

# BERMINGHAM FROM BIRMINGHAM

## His Ancestor Founded a City: He Left Home to Sing

Tall, hazel-eyed, brown haired, athletic, is Frank Bermingham from Birmingham, whose baritone voice has earned him a job for some years with opera companies in Australia. He has recently been heard over 2YA, and will broadcast from that station on Wednesday, January 31.

It was the Berminghams, his ancestors, only they had a Norman name in those days, who founded the city of Birmingham, chief seat of British metal manufacturers and great hardware centre for the world.

**A**LTHOUGH no date can be given to the founding, it was probably after the Saxon conquest of Mercia; and for centuries Birmingham was no more than a collection of huts round the manor house. The early spelling was "Bermingham," and it formed one of the large possessions given by William the Conqueror to the Paganel family. The little place was given in tenure to Paganel's steward, who adopted its name. The old estate was given to the Earl of Dudley by Henry VIII.

### Art Preferred

The most recent generations of the family prefer art to town-founding.

Frank Bermingham's father is a sculptor, both his father and elder sister are good musicians, and every member of the family can either play an instrument or sing.

Frank Bermingham was educated at Cotton College, in the lovely country of North Staffordshire. The college, which goes back to the early seventeen hundreds, is one of the oldest Catholic schools in England. There he studied piano, violin, and singing as a boy soprano.

His original intention was to be an oculist, but a friend's descriptions attracted him to Australia when the slump was just beginning, and he found that there was "nothing doing." So came the decision to go on the stage. His first job was with Fullers.

"Of course," we said in our interview, "stage life is far more interesting than pupils and irises and things, isn't it?"

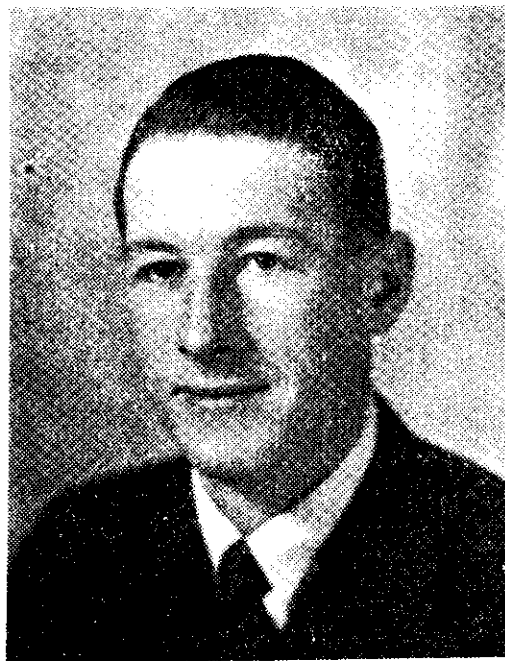
"Well," he replied with a laugh, "irises and pupils and retinas are a lot more secure!"

### No Funny Business

In one respect, at any rate, Frank Bermingham is unique among stage-folk.

Most of them cannot tell you fast enough the extraordinarily hilarious happenings with which their lives have been filled ("Too, too screamingly funny for words, my dear").

But Mr. Bermingham from Birmingham just smiles quietly and tells you he hasn't had anything very funny happen to him, and if it did, he's forgotten about it, and there's too much hard work on the stage anyway for amusing experiences.



The singer married a singer. His wife — Miss Phyllis Ferguson — is a well-known coloratura soprano on the Australian stage.

Mr. Bermingham's own debut in opera was made with Fullers' English Grand Opera Company. At first he played mainly small parts and understudied the bigger roles. With the company he played, among other roles, those of Rheinmar in "Tannhauser," the steersman in "Tristan and Isolde," the registrar in "Madame Butterfly."

Then for a little an engagement in the ABC's permanent choir kept him in Melbourne.

But he returned to the stage again; this time in the J. C. Williamson Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company. Here he played many parts later played by Bernard Manning — but I did *not* play Pooh-Bah," he says with a smile.

As a break from the Gilbert and Sullivan work, he did thirteen weeks broadcasting for the radio Grand Opera Company. In "Der Rheingold" he had the difficult part of the giant, Fafner. He was Antonio in the "Marriage of Figaro," Titirel in "Parsifal," and the Commandant in "Manon Lescaut" ("What a lovely opera!" he remarked).

Then he rejoined the Gilbert and Sullivan Company, and toured New Zealand in 1937.

One performance he remembers fondly was "Merrie England," in which he played Big Ben to Richard Watson's Long Tom. In the last scene, the masque, he was the front legs of a dragon, John Dobbie the rear legs. And John Dobbie, as it is hardly necessary to point out, is of positively elephantine stature. You may have seen him in the last Cinesound production, "Gone to the Dogs," being mountain for George Wallace's Mahomet!

# LETTER FROM MOSCOW

G. E. R. Gedye and the NBS

**T**HE National Broadcasting Service has received a letter from G. E. R. Gedye, the well-known special correspondent, about a radio review of his book, "Fallen Bastions." This book, written after the seizure of Czechoslovakia, was widely read, and in the last few months Mr. Gedye's despatches from Moscow have been quoted frequently in the cable news published by the New Zealand Press.

Here is Mr. Gedye's letter:

The New York Times,  
Moscow Bureau,  
Khokhlovsky Pereulok 13/a,  
Apartment 39,  
August 16, 1939.

Dear Sir,—I have been informed that in a recent talk on modern literature and especially on journalistic books, the speaker criticised "Fallen Bastions" as "too emotional" and cited as an example of my "emotion" my relinquishing of my position with the Daily Telegraph. I am not, of course, concerned with criticism as such, but I should be much obliged if you would correct in a broadcast, or by inserting this letter in some publication of yours, the suggestion that I resigned from the Daily Telegraph out of "emotion." The simple fact is that I was summoned from Prague to London by the Editor of the Daily Telegraph and given the alternative of resigning or being dismissed, as my criticisms of Mr. Chamberlain's policy were incompatible with the position of correspondent of the Daily Telegraph.

(Signed) G. E. R. GEDYE.

The National Broadcasting Service referred this letter to the speaker who reviewed "Fallen Bastions" at 2YA, as being apparently the critic to whom Mr. Gedye refers. The reviewer writes that he is unable to supply the exact statement he made about Mr. Gedye's retirement from the *Daily Telegraph*, but says that the following indicates his point of view:

"Mr. Gedye is not now the correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, and has been approached by at least one English reviewer who accused him of lack of fairness, and also gave the suggestion that he had been dismissed because his despatches were not impartial. I cannot see this point of view, and think it does not express a reasonable criticism. I believe that a newspaper correspondent who sacrifices a well-paid job for his independence is likely to be accepted as reliable and fair rather than the reverse."

### Madame

Mrs. Bermingham's career rouses her husband to great enthusiasm. She began in 1931 with Williamsons in Melbourne; played Micaela in "Carmen" with Joseph Hislop, under the conductor Heinze. She played with Madge Elliot and Cyril Ritchard in the "Roberta" company as Sidonie, and then went to Gilbert and Sullivan as soprano understudy.

Stage work can be the most strenuous in the world. In fact, Mr. Bermingham thinks no one but a trained athlete can stand the strain. So he and his wife have been resting on their oars for a short time. They are waiting for news of the new Gilbert and Sullivan season in Australia, for which artists have already been engaged, and which is expected to begin in March.

Meanwhile, Frank at any rate will be heard from 2YA Wellington, on Wednesday, January 31 at 8.43 p.m.