

RAYMOND WACKS

PERSONAL
INFORMATION

Privacy and the Law



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For my parents

Preface

Nearly ten years ago in my book, *The Protection of Privacy*, I expressed a general disenchantment with the use of ‘privacy’ as a legal term of art. A good deal has happened since then. But my uneasiness remains. This book represents a more sustained and systematic attempt to develop an alternative analysis the outlines of which I only sketched there.

Based on a thesis for which the University of London awarded me the degree of Ph.D. in 1986, this book is inevitably informed by the perspective adopted in *The Protection of Privacy* and other writings. However, both the scope and the objectives pursued here are materially different. And they differ even more fundamentally from my much earlier (and considerably narrower) research conducted at the University of Oxford into the protection of ‘privacy’ by the English and Roman–Dutch law for which I was awarded the degree of M.Litt. in 1974.

I have clearly been preoccupied with the subject of ‘privacy’ for far longer than should be permitted. In mitigation I plead that this has afforded me the opportunity (or the burden) of reconsidering and, I hope, refining some of the ideas which I originally held. It does not follow, of course, that I am any closer to resolving the problems I have sought to unravel in the pages that follow.

In an attempt to test the extent to which those problems touch the lives of people in Britain, I conducted the survey of solicitors described in Chapter 4. This exercise would not, of course, have been possible without the assistance of the numerous solicitors who took the time and trouble to complete my questionnaires, several of them appending lengthy addenda expressing their views and proposals. I am most grateful to them.

Dr Michael Bryan of the Faculty of Laws, Queen Mary College, University of London, was (as my adviser) a constant and ready source not only of advice, but of friendly support and encouragement. With kindness and patience he

greatly assisted, in particular, my journey through the often impenetrable thicket of the law of confidence, sparing me from many a mishap along the way. Responsibility for those that remain must, of course, be laid at my door.

Being away from England since 1982 proved more of an obstacle to my research than I anticipated. Difficulties in obtaining certain materials required periodic visits to Britain. I am indebted to both the Universities of Natal and Hong Kong for their assistance in financing my raids on the Bodleian Law Library and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.

No thanks to Mr Peter Wright. The litigation spawned by his revelations inflicted certain wounds on Chapter 3, though, since my chief concern is with 'personal information' the damage was minor. Still, the minds of almost a score of our leading judges have been exercised in a field of law notorious for its ambiguity. And the impact of their decisions extends beyond the narrow confines of the case to the action for breach of confidence in general. Moreover, as I process these words, I understand that the security service is, for the first time, to be placed on a statutory footing. Should the Security Service Bill become law, the Government's pursuit of *Spycatcher* may prove not to have been entirely in vain. And, as far as Chapter 7 is concerned, some of my comments concerning 'intrusion' by MI5 may have to be revised. I hope so.

For my part the *Spycatcher* drama could have been better timed. The First Act coincided with the despatch of my manuscript. Amendments were made just in time for incorporation in the proofs. Act II, however, was performed only after the book was in press. Nevertheless, thanks to the kind indulgence of my publishers, I have been able to squeeze into the footnotes references to the judgments of the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords.

A final word of gratitude. During the long and often difficult years during which I spent on this research, my wife, Penelope, endured what must have seemed like endless evenings and weekends without me. Throughout this period, she selflessly yielded to my wholly unreasonable demands for solitude and even for 'privacy'.

December 1988

R. W.

Acknowledgements

I have drawn on a number of my publications. In particular, 'Breach of Confidence and the Protection of Privacy' (1977) 127 NLJ 328; 'No Castles in the Air' (1977) 93 LQR 492; 'Pop Goes Privacy' (1978) 31 MLR 68; 'The Poverty of "Privacy"' (1980) 96 LQR 73; *The Protection of Privacy*, Modern Legal Studies, London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1980; '"Privacy" and the Practitioner' (1983) Public Law 260; 'Controlling AIDS: Some Legal Issues' (1988) 138 NLJ 254, 283; 'The Right to Privacy' in R. Wacks (ed.), *Civil Liberties in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988. I am grateful for permission to use them here.

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