



Marking Judith Bright's Fifty Years as Librarian at the John Kinder Theological Library

Judith Bright very recently celebrated 50 years managing the John Kinder Theological Library. This library now has offshoots including the Judith Bright Theological Library as part of St. John the Baptist Theological College in Suva, Fiji. Photographs provided by Anjali Kemp and used with permission.

A Tribute by Rev Dr Allan Davidson ONZM

20th March 2026

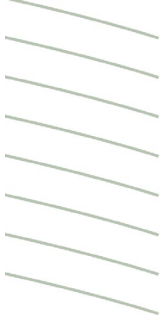


Figure 2: Judith Bright

When I joined the staff at St John's in 1982, Judith had already been here as Librarian for six years. When I retired in 2009, Judith had been here thirty-three years. Today, seventeen years later, Judith has been here fifty years. Judith, your fifty years' service is remarkable. Your many contributions to the College, the Anglican and Methodist Churches and the Australasian theological library community have been outstanding.

This building was not here when you began work at the College in 1976. You helped oversee its building, then managed the complex transfer of its books from the old inadequate library to their new shelves, something you've had to do several times. You supervised the integration of the Methodist Theological College Library books into the Kinder collection. More recently, Judith has overseen the integration of Anglican theological library catalogues throughout New Zealand into the one John Kinder catalogue.

Judith, you ensured there was excellent provision for Archival storage in this building. In 1982 you became a foundation member of the national Anglican Archives Committee. The recovery and deposit of Archives; taking seriously the memory of the College, the work



of trust boards, dioceses; personal papers from people like Bishop Manu Bennett, Sir Paul Reeves, Sir Kingi Ihaka have contributed to a huge taonga. This treasure has grown extensively under your curation. Your appointment as National Anglican Archivist, alongside your role as John Kinder Theological Librarian underlines your multi-talented abilities as librarian and archivist.

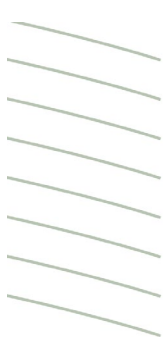
An area close to my own interests has been Judith's comprehensive work on the papers of the College's founder, Bishop Selwyn. Your listing of Selwyn's letters includes over 2,500 items which you have read and annotated. Judith is the international expert on Selwyn's papers.

Judith, together with your husband Richard, you have kept up with the huge technological advances in library management. In 1988 Judith oversaw the computerisation of all new acquisitions and retrospective cataloguing of library holdings. At a mock service, the On-line Public Access Catalogue – OPAC, was dedicated, with reference to Judith and two of the library staff.

OPAC, our help in ages past
And Judith's Bright new Toy,
A help to Erice, here at last,
And Helen's pride and joy.

OPAC. Our help in coming days,
Our help when books are lost
Let us insert, retrieve with praise
May God delete the cost.

Digitisation of archival listings, of manuscripts, photos, significant publications such as church newspapers, photographs, and synod proceedings have made the College's collections accessible worldwide. Access to eBooks and eJournals have ensured that the Library is at the forefront of theological resources in New Zealand. While staff have done much of the hands-on work, your vision and planning have helped make it possible.



Judith's work has extended beyond the College. Notably, you have made a significant hands-on contribution yourself to the church archives in Suva. You've also been a consultant and encourager with Māori, Pacifica and Pākehā on educational, archival, and library needs.

Speaking at the 40th anniversary of her appointment, Judith recalled that she was the first woman appointed to the Faculty, and said, "It's had its moments". There have been some tough times. Judith, I've always admired your resilience, grounded in your integrity, passion for your work and professionalism as a Librarian

Judith's standing in the library profession has been recognised by the New Zealand Library and Information Association which elected Judith a Fellow in 2007 and by the Australasian and New Zealand Theological Library Association which made her an Honorary Life Member in 2015.

Judith has worked with many library and archival assistants over the last fifty years, interacting with hundreds of staff, students and visiting researchers. The library under Judith's leadership has been a place of manakitanga. Many of us have experienced the hospitality and friendship of you and your staff – access to coffee or tea and conversation; the winter midday soup meals; the sumptuous Christmas morning teas. Is it any surprise, that you and your staff often know more about the College gossip than anyone else.

Judith, this library is much more than its books and archives. You have ensured that the library has been a safe, welcoming and friendly space. Your fifty years here have helped, echoing the words of John Kinder, to make: "This is the place that we have learned to love so well". Thank you Judith for your fifty years of superb service to the College, the Church and the wider theological college community.



Figure 3: Judith Bright's 50-year celebration