

**Telling Australia's story to the world:
The Department of Information 1939-1950**

Edward Louis Vickery

August 2003

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of The Australian National University.**

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Eddy Vickery

Acknowledgments

Many people have provided assistance and support during the preparation of this thesis.

My first debt is to my supervisors, Professor Ann Curthoys and Dr Nicholas Brown, who oversaw, guided and encouraged the preparation and completion of this thesis.

My thanks go also to the people who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis, in particular Mr Ron Younger who gave very generously of his time. Archivists and librarians at various institutions, including the National Archives of Australia in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, the National Library of Australia, the Australian National University, the University of Sydney, the University of Melbourne, the University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour, the National Film and Sound Archives and the Australian Tourism Industry Association, were courteous and helpful in obtaining and locating material, for which I am grateful.

A range of friends have provided support throughout the extended process of preparing this thesis, foremost amongst these was my brother Richard. Their ready ears and thoughtful comments were appreciated.

The example of my immediate family was an inspiration in undertaking this work. To my parents in particular I am appreciative at number of levels; without their support this thesis would not have been completed.

Finally, I record my thanks to my wife, Anna Lukeman. The thesis had already been a work in progress for some years by the time we met. I deeply appreciate her patience and tolerance during the longer than anticipated period it took to finish the job.

Abstract

This study focuses on the organisation and operation of the Australian Government's Department of Information that operated from 1939 to 1950. Equal weighting is given to the wartime and peacetime halves of the Department's existence, allowing a balanced assessment of the Department's role and development from its creation through to its abolition. The central issue that the Department had to address was: what was an appropriate and acceptable role for a government information organisation in Australia's democratic political system? The issue was not primarily one of formal restrictions on the government's power but rather of the accepted conception of the role of government. No societal consensus had been established before the Department was thrust into dealing with this issue on a practical basis. While the application of the Department's censorship function attracted considerable comment, the procedures were clear and accepted. Practices laid down in World War I were revived and followed, while arguments were over degree rather than kind. It was mainly in the context of its expressive functions that the Department had to confront the fundamental issue of its role. This study shows that the development of the Department was driven less by sweeping ministerial pronouncements than through a series of pragmatic incremental responses to circumstances as they arose. This Departmental approach was reinforced by its organisational weakness. The Department's options in its relations with media organisations and other government agencies were, broadly, competition, compulsion and cooperation. Competition was never widely pursued and the limits of compulsion in regard to its expressive functions were rapidly reached and withdrawn from. Particularly through to 1943 the Department struggled when it sought to assert its position against the claims of other government agencies and commercial organisations. Notwithstanding some high profile conflicts, this study shows that the Department primarily adopted a cooperative stance, seeking to supplement rather than supplant the work of other organisations. Following the 1943

Federal elections the Department was strengthened by stable and focused leadership as well as the development of its own distribution channels and outlets whose audience was primarily overseas. While some elements, such as the film unit, remained reasonably politically neutral, the Department as a whole was increasingly employed to promote the message of the Government of the day. This led to a close identification of the Department with the Labor Party, encouraging the Department's abolition following the Coalition parties' victory in the 1949 Federal elections. Nevertheless in developing its role the Department had remained within the mainstream of administrative practice in Australia. While some of its staff assumed a greater public profile than had been the practice for pre-war public servants, this was not unusual or exceptional at that time. Partly through the efforts of the Department, the accepted conception of the role of government had expanded sufficiently by 1950 that despite the abolition of the Department most of its functions continued within the Australian public sector.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	v
ABBREVIATIONS	vi
TABLES AND FIGURES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 FORMATION	15
CHAPTER 2 THE SEARCH FOR A ROLE 1939-1943	40
CHAPTER 3 STAFFING AND BUREAUCRATIC STRUGGLES 1939-1943	57
CHAPTER 4 THE ADVERTISING DIVISION	80
CHAPTER 5 THE SHORT WAVE BROADCASTING SERVICE 1939-1943	98
CHAPTER 6 THE TRANSITION TO PEACETIME 1943-1950	119
CHAPTER 7 THE AUSTRALIAN NEWS AND INFORMATION BUREAU	146
CHAPTER 8 FILM WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT	167
CHAPTER 9 RELATIONS WITH THE PRESS	190
CHAPTER 10 RELATIONS WITH RADIO AND FILM	216
CONCLUSION	240
BIBLIOGRAPHY	247

ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Australian Associated Press
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANA	Australian National Airways
ANFB	Australian National Film Board
ANTA	Australian National Travel Association
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia
AWA	Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia)
AWM	Australian War Museum/Memorial
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
GPO	General Post Office
MA	Master of Arts
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
SA	South Australia
TAA	Trans-Australia Airways
US	United States [of America]
WA	Western Australia

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1	Functional changes to the Department of Information 1939-1950	42
Table 2	Ministers and Departmental heads to 1943	46
Figure 1	Department of Information organisational chart 1945	132

"Farewell Australia, I leave it without sorrow or regret," Charles Darwin wrote in his diary as he sailed away from the continent nearly two centuries years ago. Key points: Charles Darwin left Albany on March 14, 1836. The voyage would become crucial to the development of his greatest idea: the theory that species adapted to their environments over time through genetic mutations, with the "fittest" specimens surviving to share their genes. Patrick Armstrong, an adjunct professor at the University of Western Australia, says Darwin's voyage on the Beagle was "epoch making". "Without the Beagle voyage, Darwin's development of the theory of evolution through natural selection probably wouldn't have developed the way it did at the time it did," he said. Telling Australia's story to the world: The Department of Information 1939-1950. August 2003. Edward Louis Vickery. This study focuses on the organisation and operation of the Australian Government's Department of Information that operated from 1939 to 1950. Equal weighting is given to the wartime and peacetime halves of the Department's existence, allowing a balanced assessment of the Department's role and development from its creation through to its abolition. Read more. Thesis. Telling Australia's story to the world: The Department of Information 1939-1950. August 2003. Edward The Department of Information (DOI) was an Australian Government department formed during World War II. The department was established in September 1939 under the leadership of John Treloar, the director of the Australian War Memorial, who remained in the role of departmental secretary until early 1941. It was the first of 17 new Australian Government departments to be established during the war, and was responsible for both censorship and disseminating government propaganda. The department was based The Department of Information controls news and information. National security: the new regulations, The West Australian, 26 August 1939, p. 18 and Zwar, op. cit., p. 93. September 1939. After commentary on the ABC by The Watchman, which criticises the British policy response to the invasion of Poland by Germany, the Government directs the broadcaster to ensure its programs contain only factual observations. At home and abroad, 21 September 1939 and telephone conversation reported in memorandum from W Cleary, ABC Chairman, to all Commissioners and the General Manager, 21 September 1939, as quoted in A Thomas, Political pressure in the ABC, in Moran, op. cit., p. 70. November 1939. The Department's options in its relations with media organisations and other government agencies were, broadly, competition, compulsion and cooperation. Competition was never widely pursued and the limits of compulsion in regard to its expressive functions were rapidly reached and withdrawn from. Particularly through to 1943 the Department struggled when it sought to assert its position against the claims of other government agencies and commercial organisations. Table 1 Functional changes to the Department of Information 1939-1950 Table 2 Ministers and Departmental heads to 1943 Figure 1 Department of Information organisational chart 1945. vii. 42 46 132.