

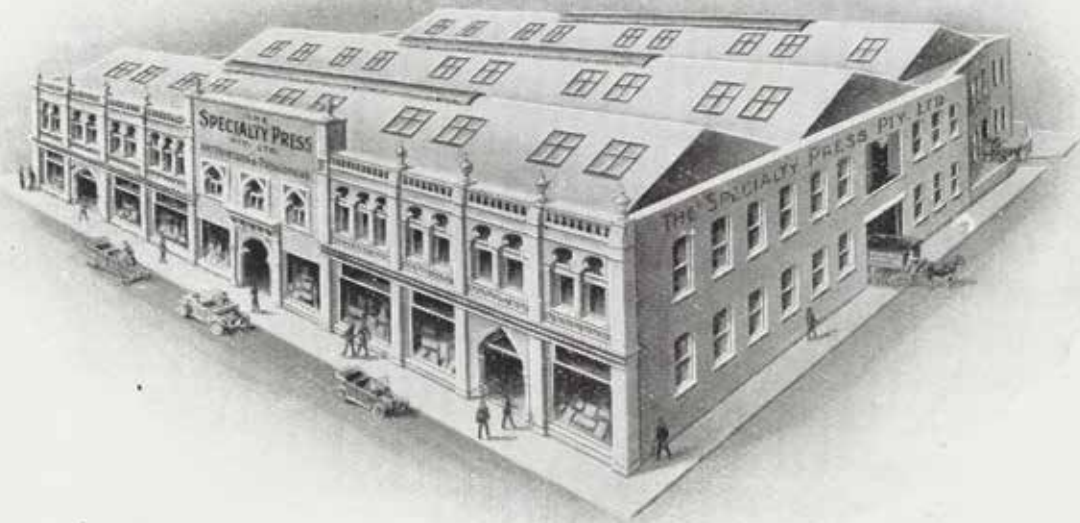
DENNIS BRYANS

‘Customers & others I am responsible for’: Thomas Allan McKay, printer, publisher and entrepreneur

In the first decades of last century, eight businesses dominated the book trade in Melbourne. These were the well-established booksellers George Robertson and Co; Melville and Mullen; EW Cole’s Book Arcade; the religious bookseller, publisher and fancy goods purveyor, ML Hutchinson; and the large-scale newspaper distributor Gordon & Gotch. The other three were relative newcomers: HH Champion, bookseller, publisher of the *Book Lover* and proprietor of the Australasian Authors’ Agency; the New Zealand publisher Whitcombe & Tombs; and Thomas Lothian, son of the established importer, bookseller and publisher John Lothian.

The trade had a remarkable fluidity, partly explained by the intimacy of a small city community where ‘everyone knew everyone else’s business’.¹ Key figures often met socially and professionally, moving from one firm to another and, not infrequently, retaining close connections simultaneously with several businesses.

Thomas Allan McKay, known as either Tom or Allan, was one of the dominant figures in the Melbourne book trade at that time. Originally from New Zealand, in 1909 he was appointed manager of the Specialty Press,² becoming managing director in 1913.³ Over the next decade or so, McKay became the key player in many complex dealings within the book trade having, at the same time, interests in publishing, bookselling as well as being, through the Specialty Press, an active printer. This article aims to dissect the



— *In the heart of the city*

Nos. 166 and 186 Little Collins Street

Between Swanston and Russell Sts.—Rear of Georges Pty. Ltd.

This advertisement (detail) for the Specialty Press Building at 174 Little Collins Street was printed in the program for the stage production of *Hit the Deck*, His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne, 28 July – 13 August 1928. TPC *Hit the Deck*, p. 43, Theatre Programme Collection, State Library Victoria

intricacies of McKay's many interlinked book trade interests from around the time he acquired a controlling interest in the Speciality Press in 1914 until around 1923.

McKay's expansion into the Melbourne book trade began in September 1914 with his purchase of 50 ordinary shares in the Lothian Publishing Company. William Pyke, better known as WT Pyke and a long-time employee of EW Cole, and his younger brother, JG Pyke, each purchased 50 preference shares and it was his dealings with the Pykes,⁴ especially William, that helped McKay expand his interests in the Melbourne book scene.

While it is often difficult to distinguish between McKay's roles as printer, publisher, publisher's agent, and warehouse of books for Melbourne booksellers, it is clear that he was either investor-publisher or co-investor,

making him the risk taker, in a number of books printed under various imprints. Tracking them all is difficult. For example, one account states that, while there was a T Allan McKay publishing company,⁵ there are no known publications with that imprint. In addition, there is clear evidence that McKay was the chief shareholder and driving force behind the Melbourne Bookstall Company and it would appear that he also had an interest in the Melbourne Publishing Company. There were publications that McKay was intensely proud of having produced, which confirms that he may legitimately be called a publisher.⁶

The Melbourne Publishing Company

Allan McKay's link to the Melbourne Publishing Company was through Thomas Symons. While employed by Whitcombe & Tombs, Symons also managed Maurice Carton's Le Française Company, which shared accommodation with the Specialty Press and Whitcombe & Tombs at 189 Little Collins Street.⁷ Sometime around 1913–14, Le Française Company was transferred to room 44 in the Cromwell Buildings, 366a Bourke Street, with T McKay being listed as proprietor. In 1915 the Melbourne Publishing Company first appears in the *Sands & McDougall Directory*, also at room 44 in the Cromwell Buildings, with Ella M Fleming as proprietor and typist.⁸

Henry Williams, one of EW Cole's managers and closest advisors, records that Thomas Symons was later questioned about McKay's connection with the Le Française Company and the Melbourne Publishing Company. Symons stated that McKay had taken over the Le Française Company to oblige him because of his ill health and that the reason why Fleming was not then listed as proprietor in 1913 was because she 'was not of age at that particular time'. Symons was adamant that 'he was responsible for the Melbourne Publishing Company' and that McKay 'had nothing to do with it'.⁹

Fourteen books were published under the Melbourne Publishing Company imprint between 1913 and 1923. The first of these was Gladys Lewis's *The Curse of Passion* (1913),¹⁰ issued in cloth at 1s 8d and in paper at 1s. It appears that McKay and WT Pyke both owned a quarter share in this work with Thomas Symons, brother of JB Symons, who was also working for George Robertson & Co. at the time. There is no evidence that JB Symons had any connection with the Melbourne Publishing Company, although he may well have done.¹¹ Another title was *Ned in the Woods*, a supplementary reader for the Victorian Education Department. This was printed by the Speciality Press along with three other supplementary readers, with McKay having an interest in at least one of them.

Interconnected dealings

Three of Allan McKay's notebooks survive,¹² each of which is indexed and consists of alphabetic entries with scattered dates throughout. The earliest entries are clearly written in pen and later entries tend to be more hurried and in pencil. Pages dealing with the purchase of enormous quantities of paper are often barely readable. Nevertheless it is relevant to note McKay's 'List of Customers & others I am responsible for calling & waiting on' in the context of his private publishing arrangements.¹³ His cryptic notes, consisting of dates, prices, quantities and customer orders, are clarified by cross-referencing them with a carefully annotated record compiled by Henry Williams and relating to a legal dispute with William Pyke and McKay.

Williams's account begins on 9 July 1917 with the startling remark 'I was advised this day that Mr Cole was being systematically robbed'.¹⁴ An unnamed man, who was unknown to Williams, came to him and, after close questioning, revealed the source of this story to be WL Davey, a disaffected director and former company secretary of the Specialty Press. This revelation in July 1917 was made some two years after the events took place and it is apparent from his notebook entries that Williams had somehow gained access to carbon copies of the Specialty Press's cashbooks. Williams's account is an important document because of the light it throws on the extent of collusion in book printing and publishing in Melbourne at the time.

Davey's revelations to Williams of the alleged fraud (as Williams claimed and Thomas Symons denied) that involved McKay in publishing books, and printing and selling others, is supported by the available evidence, which points to collusion. In 1919 Melbourne Publishing Company titles issued were *Miss Fowler's Cook Book*, Esther Paterson's *Aussie Girls*, Charles Barrett's *In Australian Wilds*, Jens Lyng's *Our New Possession*,¹⁵ and Harold Gaze's *Coppertop*. These were followed by *Coppertop Cruises* (1920) and John Armour's *The Spell of the Inland* (1923).

Specialty Press board meetings

Walter Davey's resentment of Allan McKay for ousting him from the company was reason enough for him to tell Henry Williams about a trust account that McKay jointly held with WT Pyke, but under the latter's name. Williams was given access to minutes of relevant board meetings of the Specialty Press in which the resolution confirming the board's approval of McKay's private publishing activities were discussed.

These discussions had consequences for Davey as company secretary. The first meeting, held on 26 October 1914, revealed that McKay was trading

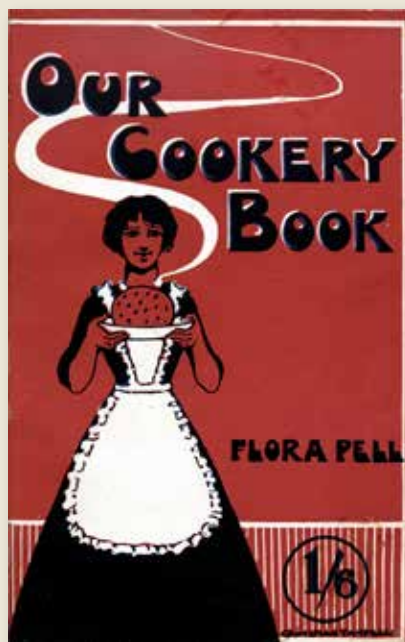
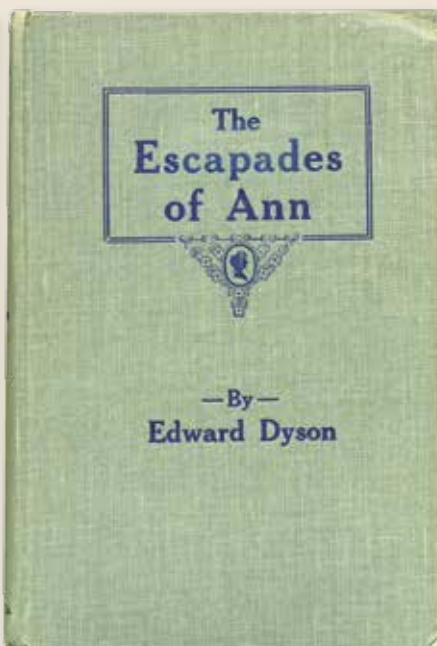
separately under his own name. This was opposed by Davey as being in conflict with a clause of the articles of association. McKay replied that ‘the business of publishing had not yet resulted in any profit to himself but about £300 worth of printing had come into the hands of The Specialty Press ... and that such printing would [otherwise] have gone elsewhere’. He revealed that he ‘had been trading for some time in his own name as a Trust a/c’ and believed it was now time to seek the approval of the company to continue. Margaret McKay, Allan’s sister and a company employee, confirmed that this was the case but annoyed her brother by revealing that the hidden trust account appeared in the ledger in WT Pyke’s name.¹⁶

Davey was ‘openly antagonistic’ and further board meetings were called to resolve the issue, including by making amendments to the articles of association concerning the transfer of shares that were proposed and carried. Two critical meetings were called at short notice and held in Davey’s absence. The purpose of the first meeting, held on 5 November, was to pass the resolution that ‘That Mr TA McKay shall be at liberty to continue to carry on the Publishing business, in his own name, in which he has been engaged for some time past with the sanction of the Company, and that any profits made by him in connection with such business shall be retained by him for his own personal benefit. The authority given by this motion to Mr TA McKay shall be retrospective ...’. The second special meeting, held on the afternoon of 23 November, at which those attending were told Davey was again unavoidably absent, confirmed and adopted the resolutions passed at the 5 November meeting.¹⁷ To rub salt into the wound, Davey, as company secretary, was obliged to forward details of the resolutions to the registrar general.

EW Cole, WT Pyke and Henry Williams

In the first decade of the 20th century, Edward William Cole, founder of Cole’s Book Arcade, began to withdraw from the day-to-day running of his business and to rely on his managers while consolidating his property interests and writing books in his retirement. In 1912, however, Cole became concerned with losses due to the over-ordering of books. To restore the business to health he demanded to see all new orders and personally approve them. The Book Arcade responded to this regimen and returned to profit in 1913.

Cole was wary of William Pyke, but valued him ‘as his original employee and as a brilliant bookseller’. He had contributed to the success of Cole’s Book Arcade for many years by editing and publishing locally printed books. One of these, *Bush Tales*, was issued in 1893 as one of ‘Pyke’s Australian Series ...



Top: The two Bookstall editions of Edward Dyson's *The Escapades of Ann* (1919). Copy in stiff boards (left), hardback copy (right) minus jacket. Author's copies

Above: Flora Pell's 1920 contract with the Specialty Press (left). Australian Copyright Records, National Archives of Australia

Flora Pell's *Our Cookery Book*, Melbourne: George Robertson, nd, c. 1920 (right). Author's copy

for sale at Cole's Book Arcade and all booksellers'. This suggests that Pyke enjoyed Cole's qualified approval to publish books in his own name. But, the addition of 'and all booksellers', shows that Pyke did not accept that a conflict of interest was possible.

The other contender for Cole's favour was Henry Williams. Williams kept meticulous records of Cole's property dealings, carefully noting on one occasion Cole's decision not to extend a lease, and recording in minute detail the size and value of each property that Cole owned. Cole's property consolidation was costly and aggravated by slow sales at the Book Arcade. Williams drew Cole's attention to the falling sales and rising debts and identified Pyke's book buying as the cause.

The private trust of WT Pyke and Thomas Allan McKay

Henry Williams's notes do not clearly distinguish between the Melbourne Publishing Company and the 'Private Trust' which he also referred to as the 'T. Allan McKay publishing company'. Given access to the account books of the Specialty Press and the minutes of the firm's board meetings, Williams copied out order numbers and details of transactions for a number of titles. Three thousand copies of *Love Letters of a Priest* (1914) were, Williams wrote, 'the factory order for Gladys Taylor's job'¹⁸ adding the remark 'the Director [Davey] stated I did not remove the duplicate Carbon Copy or they would have got a clue to my movements'. Williams wrote in his notebook that the copies of letters and instructions to the Melbourne Publishing Company were from Specialty Press carbon copies, so it is clear that he is referring to Walter Davey's reluctance to remove the duplicates, but how Williams obtained them is unknown.

In the group of books by Patricia Stonehouse in which McKay had an involvement was *Sands O' the Desert*, issued under the pseudonym Harlingham Quinn and printed by the Specialty Press in September 1913, but done, according to Williams for Gladys Taylor.¹⁹

According to the title page, *Sands O' the Desert* was published by the Specialty Press. The quantity printed, as recorded by Williams, matches McKay's tally, who noted the cost of printing 5000 volumes was £104 16s 2d.²⁰ However the imprint on the title page of *Love Letters of a Priest* is HH Champion's Australasian Author's Agency, which is at variance with both Williams's and McKay's notes associating the book with the Speciality Press.

The books recorded in McKay's notebooks as having been published by the 'Trust' recorded in McKay's notebooks show that these books: *Love Letters of a Priest*, *Sands O' the Desert* and *Kathleen Mavourneen* had William Pyke and

109 Copy
 Messrs Henderson & Hall
 Solicitors
 Melbourne
 Dear Sirs
 Cole's Book Arcade
 Melbourne
 1st September 1914
Myself & Pyke
 Referring to the allegations made by defendant
 that I consented to him trading and making
 a profit out of goods sold to me,
 I wish to state emphatically that I never gave
 my consent to anything of the kind, nor does
 his the defendant's name appear in any
 trading concern with which I may have
 had dealings,
 As soon as I ascertained that my buyer

Draft letter in which EW Cole repudiates any claim that he permitted WT Pyke to trade as a middle-man. Henry Williams notebook, p. 92. Private collection

Gladys Taylor as shareholders while, Thomas Symons by Williams's account, had a half share in Gladys Lewis's *Curse of Passion*, published by Thomas Lothian in 1913. Williams also recorded details of cheques made out to Taylor and Pyke and also signed by them, including a Specialty Press cheque for £9 10s payable to Pyke on 1 October 1914 for *Kathleen Mavourneen*.²¹ McKay also kept a record of £9 15s amounts paid to Pyke and £6 10s to Taylor for *Kathleen Mavourneen*, amounting to £9 15s paid to Pyke and £6 10s to Taylor and that £25 was due to the author, with another £10 payable after 5000 copies were sold. At the foot of the page he wrote 'Paid Gladys Taylor out = £9-10-0'.²²

Gladys Taylor's role in these arrangements is of three parts. The first being the abridgement of Mary Grant Bruce's *Mates at Billabong* for the Education Department,²³ secondly shares in two of Patricia Stonehouse's pseudonymous novels²⁴ printed by McKay. Miss Taylor had a quarter share of *Sands O' the Desert*, while McKay had a three-quarter share. *Love Letters of a Priest* was divided half between McKay and Pyke with the other half belonging to Taylor up to 26 May 1916, after which she 'relinquished all her rights in the 2 books'. Lastly, Gladys Taylor raised invoices at her legal office at McKay's bidding, charging Cole's Book Arcade for consignments of books delivered, including Melbourne Publishing Company titles and other books printed and published at Pyke's and McKay's instigation.

The titles in this category that Williams scrutinised were an Australian edition of Elbert Hubbard's *Parnell and Kitty O'Shea*. The print run of 5000 copies, which Williams asserted was printed for WT Pyke in 1914, was published with the Specialty Press imprint. There were 2000 copies of *Toasts and Maxims*²⁵ printed, and ephemeral items for EW Cole such as 105,000 Kookaburra Post Cards, which were a spin-off associated with the publication of two significant view books: *Beautiful Melbourne* and *Artistic Melbourne*.²⁶

Ultimately, the dispute was settled out of court and Williams expressed his forgiveness of Pyke for his part in the offence. It is significant that EW Cole did not sanction Pyke's private dealings, as is made clear in his letter of 1 September 1917 headed 'Myself v Pyke' in which Cole wrote 'I wish to state emphatically that I never gave my consent to anything of the kind, nor does his defendants name appear in any trading concern with which I may have had dealings'.²⁷

With the onset of the Great War, McKay printed 6000 copies of *German Democracy* by British war correspondent Robert Blatchford, which Williams alleged Pyke paid £4 3s per 1000 for and then sold 2000 copies to EW Cole for £7 per 1000, adding that 'subsequent purchases were on the same basis'. In September 1914, an edition of 5000 copies of Blatchford's *Germany and England* was also printed.²⁸ Williams noted that, on 3 September 1914, a Specialty Press cheque was written to refund WT Pyke the sum 'paid for a cable to the *Times* apologising for reprinting Blatchford's *Germany* agreeing to a Royalty they demanded'.²⁹ In addition a comparison of the order numbers recorded separately by Williams and McKay show that the orders issued by the Specialty Press against Cole's Book Arcade form distinct blocks separated from other printing and typesetting orders.

Williams had sufficient cause to question these transactions recording that there were instances of a shortfall in the delivery of some titles and of the linotype metal used. An interesting example is a school edition of Ethel Turner's *Miss Bobbie*, edited by Lillian Pyke and selected as the Victorian Education Department's fourth grade reader in 1917 and printed by the Specialty Press.³⁰ He noted that 'Miss Bobby 37,000 was charged for on 25/2/1916 subsequently as per memo 22/7/17 they acknowledged they had not all been delivered 31/3/1916'. What Williams appears to have meant here is that, while Cole was invoiced for the *Miss Bobbie* consignment on 22 February 1916, either McKay or Gladys Taylor acknowledged over a year later on 22 July 1917 that the books had not been delivered by the end of March 1916.

Elsewhere, correspondence between September and October 1916 relating to Hilda Freeman's *An Australian Girl in Germany*, questioning the accuracy of

McKay's record keeping and of books undelivered was directed to Thomas Lothian. Possibly Lothian had refused it and recommended to Freeman that the Specialty Press might publish it.³¹ Miss Freeman wrote to Lothian saying that she had not received a proper account of sales or royalties. Lothian replied that:

we have taken the opportunity of going quietly into the matter of your book with the Specialty Press. We have received every possible attention from their manager, Mr. T. McKay, and have carefully examined the agreements, letters, and books, in connection with their handling of this book ...

We find that their statement of sales is quite correct, and corresponds with their invoices and returns. Up to the end of June some 1800 copies have been sold, and that since this time, the balance of the first edition, some 700 copies, have been sold in cloth at 3/6. Only a very few copies have been sold of the reprint.

Freeman wrote back making several pertinent objections:

I would like to point out that while you mention that 1800 copies of the book were sold during the first half year I was only paid for 1433 copies, which leaves a shortage of 167 copies ...

You also say that Mr. McKay is willing to pay me for 700 copies sold since June 30th. which completes the first edition of 2500.

My contract states that the first edition shall be 5000 not 2500. If Mr. McKay printed only 2500 copies and considers it a first edition, am I right in supposing that I shall be paid at the increased royalties on the second edition of 2500.³²

The Bookstall Company and Victorian Railway bookstalls

By 1915 McKay was renting three upper floors of 189 Little Collins Street at an annual rent of £230 and, in addition, a small office on the ground floor and part of the basement for £19 3s 4d per month. In May 1917 the firm expanded again to include 191 Little Collins Street and McKay was ready to re-equip his factory, at the same address, with a new Miehle two-revolution press,³³ installed at the cost of £744 5s 9d.³⁴ In October 1917, in a bold move, McKay asked to purchase a parcel of Melville and Mullen's shares. It was agreed to invite McKay to the next board meeting on 4 November to discuss this proposal. At the meeting McKay offered to buy the company, a suggestion

that was rejected outright, but the board allowed that closer business relations might in future be entertained.³⁵

In March 1919 McKay grasped the opportunity to move across the street to 174 Little Collins Street, as announced in the *Book Lover*, to ‘accommodate our new plant, which is continually being added to’ thus providing ‘Our staff of experts in all branches ... with greatly improved conditions for production of work of every description. [O]ld customers and new clients [alike, will gain] an even more efficient service than before.’

In April 1919, the Victorian Railways announced a tender for the ‘sole and exclusive right and privilege of lending and selling books ... newspapers and ... general stationery at stations; [and the right to use] bookcases and bookstalls at certain of such stations, from 1st. July, 1919, to 30th. June 1924 ...’. A ‘deposit, 10 per cent. of annual rental’, was required.³⁶

That McKay secured the rights to the Victorian Railways bookstalls, beating Gordon & Gotch, was ‘a shock and surprise to many in the trade’. It was McKay’s links with the Pyke brothers that made his acquisition of a five-year contract to run the Victorian Railways bookstalls possible. To coincide with gaining the lease, he launched a new company – The Bookstall Company Pty. Ltd. registered on 10 June 1919 – to ‘... adopt and carry into effect ... an arrangement between the Victorian Railways Commissioners and Messrs. A.M. Gillam and J.G. Pyke for the conduct of bookstalls at stations on the Victorian Railways ... and [significantly]... carry on business as proprietors and publishers and vendors of newspapers, journals, books and other literary works and undertakings’ with the directors as the principal shareholders. The names of the directors were Thomas Allan McKay, Publisher; Percival Vincent Morris, Manager; James George Pyke, conducting the refreshment rooms at Flinders Street Station; and Arthur Mazengerb Gillam, Caterer.³⁷

McKay’s plans were bold, incorporating book publishing, rents from the bookstalls and a bookselling and distribution arm. Accountants Dunn & Co reported that ‘The Company proposes to publish a number of Australian novels in Melbourne ... one by J.H.M. Abbott and the other by Edward Dyson both expected to be ready for publication by July 1st’.³⁸ These were Dyson’s *The Escapades of Ann* and Abbott’s novel *The Governor’s Man*.

In October, ‘The bookshelf’ column in the *Woman* enthused:

‘The Escapades of Ann’ is the first of many contemplated similar productions of the Bookstall Co. Pty. Ltd., of Melbourne, who were the successful tenderers for the Victorian Railways Bookstalls ... several months ago. The new and enterprising firm is evidently determined to emulate the

New South Wales Bookstall Company³⁹ and see that Victoria shall not lag behind the mother State. We are informed that many new and popular books are being printed in cheap editions, and that the work is in the hands of the Specialty Press, the printers who carry out the work of [*The Woman*] so satisfactorily and much artistic printing for the trade.⁴⁰

Most of the projected Bookstall Company publishing did not eventuate and only three other titles are known to have been printed – Jack McLaren’s *White Witch* (1919), illustrated by Elton Fox; Sydney Powell’s *The Maker of Pearls* (1920), illustrated by Percy Lindsay; and Arthur Wright’s *A Rough Passage* (1920).

McKay completed his bookselling and distribution plans with the purchase of ML Hutchinson’s business. Dunn & Co issued a stockholders report on 31 August summarising the new venture:

This company was registered on the 15th June 1920 [actually the 10th] with an authorised capital of £20,000 in £1 shares issued as fully paid up for interests transferred, the [principal] shareholders being Thomas Allen McKay 4,000, James George Pyke 5,000, Ethel Ratcliffe McKay, T. A. McKay’s wife, 4,000, Peter Hockley 256 and Percival Vincent Morris 265. The Directors are T.A. McKay, J.G. Pyke, P. Hockley and P.V. Morris.⁴¹

Although McKay did not have a controlling majority, his parcel of shares, combined with that of his wife, gave him effective control of the company.

In August 1920, a deed of assignment, witnessed by Peter Hockley on behalf of the Specialty Press, was drawn up between Flora Pell and the Specialty Press to republish *Our Cookery Book*. The copyright registration extends to a fourth edition of *Our Cookery Book* and was assigned for one shilling, with the royalty being 10 per cent for a first edition of 3000 copies and ‘12½% on the published price of the next and any subsequent editions ... paid half-yearly in ... May and November’. Pell must have done well out of this because her book continued to be reprinted until a 24th edition appeared around 1950.

In 1921 the Specialty Press issued *Cole’s Happy Time Picture and Nursery Book No. 2.*, for Cole’s Book Arcade with a text by Lillian Pyke and containing the illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* that were commissioned during the war, paid for by McKay and executed by Percy Leason. The volume was accompanied by an illustrated alphabet featuring Australian animals.⁴²

Blending the roles of publisher, printer, wholesaler and distribution was McKay’s collaboration with CJ De Garis, who had the ambitious plan in January 1920 of offering a prize of £500 to find the elusive author of ‘The Great Australian Novel’. From the novels submitted De Garis published five, all printed by the Speciality Press.⁴³

Books printed by the Speciality Press to 1923

There were at least 290 titles printed at the Specialty Press from 1906 to 1923 inclusive.⁴⁴ Some, such as James McLeod's *The Art of Frederick McCubbin* (Lothian, 1916) and *Elves and Fairies* by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite (Lothian, 1916) are outstanding examples of book production. Other titles printed included Ellis Rowan's *Bill Baillie: His Life and Adventures* (Whitcombe & Tombs, 1908) and a series of monographs on Australian artists published by Alexander McCubbin over 1917–20.⁴⁵

There were also many works of Australian creative writing. These included Mary Gilmore's *Marri'd and Other Verses* (George Robertson & Co, 1910), Dorothea MacKellar's *The Closing Door and Other Verses* (Australasian Authors' Agency, 1911), Marie EJ Pitt's *The Horses of the Hills and Other Verses* (Lothian 1911), Edward A Vidler's *The Rose of Ravenna* (illustrated by Walter Seed; George Robertson, 1913), Rupert Atkinson's *The Renegades* (drawings by Christian Yandell; Edward A. Vidler, 1915), Marie Bjelke Petersen's *The Mysterious Stranger* (1915); George Gordon McCrae's *John Rous: A Queen Anne Story in an Australian Setting* (1918), Sydney de Loghe's *The Straits Impregnable* (1916), Gladys Hain's *Coo-ee Contingent* (1917), and Mrs MM Phillips's *The White Feather* (1917).

Other titles included Francis Pratt Winter's *The Latent Military Strength of India* (1914), and Edward Sweetman, Charles Long and John Smythe's *History of State Education in Victoria* (1922).

Conclusion

There was no doubt that Thomas Allan McKay was an entrepreneur with big ideas and the ability – sometimes questionable – to put them into practice. Although not a well-remembered publisher – there are no books with a McKay imprint – he was a key, if not the key, player in the Melbourne book scene.

His various activities as printer, publisher, bookseller and warehouse, which were all run through linked companies that he either ran or in which he had a controlling interest, reflect a thriving Melbourne trade in the prewar, war and immediate postwar years. The publications with which he was associated also show that there was more active publishing of Australian literature at the time than has sometimes been acknowledged.⁴⁶ And, from a wider point of view, they also reflect the role of Melbourne at the time as the administrative and economic capital of Australia.⁴⁷