

British Library Centre for Conservation

By the book



The British Library Centre for Conservation is a new addition to the existing British Library building, adjacent to St Pancras Station in central London. The challenge for architect Long & Kentish was to design a building that complemented the preceding high quality build, while providing a state-of-the-art facility designed to meet the specific technical requirements of book, sound and paper conservation.

It was important that the centre was both physically and emotionally connected to the heart of the British Library as previously the functions within it – the National Sound Archive, book binders and conservationists – had been situated away from the main building.

The design for the centre had to meet the highly specialised needs of book conservation and sound recording processes to ensure high standards of care for the library's priceless collections. A critical part of this was the requirement for

a controlled internal environment and superior light conditions. The interior also had to be specially designed in order to incorporate the bespoke work desks of the conservationists.

Located towards the back of the existing building, Long & Kentish's innovative design saw the new building converge with the existing library on the first floor by means of a terrace, which also serves as a roof over the loading bay below. This meant that the centre could be serviced through the same main entrance as the existing library.

For Long & Kentish the entire process was a collaborative effort, involving the client as well as the bricklayers and engineers. Low-maintenance high-quality finishing materials that weathered naturally were selected. Charnwood Forest Dark Victorian Red Mixture clay bricks (the same bricks used on the original building), green oak and natural zinc were used – thus avoiding the powder-coated

painted metalwork found on the original British Library.

It was important to Long & Kentish to make the new building subtly different from the existing one, but to maintain a sense of continuity. The intention for the new building was to create a monolithic look that would still hold the interest of the observer as they approached the building. The mortar and pointing was a key part of this strategy.

The mortar was brushed flush to the bricks, rather than raked, using a soft bristle brush to expose the natural grit of the mortar, a mix of one part ordinary Portland cement, one part Totternhoe hydrated lime, three parts Wareham (Raymond Brown Pit) washed soft sand and three parts Wareham (Raymond Brown Pit) washed sharp (3mm sieved) sand.

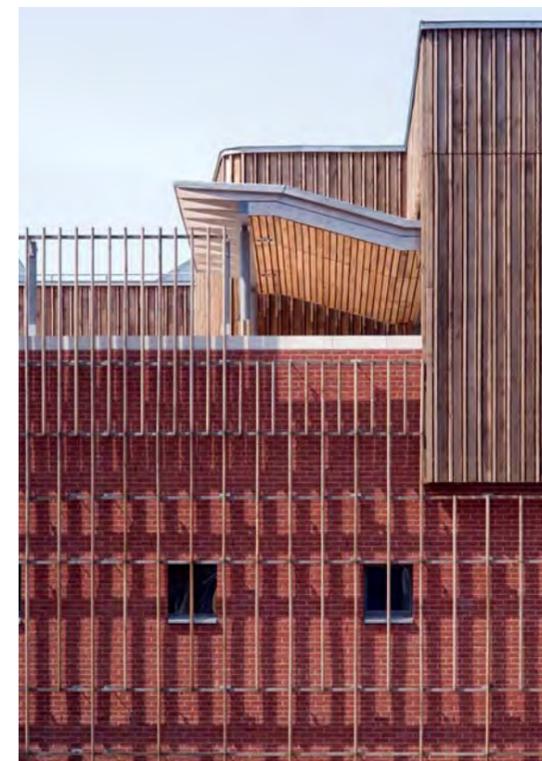
The brick walls of the building are contrasted with timber elements such as the gently curved wall of untreated, sawn green oak battens on the first floor of the

terrace and the green oak timber trellis on the east facade. Over time it is intended for the trellis to be covered by climbing plants, which will grow into a green wall facing St Pancras Station.

The windows and doors have been set back from the facade with brick jambs and suspended brick soffit. On the east elevation the wall partially consists of honeycomb brickwork with frogs, to allow for cross ventilation of the loading bay.

Another requirement of the brief was that the building had to meet blast resistance standards. A stainless-steel sheet has been incorporated in the vast majority of the wall build with all windows and doors and their fixings designed accordingly. The window frames are set behind the brickwork with the skins attached to the brickwork.

Long & Kentish achieved a BREEAM 'excellent' rating for its design of the centre, which sits harmoniously alongside the original library.



Project: British Library Centre for Conservation
Location: St Pancras, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
Architect: Long & Kentish Architects
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