

## **Transcript of talk about the ISB to LIANZA**

We began planning in earnest for the ISB in November 1993 as a result of the University picking up on the severe space shortage identified in the Library's revised 'Accommodation Programme 1993 to 2008' and the views expressed by the 1992 Review Panel on the shortage of University Library accommodation for both users and Library staff.

The present Vice-Chancellor, Graeme Fogelberg, came to the University in early 1994 committed to improving Library accommodation (largely to provide for more and better study places in an IT-rich environment).

In mid 1994 this intention was given further impetus by the findings of the Sequential Reviewer of the University Library.

On 13 November 1998, almost 5 years to the day from the first meeting of the working party, the contract was let and work began on the site on 16 November.

This was a very short gestation period for a building as complex, large and innovative as the one we are now building. So what guided us in those five years?

We knew from the start that this was a wonderful opportunity for the University to proclaim at large the high value that it placed on access to information and the importance of the Library's role as a repository of knowledge which is one of the key characteristics, defined by statute, of a university.

We saw this as a splendid opportunity to give the University a clear marketing advantage over other competing New Zealand universities.

While there had been a number of reasonably innovative new public library buildings built immediately prior to the beginning of our planning we ascertained that there were no major academic library buildings being planned in parallel with our own. There, have, however, been some new buildings for polytechnic libraries (Nelson's new Learning Centre opened and Christchurch opened their new libraries in 1999). AUT is in the process of building its new building. Massey University has since begun planning for a new library building for its Albany campus, incidentally, using the same architectural practices in the development of their project.

We wanted the building to reflect a new image for libraries. We wanted it to be a "more than" building to house the Library, but not in the sense of Whitcoulls "more than a bookstore" which has meant, in fact, much less than a book shop.

We wanted the new building to assist in positioning the Library well to meet the challenges of the early C21 with significant changes currently occurring in scholarly communication.

We wanted the new building to assist us in taking advantage of burgeoning IT developments in easing access to information and knowledge appearing in digital form.

We wanted the Library to be housed proximate to other IT services and operations, to encourage greater collaboration and derive optimal benefit from the synergies created.

We saw the new building as an opportunity to provide an environment to assist in re-grouping and even de-grouping of services and operations and to encourage more open-plan work areas to assist in maintaining and enhancing a culture of teamwork and even greater collaboration.

Traditional library buildings, and particularly traditional academic library buildings, have tended to be rather bland if solid (and even stolid) architecturally.

We wanted a building which would convey a sense of excitement that one is entering a gateway to the world of information and knowledge (not only to resources housed within the building but also providing access to resources, both print and digital, beyond the walls of the library).

We wanted the new building to provide an environment which would enhance existing library services and allow the incorporation of new ones.

We wanted the building to foster vital intellectual interchange between students and between students and staff.

A group of University staff traveled across the United States from the West coast to the East coast assessing (then) recently completed (largely academic) library buildings.

We looked for libraries that were really forward thinking and had, as a result of that thinking, produced advanced and exciting buildings. By and large we failed to find them on the first study tour. New thinking at their planning stage rarely resulted in concrete evidence of a new manner of providing services. What we saw was mostly traditional.

We saw a great deal of opulence made possible by a culture and system which allows private donors of public good building developments substantial taxation benefits. Many donors in keeping with an element of "puffery" involved, require top-of-the-line settees, richly burnished paneling, luxurious furnishings (at least in major public areas).

We knew that such gifting was not a part of the New Zealand culture and taxation system and we knew that such opulence was not seen as desirable in our local environment. We wanted the building to be a quality one but not to speak of ostentation. We wanted enduring building fabric of New Zealand materials where possible.

We looked more to building features that would provide functional efficiencies, FLEXIBILITY (now there's a key word for the building), a welcoming environment, comfortable to be in, of a human scale (even though it has a large footprint the size of the Carisbrook ground).

One feature of many of the libraries we saw in the States which we thought desirable here was an atrium to bring sunlight down into the centre of a several storied building with such a large footprint.

Built on a major campus corner with a high public profile, with a State highway on the western boundary, we wanted the purpose of the building to be proclaimed to passers by whether in cars or on foot. And so we wanted a transparent envelope, especially on the Cumberland and Albany Street frontages, so that members of the public could see students studying. This was a rare opportunity for until now the external community has seen students mostly at play.

We wanted the building to be permeable and for its services to be clearly evident by spaces merging one into the other. Most libraries want only one combined entrance/exit. We have planned for two entrances even though, as yet, the technology isn't available to provide secure control so as to prevent the second one being used as an exit. And there are 5 significant public entrances into the building as a whole.

We wanted to encourage people into the building and then divert them with a range of activities so that they will be encouraged to stay.

Alone, among New Zealand's academic libraries, we wanted to provide for a significant sociable element within the building encouraging people to congregate and talk freely, to discuss their learning and their personal issues, with refreshments being available in certain areas even as they study.

All these elements were not to be at the expense of the traditional quiet study areas. We determined that the building should be both large and clever enough to provide for a whole range of study situations from solo study places to group study rooms, those which are wired so connections can be made to the University network to those which are quiet oases where we anticipate only users of print materials will congregate. We also wanted other study situations where viewing of audiovisual resources is possible singly, in small clusters, or in a small theatre, and where interaction with digital resources is possible.

On the ground floor, clearly evident to all entering the building, (once Phase Two is completed) will be a major area allowing access to electronic databases and Internet resources. It is an important signal to all users of the growing importance of information in this form and seating will be structured to allow people to access these resources singly or in partnership with other students or with staff.

Books need to be well catered for in this building as print resources will retain their importance well into the future. Rather than the 'virtual library' or the 'digital library' being the goal the hybrid library is now the term employed to indicate where we are heading for a long time yet. This means an appropriate blending of print and digital, choosing one or the other (where alternatives exist, indeed) on grounds of price, currency, authority, reliability, speed of delivery, format most useful to the user. There is still far more in the way of library resources available in print than there is in digitised form and digitisation projects are very expensive to undertake in most instances.

But in contrast to many libraries, the collection housed within this building will not grow significantly and certainly won't grow at the expense of reader places as has been the norm in almost every academic library until now. Growth in the collections will be provided by lesser-used stock being transferred (on a regular basis) to our lending facilities just off campus in Leith Street.

A new feature of this building will be the IT Help Desk associated with the more traditional Reference/Information desk. The IT Help Desk will largely serve students but will also be available to all comers though it is anticipated that most University staff will still approach the IT Help Desk by means of phone or email. Staff at this desk will also help users who are encountering technical problems in accessing electronic resources.

The Library's user education programmes, many offered within the seminar rooms yet to be built on the ground floor in Phase Two, will be complemented by the ITS training sessions taking place close by and each will have the ability to use the other's facilities when they are not otherwise in use. The new Student Learning Centre is also a service to students which will be enhanced by synergies developing between the Library, HEDC, and ITS. Audio-conferencing facilities will also be adjacent.

In an area close by there will be an facility which provides at least a front desk introduction to a wide range of the University's student services currently housed in the clock-tower building.

Kiosks, offering a variety of student-orientated retail services will extend along the length of the Link between the secure area of the Library and the University Union building. This will be a new kind of space on campus. As well as being a major thoroughfare and entry-point to the University campus (yet being an internal space) it also provides casual study places where students may continue reading while drinking coffee, meeting up with friends and just "killing time" in between lectures.

Michael Wooliscroft (University of Otago Librarian), 9 August 2000

The connection with the Union is an important one in this regard for the Link is a vital connector between the Union, which is the social hub of the campus, and the Library, which is the learning hub, and it contains elements of both, one melding into the other.

There are two segments of the building which are designated as retail spaces for shops offering produce which is complementary to the Library and related services within the building.

Altogether, we know that this is a courageous development. When it is completed in July next year Otago will have a building well ahead of any university library/information services building in the country (at least for a few years). We hope there will be imitators.

What is important is for us to be the first of a new breed and then to have the resources and the inventiveness to maintain that lead even when others' imitations are commissioned. That will be the true challenge for the Library and for the University.

Michael Wooliscroft (University of Otago Librarian), 9 August 2000.