

## The Refurbishment of the Rochester Building

An Exhibition  
4-7 December 2007

Opening times:  
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday – 10am to 4pm  
Wednesday – 12pm to 7pm



### Background

This exhibition arose from a collaborative project between Dawn Lyon, sociologist (School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research) and Peter Hatton, visual artist (Event and Experience Design, School of Drama, Film and Visual Arts), both at the University of Kent and based at the Medway campus.

At the beginning of 2007, the Rochester Building – then named the No. 1 Building – had been boarded up for more than 20 years, unused since the closure of the dockyard in 1984.



Originally built in around 1907 – the approximate date of the photograph above – it was the Gunnery School at the Royal Naval Barracks, Pembroke. Early plans indicate the ground floor as an ammunition room with teaching rooms on the first floor.

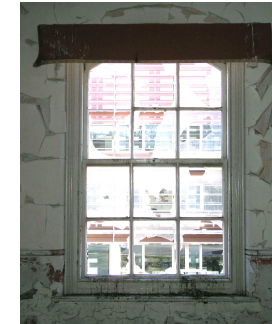
In 1958, it became the No. 1 Building of the Royal Naval Supply School at Chatham. An estimated 30-50 people worked in it at any one time for the next 25 years, principally in training and administration. The Commanding Officer of the Supply School had his office there, as did the officers for supplies, catering and other functions.

In March 2007, work started on the refurbishment of the building. For the simultaneous project of documenting its transformation, we made use of

photography to record the changes visually. In addition, we invited some of the building's previous occupants back to revisit their former workplace; and we spent time talking with the builders, architects and engineers, to gain an understanding of the construction of the new space from their different viewpoints.

Following what was a £1.5 million renovation, the Rochester Building opened in October 2007 as the Gulbenkian café bar and a University of Kent meeting and conference venue. Whilst the internal space has been completely changed, the external architectural features of the building have been restored, including the original sash windows.

### Slide show



The slide show in the former 'Captain's room' of the building is based on photos repeatedly taken from the same selected spots on a weekly basis over the period of the refurbishment. Put together in a time series, the viewer sees the building work progress from several vantage points, and from the start of the work to the present. The movement from one vantage point to the next offers the viewer a visual journey through the building as the work took place.

This sense of being on a journey through the building is reinforced by the accompanying voices of two of the former occupants of the building when it was the Royal Naval Supply School. They recount the way the rooms were laid out and who had access to them,

Dawn Lyon & Peter Hatton

and remember events that took place within the building. Their reminiscences compete against the contemporary background noise of the builders at work.

The images of the slide show are projected directly onto the wall of one room, or back onto the building itself, cutting conceptually and, quite literally, physically across the current use of the room as a meeting space.

### Assemblage



Another take on the story of the refurbishment is the collection of photos on display in what is now the boardroom. It is composed of around 300 photos laid out around the boardroom table. The viewer is invited to move around the table, effectively following the work of refurbishment in a broadly chronological representation and moving forwards in time.

In contrast to the slide show, these photos were taken on the basis of whatever work was going on in the building at the time of the visit. They highlight the different jobs and types of work required to make the building anew, and the reshaping of the building through this labour.

Both sets of images bring to the attention of the viewer the layers of work and materials that went into the transformation of the building, much of which is then concealed by the finish. The exhibition seeks to pull apart what has been remade and expose the building itself and the process of reconstruction.

### Found objects



Also in the boardroom, a third set of exhibits is composed of the objects found by the builders in the course of the renovation. They tell only partial stories of past decades, offering glimpses into what might have been casual conversations drinking Pepsi and smoking Woodbines, or formal discussions pouring over maps and other papers.

### Art at work



Finally, the project has also resulted in several photos being selected for permanent display around the building. These are all details of the walls or windows taken during the refurbishment process. They have been printed onto canvas and, as far as possible, hung in the places where the original images were taken – again, projecting the building back onto itself.

### Further information & feedback

For further information about the project, or reprints of the exhibition images, please contact Dawn Lyon at [d.m.lyon@kent.ac.uk](mailto:d.m.lyon@kent.ac.uk), or Peter Hatton at [p.hatton@kent.ac.uk](mailto:p.hatton@kent.ac.uk).

Please also let us know what you think by email or write your comments in the Visitors' book.

### Thanks

We are grateful for the support of many people at the University of Kent for this project. In particular, we would like to thank Mark Ashmore, Jeff Brown, Nick Ellwood, Clare Mackie, John Morley, and Ben Silcock.

For insights into the way the building is remembered, we thank Bill Murray and Joe Sayer; and for photos and background information, Harold Bennett.

Most of all, we thank the builders and design team for putting up with us in their workplaces, discussing so many of our questions, and generally taking an interest in what we were trying to do. Special thanks to Bruce Davies, Lester Jeffrey, John Messenger, John Paxton, Chris Smith, and Andrew Weddell.

**Refurbishment undertaken by Charles Building Services Ltd.**

**Design by Cornish Architects, and SKM Anthony Hunts Structural and Building Services Engineers.**