



NERMAN

ISABEL
WILFORD

**ISABEL
WILFORD**
1896–1979

NOTES ON A
NEW ZEALAND
MOVIE STAR

by

Ian St George



Isabel Lilian Wilford at 34, c.1930, applying lipstick in her dressing room,
unknown photographer, toned gelatin silver print 20.7 x 15.7 cm.
Alexander Turnbull Library PAColl-6232-02.

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Items in the National Library relating to Isobel Wilford

Item at Nga Taonga Sound and Vision

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Cover from the *Tatler* No.1418, 29 August 1928 page 392.

Einar Nerman was a Swedish artist. From 1922 to 1930 he was the theatre cartoonist for The *Tatler* and worked for the fashionable magazine *Eve*.

Chapter 1: family

Isabel Lilian Wilford was born in Wellington on 7 June 1896, the second child (only daughter) of a well-to-do and successful couple.

Her mother, Georgia Constance (McLean) Wilford was the daughter of Sir George McLean, Member of the Legislative Council, of Dunedin. Her father Thomas Mason Wilford the son of a Lower Hutt surgeon and grandson of Thomas Mason, Member of the House of Representatives. Her parents married in 1892 and her brother George McLean (Max) Wilford was born in 1893.

This was New Zealand aristocracy.

Thomas Wilford was a prodigy who was a Wellington representative rugby player (captain of the Epuni club) and passed all his law examinations at age 19 (the youngest ever in New Zealand),¹ though could not be admitted to the bar until age 21 (in 1891).

Wilford's urbane, genial personality and considerable gifts as an orator and actor underlay the two passions of his life – law and politics. He became a distinguished barrister, outstanding as an advocate with juries, and highly regarded within the legal profession for his courtesy and helpfulness to colleagues. He entered politics as soon as he could, standing as a Liberal in 1896 for the seat of Wellington Suburbs; he won narrowly but was unseated by an electoral petition. He won the seat in 1899, but in 1902 stood for the Hutt seat which he represented until 1929.²

He was Mayor of Wellington in 1910, a liberal, a sports enthusiast, a talented actor and raconteur – but chronic ill-health after appendicitis in 1912 diminished his capabilities.

Nonetheless he became Leader of the Liberal opposition to Massey's Reform government in 1920, became King's Counsel in 1929, was appointed High Commissioner to the UK and was knighted. He died in 1939.

His sister Izie Winnifred Wilford would marry Arthur Flowers Harding, who had settled in New Zealand after captaining the Anglo-Welsh rugby tour here in 1908. Harding had been a member of the 1905 Wales team which famously beat the 1905 Original All Blacks.

Izie and his mother assisted in his mayoral campaign,

MAYORALTY.

A MEETING of LADIES favourable to MR. WILFORD'S return will be held at the Newtown Committee Room, Riddiford-street (next the Langham Private Hotel), on TUESDAY, 19th April, at 3 o'clock p.m. Mrs. and Miss Wilford have been invited to be present.

Evening Post 18 April 1910 page 8.

In 1909 Isabel was a bridesmaid at her cousin Dr Matthew Holmes's wedding, in "dainty white, with lace mob cap, and mauve sash and bow".³ Another paper reported the bridesmaids were "in beautiful frocks of heliotrope satin with wide plumed hats of the same colour", which difference might have confused its readers.⁴

Later in 1909,

Mrs Wilford, who leaves next week for a lengthy stay in England and Scotland, where her son is to study

engineering in Denny's workshops, has been the centre of several good-bye entertainments. Mrs Chaffey gave a pleasant little luncheon for her and her intimate friends at the Windsor Hotel, and Mrs Field gives a farewell tea on Monday. Mrs Wilford herself gave a little At Home last week. Exquisite perennial sweet peas of a pale mauve shade, blended with violets and friesias, decorated the tables, and the hostess looked charming in a pale blue voile over silk, with ivory silk insertions and silver embroideries and tassels. Little Miss Wilford remains behind, staying with friends, and continuing her school studies.⁵

Isabel had started at Fitzherbert St School (the original Marsden School) in 1905 and left in 1913.⁶ She won prizes in reading, spelling and writing; brush work; scripture; history, geography, "great artists" and "general neatness and dexterity". In 1907 she acted the princess in the French play *Cendrillon*.⁷

Isabel's fox terrier was "very highly commended" at the Wellington Kennel Club in November.⁸

In December 1911,

Mr. Wilford's constituents tendered him a complimentary "social" in the Palace Theatre at Petone last evening in honour of his re-election to Parliament as member for Hutt.... In returning thanks Mr. Wilford, who was supported on the platform by his wife and daughter, Mrs. Wilford, sen., and Miss Wilford....⁹

But within a few days,

Mr. T. M. Wilford, M.P., Mayor of Wellington, who has been in poor health for some time past, will leave New Zealand on Thursday morning for an extended sea voyage, as recommended by his medical advisers. He

will be accompanied by Mrs. Wilford and Miss Wilford.¹⁰

Friends gave him a travelling bag, a gold watch bracelet for Mrs Wilford and “a hand-bag for Miss Isabel Wilford”.¹¹

By April 1912,

Mr. T. M. Wilford, M.P., is so much benefited by his treatment and the stay in the Pyrenees that he has returned to London feeling fully fit for work.... Miss Wilford, who came Home with her parents to undergo treatment for her eyes, was operated on a few days ago. and is now making good progress in a nursing home in London. Mr. and Mrs. Wilford and their daughter will leave for New York by the Baltic on the 25th April, and are due to reach Auckland on 4th June.¹²

Back into the social whirl of Wellington they swept in July: a Council reception, a Vice-Regal ball, a Children’s Dance with the Governor present (“Miss Wilford, who received the prize for the handsomest dress, was in Parma violet ninon and silver – a charming costume”¹³), a concert (“Among those present were Mr, Mrs, and Miss Wilford”¹⁴), the spring race meeting (“Miss Wilford, navy blue braided gown, close-fitting light hat with shaded rosette at side”¹⁵).

Miss I Wilford sang a Quaker song in costume, out of “The Quaker Girl,” at St Peter’s church sale of work in November.¹⁶ After Christmas they went to Taupo for their summer break.

They were living at 23 Tinakori road. Isabel and her mother visited Isabel’s grandmothers (Mrs Wilford in Wanganui and Lady McLean in Dunedin) from time to time.

In October 1913 Isabel Wilford was placed in the Wellington Shakespeare Club’s secondary schools annual reading competition.¹⁷

In her final year at Marsden she was co-dux, prefect, was on the Magazine, Sports and Debating Committees and acted in the school dramatic production *Eager Heart*.¹⁸

In March 1914 they attended a reception by the Women's Social and Political League at the Town Hall Concert Chamber for Lady Ward¹⁹ and an "at home" dance in the Marine Engineers' Institute given by the captain and officers of HMS *Psyche* ("Mrs Wilford, black satin, with an overdress of jetted net; Miss Wilford, white charmeuse, with tunic edged with swansdown"²⁰).

Mrs Arthur Pearce gave a delightful dance in late March in her beautiful house. "At this dance Miss Wilford was a dainty debutante. She has charming colouring and hair, and is the same Dresden china type as is her mother."²¹ She wore a blue frock and rose hat with black ribbon bows to the races at Trentham.²²

War was looming,

BRITONS ALL! BRITONS ALL!

A GRAND CONCERT
 Will be given by
 Miss Flora Shaw, assisted by Wellington's
 leading talent and the Wellington
 Gas Co.'s Full Orchestra.

IN AID OF THE MAYOR'S PATRI-
 OTIC FUND.

TOWN HALL CONCERT CHAMBER,
 WEDNESDAY, 6th SEPTEMBER, 1914.
 WEDNESDAY, 6th SEPTEMBER, 1914.

Under the distinguished patronage of
 Their Excellencies the Earl and Countess
 of Liverpool, General Sir Alexander and
 Lady Godley, the Right Hon. W. F. and
 Mrs. and Miss Massey, Ministers of the
 Crown, Sir Joseph and Lady Ward, Mr.
 T. M. and Mrs. and Miss Wilford, His
 Worship the Mayor and Mayoress, City
 Councillors, and other influential citizens.

FULL PROGRAMME LATER.

Popular prices.

Mrs. E. Queree, Accompanist.

W. R. POTTER, Hon. Sec.

And the social reel twirled on: Miss Wilford was invited to join a small gathering by the Governor's lady,

Her Excellency the Countess of Liverpool gave a small afternoon tea at Government House at which the guests were given an opportunity of hearing Mr. Kirkby, the well-known tenor, sing. Beautiful spring flowers were everywhere to be seen in the drawing-room, and in the ballroom, where tea was set, were more flowers and pot plants.²³

The Ladies' Committee of the Star Boating Club held a ball in the Town Hall to augment the War Fund and Isabel was there.²⁴

She passed the St John First Aid examination in June 1915.²⁵



Chapter 2: the Wellington stage

In 1915 she was 19 years old and taking dancing lessons from Miss GM Campbell at her calisthenics and dancing school in Coromandel St, Newtown,

A dance recital, the proceeds of which are to be given to the Wounded Soldiers' Fund and the Mayor's Patriotic Fund, was given in the Grand Opera House last evening by Miss Campbell's pupils.... Of interest to the audience was a one-step danced by Miss Campbell and Miss Wilford, in which was to be seen some of the latest side-steps, and a Boston waltz, both graceful performances. Miss Campbell and Miss Wilford also danced a tango, a very different thing from the burlesques that have only too frequently been performed upon the stage.... Miss Wilford was in white charmeuse draped with ninon.²⁶

CALISTHENICS AND DANCING.
MISS G. M. CAMPBELL, Diploma,
 Mrs. Henry Wordsworth, Physical
 Training College, South Kensington,
 London.
 Dancing and Calisthenic Mistress to
 Fitzherbert-terrace School and Chilton
 House School.
 Classes held in Dancing and Calis-
 thenics.
 Fancy Dancing, Deportment, Ballroom
 Dancing, and Fencing.
 Classes commencing first week in April.
 Saturday Morning Class--Dancing and
 Calisthenics for Children--10th April.
 Present Address--122a, Coromandel-
 street, Wellington. Tel. 3604 (two rings).

Evening Post 24 April 1915 page 6.

She was chosen to play Serpolette in the Wellington Amateur Operatic Society's "coming production of Planquette's melodious opera, "Les Cloches de Corneville".²⁷

No taint of professionalism will be found in the cast of “Les Cloches de Corneville,” to be performed at the Wellington Opera House next month by the Amateur Operatic Society. All the proceeds of the production are to be devoted to patriotic purposes, and consequently there will be no superfluous payments to anyone, and none of the principals are to receive a penny in fees. As a matter of fact this performance is going to be made all the more interesting by the fact that not one of the performers has ever appeared in opera in Wellington before in anything like a responsible part. The two lady protagonists are to make their initial essay in leading roles. Miss Annie Sullivan, who is to play the role of Germaine, was in the chorus of “The Geisha” and “Paul Jones,” now she gets her chance to make good. Miss Isabel Wilford has been cast for the part of Serpolette. At present her voice is on the thin side, but with experience and a little training on sound lines it will develop into quite a serviceable organ.²⁸

Miss Wilford evidently inherits the histrionic talents of her father, who used to appear on occasions with the old Wellington Operatic Company.²⁹

They opened on 25 September and the *Dominion* critic frothed about the costumes,

Some very pretty group effects and frocking were to be seen in “Les Cloches de Corneville,” which, produced by the Wellington Amateur Operatic Company, opened the first night of its season in the Grand Opera House on Saturday. As a matter of fact the chorus girls were far more like Dresden China figures than hardworking French peasants, but that of course is always one of the incongruities of opera. Blues and pinks, reds and floral patterns were all cleverly arranged and harmonised by Mrs. James Hannah, who designed the frocks. Miss

Isabel Wilford, as Serpolette, was a dainty little figure in her grey skirt with black velvet bodice, laced over white, and a very tiny check apron. Like all the others she wore a little muslin cap made with a turned-back peak on either side of the head. Later as the Countess she wore a gown of primrose satin made with panniers and a Watteau back, and opening over a skirt of heliotrope satin edged with deep flounces of lace. With it was worn over presumably, powdered hair, a black velvet hat wreathed with ostrich feathers, and at times she carried a crook tied with heliotrope ribbons.³⁰

The other papers at least commented on the performances,

Miss Isabel Wilford, as Serpolette, has not a strong voice, or, perhaps, she had not got the range of the theatre; but she showed herself to be a clever little actress, quite at home on the stage; winsome, and full of joyous, jocund spirits.³¹



Isabel Wilford as Serpolette in *Les cloches de Cornville*.
Free Lance 1 October 1915 page 8.

Miss Isabel Wilford was also exceptionally effective as Serpolette, displaying an aptitude for comedy which made the representation of the character delightfully diverting. As her voice grows stronger she ought to be able to achieve in the future something in the neighbourhood of brilliancy.³²

Miss Isabel Wilford made a successful debut in the role of Serpolette. This little lady is exceedingly bright, agile, and full of vivacity. She has inherited in full measure the histrionic ability of her father, whose success as the Lord Chancellor in “Iolanthe” and other comic opera roles is a matter of local history. Her voice is rather light, and will improve and strengthen, and I hope to hear more of her later.³³

In November Isabel Wilford was a soloist at a successful concert given by the “Victoria League girls and some friends” at Trentham Camp; they were greeted with “the usual enthusiastic audience,” and the Salvation Army Hall was packed full.³⁴

Miss Campbell and her pupils presented “the charming fairy play *Sunset Land*” in aid of Red cross funds at the Grand Opera House in July 1916,

Among the soloists in singing and dancing was Miss Wilford, as Dame Fortune, who appeared first in a grey gown panelled with pale blue, a black velvet bodice, and black witch’s hat, and afterwards in a becoming dress of gold tissue, veiled with mauve chiffon. Her songs and dances were most successful.³⁵

Isabel played Dudley in the Wellington Amateur Operatic Society’s production of the musical comedy *San Toy* in August; the *Dominion* critic found it “doubly gratifying to have to record that the performance was greeted with every sign of the most cordial approbation” and,

Another successful performance was that of Miss Isabel Wilford, as Dudley. Miss Wilford, who is distinctly chic in appearance and manners, has broadened in her methods since last year, and the pert comedy of the lively English maid suited her very well. Most of her scenes and dances were with Li (Mr. A. W. Newton), and were among the most amusing in the play.³⁶

Miss Wilford, too, was a charming little dancer, and – up to the limitations of her part as Dudley – a clever comedienne. The part admirably suited her, and she played it to the fullest extent of her ability.³⁷

As a bright, vivacious comedienne, one can praise Miss Wilford without reservation.³⁸

Miss Wilford created a breezy sphere of happiness.³⁹

Miss Isobel Wilford, whose dancing in “San Toy” was so very much admired, took part in an entertainment at Palmerston North this week. Miss Wilford is a pupil of Miss Gladys Campbell.⁴⁰



Miss Isabel Wilford, who played the part of the maid with great vim, made a very chic figure in her black silk frock, white cap with long red streamers and tiny apron with red bows on the pockets. When she danced she betrayed the smartest of black frilly petticoats, also looped with red ribbons.

She sang at the opening of the new Anzac Club in Featherston in October and went with her mother to Rotorua for the holidays.

In July 1917 she sang at a concert by the “Glad Eyedlers,”

Miss Wilford invariably receives a warm welcome from a Wellington audience. She was encored for everything, and absolutely captivated the audience with the song, “He’s a Devil,” and its encore.⁴¹



Isabel Wilford as the Princess Fiametta,
Free Lance 14 September 1917 page 14.

The Wellington Amateurs' 1917 show was *La Mascotte* at the Opera House,

Another highly creditable performance was that of Miss Isabel Wilford as the Princess Fiametta, easily the best this young lady has given up to the present. Her wilful ways and snappy manner as she snubs the Prince and defies her Royal pater were part of a spirited performance that found a ready appreciation. Miss Wilford also sang and danced well in "The Attractive Girl" scena of the last act, in which she figures alluringly in the gay trappings of a zingari.⁴²

Miss Isabel Wilford as Fiametta wins the hearts of the audience by her daintiness. She acts with archness, and even in Fiametta's most petulant moods she displays an ability hitherto unsuspected. She has only a drawing-room voice, but she is grace itself....⁴³

In July 1918 the *Dominion's* theatre critic "Sylvius" noted,

The oft-reiterated report that Miss Isabel Wilford, of Wellington, is about to go on the professional stage is not correct.⁴⁴

In October she danced at the Opera House, now as a pupil of Miss Estelle Beere,

Miss Wilford's solo, "Grief," was well danced, but she shows to more advantage in dances expressive of joie de vivre, and her later numbers were excellent.⁴⁵

She caught the pandemic influenza while visiting Christchurch, and the family spent the holidays recuperating in Timaru. In July 1919 she danced at a matinee in aid of the Mothers' Help Division,

Miss Isabel Wilford and Captain Hunt in the jazz and the hesitation waltz pleased the audience so much that they

were twice recalled. Miss Wilford's black ballet costume of frilled net with touches of scarlet at the waist and corsage, was very effective and becoming.⁴⁶

In 1920,

Mrs T. M. Wilford, accompanied by Miss Wilford, is leaving for San Francisco by the Tofua next month. Mrs Wilford has been one the most consistent and strenuous workers for patriotic causes during the whole war period, and her many friends, and those who appreciated her work, will wish her a pleasant holiday, and restored health as a result.⁴⁷

WANTED TO SELL,
 6-CYLINDER OAKLAND MOTOR
 CAR,
 3-seater, 1919 model, self-starter, electric
 light, wire wheels. Reason for selling,
 owner leaving Dominion. Apply
 MISS WILFORD,
 23, Tinakuri-road.

Evening Post 23 February 1920 page 3.



A 1919 Oakland roadster

Miss Wilford is accompanying her mother. She intends to go to Los Angeles to study for her new career, which will be in connection with the moving pictures. Miss Wilford should film well. She is animated, intelligent and very graceful, and altogether lacking in that British bugbear which is aptly termed by the French “mauvais honte.” Her many friends wish Miss Wilford every success, and a short cut to “Star”-dom.⁴⁸

Chapter 3: Hollywood February 1920–August 1921

The next we read is on 2 October 1920 when “Isabel Wilford, Wellington, New Zealand, registered at the gallery this week”,⁴⁹ presumably the Laguna Art Museum.

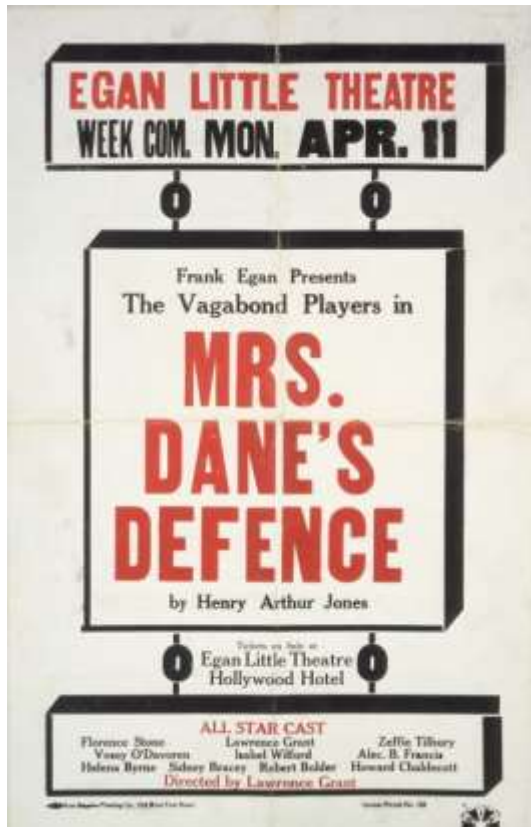
Miss Wilford, daughter of Mr T. M. Wilford, is in America, acting for a film company. Miss Wilford did a good deal of amateur acting in Wellington, and has made a good start in the United States,⁵⁰

... claimed the *Wairarapa Times*.

She worked on the legitimate stage in Los Angeles too. In December 1920 she was listed in the cast of *Paolo and Francesca* at the Hollywood Community Playhouse;⁵¹ she played the role of Gismonda;⁵²

In January 1921 she had joined the Caravan Players at the Victory Theatre in Burbank,

Among the most recent and valuable additions to the cast is Isabel Wilford who has been procured for certain productions between her moving picture appearances.⁵³



The name “Caravan Players” had been copyrighted, so “the little band of thespians” changed its name to the “Vagabond Players”.⁵⁴ In April she was cast as Janet, the ingenue lead in the Vagabond Players’ production of *Mrs Dane’s Defence* at the Egan Little Theatre,⁵⁵ 1320 S. Figueroa St. Los Angeles. Frank C. Egan was a noted drama teacher. The theatre is now the Musart.⁵⁶ She also appeared in *Mrs Temple’s Telegram*.⁵⁷

Te Kura, the Marsden School magazine, reported, “Isabel Wilford is in California and is taking part in motion pictures, and has already been given an important part.” The *NZ Times*:

Last May, Miss Isabel Wilford, daughter of the Hon. T. M. Wilford, M.P., Leader of the Opposition, went into the American moving picture world, commenced a career as a cinema actress, and has already progressed remarkably. Miss Wilford first displayed dramatic talent on the Wellington amateur stage. Bright, sparkling, vivacious, she made, a delightful ingenue. Though not yet a star, for stars are not made in a day, she has made good. She has done what she has been asked to do, and she has been screened in excellent company. To those who have trodden the same path that is a great deal to accomplish.⁵⁸

She “is making rapid strides in the motion picture world. She is appearing in important films” said the *Wairarapa Daily Times* in May 1921.⁵⁹ The *NZ Times* reported,

Commenting upon New Zealand girls who are making a success at screen work, a Christchurch exchange mentions Miss Eve Balfour,⁶⁰ a Christchurch girl who made her mark on the London stage before taking up screen work. Another recent arrival in America who appears to be advancing rapidly is Miss Isabel Wilford, daughter of Mr T. M. Wilford, M.P. Miss Wilford first displayed her dramatic talent in amateur circles in Wellington, where she proved an actress of considerable ability. Starting off by playing “extras” Miss Wilford moved upwards, and made her first appearance on the screen in “Blackmail,” in which Viola Dana was the star. Her next chance came in “Roseanne Ozanne,” in which Ethel Clayton played the name part. Later on she appeared in “You Never Can Tell,” with Bebe Daniels in the lead, and in “All Souls’ Eve,” with Mary Miles Minter as the star. Other appearances in important films with leading artists followed, including “Leopard Woman,” with Louise Glaum in the lead; “The Avenging

Arrow,” and a good part in “What Every Woman Knows,” eventually appearing in “The Affairs of Anabel,” in which Wallace Reid and Gloria Swanson were featured. Her last engagement was to play Pierrette in “The Dream Stars” at the Pasadena Theatre, Los Angeles.⁶¹

One Edith Johnson, writing a year later, in April 1922, for the *Daily Oklahoman* under the heading ***Real Hollywood Tragedy Found Among Girls Who Seek Stardom and Fail***, said many young women with big dreams came to grief in Hollywood, but that for some, the Studio Club was a lifesaver,

A girl from a prominent family in Missouri took the money her father gave her for a supposed visit to a former schoolmate to go to Hollywood, where she landed with only 10 cents. She was on the verge of starvation when she heard of the studio club. There are now in the club one girl from Russia, two from England, one from Norway and two from Australia. Miss Isabel Wilford, daughter of the premier of New Zealand was brought to Hollywood by her mother. A beginner actress, she makes her home at the club.⁶²

Actually she had been home in Wellington for almost a year by then, but the point is taken.





Poster for *Sins of Roseanne* from *Roseanne Ozanne*.



Poster for *You never can tell*.

Beginning Today



Mary Miles Minter

In a New and Delightful Story

"All Soul's Eve"

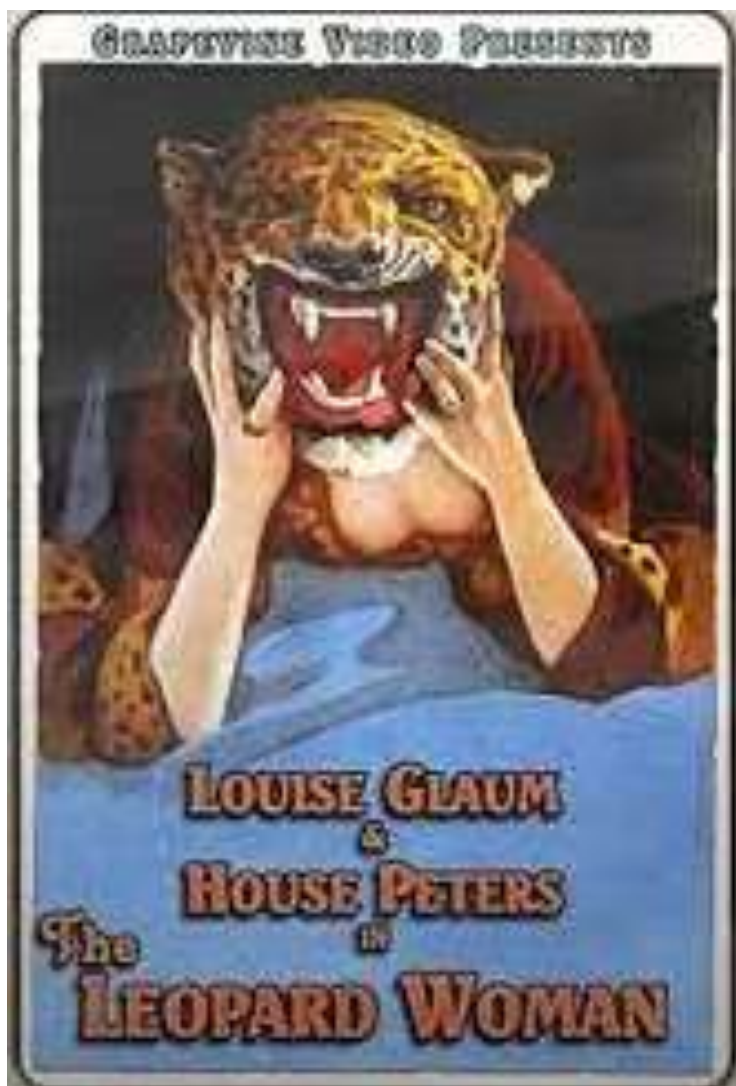
With a Great Cast, Headed by

Jack Holt

ALSO A NEW COMEDY

—SCREEN TIME—

10:30, 11:30, 12:45, 2, 3:15, 4:30, 5:45,
7, 8:15, 9:30



A PATHE SERIAL



Anita finds herself a prisoner aboard Martinez's schooner

Ruth Roland
--IN-- **"THE AVENGING ARROW"**

by ARTHUR PRESTON HANKING

EPISODE 11 "DANGEROUS WATERS"

Produced by Ruth Roland Serials, Inc.
At the Robert Brunton Studios, Inc.

Jose C. Long presents
WILLIAM DEMILLE'S
Production
 OF SIR JAMES M. BARRIE'S FAMOUS PLAY
"What Every Woman Knows"

Every woman knows that John is the one joke that every wife has on her husband. The one thing she doesn't let him know!

Made Adam's great stage success. The play that is a delicious joke in the whole role with that one that the man will enjoy as much as the women!

CONSTANCE NADEL
LEON WILSON
Presented by the
Paramount Picture





She played the maid in *What every woman knows* but her part was not mentioned in any of the advertisements for the film when it was screened in New Zealand in November 1921; nor is she included in cast lists for any of these films, so her parts must have been minor.

She returned to Wellington with her mother and father in midaugust 1921 (to recuperate from a relapse of her influenza),

Miss Wilford has succeeded in making a brilliant entry into the motion picture world, and after a holiday rest at home returns to win fresh laurels in the “movie” studios. Miss Wilford’s progress has been most marked, and by dint of hard work, study, and close application, she had reached the stage when she was allotted a lead in an allstar cast, but her departure for New Zealand postponed the honour.⁶³

Her film(s) arrived for showing in New Zealand in 1922,

ISOBEL WILFORD.

The public of Wellington will have an opportunity of seeing a New Zealand film star, Isobel Wilford, on the screen, as the first of her Universal features is booked for showing at the Queen's Theatre on Friday next. It is "Fair Fighting," a short and thrilling Western story in which Miss Wilford is supported by the popular serial star, Art Acord. It is not a society romance, but a drama which called for the greatest efforts on Miss Wilford's part. Apart from the local interest, "Fair Fighting" has a particularly fine entertainment value.⁶⁴



Arthemus Ward "Art" Acord, film star and stunt man.

FRIDAY NEXT, 26th MAY, 1922.

QUEEN'S THEATRE

NEW ZEALAND'S OWN FILM STAR,
ISOBEL WILFORD,
 IN THE UNIVERSAL PRODUCTION,
 "FAIR FIGHTING."

Evening Post 20 May 1922 page 3.

2.15 ——— TO-DAY ——— 7.30.

QUEEN'S THEATRE

WELLINGTON'S OWN FILM STAR,
ISABEL WILFORD.

The Beautiful, Talented Daughter of
 HON. T. M. WILFORD, M.P.,
 In the Universal Production from Sunlit California,
"FAIR FIGHTING,"
 — A Thrilling Drama of the West, in which the Famous Social Re-
ART ACCORD
 Suggests
ISABEL WILFORD.

Curious you may be, but curiosity is not the only thing that "Fair Fighting" will satisfy. After seeing Miss Wilford's wonderful performance you will leave thrilled by the entertainment, and satisfied as to Wellington's power to produce a perfect film star.

Evening Post 26 May 1922 page 2.

QUEEN'S THEATRE
QUEEN'S THEATRE

2.15 NOW SHOWING 7.30

Wellington's Own Film Star,
ISABEL WILFORD,
ISABEL WILFORD,
ISABEL WILFORD,
ISABEL WILFORD,

The beautiful, talented daughter of
 HON. T. M. WILFORD, M.P.,
 In
 A Thrilling Drama of the West,
 A Universal Production from Sunlit
 California,
"FAIR FIGHTING,"
"FAIR FIGHTING,"

Evening Post 29 May 1922 page 2.



Fair fighting was just one episode in a series of eight entitled *Terror trail*. Only Art Acord was named in American movie advertisements, Sheboygan's Fairyland Cinema, for instance,

The eighth chapter of *Terror Trail*, entitled "Fair Fighting," featuring Art Acord, will be shown at Fairyland tonight, together with a good comedy.⁶⁵

In an article written in 2012, Christopher Moor stated *Fair fighting* was “the last of the three Westerns she made during her brief American film career. Wilford said her first was frightfully exciting when her character got herself caught in a villainous cattle rustler’s grimy paws in *The Brand-blotters*. She also filmed *The Kinsman* in Arizona, cast as Dora Lee, who nurses the hero (Vesta Pegg) back to health.”⁶⁶

The Kinsman (“an entirely new drama”) played in Auckland in 1922, but the actors are not mentioned in the advertisements; it is not listed among the many westerns starring Vester Pegg,⁶⁷ but a still photo donated by Isabel Wilford’s daughter to the NZ National Library is said to show Pegg and Isabel Wilford in the film.



Vester Pegg and Isabel Wilford in *The Kinsman*.
ATL Ref. PAColl-6245-1-04.

The Brand Blotters showed in New Zealand in 1913, “a capital Selig picture dealing with western life amongst the cattle ranches of America,”⁶⁸ based on the 1911 book by Macleod Raine. There is a record of a later (1920) film of that name starring Isabel Wilford and Vester Pegg,⁶⁹ but I can find no record of its having been shown here.

Chapter 4: New Zealand and Australia August 1921–1925

Back home she presented the prizes in a beauty competition in Lower Hutt in September. At the Trentham races she wore “a navy coat frock, with front panel of accordion pleated grey georgette, and a small hat with bows of stiff ribbon”.⁷⁰ In November she was fined ten shillings and costs for driving her car without a headlight.

In December she joined the touring JC Williamson company in Wellington,

Miss Isobel Wilford, daughter of Mr T M. Wilford, M.P., quite captivated the audience at the Grand Opera House last evening when she appeared in the role of Eileen in “Paddy, The Next Best Thing.” Miss Wilford made a very attractive Eileen, indeed, and revealed a charming personality, together with a clear, ringing voice. Her sojourn in America, when she played ingenue lead in “Mrs Dane’s Defence” and “Mrs Temple’s Telegram,” in addition to numerous film attractions, has added to her stage ability. On several occasions last evening one noticed a tiny American accent creep into her part, but her attempt at the Irish brogue was an entire success in as far as the particular part requires. It is interesting to know that Miss Wilford will remain with the company,

and who knows but that she will be attempting the part of the vivacious Paddy next?⁷¹

The company took *Paddy, the next best thing* and *Peg o' my heart* to Oamaru, Dunedin, Christchurch, Hawera. In Palmerston North they added *Nightie night* and *His lady friends*. They opened at His Majesty's Theatre in Auckland in mid-January and by now she was famous enough to have her words used in marketing,

CINEMA ACTING.

"Miss Isobel Wilford, who has just returned to New Zealand after spending 18 months in America, where she studied Cinema Acting, gives a very interesting account of her experiences. One of the features of film acting that impressed her most was the extraordinary importance given to screen technique in producing films. To ensure a successful picture it was necessary to pay strict attention to minute details and to give the correct impression, the player had not only to feel the part he was acting, but to convey its meaning by a smooth interpretation. Anything in the way of impetuosity, quick speech or excessive gesticulation was to be avoided."—NEW ZEALAND HERALD, January 25.

In quoting Miss Wilford, it is not our intention to damp the enthusiasm of intending students, but to impress New Zealanders with the seriousness of this wonderful, fascinating and interesting study.

We want clever, talented pupils to enrol, we want many types, and we are here to utilise talent when it is available. Call at once. Interviews daily 10 to 1, 2 to 5, 7 to 9.

THE N.Z. SCHOOL OF CINEMA ACTING

(Branch of Kinematographs, Limited).

PRINCESS THEATRE BUILDINGS,

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Auckland.

On to Wellington and thence to Brisbane, Melbourne...

**THEATRICAL OFFERINGS OF THE MOMENT
ISABEL WILFORD.**

A.C.C.S. writes: "Bumped into a charming little lady and old acquaintance at The Firm's headquarters in Sydney the other day. She is Isabel Wilford, the only daughter of my most valued old friend – bluff, hospitable and brilliant Tom Wilford – erstwhile Minister of Justice in New Zealand, and now Leader of the Opposition. Tom's mantle of cleverness has fallen on his daughter, and his independence of spirit also. A year or two ago Miss Isabel made up her mind to go from New Zealand to America and try her luck in the movies, and, being a Wilford, she went, and, being a mixture of Wilford and McLean, she won through, starting as a humble extra. As a kiddie Isabel, or Babs, as her friends generally call her, was a keen little mimic and actress, and no mean dancer, and a shining light in amateur musical and dramatic circles in the windy city of Wellington. So it was not surprising that in America the lure of the footlights proved too strong and that she joined up with a company playing stock, and again made good. Family affairs led Isabel Wilford to return to N.Z., and here J.C.W. engaged her to take Miss Doris Kendall's part, Eileen, in Paddy the Next Best Thing, on tour, and now she is in Australia, supporting Isobel Brosnan at Melbourne. But let Babs tell her own modest little tale of success. Referring to her American picture jaunt, she says: 'I was just over a year in pictures, most of the time with Famous Players, Laskey and Universal, and I was fortunate enough to work for William de Mille, who is one of the finest directors in the business. In fact, I had my first part with him in What Every Woman Knows. I played four leads, the last in Fair Fighting, for Universal. I've worked with most of the well known people, Gloria

Swanson, Wallace Reid, Charles Ray, Ethel Clayton, Nazimova, Thomas Meighan, Viola Dana, Clara Kimball Young, etc. You see I started as an extra girl, so I know the business pretty well. I was also ingenue lead in stock, but, oh! it's hard work!

“Well, if brains, breeding and energy, plus a charming stage personality, can do it, Isabel Wiiford will go far yet on the ladder of fame. The Firm will do well to keep a close eye on this most promising and intelligent young artiste.

“I have watched a few hundred would-be stars in my day. Some shone, others fizzled out, but, believe me, Isabel Wilford ‘has the makins,’ as they say over yonder.”⁷²



ISABEL WILFORD

of movie fame, now a most promising young recruit to the J.C.W. Banner. She is with the Paddy the Next Best Thing Company in Melbourne.

From Melbourne they played in Adelaide, Isabel's standard press release making use of her connections,

Isabel Wilford, who has taken Miss Doris Kendall's place in 'Paddy, the Next Best Thing,' is a daughter of the leader of the Opposition in the New Zealand Parliament. Miss Wilford has had considerable experience on the stage in America, as well as in the films. In the latter she was for some time associated with the De Mille productions in important roles.⁷³

In September her parents met her in Auckland. She was travelling with the JC Williamson company which was bringing *The Bat* to New Zealand after a season in Brisbane.⁷⁴ In Auckland,

In the part of the girl, Dale Ogden, Miss Isobel Wilford was exceedingly winsome and artistic. Most of her work was of a serious nature, calling for sound judgment in its interpretation, and Miss Wilford rose well to the emergency. She was always impressive, and her charming personality suited the role to perfection.⁷⁵

Wellington, Timaru, Dunedin,

Miss Isobel Wilford, while in Dunedin, was the guest of her grandmother, Lady McLean. She was the guest of honor at many functions during the week. On Monday afternoon the Misses McLean gave a very large "at home" in the Savoy Lounge for their niece, Isobel Wilford, about 140 guests being present. The room was most artistically decorated, with long hanging baskets of green filled with trails of blue sweet peas, large pots of schianthus scattered about the room, and in the entrance a large bowl of the same flowers in shades of pink and blue. The table decorations were yellow columbine. During the afternoon the Misses Watson's string band played several selections. Miss Isobel Wilford wore a

dainty frock of pale heliotrope crepe de chine with panels of heliotrope lace, large crepe de chine hat of the same shade with a wreath of pink rosebuds encircling the crown....⁷⁶

Thence to the Theatre Royal in Christchurch,

Amongst those appearing in “The Bat,” which will be produced at the Theatre Royal next week, is Miss Isabel Wilford, the clever daughter of the Hon T. Wilford, leader of the opposition. Miss Wilford, who has the part of Dale Ogden, has climbed the theatrical ladder to fame rapidly. Successful picture acting in America, and a season with a big Belasco company in New York are amongst her experiences. Her part in “The Bat” is the most important role she has filled so far.⁷⁷

She was at home in Tinakori road, then spent the holidays with her parents at a holiday camp at Hamurana, Rotorua, where they camped for a fortnight and enjoyed the excellent fishing.⁷⁸

In February she returned to Sydney on the *Marama*.

The *Adelaide Mail's* “Special Correspondent,” writing under the head “Sydney’s Gay Week” in June, recounted,

And talking ‘bout girls. I asked Mr. George Highland (J.C. Williamson’s clever producer) if he had any promising young people coming on in his department. He said: “There is Miss Isobel Wilford. I had hoped to cast her for ‘The Cat and the Canary,’ but the arrangement was changed to meet office policy. She is a young actress of great freshness and promise, and I have great hopes for her. Not only that, but she comes from New Zealand, and speaks English. That’s so refreshing. I don’t say that all New Zealanders speak English, but I’m here to swear that to the best of my knowledge and belief most New Zealanders speak better English than

most Australians do. Miss Wilford has had exceptional advantages, of course, but in Australia I often meet girls who have had exceptional advantages and still speak a peculiarly exasperating sort of bad English. Miss Wilford has youth and charm, and an unusual degree of intelligence and sympathy. We shall be very proud of her yet.”⁷⁹

In August she came from Sydney to Wellington for a holiday. In September she returned to Sydney. In October she was engaged to take a leading part in the J.C. Williamson production of *The Cat and the Canary*⁸⁰ and *If winter comes*, opening in Christchurch on 27 October.⁸¹ In the former play,

That clever little lady, Miss Isobel Wilford, whose advance on the stage is most gratifying to New Zealanders, is allotted the heaviest role of the piece, that of Annabelle West. Slim of figure and pleasing of feature, Miss Wilford looked to perfection the young girl whose inheritance to the estate was the cause of so much unpleasing attention being paid her; she was most natural in the scenes depicting hysteria and also when she was endeavouring to stifle the pardonable fear with which she was at times filled. Indeed, it was to Miss Wilford’s clever acting that much of the success of the play on Saturday night was due, the part being a heavy one, and keeping her on the stage for a lengthy period.⁸²

In Wellington,

Patrons of the Opera House are loud in their praise of the performance of Miss Isobel Wilford (daughter of Mr T. M. Wilford, M.P. for Hutt) in the rather difficult character of Effie in “If Winter Comes.” Miss Wilford showed a fine understanding of the part, and a marked improvement in all the finer points that go to make finished performers. With study and application Miss

Wilford should go far in the profession she has chosen, and her many friends in Wellington and elsewhere will wish her the best of luck and continued success.⁸³

Miss Wilford and Mr Marsh gave a passage from act II of “The Cat and the Canary”... being the first members of a theatrical company to broadcast passages from their own plays in New Zealand... The transmission was quite up to its usual standard of excellence.⁸⁴

Isabel Wilford spent much of 1924 in Wellington as her mother was ill: she accompanied her father to several formal events. While at home she acted in *Daddy long legs* at the Opera House in July⁸⁵ but returned to Sydney in August, to take a nonspeaking part in *The green goddess* with Guy Bates Post and company.⁸⁶

Back in New Zealand she joined Maurice Moscovitch and played Jessica in *The merchant of Venice* – appropriately cast and “enacted the part with distinction”.⁸⁷ It was her first Shakespearean role. She also took part in *The great lover* with Moskovitch. They played the four main cities, Isabel staying with her parents in Wellington, her aunt in Dunedin, her friend Mrs Rhodes in Christchurch.

Chapter 5: London 1926–1933

When her parents and her brother took another voyage to England in early 1926 to seek treatment for Tom Wilford's ill-health, Isabel was already there, having arrived from Australia in mid-January.⁸⁸

She went to Switzerland with friends, then began a motor tour of France in March, meeting her parents near Cannes and going on to Carcassonne, the Loire Valley, Fontainebleau and Versailles, passing through Paris on their return to England, where they settled into an apartment in Kensington.⁸⁹

Tom Wilford made the most of the contacts his status provided: he met Members of Parliament, talked with the Prime Minister at 10 Downing St and chatted with the King at a Buckingham Palace garden party. Isabel was in work,

The New Zealand friends of Miss Isabel Wilford, daughter of Mr. T. M. Wilford, M.P., and Mrs. Wilford, will be interested to hear that she has been chosen to understudy Miss Olga Lindo, in the great London success, "The Best People," says our London correspondent. It is evident that the management at the Lyric Theatre thought highly of Miss Wilford's talents to give her anything so difficult at the outset of her London career. As a matter of fact, Miss Olga Lindo is out of the cast at the moment, being away for her health, and it is not unlikely that Miss Wilford will be called upon shortly to relieve the actress who at present is taking the part temporarily. The management of the Lyric Theatre have offered the New Zealand lady a part in a new play to be produced in September.⁹⁰

In November 1926 her parents left for New Zealand, but

Miss Isabel Wilford will remain in London. She is still at the Lyric understudying Olga Lindo in “The Best People.” Miss Wilford and Miss Kathleen Stott (Wellington) are sharing a little flat in Kensington.⁹¹

The best people closed on 11 January 1927 and almost immediately Isabel was appointed understudy to the celebrated American actors Tallulah Bankhead and Ruth Terry in *The gold diggers* also at the Lyric theatre.⁹²

Her father was alert to opportunities for her publicity,

A cable message was received to-day by Mr. T. M. Wilford, M.P., from his daughter, Miss Isabel Wilford, stating that she has been appointed sole understudy to Tullulah Bankhead, a New York star, who was engaged to go to London to continue in her leading part in “The Gold Diggers,” which ran for two years in New York. There were two understudies, Miss Madge Albury and Miss Wilford, and now Miss Wilford will be solo understudy, and leaves with the company for the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. The play has run in London since 12th December, at the Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury avenue, and will open in Edinburgh on 23rd May. Miss Wilford will play a small part as well as understudy the lead.⁹³

The gold diggers had run two years in New York and London theatregoers were eager to see it. In March Terry became ill in the first act and Isabel Wilford had to take over: she was well received and congratulated by members of the company.⁹⁴

The next play at the Lyric was *The Garden of Eden*, “a play that seems specially designed to exploit the emotional and dramatic powers of Miss Tallulah Bankhead.” They took it to Edinburgh where Miss Bankhead received “a reception of perhaps unprecedented enthusiasm” and she responded that the company considered the “intellectual and coldly critical

Edinburgh audiences an acid test of the play's worth as a London attraction." Isabel played Liane.⁹⁵



Janet Jevons

MISS ISABEL WILFORD

The charming young actress, who is understudying Miss Tallulah Bankhead in "The Garden of Eden," which is packing the Lyric at every performance. Miss Wilford is a New Zealander, and the granddaughter of Sir George McLean, and she has been with the Clayton and Waller management for a year

The Tatler 6 July 1927 page 70.

Then, on 24 October 1927, came her big chance: and she took it.

ACTRESS'S TRIUMPH

Understudy Becomes a Star in a Night Cheered for Five Minutes

When Miss Tallulah Bankhead, who has a chill in Paris, was unable to play in "The Garden of Eden" at the Lyric Theatre, Miss Isabel Wilford, her understudy, taking the role, scored a wonderful success on Monday.

After the second act Miss Wilford took three "curtains," and then, in the ordinary course of events the footlights were put out, Miss Wilford returned to her dressing-room, and the orchestra tried to play a selection.

The audience, however, cheered for over five minutes, and at last Miss Wilford, who meanwhile had had time to change from her second act costume into the third act one, appeared before the curtain again.⁹⁶

The British newspapers were full of it – "The Understudy Triumphs," "Understudy's Success," "Understudy Jumps to Fame," "Amazing Reception by Audience," "The Understudy's Chance."

The New Zealand papers were also excited – "MISS ISABEL WILFORD MAKES GOOD AT WEST END THEATRE. AUDIENCE CHEERS FOR FIVE MINUTES. AN INSTANTANEOUS SUCCESS" shouted the *Evening Star*. Mr and Mrs Wilford were gratified at the great and kindly interest taken in Isabel's success: they had received telegrams, letters and personal congratulations from throughout New Zealand.⁹⁷

LYRIC THEATRE
 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE w.i.
 LICENSEE: F.W. TIBBETTS
 PHONE: GERRARD 3686 & 3687

EVENINGS at 8.50
 MATINEES: WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY at 2.30

HERBERT CLAYTON AND JACK WALLER
 PRESENT
 By Arrangement with ARCHIBALD SELWYN

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

A New Play in Three Acts,
 By R. BERNAUER and R. OESTERREICHER.
 Adapted by AVERY HOPWOOD.

ISABEL WILFORD

The Play Produced by WILLIAM MOLLISON

Theatre poster: the panel bearing Isabel Wilford's name has been pasted over the name of Tallulah Bankhead. National Library Eph-D-DRAMA-Wilford-1927-01

She cabled home to her parents,

Tallulah Bankhead ill. Played last night. Audience wonderful. Much photographed and interviewed. Blissfully happy.⁹⁸

Reynolds's Illustrated News's "Candid Critic" reported,

Tallulah Bankhead had a great reception when she returned to her part in "The Garden of Eden," after her little bout of illness, which kept her in a Paris hospital for a few days. Isabel Wilford, who scored a triumph as Toni during Tallulah's absence, has gone back to her own small part. But she is marked down by Clayton and Waller for promotion.⁹⁹

Herbert Clayton and Jack Waller were theatrical producers, mostly in the West End.

On the third night "a number of New Zealanders turned up and presented 'Babs' Wilford with a beautiful basket of flowers."¹⁰⁰ She played the lead for ten nights and as a result was offered other parts, but Clayton and Waller would not release her from her contract at the Lyric.¹⁰¹

She was photographed by EO Hoppé. EO Hoppé was a German-born British photographer who opened a portrait studio in London in 1907.

Within a few years E. O. Hoppe was the undisputed leader of pictorial portraiture in Europe. To say that someone was a "household name" has become a cliché, yet in Hoppe's case the phrase is apt. Rarely in the history of the medium has a photographer been so famous in his own lifetime among the general public. He was as famous as his sitters. It is difficult to think of a prominent name in the fields of politics, art, literature, and the theater who did not pose for his camera.¹⁰²



Portrait of Isabel Wilford taken at the time of her 1927 London stage success in *The Garden of Eden*. Photograph taken by Emil Otto Hoppé.
National Library Ref: PAColl-6245-1-11.

In June she played two minor roles in *An American tragedy* presented by the Venturers' Society at the Apollo theatre.¹⁰³

Clayton and Waller's next production was *Sauce for the gander* at the Lyric, in which "There will also be Isabel Wilford, the understudy who created such a furore when she took up Tallulah Bankhead's part in 'The Garden of Eden,' Good!"¹⁰⁴

They opened at King's Theatre in Southsea on 23 January 1928 and at the Lyric in London on 30 January. Isabel's part was a minor one, perhaps mercifully, for the play was rather notorious: "The authors, indeed, cannot be congratulated on any regard for good taste in this last out of many recently produced sex-appeal plays."¹⁰⁵

It had been released earlier as *The cradle snatchers* but had not passed the censors so was withdrawn and extensively rewritten. Although "Miss Wilford does all that is required of her as one of the three young girls, and she looks attractive... It is a poor farce, and... it becomes rather revolting."¹⁰⁶



Isabel Wilford herself looks incredulous, but it is quite true that, in addition to playing "Liane," she understudies Tallulah Bankhead in "The Garden of Eden" at the Lyric Theatre.

Isabel Wilford herself looks incredulous, but it is quite true that, in addition to playing "Liane," she understudies Tallulah Bankhead in "The Garden of Eden" at the Lyric Theatre.

—*The People* 23 October 1927
page 12.



The Sketch 2 November 1927 page 253.

Among the New Zealanders holding up their end on the English stage are Marie Ney, Cecil Haines, Shayle Gardner,¹⁰⁷ Isabel Wilford, Robert Geddes, and Jack Kirby.¹⁰⁸

Her parents sailed from Sydney to visit Isabel, stopping in Shanghai to see their son and his family. Mr Wilford's Election Committee for the Hutt constituency desiring the Wilfords to "convey to Miss Wilford its congratulations on her recent notable achievement".¹⁰⁹

In March 1928 she had a minor role in *Square Crooks*.



"Miss Isabel Wilford, who takes a leading part in 'Square Crooks,' to be produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre to-night."

Daily Mirror 13 March 1928 page 9.



“A scene from ‘Square Crooks,’ with Isabel Wilford,
 Winnington Barnes and Clare Greet at Prince of Wales Theatre.”
Sunday Mirror 18 March 1928 page 11.

The play was well reviewed and she was “good as Jane Brown,”¹¹⁰ “appealing and natural”¹¹¹ and “delightful.”¹¹²



Theatre World December 1928.

Her next role was as Billy Dore, an American chorus girl in the stage adaptation of PG Wodehouse's *A damsel in distress*, opening in Blackpool, then at the Grand Theatre in London in August.¹¹³ She played the role "emphatically à

l'Americaine."¹¹⁴ The New Zealand papers were keeping a close eye on her,

Concerning Isabel Wilford. Very interesting news comes partly from private sources, and partly from newspapers concerning the clever Wellingtonian, Isabel Wilford, who has a leading part in a delightful play, "The Damsel in Distress," by Ian Hay and P.G. Wodehouse, now running with great success at the New Theatre in London. The play was tried out in the provinces, and proved highly successful, and a London paper says that it is "as amusing and exhilarating a thing as anyone could desire. It has an all-star cast including Basil Foster, Clive Currie, Reginald Gardiner, Harry Kendall, Jane Baxter, Isabel Wilford, Helen Hay, Clarice Hardwick. The last-named is another New Zealander, to whom Isabel Wilford, in a letter, gives generous praise. She also writes of the delightful personality of Ian Hay, who is "one of the nicest people in the world, full of kindness, and quite free from any personal pride in his achievements." Miss Wilford adds: "One of my most cherished possessions is a first night wire from Ian Hay, who says: "With love to Billie Dore, and grateful thanks for a beautiful performance." The rights for this play are sold already for America, Scandinavia, and Australia, and Miss Wilford feels sure that it is due for a long run. She was interviewed by a well-known London manager, and was offered a good part in a play in which Tallulah Bankhead is playing, but refused, saying that she was quite happy and satisfied where she was. Another paper, which publishes a caricature sketch of Miss Wilford¹¹⁵ and other members of the cast, says: "'The Damsel in Distress' is the gayest romp, packed with human nature, and acted by a cast that could hardly be bettered in London." The many friends of the New Zealand girl will hear this good news about her with much pleasure.¹¹⁶



“Miss Isabel Wilford in “A Damsel in Distress” at the New Theatre.
Daily Mirror 9 November 1928 page 11.



Sunday Mirror 11 November 1928 page 10.



"A dainty frock of red silk with white and black spots, and with red and white, as worn by Miss Isohel Wilford in 'A Damsel in Distress,' at the New Theatre, London. *Evening Post* 19 January 1929.

The New Zealand papers were full of her successes: this from *NZ Truth*,

This versatile daughter of Wellington has proved to us that the will to do, when accompanied by ability and sound judgment, can overcome prejudice, for undoubtedly there is a certain degree, slight though it may be, of hesitation among English theatrical Producers to recognise the worth of Colonial aspirants back o' the footlights.¹¹⁷

In March 1929 she played the lead in *See a fine lady* at the Q Theatre: "Miss Isabel Wilford shows real dramatic power as Judy."¹¹⁸

In May she was with the players of the Lyceum Club Stage Society at the Garrick Theatre in *Notoriety*,¹¹⁹ when she "made the most of her meagre opportunities"¹²⁰ and "was all vivacity and naturalness as a charming Dorothea the young author."¹²¹

Clayton and Waller presented *Get your man*, again with Tallulah Bankhead, at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, on 30 September; the play was renamed *He's mine* for the opening at the Lyric in London on 29 October. "Miss Wilford was piquant as Victorine" (the maid)¹²² and "acted her part with distinction."¹²³ The *Tatler's* fashion writer ME Brooke wrote,

All in quest of a becoming outfit for their parlourmaids must make a note of that worn by Miss Isabel Wilford. The dress is of *tête de nègre* taffeta with silk stockings and glacé kid shoes to match, the apron is of a *café-au-lait* shade, the apology for a cap being of the same shade; the latter consists of a large butterfly bow with streamers. It is placed just above the nape of the neck.¹²⁴

Miss Bankhead thought the play "...a ridiculous, inept mess, fated for quick disaster."¹²⁵ It ran for less than a month.

Isabel Wilford had another small part in *A warm corner* opening at the Prince's Theatre in December 1929.¹²⁶



“Miss Isabel Wilford, daughter of N.Z. High Commissioner Elect.”
Daily Mirror 2 January 1930 page 14.

Indeed, her father had been appointed New Zealand's High Commissioner in London.

NEW HIGH COMMISSIONER.

Mr. “Tom” Wilford, the new High Commissioner for New Zealand, who is to arrive in London this week, is sure to be a popular figure in social and official circles. Though, perhaps, not quite an orator, he is a born public speaker, improved by long practice at the Bar, on the platform, and in the Parliament of the Dominion. A friend of mine who knew him out there recalls him as one of the vigorous personalities in the civic and political life of Wellington, somewhat aggressive, but full of bonhomie, and popular with all parties and all classes.

His New Year ought to be a happy one, for he has achieved within the last few days his two principal ambitions—to become a K.C. and to be appointed High Commissioner. My friend is sure that Mr. Wilford is just as pleased with the success of his daughter, Miss Isabel Wilford, on the stage as with his own success in his career.¹²⁷

The Brisbane *Telegraph* carried this celeb interview,

MISS ISABEL WILFORD

Devotion to Theatre

HIGH COMMISSIONER'S DAUGHTER

In view of the fact that the High Commissioner for New Zealand (Mr. T. M. Wilford) reached London on Thursday and on the same evening saw his daughter Isabel appear in the theatrical production, "The Warm Corner," the following interview possesses unusual interest.

I interviewed, or rather I pleasantly renewed my acquaintance with Miss Isabel Wilford in her dressing-room at the Lyric, Shaftsbury Avenue, where she has been playing the part of Victorine in "He's Mine" – a Tallulah Bankhead play that has just finished its run (says a writer in the "British Australian and New Zealander" of November 28).

There is a fascination to an outsider in a glance behind the scenes of a famous theatre but even after several years of grinding work, Miss Wilford, in spite of her success, still retains the early sense of enchantment that first lured and then goaded her to seek, entirely by her own efforts, success "on the stage."

"I love the theatre so much," she said, in reply to a question, "that I wish almost that I might sleep, eat and live in it...." One can understand, listening to her story of the years before she established herself in London,

that it was this determined affection for her profession that carried her through the difficult years of her apprenticeship, first in her own land; then in the States and on the “movies,” and finally over here.

Definitely you can exclude from your mind the idea, when you meet her, that this vivacious and withal cool-headed little blonde lady has any intention of joining the ranks of those sons and daughters of successful fathers who claim an hereditary right to fame! In purely popular parlance, Miss Willford does not “give a darn for” anything in her own career beyond what she herself has achieved. The fact that her father, the Hon. T. M. Wilford – late Minister of Defence – has been appointed to the “plum” of those posts within the gift of his party, does not appear to move her nearly so much as the prospect of seeing again her father with whom she has so much in common.

“We have many joint interests...” she said; and added that the most interesting of them all to her at the moment is flying.

Mr. Wilford, as Minister of Defence, apparently had a plane at his disposal for official use in New Zealand; his daughter says that flying is the antidote to all worries; troubles, and – incidentally – fatigue! “The perfect 100 per cent enjoyment,” she calls it enthusiastically.

“I shall be terribly glad to see my people,” she says with enthusiasm.

As we talked of Miss Wilford’s dramatic career I noticed all the characteristic stage details of the interview – the little dressing-room – the dresser true to the type that one sees, with slight variations, in every dressing-room, unobtrusively handling shoes, stockings, and all the paraphernalia of make-up. As I watched, Miss Wilford changed from the charming little lady of ordinary life to the Victorine of the play.

It was interesting also to recall one of her earlier spectacular triumphs. At very short notice Isabel Wilford took Tallulah Bankhead's nerve-racking emotional part in "The Garden of Eden," and even with a critical audience of Tallulah adorers, made a fine thing of it.

Of her success she said very little, but of the kindness of Miss Bankhead – a lot. The stage is as cruel as most professions in its insistence on the survival of the fittest, and in this hurly-burly struggle for survival, and success it is a great thing to find consideration and friendliness. Incidentally, I learned that Tallulah Bankhead likes Miss Wilford to understudy her, which is a great compliment.

Miss Wilford would say little of the future, except that she would prefer to avoid getting into the habit of appearing in the more sensational parts that demand very high spirits and plenty of them – or in tense scenes. She certainly is wise in her wish for a costume part, asking for the best she has to give. Of the "talkies" she said little, except that so far she had not tried her hand or her voice at them; although she has an excellent clear enunciation, and what appears to be a good "talkie" voice, as well as film experience.¹²⁸

The Melbourne *Herald* did likewise,

**HIGH COMMISSIONER'S
DAUGHTER ON STAGE
Isabel Wilford, of N.Z.
APPEARING IN WEST END
PRODUCTIONS**

LONDON, November 28.

Dark, pretty – as her photographs well testify – vivacious, interested in life and in love with her career, I found Miss Isobel Wilford, daughter of the new High Commissioner for New Zealand in her pretty dressing-

room at the Lyric Theatre, in Shaftesbury Avenue, the other night, whiling away the leisure of a 20-minute wait with an excellent book.

There was little of the atmosphere of the theatre about that dressing-room, except for the host of telegrams from friends and fellow-members of the profession – all received on the first night of the show – which adorned the walls. There were no photographs about or newspaper clippings.

Miss Wilford is no newcomer to the stage: she has been an actress for the past seven years, and for 2½ has been appearing in West End productions.

PEOPLE ENTHUSIASTIC

“I love the stage,” she told me. “I always wanted to be an actress, and although at first my people did not care for the idea, now that they have seen me in the theatre they are more than reconciled to it. Indeed, they are quite enthusiastic. Father was in London about 18 months ago, and the first night he was here he came along to the theatre where I was appearing in a thing called “Square Crooks.” He was quite thrilled about it, he told me afterwards.

“Of course, a lot of things that are popularly imagined about the stage are altogether wrong, just as most of the things popularly imagined about everything else are wrong, too. The romance, the glitter, the show, the opportunities for travel, the wonderful dresses – these things everybody thrills to, more or less, but they don’t mean so much.

ROMANCE IN EVERYTHING

“There is romance in everything, if you know how to find it, because, of course, it just has to be in yourself or you won’t find it anywhere. No, the real attraction of the theatre lies in the knowledge that one is lifting people out of the ruts of their hum-drum lives, bringing something

of other worlds and other existences to them, making them smile, or think, or be happy for a while. One is showing them that there is romance in their lives, too. If they will look for it and allow it to come.

“I love the theatre, and I don’t think there is a better profession any where. I love it, too, because the people one meets are so kind. Theatrical people have their faults, I suppose, and one hears a lot about them; but they are the most generous, sincere and really friendly people I have ever met.”

Miss Wilford was at Hollywood for a while before she came over here to go on the legitimate stage, beginning as an extra and working up to lead. “That was hard work,” she said. “The competition was absolutely appalling, and it is much worse now. When I look back at what I did, I’m simply staggered to think I tried it. I wouldn’t do it again! And I wouldn’t advise any other girl to, either. If a girl is going to Hollywood now she needs, first, simply stacks of money, really outstanding ability, and most important of all – the most powerful influence. With all these things she still may fail.

BRITISH TALKIES

“But why go to Hollywood, anyway, when there is Elstree? England is doing so splendidly with the talkies, and there are really more opportunities here. I am intensely interested in the talkies, and hope to have the chance of doing something for them one of these days. Although at present they are in quite the initial stage, I think that the time will come when they will be quite wonderful. We cannot even imagine their possibilities yet.

“I’m looking forward with great pleasure to my father’s coming over here,” Miss Wilford confided. She added with a laugh that some of the girls at the Lyric were pretending to believe that her father was to be

“High Commissionaire!” She said, too that she had seen a photograph of a heavily moustached man, of fierce countenance, in one London daily which announced that this was New Zealand’s new High Commissioner.

“But if that was my father,” she smiled. “I have never seen him!”¹²⁹



Daily Mirror 27 May 1930 page 11.



TALLULAH BANKHEAD'S DOUBLE: ISABEL WILFORD.

Although now playing (and playing very delightfully) an important part in "A Warm Corner," Isabel Wilford first came to the front when, as Tallulah Bankhead's understudy, she took over the leading part at a moment's notice in "The Garden of Eden" and scored an instant success. Since that time Miss Wilford has appeared in several plays with Tallulah Bankhead, to whom, as our picture shows, she bears a definite facial resemblance. Her father, Mr. T. W. Wilford, is the new High Commissioner for New Zealand.

**MISS ISABEL WILFORD.
IN "A WARM CORNER"**

(Special to the "Star.")

LONDON, January 7.

The difficulty about interviewing this delightful young New Zealander is that she does not want to talk about herself, and eager as she is to lend a hand to a journalist, she has a dread of the "fulsome" article which most actresses are reputed to enjoy when it concerns their own personalities. Miss Wilford is keen about her work. She is utterly absorbed in it, and is delighted to be playing in the same company as such world-famous players as Connie Ediss, Heather Thatcher and W. H. Berry. She is learning all the time with an eagerness which is bound to lead to great things when it is combined with such charm and freshness as the gods have given Miss Wilford. She goes to the other shows in London whenever she can snatch an opportunity, again to study technique and enlarge her experience. Her present play, "A Warm Corner," at the Prince's Theatre, is her first experience of farce, and is the exact antithesis of her former engagements as understudy to Miss Tallulah Bankhead in highly emotional drama. Miss Wilford has chosen very charming frocks for her part in "A Warm Corner," where she appears as "daughter to a corn-plaster king," her stage parents being Miss Connie Ediss and Mr W. H. Berry. This rollicking affair has only been running since Christmas Eve, thus involving an extremely busy Christmas for the cast, but it bids fair to have a very long run, and will, therefore, be a consolation for the four weeks' run of "He's Mine," Miss Wilford's last piece with Miss Bankhead. As I sat in the dressing room an excited voice called out, "A topping house." The exquisite royal blue tulle evening gown which Miss Wilford wears in one scene embarrasses her a trifle by its

fashionable length; the narrow, high-waisted girdle with a diamante buckle is also very much a la mode, and so are the lovely delphiniums which trail over the shoulder. Another pretty frock is one in silk figured with pale green and yellow spots. The collar and cuffs are their wearer's special joy. They are of pique, cut to resemble a huge daisy, and came by air mail from Paris for the first night. A fair American, who thought she was introducing the fashion in London, almost collapsed when she saw Miss Wilford forestalling her.

Miss Wilford's one thought off the stage is the arrival of her parents. She is very disappointed that owing to a rehearsal she is unable to meet them at Southampton, but she is going to be at Waterloo on Thursday, and hopes there won't be too much of an official reception on the platform, as she is longing for a talk and all the home news. She has been scouring London for flats and hopes to find something suitable in the neighbourhood of Westminster.

Miss Wilford's first engagement was a part as a maid in the film version of Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows" in Hollywood. Conrad Nagel was the leading man and a photograph of the caste on that occasion still hangs in her dressing-room. An array of quaint mascots are mementoes of the first night of the present production, and a photograph of Mr W. H. Berry complete with yachting kit. Lovely Tallulah looks down from one wall, and the telegrams and messages of goodwill are pinned up in another corner. The dressing-room has a friendly air, and its owner is very popular judging from the cheery way her fellow-actresses pop in upon her. Miss Ediss came when I was there, and was asked to a tea-party by Miss Wilford and her friend, a charming girl, who is Miss Heather Thatcher's

understudy. “Connie” beamed and accepted with alacrity.¹³⁰

The first to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Wilford in London was their daughter, Miss Isabel Wilford, the actress, now playing in “A Warm Corner” at the Prince’s Theatre, who received them with an affectionate kiss.¹³¹

The new High Commissioner, the Hon. T. M. Wilford, and Mrs. Wilford, will have the pleasure of seeing their daughter play in the amusing farce, “A Warm Corner,” at the Prince’s Theatre, London. In this Miss Isabel Wilford plays the juvenile part, around whom the romance of the piece revolves.¹³²

This he thoroughly enjoyed, and is greatly pleased to find his daughter taking part in a farce of such pleasant and healthy humour.¹³³

Isabel Wilford has recently returned from a six weeks’ holiday spent in Paris and Geneva, and later in visiting Yorkshire and Devonshire, recuperating from the strain of the long run of “A Warm Corner.”¹³⁴

Speedily Fit and Vigorous !



MISS ISABEL WILFORD,

the accomplished young actress, appearing in
"A Warm Corner," at the Princess Theatre,
writes—

TO play a part realistically, both mind and body must be kept up, alert and active for a long period, and when the excitement of the performance is over, the inevitable reaction follows. After the long days of rehearsal, sleep falls the early hours of the morning, with all the nervous tension and expectancy of a first night, and except those when the curtain falls, someone that everything has gone wrong, and vowing to give up the stage as soon as possible. That is how I used to feel until I used Phosferine. I know of no actor, more timid, or safer than to withstand the mental and physical exhaustion caused by a new play production, or to keep one fit and vigorous during a long run. Phosferine is an exceptionally healthy, and easy to take wherever and whenever you feel the need to be braced up for another spell of work. Even a few doses make you look and feel as well as I could wish."

From the very first day you take PHOSFERINE you will gain new confidence, new life, new endurance. It makes you eat better, and sleep better, and you will look as fit as you feel. Phosferine is given to the obedient with equally good results.

PHOSFERINE

The Greatest of all Tonics for

Influenza	Nervousness	Laziness	Nerve Shock
Debility	Menstrual Weakness	Nausea	Malaria
Indigestion	Weak Digestion	Painfulness	Elimination
Insipidness	Mental Exhaustion	Brain Fog	Headache
Exhaustion	Loss of Appetite	Anemia	Sciatica

From Children. From Old People. From Men and Women.
The 3¢ size contains nearly four times the quantity of the 1/3¢ size.

PHOSFERINE HEALTH SALT.—The New Tonic Food Salt.

Supersedes all old-fashioned tonics—It Tones as it Strengthens!

Small Size . . . PRICE 1/6—DOUBLE QUANTITY 2/6

Here she is advertising the quack tonic Phosferine.

Tatler 25 June 1930 page 67.

She was in the social whirl of London now: she helped at the annual fete in favour of the Actors' Orphanage, and she acted as godmother for the son of a future Prime Minister,

The christening took place on Saturday at St. Marylebone Church of the infant son of Captain Anthony Eden M.P. for Warwick and Leamington, and Mrs. Eden. The Rev. W.D. Morrison officiated, and the child was named Nicholas. The godparents were Sir William Jaffrey, Mr. Roger Lumley, Lady Violet Astor, and Miss Isabel Wilford.¹³⁵

In November 1930 she "acted pleasantly" as the secretary in *Getting George married* at the Everyman Theatre in London.¹³⁶ She was "dainty and demure, so was effective".¹³⁷ "There is never a false note in the charmingly natural secretary of Miss Isabel Wilford," said the *Stage* theatre critic.¹³⁸

Miss Isabel Wilford had an unusual and difficult task to perform recently at The Everyman Theatre, London, where she played lead in the new comedy, "Getting George Married." Her vis-a-vis, "George," became ill after the first few performances, and his part thereafter was read by the manager. Miss Wilford acted well and did splendidly under the somewhat trying circumstances.¹³⁹

The comedy *Etienne* opened at St James's Theatre on 17 February 1931 with the great Emyln Williams in the title role and Isabel as the "alluring" Mme Vattier.¹⁴⁰

In April she was in *Lean Harvest* at St Martin's Theatre,¹⁴¹ opening 7 May: she was "artistically natural"¹⁴² in a part "which inspires her to a brilliant performance".¹⁴³

Back in New Zealand we were taking notice,

**MISS ISABEL WILFORD
IN "LEAN HARVEST."
PROMINENT PART TAKEN
BY NEW ZEALAND ACTRESS**

LONDON, May 13.

Looking very pretty in the pink crinoline and wide-brimmed Leghorn hat which she wears in the dream scene in "Lean Harvest," Miss Isabel Wilford told of her exciting rush back to London from Dinard, where she was spending Easter, to join the cast of this play. There were no boats, so Miss Wilford had to go by way of Paris with all the attendant joys of French cross-country train journeys. She does not regret it, however, and confessed that the play fascinated her to the extent of enjoying watching it in rehearsal, which is indeed a compliment to the author, Ronald Jeans, whose dialogue has the easy flow of the expert writer. His lines are "so easy to say," according to Miss Wilford, and they certainly produce an effect of smoothness and tautness; for, although the play has no fewer than thirteen scenes and is, consequently, difficult to stage from a technical point of view, the sets having to be placed one within the other, there is no redundancy or waste of material.

Money The Villain.

Money is the villain of the piece, for an obsession for money-making alienates Nigel (Leslie Banks) from his equally ambitious wife, Celia (Diana Wynyard), and lack of it spoils the happiness of Anne (Isabel Wilford) and her nice author husband, Steven (J.H. Roberts). Brilliant performances come from the two hard but attractive worldlings, while Miss Wilford, as Anne, and Mr Roberts, as the poor brother of the great financier, have parts pitched in a lower key but requiring very

careful and finished acting to hold our attention as they do.

Miss Wilford's Anne is a very real lovable person, someone who has an existence outside the play, so that, when the play ends by Steven and Anne made rich beyond all their dreams by Nigel's will, we tremble as we see them innocently planning to take the same path of selfish independence which killed the love of Celia and Nigel. She is particularly good in the first scene of all, where she is engaged to Nigel but throws him over because of his big ideas and ambitions, which she finds are so much more to him than her happiness. In the dream scene where Nigel, feeling the emptiness of his own existence, dreams of what he imagines Steven and Anne's life must be, Miss Wilford wears the aforementioned pink crinoline and looks adorable, consoling us for the rather dull clothes she has to wear in the other scenes.

Superb Acting.

Amongst the many interesting effects in the play is the scene where Nigel is dying with brain-fever, and as it grows, darker voices clamour in his ears, faces come crowding round him, hemming him and pressing him down, down into the bog of his own distraction. Leslie Banks's acting in the final scenes, where he was a dying and disillusioned man, was superb. The entire cast of the play is well-chosen and the standard set by the leading players is kept up in the smallest parts.

New Zealanders will be interested to hear that the very charming portrait of Miss Wilford, which hangs outside the theatre, and other photographs of her in this play, which are being used by the London Press, are the work of two New Zealand women. Miss Eila Bristow and Miss Elsa Mawley,¹⁴⁴ who are studying photography at the Polytechnic at the moment and will later go to

Dorothy Wilding's famous studio in New Bond Street before returning to New Zealand next Christmas. Miss Wilford is delighted with the work of her fellow-countrywomen and is telling her friends about them.

Miss Wilford's Plans.

The High Commissioner has not yet had an opportunity of visiting the play, but Lady Wilford was there on the first night. Miss Wilford hopes to be able to visit New Zealand when her parents go back there at the end of Sir Thomas's term of office. A more immediate holiday is planned for September, when she hopes to fly to Paris, as she did last year, if her professional engagements permit. "Lean Harvest" is certainly deserving of a long run, so perhaps Miss Wilford will have to postpone her flight.¹⁴⁵



Leslie Banks as Nigel and Isabel Wilford as Ann Dornay in "Lean Harvest".
Aberdeen Press and Journal 25 May 1931 page 2.



"SUCCESSFUL NEW ZEALANDER. Miss Isabel Wilford, the talented daughter of the New Zealand High Commissioner, whose performance in the play, "Lean Harvest," has been warmly received by London critics."
New Zealand Herald 18 July 1931 page 9 (Supplement).



Isabel Wilford, Diana Wynyard and Leslie Banks in *Lean Harvest*.
The Bystander 27 May 1931 page 42.



"SMILES OF POVERTY. The poor novelist (Mr. J.H. Roberts) and his long-suffering wife (Miss Isabel Wilford) reap a lean harvest.

"Steven (Mr. J. H. Roberts) writes feeble Jacobite novels and settles down with Anne (Miss Isabel Wilford) to a family life of drudgery and debts."

The Tatler 27 May 1931 page 20.

MISS ISABEL WILFORD.

Miss Isabel Wilford has been engaged for a part in a play entitled "Blind Alley," which will be staged this month at the Embassy Theatre, writes our London correspondent on September 4. "Lean Harvest," in which Miss Wilford was playing previously at the St. Martin's, and which had such a successful run, was taken off because the American owners of the play decided to open in New York, and they required the services of Mr. Leslie Banks, who was playing lead in London. The London management was then faced with the necessity of engaging a first-class actor to take his place, for an engagement lasting six months, and they decided not to take the risk.

Miss Wilford and her friend, Miss Pamela Williams, had booked their passages to Tangiers when, an hour or two later, Miss Wilford had the offer of an engagement under the same management in the new play. The two friends accordingly had to content themselves with a flight to Boulogne and a couple of days' holiday in France.

In "Blind Alley" Miss Wilford has a rather peculiar part. She comes on first of all as a woman of 80 of the present time. In succeeding acts she appears first as a woman of 40, then as a girl of 20 dressed in the crinolines of the period, and finally she reverts back to the age of 80.¹⁴⁶

Mrs Clark, wife of Dr Clark, late of Christchurch, organised a jolly party for Guy Fawkes afternoon at her exclusive dress shop "Contessa," in Knightsbridge. There was a mannequin parade, refreshments, indoor fireworks and delightful gifts for everyone. Among the New Zealanders invited, were Lady Wilford, Miss Isabel Wilford and Mrs Hugh Bailey, of Auckland.¹⁴⁷

She played in AA Milne's *The Dover Road* at the Embassy, Swiss Cottage in October 1932.¹⁴⁸

Later in the year she met Mussolini! Wellington's *Evening Post* reported,

**MEETING IL DUCE
TALK WITH MUSSOLINI
SIR THOMAS WILFORD'S AUDIENCE
A MAN OF PURPOSE.**

LONDON, 29th November.

During the League Assemblies at Geneva the New Zealand High Commissioner had come to know Signor Grandi, then Italy's representative there, very, intimately, and after he was appointed Italian Ambassador in London he several times expressed the wish that Sir Thomas should go to Rome and have an audience with Mussolini. He said he would be delighted to arrange one- at any time that was convenient to his friend from New Zealand.

The opportunity did occur, and arrangements were immediately made. The High Commissioner arrived in Rome bearing a letter from Signor Grandi for Baron Serena di Rampoli. Finding that he would be able to go on from Geneva, Sir Thomas wired to Miss Isabel Wilford to join him at Culoz, and thus she accompanied her father on this interesting tour.

The audience took place at the Palazzo Venezia—a magnificent old building and treasure house approached by a long flight of marble steps. The Palazzo was reached at 5.45 p.m., and Sir Thomas was first taken to a room where there were about 50 or 60 people, who evidently were awaiting an audience—their coats and hats were neatly put aside.

In about ten minutes a splendidly equipped Italian official in dark blue uniform with gold facings and little

touches of green on the collar, ushered the New Zealanders into a very big room with hangings of grey velvet, with marble pillars all round, and with furniture that was manifestly rare and old. Next they were passed on to an official in ordinary simple morning dress, such as one would meet in England, and were taken into the Fascist Council Hall, the Hall of the Mappa Mundi, whence Mussolini rules Italy.

This vast hall Sir Thomas was almost at a loss to describe. Its distance, he likened to the "extent of a cricket pitch. Its floor was highly polished, it was adorned with massive marble pillars, and its ceiling was of beautiful golden frescoes.

IL DUCE'S WELCOME.

It seemed at first to be empty. Then in a far distant corner could be seen a small table, and a man seated at it. This was Il Duce, all alone, apparently, not a soul else visible. There had been a Fascist Council meeting just before, and there was the horse-shoe council table, but all the members had left.

Expecting the arrival of Sir Thomas and Miss Wilford, Signor Mussolini rose to meet them, and he actually approached along a third of the way to extend them warm greeting, saying:—"I am very glad to welcome you, Sir Thomas," and asking Miss Wilford: "Have you been in Rome before?" "No, but my father has," she replied.

"I hope you will like it," he remarked.

"I love it already," came the enthusiastic response.

By now they had arrived at what had been the distant corner of the Chamber, where Sir Thomas observed that the appointments were nothing more than necessary, and all severely plain. There were letters upon the table, and some bundles of official documents on a desk nearby, tied with tape.

Mussolini was dressed in dark clothes, with black shirt and black necktie.

EASY CONVERSATION IN ENGLISH.

For twenty-two minutes he carried on conversation with his visitors, whom he directly faced. They discussed world affairs only, the subject each time being introduced by the host, who spoke throughout in excellent English, and used the most choice and appropriate language; he always selected just the right words to suit the situation— when he paused to think of the word best fitted to the requirement, he invariably found it.

Mussolini was specially interested to hear the details of the riots at Geneva on 9th November; he discussed Communism, the position in the Far East, and the League of Nations, unemployment, and the successful work that had been done in Italy to bring vast acres of swamp lands into cultivation. He was very specially interested in asking about Italian people who lived in New Zealand, and he inquired twice whether they proved to be worthy men and good citizens.

“I told him ‘Yes,’“ said Sir Thomas. “I mentioned the names of a number of Italians resident in New Zealand, and especially those living in Wellington, many of whom are my personal friends. He seemed greatly pleased to have such good news of his country people in my own Dominion.”

A PARTING GIFT.

At length the interesting interview concluded, with a pleasing finale. Mussolini chose a red rose from a vase near at hand, and said to Miss Wilford: “Will you accept this from me?”

She was, of course, delighted. That rose is to be a treasured possession; it is being preserved in some way.

Il Duce escorted them all the long way to the door, then twice sharply he clapped his hands, Whereat an official appeared to escort them out.

Next, following instructions subsequently issued, the visitors were shown the great reception rooms and many art treasures in the splendid old Roman palace. They arrived at 5.45 and left at 7.10, after having been accorded the great privilege of a private audience lasting 22 minutes.

Later, Sir Thomas said to his daughter, "What struck you most about Mussolini?"

"His force," was the reply! "And yet he was so calm. His great force."

Sir Thomas said: "Mussolini struck me as a man in deadly earnest. He is a man full of purpose, but he is carrying an awful load. He has a very powerful chin; he looks you square in the face all the time you are talking and his eyes are characterised by an extraordinarily brilliant light. He speaks in quiet, soft tones, and uses no gestures of any kind. He was altogether very charming and he made us most welcome. He is not a big man but he has tremendous personality."

A CHANGED COUNTRY.

In Italy itself Sir Thomas Wilford was struck by several things, but by none more than the fact that Signor Mussolini is never so called. He is always referred to as "Il Duce" or "Il Governatore" (the Head of the Government). Pictures of him appear on houses and buildings along the thoroughfares (as well as pictures of the King), and there are innumerable photographs in every shop, but never does the name Mussolini appear anywhere at all.

Another marked feature was the vast improvement in the appearance of the cities. Once the streets—and notably the side streets—were very filthy, peopled by

many miserable beggars and over-run with mangy dogs. Sir Thomas had twice been to Rome in past years, but on his third visit he found a Rome entirely transformed—clean streets, no beggars, no unhealthy dogs; every person looking neat and everyone having some kind of work to do. There was not a thoroughfare that did not look tidy, and even the narrow byways that were not wide enough to allow vehicles to pass through could not now be faulted.

Remarking upon the great difference in the appearance of the people, Sir Thomas asked an official who was accompanying him: “How has the change been effected?”

The answer was: “Mussolini has taught us all that if we can learn individual self-respect we shall gain the respect of the world.”

The Italian added in explanation: “I mean that self-respect which is so plain in the British nation.”

Another feature which cannot fail to strike the observant visitor to Rome, or the man who has correspondence with Italy, is the fact that any letter or official document gives both the date and the year, 1932, as well as Anno 11, the last referring to the Fascisti era—the eleventh year of the Mussolini regime.

Sir Thomas and Miss Wilford arrived on the day that a magnificent new thoroughfare had been opened, leading down to the Colosseum through what had once been a great slum, area. It had been opened by Mussolini with military eclat as one detail of the Fascist Week celebrations then in progress.¹⁴⁹



Miss Isabel Wilford, who has just finished playing in a successful revival of A.A. Milne's "The Dover Road." *The Bystander* 11 January 1933 page 69.

It would be her last play. The *Liverpool Echo* was first to break the news on 10 June 1933,

***London Actress
To Wed***

*Romance In Family Of
High Commissioner*

Romance has come to the family of a High Commissioner in London.

It is announced to-day that Miss Isabel Wilford, the pretty actress daughter of Sir Thomas Wilford, High Commissioner for New Zealand, and Lady Wilford, has become engaged to Mr. Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, son of the late Mr. James Penrose-Fitzgerald, of Midleton. Co. Cork, and of Mrs. Penrose-Fitzgerald, of Mildford-on-Sea, Hants.

Sir Thomas Wilford received his knighthood in 1930 when he became High Commissioner. Before then he had had a distinguished political career in his native New Zealand as member of the House of Representatives for thirty years, Minister of Justice, Minister of Defence, and, from 1919 till 1925, leader of the Liberal Party. He is K.C. and a former Mayor of Wellington.

Miss Wilford had early stage experience in one of the "little" theatres of Southern California, and came to London after being before the Australian footlights.

Understudying Tallulah Bankhead was one of her jobs soon after she came to England. but she has since established herself in the West-end.¹⁵⁰

A THEATRICAL HEROINE.

It will be a loss to the London stage if Miss Isabel Wilford retires when she is married, but I do not think she is likely to. As a matter of fact, the question whether she will continue her stage work has not been discussed with lucky Mr. Fitzgerald, the young man who is to be her husband.¹⁵¹



Hay Wrightson

MISS ISABEL WILFORD

The only daughter of Sir Thomas Wilford, High Commissioner for New Zealand, and Lady Wilford of Wellington, New Zealand, who is to marry Mr. Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, the son of the late Mr. James Penrose-Fitzgerald of Middleton, Co. Cork, and of Mrs. Penrose-Fitzgerald of Milford-on-Sea, Hants

The *Tatler* 12 July 1933.

Chapter 6: Babs and Teddy get married – 1934

Edward (“Teddy”) Uniacke Penrose-Fitzgerald was born in 1888 into a noble family, the second son of James Henry Brabazon Penrose-Fitzgerald, a descendant of William the Conqueror.

The surname Uniacke was a common occupational name for a valued military officer – a corruption of *unicus est*.

In October 1914, he was gazetted as Temporary Second Lieutenant in the Infantry.¹⁵²

He was, at that time of their marriage, a businessman, employed by Stafford & Co, wool merchants, in Lima, Peru.



Llamas arriving with wool at the warehouses of Stafford & Co, Arequipa, Peru.

TO MARRY IN PERU

Miss Isabel Wilford, the daughter of the High Commissioner for New Zealand (Sir Thomas Wilford), is to marry Mr. Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, of Lima, Peru, for which city, she sails from England on December 14.

Well known in stage circles, Miss Wilford achieved a great success when she appeared on one occasion for Miss Tallulah Bankhead, who had been taken ill in Paris.

Miss Wilford also found two congenial parts in "Lean Harvest" and "Warm Corner" during their London seasons.¹⁵³

Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford and Miss Wilford have settled down very comfortably at Northwood in the house belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wood. In the middle of December Lady Wilford and Miss Wilford will leave for Peru, where the wedding of the latter will take place to Mr. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald. Miss Wilford has been in Paris for her trousseau. Her Molyneux wedding dress is of nacre tinted crepe satin, with train 2½ yards in length, which begins quite low on the skirt—from the back of the knees. The corsage, made with a V-decolletage, has a draped effect at one side. The entire gown is cut en bias, giving a clinging effect. The enveloping tulle veil, of the same delicate tint as the dress, forms a crown round the head, and extends to meet the edge of the satin train. Numerous beautiful wedding presents are arriving.¹⁵⁴

**MISS ISOBEL WILFORD.
MARRIAGE NEXT MONTH.
DEPARTURE FROM STAGE.**

The London correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald writes that excitement prevailed in the office of Sir Thomas Wilford, High Commissioner for New Zealand, as a prelude to the marriage in Peru of Miss Isobel Wilford. She was superintending the packing of the furnishing for a house in which she will set up a home in Peru whence she left London on December 14 in company with her mother, Lady Wilford, aboard the *Georgic* via New York. Immediately upon arrival at Lima Miss Wilford will be married to Mr Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, a prominent business man resident in that city.

Miss Wilford is giving up the life of a successful West End actress—as well as the life of gaiety associated with her parents' status in London—in exchange for domesticity in a foreign tropic land. During the last six or seven years she has played many important parts, her last appearance here being the lead in the revival of the "Dover Road." Some of her earlier parts were played in a company of which Miss Tallulah Bankhead was the star. Miss Wilford understudied Miss Bankhead, and while the latter was indisposed played the lead for a time—winning much praise from the critics for her interpretation of a typical, temperamental "Bankhead" part.

In reply to the question, "Do you regret giving up all this to be married?" this charming New Zealander shook her head decisively. "Even though on my return from a trip to New Zealand four months ago, the great C.B. Cochran himself sent for me to play an important part in one of his productions, my mind was quite firmly made up," she said. "I am giving up the stage for good, and all

my ‘roles’ in the future will be concerned with domesticity!”

It was on the return voyage from New Zealand that Miss Wilford became engaged. She had met her fiance for the first time in London two years ago, and they had corresponded ever since. He made a special trip up to Panama from Peru to meet the ship as it passed through the Canal, proposed and was accepted.

The exact date of the wedding has not yet been fixed, owing to the unreliability of steamer arrivals on that particular South American run. But it will take place immediately after the arrival of the ship, approximately on January 7, Miss Wilford estimates. There will be no bridesmaids, as all her girl friends are resident either in England, New Zealand, or Australia. But she is taking out with her a wonderful wedding gown of “nacre” silk—white with a tinge of pink in it, which is being made by Molyneaux. In Paris last week at the Rue Royal Salons, I was privileged to take a look at it, in an almost-finished stage.

The gown is on straight, princess lines, with just of soft bosom drapery on one side, and a train two and a half yards long, cut in one with the skirt. The sleeves are mediaeval in design, slim and long, and widening in flower-petal fashion to hang over the wrists. A rolled coronet of tulle replaces the usual orange-blossom, and the long veil of tulle has been specially dyed to match the frock.

The trousseau comprises mainly tropical outfits.¹⁵⁵

A cable has been received by relatives in Wellington from Lady Wilford stating that Miss Isobel Wilford’s marriage to Mr. E. Penrose-Fitzgerald will take place at Lima, Peru, on Saturday next. Before leaving London,

Miss Wilford was entertained at luncheon by his Excellency Bene Vides, the Peruvian Ambassador, who is a brother-in-law of the President, and he offered to do all he could to make her life in his country a happy one. Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford were also present. Lady Wilford will leave Lima a few days after the wedding and catch the Tainui at Panama on her return to London.¹⁵⁶

Lady Wilford has given her daughter a string of pearls to wear on her wedding day. Miss Wilford's other ornament will be a diamond brooch given by the bridegroom.¹⁵⁷

**WEDDING IN LIMA.
MISS ISOBEL WILFORD
LADY WILFORD'S RETURN**

LONDON, February 15.

Lady Wilford joined the Tainui at Panama on her return from South America, whither she went in December with Miss Isobel Wilford, for the wedding of the latter to Mr. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald. On arrival at Lima, they received a most friendly welcome and were made to feel thoroughly happy.

As their steamer was four days late in reaching port, the civil ceremony took place shortly after landing. The next day, January 11, the religious ceremony was solemnised, the officiating clergyman being the Rev. S.A. Davis. The church was a mass of magnificent pink roses and rare tropical flowers of much brilliance.

The bride, who was escorted by Colonel Balfour (of the Peruvian Corporation), looked radiantly charming in her beautifully cut Molyneux gown of nacre-coloured

crepe satin with its very long train. Her tulle veil to tone was arranged, as a coronet, and fell over the back of the train. Her ornaments were the pearls given her by her mother and a long bar brooch of diamonds and sapphires—the present from her husband, who received from the bride a gold cigarette case.

Two little girls carried the train—Miss Susan Bayly and Miss Beatrice Harrison. They wore dainty frocks of frilled muslin, with wreaths of cornflowers and daisies.

Mr. F. Milne was the best man.

A reception was held at the Country Club, at which 200 guests were present.

A few days later, Lady Wilford left for England, and the bride and bridegroom went to Chile for their honeymoon. They have taken a furnished house in The Olive Grove at Lima.

Throughout her return journey from Lima everything was made as easy as possible for Lady Wilford, who arrived in London on February 13 and was met by Sir Thomas. During the journey to South America and back 16,000 miles were covered, and only thirteen days were spent on land.

It is expected that Mr. and Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald will be in England some time in 1935.¹⁵⁸

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Isabel Penrose-Fitzgerald in her Molyneux wedding dress
NZ National Library, Wellington.



Edward and Isabel Penrose-Fitzgerald on their wedding day.
NZ National Library, Wellington.

**SIR THOMAS WILFORD
PUBLIC LIFE ENDED
COMING VISIT TO N.Z.**

LONDON, Nov. 6.

Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford are going to New Zealand for a short visit of five weeks. They have booked their passages by the Akaroa, leaving Southampton on November 30, and on their way back, in March, they hope to meet at Panama their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald. The former will be coming to England from Peru on leave then. At present the Hon. Mrs. R. Anthony Eden, is visiting Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald at Lima.¹⁵⁹

Many friends will hear with interest that Mrs. Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald (formerly Miss Isobel Wilford) has given birth to a daughter at Lima, Peru. Mrs. Penrose-Fitzgerald is the only daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford, who are visiting New Zealand, and are staying at Heretaunga at present.¹⁶⁰

Mr. and Mrs. E. Penrose-FitzGerald (nee Isabel Wilford) have been on the Continent, covering most of their interesting journeys by motor-car, but doing a certain amount of flying as well. They had a very pleasant time at Prague and Vienna, and then went by air to Cologne. They flew back to Prague, picked up their car, and motored leisurely through Germany and Belgium. In August, Mr. Penrose FitzGerald will return to Lima at the conclusion of his periodic five yearly leave, but Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald will remain in England until October. While they were touring abroad their infant daughter was left at Moor Park with Sir. Thomas and Lady Wilford; The child has been

christened Sarah, and her godparents are the Hon. Mrs. Anthony R. Eden and Lord Hunsdon. The Hon. Mrs. Eden was the great friend of Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald during the time the latter lived in London, and she went out to Lima last year, on a visit. Lord Hunsdon is a well-known banker.¹⁶¹



“MRS EDWARD PENROSE-FITZGERALD with her daughter Sarah.”
Auckland Star 2 September 1935 page 11.

Mrs. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald, with her infant daughter and nurse, is leaving London for Amsterdam, en route for Lima, thus bringing to a close a very happy holiday visit to Europe, states "The Post's" London representative. Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford will cross with her to Holland to see her off, on October 28. The route to Callao is via Panama.¹⁶²

Chapter 7: London 1937: the city that would not die

In January 1936 Isabel was in New Zealand with three Misses Penrose-Fitzgerald, two of them presumably her husband's nieces. In February 1937,

Mrs. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald (nee Isabel Wilford) has arrived from Lima and, as far as she knows, she and her husband will be making their home in London. They are at present looking for a suitable flat. It is a strange coincidence that so soon after Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford have bought a home in New Zealand their daughter and her husband think they have left South America for good. Family ties are now wholly in the Old Land for Mr. and Mrs. Maclean Wilford and their two sons also reside in England, wrote our London correspondent on January 20.¹⁶³

Indeed, when Isabel and Edward attended a reception given by the NZ High Commissioner, the *Evening Post* reported, "they have come to settle in London".¹⁶⁴ She even planned a return to the stage, but,

**STAGE ROLE GIVEN UP
MRS. PENROSE-FITZGERALD'S PLAN**

LONDON, February 12.

The many friends and admirers who followed with interest the stage career of Miss Isabel Wilford (now Mrs. Edward Penrose-FitzGerald) are disappointed to learn that her plan to resume it, at least temporarily, has been frustrated by ill health.

Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald has already begun rehearsals as understudy to Miss Irene Vanbrugh in Noel Coward's new play "Operetta," and was also to play a small part in it, but has reluctantly been forced to give it up. She has no further definite plans for returning to the stage, for, though she is recovered from her illness, she will need to rest for some time. She plans to remain in England.¹⁶⁵

That was in March 1938. By December Edward had other plans,

Mr Edward Penrose-FitzGerald, son-in-law of Sir Thomas and Lady Wilford, has accepted a position in Khartoum, and, with Mrs Penrose-FitzGerald, he will leave shortly for the Sudan. They expect to go to England every year to avoid the heat of the Egyptian summer.¹⁶⁶

Isabel's father Thomas Wilford died in June 1939 and the following year,

Lady Wilford, widow of Sir Thomas Wilford, was in the south of France when the Franco-German armistice was signed. She was able to make her way to England. She has been staying with her daughter, Mrs. Penrose-Fitzgerald, and she is considering a return to New Zealand.¹⁶⁷

But it wasn't as straightforward as that seems,

Among the passengers of one of the two colliers in which British residents were evacuated from the South of France after the French capitulated to the Nazis were Lady Wilford, widow of the late Sir Thomas Wilford, formerly High Commissioner in London, her daughter, Mrs. E. Penrose-FitzGerald, her son-in-law, Mr. Penrose-FitzGerald, and their small daughter.

All were staying at the time of the French collapse in a villa at Vence, lying in the hills above Nice, which they had taken after visiting Egypt and Khartoum. They were told to leave for Cannes at short notice. There, with 750 other passengers, they were crowded aboard the collier. Conditions were poor, food was not plentiful, and they had to sleep on the coal-dust grimed iron decks. On one occasion, a torpedo from an Italian submarine narrowly missed the collier. Eventually, they were ordered into a port and were transferred to a troopship. They landed in England 16 days after leaving Cannes.

“It was more comfortable, but still terribly crowded.” said Mrs. Penrose-FitzGerald. “We were all very glad to reach England.” Lady Wilford will return to New Zealand shortly.¹⁶⁸

The Penrose-Fitzgeralds were returning to a London at war. They were among nearly 500 people interviewed by Richard Collier for his book about the Blitz, *The City that would not die: the Bombing of London May 10–11, 1941*. Eighteen thousand Londoners had already died and

Somehow on May 10, 1941, it was accepted that the street where you lived or worked was also the battlefield where you could die.

Most people, like true Britons, talked more of the weather and the spring flowers. In Kensington Mrs. Isabel Penrose-Fitzgerald, a diplomat’s wife, made up her diary for the Friday: “The chestnuts are just coming

into bloom and Hyde Park is full of daffodils.... There's very little news—the Germans *must* be preparing something.”¹⁶⁹

Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, the diplomat, and his wife Isabel, took the train to Esher in Surrey where their four-year-old daughter Sarah was evacuated.¹⁷⁰

He is referred to here as “the diplomat” but that may refer to his position at the time of interview rather than that in 1941. They dined early on 10 May,

The Penrose-Fitzgeralds found things almost too quiet in the dining-room of their Kensington service chambers, although sometimes Mrs Fitzgerald couldn't believe her eyes. The proprietress was serving dinner in full evening dress and long white gloves.¹⁷¹

The air raid began and grew,

In Elvaston Place, Kensington, diplomat Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald heard a bomb drop and dashed out to help, throwing coat over pajamas. Without warning he reeled back, a hot yellow light flashed across his eyes. He didn't know that fire had ignited the broken chunk of a 1000-pounder in the basement next door, exploding and killing nineteen men, injuring eleven others. He didn't even know London Region Headquarters, the nerve centre of all Civil Defence, was only two streets away. As he staggered back, Penrose-Fitzgerald thought only: Why us? Why Elvaston Place?

It wasn't surprising that fear was abroad in the city. At 12.30 the raid was suddenly too immense, too overwhelming for any previous standards to hold good.

Mrs, Isabel Penrose-Fitzgerald took one look at her husband's face pouring with blood and began to repeat

the litany: “Disinfectant, where did I put it? I know it’s somewhere, where *did* I put it?”¹⁷²

.... A few recalled that this day had never spelled good luck. Diplomat Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald, awaiting hospital treatment, remembered May 10, 1940. Then he had been in a French train which the Germans machine-gunned.¹⁷³

Kensington was showered with incendiary bombs on 11 May 1941. The actor S.J. Warmington who lived at 39 Elvaston Place, went out to help extinguish fires and was killed when a high-explosive bomb fell.

Chapter 8: intrigue in Mexico

In 1944 Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald was certainly a diplomat: Second Secretary at the British Legation in Mexico City.

In 1940 Leon Trotsky had been assassinated in Mexico City, on Stalin’s orders, by Ramon Mercader, a Spanish communist recruited by the Soviet intelligence agency NKVD. Mercador was captured at the scene and imprisoned by the Mexican authorities.

Communications deciphered by the American Venona project in the 1940s show the Soviets planned to free Mercador through a sleeper agent in Mexico, the artist José Maria Sancha Padros. Sancha Padros’s American girlfriend became pregnant, however, and the Soviets decided imminent fatherhood was no state for one of its agents, so in 1943 it became appropriate to extricate Padros from Mexico to Britain. Padros’s brother Tomàs, already in England, was known to be a friend of

Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald who was working at the British Legation in Mexico City. Tomàs was asked to write to Penrose-Fitzgerald to enlist his help in getting his brother, the “artist” to Britain.

Sancha Padros did reach London and for the rest of his life denied all knowledge of espionage.

The Soviet communications read like a boys-own intrigue; they contain gaps and code names (COUNTRY = USA; CARTHAGE = Washington DC; etc.), but can be readily understood,



José Maria Sancha Padros, self portrait in 1958.

From Mexico City
 To Moscow
 28 Mar. 44

The following is planned with regard to REMBRANDT's¹ dispatch from the COUNTRYSIDE:²

1. The second secretary of the local British Embassy Edward Penrose Fitzgerald henceforth GREYHEAD³ is a close acquaintance of REMBRANDT's elder brother Tomas,⁴ who lives on the ISLAND⁵ and from time to time corresponds with him. At our ... R. visited GREYHEAD and was well received by him cooperation of the British Embassy... .. organise R's journey across using these circumstances

From Moscow
 To Mexico City
 4 April 1944

Both alternative plans for getting REMBRANDT over to the ISLAND have been carefully considered by us. Recommend to REMBRANDT that he ask TOMAS to write a letter to GREYHEAD requesting him to give assistance to R. in organizing his journey across to the ISLAND. The second alternative for getting him across through VAYO⁶ we do not rule out and it remains as a reserve. If the first does not meet with success, we shall try to make sure of VAYO's proposal.

VIKTOR⁷.¹⁷⁴

¹ REMBRANDT = Jose Sancha Padros
² COUNTRYSIDE = Mexico
³ GREYHEAD = Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald
⁴ TOMAS = Tomas de Sancha, brother of Jose
⁵ ISLAND = Britain
⁶ VAYO = Alvarez del Vayo
⁷ VIKTOR = Lt.Gen. PM Fitin.

Penrose-Fitzgerald may have been cooperative in effecting Sancha Padros's journey to London, or may not. If he did cooperate his motive may have been perfectly innocent.

Britain and the USSR were arms-length allies, though soon the treason of the Cambridge Five would become evident and spell the beginning of the Cold War.

In 1947: "Edward Uniacke Penrose Fitzgerald, First Secretary (Information) at His Majesty's Embassy at Mexico City (Now at His Majesty's Embassy at Madrid.)" was awarded the OBE (Civil Division). Presumably that marked his retirement from His Majesty's Diplomatic Service.

There is a note among the National Library holdings that they lived for a time in India, but I cannot find another record of that.

They retired to London. Edward died in 1973, in Wandsworth, at the age of 85. Isabel Lilian (Wilford) Penrose-Fitzgerald died six years later, in 1979.

They had only one child, the daughter: Sarah Hamilton-Ely 1935–2003. She presented the National Library and Te Papa museum with memorabilia of her mother's life: photograph albums, clippings, theatre posters and clothing.

Items in the National Library relating to Isobel Wilford

The NZ National Library in Wellington has a range of items, most donated by Sarah Hamilton-Ely.

Eph-A-DRAMA-GB-1900/1929 Theatre programmes and flyers, including for *Square crooks*, *A damsel in distress*, *Sauce for the gander*, *He's mine*, *A warm corner* with Isabel Wilford.

- Eph-A-DRAMA-GB-1930/1949 Theatre programmes, including for *A warm corner*, *Etienne*, *Lean harvest* with Isabel Wilford.
- Eph-A-DRAMA-Wilford Theatre programmes for *Lean harvest*, *Getting George married*, *A warm corner*, *Square crooks*, *The Dover road* with Isabel Wilford.
- Eph-A-OPERA-1915 Includes Wellington Amateur Operatic Society *Les cloches de Corneville* (cast including Isabel Wilford). Grand Opera House Wellington.
- Eph-A-OPERA-WO-1913/1919 Wellington Operatic Society: Ephemera and theatre programmes, including those for *Les cloches de Corneville*, *San Toy*, *La Mascotte* with Isabel Wilford.
- Eph-D-DRAMA-GB-1928-01 Brighton poster for *Square crooks* with Isabel Wilford.
- Eph-D-DRAMA-Wilford-1927-01 Posters for *The Garden of Eden* when Isabel Wilford replaced Tallulah Bankhead.
- Eph-D-DRAMA-Wilford-1921-01 Three posters for *Mrs Dane's defence* Egan Little Theatre, LA with Isabel Wilford.
- Eph-D-DRAMA-Wilford-1934-01 *New Zealand Free Lance* poster: "N.Z. girl wedded in Peru".
- Eph-E-CINEMA-Wilford NZ poster for the film *Fair fighting*.
- MS-Group-0935 8 folders of papers relating to Isabel Wilford's life and career in Wellington, Hollywood and London; includes typescript of "San Toy", congratulatory letters and telegrams relating to Wilford's understudying of Tallulah Bankhead in "Garden of Eden" in 1927 as well as personal correspondence, clippings, invitations, contracts, manuscripts and printed matter

- MS-Group-1159 Christopher Moor's research papers, including some notes on Isabel Wilford.
- MS-Papers-6882-4 Corrected invitation to marriage of Isabel Wilford to Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald; letters of congratulation, clippings.
- MS-Papers-6882-5 Clippings relating to Isabel Wilford at the time her engagement and marriage plans were announced; two typescript articles by Joan Woolcombe.
- MS-Papers-6882-6 Clippings relating to Isabel Wilford's life as an actress and her forthcoming marriage; includes articles about her family.
- MS-Papers-7272-1 Material relating to Isabel Wilford's years at Marsden School.
- PA1-q-738 Photographs of scenes from plays produced in London theatres in which Isabel Wilford took part between 1928 and 1931.
- PA1-q-740 photographs of her marriage to Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald at Lima Peru on 11 January 1934.
- PA1-q-740-2-1 Isabel Wilford and Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald on their wedding day in Lima, Peru. Photograph taken by Aviles Hnos.
- PAColl-6232 Photographs relating to Sir Thomas Wilford, High Commissioner for New Zealand in London, and his daughter Isabel Wilford.
- PAColl-6232-02 Portrait of Isabel Wilford, applying make-up in her dressing room, taken ca 1930 by an unknown photographer.
- PAColl-6232-03 Scene from the movie *What every woman knows*, produced in the USA in 1921 and directed by William C de Mille.

PAColl-6232-04 Scene from the movie *The brand-blotters*, filmed in Arizona.

PAColl-6245 Photographs relating to the life and career of Isabel Wilford in Hollywood and in London.

PAColl-6245-1-04 Still from the film *The Kinsman*, with Isabel Wilford and Vester Pegg.

PAColl-6245-1-11 Portrait of Isabel Wilford taken at the time of her 1927 London stage success in *The Garden of Eden*. Photograph taken by Emil Otto Hoppé.

PAColl-6245-3 Jigsaw portrait of Isabel Wilford. Photographed by an unknown photographer in about 1930.

Item at Nga Taonga Sound and Vision

F51735 Film and Video collection: Scenes of Isabel Wilford's wedding in Lima, Peru, 11 January 1934. Wedding guests at entrance of church. Bride Isobel Wilford gets out of car and enters church with [Colonel Balfour]. Interior shot of church, bride, [Col. Balfour], bridesmaids and flower girls walk up aisle. Bride and groom Edward Penrose-Fitzgerald walk down aisle towards camera, pose outside church. Wedding guests outside church. Two flower girls in white dresses. Isabel and Edward towards car, paper bags of rice are thrown over them, the pair drive off in car while guests farewell them.

Items at Te Papa relating to Isobel Wilford

GHO 13802 /1-8 Cosmetic case

GHO 13803 Human hair

GHO 13804 Purse

GHO 13805 Suitcase

GHO 13806 Dress

GHO 13807 Evening dress

GHO 13808 Dress and bolero

GHO 13809 Evening dress

GHO 13810 Dress or petticoat

GHO 13811 Ribbon sash

GHO 13812 Shawl



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