

The Duhig Building: Changing Configurations of a Library Space at the University of Queensland

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Introduction

Call it what you will, "Information Resource Centre," "Learning Commons" or just plain "Library," the library building is still a significant feature of almost any university campus. It stands both as a monument to learning and scholarship and as a central hub of student life. And yet, on most days on most Australian campuses, you will now see students sitting with their laptops in any comfortable location, using the wireless network for research, study and recreation. It is only when the weather turns inclement that they seek an indoors haven and congregate in refectories, lobbies, stairwells and, of course, in the library.

The present study is about the university library as a building. It is a case-study of one particular Australian library building, the Duhig Building at the University of Queensland, which was designed seventy-five years ago and is still in use today. It will try to show not only how that building has been modified over the years to meet the changing needs of students and researchers, but also how those modifications have reflected changing perceptions of the role of the library and of the needs of those whom it serves.

"Hennessy's Horror"

When in 1935, after much debate and procrastination, the Queensland State Government finally decided to build a permanent home for its young university on the Brisbane River at St Lucia, there were many architects, both professional and amateur, who were keen to be awarded the commission for designing the new campus. A Building Committee was set up jointly by the University and the State Government, and produced a plan for the site which was published in July 1936. This design provided for a central quadrangle of buildings, with the library placed at the centre of the rear range. The plan for the library was apparently the work of the distinguished civil engineer, J.J.C. Bradfield. It was a domed Baroque structure "which will be capable of housing 350,000 volumes at the outset, and will be built for future expansion."¹ Thomis has used the term "fussily ornate" to describe the committee's plans for the campus,² and that seems an appropriate description of Bradfield's library building. Mercifully, it was never built.

¹ *Courier Mail*, 28 July 1936, 18.

² Malcolm I. Thomis, *A Place of Light & Learning: The University of Queensland's First Seventy-Five Years* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985), 165.

The State Government chose instead, without any public debate or competition, to appoint as consulting architects for the new campus the Sydney firm of Hennessy, Hennessy & Co. This was a long established architectural practice that traced its origins back to 1884 and had played a major role in the development of Catholic ecclesiastical architecture in Australia. The senior partner at the time was Jack F. Hennessy (1887-1955), son of one of the founders of the firm.³ Hennessy quickly produced a plan for a group of buildings in the form of a semi-circular quadrangle, which was presented to the University Senate in September 1936.

There do not seem to be any surviving records to tell us what brief Hennessy was given for the design of the Library building, nor what precedents he took as models. The University Senate appointed certain staff members to an ad hoc committee to liaise with the architects, and one of these staff members was A.C.V. Melbourne, associate professor of history and, since 1934, honorary librarian. According to his biographer, Melbourne "became heavily involved in the planning and construction of the new buildings,"⁴ and if anecdote and tradition are correct, he had a major role in the design of the Library building.

The minutes of the meeting of the liaison committee on 8th December 1936 record that Melbourne and Hennessy had "informally discussed" the plans for the Library. At that meeting Hennessy produced a preliminary pencil sketch of the building, designed to eventually accommodate one million books, with an "open reading room" and a "monumental entrance."⁵ Melbourne had undertaken doctoral studies in London and Harrison Bryan, a subsequent university librarian, maintained that Melbourne was so impressed by the great domed reading room of the British Museum, that he wanted to replicate it, albeit on a smaller scale, in Brisbane.⁶ Bryan's deputy, Barry Scott, wrote of Melbourne's "lack of knowledge in librarianship, a fault which found its most lasting expression in library design."⁷

However it is unlikely that so experienced an architect as Hennessy would have relied solely on the advice of a layman for the design of a major building. Hennessy and his assistants would no doubt have known something of the circular reading room at the British Museum, the pre-eminent library of the British Empire, and they may have examined at first-hand the octagonal domed reading room of the Public Library of Victoria (now the State Library of Victoria). Contemporary developments in university library architecture in England may also have been influences, for example the recently completed Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, with its domed circular reading room, gallery, and clerestory. However the basic shape of the Library building at St Lucia was determined from the outset by Hennessy's design for the front range of the university complex, with its bulky central tower, balanced at

³ Noni Boyd and Julie Willis, "Hennessy & Hennessy," in *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, ed. Philip Goad and Julie Willis (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 325-6.

⁴ Malcolm I. Thomis, "Melbourne, Alexander Clifford Vernon (1888–1943)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, ed. Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 10:480.

⁵ University of Queensland Archives, S130 Box 59.

⁶ Harrison Bryan, "On How Not to Design a Library Building," *Library Association of Australia, University Libraries Section News Sheet* 1, no. 1 (1960): 6.

⁷ D. B. Scott, "A History of the University of Queensland Library," *Australian Library Journal* 10, no. 2 (1961): 73.

the west end by the Great Hall (which was never constructed) and at the east end by the Library.

The Library was thus to be, of necessity, a tall building. The Hennessy firm were used to designing churches and cathedrals, and large airy spaces came naturally to them. They specialised in monumental buildings, and the new buildings at St Lucia were as much a monument (in this case to learning and progress) as any of the firm's ecclesiastical work. Hennessy's design for the campus can be classified stylistically as "inter-war stripped classical," a style which attempted to bridge the gulf between classical architecture and modernism. His cavernous spaces and high ceilings had the advantage of being cool in the hot Queensland summers and of providing space for tall windows to relieve the cave-like gloom. Whether or not such spaces were comfortable for working and learning is another matter. Moore finds in Hennessy's designs for the Main Building "a hint of grand fascist-style architecture"⁸ and Thomis comments that the drawings for the proposed Great Hall look "a little like the inside of a London railway station."⁹

The overall plan of the front range, with its straight lines and right angles, also dictated the ground plan of the library. However the rectangular ground plan of the earliest drawings soon developed into a more sophisticated cruciform shape: a Greek cross, with the eastern and western arms considerably truncated. According to Gyure, Greek-cross plans with a central octagonal or square reading room were one of the three basic forms used in the design of university libraries in the United States between 1890 and 1940.¹⁰ The attraction of this design was that each arm of the cross could be lit by windows on three sides. If the central reading room was lit by a skylight, then maximum use could be made of natural lighting.

But how could a skylight be used to light the central reading room in a building of five storeys? Hennessy's solution was a central light-well, or atrium, extending through all floors, except the basement, and topped by a decorated glass ceiling. This design presented certain structural problems, as it eliminated any load-bearing structures in the centre of the building. To compensate, Hennessy provided sixteen pillars around the central well, in an octagonal pattern.

There were thus two determining factors in the design of the Library: the need for a tall monumental structure to complement the adjacent buildings, and the need to provide as much natural lighting as possible. Only the second of these factors had anything to do with efficient library operation. Natural lighting had played a crucial role in library architecture since antiquity, but by 1936 electric lighting was no longer a luxury; indeed it was essential if a library were to remain open in the evenings. An architect who made natural lighting a priority

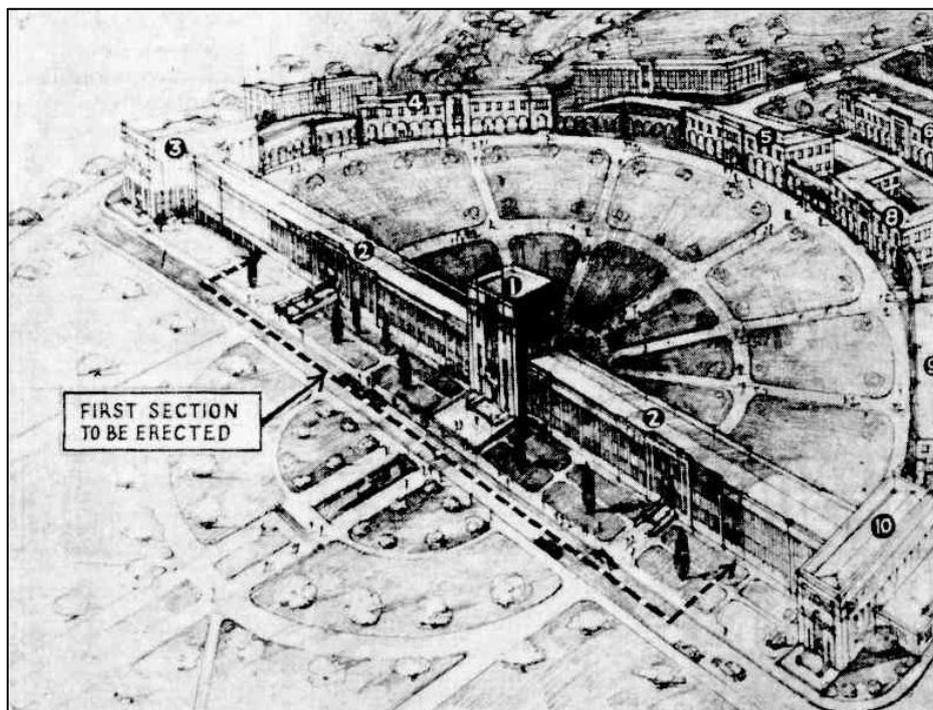
⁸ Clive Moore, *The Forgan Smith: History of a Building and Its People at the University of Queensland* (St Lucia: School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland, 2010), 8.

⁹ Thomis, *Place of Light*, 166.

¹⁰ Dale Allen Gyure, "The Heart of the University: A History of the Library as an Architectural Symbol of American Higher Education," *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, no. 2/3 (2008): 123.

in the design of a library building in 1936 was looking rather like a general fighting the battles of the previous war.

It soon became apparent that the government would not have sufficient funds to construct the whole campus at once. In May 1937 the liaison committee was asked by the Bureau of Industry's University Works Board to review the plans and limit construction to immediate requirements for the coming ten years. This led the committee to some painful decisions, but to their credit, they maintained that "the Library, perhaps more than any other building, should be planned on a permanent basis from the beginning," and, out of respect for Hennessy's overall plan, that "the Library as designed is an essential architectural feature."¹¹ However it was clear that the Library would have to be built in stages, and when construction began in March 1938, the intention was to build only the bottom floor of the Library building, with a basement connecting it to the Main Building, which would be truncated at both its eastern and western ends. However by June it had been decided to build the complete eastern wing of the Main Building, including an upper floor for the Library, on the same level as the ground floor of the Main Building, and contiguous to it.¹² That the liaison committee and the Works Board could have considered a single-storey building as adequate for the University Library says much about the size of the Library's collection at that time (about 50,000 volumes) and about assumptions concerning its future growth.



1938 plan of the St Lucia site. The Library building is numbered 3, the Main Building is numbered 2 and the proposed Great Hall is numbered 10.

¹¹ "Report on Proposed Accommodation at St. Lucia," undated, University of Queensland Archives, S130 Box 59.

¹² See floorplan dated 21 March 1938, with annotation dated 2 June 1938, in Minutes of the Bureau of Industry University Works Board, Queensland State Archives, 341196, folio 53.

Construction work on the St Lucia site continued until interrupted by the war in early 1942, by which time the Main Building and the Library were essentially complete, although internal fittings were still largely lacking. The Library building was already being used to store some little-used volumes, but these had to be removed when the site was handed over to the Army for the duration of the war. With the war drawing to a close, construction resumed in 1945. In June 1948, to realise Hennessy's grand vision, the State Cabinet approved the expenditure of £3,827 for marble facing in the Library reading room.¹³ Late in 1948 the Library, along with the Faculties of Arts, Commerce and Law, moved to the new campus.



University of Queensland Library, 1954, showing the main (northern) entrance

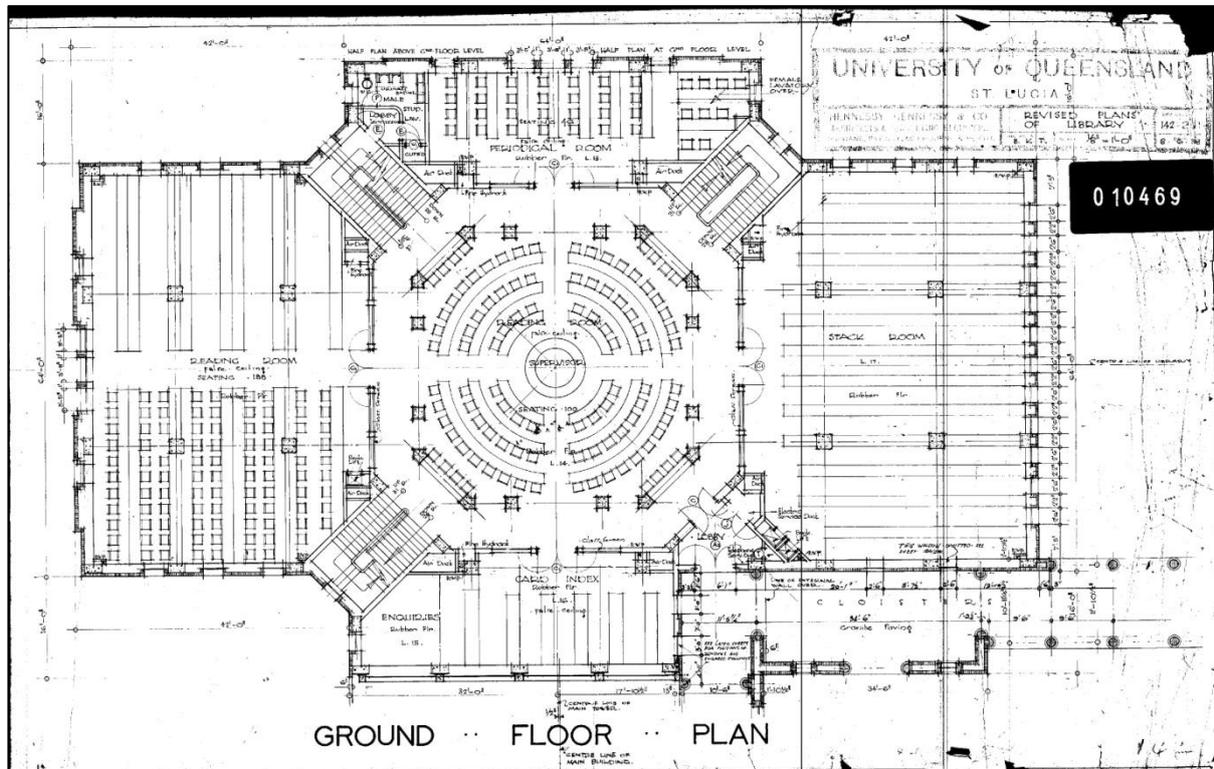
The move coincided with the appointment of the young Harrison Bryan as acting university librarian. With characteristic energy, Bryan set about the task of establishing library services in his new building, but the deficiencies of the structure soon became only too obvious.

The original plans for the main (upper) floor made no provision for security of the collection.¹⁴ The central reading room had three exits leading down to the lower basement floor (in which the grand front entrance was located), plus an exit to the cloisters in the Great Court on the south-western side of the building (which Bryan whimsically referred to as "the sally-port"). Most library staff were located in offices on the basement level; the only staffed locations planned for the upper floor were a circular supervisor's desk in the middle of the

¹³ Letter dated 25 June 25 1948 from Acting Secretary, Department of the Coordinator General of Public Works to the Secretary, P.J. Lowther & Son, University of Queensland Archives, S282 150/7 part 1.

¹⁴ University of Queensland Archives, plan no. 010469.

reading room and an enquiries office tucked away beside the proposed Card Index room in the western arm.



Plan of ground floor (Level 2) of Library Building, 1938. The northern reading room is on the left of the plan. The Great Court is in the lower right-hand corner.

The complete absence of any exit control is the clearest indication that the plans were drawn up without the close involvement of an experienced librarian. Bryan immediately placed an enquiry desk in the reading room, using battered furniture brought from the former George Street library, but there was no immediate solution to the problem of security. He fought continuing battles to restrict the number of entrances to the reading room, thereby provoking a stream of complaints from students. In the end, he had to accept both the entrance from the lower level and from the cloisters, and in an attempt to secure the collections, he partitioned off a portion of the reading room "as a kind of sheep run to divert students, entering either from the north-western staircase or the sally-port, past a control desk ... At the same time ... the north-eastern staircase [from the lower level] has had to be closed off permanently."¹⁵

The large windows also presented a security problem. Hennessy had not been in favour of air-conditioning for the University buildings: "experience overseas had shown that [air conditioning] is not satisfactory especially from the point of view of the health of those

¹⁵ Harrison Bryan, "On Squaring Circles," *Library Association of Australia, University Libraries Section News Sheet* 1, no. 3 (1960): 9-10.

working in air-conditioned buildings. Running costs are high also."¹⁶ Without air conditioning in the Library during the long Brisbane summers, it was only possible to maintain a tolerable temperature "by dint of opening all the windows, which made a mockery of any attempt to maintain security."¹⁷ As one former Library staff member wrote, many years later, "you could not control access to the library. The really useful books were always – well, somewhere else."¹⁸

The installation of electric lighting reduced dependence on natural light, but the central reading room was still partly dependent on lighting via the glass ceiling above. This, combined with the fact that this central space was constantly crossed by readers moving between the bookstacks in the southern arm, and the card catalogue in the eastern arm, and the second reading room in the northern arm, created an environment uncondusive to study. The heat generated by the glass skylight above the reading room was sufficient to warp the wooden furniture, and in 1951 the skylight was partially painted to counteract this.¹⁹ However after sunset the reading room was "in utter darkness" and readers were forced to use the northern reading room instead.²⁰



Ground floor (Level 2) in the 1950s, showing the charging counter, the southern stack area and the "sally port" exit to the cloisters

¹⁶ Minutes of the Bureau of Industry University Works Board, 12 January 1938, Queensland State Archives, 341196, folio 47.

¹⁷ Harrison Bryan, *No Gray Profession: Reminiscences of a Career in Australian Libraries* (Adelaide: Auslib Press, 1994), 26.

¹⁸ Judith Doig, "The University of Queensland Library in the 1950's: A Biased and (Probably) Inaccurate Recollection," (unpublished manuscript, 2010, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, F3554), 1.

¹⁹ Letter dated 28 November 1951 from J.D. Cramb, University Registrar's Office, to the Acting Chief Engineer, Department of the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, University of Queensland Archives, S282 150/7 part III.

²⁰ Letter dated 31 October 1958 from the Registrar, University of Queensland, to the Secretary, Department of the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, University of Queensland Archives, UQA S282 150/7 part 5.

However the most acute problem was space. In 1942, well before the move to St Lucia, the then librarian, Richard Pennington, had warned that "it is becoming doubtful whether even the new Library at St. Lucia will be large enough for the collection, without either recourse to a system of ceiling-high metal shelving or the addition of another story to the building."²¹ As university expansion gathered pace after the war, this prediction proved to be only too accurate. With no immediate prospect of upward extension, the only option was to make use of the lofty spaces by inserting metal mezzanine floors. The ceiling height on the upper floor was 18 feet (about 5.5 metres) and the first mezzanine was built in the bookstack in the southern arm of this floor in 1955. A considerably larger one was built in the centre of the basement in 1959. The mezzanines were a necessary, but ugly and claustrophobic expedient. In 1961, a temporary extension of the upper floor westward into the ground floor of the Main Building provided some additional study space for students.



Mezzanine on lower ground floor (Level 1), 1959, showing Thatcher Library (above) and periodicals stack (below)

The following description, written by a senior member of the academic staff, gives a user's perspective of the building in 1957:

The entrance at ground-level from the road in front is a pleasant one, with the broad stone square outside leading into the vestibule where book displays are staged. The Reading Rooms are upstairs on the cloister level, and have accommodation for 215

²¹ *Annual Report of the Librarian*, University of Queensland, 1942, 6, hereafter cited as: *Annual Report*.

students. The central reading room is flanked conveniently by the card index room, the book stack and the Fryer Australian Library.²²

"The University of Queensland Library is saddled with a bad building. Let me correct that; it is saddled with a fantastically bad building, a librarian's nightmare."²³ This was Bryan's considered opinion after more than ten years of trying to provide library services in the building that he elsewhere referred to as "Hennessy's Horror."²⁴ At least some of the students must have shared his opinion: in 1960, the student newspaper carried a facetious article about the latest proposal for the elusive Great Hall, suggesting that "the Hall itself, when not in use for lectures will be required as a library reading room, since the present marble-lined, octagonal horror is to be taken over full-time by the Black and White Cab Co. as a tourist attraction."²⁵



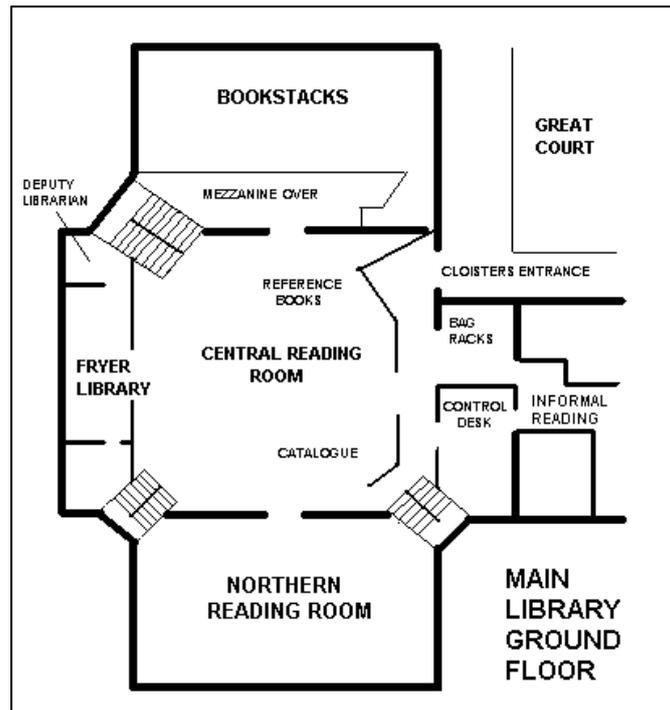
Northern reading room, ground floor (Level 2), 1950s

²² F.W. Robinson, *The University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1957), 24.

²³ Bryan, "On How Not to Design," 4.

²⁴ Bryan, "On Squaring Circles," 11.

²⁵ *Semper Floreat*, 29 June 1960, Great Hall supplement.



Floor plan of ground floor (Level 2), about 1962

The Birrell Extension

Bryan's ceaseless lobbying for an extension to the Library was finally rewarded in 1962, when the Australian Universities Commission agreed to provide funding for the project. And yet the result was not really what Bryan had hoped for, as he wanted a completely new building, on an adjacent site. In later life, he was able to reflect philosophically that the additional upper floors

were always seen as needed to balance the height of the central tower of the main building, at the end of which the temporarily truncated Library squatted. They would be considered over the years really only for this aesthetic reason rather than in terms of the Library's needs and, indeed, it was this consideration that would secure them in the end although, ironically, by that time all informed opinion (at any rate all informed Library opinion) would favour the University cutting its losses and building a new Library.²⁶

During 1962, his final year at the University of Queensland, Bryan was able to work closely on plans for the extension with the talented young architect, James Birrell, who had recently been appointed Staff Architect to the University. Born in Melbourne in 1928, Birrell had

²⁶ Bryan, *No Gray Profession*, 17.

already designed some public library buildings for the Brisbane City Council, among them the much admired Toowong Public Library.²⁷

Hennessy had not prepared any detailed plans for the projected three upper floors of the Library building, but a basic floor plan suggested that these floors were designed purely for book stacks. With book lifts but no passenger lift provided, they would only have been suitable for closed-access collections.²⁸ The high ceilings and the large light well in the centre of each floor combined to create a design that was absurdly wasteful of space.

In its place, Birrell proposed an extension of much the same height, but with five additional floors, instead of three. These floors would have ceiling heights of around nine feet (about 2.7 metres) and would be served by passenger lifts.²⁹ Extensive use of fluorescent lighting removed the need for natural lighting. Birrell's solution to Hennessy's overuse of natural lighting was to retain, in the upper floors, only the large central windows on the north and east sides; the other windows were replaced with glass bricks, which provided filtered natural light without the disadvantages of direct sunlight.

In a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor dated 14 November 1962, Birrell argued that "some simplification of detail may assist the design to bridge the stylistic gap between its conception in 1935-6 and the present day." If the façade of the completed building is not one of Birrell's more successful designs, we must remember that he was working under significant constraints. On the one hand, Hennessy & Hennessy, when consulted by the Co-ordinator General's Department about revisions to their original plans, maintained that it would not be possible to design windows for the upper levels, because of the amended floor heights. On the other hand, various senior members of the University staff were keen to see large windows on the upper floors, to take advantage of the fine views. Birrell's final design was a compromise between these two positions.³⁰ An ugly metal fire-escape on the south-western side of the building was a necessary but unfortunate addition; it was removed in a later refurbishment.

²⁷ Andrew Wilson and John Macarthur, eds., *Birrell: Work from the Office of James Birrell* (Melbourne: NMBW Publications, 1997); "Architecture as Culture: RAIA Gold Medallist James Birrell," *Architecture Australia* 94, no. 2 (2005): 90-105.

²⁸ University of Queensland Archives, plan no. 010480.

²⁹ Harrison Bryan, "Proposed Extension to Queensland's Main Library Building," *Australian Library Journal* 11(1962): 182-91.

³⁰ See correspondence relating to the Main Library extensions in Birrell Papers, Fryer Library, University of Queensland, UQFL117, Box 4, Folder 1 and plans in the same collection at A13 Folder 25.



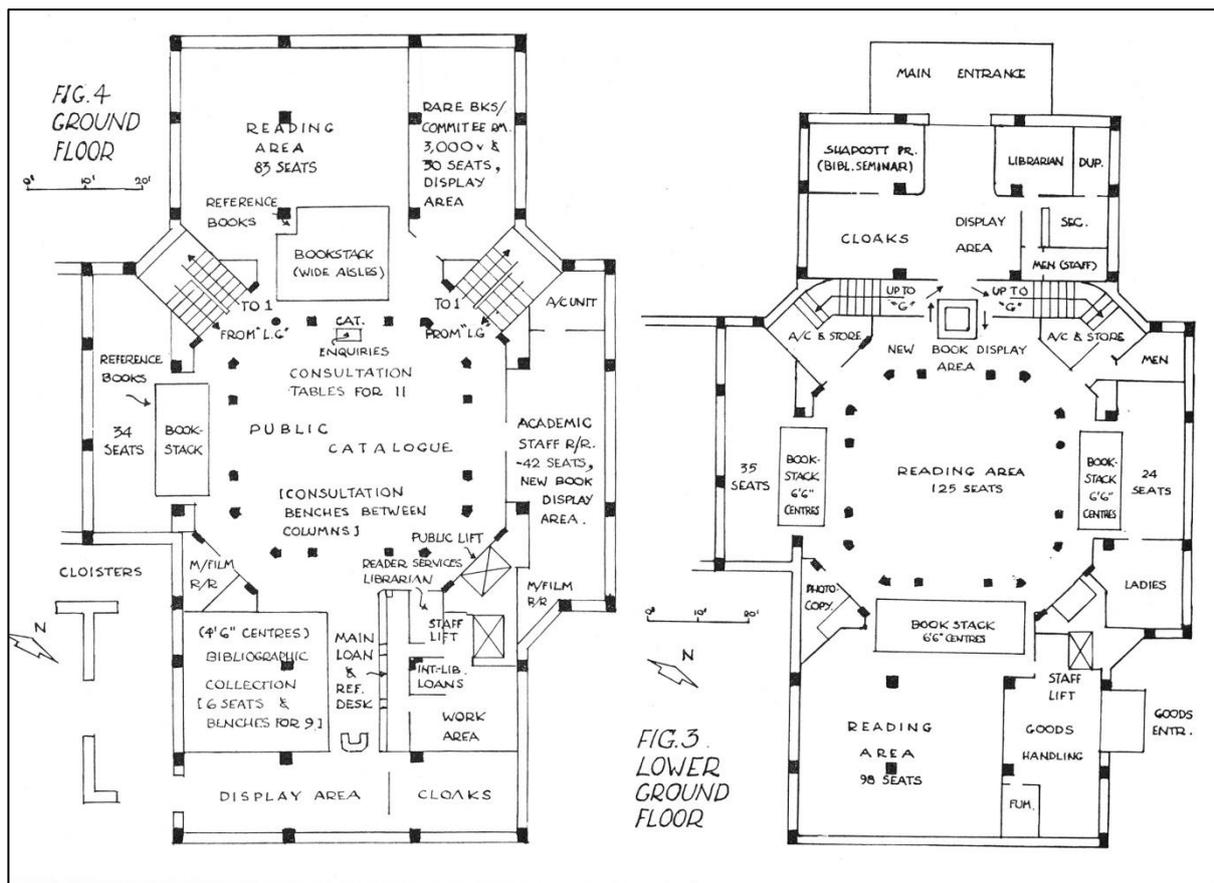
Birrell extension, 1968, from the north

Ventilation was provided by air-conditioning, which was still seen as something of a luxury. The University Registrar was obliged to write to the Secretary of the Department of the Co-ordinator General of Public Works to assure him that the air-conditioning of the whole building was essential to preserve the valuable collection of books.³¹ The comfort of Library staff and readers was not a concern.

Internally, Hennessy's light well was dispensed with. The original glass ceiling, with sandblasted motifs taken from Aboriginal artworks, which had been intended for removal and reuse when the upper floors were built, was demolished.³² Yet the original plan for the light-well continued to exert a baleful effect, because the building had been designed without any central load-bearing structures. This meant that it was necessary to leave a circular opening in the middle of the third and fifth floors (Levels 5 and 7). Even on the other floors, the central area was not strong enough to support book stacks and could only be used as a reading and study area.

³¹ Letter dated 4 February 1963 in Birrell Papers, UQFL117, Box 4, Folder 1.

³² Moore, *Forgan Smith*, 44.



Preliminary plans for ground floor and lower ground floor (Levels 2 and 1) of the Birrell extension. These plans were modified before and during construction.

The lower ground floor of the building (Level 1) took on a new life as the Open Reserve Collection of books in heavy demand from undergraduates, accessible to students but with tight security control, and with provision for reading desks. The need for improved undergraduate provision was urgent. In 1964, while the extension was still under construction, the Student Union Council had passed a motion relating to the Library, deploring, among other things, "the lack of multiple copies of essential undergraduate material."³³ The Library's annual report for that year records that "there has been a pressing demand for multiple copies of very heavily used books and about £11,000 was spent on these in 1964. It is anticipated that a similar amount will be outlaid for multiple copies in 1965."³⁴ Building work proceeded slowly and the Open Reserve section finally opened in August 1966.

³³ *Semper Floreat*, 6 October 1964, 9.

³⁴ *Annual Report*, 1964, 1.



Ground floor (Level 2) about 1972, looking north to the entrance of the Fryer Library

On the ground floor (Level 2), the "sally-port" entrance from the cloisters was replaced by a more substantial entrance, with turnstiles and staffed exit-control. There was also public access to this floor via the existing north-eastern and north-western stairs leading up from original main entrance on the lower ground floor, where an exit-control desk controlled both the Open Reserve collection and readers descending from the upper floors. The demolition of the south-eastern staircase simplified the security problem.

The busy central area of the ground floor was no longer a reading room, but instead housed the ever-growing card catalogue. Reading desks were confined to the quieter peripheral areas. For the first time it became possible to operate separate counters for loans and reference inquiries. There was now also space on this floor to develop a proper collection of reference books and bibliographies. Bryan's successor, Derek Fielding, arrived in 1965, in time to make some significant changes to the plans for this floor. He located the valuable Australiana collections of the Fryer Library in a prominent site in the former northern reading room and he dispensed with Bryan's plan for a separate reading room reserved solely for academic staff. Such a reading room had existed in the old library in George Street, but it would have been out of keeping with the more democratic mood of the 1960s.



Fryer Library (located in the northern arm of Level 2), 1969

The new first floor (Level 3) accommodated the technical services departments: acquisitions, periodicals and cataloguing. Location of these activities two floors above the goods entrance on the lower ground floor was considered problematic, particularly as so much of the material being processed would be later dispatched to the many branch libraries, but it seemed the best available option.

The remaining floors (Levels 4 to 7) provided shelving for the bulk of the collection. Reading desks were scattered throughout these floors, with large reading areas in the centre of the second and fourth floors (Levels 4 and 6), where the floor was not strong enough to support book stacks. The silky oak tables which Bryan had designed for the original reading rooms were replaced by enclosed single tables ("carrels"). Fielding reported that these single tables "are apparently not popular with the Australian Universities Commission, [but] are certainly popular with students who welcome the privacy which they allow."³⁵ Larger open tables were also provided.

Construction of the extension began early in 1964, and some of the new floors were available for occupation by the end of the following year. It was not until 1966 that the building was fully functional. Maintaining services during this lengthy construction period was extremely

³⁵ *Annual Report*, 1966, 2.

difficult; indeed Fielding reported that in 1965 "Reader Services in the Main Library had virtually broken down."³⁶

The respite gained by the addition of five floors was only brief. The 1960s were years of rapid expansion in university education in Australia, and the University of Queensland Library had to deal not only with rising student numbers, but also with increased demands for research material, as the numbers of postgraduate students and academic staff increased. In addition, a large donation of material in 1967 from the valuable Australiana collection of Father Leo Hayes "filled every storage space available in the Main Building."³⁷ In that year, more than 10,000 staff and students were using the building on some days and in the third term, with final examinations approaching, it was found necessary to extend opening hours on weekdays from 10pm to midnight.

The easy-going ways of the postwar years were over, and a much larger and less cohesive student body necessitated changes in Library policies. Library staff were required to play a more active role in policing student behaviour in the Library, and fines for overdue books were enforced more vigorously than in the past, provoking charges of "fascism" from some students.³⁸ The introduction of turnstiles for exit control was particularly unpopular, and a cartoon in the student newspaper reflected the urban myth that the turnstiles could result in castration of male students.³⁹ Restrictions on smoking in the Library, although still well short of a complete ban, were also unpopular.⁴⁰ Thefts from briefcases left in the bag racks in the Library foyers necessitated the installation, in 1972, of closed circuit television monitoring.



Main entrance from cloisters and circulation counter (Level 2), about 1972

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁷ *Annual Report*, 1967, 2.

³⁸ *Semper Floreat*, 14 July 1966, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Semper Floreat*, 15 September 1966, 3.



Fourth and fifth floors (Levels 6 and 7), 1966

A passage from Fielding's annual report for 1970 gives some idea of the Library environment at the time:

For those who work in public areas of the Main Library the experience of mass use is overwhelming in the droves of students moving through entrances and exits and in the occupation of seats, floors, stairs and window ledges by readers. Without the extra seating supplied by the carpets many readers would have long since abandoned the library. The crowding which used to be a Third Term phenomenon is now constant throughout the academic year, presumably as a result of changing teaching methods and continuous assessment.⁴¹

Fortunately, an end to these problems was now at hand. The Australian Universities Commission had recognised the need for enlarged library facilities at the University of Queensland and had accepted Fielding's proposal to build a new Central Library about one hundred metres north-west of the existing building. Construction began in 1971, and the new building was occupied during the summer vacation of 1972/73. The processing staff and much of the collection were moved out of the old building, which was now renamed the Duhig Building, in honour of a former Catholic archbishop of Brisbane who had served on the University Senate for almost half a century. Curiously, Archbishop Duhig had also been a

⁴¹ *Annual Report*, 1970, 9.

generous patron to Jack F. Hennessy, the original architect of the building, although the relationship had soured in later years and ended in litigation.⁴²

The Undergraduate Library

With the removal of the main research collections, and most of the Library staff, to the new Central Library building, the Duhig Building was redeveloped as the Undergraduate Library. This was a project that had been in the planning stages since 1969, when the Australian Universities Commission had given approval for the construction of the new Central Library. In 1970, Fielding reported that

some doubts have been expressed by people not familiar with the undergraduate library concept about its viability. While it is true that there are few British parallels ... the undergraduate library has proved its worth at many large American universities and is working successfully or being developed at most Australian universities.⁴³

At that time, there were over thirty undergraduate libraries in the United States and Canada. The prototype was the Lamont Library at Harvard University, which had opened in 1949, so the concept was by no means a new one.⁴⁴ These libraries had developed in response to new teaching methods which required students to go beyond their set textbooks and use a much wider range of readings, some specified by the academic staff and some which the students were expected to find for themselves. In universities with large research libraries, there was a perceived need for a new kind of library which went beyond the old model of a basic reserve collection of textbooks in heavy demand, but did not overwhelm the student with the full range of research material which those large libraries possessed.

As Fielding acknowledged,

... several senior academic colleagues were doubtful of the possibility of dividing service in this way. The division might inhibit good students and it was thought impossible to distinguish undergraduate material from the rest; the same books and journals were often used by all levels of students.⁴⁵

The initial undergraduate bookstock was created by removing duplicate copies from the main collection to create an undergraduate collection, which was separately housed in the Main Library until the new Central Library was ready for occupation. When the Central Library opened, the undergraduate collection was intershelved with the stock of the former Open Reserve collection, in time for the opening of the new Undergraduate Library in the refurbished Duhig Building at the beginning of the 1973 academic year. Fielding reported that

⁴² T.P. Boland, *James Duhig* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1986), 229-41, 331-36.

⁴³ *Annual Report*, 1970, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Kari Lucas, "The Undergraduate Library and Its Librarians in the Large Research University: Responding to Change to Remain Vital and Relevant," *Advances in Librarianship* 30(2006): 299.

⁴⁵ Derek Fielding, "The University of Queensland's Undergraduate Library: Cotton Purse out of Sow's Ear," *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* 5, no. 2 (1974): 62.

"about \$40,000 per year is being spent on new stock [for the Undergraduate Library], but it is intended to limit growth by ruthlessly discarding ... all books for which demand has fallen."⁴⁶ Despite this, the size of the collection almost doubled during the first ten years, from approximately 55,000 volumes to over 100,000 volumes, and growth continued thereafter, reaching a peak of over 140,000 volumes in 1996.

Adapting the building to its new function did not prove unduly difficult. The lower ground floor (Level 1) was assigned to the Thatcher Library, a growing collection of about 68,000 volumes designed solely to serve the needs of external students. Since 1965 it had been housed in the upper western end of the Forgan Smith Building. This collection was closed to internal students until 1983 and only available to them on a limited basis thereafter. Those entering the Duhig Building via the main north entrance were thus confronted with a blank wall and a small, locked door: a sad fate for Hennessy's grand foyer.

From the lower ground floor, the north-western staircase led up to the ground floor (Level 2), and along a partitioned walkway to the entrance from the cloisters and the adjacent turnstiles, which controlled all traffic exiting from the upper floors of the building. This floor remained the focus of activity and the service floor. Describing this area after the refurbishment, Fielding's comment on Hennessy's monumental reading room was that "we were unable to afford the carpet on this floor which would have lifted the environment by covering the hospital waiting room rubber tiles and warming the shire council-chamber marble."⁴⁷ Part of the book collection was shelved on this floor, and it also housed the loans desk. Staff areas on this floor remained "cramped and kinky."⁴⁸



Loan enquiries desk, Undergraduate Library, ground floor (Level 2) 1976

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 61-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.

An interesting innovation was the creation of a Readers' Adviser's desk in the middle of the floor, to create a more informal and less intimidating alternative to the traditional reference desk. The Readers' Advisers were professional librarians responsible for liaison with teaching staff, for reader education and for reference assistance, and they were seen as crucial to the effective functioning of the new Undergraduate Library.



Readers' Adviser's desk, Undergraduate Library, ground floor (Level 2), 1976

Exit control remained a problem. The south-eastern staircase, which had been removed by Birrell, re-emerged in a slightly different location as a publicly accessible fire-stair leading from the upper floors to a new exit in the former goods entrance on the lower ground floor (Level 1). It was necessary to divert traffic on this stairway through the turnstiles on the ground floor (Level 2), which was also the exit point for those descending via the existing north-east and north-west staircases or the lifts.

In a collection of high-demand material, theft was bound to be a problem. A survey toward the end of 1973 showed that 12½% of stock could not be found on the shelves or in the loan file. In response, the Library's first electronic book security system was introduced in 1974, significantly reducing losses and making the unpopular turnstiles redundant.

The first floor (Level 3) of the Duhig Building initially housed the remainder of the book collection, including the heavily used collection of photocopied journal articles. There was also an area of larger tables for informal study and group work, plus accommodation for the newly created Audio-Visual Services unit. Smoking was allowed on this floor until 1984, when the University Senate banned smoking in all libraries and lecture theatres.

The remaining floors (Levels 4-7) were initially devoted entirely to reading areas, mostly consisting of single carrels for quiet study, with a few partitioned rooms for group study. Fielding remarked that "the reading rooms have come up unexpectedly well, the formerly accursed cruciform shape breaking mass reading areas into bearable size."⁴⁹ In later years, as the book collection grew, it became necessary to use part of these floors for bookstacks. In 1979, as space problems throughout the Library's branches became acute, an area on the fifth floor (Level 7) was partitioned off to provide air-conditioned storage for fragile material that could not be sent to the Library's warehouse, and compactus shelving was installed here in 1982 to increase the storage capacity.

The Undergraduate Library was designed to meet the needs of coursework students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) in the Faculties of Arts (which then included the social sciences), Commerce & Economics and Education. Although there were some minor exceptions made over the years, it was generally the case that other faculties were served by branch libraries which provided service to both coursework students and researchers. When the Undergraduate Library opened in 1973, with seating for about 1500 readers, just over 13,000 students were enrolled in internal undergraduate courses. When the Undergraduate Library closed in 1997, the number of internal undergraduates had risen to well over 19,000 – an increase of about 50%. Of course, not all of those students were enrolled in faculties served by the Undergraduate Library, but it is clear that the demands made on the Undergraduate Library over the twenty-five years of its existence increased steadily. This is reflected in the number of items borrowed, which rose from 179,612 in 1973 to 467,968 in 1997.

For the first three years, all loan records were maintained manually, which was tedious for borrowers and exhausting for library staff. In February 1976 the Undergraduate Library became the testing ground for the Library's new automated loans system. This had been developed in-house and proved to be unstable for the first few years. Thereafter it became an indispensable tool, without which it would have been impossible to cope with the ever increasing loans traffic. The automated loans system also simplified the process of reviewing the stock to discard little-used material. Unfortunately there was no way of automating the process of reshelving returned books, and this was an area where backlogs were quick to develop and slow to clear.

Considering the doubts that had been expressed about the viability of the Undergraduate Library concept, it must have been a relief to Fielding that this new service proved to be largely successful. In 1977 he was able to report that

while there are some problems and frustrations for library staff and students in the Undergraduate Library, the basic concepts appear to have provided the best possible solution to the problems of students with deadlines.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Annual Report*, 1977, 18.

However in the lean years of the early 1980s, he began to express reservations:

The location of central and undergraduate libraries in separate buildings prevents some economies and causes some duplication in services.⁵¹

In 1984 he reported somewhat defensively that

there have been claims in the library professional press that undergraduate libraries ... are no longer an appropriate means of meeting student requirements ... There is no evidence that our Undergraduate Library is losing popularity with the students in the humanities and social sciences for whom it is intended.⁵²

An examination of the student newspaper during the years of the Undergraduate Library's existence supports Fielding's claims. Complaints about the Library centred around insufficient copies of books, reductions in opening hours, insufficient reading places at examination time and queues for service at the loans desk; however it was generally acknowledged that these problems were the result of inadequate funding from the Federal government, and not the result of bad management. The following comment from 1980 is typical:

When you have to stand in a long line of borrowers in the Undergraduate Library because the computer has broken down, make sure that you think evil thoughts about the Fraser Government's cuts to education spending.⁵³

The future journalist and novelist Matthew Condon was still an undergraduate in 1981 when he penned this highly mannered description of the Undergraduate Library for the student newspaper:

Lower floors of ash people and feminists who roll their own. Cold desert floors and small fires smouldering. Further up, games floor, paper planes, cluttering an aesthete discussion, sly pens and poor art. Closer to the clouds near the top. Rainless storms and humid cheeks reading Patrick White. A forgotten strata of boneless noises.⁵⁴

In retrospect, it is fairly clear that two developments in the late 1980s initiated the slow demise of the Undergraduate Library. The first was the introduction of an online public-access catalogue (OPAC) in 1988, containing records for the complete holdings of all the University's central and branch libraries. The second was the development of end-user searching of bibliographic databases on CD-ROM, which began with a couple of databases on workstations in the Central Library in 1988, and was extended to a workstation in the Undergraduate Library in 1989, and expanded rapidly thereafter.

⁵¹ *Annual Report*, 1981, 3.

⁵² *Annual Report*, 1984, 19.

⁵³ *Semper Floreat*, 24 July 1980, 35.

⁵⁴ *Semper Floreat*, 20 October 1981, 30.

These innovations meant that students using the Undergraduate Library could much more easily identify relevant resources available throughout the Library system, and especially in the book and journal collections in the nearby Central Library. Conversely, more researchers were making use of the bookstock in the Undergraduate Library, as budgetary pressures made it impossible to duplicate in Central Library all the titles purchased for undergraduate use. The boundaries between the Central and Undergraduate Libraries were becoming ever more blurred, and the rationale for maintaining two separate collections was becoming ever more questionable. As Fielding commented in his final annual report in 1991, "coursework students now need a broader range of information resources."⁵⁵

Meanwhile the University had decided, in 1990, to end its long involvement in external education, so the Thatcher Library was gradually being wound down and its stock discarded or incorporated into the Undergraduate Library. In 1992, the area on the lower ground floor (Level 1) which had been occupied by the Thatcher Library was refurbished to provide new premises for the expanding Library Audio Visual Services.



Library Audiovisual Services, lower ground floor (Level 1), about 1992

In 1995 this area was further refurbished and renamed Multimedia Services. For the first time, the Library was able to provide a significant (if still small) number of computer terminals for word processing and other non-Library applications. Although personal computers had been available in the Audio Visual Services section since 1982, Fielding had opposed the idea of the Library becoming a de-facto computer laboratory. However his

⁵⁵ *Annual Report*, 1991, 3.

successor, Janine Schmidt, who was appointed in 1993, accepted that there was now a need to expand services in this area.

Only a year after the expensive refurbishment of the lower ground floor, plans were being developed for a substantial internal reconstruction of the whole building. As early as 1994 Schmidt had reported that the Duhig Building and Central Library "are now showing their age. They also lack the layout and facilities needed to meet contemporary client needs."⁵⁶ The worldwide web had made its appearance and the first electronic journals were becoming available online. Librarians were starting to realise that the future of information was digital. In these circumstances, the maintenance of two separate print-based library collections to serve the humanities and social sciences, each with its own service points and staff, looked like an impossible extravagance.

And yet there was no question that both libraries were providing essential services. Loan statistics in the Undergraduate Library had never been higher. There was no question of withdrawing services: the aim was to amalgamate these two important libraries into a single service with consequent economies of scale. In 1996 the University allocated \$9.8 million for the refurbishment of the two buildings and planning began in earnest.

The architects proposed that a link building be constructed to connect the two buildings so that they could function as a single unit, with a single collection. This proposal was not universally acclaimed. Over the years, students had become very attached to the Undergraduate Library and the services that it provided, which were specifically tailored to their needs. Writing in the student newspaper in July 1996, one student pointed out that

the current arrangements meet (a little exaggeration won't hurt) the needs of undergraduate students by making available to them a large number of the most frequently borrowed books on the same terms as all other borrowers. Books in the Central Library, however, are not borrowed on equal terms.⁵⁷

For many students, the question of access to books was becoming less important than the question of access to computers. An article in the student newspaper in June 1997 commented that "general access to computers for students ... is an underdeveloped area of UQ resources."⁵⁸ With reference to computers in the Library, the same article argues that "the number of these actually available to students for personal study is not so many." Under these circumstances, the promise of substantially improved computer facilities in the refurbished building was perhaps enough to outweigh any concerns about reduced service in other respects.

In April 1997 the University Senate approved the design for the refurbishment of the two buildings, and work commenced in August. In December the collections were removed from

⁵⁶ *Annual Report*, 1994, [10].

⁵⁷ *Semper Floreat*, July 1996, 6.

⁵⁸ *Semper Floreat*, June 1997, 18.

the Duhig Building and intensive construction work began on that site and continued until the middle of the following year.

The Wilson Refurbishment

The contract for the design of the refurbished Central and Undergraduate Libraries was awarded to Wilson Architects, a long established Brisbane firm. It was Blair Wilson, principal architect in this firm, who originally suggested that the two buildings be combined by constructing a link between them,⁵⁹ and his son, Hamilton Wilson, was given responsibility for the project. For Hamilton Wilson, born in 1961 and a fourth-generation architect, the project proved to be career-changing. His collaboration with the University Librarian, Janine Schmidt, was close and fruitful and led to further major commissions in the university sector.⁶⁰

Wilson's design did not call for any major change to the façade of the Duhig Building, except for the construction of the Link building, a low structure which ran from the north-west side of the bottom floor across to the south-east corner of the Central Library. Because of the heritage value of both the Duhig Building and the adjacent Forgan Smith Building, this new structure had to be discreet and of low profile, to the point where it appears underground when approached from the west. On the eastern side it is partly obscured by vegetation.

Following the refurbishment, the original Duhig Building (now referred to as the Duhig Tower) is effectively no longer a building in its own right, but part of a larger complex. Whether or not this complex functions efficiently is debatable. For years after the refurbishment, it was not uncommon for confused readers to circle the former Central Library building (now referred to as Duhig North), peering through windows, trying to find their way in, not realizing that the only public entrance was via the Duhig Tower, one hundred metres away. This problem was finally resolved in 2009 when the former south-east entrance to the Central Library was reopened and a new exit from the Link was created nearby. At the same time, a sliding door was inserted at the south end of the Link building, enabling it to be isolated from the Duhig Tower. The Duhig North building (with the Link) began to function again as an independent building. This was a tardy recognition that the original aim of creating a single functional unit from the two library buildings had never been entirely successful. Nevertheless, when considering the post-1997 career of the Duhig Tower, it is essential to bear in mind that it was designed to function as part of a larger unit, and that it still does so to some extent.

On Level 1, Wilson revived Hennessy's grand vestibule, albeit in a more modern idiom, with a broad new staircase ascending to Level 2. Inevitably there have been complaints of wasted space, but the fault for that lies with Hennessy's original design, and Wilson has succeeded in creating an attractive entrance worthy of the Library's premier building and of one of the two

⁵⁹ Janine Schmidt, "From the University Librarian," *Links (University of Queensland Library)* 496(1998): 8.

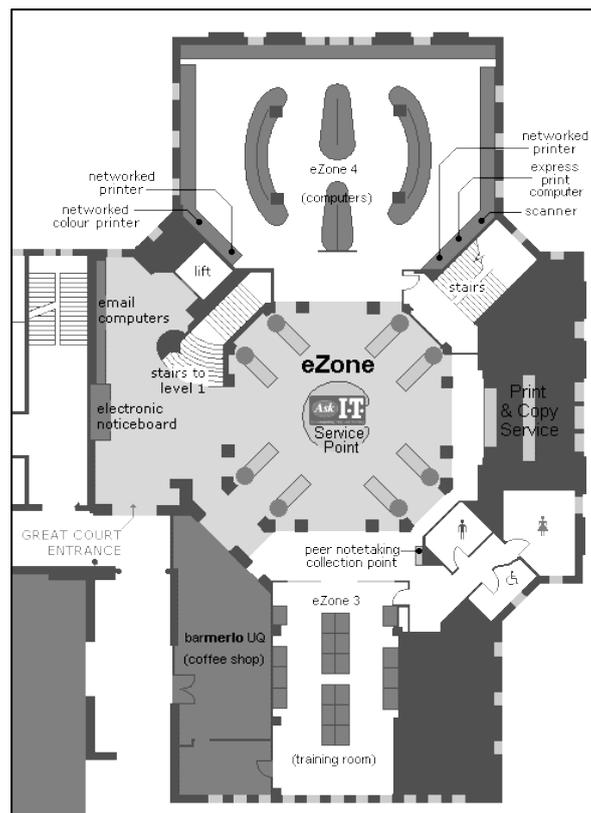
⁶⁰ Bruce Campbell, ed. *Wilson Architects, 1884-2004: Four Generations of Continuous Practice* (Brisbane: Wilson Architects, 2004), 20, 22.

original University buildings. On the other (south) side of this floor, Hennessy's grandiose dimensions have allowed Wilson to create a spacious and effective conference room. The two small training rooms which complete the accommodation on this floor have proved popular with those who teach in them.

In their overview of the refurbishment project, Schmidt and Wilson declared, as a principle of library design, that "from the foyer the unfamiliar client should be able to 'read' the layout of the building to be able to move comfortably and confidently in all parts of the library."⁶¹

Many of the staff who have worked on enquiry desks in the refurbished building would maintain that the architect failed in this objective, but it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise, in such a complex structure.

Level 2 is still the centre of activity in the Duhig Tower. Most of the expensive Ulam marble has gone, surviving only on the pillars around the central octagon. In a (probably unconscious) act of homage to the original plan, a large circular enquiry desk (for IT help) stands where Hennessy had planned a circular supervisor's desk, and large tables with laptop connections fan out from this desk, in much the layout that Hennessy had planned for the reading desks.



Floor plan of Level 2, Duhig Tower, 2007

⁶¹ Janine Schmidt and Hamilton Wilson, "Designing the Real Virtual Library: An Overview of the Preparation of an Upgrade for the University of Queensland Library," in *Robots to Knowbots: The Wider Automation Agenda: Proceedings, Victorian Association for Library Automation 9th Biennial Conference and Exhibition, January 28-30, 1998* (Melbourne: VALA, 1998), 131.

The northern arm of this floor, which Hennessy had planned as a reading room with desks and tables, now provides accommodation for a large number of computer workstations, so the function remains much the same, even if the equipment has changed. The 18-foot ceilings have been artificially lowered somewhat, to provide space for ducting, and the tall windows shielded with blinds. The short eastern arm of this floor houses the printing services, and in the southern arm is a large training room, which functions poorly because of the high ceilings and the noise from adjacent areas.

The attractive silky oak doors which Birrell inserted as the main entrance from the cloisters now lead into a café, which is also accessible from inside the Library. The provision of a "social meeting area/coffee shop" had been one of the objectives of the refurbishment from the earliest stages.⁶² In the short western arm of Level 2 there is a new doorway into the Library from the cloisters and as ever, it provides a convenient and heavily-used thoroughfare for pedestrians travelling from the Great Court to buildings and car-parking areas on the other side of the Duhig Tower. As there are no longer any open-access library collections in the Duhig Tower, there are no problems of collection security to contend with, so there are no ugly partitions to detract from the appearance of this floor, which, if not exactly as Hennessy envisaged it, is still an attractive area.



IT help desk, Level 2, Duhig Tower, 2010

However it is also a very busy, very noisy area, enriched by the buzz and odours emanating from the café. At peak times there are queues for computers, queues for the IT help desk and

⁶² Ibid., 126.

queues for the printing and copying services, to say nothing of the through traffic passing by. Remarkably, there are some students who work happily for hours in this environment, hunched over their laptops at the tables which fan out from the central help desk. Other students take one look at this area and flee in search of quieter study places upstairs or in the adjacent Duhig North building.

To access the upper floors, there is now a lift where the north-west stairway once stood. The north-east stairway remains. The fire-stair in the south-east corner is now only accessible by Library staff, and the adjacent lift inserted by Birrell is also for staff use only. This means that publicly accessible areas on the upper floors lie towards the north side of the building so as to be easily accessible from the public lift and the north-east stairway.

Level 3 is now a staff area. Most of these staff work on enquiry desks located some distance away on Level 1 of the Duhig North building, and they also work with print or multimedia collections scattered across the four levels of that building. The considerable separation of these staff from the service desks and from the collections is one of the unresolved problems of the Duhig complex.

Levels 4 and 5 contain a Postgraduate Study Area, complete with lockable desks and lockers. The lower ceilings of the Birrell extension help to make this an attractive study area. Level 5 also offers three group study rooms, which are insufficient to meet the demand for such spaces, as group work becomes an ever more important feature of student life. The failure to provide more group rooms was to some extent rectified during the 2009 refurbishment of the Link building, which provided additional spaces for group work.



Postgraduate study area, Level 4, Duhig Tower, 2001

Level 4 also contains the reading room and enquiry desk of the Fryer Library, which houses the Library's heritage collections and rich holdings of Australian literature, these being the only paper-based collections still housed in the Duhig Tower. This is an attractive area, not marred by the large circular opening in the floor above (an abiding legacy of the structural weakness of Hennessy's plan). The Fryer Library suffers from having its collections scattered across Levels 3, 4, 5 and 7 of the Duhig Tower. This dispersal of the Fryer collections no doubt owes much to the limited load-bearing areas on each floor, but it makes the retrieval of material for readers slow and expensive.



Fryer Library reading room, Level 4, Duhig Tower, 2010

Level 6 is another staff area, occupied mainly by administrative staff. The University Librarian's office is cleverly situated to benefit from one of the few upper-floor windows that Birrell retained from Hennessy's plan, and it offers impressive views. The central area of this floor lies beneath another circular structural opening, but in this case the opening is surmounted by a lightweight dome which unfortunately creates acoustical problems for those seated below. Level 7 contains shelving for a large part of the Fryer collection, along with some additional office and storage areas.

Wilson's refurbishment acknowledged and respected the representational function of the Duhig Tower, one of the University's flagship buildings. Like Hennessy and Birrell before him, he had to balance that objective against the practical problems of creating successful spaces for study, research, recreation and administration. It has never been an easy task.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is the perennially nagging consciousness of our mortality that makes us admire survivors. Certainly the Duhig Building is a survivor: seventy-five years since it was first designed, it is still used by thousands of students and staff on any weekday during the university semester. There are not many academic library buildings in Australia which have been in continuous use as libraries over the same length of time.

This longevity is a tribute to the librarians and architects who have been able to adapt the Duhig Building to meet the changing needs of a growing university and to respond to the new formats in which information is being disseminated. However the survival of the Duhig Building as a library space probably owes something also to the monumental nature of Hennessy's original design. We are loath to dispense with our monuments. Even when the monument becomes an awkward legacy from our forebears, a superstitious respect urges us to preserve it.

Nonetheless, monuments do not stand forever. Ozymandias-like, they fall and decay. In their 1998 overview of the refurbished building, Schmidt and Wilson wondered "Will it be future-proof?"⁶³ That is a question which still needs to be asked.

⁶³ Ibid., 134.