

## **A new library in Bloomsbury: relocating the UCL SSEES Library**

### **Abstract.**

**Purpose** – To describe the processes involved in an academic library building project, from the choice of site and appointment of the architects to the move itself. The focus is on finding solutions to problems caused by limited space, fixed deadlines and innovative design, and ensuring that the Library needs are fully understood throughout a complex project involving other interest groups over a number of years.

**Design / Methodology / Approach** – The experience of the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library is used as a case study to describe various issues around library design, working with architects and project managers, and managing a library move. Reference is made to the impact of the 7<sup>th</sup> July bombings in London on library staff.

**Findings** – The importance of Library involvement in every aspect of the design, the impact of decisions about internal layout on library capacity, the adaptability of library staff to unusual and difficult working conditions, the possibility of providing a limited service in an incomplete building, and the importance of balancing aesthetic and functional considerations in the final design. The impact of those design decisions on the long-term functioning and use of the Library.

**Practical Implications / Originality / Value** – The paper describes most of the processes and problems likely to be encountered in a major library building project and will be useful to any library setting out on such a project.

**Keywords** – Libraries, Library buildings, London, Academic libraries, Planning, Project management, architecture.

**Paper type** Case study

### **Background to the project**

August 2005 saw the culmination of more than six years' work with the opening of the new UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) Library in Taverton Street, just south of Euston Station and adjacent to the main UCL campus in Bloomsbury. The Library is the most visible feature of the new SSEES premises, occupying the bottom four floors of a seven-storey building that was described in the citation for its Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) award as “engagingly idiosyncratic, and reminiscent of a small palazzo”. This is not a description that could ever have been used of the old SSEES Library, based in the 1930s grandeur of Charles Holden's Senate House, although that had its own glories. Users of SSEES Library have always been accustomed to coming into a striking building, but the high ceilings, stone,

oak and marble of Senate House have been replaced with a brick-built library with modern furniture and facilities, all transformed by the striking use of glass on the interior, opening up views of the Library through a light well from every floor and making it in every sense the heart of the building.

Take in plate 1

Unlike many new academic libraries, this one was not the result of an extensive fundraising campaign; nor did the case for the new library have to go through long approval processes. Instead it was a very welcome product of the merger of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, previously part of the central University of London, with UCL, one of the largest colleges of the University. The agreement governing the merger contained a promise from UCL to re-house the School and the Library together, and generous funding was provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the University of London, and UCL itself for new premises. The purpose of the move was to bring together the scattered activities of the School into new modern accommodation managed by UCL and to vacate premises owned by the central University of London that were needed for other purposes. This good fortune brought many advantages, but did introduce time pressure on everybody to meet the date agreed for the vacation of Senate House in 2005, whether or not the new building was entirely ready.

Although funding was secured at such an early stage the nature of the new Library was not at all clear for some time. This article traces the process by the project was managed, the new Library was designed, and the process of relocating the Library carried out. Particular emphasis is laid on the importance of decisions about internal layout to the eventual capacity of the Library, the process of planning for and executing a substantial move under demanding time constraints, and the challenging aspects of providing a library service when operating in the middle of a building site.

### **Background to the Library**

UCL SSEES Library is the largest open access collection on Russia and Eastern Europe in the UK. Until 2005 it was housed in the north block of the University of London's Senate House, the main administrative building of the University. This had been the Library's home since the late 1930s, when the Senate House was built, and it shared the building with the School, although parts of the School were also housed in two buildings in Russell Square, a few minutes' walk away. The Library dates back to the founding of the School in 1915 and had grown considerably since the Second World War, with holdings of around 370,000 volumes, about two thirds of which were on the open shelves in Senate House and the other third in a store outside London. The collections cover all aspects of the humanities and social sciences of a broadly defined "Eastern Europe", incorporating those countries that had resulted from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. The geographical scope of the collections stretches eastwards from Germany to Russia, and south from Finland to the Balkans. In

addition to the book stock (including rare books going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century), and periodical and newspaper holdings it holds important archive collections, many of which contain unique source material for the study of the history of Eastern Europe between the first and second world wars.

The Library's important research collections have always attracted a wide range of academic users from all over the world, in addition to the approximately 700 students and 60 academics within SSEES, and the large number of students within UCL with an interest in European history, society and culture who use it daily. An important feature of the Library is that it holds material often not made available in the original country of publication during the communist period, and this has been a significant factor in attracting academics from Central and Eastern Europe who have been able to find books that they had not been able to find in their own countries. The largely open-access nature of the collections has always been a great draw for researchers, and the specialist nature of the stock means that most is not available electronically. Despite this inevitable emphasis on print in relation to the collections, the Library had broadened its remit in the decade before the move and had taken on responsibility for local IT provision within SSEES, and for a sophisticated audio-visual service based on recording from satellite and transmitting to viewing facilities within the Library. In the early 1990s the Library had acquired from the Russian department a large collection of film and documentary recordings and these were being supplemented on a daily basis by recording satellite TV received via dishes located on the roof of Senate House. This

service is used by students of film, current events, and language, and is a valued part of the Library's activities.

A new library therefore had to be able to accommodate a very substantial collection of printed volumes, rare book and archive holdings, a sophisticated AV infrastructure, space for storing IT equipment, and comfortable reading spaces suitable for the needs both of students and of an international academic community. The Library's remit for IT and AV provision within SSEES meant that it had an interest and an involvement throughout the project in the whole building, not only the Library. A staff of fifteen, usually supplemented with project staff, also had to be provided with office space, preferably in more comfortable surroundings than they had previously tolerated.

### **The early stages: finding a location, appointing the architects**

The process of planning began in early 1999, before the merger was completed, with an initial search in central London for buildings that had the potential to be converted. The Library was of course only part of the whole, as the project from the beginning was to house the School and the Library together. A small group was set up in 1999 on which the Librarian was included, and initial briefing documents prepared on the Library's space, IT and AV requirements. At one stage the target date for occupation was Summer 2000, but this soon proved impossible. It became clear very quickly that there were no suitable buildings available for conversion in the right location, and the search slowed while the details of merger were being sorted out over the next year or two.

During this period the Library itself went through substantial change of a different kind when it was incorporated into UCL Library Services as part of the merger process, but the principle that the Library should be relocated with the School remained intact.

In 2001 a site was finally identified in an ideal location, being the last vacant site owned by UCL and only one street away from the main campus, bringing the School and the Library much closer to the academic centre of UCL. This location also meant that the building was always going to have a high public profile, both because the site was not tucked away in the middle of the campus but was on a public street largely occupied by Georgian houses, and because the enhancement of this side of the campus was a strategic goal for UCL. The choice of architect was therefore very important and it was clear that they would need to be inventive to fit everything into a very constrained space, surrounded on three sides by other buildings. A feasibility study was commissioned and produced a rather conventional square glass-fronted building with a light well in the middle of the upper floors. The Library would be located on the lower floors where it looked as though little light would ever penetrate. Enthusiasm for this design was limited, but, as often happens, the architects finally appointed to design the scheme had a radically different approach, and the Library was faced with the unexpected challenge of fitting into a D-shaped building with a curved wall round the back and a large hole in the middle running right down to the ground floor. At that point the various textbooks on library design that had been recommended were put to one side, never to be referred to again. Concern was mitigated by the knowledge that the architects chosen, Short & Associates, had recently designed the award-winning

Lanchester Library at Coventry University, with its castle-like structure and sustainable environmental strategy (Short, 2005). The new building seemed likely to be an interesting one, and life continued to be interesting for the rest of the project.

By early 2002 the architects, the rest of the design team and the project managers were all in place and the process of designing the building began in earnest. In terms of the internal layout of the Library this was not to be completed until just before the move three years later.

### **The Specification**

As soon as the move was mooted the Library gathered as much information as possible on its current use of space: the size of the book stock, the number of seats, the amount of office space, the numerous cupboards in which all sorts of less-used stock had lurked for many years. Essentially the old Library was full to overflowing, and accommodating the book stock became the number one priority. To that end the decision was made to provide estimated figures based on likely growth over ten years, and not to waste time measuring collections in great detail until just before the move itself. It was much simpler to count shelves on the basis that they were full, as they soon would be if they were not already, and to set estimates at the high end in the sure knowledge that any number given would have to be reduced. It was already very clear from the experience of other libraries that had been through a move that the amount of shelving space decreases as one proceeds through a building project (Noone, 1999), and this was



confirmed throughout the SSEES project. Measuring the space was made more complicated by the fact that the rooms in Senate House had very high ceilings, and the library shelving therefore reached a very unfriendly eleven shelves to the height. This made calculations based on the number of square metres occupied by the Library meaningless. The other information to be used with great caution was the division between net and gross space. One of the most striking features of Senate House is its generous corridors, and the Library had used its share to full capacity. Translating that into a much more open plan layout meant that space was no longer lost to corridors and so could be used more efficiently, but it was important to remember that the old library had used parts of so-called gross space for shelving and the circulation of readers.

The general requirements for the new Library did not change during the project and remained as described in a briefing document written by the Librarian in early 2001:

“The Library needs a secure perimeter, with load-bearing floors, an access-control system and an alarmed exit. It should be easily accessible for readers with disabilities. Open access shelving should be no more than seven shelves to the height. Closed access space within the building must include some in-house storage space for archives, rare books, pamphlets and newspapers, and equipment. We would expect to take the opportunity of a new building to rethink the current configuration of the Library, so would want the space to be as flexible and potentially multi-functional as possible.”

These seem minimal but were sometimes difficult to hold onto as the project progressed, although the final result does meet all of them, and provides many other features which were never imagined at the beginning of the project, but which have enhanced the daily life of readers and of library staff.

From the beginning there was a simple list of the types of space required: open and closed-access shelving, including suitable space for rare books and archives, computer clusters, an audio-visual viewing room, reader spaces, store rooms etc. The problems of the current library were itemised: staff were too far from readers, shelves were too high, it was too hot or too cold and draughty depending on the season. The Library often appeared full when not all seats were occupied. It was also somewhat shabby, and became more so during the inevitable planning blight that prevented money being spent on the old library when everybody was working on a new library. Other ideas emerged from a number of working parties that were set up among library staff to consider ways in which the service could be improved, but few assumptions were made about the design of the new library before the first architects' plans were seen.

Once the basic shape of the building was known more detailed requirements developed in the early stages of the project. Security was always going to be an issue, both for the stock and for staff, particularly because the entrance to the Library was on the ground floor and visible from the street, and of course library staff were on duty at unsocial times in the evenings and on Saturdays when few other staff were around. A number of measures were incorporated into the structure: these include CCTV, panic alarms, and

an intruder alarm. A PA system was included when it transpired that the Library was going to end up on four floors rather than being spread out over two floors as it was in Senate House. This is particularly helpful at closing time when it is no longer possible to turn the lights out on students – presence detecting lights are one of the features of the scheme. The duration of the project meant that expectations changed as technology developed. One result was that wireless access for students became essential; this was incorporated in the plans towards the end of the process and has been much appreciated.

In a sense the most important requirement of the new Library was that the layout be flexible. In the previous fifteen years the old Library had gone through two substantial refurbishments, in both cases taking on additional space and changing the use of current space. It was obvious that future change of use would have to be as easy as possible, and a computer floor was therefore added to the list of requirements at an early stage. This added to the cost of the project, but was finally agreed following support from Information Systems. It is reassuring to know that it will be much easier to move shelving and furniture in future without needing another disruptive building project.

Other issues were more difficult to resolve. From the beginning the question of fire protection was a difficult one, and discussions dragged on through much of a year. Because of their history and provenance, the collections were irreplaceable, although the monetary value was (with a few exceptions) not very great – books were cheap in the communist period. The fire strategy for the building was designed to protect people, but the Library had to do its best to protect the stock as well. Lengthy discussions were

held with the UCL Fire Officer, who advocated sprinklers, the UCL Library Services Preservation Librarian, the UCL insurers, and a specialist disaster recovery firm. The relevant British Standard was consulted (British Standards Institution, 2000) and circulated to all concerned. Levels of water pressure were assessed and declared enough only to protect one floor. Alarming high costs were estimated for providing fire protection in the Library, and any system would also intrude substantially on space, which was always at a premium. In the end the issue was resolved in two ways: the fire consultants to the project produced a model demonstrating that in a naturally ventilated building of this type a sprinkler system would actually be detrimental to the functioning of the building's fire scheme; and the Fire Officer carried out a detailed risk assessment. The eventual outcome was that a gas system was installed in the rare book and archive store, which was also protected with four-hour fire doors, but no other measures were installed in the rest of the Library space, and the Library relies on the natural ventilation system functioning correctly to reduce the impact of any fire.

## **Project Management**

With the appointment of the architects in February 2002 a formal structure of meetings was established, a feature of the project that was to dominate the lives of those involved for the next four years. A small group of three was set up to represent SSEES: the School Secretary, a senior representative of the academic staff, and the Librarian. Between them they attempted to attend all relevant meetings. The most senior of those meetings was the Steering Group, chaired by a Vice Provost, and serviced by the

external project managers who had been appointed at the same time as the architects. This met every six weeks and monitored the budget and the programme, and also dealt with UCL-wide issues generated by the project. Any proposals for expensive additions to the project, such as the computer floor or a fire suppression system, had to gain the approval of the Steering Group. The first meeting of this group demonstrated very clearly that the ultimate occupiers of the building were only one of a number of interested parties, all of whose views had to be taken into account. These included the UCL Estates Department (the Client) and the neighbouring departments, who were all going to be variously disrupted by the construction process and were not gaining a smart new building in return. The greatest achievement of the user representatives was in convincing the Steering Group that both the Library and the School needed more space than was originally planned, instead of competing for the too limited space that was on offer at the time.

The beginning of the project also featured a number of specific workshops, arranged by the Project Managers. These included a risk workshop, which identified 130 risks to the project, from an ability to meet the brief to the weather. Even more alarming, in a sense, was a Value Engineering Workshop, which went systematically through the design looking for areas where money could be saved. It was necessary to be extremely alert throughout that particular meeting.

Below the Steering Group was a Project Meeting, also serviced by the Project Managers, which met every two weeks. This was attended by the architects and other

members of the design team, and was where everybody reported on progress and problems. Discussion could be alarmingly technical and the representatives of the users soon gained a smart new vocabulary (glulam, soffit, etc, etc.). It was vital to pay some attention even during the most technical discussion and to ask questions no matter how ignorant they might seem, as it was easy to miss a decision that was wrapped up in technical language but would have serious implications. In the case of the library, any reference to the waterproofing of the building always grabbed the attention, for what would turn out to be good reasons. Two issues that generated much discussion from the beginning were toilets and lifts. The number, location and functioning of both were key elements of the infrastructure of the building and enormously important to its occupants. Once installed, they were impossible to move and they tended to intrude into space that was needed for other things. The contractors were appointed in October 2003 and from that point there were separate progress meetings on the construction as well, although user representation was not usually required at these.

Between the project meetings there were numerous other meetings. The most frequent were design review meetings, where staff sat with the architects and representatives of Estates and discussed detailed design issues. These were very frequent, very lengthy and were sustained by large quantities of tea, coffee and chocolate biscuits. The Librarian's office became the home to improbably large sheets of tracing paper and hundreds of different sets of plans to different scales and dating from different stages of the project.

In the last year of the planning process the emphasis shifted from design to detailed functional issues, and other service departments of UCL became more closely involved. Every aspect of the functioning of the building had to be agreed and any related design or construction issue resolved. Issues ranged from locks and keys, security, telephones, data points to cleaning and rubbish removal. Even minor decisions turned out to have unexpected effects. The choice of hot air hand dryers or paper towels in the toilets did not occupy anybody for long (paper towels were messy), but the consequence is that the noise of the hot air dryers resounds through the open-plan library areas like a low flying jet engine whenever the doors to the toilets are opened.

Throughout the project the key personnel from the perspective of the users were the project managers, both from the external company and from UCL Estates. Their task was difficult, as they had an obligation to keep the project on time and on budget as far as possible, but they also acted as interpreters, translating technical language and representing user needs far as they could. During a long project it was inevitable that there would be changes of personnel, and in fact only the user representatives remained the same from beginning to end. The representatives of the architects, the project managers, and Estates staff all changed, sometimes more than once, during the project, and this was an added complication when attempting to make sure that all requirements were clearly understood at all times. Fortunately the project was very lucky in having excellent support from the UCL Estates Department, particularly during the latter stages of the design and the move itself, as without this it is hard to envisage the outcome being as successful as it has proved to be. During the move and the immediate aftermath

another key role was played by the Clerk of Works, who proved a constant source of help and support of all kinds when everything was in chaos.

### **The Layout and Design of the Library**

Before the detailed work of the design process began every effort was made to draw on the experience of other library building projects; this proved essential in helping to resolve what were to be serious issues with the Library layout. In London, Kings College and the London School of Economics Library (Wade, 2002) had recently gone through substantial refurbishment projects, and the SSEES Library staff and the design team visited both on several occasions. Most useful of all was a visit to Coventry University Library, designed by the architects appointed to the SSEES project, and the article which Pat Noone, the Librarian at Coventry, wrote under the title “The Librarian’s fear of the architect.” (Noone, 1999). The hilarious account of that project was invaluable in providing a sense of perspective, and time showed there to be many inevitable parallels between the two projects. His rueful attempt to hold on to the apparently self-evident fact that “a rectangle offers greatest flexibility and is the simplest shape for users to navigate” seemed to sum up the inevitable difference in approach between library staff with limited design skills and an architect with a clear aesthetic vision, but without a librarian’s professional awareness of how the space needed to work. Ultimately the tension between function and design was to prove very productive in the SSEES project, and the Library would have been much less attractive had the design been a standard rectangle (tempting though it sometimes seemed), but



the Library would also have been a lot less usable had its functional requirements not been constantly reiterated.

The most serious problem with the layout of the Library became evident during the first year of the planning process after the appointment of the architects, and took most of that year to resolve. The design simply would not accommodate more than fifty per cent of the stock. It also reproduced some of the problems of the old library, particularly with the inclusion of a strip of staff offices around the outer curved wall. The shape of the building, with its straight walls at the front, light well in the middle, and curved area around the back, was causing what appeared to be an intractable problem. Not surprisingly, the plans were based on the theory that rectangular areas should be used for shelving and curved areas for people. That meant that shelving was in relatively short runs radiating out from the light well. Even the shelving at the front, in the more conventional rectangular area, was problematic, as the need for corridor space made the runs very short. To increase the capacity, small runs of shelving were also located in any parts of the plan that could take them, but were of very limited use. An impasse was reached, which was only finally resolved when a specialist library shelving company was brought in at the Librarian's request. They were given a set of plans with all internal rooms removed and they were asked to lay out the shelving in a number of different ways, to see which pattern would accommodate the most stock. The result was surprising to everybody. The final design shows that the most economical way of laying out the space was to run shelving straight across the curve in long runs. The straight spaces at the front were much better used for office space and computer clusters and

short runs of shelving could be removed from the sides of the building to create additional useful rooms, used as more office and meeting space. As a consequence the Library has slightly more shelving than it had in the old building and slightly more reader places. Most library staff now occupy a beautiful open plan office opening directly on to the light well at the back and the street at the front. They are visible to readers and have enough space not to feel cramped. The artful placing of shelving allows for some privacy. The computer clusters are glass fronted and light, and the occupants can be seen from all over the Library, making the management of those troublesome facilities much easier. Seating was placed around the curved wall, where it was relatively secluded and received natural light, at the sides of the shelved areas, and in alcoves by the light well.

The one relatively conventional space was the Lower Ground Floor, which had been enlarged early in the project to fill almost all the space available. It was essentially square, although it has lost two corners; one to a pre-existing electricity sub-station and one to a plant room. This floor was somewhat less troublesome, but early designs show it partitioned into various smaller areas. The final design is essentially one large open area, with an attractive seating area under the central light well, where students can see the sky seven floors above – and can be seen by their tutors from the upper floors. On this floor, open access mobile shelving has been used to hold back issues of periodicals, and two closed access stores have been neatly positioned behind the stairwell and lift shaft.

Take in plate 2

The ground floor is one area where fitting in the stock was not a problem. This floor echoes the curved shape of the floors above, although it is much smaller as it has to accommodate a roadway around it for the benefit of the Chemistry Department behind. Once an issue desk and enquiry office had been incorporated there was little space for anything else, so it was decided that this space should be available to students who wanted to talk or use their mobile phones. Some quick reference material is available, and the area has been furnished with comfortable chairs. This facility is clearly appreciated by students and other library users, and has made the life of library staff much easier as they now have somewhere to send readers who are causing a disturbance on the quieter floors.

The four floors of the Library now work together to form a coherent space for library users. The most heavily used collections and the computer clusters are on the first floor, where some front-line staff are also based. The floor above is quieter and fewer students venture up there if they don't need those collections. Most library staff are based on this floor. Two staff meeting rooms are designed to be multi-purpose as needs change, both being suitable for group study and the larger also equipped for skills teaching. The Lower Ground Floor is popular with students who want to sit under the light well, but the larger size of this floor means that bookable carrels for research students have been tucked away on one side, out of the main circulation routes. All study spaces have been carefully designed to provide a variety of reading areas, with furniture carefully

subdivided to provide defined desk spaces for readers. Where dividers are not used shared desks are generous in size. All floors are visible to a greater or lesser extent through the light well from the staff rooms, transforming the management of the space. Readers are now much more aware of the presence of library staff and of the range of work they do, and staff are able to supervise the Library without leaving their desks.

## **Consultation**

It seems self-evident at the beginning of any project that one should consult library users as widely as possible when designing a new library. In practice this does not always prove to be practical. Decisions often have to be made quickly based on an understanding of the whole project that can only be gained from putting in the hours at the planning meetings. From the beginning, student views of the old Library were well known. It was admired for its collections and for the services it provided, and there was a level of sentimental attachment to the building, but it was not comfortable or easy to use. There was a large body of evidence itemising the needs of students, as they regularly filled in questionnaires on the Library. They were also well represented on a number of the School's committees, including the Library and Information Resources Committee. It was particularly fortunate that the Chair of that Committee throughout the project was the academic representative on the building project. This meant that the Library users were represented when any potentially serious issue affecting the Library was raised and was particularly useful whenever there was any threat to library space.

Throughout the process reports on progress with the design were issued regularly to all staff, and discussed in a range of forums. On the whole the project team were trusted to make the right decisions and report back (given the workload involved, nobody else rushed forward to take their place.) Interest from students was limited; after all most students would have graduated by the time the new library was finished and so would not see any real benefit. It was smaller practical issues that usefully went out to consultation. Examples include changes of rules made possible by the new building, such as allowing for noisy areas where talking and mobile phones were allowed. Library staff were consulted at various times and senior staff became heavily involved in planning the location of the individual collections. The architects worked closely with all library staff on the layout of staff offices. Other consultations were less useful. Two different reader chairs were brought in for visitors to try; the verdict was split almost exactly down the middle.

Consultation with students inevitably became a serious issue when the question of closing the Library for the move arose. Achieving agreement on the best ways to help the substantial number of MA students struggling to finish their dissertations was difficult, particularly as the inevitable slip in the construction programme meant that it wasn't possible to confirm the move date before Easter 2005. Once the library closure dates were confirmed as the six weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 15<sup>th</sup> August 2005 they became sacrosanct, and all parties put in huge efforts to make sure they were met. The MA dissertation deadline was put back to allow students library time before and after the closure, and special arrangements were put in place at other libraries. It was agreed to

run an enquiry service throughout the closure, based in an office outside the Library, and to fetch material as far as possible. Colleagues in other libraries, both inside and outside UCL, were enormously helpful at this difficult time.

### **The move... and afterwards**

The year before the move was occupied with a variety of preparatory work in the old library which was in some senses disruptive but in others forced staff to review all their operations in useful ways. The collections had to be tidied and spread so that they were in good order for the move and easy to map onto the new shelving. Library staff were also in the process of reclassifying the sections on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to reflect the new political reality; this was accelerated so that books only had to move once. The process of weeding the card catalogue was also accelerated so that the number of cabinets that needed to be fitted into the new building was reduced to a minimum. The contents of all library offices, cupboards and other cubby holes had to be reviewed and decisions made about what should be kept and what thrown away. Staff leave had to be planned so that enough people were available to supervise the move at both ends and to run the Enquiry Service. Academic staff were contacted and asked to submit their reading lists especially early for the coming term, so that orders could be placed and books processed before the closure. Book suppliers agreed to hold deliveries until the new Library was ready to receive them and the end of the financial year was brought forward so that book funds were spent before staff became too occupied with the move.

Numerous tasks also remained in relation to the new library. New furniture had to be specified and orders placed. Signage had to be agreed and meetings were set up with wayfinding consultants. All minor design issues had to be finalised. As the completion of the library grew closer, these got down to a remarkable level of detail: how high did the slot for the book return box have to be? Where should the cable grommets in the issue desk be – and what colour? Throughout this period the amount of shelving on the plans decreased on a number of occasions, as we had always been warned by those with experience of other library projects that it would. The figures given for the length of shelves turned out to include the uprights and a bulkhead appeared on the lower ground floor that meant the loss of the top shelf across a substantial part of that floor. This meant that the exact mapping of collections had to be adjusted right up the last minute.

As the move approached a project officer was appointed on a six-month contract to draw up an inventory and to work with library staff on the book move. The removal firm was appointed and it was agreed that they would provide a move manager. This was invaluable when the inevitable happened and the Library started to move into a building that was still in the hands of the contractors. Cleaners were brought in as soon as exams finished to clean the stock so that dust was not brought into a brand new building. A detailed schedule of cleaning, collection mapping (including working out the height of each shelf), packing, moving and unpacking was worked out for each area of the Library.

At 5pm on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July the Library closed in Senate House and on Monday morning the removal firm started to deliver crates. Delays with construction meant that the handover of the new building was phased, with the Library being given one floor at a time to stock with books. As soon as that process was finished on each floor, the shelves were covered again and the contractors moved back in and started to take up the floor. Library staff helped out with a variety of tasks, including stepping in with dusters when the books were ready to move onto one floor before the cleaners had managed to dust the brand new shelves, now covered in building dust. Scheduling a move at this stage of construction was always risky, and power came on in the new building only on the first day of the move. The lifts proved unreliable and prone to breakdown, and this slowed the move considerably at the beginning.

The move started on 4th July, but on 7th July the whole of London was disrupted when four bombs went off, injuring and killing large numbers of people. One was between Russell Square and King's Cross Station, five minutes' walk from Senate House, and another in Tavistock Square, yards from the new building. Suddenly the first priority became the safety of all staff, and the move was forgotten in efforts to contact colleagues, friends and family to make sure that they were unharmed. The impact on staff of these events and the emergency procedures put in place as a consequence have been described by the Deputy Director of UCL Library Services (Chapman, 2006). As the explosions had been so close it was extremely fortunate that no immediate colleagues were hurt, although there were casualties elsewhere in UCL and one member of UCL staff was killed. When thoughts turned again to the move the continuing



disruption that blighted the next few weeks had to be factored in and the programme adjusted accordingly; staff were consistently delayed by bomb scares, the removal firm regularly sent back to base, and an atmosphere of fear and horror soured the excitement of the move. In the circumstances everybody deserves huge credit for achieving the move on time.

Of course problems with the move paled by comparison with the threat of terrorism, but could not be ignored for long. The new lift broke down regularly, only the most minimal reader furniture was ready on time, and most staff offices were not ready at all, and were not going to be ready for some time. In fact the front of the building was not be ready until November.

Despite all this, the Library opened on schedule on 15<sup>th</sup> August, although not until 3pm, once the Fire Officer had given his approval. Even then the Lower Ground Floor could not open, as one of the fire exits was blocked. The achievement still needed to be marked, and the list of essential items to be brought over to the new building for the opening was headed by a bottle of champagne and some plastic cups. Almost all services readers needed were working: the collections were accessible, there were some reader places, photocopiers were functioning, as was the issue desk.. The same could not be said for those services the staff needed: only one small office was available, there was no drinking water (bottled water soon solved that problem) and staff and readers had to go to the next building for the toilet. Only two staff therefore moved over to the

new library, and the rest continued to be based in Senate House and run down the road to staff the issue desk.

Fortunately, the Library was unlikely to be busy during the vacation, but the disruption was to continue until Christmas. Contractors were everywhere with all the associated noise, and it was a constant battle to provide a service to readers without delaying building work that everybody wanted to be finished as soon as possible. The Library managed to function without a proper entrance or stairs, both challenges that at times stretched the ingenuity of staff. A temporary entrance to the building was created by the contractors, but it had the disconcerting habit of moving overnight. The lack of the stairs proved an object lesson for anybody involved in a building project in that it had simply not occurred to anyone to ask whether the stairs would be handed over when the library floors were. In the event they continued to be in the hands of the contractors for several months, leaving library staff and readers reliant on a somewhat unpredictable lift to move between floors. Enormous amounts of staff time went on monitoring the situation in the Library on any given day, and low points were generally related to crises with the plumbing, or with water coming in through areas which were still awaiting permanent waterproofing. Everyone's problem-solving skills came on apace. As with most new buildings, remarkable progress was achieved in the run up to the grand opening on 19<sup>th</sup> October, when the Princess Royal and the President of the Czech Republic visited and the Library put on an exhibition of its rare Czech materials.

By the end of December 2005 the vast majority of the building work was complete and the Library was settling down, although some disruption continued as the snagging process got under way and even at the time of writing, in January 2007, this is still continuing in a small way. Some problems could only become apparent once the building was occupied, and regular feedback from staff and library users has helped address myriad small and a few not so small issues.

## **Highlights**

The project was often stressful and exhausting, and it was certainly entirely absorbing for a very long time, but it could also be hugely enjoyable. Some of the best moments include the day the scaffolding came down and the splendid brick façade was revealed, the day the glass covering the light well was uncovered and the view through the Library opened up, and the day the Library front door was finally in place. One essential companion was a camera so that the Library could be captured at all its various stages.

Continuing highlights included the opportunity to work closely with a variety of other professions; watching an architect sketch out an idea was fascinating, and it was rewarding to work closely with so many other service departments in UCL. Contacts developed during the project are proving useful in the long term. Library staff proved infinitely resourceful and tolerant of working conditions which at times were extremely difficult. Feedback from visitors is overwhelmingly complimentary, and it is very

rewarding to step back from any remaining problems and see the larger picture. Images and descriptions of the Library are beginning to feature in the professional press for two professions: librarians (Hyams, 2006) and architects (Harbison, 2006).

When the next academic year began in the autumn of 2006 a new generation of students arrived who had never known the old Library, or seen the sometimes chaotic conditions of the first year. It has been very encouraging to see that occupancy numbers have shot up and are now regularly double what they were in the previous building. This is the most important vote of confidence in the design and indicates that it really is successful in serving the needs of the Library's users.

Take in plate 3

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