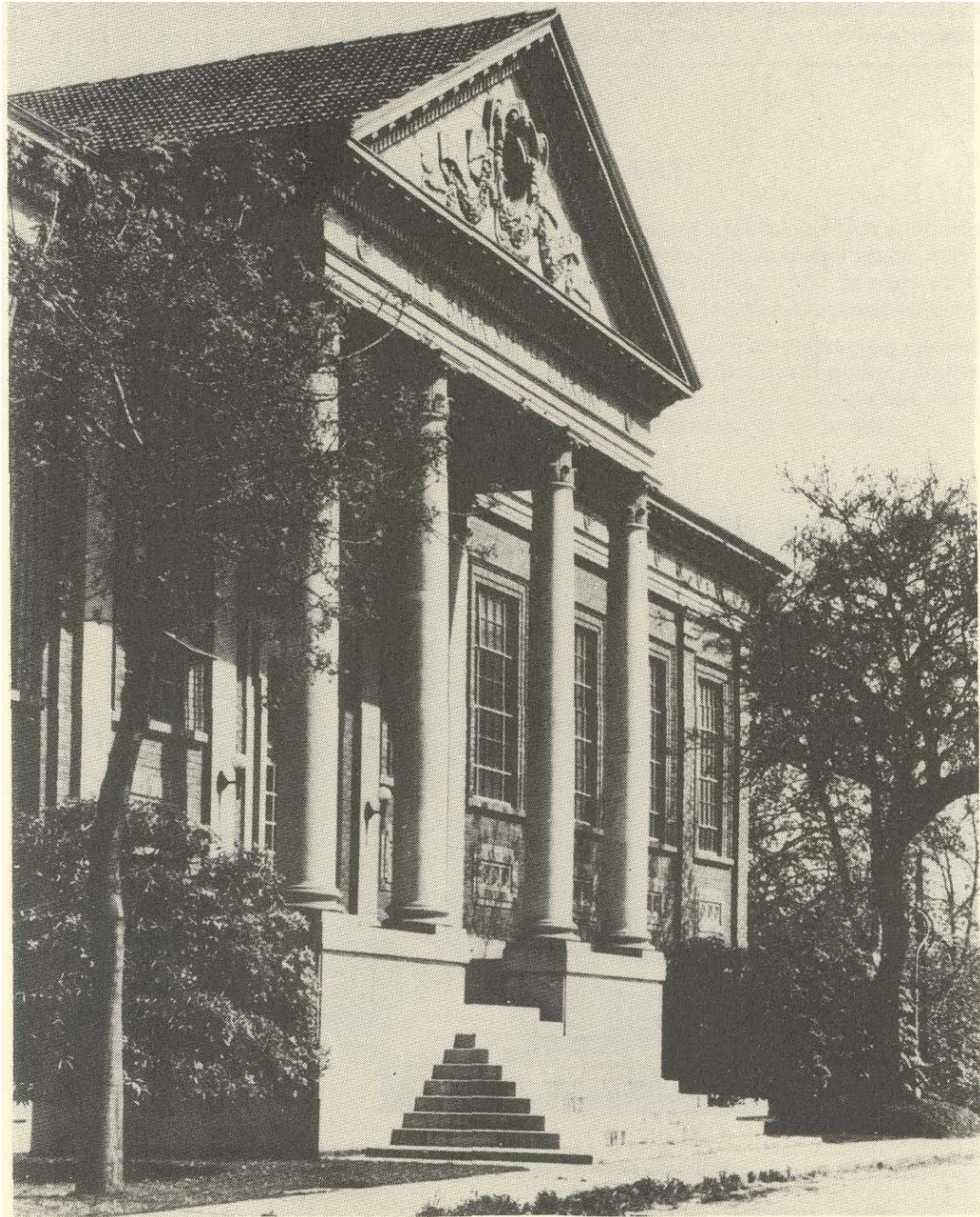


The University of Adelaide



The Barr Smith Library: its early days

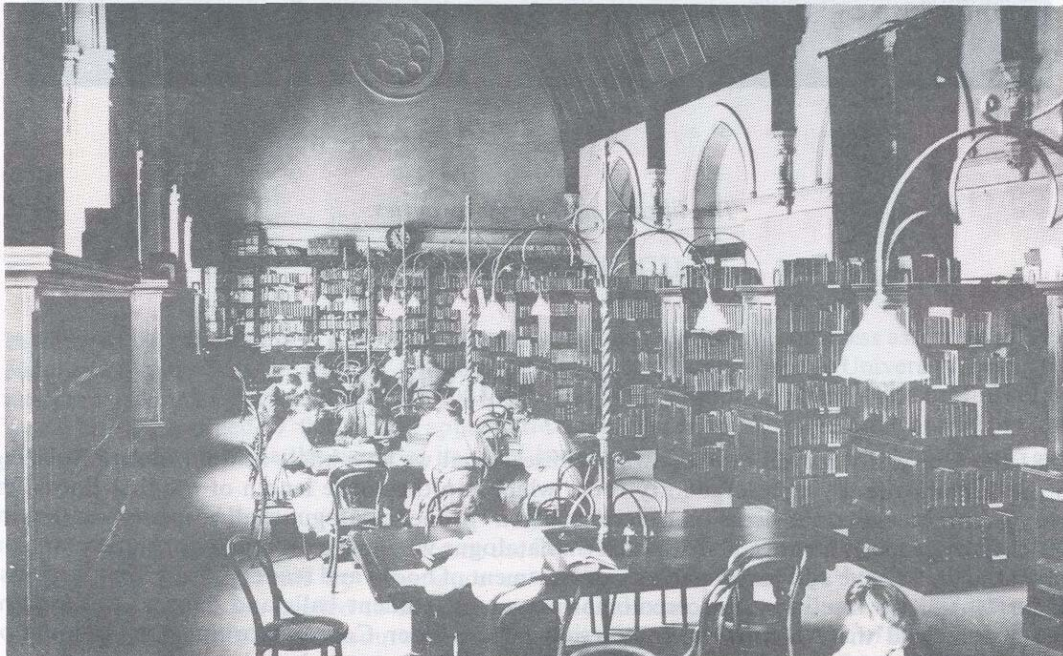
1982 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Barr Smith Library, a gift to the University from Tom Elder Barr Smith. The building was intended as a memorial to his father, Robert Barr Smith, who had given large sums of money for the purchase of books for the Library.

Gifts from members of the Barr Smith family and other benefactors greatly assisted the growth of the Library from its humble beginnings, and provided a firm foundation for the Library of today, with its annual budget of more than \$3,000,000, and its holdings in excess of one million volumes.

ORIGINS OF THE LIBRARY

The first official mention of the Library is to be found in the act of incorporation which established the University in 1874, and which included a section stating that annual government grants were to be used, among other things, for the provision of a library. The Library first appears on the University balance sheets in 1877 when the princely sum of £11 6s 11d was expended on books.

Little is known about the Library in its early days. It was the third university library in Australia (after Sydney and Melbourne), and was established in 1876, the year the first students were admitted. The Library was too small to have its own librarian and so the Registrar, William Barlow, also had to act as Librarian, supervising the functioning of the library and cataloguing the books.



The original Library in the Mitchell Building.

The first Library Committee was appointed by Council in July 1876 and its members comprised the entire Professorial Board, Rev. James Jefferis and Mr John Hartley, the Inspector-General of Schools. The Library Committee in those days was chiefly concerned with recommending to Council those books which should be purchased for the Library; it was also “empowered to give directions as to the style in which books bought for the University Library shall be bound”.

There was no catalogue as we know it; instead the exercise book which was used for recording loans also contained some pages which served as the first catalogue, and lists of books belonging to the Library were printed in the University Calendar.



The library staff in the twenties.

MITCHELL BUILDING

In 1881 the University moved into its own premises, what we now know as the Mitchell Building, with the Library occupying a large lofty room which ran the entire length of the first floor. The Library Committee used the occasion to resolve that a “proper catalogue shall be made, and that the books shall be properly arranged”. Although the catalogue was not to eventuate for some years, the new building must have allowed a spacious arrangement of books and readers. The Library was also used for University meetings and ceremonial occasions, student balls and dances, and evening concerts were held there before the completion of the Elder Conservatorium. One graduation ceremony held in the Library was disrupted by a successful student prank. A dozen alarm clocks were strategically placed behind the books at points around the room and timed to go off at five-minute intervals, considerably enlivening the proceedings.

The first Library Committee seems to have lapsed some time after 1880, and until the resurrection of the Committee in 1887 it was the Education Committee which recommended to Council those books to be purchased for the Library. Council itself divided the book grant amongst professors and lecturers, corresponded with the Library’s agents, and concerned itself with matters such as supervision in the Library and the need for a caretaker.

SMALL INCOME

In its early days the income of the University was small and Council could make only £150 available for the purchase of books each year, as it was difficult to provide much more than the sum needed to pay for periodical subscriptions and the cost of binding. Indeed one of the reasons for locating the University in the city was so that it would be close to the Public Library, where many of the books needed by students were available, and for many years the Library Committee would not authorise the purchase of books which were held in the Public Library.

In 1884 C.W. Holgate visited Australia and New Zealand and his *Account of the Chief Libraries of Australia and Tasmania* was subsequently read to the Library Association of Britain and published two years later. Holgate was unimpressed by the Library at the University of Adelaide, although he noted that it was contained in a handsome room, with the books “for the most part, well bound”, if suffering damage from the salt which was exuding from the walls. Holgate was critical of the size and range of the collections, stating that classics, law, history and medicine were poorly represented, and that the collections in mathematics and the sciences were only strong “thanks to the energy of Professors Lamb and Tate”. He expressed the hope that in ten years time the Library might have 30,000 volumes, and concluded, “The Library has had but few gifts of value, and in fact very few gifts at all”.

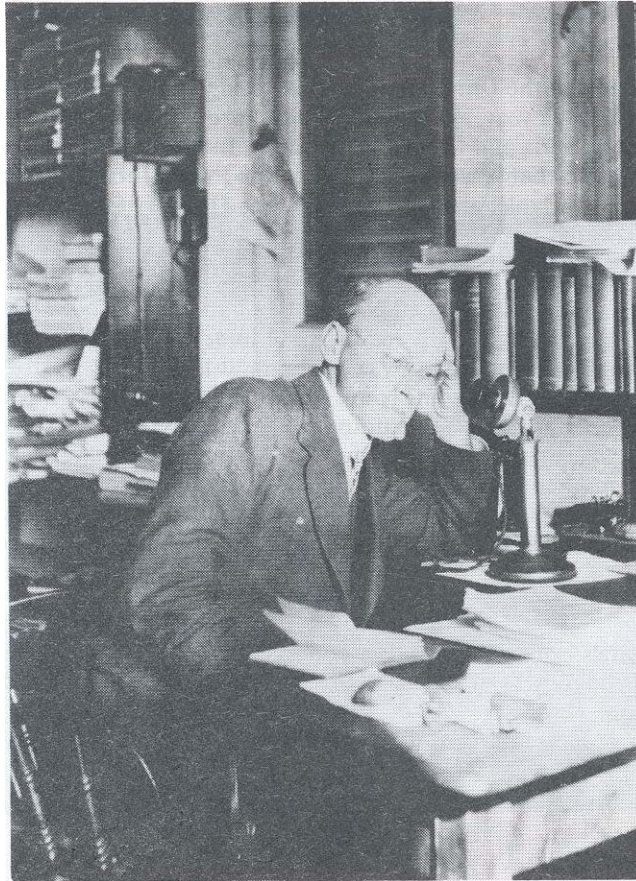
When reviewing Holgate’s book *The Register* commented “Perhaps some well-to-do colonist will take the hint”, and fortunately for the University some well-to-do colonist did.

BARR SMITH GIFT

In 1892 Robert Barr Smith, a Council member who was a friend and business associate of Thomas Elder and Walter Watson Hughes, whose endowments had established the University, began to take an interest in the Library, and gave £1,000 for the purchase of books. Between 1892 and 1911 his gifts to the Library totalled £9,000, and in appreciation of his generosity the Council resolved in 1899 that the Library should bear the name of its chief benefactor.

Robert Barr Smith’s gifts enabled the rapid growth of the Library collections, and by 1897 Dr Edward Stirling (the son of one of Robert Barr Smith’s former business associates) was drawing the attention of other Library Committee members to the need for a Librarian.

On 17 April 1900 R. J. M. Clucas became the first librarian of the University of Adelaide. Although Clucas had no staff and no experience or training in librarianship, he had the enthusiasm, intelligence and vision needed to develop professional competence and enhance his office. Clucas worked hard to build up the resources and efficiency of the library, and some of his innovations, such as the card catalogue, the adoption of typewriters and the Dewey Decimal system of classification, are still in use today [1982].



The first Librarian, R.J.M. Clucas.

Sir Walter Crocker remembers that “his duties were heavy and his hours were long but his books were his babies and he was always dashing about between the shelves and the table to see that they were well treated. Woe betide the student who marked a book or mauled a page. He even took on the academic staff. Later I overheard an exchange between him and the unlikeable law professor who threatened him with a libel action. His dutifulness resulted in many stories against him, probably apocryphal in the main but, like Mr Hodge, Mr Clucas served the University well over the years and did his part in giving and keeping its high standards”. (The “unlikeable law professor” sought to be exempt from the rule which required that books taken from the Library should be entered on the borrowers list; instead he proposed to place his calling card on the shelf in the place from which he took the book).

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

When Clucas started as Librarian the Library comprised only 9,000 volumes. At the time of his death in 1930 it had grown to 95,000 volumes. Some of this growth could be attributed to magnificent gifts and bequests from donors like Sir Samuel Way and members of Robert Barr Smith’s family, who gave £11,000 after his death for the permanent endowment of the Library.

In January 1927 Tom Elder Barr Smith generously offered £20,000 to finance the

construction of a separate building to accommodate the Library named after his father. Later the gift was increased to £30,000 to erect a building which would comfortably and splendidly accommodate the Library, and allow for future growth; a condition was that it should be completed within five years. The inscriptions on the frieze of the reading room commemorate the two donations.

ROBERT BARR SMITH DONIS PER SE ET HEREDES INDE AB A.D.
MDCCCXCII IMPERTITIS BIBLIOTHECAM PRIOREM LIBRIS
EXPLEVERAT

refers to gifts of money made from time to time by Robert Barr Smith, and supplemented after his death by his heirs.

TOM ELDER BARR SMITH HANC BIBLIOTHECAM AD PATRIS
NOMEN ORNADUM, SVMPTV SVO AEDIFICANDAM CVRAVIT A.D.
MCMXXX

records the gift of the building by Tom Elder Barr Smith.



Sir William Mitchell, Mr T.E. Barr Smith, Lady Hore-Ruthven and Mrs T.E. Barr Smith at the opening ceremony.

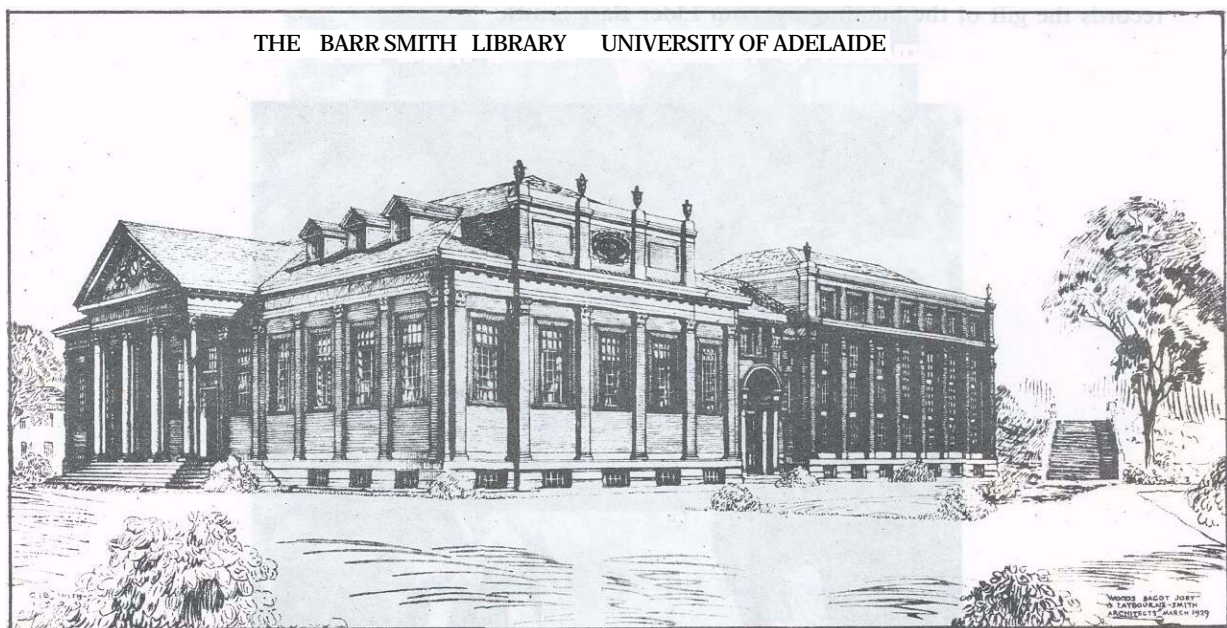
OPENING CEREMONY

When the building was eventually opened in 1932, Tom Elder Barr Smith recounted a conversation with the Chancellor, Sir George Murray, in which he pointed out that the time-limit had been exceeded, and that he thought damages might be awarded

against the Council. Sir George agreed but did not fancy Tom Elder Barr Smith's chances, as he said the case might come before him in his other capacity as Chief Justice, with the damages, possibly amounting to one farthing, to be deposited in the Library with a Latin inscription detailing the circumstances. At the same ceremony the Vice-Chancellor, Sir William Mitchell, remarked that this was the only time the Barr Smith Library would be devoted to speeches. His conclusion that "henceforth it was destined to silence" would perhaps be disputed by today's readers.

A great deal of thought went into the planning of the new building, and the architect, Walter H. Bagot, took advice from authorities overseas as well as in the eastern Australian cities. The building combined a reading-room containing books thought to be sufficient for the needs of most readers, with a closed-access stack to conserve space. The new building could hold a total of 150,000 volumes, with accommodation for two hundred readers and 15,000 books in the reading-room. There was also a comfortable common-room for professors.

Clucas died of cancer on 7th September, 1930, three weeks before the foundation stone was laid, and Professor FitzHerbert acted as Honorary Librarian until his successor, W. A. Cowan, was appointed



The original design for the Library, including proposed stack extension.

FLYING FOX

The move from the Mitchell Building to the lower level was effected with the aid of a flying fox built directly out of the Mitchell windows, down the Western Drive to the Barr Smith Library. The 80,000 books were loaded in shelf order on to special trollies and went down the overhead wire to be unloaded directly on to the new shelves.

In 1932 it was envisaged that the new building with its proposed stack extension (eventually begun in 1958 to a new design) would house half a

million volumes, and in the words of Professor J.R. Wilton in his vote of thanks to Tom Elder Barr Smith, it “should be ample for one hundred years to come”. The Library was to reach the half-million mark only thirty-seven years later, by which time a second extension had been added, and a third extension, the present Research Services Wing, was on the drawing-board.

The building’s classic Renaissance form was then thought to be highly adaptable, and also appropriate for Adelaide’s mediterranean climate. It was received not only as a fine addition to the University, but also to Adelaide, and was described as palatial, beautiful, magnificent, imposing, ornate, splendid, and so on, although a contemporary newspaper article regretted that it was “far from the madding crowd, ... for its beautiful architecture, of which there is little superior in Adelaide, will not be readily seen by the general public or interstate or overseas visitors. It would have made a fine addition to the several classically designed buildings on the North Terrace boulevard”.



Interior of the reading room, 1932.

MUNN PITT REPORT

It was, however, more than just a beautiful building. At the time, the Barr Smith Library was the only university library in Australia to be adequately accommodated. Munn and Pitt in their severely critical survey of Australian libraries in 1935 recognised that the satisfactory library facilities at Adelaide University and the excellence of the collections were due to the benefactions of the Barr Smith family.

Like other new University buildings of the time, the Library was built of brick, but it was lavishly ornamented with stone dressings to soften the effect and enhance its quietly splendid character. Despite its classic style, there was a fierce and patriotic appreciation of the extensive use of locally-produced materials and fittings, and of the excellent craftsmanship evident in the completed building. The eventual cost of the building was £34,718 and Tom Elder Barr Smith generously contributed the extra money needed to complete the lavish decoration of the reading room.

The building was opened by the Governor, Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, on 4 March 1932. The ceremony was attended by many distinguished guests and members of the academic community. At the conclusion of the ceremony four trees were planted beside the entrance to the Library, and then the guests moved to the Refectory lawns, where afternoon tea was served.



ROBERT BARR SMITH 1824-1915

Robert Barr Smith was born in Renfrewshire in 1824, the son of a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. He attended the University of Glasgow and worked in commerce before migrating to Victoria. While in Victoria he began courting Joanna Elder, and in 1855 he came to Adelaide to join her brother's firm, Elder and Co.

Joanna and Robert were married in 1856, and had thirteen children, six of whom died under the age of seven and two of whom lived to be ninety-seven. The Barr Smith family lived at Torrens Park (now Scotch College) and Auchendarroch at Mount Barker. They were noted for their charm and generosity, as well as their lavish hospitality. In *Town Life in Pioneer South Australia*, Judith Brown relates how Joanna and Robert liked to surprise their guests. On one occasion all their guests, men and women alike, were handed a pair of stilts and made to walk over the paddocks, the most successful being given prizes for their attempts.

Robert Barr Smith's interests were extensive and varied. In addition to his own pastoral properties in four states, the firm of Elder Smith pioneered much of the pastoral settlement of South Australia and provided financial backing for the copper mines at Moonta and Wallaroo. Robert Barr Smith was one of the founders of the Adelaide Steamship Company and the Bank of Adelaide, and a director of many finance and mining companies. His financial advice was widely sought, and it was said of him that he not only had his finger on the financial pulse of the state, but controlled its very beat.

Robert Barr Smith shrank from publicity — he is said to have refused a knighthood on three occasions — and did not involve himself in politics or municipal affairs. His philanthropy, however, was legendary, and among his many gifts were sums of £10,000 for the spire on St Peter's Cathedral, £10,000 for the establishment of a residential college at the University, £2,300 for the completion of Trades Hall and £5,000 for a steam lifeboat used on the rocky south-eastern coast. He assisted St Peter's College and the Royal Geographical Society and supported the establishment of the Mount Kosciusko observatory, as well as several scientific expeditions.

Robert Barr Smith died in his townhouse in Angas Street on 20 November 1915. His philanthropy and modesty as well as his achievements were widely praised in eulogies and obituaries, but the Barr Smith Library, built by his son, remains a permanent and beautiful memorial to his generosity.