



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### ALEXANDER GEORGE GURNEY (1902-1955)

One of Australia's best known cartoonists and comic strip writers was Alex Gurney, the creator of "Bluey and Curley". One of our best known poets was C. J. Dennis, the creator of "The Sentimental Bloke" and two of our best known comedians were Stiffy and Mo.

The connection is that Alex Gurney drew comic strips based on Stiffy and Mo and also on The Sentimental Bloke.

Alexander Gurney was born in 1902 at Portsmouth England and following the death of his father he and his mother emigrated to Tasmania in 1908. His early education was at the Macquarie Street School. He worked for a short time as an ironmonger when only 13 years of age before starting an apprenticeship as an electrician with the Tasmanian Hydroelectric Commission. During his apprenticeship he commenced art classes at the Hobart Technical College as well as doing a correspondence course in art. Gurney also began freelancing, with some success, selling cartoons to the Tasmanian Mail, Melbourne Punch, The Bulletin and Smith's Weekly.

Gurney came to the attention of mainland newspapers when, in 1926, he published a book, "Tasmanians Today", a collection of caricatures of notable citizens. He moved to Melbourne in 1927, commencing work with the Melbourne Morning Post which later that year was incorporated into the Sun News Pictorial. Alex Gurney then moved to Sydney to freelance. While contributing to The Bulletin in 1927 he created a strip, "Stiffy and Mo" for Beckett's Budget.

In 1928 he briefly returned to Melbourne to marry June Grover, the daughter of Montague Grover an Australian newspaperman. Back in Sydney in 1928 conditions were very hard as the depression was in full swing and three newspapers he worked for were wiped out. These were The Sunday Times, the Sydney Guardian and also the World which had been started by his father-in-law, Montague Grover in 1931. During this period he drew a strip called "Daggs" for the Sunday Times.

He then returned to freelancing until offered a contract by the Herald and Weekly Times in 1932 to draw political cartoons for the Adelaide News. This association was to last for twenty-three years.

After just twelve months in Adelaide he was transferred to Melbourne in 1933 to launch a new comic strip for the Herald. From October 1934 he drew "Ben Bowyang" based on the work of C. J. Dennis, finally taking over as the lead page cartoonist in 1935 when Sam Wells, the lead cartoonist, went to England. By this time, 1937-38, he was drawing political cartoons five days a week and on Saturdays drawing a sporting cartoon, usually on football.

Gurney had been experimenting with a character called Bluey who had a rectangular head and a square nose. Later he created Curley who had a round head and a pointed nose. He drew them dressed in different clothes, overalls, dinner suits and party hats and on the outbreak of war he put them in army uniform, Bluey, the veteran from World War 1, who knew all the tricks and Curley, the youngster who he took under his wing. The first six Bluey and Curley cartoons appeared as a full page in the Sun on 1st February 1940. From then there was a new strip nearly every morning six days a week for more than fifteen years.

