

Library buildings in the United Kingdom, 1990–1994

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Although this series had its origin in the 1940s, this volume is only the third in the present format (the previous two volumes cover the periods 1975 to 1983 and 1984 to 1989 respectively). *Library buildings in the United Kingdom* describes a selection of academic and public library buildings constructed or altered during the five-year period January 1990 to December 1994. Examples include new libraries, extensions, conversions, and major refurbishments. The latter, as the editor points out, is an aspect of increasing importance as it is an economical and often successful way of improving facilities for users, yet it has been neglected in the previous volumes of the series. It is a useful addition to the present volume.

Nine contributors, working voluntarily, participated in this publication, each chosen for his or her expertise, subject knowledge (academic or public libraries) and – in the case of public libraries – the area in which he or she lives (Scotland, Midlands etc.). In this way extensive coverage of building projects was possible.

A total of 421 building projects were reported to the team (96 academic and 325 public). Of these, 103 have been described in this book (23 academic and 80 public). The larger and more costly academic library projects have been selected for inclusion. The public library team on the other hand have attempted to cover a variety of buildings throughout the United Kingdom. A full list of all reported projects at the front of the book gives the name of the institution/authority, the name of the building, its size in square metres, its cost in pounds sterling, the date it was opened, and whether it is a new, refurbished, extended or converted building. This list is a very useful quick reference to library building activity in the United Kingdom during the period.

The most comprehensive entries provide the reader with the name of the library, the architect, the building contractor and, if relevant, the supplier of custom-designed furniture and fittings. Photographs of both the exterior and interior, floor plans, elevations (sometimes) and a table listing statistics, features, departments, services and costs are included. These tables provide a useful summary of each project. What appear to be noteworthy or unusual aspects of the *Brief to the architect* are included in some entries, giving the reader an idea of the client's specific requirements. Sensitivities regarding site and surrounding buildings are outlined where neces-

sary, and the descriptions of the buildings inform the reader of layout, special features, finishes, good and bad design points, furniture, lighting, cabling and security.

Entries vary in length, but generally are sufficiently descriptive for the purposes of this book. They have been well written, some in an attractive personal style which makes one feel that the author truly studied the building and is giving an honest assessment. For example, Jimmy Orr in describing Stirling's Library in Glasgow shows a touch of humour, and talks of 'the good news' and 'the bad news' in a forthright and open manner. At the end of his description of Dunoon Library, he warns visitors to ignore a sign directing people to the Public library. It is an old sign, and the Library does not have the right to remove it!

The book contains a good balance of text and illustration. The photographs are of a high standard, particularly those of the exteriors of the buildings. Many of the interior pictures are also excellent, illustrating some noteworthy feature detailed in the text. In a few instances, however, one feels that perhaps an alternative view could have been found which would better illustrate the specific character of the library.

The floor plans are generally useful and informative. Reprinted from the architects' plans, they vary in size and clarity. An indication of scale is missing in many instances, which is a pity, as those involved in library planning are interested in sizes and proportions.

Academic libraries are in alphabetical order of university, with the colleges of higher education at the end. On first sight, the sequence of public libraries is a mystery. One then realizes that this section is in order of borough or county council. Although obvious to local readers, the world of British boroughs is unfamiliar to non-British readers! Fortunately, a good, clear index includes both county/borough name and that of the library. The *List of all reported projects* at the front of the book indicates by means of an asterisk those projects included in the text. An additional column in this list for page number where relevant would have been a useful supplement to a very brief contents page and would have saved the reader some searching.

This book is highly recommended for those involved in library planning and design, both librarians and architects. It is not the intention of the authors to provide lengthy detail. Rather, they provide insight and important pointers as to what works and what does not, where mistakes can be made and where a combination of features can result in success. They remind planners of the importance of environmental aspects such as site and architectural sympathy with neighbouring buildings, and they provide ideas for the creative use of colours, textures and finishes. The book provides a rich and varied overview, and a wealth of practical suggestions.

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