



CANTERBURY TALE

Architect Rivington Street Studio has turned a run-of-the-mill repair and maintenance job into an elegant refurbishment for a faded campus of the Kent Institute of Art & Design. Martin Spring admires the results

SARAH BLEE

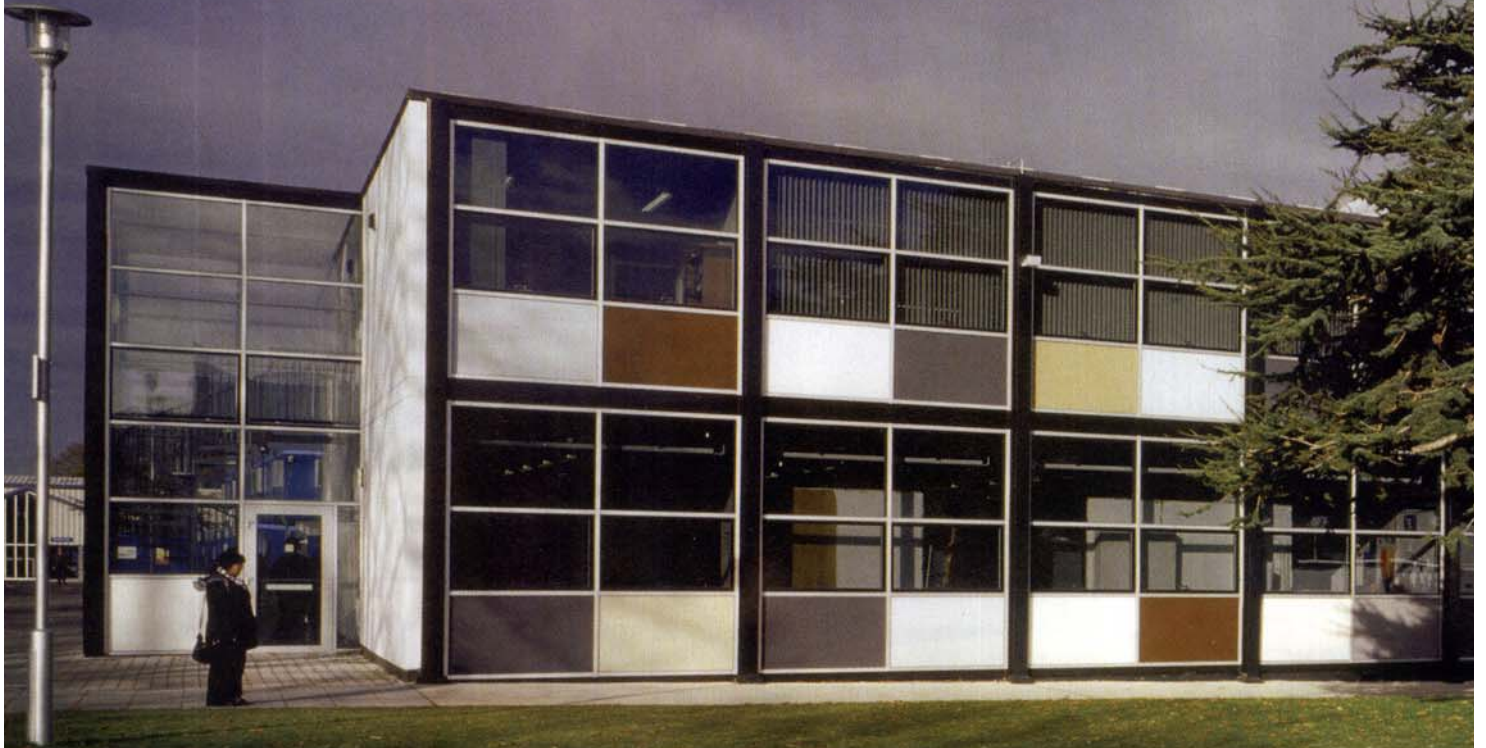
A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, A FIRST VISIT TO KENT Institute of Art & Design in Canterbury would have been a bewildering experience. You would have entered a two-storey perimeter building where you might easily have missed the reception desk behind a hole in the wall. To reach most of the teaching spaces, you would then have had to walk straight out the other side of the building to two separate blocks. If you wanted a cup of coffee, you would have had to find your way to the back of the building to a room overlooking

the service access road. And as for the buildings themselves, you would probably have noticed that they were draughty and decrepit.

Visit the college these days however, and you would receive a much warmer welcome. You walk underneath a wide-spreading cedar tree into an open-sided quadrangle of modern buildings. Once inside the main entrance, it is hard to miss the wide reception desk behind a glass screen.

From here, you can walk down a wide

light-filled corridor to the college's art gallery and teaching spaces. Or you might feel drawn through the sliding partition in natural timber boarding that is off to one side, and find yourself surrounded by students chatting and sipping that elusive cup of coffee. Gazing through the window wall, you notice that the two-storey buildings are now faced in brown, beige, grey, white and clear-glazed panels, which are neatly set off by the green expanse of lawn and the shaggy dark-green cedar. Quite an artful ►



The college's front block has been extended to fill in the ground-floor set-back (see right). A new curtain wall has been added in keeping with the 1960s educational building



FULL-FRONTAL REFURBISHMENT

An elegant new curtain wall that is up-to-date yet in the character of the 1960s educational buildings has been installed at Kent institute.

A new external wall was needed where the ground floor of a two-storey block was infilled. Since it aligned with the existing external wall on the first floor, it made sense to match both facades and to renew the obsolete upper facade at the same time.

Architect Rivington Street Studio specified a new modular system to span between the existing steel columns, as in the original design. After reviewing several proprietary curtain walling systems, the architect chose Reynaers' CW50 system. "They have narrow flat capping pieces just 50 mm wide, which are neat and tidy and available in anodised aluminium with a natural mill finish," says Rivington Street Studio's associate, Euan Durston.

"The other thing was that we didn't want huge chunky opening window frames," he adds. In Reynaers' standardised system, each opening light consists of a structural double-glazing panel that stretches right to the edges, where it oversails its frame, which is mounted behind it. This keeps the same slender width of framing throughout the facade.

The opaque spandrel panels are insulated sandwich panels fronted by Eternit composite board and fixed using standard Reynaers frames. The whole system was fabricated at the Cardiff works of, and installed on site by, Glamalco. The insulated spandrel panels were manufactured by Marko Industries.

The building works were carried out in six phases over 15 months while the college was fully occupied. The intricate management of the project was made more complicated by the main contractor, Spectrum, going into administration towards the end of the contract. Rivington associate Euan Durston recalls: "Spectrum was struggling for a long time before that, and it became difficult to co-ordinate the subcontractors." Out of a total contract sum of £4.17m, refurbishment came to £3.51m or £610/m², and the new-build extensions cost £660,000 or £1000/m².

To the college's estates director Nick Jones, the refurbishment has been a complete success. "It has opened up the whole campus and made it more versatile," he says. "And by bringing all the shared facilities together in the centre, it has brought the college together for the first time."

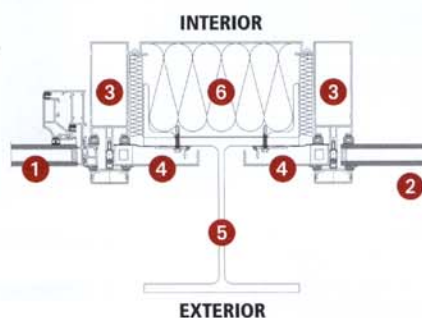
Even so, the architect has managed to impose such a radical reconfiguration on the campus while still retaining its distinctive functional

character. This character was expressed in the generous, well-lit spaces, as well as in such raw industrial elements as exposed castellated beams, pop-up triangular rooflights and basic curtain walling. Refurbishment was carried out in a straightforward though sensitive manner using today's technology, which is in the same functional, if less crude, idiom as the original technology. Now that the whole building looks neater and can be used in a more efficient and orderly way, it can be better appreciated as a minor classic of the 40-year-old functionalist style.

Project team

architect **Rivington Street Studio**
 project manager and cost consultant **Fanshawe**
 structural engineer **Michael Barclay Partnership**
 services engineer **Gibbs Dench Partnership**
 main contractor **Spectrum**
 specialist trade contractors **Glamalco (curtain walling)**, **Sladdens (mechanical engineering)**, **PA Grant (electrics)**

Curtain wall fixing: detail in plan



- 1 New opening window with aluminium frame concealed behind double-glazing panel
- 2 New fixed glazing panel
- 3 New aluminium frame
- 4 New aluminium cover flashing
- 5 Existing exposed steel column stripped and recoated
- 6 New thermal insulation

Conversions and extensions

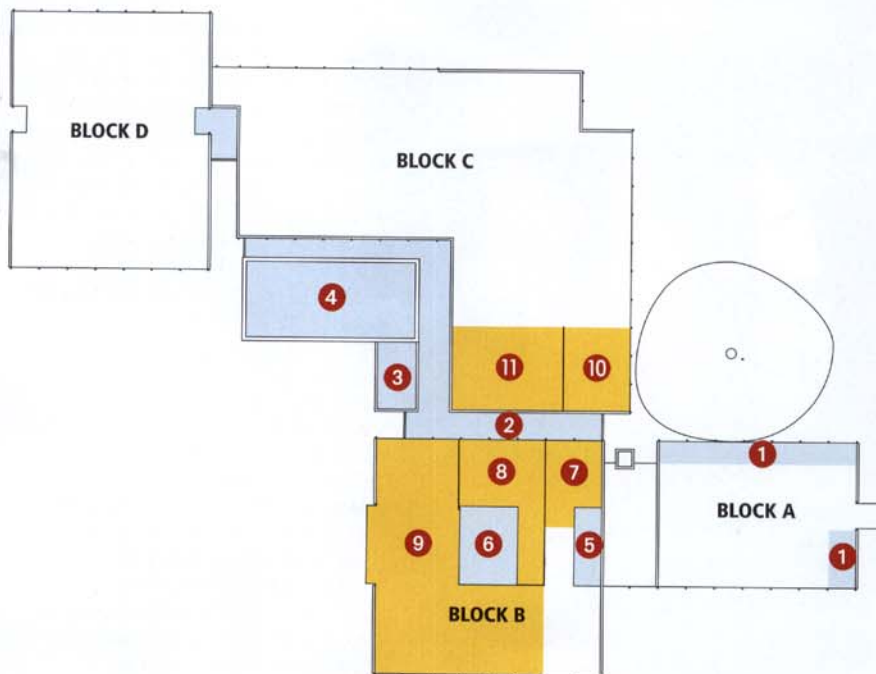
The 1960s college campus has been extended and partly converted so as to bring shared facilities together around the new main entrance.

Newbuild infills and extensions

- 1 Studio space infills ground-floor set-back
- 2 Main entrance and corridor infills gap between blocks
- 3 Seminar room
- 4 170-seat lecture theatre
- 5 Main staircase
- 6 First floor for library spanning upper void of former gallery

Building conversions

- 7 Entrance hall and bookshop moved from between blocks A and B
- 8 Lecture theatre moved from temporary site huts
- 9 Upper floor library moved from block A
- 10 Cafe moved from rear of block B
- 11 Gallery moved from block B



► combination, you think to yourself.

The radical transformation of the 1960s college complex has come about through a £6.2m refurbishment project by architect Rivington Street Studio and project manager Fanshawe, both of London. It started off as a basic £1.5m repair and maintenance overhaul funded out of the poor estates programme of the Higher Education Funding Council of England. The external curtain walls and the heating, ventilation and electrical services had all come to the end of their life and were crying out for total renewal.

On top of that, the college – not to mention its users – was also suffering from its contorted internal layout and was bursting out into temporary site huts. So the college raised its own finances, partly through property disposals, to cover a total internal reordering and three minor extensions.

Two of the extensions fill in senseless gaps in the original complex. One covers an open-air passageway between two of the blocks to create

a wide central corridor; the other fills in the set-back ground floor of the front block so that its outer wall aligns with that of the previously overhanging upper floor. The third extension comprises a seminar room and a tiered 170-seat lecture theatre at the end of the corridor.

As well as replacing the site huts with permanent accommodation, the extensions freed up circulation around the existing spaces. These could then be comprehensively reconfigured. The foundry, for example, originally occupied the prime position overlooking the cedar tree but it was being used less and less, as large cast sculptures were being superseded by digital art. So the decision was taken to halve it in size with the extra space given over to the new cafe.

The original double-height gallery was considered too inflexible to exhibit art because its many inaccessible windows and skylights made it difficult to vary the lighting. Space was freed up here by moving the main college staircase out and into the former entrance hall next door,



The cafe replaces part of the old foundry, while main entrance and corridor infill a rain-lashed gap between two blocks

along with a new lift and ramp for disabled access. The ground floor space in and around the gallery was then given over to an entrance hall, reception desk, bookshop and small lecture hall, while a new floor was slung right across the upper void to house the college's expanded library. A replacement gallery was created in a nearby studio space, which has rooflights that can be more easily blacked out but no windows.

As regards heating, ventilation and electricity, it was not just their age that made the existing systems inadequate. Hot-water radiators, fan-coil ventilation units and electric socket outlets lined the perimeter walls, where they were often blocked by large art works and temporary screens propped up against them. They have been replaced by metal ventilation ducts, horizontal radiator panels and socket outlets that are all suspended from the ceilings, where they cannot be obstructed yet remain accessible. Secondary glazing has been added to the rooflights to conserve heat.