



Geoffrey Thomas Roscoe: A Remarkable Man

By *Eve James*

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As you have heard, I work at the Roscoe Library at St Francis College. This lightning talk is a glimpse into the life of Geoffrey Thomas Roscoe after whom the library is named.

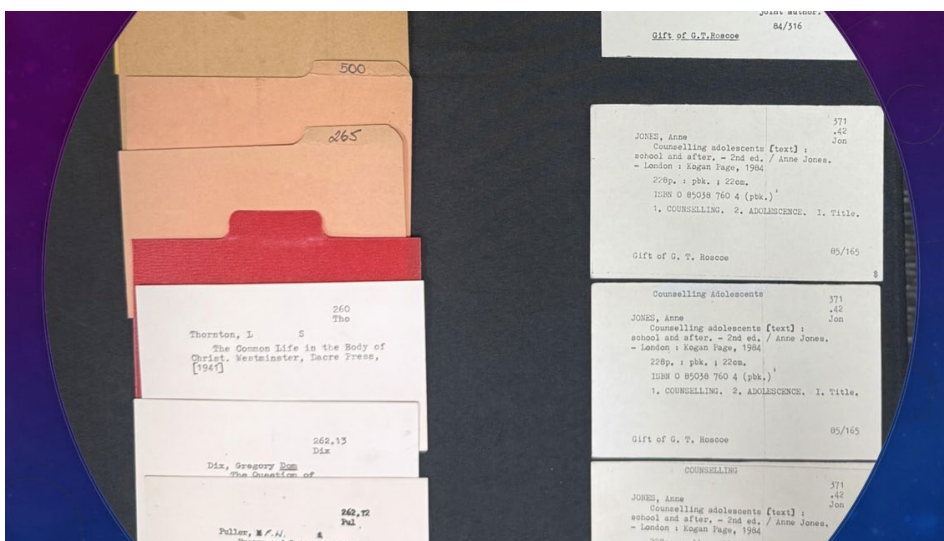
An Anglican theological college has existed in Brisbane since the end of the 19th century. It began in Wickham Terrace in the city, moved to the northside suburb of Nundah in the early 20th century and then

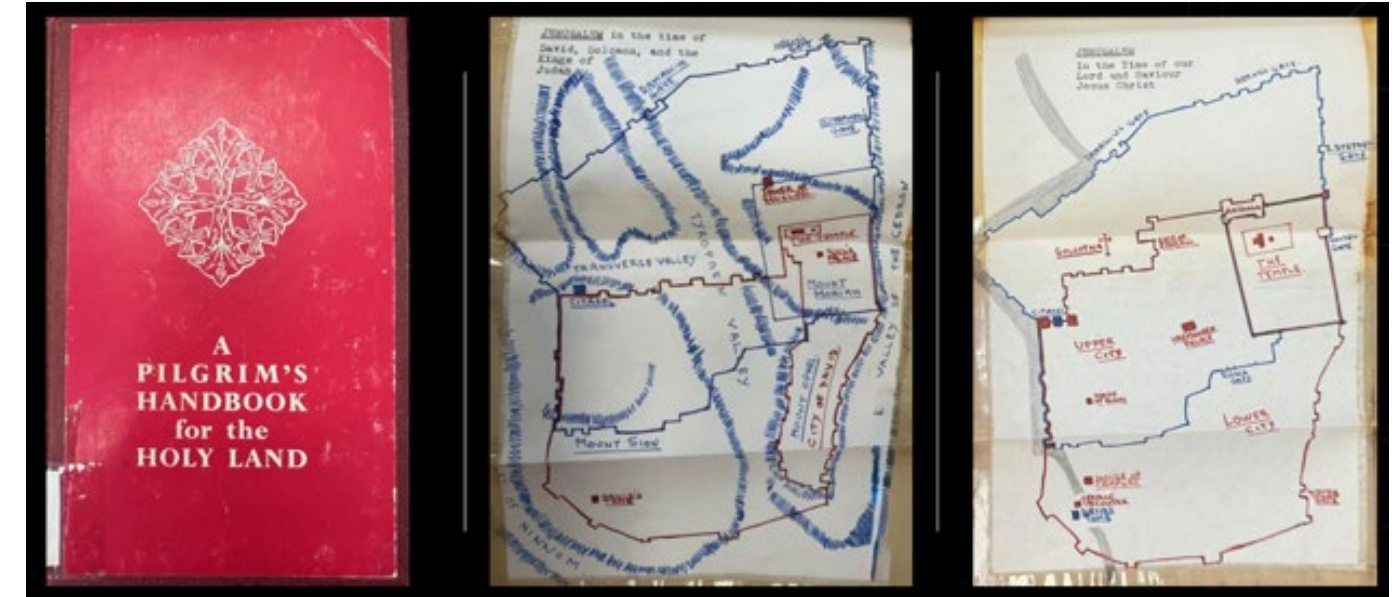
to its current location as St Francis College at Milton during the 1930s. The College has always had a library, but it was Mr Roscoe who was responsible for its greatest transformation. In recognition of this, on October 5th 1985, a plaque was placed at the entrance to this library, which reads: “The Roscoe Library is named in thanksgiving to God for the life of Geoffrey Thomas Roscoe and for his unique ministry as Librarian of St Francis College from 1975 – 1985”.



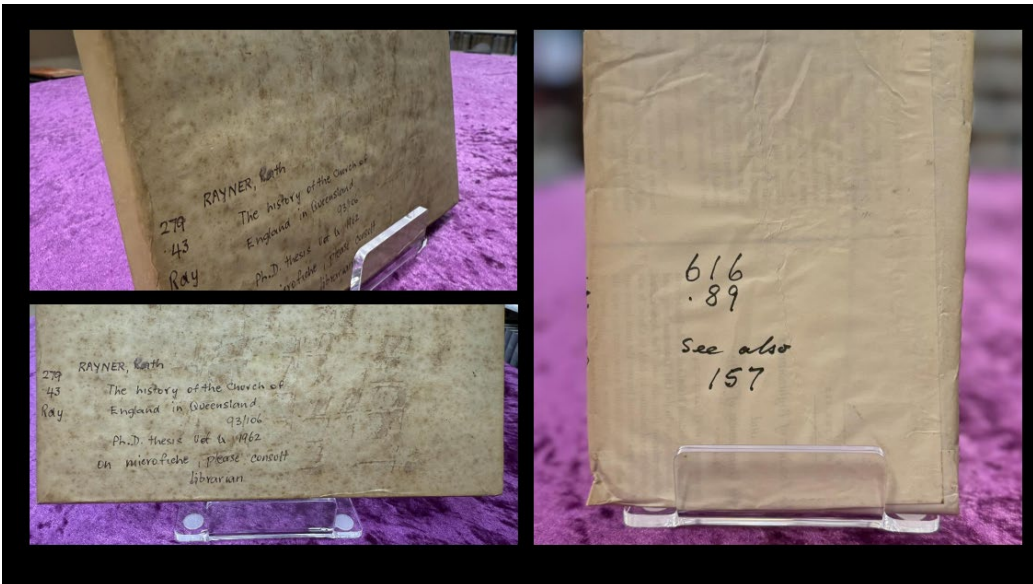
Geoffrey Thomas Roscoe was born in 1900, which makes calculation of his age at significant events particularly easy. He had a distinguished career in education, beginning in one-teacher schools in Queensland and retiring as Director of Education in Papua New Guinea in 1962. After his retirement, he travelled extensively in Europe and then returned to education on the south side of Brisbane, that is, until the administration of the school discovered how old he was. Not to be deterred, in the year that he turned 75, Mr Roscoe began his librarianship studies. This involved classes four nights per week over two years. It was at this time that he began volunteering at the library at St Francis College.

Reflecting on her time working alongside Mr Roscoe, Mrs Margaret Leditschke notes: “He set about cataloguing, enlarging the scope from author and title and adding subject headings not forgetting the shelf list. He divided the catalogue and began a vertical file of ephemeral material. With a small hand press, he printed the cards himself. If shelving was needed, he made some. He set up a self-administered borrowing system allowing 6 items, but he was very flexible to keen readers”.





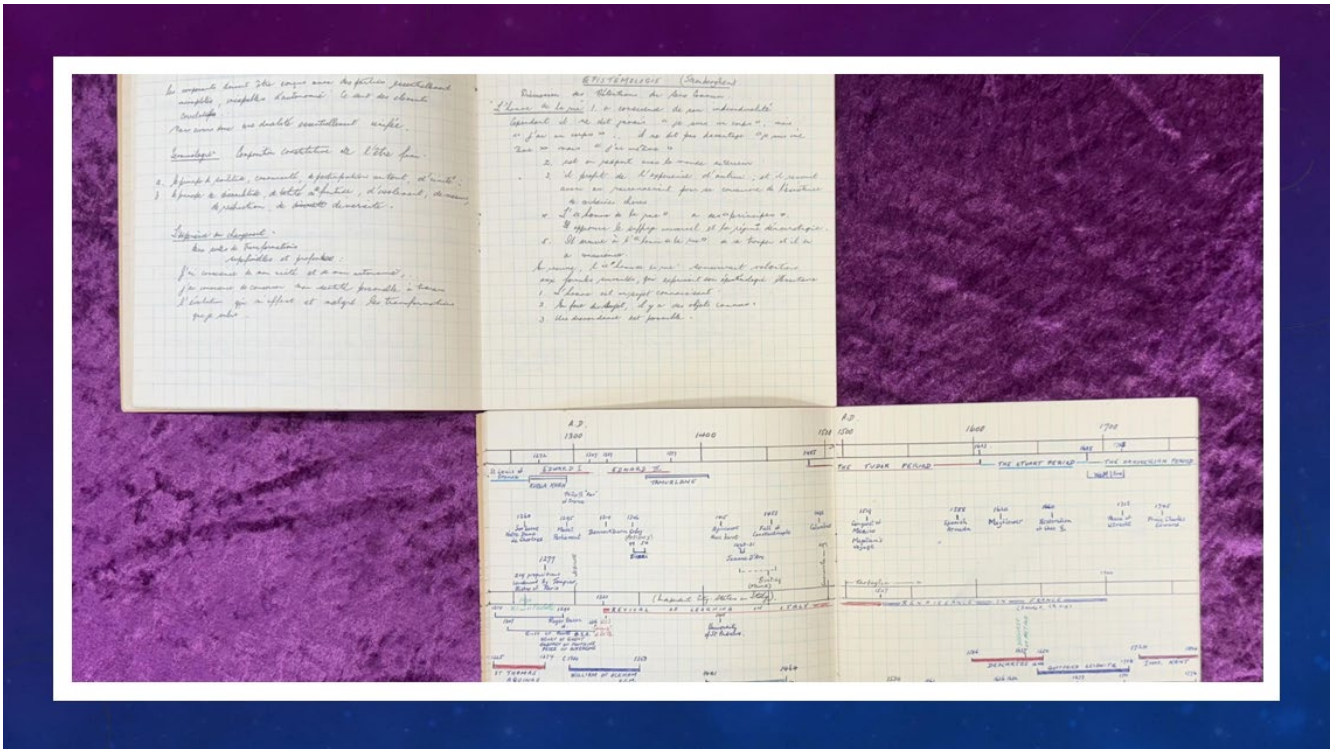
Apart from physically building whatever was needed for the smooth running of the library, we have numerous examples of ways in which Mr Roscoe would try to enhance the educational experience of the students. In this published book, Mr Roscoe has added two of his own hand-drawn maps to augment what was already there.



As soon as he was able, Mr Roscoe introduced items in microfiche format. Access to these items was provided by the librarian, so placeholders were used to raise awareness of their existence.

Prior to electronic catalogues where you can *manage related resources* to draw attention to other items that might be helpful for your research, Mr Roscoe created placeholders to direct readers to other useful shelf numbers.

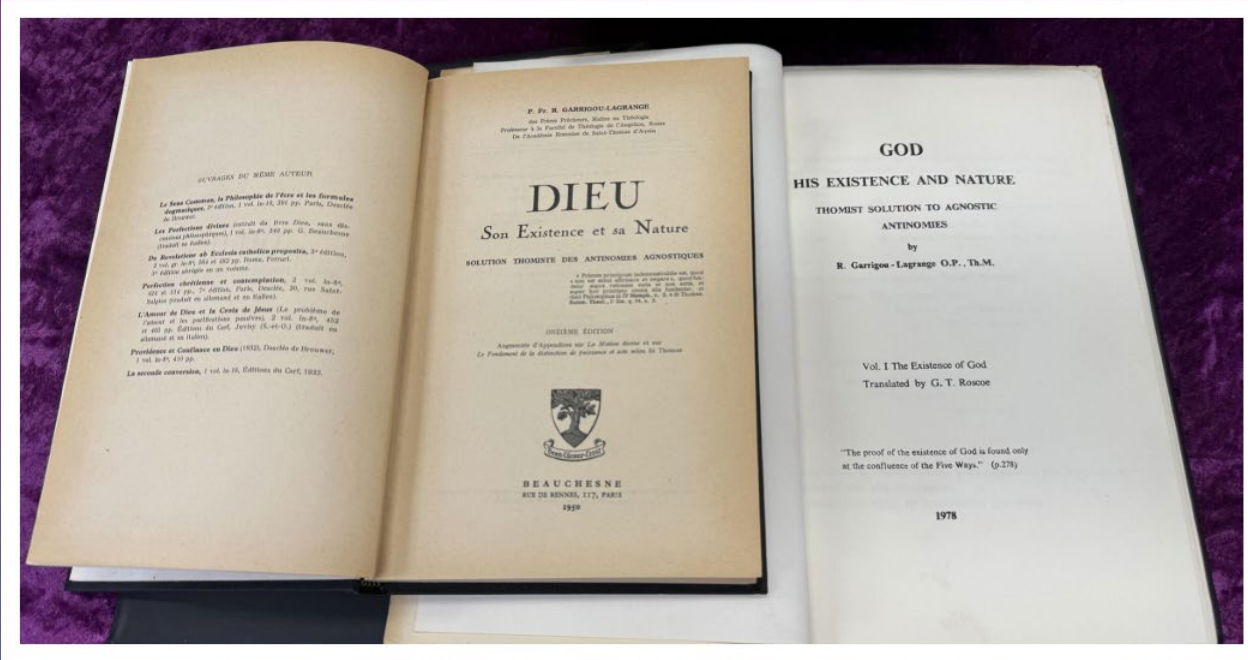
Mr Roscoe was proficient in several languages. Apart from English, we know of Italian (from his time teaching in Queensland schools), Pidgin English and some Dutch (from Papua New Guinea), Biblical Hebrew and Greek, German, and we hold translations of his from French and Latin, including some that you will be shown soon.



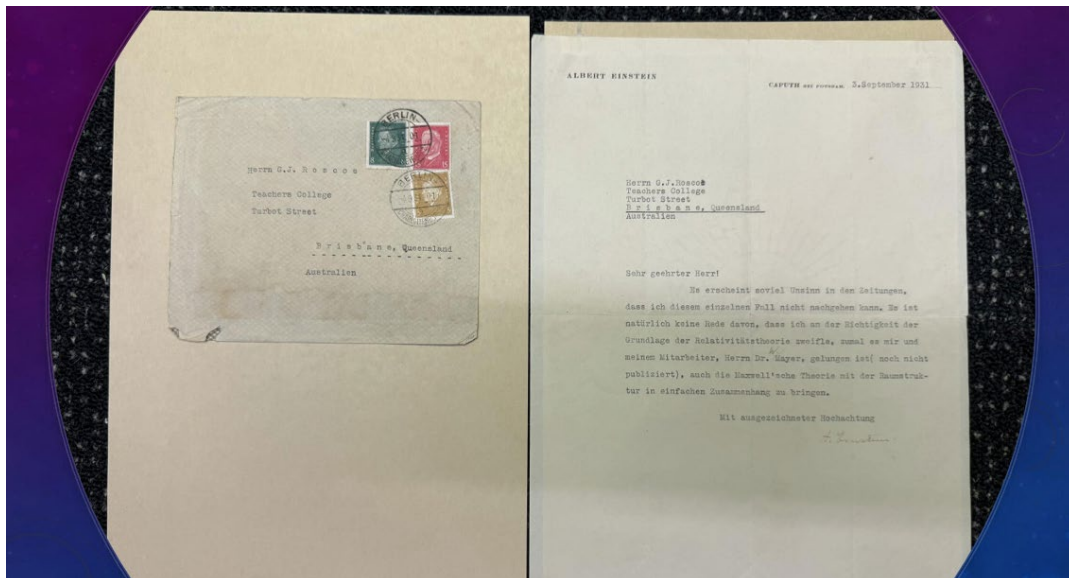
These books are from when Mr Roscoe returned to the University of Queensland in 1964 to study philosophy. They show his handwritten notes in French, German, Latin and Greek, as well as English. They also include musical notation and a timeline of Western philosophy.

In the Diocesan Archives we have a letter from December 1977 that Mr Roscoe wrote to Sir Philip Nigel Warrington Strong who was serving as Archbishop of Brisbane; Sir Philip and Mr Roscoe had become friends during their time together in Papua New Guinea.

In part the letter reads, "I have now completed two years as Honorary Librarian at St Francis' College. I have been very happy there, and I think the Principal and the students are satisfied with my work. At least they say so".



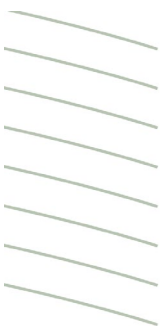
Later in the letter, he writes: “The best existing work on the “five proofs” of the existence of God is Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu, Son Existence et Sa Nature*. I ordered a copy for St Francis' Library and received it just at the beginning of the vacation. It is in French, and our students cannot read French. No English translation is available. So, I set my teeth and started on the long job of producing an English translation.”



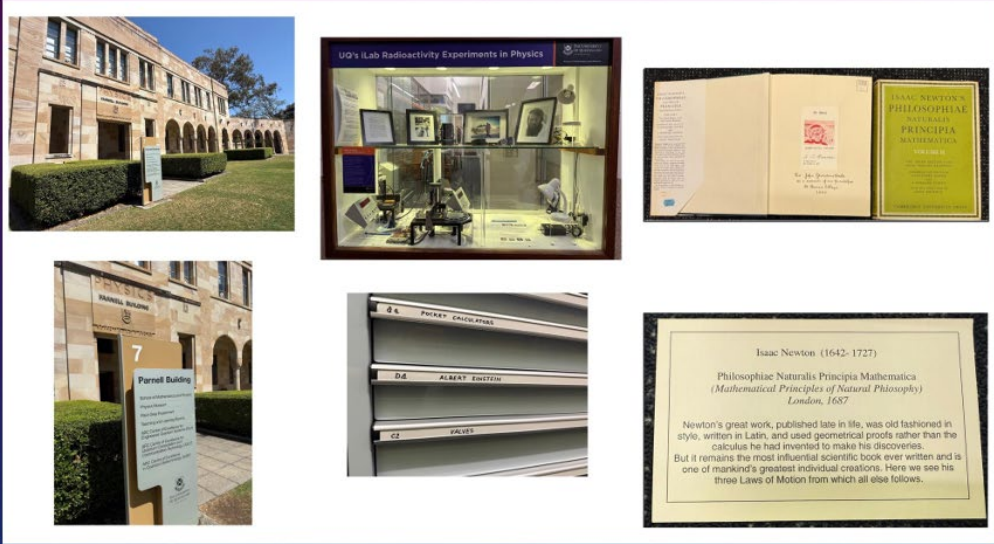
There are numerous stories of Mr Roscoe, but the anecdote that most captures people's attention, is that, in 1931, in response to a letter that he had written, Mr Roscoe received a response from Albert Einstein!!! In April 2007, his friend The Rev'd Canon John Steele, gave the library a copy of this letter and its envelope. The letter was in German; I shall read Albert Einstein's letter, using the translation provided by John Steele:



“So much nonsense appears in the newspapers that I cannot trace this instance. There is naturally no question of my doubting the accuracy of the basis of the Relativity Theory especially as Dr W Mayer, my fellow-worker, and I have succeeded (not yet published) in bringing the Maxwellian Theory also into simple agreement with space-structure.”



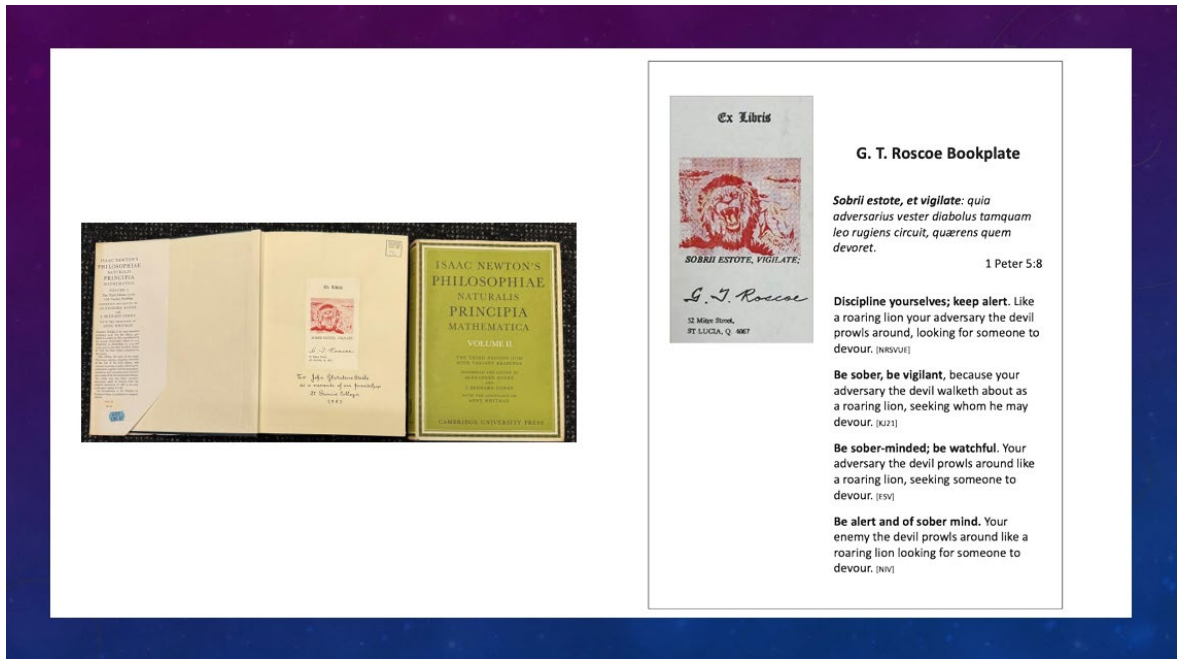
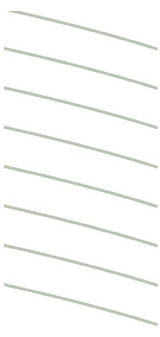
The Physics Museum, The University of Queensland, is where the original letter from Albert Einstein, together with Mr Roscoe's facsimile edition (Latin) of Newton's *Principia*, have been deposited.



To receive a letter from Albert Einstein is amazing, but there is more. John Steele's accompanying note reads:

“Geoffrey Roscoe gave me the originals of these items which I later deposited in the Physics Museum, University of Queensland, along with his facsimile edition (Latin) of Newton's *Principia*”.

In late September I arranged to visit the Physics Museum to see these original items, and to obtain a cleaner copy of Einstein's letter as ours had been wet when the roof leaked. Although the letter was precisely where their catalogue indicated, I am indebted to Dr Gil Toombes for the time and effort he placed into finding Newton's *Principia*.



When located, there was no doubt that it was Mr Roscoe's copy as it had his very familiar bookplate in the front. Gil asked whether we have a copy of what Mr Roscoe had sent to Einstein; he was intrigued with what might have been in the newspapers to prompt the correspondence and had already done some preliminary investigation. I am now also very interested and plan to look into this when time allows.

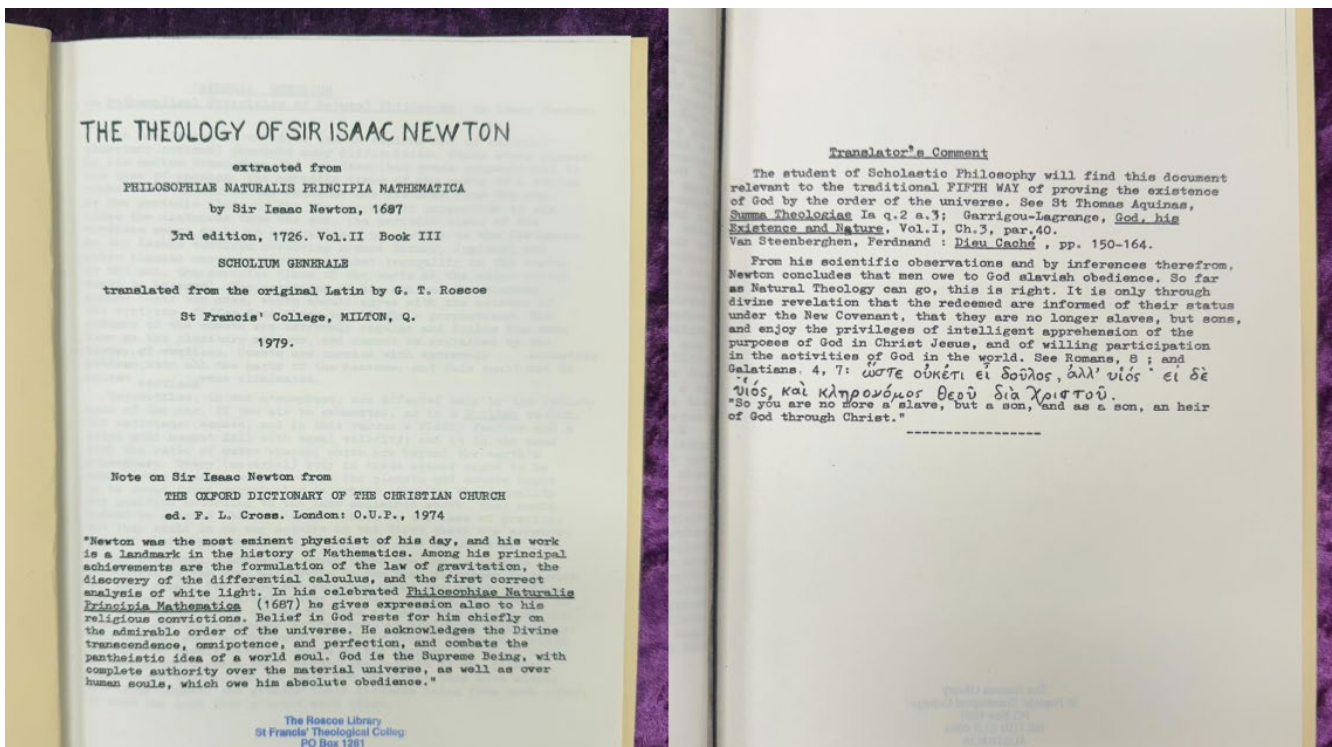
Isaac Newton (1642- 1727)

Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica
(Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy)
 London, 1687

Newton's great work, published late in life, was old fashioned in style, written in Latin, and used geometrical proofs rather than the calculus he had invented to make his discoveries. But it remains the most influential scientific book ever written and is one of mankind's greatest individual creations. Here we see his three Laws of Motion from which all else follows.

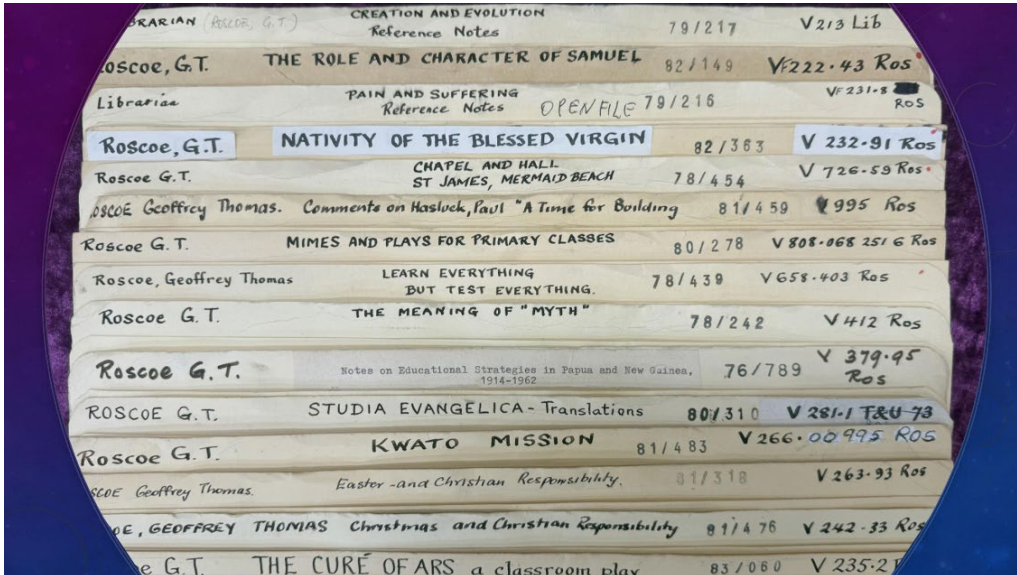
When the *Principia* was on display at the museum, its reference card noted:

“Newton’s great work, published late in life, was old fashioned in style, written in Latin, and used geometrical proofs rather than the calculus he had invented to make his discoveries. But it remains the most influential scientific book ever written and is one of mankind’s greatest individual creations. Here we see his three Laws of Motion from which all else follows.”



We have Mr Roscoe’s translation of part of this Latin text, focusing on the theology of Isaac Newton. Mr Roscoe’s comments in his translator’s notes clearly show why this work was of such importance to him: “The student of Scholastic Philosophy will find this document relevant to the traditional FIFTH WAY of proving the existence of God by the order of the universe”. He then directs students to St Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, Garrigou-Lagrange’s, *God, his Existence and Nature* and another work in French, before summarising, including references from Romans and Galatians, in Greek.

This is a wonderful example of our conference theme of *Echoes of the Past ... Creating Stories for the Future*. Here, Mr Roscoe drew on the work of Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, St Thomas Aquinas, Garrigou-Lagrange and ancient Biblical texts to offer something rich and accessible for others who follow.



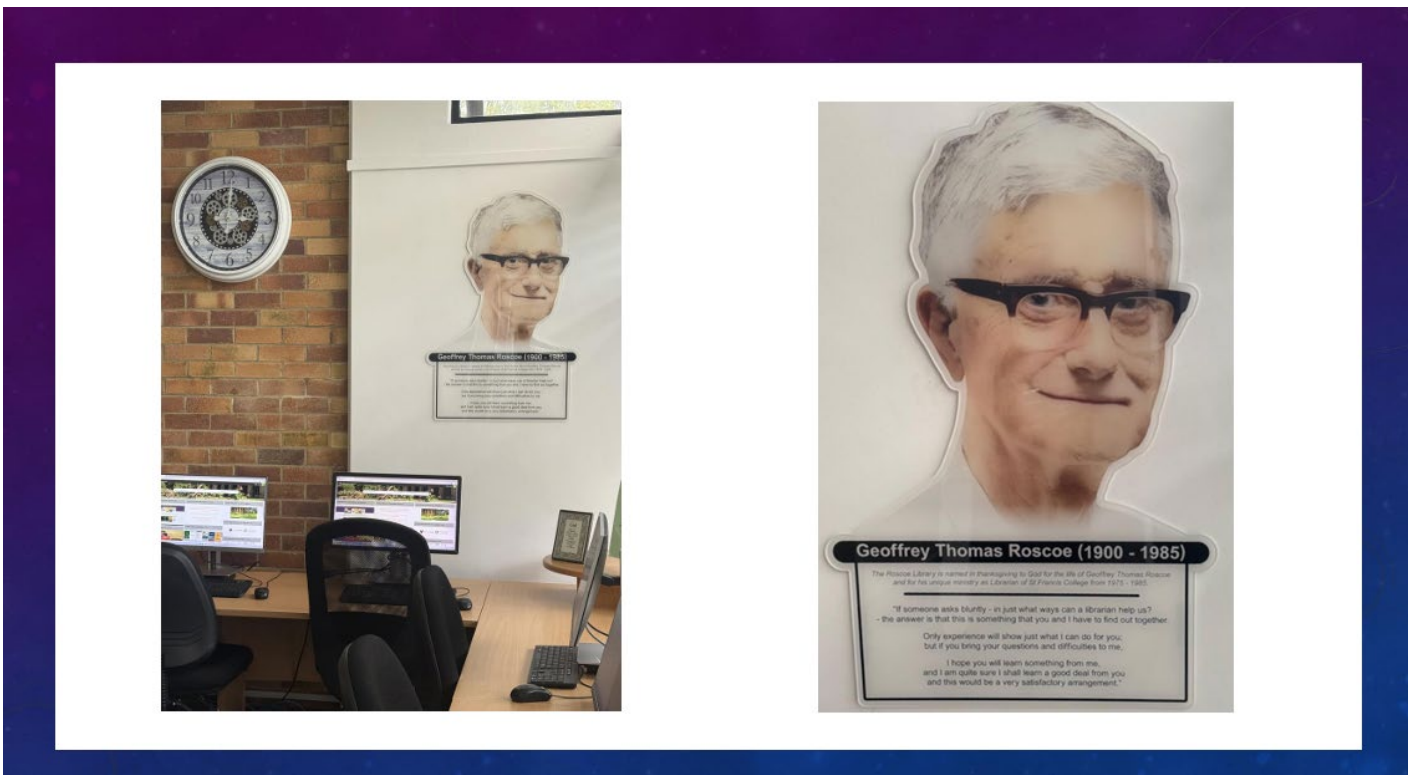
Mr Roscoe also loved to write; the library holds copies of speeches, plays and essays that we've not yet had an opportunity to consider. Each of these items tells a story. They do not, however, tell the whole story of this remarkable man. This image is of items written by Mr Roscoe held in our vertical file.



This year, 50 years from when Mr Roscoe began at the library and 40 years since it was named in his honour, we gathered to celebrate. These are members of Mr Roscoe's family, with Margaret Leditschke, now 92! From her presentation at this event, we hear more about the person of Mr Roscoe:

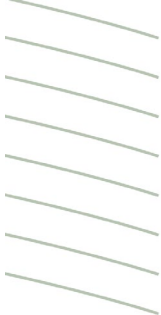
“He loved to talk to students, and he had all day, but they did not, so it was always a balance between politeness and other demands. He was very interested in all students. As he had a background in philosophy, he felt that all students would benefit from a study of this, then they ‘wouldn’t make such foolish statements, Mrs. Leditschke’”.

Mr Roscoe was the true scholar. He would come from a service in the chapel and open several translations of the Bible when he found what was read in chapel caused him to question. He certainly raised his eyebrows if someone relied on one translation, or even one language as the definitive standard.”



We added a new artwork to the wall of the Roscoe Library to mark this special anniversary. Some of you may recognize the work of Merchandising Libraries who produced this for us. It incorporates Mr Roscoe’s image, the words from the plaque at the entrance to the library, and a quote from him:

“If someone asks bluntly – in just what ways can a librarian help us? – the answer is that this is something that you and I have to find out together. Only experience will show just what I can do for you; but if you bring your questions and difficulties to me, I hope you will learn something from me, and I am quite sure I shall learn a good deal from you, and this would be a very satisfactory arrangement.”



This remarkable man died on 6 June 1985, having served ten years as Honorary College Librarian. According to Margaret Leditschke, he hoped “that there was a library in heaven as the idea of eternal rest filled him with horror”. A memorial service was held in the College Chapel with the Archbishop of Brisbane, John Grindrod, as celebrant and the Principal of St Francis College, Ivor Church, as preacher – a clear indication of the high esteem in which Geoffrey Thomas Roscoe was held.