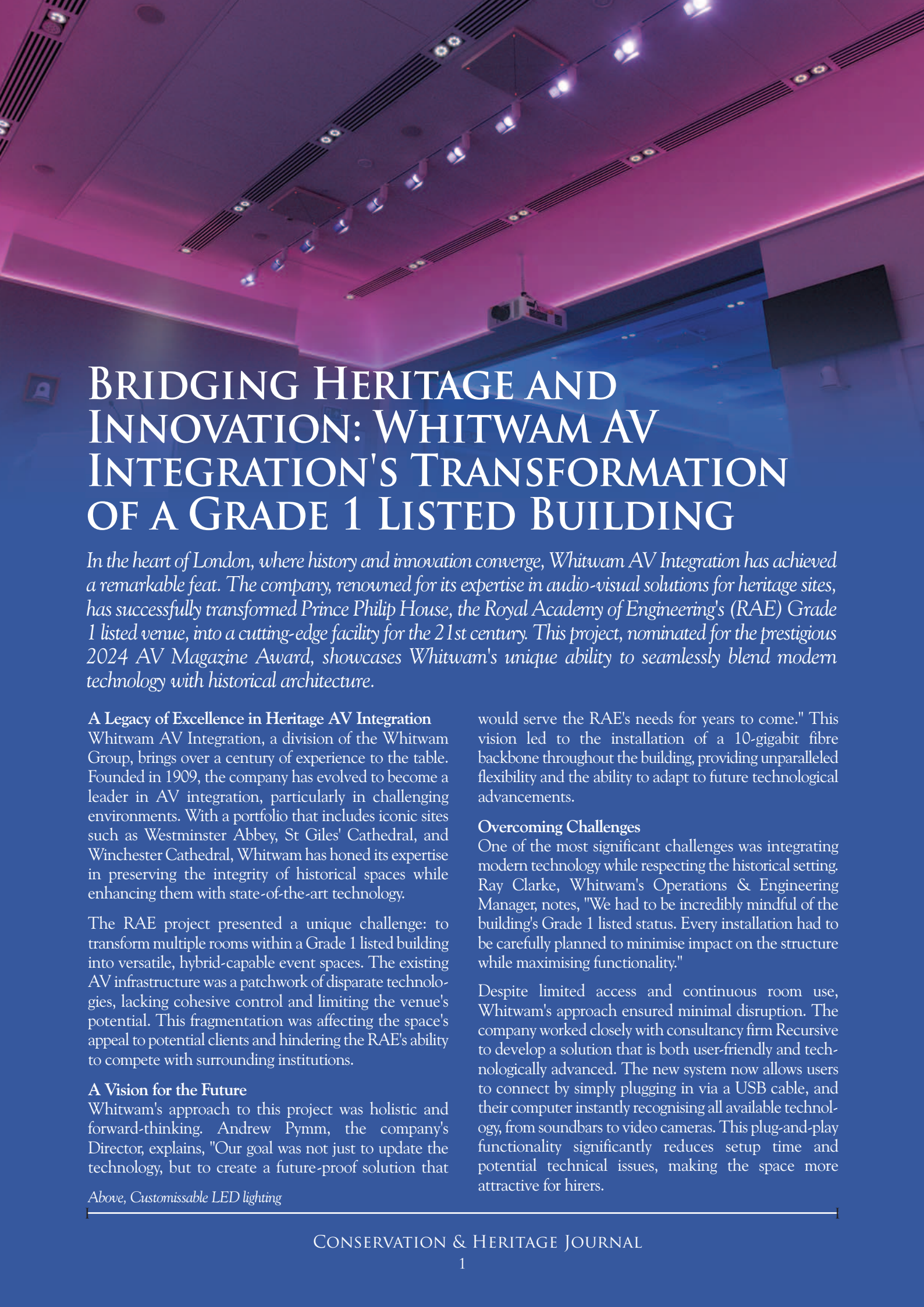




BRIDGING HERITAGE AND INNOVATION: WHITWAM AV INTEGRATION'S TRANSFORMATION OF A GRADE 1 LISTED BUILDING

In the heart of London, where history and innovation converge, Whitwam AV Integration has achieved a remarkable feat. The company, renowned for its expertise in audio-visual solutions for heritage sites, has successfully transformed Prince Philip House, the Royal Academy of Engineering's (RAE) Grade 1 listed venue, into a cutting-edge facility for the 21st century. This project, nominated for the prestigious 2024 AV Magazine Award, showcases Whitwam's unique ability to seamlessly blend modern technology with historical architecture.

A Legacy of Excellence in Heritage AV Integration

Whitwam AV Integration, a division of the Whitwam Group, brings over a century of experience to the table. Founded in 1909, the company has evolved to become a leader in AV integration, particularly in challenging environments. With a portfolio that includes iconic sites such as Westminster Abbey, St Giles' Cathedral, and Winchester Cathedral, Whitwam has honed its expertise in preserving the integrity of historical spaces while enhancing them with state-of-the-art technology.

The RAE project presented a unique challenge: to transform multiple rooms within a Grade 1 listed building into versatile, hybrid-capable event spaces. The existing AV infrastructure was a patchwork of disparate technologies, lacking cohesive control and limiting the venue's potential. This fragmentation was affecting the space's appeal to potential clients and hindering the RAE's ability to compete with surrounding institutions.

A Vision for the Future

Whitwam's approach to this project was holistic and forward-thinking. Andrew Pymm, the company's Director, explains, "Our goal was not just to update the technology, but to create a future-proof solution that

would serve the RAE's needs for years to come." This vision led to the installation of a 10-gigabit fibre backbone throughout the building, providing unparalleled flexibility and the ability to adapt to future technological advancements.

Overcoming Challenges

One of the most significant challenges was integrating modern technology while respecting the historical setting. Ray Clarke, Whitwam's Operations & Engineering Manager, notes, "We had to be incredibly mindful of the building's Grade 1 listed status. Every installation had to be carefully planned to minimise impact on the structure while maximising functionality."

Despite limited access and continuous room use, Whitwam's approach ensured minimal disruption. The company worked closely with consultancy firm Recursive to develop a solution that is both user-friendly and technologically advanced. The new system now allows users to connect by simply plugging in via a USB cable, and their computer instantly recognising all available technology, from soundbars to video cameras. This plug-and-play functionality significantly reduces setup time and potential technical issues, making the space more attractive for hirers.

Above, Customisable LED lighting

Innovative Solutions

Whitwam's expertise in heritage AV integration shone through in their discreet implementation of technology. They customised Sennheiser ceiling microphone tiles and implemented a new speech-line digital audio solution that seamlessly integrates with Dante technology. This approach preserves the aesthetic of the space while delivering superior audio quality, a crucial consideration for the Grade 1 listed building.

The project also highlights Whitwam's commitment to sustainability. By implementing a state-of-the-art hybrid solution, they have significantly reduced the need for international travel to the venue, contributing to decreased CO2 emissions. This allows global participation in debates and events without the environmental impact of long-distance travel.

Transformative Results

The transformation has been nothing short of revolutionary for the RAE. Paul Hopkins, Senior Manager of Facilities at the Royal Academy of Engineering, commented, "Whitwam has not only achieved everything they set out to do, but they've gone the extra mile. They're already looking to the future and are committed to continuous improvement."

The new AV system has positioned the RAE's venue at the forefront of modern event hosting. It can now offer seamless hybrid events, blending in-person and remote participation effortlessly. This enhanced accessibility has added substantial value for their hiring clients, increasing revenue and return on investment for the venue.

Reliability and Control

The system's design prioritises reliability and control. The RAE can now completely manage the AV setup, locking

down all inputs and outputs to prevent accidental changes or breakages. This restricted access ensures consistent performance and reduces downtime, minimising the burden on RAE staff.

Nima Chaprese, Audio Visual Technician at the Royal Academy of Engineering, adds, "The AV integration has brought us on par, if not beyond comparable venues. It's not just the integration work Whitwam have done, it's the install, the maintenance, the transparent communications and personable contact throughout that has been fantastic."

Collaborative Approach

Whitwam's collaborative approach with technology partners was crucial to the project's success. John Barrie from Sennheiser added, "Whitwam challenged themselves and everyone else with some really interesting solutions for the venue spaces." This sentiment is echoed by Chris Brzostowski, Regional Sales Manager at Lightware, who noted, "Whitwam differentiate themselves to go above and beyond, not just look at how a system can work, but how they can improve it in itself and create something with a user-centric approach, in sympathy with the venue."

The project's success is further validated by the consultants at Recursive. Richard Smith from Recursive commented, "Whitwam clearly have a very capable team, but it's also a close-knit team. And in many ways, it mirrors Recursive's own ethos. It's their personal touch, delivering and not giving up even when things get challenging and working together to find a solution to the problem."

Below, integrating the AV rack





Above, Sennheiser Microphones



Above, hybrid meeting space

Impact Beyond Technology

The impact of Whitwam's work extends beyond the technical aspects. The RAE can now offer fully customisable spaces with simple controls for end-users and advanced capabilities for in-house technicians. This balance ensures that the AV technology serves as an enabler, helping the RAE deliver its mission of bringing engineering excellence to the people and drive their business forward in innovative ways.

As a testament to the project's success and innovation, it has been nominated for the 2024 AV Magazine Award in the Venue Project of the Year category. This nomination recognises Whitwam's exceptional ability to overcome challenges, deliver innovative solutions, and create a user-friendly, future-proof AV infrastructure that has transformed the venue's capabilities.

Conclusion

Whitwam AV Integration's work at the Royal Academy of Engineering stands as a shining example of how modern technology can be seamlessly integrated into heritage buildings. By balancing preservation with progress, Whitwam has created a space that not only respects its historical significance but also meets the complex needs of a contemporary, world-class institution.

The project demonstrates that with the right expertise and vision, it is possible to honour the past while fully embracing the technological possibilities of the future.

Whitwam's success in transforming Prince Philip House sets a new standard for AV integration in heritage sites, proving that historical buildings can be equipped with cutting-edge technology without compromising their architectural integrity.

This project not only enhances the RAE's capabilities but also serves as an inspiration for similar institutions looking to bridge the gap between heritage and innovation.



Above, Royal Academy of Engineering, Prince Philip House, 3 Carlton House Terrace, London

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AV integration
Design Install Maintain

Whitwam AV Integration: Your trusted partner for premium audiovisual solutions.

With over 35 years of expertise, we deliver end-to-end AV systems from design to maintenance. Specialising in integrating modern technology into challenging environments, we install and maintain for all types of venues including Westminster Abbey, The Royal Society, Central Criminal Court, Portsmouth Coroners Office, Royal Academy of Engineering, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service.

Providing high-quality, reliable AV solutions; Excellence, quality, and value guaranteed.

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