UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS RECEIVED BY ANGUS AND ROBERTSON, 1896-1914*

JENNIFER ALISON

Introduction

David Mackenzie Angus opened a bookshop in Sydney in 1884. In 1886 Angus took into partnership George Robertson and from that time the firm was known as Angus and Robertson.1 In 1888, Australia's centennial year, and two years after the Angus and Robertson bookselling partnership was formed, the firm made a start in book publishing. Three titles were published that year and, in each year thereafter, two or three more books appeared so that by 1895 they had published at least 25 titles. Most of these were probably published on commission – that is, the author paid the cost of the book's production, the paper, printing and binding – and Angus and Robertson distributed and marketed the book and charged a commission for doing so. These books bore the Angus and Robertson imprint. Although the firm's first two titles were poetry, most of the rest were theological or medical or scientific works. The firm's publishing program was under the direction of George Robertson.

The publication, in October 1895, of Paterson's The man from Snowy River heralded a change in the fairly dull sort of publishing that Angus and Robertson had been engaged in up till then. This book marks Angus and Robertson's incarnation as a trade publisher. The man from Snowy River was published on the half-share system; that is, Angus and Robertson paid the cost of production

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the Annual Conference of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, Monash University, 3 November 1995.

1. Much of the material in this paper is drawn from the Angus and Robertson Archives in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, particularly the collection Business Records, 1880-1974 which is housed at ML MSS 3269. The Business Records contain, inter alia, the Manuscript Register, the cuttings file of newspaper reviews of Angus and Robertson publications and a series of 17 Press Copy Letter Books, comprising copies of correspondence from Angus and Robertson's Publishing Department between 1889 and 1916. Permission to quote from material in the Angus and Robertson Archives is gratefully acknowledged to HarperCollins, Sydney.

For printed sources, background on Angus and Robertson's early publishing is to be found in George Ferguson's Some early Australian booksmen (Canberra: ANU Press, 1978) and James Tyrrell's Old books, old friends, old Sydney (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1987). The flavour of George Robertson's correspondence and dealings with authors is conveyed in A.W. Barker's Dear Robertson: Letters to an Australian publisher (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982), recently republished as George Robertson: A publishing life in letters (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993). For Lawson and Paterson, Colin Roderick's two books Henry Lawson, a life (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991) and Banjo Paterson, poet by accident (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) and Clement Semmler's The Banjo of the bush (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984) contain some detailed information about the publication of individual titles by these authors.

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and after this had been recouped all profits were shared, half to Paterson and half to the publisher. Robertson made sure there was newspaper coverage when he handed the first profit cheque to Paterson.

In the next year, 1896, Angus and Robertson published Lawson’s *In the days when the world was wide* and *While the billy boils* and Dyson’s *Rhymes from the mines*. Dyson was published on half-share profit and Lawson sold his two books to Angus and Robertson for sums of money. The next year saw the publication of Louise Mack’s *Teens*, the first of a projected series of children’s books, and two volumes of verse, Barcroft Boake’s *Where the dead men lie* and Victor Daley’s *At dawn and dusk*. Mack was paid a royalty on copies sold and Daley a half-share of the profits from his book.

Robertson’s favoured method of promoting his publications was by seeking book reviews. It was not unusual for several hundred review copies to be sent out when a book was published. The resultant reviews, in magazines and newspapers throughout the country, were harvested by Angus and Robertson and are now in their files in the Mitchell Library. There were 265 reviews collected for *While the billy boils*, 151 for *The man from Snowy River*, 130 for *Where the dead men lie* and 104 for *Teens*, so coverage was considerable. Initially, at least, all the books sold well and the sales of *The man from Snowy River* and *While the billy boils* were exceptionally large for the time, and these two books in particular kept on selling.

So, all in all, this new type of literary trade publishing would have attracted a good deal of attention. One result of this attention was that would-be authors all round the country began to see in Angus and Robertson a successful publisher apparently committed to an ongoing program of publishing the literary and other work of Australian writers. Angus and Robertson therefore became the target for the manuscripts of these writers.

The Manuscript Register
By October 1896 Angus and Robertson obviously felt the need to control this material and began then to record it in the Manuscript Register, a record kept from 1896 to 1937, with a break for the years of the First World War. The Register is a handwritten ledger, each double-page spread of which records in columns the date the manuscript was received, the name and address of the author, the title of the manuscript, the date it was sent to and returned from a

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2. This may have been the first time Angus and Robertson published using the half-share system, which George Robertson told Edward Dyson he considered fairer to all concerned whether the book was a success or a failure. (ML MSS 3269 75/4 p.87. Letter dated 2 January 1896). For some years after 1895 Angus and Robertson continued to use four publication methods – commission, royalty, purchase of copyright or some variety of profit sharing – as seemed appropriate for each author or title.

3. ML MSS 3269 75/4 p.32. Letter from George Robertson to William Steele of Ward Lock in Melbourne, dated 5 November 1895.

4. This collection, Book Reviews 1894-1970, is housed in 27 boxes at ML MSS 3269.

5. The Manuscript Register is housed at ML MSS 3269 41.
reader, the decision on whether or not to publish, and the date it was returned to the author.

Manuscript characteristics
Between 1896 and the break at 1914 for the war Angus and Robertson recorded 897 unsolicited manuscripts. Sixty-one per cent were written by men and 39% by women. Thirty-nine per cent of the writers came from the Sydney metropolitan area, 27% from country New South Wales, 27% from other states, 6% (52 manuscripts) from New Zealand, six manuscripts from the United Kingdom and one from Tonga. Thus, not unexpectedly, two-thirds of the writers lived in New South Wales.

It is possible to identify the occupation of 177 of the writers and, of these, 24% were clergymen, 20% schoolteachers, 14% journalists, 7% doctors, 6% lawyers, 3% librarians. Other occupations represented include member of parliament, architect, accountant, army major, policeman and dentist.

The only indication of what the manuscript was about is in the title given in the Manuscript Register. So, allowing for the error inherent in using the title only, it is possible to arrive at a distribution of the manuscripts by genre. This reveals that 17% were general non-fiction and a further 1.5% were textbooks. Six point five per cent were works for children and 15% poetry. The remaining 60% were probably all prose fiction.

Response to the manuscripts
Of the 897 manuscripts submitted, Angus and Robertson published only 11, or just over 1%. Seventy-four of the rejected manuscripts were published elsewhere, most by regular publishers but several at what appears to have been the author's own expense. Of the 74, 47 or two-thirds, were published elsewhere in Australia, four in New Zealand and 23 in the United Kingdom. In Melbourne, George Robertson & Co published seven of the titles, T.C. Lothian five and the Australasian Authors' Agency three; in Sydney, William Brooks and the NSW Bookstall Co published four each and the Bulletin Newspaper Co three.

Two hundred and thirty-four of the authors whose manuscripts were rejected had a book published at some time, and 104 of these writers eventually had three or more published titles to their credit.

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6. The figures given in this and the two following paragraphs were arrived at by checking the rejected manuscripts by author/title in the standard sources: Ferguson's Bibliography of Australia, Hocken's Bibliography of New Zealand literature, Morris Miller and Macartney's Australian literature, Muir's Bibliography of Australian children's books, the Australian national bibliography 1901-1950, the British Library general catalogue of printed books to 1975, the National union catalog of pre-1956 imprints and the catalogues of the Mitchell Library and the University of Sydney Library.
Jennifer Alison

Of the rejected writers, 518 appear never to have published a book at all. That is, well over half the writers never managed to get into print, in book form at least.

The eleven manuscripts that Angus and Robertson did publish are listed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Manuscript Title</th>
<th>Rec'd</th>
<th>Published as</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessie Whitfield</td>
<td>Imprisoned princesses and other fairy stories</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>The spirit of the bush fire and other Australian fairy stories</td>
<td>1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Lawson</td>
<td>Good tucker track</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>In Children of the bush</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Lawson</td>
<td>Case for the oracle</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>In Over the sliprails</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Lawson</td>
<td>Mitchell on matrimony</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>In On the track</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Carter &amp; H. McCrae</td>
<td>Australian ABC</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Australian alphabet</td>
<td>1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Stephen</td>
<td>NSW police guide</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>The justices' manual</td>
<td>1906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rena Wallace</td>
<td>Star dust</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>A bush girl's songs</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Cox</td>
<td>Story of our artesian wells</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Irrigation with surface and subterranean waters...</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Essex Evans</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>The secret key and other verses</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
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Some reasons can be advanced why these particular manuscripts were selected for publication.

J.M. Whitfield - The spirit of the bush fire (1898)

Whitfield's book was one of a trio with which George Robertson sought to test the market for juvenile books. The other two titles were Louise Mack's Teens and Girls together. Saxby said The spirit of the bush fire was 'the first successful collection of literary fairy stories that were Australian,' they had 'an Australian setting and, at times, a genuine indigenous theme.' The spirit of the bush fire was published in 1898 but by 1907 was still listed as in its second thousand so it was a slow seller. George Robertson said of it:

Miss Whitfield's book has not been a success and Miss Mack's has not done as well as I had hoped. For the present we shall have nothing further to do with children's books. 

And indeed the firm avoided children's publishing for many years thereafter. Whitfield wrote three other books for children which were all published in London.

8. ML MSS 37269 72/5 p.484. Letter from George Robertson to John Kevin, dated 20 July 1898.
And indeed the firm avoided children’s publishing for many years thereafter. Whitfield wrote three other books for children which were all published in London.

**Three stories by Henry Lawson (1900/1902)**

The Lawson short stories, ‘Mitchell on matrimony’ and ‘The case for the oracle’, were both published by Angus and Robertson in 1900 in On the track and Over the sliprails respectively. ‘Good tucker track’ appeared in a revised version as ‘On the tucker track’ in the 1902, London, Methuen, edition of Lawson’s Children of the bush.9 Children of the bush was republished in Sydney by Angus and Robertson in 1907 and again in 1909. Although Lawson submitted, and sold, a great deal of material to Angus and Robertson over the years, these three stories are the sole record in the Manuscript Register of Lawson manuscripts. This indicates there was another route into the firm for some manuscripts and most probably this was the route direct to George Robertson’s desk.


Brown was an Australian-born, Cambridge-educated jurist and academic. In the year this book was offered to Angus and Robertson he was acting Professor of Law at the University of Sydney and subsequently he became President of the Industrial Court of South Australia. He was just the sort of author whose name would have added lustre to the Angus and Robertson list. The book was published for Brown on commission. There were 1,000 copies printed, of which 125 were sent for review10 and, after eight years, 577 still remained unsold.11 So, if 298 were sold at the cover price of 1/-, Angus and Robertson would have made £6/4/- from Why federate?

**N. Carter and H. McCrae – Australian alphabet (1903)**

This was an alphabet book for children. Carter had trained as a painter under McCubbin and E. Phillips Fox, and Hugh McCrae was a poet, critic and writer best known for his later books Satyrs and sunlight and Colombine. Carter contributed the artwork for Australian alphabet and McCrae the verses. This most attractive book was produced by lithography and printed in red and black with a mustard coloured glazed cover. The print run was 4,969 copies for sale at 1/- with a 10% royalty to the authors.12 Probably most copies were sold. It is very rare today, understandably so as the book was intended for young children. It was no doubt published because it looked like a good seller and could be priced reasonably.

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10. ML MSS 3269 75/11 p.54. Statement covering May 1898 to December 1906.
12. ML MSS 3269 75/11 p.28. Complete statement to June 1905.
D. Stephen – *The justices’ manual* (1905)

1,516 copies of this book were printed\(^\text{13}\) and the terms were that Stephen was to pay half the cost of production and receive a half-share of the profit.\(^\text{14}\) Angus and Robertson distributed some 10,000 prospectuses, sending one to each Justice of the Peace and police station in Australia.\(^\text{15}\) This type of handbook could sell quite well within a restricted audience and such was the case with *The justices’ manual*. Author and publisher each received nearly £39 profit\(^\text{16}\) in the first six months after publication and about £140 each overall in ten years.\(^\text{17}\) A second edition of the book was published in 1906 and a third in 1913. Fred Shenstone, head of Angus and Robertson’s Publishing Department, referred to it as one of the most successful books the firm had published.\(^\text{18}\)

R. Wallace – *A bush girl’s songs* (1905)

Information on this book is sparse. It appears to have been published on commission for the Catholic Press Newspaper Co in Market Street, Sydney, to whom accounts were sent, and Wallace may have been employed there. The very incomplete records in the Angus and Robertson files indicate sales of about 400 copies.

T. Hillhouse Taylor – *Parsifal* (1906)

Angus and Robertson’s reader and editor, A.W. Jose, reported that publication of *Parsifal* would be ill-advised as it was ‘hopelessly weak ... mere sermon-wash talked by marionettes’.\(^\text{19}\) As a play it was unlikely to have been a big seller but, even so and notwithstanding the unfavourable report, it was indeed published. The terms were that Taylor was to pay £30 towards the cost of publication or guarantee £30 worth of sales.\(^\text{20}\) J.C. Williamson, the theatrical entrepreneur, had some involvement with the book. He wrote a preface in which he mentioned the play had been written at his urging and, sometime later, there is a record that he declined to sponsor a cheaper, theatre edition of the book.\(^\text{21}\) Angus and Robertson informed Taylor in 1906 that they thought

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\(^\text{13}\) ML MSS 3269 75/11 p.12. Statement to 30 June 1905.


\(^\text{15}\) ML MSS 3269 75/12 p.111. Letter to E.J. Forbes, dated 20 January 1905.

\(^\text{16}\) ML MSS 3269 75/11 p.12. Statement to 30 June 1905.

\(^\text{17}\) ML MSS 3269 75/11 pp.12, 37, 121, 172, 198, 221, 241, 260 and 464.


\(^\text{19}\) ML MSS 314 41 p.269. Undated letter from A.W. Jose to Fred Shenstone.


a loss on the book was inevitable but, mysteriously, it was republished in Melbourne in 1907 by Lothian.

W.G. Cox – *Irrigation with surface and subterranean waters* (1906)
Angus and Robertson paid Cox £50 for the copyright of his manuscript. They then solicited advertisements to go in the book from firms selling agricultural drainage equipment and received orders for about £60. So, although there are no records of how the book sold, it is clear that Angus and Robertson had more than recouped the outlay on the manuscript before the book was published and had only to recover production costs to start making a profit.

G. Essex Evans – *The secret key* (1906)
The verse material in manuscript, together with cuttings, from which Angus and Robertson compiled *The secret key* in 1906, was the last item in the Manuscript Register to be accepted for publication up to 1914. George Essex Evans was a kind of public poet who wrote on patriotic themes. He won a prize for a poem on Federation which A.G. Stephens called 'a statement of the trite, a re-iteration of the obvious', but Alfred Deakin regarded Essex Evans as Australia's national poet. He did not enjoy the popularity of the bush balladists but, nevertheless, was published widely in magazines and newspapers. He was the sort of Australian monument that George Robertson would probably have thought was a good thing to have in the firm's list. After *The secret key* was published Angus and Robertson told Essex Evans that, as the book was selling so slowly, they thought it would take six years to recover costs. However, they did print a second edition in 1910 and a collected verse memorial edition in 1928.

**Characteristics of Successful Manuscripts**
There does not appear to be much that these publication choices have in common with each other except for their Australianness (and it should be noted how the titles of the Whitfield and Wallace books were changed to make them more Australian). The chosen manuscripts are varied in genre and subject matter and it is difficult to identify any set of selection criteria that the firm was applying. They were sure of doing well out of the Lawson stories and fairly sure of doing well also with the two handbooks, *The justices' manual* and Cox's *Irrigation*. Why federate's costs were covered and so probably were those of *A bush girl's songs* and a substantial part of *Parsifal's*. The *Alphabet book* was

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22. ML MSS 3269 75/16 p.64. Letter from Fred Shenstone to Rev. T. Hilhouse Taylor, dated 26 October 1906.
23. ML MSS 3269 48/3.
24. Information and quotation from the entry for Essex Evans in the *Australian dictionary of biography*, v.8, p.446.
25. ML MSS 3269 75/16 p.134. Letter from Fred Shenstone to George Essex Evans, dated 7 June 1908.
brought out at Angus and Robertson's cost and they probably published because it was so appealing, backing a publisher's hunch that it would sell. It was a risk of capital though. Also a risk was *The spirit of the bush fire* which really did not repay Angus and Robertson the money and effort put into it. So, from publishing these manuscripts, the firm got four failures, two titles which were probably moderate successes for a limited term, one quite successful book and the Lawson and Essex Evans works which would have been solid additions to their backlist.

Apart from the group of manuscripts just discussed, which became books, none of the many hundreds of books published by Angus and Robertson between 1896 and 1914 appears as a manuscript in the Manuscript Register. Thus the unsolicited manuscripts did not provide the firm with the main source of their publications and it is probable that most of the books that Angus and Robertson published were either commissioned directly from the author or composed from material the author was invited to submit for consideration. This, as indicated with the Lawson manuscripts mentioned earlier, would presumably have been priority material which went straight to George Robertson, by-passing the Manuscript Register.

Rejection letters
There are copies of hundreds of rejection letters in the Angus and Robertson files. Up to around 1897 nearly all of these letters were written by George Robertson and after this date by Fred Shenstone. From this time also dates the use of a form letter to indicate rejection for some of the manuscripts. George Robertson continued to write the important or delicate rejections. Robertson's letters were mostly very polite and, while being definite in their rejection, nevertheless attempted to cushion the blow to the author and help salvage his or her self-esteem.

Most rejection letters invoked the reader's opinion and gave financial reasons for deciding against publishing, employing such phrases as:
- we do not think it would pay us to publish
- our reader reports the publication of your manuscript would not be a financial success
- our reader has advised us not to risk publication
- at present our hands are full of publishing work.

Angus and Robertson refused to reveal a reader's opinion other than in general terms and would not enter into correspondence about rejections. Some writers were advised to try another Australian publisher, usually George Robertson & Co in Melbourne, or were redirected to the larger overseas market and a London publisher, such as Ward Lock or Chatto and Windus.

The rejected writers
Among the writers rejected by Angus and Robertson were some who were already, or were later to become, established writers, often with three or more
published titles to their credit. Also included among these rejected writers were well-known public figures or people having some sort of eminence in the community.

Some of the better known rejected writers were, most famously, Miles Franklin but also Vance Palmer, Barbara Baynton, A.G. Stephens, the novelists Ethel Turner and her sister Lilian, Ada Cambridge, Roy Bridges, J.H.M. Abbott, Mabel Forrest and Randolph Bedford, the poet Mary Fullerton, Will Lawson, Louisa Lawson, K. Langloh Parker, Henry Fletcher who wrote the Wayback series, later filmed, C.E.W. Bean, editor of Angus and Robertson’s monumental *Official history of Australia in the War 1914-1918*, journalists Frank Fox, Arthur Adams and C. Brunson Fletcher, a long-time editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Melbourne publisher E.A. Vidler, Ethel Pedley who wrote *Dot and the Kangaroo*, Julian Tenison Woods, the Rev Gerard D’Arcy Irvine who preached at Henry Lawson’s funeral, and Mollie Skinner who collaborated with D.H. Lawrence on *The Boy in the Bush*.

The question is whether Angus and Robertson made any mistakes in rejecting these writers. In most cases the works were not published and the manuscripts have vanished so it is hardly possible to make a judgment from the text. However, it is possible to arrive at some sort of conclusion by taking a closer look at some of the better known rejectees.

Miles Franklin

The most famous rejection was that of Miles Franklin’s *My brilliant career*, regarded by A.G. Stephens as ‘the very first Australian novel to be published’. The manuscript was returned to Franklin within a day of its receipt and a form letter was used to indicate the rejection. With the assistance of Henry Lawson it was eventually published by Blackwood in Edinburgh in 1911 and, according to Adrian Mitchell, ‘created a local sensation when it appeared, and is certainly the freshest and most memorable of her many books.’

In 1905 Angus and Robertson was given a second chance to publish Miles Franklin when they were offered ‘Some everyday folks and Dawn’. This manuscript was sent to a reader and rejected three weeks later. The reader’s report was very negative, declaring ‘The story drags to wearisomeness. It is a chronicle of very small beer narrated in the dullest, most commonplace style’. Franklin was not published by Angus and Robertson till her *Pioneers on parade*, co-written with Dymphna Cusack, appeared in 1939, and they also published some of her Brent of Bin Bin novels.

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So why was *My brilliant career* rejected? Its Australian bush settings and pioneer families were the sort of thing George Robertson was well disposed towards, but perhaps its unusual heroine and unconventional attitudes towards a woman’s place were not so well appreciated. Or perhaps the manuscript was not looked at at all. The fact that it was returned after a day indicates that it received quite cursory treatment. George Robertson certainly, at a later date, acknowledged the firm’s error in rejecting *My brilliant career*. Across Franklin’s 1899 letter to Angus and Robertson, which had accompanied her manuscript, Robertson afterwards wrote ‘This was dealt with during my absence from Sydney. It was the one serious mistake of our publishing Dept.’

Barbara Baynton

In 1900 Barbara Baynton, who had had her early work published in the *Bulletin*, offered Angus and Robertson three stories, ‘The chosen vessel’, ‘Bush church’ and ‘Little woman’, and these were declined a short time later. The following year Baynton offered Angus and Robertson manuscripts of ‘Billy Skywonkie’ and seven other stories which were rejected the same day they were received. Robertson wrote to Baynton:

I have given them careful consideration and think there is no money in them – they are too sad. Perhaps in London where the publishers appeal to the world’s market they may be made to pay – here they couldn’t I am sure.


So precise, so complete, with such insight into detail and such force of statement, it ranks with the masterpieces of literary realism in any language.

*Bush studies* with its sombre, harsh and unromantic depiction of bush life was apparently too strong for Robertson. However, the book has remained a classic telling of Australian bush life and has been frequently reprinted. It is in print today, published by HarperCollins, the firm that took over Angus and Robertson.

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29. ML MSS 314 31 p.375.
31. Quoted in *Australian dictionary of biography*, v.7, p.222. It has, however, been pointed out to me that Stephens considered Baynton’s *Bush studies*, although deserving of ‘uncompromising commendation’, was wanting in that its realism did not achieve ‘realistic art’ as it failed to proceed from the particular to the universal. See his review in the *Bulletin*, 14 February 1903.
Alice Grant Rosman

Rosman was another writer whom Angus and Robertson rejected but whom it could perhaps have rewarded them to publish. Rosman wrote for the *Bulletin*, the *Lone Hand*, the *Australasian* and *Steele Rudd’s Magazine*. In 1905 she sent to Angus and Robertson a manuscript story, ‘The stately lady’, which was declined within six days. A second manuscript, ‘Fate and Patricia’, was destroyed by fire at the reader’s premises. A third manuscript was rejected in 1908 after two months’ contemplation. In 1911 Rosman went to England where she settled permanently. In 1928 she began to write full-time which led to a prolific output over the next few years. *The window*, published in the United States and the United Kingdom, went through 12 editions in 12 months; serial and translation rights were also sold. This pattern continued with 17 further novels during the Depression years. Many of these novels sold 100,000 copies and often topped the bestseller lists. But light, romantic novels of the sort Rosman wrote were presumably not the image Angus and Robertson was looking for. Moreover, although they proved they could handle large sales with authors such as Lawson, Paterson and Dennis, undoubtedly the Australian market for Rosman would have been much more restricted than the international one and Angus and Robertson were never successful, in this period, in transferring their books to Britain. So perhaps, in the end, both Angus and Robertson and Rosman made correct decisions about the publication of her work.

Ambrose Pratt

Pratt, a solicitor turned journalist, was one of the more prolific writers amongst the authors rejected by Angus and Robertson. In 1900 he sent in a manuscript; it was rejected a week later with the advice to take it to London as it would be impossible to make a financial success of the book in Australia. In 1904 Pratt offered Angus and Robertson a second manuscript, ‘Three years with Thunderbolt’. Rejected by them it was published successfully in Sydney in 1905 by the NSW Bookstall Co. Pratt published 20 works of fiction and at least 30 titles in all. Most of his novels were published in London by Ward Lock and six locally by the NSW Bookstall Co. His two nature study books *The love of the lyrebird* and *The call of the koala* were well known to several generations of Australian school children. Pratt’s novels were adventure stories and although Australian in emphasis it is possible the level of literary content was not sufficient for Robertson. Pratt himself designated his novels potboil-ers but there is little doubt that money could have been made from his books.

33. *Australian dictionary of biography*, v.11, p.274.
Ada Cambridge

Ada Cambridge arrived in Melbourne in 1870 at the age of 25. By 1898 she had published twelve novels and two books of poetry, all with publishers in London. As well, three of the novels had Melbourne editions. In 1887 Cambridge had published a book of poems, Unspoken thoughts. Some of the poems dealt frankly with woman’s sexuality and her position in marriage and challenged the conventional view of the disadvantaged in society. In 1898 Cambridge approached a Melbourne bookseller offering poems for publication, some of which were from Unspoken thoughts. The bookseller contacted Robertson who was keen to see the manuscript saying,

I came across Unspoken Thoughts (Outspoken Thoughts would have entitled them better) some years ago and read and re-read them. Some of the poems are daring and I hope the authoress has not modified them in any way.34

But whatever Cambridge offered George Robertson, in a manuscript named ‘The shadow’, he was disappointed and wrote shortly afterwards rejecting the poems, saying ‘We like them but publication would not be a success from a financial point of view.’ In 1913 Heinemann published Cambridge’s The hand in the dark and other poems which may have been substantially the text of ‘The Shadow’. All Cambridge’s succeeding novels and her two volumes of autobiography were published in London. On its publication Unspoken thoughts had been mostly well received by reviewers and was prized by several of her contemporaries, but it sold very poorly and was eventually withdrawn from sale.35 In view of this, re-publication of some of this material in the much smaller Australian market could hardly have been expected to succeed.

Ethel Turner

Ethel Turner published her first novel, Seven little Australians, with Ward Lock in London in 1894. The first edition sold out within weeks and Turner quickly gained a reputation as a writer of promise. She had published a further five novels with Ward Lock up to 1899. In that year she offered Angus and Robertson a manuscript entitled ‘Gum leaves’ which comprised some of her poetry together with letters from the children’s page she edited in the Australian Town and Country Journal. The manuscript was declined by Angus and Robertson the day it was received, Robertson writing to say he did not think they could do anything with it and referring her to the Sydney firm William Brooks.36 Brooks accepted the manuscript for publication but apparently had second thoughts and Ethel Turner had to threaten legal action to get the book

34. ML MSS 3269 75/5 p.433. Letter to Melville, Mullen and Slade, dated 7 June, 1898.
35. ML MSS 3269 75/5 p.477. Letter to Mrs Cross, dated 12 July 1898.
published. Turner offered two further manuscripts to Angus and Robertson, 'The wonder child' for which they declined serial rights and which was later published by the Religious Tract Society in London and 'How we lived at Blue Lookout' which was also declined and was never published under this title.

Ward Lock published most of Turner's books but not Gum leaves or The wonder child. It is possible the manuscripts had been offered first to Ward Lock and declined, before being offered to Angus and Robertson. They are certainly not among the titles on which her reputation rests and Angus and Robertson was probably wise to refuse them.

Ada Holman
A writer with political connections was Ada Holman who worked for many years as a journalist before and after her marriage to the politician W.A. Holman. She was a lifelong and vigorous campaigner for women's rights and, as a journalist, contributed to the Sydney Mail, the Sydney Morning Herald, Melbourne Punch and the Freeman's Journal. In 1913, at the time he was premier of New South Wales, Holman sent to Angus and Robertson a manuscript of his wife's travel articles, which they rejected the same day. The book was published the following year by William Brooks in Sydney under the title My wander year. Ada Holman's published work included a number of novels, three children's books and several plays. She became an Angus and Robertson author with her last book, her autobiography, Memoirs of a premier's wife, published in 1947.

Louisa Lawson
After arriving in Sydney from Mudgee in 1883 Louisa Lawson, mother of Henry, became deeply involved in radical issues, women's suffrage and republicanism. In 1888, the year Angus and Robertson began to publish books, Louisa Lawson founded her feminist journal, The Dawn, which continued until 1905. Between 1896 and 1905 Louisa Lawson offered manuscripts, either stories or verse, to Angus and Robertson on five separate occasions. Each time the manuscript was rejected within a week or so of being received. The reason for rejection was usually stated as being that the book would not be profitable. Louisa Lawson's novel, Derr and Do, and The long crossing and other poems were both published by her own Dawn Office.

The rejection of the manuscripts of Holman and Lawson proves that Robertson was not to be moved by considerations of either influence or sentiment when making rejections. As a member of the relatively small social and commercial community then existing in Sydney, George Robertson revealed a confident approach to business when he declined the work of the wife of the current premier. In his continued rejection of Louisa Lawson's work Robertson

38. ML MSS 3269 75/8 p.191. Letter from George Robertson to A.W. Jose, dated 3 July 1900.
appears unaffected by any idea that she deserved special consideration as the mother of his author, Henry Lawson, from whose books he was making a conspicuous profit. Angus and Robertson also received a manuscript, twice, from Jessie Paterson, the sister of their best selling author, A.B. Paterson. Miss Paterson’s manuscript met the same fate as those of Louisa Lawson.

Characteristics of Unsuccessful Manuscripts
As to the question of whether these manuscripts should have been rejected, Angus and Robertson were probably correct in all but the case of Miles Franklin and Barbara Baynton, and they could certainly have made a success of Ambrose Pratt’s books. Miles Franklin’s was undoubtedly a new Australian voice and Angus and Robertson failed to hear it – the very job that a publisher is expected to be good at. Although Franklin’s reputation has suffered something of an eclipse she is now being re-evaluated in terms of her contribution to the story of feminism in Australia; that is, her work has retained interest and relevance over time. So, too, has Baynton’s Bush studies which has achieved some sort of minor classic status.

Many of the rejected writers Angus and Robertson could doubtless have published with some profit but it may not have been worth the effort to do so as none was spectacularly successful and it was the spectacular successes, like Paterson and Lawson, that they needed. Many of their other trade books either failed or paid their way only very slowly over time. For instance, Dyson’s Rhymes from the mines returned Angus and Robertson an average profit of £5 a year over the nine years it took to sell the 2000 copies printed. On Daley’s poems, At dawn and dusk, a critical success, Angus and Robertson made a profit of some £70 over four years but only by dint of selling the remaining stock and stereos to the Bulletin Newspaper Co. Boake’s Where the dead men lie was also sold to the Bulletin five years after publication, by which time there was still a debit of £18 on the book.

Conclusions
1. The Manuscript Register reveals a great deal of writing activity being carried out by private individuals all over the country. Many people had brought their manuscripts to a finished enough state to be submitted to a publisher.
2. Most of the writers who sent manuscripts to Angus and Robertson in the hope of publication were doomed to disappointment. Only a handful of manuscripts were published – just over 1%. Only one in ten achieved publication at all.

39. ML MSS 3269 75/5 p.83. Letter to Edward Dyson, dated 9 August 1897.
40. ML MSS 3269 75/7 pp.32-33. Statement dated December 1898; and 75/9 p.413. Letter to the Bulletin Newspaper Co dated 24 January 1902.
3. Angus and Robertson's main source for the books they published was not the unsolicited manuscripts. The published books apparently came from invited or commissioned material.

4. The fact that 92% of manuscripts rejected by Angus and Robertson were never published anywhere else seems to confirm the overall correctness of their judgment in rejecting them — even allowing that publication by another firm is not an absolute measure of worth.

5. Seventy-five per cent of the manuscripts from established writers, or those who were to become established writers, failed ever to find a publisher. This indicates the difficulty in getting published at the time and could also be viewed as another indication of Angus and Robertson's generally correct assessment of this material.

6. Angus and Robertson could probably have done quite well out of publishing My brilliant career and Bush studies, both financially and in terms of reputation. It could be seen as a mistake for them to have declined these two books. But all in all they missed little of real significance. Many of the writers may have been grist to the publishing mills of Angus and Robertson for a time but, apart from the work of Franklin, Baynton, Turner and Cambridge, none of the writers has shown enduring qualities that would make them of interest today.

7. Some writers, such as Ada Cambridge and Ethel Turner, already had a London publisher when rejected by Angus and Robertson. Some, like Ethel's sister Lilian, were able to find one. Others managed to secure an Australian publisher or, like Louisa Lawson, published their own work themselves. A few took themselves off to settle or live for a while overseas, seeking a publisher there. These were mainly writers of prose fiction — Franklin, Baynton, Pratt, Lawson, Rosman — and also journalists like Frank Fox and Mollie Skinner.

Angus and Robertson, by rejecting 99% of the manuscripts sent to them, must have caused much unhappiness. However, by establishing and, more importantly, maintaining a program of publishing Australian writing, they were undoubtedly a source of encouragement and hope for local writers. No doubt a contributing factor in being able to maintain themselves as publishers was in not overextending their resources by the injudicious acceptance of unsolicited manuscripts.

* * * *

In an odd footnote to this story, George Robertson, in a letter he wrote in 1922 to Father Hartigan (John O'Brien), spoke in somewhat despondent terms of the unsolicited manuscripts received by Angus and Robertson:

Isn't it a wonderful thing that in the hundreds of tons of MSS, which have been showered on me during the last 30-odd years there has not been even a second-rate novel? ('We of the Never-Never', 'My Brilliant
Jennifer Alison

Career, and so on, didn't come my way). The labourers have been many, their fields fertile, but the harvest a dud.42 It is difficult to believe that Robertson had forgotten that the manuscript of My brilliant career had been offered to Angus and Robertson, and rejected by them, in 1899.

Sydney