

**THE BRITISH MUSEUM**

**WINDOW TO ROOM 2 / GRENVILLE LIBRARY**

**HERITAGE  
AND  
DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT  
TO SUPPORT  
LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION**

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## **1.00 HERITAGE STATEMENT**

### **1.01 Bloomsbury Conservation Area appraisal and management strategy (adopted April 2011)**

#### The document:

The purpose of the appraisal is to define the special interest of the Conservation area and to put strategies in place to enhance and protect the relevant assets within the boundaries and to give guidance on such matters.

The initial designation of Bloomsbury as a Conservation area in 1968 was to protect elements of development to assets from the Georgian and earlier periods, but excluded areas where there had been significant later development. The document appreciates that there has been significant development in later period including Victorian, Edwardian and 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture.

The document refers to the British Museum as one of the set piece buildings generally becoming evident as landmarks in the streetscape. It is a building which forms one of the notable views of landmarks within the area.

The British Museum is considered by the appraisal to have the biggest footprint which includes linked buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries occupying the majority of a street block. The building is within Sub-Area 3 of the appraisal which refers to and describes the significance of the streetscape and façade treatments.

The appraisal refers to the British Museum making a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole. Section 5.47 particularly describes the King Edward VII Galleries and the recent demolition of a pair of 1971 neo-Georgian townhouses to make way for the North West development.

The Conservation area appraisal sets out the management of change and in particular the alterations and extensions to existing buildings. Examples of where inappropriate changes are proposed refer only to external elements.

The document makes reference to Listed Buildings and gives advice regarding how to check that a building is listed.

There is a list of buildings at risk within the area.

## **1.02 Heritage gateway**

The Heritage gateway lists the British Museum (entry no.: 1130404) as Grade 1 carried out on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1954. The following details are included as a description of the building:

"CAMDEN

TQ3081NW  
GREAT RUSSELL STREET  
798-1/100/697 (North side)  
24/10/51 The British Museum

GV I

Museum. 1823-47. By Sir Robert Smirke with later additions. Portland stone. Planned as a big quadrangle with open courtyard extending north from Montague House (the original Museum, demolished c1840).

2 main storeys in Greek Revival style. Built in stages.

East Wing 1823-26: built to house George IV's library and Angerstein pictures (later basis of National Gallery). An early use of iron beams clad in concrete by engineer John Rastrick. Fine Grecian detail to interior with scagliola walls.

West Wing 1831-4: built to house antiquities. Redecorated to Smirke's original colour scheme 1980.

North Wing 1833-8: built to house antiquities.

South Range 1842-7: built as the principal facade following the demolition of Montague House. 7-bay centre linked to projecting wings. Ionic octastyle portico with sculptured pediment projecting from a massive colonnade running around the wings. Ionic order from the temple of Athene Polias, Priene. Pediment sculpture depicts the "Progress of Civilisation" by Westmacott. Fine interior with grand central staircase.

Round Reading Room 1852-7: by Sydney Smirke. Erected to fill the open quadrangle, with domed cast-iron roof.

HISTORICAL NOTE: the museum expanded north during the C19, the last main addition being the King Edward VII Gallery (qv).

1914, facing Montague Place. Some of the galleries were damaged during World War II and have been remodelled for display purposes."

The West Manuscripts Saloon (The Grenville Library) as designed by Sir Robert Smirke and completed in 1847 survives in its entirety including all the fittings and finishes (*with the exception of the altered window at balcony level 3*) The Room as existing is highly significant historically and of great heritage merit. Architecturally it is significant as one of the last rooms designed by Robert Smirke.

Conservation guidance includes:

Room 2 – All original 1827 fabric and fittings should be retained and conserved

Grenville Library - All original and early 1847 / 1848 fabric and fittings should wherever possible be retained and conserved, including the book presses

## **2.02 The current proposals:**

The proposals are to replace the stud partition and glazed door/screen at balcony level between the Grenville Library and Room 2 with a new glazed window similar in form to the original window.

A new 4 panelled window, designed to match the form and setting out of the adjacent original windows is to be inserted in the existing opening.

The new window needs to be 1 hour fire resisting to meet the requirements of the Museum's Fire Officer and to maintain the existing provision achieved by the solid partition that currently exists. In order to achieve this, the framing of the window needs to be of a particular section size together with fire resistant glazing. In order to reduce the impact of this increased section size, mullions and transoms are profiled to give a finer edge detail which replicates in principle the glazing details of the adjacent original windows. Additional rebating of the sections emphasises the leading edge profiles.

The reinstatement of a 2/2 sash window at this level will greatly improve the shared natural light between the two rooms as was the original intention. The proposals remove the utilitarian plain partition from the Room 2 side and the uncomfortably detailed door/screen from the Grenville Library side.

The new window has been designed to match the form of the original windows and the framing has been detailed to minimise the increased section sizes necessary to provide the necessary fire resistance and glazing rebates.

Photographs of the original window and of the existing arrangements are appended to this document.

Drawing numbers AS1/1, AB1/1 and AB1/3 show the existing and proposed arrangements.

### **3.00 ACCESS STATEMENT**

Access to both rooms at level 2 is available to visitors, and the new window will be visible from this level.

Access to the balconies is limited to the Museum's staff, principally for maintenance and repair of the electrical services that run around both balconies within ducts.

Both balcony areas have controlled access managed by the Museum. In particular, the balcony at Room 2 has a demountable balustrade that has to be installed before safe access is achieved. The balcony in the Grenville Library has a discreet secondary structural glass balustrade to effect the correct height for safe access although the balconies are very narrow in places.

The current opening between the two rooms allows for secondary escape from one room to the other. Distances are such on the Grenville side that a secondary means of escape is not actually necessary; however on the Room 2 side there are dead end balconies. The intention is to manage safe access with removable ladders when the balconies are occupied; this may be via temporary collapsible escape ladders left on the balconies in discreet locations or by providing temporary ladders or gantries from level 2 whilst repair / maintenance works are being undertaken (normally out of hours).

## APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHS



Original arrangement (from Grenville Library side)



Original arrangement (from Room 2 side)





Current arrangement (from Grenville Library side)



Current arrangement (from Room 2 side)