

CHAPTER EIGHT

Peace, Rostrum and the P.O.A.

With the handing over of the last SLC drawings to the Army Design Directorate in January 1945 the radar work of my team of draftsmen ceased, and they moved from the Research Labs to join the main body of the Central Office Drafting Section at No.9 Spring Street.

Alan Lorimer, my first boss at the Labs, had a serious road accident and was absent on extended sick leave. When I returned from the Army Trials at Darwin I was asked to take over his job as acting Divisional Engineer, laboratory facilities. This involved control of instrument repair and calibration, Model Shop and Building Services and some electro-mechanical design work. I had a staff of four engineers - Ross Pitkethly, Malcolm McPherson, Arthur Baddeley and Jack Groves - and 60 technicians. I remained on this work for two years and reorganised the Division - not very exciting, but good experience. I continued following developments in television overseas and encouraged the increasing use of cathode ray oscillographs as measuring instruments for many purposes. I published papers on cathode ray tubes and on an investigation into the characteristics of different makes of telephone dials, in the Telecommunication Journal of Australia. With Ern Palfreyman I developed equalising equipment for sound-film recording, and worked with Ross Baker on the

development of the first departmental FM radio receiver, for use in tests with an experimental FM transmitter established at Jolimont in 1946. These special projects helped to break the routine of the Laboratory Facilities Job, but I longed to do something more constructive.

In June 1947 Alan returned to duty, and I was given the job of specifying and locating a suitable 100 acre site near Melbourne for proposed new Research Laboratories. In collaboration with Alan I drew up a specification of requirements. I made a detailed study of the metropolitan area from aerial survey photographs taken in December 1946. From this, several possible sites were selected and analysed in relation to availability of transport, power, gas and water supplies, and freedom from electro-magnetic and acoustic interference. The most suitable site was at East Bentleigh, on undeveloped land with no topographical obstacles. I recommended that acquisition of this be investigated, but no action resulted. It was not until 1978 that the Labs were moved to Clayton, not far from my preferred site and about the same distance from Melbourne.

I found that the aerial photographs were not infallible. I often played golf at Box Hill, and knew the course well. In the aerial survey photos one of the holes in the course had disappeared completely! It lay

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at the edge of one of the exposures, and was lost when the adjacent one overlapped.

By mid 1947 I decided I was not getting anywhere. Nearly three years had passed since my work on radar. Like Tennyson's Ulysses, I felt how -

"vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

I had acted continuously since January 1942 as Divisional Engineer, but was not yet appointed to that level. So I did two things - I applied for the advertised vacancy of Divisional Engineer (Radio - National Broadcasting) in the Transmission Section of the Victorian Branch, and I wrote to the Dean of the Engineering Faculty at Adelaide University asking if the SLC radar project would be accepted as a subject for a thesis for a Masters Degree. Both moves succeeded. The subject was approved in October and my appointment as D.E. in Victoria was gazetted in September and confirmed six months later. I was not permitted to take up duty there, however, because of commitments to Central Office. I began to draft my thesis in November 1947.

One of the laboratory secretaries, Merle Parsons, began to type it for me on Saturday mornings in January. We were then working a five day week, and it had to be done outside office hours. Not many typists can type technical material, including equations and symbols,

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accurately. Merle was a marvel. The thesis ran to 174 pages of text and occupied 14 Saturday mornings. Merle, always cheerful and uncomplaining, completed the typing in April. However, I had to attach copies of circuits, operating instructions, line-up procedures and relevant Laboratory Reports, and the complete thesis was not ready for submission until February 1949. I obtained permission from the Secretary of the Department of Army to attach a copy of the Army Report on the Darwin trials. The Army had to vet the thesis because of the secrecy associations, and required the deletion of quantitative references to operating frequency, the removal of references to security classifications and one paragraph in the operating instructions. This was done, and the Secretary of the Army advised the Director General of the Department on May 9th, 1949, that -

"it now contains no information on which there is any security restriction. Approval is therefore given for this thesis to be used for submission to Adelaide University".

I submitted the thesis forthwith, with the approval of the Director General Mr G.T. Chippindall. The Degree of Master of Engineering was conferred on me in absentia at the University of Adelaide commemoration on March 29th, 1950. It had been a long row to hoe.

I presented a paper, based on my thesis, to the meeting of the Electrical Engineering Branch of the IEA in Melbourne in August 1948.

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At the end of 1947 two important members of the Lab staff left to work with the International Telecommunications Union at Geneva on the responsible task of allocating radio frequencies to the various member countries. Mr S.H. Witt left to take up a five year appointment as a foundation member of the International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB). He became chairman of that body in 1949 until his retirement in 1957. Eric Wright took his place at the Labs in an acting capacity.

Don McDonald was the other engineer to leave for Geneva. The Lab staff wanted to give him a farewell dinner, but Eric, with his non-conformist principles, would not agree to a hotel venue. So the dinner was catered for in the second floor luncheon room at 59 Lt Collins Street, with no alcoholic beverages. I had to make a farewell speech and composed a farewell ode -

"Here's luck to Donald - Donald, Mac
Bon voyage Switzerland, and back!
May he convert the unbeliever
Who doubts our purpose at Geneva -
May he, inhaling Alpine breezes
Fulfil, among the clocks and cheeses,
His mission splendid overseas -
And allocate our frequencies."

Don took his family with him and remained in Geneva for about two and a half years.

Don Burnard moved to the Divisional Engineers' Office of the Department at Ararat, and I lost contact with him to a great degree. Colin Moodie had been

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appointed Official Secretary to Sir Ivan Mackay in 1944, and went with him to New Delhi (when Sir Ivan was appointed Australian High Commissioner) until 1947, after which Colin returned to External Affairs in Canberra. He came down to Melbourne to attend a dinner given to our old headmaster, now Archdeacon Bickersteth, who was visiting Australia and who had the responsibility for the restoration of the stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral, which had been removed during the bombing raids of the war. Bob Moodie and I also attended. The Head had changed but little in 20 years, and I was flattered when he recognised me.

In January 1947 our friend and neighbour, Fred Jones, died tragically whilst watching tennis at Kooyong with his wife Jane. It cast a gloom over our street. Jane remarried in later years. In that month Professor Oliphant was again in Melbourne and spoke, as guest of honour, at a dinner organised by the Adelaide University Engineering Graduates at the Oriental Hotel in Collins Street. He talked about the potential peaceful advantages of atomic energy, if mankind could learn how to exploit them wisely. After the dinner I walked to the station with the Professor. Referring to my radar system, which I had sent to him for examination in 1942, he said "Never lose your enthusiasm." That was sufficient encouragement for my future.

Before World War II there had been relatively little secondary industry in Australia, and a popular slogan was "Buy British Goods". There was a tendency to be suspicious about the quality of anything made in Australia. During the war, cut-off from overseas supplies of many goods, Australia was forced to make her own munitions and many other things. With the end of hostilities these manufacturing skills were turned to peacetime needs, and we found Australia could make almost anything - and make it well. The first Australian mass-produced car - the Holden - made its debut in November 1948 and there was a rush to purchase these at 675 pounds plus tax.

It took some time after the war for things to return to normal. Rationing persisted for a while, before coupons disappeared when supplies of foodstuffs became plentiful once more.

In the early part of the war my sister Marjorie worked at several jobs as a commercial artist - hoping eventually to devote her time to fine art. In 1942 she left her position as publicity artist with Ozone Theatres in Adelaide to work with Holden's, who were manufacturing munitions. Her job was to make perspective drawings of equipment and component parts from analysis of the blueprints prepared for manufacture - an exacting task requiring intense concentration on detail.

Her friend George Hann - younger brother of Bill, who played such an active part in University revues - was due to commence embarkation leave in September 1941 prior to departing overseas as a Sergeant Observer with the RAAF. However, he developed a thrombosis in the leg that confined him to Keswick Military Hospital for three months, during which time Marjorie visited him regularly. Their friendship grew stronger under the influence of a mutual love of music and a shared sense of humour.

When George was discharged from hospital they became engaged, and both were devastated when George had to leave for active service in April 1942. I met George in Melbourne and later in Sydney, before his embarkation - brief encounters, but enough to satisfy myself on the wisdom of Marjorie's choice.

With George continually involved in bombing sorties from England and Ireland, the worry about his survival, combined with the strain of long hours of concentration at Holden's proved too much for Marjorie. In mid 1943 she suffered a nervous breakdown. After eight months of suffering, including many weeks in hospital, Marjorie recovered and returned to work with Ozone Theatres and did spare time voluntary work at the canteens for Army and Airforce servicemen.

"Hello, Mr Fisher!" of an early arrival at one of Chris'

George returned home as a Flying Officer in March 1945, and they were married in April. I was able to visit Adelaide for the wedding.

George worked in the Taxation Office and studied accountancy at night, but he played the violin for pleasure. In 1945 he changed to the viola and played in the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra for over thirty years from 1946. Their first son, Adrian, was born in July 1947 and they moved into their own new home at Rosslyn Park early in the following year.

I had made Chris a sandpit at the bottom of our garden, where she played happily with her many playmates from neighbouring families. After attending local Burwood kindergartens, she began school at "Heathersett" - the junior school of the Presbyterian Ladies College at East Burwood - in 1947. This was only a mile from home, and she loved it.

I built her a two-storey doll's house, with electric light, also a very solid jarrah swing. This was strong enough for Phyll to use after washing her long golden hair, which soon dried flowing behind her as she swept back and forth. In those early years there was a good deal of ferrying to and fro for the parties of schoolfriends, and Phyll had to reciprocate with parties for Chris. I remember being acutely discomforted by the "Hello, Mr Fisher!" of an early arrival at one of Chris'

shaving. Chris loved drawing. In this she took after Marjorie and Phyll, and at birthdays and Christmas we always received the most delightful hand-made greeting cards from our daughter.

Phyll loved making and choosing clothes for little Chris, and we were able to make occasional holiday visits to Adelaide, so that our families were able to see her develop. Phyll's youngest sister Olive, who had always been known as "Chum", visited Melbourne quite often on business - she was a demonstrator in knitting for Paton and Baldwin - and Chris looked forward to these visits eagerly. She used to say "Yippee, Yippee Yum - here comes Auntie Chum".

It was a great pleasure to me to find that Chris enjoyed the same classics of children's literature that I had enjoyed in my own childhood, and I never tired of reading her the stories and verses of A.A. Milne that Marjorie and I had derived so much pleasure from, with the delightful illustrations of E.H. Shepherd who caught so perfectly the spirit of the text.

When I came to Melbourne in 1936 I was introduced to the Rostrum Movement by "Torchy" Thomas. This Movement was founded near Manchester in England by Sidney F. Wicks in 1923, to practise and promote the art of public speaking. The first Australian club was established in Sydney in 1930 and the first Melbourne club in 1934.

Membership of each club, limited to men, averaged 25.

"Torchy" belonged to Rostrum Club No.4, comprising mostly engineers and lawyers, and I was elected in September.

The Rostrum Pledge was -

"I promise to submit myself to the discipline of this Rostrum Club, and to endeavour to advance its ideals and enrich its fellowship. I will defend freedom of speech in the community and will try at all times to think truly and to speak clearly. I promise not to be silent when I ought to speak."

No.4 club met for lunch each Friday in the private dining room of the departmental store of Buckley and Nunn - now David Jones - in Bourke Street. In those days they still had a swallow-tailed shopwalker, who greeted customers at the entrance and directed them to the department required - a last stronghold of tradition! A three course meal was served for the magnificent sum of 1/6, by capped waitresses in black and white uniforms.

A programme of topics was drawn up six months in advance and members had to speak in rotation on those. Each week there were three members speaking for four minutes and one for seven minutes, with another taking the chair. At the end of the speeches the Club Critic - an experienced speaker and adjudicator - criticised their content and delivery. The criticism was constructive and helpful.

This meant that each member had a turn to speak about every six or seven weeks. It required a certain amount of research work beforehand on the nominated

topic. The meetings were most enjoyable, and gave me increased confidence so that I developed an ability to speak in public without notes - a valuable attribute. Once more I experienced the thrill that audience reaction to a touch of humour can give. I took the chair for the first time in November, 1936, on Friday the 13th - and came away unscathed, despite the date. In due course I served my time as Secretary and President of No.4, but with the commencement of radar work at the end of 1940 I left Rostrum for the duration of hostilities.

I rejoined Rostrum in 1946. The membership of No.4 had become more varied and there were some in particular that I recall very vividly. Gordon Leckie, tall and imposing, with a rapier wit. Tom Paterson, aggressively controversial. Bob Gardiner, distilling philosophy from logic, with wringing hands. Harry Arblaster, who made a virtue of a slight impediment in speech. Charles Homer-Fraser, the homespun philosopher and Hugh McCubbin, descendant of artist Frederick McCubbin, always bubbling with jovial good humour. As I once remarked "When you see Hugh McCubbin you know there's hughmer cubbin'!" Then there were the more serious types - Gordon Laycock with his analytical approach and George Mansell, architect and talented artist. A happy, interesting group. I made many friends.

The Club Critic was then Mr A.G. Adams - a grand old

commander and a great love of the English language. He gave a series of lectures to members on the art of public speaking and on the conduct of formal business meetings. He was an inspiration to all speakers and I owe him a great deal.

From Buckley and Nunn's we moved to other venues and I served several terms as Critic and Deputy Critic of Rostrum No.4, until I was obliged to resign in 1955 due to pressure of work in a new job. Rostrum taught me to think and speak on my feet, and so was largely responsible for whatever progress I made in that other organisation - the Professional Officers Association (the POA).

Professional officers in the Commonwealth Public Service were encouraged to join the POA, which had the responsibility of looking after the interests of all professionally qualified employees in the Service - Engineers, Biochemists, Astronomers, Meteorologists, Surveyors, Forestry Officers, Architects and other types of scientists. I first became interested in the POA in 1931, when Engineers who had been demoted from Engineer to Clerk during the Great Depression were concerned about the effect of this on their future promotion in the Service.

The POA had branches in all States. The central

General President, General Secretary, General Treasurer and Executive Councillors from all States appointed by their respective branches. Within State branches there were some sub-groups made up of members in particular departments. It was a very live organisation. I was appointed Executive Councillor for Victoria in 1946, and continued to represent State members for four years.

Since 1936, salaries of professional officers in the Commonwealth Public Service had failed to keep pace with the increases in salary obtained by non-professional positions both within and outside the Service. The POA decided to mount a claim to the Public Service Arbitrator (then Mr C.B. Castieau) for increases in margins above the basic wage, to rectify this anomaly. Three advocates were appointed by the POA Executive Council

Trevor (T.A.) Housley, of the Department of Civil Aviation
George (G.A.) Jeffries, of the PMG's Department, and
Bill (R.W.) Boswell, of the same Department.

Three very intelligent, competent and forceful engineers, all the same age as myself, within a year or two, and all destined to reach very senior positions in the Service. Trevor Housley later became General Manager of the OTC and eventually Director General of the PMG's Department. George Jeffries became Assistant Director, Engineering, in the Victorian Branch, frequently acting as Director. Bill Boswell rose to head the Long Range Weapons Establishment of the Department of Supply in

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Junior Counsel (Sam Cohen) was engaged, through solicitor Lewis Wilks, to advise our advocates on legal aspects of the case - which had strong opposition from the Public Service Board. The hearing was protracted and sometimes very bitter, but our advocates were victorious and the increase in salary margins obtained in 1947 restored the base-grade professional officer to the relative position in the Service which he had enjoyed before World War II. The POA had blazed a trail which made history in the status of professional officers in the Commonwealth Public Service.

The Public Service Board appealed against the Determination, but the appeal was dismissed by the Arbitrator after a hearing of only about four days.

In 1948 the PSB announced that it would review the classifications of all officers in the Service, and invited individual groups to submit claims to a Central Classification Committee in Canberra. In February 1948 the POA Executive Council appointed a two man Reclassification Committee to assist groups of members in the preparation of claims and their submission to the PSB. The Chairman was to be Bert (H.T.) Wright, one of the senior engineers in the PMG Victorian Branch, and I was to be the other member. This began a long association with Bert, who was my senior by 12 years.

We encouraged members in the many Commonwealth Departments to prepare cases for reclassification, based on changes in duties and responsibilities, and to submit them to us for examination and comment. Groups were required to nominate representatives to put their case to the PSB in Canberra.

Bert and I met at least one evening a week on this work for about two years. We used to have dinner together, usually steak and two eggs with coffee, at a restaurant in Elizabeth Street and then repair to Bert's office in the GPO Building. Bert knew the Public Service thoroughly and was a very sound and logical thinker. We attended meetings of the various groups and advised them on the desirable format of their case for reclassification. Then, when the case had been drafted we discussed it in detail with any man or men appointed as their advocates.

When a date had been fixed for the hearing in Canberra, I attended the PSB offices with the group advocate or representatives concerned and argued the case before the PSB Member who had the responsibility of hearing the case and making an appropriate recommendation to the Board - this was usually Mr Commissioner Pinner. The cases normally occupied two or three days. I flew to Canberra and stayed at the Hotel Wellington or at one of the Commonwealth Guest Houses with the group

This entailed frequent absences from my work in the Department but my boss, Ted Stewart, was very understanding and always arranged special leave for me. My salary on these trips was re-imbursed by the POA, with expenses. During my work on this Committee some 15 cases for re-classification were submitted - from the Departments of the Treasury, the PMG, Trade and Customs, Health, the Attorney General, the Interior, Civil Aviation, Supply and Development, Post-War Reconstruction, Labour and National Service, and Shipping and Fuel. In the course of this work I got to know a great deal about the professional work carried out by the various Commonwealth Departments, and dealt with a wide range of individuals. It was exacting work, but very interesting.

We had some funny experiences on those Canberra trips. Those were the days before the Molonglo River was dammed to make Lake Burley Griffin. Sometimes we had to walk across what is now the bed of the lake, from our Guest House to the PSB Offices. One evening, when we were presenting the case for the Surveyors in the Department of the Interior, we had to go to the home of one of the PSB Members for an informal discussion. Anyone who has visited Canberra knows how difficult it is to find your way, with all those circular and radiating streets, without the aid of a map. We had the address,

was the Surveyor General we became hopelessly lost. At length we came to a Fire Station, and thought "Well, they should be able to direct us!"

Alas, the Fire officer in charge had never heard of the address we wanted, and vaguely suggested we should try in that direction. About five minutes later we stumbled on the street we were looking for. We wondered what would happen if they had a fire there!

The re-classification hearings often became quite heated. Commissioner Pinner was a tough nut to crack and when he dug his toes in it was sometimes impossible to shift him. However, the claims submitted were successful to a degree, and set the pattern for future organisational development. The groups concerned seemed to appreciate the advice and assistance given by Bert Wright and myself. My attendance at the case hearings had a special advantage in that I got to know Commissioner Pinner's method of attack and the type of argument that had the best chance of success with him. Sometimes the PSB Chairman, Mr Commissioner Dunk, took part.

Flying back to Melbourne the Bio-Chemists of the Serum Laboratories presented me with a tobacco pipe with a bowl carved in the shape of a skull chewing a bone, in return for my collaboration - a symbolic gesture. Gordon Laycock of the Marine Branch rewarded me with a sumptuous

dinner followed by a night at the Tivoli Theatre. Those were the days!

Roy Atkins, POA General President for 25 years, retired from the post in December 1949. I was elected General President in his place, and continued for four years. At that stage the POA had 2500 members. Trevor Housley became Central Councillor for Victoria, to be followed by George Jeffries and then Harold White, who became General Manager of the OTC when Housley returned to the PMG's Department. I chaired interstate conferences of the POA in 1950 and 1953.

I had to resign from the Executive Council when I left the Commonwealth Public Service in 1955. It had been a very happy relationship over nine years. I had made many friends, some of whom I would meet again in my activities outside the Public Service.

When overtime work on radar ceased at the end of the war I had more time to relax and enjoy music and the theatre. Following my interest in television, I wanted to learn more about the structure of plays and the techniques used in film production. I began to take a deeper interest in good music. Buying books about orchestras and composers I found that a smattering of knowledge actually increased the enjoyment of a performance.

In the ten post-war years from 1946 Melbourne had an influx of world famous artists - the pianists Solomon, Lili Krause, Claudio Arrau, Eileen Joyce, Walter Giesecking, Paul Badura-Skoda and the wonderful Hepzibah Menuhin who came to live in Victoria as Mrs Lindsay Nicholas. Then there were the violinists Ginette Neveu and Odnoposoff and conductors Otto Klemperer, Eugene Ormandy and Sir John Barbirolli. All these I was able to enjoy at performances by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra - with resident conductor Professor Bernard Heinze and orchestra leader Bertha Jorgensen.

There was a memorable visit in 1947 by the Boyd Neel Chamber Orchestra and performances in the Collins Street Assembly Hall by the Musica Viva Quartet - sometimes with Hepzibah Menuhin at the piano. The Melbourne Town Hall was not perhaps the ideal venue for the orchestral concerts. I was told that the large monotone mural paintings, decorating the walls above the balcony, were the result of a misunderstanding. The designs by M. Napier Waller were to be transferred by H. Oliver and Sons to a set of acoustic tiles, for assembly afterwards on the wall surfaces. The tiles had a cellular structure on one side, for sound absorption. The artists were not informed of the reason for this, and as the smooth surface was more suitable for painting the murals were reproduced on the back side. As a result, the tiles were installed back-to-front on the walls and their acoustic

for chamber music, with its smaller size and wood-panelled walls. I often enjoyed lunch-hour concerts there, only a short walk from my office.

When you hear a composition for the first time, played by an inspired and brilliant artist, that performance often sets a standard in your mind - one by which all future performances are judged. That was how I felt about Hepzibah Menuhin's playing of the two Brahms piano concertos with her feeling for their Hungarian rhythms - about the Eugene Ormandy interpretation of the Cesar Franck Symphony with the marvellous cor-Anglais theme in the second movement accompanied by violins sounding like the fluttering of a thousand birds - about the Schubert "Trout" Quintet with Margaret Schofield at the piano and about the "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" of Mozart played in the sympathetic Assembly Hall. I had the same feeling when Walter Gieseking played Debussy's "La Cathedrale Engloutie" and about the Boyd Neel performance of the third Brandenburg Concerto of J.S. Bach. It is wonderful the way the human brain preserves these impressions.

During the war years J.C. Williamson's gave seasons of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas in 1940, 1941 and 1942, but the next season after that was in 1949. Apart from G and S and ballet there was very little theatrical activity during the war. There were revivals of the Arcadians, Kissing Time and Katinka (with the

irrepressible Gladys Moncrieff). Then, with peace, we saw a revival of Rose Marie in 1946 and a breath of fresh air in the following year with Annie Get Your Gun (starring Evie Hayes), White Horse Inn, Oklahoma, and Song of Norway (based on the life and music of Edvard Grieg). In that last musical in 1950 we saw Charles Dornning play the lead. I was to encounter him many years later in my career. Names that remain in the memory from those times are Don Nicol (the wonderful comedian who died young), Marie Le Varre (the flamboyant comedienne), the dapper Edwin Styles, Marie Bremner, Joy Youlden, Herbert Browne and Max Oldaker.

In 1946 Sir Benjamin Fuller's Company produced a series of nine grand operas at His Majesty's and in 1948 the National Theatre Movement gave us The Bartered Bride, the Flying Dutchman and Hansel and Gretel at The Princess, but there were no world famous names in the casts. In those days a reserved seat in "the gods" cost a mere four shillings.

Dispensing with baby sitters as our Chris grew older, it was a great pleasure to take her to the theatre with us - and she enjoyed it as much as we did. It was in her blood too, as time was to show.

But the most memorable achievement in Australian theatre during the war and immediately afterwards was the emergence of an indigenous ballet. The Monte Carlo

Russian Ballet which we saw in Sydney in 1937, on our return from that unexpected journey to Brisbane, had whetted my appetite for this form of theatre, and a second company, called the Covent Garden Russian Ballet, came to Melbourne in September 1938 and toured Australia and New Zealand. This included Irina Baronova, Tatiana Riabouchinska, Serge Bousloff and Edouard Borovansky. We saw them at His Majesty's Theatre, but when this company left in April 1939 - amid the ominous rumblings of approaching war - some of the dancers remained in Australia, notably Serge Bousloff, Edouard Borovansky (with their wives) and Tamara Tchinarova who later married Australian actor Peter Finch. Borovansky and his wife Xenia had ambitious plans to establish an Australian ballet company.

In May 1939 they set up an Academy on the first floor of a building in Melbourne's Elizabeth Street, above Pellegrinis religious artifacts shop. Borovansky was 37, born in Czechoslovakia, with 17 years experience with the Pavlova and De Basil companies in Europe and on tour. His wife, trained in Moscow, had taught ballet in Berlin.

A young Australian dancer, Edna Busse, was one of their first senior pupils and they developed a series of brilliant dancers, some of whom had overseas experience already. Dorothy Stevenson, Laurel Martyn, Joan Potter, Martin Rubinstein, Max Collis and Vassilie Trunoff were

all products of the Borovansky Academy - names that will live in the memories of all ballet lovers in Australia.

In the war years the only overseas theatrical company to visit Australia was the Ballet Company of Colonel De Basil, who came in 1940 with Tamara Toumanova and David Lichine. Antal Dorati was their orchestral conductor and Borovansky and Petroff joined them for the Australian tour ending in July.

In those days it was a costly and time consuming business to bring a large company from Europe to Australia, complete with costumes and scenery, on a sea journey of some five weeks - and the progress of the war made such visits impossible.

We saw the opening performance of the Borovansky Ballet at the Union Theatre, Melbourne University, in June 1942 - in aid of the Red Cross. To piano accompaniment they danced Les Sylphides, Italian Capriccio and The Black Swan with choreography by Borovansky. The star was Edna Busse. They gave their first professional performance at the Princess Theatre for five nights in July 1942.

Then J.C. Williamson Theatres took the company under their wing for a programme of Australian choreographed ballets at the Comedy Theatre in November 1943, followed by seasons at His Majesty's in 1944, 1945 and 1946:

Tamara Tchinarova, Peggy Sagar and Kathleen Gorham joined the company and Borovansky himself filled character parts and did much of the choreography, with Dorothy Stevenson and Laurel Martyn. William Constable designed most of the scenery and costumes.

Despite the restrictions of wartime, when Australia was culturally isolated from the rest of the world, Borovansky succeeded in generating a school of ballet that captured the admiration of Australia. Touring the States and New Zealand under the banner of J.C. Williamson Theatres, his company developed an appreciative audience that was to provide a fertile ground for the acceptance of overseas companies after the war, and the eventual development of an Australian Ballet of world standard. This was the product of his experience overseas, his imagination, his drive and above all his astonishing memory which was essential to the recreation of the classical ballets in Australia. The Borovansky Company reached a high degree of professionalism. I have vivid recollections of Laurel Martyn's touching performance in Giselle, Borovansky and Bousloff dancing "Popular Song" in Facade, and that spectacular leap by Martin Rubinstein in Le Spectre de la Rose.

After a successful tour of Australian capital cities and New Zealand in 1946 the Borovansky Company was incorporated in the production of Ivor Novello's The

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Dancing Years, whilst retaining its separate identity. This was a great success and a similar arrangement was then made in Gay Rosalinda - an English adaptation of Johann Strauss' Die Fledermaus. We saw both these productions at His Majesty's.

However, this was the end of an era. Laurel Martyn left to found the Victorian Ballet Guild - Dorothy Stevenson went overseas - and Peggy Sagar left when the Company moved to Sydney with these two musical productions. At the end of 1947 the Borovansky Company disbanded in New Zealand and the dancers scattered. Borovansky himself returned to Melbourne to find an English company - the Ballet Rambert - performing at The Princess Theatre under Marie Rambert and receiving a rapturous reception. Their style was more intimate than that of the Russian and Borovansky companies, but delightful. We saw them in October 1947 and January 1948. When the Ballet Rambert returned to England Margaret Scott, Rex Reid, Joyce Graeme and Brenda Hamlyn left that company to remain in Australia as part of the new National Theatre Ballet Company under the banner of Gertrude Johnson.

But as far as I am concerned, the name Borovansky will always be synonymous with Ballet in Australia.