

Alice Wyatt – Albury Girl on the world stage

Richard Lee

Alice Wyatt was an Albury girl, growing up in Kiewa Street. Born in August 1882, she was the daughter of William and Jane Wyatt (née Fleiner). Alice attended Albury Public School and left Albury at a relatively young age.

Her father, a bookmaker, took her to Melbourne for an audition. Her singing and acting won acclaim and Alice was quickly snapped up by the George Stephenson Vaudeville Company. She and her friend Myra Hammon performed as the 'Sandow Girls' and went on to play theatres in Newcastle, Brisbane, Perth, Kalgoorlie, Hobart and then to New Zealand with the Ben Fuller troupe and later with J C Williamson's Company.

With this under their belt, Alice and Myra travelled by ship to South Africa for a season there before moving on to London in 1908. Alice later returned to Australia.

After the outbreak of war in 1914, the 'Sandow Girls' again returned to London with Alice's younger sister Edith. After her father's death in 1915, Alice's mother also travelled to England, where she and her daughters kept an open house at St John's Wood for Australian soldiers. The girls welcomed hundreds of the ANZAC soldiers on Sunday afternoons to benefit the boys away. The girls performed numerous concerts for the war cause.

The 'Sandow Girls' played London's Oxford Theatre, the Palladium, the Empire and many others. When not performing with Myra, Alice played various principal boys and performed all over the UK. One of her more successful seasons was acting as Robinson Crusoe.

Acting was in her blood and so Alice turned to act in the silent movies of Hollywood, remaining there for four years. Though she was a more mature lady she was able to act as a 'Duchess figure.' On her return to Australia, Alice expressed the view that "talkies were just a passing craze."

In London she became friends with Syd and Charlie Chaplin and recalls a story of Charlie Chaplin calling in one afternoon and helping her mother to hang some curtains in the living room. Newspapers of the day reported that she had a close connection to Charlie Chaplin.

Cliff Chamberlain interviewed Alice for the *Border Morning Mail* at her apartment in St Kilda in 1966 when she was 84 years of age. She said she still was regularly in touch with Charlie Chaplin. Alice died on Christmas Day, 1971 aged 89.



A 1924 photograph of Charlie Chaplin with a lady who is believed to be Albury's Alice Wyatt.