local heroes ·14

Glasgow
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RS Proudley
D Meijerink

Gillespie, Kidd & Coia

St. Bride's in East Killbride, 1963.

Like a poetic Acropolis and a massive brick colossus… This was our first impression when seeing a building by the Scottish architectural firm Gillespie, Kidd & Coia (GKC). Since this impression stuck with us, we were inspired to explore their work further. GKC remains relatively unknown in the Netherlands, but at the Mackintosh School of Architecture, founded by Charles R. Mackintosh, they are definitely recognised. The same applies among students, where GKC's work continues to influence. Their broad portfolio, evident evolution in architecture, refined brickwork, and especially the large volume of work they produced around Glasgow made us wonder: *Are these Local Heroes?*

The book *Gillespie, Kidd & Coia: Architecture 1956–1987** by Johnny Rodger took us on a journey through their works in Scotland and England. And through interviews with various GKC experts, our understanding only deepened. During our visit to Glasgow, we met Johnny in Steven Holl's

**Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, Architecture 1956–1987*, Johnny Rodger, 2007, ISBN: 978-1-873190-58-6.

extension of The Glasgow School of Art. He looked at us with a wry smile when we asserted that GKC were truly Local Heroes. He left that question hanging and asked us to draw our own conclusions later.

Together with Johnny, we reviewed the list of buildings to visit, and he recommended we explore the Glasgow School of Art Archives. Besides our conversation with him, we also interviewed Mark Baines, a former GKC employee and curator of the GKC exhibition at The Lighthouse in 2007*. While enjoying folklore and pints at the Babbity Bowster, Mark mainly talked about the atmosphere in the office, the spirit of GKC's work, and how they, like us at the Academy of Architecture in Amsterdam, worked in the office during the day and studied at the Mackintosh School of Architecture at night.

* Exhibition *Gillespie, Kidd & Coia* at The Lighthouse.

The power of simplicity

The architectural firm Gillespie, Kidd & Coia, based in Glasgow, has a long history but is mainly known for the post-war projects of Isi Metzstein and Andy MacMillan from 1956 to 1987. Isi was recognized at a young age in 1945 by GKC partner Jack Coia, who was teaching at the Mackintosh School of Architecture. Nine years later, Andy, a fellow student and friend of Isi's, was invited to join the team of young, enthusiastic designers within GKC.

Gillespie, Kidd & Coia:
Isi Metzstein (1920–2012) and
Andy MacMillan (1928–2014).

From that moment, a new approach developed within the firm as they looked for simple ways to create impactful architecture. They pursued modern designs that instantly conveyed architectural expression without needing to be viewed through a specific style lens. Instead, they aimed to reinterpret and reassemble historical precedents in innovative ways. Their modern designs did not seek to break with the past but instead to reinterpret historical architecture using materials, structure, form and the manipulation of light.

They were clearly inspired by the work of modern architects such as Le Corbusier and his innovative reinterpretation (in terms of form, light and landscape) of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp. As Isi said in the interview *Slide-In*: "We tried to expand the concept of modernism. [...] We did not want to take on the complete dogma of modernism. We wanted to enhance the vocabulary of modernism where we thought it was needed." Thus, they created an interest in architecture

"We tried to extend the concept of modernism. […] We did not want to just use the complete dogma of modernism. We wanted to enhance the vocabulary of modernism there where we thought it was needed."

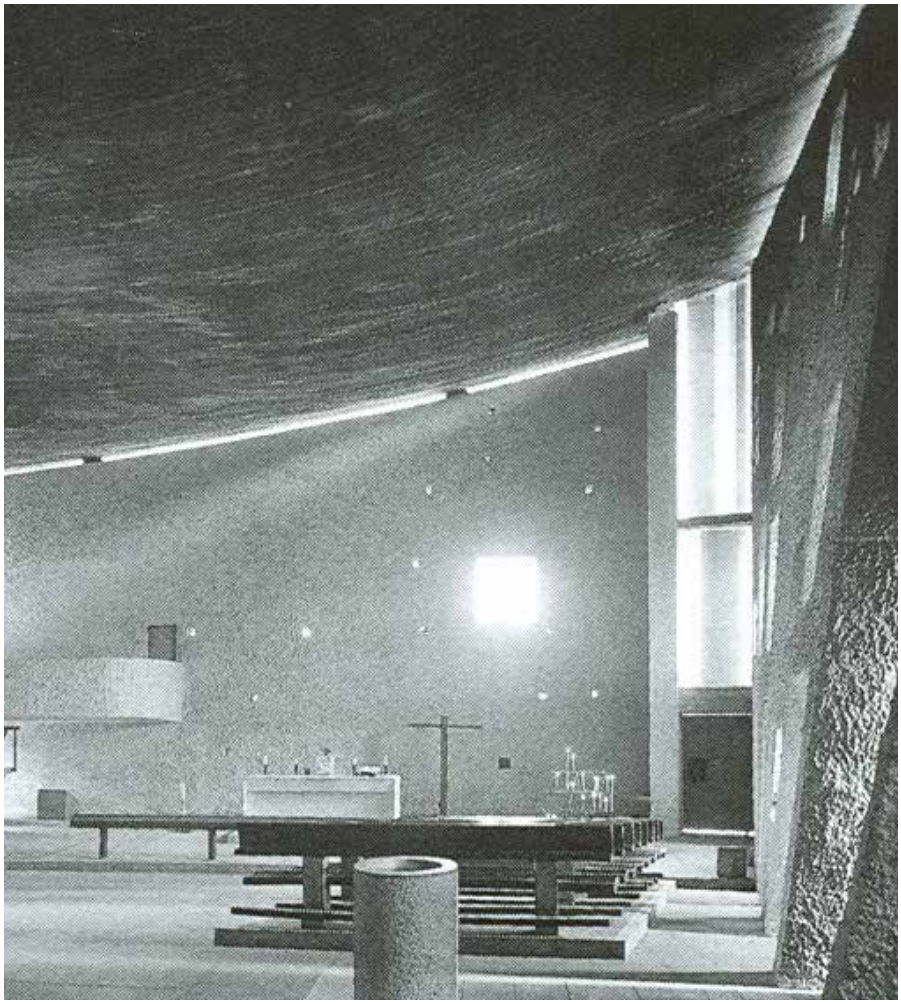
⊙ Isi Metzstein in the video *Lessons in Architecture & Slide-In*, Saul Metzstein, 2007

that consisted of a reinterpretation of historical elements while simultaneously suggesting what future architecture might look like.

Serving the ‘New Towns’

Due to demographic changes that occurred during Scotland’s post-war reconstruction project, there was a mass migration from inner cities to suburbs, such as those around Glasgow. This created many opportunities for architects to meet the demand for new housing, universities and churches in these ‘New Towns’.

With St. Paul’s in Glenrothes (1957), the first modern church by Isi and Andy, the Roman Catholic Church became one of their main clients. The church allowed significant freedom to experiment radically and explore what the new architectural expression of the Roman Catholic Church could be. This also gave Isi and Andy the chance to stand out and create innovative designs like St. Bride’s and St. Patrick’s.



Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, Le Corbusier, 1955.

St. Peter-in-Chains, Ardrossan by Jack Coia, 1938.

An indispensable inspiration in the work of GKC: Albi Cathedral, 1480.

Later, after Vatican II in 1962 – also called "bringing the Roman Catholic Church up to date and modernising it" – major changes were made in the usage, routing and hierarchy within the church. Therefore, GKC's buildings also had to adapt, since many had already been designed or built before 1962.

This convergence of opportunities and events shaped much of Isi and Andy's work. They established themselves as innovative architects in applying modernism to churches and universities. This Local Heroes issue features five key projects from GKC's diverse portfolio, including the Scottish churches of St. Bride's (pg. 6) and St. Patrick's (pg. 12), St. Peter's College seminary (pg. 18), the English student campus at Hull (pg. 25), and the university campus at Cambridge (pg. 31). Collectively, these demonstrate how the reinterpretation of traditions in a modern era by two young architects could become a landmark in British architectural history.

Our Lady of Good Counsel in Glasgow, 1965.

St. Paul's in Glenrothes, 1956.

Featured projects

Click here for an interactive map

Addresses Scotland

Our Lady of St. Francis's Secondary School extension (1964)
72 Charlotte Street, Glasgow
55.85361, -4.2413

Our Lady of Good Counsel (1966)
73 Craig Park, Dennistoun, Glasgow
55.86258, -4.22231

St. Charles' (1959)
9 Kelvinside Gardens, Glasgow
55.87911, -4.27641

St. Bride's (1963)
Whitemoss Avenue, East Kilbride, Lanarkshire
55.76303, -4.1682
contact person: Chris Carr

St. Patrick's (1964)
30 Low Craigends, Kilsyth, Stirlingshire
55.97514, -4.05379

St. Peter's College (1966)
Cardross, Dunbartonshire
55.97028, -4.64073

Addresses England

The Lawns,
Halls of Residence (1968)
University of Hull, Cottingham, Kingston-upon-Hull
53.78748, -0.42753

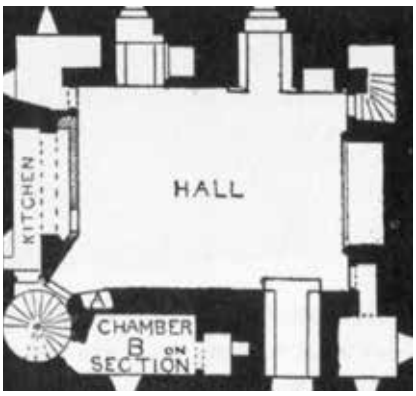
Robinson College (1980)
Grange Road, Cambridge
52.20527, 0.10544

1963

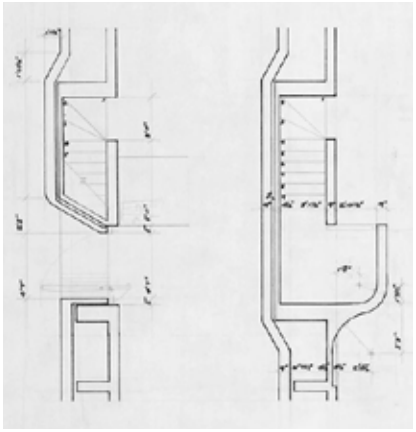
St. Bride's
East Kilbride

Built on the highest point of the village around a square, St. Bride's features a tall entrance on one side and the sacristy and rectory on the other. With seating for 800 worshippers, this is the largest church designed by GKC for the Roman Catholic Church and was completed in 1963 in the 'New Town' of East Kilbride.

The windowless main bearing structure is built from typical English brick dimensions (215x102x65mm) and supports the steel framework of the shed roof. Each facade features its own theme, accentuated through brickwork details. On the north facade, these are trees; on the east facade, clouds. Like a Scottish castle, the thick walls contain long shafts that filter light inward through the eastern hollow stone wall. The roof landscape is created by copper-clad light wells



Plan Scottish castle by Louis I. Kahn, fragment: *Slide-In*, Saul Metzstein.



Fragment of the pulpit that is incorporated into the wall of St. Bride's.

The hidden small entrance is accentuated by the masonry detail in the large opened stone box of St. Bride's.

that allow both direct and indirect daylight to shine through the wooden-slatted ceiling onto the altar below.

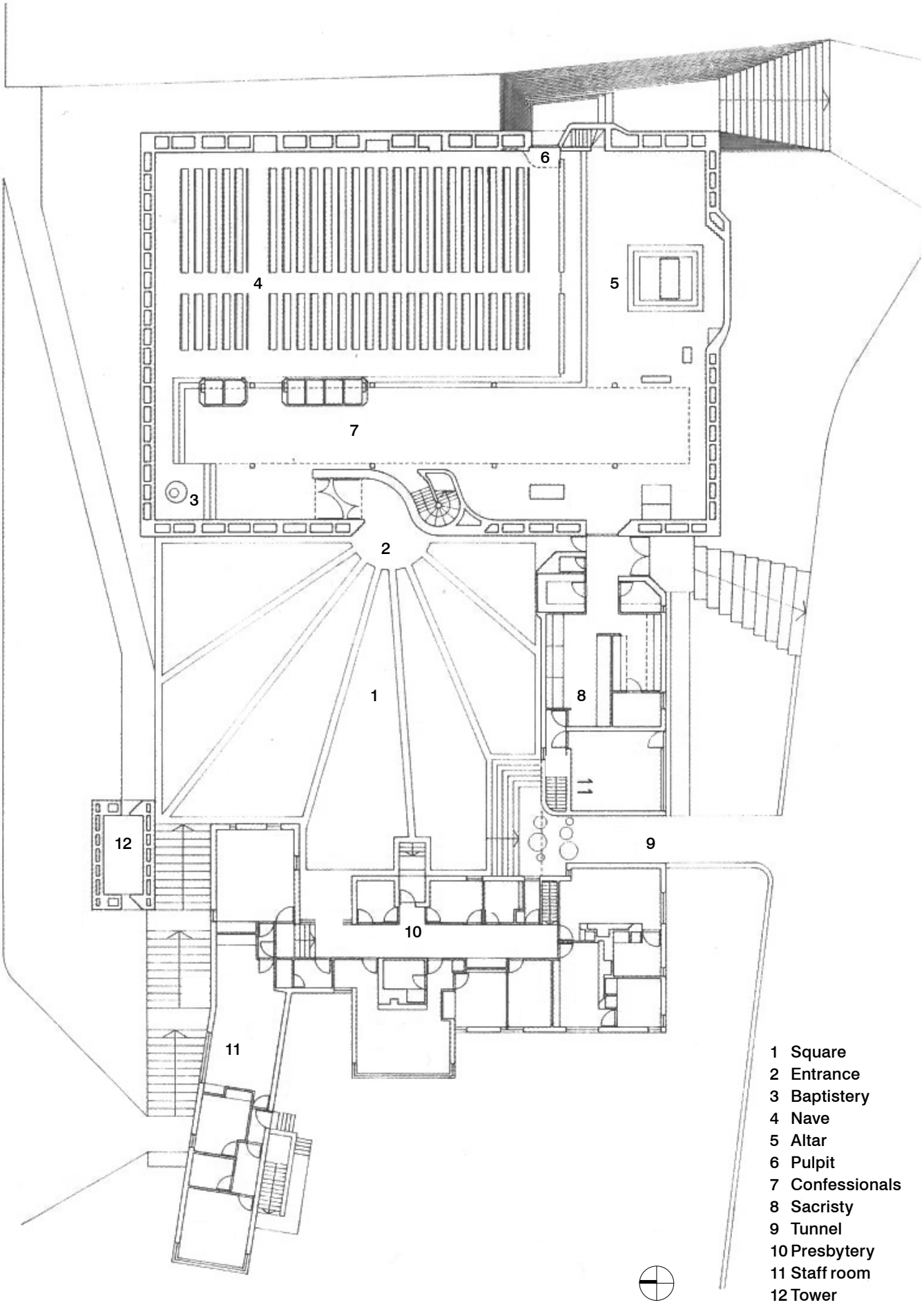
St. Bride's is a key building where GKC demonstrated their vision of modernising the church. With flat roofs, large open spans and underfloor heating, St. Bride's represented a new style of church architecture. However, the progressive design also came with some poor detailing, leaks and expensive maintenance.

East Kilbride sought a design that connected to the past without replicating it. This was achieved through the reinterpretation of classical historical elements that felt both familiar and fresh to worshippers.

In front of St. Bride's.

Standing on the square with a view of the entrance to St. Bride's.

Ground floor plan St. Bride's, 1963.



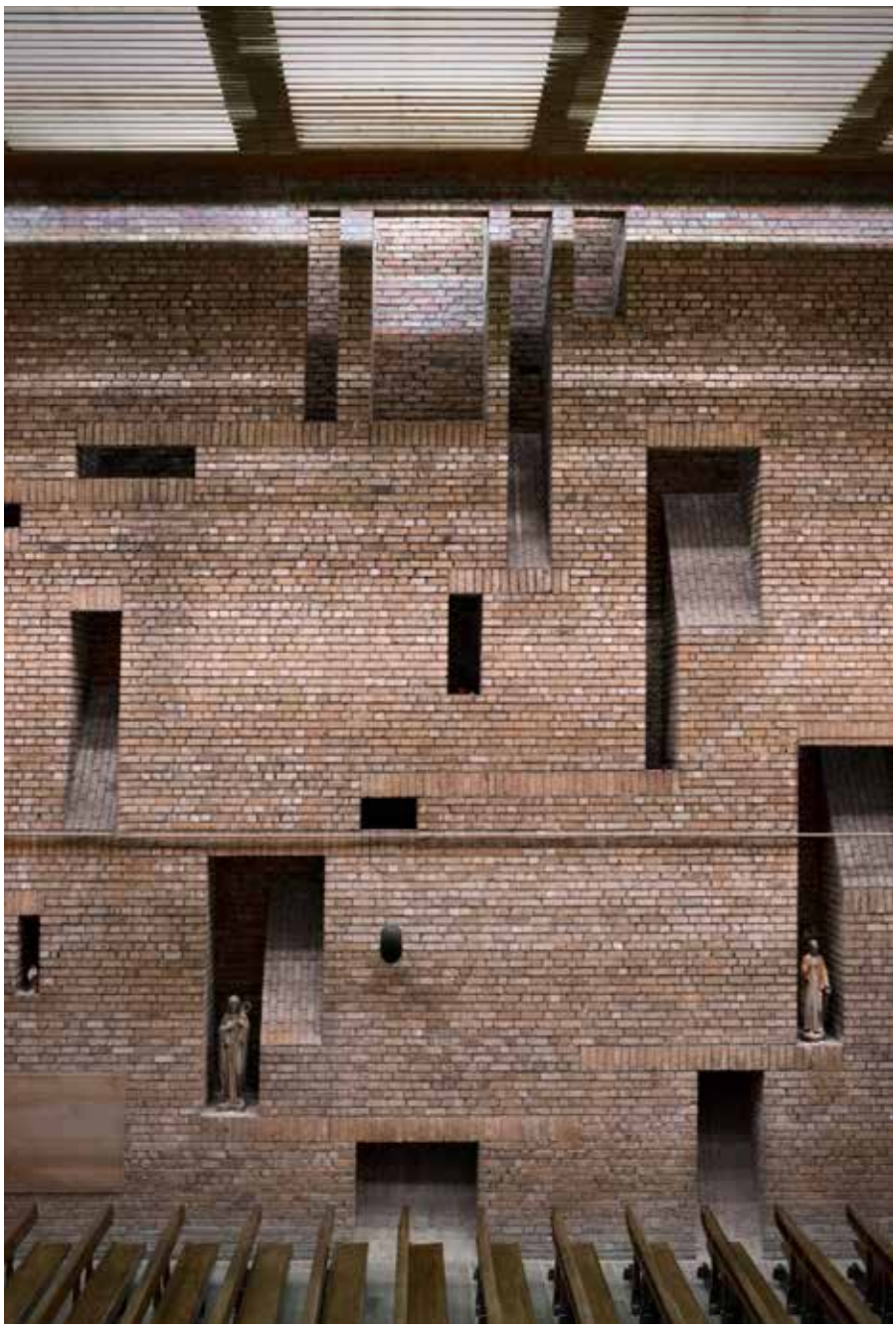
1 Square
2 Entrance
3 Baptistery
4 Nave
5 Altar
6 Pulpit
7 Confessionals
8 Sacristy
9 Tunnel
10 Presbytery
11 Staff room
12 Tower

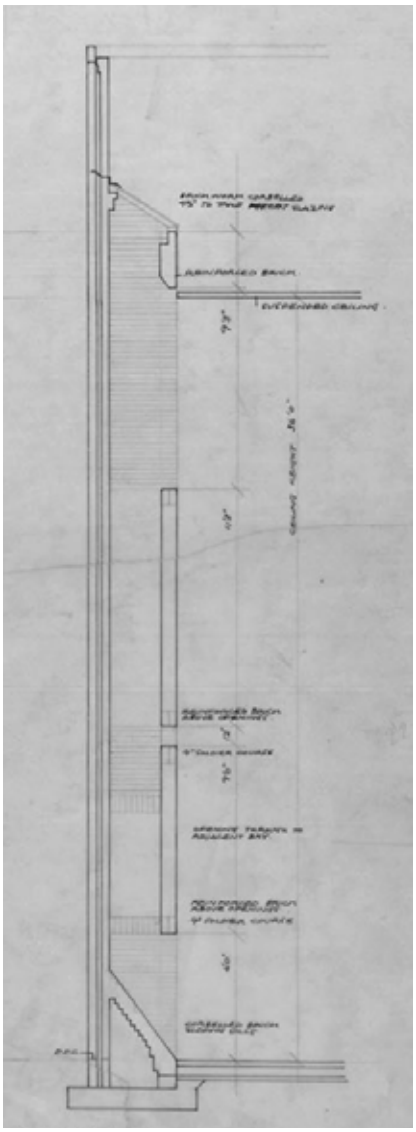
The northern end wall with ‘tree patterns’ as accents in the brickwork.

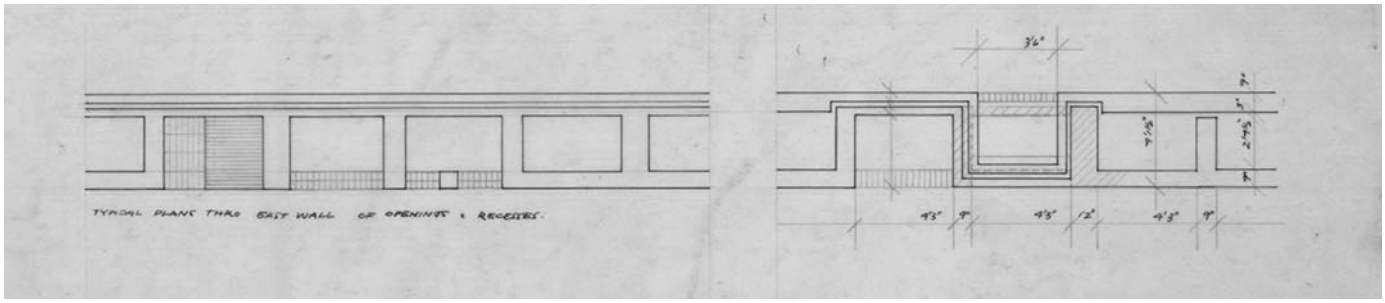
The copper light catchers that let light fall onto the altar and pulpit during the morning service.

The enclosed spatiality, in which there is still a strong focus and interaction with the altar.

The pulpit that is incorporated into the thickness of the stone wall, which is lit up via one of the light catchers.







The copper light catchers that let light fall onto the altar during the morning service.

1964

St. Patrick's Kilsyth

Located between two public squares, St. Patrick's seats 700 worshippers and is the successor to St. Bride's. Load-bearing brick walls support the copper-clad floating roof, which is constructed from steel beams and finished with wooden slats.

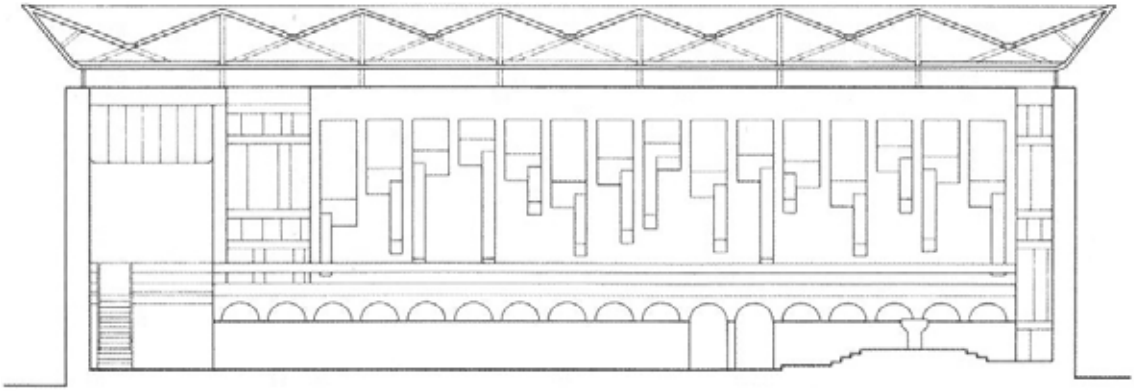
A year after St. Bride's, St. Patrick's also explored how light is used and obstructed. This was done through multiple light shafts, a continuous skylight along the nave, directed light shining behind the altar, and lighting at the entrance. The hollow spaces in the walls were also fitted with confessionals and stairs.

At a time when most everyone believed that modern buildings were becoming more transparent, streamlined and lighter, people were often struck by how 'heavy' this building was. According to GKC, this was not important, and they aimed to combine old techniques with modern technology. In their view, the thickness of the wall could serve as extra space, which can also control the entry and exclusion of light. It also created space to soften the relationship between the inside and outside.

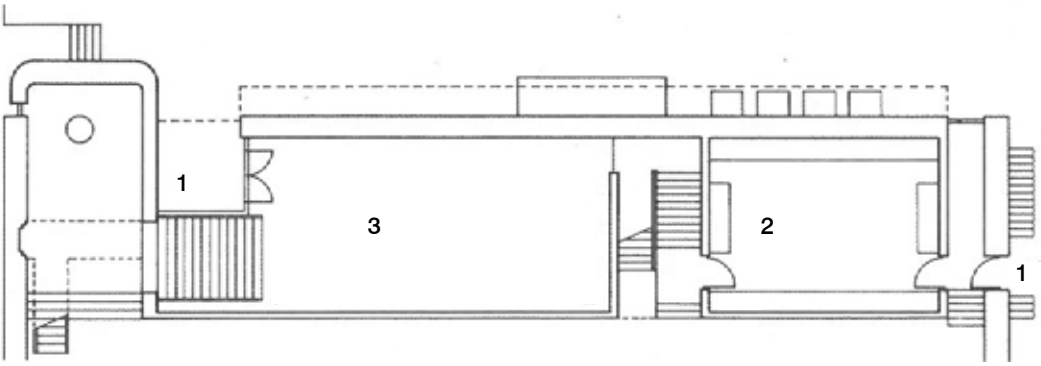
Model of St. Patrick's (above) and the transparency in modern buildings, fragment: *Slide-In*, Saul Metzstein (below).

St. Patrick's in Kilsyth.

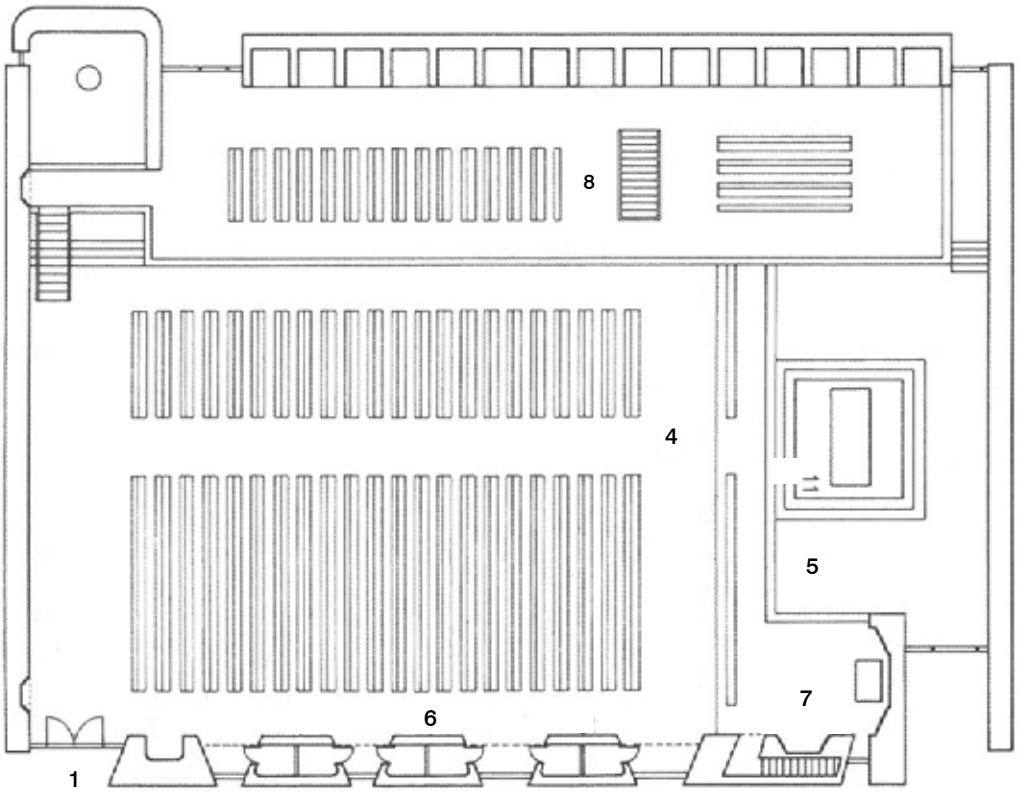
Drawings St. Patrick's, 1964.



Longitudinal facade



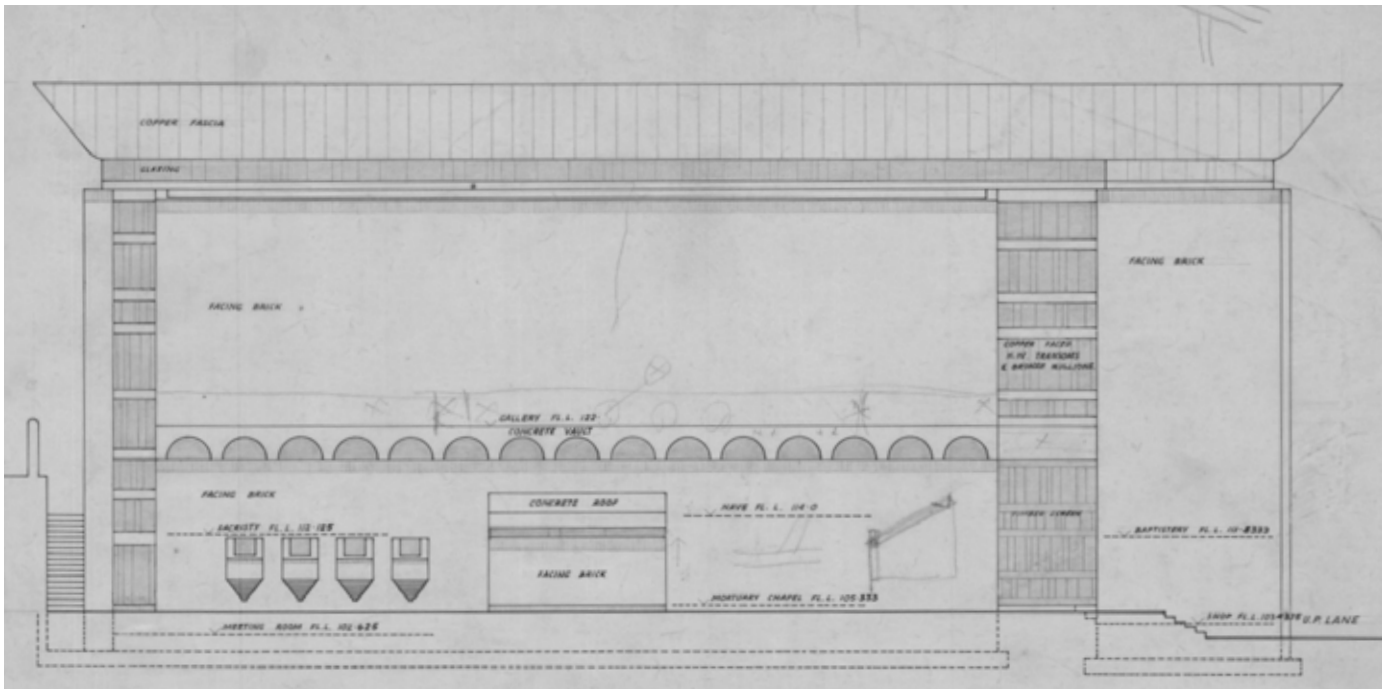
Floor plan level -1

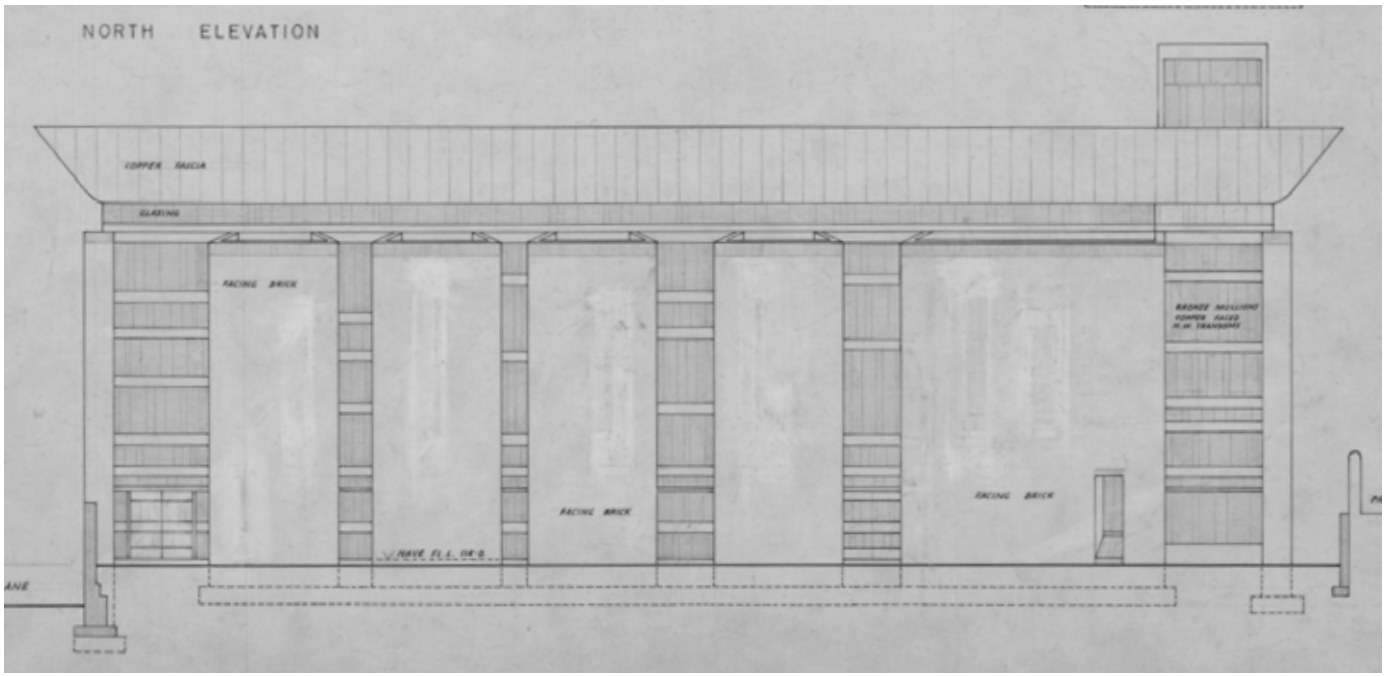


Floor plan level 0

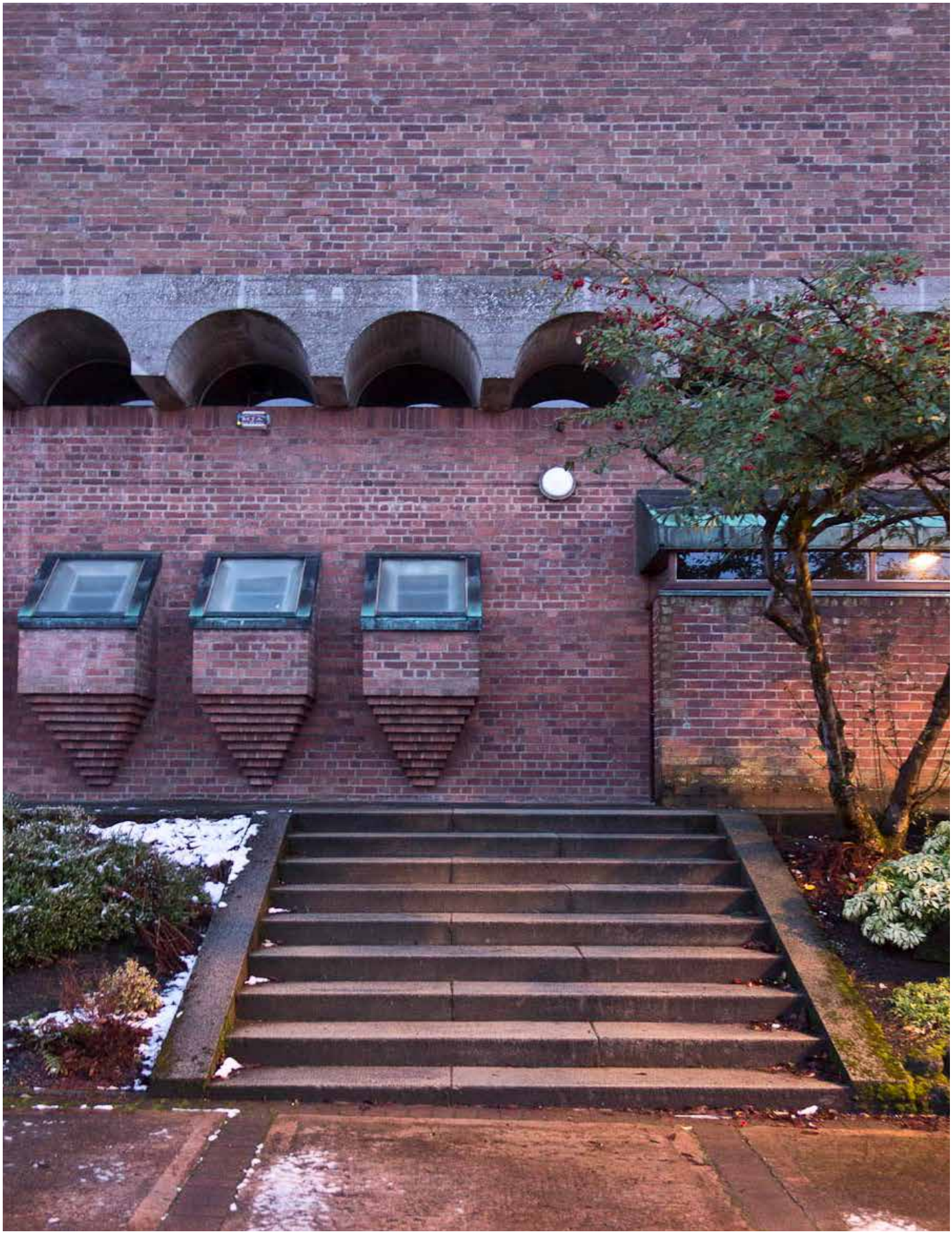
1 Entrance
2 Sacristy
3 Mortuary
4 Nave
5 Altar
6 Confessionals
7 Women's altar
8 Gallery

Drawings St. Patrick's, 1964.
The northern facade (top) and
the southern rear facade (bottom).

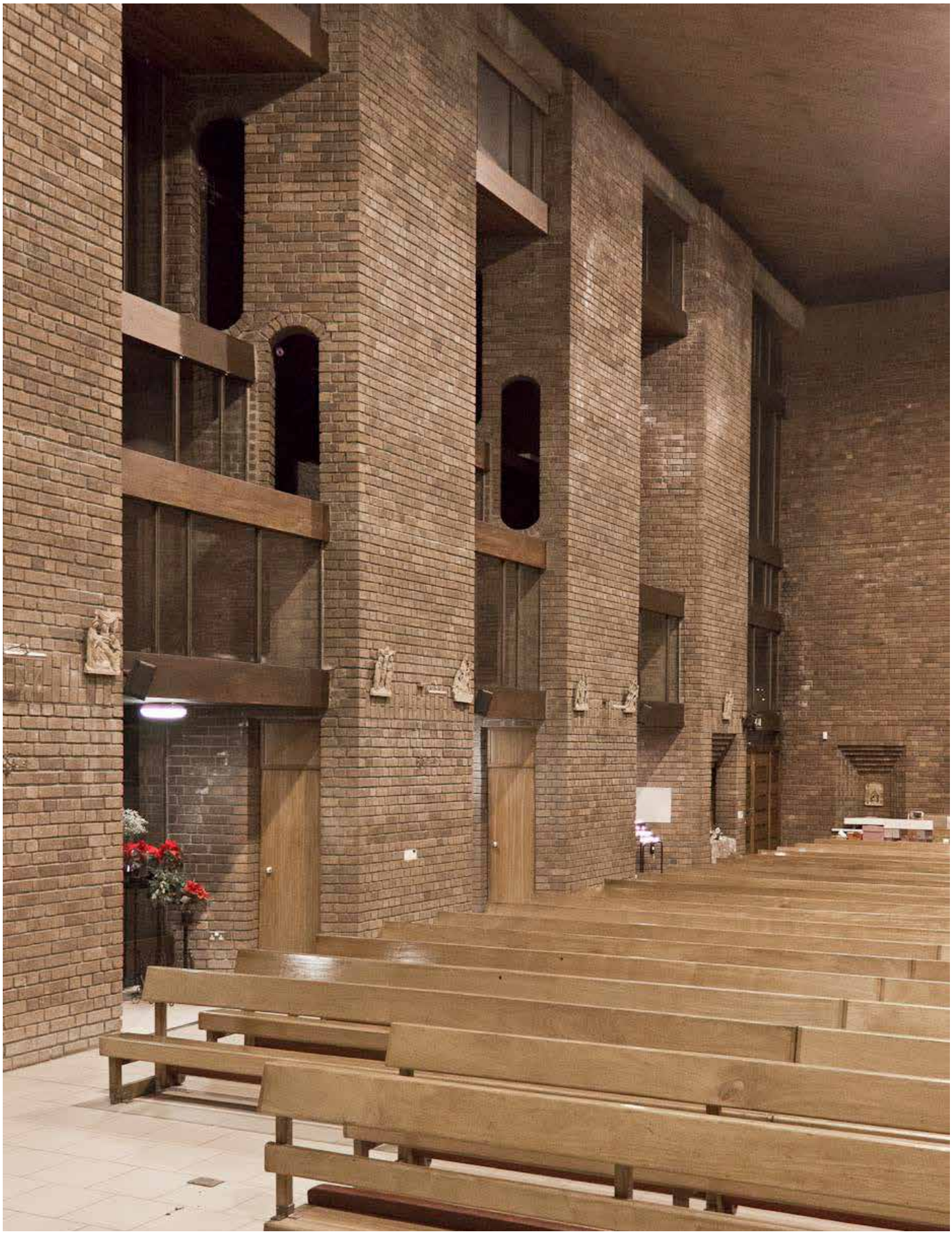




Fragment of the facade ornamentation that allows varying amounts of daylight to enter.



The hollow walls feature niches, confessionals, the play of light and brickwork ornamentation



The concrete vaults supporting the balcony are illuminated during the day by the hollow walls. The space between the hollow walls is filled in various ways.

1966

St. Peter's College Cardross

Around the 19th-century manor, Kilmahew House, GKC designed a new seminary commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church in the suburb of Cardross to train 102 students as priests. Inspired by Le Corbusier's monastery La Tourette, combined with the work of Charles R. Mackintosh and Alexander Thomson, St. Peter's College was highly innovative. The concrete main block consists of three layers of sleeping quarters that form a bridge over the dining hall and chapel via a stepped overhang. The unique structure is connected by concrete walls and vaults that also reveal the individual character of each sleeping quarter through their curvature.

The adjacent building houses classrooms, a library and studios connected to the square via the cloister. Extensive study was devoted to how light could be directed inward with limited views outward, and vice versa. The view is obstructed by shell-like light scoops, and only the end facades have a direct relationship with the outside, focusing attention on the chapel.

As early as 1980, the building's original purpose ended, and it was later completely abandoned. Changes from Vatican II shifted the focus to training priests within local communities instead of remote areas. Since then, the college has been left to nature and arsonists, lying in ruins for 35 years. Nevertheless, *The Guardian** declared St. Peter's College the most modernist building of its time in Scotland, and subsidies were finally granted in 2015 to restore it.

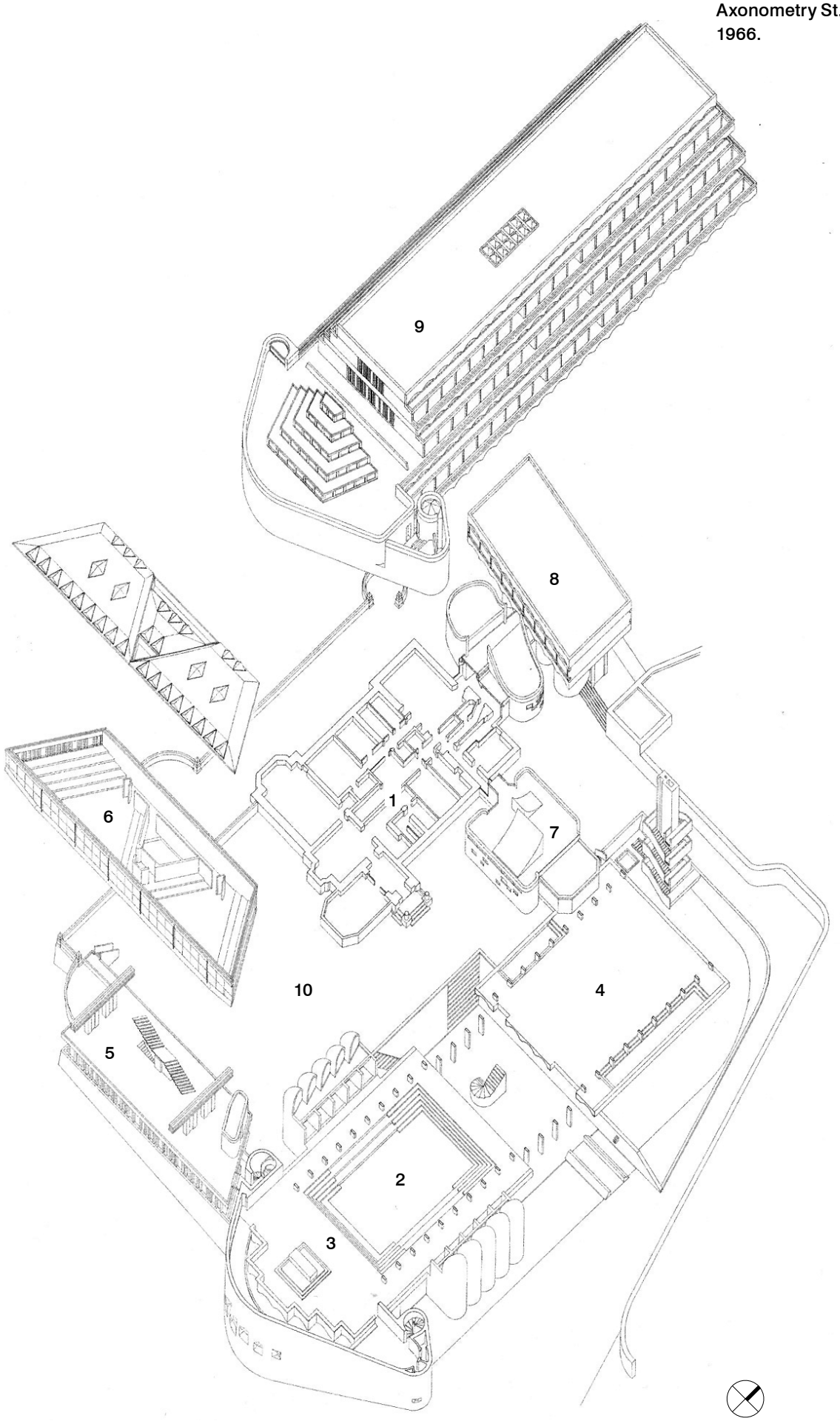
Model St. Peter's College.

Sainte-Marie de La Tourette in Éveux by Le Corbusier, 1960.

* *St. Peter's seminary – a second coming for Scotland's modernist masterpiece? The Guardian*, Rowan Moore, January 17, 2015.

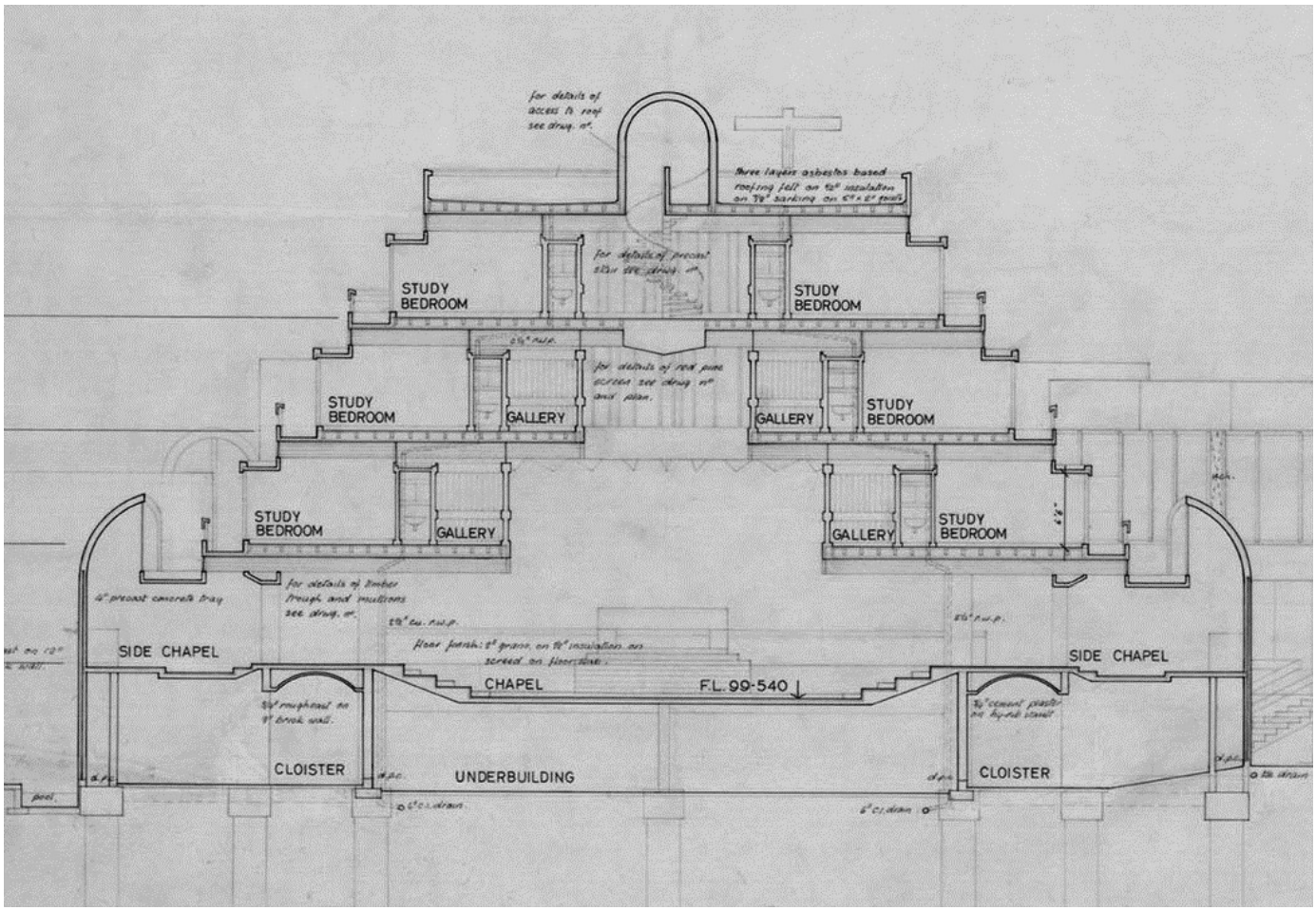
St. Peter's College in Cardross.

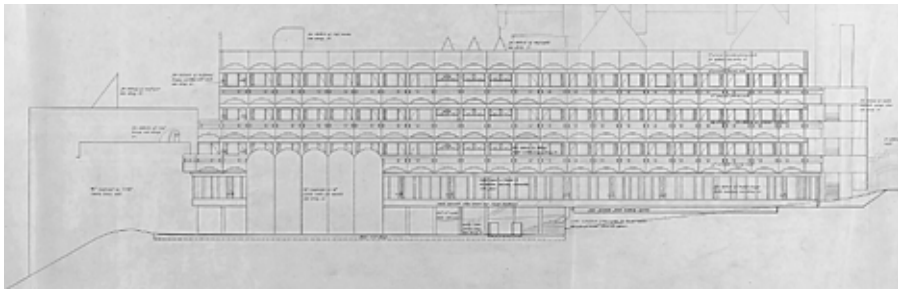
Axonometry St. Peter's College, 1966.

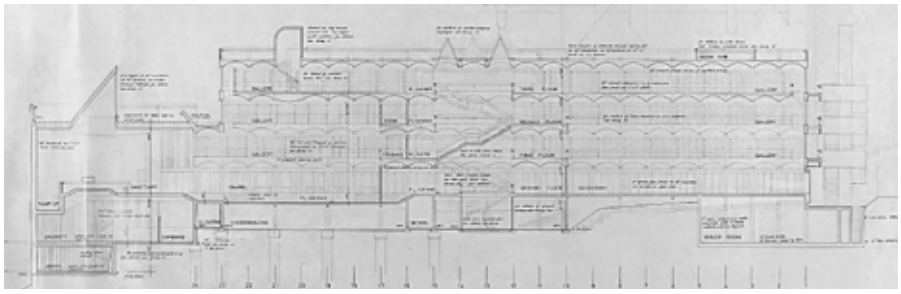


1 Kilmahew House
2 Chapel
3 Altar
4 Dining Hall
5 Library
6 Study Room
7 Kitchen
8 Cloister
9 Student Rooms
10 Schoolyard

Cross-sections St. Peter's College, 1966.

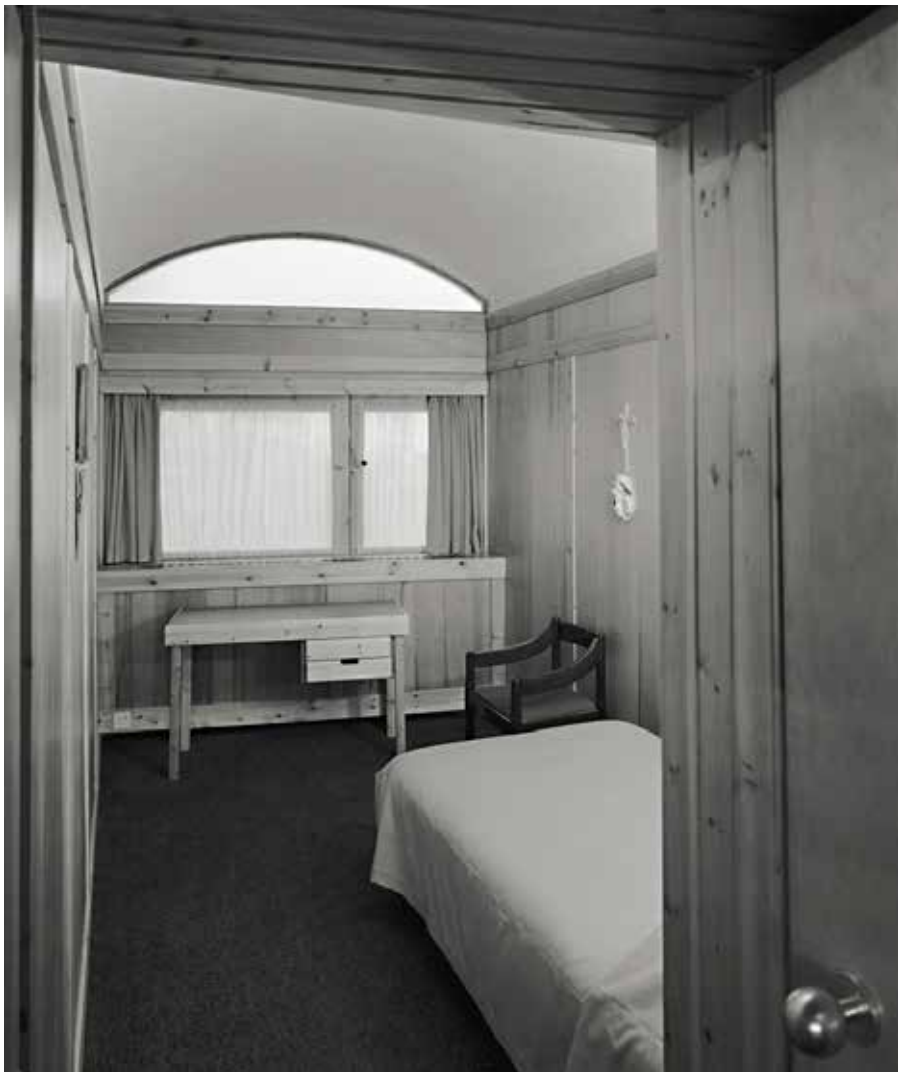




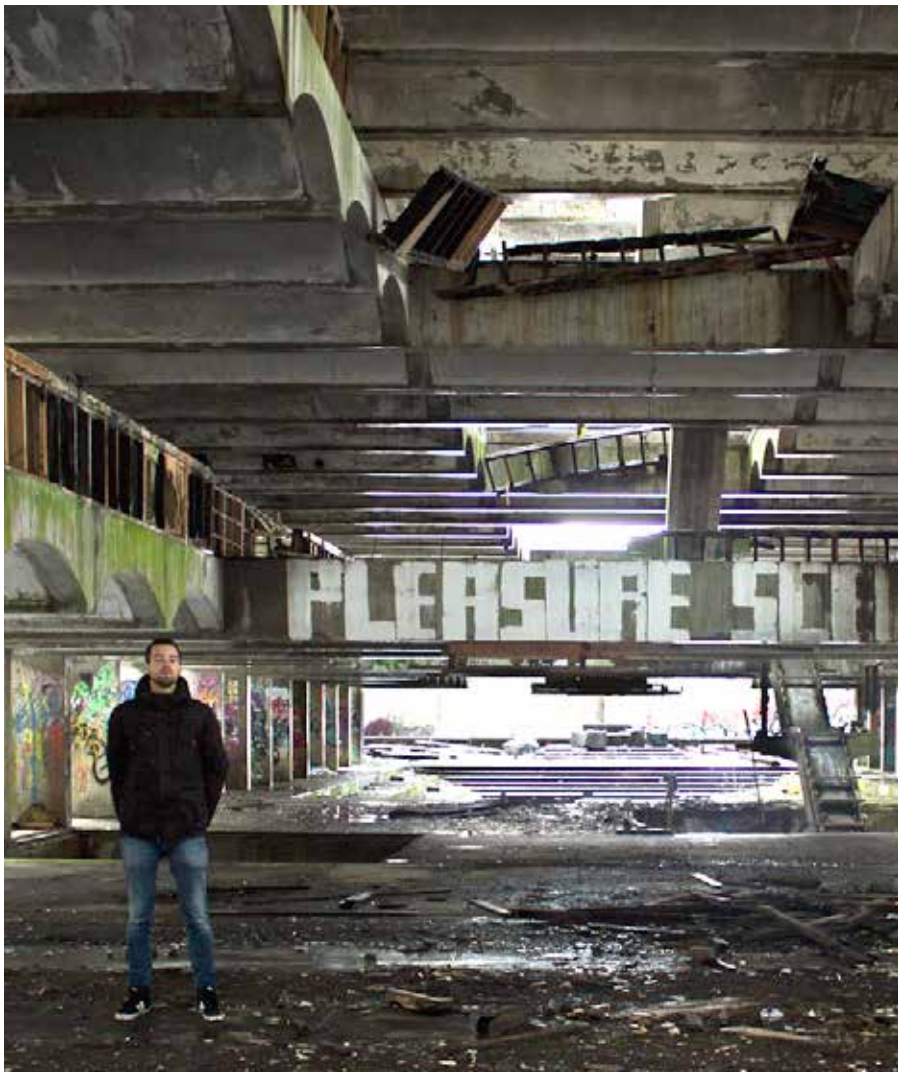


"Just as a bridge collapses when a single stone is removed, St. Peter's College cannot stand if even one part of its structure is taken away."

⊙ Mark Baines quotes Isi.



Large (top): The illuminated altar in the chapel overlooking the enclosed wooden galleries.
Left: One of the 102 wood-clad student rooms, where the curved ceiling emphasizes a certain individuality.
Small (above): View of the library, seen from Kilmahew House.



Large (top): Condition of St. Peter's Cardross, taken in 2008.
Left: The current condition of the stepped main block with galleries.
Small (above): The 'Corbusian' skylights and the current condition of the stone facade.

End of the main block, standing on the altar in the chapel, with the laminated beams still visible.

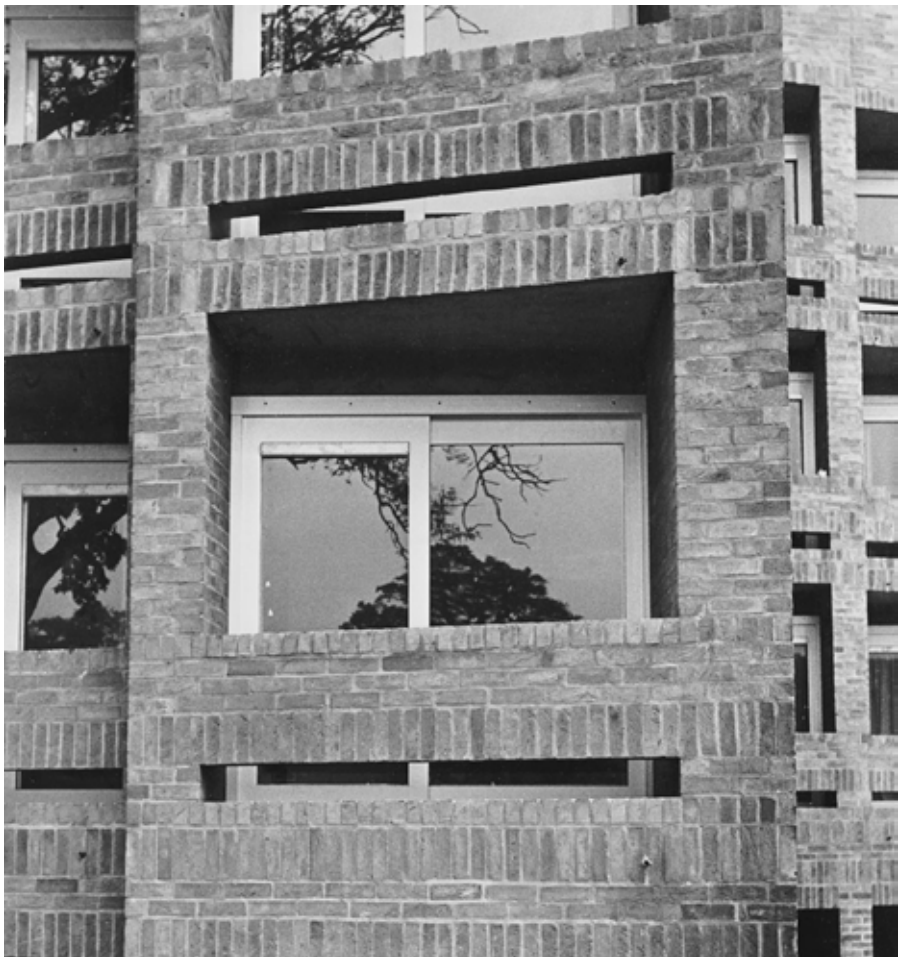
1968

The Lawns
Halls of Residence, Hull

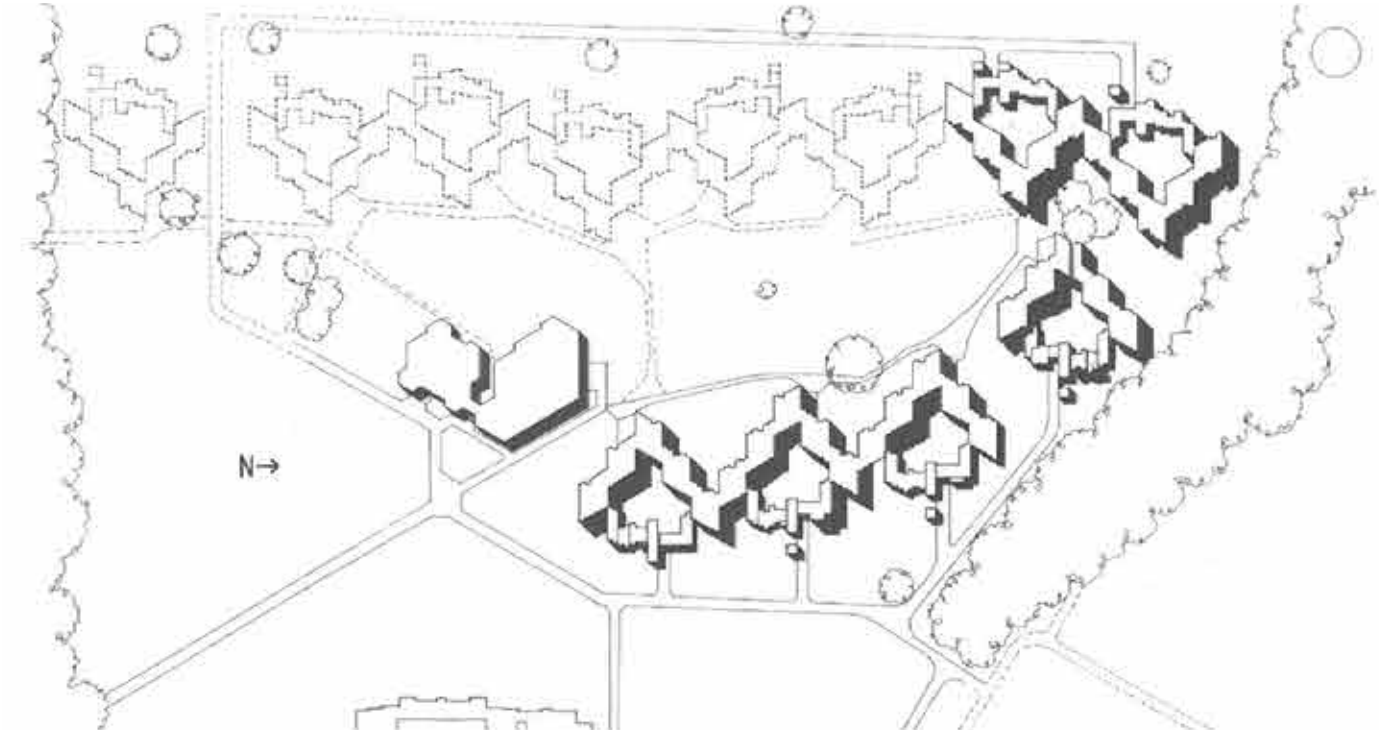
The Lawns was built for the University of Hull on the outskirts of Cottingham, England. The three-, four-, and six-story student blocks are made from brick units, each accommodating 135 students. Additionally, various recreational facilities were designed and connected to the shared paths laid between existing trees.

Isi and Andy faced the challenge of designing a repeating program: student rooms. They addressed this by integrating individual student spaces with the overall site's expression. The deep, compact student rooms repeat in a stepped pattern next to each other, preventing sound transmission and each featuring its own entrance niche. Recessed balconies create vertical fragmentation through scale reduction, while horizontal bands in the brickwork unify the entire design.

A double student room.



The Lawns in Hull.



Drawing of six of the twelve completed blocks of The Lawns, 1968.

Although the plan was not fully realized – only six units out of the twelve were finished – it does not seem incomplete. The system in which the plan was conceived ensures coherence at all levels. The brickwork creates the desired unity while also providing immense variety for the plasticity and ornamentation within the whole complex.

The view of one of the blocks, where horizontal and vertical accents break up the scale.

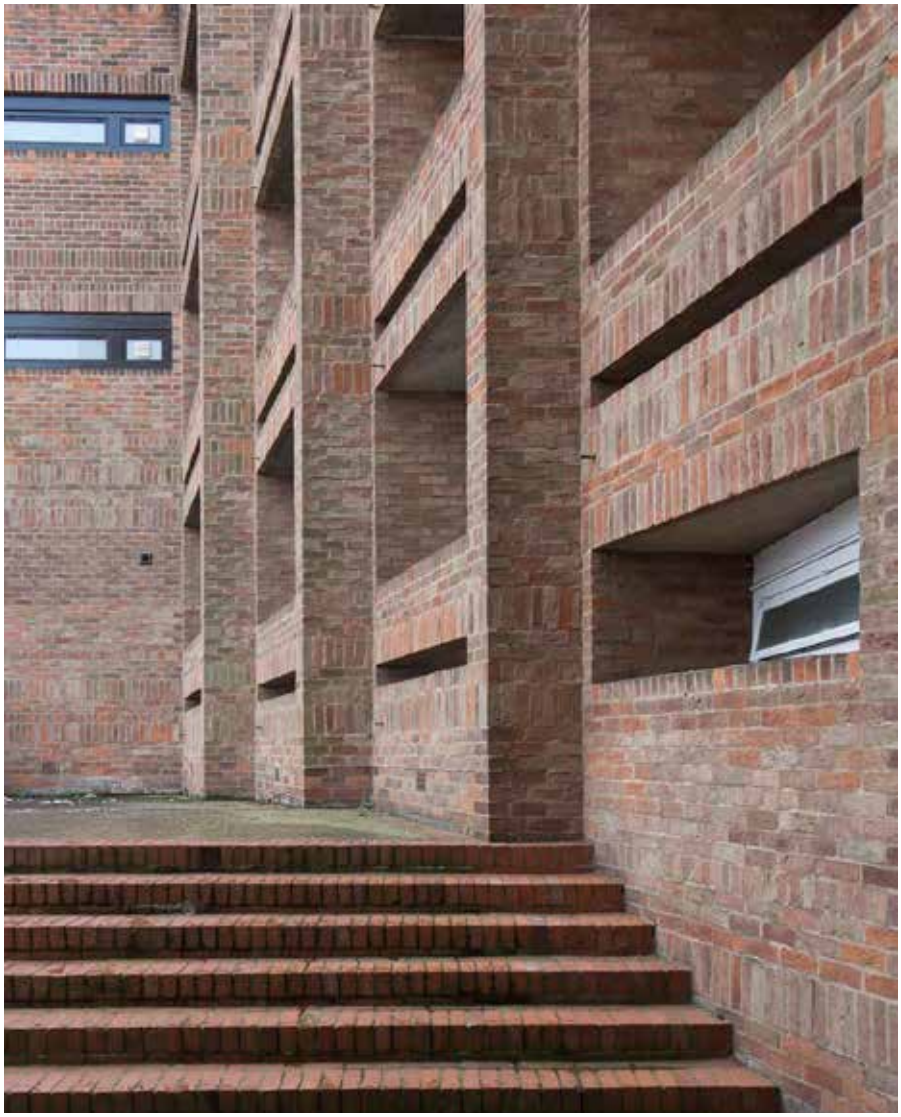
The Lawns, 1968. This drawing shows 27 student residences across three floors that interconnect to form a unified main block containing 135 residences and facilities.

1 Guest room
2 Waiting room
3 Security office
4 Office
5 Tutor's bedroom
6 Tutor's living room
7 Double student room
8 Kitchen
9 Student room
10 Sitting area

The overall facade, which incorporates a repetitive program yet maintains a scale.

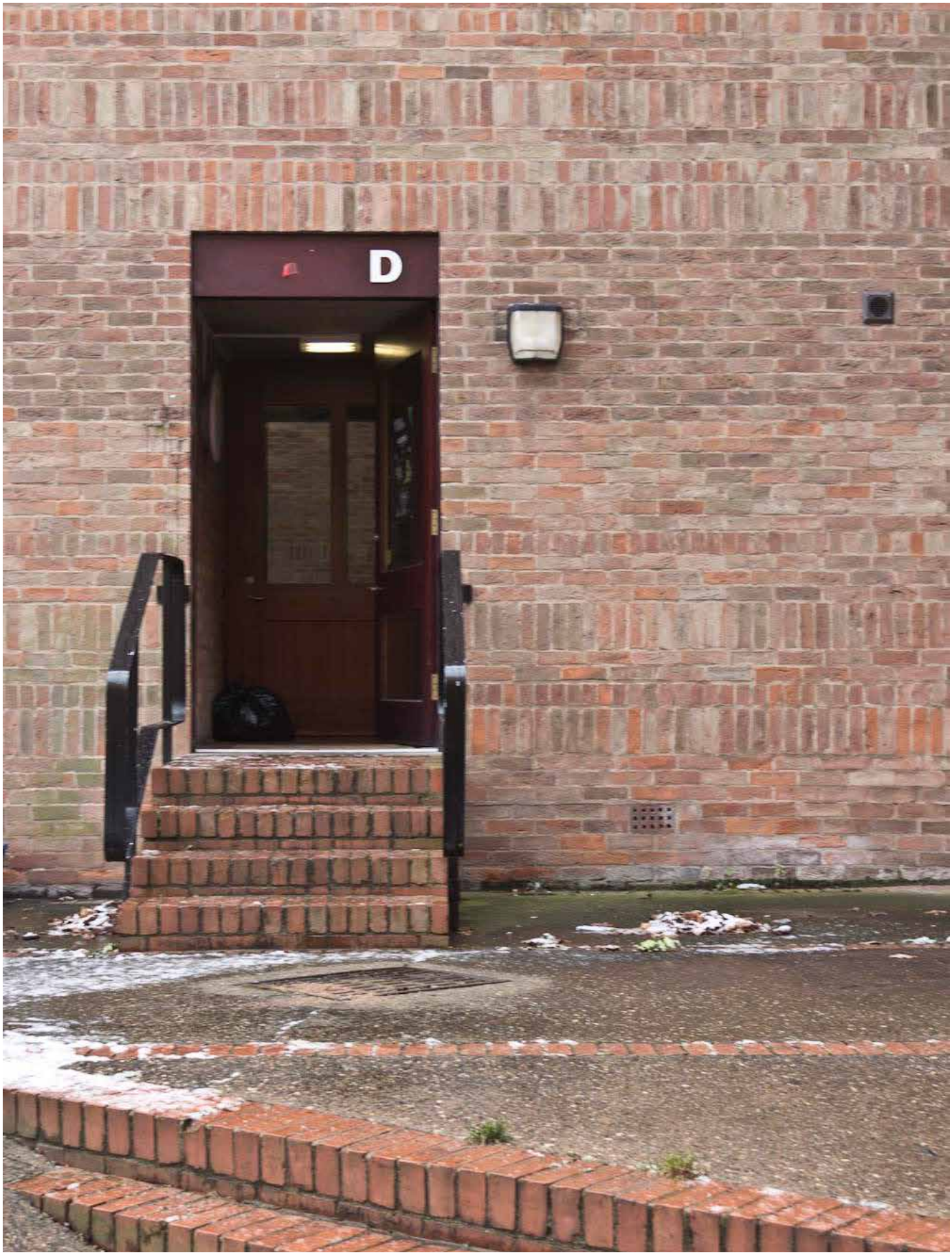
Facade fragment of the student rooms, with a passageway underneath to the ‘patio’ of one of the blocks.

The horizontal lines in the facade brickwork are used for vertical fragmentation.



The horizontal bands continue into the brickwork and connect the individual rooms into a block.

Entrance to the communal hall
that leads to the student rooms.

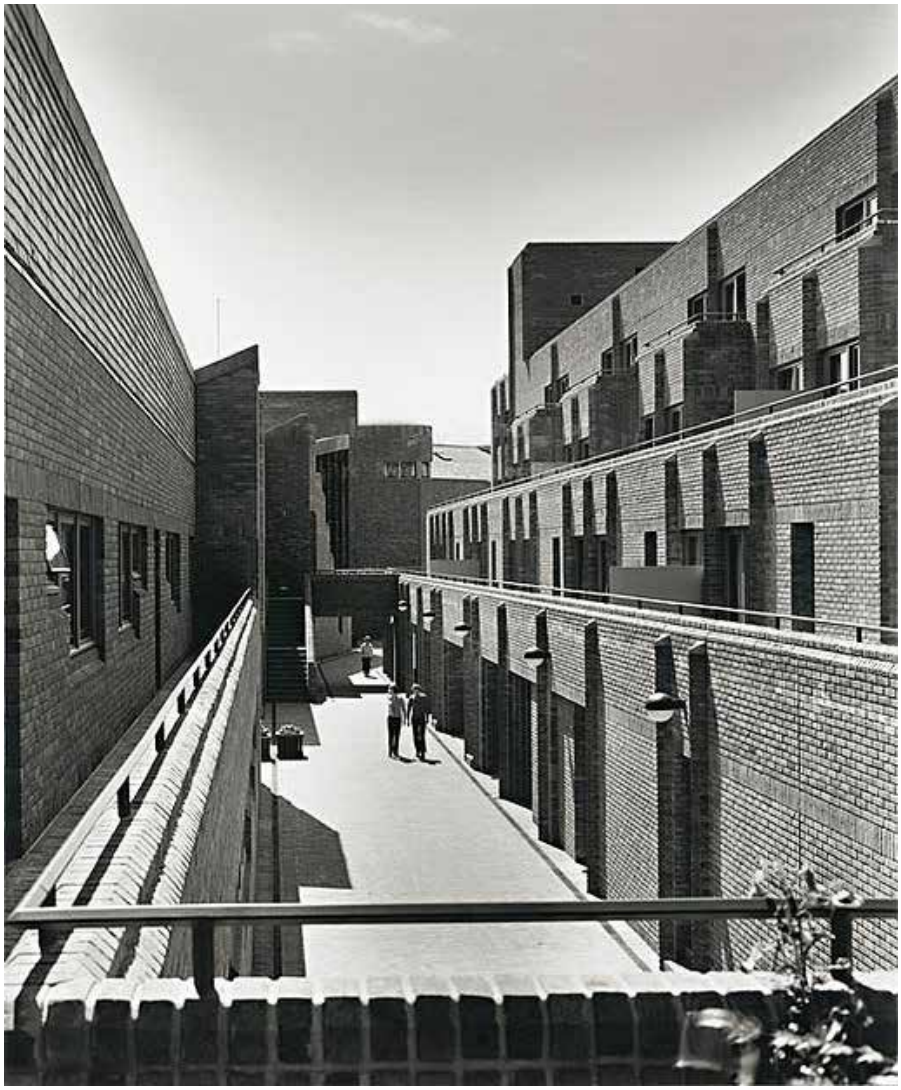


1980

Robinson College Cambridge

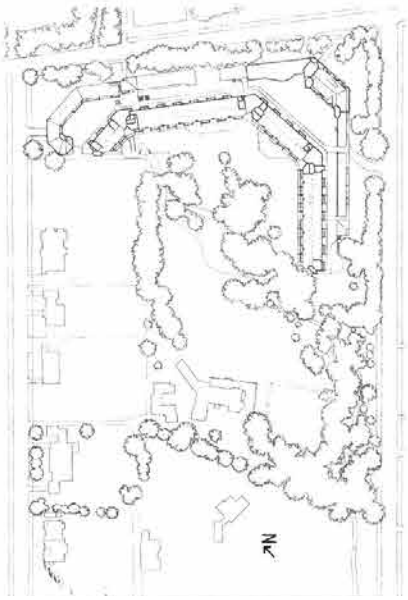
GKC designed a new L-shaped campus for the University of Cambridge in England, surrounding an existing park. The inner streets, constructed of red brick, provide access to housing for 370 students and feature a chapel, library, a 170-seat theatre, an auditorium and dining halls.

Robinson College, in a sense, reinterprets a typical Cambridge College, which traditionally features interior courtyards surrounded by buildings, according to Isi. "We didn't use the form; often a series of squares or rectangles, but rather a flexible relationship."[3] The goal was not to disrupt but to frame the richness of the existing park, with trees dating back to 1890, creating the impression of merging



"We did not use the typical shape of a campus, mostly a series of squares or rectangles, but used a very flexible relation."

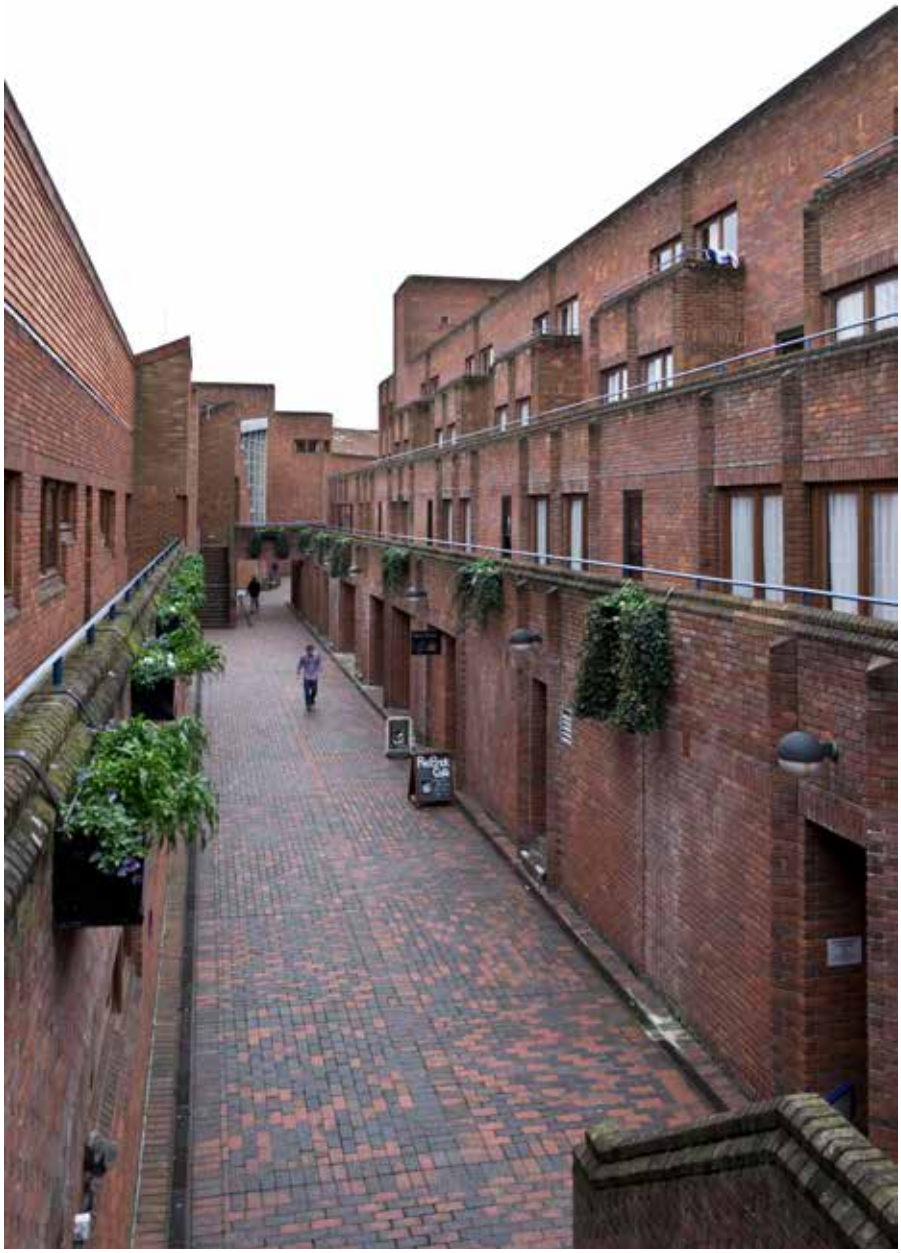
⊙ Isi Metzstein in the video *Lessons in Architecture & Slide-In*, Saul Metzstein, 2007.



Robinson College, Cambridge.

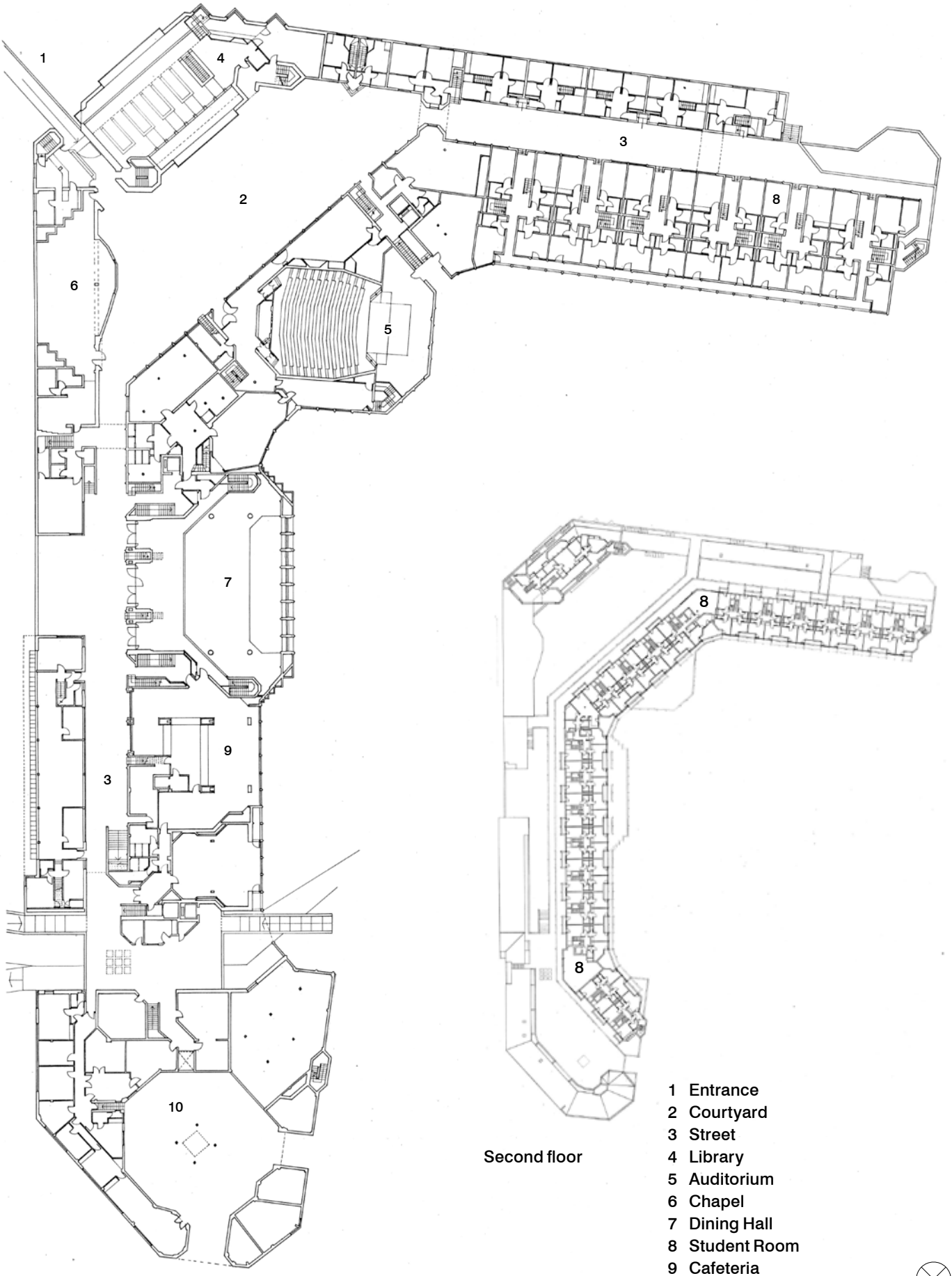
with the landscape. Additionally, the building responds to the contours of its surroundings, with low-rise construction connecting to nearby houses and taller structures balancing with the larger scale of the park.

Similar to the student campus at Hull, extensive attention was given to the facade expression, which primarily features a consistent repeating pattern. Like Alexander Thomson, the volumes are clearly divided into a base, middle section and top, with lining and ornamentation in the brickwork that clearly emphasise the segmentation of the facade planes. This creates more detailed articulation and scale along the inner streets while also maintaining an compact overall layout.



The walls of the inner street in which the galleries provide access to the student rooms. The street functions as a collective domain.

Plan of St. Peter's College, 1980.



Ground floor

Second floor

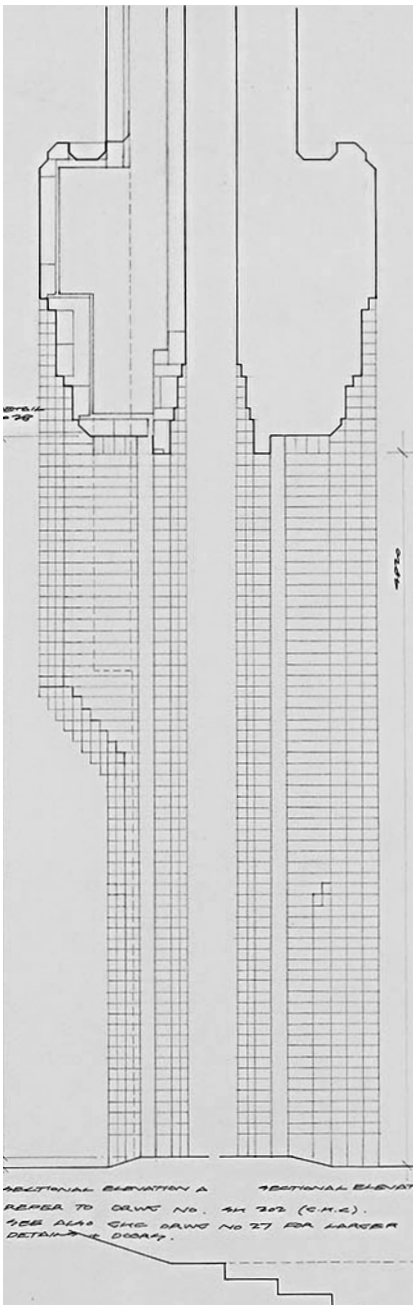
1 Entrance
2 Courtyard
3 Street
4 Library
5 Auditorium
6 Chapel
7 Dining Hall
8 Student Room
9 Cafeteria
10 Dining Room

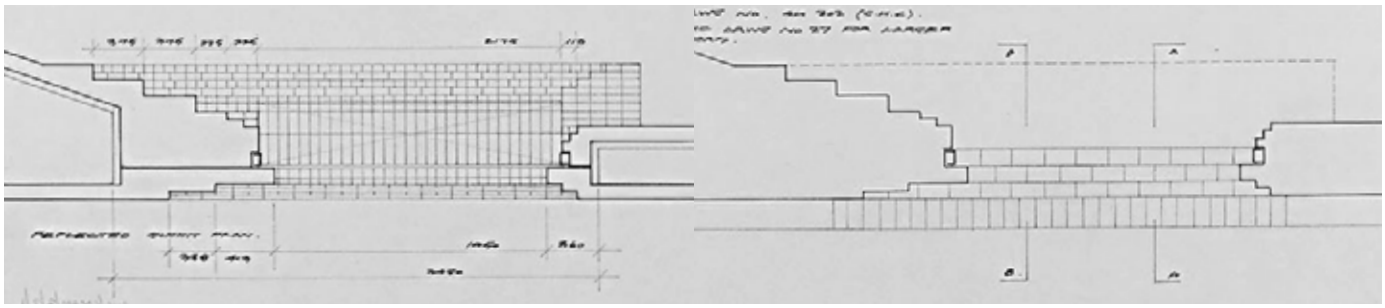
The courtyard walls, with the scale of the adjacent buildings on the left and the scale of the park on the right.

Fragment of the facade, reflecting the scale and connecting to the street profile.

Large (top): The composition of the inner street with an intimate atmosphere.
Left: The division of the facade by elements (gallery, balcony) and ornamentation provides a suitable scale to the inner street.
Small (above): The gallery in which the homes are accessed.

The ornamentation of the chapel entrance demonstrates the importance of scale at all levels.





Epilogue

Returning to our claim in the prologue that GKC's Isi Metzstein and Andy MacMillan are Local Heroes, we revisited this question. Our initial assertion was based on brief preliminary research that minimised the context of GKC's work, and the starting points of their design processes remained unclear. By visiting several notable projects and speaking with Professor Johnny Rodger and former employee Mark Baines, we gained a deeper understanding of their body of work and its context during the period from 1956 to 1987.

Due to demographic shifts in the 1950s, Glasgow experienced significant growth. Meanwhile, among other factors, the Roman Catholic Church sought new ways to express itself and reinterpret its role, as well as to modernise the church. It seems that this provided GKC with the freedom and opportunity to use Glasgow's New Towns as a testing ground for architectural 'experiments,' especially to reinterpret classical architectural principles with an ambitious outlook toward the future.

Perhaps this freedom within GKC's work created opportunities for a wide range of architecture that, partly due to reinterpretation and the question of what future architecture could look like, is not always easily classified by appearance. What is clearly visible is that through experimentation within certain projects, a kind of evolution took place. Although they themselves say there was always little room for reflection during their active years, they can still articulate what the foundation and vision of their work were: the reinterpretation in architecture that simultaneously feels familiar and enhances the vocabulary of modernism where, in their view, it was needed.

Whether this makes them Local Heroes may be decided by future observers of their work – they have, in any case, contributed several progressive and experimental projects to the Scottish architectural landscape.

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Colophon
Photography: Leslie Barry, John Crook, RS Proudley, Max Meijer, D Meijerink, Alamy Stock, Les Amis du Vieil Arbresie, Blog Hole Ousia, The Glasgow School of Art Archives, Stabrecht College Drawings: Mackintosh School of Architecture Archive Room, The Glasgow School of Art Archives
Designer: Karen Willey

Sources
Flickr: GSA Gillespie, Kidd & Coia Archives
The Glasgow School of Art Archives
Interviews: Johnny Rodger, January 16, 2015 and Mark Baines, January 17, 2015

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⊙ Local Heroes is an initiative of Office Winhov in memory of Joost Hovenier who was always targeting new perspectives.