

CLAUDE DAMPIER

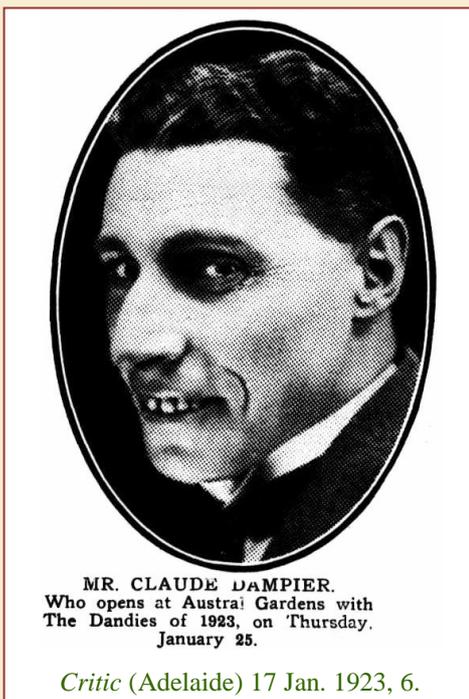
(1879-1955) Claude Dampier and his first wife Irene Vere came to Australia in 1910 under contract to Edward Branscombe. They remained in the country until 1917, with Dampier spending most of that time as manager/headliner with Branscombe's Red Dandies. He returned in 1921 for the Tivoli circuit, this time in partnership with Hilda Attenboro and was later associated with Pat Hanna, toured with a revived "New" Dandies, and secured several contracts with the Fullers (including the Frivolities, and his own Trump Cards). Dampier also starred in two Australian films in the mid-1920s. After returning to England in 1927 he carved out a very successful career on the stage and in radio - largely in partnership with his second wife, Australian actress/comedienne Billie Carlyle.

Claude Conolly Cowan, known professionally as Claude Dampier, was a British comedian who began his career in the mid to late-1890s. After playing in pierrot companies, musical comedy and comic opera he became closely associated with *The Girl from the Kays*, touring it through the English provinces (as principal comedian and general manager) for seven different managers. In 1910 he and his first wife, Irene Vere, came to Australia under contract to [Edward Branscombe](#), making their debut in Adelaide with one of the entrepreneur's Dandies troupes. The following year Dampier was appointed its director. He and Vere remained with the same company until January 1917 (it became known as the Red Dandies in 1914). They then left Australia for South Africa and later returned to Britain.

Dampier returned to Australia in 1921 via South Africa for [Harry G. Musgrove's](#) Celebrity Vaudeville ([Tivoli circuit](#)),¹ this time in partnership with [Hilda Attenboro](#) (possibly his second wife). After joining [Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers](#) in 1922, the couple were briefly engaged by [Fullers Theatres](#). In 1923 Dampier's [Dandies of 1923](#) played a two month season in Adelaide, followed by two weeks in Broken Hill (NSW). He and Attenboro then rejoined the Famous Diggers, playing New Zealand with the troupe, before reviving the Dandies for a tour of Queensland and New South Wales (as the New Dandies) between September 1923 and May 1924. After briefly appearing on the Fullers' circuit with Attenboro as a vaudeville double act, the firm's management invited Dampier to briefly put together another variety troupe during the final seven weeks of his season at Fullers' Theatre, Sydney (5 July - 22 Aug.). Renamed the [Trump Cards Revue Company](#), it presented five original revues - *All Trumps*, *A Funnier Fare* (both two weeks), and *Here's Luck*, *Hot and Cold*, and *Brand New* (one week each). Major cast changes appear to have been made for each show. All performers were then currently-contracted Fullers artists. Among the biggest names to appear with the company were Lola Hunt, Ernest Lashbrooke, and Kyrle Sylvaney (later McAllister), Bert Barton and Eileen Boyd.



Source: www.amazon.com



MR. CLAUDE DAMPIER.
Who opens at Austral Gardens with
The Dandies of 1923, on Thursday,
January 25.

Critic (Adelaide) 17 Jan. 1923, 6.

While still under contract to the Fullers in 1924, Dampier was invited by Beaumont Smith to star in the director's latest feature film, *Hullo Marmaduke* (1924). After being given clearance by Benjamin Fuller, the comedian undertook a screen test in early- September and became involved in shooting scenes later than same month. During the making of his next film, *The Adventures of Algy* (1925) Dampier met actress [Billie Carlyle](#). By 1926 the pair had formed an on and off-stage partnership.

Dampier and Carlyle played engagements for the Fullers (including the Frivolities, 1925) and Famous Diggers before moving to England in late-1927 where they established a successful comedy partnership on stage and in radio. Dampier also appeared in more than 20 films up until his death in 1955. Carlyle self-published *Claude Dampier, Mrs Gibson and Me* in 1978 (Mrs Gibson being a fictional audience member popularized by Dampier), and in the early 1980s donated a collection of letters, manuscripts and published music to the newly established Melbourne Performing Arts Centre.

Dampier died in Ashford, Middlesex on 1 January 1955.

¹ Musgrove took control of Harry Rickards Tivoli Theatres Ltd in 1921. Although often publicised as Musgrove's Celebrity Vaudeville, the company continued to trade officially under the Tivoli banner.

SEE ALSO

- **Edward Branscombe's Dandies** • **Hilda Attenboro** • **Billie Carlyle** • **Dandies of 1923**
- Trump Cards Revue Co** • *Hullo Marmaduke* (1924) • *The Adventures of Algy* (1925)

FURTHER REFERENCE

Carlyle, Billie. *Claude Dampier, Mrs Gibson and Me*. Staines, Surrey (England): B. Carlyle, 1978. Reprinted by Temple Printers, Middlesex, England, 1988.

"Claude Dampier." *Wikipedia*. [Sighted 17/11/2017]

"Claude Dampier - Comedian: An Interview." *Mail* (Adelaide) 17 Dec. 1921, 27. Dampier, Claude and Billie Carlyle." Arts Centre, Melbourne. [Manuscripts, news clippings, photographs, programmes, scrapbook, sheet music donated by Billie Carlyle.

Gare, Shelley. "People: Glittering Days of a Variety Star." *Australian Women's Weekly* 6 May 1981, 13.

"Interviews. A Chat with Mr Claude Dampier." *Critic* (Adelaide) 17 Jan. 1923, 6.

- ▶ **Claude Dampier and Billie Carlyle**. *Workers' Playtime* 16/02/1943. BBC Home Service. Published on *YouTube* 2012. [A copy of this broadcast can also be accessed via the *Australian Variety Theatre Archive* overviews for both **Claude Dampier** and **Billy Carlyle**.]
- ▶ **Claude Dampier** in **Boys Will be Boys** (1936) Extract published on *YouTube* (2007).
- ▶ **Will Hay** in *Radio Parade of 1935* - including Claude Dampier (1934) Extract published on *YouTube* (2007).



Australian Women's Weekly 6 May 1981, 13.

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