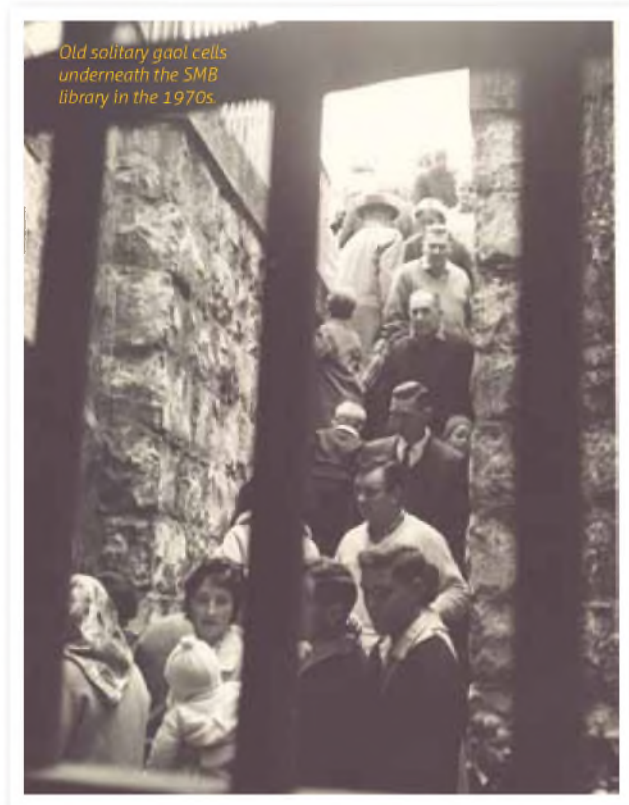




IS THERE ANYBODY THERE?

A library built on the site of an old gaol seems the perfect setting for mysterious events. Welcome to the library at the School of Mines Ballarat (SMB) campus of University of Ballarat.

Imagine coming into work and turning on the lights. You go into the information commons area to turn on the printer and the computers but while at the computers you hear the printer ticking. Hmm, that's possible. Then you hear chairs squeak and there's no-one sitting on them. You can feel a presence in the library, not scary – just unsettling. You remember that the printer is situated over the access point to the old solitary cells....



The current SMB library was built on the site of the former Ballarat Gaol with the main entrance through the gaol gate. A new building was opened in 1986 and this year underwent a refurbishment with the expansion of the library to take over the whole building – and possibly its ghosts as well.

Built in 1857, the former Ballarat Gaol was designed to hold both male and female prisoners. The gaol had 58 cells and could hold 74 inmates. It is believed at least 12 or possibly 13 men were hanged at the gaol, the first in 1864 and the last in 1908. All the bodies were buried in the courtyard of what is now SMB. In the 1920s, the City Council decided to remove the bodies but a local gravedigger could only find five of the executed prisoners, so some of the bodies are still buried in the courtyard outside the library.

The main gate is a magnificent piece of monumental work. The huge gates can still be closed to isolate the courtyards. The sound of those gates clanging behind you as you stood on the wrong side would have been frightening. One of our library staff says when leaving the library she is aware of a presence watching her from a second story window in the courtyard. It may be the same spirit that the cleaners have seen; a pleasant-looking young

boy up on top of the amenities building. He seems happy enough. The person who tells the story said he asked the boy "What are you doing here?" and then realised he was not from this realm.

Unsurprisingly, members of the security staff have the best stories; including a yelling ghost who runs at people in front of the library and hits them (the university's curator calls him 'the thumper'). This happens, apparently, somewhere near where the condemned cells were.

In the former Governor's residence, a senior member of staff could not keep the door to her office open so they had to put a stopper on it. Her new assistant would come and tell her that a woman had been sitting in the waiting area for hours, but again, it was discovered she was a spirit. She seems to have been a fairly constant visitor. Is she the ghost of one of our illustrious alumni, Bella Guerin, who once lived in that building?

The cleaners have seen all the seats in the Performing Arts (former Court House) going up and down. It is rather eerie in there early in the morning or late at night.

Once, a very strange lady from Spook Spotters told the curator that there was a head staring towards the sky in one of the gardens near the library. She wanted to come into the buildings with spook-spotting equipment but, surprisingly, no-one wanted to authorise this.

The only dead things I've known in my time were the possum that died and pungently decomposed over the loans desk and the recently deceased rat above the female toilets during the renovations. When I told someone where I worked they said, "Above the dead bodies, eh?"

It makes for an interesting workplace when you never know who may turn up at the library.

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Our thanks to Anthony Clark for permission to reprint this cartoon. Check out more of Anthony's work at <http://nedroid.com>.