

‘There is always Something Attractive about a Mystery’: The Great Mahatma Company Goes West

By Jeannette Delamoir ©

Introduction

During the nineteenth century, surprising numbers of entertainment companies ventured into the sometimes harsh Queensland outback. In those days, before motor cars were common, travellers depended on railway lines and coach services. These hardy troupers delivered a range of experiences: circus, vaudeville, melodrama, Shakespearean plays, snake-handling shows, buck-jumping displays. Thanks to travelling picture-show men and women, the exciting new technology of moving pictures also arrived early in the 20th century. All these brought fresh ideas, images, values, and fashions from metropolitan centres. Of course, novelty was part of the pleasure; no one wants to pay good money for an evening that offers only what is already known, established, predictable. But it really was hard work, with no guarantee of success. Picture-show pioneer R. F. Stephens explained:

The eternal move-on from town to town, the hard work shifting and packing our plant night after night and many times the feeble public response to our endeavours to entertain them, sickened me of touring and I could see that only misery and penury would be the lot of many who kept long enough on the road.¹

The challenges of the outback tour were evident during 1913, when the Great Mahatma Company travelled in western Queensland. Troupe members ‘Doc’ Rowe and his wife, known as ‘Mystic Mora’, had just completed a very successful ten-week tour of eastern Queensland, along with - and managed by - popular balladist Post Mason. Mora, Rowe, and Mason were all skilled in their areas of entertainment expertise, and each had a store of ‘turns’, allowing them to present new items on every night of a multi-night season. Doc Rowe - hypnotist, ‘prestidigitator and illusionist’² - manipulated Chinese rings, linking and unlinking them; his smoothly executed card tricks delivered an ‘educational’ session on ‘How Gamblers Win’; he was a master of patter, ‘a quick-witted gentleman with a striking personality.’³ As for Post Mason, he managed the tour, while also singing for his delighted fans.

Mora’s earliest Brisbane appearances, in February 1913, impressed audiences. The *Telegraph* reported she was ‘remarkable and inexplicable, and ... loudly applauded.’⁴ Throughout their initial - eastern - Queensland tour, she had generated more interest, stronger emotional responses, and higher praise than the other two well-seasoned players. This made a strong company, but it was unexpected, as she was also the least experienced in the little troupe.

When the eastern tour ended, the Rowes contracted for a further ten-weeks’ travel in western Queensland, under a different manager: Sidney Cook, proprietor of Cook’s Pictures in Brisbane. The tour started at Torrens Creek on the Great Northern Railway, 182 miles west

of Townsville. The town itself was so small that the 1913 *Pugh's Directory* did not state its population.⁵ But it was by no means empty: there was 'quite an army of railway men ... about the station and yards,' and a further one hundred men worked at the Torrens Creek Meat Export Co.⁶ In shearing season, it became even busier.⁷ And despite its small population, its position on the railway was convenient: it could transport performers to the western settlements, where people were hungry for entertainment.

Accommodation was tight, with just two hotels⁸, but on May 12, singers Ada Barnett and Noble Wheeler - selected for the tour by Sidney Cook - joined the Rowes.⁹ The four troupe members performed together for the first time that night. *Pugh's* does not list a hall in the town, so the show was possibly put on at the skating rink, in one of the two hotels, or even at Liversey's Refreshment Room.¹⁰ And something truly remarkable happened at that unknown venue. As part of her act, 'Mystic Mora' regularly invited questions from the audience, and a local resident asked about the town's most heart-breaking mystery - the disappearance of Thomas McNeill, railway employee and married father of ten.¹¹ Back in February, he had vanished after inspecting river levels near a railway bridge. In front of a roomful of witnesses, 'a friend of the deceased' asked Mora 'without mentioning his name' about the location of his body. Mora said: 'About 300 yards below the bridge, buried in the sand.'¹² And, a month later, that is exactly where Thomas McNeill's body was found.¹³ Mora had lived up to her own publicity:

MARVELLOUS MYSTIC MORA,

The World's Greatest Mental Telepathist.

The Woman who can read Past, Present, and Future, Mora is the most talked of woman appearing before the public and has created a sensation wherever she has appeared.¹⁴

The Torrens Creek prediction - and its outcome, especially for the dead man's family - was truly dramatic. But what Mora did not see - or did not reveal - were the challenges, one after another, that would occur during the tour. The journey was gruelling, the financial remuneration disappointing and professional relationships sorely tested. Finally, 'Doc' and Mora felt they had no option: they took legal action.

'Doc' Rowe and Mora

'Doctor' Richard Rowe wasn't really a doctor, although he used that title for his entire career. His name was not Richard, either. He was born in Ballarat in 1880, and the name 'William' appears on his birth certificate¹⁵; in adulthood, he used William only on legal documents. During 1912, his publicity material included the outrageous claim that he was a reformed gambler from Randolph County, Missouri:

When he left home he became a professional gambler ... During that time ROWE acquired an extraordinary skill at many gambling games, and this skill he has retained ... He displays it in order to demonstrate ... that all men who play with professional gamblers *must lose* ... The games played by them appear to be perfectly fair, but in

reality the professional can win every time ... A few years ago in a gambling club a young man lost his life in a dispute with sharpers. From that time ROWE has devoted all his energies to warning men against the vice of gambling ...¹⁶

As for Mora, she may - or may not - have been a mystic, but her name was not Mora. She was Alice Maud, née Fitzgerald, born in the North Melbourne suburb of Hotham in 1884.¹⁷ Like her husband, Mora had a commanding presence. Advertisements called her 'the White Mahatma', 'the modern witch of Endor', 'The Veiled Prophetess, Seventh Daughter of a Seventh Daughter'.¹⁸ Her persona was fierce:

The Fire of her mind is like the fire the Persians burn on the mountains. It flames night and day, and is immortal, and is fed by the pure spirit of Knowledge.¹⁹

Yet reviews also described Mora in flattering terms as a 'tall, raven-haired woman'²⁰, 'dazzlingly handsome'²¹, with a 'girlish figure'.²² Her charm was much mentioned: 'a very charming young brunette'²³; 'Dr Rowe and his charming wife'²⁴; 'irresistible charm'.²⁵

Mora first appeared as the White Mahatma at Sydney's National Amphitheatre on 15 January 1910²⁶ but she was not the *first* 'white mahatma'. Nor was she the first 'white mahatma' to perform with Rowe. Back in September 1908, Rowe toured New Zealand, billed as 'the famous American [sic] magician'.²⁷ On that tour, he was accompanied by a woman called Nadine who was billed as 'The White Mahatma'.²⁸ It is possible that Doc and Mora had met earlier than 1910, fallen quickly in love and, equally quickly, developed their act together. After all, 'Doc' had witnessed the 'White Mahatma' act many times in New Zealand. Alternatively, perhaps Mora *was* 'Nadine', in which case they had already travelled together for some time.

What happened next? The Melbourne show business weekly, *Hawklet*, stated that the pair planned to embark on a country tour through Victoria in March 1910.²⁹ Any such tour would have been brief since, in April, they appeared together at Melbourne's Waxworks.³⁰ The following month, they joined the Fuller theatre circuit through New Zealand.³¹ Despite an announcement that they had wed prior to departing Australia³², they did not marry for over a year when they finally tied the knot at Dunedin, New Zealand, on 1 August 1911.³³ And during this tour, there is could be no doubt that Mora was now the 'White Mahatma'.

Manager Horace Hazelton

Tour manager Horace Hazelton met the Torrens Creek foursome at Cloncurry on 13 May 1913.³⁴ In private life, Hazelton was the organist at Mackay's Holy Trinity Church³⁵, advertising himself as Professor of Music, 'prepared to take Pupils for Piano, Organ, Violin, Voice Production, etc.'³⁶ His love of music - and possibly also Christian values - may have generated a bond between Hazelton and Sidney Cook who had been for some years a member of the Salvation Army Band in Melbourne.³⁷ As manager, Hazelton had held a series of roles

at Cook's Pictures: Town Hall, Maryborough, 1910³⁸; Olympia Pictures, Bundaberg, 1912³⁹; Taylor's Theatre Royal, Mackay, 1912.⁴⁰ He had also been business manager for Edward Carroll's exhibition of the boxing film, *The Johnson-Jeffries Battle* at the Town Hall, Maryborough, in January 1911.⁴¹ In subsequent years, he promoted pugilistic contests at Mackay's Star Theatre.⁴² Although Hazelton does not seem to have previously experienced the challenges of extended theatrical travelling, he had supported at least one journey involving performers. During August 1911, Hazelton - then 'musical director at the [Maryborough] Bungalow' - travelled with Philip Newbury and Madame Emily Spada to Cairns where the highly acclaimed Newbury-Spada duo performed at the Cairns Shire Hall on 5 and 7 August.⁴³ But the Newbury-Spada tour involved only one couple with several musicians to support the vocalists. This experience surely could not prepare Hazelton for the grinding hardships of extended travels.

An information gap obscures the company's travels between its Cloncurry performance of 13 May⁴⁴ and its appearance at Hughendon on 28 May.⁴⁵ Likewise, there are no details of the Hughenden performances.

Typhoid

Meanwhile, typhoid raged over large areas of Australia. The *Catholic Advocate* reported an 'outbreak' in Longreach early in 1913⁴⁶; cases were reported at Cloncurry at the end of that month⁴⁷; and ten people were hospitalised by typhoid at Winton on 4 April.⁴⁸ Things only got worse:

The *Winton Herald* of the 20th May reports that since the commencement of the typhoid epidemic 63 cases had been admitted, of which nine so far had proved fatal. There were four deaths in one week. There are now 43 patients in the hospitals The bakeries have been closed. Great scavenging operations are in progress, chiefly in the direction of filling up cesspits, removing old buildings, and fumigations.⁴⁹

The Mahatma Company was scheduled to visit Winton on 30 May, ten days after this report. Singers Barnett and Whelan refused to enter the town; Hazelton's actions are not known. Perhaps bravely, perhaps foolishly - or, perhaps, simply in the spirit of professionalism - Rowe and Mora 'did the whole show.'⁵⁰ But only 'three or four people' turned up for their performance⁵¹; that night, most Winton residents attended a fund-raising ball in aid of typhoid victims. When it was over, Rowe paid a carter to load equipment and luggage on the overland coach in readiness for morning departure. He reported that he 'went to bed at 1am and was up at 4am.' At least no-one in the troupe caught typhoid.

Troubles and Triumph in Barcaldine

Touring companies completely depend on their advance publicity. There is a lot involved: pasting advertising posters on every fence and telegraph pole; strategically distributing free tickets; cheerily chatting with newspaper editors; placing advertisements in local

publications. Reaching Barcaldine on 4 June, the company discovered that this essential advance publicity had not been arranged.

The Rowses knew what to do: they presented a free show to drum up interest. Doc hypnotised a young lad, creating 'fun' through the antics of the 'victim'. But this time, the 'free show' didn't work. A disappointingly small audience attended the Shire Hall on the first night, Wednesday, 4 June. The following night, however, 'the audience was very good, and decidedly appreciative.'⁵²

Mora and Rowe together performed the 'Simla Séance'. This involved a 'cabinet' - a sort of box on stage. Mora was seated on a chair in the cabinet, her feet tied, her hands tied behind her back. A 'committee' of local men examined the ropes and knots, checking that she could not wriggle out of the bindings. Then, a curtain was drawn and the audience immediately heard the sounds of a tambourine and bell - was it the work of spirits? Or was it Mora? When the curtain was rapidly jerked back, Mora was still restrained in the same way. This act had people puzzled as it was said to be both 'very mysterious' and an educational revelation of the tricks used by fake spiritualists. Mora also impressed with her 'second sight' when she 'very ably displayed her powers of telepathy in various ways ... Of course, she bamboozles everybody as to how it is done ... She is well worth seeing ...' Rowe's solo performance also went well: 'Doctor Rowe perplexed his audience with his clever magic and card tricks, &c., and is decidedly clean in his work; his accompanying patter is also very funny.' His hypnotism involved a group of youngsters:

Six lads are placed, at intervals, under the spell of mesmerism and at the direction of Dr Rowe all the antics imaginable are performed. The audience was simply in roars throughout this turn ...

The singers, too, were a decided hit:

The vocal items of Miss Ada Barnett and Mr Noble Wheeler were much appreciated; these two artists are among the best we have heard ... Miss Barnett also presides at the piano with much ability. It is a pleasure to listen to her.⁵³

The audience demanded more; Miss Barnett gave her original rendition of 'Hullo Mr Crocodile'.⁵⁴

From Barcaldine, the company planned to visit Muttaborra, travelling by hired motor car as this town could not be reached by train. But hiring a motor car proved difficult:

Hazelton did not succeed in getting one at his price. So the party coached and did not get to Muttaborra that night ... a letter from Mr Cook ... said that he would make arrangements for their transportation, so the tour proceeded.⁵⁵

Sidney Cook

Energetic manager Sidney Cook- raised in Mackay, Queensland⁵⁶ - juggled multiple interests in film (production, distribution, exhibition), as well as vaudeville and music. Things seemed bright - if a little frantic - on 1 January 1913, with his film programs playing in four Brisbane locations, as well as ‘theatres in most of the coastal towns of Queensland.’⁵⁷

But, on 4 January, Cook was annoyed by a detail he read in the newspaper: his moving-picture screening in Longreach had been held at the showgrounds instead of the Shire Hall. Rival company, Star Photo Play, had ousted Cook’s Pictures. That was not the only irritating item. The same newspaper revealed that Longreach resident, Mrs McInerney - ‘who had the skating rink and pictures at Mount Morgan’ - was now planning a permanent open-air picture show in Longreach.⁵⁸ In February, the opening of her Royal Pictures opening attracted ‘from 800 to 900 people’ who watched the ‘beautifully clear’ images. Cook’s Pictures in Longreach nevertheless ‘drew two good houses’ on 8 and 10 February, but maybe that was because of an added attraction, escapologist Hanco, the ‘Handcuff King’. Then, on 22 February, the *Western Champion* noted that, despite ‘good houses’ for Cook’s Pictures, ‘it is a very moot point whether the two picture shows can be supported.’⁵⁹ A month later, the *Morning Bulletin* revealed the unavoidable outcome:

Mr. S. Cook has been compelled to abandon his Western Circuit of picture shows. Owing to the permanent establishment in Longreach of an open-air stadium, there was apparently not sufficient support for two shows ...⁶⁰

Around this time, however, Cook seized a great opportunity in Brisbane - or maybe reacted to a threat. Brisbane film pioneer, R. F. Stephens, put it like this:

I am afraid that at this time [1913], Cook’s [sic] was feeling the opposition springing up around him and sought financial assistance by arranging a partnership.⁶¹

Sidney Cook and Win Fowles registered a company during March 1913⁶²; on 26 May, Brisbane Mayor Harry Doggett opened the new £20,000 Picture Palace. Cook himself was not at the opening.⁶³ But he was a busy man, with many reasons to be otherwise occupied.

How had Sidney Cook morphed from a young Salvation Army musician in 1889⁶⁴, to manager of multiple entertainment businesses in 1913? He found his life path thanks to the Salvation Army’s Limelight Department (established 1892), an early adopter of moving-picture technology. The Department had quickly perceived its usefulness for recruiting members. They saw, too, that money for social work outreach could be raised by offering film services to outside clients. An attic studio and laboratory were established at the back of the Salvation Army headquarters in Bourke Street, Melbourne.⁶⁵

The business of the limelight and film-making has now outgrown the capacity of the new studio ... The Limelight Department is now well equipped. It possesses three or four of the most up-to-date bioscopes,

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thousands of feet of film, some of the finest triple ... lanterns that can be purchased, kinematographe camera, machinery for printing, developing and turning out film.⁶⁶

The outcome was 'Australia's first registered film production company producing commissioned work for external agencies.' As the Limelight Department's second camera operator, Sidney Cook was soon working for the State Governments of both New South Wales and Queensland.⁶⁷ And just as the Salvation Army footage utilised film for recruitment, so too did governments - to recruit immigrants.⁶⁸

Leaving the Salvation Army in 1905, Cook moved with his family to Brisbane, where he established Cook's Pictures, while continuously travelling for government jobs. He was, it is said, 'the most prolific Australian filmmaker of the Edwardian era'⁶⁹, sometimes using hotel cellars for darkrooms. According to his 1937 obituary: 'He was the first man in Australia to accomplish photography and developing in one day and show the pictures that night.'⁷⁰ The tight turn-arounds sometimes caused problems. At Longreach on January 8, 1913, a large crowd came to see Cook's film of local horse races, shot earlier that day. The film did not run through the projector: 'Mr Cook explained that [the film] was not properly dry owing to the short interval between the taking of the picture and the showing of it.'⁷¹

By 1913, having established production, distribution and exhibition interests - as well as his travelling vaudeville companies - Cook faced a significant obstacle: the establishment of the 'Picture Film Combine' that would have a significant impact on production, distribution and exhibition of Australian films:

The [film] showman's chief grievance is that the combine endeavours by its agreement to make a choice and selection of films for the showmen, and to stop the showmen from securing any film except those supplied by the amalgamated exchange.⁷²

From 1913 onwards, the Combine exerted a destructive impact on all aspects of the Australian film industry. R. F. Stephens told Sidney Cook's story:

Cook's had another heavy blow ... Mr Cook then shifted his picture theatre to an open-air enclosure across the street, and, in conjunction with vaudeville, had many successful seasons. Post Mason ... and many other vaudeville celebrities appeared, and conducted their own shows. The advent of the bigger and better theatres in the city and the spread of the suburban shows eventually killed Cook's Valley theatres.⁷³

No wonder Cook, with his shiny new 1913 investment, was stressed by 'unnecessary', unprofitable country tours such as the Great Mahatma Company's wanderings through western Queensland.

'You Have Treated Me Badly'

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After six weeks of touring, Sidney Cook suddenly terminated the Rowes' ten-week contract on Monday, 23 June. The company was at Blackall when they received the news.⁷⁴ The Rowes immediately travelled to Brisbane to see Cook in person (23-25 June) but, with no resolution, Rowe sued for breach of contract.

The Great Mahatma Company continued its tour. It performed in the Shire Hall, Barcaldine on 7 June⁷⁵ (week 4). The next certain location was 'the hall' in Longreach on 3, 4 and 5 July⁷⁶ (week 9). The *Capricornian* notes a later, three-night season in Longreach on 11, 12 and 13 July⁷⁷, which would have brought them to the end of their 10-week contract. These dates suggest that the Great Mahatma Company continued performing after the cancellation of its contract and possibly without pay.

Three days of hearings followed on 16-18 July in Brisbane's City Small Debts Court.⁷⁸ On Saturday, 19 July, the decision was given. The performers' difficult financial position may explain the prompt hearing and the unusual delivery of the decision on the Saturday.

The court case provides insight into the terms of Rowe and Mora's contract. They were engaged for ten weeks at a joint salary of £15 per week. They were responsible for providing 'half of each nightly entertainment' with Ada Barnett and Ernest Noble Whelan providing the remainder. The Rowes 'expected to receive expenses in addition to salary' but this had been ignored in their contract leaving them to pay their own fares, food and lodging. Rowe maintained that their joint salary was low compared to previous engagements when they received as much as £50 per week in Townsville and £25 per week in Brisbane. Despite the conditions, the Rowes were:

willing and ready to do said work ... Yet [Sidney Cook], on June 23, 1912, would not permit [William Rowe] to complete the said work, and wrongfully discharged and prevented [William Rowe] from doing and completing the same ...

Cook had a different perspective. He told the court that he cancelled the contract because he 'examined the financial statement and decided that the salary list was too high, and decided also to withdraw Hazelton as manager'.⁷⁹

Rowe claimed he was owed £50. Cook counter-argued that Hazelton had paid Rowe amounts totalling £82 10s and that Rowe actually had been over-paid by £7 10s, which should be refunded to Cook. In another possible contractual ambiguity, Rowe admitted that 'Hazelton might have asked ... in a casual way for the money', but he believed that he, Rowe, 'was responsible for the money, and was going to hand it to [Cook] when he settled up.' Rowe's statement to the court further explained:

On June 23 [Rowe] and his wife came to Brisbane, and [Cook] praised him up and said he was very satisfied with what witness had done. [Rowe] had played six weeks out of ten, and was ready and willing on June 23 to do the other four weeks, and asked [Cook] to start them off

again ... Later on, [Rowe] got a wire from [Cook], and on June 25 called on [Cook] and said: 'You have treated me badly and shut the show down when you should not have done. What do you propose to do?' [Cook] replied: 'You appointed yourself manager without my authority.' [Cook] had 50 excuses to offer, all different. It was not true that [Rowe] had appointed himself manager.

Cook seems to have been a under pressure, making hasty decisions, deeply concerned about finances, praising the Rowes one minute and cancelling their contract the next. Stress also shaped his response to the magistrate's decision: that the terms of the contract with the Rowes had not been met. Colonel Moore, PM, 'awarded [Rowe] damages of £40, with professional costs £2 2s, costs of court 4s, witnesses expenses 15s, total £43 1s.' Cook appealed and may have received some small satisfaction when the damages were reduced to £30 on the grounds that the Rowes 'had been offered similar employment and refused it'. It is not known what kind of employment was offered, nor who made the offer. Nevertheless, Cook's financial gain was probably very small compared to the costs of appealing the case at the Supreme Court.

'There is always Something Attractive about a Mystery'⁸⁰

Mora's prognostications were not always correct. For example, in response to a question at the Star Theatre, in the sugar-growing town of Mackay during April 1913, she predicted: 'I don't see any likelihood of a change in connection with the sugar excise and bounty.'⁸¹ Nevertheless, the sugar excise was abolished in July that year.⁸²

Despite the 'accuracy' of her 'visions', Mora learned her mysterious performances from Doc Rowe, who learned them while a member of the Ada Delroy Company about 1907.⁸³ That company had previously made multiple world trips with 'Professor' Samri S. Baldwin.⁸⁴ Both with the Delroy Company and his own company, Baldwin toured his 'White Mahatma' performances around Australasia four times between 1878 and 1890.⁸⁵ He referred to himself and his wives (Clara, whom he divorced, then Kitty) as 'White Mahatmas', reflecting popular culture's fascination with the exotic 'east'. In addition, Baldwin's act referenced several kinds of 'new' belief systems such as Spiritualism (the persistence of a human 'spirit' after death, and with whom living people could communicate) and Rosicrucianism. His 'trance' act was named 'Rosicrucian Somnometry'. But Baldwin emphasised:

I do not assume or claim the possession or use of any miraculous, occult, superhuman or supernatural powers whatever. In fact, I do not believe in the supernatural in any sense.⁸⁶

Spiritualism, which emerged during the 19th century, was preoccupied with determining whether manifestations were genuine or fake. The first Spiritualists - the young Fox sisters of Rochester, New York - came to notice in 1848. At different times, they claimed that they were in contact with spirits and also that this was a hoax. During 1854, the Davenport Brothers of Buffalo, New York, similarly declared that they communicated with spirits. They developed the 'cabinet' act in order to show how *fake* spiritualists manufactured 'spirit' manifestations.

On their international tours, the cabinet act became known as the ‘Simla Séance’, again referencing India and the ‘exotic East’.

Baldwin - and therefore Rowe and Mora - tantalised audiences by playing with these ideas. Clearly the Rowes’ entertainments were based on producing similar, seemingly uncanny effects. But additionally, their performances were *about* deception. The card tricks purported to reveal how scammers always win; the ‘Simla Séance’ supposedly showed how fake spiritualists create ‘spooks’; the trance-like ‘mind reading’ that was some kind of clever invisible communication. The audience was entertained, challenged, mystified - and thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of teetering on the edge of believing and not believing.

Author Neil Harris explained how audiences are fascinated by puzzles. About American showman P. T. Barnum, he wrote:

Experiencing a complicated hoax was pleasurable because of the competition between victim and hoaxer, each seeking to outmanoeuvre the other, to catch him off-balance and detect the critical weaknesses ... the opportunity to debate the *issue* of falsity, to discover how deception had been practiced, was even more exciting than the discovery of fraud itself ... Concentration on whether a particular show, exhibit, or event was real or false, genuine or contrived, narrowed the task of judgement for the multitude of spectators. It structured problems of experiencing the exotic and unfamiliar by reducing that experience to a simple evaluation.⁸⁷

Doc and Mora were very good at performing well-presented hoaxes. And, as it turns out, these hoaxes were very profitable. At the end of 1913, Rowe claimed that he and Mora had worked 51 weeks of the year, and that ‘Mora banked £1500’, equivalent to about AUD \$195,000 in 2026. Rowe claimed:

We earned money for ourselves and our managers. Ask them! Birch & Carroll, Ben J Fuller, Dix and Baker, JC Bain, M Martoo, Sydney [sic.] Cook.⁸⁸

The travels of Doc and Mora in western Queensland raised challenges but, somehow, they ended the year 1913 in good spirits, and certainly with a healthy financial position.

Or did they?

Image captions

1. Town Hall at Barcaldine, c.1920. Courtesy: State Library of Queensland.
2. Street in Cloncurry. Courtesy: State Library of Queensland.
3. Longreach, Cobb & Co, 1913. Courtesy: State Library of Queensland.

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4. Torrens Creek, Field of Bones, Meatworks. Courtesy: State Library of Queensland.
5. Winton Hotel c.1905. Courtesy: State Library of Queensland.
6. 'Doc' Rowe and Mystic Mora c.1930. W. G. Alma conjuring collection. Photographs. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria.
7. Poster advertising 'Doc' Rowe and Mystic Mora. W. G. Alma conjuring collection. Photographs. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria.
8. Poster advertising 'Doc' Rowe and Mystic Mora. 'How Gamblers Win'. W. G. Alma conjuring collection. Photographs. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria.
9. Poster advertising 'Doc' Rowe, Mystic Mora and 'The Great Mahatma Company'. W. G. Alma conjuring collection. Photographs. Courtesy: State Library of Victoria.
10. 'The New Picture Palace. To be Erected by Messrs. Sidney Cook and Win Fowles on the Site of the Old Foresters' Hall, The Valley, Brisbane'. From: *Brisbane Courier*, 8 March 1913, p. 12.
11. Advertisement, Post Mason's Mahatma Company, Cook's Pictures. From: *Daily Standard*, Brisbane, 22 February 1913, p. 2.
12. Sidney Cook, 'Biographing Brisbane,' *Sunday Observer*, Brisbane, January 1907, p. 12.

¹ Richard F. Stephens, 'A Try at Talkies 25 Years Ago ... A History of Motion Pictures in Australia', Instalment No. 2, *Everyones*, 26 May 1937, p. 12.

² 'Garden Picture Palace', *Maitland Daily Mercury*, 11 January 1913, p. 7.

³ 'Olympia Pictures', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 7 April 1913, p. 2.

⁴ 'Post Mason's Company', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 10 February 1913, p. 3.

⁵ *Pugh's (Queensland) Official Almanac, Directory & Gazetteer* (Brisbane: Edwards, Dunlop & Co., 1913), p. 996.

⁶ 'A Visit to Torrens Creek', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 25 June 1923, p. 4.

⁷ Matthew J. Fox, *History of Queensland: Its People and Industries: An Historical and Commercial Review Descriptive and Biographical Fact, Figures and Illustrations: An Epitome of its Progress* (Brisbane: States Publishing Company), p.323.

⁸ *Pugh's (Queensland) Official Almanac, Directory and Gazetteer*, 1913, p. 996. See also: 'A Visit to Torrens Creek', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 25 June 1913, p. 4 'The majority of the [meatworks] employees live at the two hotels and boarding-houses in town, while others put up at the works.'

⁹ 'Cook's Pictures', *Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette*, 26 April 1913, p. 4.

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- ¹⁰ Pugh's (Queensland) Official Almanac, Directory and Gazetteer, 1913, p. 996.
- ¹¹ Australian Cemetery Index. https://austcemindex.com/?given_names=thomas&family_name=mcneil&state=QLD&min_birth=1855&min_death=1913#google_vignette Accessed 27 January 2026.
- ¹² 'Local and General', *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers), 14 June 1913, p. 2.
- ¹³ 'Interstate: Torrens Creek,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 June 1913, p. 4: 'Mrs McNeil made an application to the Railway Commissioner for a party of men to make an exhaustive search. The Commissioner complied with the request and sent 10 men ... at 2 o'clock to-day the remains of the unfortunate man were found some 300 yards from the bridge ...'
- ¹⁴ Advertisement, *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 1 February 1913, p. 6.
- ¹⁵ Birth, Victoria, Reg. No. 35959: William Rowe, Ballarat, 14 July 1880.
- ¹⁶ Flyer, undated, theatre unidentified, included with 1912 clippings, Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora, 1912-1916, Australian Tour. Alma Collection, 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.
- ¹⁷ Birth, Victoria, Reg. No. 2080: Alice Maud Fitzgerald, West Hotham, 14 June 1884.
- ¹⁸ Clipping of advertisement for the Newton Tivoli Theatre (New Zealand), [c.1912], from Mora's First Scrapbook. Alma Collection. State Library of Victoria.
- ¹⁹ Clipping of advertisement for the Newton Tivoli Theatre (New Zealand), [c.1912], from Mora's First Scrapbook. Alma Collection. State Library of Victoria.
- ²⁰ 'Woman Mystery Magician', *Thomson's Weekly News*, 19 November 1921, from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora's 1918-21. Alma Collection, 93.1/5, State Library of Victoria.
- ²¹ Clipping from *Hawklet*, 1 August 1912, from Scrapbook of Dr Rowe and Mora, 1912-1916 Australian Tour. Alma Collection, 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.
- ²² 'Gaiety Theatre', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 17 February 1910, p. 21.
- ²³ Unidentified clipping, [c.1913], from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora's 1912-1916 Australian Tour. Alma Collection, 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.
- ²⁴ 'The Mahatmas', *Daily Post* (Bangalore), July 30 1918, clipping from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora 1918-21. State Library of Victoria, Melbourne,
- ²⁵ 'The Empire', *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 16 March 1919, clipping from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora 1918-21. Alma Collection (93.1/5). State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.
- ²⁶ 'National Amphitheatre', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1910, p. 3.
- ²⁷ 'Comic Opera', *Marlborough Express* (New Zealand), 8 October 1908, p. 5.
- ²⁸ Advertisement for Drill Hall, *Feilding Star* (New Zealand), 15 September 1908, p. 3.
- ²⁹ *Hawklet*, March 10 1910, clipping from Mora's First Scrapbook, Alma Collection, State Library of Victoria.
- ³⁰ 'The Waxworks', *Fitzroy City Press*, 29 April 1910, clipping from Mora's First Scrapbook, Alma Collection. State Library of Victoria.
- ³¹ *Hawklet*, 5 May 1910, clipping from Mora's First Scrapbook, Alma Collection. State Library of Victoria.

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- ³² *Hawklet*, 5 May 1910, clipping in Mora's First Scrapbook, Alma Collection. State Library of Victoria.
- ³³ Certificate of Marriage, Maud Fitzgerald and William Rowe, Dunedin, 1 August 1911.
- ³⁴ 'Entertainers Effervesce: Tale of an Interrupted Tour: The Tribulations of a Strolling Player: Rowe Hoes a Hard Yard', *Truth* (Brisbane), 27 July 1913, p. 10.
- ³⁵ 'Farewell Organ Recital', *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 3 May 1913, p. 7.
- ³⁶ Advertisement, *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 21 October 1913, p. 8.
- ³⁷ 'Sidney Cook', *Australian Variety Theatre Archive*, <https://ozvta.com/entrepreneurs-a-f/>, accessed January 18 2026. Cook's Salvation Army service included 'special duty in connection with the Rescue House and Prison Gate Brigade work' in Castlemaine. He apparently covered '1,300 miles on his Raleigh machine [bicycle]' while doing this work. See: 'Items of News', *Mount Alexander Mail*, 19 December 1896, p. 2.
- ³⁸ Advertisement, *Maryborough Chronicle*, 27 October 1910, p. 5.
- ³⁹ Advertisement, *Bundaberg Mail*, 10 May 1912, p. 3.
- ⁴⁰ Advertisement, *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 25 September 1912, p. 8.
- ⁴¹ Advertisement, *Maryborough Chronicle*, 13 January 1911, p. 5.
- ⁴² 'Boxing', *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 25 August 1917, p. 2.
- ⁴³ Advertisement, *Cairns Post*, 5 August 1911, p. 4. References to possible further performances have not been found.
- ⁴⁴ Company movements have been established by reference to newspaper reports, extracted from on-line newspaper archives available on TROVE. Information gaps may suggest that certain small local newspapers have either not yet been scanned and uploaded onto Trove or have been lost altogether. The *Longreach News* and Blackall's *Barcoo Independent*, for instance, are not available on Trove.
- ⁴⁵ 'Effervesce'
- ⁴⁶ 'Rockhampton and Central Queensland', *Catholic Advocate* (Brisbane), 4 January 1913, p. 26.
- ⁴⁷ 'Typhoid at Cloncurry', *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 25 January 1913, p. 4.
- ⁴⁸ 'Winton News', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 4 April 1913, p. 6.
- Untitled report, *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), 7 June 1913, p. 13.
- ⁴⁹ 'Effervesce'
- ⁵⁰ 'Effervesce'
- ⁵¹ 'Effervesce'
- ⁵² Untitled report, *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), 7 June 1913, p. 13.
- ⁵³ Untitled report, *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), 7 June 1913, p. 13.
- ⁵⁴ Clipping from *Longreach News*, 7 June 1913, from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora 1912-1916 Australian Tour. Alma 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.
- ⁵⁵ 'Effervesce'

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- ⁵⁶ State Library of Queensland. Information online with photograph, Sidney Cook next to the camera with a group of five women, Sydney, 19013. Image number: 3275-0001-0030.
- ⁵⁷ 'Motion Pictures: Early Days in Australia: Late Mr. Sidney Cook's Work', *Cairns Post*, 12 April 1937, p. 10.
- ⁵⁸ 'Longreach', *Capricornian* (Rockhampton), 4 January 1913, p. 31.
- ⁵⁹ 'Longreach Items', *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), 22 February 1913, p. 10.
- ⁶⁰ 'Barcaldine', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 22 March 1913, p. 4.
- ⁶¹ R. F. Stephens, 'A History of Motion Pictures in Australia: Pathe Lost £1000,000 in Australia', Instalment 9, *Everyones*, 14 July 1937, p. 20.
- ⁶² 'New Theatre in the Valley', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 8 March 1913, p. 7.
- ⁶³ 'Sidney Cook—Friends of Toowong Cemetery', <https://www.fotc.au/research/sidney-cook/>, accessed 21 January 2026.
- ⁶⁴ 'Motion Pictures: Early Days in Australia: Late Mr. Sidney Cook's Work', *Cairns Post*, 12 April 1937, p. 10.
- ⁶⁵ Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years* (Angus & Robertson & Currency Press, 1983), p. 11.
- ⁶⁶ 'Four Conquering Years 1896-1901', *The Victory*, Supplement, September 1901, pp. 440-43.
- ⁶⁷ 'Sidney Cook—Friends of Toowong Cemetery', <https://www.fotc.au/research/sidney-cook/>, accessed January 21 2026.
- ⁶⁸ 'Cook's Pictures', *Shoalhaven News and South Coast Districts Advertiser*, 8 June 1907, p. 4.
- ⁶⁹ 'Sidney Cook—Friends of Toowong Cemetery', <https://www.fotc.au/research/sidney-cook/>, accessed January 21 2026.
- ⁷⁰ 'Motion Pictures: Early Days in Australia: Late Mr. Sidney Cook's Work', *Cairns Post*, 12 April 1937, p. 10.
- ⁷¹ 'Longreach Notes', *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 13 January 1913, p. 6.
- ⁷² 'Picture Film Combine', *Argus* (Melbourne), March 17 1913, p5.
- ⁷³ R. F. Stephens, 'A History of Motion Pictures in Australia: 'Metro' Also Box-Office in 1914', Instalment 10, *Everyones*, 21 July 1937, p. 17.
- ⁷⁴ This location is not certain but has been deduced from a clipping from the *Barcoo Independent* (Blackall), 21 June 1913 contained in the Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora 1912-1916, Australian Tour. Alma 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.
- ⁷⁵ Advertisement, *Western Champion* (Barcaldine), 7 June 1913, p. 13.
- ⁷⁶ 'Longreach', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 4 July 1913, p. 3.
- ⁷⁷ 'Longreach', *Capricornian* (Rockhampton), 12 July 1913, p. 45.
- ⁷⁸ 'Effervesce'.
- ⁷⁹ 'Effervesce'

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⁸⁰ Prentiss Ingraham, *Buffalo Bill's Weird Warning* (New York: Street & Smith Corporation, 1908), Ch XXI, Project Gutenberg eBook.

⁸¹ 'Mackay Notes', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 9 April 1913, p. 9.

⁸² 'Sugar Industry', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 11 July 1913, p. 11.

⁸³ See for example, 'Ada Delroy Company,' *Port Denison Times & Bowen Advocate*, 5 October 1907, p. 8.

⁸⁴ 'Ada Delroy', *Australian Variety Theatre Archive*, <https://ozvta.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/delroy-ada.pdf>, accessed 26 January 2026.

⁸⁵ 'Ada Delroy', *Australian Variety Theatre Archive*, <https://ozvta.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/delroy-ada.pdf>, accessed 26 January 2026.

⁸⁶ Samri S. Baldwin, *The Secrets of Mahatma Land Explained*, self-published, no place given, 1895, p. 11. The emphasis given appears in the original manuscript.

⁸⁷ Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1973), pp. 77-78.

⁸⁸ Advertisement, *Footlights*, 24 December 1913, p. 12. Clipping from Scrapbook, Dr Rowe and Mora 1912-1916 Australian Tour. 93.1/3. State Library of Victoria.