

SHELDONIAN THEATRE

INTRODUCTION

The Sheldonian Theatre is, and has been since the seventeenth century, a forum primarily for university ceremonial. It was built between 1664 and 1669, funded by Gilbert Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of the University and designed by Christopher Wren, Savilian Professor of Astronomy from 1661 to 1673.

The Sheldonian was one of Wren's first public buildings and is acknowledged to be of great importance in the classical influence which it had upon Oxford buildings. Classicism in architecture was at its height in the mid-seventeenth century and Wren's basic source of inspiration for the Sheldonian is thought to have been taken directly from the U-shaped Theatre of Marcellus in Rome. In its finer architectural aspects, therefore, the Sheldonian has always been the focus of much discussion and is seen as having been the standard-bearer for a renaissance in public building in seventeenth-century Oxford. This recognition of the importance to the history of Oxford of the Sheldonian can be seen in the emphasis which was placed on its restoration in the Oxford Historic Buildings Appeal, begun in 1957.

The impetus behind the building of the Sheldonian was engendered by the desire of officers of the University, such as John Fell, Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor, to remove all secular activities from St Mary's Church, which had hitherto been the venue for university ceremonial. While this was intended to be its primary function, however, it was also used from the time of its opening as a home for the developing Oxford University Press. This use of the theatre came to an end in 1713 with the opening of the Clarendon Building, purpose-built for the Press.

Since this time, the Sheldonian has remained the venue for university ceremonial, principally convocations, Encaenia, degree ceremonies and Romanes lectures. It has also been used for university examinations, while the basement was used earlier in this century by the Bodleian as an extra book repository.

In addition to these official university uses of the theatre, it has remained available to the use of the public for concerts and meetings. Responsibility for accepting or rejecting applications from the public for the use of the Sheldonian in this way lies with the Curators of the Sheldonian Theatre. This body was established by university statute in 1872 to have responsibility for both the maintenance of the Theatre and its use. This statute stipulated that there should be six curators, to include the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors, and three others, who should be members of Convocation and nominated by the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors.

The records of the Curators for the years between 1912 and 1929 show the great variety of applications which were received, requesting the use of the theatre, for example, for the Oxford Diocesan Conferences and meetings on behalf of the Royal National Lifeboat Association, the Red Cross War Library and the Workers' Educational Association. In addition to such meetings, a large number of concerts have been held in the theatre.

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A further development in the body of the Curators of the Sheldonian at the beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the role of the Acting Curator, who acted for the Curators as a whole. The first recognition in the minutes of the Curators of this role was in October 1906 and in the *Oxford University Calendar* in 1909. The title was not used after 1994 when the functions were assumed by the Chairman of the Curators (the Vice-Chancellor having previously been the *ex-officio* Chairman).

The Sheldonian underwent a major restoration programme in the Oxford Historic Buildings Appeal between 1956 and 1963, supervised by the architects W Godfrey Allen and A Llewellyn Smith. In a separate project between 1970 and 1972 Michael Black carved a new set of 'Emperors' Heads' to replace the previous set at the front of the Sheldonian, which dated from 1868 and were damaged beyond repair.

The records of the Curators of the Sheldonian came to the University Archives in the early 1970s, but some items which are held with these records arrived separately: ST 37, ST 46A and ST 48 were received from the University Offices in 1992; ST 46B (a duplicate of ST 46A), ST 51 and ST 53-78 were received from the Sheldonian in 2001 and ST 52 in 2002. The papers of the architect A Llewellyn Smith relating to the Sheldonian restoration were given to the Archives by his son in 1978. ST 79-81 were received from Jeffrey Hackney, the Chairman of the Curators in 2009 and 2010.

Acting Curators of the Sheldonian Theatre

| | |
|---------|--|
| 1909-16 | CHO Daniel, Provost of Worcester |
| 1916-20 | RW Macan, Master of University |
| 1920-6 | FW Pember, Warden of All Souls |
| 1926-8 | GB Allen, Principal of St Edmund Hall |
| 1928-39 | JF Stenning, Warden of Wadham |
| 1939-46 | AB Emden, Principal of St Edmund Hall |
| 1948-52 | JHS Wild, Master of University |
| 1952-6 | HJ Carpenter, Warden of Keble |
| 1956-68 | JT Christie, Principal of Jesus |
| 1968-84 | JND Kelly, Principal of St Edmund Hall |
| 1984-8 | Sir Edgar Williams, Warden of Rhodes House |
| 1988-90 | JB Bamborough, Honorary Fellow (formerly Principal) of Linacre |

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Chairman of the Curators of the Sheldonian Theatre

| | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1990-2 | John Bamborough, Principal of Linacre |
| 1992-3 | Peter North, Principal of Jesus |
| 1993-2011 | Jeffrey Hackney, Fellow of Wadham |
| 2011- | Paul Coones, Fellow of Hertford |

Compiled 1998

Revised 2002

Revised 2009

Revised 2014

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- ST 1 Minute book of the Curators. 1872-1962
- The volume includes a list of the curators of the Sheldonian and details of the benefactions of Gilbert Sheldon (1669) and Dr John Wills, Warden of Wadham (1805), also including details of the Theatre estates in 1872.
- ST 2 Rough note book of the Acting Curator. 1916-26
- ST 3 Drafts of annual reports to Convocation prepared for publication in the *University Gazette*. 1915-28 (some missing)
- ST 4 Notice of fees charged to visitors. 1900
- ST 5/1-8 Visitors books. 1928-58
- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. 1928-30 | 5. 1946-9 |
| 2. 1930-4 | 6. 1949-52 |
| 3. 1934-9 | 7. 1952-5 |
| 4. 1939-46 | 8. 1955-8 |
- ST 6/1-2 Account books. 1868-48
1. 1868-1930 (including accounts of the Curators of the Chest relating specifically to the Theatre, 1868-1907)
2. 1931-48
- ST 7/1-2 Chest departmental accounts for the Theatre. 1933-65
1. 1933-55
2. 1955-65
- ST 8 Annual statements of receipts and expenditure of the curators. 1906-7, 1910-24
- ST 9 Counterfoils of orders for general maintenance work and goods supplied. 1914-17

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- ST 10/1-4 Vouchers for work done on the Theatre. 1902-26 and 1956-65
1. 1902-7
 2. 1917-26
 3. 1956-8
 4. 1963-5
- ST 11 Correspondence concerning Wills' Accumulated Fund. 1876-1915
- A bequest in the will of John Wills, DD, Warden of Wadham, dated 17 May 1805, set aside £2000 to be invested by the University. The interest of this was to pay off a debt to the University which had been incurred by the Sheldonian Theatre, and thereafter one half of the interest was to be given to the Curators of the Theatre annually to provide it with an accumulated income.
- ST 12 Miscellaneous correspondence concerning financial matters including Thornhill Farm, Lechlade, appeals for help in the restoration of the churches at Lechlade and Ickford and a bequest in the will of Mr JP Sheldon for restoration of Gilbert Sheldon's tomb. 1915-26
- ST 13 Papers relating to the seating capacity of the Sheldonian, and the admission of chancellors Arran (1715, description of ceremony dated 1905), Curzon (1907) and Grey (1928); including arrangements for the ceremonies and the chancellors' orations. 1905-28
- ST 14 Papers relating to the visit of HRH Edward, Prince of Wales to receive the degree of DCL by Diploma; including tickets and arrangements for the ceremony. 1921
- ST 15 Papers relating to the visit of HM Queen Mary to receive the degree of DCL by diploma; including tickets, arrangements and a programme for the ceremony. 1921 (See also MR 1/1/7)
- ST 16 File relating to the visit of General George C Marshall to receive honorary DCL; including applications for tickets and for access by the media. 1947

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- ST 17 Concert programmes, tickets and notices of miscellaneous special occasions; including programmes for a concert to celebrate the coronation (31 May 1953) and for the opening ceremony for HRH Duke of Edinburgh's study conference on the Human Problems of Industrial Communities within the Commonwealth and Empire (9 July 1956). 1897-1958
- ST 18 List of functions held in the Theatre, 1878-98, compiled in 1915 for the information of the Acting Curator. 1915
- ST 19 Keeper's list of functions held in the Theatre compiled annually by Lily Cook (as Keeper) for the Curators. 1915-34
- ST 20/1-11 Papers concerning the use of the Theatre, including applications for the use of the Theatre and related correspondence. 1912-29
- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. 1912-15 | 7. 1921 |
| 2. 1916 | 8. 1922-3 |
| 3. 1917 | 9. 1924 |
| 4. 1918 | 10. 1925-6 |
| 5. 1919 | 11. 1927-9 |
| 6. 1920 | |
- ST 21 Miscellaneous correspondence concerning arrangements for Encaenia, including instructions for special pro-proctors and applications for tickets. 1896-1929
- ST 22 Papers relating to the distribution of tickets for Encaenia, including plans of seating and lists of special pro-proctors. 1881-1927
- ST 23 Official programmes, notices, specimen tickets and orations relating to Encaenia. 1876-1956
- ST 24 Papers relating to Romanes lectures held in the Theatre, including general correspondence, specimen tickets and questions of copyright, particularly relating to the lectures given by William Gladstone (1892), Curzon (1907), Theodore Roosevelt (1910) and Herbert Asquith (1918). 1892-1919

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- ST 25 Miscellaneous printed material relating to Romanes lectures, including a notice concerning seating arrangements and compliment slips for replies to ticket applications. undated (c1900)
- ST 26 Correspondence and reports concerning maintenance and restoration work on the stonework, basement windows and 'Emperors' Heads' of the Theatre, including correspondence with architect TG Jackson and Symm and Co. 1890-1917
- ST 27 Correspondence and reports concerning general repair and maintenance work on the exterior of the Theatre, including the cupola and re-gravelling between the Sheldonian, Bodleian and Clarendon buildings. 1903-25
- ST 28 Papers relating to general repairs and alterations to the interior of the Theatre, including correspondence with TG Jackson and Smith and Brewer concerning staircases and safety precautions. 1884-1954
- ST 29 Papers relating to the general maintenance and modernisation of the Theatre organ, with an article entitled 'A new organ for the Sheldonian (in 1725)' written by Harry Johnstone and published in *The Oxford Magazine*, 2010. 1875-1963 and 2010
- ST 30 Papers relating to the installation of electric lighting, both temporary and permanent, including petitions from members of the University requesting it to make the theatre more available for use in the evenings. 1873-1934
- ST 31 Papers relating to the maintenance and improvement of the Theatre heating system. 1894-1923
- ST 32/1-3 General correspondence concerning the use and maintenance of the Theatre, including correspondence relating to the visit of HRH Duchess of York to receive the degree of DCL by diploma (1931) and to the first lecture of Albert Einstein in 1931 as Rhodes Lecturer and the Romanes Lecture of 1932 given by Lord Moynihan. 1923-45
1. 1923-31
 2. 1930-6
 3. 1937-45

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- ST 33 Miscellaneous correspondence relating to general staff matters, including insurance. 1900-46
- ST 34 Miscellaneous correspondence, including material relating to the Oxford University Appointments Committee and the Performing Rights Society. 1920-31
- ST 35 Papers and photographs relating to the maintenance of the paintings and the restoration of the ceiling of the Theatre including the reports prepared for publication in the *University Gazette* by both the Curators and the restorer RJ Nairn. 1898-1920
- There was an extensive restoration of the ceiling of the Theatre between 1898 and 1901, supervised by RJ Nairn and with the advice of Professor AJ Church, Professor of Chemistry at the Royal Academy. See also ST 50.
- ST 36 Drawings for the restoration of the Theatre interior by R Fielding-Dodd. 1935-7 (See also ST 28)
- ST 37 Volume of photographs relating to the need for restoration of a number of Oxford's historic buildings, including the Sheldonian Theatre, entitled 'The Oxford Historic Buildings Appeal'; with photographs of the Old Bodleian, Christ Church library and Queens in need of repair. nd (c1957)
- ST 38 Report on the condition of the Theatre by W Godfrey Allen, assisted by A Llewellyn Smith, the architects in charge of the Sheldonian's major restoration programme. 1956
- ST 39 Drawings for the restoration of the Theatre by W Godfrey Allen. 1958-63
- ST 40 Sketch for the restoration of the north entrance of the Theatre by W Godfrey Allen. 1959
- ST 41 Photographs of the Theatre before and during restoration. 1958-63

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- ST 42 Estimates, specifications, accounts and contracts for the restoration work by W Godfrey Allen and A Llewellyn Smith. 1958-63
- ST 43 Copy of the journal *The Builder*, 27 Sept 1963, containing a photograph of 'The Sheldonian Theatre restored', (p49 of the Supplement); with a letter from Howard Colvin to A Llewellyn Smith and a typed copy of 'The restoration of the Sheldonian Theatre Oxford'. 1963
- ST 44 Papers of A Llewellyn Smith relating to the compilation of a record of the restoration of the Sheldonian Theatre, the Old Ashmolean and the Radcliffe Camera for the Oxford Historic Buildings Appeal. 1968-74
- ST 45 Record of the restoration of the Sheldonian Theatre, 1958 to 1963, compiled 1969 by the architects W Godfrey Allen and A Llewellyn Smith and including information about the restoration by R Fielding Dodd between 1935 and 1937. 1969
- ST 46A Commemorative volume recording the 'Restoration of the Sheldonian Theatre 1958-64'. Edited and compiled c1980 by Ralph Brain, senior reporter on the *Oxford Mail*, with contributions to the text by Sir Walter Oakeshott and WS McKerrow and photographs by JW Thomas. c1980
- ST 46B Duplicate of ST 46A
- ST 47 Photographs, extracted from the papers of A Llewellyn Smith, of various views of the Sheldonian Theatre. c1960, 1970
- ST 48 Volume of photographs relating to the restoration of the thirteen 'Emperors' Heads' in front of the Theatre entitled, 'Emperors' Heads, Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford. Dec 1967'. c1968

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- ST 49/1-3 Papers of JND Kelly in his capacity as Acting Curator of the Theatre, including correspondence with JD Brown as secretary of the Curators and minutes of meetings of the Curators. 1963-83
1. 1963-76
 2. 1977-81
 3. 1981-3
- ST 50 Contents of a 'time capsule' left above the ceiling of the Theatre in 1901 by RJ Nairn, restorer, found during further restoration in 1995.
- For an account of the discovery see *Oxford University Gazette* no. 4355 (23 February 1995).
- ST 51 Photograph of the interior of the Theatre showing newly-installed electric lighting. undated (possibly c1935)
- ST 52 Compact disc recording of concert and lecture of 13 May 2002 at the Theatre to demonstrate the new electronic organ. 2002
- ST 53 Report for the Sheldonian Theatre regarding danger from fire by Smith & Brewer, Architects, London. 1905
- ST 54 Papers relating to Romanes Lectures, including arrangements issued by the Theatre, advertisements, and a copy of the *Oxford University Gazette* regarding Tony Blair's Romanes Lecture in 1999; with a face mask of Tony Blair, possibly intended for use by protestors at his lecture. 1921-99
- ST 55 Regulations issued by the curators of the Sheldonian Theatre regarding the Rhodes Memorial Lecture of 1929, delivered by General Smuts, and the Convocation of 1946. 1929, 1946
- ST 56 Notices of those receiving honorary DCLs at Convocation, 1945 and Encaenia, 1946; with notebook, containing a draft of the list for Encaenia, 1946. 1945-6
- These are handwritten and pasted on boards. The exact use of these lists could not be ascertained, but they were possibly used as references for Sheldonian Theatre staff.

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- ST 57 Invitations to miscellaneous events held in the Theatre. 1936-94
- ST 58 Concert programmes, tickets and notices of miscellaneous special events, including programme and photographs of the 1988 Thames Valley Police Crime Prevention Panel Youth Quiz, and the Conference programme for HRH Duke of Edinburgh's Seventh Commonwealth Study Conference, 1992. 1925-99
- ST 59 Letters of thanks to the Sheldonian for the use of the Theatre, including photographs of the film 'Dangerous Love' of which a part was filmed at the Theatre in 1988. 1985-91
- ST 60 Printed lists of schedules and arrangements for miscellaneous events, including a call sheet for 'Dangerous Love' 1988. 1988-9
- ST 61 'Guide to the Oxford Degree Ceremony' booklets. 1976, c1995
- ST 62 Printed lists of events held in the Theatre. 1987-92
- ST 63 Material relating to the Campaign for Oxford; includes correspondence relating to the launch of the Campaign, tickets for the launch, and a copy of the Launch Pack; with newspaper articles on the launch, two copies of *Campaign News*, 1989 and 1993, and a copy of the *Oxford Magazine*, Hilary Term 1994. 1988-94
- ST 64 Papers relating to Oxford degrees, including tickets for degree ceremonies, order forms for videos of ceremonies, photographs of the 1991 ceremony, and typed lists of arrangements for ceremonies. 1982-98
- ST 65 Programmes of Special Degree Ceremonies, including a mock up of the programme for 1999. 1995-9
- ST 66 Photographs of the Encaenia procession and of David Hockney and Betty Boothroyd, two of the honorands. 1995

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- ST 67 Programme for ordinary degree ceremony. 1998
- ST 68 Cassette tape recording of the installation of Roy Jenkins as Chancellor of the University. 1987
- ST 69 Press release by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals 1988, containing a copy of a speech on the government and higher education, possibly given by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Kenneth Baker. 1988
- ST 70 Text of speech delivered by HRH the Prince of Wales at the Theatre, entitled 'Islam and the West', on the occasion of his visit to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. 1993
- ST 71 Text of speech delivered by the Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, Dr Farhan Nizami, to welcome President Nelson Mandela. 1997
- ST 72/1-3 Visitors books. 1983-96
1. 1983-7
 2. 1987-91
 3. 1991-6
- These books contain signatures of people receiving honorary degrees at Encaenia and other ceremonies, members and conductors of orchestras and choirs playing at the Theatre, and the stars of the film 'Dangerous Love'.
- ST 73 Correspondence and papers concerning published guides to the Theatre, including correspondence regarding the publication of *The Sheldonian Theatre Yesterday and Today* by Marilyn Yurdan, four editions of the guide, and correspondence regarding a new guide to the Theatre, initiated by Marilyn Yurdan in 1995. 1981-95
- ST 74 Photographs of various aspects of the Theatre with particular emphasis on the painted ceiling, with photograph of degree ceremony, c1965. undated (c1980s)

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- ST 75 Newspaper and magazine articles relating to the Theatre; includes newspaper and journal articles relating to the 'time capsule' discovered in 1995 (see ST 50). 1959-96
- ST 76 Programmes for meetings of the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors. 1991-7 and 1999
- ST 77 Photographs of the exterior of the Theatre and interior loft space, with plans of the seating area, basement, upper gallery, and ground floor. undated (c1989)
- ST 78 Four signatures of bedels contained in a notebook, including a letter to the Head Clerk which outlines a plan to have bedels sign a page of the book with their rank in order to build a record of positions and ceremonies for the Theatre archives. undated (c1988-97)
- ST 79/1-4 Papers of Jeffrey Hackney, Chairman of the Curators, relating to the replacement of the Theatre organ. 1992-2002
1. 1992-4
 2. 1995
 3. 1996-7
 4. 1998-2002
- ST 79A Sound recording of a BBC Oxford programme on the new digital electronic organ in the Theatre. undated (1995)
- Audio cassette. Approximate duration: 25min.
- ST 80/1-6 Papers of Jeffrey Hackney, Chairman of the Curators, relating to the administration of the Theatre (except the replacement of the organ). 1993-2007
1. 1993-5
 2. 1996-7
 3. 1998-2000
 4. 2001-2
 5. 2003-4
 6. 2005-7

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- ST 81 Papers of Jeffrey Hackney, Chairman of the Curators, relating to the restoration of the painted canvas ceiling panels in the Theatre; includes 'The Sheldonian Theatre Conservation Plan', 2002. 2000-5
- ST 82 *The Sheldonian Theatre*, a pamphlet produced by the Public Affairs Directorate to mark the restoration and return of the painted ceiling panels to the Sheldonian; giving a brief account of the design of the building and of the ceiling and of the restoration work undertaken. 2008
- ST 83 Sound recording of the ceremony of conferral of DCL by diploma on the King of Spain, Juan Carlos I, in the Sheldonian Theatre, 24 April 1986. 1986
- One 90-minute audio cassette.
- The recording of the ceremony is followed by a recording of part of the Romanes Lecture by Sir Nicholas Henderson, 'Different approaches to Foreign Policy', delivered on 20 February 1986. See also NW 2/5/10 for the order of proceedings for the ceremony and a transcript of the King's speech.
- ST 84 Sound recording of the ceremony of conferment of honorary degree of DCL on the Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt, 11 May 1979, at the Sheldonian Theatre. 1979
- One 90-minute audio cassette.
- Donated by JG Griffith, Public Orator at the time of the recording. The ceremony itself is recorded on Side 2; Side 1 is a recording of the organ recital preceding the ceremony.
- See also UR 6/HD/19, file 1 for correspondence relating to the conferral of the honorary DCL on H Schmidt; and the *University Gazette* of 22 May 1979 for the transcript of the oration in Latin and its translation into English, the text of the Chancellor's formula (in Latin) and Schmidt's acceptance speech (in English).

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ST 85/1/1-2

Sound recording of the proceedings of Congregation held in the Sheldonian Theatre on 17 May 2005, concerning: Mandatory Reviews of Performance by Academic Line Managers; the re-organisation of Oxford University Libraries; and a resolution concerning Oxford's Governance Strategy. 2005

Two 90-minute audio cassettes.

1. Tape 1

SIDE 1(A) contains speeches by: Professor Fraser; Professor [Wear]; Dr Ralph Walker; Professor Averil Cameron; Gavin Williams (part 1).

SIDE B(2) contains speeches by: Gavin Williams (part 2), Bill MacMillan, Dr Daniel Lan, Dr John Robertson, Robin Briggs, Professor Andrew Parker (Part 1).

2. Tape 2

SIDE A(3) contains speeches by Professor Andrew Parker (part 2), Bennett Saffron, Andrew Dilnot, Carol Leonard, Professor David Smith, Peter Collins, Dr John Wheater, Professor Susan Cooper, Professor David Robertson, Philip Stewart, Professor John Bell, Fiona Caldicott, Dr Ralph Walker, Professor Fraser.

See also *University Gazette* of 19 May 2005 for flysheets relating to the meeting of Congregation on 17 May 2005.

The Vice-Chancellor does not mention that there would be a published transcript of this debate and no such transcript has been found so far.

ST 85/2/1-2

Sound recordings of the proceedings of Congregation held in the Sheldonian Theatre on 1 November 2005, concerning the proposed new government arrangements. 2005

Two 90-minute audio cassettes.

1. Tape 1

2. Tape 2

See also *University Gazette* of 29 Sept 2005 for the notice of the agenda of the meeting (contains a short background note); and *University Gazette* supplement (1) to No 4749, 9 November 2005 for the full transcription of the debate.

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ST 85/3/1-2

Sound recordings of the proceedings of Congregation held in the Sheldonian Theatre on 14 November 2006: voting on Legislative Proposal on the new Statute VI, concerning Council. 2006

Two 90-minute audio cassettes.

1. Tape 1
2. Tape 2

See also *University Gazette* of 9 November 2006 for corrections to the Legislative Proposal made by the Vice-Chancellor, an Explanatory Note to Legislative Proposal, and the text of the proposed Statute VI, with notes; and *University Gazette* supplement (1) to No 4788, 22 Nov 2006 for a verbatim report of the debate in Congregation on 14 Nov 2006.

ST 85/4/1-3

Sound recordings of the proceedings of Congregation held in the Sheldonian Theatre on 28 November 2006, concerning voting on the amended legislative proposal. 2006

Three 90-minute audio cassettes.

1. Tape 1
2. Tape 2
3. Tape 3

See also *University Gazette* supplement (2) to no 4788, 22 November 2006; *University Gazette* of 23 November 2006; *University Gazette* of 30 November 2006; and *University Gazette* supplement (1) to no. 4791, 7 December 2006 for the full transcription.