

RESEARCH ARTICLE

What we lost in the Jagger Library fire

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Abstract

At the University of Cape Town Libraries, the vast and valuable Special Collections Africana, rare books, government publications, manuscript and audio-visual archives were housed in the historic Jagger Library until 18 April 2021, when the building was razed by a runaway wildfire. With the reading room and galleries gutted by flames, and the basements flooded, the losses to the collection were extensive, representing a tragic and irreparable loss to South African research and historiography. While salvage and recovery efforts are ongoing, this article outlines what was lost by fire. It provides a snapshot of what was in the reading room at the time of the fire, and details the losses as far as possible – these include the prized published collections housed in the reading room and galleries, as well as the miscellany of archival materials situated on the tables and reserve shelving in the building at the time of the fire.

Résumé

La bibliothèque historique Jagger de l'Université du Cap en Afrique du Sud hébergeait de vastes et précieuses collections spéciales africanistes, des livres rares, des publications gouvernementales, ainsi que des archives manuscrites et audiovisuelles, jusqu'à ce qu'un incendie détruise le bâtiment le 18 avril 2021. Avec la salle de lecture et les galeries ravagées par les flammes et les sous-sols inondés, les préjudices pour la collection furent considérables et ont représenté une perte tragique et irréparable pour la recherche et l'historiographie sud-africaines. À l'heure où les opérations de récupération sont toujours en cours, cet article fait l'inventaire des fonds perdus dans l'incendie. Il décrit ce qui se trouvait dans la salle de lecture au moment de l'incendie et, dans la mesure du possible, les pertes subies. Au nombre de celles-ci figuraient les précieuses collections publiées hébergées dans la salle de lecture et les galeries, ainsi que les documents d'archives divers et variés posés sur les tables et conservés dans les réserves.

Introduction

This article focuses on the destruction of the Jagger Library and its contents, outlining the losses by fire to the holdings of the University of Cape Town Special Collections library and archive. It is not an exhaustive list, but rather a representation of what we

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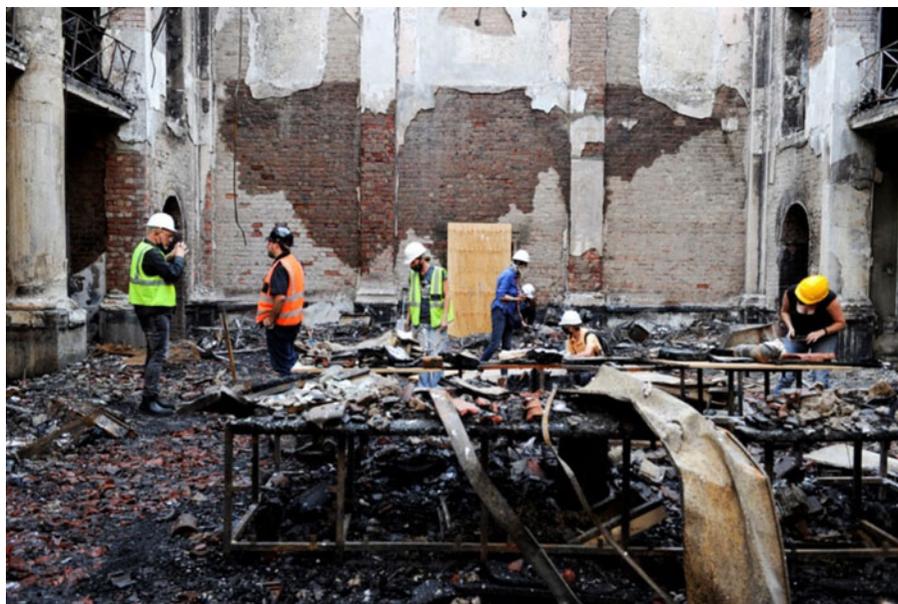


Figure 1. The remains of the Jagger Library reading room a day after the fire – with the information desk in the foreground. Photo by Lerato Maduna, April 2021.

know to be lost. Working out the losses is only possible at this stage for what we know was destroyed by fire in the Reading Room. Where collections were donated or deposited by creators, copyright holders or the next-of-kin, we have made every effort to communicate these losses directly only in cases where we are certain about the status of the collection. Despite the ongoing recovery, what was lost in the fire casts a long shadow over our efforts and represents a tragic and irreparable loss to South African research and historiography. This article will address the contents of the Reading Room itself, which were almost entirely destroyed by the inferno (Figure 1).

Responding to the Table Mountain wildfire

The wildfire that devastated parts of the University of Cape Town on Sunday 18 April 2021 took several days to extinguish. Students and staff were evacuated from the site, and the academic project was paused for a week. The fire was responsible for massive personal losses to many individuals and departments at the university, especially those whose residences or offices were destroyed by fire. On the upper campus, the Jagger Library, HW Pearson Building, Fuller residence and Smuts residence were badly damaged by the fire. On the lower campus, Cadbol House and La Grotta were destroyed. The damage extended beyond these buildings – the historic Rhodes Memorial restaurant and Mostert's Mill were burnt, alongside great swathes of mountainside. The full extent of damage to the university is beyond our scope, and full recovery will take years of commitment and investment. The Jagger Library was entirely gutted, and everything above ground was entirely destroyed. It was only on Tuesday 21 April, after the site had been 'deemed safe by structural engineers to

enter' that we could establish the extent of destruction to the building and assets therein (Crowster 2021: 29). The salvage and recovery project of the surviving Special Collections was soon formalized according to disaster management protocols. It took a few weeks of intense salvage operations to clear the basements of surviving stock. UCT Libraries is committed to their recovery, with plans to rebuild and recover. A Conservation Unit has been established, and the Libraries' Special Collections department, including both the archive and library teams, has been fully engaged in various processes and projects towards reconciling surviving stock in order to make it available to users.¹

Losing the Reading Room

The loss of the Reading Room garnered universal attention, and within days the Jagger Library was added to the Wikipedia 'List of Destroyed Libraries'.² The Special Collections Managers, Mandy Noble and Michal Singer, had the unenviable, heart-breaking task of surveying the burnt-out building with technical staff to assess what was lost and what had possibly survived. We had found hope in the not-knowing; until we knew for certain, the possibility remained that something had survived. Walking through the burnt-out Reading Room was indescribable – a visual spectre. We walked up the staircase, over the surviving mosaics restored in 2012, past the burnt-out paintings so carefully selected, and through the double-door entrance into the Jagger Reading Room. The space had been gutted; the Information Desk in the middle of the room was a carcass, surrounded by dunes of black ash and debris. We saw the markings of the fire, ghoulishly etched into the walls and surfaces that remained. What had once been a haven for scholars was now a construction site, with rubble made up of burnt and fused remnants of the African Studies Collection, which scattered in the wind that day across the southern suburbs of Cape Town (Figure 2a and Figure 2b).

The Jagger Library served as the main library building for the University of Cape Town when it moved to the Groote Schuur Campus – the upper campus. The library was built in 1930, and formally opened in 1931. Its construction and development was established almost entirely through one benefactor, businessman and cabinet minister, J. W. Jagger, who also served as chair of the university's finance committee (Phillips 1993: 159). He passed away in 1930, but his widow formally opened the library the following year. The Jagger Library later served as a short loan library, and from 2000 it became the new home of the African Studies Library. It was eventually restored in 2012.

It was put back to the way it had been when it was first built as a reading room in the 1930s It got its polished corkwood floors back, and the walls went

¹ For a comprehensive outline of the salvage and recovery of UCT's Special Collections since the fire, see Singer and Noble (2022).

² This list includes historic examples such as the Library of Alexandria, the Libraries of Constantinople, the English Monastic Libraries, the US Library of Congress, the 1933 book burning of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin, and the National Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most examples on the list include libraries that were destroyed deliberately. In this respect, the Jagger Library is a rare example of a library destroyed by natural causes. View the full list at: Wikipedia (2023).

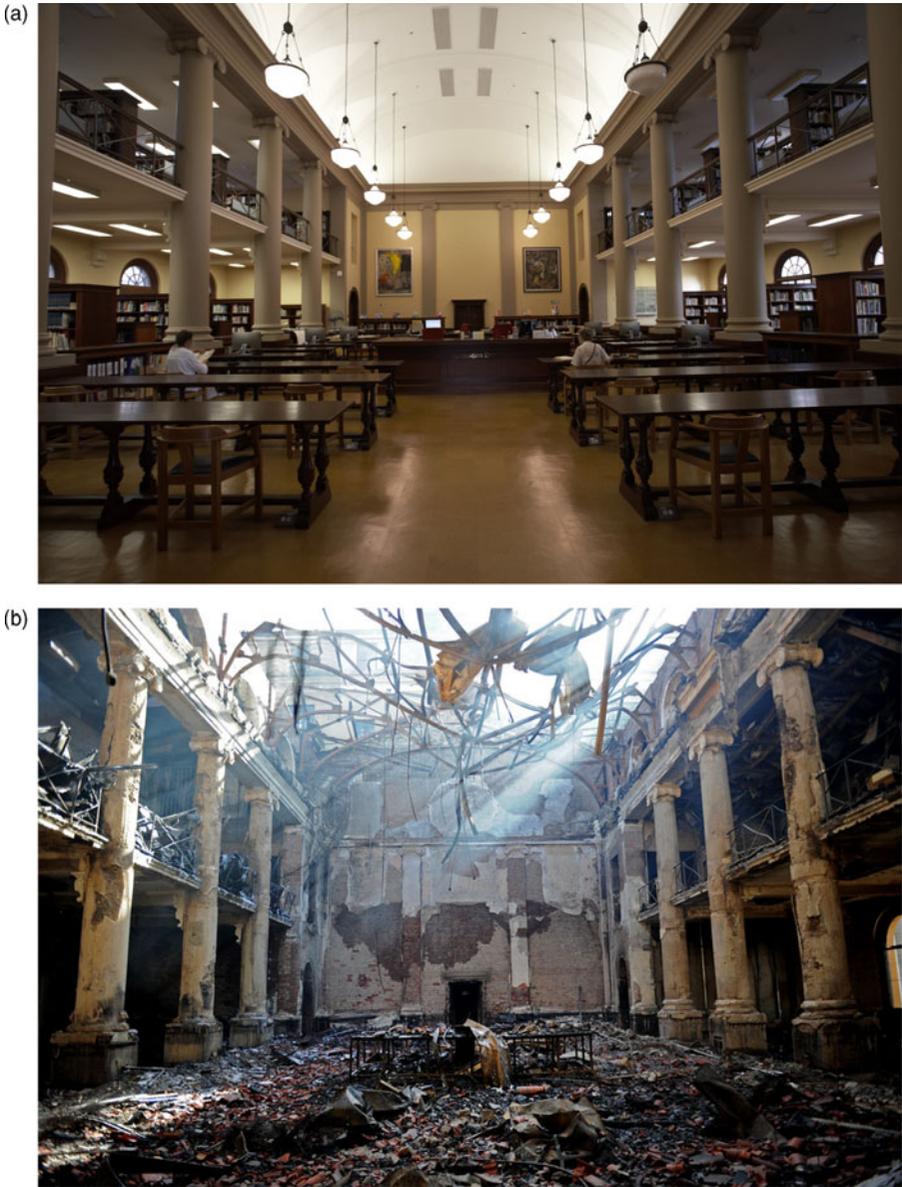


Figure 2. (a) The Jagger Reading Room as it appeared before the fire. Photo by Jen Eidelman, undated. (b) The Jagger Reading Room after the fire. Photo by Lerato Maduna, 19 April 2021.

back to the original paint, painstakingly identified, under layers of institutional gloss ... every year, we'd take students and parents through the modern, cutting-edge library, with its glass and electronics, and the clinical efficiency of a bank, until at last they reached this reading room. And I would watch them thinking, pretty much universally, 'Ah. Now this is what I was expecting from a university library' (D'Angelo 2021) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Short Loan section, once housed in the Jagger Library, c. 1980s. UCT Libraries, *All Things UCT Collection*.

Working out the losses

In the days immediately following the fire, the Special Collections team outlined a report on what was in the Reading Room and where it was – what survived, and what did not. Under a section of the report entitled ‘Destroyed by Fire – What We Know’ the losses were first formally outlined:

[T]he vast majority of the African Studies Published Print Collection, the entire African Studies Film Collection, all the UCT University Calendars, some of the most important and heavily used Government Publications documents from South Africa and across the continent, and Manuscripts kept in the Reading Room for processing or digitisation, were utterly destroyed. The Special Collections Archives Office, situated on the University Avenue side of the building, was engulfed and destroyed, and therein we have lost all the administrative records related to the archives – as well as the institutional records containing the history of UCT Libraries. The fire door system in the Libraries worked well when deployed – and so the damage extends up until the Glass Stacks and the shelving in that area. This includes the vast collection of African Studies Published Collections kept there, as well as Government Publications and unprocessed donations of manuscript collections (UCT Special Collections 2021) (Figure 4).

Once we were able to access the building we found areas that had not been touched by the fire but had suffered water damage to a greater or lesser extent. Subsequently,

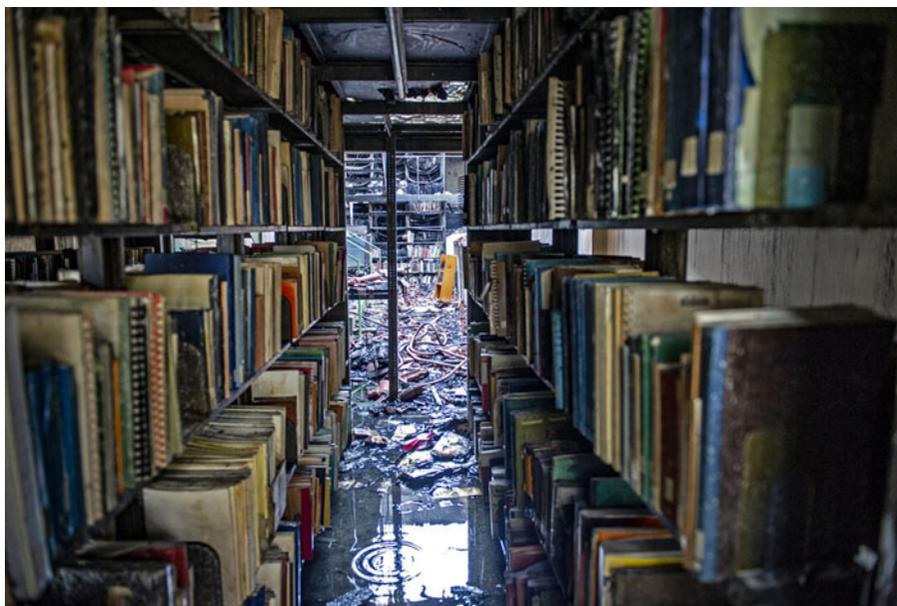


Figure 4. The destruction to the Reading Room. Photo by Lerato Maduna, 19 April 2021.

small sections of the collections were found to have survived, but these were negligible in comparison with the losses, and we had no idea how far the collections in the basements were damaged. The Libraries Executive Director urged staff not to engage in speculation or conjecture about the losses. We also felt compelled to protect and respect the interests of those affected by the losses directly, including creators and copyright holders, as well as depositors and their descendants, by ensuring that what we reported was verified, and so this report includes only what we know to be destroyed. Wherever possible donors or stakeholders impacted by losses to the published or unpublished collections have been personally informed with detailed letters outlining the status of their specific collection. This could not be finalized in all cases owing to the loss during the fire of administrative records describing the contents and contact details of donors, the fact that some are deceased, or that structures and office-bearers of organizations that created institutional records have changed. In some cases, determining losses to unprocessed materials was something of a forensic exercise, involving reference to correspondence, electronic acquisition spreadsheets, and even digital copies of box labels which had captured such information as donor names and contact details, collection names, and the physical extent and sequence of collections stored on shelves. We were also able to reach out to retired department heads and former staff members to try to identify missing information.

Losing institutional memory

The archive was made up of several thousand discrete collections donated over a period of seven decades, starting when the Manuscripts and Archives Department was



Figure 5. Burnt shelves that previously housed sections of the African Studies Collection. Photo by Lerato Maduna, April 2021.

first established in 1953, following the initial collection development efforts of Dr R. F. M. Immelman, who served as the University Librarian at UCT from 1940 to 1970. New deposits to the archive were entered into accession registers, in the form of two large minute books, to record their provenance and assign collection numbers.³ These registers were still in use at the time of the fire, kept in the Reading Room, and their destruction represents a significant loss of institutional memory for archival collections in Special Collections. These administrative records were maintained for each archival collection, including deeds of gift and related correspondence and information. They were vital to documenting the provenance of each individual archival collection. These were kept in filing cabinets in the Archives Office, which mostly protected them from the fire. Out of approximately 1600 collections, the folders for 516 collections were lost (Figure 5).

We also lost our historical chronological donation registers of books and archives donated to UCT Libraries. These were beautiful, red-bound volumes, transferred to Special Collections for safekeeping, and kept in the Reading Room. They contained detailed, itemized lists of donations of both published and primary source materials to UCT Libraries, recorded in forty-five chronological volumes. This compounds the loss of the administrative records; the donation registers would have provided an alternative source on the provenance of archival collections, and also the source for

³ The Special Collections reference code for Manuscripts and Archives is BC for collections and BCS for single items.

recording the provenance of book donations to Special Collections, including Rare and Antiquarian Book Collections. Special Collections' internal archives, including institutional records of the African Studies Library, Manuscripts and Archives Department, the Rare and Antiquarian Book Department, and other related records, were lost. As the logical space for internal record keeping, over the years many institutional records of the Libraries had been deposited in Manuscripts and Archives. These included the papers of Dr Immelman, subsequent university librarians and archivists. These were being sorted and arranged at the time of the fire.

Seventy-two card index cabinet drawers were destroyed in the Reading Room. The indices for the All Things UCT Collection, the MacMillan Photograph Collection and individual UCT-related published articles were destroyed. This interrupted the ongoing efforts of archivists to digitalize the card catalogues, posing a significant challenge to accessing those collections. The university's annual handbooks – also referred to as calendars, yearbooks or prospectuses – served as a snapshot of the functioning of the institution over time. There was a full set in the Reading Room which was destroyed. This included one hundred volumes relating to the University of Cape Town between 1918 and 2018 and about twenty volumes relating to its predecessor, the South African College, from 1829 to 1918. It included details of staff by faculty and department, syllabi for all courses offered at a given time, as well as requirements for admission, rules, and fees. A process is currently underway to consolidate and digitize the duplicate copies for certain years that were in storage in Special Collections and the university's Administrative Archives.

Losses to the published collections

Losing the African Studies Collection

The Jagger Reading Room was home to the African Studies Collection – a significant collection of published materials relating to South Africa and Southern Africa. The scope of the collection was recently expanded to include materials from West and East Africa including French- and Portuguese-speaking countries. The collection was especially rich in history, languages, literature, politics, arts, architecture, social studies, economics, education, religion and development studies. As it was a valuable research collection, it contained both historical and contemporary materials giving researchers access to the continent's past and current conditions. In addition to the monographs and books, the collection included the African Film Collection comprising 3500 films on VHS tapes and DVDs sourced from across the continent and featuring the work of independent filmmakers. The entire African Film Collection on DVD was destroyed, but thankfully the films on VHS were salvaged and those that did not suffer from water damage are in the process of being digitized.

The African Studies Book Collection had approximately 73,500 books at the time of the fire. It is estimated that more than half of the collection was destroyed – everything that was shelved in the Reading Room and the two upper galleries. This included books in the social sciences, including anthropology, media studies, economics, development studies, political studies, gender studies, education, languages and linguistics, law, religious studies and philosophy. Tragically, it included many of the 2000 titles that had been specifically sourced from French- and



Figure 6. The destruction of the African Studies Film Collection. Photo by Lerato Maduna, April 2021.

Portuguese-speaking Africa in the preceding decade. Under the leadership of Ms Joan Rapp, Executive Director of the Libraries, Dr Colin Darch was tasked with travelling to African countries specifically to purchase materials from these countries. Between 2001 and 2009, Dr Darch, an academic and researcher employed by the Libraries, travelled to Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon and Senegal to purchase books that would otherwise have been impossible to source through traditional collection development methods – these were ‘things you can’t order by post’ (Darch 2007). Dr Darch was in a unique position to undertake these trips as he was fluent in Portuguese, French and Swahili. He also had local contacts in the countries visited. UCT Libraries, specifically the African Studies Collection, was in many instances the only library in Africa to own these titles. As a result, researchers from across the continent visited Special Collections to make use of these resources (Figure 6).

Losses to the Rare and Antiquarian Book Collections

Most of the Rare and Antiquarian Book Collections shelved in the basement of the Jagger building were not damaged by the fire, and were taken out of the basement as part of the salvage process. Those that suffered water damage have been placed in cold storage or treated by local conservators. There were, however, two collections shelved in the upper gallery of the Reading Room. The first was the Jack Maclean Memorial Collection – 212 volumes. This collection of books was donated to the Libraries in the 1960s by Mrs Maclean in memory of her son Jack, along with funds to

purchase additional books for the collection. Included in the collection were travelogues, local and general history books, along with local cookery books. The second collection was the Naval and Aviation Collection donated by Humphrey Charles Willis – 2359 volumes. He was a very enthusiastic collector of books on all aspects of sailing and aeronautics. The collection included volumes on sailing ships through the centuries, including works on the wooden ships of the Elizabethan era and those used in the Napoleonic wars. Personal narratives of South Africans who served in the armed forces of both the First and Second World Wars were also included. These will be almost impossible to replace. Mr Humphrey Willis donated duplicate copies of his collection and on his death bequeathed the entire collection to UCT Libraries. The Naval and Aviation collection was consulted regularly by researchers in all disciplines including those in engineering. Both the collections, while not necessarily ones that would typically be found in an academic library in Southern Africa, added a depth and a variety to the collections in Special Collections.

Losses to government publications

Special Collections was also home to a unique and vast collection of government publications, not only relating to South Africa but also from Southern Africa, and more recently from other parts of the continent. Included in the collection were materials from the colonial period including from the British Colonial Office. In 2019 the Government Publications area in the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library was refurbished and unfortunately the most in-demand materials were moved from the area into the top-most gallery of the Jagger building. This area was just below the roof of the building and everything in there was totally destroyed. A significant amount of South African government publications were lost to the fire, including books relating to the South African government; government gazettes; annual publications of statutes; House of Assembly and National Assembly debates from 1940–2013; material relating to the pre-1994 Homelands; local government materials; provincial materials including Cape Provincial and post-1994 provincial materials; publications from the Native Representative Council, Coloured Persons Representative Council and the South African Indian Council. We lost publications relating to Tanzania, as well as a considerable reference collection. We also lost international publications from the European Union, the Commonwealth, Great Britain, including publications from the Colonial Office, and other international governmental organizations.

Losses to the archives

The losses to the archives in Special Collections were substantially fewer than the publications. Nearly two-thirds of the collection was housed in off-site storage. Despite the water penetration to the most heavily used materials that were stored in the basements onsite, most were not lost. The fire took place during the Covid-19 lockdown, at a time when staff used the Reading Room tables to lay out materials requested by researchers. Some would have been there because they had been on display before lockdown, were newly processed or arranged, or because there were pending research requests requiring their digitization.

Lost while servicing research requests

The Reading Room was a large space with many tables, ideal to accommodate the requisite social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic to enable staff members to service research requests. One of the greatest singular losses to the archive was the destruction of 90 per cent of the Black and Fagg Architectural Collection, a set of original architectural drawings of well-known Cape-based structures produced by the prominent architectural company Black and Fagg. The collection had been laid out on the tables only a week before the fire to service a research request. Most drawings dated between 1895 and 1907, but there were drawings as recent as the 1930s. Out of ten large oversize portfolios containing an estimated total of 1000 drawings, only the last portfolio, containing about 100 drawings, survived. These contents relate to numerous Standard Bank branches. Black and Fagg were awarded the first of the CPIA/Argus Bronze Medals in 1929 for the Standard Bank building situated between Adderley and St George's Streets in Cape Town. Another, more recent, architectural collection was also adversely impacted – the Roelof Uytenbogaardt Papers, containing records of certain of the architectural projects of this prolific and influential South African architect and UCT academic. The records of several projects, comprising seven archival boxes, had been used shortly before the fire and were thus destroyed. Another collection lost under similar circumstances was a wooden trunk containing the photographic record of Dr Alex du Toit's geological research, forming part of the Alex du Toit Papers. As an internationally renowned geologist associated with UCT, du Toit's work mapping the Karoo region of South Africa through the complete stratigraphy directly contributed to the advancement of continental drift theory and by extension indirectly to plate tectonic theory (Chetty 2021: 151). While his textual collection has been widely used, the trunk of photographs was a later addition by a great-nephew, containing landscape images taken throughout Southern Africa, South America, and other parts of the world. They have been consulted for various purposes including plant ecology and vegetation change over time through time-lapse photography comparison. The loss of this collection had a direct impact on research about Alex du Toit and his work.⁴

Shortly before lockdown, several museum objects had been retrieved from the Special Collections off-site strong room at the request of a course convenor of the Michaelis School of Fine Arts' Curating the Archive Object Ecologies course. Students had visited to view the objects to make selections for their student projects. As the strong room was inaccessible over lockdown, the objects remained in a secure area of the Reading Room and were destroyed by fire. This included some unique items, namely a nineteenth-century travelling brass microscope in a wooden box and a 300-centimetre-long roll of an echo-sounding chart from the maiden voyage of Swedish trans-Atlantic line vessel *Kanangoora*, passing over Aliwal Shoal near Umkomaas, South Africa, 1939. It also included a silver-plated hand mirror engraved from 'Sweet Workers Union, C.T. 1940' and a hairbrush from 'E.C.W.U. Paarl, 7.10.53' that belonged to renowned South African trade unionist Ray Alexander Simons.

⁴ Despite its own losses incurred during the fire, the Plant Conservation Unit had previously scanned a selection of these images for comparative research and was able to provide these digital surrogates to the Libraries.



Figure 7. The 1947 Royal Visit, with the Jagger Library and the Jameson Hall in the background. *All Things UCT Collection*, UCT Libraries.

Several objects destroyed related directly to the history of the university. These had been on display in honour of the installation of the new Chancellor in March 2020, until the event was postponed owing to the lockdown. Sadly this included the engraved ceremonial key used for the official opening of the Jagger Library on 1 October 1931 by the widow of J. W. Jagger. It also included a fountain pen used by Queen Elizabeth, consort of George VI, to sign the visitors' book in the Librarian's office in the Jagger Library when an honorary Doctorate in Laws was conferred on her in 1947. Two silver trowels were also on display – they commemorated the laying of the foundation stone of the Bolus Herbarium on 26 January 1938 by Vice-Chancellor Sir J. Carruthers Beattie. Another miniature trowel engraved with the university motto, *Spes Bona*, and the date, 1 May 1925, was believed to have been used by the Prince of Wales, in his capacity as Chancellor, who laid the foundation stone of the Men's Residence, the first building to be constructed on UCT's new Groote Schuur Campus (Figure 7).⁵

Various documents were laid out in the Reading Room in preparation for digitization; but at the time of the fire they had not yet been digitized. One example included documents found in the papers of Sir Baldwin Wake Walker, considered valuable in unearthing a hidden history of Turkish influence at the Cape Colony.

⁵ The upper campus of the university was originally referred to as the Groote Schuur Campus.

These Turkish papers had more recently garnered excitement by the local Muslim community of Turkish descent, as they provided rare traces of the work and influence of Sheikh Abu Bakr Effendi at the Cape Colony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Konco 2021). Effendi was an Ottoman *qadi* sent in 1862 by Sultan Abdulaziz to work with the Cape Malay community. An event in honour of these connections made, marked by the attendance of descendants of both the Walker and Effendi families, would be one of the last held in the Reading Room before lockdown, and the fire (Singer 2019).

During the lockdown, the archive team was working on a digital curation project on the Bleek and Lloyd Collection, which is inscribed in UNESCO's *Register of the Memory of the World*. It contains the original research and notebooks of linguists Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd into indigenous languages and folklore of southern African San, as well as the photographic records of Dorothea Bleek, Wilhelm's daughter, who traversed the far corners of the country to engage with different communities. Dorothea's photograph albums had been digitized the week before the fire, and locked in the Archives Office in recognition of their value – as opposed to being placed on the regular reserve shelving to be returned to the storerooms. Of the collection total of eighty-eight archival boxes, four archival boxes were destroyed. Emerging from this, the South African Heritage Resources Agency is currently engaged in a process to declare this collection as a protected national heritage asset. It is some comfort that most, if not all, of the items destroyed were digitized.

New deposits

When the fire destroyed the Jagger Library's Reading Room, it also destroyed the collective efforts of the archivists over the preceding eighteen months in processing and arranging new deposits. One of the new deposits that was sadly destroyed was the Jacob Jongens Architecture Collection. This historic collection was donated in late 2019 by Sharon and Adrian Jongens. The collection is the residue of Jacob Jongens' life work as an architect of numerous buildings in South Africa. The collection was arranged by the donor prior to handover, and the number of items was calculated using the data provided. The archival team was excited to receive such a substantive new deposit but were unable to integrate this into our holdings before the March 2020 lockdown halted all on-site operations. Almost the entire collection of 4763 oversized architectural drawings, plans and other miscellaneous data was destroyed, except for a subset of the collection, housed in metal canisters that withstood the fire. Some of the items within the canisters survived, but were partially burnt, requiring restoration.

The survival of the canisters was a rare exception – in most cases, all traces of the collection were destroyed – however, one of our tasks has been to understand what survived and whether other copies may exist. This is evident in the papers of Judge Ian Farlam, who chaired the Marikana Commission of Inquiry investigating the death of thirty-four mineworkers by members of the South African Police Service on 16 August 2012. These were deposited with permission of the Department of Justice and were being physically arranged at the time of the fire. While an external hard drive containing some of the data had been backed up on the UCT server, the collection destroyed in hard copy was extensive, comprising thirty archival boxes. These records constituted Farlam's personal complete set of the transcripts of

proceedings, heads of argument, evidence, and exhibits. They are not unique, as a copy of the record should be lodged with the National Archives, but the loss of these papers, with their annotations by Judge Farlam, less than a decade after the Marikana Massacre took place is a painful reminder of how easily the past can be erased.

Numerous collections of Holocaust survivors who sought refuge in South Africa were handed over to the archive as a means by which to preserve them, ensure their accessibility, and safeguard this record towards ensuring 'open and democratic societies' (IHRA 2021). This included some additions to the papers of the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation (2014), including documents sourced from the Holocaust and Genocide Centres in both Cape Town and Durban. While the collections had been almost entirely digitized, losing remnants that had survived the Holocaust only to be lost in the Jagger Library fire was deeply painful. This included the carefully curated personal papers of Holocaust survivor, Irene Groll, donated by her grandson on behalf of the Groll family in 2017, outlining her experiences during the Shoah as well as her post-war efforts to claim for reparations. The losses also included a large proportion of the priceless collection of German army field postcards collected by German-Jewish Commander Bernhard Schragenheim during the First World War; they were kept by his son, Julian Schragenheim, and donated in his honour and memory after he had been persecuted in Germany despite his service (SAHGF 2014). Also lost were a range of documents donated by descendants of survivors and victims, including research material collected by late survivor, Stefania Heilbrunn. As 1 September 2019 was the eightieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, we had compiled these items in the Reading Room display cases, alongside materials related to the involvement of black and Coloured South Africans in the war.

Some of the losses included material deposited by the Faculty of Health Sciences. The papers of Dr Arthur Barclay Bull, who established the UCT Medical School's Department of Anaesthesiology in 1963, were deposited by Emeritus Professor Dr Peter Gordon in 2017. This was a small collection, comprising two boxes, but important in its reflection of the institutional memory of the department, as well as the history of anesthesiology as a specialized field in medicine. Another loss to the Faculty of Health Sciences was the original registry of the Department of Human Biology's human remains, which had been fully digitized just before the fire, with detailed metadata encoded – and so the critical data was saved.

Losses were experienced across all subjects, also impacting on our record of the arts at UCT. This included the small but significant collection named for Helen Rooza, a stage costume designer who worked for many years at UCT's Little Theatre designing for UCT's own student theatrical productions. Her scrapbooks had been donated by her son, Patrick Wagner, in 2020, from Australia, and processed during lockdown; they were being kept in the Jagger Reading Room awaiting shelving allocation. Also destroyed by fire were the 294 bound volumes of chronological newspaper clippings collected by the UCT Music Library, dating between the 1920s and the 1990s. These volumes recorded the genesis of UCT's College of Music training and performances, as well as music performance in Cape Town generally for the whole period 1920s–1990s. This reflects a significant loss of institutional memory as it is an internal UCT collection that was produced over nearly a century by music librarians.

Processing backlogs

Backlogs have become a perennial element of the archive, influencing current approaches to processing (Greene and Meissner 2005: 209). During the lockdown, when Special Collections could not open, we found a rare opportunity to process collections that had waited several years to be processed – including arrangement and listing, with the possibility of digitization. The team of archivists worked from home, and then returned newly processed collections to be stored in the Reading Room, as all the store rooms were inaccessible. In this way, the team of archivists that worked out of the Jagger Library lost most of the work done during lockdown in the fire.

Some of the collections processed during lockdown were small yet significant, and great care had been taken to create rich inventories to support their discoverability. The Harold Cressy Papers outlined the research resources gathered by Emeritus Professor Mohamed Adikhari for his biography of Cressy, a South African headmaster, activist, and advocate for the right to education for non-white South Africans. The papers of Reverend David Russell, an Anglican priest and later the Bishop of Grahamstown, highlighted his role as an implacable opponent of apartheid who was declared a banned person and restricted in various ways (Goslett 2019). The papers of Reverend Daniel J. Jacobs related to the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Worcester. The William Harold Hutt Papers comprised some miscellaneous items related to the history of Commerce at UCT – in 1930 he was promoted to Chair of Commerce at UCT and he later became Dean of the Faculty of Commerce.⁶ The papers of Professor of Social Anthropology and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Martin West, had been deposited with UCT, including work conducted for his doctoral research on the subject of African Independent Churches of Soweto between 1969 and 1971. The material lost included the large number of print photographs he took as part of his research and related papers.⁷

In some cases, newly processed collections were moved to an extra office in the basement for storage. These were water logged, in many cases, and removed by volunteers during the salvage. However, some boxes survived intact. Piecing together the collections that were only partially processed has been challenging. Stock control during lockdown was challenging which has made reporting difficult as, in some cases, a collection was considered fully destroyed when some items were in fact salvaged. This included additions to the papers of the labour lawyer, Jan Theron, and the extensive papers of Emeritus Professor of Economics and Director of UCT's Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), Francis Wilson, as well as the extensive papers of Professor of Law, Denis Cowen. The papers of David de Villiers originating in the SOMCHEM case contained in two archival boxes were also destroyed; these related to a successful community challenge in the High Court against the chemical manufacturer SOMCHEM's plans for a development in the Southern Cape that threatened the environment and indigenous ecology.

Unprocessed additions to the papers of Professor of Southern African Studies David Welsh, covering South African politics, were also destroyed. The textual records accompanying the donation of Professor of Geography Ron Davies' map collection,

⁶ The main body of papers related to Professor Hutt are housed at the Hoover Institute Library and Archives, Stanford University.

⁷ See West (n.d.) for background information and digitized images.

consisting mainly of unpublished field and research notes that were used to either compile or elucidate the maps with which they were associated, were destroyed. Additions to the papers of Professor of Philosophy Martin Versfeld, who has received renewed interest by researchers in recent years, were also destroyed. The material lost in the Hugh Corder Papers related to the work of the Constitutional Assembly that drafted the South Africa's Constitution between 1994 and 1996. Papers donated by Neil Alperstein were destroyed – these reflected the activities of the United Democratic Front (UDF) which exerted significant pressure for change in South Africa in the 1980s.

Additions to collections were regularly handed over to Special Collections by organizations or individuals. This collection development was not always anticipated by or arranged with the archivists. They were set aside at the time and stored until they could be added to the existing collections. The challenge of backlogs is universal, with a 2015 study highlighting that 'on average, repositories are taking in more material per year than they can process' (Greene 2005: 211). The backlog of unprocessed collections destroyed by the Jagger Library fire highlights the danger of retaining unprocessed backlogs without speedily processing them. Regrettably, there were a large number of unprocessed collections destroyed in the fire, including of individuals and organizations that played important roles in South African education, politics and social transformation. This included twenty boxes of unprocessed additions to the Community Arts Project Archive, as well as eleven boxes of textual material relating to the South African Committee on Higher Education (SACHED). The additional papers of wartime cabinet minister and founder member of the Progressive Party, H. G. Lawrence, included albums of newspaper reports covering his whole career and photographs. The papers of Gloria Sandak-Lewin reflected her research and material related to her published works. The papers of Anne Finsen, also associated with the Black Sash, reflected her own creative work, as well as personal and family records such as photographs of her father, Owen Clough, First Speaker of the Parliament of the Union of South Africa, whose additions to his own collection were also destroyed in the fire. The additions to the Dora Taylor Papers were small but of special importance – including the letters she wrote to her daughter, Sheila Belshaw, who has described them as not merely letters but in fact a detailed ongoing diary of Dora Taylor's life and work as a writer and activist. Sheila Belshaw had retained the letters as she was hoping to have them published once she herself reached her nineties. The contents of Classicist Dr Margaret Hewett's papers were also destroyed, including her research for her translation from Latin into English of a classical Latin legal text for publication. The Cape Tercentenary Foundation emerged in the 1950s to preserve, promote and encourage literature, the visual and performing arts, and the natural and cultural environment in the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape Provinces. These lost additions to an existing archive provided a record of endeavours in diverse cultural spheres and significant contributions in the field.

Sadly, the papers of Emeritus Professor Sandra Burman, former director of the Centre for Socio-Legal Research in the Faculty of Law at UCT, were destroyed after being transferred from off-site storage to the Reading Room for processing in early 2020. Burman's work involved bridging the divide between rights on paper and the systems charged with ensuring their implementation. She had investigated how legal decisions on children are made in South Africa, and how children's rights fare in a

variety of settings across the country. The archival collection contained in eighty archival boxes constituted the records of her research and her life's work that were deposited after her early death in 2015.

Special Collections holds the extensive archive of the Black Sash in the Western Cape and the archive of the Black Sash Advice Office. In 2015 Black Sash volunteers in the Eastern Cape who had served the organization for many years decided to deposit their archive with UCT. Sadly the entire archive comprising eighteen archival boxes was lost in the fire. Other Black Sash-related material lost was a combination of donations by various Black Sash leaders and occupied twenty-six archival boxes. Laurine Platzky's papers were also destroyed – reflecting her social involvement and political work, including the Surplus People's Project, working against forced removals, and contributing to the Reconstruction and Redevelopment Programme in Presidency in 1996. Her papers, contained in ninety-six archival boxes that were considered a rich research source, were all lost in the fire.

Additions to the papers of the National Union of South African Students were burnt, but this is minor compared to the main body of the collection which was salvaged. Sadly, all holdings related to the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust, which was set up after his death in 1996, were also destroyed. This included sixty-three archival boxes that constituted the formal archive of the activities of the Trust. There were also some lost additions to the papers of the Owl Club, a longstanding Cape Town society of persons eminent in their fields who become members by invitation. Three trays of cassette tapes containing the audio recordings of interviews of individuals affected by forced removals in terms of the Group Areas Act conducted by Michele Pause for her Doctoral thesis were destroyed.

Conclusion

The destruction of the Reading Room and its contents was irrevocable and devastating to the overall project of research and learning at the University of Cape Town. Given the scale of recovery, and the number of assets that were treated on site or placed in cold storage, and are undergoing assessment and treatment, it is impossible at this stage to provide a list of total losses, and at the time of writing, the recovery is ongoing.

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