

Quest for space: Rhodes University Library odyssey 1904-2010



The new and expanded Rhodes University Library

The first law governing every Library's existence is that in an astonishingly short time it will outgrow the home provided for it

- Ronald Currey

The completion in 2010 of the magnificent new and expanded Rhodes University Library, billed as Rhodes' most intelligent building, seems an appropriate time to trace its history and reflect on the events that led to this much-needed facility and the enormous amount of planning, canvassing, pleading, persuasion and fundraising that brought it to fruition.

It is the nature of libraries to devour space. Collections grow exponentially, creating a voracious and insatiable appetite for more and more places in which to store them. In addition, as users' needs change over time, there is an ongoing demand for working areas which are versatile, able to accommodate modern paradigms of teaching and learning which now necessitate group study areas with computer access, yet which remain inviting and attractive to a broad range of students and researchers who wish simply to find a congenial space to study. The ongoing shortage of space, and the need to accommodate evolving patterns of use, common to most academic libraries, fuelled the engine which drove the Rhodes Library on its circuitous journey from humble lodgings in a single room in the old Drostdy Building more than a hundred years ago, to its final destination in the imposing position it occupies today. A constant refrain was to be money – or more aptly, the lack of it.

Libraries exist concomitantly with universities, so it was natural that within a couple of years after the founding of Rhodes University in 1904, there should already be a sizeable library collection, thanks largely to a gift in 1907 from H.M. Stationary Office of "some hundreds of massive quarto volumes of *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle, et hoe genus omne* – the famous 'Rolls Series'" (Currey 1970:167).

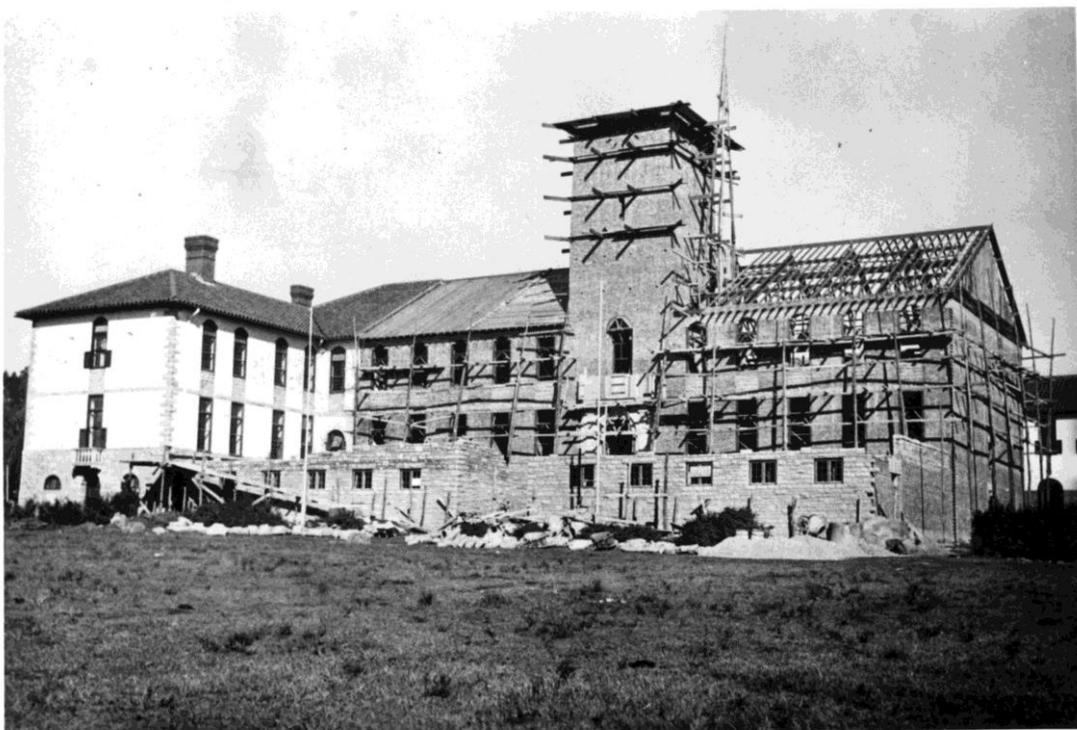
This was followed by a "most valuable gift" from Gill College in Somerset East of the material it had collected to prepare students for the examinations of the old University of the Cape of Good Hope (Currey 1970:167).

Soon the burgeoning Library had outgrown its accommodation in the Drostdy and in 1917 it moved to a small red brick bungalow north of the central quadrangle. Recently vacated by the Department of Botany, and described as "squat and hideous", it "provided at least a roomier abode for the Library. There, despite inconvenience and discomfort, the Library remained, for some twenty years" (Currey 1970:168).



Interior of the “squat and hideous” red brick bungalow which was the Library’s home from 1917 – 1937

The end of the Great Depression enabled the University to build the centre portion of the main administration block, whose upper floor (under the clock tower) was allocated to the Library, into which it moved in 1937. The foundation stone “was laid by Jan Hofmeyer the Younger, then Minister of Education, and it dutifully records in elegant Latin that once more the Rhodes Trust had contributed generously to the cost of the building” (Currey 1970:168).



The building of administration block and clock tower in process



The clock tower today

From the beginning, “the task of acquiring, classifying, housing and distributing the books of the Rhodes Library was a labour of love carried out by a member of the Senate with a Committee and a small Library staff to help him” (Currey 1970:166). The first of this “line of devoted Honorary Librarians” (Currey 1970:166) was Professor R.J. Cholmeley.

At this point, fortune smiled on the Library – its name was Carnegie.

In 1932 the Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes visited Rhodes University College, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. Upon his return to America, he “submitted a very full report to the Corporation, which in turn had it published” (Currey 1970:81). This is an excerpt:

The standards of the University Colleges in Grahamstown and Pietermaritzburg are high. Few institutions I visited impressed me more favourably. These Colleges seemed to have excellent leadership and most creditable educational and student standards. Their faculties and student bodies are also of a very high type, reminding me of Amherst or Williams. The Library facilities however are very inadequate, especially at Rhodes, whose charming academic community left an impression I shall never forget. . . . I can think of few more appealing opportunities for library development in the Union than at Rhodes University College in Grahamstown. . . The College is an institution of high character doing work of importance with facilities that are pathetically limited (Currey 1970:81).

Rhodes was in an all too familiar situation five years later when, although student numbers were growing and “building activities of the Council were altering the whole face of Grahamstown” (Currey 1970:80), money was in short supply, and departments were squabbling amongst themselves for a share of the little that was available. Happily, all this changed for the library when, thanks to the earlier Phelps Stokes report, the newly appointed Master of the College, John Smeath Thomas, received a letter “from the Carnegie Corporation

containing a proposal suggested by the Corporation's 'policy of helping the libraries of liberal Arts Colleges'. This proposal was nothing less than the offer of a generous 'Carnegie Library Fellowship' for one year, to enable a librarian to be trained, in America, as a first move towards 'making a substantial grant for the purchase of books'. Smeath Thomas must have felt that Fortune was smiling. The Library Fellow selected was F.G. van der Riet, who returned after his year's training as the first professional Librarian of the College" (Currey 1970:82). The first of what now became a long line of fine *professional*, as opposed to honorary, librarians, he was to remain at the helm for the next forty years.



Dr F.G van der Riet

A perfect gentleman, steeped in culture, with a deep interest in the history of Grahamstown, Dr van der Riet was also an outstanding scholar, who frequently expressed his disquiet at the increasing volume of information which was being produced - not least because of the implication this had for libraries, but also for the scholars who had to plough through it. During his stewardship the Library grew in stature, receiving donations of many rare and valuable items to add to its collections. Towards the end of his tenure, technology had begun to make its presence felt, and the arrival of photocopiers, telex machines and microfiche readers had begun to change forever the concept of libraries as a home for books. He escaped, with much relief, just as computers were hovering on the horizon.

Although the new quarters under the clock tower must have seemed spacious initially, it was not long before the Library had annexed "13 classrooms and studies, as well as the corridor serving them". Dr F.G. van der Riet referred to it as "a particularly lusty cuckoo in the nest during its 24-year-stay in the main university building" and as a "troublesome inmate in any building which it shares with other departments" (van der Riet 1961:7). By 1955, the library again found itself facing a critical shortage of space. Not only was the book collection growing at the rate of over 4,000 volumes per year, but "accommodation for readers was also proving insufficient and the student enrolment seemed set for a steady increase" (van der Riet 1961:7).



The Library's home from 1937 – 1960 in the south wing of main building (now the Senior Common Room and Council Chamber)



Fortunately for the Library, not only did the University Council afford this predicament high priority, but due to the sound stewardship of its incumbent Vice-Chancellor, Dr Thomas Alty, the University's excellent financial status enabled it to call for tenders for an entirely new building "on a plan designed to meet the most exacting requirements" (Currey 1970:168). This decision was almost certainly influenced by the prospect of the valuable space the library would release once it moved out of the main building as there was a "great shortage of classroom and study accommodation throughout the university" (van der Riet 1961:7).

By the end of March 1958, a site had been identified and purchased. Situated in the heart of the campus, surrounded by residences and academic buildings, it had been "formerly occupied by the Grahamstown Tennis Club, a site agreed by all concerned in planning and building the library as being the ideal one for its new purpose" (Alty 1961:7).

As if to emphasise its perfect position on campus, the entrance to the new building, "a high glass-panelled arch and a series of brick steps leading to the pavement" was described as being "exactly in line with an axis running through the centre of the main university building and onwards to the Drostdy Arch and High Street" (van der Riet 1961:7). It was indeed an ideal location. It still is.



The Library in the 1960s - soon after it was built

Able to accommodate its existing collection of 100,000 books, but with shelving capable of taking double that number, the building would, if filled to capacity, be able to house "perhaps over half a million books" (van der Riet 1961:7). There was seating for 360 readers, with sufficient room to increase this to 500. Declared officially opened on the afternoon of Saturday the 8th of April 1961 by Lady Schonland, wife of the Chancellor of the University, it was considered one of the finest of its kind in Africa. Together with furniture and equipment, it cost just over R200,000.



Official opening of the Rhodes University Library, 8 April, 1961:

L-R: Chancellor of the University, Sir Basil Schonland, Lady Schonland, Vice-Chancellor, Dr Thomas Alty, Chairman of Rhodes University Council, Dr S.B. Hobson, University Librarian, Dr F.G. van der Riet



Libraries are essentially warehouses, with floor arrangements designed to be flexible enough to accommodate a multiplicity of functions, and this one was no exception. Having learnt from past experience of the difficulties of trying to operate a library in a series of small rooms, the plan for the new library was to use a “modular design” - a new buzzword in library terminology. This would allow the structure to be supported, not by walls,

but by a “series of regularly spaced columns”, thus enabling all areas to be used, “without major alteration, to accommodate books, readers or workers” (van der Riet 1961:7). That this principle was successful is proved by its continued use today.

Dr van der Riet was particularly protective of the Library’s floor covering which he guarded zealously from the ravages of stiletto heels. Students wearing these were required to remove them upon entering the building. He need not have worried, for the deep grooves, caused by heavy bookshelves, simply vanished once cleaned and polished. With similar treatment, all traces of partitions which went up – and then came down again – were removed, and even after half a century the floor showed little sign of wear and tear.

Instead of the large reading rooms traditionally found in university libraries, areas were provided for reading on each floor, in close proximity to the book collection which were “shelved in the interior, away from the windows” (van der Riet 1961:7).



The modular design showing the reading area alongside the book shelves

The design made provision for “the addition of extra floors on top of the present building, and the site is large enough to allow for further expansion to the side. The requirements of a growing university for the foreseeable future should therefore be very adequately met by this building” (Alty 1961:7).

The intention was to make “realistic provision for the growth of the book collection for over at least 20 years” (van der Riet 1961:7). In the event, 20 years grew to 50, and the extra floors were never added – the ground was too unstable. Instead, the Library’s modular design was to be severely tested - in ways that Dr van der Riet could not possibly have imagined in 1961.

That this was possible, flexibility and the later introduction of electronic media notwithstanding, was due partly to the departure of major collections from the Main Library to new homes elsewhere, in the process releasing desperately needed space. The first of these was the Law Library, which had occupied the south side of the

building's ground floor, entrance to which was gained through handsome glass double doors. It also had an exterior glass door on the outside wall (opposite Beit House) to which senior LLB students each had a key, affording them the special privilege of after hours access.

It was at this stage that, after the closing of the Grahamstown Training College, the University bought the adjacent Training College buildings and grounds, creating what became known as the St Peter's complex, into which The Law and Divinity Departments moved in 1975, Education in 1977 and Music and Musicology in 1979. The Law Library followed suit, accompanied by Erica Rezelman, who had been seconded from the Main Library staff in 1972, after a special request by the HoD of Law, Professor Ron Beuthin, for a dedicated Law Librarian. The relocated Law Library was officially opened in Lincoln Inn on Wednesday 9th April 1975 (Rezelman 2010).

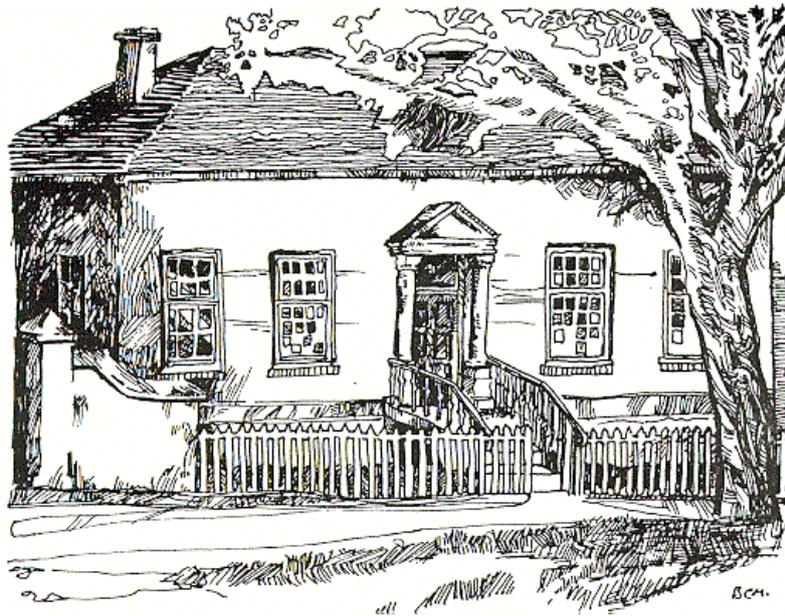


The Law Library – St Peter's Campus

The large room which Law had occupied in the Main Library was put to good use, in turn, for Short Loan, audio-visual purposes and as a quiet reading area. It also proved a convivial venue for gatherings such as end-of-year or farewell functions.

An intriguing collection which was born in what could be described as the womb of the Main Library, before moving elsewhere, was the Thomas Pringle Collection, later to become the National English Literary Museum, colloquially known as NELM. Launched in 1972 at the instigation of Professor Guy Butler, Karin de Jager recalls that the “fledgling Thomas Pringle Collection was housed in the only available open space in the Rhodes Library – for unknown reasons dubbed The Priest's Hole. This was a tiny room, always locked, safeguarding the sorry little Rhodes collection of “banned books”. On quiet days I had quite an instructive time dipping into them” (de Jager 2006:4). “All too rapidly” wrote Malcolm Hacksley, “the Collection had outgrown its first home and ... it moved from Rhodes University into its present premises in the “Priest's House” in Beaufort Street.” (Hacksley 2006:1).

So, in April 1980, rather charmingly, NELM, went from the Priest's Hole to the Priest's House, but retained its links to Rhodes by becoming an Associated Research Institute of the University.



THE PRIEST'S HOUSE BY BASIL MILLS. COURTESY OF NELM, GRAHAMSTOWN

The Priest's House – sketch by Basil Mills

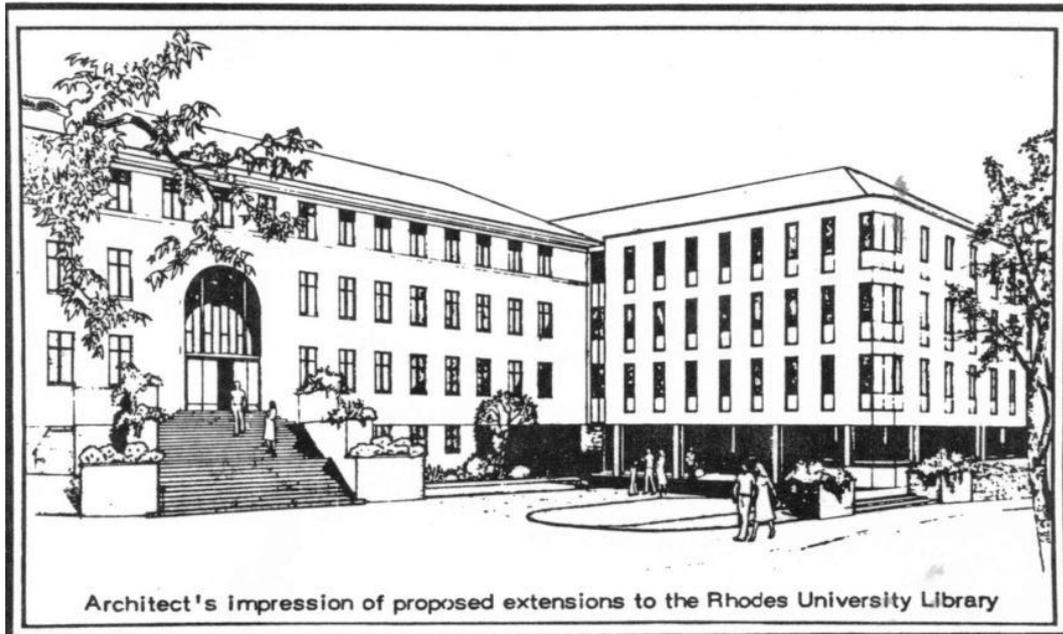
When Dr van der Riet retired at the end of 1977, he was succeeded by Mr Gerald Quinn, who had been his Deputy Librarian, making the transition a smooth and easy one. The University, however, had entered difficult times financially, and mindful of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Derek Henderson's request for austerity, Mr Quinn chose to execute his duties without the help of a full-time Deputy Librarian. To his eternal credit, this noble gesture contributed substantially to the return to good health of the Library's budget, as did his careful husbandry of its finances. Reduced to the assistance of only a quarter-time Deputy and a Professional Assistant, Mr Quinn instead consulted regularly with his senior staff during what became known as "cabinet meetings". It was during one of these meetings that the decision was made to join SABINET, marking the entry of Rhodes Library into the early age of electronic networking.



Mr G.D. Quinn

It was on Mr Quinn's watch that the Copyright Act of 1978 was promulgated, introducing an element of misery to the lives of librarians in South Africa. He was an expert in Government publications and regulations, however, and through his guidance the difficulties of navigating this minefield were considerably reduced.

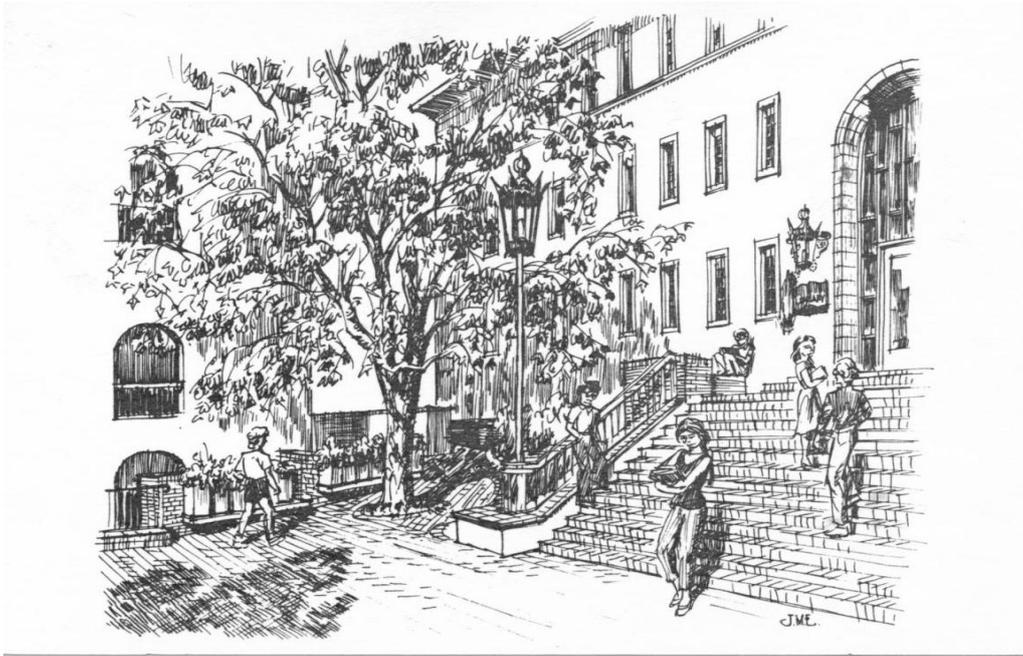
In the late 1970s, the Library had begun to look longingly at the car park that lay alongside it. Here, as Dr Alty had noted at the time the building was opened, was an ideal site for expansion. An architect was appointed to draw a plan and Library staff members were given copies of the proposed internal layout and asked to identify the areas where they thought their offices or departments should be positioned. Much enthusiastic discussion, argument and debate ensued over the following months, but in the end, it was Mr Quinn's unfortunate duty to abandon the idea. Due to the perennial shortage of funds, the cost was considered far too high. The estimated total was R3 million.



The Library's splendid location on campus was greatly accentuated when, in 1985, new buildings linking the University's main quadrangles and the Library were formally opened. English, Geography and the Library formed a third quadrangle, thus completing the development of the University's central area. In addition, the lower ground floor of the Geography Department provided a new home for the School of Librarianship, previously located in the Main Library – first in the Stanford Room on the Top Floor and then in the basement. The Library School was a welcome source of supply of many of the Library's staff members, enabling it to "grow its own timber", until its lamentable closure. The later arrival of Day Kaif in the lower area of this quadrangle provided the cherry on top.



The Library steps - a favourite spot for students



John English's sketch of the Library steps, with the new English Dept just visible to the left



Looking down from the Library towards the clock tower



Looking up towards the Library (visible at the top, centre) from the clock tower

If Mr Quinn's conscientiously frugal measures had been to the benefit of the budget's health, however, they had been to the detriment of his own, and in 1986 the post of Deputy Librarian was reinstated. Soon afterwards, Mr Quinn took early retirement and in June 1988, Brian Paterson, the newly appointed Deputy Librarian, succeeded him. With only a couple of years' experience in the Rhodes Library, and big shoes to fill, Mr Paterson soon proved himself equal to the task, introducing a refreshingly relaxed style of management. By this stage computers were truly ensconced in the Library, and in late 1990 the card catalogue's key role – and its pride of place in the foyer – had been usurped by the Library's first computerised Library system, URICA. It fell to Mr Paterson to reassure anxious academics that the print collection of books and journals would not suffer a similar fate – while at the same time ensuring that the Library kept pace with advancing technology. When, at the end of 1994, he resigned to take up a post at UNISA, his time at the Rhodes Library, all too soon, had come to an end.



Mr B.G. Paterson

It was to be a while before a suitable replacement was found, and during the interim the Deputy Librarian, Mr Michael Berning, became the Acting University Librarian, a role he had been called upon to fill on previous occasions.

In 1996, however, Mr Felix Ubogu was appointed, and immediately set about upgrading the Library's computer facilities. Electronic journals and databases, which had started appearing in their various shapes and forms, soon proliferated, revolutionising the Library's collection and providing access to an unprecedented wealth of material. The idea of access rather than ownership, was born. Like his predecessors, despite the obvious advantages of electronic media, Mr Ubogu was faced with the problem of the Library's shortage of space, particularly in the Cory Library.



Mr Felix Ubogu

In 1931 Sir George Cory had presented his "library of historical books" to the Council of the Rhodes University College "for the use of staff and students" (Berning 2004:1) forming the nucleus of what was considered at the time probably the most valuable existing collection of Africana specifically relating to the Eastern Province. As further rare donations followed, Cory Library's fine collection grew in value and reputation, attracting scholars from all over the world. It also grew in size, until, like the rest of the building, it was not only bursting at the seams, but literally crumbling under the tremendous weight of its archives. Alarming cracks appeared in the walls, and with pieces of masonry raining down upon them, it was not unusual to find Cory staff members wearing crash helmets when working in suspect areas. Cory needed a new home.

The solution to their accommodation problem finally came in the shape of a purpose-built library in the new Eden Grove complex. There were fears that this "Coryectomy" (Berning 2004:38) would jeopardise its close association with the Library, but with these allayed, the move was accomplished between December 1999 and January 2000. A comprehensive history of Cory Library can be accessed here: <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1260/>



Cory Library – Eden Grove

It was not long before Gauteng claimed another scalp, and at the end of 2000, Mr Ubogu left Rhodes to become the Library Director at Wits. Initially appointed Acting University Librarian, Mrs Margaret Kenyon was appointed to the position of University Librarian in April 2001. A much loved and respected member of the Library staff which she had joined as a cataloguer in 1982, rising to the position of Head: Collections and Technical Services at the end of 1997, Mrs Kenyon was already well acquainted with the Library's shortcomings – and with its advantages.

In her characteristically inclusive management style, she harnessed the latter and quietly and diligently addressed the former. She rescued the parlous state of the budget by persuading academic members of staff to cancel print journal subscriptions and carefully assessed the value of large purchases before committing the budget to them - all the while ensuring that the Library's resources ranked with the best in the country.

Indeed, the Rhodes Library boasted several "firsts" which Mrs Kenyon had either inspired or supported. "Always eager to try new things, it was through her initiative as Head of Cataloguing that Rhodes became the first library in SA to create hyperlinks on OPAC records to material also available in electronic format" (Botha 2005). Rhodes Library was the first South African library, and the second in Africa, to acquire JSTOR. Mrs Kenyon was an instigator of the Rhodes eResearch Repository (ReRR), which, when it launched officially in February 2006, was among the first South African universities to install an open access institutional repository and the first in the country to boast not only theses, but also journal articles, conference papers and workshop presentations from across all faculties.



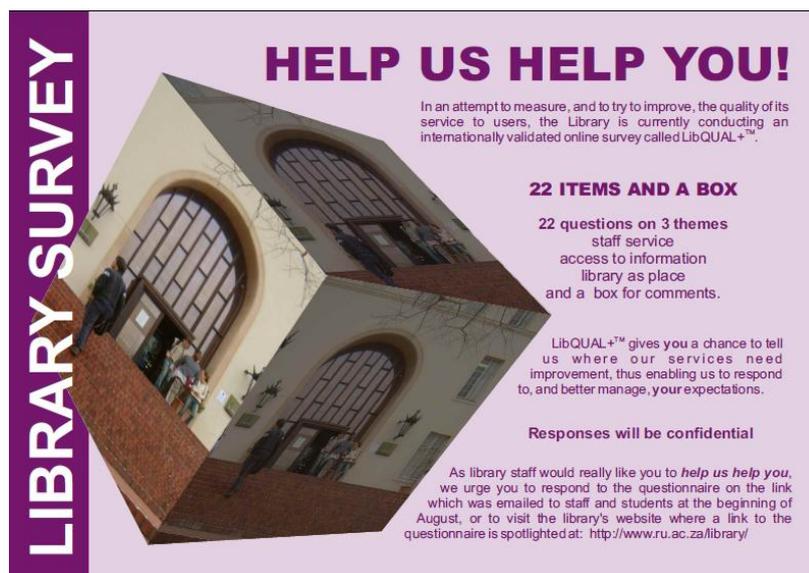
Mrs M.A.E. Kenyon

The area on the Middle Floor vacated by Cory Library very quickly had been commandeered by the Main Library's technical services staff and here they could at last enjoy a spacious, carpeted, open plan working area. There was space, too, for a Seminar Room. What had been Cory's Rare Book Room became the University Librarian's office – bigger than the Vice-Chancellor's, Mrs Kenyon enjoyed pointing out - and with a better view.

Other renovations took place in phases. What had been the technical services staff workroom on the ground floor was incorporated into the Reference area, creating a spacious area for computers and study tables alongside the Reference collection, in due course becoming one of the most popular – and busiest - areas in the building. The Circulation Desk also underwent a facelift. As a result there was space behind the counter for Short Loan which in turn made way for what became known as the video room, which doubled as a large reading room. Study carrels were added to the Top Floor, and book shelves were smartened with wooden sides. For the first time, the Library acquired a designated tea room.

Although these imaginative changes provided relief to the perennial shortage of space, they were not a permanent solution and “an extension to the Library building became a project about which [Mrs Kenyon] was particularly passionate. She devoted enormous time and energy to informing herself about libraries of the future in her effort to see that the new building would incorporate the very best ideas” (Botha 2005). She referred to them as “brick and click” libraries. Her tragic death in August 2005 came as a terrible shock and dreadful loss to the Library and the wider Rhodes community. Just before her death, however, Mrs Kenyon had contacted Geoff de Wet, Architect and Director of the Physical Planning Unit at UCT, and arranged for him to visit the Rhodes Library. Having visited over 25 libraries worldwide, his experience, expertise and interest in the field had made him one of South Africa’s most qualified library building specialists, and he had transformed UCT’s Main Library.

Although his visit, and the LibQUAL survey which she had initiated, occurred while Mrs Kenyon lay in a coma, she had laid the foundations. The outcome of both left no doubt that the proposed extension over the car park, conveniently situated adjacent to the Library building, should go ahead. Library staff in general, and the Library Building Project Team in particular, led by Professor Peter Vale, were determined that this would be a fitting legacy to her.



LIBRARY SURVEY

HELP US HELP YOU!

In an attempt to measure, and to try to improve, the quality of its service to users, the Library is currently conducting an internationally validated online survey called LibQUAL+™.

22 ITEMS AND A BOX

22 questions on 3 themes
staff service
access to information
library as place
and a box for comments.

LibQUAL+™ gives you a chance to tell us where our services need improvement, thus enabling us to respond to, and better manage, your expectations.

Responses will be confidential

As library staff would really like you to *help us help you*, we urge you to respond to the questionnaire on the link which was emailed to staff and students at the beginning of August, or to visit the library's website where a link to the questionnaire is spotlighted at: <http://www.ru.ac.za/library/>

Rhodes Library's LibQUAL poster

The LibQUAL survey produced exactly the results which Mrs Kenyon had expected: the Library scored well on “service” and “information”, but failed dismally on “place”. The pattern of student library usage had changed

and there was no space for discussion areas to accommodate the new trend of peer learning and group work. Far from decreasing, the percentage of students using the library had risen. Student numbers had swelled to 6200 and academic staff to 300 on campus, putting pressure on the library, which was able to seat only 10 percent of its users. The advent of electronic media had reduced the number of print journals needing to be kept on shelves, but there was a new problem for the Library: the installation of computer terminals and encroachment of book shelves on seating areas had made the already inadequate library facilities even more congested.

The installation of compactus shelving in the Main Library's basement had provided some relief to the need for more storage for a while, but when all creative use of space within the library building had been exhausted, it was time to turn to the old standby – remote storage. The Botany Department made its storeroom available. While much of it was underground, subject to flooding and humidity, at least it was close by, and the library soon filled every inch of its catacomb-like passages. When that was full, St Mary's Hall provided a temporary home for the overflow – until they themselves needed the space. Clearly, something needed to be done.

In June 2006, Ms Gwenda Thomas assumed the position of what was to be known in future as Library Director, rather than University Librarian. Ms Thomas arrived at Rhodes with an impressive list of academic publications to her name, and a fine reputation in library circles throughout the country and beyond.

She was exactly what the Library needed, and the University was extremely fortunate to have her, particularly at this critical juncture. She was, however, to have a baptism of fire.



Ms G.M.E. Thomas

Photograph: Stephen Penney

Ms Thomas had had previous experience with managing building projects and knew all about the Library's own plans for an extension, but even she could not have anticipated the resistance to it that she would encounter from unexpected quarters. Undeterred, Ms Thomas embraced the challenge with typical vigour, dedication and determination and worked tirelessly to champion the Library's cause, raise its profile on campus and draw attention to its plight.

Her relentless efforts were finally rewarded when, after two-and-a-half years of extensive research and planning, involving countless meetings and consultations with Faculty Boards, discussions with fundraisers, architects and more, the Rhodes University Council finally approved the construction of an expanded library building.



Architect's impression of the expanded library building

Estimated to cost R90 million, Rhodes was able to allocate R50 million of an R80-million re-capitalisation grant made to the University by the Department of Education. The Development team was tasked with raising the remaining R40 million and a major fundraising programme was initiated.

On the 22nd September 2008, the ceremony marking the turning of the first sod took place and building was underway.

The Sod-turning ceremony



Turning the first sod – the Vice-Chancellor, Dr S. Badat



Mr Neels Heunis from CMHDM Joint Venture



At tea after the Sod-turning ceremony: Mr Neels Heunis, Dr Saleem Badat and Library staff



Architect, Mr Neill Kievit and Ms Gwenda Thomas

The mammoth task of moving the library's collections was not for the faint-hearted. Mrs Jeanne Berger, then Head: Collections and Technical Services, and since 2010, Deputy Director, was appointed to head the Library Building Project team, with Mrs Rina Goosen to assist her, both of them on a part time basis. Undaunted, and with energy that left others trailing in their wake, they made light work of the logistics of packing, labelling, relocating - and then *unpacking* - every single item, not just once, but in most cases, *three* times. A "Survival Guide for Intrepid Library Users", posted on the Library's webpage, was produced and updated by Mrs Berger and proved a lifesaver for staff and users alike.



Jeanne Berger in typical guise during construction



Rina Goosen and assistant

As sections were gradually handed over to the builders for renovation, displaced staff took up temporary residence in scattered places, with technical services staff moving right out of the building to Cory Library. Throughout this period, users appeared not to notice the noise, dust, cramped conditions and general inconvenience of working in what had become a construction site, and continued to flock into the Library - which remained open, not closing even for a day.



The Library building in progress



Library staff were taken on a guided tour during the construction phase





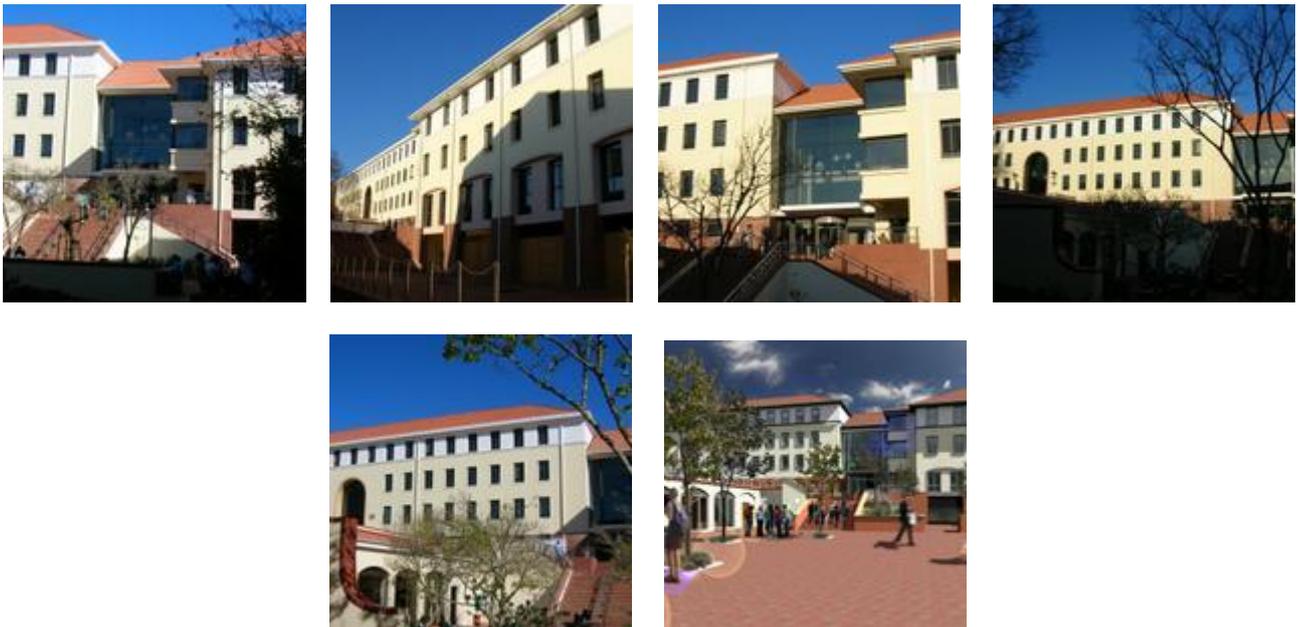
Jeanne Berger pictured on the state-of-the-art steel staircase which is suspended from the roof

At the end of January 2010, 18 months later, “a milestone was achieved when old met new and the main entrance to the new section of the Library building was opened to users” (Thomas 2010:11) – just in time for Orientation Week. Shortly afterwards, a small ceremony was held in the new entrance foyer to mark the occasion.



L to R: The Building Contractor, Mr Neels Heunis, The V-C, Dr Saleem Badat, Library Director, Ms Gwenda Thomas, Architect, Mr Geoff de Wet, DVCs Dr Siswe Mabizela and Dr Peter Clayton

With Library staff established in the new section, the old part of the building was handed over to the builders, and work began on the renovations. These were completed towards the end of the year and at last the entire building became available to staff and users alike.



Finished at last – the new Rhodes University Library

In an article in Grocott's Mail on the 29th January 2010, Ms Thomas referred to the new Rhodes Library as "one of the most exciting and ambitious infrastructure projects in the history of the institution" (Thomas 2010:11), describing it as follows:

A significant achievement of the new library building is its response to meeting the needs of the new generation of student and researchers who, having never known a world without the Internet or mobile connections, are seeking new kinds of study, learning and work spaces as well as using new ways to seek and find information. A marvel of the library is that it is so much more than a repository of printed collections.

Students will welcome the fabulous new facilities that are on offer including an information commons which provides an area with 54 computer workstations in a supported environment, staffed by a librarian with a team of well-trained student navigators.

Alongside is a 26-seater hi-tech training classroom equipped for librarians to provide hands-on information skills training to all sectors of the University making sure that everyone is able to make optimal use of the vast range of electronic resources and print collections available from the library.

But, the new library is not only about study and learning at a desk – enjoy the light and airy high-volume lobby as you enter through the new doors. As you take in the central staircase, pause to share and experience the gallery of portraits of African writers – the work and inspiration of international photographer George Hallett. Take time to use the state-of-the art computer workstations at the numerous information service points throughout the library made possible through a generous donation from the Dell Development Fund SA.

Together with a 24/7 study zone, funky newsroom, chill corners with fantastic views over the campus roof- and tree-tops, students and staff alike will be able to seek out and enjoy space that suits their requirements.

Another important initiative included in the Rhodes University Library is the introduction of faculty liaison librarians across all six faculties connecting the world of teaching, learning and research and the vast array of information resources available to staff and students. Features lined up for the refurbishment phase of the project, that will appeal to research scholars, include a comfortable and separate hi-tech facility, known as a Research Commons, where trained faculty librarians are on hand to provide top class information services in a quiet and reflective environment.

The aesthetics within and without the new library building speak to both the past and present. Campus visitors can enjoy the features retained from the old library within the new architecture. The existing entrance will be beautified as an arched window, with a rim edge pond, providing users with a grand view over the campus towards the clock tower – a symbolic reminder that time and progress never stand still (Thomas 2010:11).



The new Rhodes University Library.

Photographs by Stephen Penney



The George Hallett gallery of African Writers

Launching the Carnegie Research Commons in the Rhodes Library at a small ceremony on Friday, 3rd September 2010, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Saleem Badat, paid tribute to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, whose generous grant had made it possible and in whose honour it had been named. Arguably the showpiece among many eligible candidates for this moniker in the new state-of-the-art library building, the Research Commons forms one of three components of the Carnegie Research Libraries' Consortium Project, designed to strengthen and enhance academic library support for scholarly endeavour, particularly among young researchers, at selected South African academic institutions. The exciting RLC Project, however, was not the first time Carnegie had played a pivotal role in shaping the history of the Rhodes Library. Indeed, Carnegie had recognised the need to support libraries in South Africa, and the Rhodes Library in particular, more than 70 years before this, as we have seen.



The launch of the Carnegie Research Commons

Surrounded by residences and academic buildings, Day Kaif at its feet, with steps leading to it from every direction, spoiling students for choice, the new and expanded Rhodes University Library has emerged majestically from its scaffolding to cement its commanding position in the heart of the campus. Even the nay-sayers must surely agree that Rhodes now has a truly magnificent resource.



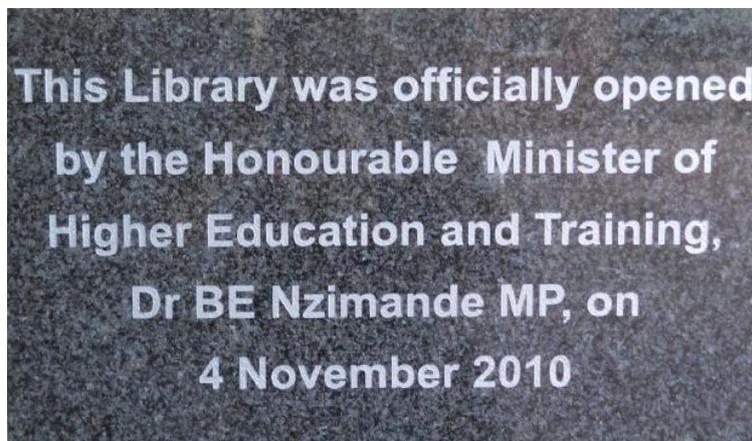
A magnificent resource



On Thursday 4th November 2010, the new and expanded Rhodes University Library was officially opened by the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande.



L-R: Director of Library Services, Ms Gwenda Thomas, Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande and Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor, Dr Saleem Badat. Photograph by Sophie Smith



Jubilant Library staff members pictured at the Official Opening Ceremony

The story does not end there, however, for with the official opening just days away, the Vice-Chancellor sent out a message on Friday 22nd October 2010 to say that he had recently received news that the final cost of the new Library had come in at almost R11 million under budget, representing a saving of 13%. This was an astonishing achievement which he attributed to “the exceptional management by our project leaders Director of Library Services Gwenda Thomas and Deputy Director Jeanne Berger, their staff and the project team as whole” (Badat 2010). If ever it was needed, here was proof of the outstanding return on Carnegie’s investment all those years ago. It was a fairy tale ending.



The Donor Boards at the entrance to the new Rhodes University Library

Sue van der Riet
November 2010

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following:

Mr Basil Mills for the use of his sketch of the Priest’s House, Grocott’s Mail and Mr Stephen Penney for permission to use photographs of Gwenda Thomas and the interior of the new library, and Cory Library and staff for assistance with photographs of the old Library

References

- Alty, Thomas. 1961. Today important date in Rhodes history. *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth). Saturday, April 8th.
- Badat, Saleem. 2010. New Library/Library renovation project. *TopList*, Friday, October 22nd.

- Berning, Michael. 2004. *The Cory library for historical research : A short history, 1931-2003*. Grahamstown: [s.n]. Available online at: <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1260/>. Accessed on 3 November 2010.
- Botha, Vivien. 2005. Eulogy for Margaret Kenyon. Rhodes University Chapel.
- Currey, Ronald. 1970. *Rhodes University 1904-1970 : A chronicle*. Grahamstown: [Rhodes University].
- de Jager, Karin. [2006]. Early days with the Thomas Pringle Collection . *Nelm News. Anniversary Edition, 25 years. "Telling Our Story"* : 4-5. Available online at: <http://www.ru.ac.za/static/institutes/nelm/anniversary/74326%20NELMtext.pdf>. Accessed on 3 November 2010.
- Hacksley, Malcolm. [2006]. Overview. *Nelm News. Anniversary Edition. 25 years. "Telling Our Story"* : 1-3. Available online at: <http://www.ru.ac.za/static/institutes/nelm/anniversary/74326%20NELMtext.pdf>. Accessed on 3 November 2010.
- Rezelman, Erica. 2010. Personal communication, October 30th.
- Thomas, Gwenda. 2010. New look Rhodes library heralds a new era. *Grocott's Mail* (Grahamstown). 29th January. Available online at: <http://www.grocotts.co.za/content/new-look-rhodes-library-heralds-new-era-29-01-2010>. Accessed on 3 November 2010.
- van der Riet, Frank. 1961. New design gives maximum use of floor space. *Eastern Province Herald* (Port Elizabeth). Saturday, April 8th.