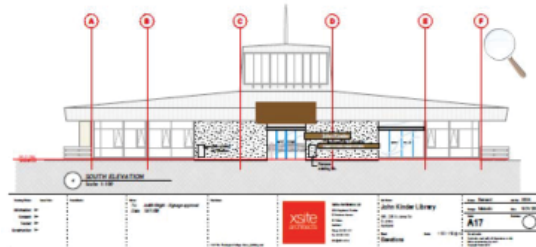


Brand Becomes Visible: The Renovation of a Library

*The John Kinder Theological Library,
Anglican Church in Aotearoa,
New Zealand and Polynesia*

by Judith Bright



Once upon a time, a bishop set up a library in the north of New Zealand in a CMS building. It was part of his dream for a college to train young men for ministry and for a diocesan centre. In time the college, church centre and library moved to Auckland, and it wasn't until 1910 that a purpose-built building housed the library.



“In 1979, with books spilling out into corridors, and the building crumbling, a new library was built, with space for 50 years, and all ‘mod cons’ as they were then known.”

In 1979, with books spilling out into corridors, and the building crumbling, a new library was built, with space for 50 years, and all ‘mod cons’ as they were then known. Computers didn’t feature. This library was opened in 1981, as a triumph of current library architecture.



In 2009, we had the opportunity to move forward again.

I never really liked the 1981 building, but it had one particularly good feature: all load bearing was on pillars rather than internal walls. We had, thank goodness, built for the future, which brings me to the first of the important points.

Be as forward thinking as you can; build for the future, not the now.

By this century, the 1981 building had grown tired, libraries were not what they used to be, our students were noisier in the library than some thought that they should be, and we were tired of poking new holes in the concrete floor for computer cables as yet another lot of technology enthused us.



But – to do anything about it required buy-in for those who would pay and those who would support such a significant financial project.



“How could the trustees catch the vision of the potential of a 21st century library when they tended to think in terms of printed books and seats and quiet?”

Thus it was vitally important that we consulted our stakeholders, and let them catch the vision of what we were trying to achieve.

Get your stakeholders on board – let them catch the vision.

Our interested parties or stakeholders came from three cultural groups – Maori, Pacific and European, and from both the theological college and the wider Anglican Church. In 2005 the Kinder Library at St John’s Theological College had become the John Kinder Theological Library for the whole Anglican Church in New Zealand and in Polynesia. We had an urgent need to re-brand what and how we delivered so that our now much wider group of stakeholders supported our direction.

A consultation in 2005 had provided church input into the wider library strategy, and a refurbishment of the building became one of the six agreed goals – it was to be a space that was welcoming and accessible to all students and other users whether they were Maori, Pacific or European.

The Trustees (the money people) also needed to be convinced that we had done our homework. And as they work to a business model, so did we.

So – the Strategic Plan

The 2005 consultation goals morphed into the bones of our strategic plan to formalise what were we trying to achieve, why, and what would be the outcome of spending all this money? Where did it fit in the grand scheme of things for the Anglican Church? How to convince them that they couldn’t exist without our refurbished library?

How could the trustees catch the vision of the potential of a 21st century library when they tended to think in terms of printed books and seats and quiet? We invited them to come and meet in the library and see just what we were talking about. It worked. The project was agreed to. The additional bonus of this visit was their request for better showcasing the approach to the building – thus we also got permission to re-landscape the surrounding grounds.

So where to start?

Know what you want your spaces to do and be.

A summary of our brief went a bit like this

- Seen as friendly by all cultural groups
- Welcoming entry way
- Silent reading/research space
- Talking space
- Group discussion/seminar space
- Reference/issue desk both standing and sitting
- Anglican ‘branding’



“I thought in terms of the lights going north to south and the shelving going east to west. The architect thought in terms of our ‘weaving of cultures’ theme and zig-zagged them.”

Do your homework - go on a library crawl.

Do your homework – visit other libraries, measure spaces, brainstorm with your colleagues, dream about it. Know what you want your spaces to do. Know what the issues are for your library. End up with a brief for the architect that you are quite clear about. Make sure that the architect is also clear about your requirements. Keep talking until this is achieved. Ensure that the architect catches the vision. Take her/him on a library crawl to see good (and bad) examples.

Understand about current library trends and how they may influence your future.

It’s a bit like crystal ball gazing, but you can future proof to some extent just as we did with the ‘no load bearing walls’ back in the 1980s.

Insist on upgrading anything that it is possible to upgrade, e.g. network wiring from cat 5 to cat 6 while the ceiling tiles are down and the wiring exposed. Read, read, read, visit and question.

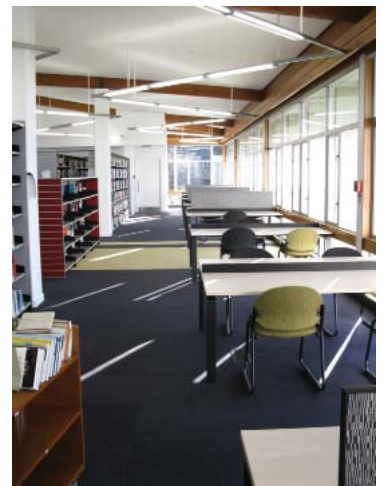
Insist on an architect BUT don’t try to micromanage the architect.

Look at the lights in this photograph. We specified that there had to be lighting that would illuminate between the book stacks. I thought in terms of the lights going north to south and the shelving going east to west. The architect thought in terms of our “weaving of cultures” theme and zig-zagged them. How cool is that, and would I have ever thought of that myself?!

So let your architect catch your vision, but don’t try to dictate where you want specific things – you are paying for expertise, why not wait and see just what is suggested. I would never have thought of some of the things that he did. But do agree together on what you do not want.

Find out how to read plans.

Find out how to read plans – preferably accurately and intelligently – or at least cultivate the art of pretending to do so, and then rush off and find out what they were really talking about. But seriously: it is too easy for things to end up not what you wanted because you didn’t realize that a little line on a plan did mean something after all.



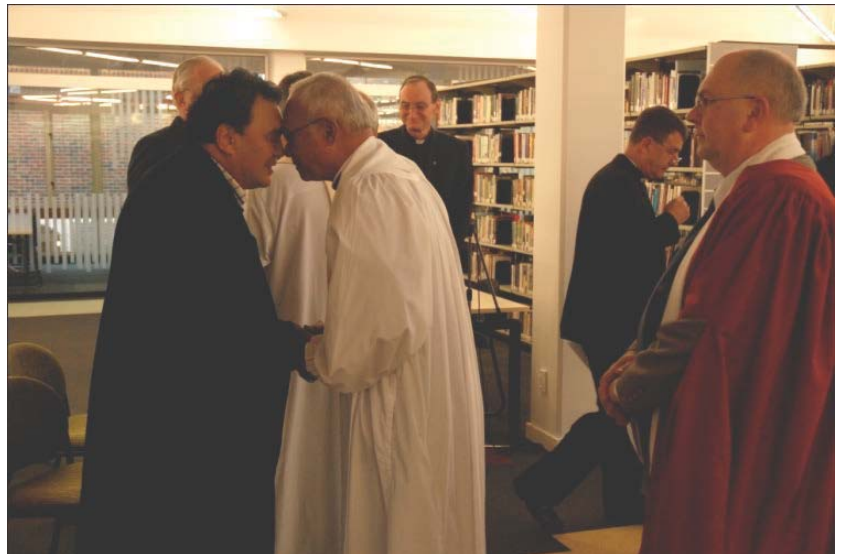
Be a member of the site meetings.

If you are not there, decisions can be made that affect the result and you will know nothing about it. If you really want to be indispensable, provide coffee and cake for the meeting.

Build trust in your ability to work with others to direct the project. I worked with the Board's facilities manager, the architect, a project manager as well as technical people. I was always consulted (well, mostly) about decisions, and was part of the weekly on-site meetings. That's how you pick up the problems before it is too late. Don't be afraid to question decisions if something seems not to be how you envisaged it.

Keep people informed. Market what you are trying to do.

Be prepared to look silly if that's what it takes. Once it is out there and public, it's harder for someone to try to derail your plans. Use such marketing opportunities for new clients – but make sure that you prepare what you want the interviewer to write up.



Make the re-opening as public as possible.

Make a really big thing of the re-opening: we invited New Zealand's three archbishops to do the liturgical bits, and invited bishops and trust members, students and librarians from other libraries including our National Librarian. Some brought others, including overseas guests. Invite anyone that you think will be an advocate for your library, and feed them well afterwards.

We had a dawn opening and then breakfast. It is much harder for someone within the hierarchy to question if they have been part of a liturgical welcome.

And – while you move – have fun.

Well – at least our young helpers did.



But – what did we get out of this major exercise? Just about everything that we had dreamed about.

The approach to the library

Note the openness of the doorway, the “woven” canopy drawing you in, the seating areas outside, the visibility of the name, and the warmth of the light grey versus the brick which was looking decidedly dated.



The interior overview

Note the repainted light well which does much to bring light into the building, the open gathering space which we have used for speaking occasions – 70 people present – a poetry reading evening, and drinks.

Look at the colours – the red and charcoal of the Anglican cross, the weaving patterns in carpet and tile.



The issue/reference desk

Note the move away from what had been perceived as a brick barrier, to a woven facade with an obvious area for a seated conversation.

This desk is now staffed at all times that the library is open.



Te Aho Marama – our silent reading and research space



Now we don't have to stop people talking in the main library area, and we also have a secure area for special collections use.

Looking towards the entry, and also Te Whariki – group study room



Staff area



The landscaping

The landscaping won us a gold award at the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects' biennial awards – chiefly for the integration between indoors and out – the flow of woven pattern tiles right into the library, and the outdoor sitting area immediately adjacent to the library. Note the path that now leads you right from the car park.



“We just love what we have become.”

So – in summary

If you are considering the possibility of refurbishing - do think outside the square. Do all of your books have to remain in the library? Do all books have to be instantly available? Because the floor space was limited and we wanted to use so much of it for activities other than book storage, we did a significant ‘weed’. All books published before 1960 are now in a stack on another floor. Previously it was a 1930 cut-off.

We disposed of all short run unbound periodicals unless there was a very good case for keeping them. Again, we moved most pre-1980 bound volumes to a stack location. Who uses them in this age of online full text?

The staff area got reorganized to allow the big reference desk area, and I tried to encourage the staffroom to be a work space rather than a storage space.

But overall, we are well pleased, and continue to enjoy the amazed first impressions of those who are visiting for the first time since the refurbishment. We just love what we have become.



View more images of the renovations to the John Kinder Theological Library by downloading the supplementary file (on the right-hand-side under Reading Tools).