George William Sydney Fitzpatrick\(^1\) (1884-1948): 
An Australian Public Relations 'pioneer'

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Abstract
Public relations scholarship has only briefly mentioned George Fitzpatrick, an Australian industry pioneer. This paper—based largely on archival material, contemporary articles, and other published primary sources—seeks to redress this gap in PR historiography. It examines Fitzpatrick's family background, business networks, and diverse career, which included PR and government lobbying activities at a time when publicity practice in Australia was thought to be confined to the film sector. From journalist origins, Fitzpatrick moved into consultancy and pro bono PR work on behalf of governments, business, and charitable organisations. His PR campaigns, grounded in research trips to America and Europe in the 1930s, reflected considerable understanding of the 'science of persuasion' to influence public opinion. Fitzpatrick's strategies included editorial, direct mail, advertising, events, and lobbying. In 1946 Fitzpatrick faced sensational allegations concerning his gambling businesses, from which he does not appear to have recovered. This paper concludes that although Fitzpatrick's reputation was strongly damaged, his earlier charitable and political campaigns encapsulated PR practices well prior to the professional PR era in Australia.

Keywords: Canberra, Gambling, Government, Lobbying, Public Relations, Tasmania

Introduction
In 1948, shortly before the formation of the (Sydney-based) Australian Institute of Public Relations, George Fitzpatrick, credited as Australia’s ‘first’ public relations practitioner, died in Sydney (Potts, 1976; Tymson & Sherman, 2009). According to Australia’s first professor of public relations, Fitzpatrick ‘did not live to see the PR field he had pioneered progress to accepted respectability and assume professional status’ (Potts, 1976, 25). The little coverage about Fitzpatrick notes his registration as a ‘practitioner in public persuasion and propaganda’ in the 1940s (Tymson & Sherman, 2009, 35). Some Australian PR historical accounts have not included him (Quarles & Rowlings, 1993; Zawawi, 2009); similarly he is absent in critiques of lobbying in Australia (Lloyd, 1991; Sheehan, 2012). It is puzzling that Fitzpatrick, who featured in selective edition of *Who’s Who in Australia* (1935-1948), did not earn an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

Australian PR historiography has traditionally emphasised several watershed events: the arrival of General Douglas McArthur, accompanied by a large PR team in 1942 (Zawawi, 2009; Turnbull, 2010; Tymson & Sherman, 2009) and the 1949 AIPR formation, ‘regarded as the official start of public relations as a profession in Australia’ (Tynan, 2011, 141). Mark Sheehan is perhaps the first scholar to have begun the important task of revisiting Australian PR historiography (2007; 2009). His research, which includes uncovering federal government publicity campaigns pre-1950, highlighted ‘paucity in recording early public relations efforts’ (Sheehan, 2007, 20). Macnamara and Crawford note that there are ‘... major gaps in understanding of the role and functions of public relations in Australia (2011, 19). Gleeson has begun to revise the early decades of PR tertiary education in Australia (2012a; 2012b). This paper seeks to detail Fitzpatrick’s diverse and extensive career, which pre-dates the beginning of the more formalised professional PR era, which began with the AIPR’s formation. A range of archival sources and published primary sources form the backdrop of this study.

\(^1\) Variously expressed as FitzPatrick. For consistency, Fitzpatrick is adopted in this paper.
\(^2\) Joined Victoria, South Australia and Queensland chapters to form the federated Public Relations Institute of Australia in 1960.
Family

George William Sydney Fitzpatrick, born in 1884, was the eldest child of Joseph Alexander Fitzpatrick, a ‘prominent member of the Loyal Orange Order’ (Sydney Morning Herald [hereafter SMH], 3 August 1932, 15) and Lizzie Jones. The Fitzpatricks, an Anglican family, lived at Westmead, near Parramatta, NSW. In memory of their mother, George and brother, Edwin, paid for one of the bells at St John’s Cathedral, Parramatta. Edwin, a qualified pharmacist and physician, worked for quite a few years as a medical missionary in Central Africa (Mercury, 1 September 1941, 4). When their father, Joseph, died, his obituary emphasised the family’s association with the church and Joseph’s strong support of charities, including the Parramatta Mental Hospital (SMH, 5 August 1932, 13).

From an early age George Fitzpatrick displayed a flair for business, writing and promotion. As a teenager, he took over editing the parish paper at St John’s Cathedral and quickly turned the publication into a profit (Sun, 4 July 1943, ‘Fact’, 4). In 1901, Fitzpatrick began full-time work as a telegraph messenger for the Post Master General’s Department (Canberra Times, 2 August 1948, 2). He then moved into journalism and after completing training as a copy-boy at the Sunday Times, Fitzpatrick was appointed the paper’s district correspondent for Parramatta. In an early sign of entrepreneurial spirit, he encouraged young boys to report sports results: he paid them 4s, and sold the information for 5s (Sun, 4 July 1943, ‘Fact’, 4).

Between 1910 and 1914 Fitzpatrick worked at the Sydney Morning Herald, The Sun and Evening News (Who’s Who in Australia 1935, 181). He was a member of the Australian Journalists’ Association, and became editor and also part-owner of newspapers, including being deputy governor of the Sunday Times and director of the Referee (Cairns Post, 10 September 1929, 4). Fitzpatrick was also involved in Dominion Publishing Agency, the NSW Advertising Men’s Institute and the Direct Mail Advertising Association of Australia.

In 1912, George married Gertrude Lowe at Parramatta and they had three children: George Jones, Edwin Albert, and Jean Marguerite. Whilst residing at Parramatta, George was appointed a Justice of the Peace (The Cumberland Argus & Fruitgrowers Advocate, 24 October 1914, 4). In the same year he began a role with the NSW Wheat Board.

Patriotic Service

After leaving the public service Fitzpatrick became involved in a myriad of causes and organisations. He was not shy in contacting – and utilising the press – to advance both himself and his clients. From his father, Fitzpatrick inherited strong patriotic sentiment towards the British Empire. In 1918, George became secretary of one such group, the Sydney Millions Club. Established in 1912, the club had a ‘belief that accelerated British migration would make Sydney the first Australian city to reach a population of one million’ (Spearritt, 1988). Fitzpatrick’s role included writing and producing the club’s newspaper (SMH, 11 March 1920, 5) and supporting returned servicemen, notably ANZACs. (Nepean Times, 24 May 1919, 5; SMH, 24 May 1919; SMH, 31 May 1918). In 1920 Fitzpatrick resigned as secretary, but remained a club member for another two decades. In 1939, after a study trip to the United States, Fitzpatrick gave an address to the Millions Club entitled ‘Will America fight?’ in relation to World War Two (SMH, 28 August 1939, 7). After leaving the club’s employ, Fitzpatrick became an associate director of the Tivoli Theatre for a short period.

Another patriotic group that Fitzpatrick joined was the Royal Society of St George. He mixed with influential business members and in December 1921 was elected secretary-manager of this group, whose aims were to ensure strong ties with the British Empire. The Society, through Fitzpatrick, made a public appeal for advice on the ‘desirability of having a fixed date to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ...’ (SMH, 30 December 1921, 9). By the mid 1930s Fitzpatrick would be the organisation’s chairman (SMH, 15 April 1922, 12; SMH, 10 December 1934, 4). Elite political and business leaders, many of whom belonged to Masonic Lodges, attended the Society, providing further networking opportunities for Fitzpatrick. It would not be until the 1940s that George Fitzpatrick declared his Masonic membership (Who’s Who in Australia 1947).
Fundraising Campaigns

From the 1920s Fitzpatrick became involved in charitable and community services. He undertook fundraising campaigns on behalf of a number of Sydney hospitals. Between 1920 and 1922 he was entrusted to undertake a $100,000 fundraising campaign for Sydney Hospital. After one appeal he publicly thanked Sydney’s business community:

From calculations I have made comparing Sydney on a population basis with other capital cities both in America and England, the figures show that the business men of this State are keenly conscious of their civic responsibilities (Fitzpatrick, 1921).

In 1921 Fitzpatrick joined the St Margaret’s Hospital ‘men’s committee’. Within a short time his powers of persuasion had convinced the Catholic hospital to appoint him as their campaign director, with a weekly salary of £20. Prominent historian, Sister Margaret Press, described Fitzpatrick as ‘an energetic man of entrepreneurial experience...’ (1994, 33). The St Margaret’s post was surprising for several reasons: first, the House Committee at Sydney Hospital had expressed concern at some of Fitzpatrick’s methods, which combined with uncertainty about the campaign’s viability, led to Fitzpatrick’s resignation from Sydney Hospital in March 1922 (SMH, 19 August 1922, 7); second, Williams Fitzsimmons, a state Liberal MP, sought to have Fitzpatrick prevented from undertaking further fundraising campaigns (Mercury, 25 August 1922, 9); and, third, Fitzpatrick’s Masonic affiliation seems at odds with the Catholic philosophy of St Margaret’s. Sectarianism was rife in Sydney in the 1920s, exemplified by the nationalist Fuller Government which was ‘not just Protestant [but] militantly Protestant and anti-Catholic’(Hogan, 1987, 190).

At St Margaret’s, Fitzpatrick changed his title to ‘Finance Director’ and on several occasions claimed to be either the hospital’s Deputy-Chairman or Chairman. Fitzpatrick set up a city office, supported by May Sheehan, the hospital’s newly appointed finance secretary (SMH, 25 January 1922, 9; St Margaret’s Annual Report, 1922). Within a couple of years, ‘Fitzpatrick had masterminded increasingly productive schemes which raised up to £14,000 a year’ (Press, 1994, 37). Yet, on at least one occasion, Sheehan, who would become integral to Fitzpatrick’s companies for more than a quarter of a century, had to publicly defend Fitzpatrick’s high fundraising costs (Sheehan, 1927).

In 1934, following some articles in The Bulletin about Fitzpatrick selling raffle tickets illegally in New Zealand, the NSW government tightened the Charitable Collections Act, which restricted St Margaret’s fundraising endeavours (Press, 1994, 38). In combination with other financial conflicts with hospital management, Fitzpatrick and Sheehan resigned from St Margaret’s. Before doing so they had arranged appointments as superintendent and executive secretary respectively of the ‘new’ St Margaret’s Hospital, which they renamed the New South Wales Community Hospital (now The Langton Centre), and operated independently.

Fitzpatrick also held roles as secretary, president and superintendent of the Food for Babies Fund (FBF). In 1924, FBF became responsible for the operation of Dalwood Home which offered a holiday for underprivileged children while their mothers were in hospital (History of Dalwood). In 1928 the facility was renamed Dalwood Health Home (SMH, 24 November 1928, 12). However, in 1930 the FBF foundress found it necessary to make the following statement in the fund’s Annual Report:

To correct an impression that it is erroneous as it is extensive the Honorary Treasurer [May Sheehan] desires it on record to say that the chairman, Mr George Fitzpatrick is an honorary officer. Mr Fitzpatrick receives no salary, bonus, honorarium or gratuity in any shape or form. Mr and Mrs Fitzpatrick are both generous contributors to the Fund (Food for Fund Annual Report, 1930).

Perhaps this statement was necessary because the fund’s financial statements that year showed £2058 spent on stationary, stamps, advertising and publicity, a similar amount to the £2097 spent on salaries and wages (Food for Fund Annual Report, 1930). In the depths of the 1930s Great Depression, the FBF provided free milk to hundreds of children attending kindergartens in Sydney and inner-city areas (SMH, 4 July 1933, 13). Dalwood experienced financial pressures, which led Fitzpatrick to make public appeals for government and private financial support (SMH, 28 November 1932; 3; SMH, 31 August 1933, 15; SMH, 5 October 1937, 7; SMH, 5 December 1938, 15; SMH, 26 February 1940, 9). Fitzpatrick made headlines when he said that ‘there are dogs that receive a
balanced diet superior to that of many children in the community’ (*SMH*, 15 September 1937, 10). What Fitzpatrick did not explain is why advertising and publicity soaked up so many funds. In 1935, for example, Dalwood’s deficit of nearly £1,600, included some £547 spent on advertising and publicity, the second largest expense item after salaries (*Dalwood Health Home Annual Report, 1935*).

**Political Campaigns**

**Canberra**

Fitzpatrick’s first significant PR campaign involved supporting the establishment of Canberra as Australia’s national capital. In 1908 a decision had been made to create a permanent capital in Canberra, which would require the temporary Parliament to move from Melbourne. In 1919, Fitzpatrick became foundation secretary of a Sydney-based Australian Federal Capital League (AFCL), a lobby group formed to respond to considerable anti-Federal sentiment in Melbourne and less populated Australian states. The AFCL campaign was necessary because ‘... the press of Victoria were on the whole vigorously virulent. They ridiculed and sneered at the movement inaugurated by the Australian Federal Capital League’ (*Federal Capital Pioneer, 1 February 1925, 2*).

Fitzpatrick played a strong advocacy role, combining lobbying and PR abilities, to promote Canberra. ‘Persistent propaganda and external vigilance were two of the means adopted for formulating public opinion’ (*Federal Capital Pioneer, 1 February 1925, 2*). At one public meeting in Queanbeyan, Fitzpatrick spoke passionately about arresting Melbourne’s position and holding politicians to account (*Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer, 5 August 1919, 2*). ‘Melbourne’, he said, ‘pretended to ignore the capital movement, and it was this pretence that had called into being the Federal Capital League’ (*Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer, 5 August 1919, 2*). Fitzpatrick engaged in considerable correspondence with Federal Government representatives, community groups, and also convened or spoke at public meetings in favour of federalism. When a new Federal Minister for Works and Railways was appointed, Fitzpatrick travelled to Melbourne to garnish support. Upon return to Sydney, Fitzpatrick advised the League’s executive that: ‘although a Victorian’ the minister was ‘a warm supporter of the Federal capital movement’ (*Melbourne Argus, 13 February 1923, 9*).

Ever alert to PR opportunities, Fitzpatrick suggested to the Federal government that events be held to signify milestones, such as the construction of schools or the sale of land (Chapman, 1924; Fitzpatrick, 1923). The AFCL ‘is very anxious that the first sale [of land] at Canberra should be a spectacular success’, Fitzpatrick (1924) wrote. In 1926, on the eve of re-location, Fitzpatrick made strident representations to government (Fitzpatrick 1926a; 1926b; 1926c). He advised the Minister for Home Affairs and Territories that there is ‘a fear here that an attempt will be made by those opposed to the removal to make Canberra merely the nominal and not the actual capital (Fitzpatrick, 1926a).

By the late 1920s Fitzpatrick described himself as a public relations consultant. The first recorded use of the phrase occurred when he visited North Queensland to discuss trade and tariff matters in 1929. Fitzpatrick spoke ‘forcefully’ in support of the local sugar industry’s quest to retain tariffson imported products (*Cairns Post, 10 September 1929, 4*). In an overview of the development of public opinion campaign and tactics to effect change, Fitzpatrick discussed some overseas precedents:

> In America and to a lesser degree in Europe, the creation of public opinion was entrusted to highly-skilled specialists, who never appear in public. The created public opinion by means of the power of the Press, letters, large advertising space, cartoons, letter writing campaigns, lobbying and co-ordinating the support of Chambers of Manufacturers and Chambers of Commerce which secure the desired effect (Fitzpatrick, cited in the *Cairns Post, 10 September 1929, 4*).

**‘Capitalist Promoters’**
In July 1933 Fitzpatrick formalised his PR business by registering his company in NSW (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1933a). The subscribers (shareholders) also included his wife, Gertrude, brother, Edwin, Janet Nolan, an advertising agent, and his secretary, May Sheehan (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1933b). The firm’s public officer and secretary was his daughter, Jean (Bloomfield). Reflecting Fitzpatrick’s broad-based business interests, the firm’s objects included ‘advising’ individuals or companies seeking to extend their business activities, being an ‘advertising contractor and agent’, and transacting ‘business as capitalist promoters and financial and monetary agents both in the state of NSW and elsewhere’ (ibid).

Two years later, the company amended its Memorandum of Association by inserting the following clause in its Objects:

To carry on business of Public Relations Consultancy, and by propaganda on behalf of approved groups individuals and causes, to mould public opinion (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1935; Fitzpatrick, Jean, 1936).

On the firm’s letterhead, Fitzpatrick detailed his main PR services: ‘Public Relations Counselling, Advertising Analysts, Business Builders, and Political Observers and Advocates’ (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1936). PR counselling focused on ‘propaganda... to mould public opinion... [along] lines adopted successfully by governments and industries, both in Europe and America’ (ibid). In terms that might now be recognised as public affairs or lobbying, Fitzpatrick said that his firm could ‘supply reports which summarise projected legislation, explaining its bearing on persons affected ... [and] skilled presentation of facts to Parliament...’ (ibid). Fitzpatrick’s letterhead at this time also contained the following quote from American academic, Everitt Dean Martin: ‘Public opinion can be manufactured to-date, in exactly the same way as bricks’ (ibid).

In 1937 the company became Proprietary Limited and by then also had offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Launceston and Hobart. Recognising the importance of the federal parliament and lobbying, Fitzpatrick had established an office in the Federal (Australian) Capital Territory in 1935 (Examiner, 19 September 1935, 6). This was the first PR consultancy in Canberra, and pre-dates the decision by Eric White and Associates (EWA) to establish a Canberra base by several decades (Lloyd, 1991, 11; Sheehan, 2012, 9).

In the early 1940s, Fitzpatrick’s firm employed former politicians, such as Labor’s Thomas Davies Mutch (NSW Parliament). In 1941, after his brother’s death, Fitzpatrick appointed his two sons as directors of the firm. The letterhead proudly proclaimed ‘The First Incorporated PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANTS [original text] in the Commonwealth’ (George Fitzpatrick Pty Limited, 1943). The letterhead’s rear contained in pamphlet style ‘The Science of Persuasion’ under which fell seven areas of service on offer: PR Consultants, business builders, Propagandists, publicists, Advertising Analysts, Reportable Speeches, and Observes and Advocates (See Plate A).

‘Ambassador for Tasmania’

In the early decades of the twentieth century most state governments recognised the need for publicity officers. Publicity officers often worked directly for the premier (or prime minister) of the day. New South Wales had set the precedent with the appointment of Ernest Harpur as publicity officer in its Premier’s Department in March 1914 (NSW Public Service Lists, 1914). Reflecting his ‘professional’ categorisation, Harpur’s annual starting salary of £600 made him one of the highest paid public servants at the time. A ‘small Publicity and Research Branch’ was established in 1917. The publicity officer’s task included compiling Australian legislation and distributing it widely (History of the NSW Premier’s Department, n.d. 7) and also seeking to co-ordinate and monitor government expenditure on advertising (Harpur, 1916, 1920a, 1920b).

A publicity office was established in Tasmania in 1935, with H.W. Blackwood fulfilling the roles of ‘Publicity Officer, shorthand writer and private secretary to the premier’ (The Examiner, 17 January 1936, 6). Tasmania’s distance from the ‘mainland’, however, hampered communication, business and trade opportunities. In 1939 the Tasmanian Government made a second appointment when it appointed George Fitzpatrick as its PR consultant in Sydney. The Tasmanian premier said Fitzpatrick was a ‘skilled publicity specialist’ (Examiner, 13
Dec 1939, 6). An article in the Burnie Advocate highlighted Fitzpatrick as the ‘founder and managing director of George Fitzpatrick Ltd, the first incorporated public relations consultancy in Australia’ (17 November 1939, 6). It also noted that Fitzpatrick had already represented Tasmanian interests in England and other Australian states and was known on the mainland as ‘The Ambassador for Tasmania’ (Advocate, 17 November 1936, 6). Fitzpatrick’s appointment was the first in Australia and reflected similar appointments made by the British Government in other countries (Mercury, 17 November 1939, 3). Between 1939 and 1946 Fitzpatrick, in an official, though honorary role, had responsibility for ‘facilitating and where required carrying out the useful publicity for the state as instructed by the [Tasmanian] government...’ (Examiner, 13 December 1939, 6).

Public affairs and lobbying became central to Fitzpatrick’s early work. He publicised, for example, that Tasmanian premier, Dwyer Gray would step aside to become the state’s Governor, as per an earlier agreement with the premier-elect, Robert Cosgrove (Barrier Miner, 4 December 1939, 4). Fitzpatrick was the eyes and ears for Tasmanian interests and zealous in advocacy. He organised events and facilitated trade opportunities on behalf of Tasmania. Sydney and Melbourne-based business leaders visited Tasmania, due to his persistence, such as the 1941 visit by M.F. Martin, the managing director of Sulphates Ltd and a representative of the Federal Government’s review on deposits of bauxite throughout Australia (Examiner, 4 October 1941, 6).

In 1942, Fitzpatrick organised a high level gathering of politicians and dignitaries in Sydney to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the discovery of Tasmania (Mercury, 28 November, 1942, 6). In the same year the Tasmanian Labor Government proposed that Fitzpatrick be remunerated for his work and travel. The conservative opposition criticised the need for an interstate PR representative when ‘almost every week Ministers visited the Mainland on public business and Tasmanian members of the Federal Cabinet should be able to attend to the work attributed to Mr Fitzpatrick’ (Mercury, 5 November 1942, 8). The Legislative Council voted against the proposal.

Postal Reforms

From the late 1920s George Fitzpatrick advocated reductions in postal rates both within Australia and mail headed for overseas destinations. He organised activities under the ‘Postal Progress Association’ (Fitzpatrick, 1928). In the mid 1930s the association was renamed Postal Reduction League. In 1936 Fitzpatrick visited Launceston, seeking support to establish a Tasmanian branch (Advocate, 18 November 1936, 5).

World War Two necessitated government taxation, so a patriotic Fitzpatrick shelved the postal reform campaign until after the war. As ‘honorary director of Public Relations’ and later Chairman of the (re-named) Postal Reform League, he said that ‘Taxation will be reduced if sufficient people make known their demands to their parliamentary representative’ (Fitzpatrick, 1946a). The League sought to ‘abolish the last “temporary” war-time tax of a halfpenny, have all first-class mail within the Commonwealth carried by air without surcharge, reduce telephone rates, either by eliminating the charge for installation or reducing the cost of calls’ (Werribee Shore Banner, 17 April 1947, 1). Fitzpatrick’s message was that it was ‘economically immoral for a great social service like the Post Office to be used as a revenue-raising activity... postal profits should be used for postal services only’ (Fitzpatrick, 1946b, 2). He also urged people to ‘protest by having resolutions carried by the civic authorities ...’ (Morwell Advertiser, 4 April 1946, 4).

1946 Crisis

Two years before his death, Fitzpatrick experienced a crisis that would severely impact on his reputation (and his PR consultancy). Some concerns about his gambling businesses in Tasmania had been publicly raised as early as 1922 (Sydney), 1935 (Western Australia), and 1942 (Tasmania). The Mirror (Perth), for example, urged its readers not to accept any unsolicited tickets from Fitzpatrick-controlled companies: Prudent Investments Pty Ltd and Investment Pty Ltd (28 September 1935, 11). In 1942 the Tasmanian Liberal Opposition directly linked Fitzpatrick to these companies ‘selling tickets in sweeps’.
In February 1946 a Tasmanian independent MP tabled a parliamentary motion calling for an inquiry into donations to political parties, and the Liberal Party raised specific concerns about donations by vested business interests, such as Fitzpatrick, to a ‘secret fund’ kept by the Labor Party leader in Tasmania (Advocate, 26 February 1948, 1; Mercury, 10 March 1948, 1). Between August and November 1946, Sydney’s Smith’s Weekly (Smith’s), following a detailed investigation, including company searches in Tasmania, published a serious of damning articles about Fitzpatrick and his Tasmanian-based gambling companies, which were predominantly administered from Sydney. Smith’s initial article, which did not mention Fitzpatrick, criticised the 1935 Gaming Act (Tasmania), which allowed private business to sell Tattersall’s gambling tickets at a 50 per cent profit on the price set by the Tasmanian Treasury (SW, 1946a). Smith’s conceded that while there was ‘nothing illegal’, the companies operate under ‘ridiculously generous regulation’ to maximise their profits (SW, 1946a).

Subsequent articles focused heavily on the ‘urbane’ Fitzpatrick, who lived ‘behind a facade of suburban respectability... ’ (SW, 1946i). Dramatic headlines included ‘The Vile Trade of George Fitzpatrick: “Smith’s” Unmasks this Public Relations Consultant’; ‘Despicable Shams of George Fitzpatrick’; ‘How George Fitzpatrick gets away with it’; and, ‘What becomes of £13,500 Fitzpatrick?’ (SW, 1946b, 1946f; 1946g; 1946i). Smith’s accused Fitzpatrick of a ‘dual character and personality’ (SW, 1946h; SW, 1946i). It targeted the operations of Prudent Investors and Investments Pty Ltd, which not only ran an ‘elaborate gambling racket’ through the sale of Tattersall’s, but also exploited ‘lonely, country people... by methods of astrology, ‘lucky’ boloney and similar duplicity’ (SW, 1946b; 1946c, 1946i). The reference to ‘lucky’ probably referred to “Lucky Fred’s”, another gambling business that Fitzpatrick’s associate May Sheehan had purchased in 1938 (SW, 1946b).

Smith’s called for the Postmaster General’s Department to review its Act so as to bring to an end Fitzpatrick’s mail-order gambling business, which operated across Australia from a Sydney GPO box. It also called upon the Postal Reform League, of which Fitzpatrick was a senior member, to “change its “attack to prevent George Fitzpatrick’s gambling companies from using mails in contravention of the spirit of Section 57 of the Post and Telegraph Act’(SW, 1946i). The same GPO box in Sydney, Smith’s claimed, was the outlet for astrological readings (SW, 1946b).

The articles came to the attention of the Tasmanian opposition and media (Advocate, 2 October 1946, 2; Mercury, 2 October 1946, 6). One opposition member labelled Fitzpatrick a ‘human parasite’ (Mercury, 16 October 1946, 16). Tasmania’s Labor premier, (later Sir) Robert Cosgrove, attempted to downplay Fitzpatrick’s PR role: ‘he offers assistance to the government, mainly by sending us newspaper cuttings of any matter that he thinks might be of interest to Tasmania’ (cited in SW, 1946b). A motion in the Tasmanian Legislative Council called upon the government to ‘sever all relations with George Fitzpatrick, Honorary, Public Relations Officer...’ (Mercury, 23 October 1946, 22). During this crisis, the highly experienced promoter became publicity-shy. Fitzpatrick did not comment, and it is unknown if Smith’s asked Fitzpatrick to do so. For the first time in his highly successful PR career, Fitzpatrick faced a significant, and intensely personal, PR crisis. A friend, Labor MP for Bondi (NSW), Abram Landa, repudiated attacks on Fitzpatrick claiming that he ‘... had given generously to many charities and was too ill to defend himself’ (SMH, 29 November 1946, 5). With no other public supporters and an ugly parliamentary debate that could impact on the Cosgrove administration, Fitzpatrick resigned from the voluntary post.

The resignation may have saved the Cosgrove government in the short term, as well as Fitzpatrick’s gambling interests, but it did not end the matter. In 1948, Cosgrove came under intense pressure. The premier’s denial of receiving any money from Fitzpatrick ‘since 1938’ except for £440, ‘paid as a normal contribution to party funds in 1947’ did little to enhance Fitzpatrick’s damaged reputation (Examiner, 10 March 1948, 3). In light of 21st century corporate governance and ethical standards, both Fitzpatrick’s donations to Cosgrove and the premier’s acceptance of donations, coming after the 1946 crisis were serious lapses in judgement by both parties. It created an impression that the donations were payback for Cosgrove maintaining the status quo and not investigating Fitzpatrick’s gambling companies.

The situation worsened for the premier, when in late 1947 he was charged with bribery, corruption and conspiracy (Townley, 1993). While Fitzpatrick was not central to the charges, the Supreme Court Inquiry nevertheless raised Fitzpatrick’s donations. Under questioning as to why a ‘mainlander’ such as Fitzpatrick donated to the Tasmanian premier, Cosgrove replied that ‘Mr Fitzpatrick is a supporter of the Labour [sic] Party’
(Launceston Examiner, 18 February 1948, 3), though omitted reference to Fitzpatrick’s gambling companies. Subsequently, Cosgrove was acquitted on all charges.

A few months later, on 1 August 1948, George Fitzpatrick suffered a fatal heart attack at his Mosman home in Sydney. A small obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald (2 August 1948, 4) noted that ‘recently he was superintendent of NSW Community Hospital and Chairman of the Dalwood Health Homes’. The Canberra Times said Fitzpatrick was ‘well known’ in ‘advertising circles’. Since his retirement [he] had devoted his time to charitable works, and the Dalwood Home for Children (Canberra Times, 2 August 1948, 2). The Tasmanian press published similarly brief articles.

In 1953, Fitzpatrick’s daughter advised the NSW Registrar General of Joint Stock Companies that ‘the company of George Fitzpatrick is not carrying on any business...and seeks to be dissolved (Bloomfield, 1953a). Clarifying correspondence advised that ‘the members have lost all interest in its [public relations] affairs...’ (Bloomfield, 1953b). George Fitzpatrick’s plea that his father’s original company be ‘allowed to die’ (1954) confirmed the family’s decision not to continue Australia’s first PR consultancy. In Tasmania, concerns about the corporate structure and excessive profits of Prudent Investors and Investments Pty Ltd continued to attract criticism from the Tasmanian Liberal opposition (Mercury, 15 October 1953, 3). The original shareholders, except the deceased Fitzpatrick, remained on the company’s books, and both companies traded until ca 1960.

In death, as in life, Fitzpatrick displayed generosity. Dalwood Health Home received £300. Sheehan, his loyal lieutenant, received the largest non-family benefit of £500, as well as other benefits (Fitzpatrick, 1948). Additionally, Fitzpatrick bequeathed some 10 per cent of his Last Will to non-family members. His Executors were asked to regard staff at Dalwood Home and the NSW Community Hospital as ‘his employees’, and those who had worked at either institution for more than ten years were eligible for a ‘pecuniary legacy’ (ibid). The amount to these employees totalled £1,300. Fitzpatrick also ensured that his Tasmanian business manager received large share allocations prior to his death (ibid).

Conclusion

George Fitzpatrick’s career involved multiple businesses including setting up Australia’s first PR consultancy. In the 1920s and early 1930s Fitzpatrick made an unprecedented contribution towards the creation of PR practice in Australia. His modus operandi resembled aspects of public information, press agentry, lobbying and public affairs. In many respect he was at least a generation ahead of publicists in integrating advertising, publicity, events, direct mail and lobbying, and to this extent he deserves recognition as a pioneer in Australian public relations. To a large extent, also, he was highly successful in the field of persuasion on behalf of his clients.

Fitzpatrick was entrepreneurial, affluent and highly networked. Ironically, as a Mason and ‘capitalist promoter’, he benefited more from an association with Irish-Australian Catholics, such as May Sheehan, St Margaret’s Hospital and Robert Cosgrove’s long serving Tasmanian ALP Government, than from establishment peers. Yet, in his non-PR businesses, the master of persuasion appears to have overlooked the importance of professional reputation and personal integrity. From the mid 1930s, Fitzpatrick heavily focused on gambling, which might have been a result of insufficient PR business? Fitzpatrick’s (1933, 10) claim: ‘Personally I am opposed to gambling...and as far as I remember never had a bet’ seems somewhat disingenuous in light of extensive gambling interests set up at about that time. His affiliated gambling businesses suffered from questionable conduct (especially by today’s standards) which flowed through to his personal reputation.

He ignored early warning signals about his gambling activities in Sydney (1922), Perth (1933) and Launceston (1942). A high public profile – built on self-promotion – could not be sustained after Smith’s Weekly uncovered the full extent of his gambling businesses, which, after political attacks, led to his sudden resignation from the Tasmanian government PR role. Fitzpatrick’s loyalty to the Cosgrove’s Labor government was admirable, though his political donations to the Tasmanian Premier in the wake of his own 1946 crisis reflected further lapses in ethical behaviour.
Nevertheless, throughout his career Fitzpatrick demonstrated commitment to community service. His work at several hospitals and charities was commendable and he seems to have been well motivated in service to children and families of a much lesser station in life. Unsurprisingly, obituaries praised Fitzpatrick as a ‘well known philanthropist’ (Canberra Times, 2 August 1948, 2). Fitzpatrick’s death might have robbed the soon to be formed AIPR of someone with significant understanding of ‘the science of public persuasion’ at a time when PR was largely restricted to publicity roles. A counterfactual question is whether the fledgling AIPR would have welcomed Fitzpatrick, given his somewhat questionable reputation in the late 1940s? (A comparison with pioneers, such as the distinguished Sir Asher Joel, is outside this paper’s scope.) Whether or not George Fitzpatrick deserves accolade as Australia’s PR ‘pioneer’, it cannot be overlooked that he was the ‘first Australian member of the National Association of Public Relations Counsel Incorporated, America’ (Who’s Who in Australia 1947), a forerunner to the Public Relations Society of America.

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