The completion of the Mitchell Library building and its many adornments was largely due to the drive and passion of William Ifould, Principal Librarian of the Public Library of NSW 1912 to 1942. During his 1923 and 1936 trips to USA and UK Ifould inspected many public libraries and was greatly influenced by the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library and the Boston Public Library.

The three pairs of bronze doors on the northern facade, the other pair of bronze doors on the southern facade, the Chaucer windows and other decorations are the result of the extremely generous donation of Sir William Dixson at the encouragement of William Ifould.

Two pairs of bronze north doors feature aboriginal people celebrating 40,000 years of their presence in Australia and one pair of navigators and explorers doors celebrating 400 years of European discovery and settlement. The south doors have images of 15th and 16th century printers’ marks which are symbolic of the invention of printing in Europe.
Thank you Richard. Good morning. (Fig1) I am delighted and proud to have been selected for my presentation. Unlike the rest of you I have no real experience in Librarianship. However, I think I can claim, with as much humility I can muster, to be one of the most important people involved with the State Library of New South Wales, the libraries of the University of Sydney and Wollongong City Library. I am a reader! My background, after 50 plus years as a dentist, is Art History. Which, interestingly, attracted me to this wonderful library with a unit for my Graduate Certificate in Arts from the University of Sydney entitled “Back Stage at the Mitchell Library” directed by Dr Anita Callaway, encompassing the art treasures in the library’s collection.

Reflecting on the theme for this Forum “Libraries for the People” I wish to go back many years. David Jones in his PhD Thesis “William Ifould and the Development of Library Services in New South Wales, 1912 - 1942” adroitly informed us “At the time of Ifould’s appointment, experience of free public library services in NSW was very limited. Free public libraries were virtually unknown.” As I am sure you are all aware by 1918 Sydney Municipal Library (hived off from the Public Library of New South Wales), North Illawarra, Tamworth, Paddington and Broken Hill were the only ones. By 1934 only Broken Hill remained.¹

I will not be venturing into the Munn - Pitt Report which I am sure will be fully covered, however I wish to recount a personal experience. My father was a bank teller who had a move to Cootamundra in 1949. I recall both my parents being delighted there was a public lending library within walking distance in that small country town. The passing of the Library Act was immediately prior to the Second World War, as a result the opening of suburban and regional Public Libraries started strongly after only 1945, as I am sure will be discussed at this forum. I’m sure you will all know this, however it was a revelation to me. What a long way we have come with now over 360 public libraries in New South Wales

While other presenters will be covering many libraries and their functions, my focus is on the Mitchell Library. In my discussion on this Library I hope to show it, and hence the State Library of NSW, having always been a Library for the people.

No one has ever been excluded from the Mitchell Library. In the past a few were banished. For example, Bea Miles, one of the brilliant eccentrics of the mid-twentieth century, on several

occasions was banned not because it was thought she was stealing books, not because she knew more Shakespeare than the Principal Librarian and continually displayed that knowledge, but because she was raucously voluble. She was readmitted many times until finally banished in the late 1950’s by the Principal Librarian, John Metcalfe. I'm know many of you working with the public in libraries are aware of similar people. Nevertheless this an example showing this library is and always has been a library for all the people.

A friend of mine who is a retired Principal Librarian of the Australian National University, Colin Steele, in his 1976 book rated the State Library of NSW (then the Mitchell Library) one of only four Australian libraries ranked in the world’s top 300 great libraries, not only for its architecture but also for its collections.

The State Library of New South Wales is still, I’m sure you will agree, one of the top libraries and will remain so. In this age of digitisation libraries will still be needed to play an important function and books will still be printed in ever increasing numbers. In 1996 10,000 million books were printed using 50 million tonnes of paper, plus about 9000 daily newspapers and magazines bringing the total annual use of paper to 130 million tonnes. By 2012 this had risen to 400 million tonnes of paper being produced. I emphasise books will still be printed.

There were two very similar important new public libraries opened in the early twentieth century: (Fig. 2) the Mitchell Library, Sydney and the New York Public Library. The Mitchell Library was built to house David Scott Mitchell’s collection of Australiana and Pacific items donated with the proviso there would be a suitable building to house them. Mitchell died on 24 July 1907 while the building was in progress. It, the northwest corner of the Mitchell Library building and was opened on 8 March 1910. The New York Public Library opened on 23 May 1911 to accommodate three private donated libraries. The New York Public Library when opened was complete, however it took until 1964 with the south east wing opening for the Mitchell Library to be finished, somewhat in the tradition of Gothic cathedrals which took up to two hundred years to complete. Both these library buildings are a combination of block building Renaissance architecture together with nineteenth century neo-classical facades. Ifould, in a 1929 talk to Sydney architects said if he wasn’t a librarian he would have been an architect. As a result of his interest in architecture he retained an overriding influence in the architecture and decoration of the Mitchell Library. In his 1923 and 1936 trips to USA, UK and Canada Ifould inspected many large libraries and was especially impressed with the architecture and decorations of the Boston Public Library, the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress (Thomas Jefferson Building). I state it is

no coincidence the facades of the Mitchell and New York libraries are similar, that in both cases a circular reading room was rejected in favour of a rectangular one and these two libraries are the only ones with four pairs of bronze doors. The many Printers’ Marks at the Boston and Congress library buildings were very obvious for Ifould to observe and, I surmise, further influenced him to use Printers’ Marks on the South doors. 

The finishing of the Mitchell Library focusses on the main person with the determination and problem solving ability to see the process to a successful conclusion. (Fig.3) This was William Herbert Ifould. The Minister Drummond was a key, however the Government Architects; Wells, Smith, Parkes; the library staff, the artists, the builders, stone masons and bronze casters were all peripheral to Ifould’s single mindedness. His high intellect and good knowledge of library architecture and decoration saw this project to a successful conclusion as a much needed public library building while also an aesthetic architectural achievement. I will return to Ifould’s personality later. Meanwhile let us focus on the architecture and decorations.

The Portico on the northern facade of the Mitchell Library (Fig 4), using reproduction of ancient Greek and Roman Architecture, shows the importance of the building for the people of New South Wales. It is the repository of a vast amount of knowledge, hence needs eight massive fluted Ionic columns to support the heavy weight of that knowledge. The candelabra are symbolic of the light to be shown on this knowledge within the library building. The three bronze doors symbolise the importance of 40,000 years of Aboriginal culture and of 400 years of European cultures in this state.

Looking at symbolism, in a 2000 book on “Building libraries for the 21st Century” there are many comments on recent, current and future library buildings. However there are relevant items relating to the Mitchell Library completed in 1964. Relating to the British Museum, for many years the location of the British Library, Jane Carr, Director of Public Affairs, The British Library states “Antonio Panizzi’s vision was of the universal library in which all human knowledge might be found. His energy resulted in the construction of the Round Reading Room, as perhaps the most powerful ever architectural symbol of the universal significance of Libraries and Librarianship. The building was needed to a visual manifestation of the knowledge and history across the arts and sciences contained within it.” This was in 1857. The author of this book states “Symbolic Librarianship, as I call it, is the little recognized portion of library practice that acknowledges the library as a system of symbols and calls for proper management of those symbols as an important

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part of a library’s resources. It is the ability to interpret, be sensitive to, and build upon public perceptions of a library as a societal asset that is as much symbolic as functional.” ⁴

If one accepts this argument of symbolism being as important as functionality, it follows that the Mitchell Library architecture and all of its decorations including the carefully selected stained glass windows and the diligently chosen motifs of all the bronze doors have high symbolic value. The architecture of the Mitchell Library is symbolic with its arresting exterior demonstrating its importance, the awe inspiring reading room is a powerful reminder this is the fountain of knowledge. My opinion is the north doors which are opened every morning are inviting the public to enter and access the knowledge contained within.

Having stated that, I appear to be eulogising William Ifould. I now wish to point out some of his shortcomings and how they impacted poorly on library function. I have seen what other readers see, but not the major part of the building which are the main functional areas. As David Jones pointed in his presentation “Getting it Right”, Ifould gave us a building with late nineteenth century architecture which appears fine on the surface but he also gave us nineteenth century function of which John Metcalfe despaired from the day he took over as Principal Librarian and those of you working will have worked have been fully aware. ⁵ Thus while I have emphasised symbolism, it should not be to the detriment of function. There is a danger of allowing one person in authority with a dominant personality to be the single project manager. As Terry Webb emphasises in his book this certainly applied to the 1930’s as much today.

Let us go onto more decorations. (Fig. 5) The symbolic value of the embellishments and decorations of the Mitchell Library are important for the people of New South Wales. In July 1934 William Dixson gave 4,000 pounds for the construction a pair of a bronze to the enlargement of the library building in honour of David Scott Mitchell. The William Dixson Donation Account under the control of the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales attracted considerable interest over the next five years before it was utilised.

In a letter from Minister Drummond to William Dixson on 1 November 1934 it was envisaged there would be one bronze door, however at the first meeting of the Bronze Doors Committee of the Public Library of New South Wales on 27 November 1934 present were Dixson, Prof Woodhouse and Ifould. S E Coleman, the senior designing architect was present by invitation. They concluded there were to be three bronze main entrance doors. The central doors were to be of navigators and explorers, the side doors of allegorical figures with the eastern doors showing

⁴ Terry D Webb ed. ibid. 194.

images of Poetry, Drama, Music and Sculpture and the western doors of Philosophy, History, Science, and Architecture. These images are similar to those of other late nineteenth and early twentieth century library buildings such as the Boston Public Library. The images on the eastern and western doors of the Mitchell Library were later changed to show aboriginal people. Thus the decision for three doors were taken by that committee and later approved by the minister. The final plans showing three pairs of north doors and one pair of south doors in bronze were signed by Cobden Parkes, Government Architect on 12 November 1935.6

As you walk out of this auditorium you will see the south facade of the Mitchell Library building has three components (Fig 6): the central part which is the rear wall of the main reading room and set back are the western and eastern (1964) parts. The central and western segments have carvings high on the walls while the eastern segment has windows in place of carvings. The cornice comprises carvings in the sandstone including decorations architecturally described as cymatium, fillet, corona, egg-and-dart on ovolo and dentils. Immediately below the frieze with the sandstone carving “Public Library of New South Wales” there are four fluted Ionic pilasters astride Caxton’s printer’s mark which is carved into the sandstone above the Caxton window, a balcony with balustrade of single balusters and brackets above the south bronze doors in addition to a guilloche carved into the sandstone surrounding the bronze doors. I will return to these doors which are my passion and the subject of my thesis.

There are nine sandstone carvings of images of past civilisations from 1447 BC to 1200 AD. These are, from left to right, Egyptian lion of Thutmose III 1447 BC when hieroglyphs had been long established, Assyrian Winged bull fourth century BC during the Ashaemenid period, Chinese war horse of Tang dynasty tenth to seventh century BC with a phoenix of Western Han dynasty second century BC, Byzantine peacocks installed at St Mark’s Venice about 1200 AD, (Fig. 7) Greek horse and rider from the Parthenon Athens fifth century BC, (Fig. 8) Assyrian mounted archer seventh century BC during the prosperous late Neo-Assyrian Empire, (Fig. 9) Hercules capturing the bull which is a Roman copy of the original Greek first century AD, (Fig. 10) Greek horse breaker of the Classical period fifth century BC, finally Byzantine griffins from St Marks where they were installed about 1200 AD.7 I think these entablatures are saying those civilisations were communicating to others and eventually to us through the written word. (Fig. 11) These high relief carvings were exquisitely created by highly skilled craftsmen of Beat Bros (Darlington).

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6 SLNSW File F2804. Bronze Doors File.

7 Trustees of Public Library of NSW. The Public Library of New South Wales. 1943. 34 - 39.
The Tasman map on the vestibule floor was fabricated using Wombeyan russet marble by the Melocco Bros of Annandale who, because of their Italian background, had to be released from a World War II internment camp for the duration of this project and other adornments in the building. Tasman’s original 1644 map is in the Mitchell Library collection having been presented by Princess Marie Bonaparte of Greece at the request of her father Prince Roland Bonaparte.

There are three stained glass windows on the north wall of the vestibule, the centre window is from the thirteenth century Gifford Psalter and the two side windows are from the eighth century Book of Kells. These windows, the internal columns with corinthian capitals and stone carvings high on the walls are best viewed from the first floor balcony level. Also in the vestibule is a bronze head of William Ifould paid for by the employees of the library and created by Arthur Fleischmann.

In the 1905 plans for the New South Wales Public Library, Walter Vernon had a hexagonal reading room 30.5 metres in diameter and seating 260 readers. This was rejected by Ifould and his Advisory Committee, with Metcalfe’s support. The Trustees had preferred a larger octagonal room, however Ifould eventually convinced them otherwise. In a December 1933 report from the National Library Building Advisory Committee of G R Thomas, J Nangle and W H Ifould to the Minister for Public Instruction was stated “The trustees of the Library and the Principal Librarian have always objected to the circular form of the reading room, and on your instruction the Government Architect has redesigned the main reading room...” “A rectangular reading room 150 feet long by 80 feet wide takes the place of the circular room in the original plan.” The resulting reading room lit from above to accommodate 400 readers is the magnificent one we know today.

In a recent journal article highlighting some library architecture problems Fred Schlipf, Professor, Graduate School of Library information Science, University of Illinois stated Librarians are still frustrated by some common dysfunctional designs from architects of library buildings. He lists over 30 of these. In attacking non-rectangular spaces he states everything put into libraries is rectangular and book stacks only work well in rectangular spaces. With circular and octagonal reading rooms the immediate surrounds must be triangular or pie shaped which is against all good library practice.

Sir William Dixson, who gave freedom of choice to the trustees, was delighted his Donation Account was used to fund the three Chaucer stained glass windows on the eastern wall of the main

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Reading Room which celebrate the Canterbury Tales printed by William Caxton in 1476, the first book printed in England.

On the western wall is the Sydney Gazette window commemorating first Australian newspaper printed in 1803 which was donated by the Sun Newspaper to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the invention of printing in Europe as it was installed in 1940.

On the southern wall is the Caxton window (Fig.12) which was donated by the Sydney Morning Herald, commemorating William Caxton presenting his patron Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy with his new “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye” in 1474, the first book printed in English. This window is based on a copperplate engraving in a 1475 presentation edition of that book, currently in the Huntington library, Los Angeles.

On the northern end of the reading room are two bronze medallions celebrating the major benefactors of the library, David Scott Mitchell and Sir William Dixson created by Arthur Fleischman.

The Chaucer, Sydney Gazette, Vestibule and Shakespeare room windows were by Arthur G Benfield and constructed by Frank G O’Brien of Waterloo. The Caxton window was by John Radecki, who was trained by Arthur Benfield and constructed by J Ashwin, Sydney.

The Shakespeare Room resulted from a group of Sydney Shakespeare enthusiasts deciding in1912 do acknowledge the 300th year of Shakespeare’s death in 1616. World War I intervened and the Shakespeare Room became part of the 1942 extensions of the Mitchell Library. The ceiling is closely modeled on that of Cardinal Wolsey’s study at Hampton Court Palace and was made by art Plasto Company. The bronze light fitting was made by Chubb’s Australian Company. Above the door is carved in the wood work the royal coat of arms of Queen Elizabeth I and the library shelves are loaded with Shakespeareana. Adorning the north walls are are seven stained glass windows depicting the Seven Ages of Man from “As you like it”. In the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC there is a 1932 large stained glass window with images of the Seven Ages of Man. William Ifould would have seen this during his 1936 trip and as he was very influential in all aspects of the Mitchell Library building design would probably have recommended these images as suitable for the Shakespeare Room.

In front of the northern facade of the Mitchell Library, isolated in Shakespeare Place by the entry and exits of the Cahill Expressway, are the Shakespeare Statues (Fig. 13). They comprise of Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Portia and Falstaff. They are by Sir Bertram Mackennal and paid for by Henry Gullett. The statues were cast in bronze in England, the white marble base came from Italy and were installed in 1926.
Near the north western corner of the library is a bronze statue of Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales from 1831 to 1837. It was paid for by subscription and was the work of Edward Hodges Baily in London in 1842.

Early in his career as Principal Librarian, William Ifould acquired the Flinders papers from Professor Flinders Petrie, grandson of Matthew Flinders. These were given on the condition a statue of Flinders be erected. This was done and a bronze statue of Flinders in naval uniform, holding a sextant was unveiled in 1925. The sculptor was William Robert Colton in England. 10 11

The symbolic value of the embellishments and decorations of the Mitchell Library are important for the people of New South Wales. The sandstone carvings are symbolic of past traditions handed down to us. The North facade, the Shakespeare Room, the Caxton, Chaucer and Sydney Gazette stained glass windows symbolise the literary and cultural traditions we have inherited. The Shakespeare, Flinders and Bourke bronze statues symbolise the literary tradition, the exploration and the settlement of this great country. Other libraries have similar traditions. In discussion with library colleagues in America I have been asked “Don’t you have any lions in front of your building?” Which of course symbolises power. And as we all know, (even without getting into Foucault’s ideas), knowledge is power; how one uses it is of prime importance.

I wish to return to the bronze doors. (Fig.14) Many people do not know there are four pairs. I certainly didn’t know there are four pairs of bronze doors until one day in early 2011 while I strolled through the Dalgety walkway and looked at architect’s plans for the Mitchell Library. One panel had drawings entitled “Bronze Doors to Southern Entrance”. I thought what doors? Which led to a brief essay and subsequently my MA (Res) thesis which is nearing completion. The only other Public Library I have found with four pairs of bronze doors are those of New York Public Library. As with the Mitchell Library there are three at the main entry and one at another facade. The Mitchell Library south bronze doors are, in my view, the most symbolic ones from the library’s point of view. I will elaborate. The South doors of the Mitchell Library have panels with printers’ marks cast in bronze this necessitates an explanation of their history and significance.

A printer’s mark, device, emblem, symbol or insignia is a trademark which acts as an intellectual property copyright to let everyone know who was the printer of the book, which has endured until the twentieth century with printing craftsmen proud of their tradition. In the early days printers were also publishers and book sellers. (Fig. 15) The first mark was used by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer in their 14 August 1457 printing of the Mainz Psalter, which was the first


book printed bearing the date and place of printing and names of the printers. For some unknown reason the mark did not appear on all copies of the Psalter and now exists on only one copy.  

This mark is in distinctive red, however their subsequent marks were all in black. The right shield has the arms of Schoeffer, the stars later being replaced by roses after the death of Fust in 1468. The left shield is the arms of Fust. For their printed works over the next five years they did not employ a mark but did finish with a colophon. Their next work with a mark was their 1462 Biblia Latina. This and all other subsequent works had the same mark in black. So the mark continued and we have examples of six of these on the south doors of the Mitchell Library.

Johann Gutenberg did not use a printer’s mark. He came from a financially secure family background with a family crest which he could have used, or part thereof, as a printers’ mark. There are many interpretations of this crest, several of which are plausible but none is definitive.  

There are six panels on the South doors with castings of fifteenth and sixteenth century printers’ marks.

Jan Veldener (Fig. 16) birth date unknown, died between 1486 and 1496. His worked from 1471 to 1485 in Cologne, Louvain, Utrecht and Culemborg. His printer’s mark has the twin shields of Veldener and Louvain with Veldener’s name between, suspended from a branch of the Tree of Knowledge with foliage.

Luc Antonio Giunta (Fig. 17) lived from 1457 to 1538. His working period was 1482 - 1536 in Florence and Venice. His printer’s mark is a broad Fleur de Lis, the symbol of the Christian Trinity, with the initials LA.

Johann Fust (c1400 - 1466) working period 1457 - 66 and Peter Schoeffer (c1425 -c1503) working period 1457 - 1502, Mainz. (Fig. 18) Their printers’ mark (1457) has the twin shields of Fust and Schoeffer suspended from a twig of the Tree of Knowledge.

Aldus Pius Manutius (Fig.19) (1449 - 1515). Working period 1494 - 1512 in Venice. His printer’s mark (1502) is a dolphin and anchor with AL and DVS either side. Motto “Festina Lente” ie “Hasten Slowly”

Jean (Jehan) Petit, (Fig.20) (birth and death dates unknown). He had many printer’s marks, his working period was 1495 - 1530 in Paris printing over 1000 works with fifteen presses. His


was a large family firm lasting 366 years, and had many printer’s marks. The printer’s mark (1516) is a shield with a narrow Fleur de Lis and initials “I P” on either side.

William Caxton (Fig. 21) (1415 - 1492) whose working periods were 1471 - 72 Cologne, 1474 - 76 Bruges and 1476 - 91 London. He was a wealthy businessman in the Low Countries watching the impact of printing and the business opportunities. His printer’s mark which, unlike many others, never changed is composed of the letters of his name and 74 in medieval Arabic numerals. 1474 was a very significant year for Caxton as he had completed his “Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye”, the first book Printed in English, and in that year presented it to his patron, Princess Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, which was a significant moment in his career.

William Roberts. Printers’ Marks: A chapter in the history of typography. 1893. 112.

Davies. ibid. 374.

Davies. ibid. 197.
The date inscribed in the sandstone immediately above the south doors is MXMXLI (1941) and the doors were installed in 1942 (Fig.23), one of the last items in place on a magnificent building project which took almost four years. All that remained to complete the building was the southeast corner which was done to Ifould’s designs in 1964. The south doors, a celebration of the printing of books, could thus be regarded as the final piece in William Ifould’s great undertaking. Unfortunately, due to the 1987 major extension of the State Library buildings general access to these doors has been completely eliminated. It is to be hoped this will be rectified in the next upgrade to the buildings which is already underway, allowing any walking past to closely view the bronze south doors. In the meantime in my thesis I will show a simple and relatively cost effective short term method for public viewing to be achieved. It is very important these doors, one of the treasures of the State Library of New South Wales, should be seen and understood’

As well as this Forum celebrating 75 years since the passing of the Library Act, (Fig. 24) 2014 is also the year of celebrating 50 years since the completion of the Mitchell Library building. I hope what I have presented will give you a broader understanding of the architecture and decorations of the Mitchell Library. I seek your agreement they are rich artistic, cultural and architectural treasures emphasising the symbolic nature of the Mitchell Library being a library for the people. Thank you.

Bibliography.


