

# FRED BLUETT

(1876-1942). English-born comedian, comic singer, film and radio actor, songwriter, poet.

Regarded by his peers as one of the leading comedians to work the Australasian circuits during the first three decades of the twentieth century, Fred Bluett was particularly noted for his original comic songs. The son of London music hall artists, he left England for Australia in 1892 and soon afterwards began developing his comedic craft in Melbourne with several amateur minstrel companies while also working as a bootmaker. An ill-fated New Zealand tour in 1898 led to him coming to the attention of the Fuller family. Over the next few years he established himself as one of their biggest stars in that county. Bluett later spent many years with Harry Rickards before travelling to South Africa and England (1913-1916). By this time he had also developed a popular partnership with his young son, Gus. After returning to Australia father and son toured together until Gus joined J.C. Williamson's. Bluett senior then continued to work as a solo comedian, albeit with occasional temporary partners - including Roy Rene (as Bluett and Mo) in 1926. During his career Fred Bluett worked for many other leading variety firms and troupes, including Hoyts, John N. McCallum (Brisbane), George Marlow, the Pugliese family (Sydney), Leonard Davis (Perth), Ted Holland (Brisbane), Harry Clay (Sydney/NSW), and Dix-Baker (Newcastle). He made his radio debut in 1924 and from the early-1930s was heavily involved in the medium as an actor, performer and host. He also appeared in at least three films. Fred Bluett died in his sleep shortly after recording a radio drama episode.

## 1876-1900

Described by Frank Van Straten as "a genial, robust knockabout comedian" who was "equally at home in the role of a pantomime dame,"<sup>1</sup> Fred Bluett was regarded by his peers as one of the leading comedians working in Australia during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Given the birth name Frederick George Goodwin, he was born in Marylebone, London on 20 January 1876. His father, Frederick William Goodwin was a letter carrier who also worked in music hall (as William Bluett). His mother Elizabeth Sarah Goodwin (nee Dell) was also an entertainer, as was one of his grandfathers. Young Fred Goodwin subsequently grew up surrounded by theatrical people (his father was reportedly a friend of Harry Rickards in London) and made his first appearance on the stage at age three. In 1892, however, he was sent by his parents to Australia to take up an apprenticeship as a bootmaker with a brother-in-law who had settled in Melbourne.

While living in the Victorian capital Goodwin became involved in amateur theatricals and sang at smoke concerts under the stage name Fred Bluett. Two of the companies he was associated with were the [Brooklyn Entertainers](#) (1893-1895) and the [Diamond Minstrel and Variety Troupe](#) (1895). Managed



\*2

**TEMPERANCE HALL**  
For a Season commencing  
**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2.**  
**THE VAUDEVILLE SPECIALTY**  
**UNION.**  
**EVERYTHING NEW**  
**AND UP-TO-DATE.**  
**HOBART FAVOURITES—**  
John Matlock      Miss Vivie Keeling  
Pete Miller        Miss L. Bentley  
Fred. Bluett        Miss Eva Wilson  
G. E. Jones        Miss M. Sugden  
Fred Marsh.  
**POPULAR PRICES—1s. and 6d.**  
Doors open 7.30. Commence 8 p.m. sharp.  
**JOHN MATLOCK, Manager.**

*Mercury* (Hobart) 1 Dec. 1897, 3.

by Dan Scullien both parties were active in the suburbs of Melbourne - particularly around Prahran, Windsor, St Kilda, South Yarra, Cremorne, and Richmond. Bluett was also a member of the Trilby Minstrel and Variety Company (ca.1896). Having completed an apprenticeship as a bootmaker Bluett's primary source of income during the mid to late-1890s was from his employment in the boot trade. According to his poem, "Twenty Years Ago" (published in *Australian Variety and Show World* in 1920), he also appears to have operated a business in Chapel Street, Prahran.<sup>3</sup> The same poem and several newspaper reports from the 1890s further indicate that he was an active member of the Windsor Bicycle Club.

Bluett accepted possibly his first fully-professional contract with a variety troupe in November 1897. The engagement, with veteran African-American comedian [Johnny Matlock](#) and his Vaudeville Specialty Union, started in Hobart beginning 2 December. After concluding the season in mid-January the following year, Matlock took the company on a short tour of select regional towns until early February. Among the places visited were Queenstown, Zeehan, Dundas and Strachan.

<sup>1</sup> "Fred Bluett." *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (1995), 91.

<sup>2</sup> \* The citation details for this photograph of Fred Bluett have been lost. The photograph appears in Peter Downes' *Shadows on the Stage* (1975), but this digital version has been copied from an online source that no longer appears to be available.

<sup>3</sup> Bluett. "Twenty Years Ago," 6.

By mid-1898 Bluett had abandoned his bootmaking career and committed himself to the professional stage. His first significant undertaking was a New Zealand tour with [Ada Juneen's Melbourne Burlesque and Musical Comedy Company](#). The venture, which featured the pantomime *Robinson Crusoe*, was not a success, however, and indeed appears to have been stricken with problems from the outset. First the publicised Auckland season, set for 7 June, was cancelled. Then the company failed to arrive in Dunedin for its rescheduled (and advertised) New Zealand debut on 22 June. This was because it was still in Australia, and in fact did not depart for the Dominion until 16 July.<sup>4</sup> According to Walter Fuller (music director and manager for [John Fuller and Sons](#)) much of the blame for the tour's failure could be levelled at the weakness of the show and the fact that Dunedinites were largely uninterested in the entertainment being offered. He also recalls that a severe snow storm kept audiences numbers down. After the Dunedin season the company travelled to Christchurch but by then Juneen was in severe financial straits and soon afterwards was forced to disband the company.<sup>5</sup> In all the tour lasted less than two months. Bluett reportedly played a few local shows before being given an opportunity in Auckland with Fullers on the strong recommendation of comedian [Will Watkins](#).<sup>6</sup>

Bluett made his debut with the Fullers on 5 November 1898 at Auckland's Agricultural Hall as a member of the Will Watkins Musical Comedy Company. Interestingly the Fullers announced in advertising that Bluett was appearing "direct" from Harry Rickards theatres in Australia. No evidence for this claim has yet been located in a survey of the comedian's early career. While Walter Fullers' recall that Bluett was "given the bird" for much of his first week with the company is questionable,<sup>7</sup> there is no doubt that he is right in claiming that Bluett quickly established himself as a New Zealand favourite and went on to become a huge star in that country. Further evidence of his stature can be seen in the fact that the following year he was offered a lucrative eighteen-month contract to tour the Fullers' New Zealand and Australian circuits. Bluett also recalls this significant period of his career in his poem "Twenty Years Ago."

Fred Bluett's time in New Zealand was not only significant in terms of his career. It also played a vital part in his personal life. At some stage during the years 1899 to 1900 he met and fell in love with Dunedin dressmaker, Catherine McKechnie. On 1 April 1901 they married at her father's house. Their only son Gus was born on 23 April 1902 at Prahran, Melbourne. The family always travelled together – with Catherine working as Bluett's dresser. As a result Gus had very little regular schooling. Father and son were reportedly very close, and Gus subsequently developed his considerable comedic stagecraft from an early age.

## 1901-1912

Fred Bluett's first performance back in Australia was with [John Fuller Snr](#) at Sydney's [Empire Theatre](#) on 20 April 1901. Over the next two years he alternated short to medium term-engagements with several firms, including the Fullers (Tasmania, 1902 and New Zealand, 1903-1904), [Percy St John's Royal Burlesque and Speciality Company](#) (Brisbane), [Frank Gourley](#) (Tasmania) and [Harry Rickards'](#) Tivoli Vaudeville Company. Among the leading Australian and international artists he worked alongside were [Cinquavalli](#), [Emil Lazern](#), [Peggy Pryde](#), [James Bell](#), [Denis Carney](#), the [Lentons](#) (aka [Lenton Trio](#)), [Kitty Lenton](#), [Maud Fanning](#), [McKisson and Kearns](#), [Ida Roslyn](#) (aka [Ida Tauchert](#)), [Ted Herbert](#), [Amy Blackie](#), [Prof. Fred Davys](#), the [Perman Trio](#), [Tom Edwards](#), [Neva Carr-Glynn](#), [Stella and Florrie Ranger](#), and of course [Will Watkins](#).

From 1903 until his departure for South Africa and England in 1913, much of Bluett's working life was spent touring Harry Rickards' Australasian circuit. On a number of occasions, however, Rickards leased his star comedian out to other firms - notably [Leonard Davis](#) (Perth) and [Ted Holland](#) (Brisbane). In 1904 Bluett also put together his own vaudeville show in Launceston, Tasmania, leasing the town's Empire Theatre for the entire month of June. Billed as Fred Bluett's

**EMPIRE THEATRE**  
(LATE ROYAL STANDARD), Castlereagh-street.  
Quit 'Buses and Trams at Bathurst-street.

SIXTH WEEK, and UNBOUNDED SUCCESS of Mr.  
**JOHN FULLER'S**  
EMPIRE MINSTREL and SPECIALTY CO.

EVERY EVENING, at 8; MATINEES, SAT., 2.30.  
Children half-price to all parts.

MORE NOVELTIES AND ATTRACTIONS.  
THIS AFTERNOON, SATURDAY, at 2.30,  
OUR GRAND DOUBLE COMPANY,  
OUR FIRST ENGLISH INSTALMENT,

FRED. BLUETT	Miss Amy Blackie
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Ted. Herbert
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Jeannie Johnston
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Will Watkins
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Heba Barlow
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. John Fuller
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Tillie Dunbar
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Geo. Scott
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Eva St. Clair
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Jas. Hughes
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Alice Scott
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Geo. Wallace
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Ida Nansell
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Will Stevens
FRED. BLUETT	Miss Allie Gray
FRED. BLUETT	Mr. Wal. Cottier.

Mr. FRED. BLUETT, the Celebrated Young English Comedian, specially engaged by John Fuller and Sons for the Australasian circuit, will make his First Appearance in Australia THIS AFTERNOON and EVENING.  
First Appearance in Sydney of Miss HEBA BARLOW, the Dashing Young Hero.

2½ HOURS of MINSTRELSY, VAUDEVILLE, and  
FARICAL COMEDY. 2½ HOURS.

*Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 20 Apr. 1901, 2.

<sup>4</sup> The advance agent for the tour was [Claude H. Whaite](#).

<sup>5</sup> See "Historical Notes and Corrections" (No 7) below regarding errors in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* relating to both the Juneen tour of New Zealand and other aspects of Bluett's career during the late-1890s.

<sup>6</sup> Will Watkins was also a member of the ill-fated Ada Juneen tour. He secured a contract with John Fullers Snr almost immediately after the company disbanded, making his debut at the Agricultural Hall, Auckland. This engagement marked the Fullers' first foray into vaudeville in New Zealand. The family-run business had previously cemented its reputation as a concert party.

<sup>7</sup> See "Historical Notes and Corrections" section below for Walter Fuller's somewhat suspect recall of Bluett early days with his family's company.

Company of Vaudeville Star Artists, the line-up included Frank Herbert, magician Carl Wolfe, Fred Carnham, Barbara Renton, George Williamson, John Elliott, Bessie Young, **Bob Bell**, Vulcan the handcuff king, and Misses Everard and Louriston. During the latter stages of the season Bluett brought in popular Melbourne-based society sketch artists **Lily Octavia and Dave Warne**. For his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry Martha Rutledge writes of the comedian's career during this period:

As he strutted the stage with "red nose, baggy pants and huge flapping boots," clowning and singing comic songs in an exaggerated Cockney accent, Bluett 'could literally roll an audience in the aisles'. He had an 'extraordinary talent for wisecracks not in the script'. Backstage, he enraged (understandably) his fellow thespians with practical jokes—such as inserting pins in sticks of grease paint or nailing stage shoes to the floor. Weighing sixteen stone (101 kg), he was "virtually immune from physical attack" and ignored verbal abuse.<sup>8</sup>

One of the *Brisbane Courier's* theatre critics raved about Bluett's return to that city in 1905, writing:

Mr Fred Bluett has not been in Brisbane for some four or five years, and in that time he has rubbed shoulders with some of the world's best, with the result that his business on Saturday night challenges comparison. There was a deal of originality in his methods, and his first item "The Dancing Master" created quite a furore of applause. He had to respond with no fewer than five songs, each involving a change of costume, and next to the opening turn, the absurdity "Mooch About" was probably the most amusing. No one in the line of business – either Australian or imported – has created a better impression, or deserved it more than this artists.<sup>9</sup>

Claude McKay, writing for *Smith's Weekly* in 1941, recalls Bluett's act from possibly the same year:

When first I saw Fred Bluett he was appearing at **Percy St. John's** vaudeville theatre in Brisbane in his boy scout act. That would be about 1905 when Baden Powell's idea had captured the imagination of Smith minor. The act was Bluett's own creation and with his broomstick and his cub, his badges and overwhelming pride in camp lore, it was burlesque without restraint.<sup>10</sup>

During his Rickards years Bluett also filled in some between-engagements by working for lower-level managers like **J.C. Bain** (1905) and **Harry Clay** (1905). In 1908 he also undertook another brief solo venture, producing a show at His Majesty's Theatre, Geelong (Victoria). The line-up included Ella Ogilvy (later **Ella Airlie**), the Musical Ibsons, and **George Campbell**.<sup>11</sup> The following year the *Theatre Magazine's* "Sinbad" columnist gave Bluett special mention:

Fred Bluett at the Tiv. gives an exquisite burlesque of Salome. Flooded in the violet limelight in his cotton singlet, with a few streamers of riband, he goes through the poses of the famous Salome with a screamingly funny effect. The final tableau, where he falls in mock death, clutching a sheep's head, simply makes the idea of the original a laughing stock. "Sinbad" will never be able to gaze on Salome again without thinking of Fred Bluett...<sup>12</sup>

1909 also saw the birth of Bluett's first daughter, Belle, and marked the beginning of his onstage partnership with son Gus (then aged seven).<sup>13</sup> One of their most popular routines was a new version of the Boy Scout sketch. Bluett Snr often incorporated other youngsters in variations of the sketch, too, and even presented an "army of Boy Scouts." In *The Balls of Bob Menzies*, folk historian Warren Fahey reproduces the following lyrics to Bluett's "How Are They Going to Get to Sydney" (1910).<sup>14</sup>

I'm a country chap who is very patriotic,  
That's why I came to Sydney all alone  
To join the bloomin' army but I wasn't tall enough,  
So I formed a little regiment of my own.  
You wouldn't take my regiment for the horse guards,  
Though every one of them is staunch and true,  
And we're waiting for the foe to come to Sydney,  
They'll get a warm reception if they do.  
There are eighteen of 'em guarding the Pymont Bridge,  
Half a score at Pinchgut too,  
Half a dozen guarding Bondi Beach,  
And a bunch at Waterloo.  
Eight or nine dressed up fine, all dying for a row,  
So what I want to know, is how are all the foe  
Going to get to Sydney now?

Caricature by George  
Cook (ca. 1910-19)  
Source: V&A Museum



<sup>8</sup> Rutledge, 37.

<sup>9</sup> "Theatre Royal," 31 July 1905, 5.

<sup>10</sup> C.M. "That Reminds Me," 12.

<sup>11</sup> "Amusements: Vaudeville Entertainment." *Geelong Advertiser* (Vic) 26 Nov. 1908, 3.

<sup>12</sup> "Sinbad." "Sparks from the Stalls," 8.

<sup>13</sup> Gus Bluett actually made his first appearance on any stage at the Adelaide Tivoli on 11 January 1907.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Fahey. *The Balls of Bob Menzies* (1989), 43.

Fred Bluett left Australia with his family in early April 1913 to take up a six month contract in South Africa. This was followed by an extended period touring the British music hall circuits. An advertisement placed in the *Bendigo Independent* prior to Bluett's appearance in the town in early March 1913 claims that the comedian had secured a two years contract with the Moss and Stoll circuit.<sup>15</sup> Bluett refuted this claim on his return to Australia in December 1916, however. In an interview with Perth's *Daily News* he indicates that he arrived in England without a contract and recalls how difficult it was to connect with British music hall audiences:

I'm not going to tell you any fantastic stories about what didn't happen. I didn't go under an engagement, but announced myself in due course, and showed them my credentials. "What can you do" one manager said to me. "Do," I said, "[I] do my best." "Yes, but you're supposed to be the Australian comedian; let's see how you go. Seemingly my style of humour didn't suit that particular audience, and they gave me the bird. "Boy Scout," they wouldn't have it; more "bird." It was lovely, I tell you. So I got out of that circuit of vaudeville into revue, with Fred Kitchen, and did all right. I'm not complaining, but it takes a man 'a long tune to get a footing there, particularly a stranger. Our style of humour and theirs are different, that's all there is to it. I'm glad I went, the experience has been invaluable to me<sup>16</sup>

In England Bluett and his son often appeared on stage together - in both vaudeville and revue. In one of Fred Kitchen's productions, for example, Gus appeared as a page boy. The Kitchen revue Bluett was best identified with was *It's All Square*, the production finding much success in London as well as in the English provinces. Entertainer Frank Kavanagh mentions Bluett in a letter he wrote from London to Sydney's *Referee* newspaper in mid-1916:

I have met many Australians during our present season in London; Athos and Read are well established, and Fred Bluett has turned out to be a tremendous success as a revue comedian. I have tried to get him to return, and arranged for down below the very fine revue he has been starring in here, but he likes his prospects here too much to return at present. However, he has obtained the Australian rights of this particular show, and many other winners also, and no doubt he will be seen some day with these in Australia.<sup>17</sup>

It appears that Bluett returned briefly to the vaudeville stage towards the end of his British sojourn, reportedly touring Scotland with some success. His final year in Britain also included the birth of the third Bluett child, Kitty. She was reportedly born during a Zeppelin raid while the family were living in London.

**TIVOLI THEATRE**  
 Just arrived from London under Special Engagement, and will make his First Appearance in Australia at the Matinee  
**TO-DAY (SATURDAY) TO-NIGHT**  
 At 2.30. At 8.  
 His First Appearance in Australia  
 After a  
**Four Years' Tour of England.**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT,**  
**FRED BLUETT.**  
 Australia's Greatest Vocal Comedian.  
 Originator of the Famous "Boy Scout Burlesque" and "The Sandowner."  
 In all the Latest London Successes. "The Shipwrecked Mariner," "Grief and Pain," "Longing to go Back," "Down on the Farm," "Go to Sleep Baby," "Quick Cricket."

The family returned to Australia in December 1916, and Bluett went almost immediately back on the Tivoli circuit, making his return debut in Melbourne on New Year's Eve. Five months later he terminated his contract, reportedly after "some trouble" at the Sydney Tivoli.<sup>18</sup> His departure coincided, however, with his involvement in John F. Gavin's three-reel comedy, *An Interrupted Divorce*. After shooting finished in late May or early June, Bluett began organising another of his own temporary variety troupes, and once again headed to Tasmania where he opened at Hobart's Temperance Hall on 30 June 1917. This time he shared headline status with comedian/pianist, Phil Percival.

*Argus* (Melbourne)  
 30 Dec. 1916, 16.

**TEMPERANCE HALL — TO-NIGHT (SAT.) — AND EVERY EVENING.**  
 OPENING AT THE MATINEE. SHORT SEASON ONLY.  
**GREATEST OF ALL COMEDIANS.**  
**FRED BLUETT — FRED BLUETT**  
 —AND 12 STAR VAUDEVILLE ARTISTS—  
 Including—  
 PHIL PERCIVAL—Comedian at the Piano.  
 GEORGE CROTTY—American Revue Comedian.  
 CLAUD DUCAR—Wonderful Comedy Acrobat.  
 KEELY AND ALDOUS—Last word in Dancers.  
 CLIFF SISTERS—Dainty, Debonair Duettists.  
 EVELYN MARTINI—Girl with "some" voice.  
 HARRY THE SLOP POLICEMAN and Sketch Co.  
**PRICES: 3/, 2/, 1/, plus tax. Box Plan Fridays. Book early.**

*Critic* (Hobart) 30 June 1917, 4.

**THE PICCADILLY**  
 "THE HOUSE OF REFINEMENT."  
 PITT-STREET, NEAR G.P.O.  
 ALL THIS WEEK.  
**Emmy Wehlen**  
 IN  
**A Slave to Fashion.**  
 AN ENTRANCING "METRO."  
**JOAN SAWYER**  
 AND  
**STUART HOLMES**  
 IN  
**LOVE'S LAW.**  
 A FOX PHOTO-PLAY SUPREME.  
**FRED BLUETT**  
 Supported by Vera Remée in the Great Australian Comedy,  
**"An Interrupted Divorce."**

*Sun* (Sydney) 5 Aug. 1917, 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Bendigo Independent* 26 Feb. 1913, 1.

<sup>16</sup> "They Gave Me the Bird," 5.

<sup>17</sup> "The Kavenaghs in England." *Referee* (Sydney) 26 July 1916, 14.

<sup>18</sup> "Bluett Leaves Vaudeville." *Mirror of Australia* (Sydney) 5 May 1917, 10.

In October 1918 Bluett returned to New Zealand for the first time in 14 years. Engaged by Ben and John Fuller, he opened at the Princess Theatre, Dunedin on the 28<sup>th</sup> and remained in the city until early January the following year. His Dunedin season was broken for a month, however, when the Fullers were forced to close the theatre in response to the worsening flu epidemic. The *Evening Times* critic wrote of his opening performance:

There were doubtless many in the house who remembered Fred Bluett when he started his career in the old Alhambra Theatre nearly 20 years ago, and later when he had established himself as a clever comedian. And those people would have no difficulty in recognising the old Fred, for he retains the well-remembered mannerisms of years ago. The facial expression, the voice, the gait, and the style of song (a style which the majority of low comedians adopt, and in which the touch of coarseness is so humorously dressed that it is overlooked) were familiar to old vaudevillians, and decidedly acceptable to the younger generation. Mr Bluett sang four songs. First, attired in curate's garb, he told of the "grief and pain" buffered as a result of various experiences; "Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes" brought further hearty laughter, which was, if anything, intensified by the relation of what happened "Paddy M'Ginty's Goat." His last song was about his twins (whom he trundled on in a go-cart), and the difficulty he had in telling which was which, Mr Bluett's reappearance was certainly a big success.<sup>19</sup>

**PRINCESS THEATRE.**  
 COMMENCING MONDAY NEXT,  
 AT SPECIAL LABOR DAY MATINEE.  
**TOM HAVERLY**  
 AND THE  
**KUTE KEWPIE KIDS.**  
 Presenting for the first time a  
 UNIQUE FOAM BUBBLE OF GAIEETY:  
 'THE PORTOBELLO CUP,'  
 'THE PORTOBELLO CUP,'  
 Also,  
 Star Attraction Superadded.  
 The Greatest of Australian Comedians,  
**FRED BLUETT.**  
 Born in Australia; scored his first great  
 successes in Australia and New Zealand;  
 for many years topped the de luxe bills of  
 the great music halls in England and  
 America; and now at the apex of his career  
 returns under the Fuller flag.  
 BOX PLANS NOW OPEN AT THE  
 BRISTOL.  
 Remember:  
**TWO PERFORMANCES LABOR DAY,**  
 2.30 p.m., 8 p.m.  
*Evening Star* (Dunedin, NZ) 24 Oct. 1918, 5.

Bluett remained in New Zealand until late-1919, playing each the other three major cities twice. He also returned to play Dunedin on two further occasions. Christchurch's *Sun* newspaper appeared to echo the *Evening Star's* sentiment when one of its critics reviewed a Bluett turn in that city:

Fred Bluett is a low comedian of no ordinary calibre, who has a very fair gift or characterisation. As a comedy sailor his parodies had the house rocking, and with various changes he sang with equal success "I Can't Do My Rally Button Up," "Little Bit Heavier," and "A Couple of Twins."<sup>20</sup>

After returning to Australia in mid-November Bluett played a two-week engagement Newcastle for [Dix-Baker](#) (possibly under lease from [Fullers Theatres](#)) then opened in Sydney on the Fullers circuit at the end of the month. He remained in Sydney until the New Year.

## 1920-1929

The 1920s saw Bluett working with few breaks throughout Australia.<sup>21</sup> He was able to do this by making himself available to firms across the variety industry spectrum - from the top level through to small-time vaudeville operators, film exhibitors and short-term touring companies. He also continued to occasionally produce his own vaudeville shows, notably in Newcastle in 1924.<sup>22</sup> To a large extent this period saw him expand and evolve his abilities as a performer - working as required (whether it be as solo act, as a member of a double act, or in ensemble productions) or as a comic singer, sketch artist, songwriter, producer, director or writer. In December 1921, for example, he returned to pantomime after many years away from the popular entertainment form. Already a Brisbane favourite having spent some nine months in the city to that time,<sup>23</sup> he garnered much acclaim as the dame in the [John N. McCallum/Town Topics](#) production *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. The Town Topics company also featured his son, Gus.<sup>24</sup>

Bluett's success in the Brisbane pantomime appears to have convinced J.C. Williamson's management to feature him as the dame in its 1922 *Cinderella* extravaganza at Sydney's Theatre Royal. That production also featured Gus Bluett (as Buttons). Throughout the course of the next nine years Bluett featured in several more pantomimes. These included George Marlow's *Aladdin* (1926) and *Babes in the Wood* (1929), and William Russell's *Dick Whittington* (1928). The 1926 *Aladdin* panto was also undertaken during his brief partnership with [Roy Rene](#). By then [Bluett and Mo](#), as they were invariably billed, had worked a sketch, song and patter act on the Tivoli circuit for some eight months.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Princess Theatre." *Evening Times* (Dunedin, NZ) 29 Oct. 1918, 6.

<sup>20</sup> "Opera House." *Sun* (Christchurch, NZ) 4 Mar. 1919, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Bluett toured New Zealand in 1918 and 1919.

<sup>22</sup> See [The Radios](#) (aka Bohemia Radios)

<sup>23</sup> Bluett remained with McCallum's Brisbane and Queensland operations for some 16 months (April 1921-July 1922).

<sup>24</sup> The pair had reunited briefly in Wollongong in January 1921 with George Sharratt's So and So's Costume Comedy Company. Gus Bluett's appearance was advertised as "by kind permission of J.C. Williamson's." It is presently unclear if he was leased to McCallum in April 1921 or is if he was by then off-contract with the Firm.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Rene's involvement with Bluett occurred during his 18-month hiatus from regular partner [Nat Phillips](#).

Bluett and Rene teamed up in May 1926 after separately joining J.C. Williamson's Tivoli Celebrity Vaudeville. They made their debut in Sydney on 10 May in a 30 minute nautical sketch written and directed by Bluett. Rene played an Admiral and Bluett a sailor. Although popular from the start in Sydney the pair initially fared less well in Melbourne with the view being that their personalities and comedic style were too diverse. A second sketch, "The Fashion Plates," was first introduced midway through their first Melbourne season. During their nine



*Brisbane Courier* 26 June (1926), 2.



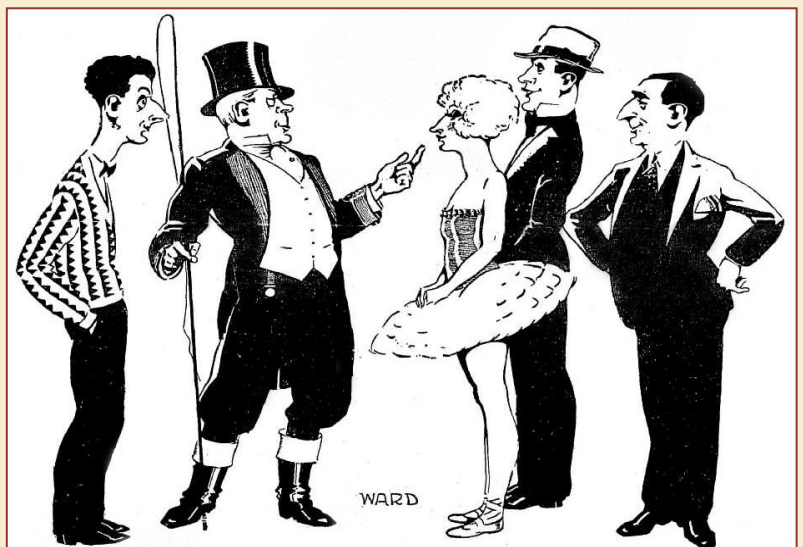
Yo, ho, mates, Fred Bluett and Roy Rene (Mo), who will rock the Tivoli with laughter on Monday.

*Daily Standard* (Brisbane) 26 June 1926, 2.

In addition to further cementing his reputation as one of Australia's leading vaudeville, pantomime and musical comedy performers, Bluett also firmly established his credentials as a radio star during the 1920s. He is believed to have made his broadcasting debut in late August 1924 during a temporarily break from live theatre work. This came about after he completed his Fullers' contract in Adelaide in mid-July. On his return to Sydney he initially took up short-term picture house engagements for the Szarka Brothers ([Enmore Theatre](#)) and Hoyts (De Luxe Cinema). With his next major engagement locked in with T.A. Shafto at Perth's [Shaftesbury Theatre](#) in early-October, Bluett was offered a contract with Sydney radio station 2FC (Farmers' Service) to appear in its evening broadcasts Throughout the late-August/September period. His first performance occurred during a variety-style programme on Thursday 21 August. The station's management brought him back for another four nights in succession beginning 23 August, announcing his inclusion in radio listings as simply "He's on the air."

months together the two comedians played Geelong (twice), Brisbane, Sydney (four times, including J.C. Williamson's *Aladdin* pantomime), Newcastle, Melbourne (again), Adelaide (Star suburban circuit), and Perth. The final Bluett and Mo shows were at the Haymarket Theatre, in early February 1927. Sydney radio station 2FC broadcast performances from the Haymarket in August 1926 and February 1927.

Following the end of Bluett and Mo, Fred Bluett secured a role in the Australian production of the Harbach, Hammerstein and Kern musical comedy, *Sunny*. Produced by Rufe Naylor and directed by [Ernest C. Rolls](#), *Sunny's* Australian premiere season was given at the New Empire Theatre beginning 28 February 1927. Bluett's big hit from the show, and which he also recorded, was "Mama's Gone Young, Daddy's Gone Old." He remained with the show when Fullers' Theatres took over the production for a season Melbourne's Princess Theatre in mid-July. After the 12 weeks season ended Bluett returned to Sydney to take up a brief contract at the Tivoli with J.C. Williamson's. Although his engagement appears to have ended in mid-November he was back at the theatre on 12 December with son Gus for a midnight fundraiser given to limbless soldiers.



FIVE WARD IMPRESSIONS FROM "SUNNY"  
Fred Heider, Fred Bluett, Wyn Richmond, Van Lowe, and Jack Morrison are the five players from "Sunny" at the Princess here caricatured by Ward.

*Table Talk* (Melbourne) 18 Aug. 1927, 28.

Bluett's experience in the new medium appears to have had quite an impact on him. In late-December that same year, for example, he organised to take his own troupe of artists to Newcastle to play the Bohemia Marquee Theatre. For

that engagement he named the company [The Radios](#) (it was also known as the Bohemia Radios). Bluett was back broadcasting for 2FC in February, May, November and December 1925, while also making at least two appearances in Melbourne for 3LO (August and September). He appeared again on 2FC in January and February 1926, and as noted above, performed live on air with Roy Rene from the stage of Sydney's Haymarket Theatre for the same station in August 1926 and February 1927. Other live broadcasting opportunities in 1928 came from 2BL (Sydney), and 3LO (Melbourne), with the latter station securing the comedian for numerous appearances over the latter months of the year. Most of these broadcasts were heard around Australia on relay. The following year he performed live on 2BL (Apr., Aug-Dec.), and 2FC (July, Aug), and 3LO (Aug.).

From 1927 stations around the country had also begun playing Bluett's gramophone recordings, and in some instances giving him high rotation. Among his most popular songs from this period were "Mama's Gone Young, Papa's Gone Old," "Henry's Made a Lady Out of Lizzie," and "There Ought to be a Law Against That." Radio listings indicate that his recordings continued to find favour with programmers well into the 1930s. Advertisements and new release publicity indicate that Bluett recorded for both the Regal and Parlophone labels.

In addition to his stage and radio commitments Bluett also joined several other Australian performers in the filming of a series of "talkie" shorts. Reportedly the first Australian-made synchronised sound pictures (they were produced in Sydney mid-way through 1929), the shorts were the result of a collaboration between the proprietors of Australtone talking equipment, Broadcasters Limited (Melbourne), and cinematographer Arthur Higgins. The inventor of the technology was young engineer W.J. Tighe. Filmed at the Sydney Showgrounds lecture hall, the other artists included humourist [Hector St Clair](#), singers Norman Wright and Charles Wade, violinist Mabel Barnham, and Rohmer and Corrie and Don Bennett (songs at the piano). Broadcasters Limited provided the recorded sound. The films were first exhibited at a trade screening in the Queen's Theatre, Crows Nest (Sydney) on 31 July. Bluett's performance of "I Know Where the Flies Go" was later one of the support features exhibited with *The Donovan Affair*, an American talkie which played select Australian metropolitan and regional venues beginning in Sydney in August 1929.

For Bluett the 1920s ended with two major engagements. The first was an [Old Time Minstrels](#) retrospective which opened at the [Grand Opera House](#), Sydney, in early November 1929 (following on from a Veterans of Variety season). The following month he played the dame in *Babes in the Wood* at the same theatre during a matinee pantomime season produced by George Marlow.

## 1930-1942

In 1930, some thirteen years after his first feature film role, Bluett secured a role in Australia's first full-length "talkie," [Showgirl's Luck](#). In addition to playing the part of Hollis, he also undertook the role of assistant to director Norman Dawn. Interestingly, the film's narrative actually concerns the making of a fictional "first" talkie by an Australian company.



*Truth* (Sydney) 3 June 1934, 25.

Although filming took place as early as May 1930 *Showgirl's Luck* did not premiere until December the following year. This was because original sound-on-disc system was quickly superseded by more advanced sound technology. Dawn eventually transferred the sound to an optical track but by then the film's storyline was viewed as passé. Its limited release in both Australia and Great Britain was largely due to negative critical responses and poor publicity.



Source: Oz Movies

Five years later Bluett revived his famous pirate character for Ken G. Hall's *Cinesound Varieties* (1934). The first part of the film involves a demonstration of the evolution of the waltz by music director [Hamilton Webber](#) and a 30-piece State Orchestra. The second part, titled "Nautical Nonsense," is a musical revue featuring more than 60 variety artists and musicians. For his turn Bluett rebooted his famous Boy Scouts sketch as a shipload of Sydney pirates.

During the first few years of 1930s Bluett was able to continue working in much the same way that he had throughout his earlier career, even despite the depression and increasing competition to live theatre from moving pictures. In late-October 1930, for example, he travelled to Melbourne to headline the second edition of Hugh D. McIntosh's revue *Here's Luck*. He remained in the city until the following year to take on similar high profile roles in other revues like *Central 928* and *Top Hole*. Ernest C. Rolls engaged him for a support role in his 1932 revue *Venus Ltd* (Theatre Royal; Sydney). Interestingly, his son Gus was one of the stars of that production. Bluett was in Melbourne again between August and late-October appearing at the Fullers' *Bijou Theatre* headquarters in both vaudeville and revue. Among his co-stars were George Ward and Bert Le Blanc. Prior to the Fullers' engagement he had spent a couple of weeks in Newcastle (NSW) with Humphrey Bishop's *Dandies*. One of the Dandie's shows (22 Aug.) was broadcast in its entirety by local radio station 2HD.

In June 1933 Bluett was accorded a massive reception when he went back to Adelaide for a season with Harold Lennon's *Tivoli Follies*. Also working in the same company were Nellie Kolle and Ron Shand. Shortly after his return to Sydney Bluett was one several high-profile entertainers to feature in a "Grand Musicale" at the Town Hall. Held on 10 November the event was sponsored and produced by the White Wings company.

In between these live theatre engagements Bluett continued to be heard around Australia via radio on a regular basis. Most of these broadcasts were initially relayed from Sydney station 2BL, with some also emanating from 2FC. He is also known to have later appeared on air for 2KY and 2GB. It is perhaps not surprising that Bluett's radio engagements were of a varied nature. In addition to his comedy work he occasionally hosted variety programmes or specials, and was sometimes involved in community concerts. For several years he was also closely aligned with the A.B.C. Dance Band, providing comic interludes between the orchestra's musical numbers.

8.0: The Carol Quartet. 8.7: "The Air We Celebrate." A musical novelty. 8.22: Fred Bluett, comedian. 8.31: Clive Amadio, saxophone solo. 8.34: Hilda Lane, soprano. 8.37: Vincent Aspey, violinist. 8.40: Joe Cahill, entertainer. 8.47: The A.B.C. Orchestra, conducted by E. J. Roberts. 8.54: Fred Bluett, comedian. 9.4: Al Maling, marimbaphone solo. 9.7: The Carol Quartet. 9.14: Joe Cahill, entertainer. 9.21: Hilda Lane, soprano. 9.24: The A.B.C. String Quartet. 9.30:

#### 2FC, Sydney.

8.0: Variety programme by the A.B.C. Dance Band, Jack Lumsdaine (the radio rascal), Clive Amadio (saxophonist) and Fred Bluett (comedian). 8.44: Gardening talk by "Redgum."

24 Apr. 1931

*Western Mail* (Perth) 23 Apr. 1931, 25.

2BL 22 Aug. 1930

*Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* (NSW)  
22 Aug. 1930, 11.

From 1934 onwards Bluett began to wind down his touring commitments, preferring to accept short, one-off seasons in capital cities or major regional centres, and preferably those closer to home.<sup>26</sup> These included, for example, a headline engagement in Wollongong for Les Shipp (1934). His Sydney theatre appearances included suburban theatres and/or cinemas, club functions, harbour concert cruises (Sydney Harbour)<sup>27</sup>, and fundraisers (both industry-based and war fund events). These engagements were typically either between-films entertainment or small-time vaudeville shows. Somewhat surprisingly he spent some time in Brisbane over the 1935/36 period working for Graham Mitchell as a headline artists with both the *Serenaders* and *Jesters* companies. During his time in Brisbane he appeared in shows at the Town Hall, *Theatre Royal* and *Rex Theatre* (Fortitude Valley). On the highlights of 1940 was his appearance in Newcastle for a war fund matinee staged by the Newcastle Theatre Managers association. Among the star-studded line-up were Roy Rene, Sadie Gale, Mike Connors, Queenie Paul, Ike Delavale, Minnie Love, Billy Kershaw and Maggie Buckley.

Although Bluett turned sixty in 1936, he was still able to make a comfortable living alternating between live stage work and radio. His "fruity" voice was well suited to broadcasting. According to Claude McKay, he had "unction, an elastic face and great comic gusto" and looked "well-nourished and dapper, with just that sartorial jauntiness" one associated with a vaudeville artist.<sup>28</sup> So well-known was he that listeners around Australasia had no trouble in visualising him over the airwaves, whether it be in variety sketches or in other forms of entertainment. His reputation also led to him hosting the Australian Broadcasting Commission's series *Music Hall Memories* in 1938.

Bluett's biggest successes in radio were in the 1940s. The first of these, *The Night Watchman*, is a collection of stories originally written by W.W. Jacobs and adapted for radio by Max Afford. Produced by 2FC (Sydney) and transmitted around the country on relay, the series featured several other well-known variety entertainers - Phil Smith, Arthur Hemsley and Bert Barton. The first episode went to air on 5 August 1940. Later that same month the A.B.C.

<sup>26</sup> Bluett and his wife are believed to have resided in the eastern beachside suburb of Bondi.

<sup>27</sup> Bluett is believed to have been involved in a series of harbour cruise concerts in 1940, possibly extending back to the start of the year and continuing on at least into late-spring. See Jessie Collings. "Singing on the Harbour." *Sun* (Sydney) 31 Mar

<sup>28</sup> C.M. [Claude McKay], 38.

premiered the light entertainment show, *Out of the Bag*. Produced by Harry Pringle and featuring Jim Davidson and his A.B.C. Dance Band, the show comprised a mix of old and new, and involved quizzes, sketches comedy, music and songs. For the show, which replaced both "Mo" and "Music Hall Memories," Bluett was engaged to play Mr Walker, a whimsical cockney barrowman, in a segment called "Mr Walker Wants to Know."<sup>29</sup>



**FRED BLUETT,**  
Father of that beloved comedian, the late Gus Bluett, and a popular comedian in his own right. Comedy runs in the Bluett family. Fred's daughter, Kitty, is making a name for herself in comedy over the air, and her sister, Belle, is married to a comedian in London. Fred Bluett portrays the whimsical "Mr. Walker" in "Out of the Bag" on Saturday nights in the National programme.

*Bowen Independent (Qld) 6 Sept. 1940, 3.*



*Fred Bluett, still going strong in the role of public entertainer in Sydney.*

*Sporting Globe (Melbourne) 20 Apr. 1940, 7.*

Interestingly, the A.B.C. orchestrated a nationwide publicity campaign for its leading celebrities around this same period,<sup>30</sup> with Bluett seemingly the focus of attention. His photo and accompanying biographical and/or career blurbs appeared in regional newspapers in most states for much of the second half of the year.<sup>31</sup>

Possibly his biggest radio career role, and also his last, was playing the character, Albert, a Cockney air-raid warden, in the popular drama *Searchlights over London*. By December 1942 Bluett had appeared in more than forty episodes. On 3 December 1942, however, the actor/comedian made his final appearance in the series. After leaving the A.B.C. studios he returned home and sometime later that night died in his sleep of a heart attack. Reports of his death were published widely throughout Australia and New Zealand. Bluett was survived by his wife and daughters. Belle had married the variety star Jimmy Jewell, while Kitty had become a popular radio actress. She returned to Britain in 1948 and went on to carve out a very successful career in theatre and film.

During his career in Australia and New Zealand, Fred Bluett worked for numerous variety firms and appeared with many high profile troupes organisations. In addition to John Fuller Snr and Harry Rickards these included: **John N. McCallum** (Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane), **Harry Rickards Tivoli Theatres Ltd**, **Fullers Theatres**, **Humphrey Bishop** (Comedy and Operatic Company), **J. C. Williamson's Ltd**, Leonard Davis (Palace Gardens, Perth), **Ted Holland** (Brisbane), **Harry Clay** (Sydney), **J.C. Bain** (Tasmania) and **Dix-Baker** (Newcastle). In its obituary for Bluett the *Sun* newspaper (Sydney) proposed that Fred Bluett would be best remembered for his gags. According to the writer his final words spoken to an audience, in the role of the air warden Albert were: "If I had to choose between ten bob and a kiss from you Liza it'd be hard to take the ten bob."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bluett does not appear to have originated his *Out of the Bag* role. In 1940 the *Shepparton Advertiser* records: The present Mr. Walker of the "Wants to Know" problems is Fred Bluett; but the first to introduce Mr. Walker to Australian radio audiences was Joe Brennan. He made fame with his presentation of the genial cockney barrowman ("**Joe Brennan Comedian**." 22 Nov. 1940, 3).

<sup>30</sup> See for example, "**A.B.C. Artists**," *Cootamundra Herald* (NSW) 29 Aug. 1940, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Including, for example, **New South Wales Northern Star** (Lismore), *Grenfell Record*, *Manilla Express*, *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga), *Picton Post* • **Queensland Nambour Chronicle**, *Warwick Daily News*, *Bowen Independent*, *Cloncurry Advocate* • **South Australia Recorder** (Port Pirie), *Border Watch* (Mount Gambier), *Laura Standard* • **Victoria Shepparton Advertiser**, *Kilmore Free Press*,

<sup>32</sup> "**Death of Fred Bluett**," 3.

## SEE ALSO

[Gus Bluett](#) • [Kitty Bluett](#) • [The Brooklyn Entertainers](#) • [Diamond Variety Co](#) •  
[The Town Topics](#) • [The Radios](#) • [Vaudeville Specialty Union](#) • [Bluett & Mo](#)

## HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Bluett's nephew, [Les Coney](#), was also a highly respected comedian and variety entertainer. Coney's mother, was Margaret E. Coney (nee Goodwin/Bluett). Another older sibling was Augustus Robert Goodin/Bluett who served with the 7<sup>th</sup> Queen's Own Hussars. He died at the Military Hospital, Peitermaritzburg, South Africa in 1898 aged 26.<sup>33</sup>
2. In November 1895 Bluett and two other men were charged with behaving in an insulting manner at South Yarra on 25 November. A few days later all three were given the option of a 10 shillings fine or three days' imprisonment.<sup>34</sup>
3. Peter Downes incorrectly claims in *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand - The First 70 Years* (1975) that Fred Bluett had been worked for Harry Rickards prior to joining the Fullers in New Zealand. Having noted John Fuller Snr's decision to allow his son Benjamin to take increasing responsibility for the family's emerging theatrical business, Downes' writes:

Ben brought in outside artists to augment the family show, among them Will Watkins, Will Stevens and the man who became the first Fuller super-star, Fred Bluett. Fred had been one of Rickards stalwarts in Australia... The Fullers starred Fred Bluett in their shows for several years and he was always enormously popular. His song "How De Do De" was an especial favourite and he was rarely allowed to go home from any performance without singing it (147).

As this biography indicates Fred Bluett did not begin working for Harry Rickards until 1902, almost four years after he first appeared in a Fullers' show. In this instance Downe's may have been misled by the Fullers' fabricated publicity blurbs which were published in several Auckland newspapers in the lead-up to his debut with the family company in November 1898 [see below]. No evidence has been found from any Australian newspapers which supports the claim that Bluett had been engaged by Harry Rickards prior to his arrival in New Zealand, let alone that he was by then a Tivoli "stalwart."

1<sup>st</sup> AGRICULTURAL HALL 6<sup>th</sup>  
Under the management of  
MR JOHN FULLER.  
SATURDAY NEXT, NOVEMBER 5<sup>th</sup>.  
MR WILL WATKINS'  
MUSICAL COMEDY COMPANY.  
NEW ARTISTS.  
MR FRED BLUETT—Eccentric Humorous  
Vocalist, late of Harry Rickards' Company.  
MR H. L. JANSEN — Descriptive and  
Character Vocalist.  
Reappearance of MISS ALICE MAHER.  
First time of Musical Comedy

Character Impersonations—MR FRED  
BLUETT, direct from Sydney Tivoli

*Auckland Star* (NZ) 10 Nov. 1898, 8.

*Observer* (Auckland, NZ) 5 Nov. 1898, 8.

4. In a 1913 *Theatre Magazine* article titled "Bluett in Vaudeville," Walter Fuller recalls that had it not been for comedian Will Watkins, Bluett may never have got a start with his family:

"It was wholly through Watkins that we decided to give Bluett a show. John Fuller Snr had seen [him] in Dunedin. He was emphatically of the opinion that Bluett was no good. Still, such was Watkins confidence in Bluett, and so persistent were his representations on his behalf that we consented to put him on - at the princely salary of £2/10 a week. Bluett opened with us at the Agricultural Hall, Auckland, on a Saturday night. He got the bird, in the fullest sense of the word. He was simply howled off the stage. Of course this satisfied John Fuller Snr, that he was right in not wanting Bluett at any price. As the week advanced Bluett did little better. But Watkins stuck by him. He was sure that Bluett would yet come out on top. The next Saturday night Bluett happened to strike a song that rather tickled the audience. He was enthusiastically recalled."

<sup>33</sup> "Deaths." *Age* 29 Oct. 1898, 5.

<sup>34</sup> "Prahnan Court." *Prahnan Chronicle* 30 Nov. 1895, 4.

This song was really the turning point in Bluett's career. Mr Fuller recalls some of the lines of it as follows:-

Slap dab, slap dab  
Up and down the brick-wall;  
Slap dab all day long -  
In and out the corners  
Round the Johnny Horners  
We were a pair of fair-clean goners  
Slap dab, slap dab.  
Up and down the brick-wall;  
Talk about a fancy ball  
I put more whitewash on the old dutch  
Than I did upon the garden wall.

Mr Fuller explains that Bluett, spurred on by the hard times he had gone through and nightly getting more confidence in himself soon became all the rage. "It wasn't long before he began to rival Watkins - one of the finest comedians ever seen in the business. From there we took Bluett to Dunedin to open the Alhambra. He was an instantaneous success. He appeared at the Alhambra for nine months at a stretch - a phenomenal season in view of the limited population... the popularity of Bluett's farewell season in Wellington was extraordinary... I never turned away as much money in my life as I did on the occasion of Bluett's last night."

As noted above (page 2), Walter Fullers' recall that Bluett was "given the bird" for much of his first week with the company is questionable, given that several Auckland newspapers indicate that he went over well (see for example the "Additional Quotations and Anecdotes" section below).

In the same *Theatre Magazine* article Fuller further records that during Bluett's time in New Zealand the comedian was required to work as an endman in the family's minstrel shows. In Fuller's estimate Bluett demonstrated a talent that made him one of the finest exponents of the endman role ever seen in that country (31). Although he suggests that Australians may never have seen the comedian perform as an endman this was not altogether true. Reviews of Bluett's appearances in Melbourne and Tasmania during the 1890s indicate that he did appear as the "bones" endman for Dan Scullien's shows and the Vaudeville Specialty Union.<sup>35</sup> It is likely, however, that he stopped performing in blackface during the Fullers 1901 Empire Theatre season in Sydney. This was certainly the case after he joined Harry Rickards organisation shortly afterwards, as the entrepreneur had all but banished the minstrel format from his shows (apart from occasional retrospective revivals).

5. One of Bluett's most popular song sketches is spelled variously as "Mooch About" or "Mooch Abart."



*Sun (Sydney) 10 May 1929, 2.*

6. In her 2005 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry on Bluett, Martha Rutledge writes: "Interested in boxing and amateur theatricals, he appeared as a vocalist at smoke concerts before returning to Britain. Stranded at Dunedin, New Zealand, when Ada Juneen's company folded in 1899, he sang comic songs at smoke concerts and amused (Sir) Benjamin Fuller who gave him an eighteen-month contract in 1900." A number of errors and issues require further contemplation here:

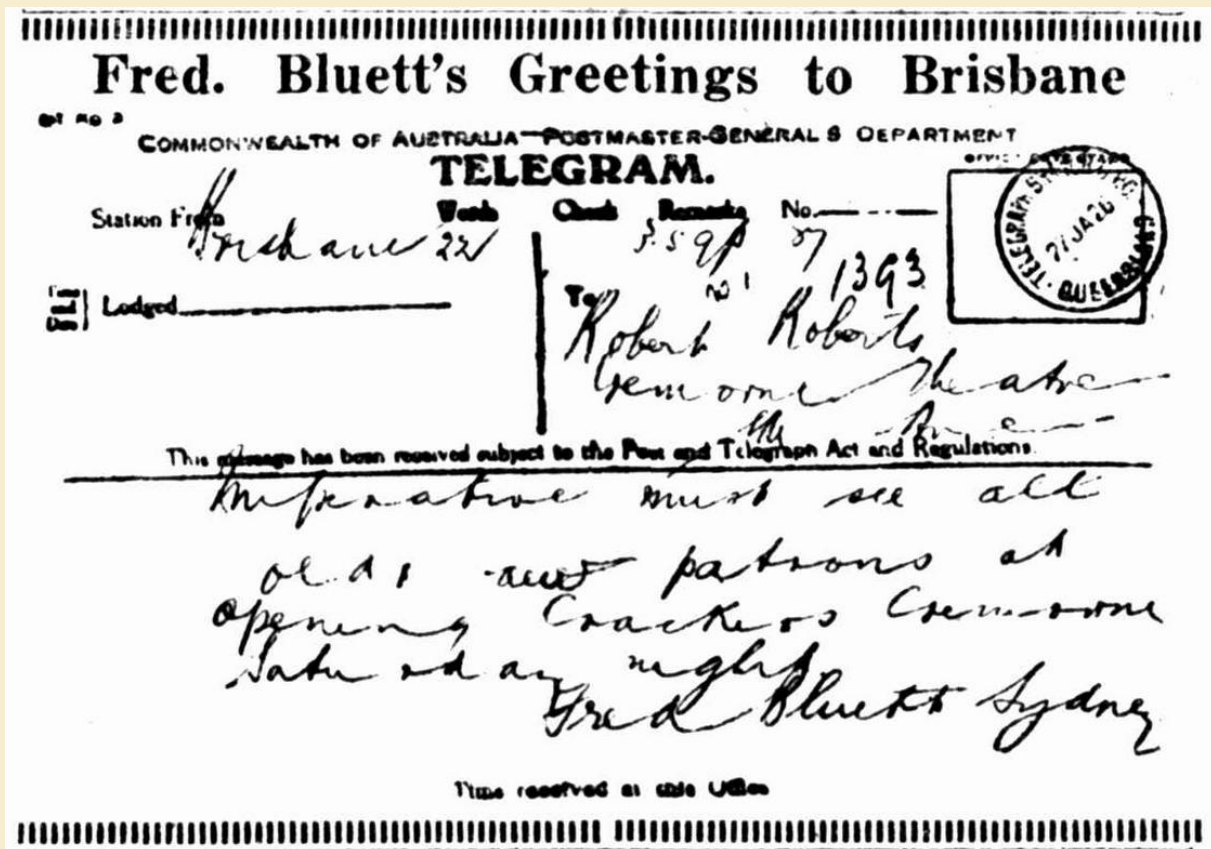
- i) Contemporary reports indicate that Bluett was more heavily involved in cycling than in boxing during his early days in Melbourne.
- ii) There is no actual or circumstantial evidence indicating that Bluett returned or even intended returning to Britain in the mid to late-1890s, or indeed that Ada Juneen planned to take her company there after the New Zealand tour.
- iii) Bluett was stranded in Christchurch not Dunedin following the end of the failed Ada Juneen tour, and the year was 1898 not 1899. Routledge was likely influenced by several inaccurate reports published in Australia in the months that followed.

<sup>35</sup> See for example "Vaudeville Specialty Union," 3.

iv) Bluett first appeared with the Fullers in New Zealand in 1898. At the time that the family's business operations were still under the control of John Fuller Snr. Routledge cites no evidence for her claim that Ben Fuller (later Sir Benjamin Fuller) signed the contract.

Bluett's ADB entry also includes the somewhat contentious and subjective assumption that he was less versatile than his son. By way of example Routledge points to Gus's ability to captivate Australian audiences in musical comedy roles such as Reggie in *The Five O'Clock Girl* (1929). This follows on from her assessment of his father's career in the 1920s as being primarily located in vaudeville. There is no doubt that Gus Bluett was an extraordinarily versatile entertainer/performer, or that he achieved much popularity and critical acclaim during his all-too brief career. As the above biography indicates, however, Fred Bluett's career as a variety entertainer and performer was also marked by extraordinary versatility. His success in adapting to the broadcasting medium provides further evidence of his abilities as an all-round entertainer.

7. One Fred Bluett's more popular creations was his pirate persona. Although it came to prominence in Australia during the 1920s and was incorporated into Ken G. Hall 1934 film *Cinesound Varieties*, the character may have been initially developed by the comedian in New Zealand as early as December 1903. At that time Bluett had been engaged by the Fullers to play a pirate in their *Robinson Crusoe* pantomime. In claiming that Bluett "created his famous role" in the 1920s, Martha Routledge was likely unaware of Bluett's involvement in the 1903 New Zealand production.
8. A six-year old Western Australian racehorse was renamed Fred Bluett in mid-1914. The gelding (by Challenger-Songstress) was owned by V. O'Hara and trained by R. Vettler.<sup>36</sup> It remained active in the state under its new name until at least 1919.



*Telegraph* (Brisbane) 29 Jan. 1926, 3.

9. "Fred Bluett" appears to have been used as a Cockney (aka Australian) rhyming slang for "common or boarding-house table cruets"<sup>37</sup> from at least 1915. One of the earliest known references appears in Perth's *Sunday Times* in July that year.<sup>38</sup> In October 1916 the same paper published a par noting that a "blackboy soldier, one of the hardest cases in the camp, [had] considerably astonished and puzzled a lady helper" at the previous Sunday's Y.M.C.A. Lonely Soldier's Tea:

<sup>36</sup> "Sport of Kings." *Sun* (Kalgoorlie, WA) 9 Aug. 1914, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Cruets are typically used for serving liquid condiments such as olive oil and vinegar. Unlike carafes, cruets have a stopper and/or a lid.

<sup>38</sup> "Sunday Salad." *Sunday Times* (Perth) 11 July 1915, 20.

"Missus," he remarked...  
 "Yes." She answered.  
 "Railroad the Fred Bluett up the Cain-and-Abel," he said.  
 "The what?" she answered in amaze.  
 "The Fred Bluett," he answered pointing to the condiment utensil. I can't tackle a Deason Skinner without the 'quick-stepper' and the 'march-an'-halt."<sup>39</sup>

- 10.** Bluett's celebrity status saw him become a popular choice for impersonators, both male and female, especially during his four years overseas (1913-1916) and beyond. Among those identified to date are Edward Elliott (ca. 1913), Alice Marton (ca. 1913), and Bob Smith (ca. 1921).

In 1914 Ted Bailey (Bailey's Cats and Dogs) developed an original animal pose based on Bluett's well-known character study the "Sundowner." Adelaide's *Advertiser* records that Baily and his dogs presented a typical Australian scene.<sup>40</sup>

- 11.** In 1936 Bluett's son Gus died in Melbourne of haemorrhaging gastric ulcers. Known as a "man of infinite wit and charm," the still unmarried Gus had lived exuberantly and refused to slow down, despite warnings from his doctors. His death as not surprisingly a shattering blow to his father. Indeed, a 1926 feature article looking at Gus Bluett's comedic inheritance gave the twenty-two year old a chance to give some insight into both his father's influence and his own unusual upbringing;

"I owe everything to the Dad... we are far more than just father and son - real pals." His father, Bred Bluett, the well-known comedian, always had his family with him. "At different times when I was a boy," Gus... goes on, "Mother used to suggest placing me at school and leaving me behind. I remember once in London she suggested it when they were going on tour, but Dad would keep me with him, and said, 'I will teach him all he needs to know.' And he did ("Comedy," 12).



**Gus Bluett**

Source: National Library of Australia

## ADDITIONAL ANECDOTES AND QUOTATIONS

- 1898:** Mr Will Watkins and his musical comedy company made their initial bow before an Auckland audience when they produced an amusing musical comedy entitled *Husbands and Wives*, which went splendidly from start to finish... Mr Fred Bluett was good as the injured husband, although at times rather inaudible. Mr Bluett would do well to bear this in mind, for some of the best points were entirely lost... During the comedy the following songs ere sung: - "Sing me an Irish Song," by Mr Fred Bluett... [and in the final section he] snag a comic song in a quaint original style, for which he was also encored ("Mr Will Watkins," 5).
- 1905:** Mr. Fred Bluett had a remarkable reception having to appear no less than five times, and if they had had their way the audience would have brought him out five times more ("Theatre Royal," *Brisbane Courier* 14 Aug. 1905, 5).
- 1905:** Mr. Fred Bluett is in the higher class, and the audiences have been quick to notice his merit. He opened with a sketch on the war correspondent, introducing the name of a well-known versifier, and in response to hearty encores he ran through a long list of songs, and finally yielded to a demand for another repetition of "Mooch About," a character sketch which he has made famous in Brisbane ("Theatre Royal." *Brisbane Courier* 18 Sept. 1905, 5).
- 1905:** Mr. Fred Bluett continues to be a great attraction, and on Saturday night he as generous to his admirers, as he submitted to repeated recalls. Mr. Bluett has solved the problem of entertaining an audience without appealing to the baser nature and the absence of objectionable features in his songs are their greatest charm to many ("Theatre Royal." *Brisbane Courier* 9 Oct. 1905, 5).
- 1906:** Fred Bluett has become quite a favourite with his whimsicalities (*Theatre Magazine* Nov. 1906, 9).

<sup>39</sup> "War is War." *Sunday Times* (Perth) 9 Oct. 1916, 8.

<sup>40</sup> "King's Theatre." *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 7 Feb. 1914, 22.

- 1913:** L.W. Dodge has vivid recollections of Fred Bluett and [Will Whitburn](#) in their early days. "I first heard Bluett," he remarked in conversation with *The Theatre*, when he was with the Fullers in Tasmania. It must have been over ten years ago, or just when the Fullers were starting there. Bluett was appearing with them in Launceston. One of his songs was "Mooch About." He sucked and sucked on his pipe without getting the semblance of a draw from it. Then striking a meditative attitude he remarked, 'I don't think this Robur Tea is what it's cracked up to be!' He was inimitable even in those far-back days... No man has ever been brought from England or America that could touch either Bluett or Whitburn in their respective lines of work" ("Whitburn and Bluett," 31).
- 1913:** Fred Bluett is in a terrible quandary this week. He doesn't know whether to turn the vaudeville game up and go in for professional punting, or give his commissions to Porky [[Jack Kearns](#)] to play up at the gee-gees (*Australian Variety* 22 July 1920, 21).
- 1916:** Mr. Fred Bluett, billed as "The Australian Comedian," has just finished a 10 months tour of the English provinces, playing the principal comedy parts in a revue by Fred Kitchen ("[Music and Drama](#)." *Brisbane Courier* 23 Sept. 1916, 12).
- 1917:** Fred Bluett returns to the Tivoli (Sydney) on February 5. Did Fred have to go to England to convince Hugh D. McIntosh how good he really is? Fred's earliest - and in the opinion of some - his best work was done with the Fullers (*Theatre Magazine* Feb. 1917, 31).
- 1917:** "The Tramp": Bluett was in the Fullers' bill with which they opened at Dunedin in 1899, and for some years was immensely popular wherever he appeared on the firm's bills. I saw him at the Melbourne Opera House just prior to his departure for England, and he was then by no means as entertaining as he was twelve years back. Of course his trip may have improved him. I hope it has. I think his "Mooch Abart," and other turns of the kind were far ahead of his later work. He was an excellent farce comedian, and should do well in revue (*Theatre Magazine* June 1917, 50).
- 1917:** Fred Bluett, few people know holds the record for an Australian in flying. It took place while Fred was in London and a very old friend met him and offered to take him up in his 'plane, which Fred readily accepted. This flight of course, was a success, but very sensational for the time when in the air, as they lost their bearings and thought it was all u. They gained a tremendous height and the record was established, they not knowing it. After some considerable [time] and anxiety among their friends, they landed safely. Now mention a flight to Fred - but do not wait for your answer (*Australian Variety* ca. Aug. 1917).<sup>41</sup>
- 1917:** Fred Bluett was very well received at Clay's opening at the Eden Gardens, manly, on Saturday last, being forced to respond to several encores. The marine suburb folk just "eating" Fred's work, which was of his usual high standard (*Australian Variety* 20 Oct. 1917, n.pag.).
- 1922:** Always Popular: A parody of well-known songs was Fred Bluett's opening number. This was followed by "A Seaman Bold You See in me." In the incidental patter he remarks that he has the best job he ever had in his life - he's a deckhand on a submarine! "The Body in the Bag" is his third song. Three widely-varying characterisations - in make-up and treatment. The lot of them are superbly presented. Mr Bluett as enthusiastically applauded from all parts of the house (*Theatre Magazine* Sept. 1922, 19).
- 1923:** Messrs. Gus and Fred Bluett, who are entering their last week, appropriately chose as their main item, "Good-bye-e-e," which to use a theatrical phrase, "went big." They also figured in several comedy interludes, and added to their popularity with fresh verses from "Mr Gallagher and Mr Sheen." The younger one of the two also appeared in a novelty number, "The Busy Brisbane Fly" ("[Bohemia](#)." *Brisbane Courier* 24 Nov. 1923, 17).
- 1926:** For many Fred Bluett had written his name in bold dashing characters right across the head of the bill, and although he gave a number of bright songs unfamiliar to Brisbane there were such insistent cries for "The Body in the Bag," that it was courteously removed from cold storage and placed before the audience, apparently as fresh as it had appeared to be two decades earlier ("[The Crackers at Cremorne](#)." *Brisbane Courier* 1 Feb. 1926, 15).

<sup>41</sup> The citation details for this quotation, which was photocopied at the Mitchell Library in 1997, have been mislaid. If you have any details regarding the online location of the image please contact the AVTA.

- 1926:** Fred Bluett manages to get into financial difficulties, and his efforts to fill his purse cause no end of merriment... Ever since Fred Bluett and the company have found it possible to portray "Impossibilities," Cremorne patrons are always eagerly watchful for these humorous sketches. This week's "Impossibilities" touch on a number of local questions, and include skits on the servant question, the North Quay question, the Brisbane mail, the Post Office, and a journalistic jar...Once again Fred Bluett was the feather that tickled the house to laughter, and he would persist, metaphorically speaking, in tickling his audience "under their mental arm pits until they could stand no more ("[Cremorne Theatre.](#)" *Brisbane Courier* 5 Apr. 1926, 15).
- 1926:** A New Comedy Firm: The linking up of Roy Rene (famous "Mo") and Fred Bluett marks an era in the history of the music-hall in Australia, and the pair proved very amusing in a nautical sketch. As time rolls on in its relentless march the gifted pair will work even better together, and the raw edges of the turn will be polished up as smooth as Windbag's tongue. The new firm of comedy merchants promises to be a big thing in the future (*Theatre Magazine* June 1926, 13).
- 1926:** At the afternoon and evenings sessions "Mo" and Fred Bluett will be offered in a brand new sketch entitled "Oxford bags," in which the popular humorists burlesque the latest mode which has created so much discussion. Their season has been extended for another week by popular demand ("[Tivoli Theatre.](#)" *Brisbane Courier* 5 July 1926, 17).
- 1926:** Fred Bluett is known as the comedian who never smiles. "The Body in the Bag," and "Roses and Radishes" are among his best known successes ("[Bluett and Mo: Strand on Saturday.](#)" *Newcastle Sun* 2 Sept. 1926, 9).
- 1968:** Then there was dear old Fred Bluett. I used to go fishing with Fred at Double Bay, Sydney, and the day was baited with Fred's new and original humour, but he never could resist one favourite standby gag. He'd join a crowd watching a sweating gang of navvies digging a ditch in the blazing sun, or shaking on the end of a clattering jack-hammer, and Fred would remark in a loud voice, "Look at those lazy blighters. too lazy to learn a comic song." Fred made his vaudeville fame with a Scout Master sketch including an ill-sorted troupe of funny kids including his own son, Gus, probably the best comedian that Australia ever knew in the musical comedy field (Moloney, 91).
- 1983:** Fred Bluett was also a minstrel comedian who performed with Fullers when they began running vaudeville shows at the turn of the century. Bluett also travelled to new Zealand and performed with Fullers Waxworks and variety shows in the 1890s. His specialty as comic songs in which he frequently satirized affectation and pretention. In one of his most successful songs. "The Hobble Skirt," he impersonated a society matron complete with the appropriate costume, mincing gait and affected mannerisms. The technique of mocking figures of some standing in society as common to many early Australian comedians (Bard, 68).



Bluett and Mo, described by their press agent as Australia's "household word," comedians are delighting Tivoli audiences.



## ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

Although extensive, the following list of theatrical engagements remains incomplete and should be considered a snapshot of Fred Bluett's career only.

- 1893:** D. SCULLIEN Melbourne (Centennial Hall, South Yarra; 12 July > Brooklyn Entertainers).<sup>42</sup>
- 1894:** D. SCULLIEN Melbourne (Alfred Hall, St Kilda Junction; 5 July > Brooklyn Entertainers) ► PRINCE ALBERT LODGE (I.O.O.F.) Melbourne (Cecil Place, Prahran; 10 Oct. > Pound night) ► n/a Melbourne (Centennial Hall, South Yarra; 19 Dec. > McLelland benefit concert).
- 1895:** D. SCULLIEN Melbourne (Centennial Hall, South Yarra; 3 Apr. > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co) ► CHARNWOOD LODGE (U.A.O.D) Melbourne (Charnwood Lodge Room; Prahran; 4 Apr.) ► D. SCULLIEN Melbourne (n/e, Richmond; 11 Apr. > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co) • (Centennial Hall, South Yarra; 6 May > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co) • (Alfred Hall, St Kilda Junction; 28 June > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co) • (Centennial Hall, South Yarra; 17 July > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co) • (Alfred Hall, St Kilda Junction; 3 Aug. > Diamond Minstrel & Variety Co).
- 1897:** JOHN MATLOCK Hobart (Temperance Hall; 2-31 Dec. > Vaudeville Specialty Union).
- 1898:** JOHN MATLOCK Hobart (Temperance Hall; 1- ca. 10 Jan. > Vaudeville Specialty Union) • Tasmania (regional tour; ca. 12 Jan.-early Feb. > Vaudeville Specialty Union).
- Note:** John Matlock's regional Tasmanian tour included seasons in Queenstown (Cairns Hall; 15 Jan. -) • Zeehan (Academy of Music; 20-22, 25 Jan) • Strahan (Pontifax Hall; 26 Jan.-) • Dundas (no details).
- 1901:** JOHN FULLER & SONS New Zealand (no details; 1 Jan. - ca. Apr.) • Sydney (Empire Theatre; 20 Apr. - 14 June > John Fuller's Empire Minstrels & Specialty Co) ► PERCY ST JOHN Brisbane (Theatre Royal; 17 June - 13 July > End of Royal Burlesque and Specialty Co season) ► JOHN FULLER & SONS Sydney (Empire Theatre; 20 July - ca. 14 Sept. > John Fuller's Empire Minstrels & Specialty Co) ► HARRY RICKARDS: Melbourne (Rickards' New Opera House; 21 Sept. - > Harry Rickards Tivoli Co) • HARRY RICKARDS Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 21-31 Dec. - > Harry Rickards Tivoli Co).
- 1902:** HARRY RICKARDS Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. - 25 Mar. > Harry Rickards Tivoli Vaudeville Co) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 29 Mar. - 16 May > Harry Rickards Tivoli Vaudeville Co) ► JOHN FULLER & SONS Launceston, Tasmania (Empire Theatre; 31 May - 4 July > Fullers' Polite Entertainers) • Hobart (Temperance Hall; 5 July - 8 Sept. > Fullers' Polite Entertainers) • Launceston, Tasmania (Empire Theatre; 9 Sept. - 27 Oct. > Fullers' Polite Entertainers) • Hobart (Temperance Hall; 28 Oct. - 29 Nov. > Fullers' Polite Entertainers) • Launceston, Tasmania (Empire Theatre; 1-13 Dec. > Fullers' Polite Entertainers) ► HARRY RICKARDS: Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 20-31 Dec. > Harry Rickards Tivoli Vaudeville Co).
- 1903:** HARRY RICKARDS Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 1-10 Jan.) • Perth (Theatre Royal; 28 Jan. - 14 Feb.) • Western Australian regional tour; 16 -24 Feb.) • Fremantle, W.A. (Town Hall; 27 Feb. - 2 Mar.) ► FRANK GOURLAY: Launceston, Tasmania (Empire Theatre; 28 Mar. - 13 May > Gourlay's Palace of Varieties) ► JOHN FULLER & SONS New Zealand (Dominion tour; 18 May - 31 Dec.).
- Note 1:** Harry Rickards' Western Australian tour itinerary incl. Northam (Town Hall; 16 Feb.) • Boulder (Mechanics' Institute; 17-18 Feb.) • Kalgoorlie (His Majesty's Theatre; 19-24 Feb.). Rickards' 1905 shows were initially billed as being presented by his Tivoli Vaudeville Co.
- Note 2:** Bluett's New Zealand itinerary for the Fullers incl. Dunedin (Alhambra Theatre; 18 May - 4 July) • Wellington (Choral Hall; 6 July - 21 Aug.) • Christchurch (Opera House; 24 Aug. - ca. Oct.) • Dunedin (Alhambra Theatre; 12-23 Oct.) • Auckland (Opera house; 28 Oct. - 27 Nov.) • Christchurch (Opera House; 2-31 Dec. - incl. *Robinson Crusoe*).

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*Bendigo Advertiser (Vic) 21 Dec. 1901, 1.*

<sup>42</sup> The Brooklyn Entertainers made their debut at Alfred Hall, St Kilda Junction on 22 May 1893. Although Bluett may have been a member of the company at that time, his name does not appear in any reviews located to date. The 12 July show is therefore his first known stage appearance in Australia.

- 1904:** JOHN FULLER & SONS New Zealand (Dominion tour; 1 Jan. - ca. May) ► HARRY RICKARDS Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 25 May - 2 June) ► FRED BLUETT Launceston, Tasmania (Empire Theatre; 4 June - 2 July) ► HARRY RICKARDS Melbourne (Opera House; 23 July - 12 Aug.) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; ca. Dec.) • Broken Hill, New South Wales (Crystal Theatre; 20-25 Aug.) • Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 27 Aug. - 10 Sept.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 13 Sept. - 6 Oct.) • Perth (Theatre Royal; 15 Oct. - 2 Nov.) • Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 12-23 Nov.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 26 Nov. - 23 Dec.) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 24-31 Dec.).
- Note 1:** Bluett's 1904 New Zealand itinerary for the Fullers incl. Christchurch (Opera House; 1-14 Jan. > incl. *Robinson Crusoe*) • Dunedin (Alhambra Theatre; 18 Jan. - 5 Feb.) • Invercargill (Zealandia Hall; 6-13 Feb.) •
- Note 2:** Harry Rickards' 1905 shows were initially billed as being presented by his Tivoli Vaudeville Co.
- 1905:** HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. - 24 Mar.) • Adelaide (Rickards' New Tivoli Theatre; 25 Mar. - 7 Apr.) • Perth (Theatre Royal; 15-29 Apr.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 6, 7-8 May) ► J.C. BAIN Hobart (Temperance Hall; 13 May - 2 June > Bain's Gaiety Entertainers) • Launceston, Tasmania (Academy of Music; 3-14 June > Bain's Gaiety Entertainers) ► HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 17 June - ca. July) ► TED HOLLAND Brisbane by arrangement with Harry Rickards (Theatre Royal; 29 July - 13 Oct. > Holland's New Vaudeville Entertainers) ► HARRY CLAY Sydney (city and suburban circuit; ca. Oct.) ► HARRY RICKARDS Melbourne (Grand Opera House; 4 Nov. - ca. 8 Dec.) ► LEONARD DAVIS Perth by arrangement with Harry Rickards (Palace Gardens; ca. 22-31 Dec.).
- Note:** Harry Rickards' 1905 shows were initially billed as being presented by his Combination Vaudeville Stars. By the end of the year this had changed to Harry Rickards' New Tivoli Vaudeville Specialty Co.
- 1906:** LEONARD DAVIS Perth by arrangement with Harry Rickards (Palace Gardens; 1-27 Jan.) • HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 24 Feb. - 23 Mar.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 24 Mar. - 13 Apr.) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 14 Apr. - 30 June) • Melbourne (Opera House; 2 July - 1 Oct.) • New Zealand (Dominion tour; 8 Oct - 17 Nov. > Harry Rickards' All-Star Vaudeville Co) • Hobart (Theatre Royal; 23-28 Nov) • Melbourne (Opera House; 1-20 Dec.) • Adelaide (New Tivoli Theatre; 22-31 Dec.).
- Note 1:** Harry Rickards' 1906 shows were largely billed as being presented by his New Tivoli Vaudeville Specialty Co. The New Zealand tour was managed by Rickards' brother, Jack C. Leete.
- Note 2:** The New Zealand tour itinerary incl. Auckland (His Majesty's Theatre; 8-16 Oct.) • Wanganui (Opera House; 18 Oct.) • Palmerston North (Municipal Opera House; 19 Oct.) • Wellington (Opera House; 20-30 Oct. -) • Christchurch (His Majesty's Theatre; 2-9 Nov.) • Dunedin (His Majesty's Theatre; 12-17 Nov.).
- 1907:** HARRY RICKARDS Adelaide (Tivoli Theatre; 1-19 Jan.) • Kadina, SA (no details; 22 Jan.) • Walleroo, SA (no details; 23 Jan.) • Moonta, SA (Institute Hall; 24 Jan.) • Broken Hill, NSW (Crystal Theatre; 26 Jan. - 8 Feb.) • Adelaide (Tivoli Theatre; 9-21 Feb.) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; ca. 23 Feb. - ca. 1 June) • Melbourne (Opera House; 4 June - 31 Aug.) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 2 Sept. - 15 Nov.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 16 Nov. - 31 Dec).
- Note 1:** Harry Rickards' 1907 shows were largely billed as the New Tivoli Vaudeville and Specialty Combination (or Company).
- 1908:** HARRY RICKARDS Melbourne (Opera House; 1 Jan. -) ► FRED BLUETT Geelong, Vic (His Majesty's Theatre; 25 Nov. -).
- 1909:** HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; ca. June/July) • HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; ca. Oct- 31 Dec.).
- 1911:** HARRY RICKARDS Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. -) ► HOLLAND & St JOHN Brisbane (Empire Theatre; 7 Oct. -).
- 1912:** HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 15 June - 26 Sept.) • Melbourne (Opera House; 30 Sept. - 31 Dec.).
- 1913:** HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Melbourne (Opera House; 1-ca. 23 Jan.) ► n/e Melbourne (Empire Theatre, Coburg; ca. 24-29 Jan.) ► n/e Melbourne (Williamstown Theatre, Williamstown; 30 Jan. - 3 Feb. > Support to *A Daughter of Australia* film) ► n/e Melbourne (Western Reserve, Footscray; 1 Feb. > Footscray Band concert)<sup>43</sup> ► n/e Melbourne (Lyric Garden Theatre, St Kilda; 6-8 Feb.) ► SNOWDON PICTURES Melbourne (Princes Bridge; 10-23 Feb.) ► RICHMOND STALL COMMITTEE (Richmond Town Hall; 19 Feb. > Invitation Concert); ► n/e Bendigo (Royal Princess Theatre; 3-5 Mar.)<sup>44</sup> ► EMPIRE PICTURES Albury, NSW (Empire Theatre; 10 Mar. -) ► n/e Corowa, NSW (School of Arts; 11 Mar.).
- Note:** Bluett and his family departed for South Africa on 10 April.

<sup>43</sup> This engagement was played on the same night as the nearby Williamstown picture show support, likely at a later timeslot.

<sup>44</sup> Touring manager was George Francis.

**1915:** n/e **Dublin, Ireland** (Tivoli Theatre; 31 May - > headline act, see *Theatre Magazine* Sept. 1915, 47).



**Fred Bluett in civilian clothes**

Taken with some wounded Australian soldiers at Eastbourne (England). The photograph was supplied by Mr Bluett's nephew, Les Coney, who is appearing with the Frolics at the Ozone Pavilion, Semaphore Beach Adelaide. At latest Mr Bluett was in Fred Kitchen's revue, *It's All Square*." *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) Apr. 1916, 37.

**1916:** HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 31 Dec.).

**Note:** Bluett and his family returned to Australia from England in early December.

**1917:** HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. - 2 Feb.) • **Sydney** (Tivoli Theatre; 5 Feb. - 9 Mar.) • **Melbourne** (Tivoli Theatre; 12 Mar. - 3 Apr.) • **Brisbane** (Tivoli Theatre; 7-14 Apr.) • **Sydney** (Tivoli Theatre; 16-ca. 28 Apr.) ► FRED BLUETT Hobart (Temperance Hall; 30 June - 13 July) • **Launceston** (Mechanics' Institute; 14 July - 21 July) ► HARRY CLAY Sydney (city suburban and South-west NSW circuits; ca. 13 Aug. - Nov.) ► DIX-BAKER Newcastle, NSW (Victoria Theatre; 24 Nov. - 7 Dec.) ► n/e **Kurri, NSW** (King's Hall; 12 Dec.) ► HENRY ISON Tamworth, NSW (Ison's Picture Palace; 24 Dec.).

**Note 1:** Bluett as involved in the filming of *An Interrupted Divorce* during May.

**Note 2:** Harry Clay's Sydney suburban circuit incl. Newtown (Bridge Theatre) • North Sydney (Coliseum) • Bondi Junction (Coronation Hall) • Parramatta (Town Hall) • Ashfield (Town Hall) • Surry Hills (Ogden's Crown Star Theatre) • Daceyville (Daceyville Hall) • Manly (Eden Gardens).

**Note 3:** Harry Clay's South-west New South Wales circuit incl. Wagga Wagga (Strand Theatre) • Goulburn (Majestic Theatre) • Cootamundra (Town Hall) • Lithgow (Oddfellows' Hall) • Katoomba (Town Hall).

**1918:** HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 12 Jan. - 25 Jan.) ► n/e **Williamstown, Melbourne** (Williamstown Theatre; 26 Jan.) ► HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre, Roof Garden; 9-22 Feb.) • **Melbourne** (Tivoli Theatre; 25 Feb. - 8 Mar.) ► FULLERS' THEATRES Adelaide (Majestic Theatre; 6-19 Apr.) • (Port Adelaide Town Hall, 20 Apr.) • **Broken Hill, NSW** (Crystal Theatre; 23 Apr. - ca. 4 May) • **Adelaide** (Majestic Theatre; 5-31 May) • HARRY SADLER in assoc. with Fullers' Theatres **Perth** (Melrose Theatre; 8 June - 19 July) • **Kalgoorlie, W.A.** (Town Hall; 20, 22-24 July) • **Boulder, W.A.** (25-26 July) ► FULLERS' THEATRES Melbourne (Bijou Theatre; 12 Aug. - 6 Sept.) • **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 7-ca. 28 Sept.) • ACTORS' ASSOCIATION Sydney (Her Majesty's Theatre; 3 Oct. > Actors' Association Annual Matinee) ► FULLERS' THEATRES New Zealand (Dominion tour; 13 Oct. - 31 Dec.).<sup>45</sup>

**Note:** Bluett's 1918 New Zealand itinerary comprised only Dunedin (Princess Theatre; 13 Oct. - 13 Nov. / 14 Dec. - 31 Dec.).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Many theatres throughout New Zealand were closed from mid to late-November as a result of the spread of influenza.  
<sup>46</sup> The Princess Theatre, Dunedin was forced to close on 14 November and did not reopen until 14 December.

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*Sun (Sydney) 29 July 1917, 14.*

**1919:** FULLERS' THEATRES New Zealand (Dominion tour; 1 Jan. - 1 Nov.) ► DIX-BAKER Newcastle, NSW (Victoria Theatre; 15-28 Nov. -) ► FULLERS' THEATRES Sydney (Fullers' Theatre; 28 Nov. - 31 Dec.).

**Note:** Bluett's New Zealand itinerary incl. Dunedin (Princess Theatre 1-4 Jan.) • Auckland (Opera House; 13 Jan. - 1 Feb.) • Wellington (His Majesty's Theatre; 3-22 Feb.) • Christchurch (Opera House; 24 Feb. - 5 Apr.) • Dunedin (Princess Theatre 7 Apr. - ca. 17 May) • <sup>47</sup> • Auckland (Opera House; 24 May - ca. 13 July) • Wellington (His Majesty's Theatre; 21 July - 23 Aug.) • Dunedin (Princess Theatre; 1 Sept. - 11 Oct.) • Christchurch (Opera House; 13 Oct. - 1 Nov.).

**1920:** FULLERS' THEATRES Sydney (Fullers' Theatre; 1-ca. 9 Jan. -) • **Brisbane** (Empire Theatre; 15 Jan. - 20 Feb.) • **Adelaide** (Majestic Theatre; 12 Mar. - 16 Apr.) • **Melbourne** (Bijou Theatre; 24 Apr. - ca. 6 May) ► C.F. PUGLIESE Sydney (Alhambra Theatre; 12-ca.25 June -) ► SZARKA BROS Sydney (Enmore Theatre, 1-16 July - . > Between-films performances and Thursday nights with Frank Reis Vaudeville Co) ► FULLERS' THEATRES Sydney (Fullers' Theatre; 17 July -23 Sept. -) • **Brisbane** (Empire Theatre; 25 Sept. - 19 Nov.) ► REG THORNTON New South Wales (Central-west circuit; ca. Nov-Dec.).

**Note:** Bluett is recorded as having been specially engaged to appear with the K-Nuts. His known appearances were at Bathurst (Masonic Hall; 27 Nov.) • Orange (Empire Theatre; 30 Nov.) • Lithgow (Colosseum; 2 Dec.).

<p>Official opening address by the State Premier, the Hon. John Storey, at 8 p.m.</p>	<p>THE NEW <b>ENMORE THEATRE</b> OPENS <b>TO-NIGHT</b> BETTER BE THERE.</p>	<p>Program headed by FRED BLUETT, ERNIE BARRACLOUGH, and these two feature films, "PLEASE GET MARRIED" and "LOUIE WOLF'S DAUGHTER."</p>
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*Sun (Sydney) 1 July 1920, 12.*

<sup>47</sup> An advertised four night season in Wanganui (20-23 May) was cancelled due to shipping difficulties between the south and north islands at that time.

**1921:** C.W. WEBBER Hobart (Temperance Hall; 8-21 Jan. > The Follies) ► GEORGE SHARRETT New South Wales (Illawarra and Northern Rivers tour; ca. 1 Feb. - ca. Mar.> So and So's Costume Comedy Co) ► JOHN N. McCALLUM Brisbane (Cremorne Theatre; 15 Apr. - 31 Dec. > Town Topics).

**Note 1:** The So and So's itinerary incl. Wollongong (Crown Theatre; 1, 8, 14, 22 Feb.) • Woonoona (Friendly Societies' Hall; 18 Feb.) • Byron Bay (Literary Institute; 28 Feb.) • Murwillumbah (School of Arts; 2-4 Mar.) • Lismore (Federal Hall; 5, 7-9 Mar.) • Casino (School of Arts; 14-15 Mar.) • Kyogle (School of Arts; 16 Mar.) • Grafton (Fitzroy Theatre; 5-6 Mar.)

**Note 2:** The Town Topics engagement in Brisbane included *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. Bluett was cast as the dame.

**Note 3:** Gus Bluett appeared with his father on a number of occasions during the year with permission from J.C. Williamsons. These engagements included the So and So's (Crown Theatre, Wollongong; 14 Feb.) and the Town Topics season in Brisbane (Cremorne Theatre; 15 Apr. -).

**1922:** JOHN N. McCALLUM Brisbane (Cremorne Theatre; 1 Jan. - ca. 19 May > Town Topics) • Toowoomba, Qld (Strand and Princess theatres; 20-ca. 26 May > between films entertainment)<sup>48</sup> • Rockhampton, Qld (Theatre Royal; 14-24 June > Town Topics) ► HARRY RICKARDS TIVOLI THEATRES Ltd: Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 14 July -) ► J.C. WILLIAMSON'S Sydney (Theatre Royal; 23-31 Dec. > *Cinderella*, as The Dame; with Gus Bluett, as Capers).

**Note 1:** The Town Topics engagement in Brisbane included *The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe*. Bluett was cast as the dame.



*Sun* (Sydney) 3 Nov. 1922, 2.

**1923:** J.C. WILLIAMSON'S Sydney (Theatre Royal; 1 Jan. - 1 Feb. > *Cinderella*, as The Dame; with Gus Bluett, as Capers) ►<sup>49</sup> ► RAWDON BLANFORD Brisbane (Bohemia Theatre; 4 May - ca. 30 Nov. > Classics Co).

**1924:** FULLERS' THEATRES Newcastle, NSW (Victoria Theatre; 29 Mar. - ca. 18 Apr.) • Sydney (Fullers' Theatre; 10-29 May) • Melbourne (Bijou Theatre; 31 May - 19 June) • Adelaide (Majestic Theatre; 21 June - 11 July) ► SZARKA BROS Sydney (Enmore Theatre; 28 July - ca. 1 Aug.) ► HOYTS Sydney (Hoyts De Luxe Cinema; 9-ca. 15 Aug. -) ► CATHOLIC CLUB Sydney (Southern Cross Hall; 22 Sept. > Smoke social) ► T.A. SHAFTO Perth (Shaftesbury Theatre; 10 Oct. - ca. Nov.) ► FRED BLUETT Newcastle, NSW (Bohemia, Telford Street; 26-31 Dec.)

**1925:** FRED BLUETT Newcastle, NSW (Bohemia, Telford Street; 1-9 Jan.).

**Note:** All engagements between 10 May 1927 and 11 February 1927 are for Bluett and Mo unless otherwise noted.

**1926:** n/e Sydney (Australian Theatre, Liverpool St; 18 Jan. > between films) ► ROBERT ROBERTS in assoc. with John N. McCallum Brisbane (Cremorne Theatre; 30 Jan. - ca. 14 Apr. > Crackers Co) ► J.C. WILLIAMSON'S/TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 9-21 May) • Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 23 May-18 June) • Geelong, Vic (Geelong Theatre; 19-23 June) • Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 28 June - 10 July) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 14-27 Aug.) ► UNION THEATRES VAUDEVILLE<sup>50</sup> in assoc. with J.C. Williamson/Tivoli Celebrity Vaudeville Sydney (Haymarket Theatre; 28 Aug. - 3 Sept.) • Newcastle, NSW (Strand Theatre; 4-10 Sept.) ► J.C. WILLIAMSON'S/TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 13 Sept. - 9 Oct.) • Geelong, Vic (Geelong Theatre; 11-13 Oct.) ► D. CLIFFORDS THEATRE Ltd in assoc. with J.C. Williamson/Tivoli Celebrity Vaudeville Adelaide, NSW (Star Theatres suburban circuit; 16-30 Oct.) ► UNION THEATRES VAUDEVILLE in assoc. with J.C. Williamson/Tivoli Celebrity Vaudeville Perth (Prince of Wales Theatre; 6-19 Nov.) ► J.C. WILLIAMSON'S in assoc. with George Marlow Sydney (Grand Opera House; 27-31 Dec. > *Aladdin*).

<sup>48</sup> Bluett appeared in Toowoomba in association with John N. McCallum.

<sup>49</sup> Publicity published in Brisbane newspapers in late-January 1923 for the forthcoming Musgrove Theatres/Humphrey Bishop season (Cremorne Theatre beginning 9 Feb.) indicate that Bluett was to a feature performer. The comedian did not appear with the company, however. His place appears to have been taken by Billy Maloney.

<sup>50</sup> Sydney's *Sunday Times* refers to The Union Theatres Vaudeville season in Newcastle as being under the direction of the Union Theatres Master Artists Circuit (26 Aug. 1926, 26).

**Note 1:** The Star Theatres circuit in Adelaide in 1926 included Unley, Goodwood, Port Adelaide, Torrensville, Semaphore (Wondergraph Theatre), St Peters, Norwood and Parkside.

**Note 2:** During their Adelaide suburban engagement Bluett and Mo also played the regional towns of Murray Bridge (Lyric Theatre; 21 Oct.) and Kadina (Ideal Theatre; 23 October). Both venues appear to have also been under the direction of D. Clifford Theatres Ltd.

**Note 3:** In its 1 December 1926 edition Sydney's *Referee* newspaper indicates that Bluett and Mo were dividing their time in Western Australia between the Prince of Wales Theatre, Perth, and the Princess Theatre, Fremantle ("Around the Shows," 11). No references to the later season have yet been located.

**1927:** J.C. WILLIAMSON'S in assoc. with George Marlow **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 1-29 Jan. > *Aladdin*) • J.C. WILLIAMSON'S/TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE **Sydney** (Tivoli Theatre; 31 Jan. - 4 Feb.) • **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; 5- ca. 11 Feb. > final Bluett and Mo engagement) ► RUFE NAYLOR/EMOIRE THEATRE Co **Sydney** (New Empire Theatre; 28 Feb. - 9 July > Sunny - musical comedy) ► FULLERS' THEATRES **Melbourne** (Princess Theatre; ca. 16 July - 14 Oct. > in *Sunny*. Dir. Ernest C. Rolls) • J.C. WILLIAMSON'S/TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE **Sydney** (Tivoli Theatre; 31 Oct. - ca. 18 Nov.) ► OATLEY DISTRICT ATHLETICS CLUB **Sydney** (Picnic and river cruise; 20 Nov.) ► J.C. WILLIAMSON'S/TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE **Sydney** (Tivoli Theatre; 12 Dec. > Tivoli Midnight Revel - fundraiser for limbless soldiers).



In *Sunny* (1927)  
*Truth* (Sydney) 29 May  
1927, 11.

**1928:** WILLIAM RUSSELL **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 22-31 Dec. - > *Dick Whittington*).

**1929:** WILLIAM RUSSELL **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 1-25 Jan. - > *Dick Whittington*) ► n/e **New South Wales** (Central-West and South-West regional tour; ca. 28 Feb. - > with Len Maurice and Franc Roussel, as film support) ► GEORGE MARLOW **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 26-31 Dec. > *Babes in the Wood* - matinees only).

**Note 1:** In late-January and early-February several newspaper items refer to Bluett as being a member of Robert Roberts' Smilestones of 1929. That company's season in Sydney began on 9 February at the Grand Opera House. Research into Bluett's movements around that period has failed to identify his name in any reviews or publicity. Given that the comedian undertook a New South Wales regional tour beginning late-February, it would seem unlikely that he had been engaged by Roberts.

**Note 2:** New South Wales tour incl. Forbes (Strand Theatre; 28 Feb., 11 Mar.) • Parkes (Broadway Theatre; 1 Mar.)<sup>51</sup> • Grenfell (Royal Theatre; 5-6 Mar.) • Young (Strand Theatre; 15-16 Mar.) • Hillston (Globe Theatre; 22 Mar.) • Leeton (Globe Theatre; 25 Mar.) • Narandera (Globe Theatre; 26 Mar.) • Gulgong (Pictoria Theatre; 1 Apr.). Fred Bluett may have been the manager/producer for this venture.

**Note 3:** Advertised seasons for Bourke (North-west NSW) and Lithgow in March appear to have been cancelled.

**1930:** GEORGE MARLOW **Sydney** (Grand Opera House; 1 Jan. - 1 Feb. > *Babes in the Wood* - matinees only) ► HUGH D. McINTOSH **Melbourne** (Tivoli Theatre; 25 Oct. - 31 Dec.).

**1931:** HUGH D. McINTOSH **Melbourne** (Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. - 20 Feb.).

**1932:** ERNEST C. ROLLS **Sydney** (Theatre Royal; 30 Apr. - > *Venus Ltd* - revue) ► TERRY MITCHELL & Co **Newcastle, NSW** (Lyric Theatre; 13-ca. 27 Aug. - > Humphrey Bishop's Dandies) ► FULLERS' THEATRES **Melbourne** (Bijou Theatre; 17 Sept.).

**1933:** HAROLD LENNON **Adelaide** (Tivoli Theatre; 24 June - 15 July) ► WHITE WINGS **Sydney** (Town Hall; 10 Nov. > "Grand Musical").

**1934:** n/e **Sydney** (Victory Theatre, Kogarah; 7 Mar. > vaudeville company) ► LES SHIPP Wollongong, NSW (Town Hall; 5 May).

**1940:** n/e **Penhurst, Sydney** (Fernland Hall; 14 Feb. > Grand Community Concert) ► LEE MURRAY **Parramatta, NSW** (Town Hall; 19 Mar. > with Lee Murray Players)<sup>52</sup> ► n/e **Sydney Harbour** (Harbour Concert Cruises; ca. Mar.)<sup>53</sup> ► n/e **Stanmore, Sydney** (Stanmore Cinema; 13 Apr. - > between films entertainment) ► ST GEORGE BOWLING CLUB **Rockdale, Sydney** (St George Bowling Club Assembly Hall; 12 June) ► NEWCASTLE THEATRE MANAGERS APPEAL COMMITTEE **Newcastle, NSW** (Victoria Theatre; 18 July > War Fund matinee) ► AUSTRALIAN ACTORS' EQUITY **Sydney** (Theatre Royal; 28 Oct. > Gala matinee).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The Broadway Theatre in Parkes may have operated under the business name Parkes Picture Palace.

<sup>52</sup> Variety entertainer Frank Perrin was also engaged by Murray for this show.

<sup>53</sup> Bluett is believed to have been involved in a series of harbour cruise concerts in 1940, possibly extending back to the start of the year and continuing on at least into late-spring.

<sup>54</sup> The line-up also included Marie La Varre.

## GRAMOPHONE RECORDINGS

- "Mama's Gone Young, Papa's Gone Old" b/w "The King Isn't King Anymore." (Parlophone, A2181, 1927)
- "Henry's Made a Lady Out of Lizzie" b/w "All for Ladies" (Parlophone, 1928)
- "There Ought to be a Law Against That" (1928)
- "I'm Not Going Home Tonight" b/w "Oh! What Must It Be To Be Poor" (Regal 6013, n.yr.)
- "They Wouldn't Let You Do That Here" b/w "The Good Ship Hardship" (Regal 6014, n.yr.)
- "Go To Sleep, Baby" b/w "The Old Sundowner" (Regal 6015, n. yr.)
- "Anyone's Welcome To Mine" b/w "My Days Are Over" (Regal 6016, n. yr.)
- "I Knew There Was Something I Forgot" b/w "He's A Jolly Good Fellow" [by Charles Vaude] (Regal 6017, n. yr.)
- "Jeremiah Diddler" b/w "Boy Scout Burlesque" (Regal 7137, n. yr.)

The following recordings are available commercially and/or through various Australian libraries.

- "Mama's Gone Young, Papa's Gone Old." In *Stars of the Australian Stage and Radio: Volume 2*. Larrikin, CD, LRH 430. [Series: Warren Faye Presents Yesterday's Australia]

The following MP3 recordings have been made available to the National Library of Australia by the Callaway Centre Archive (University of Western Australia).

- ▶ "On Board the Good Ship 'Hardship'" (aka "The Good Ship Hardship")
- ▶ "He's a Jolly Good Fellow" 1911 [by Charles Vaude]

*Truth* (Melbourne ed.) 7 Dec. 1918, 4.

## ORIGINAL WORKS (Published and Unpublished)

Including sketches and poetry (only works established as having been written by Fred Bluett)

*Sailors*. First performed by Fred Bluett and Roy Rene on 10 May 1926 at the Tivoli Theatre, Sydney.

"Twenty Years Ago." *Australian Variety and Show World* (Sydney) 8 Jan. 1920, 6. [See [Poetry, Prose and Short Stories](#) in the AVTA's "Texts: Published" page.]

## ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS (Published)

♪ = Published score available online. Unless otherwise noted these are available courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

All other scores are held by the NLA but not yet given online access.

Words and music (or music) by Fred Bluett unless otherwise noted.

- ♪ **1907:** "They Wouldn't Let You Do That Here." Words by Fred Bluett. Music by Fred Hall.
- 1909:** "Corn Beef and Carrots."
- ♪ **1910:** "The Hobbly Wobbly Skirt." Words by Fred Bluett and Harry Lindon. Music by Joe Slater.
- ♪ **1911:** "I Knew That There Was Something I Forgot."

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*ABC Weekly*: 19 Dec. (1942), 26.

*Bulletin*: 5 May (1910) • 19 May (1910) 8.

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