

# CPLS

## EARLY DAYS

### The Service...



Bon Gertz

**BON GERTZ**  
**Former Assistant Director: Central Organisation**

There has been a flurry around correct dates; regrettably I have to add to the confusion but this is important. The Cape Provincial Library Service in fact started in 1945 with the appointment of the first Library Organiser, S.J. Kritzing. The scheme was financed entirely by the Provincial Administration and was under central control from Cape Town where the bookstock was kept. Three regions were opened in Vanryhnsdorp, Calvinia and Malmesbury areas and by 1954 had served 43 libraries and 126 depots. However, the service was suspended in 1954 when, as predicted by librarians, it had proved financially unrealistic and it had failed to engage community support as there was no local involvement.

And this in the Cape which in 1940 had 173 extant libraries compared with 11 in the Transvaal, 12 in Natal and 10 in the Orange Free State (OFS), yet there the provincial services to rural communities had been successfully introduced between 1946 and 1952. How had they got it right? This lesson needs to be noted by those currently involved in planning public library structures on a national scale. Our lawmakers did their citizenry a serious disservice in 1994 when they excluded local authorities from their former share of responsibility for public library services by making them a solely provincial responsibility. We certainly are experiencing the result of that mistake.

Now William JB Slater, the dynamic new provincial secretary of the Cape, had come from the OFS where he had experienced the success of the model which Boland had started in Germiston and which had been adopted by all three of those provinces. Suspending the Cape Service Slater set about the revision of the Library Ordinance to comply with the formula based on joint responsibility for libraries between the province and the local authority. This became the Revised Ordinance, no 4 of 20 May 1955. Theo Friis, fresh from a year's study under Leon Carnovsky

### The Magazine...



Left: **Cape Librarian - 1959**  
 Style of a main article written by Dr Theo Friis. Typography and layout have changed vastly since then!

Right: A news page from a 1960 issue, showing a simple new hand-lettered heading design



Left: A news page from a 1961 issue with an improved new heading which has stronger design elements

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at the prestigious Chicago Library School was appointed just in time to have audiovisual materials added to the document. Friis had strong support from Slater which enabled him to move forward through the bureaucracy at an unprecedented rate in getting finance, staff and new administrative procedures in place. The ordinance was unique in making provision for urban library areas, namely Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London which would receive substantial financial assistance from the province for their independent library services.

Apartheid laws ruled so there were separate libraries and stock for White and Coloured communities. Tragically no African communities could be served as by law all amenities had to be financed and provided by the national Department of Native Affairs. The matter of library services for Africans was to be investigated by the DeVaal Commission of Enquiry which published a report in 1965. This neglect was a blight on the Service.

When I assumed duty in August 1955 as the first appointment under the new ordinance, the Library Service was housed in one big room on the ground floor of the provincial building in Vale Street with a handful of staff; new books dribbled in on standing order while in the basement of the building stood over 200 000 books from which the libraries had been served from 1950 to 1954, and an immediate task was to allocate this stock to the newly-planned 18 regional libraries.

Early in 1956 there was an influx of new staff, a contingent of whom went on a tour up to Port Nolloth and across to Mafikeng and Kimberley to introduce the new service. I recall the mirage of Pofadder rising up to meet us in the February heat, and then having driven through it before realising it was past! The Service now moved into an old four storey factory building at 48 Keerom Street with Cataloguing and the Preparation Sections housed on the top floor under a tin roof which some summer days got so hot that the staff had to be sent home. It was an exhilarating time, Friis was a brilliant, visionary organiser and an inspiring, enthusiastic team builder who readily delegated, planning meetings were lively and fruitful - and there was much to plan.

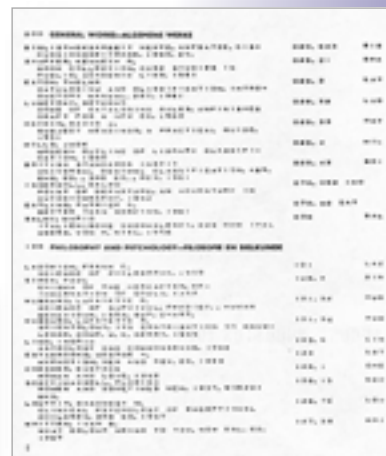
Three new regions were opened every six months and by December 1957 all 18 were established with regional staff, premises and stock. Many of the early regional librarians went on to prominent positions in the profession, names like Andre Cornellisen, Gerhardt L Nordier, Arnold Lubbe, Steve van Niekerk and CJ Fourie come to mind. The contract which each municipality signed on affiliation

## The Magazine...

Right:  
The cover designs changed frequently during the first decade of the CL. Here the May issue of **The Cape Librarian** 1961 shows the limited use of typography and a simple layout



Left: and below:  
**The Cape Librarian 1962**  
Accessions receives a new title page with a clean, readable typographic design. However, the proceeding pages of accessions are very difficult to read as the type is in capitals and widely spaced. We are indeed most fortunate these days to have such wonderful choices through computer-generated DTP (desk top publishing)



Left:  
**The Cape Librarian 1962**,  
September issue has the first article on Library Workshops for Display teaching librarians how to put together their own displays. Featured here are librarians busy learning the various methods for producing lettering

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pinned them down to standards of staffing, salaries, hours, and the provision of a building brought up to standard within five years. New standard buildings were also being planned and erected, eight had opened by 1963 and a further ten were ready during 1964. Training courses lasting two weeks were held three times a year as new areas came on stream. A depot service to schools expanded as regions opened and were serviced until the end of 1963 when the Education Department started their library service and took over the stock and service.

As the existing libraries joined the Service a reorganising team went out to weed the old stock, and to catalogue and process the retained stock to accord with the card issue system which was used for the new stock coming from province. There were some amazing adventures in this process as most of the old subscription libraries had books going back to Victorian times and they had not been moved in years. So, weeding in the dark, dusty Lusikisiki Library I removed a squeezed batch of books at eye level to find myself looking at a huge slowly-stirring puffadder - the library was surrounded by a five foot fence and to this day I do not recall clearing it!

The Central Organisation was also humming - in America Friis had seen the early experiments in automation and so the bold step was taken to introduce punched cards, the forerunner of computers; theoretically this would eliminate all future card sorting and filing, so it was worth a try! Adjusting standard cataloguing to the rigid limitations of the two lines of card was a nightmare, the length of the cards required bigger card holders, and the experimental adjustments had the suppliers equally phased and are best forgotten, but the noise and problems with the giant machines themselves, up there on the hot top floor remained, but dear Hazel Jones (Verwoerd) battled on! Now you know why the issue cards are so big - they had to fit the cabinets which were now standard stock! The machines did not follow us to Hospital Street.

On machines I want to add my bit to the printing saga as outlined by Tonie Roux in the January/February 2007 issue of **CL**. This was another bold innovation by Friis and once purchased, the huge machine was installed in the basement of Keerom Street, the fiefdom of Oom Smuts, a delightful retired barman from the Provincial Council who was our storeman, receiving and unpacking new books. So the poor man had to oversee this too, while, as you heard, we all found our feet. Considering the inexperience, those first issues are commendable. Then Wale Street (Administration headquarters) woke up to the presence of the printer and slowly started to

## The Magazine...

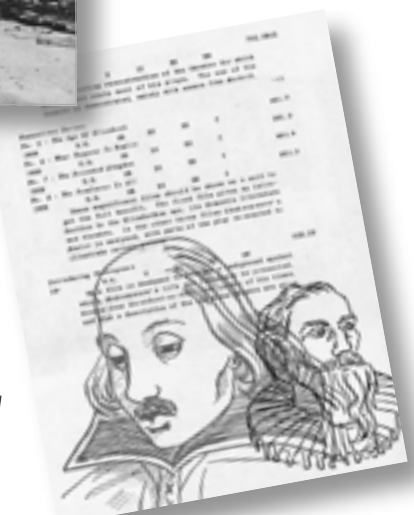


Above:  
*The Cape Librarian 1963 - a series introducing the regions by librarian Thys du Preez*



Left:  
*The Cape Librarian 1963. An example of a news page which demonstrates how clumsy the type was at that time. Note the present library building in its very beginnings with the scenic backdrop of Table Mountain which today is almost invisible due to tall new buildings in the area*

*The Cape Librarian 1964. An article on Shakespeare is illustrated by atmospheric drawings to liven up the page, but the text remains difficult to read*



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send up their work for printing and the queue started building up; when we left Keerom Street the machine was moved down to the Wale Street basement where the CPA started its own printing section based on the Library Service initiative.

The Book Selection Section was constituted from the start of the new organisation. An early task I had was to visit local stock holding booksellers to invite them to submit books on approval for selection. Adjustments and refinements to the approval system were made but all through this period an agreement on terms was negotiated annually with the Booksellers Association of South Africa for imported books while Afrikaans books were ordered from the publishers. The Children's Department was led by Bessie Lyndhurst who mentored Lydia Pienaar and strict standards were applied - the buying power of the Service and the dearth of Afrikaans books resulting in large orders which enabled the co-production of wonderful children's books by new firms like Human and Rousseau. It is regrettable that it has not proved viable for the same to happen for indigenous languages. Jean Albert held the adult selection team together and Elizabeth Schoeman, (later de Roubaix), reviewed Afrikaans books. A team of book reviewers dealt with the large English volume.

The innovation of audiovisual materials - 16mm films, gramophone records and art prints - created their unique challenges in sourcing, processing, housing and issuing. Three film libraries were stocked as part of the three reference libraries in Cape Town, Kimberley and Port Elizabeth and all standard libraries were issued with film projectors; records and art prints were allocated to regional libraries for distribution to libraries, while art prints were housed in three sizes of plastic-sleeved folders with wooden exchangeable frames made available in the libraries - this proved a nightmare all round! The A-V department was staffed by Dr Helen Oppenheim, an art historian, and her sister Kiko Gaskell who had been tutor to Yehudi Menuhin and his sister when they were young!

The Service grew at a phenomenal rate as is reflected in the record of service points; by 1959 there were 785 affiliated service points comprising 152 public libraries, 242 depots serving whites, 126 depots serving coloured communities, 231 depots at white schools and 34 depots at coloured schools. The service continued to grow and by the end of 1963 there were 207 public libraries, 224 white depots and 161 depots serving col-

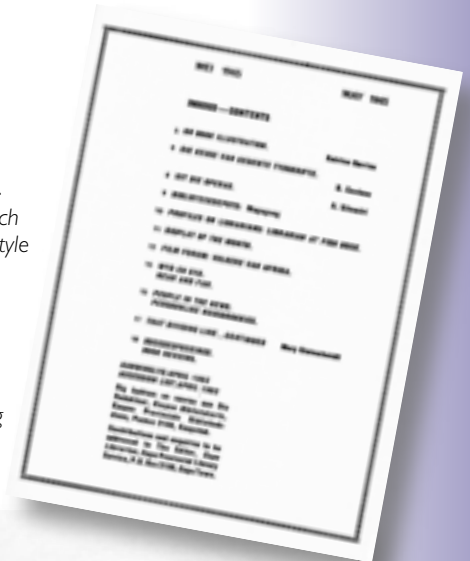
## The Magazine...

Right: *The Cape Librarian* 1965.

The contents page becomes much more legible, with an improved style of layout and text

Below:

A page allocated to Profiles on Librarians. Here the well-loved Miss EM Gillard is seen handling art prints which sadly are no longer being issued to libraries



Below:

*The Cape Librarian* 1966.

The forerunner of our current Wheelie Wagon was this hospital book trolley mentioned in an article by Rheina Epstein - seems it was a really needed service to hospitals



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oured communities. The service to schools continued until 1964 when it was transferred to the newly-established library service in the Education Department. By 1963 public membership was 265 506 and 7 194 141 books were circulated.

The service was soon bursting out of Keerom Street and after speculation of being located well out of town a large plot adjoining the newly-built Provincial Stores Department in Prestwich Street and which had been the location of a so-called hospital for abandoned old people (there were many ghost stories in the early days) was made available. Planning was underway by 1960 and the building was due for completion early in 1964. Here too Friis had introduced many original features, but more of that next time.

So to 1963. This was a dark, dark year for the Service. In March Dr Theo Friis, the director was suddenly suspended from the Service and a Commission of Inquiry into his management of the Service became front-page news for many weeks. Regrettably his hubris, ambition and unorthodox style had made him enemies in both the book trade and the Administration, and he had made an unwise friendship with a purveyor of American remaindered books which

he insisted on buying in large quantities - he had never pretended to be a book man and the lack of judgment was deplorable. By mid-year he had retired and Julie te Groen acted as director till the end of the year. Friis left the profession and it was a tragic end to what had been a meteoric career during which he had made an enormous contribution to the library profession. Sadly the only remaining legacy of those vital professional standards for public libraries is reflected in the many fine library buildings to be found throughout the Cape, libraries like Bellville or my own beloved Hout Bay.

It was a tough time for the Service, having been the jewel in the crown of the Administration we were now pariahs with a flood of suspicious questions and petty controls from Wale Street (Administration headquarters). It must be said that the pace had taken its toll in some of the necessarily hasty decisions, but overall it was wonderful to have been part of the exhilarating expansion of libraries and to have experienced the delight of thousands of children and adults who, after years of starvation, could now enjoy access to all the riches on offer.



*Julie te Groen who became acting director after Theo Friis retired*

## The Magazine...



Above:

*The Cape Librarian 1967 - the first cover design to feature graphic drawings with a clear, readable typeface*



Above:

*The Cape Librarian 1967.*

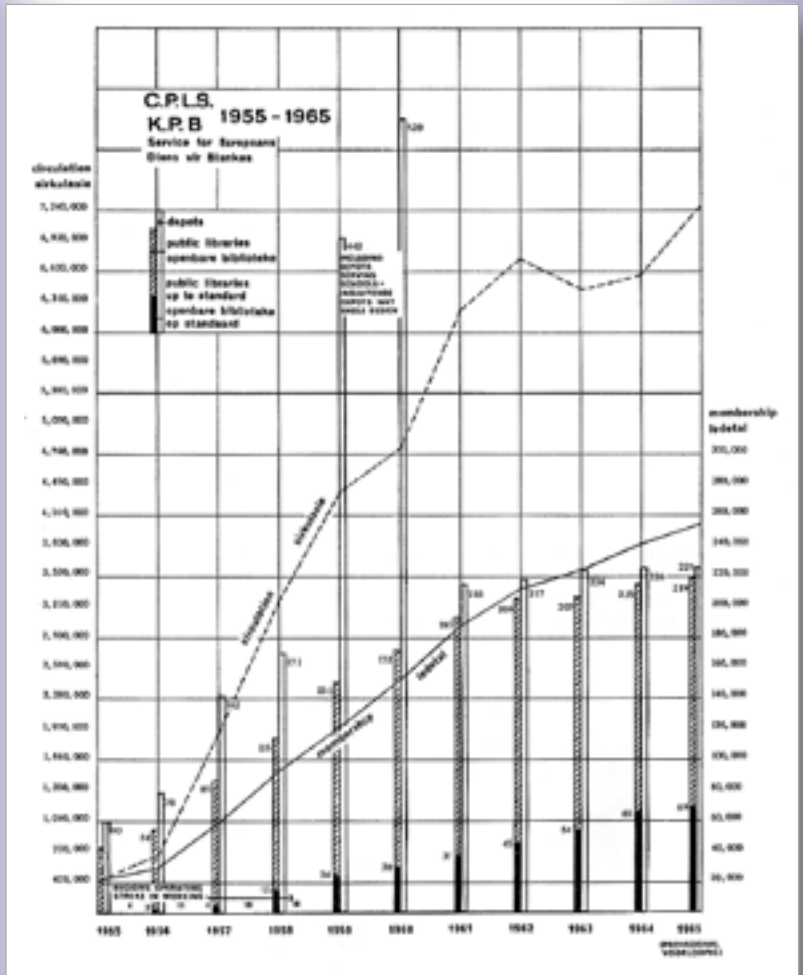
*A novel idea of using the accession cards placed in a semi-circle for a design for the first page of the accession's section*

*Note: This article is part two of a series of six.*

Right :  
The *Cape Librarian* 1966 featured a membership and circulation graph from the years 1955 - 1965



Above:  
Even in the early days, the Arts were always popular - a column which today is still being featured in the CL



Left: *The Cape Librarian* 1967.  
The November/December issue featured ideas for a Christmas display in which drawings of the Three Kings were supplied. During a last 'opinion poll' amongst librarians, the Display column remains a firm favourite



Right: *The Cape Librarian* 1967.  
Lists of Christmas Plays were made available on request from Central Reference. Note the use of the opposite masks which are the theatre symbol