

Some Simple Lessons from the Renovations to the Carmelite Library in 2006

Presented by Philip Harvey at the ANZTLA Conference in Perth, July 2010.

1.

When the Carmelites in Melbourne sold their monastery in Donvale to the Coptic Church, they moved their Library to the Carmelite Hall, a spacious building in their parish at Middle Park.

Provide adequate space for expansion over the next twenty to thirty years. Libraries need to think in the long term.

2.

The Hall, built in 1918, had a raised and sloped stage for theatre and public meetings. The plan was to remove the stage and build a mezzanine, but council's architect and theatre and heritage lobbyists heard about the plan and successfully halted progress through government. It is one of only half a dozen sloped stages left in Melbourne.

Be aware of the heritage rights and significance of the buildings under renovation.

3.

Plans for the Hall had to be redrawn, with the Library now having use of most of the space, including the impractical sloping stage. An architectural firm with experience in school libraries drew up plans for a new theology library.

From the start, make sure that librarians and library experts are involved in all consultation and planning. The librarian and her committee need to be kept regularly informed of all plans, decisions, and changes that pertain to the Library itself as a working environment with its own special needs. From the start, make sure that everything you want for the Library is included in the plan.

4.

Part of the architectural brief was for renovation of the Hall, as well as the adjacent Church and gardens. In 2006 the entire Library collection was removed from the Hall space for the year of renovations.

Formulate a fully staged and timed process, ensuring that the collection remains available throughout the period of renovation. Avoid closing the Library for any extended period. Do not underestimate the substantial cost of removal and reinstallation.

5.

Specifications were provided by the librarian for optimum use of space, including shelving arrangement, stack allocation, and office. Due to difficulties in the planning procedures, time and cost constraints, not all of these specifications could be met by the architects.

The relationship between the Library owner and the architects is one of patron and client. Ideally but also in practical terms, those who design and renovate the Library will be following any of the direct specifics coming from the Library itself. The Library should formulate and document essential requirements and provide the same to the architects.

6.

In the summer of 2006-7 the collection was returned from its temporary house north of the Yarra River, mainly because the shelving had been erected.

Shifting a collection is a time-consuming activity. You should plan to minimise the amount of necessary shifting likely to happen in the whole process. Whenever possible, hire professional library removalists. The consultant of the removal company should inspect your site and inspire confidence that he understands your needs. This will not necessarily be the cheapest quote. The Library staff will spend enough time as it is moving the collection once it's in the new building.

7.

Certain renovations were continuing inside the Library after the collection was rehoused. At the same time, the staff was arranging all areas of the Library to suit future daily management.

Librarians should not be working inside a construction site. You need to be knowledgeable about the occupational health and safety issues of such circumstances. Also, it is useful to remember the rule of thumb about new libraries: architects design libraries to work effectively and, once they are out of the building, the librarians move in and redesign everything so the library can work effectively.

8.

It was only after the entire collection, including stack and the large donations collection, was out of boxes and back in the building that space allocation could be finalised. Only then could we allocate exact use of locked rooms, practice feng shui on study spaces, and determine the best position for the furniture.

Prepare an ideal ground plan for the Library that addresses all available spaces and their concomitant issues. This plan should be with the architects and planners at the earliest stages of design.

9.

Although we were back in the building in 2007, the builders and electricians still had to set up the wiring for the computer network and the Library system. The building is ninety years old and not designed for the needs of modern electronics. This was also a question in regard to lighting.

Plan for the imagined future online and computer requirements of the Library, its staff and users. Be aware of the potentialities and limitations of the building's structure, in this regard. Likewise with heating and air-conditioning, if total climate control is unaffordable, you might need to decide whether you heat the library or the users. If the budget is tight, it is sensible to create smaller climate-controlled spaces for the users rather than for the stacks.

10.

After the Library re-opened, the Carmelites followed the advice of a Library task force and established a Library Board of Governance. One of the Board's first requests was for a report on security of the building. A list of security issues was collected, with quotes for work that needed to be done.

Pre-existing buildings are always going to require a review of security when renovations are proposed. Identify any security issues both before and after the renovations.

Other issues:

Signage; staff amenities; ventilation; electrical/internet outlets for users in carrels or nearby; internet use security and legal issues; long-term storage overflow issues (need to plan for compactus, offsite storage, or alternatives); special requirements: e.g. lockers, rare books, reserve, &c.; in 1- or 2-person libraries, effective line-of-sight location of librarian's office for supervision, accessibility to users, oversight of entries and exits; sound-proof areas