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Abstract

In recent years the Carnegie Corporation's influence on Australian library development has been fruitfully examined from many angles, among them its role in promoting free-library movements in the various states. One piece of the story, however, remains mostly in the shadows: the Corporation's initiatives pointing towards modernizing and professionalizing Australian university libraries. Although the Corporation's philanthropic enterprise at the university level yielded mixed results at best, it was not inconsequential. It provided a blueprint for future university-library development in Australia. In one instance, at the University of Melbourne, it inspired a vice-chancellor to articulate a vision of a library future that comported with the best practices in Great Britain and the United States. In another, at the University of Adelaide, it showed how, with philanthropic intervention, university-library modernization could be expedited with salutary results.

Keywords

Australia, university, libraries, Carnegie, Carnegie Corporation, philanthropy

Disciplines

Australian Studies | History | Library and Information Science | United States History

Comments

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'NOT YET READY': AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND CARNEGIE CORPORATION PHILANTHROPY, 1935-1945*

MICHAEL J. BIRKNER

In recent years the Carnegie Corporation's influence on Australian library development has been fruitfully examined from many angles, among them its role in promoting free-library movements in the various states.¹ One piece of the story, however, remains mostly in the shadows: the Corporation's initiatives pointing towards modernizing and professionalizing Australian *university* libraries. Although the Corporation's philanthropic enterprise at the university level yielded mixed results at best, it was not inconsequential. It provided a blueprint for future university-library development in Australia. In one instance, at the University of Melbourne, it inspired a vice-chancellor to articulate a vision of a library future that comported with the best practices in Great Britain and the United States. In another, at the University of Adelaide, it showed how, with philanthropic intervention, university-library modernization could be expedited with salutary results.

Keppel's vision

As president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York from 1923 to 1941, Frederick Keppel recommitted the Corporation to the original design of its founder and prime benefactor, Andrew Carnegie. A former Dean of New York's Columbia College, high-level aide in the United States War Department during World War I, and director of several prestigious foundations before assuming the presidency of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Keppel was first and foremost an advocate of liberal learning.² He shared Andrew Carnegie's idea of erecting stepladders

* I am grateful to the Faculty Development Fund at Gettysburg College for supporting the research in New York City and various Australian cities, and the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne for its generous hospitality, which made the writing of this essay possible.

¹ In a large and growing literature, these pieces stand out: David J. Jones, 'From Munn-Pitt to Library Act, Stimulating Support for Public Libraries in New South Wales, 1935-1939, Part 1, Enthusiasm and Optimism', *Australian Library Journal*, 44 (1995), 55-66; idem, 'Part 2: The Ifould Report', *Australian Library Journal*, 44 (1995), 134-51; Carmel Maguire, "Nobody Dodges Remington": The Free Library Movement and the Achievement of Public Library Legislation in New South Wales, 1935-39', *Australian Library Journal*, 56 (2007), 222-32; and Donald Barker, 'Reformers and Reform: Towards Free Public Libraries in Victoria', *Australian Library Journal*, 56 (2007), 373-91.

² On Keppel's background and outlook see Neil A. Radford, *The Carnegie Corporation and the Development of American Libraries, 1928-1941* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1984), pp. 8-9; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), pp.100-103; and Keppel's papers at Columbia University, which include an unpublished biography by his son. Lagemann aptly describes Keppel as

to success for working-class people of the English-speaking world through the Corporation's cultural philanthropy, including benefactions to libraries, museums, and adult education programs. Building libraries where communities made a commitment to support them was perhaps the most celebrated Carnegie initiative. By the end of World War I, having underwritten construction of more than 2,500 libraries in the USA and the Dominions (four of them in Australia), the Corporation's trustees decided it was time to move in a new direction, focusing on scientific philanthropy and support for think-tanks and academic clearing-houses.³

When Keppel took charge four years after Carnegie's death in 1919 he redirected the emphasis to a Carnegie-like track, or at least broadened its purview to include support for adult education and a substantial investment in higher education.⁴ Keppel believed that an efficacious university experience required well-equipped, professionally staffed libraries that were fully integrated into the academic program – a notion that was increasingly accepted in American universities and the stronger liberal arts colleges but only slowly gaining traction in Australia in the 1920s.⁵ When in the latter part of that prosperity decade Keppel turned his attention to the Southern Dominions, a significant Carnegie benefaction was intended for Australian university libraries.⁶ The caveat was this: for the money to flow, the libraries must meet standards that Keppel had developed and refined working closely with three principal advisers: Ralph Munn, the director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and lead-author of the influential Munn-Pitt report; James Russell, the former Dean of Teachers College at Columbia University, who had visited Australia under Corporation auspices in 1928 and regularly advised Keppel

a 'genial and energetic man of unswerving integrity and character, of wide personal acquaintance and eclectic interest' (p.7).

³ Radford, *Carnegie Corporation*, pp.15-16. The best account of Carnegie's reorientation and priorities under Keppel's leadership is Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge*. A useful complement to this work, essaying a variant view of Carnegie philanthropy, is Michael White, 'Carnegie Philanthropy in Australia in the Nineteen Thirties: A Reassessment', *History of Education Review*, 26 (1997), 1-24.

⁴ Carnegie library-oriented philanthropy in the English-speaking world exceeded \$65 million during the period 1911-1960, of which the greatest share by far was directed to American libraries. Australian libraries received more than \$1.5 million between 1927 and 1960, an era when the American dollar packed real punch. For a compendium of grants made to the Dominions see Maxine K. Rochester, 'Refocusing the Role of Libraries in Australia: Carnegie Corporation of New York Grants, 1923-1961', in W. Boyd Rayward, ed., *Libraries and Life in a Changing World: The Metcalfe Years, 1920-1970* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies, 1993), 138-55; and Stephen H. Stackpole, *Carnegie Corporation Commonwealth Program, 1911-1961* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1961). For Australia grants see pp.34-39.

⁵ Radford, *Carnegie Corporation*, p.17. See also Keppel's correspondence with Australian university officials in the Carnegie Corporation files at Columbia University.

⁶ The Corporation initiated its grant-making in Australia in adult education – a major interest of Frederick Keppel. Gradually other programs were developed, among them travel grants for scholars and the creation of the Australian Council for Educational Research. Launching and sustaining the ACER was one of Keppel's proudest – and most lasting – accomplishments in Australia.

on needs and opportunities for educational philanthropy; and William W. Bishop, the Director of the Library and head of the Library School at the University of Michigan.⁷

On site in Australia

Russell and Munn had visited Australian universities and spoken with key personnel at each of them. Their observations about what needed to be done to upgrade library staffing and service – and what *could* be done – meshed well with Keppel's judgments in the wake of his subsequent Australian excursion in 1935.⁸ Meeting with vice-chancellors, university registrars, and library directors, Keppel had consistently emphasized that modernization initiatives, including a more professionalized library staff and service, that were *already in progress* in the United States, should serve as a model for Australian library development. Following the prescriptive literature of the day, Keppel explained that the university library should serve as a central element of a thriving campus intellectual life. It should encourage a spirit of enquiry and make readily accessible to undergraduates the best in literature, historical studies, and fine arts then available in print. Based on the reports he received from Russell and Munn, and his own observations during a 1935 visit to each of the major Australian universities, Keppel was certain that Australian university libraries were deficient in each of these areas. What remained to be seen was whether Australian university administrators would embrace the Carnegie challenge by investing more in centralized collections, improving library facilities, and advancing the specialized training of their staffs. As Keppel reminded officials from the University of Melbourne gathered for dinner at the home of Sir Lennon Raws, he would support no grants to Australian university libraries 'until they have improved their library technique, and in particular the qualifications of their librarians.'⁹

⁷ There is no good biography of Munn, and one is sorely needed. A good starting point, however, is Munn's correspondence with officials of the Carnegie Corporation, CCNY Papers, Columbia University Special Collections, especially Series III-A, Box 231; and John Metcalfe's insightful essay, 'Ralph Munn and Australia', *Australian Library Journal*, 24 (1975), 138–43. Russell's correspondence regarding Australia may be found in the Carnegie files Series III-A, Box 316. On Bishop see Radford, *Carnegie Corporation*, pp.12–13, 21–23; and Claud Glenn Sparks, *Doyen of Librarians: A Biography of William Warner Bishop* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993).

⁸ For Munn's largely critical account of Australian university libraries see *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for Their Improvement* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1935), pp.89–102. This seminal document in Australian library history was published with Carnegie money in 1935 under the auspices of the Australian Council for Educational Research. It was co-authored with Ernest Pitt, Chief Librarian of the Public [i.e. State] Library of Victoria, but it is clear that Munn was the principal author. Keppel's 'Informal' Report on his travels in the Dominions may be found in Series III-A, Box 196. Correspondence between Munn and Keppel is in Box 231 and in the Carnegie files on the respective Australian universities in the CCNY collection.

⁹ See Raymond Priestley memo, 'Talk with Dr. Keppel', 23 March 1935, in University of Melbourne Archives, Folder 1933/73. See also Keppel's letter to the President [i.e. Chairman of the Council] of Auckland University College, 30 June 1931, in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 50.

An American playbook for reform

To advance his modernizing agenda Keppel worked along several tracks. For example, at the time of his visit to the Southern Dominions, the Corporation was then investing heavily in American higher education. It granted substantial sums to establish and sustain university-based library schools in the United States, endowing librarian positions at a dozen liberal arts colleges, and making major gifts to more than one hundred carefully vetted liberal arts colleges to upgrade their collections in the humanities and social sciences. An important book by Neil Radford, *The Carnegie Corporation and the Development of American Libraries*, describes this effort in considerable detail.

There is no comparable book for Australia, and probably cannot be one. This is so, first because Australia lacked the kinds of private institutions that comprised an important segment of American higher education. There is simply less of a story to tell. Equally important is the second fact. With one major exception, during the Depression decade, when Keppel was most absorbed in library development, Australian universities were *not ready* to embrace the program that Keppel had in mind. With a few exceptions, library policy was controlled by faculty committees and the concept of a library's function in the university remained traditional. It is true that Australian university librarians – most of them full- or part-time faculty members at their respective institutions – advocated for their libraries as important and deserving more institutional resources. Yet, as of the publication of the Munn-Pitt report in 1935, none of them were conversant with the American library revolution or ready to overhaul operations within their own fiefdoms.

It is worth noting that Australia's universities at the time of the Carnegie Corporation's greatest focus on library development were in a twilight zone between the older-mode 'college on a hill' and the more modern, bureaucratic university system that we take for granted today. Enrolments were comparable to those in American liberal arts colleges and private universities; they did not remotely approach the numbers of students at flagship state universities in the United States. In 1935, there were fewer than 10,000 university students enrolled in all the Australian universities combined. Departments were often staffed by one professor and a handful of assistants. While Oxford and Cambridge were models Australian universities followed in many respects (and whose staffs typically had studied at English universities), the latest innovations in curricular thinking and library practice had yet to extend deeply into the Southern Dominions. Indeed, as Stuart Macintyre has noted, in the mid-1930s 'the library was peripheral to the main function of the University, which was to train gentlemen for the professions.'¹⁰

¹⁰ Data on student enrolment and the quote are both derived from Stuart Macintyre's introduction to *Making History: R.M. Crawford, Manning Clark, Geoffrey Blainey* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1985), p.10. My observations about Australian universities have been informed by reading in the archives at each of the major Australian universities of the 1930s, in particular by a close examination of the remarkably detailed diaries of Vice-Chancellor Raymond Priestley for the period of his service at Melbourne University (1935–38), Priestley Papers, Melbourne University Archives,

Australian university libraries as 'not ready' for reform

The traditionalist mindset about university library operations emerges most clearly from minutes of a librarians' meeting, underwritten by the Carnegie Corporation, that convened at the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney in August 1935, several months after the Munn-Pitt report had caused its initial stir and weeks after Keppel had completed his Australian fact-finding tour. At that meeting, the delegates congratulated themselves on the increased 'recognition' that Australian university libraries enjoyed, noting that 'grants and in some cases staff and salaries had been increased.'¹¹ Regarding the Munn-Pitt report, the delegates were more defensive than chastened, much less grateful for the wake-up call Munn and Pitt had offered. 'We regret the lack of acknowledgment that many of the weaknesses pointed out in the Report had been often emphasized by University Librarians', the minutes noted. Further, they referred to 'certain misapprehensions and mistakes, particularly in regard to the Libraries of the Universities of Sydney and Adelaide and their administration.'

Aside from a toothless consensus that more open access of library resources to undergraduates was 'desirable' and an equally lame assertion that centralized control of department libraries was also 'desirable', there was little in the proceedings of the librarians' meeting that substantively addressed the Munn-Pitt report's concerns. Nothing in them matched Keppel's spirit of innovation or met his criteria for Carnegie Corporation investment in Australian university libraries. Rather, the minutes reflected the traditionalist perspective of Sydney University Librarian Henry Green, whose disgruntlement with Munn and Pitt's critique of his library had recently spilled out into an eleven-page rebuttal directed to Ralph Munn and ultimately to Carnegie President Keppel – a letter long on self-justification but short on vision for a modern university library.¹²

Accession 73/79. For useful context see Wallace Kirsop, 'Scholarship, Collecting and Libraries in the Old and New Worlds: A Personal Journey', in Kirsop, ed. with the assistance of Meredith Sherlock, *The Commonwealth of Books: Essays and Studies in Honour of Ian Willison* (Melbourne: Monash University, Centre for the Book, 2007), pp.247-48. Kirsop notes that the Australian elite looked to Oxbridge rather than Sydney or Melbourne for educating their children.

¹¹ This and subsequent quotes are derived from 'Report of the Second Inter-University Library Conference Held in the Fisher Library, the University of Sydney, August 15-16, 1935', mimeograph copy in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 218.

¹² Henry Green to Ralph Munn, 30 April 1936, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 343. Green's letter received a respectful response from Munn, but nothing that could be considered a retraction of the basic points made in the Munn-Pitt report respecting the University of Sydney. When Munn showed Green's letter to Keppel, the latter directed Munn to inform Green that his own site visit to Sydney had confirmed Munn's observations. For Munn's private (negative) view of Green see Munn to John Russell, 8 January 1935, and Munn memo on library leadership in Australia, 8 February 1935, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 231.

Impressing Keppel – different strategies

At a higher level of administration – the vice-chancellors – there was evidence of an awakening on library matters. This was driven initially by the scent of American benefactions. Times were hard and budgets tight; Carnegie grants appeared to be low-hanging fruit. In discussions with his peers, R.S. Wallace, the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, was candid about the need to manage interaction with Keppel in the interests of all the universities. Preparing for the Carnegie President's arrival in Australia, Wallace wanted each university vice-chancellor to 'do a great deal by way of looking after Dr. Keppel'. Wallace planned to 'wine and dine Dr. and Mrs. Keppel' and arrange 'entertainments; put a car at his disposal; see that he gets the viewpoint of Australian universities; put him up "for clubs"' such as the Australian Club, the Golf Club, 'and so on and so forth.'¹³ Wallace proposed a special dinner for Keppel when the vice-chancellors met in Melbourne, for which 'we should all willingly pay our share'.¹⁴ On the point of protocol, Wallace noted: 'if we all act in complete harmony, as we are doing, I have high hopes ... [However,] we must be careful not to plead excessive poverty, for the American folk act on the principle "unto him that hath shall be given."'¹⁵

Wallace's approach was not unreasonable under the circumstances. However, treating the Carnegie President with tenderness was insufficient to close any deals. In the case of Sydney University, no amount of good wine, dining, or general cheer could counterbalance Frederick Keppel's astringent view of the Sydney University Library – and its lack of any serious plan for change. As matters developed, aside from benefactions to Sydney's Adult Education Library, the University of Sydney received not a dime from the Carnegie Corporation for library operations during Keppel's tenure.¹⁶

If R.S. Wallace was playing the 'cosy up to the rich fellow' card, with mixed success, Melbourne University Vice-Chancellor Raymond Priestley operated along a different track. Priestley sought to entice Keppel by describing a university that was rethinking its mission and the means of achieving it, something he was convinced was happening at all the best British and American universities. This process, in Priestley's view, entailed strategic planning for better undergraduate instruction, more sophisticated research, and improved university outreach. All of this was, to Priestley, the obvious thing to do at Melbourne University, Carnegie Corporation

¹³ For these quotes see Melbourne University Registrar J.A. Bainbridge to University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor (and Librarian) E. Morris Miller, 11 February 1935, in University of Melbourne Archives, Folder 1933/73. Bainbridge quoted Wallace freely because the remarks had been made directly to him.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ R.S. Wallace to J.A. Bainbridge, 14 September 1933, in University of Melbourne Archives, Folder 1933/73.

¹⁶ During the Keppel era Sydney University received moneys for adult-education research and music study-materials but nothing for collection development in the Fisher Library. On this see Stackpole, *Carnegie Corporation Commonwealth Program*, p.38.

or no Carnegie Corporation. It did not hurt that Priestley's vision for his university meshed with Frederick Keppel's notion of how a modern university *ought* to function.¹⁷

Arriving at Melbourne University to assume his new duties as Vice-Chancellor on 17 February 1935, only weeks before Keppel was scheduled to visit his campus, Priestley engaged in a whirlwind of preparations. Taking a break from his innumerable meetings, memo-writing and correspondence, he spent several hours with University Librarian Leigh Scott, traversing every nook and cranny of the University's antiquated library, all the while taking extensive notes, doubtless the better to make his case to Frederick Keppel about specific opportunities for Carnegie investment in the University.¹⁸ Priestley intended to examine *every* university operation, from fund-raising to curriculum development, from library operations to the cultural opportunities available to students. Further, he believed he could best advance Melbourne's future by drawing on the best practices in leading universities in the United States and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. Priestley looked forward to investigating these practices personally with a Carnegie Corporation travel grant to the USA; for investigations in England and South Africa he would engage a young scholar named John Foster. Together they would compare Melbourne's instruction, cultural life, and service delivery with prevalent norms abroad. Priestley would be happy, he told Keppel, to share his findings with other Australian universities, making his survey a template for transformational change.¹⁹

Keppel was impressed by Priestley as a person and by the Vice-Chancellor's vision for reform in Melbourne. In retrospect, probably no one in Australia better understood or more ardently embraced Keppel's notion of liberal education than Raymond Priestley. It was Priestley's hope to build on his rapport with Keppel – to demonstrate that Melbourne would do what needed to be done to win the Carnegie Corporation's good will – and its benefactions.²⁰ Any Carnegie Corporation grants, Keppel made clear, would not include underwriting a badly-needed new library (one of Priestley's leading priorities). It was up to the University to show its serious commitment to the library by finding such resources on its own. On the

¹⁷ See, for example, Raymond Priestley, 'The University Idea', *Australian Quarterly* (December 1935) and Priestley's commencement address, 6 April 1935 (at which Keppel was awarded an honorary degree), as reported in *The Argus* [Melbourne], 8 April 1935. Priestley's observations comport remarkably well with Keppel's outlook, as expressed in his president's reports and occasional writings. Priestley's 186-page survey of best practices at American universities, composed in the final months of his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, are in Melbourne University Archives, Accession 80/54, Box 15.

¹⁸ On the patent inadequacy of the Melbourne University Library see Munn-Pitt report, p.95; Priestley's diary entry for 5 March 1935, University of Melbourne Archives, and his memo to Melbourne Faculty Council members, titled 'The Carnegie Survey', 7 October 1935, cited Keppel's willingness to fund a survey of major universities in the United States and Great Britain. 'University reform is in the air both in Britain and America,' Priestley observed, 'and I cannot think of a time when more results could have been obtained from an enquiry of this nature.'

¹⁹ Priestley, 'The Carnegie Survey'.

²⁰ Priestley's correspondence with Keppel and other members of the CCNY staff is located in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 218. Also helpful are entries in Priestley's diary for March and April 1935.

other hand, Keppel was impressed by Priestley's passion and interested in his ideas. He encouraged Priestley to pursue his notion of a university survey and ultimately provided \$7500 for that purpose.²¹ When Keppel mentioned his willingness to make a major grant for collection development, provided that the University invested in its library facilities and its personnel, Priestley was eager to apply for the money. But the timing was off. Keppel had repeatedly observed that the Corporation would make grants only to institutions that were prepared to invest *their own capital* in projects for which they were seeking support. The Victorian state budget, unfortunately, remained pinched. Melbourne University would not see any substantial increase in its allocation in 1936 or 1937, thereby diminishing any prospect that Priestley could show the Carnegie Corporation the University's commitment to enhance its library facilities and book collection. Further, Priestley lacked the full backing of his library committee and the University Board to effect the necessary changes in library staffing and outreach to students. His decision to take six-months' leave to pursue his *idée fixe* of an education survey in the USA did not help either, leaving him out of touch at the very time he ought to have been putting his stamp on university policy.²² By 1936, Priestley was increasingly beset on several fronts – by a Chancellor who consistently meddled in administrative affairs, a complex censorship case, and a few troublesome faculty members. The final straw for Priestley was the state government's rejection of his request for a £25,000 endowment he had insisted was vital to the University's advancement. Despairing of accomplishing his goals, Priestley accepted an offer to become Vice-Chancellor at the University of Birmingham and departed Melbourne in March 1938, just as the University was engaged in a bitter internal struggle about his successor. Priestley left behind many disappointed admirers as well as old-guard trustees who were glad to see him gone.²³

Raymond Priestley's departure for England was a serious loss to the university he hoped to reinvigorate. All the same, the Carnegie Corporation proved satisfied with the choice of Priestley's successor, Oxford-educated schoolmaster, John Medley. Over the next two decades it made generous grants to Melbourne University for

²¹ Priestley spoke to Keppel about his idea of a survey during Keppel's visit to Melbourne in 1935 and followed up with a formal proposal on 9 July 1935 – copy in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 218. The approval of the Corporation's Board is reflected in a memo dated 7 October 1935, titled 'The Carnegie Survey', *ibid.* In addition to the support Keppel provided for Priestley's General Education Survey, the CCNY made other substantial grants to Melbourne University during the Keppel era, among them moneys for adult-education lectureships in several fields, music and art study-materials, support for German refugee scholars at the university, and a \$12,000 Vice-Chancellor's Fund to support research. See Stackpole, *Carnegie Corporation Commonwealth Program*, pp.36-37.

²² For background on Priestley's difficulties see R.J.W. Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne, 1850-1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), pp.668-90; and Geoffrey Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1957), pp.144-50. Selleck questions the wisdom of Priestley leaving the University for so long so early in his tenure as Vice-Chancellor (*The Shop*, p.684).

²³ Selleck, *The Shop*, pp.685-90.

adult education, faculty travel, and support for a variety of program initiatives. This was true at Sydney also. But in the end the Corporation would give nothing to either university library until a new library was in the works. At Melbourne a bequest of more than £100,000 by a member of the Baillieu family in 1944 was the first sign of real promise along those lines. That was too late for Priestley, or for Keppel, who retired from the presidency in 1941.²⁴

Criteria for grant making

Reviewing the voluminous Carnegie Corporation files on Southern Dominions cultural philanthropy, it is clear that each case was distinctive. Nonetheless, certain patterns are discernible. Frederick Keppel was prepared to invest in Australian universities to the extent that they would partner with his foundation and direct funds to worthy projects, among them faculty development and library modernization. In dealings with officials at Victoria University College, Wellington, New Zealand, where he had a salutary experience in 1935, Keppel felt he was dealing with people of the right spirit and will. Later that year, Victoria received a substantial Carnegie grant for book purchases. When convinced that a university administration was merely playing him for the purposes of securing Carnegie grants but had no serious plan for upgrading its library service, as Keppel concluded was the case at Auckland University College, he rejected the requests for funds with sharp words for a university official he felt was playing games with him.²⁵

Available evidence indicates that no Australian university vice-chancellor or registrar irritated Frederick Keppel as much as Auckland University College Registrar Rocke O'Shea had. Australian university leaders were desirous of moving forward along lines the Carnegie prescribed. Most of them, however – as the case of Raymond Priestley suggests – were poorly positioned to do much. It was, after all, a Depression decade. Deficits lingered, faculty hiring largely ceased, and salaries were cut across the board. The historian of Melbourne University characterizes the 1930s there as 'tense, depressing, and sour'.²⁶ That was not Melbourne's experience alone.

Queensland and Tasmania University officials faced similar difficulties – faculty

²⁴ Karel Axel Lodewycks, *The Funding of Wisdom: Revelations of a Library's Quarter Century* (Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 1982), pp.100–101, 115. See also Stuart Macintyre and R.J.W. Selleck, *A Short History of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), pp.107–109; and James Kilpatrick, 'Grow with Praise of Future Ages: Creating the Baillieu Library Building 1959', *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 32 (2001), 82–92.

²⁵ Compare Keppel's prescriptive letter to 'The President', Auckland University College, 30 June 1931, with his increasingly testy correspondence with and about Martin Rocke O'Shea, the College Registrar, in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 50. Munn concurred with Keppel that O'Shea was not serious about library reform and wrote that Mr O'Shea should not 'talk himself into this [collection development] grant without fulfilling its conditions', Munn to John Russell, 15 October 1934. Russell's own tough letter to O'Shea is dated 23 July 1935, *ibid.* See also transcript of a conversation between Keppel and Auckland City Librarian, John Barr, a CCNY consultant on library matters, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 55.

²⁶ Selleck, *The Shop*, p.646.

resistant to any reduction of authority for the library, state governments' tight purse-strings, and a lack of local philanthropy. The will to change was evidenced, notably in the person of Queensland librarian A.V. Melbourne, but the timing, as in Melbourne, was not right.²⁷ University funds were not available during the Depression decade to do more than keep library doors open and services on an even keel; as a consequence neither Queensland nor Tasmania received Carnegie grants to build their respective book collections.²⁸

In Western Australia, where Vice-Chancellor Hubert Whitfield had a friendly connection to Carnegie consultant Ralph Munn dating back to World War I, and whose university was a leader in adult-education programming that Keppel found so appealing, there was a different outcome. Keppel awarded the University of Western Australia generous grants to support adult education and adult-education libraries, and ultimately \$20,000 more, for the purchase of books in the humanities and social sciences, a gift sparked partly by the desire to assist a young university and by Munn's generally favourable assessment of library operations there.²⁹ The Carnegie benefaction was a remarkable bonanza for the University, but it did not serve as a model for the reforms that Keppel had in mind when he instigated his library enterprise.

W.A. Cowan and the Adelaide example of constructive engagement and emulation

Adelaide University's library, by contrast, would provide that model. What transpired in Adelaide was deeply gratifying to the Carnegie president and his advisers. It demonstrated how corporation philanthropy, thoughtfully orchestrated, could

²⁷ These observations derive from the Carnegie Corporation correspondence files at the University of Queensland and from CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 303. For the Munn-Pitt report's criticisms of the Queensland and Tasmania University Libraries see pp.96-97, 100-101 respectively. Munn's notes on his visit to the Queensland University Library and his conversations with Melbourne are extracted in University of Queensland Archives, Ms 9596, Box 1, Folder 19. This folder also contains the University Librarian's response to the Munn-Pitt survey.

²⁸ Munn and Pitt charitably referred to E. Morris Miller's efforts at cataloguing the small collection of printed matter at the University of Tasmania but saw little evidence that Tasmania was ready for transformational change, *Australian Libraries*, p.100.

²⁹ On Western Australia's grant see White, 'Carnegie Philanthropy in Australia in the Nineteen Thirties', p.16. The connection with Munn, and Munn's support for adult-education grants at UWA, is discussed in Fred Alexander, *Campus at Crawley: A Narrative and Critical Appreciation of the First Fifty Years of the University of Western Australia* (Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire for the University of Western Australia Press, 1963), p.663. Vice-Chancellor Hubert Whitfield's memo, 'Notes on Dr. Keppel's Visit to Western Australia', 24 April 1935, which expressed the (unrealistic) hope that the CCNY would help fund a library building at some indefinite date in the future, is accessible in the University of Western Australia Archives. For background on the evolution of the University Library's collection see Madeline McPherson, 'A History of the Library of the University of Western Australia, 1913-1959' (Librarianship Diploma Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1965), pp.7-10, copy in Scholars' Centre, University of Western Australia. For the upbeat assessment of UWA library policies and priorities see *Australian Libraries*, pp.98-100.

begin to change a culture. It was the great exception to the story of university library modernization deferred.

The Adelaide success story begins with the appointment, in 1933, of a 25-year-old head librarian and part-time Classics professor, William A. Cowan. Bill Cowan's entire knowledge of libraries at the time of his appointment derived from his experience of using them as a student in his native New Zealand and, in London, as a tutor in Classics.³⁰ While visiting Adelaide University in 1934 Ralph Munn had a pleasant, albeit brief, discussion with Cowan and sensed his potential as a library leader. Soon thereafter Munn made a private vow to help the young scholar realize that potential, by urging Keppel to fund Cowan's education in librarianship through a year-long study-leave at the University of Michigan, which was then perhaps the leading American library school.³¹ Keppel supported this recommendation, and did more: the Carnegie President plotted with Munn, Michigan's Professor Bishop and Cowan to effect reforms at Adelaide's Barr Smith Library that could be accomplished only with Cowan's explicit support and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring.

Taking cues from the Carnegie

In their 1935 report on Australian libraries, Munn and Pitt had criticized the practice of faculty control over library budgets, staff, and policies. 'The allotment of funds by departments', they noted, 'results in gaps in the book collections, especially in those subjects which are outside the fields in which instruction is given.' In the section of their report on the University of Adelaide, Munn and Pitt took note of the impressive new library building, resulting from the benefactions of the Barr Smith family, and an excellent book collection, again due to gifts from the same family. However, the report cited 'deficient' technical processes (for example, cataloguing), lamented the librarian's lack of status and authority, criticized the 'disgracefully low' salaries for staff, and then fired this salvo: 'The university administration recently exhibited a complete lack of appreciation of the importance of trained and skilled library personnel by appointing as chief librarian a young lecturer who,

³⁰ Portions of what follows are drawn from my paper 'Forefront of the University: W.A. Cowan and the Transformation of the University of Adelaide Library', delivered at the University of Adelaide, 2 June 2008. In light of subsequent developments, it is ironic to note that Ernest Pitt spoke out at a Melbourne University Library conference in 1933 against Cowan's appointment as Librarian at Adelaide. He argued that Cowan was ill-prepared for the task and that his appointment was an affront to library professionals. On this see Jean P. Whyte, 'Professional Discourse among University Librarians in Australia 1926-37', in M. Burns and C. Palmer, eds, *Innovation No Stranger: Essays in Australian Librarianship in Honour of Ira Raymond* (Adelaide: Investigator Press for the Barr Smith Library, 1982), pp.69-82.

³¹ Munn, undated memo to Keppel on the situation in Australia, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 52. Whether Munn was referring literally to having told Cowan about denouncing him at their meeting in Adelaide, or whether he subsequently wrote to Cowan, is not entirely clear. Most likely it was an oral comment, more delicately phrased than in Munn's recounting to Keppel as a determination to 'denounce' Cowan for his lack of credentials as a library administrator.

though scholarly and personable, is wholly without library experience. At present he is learning library technique from his own staff.'³²

To some individuals such an emphatic criticism in a widely circulated publication would be felt as a crushing blow, as was the case with Sydney University's Henry Green. That was not at all how Bill Cowan responded. He seems to have had a strong enough ego to roll with the criticism, perhaps not least because he knew that it was accurate. Moreover, he was aware that Munn had written with the purpose not to *eviscerate* but rather to *empower* him. During their meeting in Adelaide, Munn assured Cowan that his words were crafted to catch the attention of university administrators and to encourage the kinds of changes at Adelaide that Cowan himself wanted to effect, once he had the opportunity to complete his studies in the USA. Once Keppel had received assurance that the faculty library committee at the Barr Smith supported Cowan's study-leave, the arrangement was set – though Cowan would, at Munn's counsel, put off pursuing this fellowship until he came to know his own library better.³³ He did not depart for Michigan until September 1935, in what would prove for him to be the most intellectually intensive and rewarding experience of his life.

The University of Michigan library program was an ideal vehicle for someone like Cowan, who wanted to put his mark on a venerable but sleepy library back home. At Michigan, he flourished in seminars with first-rate professors, including Bishop. Cowan stood out at Michigan among the library-science students, impressing Bishop with his earnestness, good sense, and vigour. Bishop clearly developed an avuncular affection for the earnest young New Zealander and did his best to promote him, writing strongly positive evaluations of his work at Michigan to Adelaide Vice-Chancellor William Mitchell and Carnegie Corporation President Keppel. As Bishop put it in a letter certifying that Cowan had earned a BA in Library Science, he 'has shown unusual discrimination, great industry, clearness and terseness in statement, and has given evidence of careful and thoughtful reflection on the materials with which he has worked.' Bishop called Cowan 'one of the best students we have had in the ten years in which the Department of Library Science has been operating'.³⁴

Bishop's letters circulated (probably through Frederick Keppel) to Ralph Munn. The two consultants then joined with Keppel in hatching a scheme entailing in-

³² *Australian Libraries*, p.98.

³³ For the University Library Committee endorsement of Cowan's study-leave see 'Minute of the Library Committee on the Munn-Pitt Report on Australian Libraries', copies available both in University of Adelaide Special Collections, Minutes of the Library Committee and in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 52.

³⁴ This letter, dated 11 June 1936, was written at Cowan's behest to share with Mitchell. There is no reason, however, to believe that Bishop was lacking candour in his effusive comments; his relations with Cowan remained warm over the years. See, for example, Bishop to Mitchell, 14 May 1937, in which Bishop cited Cowan's 'promise' and assured Mitchell that he could count on Cowan for 'successful administration' of the Adelaide University Library. These documents can be found in Cowan's papers at the University of Adelaide.

centives for Adelaide University to take fullest advantage of William Cowan's new expertise. As Cowan was en route to Ann Arbor, Mitchell in Adelaide was readying a formal proposal to the Carnegie Corporation for library funding. Back in New York, Keppel and Munn discussed Mitchell's request and how they might accomplish *their* ends with *his* proposal. Keppel replied to Mitchell on 10 October 1935, saying it was best to 'make haste slowly' regarding libraries but that the Corporation would give serious consideration to his request.³⁵

At this time the \$20,000 Carnegie grant to the University of Western Australia for book purchases was already in the works.³⁶ Keppel was prepared to make a similar grant to Adelaide – *if* Adelaide University met a stiff set of conditions. Specifically, the Corporation called for more space for books, more specialization in library organization, higher status and pay for librarians, more authority for the librarian to hire, fire and set pay scales for his staff, and more 'modern' library practices generally. As a consultant to Keppel on the library situation in Australia, Munn argued that the money Adelaide sought should be allocated only *after* substantive policy changes were enacted, putting the library on a modernizing track.³⁷

Cowan's contribution

When Cowan returned to Adelaide in September 1936, he was ready to implement many of the best practices he had come to appreciate at Michigan and at the other libraries he visited in his travels on the Carnegie fellowship. How well or quickly he might have done this without the leverage of the Carnegie Corporation is difficult to say. But in hindsight it *is* evident that, working behind the scenes with Munn and Keppel, Cowan was able to accomplish more change, and faster, than he could ever have achieved working alone.

Shortly after returning to Adelaide, Cowan prepared a report that he believed would serve several purposes simultaneously: first to provide evidence to his faculty colleagues and the Vice-Chancellor that the leave of absence granted for his foreign studies was time well spent; second to advance his status and influence as Librarian; and third to provide a foundation for the proposal Mitchell had initiated to secure \$20,000 from the Carnegie Corporation for the purchase of books. Cowan's extensive report was ideally suited to serve all three purposes. It described the development of libraries in the USA and Great Britain, with their current emphasis on the library as a key 'educational force'. Cowan took note of the various services, including inter-library loan and specialized collection programs, that university libraries routinely provided in the USA but that were badly in need of upgrade in

³⁵ Keppel's letter about making haste slowly is in CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 32.

³⁶ See Keppel to Whitfield, 23 September 1936 and Whitfield to Keppel, 18 November 1936, University of Western Australia Archives, First Series 3702. The Carnegie Corporation's files on the University of Western Australia before 1955 were, regrettably, lost in the move from the Corporation's Manhattan office to Columbia University – CCNY Archivist Jane Gorjevsky, conversations with Michael Birkner, March and April 2009.

³⁷ Undated Munn memo, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 2.

Adelaide. Deeply impressed by the 'innovative' approach of American libraries, as well as by government support for libraries at all levels, Cowan's report echoed many of the arguments embedded in the Munn-Pitt document: highlighting the need for stronger book collections, separating research needs from undergraduate book needs, improving salaries for staff, and, not least, endowing the head librarian with new status and authority.³⁸

Cowan emphasized that under the *old* structure of library governance – a structure that Mitchell could not fail to notice was actually the *present* structure of library governance at Adelaide University – faculty committees enjoyed 'close control' of university libraries. That was problematic, since it was difficult for committees to reject any request from a colleague or disagree with objections; as a result no coherent administrative policy emerged. Cowan stated the situation bluntly, from his perspective: 'It is the librarian who is best qualified to view the library as a whole.' Consequently, he called for direct reporting-access to the Vice-Chancellor, rather than to a 'committee of professors reluctant to adjudicate on a question of personal interest to a colleague'.

Cowan made a strong case for better salaries for professional staff, citing data indicating that Adelaide was lagging behind British universities in the percentage of the total library budget represented by staff salaries. He noted also that support for libraries in Britain encompassed 3.8 per cent of total university expenditures, compared to 3.5 per cent at Adelaide, based on a much smaller overall budget. Department libraries, like Munn, he mostly opposed. The Dewey Decimal Classification System, by contrast, he embraced, along with the extension of borrowing privileges to all undergraduates. The report was an extended document, in some respects a distillation of all Cowan had absorbed in Michigan and wanted to implement now in Adelaide. His recommendations went well beyond the basics mentioned above; they included better space allocations in the library and the need for new equipment, including a typewriter, a filing cabinet and photo-copy apparatus so that 'more economical library methods may be adopted'. Most audacious was the final section of the report, wherein Cowan insisted that 'greater power' should be placed in the hands of the librarian. Further, in university policy-making regarding budgets, seeking gifts, and creating a conducive environment for learning, the library should be 'placed very much in the forefront of the university'.

Both Munn and Bishop read Cowan's report with deep interest and broad approbation. Munn called it 'splendid'.³⁹ Bishop pronounced himself in 'complete accord' with Cowan's views.⁴⁰ Bishop told Keppel's assistant, John Russell, that

³⁸ Cowan also cited the importance of such new technologies as microfilm – 'bibliofilm' as he styled it. For his report see Cowan to Mitchell, 25 February 1937, in University of Adelaide Special Collections, Cowan Papers, 92 C8713pSR mss, University of Adelaide Special Collections.

³⁹ Munn to Russell, 7 February 1938, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 2.

⁴⁰ Bishop to Russell, 21 January 1938 and Munn to Russell, 7 February 1938, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 52. See also Russell to Cowan, 14 March 1938, enclosing Keppel's letter to Mitchell, 11 March 1938, Cowan Papers, University of Adelaide Library. Keppel's letter laid out the prospect of

Cowan had produced a 'fine document' that represented 'careful analysis' based on 'wide observation', with recommendations that were 'reasonable and sound'. He was sure that Keppel would read Cowan's report with 'great interest' and added that he anticipated that grants to Australian university libraries were likely to be made if they showed evidence of 'putting into effect a program of library work on a modern basis'. Bishop alluded to a program like the one recently funded at Victoria University College, Wellington; but he could easily have been referring to what lay in prospect for Adelaide if it would embrace a modernizing course such as Cowan had outlined in his study-leave report.⁴¹

Mitchell was the linchpin in this scenario. Was he prepared to make the wholesale changes that Cowan recommended, at the risk of alienating influential faculty members? And what would be the attitude of the faculty-dominated library committee, which surely would lose authority as the university librarian gained it? Would the professors reject what Cowan was advocating as an unacceptable and unrealistic revolution, appropriate more to American circumstances than to Australian ones?

As matters first played out, the faculty committee was willing to accept Cowan's recommendations for change – but only up to a point. In its response to the Munn-Pitt report the committee had, in effect, telegraphed its response to Cowan's report by cheerfully accepting some criticisms as fair but rejecting Munn and Pitt's assault on the value of department libraries and their harsh words about low staff salaries. The committee argued that Adelaide University staff salaries 'do not compare unfavourably with those given in other Australian University Libraries', a riposte that may well have been true but missed the point that Munn and Pitt were trying to make. The faculty also rejected the notion that they did not expect a librarian to have 'technical efficiency'. Cowan had been chosen as librarian not because of his technical efficiency – something that they believed he could easily master – but because he had appropriate academic qualifications and would know how to deal with the various university constituencies appropriately because of that fact. 'No amount of technical competence in the librarian's craft can compensate for the lack' of academic *savoir faire*, the faculty concluded.⁴² Subsequently, when Mitchell formally referred Cowan's recommendations to the library committee, it resisted a number of them, for example refusing to grant him major authority for collection development and declining to endorse his recommendation that all matriculating students be allowed to borrow books. When word of this reached New York, it provoked a strongly negative reaction and a sharp warning to Mitchell: no over-arching policy change, no money for books.⁴³

making a grant to the University of Adelaide comparable to the one given to the University of Western Australia – provided its conditions were met.

⁴¹ Bishop to Russell, 21 January 1938, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 52.

⁴² Library Committee statement in Adelaide University Library Committee Minutes.

⁴³ The quote is from Keppel's 11 March 1938 letter to Mitchell. Keppel's letter was influenced by Cowan's long letter to John Russell, 31 January 1938, and by the comments of Munn (letter to Russell,

In his letter of 14 May 1937, responding to Cowan's report, Bishop had said that he did not expect the Carnegie Corporation to use its 'leverage' to impose change at Adelaide or other universities; but that is precisely the tack that the Corporation – with the explicit support of Munn and Bishop – pursued. Failure to give Cowan 'sufficient authority' in expending funds Bishop called a deal-breaker for any grant. For his part, Munn wrote to John Russell that it would be better for the Corporation to deny any grant to the University than to accede to half-way measures. Keppel must 'insist', Munn added, that the University Council give the librarian a 'freer hand'. And that is exactly what happened.⁴⁴

That the Carnegie Corporation's money mattered in affecting policy is exemplified in the response to its insistence that Adelaide make the substantive changes it demanded or no grant would be forthcoming. Put simply, Adelaide caved in on the major points. Mitchell wrote to Keppel that his institution would 'gratefully' accept the grant being proffered with the stipulations indicated. He noted that a new university flow-chart would place the librarian on a par with the deans of the faculty; staffing would be increased; the university's book budget would be substantially enhanced; all students would be permitted to borrow books (providing they paid a £10 advance on any fines); and the Carnegie money would be used – as stipulated – for the purchase of books for 'general undergraduate reading' as well as pertinent periodicals.⁴⁵

When Munn received a copy of Mitchell's letter, he told Keppel that, with Adelaide's 'complete conversion' on the key issues, he saw no reason to deny them the grant they sought. He made it clear that the changes would most likely not have occurred 'without the incentive of your grant'.⁴⁶ Meetings in New York weighed the evidence, and Keppel's assistant prepared a memo indicating that the essential changes sought had been made and that the grant was 'endorsed' by Munn. Several months later, in November 1938, Keppel wrote a brief note to Mitchell informing him of the Carnegie Board's decision to make the full grant of \$20,000 to the University Library, payable in \$5000 instalments over four years, commencing 1 December 1938.⁴⁷

7 February 1938) and Bishop (letter to Russell, 21 January 1938). Cowan had written to Russell that, if the Carnegie Corporation should decide to make a grant similar to the one made to the University of Western Australia, 'I can assure you that there is a far better chance now of its being put to good use.' He went on to suggest that the Carnegie so stipulate in its correspondence with Mitchell.

⁴⁴ Munn to Keppel, 13 June 1938. On the Committee's decision to extend borrowing privileges to 'all matriculated students in the university' see Library Committee Minutes, 12 April 1938. It is evident from these minutes that something less than a 'complete conversion' had occurred. The Library Committee retained much of its responsibility for collection development, and it would take some years before library assistants' salaries were noticeably improved – see minutes for 1941. On salary increases see minutes of 16 November 1942.

⁴⁵ Undated memo, University of Adelaide Library Development, and John Russell's memo, 29 July 1938, of a discussion in Melbourne with Cowan that month, in which Cowan laid out the changes that had been adopted in library policy and administration, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 2.

⁴⁶ Munn to Keppel, n.d., CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 231.

⁴⁷ Keppel to Mitchell, 16 November 1938, CCNY Papers, Series III-A, Box 2.

Conclusion

History is rarely a matter of linear forward progress. In the case of the Barr Smith Library, World War II put some of the modernization program on hold.⁴⁸ Frederick Keppel resigned as President of the Carnegie Corporation in September 1941, after eighteen years of service. With a world war's outcome still uncertain, the Corporation's library program for the Dominions was put in abeyance for the duration.⁴⁹ Post war, grants to Australian university libraries continued, but by 1947 the Corporation was moving in new directions, with its predominant focus on providing travel funds for promising Australian scholars in law, medicine, the humanities and social sciences.⁵⁰ Not until the Murray report of 1957, issued by an arm of the Australian government, did substantial federal and state moneys begin to flow into university library budgets.⁵¹

In concluding this account of the Carnegie Corporation's initiative in regard to Australian university libraries, it would be unwise to claim too much. The 'big' story was its role in encouraging a free-library movement and the modernization of library facilities and practices. But, as the case of Adelaide University suggests, the Carnegie Corporation's commitment to library advancement in Australia was not simply a public-library story. That the Corporation did not find ready partnerships for progress at any but one Australian university does not vitiate the seriousness or the wisdom of the Corporation's initiative.

⁴⁸ Under the terms of the Carnegie Corporation grant, the University would receive four annual \$5000 instalments beginning on 1 December 1938 and running until December 1941. Because of the War, the Library was able to make use of little more than half of the \$10,000 in the pipeline before the grant was suspended. Most of what was expended went towards the purchase of books in the field of modern British literature. Book dealers in London had essentially shut down for the duration by the late spring of 1940. Substantial collection development was resumed only in 1947, nearly a decade after the CCNY grant was made.

⁴⁹ See Carnegie Corporation of New York annual reports, in particular the President's reports for 1942-1945. For the Australian library situation during war time see David J. Jones, 'Public Libraries: "Institutions of the Highest Educational Value"', in Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, eds, *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market* (St. Lucia: Queensland University Press, 2001), esp. pp.171-73.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the Corporation's new priorities, see annual reports of the President, CCNY, in Columbia University Special Collections.

⁵¹ For a helpful analysis see G.H. Russell and A. Grenfell Price, 'The University Libraries', in A. Grenfell Price, ed., *The Humanities in Australia: With Special Reference to the Universities* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1959), pp.99-127.