

## Design Statement

### ***Consideration of the building's special interest: flexibility***

The structural and functional capability of Senate House to alter its internal layout is an important part of its special interest. To resist this potential is to the building's detriment. The partitions do not and never were intended to create a particular plan form but just to reflect organisational need. They are not rare on two counts; in terms of similar fabric in this building or within similar buildings of the period. The application drawings and the extensive photographs have recorded the building's current arrangement and condition.

There is considerable evidence of Holden's and the University's desire for flexibility in the areas of low and medium importance. In a memorandum from the architect to the University dated 16 February 1932 Holden makes the following comments upon his intended approach:

*There is one important point bearing on the cost which should, I think, receive the Court's earnest consideration – to decide to what extent the new home of the University should be built to serve the future. The steel or reinforced concrete frame building may be permanent enough for commercial needs but I cannot think that a life of from fifty to one hundred years (which is probably the limit for a frame building) would be adequate for so permanent an institution as the London University.*

*I am fully aware that the steel frame work has been employed for similar institution and there may in some cases be some justification for so doing. I would like to feel that we are not going to hand over to those who come after us and within the term of one life, a dilapidation and a liability.*

*The building which I have in mind is one that will be built substantially and will have all the services, Staircases, Halls, Lavatories permanently installed – the remainder of the floor space would be in the form of a shell which would be capable of infinite variety of subdivision by means of light partitions.*

Following the occupation of the building, Holden delivered a speech to the RIBA on 25 April 1938. The speech was printed in full in the RIBA Journal on 9 May 1938. The paper contained the following indications of his intentions for the building:

*This arrangement, attractive enough in itself, had to be abandoned on account of the rigidity of the planning into arbitrary outlines ill-suited for the degree of flexibility which was felt to be desirable in a building with a long future before it.*

*In this plan the intersections of the spine and ribs would contain the lifts, staircases, lavatories and cleaning services, leaving the whole of the remainder of the units to be sub-divided at will.*

p.638

*For the more important buildings in a large University (unlike most buildings, public or private), a continuity of active life extending over many centuries must be anticipated, and we felt it our duty to make provision for that continuity.*

*We therefore resorted to a method of construction based upon centuries of experience, for we did not feel that this was an occasion for the admission of any element of doubt as to the permanence of the structure.*

*For this reason brick and stone were selected for their known permanence and stability in the conversion of the weight-bearing walls and piers.*

*p.640-1*

*The floors are of steel girders in pairs spanning from outside wall to outside wall, with the intervening spaces filled with hollow brick tiles separated with concrete ribs cross-reinforced, and of a sufficient strength to carry partition walls and corridor walls in any position that might be required, either now or in the near or distant future; by this means the spaces within the building were capable of infinite change without disturbance to the main structure, and with little risk of becoming obsolete.*

*Generally, therefore, it may be said that the supporting walls are the most durable element in the building....*

*p.641*

*The requirements of the floor system were clear spans, flat soffits, abundant room for and easy access to conduit, strength to carry partitions anywhere.*

*p.659*

The strength of Holden's conviction, leads one to conclude that the third floor works were never intended to last beyond their useful life. Given his forward thinking approach and the obvious eventual growth in the library collection, it is most likely that Holden anticipated that the floor lying adjacent to the main library would at some point need to be converted as is currently proposed.

## **Specific Materials and recommended solutions**

### **Teak floor and skirtings**

The outlets for power and communications systems are contained within floor boxes. These are recessed into the timber floor. The proposed layout of floor boxes has been coordinated with the lines of original accessible teak boards and to aid installation and future access widening the accessible areas to three boards wide is proposed; this will be made up of a ply board access panel under carpet in order to salvage teak to use in exposed areas. The solution is considered to be sympathetic to the original fabric and will greatly discourage the need for any future surface mounting of cables and trunking.

### **Floor Finishes**

The teak flooring is currently covered with a carpet finish in most areas. In rooms this is generally synthetic carpet tiles and in corridors, broadloom carpet with a perimeter of exposed teak boards. Public circulation spaces are finished with either travertine or terrazzo.

More specifically, the following is proposed:

- Low pile woven carpet tile in the general office areas;
- Broadloom carpet with a perimeter of exposed teak boards in the library spaces on the third floor;
- Exposed teak boards with loose laid rugs in senior level offices; and
- Wilton body carpets with exposed teak perimeters in corridors.
- Rubber in the Membership, Catalogue and Exhibition Halls on the fourth floor
- Low pile woven carpet tile in the libraries on the fourth, fifth and sixth floors.

Previously, a solvent based Tackifier has been applied to fix the carpet tiles in place. Discussions and trials have been held with specialist installation companies with regard to restoring these areas of teak flooring and avoiding such adhesive in the future.

### **Partitions**

The existing partitions are generally constructed of plastered brick. The corridor partitions are built off the floor slab. The cross partitions are also typically built off the slab though examples of partitions on top of upstand beams exist. They have hardwood skirting that incorporate electrical wiring, dado rails, picture rails and simple plaster cornices.

All efforts have been made to limit the extent of demolition of existing original partitions and the formation of new ones. Where demolition of cross partitions is unavoidable, it is proposed to make good the affected areas. These works are principally to the third floor. The works of making good will allow the space to retain the character of Holden's aesthetic. It is important to note that it is the intention to infill the teak flooring where a partition is removed with identical material but at right angles to the existing grain. This is intended to leave evidence of the original plan form.

Any new partitions will be built off the floor slab and will use load bearing metal studs clad with cement reinforced particle board with an outer skin of skim coated plasterboard.

The principles of the making good works and erecting new partitions are illustrated in the isometric drawings.

## **Doors**

The original timber door sets are generally retained intact. Investigations have been made into the refurbishment of the original timber finishes with French polishing experts. The original ironmongery and door numerals will also be retained. Where a new door is required, a salvaged doorset will be re-used.

## **Windows**

The existing external window sets will be retained and cleaned.

## **Travertine Heater Panels**

The travertine panels are consistent almost throughout the building. These provide a sense of coherence to Senate House. All of the panels are to be retained throughout the building. The original electric heater units that warm the panel from behind contain asbestos and must be replaced.

## **Ceilings and Walls**

There has been a gradual addition of suspended ceiling systems and acoustic tiling to many areas within Senate House. These have detrimentally affected the character and appearance of these rooms. The University wishes to remove these later additions and restore the rooms to their original appearance and proportions. Test areas have revealed the need for specialist plaster repairs.

## **Fittings**

Many of the rooms contain the original fittings. Although many can no longer be used, these will be left in situ.

Fittings include:

Door Ironmongery

Wall clocks

Plastic/ Bakelite Thermostats

Bronze finish light switches

Bronze finish heater switches

Bronze finish key switches

Original round two/three pin sockets

## **Lighting**

The floor void is used for the power supply distribution to light fittings on the floor below. Power passes horizontally through the floor structure via original conduit routes to drop vertically to recessed besa boxes within the plastered ceilings below. The coordination between the original besa box locations and the

requirements for the new lighting design luminaire locations may not always correspond. Where it is not possible to re-use the existing bsa boxes, there will be the need to drill through the floor structure and/or chase the supply horizontally within the ceiling plaster.

The lighting design includes enhancements to original fittings and new fittings that are sympathetic to the original building. Most of the existing original fittings will be refurbished and rewired; where any original fittings are removed these will be relocated in a similar position (e.g. from one corridor to another) or it will be stored for future re-use. The majority of the offices and some libraries are fitted with modern florescent luminaries that will be replaced by a more efficient and sympathetic design.