

WELCOME TO TELEVISION: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION 1956-1992

Conceived by Liz Jacka and Nick Herd

Partly funded by the Australian Research Council and the Australian Film Commission in collaboration with industry partners Currency House Inc., ScreenSound and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI)

Advisory panel: Bob Donoghue, Hugh McGowan, Len Mauger, Bill Rayner, Ted Thomas and Peter Westerway.

Background

Many books have been published on Australian cinema. Not nearly the same attention has been paid to television despite the fact that Australian television has been a much more potent influence on Australian life. A significant body of work exists on public service television, notably Ken Inglis's monumental history of the ABC, but much less attention has been paid to commercial TV.. There has been no standard history since 1976, leaving half the period from 1956 unrecorded.

It is high time this gap in Australian history was filled. This task is especially urgent as year by year we are losing the bank knowledge held by our pioneers. Fortunately, two oral history groups have been working under the auspices of ScreenSound Australia and this project will build on their work.

This Project

Why is it important to undertake a history of Australian television?

Television would have to be the most influential cultural form in modern societies. Television contributes to our sense of ourselves as a nation; it informs us about our place in the world; it gives us images by which we make sense of our environment, it contributes to the democratic functioning of our society, it provides an outlet for creative expression. To examine history via a medium like television is to round out our understanding of who we are and how we came to be.

The historical area of our study will be the period beginning just before the first television broadcast in 1956 to the advent of the new multi-channel broadcasting regime in 1992.

1940-1956	The coming of TV
1956-1963	Maturation, addition of third network
1964-1975	Consolidation, Australian production begins etc
1975-1980	Colour TV and the establishment of SBS
1981-1988	'High communication policy'—national networking, satellite, equalisation
1988-1992	Advent of multi-channel television

Such a history will give us perspectives on:

- Industry
- Programs

- Policy and regulation
- Personalities
- Technology
- Audiences
- Social and cultural effects
- International context

It will also engage with such themes as:

- Australian national and cultural identity
- Television and public/private/domestic space
- Television and politics
- Television in relation to other media
- Television and other cultural forms (e.g. sport)

Australian television consists of a number of distinct sectors – commercial, public service, community, indigenous, as well as new forms such as pay TV and television delivered via new media. This project will concentrate mainly on the history of free-to-air commercial TV, on the grounds of its more pressing need to be recorded.

Outcomes

The desired outcomes of the research are:

- a book for the general reader on the history of Australian television 1956–92 of approximately 80,000 words to be published provisionally by Currency Press.
- An alphabetically organised, comprehensive *Companion to Australian Radio and Television* to be published by Currency House Inc.
- Documentary film(s) possibly in collaboration with Film Australia.
- Other academic outcomes such as edited books and scholarly articles

Timetable:

The kind of history envisaged is a large undertaking and it is planned that the project will extend over several years, will have progressive outcomes and involve collaboration with significant industry players, some of whom will be engaged as further partners.

Funding the project

The principal federal research funding body, the Australian Research Council (ARC), has funded the project for three years 2003–2006 at a total of \$165,000; the Australian Film Commission has allocated \$10,000; Currency House and ACMI are each providing \$30,000 over three years. With this level of funding, we are able to complete only the massive research and the first book. To complete the others, especially the *Companion*, we need to secure further funding.

Management of the project

The principal researchers are Professor Liz Jacka and Nick Herd. Liz is Professor of Communication Studies at UTS and has published many books

and articles on Australian film and television, including their histories. Most relevant are Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, Volumes 1 and 2 (1987 and 1988), and Jacka, *The ABC of Drama* (1991). Nick Herd is a former General Manager of the Screen Producers' Association of Australia (SPAA) and has worked in the Australian film and television industry for twenty years including at SBS and the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal and its successor, the Australian Broadcasting Authority.