

## DICK HEANEY

Doorman, usher, Randwick Racecourse gatekeeper, house manager, singer. Employed for over 37 years at Randwick as a gate-keeper Dick Heaney was also associated with Harry Clay and his vaudeville operations for some 30 years.

Described in 1922 as "right-Bower to Harry Clay," Dick Heaney was also apparently "one of the best-known and popular gate-keepers at Randwick, where he... enjoyed an uninterrupted engagement for thirty-seven years."<sup>1</sup> *Australian Variety* wrote further that "Mr Heaney has been intermittently associated with Mr Clay for a period of twenty-five years."<sup>2</sup> Heaney's name has been first identified in connection with the Randwick Racecourse in 1903, at which time he was already being referred to as "the well-known gatekeeper."<sup>3</sup> In the brief *Sydney Sportsman* par outlining Heaney's current health woes, the writer called for financial assistance from Heaney's many friends to help him defray the costs of a recent, and expensive operation. The writer also refers to Heaney as undertaking similar gatekeeping duties at Rosehill Racecourse. A benefit social was eventually tendered to him at Oddfellows Hall. Bert Bert Howard took on stage manager duties for the event.<sup>4</sup>

At some stage over the next few years Heaney took his expertise into the theatre industry, being identified in 1908 as a staff member at James Brennan's National Amphitheatre. In April that year Brennan accorded him a complimentary benefit at St George's Hall, Newtown.<sup>5</sup> How long his tenure at the National lasted is currently unknown. Harry Clay is recorded as having installed Heaney as House Manager at the Bridge Theatre in 1918. *Australian Variety* noted that "the management could not have made a better judgment. He handles the large audience on Saturday's and week nights in a most capable manner, and finds seats for them when it seems impossible."<sup>6</sup>

Despite his reputation for handling all classes of trouble should it be required, Heaney was reportedly a quiet and tactful man. And in addition to this role with Clay's, he was also on occasions called upon to deputise for any singing turns which failed to make it to a performance.

### ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- 1917:** **Sydney:** Dick Heaney is going to make application to the Lord Mayor to endeavour to have the corner of Park and Pitt Streets (the Victoria Picture Theatre side) christened "Nip Corner," which is little wonder, as all the "bums" and "dead-beats" in creation seem to "work" this particular spot, and it would be a fine thing if the police got a move on and "vagged" some of these pests, who are sometimes confused with the large number of inoffensive pros (*Australian Variety* 18 July 1917, n. pag).
- 1918:** **Sydney:** A real singer - Dick Heaney is one of Clay's right-hand men. Furthermore, he has a voice, but few know it. Last week he deputised for a performer at a concert, when he sang "Mother Machree" and "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." In response to several recalls, he sang "Turn Back the Pickle-factory and Give Me Yesterday" (*Australian Variety* 1 Feb. 1918, n. pag).
- 1918:** **Sydney:** Dick Heaney is a well-known figure at Newtown, and very popular with the patrons of the Bridge Theatre. Dick has never any trouble with the audience. If there should, however, happen to be a little row, Dick has only to come in, and like magic, there is quietness. A tactful fellow, he knows his work in handling all classes. Dick, by the way, goes about sixteen stone so no one will take the risk! (*Australian Variety* 15 Feb. 1918, n. pag.).
- 1920:** **Sydney:** "Brought Griffio to Meet Pluto." I met Dick Heaney at the Hippodrome on Wednesday last. We had an in interesting talk about old times and the days of the Griffio-Pluto outbreaks - in the streets or anywhere, it mattered not, such was the tense, nature of the feud between them. Mr. Heaney recalled some interesting experiences associated with a trip to Melbourne in 1888, when he brought Griffio over there to meet Pluto ("[W. F. Corbett's World of Boxing](#)." *Arrow* 6 Dec. 1918, 6).

<sup>1</sup> *Everyone's* (Sydney) 11 Jan. 1922, 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Australian Variety* (Sydney) 15 Apr. 1920, 3.

<sup>3</sup> "Notes in a Nutshell." *Sydney Sportsman* 22 Apr. 1903, 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Music and Drama." *Sydney Sportsman* 27 May 1903, 2.

<sup>5</sup> "National Theatre." *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 Apr. 1908, 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Australian Variety* (Sydney) 4 Oct. 1918, 12.

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