

of columns and internally in the stair and handrails, and most of all in the magnificent luminous entrance hall that echoes the great hall at Otaniemi and the central gallery of the North Jutland Museum of Arts in Aalborg, Denmark of 1969–73 by Elissa and Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Barué. On any visit to the library in the company of Sandy Wilson he will make frequent reference to his acknowledged 'homages' to Scharoun, to Aalto and, in one room, to James Stirling.

Sandy Wilson has also often referred to a painting by Antonella da Messina of *St Jerome in his Study* now hanging in the National Gallery in London (Wilson, 1996, p.50). The late 15th century painting shows the saint in a wooden *ædicule* within a large Gothic space. It is a picture of the scholar in his personal space surrounded by his information source, able to concentrate on the task before him but still aware of the outer world. It has become a much reproduced icon – I had used it as the frontispiece to my book on library design in 1970 – that encapsulates what is needed if reader and book are to come together in what Wilson has called a 'privileged aura'. The influence on the design of the furniture in the reading rooms is discernible. When Sandy Wilson was exhibiting the design of the British Library in the British Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Biennale he made a carving of St Jerome by Joe Tilson the centre-piece of his double height 'spolium' wall, a montage of samples, prototypes and other fragments from the library.

It has been suggested that there is an element of a vernacular idiom in the library complex (Fawcett, 1980, p.891). Certainly it is unlike Aalto's buildings in the centre of Helsinki: the Rautatalo offices, the Enzo-Gutzeit Headquarters or the Academic Bookshop building. The library is much more akin to Aalto's designs on the Campus of the Institute of Technology at Otaniemi on the edge of Helsinki. Some of the criticism of the British Library which occurred while only its exterior was visible, thus before it was possible to appreciate the grandeur of some of its internal spaces, may have been partly due to its



Above  
**Colin StJ. Wilson & Partners, British Library, London 1997;** entrance court with St. Pancras Hotel & Station in the background

Right  
**Alvar Aalto, Institute of Technology, Otaniemi, Finland 1955/1961–69;** main building

