

Redmond Barry and the University of Melbourne Library

Carole Hinchcliff

Redmond Barry (1813–1880) was an Anglo-Irish lawyer who arrived in Melbourne in 1839 to establish his legal career. He served as standing counsel for Aboriginal people from 1842 and became the first puisne judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1853.¹ Though best known today for sentencing to death the legendary bushranger Ned Kelly in 1880, he was knighted for his efforts in establishing and developing the cultural, educational and intellectual life of Melbourne, rather than for his legal career. This is largely due to his roles as inaugural chancellor of the University of Melbourne and chair of trustees of the Melbourne Public Library, now known as State Library Victoria,² as well as in founding or supporting numerous other cultural, scientific, educational and philanthropic endeavours. Barry not only had fingers in every cultural pie, but baked many of them himself.³ He was instrumental in expanding the Public Library to include the National Gallery, the National Museum and the Technological Museum. He truly believed that Melbourne required a grand institution modelled on the British Museum to promote learning and civilisation in the new colony of Victoria. This article examines the involvement and influence of Redmond Barry on the University of Melbourne Library during his 27-year tenure as chancellor of the university.

In April 1853 the lieutenant-governor of Victoria, Charles La Trobe, appointed a council of 20 prominent Melbourne men to establish the University of Melbourne. At the council's first meeting, convened by Barry at the Supreme Court, Barry was elected chancellor, a position he would hold until his death on 23 November 1880.

Although Barry's contemporaries, such as auditor-general Hugh Childers and lieutenant-governor La Trobe, may have initially proposed the establishment of the university, Barry is generally considered its founder.⁴ He was the figure who was the most immersed

in its governance and day-to-day administrative matters, including those of the University Library. The role of chancellor is an honorary one, and to date Barry is Melbourne's longest-serving chancellor.

The third of July 1854 was an important date in the history of Melbourne: the foundation stones for the University of Melbourne and the Public Library were laid, with Barry presiding at both events. At the university's inauguration on 13 April the following year, Barry delivered a long, ponderous speech, concluding with his aspiration for the colony's first university:

And we hope that the University of Melbourne may stand forth amidst the institutions of the Southern Hemisphere with a steady and increasing refulgence, the nursing mother and generous instructress of a race of distinguished scholars, and that there is no presumptuous anticipation of her late-born renown in the spirit and confidence with which we have chosen, as her motto—

Postera crescam laude⁵

The motto, which means 'I shall grow in the esteem of future generations', comes from Horace, one of bibliophile Barry's favourite classical authors.⁶ On the inauguration day, classes commenced, with 16 students—all male. The curriculum covered classics, mathematics, logic and natural science.⁷ Classes were held in the former Exhibition Building at the corner of William and La Trobe Streets. Only seven of the inaugural intake from 1855 completed their second year and, disappointingly, the 1856 intake consisted of only 14 students. From the time the idea of Melbourne having a university was proposed, the local press was vocal in expressing the view that offering an Oxbridge-inspired classical education for privileged young men was ill-fitting for the colony, and wasteful of government funds.⁸

JULII POLLUCIS
ONOMASTICUM
Graece et Latine

Cum Comentariis Jungermanni, Kühni, Scheri et aliorum.

AMSTELAEDAMI
Ex Officina WETSTENIANA 1706.



Opposite: Frontispiece from Julius Pollux, *Onomasticum Graece et Latine*, 2 vols, Amsterdam: Officina Wetsteniana, 1706. Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

The beginnings of the University Library

The university's four founding professors, William Edward Hearn (modern history, literature, political economy, and logic), Frederick McCoy (natural science), Henry Erskine Rowe (classics, who died before arrival and was replaced by Martin Irving) and William Parkinson Wilson (mathematics), were informed during the hiring process that £3,000 was available for the purchase of books for the library, and were invited to propose titles, to be bought in London. Although the original plans for the university's first building on the Carlton site included a library, no separate purpose-built library eventuated. When the building, today known affectionately as 'Old Quad', opened on 3 October 1855, the library books were to be shelved in one of the two small rooms on its west side that accommodated the registrar's office and council chamber.⁹ The collection was under the watchful eye of the registrar, who was responsible for the library until 1892, when Edward Bromby was appointed as the first university librarian.¹⁰

Redmond Barry was well versed in selecting books through the London book dealer J.J. Guillaume, who had been supplying the Parliamentary Library since 1851. In 1853, Barry placed the first book orders for the Public Library and the Supreme Court Library (both of which he had established) and in 1855 for the University Library. The professors submitted lists of titles, and the first delivery was dispatched on the ship *Sultana*, which arrived in Melbourne in early 1856.¹¹ Barry reported that the books were placed in the council's board room and that when the balance of the books arrived and were 'classified in the apartment allotted to them' they would also be accessible to the public.¹²

The embryonic library collection comprised approximately 400 titles and 1,284 volumes, listed in a catalogue compiled by Guillaume and published in 1856.¹³

(Guillaume also prepared catalogues in 1860 and 1864 of additional titles that he had supplied.¹⁴) In 1856 the principal subject areas represented were literature (37% or 148 volumes), history and geography (19%), science (17%), social sciences (10%), languages (6%), philosophy and psychology (5%) and religion (2%). Approximately 50 titles are no longer extant. The collection was a working one, to support the curriculum. Missing books were replaced only at the request of the relevant professor, who preferred to acquire the latest edition. Some titles appear to have been re-bound. Surviving titles now reside in Special Collections. The books from Guillaume's catalogue range in publication date from 1706 to 1855. The oldest title is known as *Onomasticum*, a glossary in Latin and Greek by Julius Pollux (AD 180–238). It bears the bookplate of Alexander Henderson (1791–1832), surveyor of the post office in Edinburgh from 1819 to 1822 and a private book collector (see opposite and inside front cover).

Building the collection

Barry's letters to Guillaume regarding the purchase of books for the University Library cover similar content to his correspondence regarding the Public Library and the Supreme Court Library. Barry was a demanding customer, who imposed requirements for edition, condition, size, binding, design of ownership stamps and—most importantly—price. Not surprisingly, having one supplier for all four libraries led to confusion by Guillaume when filling and despatching orders, and the dealings were fraught with disagreements and misunderstandings.

To attract more students, and to boost its income, in 1857 the university offered its first vocational course: a two-year certificate course in law, leading to eligibility to practise as a barrister and solicitor in the colony of Victoria.¹⁵ The University Library's first printed catalogue listed five law titles; small and uneven allocations of money

were characteristic of its budget in its early years,¹⁶ and a later university librarian commented that ‘The law students also began to make a nuisance of themselves—I mean, became prominent—by asking that text-books be made available in their section of the Library’.¹⁷

On 15 October 1860, Barry delivered a lecture to law students and faculty members. Extolling the benefits to lawyers of a broad education like his own, he cited various reporters and highly regarded legal authors, and titles whose contents he instructed ‘should be known by heart’. But he did not refer to libraries, and the works mentioned were not available in the University Library.¹⁸ Fortunately, the new law students, who were working as articled clerks, had access to the libraries of their employers and the Law Institute,¹⁹ and to the Public Library’s law collection (175 titles).²⁰ The Public Library offered Saturday and weekday evening opening hours, while the University Library was open on weekdays only, from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm.²¹

By 1865, the University Library needed more space, so the first floor of the Quadrangle’s north wing became the library’s second temporary home. This decision resulted in an acrimonious dispute with the natural science professor, Frederick McCoy, whose National Museum had occupied that space. The library remained here until 1875: ‘The communal centre was the library, where in winter the students worked in black gowns and trencher caps by blazing coal fires’.²²

The library’s third and final temporary home was on the first floor of the Northern Annexe of the Quad, from 1875 to 1925 (pictured on page 36).²³ In the meantime, the move of the medical and chemistry books to the medical school heralded the proliferation of branch libraries to compensate for the lack of space in the general library.²⁴

Not surprisingly, students used the Melbourne Public Library, which in 1856 had some 3,846 volumes and by

1880 more than 110,000. As was usual for the time, the professors developed their own personal collections. The first five—Hearn, Irving, Wilson, McCoy and Halford (medicine)—in addition to being dedicated teachers and delivering public lectures, ‘sought new discoveries and enlightenment’. This established the tradition of research at the University of Melbourne, distinguishing it ‘at a time when many of the most famous universities were apathetic to research’.²⁵

Library Committee

A University Library Committee had been appointed from 1860, but had not met, apparently because ‘the duties of the Committee have never been defined’ and they ‘do not appear to have understood the nature of the functions they were expected to discharge’. The committee’s revival got off to an inauspicious start at the meeting of 22 September 1870: only the chairperson, George McKay, attended.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, there are only 32 pages of University Library Committee minutes from its first meeting, on 22 September 1870, until its last, on 4 April 1876.

At the Public Library, Barry was accustomed to poorly attended committee meetings, and even to being the sole attendee, becoming adept at operating as a one-person committee. Thanks to his autocratic style, and his habit of visiting the Public Library almost every day, his fellow committee members left him to his own devices.²⁷ Similarly for the Supreme Court Library: despite the rule that its committee meet every month, there were no meetings from September 1855 until February 1859. This left Barry to build that collection, make decisions about staffing, and otherwise develop the library as he wished.²⁸

Barry stated that the University Library Committee was ‘formed to communicate with the Professors respecting the works especially required and to supervise

the orders to be transmitted from time to time'.²⁹ At its second meeting, on 19 December 1870, the members acknowledged that the committee had not been meeting since 1860, and set out its responsibilities, the first being 'to supervise in the first instance the lists of books to be ordered for the library with power to exclude any recommended of which they may disapprove or introduce any suggested of which they may approve'. All correspondence with booksellers was to be conducted through the chancellor or vice-chancellor, 'so as to ensure uniformity of prices, punctuality of delivery and substantial compliance with orders'.³⁰ Other duties were to make contracts for binding, purchase stationery, and produce the university calendar and the library catalogues. These changes were made to overcome having the professors, president of the professorial board, building committee and registrar involved in these activities, without any of them 'being directly responsible to the Council for the higher execution of these duties'.³¹ The Library Committee occupied itself with matters such as approving professors' requests for books, requesting a stocktake to identify 'what volumes or parts are deficient and what volumes require binding',³² and even deciding how the books should be arranged on the shelves.³³

Library staff

In 1865, when the collection moved from the registrar's office to the north wing of the Quadrangle, the collection was no longer close by for the registrar to monitor. This necessitated the employment of the first assistant librarian: arts graduate C.H.H. Cook, who held the position from 1865 to 1867. Cook was succeeded by G.H. Neighbour, an arts graduate who during his tenure as assistant librarian from 1868 to 1871 was undertaking an MA and LLB. In 1873 rules were laid down 'for the guidance of the permanent assistant librarian', an appointment that

was 'a reward for academic success'.³⁴ The next incumbent, Thomas Francis Bride, held the position from 1873 to 1881. Notably, he left the university to become chief librarian of the Public Library from 1881 to 1895. One of Bride's successors at the Public Library, Edmund La Touche Armstrong, commented on Bride that 'His experience at the University was of some use to him but he had acquired little knowledge of Library management and its implications, as it was understood in America and as it was beginning to be understood in England'.³⁵ This is hardly surprising; among the Library Committee's requirements for the permanent assistant librarian was the ability to command the respect of the students, maintain order in the library, and preserve the books and property in his charge from loss or injury.³⁶ The focus was to enforce the rules and maintain order, since the students were known to be spirited, and there was an edict of 'strict silence' in the library. In 1871, a student who gave shouts, dashed across the library floor, and smeared an edition of St Paul's epistles with a flying inkpot was suspended from the library for a month.³⁷ But Bride has been described more generously by others as 'able'. In addition to fulfilling his routine duties, he began cataloguing the books and continued to assist his supervisor, the registrar.³⁸

The students' view of the library collection

In 1870, assistant librarian G.H. Neighbour noted that the library contained books and periodicals that were not used by the students. In 1884, the student view was that:

There is a great deal of useless rubbish lying on the floor of the library ... literally heaps of Reports on the Administration of the different Provinces of India; and such valuable and interesting works as 'The Annual Reports of the Superintendent of the Governmental Experimental Farm at Mysore'; 'Reports of Traction

Interior of old Central Library in its third home, on the upper level of the Northern Annexe of the Old Quad, where it was located between 1875 and 1925, photographed c. 1901, sepia-toned photographic print, 15.0 x 20.5 cm. 2017.0071.00275, University of Melbourne Archives.



The newly restored former library space on Level 1 of the Northern Annexe of the Old Quad, photographed in 2019. This area will be used for ceremonial functions and events. Photograph by Christian Capurro.



Engines rented by the natives from the Government; 'Blue Books of Ceylon;' Price Lists of the Pacific Saw Manufacturing Co., &c, &c. We query whether any of these heaps have ever been looked at, or ever will be except as curiosities.³⁹

These titles, which have long since been deaccessioned, were probably secured by Barry as donations. One of his collection-building strategies was to ask government officials, libraries, scholarly societies and others to donate books to his libraries, primarily the Public Library and the University Library. He actively sought donations from India to progress his plan to prepare University of Melbourne graduates for positions in that nation's civil service. Barry was optimistic that the broad-ranging Indian collection at the Public Library would facilitate trade and industry between Victoria and India. Not surprisingly, the students complained, because they had identified at least 25 books required for the pass and honours examinations in arts, law and engineering that were not yet in the library, and other students required titles that were missing from the shelves. Students were also frustrated that books at the Public Library were 'frequently stolen' and portions of books at both the University and Public libraries had been excised. They proposed the purchase of multiple copies of standard works for reference, and the updating of titles, especially science titles. They also requested a suggestion book in which students could recommend for purchase books that were mentioned in lectures.

Students depended on the Public Library. Lack of access to case reports in the University Library was a complaint of law faculty and students that persisted into the 20th century, whereas in 1871 the Public Library had 'all the reports in all the superior courts of law and equity, accessible to members of the profession and students'.⁴⁰

In 1861, the medical profession requested that the Public Library follow the example of the British Museum Library by providing a students' room, to make best use of the impressive collection of 'maps, charts, diagrams, drawings, specifications of patents, architectural designs, illustrations of natural history, physiology, or anatomy, or works on the applied sciences generally'. They argued that students needed a room where they could use pen and ink to make notes. The authors acknowledged that it would not be possible to quickly assemble a medical faculty library at the university, hence their request to use the Public Library's 'magnificent collection'.⁴¹

In 1871 the *Gardener's Chronicle* described the university grounds as the best kept in the southern hemisphere. Indeed, the university spent more money on the grounds than on the library.⁴² There were 9,000 trees and shrubs and 16 acres of lawn, all open to visitors, who were encouraged to visit the National Museum, picnic by the lake and stroll around the campus. The University Library collection was also available to the public,⁴³ although this was later restricted to 'on presentation of letters of introduction'⁴⁴ or sometimes more specifically to graduates of the university or 'Strangers on production of a reading order signed by any Member of Council, or a Professor'.⁴⁵

The library relied on modest annual book votes and donations, many of the latter solicited by Barry.⁴⁶ But such gifts were not free of cost, as many required binding, an expense that the library could ill afford. More importantly, they required shelf space. On his travels to London in 1862, Barry secured a large gift of United Kingdom parliamentary papers, which incurred shipping charges and triggered protracted disputes about binding. In 1901, university librarian Edward Bromby decided, due to lack of shelving and no interest from readers, to give the parliamentary papers, many still in unopened boxes, to the Public Library to dispose of as it saw fit.⁴⁷

Thomas Foster Chuck (Melbourne), *His Honour Sir Redmond Barry, K.C.M.G. in his robes as chancellor of the Melbourne University, 1878*, albumen silver photographic print on cabinet card, 17 x 11 cm. State Library Victoria.

The last recorded meeting of the University Library Committee during Barry's tenure as chancellor was held on 4 April 1876. Barry set off on his last overseas trip in 1876 and, during his absence, Professors Irving and Pearson attempted to depose him as chancellor and council member. They failed, but did convince the council to replace the finance, building and library committees with an executive committee, to comprise all the council members and to be chaired by the chancellor, which would report to council on matters previously handled by the discontinued committees. The aim was to end the situation whereby Barry handled buildings, finance and library matters nominally through the committees.⁴⁸

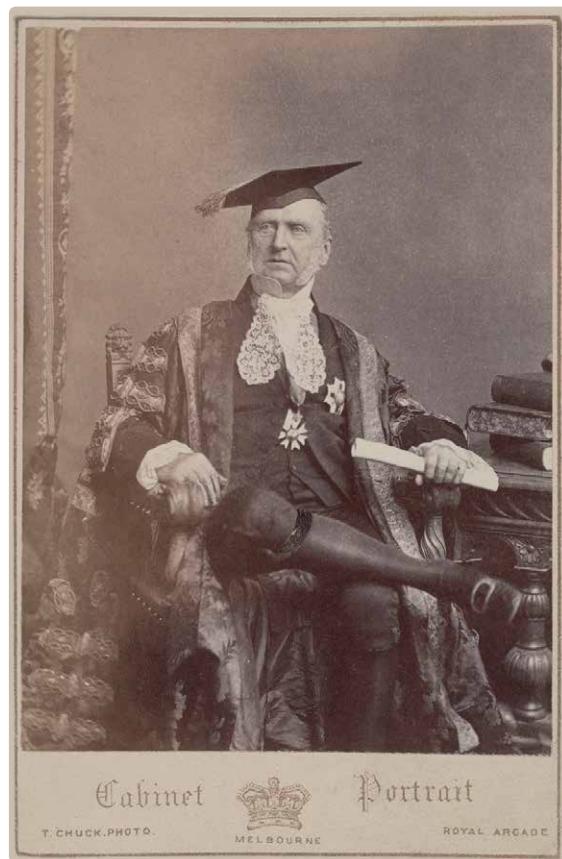
During that trip, in 1878 Barry delivered papers at an international library conference in London on his pet topics: the lending operations of his Public Library, and book-binding specifications. By the time of his death in 1880, the Public Library was housed in an architecturally significant building that had expanded to accommodate the National Gallery, Technological Museum, and School of Design. Soon after the opening of the Public Library in 1856 there had been criticism that it was 'too much of a nobleman's and gentleman's library'.⁴⁹ But Barry was immensely proud of the impressive, world-renowned collection that he had developed, although the momentum was not sustained by his successors.

The Supreme Court offered an impressive law collection and an eclectic range of other titles for use by the legal community.⁵⁰ Although Barry was instrumental in planning the grand Supreme Court building with its iconic library from the earliest stage of the design process in 1870, he did not live to see its opening in 1884.

The Long Room of Trinity College Library, Dublin, which Barry had used as an undergraduate student, is said to have inspired him in creating the Queen's Hall Reading Room of the Public Library. But dreams of such

a grand space were not part of his plans for the University Library. Instead, Barry had seen the University of Sydney's Great Hall and he secured Sir Samuel Wilson's gift to build a similarly impressive Gothic Revival space for graduations, called Wilson Hall.

In 1880 Barry stated that the major libraries in Melbourne offered collections that met the needs of their primary users and avoided duplication of titles.⁵¹



In fact, the latter had been achieved more by good luck than by good management. Barry's usual modus operandi was to act first, explain or rationalise later.⁵² In 1884, C.W. Holgate, an English barrister and writer, surveyed Australia's major libraries. He observed of the University Library that:

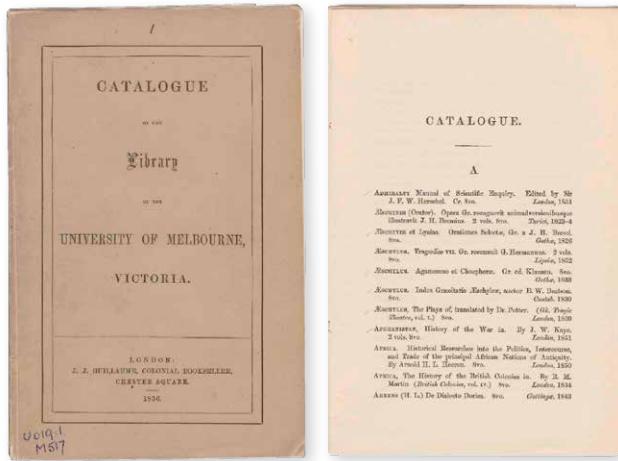
In early days it was almost entirely devoted to classical and educational works, and maintained rather an exclusive character; this being due to its promoters being anxious that it should not in any way seem to compete with the Free Public Library; but there is no longer any cause for anxiety on that ground, the two libraries having long since been firmly established and having justified their creation.⁵³

It is telling that Holgate devoted eight pages to the Melbourne Public Library but only one page to the University Library. Well into the 20th century, the University Library struggled to provide a collection to support teaching, study space suitable for students, and adequate staffing. The library was only one component of the university budget, and proposals to improve library space and acquire books were routinely relegated down the list of spending priorities and funding requests from the professoriate. Barry's first priority was always the Public Library. It was better funded, and was where he succeeded in creating the prominent and comprehensive cultural institution that he had long envisioned for use by all Victorians.⁵⁴

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Carole Hinchliffe has been the Law School librarian at the University of Melbourne since 2008 and has recently worked with the *Lives Lived with the Law* and *Threads of the Past* projects.

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