Some early Australian bookmen

George Ferguson

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This book does not tell the whole story of the trade; rather, it selects some of the outstanding figures among booksellers, book publishers, authors and bibliophiles to show how the trade developed during its formative years and the debts we owe to these significant and interesting pioneers.

The book is extensively illustrated, with reproductions of rare books, portraits of outstanding bookmen, pictures of old Sydney and old Melbourne, and a rare poem by Henry Lawson.

Beautifully designed and printed, in an edition limited to 1,000 copies, this book graces its subject and will grace the shelves of the discriminating book buyer.
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This edition is limited to
1000 copies signed by the author
of which this is number

OUT OF SERIES

Copies numbered 1 to 100
have been produced to commemorate the
addition of the one millionth book to
The Australian National University Library
Some early Australian bookmen

George Ferguson

Australian National University Press
Canberra 1978
I would like to offer my grateful thanks to those mentioned below for their assistance in the making of this book.

To the Council of the Royal Australian Historical Society in Sydney for their invitation to lecture to the members in September 1967 on the subject of our early booksellers and publishers, thus providing the stimulus for the collecting of the material.

To Mr John Holroyd, veteran bookseller and formerly head of the rare book departments first of Robertson & Mullens in Melbourne and then of Angus & Robertson in Sydney, for much information on the elder George Robertson and also on Samuel Mullen—since included in his excellent biography George Robertson of Melbourne (Robertson & Mullens 1968).

To Mr Eric Russell for much help on the early Sydney booksellers here mentioned, resulting from his research in the Mitchell Library into the early issues of the Sydney Gazette.

To Mr Geoffrey C. Ingleton for allowing me to reproduce his painting of Angus & Robertson’s ‘Auld Shop’.

George Ferguson
BOOKSELLING, to a less extent publishing, and, later, bibliophilia, have formed a part of the social life in all the Australian colonies from early times. The following brief account however is confined geographically to Sydney and Melbourne, and to the men who carried on business in those two cities and who, for one reason or another, seem significant or interesting figures. Between them they span the whole of the ‘early’ period—roughly, the nineteenth century.

Apart from the Howes there were virtually no publishers, and certainly no booksellers, in Sydney before the very late twenties; and naturally from a later date in Melbourne. So almost the whole of what follows will be applicable to the period from about 1830 to 1900. By publishers are meant only book publishers, as opposed to the publishers of newspapers or journals, who are a separate study in themselves.

Although bookselling is an ancient profession, references to which may be found frequently in the literature of 2000 or more years ago, book publishing as such is a comparatively modern pursuit. People, of course, have published books as long as booksellers have sold them; but it was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century, even in England and the United States, that the publisher was first identified as a separate species. Thus, for the whole of the period with which this short account is concerned, publishing was only part of the activities of printers or booksellers or both. Publishing as a separate business on its own could never have survived in nineteenth-century Australia. Indeed publishers who were not partly supported by some other activity are not found in Australia until as late as the 1940s. Hence it is difficult to decide whether some of the men referred to here were primarily publishers or booksellers.
NEW SOUTH WALES

General Standing Orders:

SELECTED FROM THE GENERAL ORDERS ISSUED BY

FORMER GOVERNORS,

FROM THE 1ST OF FEBRUARY, 1796, TO THE 6TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1800.

ALSO,

General Orders issued by Governor King,

FROM

THE 7th OF SEPTEMBER, 1800, TO THE 30th OF SEPTEMBER, 1802.

SYDNEY:

PRINTED AT GOVERNMENT PRESS.

1802.

The first book printed in Australia
— from a copy in the Mitchell Library, Sydney
It is interesting to note, too, that there is even now a measure of decentralisation in book publishing in Australia that reminds us more of the situation in the northern European countries rather than of those in England or the United States. This was no doubt due to the side-by-side existence of competing colonies owing allegiance to no one indisputable intellectual centre within Australia and aided certainly by the isolated nature of the early settlements and the poor communications.

The first book to be published in Australia, *New South Wales General Standing Orders*, was issued by George Howe in Sydney in 1802. George Howe also printed and published, in 1819, Australia's first book of verse (Barron Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry*), and in the same period (1818) Andrew Bent produced in Tasmania the first Australian book of literary prose (and the first unofficial book printed in Tasmania), one dealing with Michael Howe the bushranger. While considering these 'firsts' it is also interesting to note the publication of the first children's book, *A Mother's Offering to her Children* by 'A Lady long resident in New South Wales' (Lady J. J. Gordon Bremer). This is an interesting book in our bibliographical history for another reason, too. It is said to have been the last book issued from the old *Gazette* office. These, and other early ventures in book publishing were interesting—and creditable—in relation to their times, but they were essentially sporadic enterprises. Many years were to elapse before publishing developed in any organised fashion.

Nevertheless no account of early publishing can possibly pass over George Howe, who arrived in the colony on 22 November 1800,

1 Michael Howe, the last and the worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land (Ferguson 716).
2 Ferguson 3158.
FIRST FRUITS

AUSTRALIAN POETRY.

I first adventure. Follow me who list,
And be the second Austral Harmonist.

By Barron Field

Sydney, New South Wales.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION.

1819.

Title page of the first book of poems published in Australia, issued anonymously by Barron Field
—from a copy in the Mitchell Library, Sydney
MOTHER'S OFFERING

TO HER

CHILDREN:

BY A LADY,

LONG RESIDENT IN

NEW SOUTH WALES.

"Every creature and every thing affords me an opportunity to raise my thoughts to the Creator; and excites me to bless the goodness of him, who has given to earthly things, the power to please and cheer my soul. If even in this world, God is so admirable in his works, what will he be in a future state?"—Sturm.

Sydney:

PRINTED AT THE "GAZETTE" OFFICE, LOWER GEORGE-SIREEY

Title page of the first children's book published in Australia
—from a copy in the Ferguson Collection
and to whom, two years later, fell the honour of issuing our first book. It is perhaps fitting, also, in any study of early books in Australia, to mention the name of Howe’s predecessor as printer to the colony, George Hughes, a convict, who, though he printed no books, was certainly the first man ever to operate a printing press on these shores.

The organised sale of books in Sydney during the twenties, and before, was practically non-existent. Many of the more cultivated colonists regularly received parcels of books from friends in the Old Country or from London booksellers. One can imagine that these were passed eagerly from hand to hand among groups of friends so that ‘book clubs’ were formed which, no doubt, stimulated the foundation of the Australian Subscription Library in 1826. Shipments of secondhand books occasionally arrived and usually met with a ready sale—sometimes on the wharf.

In 1834 a Mr Blackman (probably John Blackman, licensed auctioneer and estate agent of 5 King Street, Sydney) issued a ‘Catalogue of Books to be Sold by Auction without reserve’. This sale was held at his rooms, ‘Hutchinson’s Buildings, King Street on Monday evening, 30 June 1834. Commencing at 6 o’clock precisely, Terms cash.’ There were ninety-three lots offered, including much solid reading: ‘Henry’s Bible, 2 vols. quarto, with plates; Temple’s Works, 4 vols.; Blair’s Lectures on Rhetoric, 4 vols.; Gil Blas, 4 vols. 12mo; Cowper’s Poems; Edinburgh Review, 34 numbers; Goldsmith’s History of Greece; Select Scotch Songs, 2 vols.’; and so on.

The honour of having been Australia’s first regular bookseller seems to belong to William McGarvie, who was in business in

TEGG'S CATALOGUE
FOR 1838.

Aristotle's Works, 10 vols., in a case
Way to do Good
Child and the English
Child at Home
Mother at Home
Young Christian
Parental Duties
 Fireside
Little Philosopher
Teacher
Every-day Duty

Adam's Rassan Anthology, a new edition, with numerous Notes and
improved Indexes, by James Boyd, LL.D., 10 Engravings
Private Thoughts on Religion
Summary of Geography and History
Select Passages from the Bible, arranged under distinct
Heads for the use of Schools and Families

Africa, (A History and Description of), by Josiah Conder, maps and
plates, 3 vols.

Arnaud de Maledelet, an Historical Tale, by Grattan, Author of
Highways and Byways, 3 vols.

Akin's Calendar of Nature, for Young Persons, engravings

Akin's Cabinet; or, the Selected Branches of Literature

Allan's Atlas of the Unconverted States

America, (A History and Description of), by Josiah Conder, maps
and plates, 2 vols.

Associates of the Bombay Mission

of the Family Circle

of Books and Authors

Anne Grey, a Novel, edited by the Author of Gray's, 3 vols.

Anthon's (Professor) Horace, with explanatory Notes, selected from
the larger edition, revised and corrected by J. Boyd, LL.D.

Anthon's (Professor) Sallust, with easy English Notes, the fifth
edition, revised, corrected, and enlarged, with Questions by
J. Boyd, LL.D.

Antipathy, by Amide, 3 vols.

Arabia, (A History and Description of), by Josiah Conder, map and
plate.
Sydney in 1829. McGarvie was born in 1810 in Glasgow and had some training as a journalist on the *Glasgow Herald* before following his elder brother John to Sydney. John had been appointed minister of the Presbyterian Church at Ebenezer on the Hawkesbury on his arrival in 1826. William arrived here in 1828. Among the McGarvie papers in the Mitchell Library are copies of two advertisements by McGarvie. They carry no date but probably belong to 1828 or 1829. In the first, one William McGarvie of the Australian Stationery Warehouse and Circulating Library adjoining the Gazette Office, George Street, Sydney,

begs leave to return thanks to his numerous friends and the Public, for the patronage he has received since his commencement in the Bookselling and Stationery business, and informs them, that in addition to his former Stock, he has received, by recent arrivals, a large assortment of useful, elegant, and fancy Stationery.

There follows a catalogue of miscellaneous articles ranging from usual stationery items such as paper, pens, etc. to charts of Torres Strait, East Indies, Indian Ocean, New Zealand, Mediterranean, Brazil, Australia, and Van Diemen’s Land; to Christmas pieces, theatrical characters and combats, caricatures and coloured prints, in great variety; to school textbooks; to Bibles, Prayer Books and Psalm Books; to hair brushes, toothbrushes, and ladies’ round combs. In the second advertisement, issued again from the Australian Stationery Warehouse ‘two doors from the Gazette Office, George Street, Sydney’ William McGarvie

* ML A1613.
begs to intimate that he has removed his long established Stationery Warehouse and Circulating Library to those new Premises next his Former Shop, where he will continue to keep every Article in his Line of the best quality. He has just received by a late arrival a very large investment of articles in the Bookselling and Stationery Business, which will enable him to dispose of his Stock at a great reduction of prices.

There follows a long list of articles, much as before, but containing rather more books. At the conclusion of the advertisement ‘W.M. begs to call the attention of the Public to his Circulating Library, which now contains upward of three thousand Volumes, and Subscription to which is extremely moderate, being £2. 0s. 0d. per Annum, £1. 1s. 0d. per Half-Year, and £0. 12s. 0d. per Quarter.’

In 1829 McGarvie published a ‘Catalogue of Books in the Circulating Library of William McGarvie, at the Australian Stationery Warehouse, (near the main guard) George Street, Sydney’. A copy of this catalogue is in the Mitchell Library; it is probably the first regular catalogue of books issued in Australia apart from the issues of sporadic lists of secondhand, and occasionally new, books by people who were not regular booksellers.

The Australian Stationery Warehouse, in Lower George Street, was originally part of the establishment of Robert Howe of the *Sydney Gazette*, and later it was owned by Ann Howe.

If McGarvie was our first full-time bookseller and stationer, our most important early Sydney bookseller was James Tegg. Thomas Tegg, father of James and his three brothers, was a publisher and bookseller of Cheapside, London, who decided that his boys should

* P1280.
George Robertson as seen by Low
set up as booksellers also. Accordingly he despatched James and Samuel to Sydney, Henry to Cape Town, and kept William with him in his London business.

James and Samuel arrived in Sydney on 12 December 1834 and opened a bookshop in George Street in 1835. The following advertisement appeared in the *Colonist*, Sydney, 29 January 1835:

> Messrs J. & S. Tegg, Booksellers and Publishers, opposite Bridge Street, George Street, Sydney. Messrs J. & S. Tegg beg respectfully to inform the inhabitants of Sydney, and country dealers, that their establishment is now opened, where all orders entrusted to them will be executed with promptitude and correctness, and at London prices. N.B. Schools supplied on liberal terms.

Samuel returned to London late in 1835, via the United States, and in December 1836 arrived in Hobart with a stock of books and 'opened a bookseller's shop high up in Elizabeth Street, then removing lower down, near Liverpool Street, and finally settling down at the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool Street, now known as Wellington Bridge'.

An advertisement in the joint names of James and Samuel carries the message 'Just arrived, per *Statesman*, new and valuable books, to be sold at London prices, by James and Samuel Tegg, George Street, opposite Bridge Street, Sydney'. This is followed by a long and diverse list of titles containing classics, poetry, the usual self-improvement books of the day, dictionaries, educational books, and quite a collection of novels. Some examples are

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*Jubilee number of *Walch’s Literary Intelligencer*. May 1909. ML A805/1.

*ML A1613.*
Young Man's Own Book, Manual of Intellectual Improvement, 1 vol.; Wilberforce's Practical View of Christianity, 1 vol.; Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel, 1 vol.; Girls' Own Book, with One Hundred and Forty-four Engravings, 1 vol.; Bibles and Prayer Books, in great variety; Modern Voyages of Discovery, by Captain Parry, Captain Franklin and Major Denham, with beautiful engravings of Finden, 13 vols.; Moore's Stories for Persons of the Middle Ranks; Moore's Tales for the Common People; Cyclopaedia of Popular Songs, containing Two thousand, 1 vol.

Tegg represented his father's large London publishing and bookselling house and the extent and variety of his stock indicates both his own background and training and also the fact that a market apparently existed in the Sydney of the thirties for a well-selected stock of books.

James Tegg also deserves mention as a publisher, in addition to his bookselling activities. In 1836 he published Tegg's New South Wales Pocket Almanac and Remembrancer. This was a small 8vo of 64 pages, in brown wrappers, and with a coloured frontispiece. The Almanac was published annually by Tegg until 1844.

In 1844 James Tegg retired for health reasons, selling his business to W. A. Colman, and died on 16 May 1845. In the same year Samuel sold his business to Major J. W. H. Walch, who on retirement from the army had settled in Van Diemen's Land. The firm of Walch and Sons, printers and stationers (though not now booksellers), still carries on business in Hobart. After visiting Sydney in 1847, Samuel Tegg returned permanently to England.

* F2190.
An interesting paragraph in the *Colonist* of 26 March 1835 has this to say of the contemporary bookselling scene:

Sydney has assumed quite a literary aspect of late. In addition to the older establishments of Mr McGarvie, Mr Moffitt, and Mr Evans, we have now no fewer than two other booksellers' shops in our colonial Capital. The Messrs Tegg, sons of the famous Cheap bookseller, of Cheapside, London have lately opened a shop in George Street, not unworthy in appearance of the British Metropolis itself; while Mr Innes's shop, in the handsome row of buildings recently erected in King Street, is equally creditable in its exterior, and seems remarkably well stocked. We trust that they will both meet with the patronage and support which their enterprising spirit deserves.

Bookselling in Melbourne naturally had somewhat later beginnings than in Sydney. In the early days there are some records of the same sporadic sales of books, mostly secondhand, by individuals not trading as booksellers. The first trading firm was probably that of Kerr and Thomson (later Kerr and Holmes), who sold books in 1840. Kerr's *Almanac* of 1842 contains an advertisement inserted by Matthews Holmes listing stationery, jewellery and other merchandise. It also referred to a collection of new and standard works including the *Nautical Almanac* and *The Penny Magazine*. As these are the only books advertised it rather suggests that the other merchandise, and not books, was the main stock-in-trade. Kerr's *Melbourne Almanac and Port Phillip Directory for 1841* was, in fact, compiled by William Kerr and 'published by Kerr and Holmes, Book and Stationery Warehouse, Collins Street' which is direct evidence of bookselling, even though it was probably subsidiary to stationery.9

9 F3233.
The discovery of gold seems to have attracted several booksellers among the many thousands of migrants who flocked into Victoria in the fifties. Several are noted by Leonard Slade in the paper he read before the Historical Society of Victoria on 28 May 1934.10 Of these the most significant were George Robertson and Samuel Mullen, to whom reference is made later, and H. T. Dwight.

Dwight arrived in Melbourne in 1857 with a large stock of second-hand books and opened a shop at 234 Bourke Street East. He must have prospered because in 1864 he moved into larger premises close by. A lively recollection of Dwight's shop was contained in an article by Arthur Patchett Martin on 'Orion' Horne in Australia which appeared in the London Academy of 29 March 1884:

What old Melbourne resident does not remember the secondhand bookseller's shop on the brow of Bourke Street Hill, near to the Houses of Parliament, where some fifteen to twenty years ago, and down to a later period, the colonial Quaritch—one Henry Tolman Dwight—held literary sway? Thither, on hot summer afternoons, would flock men of local note—lawyers, doctors, divines, journalists—a motley crew, but united in the bonds of bookdom.

It was no light privilege to be admitted into the sacred circle, for 'Dwight's' possessed, in the eyes of those of the younger generation who cared not for the politics or commerce of a prosperous province, much of the charm of a London literary coterie.

Dwight's shop must have possessed real attraction for those with literary inclinations. It was the regular meeting place of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Henry Kendall, Marcus Clarke and George

10 "Victorian Historical Magazine," vol. XV, No. 3 (May 1935).
Gordon McCrae (son of Georgiana and father of the poet Hugh). And of course Richard Henry (Hengist) Horne himself, who is recalled by Patchett as ‘a little odd-looking gentleman with cork-screw curls’. Another of Dwight’s ‘regulars’ was Sir Archibald Michie, leader of the bar, whose real aim in life was collecting rare editions of Montaigne.

Sir Ernest Scott quotes a story told to him in the 1890s by David Blair, a prominent M.P. and journalist.11 Blair was walking up Bourke Street towards Parliament House and on the way passed Dwight’s shop where, in a fourpenny box, he noticed Browning’s *Pauline*, first edition, inscribed ‘To Richard Henry Horne, from his friend Robert Browning’. Being in a hurry to get to Parliament Blair did not stop to buy the bargain but at the first opportunity some hours later returned and looked for the book, but it had gone. Either Dwight had retrieved (and no doubt re-marked) it or someone else had snapped it up.

Dwight died after being in business there for only ten years. His widow carried on the shop until 1872. Dwight’s estate eventually went to Melbourne University for the endowment of Dwight Prizes in various disciplines. Among the winners of these prizes appears the name of Robert Gordon Menzies, for Constitutional History.

We now turn to the man who was the first to make a really substantial impact on both bookselling and publishing in Australia—George Robertson.12 This is the George Robertson of Melbourne, not his Sydney namesake, who will appear later.

11 *History of the University of Melbourne*, M.U.P. 1936.
12 For information about George Robertson, of Melbourne, I am greatly indebted to my friend John Holroyd, whose memoir on George Robertson in 1968 deals fully with this outstanding bookseller.
George Robertson was born in Glasgow in 1825, son of a Congregational minister. When he was four years old his parents moved to Dublin where George received what scanty schooling he had. At the age of twelve he was apprenticed, in the manner of the times, to William Curry, Jun. and Company, a leading firm of booksellers. A fellow apprentice at Curry’s was Samuel Mullen, three years his junior, with whom Robertson formed a strong friendship. The manager of Curry’s in Dublin was an extremely able bookseller, James McGlashen, who had been secretary of the Dublin Booksellers’ Association, and was described by Charles Lever, the Irish novelist, as ‘the very ablest man in his walk, and—now that Blackwood is gone—far above Murray, Colburn, Longman and the rest of them; and in London, and with capital, would beat them hollow’. There is no doubt that the youthful George Robertson and Samuel Mullen were most fortunate in being apprenticed under such a capable teacher. After completing their apprenticeship Robertson stayed with Curry, and Mullen moved to London where he joined the Strand branch of the famous house of John W. Parker & Son, Oxford and London.

Although separated, the two friends kept in touch with one another. In 1852, being doubtful of future prospects at home, and possibly being fired by various books on the antipodes published by Curry during the thirties and forties, the two young men decided to emigrate. Robertson had every intention of remaining a bookseller in his new surroundings and took a large, and no doubt well-selected, stock of books with him. They came out in the Great Britain, a six-master of 3500 tons, propeller-driven as well, the largest and fastest ship afloat at the time.

George Robertson of Melbourne
Mullen had determined to follow a life on the land and had secured a position with Samuel Baird on Mount Bute Station near Apsley in the Western District of Victoria. On disembarkation (12 November 1852) Mullen departed for Mount Bute. Robertson, being short of cash, opened a case of books on the wharf and rapidly sold them. He secured a shop at 84 Russell Street, on the east side, between Bourke and Little Collins Streets. He took thirteen shillings and fourpence on the first day, and his shop was an immediate success. The following year, Robertson was forced by expansion to move to a larger shop at 85 Collins Street East. From that address, in 1855, was issued Robertson’s first publication, a sermon preached at Geelong by the Reverend Mackintosh Mackay. At about the same time Mullen decided that the land was not for him, and his friend was no doubt very glad to have him back in the old trade as his senior assistant. Robertson’s shop by this time was the biggest bookshop in Melbourne, if not in Australia, and in addition to retail bookselling the business was becoming steadily more prominent in the wholesale bookselling trade, as well as taking an active part in publishing, and in the sale of stationery. Robertson had great organising ability, and early perceived that in a country the size of this, decentralisation was inevitable. This led him not only to open branches of his own business in other cities, but also to encourage the small booksellers and newsagents in the country towns with whom he quickly built up an impressive wholesale business. His trade catalogue for 1860 is a most remarkable publication. It consists of 172 pages, thumb-indexed, and interleaved for the writing of orders. It contains a wide variety of books of all kinds, including school books, legal and medical texts, and some of his own Australian publications.

14 FI2035.
Robertson's business prospered so rapidly that in 1857 he took the adjoining shop (87 Collins Street East); in the same year he decided to open a London office, being the first Australian bookseller to do so. The man chosen to manage the London office was his old colleague Samuel Mullen, who by this time had married in Melbourne. Mullen, with his wife and infant son, left for London but on arrival there he received a letter from Robertson terminating the arrangement and giving the job to his brother, William Robertson. No reason has ever been given for this sudden change, and thereafter the two men never again spoke to one another.

Mullen returned to Melbourne in 1857 with his family and his brother, W. L. Mullen. The two brothers opened a book and
stationery shop at 55 Collins Street East, near Swanston Street. Later W. L. withdrew to open his own business at Ballarat, and later when Samuel Mullen retired in 1889, W. L. Mullen together with A. G. Melville and Leonard Slade purchased the Melbourne business.

Ever since Samuel Mullen had started his business it had included a lending library. Long before the days of organised public libraries it obviously supplied a great need in Melbourne and grew rapidly in size and public esteem. A. G. Melville, who later became one of the partners, was first appointed to take charge of the library, about 1863. Mullen’s library was undisputed leader in the field in Melbourne for a hundred years until finally it had to be closed for the same reasons as have forced the closure of all similar libraries—steadily rising costs, and competition from government-financed free public libraries. The *Illustrated London News* during the eighties referred to Mullen’s library, under a double-page picture, as ‘the Mudie’s of Melbourne’.

Samuel Mullen went for a trip to England in 1890 and died suddenly in London in that year. He had been a distinguished bookseller with probably more literary taste than most of his contemporaries in the book trade. With this asset, as well as his sound training at Curry’s and later at Parker’s, and his interest in the community around him, he did a great deal to raise the standards of bookselling in his adopted country. Although he never aspired to public positions he gave much time to the affairs of the Church of England, and to the Melbourne Orphans’ Asylum, in addition to being a member of the Melbourne Chess Club and one of the first members of the Shakespeare Society.

Meanwhile Robertson’s business continued to expand, though in a different direction from Mullen’s. For a time Robertson operated
a rival lending library, also in Collins Street, but this never made real headway against Mullen’s library and in 1878 it was closed.

Whereas Mullen was content to conduct a profitable business based on the citizens of Melbourne, Robertson’s vision was wider. His wholesale distribution system, together with his own publishing, made it essential for him to seek the widest possible market not only in Victoria but throughout Australia and New Zealand. In 1860 he opened a branch in Sydney at 383 George Street and placed it in the care of William Maddock, another distinguished early Sydney bookseller. Maddock, who had been trained by the Liverpool booksellers and cartographers, George Philip & Sons, had migrated to Australia in the fifties, becoming friendly on the voyage with Frederick Lewis Edwards, who became one of the founders of the famous house of Edwards Dunlop & Co. In 1862 Robertson sold this branch to Maddock, who continued trading there on his own account, adding a library to the shop, and becoming the undoubted leader of bookselling in Sydney. He also did some publishing, his most notable book being Kendall’s *Songs from the Mountains* (1880). In 1896 he sold out to William Dymock, and on the amalgamation Maddock founded the library of Dymock’s, destined to be a celebrated Sydney lending library for over half a century. William Maddock’s son, Stanley, was later for many years the respected head of the very large educational section of Dymock’s Book Arcade.

It is not known why Robertson sold to Maddock, with whom he always remained the best of friends. It may have been dictated by difficulty of control at a distance, and served by poor communications. Or perhaps he needed all available capital for his rapid growth in Melbourne. At any rate, after another decade of expansion in Victoria he again turned his attention interstate. On 13 September
Mullen's bookshop and library, on 'The Block', Collins Street, Melbourne
— from Australasian Sketcher, July 1879

23
1875, writing to Sir Henry Parkes in connection with the publication of his *Speeches on Various Occasions, 1848-74*, Robertson says:

I have taken a lease of the premises 125 Pitt Street, Sydney, and expect to open there in a few weeks’ time and if you would prefer that your book should appear with a Sydney imprint, I shall be in a position to do that for you. I have also only last week leased premises in Adelaide and shall by the time your book is ready be actively operating there. For Brisbane I propose Geo. Slater & Co. and for Hobart Town, J. Walch & Sons.

An advertisement in Sands’s *Sydney Directory* for 1897 draws the attention of the public to ‘George Robertson, Wholesale and Retail Bookseller and Stationer, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and London. Sydney branch: 125 New Pitt Street (opposite the Oriental Bank), Sydney.’ No. 125 was in what is now known as Pitt Street, between Bond Street and Little George Street, on the west side, probably diagonally opposite to the bank which was near Spring Street, in Pitt Street. The ‘new’ was probably only a colloquial and very brief addition to the street name, given by the public—it was never officially part of it—when changes were made in the Circular Quay end of this thoroughfare. Later, in the Sands’s *Directory* for 1880 we find George Robertson ‘Importer of Books and Stationery, Publisher, Bookbinder and Manufacturer’, informing all and sundry that

In consequence of the great increase in all Branches of his business, G.R. has now Removed to those handsome and commodious premises, 361, George Street (One door north of King Street) where, by his greater facilities, he trusts to be able to execute, with his usual promptitude and despatch, all orders he may be favoured with. . . .

18 Parkes Correspondence.
GEORGE ROBERTSON,
Importer of Books and Stationery,
PUBLISHER,
BOOKBINDER & MANUFACTURER.

In consequence of the great increase in all Branches of his business, G. R. has now Removed to those handsome and commodious premises,

361, GEORGE STREET,
(One door north of King Street)

where, by his greater facilities, he trusts to be able to execute, with his usual promptitude and despatch, all orders he may be favoured with.

Joined to his Immense and well-selected Assortment of Books,

in the STATIONERY DEPARTMENT,

which is replete with every novelty issued by the manufacturing houses both at home and abroad.

G. R. draws special attention to the extensive and complete arrangements he has now made for the Manufacture of Account Books, Bookbinding in all its Branches, ENGRAVING, LITHOGRAPHING, &c.

NEW BOOKS
are constantly being received from England and America, and Monthly Catalogues of them are issued Gratis, and are to be had on application.

361, GEORGE STREET, SYDNEY,
and at
Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane.
He gives his other addresses as Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane.

The Brisbane house (opened in 1879) was originally in Edward Street close to the Elizabeth Street corner. The branch had several moves and never seems to have prospered. It was closed in 1888. The Sydney branch, on this second occasion, was in the care of C. T. Clarke who later became manager of the book department of Edwards Dunlop & Co. The Adelaide branch employed two famous Australian booksellers both of whom later established their own businesses, F. W. Preece in Adelaide, and W. J. Griffiths in Geelong. No greater training ground for booksellers has ever existed in Australia than the original George Robertson's establishment. In addition to those named, Robertson also employed in one or other of his branches William Dymock, David Angus, George Robertson, G. B. Phillip, E. J. Dwyer and T. V. Carroll (all of whom established their own bookshops); Richard Thomson, Robertson's New Zealand manager in Auckland, later established his own bookshop in Brisbane, but then withdrew in favour of his brother, becoming a member of the firm of Angus & Robertson and ultimately Chairman of Directors. E. A. Petherick was Robertson's London manager (following William Robertson referred to above). Petherick had had a keen interest in Australiana and had collected from his school days. He must have had ample opportunities in London before Australiana became greatly sought after. He added steadily to his library which now forms an important part of the great collection of the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Meanwhile the business in Melbourne had continually expanded. Early in 1860 Robertson bought the property at 69 Elizabeth Street which forms part of the premises occupied for many years by Robertson & Mullens and now Angus & Robertson's Melbourne branch (now numbered 107 Elizabeth Street). He proceeded to de-
molish the disreputable shanties which stood on the site, and at a cost of £8000, no doubt then a very considerable sum for any bookseller, he erected his new building and therein housed his stock valued at £20,000. The Argus of 16 July 1860 published a lengthy and most enthusiastic article under the heading 'Something like a Bookshop', from which it seems appropriate to quote at some length:

Puffing, either the preliminary, the direct, or the collusive article, it is pretty well known is not one of our weaknesses, but we conceive we should be omitting an obvious duty were we to pass over without notice an enterprise which for magnitude, and the admirable manner in which it has been brought to completion, has no rival in its special department on this side the equator. But to the proof. Upon a piece of ground lately encumbered by two tumble-down shanties Mr Robertson has in a few months erected this noble three-storied building, which for commodiousness and workmanship may bear favourable comparison with many structures of greater pretension. While every foot of room is, or will be, fully appropriated to the large stock and requirements of the establishment, there is no appearance of crowding, and each floor is admirably lighted. On each side run eleven airy looking yet substantial iron columns, of colonial manufacture, ending in ornamental capitals. These give a particularly elegant and graceful appearance to the two main business rooms (the second floor is occupied by unopened cases) which are each 115 feet in length, while the general effect is greatly heightened, particularly in the lower room, by the unexceptionable furniture and fittings, upon which great
taste has been bestowed. The ceilings—a wise precaution in this country of bad plaster—are panelled throughout. A handsome staircase, the width of which at once strikes the eye accustomed to the break-neck and ladder-like contrivances so common in Melbourne shops and stores, leads us to the top of the building, where, although erected upon almost the lowest part of the city, a fine view is obtainable. While we are up there let us see how the book trade is managed, first of all presuming everything to be in apple-pie order, which is hardly the case at present. Here are stowed away the vast cases of light and heavy literature. A box from Murray’s, or Routledge’s is wanted. Duly labelled, and placed so as to be easily accessible, it is at once seized upon and made to disgorge its multifarious contents upon a large table situated conveniently in the centre of the room. The manager of the country trade makes his selection, then the superintendent of the town supply, and each bear off their shares of the spoils downstairs, where they are re-packed and despatched to their various destinations. The rest are put in stock on the second or ground floor, as occasion requires, a sample being reserved for the inspection of the proprietor, who has a little room devoted to the purpose . . . Thus all confusion is avoided, and a few moments will at any time suffice for ascertaining the quantity on hand of any particular description of stock. Every publisher of note in England has one or more compartments appropriated to the emanations from his establishment, so that what at first appears to be a chaos of cloth and boards is really as perfectly ordered an array of books as that in the Public Library. . . .
After a somewhat wordy description of how the shop operates, the writer concludes:

But we have already extended this notice somewhat beyond bounds, and will therefore conclude by wishing Mr Robertson God-speed in his plucky undertaking, and Victorians a thirst for knowledge commensurate with the wishes of such an enterprising literary vintner.

The readers of the Argus must have come to the inescapable conclusion that it was, indeed, 'something like a bookshop'.

The Bookseller (London) for September 1860 refers to copies of the Argus, the Herald and the Examiner sent to it by a Melbourne correspondent, obviously impressed with the new shop, who is quoted as saying:

The good folks at home consider Australia generally, Victoria particularly, and Melbourne peculiarly, as merely a name, where people go down for a year or two, live roughly, become uncivilized, and return with a fortune.

He goes on to say that the extent of the book trade, and the demand for books by the colonists, give the lie to this impression, and concludes:

but the best proof has just been produced, viz. that the largest importer in Australia has found it necessary, for the despatch of his business, and the increase of his stock, to erect a building which would bear comparison with any in the Row.

Notwithstanding this magnificent establishment Robertson found it necessary to expand further, building a four-storey bulk store and factory at Collins Place (now called Equitable Place) at the
rear of his shop. In this new building he installed machinery for binding and for stationery manufacture.

So far, much has been said of Robertson’s bookselling and wholesaling activities, but I have not touched upon his publishing. I have always regarded this George Robertson as the father, in time, of Australian publishing, and there can be no doubt that he published many important books by many famous men. It can never be forgotten that he published for Marcus Clarke, Henry Kendall, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Brunton Stephens, George Gordon McCrae and many others. He published in 1873 the Australian edition of Trollope’s *Australia and New Zealand*, and what was probably the first Australian children’s book to be printed in colour, *The Australian Christmas Story Book* (1871). There were hundreds of other titles of all kinds, some very important books. Some bore Sydney and Adelaide imprints, but the great majority originated in Melbourne. Unfortunately no systematic attempt ever seems to have been made to keep a file copy of everything published by George Robertson, or if so the collection was dispersed long since. A complete set would have been both interesting and most valuable today.

Yet despite these achievements, I believe that this George Robertson was at heart a bookseller, or perhaps more correctly a wholesale bookseller, rather than a publisher. He does not seem to have had any recognisable philosophy of publishing, such as his Sydney namesake had, or A. C. Rowlandson of the New South Wales Bookstall Co. Robertson’s publishing had a certain *ad hoc* quality about it, and this I think arose from the fact that he seems rarely to have been the publisher of a book in the full sense of bearing the costs and risks of publication and paying a royalty to the author—and of often even getting the original idea for the book. Unfortunately, because of the absence of any records, we shall
never know which books he published at his own risk and which at the author's. One suspects that the latter outweighed the former. Even so, it is necessary to remember the times in which he operated. Such arrangements were common enough in the sixties, seventies, and eighties even between English and American publishers and their authors. One of Robertson's early books was *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip* by James Bonwick (1856). The title-page states that this book was printed by Goodall and Demaine and published for the author by George Robertson. The inference is that the author met the costs. However, Kendall's *Leaves from Australian Forests* (1869) was published under a profit-sharing scheme and at the publisher's expense. Robertson issued 1500 copies at his own risk. In the event there was no profit and Robertson lost about £100.

In the letter to Henry Parkes referred to above, dated 13 September 1875, Robertson says 'as a rule I do not publish except I have charge from the beginning but in the present case I am willing to waive that, as with Mr Blair's reading and Firth's printing I feel satisfied that the work will be well done'. This indicates pretty clearly that the risk was usually with the author, for if Robertson had assumed the risk and paid the costs there is no doubt that he would naturally have had control.

In the same letter he goes on to say

as to sale in England, past experience with other Australian publications forbids me to hope much. There is a tendency on the part of the English press and the English trade to neglect, or if noticed, to snub anything Australian. My London office is for 'buying' and not for 'selling'; but through that office I can, if you desire it, place a supply of
your book in the hands of Simpkin Marshall & Co. or some other 'commission' house. The regular publishers decline all books except such as they have the opportunity of producing themselves.

He then asks Parkes for 'instructions as to selling price', another indication that he was merely distributor, not publisher in the full sense.

However, in spite of his somewhat depressing comment about sales in England, and in spite of a refusal by Macmillans to allow their name to be used,\(^\text{16}\) he is able to write to Parkes on 17 February 1876 telling him that Longmans had consented to have their name on the title-page of *Speeches on Various Occasions*, and to sell it on commission. ‘I am very much gratified by this’, he adds, ‘as we could not have had a better house for our purpose’.\(^\text{17}\) He then breaks the news to Parkes that ‘Mason, Firth & Co.s bill [for printing] will amount to £230’.

If Robertson had his doubts about accepting financial responsibility for the books that bore his name, he had none about the respect due to copyright. There is an interesting correspondence in the *Argus* of April 1854 on this subject. On 18 April the *Argus* ran a leading article headed ‘Books’. This very lengthy article heartily applauded the then current practice of American publishers, before the days of organised international copyright, of merely taking any English work that appealed to them and of republishing it without permission or payment. After enlarging on the high cost of English books, the *Argus* speaks with contempt of English copyright owners, whether publishers or authors,

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 24.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 27.
who think more of the few paltry shillings they would gain by the sale of their own copyrights than of the extending reputation they acquire among the new generation of the Antipodes, and the elevating influences which they contribute to the minds of the weary exiles who, in the city, the bush, or the diggings, hold intellectual fellowship with earth's truest nobility.

The newspaper also objected to the giving of authority to the Customs authorities to hold up pirated editions seeking entry to Victoria.

On 22 April George Robertson wrote a long letter (which the Argus printed in such minute type as to be hardly readable), in which, inter alia he said

we have no necessity to have recourse to American pirated editions. Our population are certainly fonder of brandy than of books; 'nobblers' have greater attractions for them than knowledge; but with multitudes at home it is the same. Ignorance and vice are rampant in the back slums of London and Manchester as they are here. If the operation of the copyright laws would form a hindrance to social progress here, they would do the same in England. But I contend that they do not. They form the cradle of literary talent; the nursing mother of genius. They give a stimulus to literary effort in the most effectual ways, by holding out a rich prize to those that are successful in the race.

He goes on to point out what he himself has done to promote the reading of good books in Victoria, and suggests that if the Argus
DEAR SIR, —

The goods, as per enclosed order, please forward; cheque will be sent, as usual, on receipt of invoice.

J. T. STEELE.

[Copy]

Observe the reply.

To Mr. J. T. Steele.

Sir.

I regret to say I cannot supply you with the Goods ordered by you at TRADE PRICES,

In consequence of your Underselling the Regular Booksellers.

I can supply the books ordered at retail prices.

Respectfully yours, pro Geo. Robertson,

THOMAS HOBLETHORPE.

In reply to your favor of the 3rd instant, I beg to state that I never did, or ever intend to, recognise any absurd TRADE COMBINATIONS to keep up the prices of any class of goods, believing that it is very unfair to the general public so to do, and that it is my intention to continue, as I have hitherto done, to sell goods at the smallest possible remunerative profits, as my motto is, SMALL PROFITS AND QUICK RETURNS.

I regret for your sake that you should be induced to DISCONTINUE the execution of my orders, for the REASON YOU MENTION, but fortunately for my customers and myself there are other Wholesale Houses in Melbourne in the trade not so anxious as you are to keep up prices. I have also to inform you that it is my intention to publish (if you have no objection) your letter.

I am, yours, &c.,

J. T. STEELE.

HOWLISTON TATE AND CO., Printers, Maldon.
is sincere it would do better to be a little more active in that direction itself.

I am only sorry [he says] that you have hitherto so completely eschewed literature in your paper; as in a city like this, where there is, comparatively speaking, so little social intercourse or literary society, a few occasional notices of books would, I am sure, be very much valued by many of your readers who have no other means of obtaining a sound opinion as to the merits of new books arriving from England. This would be a step in the right direction, and would accord with your character as a 'promoter of social progress'.

Robertson was a reserved man who never entered public life. He was generous, shy, a strict disciplinarian, but kind to his staff. He never employed women. 'They chatter too much and waste time', he said, 'besides they distract the young men from their work'. He married twice and had fourteen children in all. He retired in 1890 and died at St Kilda on 23 March 1898.

In addition to his concern for the preservation of copyright, Robertson believed strongly in the preservation of retail prices in the book trade and refused to supply booksellers who engaged in price-cutting. The correspondence reproduced on p. 34 is proof of this. It is interesting to note that this exchange took place almost a hundred years to the year before Mr Justice Eggleston in the Trade Practices Tribunal found—in 1972—that the preservation of set retail prices in the book trade was not in the public interest. As a result price-fixing had to be discontinued. Whether either the public or booksellers are better off is a debatable point.

It is interesting to note that years later—in 1922 when both
George Robertson and Samuel Mullen were long gone—and despite the antagonism of their later years—the two businesses, then George Robertson & Co. Ltd (it had become a public company in 1883) and Melville and Mullen Pty Ltd combined to form Robertson & Mullens, which was for many years a leading Melbourne bookshop.

Let us return now to Sydney, and consider the early careers of two other notable migrants, David Mackenzie Angus and the second George Robertson, and the effect they had upon the book-selling and publishing scene in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

David Mackenzie Angus was born in Thurso, Caithness-shire, Scotland, in 1855. His father, who was a stonemason, moved with his family to Edinburgh in the early seventies, and there David, the youngest child, received his education. Resolved from early years to become a bookseller, he was apprenticed to the firm of E. and S. Livingstone, then booksellers to the University of Edinburgh, now not booksellers but a world-famous firm of medical publishers.

Having completed his apprenticeship, Angus joined William Brown as assistant when Brown started his bookselling business at the west end of Princes Street, Edinburgh.

At this period a serious breakdown in health threatened to terminate Angus's career, if not his life. Resort to a milder climate without delay was imperative. He determined to go to New South Wales, where his eldest brother, Donald, was already residing. In the month of August 1882 he sailed from London by the Orient steamer Liguria. On the way round to Plymouth the young man was so ill that the ship's doctor ordered him to be put ashore at that port. This was done, and he made his way back alone to
London, where he was placed in hospital. Making a rapid recovery, he sailed again a month later, this time in the Orient steamer *Austral*, arriving in Sydney on 3 November 1882. Having safely delivered Angus to his new country, the *Austral* sank at her moorings in Sydney Harbour a few days later.

After a period of rest in Sydney, young Angus entered the employment of George Robertson & Company, of Melbourne, as we have seen carrying on a branch business at 361 George Street, Sydney. He remained in this situation for about eighteen months and it was there that he first met George Robertson, who was no relation of the head of the firm which both were then serving, but who was destined to join Angus in a notable partnership.

The time came when the latent ambition to establish his own business, which Angus had formed in Scotland, and which ill-health had checked, became so strong that he determined to make the perilous venture.

At this time Sydney was served by a number of bookshops, notably, in addition to George Robertson & Company, by William Maddock, J. W. R. Clarke, W. R. Piddington, E. R. Cole, and J. J. Moore. The circle of Sydney book-lovers and book-buyers was not a wide one, and any bookseller making a bid for a livelihood had to create his own clientele by his enterprise and enthusiasm, and by the engendering in the public of a desire for reading and a pride in book ownership.

Fully conscious of the difficulties ahead, Angus proceeded to lay his plans. Negotiations with home publishers and with his former employers in Edinburgh resulted in promises of support, and presently the first shipment of books reached Sydney. It consisted of about eight or ten large cases of secondhand books from Young J. Pentland, who had been a fellow apprentice at Livingstone's.
Opening Announcement

New Bookseller's Establishment

410 Market St.
Sydney, June 1886.

Sir,

I beg respectfully to intimate that I have opened premises at the above address, and have now on hand a carefully-selected Stock of New and Second-hand Books which have been purchased in the Home Markets on very favourable terms.

From the experience I have had in the Business both at Home and in the Colony I trust to be able satisfactorily to fulfill all orders entrusted to my care.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant

D. M. Angus

A.N. Special attention given to Country orders. All Monthly and other Magazines promptly forwarded.

Books not in stock can be forwarded from Sydney or Melbourne or can be ordered from England if desired.

Second-hand Books at present in stock are a special lot and of value.

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Donald Angus and another friend had erected the shelving at nights, and on Saturday afternoon—so that only a week's rent and the cost of the timber had been drawn from that tiny horde of £50 in the bank. But Pentland must be paid, other goods were on the way and what if health failed him?

Two copies of this circular—the first issued in connection with the business—have been miraculously preserved. One is in the Mitchell Library, the gift of Mr Dunlop, the other was found by William Wood many years after the above events among some old papers, and presented to George Robertson. It reads as follows:

Opening Announcement
New Bookseller's Establishment

110 Market Street
Sydney June 1884.

Sir,

I beg respectfully to intimate that I have opened premises at the above address, and have now on hand a carefully selected Stock of New and Second-hand Books which have been purchased in the Home Markets on very favourable terms.

From the experience I have had in Business both at Home and in the Colony, I trust to be able satisfactorily to fulfil all orders entrusted to my care.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,
D. M. Angus

19 ML A463/1.
N.B.—Special attention given to Country orders. All monthly and other Magazines punctually forwarded.

Books not in stock can be procured in Sydney or Melbourne or can be ordered from England if desired.

Second-hand books at present in stock are a special lot and of extra value.

The Mitchell copy bears the following message handwritten on the back:

Dear Mr Dunlop,

Mr Angus is a friend who has recently opened business as a Bookseller. I forward to you a packet of circulars will you kindly open them and oblige me by giving them to the messenger asking him to distribute them amongst the gentlemen telling them that a Bookseller Mr Angus has forwarded them. Your kind attention will favour.

Yours faithfully,
A. Macartney Hyde.

Unfortunately no picture is known of the original shop in Market Street.

For twelve months all went well. Angus moved for a time from 110 to 112, and subsequently, after Robertson joined him, the partners returned to 110, as well as 112. Details of these early moves are given by the late James Tyrrell, who joined the firm in Market Street days. Business steadily improved and booklovers were attracted by the new and old books, all reasonably marked.

The outlook was bright—when Angus's health suddenly broke down again. A long spell in the dry air of the interior was his only chance, and to Mudgee he went, leaving a Mr Tracy, an American friend of his brother, in charge. Tracy knew nothing of the business, and his daily letter to Mudgee could hardly have been cheerful reading for an invalid.

Angus soon saw that the desperate situation could be saved only by the introduction of someone into the business. In default of skilled help it would go to pieces, to his shame and the hurt of his creditors in the old country.

Now his former comrade, George Robertson, had often assisted him in these pioneering days, marking books for him after business hours, and prompting him to buy the library of the Reverend Wazir Beg, Presbyterian divine of Chalmer’s Church, Sydney which, as arranged and priced by Robertson, became an attractive section of Angus’s first stock, and notable as the first library handled by the firm. When George Robertson noticed the difficulties under which Angus was labouring and that his own vigour and experience could effectually aid the endangered business, he offered to become a partner; and for the sum of fifteen pounds, his total capital, was admitted to a half-share in January, 1886.

An alliance had come into being which, in the fullness of time, was destined to exert a mighty influence in encouraging the growth of a distinctive Australian literature and in extending the cause of education, the love of reading, the joy of book acquisition and the respect for scholarship throughout Australia and New Zealand.

George Robertson, the son of Scottish parents, was born at the Manse, Halstead, Essex, England, on 14 April 1860. His father, the Reverend John Robertson, was Unitarian Minister of Halstead. It is interesting to find that during his student days at Glasgow John
George Robertson of Sydney
Robertson had maintained himself by conducting a bookshop in that city, and several books of the day bear his imprint as publisher. As author, he edited The Eeden Scholars' Class Book (London, 1858) and issued Sermons preached to Congregations chiefly composed of Working Men (London, 1863), and other works.

His father dying when George was four years of age, the widow and seven children returned to Scotland. Reared in straitened circumstances George was compelled to leave school at fourteen and became apprenticed to James MacLehose senior, Publisher and Bookseller to the University of Glasgow. This well-known Scottish publisher and his sons published no less than 578 volumes and 1121 pamphlets, mostly in connection with the University, between the years 1835 and 1905. The master took the keenest interest in his young apprentice, and, after teaching him his business most efficiently, maintained a regular correspondence with him in New Zealand and Australia until his death in 1885.

In 1879, at the termination of his apprenticeship, George Robertson migrated to New Zealand, where his brothers were conducting a sawmill in Canterbury. After working in the bush there for nearly three years he made his way to Sydney, landing there without friend or job.

At a social gathering held in honour of Mrs C. T. Clarke in 1926, George Robertson recalled his experience on arrival in this country.

I landed in Sydney on the afternoon of 12 February, 1882, with 10/1 in my pocket, all of which went for bed and breakfast at a boarding-house, and in the morning you may be sure that I was up good and early to look for a job. The first I went after was driving a portable engine at a joiner's shop at Paddington; it was filled and off I went,
across country, after a handy-man's billet in a hay and corn store in the Haymarket. That was filled up too and I strolled disconsolately along George Street until I happened on Mr Turner (afterwards of Turner and Henderson) taking down his shutters on Brickfield Hill. An inspiration came to me—why not try the old game? Turner, Jerry Moore, Maddock, Cole had nothing to offer so I crossed over to George Robertson & Company who were in the building now occupied by Beard Watson & Company. Behind the counter, in a white waistcoat, was a man whom I got to know very well—the somewhat erratic but wholly lovable William Dymock. He said that his experience was that British booksellers were no good for the Colonial trade, but he would take me to the general manager, and he took me to Mr Lewis's office. Lewis said, Yes, he thought he could give me a start—where had I been and what was my name? When I replied: 'George Robertson' he froze instantly, and said that he was afraid I would not suit, and presently turned to his letters again. With that prescience which probably has had much to do with any success I may have attained in life I said: 'I'll leave you my address, anyway.' When the manager of the retail section Mr C. T. Clarke (later of Edwards, Dunlop & Company) returned from lunch, Lewis told him about the George Robertson No. 2, who was also a bookseller, and what a nuisance it would be to have an employee with that name on the staff. With that sheer commonsense, which was one of Mr Clarke's chief attributes, he said 'He writes a good fist, MacLehose's is a first-rate house, and we could call him "George".'
Then was written a letter offering Robertson his first and only billet in Sydney. This document he always cherished as a valuable possession, and he gratefully acknowledged his obligations to his lifelong friend, Mr Clarke, for his timely aid.

In later life George Robertson stated that he owed his success in business to a capacity for organisation and hard work. These qualities he displayed in his new position, and there he served until the end of 1885, having attained eventually to the dignity of manager of the retail department. After fifteen weeks in this office, he wrote to his principal, the celebrated George Robertson of Melbourne, whom he had never met, suggesting that he was entitled to a rise in salary in view of his new responsibilities. In the only letter he ever received from his namesake his claim was allowed and the sum of £15 arrears of salary was forwarded to him. Meantime, however, the exigencies of Angus’s business had suggested his retirement from the house of George Robertson & Company and he left in December 1885. The younger George Robertson never met the older one; but he always held him in the highest regard.

The name ‘Angus & Robertson’ now appeared above the windows of the shop in Market Street, and business increased steadily, though the want of ready capital was often severely felt. In the first year of association the partners sold nearly £4000 worth of books. In addition to his partner, Robertson found at work Donald Angus, David’s elder brother (always known as ‘Dan’) a canny book-keeper to the business, somewhat dry and caustic in his humour, but universally respected for his reliability and general worth. He remained in the service of the firm until his death in 1916. Dan Angus is immortalised by Henry Lawson in The Auld Shop & the New.

The junior and only other member of this small staff was a boy,
Fred Wymark, who had been engaged under curious circumstances, indicative of the ready intelligence of the lad, who was later to become a noted expert in Australiana and a director of the company subsequently formed. David Angus told his partner how he advertised for a boy—in those days thirty would turn up for a five-shilling position—and took one who lived in Balmain, quickly too, no doubt, for the other twenty-nine would be shouting uncomplimentary personalities. When all were gone Fred strolled in and said:

‘Got a boy, sir?’ Angus said ‘Yes’ shortly, and turned to the work in hand.

‘What time is he coming to-morrow?’ asked the irrepressible lad.
‘Eight-thirty.’
‘If he doesn’t turn up, will you have me?’
‘Clear out of this,’ said the irate Angus.

At 8.30 on the morrow he found Fred sitting on the doorstep. ‘That boy is no good, sir,’ he said, ‘or he would have been in time the first morning.’ When Angus opened the door he stepped in, asked where the broom was kept and, having swept out the shop, announced that the job was his.

Robertson began to prosecute almost at once a branch of the business which was to attain great dimensions very speedily. This was the acquisition and sale of books, pamphlets, manuscripts, maps and prints relating to Australia, New Zealand and the South Seas. The subject had not gained any great hold upon the imagination of Australian bookbuyers and collectors as yet, although in the United States Americana had long been the object of careful search and eager purchase. David Scott Mitchell, who had been a large buyer of general literature, was influenced by Robertson to turn his attention to the purchase of some of the rare items of Australiana displayed in the Market Street shop, and soon he developed that keen interest
Frederick Victor Wymark
Sir William Dixson
—from an etching by Lionel Lindsay
in the great subject which led to the formation and endowment of his magnificent collection, now the nucleus of the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Angus took little or no interest in this branch of the business but Robertson found an enthusiastic ally in the youthful Fred Wymark who had been employed as a boy by Angus before Robertson joined him. As Robertson became more and more engrossed in the cares of a growing general business, the management of the Australiana section passed to Wymark, and his keenness in buying, his intuitive appreciation of the historical significance and value of this material and his unerring judgment were unhesitatingly relied upon by D. S. Mitchell and, later, by Sir William Dixson, another discriminating collector, whose magnificent library now supplements and rounds off the treasures already in the Mitchell Library, and whose priceless collection of Australian pictures now adorns the walls of the Dixson Gallery there. The whole of Europe and Australasia was ransacked during many years for material of literary, historical, geographical, and anthropological importance and many journeys by land and sea were undertaken by Robertson, Wymark, and Richard Thomson, in this treasure hunt. Many famous libraries, as well as individual diaries, log-books, letters, journals, rare books, pamphlets, maps, and pictures were found, and were scrambled for eagerly by Australian collectors. In this way, too, the name of the firm, its stability and its well-directed and efficient business methods were brought under the notice of the great bookselling establishments in the old world, with satisfactory results in valued connections.

A very clear and valuable statement of the efforts of the firm in building up the collection of D. S. Mitchell will be found in the evidence given by George Robertson in 1905 before the Public Works Committee of the Legislative Assembly of New South
Wales, which enquired into the question of the establishment of the Mitchell Library as a section of the proposed national library of New South Wales. Indeed his account of the immense value of this collection largely influenced the Committee to recommend the immediate construction of the library. Perhaps the most lasting and most important of all Robertson's activities as a bookseller lay in his imaginative understanding of the importance of the early literature of his adopted country at a time when few people paid any attention to it. This understanding shows clearly in his evidence above referred to which reads, in part:

When I hear the money value of the Mitchell Collection spoken of, I always feel tempted to break the peace. When safely housed by the State, its value will be what it is worth to New South Wales and the world at large, not what a Carnegie or a Pierpont Morgan would be willing to give for it. In a Government institution the Mitchell Library will be well cared for and, perhaps, judiciously added to; but the best board of trustees in the world could not have assembled it. To do that, an untrammelled man of genius was needed, with ample wealth and dogged perseverance, with education and those much rarer qualities, taste and discrimination. Such a one New South Wales has had in Mr Mitchell, and not the least of his qualifications for his life-work has been the power of transmitting some tincture of his enthusiasm to those who serve him.

He goes on to enumerate many of the treasures of the great Mitchell Collection and ends as follows:

It is as a whole that the library should be judged. It is not merely a collection of the unique and rare. Though
David Scott Mitchell

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Mr Mitchell has never willingly allowed the rare thing to escape him, he has not neglected ordinary Australiana, and many an item which looks unimportant now will assume a different aspect in time to come. Whatever its value now, the time will arrive when from all parts of the world men will come to consult it. It is no small distinction to have conferred on your native city, this. Its present value is great and real; a hundred years hence one might as well offer to purchase the Bodleian at Oxford as the Mitchellian here. The Andrew Lang or Austin Dobson of that period will relate the story of the Mitchell Library, and compare us with the Provost of Eton who caused Jacob Bryant to change the destination of his library from Eton to King’s College, Cambridge, by debating the question of freight.

If Robertson’s reputation as a bookseller rested on nothing else it rests securely on his relationship with the great Mitchell Library.

Meanwhile, in addition to this special activity, all the ordinary branches of a bookselling business were being vigorously carried on, and particular attention was given to the importation of the latest medical and other technical books, and the display of theological works. The firm was appointed booksellers and publishers to the University of Sydney. The shop soon became a rendezvous of academic and professional people, many of whom loved to discuss the new books with the partners, who read as well as sold books, and to exchange jokes and stories, some of which Robertson loved to recall in after years. Many names could be mentioned of those who belonged to this intellectual but often empty-pocketed band of young men. The firm had no political or theological preposses-
sions, and attempted a universal service. The theological section held some volumes to suit men of every creed—or no creed.

Robertson used to tell a story of the Very Reverend Dean Slattery, a valued patron.

'Your prices are exorbitant Mr Robertson. Now, I'll tell you what you ought to do. Go down to Mr Dymock's and see how he marks his books.' Then (I was obviously angry) 'tut, tut, tut, he wouldn't mind the likes of you looking round.'

A few weeks later I met Dymock, who said: 'Does that old swine Father Slattery ever come to see you? . . .' And I learnt that he had told Dymock that he was a very deserving young man, but he really ought to go up and see how Mr Robertson priced his books. On hearing this I naturally forgave the Dean, and never willingly missed an opportunity of serving him myself. I could fill a volume with stories of 'The Dane' as his co-religionists styled him.

'William Dymock and I were always good friends,' added Robertson. 'I never grudged him his success, and I am sure he never grudged me mine. At times, when we were both after the same library, there might be a little tension; but that was soon forgotten.'

The year 1888 was a notable one for in this year three books were published, thus inaugurating a branch of the business which Robertson always regarded as the highest and most important activity of the firm and which some years later assumed large dimensions. The books were, in order of date of publication, A Crown of Wattle, a slender volume of verse by H. Peden Steel then a young solicitor; Sun and Cloud on River and Sea, verses by
Ishmael Dare, the pen-name of Arthur W. Jose, then a schoolmaster at Bathurst, and afterwards author of a number of books and editor-in-chief of the first *Australian Encyclopaedia* (1927). The third volume, a thin folio, was entitled *Facsimile of a Proposal for a Settlement on the Coast of New South Wales by Sir George Young* (1785): *From a copy in the possession of the Publishers*.

Copies of each of these three books are now very scarce indeed.

After about three years of joint endeavour the partners found the accommodation in the Market Street shop much overtaxed and the addition of a further shop, No. 116, afforded only a slight alleviation. It was clear that a move must be made to much larger premises.

By great good fortune, premises forming portion of the site occupied by the business at 89 Castlereagh Street for the next 75 years were secured on advantageous terms. This street was soon to become the Paternoster Row of Sydney. The building then occupying the site had been used as a coach factory and was one hundred feet long by twenty-five wide. The stock from Market Street seemed to be swallowed up in this comparatively vast space and it was some time before it began to look like a bookshop. There was an upper floor, which was sub-let to the Scottish Rifles and had a separate entrance from the street. This transfer took place in 1890.

With the increased facilities provided in the new premises further progress was made. Publishing, particularly of educational books, became increasingly important. There had been no outstanding success however, until A. B. ('Banjo') Paterson, then a member of the firm of Street and Paterson solicitors, offered Robertson the MS. of his book *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*.

For an amusing and interesting 'catalogue' of the Castlereagh Street booksellers of the early part of this century see *Along the Castlereagh*, a four-page pamphlet in rhyme, by A. G. Stephens, published in an edition of 60 copies in August 1924.
Paterson’s own account of this is of great interest:

But nothing daunted Robertson. I think to this day that the driving force behind him was his desire to send to his old firm of MacLehose a book published by himself. Be that as it may, he went to work on ‘The Man from Snowy River’, circularised the bookselling trade (most of them his rivals), interviewed reviewers, and finally launched his book; and sent the first copy to MacLehose. This is not the place to speak of the success of the book; but as soon as it was well under way he started on a similar collection of the verse of Lawson. Lawson was at that time writing for a labour paper, and he was very dubious whether the capitalistic classes would have anything to do with his book, so he sold his rights in the book straight out for a lump sum and sat down and awaited the denouement. His book also sold remarkably well, and it was not long before Lawson repented of his bargain. He took no pains to conceal his dissatisfaction, and Robertson, who hoped to do further business with him, wiped out the old bargain and paid Lawson a royalty on sales. Lawson’s book continued to sell well, and its author, who had a vein of bitter humour, once said to me ‘Do you know who’s buying my book? Your friends of the capitalistic classes! The Labour people are not buying my book. They have declared me bogus for writing a story disclosing some good points in a squatter.’

These books, beautifully illustrated by Frank Mahony and issued at the end of 1895 and beginning of 1896 sold in many thousands of copies and established the important fact that Australian subjects

22 Sydney Mail, 20 September 1933.
A CROWN OF WATTLE

BY

H. PEDEN STEEL.

Songs of my leisure hours,
Songs of my solemn days;
Sung when the dark sky low'rs
And in the sun's bright rays.
Songs that may go for nought,
Save to a kindred soul;
From such is favour sought,
To such my goal!

ANGUS & ROBERTSON,
110 MARKET STREET, SYDNEY.
1888.

Title page of the first book published by Angus & Robertson
and background, when sympathetically treated by Australian genius, had power to attract numerous readers. From this moment publishing on a large scale became a regular feature of the business, and a new field of opportunity was opened up to Australian authors. During the nineties and later, many names now famous in Australian literature were enrolled in the catalogues and trade lists of Angus & Robertson.

Henry Lawson had begun to frequent the vast barnlike shop in Castlereagh Street in 1895 and much of his writing was composed there. He has immortalised the original building at 89 Castlereagh Street in *The Auld Shop & the New* 'Written specially for "The Chief", George Robertson of Angus & Robertson as some slight acknowledgement of and small return for his splendid generosity during years of trouble, and addressed to Donald Angus by Henry Lawson.' This is a small volume of verse in pseudo-Scottish dialect written in 1910 and printed for private circulation in 1923 in a limited edition of seventy-five copies.

When the Scottish Rifles vacated the upper floor, the extension of business had justified a complete alteration in the somewhat ungainly building; the stairs were moved, a new front was put in and other improvements made. Thus was created Lawson's 'New Shop' and his verse points the contrast between the old and the new.

> Oh! do you mind the auld shop, Dan?
> They've scarcely left a hint—
> Where Banjo and meself, lang syne,
> Brot our furse books to print?
> They've partly left the auld front, Dan,
> But that is going too—
> An' sae I sadly sing the sang:
> 'The Auld Shop an' the New!'
Twa boxes 'neath the window-sills
Stood open to the glare,
An' soiled and tattered Secon'-han'
Took dust, or fluttered there.
Twa cards stood on the pavement stanes
Writ large for great an' sma',
Wi' ALL IN THIS BOX SIXPENCE, Dan,
And A' IN THIS BOX TW A.

Our furse bukes made them publishers
Well kent throughout the wirl—
The young chief gave his leg a fling
And gie'd his pipes a skirl:
He took those boxes from the door
In all his prideful sin,
And ca'ed a saw-and-hammer man
To board the spaces in.

Depair-r-tments grew by yards since then,
The shelves have run by miles,
But, save his winsome selling-smile
The Black Chief seldom smiles.
And mony a time he thinks an' sighs,
An' longs, wi' bitter pain,
(As Banjo put it aince) to see
Those boxes back again!

The 'Young Chief' and the 'Black Chief' are of course, George Robertson, and this genial piece of satire shrewdly depicts the change of business status accompanying the transformation of the premises. The day of small things was over.
The Auld Shop & the New

Written specially for

"The Chief," George Robertson
of Angus & Robertson

As some slight acknowledgment of and small return for
his splendid generosity during years of trouble

and addressed to
Donald Angus

by

Henry Lawson

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION
1923

Title page of Henry Lawson's book celebrating A & R's new shop
Henry Lawson was the most important of the early authors of the Firm—perhaps of all its authors. And one of the most difficult. Robertson’s account of their early relationship is a testimony of this fact:

‘Banjo’ brought the MS. of his book ‘The Man from Snowy River and other Verses’, to me in April, 1895. An arrangement was made with Lawson for a volume of verse, and one of prose, before ‘Snowy River’ came out. Both the Paterson and Lawson agreements provided for an equal division of profit between author and publisher; but three months later (and before ‘Snowy’ was published) Lawson commuted his interest in his volume of verse—then in the press—for the sum of £54, of which £14 had already been advanced to him. The volumes were to be produced at the publisher’s risk in the event of a loss, and Lawson’s is probably the first instance in which an Australian publisher bought the copyright of a volume of verse prior to publication. Afterwards, when ‘Snowy River’ had proved such a great success, we voluntarily wrote to Lawson to say that we would cancel the straight-out sale and consider the £54 a payment in advance of half profits. In a short time, however, we were forced to buy him out again; he thought a profit-sharing agreement entitled him to half-a-crown or five shillings or five pounds whenever he wanted them—which, very often, was several times in the course of one day.’

Robertson’s place as a publisher is quite secure. Although he added greatly to his achievements between 1900 and 1933 when he died, the foundation was securely laid in the nineties. Far more than
his Melbourne namesake or any of his predecessors he really became an Australian in every way except by birth. He never doubted the future of Australian books or Australian publishing, even though all around him doubted it—including Angus and most of his other colleagues.

He always held strongly that bookselling was an honourable and valuable calling, and that booksellers were entitled to fair rewards. In a revealing, and prophetic, letter to the book trade in 1919, after thanking booksellers generally for their support, he says:

At the same time, we feel bound to say that our last analysis revealed the fact that there are still a considerable number of firms, many of them in a large way of business in the coastal cities and towns, who do not take the trouble to ‘size up’ Australian publications, but say ‘We can always send for them when they are asked for.’ And so they peddle with them, and out of the 2,200 ‘Art of J. J. Hilder’, 7,000 ‘Snugglepot and Cuddlepie’, and 15,000 ‘Digger Smith’ sold by 31st December, they only handled a few copies.

To such we would say ‘Amend your ways. We want Australia to be a great self-supporting nation, and the way to make it one is to help the pioneers. Australian authors, artists, blockmakers, printers, and publishers of today deserve your help. Plenty will follow in their footsteps when the track has been blazed, and the time is not far distant when the booksellers of Australia and New Zealand will draw most of their supplies from publishers in the Commonwealth and the Dominion.

In 1900 David Angus decided to retire from the business and return to his native Scotland. He died at Bournemouth, in England, on 25 August 1901.
It is not the purpose of this account to go beyond the end of the century, so Robertson’s later career (he died on 27 August 1933) is not included. During the whole of that thirty years he devoted himself mainly to publishing.

It may be appropriate to make a brief assessment of his strength as a bookseller and as a publisher. His outstanding characteristics were a love for, and an understanding of, books; his belief in Australia and hence Australian books, old and new; and his consistent attention to matters of detail and ‘good housekeeping’. He had no patience with muddle or muddlers. He believed that every book worth buying had a customer waiting somewhere, and that it was the bookseller’s job to relate the two. He often said that a good bookseller was a ‘dispenser’ not a ‘prescriber’, yet his own standards continually influenced people towards books he felt were worth while. In a time before most of the population had any more than a primary school education, and before there were such things as public libraries on any adequate scale, the bookseller’s shop was an important social and cultural centre. He believed implicitly in the sentiments expressed in a letter to his former master-bookseller, James MacLehose of Glasgow, from Daniel Macmillan:

Bless your heart MacLehose, you surely never thought you were merely working for bread! Don’t you know that you are cultivating good taste among the natives of Glasgow; helping to unfold a love of the beautiful among those who are slaves to the useful, or what they call the useful? . . .

We booksellers, if we are faithful to our task, are trying to destroy, and are helping to destroy, all kinds of confusion and are aiding our great Taskmaster to reduce the world into order and beauty and harmony. . . .
At the same time it is our duty to manage our affairs wisely, keep our minds easy, and not trade beyond our means.23

He was meticulous himself, and insisted that those around him should be also, in the careful recording of customers' names and interests in the matter of books. Thus he built an accurate and highly successful mailing list which brought his stock of books, and information about new books to arrive from England, before thousands of people living out of reach of bookshops all over Australia and New Zealand. He laid down a technique of bookselling in which he trained many men who later established their own shops; and thus, like George Robertson the first, he spread his influence far and wide in time and place.

This book was designed by Adrian Young \textit{MSIAD}

It was set in ‘Monotype’ Bembo

The book was printed on ‘Glastonbury’ Antique and bound in tan canvas

Printed and bound at Griffin Press Limited, Netley, South Australia, 5037
George Ferguson, c.b.e., is himself a bookman to his fingertips. He is the son of Sir John Ferguson, author of the *Bibliography of Australia*, and grandson of George Robertson, of Angus & Robertson.

A graduate of the University of Sydney, George Ferguson entered the book trade as a junior assistant in the educational book department of Angus & Robertson Ltd in 1931 and worked in its various retail departments and in London for the next eight years. After wartime service in the Royal Australian Artillery he returned to A & R, to the publishing division, of which he became director in 1949, a position he held until he left the company in 1971.

For the next five years he was Director of the Australian Book Publishers Association, which he was largely instrumental in founding and which he served as President for two terms.

Now retired, George Ferguson still has his finger in the pie, as part-owner of a Canberra bookshop, and he still retains his enthusiasm for the trade he has served so long and so well.