

University of Adelaide



Official Opening and Inspection of the Barr Smith Library

By

His Excellency Brigadier-General the Honourable
Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, V.C., K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.

*Governor in and over the State of South Australia
Visitor of the University*

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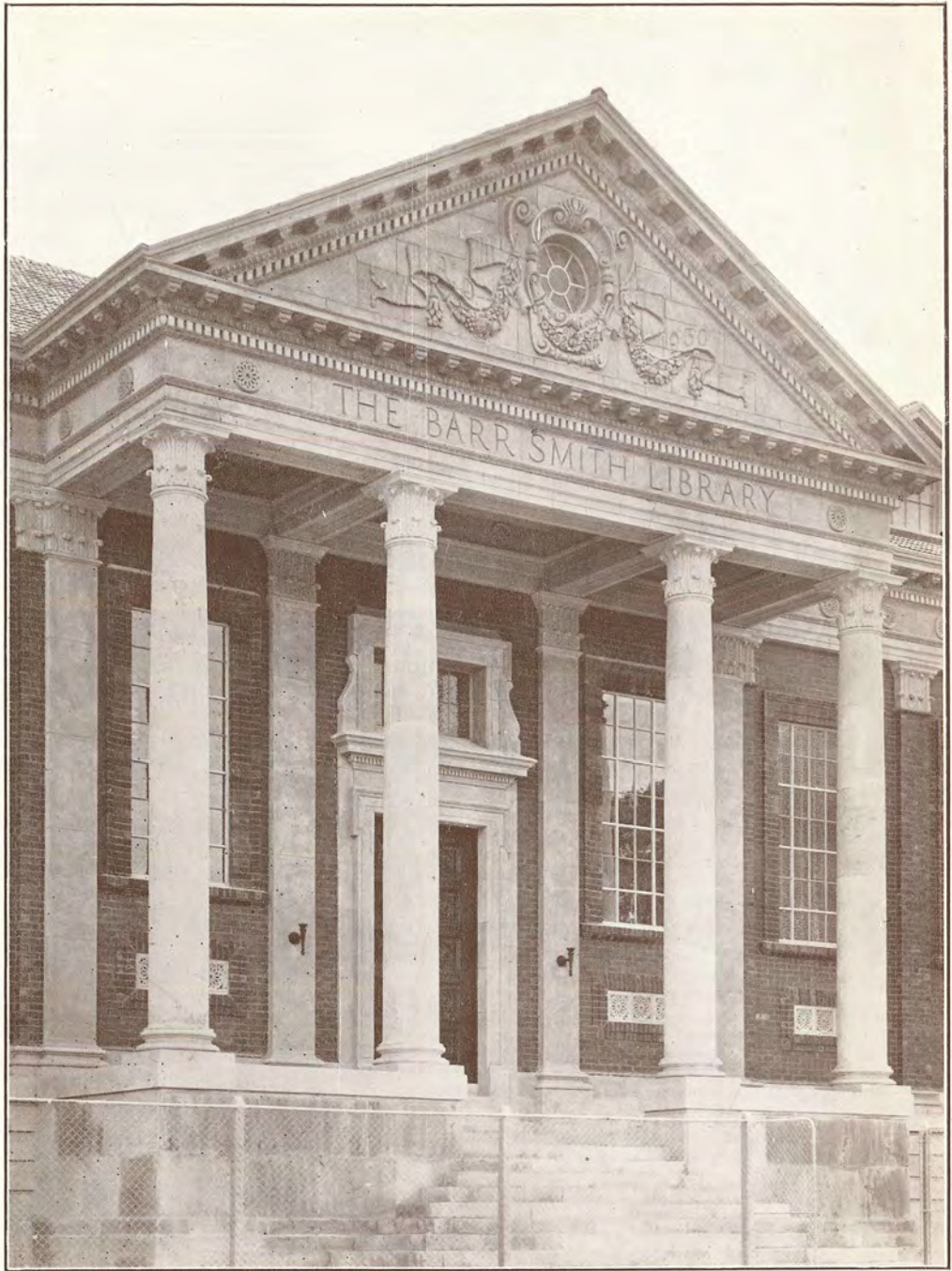
THE inscriptions on the frieze of the Reading Room commemorate two separate donations:

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 Mr. Robert Barr Smith, and supplemented, after his death, by his heirs; the money so given forms an endowment for the purchase of books for the library.

TOM ELDER BARR SMITH HANC BIBLIOTHECAM AD PATRIS NOMEN
ORNANDVM SVMP TV SVO AEDIFICANDAM CVRAVIT A.D. MDCCCXXX

records the gift of this building by Mr. T. E. Barr Smith.



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The Portico Entrance

The Barr Smith Library

THE situation chosen for the building has been largely determined by the needs of future development towards Frome Road and Victoria Drive. The axial line from the portico of the Library to the present gates on Frome Road will be preserved, when the whole area is available, by the erection of appropriate permanent gates at the same point. The Victoria Drive railings will be continued to meet them and to extend along the Frome Road alignment.

Space has been left at the rear of the Library for the addition of stack rooms to provide for the expansion of the collection of books. These stack rooms will be uniform in height and mass with the present structure, and will effectually mask the somewhat harsh lines of the escarpment which cuts the natural contours at this point.

For some years past it has been the accepted policy of the University to use brick for new buildings as most effective and serviceable in proportion to outlay. This departure from previous practice was begun with the Darling Building in 1920, and confirmed by the erection of the Physics and Engineering Building in 1926 and The Union Building and Lady Symon Building in 1928.

For reasons of unity, therefore, apart from its suitability in other respects, brick was predetermined as the natural material for the Library. The fact that a building of this character calls for an unusual refinement of finish, has led to the increased use of dressings of stone or stone colour, with softening effect.

The internal structure is of reinforced concrete, with a pier system encased in the walling carried down to the solid subsoil. The use of gypsum blocks in the floor slab has been adopted in such manner as to avoid any obstructions to the level of the ceiling, an essential requirement for the compact storage of books in a stack system.

The practical needs of convenient book storage, simple and obvious as they may be, exert a marked influence on the structural design of a Library. That every book should be within reach of the floor determines the height of the top shelf, and to avoid waste of space, stack rooms are made about 7 feet 8 inches in height, or, as in this case, 8 ft. 5 inches from one floor to the next. This is the vertical measuring rod for the whole structure, so that stairs and elevator landings are designed to suit the future stack room annexe of five storeys, and the working rooms are equal in height to two or more stack storeys.

THE BARR-SMITH LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE



The Barr Smith Library: Original Project for Completed Building

Future Stack Room Annexe on the Right

WOODS BAGOT JURY
& LAYBOURNE-SMITH
ARCHITECTS MARCH 1929



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The Reading Room

Similarly, the length of shelf adopted becomes the unit in the scale of the whole plan horizontally.

In a University Library it is desirable to have a portion of the books readily accessible to the general reader; others may be withdrawn from general access, but left available for professors, lecturers, and advanced students. Accordingly accommodation has been provided for 15,000 volumes in the reading room, and the present stack room is capable of holding about 100,000 volumes. So far shelving has been provided for about 60,000, and this leaves room for a few years' expansion. The future stack room annexe, as planned, will be capable of housing a further half-million volumes.

Lighting, natural or artificial, is a matter of paramount importance, and for this reason the reading room has been planned so as to receive light from every aspect, including clerestory lighting of the ceiling by means of dormer windows. The effective area of glazing is equal to about 20 per cent. of the floor area.

To modify excess of light according to aspect and season, inside Venetian blinds have been installed.

The window frames throughout are of steel locally manufactured, with sashes opening outwards in such a manner as to facilitate cleaning from within. They are glazed for the most part with white "Flemish" glass, which is found to give a brilliant illumination while breaking up the direct intensity of the rays and obscuring the effects of weather on the outside.

After investigation of various means of lighting, the pendant system has been adopted, as at once the most efficient, the most simple in maintenance, and the most economical of current.

The reading room is lit by five large grouped pendants from the nave vaulting and twenty-two smaller pendants from the aisle ceilings. Any light may be lowered to floor level as repair or replacement becomes necessary. Shadows have been successfully eliminated, and an even gradation of light from floor to ceiling obtained.

The unit of lighting adopted is the Denzar fitting of varying size, used singly in the aisles, and with a corona of grouped spheres in the nave. The intensity of light obtainable at table height is five foot candles.

The warming of the reading room is effected by means of tubular electric foot warmers encased in the foot rail of each table. The unit is enclosed in bronzed tubing, and is protected from contact with the reader's feet. The current to each table is controlled by a separate switch from the direction platform, and shows by a small red lamp when it is in use.

The ventilation of the reading room is by natural means. Fresh air enters by inlets above the wall shelves, and numerous outlets are provided at ceiling levels. Thirty per cent. of the window area is also capable of being opened.

The style of a building is only properly chosen when it is in harmony with its practical needs, functions, and surroundings.



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Eastern Aisle of Reading Room

The tradition that the mediaeval styles are appropriate to educational buildings dies hard; but it is dying. Climate is the dominant factor, and a mediterranean climate such as this should predispose us to a mediterranean, that is to say, a classic form of architecture, for reasons not to be elaborated here.

The classic style, although far older, is more adaptable to modern requirements and to modern means of construction. Fortunately, there was no battle of styles in this case; the most recent University buildings pointed the way in style as they did in material. The question, if any, was which phase of the renaissance or the classic style was the most suitable? The answer is naturally, our own native development of it. Sir Christopher Wren, at Hampton Court and Kensington, has handled to perfection the same style and material; the problem thus became one of adapting his methods and ideals to the building in hand. Yet so adaptable is the classic idea that the interior, with its coffered vaulted nave and aisles, has as much resemblance to a Roman basilica of the Early Empire as to any work of Wren.

The scheme of decoration of the reading room is designed for restful effect; the harmonious tones of the "oak" furniture and the parquetry are the deepest note of a scheme which lightens gradually towards the ceiling. This is finished in tones of antique ivory and gold, the one contrasting tint being a soft green which itself is an echo of the colour of the terrazzo frieze, and is related to the colour of the rexine upholstery.

The detail of the acanthus and other plastic ornament with which the coffered panels of the ceiling are enriched has been heightened by a dark overglaze applied over a light ground, and then wiped off the highlights.

The design and supervision of the building and its equipment has been in the hands of Mr. Walter H. Bagot, F.R.I.B.A., F.R.A.I.A., of the firm of Woods, Bagot, Laybourne-Smith & Irwin, Architects, Mr. Laybourne-Smith, F.R.I.B.A., F.R.A.I.A., being responsible for the electrical installations, comprising light, power, heating, and the elevator.

The Architects have been ably assisted in the work of supervision by Mr. James Henderson as Clerk of Works.

The various Contractors have throughout the work shown a proper conception of the finish required, and loyally contributed to the general effort to obtain it.

For the last year or two it has been possible to obtain the services of tradesmen of special experience and ability, who, understanding the demands of good craftsmanship, have been able and willing to contribute something of their own individuality to the work.

The cost of the building and equipment amounts to about thirty-four thousand five hundred pounds (£34,500).

The dimensions of the reading room are 127 feet by 58 feet, and the height varies from 34 feet to 23 feet, these dimensions all being approximately multiples of the factor of 11 feet 7 inches, the width of one bay.

LIST OF PRINCIPAL CONTRACTORS AND SUB-CONTRACTORS.

- The Building*: Mr. H. S. C. Jarvis.
The Murray Bridge Freestone Portico: The S.A. Monumental Works, Ltd.
The Ceilings and other Plastic Decoration: Mr. J. G. Harris.
The Decoration of the Reading Room: Messrs. Martindale & Flehr, Ltd.
The Terrazzo Frieze and Inscription, etc.: Mr. A. del Fabbro.
The Electric Installation and Manufacture of Lighting Fittings, the Automatic Elevator: Messrs. Unbehaun & Johnstone, Ltd.
The Steel Window Frames: Messrs. A. Simpson & Son, Ltd.

THE PRINCIPAL ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT COMPRISE:

- Furniture and Fittings locally manufactured from Tasmanian Hardwood known under the trade-name of Australian Oak (Eucalyptus obliqua)*: Messrs. Mathias & Co., Ltd.
The Steel Shelving of the Stack Room manufactured in Sydney by Messrs. Wormald Bros., Ltd.
The Floor Coverings of Linoleum laid upon Celotex: Messrs. A. W. Sandford & Co., Ltd.