

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4720

Gavin, Agnes Adele

(1871 - 1947)

Born 30 November, 1871, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 9 January, 1947, Kensington New South Wales Australia

Occupation Actor, Scriptwriter

Summary

Agnes Gavin is commonly historicised as a supporting figure to her husband's film ambitions. This inaccurate perception, however, minimises her contribution to early Australian silent film, most notably as one of the first female scriptwriters to achieve international success with her scripts.

Agnes Adele Wangenheim was born in Sydney in 1872. In 1890, she married Barney Kurtz, however they divorced shortly after. On 1 October 1898, she married stage actor John Frances Henry Gavin.

Gavin and her husband both worked as actors in the Bland Holt stage company and in vaudeville for many years.

Gavin made her credited debut in *Forsyth's Moonlight* (1910). In this film, Gavin played an Aboriginal girl named Bunda.

Gavin's husband then began to direct his own films. Gavin played small parts in her husband's films and was credited as scenario writer for *Ben Hall and His Gang* (1911), *Frank Gardiner, King of the Road* (1911), *The Assigned Servant* (1911), *Keane of Kalgoorlie* (1911), *The Drover's Sweetheart* (1911) and *Assigned to his Wife* (1911).

In 1916 Gavin and her husband released their most successful film, *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell*, for the Australian Famous Feature Company. The film told the story of English nurse Edith Cavell who was executed by the German Army in October 1915. Written by Gavin, the film was well received in Australia, Britain and the USA.

Gavin's next script again focused upon German war atrocities. *The Murder of Captain Fryatt* (1917) told of the murder of a commander of a merchant ship. This film was not received as well.

After this unsuccessful script, she returned to the subject of bushrangers and convicts in *His Convict Bride* (1918). Later in 1918, Gavin and her husband moved to Hollywood where her husband acted in Western and comedy feature films. It is not known what Gavin did during this time.

In 1925, Gavin and her husband returned to Australia permanently. Upon return, she wrote her final scripts for *Trooper O'Brien* (1928) and *The Adorable Outcast* (1928).

Published resources

Book

Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production, Pike, Andrew and Cooper, Ross, 1980

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Film and Sound Archive

[Gavin, Agnes : Semi-profile, upper body portrait, looking to her left into the camera]

Trooper O'Brien : Original Release

[The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell : Documentation]

[His Convict Bride : Documentation]

[Moonlite : Documentation]

The Assigned Servant : Documentation

Author Details

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