

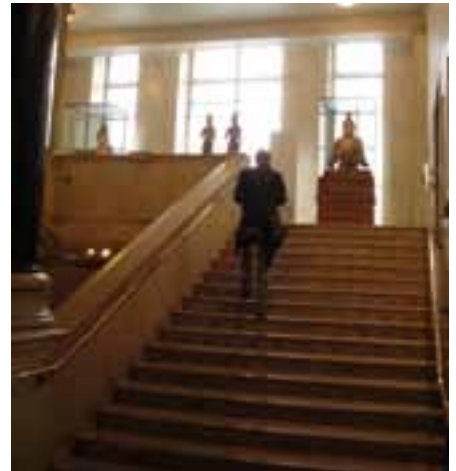
WORLD CONSERVATION AND EXHIBITIONS CENTRE



The lowest flight of the North stairs



The Ground floor landing showing light penetrating from the mezzanine landing windows



Looking up to the mezzanine half-landing

THE NORTH STAIRS

The staircase on the north side of the Museum (North stairs) was designed between 1904 and 1914 by Sir JJ Burnet as part of the King Edward VII building. It is conceived on a grand scale and has survived without significant alteration.

The original architect never intended for there to be views from the North stairs windows which look out over back-of-house areas. As such, the windows are frosted.

The construction of the World Conservation and Exhibition Centre will not affect the visitor's appreciation of the North stairs or compromise the interesting lighting effects which characterise this space, the sense of moving upwards into the light. The modest reduction in daylight received through some of the upper level windows will improve the display of objects on the landings by reducing background glare. These conclusions are based on a detailed lighting study carried out by leading engineers Arup.

The visitors' experience

Visitors approach the stairs from the Montague Place entrance, rising from the lowest flight (screened from external daylight by a mahogany panelled partition) to ascend the stairs. These are increasingly lit by daylight filtered through the giant Corinthian columns which support the landings, and visitors finally emerge into the upper space lit by the top west windows and enriched by a gilded and vaulted ceiling.

Effect of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre

To understand the impact of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre, the Museum commissioned a lighting study from recognised experts, Arup Lighting. This study shows that while there will be a slight reduction in light levels as a result of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre, the visitors' experience of ascending the stairs towards increasing light will be preserved.

The windows of the North stairs are already screened by obscured film (preventing a view out) and UV-absorbing and light-reducing film to protect the valuable collection from direct sunlight.

For the visitor, the background glare from the windows can prevent the objects within the cases from being viewed to their best advantage, and under conditions of strong sunlight, spotlights are ineffective.

Recently, the Museum has wished to improve the internal lighting of the North stairs by introducing a more appropriately scaled pendant over the top landing. As part of the proposals for the new Centre, the Museum has undertaken to review the lighting design of this important space, including object lighting.



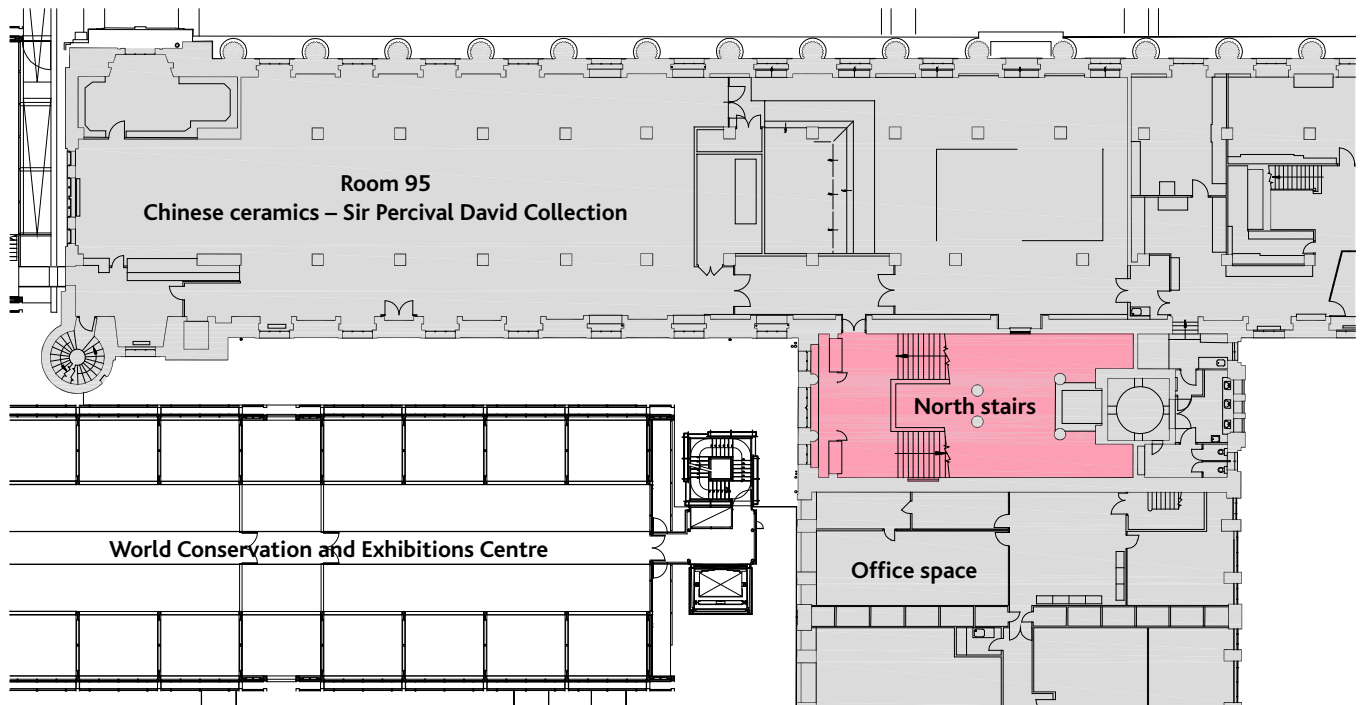
Looking up to the main Level 4 landing



Looking up to the upper half-landing



The top windows and the gold ceiling



Protection of the collection

Importantly, for the quality of the display and for the protection of the objects, the principal advantage of the new building will be to cut out the afternoon sunlight which, as with the Joseph E Hotung Gallery of China, South Asia and Southeast Asia (Room 33), has long been a problem affecting the conservation of objects displayed on the half-landings of the staircase.

The light study carried out for the Museum between December 2008 and March 2009 raised serious concerns that the light-sensitive painted wooden figures displayed on the landings were being exposed to dangerous levels of sunlight, despite efforts to shield them from direct light. On 18 March 2009 the study recorded a light level of 1355 lux whereas the recommended maximum intensity to protect the collection is 200 lux.

The new World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre will reduce the higher levels of daylight and damaging levels of sunlight from within the North stairs. The natural light remaining in the staircase will, however, still give visitors noticeably changing natural light levels as the stairs are ascended, but without the need for the Museum to apply denser film to the windows which would make the ambient light conditions gloomy whatever the weather.

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