



Libraries through the lens

New reading room, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

WHEN it opened in 1914, the Ersnt von Ihne-designed Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, was Berlin's largest building. Thomas Guignard's image is inside the library's new reading room, which was opened in 2012.

The original library highlights the difficult legacy of its patron Wilhelm II, Germany's last Emperor and King of Prussia, whose "expansionist views and foreign policy blunders antagonised the international community, precipitated the outbreak of World War One and sowed the seeds of resentment that would culminate in the horrors of Nazi rule and the

Second World War. His reign was also one of modernisation, enthusiastic promotion of the arts and sciences and development of public education and social welfare."

Work on the library took 11 years to complete and "in the centre of the massive structure was a large reading room crowned by a cupola, rivalling the national libraries of France, Britain and the US."

The original building was severely damaged during Allied bombing raids over Berlin in 1941 and following the war, under East German rule, it remained unrepaired. It was eventually demolished in 1977 and replaced by a concrete book storage tower.

"After the Reunification of Germany, the architect H. G. Merz was tasked with the daunting task of renovating the badly bruised icon. The project started in 2005 and lasted until the reopening (virtual) celebrations in January of this year. The library remained open through most of the renovation. In 2012, a new reading room was inaugurated, rising again where the original one had stood.

"During my last visit to Berlin a few years ago, I was fortunate enough to get a sneak peek at the renovations still undergoing, as well as this rare early morning look at the still empty reading room!"