



Libraries through the lens

Seeley Historical Library, Cambridge

THIS Year's Libraries through the lens columns begin a little closer to home for most CILIP members, with a UK library and a trip to Cambridge.

Thomas Guignard, Librarian and photographer, captured the University of Cambridge Faculty of History's Seeley Historical Library providing the latest image in the series. He says: "The library occupies the base of the faculty of History building, designed by Sir James Stirling and his then associate James Gowen, and completed in 1968. Together with that of the engineering laboratories at Leicester University and the Florey building at Queen's College in Oxford, the Cambridge Faculty of History is part of Stirling's 'red trilogy', as the three structures share visu-

al similarity through the use of red brick contrasting with glass and steel."

Designed to make use of space on the site, but as Thomas explains things did not go entirely to plan. He says: "The library fills the triangular shape left by the two perpendicular towers where the faculty offices and seminar rooms are located and whose L-shape can be seen as representing an open book, with pages fanning out over the library. The latter is crowned by a stepped glass pyramid, which illuminates the reading room below both by letting sunlight in during the day and through cleverly hidden light tubes at night.

"This glass canopy may be an interesting feature for architecture aficionados and library photographers, but it has

also provided its share of discomfort to staff and users. Temperature control was intended to happen through air circulation within the canopy's double glazing, but the system apparently never quite worked, a situation maybe confounded by the fact that the library was originally planned to be oriented in a different direction: the design was rotated by 90 degrees late in the project due to the University failing to acquire some of the land earmarked for its new Sidgwick campus.

"Nevertheless, the Seeley Historical Library remains a major signpost of British modern architecture, and I was honoured to be let in a few minutes before opening time one summer morning so I could take a few photographs!"