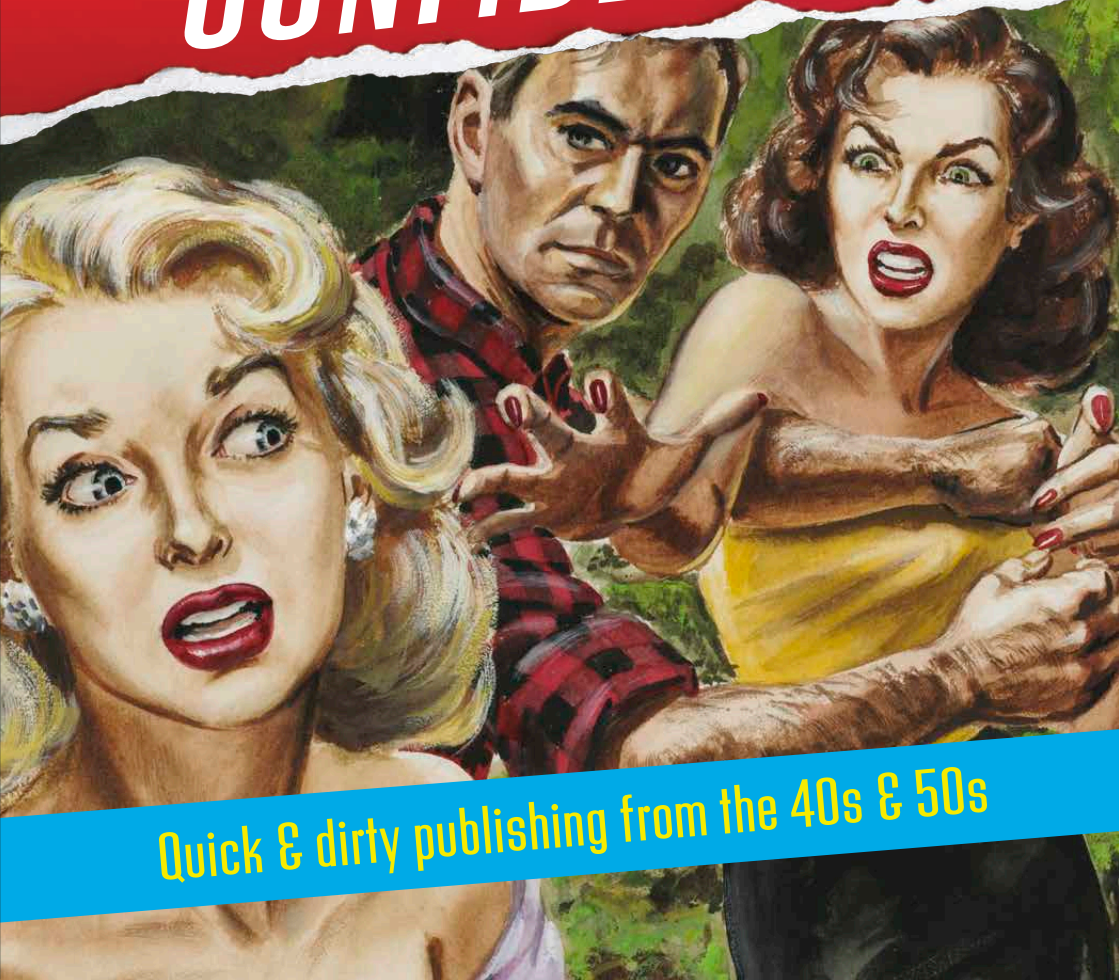



PULP

CONFIDENTIAL



Quick & dirty publishing from the 40s & 50s



THAT'S A JOHNSON!

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FANCY FICTION
AND FACT.

A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION

PULP

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Quick & dirty publishing from the 40s & 50s



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COVER: ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, 'WAGES OF DESIRE' (DETAIL), C. 1947,
WATERCOLOUR AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/5/F. 490

INSIDE COVER: NOEL COOK, ENVELOPE WITH COLOUR CARTOON,
'THAT'S A JOHNSON!', 1943, © NOEL COOK, WATERCOLOUR AND INK, PX*D 68/10

FOREWORD

PULP CONFIDENTIAL: QUICK AND DIRTY PUBLISHING FROM THE 40s & 50s

In 1965 the Library purchased the papers of Sydney publisher Frank Johnson, who had passed away in 1960. Johnson was known for his bohemian literary career in the 1920s and 1930s, when he published great literary figures like Kenneth Slessor and Norman Lindsay.



But the Library found something even richer. The papers were a trove from the last two decades of Johnson's life when he published 'pulp': comic books, crime paperbacks, humour magazines, boxing and racing fiction and adventure stories.

Published in vast numbers of titles, available on every newsstand and sometimes selling in the hundreds of thousands, 'pulp' were throwaway items accessible to anyone. Cover, image and text came together to attract and enthral the reader. Because few were retained and cheap paper made them vulnerable, their rarity now makes them collectables.

Pulp Confidential explores the thousands of original drawings, ephemera, letters, manuscripts, contracts and records in the Frank Johnson papers. Curator and novelist Peter Doyle takes us behind the scenes of an extraordinary Sydney publishing house. We learn about the editorial decisions and the artists and writers who fed an insatiable, pre-television readership hungry for adventure, sport, crime, sleaze and romance.

ALEX BYRNE

NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive



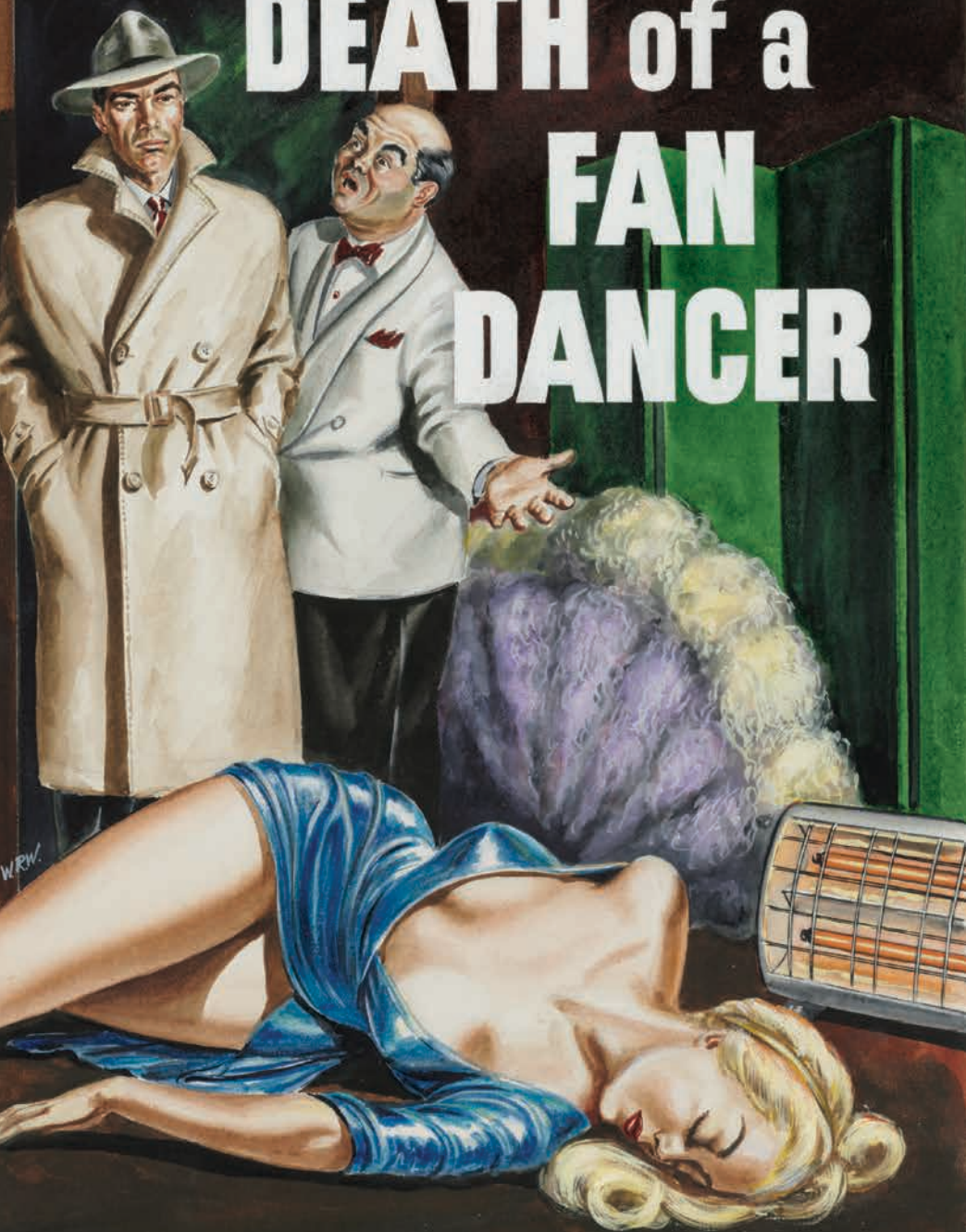
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LOCK (NM SHERLOCK), BOOKPLATE CARICATURE OF FRANK JOHNSON
(DETAIL), C. 1945, © LOCK (NM SHERLOCK), WATERCOLOUR AND INK,

PX*D 68/10/F. 37

DEATH of a FAN DANCER



CHAPTER ONE***PULP
CONFIDENTIAL***

In February 1960, the Deputy Mitchell Librarian formally wrote to the estate of one Frank C Johnson, a recently deceased Sydney publisher. She expressed her condolences, and gently enquired whether there might be any of Johnson's personal papers suitable for the Mitchell's collection of Australian literary papers.

PETER DOYLE

WRW, COVER ARTWORK, 'DEATH OF A FAN DANCER', C. 1947,
WATERCOLOUR AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/5/F. 453

VISION

A LITERARY QUARTERLY



No. 1.

MAY, 1923

Published by The Vision Press
141 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

VISION: A LITERARY
QUARTERLY, SYDNEY,
NSW: THE VISION PRESS,
MAY 1923, QA820.5/V

Decades earlier, in 1923, a young Frank Johnson — then a junior shop assistant at Dymocks Booksellers — had teamed up with poet Kenneth Slessor and journalist Jack Lindsay, and founded an arts quarterly named *Vision* (with assistance from Jack's famous father, Norman). It disappeared after four issues, but through the 1930s Johnson continued to sporadically publish books of art and verse: *Pirates* (1931), a collection of large, colour linocuts by artist James Flett; *Darlinghurst Nights* (1933), Kenneth Slessor and artist Virgil Reilly's poetic exploration of Sydney lowlife; and in 1939, Slessor's *Five Bells*, dedicated to Johnson and Slessor's charismatic mutual friend, cartoonist Joe Lynch, who had died some years before.

Frank Johnson had long associations with a number of well-known writers, poets, journalists and artists, both popular and highbrow. He knew the writers Dulcie Deamer and Jean Devanny, the eccentric Bea Miles, other Lindsays (Ray and Phil), cartoonist-artists

George Finey, Unk White, Emile Mercier and many others. He had connections with Henry Lawson's widow, Bertha Lawson and her de facto husband, author Will Lawson (no relation to Henry).

So Johnson's personal papers, if there were any, would likely be of considerable interest, and would obviously make an excellent addition to the Mitchell's prestigious manuscripts collection.

It seems there was no immediate reply, but five years later, in 1965, Frank Johnson's daughter contacted the Library to say her father had in fact left some material and she was open to discussions about its future. A manuscripts librarian duly trooped out to her house in Carlingford, where he found a sprawling array of letters, manuscripts, artwork, cover designs, scrapbooks and ephemera, rat-gnawed and in poor condition, stored in a shed.

The material turned out, however, not to be representative of Johnson's 1920s and 1930s bohemian literary career, but rather the last two decades of his life to 1960, when he had been a hard-grafting but resolutely low-rung publisher of comic books, crime paperbacks, humour magazines, boxing and racing fiction, adventure stories, bush tales and anything else that might move a few units in newsagents and on railway station bookstands. It wasn't high literature but pure pulp, of the quick and dirty sort.

In the mid 1960s, the term 'pulp' was an unambiguous insult, with none of the hip connotations it has now. Since then, entire zones of hitherto fringe cultural production — including comic books, crime fiction, 'trash' and B-grade exploitation cinema and rock 'n' roll music — have moved steadily from beyond the pale of respectability to the very centre. (Striptease, wrestling and stock car racing are still out in the cold, for now.) So complete has been the rehabilitation of pulp cultures, that it is difficult for us now to realise just how much disdain and even panic they caused back in their day.

Indeed, through the earlier and mid parts of the twentieth century the cheap, corrupting, insidious, gratuitously violent and sexualised

IT WASN'T HIGH
LITERATURE
BUT PURE
PULP, OF THE
QUICK AND
DIRTY SORT.

tropes of pulp cultures — in particular, in comic books and crime stories — had managed to unite cultural spokespeople from all sides of the political and cultural divide. People of the left and right, the high and the middlebrow, from university scholars to media rabble-rousers, and tweedy pipe-smoking intellectuals to church and community groups — nearly everyone agreed the pulps were a pernicious cultural presence, of zero artistic value and symptoms of cultural decay.

Luckily for us, the Mitchell's acquisition philosophy was refreshingly non-judgmental. 'Though not of great artistic value', read the manuscript librarian's report in 1965, 'nevertheless it is

extremely interesting [emphasis added] ... showing the type of material in wide demand at the time'. So, after a little negotiation, the papers were acquired (for the not inconsiderable sum of £250) by the Mitchell Library.

**PULPS WERE
A PERNICIOUS
CULTURAL
PRESENCE, OF
ZERO ARTISTIC
VALUE AND
SYMPTOMS OF
CULTURAL DECAY.**

THE BIG SCORE

Now, half a century later, the Frank Johnson papers present an extraordinarily concentrated collection of cultural artefacts. The lurid original magazine cover

art, with its urgent, almost violent brush work, and the hasty but free and flowing pen and ink drawings and washes — all so outré and lowbrow in the 1960s — now present as extraordinarily energetic and surprisingly modern. Indeed, that once disdained visual aesthetic would come to be highly valued, and rehabilitated as a major driver of design, cinema and even fine art.

The lively, melodramatic (and sometimes inadvertently amusing) illustrations are mostly rendered on good quality rag paper or Bristol board. Around the smudged and dog-eared edges we see pencilled notes, suggestions, corrections and amendments, reminding us that this stuff was the result of a well-organised production process.



FIRST UP

CHUCK HEADLEY

THE BIG FEAR

CHUCK HEADLEY

WRW, COVER ARTWORK, 'FIRST UP' AND 'THE BIG FEAR', C. 1947,
WATERCOLOUR AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/5/F. 459



ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, 'OLD MAN MURRAY', C. 1947,
WATERCOLOUR AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/5/F. 488

There's a sizeable bundle of correspondence there too, from authors and artists, which indirectly reveals much about the day-to-day business of writing, drawing and finding an audience in 1940s Australia. There are also short story manuscripts and book contracts and publishing contracts with artists.

It is noteworthy how consistently *Australianised* the Frank Johnson materials are, particularly when viewed with a twenty-first century perspective. Odd as it may seem now, it was extremely unusual

in the 1940s and 1950s for locally made cultural output to consider the contemporary urban and suburban spaces we actually inhabited. And anything with an Australian setting, whether contemporary or historical, generally ran a distant last to a whole range of remote story locales. The mid twentieth-century world was smitten with the American West, or the American gangster city, or the American dream home, or the American slum. Or the Deep South. Or the African jungle. Or the castles and grand houses of the old world. Or the espionage-ridden midnight trains and dark corridors of Eastern Europe. Or the sands of the Sahara. Or imagined far-away planets and galaxies. Or even the brutish landscapes of pre-history. And so on. Anywhere was better than here. And the suggestion that there might be a local romanticism, other than the bush?: No way. For example, detective stories written in Australia — such as Alan Yates's long-running, million-selling *Carter Brown* series, published by pulp heavyweights Horwitz Publications right through the 1950s and 1960s — were scrupulously stripped of references to actual places and any bit of slang that might pin the story down to Australia.

MENTAL RUBBISH

The problem — if that's what it was — was both structural and cultural. On the one hand, the relatively small domestic market made it difficult for producers to survive on local sales alone, and infinitely more so when they had to compete with US and British product that had already recouped its production costs in the home market, and could be dumped on the Australian market at low cost.

Throughout the 1930s there had been long-running tensions in Australia over the importing of foreign pulps (the word 'foreign' viewed with as much disgust as was possible). As researcher

THE MID TWENTIETH-CENTURY WORLD WAS SMITTEN WITH THE AMERICAN WEST, OR THE AMERICAN GANGSTER CITY, OR THE AMERICAN DREAM HOME, OR THE AMERICAN SLUM.

Toni Johnson-Woods points out, unlikely alliances were formed between temperance groups, evangelicals, Roman Catholics and free-range moral conservatives on the one hand, and authors and publishers on the other.¹ A concerted case was mounted, finding expression in the now notorious publication in 1935 of a pamphlet — *Mental Rubbish from Overseas* — issued by the ‘Cultural Defence Committee’. The tenor of the pamphlet is acridly and unashamedly racist. The problem with the foreign pulps, it argues, is that they are meant for the US market, which includes ‘illiterate and superstitious migrants’ from central and southern Europe, and ‘African Negroes’ — hence the recurrent jungle themes, the stories of ‘voodoo’ and ‘demonology’ (the text is obviously referring to Tarzan and Mandrake the Magician here!) and the general moral nihilism of US comics and pulps. The pamphlet goes on to denounce a range of other pulp offshoots such as ‘crooning’, the gangster film and Mae West’s films, and then it condemns generally the proliferation in modern culture of unnamed ‘wise-cracking American Jews’ and ‘pop-eyed and goitred American comedians’. Australia, it argued, was ‘90% British’ and those exotic influences were not welcome.

The pamphlet has PR ‘Inky’ Stephensen’s name on the title page, where he is listed as Chairman of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. It complicates the picture somewhat: Stephensen was no redneck. Recently back from a series of controversial, boundary-testing publishing enterprises in Britain, he was, in 1935, still associated

A CONCERTED CASE WAS MOUNTED,
FINDING EXPRESSION IN THE NOW
NOTORIOUS PUBLICATION IN 1935
OF A PAMPHLET — *MENTAL RUBBISH
FROM OVERSEAS* — ISSUED BY THE
‘CULTURAL DEFENCE COMMITTEE’.

With Kelt. Kaloshis compliments

MENTAL *W. H. Gould* RUBBISH FROM OVERSEAS

A PUBLIC PROTEST



"FOR AUSTRALIA."

Pamphlet No. 1.

Published by the Cultural Defence Committee.

June, 1935.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

*MENTAL RUBBISH
FROM OVERSEAS:
A PUBLIC PROTEST,
CULTURAL DEFENCE
COMMITTEE, SYDNEY,
1935, ML 301/4A1*

with the progressive left (he would soon swing wildly to the right), and was known as an ardent campaigner against censorship and cultural repression.

In fact, on closer reading the Cultural Defence Committee appears somewhat less heated when denouncing the purported sexualised content of pulps, which so exercised conservative moral guardians. It was more concerned about what it saw as the puerile silliness and senseless exoticism of US pulps and mass culture in general.

The mostly unstated resistance to representing the local urban contemporary milieu was not simply the result of commercial pressures, and for decades one band of Australian writers and artists had recognised a pressing need to find new ways to represent modern 'Australianness' (whatever that was). A frequently articulated belief among the Sydney bohemian circle, which centered around Johnson's friend and mentor Norman Lindsay,

DARLINGHURST NIGHTS

BY
KENNETH
SLESSOR
&
VIRGIL REILLY



KENNETH SLESSOR AND VIRGIL REILLY, *DARLINGHURST NIGHTS AND MORNING GLORIES:*
BEING 47 STRANGE SIGHTS OBSERVED FROM ELEVENTH STOREYS ...,
SYDNEY: FRANK C JOHNSON, 1933, QA827/S632/1A

was that Australian artists and writers should cast off foreign modernist influences, along with wowsery reservations, and focus on local life and experience, using local tropes. (But these could be mixed up, if possible, with old world mythological fauns, nymphs and satyrs. Not a lot are sighted in the Australian countryside, but never mind). One recurring figure from Norman Lindsay's work — the buxom naked lass — would turn up again much later in Frank Johnson Publications (FJP) comics, not all that much changed.

Johnson's early publishing ventures demonstrated a strong commitment to the Australianist ethos. *Darlinghurst Nights*, with its simultaneously gritty and dreamy artwork, its cast of razor gangsters, coke-sniffers, flappers and prostitutes, its high-rise flats and late night coming and goings, presented a new kind of bleak, modern, romanticist take on inner-city life. Slessor's verse book, *Five Bells*, which was explicitly set in contemporary Sydney, was a similar work. Johnson later embraced pulp completely, but the range of his product over the 1950s and 1960s, however down-market it may have been, remained every bit as Australia-centric as his handful of early art and literary outputs had been.

CORKER!

The turning point in Frank Johnson's career was the outbreak of World War II, which saw the federal government promptly banning the import of all foreign print publications, not for cultural or moral reasons, but to preserve foreign currency needed for the war effort.

Filling the sudden supply gap in the pulp market was the obvious move for Johnson. He knew plenty of writers, plenty of artists and plenty of other creative jobbers who could approach the task squarely, putting aside airs and graces and any prejudices they had about the low-status business of pulps.

JOHNSON'S EARLY
PUBLISHING
VENTURES
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ETHOS.

In July 1941 Johnson published *Amazing Comics*, the first of what were to be many cheap, disposable but lively comic books published weekly right through the 1940s. For the next 20 years Frank Johnson Publications remained on course, issuing a steady output of comics, magazines and cheap novels (with just an occasional literary novel thrown in), the business neither markedly growing nor contracting. From office premises at 350 George Street, assisted by wife Vera and Raymond Lindsay (another son of artist Norman), Johnson wrangled writers, journos, novelists, artists and a few shady advertisers, producing the long-running true crime magazine *Famous Detective Stories*, along with a bunch of mildly saucy digger humour and gag books by Unk White, Emile Mercier, Ron Bradley, Dan Russell and other well-known and well-liked artist-illustrators of the day. He published stand-alone crime fiction and adventure stories, many children's stories, the occasional more or less literary title, and smaller series of horse-racing and boxing-related fiction. Pirates, Australian folklore and natural history remained staples. He also published the music monthly *Tempo*, which in the mid 1950s became *Tempo and Television*. (Under editor-musician-

journalist Merv Acheson, *Tempo* presented itself as the 'hep' rival to the more conservative *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*.)

Among the last publications issued by FJP was the magazine *Teenager*, which carried pictures and stories about the new wave of US teen idols. But even here there is evidence of Johnson's lingering bent for the local. Among the pieces on Elvis, Fabian and Tommy Steele appear articles about two of the most Australianist performers of the time: Jimmy Little and Chad Morgan.





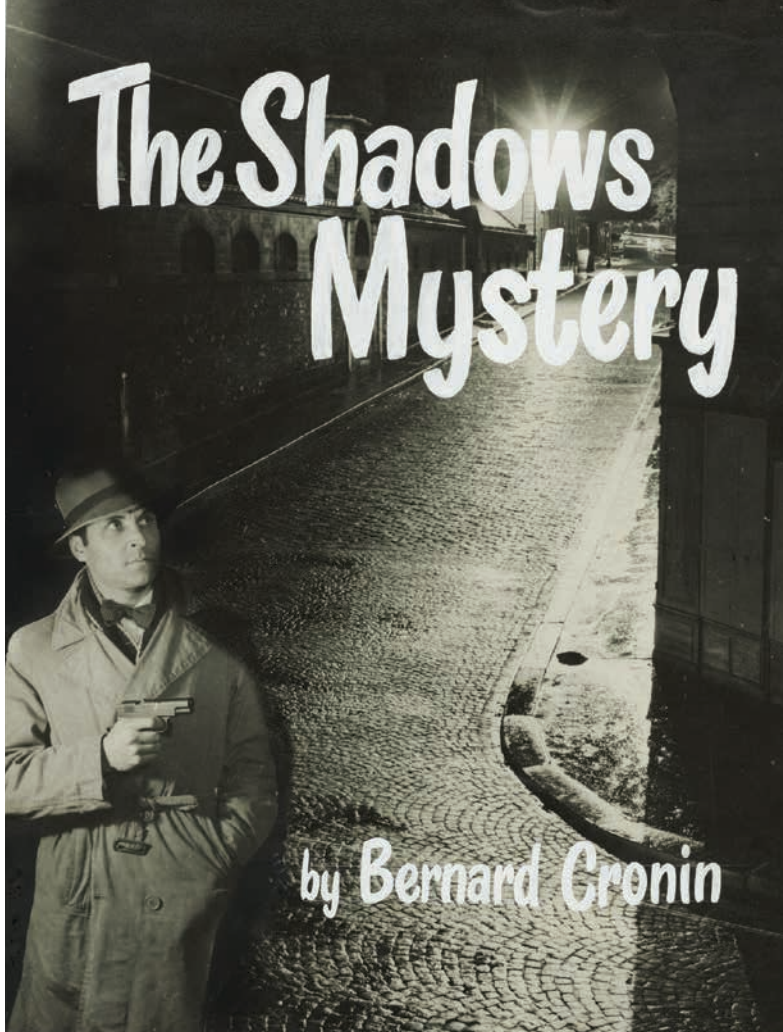
LOCK (NM SHERLOCK),
UNTITLED, UNDATED,
INK AND WASH,
PX*D 69/8/F. 1125

OPPOSITE:
UNK (CECIL JOHN) WHITE,
COVER ARTWORK,
AMAZING COMICS, 1941,
A FRANK JOHNSON
PUBLICATION,
SYDNEY, Q808.7/J

SHADOWMAN

The material — letters, manuscripts, images and ephemera — that happens to comprise a body of ‘personal papers’, held in an institution such as the Mitchell Library, may have found its way there through very deliberate processes. A well-known person or his or her agent or executor carefully selects and edits material to be passed on to posterity, with a view to what will be of interest to researchers, what secrets might be revealed and what secrets might remain secrets. The process of selection and curation itself is thus a kind of conscious narrative-making. But a collection may just as likely be comprised of the stuff that no-one ever got around to throwing away. Maybe it’s not really trying to tell a story. The presence or absence of any particular document, artefact or piece of information may be highly meaningful. Or it may mean nothing much at all. And it may be very hard for us to even figure out what kind of archive it is — very deliberate or totally random — that we’re looking at.

The Frank Johnson papers *are* very extensive, but one senses a randomness there too. Certainly there is a great deal of artwork, beautiful and cheerfully garish pen and inks and gouaches. There are ideas for comics and cartoons once pitched, maybe taken up, maybe rejected. We see the sureness of line in the work of the best practitioners — the sable dipped into the ink, a free, loose, unerringly *right* stroke on the paper, as effortless and graceful as a dance move.



ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, 'THE SHADOWS MYSTERY', C. 1947,
PHOTOPRINT AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/5/F. 450

A few more strokes and there's a whole illustration there, ready for the printer. These pages speak of an incredibly vibrant visual culture, from a time when the *work*, the labour of art, sat in a zone where craft, trade, hustle and industrial process all overlapped. And the bits of ephemera in the collection — the in-house gags, the hasty caricatures, the decorated envelopes and letters, the rejected ideas and the finished artwork — all clearly show that those involved, artists and entrepreneurs alike, took great joy in the business.

The Frank Johnson papers reveal much about the daily grind of under-capitalised publishing: the rolled-up sleeves and full ashtrays, the sheer work of it all, the constant hassling over relatively small sums of money. The material tells us much too about the emotional

THESE PAGES SPEAK OF AN INCREDIBLY VIBRANT VISUAL CULTURE, FROM A TIME WHEN THE WORK, THE LABOUR OF ART, SAT IN A ZONE WHERE CRAFT, TRADE, HUSTLE AND INDUSTRIAL PROCESS ALL OVERLAPPED.

ecologies there, such as the often hurt and resentful feelings of writers who believe their work is under-appreciated.

Despite the richness and variety of material in the Frank Johnson papers, there are major gaps and lacunae, and for every question answered, another three are raised. There are no accounting records, for instance, no sales records, no

cheque stubs or ledger books, no company minutes. We can only guess at how well or poorly individual titles moved, what level of sales a successful comic or magazine attained in 1940s or 1950s Australia, and how much money that may have put in Johnson's pocket. We know only anecdotally how severely the sales of pulps were affected by the rise of new slicker drama serials and the later pop music-based radio broadcasting of the 1950s. There is no record of how decisive a death blow was dealt by the coming of television in 1956. Nor is there much direct indication of who exactly Johnson was, and what kind of man. Frank the crafty entrepreneur is present everywhere in these papers but, like Orson Welles' Harry Lime in the 1949 movie, *The Third Man*, he's there mainly as a shadow, his presence more manifest in the actions, evasions and desires of those who hover around him, or chase after him, or who love and hate him.

1. Toni Johnson-Woods, 'Pulp Friction: Governmental Control of Cheap Fiction, 1939-1959', *Screen & Print*, 30.2, 2006, pp. 103-119.

A painting of a woman with blonde hair and red lips lying in a bathtub. She is wearing a pink bra and a white lace-trimmed top. Her eyes are closed. A hand from above is pouring water from a glass into the tub, with a stream of water falling over her head. The woman's left hand is visible, holding a glass of water. The background is dark and moody.

famous
DETECTIVE
stories

**The taste
of death**

CHAPTER TWO

TRUE CRIME

Famous Detective Stories was Frank Johnson Publications' (FJP's) longest-running and most successful title. Each issue featured a number of actual crimes — often but not always murders — committed in Australia, or nearby in the South Pacific or New Guinea, in colonial times or in more recent history. There would be one or two main stories of 5000 words or more, plus a few 2000–3000 word pieces. Stories were luridly illustrated with black and white pen or brush work, and the illustrations often added a hint of Wild West or urban *noir* sexiness to the events.

PETER DOYLE

ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*, 'THE TASTE OF DEATH',
C. 1947, WATERCOLOUR, GOUACHE AND COLLAGE, PX*D 68/5/F. 439

BURVETT INVESTIGATES

BY C. K. THOMPSON.



PHIL BELBIN,
ILLUSTRATION FOR
*FAMOUS DETECTIVE
STORIES*, 'BURVETT
INVESTIGATES',
1946, INK AND
GOUACHE,
PX*D 68/1/F. 177

OPPOSITE:
PHIL BELBIN,
ILLUSTRATION FOR
*FAMOUS DETECTIVE
STORIES*, UNTITLED,
1947, INK AND WASH,
PX*D 68/1/64

The stories were written by moonlighting journalists and freelancers, or by keen amateurs who sent in unsolicited manuscripts and ideas for stories. The stories themselves were told in plain, workmanlike prose. Authors were paid around £1 per 1000 words.

FJP artists working in black and white produced free, often impressionistic work, with dramatic lighting effects and bold contrasts. Sometimes the work mimicked police photography, with close attention to documentary exactitude. Editor Johnson was constantly asking contributors to source, if they could, any relevant crime scene photos, mug shots, or any visual material they could find. Phil Belbin and Peter Chapman, then young men barely out of their teens, churned out the bulk of the black and white illustrations. Chapman's artwork in particular often featured two or three figures, with the glances between characters triangulated so as to suggest complex emotional relationships and unfolding tensions.

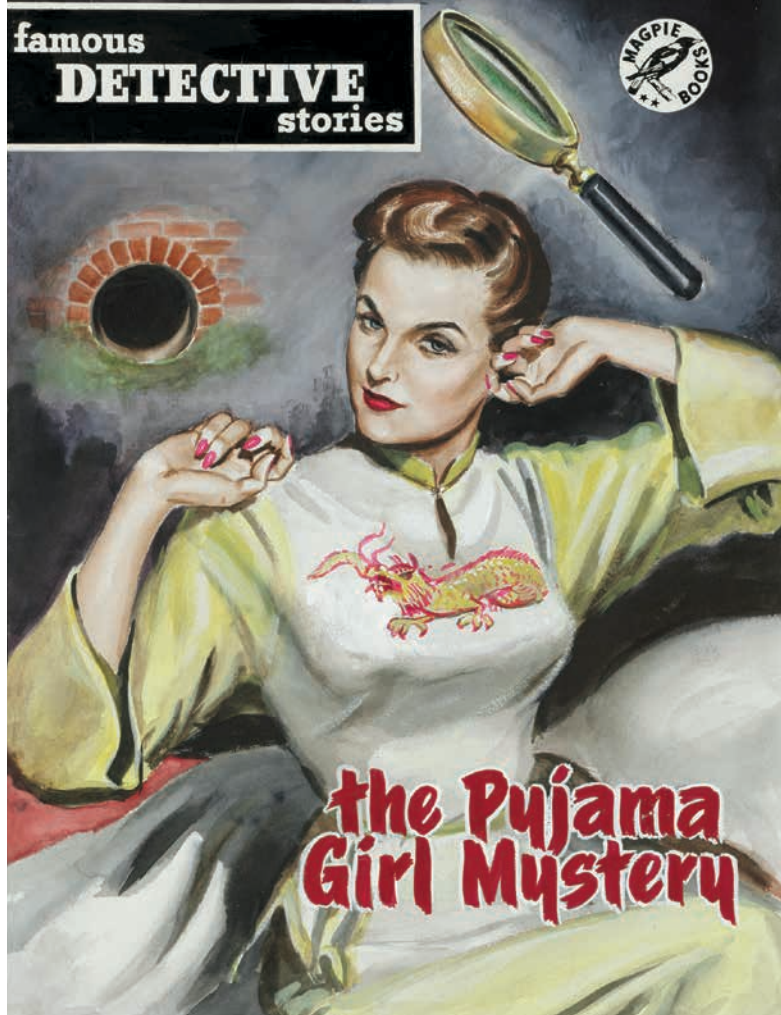
Journalist CK ('Charlie') Thompson, of *The Newcastle Sun*, was one of *Famous Detective Stories*' main authors, and was on board from nearly the beginning

of the series. Correspondence in the collection reveals that Thompson and Johnson had discussed the idea of a true crime magazine series one day late in 1946 over a few beers in Usher's Hotel. Thompson wrote back promptly the next day, pitching ideas for specific stories.

Thompson was in touch with the family of a former Victorian CIB (Criminal Investigation Branch) detective, Alfred Burvett, who had been at the centre of a number of famous police cases in the early twentieth century. Thompson accumulated 'a hell of a wad'¹ of material — whether from interviewing Burvett or perhaps from Burvett's own memoirs is unclear — but Thompson was confident that he (and Johnson) would have unencumbered rights to the stories. He suggests in a letter that he 're-write cases into up-to-the-minute style'.² Alternatively, he says, the articles might be presented in Burvett's first person voice (with the byline 'As told to CK Thompson'). As a working journalist Thompson would also have had ready access to his own paper's clippings library, which enabled him to fact check and generally round out the stories and, of course, to access a rich record of crime in general. Referring to his collection of 'court anecdotes', Thompson writes, 'I have plenty of these from all states and New Zealand, as well as from England and the U.S.A. I could supply any quantity each month or as often as you wanted them.'³

The first issue of *Famous Detective Stories* hit the newsstands in December 1946, and came out monthly until its demise in 1954. The use of 'Detective' in the title suggests that Johnson fully intended to make the most of Burvett's and any other detectives' recollections he could muster.





ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*, 'THE PYJAMA GIRL MYSTERY', C. 1947, WATERCOLOUR, GOUACHE AND COLLAGE, PX*D 68/5/F. 450

Some of the events in *Famous Detective Stories* would have been well in the public memory in the late 1940s: the 'Milperra Murder' referred to a double killing committed by William Cyril Moxley, a Sydney break-and-enter merchant and police snitch who had himself once been shot point blank in the head by angry underworld associates. He recovered, but became a reclusive timber cutter in the forests south-west of Sydney. In April 1932 he came upon a young couple petting in a car parked near Strathfield Golf Course.

He bashed the man, then took the couple to Milperra, where he raped the woman and finally killed both of them. The ensuing manhunt was huge, and Moxley instantly became a nationally despised and feared figure. (He was quickly caught, tried and hanged.) Likewise the Pyjama Girl murder of 1934, finally resolved in 1944, was — and remains — one of the most famous murder cases in Australian history. Both cases turned up as long, featured pieces in *Famous Detective Stories*.

The magazine also delved into the 1920s-era criminal doings in Melbourne, involving well-known razor gangsters ‘Squizzy’ Taylor, ‘Snowy’ Cutmore and others. It dealt in some depth with the story of Eugenia Falleni, the cross-dressing murderer of her lover-spouse Annie Birkett. Lesser known urban stories were also featured: a Sydney story about the ‘Darlington Counterfeiters’, as well as accounts of, by then largely forgotten, early twentieth-century confidence scams and frauds.

Colonial era crime was the staple: *Famous Detective Stories* ran long stories on cases such as the almost slapstick Bertrand-Kinder murder of 1865 and the Melbourne murderer Frederick Deeming, hanged in 1892, portrayed at the time as almost a local counterpart to Jack the Ripper. The so-called Mount Rennie Outrage — a gang-rape case of 1886 involving a South Sydney ‘larrikin’ gang, which saw the conviction and controversial hanging of four gang members — was covered in *Famous Detective Stories*, as was the story of Frances Knorr, the Melbourne ‘baby farmer’, also of the 1890s. All had been sensations in their respective times, and each had generated huge press coverage. All the 1940s writer had to do was access any well-kept newspaper clippings library to have the whole story already there, more or less fully assembled.

**ALL THE 1940s
WRITER HAD TO
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TO HAVE THE
WHOLE STORY
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FULLY ASSEMBLED.**

the Sheep and the Wolves

by Max Afford



Before long, the inevitable feeling arose that *Famous Detective Stories* had mopped up most of the available material. In 1953 Charlie Thompson would write to Johnson that ‘apart from really up to the minute cases, the Australian field is about played out’.⁴ They’ve done the Deeming story three times, he writes, with some disgust. ‘I’d prefer,’ he suggests, ‘to do overseas cases ... a good collection of French and American ‘crimes of passion’ ... [we] could select those which are not too brazen’.⁵

The final issue of *Famous Detective Stories* struggled onto the newsstands a few months later, in January 1954 — but it has never fully gone away. Just as FJP’s moonlighting journos were able to go to their own clippings libraries and, with a bit of minimal rewriting and top and tailing, knock together a sellable few thousand words on a semi-forgotten crime, so too would later hacks mine and refashion the FJP *Famous Detective Stories* material. It would keep reappearing in the ‘crimes that shocked Australia’ potboilers and TV programs, through the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and, indeed, right up to the present.

1. CK Thompson, letter to Frank Johnson, 7 November 1946, Frank Johnson papers, ML MSS 1214/2, no. 255.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

4. CK Thompson, letter to Frank Johnson, 10 November 1953, Frank Johnson papers, ML MSS 1214/2, no. 379, p. 2.

5. *ibid.*

THRILLS • MYSTERY • ADVENTURE • FUN

SUPER

COMICS

6^d



CHAPTER THREE

AMAZING!

The outbreak of World War II saw the banning of printed imports, in order to preserve much-needed foreign currency, and severe restrictions placed on all local publishing.

Regulations dictated that no new *serial* publications could be issued; but local publisher NSW Bookstall Company realised that *one-off* publications might be exempt, and started publishing serial comics, with each issue appearing under a new title.

PETER DOYLE

ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, *SUPER COMICS*, c. 1947,

A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION, SYDNEY, Q808.7/J

It is not known what turned Frank Johnson's attention from the literary highbrow to the humble comic book form, but he entered the field with gusto. His first comic book title, *Amazing Comics*, hit the newsstands in July 1941, retailing at sixpence a copy. Inside was a mix of adventures and naturalistic (using the term loosely) drama stories, alongside humorous, funny-figure stories. The following week *Star Comics* continued some of the stories from *Amazing*. Thereafter

IT IS NOT KNOWN
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followed *Marvel, Magic, Thrilling, Super, Mighty, Master, Victory, Winner, Conquer, Hero, Hot Shot, Crash, Thunder, Terrific, Ace, Bullet, Corker, Startling, Modern* and *Monster Comics*. The relentless quest for new titles produced *Punch, Knockout, Smash Hit, Dynamite, Stirring, Giant, Gem, Wizard, Exciting, Colossal, Weird* and *Zip Comics*, among others. When no more could be dreamed up, old titles were re-used with the addition 'New': *New Startling, New Magic, New Crash Comics* and so on.

TOUGH GUYS, (MILDLY) SUPER POWERS

If buyers were confused by the never-ending succession of titles, Frank Johnson Publications (FJP) countered somewhat by sticking with a distinctive, action-filled montage cover style, always with the FJP logo prominent, drawn by artist (and old Johnson crony) Unk White. White also contributed the series characters Blue Hardy (an outback adventurer, aided by girlfriend Kit and 'black tracker' Jacky), super-villain Dr Evil and regular tough guy Don Taylor. Artist Dan Russell soon began alternating covers with White, and also contributed some new strips: Jimmy Dale, world heavyweight champ; Wanda Dare, girl reporter; and Val Blake, ventriloquist adventurer.

Other comics artists were soon on board: Carl Lyon, Les Dixon, Bruce Cousins, Noel Cook, Frank Jessup, Rhys Williams and others all wrote action and adventure strips for Johnson. Characters in FJP comics

LOST IN THE GERM WORLD

STIRRING 6^D COMICS



WANDA DARE
GIRL REPORTER

DR EVIL
and the
Robot Man

TAXI DRIVER **BARTY MALONE**

TERRY M'BRIDE

DR DARBIL

A
FRANK JOHNSON
PUBLICATION

DAN RUSSELL, COVER ARTWORK, *STIRRING COMICS*, 1942,
A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION, SYDNEY, Q808.7/J

BARTY MALONE

TAXI DRIVER

BY CARL LYON



BARTY MALONE, IN HIS TAXI IS CRUISING ALONG THE STREET, WHEN, IN FRONT OF A HOTEL—



— HE IS HAILED BY A GIRL —



THE GIRL STEPS INTO THE TAXI, AND ORDERS HIM TO FOLLOW A CAR AHEAD —



— BUT AS THE TAXI LEAVES THE KERB, A CAR
DRAWS OUT BEHIND IT —



UNAWARE THAT THEY TOO, ARE BEING FOLLOWED, BARTY QUESTIONS THE GIRL —

were firmly identified with their various occupational categories. Skip Dolan was a crime-fighting Sydney journalist and Roley Slade was a Customs man, forever thwarting nefarious opium smugglers in Sydney Harbour. Then there was Ken Bailey of the North Australian Mounted, not to be confused with Headley of the *South* Australian Mounted. Scorch Morgan was a millionaire detective (solving crimes not because he had to, but because he *liked it*). Carl Lyon's Barty

Malone was a humble taxi driver, endlessly cruising *noirish* city streets, occasionally coming to the aid of a slinky female passenger in distress. There was Judd Barton, pearler, Terry McBride of the Sea Scouts, K27 of the Secret Service, Nick Carver of the circus and so on, all the way down to the modest but quintessentially Australian Greg Bartlett, linesman. Other two-fisted characters included Inspector Dean and Steele Carewe. There were boffin heroes too, in the form of naturalists Dr Darbil and Professor Darwin — their scholarliness and learning helped immensely when they came up against freaks and monsters. Super powers possessed by FJP heroes were rather more modest than those of their US counterparts, but novel nonetheless: The Eagle, with his large angel-like (or maybe demon-like) wings, had the power of flight. Shadowman could make himself invisible at will. 'Jo and her Magic Cape', written and drawn by the then-teenaged Moira Bertram, featured a super-powered young heroine, forever striking elaborately dramatic poses in her smart leotard, zipping through and above the jungle with her magic cape, getting the best of Japanese soldiers and helping out our beleaguered boys down below.

SAME-OLD

Pirate-themed comics were a great staple. Sometimes they told of actual historical figures, or made-up figures, or, best of all, made-up stories based on actual

MOIRA BERTRAM, 'JO AND HER MAGIC CAPE' (DETAIL), *WIZARD COMICS*, C. 1947, A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION, SYDNEY, ML 741.5994/40

OPPOSITE:

CARL LYON, 'BARTY MALONE TAXI DRIVER', *MIGHTY COMICS*, C. 1947, A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION, SYDNEY, Q808.7/J



historical figures (such as Peter Chapman's 'Cromwell and the Pirates'. 'With true characters you can make up anything', Chapman once commented'). *True Pirates*, to which Chapman regularly contributed, was a particularly successful FJP series of the early postwar years.

Despite Johnson's unconventional background, the comics he published unquestioningly upheld white, Anglophone, colonialist, masculinist, classist prejudices of the day. Asian males are presented as unfailingly grotesque and wicked, and Asian women as lynx-eyed femmes fatales. Tribal natives are almost unfailingly savage, but occasionally nobly so, and always in need of help and guidance from white men, for which they are abjectly grateful. Women, with the notable exception of Jo, are obliged to wait around to be saved by men.

Although the storylines are mostly hackneyed, FJP's crime-action-adventure comics sometimes featured surprisingly accomplished, up-to-the-minute artwork. Unk White's strong compositions and Carl Lyon's grim, inky panels stand out. Other strips, such as Jon Hill's earliest Skip Dolan, are almost shockingly amateurish — as with many FJP comics, the drawing gets better as the series progresses.

FJP comics also contained funny-figure series and super-hero parodies. Popular cartoonist Emile Mercier contributed 'Wocko the Beaut', 'Mudrake the Magician', 'Supa Dupa Man', 'Three Gun Ferdie', 'Speed Umplestoop' and the like. Eric Porter's 'Waddles Wombat' was a put-upon modern suburbanite in the shape of a marsupial, facing (and mostly losing) the myriad small battles and trials of everyday life.





ARTIST UNKNOWN,
'NELSON POWER',
UNDATED, PEN, INK
AND WATERCOLOUR,
PX*D 69/4/F. 518

OPPOSITE:
JON HILL, 'SKIP DOLAN'
(DETAIL), UNDATED,
PEN, INK AND GOUACHE,
PX*D 69/1/F. 130

According to comics historian John Ryan, Frank Johnson was well ahead of world practice in giving artists a free hand to invent stories, or, if they were given instructions regarding a story's general direction, they were allowed to fill in the story and dialogue details as they saw fit. (Under boss Stan Lee, US trailblazer Marvel Comics would adopt a similar system in the 1950s.)

After the war, US imports first trickled, and soon flooded back into the local market, bringing a new cast of improved super heroes, more dynamic storytelling and nuttier comic figures. Australian publishers also began printing US comics locally, under licence. The local industry lost its competitive advantage, and FJP gradually dropped the comics side of the business. Today FJP comics are prized by collectors and, despite their manifest shortcomings, still demonstrate a zesty storytelling spirit and nous.

1. Peter Chapman, interview with the author, 3 December 2014.



NOEL COOK, ENVELOPE WITH COLOUR CARTOON,
'IF IT'S A BEST SELLER - FRANK JOHNSON',
1943, © NOEL COOK, WATERCOLOUR AND INK,
PX*D 68/10/ F. 24

FRANK JOHNSON
PUBLISHER
350 George St.
SYDNEY. NSW



AH!
ANOTHER
JOHNSON
LAUGH
SPECIAL!

NAW!
HONEY,
THE "PURPLE
HEART" IS
NOT A JOHNSON
BOOK-IT'S A
DECORATION



THE SUN
IS UP.
JOHNSON PUBLIS

JOHNSON
PUBLIS

NOEL
COOK

O'LAND.

FRANK JOHNSON

LAUGH
PUBLICATION



CHAPTER FOUR***GRUB STREET,
SYDNEY***

Behind the imposing stone facade of the Equitable Life Assurance building at 350 George St, Sydney, is a stately labyrinth of offices that once housed architects, accountants, commission agents, importers, dentists, engineers and various professional associations.

PETER DOYLE



ARTIST UNKNOWN, COVER ARTWORK, WIZARD COMICS, 1946, A FRANK JOHNSON PUBLICATION, SYDNEY, ML 741.5994/40

From some time in the late 1930s, it was also the home of Frank Johnson Publications (FJP). It may have been Pulp Central, but it certainly wasn't Skid Row, and Johnson was careful to use the address for maximum effect. The comics, magazines and books issued by FJP typically sported a prominent logo — either a stylised 'FJP' or a six-pointed star with the company name in the centre — and that prestigious George Street address was usually placed somewhere in large font. The address may have been smart,

but the company office itself was small, staffed by just Johnson himself, sometimes wife Vera, a secretary and a quiet Raymond Lindsay, who edited the manuscripts.

Hopeful freelancers would bring work in to be judged. Johnson would run an eye over graphic art offerings — single-page cartoons, comic strips and the like — and make an on-the-spot judgment. A nervous 14-year-old Moira Bertram fronted Johnson in the early 1940s with one page of her super-heroine comic 'Jo and her Magic Cape', to be told to return within the week with the complete story. Likewise, teenagers Peter Chapman and Phil Belbin, both then students at East Sydney Technical College, were given a gruff go-ahead. Over the subsequent decade, Chapman and Belbin both went on to produce a great many comics, illustrations and book covers for FJP. During that time their work would transform from youthfully enthusiastic but often flawed renderings, to fully professional work with innovative, dynamic compositions.

'If Frank liked you, you were all right, you got the jobs,' recounts Peter Chapman. 'But if he didn't, there was nothing.'

Letters of contract among the Frank Johnson papers show the rates artists were paid. The standard was 30 shillings or even 40 shillings (£2) per page, for comics and cartoons. An artist who could produce a page, possibly two, even three pages a day could thus make handsome money at a time when the basic wage was just over £6 per week. Sales of 60,000 or more for a single comic book were not uncommon.

Johnson needed the artists, needed their work, and although he didn't hand over cheques with any noticeable relish, he *did* pay, and at the agreed-upon rate. It was not so happy a story for FJP's writers. Notionally, FJP paid writers royalties of £2/10 per 1000 copies for a short novel, and print runs were 10,000 minimum. Typically a novella would earn the author anywhere between £25 and £100.

IT MAY HAVE BEEN
PULP CENTRAL,
BUT IT CERTAINLY
WASN'T SKID ROW,
AND JOHNSON WAS
CAREFUL TO USE
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MAXIMUM EFFECT.

But letter after letter tells of increasing frustration over non-payment for a published story, or a late (or non-existent) royalty statement. There are many increasingly testy series of enquiries as to whether Frank has yet had a chance to read this or that manuscript, and one very angry letter stating that it was obvious Frank had read the piece, despite his denials, because the story had turned up in the latest issue of *Famous Detective Stories*. (Johnson's way of wriggling out of *that* one is a masterpiece: the printers in Melbourne slipped the story into the current issue, he says, without his knowledge; and the distributors, also in Melbourne, got it out to the shops before

Johnson had even seen a copy. Why, he was every bit as surprised as the letter-writer!)

THE MOST COMMON PATTERN OF CORRESPONDENCE IS A SERIES OF POLITE BUT TENSE ENQUIRIES LEADING FINALLY TO A 'GO TO HELL!' MOMENT.

The most common pattern of correspondence is a series of polite but tense enquiries leading finally to a 'go to hell!' moment. Jean Devanny scolds Johnson for his lack of courtesy. Long-time friend Charlie Thompson says he's astounded at receiving Frank's 'miniature' cheque for £8, when he was expecting

£20, and sets the solicitors on Frank. And so on. The papers don't hold all of Johnson's letters back to the correspondents, but the context of subsequent letters from many an author indicates that Johnson was a master at manipulating the writers, throwing a bone — a small cheque and maybe a few consoling words — at the judicious moment, just enough to cool him or her down. FJP regular Will Lawson apologises for having been 'snarky' in the office the day before. ('But you can be a nark when you've had a few,' he writes.²)

The authors' letters are frequently defensive in tone, blustering and wheedling at the same time. 'I'm sick of having to come to you hat in hand for money which is due to me,' writes Will Lawson in another letter to Johnson. 'I am just as celebrated as any of them.



PETER CHAPMAN, ILLUSTRATION FOR *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*,
UNTITLED, UNDATED, INK AND WASH, PX*D 68/3/F. 325

151
"Woods."

Sorell, Tasmania.

19. September, 1945.

Mr. Frank Johnson.
350 George St.
Sydney.

Dear Mr. Johnson —

Your letter reached me yesterday. I read it on my way from the bush gate, & was so much surprised that I fell into a rabbit burrow.

I am pleased that you will use the two yarns for the Hoagie Series, — especially "Many Colours".

But, please, — have I missed one of your letters? The latest I have states only that "Dead Fires" would make a "Hoagie", you had not read "Many Colours". You said you would hold the ms. if I wished.

So — I've no idea at all of your business arrangements regarding this series. How is it conducted, please? —

Even Mr. Rowlandson had elaborate "agreement" forms for his Bookstall shilling list. Not that I wish such worries. I merely ask information on the financial position.

With best wishes for your success, now that prospects appear to be brightening; — my brother yours with me in this.

Yours sincerely

Hilda Bridges.

P.S. I have just remembered that I used a pen name "Joan Gardner" when the ms. were used for broadcasting — I enclose ABC memo. you will use the name you prefer (B)

Unk White, [Harry] Weston, Emil [*sic*] Mercier, Beatrice Grimshaw and the rest. Ask Dymocks how my books sell.³

The same Beatrice Grimshaw writes the one letter to Frank that seems to rattle him: a curt, 'I am sorry that my letter of the 22nd October did not rate a reply, yours faithfully ...'.⁴ It elicited an immediate apology from an obviously chastened Frank.

Yet there are plenty of matey and convivial letters among the correspondence. Johnson did publish unsolicited manuscripts, and not infrequently their authors are surprised and delighted to hear they are to go into print. So shocked was Miss Hilda Bridges (of rural Tasmania) to read that FJP was to publish her, she fell into a rabbit burrow, she writes. Frank replies, 'We hope by this time you have recovered from your fall in the rabbit burrow.'⁵ ('I am quite recovered,' she replies in turn. 'The burrow was large and muddy.'⁶)

Johnson drank hard with his old bohemian cronies, but presented a more forbidding figure to younger writers and artists. 'He was a shifty old bloke,' says Peter Chapman. 'But he liked me.'⁷ And plenty of people liked him. There are a number of decorated envelopes, caricatures, playful sketches, group photos, references to fondly remembered drinking sessions, and the citing of numerous collective in-jokes among the ephemera and correspondence. Even when he falls out with a pal, reconciliation usually follows.

Frank Johnson paid little and he paid late, but he kept his business going when the industry as a whole was in steep decline. By the 1950s, Top 40 radio was distracting young readers from all but teen idol mags (which Johnson also published), and newer edgier horror and super-hero comics were coming in from the US. Ever slicker Disney comics were published locally in huge numbers and finally, in 1956, the coming of television knocked all but the biggest of the pulp publishers right out of the game forever.

1. Peter Chapman, interview with the author, 20 November 2014.

2. Will Lawson, letter to Frank Johnson, 4 December 1943, ML MSS 1214/1, no. 55.

3. Will Lawson, letter to Frank Johnson, 8 November 1943, ML MSS 1214/1, no. 51.

4. Beatrice Grimshaw, letter to Frank Johnson, 15 November 1945, ML MSS 1214/1, no. 497.

5. Frank Johnson, letter to Hilda Bridges, 3 September 1945, ML MSS 1214/1, no. 145.

6. Hilda Bridges, letter to Frank Johnson, 7 September 1945, ML MSS 1214/1, no. 147.

7. Peter Chapman, interview with the author, 20 November 2014.

BLACK GHOST RANCH

6¢



BY C. K. THOMPSON

SURE FIRE WESTERNS



CHAPTER FIVE

AUSTRALIA'S FICTION FACTORIES

Australia has always struggled to maintain a home-grown publishing industry. Since the nineteenth century, long distances, a small population and a relative lack of professional writers have hampered local attempts at periodical and book production.

DR TONI JOHNSON-WOODS

PHIL BELBIN, COVER ARTWORK, 'BLACK GHOST RANCH', 1947,
WATERCOLOUR AND GOUACHE, PX*D 68/1/F. 12

That is until an all-too-brief period in the mid-twentieth century when publishers found a ready market for locally produced reading material.

Around the outbreak of World War II, imported reading material — especially pulp magazines from the US — was virtually banned. Under such protectionism (so-called by some), a handful of small publishers such as Frank C Johnson turned from printing miscellaneous journals and small periodicals to publishing entertaining reading. Suddenly amateur writers, journalists and anyone who could pen a decent story found work. And readers. Railway stands, newsagents and booksellers filled their racks with genre fiction written by Australians for Australians.

At first the most popular format was a small digest of roughly 34 pages, stapled in the middle and printed on cheap pulp paper. Indeed, the paper is so poor that it is amazing that any pulps survive today. Over time the format evolved into soft-covered novels of roughly 97 pages, and by the mid 1950s what are now recognisable as paperbacks were available. As the format developed, so too did the genres.

Westerns were prolific in the early days. They gave way to a brief fascination for science fiction/speculative fiction after World War II. Crime fiction, especially detective stories, grew in popularity by the 1950s. Romance remained a staple throughout. Nearly all of the

publishers, most of which were located in Sydney, experimented with each of the genres and often became known for one particular genre: Horwitz Publications for crime, Cleveland Books for westerns and Frank Johnson Publications for true crime.

THE PAPER IS SO POOR THAT IT IS AMAZING THAT ANY PULPS SURVIVE TODAY.



famous
DETECTIVE
stories



**the doctor
talked too
much**

Woollett

WOOLLETT, COVER ARTWORK, *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*, 'THE DOCTOR TALKED TOO MUCH', C. 1947, WATERCOLOUR, GOUACHE AND COLLAGE, PX'D 68/5/F. 442

OPPOSITE: *FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES*, VOL 1 NO 6, MAY 1947,
SYDNEY: FRANK JOHNSON, PRINTED BOOK, A823.05/2



ARTIST UNKNOWN,
COVER ARTWORK,
'PARDON MY INTRUSION',
C. 1947, WATERCOLOUR
AND GOUACHE,
PX*D 68/5/F. 449

Because demand for such material was high, publishers competed for readers' pennies by creating lurid covers with equally sensational

titles. Semi-clad females, green monsters and action-packed situations drew readers ever closer, and soon attracted the attention of moral crusaders. Soon people were lamenting the effect of such material, especially on the youth of Australia. A two-tiered system of censorship developed. States developed censorship boards, but publishers were more afraid that distributors (such as Gordon and Gotch) might refuse to distribute offensive material, so they also developed in-house guidelines for writers.

While writers contended with the censors, artists continued to create high-octane covers. Stylistically, the earliest covers resemble comic books, pulp's closest literary relation. Later, they came to incorporate movie poster design elements. Some tried photographic covers, but hand-tinting colour was expensive. It was cheaper to commission an artist, and some publishers had full-time artists who created generic covers. Sometimes the cover art matched the story,

often it didn't. In fact, the reverse was true: authors wrote to the demands of the cover, and a book definitely could not be judged by its cover.

Pay for artist-illustrators and writers was poor by today's standards. Rights were sold outright, and a publisher could then onsell material overseas and creators did not receive royalties. While they might have grumbled, for many this work was a supplement to their regular salaries. In some cases, writers such as railway signalman Gordon Clive Bleek could double their annual income. Some wrote to pay for a particular thing: a down-payment on a house, a car, a telephone, a holiday. There was plenty of work available, and someone who could churn out a new story each week soon found themselves in demand. Most writers submitted material to a variety of publishers, and editors were not averse to recommending other publishers if a story was not suitable for them.

PETER CHAPMAN,
COVER ARTWORK,
'SON OF BIDGEE BOB',
C. 1947, WATERCOLOUR
AND GOUACHE,
PX*D 68/3/F. 320

THERE WAS
PLENTY OF WORK
AVAILABLE, AND
SOMEONE WHO
COULD CHURN
OUT A NEW STORY
EACH WEEK
SOON FOUND
THEMSELVES
IN DEMAND.





WIDE WORLD

DARK
COURT
and RAC
Frank Chime

Famous
Stories

STANDARD

OPINIO
The Express

PHOTOPLAY

HOW TO PLAY
THE GAME OF WIN
MAN

WORLD
READING

HANGING
MATTERS

AUSTRALIA

THE ABC
WEEKLY
ARNHEM LA
EXPEDITION
BELL-RINGING
4 PICTURE PAGES

GLAMOR

NEW IDEA

NEWSSTAND AND VENDOR,
MARTIN PLACE, SYDNEY,
C. 1947, PHOTONEGATIVE,
ACP MAGAZINES LTD
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE,
ON 388

Most writers were published under a house name — it was an early form of branding. The in-house editors could then manipulate the stories to conform to their needs. Of course, some writers became synonymous with some house names — Len Meares wrote hundreds of Marshall Grover westerns. However, voice did matter sometimes, and Alan Yates seems to be the sole author of the 300-odd Carter Brown stories. The bylines and author blurbs could be deceiving — journalist Audrey Armitage and school-teacher Muriel Watkins penned Horwitz's Johnny Buchanan series, but the 'author' photo on the back was of a June Dally Watkins model. One author, CJ McKenzie, claimed that one Horwitz editor suggested that they hire a handful of writers, each assigned to write a specific part of the book. The idea did not come to fruition.

Each week dozens of titles rolled off the presses. Stands were crammed with hundreds of disposable reading materials. Books were pocket-sized so they could easily fit into a handbag or a pocket, for quick consumption on a train journey or leisure entertainment. It was before the advent of television. Just as quickly as the industry blossomed, it died. Many publishers appeared overnight and just as quickly folded. Unfortunately, in-house archives were discarded. Materials like those in the Frank Johnson papers are rare.

At the end of the 1950s, import restrictions were lifted. American paperbacks jostled Australian material off the shelves. Overnight, many publishers closed, and only two Sydney publishers survived. Cleveland concentrated on westerns, and Horwitz diversified into schlock sex stories. Authors struggled to find a market. Protectionism was over, and so too was the golden age of Australian publishing.



**Blood in
the Bagnio**

APPENDIX

THE FRANK JOHNSON PAPERS

The Frank Johnson papers were purchased by the Mitchell Library in 1965. They range in date from 1906 to 1960. The works on display in the exhibition are drawn from all five series in the papers.

SERIES 01

ML MSS 1214

Five volumes, comprising:

Volume I — contracts from 1932 to 1948

Volume II — correspondence from 1931 to 1960

Volume III — manuscripts submitted for publication from 1931 to 1960, including novels, short stories, articles and poems, manuscripts and printed extracts. Highlights include works by John Barr, EJ Brady, P Hopegood, J Lawson, Will Lawson and Bea Miles.

Volume IV — mock-ups and collections of stories used in magazines

Volume V — miscellaneous material, including correspondence

SERIES 02

Illustrations for children's books PX*D67

Sixteen volumes, comprising:

1855 illustrations by artists Dick Alderton, Frank Beck, Margaret Bourke, Nancy Dobson, Eyre, Frank Jessup, Carl Lyon, Emile Mercier, Flora Mercier, Syd Miller, Ridgway, N and R Shelley, Unk White, Rhys Williams, Ron Broadley, Eric Porter, Harry J Weston, Dick Alderton, Margaret Boyd, Stuart Reid, Peggy Oldfield, Dan Russell, Peter Chapman and unknown artists

SERIES 03

Illustrations for novels, westerns and detective stories PX*D68

Ten volumes, comprising:

976 illustrations by artists Peter Chapman, Phil Belbin, Ron Broadley, George Finey, Richard Cocks, Dal, Gerrard Lants, James Flett, John McCormack, Emile Mercier, Ridgway, Les Such, Woollett, Unk White, unknown artists and the scrapbook of Frank C Johnson

SERIES 04

Illustrations for comics, cartoons and magazines PX*D69

Eleven volumes, comprising:

1774 comic and cartoon illustrations by artists Pat Andrew, Frank Ashley, Ernie Carroll, Phil Belbin, Peter Chapman, Bill Gill, Rowl Greenhalgh, John Harris, Jon Hill, Graham Jones, Bjorn Karlstrom, Lock, McHic, Emile Mercier, Reg Murray, Angus Orchard, Ron S Perigo, E Porter, Norm Rice, Dan Russell, Michael Tudor, John Young, Graham Jones, Dick Alderton, John Bice, Ron Broadley, Frank Bruno, Noel Cook, Les Dixon, Harry Eyre, Fitz, Audrey Francis, Gerry, Gum, Heth, Frank Jessup, Mark Kemp, Carl Lyon, HL Mansfield, Ram Mascord, R Lawrence, Jack Lusby, K Naughton, Mark Regal, Norm Rice, Colin Robertson, Jim Russell, Les Such, Webster, Unk White, Willo, E Porter, Michael Tudor, John Young, Heth, Lock, Jack Lusby, K Naughton, Norm Rice, Colin Robertson, Webster, Virgil Reilly and unknown artists

SERIES 05

PXB 520

Seven photographs from the papers of Frank Johnson Publications



ARTIST UNKNOWN,
[FRANK JOHNSON], UNDATED,
INK AND GOUACHE,
PX*D 69/11/F. 1723



QUEENSLAND

FRANK JOHNSON
PUBLISHER

350 George St.
Sydney
N.S.W.



