

ASBESTOS TRIAL ABATEMENT, REUBEN COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Heritage Statement

February 2021

1.0 Background

This brief heritage statement concerns the proposed asbestos trial abatement at Reuben College (formerly the Radcliffe Science Library), which is required in order to confirm the most suitable means of managing the asbestos containing materials (ACM) found throughout the building prior to continuing with the permitted refurbishment scheme.¹ The trial is to be focused in one room on the first floor of the Jackson wing (i.e., the range fronting onto South Parks Road).

The Radcliffe Science Library (RSL), which forms part of the Reuben College site, is listed at Grade II. Although the site is also located within the Central (City and University) Conservation Area and closely neighboured by other listed buildings, it is specifically the Grade II listed RSL building which is impacted by the proposed work.

2.0 History

The Jackson wing comprises the first phase of construction for the Radcliffe Science Library. In response to the Radcliffe Library outgrowing its space within the University Museum, a dedicated library building was sought following a plea from the Radcliffe Librarian in 1894.

Thomas Graham Jackson had established himself as a popular architect with the University and colleges in the late 19th century, having designed the successful competition entry for the Examinations Schools on the High Street in 1876. He was employed to design the new Radcliffe Library in 1897.

Construction of the library took place between 1898 and 1901. Building was funded by the Drapers' Company, who also employed Jackson to carry out alteration of their City of London livery hall. The ground floor and basement of the new library were originally book stacks. The first and second floors provided reading rooms and offices. The location of the trial abatement works was originally a librarian's office, with a ventilation shaft in the north-west corner and, according to original plans, a fireplace.² There is no evidence of either of these features within the room today, although there is a section of shaft evident in this location on the ground floor.

By 1930, the library collection had continued to grow and instigated an extension to Jackson's original wing, along Parks Road. As part of this phase of work, the ground floor entrance hall off South Parks Road was redecorated in a Grecian style. At this time, the room where the abatement work is proposed was re-purposed as a catalogue room (with a new office for the Keeper in the new wing).

Further growth and considerable debate concerning how to accommodate the expanding library led to further extension in the 1970s via a two-storey basement which extends under the lawn of the

¹ Listed building consent 20/00943/LBC.

² An extract from the 1890s plan is appended.

University Museum. The layout within the Jackson wing remained largely unaltered during both of these later phases of extension. There was considerable intervention at the north end of the 1930s extension as part of the 1970s work, including the complete replacement of the staircase.

3.0 Heritage Impact

The Jackson wing of the Radcliffe Science Library is significant for its architectural value, particularly externally and the principal spaces (reading rooms and main staircase). Historically, the room where the trial abatement work is proposed was secondary in status, being the office of the Radcliffe Librarian; however, there is little surviving in its fabric today which illustrates this.

The asbestos abatement works proposed to be trialled in this room are physically intrusive in nature and will consequently disturb the built fabric of the Grade II listed building. The impact of this is mitigated by the selection of an interior with few historic fixtures and fittings, and reduced character compared to the principal spaces. This impact is therefore localised and reduced to the minimum amount necessary to best secure the condition of the whole building in the long term.

Significant historic features which will be removed but are to be replaced following the works include timber items (skirting, window sills and doorcase) and the decorative skirting grilles on the left-hand side of the radiator. Characteristic architectural features, such as the finish to the shallow-arched window reveals and their chamfered front edge will be lost due to the need to remove the asbestos-containing plaster, but will be recreated using suitably specified replacement plaster such that the appearance is reinstated using a sustainable material that will enable the long-term good condition of the built fabric and continued occupation of the building.

The conclusion of the exercise will have a positive knock-on impact in understanding how best to remedy asbestos-related issues elsewhere across the listed building, making safe its built fabric and maintaining an optimum viable use.

Site Photographs



Timber windowsills, chamfered detailing to reveal and skirting



Decorative skirting grille



Moulded cornice, shallow arch-headed window reveal and chamfered edge



Doorcase

Hettie Dix, Senior Heritage Consultant

On behalf of Purcell ®

104 Gloucester Green, Oxford, OX1 2BU


www.purcelluk.com

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