

Obituary: Allan Percy Fleming

b. 5 March 1912; d. 18 January 2001

As a soldier, journalist and senior Commonwealth public servant, Allan Fleming had a long, distinguished and exceptionally varied career, marked at times by high romanticism.

In all that he undertook, he showed initiative, creativity, ability to adapt readily to new situations and relate well to people.

Entering the Public Service through the Defence Department, Fleming played a significant part in the formative stages of Australia's post-war military-intelligence agencies as director of the Joint Intelligence Bureau, Controller of Joint Intelligence, later becoming an assistant secretary, then Controller of Joint Service Organisations. Later he held senior positions in the Department of Trade and Industry before becoming Parliamentary Librarian and later National Librarian. At the behest of Sir Peter Lawler, as Secretary of the Department of Administrative Services, he came out of retirement in 1976 to spend two years as Commonwealth Government VIP Security Coordinator, his last public-service appointment.

However, Fleming, who has died in Melbourne from lung cancer aged 88, is probably best remembered in his role as National Librarian, where he succeeded the long-serving Sir Harold White. The task confronting him was not an easy one, particularly as he was not a librarian. Interestingly, it was Sir Harold White who had recruited him for the parliamentary job.

It was a time of change in library practice, as computer technology was introduced. He set about producing a national information policy oriented towards user needs. He built up staff with the expertise needed to integrate all ar-

reas of information and make it available to users as speedily as possible. And in seeking to extend the library's scope beyond the humanities and social sciences, he sought to make information on science and technology available to users. He was not averse to seeking the cooperation of outside bodies.

The library entered a major development phase with his appointment of Alec Bolton, from Angus and Robertson, to establish a publishing section; the acquisition of a major music collection and, in the film area, copies of the Cinesound-Movietone collection, now a prized item in ScreenSound Australia's holdings.

The emphasis he put on the dissemination of information at the National Library was a natural progression from what he had put in train as Parliamentary Librarian. There he had consolidated and expanded the research service. As well as generally building up staff, he encouraged the development of the current information section.

Born in Melbourne on 5 March 1912, Fleming was educated at Lee Street State School, North Carlton, Scotch College and Melbourne University, where, among other things, he edited *Farrago*, the student newspaper, and from where he graduated with an arts degree.

At university he helped support himself as a teacher-in-training and

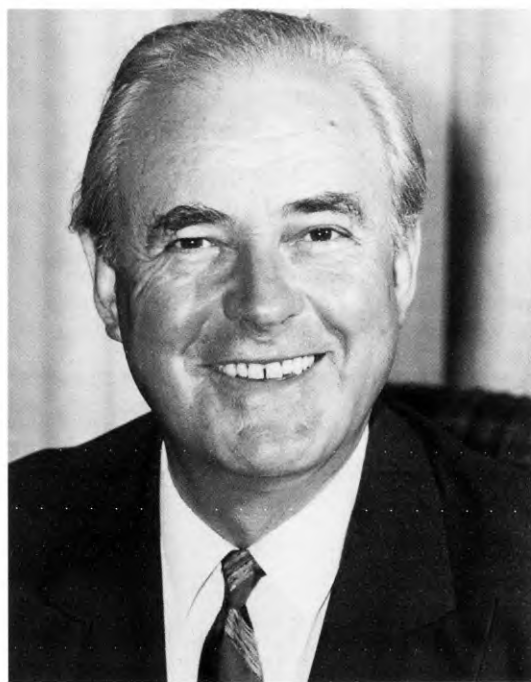


photo: National Library of Australia

housemaster at Scotch. There he met his future wife, Margaret, a nursing sister, whom he married in 1940.

He abandoned the prospect of a teaching career to become a cadet reporter on the now-defunct Melbourne *Argus*. Approached by the Herald company in Melbourne, he went to the *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, where he became assistant editor of the *Sunday Mail*, and wrote editorials and a daily column for the *Courier-Mail*.

Enlisting in the AIF as a private in 1939, he saw service in North Africa, Greece, New Guinea and the South-West Pacific. He rose to lieutenant-colonel, and, after various intelligence appointments, finished the war as air liaison officer Advanced Land Headquarters. He was made an OBE and twice mentioned in dispatches.

Though he had no specific training for most of his jobs, he left none of them without having made a significant contribution. This was recognised when he was appointed CBE in 1979. After his retirement he lived in Melbourne with his wife, Margaret, who died in 1999. His daughter, Alannah, and two grandsons survive him.

Extracted from an obituary by John Farquharson in The Canberra Times, 26 January 2001

Special ALIA award winner

Only twice in its history has ALIA awarded its Ellinor Archer Award, commemorating the contribution to librarianship of the first woman president and foundation member of the Australian Institute of Librarians. The last recipient was Allan Fleming, who received the award in 1989.

The Ellinor Archer Award is conferred by ALIA Board of Directors on a person who is or has been employed in library and information services, who is not eligible for Associateship of ALIA, and who has rendered outstanding service in the library and information service sector. ■