



The Lasok Law Library

The shared library at the Combined Universities in Cornwall site at Tremough has also benefited from integration with an exciting new 'Exchange' building; this has been designed to bring together teaching and learning spaces and some student services into one innovative location and was handed over in September 2012.

Realising the vision: building the Sir Duncan Rice Library at Aberdeen¹

Chris Banks
*University Librarian and Director
Library, Special Collections and Museums
University of Aberdeen
c.banks@abdn.ac.uk*

When, just over five years ago, I announced to colleagues at the British Library – where I had worked since 1987 - that I was to move to Aberdeen to take up the post of University Librarian, there were some raised eyebrows and some mutterings. The more vocal of the commentators saw the proposal to build a new University Library as a bit of a folly: 'everything is going online isn't it?' and 'students can work anywhere and don't necessarily need to use a library'. Having moved with the British Library from the British Museum to the new building in St Pancras, and having seen the growth in reader and visitor numbers I wasn't about to write off the importance of the library as an important physical space. The experience at Aberdeen, where we have seen over a 50% increase in visitor numbers to the building (and 102% increase in occupancy) since opening the new building confirm that the physical library remains very important indeed.

But, to step back for a moment, the attraction of the Aberdeen opportunity was threefold:



*Aberdeen University campus and the
Sir Duncan Rice Library
Photo credit: Adam Mørk*

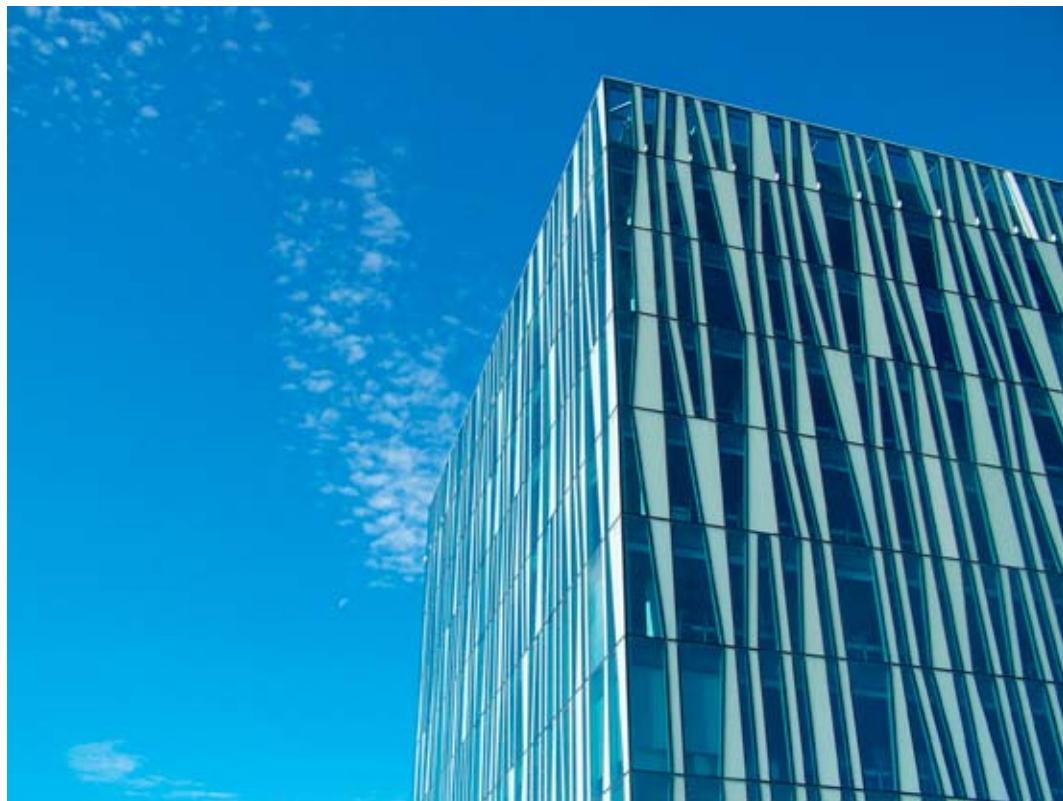
- 1 The University's collections: Aberdeen is an ancient University that has been collecting throughout its 500 year existence and has assembled some wonderful treasures of international significance as well as collections of considerable depth and breadth. Additionally it had become an early investor in online resources
- 2 The University's commitment to building a new Library and Special Collections Centre, and its commitment to building an iconic building (the architects had, following an international competition, been selected at the time of my appointment)
- 3 The vision of the University's then Principal, Professor (now Sir) Duncan Rice, that the new building would not only serve as a fitting study and research environment for the academics and students of the University, but that it would also provide the opportunity to share and showcase the University's treasures to the wider public.

My arrival at Aberdeen coincided with the submission of the planning application to proceed with the project. The architects who had won the competition to design it were Schmidt Hammer Lassen. SHL have a strong record in library and other cultural buildings, including the award winning "Black Diamond" in Copenhagen - their imaginative extension to the Old Royal Library there.

In progressing the project since my arrival we took a holistic approach: we looked at process and workflow and used this to inform location and layout; we analyzed borrowing and use data in order to inform our decision making about which collections would be prioritized for the open access stock; we sought to eliminate complexity and to respond to the substantial body of feedback that had been assembled over previous years, and we have worked with the key features of the design in planning layouts and facilities. Additionally, we continued to keep abreast of library space developments and have used findings to make relevant modifications to the design as part of an iterative process of development and refinement. Never, when I took my music degree all those years ago did I think that I'd ever need to know about the setting temperatures of concrete, the parameters which are required for silicone to perform its magic (or science), or the detailed legislation surrounding procurement of everything from construction to chairs.

To summarize, here are some of the approaches we took, and the outcomes:

- Process improvement: we looked particularly at the process of ordering and processing of monographs, looking at the various stages of the process (for us, this was across 3 teams). Our facilitator used KaiZen as a tool and this has resulted in a more efficient ordering pro-



The Sir Duncan Rice Library

cess, shorter processing times, the co-location of the book acquisitions and documentation teams, and the re-location of their office so that it minimized “book miles” within the new building

- Automating processes: we have not only been able to use the new building to take the opportunity both to move to RFID and faster self-issue - it is up from 36% to 89% - but also to install automated self returns equipment and a book sorter. Self return is available 24/7 through the introduction of an external returns facility.
- Prioritizing printed collection for open access shelving: our loan data showed that nearly 50% of the stock in the Queen Mother Library had not been borrowed since our online borrowing records began in 1999. We supplemented this data with a three year survey of onsite use – users were asked not to replace books on shelves but to place them on dedicated trolleys and individual items were subsequently scanned. We were seeking to identify whether there was substantial onsite use which was not captured in the borrowing data and whilst initially it looked as though something approaching 5% of materials were being used onsite but not borrowed, over the period of the survey most of those “onsite use only” items translated into loaned

items. With this evidence we were able to prioritize the stock destined for open access.

- Reducing complexity: survey and anecdotal evidence suggested that the layout in the Queen Mother Library was not logical. The footprint of the building did not help with this, neither did the fact that the organization of the stock was not logical – with up to three locations for any subject – and that journals were scattered amongst the various subject classes. We have integrated the sequences, and we now have a dedicated journals floor. Despite the fact that the new library houses only around 50% of the open access stock formerly in the Queen Mother Library, we have seen a reversal in the decline in book borrowing.
- New Library spaces: visits to other libraries have informed our planning for study spaces. We have introduced 16 Co-Labs – fully equipped group study spaces seating up to 8. Having seen that much “funky furniture” in other re-developments was frequently not used, we have avoided this and have gone for functional, varied furniture. Visits to other institutions resulted in some basic “norms”: round tables encourage collaboration and rectangular tables encourage more formal behavior and quiet study.



The atrium and book stacks



Study desks

Photo credit: Adam Mørk

- **Managing the planning:** a large project is likely to result in a large number of procurement exercises. Depending on the value of any component element of the project, it may be necessary to go to full EU tendering. For all procurements it is essential early on to identify the procurement route, and the likely duration of each individual procurement exercise. But, above all, there is a need to recognize that any project is likely to have a finite number of individuals who can be involved in these procurement exercises (library, estates, finance), and that in order for these to be managed effectively, they need to be timetabled to take account of the human resource available.
- **Logical layout:** modern collections are distributed across the seven tower floors. In planning for the layout of those floors we took into account the likely noise levels, particularly at the atrium, and we planned for a horizontal approach to noise management with the collaborative spaces being placed near the lifts and the silent study rooms being placed furthest away from the main entry to each floor (and with an additional buffering of book cases for good measure). We also sought to ensure that where any function was duplicated across floors it was

located in the same place on all floors as far as was possible to ensure a visible consistency of approach.

- **Fundraising:** special collections provide a wonderful opportunity for fundraising, particularly where there is also an element of public engagement with a new build project. At Aberdeen we have raised around £19m from a variety of private individuals, businesses, trusts and foundations. For us, this funding has enabled us to create a purpose built gallery in which we can showcase our collections (and others – we have ensured that we meet requirements for Government Indemnity should we wish to borrow from other national collections). Since the commencement of our own project both the REF and the emergence of the “public engagement with research” agenda have been powerful and affirming.
- **Minimizing the environmental impact of the building:** at Aberdeen there is a commitment to using renewable resources wherever possible and also a commitment to build new buildings which respect the environment. The new library achieved a BREEAM Excellent rating and, despite the fact that we provide BS5454 for our archival and manuscript collections, positive contributory elements include:

- Rainwater harvesting – water is filtered and stored for use
- Photovoltaic cells on the roof
- Link in with the University's existing Combined Heat Power station



The Special Collections Centre



The Wolfson Reading Room

Since the first phase of opening in September 2011 the building has proven to be a magnet for those studying at Aberdeen and, as mentioned above, we have seen a significant increase in footfall and occupancy. Additionally, we are attracting significant numbers of external visitors to our exhibition and events programmes. We have received many positive comments about the building but my favorite, because it sums up what we were trying to achieve, is "If Apple built libraries they'd be like this: white and shiny and intuitive". We owe the white and shiny to our design team and we are quietly proud of the "intuitive" statement.

NOTES:

1. This article is an updated version of 'Aberdeen University Library', *Panlibus Magazine* (issue 25, Autumn 2012), pp 10-11 and is reproduced here with permission.
2. Further information is available on the University of Aberdeen library web pages at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/about/main/>