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Remembering Redmond Barry, 1813-2013: Melbourne memorials

SIR REDMOND BARRY (1813-1880) is fittingly honoured by various permanent memorials in the city he made his home. He arrived in the District of Port Phillip on 13 November 1839 and marked this significant day almost every year thereafter by sharing a sumptuous meal and a specially labelled bottle of port with other colonists.¹ 2013 was the bicentennial of the birth of Redmond Barry and throughout the year various events marked this anniversary in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the cultural, legal and educational development of Melbourne and Victoria.

The most prominent is on the forecourt of the State Library of Victoria. Barry lived a life larger than most, both personally and publicly, and a larger than life bronze representation of him stands in front of the library he founded as the Melbourne Public Library. He wears the robes of Chancellor of the University of Melbourne² and stands turned slightly towards the north as if to acknowledge the university he established, located just a short distance from the library. The statue was paid for by public subscription and a plaque on the statue's plinth reads 'erected by a grateful public to perpetuate the memory of invaluable services rendered to Victoria by Sir Redmond Barry'.

The Melbourne Public Library opened in 1854 – to anyone over the age of 14 years with clean hands – and was Barry's greatest pride and principal cultural interest. An expression of his special pride in this institution is still to be seen under its portico, completed in 1870 as the fourth stage in the building of Joseph Reed's competition winning design. Barry had his personal coat of arms placed under the portico,³ together with those of the other Library Trustees, in recognition of the Trustees' public service and as 'sanctioned from a remote antiquity in every part of the civilised world'.⁴ Parliament debated the rights and wrongs of what was considered by some to be a 'defacement' of a public building, but the arms remain today 'unobtrusive and unnoticed . . . as interesting little mementos of the first Governors of the Institution'.⁵

A much more obvious acknowledgement of Barry's role in the library's establishment is inside the library itself – the beautiful Redmond Barry Reading Room (previously the National Museum's McCoy Hall). This reading room with his portrait just to the left as you enter, was opened in 2004 after the refurbished museum spaces were incorporated into the library and it rectifies the loss of Barry Hall, named in Barry's honour after his death and then used by the Art Gallery, the Museum, and the Planetarium⁶ and currently housing the Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas on Little Lonsdale Street.

The library also has on permanent display, in its 'Changing Face of Victoria' exhibition,⁷ a marble bust of Barry (by Charles Summers, commissioned 1860), situated

not far from the armour and plaster death mask of his nemesis – though some would have it the other way around – and the man so often associated with him, Ned Kelly. The library also holds various photographs and paintings of Redmond Barry in its Pictures Collection. In addition, the library honours its founder with the Redmond Barry Lecture as part of its Foundation Day commemorations in July each year, and it awards membership of the Redmond Barry Society to anyone who names the library as a beneficiary in their will.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) also honours Barry's contributions to libraries and librarianship with its premier award – the Redmond Barry Award. The award is conferred annually for 'recognition of outstanding service to or promotion of a library and information service or libraries and information services, or to the theory or practice of library and information science, or an associated field'.⁸ This in turn is fitting retrospective recognition of Barry's own contributions to libraries and librarianship during his lifetime.

Soon after Redmond Barry arrived in Melbourne he gave the public access to his own collection of books in his Bourke Street residence, called by the *Argus* Melbourne's 'First 'public' library'.⁹ The *Argus* also reported that it had been suggested that this house should be preserved (similar to that of his contemporary Sir Charles La Trobe) in the grounds of the Melbourne Public Library in honour of Barry, but this was not to transpire and the house was demolished in 1924 by Whelan the Wrecker.¹⁰ Redmond Barry also founded the libraries of the parliament, university and Supreme Court of Victoria and he was heavily involved in their development and day-to-day activities.¹¹ He was also associated with various mechanics institutes, including the Melbourne Mechanics Institute (renamed the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1873), and the public, court and School of Mines libraries in Ballarat.

Imagine if in 2013, 200 years after his birth, Redmond Barry had broken free of the bronze carapace of his statue at the library, and stepped down from its plinth and strolled around the city of Melbourne and its environs and re-visited country Victoria. He could have still visited many places he knew well in his lifetime (although in a vastly changed landscape) and he might perhaps have taken some pride – humble or otherwise – in the acknowledgements made of his part in Melbourne's history.

Moving from his central position in front of the library he loved, he could cross La Trobe Street and enter the old Magistrates' Court, built after Barry's death on the site of the first Supreme Court of Victoria. The old Supreme Court was demolished in 1910 but it was there that Barry presided over many cases, including that of Edward 'Ned' Kelly (1880) and some of the Eureka rebels (1855). The building is now owned by RMIT University and retains the original Supreme Court fittings in Court 2, used by the university for meetings and special events. This furniture includes the canopy under which Barry sat to sentence Kelly and which very nearly once collapsed on him.¹²

A reconstituted Redmond Barry might then have continued past the familiar Old Melbourne Gaol, still looming large in Russell Street as it was in Barry's day, to Carlton



Peirce, *photographer*, Unveiling the statue of Sir Redmond Barry, 23rd August 1887, by William Cain (mayor). Photographic print on cardboard mount, H42343.



where he founded three sporting clubs – the bowling, cricket and football Clubs – and established the University of Melbourne. A winding detour on the way to the university could have taken him past the Carlton Gardens, to which he donated over 200 trees, and the site of his mansion on the corner of Pelham and Rathdowne Streets. This later house became the St Nicholas Hospital, now demolished but the site is marked with a plaque. Continuing west down Pelham Street, through Argyle and Lincoln Squares, would have brought him to the new Law Building of the University of Melbourne,¹³ facing ‘his’ square, Barry Square.¹⁴ He could then have strolled down Barry Street, past the original houses which are now mere facades, before crossing Grattan Street and finding himself on a very changed university campus. The original Law School Building and the Old Quadrangle, constructed between 1854 and 1875, would be familiar sights but not so the Redmond Barry Building, the tallest building on campus and a classic ‘office block’ 1960s design.¹⁵

The University of Melbourne also acknowledges Barry’s contribution to the university by naming the highest level of donation in The Chancellor’s Circle (of university benefactors) the Redmond Barry Circle. The University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria further remember Redmond Barry’s hands-on role in their development by jointly sponsoring the Redmond Barry Fellowships. The Fellowships are awarded annually to fund research which uses the collections of either the library or the university and they were introduced in 2004 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stones for both institutions on the same day in July 1854 (by Lieutenant-Governor Charles Hotham). The location of the university’s foundation stone is not known but a facsimile of the foundation plate, which covered the stone, is on display at the university with an English translation of the Latin inscription composed by Redmond Barry in 1867.

Also on display at the University of Melbourne, in the Leeper Library of Trinity College, is another marble bust of Redmond Barry. Although Barry attended Trinity College, Dublin to study for an Arts degree (while also at King’s Inns preparing to be admitted to the Irish Bar), he had no role in the establishment of Trinity College, Parkville. Nevertheless, Sir William Clarke, a major benefactor of Trinity College, donated the bust of Barry to Trinity in 1881. Newman and St Mary’s Colleges at the university hold nearly 50 of the books from Barry’s personal collection in their libraries¹⁵ and the university also owns a bookcase purpose-built for Barry’s books, surmounted with the Barry coat of arms (as on Redmond Barry’s bookplates and the State Library of Victoria’s portico).¹⁷

Other books owned by Redmond Barry are held by the Supreme Court of Victoria in William Street. Barry was directly involved with the design of the building and of its library (suggesting that the judges should have private access to it from their chambers) but he died before the new courts and library were occupied. The library commemorates its founder and extremely active Library Committee member with both a bust and portrait, and his case book and other legal accoutrements are on prominent display.

If a ghostly Redmond Barry had then made his way back to the State Library he could have perambulated via Collins Street: past the Athenaeum (no. 87) and Melbourne Club (no. 36), both of which he had been an active committee member, and, if he had felt up to it, travelled to the 44th floor of the ANZ Tower (no. 55) where images representing aspects of his life are on display in the Redmond Barry Room. This function room has magnificent views of a city now vastly different from the village Redmond Barry arrived at in 1839, just four years after the settlement opened.

Barry lived in several houses after his arrival in Melbourne – lodgings in Collins Street, a cottage in Bourke Street West, and mansions in Rathdowne and Clarendon Streets. Barry's funeral procession left from Valetta House in Clarendon Street, East Melbourne; the only Barry residence in the city of Melbourne still standing, although it was damaged by fire in 2011. Barry also purchased houses in Melbourne for his companion and the mother of his four children, Mrs Louisa Barrow, and two 'country residences' – St John's Wood (occupied, since the mid-1920s, by the Riversdale Golf Club)¹⁸ and his 'Sabine Farm' in Mulgrave – enjoyed by the whole family. Barry is buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery. His tombstone mentions his links to the Supreme Court of Victoria, the University of Melbourne and the Melbourne Public Library but includes no indication that his life companion, Louisa Barrow, is also interred there.

Redmond Barry is also commemorated outside of Melbourne. Perhaps it might have been possible for the locomotive Sir Redmond Barry to be liberated from the Australian Railway Historical Society Museum yards in Williamstown and fired up to allow Sir Redmond to re-visit the courthouses he occupied many times while on circuit (then travelling by horse, carriage or ship). In particular, he could view his leadlight window in the court at Bendigo and a commemorative plaque outside the court in Castlemaine.

Redmond Barry was a significant figure in the history of Melbourne and Victoria and it is appropriate that tributes to him permanently recognise his contributions to public life, law and society. His name and achievements are, however, remarkably little known by the general population who today walk the streets of Melbourne in his footsteps and benefit from his enduring accomplishments. In 1980, to mark the centenary of Redmond Barry's death, a second plaque was added to the plinth on which his statue so proudly stands outside the State Library of Victoria. The inscription gives rather stern notice that the statue should 'remind the people of Melbourne of the benefits they continue to receive from the vision and enterprise of this great man'. It is to be hoped that during 2013, 200 years after Redmond Barry's birth, a similar reminder occurred through public attention being again drawn to what Redmond Barry achieved in so many different arenas other than just the courtroom he shared with the perhaps more (in)famous Ned Kelly.