

Finding Sir Redmond Barry

Evidence of zealous and distinguished labours

Jason Benjamin

There are few who could claim to have had such a fundamental influence on the development of Victoria's cultural, educational and legal landscape as Sir Redmond Barry (1813–1880).¹ A visionary with a passion for the arts and learning, Barry was instrumental in establishing some of Victoria's most important institutions, including the University of Melbourne, the Melbourne Public Library (now the State Library of Victoria) and the National Gallery of Victoria.

June 2013 witnessed the bicentenary of Barry's birth. The occasion was marked by a number of events, public lectures and exhibitions organised by the University of Melbourne, the State Library of Victoria and the Supreme Court of Victoria. One of the highlights of the celebrations was a symposium reflecting on Barry's life and achievements, held at the Baillieu Library on his 200th birthday, 7 June. The event was presided over by the chancellor of the university, Elizabeth Alexander AM, with the Hon. Marilyn Warren AC, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria, as one of the guest speakers. Accompanying the symposium was an exhibition exploring Barry's life through objects and documents drawn from the university's cultural collections.



Barry was born in Ballyclogh in County Cork, Ireland, in 1813, the third son of a well-established Anglo-Norman family.² He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, with a Bachelor of Arts in 1837 and was admitted to the Irish bar in 1838. Barry had limited prospects in Ireland, so emigration offered him one of the few avenues to advance his legal career; he set sail for Australia in April 1839. Arriving in Melbourne on 13 November 1839 after first being admitted to the bar in Sydney, Barry proceeded to establish his legal career and standing in Melbourne society. Over the following 40 years he was to become a highly influential force in Victoria's cultural, educational and legal spheres.

As the first chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Barry

looms large in the university's early history. He stamped his strongly held opinions on all aspects of the early university, from its curriculum to its infrastructure. Barry's enthusiasm, dedication and hard work over the 27 years he served as chancellor were instrumental in building the strong foundations upon which today's university now stands. It is fitting then that within the cultural collections of the university can be found much evidence of Barry's contribution to his adopted home. Archives, books, furniture, artworks and other personal objects give us an important glimpse of the man Barry was.

The University of Melbourne was founded by an Act of the Victorian Parliament in January 1853. The driving force behind its establishment was Hugh Childers, auditor-general and former inspector of schools for Victoria. On the passing of the legislation, Governor La Trobe invited Barry to become provisional chancellor.³ At the meeting of the University Council held on 17 May 1853, a ballot was held and Barry was formally elected chancellor, a role he was to hold until his death 27 years later. Although Barry had not been the principal player in the founding of the university, once elected as chancellor he became the dominant force that made its actual establishment and

early success possible. Writing many years later, Hugh Childers was to acknowledge that ‘the largest share of the University’s work was done by Barry’.⁴

Evidence of Barry’s role in the university is contained in the collections of the University of Melbourne Archives in the form of letter books, correspondence, minute books and published ephemera. Of particular note is a circular dated 18 April 1853 from Victorian colonial secretary William Lonsdale, notifying Barry of the first meeting of the University of Melbourne Council, to be held on 3 May 1853,⁵ a meeting that was held in Barry’s chambers at the Supreme Court. Also of note is the University Council’s first outward-bound letter book, which records the correspondence generated by the council as it went about its business. The second entry in this letter book, dated 17 May 1853, records the contents of Barry’s letter to the colonial secretary to report, among other outcomes of the second council meeting, his election as chancellor. Writing this letter would have been one of Barry’s first acts as the officially elected chancellor.⁶

In this role, Barry presided over all formal occasions associated with the university. Suitably attired in his newly tailored chancellor’s robes,

Barry officiated at the laying of the foundation stone for the university’s first building, the Quadrangle, on 3 July 1854. Ten months later, on 13 April 1855, he officiated at the university’s official inauguration, when the first 16 students enrolled. Both these events are commemorated in the holdings of Special Collections in the Baillieu Library, which has original editions of the *Argus* newspaper reports of the laying of the foundation stone, published the following day, and the published proceedings of the inauguration held on 13 April 1855. Barry’s speeches delivered on both these occasions are reproduced in these sources.⁷

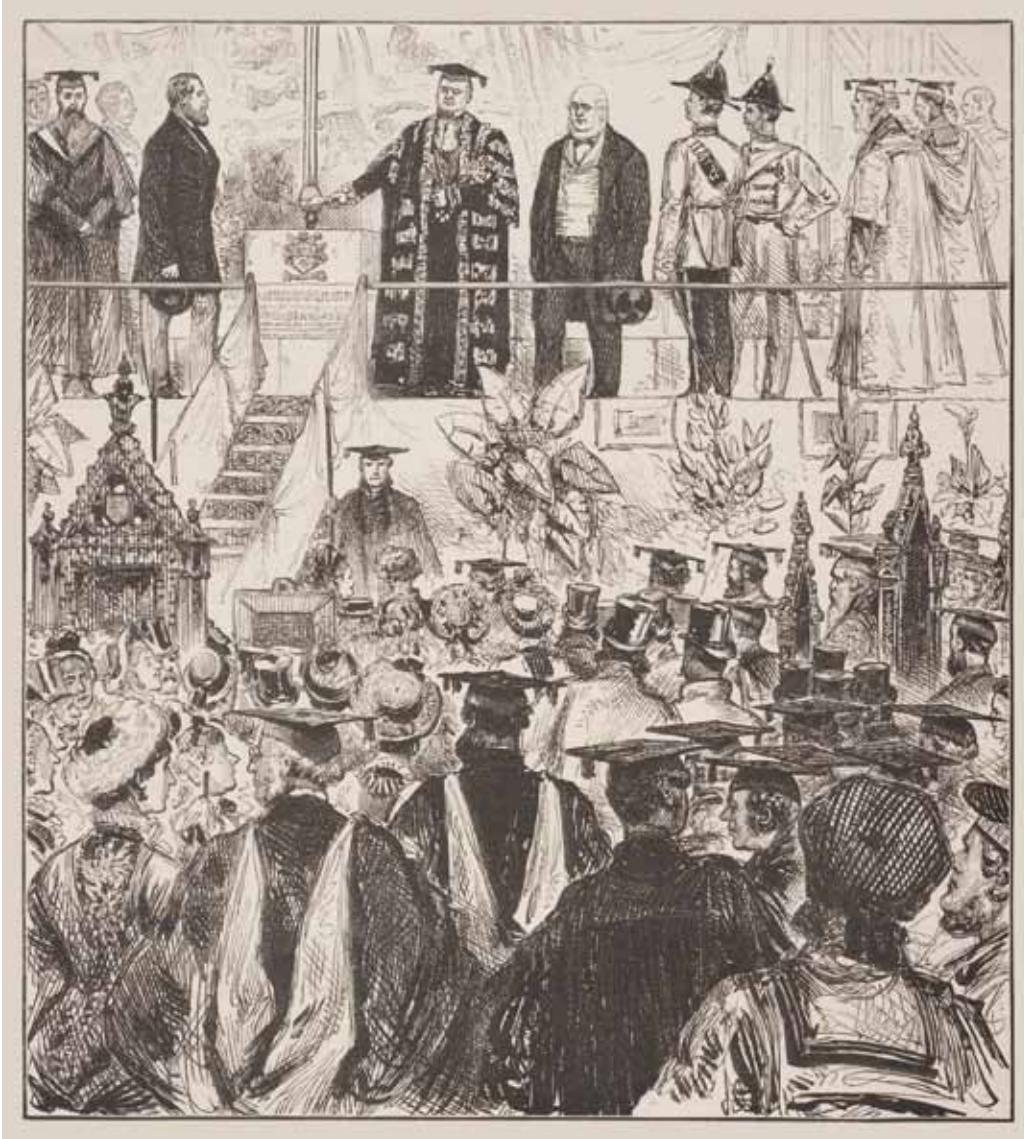
During Barry’s tenure as chancellor he played a very active and vocal role in shaping the buildings and grounds of the university. The original university building (the Quadrangle), designed by Francis Maloney White, was begun in early 1854 and stages were built over the following three years. Funding to complete the building as planned by Maloney, however, was not available. This was to set a precedent for the expanding university as it struggled to raise funds for suitable accommodation. Barry was to expend a great deal of energy petitioning the government to support his plans for providing the university with grand

buildings befitting his aspirations for the institution.

Barry’s greatest success in this endeavour was the realisation of a ceremonial hall for conferring degrees and holding examinations, known as Wilson Hall.⁸ Having been greatly inspired by the Great Hall at the University of Sydney in the early 1860s, Barry lobbied hard over many years to realise his dream. Wilson Hall was made possible by a generous donation from the pastoralist Sir Samuel Wilson, whom Barry persuaded to fund its construction.⁹

Glimpses of the role Barry played in the realisation of the hall, along with many other university buildings, can also be found in the collections of the University of Melbourne Archives. Annual reports over many years record his lament over the lack of a suitable hall for graduation ceremonies and examinations. In the Registrar’s Correspondence series of files can be found letters both to and from Barry that demonstrate his influence on the design of the hall. Of particular note are the letters to the vice-chancellor, Sir Anthony Brownless, that Barry wrote in 1877 while travelling in Europe. These discuss design features for the hall and enclose photographs of similar university buildings that he saw and admired in Lisbon.¹⁰

Laying the memorial stone of the Wilson Hall, Melbourne University, 1879, wood engraving, 25.5 × 22.7 cm, published in *The Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 25 October 1879.
Special Collections, Baillieu Library,
University of Melbourne.



Attributed to the Compagnie des Cristalleries de Baccarat, Wine glass with engraved crest of Sir Redmond Barry, before 1880, height: 17.5 cm. Reg. no. 1979.0242, gift of Mr and Mrs W. Pate, 1979, the Ernst Matthesi Memorial Collection of Early Glass, University of Melbourne.



At the laying of the memorial stone for the hall on 2 October 1879, Barry was again to perform his chancellor's duties and officiate. The moment is captured in a wood engraving published in *The Australasian Sketcher*, a copy of which is held in Special Collections in the Baillieu Library (see page 5).¹¹ Dressed in the full splendour of his chancellor's robes, Barry is shown on the scaffolding, delivering to the assembled crowd the lengthy speech he had prepared for the occasion. Also in Special Collections can be found the official publication produced after the ceremony, which reproduces Barry's speech in full. Another wood engraving, held in the Baillieu Library Print Collection, depicts the same occasion. Published in *The Illustrated Australian News* on 31 October 1879, this print shows Barry standing to the side of Sir Samuel Wilson as the latter taps the memorial stone into place.¹²

Barry was a well-known social identity in Melbourne and was especially renowned for his entertaining. Of particular note were the dinners he held each year on the anniversary of his arrival in Melbourne, at which he would entertain his gentlemen friends with a dinner followed by large bottles of port that were passed around as

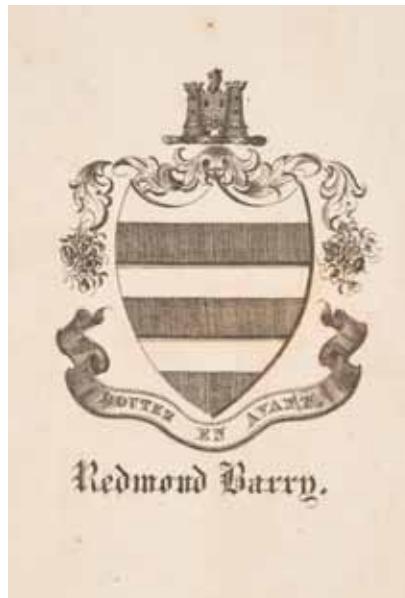
Right: Sir Redmond Barry's deed box, c. 1860, wood, leather, brass, 15.5 × 47.0 × 28.0 cm. Reg. no. 1985.0177, University of Melbourne Archives.

Below: Bookplate of Sir Redmond Barry, before 1880, wood engraving, 8.9 × 7.6 cm, in John Leslie Fitzgerald Foster, *The new colony of Victoria, formerly Port Phillip: Together with some account of the other Australian colonies*, London: Trelawney Saunders, 1851. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.



stories were told.¹³ Evidence of his lavish style of entertainment can be found in the Ernst Matthesi Memorial Collection of Early Glass, which forms part of the University of Melbourne Art Collection and is on display at University House.¹⁴ Among the large number of significant pieces of glass dating from the 17th century onwards is a wine glass with the finely hand-engraved crest of Sir Redmond Barry on the bowl (pictured opposite). Dating from c. 1850–75, the glass has a diamond-cut stem and plain foot and is thought to have been made by the French Compagnie des Cristalleries de Baccarat, one of the leading producers of quality stemware of the day. Most likely sold from Barry's estate following his death, the glass was generously donated to the university by Mr and Mrs W. Pate in 1979.

Sir Redmond Barry was a great bibliophile and believed strongly in the Victorian-era ideal of self-improvement through the gaining of knowledge. From the early 1840s he opened the small personal library in his home for use by working men and, as stated earlier, was instrumental in the founding of the Melbourne Public Library. As a trustee he was to take a very active role in the library's administration, including the selection of books. The



University of Melbourne Archives holds the original architectural drawings of Joseph Reed's design for the State Library of Victoria building, into which Barry no doubt had a significant input.¹⁵ Barry was also the driving force behind the founding of the Supreme Court Library and the Victorian Parliamentary Library.

On Barry's death his substantial personal library was dispersed across various public and private collections. Today a number of these books can be found in the collections of the University of Melbourne Library, easily identified by Barry's distinctive

bookplate bearing his crest. Books held in Special Collections of the Baillieu Library include a volume presented to Barry as a child by his aunt,¹⁶ as well as a volume on British painting and sculpture acquired in 1841 to expand the book collection he made available to Melbourne's working men.¹⁷ Of particular note is a copy of John Leslie Fitzgerald Foster's 1851 publication *The new colony of Victoria, formerly Port Phillip*,¹⁸ with a personal inscription from the author to Barry.¹⁹

The University of Melbourne Law Library Rare Book Collection also holds a number of legal texts that once formed part of Barry's professional library as a lawyer and Supreme Court judge.²⁰ Another reminder of Barry's legal career is his deed box, held by the University of Melbourne Archives, which he would have used in a similar fashion to a briefcase for his legal work (pictured above). A more stark reminder of Barry as judge resides at the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, in the form of Ned Kelly's death mask. Despite his many long-lasting achievements, Barry is largely remembered in the popular imagination as the judge who, in 1880, presided over Kelly's trial and sentenced him to death.

Bookcase formerly owned by Sir Redmond Barry, before 1880, Huon pine and metal, 303 × 376 × 42 cm. Acquired from the estate of Sir John Henry MacFarland, 1935, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Heath Sciences, University of Melbourne.



George Frederick Folingsby, *The Hon. Sir Redmond Barry KCMG*, 1881, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 76.0 cm. Reg. no. 1881.0001, commissioned and presented by subscribers 1881, University of Melbourne Art Collection.



As a man of learning, Barry had a wide range of academic interests, which he liked to share in speeches and addresses. He expounded on topics such as agriculture, sculpture, architecture, painting, music, poetry, law and education for the edification of the general public. Barry collated and published many of his speeches, of which Special Collections in the Baillieu Library holds various copies. One volume of his speeches that includes many related to the arts also contains a catalogue he prepared in 1875 of the oil paintings in the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria.²¹

Also held by the university, in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Heath Sciences, is a bookcase that once graced Barry's home (pictured opposite). This large, highly figured, golden-toned Huon pine bookcase, with a carved pediment featuring a central shield flanked by two smaller ones, was acquired by the university from the estate of Sir John Henry MacFarland in 1935. MacFarland, the seventh chancellor of the university, had purchased the bookcase from Barry's estate in about 1881.²²

Sir Redmond Barry died on 23 November 1880 at the age of 67. His death was greatly lamented by his fellow Melburnians and his

funeral procession was one of the largest the city had seen. In the years following his death Barry's contribution to the development of early Victoria was commemorated in public monuments and artworks. The most notable of these is the bronze statue of Barry that stands in the forecourt of the State Library of Victoria.

The importance of Barry's contribution to Victoria was, however, recognised during his own lifetime. In 1877 the University Barry Memorial was established to raise funds by subscription to appropriately honour 'the zealous and distinguished labours of the Chancellor'.²³ Eventually amassing over £300, options considered were a statue, a portrait or the naming of a scholarship. In 1879 the Barry Memorial Committee commissioned George Folingsby to paint a full-length portrait of Barry dressed in his chancellor's robes. The records of the University Barry Memorial, held by University of Melbourne Archives, provide us with the details of those who subscribed as well as the committee's dealings with Folingsby.²⁴ But Barry was to sit only twice for the portrait before his untimely death,²⁵ and the painting was not completed until May 1881, at which time it was first publicly exhibited.²⁶ Following the completion

of Wilson Hall in late 1882, the portrait was hung in a prominent position close to the dais, where it remained until the hall was partly destroyed by fire in 1952. Sustaining considerable damage to its lower section, the portrait was subsequently re-sized to three-quarter length as part of conservation works (illustrated above and on the front cover). It now hangs proudly in the university's Council Chamber.

In the 20th century the university continued to commemorate Barry, through the naming of a prominent building on the Parkville campus and various public lectures in his honour.²⁷ In more recent times the Redmond Barry Fellowship, which is offered in partnership between the University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria, has continued to pay tribute to Barry's legacy by facilitating scholarly research and writing that draw upon the superb collections of the two institutions he was instrumental in establishing.

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¹ Barry was made a Knight Bachelor (KB) in 1860 and a Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (KCMG) in 1877.

- 2 Ann Galbally, *Redmond Barry: An Anglo-Irish Australian*, Melbourne University Press, 1995, p. 5.
- 3 Ernest Scott, *A history of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, 1936, p. 6.
- 4 Scott, *A history*, p. 7.
- 5 Colonial Secretary circular, 18 April 1853. File: Council papers, Part 1, Docket 1, 1853, item 8, UM 447, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 6 Council letter book (outward) 1853–71. UM 5 (ref. no. 2001.0076), University of Melbourne Council, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 7 *Proceedings on the occasion of the inauguration of the University of Melbourne on Friday, the 13th of April, 1855*, Melbourne: John Ferres, Government Printer, 1855. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 8 For more information on Wilson Hall see Jason Benjamin and Emily Wubben, *Architectural ornament: The history and art of Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne*, Cultural Collections Department, University of Melbourne, 2012.
- 9 Scott tells of a meeting between Barry and Wilson at the Melbourne Club in which Wilson spoke pessimistically of the prospects of his coming wool clip. Taking the initiative, Barry shrewdly convinced Wilson that if the clip were bountiful he should give his surplus profit to the university. (Scott, *A history*.)
- 10 Redmond Barry, letters to Dr Brownless, 23 March and 23 September 1877. File: 1877/5, Brownless, Dr: letters to, UM 312 (ref. no. 1999.0014), Registrar's Correspondence Files, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 11 *Laying the memorial stone of the Wilson Hall, Melbourne University, 1879*, wood engraving published in *The Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 25 October 1879. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 12 *Laying memorial stone of the Wilson Hall, Melbourne University*, wood engraving published in *The Illustrated Australian News*, 31 October 1879. Reg. no. 2012.0040, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.
- 13 Galbally, *Redmond Barry*, p. 140.
- 14 The collection was established in memory of Ernst Matthaei (1904–1966), a staff member in the School of Botany. Money subscribed to a memorial appeal was used partly to purchase a small initial collection, with the balance invested to fund future purchases. The collection currently consists of some 300 individual pieces. See Peter M. Attiwill, 'The Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass', *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 8, June 2011, pp. 37–46.
- 15 See ref. no. 1968.0013, Bates, Smart McCutcheon Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 16 Oliver Cromwell, *Memoirs of the protector, Oliver Cromwell, and of his sons, Richard and Henry: Illustrated by original letters and other family papers, by Oliver Cromwell, a descendant of the family*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1821. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne. This work was presented to the nine-year-old Redmond Barry by his aunt Elizabeth Arabella Barry in 1822.
- 17 George Hamilton, *The English school: A series of the most approved productions in painting and sculpture, executed by British artists from the days of Hogarth to the present time*, London: C. Tilt, 1831–32. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne. According to the inscription on the inside cover, Barry acquired this book on 7 January 1841.
- 18 John Leslie Fitzgerald Foster, *The new colony of Victoria, formerly Port Phillip: Together with some account of the other Australian colonies*, London: Trelawney Saunders, 1851. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 19 John Leslie Fitzgerald Foster (1818–1900) had arrived in Victoria in 1841 to take advantage of the business opportunities provided by the colony's expanding pastoral industry. He wrote *The new colony of Victoria* after he returned to the United Kingdom in 1850, as a handbook for prospective colonists and migration agents. In 1852 Foster applied for the Victorian colonial secretaryship, returning to Victoria to take up the post on 20 July 1853.
- 20 Owen Ruffhead, *The statutes at large: From Magna Charta to the Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, London: Printed by Mark Basket and by the assigns of Robert Basket and by Henry Woodfall and William Strahan, 1763–1800. Law Rare Books Collection, University of Melbourne.
- 21 Sir Redmond Barry, *Lectures and addresses*, Melbourne: Mason, Firth & M'Cutcheon, General Printers, 1874. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 22 Sir John Henry MacFarland (1851–1935) served as chancellor from 1918 until his death in 1935. The provenance is recorded on a plaque now affixed to the bookcase.
- 23 *The University Barry Memorial 1877* (printed pamphlet). File: Barry Memorial Fund 1877–1881, UM 447, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 24 Barry Memorial Fund, University of Melbourne Accounts Branch. Ref. no. 1982.0003, University of Melbourne Accounts Branch 1853–1969, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 25 'Victoria', *Launceston Examiner*, 4 December 1880, p. 1.
- 26 'Latest telegrams, Victorian intelligence', *Evening News* (Sydney), 31 May 1881, p. 2.
- 27 The Redmond Barry Building was completed in 1961. Intended as a 'decanting' building for a variety of poorly housed disciplines (including commerce, education, psychology, physics and biology), the building in this way represents its namesake's broad interests.