

Grey District Library History – 1868 to now

Grey District Library had its beginnings on 15 August 1868, the same year that Greymouth became a borough, when a group of citizens formed the semi-private Greymouth Literary Society to circulate books. The association had a membership fee of £2-2-0 (2 pound & 2 shillings) and admission was by ballot. The first mayor, Edward Masters, was a founding member. The Society met in various hotels including the Albion (now Kingsgate), the Gilmer (now Neptune's Backpackers) and in the Tramway Chambers, at the back of the Union Hotel, where they had a reading room.

In March 1871, at the request of the citizens the semi-private association became a public association, The Greymouth Literary Association and Public Library. The Society soon moved to a large building on Mackay Street, remaining there for some years until the building and everything in it was destroyed by a fire that swept the town in the 1880s. The Society relocated the library to a corrugated iron shanty, built near the railway crossing on Tainui Street, where it stayed for 20 years, opening the reading room to the public for free and lending books to members.

In 1906, with the assistance of a grant of £2,250 (2,250 pounds Sterling) from the Carnegie Foundation, the library was established in a wing of the new Town Hall and was known as the Carnegie Library. The library contained a lending library (32ft x 17ft 6in), a public reading room (34ft x 17ft 6in), a librarian's room (20ft x 17ft 6in), and upstairs a library reading room and a ladies' reading room.

The library was made free to ratepayers of Greymouth Borough in January, 1947 and therefore became eligible for assistance from the National Library of New Zealand. This has continued in the form of loans, requests and professional advice.

In July 1947 the Town Hall was destroyed by fire (arson). Most of the library stock was saved. The library was rehoused temporarily in the Trinity Hall (belonging to the Anglican Church) on the corner of Guinness and Albert Street, where it stayed for 10 years.

The library was opened on the present site (corner of Albert and Mackay Streets) on 17 April 1947. In May and September 1988, Greymouth had two major floods. The library was inundated with water to a depth of 800mm and lost one-third of its books, over 8000 volumes.

The library's client base increased from 8,000 to 13,000 in November 1989 when the Borough became a District. Runanga Library became a branch of the Grey District Library.

In October 1993 the library moved from a manual library system to a computerized system, the Catalist system. It upgraded to C2 in 1997 and changed to .eLM in 2006.

By 1997, after 40 years in the same building, the library was too small. Better conditions for staff were required by Occupational Safety and Health regulations and more room was required to house new technologies. After considering different options and plans, Council decided to enlarge and remodel the current building at a cost of more than \$500,000. Work started in March 2003. During this time the library operated temporarily a few doors down the road, on the corner of Mackay and Tarapuhi Streets. The updated

library building was opened in August 2003. It included a sunny reading room, a public toilet and a large Reference area.

In 2006 the library began updating to provide online resources. The Grey District Online Library allowed access to the library catalogue, user's records, databases and websites via the internet. Cooperation between libraries of the Buller, Grey and Westland Districts increased. Together, the libraries subscribed to the EPIC (Electronic Purchasing in Collaboration) databases. They became the first libraries in the South Island to join Aotearoa People's Network, providing computer use, a host of different computer programmes, internet access and a wireless connection for people with their own computers or electronic devices, all for free. This had a huge impact on the library, widening the user base, changing the perception of the library and markedly increasing the number of people using the library.

Other changes in the 2006-9 period included reorganizing the library to create a much bigger children's area, space for computers and display areas. The Reference area, now infrequently used in the online environment, was considerably downsized. Also, the public libraries of the West Coast joined with the National Library of New Zealand library advisor based in Greymouth to plan and host the South Island Children's Conference 2009, a national conference for librarians from all over New Zealand.