

JIMMY BOYLE

(1872-1924) Associated with Harry Clay for some 20 years, Jimmy Boyle was the vaudeville entrepreneur's Queensland advance representative from 1901 to 1903 and tour/business manager between 1904 and 1912. He operated a business in Brisbane around 1915, while also working for C.E. King and in 1916 he worked as the Fullers' Manager at the National Theatre (Sydney). During this period he also ran a private business next to the Theatre Royal. Around the end of 1916, early 1917 Boyle returned to work for Harry Clay as the North Sydney Coliseum's House Manager, leaving in 1918 to manage Clay's operations at Eden Gardens (Manly). Boyle is known to have looked after the Bridge Theatre around 1923-24. He died suddenly on the 1st of November 1924, leaving behind his wife Nora Ann.

Born James William Boyle in Camden Town, London, in 1872, Jimmy Boyle was often described in industry magazines like the *Theatre* and *Australian Variety* as a "dapper little Englishman." He was a long time associate of Harry Clay's, beginning in 1901 when he acted as the advance rep for Clay's first Waxworks tour of Queensland. The pair had been linked together as early as 1900, however, when both were employed by Walter Bell for his Waxwork's and Variety Company tour of Queensland. For that engagement Boyle also worked both as the troupe's advance rep and as its phonograph operator.¹ During his first year with Clay he also appears to have undertaken dual roles again, with the *Western Champion and General Advertiser* recording that he performed as a farcical comedian during the company's show at Barcaldine, Queensland.²

During the years 1904 and 1905 Boyle acted as the company's business manager, while Harry Clay ran the tour operations. When Clay temporarily retired from the Queensland tours to look after his Sydney circuit, Boyle took over both duties, continuing on in that role until 1912. He also undertook the managerial duties for Clay's 1909 Queensland tour by Scottish tragedian, [Walter Bentley](#).

Boyle was a popular figure in the vaudeville industry, and an extremely well-liked character within the Queensland regional centres he toured during the early decade of the 20th century. He was regarded quite highly as a reliable and hardworking manager, not only by Harry Clay, but also by many who knew him. After the 1910 tour he returned to England for a period, requiring Clay to once again tour Queensland as the company's manager. Boyle returned to take control of the business side of [Stanley McKay](#) pantomime tour of Queensland in 1911, and the following year's tour by Clay's vaudeville company.

From around 1914/15 Boyle is known to have worked for C.E. King's Brisbane theatrical enterprises while at the same time operating his own "squash shop" (refreshment room) in the city. He returned to Sydney in late 1915/early 1916 to do similar business with Fullers³ as their manager at the [National Theatre](#), Sydney. He also ran a successful refreshment room next to the Theatre Royal, it being a regular meeting place for vaudevillians. Sometime around the turn of 1916/17 he returned to Harry Clay's company as the manager of the North Sydney [Coliseum](#), where he remained until October 1918, at which time he was given the operations of Clay's newly opened [Eden Gardens](#) theatre in Manly. He stayed with Clay's until his sudden and unexpected death in November 1924, just three and a half months before his long time friend and boss Harry Clay died. During his last years he was the House Manager at the [Bridge Theatre](#), Newtown, ca.1923-24.

SEE ALSO

- [Harry Clay](#) • [Harry Clay's Artists, Managers and Staff: 1901-1930](#)
- [Harry Clay's New South Wales and Queensland Tours: 1901-1918, 1922, 1927 and 1929](#)

QUOTATIONS AND ANECDOTES

1910: Jimmy Boyle once tried his strength on a punching machine. He carefully put away glasses in his vest pocket, and let go. Something went click on the floor. "I've broken the machine," said the fragile, deluded Jimmy. He stooped to the floor to look. "It's only my glasses," he murmured, picking these up, and making a desperate attempt to look as dignified as usual (*Theatre Magazine* Aug. 1910, 6).

¹ "Waxworks and Variety Company." *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld) 30 July 1900, 5.

² "Barcaldine Memoranda." *Western Champion and General Advertiser* 16 July 1901, 2.

³ At that time the company operated as [Brennan-Fuller](#).

- 1910:** Jimmy Boyle recently left Sydney for England. Among those at the wharf to see him off was the big-hearted, ever-generous Harry Clay (*Theatre Magazine* Dec. 1910, 8).
- 1915:** Among his pals Jimmy Boyle was long known as "Simple Simon." Mr Boyle once got the tip for a double at Randwick (Sydney). On his way into the city from the suburbs to back it for £500 he went into a barber's shop for a shave. The barber persuaded him the horse he was finishing with was no good, and that for this neddy he should substitute Simple Simon - then a good hurdler and steeple chaser. Mr Boyle varied the double accordingly. The two horses he was originally told to back - and intended backing, until the barber - won. So Mr Boyle, through tinkering with Simple Simon, who didn't get a place, lost the £500 that would have otherwise been his. Hence the designation, "Simple Simon." But it was Mr Boyle's luck, later on, to get back on at least one of those who were always guying him over the Simple Simon affair. This was Harry Clay. "Do you see who's starting today?" remarked Mr Clay to Mr Boyle at one of the pony-meetings. "Yes; and I'm going to back it," replied Mr Boyle, looking at his race-book. The horse referred to was Queen Bird. "Queen Bird" was another of the pet names by which Mr Boyle was known to Mr Clay. Mr Boyle took £100 to £5 on Queen Bird. It won. Mr Clay's horse was left at the post. Altogether it was a disastrous outing for Mr Clay, because he was that day betting for the first time on a dead-sure system respecting which he had got the whisper, and it wasn't until he had done in three figures that he discovered he couldn't have done worse if he had backed nothing but bookmakers' tips. So for a few days it was Mr Boyle's turn to laugh; and he made abundant use of the opportunity, too (*Theatre Magazine* June 1915, 49).
- 1919:** Jimmy Boyle reports excellent business at the Eden Gardens, Manly, and last week established a record house with *Toyland* (Ted Stanley and Co). Jimmy says that this house will certainly take some beating. It might be mentioned that Jimmy is one of Manly's foremost surfers (*Australian Variety* 24 Jan. 1919, 5).
- 1919:** Mr Boyle was noticed amongst the breakers last Saturday. His fine figure looked like a Roman Gladiator as he posed in the sun (*Australian Variety* 28 Feb. 1919, 9).
- n.yr.** A better worker than Mr Boyle I never met. (Harry Clay)
- n.yr.** Harry Clay had a little dapper English manager [named] Jim Boyle. When a circuit went on a north Queensland tour, it was Boyle's job to write ahead and book the local school of arts. The company arrived at one small town to find no booking had been made. One afternoon Harry Clay received Boyle's letter back from the dead letter office. It was addressed to "The Caretaker, School of Arts, Queensland." At that minute Boyle walked in swinging his cane. Clay abused him roundly till he ran out of breath. Boyle was crestfallen: "You know Mr Clay," he said, "I ought to be kicked." A happy smile lit Harry Clay's face. He jumped to his feet and delivered a mighty blow with his boot that Boyle was still rubbing days after ("Sometimes His Shows Were a Riot" no details).⁴
- n.yr.** One of the big tasks was to offer a forthcoming attraction that would ensure a full house at the next show. [Jimmy] Boyle had the job one night. He had heard Miss Annie Jones sing privately and decided to build her up..... "Thank you for your attendance," Boyle told the audience. "I want to say that next Friday night you will be given the honour of hearing the greatest soprano voice ever produced in the country." For ten minutes he kept the audience sitting while he built up Annie Jones' reputation. After the show some of the audience came back stage: "Is this fair dinkum?" they asked. "My oath, it is." Next Friday the theatre was packed. They all came to hear the new Australian nightingale. Miss Jones was the last act. She waddled on to the stage. There was deep silence. She opened her mouth. From it came a voice so thin the orchestra leader in the pit could hardly hear it. The audience stayed still for a minute. Then all hell broke loose. The mob raged and roared. Missiles of every description were thrown at the unhappy soprano. Boyle ducked out the stage door. He could still hear the shouting as he disappeared up King Street ("Sometimes His Shows Were a Riot" no details).

FURTHER REFERENCE:

Djubal, Clay. "[Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company – 1865-1930.](#)" (1998), v. pags.

⁴ The publication details for this article are currently unknown. A copy is available, however, through the *Australian Variety Theatre Archive*. See [Harry Clay's](#) entry in "Entrepreneurs [A-F]."

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