



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

The Sheldonian Theatre Conservation Plan

May 2012



Building No. 236

Oxford University

Estates Services

First draft August 2010

This draft May 2012

THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE, OXFORD
CONSERVATION PLAN



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Sheldonian Theatre was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and was built between 1664 and 1669. It is a Grade I listed building and was described in 1994 by the European Commission as ‘one of the architectural jewels of Oxford’. The theatre is a functioning building, having operated as the primary assembly room of the University of Oxford since its construction, and recent redecoration work has restored the interior to something akin to its original character.

1.1 Purpose of the Conservation Plan

The University has an unrivalled portfolio of historic buildings, of which it is rightly proud. It has traditionally taken a thorough, holistic approach to building conservation, seeking to understand all the varied factors that make historic buildings significant to their diverse stakeholders, and using this to inform necessary change. It has become clear that this approach is vital to the conservation culture of an institution where so many of its historic buildings that are valued for their function also have extensive historical or architectural significance. This Conservation Plan represents the continuation of this tradition of seeking to understand what makes the University’s buildings cherished assets, and of seeking ways to conserve these most important features for the enjoyment of future generations.

The success of this approach is such that it has now become codified in government policy: First in March 2010’s *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historical Environment* then in its replacement, March 2012’s *National Planning Policy Framework* (hereafter: NPPF). NPPF provides useful guidance on approaching the conservation of heritage assets, and postdates the University’s existing literature. NPPF defines a heritage asset as:

‘A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).’

This designation clearly applies to the Sheldonian Theatre.

The purpose of this Conservation Plan is to update the Sheldonian Theatre’s conservation policy to take into account the new guidance provided by NPPF. It will be of use both for informing responsible regular maintenance and in the preparation of future planning applications, as specified in NPPF paragraph 128.

The Conservation Plan should form the basis for the Sheldonian Theatre’s Conservation Policy and exists as part of an ongoing process. It will be renewed and updated at least every five years or following any major alterations or legislative changes.

1.2 Scope of the Conservation Plan

This Conservation Plan will cover the interior and exterior of the Sheldonian Theatre, a single, self-contained building located on a raised pavement on the southern side of the eastern end of Broad Street, Oxford (see **Figure 1**).

The plan is not a catalogue and in order to facilitate its practical use will concentrate only on the most vulnerable aspects of significance, suggesting how they should be approached and conserved in the future. A brief list of the most significant architectural elements can be found in the checklist in **Appendix 4**.

1.3 Existing Information

TFT Cultural Heritage produced a Conservation Plan for the Sheldonian Theatre in June 2002; however this is a high-profile building and has undergone various periods of work since then. Recent planning applications have included Heritage Impact Statements, which provide a good introduction to the history and significance of the theatre. Applications 10/02206/LBC (Proposed Redecoration of the Main Auditorium) and 10/00955/LBC (Proposed Replacement of Lighting to Main Auditorium), both from 2010, contain useful Heritage Impact Statements that will form the basis for **Section 2** and **Section 3**, and will inform **Section 4** and **Section 5**.

Application 10/02206/LBC also contains *The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford: Auditorium and Circulation Spaces: Architectural Paint Research Archive Report*, a report on the history of the interior paintwork prepared by the conservation consultancy Crick Smith (a commercial arm of the University of Lincoln). This provides a useful gazetteer of the extant decoration within the theatre, as well as a detailed history of its decoration and construction. This will form the basis of a major component of **Section 2** and inform **Section 3**.

A description of the Sheldonian Theatre and its contents can be found in its listed building description, available from Oxford City Council. This explains the original basis for its grant of listed status and will inform **Section 3**.

The Sheldonian Theatre has been the major congregation room for the University of Oxford since its construction in 1669 and features in various histories of the University and city. Its history to 1954 is covered by: 'The Sheldonian Theatre', *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 3: The University of Oxford* (1954), 50-54. This will inform **Section 2**.

Broad Street, Oxford: The Plan was prepared by Kim Wilkie Associates on behalf of the Broad Street Steering Group in 2004. This sets out a series of short- to medium-term plans for the regeneration of Broad Street, as well as providing valuable insight into the rôle of Broad Street (and its constituent elements) within the city as a whole. It will inform **Section 2**, **Section 3**, and **Section 5**.

The plan draws on statutory guidance from NPPF prepared by HM's Department for Communities and Local Government in March 2012. These inform **Section 3**, **Section 4**, and most notably **Section 5**.

1.4 Methodology

The Conservation Plan is a document that assesses the current and predicted conservation needs of the Sheldonian Theatre and attempts to address them with a view towards maintaining or increasing the significance of the heritage asset. Its formulation to supersede any existing literature is a response to the requirements of NPPF, and it is prepared in accordance with the policies contained therein.

1.5 Constraints

The Sheldonian Theatre and its environs are subject to various constraints imposed by Oxford City Council:

- HE.2 – Archaeology Area: Any planning application must incorporate sufficient information to define the character and extent of potential archaeological deposits, including the results of fieldwork evaluations.
- CP.3 – Limiting the Need to Travel: New development will be limited to accessible locations on previously developed sites.
- HE.9 – High Building Areas: Planning permission will not be granted for any development within a 1,200 metre radius of Carfax which exceeds 18.2m in height, except for minor elements of no bulk.
- TR.3, TR.11, TR.12 – Car Parking Standards: The City Council will not allow any significant increase in the overall number of car-parking spaces in the Transport Central Area or development that provides an inappropriate level of car-parking spaces. It will attempt to reduce the level of non-residential car parking.
- The City of Oxford Smoke Control Order No. 1: It is an offence to emit smoke from the chimney of a building, from a furnace, or from any fixed boiler if located in a designated smoke control area.
- HE.7 – Conservation Areas: The Central (City and University) Conservation Area: Planning permission will only be granted for development that preserves or enhances the special character and appearance of the conservation areas or their setting. All trees in Conservation Areas with stem diameters greater than 75mm at 1.5m off the ground are protected.

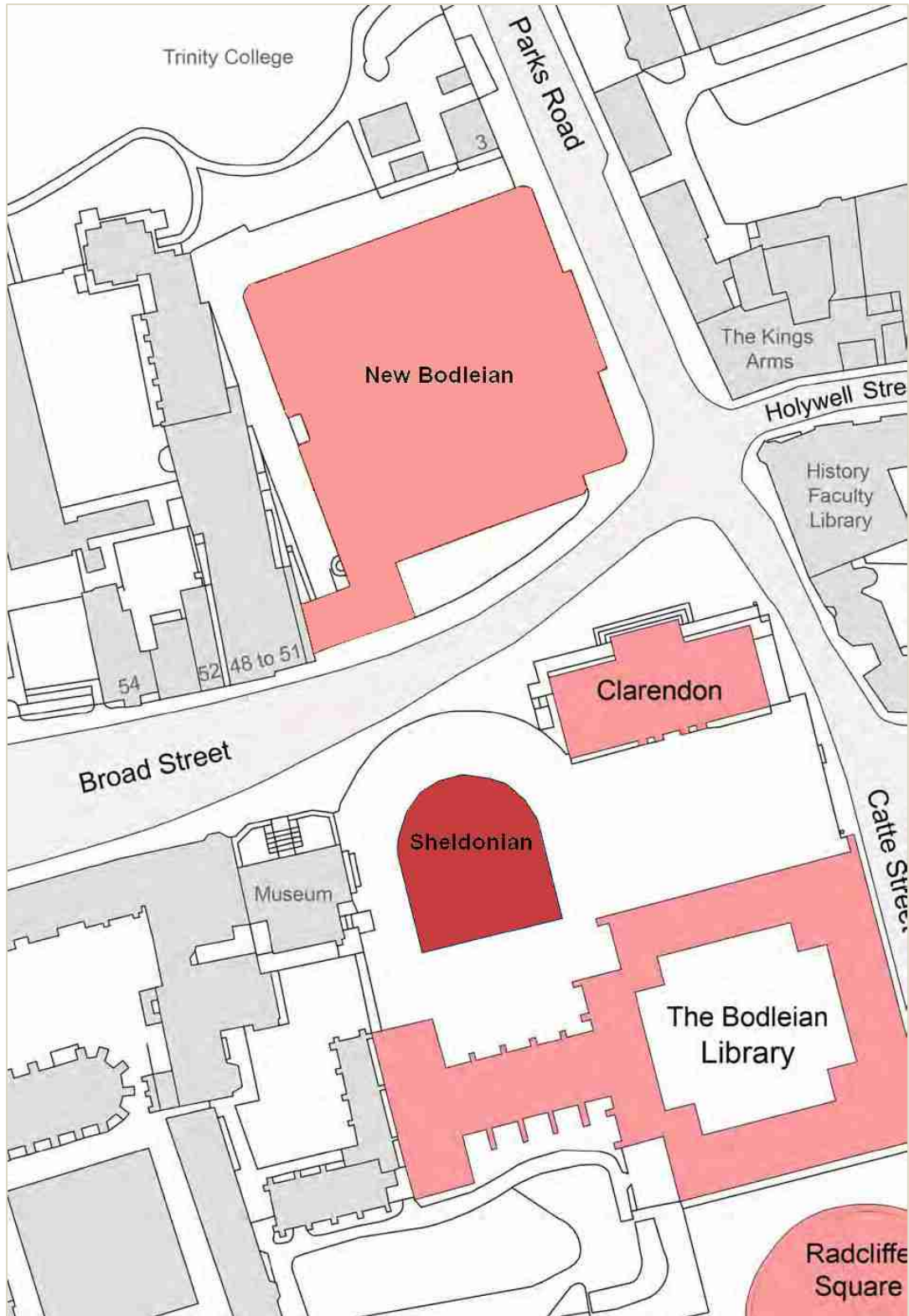


Figure 1. Sheldonian site plan, with Sheldonian theatre marked in dark red and the Bodleian buildings marked in pale red

2 UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

2.1 History of the Site and University

The University of Oxford has a long-standing tradition of exceptional education. Able to trace its roots to the 11th Century, it is known to be the oldest university in the English-speaking world. The Sheldonian Theatre stands on the eastern end of Broad Street, the monumental centre of the city and the University. Broad Street has a long history and was initially peripheral to the mediaeval settlement, being known as Canditch as it was defined by houses constructed along a ditch outside the city walls. However, Henry II granted Oxford its charter in 1155, and with the formal recognition of the University, Catte Street and the eastern end of Broad Street became the centre of a small area of ‘schools’ set up in tenements, which in turn attracted scholars from across Europe. Various colleges sprang up in the area during the late middle ages, notably Balliol in 1263, and with the building of the Divinity School and Duke Humphrey’s Library in 1487, the focus of the University settled on this part of the city.

Since then the principal non-collegiate buildings of the University have been situated in a cluster around the eastern end of Broad Street, including the Sheldonian Theatre itself (1669), the Old Ashmolean (1678-83), the Clarendon Building (1711-13), the Indian Institute (1884-96), and the New Bodleian Library (1937-40). The Old Bodleian Library (1602-1637) interacts with the space through the arch of the Clarendon Building. In 1703 Hawksmoor proposed the formation of a formal university campus at the eastern end of Broad Street. Whilst this never officially occurred, a similar effect has been achieved almost by default, with the urban space of eastern Broad Street being defined by University buildings, and being a focus for ceremonies, protests, tourism, and gatherings.

In April 1971 Oxford City Council designated the majority of the city centre as part of the Central (City and University) Conservation area, focused on Broad Street East, the Sheldonian Theatre, and the Bodleian complex (see **Appendix 2**).

2.2 Construction and Subsequent History of the Sheldonian Theatre

The Sheldonian Theatre was originally designed as, and remains to this day, the principal assembly room of the University, and regular meeting-place of Congregation, the body of resident Masters of Arts which controls the University’s affairs. The building was also originally designed to accommodate the University Press (who subsequently relocated to the neighbouring Clarendon Building in 1713).

It was constructed between 1664 and 1669, funded by Gilbert Sheldon, Warden of All Souls College and later Archbishop of Canterbury, and was the first major design of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723). The Master Mason and builder was Thomas Robinson.

The original roof also incorporated ingeniously constructed timber trusses and complicated cross beams, supported by only braces and screws, without any columns, spanning the 70 foot (21.34 metres) by 80 foot (24.38 metres) auditorium.

Wren's original roof was however rebuilt by George Saunders, architect to Oxford University, in 1801-2, with the existing cupola being redesigned by Edward Blore in 1838.

More recently, in 2007, the slated roofs (covered with green Westmoreland slates) were overhauled, in advance of the reinstatement of the ceiling paintings, following their conservation and repair off site. The restored paintings were back in place by November 2008.

Various parts of the external elevations have been refaced over the years with repairs being known to have been carried out in 1826, 1838, and 1911. During the 1958-63 restoration projects, undertaken in three phases under the supervision of W. Godfrey Allen, further extensive repairs were carried out to the stonework, including the complete refacing of all elevations and the rebuilding of the parapet and balustrading at roof level.

Wren's original windows were first replaced with "Georgian" timber sash windows in 1767-68 but during the major restoration works in 1958-3 new (current) oak windows were installed; the new windows being similar (but not identical) in design to Wren's original.

Internally, in 1935-37, the timber structure supporting the galleries around the Auditorium was found to be in poor condition and a steel frame was inserted to provide suitable support.

To facilitate this work the balcony fronts were temporarily dismantled and the timber panelling and seating were removed and subsequently reinstated following installation of the new steel "skeleton" structure. The plastered vaults over the Ladies' Gallery were also stripped out and subsequently replastered.

Further improvements were also carried out at that time, including the introduction of electrical power and electric lighting.

In 1962-63, as part of the final phase of the major three-phase restoration project, the original timber floor of the auditorium was replaced with a new reinforced concrete "coffered" floor.

In 2009, the discovery of boarding containing asbestos required numerous internal window boards to be removed and replaced, although the affected boards were not original: having been replaced previously during the restoration work by W. Godfrey Allen in 1961-63.

The existing brass and crystal glass fittings were installed in 1961-63, replacing the only previous lighting installation (dating from 1935-37), when electricity was first introduced into the building. The chandeliers, wall-mounted scones, candelabras, and pendant fittings would appear to have been a compromise solution and did not provide a satisfactory level or quality of illumination for performers using the theatre. These were replaced with subtle recessed lighting and improved spot-lighting in 2010.

A new paint scheme was also completed in 2010; this replaced the last decorative scheme (completed in the early 1960s) with one more akin to the understated refinement of Wren's original design. This included removing much of the faux-marbling that had come to dominate the interior, and reintroducing: grey wainscot panelling; a 'Cedar' finish to the seating; dark red 'Rouge de Rance' marbling to the columns (blending with one another and the background to create the illusion of a 'floating' upper gallery, unsupported from below); and a 'Stone' colour to the Lower Gallery fronts and Upper Gallery balcony fronts.

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3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE

NPPF paragraph 128 specifies that in assessing planning applications:

‘Local planning authorities should require an applicant to provide a description of the significance of any heritage assets affected including any contribution made by their setting.’

The significance of the Sheldonian Theatre has been publically recognised by two statutory designations: It was designated a Grade I Listed building in 1954 (see **Appendix 1**); and it was included in Oxford City Council’s designation of the Central (City and University) Conservation Area in 1971, and in its subsequent revisions in 1974, 1981, 1985, and 1998 (see **Appendix 2**).¹

3.1 Significance as part of the city centre, Broad Street, and the Central (City and University) Conservation Area

As mentioned above (**Section 2.1**) Broad Street East forms the monumental core of the city of Oxford, and is the city’s major civic meeting space. Oxford is one of the most visited places in the UK, and Broad Street is the focus for the visitor’s experience. It is one of the most renowned and beautiful streets in Europe, with an architectural and cultural heritage that deserves World Status.

The Sheldonian is significant as a major contributing factor to the drama of this space, which is so integral to the significance of the Central (City and University) Conservation Area as a whole. Its curve can be seen from the western end of Broad Street and it draws the eye at least as much as the Bodleian buildings around it. As an iconic feature of Oxford University, the Sheldonian is second in stature only to the Radcliffe Camera.

The theatre is open to the public and is a major focus for tourism, with its presence enlivening the area. There is public access to the cupola, which is a bland space in itself but has fantastic views north across Broad Street and south over the Bodleian that can be enjoyed by a wide audience. The Sheldonian is a venue for public artistic and musical performances, and so contributes to the culture and night life of Broad Street and the city centre in general.

3.2 Significance as part of Oxford University’s monumental centre

3.2.1 Significance of relationship with the Bodleian Complex

The Sheldonian is not part of the Bodleian Library, but its location and design cause it to interact with the library buildings around it. The Broad Street elevation is actually the rear curve of the Sheldonian, with the main entrance as Wren intended facing directly onto the Divinity Schools of the Old Bodleian. This forms a quadrangle between the two which is central to both the character of the area and to the University’s ceremony, with graduands changing robes in the Divinity Schools and then congregating in this quadrangle before entering the Sheldonian to graduate.

¹ The external railings and boundary wall were also designated as Grade I listed in 1972.

Equally, the eastern elevation of the Sheldonian forms the western perimeter of a quadrangle bounded by: the southern elevation of the Clarendon Building to the north; by the northern elevation of the Old Bodleian Library to the south; and by Catte Street to the east. This is an open area of unrivalled character enjoyed by readers, tourists, and film crews alike (see **Figure 2**). These areas have become vital for the enjoyment and character of this space.

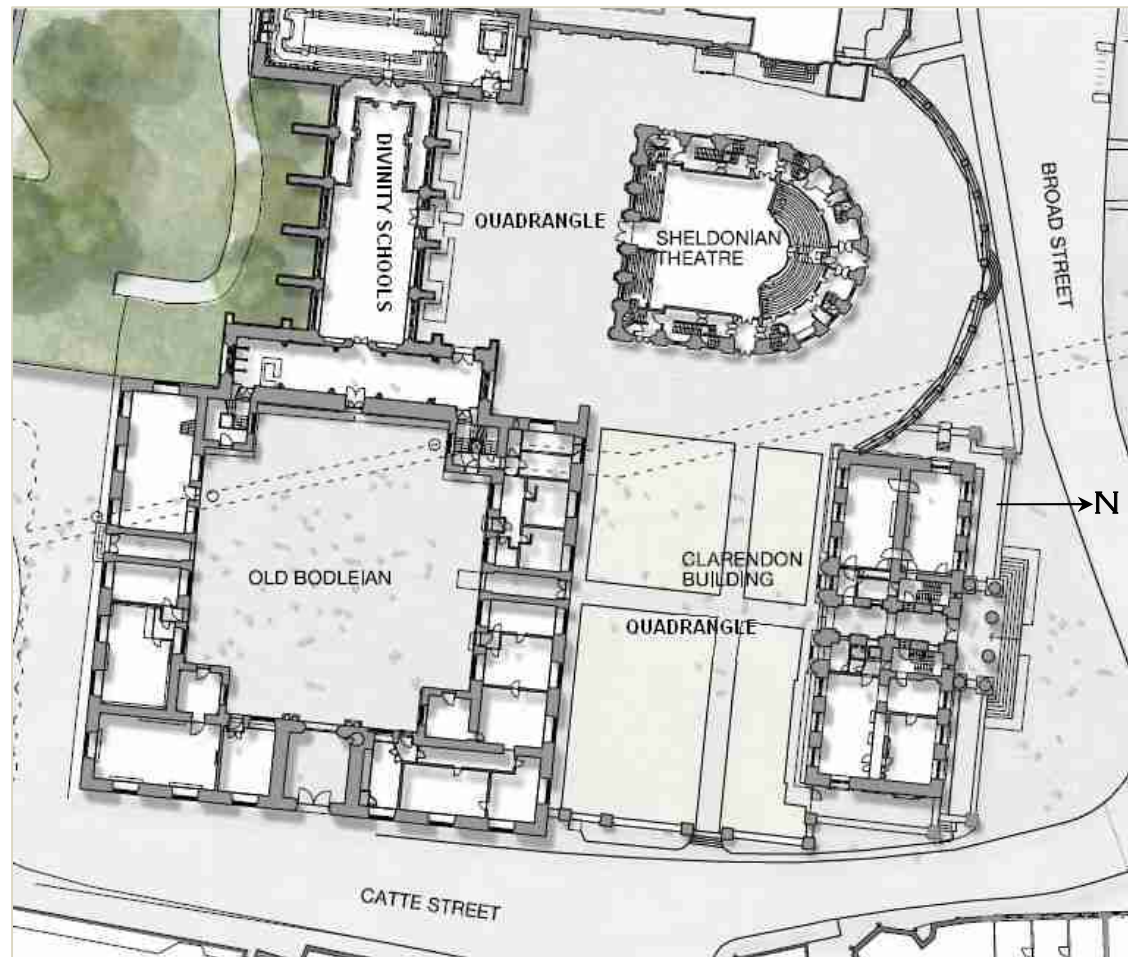


Figure 2. Plan of Sheldonian and some of the Bodleian complex showing quadrangles created by the placement of the Sheldonian

3.2.2 Significance as the focus for University ceremony

As mentioned above (**Section 1.1**, **Section 2.2**, and **Section 3.2.1**) the Sheldonian forms the major ceremonial space for the University. It is the location for Matriculation and Graduation ceremonies, so forms a memorable and important aspect of every student's experience of Oxford. Members of the public also enjoy congregating outside during such occasions in order to experience the much-lauded spectacle.

The Sheldonian is the regular meeting-place of Congregation, the body of resident Masters of Arts which governs the University, and has played an important rôle in the public life of the institution since its construction in 1669.

3.3 Historical Significance

The long history of the Sheldonian Theatre is summarised above (**Section 2.2** and **Section 2.3**) and is clearly a major component of its significance as a heritage asset. As the meeting-place of the Congregation, from its construction the history of the Sheldonian is synonymous with the history of the University.

The list of distinguished alumni who matriculated and graduated within this building is too long to quote, but includes prominent historical and literary figures such as: Sir Robert Peel the Younger; William Ewart Gladstone; Edward VII; Clement Attlee; Tony Benn; T.E. Lawrence; Philip Larkin; Iris Murdoch; Mary Renault; and J.R.R. Tolkien; as well as countless prominent academics. The numerous notable historical figures that have had even this passing acquaintance with the Sheldonian make it one of the nation's foremost historical buildings.

The Sheldonian is also significant as the location of the premier of Handel's oratorio *Athalia* on the 10th July 1733, which was conducted in person by the composer himself. This marks its significance in the history of music, and it continues to be an important location for live performances to this day.

The history of the Sheldonian is remarkably well recorded throughout its lifespan, beginning with the logs recording the payment of the works responsible for its initial construction. The Bodleian Library contains a wealth of information on the Sheldonian, allowing one to trace the construction history of the building to an astonishing degree. This makes it a significant resource for the study of historical building methods.

3.4 Archaeological Significance

The Sheldonian is built on the location of several houses dating from the first half of the Seventeenth Century or earlier. These were demolished for its construction but, whilst the building does have cellars, there is likely to be some extant subterranean archaeological material relating to them; moreover, the areas beneath and around the Sheldonian no doubt hold archaeological material related to the construction of the Theatre itself. During excavations in 1962-63, the city ditch, infilled in the 17th century, was found to run through and to the northwest of the Sheldonian.

Whilst the paved area around the Sheldonian has been reconfigured on numerous occasions, the area has a continuous history of occupation since at least the Eleventh Century, and the probable depth of the relevant stratigraphic layers would suggest that it is likely that significant material may be extant.

3.5 Architectural Significance

3.5.1 Wren

The Sheldonian Theatre was the first major commission of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), although it was completed after his second, the design for the chapel of Pembroke College, Cambridge, finished in 1663. The Sheldonian Theatre employs a combination of classical design (based loosely upon the first-century Theatre of

Marcellus in Rome, dedicated by Augustus in 12 BC) and seventeenth-century empiricism. The roof and ceiling replace the open-air design of the Roman theatre. These were constructed using an innovative design involving timber trusses and complicated cross beams to avoid having to limit the width of the building according to the size of available roofing beams.



Figure 3. Sir Christopher Wren in 1711 (aged 79)

Wren is now recognised as one of the finest architects ever to have lived, with his numerous commissions including: St. Paul's Cathedral; the Greenwich Royal Observatory; Hampton Court Palace; the Royal Hospital Chelsea; and over 50 churches in London. He went on to become the "King's Surveyor of Works" for Charles II. The Sheldonian remains significant as a remarkable and near-complete example of Wren's work.

3.5.2 Preservation of the Sheldonian

The Sheldonian is in remarkably good condition and, whilst it was refaced in 1958-63, the exterior retains Wren's original design, including the distinctive round windows. Of the exterior only the loss of the elliptical dormer windows and the enlarged cupola, built in 1838 under Edward Blore, detract from Wren's original design.

On the interior, the colour scheme has recently been restored to its original state, replacing the previous scheme which dated from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and was rather brighter than Wren's scheme; moreover, the intrusive light

fittings that hung within the theatre were replaced with recessed lighting (in the window sills) and subtle spotlighting. These minor alterations have meant that, other than the organ housing (dating from 1876) and the emergency exit signs (and other necessities of modern utility), the character and atmosphere of the building are now much as they would have been in 1669 (**Figure 4**).²



Figure 4. The interior of the Sheldonian, showing Wren’s original colour scheme (restored in 2011) on the left and the nineteenth-century colour scheme and intrusive twentieth-century light fittings on the right. Note the heavy marbling on the balconies on the right-hand side, and how on the left-hand side the darker pillars blend in with the background.

² All documentary evidence denotes a date of 1876, but the dedication on the organ itself states 1877.

3.5.3 Ceiling Paintings

The ceiling paintings were completed in 1668 by Robert Streeter, the serjeant-painter to the court of Charles II. The allegorical programme in the paintings shows Truth descending upon the Arts and Sciences to expel Ignorance from the University. They were repaired or restored by Tilley Kettle in 1762, in 1802 by William Delamotte, and perhaps in 1826 by Dixon. Since the 1870s a major thematic element of the scene, the villainous figure of Ignorance, has been obscured beneath T.G. Jackson's organ housing. The paintings were most recently restored in 2004-08 by International Fine Arts Conservation Studios Ltd., Bristol. They have been a feature of the building since shortly after its construction and contribute significantly to the character of the Sheldonian (see **Figure 5**).



Figure 5. The restored ceiling

3.6 Social Significance

It has been noted above (see **Section 3.1**) how the Sheldonian makes a significant contribution to the character of the area. It is also significant as the venue for live performances of classical music, being regularly granted public performance licenses by Oxford City Council. This contributes to the cultural life of the city and to the local economy, as the theatre's patrons tend to also visit local pubs and restaurants. It is also the setting for public lectures of some significance, for instance the Romanes Lecture given by the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown on 27th February 2009.

4 VULNERABILITIES

4.1 The ability of the Sheldonian to fulfil its current function

The Sheldonian's current function as the main public chamber of Oxford University and as a public music venue is its optimum viable use.

The Sheldonian was designed for this function and, other than the need for electrical amplification and lighting, the requirements for staging classical music performances have not changed greatly since 1669. The alterations that have been required of this building for its current function are no greater than those that would be required for any form of modern utility, i.e. those related to electricity provision, adequate plumbing, lavatory accommodation, housing staff, and disabled access. Without requiring alterations, the current use funds the upkeep and conservation of the heritage asset and ensures its continued existence and significance.

The retention of this function is vital to the continued significance of the Sheldonian. In order to retain this use it must continue to meet modern standards of health and safety and fire safety. Its fire exits are limited by the original design to the 6 ground-floor doors (only 3 of which are immediately accessible from the auditorium) and 1 basement-level exit. The raised galleries pose a risk to users in the event of an emergency as they have no direct means of egress and must be accessed via stairs from the ground floor. The cupola and roof space are publically accessible but have no direct escape routes, and must be exited via a series of wooden staircases some of which are relatively narrow.

4.2 Exterior facing and setting

The exterior facing is relatively modern (1958-63) but follows Wren's original design and is central to the significance of the exterior of the building, as it comprises the majority of the iconic views of the Sheldonian from Broad Street and Cattle Street. These are exposed to weathering, erosion, and potential vandalism, damage which could detract from the significance of the heritage asset.

The slated roof was replaced in 2007 and should be adequate for the foreseeable future, but will be vulnerable to unexpected or extreme weather conditions.

The ongoing alteration of the New Bodleian (forecasted to finish in 2015) will eventually change the character of the eastern end of Broad Street, encouraging greater public interface with the buildings. This will affect the nature of the Sheldonian's interaction with this space and should be monitored; however, the net impact on the Sheldonian's significance will be positive as the alterations will encourage a greater public enjoyment of the space.

4.3 Interior Fixtures and Fittings

Few of the fixtures and fittings are original (though original features are no doubt extant beneath later restoration and alteration) but, whilst most are not, the majority of them have some architectural and historical significance, e.g. Sir Thomas Jackson's organ housing dating from 1876; moreover, the atmosphere and character they create

are integral to the significance of the Sheldonian as a heritage asset (see **Section 3.5.2**). As they are in regular use and of less permanent construction than the external structure of the building, they are more vulnerable to vandalism, accidents, and general wear and tear. Some of these issues should be mitigated assuming adequate security is in place, but ultimately these significant elements will have limited lifespans. These lives can be lengthened as much as possible through regular, adequate monitoring and maintenance.

As a Grade I listed building any interior alterations, or repairs made with non-original materials, will require listed building consent.

4.3.1 Ceiling Paintings

The significance of the ceiling paintings has been established above (see **Section 3.5.3**). These have recently undergone extensive restoration, but because of their age and quality will always remain a vulnerable feature; fortunately they are inaccessible and safe from most accidental harm, but they are inevitably susceptible to craquelure and environmental deterioration, and are particularly vulnerable to fire/smoke hazards. Due to their location, the ceiling paintings will be vulnerable to water damage from any roof leaks that may occur (see **Section 4.2**).

5 CONSERVATION POLICY

Having established the significance of the Sheldonian Theatre as a heritage asset, and having identified ways in which the significance of the Sheldonian is vulnerable to harm, it is necessary to recommend policies to reduce the probability of such harm occurring and thereby conserve the significance of the site. In essence, these policies set parameters for managing the fabric of the site.

The Conservation Plan is intended as an active tool for the regular maintenance and long-term management of the Sheldonian Theatre. It needs to be reviewed regularly, and revised as appropriate to take account of additional knowledge and changing priorities. Through a process of regular review it should continue to act as a useful resource.

5.1 **The Sheldonian's current use, as the primary ceremonial space for the University of Oxford and as a public music venue, is its optimum viable use. Permit, in line with NPPF paragraphs 131, 132, 133, and 134, alterations intended to facilitate its continued use in this way**

The significance of the Sheldonian as the primary ceremonial space for the University of Oxford means that its current rôle represents its optimum viable use. In line with modern standards it can continue to fulfil this function without alteration, however if alteration is required in the future it should be permitted with the following provisos:

- Any alterations must be sympathetic to the Sheldonian's significance as a heritage asset and, in line with NPPF paragraph 134, any proposals that involve 'less than substantial harm to the significance' should deliver 'substantial public benefits.' In line with NPPF paragraph 132, any proposals that involve 'substantial harm or loss' should be 'wholly exceptional.'
- Any changes should: '...preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset' (NPPF paragraph 137).

5.1.1 **Note that the Sheldonian Theatre is a Grade I listed building and ensure that appropriate consents are obtained for any alteration works to the interior or exterior of the building**

The upcoming alterations should preclude the need for any significant changes in the near future, but due to the listed status of the building even minor routine repairs may need consent. Caution should be applied in order to ensure that any statutory duties are fulfilled. In cases of doubt **Estates Services should be contacted in the first instance**, and if necessary they will refer queries on to Oxford City Council.

5.1.2 Ensure proper consultation in advance of any work to the building with the Local Authority Conservation Officer and any other interested parties

It is important to guarantee that the best advice is obtained at an early stage of any proposal to alter any part of the building in order to ensure that the significance of the building is respected.

5.1.3 Refer to this Conservation Guide when considering repairs or alterations in any space

The Conservation Plan gives an overview of which aspects of the building are significant or vulnerable. Where original or significant material is extant, repairs should be carried out using the same materials and techniques and should not affect the significance of the asset without providing substantial public benefits in line with NPPF paragraph 134.

5.2 In order to ensure that the Sheldonian can operate to modern standards, and that its significance can be maintained by making access as wide as possible, special concern should be applied to ensuring that disabled access is adequate

Ensuring that the heritage asset can be enjoyed as widely as possible will have a major positive impact on its significance. Alterations in 1988, 1993, and 1997 (see **Section 2.3**) made aspects of the building more accessible (including external ramps and disabled lavatories) and this should be approached as part of an ongoing process.

5.3 Any redevelopment needs to respect the Conservation Area and the Sheldonian's setting adjacent to several important listed buildings

It has been established that the Sheldonian is significant as an integral aspect of the University's monumental centre at Broad Street East, possessing an important spatial relationship with the Bodleian Complex. Any future alteration should be sympathetic to this fact, and should not diminish its rôle there.

5.4 Conservation of specific features contributing to overall significance

A great deal of the interior fixtures and fittings have some historical significance (see **Section 4.3**). These finishes should be identified and conserved and kept in use where possible in line with **Section 5.1**. It is accepted, however, that all these materials have a natural life span and some degree of change must be permitted to keep the building safe, useable, and generally fit for its primary purpose as a working theatre. Some materials such as the external stone elevations have a very long life expectancy if given minor maintenance; others such as the paint work have undergone various incarnations (the theatre has now enjoyed 8 separate paint schemes) and will need periodic replacement. Within the framework of understanding and valuing what is present in the building a degree of ongoing change is inevitable.

5.4.1 The exterior elevations will remain substantially unchanged

The extant facing of the exterior elevations of the Sheldonian Theatre date from 1958-63 and are sympathetic to the original design. The exterior view of the Sheldonian is vital to its significance as part of the monumental complex at Broad Street East and as an iconic Oxford landmark. Changes to these elevations would substantially affect the character of the building. They will remain unchanged from their initial design, allowing for restoration and repair work as required. The recent interior lighting alterations have successfully highlighted some of the external features of the building without detracting from its character.

5.4.2 The interior will remain largely unchanged

The character of the interior of the building is vital to its significance. Successful recent alterations have returned the interior of the theatre to a state close to its original character, enhancing its significance as a heritage asset. With this in mind, and taking into account the allowances made in **Section 5.1**, the interior will remain largely unchanged from its current state, allowing for restoration and repair work as required. A notable exception remains the parquet floor of the auditorium, which is a recent addition and not of significance.

5.4.3 Robert Streeter's restored ceiling paintings are integral to the character and significance of the heritage asset and will remain largely unchanged

The ceiling paintings are now in something akin to their original condition and contribute significantly to the character of the space, drawing the eye immediately upon entrance. Beyond their artistic significance, their bright and hopeful demeanour contributes to the sense of light and openness required by the boulevartion-influenced design and facilitated by the ample windows and clear central space. Loss or alteration of these would negatively affect the character of the space and they will be retained *in situ* and conserved as required.

5.5 In the vein of NPPF paragraph 110, efforts should be made to ensure that the Sheldonian Theatre's contribution to climate change is as minimal as is feasible for a building of its age, size, materials, and use. Any proposals for alterations should assess the feasibility of incorporating low and zero carbon technologies

Ensuring that the building is sustainable will be crucial to its long-term survival and significance. As stated in NPPF paragraph 110, development should seek to 'minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment.'

5.6 A disaster recovery plan will be prepared for the building and will be regularly reviewed to keep it up to date

This is a significant building with internal contents of particular value and significance. It is imperative for the safety of the building that a clear disaster recovery plan exists.

5.6.1 The provision of emergency escape routes from the cupola, roof space, and galleries should be reviewed and if necessary improved

These spaces are publically accessible but are difficult to escape in the event of emergency as the exits are all located on the ground floor or basement level. The feasibility of improving the provision of emergency exits without causing substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset should be reviewed.

5.7 If during subsequent renovations or alterations any evacuation work is carried out beneath the Sheldonian or surrounding paved area an archaeological assessment will be made of the potential for significant finds, and if appropriate an archaeologist will be given a watching brief as the excavation takes place

There is the potential for significant archaeological material across the site and should any evacuation work be carried out an assessment of the archaeological potential should be made. This should include at least a desk assessment, but possibly geophysics and trial trenching. A watching brief will almost certainly be required for any such work.

5.8 A good practice of routine recording, investigation, and maintenance will be enacted and sustained. Such an approach will minimise the need for larger repairs or other interventions and will usually represent the most economical way of retaining an asset

5.8.1 Estates Services (or its agents) will ensure that a senior member of staff has responsibility for the administration and recording of a routine maintenance programme for the building

All buildings need to be routinely maintained if they are to stay in good condition. This requires a detailed maintenance programme and, critically, someone who is responsible for ensuring that the routine operations are carried out. A proper record of the repair and maintenance work in a maintenance log is a useful management tool. Such information will be recorded in the Estates Management software package *Planon*.

5.8.2 A detailed routine maintenance programme will be prepared for the building

Maintenance is best carried out as a series of planned operations. A well thought-out and properly-administered maintenance programme may appear to be time-consuming but will result in a better-functioning building with less need for emergency repairs.

5.8.3 The Conservation Plan will be circulated to all senior staff who work in the Sheldonian Theatre and to all other members of the University who have responsibility for the building or the collection

The value of the building needs to be appreciated by all the senior staff managing or working in the building. Only in this way will the heritage asset be properly treated, repaired, and maintained.

5.8.4 The Conservation Plan will be made available to Oxford City Council, English Heritage, and any other party with a legitimate interest in the building

The Conservation Plan is intended to be a useful document to inform all parties with a legitimate interest in the building.

5.9 The Conservation Plan will be reviewed and updated from time to time as work is carried out on the building or as circumstances change. The recommendations should be reviewed at least at five-yearly intervals

Policy changes, building alterations, or other changes of circumstance, will affect the conservation duties and requirements of the building. The policy recommendations in the Conservation Plan will inform the future of the building and should be a useful tool for people carrying out maintenance work or where more significant alterations are being considered. The recommendations need to be kept up to date if they are to remain relevant.

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6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*.
- *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservations Areas) Act 1990*.

6.2 Planning Applications and Supporting Documents

- *Application 10/02206/LBC: Proposed Redecoration of the Main Auditorium* , Estates Services (August 2010):
 - *Heritage Impact Assessment*, Estates Services (August 2010).
 - *The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford: Auditorium and Circulation Spaces: Architectural Paint Research Archive Report*, Crick Smith (December 2008 – April 2010)
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6.3 Other Documents

- *Broad Street Oxford: The Plan*, Kim Wilkie Associates (November, 2004).
- Bettley, J., *Sir Thomas Graham Jackson, Bart., R.A., 1835-1924, An Exhibition of his Oxford Buildings, Examination Schools, Oxford*, 1983 (Oxford, 1983).
- Salter, H.E., and Lobel, M.D., (eds.), 'The Sheldonian Theatre', *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 3: The University of Oxford* (1954), 50-54.
- *The Sheldonian Theatre: Conservation Plan*, TFT Cultural Heritage (June 2002).

6.4 Websites

- Sheldonian Theatre website:
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<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, accessed 25.08.2010.
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http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/_data/assets/image/0003/65856/12a-Bodleian-Libraries-birds-eye-view.jpg, accessed 26.08.2010.

- Wikipedia Commons:
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- Estates Services website:
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<http://www.chem.ox.ac.uk/oxfordtour/sheldonian/sheldonian.html>, accessed 26.08.2010 (This contains a useful three-dimensional panoramic view of the interior of the theatre).
- English Heritage, Heritage Gateway:
<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway>, accessed on 31.08.2010 (resource includes public access to Listed Building descriptions).

6.5 Image Credits

- Figure 1: adapted from *New Bodleian Library: Historic Impact Assessment*, Purcell Miller Tritton (March, 2010).
- Figure 2: adapted from *New Bodleian Library: Design and Access Statement*, Wilkinson Eyre Associates (March, 2010).
- Figure 3: Wikipedia Commons:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4d/Christopher_Wren_by_Godfrey_Kneller_1711.jpg, accessed 26.08.2010.
- Figure 4: Estates Services website:
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/estates/conservation/sheldonian.shtml>, accessed 26.08.2010.
- Figure 5: Sheldonian Theatre website:
http://www.ox.ac.uk/subsite/sheldonian_theatre/sheldonian_theatre/about_the_theatre/, accessed 25.08.2010.

7 APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Listed Building Description

Building Name:	The Sheldonian Theatre	LBS Number:	245362
Parish:	Oxford	Grade:	I
District:	Oxford	Date Listed:	12 January 1954
County:	Oxfordshire	Date Delisted:	
Postcode:	OX1 3AZ	National Grid Reference:	SP5152106442

Listing

Text:

1. BROAD STREET
 1485
 (South Side)
 The Sheldonian Theatre
 SP 5106 SE 9/148 12.1.54.

I GV

2.

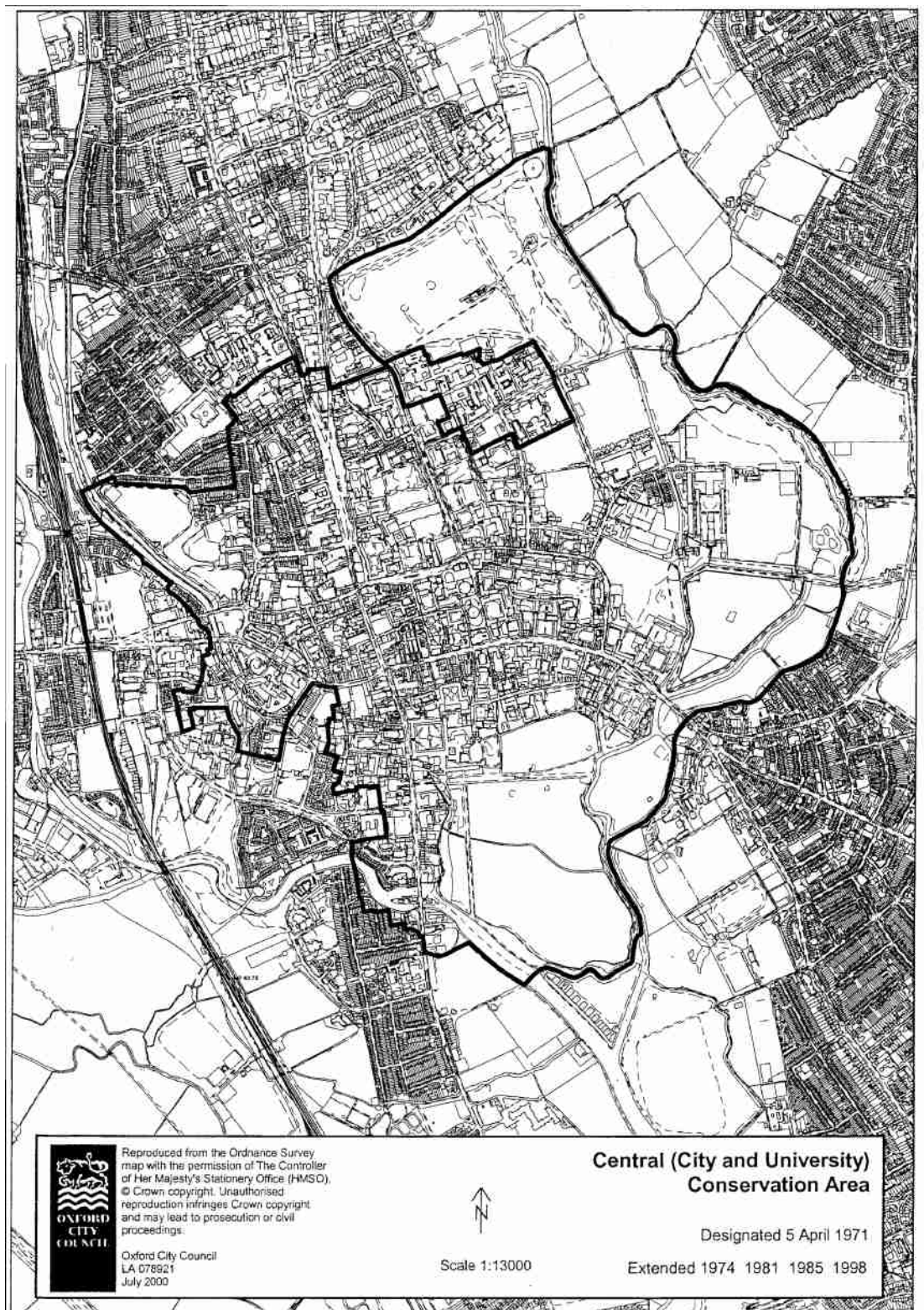
RCHM 2. Built in 1664-69 at the cost of Archbishop Seldon to the designs of Wren. Thomas Robinson was master-mason with Arthur Frogley, master-carpenter. The stone used came from Headington (the ground storeys,) Burford and Barrington, while the upper stages were built in Taynton Stone. The whole South elevation is in original Barrington stone in the upper stage with Windrud stone in the lower stage. The upper stage of the semi-circular North elevation was refaced in Bath stone, probably in 1838, and since partly refaced in Clipsham stone. The cornices and balustrades have also been repaired in Clipsham stone at various times. The original stone-carving was by William Byrd and the wood-work by William and Richard Clere. The ceiling was painted by Robert Streater; an early example of English illusionist decoration.

Exeter College, The Old Ashmolean Building, The Sheldonian Theatre and The Old Clarendon Building form a group with The Indian Institute, Catte Street.

Listing NGR: SP5151906448

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Appendix 2: Conservation Area Description



Central Conservation Area, No. 5

The historic centre of Oxford forms one of the masterpieces of European architectural heritage. It is also a major regional commercial centre. Many of

its historic buildings still function for the purpose for which they were built, and provide accommodation for the University of Oxford and its colleges.

From small beginnings as a settlement in the Saxon period, Oxford grew by the 11th century into one of the largest towns in England and a major trade centre. The Norman conquest brought the construction of the Castle and the establishment of major religious houses. The infant University arose in the 12th century and gradually grew into a major force in the city's life. The Saxons' rigid street layout and the fixed line of the 13th century defensive walls, together with the floodable river valleys, largely determined the plan of the historic centre as it is today. The gentle curve of the High Street, the great market place of St Giles and the older churches, together with the post-medieval timber-framed houses, belong to the town rather than the gown.

The University as it expanded, colonised the eastern half of the town with colleges and halls, building quadrangles of medieval and post-medieval gothic buildings, both within and without the walled town. The growth of the University's central institutions is well shown by the magnificent group of buildings situated between Broad Street and St Mary's Church. This group began in the 15th century with the building of the Divinity School and the Duke Humphrey's Library, a nucleus which expanded in the 17th century with the addition of the Schools' Quadrangle, Convocation House and Sheldonian Theatre. The group was further extended in the 18th century by the addition of the Old Clarendon Building and Radcliffe Camera to form a sequence of buildings and spaces of the highest architectural and historic interest, that today form the visual heart of the conservation area. Aspects of Oxford's 19th and 20th century change and growth may be illustrated by the considerable additions made to University and College buildings in Victorian and recent times, by the vigorous commercial and shopping centre, and by the welcome fact that the presence of the University ensures that many upper floors of buildings in the conservation area are in use for residential purposes, rather than unoccupied as in some historic towns.

Thomas Sharp, in his report to the City Council, published in 1948 as *Oxford Replanned*, set out and defined Oxford's special physical and architectural character and stressed its virtues and problems in a 20th century context. The Council, in its Review of the Development Plan, approved in 1967, approved much of the central area as an area of great historic value, and since 1962 the Council has protected the prospect of the city's unique skyline with its high buildings policy. The complementary views out of the city to its open country background have been similarly protected by the Green Belt and other policies.

The Council designated a large part of the central area as a conservation area in 1971. An extension taking in the Folly Bridge riverside was designated on 28th May 1974, a second extension covering part of Walton Street, Fisher Row and lower St Aldate's was designated on 23rd February 1981, while a third covering Cornmarket and Queen Street was designated on 29th April 1985. On 9th December 1998, a fourth extension was made to the conservation area taking in part of the St Thomas' area, the University

Observatory adjacent to University Parks and Magdalen College School playing field.

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Appendix 3: Chronology of the Sheldonian Theatre

March 1663	University approaches City about possible sites for theatre
29 April 1663	Sir Christopher Wren presents his model for the theatre at the Royal Society
1664	University obtains lease of land and tenements in Canditch
1664	Bishop Sheldon donates £1000, which fails to attract further donors, resulting in him eventually donating the entire cost of £12,200
26 July 1664	Foundation stone laid
14 Sept 1666	William Bird begins carving capitals and keystones
1667	Exterior largely completed
1667	Nearby houses demolished to improve setting
1668	Ceilings painted by Robert Streeter, serjeant-painter to the court of Charles II
1669	Interior painting completed by Richard Hawkins at the cost of £235 3s 1d
9 July 1669	Encaenia and first opening of the Sheldonian Theatre
1671	First permanent organ installed by Bernard Schmidt
1687	James II criticises the ceiling decoration: "Twas a pity Varrio did not paint it".
1720	William Townsend inspects the roof and finds it in fine condition
1720- 27	Interior repainted by Witherington
1720- 27	New organ installed by Renatus Harris
10 July 1733	George Frederic Handel conducts a performance in the Theatre of his oratorio <i>Athalia</i>
1737	Statues of Archbishop Sheldon, the Duke of Ormonde, and King Charles II are carved by Henry Cheere. Removed 1958-63 due to their poor condition
1761- 62	Interior repainted by Tilly Kettle
1767- 68	Sash windows replace originals
1790s	Large-scale redecoration and repair
1801- 02	New roof constructed by George Saunders and ceiling repainted by William Delamotte
1826	Interior repainted and gilded by Dixon
1838	Edward Blore designs current cupola
1838 or 1868	Stonework refaced and heads of the "metaphysic sages" restored
1858	New organ installed by Henry Willis

1876	Current organ case installed by Sir Thomas Jackson
1880	Proposal to introduce electric lighting rejected
1890	Sir Thomas Jackson undertakes restoration work on the exterior elevations. Further work undertaken in 1910-11
1899-1901	Robert J. Nairn carries out minor repairs to nine of the paintings
1906	New rostrum-staircase constructed
1911	One bay of west front refaced. Cornices of west and north fronts repaired
1934	Electric lighting installed after half a century of debate
1935	Structural alterations: wider exits from Upper Gallery and fire-proof staircases
1936	Galleries reconstructed with steel columns and teak joists
1954	Sheldonian Theatre designated a Grade I listed building
1958-63	Extensive repairs and restoration including introduction of current windows, refacing of all elevations, and rebuilding of parapets and balustrading at roof level
1961-63	Following various extensions, organ case reduced to its current size
1972	Michael Black carves extant heads of "metaphysic sages"
1972	Exterior walls and railings designated as Grade I listed
1988	Basement altered with additional lavatories and a new room for the conductor. Disabled lavatories built on ground floor
1991	External gravel surfaces upgraded with Riven York Stone paving slabs
1993	York Stone pavement and surrounding cobbled areas reconstructed to provide wheelchair ramp
1995	Signage on main gate piers replaced with inscription reading: "THEATRVM SHELDONIANVM"
1997	Paving outside south-west door raised to provide wheelchair access
1998	The present digital organ, a gift from Robert Venables QC, is installed by J. Wood & Sons Ltd
2004	Painted ceiling panels removed for conservation and repair
2005	Basement altered to incorporate staff room, involving the creation of a new internal doorway
2007	Slated roofs overhauled
July-Nov 2008	Repaired ceiling paintings reinstated
2010	New lighting scheme and original paint scheme introduced

Appendix 4:

CHECKLIST OF SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

This checklist is intended for the use of those working or planning work on the building. It highlights features of architectural significance within the Sheldonian Theatre; these may be original features or new additions that nevertheless contribute positively to the character of the building. As this is a Grade I listed building any repair or alteration work to factors that contribute to the significance of the building will require listed building consent in order to avoid prosecution under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. **If planned work will likely affect any of the aspects featured in the list below advice should immediately be sought from the Building Conservation Team at Estates Services.**

The checklist lists both general significant features that affect the building as a whole and which should be held in mind if working in any space, and specific features of particular significance that should receive special regard if working in these particular spaces. The Further Information column refers to the relevant page reference in the Conservation Plan proper.

The Sheldonian Theatre, Building No. 236		
SIGNIFICANT FEATURE	✓	Further Information
General:		
External railings, boundary walls, and heads of the “metaphysic sages”		Separately Grade I listed LBS No. 245363
External elevations		p.13-14, 19, 21
Exterior of cupola		p.10, 13-14, 19, 21
External slated roofs and internal roof space		p.10, 13-14, 19, 21
Windows throughout		p.10, 13-14, 19, 21
Internal paintwork and decoration throughout		p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
Lighting scheme and fittings		p.10, 16-17, 18, 21
Seating and seating scheme throughout		p.16-17, 18, 21
Balustrades, banisters, and handrails throughout		p.16-17, 18, 21
Specific Features:		
External Elevations:		
-External carvings		p.13-14, 19, 21
-External stone facing		p.13-14, 19, 21
-External balustrades		p.13-14, 19, 21
-External timber doors		p.13-14, 19, 21
-Windows at all levels		p.13-14, 19, 21
Auditorium:		
-Wall painting and paint scheme		p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Ceiling paintings and their settings		p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Organ and organ housing		p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23

-Pillars, moulding, and panelling on Upper Gallery	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Pillars, moulding, and panelling on Ladies Gallery	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Plastered vault over Ladies Gallery	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Seating in circle and on galleries	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Internal carving and moulding including lion's heads and fasces above internal doors	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Internal timber doors	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Balustrades, banisters, and handrails	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
-Windows at all levels	p.10-11, 16-17, 20, 23
Roof space:	
-Timber beams	p.10, 13-14, 19, 21
-Timber flooring	p.10, 13-14, 19, 21
-Windows	p.10, 13-14, 19, 21

PRIOR TO UNDERTAKING ANY REPAIRS OR ALTERATIONS ON THE ABOVE-LISTED ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES, CONTACT THE CONSERVATION TEAM AT ESTATES SERVICES ON (01865) (2)78750

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