

The Alexander Library Building

The new premises for the State Library Service of Western Australia, now named the Alexander Library Building, opened to the public on 29 April 1985. Already public use is rapidly increasing. The Western Australian Premier, Brian Burke, will officially open the new library on 18 June before a large audience including Federal and State politicians, State Librarians, the Director General of the National Library of Australia and other guests.

Planning for the new library began in earnest at the end of 1977 with the appointment of Perth architects Cameron, Chisholm and Nicol, who worked in association with the Building Management Authority and Consulting Engineers Norman, Disney and Young Pty Ltd. The main library frame commenced in January 1982, and practical completion of the building was reached early in 1985 when the staff began to move in from ten different premises and annexes around the city.

The building was constructed under a co-ordinating contract system controlled by Multiplex Constructions Pty Ltd. The structure is of reinforced concrete with waffle slabs and concrete columns on an 8.4m grid; the external cladding panels are in polished pre-cast concrete with granite aggregate. Windows are toughened 'float' glass in anodised aluminium perimeter frames, while internal partitions are generally plasterboard sheets on steel stud framing.

The fully air-conditioned building is set in the middle of the Perth Cultural Centre and its landscaped pedestrian plaza, only a few minutes' walk from the city centre.

The library, named in honour of the Board's long-standing Chairman, Emeritus Professor Fred Alexander, has been designed to meet library needs as at the year 2000. With a gross building area of 30,784 square metres, the building is large by world standards and is the first of the 'new generation' of State Libraries to be opened in Australia.

As well as the public services provided by the General Reference Library and J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History, the building also accommodates Circulation Division which maintains public library stocks throughout the State and also holds extensive performing arts, Foreign Language and Cassette Collections; Acquisitions and Cataloguing Divisions; Data Processing and Systems Development; Photographic and Conservation Units; and the Management Services Division.

The three major elements — public service areas, book stacks and staff work areas — are in vertical rather than in horizontal relationships, with some architectural relief provided



Looking into the void.

in the public areas by the incorporation of voids. These voids are spanned by bridges to allow access to the various departments. Glass-fronted public lifts provide changing panoramas up and down the voids. The capital cost of the library was \$37.6 million which includes \$6.2 million for loose furniture and equipment.

Nearly all the furniture has been purpose-designed by the architects, the Building Management Authority's Interior Design Department, and a library consultant, who jointly formed the Design Team. It has been built and fitted by various Western Australian furniture manufacturers using a combination of light grey laminates, Tasmanian oak trims and satin-finished stainless steel frames. Other items are moulded from clear acrylic sheeting. In addition, the opportunity has been taken to re-equip the library completely with up-to-date data processing, audio-visual, microform, photographic, materials handling, and other types of specialised equipment.

Other features include a public coffee lounge; the 208-seat library theatre equipped for film, slide and video projection, music programs, lecture facilities and a deaf-aid system; public meeting and seminar rooms; and extensive exhibition and display facilities.

Most areas of the building are easily accessible to disabled people and various specialised aids have been provided.

The State Library Service expects that the new building with its expanded open access collections will significantly improve not only its public image, but also the public's awareness of its services.

David Hickson

Library Board Building Consultant,
Alexander Library building project



Adding the finishing touches to the new Alexander Library Building.