

The British Museum  
Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery &  
Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery

Design and Access Statement and Heritage Statement  
for Listed Building Application

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Richards





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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*Nissen Richards Studio is an experienced and ambitious architectural and design practice with a broad portfolio of work. Many of our completed projects have involved working with listed buildings and in locations of historic significance, requiring a particularly sensitive approach to design and careful consideration of existing context.*

*Our current and past projects include the refurbishment of the Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre at the Grade I Listed Victoria & Albert Museum, Nature’s Library Natural History Gallery at the Grade II\* Listed Manchester Museum, new displays and internal interventions at the Category A Listed Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, and proposed new works within and around the Anglo-Saxon burial ground and Scheduled Ancient Monument at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk.*



Dvarapala gilded bronze head detail (1960.0729.1)



### 1.1 Executive Summary

The following report acts in support of a Listed Building Application relating to proposed refurbishment and redisplay of the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery (Room 33) incorporating Asahi Shimbun Gallery (Room 33a), and the adjacent Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery (Room 33b).

The project will enable the galleries to improve the display of objects from China, the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia, as well as the extensive collection of Chinese Jade within Room 33b and the sculpture and carvings of Amaravati displayed within Room 33a.

The project also provides the opportunity to undertake some much needed refurbishment to the galleries, including: the seamless integration of new building services and low energy lighting; the reintroduction of the original ventilation system with improvements to the existing windows; improvements in terms of security and accessibility of the existing peninsular showcases; the removal of non-original window showcases; the introduction of new decorative boxings under the windows; and the replacement of the existing obtrusive wheelchair lift at the entrance to Room 33b with a more compact unit.

The proposals also include the replacement of the existing vinyl and carpeted floors with new vinyl throughout, general redecoration and also an improved interpretative approach, including new signage, text panels, labelling and orientation signage.

*This statement should be read in conjunction with the drawings submitted as part of the application.*



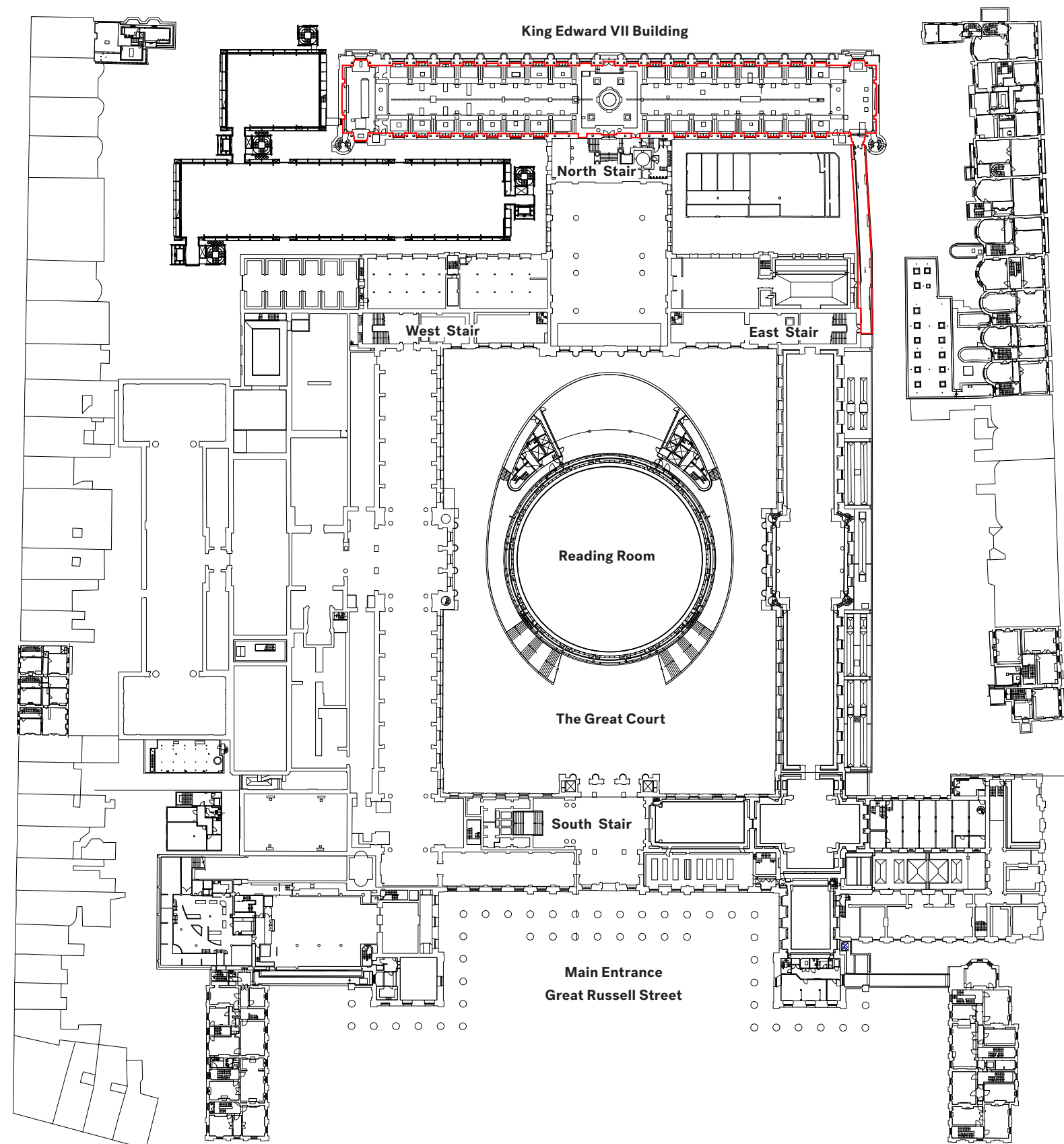
(above) Illustrative view of the proposed orientation space

## 1.2 Introduction

Nissen Richards Studio was appointed in August 2015 by the British Museum to act as Lead Consultant, Architect and Exhibition Designer (both 3D and 2D) to refurbish the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery for China, South and Southeast Asia (incorporating the Asahi Shimbun Gallery within Room 33a). The Gallery is located within Room 33 at Level 3 of the King Edward VII Galleries facing Montague Place. The project also includes the refurbishment of the adjacent Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery for Chinese Jade within Room 33b that is contained within the 'bridge' that connects the King Edward VII Galleries with the East Stair.

Room 33a situated at the western end of the main gallery, contains the Asahi Shimbun Gallery and displays the ornate stone carvings and sculptures from Amaravati. The project will also consider some minimal refurbishment of this space, including new lighting, interpretation and object labels.

Studio ZNA (lighting designers), TGA Consulting Engineers (building services engineer), Alan Baxter Associates (structural engineer) and Stace (quantity surveyor) have been appointed separately to work alongside Nissen Richards and the project management team in the Department of Capital Planning and Programme Management. There has also been considerable in-house input into the design process that provides curatorial, interpretative, practical and technical expertise throughout the development of the project.



(above) Location of Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery (Room 33) incorporating Asahi Shimbun Gallery (Room 33a) and adjacent Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery (Room 33b)



### 1.3 Project Aims and Objectives

The refurbishment of the existing Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery and adjacent Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery will cover the following aspects:

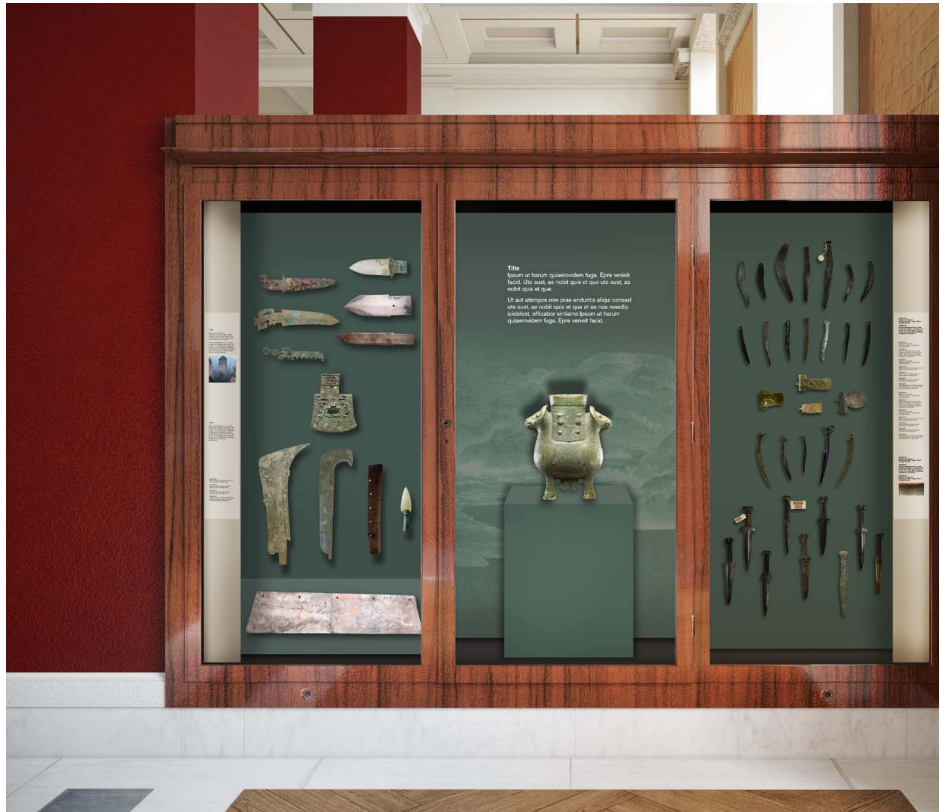
- Replacement of all interpretation material (graphics, labels and panels).
- Addition of some digital interpretation.
- Repositioning or removal of display cases to accommodate new displays of objects, and new digital interpretation, and improve visitor circulation.
- Addition of environmental conditioning to some display cases.
- Modification of historic mahogany display cases to conform to current museum security standards and improve access.
- New inserts and object mounts to all display cases.
- Reorganisation of sculpture displays.
- Full redecoration of the gallery.
- Refurbishment of wall and floor finishes, as well as the gold leaf where required due to repositioning or removal of display cases.
- Replacement of all lighting in the gallery with energy efficient LED sources, to include emergency and service lighting.
- Addition of screens, blinds or film to windows to address UV light penetration and solar gain that may damage objects.
- Upgrading of building services in response to Preventative Conservation concerns, and improvements to building fabric in terms of minimizing heat loss and improving ventilation.

Once the refurbishment is completed, the British Museum expects that on leaving the galleries the majority of visitors would feel that they have:

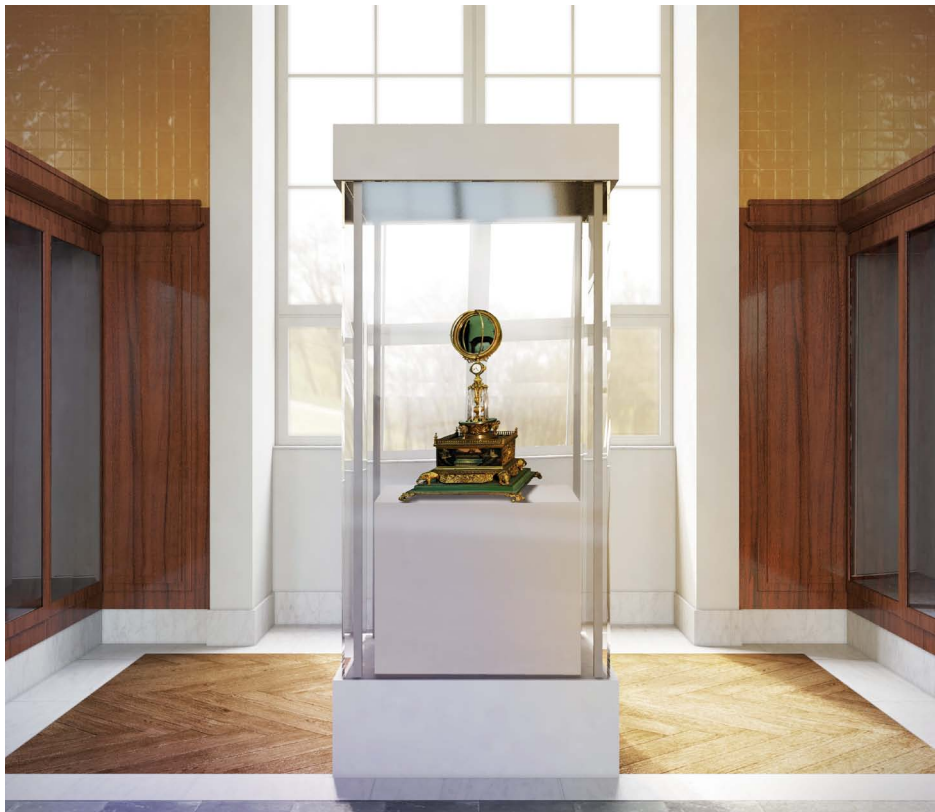
- Visited an impressive, inspiring and coherent object focused display, one that is intellectually, emotionally and aesthetically satisfying.
- Engaged with at least a small number of the most important objects in the galleries at a whole (gateway objects).
- Visited a display that has relevance to their own experience and the world today, one that helps them better understand contemporary China, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- Have made connections between cultures, recognising that civilisations do not arise or exist independently or in complete isolation.
- Have been encouraged to question their preconceptions and to have discovered something new.
- Understand that the British Museum actively researches its collection, and that it works collaboratively with institutions around the globe.
- Be inspired to share their experiences in the Galleries with their friends and family through social media and other channels.
- Be inspired to find out more about China, Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia and to establish a relationship with the Museum through digital channels and other platforms.



(above) Proposed new displays within existing peninsular showcase



(above) Proposed new displays within existing peninsular showcase



(above) Proposed new displays within existing refurbished freestanding Hahn showcase



(above) Proposed new displays within repositioned and refurbished table showcase



The British Museum is seeking the highest quality of design, appropriate to its stature and national importance, and it is expected that the refurbished gallery is to have a lifespan of up to 25 years. Although as part of the refurbishment works the design response is to make allowances for changing of the object displays with ease, while ensuring the style of the gallery is one of permanence and longevity.



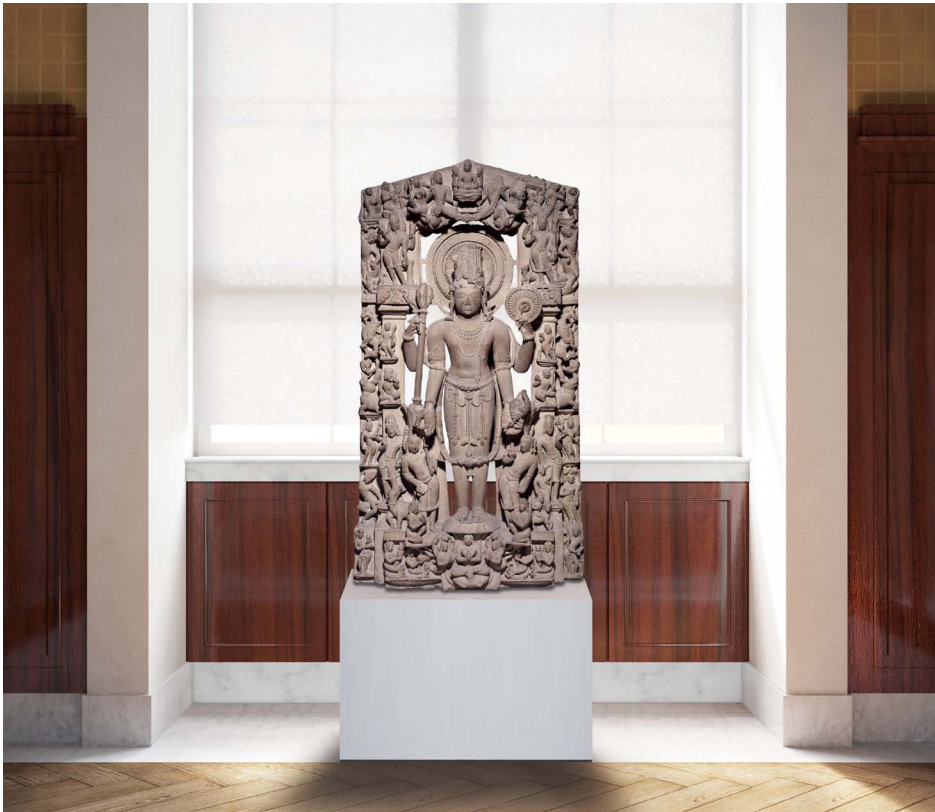
(above) Proposed new displays within existing peninsular showcase



(above) Proposed new displays within existing peninsular showcase



(above) Proposed new displays within existing refurbished freestanding Hahn showcase



(above) Proposed new display on new stone plinth



## 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING



(above) Existing Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery looking east towards China Collection



2.1 Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery (Room 33)

The Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery at 115 meters in length is the longest single gallery in the British Museum. It is central to the Museum’s global mission as a museum of the world in presenting the cultures of major countries of Asia, China, the Indian subcontinent, South-east Asia and the Himalayas - Korea and Japan are shown in galleries higher up the same building.

In displaying the material cultures of these large areas of Asia, the major objective of the gallery is to illuminate their histories and cultures, to express their major achievement in art and technology, and to compare and contrast them with other parts of the world seen in other galleries.

On entering the gallery, therefore, two immediate impressions are essential: the scale and beauty of the gallery must be immediately apparent, expressing thereby the richness of the Museum’s collections and its interest in and commitment to Asia; and the areas and time periods included in the space must be recognised easily, so that the visitor knows what to expect and where to go.

Therefore, the central area of the gallery needs special attention to allow the visitor to appreciate the long vistas with their rich content and to understand the ways in which the exhibits are arranged.

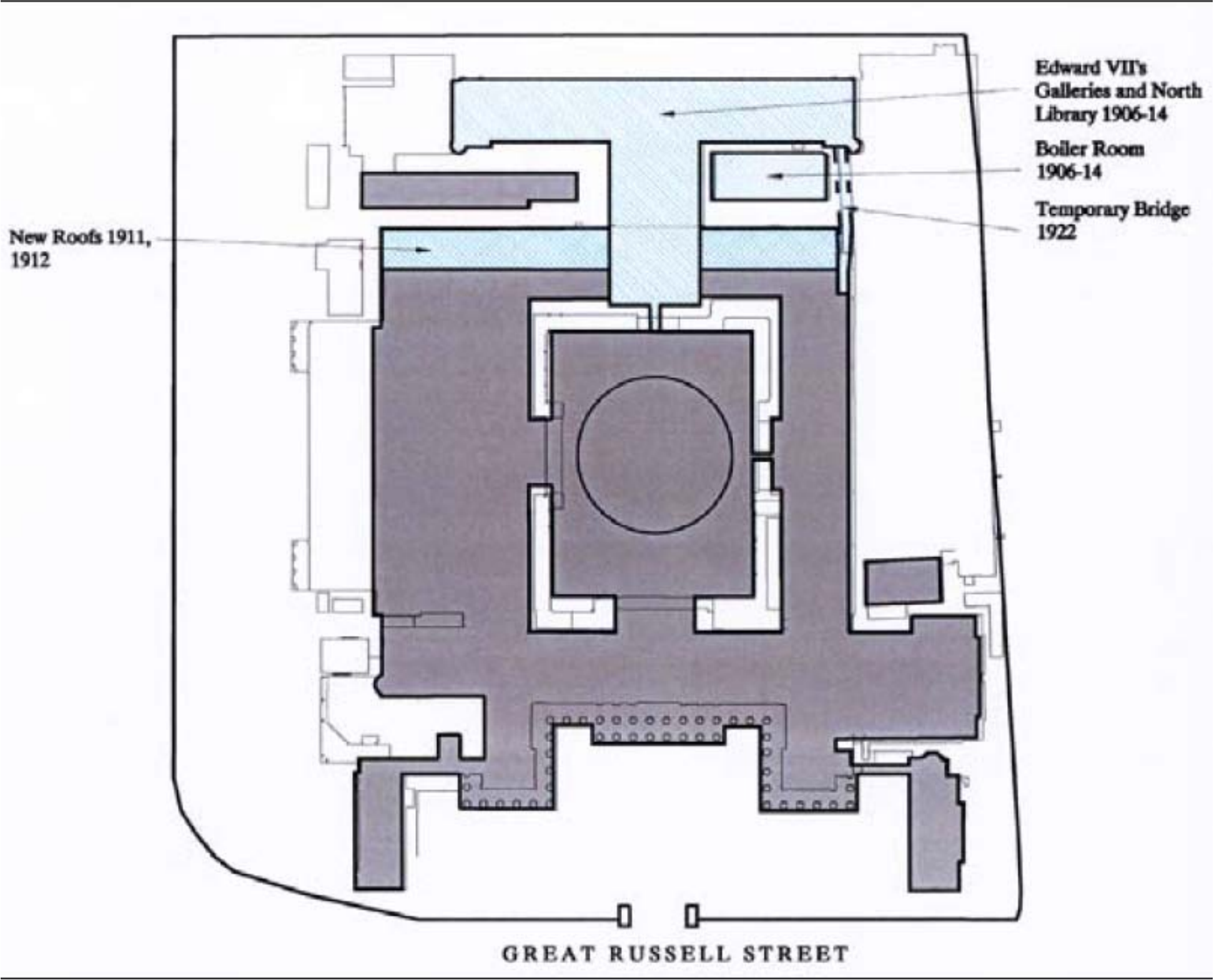
The two halves of the gallery are dedicated to very different regions and cultures: to the east, China; to the West, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

The present gallery traces the history of China, the Indian subcontinent and South and Southeast Asia from prehistoric times to the present day.

Room 33 is the main gallery of the King Edward VII building, and was built to the designs of Sir John James Burnet from 1906–14 and opened in 1920–21. It has a square central bay with large central circular opening to the entrance lobby below and a long, columned room extending to east and west which formed the Ground Floor Gallery. This space originally contained medieval collections and European pottery in the eastern section and oriental ceramics and glass in the western section.

In 1992 there was a substantial refurbishment. Lattice gate grilles on the north windows were removed and the top lights of the south side have been fitted with modern opening devices and roller blinds. The plaster walls were gilded, and wood-effect vinyl flooring installed. Track lighting replaced earlier pendant lights. More cases were installed in the window reveals and all free standing cases are from this date. Doors were fitted with magnetic hold-backs, some fire doors were inserted, and the bronze glazed doors to the central North Stair opening were installed. A glazed screen partition was introduced at the west end column screen in order to create the Asahi Shimbun Gallery of Amaravati Sculpture (Room 33a).

This was necessary, as the sculptures required an air-conditioned environment. The room is reputed to be the longest gallery in Europe and is one of the highly



(above) The development of the British Museum (1900-1925) showing the King Edward VII Galleries, Temporary Bridge and adjacent Boiler Room.



significant spaces in the Museum. The upright display cases, the mahogany entrance doors to the spiral stair, lift and gallery are original, the marble border of the floor, the walls, ceiling, and windows are all essentially original and of good quality. The present gold leaf wall decoration replaces the original gold paper. The display cases in the window reveals are slightly incongruous, but in themselves of good quality - and of historical interest as many of them are probably reused from an earlier gallery.

The architectural treatment of the columns, walls and ceiling is significant in its relationship with the North Stairs and the building as a whole.

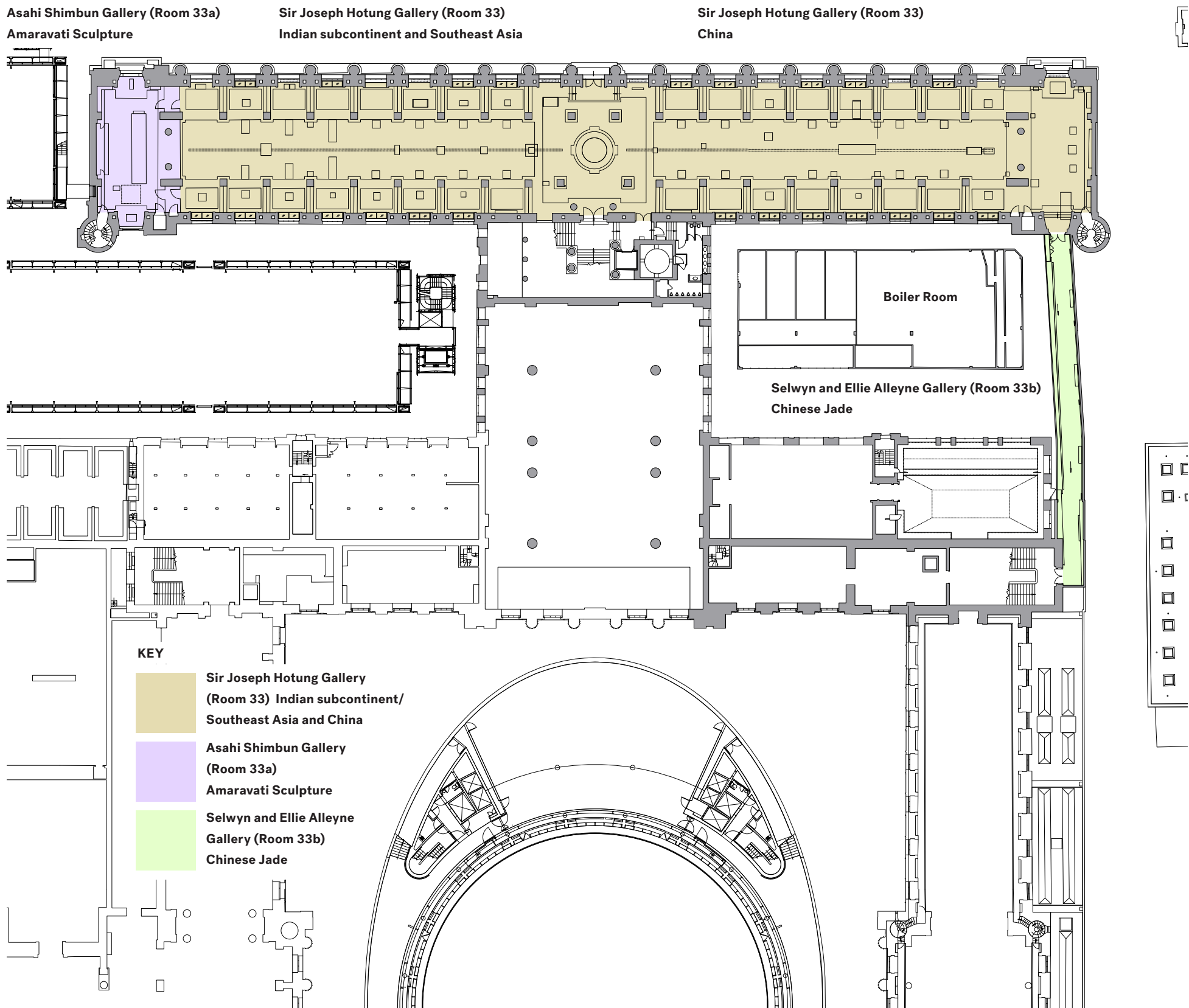
The Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery (Room 33) explores the history of the material and visual cultures of China, South Asia and Southeast Asia, although many parts of Asia have long been connected through trade, commerce and shared religious systems, there are strong regional differences. In addition to major variations in language, Asia has developed localised cultural networks, patterns of government, technology and styles of artistic representation.

The South Asia section uses objects to chart the major religious systems developed in India: Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. It also examines the impact of these religious systems on Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Tibet. The impact of Buddhism in central and east Asia is also explored in the Chinese section.

Chinese civilisation is traced chronologically from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century.

Within the Asahi Shimbun Gallery (Room 33a) the carvings and sculptures of Amaravati are displayed. Buddhism originated in north India and spread to other parts of the subcontinent in the third century BC. The Andhra region, located along the southeast coast, welcomed Buddhism and a stūpa, probably built to house a relic of the Buddha from the north was constructed at Amaravati.

Between the second century BE and third century AD, ornate slabs carved with detailed models of the stūpa were added to its exterior and it was surrounded by a limestone railing. This was carved with lotus roundels, scenes of worship and depictions of events in the life of the Buddha.



(above) Plan showing the various galleries; Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery (Room 33) incorporating Asahi Shimbun Gallery (Room 33a) and adjacent Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery (Room 33b).



## 2.2 The Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery (Room 33b)

At the eastern end of the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery is the entrance to the Selwyn and Ellie Gallery for Chinese Jade (Room 33b). This linear gallery is in fact an enclosed bridge designed by Sir John James Burnett in 1910 and links the King Edward VII Building with the East Stair. The original intention was that the building would be joined to a similar wing on the site of the present Montague Street houses, and so this bridge was designed as a temporary expedient to serve until the new wing was completed.

While the original iron structure remains, and is only visible externally, much of the original features were stripped out in 1992, and a further refurbishment in 2002 provided new wall, ceiling and floor finishes as well as wall mounted showcases when it was reopened as the Selwyn and Ellie Alleyne Gallery for Chinese Jade.

Jade has been a material of the highest value since ancient times. The objects on display in Room 33b illustrate the history of the exotic stone, prized for its beauty and magical properties. Translucent yet tough, jade was worked into ornaments, ceremonial weapons and ritual objects by Chinese craftspeople.

The majority of the jades on show in Room 33b are on loan from the collection of Sir Joseph Hotung and demonstrate many different types of workmanship.

They range from long, smooth Neolithic blades to later plaques, ornaments, dragons, human sculptures and intricate eighteenth century pendants.



(above) Existing view of the gallery with the entrance from the east stair in the distance



(above) Existing view of the linear showcase wall with Room 33 entrance in the distance