Abstract
Fox News host, Greta Van Susteren, re-opened the debate on the virtual versus the physical library recently. This article briefly examines trends in library building design and the emergence of a new typology in the 21st century citing a number of examples from which lessons can be learned. At the turn of the century issues under discussion were the move from print to e-collections, the hybrid library, the library as third place and the freeing up of shelving space for new uses and services. More recently the topics being debated include sustainability, what makes effective learning spaces, the need for postgraduate and research areas, storage projects, and post-occupancy evaluation. The need for further research to ensure continuous improvement in the design of libraries is noted.

Keywords: Library Buildings
Introduction

On the 31st October 2016, Greta Van Susteren former Fox News host of the week-night current affairs programme, On the Record, put the library cat firmly amongst the perching pigeons by suggesting that educational institutions should stop building vanity projects like huge libraries and passing the cost on to the student body since “full libraries are on our smartphones” (Van Susteran, 2016). Needless to say this provoked the ire of academic librarians world-wide and of the book-loving public. The latter focused on the continuing role of the book and indeed the librarians, too, made the point that not all material is available on-line and open access citing special collections in particular. They also highlighted the need to curate and deliver electronic material. On the whole, however, the response from information professionals centred on the role of the library building as a well-maintained place to carry out scholarly work at all levels with expert help and a wide range of tailored services on hand. Most excitingly for those of us involved in the field of library building design, it moved to centre stage many of the topics that we have been talking about in darkened rooms, and indeed brightly lit conference venues, for some time now.

However, it would be wrong to sweep Ms Van Susteren’s comments aside in a wave of self-righteous indignation. By definition provocative statements are intended to throw down the gauntlet, challenge the status quo and stimulate discussion. There undoubtedly is an element of vanity in designing new library buildings or refurbishing old ones. We want our library buildings to attract publicity; we want our patrons to admire, like and yes, use them; we want our institutions to feel proud of them and see them as a draw for students particularly in a highly competitive global market (that way we hope adequate funding lies) but vanity alone is not enough. We also need the spaces to reflect user needs and enable us to deliver new and creative services; we need to respond to the declining need for storage space by creating a range of new and zoned spaces for learning and studying both collaboratively and individually. It is in this area that there is scope for further research. We need more evidence on how students, and indeed staff, operate in the digital age. The holy grail of library design as we move more deeply into the 21st century is to identify the kind of building that will meet the changing learning and research needs of our users in the same way that for previous centuries the classic model of the academic library did with books as the medium through which knowledge was made available.

Changing typology and recent developments

It is hard to pinpoint exactly when the longstanding typology for library buildings began to change but it undoubtedly coincided with the move from print to electronic resources – the dawn of the digital age. The late 20th and early 21st century saw a plethora of articles (Latimer, 2011) on the move from the physical to the virtual library with the Van Susterens of the day predicting the demise of the physical library altogether and provoking much the same sort of response on the importance of rare and unique collections and the value of professional librarians in brokering information. In the public library field, Seattle Public Library designed by Rem Koolhaas and OMA in 2004 is generally held to be the building that took a new look at bringing people and information in all media together and had a major impact on architects and
librarians considering new, or refurbished, spaces in the 21st century. This was soon followed by the 2007 Amsterdam Public Library designed by Joe Coenen, the influence of which is seen in many UK libraries such as, for example, Newcastle and Cardiff. Contrary to the doomsayers much seemed to be happening on the public library front with Idea Stores in various London locations as well as Will Alsop’s library on stilts at Peckham and Christophe Egret’s mini Guggenheim at Clapham. Outside London, as well as the above-mentioned Cardiff and Newcastle libraries, were the Jubilee Library in Brighton, Bournemouth Public Library and many more.

This period also saw changes in the approach to designing academic library buildings. It is always invidious to pick one example but Delft University of Technology Library has to be considered an early adopter of the new typology. The brief for this building, designed by Mecanoo, who have gone on to work on many more libraries, clearly stated that this was to be a library where technology should receive equal billing with books. Other university libraries of note at this time, to name but a few, included those for the University of Utrecht (Wiel Arets), the Free University of Berlin (Foster Associates’ aptly nicknamed ‘Berlin Brain), Herzog and De Meuron’s Cottbus library for the Brandenburg Institute of Technology (where possibly the need to create a landmark building took precedence over the functional aspects) and, at opposing ends of the enclosed versus free-flowing space spectrum, Max Dudler’s Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum at Humboldt University and the Rolex Learning Centre designed by Japanese architects, SANAA. Closer to home there was the ground breaking Saltire Centre for Glasgow Caledonian University, the Warwick University Learning Grid, the University of Sheffield’s Information Commons, the 2010 SCONUL award winning David Wilson Library at the University of Leicester, the Postgraduate Research Centre, University College Cork and, more recently another SCONUL winner, this time in 2013, The McClay Library at Queen’s University Belfast. After opening in 2009, The McClay Library carried out two further enhancements to add additional PCs and seating in 2010 and 2013, and a move into the adjacent David Bates Building is currently in the planning stage.

In the first decade of this century, topics that were regularly aired in the literature and at seminars and conferences focused on the shift from curating and providing access to print collections, via the hybrid library - the “link between the legacy of Gutenberg and the byte of the digital age” (Brawne, 1997 p.6) - to the freeing up of library space to support learning and research. There was much discussion about the library as the third place following the Oldenburg model (Oldenburg, 2001), as social space, and as information and learning commons. As we move through the second decade the debate has widened to include sustainability, incremental refurbishments and extensions, effective IT-rich learning spaces, postgraduate and research space, storage projects, and “the benefits of using post-occupancy evaluation case studies for testing new concepts in practice and as a tool for continuous improvement in designing new buildings as well as refurbishing and adapting existing spaces” (Latimer and Sommer, 2015 p.5). Despite many challenges, particularly in the
public library sector, this period, too, saw many major projects completed.

In the last five or six years there has been considerable activity in the library building world. The Library of Birmingham, again the work of Mecanoo, opened to much fanfare in 2013 although the funding pressures which were to follow cast something of a shadow over what is in design terms a highly impressive building. Exceptional restoration projects have been carried out at the central libraries in Manchester and Liverpool. More recently the South Shields Hub - The Word - designed by library specialists FaulknerBrowns who were also responsible for the RIBA award winning Hebburn Central Library, is being hailed as a model for the future. Locally, the Lexicon library at Dun Laoghaire by Cotter Naessens is a highly impressive and evidentially successful library building. Internationally, DOKLAB at Delft and, recently, DOKK1 in Aarhus have been winning all the awards and plaudits and setting the benchmark for future projects. However, funding for new or even refurbished public libraries is increasingly hard to find, certainly in the UK, as are funds to maintain and staff them but that is for others more qualified and better informed than this author to discuss.

The case for academic libraries tends to be easier to make (although funding pressures are an issue here also) and there are numerous recent examples to learn from in this sector. Sheffield University has moved on from the earlier Information Commons with The Diamond learning centre being seen as the next stage in the Library’s evolution, and the University of Birmingham has just opened the doors of its new library which is next on this author’s list to visit. The recent SCONUL Awards saw The Hive at the University of Worcester win the major award. The Hive marks a new development for libraries as it is a joint venture between the University and the County Council bringing together a university and a public library (with shared staff) for the first time. It is also a very distinctive and highly sustainable building which developed from a very detailed design brief. Other shortlisted projects from which much can be learnt include a complex and transformational refurbishment of the Brynmor Jones Library at the University of Hull; the Cruciform Hub which created a ground-breaking new medical library for University College London; and, of course, the new library at Maynooth University which triumphantly emerged from a deep recession to deliver a user-focused, service-enhancing, environmentally-friendly building that has firmly established itself as key to the University’s activities and profile. Another recent local example is the Cregan Library on the St Patrick’s campus and there are a number of other projects waiting to come to fruition throughout Ireland.

This second decade has been a particularly busy one in the UK with many exciting new and refurbished library buildings opening to much acclaim from users and the wider public alike. The Sir Duncan Rice Library at the University of Aberdeen, designed by Schmidt Hammer Lassen of Black Diamond and now DOKK1 fame, opened in 2011 as did the Central St Martins College of Arts and Design Library – a restored listed granary warehouse which is part of the transformational King’s Cross regeneration project. One of the libraries that most impressed me during a year of library visits wearing my LIBER Architecture Group (LAG) hat, was the...
Weston Library at the University of Oxford. This major refurbishment of Giles Gilbert Scott’s listed 1930s New Bodleian by Wilkinson Eyre is an extremely effective and sensitive project embracing much of the current thinking on innovative services for researchers, widening access and high quality storage for valuable collections. It was shortlisted for the prestigious RIBA Stirling Prize in a year that saw a number of libraries win RIBA national awards. Two of these were Heneghan Peng’s library for the University of Greenwich in the centre of a UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Design Engine Architects Ltd’s Oxford Brookes Library in the John Henry Brookes building which is closely integrated with the teaching and learning spaces. Another recently opened and impressive new building is the Laidlaw Library at Leeds which offers undergraduates a wide choice of individual and group study spaces. Two American libraries, which have received much publicity as exponents of the new typology and both designed by the Norwegian architects Snohetta who kicked off their career as young graduates with the competition-winning Bibliotheca Alexandrina, are The James B. Hunt Library at North Carolina State University and, with the Zeidler Partnership, the Ryerson Learning Centre in Toronto – and there are more libraries in the pipeline from this practice. Increasingly also many Australian academic libraries are very creatively adapting space released by reducing print storage.

For many of us a new library or a complete refurbishment is not on the cards; the Universities of Durham and Edinburgh have adopted an incremental approach, following on from earlier major schemes, carrying out extensive programmes of refurbishment and reordering of their library spaces. There is no shortage of inspiring examples worldwide either with the Kaisa House at the University of Helsinki by Anttinen Oiva Architects and Degelo Architect’s new library for Freiburg University providing much of interest and both of which hosted the Biennial LIBER Architecture Group seminar, in 2014 and 2016 respectively.
The LAG website (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche, 2016) is a rich source of information on recent academic library buildings in Europe. For general information on all building types internationally visit the IFLA Library Buildings and Equipment Section’s website (2016) at http://www.ifla.org/library-buildings-and-equipment/ and sign up for the social media spin-offs. Closer to home is the Designing Libraries website (2016) which contains a wealth of information (and I declare an interest here) at http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk and www.librarybuildings.ie

**Conclusion**

In a short article it is only possible to touch on a selection of library buildings of interest. What is clear is that there are plenty of examples to choose and learn from and no shortage of sources of information – books, articles and websites – to consult either. Libraries are most definitely not all on our smartphones and even the content that is, still needs to be curated and delivered and these processes themselves require considerable physical space. The virtual undoubtedly has had an impact on the physical. Perhaps more needs to be done, and not just said, to counter the vanity argument and demonstrate true value for money. We know our library users’ behaviour and requirements have changed but where is the evidence that we have really asked them what they want and taken the answers on board? Have we limited ourselves to a few undergraduate focus studies rather than systematically collecting data from the whole range of our users to include academic staff, researchers and indeed library staff as well as students? Are we taking the opportunity of freed-up space to deliver innovative and newly relevant services? And where are the formal evaluation metrics and the comparative post-occupancy evaluation studies once projects are completed to tell us what we got right or wrong? We need this information if we are to ensure that the libraries we are building today continue to remain as relevant in the electronic era as those that were built for print collections continued to be for many of the preceding centuries.

Karen Latimer, OBE, MA, Dip LIS, FCLIP is Chair, Designing Libraries Advisory Board

**References**

- Van Susteran, G. (2016) Colleges should stop building vanity projects like huge libraries and billing students-full libraries are on our smartphones! [Twitter], 31st October, Available at: https://twitter.com/greta/status/793052011386265600 (Accessed: 4th January 2017).