J.C. BAIN

(1870-1946). J. C. Bain started his career as an amateur comic in Brisbane in 1894 and went on to work extensively around Australia and New Zealand. He appeared with such firms as the Cogill Bros, Percy St John, Harry Rickards and Percy Dix. Between 1903 and 1906 he ran a company in Tasmania and later established himself as general manager at the National Amphitheatre (Syd). He operated his own Sydney circuit (1911-1914) and theatrical agency (ca.1915-16) before returning to comedy work in 1916 for the Fullers, Dix-Baker, Birch and Carroll, Harry Sadler, Harry Clay and Andy Kerr. After three years in government employment (ca. 1920-23) he returned to the stage, and in 1924 took over the lease of Wirth’s Hippodrome (Sydney) before retiring.

One of the best known vaudeville managers in Australasia" (AV: 23 Oct. 1919, n. pag.), James Cairns Bain1 was also regarded by his contemporaries as one of Queensland's most celebrated comedians and popular singers during the heyday of vaudeville. One Theatre magazine critic even proposed in 1923 that "for diversity in characterisation and versatility generally we have not the slightest hesitation in declaring Mr Bain… to be the greatest vaudeville comedian Australia has ever known" (June 1923, 10, 12). X-Ray's June 1914 article published in the same magazine provides further insights into a typical Bain performance:

During the past month [I have] had the pleasure of hearing J. C. Bain sing before an exclusive gathering. Among the old favourites that he revived were “Signor Don Fitzcalligan,” ”The Laughing Madman,” ”Ada's Serenade,” ”I Haven't Told the Missus Up to Now,” ”Sitting on the Rocks When the Tide Comes In,” ”It Wouldn't Take a Lot of That to Upset Me,” ”If I Hadn't Been a Sunday School Teacher” and ”The German Fifth.” When on the Rickards circuit, Mr Bain sang ”The Laughing Madman” for ninety performances at a stretch. Even more successful than this was his number ”Sitting on the Rocks When the Tide Comes In.” Mr Bain has a wonderful gift of characterisation. His props consist of half-a-dozen different hats and caps. He tosses on to his head a hat or cap in keeping with the song he is going to sing, and straightaway he becomes a Dutchman, a Scotsman, or an Irishman. He is equally at home in the three tongues. His facial expressions are as varied as they are marvelous. The world indeed lost a comedian of the very front rank when Mr Bain gave up the stage to become a manager (28).

1870 - 1895

The third and eldest son of Scottish blacksmith James Bain and his wife Elizabeth (nee McPherson McFarlane), J. C. Bain was born in Ipswich in 1870. His parents, who came from the central Scottish city of Perth, arrived in 1862 and soon afterwards settled in Ipswich, where Bain Snr eventually became the lessee of the local Municipal Baths. His eldest son attended Ipswich Grammar, excelling at sports from an early age. Numerous local newspaper notices report his exploits in both athletics (as a runner) and rugby, and in his senior year he captained the school's rugby team, playing in one of the forward positions. After leaving school he spent some time in the nearby Toowoomba region, being recorded as the captain of the Aubigny Rugby Club in 1889.2 That same year he was unanimously elected captain of a combined Darling Downs team to play the visiting New Zealand Maori team on 16 July. According to the Darling Downs Gazette Bain did not play in the warm-up match held

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1 Details relating to Bain's early life and family history have been sourced in large part from his descendents, in particular Liz Hardie (great-great-granddaughter).
2 Situated about 40 kilometres north-west of Toowoomba, the small town of Aubigny was also the centre for the State electoral district of the same name. It was created in a redistribution shortly before the 1873 state election and ceased prior to the 1972 election.
a few days earlier as he reportedly injured his shoulder the previous week during a rugby match played on skates. He did, however, referee the game (15 July 1889, 2). He was also named as a member of the combined Ipswich/Toowoomba team which played the "Maoris" two days later, but it is unclear if he took part in that game.  

In 1890, then aged 20, Bain extended his athletic exploits and reputation by winning the Barcaldine Handicap, and on 1 January the following year won the amateur foot race held as part of the Ipswich picnic day races. The event, sponsored by railway developer George Bashford to launch the new line, was hosted by Bashford's daughter and Bain's future wife, Mary Emma Bashford. Two days later he also beat his competitors to win the Ipswich Handicap (receiving another £10 for his efforts). By this time Bain appears to have been living in Barcaldine, operating a tobacconist and fancy goods business under the name Bain and Co. The local newspaper, the Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central Western Districts also records that he had done a bit of bookmaking on the side (16 July 1895, 9).

Evidence regarding Bain's business activities from this period comes from details recorded in a court case and subsequent appeal taken against him and Messrs Holland and McBride in 1892 by Brisbane merchants Hertzberg, Millingen and Co. While details of the dispute which led to the first court case have not yet been located, it appears to have been instigated after goods delivered to Bain were not paid for. The Brisbane Courier records, however, that Bain was accorded the original verdict, and this may have been the result of confusion over who actually owned or was a partner in the business. According to statements made by Hertzberg he had initially determined that Holland and McBride owned the business and that Bain was employed as their manger and with full control over the running of the venture. This was to continue until certain conditions had been complied with, at which time Bain was to become proprietor. It had since been ascertained that "Bain never complied with the conditions and McBride ultimately took possession of the business." It appears that the plaintiffs had originally proceeded against Bain not knowing about this situation. Hertzberg's legal team (led by Attorney-General Sir S.W. Griffith) argued that they should have been awarded the judgement because there was significant doubt regarding a particular evidentiary document used in the earlier trial. The crux of the appeal lay therefore in establishing whether Bain was a partner in the business at the time or whether Holland and McBride were partners or disclosed or undisclosed principals. The appeal (which was undertaken in an attempt to recover costs) was eventually dismissed, however, on the grounds that the goods had since been paid for and that there was no evidence of fraud or surprise - the only grounds available to the plaintiffs in this instance (BC: 11 June 1892, 6).

After leaving Barcaldine Bain returned to his home town where he took up a position as a clerk. In August 1893, just after his 23rd birthday, he married Mary Bashford in Ipswich. His great-great granddaughter Liz Hardie writes that Mary was some five months pregnant at the time of their wedding, with their first child, James Bashford Bain born in December 1893. That same month Bain registered as a competitor in the Western Star Handicap, and was forced to start 12 yards back from the starting line such was his standing as a sprinter. By the following year Bain and his wife were living in Brisbane where he initially found employment with George Adams' Tattersalls Sweeps and later with Finney, Isles and Co, a furniture and drapery business located adjacent to the Gaiety Theatre (Hardie, email, 22 Mar. 2012). It is believed that it was around this time that Bain began to increasingly try his hand at presenting comedy routines at various amateur entertainments, including benefits and smoke nights. His first recorded appearance found to date was at a benefit held for Ted Holland and James Bashford (Theatre Royal) on 11 May. His amusing rendering of "Hip Hip Hooray for Temperance" and "Riley" were again well encored (BC: 21 May 1894, 6). The following night he took part in the "Great Musical Entertainment and Sports Night" fundraiser for the Brisbane Rowing Club (Gaiety Theatre). In its review of the evening the Brisbane Courier wrote:

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3 For further details of these representative games see the "Historical Notes and Corrections" section below.

4 Hardie, email 22 Mar. 2912
Mr J. Bain, who has become a firm favourite at these sports night gatherings, sang "Signor Don Fitzcallaghan." His comical gestures and the absurdity of the words of the song caused intense amusement, and in response to an encore he sang "Is That Mr. Reilly?... Mr Bain followed with another of his comic songs "I Haven't Told the Missus." He was doubly encored and succeeded throughout in provoking the heartiest laughter (22 May 1894, 6).

In mid-July that same year Bain travelled to New South Wales with the Queensland Representative Rugby team for a series of games against various regional teams and two "Champion Inter-colonial matches" between the two states. These were played on 21 and 28 July. It is unclear in what capacity his involvement was, as his name does not appear in the fixtures for either game (either as a run on player or as an "emergency man."

On the evening before the second match, however, Bain was given feature billing by Harry Rickards for a "Special Sports Night" held at the Tivoli for the visiting Queensland football team. According to the *Theatre* magazine in 1909 "the house laughed itself horse and wanted some more. Mr Rickards at once offered Bain an engagement [but] Bain refused it [as he] was still not satisfied with himself." He subsequently "went back to Brisbane, determined in mind" to develop a professional act (Dec. 1909, n. pag.).

After returning to Brisbane Bain began working more intensely on his comedy routines. This lead to more regular engagements in the city, and especially at the two leading vaudeville venues - the Gaiety and the Theatre Royal. Reviews of his performances over the next 18 months were unanimously generous:

Mr J. C. Bain, whose reputation as a comic singer of excellent parts is growing very rapidly, was also a performer. He found a most appreciative audience, and the selections which he gave, evidencing very happy gifts as an entertainer, vastly amused his hearers. He was recalled very enthusiastically four times in succession, and then the audience were loath to let him go (6 Apr. 1895, 4). McGregor benefit Cent hall

The crowning feature of the evening was the appearance of Mr J. C. Bain, who is fast winning for himself a strong reputation as a clever entertainer. In the comic sketch, "Perhaps and Perhaps Not," he fairly captured his audience, leading them at his pleasure both through mirth and sadness. They proved not a little exacting; for not until Mr Bain had reappeared during the first part three times did they relieve him. In the second part he appeared to even greater advantage than in the first, and in the chorus he was joined heartily by the audience (29 Apr. 1895, 4).

5 A term sometimes applied to a reserve player (see for example "Intercolonial Football," BC: 25 Aug. 1891, 6). A list of players for the Qld v NSW game appears in the 20 July 1894 issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (page 3).
On 27 April 1895 Bain took part in a charity fancy dress football match played at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds. The Queenslander noted that he "added greatly to the artistic aspect of the performance by appearing as Sen. Don Fitz-Callaghan, and true to his reputation fought well and helped to avert defeat (4 May 1895, 829). It also appears that by mid-year Bain had begun to feel assured that he had what it took to become a professional variety entertainer and made his first step, albeit a big one. In this respect he finally accepted Harry Rickards' invitation to appear at the Sydney Tivoli. He was not yet confident enough to quit his employment in Brisbane, however, with the Brisbane Courier recording that the Sydney and a following engagement with Rickards in Melbourne were being undertaken during his three weeks holidays (3 July 1895, 5). Bain may have technically made his professional debut at the Tivoli, a claim that very few if any other vaudeville performers would have been able to make. His first appearance under Rickards' management was on Saturday 6 July, with the Melbourne engagement beginning the following Saturday (13 July). The Sydney Morning Herald, Australian Town and Country and Argus were just three newspapers which recorded that his two engagements were a marked success.

During the remainder of the year Bain appeared at various one-off amateur engagements (benefits, charity fundraisers etc), while continuing to fulfil his employment duties with Finney, Isles and Co. Arguably his most important engagement, however, was a one week’s appearance at the Theatre Royal for the Cogill Brothers. For this he received top-billing for the week, another unusual situation given his still largely amateur status. He also shortly afterwards made a featured guest appearance with Pollards Lilliputian Open Company (Her Majesty's, 2 Dec.). Things did not go altogether well for him at this time, though. In late November Bain received possibly his first ever negative review, this being in response to his lead performance in Seymour Dicker's production of The Sorcerer (by Gilbert and Sullivan). In reporting on the one night only production at the Opera House on 21 November, the Brisbane Couriers theatre critic wrote:

> The main part was taken by Mr J. C. Bain, who as a singer of comic songs made a highly creditable reputation, not only in Brisbane, but also in Sydney and Melbourne. It is therefore singular that Mr Bain should have failed to grasp the humour of the part, and that is [all] the more remarkable seeing that Mr Dicker has had opportunities of studying Grossmith in it, has played it himself in good company, and should have put his chief comedian in the way of understanding what Gilbert really intended. Mr Bain was also deficient in the music, and introducing "gags" which were entirely out of place (22 Nov. 1895, 6).

**1896-1899**

On 27 January 1896 a complimentary farewell benefit was held for Bain in the lead-up to his departure for Sydney and proposed later trip to England. While the latter venture did not eventuate, Bain had finally made the decision to become a fulltime variety artist, and in this respect used his connection with Harry Rickards to secure engagements in Sydney and Melbourne during the year. His final appearance on the Brisbane stage as a local resident was on 18 February when he featured on the bill of a concert put on at the Centennial Hall by the Northern Flood Relief Fund to raise funds for the Pearl disaster. Recorded as leaving Brisbane by train on 5 March, he appears not to have been accompanied at that time by his family (BC: 6 Mar. 1896, 5).

While the Brisbane, and indeed Queensland public, was led to believe that James Bain's departure for the south was to finally pursue a career on the professional stage, this was in fact only part of the reason. What they were not aware of was that by late 1895 – the year his second child, Alma, was born - Bain had developed a severe gambling problem. Liz Hardie writes that her great-great grandfather "was betting on horse racing, cricket and football matches and borrowing money from a number of different sources, including his mother-in-law and his employer, Finney, Isles and Co." As a patron of his benefit Thomas Finney no doubt kept a close eye on the money raised. Hardie notes in this respect that Bain made no money from the event, with all the proceeds going towards his debts.

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6 See full report in the "Additional Quotations" section below.

7 Reports of Bain's success at this time, and indeed over the course of his career, were often published in regional Queensland newspapers.
After leaving Brisbane, Bain went on to the Tivoli circuit, playing seasons in Melbourne and Sydney before joining the Charles Godfrey Vaudeville Company. Godfrey, an eminent actor, descriptive comic singer and character impersonator, had begun his career in Britain in the mid-1870s, and by the time of his first Australian tour for Harry Rickards was widely heralded around the colonies as a "lion comique." After the completion of his Tivoli engagement Godfrey put together his troupe, headed by Bain, the Bovis Bros, Ada Baker, and the Lingard Sisters. The company made its debut in Geelong before playing seasons in Sydney, and Melbourne. In early September Godfrey took his troupe to New Zealand. That tour, which began in Dunedin on 7 September, is now considered significant in terms of the country's cinematic history. In this respect Godfrey arranged with two showman, Professors Housman and Gow to present a programme of films projected by Edison's Kineotagraph during his Auckland season. As Clive Sowry records, "this was the first public screening of motion pictures in New Zealand" (n. pag.).

The company toured with Hausman and Gow Godfrey through several centres on the North Island, including Thames, Paeroa, Gisborne, and Wanganui before parting ways at Wellington. The Godfrey troupe then returned to the South Island to play a return engagement in Christchurch.

Bain's contributions to the entertainment impressed most of the New Zealand critics, especially given his youth. Even before the tour had commenced the young comedian was being described as "Australia's Chevalier" (AS: 12 Sept. 1896, 2). The Star (Christchurch records that "the young Australian comique was very successful on his first appearance, and in 'Ada's Serenade' gave proof of great ability as a character vocalist" (16 Sept. 1896, 2). Wellington's Evening Post similarly noted: "In Mr J. C. Bain the company possess a clever comique, and encore after encore was the reward of his efforts" (26 September. 1896, 5). At least one critic noted, however, that Bain's inexperience was still somewhat evident, writing "J.C. Bain, the Brisbane comique, is also a great favourite here. I Haven't Told the

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Charles Godfrey
Source: www.allposters.com

Magician and entrepreneur George Percy Hausmann was later known as Percy Verto and had a long association with Australia.

Godfrey's 1896 Auckland season at Abbott's Opera House began on 10 October. The Kineotagraph exhibition began on Tuesday 13 October.
Missus,’ 'There Yet,’ [and] 'Ada's Serenade,’ etc go well. Mr Bain has, however, a lot to learn yet in the way of biz" (OW: 22 Oct. 1896, 39). The Godfrey vaudeville Company returned to Australia in early December, travelling first to Tasmania where they opened at Hobart's Theatre Royal. The Mercury records that the troupe's appearance on opening night was undertaken almost immediately after they stepped off the boat. The large attendance was also in part a response by the locals to the appearance of the Australia 11 cricket team which had just returned to the country from a tour of Great Britain and the USA. Writing of Bain's performance the Mercury's theatre critic said:

Mr J. C. Bain, described as a young Australian comique, appeared in a little musical entertainment of his own, the most successful number in which was 'Ada's Serenade,' in which he illustrated, in a highly amusing way, the different serenades of 'Ada' by lovers of various nationalities - the most practical and characteristic of which was the Scotchman's. Mr Bain contributed half-a-dozen or more songs to the night's entertainment, and had his full share of the abundant applause (5 Dec. 1896, 3).

In February 1897 Bain returned to Brisbane, having played at the Sydney Tivoli from mid-December the previous year. It was not a homecoming he would have been looking forward to. By then the comedian's debts, and his inability to repay them, had become so problematic that he was forced to apply for insolvency. To make matters worse a number of creditors, including his previous employer Finney, Isles and Co and a Mr G H Perry, had sought to press fraud charges against him. After having his financial situation investigated, Bain was placed in the humiliating situation of appearing in court in early April to undergo a final examination. Even worse, a comprehensive transcript of the hearing was publishing in the Brisbane Courier, with the report outlining the history and extent of his gambling addiction. According to Bain's testimony he had borrowed almost £300 between May 1895 and January 1896. The transcript also listed his creditors, two of these being his wife's parents (owed more than £100) and Deane and Co (aka Delohery, Bovis and Deane) who were then the lessees of the Gaity Theatre. According to the transcript the attempt to charge Bain with fraud largely centred on three issues - his omission of Deane and Co as a creditor, a matter which the plaintiff's solicitor argued contravened the insolvency act; that he attempted to borrow money under false pretences (by not indicating the extent of his debts), and that his failure to keep proper account of his debts. After some argument the presiding judge, Justice Cooper, refused the application for committal. In his summing up Justice Cooper said that although it was a "most unsatisfactory insolvency... he had no doubt that [Bain] could arrange matters with his creditors if he tried." He then "adjourned the examination for six months with leave for the insolvent to apply for re-examination at an earlier date on giving fourteen days notice to his creditors" (6 Apr. 1897, 2).10 Bain underwent his final examination before Justice Cooper at the Insolvency Court on 6 October, at which time his application for insolvency was passed (BC: 8 Oct. 1897, 4).

During his time in Brisbane in 1897 Bain appeared on bills for a variety of organisations, the most notable being a series of Saturday Shilling Concerts staged at Centennial Hall by Mrs Gilbert Wilson beginning 8 May. Bain was invited to perform for the second show on 15 May. Arguably the biggest name on the bill for these concerts, however, was Scottish tragedian and would-be Queensland parliamentarian Walter Bentley, who throughout the year presented a range of comedy lectures on Ireland and Scotland among other topics. Bain's other known appearances at these concerts occurred in late May, June, September, October and December. In August Bain and Bentley also joined several other local artists to present an evening of entertainment for the annual dinner of the Queensland Stock Exchange (courier Building, CBD). Among his other Brisbane engagements were several appearances with the Elite Burlesque Co (managed by Delohery, Bovis and Deane), a role in The Work Girl (produced by Charles Holloway and William Anderson at the Opera House), and benefits for F. M. Clark and Deane's English Opera and Burlesque Co.

With his insolvency having been finalised Bain's final appearance in Brisbane was set for the 9 October Shilling Concert. His departure was delayed, however, when he caught Typhoid fever and was forced to remain for several weeks in Ipswich. After recuperating he made his reappearance at the popular Centennial Hall concerts on 4 December. He was re-engaged for the festive season, when Walter Bentley oversaw the production of The Passion Play - held on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day (1898). Bain's performance again attracted positive reviews, as he had all year, with the Brisbane Courier critic writing: "Mr J. C. Bain, as usual had his audience with

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10 See "Further Reference" section below for a link to this article in the National Library of Australia's Trove digitised newspaper repository.
him, every one of his half-dozen comic selections serving to establish his claim to rank as a first-class comedian and mimic" (BC: 28 Dec. 1897, 5).

By the late 1890s Bain’s reputation was becoming well known further afield. Some critics suggested in later years that the ten year period spanning the turn of the decade was when his stage craft was at its peak. The *Brisbane Courier* notes in 1902, for example, that Bain was one of those performers “who only has to step before the curtain to score applause [and that] the fun was fast and furious whilst he held the boards” (27 Jan. 1902, 6). In early January Kate Howarde engaged him to appear as a special guest during her Brisbane pantomime season. The productions staged were *Diavolo Up-to-Date, Little Jack Sheppard* and *Aladdin Up-to-Date*. He ended his engagement on 7 February with an appearance at Howarde’s benefit, performing a selection of songs from his comic repertoire including “Oh What a Time!” A few weeks later the theatrical community planned another benefit for Bain, with the event to be presented under the patronage of the Queensland Attorney General, the Hon. T. J. Byrnes. As one of the feature acts Bain promised to introduce a few of the latest character sketches from London (BC: 19 Feb. 1898, 4). The benefit was cancelled, however, on account of heavy rain. Although it was held a week later (28 Feb.), a number of artists were forced to cancel after coming down with dengue fever. The auditorium was nevertheless reduced to standing room, so large was the attendance. The *Brisbane Courier* further reports that Bain “fairly surpassed himself” in providing the comic elements: “He sang song after song and it was with much reluctance that the audience allowed him to leave the stage” (1 Mar. 1898, 5).

Some two weeks after appearing at Seymour Dicker’s testimonial at the Centennial Hall (14 Mar.), Bain arrived in Charters Towers with his own company of vaudeville artists. This tour of the Queensland North is believed to have been his first entrepreneurial venture in the variety industry, and was surprisingly strong given it’s manager’s inexperience. The company not only boasted world famous illusionist Emile Lazern, but also seasoned patter comedians Carlton and Sutton, pianist David Cope Jnr (son of the well-known music director/composer), celebrated baritone C. J. Botter, Little Stella Tracey (late of Her Majesty’s Theatre, Sydney) and May Heckey (a Tivoli artist). The troupe later played five nights in Rockhampton and several other towns before returning to Brisbane to open at the Centennial hall on 20 April. The company is next reported as appearing in Warwick on 11 May.

In December that same year Bain appeared on a Harry Rickards bill at the Cremorne Theatre (Perth), possibly upon his return to Australia. After engagements in Sydney and Melbourne in early 1899 he returned to Brisbane, appearing with the Continental Vaudeville Company during its season at the Theatre Royal (ca. Aug.). That troupe included such notable performers as Harry Clay (also manager), Albert McKisson and Jack Kearns, Ida Rosslyn (aka Ida Tauchert) and Bob Bell (later an entrepreneur in his own right). A season with Percy St John’s Empire Company (Bris) later in the year was followed in mid-January 1900 by another Rickards engagement at the Bijou Theatre (Melb). Bain continued with Rickards on a number of occasions through to 1902 when he again returned to Brisbane in early 1902 to take up another engagement with Percy St John at the Theatre Royal.

An additional highlight of 1898 was the birth of his second son, Thomas. It also appears that Bain travelled overseas, first to undertake engagements in South Africa for Messrs Hyman and Alexander, and then to try his luck in London. Bain had been signaling throughout the year that he intended to go (at least) to London but these announcements always seemingly suggested that it was occur shortly.12 The last mention of his leaving Australia has been found in a preview for his benefit at the Fremantle Town Hall on 10 September, with the notice recording that the event was being held “prior to his departure for London” (7 Sept. 1898, 6).

11 See *Australian Variety* 18 Apr. 1917, 10; and *Theatre* June 1923, 10-12.
12 See for example: NM: 24 Mar. 1898, 2; WE&T: 7 May 1898, 7; WA: 10 Sept. (1898), 5
While details of his overseas travels are yet to be confirmed, the fact that Bain's name subsequently disappears from newspapers currently held in the Trove digitized newspaper repository between 10 September 1898 and 1 April 1899 (when he re-appears at the Sydney Tivoli) suggests that he may well left Australia. In this respect six and a half months would have been given him enough time to play a series of short engagements in South Africa and/or the UK.

Following his return to the Rickards circuit, which also included a season in Melbourne at the Bijou Theatre, Bain's next major engagement was in Brisbane with the touring Continental Vaudeville Company. For this season he appeared alongside high profile artists such as Harry Clay, Albert McKisson and Jack Kearns, Ida Rosslyn, Bob Bell and music director Joe Summers.13

**1900 - 1946**

[NB: Research into this period is currently being undertaken. An updated biography is planned for publication by mid-2014]

While Bain's movements over the next year or so are unclear, sometime around 1903 he moved to Hobart and set up a semi-permanent company in Hobart. Bain's Entertainers continued to service the Tasmanian capital and several regional centres up until sometime around 1907. By 1906 he was running five companies, having opened up a regional Victorian circuit, which included Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo. Bain later closed down his Tasmanian and Victorian companies and moved to Sydney where he took up a contract with James Brennan at the National Amphitheatre. By 1908/09 he was employed as the "Nash's" general manager in addition to part time performance duties. He remained with Brennan until April 1912 at which time he set up his own Sydney circuit. A little over a month after Bain's Advanced Vaudeville Entertainers opened for business, initially playing out of four venue operations - the Princess Theatre (city, from 16 Sept.), the Coliseum (Nth Syd), Coronation Theatre (Bondi Junction) and ACME Theatre (Rockdale) - he was tended a complimentary benefit by the Australian Vaudeville Artists' Federation (A.V.A.F.) for his services to the industry. As the Theatre notes, Mr Bain "has kept in employment on an average 80 Australian performers weekly [and in doing so] is regarded as the saviour of the A.V.A.F. in Sydney" (May 1912, 27). Leading Australian performers known to have been engaged by Bain over the next three years include: George Sorlie, Joe Rox, Ward Lear, Con Moreni, Billy Cass, Jack and Vera Kearns, Carlton Max, Ted Stanley, Sadie Gale, Arthur Tauchert, James Craydon, Maud Fanning (including Arthur Elliott and the Elliott Sisters), George Pagden, Johnny Gilmore, Maurice Chenoweth, and Shipp and Gaffney. The Theatre notes in 1912, too, that while Bain was not confining himself entirely to local performers (with recent overseas arrivals such as Nellie Kolle known to have been engaged), "any Australian who can deliver the goods can always rely on getting an opening with him at a most liberal salary" (Oct. 1912, 23). By 1914, however, Bain's changed his engagement policy, employing only members of the A.V.A.F.

Around 1914, Bain's youngest daughter, Verna (born ca. 1905), began attracting the attention of critics and vaudeville agents. Billed as Little Verna, she was described by Australian Variety that year as one of Australia's finest exponents of the Genee school of Terpsichore. The situation for Bain around the time war broke out, however, was one of much difficulty. After being forced to reduce his Princess Theatre orchestra down to pianist, Will Farrell, Bain eventually closed down his operations and temporarily set up a theatrical agency at Inglis Chamber, 244 Pitt Street, Sydney. Over the next four years he and Verna appeared with a variety of Australian-based companies, including Dix-Baker (Victoria Theatre, Newcastle), the Fullers, Birch and Carroll (Qld). Although reduced to working for other companies after having spent several years in charge of his own, Bain refused to accept anything but quality engagements. During one Fuller's season in 1916, for example, he walked out of his contract after objecting to being asked to open a programme - a position deemed by most artists as the worst on a bill (TT: Nov. 1916, 49). All was apparently forgiven, however, as he was back with the company touring New Zealand later the following year.

Theatre May (1911), 6.

In early 1917 he and Verna were engaged for a tour of South Africa, and upon their return to Australia found engagements with Harry Sadler (Hobart) and Harry Clay (Syd) before undertaking a tour of the East. The three month

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13 The Continental Vaudeville Company toured Queensland in 1898 and 1899. Both companies were managed by different entrepreneurs, however - with the earlier tour overseen by J. L. Travers and the 1899 tour by G. Sullivan. One constant was the presence of Harry Clay and his wife (Kate Henry) and daughter (Essie).
engagement was abandoned after six weeks, however, when Verna contracted a mild case of malaria while in Surabaya. After returning to Australia and spending some time in recuperation Verna traveled to New Zealand with her father to work the Fullers' Dominion Dominion circuit. The pair later toured New Zealand briefly with Tom Pollard and returned to Australia playing the Birch and Carroll Queensland circuit once again, followed by another Fullers engagement, this time at the Empire Theatre (Bris).

In 1919 Bain took up a position with Andy Kerr running the Gaiety Theatre (Syd), but that association does not appear to have lasted long despite much industry hype having surrounded the partnership. An advertisement in the Brisbane Courier indicates that he had signed up hypnotist Dr Raymond for a season at Brisbane's Elite Theatre in October 1921. Sometime after this venture, however, Bain retired from the industry for a few years, taking up a government position in Sydney. By May 1923 he was once again treading the boards as a comic, and the following year returned to management, taking over the reins of Wirth's Hippodrome (Syd) beginning 2 August. He remained there through until sometime during the following year. One of his key signings during that period was Jack Kears. While details of Bain's career from 1925 onwards have not yet been established, it is known that he was one of several veterans to appear on the final Sydney Tivoli Theatre programme, staged on 26 September 1929. Bain is believed to have returned to Brisbane in his retirement. He died there in 1946.

Aside from his colourful career on the variety stage, J. C. Bain continued to maintain his reputation as an avid gambler, with a particular liking for horse racing. "One of the biggest and gamest bettors," records Australian Variety in 1916, "when Queen of Scots and Parisian won the Newmarket Cup double (about five years ago), Jimmy cleaned up £4,000 and in less than six months had done the lot! Bet? Jimmy would bet! He used to make some of those bookmakers sweat. And Lord help them if he picked three running! (7 June 1916, 17). Another report concerning Bain's betting victories notes that he backed Portrush and St Carwynne for £10,000 in the 1914 Epsom and Metro cups. Portrush duly won; St Carwynne was 3 to 1 and Jimmy would not lay off a bob! He still has the vouchers" noted Australian Variety (23 May 1917, 22).

Regarded as a clever manager, in the same class as those like Harry Clay and Frank M. Clark, J. C. Bain was capable of using any tricks and devices possible to get the best out of his performers. Variety performer and occasional journalist, Redhead Wilson, recalls in 1917 that Bain would try to build the confidence of opening acts at his matinees - generally new and emerging artistes - by getting all the kids at the back to create a furor of noise. "Jimmy led the kids and kicked the loose barrier and encouraged the crowd with his head just over the top. Serosos was his special delight, as they sang and danced themselves to a state of exhaustion, thinking what a tremendous hit they were and how Mr Bain would be pleased with their success. Sometimes they did as many as five and six songs and dances - all they knew - at the matinee but were hugely disappointed at night, and thought the audience were [sic] horrid!" Wilson also recalls that when Bain was running his operations in Hobart he employed a man, Andy Kirk, to note down any failures deemed the result of alcohol. "In those days," writes Wilson, we had many who were inclined to bend the elbow and Andy was kept pretty busy reporting. To be seen coming out of a hotel constituted an offence… and [Kirk] would then glue his eyes on the performer to observe the ill-effects oozing out."15

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

• The smoke concert given in the Trades Hall, Turbot-street, was largely attended… Mr J. C. Bain contributing in both parts and as usual to the vast delight of the audience. For each song this delightful entertainer was recalled twice (BC: 25 Feb. 1895, 6).

• Mr James C. Bain, the young Queensland comic singer, whose clever and amusing sketches have always been so highly appreciated at entertainments in this city, leaves next week for the South on a three weeks' holiday. While away Mr Bain will appear with Mr Harry Rickards's variety company in the two big capitals. He has been engaged for the Tivoli Theatre, Sydney, during the week commencing 6th July, and for the Opera House, Melbourne, during the following week. Mr Bain sang at the Tivoli Theatre while in Sydney with the intercolonial football team last year, and was such a great success that Mr Rickards was only too anxious to secure his services again for the brief periods named. The young artists is a native of Ipswich, of which town his father was a respected citizen for many years (BC: 3 July 1895, 5).

• Mr J. C. Bain, as usual had his audience with him, every one of his half-dozen comic selections serving to establish his claim to rank as a first-class comedian and mimic (BC: 28 Dec. 1897, 5).

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14 A report, published in Australian Variety 23 May 1917, 22) indicates that not only had Bain won £5,000 and was broke after nine months, but that he failed to cough up the commission due to Harry Sadler.

15 The citation details for this anecdote have been mislaid. The article is titled "Humour from the Dressing Room" and credited to "Redhead."
"Manager James C. Bain and some of his old-time stage characters. The series probably constitute a world’s record in grotesque expression for an actor."

Theatre  Feb. (1912), n. pags.
HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Although captaining the "Downsmen" team for the 16 July 1889 game in Toowoomba against the touring New Zealand side, Bain does not appear to have played a significant role in the game, receiving no mention in any of the reports. This may have been in part a result of the shoulder injury he had suffered a little over a week earlier. The following is a section taken from Peter Horton's 2012 paper "International Rugby Comes to Queensland (1888-1889): Two Tours and their Impact on the Development of the Code." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29.3 (2012), 419-20. (NB: The June dates at the start of this section are errors. The month was July)

Between their clashes with the Queensland team, the Natives first travelled on Monday, 15 June 1889, to Toowoomba to play the 'Downsmen' and then on Thursday, 18 June, to Ipswich. The Natives were to have arrived in Toowoomba on the midday train to a great welcome, however, they were delayed and did not arrive until 9.45 p.m. Despite the confusion, over 500 people congregated at the railway station, 'in the hope of getting a glimpse at the Maori [sic] footballers.'

The next day, the weather was atrocious. A driving wind and lashing sleet greeted the teams as they met at the Racecourse Ground. Considerable speculation was made as to the sanity of the spectators:

The wind increased in violence, until it blew half a gale, driving the rain before it horizontally like sleet, the longer the players waited, the worse the aspect of affairs. But all the time the crowd kept increasing. Cabs arrived every minute crammed with full grown men, perfectly sane on every other subject while not a few lunatics trudged the entire distance, reaching the ground like drenched rats.

The Toowoomba team took the field first and the Natives followed. *The Darling Downs Gazette* somewhat patronisingly and, in a highly racialised manner, described the teams as they appeared upon the Racecourse Ground: 'The Maori [sic] followed. It was easy to distinguish the teams, the New Zealanders being pretty near all black and the Downs men nearly all white'. The tone of the description, though tinged with an element of sarcasm, was very much in keeping with country attitudes on the question of race. The match against Toowoomba never rose to any great heights, the elements precluding any open play or enjoyment for the players. The provincial nature of the game was characterised in the dismay shown by the Toowoomba players when their single chance of scoring a kick at goal was denied them, when the ball struck a tree and was deflected away.

In the *Darling Downs Gazette*, Wednesday, 17 July 1889, the Toowoomba team was described for this, the first of two matches, as an XVIII, whilst records show that the first match was between a 'Maori [sic] XV and a Toowoomba XVI, with the second a 'Maori [sic] XIV against a Toowoomba XVII.

1st Match Team

*V. Toowoomba (16). N.Z.N. Team won by 16 points to nil.


*New Zealand Native Team played with 14 men.

Ipswich Combined Team and Toowoomba 2nd Match Team

*V. Ipswich, N.Z.N. Team won by 17 points to 5.


It can be seen that the Natives' clash against Ipswich was not, in fact against an Ipswich Rangers Rugby Club team. The Ipswich team had been strengthened by the inclusion of several leading Brisbane club and Queensland representative players, including Harry Speakman, R. Stronge, Fred O'Rourke and M. Hyland. The strengthened Ipswich team was far more competitive and scored five points to the Natives 17.
2. The December 1909 _Theatre_ magazine (Dec. 1909) article records that that Bain "came to Sydney with a crack football team and sang at a sports night at the Tivoli" in 1895. As the above biography notes, however, this actually occurred in 1894. The article also suggests it was three years before he had put together a satisfactory act (TT: Dec. 1909, n. pag.). His name can be found in December 1896 Tivoli advertisements.

**ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY**

An asterisk (*) beside a date indicates that it is either approximate or has yet to be established.

**1894:**
- n/e (W. McFarlane, Secretary - Centennial Hall, Bris; 10 Aug. > one night only – “Grand Scotch Gathering”) ▶ **COLLIE** (Th Royal, Bris; 11 May > benefit for Ted Holland and James Craydon) ▶ n/e (Sandgate TH, Bris; 20 May > St Nicholas' Church fundraiser) ▶ n/e (Gaiety Th, Bris; 21 May > Brisbane Rowing Club fundraiser) ▶ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 27 July > one night only – “Special Sports Night”) ▶ n/e (School of Arts, Bulimba, Bris > benefit to family of a man who drowned in the Brisbane River) ▶ **CALEDONIAN SOCIETY & BURNS CLUB** (Centennial Hall, Bris; 20 Sept. > one night only – annual reunion) ▶ **SANDGATE STATE SCHOOL** (Sandgate TH, 14 Dec. > Break-up concert)

**1895:**
- **CIVIL SERVICE ASSOCIATION** (Trades Hall, Turbot St, Bris; 8 Feb. > Smoke Night) ▶ n/e (Centennial Hall, Bris; 18 Mar. > St Patrick's Day Celebrations) ▶ **BRISBANE GYMNASIUM** (Brisbane Gymnasium, 22 Mar. > fundraiser) ▶ n/e (Opera House, Bris; 22 Mar. > Harry Marshall benefit) ▶ n/e (Centennial Hall, Bris; 5 Apr. > D. McGregor benefit) ▶ **CALEDONIAN SOCIETY & BURNS CLUB** (Society Rooms, Bris; 25 Apr. > one night only – “Grand Opening”) ▶ **CIVIL SERVICE ASSOCIATION** (Trades Hall, Turbot St, Bris; 27 Apr. > Social) ▶ **YORK & JONES EMPIRE MINSTRELS** (Gaiety Th, Bris; 14 May > York and Jones benefit) ▶ n/e (Centennial Hall, Bris; 15 May > C. J. Botterg benefit) ▶ **BRISBANE GYMNASIUM** (Brisbane Gymnasium; 19 May > fundraiser) ▶ n/e (Centennial Hall, Bris; 3 June > Alfred Gross testimonial) ▶ **CIVIL SERVICE ASSOCIATION** (Protestant Hall, Bris; 14 June > Social) ▶ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 6-12 July) ▶ (Opera House, Melb; 13-19 July) ▶ **HELEN GORDON BENEFIT** (Gaiety Th, Bris; 5 Oct.) ▶ **COGILL BROS** (Th Royal, Bris; 19-25 Oct.) ▶ **SEYMOR DICKER** (Op House, Bris; 21 Nov. > _The Sorcerer_ – one night only) ▶ **POLLARD'S LILIPUTIAN OPERA Co** (Her Maj, Bris; 2 Dec. > One night only)

**1896**
- **LONDONER'S CLUB** (Club Rooms, Bris; 15 Jan. > Retirement benefit to the club's secretary) ▶ **RAILWAY CRICKET CLUB** (Railway Club and Library Reading Room, Bris; 24 Jan. > one night only - concert) ▶ n/e (Gaiety Th, Bris; 27 Jan. > Bain’s farewell benefit) ▶ n/e (Sandgate Th, Bris; 1 Feb. > St Nicholas' Church fundraiser) ▶ n/e (Centennial Hall, Bris; 18 Feb. > Northern Flood Relief Fund benefit) ▶ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Opera House, Melb; ca. 6 Apr. -*) ▶ (Tivoli Th, Syd; ca. May) ▶ **CHARLES GODFREY** (New Zealand tour; ca. Sept-Nov. > Charles Godfrey Vaudeville Co) ▶ (Th Royal, Hobart; 4 Dec. - *) ▶ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 19-31 Dec.)

1917: **HARRY RICKARDS** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 1 Jan. - ca. Feb. *) ➤ **PADDINGTON CRICKET CLUB** (Oddfellows Hall, Woollahra, Syd; ca. week beginning 19 Jan. > entertainment put on for J. J. Kelly, Australian Cricket wicketkeeper) ➤ **DELOHERY, BOVIS & DEANE** (Gaiety Th, Bris; 20-26 Feb. > Elite Burlesque Co) ➤ **CHARLES HOLLOWAY & WILLIAM ANDERSON** (Op House, Bris; 27 Feb. - * Charles Holloway Dramatic Combination, *The Woman Who Was Married*) ➤ **DELOHERY, BOVIS & DEANE** (Gaiety Th, Bris; 28 June. > Elite Burlesque Co, last night of the season) ➤ **F. M. CLARK BENEFIT** (Gaiety Th, Bris; 2 July) ➤ **OLD STOCK EXCHANGE** (Courier Building, Bris; 6 Aug. > Annual Dinner) ➤ *n/e (Gaiety Th, Bris; 17 Sept. > benefits for Deane's English Burlesque Co)

NB: Bain's known Shilling Pops Concerts (Centennial Hall, Bris) were 15 May, 22 May, 23 May, 5 June, 4 Sept., 9 Oct., 10 Dec and 25 and 27 Dec (*Passion Play* performances).

1899: **HARRY RICKARDS** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 1 Apr. - *) • (Bijou Th, Melb; 6 May - *) ➤ **G. SULLIVAN** (Th Royal, Bris; 5 Aug. - 1 Sept. > Continental Vaudeville Co) ➤ **J. F. MACMAHON THEATROPHONE Co** (Th Royal, Charters Towers; 9 Oct.) ➤ **J. C. BAIN** (Qld regional tour; ca. Oct-Nov. * > Bain's Entertainers) ➤ **ST JOHN'S EMPIRE VARIETY Co** (Op House, Bris; 25 Dec.)


1900: **ST JOHN'S EMPIRE Co** (Op House, Bris; 1 Jan.) ➤ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Bijou Th, Melb; 13 Jan.) ➤ **PERCY DIX** (New Zealand tour with Dix's Gaiety Co; 21 June – 31 Dec.)

NB: New Zealand tour itinerary incl. (City Hall, Auckland; 21 June -). *(Exchange Hall, Wellington; ca. July-Aug.) • (Gaiety Th, Christchurch, ca. 1 Sept. – mid Nov*) • (City Hall, Auckland; 8-31 Dec.)

1901: **PERCY DIX** (City Hall, Auckland; 1 Jan. – *) ➤ **J. C. BAIN** (New Zealand tour; ca. Jan - June) ➤ **HARRY RICKARDS** (Melb; ca. July-Aug. > *See A: 30 July 1901, 7) (Tivoli Th, Syd; ca. 16 Nov. – *)

NB: Bain's New Zealand tour itinerary incl. *Miners' Union Hall, Thames (29 Jan. -*) • (Napier; ca. 16 Feb. -*) • (Th Royal, Gisborne; 21 Feb. -*) • (Oddfellows' Hall, Wanganui; 6 Mar. -*) • (Palmerston; ca. 11 Mar.) • (Dannevirke; 19 Mar.-*) • (Greymouth; ca. 16 Apr.) • (Invercargill; 24 May -*)

1902: **ST JOHN'S ROYAL BURLESQUE Co** (Th Royal, Bris; 4 Jan.)

1904/05: **BAIN'S ENTERTAINERS** (Hobart; no details. > *See TT: Aug. 1905, 6)

1906: **BAIN'S ENTERTAINERS** (Hobart, Launceston, regional Victoria - incl. Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo; ca. June-Aug. > *See TT: June 1906, 5; July 1906, 5; Aug. 1906, 5)

1909/10: **JAMES BRENNAN** (Nat Amph, Syd; ca. Apr. 1909 - early 1911. > See TT: Apr. 1909, 17 and SMH adverts thereafter (to ca. 1911). See also Gaiety Th, Syd May 1910 onwards)

1911 **JAMES BRENNAN** (Nat Amph, Syd; 14 Jan. > Ends relationship with Brennan ca. Apr.) ➤ **J. C. BAIN** (Princess Th, Syd; 16 Sept. > Opening night).


1913: **J. C. BAIN** (Sydney circuit. > *See TT: Jan. 1913, 16 and SMH adverts from 6 Jan. thereafter)

1914: **J. C. BAIN** (Princess Th, Syd. > *See AV: 14 Jan 1914, 4 and SMH/AV adverts to Oct.)

1915: **J. C. BAIN THEATRICAL AGENCY** (Inglis Chambers, Pitt St, Syd; ca. July - Dec.)


1920: The *Theatre* reports that Bain was employed in a government job in Sydney (June 1920, 17).

1921: **BAIN'S VAUDEVILLE ENTERPRISES** (Elite Th, Bris; 24 Oct.  > Bain presented hypnotist, Dr Raymond)

1923: The *Theatre* reports that Bain had returned to performing ca. 23 May. No details are available (June 1923, 10-12)

1924: **J. C. BAIN** (Hippodrome, Syd; ca. Aug. - Dec.  > See TT: Sept. 1924, 41-2 and E: 26 Nov. 1924, 34)

1925: **J. C. BAIN** (Hippodrome, Syd; Jan - ca. May)  •  (Hippodrome, Syd; 11 Mar.  > J. C. Bain benefit)

1929: **TIVOLI THEATRES LTD** (Tivoli Th, Syd; 26 Sept.  > Final Tivoli show)

**FURTHER REFERENCE**


Queensland Rugby Union Annual 1899, 97-98.

Sowry, Clive. "Film Pioneers of New Zealand: The Kinematograph Arrives in New Zealand."

(T Winter 1996), n. pag. - online (sighted 10/05/2012)


See also:

BC:  12 May 1894, 4 • 21 May (1894), 6 • 22 May (1894), 6.


TC:  17 July (1889)

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The first night of vaudeville at the Princess Theatre, Sydney. Previously known as the Bijou Picture Palace (1908-1911), the theatre had also been used as a cinema by West's Picture Ltd between May and September 1911.

*Sydney Morning Herald* 16 Sept. (1911), 2.

Last updated: 24/09/2015

Expanded and updated from Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight." Ph D Diss. U of Qld (2005), Appendix D.

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