

Australian Dictionary of Biography

Martin, Alfred Horatio (1883–1953)

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Alfred Horatio Martin (1883-1953), psychologist, was born on 9 May 1883 at Cosham, Hampshire, England, third son of Edwin Paddon Martin (d.1891), a master linen draper, and his wife Frances Mary Ralph, née Green. In 1886 the Martins emigrated to Sydney where Edwin opened a mercery and drapery store at Petersham. With his death, the family was impoverished. Alfred left school at the age of 13 and worked briefly in the Treasury before being employed as a pupil-teacher, from June 1898 at Camdenville Public School. In 1902 he attended Fort Street Training School. He taught in Sydney, and at Narrabri (1907-11) and Glen Innes (1911-13). At St Cyprian's Anglican Church, Narrabri, on 16 September 1911 he married Bertha Christina Ross, a fellow schoolteacher.

Posted to Granville Public School in 1913, Martin became a part-time student at the University of Sydney (B.A., 1917; M.A., 1919). He twice graduated with first-class honours and the University medal in philosophy. Awarded the **James King** of Irrawang travelling scholarship in 1919, he studied experimental psychology under E. L. Thorndike and R. S. Woodworth at Teachers College, Columbia University (Ph.D., 1921), United States of America. Martin returned to Sydney in 1921 and joined **Henry Tasman Lovell**, associate-professor of psychology at the university; he was given responsibility for teaching experimental psychology, and for setting up an experimental laboratory.




A foundation member (1923) and general secretary (1923-28) of the Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy, Martin was a prolific contributor to its journal. In October 1926, with the assistance of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, he established the Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology. Under his directorship it pioneered—especially during the 1930s—the construction and application of aptitude tests for vocational guidance and selection. He used the institute as an adjunct to his work at the university: many of the theories which he expounded to his students were put into practice at the institute. He encouraged the A.I.I.P. to provide a number of community services, including a 'Worry Clinic' for young job-seekers and their parents, lectures and radio broadcasts on basic and applied psychology, and a range of pamphlets. The institute's role declined during World War II due to its failure to procure army contracts.

Martin was an imposing figure, barrel chested and square chinned, with a sharp wit and quick mind. He was known for his abrasiveness and short temper. In 1947 he accepted a position at the University of Tasmania. Arriving in Hobart early in 1948, he suffered a debilitating stroke in late March and was forced to return to Sydney. He entered the New South Wales Home for Incurables, Ryde. Survived by his wife and two daughters, he died there of complications of cerebral and vascular disease on 31 March 1953 and was cremated. His daughter Leonie became a prominent psychologist in Hobart. Martin was a pioneer in his field. Although not an original thinker, he adapted the best of overseas developments in applied psychology for use in Australia.

Select Bibliography

- *People* (Sydney), 5 July 1950, p 8
- P. D. L. Brandon, Alfred Horatio Martin, 1883-1953: Educationalist and Pioneer in Industrial Psychology in New South Wales (B.Ed. thesis, University of Newcastle, 1993)
- teacher's record (State Records New South Wales and Dept of Education Archives, Sydney)
- University of Sydney Archives.

Related Entries in NCB Sites

- **Lovell, Henry Tasman** (work colleague)  
- **Wilson, Enid Phyllis** (influenced) 

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