

Sir Frederick Shedden and the Shedden collection

Sir Frederick Geoffrey Shedden ([CP 320](#)) was the Secretary of the Department of Defence from 1937 to 1956. During this period he compiled a collection of records that has become one of the most widely-used record series held by the National Archives in Canberra. This collection, registered by the National Archives as record series [A5954](#), and popularly known as the 'Shedden collection', documents the history of Australian defence policy both before and during Shedden's period as Secretary and also reflects the interests and concerns of Shedden as an individual. He was an assiduous recordkeeper: six full-time librarians were employed to maintain the collection.

The nature of the Shedden collection

The Shedden collection spans the period 1917 to 1971 and documents many of the major events that occurred within this era. It provides one of the most comprehensive insights into Australian defence policy and decision making during World War II. In addition there is material relating to events such as the Suez crisis, the Korean War, Australian elections (especially the contentious 1943 campaign), American presidential campaigns, the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, the Petrov defection and the Royal Commission on Espionage, ANZUS and ANZAM treaties and all areas of defence and security administration. The collection has files on many world leaders, including Churchill, Stalin, Eisenhower and Truman. Shedden also gathered large numbers of clippings from newspapers, and sources such as journals and Hansard.

Shedden accompanied Prime Ministers Menzies and Curtin to the United Kingdom during World War II and later travelled extensively in his capacity as Secretary of the Department of Defence. He represented the Commonwealth at conferences associated with the conclusions of both World Wars and at a number of Imperial Conferences.

After his retirement as Secretary of the Department in 1956 until his death in 1971, Shedden worked on the preparation of a comprehensive history of Australian defence policy. His manuscript, titled 'The History of Australian Defence Policy', which is included in the collection, remains unpublished.

Records relating to World War II held in the Shedden collection

As Secretary of the Department of Defence, Shedden played a crucial role in organising the administration and defence of Australia during World War II. This is well documented in the collection. He was responsible for maintaining the records of wartime bodies such as the Advisory

War Council and the War Cabinet, of which he was Secretary. Records of the proceedings (minutes) of the War Cabinet, compiled by Shedden and his assistants, Herbert Port and Vincent Quealy, are in the collection (see A5954, items 803/1 to 811/2). The agenda of the meetings of the Advisory War Council, which comprised members from both sides of Parliament, are in the record series [A2679](#).

Shedden also maintained the 'War Cabinet notebooks' from which he and his assistants compiled the minutes of the meetings of the War Cabinet. Microfilm copies of Shedden's handwritten notebooks from these meetings are available in all research centres in record series [A9240](#) except Melbourne, digital copies are hosted on RecordSearch.

Other items of interest contained in the Shedden collection

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
The history of the return of the AIF and its relation to operations in the Far East and South West Pacific area. (Contains debate over the return of the 9th Division AIF to Australia)	1941–42	A5954, 648/1
War Books for the Commonwealth of Australia	1925	A5954, 1010/3
War Books for the Commonwealth of Australia	1956	A5954, 1306/1
War Books for the Commonwealth of Australia	1939	A5954, 1306/2
Records relating to the Brisbane Line	1942–43	A5954, 1300/1
Records relating to the Brisbane Line	1942–43	A5954, 1300/2

Among its holdings the National Archives has considerable material documenting the career of Frederick Shedden. Some significant items selected from other sources as well as the Shedden collection are listed below:

Specific files charting the career of Sir Frederick Shedden

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Lieutenant Shedden [World War I personnel file]	1914–18	B2455, Shedden Frederick Geoffrey
AIF Chief Pay Office Report by Lieutenant FG Shedden	1916–18	MP367/1, 474/1/149
FG Shedden – Attending London courses in Economics and Accounting – Extension of his term in the United Kingdom	1927–33	A664, 632/401/109
Shedden, FG – Appointment as Secretary to Defence Committee	1930	A664, 404/401/75
Frederick Shedden – Diaries (A5954, 17/1 to 17/20)	1932–63	A5954, 17/1
Shedden FG – Position overseas	1933	A6006, 1933/2/28
FG Shedden – Duties in London	1933	A5954, 953/8
Summarized Economic Survey of Australia, by FG Shedden	1935	CP503/1, 6
Appointment of Shedden as Secretary, Dept of Defence	1937	A5954, 1133/5
Appointment of Shedden as Secretary, Dept of Home Security	1941	A1567, 677/2/5431

<u>Frederick Shedden – Award of KCMG</u>	1944	A5954, 654/7
<u>Shedden – Chairman of the Defence Committee</u>	1947–56	A5954, 1133/9
<u>Sir Frederick Shedden – Special task and appointment of [new] Secretary, Department of Defence</u>	1956–68	A4940, C1296
<u>Shedden, Sir Frederick Geoffrey [Defence personnel file]</u>	1957–87	A1945, 258/19/198