The Librarian, his books and his library: the contributions of the first Librarian to the University of Melbourne.

Philip G. Kent, University Librarian, University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Although the University of Melbourne was founded in 1853, it was not until 1892 that the post of Librarian was inaugurated. Edward Hippius Bromby built collections, facilities and services to support the growing curriculum of the remote young university. The paper examines Bromby the person and Librarian, the collections that he assembled and the physical manifestation of the Library on campus. Scarce funding coupled with inadequate student and collection spaces posed particular challenges in the post Gold Rush economy. The paper posits that these environmental factors and the limited response provided by the university were a source of disappointment for the first librarian. While Bromby did not achieve the outcomes he hoped for in library accommodation and collections, he laid the foundation for future developments.

1. Introduction

On the 1st of July 1851, the District of Port Phillip officially became the Colony of Victoria and two weeks later Charles La Trobe was appointed the first Lieutenant-Governor of the fledgling colony. Shortly afterwards the discovery of gold led to a rapid rise in population and wealth. By early 1853 there was a desire to civilise the colony with learning and to improve the moral character of the young town. Consequently legislation was passed to create the University of Melbourne. On 3rd July 1854 Governor La Trobe famously laid the foundation stones for the University and the Melbourne Public Library on the same day.  

Sir Redmond Barry, instrumental in the creation of both institutions as well as the Supreme Court was to play a leading role in the life of all three institutions until his death in 1880. He was elected the first Chancellor of the University on 17 May 1853. Barry’s particular interest in libraries was beneficial at each institution although his lasting legacy was most prominent in the Public Library.

The first four professors arrived early in 1855 and formal classes commenced on 13 April 1855 in the old Exhibition Building ‘long since demolished to make way for the Royal Mint’. In 2013 this is known as the Old Mint building in William Street. The newly constructed University building was not ready for occupation until 3 October 1855.

The University of Melbourne was established as a secular university and did not offer degrees in divinity, although churches were welcomed to establish colleges north of the campus. In the search to appoint the first professors, Scott suggests that: ‘a total abstraction from political or sectarian interference was rigidly enjoined’.

The first four professors were: Henry Erskine Rowe (Greek and Latin Classics and Ancient History); William Parkinson Wilson (Pure and Mixed Mathematics); William Edward Hearn (
Modern History, Modern Literature, Political Economy and Logic; and Frederick McCoy (Natural Sciences). Professor Rowe died soon after arrival and was replaced by Martin Howy Irving in 1856. Each of the professors brought their personal libraries with them. Hearn’s two thousand volumes provided props for his lectures that transmitted his ‘infectious love of knowledge’.

The first University Act empowered the University Council to confer the following degrees: Bachelor and Master of Arts; Bachelor and Doctor of Law; Bachelor and Doctor of Music, and Doctor of Philosophy. Initially the only degree offered was the Bachelor of Arts. The University moved quickly to diversify its program, establishing courses in Law in 1857, Engineering in 1861, and Medicine in 1862, for which a new medical building was constructed.

The University’s Council was divided over the wider objectives of the new university. In the conservative view, led by Sir Redmond Barry, the university was to be a civilising influence, bringing classical learning to the young colony. The opposing view of a group of principals from some Melbourne schools argued that the university’s role was to educate a wide number of students in practical subjects. Foley highlights the economic needs of the colonies and demand for ‘trained professional and trades people’. He asserts that while the University of Melbourne was initially established in the liberal model of traditional English and Irish universities ‘it was quickly transformed into an institution for vocational education’. ‘The apparent compromise between the opposing factions was to create vocational courses which included a substantial liberal arts component.’

The Rev Dr John Bromby, first principal of Melbourne Grammar School was one of the public supporters for the admission of women to the university. The first women were admitted in 1881, further evidence of the growth and changing nature of the young university. New Chairs in Science followed including Chemistry in 1882, Biology in 1887 and Natural Philosophy (1889). The Ormond Chair in Music was established in 1891. In 1906, the faculty of Agriculture was established requiring the first professorial appointment in botany. Veterinary Science was established in 1911 to service Melbourne’s population of horses used for transport. However that department declined with the growth of the motorcar. The growth in disciplines required additional academic recruitments and placed pressure on the university’s infrastructure and resources.

Through class and staff lists reproduced in the University Calendar it is possible to estimate the size of the university population in 1889 when Edward Bromby joined the University library.

The table following suggests that the number of students and academics at the time of Bromby’s arrival was small with the main focus on Arts and Medicine.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
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Table 1 The University of Melbourne Student Population by Discipline 1889
In contrast, the data from 1915 when Bromby retired from the University demonstrates that the number of students had grown by 12 times. This included 260 women students. The timetable had expanded with 82 students attending evening lectures. xiii

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<td>Veterinary Science</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1200</strong></td>
<td><strong>170</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 The University of Melbourne Student Population by Discipline 1915

Despite this significant growth in discipline diversity and the large growth in student and faculty numbers, a comparison of the annual accounts provide a concerning snapshot of library expenditure over the time of the first librarian’s career. In 1889 when Edward Bromby joined the university, book expenditure totalled £ 376 and binding costs were £68 totalling £442. xiv The annual accounts for 1915 records expenditure of £ 361 on books and binding costs were not recorded. xv This stagnation in library resources despite the growing needs of the university evidences a pattern of negative events and outcomes that limited Bromby’s career and opportunities which will be revealed through this paper.

2. The First Librarian

2.1 Early Library Responsibility

From the foundation of the University, responsibility for the Library was shared with the roles of Secretary and Registrar. Edward Graves Mayne was appointed Secretary and Registrar in 1853.
He was replaced by John Frederick James in 1856 as Registrar, Secretary and Librarian. Edward FitzHayley a’Beckett, a barrister and son of the Chief Justice Sir William a’Beckett held this multiple role for an extended period from 1864 – 1901 during which the university expanded greatly. xvi

The initial collection of library books was held in a cupboard in the Registrar’s office. According to Scott, the role of Assistant Librarian was created in 1865 when the Library moved out of the registrar’s office into the North Wing. The composite position had become ‘no longer possible with the growth of schools and demands upon the library’. xvii Gallagher suggests that the position of Assistant Librarian was considered a ‘temporary perk, to be granted to a student as a reward for academic success and to assist him in gaining a profession’. xviii This appears to be the case as various assistant librarians attained respected positions such as County Court Judge, headmaster of Wesley College, and Assistant Inspector of Schools. A list of the Officers in Charge of the University Library from instigation to Bromby’s time appears as an Appendix. One noteworthy Assistant Librarian at the University was Thomas Francis Bride (1873-81). His next post was Librarian at the Public Librarian but he maintained his links with the University through his election to the Council in 1887. xix

2.2 The First Librarian’s Background

Edward Hippius Bromby joined as Assistant Librarian in 1889 and was promoted to the role of Librarian in 1892. Edward Bromby’s tenure to 1915 covered an important and fascinating time in the development and growth of the university and the Library.

Administrative Officers of the University of Melbourne 1894.

L-R Rear Edward Bromby (Librarian), Frank Gladish (porter), John Steele Robertson (Medical Librarian), Philip Marchman (Bellringer)

L-R Front John James (Assistant Registrar), Edward a’Beckett (Registrar), Frederick Dickson (Accountant)]

Edward was the son of the same Rev Dr John Bromby who established Melbourne Grammar School and supported entry of women into the University. Edward was number 16 on the Grammar School roll on the opening day in 1858xx. A scholar in his own right, Edward was the
56th person to be awarded a Bachelor of Arts from the University in 1866. Young Bromby then went to Queen’s College, Oxford where he achieved his Bachelor of Arts in 1870. Following Edward’s return to Melbourne he was awarded his Master of Arts in Language and Logic in 1873.

In early Melbourne education in librarianship was limited to ‘inhouse’ training at the Public Library but Bromby’s academic training in Melbourne and Oxford stood him in good stead. A reference from Professor Edward Morris attested that: ‘As he is a graduate of this University and a graduate in honours of Oxford, there is no doubt about his literary qualifications for the library work: but I may add that he possesses a good knowledge of French, and that at the Grammar School he had some experience of library work though on a small scale’.

Bromby’s family history that centred on education, scholarship and church traditions must have prepared him for the academic environment of the University of Melbourne. His father’s prominent role in society and membership of the Council of the University may have created opportunities and contacts that assisted Bromby to settle into the university community. However five years prior to Edward Bromby’s recruitment the Age had accused the University of nepotism. One appointment that attracted criticism was that of Bromby’s brother Robert who held the position of Library Clerk from 1881-84. Edward Bromby’s own academic formation in the early days of the colonial university would have provided a formative and personal experience of the early library and its resources. According to Blainey: ‘The communal centre was the library, where in winter the students worked in black gowns and trencher caps by blazing coal fires’. The diary of a later visit to England reveals Edward Bromby’s affection for his academic life and achievements at Oxford including his college where he rowed and sang.

This experience with world-class learning and the rich academic resources of Oxford may have raised Bromby’s aspirations and expectations of the University of Melbourne.

2.3 Bromby’s Characteristics

Little is recorded about Bromby’s personal characteristics during his career at the university. According to Ernest Scott’s history Bromby’s ‘courtesy and eagerness to assist any student, or any person making researches, were notable.’ Scott added that ‘his industry led him to make corrections in volumes which published lists of errata so that for example such reference works as the Dictionary of National Biography are improved by the emendations made in his characteristically neat script’.

Similar corrections found in other university records create a picture of a librarian with an attention to detail and who valued accuracy and correctness. The University Library Report of 1890 demonstrates Bromby’s indexing in the margins. The Library’s Accession Book from 1901 onwards provides Bromby’s rules on how to keep the register as well as lists of abbreviations to foster consistency. From Bromby’s detailed list making in the Accession Book we learn more about the practices of acquiring library books at that time including six different booksellers and the eleven different styles of binding that were utilised at that time.

The parchment presented to Bromby on his retirement highlights his role in maintaining discipline within the library as: ‘perhaps the most anxious of all duties to a man of sensitive temperament’. Then as now students were vocal about opening hours. A petition of about 100 signatures to the Professorial Board dated 12 July 1899 complained about the
inconvenience caused to students through the closure of the Library between 9 – 10 am and 1 – 2pm during term. They also complained that the general library was closed between 12 noon – 5 pm during the vacation. While there is no evidence of Bromby’s response to the complaints, we know that it was to be sometime before the library staff numbers increased in order to provide greater flexibility in services and opening times such as evening hours.

In summary the limited historical record of Bromby’s demeanour supplemented by his annotations on university records such as the Annual Reports of the Library and the Minutes of the Library Committee provide a picture of Bromby as sensitive and industrious librarian with an orderly disposition.

3. Collections During the Time of the First Librarian

3.1 Status of Collections in 1889

The early library collections at the University were overshadowed by those at the Melbourne Public Library. C. W. Holgate’s Account of the Chief Libraries of Australia and Tasmania reported that: ‘The Melbourne Public Library is the only Library in the Australian Colonies which has yet, so far as I am aware, attracted notice in England’. In the absence of limited comparative evidence from that time, Holgate’s major study published in 1886 is most helpful. The University of Melbourne’s library collections received a positive report in the study. Holgate reported 24,000 volumes in the collection which at that time also included the Library of the Medical School. The contribution of Sir Redmond Barry to collection building at the university was acknowledged by Holgate. The collection was increasing at the rate of 500 volumes a year. Half of the acquisitions were donations, the details of which appear in the Library’s Donation Book instigated in 1873. Professor Hearn is credited for his great benefaction of legal works. Purchased books were funded through nominal annual grant of £400 also reported by Holgate. It was increasing at the rate of 500 volumes a year.

The Library facilities were reported as being well lit, but that changes in temperature were easily felt and that it was not large enough for students or for an increase in books. Holgate reported:

In the early days it was almost entirely devoted to classical and educational works, and maintained rather an exclusive character; this being due to its promoters being anxious that is should not in any way be seen to compete with the Free Public Library; but there is no longer any cause for anxiety on that ground; the two libraries having long since been firmly established, having justified their creation.

Holgate’s account of Sydney University library is useful for comparative reasons, particularly due to the spirit of competition that prevailed between the two young universities. At the time of Holgate’s investigations, Sydney held a smaller collection of 15,000 volumes and the catalogue was reported as ‘a most slovenly piece of work’.

3.2 Financial Pressures

Then as now, senior finance managers in Universities are not always familiar with the vagaries of library purchasing. Responding to a request from the University Accountant, a letter from Bromby in 1896 estimated that the average amount expended on periodicals was about £125pa.
Bromby was quick to point out that some foreign serials are very irregular in price and time of publication and it is impossible to state the sum accurately.xxiv

Records of the Library Committee reveal regular requests for additional funding for the library. It is interesting to note that requests were made formally through senior academics rather than the position of the Librarian. In a letter to the University Council in 1899, Professor Morris, Chairman of the Library Committee reported that: ‘out of the vote of £250 the average expenditure has been for books £70, for periodicals £126, and for binding £46’. Morris continued to argue that: ‘to maintain even a moderate state of efficiency the ten departments of Classics, Modern Languages, History, Law, Mental Philosophy, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Engineering, Biology and Natural Science, requires far more than the insignificant sum of £70’.

In 1899 Professor Morris also requested a special vote of £35 for the:

*urgent need of a new catalogue, which shall keep abreast of modern requirements. The old catalogue begun many years ago is quite worn out, and a new one of some kind must immediately be provided; it is highly desirable that this take the form of a card catalogue, a form which allows of constant addition and easy reference.*xxv

It was during Bromby’s period that the University became aware of the fraud committed by Dickson the accountant. During August 1901 Council learnt that almost £24,000 had been defrauded over a 15 year period. Selleck highlights that in 1900 the university’s total grant was less than £15,000.xxxvi The period after the fraud saw incredible pressure on the University’s budget that may have been the cause of the reduced book vote.

### 3.3 Unnecessary Expenditure?

Again Bromby’s annotations of historical documents provide insight into his views and frustrations. In the early days of the University, Sir Redmond Barry, anxious to increase the collections had arranged for the acquisition of an extensive set of parliamentary papers from England. A letter from the Speaker of the House of Commons in 1862 was annotated on the verso by Bromby in 1901.xxxvii He says ‘This Noble Gift’ cost the university £465 for the bindings in England and the freight for the initial 1086 volumes. Subsequently an additional 800 volumes were bound ‘cheaply’ in Melbourne. According to Bromby: ‘several further cases were received but not opened until 1901 when the whole set was sent to the Public Library to be disposed of at the discretion of the authorities.’ That the final instalment of the collection remained unopened for some years and was then ‘disposed’ to the Public Library together with the sarcastic label of ‘This Noble Gift’ evidences Bromby’s frustration with excessive expenditure on collections that he believed to be excess to needs.

In 1903 while Bromby was on leave in England, a retired baker George McArthur of Maldon committed suicide. His collection of over 2000 rare and valuable books was bequeathed to the University Library. Miss Mary Lugtonxxxviii and Ian Morrisonxxxix have documented the importance of this bequest and the implications of this great benefaction.

Although a significant addition to the Library, there was no extra money to transport, house and process the McArthur collection. Also the majority of the collection covered disciplines beyond the undergraduate teaching responsibilities of the university.
Bromby resented the diversion of funds and effort on the McArthur collection instead of basic acquisitions. This was also at a time when additional resources were being requested by the university community for longer opening hours and improvements to the catalogue.

In addition the implications of the McArthur bequest came at the time of Bromby’s constant frustration at the lack of support for appropriate accommodation for the Library. The inadequacy of appropriate shelving heightened existing accommodation problems and sparked the proliferation of branch libraries.

However as Morrison observed the McArthur gift sowed the seeds for research collections and a profile as a significant library. Morrison concluded that: ‘Bromby’s lack of vision for the future of the University, and the diversity of potential roles for the library, marks a lost opportunity to establish the role of the librarian as something more than a simple gate keeper’.

Bromby’s own article on the Library published in 1915 highlighted deficiencies in the collections. However he also drew attention to collections strengths and particular rare books. He concluded that the library: ‘contains a good many things of great interest and value, which nevertheless must appeal less to the average student than to the more mature and leisured bibliophile.’

4. Pressure on Library Accommodation

The campus map that featured in the University Calendar of 1892 shows the campus footprint at the time of Bromby’s appointment to the position of Librarian. The Library throughout his time was located in the north of the Quad that was central to the small footprint of the university and close to teaching spaces.

Library accommodation was also inadequate and the Minutes of the Library Committee note ongoing problems associated with the inadequacy of space. In 1893, Professor Morris petitioned the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Council regarding library facilities. He advised: ‘The Library still suffers from two or three chronic wants: viz. the want of proper tables, the want of more satisfactory and sanitary warming apparatus, and the means of reducing the nuisance of dust.’ An earlier request for tables, matting and a stove from 1885 was annotated subsequently by Bromby with: ‘(Proper tables not provided till 1913. E.H.B.)’
During Bromby’s period, Scott notes that the library only occupied part of the upper floor of the North Wing extension of the Quad. Bromby’s requests for additional space were not successful throughout his entire career and it was only under Bromby’s successor, Ulrich that the whole of the north wing was converted for the library.

Space constraints within the general library sparked the move to split collections. Initially medical and chemistry collections were moved to the Medical School. Bromby noted that: ‘our chemical work in those days was mostly to medical researches’. The addition of 2,000 volumes through the McArthur gift in 1903 created a ‘chief crisis’ as ‘there was no place to put them in’. Consequently there was further distribution of the collections. Bromby explained:

*Engineering led the way, and was followed by Biology and Botany. More recently Metallurgy has developed a separate branch; and at the present moment Agriculture is in a sort of unconscious way being distilled out of Botany. And yet the Central Library, and most of its branches, are much cramped for room.*

While the Medical and Chemical Library were administered separately the newer branches were regarded as part of the general library.

5. **Options for Library Accommodation**

Selleck reports that with the move of the Conservatorium to its new building on Sydney Road (now Royal Parade), Bromby considered shifting the Library from the ‘beautiful but inadequate space’ in the north wing to the old national museum building. If this proceeded it was proposed that the medical and central libraries would be re-united.

The Council however concluded that the building was unsuitable for a permanent library and would not spend the money to set it up as a temporary facility. Bromby reluctantly suggested that the Library could survive as is for a few more years. Council ‘calmed his fears by declaring that a properly equipped library would be set up at an early date, then left the Library languishing at the bottom of its list of building priorities for decades’.

Bromby was not a sole voice advocating for expanded library premises. Selleck documents proposals from three professors in 1912 for new building plans. Professor Thomas Cherry’s suggestion included a Library, Arts and Law lecture theatres ‘which could have been placed on either side of the Quadrangle, and a partial closing of its south front’. However the three proposals did not eventuate and ‘these plans rest in the archives, mute reminders of vain enthusiasm’.

6. **The End of an Era**

Bromby’s career was marked by illness in 1902 and again in 1903 during which 9 months leave on half pay was spent recuperating in England and Scotland. Continuing illness meant further absences after his extended leave. In June 1914 Bromby tendered notice of his planned retirement in six months. However this was withdrawn by a letter dated 5 September 1914. In responding to a letter from the registrar that does not survive he said: ‘I am willing to remain in office next year until June at least, if health holds out’. Bromby eventually retired in December 1915.
Upon his retirement, Bromby was presented with a handsome parchment highlighting his achievements and signed by University colleagues. The text also drew attention to the ‘large amount of arduous physical work’ required in his role and the ‘ever growing demands on the physical space’. Ever the annotator and corrector of errors, Bromby added the correct spelling of his middle name and transcribed the signatures of key professors in the left margin.

In March 1916 Council recorded the following resolution:

*Mr Bromby’s extensive reading, literary taste and bibliographical knowledge entitle him to be regarded as one of the most scholarly librarians that any Australian University has yet possessed. The admirable card catalogue, begun and completed by him, is based on the most approved principles of scientific librarianship, and has been executed with equal skill and conscientiousness. It is a finished monument to his loyal devotion, and will prove of permanent value.*

This paper has provided a picture of the early university and its development in size, complexity and disciplines served during a 26 year period that spanned the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. While the library and its collections were rated positively by Holgate prior to Bromby’s commencement, university records reveal repeated and unsuccessful requests for additional resources and in fact a decline in collection budgets during his librarianship. Contrasted with this, evidence is provided that limited funds had been diverted to supporting earlier donations arranged by Sir Redmond Barry and the McArthur bequest received during Bromby’s career. Both collections were deemed by Bromby to be of limited value to the university but became lasting treasures in the special collections of rare and valuable books.

Bromby did not achieve the outcomes he hoped for in terms of library accommodation or adequate funding for collections during his years of service. His colleagues drew attention to the physical and supervisory challenges of his role. The latter part of his career was marred by illness and consequent absences. While there is limited evidence of Bromby’s views, his annotations and brief commentary survives. The language used and the issues covered hint at a sense of frustration, disillusionment and disappointment.

Following his retirement Edward Hippius Bromby enjoyed improved health and an active lifestyle as documented by a family history. He died on 6 July 1938 in Malvern, Victoria aged 91 years. While he left an estate of only £4000, Bromby left an important legacy through his persistence and contribution to the Library during its formative period in the history of the University of Melbourne. As the first named Librarian, Edward Hippius Bromby laid a foundation for the future development of a major Australian University Library.
1. S. Reynolds, Libraries, Librarians and Librarianship in the Colony of Victoria, Australian Academic & Research Libraries 40,1,50

2. E. Scott, A History of the University of Melbourne (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1936) Chronology

3. G. Blainey, A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1957) 1

4. Scott 23

5. Scott 21

6. Scott 23

7. Blainey 40


16. Scott, Chronology

17. Scott, 137


19. Gallagher, 8


21. The University of Melbourne Student Record – Bromby, Edward Hippius. Enrolment No 18630253 University of Melbourne Archives


Blainey 48


Scott, 137

The University of Melbourne to Edward (Hippins) Bromby MA December 1915 in Papers of Edward Hippius Bromby. Bromby Family Papers 1700-1979 MS11102. Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. Box 1611/1

To the President of the Professorial Board 12th July 1899 University of Melbourne Archives

C.W. Holgate An Account of the Chief Libraries of Australia and Tasmania (London: Whittingham, 1886) 15

Holgate 23-24

Holgate, 24

Holgate 43

E. H. Bromby Correspondence to The Accountant March 31, 1896 University of Melbourne Archives.

Edward E. Morris. Correspondence to the Council. April 28, 1899 University of Melbourne Archives

Selleck 432

Copy of letter from the Honourable the Speaker of the House of Commons to His Honour Sir Redmond Barry Chancellor of The University of Melbourne. 20th June 1862. Annotated on verso by E.H.B 26 July 1901.


Morrison, 279

E.H. Bromby, The University Library. The University Review 3, September1915 67

Morris, Correspondence to the Chancellor, Vice- Chancellor, and Members of the Council. October 25, 1893 University of Melbourne Archives

Scott, 137

E.H. Bromby, The University Library 63

Selleck, 513
APPENDIX

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<th>Years</th>
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<td>E.G. Mayne, Registrar</td>
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<td>J.F. James, Registrar, Secretary and Librarian</td>
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<td>1864-92</td>
<td>E.F. a’Beckett, Registrar, Secretary and Librarian</td>
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<td>1866-67</td>
<td>C.H.H. Cook BA, Assistant Librarian</td>
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<td>1868-71</td>
<td>G.H. Neighbour BA, Assistant Librarian</td>
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<td>T.F. Bride LLB, Assistant Librarian</td>
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<td>1881-84</td>
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