

Tessa's Temple of Solomon

Model of architectural masterpiece a recreation of scientist's vision

Charlotte O'Neill

Bachelor of Arts student, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW

It is imposing. A model of the Temple of Solomon on display in Avondale Libraries (Lake Macquarie campus) is the work of Dr Tessa Morrison, who constructed it based on descriptions in a circa-1680s manuscript written by physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton.

Tessa found the manuscript in the digital archives of the Horn Library at Babson College (Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA)—she had been studying utopian cities. Written predominantly in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, the manuscript “was a scriptural exegesis of the book of Ezekiel.” Tessa, a senior lecturer in the School of Architecture and Built Environment at The University of Newcastle, translated the “scratchy handwriting” to reveal a detailed architectural description of the temple.

After successfully applying for an Australian Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Tessa

began the painstaking construction process. She initially recreated Newton's reconstruction using the building information modeling software program ArchiCAD. The physical model, at over two metres square, features 1000 columns and 1200 window grids, all of which had to be sanded and painted. “I could have painted my house several times over in the time it took me,” says Tessa. Her favourite aspect of the project: the relief of finishing it. “But [in] saying that, I am immensely proud of it.”

Avondale vice-president (research) Professor Anthony Williams, formerly head of the School of Architecture and Built Environment at Newcastle, describes the model as “the pulling together [of] 5000 pages of writing.” It combines not only architecture and history but also two iconic figures, “one of the greatest scientists that has ever lived and the biblical figure of Solomon—both people who are associated with wisdom,” says Tessa. **TEACH**

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A model of the Temple of Solomon, as constructed by Tessa Morrison

[Photograph: Brenton Stacey]