



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

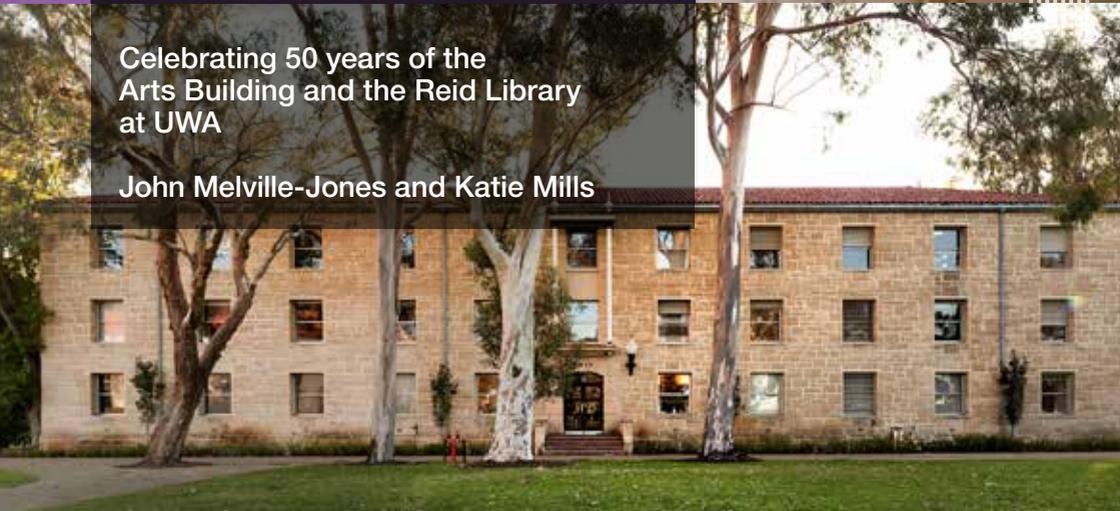
FACULTY OF ARTS

A Tale of Two Buildings

1964 - 2014

Celebrating 50 years of the
Arts Building and the Reid Library
at UWA

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The Beginning

For more than a decade after the end of the Second World War The University of Western Australia was unable to create new buildings that would satisfactorily match its growing student population (although a westward extension to the Administration building, which then also housed the Faculty of Arts, was completed in 1953). But after the Murray Committee submitted its report in 1957, a report which was accepted by the Commonwealth government, more money began to flow into Australian universities, and the Western Australian government, in a time of increasing prosperity, was also able to be more generous to what was still a state university. So in 1959 a new Arts building began to be planned, the firm of the Western Australian architect Marshall Clifton was selected to be entrusted with its design, and work began on the site in 1962.

In the winter of the following year, when the roof was being added, the University's head gardener George Munns cheerfully replanted five large eucalyptus trees on its western side which were as tall as the building, a striking demonstration of one-upmanship, although one of them was blown down some forty years later by a freak gust of wind.

Opened by Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

The building was completed in time for the beginning of the academic year in 1964, and formally opened by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, on April 29, a day on which he also received the honorary

degree of Doctor of Letters. A plaque commemorating this event was unveiled by his wife, Dame Pattie Menzies, and may be seen on the wall to the right of the entrance to the Alexander Lecture Theatre.

The Design

The Arts building is designed in an interesting way, not as a single block but in two connected parts, with lecture rooms that are separated from the offices of teaching staff and tutorial rooms, and from the small number of offices needed at that time for the Dean and for secretarial staff in the departments. Its 'Mediterranean' exterior has a modified Georgian style of architecture, with a symmetrical arrangement of windows, which hides the fact that the offices of teaching staff are of different sizes, to suit professors (all at that time heads of departments) and staff at lower levels.

Visitors to the building will notice that the exterior stonework is arranged so that a large block of stone is placed beneath the centre of each window, with a small unmortared area at the top of each block. This was intended to make it easy to install box air conditioners for individual rooms later. This, which would have severely damaged the appearance of the building, has not happened. In the 1990s air conditioning was supplied for lecture and tutorial rooms and the top floor of the northern block, and in hot weather some of this filters down to the lower floors.

The Australian Universities Commission had a general oversight over the design of the building, but the architect and the

Senate were able to include some features that were slightly more generous than those that were being allowed in universities in the eastern states, such as the width of internal corridors, and the covered ambulatories that joined the two parts of the building. Enough money was also found to face its walls with local limestone, matching the original Hackett buildings that were visible at an angle across the Great Court.

One feature of the building was considered to be unusual at the time: although it had only three levels (and the lecture rooms were on only two levels), a lift was installed at the south-west corner of the northern block. This has proved useful not only for lifting weighty items to the upper levels, but as the University became more friendly to persons with disabilities that made them unable to climb stairs, it enabled them to access this part of the building, although no money has ever been available to allow them to pass through doors to access staff studies on the first and second floors without assistance.

The New Fortune Theatre

A much more unusual feature of the building came into being when Professor Allan Edwards, the head of the English Department, realised that the dimensions of the western half of the enclosed space surrounded by offices for academic staff that formed its northern part were approximately the same as those of the Fortune Theatre in London, erected in London in 1600, where some of the plays of Shakespeare had been performed. As a result, a stage was included, with upper

levels matching the Elizabethan theatre, and balconies which replicated the viewing areas from which gentlefolk might watch the performances. Even now, when the University has so many air-conditioned buildings, the 'New Fortune Theatre' is still used every summer to present plays, and in 2014 a 50th anniversary performance which included scenes from Hamlet, the first play presented there, drew a large audience.

The Lecture Theatres

When the building was officially opened, it was decided to name one of the two large lecture theatres that it contained after Walter Murdoch, a former Professor of English who had also served as Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor and Chancellor, and at a later date the matching large lecture theatre was named after Fred Alexander, the first professor of History, who had also served in a number of other capacities, and had been Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the years when the Arts building was being planned. At a later date again two other lecture rooms received the names of Fox Lecture Hall and Austin Lecture Hall, to commemorate the professor of Philosophy and the professor of Classics and Ancient History after they too had retired.

The Sculptures

At the time of construction some money was available to add artistic decorations to the building. The tower that had been built at the south-west corner of the northern half of the building was ornamented with a swivelling bronze sculpture of a swan

beginning to fly, so designed that it could swivel and act as a weather vane. In the eastern half of the central courtyard of the northern block, a fountain designed by the same artist, Margaret Priest, was placed. It took the form of a many-headed serpent, and the Classicists in the building, reminded of the ancient Greek myth, referred to it as the Hydra. The water does not run all the time, because the noise has been considered intrusive by some people, although when after its installation a survey was taken, one staff member was strongly in favour of it, since as he said, it was helpful to him, since he was taking diuretic medicine.

Some replicas of works of Greek and Roman sculpture were placed in the building soon after it came into use. Three plaster casts were bought from the Gipsformerei of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, a factory that has for a long time specialised in producing casts of very high quality from works of ancient sculpture. One (appropriately located outside the office of the person who was the Acting Head of Classics and Ancient History at the time) reproduces a metope, or square panel, from the decorations of the temple of Zeus at Olympia. This represents the hero Hercules bearing the sky on his shoulders while Atlas, who normally bore this burden, has gone to fetch the apples of the Hesperides. Another, outside a tutorial room on the first floor, is a copy of a panel from the *Ara Pacis* or Altar of Peace in Rome. It shows the first Roman emperor, Augustus, and members of his family, making an offering to Pax at the

time that the site was consecrated. A third panel, located on a neighbouring wall, is a reproduction of a less important work, in the style called 'Neo-Attic', which was popular with the Romans. It shows the Greek god Dionysus (Bacchus to the Romans), with an accompanying panther and musicians. In Greek art this would have had a religious and mythological significance, but for the Romans it would have been purely decorative.

Also, a terracotta cast of a famous ancient Greek bronze sculpture, the 'Charioteer of Delphi' was moved from an archway (now the southern entrance to the Visitors' Centre) at one end of the external colonnade of the Vice-Chancellery, where it had stood since 1933, and placed in an alcove located at the middle of the ground floor walkway at the western end of the block of tutorial rooms and staff studies. The original work, made about 460 B.C., represented a charioteer bringing his team of four horses to a halt, while a slave boy held their heads. A landslide buried the group soon after it was first put in place, and although the chariot, and most of the remaining parts of the group were recovered in ancient times, the charioteer himself and some fragments of the other components were found by French archaeologists a little over a century ago. The replica was presented to the University by Mrs R.T. Robinson and accepted at an afternoon tea function by the Vice-Chancellor and by the President of the Guild of Undergraduates, Mr Hewitson Roberts, the latter promising that the students would 'take the statue under our protection'. In spite of this, the

replica has lost its right forearm, which is preserved on the original statue, because it stretched out horizontally, and this provided too much temptation for those who wished to hang things on it.

In addition, at a later date, a former student who wished to remain anonymous presented a high quality fibreglass copy of the head of the horse of Selene, the moon goddess, which is among the pieces of sculpture from the Parthenon acquired by the British Museum from Lord Elgin in 1815. It is located inside the eastern entrance to the northern part of the building.

The Peacocks

In 1975 the University received a family of peafowl from the Brodie-Hall family, and although it was at first thought that they would add their charm to the Whitfeld Court at the front of the University, the enclosed courtyard in the northern part of the building, away from the dangers of Stirling Highway, was considered to be a safer home. Food and water were provided for them in their first years there by the Dean's secretary, Elizabeth Wallace, and they and their successors have remained in residence ever since, being now fed only three times a week to encourage them to make modest forays to search for food in a natural way as well. Their occasional contributions to performances in the New Fortune Theatre have come to be accepted by audiences and performers alike. Some academics, however, complained at first about their cries, and after a few years a peacock was found with its neck wrung. The culprit has never been identified,

although at the time there were suspicions.

In recent years there have been small modifications to the building, in the form of dividing one room and closing off some rooms that had open fronts because they were used as secretarial offices, but it is essentially the building that Marshall Clifton designed, and has stood the test of time well.

The History of the Reid Library

When UWA was founded in 1913 and the first building was constructed at the Irwin Street site, just £2000 was set aside for the purchase of roughly 100 books. By the time the campus moved to Crawley, there were over 10,000 volumes and a dedicated librarian. Library services at Crawley initially operated out of the Main Library, which was set up in a wing of the Administration building (now the Visitor's Centre). By the early 1960s, overcrowding had become a significant issue leading to the Winthrop Hall Undercroft's being enclosed and then re-opened as a temporary library annex consisting of the Reserve Collection for undergraduates and bound volumes of periodicals.

As early as 1927, campus plans and sketches had begun to showcase a dedicated library building as a feature on campus. In fact, Leslie Wilkinson's 1927 campus plan included a main library building facing the river on the west side of the Great Court, in between the proposed Arts and Science buildings. However, a new campus plan produced by the Consultant Architect to the Senate, Professor Gordon Stephenson in 1955 essentially turned the orientation of the campus around by

proposing a grand library building facing Winthrop Hall across the Great Court.

When the University included the first stage of a main library building in its building program for the triennium 1961-3, the University Library finally became a reality. At the same time that Marshall Clifton was selected to work on the Arts Building, Gilbert Nichol from local architectural firm Cameron, Chisholm and Nichol was commissioned to work on the Library and construction began in August 1962. The two firms were tasked with working together to ensure the two buildings complemented each other and framed the Great Court. In fact, the two projects shared the same structural engineer, D.H. Fraser.

Named after Sir Alexander Reid (UWA Chancellor 1956-1968), the Reid Library opened its doors to readers in February 1964, with its official opening taking place the following May. The building opened to widespread acclaim, winning the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) 1964 Bronze Medal and being generally regarded as one of the most attractive University buildings in Australia.

As originally intended by Stephenson, the Reid Library makes a grand statement on the campus. The Library rises up from the Great Court, its colonnades giving it an almost temple-like façade and conjuring up images of Ancient Greek architecture. The Reid Library is integrally connected to the Arts building by an elevated walkway which extends into a deep veranda that provides protection from the weather and has become a popular meeting place for Arts students. Various campus plans

had emphasised the need for a spacious heart in the centre of the University, and the combination of the Reid Library and the Arts Building, with the lengthy Saw Promenade running between them, provides just that.

On its north side, the Reid Library is bordered by an ornamental pond, affectionately dubbed 'the moat' by staff and students. Students have spent many lunch hours trying to calculate the perfect trajectory and velocity required to clear the water and take a shortcut from the café terrace on the other side. Each semester there are inevitably one or two unsuccessful attempts.

On the inside, the Reid Library has undergone a dramatic transformation. The card catalogues, turnstiles and microfiche have been replaced by iPads, computers, eBooks and large open spaces designed for collaboration. Students are no longer restricted to studying within the library walls owing to an ever-increasing collection of online resources and a powerful campus wireless network. However, on any given day the Library is packed full of students enjoying dedicated research study areas as well as flexible spaces which are perfect for anything from group study to late night exam revision sessions to quiet reflection.

With over one million visitors each year, the Reid Library is one of the busiest and most popular spaces on campus. Ask any Arts alumni about their time at UWA and chances are they will have fond memories of many hours spent in the Reid Library.

The West Australian,
April 30, 1964, p. 7

Arts Expanding, Says Sir Robert

Despite the spectacular advance in science, the humanities were growing faster in Australian universities, the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, said when officially opening the £500,000 WA University Arts Building.

It was the humanities, not the sciences, that had been forced to respect student intakes.

This had come about partly because many students and parents were reacting against narrow specialisation.

The humanities cultivated sympathy between human beings. Scientific advances in this century had not led to greater international good will. The humanities could prevent the advance of science from causing a recurring series of human disasters.¹

Study of the arts helped people to communicate. He was shocked to meet outstanding scientists who were almost illiterate when trying to express themselves.

Scientists had to be able to explain things well if their research was to be of real value to people.

It was a mistake to describe precise speech as quibbling and pedantic.

No Pranks

University authorities took elaborate precautions to prevent student pranks during the Prime Minister's visit.

A watchman stood all day guarding the veiled plaque in the Arts Building to prevent anyone tampering with it before the unveiling.

Arts Faculty Dean Professor Fred Alexander said in the official opening:

"I don't trust the student body." He then produced a key and unlocked a drawer in which he had concealed a gift for Sir Robert – a jarrah cigar box.

But Sir Robert said: "I am astonished at the docility of the students."

Later he told the students: "I am pleased to see that this plaque is so well bedded in the wall that none of you characters will be able to get it out."

¹ This paragraph should be considered in the context of the Vietnam War, which was going on at the time. Later that day, there were student protests against it.



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