

HARRY BARRINGTON

(1859-1930) Singer, interlocutor, stage manager, manager and entrepreneur. Largely associated with Frank Smith at the Alhambra Music Hall in Sydney (1884-92) and Harry Rickards (Tivoli Theatre, Sydney) between 1898 and 1912. Barrington operated his own variety companies in Sydney during the mid-1890s and between 1913 and ca.1915.

A popular baritone who specialised in ballads, patriotic and martial songs, Harry Barrington's reputation as a reliable stage manager saw him undertake this position throughout much of his career. His first recorded engagement as a performer was in Melbourne in December 1880 at the People's Concerts. Among his fellow-artists at that time were [Amy Rowe](#), [Harry Allnut](#) and [Tom Buckley](#).¹ Although few details relating to his career between 1881 and 1884 have been located to date, Barrington's position as the interlocutor at Frank Smith's [Alhambra Music Hall](#), Sydney, in 1885 indicates that he was by then an experienced variety performer. Indeed, it is believed that he was engaged exclusively by [Frank Smith](#) during the next ten years, appeared regularly at the manager's two Sydney venues - the other being the [Sir Joseph Bank Pavilion and Pleasure Grounds](#) at Botany. During his tenure with Smith, Barrington worked with most of the leading Australian-based vaudeville and minstrel artists of the era, including [Edwin Shipp](#), [Charles Fanning](#), [Harry Clay](#), [Amy Rowe](#), [Johnny Matlock](#) and [Johnny Cowan](#). Smith is believed to have employed Barrington as the Alhambra Theatre's stage manager from sometime in 1887 - with the position having been held by Edwin Ship for several years prior to that time.

Theatre Magazine (Sydney) Aug. 1913, 32.



Following Frank Smith's decision to close down his operations at the Alhambra in the New Year of 1893, Barrington undertook his first foray into management. His company, which opened at the Alhambra Music Hall on 4 February, included Americans George and Viola Fortesque (then touring the Antipodes). The company moved to the Opera House in May, with another change of venue occurring on 4 August 1894 when he set up operations at the School of Arts. Harry Barrington's Variety and Burlesque Company by then comprised a number of leading Australian-based performers - notably [W. Horace Bent](#), [Priscilla Verne](#), [Florrie Forde](#), [Martyn Hagan](#) and [Lucy Fraser](#), [Dave Gardener](#) and [Johnny Matlock](#). His reputation and position within the industry was also such that [Harry Rickards](#) lent several of his high profile performers to Barrington's farewell benefit on 29 September – notably [Charles Fanning](#) and the [Bovis Brothers](#), along with General Mite (the world's smallest comic) and Americans Crawford and Mooney.

While details of Barrington's career between 1895 and 1897 are unknown at this stage, it is very likely that his activities were well known to Harry Rickards who offered him a contract in early 1898. By the following year Barrington was the [Tivoli Theatre's](#) stage manager, a position he held for almost fifteen years. His is known to have spent periods of time managing Rickards' Melbourne operations during that time, too. His employment with Rickards was not confined solely to management, however, with advertisements showing that he often took on the role of interlocutor in the first part minstrel programme. In 1900, for example, Barrington oversaw the proceedings in a troupe that included [Alf Lawton](#) and [Joseph Watts](#) (tambos), [Gus Franks](#) and [Jack Williams](#) (bones).

Harry Barrington left the Tivoli in 1913 and once again involved himself in entrepreneurial activities, returning to the Alhambra Music Hall later that same year with his own company. The [Theatre Magazine](#) notes in its December issue that Barrington "put on a first part which, allowing for the material at his disposal was never surpassed in any Sydney vaudeville house. Difficulties arose, however, in getting sufficient numbers at the Alhambra and it closed down as a vaudeville house opening for pictures."² Undeterred, Harry Barrington's Variety Company opened up its own small circuit in Sydney the following year, with the venues including the popular Coronation Theatre in Leichhardt. Artists of the calibre of [Nat Hanley](#), [Wal Cottier](#), [Shipp and Gaffney](#), [Denis Carney](#), [Olga Pennington](#), [Harry Rocks](#) appeared on the circuit during 1914, with [Billy Cass](#), [Wal Rockley](#), [Tom Leonard](#), [Lulu Eugene](#), [Joe Rox](#) and [Lily Vockler](#) being just some of the stellar artists engaged during 1915.

¹ "News of the Day." *Age* (Melbourne) 20 Dec. 1880, 2.

² *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) Dec. 1913, 7.

Harry Barrington's last known career movements were as manager at the Kensington Picture Palace, Sydney, in 1915 and as General Manager of the Alhambra Theatre in 1920.³ He died in Sydney on 18 July 1930, aged 71, and after almost a decade in retirement. His death was widely reported around Australia over the coming days and weeks such was his renown within the entertainment industry. He was survived by his wife, Ethel Barrington Parkes, and daughter, Mrs G. Harvey of Peak Hill, Sydney.

SEE ALSO

- [Frank Smith](#)

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

All engagements are for Sydney and metropolitan regions unless otherwise noted.

- 1884:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall / Sir Joseph Banks Pavilion, Botany > See *Australian Variety* 15 July 1914, 8).
- 1885:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall / Sir Joseph Banks Pavilion, Botany > See *Sydney Morning Herald* from 23 May).
- 1886:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall; 1 Jan. -).
- 1887:** [FOURTH IMPERIAL IMPS MATINEE](#) (Opera House; 11 Aug.).
- 1888:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall / Sir Joseph Banks Pavilion, Botany; 1 Jan - 31 Dec.).
- 1889:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall / Sir Joseph Banks Pavilion, Botany; 1 Jan - 31 Dec.).
- 1890:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall / Sir Joseph Banks Pavilion, Botany; 1 Jan - 31 Dec.).
- 1891:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall; 1 Jan - 31 Dec.).
- 1892:** [FRANK SMITH](#) (Alhambra Music Hall; 1 Jan - 31 Dec.).
- 1893:** [HARRY BARRINGTON](#) (Alhambra Music Hall; 4 Feb. > Alhambra Co) • (Opera House; ca. May - > Imperial Minstrel Co).
- 1894:** [HARRY BARRINGTON](#) (School of Arts; 4 Aug. > Variety & Burlesque Co).
- 1898:** [HARRY RICKARDS](#) (Tivoli Theatre > See ca. Mar. and *Sydney Morning Herald* adverts thereafter).
- 1899-1912:** [HARRY RICKARDS](#) (Tivoli Theatre > See *Theatre Magazine* Dec. 1913, 7; as Stage Mngr.).
- 1913:** [HARRY RICKARDS](#) (Tivoli Theatre > See *Theatre Magazine* Dec. 1913, 7) ► [HARRY BARRINGTON](#) (Alhambra MUSIC Hall; 7 June > Alhambra Co. See also *Sydney Morning Herald* adverts to early Nov.).
- 1914:** [HARRY BARRINGTON](#) (Sydney circuit - incl. Coronation Th, Leichhardt > Variety Co. See *Australian Variety* 6 Jan. 1914, n. pag.).
- ca. 1915:** [KENSINGTON PICTURE PALACE](#) (Kensington; no details).

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Obituary: Mr Harry Barrington." *Western Champion* (Parkes, NSW) 28 July 1930, 10.
- "Tivoli Old-Timer: Harry Barrington Dead." *Sun* (Sydney) 18 July 1930, 14.

³ *Sun* (Sydney) 20 July 1920, 3.