



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

IMPACT REPORT

Projects undertaken with donations to the UCT Fire Fund

UCT Development
and Alumni Department
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WRITING

Sarah Archer
Alacia Armstrong
Duane Jethro
Bodhisattva Kar
Alirio Karina
Libo Msengana-Bam
Jade Nair
Medee Rall
Natalie Simon
Jill Sloan
Tony Verboom

INTERVIEWS

Yvette Abrahams
Abdud-Dayyaan Badroodien
Edwina Brooks
Nikki Crowster
Carolyn Hamilton
Timm Hoffman
Cornelia Klak
Memory Muturiki
Ian Rijksdijk
Ujala Satgoor
Sibabalwe Siqala
Pippa Skotnes
Thomas Slingsby
Alexia Smit

PICTURES

As credited in the publication

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Banss Design Lab

PROOFREADING

Barbara Seele

DATA ANALYSIS

Lwando Madlingozi
Ashraf Mohammed

PRODUCED BY

Development and Alumni Department

Cover photo: Interior of Jagger Library
one day after the UCT fire (source:
Lerato Maduna)

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A HEARTFELT THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE UCT FIRE FUND AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

The Table Mountain fire that swept across the University of Cape Town's Upper Campus on 18 April 2021 left our global community devastated. The immediate impact on students, staff, learning materials and spaces, catapulted the University into a new realm of functioning: an emergency response that addressed damage mitigation and recovery. To mark the second anniversary of the fire, we have produced this Impact Report describing key institutional projects that have benefited from your support.

The recovery period following the fire was characterised by two key enablers. The first was an outpouring of interest, support, gifts and volunteerism from near and far. Underscoring the incredible relationships that UCT enjoys, this extensive and layered support enabled both immediate recovery and the initiation of longer-term projects.

The second enabler that emerged from the fire was a paradigm shift in thinking about the future of UCT's learning resources, underscoring the critical need for accelerated digitisation and securing of collections for future generations of scholars. Thoughtful referencing and archiving of digital collections are fundamental to putting in place secure, cloud-based systems that enable the backup of data and source materials that are the lifeblood of the academic project.

The UCT Fire Fund was established by the Development and Alumni Department (DAD) on 19 April 2021. It has served as a vehicle for the responsible management of incoming donations relating to the UCT Fire, as well as the disbursement thereof to agreed projects within UCT. DAD established the UCT Fire Fund, with categories for:



Sarah Archer, Executive Director, Development and Alumni Department (DAD)

- **Earmarked donation income:** Donations made by individuals and organisations towards named or specific projects. These donations were transferred from DAD to benefit the related projects.
- **Discretionary income:** Donations for fire recovery efforts for which a specific project had not been identified by donors.

In this Impact Report, we provide summary data on the 1,393 organisations and individuals who have given cash donations to the UCT Fire Fund to date (p. 4). All UCT projects that have received donation funding are listed on page 5. We have also reflected some of the outstanding contributions made

through volunteerism and in-kind donations, including the contribution of the 2,000-strong volunteers who have supported work relating to the Jagger Library. In the second half of 2023, we will host volunteers and donors at an event and tour of the UCT Library and of the post-fire Upper Campus landscape.

Our message to you is one of deep gratitude. On behalf of staff and students, thank you for supporting UCT at a time when we needed you. The scale of work described in this Impact Report would not have been possible without the generous gifts of interest, time, money and in-kind donations provided by so many. For this, we wish to thank each and every one of you for your unstinting support. Your funding has enabled the University to imagine a better future.

DONATIONS TO THE UCT FIRE FUND

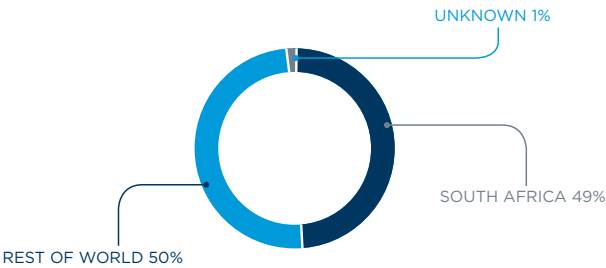
Total donated: Almost **R47.3 million**

Donor description	No. of donors	Amount given
Individuals	1311	R15 403 704
Corporates	54	R6 538 283
Trusts and foundations	13	R21 308 095
NGOs, aid agencies and clubs	11	R2 052 140
Universities	2	R649 136
Embassies and consulates	2	R577 789
All categories	1393	R46 529 148
Unknown source* (665 donations)		R740 257
Total donation income		R47 269 405

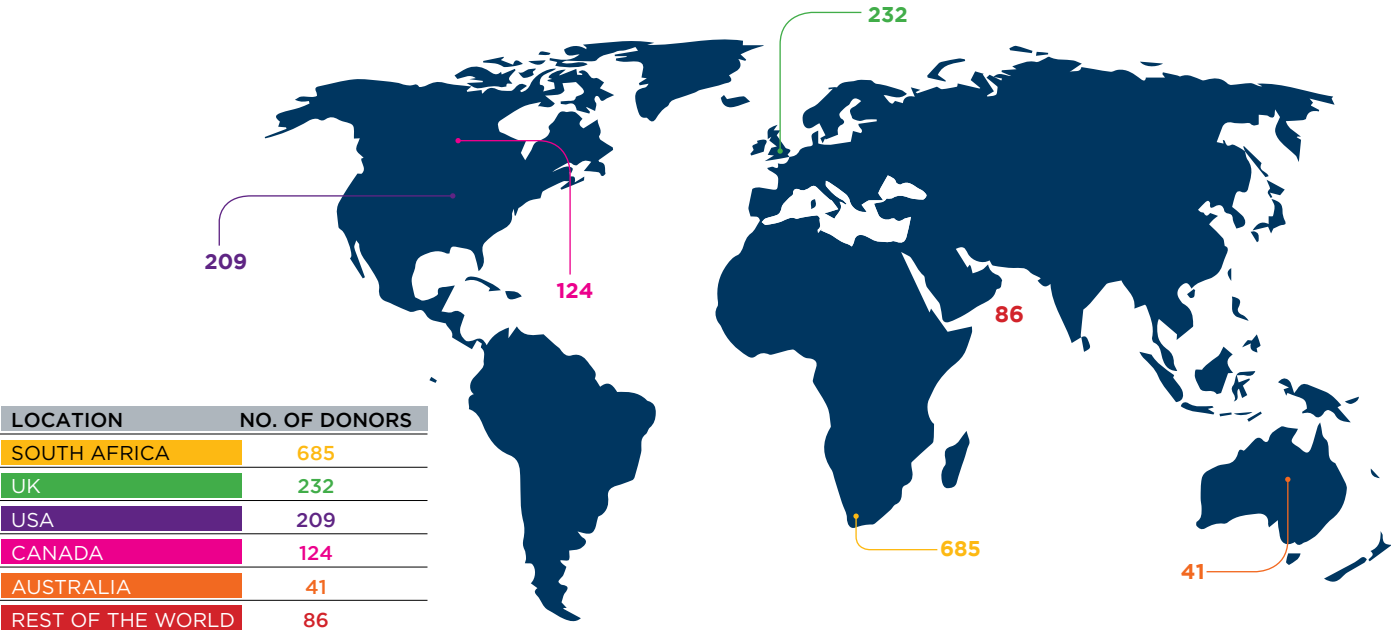
**We are unable to quantify the number of unknown donors who made donations. As a result, we have shown these 665 donations as 'Unknown source' and have not included them in calculations on donor numbers.*

1,393 known donors
1,311 individuals donated over **R15.4m**

HALF OF OUR DONORS WERE LOCATED OUTSIDE SOUTH AFRICA



DONORS WERE SPREAD ACROSS 38 COUNTRIES



NOTE: Sixteen donations were received from unknown locations. These are not reflected on the map above.

Category of donation amount (in ZAR)	No. of donors
R10 million or more	1
R5 million to R9,999,999	1
R1 million to R4,999,999	4
R500,000 to R999,999	4
R100,000 to R499,999	40
R50,000 to R99,999	21
R10,000 to R49,999	124
R1,000 to R9,999	758
Up to R999	440

DISBURSEMENT OF DONATIONS TO UCT PROJECTS

A summary of all disbursements to UCT projects follows. Due to the recent receipt of some donations, and because the nature of the work of some projects is long-term, a number of projects are still in the initial stages.

Department and projects	Source of funding		Amount
	Earmarked donations	Discretionary donations	
Department of Student Affairs			R4 517 724,31
Taking care of students' practical needs and trauma	x		R4 517 724,31
Jagger Libraries			R14 244 349,13
Jagger Library: Recovery from the fire	x		R6 812 978,13
Reclaiming the archives and building a conservation unit		x	R7 431 371,00
Centre for Curating the Archive			R1 675 000,00
Bleek and Lloyd collection	x		R500 000,00
Accelerate and widen digitization of the Bleek and Lloyd Archive		x	R855 000,00
After the fire: Loss, archive and African Studies		x	R200 000,00
Exhibition documenting the fire, librarians and volunteers		x	R120 000,00
Department of Biological Sciences			R19 102 963,46
PCU and Bolus Herbarium	x		R702 963,46
Creating the Virtual Bolus Herbarium		x	R3 000 000,00
Increasing specimen storage capacity in the Bolus Herbarium		x	R400 000,00
Digitizing key scientific collections in the PCU		x	R500 000,00
Upgrading phytotron facility for climate change research		x	R2 000 000,00
Postgraduate studies on climate change and fire ecology in fynbos environments	x	x	R8 500 000,00
Nurturing research, teaching and learning: Bainskloof field station upgrade	x		R4 000 000,00
Centre for Film and Media Studies			R3 620 000,00
Digitization of African Cinema Film collection		x	R2 000 000,00
Metadata collection and student internships		x	R320 000,00
Licensing African film and streaming rights		x	R1 000 000,00
Public engagement with the African Audiovisual Archive		x	R300 000,00
Department of Historical Studies			R1 437 500,00
Funding for extension of studies for postgraduate students		x	R277 500,00
The Aftermath: Making accessible Africa's deep past		x	R1 160 000,00
San and Khoi Unit			R437 085,00
Collection and digitization of San and Khoi stories/knowledges		x	R437 085,00
Fuller Hall Residence			R35 160,69
Fuller Hall Residence	x		R35 160,69
Upper Campus Residence (Smuts Hall)			R29 622,20
Upper Campus Residence (Smuts Hall)	x		R29 622,20
Total			R45 099 404,79

Balance of funds currently in UCT Fire Fund

R2 170 000,00

At the time of writing this report, the Fund remains open since occasional donations are still being received for this cause. Notably, a pledge for approximately R9m, earmarked for the Department of Biological Sciences, is still expected.

TAKING CARE OF OUR STUDENTS



UCT received an outpouring of in-kind donations of accommodation, transport, food, clothing, stationery and toiletries for its students who were evacuated from residences. In this image, a volunteer makes up toiletry packs for students evacuated from residences (source: Lerato Maduna).

Practical needs

The fire came amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and followed hot on the heels of UCT re-opening its campuses in February 2021. Students had only been resident back at UCT for just over two months in 2021 when they experienced the life-threatening disaster of the fire.

With the safety of its students being its number one priority, on the afternoon of 18 April 2021, UCT led the emergency evacuation and relocation of close to 4,000 students. Because it was not safe for students to return until all affected buildings had been assessed and secured for human traffic, these 4,000 students were left without access to their usual sources of food and separated from their personal belongings.

During the fortnight following the fire in which UCT's campus was secured for a return of human traffic, several relief and support organisations joined forces with UCT's Department of Student Affairs, Properties and Services, the SRC, Residence House Committees, the Graduate School of Business, as well as staff and student volunteers. Collectively, they ensured that UCT students continued to stay in safe temporary accommodation and received essential supplies, including food, toiletries, clothing and study materials.

In addition to receiving UCT Fire Fund donations made by individuals and organisations wanting to support students' immediate needs post-fire, the Department of Student Affairs also received donation funding to ensure the food security of students over the year that followed the fire. Some of these were students experiencing multiple challenges linked to COVID-19. A number of these students were left vulnerable by a change in state (NSFAS) bursary funding conditions that left them without bursaries for their studies in 2021.



During 2021, ninety-one Postgraduate Certificate in Education students no longer receiving NSFAS bursaries each received R560 worth of cash vouchers every two weeks. The Department of Student Affairs also disbursed subsistence assistance vouchers to over 100 students monthly during 2021. In 2022, we provided students in need with nearly 600 care packs of food and toiletries per month over the first half of the year.

This sustained support for students in the 14 months after the UCT fire assured food security, well-being and academic success. An analysis of UCT's 2021 cohort who received food vouchers showed that 74% of recipients qualified to either continue their studies or graduate. We believe this shows the positive impact of the food security support programme.

**Edwina Brooks, Director of Student Development,
Department of Student Affairs**

Dealing with the trauma of the fire

UCT's Student Wellness Service focuses on providing students with psychosocial support. Managing academic stress and adolescent and youth stress all require coping skills. This Service supports students by offering emotional support. This provides them with the foundation to succeed academically, while also helping them to build resilience, which they can use later when they are graduates and employees in the workplace.

In the aftermath of the UCT fire, the Student Wellness Service saw a significant influx of students battling psychologically because of missed work, uncertainty and loss of belongings, and even some who suffered from post-traumatic stress from the effects of the fire. Significant donations in both cash and kind enabled an expanded raft of services to students in the months that followed.

“We were so grateful to have the capacity to support these students and hold their hands throughout this time.”

Memory Muturiki, Director of Student Wellness Service



Thankfully, the generous donations in the wake of the fire allowed us to add capacity to our clinical hours to take on, support and hold more students for as long as they needed.

Many of the students who reached out for support in the wake of the fire also had pre-existing mental health problems. The trauma of the fire triggered these previously neglected psychological issues. We were so grateful to have the capacity to support these students and to hold their hands throughout this time.

We also used the added capacity to support students whose symptoms indicated post-traumatic stress syndrome. Sometimes, symptoms only present a few weeks after the

traumatic incident and there is no way of knowing how long those students will need support for. For some it was a few weeks of counselling, but others will need years of support.

The Fire Fund also allowed us to respond to students' needs in non-traditional ways. In addition to counsellors and psychologists, we provided peer counselling services and services focused on well-being. This included activities like a run-walk every Sunday and workshops to teach practices of mindfulness.

Despite the challenges, many of the students who reached out for support were able to continue and complete their year of studies. We see this as a significant positive story.

Postgraduate studies

In the Department of Historical Studies, three master's and one doctoral degree student were left stranded when their access to source materials that they were using for their research projects summarily came to an end. Key to these students' arguments and analyses were numerous irreplaceable records in UCT's Special Collections that were affected by the April 2021 fire.

Despite UCT Libraries' best efforts, copies of these primary records could not be found elsewhere. This meant that these scholars – all dedicated and diligent students who had a track record of scrupulously working through massive piles of historical records to produce excellent work – had to reimagine their entire projects right in the middle of their research. Despite the difficulties of severely restricted access to all public archives for the prior two years of COVID-19, as well as several personal losses during the pandemic, these promising young scholars had made noteworthy progress until April 2021.

A critical challenge these scholars faced was where to find the funds to extend their study period so that they could change direction and still complete their studies. Through the gift of a portion of the UCT Fire Fund donation income, the Department of Historical Studies received bursary funding to financially support these four students to extend their studies by between six and twelve months.



The April 2021 fire was deeply traumatic both on a personal and intellectual level. The fire fund was an absolute lifeline. It gave me such hope and confidence in a time of deep despair.

In my Honours year (2019), I made deep connections with the UCT Libraries archivist, the Jagger Library space and some un-researched collections in the Library, including the Lestrade Papers, the Norton Papers, the Bleek and Lloyd Papers, and the UCT Exam Papers collections. These collections were the focus for my master's studies that addressed the history of race and language in South Africa, with more than half of these sources being held in the Jagger. Almost overnight following the fire, I was left with an aching hole and no hope of finishing my master's without compromising everything I had envisaged for my research project.

The bursary – and its symbol as an expression of support – completely changed my research trajectory. I was able to gain time and support, and managed to reorient to new archival research in the UCT admin archive. I worked closely with Jagger staff to find materials that had been stored off-site and were undamaged by the fire: these were scanned and sent to me for use. In the space of eight months, I undertook archival research, reorientated the project and wrote the remainder of my thesis.

I express deep gratitude to the funders and others involved in helping me. I can't thank them enough. It is not an understatement to say that this process, and Dr Kar and the Department of Historical Studies' support, saved my degree."

Abdud-Dayyaan Badroodien, Master's scholar in Historical Studies, 2021

JAGGER LIBRARY



Volunteers form a human chain to move crates during the Jagger Library salvage (source: Je'nine May)

Volunteers salvage Jagger Library materials

UCT alumni, academics, scholars and librarians from around the world were left horrified at graphic images of the Jagger Library Reading Room in flames. An iconic touchpoint for many of UCT's students over the years, the destruction of this Library was distressing to witness.

During the process of dousing the flames consuming the building, vast amounts of water seeped into and flooded the basements located immediately below the Jagger Reading Room. These basements were home to UCT's Special Collections, including many of its African Studies materials. Many irreplaceable collections stored in the basement – although not destroyed through fire damage – were found to be under threat of severe water damage. Because of the fragile nature of many of these items, their removal, storage and rehabilitation required extreme care.

Applying disaster management principles and cognisant of the need to enforce strict COVID-19 preventative measures, UCT Libraries immediately undertook an emergency plan to salvage these collections. The first phase of this plan involved the removal of all items from the basement to prevent further water damage and the development of mould on publications. Recognizing the need to ensure extreme care, the Libraries team put out a public call for volunteers to form a human chain to move clearly marked materials in donated crates from the basement to trucks parked outside the Jagger Library, which then transported the crates to secure temporary storage sites. Further volunteers worked in a temporary shelter – the triage tent – adjacent to the Library, painstakingly drying materials that were sodden, and preparing delicate and damaged items for cold storage to allow for their rehabilitation at a later stage.

Libraries, universities, community-based organisations and members of the public from across the greater Cape Town area responded to the call for volunteers. Alumni, students, academics, current and retired UCT Libraries staff, UCT staff, conservators and friends of UCT shared the intense experience of supporting this mammoth salvage task, making for an unforgettable experience of camaraderie.

“Working with volunteers was a privilege for me because I got to work with a hugely dedicated and motivated team. To work with such a large group of people, different every day, where almost every person was rearing to go, really was an exceptional and unique experience. Every single shift was hard, dirty labour; and every single shift was massively motivated and achieved awesome things under very trying circumstances.”

Thomas Slingsby, volunteer coordinator and UCT Libraries geographic information systems officer

WHAT WAS LOST IN THE FIRE

45,500 items from African Studies collection

43,040 items from Government Publications collection

3,500 items from African Films DVD collection and several manuscripts from Primary collections

THE SALVAGE OPERATION

38 days spent removing items from Jagger Library

2,000 volunteers working over 20 full days

100 volunteers on every shift to form the human chain

12,900 crates filled and removed

10,000 water-damaged items placed in cold storage

MATERIALS EVACUATED FROM JAGGER BASEMENTS

30,000 video and audio tapes

33,157 pamphlets

14,953 rare and antiquarian materials

2,076 African Studies posters

246 distinct manuscript collections

668 African Studies maps

36 cabinets containing architectural drawings

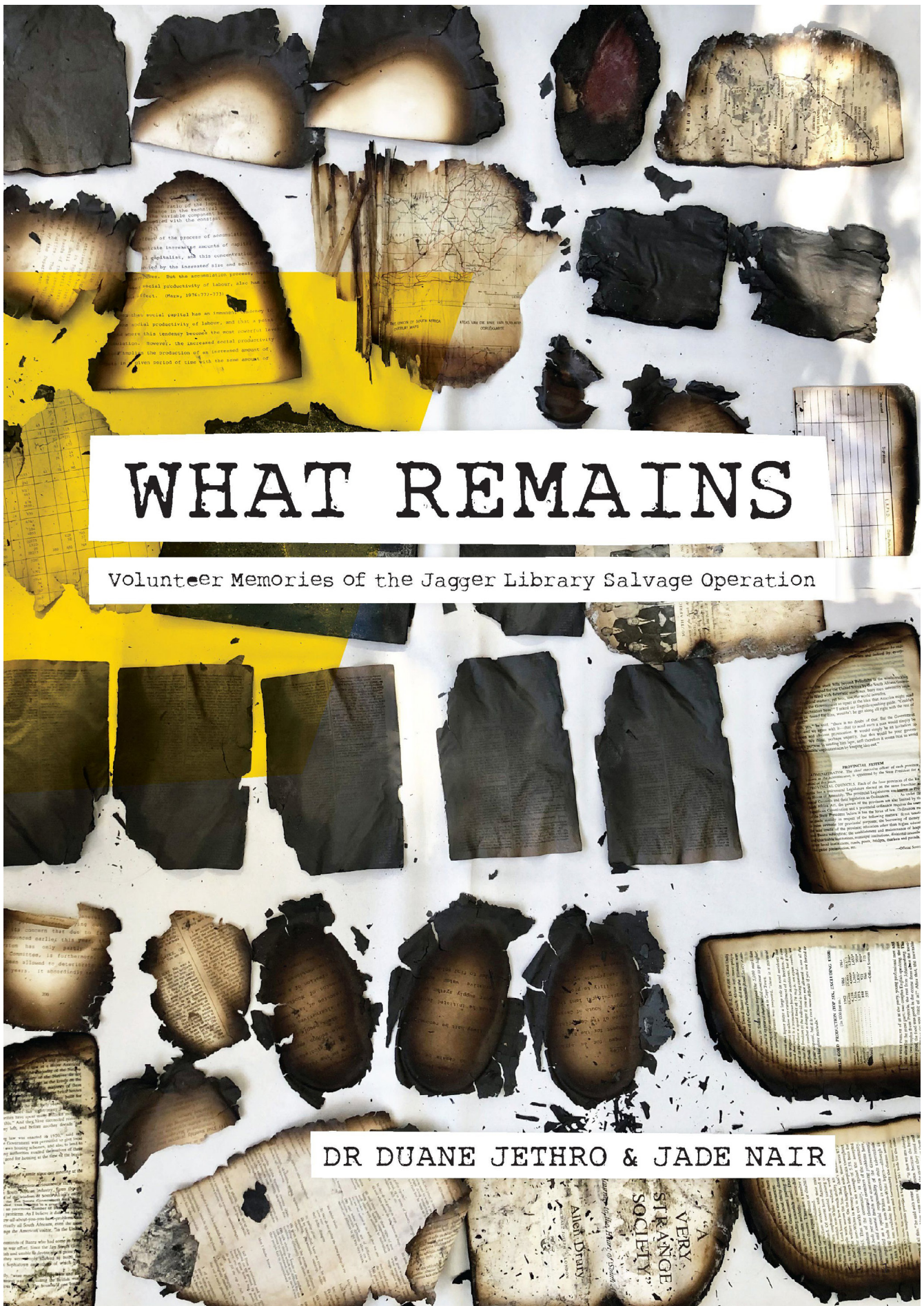
“I thought it would be heartbreaking and somber to begin with, but it was fascinating, and a great camaraderie developed amongst volunteers.... It was wonderful to be part of something so important and to meet so many lovely people. Thank you for letting us help..”

Anne Ellis Brown, volunteer



“We would not have been able to do this without the many selfless beings who stepped up in this crisis. Neither would it have been done so successfully and without a single instance of COVID-19 infection onsite without careful planning and handling of the gift of volunteerism.”

Nikki Crowster, UCT Libraries Director: Information Systems and Resources



WHAT REMAINS

Volunteer Memories of the Jagger Library Salvage Operation

DR DUANE JETHRO & JADE NAIR

This online publication reflects volunteer and staff memories of the Jagger Library salvage and recovery operations (source: 'Of Smoke and Ash' website)

OF SMOKE AND ASH:

The Jagger Library memorial exhibition

This curatorial project was a collaboration between the Centre for Curating the Archive, UCT's Michaelis Galleries and UCT Libraries. Launched on 19 April 2022 on the one-year anniversary of the fire, the exhibition commemorated the work of UCT Libraries and the volunteers involved in the salvage operations, and memorialised the loss of the Jagger Library. It produced a visual record of UCT's disaster and recovery efforts as an institution. It served as affirmation of the significance of the African Studies collections and the broad scope of its loss, shedding light on the cultural importance of the Jagger Library, as well as the value of librarianship, librarians and knowledge keeping at UCT.

In addition to the exhibition, this project also produced a 2022 publication titled *What remains: Volunteer Memories of the Jagger Library Salvage Operation* (ed. Jethro, D. & Nair, J.) that reflects volunteer and staff memories of the salvage and recovery operations.



FOR MORE ON THIS CLICK LINKS BELOW:

[Digital exhibition and project site](#)

[Exhibition video](#)

['What remains' publication](#)

“The exhibition contributed to the commemoration of the tragedy, producing a visual record of UCT's disaster and recovery efforts as an institution.”

Jade Nair, Curator, Michaelis Galleries, and Duane Jethro, Junior Research Fellow, Centre for Curating the Archive

AFTER THE FIRE SYMPOSIUM:

Loss, archives and African studies

Timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the Jagger Library Fire, this symposium brought together scholars from Africa and beyond on 18 and 19 April 2022 to think about loss, archives and African studies. It accommodated exciting contributions from within and beyond UCT, and was timed to coincide with the opening of the Jagger Library Fire Memorial Exhibition on 19 April 2022.



A selection of the conference papers have been collated for a special, open-access issue of the journal *Social Dynamics*. The journal has roots in the Centre for African Studies, and therefore leans into a UCT supported platform to broadcast critical conversations from the symposium. The special issue has a broad continental scope, with contributions from Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and South Africa, and a wide topical range that allows for multiple perspectives on the disaster. It also brings questions from UCT into continental conversation about archives. We believe it will make an important and lasting contribution to the field of African studies.

Duane Jethro, Junior Research Fellow, Centre for Curating the Archive and Alírio Karina, postdoctoral scholar, Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative

Embedding the skills and equipment for conservation and preservation of library materials

The Jagger Reading Room that was destroyed in the fire formed part of UCT Libraries' highly acclaimed Special Collections, which covers a wide spectrum of materials. Published collections include the African Studies collections of books, pamphlets, maps, newspapers, film, microfiche and ephemera; Rare and Antiquarian Book collections, and the Government Publications collection. Primary collections are made up of over 1,600 manuscripts and archives collections, including personal papers, institutional records, ephemera and architectural drawings, 41 audiovisual collections, 43 contemporary photographic collections, and a wealth of institutional records and publications, including the history of UCT and its forerunner, the South African College.

In the days and weeks after the fire, UCT experienced the tremendous support and solidarity that this tragedy had triggered. This manifested in the very generous donations from individuals and organisations to the UCT Fire Fund, some of which were earmarked for the Jagger Library recovery, and in the volunteerism of skilled individuals.

A recent further allocation of discretionary donation income has boosted the UCT Libraries' coffers for the continued conservation and digitisation of these collections that has been ongoing over the past two years.



Meticulous work underway in the triage tent outside Jagger Library (source: Je'nine May)

“As we go forward in building a centre of excellence in conservation and preservation, we will be able to ensure South Africa has the necessary skills and equipment to respond immediately and effectively to future disasters.”

Ujala Satgoor, Executive Director, UCT Libraries



In the wake of the fire a number of volunteer conservators supported us. An online community of practice was also formed, and convened by Dr Dale Peters, a former Deputy Director of UCT Libraries who is herself a trained conservator. It was clear, however, that there was a dearth of in-depth conservation and preservation skills in South Africa that needed to be filled. The volunteer conservators who came forward were either retired already or were very senior practitioners. So we saw the need to invest in deep capacity building in this sector.

We were so fortunate to benefit from the expertise of German conservator Tina Löhr, who –first at her own expense, and then later supported by a larger donation – came forward to salvage what could be saved from our Special Collections, and who spent six weeks in early 2022 setting up conservation processes, work flows

and protocols so we were all clear on what needed to be done and how to do it. Interns from UCT and the University of Pretoria received expert instruction on current conservation techniques and methodologies, also cleaning and categorizing 800 large-format objects during the 14 days of their internship.

Our next priority is the establishment of a longer-term legacy project: a conservation and preservation unit of expertise. We are investing in the relevant and appropriate equipment, as well as sourcing the correct space and building capacity for such a unit. We are particularly grateful to our funders to have been able to buy significant large equipment that has really made the difference in saving and restoring damaged materials. This includes a vacuum freeze dryer and special dehumidifiers.

FOR MORE ON THIS:

In pictures: Runaway fire destroys some of UCT's historical buildings

Mapping tool: PCU research associate Dr Zander Venter developed a sliding tool using Google Earth Engine to visualise the extent of the fire that began on 18 April 2021. View the mapping tool here:

Video: 'Rebuilding what was lost- reflections on UCT's Jagger Library

Article: Reflections on the first anniversary of the Jagger Fire

Blogs: Many contributions on the subject of library conservation and archival work can be found here:

SECURING AT-RISK COLLECTIONS


Preserving South Africa's botanical treasures: The Virtual Bolus Herbarium

The HW Pearson building is home to staff and students working in the fields of botany, zoology and ecology, as well as key research entities within the Department of Biological Sciences, being the Plant Conservation Unit (PCU), the Bolus Herbarium and the Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa. The UCT fire ravaged the entire top level of the HW Pearson building. Extensive fire-related and water damage was sustained across multiple floors of the building.

The Bolus Herbarium collection is an essential and unique part of South Africa's history and ecological heritage. It hosts one of the world's most important collections of Cape flora, incorporating more than 350,000 dried plant specimens within collections built over the past 150 years. Started in 1865 by Harry Bolus, it consists of specimens from across South Africa, with a total of at least 12,000 type specimens, being unique specimens upon which plant names are based. The collection is primarily used by UCT staff and students for their research and teaching, but is also utilized by visitors from outside of UCT. In addition, the collection is accessible to researchers in many parts of the world.

In 2021, the Bolus Herbarium imaging and digitization project had already been set up in collaboration with UCT Libraries. But less than half of the full collection had been digitized by the time of the fire.

The Department of Biological Sciences applied for donation funding to store physical specimens and accelerate the digitization and imaging process already under way in the Bolus Herbarium, with the end goal being the imaging and digitizing of its entire collection. Creating this virtual collection will provide a backup against damages and losses due to insects, as well as disasters. It will also allow scholars not physically located at UCT to access the collection.

A portrait of Cornelia Klak, Curator of the Bolus Herbarium. She is a woman with short grey hair, smiling, wearing a patterned top. She is sitting at a desk with papers and a computer monitor in the background.

“... the Bolus Herbarium is not just a collection of plants, but a treasure that represents our botanical heritage and contributes to our understanding of the natural world.”

Cornelia Klak, Curator of the Bolus Herbarium

After the fire, our efforts to safeguard the physical specimens and generate digitized copies became even more urgent. The physical specimens, used for DNA extractions and for sharing with other institutions to advance research in this area, are particularly vulnerable to degradation and require specialized cabinets for preservation. Funding made this possible.

By collecting plants before changes in the environment and then recollecting them later, we are able to create a snapshot of the past and predict how it may change in the future. This is especially important as we face the effects of climate change. We are dedicated to preserving and making

accessible this invaluable collection for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

Currently, we are working towards imaging our collections of flowering plants. This project alone will take us another five years to complete. Fortunately, we have doctoral and undergraduate students working on the project to help us improve access to this historical and unique collection and improve its visibility.

We believe that the Bolus Herbarium is not just a collection of plants, but a treasure that represents our botanical heritage and contributes to our understanding of the natural world.

Leaves bright silvery in the wind, young leaves
- stems with faint pink tinge

BOLUS HERBARIUM



BOL218283

Imaged

A digitized image of a *Leucadendron*
produced for the Virtual Bolus Herbarium
(source: Cornelia Klak)

Ex BOLUS HERBARIUM. UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

No.

Leucadendron sp. nov. *bonum* Williams
1855.

Cape Prov.: Ceres Div.:
Sandfontein, S. Cederberg. On





Images of the valley below the Noordhoek lookout at Silvermine, Cape Town, showing the encroachment of invasive pine trees over the years (Watermeyer, 1946 and Cowen, 1999)

PROTECTING THE PAST, SECURING THE FUTURE: Digitization of Plant Conservation Unit collections

The Plant Conservation Unit (PCU) is home to the single largest collection of landscape photographs in Southern Africa. It was devastated by the loss, through fire damage, of its physical collection of historical landscape photographs curated over three decades, as well as its two pollen collections used for palaeoecological work in the unit. These losses highlighted the importance of digitization for accessibility and preservation, but also emphasized the need to protect and preserve rare physical records. Funding was granted to enable the PCU to resource the digitization and secure storage of source materials urgently as a preventative measure.

Despite losing our entire collection of original landscape photographs and the physical pollen collection in the fire, with the funding made available, we have actively been building and expanding our digital archive. To date we have digitized about 30,000 historical photographs. Efforts are currently underway to add new digitized collections to the existing database. The initiative forms part of a citizen science project called rePhotoSA that provides open access to researchers from around the world.

The pollen collections are being reconstituted from material collected from herbarium specimens and from

the field. Once the material has been placed on slides, it is photographed and organised in a database. These collections serve as a reference for palaeoecological work that explores long-term change in southern African vegetation by investigating fossil pollen found in cores.

The collection of historical photographs provides a unique glimpse into environmental change over the last century. This is a valuable resource for studying the effects of climate change on southern African landscapes.

Together with colleagues, students and citizen scientists, we have visited

and re-photographed over 2,000 sites in our repeat photograph collection. Our rare photographs offer a time machine to the past, changing the way we view the present and providing a baseline against which future changes can be evaluated.

**Timm Hoffman, Professor,
Plant Conservation Unit**

FOR MORE ON THIS:

[*The rePhotoSA website*](#)

[*Article in The Guardian, 25 June 2021*](#)

THE AFTERMATH:

Making accessible Africa's deep past through digitization

When fire engulfed the historic Jagger Reading Room, the loss of the African Studies Library was a significant one. But within every catastrophe lies an opportunity, in this case to contribute to the development of the African studies focus in the Library in new ways.

The Five Hundred Year Archive (FHYA) project, based in the Department of Historical Studies, works to stimulate engagement with the neglected areas of the southern African past. Thanks to the UCT Fire Fund, the FHYA was able to launch The Aftermath, an initiative that works to make Africa's deep past more accessible to scholars using the African Studies Library.

THE INITIATIVE HAS THREE FOCI:

- *The Historic Black Humanities augments UCT's African studies holdings with materials pertinent to the black humanities that flourished outside the racially exclusive universities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This project is founded in a new model of open-access digitization-led archiving that facilitates the arrangement and contextualization of the material online, making it accessible to others.*
- *The African Language Archive involves digitizing and making readily searchable the fullest*

possible corpus of early African language materials as possible. Drawing on a large collection of datable African language texts, researchers are able to track how words and concepts were used at particular times and how usage changed over time. This creates a language archive that is much more than the sum of its parts.

- *The Deep Past re-curates colonial collections to make Africa's deep past more accessible for research. This addresses the persistent research neglect and colonial distortion of Africa's deep past.*



"Thanks to the UCT Fire Fund, the FHYA was able to launch The Aftermath, an initiative that works to make Africa's deep past more accessible to scholars using the African Studies Library."

Carolyn Hamilton, Research Chair and Director of the Five Hundred Year Archive

SECURING THE ORAL HERITAGE OF AT-RISK COLLECTIONS: SAN AND KHOI STORIES

Embedded within the African Studies Department, the San and Khoi Unit is part of the acknowledgement that UCT stands on land that was originally that of the first inhabitants of Southern Africa, the San and Khoi people.

A critical need that emerged after the UCT fire was to expand the San and Khoi Unit's existing archive on the Khoekhoegowab and N!uu languages through training researchers to collect first-hand accounts from individuals and communities who still carry such knowledge. The funding the centre received from the UCT Fire Fund enabled this work to take place, as well as being used to publish an oral history reflecting Khoi and San memory of the Observatory area of Cape Town.

"We have been conducting accelerated gathering of unarchived stories and knowledges from elder San and Khoi knowledge holders; and then curating these in a digital archive."

Yvette Abrahams, Director, San and Khoi Unit



Critical to the success and sustainability of our recent work is the UCT Fire Fund income that we have used to train community researchers in key research skills. This allows them to collect the stories that feed our digital archive.

We have also used this funding to put together an oral history of the Two Rivers Urban Park in Observatory, Cape Town. This was once an important area for the original San and Khoi who lived there, being the first site of colonial dispossession by the Dutch settlers.

PRESERVING AFRICAN FILM HISTORY:

Rebuilding and digitizing a lost collection



Some of the audiovisual collection salvaged from the Jagger Library (source: Je'nine May)

The Jagger Library fire brought increased urgency to the project of digitizing the remaining African Cinema collection. The African Cinema collection, which forms a core focus of the work of the Centre for Film and Media Studies and its students, suffered huge losses as the film collection was situated in a part of the library that was severely affected by the fire. Almost 3,500 rare and specialist DVDs documenting key moments in South African history were lost in the fire.

Much of what has been salvaged is on older media such as celluloid, VHS tapes and betacam tapes. UCT has a responsibility to safeguard these stories for generations to come. Digitization is necessary to prevent further degradation of these valuable resources and to make the archive accessible to a wider group of scholars.

These materials include valuable records of South African history and African film history, including the Lindy Wilson collection and the Simon Bright collection. Funding provided to this project is enabling the urgent digitization of these materials.

“Our Centre for Film and Media Studies is now looking at new long-term projects, such as programs on the art of digitization.”

Ian-Malcolm Rijdsdijk, Director of the African Cinema Unit, Centre for Film and Media Studies



As the first university in the country to offer African studies, our efforts in showcasing African history and culture through films and memorializing our heritage suffered a devastating blow.

While most of what we had was either damaged or destroyed – and it will take time to rebuild this collection of rich and vulnerable works – we have learned a great deal and this experience has advanced our teaching capacity.

Through the restoration process, the library has become a focal point for collaboration and has brought to the forefront the importance of preserving vulnerable collections, a case study we will be presenting in a conference in Ghana later this year.

The funding provided has enabled us to build a collaborative and collegial partnership with the UCT Libraries, and has evoked passion in our students.

Staff member explaining metadata process to students (source: Alexia Smit)



PRESERVING OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE: Students providing metadata for the African film archive

The devastation of the fire emphasized the importance of digitizing and preserving our historical collections and has brought excitement about African film back into the Centre for Film and Media Studies.

As precious archival material salvaged from the fire is digitized, it needs to be made accessible and searchable so that it can be used in meaningful ways. This process is known as developing metadata: essential summaries of basic information about data, making finding particular instances of data easier. Metadata works hand in glove with digitization to provide a roadmap of digitized materials and a searchable data base of reference points for further research.

Funding for this project enables Centre for Film and Media Studies postgraduate students to work as paid interns to capture metadata for the African Cinema archive as the films are digitized. These students are learning skills in metadata collection and archiving. In addition to providing vital staffing to the digitization project, this project also provides a pathway for UCT postgraduate students to engage meaningfully with the African Cinema collection.



The digitization project has become a central part of our mission, as we look to future complexities in archiving our present.

Because our celluloid footage was severely damaged and remained vulnerable to degradation, we have begun the collection of rich metadata, essential in making the media searchable and accessible globally. Through funding made available, we were able to involve our students. As the machines whirled in the background, we reviewed never-before-seen footage of our history, including footage by Lindy Wilson showcasing key moments of our apartheid legacy. This has changed, and continues to, change the way we understand our past.

As a teacher, I've never felt prouder about bringing students into the digitization process and to learn alongside them. Now that we have formalized the process, we will be hiring interns to complete the work. We also plan to involve filmmakers and the public in celebrating our collection, once completed.

We are now looking for ways to ensure that our archives remain relevant and accessible to future generations, and we are proud to have made such progress in preserving our cultural heritage. We hope that our efforts will not only benefit our students but also African film writers and producers who deserve to have their work showcased to the world.

“As a teacher, I’ve never felt prouder about bringing students into the digitization process and to learn alongside them.”

Alexia Smit, Senior Lecturer, Centre for Film and Media Studies

Preserving and making public the Bleek and Lloyd collection

The Bleek and Lloyd collection – a vast array of notebooks, drawings, photographs and lexicons compiled by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the 1800s – records the cosmologies and languages of the !xam and !kun people who were amongst the earliest inhabitants of Southern Africa.

The extent of the collection is testament to the commitment of Lloyd and Bleek, and later of Bleek's daughter, Dorothea Bleek, in recording information about the lives and languages of the people of Southern Africa, including the Kalahari, Northern Cape, northern Namibia, Angola and even as far as Tanzania. This collection offers us insight into precolonial times and into the lives of people about whom little else would otherwise be known.

UCT's Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) has been working since the early 2000s to digitize and publish the collection. By the time the 2021 fire ravaged UCT, digitization of the notebook collection and a portion of the !xam dictionary collected by Lucy Lloyd had been completed. The !xam dictionary alone amounts to some 50 000 cards. Funding was provided to the CCA to accelerate this critical digitization project.



“The fire was a devastating loss in terms of archival holdings of the university. Part of the imperative after the fire is for us to think about how to create a forward-looking, twenty-first century archive that is relevant to scholars and public alike.”

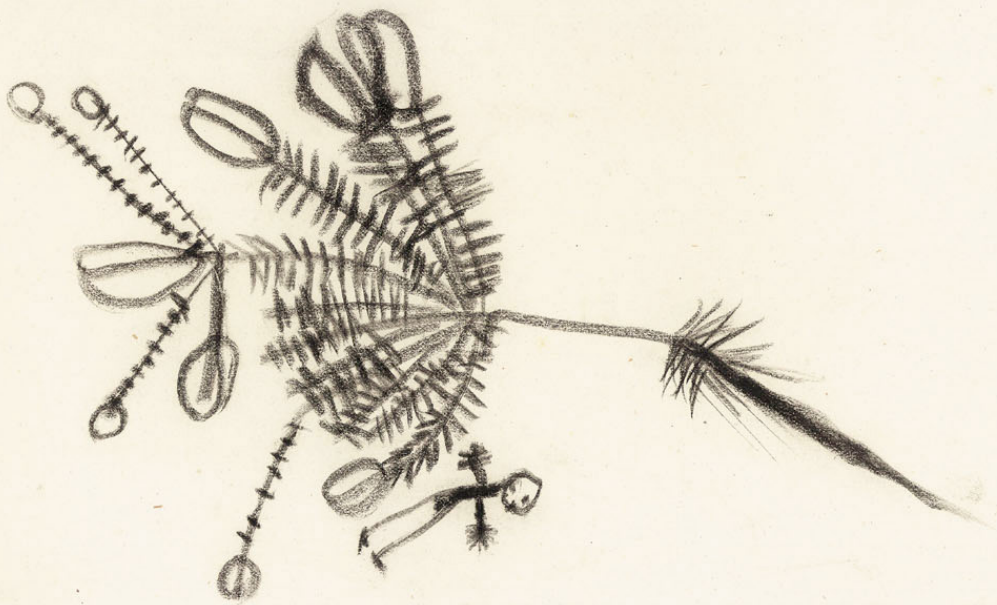
Pippa Skotnes, Director of Centre for Curating the Archive

It was a great act of providence that the bulk of the Bleek and Lloyd collection— a United Nations listed site of The Memory of the World and the jewel in UCT's archival crown--survived the fire. Donations from the UCT Fire Fund allowed us to energize our efforts to digitize this archival treasure trove and keep it digitally secure from future disasters.

But the fire fund also allowed us to take our work a step further. This funding has opened the door to making this collection widely accessible beyond scholarly study, to reach descendant communities. As an example, we were recently able to bring copies of watercolours and drawings made in Cape Town by young boys who had lived on the Kavango River back to their descendants, hearing their thoughts and dialogues on these unique images.

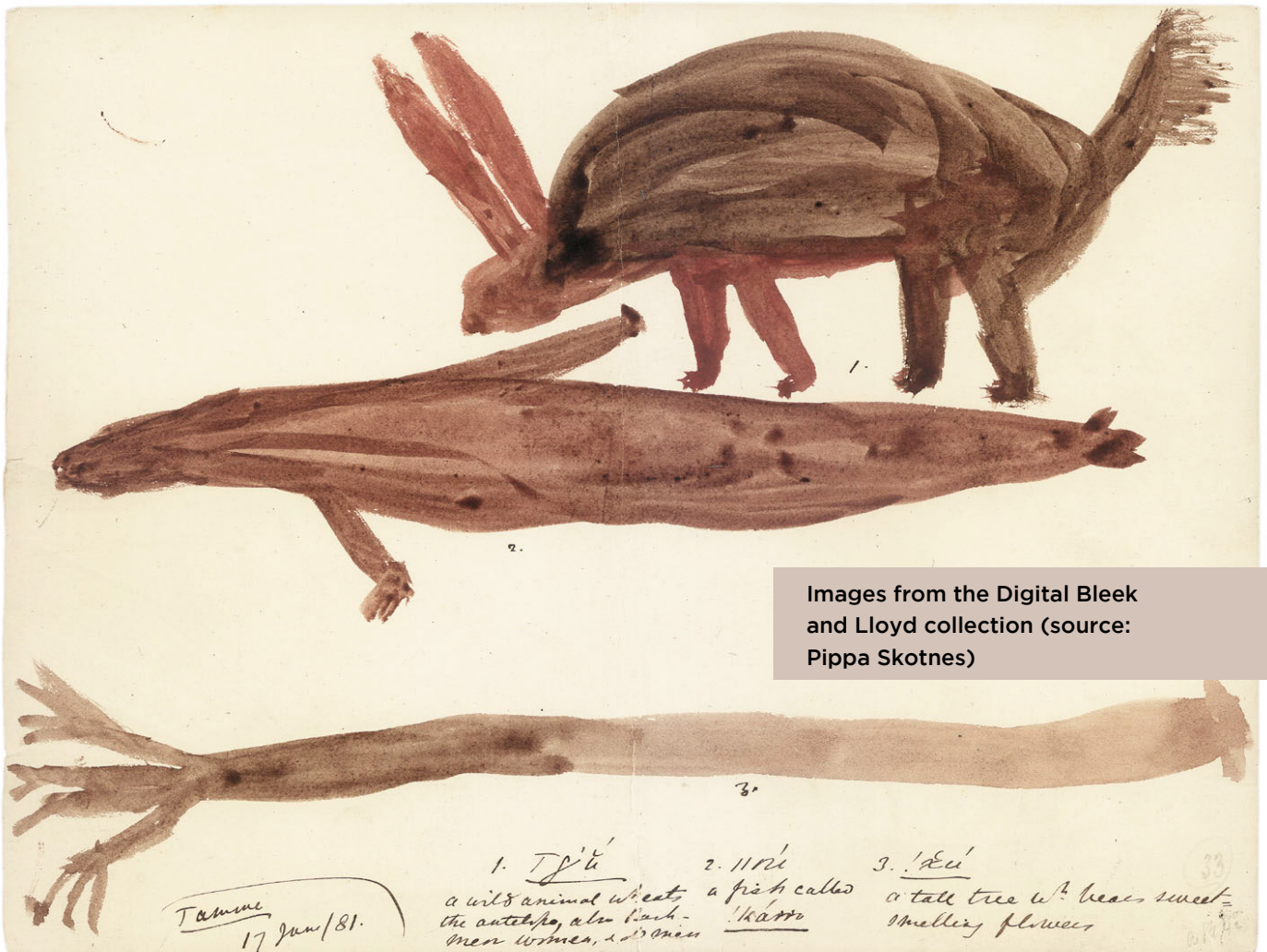
FOR MORE ON THIS:

[The Digital Bleek and Lloyd](#)



(1) Jan. 25/80.

A little child asleep ^{during} the heat of the sun,
in the shade of a tree ('yū')



Images from the Digital Bleek and Lloyd collection (source: Pippa Skotnes)

Tamme
17 Jan/81.

1. Tj'ū'
a wild animal which
the antelope, also Bush-
men women, & others

2. Horē
a fish called
'kārro'







3. 'Eu'
a tall tree w^h bears sweet-
smelling flowers

Ujala Satgoor, Executive Director of UCT Libraries in the Jagger Library on the first-year anniversary of the fire (source: Lerato Maduna)



CONNECT WITH UCT'S NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY

We want to stay connected to our donors, alumni and friends. Engage with us through one of the channels described here:

Find and follow us on **social media**:      

We invite all our alumni to join our bespoke social networking platform, **UCT Alumni Connect**. It is free and will link you to a global community of fellow UCT alumni: www.uctalumniconnect.com

Contact our Development and Alumni Department:

SOUTH AFRICA

Sarah Archer
Executive Director
sarah.archer@uct.ac.za

Libo Msengana-Bam
Senior Manager: Alumni Relations
libo.msengana-bam@uct.ac.za

Stafford Bomester
Senior Manager: Fundraising
stafford.bomester@uct.ac.za

EUROPE

Andrew Wigley
Development & Partnerships Director
andrew.wigley@uct.ac.za

USA

Shireen Badat
Director: International Operations (USA)
shireenbadat.badat@uct.ac.za

UNITED KINGDOM

Angela Edwards
Director: UCT UK office
uct-trust@tecres.net

CANADA

Di Stafford
Director: UCT Canada office
info@uctcanada.ca

AUSTRALIA

Ruth Thornton
UCT Alumni Coordinator
rjthornton1@bigpond.com

