

Sir John Starke

Sir John Starke, who died in Melbourne on 22 November 1994, received the Redmond Barry Award and honorary membership from the then Library Association of Australia in 1985. The Redmond Barry Award may be conferred on any person not eligible to be a professional member of the Association and not employed in a library who 'has rendered outstanding service to the promotion of a library or of libraries...', and the award to Sir John recognised his outstanding service to the State Library of Victoria and Victorian public libraries over two decades.

Sir John was appointed in 1967 as second President of the Library Council of Victoria, the then umbrella body responsible for the State Library of Victoria and the important Public Libraries Division, and held that office until 1986. He was a forceful defender of the principle of free public libraries, but his great cause throughout his term of office was the fight for a Victorian Government commitment to a new State

Library building. He thought he had succeeded in this when the Cain Labor Government came to power in 1982 with an announced policy of a new building on the Queen Victoria Market site, and again with the subsequent 1984 decision in favour of the Queen Victoria Hospital site next to the historic Swanston Street buildings, and was devastated when these commitments collapsed.

Sir John was very honoured when the Association conferred the Redmond Barry Award on him, but also particularly pleased because of the name of the award. Sir Redmond Barry was the first Chairman of the Trustees of the Melbourne Public Library (now the State Library of Victoria) from 1854 to 1880, and Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria. Sir John held that same high legal office at the time the Award was conferred on him.

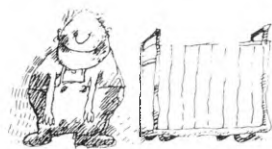
There are many stories about Sir John, who was formidable in build, in manner and in the bluntness he often brought to Council

meetings and public occasions. I certainly could have done without the performance he once put on in publicly abusing Premier Cain at a joint State Library/National Gallery exhibition, over some imagined slight to the Library! He was also well-known throughout Australia from his legal career, and many will have seen him in television documentaries as the judge required to sentence Ronald Ryan, the last man hanged in Australia.

I worked with Sir John from 1981-1985, and developed great affection for him and respect for his integrity. He was a hard taskmaster, but could be immensely kind and forgiving, and he taught me and others much about the responsibilities of public office. Sir John cared immensely for the State Library of Victoria and the democratic values which he believed libraries underpinned, and the Association in conferring the Redmond Barry Award on him fittingly recognised his long and dedicated service to our profession.

Warren Horton

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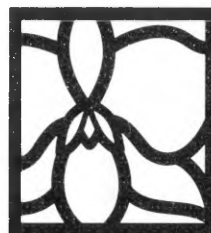
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