Reinstatement of the Central Pinnacle of the Ramsden Building at the University of Huddersfield. A Grade II listed Building

Project No: 2022/001
Date: 11th May 2023

HERITAGE STATEMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Title : The Ramsden Building at the University of Huddersfield
List Entry No: 1277501 as Grade II dated 29th September 1978
Address: The Ramsden Building at the University of Huddersfield. Queensgate.
Huddersfield. HD1 2DH.
Listing NGR: SE1464216282
District: Kirklees

The Ramsden Building is one of the most important buildings in the history of Huddersfield and has a prime location on the University Campus adjacent to the Huddersfield Ring Road.

With its towers, turrets and distinctive Victorian Gothic styling, the Ramsden Building is the historic heart of the University of Huddersfield. The cornerstone of the building was laid by the Warden of the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers on 21 October 1881. It was opened in 1883 as Huddersfield Technical School and Mechanics' Institute, the amalgamation of Huddersfield Mechanics' Institution and Huddersfield Female Educational Institute. In July 1883 the building housed a Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, which was opened by the Duke of Somerset. 329,639 people visited the Exhibition, among them The Duke and Duchess of Albany (The Duke was the fourth son of Queen Victoria).

The Technical School cost £20,000 to build raised by public subscription and generously supported by the Science and Art Department and by grants from and the Clothworkers' Company which donated £2,000 to the building fund. The coats of arms of Sir Thomas Brooke, Huddersfield Corporation, Sir John William Ramsden and the Clothworkers' Company.

Sir John Ramsden was, a wealthy landowner in Huddersfield and key player in the textile industry, seen as one of the founders of Huddersfield. He created the Huddersfield Narrow Canal through Huddersfield, taking trade goods inland from Manchester and Liverpool. The reduced width of the canal both saved money in construction and gave cause for the cargoes to unload from the wider Manchester barges onto his narrow boats in order to pass through the narrow locks. He therefore held a monopoly on the viable transport system of the day. The building was held in curatorship by Kirklees Council and became part of the Huddersfield Polytechnic and then transferred into the the University of Huddersfield.

The listing states:

> *Hammer dressed stone. Ashlar dressings. Hipped slate roof. three storeys. Bracketed eaves cornice. Openwork parapet. Strings. Continuous sill bands. Nine ranges of casements in moulded surrounds with transoms, the first, the fifth and ninth also with mullions. The third and the seventh ranges are full height bays, oblong at ground floor, canted above, and surmounted by moulded foliage cornices and hipped roofs with tall iron finials: above the ground floor are sculpted lions holding shields: the second floor windows have two transoms*

and the upper lights are filled with cusped reticulated tracery.

At second floor level four octagonal tourelles are corbelled out on moulded squinches and end above eaves level in gabled tops with short octagonal spires. Between centre two is a gable with traceried panelling, and pointed arched window with hoodmould, two transoms and cusped reticulated tracery. Planked doors in shouldered arch, fanlight with four trefoiled lancets in moulded frame, with colonettes and hoodmould. This is set in a porch which breaks forward slightly, has diagonal buttresses, colonettes, bracketed eaves cornice and openwork balustrade with finials on the end piers. Roof has four triangular lucarnes, two tall ornamental iron finials, and some simple cresting. Octagonal lantern with open pointed arcade, gables to each side, tiled flèche, and tall ornamental iron finial.

Panel above north canted bay inscribed "This memorial stone was laid by the Master of the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers of the City of London, (Rev Alfred Child, MA) assisted by members of the Court, on Wednesday October 17th, 1881".

It is the Central Pinnacle to which we refer – the “Octagonal lantern with open pointed arcade, gables to each side, tiled flèche, and tall ornamental iron finial”. At this time the rest of the building would be unaffected.

It had been noted that the iron finial was leaning to one side and access was made up there to investigate earlier in 2023 by The University Estates Department Surveyors using a cherry picker and being able to get right up to the finial and lantern to inspect at close quarters.
The finial is the original ornate globe in wrought iron and held together by iron rivets, and supported off the capping by four offset iron legs. There is much weathering, decay and delamination present and many of the rivets are missing. Interestingly, the central iron column was perfectly plumb, but the finial itself was loose in its timber socket.

The weathering collar itself has split at the top and allowed water ingress and due to timber decay the socket at the very top of the flèche is enlarged allowing the finial to move around. Originally the four legs to the finial were exposed but the weathering collar, which we presume was originally lead has been replaced with a fibrous alternative, also of age - has encapsulated them. The fibrous material appears to be glass fibre, but could also be an asbestos containing material. The collar was treated with due caution, but has not yet been tested.

Further down the spire the leadwork has been overpainted but is stained with rust from the finials, and beneath that is the lantern. Comprising of eight turned piers, the lantern supports the entire fleche. The posts were thought to be oak but the decay has exposed the timbers and they are in pine. The decay is severe in places and there is significant material loss in several places.

Between the turret from the barrel and the gallery is a tracery drum capped in leadwork which formerly had an access hatch through up into the gallery. This can be seen from the inside of the barrel but access is tight.

The Pinnacle clearly has a limited life span and we are looking to revive the old skills, and as far as practicable reinstate it to its former glory, including replacing the decayed timbers in Oak including renewing the tracery; re-slating the entire fleche in Westmoreland slate; replacing defective leadwork; and replacing the defective components of the exposed finial with new rivetted iron.

The nature of such works mean that it is not viable under current Health and Safety Legislation to do it in situ when there is a safer alternative. We have therefore opted to take down the finial by crane to have the work done in a Joiners Shop. Separation is complicated and there are uncertainties as to how the different stages are connected, but we would be under the supervision of structural engineers throughout. Naturally, protection would be applied to the frustum whilst the pinnacle is absent.

Once reinstated, we would create a protective cradle around the entire unit the raise and refit the pinnacle in one piece, fixing it from cherry pickers externally and from within the roof void. It is a delicate operation and needs very experienced operatives, under close supervision and under the direction of a Structural Engineer.



High level access to the Pinnacle from the ring road

Iron finial above the Pinnacle – rivets missing







Support feet and decay at weather cap to base of finial





Gallery gables and tracery beneath. Weather beaten face of gallery and subsequent decay.



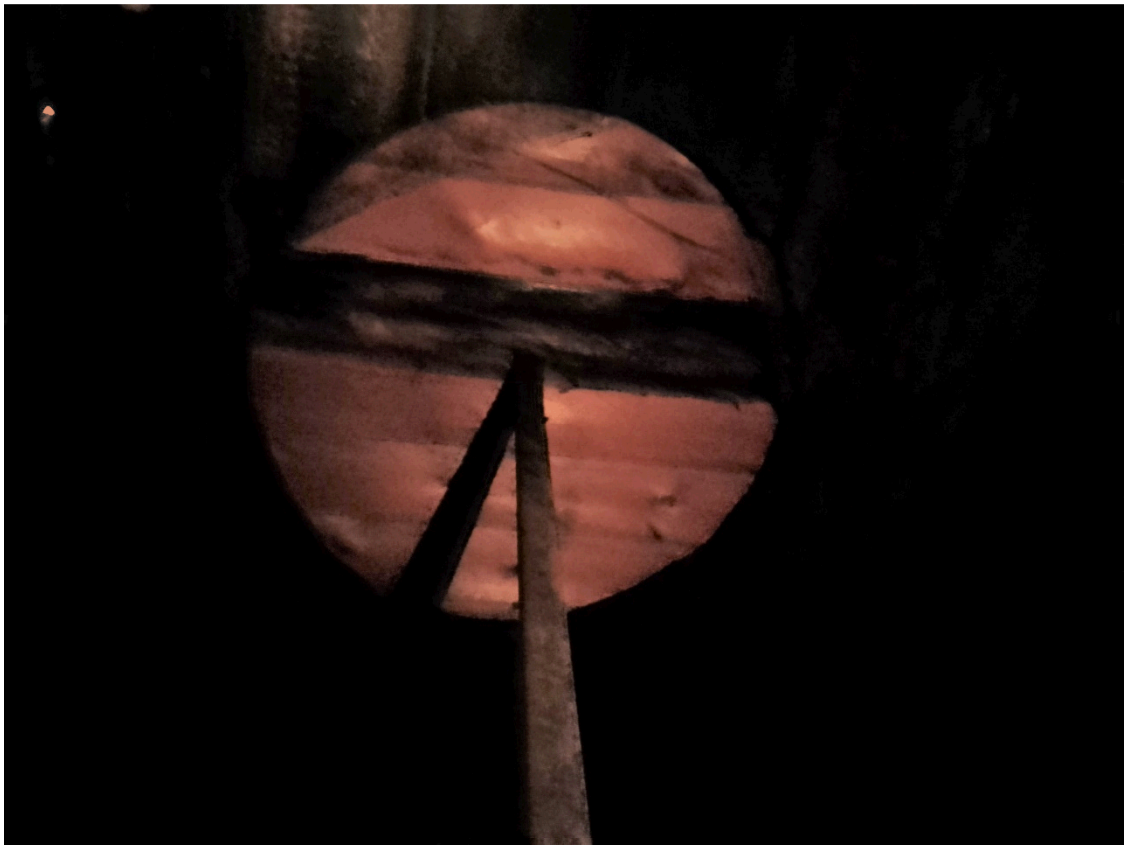
Lower section of pinnacle with gallery and tracery below. Extent of timber decay on lower picture..







Tracery and point of disconnection just above the existing lower level lead skirting



View from inside the barrel in the roof void up to the underside of the leaded capping.