 survey drawing mentioned above.

The Museum's Conservation Plan (sections 3.5d & 3.5j) refers to the Central Saloon as follows:

- 'The modern lay light is a disturbing remnant of the post-War repair and will ultimately be replaced by a more sympathetic restoration.'
- 'The roof of Room 36 (Central Saloon), damaged during the War, requires renewal in the Smirke style. Restoration would include the roof lights to reintroduce daylight following the removal of the lay light panels'

Appendix B (Section 6.3) of the Plan also indicates the following guidance for these ceilings:

- 'Consideration should be given to reinstating the pre-second world war skylight and ceiling configuration as the present design clashes with the remaining neo-classical detail.'
- 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 (pg.5).

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 (pg.19). This screen was demolished with the reordering of the spaces following extensive bomb damage in 1941.

The Museum's Conservation Plan (sections 3.5d and 3.5j) refers to this screen as follows:

- 'The Collman and Davis colour scheme has been (recently) restored. The link between the staircase and the Central Saloon (36) requires thought since Smirke's screen wall was destroyed in the Second World War. The restoration of the screen wall would mitigate the juxtaposition of the polychrome decoration of the Front Hall and Staircase.'
- 'A restored screen would allow the termination of the Collman decorative scheme extending from the Front Hall. The Central Saloon, once more a distinct space, would then be a part of the articulation between the staircase and the upper galleries.'

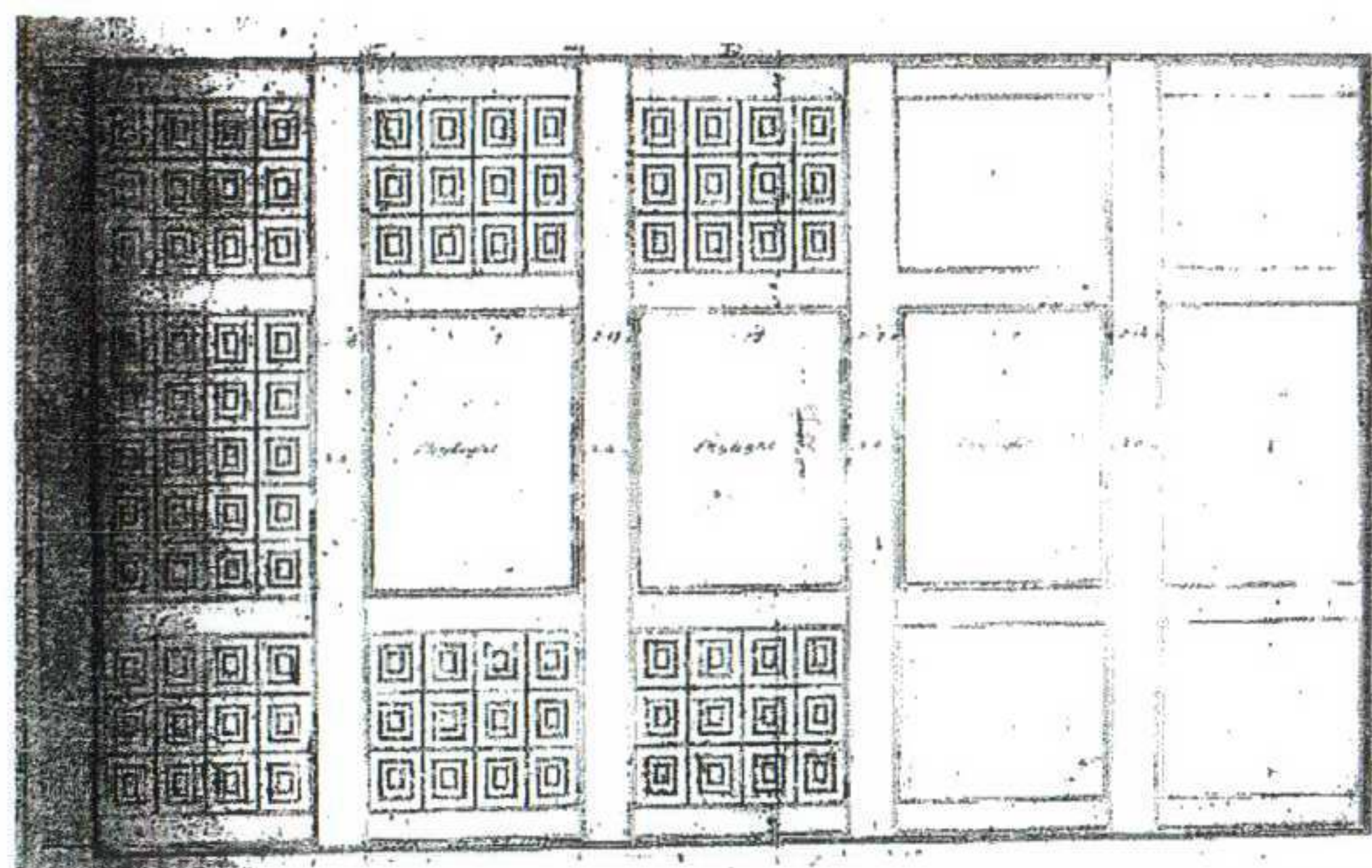
Appendix B (Section 6.3) of the Plan also indicates the following guidance for this screen:

- 'Consideration should be given to reinstating the original screen wall at the top of the principle (South) staircase to reform a subdivided spatial hierarchy and reinforce the surprise of the view into the Great Court from the Central Saloon.'
- A north extension to the Central Saloon was added in 1877, involving the removal of the north wall and replaced with two columns (pg.18). This extension was subsequently modified, a lift lobby added within a reconstructed South Portico and the north wall reconfigured with a single opening as part of the Great Court project (pg.30).

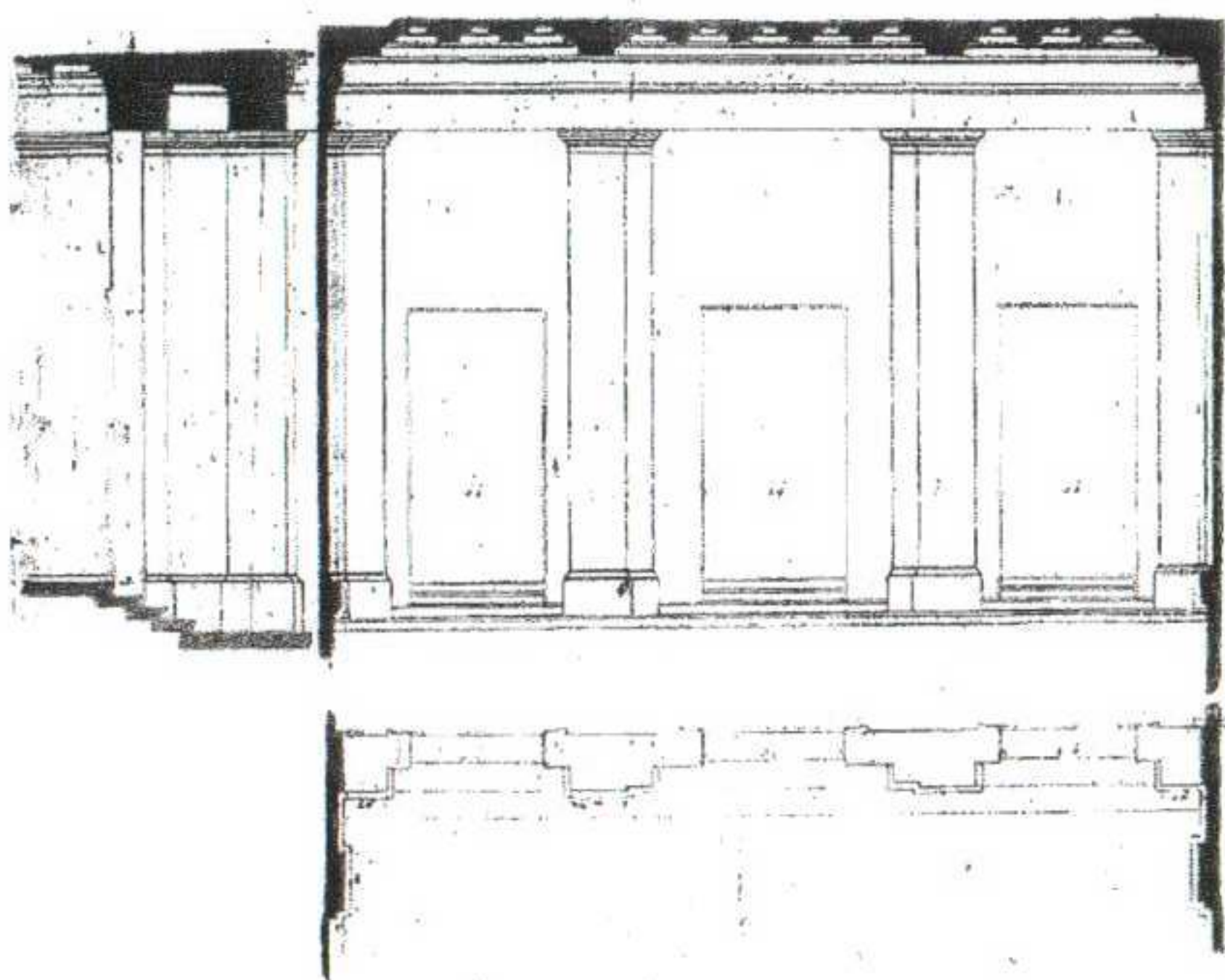
The new single opening from the Central Saloon into this lobby reflects the scale and remaining detail of the existing doorway into the adjacent Gallery 40 corridor. However, the spatial connection to the lobby and Great Court beyond appears relatively discrete and the light limestone floor (matching the Great Court) further detaches this space from the Central Saloon and South Stair.

- Following bomb damage and post-war strengthening of the floor structure, it appears from recent site investigations that the original timber floor finishes to the Central Saloon and Gallery 37 have been replaced. These now incorporate a mixture of modern tongue and groove timber or plywood boarding with a linoleum finish.
- Although the original stone borders with integral slate duct covers still remain within Gallery 37, localised areas around the two stone columns appear to have been reinstated in modern concrete screed.
- Although altered in some places, it would appear that most of the original features and joinery to the doorways leading off from the Central Saloon and Gallery 37 are original and remain intact. These include full height timber doors which fold back flush into the adjacent door reveal linings and architraves.

However, it would appear from pre-war photographs (pg.4) that the original cornice above the door into Gallery 40 has been removed. The original door canopies above the doors into Galleries 38 and 69 do, however, appear to be original. It is also worth noting that there was originally a cornice of the same design above the central opening in the screen wall between the South Stair and Central Saloon.



Design drawings for the proposed ceiling to the South Stair dated 1843 illustrating the downstand beams bisecting the roof light



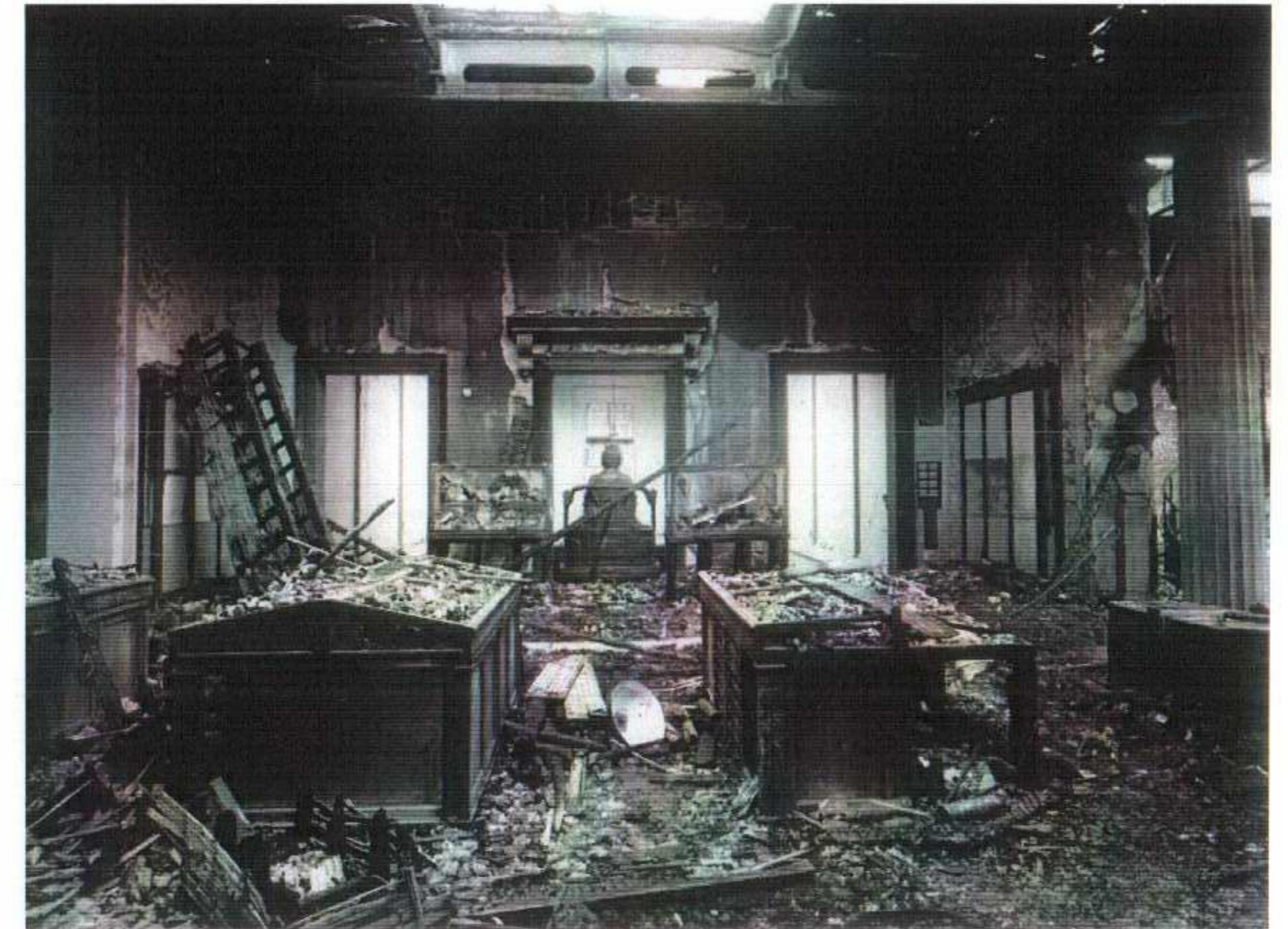
Design drawings for the proposed screen between the South Stair and the Grand Saloon dated 1847. This scheme was implemented and is evident in archive photographs illustrating the bomb damage of 1941.



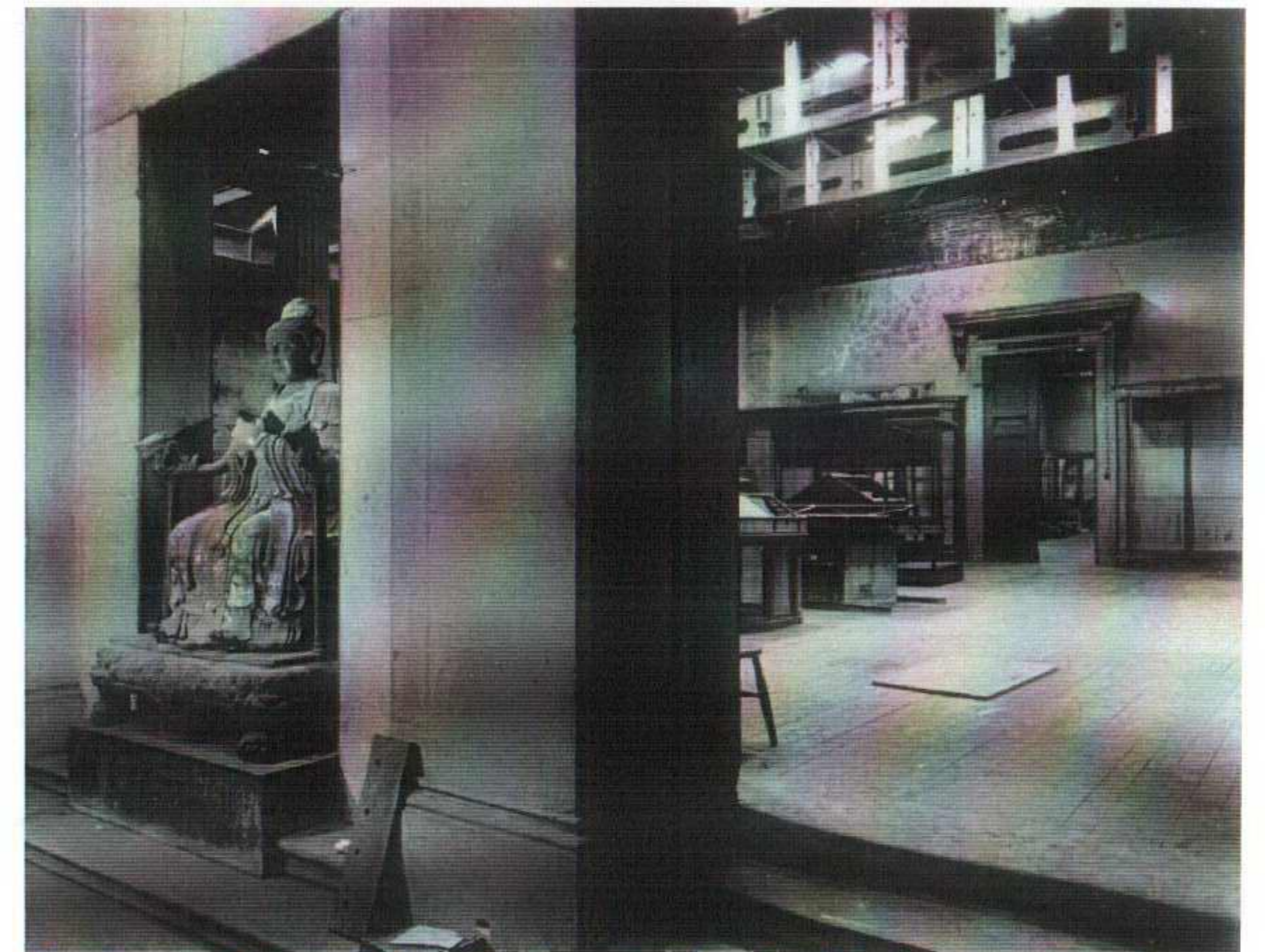
Grand Saloon looking North and illustrating the ceiling configuration and rooflight prior to bomb damage in 1941. The photograph also illustrates the embellishments to the door opening into Gallery 40



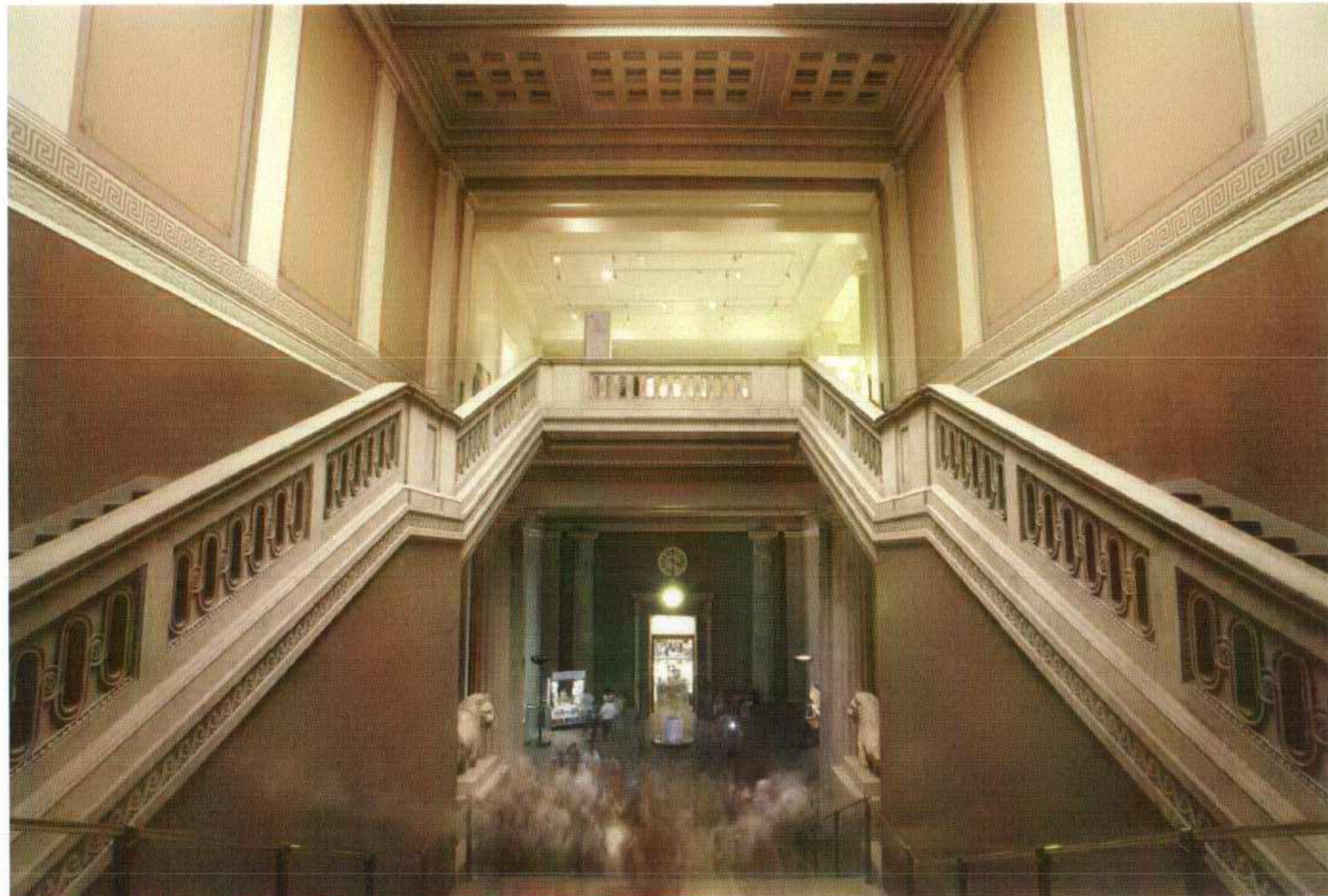
view towards original screen wall from Central Saloon following 1941 bomb damage



view towards original screen wall from Central Saloon following 1941 bomb damage



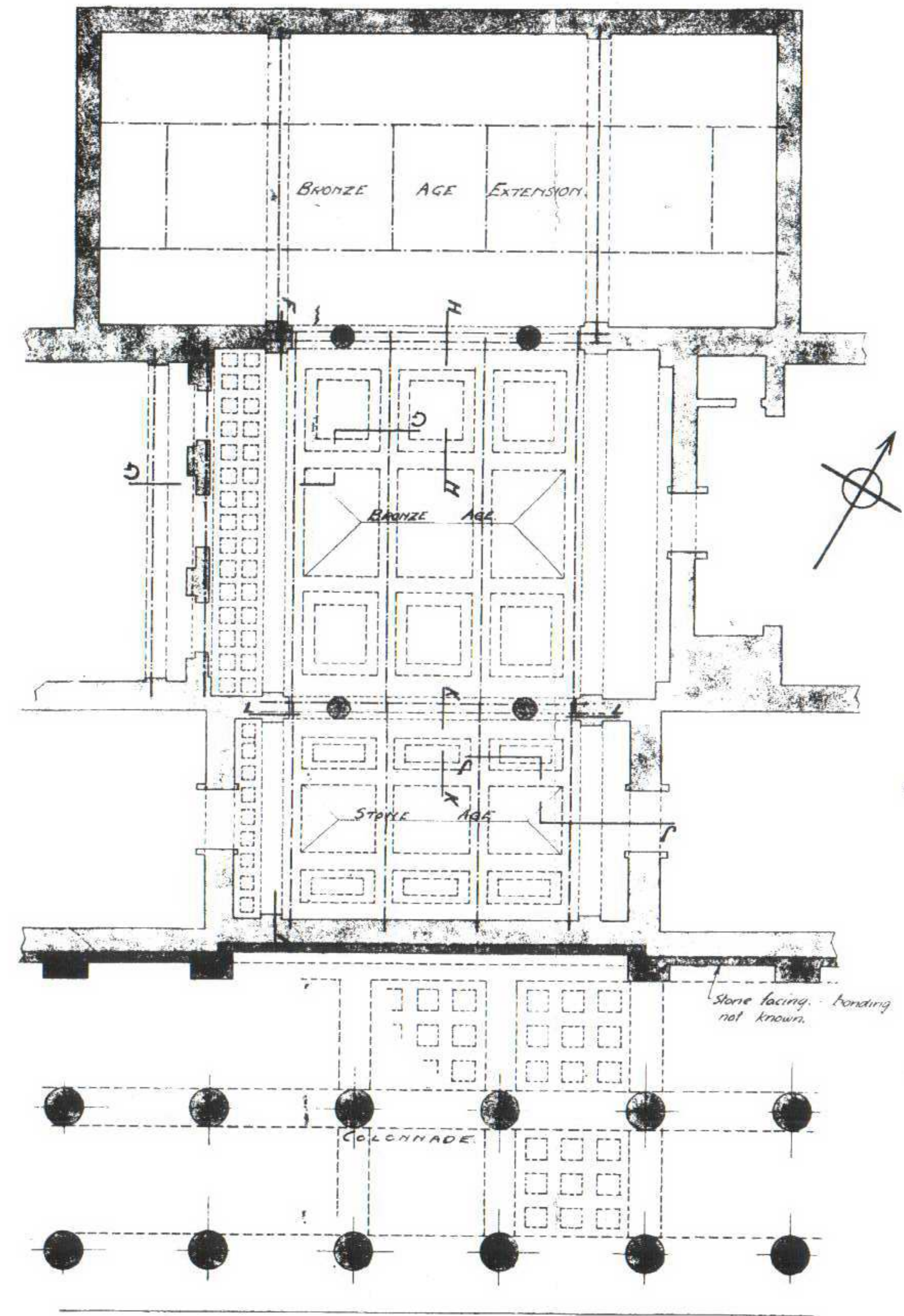
view from top of South Stair landing through openings in original screen wall towards Central Saloon



Existing view from South Stair landing up to Central Saloon



Existing ceiling line between Central Saloon and recently reinstated polychrome ceiling to South Stair



PLAN SHOWING CEILING AND SKYLIGHTS.

1931 survey drawing of Central Saloon showing original screen wall to South Stair and coffered ceiling



The Central Saloon from Gallery 40 with Gallery 37 to the left, the South Stair in the background and the opening to the South Portico and Great Court to the right



Existing stone /slate floor detail in Gallery 37 looking towards doorway into Gallery 68



Existing doorway and cornice into Gallery 68 from Gallery 37



Existing doorway and cornice into Gallery 37 from Gallery 68



Typical fire shutter detail used elsewhere in the Museum



The lift lobby to the South Portico looking into the Great Court (left)