



Dr AA Barr and his library legacy

Dr Alan Alison Barr was a respected and long serving general practitioner at 173 Canning Highway in South Perth from 1948–1980. For most of this time he was in solo practice. In the 1950s his brother Lindsay Barr was in partnership for a few years before setting up his own practice in Coode Street, Como. Alan's son Marshall joined him in 1960–61 before specialising in anaesthesia, while Lindsay's son Andrew became a Perth haematologist.

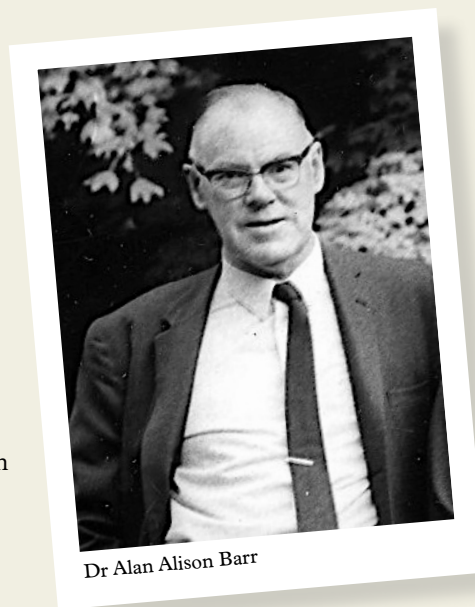
His father John E Barr had migrated from Londonderry to Western Australia at the age of 16, married Ellen Carter of Cunderdin in 1902 and became an estate agent in Perth.

Alan became a pharmacist with a shop near the intersection of Walcott and Beaufort Streets, Mount Lawley. In 1930 he married school teacher Millicent Marshall who was his constant support in the move from pharmacy to medicine, and then in running the practice.

To study medicine, since he lacked Junior Certificate Latin, he had to enrol in the University of Queensland. Latin was not a requirement for Australia's newest medical school. He graduated during WWII and after a year at the Toowoomba Hospital he was conscripted by the Queensland Government to do locums for rural practitioners who were serving with the forces. He then spent 3 years as a solo GP in Miles before returning to Western Australia.

Alan and Millicent Barr had four children:

- **Heather Barr** (born 1932, died 1989) was Principal of Presbyterian Ladies College from 1968–1989.
- **Marshall Barr** (born 1934) was a medical graduate 3 years ahead of me in Adelaide. He did his final year of study at the new UWA Medical School at Royal Perth Hospital. In 2009 he was one of the surviving doctors from that year who were awarded an MBBS *ad eundem gradum* at UWA. He had been the first Head of Department of Anaesthesia at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital from 1970–72, emigrated to the UK and was a consultant anaesthetist at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading from 1973–1994). From 1967–68 he had been an anaesthetist with the Australian Army Medical Corps in Vietnam, later writing about his experiences in *Surgery, Sand and Saigon Tea: An Australian Army Doctor in Viet Nam* (Allen & Unwin, 2001).
- **Alison Barr** (born 1939) married Jim Gregg, became a children's librarian and as a mature student received a PhD on the development of library services for children in Western Australia. She was co-author with Paul Dench of *Carnarvon and Apollo, one giant leap for a small Australian town* (Rosenberg Publishing Pty Ltd 2010).
- **Janice Barr** (born 1943) became a teacher and married Ron Hawkins. She died of melanoma in 1982



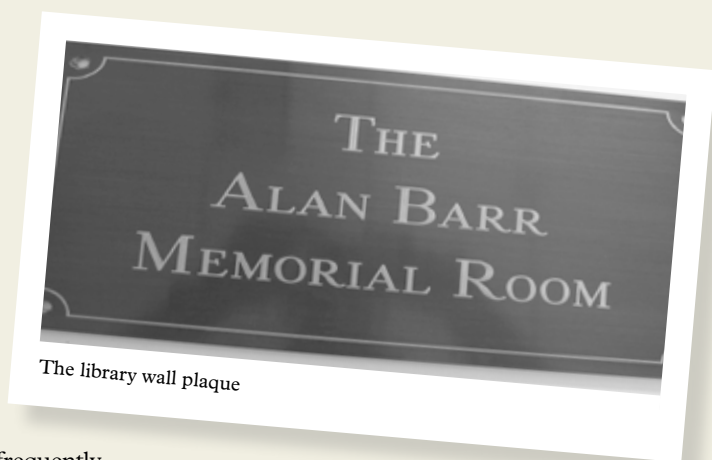
Dr Alan Alison Barr

Millicent Barr died in 1980 and Alan Barr 2 years later aged 76. They had both been lifelong committed Presbyterians.

Alan Barr was for many years an elder of St Andrews, Perth. He was a committee member of Numbla Nunga Nursing Home in Derby, and was active in the establishment of Braemar Home for the Aged in East Fremantle and was their medical officer.

In 1983 the family approached me with the idea of a scholarship to commemorate their father's name. Following a discussion of different suggestions, they decided on a \$10 000 donation towards a general practice library. This would be housed in the Claremont Community Health Centre (CCHC). The money was to be invested and the interest used to provide hardware such as shelving and audiovisual aids for the library. Books would be purchased by the RACGP's Family Medicine Program (FMP) and audiovisual material by the UWA Department of General Practice (UDGP).

The Barr family were, presciently, very cautious about their donation. Prior to settlement, they sought a meeting with the then chairman of the Western Australia Faculty of the RACGP, Dr Philip Melling. He convinced them to donate the money to the RACGP rather than to the UDGP. A plaque was made and the Reading Room (by far the most attractive room in the CCHC) became 'The Alan Barr Memorial Room.'



In the 1990s, the library was moved upstairs at the CCHC in order for it to be close to the offices of the FMP. It was frequently used by registrars of the program and by undergraduate medical students. Few GP preceptors used it, and such was their rarity, they were fed and feted by all of the education oriented tenants. A library committee had been formed with representatives from the UWA Medical Library, the UDGP, the RACGP FMP and the RACGP WA Faculty.

The UWA Medical Library provided a librarian, Danuta Michalak, for one half day a week. Her salary was shared by the FMP and the UDGP. The committee stopped meeting in 1998. Books were then purchased individually by the main education based tenants in the CCHC.

By 2010 the library had a good collection of books and journals, but computers had rendered access to library held journals and books obsolete. Few people used the library. On 22 March 2010, a hail storm destroyed the Faculty of Medicine offices at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

In my absence in the Kimberley, the library was cleaned out to make space for the faculty 'refugees'. All the books were sent to the medical library and then to an Emeritus Professor David Allbrook, and the UWA and AMA supported organisation, Australian Doctors for Africa. That organisation sent them to the new University of Hargeisa Medical School (founded in 2003) in the capital of the Republic of Somaliland.

In 2010, UWA sold the CCHC to the developers, Aria Land Pty. Ltd. They intend to bulldoze the building and build high rise accommodation. The built in library furniture will become a casualty of this redevelopment.

To quote the managing director of Aria Land Pty Ltd., Peter Simpson, "sorry about that, but you can't stop progress."

All that will remain of the Alan Alison Barr Library is the plaque rescued by the RACGP WA Faculty archivist. This was mounted on a wall of the new College House at 34 Harrowgate Street, West Leederville, in 2010.

Recollected by Professor Max Kamien, RACGPWA Faculty Archivist and Dr Marshall Barr, son of Alan Barr

Sources

- Archives UWA Department General Practice
- Jim and Alison Gregg – Alison is Dr Alan Barr's remaining daughter
- Dr Marshall Barr, Dr Alan Barr's son
- Letter from Philip Melling, Chairman RACGP WA Faculty, dated 13 December 1983 to Mrs Alison Gregg:

We thank you for your kind offer of a bequest from the estate of Dr AA Barr. We have approached the President of the RACGP who has kindly agreed to make available additional funds. It is our intention to use the bequest to set up a video loan library with particular reference to the needs of rural practitioners. It is intended to name this library the Dr and Mrs Alan Barr Memorial Library.

- Letter from Dr Melling dated 5 September 1985 to Mrs Alison Gregg:

The faculty has recently published the enclosed booklet, by Peter McLaren FFARACS, on the 'Transport of the Sick and Injured'. This book is to be distributed free of charge to all rural doctors in WA and is being advertised for sale at a nominal cost to rural practitioners in other parts of Australia. Funding for the project came from the Dr and Mrs Alan Barr Memorial Library, and as you will note from the inside front cover, the library has been acknowledged as the source of the funds.

