Harrie P. Mortlock and the Beacon Press, Sydney

MARK J. FERSON

Introduction

In late 1930, following approaches by P. Neville Barnett and M. Danvers Power to print their own works to a high standard, Harrie Mortlock, a director of Sydney printing house Boylan & Co., established the Beacon Press. Although run to some extent on a commercial basis, Mortlock, working closely with each author, oversaw the production of fine books which were hand printed and bound by his staff. The Beacon Press books printed for Barnett about bookplates and Japanese prints are well known; however, its other books are less well recognised, and nothing has been written to date on Mortlock himself. The intention of this paper is to raise awareness of the Beacon Press (1930 to 1953) and its visionary proprietor, as well as to document in a checklist the Press’s oeuvre of finely printed works.

Mortlock’s life, occupations and interests

Harrie Percivale Mortlock was born in Sydney on 22 November 1894 to Charles P. Mortlock and Mary (née Beckett). Little is known of his childhood except that he left school around the age of fourteen. He enlisted in Sydney on 3 June 1916 at the age of 21 in the 1st Infantry Battalion, with regimental number of 6538 and his occupation listed at the time as clerk, resident of Dunroon Street, Eastwood (Sydney). Harrie’s elder brother Kenneth Charles had enlisted the previous January. During fighting around Bullecourt on 4 April 1917 he suffered a serious injury to his right thigh from a shell fragment, requiring prompt amputation of the right leg. On 23 May, having received an official notice from Major J. M. Lean of the Base Records Office in Melbourne advising of Sergeant H. P. Mortlock’s injury and his admission to the 3rd General Hospital, Boulogne, France, his father wrote to acknowledge Major Lean’s letter.

After returning to Sydney and a period of convalescence, Harrie was offered a cadetship at Samuel E. Lees Limited, Printers, Stationers and Bookbinders,

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1 I wish to thank for their generous assistance, time and access to family records members of the family of Harrie Mortlock including David Mortlock, Bryan Mortlock, Jocelyn Grimshaw and Jeanette Crakanthorp. I also thank Mark Barron, C. B. Fyfe, Cecilie Mortlock, Ruth Kerrison and Professor Elizabeth Webby. Acknowledgement is due to the staff of the Mitchell Library, State Records NSW, National Library of Australia and the Fisher Library, University of Sydney.


3 Defence records (World War I) for H. P. Mortlock, National Archives of Australia, series B884, item N78815.
of Ballarat House, 68–70 Wentworth Avenue (Sydney), where his father was
director and general manager.⁴ By May 1921 Harrie was taking an active role in
the company’s Employees’ Social Club and was elected to the position of vice
president at the Club’s second annual meeting, 6 June 1922. During this period
Harrie undertook correspondence courses in a variety of business studies and
he was featured as the accountant at Samuel E. Lees Limited in the October
1922 issue of the company magazine, which also had editorial and photographic
contributions from him (Figure 1).⁵ In December 1923, Samuel E. Lees Limited
became part of the newly-incorporated printing business of Jackson, O’Sullivan
& Mortlock Ltd. The directors of the new business were Harrie’s father C. P.
Mortlock (managing director) and Brisbane-based printers W. J. O’Sullivan and
C. H. Jackson. Harrie was included among the company’s initial shareholders.⁶

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⁴ Founded in the 1870s by Samuel Lees (1843–1916), who took C. P. Mortlock into partnership in
1908; from Lee’s House Organ, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1921): 3–5, and entry for Samuel Edward Lees in
⁵ Information taken from Lee’s House Organ, vol. 1, no. 4 (July 1921): 13; no. 10 (August 1922): 16;
no. 11 (October 1922): 11 (in the possession of Jocelyn Grimshaw, Sydney).
⁶ Business records of Jackson O’Sullivan & Mortlock Ltd. held by NSW State Records, no.
8771, container 17/5561; these records show that the company’s name was changed to Jackson &
O’Sullivan Ltd. in early 1933 and a resolution to wind up the company was made in November 1936.

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Figure 1: Portrait of Harrie Mortlock in Lee’s House Organ, December 1921.
In November 1925, Harrie married Lois Clarke Selkirk Payne (1899–1995) and one of his gifts to her was a bookplate. It is not known when Harrie joined the staff of Boylan & Co., an established Sydney printers, formed in April 1914 with the purchase of the goodwill and property of W. M. Madgwick & Sons, printers, of 528 Kent Street, Sydney. By early 1928, the business had moved to Cunningham Street, Sydney, a laneway close by the Central Railway Station and the Haymarket. By the following year, numbers 29 and 31 Cunningham Street were occupied by a small community of printing and related businesses: at no. 29, Viles & Walker, linotypers, and B. A. Butcher & Co., printers; at no. 31, Boylan's as well as William Homer, printer, and Penlington & Somerville, printers.

Also in 1928, Harrie joined the Australian Ex Libris Society (see front cover image for his design for a bookplate), and it is most likely that this occurred through the offices of the Society's energetic Honorary Secretary, P. Neville Barnett. Harrie later joined the Australian Limited Editions Society, which had been formed in 1936 by Ure Smith and Benjamin Fryer, among others, to produce finely printed editions of important Australian works. At this Society's first annual general meeting, held on 30 March 1937, Harrie was appointed to its technical committee in the company of well-known book designers, printers and typographers. Further light is shed on Harrie's own network and interests by some of the recollections of his children. David remembers at the age of five or six joining his father and Lionel Lindsay on a painting excursion in bushland of Sydney's north shore; at this time the Mortlocks lived in Wahroonga on Sydney's upper north shore, not far from Lindsay and his family. Jocelyn went on her father's painting trips, this time with artist and illustrator Rhys Williams. Some of Harrie’s oil paintings remain in the possession of his children. Jocelyn describes her father as being very sporting and, despite his very heavy artificial leg, regularly playing golf, tennis and lawn bowls, as well as being very interested in poetry, “a keen gardener” and “a mad orchid grower.”

In late 1940, Mortlock enlisted for duty and was assigned to the Security Service of the Intelligence Corps, in which he had attained the rank of Major by 1944. His family recollected that he spent all of his War service based in Sydney. In March 1946 he was admitted to the Australian General Hospital with

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7 Business records of Boylan & Co. Ltd. held by NSW State Records, no. 5192, container 3/5873; these records also indicate that in July 1920 it was resolved to wind up the business with W. J. Boylan as liquidator, authorised “to sell all or any of the property of the Company to a New Company about to be formed” and that the Company’s name was struck off the Register and the Company dissolved on 10 March 1939. Records explaining the actual continuation of the business are yet to be located.
9 “Limited Editions Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 1937, 12; other members were Douglas Annand, Adrian Feint, Alan Ball, Alan Baker, Perce Green, E. H. Shea, Ben Waite.
10 Information based on the author’s interviews with son David Mortlock on 9 February 2008 and with daughter Jocelyn Grimshaw on 9 August 2009.
suspected tuberculosis and was discharged from active service in the following November with the diagnosis confirmed. Harrie’s daughter Jocelyn recalls that he spent around one year in hospital with tuberculosis, and then his home was modified so he could be relatively isolated from his family and thus reduce their chance of becoming infected. After a further active period working with the Press, he died on 20 June 1954 at the Concord Repatriation General Hospital (Sydney) at the age of 59 following a myocardial infarction, survived by his wife and three children. The final balance of his estate was valued at £9245 of which £2245 comprised shares in Boylan & Co.

**Origins of the Beacon Press**

In his Beacon Press diary, Harrie relates the approach from P. Neville Barnett in 1930 which led to the formation of the Beacon Press. The Australian Ex Libris Society had issued annual reports since it was formed in 1923, and from the time he was elected as Honorary Secretary in July 1924, it fell on Barnett to organise printing of the Society’s publications. Through his previous association with art printers Radcliffe Press, Barnett may have been familiar with other printers operating in Sydney. He had arranged for the Society’s annual reports for 1929 and 1930 to be printed by Boylan & Co. and this printer was used for the Society’s Journal No. 1, also published in 1930.

On the occasion related by Mortlock, Barnett contacted Harrie at Boylan’s on his own behalf, as he needed a printer for his first publication, *The Bookplate in Australia: Its Inspiration and Development*, reprinted from the 1929 Year Book of the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers. This was the start of a relationship that led to the design and production of a series of books considered by many to be the most beautiful Australian books of the period, published under the imprint of Beacon Press, Sydney. In the event, the booklet was published with a Tyrrells’ Galleries imprint, rather than that of the Beacon Press.

However, the first book bearing the Beacon Press imprint was a slim volume of poetry by M. Danvers Power, titled *Folk Art, Verse*, printed in December 1930,

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11 Defence records (World War II) for H. P. Mortlock, National Archives of Australia, series B884, item N78815.
12 Information from death certificate and probate records.
13 A small bound journal is in the possession of the family in which Harrie has written in pencil on the first page “Diary of the Beacon Press, 1930—” with his signature. Thirteen hand numbered pages at the front describe the beginnings of the Press and give notes on some of its books; the last pages list thirty-three books of the press with author’s name, size, number of pages, copies, start (mostly missing) and completion dates, and title.
16 *Diary of the Beacon Press*, 1–2.
and illustrated with wood engravings by L. Roy Davies (Figure 2). Muriel Danvers Power (née Blain, 1876–1951, also used Muriel Faucett Power) was the first President of the Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW, 1906–1908 and again in 1911 and 1926, having been made a life member in 1925. Whilst she had some of her poetry commercially printed and published, she also prepared and bound small hand-written booklets of verse and inspirational quotations. The colophon of one of these booklets, Meditations, states: “This book was written and bound by M. F. Power; and completed on the third day of February, nineteen hundred and thirty, at ‘Rhincru,’ Burwood.”

It is likely that Neville Barnett was the link between the author and printer, as he had given a talk on bookplates to Society of Arts and Crafts members in 1923–24, and loaned bookplate displays to the Society’s annual exhibitions in the mid-to-late 1920s. Barnett may himself have been introduced to the Society by Eirene Mort (1879–1977), a founding member and a bookplate designer. Furthermore, he viewed himself to some extent as the patron of artist L. Roy Davies (1897–1979), who was also a founding member of the Australian Ex Libris Society and, in Barnett’s view, a wood engraver whose skill approached that of

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the internationally renowned Australian printmaker Lionel Lindsay. Barnett had himself learned the basic technique of wood engraving from Davies and arranged bookplate commissions for the artist.\textsuperscript{18}

Davies appears to have had a strong and continuing association with this creative circle—he had already for a number of years been part of the dominant Sydney art network centred around Julian Ashton and Sydney Ure Smith (of which Barnett and Lionel Lindsay were both members). Davies had undertaken art training at Ashton’s Sydney Art School and after a period mixing spates of work and inspiring pleasure trips he joined the Smith and Julius Studios. Through this relationship, Davies’ work was included among the images featured in the “Revival of the woodcut” in the May 1923 issue of \textit{Art in Australia}, and he became closely involved with the woodcut exhibition held later that year at Tyrrell’s Galleries. In 1930, one of his wood engravings appeared in a special issue of the \textit{Studio}, and following the publication later that year of Danvers Powers’ \textit{Folk Art, Verse} he was invited by the Ashendene Press to provide illustrations for its forthcoming book \textit{Ecclesiasticus} (1932).\textsuperscript{19} The text had been compiled for the Ashendene Press by Arnold Danvers Power, and it seems likely that the approach to Davies was a result of the Danvers Power family connection.

But we should return to the Beacon Press, the founding of which is best related in Harrie’s own words:

\begin{quote}
In the month of October 1930 I received a commission from Mr P. Neville Barnett to produce for him a high quality booklet entitled “The Bookplate in Australia – Its Inspiration and Development.” This book – Mr Barnett’s first – was produced by Boylan & Co. Ltd of which firm I was a director and was finished on 7\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 1930. The book was produced in two editions the same content being bound in two ways, one a limp paper cover and the other bound stiff with paper sides turned in & cloth backs. The page size was 8 x 6 and the work consisted of 32 pages printed on Worthy Signature Laid paper, with covers of Roxburgh in various colours.

The success of this production and the inspiration of Mrs Danvers Power with her enthusiasm and keen interest in Private press work overseas (notably Mr Hornby of Ashendene Press)\textsuperscript{20} led me to obtain the permission of my co-directors of Boylan & Co. Ltd for me to register The Beacon Press and so was founded.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{19} See Conal Coad, “The Engraved Work of L. Roy Davies,” in \textit{L. Roy Davies: Wood Engravings}, ed. Lin Bloomfield (Sydney: Odana Editions, 1978), 15–17; the catalogue which accompanied the Tyrrell’s exhibition, \textit{Woodcuts} by A. G. Stephens, contained an original wood engraving by Lionel Lindsay and decorations by Davies, a dozen of whose works were listed for sale.

\textsuperscript{20} One of the items in Harrie’s library now in the possession of the National Library of Australia is C. H. StJ. Hornby, 25 June 1867–26 April 1946, \textit{An Anthology of Appreciations} (London: Published for private circulation by W. H. Smith, 1946). (Rosalind McDonald, NLA, personal communication, email, 18 March 2008.)
the semi-private press of that name. Permission was obtained to use the “Beacon” trade-mark (registered by Boylan & Co. Ltd) and a commission from Mrs Danvers Power to produce a volume of her verse on the 18th Nov. 1930 was the commencement of operations of the Beacon Press working on the tradition and along the lines of the private presses of the old world but producing the work in a commercial atmosphere on the presses of the Company which I directed. … The registration took place on 2nd Dec. 1930 and on the 15th Dec. 1930 the first book was finished.

This volume of verse by Mrs Danvers Power consisted of 150 copies of 72 pages printed on Worthy Signature Laid paper, bound in paper sides turned-in, cloth backs, size 8 x 6 and was altogether a worthy production for the first volume. Sold at 7/6 by the author, Mrs Power inspired Mr L. Roy Davies to produce five beautiful wood-cuts specially for the verses and a limited number of volumes were equipped with signed and numbered plates and sold at 12/6. It is my privilege to possess a special publisher’s copy of this book with an appreciation by Mrs Power scribed therein. From this, grew the custom of the Beacon Press to produce Publisher’s Copies of books published bearing its colophon.  

The Beacon Press in the 1930s and 1940s

Over the following three years, the output of Beacon Press comprised further works by M. Danvers Power, other works of poetry, three volumes by Barnett on bookplates and publications of the Australian Ex Libris Society. Although the books of poetry showed the Beacon Press device on their title pages, it seems more than likely that they were paid for and hence published by their authors, rather than the Press. There was very little interest among Australian publishers in the inter-War period for volumes of poetry, and even established poets often had to pay for their poetry to be published, whether by the major or smaller publishers.

One innovative project was the publication of the Australian Rhyme Sheets and Australian Broadsheets, of which four are held in Australian libraries. They combined verse, in simple clear typography, and artwork, and were produced in the style of the English broadsheets popularised in the first decades of the twentieth century as an accompaniment of the private press movement by, for example, the Cuala Press, Dublin, and Nonesuch Press and St Dominic’s Press in England. Mortlock relates how he was approached in early 1931 by Kathleen Monypenny (1894–1971), then with the Mitchell Library, to produce the Rhyme Sheets which

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24 B. H. Fletcher, Magnificent Obsession: The Story of the Mitchell Library (Sydney: Allen & Unwin
were released in April 1931 to very poor sales, despite a very positive notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A further set was published in the following November in an attempt to take advantage of the Christmas trade, but these also made a loss and the idea was abandoned.

Barnett’s trio of bookplate volumes, *Pictorial Book-Plates in Australia* (1931), *Armorial Book-Plates in Australia* (1932) and *Woodcut Book-Plates* (1934), were significant as contributions to scholarship on bookplate history and design in a world context, but their physical characteristics stunned those who beheld them. A pseudonymous writer, “A. D. C.,” in the short-lived Sydney literary magazine *Opinion*, reviewed each of the three books in similar glowing terms, but the response recorded by A. D. C. to the display of the books at the 1935 Australian Authors’ Week exhibition is most eloquent:

By common consent though, the most striking exhibits were from Mr P. Neville Barnett.

It was at a large three-tiered cabinet that one hesitated and was lost in admiration. Mr Barnett’s three large de luxe volumes with their smaller marginal editions and their unique satellites—the Souvenirs—magnetised onlookers.

The Beacon Press of Sydney certainly deserves the highest commendation for these productions. “Lay-out,” hand-made paper and printing, in the hands of their technicians, are taken and made into the finished works of artistry which rival any volumes from the old established and well-known presses of the Old World and America.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to locate any correspondence between Mortlock and Barnett or any of the other protagonists in this long term, productive relationship. Moreover, Barnett hardly used the vehicle of his books to expand on this association, except where he briefly thanks Mortlock and his staff for their care in their production in scattered words found in the books’ acknowledgement pages and colophons. He is most expansive in his *Souvenir of “Armorial Book-Plates”* where he relates how, after spending some time in the company of the inspiring “dreamer and doer of things, Mrs Danvers Power,” who had just given him some books on heraldry, he had suddenly conceived the idea of a volume on armorial bookplates. This revelation occurred to Barnett on 10 December 1931 whilst travelling in a car with Harrie Mortlock, whom Barnett described as an enthusiast of fine paper, who “at his commercial private press—the first of its kind in Australia—had printed for … the present writer, his *Pictorial Book-
Later in this description of the genesis of *Armorial Book-Plates* Barnett acknowledges Mortlock for his lengthy consultations and provision of expert advice, “all of vital concern to the projected book” whilst in a letter to Adelaide book seller and bookplate collector H. B. Muir he mentions that the deluxe edition of *Woodcut Book-Plates* “has exceeded his anticipations.” On a lighter note, *Woodcut Book-Plates: Coming Out Party Souvenir* includes “the page the author did not know about,” showing a humorous depiction of Barnett composed of printer’s flowers by Beacon Press compositor George Hay.

*Woodcut Book-Plates* was indeed a tour-de-force by any standard, providing an authoritative survey of relief printed bookplates (i.e. woodcuts, wood engravings and linocuts) from all parts of the world over the previous five centuries, together with a foreword by Lionel Lindsay, already known internationally for his wood engravings. Barnett dedicates the work to “L. Roy Davies and Harrie P. Mortlock, its alpha and omega” and in the accompanying *Woodcut Book-Plates Souvenir* lists Harrie Mortlock among those who are “hidden in anonymity for valuable assistance.” Here he also acknowledges his “indebtedness for outstanding services … to L. Roy Davies, the designer of the Title Pages and the Dust Jackets … to say nothing of the no less happy badge [i.e. the Beacon Press device] of what is fast becoming a notable Private Press.”

Perhaps the final seal of approval for the quality of the three bookplate books was their acceptance into the royal library of King George V, announced through a notice in Ben Fryer’s “Printing arts craftsman” page in *Newspaper News* for 2 March 1936. Fryer also provides some details of the production of the books, naming the typesetters, text font, the use of Worthy papers, and making reference to the design and setting of the title page of *Armorial Book-Plates* by Cecil and James Johnson, Australian printers and owners of the renowned Windsor Press, San Francisco.

The mid-1930s were significant to the Beacon Press for two other productions, which were associated with neither Neville Barnett nor bookplates. It had been decided by the Trustees of the ANZAC Memorial in Sydney’s Hyde Park that the completion of the Memorial would be marked by, among other events, the publication of an official volume entitled *Book of the Anzac Memorial, NSW*. The Trustees required that the standard of the book would be in accordance with the very high quality of the Memorial itself, and would combine a description

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29 Ibid, 19.
32 B. N. Fryer, highly influential typographer, book designer, teacher and promoter of craftsmanship in printing, edited this column for a number of years; “Ex Libris Works,” *Newspaper News*, 2 March 1936, 27.
of the physical structure together with an explanation of its artistic and spiritual elements. With building work having commenced in 1932, a meeting was held at Government House on 28 September 1933 when it was agreed that the production of the book would be managed entirely by the Limbless Soldiers’ Association of NSW—among others H. P. Mortlock was present at this meeting and was subsequently appointed a member of the Management Committee for the production of the book. In the September 1934 issue of Limbless Soldier it was announced that the publication was in preparation, but that the unfinished Memorial interiors, of which it was planned to take photographs for use in the book, meant some delay to publication. The Memorial was opened by the Duke of Gloucester on 24 November of that year, printing of the book was completed in the same month and its publication announced in the December number of Limbless Soldier. A deluxe edition bound in full Morocco was available at two guineas and a standard edition bound in quarter cloth at a guinea.

Patrick White’s first published collection of poems, The Ploughman: And Other Poems, was printed during January and February 1935. It had originally been accepted for publication by P. R. Stephensen & Co., into which business White’s mother Ruth had put some capital. However, with the company in financial difficulties, Stephensen’s usual printer W. T. Baker & Co., Sydney, declined to print the book and Ruth White subsequently arranged for Boylan’s to print the book, “Dedicated to my mother,” under the Beacon Press imprint. The book received some positive reviews as to both its contents and production standards. A short notice in the Sydney Morning Herald describes White’s “juvenilia” within the slim volume as manifesting “the usual melancholy of youthful poets” and highlights two of the poems as standing out: “When Thoughts are Still and Formless” and “The Ploughman.” The reviewer finishes by commenting on the fine printing and effective woodcut illustrations (they are more likely to be pen-and-ink drawings) by Roy Davies. The reviewer in the Opinion expressed admiration both for the quality of the poems and its being “excellently produced.” White’s biographer, David Marr, reports that the book, published at five shillings, found little interest in Australia and sold few copies. He also notes White’s later embarrassment about

35 Limbless Soldier, vol. 8, no. 2 (December 1934): iii, 12; see notice of publication, “In Memory,” Sydney Morning Herald, 17 November 1934, 12.
his early poems and cites correspondence from the late 1970s with the National Library of Australia where White wished this work best forgotten and that copies of *The Ploughman* should be destroyed.\(^{39}\) This should not detract from the finely printed quality of the volume.

In the remaining years of the 1930s and during the early 1940s, the Press produced a number of smaller items, including three *Year Books* and a luscious, art deco booklet entitled *Bookplate Artists: Number 1: Adrian Feint*, all for the Australian Ex Libris Society, as well as a promotional pamphlet for Neville Barnett and a book of poetry. However, the major works of this period were Barnett’s series of books on his second passion, Japanese colour woodcuts. Once again generally acknowledged as exemplars of the book beautiful, apart from Barnett’s comments that he has spent much time arranging for the execution and purchase in Japan of the thousands of prints required as illustrations,\(^{40}\) there remain few descriptions of the undoubted travails of producing and financing these works.

Fryer alone, in his column in *Newspaper News*, provides a technical criticism of one of these books, *Hiroshige* (1938). In it he refers to the craftsmanship of the work in relation to choice of binding, endpapers, use of Worthy Coronet Text paper for the text, and the Locarno typeface, which Barnett “had personally to import” and which Fryer considers perfectly suited to the subject. He continues with his opinion that *Hiroshige* is “perhaps one of the loveliest books yet done in Australia,” and ends the review with:

> The book as a whole will bear study in graphic art circles … carrying as it does … the all too rare … attributes of body, mind and spirit, contributed to by all working on it.\(^{41}\)

Within a few years, the War was causing difficulties in the production of luxury goods such as Barnett’s books, and he was having trouble financing his expensive small-edition books *Glimpses at Ukiyo-Ye* (1940) and *Nishiki-Ye: Brocade Prints of Japan* (1941). Diane Kraal, who has undertaken extensive research into Barnett’s life and work, writes that to defray the printing costs Barnett offered Mortlock copies of some of the rarer books. “He was pleased that Mortlock had agreed to share some of the costs that he could not otherwise finance.”\(^{42}\)

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\(^{40}\) In relation to a proposed book of Japanese bookplates (which did not eventuate), Barnett describes in a letter dated 19 June 1933 to H. B. Muir the effort involved in securing multiple copies from Japanese designers (Corrigan Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales Research Library); “Publisher of Rare Books,” *New Zealand Free Lance*, 28 April 1948, 18; see also D. Kraal, “Barnettiana: P. Neville Barnett and Japanese Colour Prints,” in *P. Neville Barnett*, 24–25.

\(^{41}\) “Fine Printing,” *Newspaper News*, 1 September 1938, 22.

The gap in the Beacon Press book list that occurs after Nishiki-Ye was caused by Mortlock’s enlistment in late 1940, his war service and subsequent period of debility caused by tuberculosis. With the Beacon Press dormant, some of its usual authors retained their business with the parent company. Gertrude Moffitt, author of the Beacon Press’s *Folk Art* (1932), had a small book *Verse* published in 1945 with the imprint of Boylan & Co. Pty. Ltd. However, Barnett felt unable to use them in the absence of Mortlock, and in his colophon to *Souvenir of Glimpses at Ukiyo-Ye and Nishiki-Ye: Brocade Prints of Japan* (1942, revised edition 1943) states that, due to “the exigencies of war,” the booklet was printed by T. V. Bennett & Co., Sydney. In this booklet he also expresses his regard for the absent Mortlock by dedicating it “without permission to Harrie P. Mortlock a printer-friend to whom the author is indebted beyond measure.”

**Post-war years**

Recovery from tuberculosis saw Mortlock again involved in major productions—the Barnett works on bookplates and Japanese prints, starting with *Figure Prints of Japan* (1948), and a compilation of the poetry of M. Danvers Power. Although not in the “book beautiful” league of the Barnett books, *The Verse Book of Muriel Faucett Power* (also 1948) has been made with considerable care, the text printed sparsely but tastefully with generous margins on uncut cream Worthy Georgian laid paper. Barnett’s major and last bookplate work *Australian Book-Plates and Book-Plates of Interest to Australia*, published in 1950, provides a detailed and erudite survey of the world history of the artform, and not solely of the Australian connections suggested by its title. The quarto standard, special and author’s editions are printed with generous margins in the graceful Egmont type face on Worthy Signature Highplate paper, with a large number of bookplates mounted or reproduced. His extensive acknowledgement at last gives more than passing due to Mortlock and the Press:

> To my excellent friends, the proprietors of the Beacon Press, initially Harrie P. Mortlock, and with him in later years Gavin C. Dunn, I can but say how much I have appreciated their fine and generous co-operation throughout the many years of our association.43

This work, both culmination and swansong of Barnett’s five-decade devotion to promoting the bookplate, was accompanied by the publication the following year of two souvenir booklets, *Souvenir of Australian Book-Plates* and *Fun with Book-Plates*. It was in this period that Mark Barron undertook his five-year apprenticeship as hand compositor with Boylan & Co., starting on 14 October

1950, a few days before his sixteenth birthday. Barron recollects seeing “Mr Mortlock” and his co-directors Miss Thelma Box, “in the office,” and Gavin Dunn (who was Harrie’s brother-in-law), general manager, as well as the very outgoing compositor turned successful printer’s salesman George Hay. At this time, Boylan & Co. had eight men, many of whom were returned soldiers, working in the printing and composing departments, packing and guillotining; there was a bookbinding department with four to five women and an apprentice printer and compositor were also indentured. One of Barron’s first jobs was to hand-set one of the Barnett booklets, probably *Fun with Book-Plates* (1951), in Locarno type. He recalls setting up the type with original wood- and lino-blocks fitted in between, and over fifty years later still has a clear memory that “everything had to be spot on.”

The Beacon Press ceased following Mortlock’s death in 1954, whilst Boylan’s continued for some time afterwards. James Dickson, who in a series of three articles published in *Biblionews* wrote of his seventeen-year search for all of Barnett’s books in all editions, describes finding in 1969 in Cunningham Street, Sydney, Barnett’s former printers, who “received me kindly there, reminiscing and showing me a badly-foxed copy of one of the wood-block print books.”

Conclusions

Modern critics of the book arts still consider the Beacon Press books as objects of great desire. If one reads Barnett’s writings—and he went to great effort to promote his own work whilst Mortock is not known to have done so—it seems that Barnett played the major role in the design of his own Beacon Press volumes on bookplates and Japanese prints. Only toward the end of his own life did Barnett finally acknowledge Mortlock’s important contribution. Although the other Beacon Press volumes are less grand, they demonstrate great care in their design and production—printed and bound by hand, using the highest quality papers. It does seem worthwhile to record the response of artist and art critic William Moore to the very first book from the Press, Muriel Danvers Power’s *Folk Art, Verse* (1930):

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45 The three articles were reprinted in *P. Neville Barnett: Australian Genius with Books*.
47 Notices of, for example, *Edelweiss* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 1932, 8) and *The Hidden Face* (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1939, 6) comment on the high standard of each book’s production.
A volume of simple verse issued by the Beacon Press is a fine example of what can be done by those in charge of a private press who have high ideals regarding the elements which go into the making of a perfect book, the printing, the binding, and the title on the cover showing that devotion to craftsmanship which gives to a hand-made work a character of its own.48

It may be argued whether the Beacon Press was truly a private press or in Mortlock’s own words a “semi-private press.”49 It seems clear that Mortlock’s role was to oversee the whole process of letterpress printing by hand of books published at the behest of the author, e.g. P. Neville Barnett, M. Danvers Power, or an agent of the author, e.g. Ruth White in the case of her son Patrick’s The Ploughman, or Barnett on behalf of the Australian Ex Libris Society. There is no evidence that Mortlock and the Beacon Press actually initiated these books, contrary to Carter and Barker’s requirement that “A private press is one whose owner prints what he likes, how he likes, not what a publisher pays him to print.”50 For example, the title pages of Barnett’s books record them as being “Privately printed;” whilst the colophons of the volumes of poetry often use explicit wording that they have been printed for the author.51 However, the joy of production of these beautiful books, and the sense of collaboration between author, Mortlock and his printing house staff, are evident to those who have handled them. On balance, perhaps the Beacon Press may not be classified as a private press, but the Press’s books are produced by the same methods and are of a quality equivalent to the books produced by recognised private presses. Irrespective of definitions, the finely produced books of the Beacon Press together stand as a monument to Mortlock’s vision, attention to detail and his great love of books.

49 Diary of the Beacon Press, 3.
51 For example, the colophon of M. Danvers Power, Folk Art, Verse, states “made for M. Danvers Power” and that of W. Birkett, Edelweiss and Other Poems, reads “privately printed for Winifred Birkett.”