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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.

Gurney was meticulous in his work, being an excellent draughtsman, and to get realism in his sketches he visited many army camps in Australia to get the feel of army life. While visiting New Guinea in 1944 he contracted malaria and the strip continued in the Sun-News Pictorial three days a week until his discharge from hospital. He was very clever at being able to alter a doubtful or risqué joke to use it in a comic strip. He called it dry cleaning a story, his work never being questionable.

The strip had a distinctively Australian flavour and made great use of the Australian idiom and slang with a great ability to interpret the Australian male. Following the war Bluey and Curley were in Britain for the victory march and followed up with service in the occupation forces in Japan before being discharged. In civilian life they became lighthouse keepers, lion tamers, and private detectives among other occupations.

Another strip running during the war was, of course, Wally and the Major, drawn by Stan Cross which appeared in Smith's Weekly. In May 1941 the Sydney Daily Mirror commenced with Bluey and Curley appearing and also a new strip called Boofhead.

Bluey and Curley was widely syndicated in fifty-three publications in Australia, New Zealand and Canada but Gurney refused to change the Australian character of the strip and for that reason it was never well received in America. In 1948-49 Bluey and Curley was adapted for the wireless as a serial on 2SM.

Gurney illustrated two small books, "Sickness Without Sorrow" in 1947 and "Life With Laughter" in 1950 and the proceeds of these went to the Food For Britain Appeal. He also designed emblems for South Melbourne and Essendon Australian Rules teams.

Gurney has been described as the most Australian of all cartoonists. He belonged to the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmens' Imperial League of Australia, the Bread and Cheese Club, the Melbourne Savage Clubs and the Tee Square Club, comprised of artists and architects. His favourite pastimes were fishing and shooting.

Alex Gurney died suddenly of a heart problem on 4th December 1955 at his home in Elwood in Victoria survived by his wife, son and three daughters.

The strip was subsequently drawn by Norman Rice and Leslie Dixon until 1975.

Alexander George Gurney was initiated in Lodge Pacific No. 5, Tasmanian Constitution, on 16th August 1923, passed and raised on 20th December 1923 and 13th February 1924 respectively in the same lodge. He called off from that lodge in 1935 after affiliating with Lodge Literature, No. 500 New South Constitution on 7th July 1932. Alex Gurney called off on 1st October 1936.

Ref: Australian Dictionary of Biography.

Melbourne Herald 9.8.47

Melbourne Herald, 5.12.1955

John Ryan, "Panel by Panel", Cassell Australia Ltd., 1979

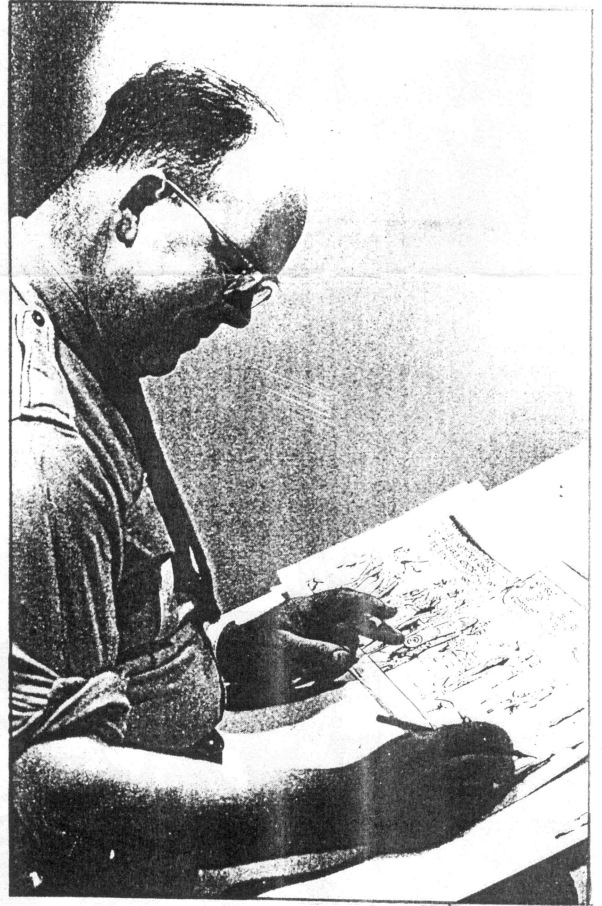
Vane Lindsay, "The Inked-in Image", Hutchinson Group Australia, 1979.

John Gurney and Keith Dunstan, "Gurney and Bluey and Curley", Macmillan Australia, 1986

BRO. ALEX GURNEY



In uniform as a war correspondent.



The cartoonist at work — on a 'Bluey & Curley' strip.

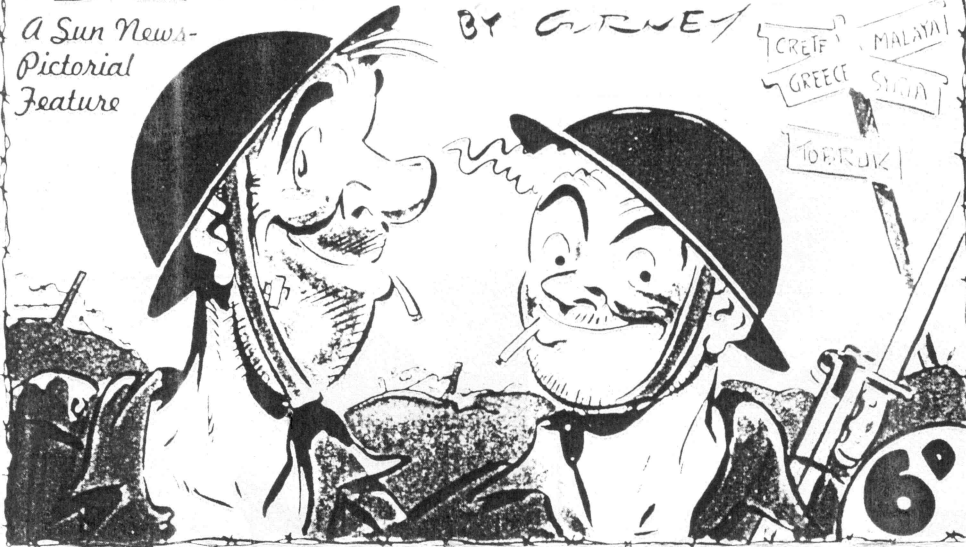


'Yer tellin' me': the bronze busts of Bluey and Curley made by Leslie Bowles.

BLUEY AND CURLEY

A Sun News-Pictorial Feature

BY GURNEY



Some cover pages of Cartoon Albums by Alex Gurney.

BEN BOWYANG

A HERALD FEATURE



STIFFY AND MO



CARTOONS



ALEX GURNEY

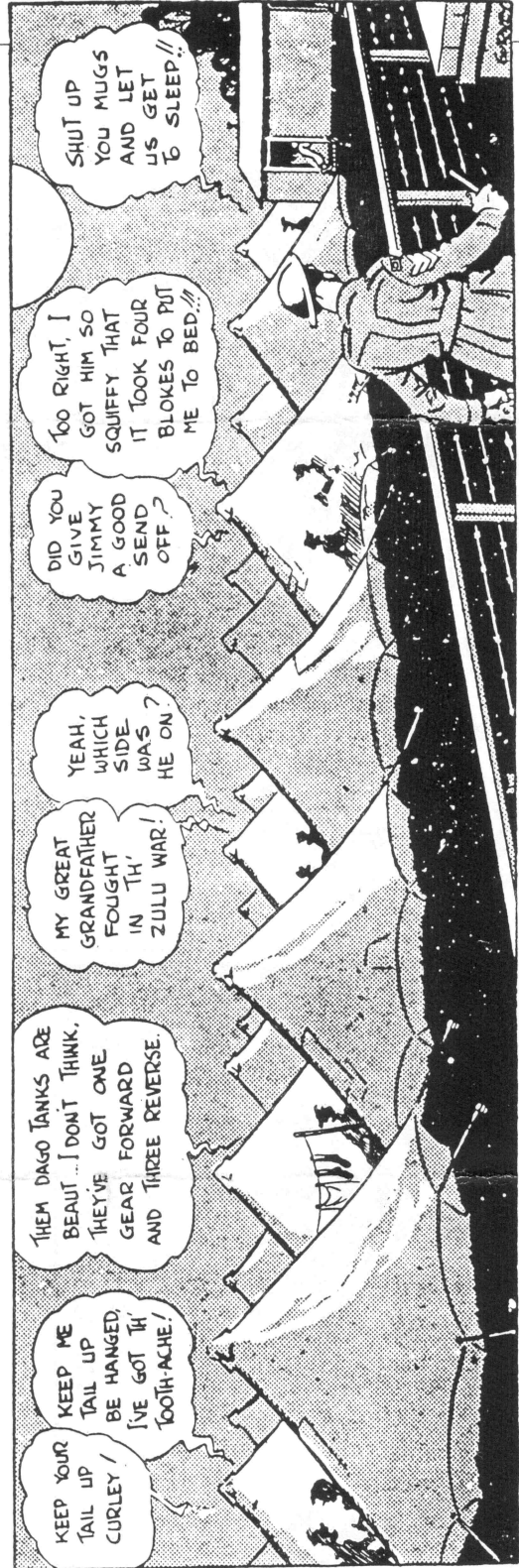


ANNUAL 2!

Acktual Fact



Bedtime Stories



A Marked Man



THIS IS THE BLOKE WOTS VOLUNTEERED TO DONATE SOME OF HIS SKIN, FOR GRAFTING ON TO THE WOUNDED PADRE!!

THAT'S SPLENDID, THE POOR PADRE NEEDS IT BADLY!!



ASK HIS REVERENCE IF HE'D LIKE A FOUR-MASTED-SCHOONER, OR A PICTURE OF MAE WEST?

Putting Him to Flight



HALT! WHO GOES THERE?

A GERMAN FLYING OFFICER!!



WELL, LET'S SEE YOU FLY!!!