

REG WYKEHAM and PRESSY PRESTON

As an actor Reg Wykeham is known to have been associated with Hugh J. Ward, George Willoughby and, J. C. Williamson's during the first decade of the twentieth century. Although he began his entrepreneurial activities in the 1910s, both in dramatic and variety theatre, Wykeham continued to be involved in acting well into the late 1930s, and also appeared in a number of films between 1924 and the 1950s. His career as a vaudeville performer and actor included a partnership with Pressy Preston that began sometime prior to 1912. The pair, who married in 1916, appeared for such managements as the Fullers, J.C. Williamson, Hugh J. Ward and Birch and Carroll managements during the 1910s. As an entrepreneur Wykeham's own companies included the Wykeham-Nable Dramatic Co (ca. 1912) and several variety troupes in the 1920s, notably Reginald Wykeham's Company of Comedians, The Arrivals of 1922, and Reg Wykeham and Co. The mid to late-1920s also saw him return to the "legitimate" stage on occasions, undertaking roles in productions for J. C. Williamson's and Dion Boucicault Jnr among others. Both Wykeham and Preston were involved in radio from the 1920s.

Born in England ca. 1879, Reginald Wykeham's early professional career as an actor saw him engaged by George Willoughby and Hugh J. Ward's dramatic company around 1906/1907. In 1909, he toured as a leading member of Ward's Clever Company of London Comedians, starring in such productions as *A Bachelor's Honeymoon*, *The Man From Mexico*, *Vivian's Papas*, and *The Fencing Master*. When he took over the direction of the company in 1909, touring it as Reginald Wykeham's Company of Comedians, its engagements were still produced under the auspices of Ward. Among the works presented during his Queensland tour, for example, were *Seven Days*, *The Girl from the Rectors* and *A Bachelor's Honeymoon*. The company's principal actors at that time included Wykeham, Robert Grieg, H. H. Wallace, Celia Ghiloni, Pressy Preston (aka Christina Preston) and Maud Chetwynd.

In late 1911 or early 1912 the Wykeham and [Edward] Nable Comedy Company undertook a tour of New Zealand, with Pressy Preston and Maud Chetwynd being billed as feature artists. Preston, who in 1916 became Wykeham's wife, was born in the Victorian township of Ondit in 1881, and given her association with the Ward company prior to 1909 was likely developing her talent on the stage by the turn of the century. A preview of the Wykeham-Nable Company's opening show in Nelson (NZ) records that Preston was one of the well-known artists who recently featured in the *Mother Goose* pantomime.

Christmas 1912 saw the couple make their first appearance at Holland and St John's Empire Theatre (Bris). Advertised as the headline act the pair was referred to as "English Star Sketch Artistes" (BC: 28 Dec. 12, 2). Sometime later that year Wykeham joined J. C. Williamson's dramatic company, with one of his roles being Gilder in *Within the Law*. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described his characterisation as having been played with "studious care and success ... redeeming the hardness of the character without exaggeration" (SMH: 22 Sept. 1913, 4). His revival of the role in Melbourne the following year was similarly acclaimed.



Theatre 17 Oct. (1914), n. pag.



Courtesy of Alan Preston

In late 1914 Wykeham and Preston returned to New Zealand presenting a vaudeville act under the direction of the Fuller-Brennan organisation. Describing their act as an "unqualifiable glorious success," the *Evening Post* also records that one of the couple's sketches presented at His Majesty's Theatre (Wellington) in January 1915 was "My Friend Smith." During the remainder of the year the pair is known to have continued touring under the Fuller-Brennan management, playing Queensland on the Birch and Carroll circuit, followed by engagements in Melbourne (Bijou Theatre), Adelaide (King's Theatre) and Perth. One of the sketches staged during April at Brisbane's Theatre Royal, "Not in These," while described as "clever" by the *Theatre* magazine's variety critic, was nevertheless viewed as being from the outset "near the knuckle... with the climax worse than course" (May 1915, 44). Two other original sketches from this period were "Many a Good Time" and "Two of a Kind."

The next engagement identified with either performer is Preston's 1918 role in the *Million Dollar Girl*, (Tivoli Theatre, Syd) in which she played the character May Galloway opposite George Edwards, Rosie Parkes, Lottie Sargeant [sic], Vera Spaul and Scottish comedian Hughie Ogilvie. In its review of the opening performance the *Sydney Morning Herald* records that Preston "played to advantage the chief impersonator" of the show (1 Apr. 1918, 5).

No details of their movements between 1918 and Wykeham's lease of the Sydney Hippodrome in 1922 have yet been located. The Hippodrome venture, a season of vaudeville and revusical staged under the name the Arrivals of 1922, was produced by Wykeham with London revue director Spencer Barry overseeing the staging of the shows. The Arrivals troupe, which comprised in excess of two dozen variety performers, along with chorus girls and an orchestra, featured several high-profile Australian artists, notably Arthur Morley, Sadie Gale, Bert Desmond and Mattie Jansen, Will and Dora Gilbert, Syd Garti, and George Whitehead.

Although further details regarding Wykeham's career are also yet to be located for the period 1923-1924, a Melbourne Tivoli bill for 8 August 1925 advertises Reg Wykeham and Co (including Pressy Preston) as presenting a farce called *The Bachelor*. The advertisement also records that Wykeham had lately been with Dion Boucicault Jnr's company (which toured Australia between 1923 and 1925).

December 1926 saw Wykeham at King's Theatre, Melbourne, supporting Renee Kelly in J. C. Williamson's production of *The Naughty Wife*. His association with Williamson's is believed to have continued through until at least 1929, when he was engaged for three of the Firm's productions that year: *The Perfect Alibi* (Criterion Theatre, Syd; 6 July), *Journey's End* (Theatre Royal, Melb; 10 Aug.), and *Miss Nell O' New Orleans* (Theatre Royal, Syd; 15 Dec.).

BOY OFFICE NOTICE.—Box Plans will OPEN TO-DAY at SCOWEN'S.
FIRST PRODUCTION—
“The Girl from Rector’s”
SECOND PRODUCTION—
“SEVEN DAYS.”
Direction Reginald Wykeham. Business Manager W. A. Low.
A HARVEST OF SMILES WILL BE REAPED ON
Tuesday and Wednesday, July 24th and 25th,
—BY—
REGINALD WYKEHAM'S COMPANY OF COMEDIANS
Including the Ever Popular Comediennes,
MISS CELIA GHILONI, -- MISS MAUD CHETWYND,
MISS PRESSY PRESTON,
When they present the Most Famous Comedy Conceptions of the 20th Century, “THE GIRL FROM RECTOR’S,” a Spicy Salad with very little Dressing. “SEVEN DAYS” makes one “WEAK” from Laughing.
A JOYOUS WHIRL OF FUN. Presented by arrangement with HUGH J. WARD. Undoubtedly the Greatest Amusement Event ever chronicled in Gympie.
PRICES: 4/-, 3/-, 2/-, and 1/- -- Box Plans and Day Sales at SCOWEN'S.
GEOFFREY NYE, Touring Manager.

Gympie Times 22 July (1911), 2.

In addition to his theatrical career Reg Wykeham also appeared in several films between the 1920s and late 1940s, with his first known appearance being that of a Brigadier-General in Beaumont Smith's *The Digger Earl* (1924). Two further film roles were as W.O. Pay Corps in the 1933 Pat Hanna/Raymond Longford comedy *Diggers in Blighty*, and as Dr Moore in the 1949 Ealing Studios production of *Eureka Stockade*, which features Chips Rafferty.



Smith's Weekly 21 Mar. (1925).

Wykeham and Preston are also known to have been involved in radio, possible as early as the mid-to-late 1920s. Fred Malcolm, recalls that Preston was one of the early staff at 3LO Melbourne (now 774 ABC Melbourne) and had her own programme for a while. She also made the first broadcast of the fashions from the Melbourne Cup, and regularly covered the fashions at high profile functions like the Lord Mayors Ball. She and her husband also starred in the series called *Emma and Erbert* on 3LO [see *Additional Quotations, Patter and Insights* section below].

While it is not yet certain when Wykeham and Preston ended their stage or radio careers, he is known to have still be active in the mid-1930s, appearing for example in the Gus Bluett-led comedy *Nice Going's On* (alongside Charles Norman, George Moon Jnr and Phil Smith) at the Criterion, Sydney beginning 12 January 1935. Given that he was still involved in film acting up until the late 1940s, Wykeham is likely to also been continuing to accept dramatic roles even until then. It is also likely that by the 1930s they established a more settled existence in Melbourne, perhaps only travelling interstate for short seasons as opposed to the constant travelling required of vaudevillians. Pressy Preston died in St Vincent's Hospital in 1949, possibly the result of an accident in which she fell down a lift well. Her husband died in the Melbourne suburb of Malvern six years later.

SEE ALSO

- [Arrivals of 1922](#)

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS, PATTEN AND INSIGHTS

- "The Colonel and the Maid" At the National (Sydney):-
 - Miss Preston (deferentially): And what might your name be?"
 - Mr Wykeham (explosively): Never mind what it MIGHT be!
I AM Colonel Bagshot (TT: Apr. (1916), 33).

- "Her Say" At the National (Sydney):-
 - Mr Wykeham (a peppery, love making colonel, speaking to Miss Preston for the first time) "I'm going to marry you. So – that's settled."
 - Miss Preston: "Don't you think I might have something to say about that?"
 - Mr Wykeham: "You say 'Yes.' That's all you have to say"

(TT: Apr. 1916, 36).

The Wykeham-Nable Comedy Coy., will commence a season of three nights at the Theatre Royal on Thursday next. The opening piece will be the side splitting farce comedy "Mr. Plaster of Paris," which has been played with great success in the chief centres of the Dominion. Among the members of the Company are Miss Pressie Preston, who is well known as one of the artists who featured in the "Mother Goose" pantomime, Miss Maud Chetwynd, and Mr. Reginald Wykeham, who were with "The Girl from Rectors" Company, and Mr. Edward Nable, who was for years a member of Pollard's opera company. The box plan will be opened at Jackson's on Monday.

Theatre Royal, Nelson (NZ)

Colonist 3 Aug. (1912), 7.

- [Christina Preston] was quite a stage lady. I recall seeing a poster for *Miss Hook of Holland* in of all places a barber shop in Prahran (he used to collect that sort of thing). It featured Pressy Preston as one of the stars. Later she was one of the early staff at 3LO Melbourne, and had her own programme for a while. She made the first broadcast of the fashions from the Melbourne Cup, and she also covered the fashions at such functions as the Lord Mayors Ball etc. In one instance, some fault occurred with the microphone, and she had to ad lib from a nearby room, fortunately she had obtained particulars of the dresses etc of some of the VIP's and was able to give a description. Her brother Jack was listening, possibly in Sydney, and he complimented her later: "I really felt that I was there, seeing it all!" Like all theatricals, they did have their "resting" times and we had a few visits from her at some of the country Post Offices where we lived at the time. Her aunt, my grandmother, was a little appalled when her niece had "beer for breakfast". Gran was a bit straitlaced! Chris later died whilst a patient at St Vincent's Hospital I think, she fell down the lift well one night and was killed. When I was about 13 I saw Reg Wykeham in *Journey's End* when I went with a party of Boy Scouts, but I was unable to go backstage at the time. He and Chris made some money posing for adverts for Seppelts and Penfolds. They also appeared in the series called *Emma and Erbert* on 3LO (Fred Malcolm).

Sourced from two letters by Fred Malcolm, grandson of Alice Malcolm (nee Preston) and dated 3 Oct. 1999 and 10 Jan. 2001. The content has been rearranged to provide continuity and order.

This information was kindly contributed by Alan Preston.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. A photo of "Reginald Wykeham" published in the 1 August 1907 edition of the *Theatre: An Illustrated Monthly Devoted to the Stage* (page 13) is believed to have been incorrectly captioned, and is instead that of W. J. Curtis. [See his entry in *Practitioner C*]



Brisbane Courier 28 Dec. (1912), 2.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.
 Courtenay-place. Direction FULLER-BRENNAN. 'Phone 165

TO-NIGHT! AT 8. TO-NIGHT!

Soe our Big New Show. New Artists, New Acts, New Specialties. A magnificent Constellation of Stars of the First Magnitude. The finest programme ever presented in New Zealand. The pick of the World's Vaudeville Shows.
TO-NIGHT!—A MIGHTY ATTRACTION, DIRECT FROM AMERICA—
SCHELL'S LIONS!

Imported at enormous expense. Absolutely the most nerve-tingling Animal Act ever placed before a Wellington audience. Introduced by MDME. SCHELL, the Smallest Lion-tamer in the World.

REG. WYKEHAM!	The Celebrated Farce Comedians.	PRESSIE PRESTON!
(Late of J. C. Williamson and Hugh J. Ward Brilliant Comedy Companies).		PRESSIE PRESTON!
M'KENZIE AND GUEST!		KEEN AND WALLER!
M'KENZIE AND GUEST!		KEEN AND WALLER!
GEORGE WHITEHEAD!		THE CORRICK FAMILY!

Last: Few Nights of

DAVENPORT'S MODELS! The World's Most Beautiful and Original Statue Posing Act.

PRICES—2s, 1s 6d, and 1s. Booking at Bristol Piano Co., 6d extra. Doors open 7.15, commence at 8. Motors 10.20.

Wellington, New Zealand
Evening Post 18 Jan. (1915), 3.



Reg Wykeham
Theatre May (1915), 37.

TIVOLI THEATRE.

"The Home of Celebrity Vaudeville."
 Licensee: Harry Rickards' Tivoli Theatre Ltd.
 2.30 p.m. TWICE DAILY. 8 p.m.

MELBOURNE'S BRIGHTEST ENTERTAINMENT
MELBOURNE'S BRIGHTEST ENTERTAINMENT
 is to be found at the Tivoli, both MILTON HAYES and WILL FYFFE being "headliners" who top the bills at England's greatest vaudeville theatres.

<p>Different Every Night. MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES, MILTON HAYES,</p>	<p>Last Five Nights of WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE, WILL FYFFE,</p>
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"The King's Jester," Whose every word and gesture are original. The sparkle of his spontaneous wit astounds and captivates his audiences. His stage humour possesses the same brilliance as his other compositions "The Green Eye of the Yellow God" and the popular novel, "The Cling of Clay."

Scotland's Genius of Comedy.
 For the last week of his season, ending next Thursday, he will present the most popular numbers of his brilliant repertoire. Do not miss the wonderful Scottish night to be given at the theatre on Tuesday next by the Royal Caledonian Society and other Highland institutions.

Popular Return of
ERNEST HASTINGS,
ERNEST HASTINGS,
ERNEST HASTINGS,
ERNEST HASTINGS,

The Prince of Entertainers.

<p>IRIS and PHYLLIS, IRIS and PHYLLIS, IRIS and PHYLLIS,</p>	<p>THE VAULTOS, THE VAULTOS, THE VAULTOS,</p>
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London Musical Comedy Girls. Novel Acrobatics.

REG WYKEHAM and Co.
REG WYKEHAM and Co.
REG WYKEHAM and Co.
 (With PRESSY PRESTON),

In the Clever Sketch, "Hubby's Away."

JEANETTE GERRARD,
JEANETTE GERRARD,
JEANETTE GERRARD,

Bag Picture Artist.

ROBT. KEERS and TIVOLI ORCHESTRA.

Phone Central 928 or 929 for Reserves. Tel. Reserves held till 9.45 p.m. Book at Glen's or Tivoli Box Office.

Argus 5 Sept. (1925), 38.

ATTEND TO-NIGHT'S GREAT GALA AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE!

CRITERION—"NICE GOINGS ON"—TO-NIGHT AT 8.
WITH GUS BLUETT AND WONDERFUL COMEDY CAST.

Box Plans at Palling's till 11.30, then Theatre. Plans open for first six nights. Day sales at Peluso's on day of performance only.

This riot of mirth and melody provides Gus Bluett with the greatest role of his career, and marvellous parts for the remainder of the superlative cast, which includes:

CHARLES NORMAN, AGNES DOYLE, DON NICOL, PHIL SMITH, NOEL BOYD,
ERIC BUSH, LILY TITHERADGE, LOIS GREEN, REG. WYKEHAM.

Victor Gourié, George Moon, Fred Bonner and the famous "White Horse Inn" ballet. "Nice Goings On," one glorious succession of laughs, entrancing music, and fascinating ballets, is unquestionably the sweetest musical comedy any theatre has presented during the past six years. Produced by S. Albert Locke (of "White Horse Inn" fame), with ballets arranged by Ruby Morris. Musical Director: Leopold Packer.

Prices: First Night (to-night), R.S. and D.C. (booked), 6/6; B. Stalls (if any) 5/; Balcony, 2/. Week Nights, 7/ 5/ 2/. Matinees: 6/6, 4/6, 2/. Ordinary Saturday Nights, 6/ 5/ 2/. (Prices Plus Tax.)

Sydney Morning Herald 12 Jan. (1935), 2.

Additional information contributed by Alan Preston and Fred Malcolm.

First published: 20/08/2011

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