

PART 2 – THE GAZETTEER

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INTRODUCTION

This part of the Conservation Management Plan for Oxford Town Hall presents a detailed gazetteer of the buildings and spaces within the study area. The entries covering the built elements include the principal facades and internal rooms. The latter have largely been grouped by floor level, except that the 1932 extension at the north-west corner is covered as a single entry. The open spaces include the internal lightwells of Hare's Town Hall, as well as more ancient features such as Kemp Hall Passage. The entries for the lightwells have been given simple geographical names (e.g. north of Main Hall), and have also been cross-referenced to the lightwell letter codes given in the Berman Guedes Stretton (BGS) Feasibility Study. The whole site is under the current ownership and management of Oxford City Council, and so these attributes (which would normally be catalogued for each individual gazetteer entry) are taken as read. The use of each entry is identified where relevant, while a full description and assessment of significance are also provided. Finally conservation issues are identified, and relevant specific policies from the main report have been repeated or cross-referenced. The entries can be grouped into the following structurally defined areas:

- The St Aldates and Blue Boar Street elevations of the 1893-7 building;
- The 1932 extension;
- The basements;
- The ground floor;
- The first floor;
- The second floor; and
- The open spaces in and around the buildings.

Plans at the end of the Gazetteer show the numbers used on each level and area.

The gazetteer entries would normally include a section on the statutory designations of each defined element. In the case of Oxford Town Hall, however, the whole building is Grade II* Listed¹ (including the 1930s extension) and lies within the Oxford City Centre Conservation Area. Therefore entries on statutory designations (and the need to seek relevant permissions/consents as necessary) have been excluded, as this reference can be taken to apply to all elements.²

¹ The former Grade II listing was upgraded on 6 September 2005.

² The open spaces within the building can be deemed to be covered as curtilage elements of the Listing.

1 THE ST ALDATES ELEVATION OF THE 1893-7 BUILDING

USE

Principal/public frontage of Hare's Town Hall, facing onto and with main entry from St Aldates.

DESCRIPTION

The external façade is of Clipsham stone for the dressing and carved detail. The latter is Renaissance/Italianate and symmetrical (except for the south turret) with curvilinear gables, arched colonnades, central open cupola and a balcony over the entrance. The external sculpture was by Aumonier. Tall high windows on the St Aldates frontage mark major rooms at first floor level. The Main Hall and Assembly Rooms were placed centrally, with City Council Offices and Council Chamber to the left (north). The Court and Police functions were to the right of the entrance hall, with the Public Library occupying the corner with Blue Boar Street. The Public Library is now the Museum of Oxford with a prominent sign on the corner.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The St Aldates frontage is of **exceptional significance** as the principal elevation of Oxford's premier municipal building. The design, and the quality of both construction and finishes are excellent. This is among the best examples of Henry T Hare's work on civic buildings, and it presents a suitably grand effect for an important structure in such a prominent location.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- It is important that the entirety of the design and the quality/finishes of this elevation are fully respected in any future initiatives at the Town Hall. This would extend through the whole spectrum from signage to major redevelopment of the whole building.
- Condition is generally good, with no major issues. It is always necessary to pay particular attention to the decorative elements of main facades such as this, but this should not be at the expense of the rest of the masonry. Oxford City Council operates an appropriate regime of inspection and condition surveys, usually at five-year intervals. This is the best way of monitoring condition and identifying any issues that might arise in future. It may be appropriate for council officers to carry out periodic checks within the five-year cycle as well. For instance, if minor cracks become apparent in a full inspection, it might be good policy for these to be re-assessed at intervals (annually or otherwise). The matter of the condition survey system may now be taken as read for all other parts of the Town Hall (internal and external) and so will not be re-stated in other Gazetteer entries (though any major condition issues will be identified).

2 THE BLUE BOAR STREET ELEVATION OF THE 1893-7 BUILDING

USE

Secondary frontage of Hare's Town Hall, facing onto Blue Boar Street and with access from there to the Police Station (now closed) and court rooms above.

DESCRIPTION

The domed turret with arched windows and balustrade, faceted with small arched windows at first floor level, marks the entrance to the Museum of Oxford (formerly the Public Library) on the corner of Blue Boar Street and St Aldates. There is a single curvilinear gable similar to the St Aldates frontage, with a three-light rather than bow window at first floor level. Entrance to the building is via a long set of stone stairs into a double-height entrance porch with imposing door. This is surmounted by a stone inscription (Studies serve for Delight for Ornament and Abilities). The remainder of the façade has simple gable ends with Elizabethan-style stone mullioned windows. There are also two oriel windows for the Judge's and Barristers' Rooms, and a Venetian-style window set high above the Judge's bench in the Court Room, all at first floor level. Along Blue Boar Street is the entry to the Courts and Police Station, via an excellent colonnaded loggia with a short series of steps to the entrance.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This façade is also of **exceptional significance**. It is deliberately more restrained and less 'showy' than the St Aldates frontage, reflecting the more sober functions of the rooms and areas behind it (ie justice, law and order). Despite this the architectural treatment is very pleasing, especially the careful design of and balance between the entrance loggia and the first-floor windows.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Just as much as with the St Aldates frontage, it is important that the entirety of the design, and the quality/finishes of this elevation are fully respected in any future initiatives. This again extends through the whole spectrum from signage to major redevelopment of the whole building.
- Condition is generally good, although there appears to be some evidence for dampness and staining from rainwater run-off, especially under the oriel windows. There has also been some damage to the iron grilles protecting the pavement-level windows lighting the basements. Unfortunately the entrance loggia is sometimes a target for anti-social behaviour, but it is very difficult to deter this given the fact that this is a side street. It also does not help that this has been a relatively under-used entrance since the closure of the Police Station and Courts.

3 EXTENSION ON ST ALDATES/HIGH STREET CORNER

USE

Oxford City Council offices, including paying-in point on the High Street frontage. The St Aldates entrance also provides level access to the remainder of the ground floor as far as the entrance foyer (Gazetteer 11), and via a lift within the Town Hall council offices (Gazetteer 10) to the remaining levels inside the Victorian building.

DESCRIPTION

The north-west corner of the Town Hall extending up to the Carfax corner is an extension of 1930-1 by the architects Ashley and Newman, who also rebuilt the south-west corner of Carfax at the same time. The extension is a stone-faced building with an austere frontage. The offices replaced Carfax House and the Castle Inn (both properties acquired in 1898 and 1899, and demolished in the 1920s), as well as the former town clerk's offices built in the mid-19th century. The 1930s extension has a plain front with two-floor bow windows on the St Aldates frontage. Floor levels are defined by dripmouldings and the corner is faceted. The top of the building has a plain parapet, a high roof with gabled dormers and a cupola. The ground floor has arched openings to accommodate shops and businesses, with an entrance on the corner.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The 1930s extension is of **some significance** architecturally, and its simple, austere design purposefully makes no attempt to compete with the St Aldates façade of the Town Hall. The main function of the extension now is to provide offices and facilities for Oxford City Council, including a paying-in facility for bills. The frontage of the extension onto St Aldates is of **considerable significance** in providing disabled access to the Town Hall itself.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- This building is in good condition externally and internally. There are some good quality features, fixtures and fittings internally that merit retention. These include doors, windows and associated handles etc.
- The entrance off St Aldates is the principal access for Oxford City Council staff, and as such cannot be kept open to the public. It is also the only wheelchair access to the Town Hall at the moment, and users therefore have to call staff to be allowed in. This is far from ideal.
- The Berman Guedes Stretton feasibility study envisages a transformation of public access to the Town Hall as a whole. If implemented, the relevant provisions would provide a single, level entry to the ground floor of the Town Hall through the High Street frontage of the 1932 extension. This would resolve the disability access issue while retaining a private entry for Oxford City Council employees.

4 PLATE ROOM (KNAPP HALL CELLAR)

USE

Late medieval crypt, formerly to Knapp Hall, now used as secure store for civic plate.

DESCRIPTION

A three-bay, quadripartite vaulted crypt with hollow chamfered ribs from moulded capitals and chamfered bases. The west end features a blocked door with chamfered jambs and two-centred head. This would have provided entry from the street or, more probably, from a series of further cellars known to extend under St Aldates. Historic photographs in the National Monuments Record (English Heritage) show the door before it was blocked up, and part of another crypt can just be seen through the door. There is evidence for another blocked feature in the east wall, though it is difficult to determine whether this is a larger window of earlier date than the existing one, or a second former door. The crypt is now only accessible through a door in the south wall, via a long and steep set of steps from the ground-floor corridor of the Town Hall. The public may visit the Plate Room by arrangement with Oxford City Council.

On three walls are glass display cabinets with grey background, which contain displays of the Oxford Civic plate, with a central full height glass display of the Oxford Mace, a 17th-century mace comparable with that of the House of Commons. The rubble stone vault is uplit with lights near the cases and the pillars, and this accentuates the moulded capitals.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Plate Room is of **exceptional significance** as a surviving late medieval crypt within one of England's most historic cities. The civic plate housed within it is also of **exceptional significance**, though the lack of disabled access is a **negative feature**. The Plate Room is featured on the virtual tour accessible both at the Town Hall and through Oxford City Council's website, however, and this may have to remain as the only means of disabled access for the immediate future at least.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Oxford City Council maintains the Plate Room in very good condition. It is also kept secure and with an appropriate environment for the storage of rare and valuable civic artefacts.
- Open to public access by arrangement. No immediate prospect of disabled access for council employees or public due to considerable change in level between the crypt at 60.85m OD and the adjacent Town Hall basements at 62.51m OD, and the exceptionally high sensitivity of the historic fabric of the crypt. The virtual tour at least allows a view of the room and plate. Historic information could be enhanced.

5 TOWN HALL BASEMENT

USE

Principally in use for plant, servicing and storage.

DESCRIPTION

A series of simple, plain rooms in brick with painted walls. Some rooms are used for storing council papers and files, while others are used for temporary storage of seating when this is not being used in one or other of the main public rooms (eg the Main Hall and Assembly Room) on the first floor. The basement can be accessed via stairs on the ground-floor corridor leading north from the entrance foyer, or via the adjacent lift. Various services are housed within and run through the basement, often in ducts or trunking attached to the underside of the ceiling.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Town Hall basement is of **little significance** except in that it provides the base for the rest of the building. The space is under-used compared to most other parts of the building, largely because of the restricted nature of access. This would also affect the ability to escape from the basement in the event of an emergency (though there is an exit to Kemp Hall Passage on the east side of the Main Hall basement).

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally in good condition, though some cosmetic issues of decorative quality and condition. Not important while the basement is not open to the public.
- Not open to public access. Access for council employees via existing lifts could be used for wider disabled access if the basements were brought into wider use.
- Not on the virtual tour, although there is little reason why it should be at the moment given the low significance of the area.
- The conversion and/or enhanced use of the basement (or parts of it) might require some reorganisation of existing areas and uses, eg of stored papers and materials. Any provision of public access would certainly require careful consideration of safe means and routes of escape in the event of an emergency and/or evacuation. It is unlikely that the current entry/exit points would be deemed adequate.

6 MUSEUM OF OXFORD BASEMENT

USE

Lower display area for the Museum of Oxford collections.

DESCRIPTION

The basement is accessed via stairs from the ground floor (on a single directional route, thus with a down-stair and a separate up-stair), and contains displays on the city's prehistoric and earlier historic periods. Some rooms have mock panelling painted a dark red-brown, placing the emphasis is on the display panels and glass cases. The displays include the geology, natural history, prehistoric evidence, and the Roman pottery industry. Letterbox-style narrow displays of artefacts accompany this. The Anglo-Saxon foundation of the town and St Frideswide are also detailed, along with the foundation of the University.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As with the Town Hall, the Museum of Oxford basement is of **little significance** in its own right, although there are good views into its central lightwell. The exquisite high-level windows in the Panel Room are a particular feature of the view. The contents of the basement are of **considerable significance** in their own right, though they are of little direct relevance to the municipal buildings as such.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally in good condition, and the displays are well maintained.
- Little or no disabled access possible, as there are no lifts, while the flights of stairs are both long and quite steep. The displays could have enhanced features for blind or partially sighted people (eg more use of tactile elements and Braille).
- Featured on the virtual tour of the Museum of Oxford.

7 MAIN HALL BASEMENT

USE

Storage, or not in use.

DESCRIPTION

Divided into several separate rooms, mostly quite small and very plain, off a central spinal corridor. Partly used for storage, but some rooms are not in use. Separated from Town Hall basement by corridor under the Drill Hall Corridor. Exit to Kemp Hall Passage is provided on the east side of the Main Hall basement.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This basement is of **little significance** in its own right.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally in good condition, though some minor cosmetic issues associated with decoration. Not a priority while the basement is so little used.
- There would be issues of floor loading under the Main Hall area if there is an intensification of use on the ground or upper floors. Engineering issues would need to be addressed as part of any proposals.

8 BASEMENT BELOW DRILL HALL CORRIDOR

USE

Provides access between Town Hall and Main Hall basements. Also an important route for service ducts and trunking.

DESCRIPTION

Long narrow brick-built corridor running under, and for the full length of, the Drill Hall Corridor.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The corridor is of **little significance** in its own right, especially given the current low level of usage of the basements as a whole. It could become a more valuable space if the basements are opened up for wider/greater use, and could be an attractive display or gallery area.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- No issues at the moment, though decoration and re-location of services (or hiding them with a false ceiling) would become issues if the basements are opened up.

9 POLICE STATION/COURT BASEMENT

USE

One room is used for storing old court files, otherwise unused.

DESCRIPTION

Cells with original doors, window grilles and some original internal features retained. Accessed off a central corridor, with steps down to the north to a lightwell that provided an exercise yard for detainees. Stairs also provide access to the upper levels of the Police Station. Polychrome glazed off-white and red-brown brick used virtually throughout. This basement area also contains the former public lavatories (male and female) with separate entries (now closed) from Blue Boar Street.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This area is of at least **some significance** in preserving (relatively intact) an important aspect of the Town Hall's original use – law and order. The cells are a well-preserved example of later Victorian prison-style design, and the overall ensemble with access stairs, exercise yard and the rest of the Police Station complex arguably lifts the level of significance to **considerable**.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good, partly because of the robust nature of the glazed bricks. Lighting and other modern services are of poor quality but appropriate for current use.
- Storage of old court files seems inappropriate here, not least because these may contain sensitive and/or confidential information.
- Any potential new use (eg the café-bar suggested in the BGS feasibility study) would need to be designed sensitively, and with as little impact as possible on the brickwork, fixtures and fittings, especially of the cells. It may not be possible to retain all of these, but items such as doors, beds and window grilles should not be removed unless there is a compelling reason to do so (eg public safety or disabled access). This would have to be justified very rigorously.

10 COUNCIL OFFICES

USE

Offices for council employees, and rooms for political parties on council.

DESCRIPTION

A series of office rooms to either side of a central corridor, inter-connecting with the 1930s extension at the north end (there is a similar connection at first-floor level). The rooms to the west of the corridor face out onto St Aldates and have excellent fixtures

and fittings surviving largely intact. The doors and windows are particularly good, designed by Hare harmoniously in the same style as his St Aldates elevation. The rooms to the east appear to have been more affected by subsequent changes (these are largely used as the political party rooms). Most of the furniture is modern and functional.

The corridor provides level wheelchair access to the remainder of the Town Hall's first floor, and to the basement/upper floors via the lift on its east side. The stairs down to the Plate Room and crypt are also to be found here.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The remaining features, fixtures and fittings of Hare's design are of **considerable significance** for their contribution to the internal ambience of the Town Hall. The modern alterations (eg the insertion of the lift) have had some effect on original fabric, but this is outweighed by the positive benefits of enhanced accessibility to the rest of the Town Hall. The modern furniture has no impact on significance, though fixtures such as shelving have done a small amount of damage. This is sufficiently minor that it does not warrant any further attention.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Good condition, does not warrant further comment.
- All surviving original features, fixtures and fittings should be retained intact. Modern equivalents may be expendable (eg subject to alteration or replacement).
- Any further fixtures to the fabric, eg for shelves or lighting, will need careful design and implementation.
- The corridor and lift will continue to provide vital access routes until such time as a more extensive design solution (such as that proposed in the BGS feasibility study) can be implemented.

11 ENTRANCE AND MAIN FOYER (RECEPTION)

USE

Main public entrance off St Aldates, reception into public and private areas of the Town Hall, and circulation space to other facilities (eg toilets) and upper levels of the building.

DESCRIPTION

The main entrance is in the middle of Hare's original St Aldates frontage (ie omitting the 1930s extension). The outer vestibule contains eight steps leading to the main doors. The vestibule displays the Royal Coat of Arms, the Arms of the City, Oxford

University and the Earl of Jersey who was High Steward when the building was completed in 1897. The main entrance lobby is through a set of double doors, and Hare's fine decorative detailing throughout is to all intents and purposes intact. This makes it a very pleasing space. There is a reception desk for visitors to the Town Hall, a large, ornate mayoral chair and a display cabinet for various civic awards. There are small offices to the east, south and south-west of the foyer. The area to the rear (east) of the foyer contains a small information area (including a touchscreen terminal for the Town Hall virtual tour), and the public toilets. It is also the current limit of wheelchair access, but permission has been granted for the insertion of a chair lift to the Drill Hall Corridor. This will greatly extend accessibility, including to the ground floor of the Museum of Oxford.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The entrance, and especially the foyer, is of **exceptional significance** both for its intact architecture and decoration, and as the principal public entrance to the whole Town Hall complex. Disability access issues were rarely if ever considered by the commissioners and designers of Victorian municipal buildings, and so the entrance certainly suffers from poor access quality. This is a **negative factor** but one which will be exceptionally difficult to address without an unacceptable level of intrusion into the historic fabric.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally very good condition, with no obvious concerns.
- The approved proposals for extended wheelchair access to the Drill Hall Corridor, and thus to the ground floor of the Museum of Oxford, represent a considerable step forward in access provision.

12 MUSEUM OF OXFORD GROUND FLOOR

USE

Museum of Oxford foyer, reception/shop, displays and auditorium.

DESCRIPTION

The foyer provides access to an education room to the east, the reception/shop to the west, and a staircase to the south. These stairs formerly provided access to the old Reference Library, but is now largely for the private use of the Town Hall's resident caretaker. The lintels over the doors through to the east and west rooms retain the original Victorian mosaic panels with the names of the former library rooms.

The museum displays are housed in three main rooms (each sub-divided by screens to create smaller display areas) ranged around a central lightwell. There are modern

panels and fascia boards, with wall display panels and dividing panels for information sections on different time periods of the history of Oxford. The panels include historic scenes above the cases with artefacts. There is a recreated room scene of a Tudor parlour. There is also an auditorium where visitors can listen to the history of Oxford, and a touchscreen terminal for the Town Hall/Museum of Oxford virtual tour.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The surviving original features – especially in and around the entrance foyer – are of **exceptional significance**, but otherwise the remaining interiors have been filled with museum displays. These are of interest in their own right but are not directly relevant to the building itself. The interiors and displays are therefore of **little significance** in the context of the Town Hall and former Library, though their intrinsic value is not in doubt. The possibility that original wall coverings could survive behind some of the museum displays cannot be discounted, and there may be potential for **enhancement of significance** in this respect.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition generally appears to be very good, with no obvious issues.
- The approved proposals for extended wheelchair access to the Town Hall Drill Hall Corridor will enable access to the ground floor of the Museum of Oxford for the first time, representing a considerable step forward in access provision.
- There is considerable potential for enhanced intellectual access in the museum displays, which currently contain relatively little information about the Town Hall and Library complex.

13 ROOMS UNDER THE MAIN HALL

USE

Storage, meetings/presentations in the Long Room on the south side. The room on the north side is being converted to a gallery space.

DESCRIPTION

Simple, relatively plain spaces featuring polychrome off-white and red-brown brickwork throughout (though these have been over-painted in some areas). The two main long rooms on either side of the central corridor feature good quality square piers that underpin similar features in the Main Hall above. The north room (formerly a print room) is well lit with fine, large windows. The Long Room also has good windows towards its west end where it runs alongside a lightwell. The end room (ie at the east end) has been used at times as a creche, but is currently used for meetings and

events such as training. A number of smaller rooms are also contained in the east end of this space.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

These rooms are of **some significance** both architecturally and for their current usage. The current refit of the former Print Room as a gallery space should represent an **enhancement of significance**. The new provision of disabled access to the Drill Hall Corridor will also make these rooms accessible, and this will also represent an **enhancement of significance**.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally in fair to good condition, though the refurbishment of the former Print Room will improve matters.
- The approved proposals for extended wheelchair access to the Town Hall Drill Hall Corridor will enable full access to these rooms for the first time, representing a considerable step forward in this respect.
- There is much potential for improving intellectual access, perhaps as part of the Print Room refurbishment. This was the site of the Victorian Cornmarket, and also close to the Chief Constable's House before both buildings were demolished to make way for the new Town Hall in 1893. Prints of these buildings could feature on the walls, either in the new gallery space or along the corridor. The pictures should be hung and captioned in as inclusive a manner as possible, eg to cater for those in wheelchairs or with sight impairments.

14 DRILL HALL CORRIDOR

USE

Access point from Blue Boar Street to the former courts, Police Station, and rooms under the Main Hall.

DESCRIPTION

This long, narrow corridor runs north from the Blue Boar Street entrance, where there are two flights of steps up from the door. The corridor is built of polychrome off-white and red-brown glazed brick, though these have been painted over in cream. The corridor provides access to the rooms and facilities of the courts and Police Station to the east, and the Town Hall and Museum of Oxford to the west. There are differences in level between the corridor and the Town Hall, which had prevented easy access between the two until recently. This will be resolved by the introduction of the approved lift.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Drill Hall Corridor is of **some significance** as a link between the various parts of the Town Hall complex and as an architectural feature. The overpainting of the polychrome brickwork is a **negative influence**, but the negative access issue is being addressed.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally good condition, though the overpainting of the polychrome brickwork is regrettable.
- Accessibility will be improved soon through the introduction of a chair lift from the area behind the Town Hall entrance foyer.

15 POLICE STATION

USE

Partial, for offices.

DESCRIPTION

The ground-floor Police Station and Library were accessed from Blue Boar Street. This was immediately below the Session Court with cells, offices and a parade room. The upper floor provided a sleeping apartment for the resident constables. The rooms in this part of the complex are mostly small and plain, reflecting the status and use of the Police Station.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This part of the Police Station is of **some significance** for its historic use, but of **little significance** in terms of the current office usage. There is potential for **enhancement of significance** through interpretation (which could include the presence of earlier police buildings on the site) and more imaginative use of the spaces.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally fair to good, though some of the decoration might benefit from upgrading.
- There are issues of disability access due to changes of level from the Town Hall and within the Police Station. Some of these will be resolved by the introduction of the chair lift.
- Interpretation and intellectual access – clear potential for initiatives here.

16 COUNCIL CHAMBERS

USE

As Council meeting rooms, personal office of the Lord Mayor, and for smaller private functions/receptions.

DESCRIPTION

Rooms off the Council Chamber Corridor on the first floor include the Lord Mayor's Parlour, the Council Chamber, St Aldate's Room and the Plowman Room. All bar the Council Chamber overlook St Aldates. The corridor to the Council Chamber has a collection of 20-30 paintings by William Turner of Oxford, which were given in 1931 by Sir Michael Sadler of University College.

North of the landing hall is the Council Chamber. The three seats on the west end are mounted on a dais and are for the Lord Mayor (centre), the Deputy Lord Mayor to the right and the Chief Executive to the left. A carved wooden canopy rises above the central seat which has a high back inset with painted arms of the city. Directly opposite the Lord Mayor's seat at the far end of the chamber is the Sheriff's seat with a plain high curved back. The public gallery, holding up to 25 people, is to the rear of the Sheriff's seat. Each councillor has a seat and desk, and the room was designed for a total of 68 members seated in three tiered rows around the edge of the room. Officials and reporters use the seats in the central area.

The walls have a mixture of panelling and ashlar stone. On the walls are portraits of 17th, 18th and 19th-century aldermen, some in 17th-century frames from the old Council Chamber. The ceiling is separated into panels by a grid of timber beams supported on carved stone corbels, with pendants on the intersections. Plasterwork shields lie within the coved panels, each with a different sign of the zodiac. The windows are set high in the north, south and east walls and have stained glass with the Arms of 19th-century Mayors.

The north-west corner of the 1890s building in the angle between the Council Chamber and Assembly Room houses the Lord Mayor's Parlour, a panelled room incorporating a Jacobean overmantle from the old parlour of the Guildhall, and the Committee Room. Both overlook St Aldates. The ceiling of the parlour is of plaster with shields of the Queen and the City flanking that of the 7th Earl of Jersey (Lord Lieutenant for Oxfordshire 1887-1915) in the centre. The fireplace is of polished Hopton Wood stone with fine tiling. This, the carved wooden overmantel and the surrounds of the door are from the old Council Chamber in the 1751 Town Hall Yard. The 12-light window facing St Aldates has two opening casements at the bottom and top openers in the top centre. It features the stained glass coats of Arms of two 17th-century mayors of Oxford along with that of its twin city of Bonn. All the furniture was designed for the room. This includes the chair used by the Prince of Wales when he opened the building in 1897.

The St Aldate's Room was previously Committee Room 1. It is wood panelled, with a ceiling divided by wooden ribs. On the south wall is a fireplace with carved wooden surround and William de Morgan decorated tiles. There is also a stained glass window commemorating 18th-century Oxford officials. The Plowman Room is adjacent to the Lord Mayor's Parlour but in the 1930s extension. It was originally the room of the Town Clerk. It contains prints and charters associated with Bonn, Grenoble, Leiden and Leon (the twin towns of Oxford).

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Most of these rooms are of **considerable significance**, while the Council Chamber is of **exceptional significance**. The rooms are well designed with many fine decorative and architectural features, while they also contain some excellent furniture and a good collection of paintings (especially the mayoral portraits).

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally at least good. This is not surprising as these are among the most important rooms for the city's civic and political administration. If civic pride can be said to reside in town halls, it is especially true of chambers such as these.
- There is potential for enhanced public/intellectual access to and interpretation of these rooms. This should include their relationship to the similar chambers in earlier versions of the Town Hall. Some of the furniture and fixtures from these still survive in use, though there is little indication of this today. The virtual tour could perhaps include more of this sort of information, or links to it.

17 GRAND STAIRCASE AND MAIN HALL FOYER

USE

Main thoroughfare to the Main and Assembly Halls. Has a modern glass display case of Oxford artefacts, either made or donated from Oxford sources.

DESCRIPTION

The entrance foyer leads on to a central grand staircase up to the first-floor landing and foyer in front of the Main Hall. The landing/foyer has stone carving and a moulded plaster ceiling in a broadly Jacobean style. The main stair has griffins with heraldic shields on the pillars to either side. The handrails have metal balusters and a wooden rail. Contrasting nosing strips have been inserted into the front of each stair tread to make the rises more clearly visible to people with visual impairments. The staircase is some distance from natural light sources, and has to be artificially lit. This is adequate, but no more than that.

The internal detail of the staircase wall and landing foyer is of Bath stone, with polished Hopton Wood stone and Black Birdseye marble dado rails and balustrades. There is polished stone paving to the foyer and the stairs. Flooring of oak and pine is restricted to the main rooms. The main circulation spaces have carved beasts and cartouches by Butcher and Axtell, and excellent metal grilles are also a feature. Ceilings are covered with painted plasterwork. Corridors are mostly wood panelled with vaulted stone and plaster ceilings. Fibrous plasterwork is by George Jackson and Sons. There is an excellent group of stained glass windows in the north wall, lit from a lightwell, while a small stained glass cupola is featured over the half-landing at the top of the main flight of stairs. There are several display cabinets containing items of civic interest, and weaponry.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The grand staircase and first-floor foyer are of **exceptional significance** for the very high quality of their architectural and decorative treatment. They are of the same level of importance as holding and circulation areas between the major civic, public and court spaces on the first floor. The foyer provides direct access to the Panel Room, the Main Hall and Assembly Room, and indirect access to the remaining court rooms, the old Reference Library, and the council chambers.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good or better. Maintenance is probably at its best here.
- The stairs were clearly not designed in an age when inclusive access was a consideration, but for people in wheelchairs the Main Hall foyer and most other parts of the first floor can be accessed by lift and chair lift. There are two disabled toilets on this floor.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved, both in relation to the building itself and with regard to the earlier phases of the site's use. The relationship of current walls and spaces to earlier property boundaries could be emphasized, for instance, while the displays in cabinets could be described and explained more clearly and extensively. This might mean a reduction in the number of items on display. Again the virtual tour could be used as one vehicle for more information, or links to this.

18 MAIN HALL

USE

Principal public space within the Town Hall, for concerts, meetings, events and large receptions.

DESCRIPTION

The Main Hall (the Town Hall of the original brief) lies immediately to the east of, and is accessed from, the foyer at the top of the grand staircase. The Main Hall is the biggest room in the building by some distance. There is an apse at the staged, east end of the room, at the back of which stands the Henry (Father) Willis organ built in 1896-7 in a plain Rococo-style case. The stage can hold up to 200 people in tiers (the Hall itself can house an audience of around 750). Under the stage are rooms for performers (these are essentially at first-floor level). The remaining three sides of the Hall (ie north, west and south) have balconies with tiered seating and heavily enriched stucco fronts. The arms on the balcony clockwise from the east end are of the County of Oxfordshire, the Royal County of Berkshire, John Radcliffe, and St Edwards School. To the right of the stage platform are the arms of the Diocese of Lincoln, Rewley Abbey, Osney Abbey, the Diocese of Oxford, and the University of Oxford. The Royal Arms are above the entrance door. Carvings abound, and the ceiling is richly plastered and decorated. The ornate modelled plaster is painted in a cream white with blue background and covers most of the room with a panelled dado on the lower portion of the walls. Allegoric sculpted figures by F E E Schenk are in the spandrels depicting subjects such as Sloth and Industry. The room is painted in a dark blue at dado level with light blue above. This colour scheme is *c* 15 years old.

The position of the Main Hall was formerly that of the Cornmarket built in 1861-3. It is partly for this reason that the Hall is set at a slight angle to a perpendicular line from the St Aldates entrance and grand staircase. This angle also reflects the alignment of Blue Boar Street, but the latter was a Tudor insertion into the medieval street pattern. The Main Hall alignment therefore pre-dates that of Blue Boar Street, and in fact it is clear that the south side of the Hall in particular rests on an ancient property boundary that can be traced back to the 12th/13th century at least.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Main Hall is the most important and grandiose room in the whole of the Town Hall, and there is no doubt that it is of **exceptional significance** as an architectural space, for its extraordinarily rich decoration (Schenk's sculptures are an especially notable feature), and for its group value with the foyer and other public rooms on the first floor.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good though some areas of the decoration require attention, and there is a backlog of substantial capital works that needs to be addressed. This is especially true on the balconies, where there are large areas of peeling paint, and on the square columns supporting the balconies. Many of the corners of these have suffered from wear and tear, exposing earlier paint schemes beneath the existing colours. When these are redecorated, it will be important to make a record of the earlier colours in case future generations wish to alter the present colour scheme, for instance back to an earlier precedent.

- The existing fixtures, fittings, and decorative plasterwork/sculptures are all absolutely fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way.
- The modern removable seating that is installed as needed is not an issue. Though not in keeping with the character of the room, it is an appropriate and flexible way of accommodating a seated audience while also allowing the room to be cleared for other types of events such as beer festivals.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially with regard to temporary fixings on walls and panelling. There may also be some concern over spillages on and damage to the floor, although in practice this does not appear to be a major concern.
- Disabled access to the balconies, stage and backstage areas varies from difficult to impossible. It will be difficult to introduce access to most of these areas without major and costly redevelopment. The stage is an exception, in that a mobile chair lift could be brought in for use as and when necessary.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall. The ancient nature of the property boundary along the south side of the Main Hall, and its predecessor (the Cornmarket, still an important name in Oxford city centre) are obvious points worthy of emphasis.

19 ASSEMBLY ROOM

USE

Meetings, functions and events.

DESCRIPTION

The Assembly Room lies to the west of the landing foyer, lit from the St Aldates frontage by wide, multi-leaded windows. The walls are covered in carved wood panelling to about half their height with plain ashlar walling to ceiling level above. The carved wood forms wide panelling at floor level with smaller panels above and a deep carved dado rail. Ashbee and Co of Gloucestershire provided the flooring while G Hawkings was responsible for the woodcarving. The ceiling forms almost a barrel vault on stone corbels. Thick wooden ribs with carved wooden detail forms the central portion of the ceiling. Decorated plasterwork panels lie within the ribs. The most ornate plasterwork is in the coved part of the ceiling, and at the north and south ends of the room.

The paintings in the Assembly Room include the *Rape of the Sabines* by Pietro Berretini (Pietro de Cortona 1596-1669) donated by the Duke of Marlborough in 1901. There are also portraits of Queen Anne, the 3rd Duke of Marlborough, the 11th Viscount Valentia (MP for Oxford 1895-1817), the 1st Earl of Abingdon, Lord Nuffield, James Langston (1796-1863) MP for Oxford, Thomas Rowney, Sir John Walter MP, James Herbert MP and Sir John Treacher (four times Mayor of Oxford). There is a decorative fireplace of 1895. The large fireplace has an imposing overmantel with pillars of Frosterley marble from County Durham, which support a

musician's gallery. Beneath this gallery the hearth of the fireplace contains red lustre William de Morgan tiles and a cast-iron fireback dated 1896.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Assembly Room is second only to the Main Hall among the most important and grandiose rooms in the whole of the Town Hall. It is designed as a late medieval or early Tudor-style Great Hall, and undoubtedly it is of **exceptional significance** as an architectural space, for its rich decoration (the fireplace and musicians' gallery are an excellent centrepiece), and for its group value with the foyer and other public rooms on the first floor.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good or better, with high-level maintenance befitting such an important room.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, and decoration are all absolutely fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way.
- The modern removable seating that is installed as needed is not an issue. Though not in keeping with the character of the room, it is an appropriate and flexible way of accommodating an audience while also allowing the room to be re-configured for other types of events such as receptions, meals and for use during festivals.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially with regard to temporary fixings on walls and panelling. There may also be concern over spillages on/damage to the floor and wall panelling, although in practice this does not appear to be a major concern.
- Disabled access is straightforward, and not an apparent issue.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall. The relationship of the Assembly Room to the ancient property boundary that continues from the south side of the Main Hall, to the former Domus Conversorum, and to the 1751 Town Hall are points worthy of emphasis.

20 (OLD) REFERENCE LIBRARY

USE

Meetings, functions and events/performances.

DESCRIPTION

The old Reference Library is to the south of, and now largely accessed from, the Assembly Room. On its eastern side it retains the galleries and principal bookcases

from the original lending library. The alcoves and gallery were used for the local history collection. The south end has the original stairs that connected the room to the main library below (now the Museum of Oxford). There is a small separate seating area at the south-west corner of the room. The main space has a lofty ceiling with heavily moulded cark, timber beams and carved bosses having painted shields. The timber ceiling ribs are thin by comparison. The walls are painted and there is no decorative plaster. The windows overlooking St Aldates have stained glass Arms of famous Oxford-born people.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This room is of **exceptional significance** for its excellent architectural design and decoration. It also forms an integral part of the original design of the full library complex, though it is now largely divorced from the rest of it (ie the Museum of Oxford) in practical terms.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good or better, with high-level maintenance befitting such an important room.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, and panelling all absolutely fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way.
- The older tables and seating that are usually installed in this room are characterful and add to the stately feeling of the room. This is very well lit both by the large windows on the west and south sides and via artificial sources, but the dark wood panelling and furniture make the Assembly Room ‘feel’ dark. This may be an issue for people with visual impairments, but no alterations should be made (eg to the panelling) that would adversely affect the character and significance of the room.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially on temporary fixings on walls and panelling.
- Disabled access is fairly straightforward and generally not an issue, with the exception noted above of perceived light levels. It will be difficult to improve this without alterations that would unacceptable on historic and conservation grounds.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall. The ancient property boundaries and the former library use of the room deserve more emphasis than they currently receive.

21 CARETAKER’S FLAT EAST OF THE REFERENCE LIBRARY

USE

Private residential accommodation for the Caretaker of the Town Hall and Museum of Oxford. Originally provided as part of the Library complex, but seemingly always

intended for caretaker's use. The flat's occupant therefore provides an additional level of security and fire safety/detection for the premises during office closing hours.

DESCRIPTION

Private two-bedroom flat, not accessed during this study but believed to retain many original design features. The access stair, lobby/foyer, and door to the old Reference Library are all of excellent design and decorative quality.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The design and decoration of the staircase, lobby and door to the old Reference Library are of **considerable significance** in their own right and of **exceptional significance** for group value with the rest of the former Library complex (including the old Reference Library). The flat is also of value in providing living quarters for the Town Hall's resident caretaker.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally very good in the accessed areas. No observation of the caretaker's flat was possible.
- Not publicly accessible. No disabled access feasible via the stairs, though the lobby/foyer can be entered from the old Reference Library.
- Could be included in enhanced interpretation, eg on the virtual tour, while maintaining the once-public but now essentially private nature of the stairs and lobby. Hare's care to carry the design language of the rest of the building through these areas reflects their origin as public space.

22 PANEL ROOM

USE

Meeting and function room.

DESCRIPTION

The room is on the south side of the Main Hall foyer and was originally the 2nd Committee Room. It also has access to the Court Room Corridor via a second door in the east wall. The room is panelled on all walls to a height of 3m (10ft) with impressive carved jambs and architrave. There are paintings and a carved wood cartouche above this. On the north wall is a stone fireplace with green tiles with the Royal Coat of Arms above. On the west wall are six high leaded windows with Doric-

style pilasters in between. The room is rectangular with an apsidal end. The ceiling is moulded plaster of an intricate intersecting curvilinear design.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This room is of **exceptional significance** both in its own right for the quality of its architectural design and decoration, and for group value with other first-floor rooms.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good though some attention to relatively cosmetic issues of decoration may be necessary in the future.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, and wall panelling are fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way unless this is unavoidable and essential for other reasons such as public safety.
- The modern furniture is not an issue in its own right, but is not in keeping with the character of the room. It would be advisable to leave the modern furniture in place while the room is in use as a sales area. Appropriate ‘period’ furniture could be supplied at other times. Great care should be taken to avoid damage to the panelling and doors during the transportation of furniture.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially with regard to temporary fixings on walls and panelling. The room is used quite extensively as a sales area, eg for charity Christmas cards.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall.

23 JURY ROOM

USE

Meeting and function room.

DESCRIPTION

The room is adjacent to the Judge’s Room and has windows placed high on the west wall. It is a fairly small room (6m by 4m). The room is plain and the walls are used to display some contemporary paintings. The furniture is modern.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This room is of **some significance** in its own right, but of **considerable significance** for its group value with the remainder of the court complex.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good though some attention to relatively cosmetic issues of decoration may be necessary in the future.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, and wall panelling are fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way unless this is unavoidable and essential for other reasons such as public safety.
- The modern furniture is not an issue in its own right, but is not in keeping with the character of the room. It may be desirable to replace it with more appropriate furniture if resources allow this.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially with regard to temporary fixings on walls and panelling.
- Disabled access is possible via a chair lift but this is somewhat cumbersome and also inconvenient for others when in use.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall.

24 JUDGE'S ROOM

USE

Meeting and function room.

DESCRIPTION

The Judge's Room lies off the south-west corner of the Court Room (there is a connecting door at the south end of the common wall between them) and overlooks Blue Boar Street. Wooden stairs with carved wooden griffins link the room to the door to the Justice's podium in the Court Room. The Judge's Room has wood panelled walls to a height of 3m. There is a carved stone chimney of classical design on the north wall. The ceiling comprises thirty decorative plaster panels set between moulded timber beams. The existing furniture in the room is all modern.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This room is of **exceptional significance** for its architecture, decoration, fixtures, fittings and panelling. It is also important for its group value with the rest of the court complex. The modern furniture is of no importance.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good though some attention to relatively cosmetic issues of decoration may be necessary in the future.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, and wall panelling are fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way unless this is unavoidable and essential for other reasons such as public safety.
- The modern furniture is not an issue in its own right, but is not in keeping with the character of the room. It may be desirable to replace it with more appropriate furniture if resources allow this.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially with regard to temporary fixings on walls and panelling.
- Disabled access is possible via a chair lift but this is somewhat cumbersome and also inconvenient for others when in use.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall.

25 COURT ROOM

USE

No longer in use for its original court function, but used for meetings, functions and events.

DESCRIPTION

The Court Room occupies the south-east corner of the first floor. Built as the Magistrate's Court, it has also served as the Court of Quarter Sessions and as a Crown Court. Austere room befitting its original function with dark wall panelling, fixed benches and furniture. The dock connects by stairs to the cells beneath. In the stained glass on the south wall are the Royal Arms to the left, the Arms of Henry I and on the right-hand side the Arms of Richard I. The room was used to stage the courtroom scenes in the film *A Fish Called Wanda*.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This room is of **exceptional significance** for its architectural design and the virtually intact survival of its original fixtures and fittings. Though no longer used for its original purpose, it is still an imposing and affecting space, largely because little has been changed since its redundancy. The current uses (eg for meetings and events) and the income they generate are an appropriate means of sustaining the room for the future.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good though some attention to relatively cosmetic issues of decoration and furniture may be necessary in the fairly near future.
- The existing fixtures, fittings, wall panelling and furniture are fundamental to the historic significance and ambience of the room. They should not be removed, altered or tampered with in any way unless this is unavoidable and essential for other reasons such as public safety.
- It may be advisable to issue guidance notes to users on appropriate uses of and actions within the room, especially on temporary fixings on walls and panelling.
- Disabled access is possible via a chair lift but this is somewhat cumbersome and also inconvenient for others when in use.
- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall.

26 BARRISTERS' ROOMS

USE

Meeting room, with some facilities (toilets) off the vestibule/waiting area. Stairs on the east side provide access to the floors above and below.

DESCRIPTION

At the rear of the Town Hall building, originally a second court room, the rooms of counsel and court staff, plus the waiting area for witnesses. A third court room was on the floor above and reached by wrought iron staircase, which still survives. The former waiting area has oak panelling from the 17th-century Council Chamber of the original Council House (part of the Guildhall complex).

The main room (Barristers' Room) has panelling half way up the walls with plain plastered walls above. Possibly original shelving lies in the alcoves. The ceiling is modern with halogen lights. The floor has 1960s-style wooden parquet flooring. A wide bow window with leaded lights faces onto Blue Boar Street.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This area is of **considerable significance** for the quality of its design and decoration.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition is generally good.
- Disabled access is possible via a chair lift but this is somewhat cumbersome and also inconvenient for others when in use.

- Intellectual access and interpretation could be improved on site, and perhaps also via the virtual tour of the Town Hall.

27 EAST STAIRCASE TO 2ND AND LOWER FLOORS

USE

Mainly used for access to private second-floor offices. Also an access route to the various levels of the Police Station/court complex by Oxford City Council staff.

DESCRIPTION

Staircase on the east side of the Town Hall complex, located between the Main Hall and the Police Station, and giving access to all floors of the latter and the court complex. Faced in polychrome off-white and re-brown glazed bricks. The landing at first-floor level (eg into the Barristers' Room part of the court complex) features a fine ballustrated arcade, now partly enclosed by a boarded partition, and a finely decorated door surround that formerly provided direct access into the Main Hall. This door is now blocked.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The staircase is generally of **some significance** for its quality and as an important secondary access within the Town Hall complex. Indeed it is now the main access to the second floor offices over the court area. The staircase has some features at and off the first-floor landing that are potentially of greater significance, but these are either blocked or partially obscured.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Generally in good condition.
- The blocking and obscuring of the architectural embellishments at first-floor level are intrusive. The stairs also have more than one handrail, which seems unnecessary for a relatively under-used staircase.

28 NORTH OF COUNCIL CHAMBER (BGS LIGHTWELL E)

USE

External access for various parts of the Town Hall complex, and natural light for the Council Chamber.

DESCRIPTION

An open courtyard providing access for maintenance and repair to the north side of the Council Chamber, and the rear elements of the 1932 extension. Hard surface in tarmac.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This area is of **little significance** except in that it provides access and natural light to certain parts of the Town Hall complex. Its significance as part of an access route would be enhanced considerably if the BGS feasibility study proposals are taken forward.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition and maintenance in an enclosed area might cause some problems. In practice this seems to be dealt with as a routine matter.
- Pigeon guano is a problem here (and in all other lightwells in the Town Hall and Museum of Oxford complex), requiring regular cleaning.

29 SOUTH OF COUNCIL CHAMBER (BGS LIGHTWELL C)

USE

External access for repair and maintenance. Natural light for the Council Chamber, Main Hall foyer, and a number of other small rooms.

DESCRIPTION

Fully enclosed courtyard between the Council Chamber and the Main Hall foyer area, providing natural light to both and access to their external walls for maintenance and repair. Hard surface in tarmac or similar material.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This courtyard/lightwell is of **little significance** except in that it provides access and natural light to two important parts of the Town Hall complex.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition and maintenance in an enclosed area might cause some problems. In practice this seems to be dealt with as a routine matter.

30 MUSEUM LIGHT WELL (BGS LIGHTWELL B)

USE

External access for repair and maintenance. Natural light for the Museum of Oxford and the Panel Room.

DESCRIPTION

Fully enclosed courtyard largely for the Museum of Oxford (former Library), but also overlooked by the Panel Room and a number of small rooms on the south side of the Town Hall. Provides natural light to these areas/rooms, and access to external walls for maintenance and repair. Hard surface in tarmac or similar material.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This courtyard/lightwell is of **little significance** except in that it provides access and natural light to important parts of the Town Hall and Museum of Oxford complexes.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition and maintenance in an enclosed area might cause some problems. In practice this seems to be dealt with as a routine matter.

31 SOUTH OF MAIN HALL (BGS LIGHTWELL A)

USE

External access for repair and maintenance. Natural light for the Main Hall and parts of the court complex.

DESCRIPTION

Fully enclosed courtyard between the Main Hall and the court complex, providing natural light to both and access to their external walls for maintenance and repair. Hard surface in tarmac or similar material.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This courtyard/lightwell is of **little significance** except in that it provides access and natural light to two important parts of the Town Hall complex.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition and maintenance in an enclosed area might cause some problems. In practice this seems to be dealt with as a routine matter.

32 NORTH OF MAIN HALL

USE

Links with Kemp Hall Passage. Provides external access/escape route.

DESCRIPTION

A narrow passageway leads along the north side of the Main Hall and opens out into a courtyard area at the north-west corner of the Hall. The passage is barely used, though presumably it is sometimes used for maintenance and repair work as well as for access and emergency escape.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The passage is of at least **some significance** in that it may reflect very closely the historic pattern of property boundaries and passages on and leading back from the High Street and St Aldates frontages. There is clear potential for **enhancement of significance** if this can be proved.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Lack of use except as noted above.
- Precise historic ‘pedigree’ of the passage, and its relationship to historic boundaries etc needs to be established.
- No interpretation – potential for enhancement of intellectual access by providing information on the city’s complex network of property boundaries and passages both in this specific area and more widely.

33 KEMP HALL PASSAGE

USE

Linking corridor between High Street and Blue Boar Street. Also provides access to a number of private commercial premises off High Street, and to the rear of the Town

Hall. Gates secure the Blue Boar Street entrance, while a second gate closes the passage at the north-east corner of the Town Hall. The section of corridor between the gates is therefore not publicly accessible under current arrangements. The BGS Feasibility Study suggested that Kemp Hall Passage should become an important entry point into the Town Hall complex.

DESCRIPTION

Narrow corridor between older properties with brick paving. Entrance off the High Street is via a gateway to a tunnel-like passage through a gable-fronted building on the High Street. The passage is between No 129/130 and number 128 High Street. The Grade II listed Kemp Hall (number 130A), at present a Thai restaurant, was formerly an early University Hall. It subsequently functioned as the police station until 1897 when the new facilities in the Town Hall opened. Kemp Hall lies on south the side of the entrance passageway and is a three-storey jettied 16th/17th-century town house. The property to the other side is a 19th-century replacement for a former late medieval building. The properties to the sides of Kemp Hall passage lie on medieval tenements. The passage itself opens out into a yard-like space behind the Main Hall, and then passes under Ebor House to a gated entrance of Blue Boar Street.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Kemp Hall Passage is of **considerable significance** as a surviving element of Oxford's historic townscape. It provides a direct physical and intellectual link with the medieval pattern of streets and alleyways, as well as a potentially important (but currently barely used) means of access and egress. It could be an important emergency escape route for parts of the Town Hall complex, both now and especially in the future if development plans such as those in the BGS feasibility study come forward for implementation.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- The High Street part of the passage is used for access to commercial premises, and the Blue Boar Street/Town Hall part provides private access for Oxford City Council employees and officers. Otherwise there is minimal public use of the passage. This is regrettable for such a long-lived and important feature of the city.
- There is little or no interpretation of or in the passage, or indeed of Kemp Hall itself. There is potential for improvement here, especially if the passage is opened to wider usage.
- Any wider usage would inevitably need to be reviewed for security, public safety and maintenance implications.

34 SECOND FLOOR OFFICES

USE

Offices.

DESCRIPTION

Formerly part of the court suite, now used for private offices. Separate access is provided by the staircase running down through the court and Police Station complexes. The second floor complex is otherwise inaccessible to the public. The sensitive/confidential nature of the offices precluded detailed inspection during this project, but it is believed that the rooms retain some of their original fixtures and fittings.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The second floor rooms are of at least **some significance** architecturally, but they are currently in private use and thus not publicly accessible. There is some potential for **enhancement of significance** if they can be opened to wider access in the future.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Condition and decoration are generally in good condition.
- This area is only accessible via several flights of stairs. No disabled access.
- No interpretation or information available. Potential for enhancement.



