

Cottrell & Vermeulen Architecture

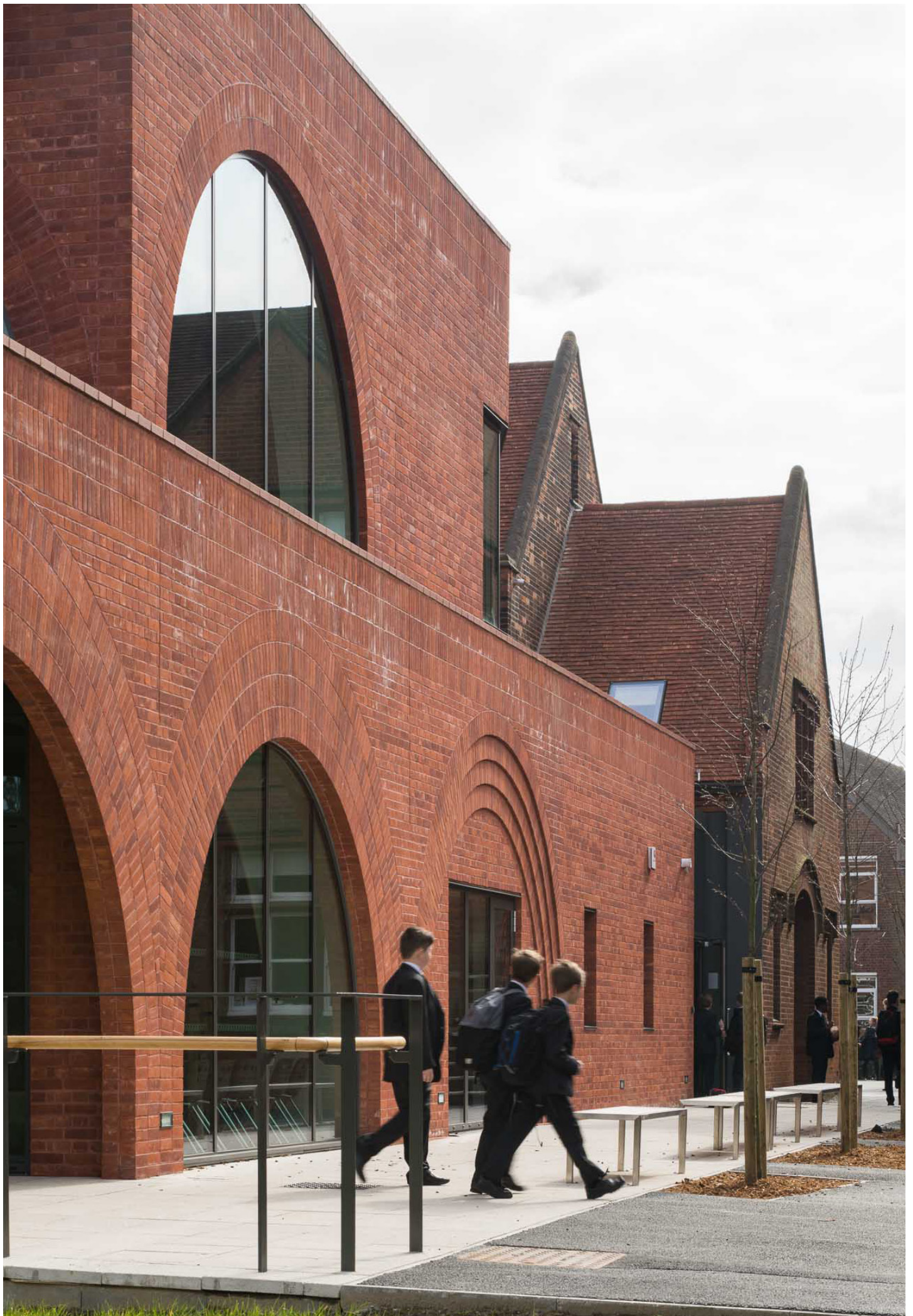
Brentwood School Learning Resource Centre

Design South East 2019





The Bean Learning Resources Centre (LRC) at Brentwood School in Essex provides the independent school with a new two-storey extension to their existing library, transforming how the building is used while meeting the demands of the 21st century technological and pedagogical landscape. The project also sees the redevelopment of an adjoining 1960s teaching block – the Cunliffe Building – expanding learning space and achieving a sense of coherence between the buildings.





The existing Bean Library was built in 1929, encompassing two floors at the centre of the campus. Unable to accommodate the present day needs of 1,200 pupils, the library was seen to be in need of vast improvement. The expanded library now offers 206 seated study places in a range of varied, flexible spaces, far exceeding guidelines and thus allowing for future growth within the school.



Work on the first floor of existing Bean library focused largely on preserving the space to its original state. The underused ground floor, however, was heavily altered in order to achieve a sense of cohesion between the existing building and the extension. In doing so, one continuous volume has been created and linked through a new feature staircase, creating a range of study spaces that encourage individual learning.





As well as creating an education hub, the ground floor of the new library has been designed as a dedicated social area, rectifying current deficiencies of the school where students have no suitable space for relaxation and recreation before, after and during school hours. This area can also be used as an additional assembly area when required, capable of accommodating a year level group of 180 pupils. An entrance portico links study and social spaces, offering a transition space that can also be used for talks and lectures.



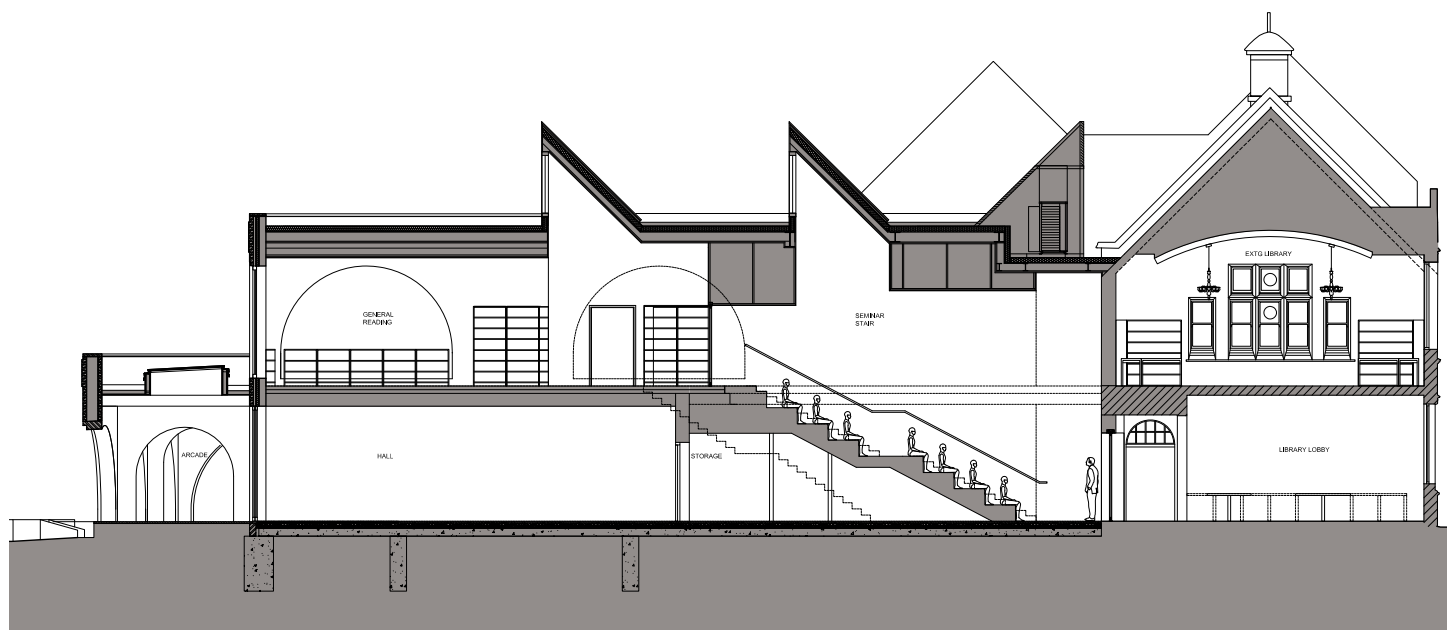
The design responds to and reemphasises the existing grain of the site, which is characterised by a series of courtyards. Previously, a ground floor connection between the Bean Library and the Cunliffe Building prevented movement between the library square and stage lawns beyond. This link has now been removed, physically re-connecting the school's central gardens through a new brick arcade. This arcade takes inspiration from a nearby cloister and informs the rest of the elevation, creating an array of arches that form a picturesque backdrop to a stage lawn. Above, a glass connection links the Bean LRC and the Cunliffe Building on the first floor, reading as a distinct visual separation and retaining a physical connection between the buildings.



The façade of the Cunliffe Building has been replaced, demolishing a gabled wing and extending the building to align it with the Bean library. The building is now better unified with the surrounding architecture, while the two buildings together create a defined edge to the library square. The new façade offers a contemporary interpretation of the neighbouring original Bean Library building, featuring a pitched roof and gabled windows. While its red brick further engrains the building within its surroundings and adds further visual interest to the façade.



Ground floor plan



Section A-A

The extension also rectifies the internal layout of the Cunliffe Building, allowing for a central corridor and vastly improved teaching spaces. Where previously there were examples of classrooms being accessed through other classrooms and several small and cramped spaces, the revised internal layout has allowed for the space to be maximised. On the second floor, classrooms nestle smartly into the existing gable roof, where new skylights flood the spaces with natural light. The £6.7 million redevelopment was completed in December 2015, with students occupying the building from the beginning of 2016.



Project Team

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