

Weston Library

Complete	Area	Client	Architect
2015	UK England	University of Oxford	Wilkinson Eyre

The Weston Library, previously known as the New Bodleian Library, is the main research library for the University of Oxford. Designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in the 1930s, the building is in one of the most historically sensitive parts of the city and is Grade II listed.

During this renovation project, the library was transformed into a modern, dynamic resource that better integrates with its surroundings and, by opening up the building and improving public access, a more welcoming and engaging experience has been provided for its many visitors. There was also a major reconstruction and upgrade to the existing collections storage and handling of books plus the creation of a new conservation centre, digital media study suite, reading rooms and facilities for visiting fellows.

The development has received the Architect's Journal Retrofit Award, which recognises design, engineering and construction excellence that prolongs and improves the life of the built environment. It has also won a RIBA National Award, a RIBA South Regional Award, the Architect's Journal Building of the Year 2016 Award, an Oxford Preservation Trust Award and was short listed for the coveted Stirling Prize 2016. In 2017 it won the Civic Trust Award.



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Services provided

Sandy Brown was appointed by the University of Oxford to provide advice on the refurbishment and renewal of the Weston Library Building. Key aspects of this included the control of:

- external noise ingress from the adjacent busy roads
- airborne and impact sound transmission internally between spaces
- reverberation and noise build-up in Blackwell Hall and other areas
- noise egress from building services plant to sensitive adjacent premises.

Special acoustic features

Through the modernisation of this well-known library, the aim was to create high quality storage for the library's special collections, develop advanced research space and expand public access.

Eleven storeys of the former central part of the bookstack were removed and replaced by a new ground floor entrance hall, the Blackwell Hall, that sits beneath a 'floating' central bookstack. A three-dimensional computer model of this space was constructed in order to evaluate its acoustic characteristics and advise on the acoustic treatment required to mitigate reverberation and noise build-up.

The library also contains a range of acoustically sensitive spaces including reading rooms, study carrels, digital media centre, exhibition spaces and an auditorium. In each of these, achieving good sound insulation, room acoustics and low background noise were important considerations.

Conservation of the vast collections formed an important part of the brief, some of the equipment for which generates high noise and/or vibration levels. Surveys of existing equipment were carried out in order to inform the development of appropriate design measures including room acoustic treatment and vibration isolation supports.

Throughout the design, careful evaluation of existing retained structures was required along with improvements to other retained elements, particularly where these were an integral part of the building's historical listing.

The scheme also included the introduction of extensive new building services plant required to provide appropriate internal conditions for the sensitive collections and the library occupants. As the library is surrounded by sensitive nearby colleges, the control of environmental noise from plant was an important consideration.