

# VAL MORGAN ADVERTISING CONTRACTOR

aka **Val Morgan Pty Ltd / Val Morgan and Sons Pty Ltd / Val Morgan and Co / Val Morgan Cinema Advertising**

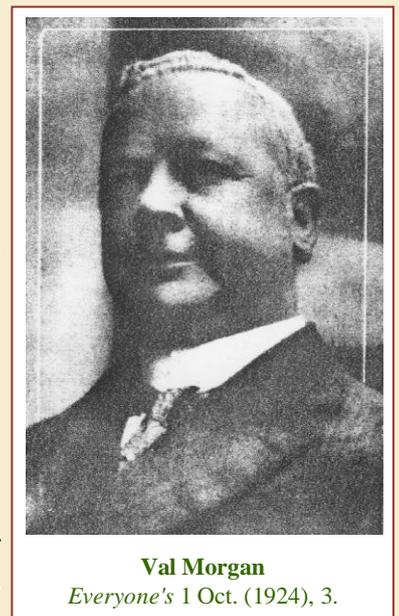
(1894-) Theatre and cinema advertising company.

Established in Melbourne in 1894 and privately owned until 1990, the company best known as Val Morgan Cinema Advertising pioneered the concept of cinema screen advertising in Australia. For the first twenty years, however, its founder Valentine Morgan (1877-1952) built the company on the back of live venues in Melbourne and regional Victoria - those offering entertainments such as legitimate theatre, minstrelsy, vaudeville, community events and exhibitions etc. While some of these venues occasionally or regularly offered moving pictures it was not until 1914 that Morgan began to focus on cinema as the company's primary business. By the mid-1920s Val Morgan Pty Ltd controlled the advertising in more than 100 Victorian cinemas. By the time of his death Morgan had built the company into the largest cinema advertising company in Australia. His other activities included ownership of Melbourne radio station 3KZ and *Morgan's Street Directory* (1916-ca.1970s).

The third of five children born to English journalist William Morgan and his Australian wife Annie, née Browne, Val Morgan's career in sales and advertising began in boyhood.<sup>1</sup> He started out selling copies of the *Record* at Melbourne football matches and later sold advertising space on sports ground billboards, in the *Record* and in programmes for events held by the Melbourne police, fire brigade and various local councils. He established his own business, initially known as Val Morgan Advertising Contractor in Little Collins Street in 1894,<sup>2</sup> and got his first big break two years later when he secured the contact as advertising representative for the Victorian Police Department. In this role he publicised all the social activities connected with the Police football club, athletic association and social activities. He retained his contract for several decades.<sup>3</sup>

For much of the first thirty years Morgan spent a good deal of his time on the road soliciting advertisements throughout regional Victoria. It was not until 1914 that he turned his attention on cinema advertising. Up until then advertisements for his continually expanding clientele appeared almost exclusively in venues that primarily offered theatrical entertainments (including minstrelsy, vaudeville). The idea of providing advertising space at theatres - around the hall or on the stage curtain - was not new. Most city and leading regional theatres provided this opportunity to local businesses.<sup>4</sup> Touring shows like Harry Clay's Waxworks and Comedy Company, which began operating in Northern New South Wales and throughout Queensland on an annual basis from 1901 regularly provided advertising space at the theatres Clay leased. Local businesses were also often involved in providing prizes for various competitions held in conjunction with the shows. Clay likely borrowed these ideas from the companies he appeared with, or toured with, during the late-1890s. These showmen, including Bob Bell, Dan Tracey, Ralph Walshe, Alf Lawton, Harry Rickards, and J. L. Travers, would have in turn been using the same commercial strategies they learned from their mentors.<sup>5</sup>

In 1914 Morgan decided to attach a branch to his business that focused on cinema advertising. This move came about when he began to see the potential for film as an entertainment medium within the communities he frequented. His initial foray into this new type of advertising market was a suburban cinema in Melbourne. There he began developing his own advertising slides. It also began to realise the need for presenting and preserving a professional service, one that reduced the possibility of erratic exposure of the lantern slides and therefore diminish both his reputation and that of his clients. As his list of cinemas grew he therefore began to monitor the slide operators and set in place a strict form of training and censorship. In her *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry on Morgan, Ina



<sup>1</sup> Ina Bertrand records in her *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry that Morgan was likely born in Albert Park, Melbourne. His mother was from Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Ina Bertrand for much of the above information. NB: In her ABD entry Bertrand indicates that Morgan's business had become a proprietary company by the 1920s. A 1924 *Everyone's* article devoted to Morgan records that it had been formed into a proprietary company "some two years ago," suggesting a date of ca. 1921/1922.

<sup>3</sup> "Slide Advertising of the Business, The." *Everyone's* 1 Oct. (1924), 3. Unless otherwise not all citations from *Everyone's* are from this article. To see the article in full see the "Research Notes PDF attached to the AVTA's entry on Val Morgan Pty Ltd

<sup>4</sup> One of the best pieces of evidence supporting this claim is a photograph of the interior of the Bellingen (NSW) Shire Soldiers Memorial Hall on the January 1923 issue of *Green Room* (40). On both side walls near the cinema screen are large posters advertising local businesses.

<sup>5</sup> Clay Djubal. "[Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company, 1865-1920.](#)" (Revised edition) Chapter 5, 107-108.

Bertrand notes that his "company had a reputation for professionalism not common in the advertising industry at that time." This observation is supported in an article of Morgan published in *Everyone's* in 1924. The writer notes in relation to Morgan's demand for the highest quality product for his clientele that the concept had "been faithfully adhered to right up to the present" (3). By the early 1920s, at which time Morgan has restructured his business as Val Morgan Pty Ltd, he controlled the advertising in more than 100 Victorian theatres. Morgan also travelled widely overseas in order to keep abreast of latest trends and to build business relationships. For these trips he was invariably accompanied by his wife. One of his ideas was to establish an accountable Film Booking System for his advertisers. The system remains the only one of its kind in Australia and has been enthusiastically received in overseas markets." <sup>6</sup>



Museum Victoria

Morgan's entrepreneurial interests were not confined only to cinema advertising, however. In 1916 he purchased *Moulton's Street Directory*. Renamed *Morgan's Street Directory* it continued publication up to the late 1970s, and provided his firm with another avenue of income - both from sales of the directories and from advertising revenue. By the 1920s the firm had also invested in "electric sky signs" (billboards) and various forms of related advertising opportunities. In 1930 Morgan also negotiated the lease of Melbourne radio-station 3KZ from Industrial Printing and Publicity Pty Ltd, a company set up by various trade unions to take over the station's operating licence. Morgan later 3KZ Advertising as a separate company.

In 1933 Val Morgan Pty Ltd was registered as Val Morgan and Sons Pty Ltd, in response to the increasing involvement of his three sons, notably William and Sydney. William V. Morgan, the eldest, joined the company in 1918 as a qualified accountant. Following their father's death William took over as managing director of the company, while Sydney (the youngest) took on the role of managing director of 3KZ. The third son predeceased his father. The family sold its interest in the firm in the late-1980s.<sup>7</sup>

As Val Morgan and Sons activities prospered it grew to be the largest cinema advertising company in Victoria and spread to South Australia and Western Australia, and eventually operated throughout much of the country. The company gradually absorbed its rivals, reducing the number of cinema advertising firms in Australia from thirteen to two. From the 1990s the company began expanding its operations into international markets, including the United States of America, United Arab Emirates, Chile, Argentina, Peru and some Asian markets - notably Singapore and Hong Kong. The acquisition of Media Entertainment Group in 2001 saw Val Morgan Cinema Advertising hold the advertising rights to the majority of cinema advertising screens in both Australia and New Zealand. In Australia this included the circuits of Hoyts, Greater Union, Birch, Carroll and Coyle, Wallis, Australian Multiplex Cinemas and most independent cinemas. The following year Village, Amalgamated Holding Ltd (AHL) and Hoyts acquired Val Morgan as a joint venture partnership.

### HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Morgan collapsed and died at the Melbourne Stock Exchange, Bank Place, on 11 July 1952 . His residence at the time situated in Merton Ave, Elwood (Melbourne). His wife, two remaining sons and a daughter survived him. He is buried in the Catholic section of the St Kilda cemetery.
2. His marriage to Emmeline Jolly took place in Melbourne on 25 May 1895. His address at the time was Albert Park.
3. Morgan retained a strong interest in sport throughout his life. This included membership of three Melbourne racing clubs, the South Melbourne Football Club and several other city-based clubs. South Melbourne Football Club's Val Morgan Trophy, presented at the club's annual Meeting, was inaugurated sometime around the turn of the century.

### FURTHER REFERENCE

"[History](#)." *Val Morgan Cinema Network*. [sighted 13/3/2015]

"Slide Advertising Side of Business, The." *Everyone's* 1 Oct. (1924), 3.

Bertrand, Ina. "[Morgan, Valentine \(Val\) \(1876-1952\)](#)." ABD: Supplementary Volume (2005). [sighted 14/03/2015]

<sup>6</sup> "History." *Val Morgan Cinema Advertising*.

<sup>7</sup> The head of the company at that time was grandson Valentine Charles Morgan.