

WORLD CONSERVATION AND EXHIBITIONS CENTRE



A view along the Joseph E Hotung Gallery

THE JOSEPH E HOTUNG GALLERY OF CHINA, SOUTH ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

In addition to providing essential new facilities to house special exhibitions and the vital work of the Museum's conservators and scientists, the proposed World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre will also offer a positive effect to the natural light levels, and consequently to the long-term conservation of the collection, within the Joseph E Hotung Gallery dedicated to China, South Asia, including large holdings from India, and Southeast Asia (Room 33).

History

The principal gallery of the King Edward VII building was designed by Sir JJ Burnet between 1904 and 1914. Reputedly the longest in Europe at the time, the gallery forms a single, long-aisled room divided into side bays by columns and cases, and lit by windows to the north and south. Its bold Beaux Arts interior echoes the detail of the external façade.

The Museum continues to use the gallery as it was originally conceived, and it now houses significant works from the Chinese, South Asian and Southeast Asian collections.

Daylight requirement

Because the gallery runs east-west there has always been a strong imbalance between the daylight entering from the north and sunlight from the south windows. As a consequence, the south windows have had to be fitted with permanent light-reducing film and blinds in order to reduce the strong, direct sunlight.

Concerns at the high level of light entering some galleries resulted in a study being carried out for the Museum between December 2008 and March 2009 by recognised experts Arup. Direct sunlight not only presents a problem to the effectiveness of the displays but can severely damage the irreplaceable artefacts in the collection. The results of the study noted that 'the gallery of greatest concern in the Asia Department is Room 33', and it recommends that 'a long-term strategy is needed to reduce the amount of natural light entering the gallery.'



The sun-shading screen on the south side



A side bay on the south side



A side bay on the north side

Effect of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre project

The north façade of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre would be built approximately 4 metres away from the south windows of the King Edward building. The Arup lighting study shows that there will be a minor effect on the amount of natural light entering the gallery, but the most important and positive effect will be the shading effect of the new building, reducing the direct sunlight entering the gallery.

The Museum's primary function is the care, display and interpretation of historic and cultural artefacts. The conservation of some artefacts is currently compromised by these high levels of sunlight. The effect of the new World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre will be to redress the north-south imbalance across the gallery, to allow the removal of the present sunscreens from the south side, and to provide proper and lasting protection for the collection.

The visitors' experience of the gallery and their appreciation of the displays will be improved on sunny days by the reduction in contrast and reflection as a result of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre.

'We have been losing the battle with the effects of strong sunlight in these spaces for years, and this is a great opportunity finally to address this problem.' David Saunders, Head of Conservation and Scientific Research

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