

CLAUDE HOLLAND

The only child of Brisbane entrepreneur, Ted Holland, Claude Holland began appearing on the stage as a small child. In later years he appeared with Huxham's Serenaders before pursuing a career in radio.

Claude Holland, only son of the great actor Ted Holland and his wife Eva Wilson, was born 26th August 1901. His proud father had him on stage at a very young age. Ted Holland's wife Eva (billed as Eva Wilson) and son Claude (billed as Little Claudie) were a popular stage act. One of Claude Holland's first stage performances was in 1905, when he joined his mother in the chorus of *The Man in the Overalls*. The *Brisbane Courier* records that although "Baby Holland [was a] little toddler who could not yet articulate properly," his effort was "greeted with a round of genuine applause" (12 June 1905, 4). A few weeks earlier, the paper's theatre critic had written of his mother: "Miss Eva Wilson showed that she is still high in public favour and was given an enthusiastic reception in each of several comic songs" (29 May 1905, 5).



By the time Claude Holland had reached the age of twelve his father had him enrolled at Christian Brothers' School, Gregory Terrace. The school's ledger from the war years suggests a great start followed by a less than great exit in 1917 when young Claude Holland of "Elgar" North Quay was expelled from the prestigious school with the marginal notation "6th Class Proficiency." We can only assume Claude Holland's love of theatre, vaudeville and good times clashed with that of the pious Christian Brothers in charge of his education. At sixteen years of age, a full time career in theatre lay waiting. By now Eva Wilson was sole guardian of Claude, his father having passed away on 4 September 1914 after a short illness. A year earlier Holland Snr., in an interview with *Theatre Magazine* commented that "during the first year of my Brisbane venture (1904), little Claudie would come on stage and join in the chorus of some of Jim Rhodes's songs, thus ensuring enthusiastic recalls at every performance" (June 1913). Claude enjoyed a close relationship with his father who groomed him from an early age to continue the family's thespian tradition. Claude was only thirteen when his father passed away.

Each year Claude and his mother would insert an *In Memoriam* notice in the local paper such as this example: HOLLAND. — In loving memory of my dear husband and father, Ted Holland, who departed this life at "Elgar," North Quay, September 4th, 1914. Inserted by his loving wife and son (QLD: 9 Sept. 1916, 9). "Elgar", the stately family residence at 21 North Quay, Brisbane (see left), was demolished in 1920 to make way for Tritton's department store, forever changing the North Quay streetscape.



Claude Holland was eventually noticed by entrepreneur Hugh Huxham. He joined Huxham's Serenaders in 1920 as a "promising juvenile actor," and was able to maintain steady employment throughout the early 1920s. Hugh Huxham and his company toured extensively.

One can only be impressed by the mobility of the early actors. The tyranny of distance appeared no hindrance as companies and individuals popped up in various cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. As one Tasmanian scribe penned:

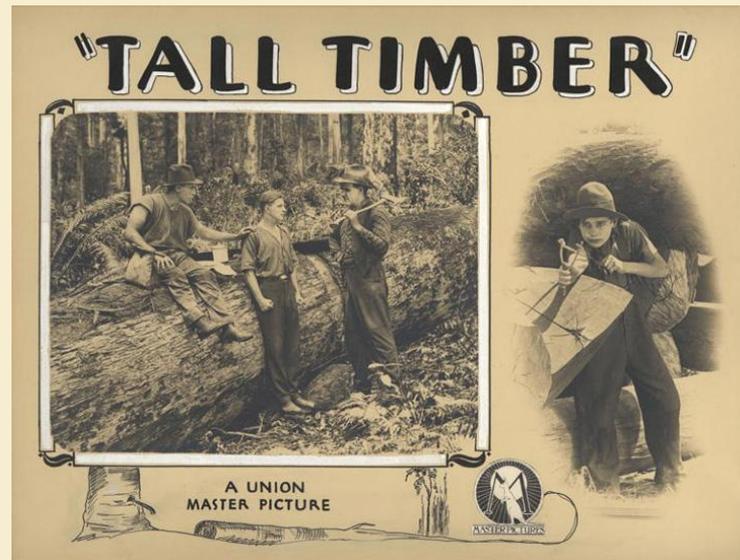
"Memories of old-time minstrelsy and vaudeville in Hobart are revived by the visit with the Serenaders of a promising young artist in Mr. Claude Holland, whose father, the late 'Ted Holland' was one of the best and most popular performers of his time. He was an endman of the good old school, and after many year's success as an artist he went into business as a manager of vaudeville in Brisbane, where he carried all before him, and built up a reputation as a manager. Mr. Claude Holland is yet young in the theatrical business, but he promises to keep the family name green in the memory of the old-timers" (HM: 6 July 1920).

Claude Holland was one of the younger members of the Serenaders, yet arrived with an impeccable theatrical pedigree. His good looks saw him featured in the *Adelaide Mail* theatre pages (17 Feb. 1923). In a section *Footlight Flashes* the critic lauds the Queensland youngster as a "consummate song and dance man." Later that year Hugh Huxham's Serenaders were back in Brisbane.

Huxham was a Freemason, having joined the newly formed day lodge Thespian No. 73 Q.C., at its Alice Street Temple in Brisbane in July 1919. Freemasonry would no doubt have been discussed on the road. Masonic actors, singers and managers regularly visited interstate lodges when staying in towns and cities for short or extended seasons. While it was rare for Catholics to join the Masonic Order in the early part of the 20th Century, we have to assume that Claude Holland was a lapsed Catholic since his exit from Gregory Terrace. To this end Huxham proposed Claude Holland into the craft. Holland became a Freemason in Thespian Lodge No. 268 on November 1, 1923, aged twenty-one.¹

Claude Holland remained with Huxham's Serenaders until shortly before the company disbanded in 1926. His good physique and looks landed him a role in a silent movie *Tall Timber* shot at Langley Vale, near Taree, NSW. The film had a simple yet appealing plot. Jack Maxwell, a young ne'er-do-well, is disowned by his wealthy father after a raucous party, and goes to work at a mill in the North Coast timber district owned by his friend Dick Desmond. (Dick Desmond is played by Claude Holland). He falls in love with Betty Manning, the daughter of the widow who cooks for the workers, and clashes with Steve Black, the ganger of the mill who is behind a spate of timber robberies, who also loves Betty. A sundowner arrives in camp and shoots Steve in revenge for seducing the sundowner's wife years ago. He also reveals Steve has been blackmailing Dick's father for a murder for which he can now be proved innocent. Jack saves the mill from a robbery and is offered a partnership from Desmond. The action packed melodrama was playing in cinemas around the country, in New Zealand and even had a run in the United Kingdom. In the 1926 movie poster Claude Holland is seated on the giant tree. Claude Holland's fame grew commensurate with the film's success.

A year after the film's release he was in New Zealand. The *Auckland Star* records: "Claude Holland, who played the juvenile lead to Elsie Prince in *Nanette* has been in the profession for over twelve years. His first big show was *Our Liz* in which he played junior lead to Ada Reeve, this was followed by *Spangles* followed by many comedy parts. For several years he was with Hugh Huxham's Serenaders and also eighteen successful months with Moon and Morris Revue Company. This is Holland's fourth tour of the Dominion as audiences flock to see the famous Australian" (7 May 1927).



Holland's theatrical career continued unabated. Through theatre and film he was introduced to Miss Monica McInerney whose stage name was *Monica Mack*. Monica Mack, a beauty queen, was runner-up in the Miss Australia Contest of 1926. Mack's career saw her play substantial roles in two silent movies, *The Gentleman Bushranger* (1921) and *Dope* (1924). The couple's wedding in December 1928 was featured prominently in the Sydney papers and interstate journals. *The Queensland Figaro* of 15 December 1928 gave a verbose account of what had transpired a few days earlier in St. Anne's Church, Bondi, including an extensive guest list and description of everyone's attire. The article concluded "the happy couple will honeymoon in Brisbane."

Monica Mack was in high demand as a photographic model. Mack featured in countless newspaper and magazine advertisements for a wide range of products. One picture of her smiling face and perfect complexion appeared in a 1925 edition of 'The Home' magazine, where she extolled the wonders of "mercolised wax," a facial preparation. This *avant garde* studio photo from Monte Luke Photography Studio, Sydney in the late 1920s is further proof of her classic beauty at the time.

In 1929 Holland was a great success in the musical comedy *Whoopee* at the Empire Theatre. Even the Great Depression failed to slow him down as patrons were drawn to live theatre to escape the reality of hard times. As newlywed Monica Mack settled in to married life away from the lime light, husband Claude's career continued with a string of plays and musicals both



¹ Thespian Lodge became part of the United Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Queensland in 1921 and was assigned number 268

in Sydney and interstate. In 1929 he starred in Frank Neil's production of *Clowns in Clover* at the King's Theatre, Melbourne. Two years later he starred at St. James' Theatre in Sydney in the comedy riot *Topsy Turvy*, (1931), a vaudeville revue to which Sydneysiders flocked sufficiently to have the season extended. During his time in Sydney he was a frequent visitor to the actors' Masonic Lodge, Thespian No. 256, where he would entertain Brethren at the Festive Board.

Sometime during the height of his stage career in the 1930s Holland made a transition to radio. This new medium suited his voice. The transition was no doubt helped by his already established following on stage and in movies so that when Holland took to the airwaves people tuned in. Over the ensuing decades Holland worked as announcer, disc jockey, producer and manager.

Holland thought much of World War I diggers. His name became linked with the RSL movement during the Depression years. He worked tirelessly to connect Diggers in Sydney and rural NSW country where his broadcasts could be heard. *The Cumberland Argus and Fruit-growers' Advocate* (Parramatta) records in its 10 August 1938 edition:

Claude Holland's name is synonymous with the 2UE Diggers' Session heard every Saturday morning at 9 a.m. Much praiseworthy work has been done under Mr. Holland's direction for diggers as well as providing these war men with bright radio entertainment. In addition it has been responsible for holding together that sense of good fellowship which has permeated their lives since the trench days. The 2UE sessions have been instrumental in bringing many old parted friends together again that they may enjoy each other's company. The tremendously popular Diggers' Concerts which takes place at the Tivoli Theatre every second Sunday at 2.30 p.m. continue to be popular with large audiences, many excellent performances given by talented Diggers. The proceeds from these concerts go to the RSSLA which provides comfort for incapacitated soldiers. Listen in to these Diggers' sessions and attend the Diggers' Concerts. They are thoroughly entertaining. If you cannot get along to the concerts, be sure to hear Claude Holland's broadcast from 2UE.

Holland's radio career later continued at 2SM. *The Catholic Press* (11 Jan. 1940) informed its readership of his appointment, recording:

2SM has appointed to its announcing staff Mr. Claude Holland, who has had a colourful career in show business. Born in Melbourne, he made his first appearance on the stage as a baby. He toured with his own act at the age of 18; played juvenile lead in the Australian silent film, *Tall Timbers*, and juvenile lead in *Our Liz*; was juvenile and light comedian with Ada Reeve in *Spangles*; and lead with Elsie Prince and Jimmie Godden in *No, No, Nanette* and *Lady Be Good*. Later he joined Ernest Rolls in *Clowns in Clover* and *Whoopee*; and did a season of stock drama with Richard Bellars, with Mayne Lynton and Nancy Stewart in *'My Old Dutch'* and others, and with the late Nellie Stewart. He is very well known in radio in Sydney. His popularity with listening audiences on 2SM is guaranteed.

His love of live theatre did not cease with his transition to radio. Indeed, it could be argued that he promoted live theatre throughout his radio career. In an article, again in *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate* (18 Jan. 1939) entitled "THEATRE MEMORIES" one learns about bringing back the past...

Claude Holland, 2UE personality and well-known throughout the theatrical business, presents a session of "Theatre Memories" every Tuesday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and during the half hour period of the programme he revives new interest in the theatre and the days when it was such an integral part of our entertainment: and he is reviving new interest in the Theatre today. Mr. Holland also interviews old personalities of the stage, and many interesting and amusing reflections are made by those who remember back twenty, thirty and forty years before films arrived and other influences which to a large extent have replaced the foot lights.

Holland's network of theatre friends secured a steady stream of retired actors who reflected and reminisced the past. To this end Holland can be seen as a theatre historian. Much later, in the 1950s, Holland went on to record a series of radio interviews, some of which are preserved in the National Film and Sound Archives in Canberra and accessible on request. Throughout the 1950s Holland travelled extensively for the radio show *Amateur Hour*. His name appears as a "call sign" for undiscovered talent in several metropolitan dailies.

There were occasional hick-ups along the way as Adelaide's *Advertiser* notes in 1951: "All records of auditions for Australia's *Amateur Hour* held during the past 12 months were lost last December when a suitcase containing the record was lost in transit. Mr. Claude Holland, Terry Dear's talent scout, is most anxious to audition again anybody heard during the last 12 months who did not appear in the programme. Would anyone interested in appearing please apply at 5AD as soon as possible?" (24 Feb. 1951)

Holland's wide travel slowed down somewhat by the late 1960s. He had become a household name in radio and saw out his last years in broadcasting on 2UW where his name was added to the Australian Broadcasters' Honour Board in 1976. His earlier association with the RSL movement continued, now with World War II diggers, trying (and succeeding) to connect through the airwaves.



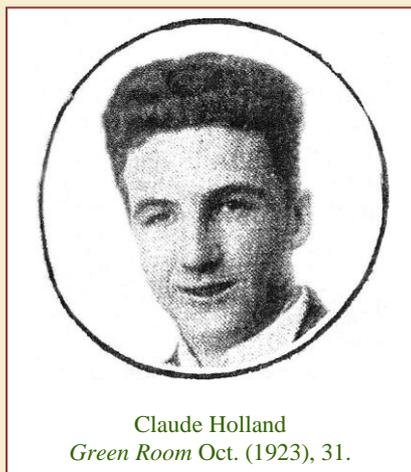
From infancy on stage in Brisbane, as a young adult in vaudeville, silent movies and a string of theatre roles across Australia and New Zealand and finally, a long distinguished career in radio, Holland squeezed much into his long life.

His membership in Freemasonry at Thespian Lodge No. 268, UGLQ was a bold move at a time when Catholics, in principle, were forbidden by their church to join the Order. Holland's theatrical mentor and Masonic proposer Hugh Huxham had more than a cursory influence on 21-year-old Holland's decision to join Freemasonry. Holland is fondly remembered in the annals and attendance books of Freemasonry across three states, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria where Holland and Huxham were regular visitors throughout the 1920's and beyond.



Claude Holland undoubtedly played a significant part in helping develop Australia's entertainment industry during the early to mid-twentieth century. From his early stage appearance in 1905 he lived through - and contributed to - silent movies, radio, talking pictures, television and the beginning of the computer revolution. Apart from the last invention, Claude Holland lived long enough to make an indelible mark on all genres. Importantly, he took up the baton left by his famous parents and simply continued and expanded the Holland family tradition.

Monica Holland passed away on 27 March 1973, aged sixty-seven. Claude Holland followed her eleven years later, 5 August 1984. Both are buried in the Catholic Section of Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.



Claude Holland
Green Room Oct. (1923), 31.

SEE ALSO

- [Ted Holland](#)
- [Huxham's Serenaders](#)

FURTHER REFERENCE

Let's Look at Radio: A Review of Commercial Broadcasting in Australia. Sydney: Australian Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations, ca. 1949.

This biography contributed by Stig R. Hokanson

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