

The Restoration of the

The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library

At
Cecil Sharp House
2017

Historic Conditions Report 1950

1950 Report on the restoration needs of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (aka The Library) following bomb damage caused in 1940

Revised

Memorandum for presentation to Rebuilding Committee

REPORT ON REHABILITATION (FABRIC & FURNISHING) OF THE LIBRARY

SECTION I-4) WAR DAMAGE TO FABRIC.

Damage to East wall abutting on Entrance Hall.
DOORS blown down and destroyed. Architectural damaged or destroyed.

WALL NO RIGHT OF DOOR. Possible deterioration under recent distemper following on bombing and later "river-aid", fitting of water, gas etc. and kitchen fittings.

WALL NO LEFT OF DOOR. The shelving now stands away from the wall and the intervening space contains rubble from the damaged partition-wall. The cork "tiles" (originally polished) were torn by flying glass and wood, and have in some places been patched with cement. A ragged filling has replaced radiator grilles in front of the windows. The damage occasioned by bombing was added deterioration after first-aid repairs during five years' emergency use as kitchen and canteen. "Tiles" need replacing and/or re-setting and the whole floor re-surfacing. The polished surface is essential to the lighting of the room as well as better for cleaning etc.

WALLS AND CEILING. The wall cracks/damage by damp and penetration of water from defective roof (disintegrating relics of emergency canteen fittings) are presumably embraced by the Architects' survey.

WINDOWS. The framework has been remedied but the fastenings of all need examining - some are broken or have been not very satisfactorily repaired. The windows open inwards and the fastenings are now light enough to yield to a knock. The bronzing of the framework is worn off - the ornamental ironwork outside is badly rusted where it still exists and loosened in its seating. The pane of this window is broken. Floor HEATING. Original apparatus damaged or destroyed. Floor grilles and grilles in recesses under windows damaged or destroyed - those on the floor being filled in with cement. Original electric wiring system with gas in cement. Gas cut destroyed. A new heating system is being installed, but unsatisfactorily remains of old water or electric appliances need removing. In some instances they are against (or possibly under) shelving.

SECTION I-11). WAR DAMAGE TO FITTINGS & FIXTURES.

For the purpose of this report the shelving is regarded as a fixture or fitting and the position is designated as follows:- East wall, left of door Bays A, B (corner cupboard), South wall Bay C (glazed cupboard), Bay D (corner glazed cupboard), Bay E (glazed cupboard), Bay F (corner cupboard), West wall, Bays G, H (window), I, J (corner cupboard), North wall, Bay K (window), South wall, Bay L (window), Blank wall containing round to East wall, no door. On these blank walls it is proposed to add new Bays (L, M, N), but probably no corner cupboard, new stand away from the wall and there is rubble behind. SHELVING. (1), Bays A & B, East wall, new stand away from the wall and there is rubble behind. Irons' fittings are badly crushed and need renewing so that shelves can be placed as required. Shelves in lower part of Bays A & B have been home-made and need examining to see if they are satisfactorily lasting and uniform in finish with the original. Home-made shelves were part of first-aid repairs, (11), Bays C, D, E (South wall) Irons' fittings crushed and in need of renewal. Lower shelves require examination as above. Bay D is out of true and shelves no longer lie straight.

Bays G, H, I, J (West wall) 'Tanks' fittings crushed. Shelves, both upper and lower include some "home-made" and need examining as above. Bays K, L, sulfate is splintered and backing is badly warped. The deep drawers below now fit badly and their damaged fronts have had only "home-made" repairs which are now breaking. Bay K (North wall) Tanks fittings in upper part need examining, shelves below are fixed.

GLAZED CUPBOARDS. Upper and lower. The doors do not lock satisfactorily; that between Bays J & K had woodwork round lock splintered, and cupboard feels slightly damp. This may be due to an injured exterior wall. Grille below this cupboard broken. **GLAZED CUPBOARDS.** (South wall). The doors, which are intended to fit well enough to protect fine books from dust, no longer so fit, and the locks are unsatisfactory, responding to almost any key. The original keys do not now particularly fit. Cupboards below - nothing wrong.

SHIELDHAM SHAW CABINET. This stands against the wall and is not built in: the cupboards feel slightly damp and the wall behind might be examined. The locks and bolts need examining and adjusting. **LIGHTS.** The original ceiling lights (said to be unsatisfactory) and two standard lamps destroyed; wiring system with lighting and power points in the wall damaged or destroyed. The temporary ceiling lighting rigged in first-aid repairs will be removed. The Librarian understands that Mr. Strang and a lighting expert will advise - in consultation with herself - on new lighting: mean-time she sets down the following desiderata: on such occasions as the room is used for reception. Lectures are a recent innovation and the lighting should either be concealed or should not try the eyes of the audience.

Shelf-lighting is an essential, and if possible should be applied to each Bay in the most economical manner. The card-catalogue should have a light directly on the opened drawer. Readers' and Librarian's lights. Most readers prefer individual table lights which give a sense of privacy, as well as direct illumination. The Librarian herself prefers this for her desk, particularly when working at night "after hours". Some kind of individual control of lamps is essential even if desk lights are not provided and if indirect illumination is chosen, then it should be "wasteful" and the appliances selected accordingly. Individual standard (or desk) lamps should be related to sitting of furniture - trailing flexes are not desirable.

TELEPHONE. Both internal and external telephones are necessary and the present abominable sitting requires alteration. The points should be convenient to the Librarian's desk and the flexes should not trail on ground traversed by visitors or staff. For this purpose and for lighting the situation of the desk should be decided, and in conjunction with essential engineering the following points remembered:-
The desk must have good daylight and heating.
It should be removed from readers, who need quiet.
It should not impede access to shelves frequently required.
It should have space round it for "workshop activities" and secretary.

It is suggested that the desk is placed where the piano now is (the piano was not originally part of the Library equipment and belongs to another room) in front of the new shelves which will be arranged to take material, experience has proved to be below required. (This gives right hand daylight but would fulfill other conditions) - and the lighting and telephone arranged accordingly.
POWER POINTS. These should be renewed, in positions convenient for vacuum cleaner, use of portable record-player or

small projector and heater (if the latter is required).
SECTION I. (111). WAR DAMAGE TO LIBRARY FURNITURE & HANGINGS.

Almost all the original furniture made by Betty Joel (see list in Gift Book) and all the hangings to which were destroyed. There only remains Librarian's desk (damaged); two upright chairs (imperfect) and one (of two) leather easy chairs (damaged and now patched).

At the present time the Library is furnished by the remains of the original buffet furniture and some tables and chairs belonging personally to the Librarian, which the Director permitted her to "store" in the Library. These last items will shortly be removed. The piano was formerly in a class-room downstairs.

In replacing it should be borne in mind that the work of the Library is different from that before the war and readers are of the student class rather than the scholar. While the room is the Society's main "reception-room" it is now really used by workers and has an evening life as a lecture-hall. The Librarian would propose that in selecting new furniture it be remembered that for a lecture space must be completely cleared and individual tables and chairs should not be too large or heavy.

Experiments has shown that readers like the long buffet tables and will do, so the small square ones; that one of these tables will only accommodate one reader; that one of these and chairs, designed for buffet use, are too high for reading and writing.

Experience has also shown that readers want access to the shelves and large pieces of furniture (piano, and display-table) are undesirable in what is, compared to most libraries, a small room and one designed for appearance rather than service study.

One of the desiderata are suggested - a lecturers book-desk with light; accommodation (not a large table) for periodicals; readers book-desks or rests, since many of our books are of "music-sheet". A table to support the card-catalogue which may later require another six-drawer section - this table being fitted with a light; a work-table with cupboard below for unsightly impedimenta.

HANGINGS. All window-hangings, also by Betty Joel, originally matching upholstery of chairs require replacing. It is essential they are adequate in fullness, and eye light-proof against bright street-lamps immediately outside.

GLAZED CUPBOARDS & SHIELDHAM SHAW CABINET. In examining and where necessary re-hanging cupboard doors, the necessity for ventilating should be remembered. Leather bindings require air. The cabinet-stands in particular need examination - either they fit too well or there is dampness from the exterior wall behind.

SECTION II. NORMAL WEAR & TEAR.

The bomb damage was considerable as shown and damage was further occasioned by leakage from the bombed roof. Further deterioration arose from the use of the room as kitchen and garden and it is not now possible to assess what is "normal wear and tear".

SECTION III. IMPROVEMENT.

NEW SHELVING. The Executive Committee approved new shelving be erected on the remainder of the North and East walls (in corner cupboard) matching in dimensions, structure and finish those of Bays A, B & K. The lower part is either to be open shelves, as elsewhere, or to be fitted to the Librarian's specification, with dustproof pigeon-holes for grammophone records. (By the time this is to be done the recommendation, made in a recent Rebuilding Committee that Library grammophone records

might better be stored and used by "readers" in another room - e.g. Service, may be preferable - but it must be borne in mind that accommodation for record storage, as well as for increasing books, pamphlet boxes and photographs is urgently required.

NOTES ON PICTURES AND MUSEUM SPECIMENS. The library holds a number of glazed pictures (some valuable) and also costume models and materials of the old "museum". With the erection of new shelves there will be no space in the library to show pictures, and if all the pictures now held are not displayed elsewhere in the building, some proper storage for pictures needs to be provided. Upright shelves and specimen-tables for better museum specimens and fine books have been recommended for the first floor landing and waiting-room, but accommodation including drawers - needs to be provided, somewhere, for articles proper to preserve in the museum, but not attractive to look at. Most libraries store photographs and pictures available for everyday use in boxes lying flat on wood racks and larger unframed pictures and maps in sliding trays. These are excellently practical, but not slightly and it is relevant that the Library Committee have also remarked that the necessary boxes now containing unbound music, pamphlets etc. are unsightly in a room which is the building's most decorative apartment, this well-known library problem is usually solved (with certain disadvantages) by a storage-room elsewhere. In our library, which will never have a large stair to fetch and carry, the suggestion of using a class-room, accessible to the "reader" would seem more practical than utilizing distant attic-space in the roof.

TRAINING. In the original building the title of each room was lettered on the architrave, and experience increasingly shows this practice to be useful. But not only is the title "Library" or "Ocell Sharp Library" desirable on the architrave, but a notice-board is requisite for displaying "Hours of Opening", "Closed for Committee", "Lectures", etc., and it is desirable this should be part of the design of the entrance hall. Such a notice-board specially designed and with magnetic surface already exists and it is suggested that it, or a similar one, is used for this purpose.

(Signed) M. J. DEAN-SMITH

Secretary to Library Committee.

January, 1950

** Additional Item SECTION I (111)

KEYS TO CUPBOARDS. The few surviving keys no longer secure the majority of the locks, and all locks and keys to cupboards need examining, and new keys supplying where necessary.

A NOTE ON RESTORING THE LIBRARY AFTER REBUILDING

It will be recalled that with rebuilding the additional shelving on the East Wall will allow room for much needed expansion and permit of an arrangement of the books that may hope to be enduring for a year or so to come. Suggestions have also been made for the storing of boxed material elsewhere so that the full length of shelving may, as requisite, be used for books - with the possible exception of the top shelves which being cut of hand's reach, may be conveniently used for periodicals in the uniform, specially-made periodical boxes.

With a comparatively enduring arrangement it should be practicable to provide some sort of "guidance" to the library to supplement the "classified" subject catalogue which is a "map" of the library, but not one which commends itself to the average reader. The following suggestions for "guiding" are therefore appended.

1. **MOVABLE SHELF-GUIDES.** (lettered card). The clearest, most explicit method - but objectionable in a decorative room. It also depends for effectiveness on constant care - moving the guides as required, and renewing as existing ones become soiled or snabby.
2. **DESCRIPTIVE LEAFLET.** The most enduring, not requiring revision until a new arrangement is planned; but not so explicit to the reader who wants to exert himself as little as possible.
3. **CHART.** Preferred by some to the leaflet, but is less mobile. It also cannot indicate so well what may be stored elsewhere: it also requires to be displayed, and this library provides little opportunity for display.
4. **COMBINATION OF LEAFLET AND CHART.** This is probably the most practicable in the circumstances.
5. **NAMED SECTIONS.** (Musician "Dance" etc) The names being painted on the cornice of the shelving. This is probably the clearest, and least contrary to the decorative intention of the room - but it fixes the arrangement of the books in a way that may turn out to be wholly impractical.