MANCHESTER 1824

The University of Manchester

PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL

DIRECTORATE OF ESTATES

DESIGN SERVICES UNIT

PROJECT NO. 5828

SAMUEL ALEXANDER BUILDING CLASSICS – ERECTION OF A BLUE PLAQUE DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

1.0 Introduction

This statement has been prepared in conjunction with informal advice with Mr Paul Mason on 25th June 2012.

2.0 Historical Context

The Samuel Alexander building is the University Faculty of Arts. The building was by Percy Scott Worthington of Manchester Architects Practise Thomas Worthington and Son and was opened in 1919.

The building provides a teaching environment in which language learners exercise and develop their linguistic vocabulary, reading, writing listening and speaking skills.

The building is listed grade II.

The Faculty of Arts building was a major commission for Percy Scott Worthington, knighted in 1935, who was a partner in the family firm of Thomas Worthington and Son (his father, the architect Thomas Worthington, died in 1909). Work commenced in 1911, but progressed slowly due to the onset of World War I. At the opening ceremony on 7 November 1919, the University of Manchester conferred the degree of doctor of letters upon Worthington. The neo-classical building was subsequently positively reviewed in an article in the 1920 Architectural Review, and, together with his Masonic Temple in Manchester, it was cited as a principal work when Worthington was awarded a gold medal in 1930 from RIBA.
In 1925 the sculptor Jacob Epstein produced a bronze bust of Samuel Alexander, Professor of Philosophy at the university from 1893. It stands in the central entrance hall and the building was renamed the Samuel Alexander Building in 2007.

The Central main entrance opening into a full-height entrance hall dividing the building into two halves; each half with rooms opening off long corridors; east and west wings terminating in lecture rooms; a central lecture room located behind the entrance hall and projecting to the rear.

EXTERIOR: Symmetrical front elevation facing north-north-west (hereafter referred to as north for ease of description). Two-storeys and a basement. Central flight of stone steps up to projecting, full-height, Portland stone portico; two Roman Doric columns, entablature with FACULTY OF ARTS inscribed and picked out in gold on the frieze, and triangular pediment above. Door architrave incorporates the date 1919 in Roman numerals, and a relief carving of two putti holding a wreath encompassing a serpent

(which features on the university coat of arms), with the university motto ARDUS AD SOLEM (striving towards the sun) inscribed over. Architrave cornice with consoles, empty niche over with console. Projecting stone lion masks on pediment are echoed in the two angular bronze lion masks attached to the double panelled doors, which have part-glazed inner doors beyond. To each side of the portico are five bays with the first floor set back from the single-storey ground-floor sections, flanked by projecting three-bay end pavilions, all built of brick in English garden bond, with the plinth/basement level, entablatures and parapets of Portland stone. End pavilions articulated by giant brick pilasters, with six-over-nine pane sash windows on ground and first floors. Single-storey ground-floor bays have parapets incorporating stone balustrading, and stone architraves to the six-over-six pane sash windows. Six-over-six pane sash windows to the set-back, first-floor bays.

East and west wings of three-storeys and basement, with eight bays to the east wing and nine bays to the west wing. Brick-built with brick parapets. Five north bays of both wings project slightly, articulated by giant brick pilasters rising through ground and first-floor levels. Portland stone plinths and entablature band over pilasters. Second-floor level of east wing has central brick niche flanked to each side by two windows separated by an oval stone medallion. West wing has five windows at second-floor level, interspersed with oval stone medallions. Six-over-nine pane sashes on ground and first floors, six-over-six pane sashes on second floors.

INTERIOR: Central entrance hall is top-lit with two Ionic columns of Portland stone at either end supporting an entablature and a coffered barrel roof. The floor is paved with stone flags primarily laid diagonally with black stone squares at the intersections. At the south end is a first-floor balcony with white painted metal balustrades incorporating laurel leaf motifs and bronze handrails. It is reached by symmetrical staircases, with similar balustrades, bronze handrails and newels, rising east and west from the hall to half landings before returning to a central doorway opening onto the balcony. To each side of the hall are two doorways with original half-glazed doors flanking a central, tall, round-headed opening, with glazed double doors and fan light, leading through to a wide corridor. To rear of the hall is a round-headed doorway leading through to symmetrical east and west staircases descending to the basement level with two sets of fielded-panel double doors opening into the large, central lecture room from quarter-space landings with ceiling domes containing circular bronze ceiling lights. The lecture room rises through basement and ground-floor levels. Towards the rear of the entrance hall is a bronze bust of Samuel Alexander by Jacob Epstein, dated 1925. It is set on a rectangular marble plinth; the layout of the original stone flags has been altered to accommodate the plinth. Features of note in the entrance hall include four original suspended bronze lanterns, circular bronze ceiling lights above and below the balcony, a copy of a section of the Parthenon Frieze above the entrance doorway, and notice boards. The lecture room has a coffered ceiling with modillion cornicing and original square bronze ceiling lights.

The wide corridors leading off to east and west on the ground floor are lit by high semi-circular windows in circular openings, with round-headed arcades to either side, some openings containing fielded-panel office doors with bottom-hinged opening fanlights, some blind. The corridors on the first floor have rooms on one side only, with similar doors with opening fanlights,

and sash windows on the other, interspersed with copies of sections of the Parthenon Frieze. On both floors the corridors return through round-headed archways in a southerly direction. Second-floor corridors are barrel-vaulted and top-lit, also with copies of sections of the Parthenon Frieze. Features of note include the wooden parquet flooring and original bronze ceiling, wall, and suspended lights which light the corridors and staircases.

Individual rooms have parquet flooring, some with wooden corner mantelpieces (all now boarded), and decorative banding to the plaster ceilings. There have been some removals of sub-dividing walls to increase room sizes. Some larger rooms (mostly lecture rooms) have modern suspended ceilings containing lighting and projection equipment beneath the plaster ceilings, whilst others have modern strip lighting. The basement lavatories have been refitted.

The 1950s west extension is not of special interest. The two c.1970 ranges which run eastwards from the west extension and are linked on the east side by a covered corridor are not of special interest.

3.0 Proposed Use

The purpose of the project is to erect a commemorative blue plaque to commemorate the life and works of the writer and composer Anthony Burgess.

4.0 Layout

The Plaque is to be placed on the brickwork on one side of the old wing entrance doors between the windows.

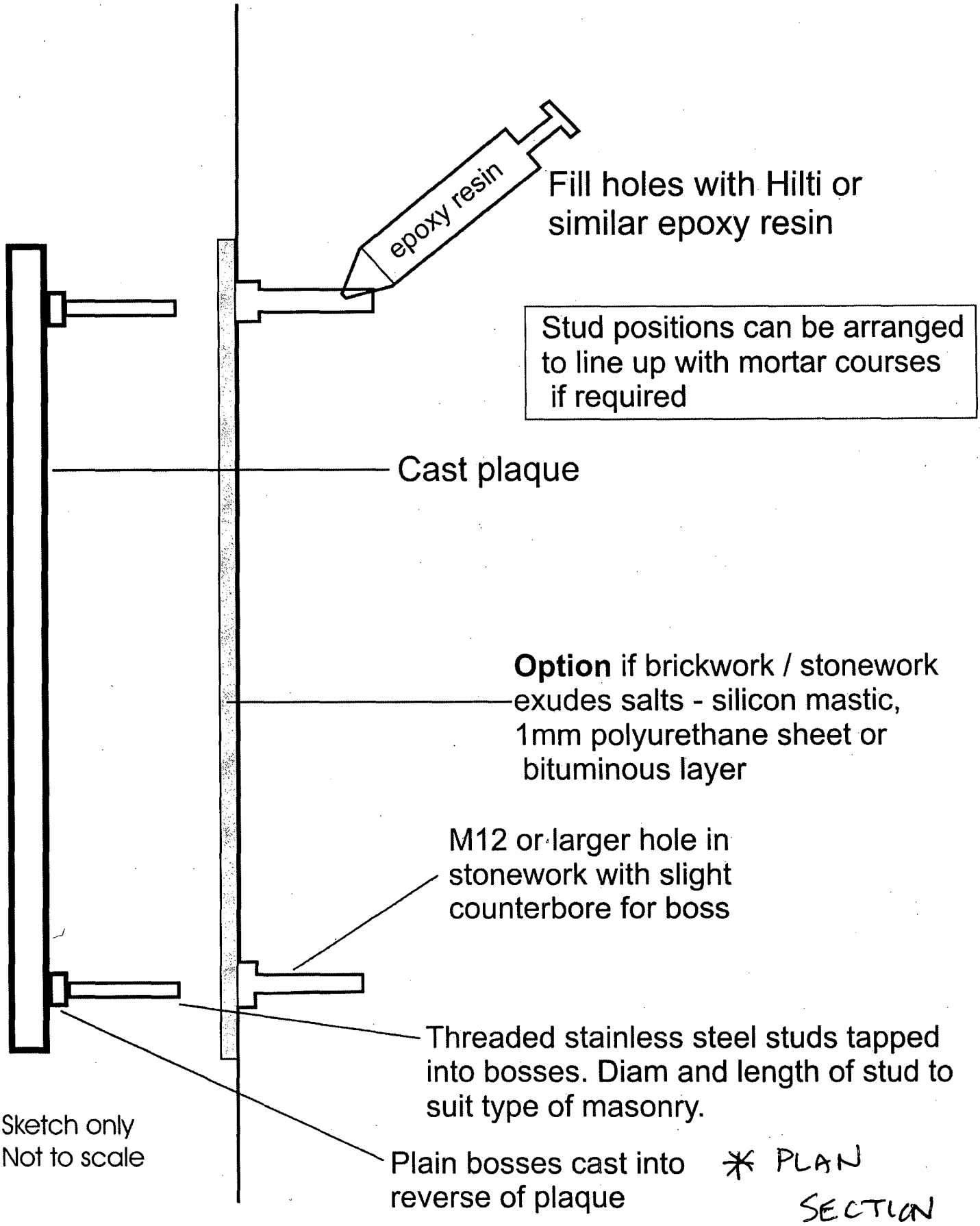
5.0 Appearance

The Blue Plaque is 450 mm in diameter and 13 mm in thickness and made from cast aluminium with a wet sprayed acrylic paint finish, which will not fade with the effects of sunlight. The plaque will be fixed with concealed resin anchor bolts into mortar joints (see attached drawing).

8.0 Conclusion

The design of the plaque is consistent with the Blue plaques installed around the campus in recent years.

Typical fixing detail for face-fixed wall-mounted plaque using concealed fixings



If you have a plaque fixing problem, please ring
Leander Architectural - Buxton, Derbyshire & Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, Powys
01298-814941 (Buxton) or 01691-780078 (Powys)