

The logo for the Victoria and Albert Museum, consisting of the letters 'V' and 'A' in a stylized, teal, serif font, with an ampersand between them. The logo is positioned in the upper left corner of the page, partially overlapping the image of the gallery.

V&A

A wide-angle photograph of the interior of the Victoria and Albert Museum's Cast Courts. The space is filled with ancient stone artifacts, including two massive, intricately carved columns that rise towards a high, vaulted glass and steel skylight. The walls are painted in a deep red, and a balcony with a decorative railing is visible on the upper level. In the foreground, various stone crosses and smaller carvings are displayed on the floor. The lighting is bright, highlighting the textures and details of the ancient stonework.

FUTUREPLAN PHASE 2

## THE CAST COURTS: PHASE TWO PRIORITIES FOR SUPPORT

PREPARED FOR THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY  
ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION, JUNE 2017



# THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

The Victoria and Albert Museum is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. It was founded after the Great Exhibition of 1851 with a vision to inspire and educate the designers and makers of the future. Today, its collections span Europe and Asia from ancient times to the present day and include ceramics, dress, furniture, glass, jewellery, metalwork, paintings, photographs, prints, sculpture and textiles.

## FUTUREPLAN

In the past 15 years, the V&A's programme of capital renovations – FuturePlan – has transformed over 85% of the Museum's public spaces through a series of major building projects. These projects have had an enormous impact on our audience's enjoyment and understanding of the Museum's buildings and collections, enabling thousands of objects to be newly conserved and displayed to better tell the story of the history of art and design for a diverse contemporary audience.

We are currently in the closing stages of the second phase of the renovation of the Cast Courts, which follows the successful reopening in 2014 of the Weston Cast Court (pictured below). As a dedicated supporter of projects that make heritage and the arts accessible to all, we would be delighted if The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation would consider making a grant to support the intellectual or physical accessibility of the Museum's cast collection.

This document provides an overview of the Cast Courts project, and outlines two important funding priorities:

1. Interpretation of the casts for audiences with access requirements, including hearing- and sight-impaired visitors
2. Physical access improvements to the entrance lift and ramp.



The first phase of the Cast Courts project: The Weston Cast Court, which reopened in 2014, before and after its renovation.

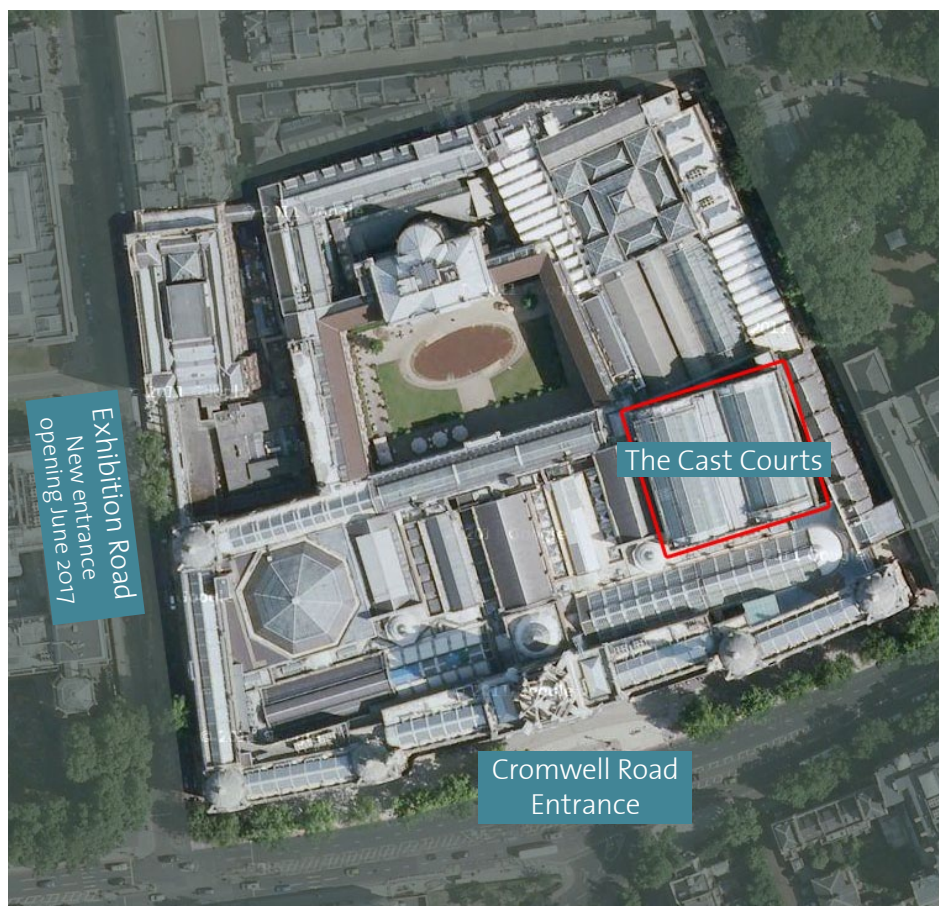
## THE CAST COURTS

The Cast Courts are among the V&A's most dramatic and popular galleries. Opened in 1873 as the Architectural Courts, they were designed to house the Museum's collection of large-scale plaster casts. The casts – detailed plaster reproductions of famous architectural and sculptural landmarks from across Europe – played a vital educational role for both practitioners and the public, who were often unable to visit the originals. Recreating the design and physical presence of the original objects, the Cast Courts enabled all visitors to experience highlights of international art and design without having to travel.

Today, the Cast Courts continue to serve as a vital scholarly resource, offering a unique global and historical record of sculpture. Importantly, the casts are becoming increasingly significant as records of originals that have severely deteriorated as a result of the environmental conditions of more than a century. Following the reopening of the Weston Cast Court, we are now refurbishing the West Court, the Top Gallery overlooking the courts, and the Central Gallery, which connects the courts at ground floor level.

This project will enable us to:

- Carry out urgent conservation to the casts and improve environmental conditions to preserve the collection for future generations of visitors
- Develop new interpretation of the Cast Courts to promote understanding and appreciation of sculpture for all our visitors, including those with additional accessibility needs
- Improve physical access to the Cast Courts for people with specific mobility needs.



Map of the V&A site, showing the location of the West Court and Central Gallery.



## FUNDING PRIORITY 1: INTERPRETING THE CASTS FOR ALL OUR VISITORS

Despite the Cast Courts' popularity with our visitors, many people do not understand that the objects on display are copies, and know little about how they were made and why the Museum holds such a significant collection of casts. Through a new interpretive exhibition in the Central Gallery, we aim to bridge this gap in understanding and explain the importance of the objects in a way that is accessible to all our visitors.

The exhibition will complement the Cast Courts, telling the story of why the casts were produced and why they remain important and inspirational objects. A series of ten displays featuring objects including moulds, type-casts and other 19th-century reproductions, such as electrotypes, photographs and brass rubbings, will also explain the importance of these objects and processes in the preservation of cultural heritage. The exhibition will also demonstrate the contemporary relevance of copies, by displaying new methods of replication using digital media and 3D-printing being developed by artists and factories today.

Alongside the objects, a diverse range of new interpretation will illuminate the story of the Cast Courts for audiences with many distinct accessibility needs. The interpretation provided will include text panels and films explaining both the history of the courts and methods of plaster-casting and electrotyping. Touch objects will provide tactile opportunities for visitors to explore these processes and gain an understanding of how fragile the casts are. In addition, a series of large facsimile books will reproduce pages from Victorian plaster-casting and electrotyping workshop catalogues, and Owen Jones' famous pattern book *The Grammar of Ornament*.

We are committed to making new interpretation accessible to all our visitors, and this scheme will use expert knowledge gained from previous successful FuturePlan projects including *Europe 1600-1815*. Specific accessible elements of the exhibition will include:

- Process films accompanied by subtitles for hearing-impaired visitors
- Large print books reproducing all the content from the wall panels accompanying the Central Gallery displays
- Touch objects, which will be mounted at an accessible height and provide sight-impaired and other visitors with the opportunity to experience the casts through touch.



Two plaster casts that will feature in the Central Gallery exhibition (from left): cast of a second-century Indian railing pillar ornamented with elephants; cast of a door knocker from Durham Cathedral.

Beyond the Central Gallery exhibition, additional interpretation will be produced in the West Court. As part of this project, the lower half of the cast of Trajan’s Column will be opened up for visitors to enter. Benches will be installed with new interpretation books, enabling visitors to sit inside and learn about this monumental cast.

This new interpretation will enable additional activities to take place that will make the Cast Courts accessible to wider audiences. Activities to take place in these spaces could include elements of those learning programmes already supported by The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, such as:

- Pop-up performances with BSL interpretation for hearing-impaired families
- Gallery sessions for individuals with early-stage dementia.

The new interpretation will also augment other accessible programmes, such as the V&A’s ‘touch tours’, which introduce partially sighted visitors to touch objects around the Museum.

We would be extremely grateful if the Foundation would consider awarding a grant towards these accessible interpretation elements of the project, which we estimate will cost as follows:

ITEM	COST (£)
Production of three process films with subtitles (£3,000 per film; £1,000 contingency)	10,000
Production of eight large-print interpretation books for the Central Gallery exhibition and Trajan’s Column	2,000
Production and mounting of two touch objects for display in the Central Gallery exhibition	3,000
<b>TOTAL COST</b>	<b>£15,000</b>



Watercolour of the interior of the West Court from the South Gallery, artist unknown, late 19th century.

## FUNDING PRIORITY 2: PHYSICAL ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

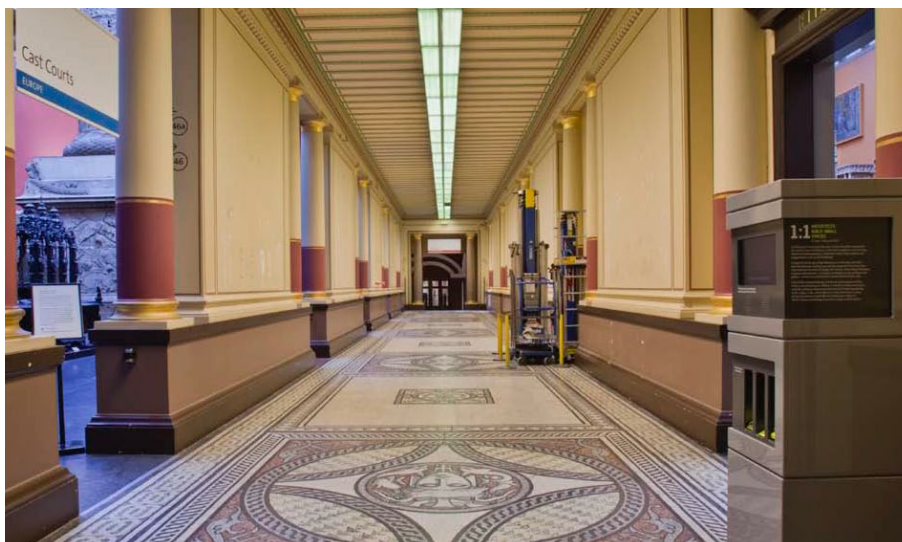
Since its closure in 2011, the Central Gallery has acted as a barrier between the Cast Courts, especially for visitors with mobility access needs, who have had to travel further to move between the courts.

This project will reopen the archways along each side of the Central Gallery, greatly improving physical access into and between the courts. Following this project, both courts and the Central Gallery exhibition will be fully wheelchair accessible, ensuring that visitors with physical access needs can get suitably close to the casts, touch objects and related displays to learn and be inspired by them.

Wheelchair access to the Cast Courts is provided via a lift and ramp at the north end of the Central Gallery. This access point is currently unsightly and in need of significant refurbishment and repair, which we propose to complete as part of this project. The lift platform will be refurbished, and new flooring and hand rails will be installed on the lift and ramp. This work will ensure the improved Cast Courts are more welcoming and accessible to visitors with physical access needs approaching from all areas of the Museum.

These improvements will cost a total of £80,000, as detailed in the budget table below. We are seeking a grant towards part or all of this important aspect of the Cast Courts project.

ITEM	COST (£)
Replacement of existing floor finish	5,000
Replacement handrails, glass balustrades and lift doors; installation of new cladding for lift	28,500
Mechanical and electrical works including new lighting	10,000
Contractor preliminaries	10,000
Contingency	6,500
<b>TOTAL COST</b>	<b>£60,000</b>



View from the southern end of the Central Gallery prior to closing in 2011.



## THANK YOU

We are extremely grateful to you and your fellow Trustees of The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation for your ongoing support that helps to make the V&A accessible to more people. Thank you for considering making a grant towards this very important project, which will enable the transformation of the iconic Cast Courts for the benefit of all the Museum's visitors.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like more information about the Cast Courts project, or if you would like to visit the spaces to learn more about the project in person.

**Jane Lawson**  
**Director of Development**  
Victoria and Albert Museum  
South Kensington  
London SW7 2RL

Phone +44 (0) 20 7942 2758  
Fax +44 (0) 20 7942 2150  
Email [j.lawson@vam.ac.uk](mailto:j.lawson@vam.ac.uk)



The plaster cast of the Pórtico de la Gloria from the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, in the West Court.