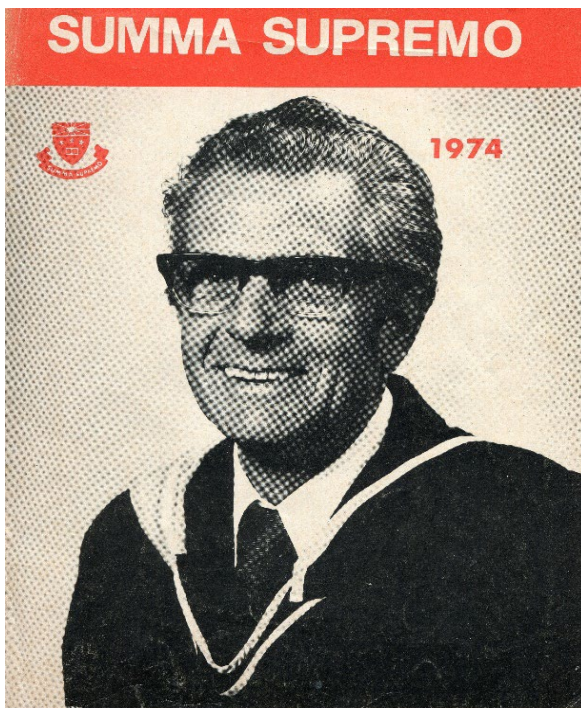




The Gilbert Wright Library - Morling College

By Nerida Halnan
Morling College

As of January 2021, Morling College Library now has branches in Sydney and Perth. Our Sydney branch, the Gilbert Wright Library, is named after Rev. Bramwell Gilbert Wright (1908-1991). Wright served as vice principal of Morling College (then called the Baptist Theological College of NSW) for fifteen years (1949-1964), then as principal for a further ten years (1964-1974).



Principal Wright on the cover of *Summa Supremo*,
the College magazine, in 1974

Gilbert Wright

Wright was born in Adelaide in 1908 to two Salvation Army officers; the family then moved first to Queensland, then to Newcastle.¹ He showed early academic ability as dux of both his high school and technical college, before receiving a BHP scholarship to study an Electrical Engineering Trades course.² This practical experience and mindset were invaluable assets to the Baptist Theological College of NSW in future years.

After working as an electrical fitter, Wright was called to join the Salvation Army. He trained as an officer in 1931 and served until 1937, when he left over theological concerns and growing Baptist convictions. Wright's time with the Salvation Army gave him experience in preaching and leading worship, as well as ministering to a variety of people

¹ E. Ron Rogers, "Bramwell Gilbert Wright: Principal, 1964-1974," *Summa Supremo* (1974): 2.

² Bruce Thornton, ed., *Making their mark: NSW/ACT Baptist biographies* (Macquarie Park: Greenwood Press, 2012), 294.



– his service took him from Sydney’s slums to New England’s sheep shearers and North QLD’s cane cutters and cattlemen.³

Wright then served with the Baptist Home Mission in Maitland for two years (1938-39) before enrolling in the Baptist Theological College in Ashfield.⁴ As a married first-year student, Wright was assigned to ministry at Epping Baptist Church.

Wright was ordained in 1943 and called by Epping Baptist as their full-time pastor.⁵ His ministry there emphasised preaching, evangelism and prayer; he also spoke out against the horrors of war. Wright encouraged ecumenical prayer meetings, missionary involvement, and women in ministry positions.⁶

During his time studying at college and pastoring at Epping, Wright also found time to complete his BA (awarded in 1944), then his BD in 1946, both through London University by external study.⁷ He later received his MA from the University of Sydney in 1953 for work on the history of the Baptists in NSW.⁸

When Wright was called to Manly in 1947, the church in Epping was “saddened but not unduly surprised.”⁹ His ministry at Manly was cut short, however, as he was appointed vice principal of the Baptist Theological College of NSW in 1949.

As vice principal, Wright had both lecturing and administrative responsibilities. He had been lecturing in Greek, church history, ethics and philosophy in an honorary capacity since 1945. The principal at the time, G.H. Morling, was a man of great spiritual depth, highly respected by all, but lacking in administrative ability or inclination: Wright was considered Morling’s “perfect balance” and was the college’s practical mainstay.¹⁰

The years from 1949-1964 saw significant changes in the College. New courses were introduced, existing courses became more practical, plans were made to move the college from Ashfield to a larger site (eventually settling in Eastwood, now Macquarie Park), and the library was increasingly given funding, with plans for a dedicated building on the new site. Throughout all this, Wright lectured, oversaw deputation and administration, and made sure the College could meet its financial obligations.¹¹ He also reorganised the library. During these years, Wright travelled long distances, visiting hundreds of local churches, to keep the College afloat financially.¹²

Principal Morling retired in 1960. Wright remained as vice principal under Roberts-Thompson until 1964, when he was elected the next principal.

³ Harold W. Gow and Ken R. Manley, *People with a purpose: Epping Baptist Church, 1933-1983* (Epping: Epping Baptist Church, 1983), 29; “Introducing our new Vice-Principal,” *Summa Supremo, Journal of the NSW Baptist Theological College*, March 1950.

⁴ Thornton, *Making their mark*, 295.

⁵ E. Ron Rogers, *George Henry Morling: ‘Our beloved principal’* (Macquarie Park: Greenwood Press, 2014), 182; Thornton, *Making their mark*, 295.

⁶ Gow and Manley, *People with a purpose*, 28-29, 31-33.

⁷ Thornton, *Making their mark*, 295.

⁸ Rogers, “Bramwell Gilbert Wright,” 3.

⁹ Gow and Manley, *People with a purpose*, 33.

¹⁰ Vic Eldridge, *For the Highest: A history of Morling College* (Macquarie Park: Greenwood Press, 2015), 113-114, 163.

¹¹ Eldridge, *For the Highest*, 190-191.

¹² Rogers, “Bramwell Gilbert Wright,” 3.

Wright's principalship was a decade of relative peace and confidence. He was known and trusted by the students, faculty and wider church.¹³ During his time as principal, postgraduate studies were fostered, and relationships with Macquarie University developed, as well as new courses in pastoral studies.¹⁴ Wright also spent a period of study leave in the USA in 1972 and came back with ideas that pushed the College's educational thinking forward. One flow-on effect of this was to develop the library.

Gilbert Wright retired in 1974 and was given the title "Principal Emeritus" in honour of his service to the College: *The Australian Baptist* estimated that 60% of the 250 accredited Baptist ministers serving in 1974 had studied under Wright.¹⁵ He was remembered as a warm friend and wise counsellor to both students and staff, a spiritual guide, and a teacher.¹⁶

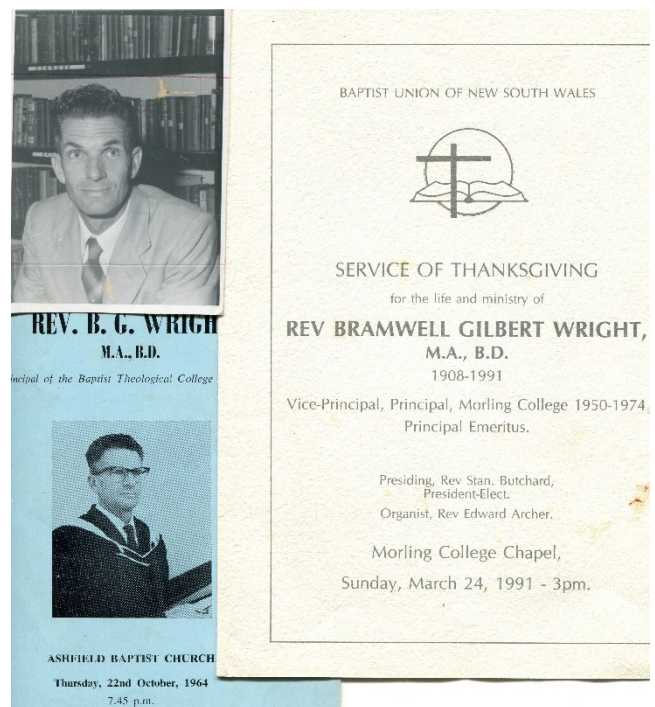
Wright died in 1991 at the Shalom Centre in Macquarie Park.

The Gilbert Wright Library

When the College moved to Macquarie in 1961, a dedicated library space was built; however, by 1975 that space was already too small, and there were calls to double its footprint. 1976 saw calls for better lighting, more books, heating, and quiet study facilities. Again, in 1977, there were calls for upgrades to the library space. In 1980, Ryde Council approved plans for a new library building (and classrooms), which was opened in 1981 as the Gilbert Wright Library.¹⁷

At this point, the library was still run by students, although the need for professional staff was becoming obvious. Computers were introduced in late 1990, along with the first full-time library employee. The first qualified library staff was hired soon after that, for three days a week; the first full-time professional librarian was hired in 2001. "The library was now a fully professional and modern resource."¹⁸

In December 2016, library staff began the move from Pettee to Library of Congress Classification. Pettee had served the theological collection well, but Morling's growing education and counselling departments needed a system



Wright in his office; orders of service from his ordination and memorial services.

¹³ Eldridge, *For the Highest*, 214.

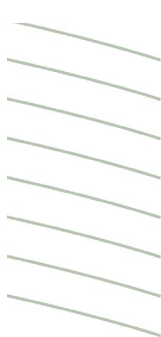
¹⁴ Rogers, "Bramwell Gilbert Wright," 3.

¹⁵ Eldridge, *For the Highest*, 214.

¹⁶ Thornton, *Making their mark*, 296.

¹⁷ Eldridge, *For the Highest*, 227-228.

¹⁸ Eldridge, *For the Highest*, 308.



that was updated to include modern concerns. At the time of writing (June 2021), this project is nearly complete. November 2019 saw the library move to a new building and space with a condensed collection, the remainder kept in Stack in the old building.

Today, the Gilbert Wright Library holds 26,000 physical books (plus 16,000 in Stack), with collections in Chinese and Korean, serving over 700 borrowers in Sydney and all over the world. Wright would be proud to see his vision continue.

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