

How to make a grand entrance

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This work has been wholly reliant upon the participation of, and collaboration with, the UL's Reader Services Desk (RSD) team

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University Library, Cambridge University Libraries

Image: Alice the Camera



Our *grand*
art deco entrance

Architect :
Sir Giles Gilbert-Scott



Image: Alice the Camera

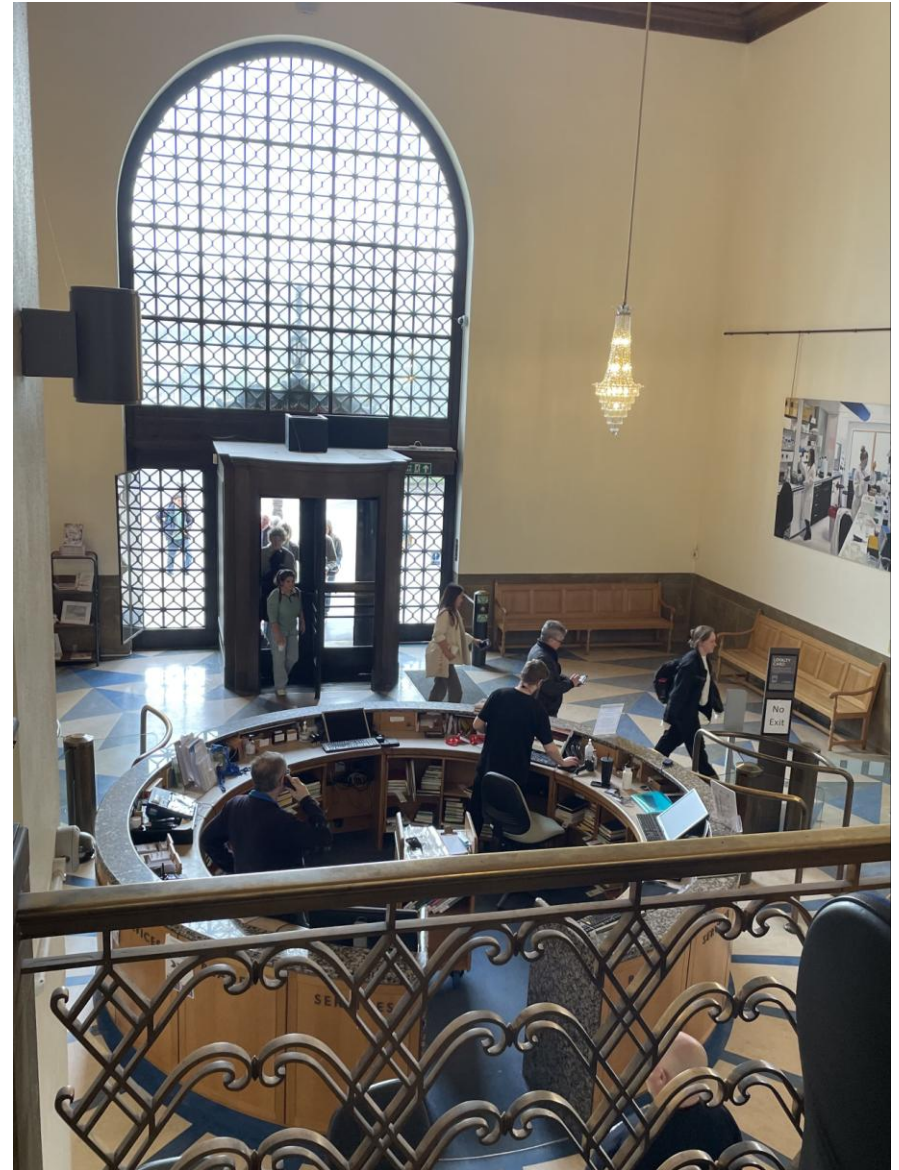




Image: Alice the Camera

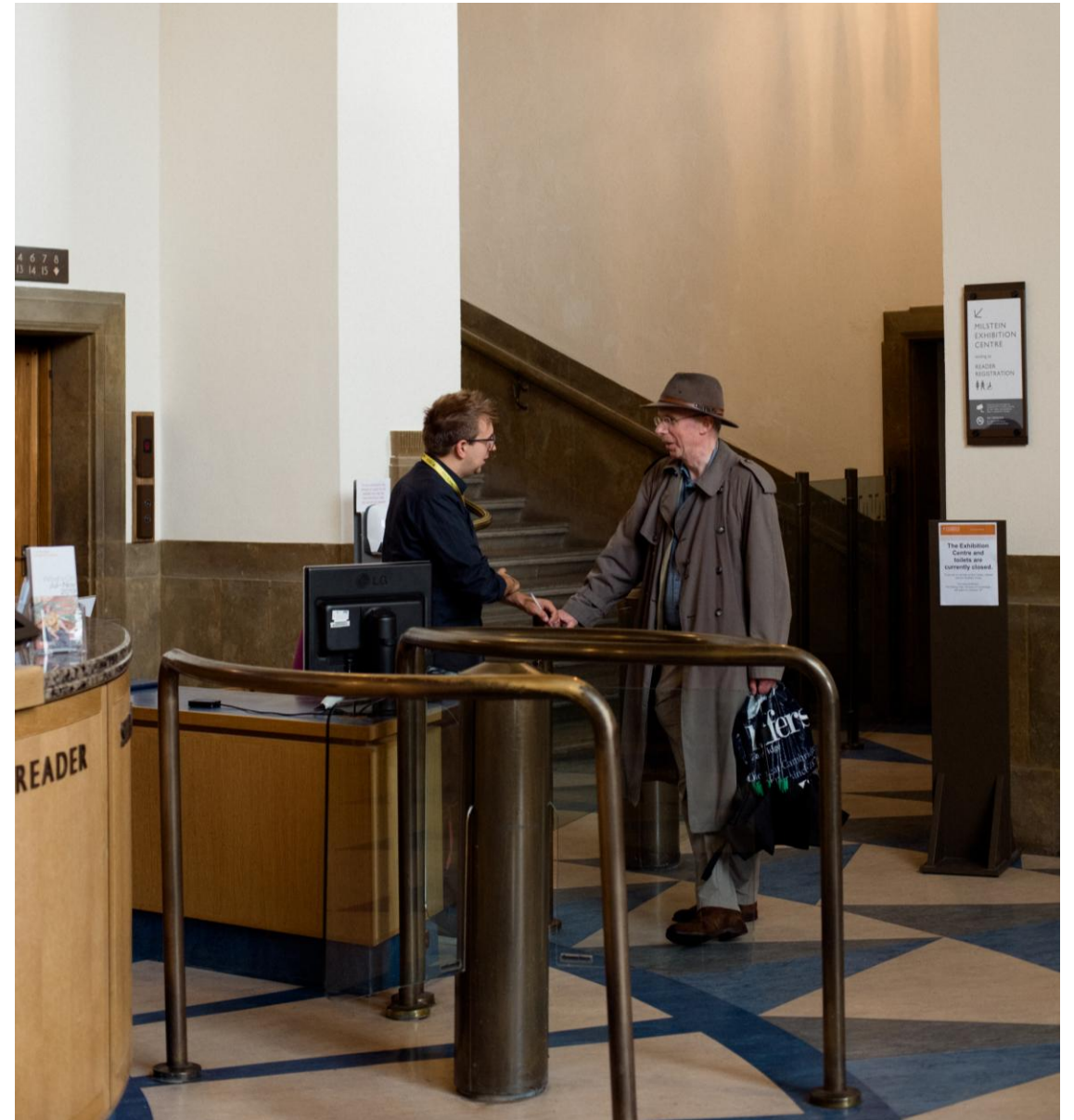


Image: Alice the Camera

Troublesome Listed buildings

"When making a decision on all listed building consent applications or any decision on a planning application for development that affects a listed building or its setting, a local planning authority must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Preservation in this context means not harming the interest in the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged."

Historic England

: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/decisionmaking/legalrequirements/>

Aligning with
institutional
vision and
refreshed
strategy/UL
Masterplan

"an exceptional physical library
experience"

"Transform the University Library into a
compelling destination for all those
curious about Cambridge"

"We will reach out to communities
within and beyond the University of
Cambridge, creating exhibitions,
events, communications and digital
content that generate excitement and
create new routes for discovery.



User Research projects & threshold anxiety

- "Reinvent older spaces"
- "The design and the feel the building is one of the most important factors in making students confident and comfortable with using the university library."

*Alterline's Library Futures User Research:
Equality, diversity and inclusivity in libraries –
Black students' experiences*

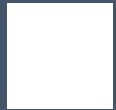
How to tackle a grand entrance



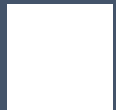
Start with a 'grand' team who work in the space



Establish strategies for becoming more agile in a large organisation!

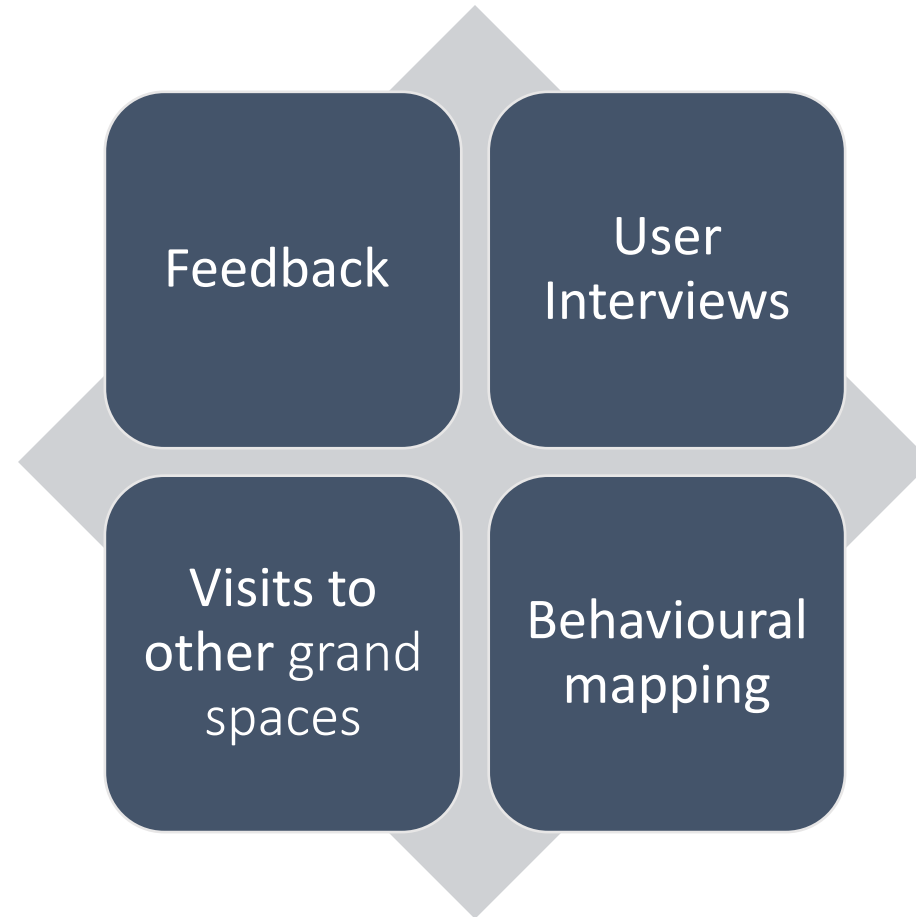


Establish early on what can't be changed, but...



Remember that user behaviour evidence is powerful!

Project activities: an outline



User Feedback Christmas Tree

- Responses from users
- Team contribution devising answers for the 'You said, we did' response (ownership)
- Feedback to the Users



When you can't JUST
"find a better painting to
put on the wall"

User Interviews 1

"she was excited to be able to come in, **thought it was a grand, big space, not like any other she'd previously had access to.** It was an **intimidating** size, but there's nothing you can do about this. She came in the first weeks of term, so **there was someone in the entrance handing out a free bag, pencil and map – she really liked this** and felt it was very clearly signposted where to go. Good to have a staff member guiding you. She remembers **not liking having to put things in a locker.** She knows a lot of her friends don't come into the UL for that reason. It's annoying to find a plastic bag or to remember to bring the one you've bought from the Library."

User Interviews 2

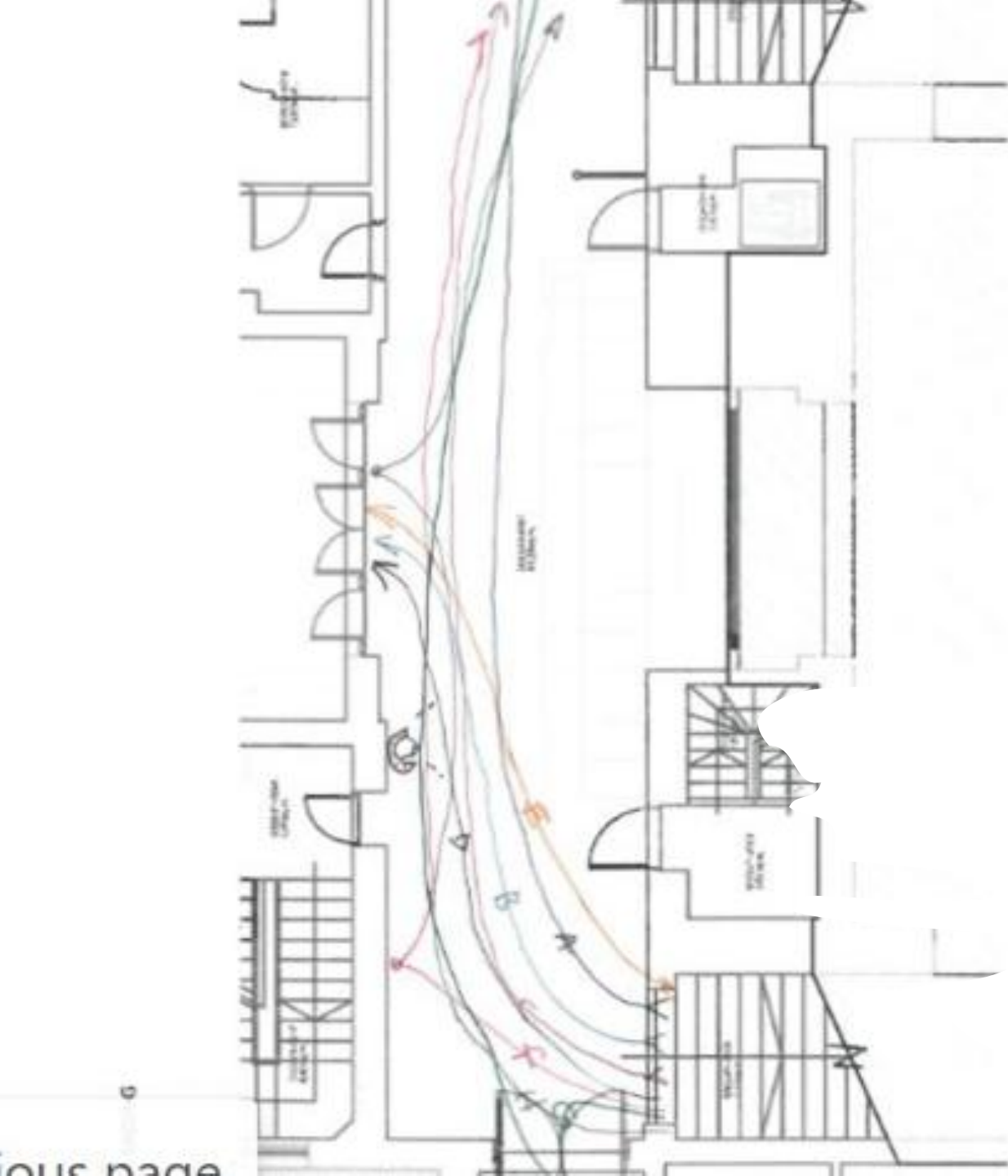
"She first came into the UL as a fresher, she was taken in by two second years who were showing her around Cambridge. **They only went as far as the foyer. She hasn't been back since – she is here today to attend a seminar in the Rare Books Room.** This time round it feels different to when she first visited – she's more settled at Cambridge as a place and being in bigger buildings and **has grown in confidence.**"

Visits to
other
institutions



Team visits to other 'grand' entrances: critical to team engagement with concepts of change

- A permanent welcome banner in lieu of one the current exhibition banners.
- Removing the Reader Services Desk and barriers in the entrance hall.
- A dedicated reader registration space at the entrance of the library, with an accessible entrance.
- Digital billboards
- New lockers, without batteries saves constant failure of lockers
- Installing a shop, café and some comfortable seating in the entrance hall.



Behavioural Mapping

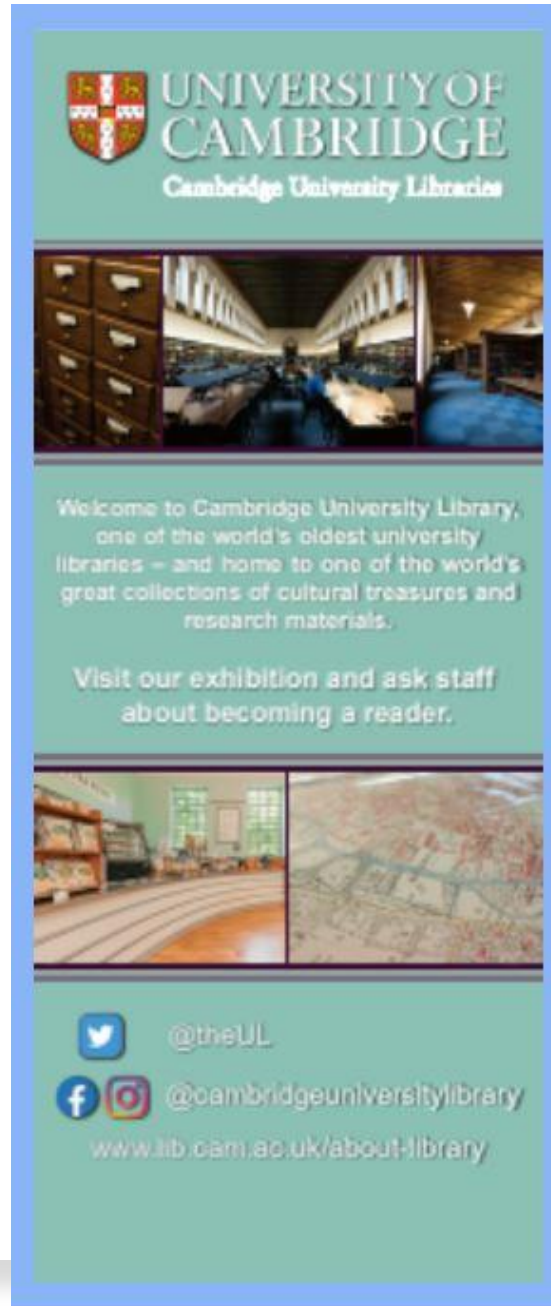
Behavioural Mapping Observations

- First time user vs confident user behaviour
 - Visitors: hesitation, look lost, and often gave up and went back out again
 - Entrance hall and balcony used as a meeting space
- Staff multi-tasking - restricts availability and welcome
 - Staff find it difficult to get out of the donut shaped RSD
 - Staff at helpdesk in the wrong place to be helpful!



Response:
Iterative testing: furniture changes on the
balcony

Response: Greeters & banners & lockers





Result:

Team transformation

- Post-pandemic, new staff bonding
- Openly and honestly discussing team ideas about change
- Established team away days for participation and idea generation & exploring different ideas
- Team appreciated some control
- Iterative pilots (low stakes pilots) – not risky for Library Leadership, but demonstrates value of small-scale trials
- Evidence that change is possible and is not bound up in institutional red-tape



Grand changes in our grand entrance?

No! But little changes can make a big difference

- You can create significant changes for users in a listed building by working at a small scale
 - Involving the whole team to explore change transformed their views on what could be achieved
 - Evidence from user research provided the motivation to enable acceptance of small changes and continued to expand the vision of staff for this area
-

What's next?

- Currently trialling small-scale changes
- Re-running some of the research eg behavioural mapping
- Evaluate success of activities
- Formalise proposals for permanent changes

Some References

- ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/booksanddigitalresources/digital/9780838936726_OA.pdf
- <https://www.makearchitects.com/thinking/from-listed-buildings-to-21st-century-schools-part1/>
- Oliver Smith (2014) Balancing Heritage and Environmental Policies for Sustainable Refurbishment of Historic Buildings: The Case of New Court, Trinity College, Cambridge, The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice, 5:2, 116-131, DOI: [10.1179/1756750514Z.000000000050](https://doi.org/10.1179/1756750514Z.000000000050)

Questions?

