



REDMOND BARRY: A LIBRARY CHAMPION

Redmond Barry – man about town, library patron and the man who sentenced Ned Kelly to hang – is Sue Reynolds’ library hero.

Where would Melbourne be without Redmond Barry? And I don’t mean that it would have been at the mercy of rampaging bush ranger Edward Kelly and his gang if Sir Redmond Barry had not sentenced Ned to hang.* It is not Barry’s legal work that Melbourne should appreciate the most; it is his zeal for bringing the culture of Europe to the colonies and his apparently boundless energy for getting things done for which we should be grateful.

On arrival in New South Wales Barry was shunned by Sydney society for having an affair with someone else’s wife and so he came south to the District of Port Phillip in Victoria. It has been said the Barry’s success in Australia was because he was lucky in time and place but really Melbourne was lucky to have a man such as Barry come its way. Redmond Barry was a leader in the establishment of the Philharmonic Orchestra, the Horticultural Society, the Melbourne

Hospital, the Royal Society and more, including libraries.

The first thing Barry did for Melbourne was to make a lending library available from the kitchen of his house on Bourke Street. He was a frequent (and long-winded) speaker at the Melbourne Mechanics Institute (now the Athenaeum) and on its committee. He was on the first committee for the Parliamentary Library and founding Chancellor of the new University of Melbourne. He established the university’s library and conceived and established the Library of the Supreme Court of Victoria, setting up a unique system of funding whereby every new legal graduate today still makes their way to the Library at the Supreme Court to hand over their admission fee before they can commence the practice of law.



Redmond Barry - the man for Melbourne (Image courtesy of State Library of Victoria)

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Redmond Barry also established the Melbourne Public Library, now the State Library of Victoria. This library was his most loved. It was conveniently just across the road from the old Supreme Court where he was a judge (now demolished and replaced by the Magistrate’s Court where you can still see the fittings from Kelly’s courtroom), and this proximity allowed Barry to be hands-on in developing the library, selecting the books and literally rolling up his sleeves to put them on the shelves in time for its opening.

If you are in Melbourne, you can visit the State Library, have a peek inside the Supreme Court Library, go upstairs to the Athenaeum on Collins Street and, if you are lucky, catch the Parliamentary Library on an open day. Sir Redmond Barry, ‘librarian’ extraordinaire, is also recognised by ALIA through the Redmond Barry Award presented to individuals for outstanding service, promotion, practice or research in the library and information science field.

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*Unfortunately for Barry, Ned’s last words to him at the bushranger’s trial came true rather more quickly than anyone might have predicted. When he sentenced Kelly to hang, Ned replied he would soon see Barry where he himself was going, and twelve days after Kelly’s hanging, Redmond Barry was also dead – either cursed, or blood poisoned from a boil on his neck caused by the heat of November and an ill-fitting horse-hair wig.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Sometimes when INCITE celebrates the life of a library professional known for a great contribution to our profession in decades past, newer colleagues wonder who they were. Our forward focus is vital, but an understanding of how we came to do what we do, the way we do it, is also important and so is knowing who has led the charge to make us better at what we do.

ALIA celebrates some great Australian contributors to the profession through awards made in the name of FA Sharr, Redmond Barry, HCL Anderson, Metcalfe, Ray Choate and Ellinor Archer, amongst others. Valerie Johnson, on behalf of the ALIA Retirees group, has taken up the task of ensuring the people behind the ALIA awards are remembered for their contributions. Valerie is in the process of collecting biographical information to be used to enhance Wikipedia entries and the ALIA website, both to keep this information available to the profession and to raise our profile amongst the general community.

The group also maintains a Celebrations and Acknowledgements blog at aliaretirees.blogspot.com/ where ALIA members, the profession and the wider community can contribute information about retirements, awards and honours, and news about retiree or retiring members and colleagues.

Contributions are welcome. Contact Faye Lawrence at flawren@bigpond.net.au.