

The Pirate Castle in Camden Town was built in 1977, as the home of the Pirate Club, a youth club specialising in the provision of water-based activities on the Regents Canal.

From 1999 to 2003 AAB architects and Gardiner and Theobald provided pro-bono services to help the club examine options for providing additional facilities and improved access. Planning permission for a two storey extension was obtained in 2004, and for the following couple of years AAB architects assisted the club in making grant applications. Funding was eventually secured from the Lottery, the Bridge House Trust and a Section 106 agreement in respect of the neighbouring development. In 2006 AAB architects were appointed by Barratt West London to complete the design of the extension under a Design and Build contract, and the extension was completed in 2008.

The extension provides a new lift, showers and toilets, an enlarged hall and separate access to the canalside. One of the primary motivations behind the project has been to improve access to the Pirate Castle, and the club now provides inclusive community activities and training opportunities on both water and land. Improvements to the main hall has increased the number of community groups hiring the space, increasing the financial sustainability of the club by providing 20% of its annual income.

The design team also included:

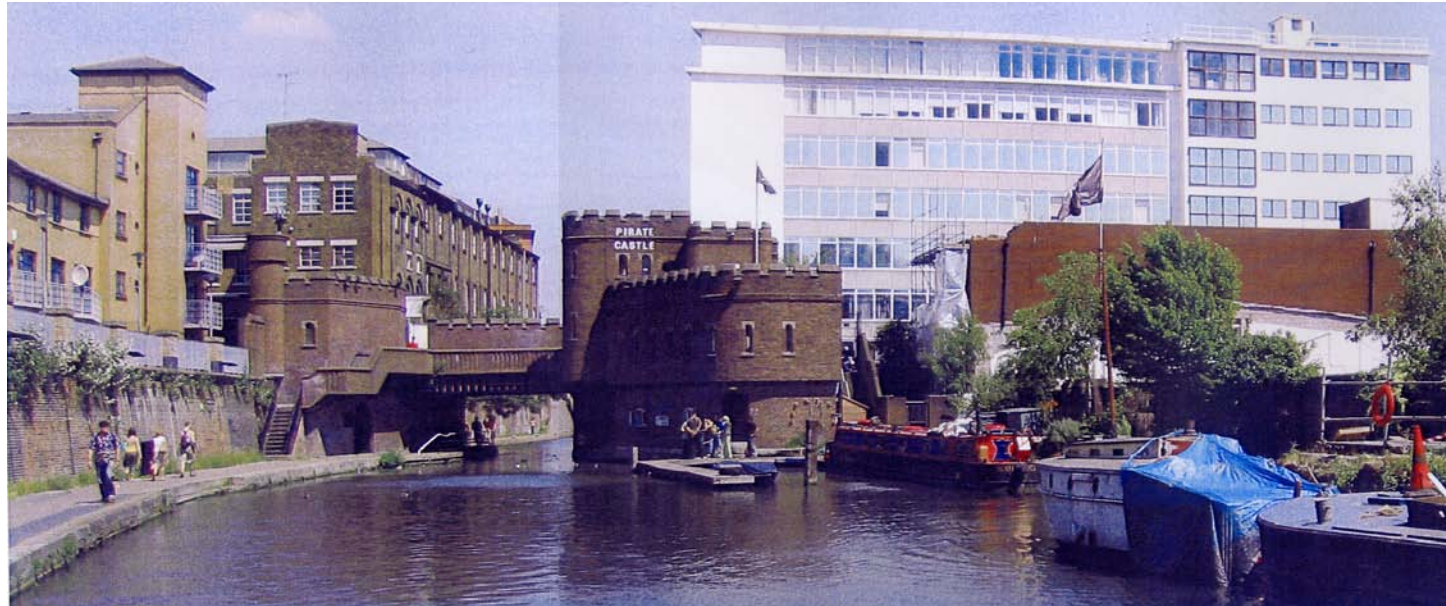
| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Ove Arup and Partners | Structural and building services engineers |
| Gardiner and Theobald | Quantity surveyor and project manager |
| Delva Patman | Party wall surveyor |
| Mette Heinz | Graphic designer |

Summary
Context - Pirate Club
Process
Project

The Pirate Castle

The Pirate Club was established in 1966, when its first head quarters was an old canal barge. In 1977 new premises were designed for the club by Richard Seifert.

The site of the Pirate Castle was originally a bridge abutment at the north end of Gilbey's Wharf, abutting Oval Road to the north. It is located within Regents Canal Conservation Area, which is characterised by its industrial past and secluded nature of the canal and towpath. There are many fine examples of industrial brickwork along the canal, which influenced the choice of materials for the new extension to the Pirate Castle.



Existing view of the Pirate Castle in 1999



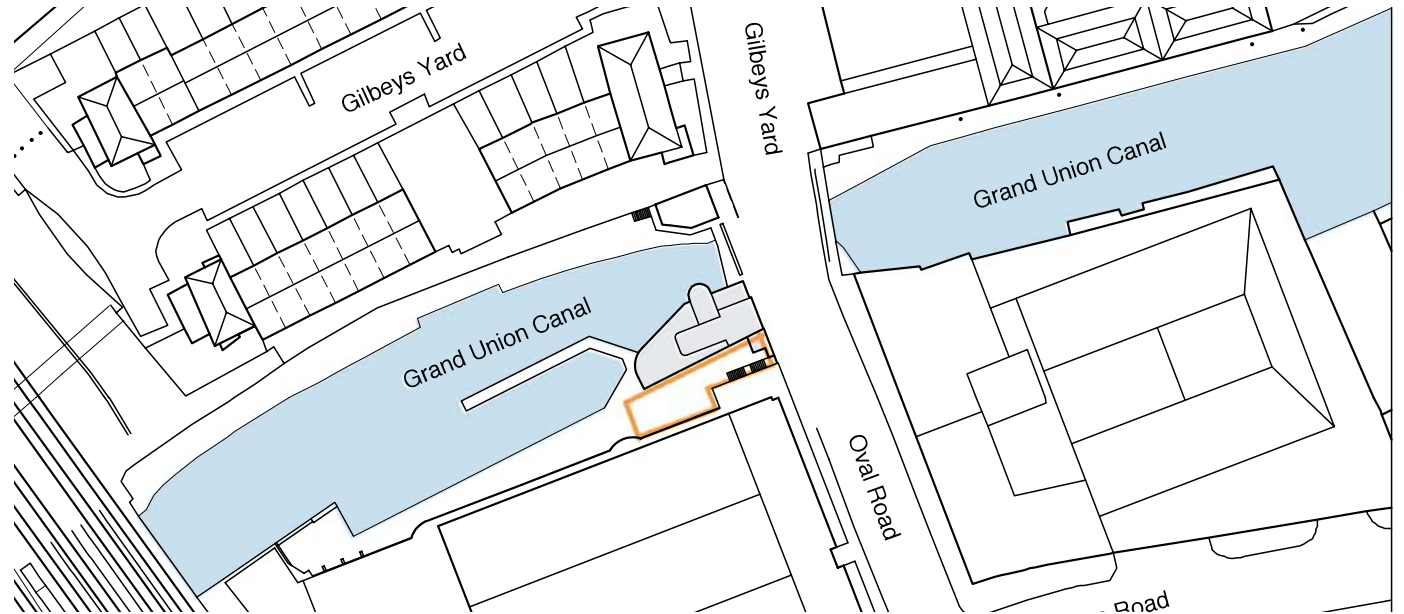
Early days of the Pirate Club



Summary
Context - brief
Process
Project

The Pirate Castle

The club owned the freehold of Gilbey's Wharf and were therefore able to extend the Pirate Castle building to the south. The brief for the new extension was developed over a number of years. The first need was for additional WCs and showers for canoeing and boating activities. Gradually the brief was extended to improve and increase the accommodation and to make the facilities offered by the club accessible to all.



Existing street entrance to the Pirate Castle



Existing site looking towards the Regents Canal



Existing site showing the level change between the street and the canal

A new lift was placed centrally in the building to provide access to all main levels of the building. A new entrance gives access to Canal Level without having to go through the Main Hall. A large opening was created in the existing flank wall and the size of the main hall was doubled. This provides a more flexible space which can be hired to community groups and can also accommodate theatrical performances.

An additional activity space was required at Canal Level for boating-related activities under cover, but in close proximity to the wharf. New toilet and showers were provided for participants in the activities at canal level, along with a shower/changing and toilet facility for disabled users and also a shower/toilet accessible externally from the canal-side for use by boating staff.



Sectional perspective showing the new circulation and main spaces



Development model showing the street elevation



Choosing appropriate materials

An almost black brick was used as the main cladding material, reflecting the use of monolithic brickwork in the area. The dark colour was used to dramatise the castle theme of the existing building without the use of pastiche crenellations, providing a contrast with the rather dull brickwork of the 1970s building and picking up the glazed finish of engineering brickwork used on the towpath opposite.

The street elevation is defensive, with slot windows providing oblique views to the street. The canal elevation has a large glazed opening overlooking the canal, which can be opened up to give access to a balcony. The glazing has an internal sliding acoustic screen which can be shut during loud events to prevent break out noise affecting the nearby residents. For events in the main hall where there may be large numbers of people, mechanical ventilation is required; this is provided by units on the roof which are fitted with heat exchange units and sound attenuation. The curved brick 'turret' wall wall relates to the curved forms of the original building and helps screen direct views between the Pirate Castle and the new neighbouring development.



Development model showing the canal side elevation

Summary
Context
Process - construction
Project

The narrow strip of land between the Castle and the neighbouring was difficult to access and at a level lower than the street. Construction was made significantly easier by the fact that the extension was constructed by the developer of the neighbouring site for housing, Barratt West London.

The method of construction reflected that used for the neighbouring development: concrete piles, concrete framed structure with flat slabs and infilled with blockwork. This has resulted in a robust building that will suit the long term needs of the client. The external cladding materials were bespoke for the Pirate Castle: black bricks, high quality aluminium windows and an oak screen to the canalside windows. The black 'pirate' theme was used indoors with a black quarry tile floor.

Due to the close proximity of the site to the canal, British Waterway was notified prior to construction, to ensure that the canal was protected from possible damage or pollution.



Canal level slab and reinforcement to spine walls



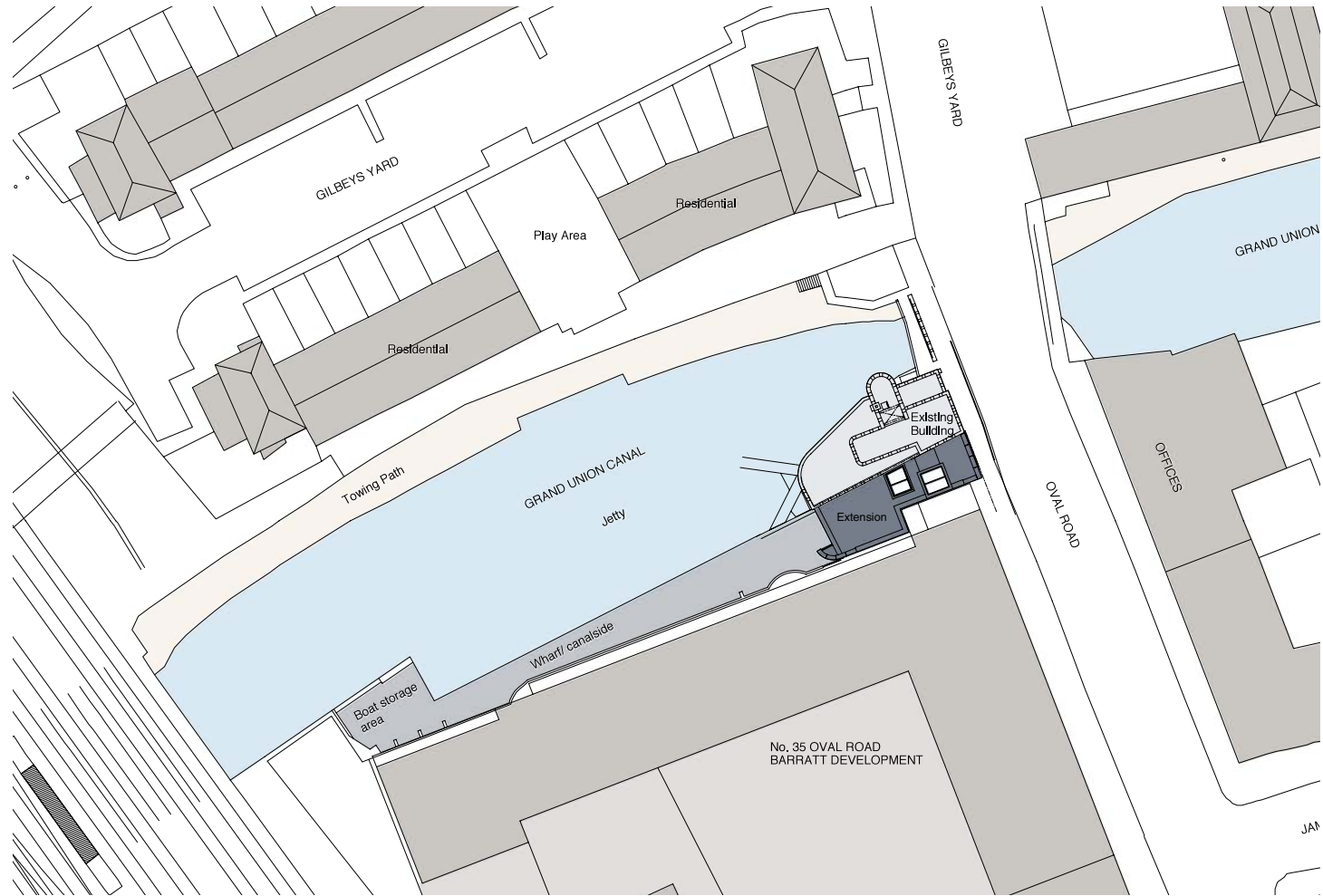
Reinforcement to the curved 'turret' wall

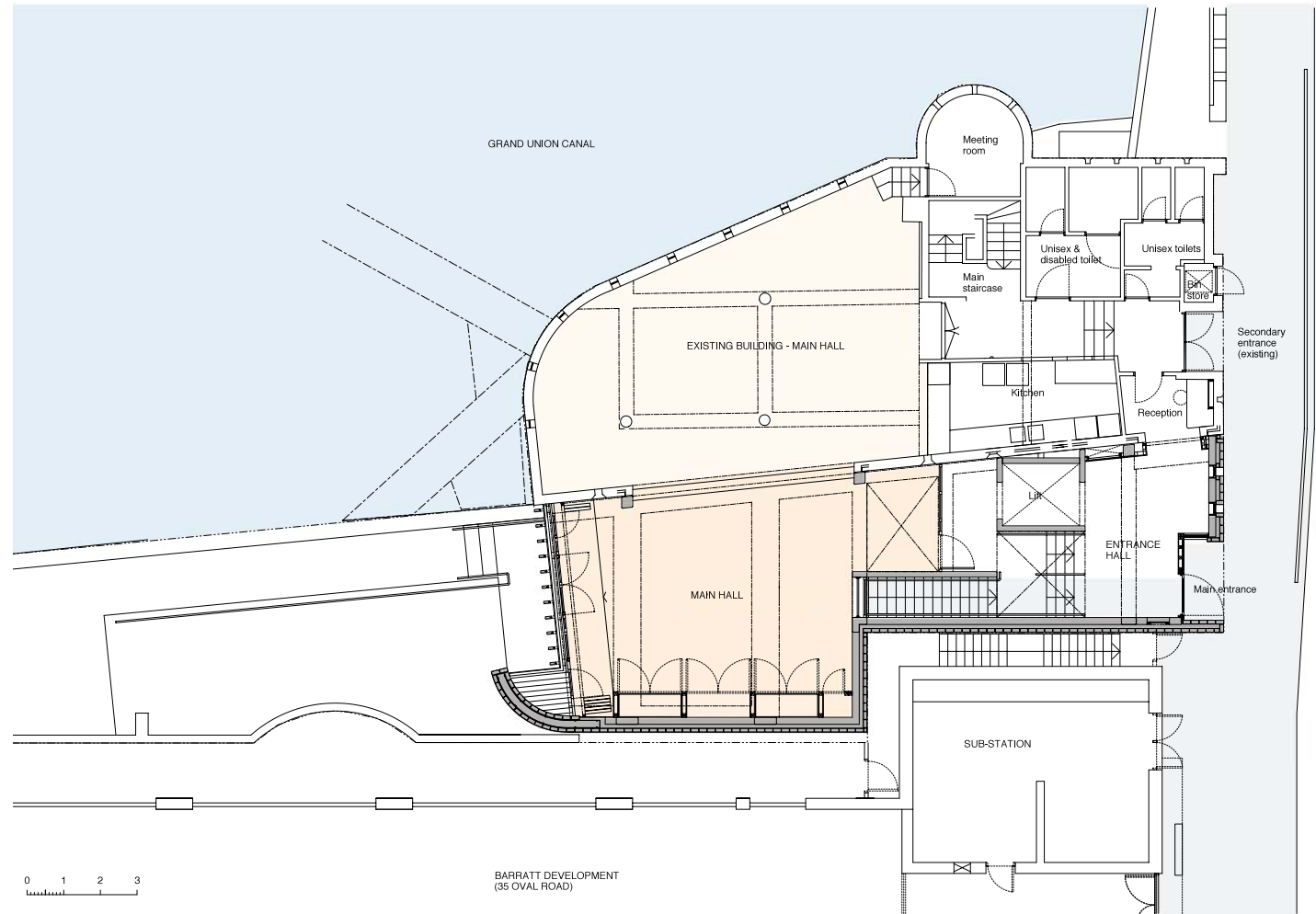


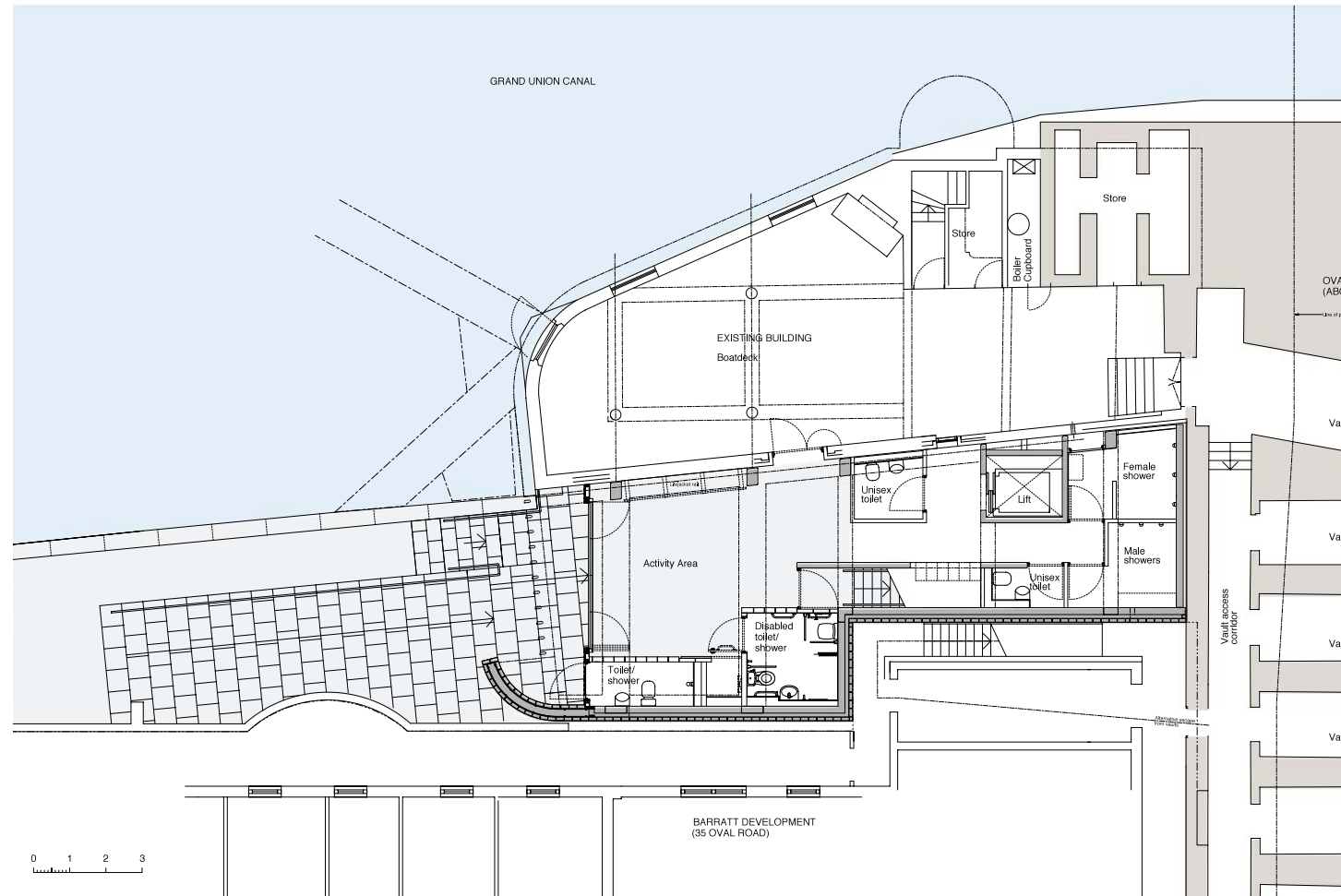
First floor level slab prior to breaking through to the existing



Brickwork cladding to 'turret' wall







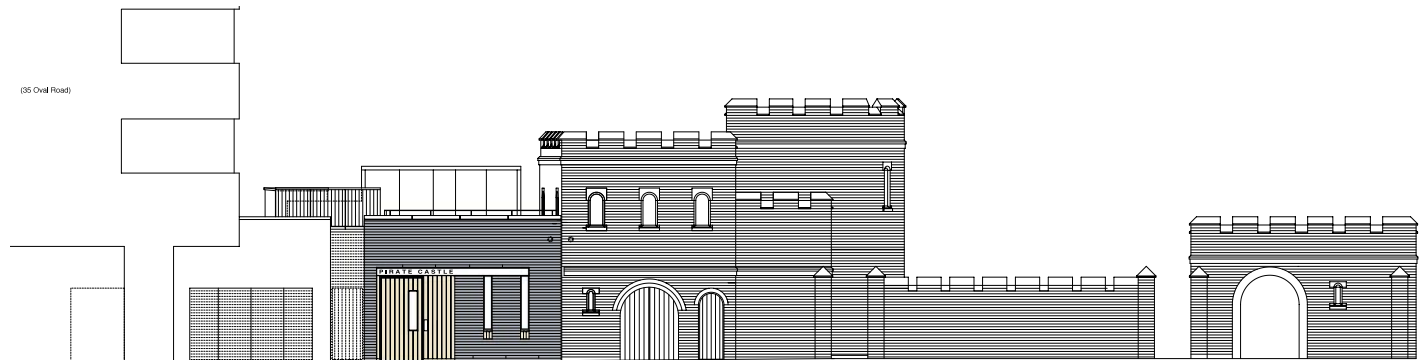
Canal level plan



New street entrance



View of entrance from lobby

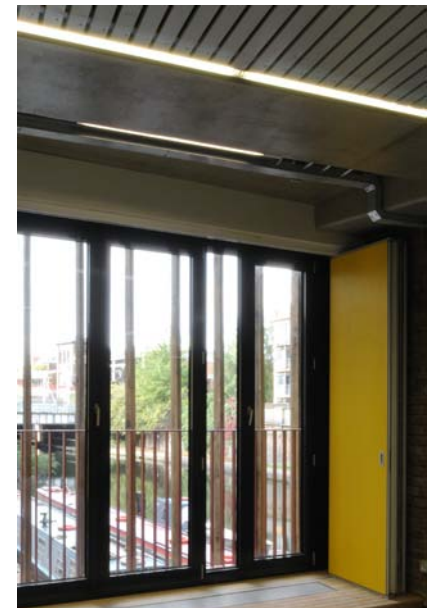


Summary
Context
Process
Project - canal elevation

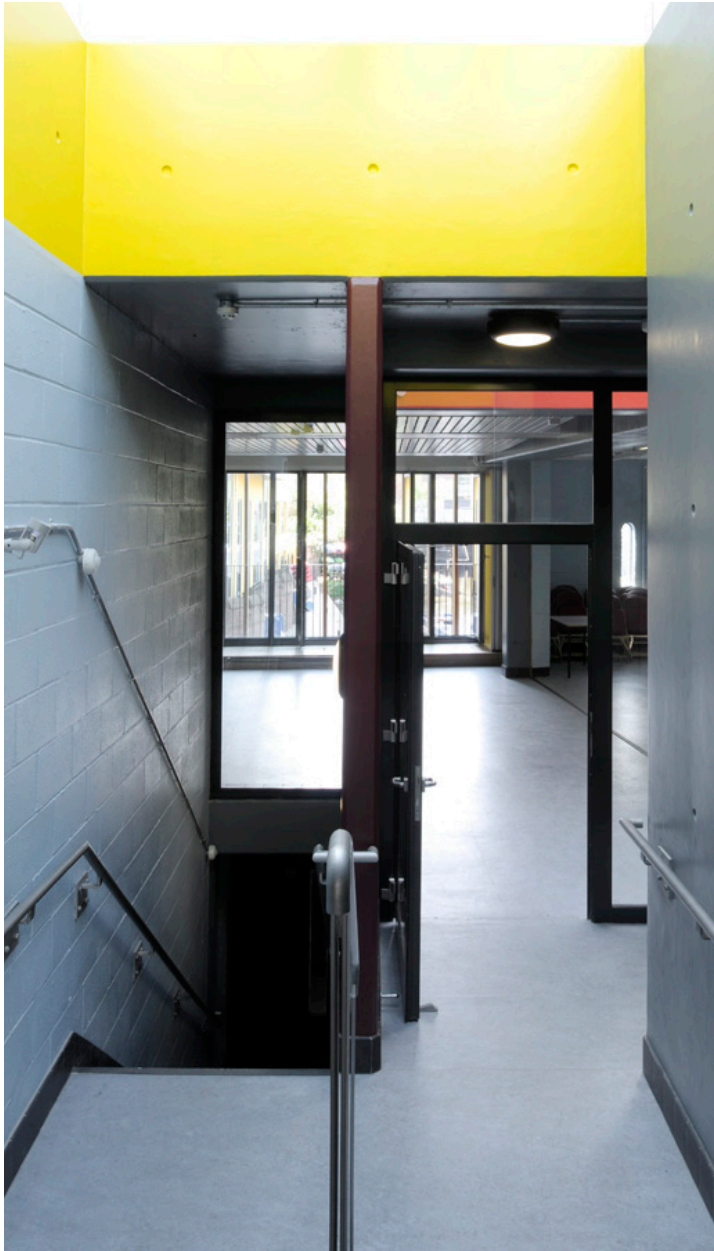
The Pirate Castle



Canal elevation



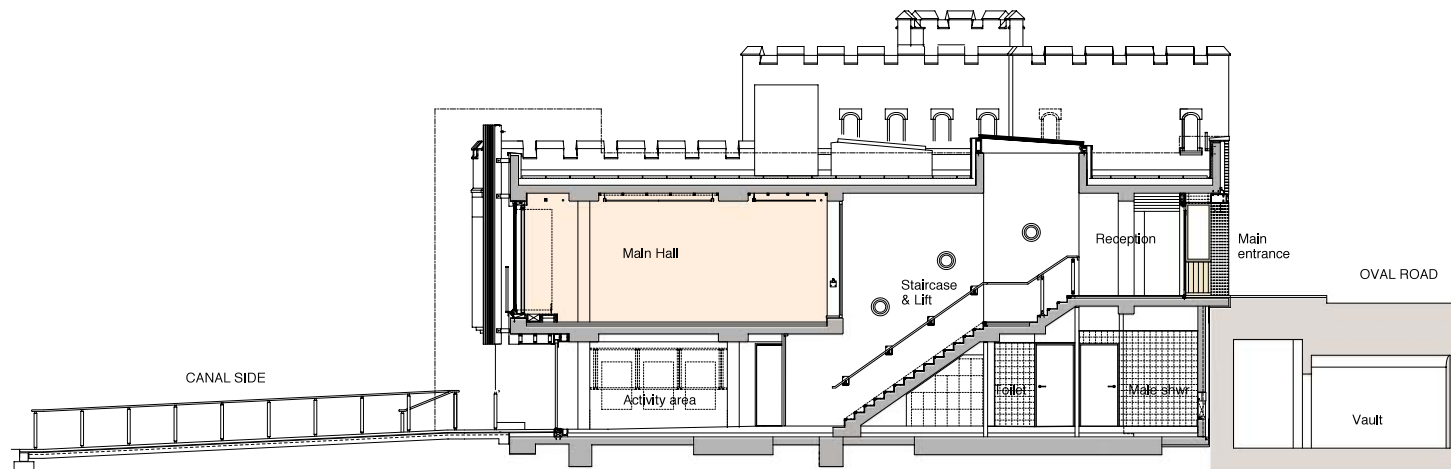
View out of canal from main hall



View through to main hall and down to canal level from lobby



View through to circulation space from the extension of main hall

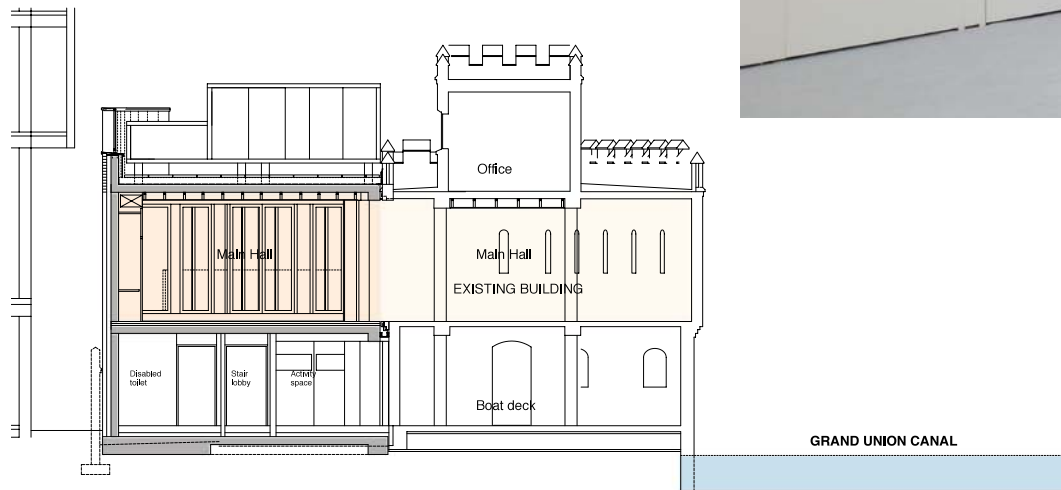




View over the canal



Extension to main hall





Main hall in use: 'Mugger's Alley' 2009



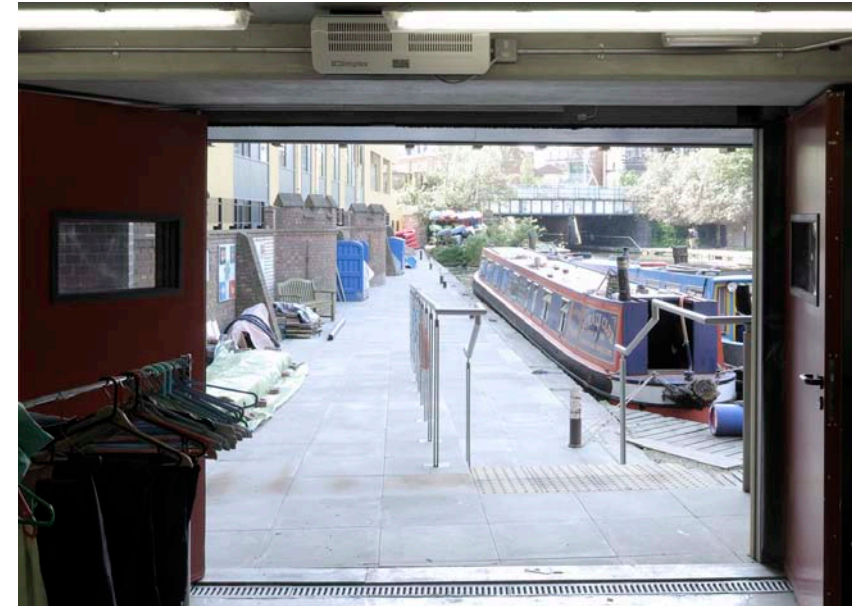
Acoustic screen open



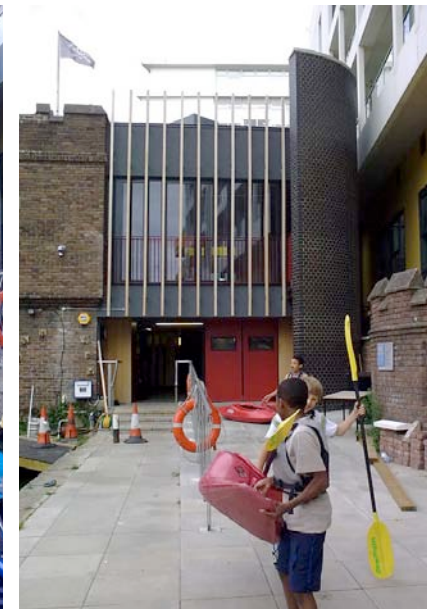
Acoustic screen closed

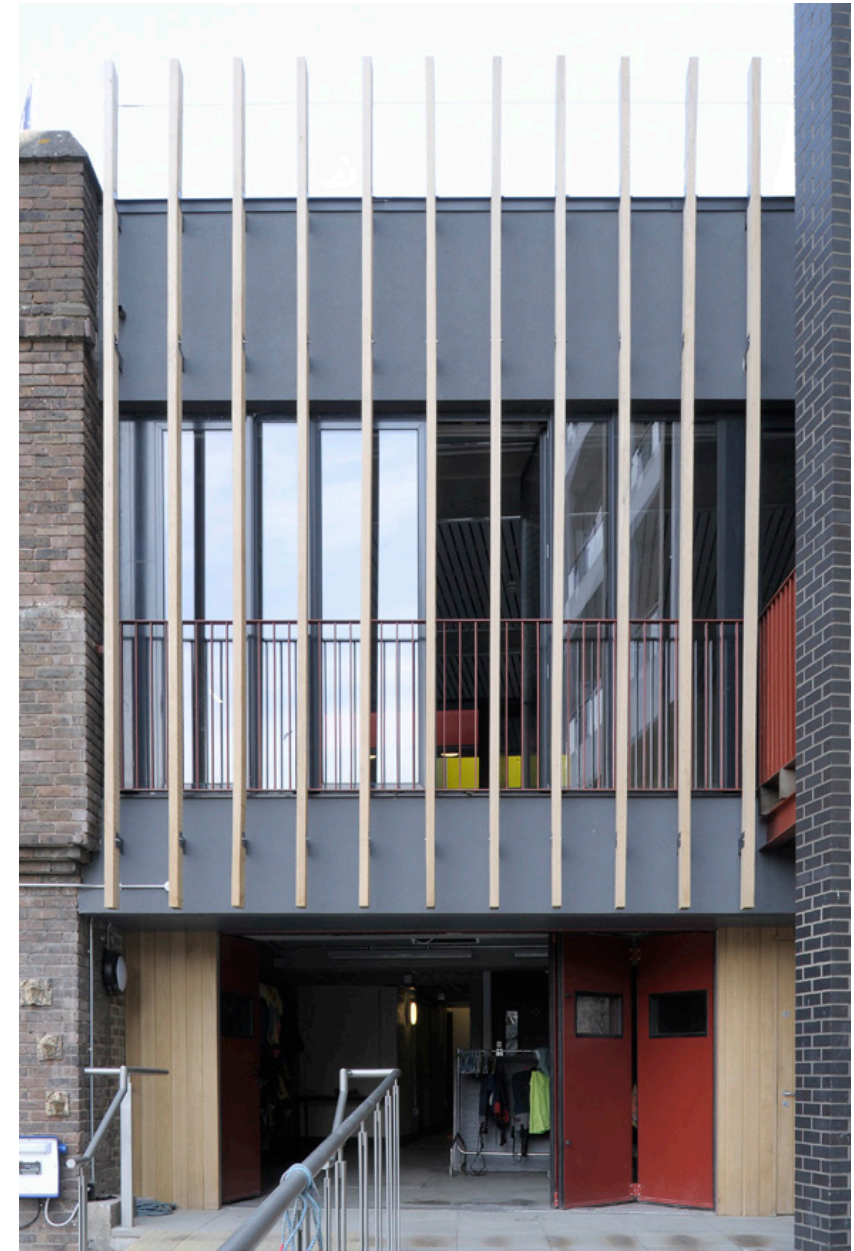


The Pirate Club activities on the canal



Boat storage area opened up to canal level





Canal level elevation