

ALEXANDER C. HABBE

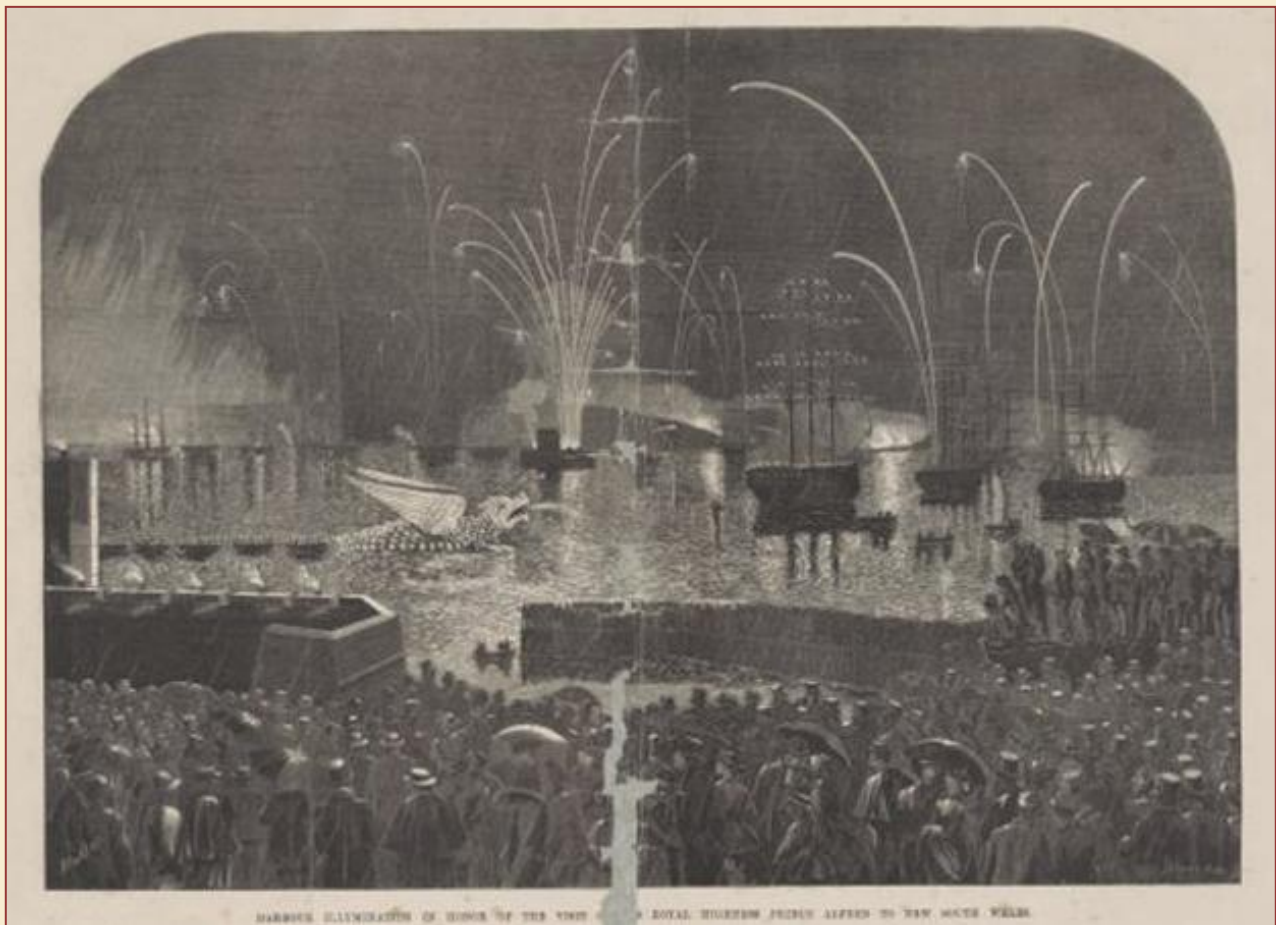
(1829-1896) Alexander Habbe came to Australia in 1855 to seek his fortune on the Victorian goldfields, but shortly afterwards found employment as a scenic artist at Melbourne's Theatre Royal. Between 1860 and 1864 he was largely associated with Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre, and later with the Royal Adelphi and Royal Victoria. Although he returned to settle in Melbourne in 1872 Habbe nevertheless supplied occasional scenes for Sydney theatres. During his career he collaborated with a number of other scenic artists, including W.J. Wilson and John Little.

Born in Elisnore, Denmark on 22 April 1829, Alexander Christian Habbe and his artist brother Nicholas (1827-89) came to Australia in 1855 to seek their fortunes. While working the Victorian gold diggings Alexander did some scenic art for several theatres and by 1858 was engaged to provide paintings for Melbourne's [Theatre Royal](#). He later moved to Sydney, where from 1860 to 1864 he was largely associated with the [Royal Victoria Theatre](#).

Habbe painted the first of many pantomimes, *The Pilgrim of Love*, in December 1860 and in 1865 began providing scenery for W.S. Lyster. He briefly returned to Melbourne in 1866, working for the [Royal Haymarket Theatre](#) and also the [Princess Theatre](#) [1] (where he also designed and painted a ceiling mural), before moving back to Sydney. During the late 1860s Habbe was associated with the Royal Adelphi (Sydney) and in 1871 began providing the scenic art for the Royal Victoria (Sydney).

Largely operating out of Melbourne from the early 1870s onwards, Habbe was mostly engaged for productions at the Theatre Royal and Prince of Wales Opera House. He did, however, occasionally supply scenic art in Sydney, for example, on *Back to the Grave* at the Opera House (1884). Among his best received works during this period were for [Garnet Walch's Trookulentos the Tempter](#) (1871) and *Australia Felix* (1888), and [George Musgrove's](#) production of *La Fille Du Tambour-Major* (1880). During his career Habbe collaborated with a number of other scenic artists, including [W.J. Wilson](#), [John Little](#), and Messrs. Burbury, Guy, and Kelly.

Alexander Habbe died on 14 April 1896 in Melbourne.



"Harbour illumination in honour of the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Alfred to New South Wales."

Engraving by M. Jackson and drawing for the wood engravings by Alexander C. Habbe.

Originally published in *Illustrated Sydney News* Mar. (1868), Supp.

This image sourced from the National Library of Australia.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. The entry on Habbe published by *Design Art Australia Online* records that one of his occupations was as a soldier. No details regarding that claim have yet been located.
2. Nicholas Habbe was also a prominent scenic artist and painter.



Nicholas Habbe. "Britannia Rules the Waves."

Source: Anita Callaway. *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth Century Australia* (2000), 172.

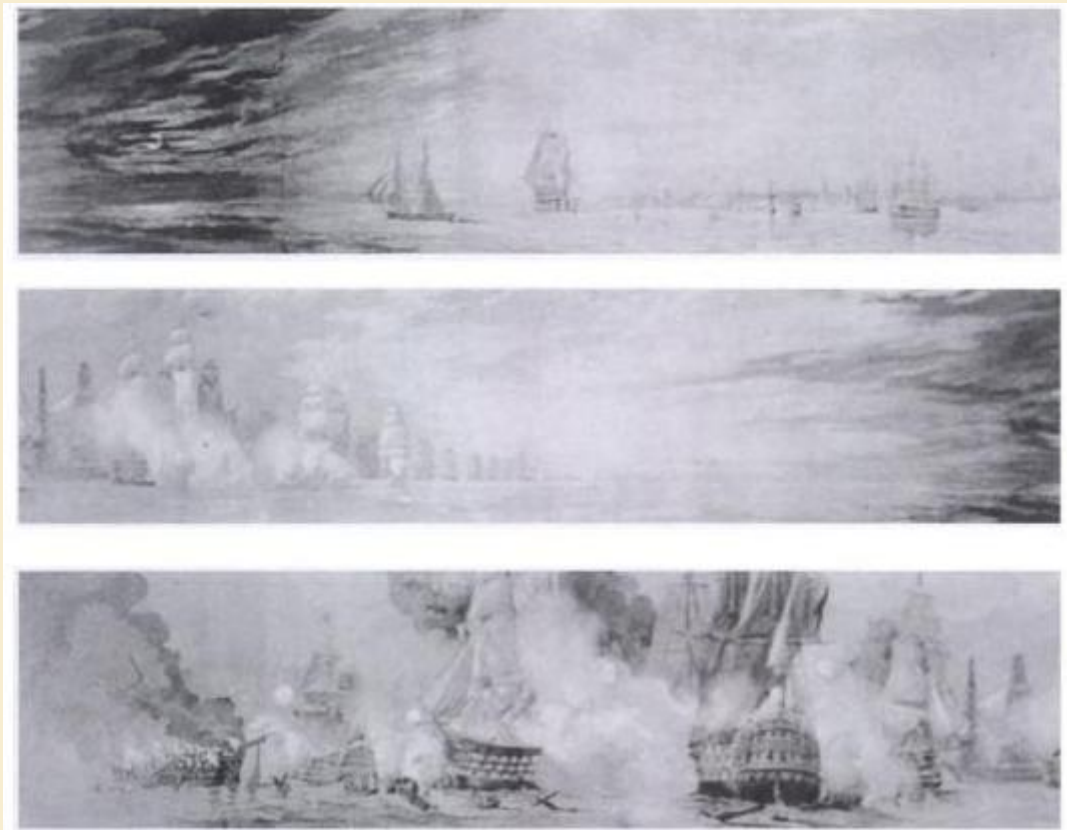
SCENIC ART (PRODUCTIONS)

The following list comprises first known stage productions with scenic art by Alexander Habbe that have been identified to date. AS usch it remains incomplete

- 1858:** *Harlequin Robin Hood* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 27 Dec. > with P. M. [or B.] Tannett and W.J. Wilson).
- 1859:** *The Yellow Dwarf; Or, The King Of the Golden Mines* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 25 Apr. > with William Pitt and W.J. Wilson).
- 1860:** *Garibaldi the Hero of Palermo* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 16 Oct.) • *Pilgrim of Love; Or Harlequin Prince Ahmed, The Talking Cockatoo and the Enchanted Horse* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 26 Dec.> with Mr Guy).
- 1861:** *Little Jack Horner; Or, The Downfall of Ignorance* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 29 May) • *Napoleon I* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 8 June).
- 1862:** *Puss in Boots* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 21 Apr.) • *David Copperfield* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 28 Apr.).
- 1863** *Raymond, Lord of Milan* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 14 Sept.) • *Lady Audley's Secret* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 16 Oct. > with Mr Burbury) • *Harlequin Gulliver, the Giants of Brobdignag and the Dwarfs of Lilliput; Or, The Bee and the Orange Tree* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 26 Dec.).
- 1864:** *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 29 Jan. > with Mr Burbury).
- 1865:** *Oberon* (Prince of Wales Opera House, Sydney; 19 June > with W. J. Wilson).
- 1866:** *Metamora* (Royal Haymarket, Melbourne; 13 Mar.) • *Romeo and Juliet* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 19 Apr.) • *Never Too Late to Mend* (Princess Theatre, Melbourne; 2 Aug.).
- 1869:** *The Model Husband* (Royal Adelphi, Sydney; 27 Nov. > with W. J. Wilson - aka *A Lesson for Husbands*) • *Love's Silver Dream* (Royal Adelphi, Sydney; 24 Dec. > with W. J. Wilson).
- 1870:** *Two Lovers* (Royal Adelphi, Sydney; 11 June > with W.J. Wilson).
- 1871:** *Foul Play* (28 Oct.) • *Man and Wife* (4 Nov.) • *Buttons* (24 Nov.) • *Exchange Wives* (2 Dec.) • *Fatal Gap* (14 Dec.) [All produced for the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney]
- 1873:** *Australia Felix; Or, Harlequin Jackass and the Magic Bat* (Prince of Wales Opera House, Melbourne; 26 Dec.).
- 1874:** *Adamanta, the Proud Princess of Profusia, and her Six Unlucky Suitors* (Prince of Wales Opera House, Melbourne; 24 Dec.).
- 1880:** *La Fille du Tambour-major* (Prince of Wales Opera House, Melbourne; 27 Dec.).
- 1883:** *The Naked Truth* (Opera House, Melbourne; 12 May > with John Little and George Kelly).
- 1884:** *Back From the Grave* (Her Majesty's Opera House, Sydney; 1 Aug. > with John Little).

FURTHER REFERENCE

"Alexander Christian Habbe." *Design Art Australia Online*. [sighted 9/03/2013]



Alexander Habbe's design for his "Battle of Trafalgar" panorama in the 1870 Christmas pantomime *Robinson Crusoe*.

Source: Anita Callaway. *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth Century Australia* (2000), 172.

Original held by the performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre.

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