

Joseph I vess 'Celebrated Country Newspaper Propagator'

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According to G. H. Scholefield, Joseph I vess established forty-five newspapers in New Zealand and Australia.¹ Even though Scholefield later modified his estimate to twenty-six New Zealand and five Australian titles,² this still high number calls for explanation. For one man to 'plant' over thirty newspapers during his working life is nothing short of extraordinary. Scholefield's statements raise two major questions: which newspapers did I vess establish and why did he establish them?

The first question is the easier to answer, although to do so is impeded by the lack of an adequate bibliography of newspapers published in New Zealand. The disappearance of many of this country's newspapers is a further impediment. Some evidence can be gleaned from the few I vess newspapers which can still be located. But this combined with the evidence in secondary sources is insufficient to confirm the precise number of titles in which I vess had an interest. In addition, the nature and extent of that interest is sometimes by no means clear. I have in the Appendix identified forty-four newspapers published in New Zealand which have some connection with I vess, (twenty-nine definitely established by him) but have identified only two Australian newspapers as being I vess titles.³

Having refined Scholefield's figures, the second question can be addressed: why did I vess establish this large number of newspapers? What were his motivations? Several of his titles proved themselves capable of providing at the least a comfortable living, so the explanation cannot be made solely on the grounds of economic necessity. Scholefield, himself a former newspaper editor who had met I vess, suggests a reason:

I vess was the most picturesque of that gay band of pioneers who, with a handpress and a hatful of type, rushed from point to point . . . to hoist the banner of free journalism wherever men needed such an organ of expression.⁴

This may present part of the truth, but probably only a small part. I vess stressed many times in his editorials that he was a businessman, with the motivations of earning a living and of making a profit which that entails.⁵ He may also have had a more detached interest in principles of free speech and democracy, and may well have considered his newspapers as a vehicle through which the common man could