

THE LANE MULLINS FAMILY and THE WORLD OF BOOKPLATES

Bookplates, labels pasted inside books to denote ownership, first came into use in Europe shortly after the invention of printing from moveable type. Artists of the stature of Albrecht Dürer were prominent among bookplate designers around the start of the sixteenth century. Collecting them is documented in England from early in the nineteenth century, and became a craze at the end of the century when the London-based Ex Libris Society (1891–1908) flourished, London publisher George Bell & Sons initiated its 'Exlibris Series' of bookplate books and the highly influential art magazine *The Studio* forcefully promoted the pictorial bookplate style.

Following European settlement of this country, members of the elite and professional class brought their British bookplates with them, but by the 1830s simple armorial designs were being produced locally by commercial stationers and engravers.

The hobby of bookplate collecting only became evident in Australia from the 1890s, promoted by a very small group of Sydney enthusiasts. John Lane Mullins was at the centre of this group and — no doubt stimulated by their frequent appearance in the pages of *The Studio* magazine — lit the torch of modern pictorial bookplate design when, in 1892, he commissioned the first Australian pictorial bookplate. He had been collecting, promoting, commissioning and writing about bookplates for at least forty years by the time he became founding president of the Australian Ex Libris Society in 1923 and his role as a powerful figurehead was such that after his death in 1939 the Society faded away.

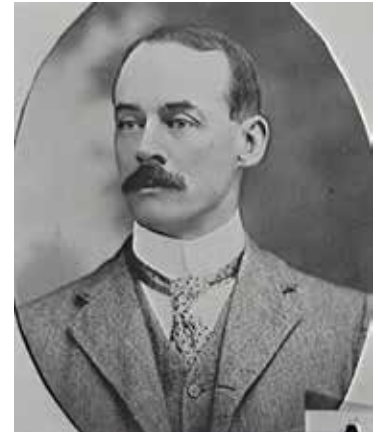
Fortunately his daughters donated Lane Mullins' significant bookplate collection to the Mitchell Library, Sydney; this collection together with his own writings and his influence on other writers, particularly P Neville Barnett, and bookplate artists have left an important legacy to those interested in bookplates in the twenty-first century.

This publication is one of the means by which the New Australian Bookplate Society is celebrating the 'Centenary of bookplate collecting in Australia 1923–2023'. Our celebration marks one hundred years since the founding in Sydney of the Australian Ex Libris Society and aims to serve as a reminder that there is current interest in bookplates. It also celebrates the key role that John Lane Mullins played, as we bring together essays on the man himself, on members of his family including his father James Mullins who greatly influenced John, and an overview of the John Lane Mullins Bookplate Collection in the State Library of New South Wales.

It is with much gratitude that I thank those who have contributed selflessly to this volume: Juanita Hattersley, great niece of John Lane Mullins, for her essays on James Mullins, her grandfather Dr George Lane Mullins and Thomas Lane Mullins; Alice Tonkinson, Librarian, Collection Acquisition and Curation at the State Library of New South Wales, for her essay on the John Lane Mullins Bookplate Collection; Stephen Szabo for his expert heraldic interpretation; and Mary Keep for her superlative design of this booklet.

MJF

Sydney, September 2023



Alderman John Lane Mullins,
Municipal Council of Sydney, 1901
(Courtesy City of Sydney Archives)

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www.bookplatesociety.org.au/

Editor/President

Dr Mark Ferson 0401 141 890 m.ferson@unsw.edu.au

Designer

Mary Keep mary.keep@gmail.com