

Whitechapel Gallery

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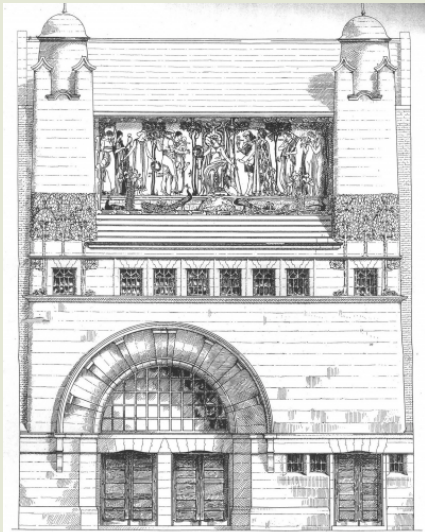
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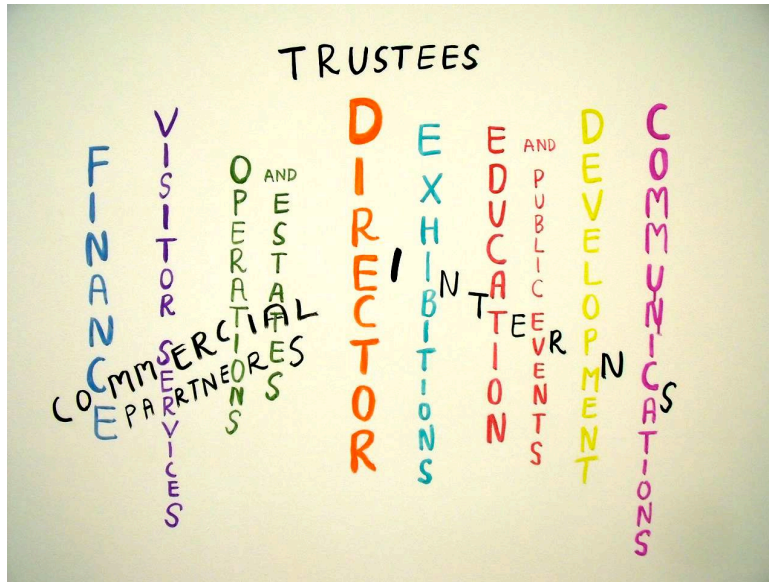
Ian Berry "This is Whitechapel" 1972

Initial idea

Our initial idea was raised after looking at the history, location and local surroundings of the gallery we didn't know at first. This enabled us to sense much about what we were working with from careful look. We formulated our design approach to the client, the Trustees of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, at the first meeting supported by the buildings' common origin as well as the logic of future use. Our basic idea was to considered gallery and library as a single building.

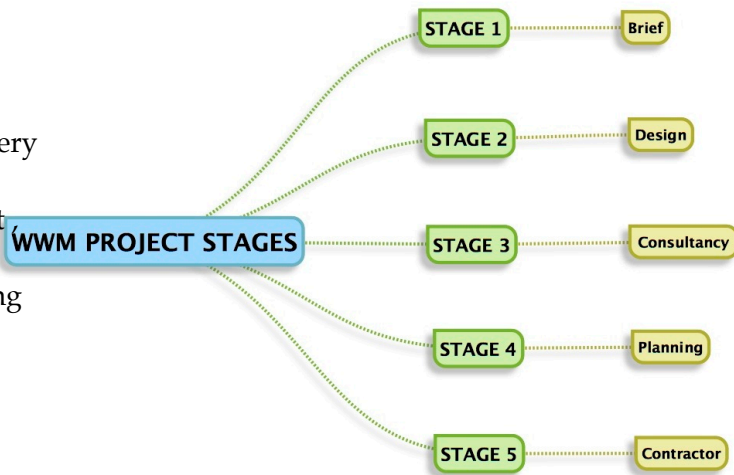


Whitechapel Gallery and Passmore Edwards Library in 1901



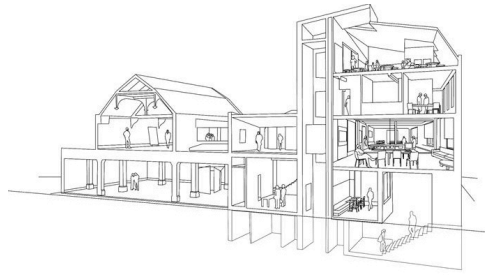
Project stages and Communication

Throughout the Whitechapel Gallery expansion stages our precise presentation of the project to the client, the community as well as the consultants and contractor engaged the different audiences through public and private consultations.



The concept and the design of the project, as well as, other topics regarding the costing and construction of the proposed expansion of the Whitechapel Gallery, were discussed with the client with direct meetings which were held regularly in purpose to receive constant feedbacks. The information obtained from the meetings was documented to fully satisfy the client's needs and to be able to keep the Robbrecht en Daem architects, via email and phone on the new details and changes of the project.





Other Communication Methods

An other way of nonverbal communication was employed to explain our proposals through image-visualization of the designs which were first sketched by hand in pencil, then by inkjet plotter on crisp rolls of paper. This was initially a way of pointing towards our ambition, which came to seem increasingly a statement of fact with the client's approval. Within our regular meetings, we took clear positions on what most clearly did and didn't work, or what to leave alone and what to transform. These were, respectively, the main rooms and the circulation. The proposal was approved we used models and perspective images as rendering to show the final appearance and different use of the Gallery and library spaces. This has been an efficient way to engage the client on the design process and clear view of the proposed transformation of the internal spaces.

A part from the presentations to Iwona Blazwick director of the Trustees of the Whitechapel Gallery, several other meetings were held during the design process with different engineers. Richard Griffiths Architects and Ala Baxter Associates engaged as specialist conservation consultant, gave us a wide range of information in terms of use and building fabric providing us on-going advice as the proposal have evolved.

During meetings with the structural engineer, Price and Myers and Service engineer, Max Fordham and the client, the design was discussed showing plans, sections, elevations and specific drawings of detailing and services which were then reported via email to the corresponding engineer so they could assess the feasibility of the design.



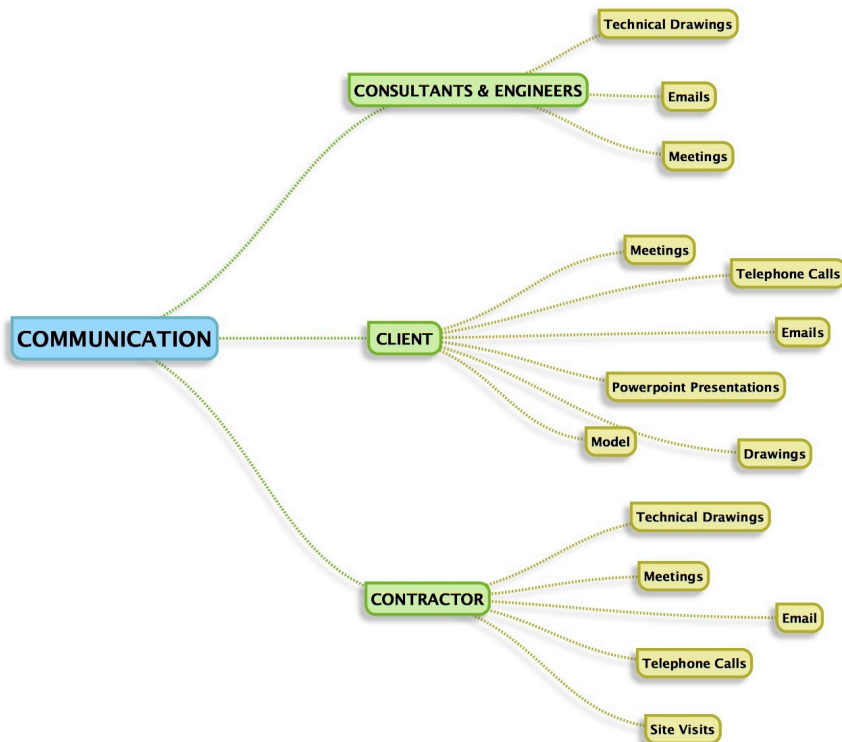


Communication efficiency

As the original library and gallery buildings were listed for the conservation statement there were some issues regarding the planning application. Therefore, our communication with the planning committee had to be really efficient even though it was through letters since they had to be updated for any changes on the exterior facade of the building.

It was important that we remained in contact all times with Wallis Special Projects, the main contractor, as they oversee the construction process and we need to ensure that the project was on time and on budget.

In order to be more efficient in solving any problem the main means of communication between our practice and the different audiences was through a series of meetings, emails and phone calls to clarify any changes needed to the design. For the same reason the working drawings and detailing were being sent through to the contractor as the verbal communication can sometimes be misunderstood. This process enabled us to be sure that both the contractor and construction team knew exactly what was required for the development of the project. The efficiency of the communication then was proved at the site visit which were necessary to guarantee that the project was being executed as intended.





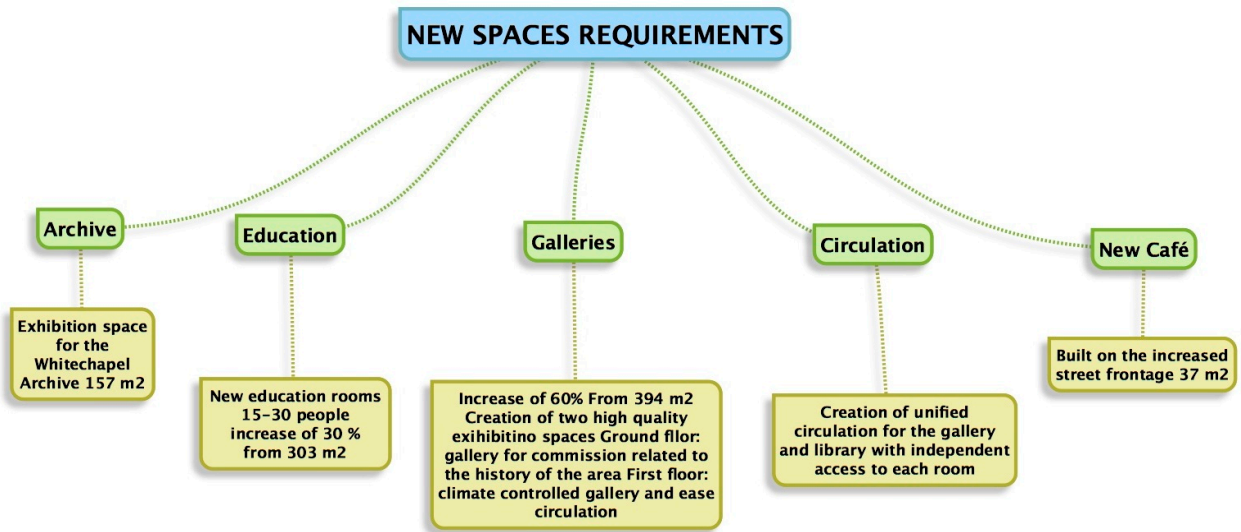
Community And Local Groups

Our role for the Whitechapel Gallery is to create new models for education and interpretation by responding to the changing social since the East End has become a pre-eminent location for artist and creative industries spread throughout the area with an E postcode. For instance, the Whitechapel project was introduced to a number of singular artists, which collaborated with us for designing all the spaces dedicated to art, led by the artist Rachel Whiteread. Therefore, between the funding organisation which sustains the gallery, the one which has more affected the approach to the project is the Arts Council England with a grant of £ 650,000.



The Whitechapel Gallery expansion project was intended to be addressed to a general audience from diverse backgrounds from school age children and students, to a range of community and social groups. The and community programme appears to be a point of contact between buoyant art activities located in the area and the educational and cultural institutions of the East End. Further details on the main of the expansion project are still reported on the Whitechapel Gallery website.







Building's Site

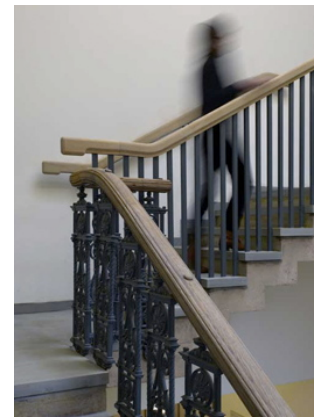
The Whitechapel Gallery is ideally situated on Whitechapel High Street London E1 with street level access from a wide boulevard-style pavement and an important rear access on the north side through an undeveloped site to the rear of the gallery. The building is limited on the south by the Whitechapel High Street and the west angel alley which are both used for public projects and events. The breakthrough between gallery and library early in 2008 was paralleled by a linkage in the wider area. With the closure of the Aldgate Gyratory, and the conversion of the Whitechapel High Street back to two-way traffic, a significant barrier between the Whitechapel and the City was breached. It is now possible to walk from Aldgate underground station to the gallery without leaving ground level into the maze of subways.



The site's location of Whitechapel Gallery has imposed several constraints to us during the design process. Therefore, our project was designed to fulfil the necessary building regulations in purpose to ensure that the planning application would be approved.

The main constraint which we had to face in the design was the "Listed Building Consent" which prohibits certain works to these buildings that also must be approved by the local authority. The only works allowed on Grade II Listed building is regarding the material alteration, the changes to the Proportions or balance of the Building and extension of existing





Building fabric and precedents

The brief formulated by director Iwona Blazwick and the staff of the Whitechapel Art Gallery gave us the basic principals to formulate our architectural response. In making the Whitechapel Art Gallery's archive, of 120 years' activity, as central part of the new building project, demonstrated the historical self-awareness that would also be relevant to the design. This decision displayed a clear understanding on the client's part of the need to fit the design brief to the building as much as to adapt the building to new requirements.

The language of the existing library building would be preserved where possible as the existing wooden floor and plaster moulding constitute an important part of the experience of the building and will be maintained in a "light touch" restoration. Instead, new finishes and materials would be selected on the basis of their fit with the existing, suitability for proposed uses and economy of construction with a careful eye for consistency throughout the whole. Most of the gallery was recycled and restored, such as the

existing staircases and rail but the interior gallery walls will be dry wall to create a clean yet strong background as typical of traditional art galleries. Contemporary gallery spaces are by convention as materially abstract and scaleless as possible, allowing the works displayed to establish their own materiality and scale. Instead, this is an architecture that reveals itself through use over time. Concerning the circulation system we proposed to use diagonal movement for between exhibition rooms which has been previously used by Robbrecht en Daem in earlier projects for example in the disposition of the Documenta Pavilions at Kassel, digesting the possibilities shown at Mies' Esters and Lange Houses, masterpieces of understated but powerful modernism now in use as galleries. At the Whitechapel, this tactic has found its natural home: a complex set of rooms in the existing building, and an institution that is both established and still unsettled.

