

Moving the Colin Library to Smaller Premises: Planning and Execution

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Introduction

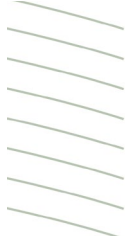
There is a substantial body of writing about what I would call happy building projects for libraries. Where possible we would like to move into more spacious, accessible, well-lit spaces, with few constraints and many new opportunities. The reality is different. I suggest we all need to plan for changes in our organizations that involve a downsizing. While this may have been a trial for us, there are some good things I hope I can share with you.

Our chronology: beginning in early 2021 we knew we would be moving premises and the certainty was that the new premises would be smaller. The architect's plans were circulated. There was a round of discussions. The floor space for the library was an important consideration. By mid-2021, the move to an historic building was agreed. We took possession on 1 January 2022 and builders created offices and did the necessary work to make meeting rooms into teaching spaces. The move of staff offices happened at the end of April and the library was moved in 3 days in May 2022.

Planning ahead:

For me, the first step was rereading past conference papers:

- Harvey, Philip. "[Renovations: A New Look for Libraries.](#)" *ANZTLA EJournal*5 (2010): 80-82.
- Bright, Judith. "[Brand Becomes Visible: The Renovation of a Library.](#)" *ANZTLA EJournal*5 (2010): 83-93.



Both of these articles are useful. Perhaps the most useful aspects were the checklists. In the case of the Kinder library - the keywords in the brief:

- friendly
- welcoming
- silent
- talking
- group work

In the Carmelite example, a list of 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, off site storage, or alternatives)
- special requirements: e.g. lockers, rare books, reserve
- sound-proof
- and 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

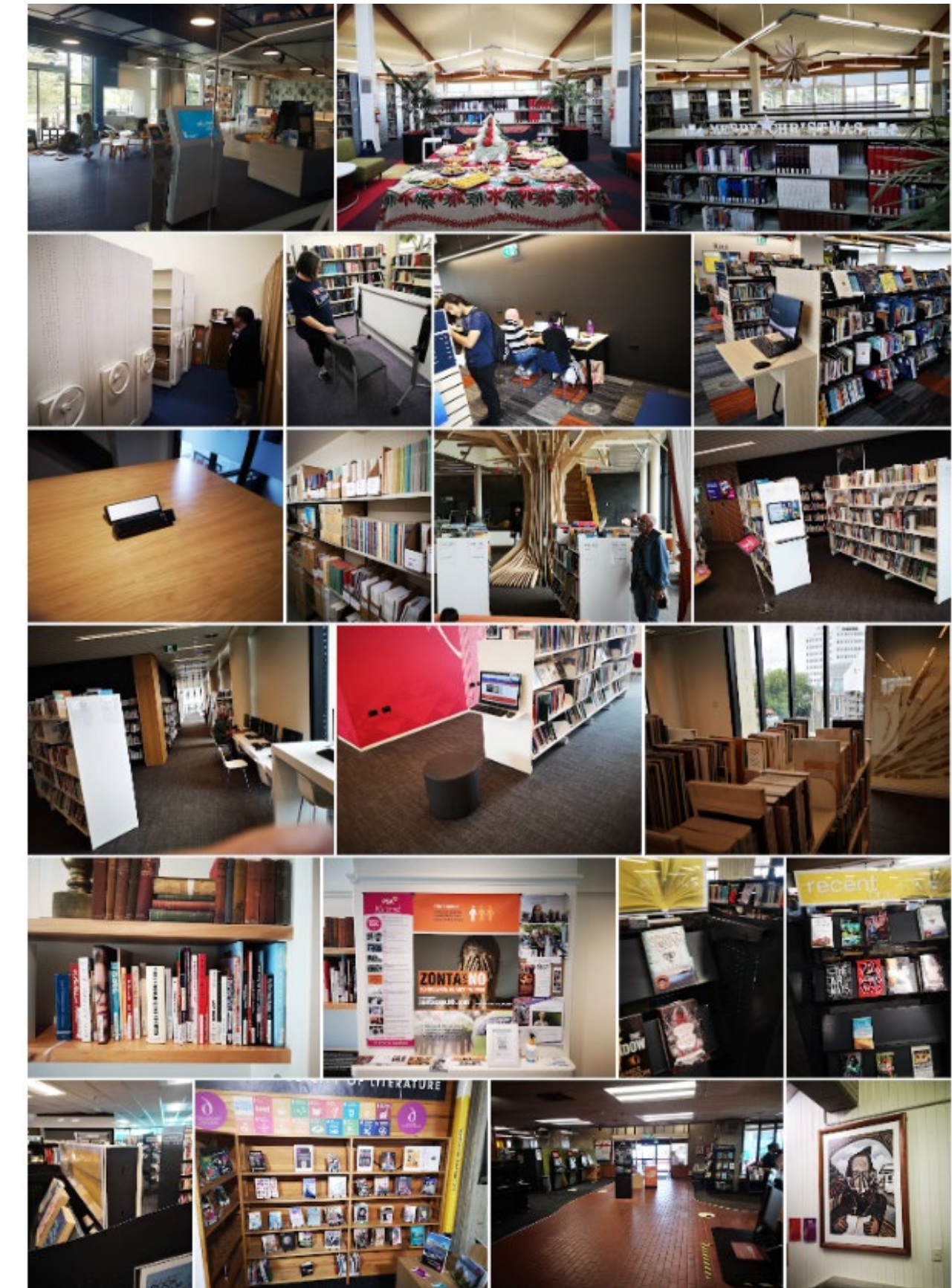
These articles are more useful than accounts of futuristic designs and seemingly no budget constraints eg: Lushington, Nolan, Rudolf, Wolfgang, Wong, Liliane, and Blake, Norma. *Libraries: A Design Manual*. 2018. But ... nice to look through.

So, you see my problem: far too many books and too little space. We were going from a spacious 340 square metres to just under 170 square metres.

TIP #1: Do some reading. It is free, fun and reassuring.

I also organised visits to two theological libraries. I was well acquainted with these libraries but it couldn't hurt to have at least a couple of academics who had seen things so that at later meetings I could refer to them.

On the following page is a snapshot of photos from a number of libraries... lots of shelving possibilities, but also ideas for entranceways, study desks, entertaining spaces, artworks, displays.



I also went out of my way to look at other libraries.

TIP #2: Look around and talk to the librarians about what works.

I started doing some planning even before the architect presented his plans. To be honest my first plans were too focussed on reproducing the existing library in a smaller space.

When I started planning, the confronting problem was one of storage: how to house the existing collection. The solutions to that seemed to be both to lobby for a bigger space than was being allocated, and to look for space saving shelving i.e. compacta shelves.

An option I did not want to pursue was off site storage. My experience is that usage of such material is very low. On a cost per retrieval basis it is a very expensive option.

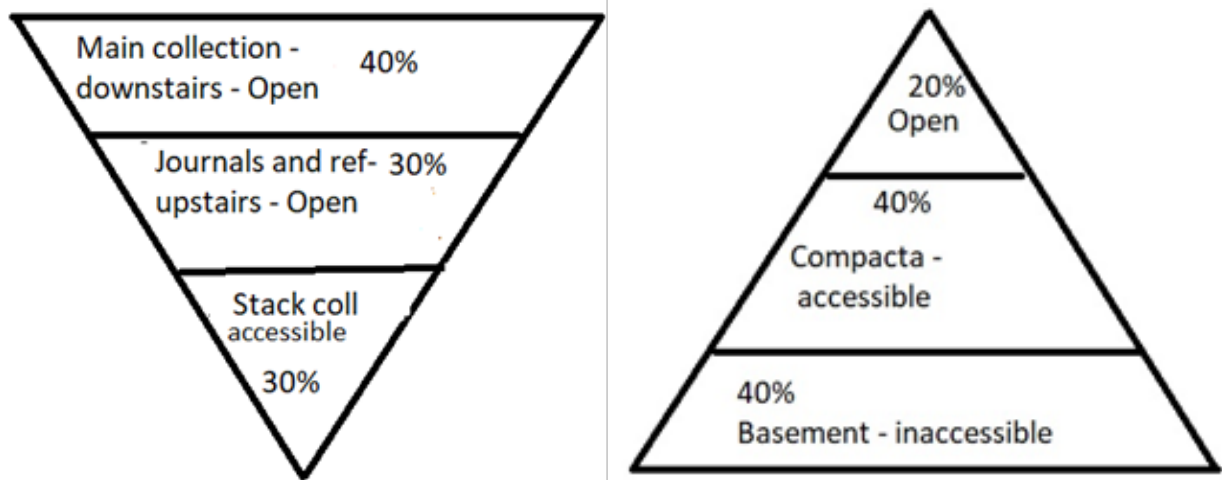
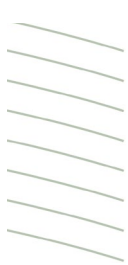
Once I had a plan using compacta shelving it was clear we could store everything on site. Hooray!

But this did mean the library would become more like an iceberg with less than 20% on open shelves.

The old site: so crammed with shelves that the only room for a book display was a single trolley at the entrance. A map above summer reading indicates the layout.



The new site would inevitably have fewer books on open shelves.



You may be juggling different scenarios with different combinations of shelving, etc. I found it is easier to think in terms of shelves (my estimate is 40 books per shelf), rather than books. At one stage it looked like we would need to have very long compacta stacks (all more than 5 metres). I am pleased we could create a more accessible layout with lengths of either 2 shelves (180 cm) or 4 shelves (360 cm). It is very important to have a user perspective on the physical layout. Relatively large serial runs presented an opportunity. Those available online could be discarded early on in the process. A certain amount of right-sizing was a good outcome of this process.

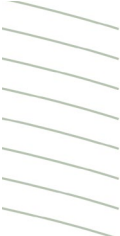
Consider:

- What is the best idea you got from visiting another library?
- If you had to remove 25% of the shelving where would you start?
- Do you have security concerns related to library layout?
- What mix of open/accessible/closed shelving works best for your library?

TIP # 3: Think in terms of numbers of shelves, not numbers of books.

The pictures on the following page show the new site with books shelved along the walls and on rollaway shelving units:





Working with the architect can be a challenge. In this case, the architect was presenting plans and we were given the chance for feedback. Apart from the meetings, we were not encouraged to have any contact with the architect. So, I found one of Judith's tips useful - join in site meetings or planning meetings. If there is some difficulty about this, I would suggest inviting yourself along. Most organisations will appreciate it if you have done your homework and come with the right attitude. I certainly found volunteering to be the minute-taker for a meeting helpful. The architect will probably have a clear idea about how a library should look but little idea about how a library works.

In my case, the architect's plans created a nice space for students to gather in the middle of the centre. He was also pretty keen on enclosing the library behind glass partitions. I was keen on the first but not so much the second.

I was much more in favour of accessibility. In a library with often a single person managing it, our security measures are only effective for absent-minded users, as making off with books is pretty easy one way or another. One inconsistency with our security tags was that while newly acquired books have tattle-tape, neither bound journals nor reference books were protected in this way. So the material which cannot be borrowed was given less protection than material that can be borrowed.

Just being at a meeting tended to mean that the library was not left out of considerations and sometimes our issues could be pushed a little, or, where necessary, crazy ideas nipped in the bud. As important as it is to have allies, it does not compare with having a seat at the table.

TIP #4: Be a member of planning groups. Become a mentor/ally for the architect

There will be a lot to do after you move in. I am still discovering what needs to be done. But once we had got over various hurdles with the space allocated, finances and just getting an idea of what would be possible and the other constraints of the building, it did become possible to imagine what plans might work for the future.

Any predictions will necessarily be provisional but here are mine:

- More digital, less print.
- Attractive and adaptable study spaces the priority.
- Flexible spaces will be desirable
- More students will study from home, more staff will teach and work from home.
- Relocations and amalgamations are more likely to happen than in the past

These things will always be desired:

- good light for study,
- easy access spaces,
- workable facilities.

During this presentation at the ANZTLA Conference, one of the participants in the Zoom discussion added to the chat on weeding, “start weeding now”. I can heartily agree. Weeding is a sensitive subject that we cloak in euphemisms and hide in collection management plans. Make it part of your practice to evaluate and make withdrawal decisions. I realise it is easier to recommend this than to enact it.

TIP #5: Try to plan for the future

Rollaway shelves allow the main space to be used for functions such as graduation:





Bibliography

Harvey, Philip. "[Renovations: A New Look for Libraries.](#)" *ANZTLA EJournal*5 (2010): 80-82.

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Lushington, Nolan, Rudolf, Wolfgang, Wong, Liliane, and Blake, Norma. *Libraries: A Design Manual*. 2018.

Feldsien-Sudhaus, Inken. [*Building on Experience: Learning from the Past to Plan for the Future ; Documentation of New Library Buildings in Europe*](#). Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2008.