

JOHN LITTLE

John Little's career as a professional scenic artist began in Melbourne sometime around 1870/71. Between 1872 and 1882 he was largely associated with John Hennings at Melbourne's Theatre Royal. He later painted drama and pantomime scenes for Williamson Garner and Musgrove, Alfred Dampier, George Rignold, Charles Arnold W.J. Holloway, Dan Barry and Kate Howarde, often in collaboration with other leading artists (notably Harry Grist). Variety theatre clients included F.M. Clark, Harry Cogill, and the Gaiety Novelty Company. John Little and Sons (1895 onwards) continued to supply stage scenery up until at least the late-1910s.

John Little began advertising his services as a scenic artist in early 1871, having set up a studio in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton. The first professional production known to have included his work was Walter Cooper's *Foiled*. Produced at the [Princess's Theatre](#) by L.M. Bayless beginning 7 October, the "new and authentic scenery" was credited to Fry, Little and Assistants.

NO MANAGERS of PRIVATE THEATRES, Amateurs, &c.—SCENERY PAINTED by J. Little, 3 Lynch street, Carlton.

Argus (Melbourne) 17 Apr. 1871, 8.

By late 1872 Little had begun his association with the [Theatre Royal](#), then under the management of [Henry R. Harwood](#), [John Hennings](#), [Richard Stewart](#) and [George Coppin](#). His earliest established works at the Royal were *Quite Alone* and *My Turn Next*. Staged as part of a double bill in early November 1872, both productions were credited to Hennings, Little and Harry Grist. The trio collaborated on numerous works up until 1877, including [Garnet Walch's](#) 1875 pantomime *A Frogee Would a Wooing Go*, and his 1876 burlesque *Pluto; Or, The Magic Lyre*. During this period Little also provided scenery for productions staged by other firms. Allison and Booty, for example, engaged him to paint the scenery for their 1873 Christmas pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe; Or, Harlequin Friday, the Fairy Liberty and the King of the Carribee Islands* (St James Hall, Bendigo; 26 Dec.). [John Hennings](#) provided a panorama depicting Crusoe's voyages for the same production.

From 1878 through to 1882 Little and Hennings worked mostly in collaboration, supported by a team of assistants. Among the productions staged during the last two years of Hennings, Harwood, Stewart and Coppin's lesseeship of the Royal (1878-79) were [George Darrell's](#) *Back from the Grave* (1878), *Struck Oil*, starring [J.C. Williamson](#) and Maggie Moore (1879), and [Garnet Walch's](#) 1879 Christmas pantomime *Babes in the Wood*. During the years 1880 to 1882, when the theatre was managed by [Coppin](#), [Hennings](#) and [Greville](#), the two scenic artists produced scenery for *Sin Fane; Or, Shamrock Green*, starring Gratton Riggs; *Bland Holt's New Babylon; Not Guilty*, starring B.N. Jones; [Walch's](#) *Sinbad the Sailor*, featuring the Stewart family (1880); *The Three Guardsmen* (1881); and *Russia As It Is* (1882), starring [Alfred Dampier](#).

After leaving the Theatre Royal, Little painted drama and pantomime scenes for various firms under his own name up until 1895, at which time he established John Little and Sons. Between 1883 and 1895 his "legitimate" theatre clients included [Williamson Garner and Musgrove](#), [Rignold](#) and [Allison](#), [W.J. Holloway](#) and [C.F. Coutts](#). Some of the works undertaken in collaboration with other artists, notably [Alexander Habbe](#), [George Kelly](#), [Harry Grist](#), [J.R. Walsh](#), [George Gordon](#), [Alfred Clint](#), [John Hennings](#) and [George Campbell](#). In 1891 he also began undertook possibly his first commission from the variety industry, this being minstrel semi-circle scenery for [F.M. Clark](#). Later variety theatre clients included [Harry Cogill](#), and [Perman and Lang's Gaiety Novelty Company](#).

After setting up John Little and Sons, the business expanded its operations beyond Melbourne and nearby Victorian centres such as Bendigo and Ballarat, securing contracts with professional and amateur theatre companies in Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia. The company's work was also appearing further afield through Australian and New Zealand tours by [Dan Barry](#), [Alfred Dampier](#), [M.L. Raphael](#), [Charles Arnold](#), the [Permans](#), the [Coulter Dramatic Company](#), [Kate Howarde](#), and [Meynell and Gunn](#).

ROYAL PRINCESS THEATRE
Under the direction of Mr. W. J. Holloway.
LAST NIGHT BUT ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PLAY Ever produced in Sandhurst.
TO-NIGHT (MONDAY) TO-NIGHT "LIGHTS O' LONDON,"
Mr. W. J. HOLLOWAY
And his Specially-selected Company.
Every scene new and painted by Mr. J. LITTLE.
"The representation was greeted at all points with unequivocal marks of favor, the audience reaching at times the highest pitch of enthusiasm."
—ADVERTISER.
"The management have placed it upon the stage in a most complete and creditable manner, the scenery being magnificent."
—*Independent*.
"It is of a higher tone, morally, than the average popular works of modern times, and therefore the more deserving of liberal patronage."
—*Evening News*.
WEDNESDAY.
"LED ASTRAY."
Box plan at Evans's music warehouse. Tickets for all parts at Evans's, and Hanstein, tobacconist. Subscription ticket: (circle), seven for £1. Circle, 4s.; stalls, 2s. 6d.; pit and gallery, 1s.
SPECIAL NOTICE.—Doors open 7.15, commencing at quarter before eight sharp.
1809 NEIL O'BRIEN, Agent.

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic) 5 Nov. 1883, 1.

While much still remains to be found in relation to John Little's life and career (both as a scenic artist and businessman), it has been established that his company was still producing scenery for the Australian theatre industry as late as 1918. That year saw Little and Co linked to a tour of *Charlie's Aunt* by Edmund Duggan and Leslie Woods.

SCENIC ART (PRODUCTIONS)

The following list comprises stage productions with scenic art by John Little and John Little and Sons that have been identified to date.

Abbreviations

Scenic Artists: AC = Alfred Clint • CF = Charles Fry • GG = George Gordon • HG = Harry Grist • AH = Alexander Habbe • JH = John Hennings

Firms: HHS&C = Hennings, Harwood, Stewart and Coppin • CH&G = Coppin, Hennings & Greville • WGM = Williamson, Garner & Musgrove

Year	Production(s) / [Entertainment]	Venue / Tour details	Management / Company
1871:	Foiled	(Princess's, Melbourne; 7 Oct.) with C.F and assistants.	[L.M. Bayless]
1872:	Quite Alone / My Turn Next	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 7 Nov.) with JH / HG	
1873:	Robinson Crusoe	(St James Hall, Bendigo; 26 Dec.)	[Allison & Booty]
1875:	The Octoroon	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 9 Aug.) with JH / HG	
	The Lancashire Lass	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 18 Sept.) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
	A Froggee Would a Wooing Go	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 26 Dec.) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
1876:	Saratoga	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 19 Feb.) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
	Pluto; Or, The Magic Lyre	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 20 May) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
1877:	As You Like It	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 28 July) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
	King Richard III	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 22 Sept.) with JH / HG	[HHS&C]
1878:	Class	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 17 June) with JH	[HHS&C]
	Back From the Grave	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 29 June) with JH	[HHS&C]
	Our Boarding House in St Kilda	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 5 Sept.) with JH	[HHS&C]
1879:	Struck Oil	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 23 Aug.) with JH	[HHS&C]
	The Moonstone	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 13 Oct.) with JH	
	Babes in the Wood	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 26 Dec.) with JH / HG	
1880:	Gratton Riggs	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 27 Mar.) with JH	[CH&G]
	For Life	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 1 May) with JH	[CH&G]
	New Babylon	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 12 June) with JH / HG	[CH&G]
	Sentenced to Death	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 31 July) with JH	[CH&G]
	Not Guilty	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 14 Aug.) with JH	[CH&G]
	Sinbad the Sailor	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 27 Dec.) with JH	[CH&G]
1881:	The Three Guardsmen	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 26 Mar.) with JH	[CH&G]
	Shaun Slieven	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 9 Apr.) with JH	[CH&G]
1882:	Russia as it Is	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 6 May) with JH	[CH&G]
	Jack and the Beanstalk	(Theatre Royal, Melbourne; 26 Dec.) with JH	[WG&M]
1883:	The Naked Truth	(Opera House, Melbourne; 12 May) with A.H. and George Kelly	
	Lights of London	(Theatre Royal, Brisbane; 16 July)	[W.J. Holloway]
	Lights of London	(Royal Princess Theatre, Bendigo; 31 Oct.)	[W.J. Holloway]
	Babes in the Wood	(Royal Princess Theatre, Bendigo; 23 Dec.)	[C.F. Coutts]
1884:	Back From the Grave	(Her Majesty's Opera House, Sydney; 1 Aug.) with JH	
1886:	Only Dust	(Bijou Theatre, Melbourne; 22 May)	
	Tempted	(Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 27 Nov.)	
	The Navvies or the Tram Line	(Victoria Hall, Melbourne; 27 Nov.) with HG. and J.R. Walsh	
1887:	Mates on the Goldfields	(Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney; 26 Nov.)	[Rignold & Allison]
	Siberia	(Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney; 10 Dec.) with GG	[Rignold & Allison]
	In the Ranks	(Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney; 16 Dec.) with Geo. Campbell	[Rignold & Allison]
1889:	The Vendetta	(Her Majesty's, Sydney; 23 Feb.) with AC.	
1891:	"Fin de Siecle" - Minstrel 1 st Part	(Gaiety Theatre, Melbourne; 26 Dec.)	[F.M. Clark]
1892:	Les Cloches De Corneville / Girofle Girofla / Grand Duchess / Manteaux Noir / Falka / La Perichole / Martha / Maritana / The Bohemian Girl	(Princess Comic Opera Co Queensland tour; ca. Aug.)	[Melton Morley]

NB: John Little & Sons from 1895 onwards unless otherwise note.

1895:	The Forty Thieves Is Life Worth Living [Gaiety Pantomime Co]	(Town Hall, Perth; 26 Dec.) with Cameron Robbie (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 26 Dec.)	[Gaiety Panto Co /James Wilkinson]
1896:	[Gaiety Pantomime Co] [Fancy Yacht Fair]	(Town Hall, Perth; ca. Dec.) with W.H. Pulford (Elsternwick Presbyterian Church Drill Room, Vic; 25-38 Nov.)	
1897:	Rip Van Winkle The Hermit's Bell Ups and Downs of Life A Cruel Wrong Cinders "The Rose Bower"	(Queen's Theatre, Melbourne; 26 June) (Bijou Theatre, Melbourne; 8 July) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 25 Sept.) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 9 Oct.) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 30 Oct.) (Harry Cogill's Australian tour; ca. Nov. - Dec.)	[Comic Opera Co] [Victorian Operatic Society] [Alexandra Dramatic Co] [Alexandra Dramatic Co] [Alexandra Dramatic Co] [Harry Cogill]
1898:	The Roll of the Drum A Miner's Secret	(Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 23 Apr.) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 29 Oct.)	[Dan Barry] [Alexandra Dramatic Co / Erskine Scott]
1899:	Robinson Crusoe The Irish Detective [German Reed Entertainment season]	(Theatre Royal, Adelaide; 11 Mar.) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 29 Apr.) (Alexandra Theatre, Melbourne; 26 Aug. -)	[Wybert Reeve] [Duncan McCallum] [F.M. Alexander and Robert Young]
	Jack and the Beanstalk	(Raphael Pantomime Co Australian tour; Jan. - ca. Sept.) - Incl. Brisbane; 4 Nov.	[M. L. Raphael]
	In Town / A Gaiety Girl	(Harry Cogill's Australian tour; ca. Oct. - Dec.) - Incl. Bendigo; 12 June / Mt Gambier; 7 Aug.	[Harry Cogill]
1900:	HMS Pinafore Briton and Boer In Town / A Gaiety Girl	(Academy of Music, Launceston; 22 May) (Criterion Theatre, Sydney; 9 June) (Harry Cogill's Australian tour; ca. June - Sept.) - Incl. Tasmania; ca. Oct.	[Launceston Operatic Society] [Alfred Dampier] [Harry Cogill]
	What Happened to Jones Jack and the Beanstalk / Maritana	(Palace Theatre, Sydney; 25 Aug.) (Raphael Pantomime Co Australian tour; Jan. - ca. Sept.) - Incl. Tasmania; ca. Mar.- Apr. / Perth; 17 Aug. / Kalgoorlie; 7 Sept.	[Charles Arnold] [M.L. Raphael]
1901:	Les Cloches de Corneville	(Princess's Theatre, Melbourne; 27 July)	[George Musgrove]
1902:	Gilded Sin	(His Majesty's Theatre, Brisbane; 15 Mar.)	[Dan Barry]
1903:	[Gaiety Novelty Entertainers] After Dark	(Gaiety Theatre, Melbourne; ca. Aug.-Dec.) (Dan Barry Dramatic Co Australian tour; ca. Dec.) - Incl. Bendigo; 28 Dec.	[Perman and Lang] [Dan Barry]
1904:	[Gaiety Novelty Entertainers] After Dark	(Gaiety Theatre, Melbourne; 1 Jan. - 15 July) (Dan Barry Dramatic Co Australian tour; Jan. - ca. Apr.) - Incl. Brisbane; Mar.	[Perman and Lang] [Dan Barry]
	Little Red Riding Hood	(Perman/Lang's Australian tour; ca. Feb. - Oct.) with HG - Incl. Adelaide 13 Feb. / Brisbane 26 Mar. / Sydney 23 Apr.	[Perman and Lang]
	[Austral Competitions] Pygmalion and Galatea /Caste	(Bendigo, Vic; 26 May) (Coulter Dramatic Co Victorian tour; ca. June - July) - Incl. Warragul 9 June / Maffra 17 June	[Austral Association] [J. Coulter]
	In Gay Patee	(Perman/Lang's Australian tour; ca. Feb. - Oct.) - Incl. Melbourne 25 June / Bendigo 5 Sept.	[Perman and Lang]
	The World's Mercy / In Mighty London / A Wife's Peril / The Russian Spy	(Coulter Dramatic Co Australian tour; ca. Sept-Dec.)	[J. Coulter]
1905:	The World's Mercy / In Mighty London / A Wife's Peril / The Russian Spy	(Coulter Dramatic Co Australian tour; ca. Jan.)	[J. Coulter]
	H.M.S. Pinafore	(Academy of Music, Launceston; 29 Nov.)	[Launceston Operatic Society]
1906:	[Austral Competitions] The Two Orphans The Fatal Wedding	(Bendigo, Vic; 14 May) (Bijou Theatre, Melbourne; 2 June) (Meynell & Gunn Dramatic Co Australia tour) - Incl. Sydney 21 Apr. / Hobart 27 July / Perth 26 Dec.	[Austral Association] [Irving Dramatic Co] [Meynell and Gunn]
	The Gaiety Girl The Three Hats	(Mechanic's Theatre, Albury, NSW; 9 Aug.) (City Hall, Prahan; 27 Sept.)	[Albury Operatic Society] [Garrick Comedy Co]
1907:	The Double Event	(Theatre Royal, Hobart; 26 Jan.)	[Kate Howarde]
1909:	The Giesha	(Academy of Music, Launceston; 8 Dec.)	[Launceston Operatic Society]
1910:	The Partners	(Albert Hall, Launceston; 6 June)	[The Idlers Co]
1911:	Miss Hook of Holland	(Academy of Music, Launceston; 20 Nov.)	[Launceston Operatic Society]
1912:	San Toy	(Academy of Music, Launceston; 2 Dec.)	[Launceston Operatic Society]
1918:	Charlie's Aunt	(Camperdown, Vic; 28 Mar.)	[Edmund Duggan/Leslie Woods Co]

GAIETY THEATRE.
 The Happy Home of Hilarity,
 FULL of GINGER.
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26 (BOXING NIGHT),
FRANK M. CLARK'S
LAST SENSATION.
LAST SENSATION.
LAST SENSATION.
 First appearance in Australia of
GODAYOU'S TOKIO TROUPE.
GODAYOU'S TOKIO TROUPE.
 Seven artists just arrived from Europe per S.S.
 Coptic, and immediately secured by Mr. Clark at
 considerable expense. Re-appearance after his Tas-
 manian trip of
FRANK M. CLARK,
 Who will sing for the first time an original local song,
 specially written for him by Lance Lenton, and en-
 titled "It's Just the Sort of Thing that I Expected."
THE FIN DE SIECLE FIRST PART.
 The Scenery Painted by **JOHN LITTLE.**
 The whole forming a novel, clever, and compre-
 hensive Entertainment.
 Then we pursue the even tenour of our way, and
 draw attention to the fact of our having a
QUALIFIED QUARTETTE PARTY.
 Messrs. Speed, Downes, and Mdlles. Walker and
 Busch.
 Con the capable company :-
FRANK M. CLARK
 T. C. Callaghan Florrie St. Clair
 Sam Keenan Ada Walker
 Wm. Downes Dora Busch
 W. H. Speed Aggie Atkinson
 Geo. A. Jones Julia Dasma.

Argus (Melbourne) 26 Dec. 1891, 12

GAIETY THEATRE.
 Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr. Tom Perman.
TO-NIGHT (SATURDAY) TO-NIGHT.
GAIETY NOVELTY ENTERTAINERS.
 First Appearance of
LILLIE OCTAVIA and WARNE, DAVE
OCTAVIA and WARNE,
OCTAVIA and WARNE,
 In their Eccentric Comedy Sketches.
 First Appearance of
Mr. A. CLARK, Vocalist and
Mr. A. CLARK, Expert Mandolinist,
 In Conjunction with the Ever Popular
GAIETY NOVELTY ENTERTAINERS.
 New and Brilliantly Illuminated
FIRST PART.
 Specially Painted by John Little and Sons.
 Bones: **DAVE WARNE, ALF. CONNOR.** Interio-
 rator: **JAS. CRAYDON.** Tambos: **GEO.**
PAGDEN, GEO. WALLACE.

Age (Melbourne) 19 Mar. 1904, 16.

TOWN HALL, PERTH.
 Sole Lessee and }
 Manager..... } **Mr. JAMES WILKINSON**
 Business Manager..... } **Mr. GEO. STEVENS**
 Musical Conductor..... } **Mr. JAS. STEWART**
 Scenic Artists { **Messrs. LITTLE & SONS and**
 } **CAMERON FORBES**
 Stage Manager..... } **Mr. JOH COWAN.**

THE GAIETY PANTOMIME CO.'S
GORGEOUS CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME,
"THE FORTY THIEVES."
GRAND OPENING, BOXING NIGHT,
 December 26th,
 And Every Evening until further notice.
 Matinees every Saturday Afternoon.

The Curtain will rise at 8 o'clock precisely
 on the most comic and magnificent of all
 Christmas Annuals, illustrating for the first
 time in Western Australia the most popular
 of all Eastern legends, with unprecedented
 regard to the most minute details, the
 greatest effect, and the strictest accuracy of
 Oriental manners and customs.

New and Magnificent Scenery,
"THE TRIUMPH OF SPRING."
 The most elegant Transformation Scene ever
 produced this side of the Continent.
 Specially painted by Messrs. **JOHN LITTLE &**
SONS, of Melbourne.
 The Latest and Greatest Successes from
 the London Theatres.

West Australian (Perth) 21 Dec. 1895, 1.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Stonyford Hall curtain: In 2012 *The Australian Variety Theatre Archive* was contacted by Paul Wilson of Camperdown, Victoria.¹ He was in possession of a backdrop upon which was painted a scenic depiction of Stonyford Hall. An inscription on the back of the curtain reads:

J. Little
 Scenic Artist
 Hawthorne. Melb.
 1933
 Ph HAW 5164

It is presently unclear if this work was by John Little (the subject of this biography) or a son. See image below.

¹ Emails 14 and 17 February, and 24 June 2012.



Stonyford Hall curtain (1933)
Courtesy of Paul Wilson