

**External Masonry Conservation and Cleaning to
John Rylands Library, Manchester**

Heritage, Design and Access Statement
For The University of Manchester
September 2022

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1.0 Summary of Heritage, Design and Access Statement

1.1 Introduction

Donald Insall Associates was commissioned by The University of Manchester in August 2022 to develop proposals for the John Rylands Library in Manchester. This statement has been prepared in support of an application for listed building consent for external masonry conservation and cleaning.

1.2 The Building, its Legal Status and Policy Context

John Rylands Library is a Grade I-listed building located in the Deansgate/Peter Street Conservation Area within the city centre of Manchester. Alterations to a listed building generally require listed building consent; development in conservation areas or within the setting of a listed building or conservation area requires local authorities to assess the implications of proposals on built heritage.

The statutory list description of the listed building is included in Appendix I and a summary of the Conservation Area provided by the local planning authority is in Appendix II.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is the legislative basis for decision-making on applications that relate to the historic environment. Section 16 of the Act imposes statutory duties upon local planning authorities which, with regard to listed buildings, require the planning authority to have '*special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses*' and, in respect of conservation areas, that '*special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area*'.

The courts have held that following the approach set out in the policies on the historic environment in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 will effectively result in a decision-maker complying with its statutory duties. The Framework forms a material consideration for the purposes of section 38(6). The key message of the NPPF is the concept of 'sustainable development' which for the historic environment means that heritage assets 'should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance'.

The NPPF recognises that, in some cases, the significance of a designated heritage asset can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. The NPPF therefore states that any harm or loss to a designated heritage asset 'should require clear and convincing justification' and that any 'less than substantial' harm caused to the significance of a designated heritage asset should be weighed against the benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use. A designated heritage asset is defined as a World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area.

1.3 Summary of Project Brief

The John Rylands Library is managed by the University of Manchester. The University is responsible for maintaining and managing the building whilst also protecting the significance of the heritage asset. The proposals seek to address the following:

- Excessive growth of moss and algae in specific locations on the external elevations
- Loss of mortar from stonework joints in isolated locations
- Damaged stonework to two window dressings on the south (Spinningfields) elevation

A more detailed description is included in Section 5.1.

1.4 Summary Assessment of Significance

The John Rylands Library is of extremely high significance, and this is recognised through its statutory listing at Grade-I. The building holds exceptional levels of historical and aesthetic value along with high communal and evidential values.

A more detailed description is included in Section 4.

1.5 Summary of Proposals and Justification

The proposals seek to address the issue of internal dampness and impact on the building's aesthetic values through a careful programme of targeted masonry cleaning, repointing in appropriate lime-based mortar and stone indent repairs.

The current issues impact on the building's aesthetic values through the detrimental visual effect on the external elevations. These issues also impact the overall significance of the building through the risk of internal damage caused by moisture ingress and accelerated decay of the historic fabric. It is the aim of the proposals to address these issues threatening the existing heritage values, thereby having a positive impact on the building's significance.

External cleaning and masonry conservation have the potential to harm the heritage values of an asset if not undertaken carefully and correctly. In order to avoid any potential harm the University has appointed a specialist conservation architect (Donald Insall Associates). Donald Insall Associates have undertaken thorough research and prepared a robust specification with a 'conservation approach' to ensure appropriate techniques are employed and that replacement materials are carefully selected, in order to protect the buildings significance.

Pre-application advice has been sought from the local authority conservation officer and the advice has been incorporated into the development of the proposals.

1.6 Conclusion

The proposals are considered justified in order to prevent further deterioration of the fabric and safeguard the building's heritage values. This is in line with the policies of the 2015 Conservation Management Plan.

The impact of the proposals on the significance of the building has been assessed. It is considered that with the correct approach and methods of control, the proposals will be of benefit to the significance through the protection of historic fabric and the enhancement of the existing aesthetic values.

The proposals will also be of benefit in terms of protecting the historic fabric in the future. Detailed records of the approved techniques and materials will be kept in order to provide the University with a robust specification and methodology which can help inform future repairs and maintenance.

2.0 Historical Background

2.1 Site and Context

A full and detailed description of the building, its site and context is included within the Conservation Management Plan of 2015 and is included in Appendix IV.

The John Rylands Library was founded in the late nineteenth century by Mrs Enriqueta Augusta Rylands in memory of her late husband, the successful cotton entrepreneur, John Rylands. The John Rylands library is one of the finest neo-Gothic buildings in Europe and was designed by the architect Basil Champneys. John Rylands was a dedicated non-conformist and his widow was especially concerned about supporting and improving the moral and spiritual condition of the people of Manchester. Mrs Rylands chose the site for the library in Deansgate, which at that time was one of the less affluent areas of the city, in the hope that the library would act as a catalyst for urban improvement.

The establishment of the library needs to be understood within the context of the development of the city of Manchester at that time. During the mid-nineteenth century Manchester had risen to a position of commercial eminence, thanks to the booming trades that had grown out of the Industrial Revolution, in particular the cotton industry. The city was growing in confidence and this period saw a dedicated effort to build libraries, art galleries, museums, civic parks and educational institutions.

The building was inaugurated in 1899, after nine years of construction, and welcomed its first readers in 1890. The building and its collections have remained accessible to members of the public since that time. The library became the responsibility of the University in 1972 and remains open to the public, free of charge, today.

The John Rylands library was included on the statutory list at Grade-I in 1952. This decision, taken at a time when appreciation for Victorian architecture was generally very low, is testament to the enduring appreciation felt for the building as a piece of architecture and a cultural institution. Manchester City Council identified the library as a 'landmark building' and designated the area within which it sits as the Deansgate/Peter Street Conservation area in 1985.

2.2 The Building

The building has been described as a final flourishing of neo-Gothic, a style which was already falling from favour in the 1890's. The architect, Basil Champneys, was known for employing a Gothic style. Through her choice of architect and close involvement with the design it has been said that Mrs Rylands wished to gift to the city of Manchester a piece of instant cultural heritage, which would rival the ancient seats of learning that are the Oxford Colleges.

The building is constructed from Barbary Plain red sandstone, from Cumberland, which was specifically selected for its uniform colour and hard-wearing properties. With the exception of the roof there was no steel employed in the original building and the soundness of construction and lack of 'trickery or flimsiness' was noted by contemporary architects at the time.

The building is generally rectangular with the primary elevation situated on the narrow frontage facing Deansgate. This is flanked by two longer elevations along Spinningfields and Wood Street. Due to the dense, urban character of the site the building was designed with the principal first floor spaces set back from the street edges in order to afford them better daylight and provide a buffer from street noise. The style of the building is strongly neo-Gothic with elaborate detailing and highly ecclesiastical character.

The original 1899 building has been extended a number of times in the last century; in 1920, 1957 and in 2005 (which replaced an earlier extension from the 1970s).

3.0 Site Survey Descriptions

3.1 The Setting of the Building

3.1.1 The Wider Setting

The Deansgate/Peter Street Conservation Area lies within the city centre of Manchester. The area is mostly flat with the predominant street being Deansgate, a long, straight road running south-west to north-east. The area is densely packed with buildings and the lack of a regular pattern of roads results in interesting building forms, many with acute and oblique angles and corner entrances. Today the library is surrounded by a mixture of twentieth and twenty-first century office and mixed-use buildings.

3.1.2 The Immediate Setting

The library occupies a roughly rectangular plot oriented east-west and bounded by roads on three sides. Wood Street to the north is a narrow road which is mainly used as a thoroughfare and access for delivery vehicles. Deansgate is a busy road for both vehicular traffic and pedestrians and experiences the heaviest footfall, although the main entrance to the library is now via the 2005 extension to the south-west. Following demolition in the mid-twentieth century Spinningfields has adopted a much more open character and recent public realm developments along this street have created pleasant and generous pedestrian area which leads to the library's new main entrance.

3.2 The original 1899 Building

3.2.1 External Description

The elevations are constructed of Barbary Plain red sandstone. The east (Deansgate) elevation is characterised by 'lacey and elaborate' neo-Gothic detailing and twin towers at either end. The street frontage is delineated by ornate bronze railings in an Arts & Crafts style. This elevation contrasts with the more solid north and south elevations which are punctuated with regular bays and deeply recessed openings.

The roofs are a mixture of pitched, slate roofs and flat, asphalt roofs.

3.2.2 Condition

There are issues with moss and algae build-up on sky facing slopes such as flying buttresses and piers, particularly to the elevation to Wood Street which is sheltered and does not get direct sunlight. Generally the areas with the highest concentration of moss and algae are the basement and ground floor levels of the building.

In some locations there are open joints within the stonework, some of which have been caused by moss roots pulling mortar out of joints. The open joints are contributing the ingress of moisture into the building and a damp internal environment.

There are numerous instances of historic cracking, much of which has been pointed with inappropriate, black-coloured mortar.

There are two instances of damage and missing stonework to window dressings BW49(S) and GW52(S) on the Spinningfields elevation.

4.0 Assessment of Significance

4.1 Significance

A full and detailed assessment of the significance of the building is included within the Conservation Management Plan of 2015 and is located in Appendix IV.

The status of the John Rylands Library at Grade-I reflects the exceptional importance of the building both nationally and internationally. This level of protection particularly reflects the high levels historical and architectural value the building has.

4.2 Historical Value

The 1899 library is considered to be of exceptionally high historical significance due to its association with the Rylands family, a leading industrialist family of the time much associated with patronage and philanthropic endeavours in Manchester. Contributing to this historical value is the association the notable artists Charles Kempe and John Cassidy, along with Basil Champneys, who is a celebrated late nineteenth century architect working in the Gothic revival style. The rare collections of books within the library are also of extremely high historical value.

4.3 Aesthetic Value

The 1899 library is considered to be of exceptionally high aesthetic value as a secular building with such expressive neo-Gothic style, which is recognised as one of the finest examples in Europe. The building encompasses Basil Champneys' unique blend of elaborate Gothic rival detailing infused with Art Nouveau freedom.

4.4 Communal Value

The 1899 library is considered to have high communal value for its contribution to the street scene and the architectural character of Manchester City Centre. It is highly distinctive building which many local people will identify with and feel a close connection to. Contributing to its communal value is also the value placed upon the building by members of the University and the generations of scholars who have used the building.

4.5 Evidential Value

The 1899 library is considered to have high evidential value for the way it contributes to ones understanding of the past through the evolution of the building and its phasing. Evidential value is present within the historic fabric of the building, particularly elements which have been concealed by later phases such as original wall finishes.

5.0 Client Brief, Proposals and Policies

5.1 Client Brief

The John Rylands Library is managed by the University of Manchester, whose role it is to manage and maintain the building whilst protecting the significance of the heritage asset.

The 2022 Condition Survey noted open joints in the stonework and excessive moss growth on the outside of the building which is thought to be contributing to the dampness. The 2022 Condition Report is included in Appendix V. The moss is having a detrimental impact on the historic fabric by contributing to the loss of mortar from stonework joints and retaining moisture on the surface of the stone, which can lead to accelerated decay.

The University also have a duty to protect the aesthetic values of the building and ensure the building continues to contribute positively to the street scene and the character area. There are a number of elements which are currently having an unacceptable negative impact on areas of the external elevations which include excessive moss and algae growth, previous unsympathetic mortar repairs and damage to sandstone window dressings.

5.2 Proposals

The University of Manchester wish to protect and enhance the internal conditions and the historic fabric of the building by addressing the elements which are currently having a detrimental impact on the external elevations. The proposals for addressing these issues are as follows:

- a. Erection of a free-standing scaffold to three sides of the 1899 building in order to provide safe access for closer inspection and undertaking of conservation work
- b. Careful cleaning of masonry using the 'Doff' steam system in areas of excessive moss and algae growth, taking care not to 'over clean' these areas and ensure they blend in with remaining areas of uncleaned masonry
- c. Isolated repointing of open joints in a suitable lime-based mortar which matches the original mortar in softness, porosity and appearance as closely as possible
- d. Indent repairs to two small areas of damaged window dressings on the Spinningfields elevation using a red sandstone which matches the existing in mineralogical characteristics and appearance as far as possible. The original Barbary Plain red sandstone is unfortunately no-longer available.

A thorough specification has been prepared to control the works which is included in Appendix VI. This specification has been developed with a 'conservation approach', adhering to best practice guidance for cleaning historic buildings and utilising detailed analysis of the existing materials. A report on the analysis and suggested replacement mix for the existing mortar is included in Appendix VII.

The University has appointed specialist conservation architects (Donald Insall Associates) to develop the proposals, monitor the works on site and liaise with the local authority conservation officer to ensure that the significance of the building is protected and enhanced through the works. The contractors and subcontractors will be selected on the basis of their expertise and experience in all elements of the proposals to ensure that the work undertaken is of the highest quality and protects the building's heritage values.

The specification ensures that the level of intervention and selection of materials will be appropriate for the building through the use of multiple samples, trial panels and continued dialogue with the local authority conservation officer.

5.3 Policies

The proposals are in line with the following policies from the 2015 Conservation Management Plan:

4.3. Policy: Cyclical building survey and maintenance

Strategies for the effective management of the upkeep of the building must be developed by the University of Manchester to ensure that all maintenance and repair requirements are handled efficiently and are mindful of the historic nature / fabric of the building.

The University of Manchester will continue to procure surveys on the building condition on a 5 yearly basis. These will be carried out by external specialists.

The University of Manchester will establish a management and maintenance plan and will manage cyclical maintenance according to this plan using approved contractors. The University will also have a system in place for responding to incidents.

A cyclical cleaning programme will be established for all areas of the library. This should include special mention of the collections and areas particularly vulnerable to damage which require specialist cleaning (i.e. high level fretwork). Cleaning staff should be trained in appropriate cleaning techniques and provided with necessary equipment.

Cyclical maintenance will be undertaken on a regular basis, with an appropriate level of funding and access to specialist external advice, when required. All personnel involved in maintenance will be aware of the special significance of the building fabric.

Current access arrangements will be assessed, tested and improved as necessary to facilitate safe maintenance of all parts of the library.

4.4. Policy: Building Repairs

The University of Manchester will address the defects identified in the 2015 survey, and implement works as planned for the next 5 years. Unexpected defects affecting the building will be promptly addressed.

External contractors will be carefully selected for their knowledge of conservation, adequately briefed and work inspected by an appropriate specialist. A specialist list of contractors who specialise in conservation work will be drawn up who can be asked to tender for projects at the library.

An adequate budget will be allocated by the University of Manchester to address repairs to John Rylands Library.

Comprehensive and tested specifications and methods for repair / replacement will be established where appropriate to guide future works at the library. These should be developed in conjunction with relevant specialists to ensure that the specifications / methods established are suitable.

4.5. Policy: Conservation and Restoration philosophy

Conservation principles will place importance on retaining cultural significance of the library and its collections, and will include provision for their security, maintenance and future.

Restoration or reinstatement of original features where lost, may sometimes be appropriate, but should always avoid conjecture. All conservation and restoration should be documented, and photographically recorded prior to and during the works.

Accepted Historic England conservation principles will guide the approach to future works at the library, including;

- Minimum intervention*
- Reversibility*
- Honesty, visibility of repairs/modern materials*
- Retention of as much original fabric as possible*

6.0 Pre-application Advice

6.1 Pre-application Advice

Pre-application advice has been sought from Paul Mason, Heritage & Urban Design Manager for Manchester City Council in the form of a site visit, presentation of proposals and email correspondence. Paul Mason indicated he is broadly supportive of the proposals but that the proposed work has the potential to impact on the appearance of this highly significant Grade-I listed building, particularly the masonry cleaning. Therefore, it has been recommended that listed building consent is applied for in order to control and agree the approach, method and level of cleaning along with the control of material and repointing samples.

7.0 Justification and Heritage Impact

7.1 Justification

The proposals are considered justified in response to the detrimental impact the current issues of moss, algae, open joints and damaged stonework is having on the historic fabric and heritage values of such a significant building.

The building was last cleaned following the 2015 Condition Survey which picked up the impact of moss and lichen growth on the outside of the building. Since 2015 the moss has reappeared and was picked up as an issue contributing to dampness in the 2022 Condition Survey.

The level of intervention proposed is low and careful mechanisms for controlling the appropriateness and quality of workmanship have been developed and specified. The proposals have been developed by specialist conservation architects and are in line with the policies of the 2015 Conservation Management Plan for the University.

6.2 Heritage Impact

The John Rylands Library is of exceptional historical and aesthetic significance and also holds high levels of communal and evidential value. It is considered that the proposals will be of considerable overall benefit to the heritage values by protecting the historic fabric against moisture ingress and accelerated decay.

The existing high concentrations of moss and algae in particular areas are causing contrast over the elevations which is of detrimental impact to the building's aesthetic and design values. In addition, instances of previous unsympathetic mortar repairs are having a negative aesthetic impact. The careful use of steam cleaning which is undertaken at low level and restricted to particular areas will have a positive impact on the building's aesthetic values and help re-balance the appearance of the elevations. The careful development of closely matched mortars and stone indent repairs will ensure that the aesthetic values of the building are enhanced, and that the historic fabric is protected against inappropriate repair and the potential for accelerated decay.

It is the responsibility of the University to ensure that cyclical, well-informed and appropriate maintenance is undertaken to the building, in line with the policies of the Conservation Management Plan. In order to benefit future maintenance work the development and outcome of the strategies for cleaning, repointing and repair of stonework will be thoroughly documented and recorded for future use on the building.

7.0 Design and Access Statement

7.1 Use

The use will remain as existing.

7.2 Amount

The amount will remain as existing.

7.3 Layout

The layout will remain as existing.

7.4 Scale

The scale will remain as existing.

7.5 Landscaping

The landscaping will remain as existing.

7.6 Appearance

The existing appearance will be protected and enhanced as a result of the proposals.

7.7 Access

The access arrangements will remain as existing.

8.0 Conclusion

The John Rylands Library is a Grade-I listed building of outstanding importance both nationally and internationally. It holds exceptional significance as a heritage asset for both its aesthetic and historical values. It also contributes strongly to the character and importance of the Deansgate/Peter Street Conservation Area.

The proposals seek to address issues with the external fabric which are currently having a detrimental impact on both the internal environment, the longevity of the historic fabric and the aesthetic qualities of the building. The proposals have been developed by a specialist conservation architect (Donald Insall Associates) in order to ensure a 'conservation approach' is taken to the work in order to protect and enhance the existing heritage values.

Pre-application consultation with the local authority conservation officer has taken place and a thorough specification has been developed in order to ensure adequate control and approval mechanisms for the proposed cleaning, repointing and stonework repairs.

The impact of the proposals on the significance of the building is considered to be positive. The proposals will be of benefit in terms of protecting the historic fabric, reducing the impact of factors which are currently having a negative visual impact and providing the University with a robust specification and methodology which will be of benefit to the heritage asset in future repairs and maintenance.