

Regeneration King's Cross: the Central Saint Martin's College of Art relocation project

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Central Saint Martin's move to a prestigious new site at King's Cross is part of the most significant redevelopment project in London in the last 150 years. The Library will inhabit a 19th-century grain store, the Granary building, designed by Lewis Cubitt. To date the process of planning the library has included work with base build architects Stanton Williams, the fit out architects Pringle Brandon, library consultants The Design Concept and Embervision, and suppliers Demco.

The King's Cross Project

In Autumn 2011, Central Saint Martin's 4700 students and 1000 staff will be integrated on two sites: at King's Cross and at Archway, where the Byam Shaw School of Art will continue to be based.

The move to King's Cross is a £200m relocation project for the College but it is also part of a much bigger redevelopment project for the area and the biggest regeneration project in London for 150 years. The project includes the restoration of historic buildings, the construction of new offices, streets and homes, the creation of large public spaces and the development of retail and entertainment venues. Central Saint Martin's (CSM) is one of the first to move to the new site and the close proximity to St Pancras and King's Cross stations, the arts and entertainment venue King's Place and the British Library, amongst others, provides significant opportunities for the College.

CSM is one of the six colleges that make up the University of the Arts London. The colleges offer the University's 20,000 students a diverse range of courses at all levels from foundation and undergraduate to postgraduate and research. As active professional artists, practitioners, designers, critics and theorists, the University's teaching staff lead the way in creative and experimental practice alongside historical and theoretical analysis.

The College has a long and illustrious history pioneering radical innovations in art and design teaching and learning for more than 150 years – separately as the Central School and Saint Martins and for the past 20 years as Central Saint Martins. Currently CSM occupies eleven buildings on six sites and comprises the Schools of Graphic and Industrial Design, Fashion and Textiles, Fine Art, Drama Centre London and Byam Shaw School of Art. The buildings are ageing, some are 100 years old, and they are no longer able to be adapted to the needs and requirements of modern students. Nor do they reflect contemporary teaching and research methods and learning styles.

The new site at King's Cross will bring together staff and students from across the range of disciplines the College offers, providing greater opportunities for collaboration and for staff and student interaction, building on the College's already strong sense of community and identity. As well as increased collaboration, the benefits of the new space for the College include purpose-built art and design accommodation; the co-location of teaching, research, innovation and enterprise, and access to improved equipment and more modern facilities.

CSM's new 39,000-square-metre campus will occupy a site comprising the landmark Grade II listed Granary building,¹ the Eastern Transit Shed

and a newly designed modern building linking the two. Designed by Lewis Cubitt,² the Granary building is a 19th-century grain store, which will house the new library and a hub for research, innovation and enterprise. The heavy workshops and studios including wood and metal workshops, ceramics, jewellery, textiles and fashion will be located in the Eastern Transit Shed. The Studio Blocks include art, digital media, photography and printmaking. A Performance Centre will encompass a public theatre, studios and rehearsal space. One of the most distinctive features of the site is a vast 75 by 13 metre internal street, naturally lit through a translucent roof and running the length of the building, linking the Granary building at the south to the theatre at the north.

Central Saint Martins Library

Information Services: Libraries is a University-wide department serving all staff and students across its six component colleges. Rather than there being a central University Library each college is served by a site library responding to the specific local needs of that college but accessible to all. This structure has an impact on projects such as the King's Cross move because the site libraries are integral to but separately managed from the colleges. Therefore any change to a local site library must take into consideration department-wide as well as college aspirations.

CSM Library is currently located at three sites – Southampton Row, Charing Cross Road and Archway – covering around 1600 square metres in total. The libraries hold around 100,000 items, housed on some 2500 linear metres of shelving. A team of 24 staff members works across the three sites. Like the rest of the College the libraries have outgrown their current, less-than-adequate surroundings: the library at Charing Cross is located above a nightclub, which is not particularly conducive to study when the sound system is tested in the afternoon.

The move to King's Cross offers CSM Library the chance to merge the collections and to review services and procedures in order to meet the changing needs of students and to align with the developing College Academic Plan. Our aspirations mirror those of the College in providing flexible learning spaces which reflect the learning, teaching and research needs of current and future students and staff. More specifically the library will offer extended opening hours and the facility for 24/7 opening, RFID, roaming support, zoned areas to

support different learning styles from highly informal to silent study, with bookable group study rooms and dedicated display and exhibition spaces.

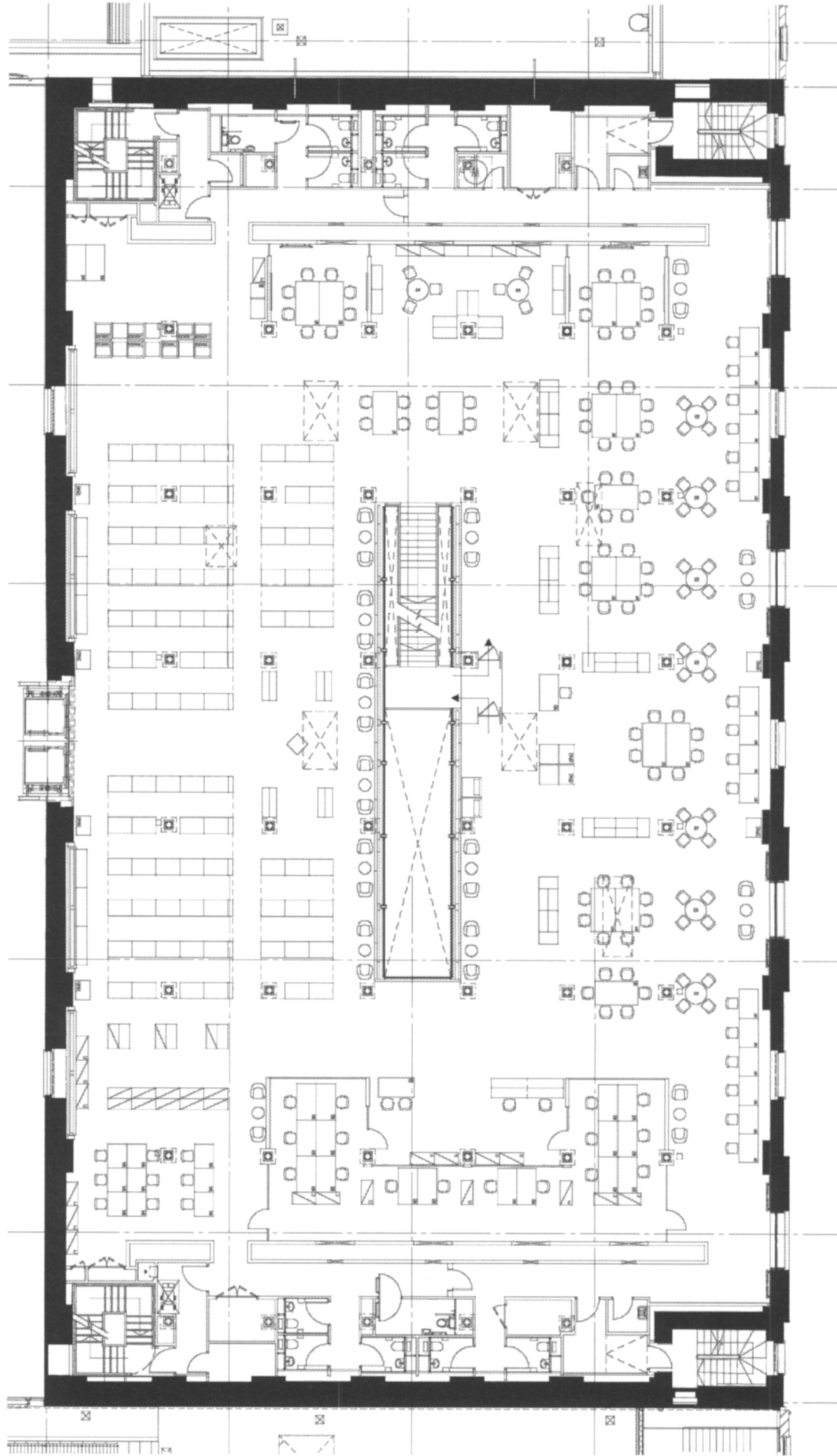
The issue of floor loading meant that the decision to locate the library in the Granary building was taken very early on in the project. Initially the library was to be located on the first and second floors but when the College gained an additional floor it was moved to the second and third. The available space for the new library is around 1800 square metres, which is an increase of around 200 square metres. While there is not unlimited scope for growth we were fortunate not to lose space.

Designing the Library – Phase 1

During the latter part of 2007 I had initial meetings with Stanton Williams, the architects designing the base build. Together we established a high level brief for the library through the exploration of existing and anticipated user requirements and the potential opportunities offered by the space allocated within the building. In preparation for these meetings I worked with library colleagues to provide detailed information about our existing use of space, including shelving, storage, work spaces and staff offices.

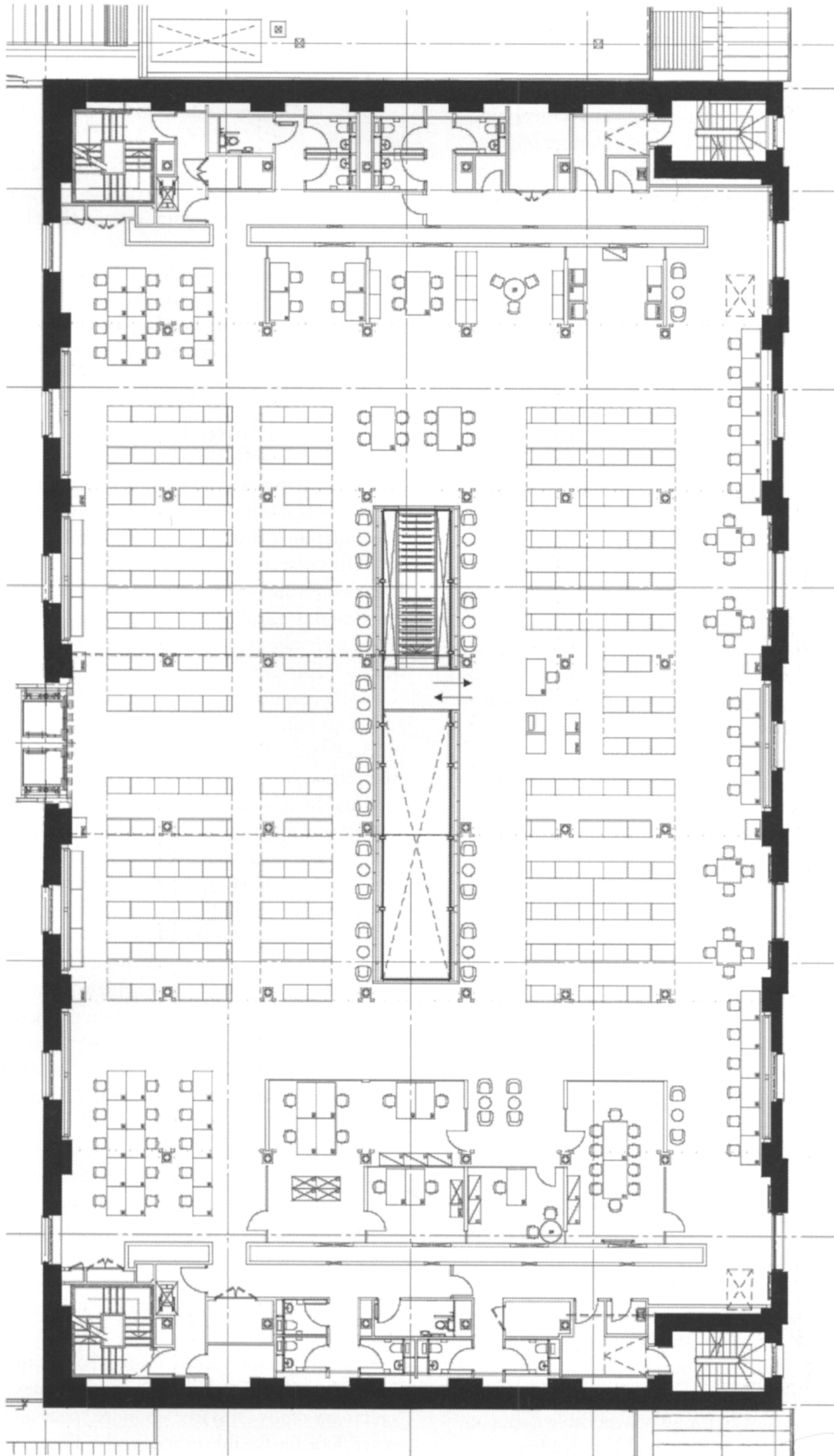
Among the main features of the library space are the original pillars, which run throughout at intervals of seven metres by three metres and which cannot be removed. The ceilings are low and the original wooden beams and exposed brickwork will be retained. Being a warehouse, the Granary building has small windows and the main source of natural light is provided by a stunning 20- by 3-metre lightwell running through the centre of the building. These features provide a very strong, wonderfully industrial aesthetic for the space but also impose significant restrictions in terms of layout.

A space planner working with the architects and the College produced the first indicative plans for the library. From this early stage the intention was to provide different working spaces on the two floors, the lower floor being noisier and offering flexible group study space and the upper floor being quieter and offering opportunities for individual quiet study. It was also important to ensure that the library could open for extended periods when the rest of the building was closed. And the design needed to incorporate RFID or at least self-issue, but with scope for the contingency plan of a larger issue desk if this was not feasible.



Library plan produced by Overbury.

CSM Library layout, Granary building, second floor.



Library plan produced by Overbury.

CSM Library layout, Granary building, third floor.

Library – Phase 2

By June 2008 the initial planning for the entire College was complete and indicative briefs were produced to provide Stanton Williams with zoning and fit out information. The space planner with whom I had worked in 2007 produced these briefs since the architects had been primarily concerned with the base build, and the brief for the library had therefore not progressed from the initial layouts. The library required very little in the way of building work other than the installation of the lightwell and a minimum number of internal walls to create study rooms and offices. The indicative layouts simply split the library in half lengthwise on each floor with the bookstacks in one half and study spaces on the other: a useful but rather uninspiring starting point. The real design process for the library did not begin until the fit out architects were appointed in December 2009.

Therefore in summer 2008 I appointed a separate library consultant, The Design Concept, to start thinking about layout in more detail and how to make the best use of the space. Library staff went through a process similar to that with Stanton Williams, but because The Design Concept is a specialist library planning company we were able to consider more options and challenge the notions of the indicative plans. These were the first plans to provide an idea of how all the library collections and services might fit into the space. While ultimately they were overly complex and leaned more towards a public library design, it was a very useful exercise to undertake while awaiting the next formal stage in the project.

Library – Phase 3

In March 2009 the University gained additional space for the College and as a result the library was moved from the first and second to the second and third floors of the Granary building. While this was an excellent development for the College, it had a significant impact on the library design because the second and third floors can only be accessed internally via a staircase from the first floor, and as a result we had to rethink the plans.

Stanton Williams provided additional layouts in May 2009, taking into account these changes. Again these were indicative but they did attempt to resolve the issue of the library entrance and also worked on fitting in all the library's existing stock. The entrance to the library is now via lockable doors on the first floor of the Granary building, leading

directly to stairs into the library itself, on the floor above. While this is a compromise it does mean that users see the library opening up in front of them, as they come up the stairs and turn right into the space from the landing positioned in the centre of the lightwell.

However, there was little other development from the initial plans, although also at this time a number of internal walls were removed from the plan, meaning that we lost the separate group study rooms. As the side walls were retained these have been re-designated as 'study booths', a model library staff have seen working well at both Imperial College and the University of Bournemouth.

Library – Phase 4

During summer 2009 library staff began planning the fit out and library move project in detail. We appointed the consultants Embervision to work with us on this planning phase. Embervision work with libraries to support change – not just in terms of a physical move and the design process – but also the cultural changes required and the support that staff need to make those changes.

In preparation for consultation with the fit out architects and on the advice of Embervision we produced a Library Brief and a stock strategy. The stock strategy is based on the College Academic Plan and breaks the stock down by subject area, subject as percentage of the total stock and percentage of loans per subject area. This enabled us to understand where we needed to develop our stock and where we needed to weed. The Library Brief was a pithy vision for the library in layman's terms. Its key messages were to improve user satisfaction, increase use, support student achievement, ensure a strong visual aesthetic, and to retain the best of the old and embrace the best of the new.

Embervision produced a high-level concept plan which was far less detailed than the earlier indicative plans. They felt these initial plans were too traditional and focused on the stock at the expense of the students; their plans instead focused on the aspiration to design a student-centred service by creating different study environments. The plan is designed around self-issue and roaming support, and locates staff at small 'welcome pods' close to the entrance on both floors rather than at a traditional issue desk.

By locating significantly more stock on the upper floor, Embervision were able to create zones of 'sanctuary study' and free up more space on the lower floor for flexible group study. The most

radical discussions we had were around organising some of the stock in what Embervision term a 'boutique' layout – u and s shaped shelving layouts similar to those found in a retail environment to facilitate browsing – and moving away from Dewey or other strict methods of categorisation as a means of grouping stock. Again this was an extremely useful exercise: in challenging the previous plans and our own professional practice, it allowed us to be far more experimental in our thinking within the restrictions placed on the design by the space. But while we have retained the stock split proposed by Embervision, we have not gone as far as abandoning Dewey.

Embervision suggested that the next step would be to take their concept plans to a preferred supplier to work on detailed layouts. We began working with a Demco consultant in November 2009 to translate Embervision's concept plans into detailed layouts by February 2010, with the intention that these would inform our work with the fit out architects, Pringle Brandon.

Library – Phase 5

Two successful meetings took place with Pringle Brandon in April last year. Using Demco's plans as a starting point we reviewed the requirements for the library, taking into account specific architectural elements – particularly the ventilation and heating systems, which impacted on the layout. Pringle Brandon revised and refined the plans through two iterations incorporating feedback from library staff, with final sign off in July. During this process and continuing through the summer, library staff have worked on planning service models for the new library, preparing the library cataloguing and the physical collection for the move and producing detailed shelving maps in preparation for the physical move. The next stage of the project is the detailed specification and procurement of the furniture and equipment, and library staff will be fully involved with this process. We are looking forward to an extremely busy year with a provisional move date in July 2011, ready for the academic year 2011/12.

Conclusion

In planning the library at King's Cross I have talked to a wide range of library staff and visited a number of institutions across the UK. While projects and contexts vary, I have benefited from the wealth of

experience of staff involved in building projects and from their willingness to share their expertise.

To date the project has been both challenging and exciting. I have learned a lot throughout the process: the need to be flexible as the design process is a very fluid one; the ability to focus on what I could control and relinquish what I could not; the importance of sustained communication whether or not there is anything new to communicate and, crucially, to be willing to question every aspect of the project.

The project itself is of course a work in progress, which will continue long after the College has moved to its new home.

Note

For current images of the site please go to the College's Flickr site,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/csm-kings-cross/>.

References

1. A listed building in the United Kingdom is one that has been placed on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. It is a widely used status, applied to around half a million buildings.
2. Lewis Cubitt (1799-1883), an English architect who was responsible for the design of King's Cross Station, the terminus of the Great Northern Railway (1851-2).

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