



# The Donald Robinson Library, Moore Theological College

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The Donald Robinson Library at Moore College is the largest single theological library in Australia and New Zealand, and one of the most significant libraries in the reformed evangelical Anglican tradition anywhere in the world. The Library has always been a core resource for the College's teaching, and a key component of its international reputation. Successive Principals have contributed to the growth of the Library and considered it only second to the faculty in importance to the College's mission.<sup>28</sup>

The College owes its existence to a pious Englishman named Thomas Moore, who began his colonial career as ship's carpenter and master boatbuilder, and was then granted a portion of land in Liverpool. He became a sheep farmer, magistrate, benefactor of St Luke's Church, Liverpool, and foundation member of both the Bank of New South Wales and the NSW Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society. His wife Rachel had been a Second Fleet convict, and although she had a son from a previous relationship with First Fleet surgeon John White, she and Thomas had no children together. He therefore bequeathed his estate to the Church of England, for the foundation of a college for "Boys or Youths of the Protestant

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<sup>28</sup> D. Broughton Knox, *Principal's Report to the College Committee*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1971. MTC Committee Minutes, series 002-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

Persuasion”.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Moore died in 1840, and it was not until 1856 that the College was founded thanks to the leadership of Bishop Frederic Barker.



*Figure 1: Moore College, Liverpool, circa 1880s. Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.*

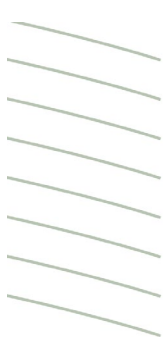
The Library began modestly in 1856 when the College opened with three students in the home of Thomas Moore in Liverpool, NSW. Later that year, plans for further building work, including a dedicated library space, were approved by the trustees.<sup>30</sup> However, this work was delayed for several years, and in 1865 the Principal William Hodgson donated £100 and loaned a further £200 of his own money to build the dining hall and library.<sup>31</sup> He also started gathering donations of books.

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in M.L. Loane, *A centenary history of Moore Theological College* (Angus & Robertson, 1955), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Loane, *Centenary History*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Loane, *Centenary History*, 25.



A substantial number of books were donated by Oxford University Press in 1872, thanks to the influence of the Bishop of Sydney Frederic Barker, who also paid for the books to be bound.<sup>32</sup>

During the Principalship of Arthur Lukyn Williams (1878-1884), growth of the Library became a priority. When he arrived at the College the Library held around 1,500 books. Williams appealed to Synod in 1879 for donations, and over the next year received £25 and 500 volumes. He kept up his appeal in his Synod report for 1882: “We need ... our library much more full of recent books; we need more magazines, both secular and religious”.<sup>33</sup>

After the College moved to Newtown in 1891, the struggle for adequate funding for the library continued. Principal Bernard Schleicher wrote that the library was deficient in recent publications, but that he hoped to be able to buy more books with the proceeds of selling the chapel organ.<sup>34</sup>

The Moore College branch of the Australian Student Christian Movement had their own section of the library, primarily devotional books.<sup>35</sup> The Sydney Diocesan Education and Book Society made regular donations to the College to buy textbooks. In 1933, Mrs Dorothy Wright gave the College 500 books from her late husband, Archbishop John Charles Wright. During the Second World War, the Library was transferred to Springwood for safekeeping.

Efforts were made in the late 1940s to extend the card catalogue, stock take and classify the collection. A printed circular was sent in 1946 to clergy who had graduated in the previous 10 years, requesting them to take a look at their bookshelves and check for Library books they had taken home and never returned! It also stated that the Library was, for the first time, to be classified according to the Dewey Decimal System, as it was “accepted as standard in most libraries in the English-speaking world.”<sup>36</sup>

The Librarian in 1948 produced a procedural memorandum outlining how the Library operated. It began, “this Creed is useful information for future Librarians”, and its first section was titled, ‘The Adventures of a Book’, containing instructions on sorting and labelling. It concluded, “any zealous student ... may be

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<sup>32</sup> Loane, *Centenary History*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Loane, *Centenary History*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Loane, *Centenary History*, 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Societas*, Lent 1929, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Circular, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1946. Series O10-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

persuaded to stamp the books or dust them. This job may be regarded as equivalent to penal servitude for life, but it MUST be done.”<sup>37</sup>

The construction of the dining room building in 1960-1961 provided more space for the Library. Staff and students spent several years in the early 1960s cataloguing the books, which were moved into the T.C. Hammond room, a lecture room adjacent to the dining hall. Students used the disruption of this process to make mischief and barricaded fellow students’ rooms and bathrooms with empty bookcases (the books being piled on the floor!).<sup>38</sup>



*Figure 2: Library service desk, circa 1960s. Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.*

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<sup>37</sup> *Moore Theological College Library, March 1948*. Series 011-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

<sup>38</sup> N.K.M. “The Bookcase Conspiracy”, *Societas*, 1958, 25.

In 1961, the CENEF (Church of England National Emergency Fund) Memorial Building in Castlereagh St was sold, and the CENEF library books transferred to Moore College.<sup>39</sup>

Two major donations were made to the Library in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which cemented its place as a leading theological Library. Firstly, the Sydney Diocesan Library closed down in the 1950s, and the books were transferred to the College. This collection included the 'Port Jackson Lending Library', a collection of books brought out by Rev Samuel Marsden in 1809, and the Cruden's Concordance belonging to First Fleet chaplain Richard Johnson. It also included the books sent to Australia in response to an appeal sent out by Bishop Broughton in 1836, for books for the colonial clergy. Some of these books are now the finest in the collection – a 1473 edition of St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, the first edition of the Authorized (King James) Bible, and a 1684 edition of the *Works* of St Jerome donated by Rev John Henry Newman.

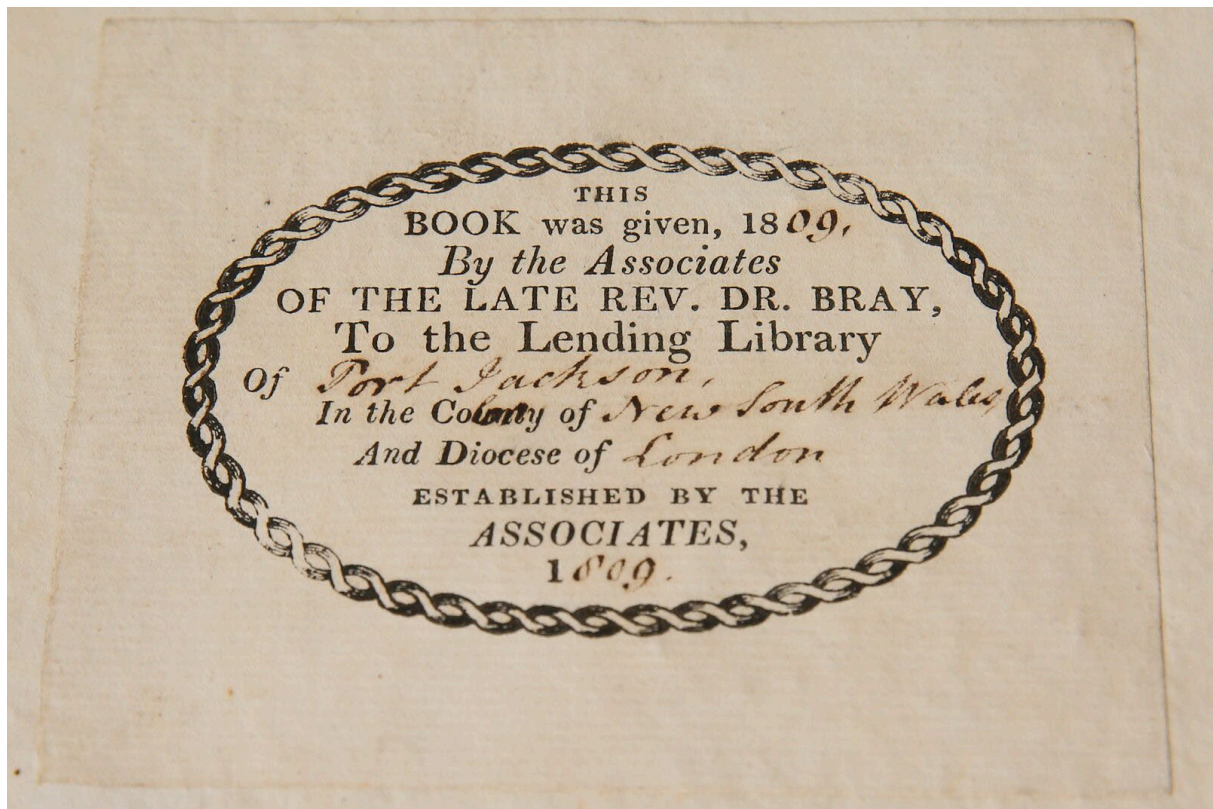
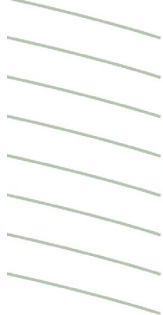


Figure 3: Bookplate of the Port Jackson Lending Library, 1809. Moore College Library.

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<sup>39</sup> *Societas*, 1962-1963, 4.



Secondly, avid book collector Douglas Campbell Tilghman (d. 1970) bequeathed his Australiana collection to the Library, requesting that it be named after his mother-in-law Margaretta Mary Woodriff, a descendant of colonial naval officer and landowner Daniel Woodriff.<sup>40</sup>

Until the 1970s, the Librarian of the College was a faculty member, assisted by typists and students. Rev Noel Pollard and Margaret Chivers oversaw the publication in 1973 of the *Catalogue of the Bishop Broughton Memorial Library*, a short title catalogue of the pre-1700 imprints. Donald Robinson, Vice Principal of the College at the time, gave significant assistance to the project.<sup>41</sup>

A ‘Moore College Library General Progress Report’ produced in 1974 by the Library Committee for the College Committee provides a general picture of the Library at this point in time. It consisted of the Main Library, a smaller Lending Library, the Bishop Broughton Memorial Library (rare books) and the Margaretta Mary Woodriff Memorial Library (Australiana). Gifts of books from Bishop John Stoward Moyes and Archbishop M.L. Loane are mentioned as major recent acquisitions. A list of recommendations for the improvement of the Library shows that despite changes in technology, the primary aims and concerns of theological librarians have not changed: acquisitions, space staffing and ‘reader education’. “As information retrieval becomes more complex, even in theology, a corresponding increase is needed in the systematic instruction given to users of a Library if they are to obtain maximum benefit from the available material and make the most efficient use of the time and facilities.”<sup>42</sup>

Principal Broughton Knox advocated strongly for the growth of the Library and increased its funding. In the mid-1970s, the first qualified librarian was appointed, Kim Robinson. He oversaw the substantial growth of the print collection over several decades, as well as the purchase of the first library computer in 1991.<sup>43</sup> The Library has been a member of the Australian and New Zealand Theological Library Association

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<sup>40</sup> *Proposal concerning the bequest of books from D.C. Tilghman for Library Committee, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1971*. Library Committee Minutes, Series O11-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

<sup>41</sup> N.S. Pollard and Margaret J. Chivers, *The Short Title Catalogue of the Bishop Broughton Memorial Library* (Moore College Library, 1973), vi.

<sup>42</sup> *Moore College Library General Progress Report, September 1974*. Moore College Library Committee minutes. Series O11-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

<sup>43</sup> Library executive meeting minutes, 19 March 1991. Series O11-1, Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.

since its establishment in 1986. Julie Olston, Library Manager from 2005-2019, led the Library into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the expansion of databases and online content.

In 2017, Moore College opened a new Library and Administration building at 1 King St Newtown, after many decades of praying and planning for a library space that was fit for purpose. Principal Mark Thompson named the Library after Donald Robinson, lecturer and Vice-Principal at Moore College.



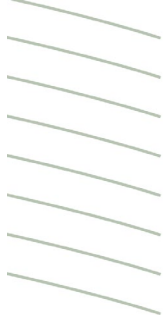
*Figure 4: Interior of new Library, 2017. Moore Theological College.*

Donald William Bradley Robinson AO (1922-2018) was born in Lithgow and studied at Sydney University and Queens' College Cambridge. During WWII, he was involved in military intelligence. Though originally with the Artillery in Newcastle, he was recommended by his Greek professor to the Central Bureau of Military Intelligence to work with the codebreakers in Brisbane.<sup>44</sup> After ordination in 1950, he

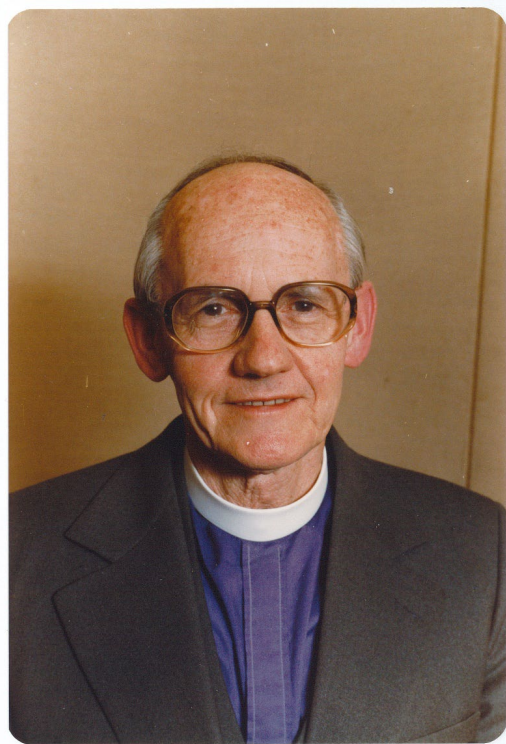
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<sup>44</sup> Shiner, Rory. "D.W.B. Robinson and the puzzle of Sydney Anglicanism" ABC Religion and Ethics, accessed 25 March 2026:

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/dwb-robinson-and-the-puzzle-of-sydney-anglicanism/10239100>



served in parish work in St Matthew's Church, Manly and St Philip's Church, Sydney. He then lectured at Moore College and served as Vice-Principal until his consecration as Bishop of Parramatta in 1973. He was elected Archbishop of Sydney and Metropolitan of NSW in 1982, a position he held until 1993. His work on the nature of the church, along with that of Moore College Principal D. Broughton Knox (1916-1994), have together become known as the 'Knox-Robinson ecclesiology' and are a cornerstone of Sydney Anglican doctrine. Robinson was also a leading figure in the development of *An Australian Prayer Book*, published in 1978.



*Figure 5: D. W.B. Robinson. Samuel Marsden Archives, Moore College.*

In 2019, Robinson's own heavily annotated books and extensive personal archive were also donated to the Library. Donald Robinson had a significant role in setting the trajectory of the Library towards the world-class resource it is today, and his approach to biblical theology remains at the heart of the College's teaching.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Mark D. Thompson, "Donald William Bradley Robinson (1922-2018): A tribute" in *Donald Robinson: Selected Works Volume 4*, ed. Edward Loane. (Australian Church Record, 2018), x.