

WILLIAM KINCHELA

aka **William Kinchella**

Sydney-born scenic artist William Kinchela learnt his trade in the early to mid-1860s. The first productions attributed were in 1869 and by the mid-1870s he was associated with the Queen's Theatre. It was in the 1880s, however, that his career peaked, being responsible for numerous productions staged at the Gaiety Theatre (Sydney) between ca. 1881 and 1886. He painted many scenes for Alfred Dampier beginning ca. 1885 and in his later years collaborated with Edward Vaughan at the Lyceum Theatre (Sydney). Kinchela died in Sydney in late January 1898 of throat cancer.

Considered one of Australia's finest scenic artists of the late nineteenth century, William Kinchela was born in Sydney, the youngest son of Patrick Kinchela.¹ He is believed to have learnt his trade as a scene painter there in the early to mid-1860s. The first productions with artwork attributed to him found to date are *Job Vigil*, *The Watchman*, staged at the Royal Adelphi (Sydney) and *Harlequin Mazeppa* (Royal Alexandra, Brisbane) in 1869. The following year he was engaged to paint *London after Dark* for its Brisbane season.

From the mid-1870s Kinchela was largely associated with the Queen's Theatre (Sydney), where he provided the backdrops for such melodramas as *Hazard* (1875) and *All for Gold* (1879), and the pantomime *Robinson Crusoe* (1878). It was in the 1880s, however, that his career peaked, being responsible for numerous productions staged at the **Gaiety Theatre** (Sydney) between ca. 1881 and 1886, including *The Forlorn Hope* (1880) starring **George Darrell** and co-painted with **W.J. Wilson**; *No Mercy* and *Vanity Fair* (1881); *Passion* (1884); and *Under the Southern Cross* (1885). It was from 1885, too, that Kinchela began his association with **Alfred Dampier**, working with actor/manager at the Gaiety and **Royal Standard** theatres (Sydney) and then the Alexandra Theatre (Melbourne) from 1888. During this period he painted such productions as *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1886) and *Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1889).

In the final years of his career Kinchela collaborated with Edward Vaughan at the Lyceum Theatre (Sydney). He died at his Darlinghurst home on 24 January 1898 of throat cancer.



Brisbane Courier 21 Dec. 1869, 1.

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- Poor William Kinchela, the scenic artists, is at death's door in Sydney. Four doctors say that his disease, cancer of the throat, is incurable and that though he may linger on he cannot do any more work. A benefit is being arranged in Melbourne ("**Music and the Drama.**" *Queenslander* 29 Jan. 1898, 218).

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Kinchela married Marian Jane Poulter (youngest daughter of Charles Poulter of Manly) at Manly Beach on 5 January 1875.²
2. Kinchela's last address was 255 Victoria Street, Darlinghurst.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 Jan. 1875, 8. [ctd. William Kinchela marriage announcement]

² *Ibid*, 8.



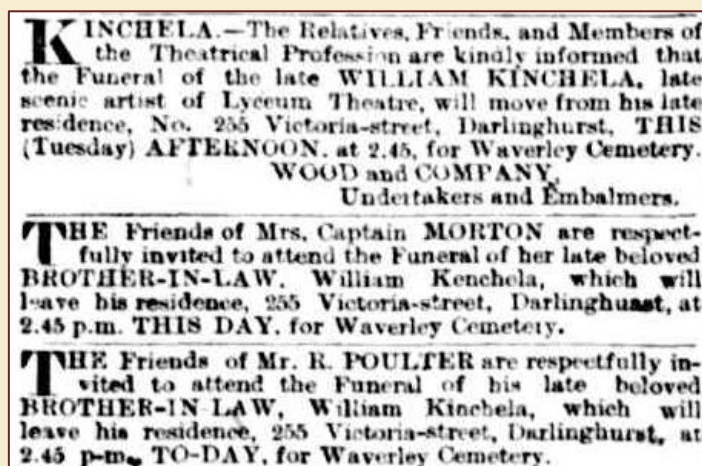
Two small paintings by William Kinchela that may have served as preliminary studies for larger scenic art works.
Courtesy of Roger Pettersen, Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand (private collection)³

³ On the back of each painting is inscribed: "Painted by William Kinchela, Sydney, Australia, 1897."

SCENIC ART (PRODUCTIONS)

The following list comprises a snapshot of theatrical productions with scenic art by William Kinchela that were identified during the research for this biographical entry. It should be considered very incomplete.

- 1869: *Job Vigil, The Watchman* (Royal Adelphi, Sydney; 11 Sept.) • *Harlequin Mazeppa; Or, The Wild Rocking Horse of Tartary, and the Little Fairy of the Enchanted Sugar Groves of North Australia* (Royal Alexandra Theatre, Brisbane; 26 Dec.)
- 1870: *London after Dark* (Royal Alexandra Theatre, Brisbane; 17 Mar.)
- 1874: *Pat and Judy* (Queensland Theatre, Brisbane; 17 Nov.)
- 1875: *Hazard* (Queen's Theatre, Sydney; 23 Aug.)
- 1878: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (12 Oct.) • *Robinson Crusoe* (9 Nov.) • *Jessie Brown; Or, The Relief of Lucknow* (23 Nov.) [All Queen's Theatre, Sydney]
- 1879: *All For Gold* (30 May) • *Conrad and Lizzette* (26 Dec.) [All Queen's Theatre, Sydney]
- 1880: *It's Never too Late to Mend* (30 Mar.) • *All for Gold* (8 May) • *The Nihilists* (29 May) • *Only a Fool* (7 June) • *The Shaughraun* (8 July) • *The Forlorn Hope* (10 July > with W. J. Wilson) [All Queen's Theatre, Sydney]
- 1881: *No Mercy* (Gaiety Theatre, Syd; 4 Mar.) • *Vanity Fair* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 24 July) • *The Black Flag* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 19 Dec.)
- 1882: *The Merchant of Venice* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 25 Nov.)
- 1883: *Grif* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 17 Feb.)
- NB: John Hennings did the Melbourne season of *Grif*.
- 1884: *Passion* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 12 Apr.) • *The Philanthropist* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 30 Aug.) • *Grasp* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 18 Oct. > with E.L. Williams)
- 1885: *Under the Southern Cross* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 9 Nov.)
- 1886: *No Mercy* (Gaiety Theatre, Sydney; 13 Mar.) • *The Phantom Ship* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 8 May) • *Our Em'ly* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 22 May) • *For the Term of His Natural Life* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 5 June) • *Voices of the Night* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 24 July > with J.S.) • *For the Term of his Natural Life* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 14 Aug.)
- 1888: *Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 25 Aug.)
- 1890: *Hamlet* (Royal Standard, Sydney; 15 Mar.)
- 1895: *Robinson Crusoe* (Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney; 24 Dec. > with Mr Ricketts)
- 1897: *At Duty's Call* (Lyceum Theatre, Sydney; 4 Oct.)



Sydney Morning Herald 25 Jan. 1898, 8.

FURTHER REFERENCE

Corry, Marion, comp. *Waverly Cemetery's Who's Who Encore*. Waverly, NSW: Waverly Library, 1995, 72.

See also:

Sydney Morning Herald: 12 Oct. 1878, 2 [Uncle Tom's Cabin advert] • 9 Nov. 1878, 2 [Robinson Crusoe advert] • 23 Nov. 1878, 2 [Jessie Brown; Or, The Relief of Lucknow advert.] • 25 Dec. 1879, 2 [Conrad and Lizette advert] • 30 Mar. 1880, 2 [It's Never too Late to Mend advert] • 19 Dec. 1881, 2 [The Black Flag advert.] • 25 Nov. 1882, 2 [The Merchant of Venice advert] • 15 Mar. 1890, 2 [Hamlet advert] • 2 Oct. 1897, 2 [At Duty's Call advert.].