

SYDNEY JAMES

English ventriloquist, comedian, manager, theatrical agent. Best known in Australia for his ventriloquial act with "Billy," Sydney James started out in London in the 1890s as a singer, comedian and mimic. He toured Great Britain with his Strolling Players trio and internationally with the Royal Strollers troupe (it played the Antipodes between 1914 and 1919, albeit with a name change in 1918 to the Pierrot Pie Co.). James died in Karachi (Pakistan) of a burst appendix.

While working in his grandfather's wholesale business in the mid to late-1890s, Sydney James began to moonlight as a variety performer, before eventually deciding to make it his career. In 1900, having already established his credentials at various London concert rooms as a singer, comedian and mimic, he formed a trio that worked under the name The Strolling Players. Under the James' direction the trio presented a "costumed" music hall act built around song and dance, comic interplay, ventriloquism, and refined comedy sketches. The line-up was eventually expanded to around six to eight performers in order to present costume comedy entertainment. This led to him also changing the troupe's name in 1911 to the more refined-sounding Royal Strollers.

James' involvement in the variety industry also saw him act for a number of years as a theatrical agent. Prior to being its association with Australia the Strollers played regular engagements throughout the British Isles, and undertook four tours of South Africa and at least one tour of the USA. Although regarded by his peers as an especially gifted variety entertainer and producer, James' most popular act was undoubtedly his "partnership" with "Billy," his ventriloquial dummy. James and his troupe arrived in Australia in 1914 shortly after the outbreak of war, and subsequently remained until after the Armistice. During that time the Strollers were engaged by Jack Waller, J. and N. Tait, the Tivoli circuit and Fullers Theatres among others, and also toured New Zealand on at least two occasions.

SYDNEY JAMES
Author and Composer of "Why did I cook the Bacon and Eggs?" or "Brothers in Crime in a Flat."



JOGGING ALONG WITH
"THE PASSING SHOW,"
Tivoli Theatre, Sydney.

"Good-By-ee!"

Australian Variety 17 Jan. (1917), 42.



In 1918 James changed the name of the troupe to Sydney James' Pierrot Pie Company, and early the following year booked it for a tour New Zealand and India, the intention being to then return to England. James' died unexpectedly in Karachi, however, as a result of his appendix bursting during the troupe's three day journey from Bombay.

SEE ALSO

- [The Royal Strollers](#)

FURTHER REFERENCE

"Royal Strollers: Hearty Reception at Tivoli." MA: 17 Mar. (1917), 7.
"Strollers: A Brilliant English Company at the Austral Gardens, The." MA: 28 Nov. (1914), 12.

Theatre Aug. (1921), 21.



Theatre Mar. (1918), 29.

AUSTRAL GARDENS LIMITED
NORTH TERRACE.
 General Manager Mr. Jack Waller.

OPEN-AIR THEATRE
 BOX-PLAN OPENS ON MONDAY NEXT AT ALLAN'S.

THURSDAY, 9th NOVEMBER, at 8.15.
 THURSDAY, 9th NOVEMBER, at 8.15.
 AND NIGHTLY at 8.15.
 AND NIGHTLY at 8.15.

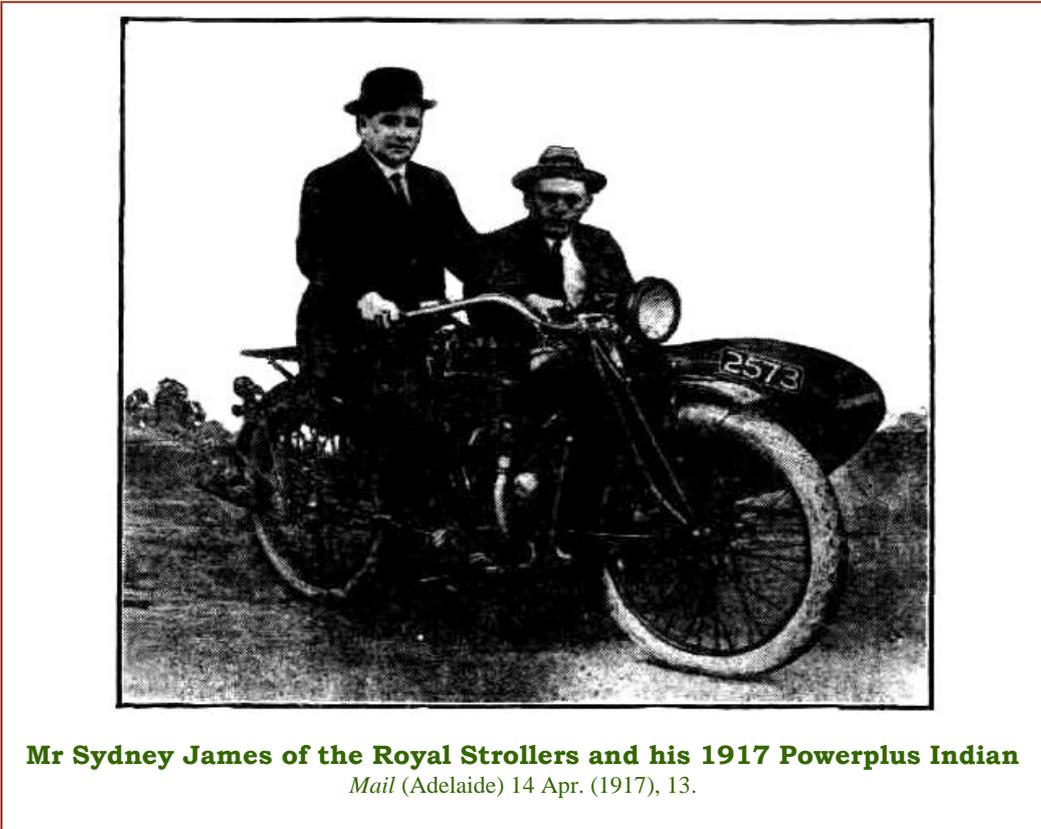
JACK WALLER
 PRESENTS
SYDNEY JAMES
 AND HIS FAMOUS
ROYAL STROLLERS
ROYAL STROLLERS

(Direct by E.S. Malva from the Palace Theatre, London).
 Specially commanded by H.M. the King and Queen, July 1st.
 Admitted unequalled in the history of Concert Parties.

Mail (Adelaide) 23 Nov. (1914), 2.



With "Billy"
Theatre Mar. (1915), 33.



Mr Sydney James of the Royal Strollers and his 1917 Powerplus Indian
Mail (Adelaide) 14 Apr. (1917), 13.