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DEWE, Michael (ed). *Renewing our libraries: case studies in re-planning and refurbishment*. **Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2009. 284 pages. ISBN 978-0-7546-7339-2. £60.00**

Like a great many other librarians, much of my recent professional life has revolved around the modernisation, refurbishment and re-invigoration of the libraries I've worked in, so I was fascinated to read the accounts and experiences of others who had undergone similar transformations – and a little frustrated that such a volume wasn't at hand when we were considering the various design options available to us.

The book is departmentalised into logical chapters which group the 16 case studies by refurbishment type, so that the aspirations and limitations which influenced renewal or refurbishment take precedence over sector definitions. The effect is to allow those with particular interests to more easily compare and contrast the techniques and resolutions employed by others who might have faced similar challenges to their own.

Surrounding the chapters are Michael Dewe's own excellent contributions. The Preface and Introduction offer him an opportunity to clearly describe the design logic which underpins the chapterisation of the book and the criteria against which the case studies were selected; and to consider the many and various forces for change which, over the years, have brought about periods of library building, refurbishment and renewal. I found his 'snapshot' case studies, a gallop through a variety of recent (up to 2007) refurbishments, this time sub-divided mostly by sector, very enlightening. No great depth is offered for individual cases, but any would serve well as a basis for future investigation by those faced with similar restrictions or with similar aspirations. The book ends with an overview of the various stages through which a typical project might ideally progress, and in itself becomes a very useful 'toolkit', a guide for libraries approaching their own refurbishment project – starting with an assessment of the library building, progressing through a thorough review of user requirements and other influences upon the design, to methods of mitigation during the works themselves and finally to the conduct of project review and impact assessments. At each stage, reference is made to the previous case studies, with discussion of the real-life problems faced and overcome.

The case studies themselves, though each author is allowed their own style and voice, are well and clearly written, detailed and informative, and a number of photographs and tables are used for illustrative purposes. They follow a similar content pattern, designed to ensure that all important facets are covered – the reasons for refurbishment, descriptions of the various design stages and the final design itself, a summary of any difficulties encountered and their resolution, and finally an evaluation of the refurbishment and its impact on the library community. Most library sectors are covered, including national, academic, public and independent libraries; and a variety of refurbishment types are included, covering the problems of modernising and extending library space, creating modern learning and research environments and creating environments

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capable of delivering new styles of provision, to enhancing heritage buildings with modern facilities. The case studies are predominantly UK based, though with valuable contributions from Sweden and the Republic of Ireland, and projects in Australia, Canada and the USA are discussed in the surrounding chapters.

Michael Dewe describes periods of library renewal as being largely cyclical in nature – they seem to happen in a big way every so many years. In reality, of course, it's unlikely that anything we do today will remain as it is for very long. We all make 'fine-tuning' changes along the way to meet current demands, or to enable better use of various features – however, there comes a time when fine-tuning just isn't enough anymore, and we need to take a deep breath and start over. This well-written, well designed collection of case studies and commentaries illustrates many of the challenges faced by those charged with renewing our libraries, and discusses the outcomes achieved. I have no doubt that it will prove an invaluable reference tool for students of library design and history, architects, designers, planners and librarians for many years to come.

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