

## GALLERIES 38, 39 AND 40

### 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:

- As part of the sequence of upper galleries, these rooms represent significant early, 1847 spaces designed by Sir Robert Smirke.
- Galleries 38 & 39, originally designed as the Botanical Rooms, appear to retain many of their original features including:
  - Roof structure and early 20th century roof lanterns
  - Coffered ceilings and cornices
  - Wall finishes including elements of original skirting and some door architraves
  - Original perimeter stone flooring with integral floor grilles (some missing) and central timber boarding.
  - Original floor structure (cast iron beams, brick arches/sleeper walls and timber floor joists)

Recent modern alterations to the spaces include:

- Horizontal security grills and metal solar control louvres at high level within the roof lanterns.
- Sub-division of both spaces with modern dry lining to create temporary storage and maintain public access through to Botanical stair and Gallery 47 during the Great Court Project.
- Linoleum floor finish and plywood substrata across all original stone and timber flooring.
- Modern opening into Gallery 40 from Gallery 39 appears inconsistent with historical records.
- Modern door and architrave from Gallery 39 into Botanical stair corridor.

The Museum's Conservation Plan (sections 3.5l and 3.5m) refers to these spaces as follows:

- 'Behind the temporary partitions these rooms retain much of their original appearance.'
- 'The existing cross links between Rooms 39 and 40 are poorly executed and do not enhance their visual coherence. In any future refurbishment of these galleries the relationships between them and their circulation require careful consideration and sensitive design.'

- 'The exit door (to Botanical stair) at level 6 was altered as part of the refurbishment of the link corridor work. This scheme executed in a neutral manner, takes advantage of a back of house space to allow direct access by the public to rooms 47, 46 and 48. It was completed in 1996.

Appendix B (Section 6.3) of the Plan does not give much clear guidance for these spaces apart from the following:

- 'All original remaining fabric and fittings should be retained and conserved.'
- As with the South Stair and Central Saloon, the original roofs and ceilings to Gallery 40 suffered extensive bomb damage in 1941 and were entirely remodelled during reconstruction after the war. Apart from the original floor structure which was itself strengthened after the war, Gallery 40 appears to have lost all traces of original features above floor level. From the available historical record and on site investigations, the apparent changes from the original 'Smirke' interiors can be summarised as follows:
  - The original ceiling configuration and detailing can be seen in a number of archive photographs included within this report. This appears to have been a coffer and beam arrangement with three separate central roof lanterns, similar in configuration and detail to the existing ceilings in Galleries 37, 38 and 39 and original ceiling in the Central Saloon.
  - Archive drawings and post-bomb damage photographs indicate a full height vestibule and embellished cross beam arrangement at the west end of Gallery 40. Although this vestibule and crossbeam were removed after the war, it is possible to see a similar arrangement within the Grenville library on the floor below.

- Archive photographs indicate the original arrangement of the Gallery with continuous display cabinets located on both the north and side walls.
- The new steel roof structure incorporated a full length suspended mezzanine floor and access staircase along the north side of the gallery.
- From current information and site investigations it appears that majority of original finishes within this gallery have been replaced including ceilings, walls and floor finishes. In addition a number of fixed items of furniture and wall mounted steel work/brackets have been integrated in the space.

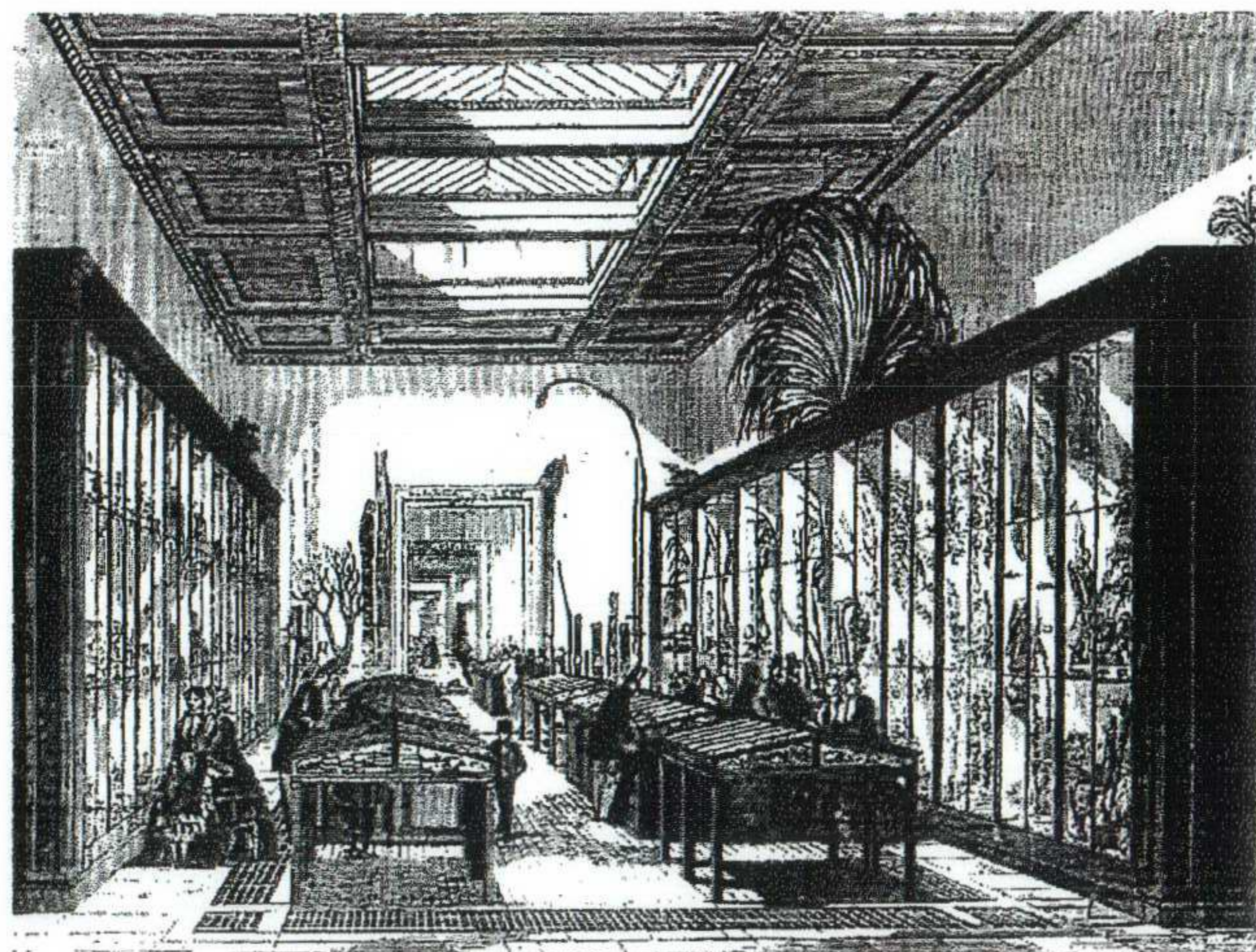
The Museum's Conservation Plan (sections 3.5k) refers to the Gallery 40 as follows:

- 'This area is part of Smirke's original configuration of upper southern galleries, although much altered'



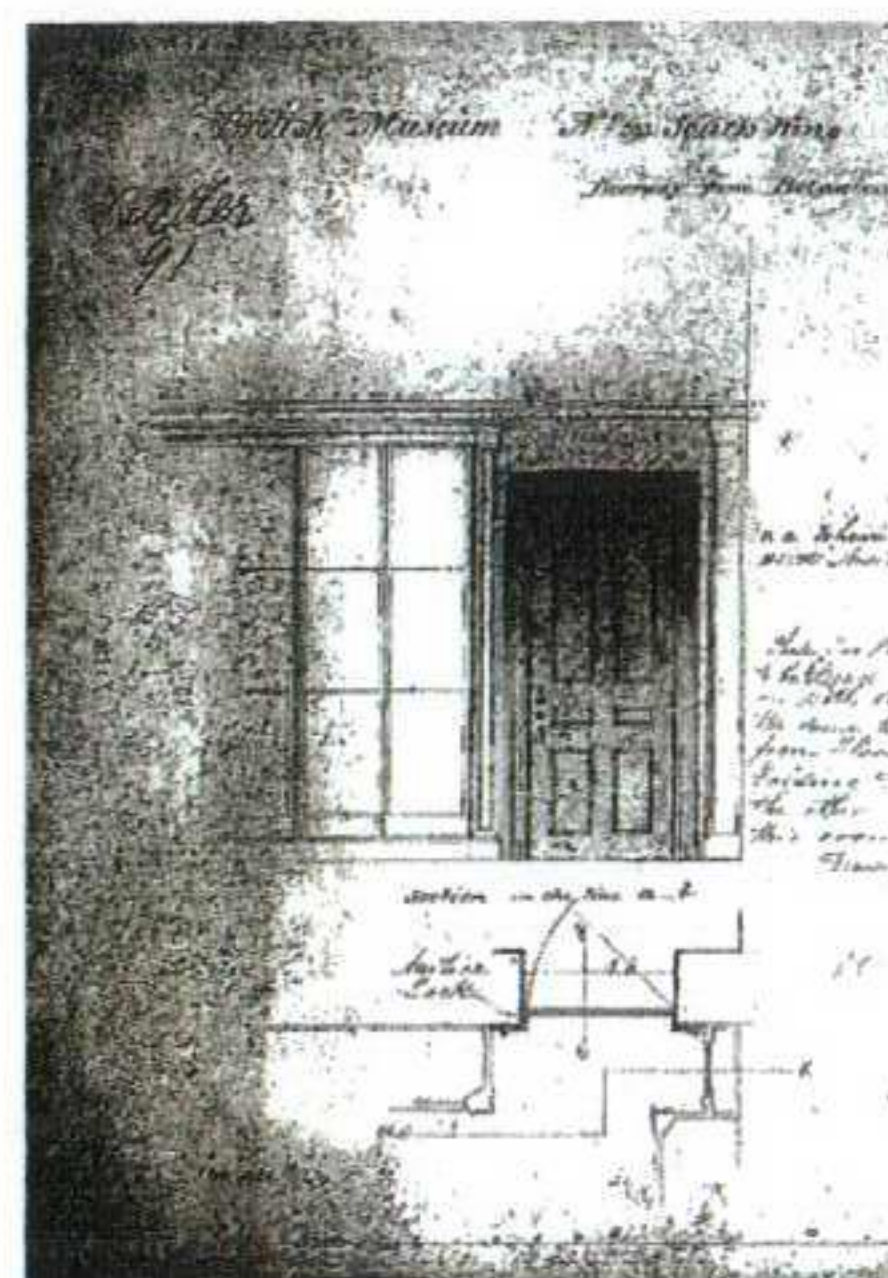
Archive photograph of Gallery 40 illustrating the ceiling layout and wall cabinets



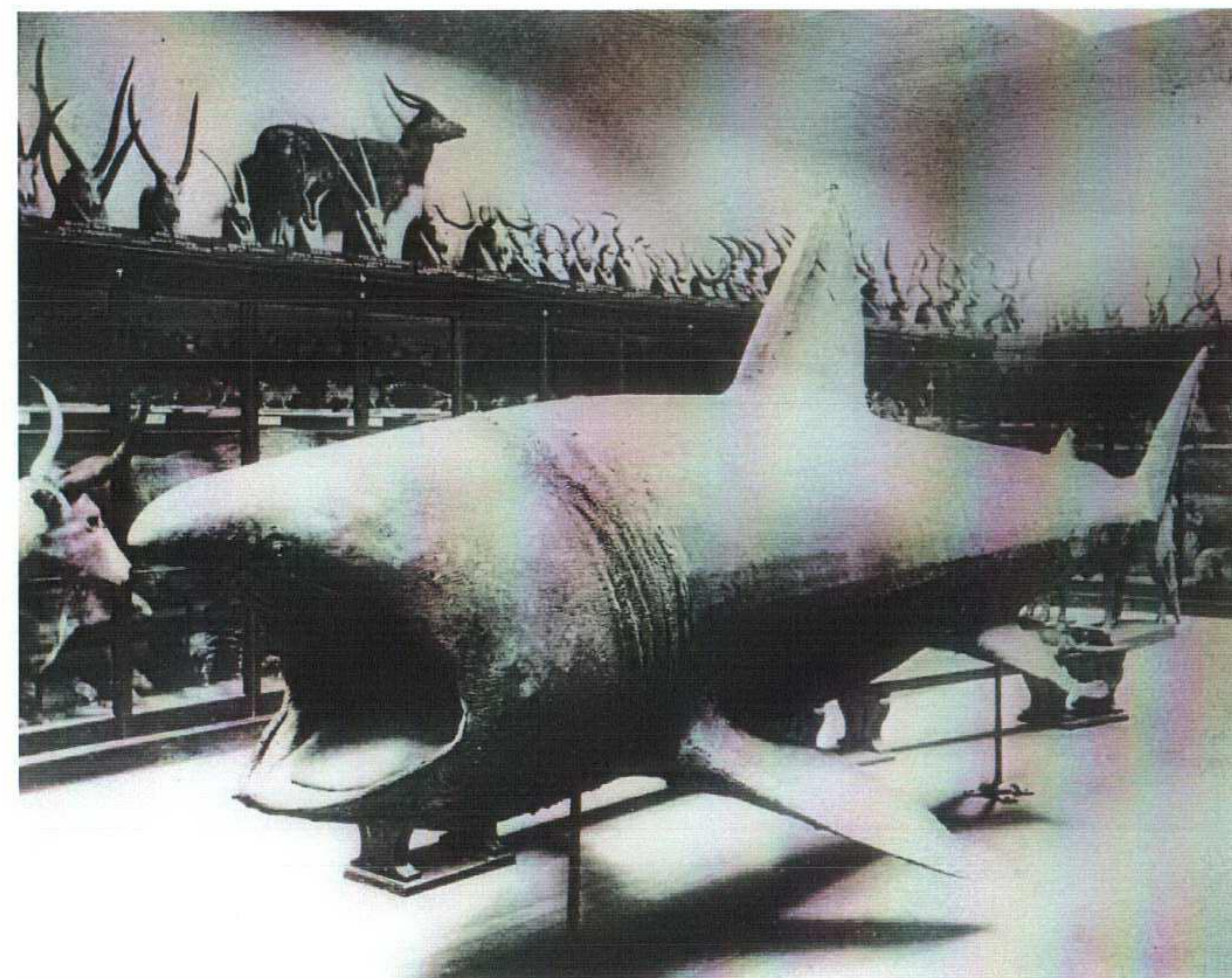


THIS IS THE GREAT BOTANICAL ROOM AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM, SEE PAGE 20

1858 Engraving of Botanical Room, Gallery 39 from the Illustrated London News



Original design for the door leading into the Botanical Stair from Gallery 40



Archive photograph of Gallery 40 illustrating the ceiling layout and wall cabinets





Archive photograph showing bomb damage in Gallery 40 looking towards vestibule and doorway into Central Saloon



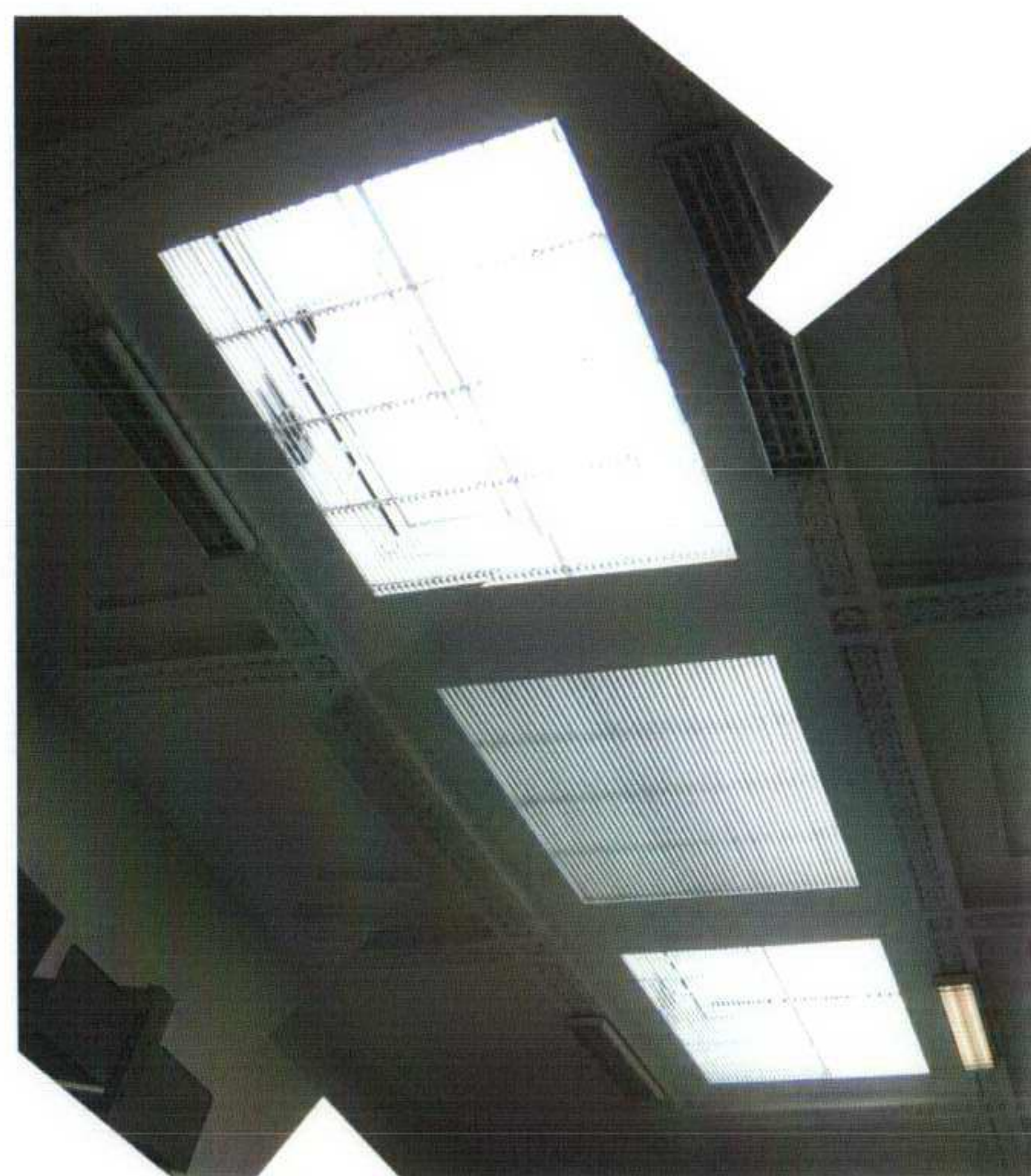


The partitioned access route through Gallery 40



Gallery 40 with the partitioned access route to the right





Existing ceiling within Gallery 39



Existing ceiling within Gallery 38



Existing door casing, architrave and skirting within Gallery 38

