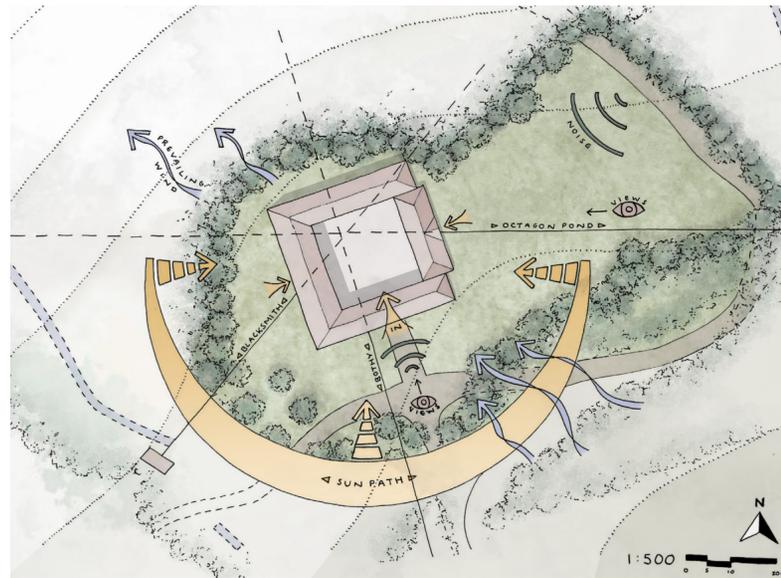# Writer's Retreat

Context & Functional Analysis

The introduction of a unique writing retreat allows scholars and the public to interact, giving visitors the unique opportunity to fully understand the writing process from concept to product, an area in which Gibside's Mary Eleanor excelled.

Travelling authors are encouraged to champion their profession and pass on their knowledge and skills to one another within a stimulating environment, establishing a sense of community throughout their stay together. The surrounding landscape will allow interaction between the public and the resident academics, whilst celebrating the existing stables. The design scheme, which includes a variety of accommodation, workshop/events spaces, a café and a working library, is largely founded on the motif of arches, honouring the stables' vernacular.
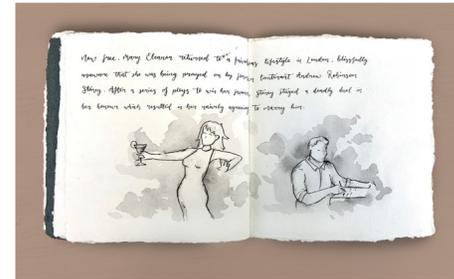
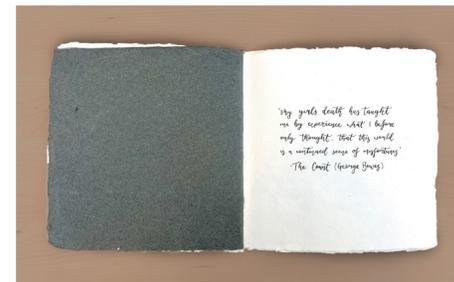"A place for contemplation and inspiration within a rural landscape, rich in historic narrative"

Site Analysis
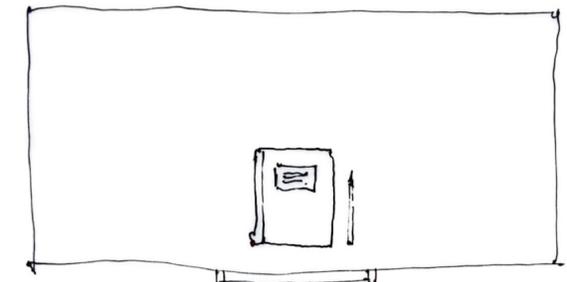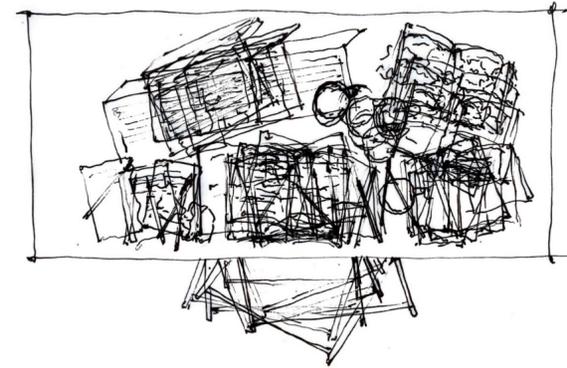

Site Sketch

Serial Vision

Reading/writing within the existing

'The Unhappy Countess'
A book about the life of Gibside's Mary Eleanor

the desk

an architectural ordering of place, focus and function. a frozen moment of serenity.

the writing

creative practice begins to undermine architectural order. traces of occupation over time.

the trace

order born of disorder. a triumph. a palimpsest.

The Writing Process

Gibside's Vernacular - Motif of Arches
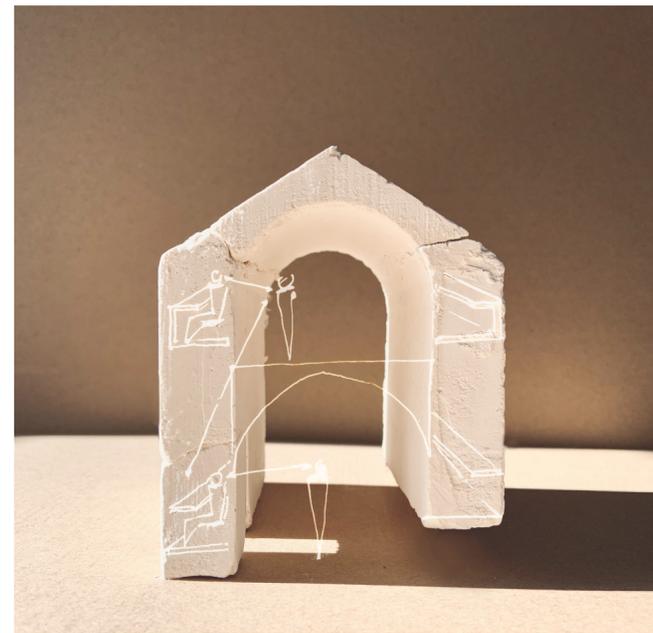
Concept Development & Site Plan

Stables:

Both the work and live spaces within the retreat are largely based on the motif of an arch, a sculptural nod to the stables' vernacular.

In terms of layout, the primary focus is on **generating a sense of community - creating private/ public divisions using positive and negative space, as opposed to closed boundaries.** There is also an emphasis on interesting visual connections between these pockets of privacy (see concept model - right).

**Landscape - Blacksmiths' Lodge:**

Originally based on the volume of the carriage stores, the arched face of the insertion runs parallel to the stables, creating a direct visual link. Clad in charred timber, the dramatic exterior complies with the surrounding woodland, whilst being a nod to the original function of a blacksmiths. The interior, conversely, is fit out in birch plywood; a single piece of joinery that generates a sense of warmth and comfort. The continuous strip of glazing, in which the interior configuration is centred around, tracks the sun path, the double height space amplifying the drama of this.
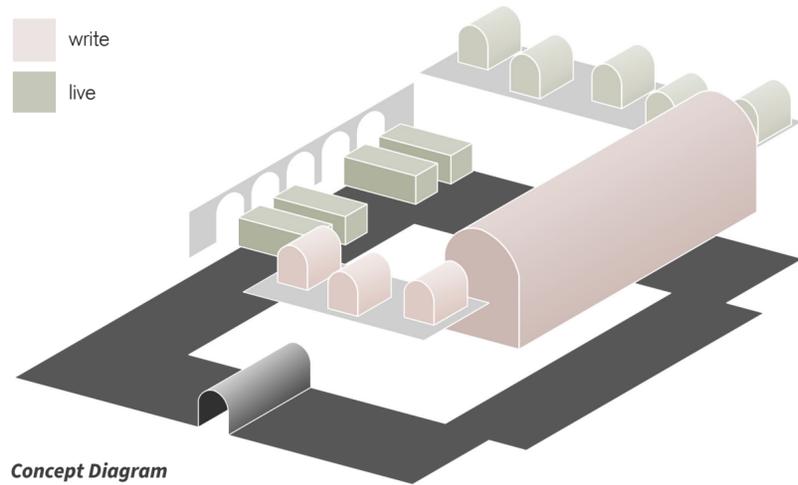
Landscape - Pavilions:

Anchoring the retreat within the landscape, each pavilion is essentially a different configuration of the same arched mass. Constructed using the same materials of the blacksmiths' lodge, the purpose of these spaces is to encourage interaction between the public and the resident academics, whilst being a contemplative space to relax/work. A moment to pause, escaping the distractions from modern day life.
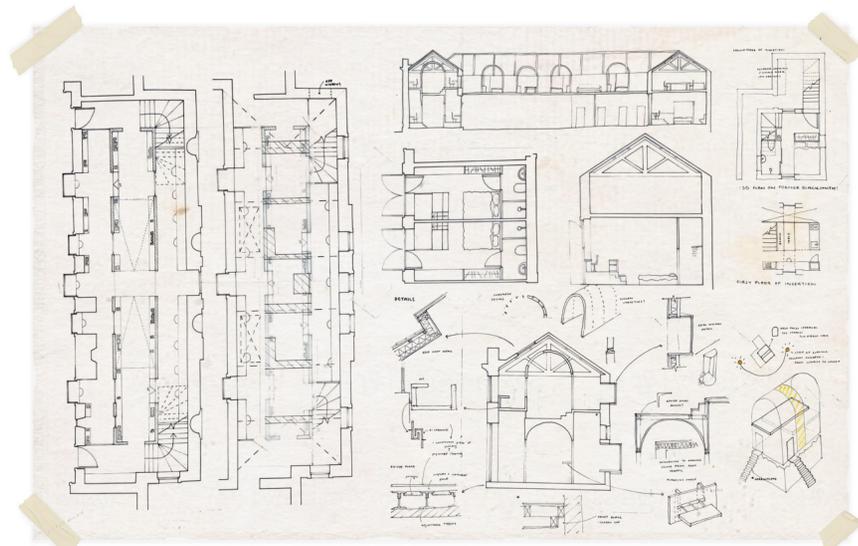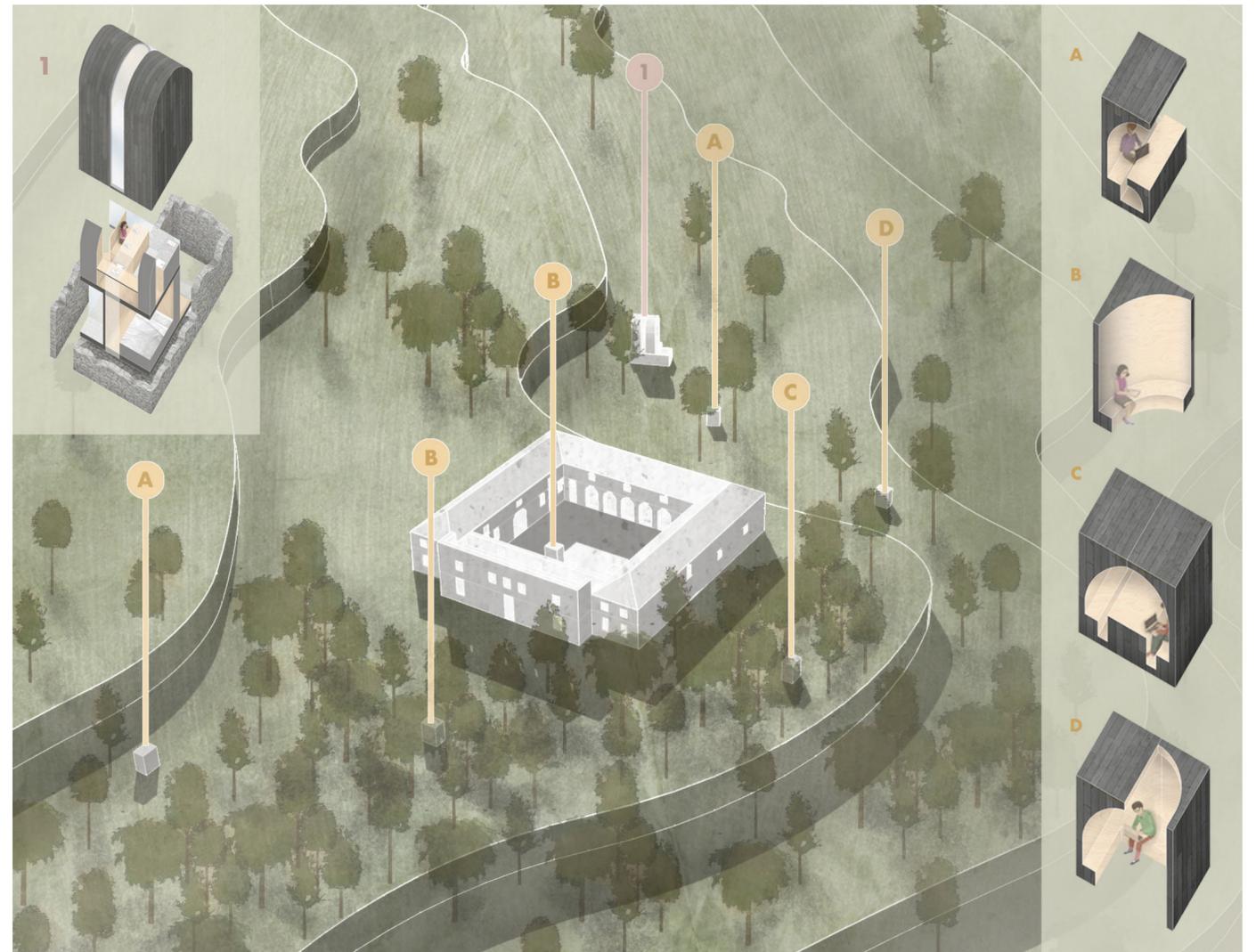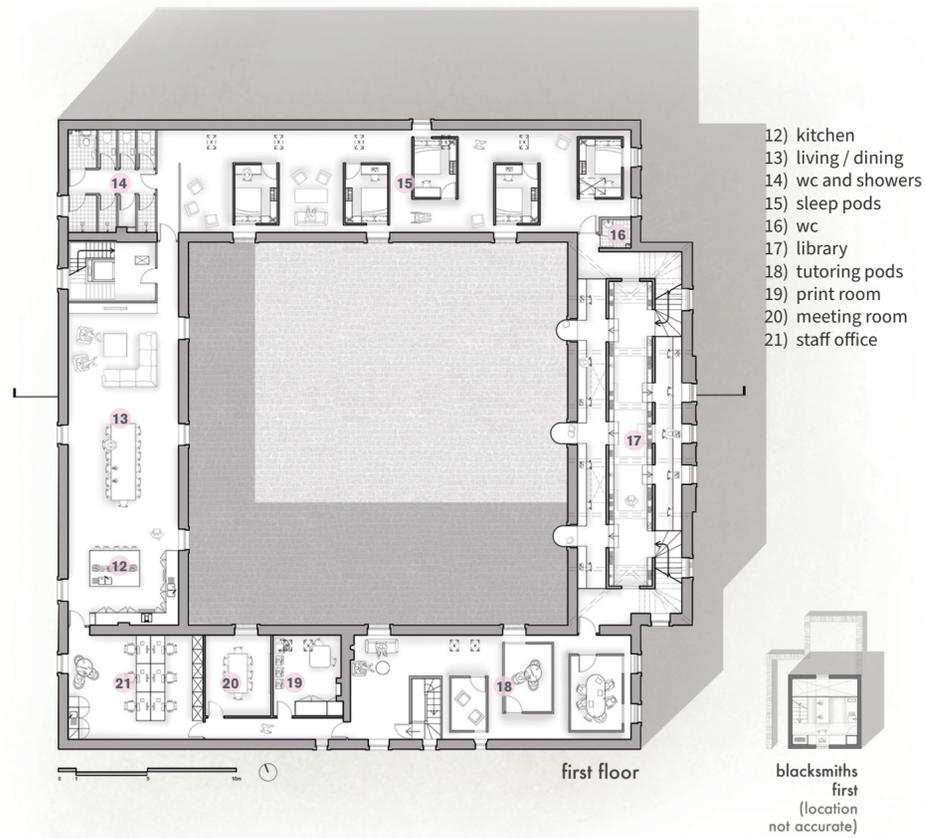

Concept Model
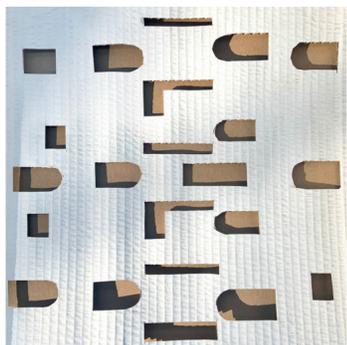
Developed Concept Model

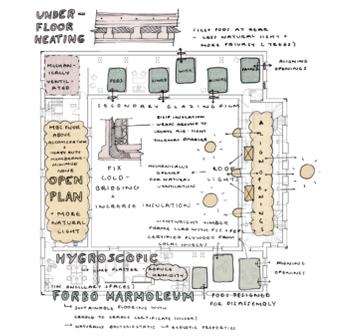*Concept Diagram*

- write
- live

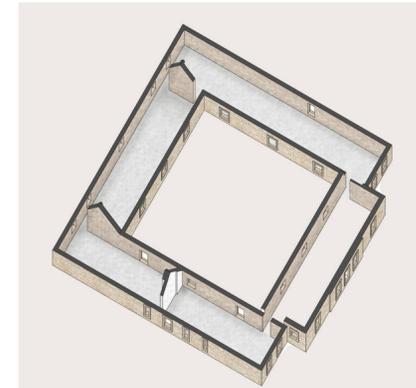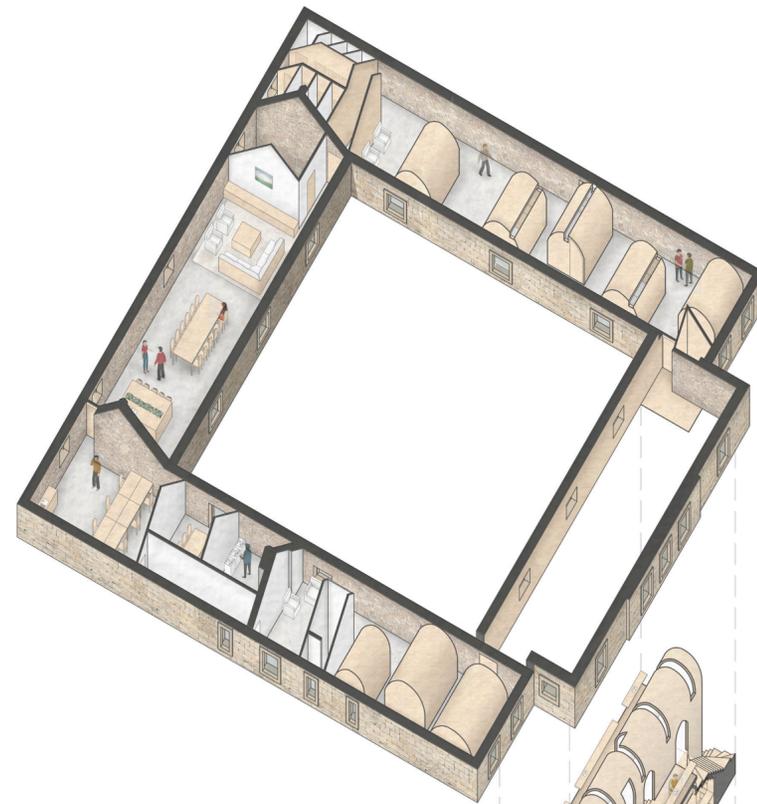*Sketch Development*

Location of Pavilions and Blacksmiths' Lodge within the Stables' Locale

12) kitchen
13) living / dining
14) wc and showers
15) sleep pods
16) wc
17) library
18) tutoring pods
19) print room
20) meeting room
21) staff office

blacksmiths
first
(location
not accurate)

First Floor Plan

1) workshop
2) cafe
3) kitchen
4) accommodation
5) stairs
6) plant room
7) wc
8) boot/laundry room
9) event space
   (flexible layout)
10) storage
11) library

blacksmiths
ground
(location
not accurate)

= public

ground floor

Ground Floor Plan

Axonometric Drawing

First Floor

Existing ready for Insertion
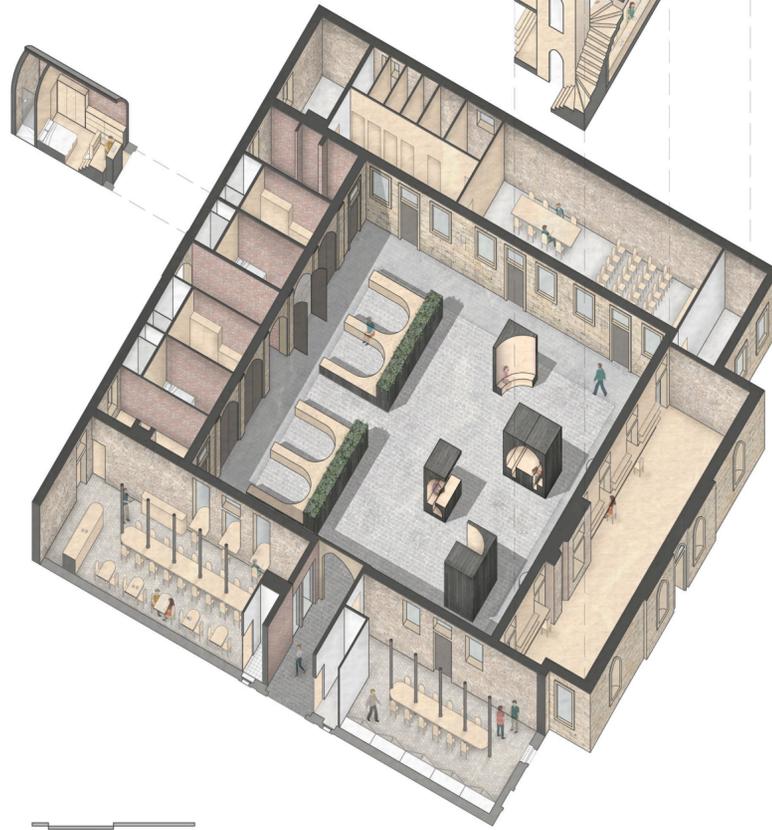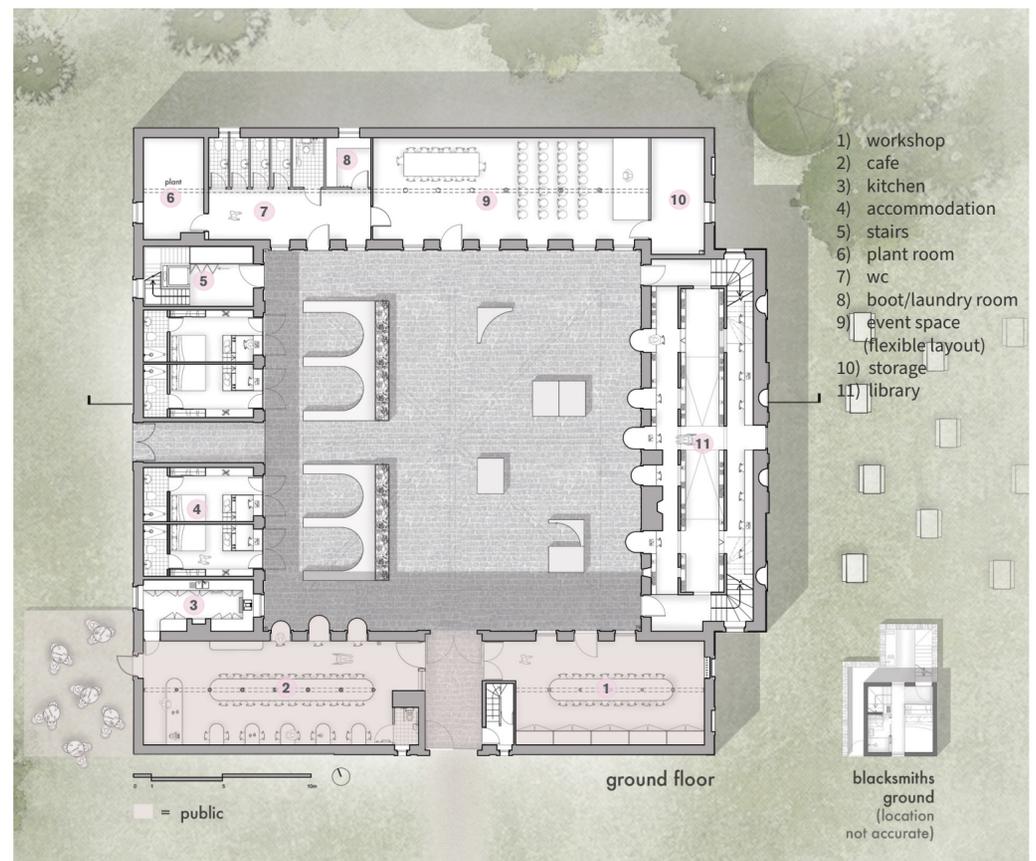
Ground Floor

Environmental Plans

"Drawing upon Gibside's many historic literary ties, the writer's retreat is designed to be a contemplative and yet stimulating environment, hosting a series of writing courses, events and retreats whilst providing scholars with an escape from the distractions of modern life"

The south wing at ground floor level, housing a cafe and a workshop/events space, is the only part of the stables permanently open to the public. The remainder of the building is accessible only to the staff, tutors and resident academics. The reason behind this is to allow writers to feel comfortable within their home-away-from-home, confidently interacting with their scholarly peers in both live and work environments. This sense of community is heightened further through the introduction of 'pods' on the first floor, for both sleeping and tutoring, removing the need for any harsh physical boundaries. The primary space, however, is the sculptural library insertion set within the Palladian wing - a volume which perhaps embodies this idea of positive and negative space the most succinctly.
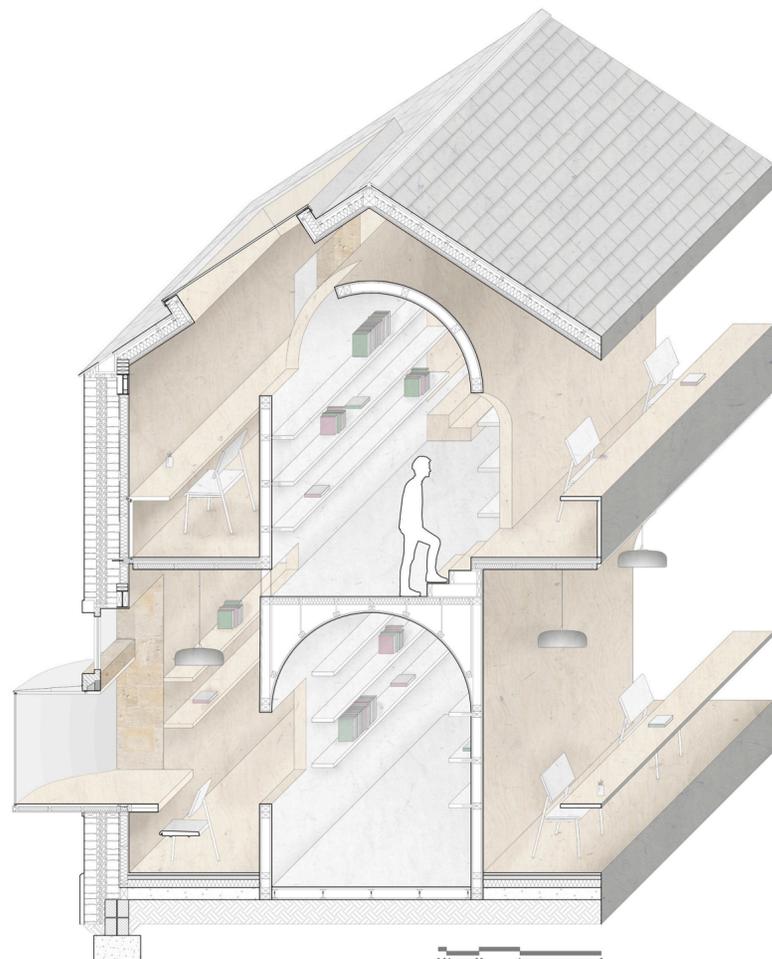
Plans & Axonometric Drawings

Sections & Relationship between New & Existing

Long Section

0 1   5   10m

1:20 Detail Model of Library Insertion

Technical Section of Library Insertion in Palladian Wing

0.01   0.5   1   2

"Inside the heavy stone walls, the space turns to vivid yellow covered by larch plywood. It seems that the world changes. It looks like hiding place"

Within the Palladian wing, a false sense of volume is created, forming the library. Beyond this, negative space is used to create 'hidden' nooks for writers to focus in. This simple yet complex defining of visual versus physical connections, enhanced by the alignment of openings so as not to block natural light, allows writers to find solitude within an otherwise large, open space, without feeling too disconnected. Furthermore, plywood is a material often used for writers retreats due to its warm, natural feel as well as its durability. In using ply, the space becomes a crafted piece of joinery.

One of the main features within this space is the oriel windows that form a desk within the existing opening, whilst amplifying the amount of natural light entering the atrium. These mirror the curved alcoves on the opposite existing wall.
Another feature is the positioning of voids within the structure. Although primarily based on the placement of existing windows, the openings also allow a visual connection between different levels, as well as giving space for the existing trusses to puncture through. As a result, the dialogue between the new, light structure versus the heavy, existing shell is something quite visually interesting.

Oriel Window in Library

Oriel Window in Library

Desk within Accommodation

Accommodation in Blacksmiths' Ruins

Relationship between Existing and Insertion

Visuals

Top:
Library insertion at first floor
Bottom, left to right:
Desk within oriel window, self-contained
accommodation within the existing carriage rooms,
workspace 'behind' library on first floor, blacksmiths'
lodge.