

LAWRENCE CAMPBELL

(ca. 1867-1941) Lawrence Campbell studied acting and elocution in England and attempted a career on the English stage before immigrating to Australia in 1888. He initially set up schools of elocution in Devonport and Launceston then moved to Sydney where he established himself as one of the country's leading instructors in stage and public speaking. Campbell performed regularly himself, and between 1916 and the mid-1920s held the stage performance rights for C.J. Dennis's *Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* in both Australia and New Zealand. He also presented "The Bloke" on radio in 1930. Campbell's radio career was carried out from 1925 until 1940.

Born in England ca. 1867, Lawrence Campbell, M.B.E., studied elocution and dramatic art at the Polytechnic Hall in London and began his career on the English stage in 1888. He travelled to Australia health reasons in 1892, initially staying with his relatives, Mr. and Mrs. F. Bourne in Davenport, Tasmania. In a 1923 interview Campbell recalls that after arriving in the country "tried his hand at the miner's pick." It appears, however, that the most he came across was a small gold nugget won in a raffle.¹ Campbell subsequently set up schools of elocution in Devonport and later Launceston and began performing on stage. His first known professional appearance in Australia was at the Burnie Town Hall in early November 1892, the entertainment being presented jointly with comedian/ ventriloquist Val Vousden.

MR LAWRENCE CAMPBELL (from the Polytechnic and St. James's Hall, London), Teacher of Elocution. Schools visited. Pupils instructed privately. "At Homes" attended. Terms at Mr Birchall's.

Launceston Examiner (Tas) 18 Jan. 1893, 1.

By late-January 1893 Campbell's rapidly expanding commitments in Launceston saw him relocate there, but not before West Devonport gave him a public farewell at Giblin Hall.² During his time in Launceston he gave frequent recitals. He also began his long association with schools after being invited by the Headmaster of the local high school to teach a special class.³ A similar invitation was soon extended to him by other institutions in the region.

THE LAUNCESTON SCHOOL OF ELOCUTION, under the auspices of the Launceston Technical School. Director, Mr LAWRENCE CAMPBELL.

Launceston Examiner (Tas) 5 July 1893, 1.

Campbell's success in Launceston led him to contemplate relocating to a capital city, and on 19 March 1894 he gave his farewell concert at the Launceston Mechanics' Institute. Although he announced his intention to open a new school of elocution in Hobart this did not eventuate,⁴ and instead moved to Sydney, offering classes out of rooms in the Palings Building in the heart of the city from around mid-April. He later moved to the Equitable Building, also situated in George Street.

MR. LAWRENCE CAMPBELL, TEACHER OF ELOCUTION, from the Polytechnic School of Elocution, London. PRIVATE TUITION and CLASSES Schools attended. Special system for the Culture of Children's Voices. Jersey-chambers, 334 George-st., two doors from Palings's.

Sydney Morning Herald 21 Apr. 1894, 2.

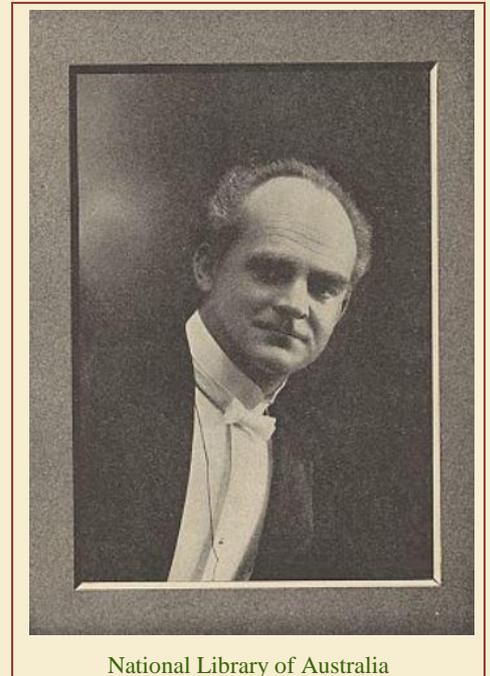
After establishing himself in the city as a teacher, Campbell involved himself in a number of ancillary activities, including taking up the position of President of both the Australasian Elocutionary Association, and the Speech Association of New South Wales. He also became involved with the London College of Music, thereby providing an opportunity for his students to participate in local examinations as well as in the elocution portion of the Trinity College of Music exams.

¹ "When We Were Boys." *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas) 20 Jan. 1923, 2.

² 20 January.

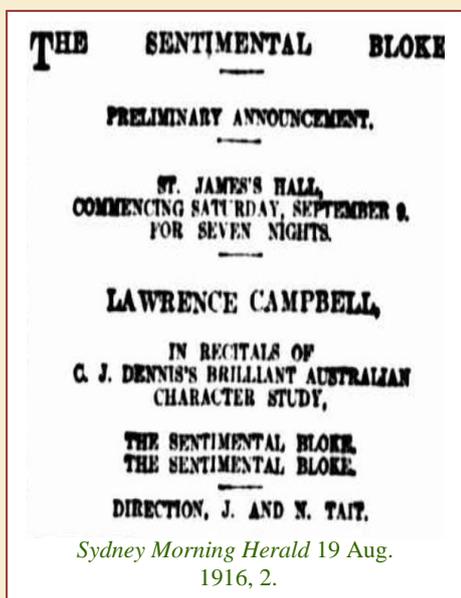
³ "Current Topics." *Launceston Examiner* (Tas) 28 Jan. 1893, 4.

⁴ "Touchstone." "Music and the Drama." *Launceston Examiner* (Tas) 8 Mar. 1894, 2



National Library of Australia

In addition to teaching, both privately and through his association with the New South Wales Department of Education, Campbell continued presenting his dramatic recitations around Australia and New Zealand. From 1916 through until the mid to late-1920s he was best known for his impersonations and readings from C.J. Dennis' *Songs of the Sentimental Bloke*. Campbell secured the performance rights directly from Dennis in 1916,⁵ and was engaged by J. and N. Tait to present his show at St James' Hall, Sydney on 9 September. Campbell and the Tait's were quick to point out to both public and other performers that the elocutionist held the sole Australasian performing rights and that neither the verse of songs incorporated into the performance could be seen anywhere else⁶ - a publicity ruse that likely contributed to full houses for his debut season. While reviews of his performance were typically glowing, at least one critic saw disparity in Campbell's performance and the work's "low" sensibilities:



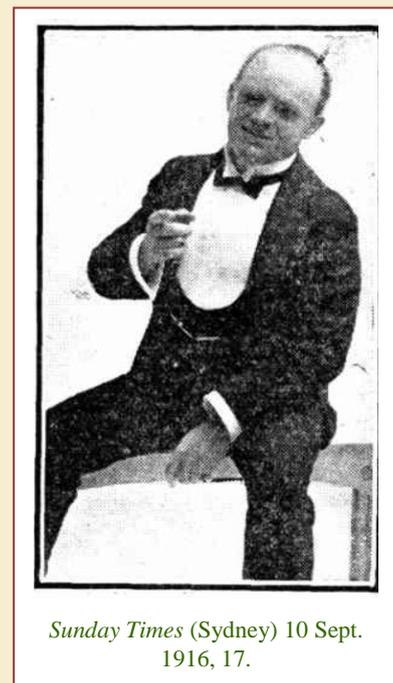
Mr Lawrence Campbell scored a popular success last night at St James' Hall with his rendering of *The Sentimental Bloke*. The building was packed uncomfortably by an appreciative if at times undiscerning audience. Most of those present went to hear a humorous recitation, and for the greater part of the evening got what they sought. But it is open to question whether *The Bloke* is so humorous as last night seemed to be the general impression. As a piece of memory work, and a one-man work at that, there was no fault to be found with Mr Campbell's effort. In other directions, however, there was room for doubt. Mr Dennis' poem has a universal appeal because its theme is universal. Chance has it that the sentiments are expressed in a dialect. Yet so perfect is the artistry that the vehicle of expression is the least dominant factor of all. Last night the impression given by the elocutionist was the reverse of this. The poem seemed a series of Gawdstruths and Stikemes kinked together by strips of unaspirated English, or rather Cockneyisms. Apart from that false emphasis followed on false emphasis with monotonous regularity. Still it is to be presumed that Mr Campbell will improve on his first performance of a difficult task, particularly if subsequent audiences are all as sympathetic as was the case last night. Owing to the limitations as to time imposed by such a recital, Mr Campbell has found it advisable - with the author's permission - to cut 'The Stouish of the Day'.⁷

Unfortunately for Campbell his debut season was temporarily postponed for several nights following the premiere due to the continuing effects of a cold. Despite this, the Sydney season was a considerable success, and led a Melbourne *Punch* critic to suggest that Campbell was not only helping to increase the sales of *Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* but that he was also providing impetus for the forthcoming release of Dennis' new volume of "Bloke" verse, *Ginger Mick*.

Following the Sydney season the Tait's sent Campbell to Melbourne and then New Zealand, where the Dennis poems were also popular. Some two months later he played another sold-out season in Sydney at the St James' Hall. Campbell continued presenting his one-man "Bloke" shows in Sydney, with occasional regional and interstate tours right through the war and immediate post-war years, often under the auspices of a war-fund or charity. In December 1918 he even headlined the Sydney Tivoli for five nights, presenting a selection of favourite pieces to a vaudeville audience. His *Sentimental Bloke* recitals were not the only shows staged by Campbell during the late 1910s, however. In 1918, for example, he gave a Good Friday performance of Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* at St James' Hall prior to a week-long return season of "The Bloke."

After almost three years of staging *The Sentimental Bloke*, Campbell stopped performing it in November 1919 shortly before the release of Raymond Longford's the film adaptation:

Admirers of Mr Lawrence Campbell will regret to hear that he is relinquishing the platform rights of C.J. Dennis' *The Sentimental Bloke* and will be heard in this popular Australian class for the last time on Tuesday at St James' Hall. Mr Campbell is a past master in the art of character delineation, and is considered by the author to be an ideal interpreter. The direction is by Mr J.E. Brownlow [Palings].⁸



⁵ "Amusements: *The Sentimental Bloke*." *Sydney Morning Herald* 19 Aug. 1916, 20.

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 Sept. 1916, 2. Advert.

⁷ "The Bloke." *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 10 Sept. 1916, 2

⁸ "Lawrence Campbell's Recital." *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 16 Nov. 1919, 12. [Incl. Photograph]

Sunday Times (Sydney) 1 Dec. 1918, 15.

In addition to his public performances, Campbell expanded his activities into other areas of entertainment, including song writing and publishing. He is known to have collaborated with composer Dorothy Scott-Young on the song "Love's Beatitude," which Palings published sometime during the 1910s. The Frederick Harris Company of London also published a series titled *The Lawrence Campbell Musical Monologues*. Especially suited to music hall performers, the series included an adaptation of [Banjo Paterson's](#) poem "A Bunch of Roses" (with music by K. Shaw-Mayer). All of the songs in the series, which possibly numbered up to 12, were also likely linked to Campbell as the originator.

Sydney Morning Herald 28 Sept. 1927, 2.

Campbell's output of publications also included several books. Blennerhassett's Commercial Educational Society of Australia published his lecture *Public Speaking: A Business Essential* in 1930, and ten years later (as the Blennerhassett Institute of Accountancy) re-produced his lecture *The Spoken Word - The Art of Speaking Effectively* (1940) jointly with B. C. Newland's *Planned Organisation: Its Function in Manufacturing Enterprise*. Campbell also self-published a small volume in the 1930s called *The Power of the Tongue*.

During the 47 years during which he taught elocution in New South Wales, Lawrence Campbell visited most schools and institutions in the State. He also undertook the role of adjudicator at speaking competitions around Australia. Campbell died at his home in Lindfield in 1941, aged 74, and was survived by his wife, and a son and daughter.

Advocate (Burnie, Tas) 10 Jan. 1922, 3.

⁹ "Personal." *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas) 31 July 1934, 6.

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

1910: **Wanganui, NZ:** In Australia it is generally recognised that Lawrence Campbell can justly claim to have immensely helped and raised the standard of Australian elocution to its present standard. His many pupils have been highly successful, and many are now resident in our Dominion. He has given many numerous recitals in the Y.M.C.A., Sydney, and rarely, if ever, fails to charge his audience with good humour, laughter, kindness and goof fellowship. Truly he is a remarkable craftsman. Wanganui is undoubtedly lucky in having a visit from this distinguished artist ("[Lawrence Campbell Elocutionist.](#)" *Wanganui Chronicle* 28 Dec. 1910, 4).

1914: **Sydney:** The second of the series of the Lawrence Campbell recitals will take place in the Concordia Hall on Monday next. Mr Campbell's items will include the "Fall of Wolsey," from *Henry VIII*, "Soul Music" (Jerome), "The School Examination" (Manners), "Female" (Barry Pain), musical monologues and "The Old Actor," the latter having been specially written for the reciter by Mr Ellis Price. Miss Constance Brandon Usher and Mr W. Shotton will assist ("[Amusements: Lawrence Campbell Recitals.](#)" *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 July 1914, 24).

1914: **Mr Lawrence Campbell:** Mr and Mrs Lawrence Campbell received their friends at St James' Hall last night, in celebration of the fact that the elocutionist has completed 20 years of professional work in this city between 1894 and 1914. During the evening he was presented with a silver purse of sovereigns, when, in a reminiscent speech of thanks, he recalled the fact that when he started in Sydney the only advertised teachers of elocution were Harry Leston and John Howe, with F.C. Clitherow a little later. Since then the increase had been marvellous, as was evidenced by the group of well-known teachers from his own studio alone, and the output of other leading studios had to be considered. Thanks seemed an empty word for all he owed to the artists around him, who since they had become brother and sister professionals, had treated him as a sincere friend, and, on critical occasions, as their father confessor, or at any rate, advisor...

Mr Harrison Allen, as the oldest of pupils now professional artists, made the presentation, with reference to the affectionate esteem in which MR Campbell was held, adding that his strong personality was almost as familiar in Ballarat, Dunedin and other parts of Australasia as it was in Sydney.

The State Premier (Mr W.A. Holman, MLA), commented upon the way in which Mr Campbell had kept burning the sacred lamp of art in its relation to human speech and expressed a hope that the popular elocutionist might hold a similar celebration in 1934, and as he began to descend into the vale of years, might hold another joyous gathering after that ("[Mr Lawrence Campbell.](#)" *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 May 1914, 22).

1917: Mr Lawrence Campbell is commencing a tour of New Zealand shortly under the direction of the Tait Bros, reciting *The Sentimental Bloke*. The cultured Mr Campbell will turn up the collar of his coat, and wear his cap over one eye for the first time in Wellington on Tuesday. I can't myself see Mr Campbell in the part. He is too innately respectable. However, let us wait and see. New Zealand has a deep affection for the "bloke" as has the land of his birth "[Murmurs from Maoriland: The Sentimental Bloke.](#)" *Mirror of Australia* 20 Jan. 1917, 6).

1922: **Hobart:** It is not often that an entertainment of the kind to be given by Mr Lawrence Campbell in the Town-hall on Wednesday and Thursday next is held in Hobart, and those in particular who have read C.J. Dennis's great work and those who have not done so will certainly have the opportunity of, as Mr Bland Holt says, "meeting 'The Bloke' in the flesh." Mr Campbell has made special study of this work. He has had a unique run of success throughout Australia and New Zealand. During the period of the great war large sums were raised for patriotic funds by recitals of "the Bloke," and Mr Campbell did not spare himself in his efforts to assist those who were prepared to give all for King and country ("[Amusements: The Sentimental Bloke.](#)" *Mercury* 21 Jan. 1922, 10).

ELOCUTIONARY RECITALS

—BY—

LAWRENCE CAMPBELL
(of SYDNEY).

AUSTRALIA'S FOREMOST ELOCUTIONIST.
10 Years Adjudicator at Grand National
Eisteddfod (Ballarat).

**VICTORIA HALL, GAWLER
PLACE.**

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 20th
Selections from Shakespeare, Tennyson, and
Dickens.

THURSDAY, SEPT. 21st.
Kipling, Service, Hood, Shakespeare. Scenes
from 'As You Like It.'

SATURDAY, SEPT. 23rd.
Mr. C. J. Dennis' Brilliant Australian Character
Study, "The Sentimental Bloke."
Mr. DENNIS says:—
Any Author is fortunate to have such an in-
terpreter. **BLAND HOLT** writes:—
When I read "The Sentimental Bloke" I en-
joyed him. When I heard Lawrence Campbell
recite it I saw him in the flesh.

RESERVED SEATS, 3/ (PLUS TAX).

Mail (Adelaide) 2 Sept. 1922, 10.

1922: **Sydney:** The revival by Mr Lawrence Campbell of *The Sentimental Bloke* crowded St James' Hall last night. Five years ago the popular elocutionist and entertainer had his first success on the platform in the cleverly audacious mixture by C.J. Dennis of Australian slang, maudlin sentiment and rough-edged humour. There were many new touches in last night's recital and all the songs which we associate with the names of Bill and Doreen were presented without exaggeration or over-emphasis. Mr Campbell, who was in evening dress, had no music to help him. Music was not needed, as the full-flavoured love episodes had an accompaniment of hearty laughter from "the Spring Song," to "The March of Life." The enjoyment of the audience almost broke beyond bounds in the Dennis account of Bill and his sweetheart at a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. Among the other popular songs were: "The Intro," "Doreen," "The Straw Hat Coot," "The Reconciliation," "Ms," "The Pilot Bloke," "Hitched," "Beef Tea," "Uncle Jim," and "the Kid" ("*Murmurs from Maoriland: The Sentimental Bloke.*" *Mirror of Australia* 20 Jan. 1917, 6).

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. **Lawrence Campbell Oratory Competition:** The coveted annual competition in impromptu public speaking between representatives of each of the Great Public Schools (GPS) and Combined Associated Schools (CAS) in New South Wales was established by a committee of Sydney artists in 1934 to commemorate Campbell's 40 years of professional service.¹⁰ The first competition was held the following year.

**Elocution, Mirth, Mimicry,
and Ventriloquism.**

A GRAND
Combination Entertainment
WILL BE GIVEN BY

VAL VOUSDEN,
(THE KING OF MIRTH.)
AND
LAWRENCE CAMPBELL
(THE ENGLISH ELOCUTIONIST.)

AT THE
BURDIE TOWN HALL,
ON

Thursday, November 3, 1892

THE Entertainment to be given will consist of gems from the *repertoire* of both these Unrivalled Artists; and will be superior to any performance of its kind ever given in Tasmania.

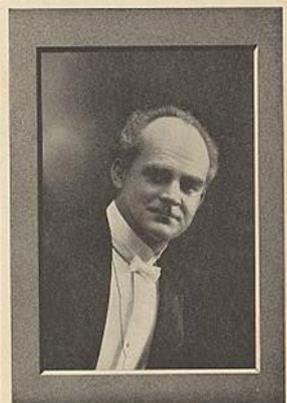
ADMISSION—2s. and 1s.
Children in arms, ONE GUINEA.
**A MOST ENJOYABLE EVENING'S
ENTERTAINMENT GUARANTEED.**

*Wellington Times and Agricultural and
Mining Gazette* 29 Oct. 1892, 3.

**THE
LAWRENCE CAMPBELL
MUSICAL MONOLOGUES.**
Recitations with Pianoforte Accompaniment.

No. 2.
A BUNCH OF ROSES

WORDS BY
A. B. PATERSON.
MUSIC BY
K. SHAW-MAYER.
PERFORMED
BY
LAWRENCE CAMPBELL.



No. 1. CROSSING THE BAR
No. 2. A BUNCH OF ROSES
No. 3. TWENTY GALLONS OF SLEEP.
No. 4. A BROKEN WEB.
No. 5. PLAYMATE.
No. 6. GOOD-BYE, LYNETTE.

No. 7. BUTTERFLIES.
No. 8. WHISPER LOW.
No. 9.
No. 10.
No. 11.
No. 12.

MUSIC HALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
LONDON:
THE FREDERICK HARRIS COMPANY,
85, Newman Street, W.
AND AT TORONTO
Boston, Mass., THE OLIVER DITSON COMPANY.
PRINTED IN ENGLAND

Copyright.

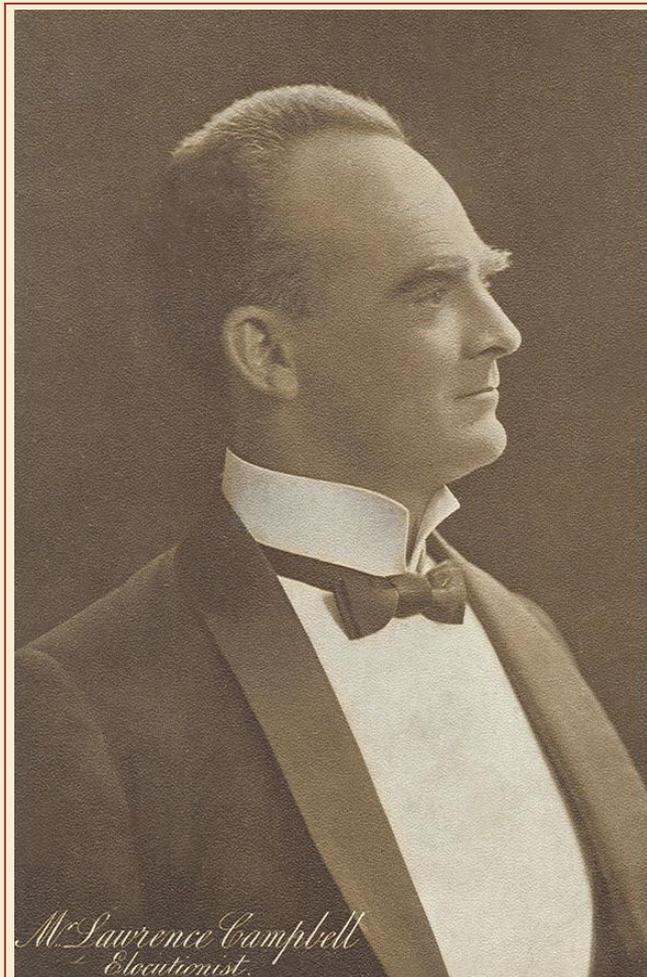
PRICE 2s. net.
60 c.

National Library of Australia

¹⁰ "Personal." *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas) 31 July 1934, 6.

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Bloke: Lawrence Campbell Recital, The." *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 10 Sept. 1916, 2.
- "Current Topics." *Launceston Examiner* 28 Jan. 1893, 4.
- "Death of Mr. L. Campbell." *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 Aug. 1941, 14.
- "Devonport: Death of Elocutionist." *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 17 Sept. 1941, 4.
- "Lawrence Campbell Papers, ca. 1891-1941." Manuscripts, Oral Histories and Pictures Collections. State Library of New South Wales [MLMSS 8187]
- "Lawrence Campbell: The Man with the Eyebrows - A Talk on Elocution." *Dominion* (Wellington, NZ) 24 Dec. 1910, 14.
- "Mr Lawrence Campbell." *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 May 1914, 22.
- "Mr. Lawrence Campbell." *Mercury* (Hobart) 26 Aug. 1941, 4.
- "Sentimental Bloke, The." *Brisbane Courier* 20 Apr. 1925) 13.
- "When We Were Boys: Mr Lawrence Campbell - An Interesting Chat." *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas) 20 Jan. 1923, 2.



S. JAMES HALL.

TO-NIGHT, TO-NIGHT.

LAWRENCE CAMPBELL RECITAL

—

LAWRENCE CAMPBELL WILL RECITE:—

Selection from "As You Like It" Shakespeare
 "Two Points of View" (Humorous Selection).. Brown
 "East and West" Kipling
 "A World of Sunlight" Waterhouse
 "A Broken Web" (Musical Monologue) Ogilvie
 "Betray and I" Carleton
 "Hitched" ("The Sentimental Bloke") Dennis
 "My First and Last Appearance on the Stage" .. Turner

MADAME HENRI VERBRUGGHEN WILL SING:—

1. Ophelia's Songs from "Hamlet" Shakespeare
 (as sung in Shakespeare's time)—
 (a) "How Should I Your True Love Know?"
 (b) "And will He Not Come Again?"
 (c) "St. Valentine's Day" (words revised).

2. "The Rocky Road to Dublin" Tom Doonan
 (1) "Breakfast Time."
 (2) "The Cat."
 (3) "Grafton-street."
 (4) "Pastoral."
 (5) "Seumas Beg."
 (6) "Westland How."

FINAL RECITAL NEXT SATURDAY.

PRICES: 4/ (Reserved) and 2/.

Plan at Paling's. Direction J. E. BROWNLOW.

Sydney Morning Herald 29 May 1920, 2.

Undated postcard (ca. 1910s)
Djubal Collection

Some information in this biography has been sourced from Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
(Manuscripts, Oral History and Pictures Collection)

First published: 9/12/2013 • Last updated: 11/09/2018

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:
Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/practitioners-c/>