

Research plan



LAW COURT ANNEX, GOTHENBURG – ERIK GUNNAR ASPLUND



THE BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON – COLIN ST JOHN WILSON

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In this research plan, we aim to analyse two important buildings which will help us in the development of the research for the Library design for the Stockholm Public Libray. We analysed one building by Asplund, the Law Court Annex in Gothenburg, and we analysed one modern library: the British Library by Colin St John Wilson.

Upper front page: Gardner, G. (2023). Exterior view of Gothenburg Law Court Annex by Asplund. garethgardner.com.

Lower front page: Donat, J. (1997) Aerial view of the British Library. www.bl.uk.

Imagery and drawings in this document are made by the authors, unless otherwise specified.

Made with the guidance of
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GOTHENBURG LAW COURT ANNEX INTRODUCTION



Gardner, G. (2023). Photograph of the Annex' inner courtyard. garethgardner.com.

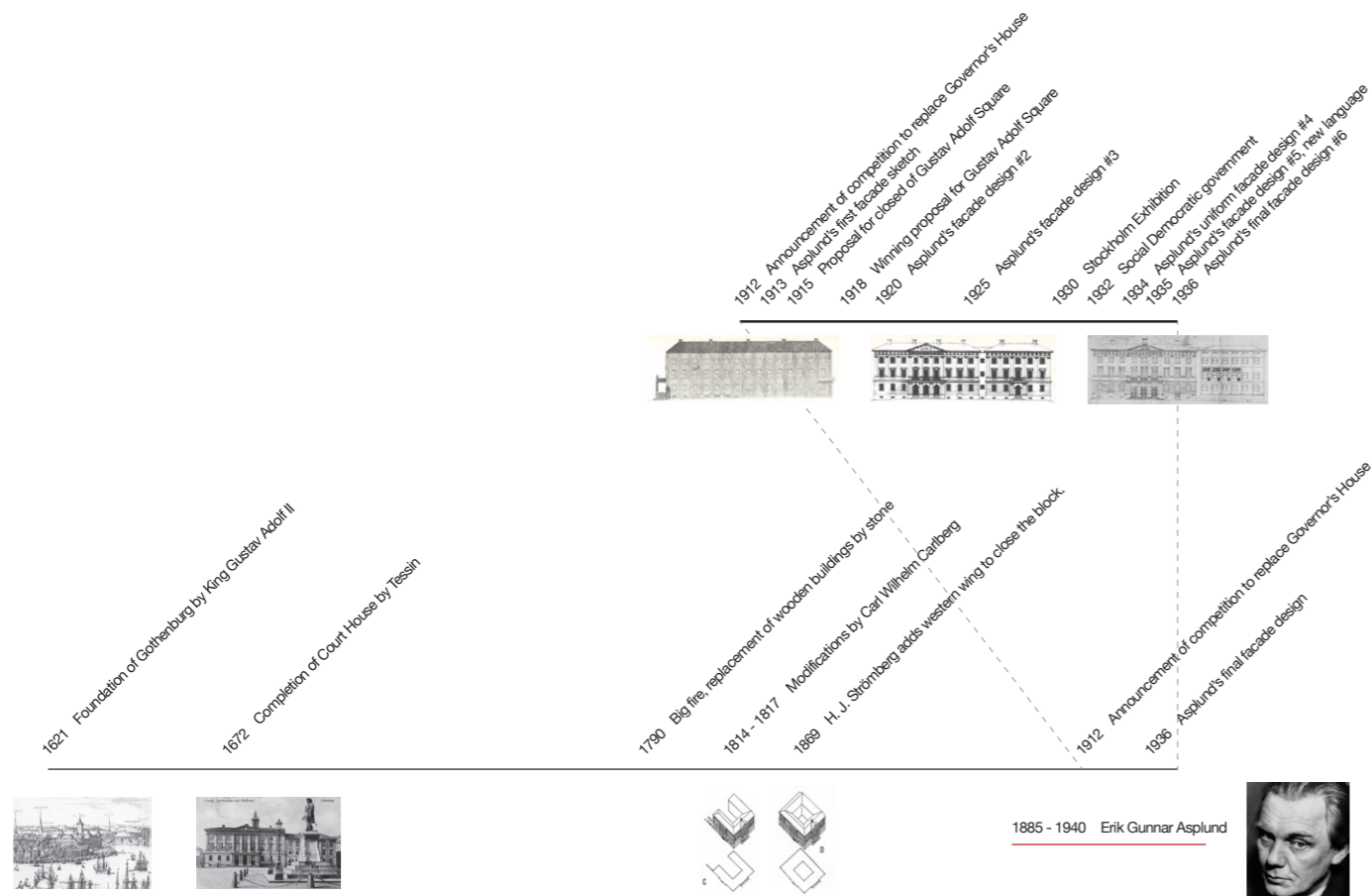
Gothenburg is the second city of Sweden and was founded by King Gustav Adolf II in 1621. The city is situated on the eastern bank of the Göta River and faces the North Sea. The Law Court Annex by Asplund is situated in the heart of the city, on the Stora Torget (Swedish for “the big square”), later known as Gustaf Adolfs Square. The Law Court Annex is, as the name implies, an extension of the city’s Courthouse designed by Nicodemus Tessin the Elder and completed in 1672. This Courthouse underwent a series of modifications with its latest change being the extension designed by the Swedish architect Erik Gunnar Asplund.

In 1913, Asplund emerged with a winning proposal in the competition for the Courthouse extension, presenting a national romantic design that harmoniously integrated both the Courthouse and the Annex. Yet, this initial triumph did not solidify the ultimate blueprint for the project. After many design changes, Asplund ended with a design that has modern interpretations of classical elements, a design that respects the monumental Courthouse. The extension keeps the proportions of the Courthouse and abstracts classical elements like pilasters. It is clear that Asplund attempted to strike a balance between the traditional and the modern. Both facades have their own identities, so there is a clear distinction between what was already there and what was added. Within the interior, a merging of the old and new is unfolding, creating a seamless transition between the two.

The interior of the Annex is a reflection of the interior of the Courthouse. Asplund mirrored the courtyard of the Courthouse in the Annex and made this the heart of the building from which people would move to the different courtrooms. Within the interior, there’s a deliberate effort to transform the space into a comfortable space despite the function – a living room ambiance that defies the conventional expectations associated with a courthouse. While awaiting trial, the focus is on making individuals feel relaxed, recognising the inherent stress associated with court appearances.

Moreover, the reliefs on the facade pay tribute to Gothenburg’s maritime identity, symbolising its involvement in sea trade. The scrupulous attention to detail is evident in the wood elements, walkway paths, and volumes of the main hall. The integration of lighting, carpets, ironmongery, and the curved walls in the chambers collectively imparts a domestic feel to the rooms, enhancing the overall comfort and ambiance of the space.

SITUATION



Timeline for major events in the evolution of the Gothenburg Courthouse.
As seen in the timeline, Asplund went through many design changes in the 24 years of the design process.



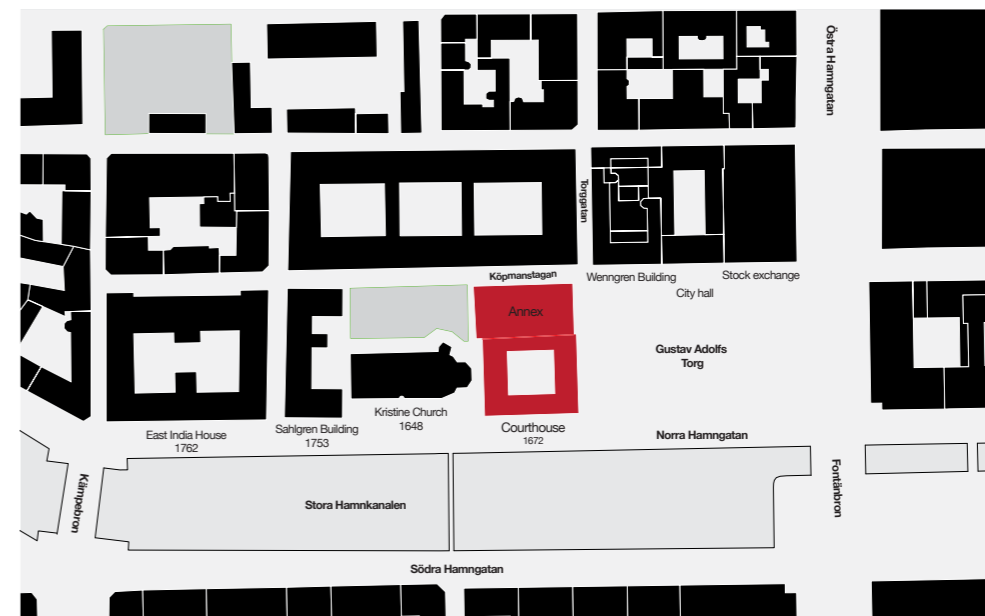
Stockholm Exhibition, 1930. (left) ACCEPTERA (Lewerentz, 1930)— The Manifesto of Swedish Functionalism, 1931. (Asplund et al., 1931, right)
Swedish Functionalists, known as “Funkis” began to plan a massive propaganda push (er, exhibition) that would showcase their new viewpoint across all areas of building and product design and stress their relationship to a balanced life true to Scandinavian values.

URBAN SETTING



Map of Gothenburg, 1921.

The map shows the remains of the city's defensive curtain. Clearly visible is the relationship between the city and Gustaf Adolfs Square.

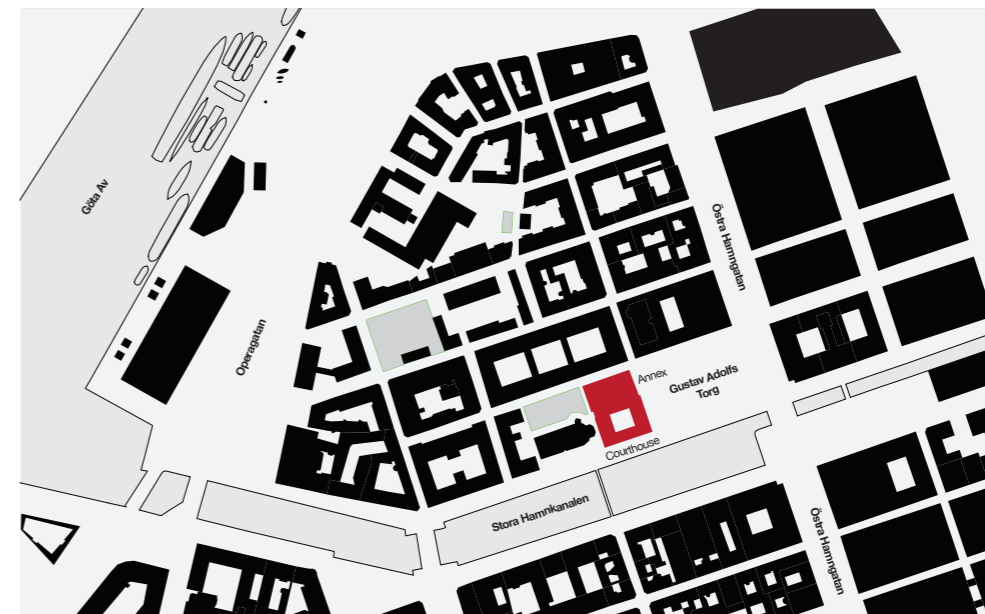


Urban situation in 1936 with the Annex building. Based on Adams (2015).



Urban situation in 1925. Based on Adams (2015).

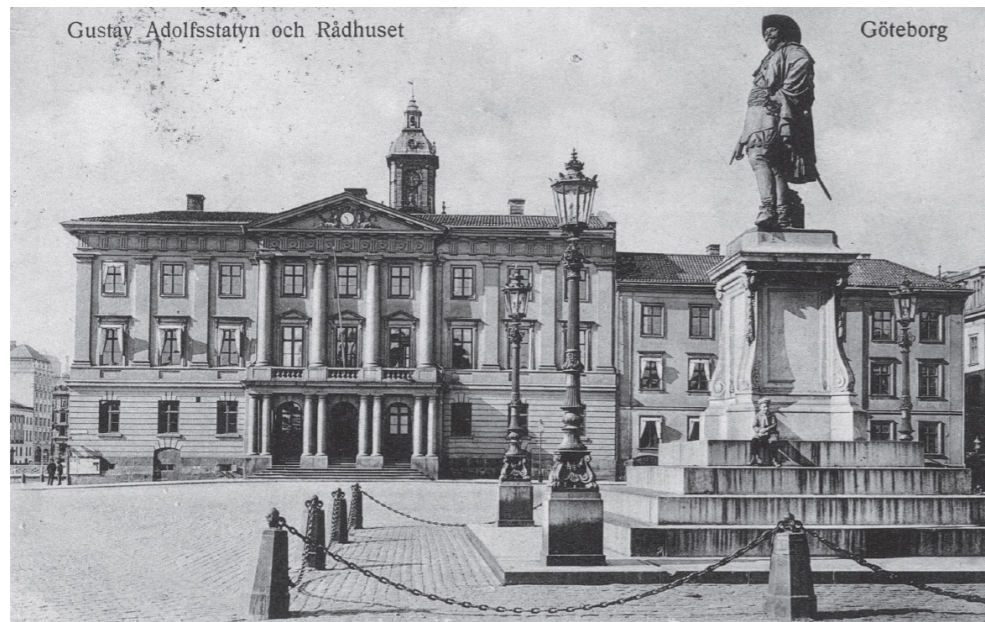
The city plan is based of a grid. Canals are used to break the street pattern and they make the square easily accessible by water for trading goods on the square. Gothenburg's most important buildings are build along the Stora Hamnkanalen and around the Gustaf Adolfs Square. Making it the political heart of the city.



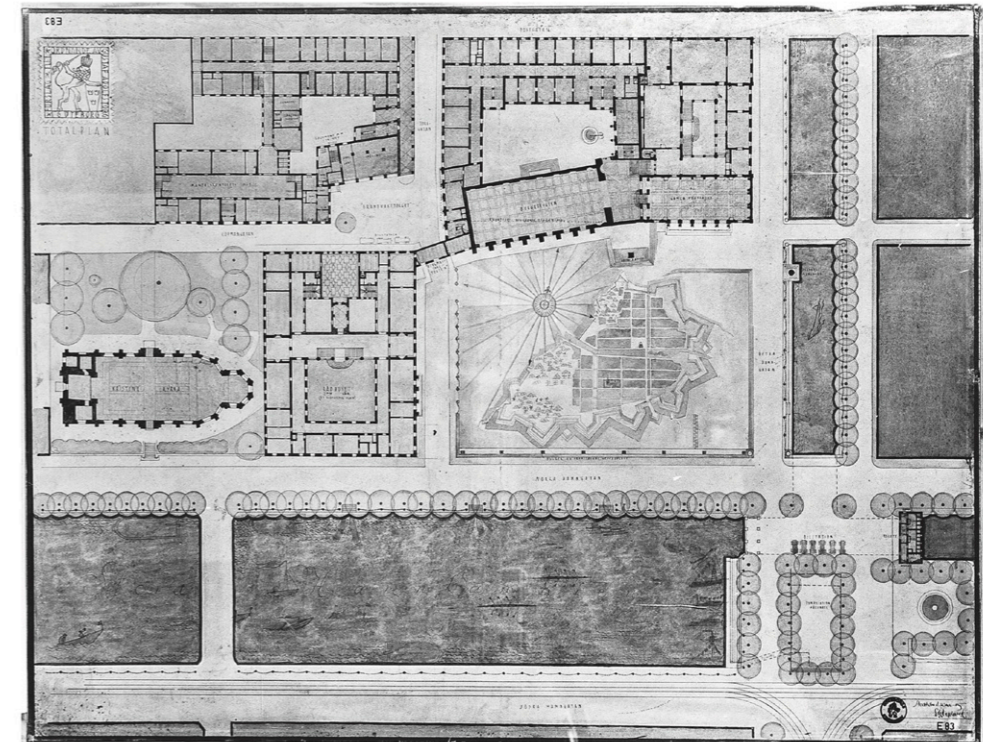
Urban situation of the Gustaf Adolfs Square. Based on Adams (2015).

Having developed very little, the square and many monumental buildings maintain their appearance. However, their functions have changed. The main canal Stora Hamnkanalen is still there, but the canal along the Östra Hamngatan was filled in 1936.

URBAN SETTING

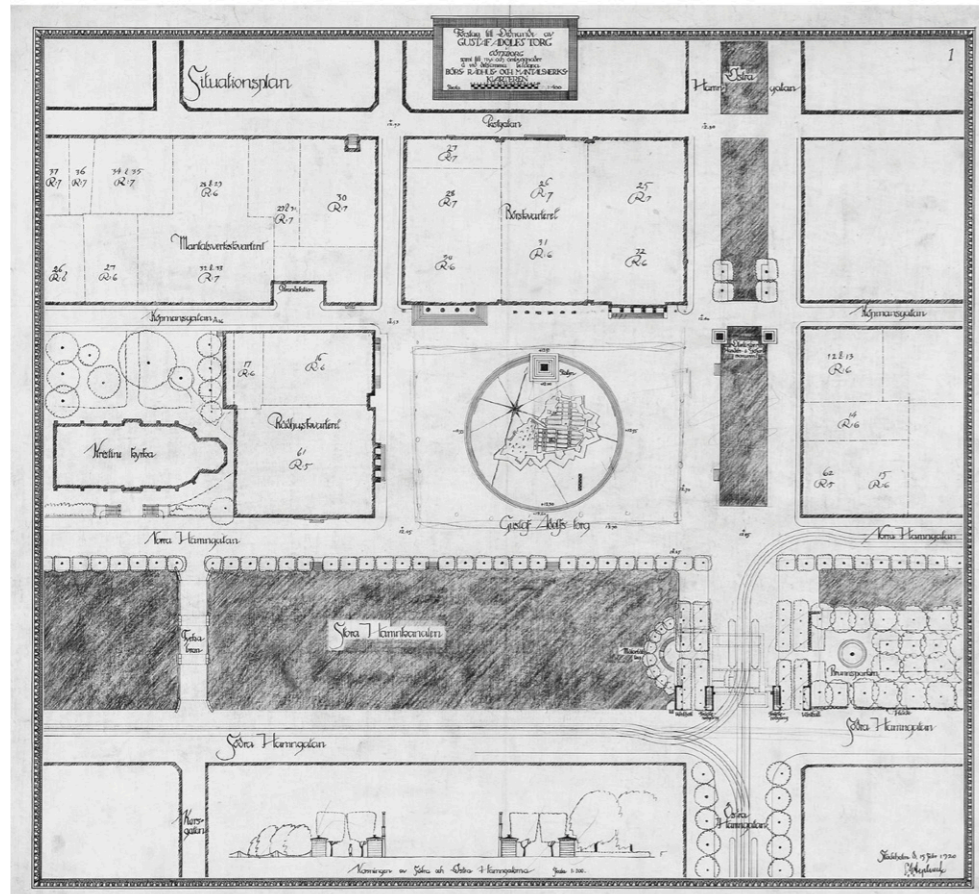


Bengt Erland Fogelberg, statue of Gustav Adolf II, 1849 (original statue, copy erected 1854)
 This view shows the statue standing before Tessin's Courthouse and the Governor's House. The Governor's House has some elements similar to the Courthouse, for example the pilasters and the stairs leading to the entrance. It has an overall subdued character, which makes the Courthouse stand out more in the ensemble.



Renovation proposal of the Gustaf Adolfs square by Gunnar Asplund. November 1915.
Region- och stadsarkivet, Gothenburg, E83.
 The concept of a unified structure was Asplund's first idea for the designs of the Courthouse and its extension. The facade of the extension is a continuation of the composition of the Courthouse facade, transforming it into one structure. The architect was subsequently asked to also investigate the redevelopment of Gustaf Adolfs square, which focused on the idea of connecting the buildings on the north with the Courthouse. The statue moved to one side of the square, enabling all spectators to see the sculpture frontally. The pavement shows a map of the original plan of the city, which makes the city itself the focal point of the square.

URBAN SETTING



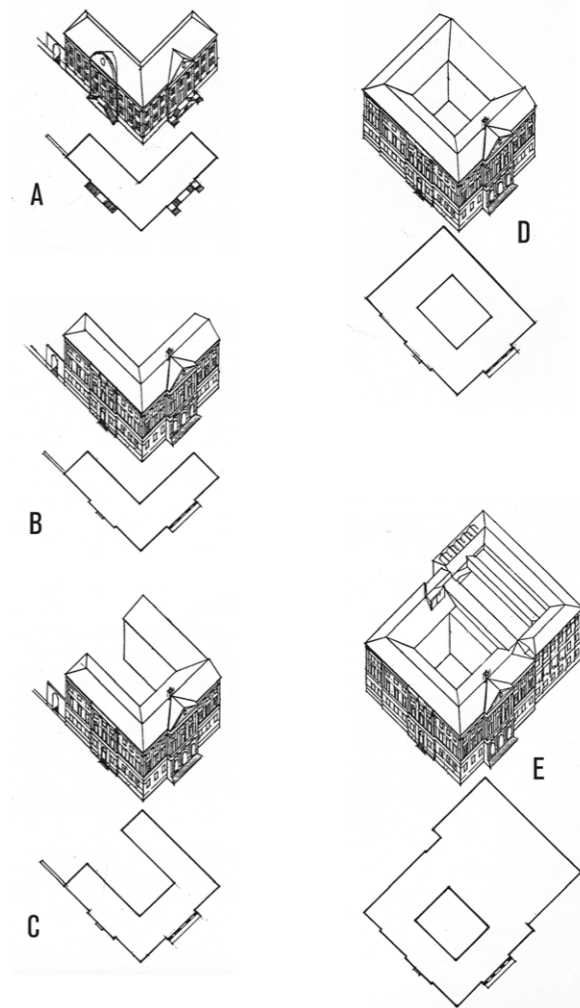
Renovation proposal of the Gustaf Adolfs square by Gunnar Asplund. February 1920.
Collection Centre canadien d'architecture, Montreal, DR2000:0024

Many elements of Asplund's first design of the Gustaf Adolfs square carried over into a later design of the square. The statue was still not centred on the square and there is still a map in the pavement, but now smaller. The grid of the streets is not broken anymore as the buildings on the north and west of the square are no longer connected. The design of the square was never realised, but it contributed to further intents for the Annex. The main change is that the architect shifted his attitude towards having a single facade for the courthouse and its extension.

Original Courthouse building by Nicodemus Tessin. L-shape. Completed in 1672.

City architects Carl Wilhelm Carlberg and his assistant Jonas Hagberg add attic level. L-shape. Orientation changes. 1814-1817

City architects Carl Wilhelm Carlberg and his assistant Jonas Hagberg add north wing. U-shape. 1835



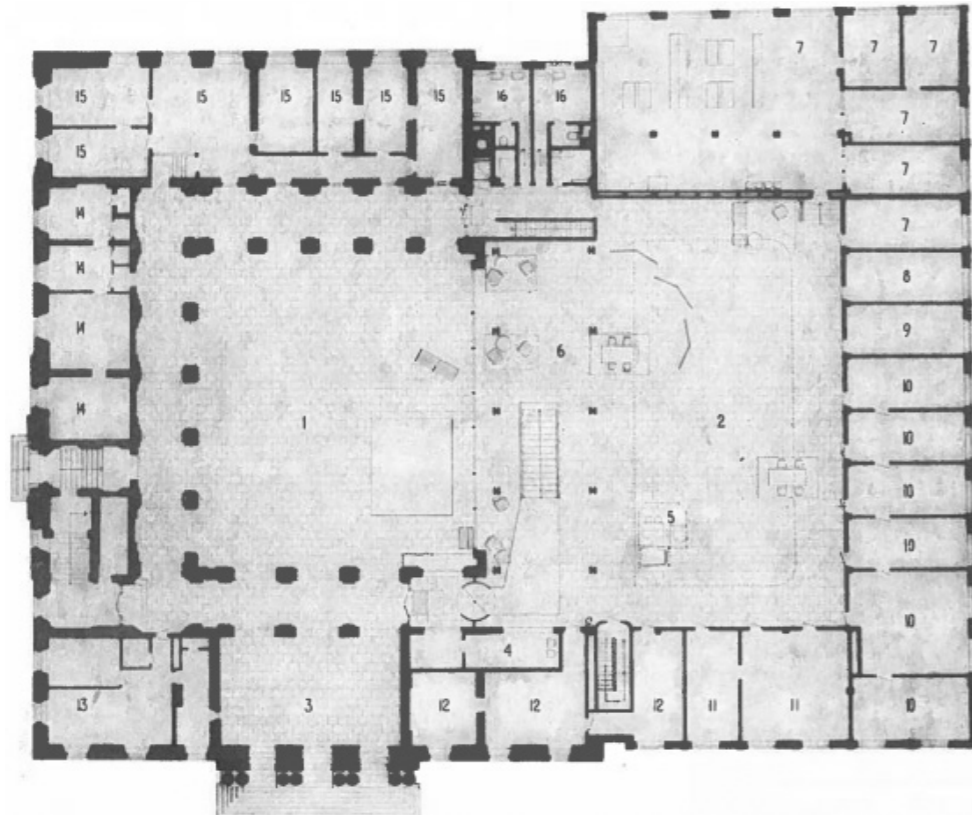
H. J. Strömberg adds western wing to close the block. Closed block. 1869

Annex added by Erik Gunnar Asplund. 1936.

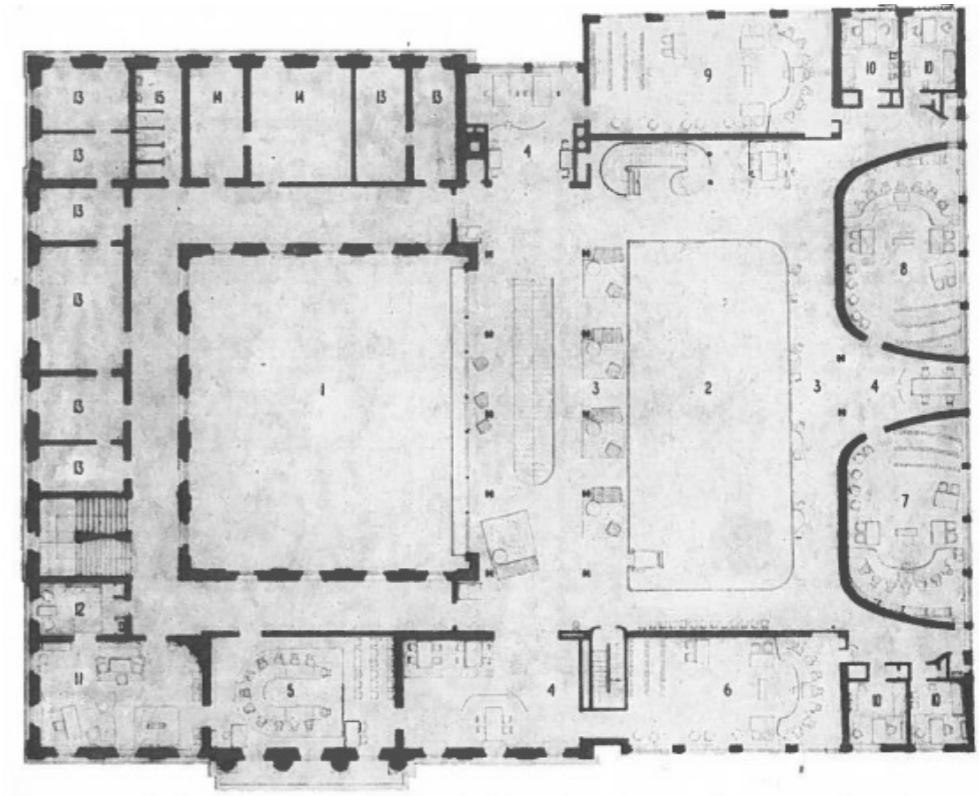
Expansion of the Courthouse over the centuries. Images from Blundell Jones, P. (2002).

It was not only the design of the Law Courts but also the Courthouse that went through many changes over the years. The first design had two facades accentuated by pediments over giant order pilasters, but both had distinctive design expressions, making the east facade slightly more important. From 1817, the facade aligned with Stora Hamngatan changed into a clear secondary facade as some monumental elements like the segmental arch and stairs were removed. Whereas the east facade entrance acquired a more pronounced character. In his first designs of the extension of the Courthouse, Asplund proposed to make the east facade the secondary facade, completely changing the monumentality of the Courthouse. As this was too radical and against the wishes of the City Council, he discarded the idea and kept the entrance to the Courthouse untouched.

COMPOSITION

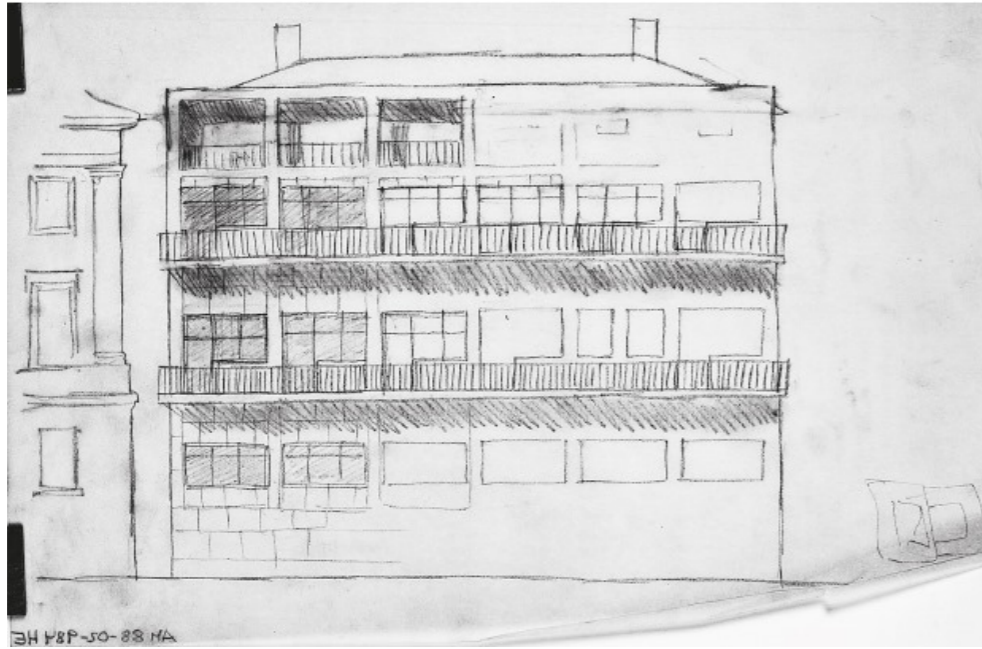


Ground Floor Plan. Blundell Jones, P. (2002).
 1. Courtyard.
 2. Hall.
 3. Entrance hall.
 4. Cloak room.
 5. Telephone exchange.
 6. Waiting room.
 7-12, 14-15. Offices.
 13. Caretaker's lodging.

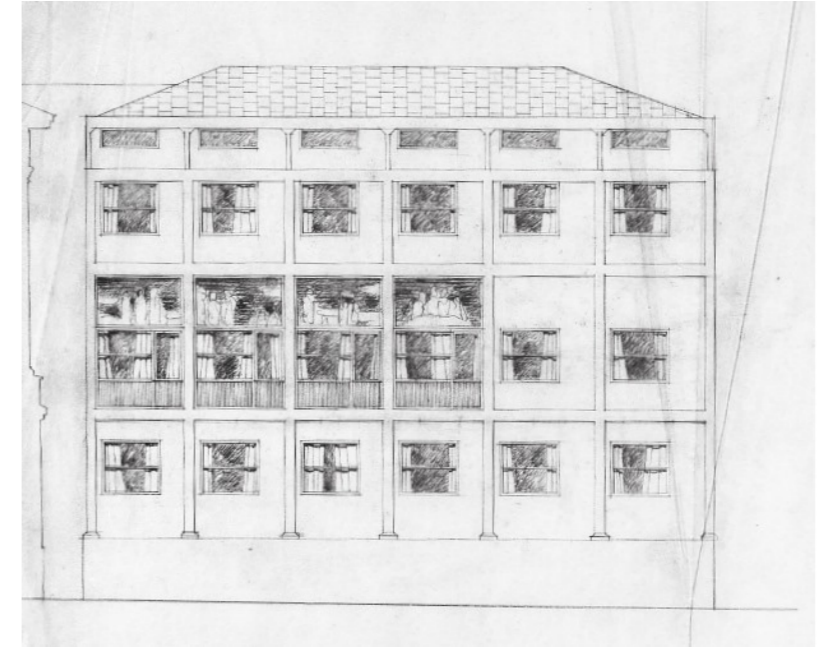


First Floor Plan. Blundell Jones, P. (2002).
 1. Courtyard.
 2. Hall.
 3. Public waiting room.
 4. Anteroom to court room.
 5. Magistrates' sessions hall.
 6. 2nd department court room.
 7. 3rd 8. 4th 9. 5th 10. Conference room.
 11. Burgomaster's room.
 12. Anteroom.
 13. Courthouse chancery.
 14. Office for deceased persons' estates.
 15. Staff lavatory.

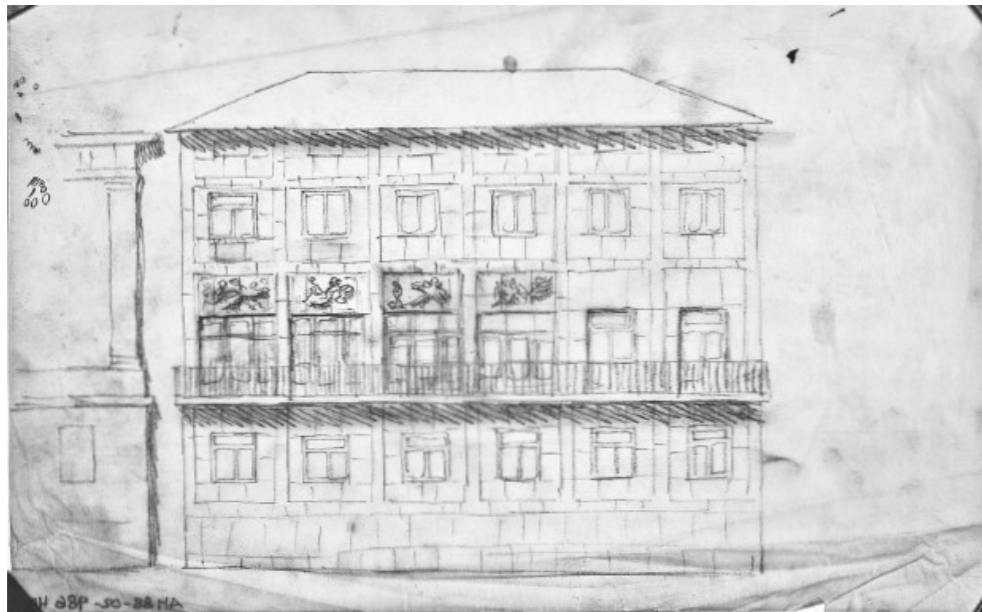
COMPOSITION



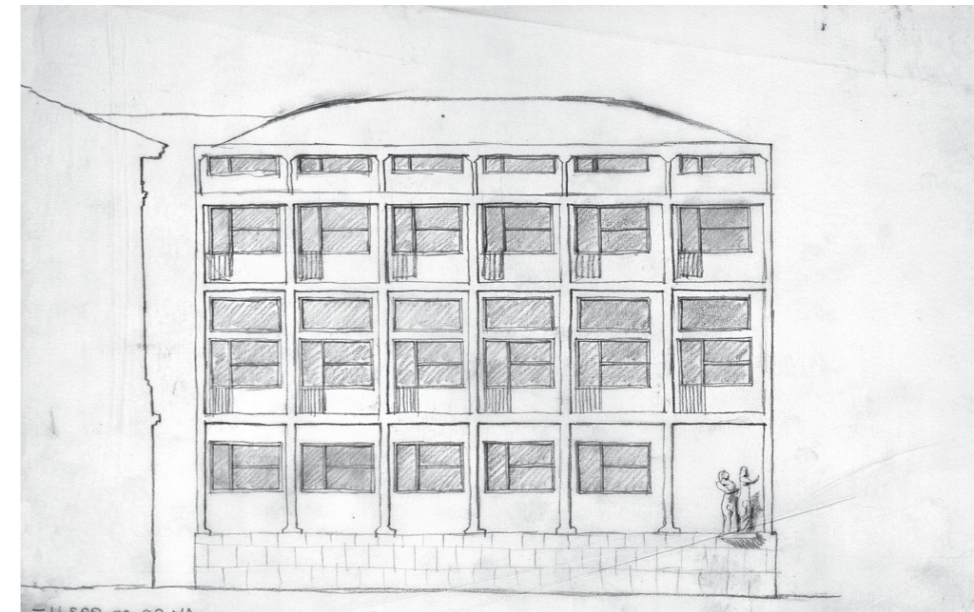
1935 Facade study of the Annex. Adams, N. (2015).



1935 Facade study of the Annex. Adams, N. (2015).



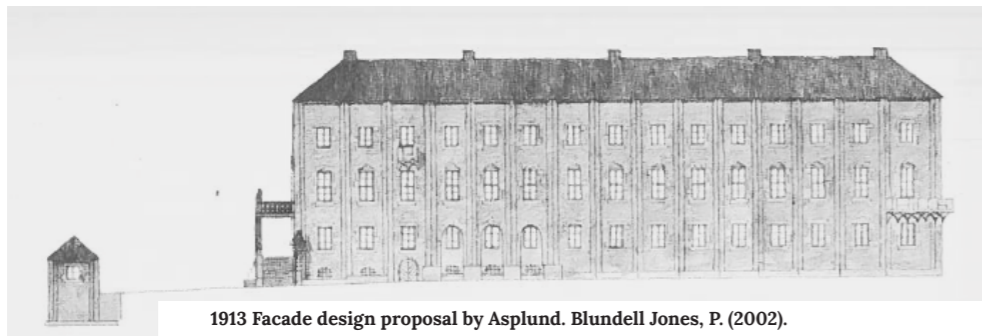
1935 Facade study of the Annex. Adams, N. (2015).



1936-1937 Facade design by Asplund. Adams, N. (2015).

Several iterations have been done to reach the final composition of the facade. From a functionalist building to a building with more classical elements. The compelling elements that can be observed are the balconies, as they give the facade a more residential character. The many sketches also show how Asplund was trying to find a balance between the old Courthouse and the new extension. Each of the facades needed to showcase its identity, while still maintaining architectural cohesion.

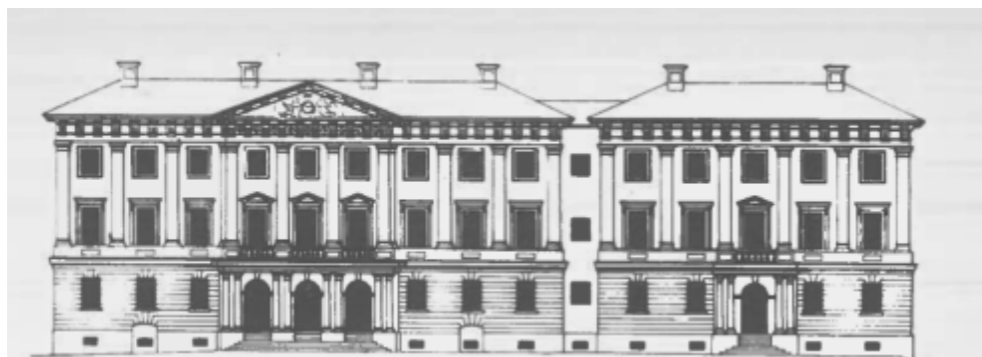
COMPOSITION



1913 Facade design proposal by Asplund. Blundell Jones, P. (2002).



1920 Facade design proposal by Asplund. Blundell Jones, P. (2002).



1925 Facade design as two connected parts with separate entrances. Blundell Jones, P. (2002).

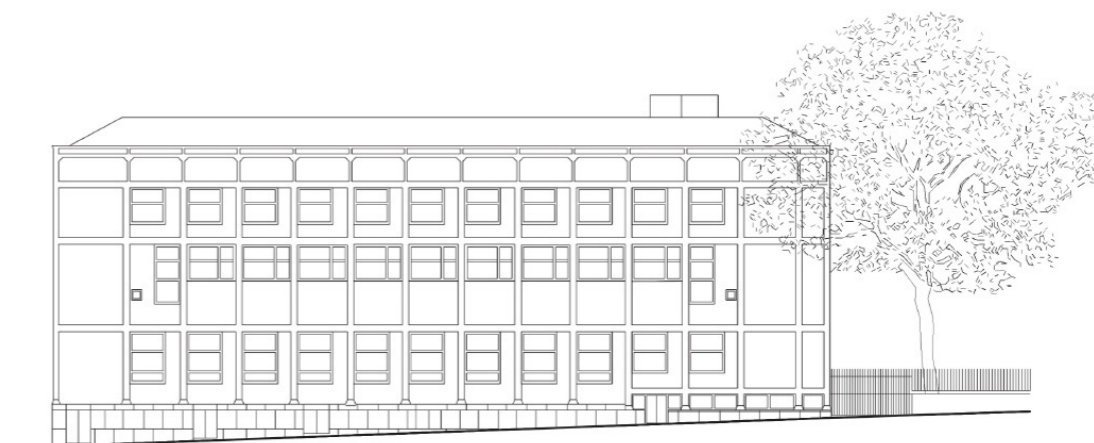


1935 New architectural language for the facade. Adams, N. (2015).

The vertical division in the facade is mimicked: the base and the roofs have the same height, and the attic windows fit within the height of the frieze of the Courthouse. In a subsequent design iteration, Asplund made a shorter version of the Courthouse, because the city council was opposing his facade designs. By 1935, Asplund had taken a more modern approach to the facade. He still took inspiration from the Courthouse. The horizontal and vertical division of the Courthouse facade continues in the extension but without the prominent classical ornaments. There is still a reference to the pilasters, as the vertical lines in the facade have a base and a capital, but they are more abstract.



1936 Final (built) proposal for the facade by Asplund. Adams, N. (2015).



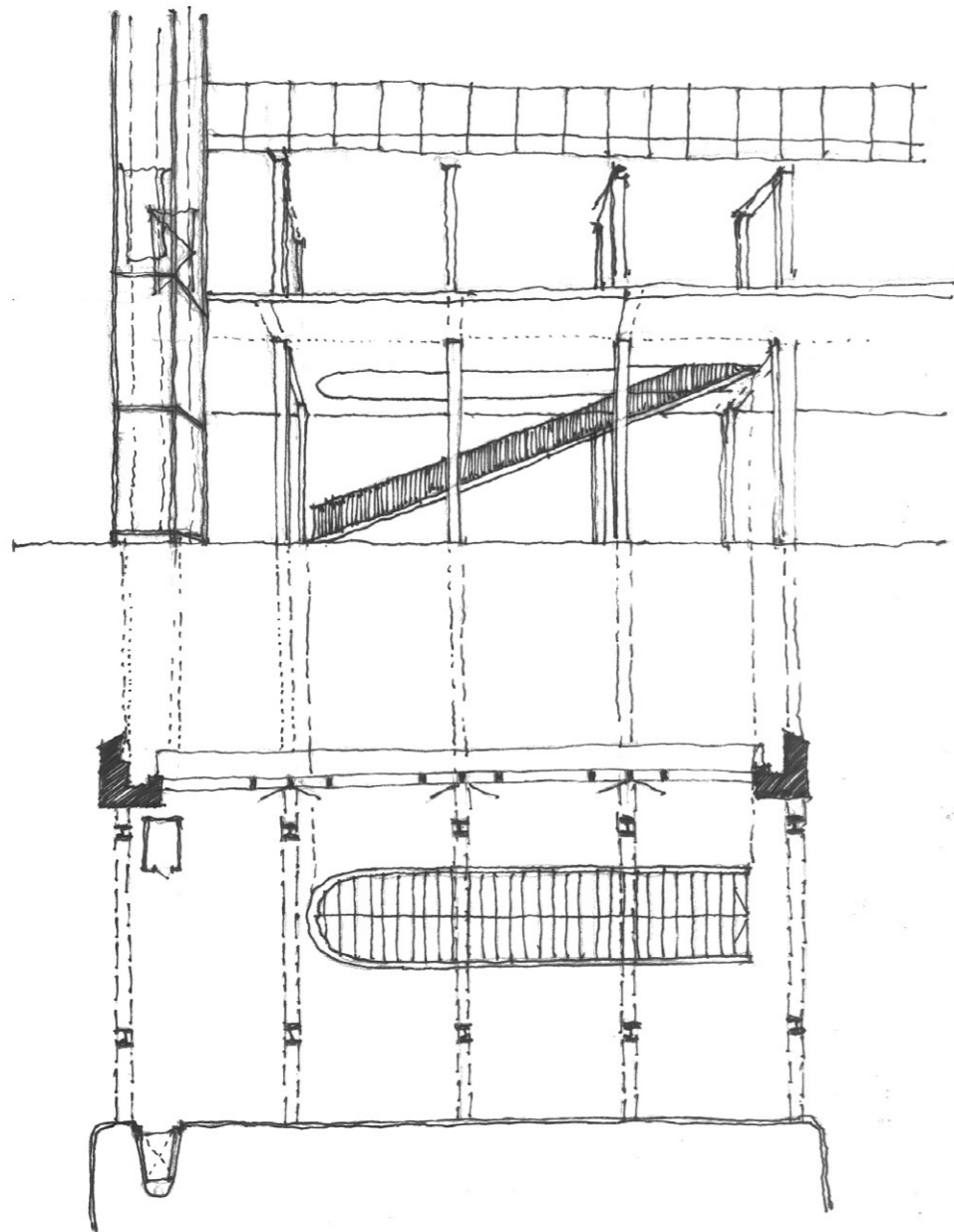
1936 Final (built) proposal for the North facade by Asplund. Adams, N. (2015).



Photograph of the west facade. Adams, N. (2015).

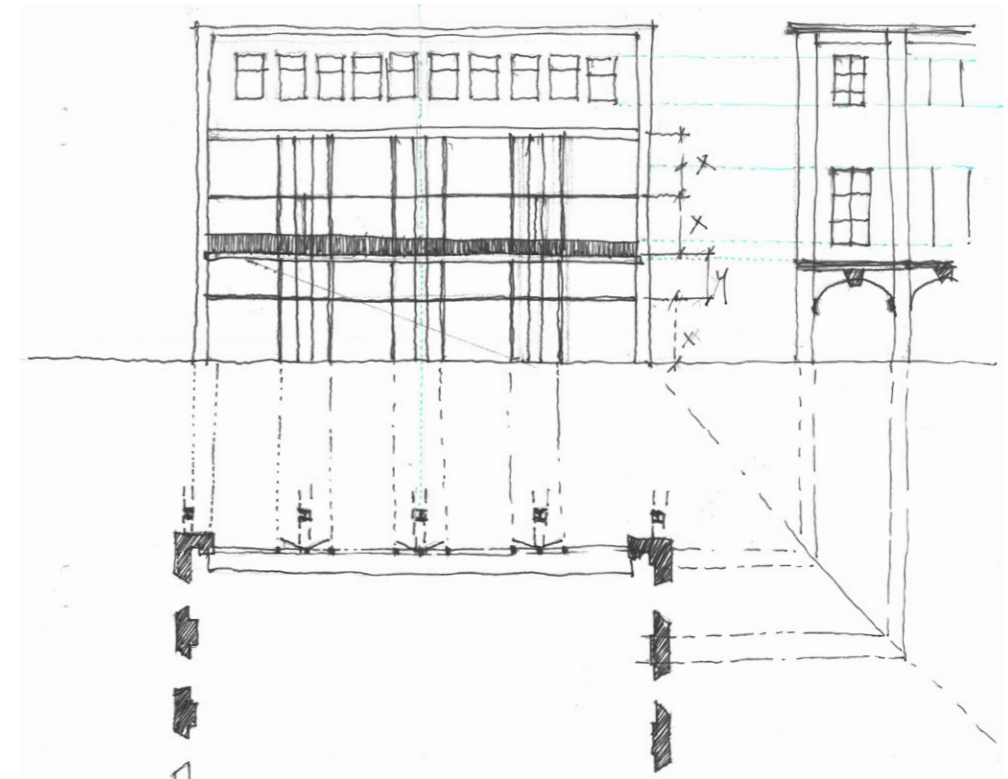
In the architect's latest facade iteration, the windows shifted from a centre position in the grid. The visual effect is one of the Courthouse pulling the windows towards it. The north and west facades continue in a similar rhythm to the east facade. The north facade seems to be more playful, as the vertical grid has different widths that break the pattern. The west facade has a residential character, because of the doors with shallow balconies.

COMPOSITION



Internal View of the vertical circulation.

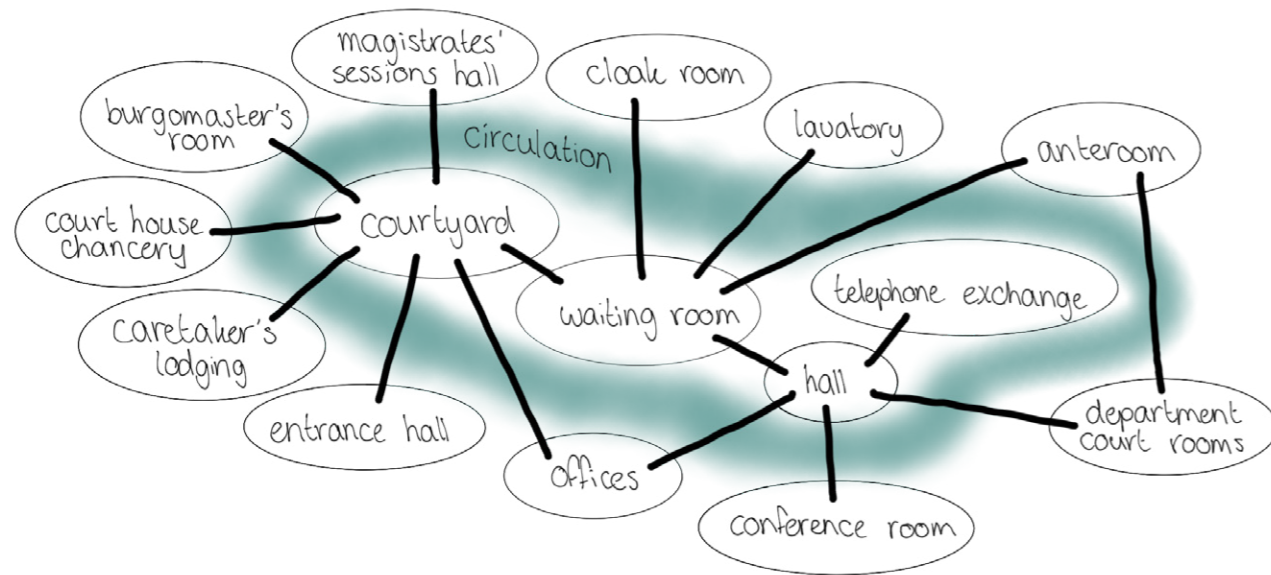
The striking aspect of this view, in terms of its visual composition, is the element of the staircase that is carelessly breaking the rhythm of the columns. The loose furnishings and decorations have been omitted in the sketch, in order to draw attention to the architectural shell.



Analysis of Annex facade elements in relation to the existing facade.

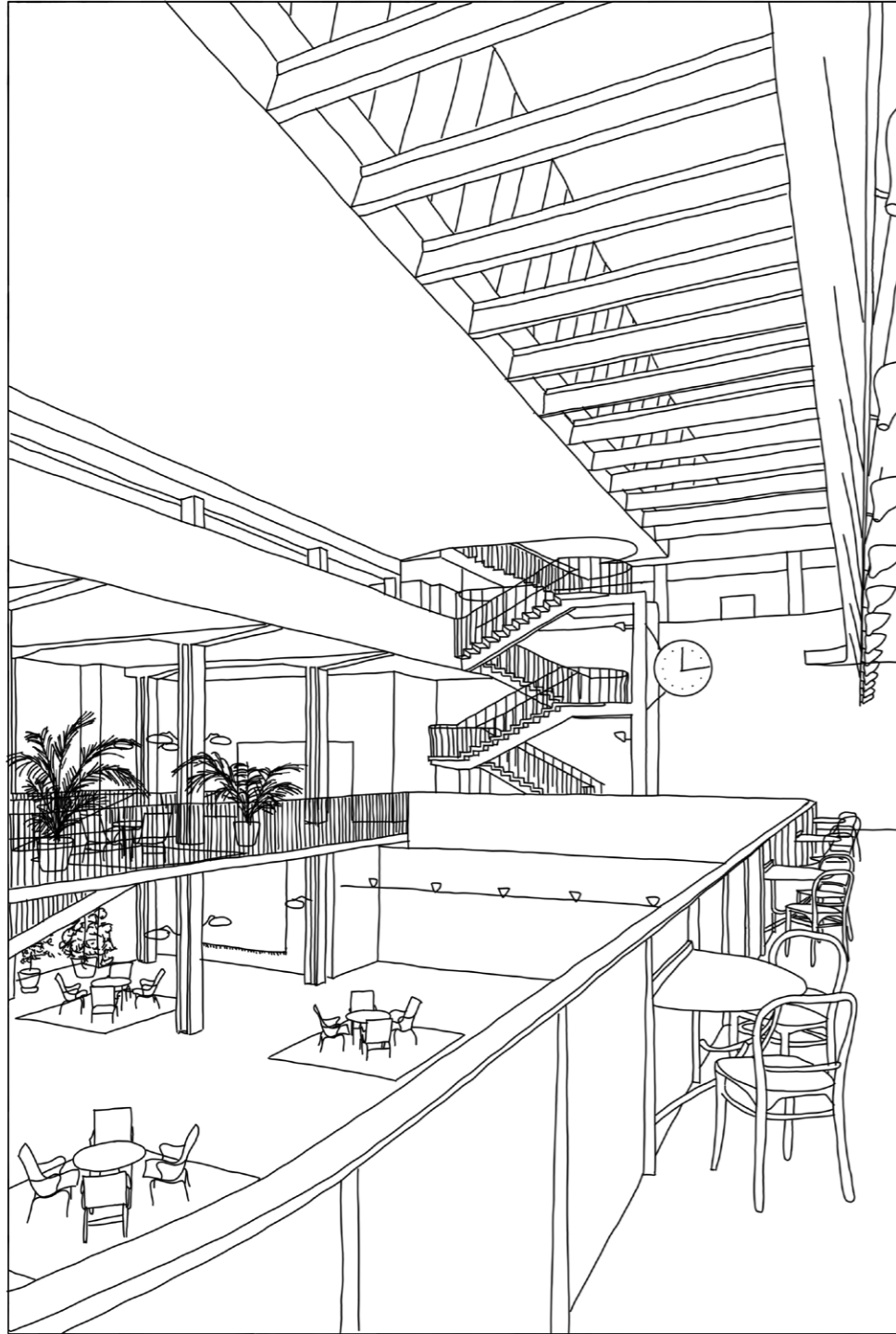
The structural and decorative elements are carefully balanced - the richness of timber frames, abundance of glass and the columns seen on the inside add depth to an otherwise flat facade.

SPATIALITY



Scheme of the spatial configuration of the floor plan.
Scheme of the floor plan. The courtyard functions as a connection space between all the rooms.

SPATIALITY

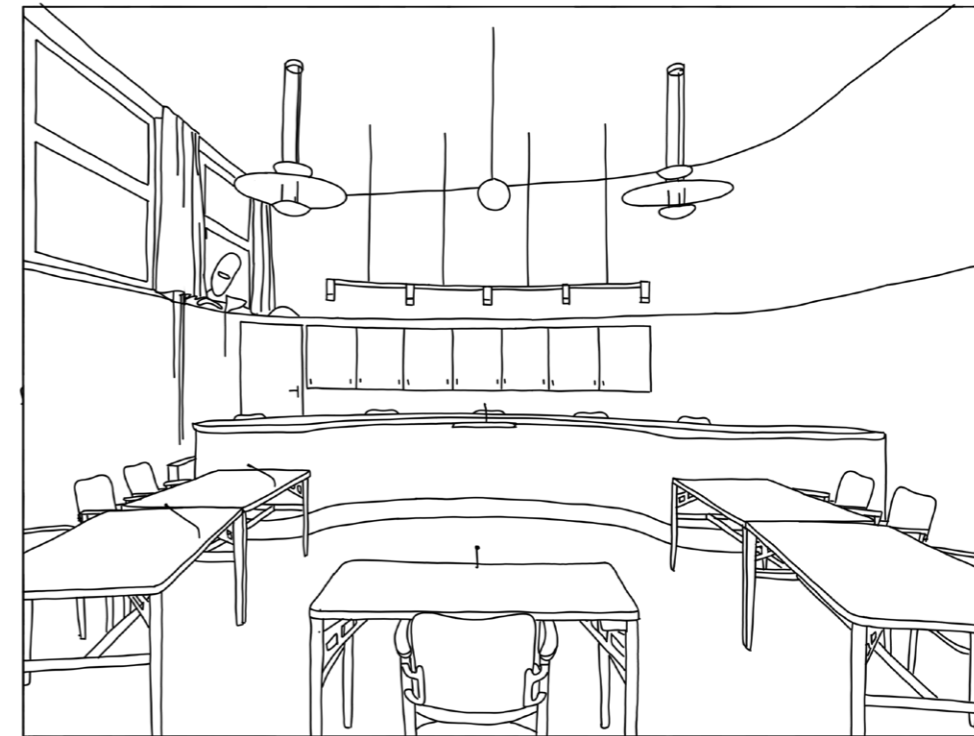


Interior courtyard. Sketch based on photographs by Gardner, G. (2023).

In the 1930s, the Stockholm Exhibition displayed new ways of Scandinavian living. For many Swedes, this exhibition was their first encounter with modernism and functionalism. Also, the concept of the domestic public interior became more important at this time. This domesticity is visible in these sketches: carpets, loosely placed tables and (comfortable) chairs, plants and an over-dimensioned clock, all executed in wooden materials. This contrasts with the nature of the Law Courts, where people would naturally encounter a tense situation. While waiting for trial, they spend their time in this space that resembles a living room.

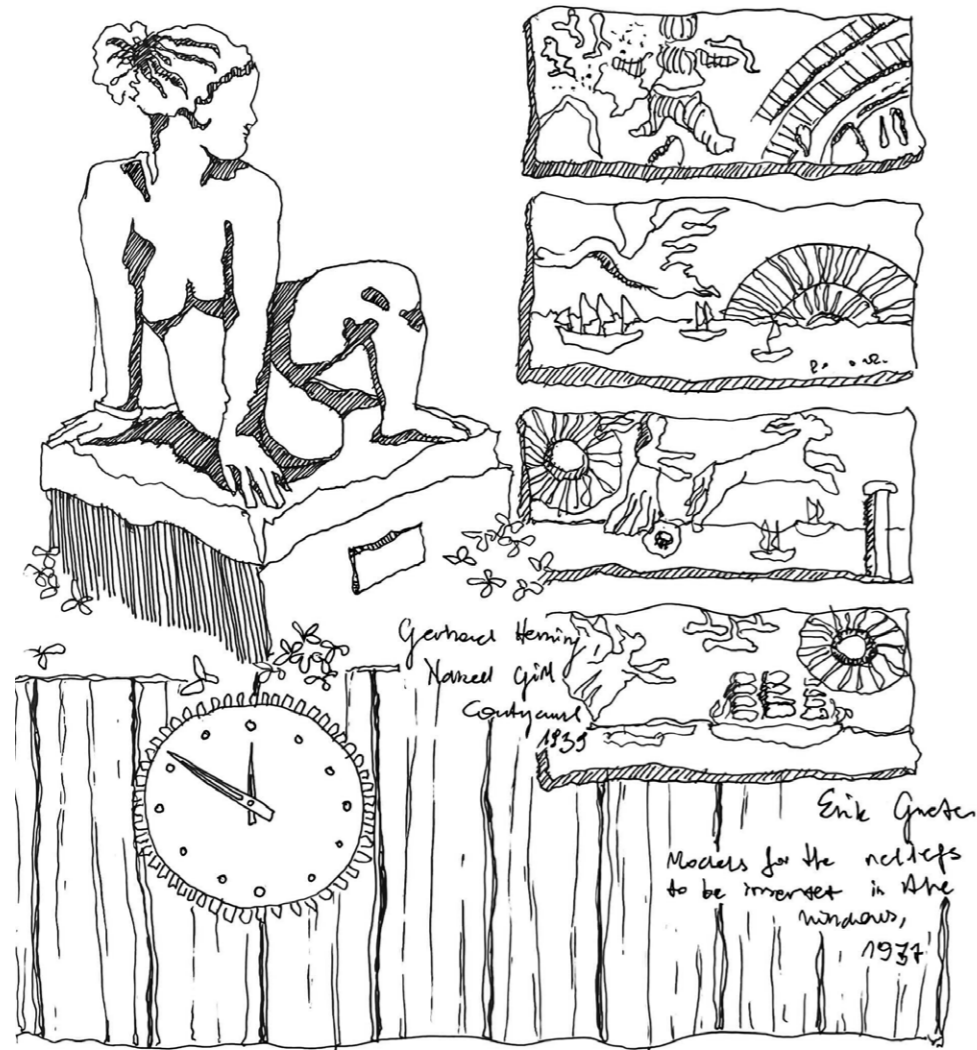


Interior space between outdoor and inner courtyard. Sketch based on photographs by Gardner, G. (2023).

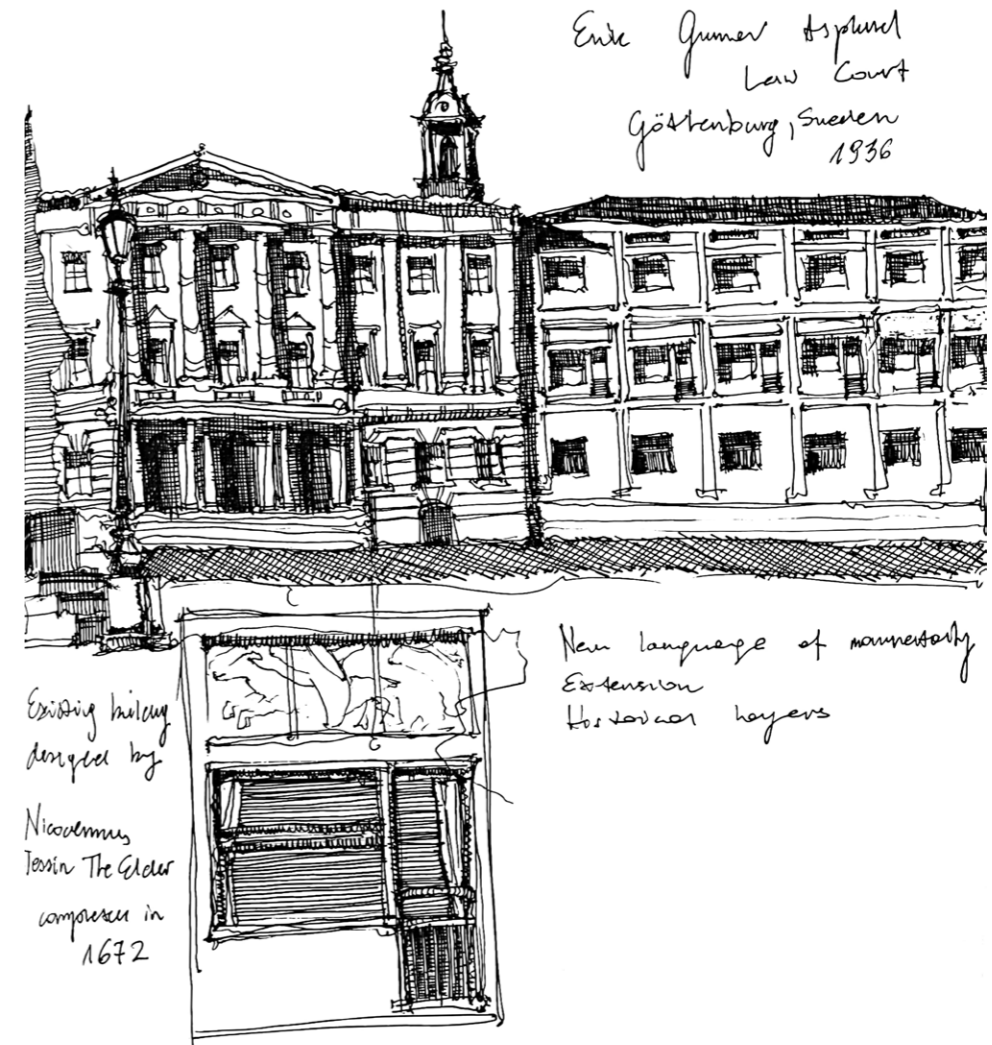


Court room. Sketch based on photographs by Gardner, G. (2023).

ORNAMENT



Ornaments on east facade facing Gustaf Adolfs Square.
Reliefs on the facade refer to Gothenburg as a city on the sea, involved in sea trade. Asplund added domestic ornaments to the interior.



Ornaments on east facade facing Gustaf Adolfs Square.
Two distinct parts: the classicist Courthouse building (left) and the skillfully integrated modernist extension designed by Asplund (right). The modernist style integrates with classicist elements, harmonizing proportions, color palette, and both vertical and horizontal design features, creating a seamless transition.

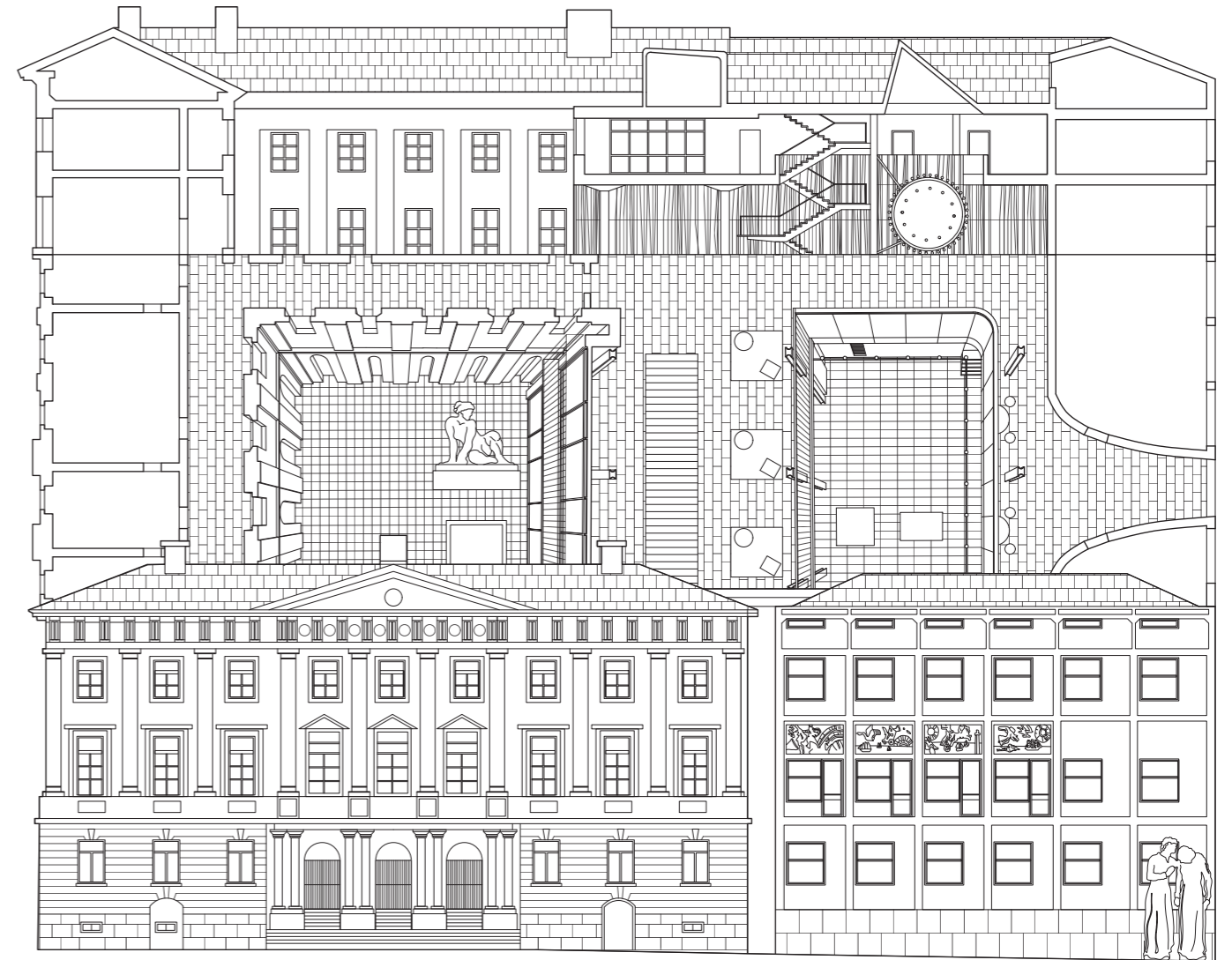
ORNAMENT



East facade facing the square. Gardner, G. (2023).
Faced with a highly conservative building committee as well as his own desire to fit his addition harmoniously into the historic surroundings, Asplund strove in his final exterior designs for a melding of modernism and classicism.

FINAL DRAWING

The final drawing we made aims to represent the way Asplund interacted with the existing Courthouse building by Tessin. It shows the front elevation, the first-floor floor plan and the interior elevation all at once. The two courtyards, Tessin's outside courtyard and Asplund's indoor courtyard, are highlighted by showing a top-perspective view of these courts. The texture is added to show the domesticity of the interior space. A statue planned by Asplund in front of the front elevation is added, even though it wasn't built.



THE BRITISH LIBRARY INTRODUCTION



Eric Winter perspective drawing of the entrance of the British Library. RIBA Collections.

The British Library in London, the United Kingdom, is one of the world's most esteemed and extensive libraries, containing over 14 million books. (St John Wilson, 1998). Initially established as the British Museum Library in 1753, it was regarded as a resource for scholars. Its mission was to provide access to a collection of books and manuscripts to advance knowledge. Colin St John Wilson, an architect strongly influenced by Alvar Aalto and Asplund, was later commissioned to design the expansion of this Museum Library. The Library opened its doors in 1997. Possible changes throughout its requested lifespan of 200-250 years were accommodated by creating accessible voids throughout the ceilings and floor. One of its unique features is that by law, the Library is to receive a copy of every publication produced in the UK and Ireland.

The Library is situated on a large plot next to St Pancras railway station. Its interior space can be perceived as the threshold between London and Europe. This relationship to the railway station is also perceived in the volumetric composition of the Library. On the station side, the height of the Library matches the high station facade. On the residential side, the Library volume is lower, matching the residential height. The exterior facade cladding is made of a red brick that reflects the materials used in its central London context.

The Library's programme includes rooms for research, exhibitions, and education. It offers extensive research services and access to its vast collection, which includes books, manuscripts, and digital resources. Its role extends beyond scholarly research, which was the only feature of the former British Museum's Library, to include cultural engagement and public interaction. It also exhibited King George III's collection of books to the broader public, making the King's book collection public for the first time.

The Library's main entrance on Easton Road is marked by a monumental portico and bronze doors that frame the sculpture by Eduardo Paolozzi's self-portrait as the naked Newton, who interrogates the geometries of the Universe with his dividers. From here, the user walks onto The Piazza. This Piazza is set back from Euston Road, forming a buffer zone between the busy central London streets and the quietness of the Library. You enter the building at the main entrance from this outdoor interior space. The Humanities Reading Rooms are situated on the West, and the Science Reading Rooms are on the East. The interspace between these houses is the primary public programme with Exhibition Galleries, Bookshop and Restaurant. The King's Library is designed as a black box in this central space, showing the books through its glass walls. The Conference Centre has a separate identity on the southeast prow of the building.

The interior section is designed such that the reading rooms are situated along the roofline, flooding them with diffuse natural light and creating a visual connection with the exterior. The floor plan is based on 7.8mx7.8m bays, offering flexibility in their usage. These bays are either one floor, double or triple-height. This is one of the tools used to break down the sheer size of the building. Colin St John Wilson also gave unique identities to different spaces in the Library by playing with the allocation of space for book stacks, reading tables and open spaces.

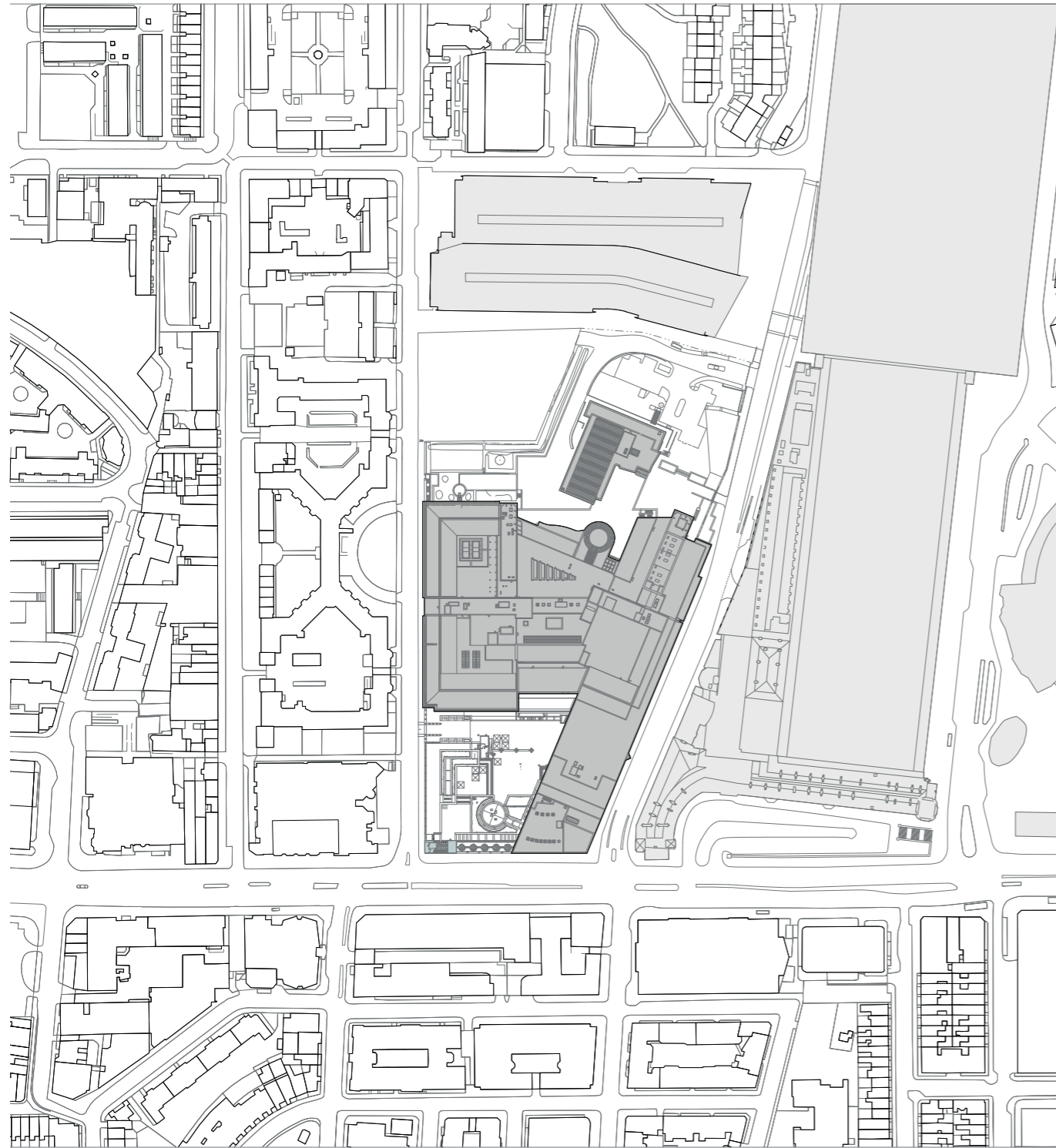


Donat, J. (1997). Entrance hall of the Library.



Donat, J. (1997). King's Library inside the British Library.

URBAN SETTING



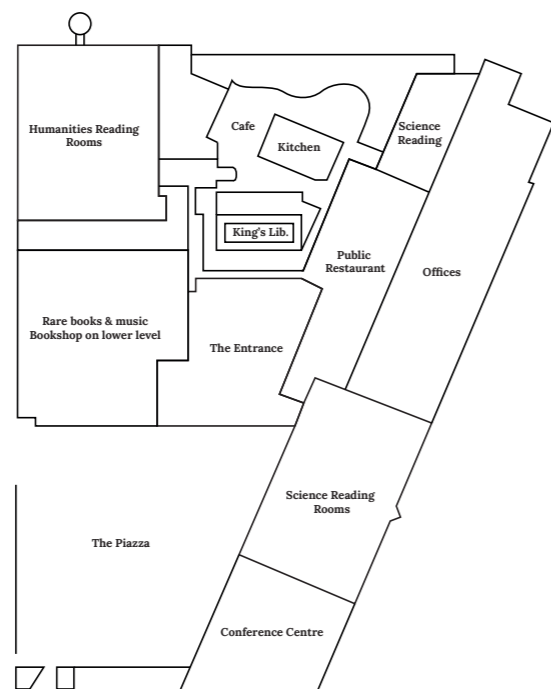
Urban situation of The British Library in darker grey.

Visible is the road on the east side with on the other side St Pancras Station. On the west side, there is a residential area. Euston Road is on the south side of the building, where the main entrance is located.

0 50 125m

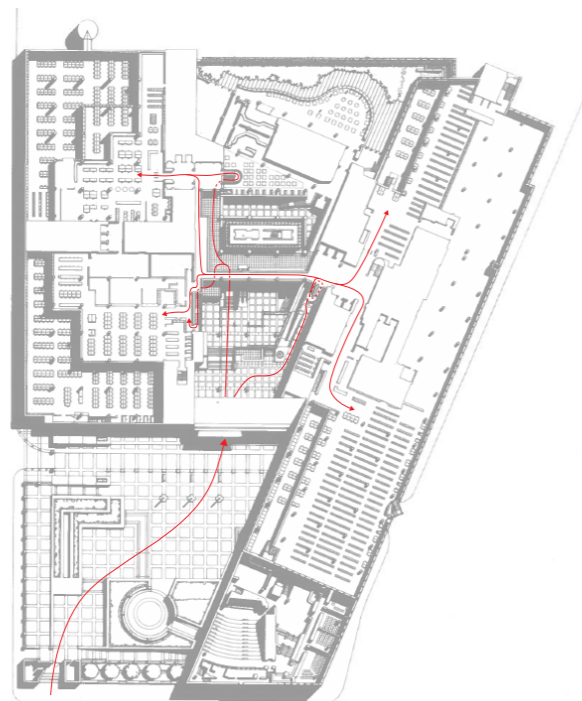
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ANALYTICAL DIAGRAMS



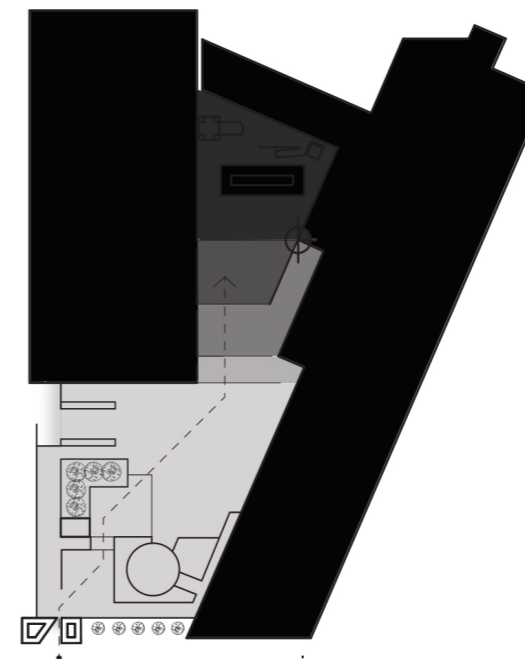
Floor plan organisation.

Simplified overview of the different sections of the building. The building can be divided in three parts, the humanities wing, the science wing and the space in between those wings, which is the entrance. At the heart is the King's Library, which is not accessible by visitors, but they will walk past it when they find their way to the reading rooms.



Circulation.

Arriving through the iron door in the portico, you enter The Piazza. This leads to the front entrance. The terracing of the interior gradually leads you up to the different reading rooms. The entrance is like a crossroad, from here you go into different directions. Both wings can be accessed through the bridge in the entrance, which makes it possible to take different routes to the reading rooms.



From noisy to quiet oasis.

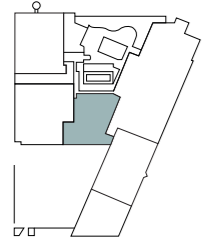
Going from noisy to quiet, this diagram illustrates the way The Piazza forms a buffer zone between the busy Central London streets to the quiet multi-level interior landscape of the Library. The quiet rooms enclose The Piazza.



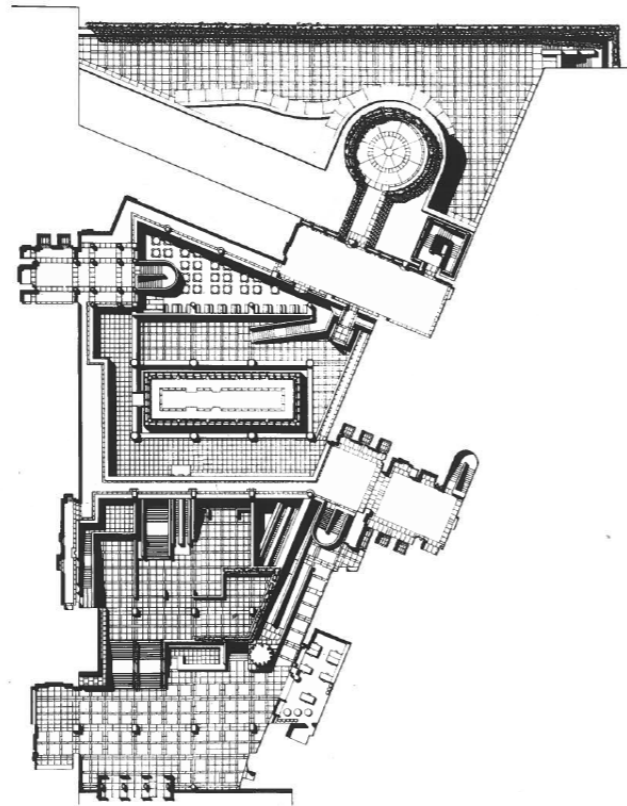
Daylighting and vertical arrangement.

This diagram shows the vertical arrangement of the Library rooms and how natural diffused light floods the reading rooms, situated along the roofline. The exhibition gallery is located on the ground floor to allow the public to visit it easily. Most of the book storage is situated underground, since one of the main purposes of the library is to house the vast collection of books published in the UK and Ireland.

THE ENTRANCE HALL



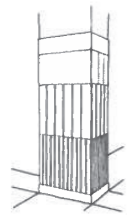
Location of the room in the building (left).



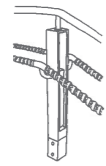
When a visitor walks through the entrance doors, they find themselves in a large open space. The ceiling gradually goes up, making the space less overwhelming. The use of balconies and terraces create an interplay of motion and stasis. When visitors walk through the building they are surprised by the different scenes they'll come across, these scenes often force them to look back to the open space so they can orientate themselves.

Image source (right axo): Colin St John Wilson. (1998). *The Design and Construction of The British Library*.
 Sketches based on St John Wilson, C. (2007). *Buildings and Projects*.

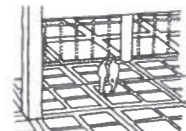
Architectural elements



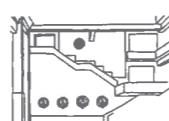
columns



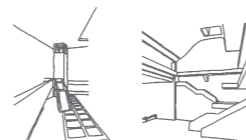
handrails



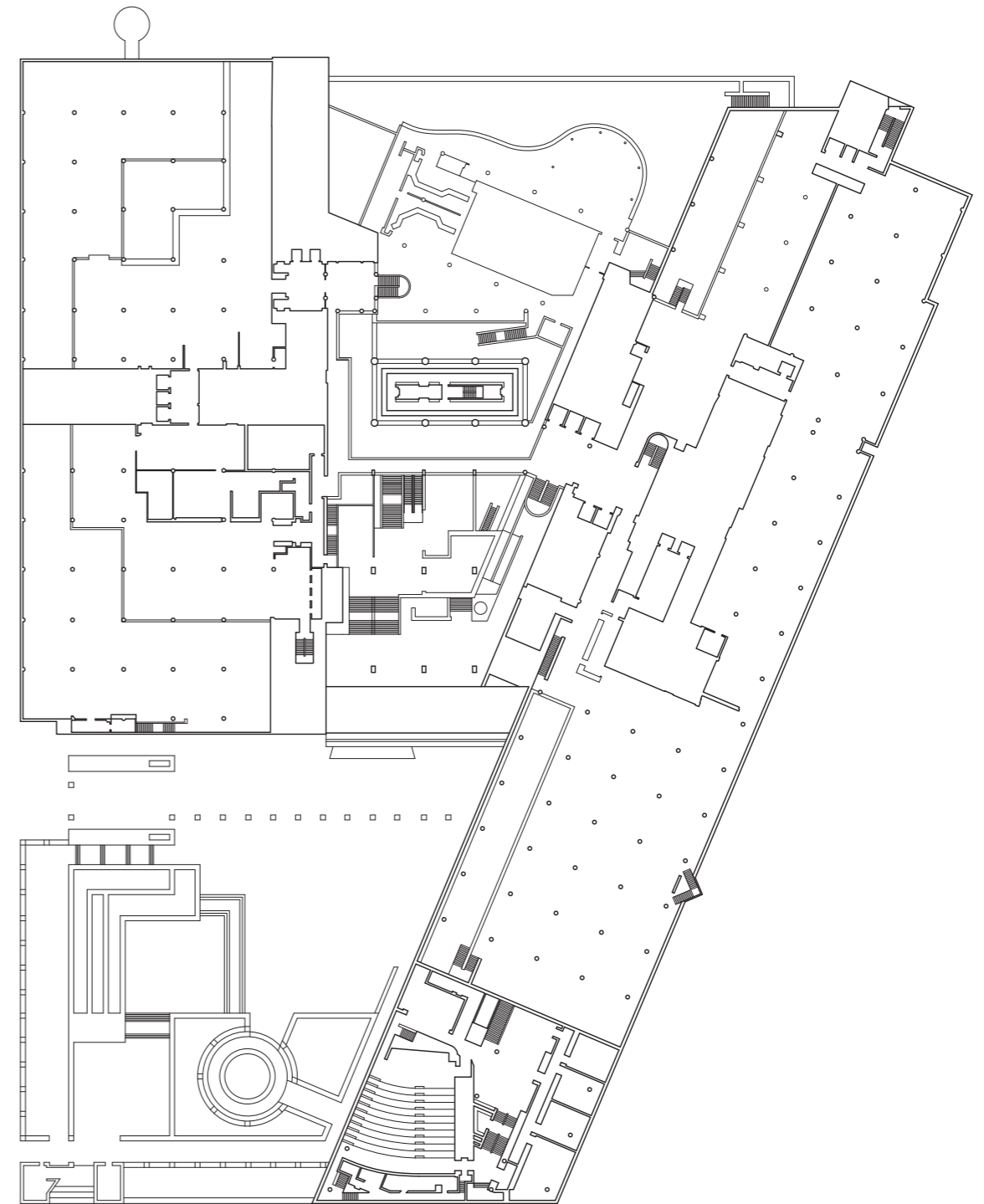
use of the grid squares



punctuations



angles

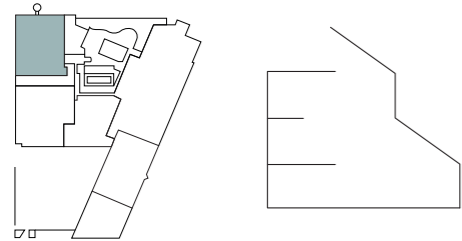


Simplification of the floor plan, showing the different main rooms and entrance hall.

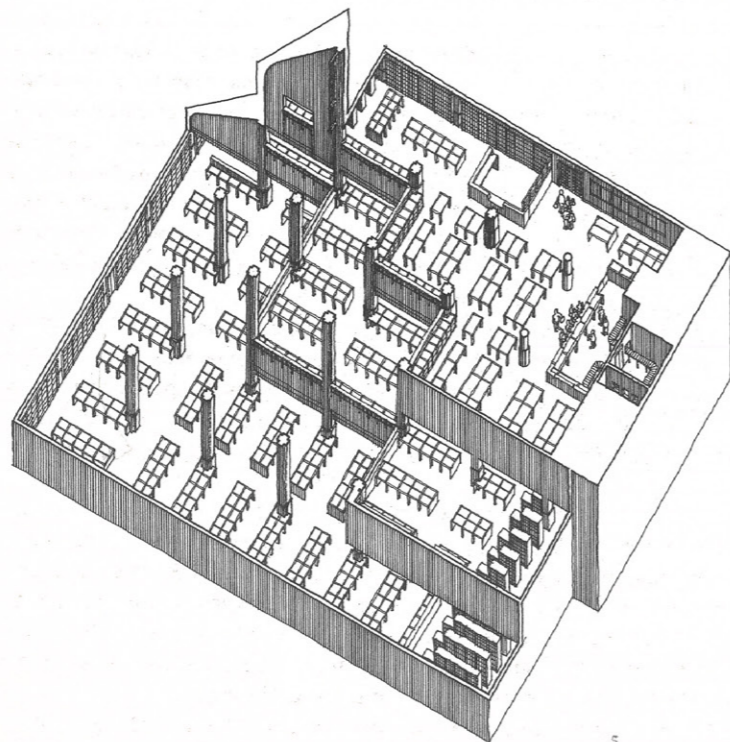


Donat, J. (1997). Interior photographs of the British Library.

THE HUMANITIES READING ROOM



Location of the room in the building (left) and Schematic section of the room (right).



Axo highlighting the vast amount of reading tables in the room, while book stacks have been put in the periphery of the room.

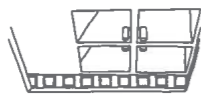
The humanities reading room the reading spaces are layered in zones. These zones provide different spaces for people to use. From the more secluded intimate spaces to the large open spaces. Allowing visitors to find a place they feel most comfortable.

Image source (right axo): Colin St John Wilson. (1998). *The Design and Construction of The British Library*. Sketches based on St John Wilson, C. (2007). *Buildings and Projects*.

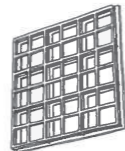
Architectural elements



layering of materials and elements



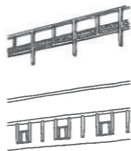
use of the grid squares



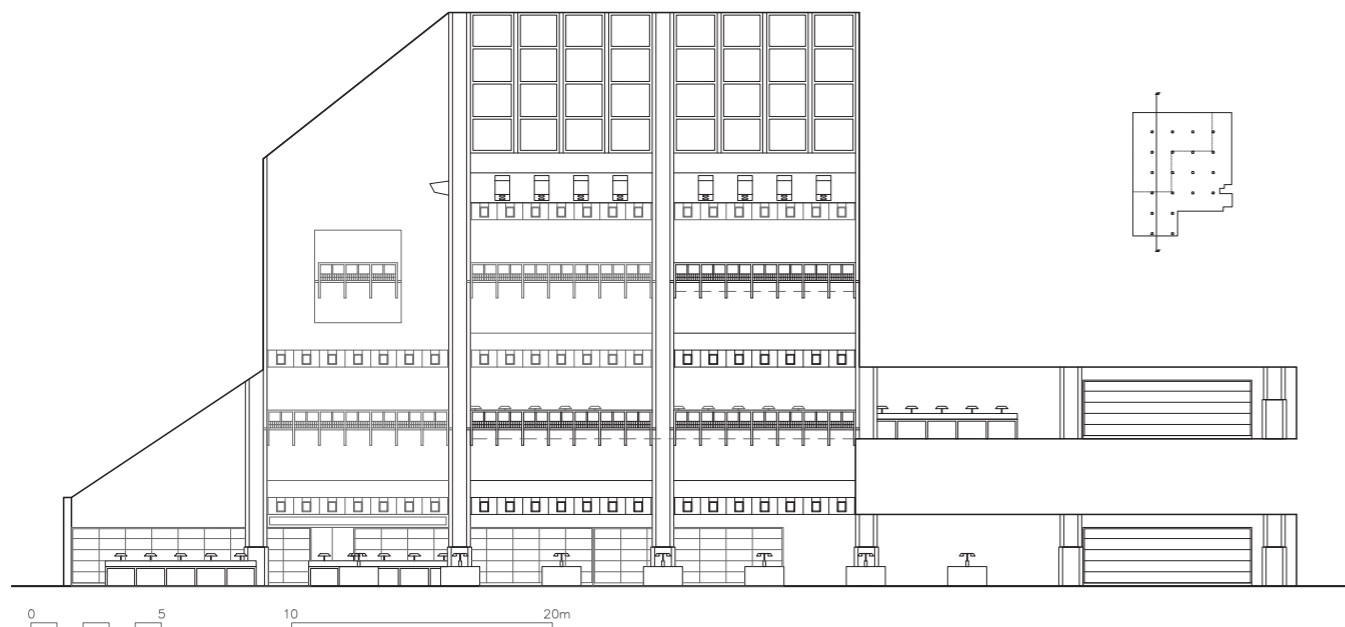
sticks



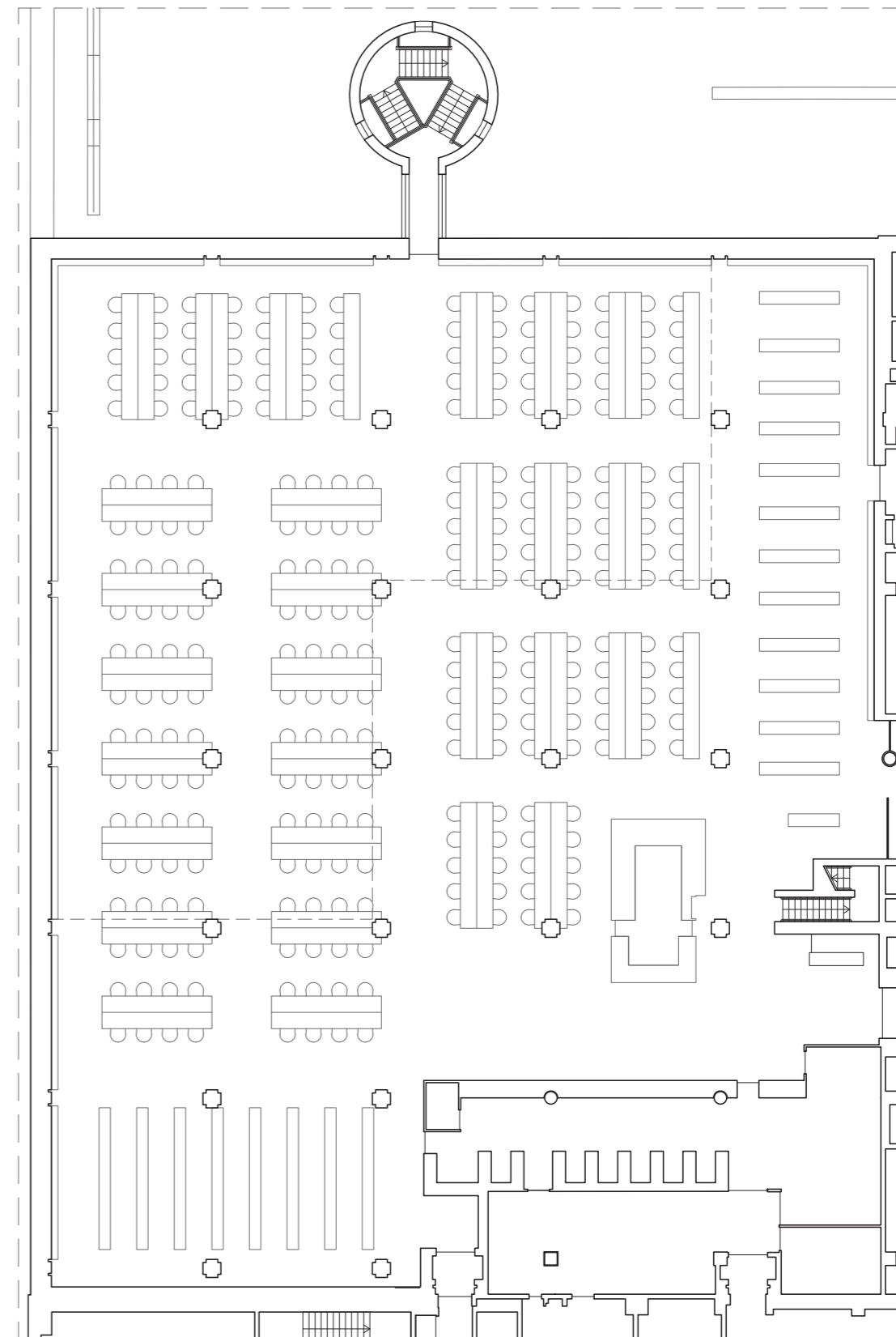
lines and rebates



lines and rebates



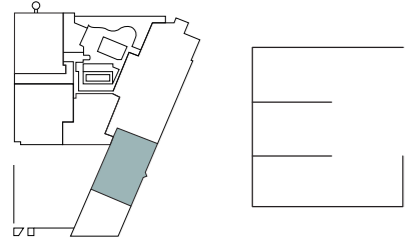
0 5 10 20m



The Humanities Reading Room Plan
Scale 1:200

0 5 10 20m

THE SCIENCE READING ROOM

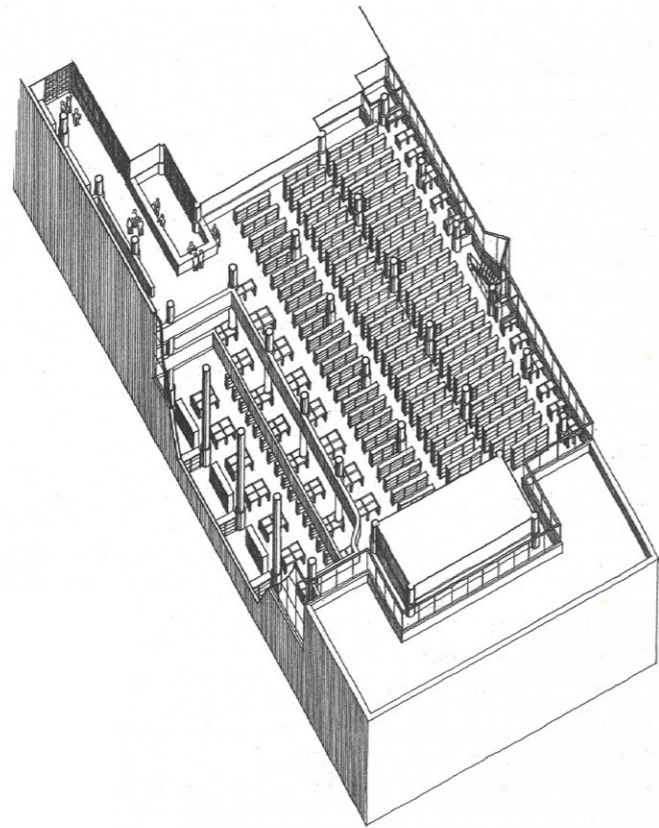


Location of the room in the building (left) and Schematic section of the room (right).

While the humanities reading room has a focus on tables, the science room primarily has book stacks, with only some reading tables on the side.

The layers of the terraces form zones for reading desks and rows of bookshelves. The bookshelves are positioned underneath the terraces, whereas the reading desks are placed on the edge, making them part of the open space.

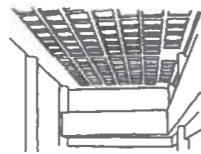
Image source (right axo): Colin St John Wilson. (1998). *The Design and Construction of The British Library*. Sketches based on St John Wilson, C. (2007). *Buildings and Projects*.



Architectural elements



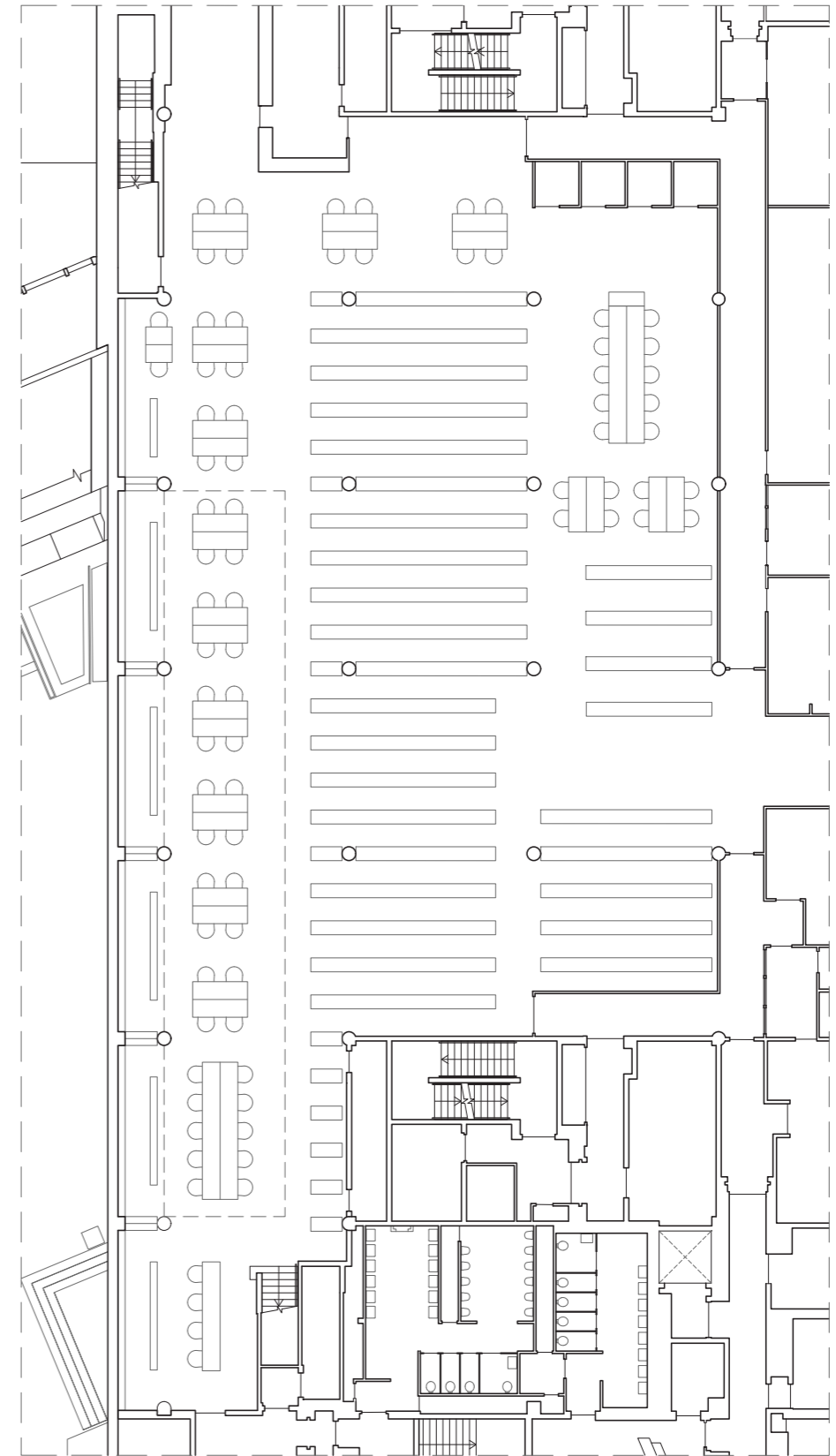
layering of materials and elements



use of the grid squares



lines and rebates



The Science Reading Room Plan
Scale 1:200



THE HUMANITIES READING ROOM



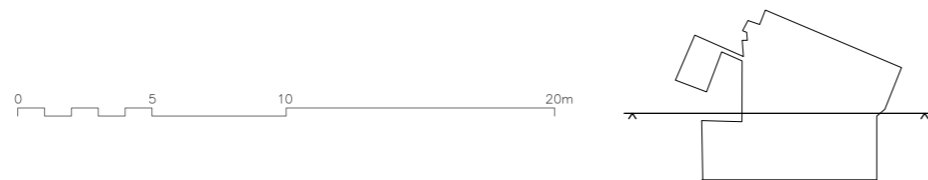
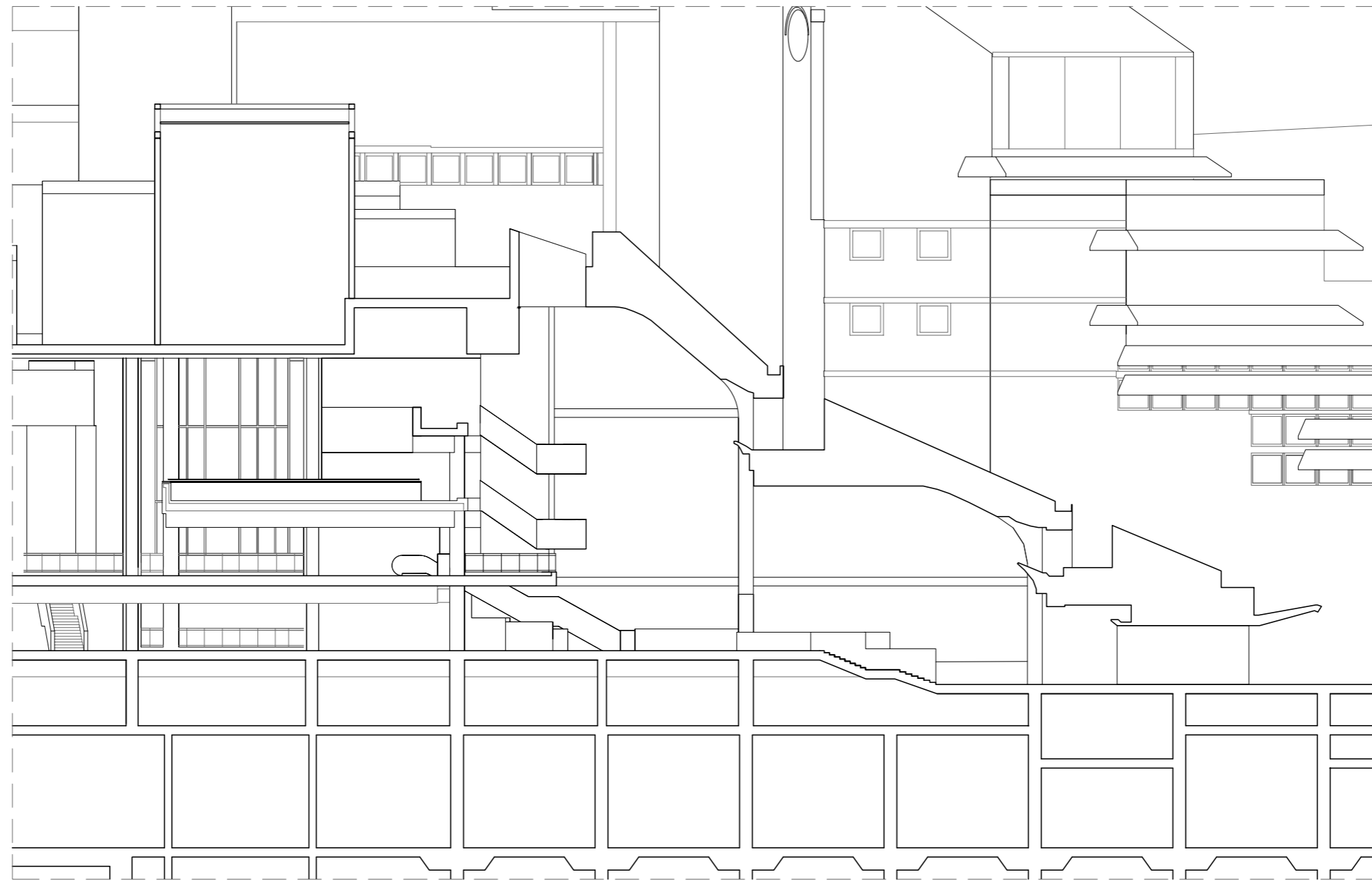
Donat, J. (1997). Interior photographs of the humanities reading room in the British Library.

THE SCIENCE READING ROOM

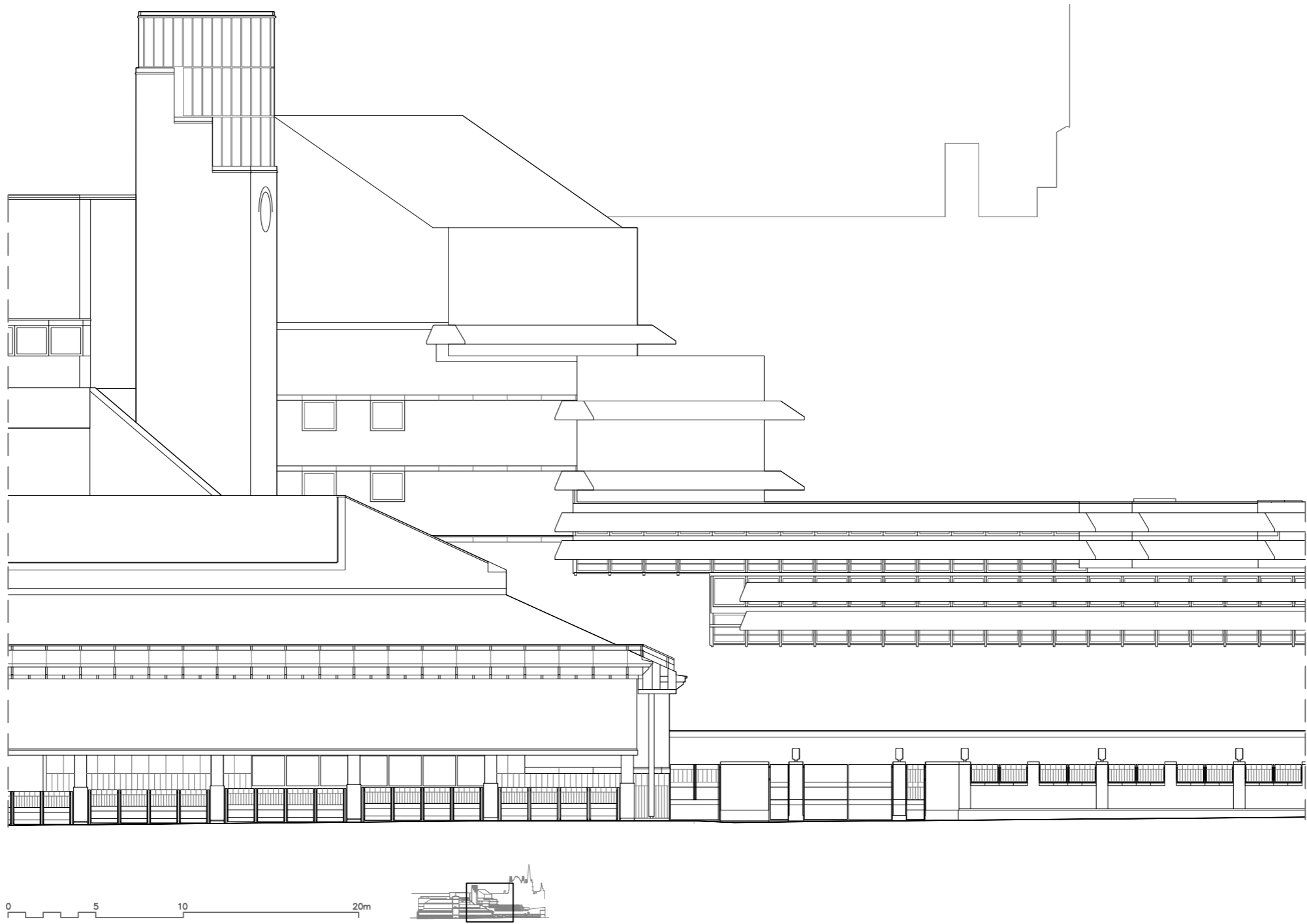


Donat, J. (1997). Interior photographs of the science reading room in the British Library.

The experience of intimate monumentality is thoughtfully exemplified through the harmonious integration of domestic materials such as timber, carpets, and warm lighting in reading rooms. Carefully incorporated, they serve to infuse vast interior spaces with a sense of warmth and approachability, within the vastness of the public institution.

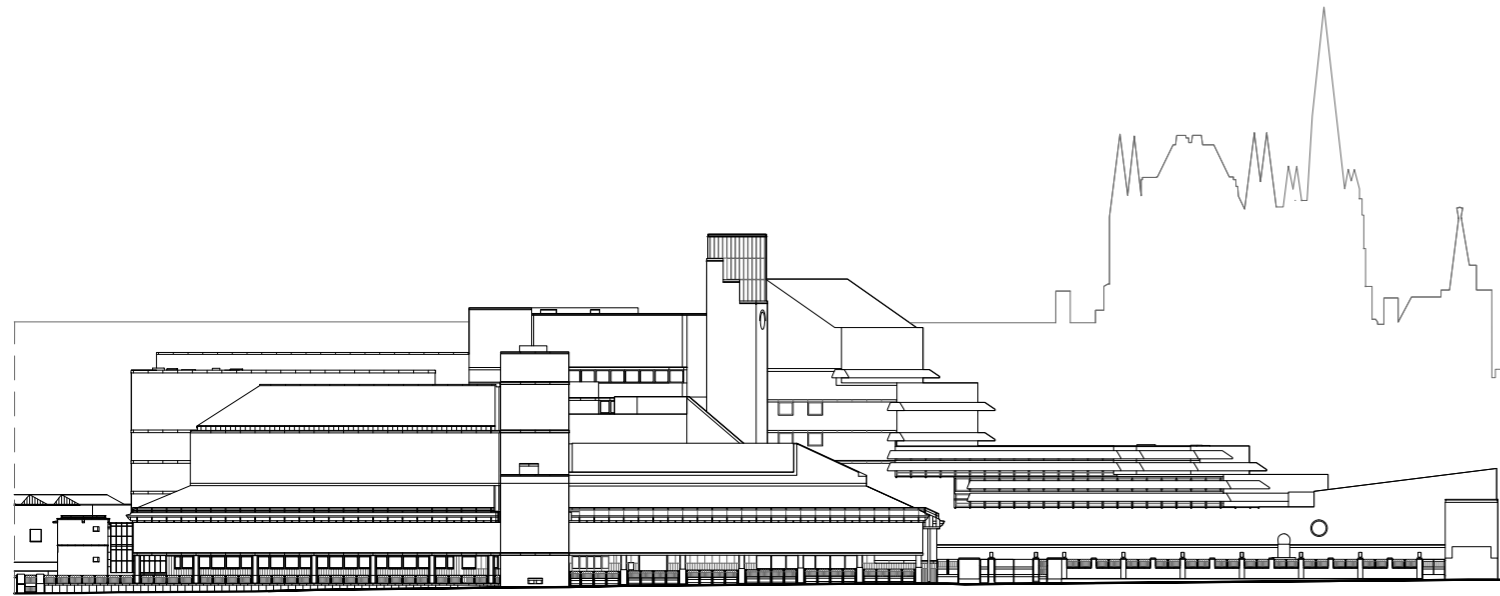


Section AA Fragment
Scale 1:200

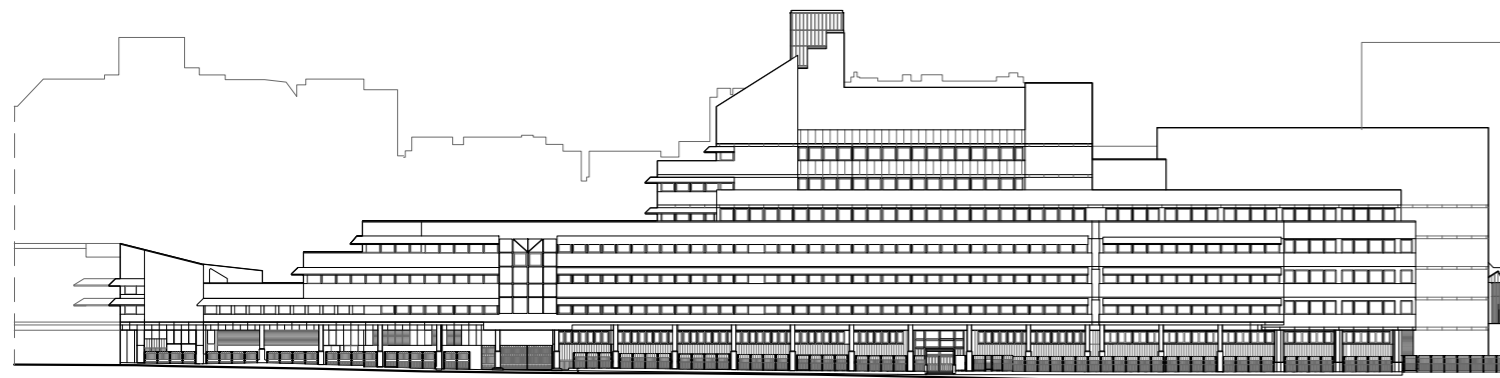


West Elevation Fragment
Scale 1:200

USED SOURCES



West Elevation
Scale 1:1000



East Elevation
Scale 1:1000

0 5 10 20 50m

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