



## Bangkok Post Learning: *Test Yourself*

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# For the love of reading by Gary Boyle



Photo courtesy of Pichaya Svasti

Read the following story by Pichaya Svasti from the *Bangkok Post*. Then, answer the questions that follow.

An old library in the heart of Bangkok is a memory of love from an American doctor for his wife.

### OLD AND THE NEW

Walking along Silom Road to learn about the development of modern education, medicine and missionary work in Thailand is well worth the effort.

Today, Silom is Thailand's major business district and nightlife hub. It has some of Siam's first roads that were built during the reign of King Rama IV. This development happened after the 1855 signing of the Bowring Treaty with Britain, which consequently saw an increasing number of Western traders coming to Siam, bringing with them Western-style healthcare, education and sports.

On neighbouring Surawong Road, the 96-year-old Neilson Hays Library was recently reopened after a major **restoration** project. The library is well worth visiting.

Khun Sirikitiya Jensen, the youngest daughter of Princess Ubolratana, was a guest of honour at the recent reopening. She discussed her favourite book and cultural **preservation** in a discussion titled, "Treasuring the Old and the New".

"I'm interested in conservation. This library has a unique history and architecture. It saw a lot of history and foreigners coming to Thailand. It is interesting how it reflects culture through connections," she noted.

## ITALIAN INFLUENCE

Sitting on a 1-rai plot of land, the library was designed by Italian architect Mario Tamagno in the neoclassical style with domes and pillars as well as a floor plan in the shape of the letter H. It was constructed with the same technique as the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Today, the library has 17,000 English-language books.

Dr T. Heyward Hays, an American doctor who spent his life in Siam in the 19th century, dedicated this library to his bookworm wife Jennie Neilson Hays in 1921. Mrs Hays was a member of this library when it was mobile and run by the Bangkok Ladies' Library Association. The mobile library was established in 1868 by the wives of Dr Bradley and Dr Smith, Siam's first missionary doctors during the Rattanakosin Period.

Today, the library is a non-profit organisation that is operated mostly by its volunteers. It is financed by its memberships, donations and arts programming. It serves as a cultural centre that offers educational and cultural activities, such as story time for young children, writing competitions, concerts, workshops, performances and book sales.

## PROTECTING THE BOOKS

Nalin Vanasin, president of the Neilson Hays Library Association Board, said: "The current library building was built in 1921 and was registered as a historic site by the Fine Arts Department in 2001. The 18-month restoration work was made possible with support from both the non-profit and private sectors. This project was an example of an ideal community collaboration in creating something beautiful for the common good."

According to conservation architect Yuwarat Hemasilpin, a member of the restoration project team, the building is different from other libraries of the same period since it was specially designed to serve as a library.

The building can handle the weight of books properly and it has systems to ensure good ventilation and protect books from moisture and termites.

A visit to the Neilson Hays Library allows for the exploration of neoclassical architecture in Thailand and the history of the development of Siam in the early Rattanakosin Period, besides reading books.

### Vocabulary

restoration (n): the work of repairing and cleaning an old building

preservation (n): the act of keeping something in its original state or in good condition

### Section 1: Read through the story and answer the following questions.

1. Neilson Hays Library is on which road? .....
2. How old is the library? .....
3. Who said the library reflects culture through connections? .....
4. The library was designed by an American. True or false? .....
5. How long did the restoration work take? .....
6. How many Thai-language books are in the library?
  - a. 17,000.
  - b. None.
  - c. The story does not say.
7. Who established the mobile library?
  - a. An association.
  - b. Two doctors.
  - c. Two women.
8. Who paid for the restoration?
  - a. The private sector.
  - b. The non-profit sector.
  - c. Both a and b.

### Section 2: Specify whether each of the following words is used in the story as a verb, noun, adjective or adverb.

9. work. ....
10. mobile. ....

11. building.                   .....
12. serve.                       .....
13. visit.                       .....

**Section 3:** Read the following passage. Then, fill in the blanks with the correct words from the choices given.

The restoration ...14... two years and ...15... with researching the original plans, old pictures from the library's archive and historical documents. ...16... to history, damage was ...17... by Japanese troops ..18.. occupied the library and removed all the books and objects during World War II. The next step was to do research and ...19... the original structures of the building.

14. a. spent                    b. lasted                    c. was
15. a. began                    b. start                     c. begun
16. a. Following                b. Speaking                c. According
17. a. done                     b. made                     c. had
18. a. which                    b. whom                    c. who
19. a. exam                     b. examine                 c. examination

**Section 4:** Find synonyms in the story for the following words.

20. Occurred.   21. Built.   22. Book-loving.   23. Present-day.   24. Airflow.

**Section 5:** Discussion questions:

1. What is your favourite library and why?
2. Have you ever visited Neilson Hays? Why or why not?
3. What examples of old Thai buildings can you think of?
4. Why is it important to protect old buildings in Thailand?

For the answers, find the story online at [www.bangkokpost.com/learning](http://www.bangkokpost.com/learning)

If you have any questions or feedback, please contact the Editor at [garyb@bangkokpost.co.th](mailto:garyb@bangkokpost.co.th)